The commissaire civil at Constantine—one of colonial Algeria’s provincial capitals—was concerned. Reporting to his superiors back in France in 1847, he described the Catholic personnel in his city. Ever since Napoleon’s Concordat with the Catholic Church, churchmen in France were employees of the state: appointed, paid, and surveilled by the Ministry of Cults, to ensure their qualifications and political acceptability. The Diocese of Algiers, instituted in 1839, formed part of that hierarchy. This assimilation of the Algerian Church into metropolitan France gave French officials a measure of control over the clergy in Algeria. And in 1847, Constantine’s commissaire civil, M. Lapame, felt the need to exercise that control. His complaint: “The clergy of Constantine belong entirely to the Society of Jesus.” They were Jesuits.

No religious order was more symbolic of conflicts between church and state in nineteenth-century France than the Jesuits. The controversial order was a favorite target of anticlerical politicians and writers. It was often alleged that the Jesuits’ real loyalty was not to France but to their superior in Rome. Because little was known of their internal organization, the Jesuits were the object of deranged conspiracy theories that greatly overestimated their actual strength, influence, and radicalism. Even under the Old Regime monarchy, in 1762, the Jesuits had been expelled from France because of their allegedly outsized influence as “a political corps” hiding “under the veil of a religious institute.” After the Revolution, the Jesuits began to trickle back into France, but they would continue to be feared for their political influence and intrigues and targeted by political leaders who hoped to profit from popular hatred of the Order. Under the Restoration of the Bourbon Monarchy in the 1820s, opponents of the arch-Catholic and reactionary Charles X accused the king of being a creature of the Jesuits, secretly colluding with them to reverse the liberal gains of the Revolution. One
feverish conspiracy theory even had it that the Jesuits were using their *maison* at Montrouge, just south of Paris, to train a counterrevolutionary militia, and that an underground passage linked this novice-house to the king’s palace at the Tuileries. The Jesuits were barred from teaching in French schools in 1828; targeted throughout the 1840s by anticlerical liberals of the July Monarchy and, finally, expelled from France by the emerging Third Republic in 1880. Summing up this century of anti-Jesuit polemic, French historian Jacqueline Lalouette writes: “Republicans, democrats, and anticlericals of the nineteenth century” had a “veritable obsession with the Jesuits,” as evidenced “by the great number of publications, novels, essays, [and] satires directed against the famous Society.” In the anticlerical mind, the Jesuits often stood for everything hated about the Catholic Church as a whole.

In one sense, then, in his denunciation of the Jesuits at Constantine, the commissaire civil there was simply acting on anxieties and anti-Jesuit clichés imported from the culture wars of metropolitan France. Indeed, his first accusation was a conventional one: that the Jesuits were unpatriotic, loyal to Rome rather than to the French Church hierarchy. But there was another problem with the Jesuits at Constantine, a problem unique to the Muslim-dominated context of the Algerian colony: “They seem more occupied with the desire to propagandize in the army and indigène population than to exercise this action on the European civil population, which they hardly take care of.” Even worse, since the colonial administration “finds their inclination for a General Conversion [of the Muslims] premature . . . [they] set themselves up as martyrs.” In other words, not only did they attempt to proselytize among the Muslim population against the colonial administration’s wishes; they whined about any opposition. The commissaire ended his report by asking that the Jesuits be replaced by priests belonging to no religious order. The minister of war was concerned by these revelations and received assurances from the bishop of Algiers that he would replace the Jesuits as soon as there were enough “secular” priests to fill Algeria’s parishes.

Missionaries’ attempts to convert the Muslims of French Algeria have sometimes been minimized, on the grounds that either the colonial administration did not look favorably on such proselytization or the clerics in Algeria were not truly interested in missionizing “indigènes”—at least until around 1870 and the missions of the White Fathers (Pères Blancs). According to one recent study, missionaries and administrators alike cared more about presenting a colonial unified front against Algeria’s Muslims than they did about converting Muslims to Christianity. Churchmen and colonial officials, according to this interpretation, knew better than to bring the culture wars of the metropole with them...
to Algeria. Although there is a great deal of truth to this portrait of routine church-state cooperation in the colony, in fact, since the beginning of the Algerian conquest in the 1830s—40s, some missionaries (and their ultramontane supporters back in France) regularly clashed with colonial administrators and attempted to evangelize Algeria's Muslims.

To frame the context of the Jesuits' Arab mission, this chapter will explore the conditions of colonial Constantine in the 1840s and 1850s, when the Jesuits first arrived there. It will recount the complex dialectic of cooperation and conflict that characterized the Jesuits' relations with military and civilian authorities in the colony. Colonial authorities were not always opposed to the Jesuits and other religious congregations. Some officials were devout Catholics themselves, some were admirers of the Jesuits' scholarly or charitable efforts, and some sought to present a civilizational unified front against Muslim Algerians. Still, whenever the question of public evangelization of Algeria's Muslims arose, administrators were regularly and almost uniformly opposed to such missions.

This chapter culminates with the Jesuits' 1850 request to be permitted to live among and missionize Arab tribes that resided on military territory—lands protected from colonist encroachment—in Constantine Province. This request was transmitted by the governor general to the officers of the Bureaux arabes (Arab Bureaus), specialists in the management of the Muslim populations on military territory, and their responses were unanimously negative. Even in cases where missionaries were denied contact with Arab populations, though, they cannot simply be taken as proof that missionary aspirations did not matter. Arguments deployed by missionaries and colonial administrators in these early debates are rich in insights about how missionaries viewed Islam and how their missiological approach both coincided and conflicted with the colonial state's own secular "civilizing mission." This question of a potential Jesuit mission among the tribes in 1850 would surpass the confines of Arab Bureaus and ministerial offices and reach even to the Parliament and press of Second Republic France. The refusal of the Jesuits' mission was bitterly commented upon by ultramontane Catholics, and it became instrumentalized in larger debates about colonial policy and the place of religion in French society.

Church, Colonial State, and the Jesuits in 1840s Algeria

The story of the Jesuits in Algeria begins early on in the French conquest. They were called in as “auxiliaries” by colonial Algeria’s first bishop, Monseigneur Antoine-Adolphe Dupuch, in the 1840s. In addition to serving as military
chaplains, orphanage directors, and educators, as they had in France, the Jesuits were put to work by the short-handed bishop as parish priests in Constantine, the most overwhelmingly Arabic of early French Algeria’s urban centers, and the same city that Abbé Suchet had first visited in 1839 and had seen as so admirably devout and patriarchal.\(^{10}\) Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the famous missionary vocation (and infamous aggressiveness) of the Order, the Jesuits made attempts to launch a mission among the Muslim populations of Algeria with more frequency and with a higher public profile than other missionary congregations such as the Lazarists. In mid-nineteenth-century France, the Jesuits were the bogeymen of the anticlerical party—a flash point for debates about the place of religion in society and in education.\(^{11}\) Indeed, their arrival and establishment in Algeria was carefully surveilled by authorities in France and in Algeria, and seen by many as a backdoor ploy to achieve the recognition and educational prerogatives in Algeria that they had lost in France.\(^{12}\) The history of the Jesuits in Algeria is significant, on one level, simply as an illustration of the form that metropolitan culture wars could take in colonial and Muslim contexts. Hounded from anticlerical France, the Jesuits epitomized Claude Prudhomme’s description of the ideological significance of nineteenth-century missions—“simultaneously a refuge . . . a Christendom transferred from Europe overseas, and a laboratory for the Christian reconquest of the metropole.”\(^{13}\)

But the Muslim-dominated context of colonial Algeria—combined with Algeria’s special status as a settler colony, politically assimilated to the metropole—added a complicating factor that was not present in domestic debates about religious congregations. General Louis de Bourmont, upon disembarking at Algiers in 1830, had famously promised that the French invaders would leave the Algerians free to practice Islam.\(^{14}\) Colonial administrators of Algeria throughout the nineteenth century worried that Catholic missionaries—especially if they were perceived by the Muslim population as having the support of the authorities—would provoke religiously motivated insurrections or jihads. In a sense, then, the Jesuits’ plans and efforts to evangelize the Muslim populations of Algeria only made their rapport with colonial administrators more volatile. Conversely, the Jesuits’ proselytizing efforts only increased their symbolic prestige for conservative Catholics back in France, who enjoyed accusing the July Monarchy and subsequent regimes of antimissional obstructionism. Even in a Muslim context, France’s culture wars—clericalism and anticlericalism—could be “articles for export.”\(^{15}\) Whatever their desire to present a unified, civilizational front in the face of colonized populations, the French could not help but bring the heterogeneity and conflicts of metropolitan modernity with them.\(^{16}\)
But missionary-administrator conflicts were not simply motivated by varying levels of religious devotion or by varying commitments to the Christianization of North Africa. These conflicts were sites of competing representations of Islamic society: debates about Islam’s capacity for civilization and of the role that religion—Muslim or Christian—might play in that civilizing process. The Jesuits’ “Arab mission” in Algeria offers fertile ground not only for understanding domestic debates about the role of Catholicism in France, but also for understanding colonial debates about the nature of Islam.

The story of the Jesuits at Constantine suggests that French missionaries initially relied on a deeply ambiguous representation of Muslims—a philo-Islamism that was particular to mission-minded French Catholics in the first, hopeful decades of the Algerian Empire and of France’s “missionary awakening.”17 According to this view, Muslims were people of great piety and faith, who would make ideal converts to Christianity; yet, simultaneously, they were fanatics incapable of coexisting with the French unless they converted. Muslim children especially could still be converted. Their natural (Muslim) capacity for religious devotion would be transferred seamlessly to Christianity, making them better Christians than many Europeans and ideal missionaries back to their own Algerian countrymen.

In addition to this kind of cautious philo-Islamism, the Jesuit mission was also informed by some of the culturally adaptive methods for which earlier Jesuit missions in India and China had been famous: attempting to respect and adopt local customs as much as possible and offering a minimally invasive version of Christian doctrine. The Jesuits were the first missionaries in Algeria to start learning and preaching in Arabic, and to translate prayers, catechisms, and songs. In Constantine, they regularly invited Arab notables to their house, shared meals of couscous and coffee, and exchanged gifts. The Jesuits encouraged their Muslim friends and students to think of them as “marabouts,” Muslim holy men bearing a kind of spiritual power or charisma. Of course, this philo-Islamic sympathy and cultural adaptation could only go so far. The Jesuits’ goal was to convert Muslims to Christianity, so theirs was a sympathy like Louis Veuillot’s, that ironically worked in tandem with their “project to make Islam disappear.”18 But in the context of the mid-nineteenth century, where colonial administrators and jurists debated whether to culturally “assimilate” Muslims before allowing them the rights of citizenship or whether instead to allow them to maintain some measure of cultural autonomy, the missionaries’ sympathetic approach placed them, perhaps unwittingly, in the more culturally respectful camp.
In 1845, French Algeria’s first bishop, Monseigneur Dupuch, having spent himself into bankruptcy in his attempts to build up the new diocese, was forced to resign and unceremoniously decamp back to France to escape his creditors. Attempting to deflect the blame for his failure, Dupuch addressed an open letter to the pope, summarizing his brief career in Algeria and exaggerating the extent to which he had been opposed by the colonial administration. Especially on the question of an apostolate to the Muslims, Dupuch claimed, the administration had constantly “thwarted” him. Among other things, he maintained that he had been “officially warned” not to minister to anyone but Catholics; that he had been ordered to “repress” a priest who had dared to tell a Muslim that Islam was “absurd”; and that his seminarians had even been prohibited from studying Arabic.

While Dupuch was likely overstating the administration’s opposition to deflect the blame for his own financial failures, state archives make clear that Dupuch and other Algerian clergy were carefully surveilled by the government for any sign of evangelistic contact with Algeria’s Muslims. Indeed, even the creation of a Catholic diocese in Algiers in 1839 was roundly criticized by the parliamentary Left in France. According to some deputies, making Algiers into a Catholic diocese risked dangerously offending Muslim consciences and allowing clerical “encroachments” and “invasions” back into French politics. Far from dismissing these fears of Catholic encroachment, the minister of justice, in defending the institution of an Algerian diocese, accepted the anticlerical terms of the debate. It was precisely because a concordataire (state-employed) clergy would be bound to the government in ways that missionary congregations and Rome-appointed apostolic prefects were not, the minister argued, that a French-controlled diocese was the right model for Algeria’s pluralistic religious terrain. “We are not sending missionaries to convert the Arabs, that has to be made quite clear; we are sending a few priests and a bishop in order that the religious needs of the European population might be satisfied.”

Shortly after Dupuch’s arrival in the new diocese, the minister of war heard that the new bishop had allowed a religious procession, the Corpus Christi, to take place outside the walls of his palace, and also that members of religious congregations were offering (unwanted) ministrations to non-Catholics in the hospital. Given the risk of “alarming” the other “cults,” the minister demanded of Governor General Maréchal Valée that his administration “exercise an assiduous surveillance” of any such events. When both Bishop Dupuch and Governor General Valée responded that the procession had been insignificant, the minister of war nevertheless reiterated his general point: Paris should always
be kept informed about such matters, because “in a country where religious fanaticism . . . is the main strength of our most dangerous enemy, nothing that concerns religion is unimportant.” Even more than the security of the colony, the minister admitted, it was the political climate of metropolitan France that had to be taken into account. As the government attempted to navigate its way through debates about the place of religion at home in France, the acts of careless clergy in Algeria might be taken up by “malevolent” left-wing observers and used against the government in the coming elections.

The colonial administration was especially concerned with monitoring the presence of religious congregations in Algeria. One functionary at the Ministry of War, writing in 1846, put the department’s position on religious congregations this way: “The motives [for denying official status to congregations] come down to just one: the fear of religious proselytization.” Since “the need to proselytize is inherent to every Catholic congregation,” the administration thought it best to simply tolerate, at its discretion, such dangerous entities, making it easier to control and expel them if need be. Female religious congregations whose members worked in hospitals and schools, and whose proselytization took place only on the individual level in the context of charitable work, might be granted authorization, since they did not engage in open preaching, and since they fulfilled a necessary social function that the state could not afford to take up. But authorizing provocative and socially useless male congregations, it was implied, was out of the question.

The Ministry of War echoed the general sentiments of this report in its correspondence with the Algerian administration: even those congregations that were legally authorized in France (the Jesuits were not) should not, as a rule, be given official authorization in Algeria, so the government might be “ready to suppress immediately the abuses which could occur . . . on the pretext of charitable work.” Suspicion of missionary contact with Muslims was not confined to the Jesuits. The Lazarists (the “Congregation of the Mission”) were also present in Algeria from early on in the French conquest. Despite their reputation for being more patriotic and less conspiratorial than the Jesuits, some Lazarists did run afoul of the administration over attempts to make evangelistic contact with Algeria’s Muslims. Père Girard, a Lazarist who spent his entire career in Algeria, later reminisced that he and Algeria’s bishops met with much opposition because the government “feared [Catholic] proselytization” and preferred to pander to the sensitive Arabs. On one occasion, Girard was almost prosecuted for “corruption of minors,” for catechizing some Algerian Muslim children without their parents’ permission. Girard would later leave
an embittered testimony of his hopes for Muslim missions, hopes that had been
dashed by both administrative obstruction and the resistance and alleged in-
constancy of the Arabs themselves: “Upon arriving [in Algeria], I hoped to
see the Arabs soon convert, and it has taken me fifteen years to abandon this
illusion. . . . [W]ith a population without faith, with an atheistic legal regime,
with a government indifferent to religion . . . what can one hope for?”

This was the context into which the Jesuits inserted themselves in
1840s Algeria, a context of anxious government surveillance of any public
Muslim-Christian contact, of especial suspicion toward congregations, and of
“fear of religious proselytization”—to use the Ministry of War rapporteur’s
own words—to say nothing of the contentious and symbolic position of the
Jesuits themselves in the debate then raging over religious education back in
France. Perhaps it should come us no surprise that when Bishop Dupuch orig-
inally called on the Jesuits to help him serve his vast, new diocese, he referred to
them simply as “auxiliary priests”—because, the Jesuits’ own historian tells us,
“it would have been impossible to obtain the pères openly.” Seven Jesuits—five
priests and two brothers—arrived in Algeria near the end of 1840. Two pères and
one frère were sent eastward to Constantine, which had only been conquered
some three years before, to serve as parish priests or military chaplains to the
soldiers and colonists there. The rest stayed at Algiers, quickly taking up posi-
tions as directors of orphanages, hospital and military chaplains, and directors of
various religious œuvres and associations among the colonists. The Order soon
added a post in the coastal town of Philipperville, and another at Oran—the
heavily Spanish-influenced provincial capital of Western Algeria. By 1849 there
were already some seventy Jesuits in the colony.

Among the Jesuits’ ministries, the one that would take on the highest profile
in these early years, at least from the perspective of the French authorities, was
their orphanage at Ben-Aknoun, near Algiers. After 1842, when Dupuch en-
trusted his diocese’s orphanage to the Jesuits, its director was the ambitious Père
Ferdinand Brumauld. Brumauld was soon caring for some two hundred chil-
dren with the help of several other Jesuits. Other Jesuits in Algeria would grow
to resent Brumauld’s autocratic style or to disapprove of the extent to which
this orphanage swallowed the resources of the Order and took priority over
other ministries, but Brumauld knew how to maintain good relations with the
military authorities for the use of government property and finances. General
Bugeaud, governor general of Algeria throughout the early and mid-1840s, espe-
cially respected and admired Brumauld and the orphanage. Brumauld’s various
utopian projects for populating Algeria with orphans-turned-farmers seem to
have caught the imagination of the general. The social utility of the orphanage and the goodwill Brumauld had garnered among colonial authorities would shield the Jesuits from anticlerical attacks emanating from France. In 1844, an article in the *Journal des Débats* exposed the presence of the Jesuits in Algeria and charged that they had already taken control of the diocesan petit séminaire, that they enlisted children in a secret congregation and used them to spy on the public school, and even that they supported royalist conspiracies in the colony, in favor of the ousted Bourbon dynasty. Alarmed, the minister of cults wrote to the minister of war, reminding him that the “Jesuits’ houses existing in France are watched with great attention by the government” and that it was illegal for them to involve themselves in education—even clerical (seminary) education. He asked the minister of war to verify the details of the story and even suggested that the Jesuits be banned entirely from Algeria. The minister of war transmitted these concerns to Governor General Bugeaud and to the procureur general of Algiers.

It was only at this point that Bugeaud discovered that his friend Brumauld was a Jesuit. Despite his surprise, Bugeaud still defended the Jesuits. General Bugeaud responded to the Ministry of War, acidly, that the *Débats* article had been sent in by a jealous educator. The General mocked the absurd idea that a political conspiracy of any kind could take place in a colony surrounded by Arab enemies, a colony entirely dependent on the metropole for survival. Finally, Bugeaud launched into a glowing description of Brumauld’s orphanage, explaining that it served a vital function that the administration could not yet afford to take up on its own and that its pedagogy, both vocational and religious, was entirely unobjectionable.

Authorities back in France were not so sanguine. The Ministry of War went so far as to send someone to Algeria to investigate. This functionary complained that the Jesuits must have found out about his confidential mission and abruptly sent their seminarians back to the bishop, feeling more legally secure on the terrain of orphanage work alone. Unable to catch them in the act of education, he nevertheless gave a full, alarmist report on the number and functions of the Jesuits in Algeria. He concluded that the governor general’s appreciation of their usefulness was irrelevant; as a “question of legality and social order,” the Jesuits should not even be allowed to operate an orphanage. Throughout the duration of the July Monarchy, authorities in Paris would worry about the presence of the Jesuits in Algeria—and the possibility that the Jesuits were seeking a back door to the official recognition that had been denied them in France. In the context of the July Monarchy’s culture war, the administration’s view of the Jesuits in
Algeria had been fixed: “It is a notorious fact in Algeria that [Brumauld’s orphanage] at Ben-Aknoun served as a mask for the installation of the Jesuits.”

But Brumauld’s orphanage and the Jesuits in Algiers were oriented almost exclusively toward the European population. These early accusations against them were driven more by general anti-Jesuit sentiment and by anticlerical education laws back in metropolitan France than by any uniquely colonial fears of proselytization to Muslims. It was at Constantine, far to the eastern interior of the country, that the Jesuits felt most deeply their contact with Algeria’s Muslim populations and their obligation to missionize these wayward offspring of Abraham.

“True Descendants of Ishmael”: Colonial Constantine as Mission Field

The choice of Constantine as a possible center for a wider missionary effort was not a random one, nor was it due exclusively to the aspirations of the Jesuits there. Geographically and demographically, the city seemed ideal for a mission. Conquered by the French in 1837, Constantine, the capital of Algeria’s eastern province, was a crossroads to the east, and Tunisia, and to the south, with its plains and desert. The precolonial city was a center of Turkish administration and a “flourishing entrepôt between Tunis and the Sahara, trading gold and silver thread, embroidered clothing, gilded pipes, perfumes, ostrich feathers . . . silk from Syria, precious fabric from Constantinople, and moka coffee.”

The shock of France’s invasion and colonization transformed the social and demographic composition of Algeria’s cities drastically, as expropriated Algerians migrated out of cities like Algiers and European populations quickly achieved a majority there. Constantine survived an initial French attack, but in 1837 a second expedition breached the city’s walls and subjected its people to violence and plunder the survivors would remember for generations: women and children fell to their deaths attempting to flee down the rock-perched city’s iconic ravine. But while it is true that Constantine, like Algiers, saw its religious endowments confiscated, many of its mosques and chapels appropriated, and its indigenous population decrease in the days after French occupation, the city was exceptional in retaining an overwhelmingly Arab population and much of its precolonial layout (see figure 2.1). For one thing, to maintain the “Arab . . . character” of the city as a symbol of France’s paternal care for its new subjects, Governor General Bugeaud ordered European settlers to cease buying up property in Constantine’s “indigenous quarter.”
Both before and after the French conquest, the province of Constantine maintained strong traditions of influential Muslim religious confraternities and ongoing contacts with the seats of Muslim learning farther east. The small number of European colonists made the creation of an alternative, European city center unfeasible. Even when European immigration into the city picked up in the 1850s and 1860s, Constantine’s unique topography, perched like an “eagle’s nest” on the “Rocher” (Rock) and bounded by cliffs on three sides, limited development and transformation (see figure 2.2). French planners could not simply expand the city by annexing neighboring communes, nor could they reduce the traditional city center to a peripheral, ghetto-like casbah by building a new, European city, as they had at Algiers. To be sure, there was no shortage of “symbolic violence” in the French takeover of Constantine, with Arab homes
demolished, the principal mosque transformed into a church, and— with the arrival of the first civilian settlers in the mid-1840s—a measure of segregation imposed between the French and Arabs. Still, the minority Europeans, though they had their own *quartier*, were forced to live in close proximity to a large Arab population. It was only in the last third of the century that European architecture, facades, and urban planning became predominant, and that homogenously European *faubourgs* began expanding beyond the ancient city center.

From the very first, Algerian clerics viewed Constantine as a more fertile mission field than Algiers. In addition to demographic and urban factors, this may also have been because, at a time when much of Algeria was ignited by Abd-el-Kader’s rebellion in the west, the traditional aristocracy of Constantine in the east had allied with (and been propped up by) the French. Abbé Jacques Suchet was delegated by Bishop Dupuch to travel to the newly-conquered Constantine in 1839 and establish the Catholic religion there. Suchet was especially struck by the religiosity and receptivity of the population: “The Arabs come in droves to our ceremonies. . . take holy water and kneel like us, and also move their lips when they see us pray. They are very curious.” Muslim notables, even, attended Suchet’s services and asked him many questions about the Christian religion. Like Louis Veuillot, Suchet wrote, “Truly the dispositions of these good Arabs, the respect, the affection that they bear for priests and nuns astonishes
us and fills us with admiration." The contrast with Algiers—already much more of a European settler colony, and much less of a missionary outpost—was unavoidable: "Monseigneur [Dupuch], who has just left us to return to Algiers, is delighted [with the receptivity of Constantine’s Arabs]; he told me that he thought he was dreaming, since the things he saw seemed so incredible."

The comparison between colonized, jaded Algiers and the virgin soil of Constantine was a theme that would continue throughout Suchet’s letters, as well as in the writings of the Jesuits assigned there in the decades to come. For missionaries, this theme was linked, implicitly and sometimes explicitly, to the philo-Islamic conviction that sincere Muslim religiosity was superior to “civilized” religious indifference—the conviction that bringing European civilization and customs without Christianization would be a loss for these religious noble savages. Upon learning that he had been appointed one of Dupuch’s vicar generals, and thus recalled to Algiers, Suchet wrote that he preferred to “stay at Constantine,” with “my good Arabs.” In contrast to the urbanized “Moors” of Algiers—corrupted by contact with European civilization—these Arabs of the inland were “true descendants of Ishmael; they have pure and completely patriarchal values.” And if “Moors” were bad, the Europeans themselves were even worse. Suchet seems to have believed that the main factor in determining a city’s ripeness for missionary work was the presence or absence of irreligious French settlers: “If the province of Constantine is the best in the whole colony, that is because it has fewer colons.” The Jesuits and other Catholic observers of missions in Algeria would continue to evoke this tension—between the unspoiled mission field of Constantine, and Europeanized (and thus already post-Christian) Algiers; between the civilization of the metropole, simultaneously the fruit but also the corruption of Christianity, and the noble naïveté of these “true descendants of Ishmael.”

The first two Jesuits accredited by Dupuch to serve as parish priests arrived in Constantine in December 1840—Père Lasserre as curé, and Père Brumauld tasked with serving surrounding outposts of European colonists. Like all French clergymen serving “secular” state functions in Algeria, they were supposed to focus their efforts on the European populations and, in the heavily-garrisoned Constantine, on the spiritual needs of the soldiers. Indeed, Lasserre as much as admitted to his superior at Lyon that, since there were only five or six hundred European colonists, who had not exactly “come to Africa out of piety,” his work among the soldiers took up the largest part of his time. As for the Muslim population, which was nearly ten times the European civilian population, Lasserre was initially more skeptical than Suchet, writing that “in addition
to [our] ignorance of their language, an insurmountable obstacle to all good will, I do not believe the moment [has] come for their conversion. . . . After all the nice things that have been said about their dispositions toward Christianity, I am not quite convinced. . . . The Arabs are naturally dishonest; they easily deceive Frenchmen with poetic imaginations.”67 The Arabs’ interest in Christian tableaux and medals, Lasserre claimed, was motivated only by wonder and greed, and they retained a fanatical devotion to their marabouts and a concomitant hatred for Christians. “The mercy of God has not yet come for this unfortunate people. It will come, I am sure of it...but little by little and imperceptibly.”68

In casting himself as a realist, though, Lasserre’s letter confirms the currency of such views among Catholic observers of Algerian Muslims. Lasserre’s recommendation to postpone missionary efforts likewise implies that expectations of a mission arabe were inescapable for the Jesuits at Constantine. In 1844, an Arabic-speaking père from the Jesuit mission in Syria arrived to make some attempts at proselytization, and two scholastics were sent from France to direct the colonists’ primary school and to devote themselves to study of the Arabic language.69 But not until 1847, with the arrival of the Arabic-speaking Jean-Baptiste Creuzat as curé of Constantine, did opportunities for Muslim-Christian contact begin to proliferate. By 1848, Creuzat was preaching in Arabic to a “rather numerous” audience every Sunday.70 In 1848 Bishop Pavy also entrusted the curé of Sétif, west of Constantine, to the Society of Jesus, thereby setting the stage for the Arabic-speaking Père Schembri’s visits to the surrounding tribes. Despite Schembri’s lack of success in establishing meaningful contacts (due, he claimed, to the opposition of the military authorities there), the hope remained that Constantine might become a “center from which missionaries might spread far around.”71

The year 1850 would be a pivotal one for these early Jesuit attempts at a mission arabe—a year ripe with hopes and plans, but also full of disappointments. The efforts of Creuzat and the other Jesuits at Constantine seemed to be bearing fruit. Bishop Pavy visited Constantine in 1848 and, according to Jesuit historian Jules Burnichon, what Pavy saw in this city, “the citadel of Islamism in Algeria, had filled him with hope. While at Algiers the administration had placed a sentry at the door of Notre Dame des Victoires, to prevent the Muslims from entering,72 [the Muslims] of Constantine crowded into the church, more numerous than the Christians themselves, and to satisfy them, it had become necessary to translate into Arabic the litanies of the Holy Virgin and other prayers, which they sang to tunes in use at the mosque.”73 Pavy also observed Creuzat preaching in Arabic.74 The following year, Creuzat wrote in a cautiously optimistic letter
that the mission would be slow-going, but as long as missionaries did not aggressively “rail against the *Coran*” because “this would be to lose all their confidence and to become unable to help them,” he could always find opportunities to educate and teach Muslims to appreciate Christian dogma: “Generally, the *‘ulama* admit that it is praiseworthy to study the Gospel.”

These allusions to the regular use of Arabic and even the borrowing of traditional Muslim tunes for Catholic liturgies afford a tantalizing glimpse of the Jesuits’ methods at this early juncture. Jesuit missionaries in earlier periods, notably Matteo Ricci in China and Robert de Nobili in Madurai (India), had been famous for attempting to respect and adapt Christian doctrine to local customs as much as possible. Some scholars have suggested that nineteenth-century Jesuits avoided the kind of cultural accommodation practiced by earlier Jesuit missionaries, whether out of fear of finding themselves again under papal condemnation, or perhaps simply as a reflection of the increasing conservatism of nineteenth-century Catholicism. Such suggestions are reductive in their view of nineteenth-century Catholicism, which though explicitly “antimodern” in many ways, was plural and always in the process of selectively modernizing. More than that, this view underestimates the extent to which the missionary encounter tends by its very nature to relativize religion and to call forth a measure of dialectical adaptation. For the Jesuits in Algeria, “inculturation” was an ideal toward which they still strove. In 1847, Père Jordan, the superior of Algeria’s Jesuits, had outlined his vision for a potential *mission arabe*, describing the Arabs as the “great purpose of our mission in Africa” and recommending “a means similar to that [used by] P. Nobili in the Indies: to live among the Arabs, to take up their customs.”

Parallel to the efforts of Creuzat at Constantine, Jesuits at Algiers established a seminary near Brumauld’s Ben-Aknoun that was devoted to “the study of Arabic and the teaching of French to the indigènes,” who were “touched . . . by the care that the *pères* [took] to treat them after the fashion of their country.” Brumauld himself visited the Council of the Association for the Propagation of the Faith in Lyon to seek an allocation for this seminary, which the Jesuits hoped could become a training ground for candidates destined for other Arabic-speaking countries. The Association’s Council was not optimistic about the chances of success. “The *pères* of the Society do good in Algeria,” the Council noted, “But the conversion of the Arabs will be the work of forbearance, of patience, and of charity, if it is even possible. The lack of effect of Christianity on Mohammedanism is a mystery.” Nevertheless, the Association offered a measure of financial support to the seminary and to the Jesuits’ hopes for increasing
contact with the surrounding Arabs. This seminary, however, lasted no more than three months. Its brief duration may be attributed to several issues: the pères tasked with directing it could not agree on its exact purpose and missiological method; Brumauld’s heart seems not to have been in it, and he may even have cynically viewed the seminary as a pretext to get more funding for his orphanage; and finally, perhaps, Bishop Pavy resented that he was not informed of this new ministry in his diocese and that his own allocation of funds from the Propagation of the Faith was reduced in order to support it. Whatever the financial or interpersonal reasons for the failure of the seminary at Algiers, the more interesting revelation is that the Jesuits were themselves divided in their views of Muslim potential for conversion and how best to overcome the Muslim challenge. Those Jesuits who believed most in the mission arabe and who had entered into sustained contact with Muslims were convinced of the merits of a culturally accommodationist approach—“to treat them after the fashion of their country.” For Père Baulard, the director of the short-lived seminary and one of the most vocal supporters of Muslim missions, the Jesuits at Brumauld’s orphanage were not focused enough on the necessary preparation—study of the Arabic language and customs—since they were too absorbed by their own work with orphans. At the other extreme, some wanted the mission and large-scale contact with Muslim tribes to come all at once. The following year, a dejected Baulard complained that all the pères seemed to be “in agreement that there [was] nothing to be done” for the Arab mission, and he even accused a fellow Jesuit of refusing to baptize an Arab and of referring to the Arabs as a “cursed nation.”

In 1853, a second catechumenate near Ben-Aknoun was attempted, funded by the pious Baroness de Coppens and directed by Baulard and the German Jesuit Père Meyer. Again, the catechumenate was closed after only a short time. Brumauld, the controversial orphanage director, sent a report to his superiors in France criticizing the catechumenate’s approach to Arab missions. Brumauld argued that the best way to convert Algerian Muslims was first to re-Christianize Algeria’s Europeans, as his orphanage purported to do, so that the Muslims would have true models of Christianity to emulate. Until then, Brumauld maintained, it was better to leave the Muslims alone. Brumauld was far from alone in prioritizing ministry to Europeans; most clerics in Algeria concentrated on the European, settler population. Brumauld may have sincerely believed in this strategy, but he also may have hoped to consolidate the power of his own European-focused institution. Indeed, when his advice was followed and the catechumenate for Muslims was suppressed, his orphanages absorbed the funding as well as the fledgling catechumenate’s few Algerian students.
In the wake of this disappointment for the more mission-minded Jesuits, Père Meyer wrote a defense of the methods of the catechumenate and included a scathing critique of Brumaud. Meyer claimed that the Jesuits who had experience working with Algeria’s Muslims agreed that the Muslims’ education and evangelization must happen separately and distinct from European models, following the famous example of the Jesuit “reductions,” the hinterland missions in eighteenth-century Paraguay. Meyer insisted, “In order to succeed it [is] necessary to know the Arabs, to speak their language . . . to raise their children not à la française or à l’Européenne . . . but after the fashion of the country, it [is] necessary to conserve their customs, their language and only change their beliefs and their mœurs.” This was the accommodationist model advocated by Jordan, Baulard, and Meyer. Following the suppression of the Muslim catechumenate and its absorption into Brumaud’s European settler-focused orphanage, the remaining Muslim children found this “completely French education” was ill-adapted to their needs. Some asked to leave; others simply snuck away.86

The 1850 Proposal for a “Mission among the Tribes”

Though Bishop Pavy had felt some resentment about the Jesuits’ unilateral attempt at an Arab seminary at Ben-Aknoun, he remained encouraged by Père Creuzat’s progress among the Muslims of Constantine, “the citadel of Islamism in Algeria,” and by the good reports brought back from Père Schembri’s work around Sétif. Inspired by the seeming openness of the Muslims at and around Constantine—those Muslims most preserved from unhealthy contact with godless Europeans—Pavy agreed to speak to the colonial authorities on the Jesuits’ behalf.87 In 1850, the same year as the first unsuccessful attempt at an “Arab Seminary” near Ben-Aknoun, Pavy made an official request to the government for a Jesuit Arabic mission among the tribes on the military territories surrounding Constantine.88 Pavy addressed his proposal for the mission directly to the minister of war, asking that the Jesuits be permitted, “to begin . . . under my personal responsibility, [an Arabic Mission] in the tribes of the province of Constantine.” No other congregation, Pavy added, “can successfully do what they are capable of in this genre.”89 As motivation for his request, Pavy cited his Christian desire to see the Arabs converted. However, in an effort to prove his patriotism to this military audience, he also emphasized the pragmatic, political benefits of conversion: since Islam teaches interminable war with Christians, no assimilation of the Muslims would be possible without their conversion. The Jesuits were ready to begin their apostolate, but they were asking for three guarantees
from the government: “(1) that the Arab Bureaus raise no opposition to their communication with the tribes; (2) that the military leaders look on them sympathetically and favor them”; and (3) that the government give them a house at Constantine as a base of operations.90

Minister d’Hautpol responded that such a sensitive political question would have to be put to the officers of the Arab Bureaus, the military specialists in indigenous affairs who administrated Algeria’s tribal territories.91 Algeria’s governor general at the time, the Baron Viala Charon, sent a circulaire around to his provincial bureau chiefs, who in turn transmitted it to their local subdivisions and cercles, asking for their views on the Jesuit proposal. The resulting responses from these officers ranged from polite respect for Pavy’s sincerity to open anticlericalism. Some focused on the pragmatic side of the question, while others waxed philosophical. But the officers’ responses were unanimously negative. The officers’ reports show how entrenched the military administration’s position against missions was. Perhaps more importantly, the reports reveal a kind of institutional orthodoxy that Arab Bureau officers shared: on Islam and its capacity to civilize, on the relationship between Christianity and Islam, and on the role of religion in the civilizing process.

The officers’ objections to the mission were often expressed in terms of the concern that missionaries would provoke unrest and jihad, like Bu Ziyan’s revolt at the southern oasis of Zaatcha that had been bloodily repressed only the year before.92 Such concerns were premised on the idea that the Muslims were, at least for the moment, helplessly, irrationally fanatical. The officers were also afraid of losing the slight progress which their own civilizing initiatives—such as vaccinations, judicial reform, and schools—had made. Over and above these particular reasons, though, stood the unique institutional role, sociological make-up, and ideology of the Arab Bureaus. The Arab Bureau officers were motivated by the desire to protect their exclusive status as mediators between France and the Algerians, and they were firmly rooted in Saint-Simonian notions of historical progress and of Islam’s place therein.93

Saint-Simon’s social thought, as filtered through Prosper Enfantin and his coterie of followers at the École polytechnique, was widespread among Bureau officers, many of whom had been students together there.94 For some among these Saint-Simonian “apostles of modernity,” Algeria was a chance to construct an ideal society, an “alternative modernity” that would reconcile East and West.95 Above all, the historicism of Saint-Simon—his belief that societies progressed in stages, but not necessarily along identical tracks—disposed his followers in Algeria’s military administration to prefer “association” (indirect rule and sensitivity
to Algerian customs) over “assimilation.” Algeria had been “divided into civilian, mixed, and military territories” in 1845, and in the years following, the officers who managed the military territories began compiling massive reports on Algeria and its populations that would guide subsequent policy. By 1850, when they were called upon to set down their views on the Jesuit mission, the officers were beginning to enter a period of “ascendance” in French colonial policy-making: Ismaïl Urbain, the Saint-Simonian convert to Islam, would eventually gain the ear of Napoleon III and directly inspire the protectionist, “Arabophile” policies of the emperor throughout the 1860s. Urbain crystallized the culturally protectionist beliefs of the Arab Bureaus in a remarkable book published in 1860, entitled *L’Algérie pour les Algériens* (Algeria for the Algerians). According to Urbain, “It is not a matter of knowing if the Muslims will one day become Christians... we only want to establish that it is not impossible to make them French.... [E]very race, every people, every man as it were, departs from a specific point and goes toward a specific goal.”

One officer at the Philippeville Arab Bureau gave lucid expression to the Bureaus’ worldview in his reaction to the Jesuits’ 1850 missions proposal. Since, at their current educational and civilizational level, indigenous Algerians would not even understand what the Jesuits were trying to teach them, the officer wrote, “Let us develop therefore the faculties of the Arabs by a religious education in keeping with the dictates of the *Coran*, for in following [those dictates] with understanding, one finds the principles of all good. Let us force the Muslims to practice them... and we will have done more to lay the foundations of the Christian faith than all the preaching” with its inevitable “trouble and disorder.” In the Saint-Simonian worldview of these officers, Islam was appropriate to the social and moral level of Algeria’s Muslims and, properly followed, could serve as a prelude to modernity just as well as Christianity had served to civilize Europeans.

The harshest critic of the potential mission, whose response was sent along to Charon but summarized more tactfully by his subdivisional commander at Bône, was an officer by the name of Devoluet: “I consider the idea of the conversion of the Arabs as a utopia, and if this were the occasion... I would seek to prove that the dogma of the *Coran* is simpler, more sympathetic to the senses of the Arabs than Catholic dogma. I would show the Catholic faith losing ground every day in Europe and forced to come plunge its dull weapons into the sands of Africa.” The only fruit of this utopian delusion would be martyrdom. Devoluet’s furious ant clericalism made him something of an outlier in the responses: most Arab Bureau officers were not against the eventual assimilation of Algeria’s
Muslims to something approximating European and even “Christian” civilization. Yet he and other Saint-Simonians viewed Islam, properly understood, as a legitimate stage of development along a path to an “alternative modernity” that would fuse the best of Orient and Occident. From this perspective, aggressive Catholic proselytization was a delusory attempt to transplant the particular, organically developed values of one culture into the alien ground of another.

Finally, in their responses to the 1850 proposal, many Arab Bureau officers in the province of Constantine also criticized the fact that Catholic priests had seemingly been unable to convert any Muslims in the cities of the civilian territories, despite having preached Catholicism “for more than thirteen years . . . in complete freedom!” Should not city-dwelling Muslims, who were more “enlightened,” be easier to convert? The subdivisional commander at Bône, one of Constantine Province’s main coastal cities, took this line of argument in another direction, putting his finger on the reason why missionaries had optimistically deceived themselves—“The Arabs have respect and consideration for everything that is religious”—before presenting his counterarguments: The Muslims of the province of Constantine had been less influenced or corrupted by “conquest and civilization” than those of the other provinces, and they “[followed] the precepts of their religion with more regularity. . . . The Arabs are not idolaters, they have an even more extensive religion than our own. They cling to it even more than the majority of those who bear the name of Christian do to theirs.” For this reason, he added in a gratuitous parting shot, the Jesuits would do better to concentrate on restoring the religious practice of their fellow European settlers, or even on attempting to convert the “Israelites,” since neither of these populations would pose security risks.

It is interesting that this officer put his finger on the missionaries’ alleged failure to convert Algeria’s “Israelites.” Given the place of Jews in French Algeria’s racial hierarchy, the Jesuits’ conspicuous neglect of Algeria’s Jews placed them at odds with the priorities of the civilizing mission and may indeed reveal some latent anti-Semitism on the missionaries’ part. Though many Jewish Algerians participated in a wider North African culture, consuming “Arab” food, dress, music, and—and Algerian Muslims—practicing polygamy, colonial leaders and ideologues chose to ignore these facts and portray Jews as distinct and higher on the racial hierarchy than Arabs. According to this colonialist “mythology,” Algeria’s Jews had been persecuted and degraded by the Muslims and were in need of French liberation and protection. In their gratitude to their French benefactors, they would be more susceptible to assimilation, worthier of citizenship than the Muslims, and would become “useful allies” in the pacification of the
Like the similar claim that Algeria’s women needed to be protected, liberated, and unveiled by French dominance, the myth of Algerian Jews’ oppression under Islam functioned as a “colonial hierarchy” that “[helped] to justify a wider system of exclusion” and colonialism itself.¹⁰⁷ The sticking point was that no “indigène”—Jew or Muslim—would be allowed the rights of citizenship unless they agreed to submit to French “personal status law”: agreed, in other words, to renounce polygamy, divorce, and the religious courts that regulated family law and inheritance. Yet hardly any Jews or Muslims were willing to renounce the “personal status law” of their respective religions, until Algeria’s Jews had citizenship forced upon them en masse by the Crémieux decree.¹⁰⁸

In the officers’ emphasis on the failures of missions in the cities of the civil territory, they were taking their cue from Governor General Charon’s initial request for their opinions. Charon had set the tone for the responses by asking the officers to use missionary success or failure in the cities as an indicator of what might be expected among the tribes.¹⁰⁹ And yet this framing of the question—where the missionaries’ failure to convert “enlightened,” urban Muslims would inevitably translate into a similar failure among military-administered tribes—was a gross misunderstanding of the Jesuits’ strategy. It was also a misunderstanding of the clear similarities between the missionaries’ proposed method and that of the Arab Bureaus’ own civilizational project. What the military administration saw as an obstacle to missions—that the Muslims surrounding Constantine were less touched by “civilization” and therefore less willing to give up their religious practices—was likely what the Jesuits imagined would be key to their success. It was the Muslims of the rural tribes, with their presumed simplicity and piety, who the Jesuits hoped would make ideal converts.

Distinguishing sharply between the Jesuits’ religious mission and the officers’ civilizing mission—the former culturally invasive, the latter culturally protective—underestimates the Jesuits’ commitment to philo-Islamism and culturally adaptive methods. These Jesuit missionaries shared the philo-Islamic admiration and envy for Muslim religiosity expressed by Veuillot, Boré, Suchet, and others. Encouraged by the apparent religiosity of Algeria’s Muslims, some missionaries even viewed Islam—in a sense similar to the views of Bureau officers—as a possible step toward rather than away from Christianity and civilization. Behind their mutual opposition and competing goals, the Bureau officers and the Jesuit missionaries in fact had surprisingly similar visions for the future of Algerian Islam and for how best to usher in that future. Much like the military officers of the Arab Bureaus, the Jesuits put less stock in their influence over the supposedly atomized, uprooted Muslims of Algeria’s cities, who had grown...
callous and corrupt through contact with European colonists. Much like the officers—with their military territories and civilizing experiments—the missionaries wished for a “hinterland” mission, where they might serve as the sole interpreters of French civilization, the sole mediators of French modernity and power. A “utopia” this may have been, as the officer Devoluet perceptively accused, but only in the sense that the officers’ own Saint-Simonian, Romantic model of civilization-by-association was itself a utopia.

Despite these similarities between their culturally protectionist intentions, the approaches of the Arab Bureaus and the proposed Jesuit mission could not have been further apart. Of course, the officers rejected the missionary argument that conversion to Christianity was a necessary stage toward the civilization and political assimilation of Muslim Algerians. The governor general even pointed to the historic example of Muslim civilization in Spain to prove that Muslims could be civilized without ceasing to be Muslims. But behind this pragmatic disagreement was a deeper ideological one: the military administration aimed to secularize Algerian Islamic society—to leave Islam intact but to interiorize and domesticate it. By contrast, what the philo-Islamic missionaries most admired about Algerian Islam—and what, to them, was most worth saving in indigenous society—was the all-encompassing social force of religion.

Governor General Charon finally responded to the minister of war’s question about the Jesuit tribal mission in January of 1851, summarizing his Arab Bureau officers’ various objections to the mission—an “idea so completely outside of [the ideas] which have until now dictated our policy . . . vis-à-vis the Arabs.” He stressed the Muslims’ fanatical attachment to their religion and argued that this was why, whatever other aspects of Algerian society the French might overturn—whatever lands the French expropriated or customs they suppressed—they must always leave the Muslims the personal practice of their religion—since it was their only possession which had “remained . . . sheltered from every attack.” The Muslims needed to be taught that France’s economic, military, or civilizational dominance would always be kept separate from the question of religion, to be taught that “religion is independent of the temporal power.” Their “submission will only be definite on the day when we have completely persuaded the indigènes that, while protecting our interests, we will do no harm to their religious belief,” and that their “personal belief” will be respected. Submission would only be complete, in other words, when Algerian Islam had been “secularized”—when it had accepted the French colonial administration’s own definition of what counted as “religion” and what did not.
Nothing could have been more at odds with the Jesuit (and ultramontane Catholic) vision of Algeria’s future, where Muslims, though converted to Christianity, would still retain their “Muslim” religious fervor and be organized into theocratic settlements led by Jesuit missionaries. At the very moment when—in the wake of the Mahdi Bu Ziyan’s apocalyptic revolt the year before—the military administration and Arab Bureaus were more suspicious than ever of marabout and Sufi models of piety and “socioreligious” leadership and more concerned than ever to surveil and contain these local saints, the Jesuits were fervently hoping that Algerian Muslims might think of them as marabouts, with all the political and religious authority that entailed. Charon, in his summary to the minister of war, had warned that even if the Jesuits were somehow successful in converting large numbers of Muslims, this would not decrease but rather exacerbate colonial violence, since Christian and Muslim “Sharifs” would then wage “holy war” against each other. In Charon’s view, “the Arab”—even once converted to Christianity—could still not resist his own fanatical, irrational attachment to jihad. Algeria’s military administrators in the 1850s and 1860s, seemed to believe paradoxically that Islam was in need of privatization but also that Muslims were almost biologically incapable of being anything but fanatical. Jesuit missionaries and their supporters would have disagreed with Charon’s negative assessment, but in a sense they were counting on this very possibility: that Muslim “fanaticism” and fervor would remain, even once converted to Christianity. But blocked by Algeria’s military administrators, the Jesuits were never given the chance to attempt this tribal mission.

The question of a Jesuit mission on Algeria’s protected tribal lands surpassed the confines of the Arab Bureaus and ministerial offices and became instrumentalized in larger parliamentary and journalistic debates about colonial policy and the place of religion in French society. The debate about the best way to missionize or “civilize” Muslims—whether Christianity was a necessary stage of progress toward civilization or whether Christianity was wholly unnecessary to the process—was a sensitive question in the colony in part precisely because it was a terrain of intense apologetic and political debate back in metropolitan France.

For one thing, the question of a Jesuit mission among Algeria’s Muslim tribes pitted Catholic against Catholic in an internecine battle between the conservative-ultramontane wing of French Catholicism and those who were more liberal or simply more cautious and pragmatic. These larger divisions resembled the local tensions between the ultramontane Jesuits and state-employed ecclesiastics like Algeria’s Bishop Pavy. When one devout colonist and missionary supporter
accused the bishop of being in the colonial administration’s pocket, obstructing the Jesuits and other missionaries and concentrating only on his European parishioners, Pavy and this pro-Jesuit critic fought out their battle in the pages of Veuillot’s influential *L’Univers*.[119] Pavy proved adept at a kind of rhetorical double-game, emphasizing his commitment to Muslim missions whenever he needed funds from the Association for the Propagation of the Faith and other supporters of missions, but avoiding the subject when addressing larger, mainstream colonial and metropolitan audiences.[120]

Beyond the debate between Bishop Pavy’s supporters and critics, in the broader context of France’s culture wars, the refusal of the Jesuits’ tribal mission set conservative Catholics against both mainstream Catholics and Republican anticlericals. During parliamentary debates on Algeria’s religious budget, Émile Barrault, a Republican deputy representing Algeria, revealed the story of the Jesuits’ request to evangelize the Muslims in Algeria’s “cities of the interior.” This plan was just one more sign of the “Church’s and religious corporations’ system . . . of invasion in Algeria.” Barrault claimed that although the government had had the “wisdom to refuse” Pavy’s request for a Jesuit mission, it felt obliged to concede more land and funds for the bishop’s other projects as a kind of consolation prize.[121] The General d’Hautpol, minister of war and former governor general of Algeria, disingenuously denied such accusations, claiming that only a “mental aberration” would lead one to think the Muslims could be converted to Catholicism: “no one is thinking of [the conversion of the Arabs], no one is asking for it.”[122]

*L’Univers*, Louis Veuillot’s ultramontane journal, published the text of this debate, along with indignant commentary; but what angered the journal’s staff most was not Barrault or other anticlerical deputies’ opposition to the Jesuits. Rather, *L’Univers* decried the fact that not even the parliamentarians on the Right had supported the idea of a Jesuit mission in Algeria. Instead, even on the Right, the deputies had “applauded” d’Hautpol’s assurances that no one was attempting the conversion of the Arabs. Even these conservative deputies had affirmed their respect for “religious freedom” in Algeria—or at least their pragmatic concern for the security of the colony. *L’Univers* fulminated bitterly against this fetishization of tolerance taking root even among conservatives: dithering between Christianity and Islam instead of openly supporting Christianity, the state would only succeed in “inoculating [the Arabs] with apathy in religious matters” and in “sowing anarchy” in the name of order.[123] *L’Univers* concluded its discussion of the missionary debate: “Our society,” after all, despite its “contemporary impieties, only survives by leaning on the blessings . . . amassed
by Christian generations.” Even if the French found it convenient to deny how much their civilization owed to Christianity, they should not deny Algeria the same Christian civilization that Catholic religious orders had brought to European history.¹²⁴

Here, in distilled form, was the argument of Veuillot’s *Les Français en Algérie* of five years earlier: the only solution to the “Algerian question,” the only chance for unity between France and Algeria, was for France to reverse its decadent course and return to the civilizational roots of Christianity, while simultaneously leading the Algerians historically forward to that same *civilisation chrétiennne*. Parallel to wider debates about the existence of the Jesuits in general, the issue of Catholic proselytization in Algeria was becoming a bone of contention even between French Catholics—a cause only the most extreme Catholics would openly defend, while mainstream and liberal Catholics applauded the policy of “tolerance” in Algeria.