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CASALT, LOUIS-JACQUES, priest, professor, superior of the Séminaire de Québec, rector of Université Laval; b. 17 July 1808 at Saint-Thomas-de-Montmagny (Montmagny, Que.), son of Louis Casault and Françoise Blais; d. 5 May 1862 at Québec.

Jean-Baptiste Casault, grandfather of Louis-Jacques, arrived in Canada in 1759 from the parish of Saint-Pierre-Langers, near Granville, Normandy. He never forgot his native land and provided his grandson with a living link with France until the boy was almost an adolescent, for he died at the

venerable age of 87 and was buried on 11 June 1822 at Saint-Thomas-de-Montmagny.

At an early age Louis-Jacques was placed in a school in his parish, and was initiated into the rudiments of Latin. A gifted and unusually studious child, he made such rapid and auspicious progress that his parents thought they should make sacrifices in order to give him the advantages of a higher education. On 1 Oct. 1823 he entered the Petit Séminaire de Québec, where he was a brilliant student for five years. But when he came to Quebec nothing about him predicted future success; according to one of his classmates: "L.-J. Casault was already old for a pupil in the Thirty-sixth [the preparatory class], as it was called then. Brought up in the country, he had attended only small schools – Heaven knows what they were like at that time – and showed every sign of excessive reserve and great shyness. In short, his comrades' first impression of him was far from favourable; but opinion soon changed. In the first lessons he received, his remarkable talents were revealed; and while the little rascals who had made fun of the new boy continued to grope along at the bottom of the Thirty-sixth class, at one stride he took the lead and soon had to be transferred to another class, so that fresh material could be provided for his eager mind and more noble awards put within his grasp." According to that remarkable educator Abbé Jérôme [Demers*](#), then superior of the Séminaire de Québec and a professor of physics, young Casault was "the best pupil he had encountered throughout his long career."

At the conclusion of his classical studies, Louis-Jacques Casault decided on the priesthood. On 5 Oct. 1828 he received the tonsure from Bernard-Claude [Panet*](#), bishop of Quebec. While studying theology, Abbé Casault was employed as classroom supervisor and as a teacher in the fourth, third, and second years. He was ordained priest on 27 Nov. 1831, and a few days later Bishop Panet appointed him curate to Abbé Félix Gatién, who since 1817 had been parish priest of Sainte-Famille-du-Cap-Santé. Three years later, in the autumn of 1834, Casault's inclination for study and teaching brought him back to the Séminaire de Québec, where he was to spend the rest of his life.

There he was assigned to teach physics, which finally was being separated from philosophy. He held this chair from 1834 to 1854, except when other responsibilities claimed him. In the opinion of one of his former pupils, "as a teacher he was remarkable for the clarity and brevity of his explanations, which were always affectionate and kindly in manner; and from his customarily diffident words, there invariably sprang light." Abbé Casault became a member of the community of the seminary on 14 Aug. 1840, and the next day joined the seminary council. He was director of students from 1843 to 1851 and in this office

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showed concern for maintaining strict discipline. No experience was more dreaded than having “to appear before M. Casault.” He knew that one of the best ways to combat unruliness among pupils was to show a great deal of interest in them and seek by all possible means to improve their lot. He had the playgrounds enlarged at the Petit Séminaire; he beautified the estates of Maizerets (Quebec) and Petit-Cap (Cap-Tourmente) at Saint-Joachim; and he instituted an annual festival in honour of Bishop François de [Laval*](#).

But Abbé Casault's principal accomplishment was the founding of Université Laval at Quebec, the plan for which he took from the abbés Jérôme Demers and John [Holmes*](#) who counted him their favourite disciple. Several years before Bishop Ignace [Bourget*](#) publicly advocated the establishment of a university at Quebec in 1851, Abbé Casault, “who understood” according to Abbé Jean-Baptiste-Antoine [FERLAND](#), “that a university is not only, as some might think, a college with the power to confer degrees or give diplomas, but also an establishment distinct from and superior to colleges, in the nature and extent of its teaching,” had carefully studied all the issues related to higher learning, and particularly the functioning and structure of European universities. Casault published historical notes in *L'Abeille* on Oxford University (17 and 24 Jan. 1850), and the academies of France (30 May, 5 and 20 June 1851), with the intention, apparently, of preparing opinion for the plan he foresaw must soon be put before the public. Almost every evening of the year 1849–50 he talked to his friend Abbé Charles Trudelle, a teacher of the second year, about his favourite subject, which had become almost an obsession.

In 1851 Abbé Casault succeeded Abbé Louis [GINGRAS](#) as superior of the Séminaire de Québec. He now possessed the authority and influence necessary for translating his plans into reality. But Bishop Bourget took the initiative; in a letter to the archbishop of Quebec, Pierre-Flavien [TURGEON](#), on 31 March 1851, he suggested that Turgeon entrust to the Séminaire de Québec the task of founding a university, which he saw as a provincial university under the jurisdiction of the bishops of the ecclesiastical province of Quebec: the Séminaire de Québec would be at the head of the structure and its constituent members would be the various colleges, who would thus be “raised to the status of university colleges.”

At Quebec, Abbé Casault and the directors of the seminary, who had been calculating their resources in money and men, had been thinking more and more seriously about setting up a university, but being realistic, and no doubt distrustful of the bishop of Montreal's grandiose plan, they had concluded that to secure its future prospects such an institution should begin modestly and be subject to a single authority. In their view, it should not be a provincial university under the jurisdiction of the bishops of the ecclesiastical province, but a diocesan university, attached directly to the Séminaire de Québec, with the archbishop as its supreme head. On 30 March 1852 Abbé Casault communicated their proposal to Bishop Turgeon, who on 12 April forwarded to Bishop Bourget this “plan for the establishment of a university at Quebec.” After much hesitation the bishop of Montreal perforce accepted what Quebec had decided. In a letter of 4 May to Turgeon he refers to the fact that “all the steps [had been] taken at Quebec to ask the Pope for a bull for canonical establishment, and the government for a bill of incorporation, for the university establishment that it [had been] decided should be set up there.” On 10 May the council of the seminary, with Abbé Casault presiding, adopted two texts: the petition to be addressed to Queen Victoria and the draft of a university charter to be presented to her.

Abbé Casault had already seen to securing the approval of Lord Elgin [Bruce],

governor general of Canada since 1 Oct. 1846. Elgin deplored the fact that there were already too many universities in the country. But they served only the Anglophone population: King's College, which became the University of Toronto, founded in 1827; McGill College at Montreal, 1829; Victoria College at Cobourg, Upper Canada, 1841; Queen's College at Kingston, Upper Canada, 1842; and Bishop's College at Lennoxville, Lower Canada, 1843. Casault stressed to Elgin that the Francophone group should be provided with at least one university. Ferland noted: "He surprised the noble lord by the lucidity of his exposition and the elevated nature of his views." When the archbishop of Quebec's letter of 10 May 1852 corroborated Casault's verbal assurance that the Séminaire de Quebec possessed the necessary means to found a university, that a draft charter had been drawn up, and that the date on which the future university would open its door to students had been projected, Elgin hesitated no longer to support the project. On 13 May Étienne Parent*, who had held the post of assistant secretary of the Province of Canada since 1847, gave Bishop Turgeon the copy of an order in council, dated the previous day, which outlined the merits of the establishment of a Francophone university for the Catholic population of Lower Canada.

On the same day Bishop Turgeon forwarded to Elgin a copy of the draft university charter and requested him to facilitate the steps being taken by Abbé Casault, who was leaving in two days for Europe accompanied by a secretary, Abbé Thomas-Étienne Hamel, at that time a seminarist. On 5 June the provincial secretary got in touch again with Bishop Turgeon to inform him of a new order in council, which announced that the governor general would give his approval of the seminary's petition to the queen. In London the royal charter was granted with dispatch. On 26 June the Colonial Office undersecretary notified Abbé Casault, who had recently arrived in the British capital, that he had received his petition and was now awaiting the governor general's report. On 7 July the same official informed Casault that he had received a letter from Lord Elgin recommending the granting of a royal university charter to the seminary of Quebec. On 16 July the colonial secretary, Sir John Pakington, informed Lord Elgin that he had received his communiqué; Pakington had advised the queen to grant the privilege requested, and the queen had proved to be in favour of the plan. On 9 August the archbishop of Quebec in turn was informed by the governor's aide-de-camp of the success of Abbé Casault's negotiations. The charter was accepted as the directors of the seminary had drafted it. At Casault's request it was dated 8 Dec. 1852. The official document reached Quebec on the following 14 January.

Rome did not proceed as expeditiously as London. Abbé Casault had gone there in July 1852, armed with a letter dated 12 May from Bishop Charles-François BAILLARGEON, the coadjutor of Quebec, which introduced him as being "sent to the Holy See to request the establishment of a Catholic university in this province." The secretary of the Propaganda had replied at that time that "the sovereign pontiff might grant the request of our lord bishops of Canada more readily when he no longer had cause to fear that the privileges he accorded would be rendered useless by the ill will of the civil authority." Abbé Casault reminded him of this in a letter of 21 Jan. 1853, forwarding an authentic copy of the charter just received at Quebec: "I hope that this document will be found satisfactory, and that it will persuade His Holiness to grant the favour requested on our behalf." The reticence of Rome is explained by the fact that Great Britain, currently a victim of "papal aggression," was refusing to recognize the dioceses that Pius IX had created by his brief of 29 Sept. 1850; nor did London want to grant legal existence to the Catholic university of Dublin. But on receiving the charter the

pope signed a brief, dated 6 March 1853, authorizing the archbishop of Quebec to confer degrees in theology. Université Laval was not awarded a pontifical charter, however, until 15 May 1876 by the bull *Inter varias sollicitudines*.

Thus the university was born. Abbé Casault and the directors of the seminary, wishing to baptize it with a name which would be universally acceptable, “anxious also that the glory with which it might shine should be shared by the founder of the seminary, called it Université Laval.” According to the charter, the two offices of superior of the seminary and rector of the university would henceforth be inseparable. Superior of the seminary since 1851, Abbé Casault, therefore became the first rector of the university. He was assisted by a council composed of the directors of the seminary and the three most senior titular professors of each faculty. The first session of the new council was held on 21 Feb. 1853. As no faculty yet existed, the only participants, besides the rector, were the directors, the abbés Joseph Aubry, Félix Buteau, Michel [Forgues*](#), Léon Gingras, Louis Gingras, Edward John [Horan*](#), and Elzéar-Alexandre [Taschereau*](#). Université Laval was to include four faculties: theology, law, medicine, and arts.

The faculty of theology could not be created immediately: there were too few ecclesiastical students, and the needs of the parochial ministry were so manifold and pressing that the seminarists could not yet be given time to devote themselves freely to the study of the sacred sciences. This faculty was thus not inaugurated until 1866.

By contrast, the faculty of medicine was organized and had begun to function as early as 1853. There had been a school of medicine at Quebec since 15 May 1848. The council of the university found in this school the members from which to form a group of professors able to undertake the teaching of medicine. Six of these professors left their chairs to accept an equivalent position at the university. They were Jean [Blanchet*](#), professor of general pathology, who was elected dean, Charles-Jacques [FRÉMONT](#), professor of external pathology and surgery, James Arthur Sewell, professor of internal pathology and special therapeutics, Jean-Zéphirin Nault, professor of materia medica and general therapeutics, Jean-Étienne [Landry*](#), professor of descriptive and surgical anatomy, and Alfred Jackson, professor of tocology.

It was not so easy to create the faculty of law, and the first move to set it up was not made until 1854. After numerous negotiations two professors were obtained, Augustin-Norbert [MORIN](#), judge of the superior court, who was appointed professor of natural law and the law of nations on 13 June 1854, then dean of the new faculty, and Jacques [Crémazie*](#), who was appointed professor of civil law on 4 September. On 12 June 1855 the university council was able to add Judge William [Badgley*](#) as professor of criminal law, lawyer Jean-Thomas [Taschereau*](#) as professor of commercial law, and lawyer Joseph-Ulric [Tessier*](#) as professor of procedure. Unfortunately their pursuits outside the university prevented most of these professors from preparing and giving courses, so that for some years the teaching in the faculty was limited to civil and Roman law.

Civil law was looked after by Jacques Crémazie, and the teaching of Roman law was assigned to Auguste-Eugène Aubry, who began his course on 15 Jan. 1857. Aubry had been recruited in Paris by Abbé Thomas-Étienne Hamel, then a student at the École des Carmes. The Casault-Hamel correspondence throws interesting light on the qualities required of the candidate and his position at Quebec. On 22 Feb. 1855 Casault wrote to Hamel: “He must be young (about 30), religious, have solid talent, be studious, express himself readily with a good delivery, and finally be a doctor of law.” The rector then specified the professor’s

working conditions and salary: “The task he will have here is to teach Roman law. . . . The periods in the faculty last at least an hour, and he will have six a week except during the holidays. The salary he may expect will be 800 piastres for the first year. If we are satisfied with him, we will add 100 piastres to this sum for the second year and so on for the following years, with the proviso that once it has reached 1,200 piastres this salary will remain fixed.” Abbé Casault added at the end of his letter that if the future professor were a “talented, hard-working man” he could “easily increase his income greatly through activities compatible with the duties of this post.”

Certain professors more than liberally utilized this method of adding substantially to their salary, for on 20 Dec. 1856 the rector informed Hamel that the law faculty “was functioning badly,” to the point that he feared it would give itself “a very unsavoury reputation” in the public eye. Jacques Crémazie was “in reality the only professor who is doing his job.” As for Dean Augustin-Norbert Morin and William Badgley, both judges of the Superior Court of Lower Canada, they were no doubt too preoccupied with their duties to attend effectively to their teaching. “Our judges,” added Casault, “are valuable for the honour they bring us, we need others for the work.” On 28 Sept. 1857 Casault wrote to tell Hamel that Aubry had that month “asked to be given the courses in criminal and commercial law” “abandoned” by Judge William Badgley and lawyer Jean-Thomas Taschereau.

Aubry was to give supplementary courses in the faculty of arts. This faculty, the fourth to be organized, was the least privileged. According to Camille [Roy*](#), the reason was that “One could not indeed establish university teaching in the arts and sciences at Quebec at a period when it would have been difficult to recruit enough students. Young people who had received their first literary or scientific training in our colleges and Petits Séminaires were not concerned with furthering their education in this direction. They were obliged to establish themselves immediately in society, to earn their living by entering one of the liberal professions; they began their studies in theology, law, or medicine immediately on completing their classical programme, and they had neither time nor money to devote to arts and sciences at the university level. Hence Université Laval, in its first years, did not deem it appropriate to set up university chairs in the faculty of arts.”

Unable to organize regular courses in arts and sciences, the university instituted public classes or evening lectures. Aubry began in September 1857 with a course on universal history, which was a great success. He gave lectures three times a week during the university sessions 1857–58 and 1858–59, concluding the course on 14 April 1859. At that time his colleagues in the faculty of arts were Jules Tailhan, a French Jesuit who had been lecturing in philosophy since September 1858, and Abbé Jean-Baptiste-Antoine Ferland, who taught Canadian history.

Casault, as rector, in addition to looking after the organization of teaching in the faculties, had provisionally housed the staff of the new university in a building of the seminary, and he had to see to the construction of the university buildings. In 1853 he called in architects and contractors to discuss plans and estimates. In May 1854 a site was acquired adjoining the seminary, and a new street mapped out from the ramparts to Rue Sainte-Famille. This university street would link together the central block, whose corner stone was laid on 21 Sept. 1854, the medical faculty building, erected the same year, and the university residence, completed in September 1855. The architect who drew up the plans of the central

building and the residence was Charles [Baillairgé*](#), nephew of architect and sculptor Thomas [Baillairgé*](#) and protégé of Abbé Jérôme Demers.

But it was not enough to build in stone. It was above all necessary to build in men, in other words to train competent professors. On 26 Aug. 1853 abbés Louis Beaudet, Alphonse Marmet, and Cyrille-Étienne Légaré had left for Europe to study humanities at the École des Carmes in Paris. The following year Abbé Thomas-Étienne Hamel joined Beaudet and Légaré – Marmet having died – to take classes in mathematics. Beaudet, Légaré, and Hamel returned to Quebec, the first two as bachelors of arts, the third as a bachelor of mathematical sciences. When Abbé Casault terminated his rectorship he thus was able to say that, although he had provided for the housing of his teaching staff and student body with a certain munificence – denounced by some as extravagance – he had nevertheless not neglected the academic training of his professors, since their ranks already included three with degrees from the Sorbonne. For its part, Rome had conferred the degree of doctor of canon law on Abbé Elzéar-Alexandre Taschereau, after he had spent two years, 1854–56, on the banks of the Tiber.

Despite frail health, Abbé Casault had valiantly assumed an office beset by problems of all kinds, some directly related to the functioning of the university, others to the affiliation of the colleges. Université Laval had been founded to serve the Francophone population. The charter authorized the university council to grant the diploma of *bachelier ès arts* to the pupils of all Catholic colleges in Lower Canada. Regulations therefore had to be drawn up for the secondary schools that would be as uniform and equitable as possible. Submitting all candidates to the same examinations would create a healthy spirit of emulation. Casault indicated this aim in a letter of 18 Feb. 1853 to the archbishop of Quebec, who conveyed it to all the bishops of the province and through them to the seminaries and colleges of the dioceses. The rector had attached to his letter a draft statute in 13 articles governing the obtaining of a *baccalauréat ès arts* and admission to the university. This draft became the “Règlement provisoire pour les épreuves du baccalauréat ès arts et de l’inscription, dans L’Université Laval,” and was published for the first time in the *Annuaire . . .* of 1856–57.

With the obvious exception of the Petit Séminaire de Québec, which had the first two *bacheliers*, Pierre Roussel and Benjamin [Paquet*](#), the colleges deemed the Laval statute too exacting. “Extreme opposition” to the programme of university examinations drawn up at Quebec was expressed, especially in the Montreal region where in 1858 some college directors considered that the affiliation of their institutions to Laval should not necessitate such a close control by the university of the *baccalauréat* examinations and admission. But Casault remained adamant: “It is quality and not quantity that is needed at Université Laval,” he constantly repeated. He was encouraged to maintain this policy of excellence by such colleagues as Abbé Michel-Édouard [Méthot*](#), who in his biography of Casault was to praise the former rector for not deviating from the line of conduct that he had established for himself: “The *Baccalauréat ès Arts* is the diploma that opens the door to all the others. . . . Now how can one ensure that candidates from diverse institutions have acquired the sum of literary and scientific knowledge that is everywhere required of an educated young man? The idea of giving all the classical colleges the power to confer this degree on their own pupils was too dangerous for M. Casault to consider for one moment. He saw no other way than to oblige all candidates indiscriminately to take a serious examination on all the subjects of which secondary education is normally comprised.” When he was about to leave his post as rector, Abbé Casault sent Bishop Baillargeon, the administrator of the diocese, a long disquisition in three

letters dated 1, 3, and 4 June 1859, in which he vigorously defended the standards he believed worthy both of Université Laval and of the institutions that would agree to be affiliated to it, with a view to furthering the progress of university and classical education in the province.

In 1860 Abbé Elzéar-Alexandre Taschereau succeeded Abbé Casault as superior of the Séminaire de Québec and rector of Université Laval; the latter accepted the directorship of the Grand Séminaire and resumed the teaching of theology. As a member of the university council, assistant superior, and vice-rector from 9 April 1862, when this post was created, he was in a position to give his colleagues the benefit of the experience he had so laboriously acquired. But already, at less than 54 years of age, he foresaw his end. On the eve of the first day of the year 1862 the staff of the university had presented him with his portrait, painted by Théophile [HAMEL](#) and, in Ferland's words, "a perfect likeness."

Abbé Casault had been in feeble health for many years. He suffered particularly from gout, and an acute attack of this disease brought about his death on 5 May 1862. He was given an impressive funeral in the cathedral of Quebec, and buried in the crypt of the seminary chapel. His coffin bore an inscription in lead; its text was reproduced on a marble epitaph unveiled in the former exterior chapel on 8 Jan. 1863 and transferred in 1909 to the present chapel. On the campus of the university at Sainte-Foy on the outskirts of Quebec, an unpretentious stele reminds recent generations of the one who, by virtue of the "very great" part he "took in its establishment," is entitled to be "proclaimed the founder" of Université Laval.

[PHILIPPE SYLVAIN](#)

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