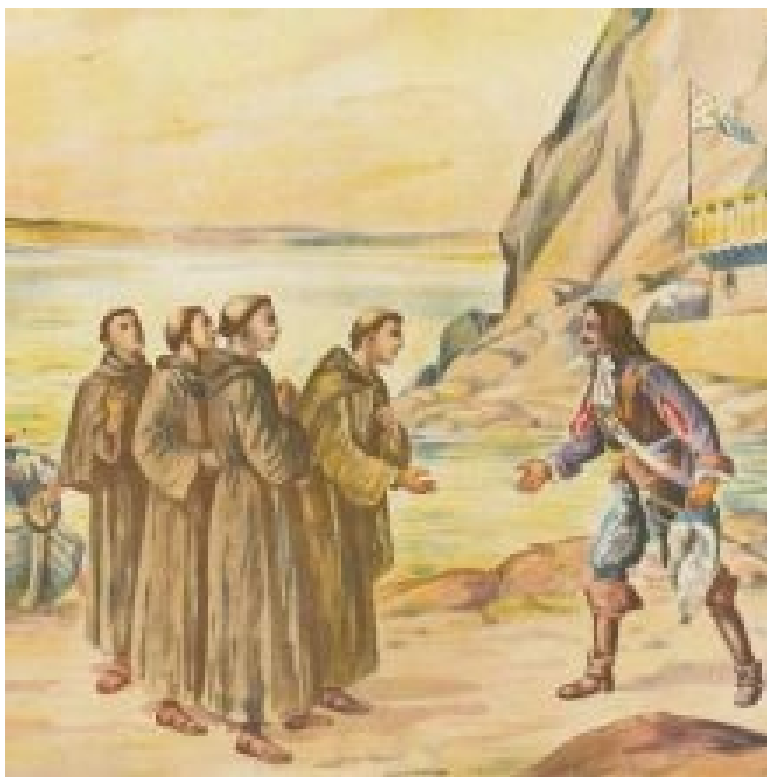


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THE FRANCISCANS IN EARLY CANADIAN HISTORY



[Arrivée des Récollets à Québec, JUIN 1615]

[Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec]

Note : In large part the text in this document has been retained as written by P. Léandre Poirier OFM Conv in the original *Chroniques & Documents* publication. Some words are not as expected. Obvious mis-spellings Have been corrected. All else remains as found.

The story was found in the *Chroniques & Documents*, Vol. 35, NO 1, Janvier 1982, Province Saint-Joseph Du Canada.

Le soir du 15 mai 1981, une cinquantaine de personnes de diverses communautés franciscaines de Toronto et des alentours se réunissaient en l'église paroissiale St-Bonaventure des Conventuels de Don Mills pour une soirée de prière et d'animation franciscaines en préparation des célébrations du se cenlenaire de la naissance de S. François d'Assise. Il était prévu que la liturgie d'une demi-heure serait suivie d'une causerie de 45 minutes sur la part des Franciscains Récollets dans l'histoire du Canada.

Pressenti dès octobre 1980 par l'organisateur, le P. Edward Debono OFM Conv, le P. Hervé Blais avait demandé au P. Léandre Poirier de le remplacer pour cette conférence en anglais. Accompagné de son Père Gardien, Clarence Laplante, le P. Léandre se présenta avec le texte publié ci-après. Il tient à exprimer sa reconnaissance aux confrères qui l'ont aidé dans sa rédaction anglaise, spécialement les PP. Walter Bédard, Guillaume Lavallée, Florent Long et Oscar Giroux. L'échange qui a suivi la causerie a manifesté le désir de l'auditoire d'en savoir davantage sur le sujet, assez nouveau pour la plupart d'entre eux. Il est à souhaiter que ce texte, tiré à part et distribué dans les milieux anglophones, offre un début de réponse au besoin exprimé. L. P

Time and time again, it has been said that the history of the Franciscan Récollets in the Canadian Church is yet to be written, both from the scholarly point of view and in popular presentation. I intend to write such a popular though accurate presentation next year during the centenary of the birth of St. Francis of Assisi, under the title *Présence de saint François dans l'histoire de l'Église canadienne*. It would include not only the Récollets and the Capuchins but the other branches of the First, Second and Third Order that came to Canada at the end of the 19th century. This evening, Fr. Debono has allowed me a short hour to deal with the Récollets in New France exclusively.

It is surely good to go back to the roots. Unfortunately, it is not always an easy task: one has to do research for documents in order to be objective. In our case, most of the papers have been lost, either in France, where the French Revolution has destroyed or dispersed them, or in Québec City where fire destroyed the Franciscan Monastery with its archives in 1796. As for the Roman papers relevant to our history, for Récollets, Capuchins and Cordeliers (Conventuals), they are buried in the Propaganda Archives; their discovery is recent and their study just begun. Moreover the Récollet writers had been few in New France; the reports (Relations) they sent to France have been lost for the most part, while the Jesuit *Relations* are well known, published and quoted, which means that one is bound to see only one side of the medal...

I shall not lose time in mentioning the many errors or misconceptions which have crept into the books of historians about us — calling Fr. Hennepin a Jesuit or even a Jesuit Récollet ... Besides, what is a Récollet? a, member of a defunct Order? When the children

learn at school that the Récollets were the first missionaries here, nobody ever tells them that they were true Franciscans, one branch among many others existing at that time in the great Franciscan family. It is enough to mention now that the Order has partially recovered its unity under Leo XIII in 1897, and is now reduced to four groups: the Friars Minor or Franciscans, the Capuchins, the Conventuals and the Third Order Regulars.

You will agree that it is about time to write a complete and true history without prejudice since the great historian Kinsford already wrote in 1910: "The country owes the Order a debt of gratitude which history has only imperfectly paid; any mention of their name has been merely perfunctory without acknowledgment or sympathy" (1,72). Just recently, when bishop Laval of Québec was beatified, we witnessed some historians setting up a pedestal for their hero at the expense of the Friars' reputation, because they had some difficulty in coping with pastoral plans and methods of their bishop and with the Jesuits who sided with him against the civil authorities.

If the Friars had been only a small group without influence, it wouldn't be particularly important to set the record straight. But if one considers mere numbers, one realizes what it means. Here I quote the most recent studies of our archivist, Fr. Hervé Blais. (Incidentally, he would have had the qualified authority to give you this lecture, but he asked me to replace him.) Fr. Blais is preparing for publication the long-awaited *Biographical Dictionary of the Récollets*, put together more than 60 years ago by Fr. Odoric Jouve (who died in France in 1953, after living 24 years in Canada). Fr. Blais presents a list of 351 friars from four different Provinces of Récollets in France having worked here. From 1615 to 1849, that is almost 200 years, since we must omit 40 years of absence, names and dates are listed for 70 lay brothers, 281 priests, attached to three monasteries, serving 117 parishes, 20 military posts or forts. These include 10 Friars who died as martyrs or heroes and at least 10 others who left behind them a reputation of sanctity. I thank Fr. Debono for giving me the opportunity, this evening, to honor all these pioneers, our forerunners, and thus add to our Canadian history the Franciscan coloration which has somewhat faded into the greyness of far-away landscape.

For purpose of clarity, I have handed out a summary recalling dates and names for three periods of history [See the last page of this document]:

The first period, that of the founders, involves the 20 friars who worked during 14 years, from 1615 to 1629;

After a 40-year gap of enforced silence, the second period covers 126 years of active and organized labor in monasteries, forts, parishes and adventurous trips of exploration, from 1640 to 1796

The third period starts with the decline after the decree of secularization (1796) and ends with the death of the last lay brother in 1849: 53 years, during which some 70 friars gradually fade away.

For a final paragraph of my introduction, let me tell you that four friars before me tried to write the same summary each one in his own way. In 1927, the famous historian mentioned above, Fr. Odoric Jouve, wrote 23 paragraphs in the periodical *Vie franciscaine* of Paris, covering 17 pages (536-744, *passim*). In 1936, Fr. Hugolin Lemay, a prolific writer who died in Montréal in 1938, read a paper at the Franciscan Educational Conference - held at Santa Barbara, entitled "The Friars Minor in French and British North America" (p. 151-182 of the *Report*), with emphasis on bibliography, his special field of competence. In 1968, my old friend and historian of the Chicago Province, Fr. Marion Habig, contributed 17 pages to the *Historia Missionum O.F.M.* (History of the Missions of the Franciscans), published in Rome. Meanwhile, another of our well known historians, Fr. Archange Godbout, produced a short paper never read in public; it has just been published in our provincial periodical, *Chroniques et documents* (April 1981, p. 46-50). These are the only references I give you, in order not to extend this paper and leave you time for asking questions.

I

1534, Jacques Cartier: these are the date and the name to remember for the discovery of Canada; it was done in the name of the King of France. However, nothing important at that time influenced the future of the colony. Seventy years later, another attempt was more meaningful. In 1605, in Acadia (now the Maritime provinces), Port-Royal was founded. Two secular priests and later two Jesuits laboured there for a couple of years to spread the Gospel and bring the sacraments to the Indian tribes. Québec, destined to be the stronghold of Canada under the French régime, was founded in 1608. But we have to wait until 1615 to see the Catholic Church established, and it was by the Franciscan Récollets. In the meantime, as a devout Catholic, Champlain had been seeking zealous missionaries. These were to be subsidized by the Company of the Associates, who were under contract to give the colony all that was necessary to make it a new France. Champlain and his Récollet missionaries were to encounter endless difficulties with the Company, these gentlemen being more interested in the fur trade with the Indians than in the establishment of farmers for agriculture or in the conversion of the Indians to the true God. Moreover, many of them were Huguenots and so not very anxious to help Catholic missionaries. As I just said, the Récollets were Champlain's first choice as he had known them for some time in his own town of Brouage. His first contact with the friars of Aquitaine (Immaculate Conception Province) were unfruitful. The Récollets of St. Denis in Paris, however, readily managed to succeed. King Louis XIII, with the French cardinals and bishops, assembled in Paris for the « États Généraux », were favorable to the project in a

practical way. The approval by Rome came first through the Papal Nuncio in Paris and later by the Pope himself, Paul IV, at the request of the king.

Four friars were chosen: three priests, Denis Jamet, Jean Dolbeau, Joseph Le Caron, and one lay brother, Pacifique Duplessis. To these heroes of the Cross who brought the faith to Canada in 1615 a monument was set up in Québec City for the third century of their arrival in New France in June 1915.

The missionaries left Honfleur with Champlain on April 24th and arrived one month later on May 25th at Tadoussac, 80 miles east of Québec. Brother Gabriel Sagard, our first historian, wrote in 1636 about this first departure from France: "These good friars, after preparing themselves by prayer for such pious and meritorious endeavors, began their journey by travelling on foot, without money, imitating the Apostles, according to the Rule as real Friars Minor".

Their first contact with our country was a pleasant one at Tadoussac, where the broad St. Lawrence River is met by the pictures que Saguenay River. The planting of a cross in the name of the King of France filled their hearts with apostolic hopes. But the first meeting with the Indians had a different flavor. The Montagnais tribes of Tadoussac were just returning from war with the scalps of seven of their enemies killed in action. They were seen torturing their prisoners: they cut off their fingers with their teeth and seared their bodies with fire-brands; the women scalped them, finally tore them into pieces for the purpose of eating them. These scenes were a good preparation for apostles who wanted to become martyrs ...

They left their ship in Tadoussac and headed for Québec City in small barges. City is a big word for a settlement comprising from 30 to 40 people. But they began their ministry immediately, building a chapel dedicated to the Immaculate Conception, the mother of all churches to be erected in Canada. There the first mass was celebrated on June 25th. Without losing time, Fr. Le Caron went to reconnoiter the land with fur traders and to meet the Huron tribes living around the Great Lakes. Before following them to Northern Ontario, he returned to Québec to pick up the necessary articles, especially for the celebration of the mass. Before leaving Sault-Saint-Louis, south-west of Montréal, he met at Rivière-des-Prairies his confrère Jamet who had recently arrived with Champlain and others. On June 24th 1615, out in the open, the first concelebrated (?) mass was offered on the Island of Montréal.

It is well to note that this same Fr. Le Caron, who was to be the first missionary to the Hurons, had been a secular priest at the French court of Henry IV and the appointed preceptor of the future king Louis XIII. But it is now as a poor Franciscan priest that he decided to push further North, though Champlain tried in vain to deter him from doing so.

Father Le Caron took a month to reach Lake Huron. We can imagine the friar in his grey habit, paddle in hand and helping to portage the canoe when navigation became impossible, eating *sagamité*, a distasteful mixture of corn flour and water, in the company of unkempt Indians, bearing day and night the sting of mosquitoes . . . After he had reached Caragouha on the Georgian Bay, a large village with three palisades, the Hurons built a cabin for him. When Champlain paid him a surprise visit, he prepared an altar to say mass on August 12th 1615, that being the date on which the first mass was celebrated in this part of Ontario. Two days later, Champlain left him with the Indians. Until May 1616, the friar put in months of hard labor, prayer and sacrifice, baptizing the dying babies and learning the language. He began composing a small dictionary, mostly a phrase book, which he presented later to his former pupil, King Louis XIII.

Meanwhile, Fr. Dolbeau was starting his mission among the Montagnais around Tadoussac, where he had arrived on December 2nd. He tried to follow his flock in their hunting expeditions during winter; but he was compelled to return to Québec after a short while; he could not stand the smoke which filled the tents when the Montagnais made their fires; it tormented his eyes and threatened him with blindness.

The following summer, in July of 1616, the Founders of the Church in Canada met with Champlain for an evaluation and planification of their work, that is, to assess what had been accomplished and to plan for the future. Both Champlain and his group of missionaries had one year's experience. It was agreed that the presence of the French had two objectives: to cultivate the land and to spread the Gospel. The missionaries would then be promoters of both religion and agriculture. If they had planned to receive help from the Associates, they quickly learned that they could not share the material interests of the fur traders. These merchants were very pleased to hear from Champlain and Le Caron and Jamet, who had gone to France in that winter of 1616; but no real action followed. However, when the Friars returned from France, they brought with them a family of six persons, Louis Hébert, his wife, their three children and a brother-in law, who became the first family to settle in Canada.

Another one of Fr. Jamet's projects was to be realized also: a college for boys. He had interested the king and other officials including Charles de Bouës, Vicar General of the archdiocese of Rouen, who was to give the name of his patron saint, Charles, to the college and to the adjacent river. The monastery with its chapel was dedicated to Our Lady of the Angels. From 1620 on, many young Indians were educated there. Fr. Le Caron at Tadoussac and Fr. Duplessis at Trois Rivières also taught school. Some of these pupils were sent to France for a better education with but relative success. Around their monastery, the friars took care of the garden, the cattle, the poultry, in order to help the colony to survive.

When a second Company of Merchants was formed in 1621, the hopes of the missionaries were again shattered. Some 18 persons were to be brought to New France every two years; but what progress could be expected when their principal director, William de Caën, was a protestant? Moreover some delegates from the first Company also came to Québec and disputes broke out. The situation became so bad that at a solemn meeting in Québec, it was decided that a special delegate be sent to France in order to promote the true interests of the colony and of religion. Fr. Georges Le Baillif was chosen to bring home the case, even to forbid Protestants to emigrate here. It was evident that the annual reports or Relations of the friars had not been eloquent enough to stir the interests of the authorities, so they had to seek more practical means to obtain justice and peace.

However, the front line of battle was here at home, especially in the forest. Already in 1624, Fr. Le Caron had described his work: "We have travelled more than 600 leagues to the West and have visited eight or ten different tribes". With these groups and their difficult language, the road to faith was a long one. After nine years of hard labor, they could bring about not a new Christian people but "a little flock" as it is said in the Gospel.

It is time to emphasize that this kind of work progresses at the cost of suffering and even death. The first to die was brother Paqifique Duplessis in August of 1619. Previously in July of 1618 he had saved the colony through his friendship with the Indians who had warned him about a plot against Québec. In 1619 also, Fr. Poulain had left Trois-Rivières to spread the faith around the Great Lakes. Some Iroquois seized him and began to torture him with fire; happily he was saved by some Frenchmen who exchanged him for some of their Iroquois prisoners. He kept on working in the same region until 1622; but his health was impaired and he died in March 1623 soon after his return to France.

In the same year, two apostles arrived who were to leave their imprint on the Canadian missions: brother Gabriel Sagard who became the first historian of the Canadian Church and Fr. Nicolas Viel. The latter was destined to be thrown into the rapids of Rivières-des-Prairies at a place now called Sault-au-Récollet, on the north shore of the Montréal Island, by some traitors who were carrying him in their canoe toward Québec: that was July 24th 1625. There is a famous painting by Delfosse in the Montréal cathedral dramatically depicting this first martyrdom in New France; it includes also a young French man, called by the Indians Ahuntsic, who perished with Fr. Nicolas. Both are commemorated by a monument erected on the same spot.

Meanwhile, in 1619, a new mission field was opened on the St. John River in Acadia. Five friars were sent from the Province of Aquitaine to be the successors of the Jesuits who had been captured by the British in 1613. One of them, Bernardin Sébastien, had founded a mission on Miscou Island. In his eagerness to follow his flock during the hunting season, he got lost in the woods and perished from hunger and cold. His four companions left

Acadia shortly afterwards and joined their confrères of the St. Denis Province on the more hospitable shores of the St. Lawrence. We know, however, that they were replaced in Acadia by other friars from Aquitaine in the year 1633.

Even with these unexpected recruits, the Québec Récollets felt themselves unequal to the task and without adequate resources. And so they decided, as Sagard tells us, "after invoking the light of the Spirit, to call upon the Jesuits in France whom they deemed most suitable for the work". Thus, Fr. Irénée Piat and Brother Gabriel Sagard were sent to France to plead the cause of the Canadian missions before the Jesuits, "the greatest of all the missionary Orders, an Order, - I quote a lay historian - which has filled the world with memorials of great things and suffered for the faith, the militant and powerful Society of Jesus". And so, continues Thomas Guthrie Marquis in his *Chronicles of Canada* (vol. 4, p. 10-13):

The 15th of June 1625, was a significant day for the colony of New France. On that morning a blunt-prowed vessel cast anchor before the little trading village that clustered about the great cliff at Québec. It was a ship belonging to the Caëns, and it came laden to the hatches with supplies for the colonists and goods for trade with the Indians. But what was more important, it had as passengers five Jesuits, two of whom were to become the first martyrs of the Company of Jesus in Canada: Lallemant and Brébeuf... They had sailed from Dieppe on the 26th of April together with a Récollet friar La Roche Daillon ... The voyage across the stormy Atlantic had been long and tedious. On a vessel belonging to the Huguenots, the priests had been exposed to the sneers and gibes of crew and traders. It was the viceroy of New France, the Duc de Ventadour, a devout catholic, who had compelled the Huguenot traders to give passage to these priests, or they would not have been permitted on board the ship. Much better could the Huguenots tolerate the humble mendicant Récollets than the Jesuits, aggressive and powerful, uncompromising opponents of Calvinism.

As the anchor dropped, the Jesuits made preparations to land; but they were to meet with a temporary disappointment. Champlain was absent in France and Emery de Caën said that he had received no instructions from the viceroy to admit them to the colony. Moreover they were told that there was no room for them in the *habitation* or the fort. To make matters worse, a bitter, slanderous diatribe against their Order had been distributed among the inhabitants, and so the doors of Catholic and Huguenots alike were closed against them. Prisoners on the ship at the very gate of the promised land, no course seemed open to them but to return on the same vessel to France. But they were suddenly lifted by kindly hands from the depths of despair. A boat rowed by men attached to the Récollets approached their vessel. Soon several friars dressed in coarse grey robes, with the knotted cord of

the Récollet Order about their waist, peaked hood hanging from their shoulders, and coarse wooden sandals on their feet, stood before them on the deck, giving them a wholehearted welcome and offering them a home, with the use of half of the buildings and land on the St. Charles. Right gladly the Jesuits accepted the offer and were rowed ashore in the boat of the generous friars . . .



Tableau de C.W. Jefferys, Les Recollets accueillant les Jésuites à Québec en 1625

For a year and a half, this living arrangement proved to be successful. The Récolleis helped the Jesuits learn the Indian languages and customs. After the return of Champlain from France, the Jesuits were able to build their own house. Side by side, the Jesuits and the Franciscans conferred with one another and travelled together. Often the Friars had to help the Jesuits be accepted by the Indians who already knew the grey-robos or the bare-foot, (as they called them), but not the black-robos. Thus we happen to know that the Indians were afraid of carrying Fr. Brébeuf, a tall and portly man, whom they feared as a threat to their frail canoes ... Fr. Daillon had to help him be accepted. Months later, when the Jesuits heard that the same Daillon had been assaulted by a vicious sorcerer among the Neutral tribe, they came to his rescue. Daillon was permitted to write, in July of 1627, his Relation, where we find the first description ever written of the Huron peninsula. In that document, we also read of his readiness to offer his life for the conversion of the Indians. "When a poor friar, he writes, has something to eat and wear, he deserves nothing else on earth for himself and he is ready to give his blood for the salvation of these poor blind populations". Having returned to Québec in 1629, it was the life of the whole French colony that he saved, when governor Champlain sent him to parley with the Kircks who had Québec under siege and at their mercy ... With other Récollets, he returned to France via England on October 29th 1629. His name is linked to the discovery of oil fields in the northwestern part of the State of New York; stationed with the Neutral Nation, he writes: "They have squash, beans and very good oil, which they call *otouontu* meaning "how much there is". But this would be another story ...

II

1670-1786: RESTORATION AND FULL ACTIVITIES

The next 40 years are an enigmatic and painful period of silence for the friars. On March 29th 1632, the treatise of Saint-Germain-en Laye came into effect. And as early as December of 1631, the Jesuits - but they alone - had been informed by the Company of Merchants that a vessel would cross the Atlantic on the following spring, and so they were ready to leave in April 1632. Accordingly we may assume that the Récollets' return to Canada had been blocked by the government. Nevertheless, as early as March of 1631, they were ready to return to their field of missions and re-occupy their house on St. Charles River; we know also that Mr. Lauzon put them off time and again until 1633. And in that year, when he offered them a passage, it was too late, for the ship was about to lift anchor. In fact the Récollets would leave France only in 1670, forty years later. *Why?* It is somewhat of a mystery.

The Jesuits had no reason to be angry with the Récollets: they had worked together in harmony for four years, sharing the same hardships on the same journeys and in the same missions. And in their writings, they themselves complain because the Récollets are

not returning with them. If the Jesuits had been the guilty ones, the protests of Fr. Lallemant in 1637, even of Fr. Lejeune in 1632, would have been a blanket "to cover up their machinations". This view of Jesuit dishonesty was held by historians like Sulte and Casgrain, and, needless to say, the jansenist Arnauld. It was also the view of the Récollet Chrétien Le Clercq in his work *Premier établissement de la foy dans la Nouvelle France* (Paris 1691).

We have some reason to believe with another historian, Faillon (1865), that Cardinal Richelieu "was decided to send back among the missionaries only one Order to Canada, so as to assure harmony and unity and uniform dependance among the missionaries". But that Order would be that of the Capuchins. If the latter did not accept the offer, it is because they thought it would be better and reasonable for the Jesuits to return to the place from which they were expelled". So Richelieu cancelled the order he had already given to William de Caën on January 20th 1632, namely to take with him three Capuchins together with 40 laymen and quantity of food". The Capuchins were sent instead to Acadia.

For many historians also, the transport of Jesuits or Capuchins would not make any difference to the Merchants, so long as they were not Récollets. From 1670 on, the relations between the Récollets and the Company became even more strained. Bitter reclamations were exchanged, many charges made against De Caën. Moreover, the Récollets had won their case with the government, so they would not be welcome on the Company's ships. Possibly one can also add with some malice — that Richelieu was an important stockholder in the Company ...

But for Fr. Lenhart, the American Capuchin historian, there was another influential person at the royal court, and he was none other than the Capuchin Joseph Leclerc du Tremblay of Paris, a confidant and collaborator of Richelieu. It was "Père Joseph, l'Éminence grise" who kept the Récollets out of Canada in 1632 and in subsequent years. The Capuchin diplomat had hardly died in December of 1638 then Richelieu changed his policy and permitted the Récollets to return to Canada.

Another final aspect has to be mentioned in this difficult question: the move of the Récollet Province of Aquitaine to have the Propaganda erect a bishopric in Québec. This was stopped in time by the rival Province of Paris, which was then falsely accused of over ambition ...

The one who suffered most from not returning to Canada was Fr. Le Caron. The sympathy of all Paris went out to the veteran apostle of the Hurons; he is said to have died from sadness in March of 1632. We should also note that Fr. Sagard's books were published in Paris in 1632 and 1636 in order to show what had been accomplished by the Récollets. I

have no time to go into the story of Sagard, who left the Récollets to take refuge with the Cordeliers (Conventuals) with the approval of Cardinal Barberini, their protector, and died there after a very edifying life in the year 1650.

From an official point of view, we can say that the Récollets who lost in Paris were quite successful in Rome. An account of the labor of his confrères in Canada by their provincial, Fr. Moret, resulted in the Récollets being granted extensive privileges: the Provincial of Paris was made Prefect General of the Mission of Canada by a decree of the Propaganda on February 28th 1635. But this could become a weapon in the hands of their enemies, whoever they be ...

Let us leave this field of grief and sorrow and move on to the important event. In the year 1670, and with the help of the intendant Talon, the Récollets did return to Canada, led by their Provincial Fr. Allart, a most remarkable man who became later bishop in France and who is praised in a letter of bishop Laval to Talon. How painful for the friars to find their former monastery half in ruins and occupied by farmers with their cattle. Then and there they decided to rebuild. But we must remember — and that is more important — the Récollets are no longer the principal religious leaders. Québec has since 1659 a bishop, François de Laval, with a definite plan for the strict supervision of the apostolate of his priests. The Jesuits have taken over all of the missions to the Indians.

The Friars, sent by authority of the king, protected by the governor and the intendant, were received with honor and welcomed by a beautiful letter from the bishop. However, it became quickly apparent that they were to live in an uncomfortable situation between two authorities, though they couldn't care less, provided they could serve the people. They knew that they had been called back by the popular consent in the name of freedom of conscience, which seemed at times threatened by bureaucracy and rigorous interpretation of the law.

How could they be apostles of peace when they were compelled to take sides with the civil authorities against the Bishop and the Jesuits? It is true, if one looks only at documents from either side, one finds unfortunate quarrels; but real life is more often lived apart from documents ... The Récollets may have been somewhat naïve; they may quite innocently and even with a certain measure of rashness have been an instrument of the governor against the bishop; but the one thing to remember is that the people trusted them fully. Let me add an important consideration: true Church history is not so much about the ups and downs of ecclesiastical disputes that concern more human passions and interests rather than the spreading of the Gospel message. True Church history refers to the religious progress of communities helped by apostolic zeal and devotedness. Unfortunately many historians adhere too closely to written documents and their interpretation, and forget to bring into light what really matters for the people and the Church.

In our case anyway, one fact is more eloquent than any official approval or disapproval: it is the rise of Canadian vocations to Franciscan life among the faithful, rich or poor, farmers or nobles, militaries' or workers' families. And so the friars opened a noviciate in Québec City as soon as they could move about with some degree of freedom. The quality of the first recruits is gratifying. Let me mention first Fr. Joseph Denis, from a very well-known family; after his ordination he worked for the Church in full accord with the bishop all over the country for 60 years, as founder of parishes and religious houses. Another was Didacus Pelletier, who as a lay brother, died in 1699 with the reputation of a saint and the testimony of miracles – even in favor of the Bishop Saint-Vallier. His cause for beatification was well begun, but later on impeded by difficult circumstances. It is noteworthy that, while the Jesuits refused to accept Canadian recruits unless they be sent to France for their formation, the Récollets opened their ranks freely – too freely according to some observers and without enough discernment. Of the 77 vocations from this period, however, no more than three or four came to grief, many more remarkable, among these: Justinien Constantin, Ambroise Pélerin, Bernardin Le Neuf, Bernardin de Gannes Falaise ...

Another aspect to mention, before describing the activities of the friars: the situation must have been extremely difficult and even in-tolerable at times, if we are to judge by the number of good friars who were so disgusted by "the red tape", the rivalries and the narrow mindedness of the milieu that, after just a few months in Canada, they hurriedly left for France. Their later success showed that they were not at all wanting in ability and fervor; such men as Filiastre and Ladon, for example. Faith and charity are not enough to keep one going: hope is needed, that is a certain amount of optimism together with courage and patience to grapple with difficulties and the need to accept one's own limitations. Finally, we shouldn't be scandalized by the severity of ecclesiastical repression, at a time when the Church was quick to govern with decrees of interdiction, excommunication, reserved cases of absolution, etc. Moreover, if the men in charge are of a suspicious and irascible disposition, the harshness of interventions become more visible than the progress of apostolic action.

When we glance at the various ministries of the friars, we are bound to be amazed at how widely their zeal extended. First as for the missions among the Indians, they took care of the Iroquois around the forts Frontenac and Niagara, as also of the Micmacs and the Malecites in the Gaspé peninsula and New Brunswick. There we find the writer Chrétien Le Clercq, Jumeau, Moisan and De La Place — the latter with a reputation of sanctity and miracles in 1699.

Other[s] were attracted by distant explorations. La Salle along the Mississippi River was accompanied first by three Récollets: De la Ribourde, Hennepin and Membre. The first expedition in 1679 was not very fruitful but saddened by the death of Fr. De la Ribourde in

the wilds of Louisiana. The second expedition (1682) with the participation of Membré led the explorers to the mouth of the Mississippi River. The third (1684) was to be very different: a journey from France to the Gulf of Mexico comprising 4 vessels, 400 men and 6 priests, 3 Sulpicians and 3 Récollets. Everything went wrong: they lost their way on the sea; La Salle was killed by rival companions, while going North through the Illinois country; Douay reached the Great Lakes and returned to France. Fr. Membré was massacred at St. Louis, and Leclercq fleeing South died somewhere in Mexico. The only survivor was the indefatigable Douay; he was again ready to accompany Le Moyne d'Iberville when the latter decided to continue the work of La Salle in Louisiana. Reaching New Orléans, Fr. Douay planted a large cross on March 8th 1699, and offered mass there. In 1955, a monument was erected in honor of these explorers, opposite the Union Passenger Train Terminal in New Orléans. Later, another friar, Protasius Boyer, functioned as the first parish priest there, since we find his signature to the first eleven civil acts of the city. On recognition of the virtues and zeal of Fr. Douay, the Propaganda proposed to make him Prefect Apostolic of Louisiana to replace the Provincial of St. Denis in 1699. Opposition came from the bishop of Québec who was supposed to be the head of all the French missions in America. Bishop Saint-Vallier of Québec named Mgr Mornay to the post; he was a Capuchin who never came to Louisiana, but managed instead to have his confrères organize a mission in the area. However we find among their collaborators another French Récollet, Fr. Viêtorin, who worked there with the Apalaches Indians from 1725 to 1735.

To round up this account of the South Country - Illinois and Ohio — we mention the names of six outposts that were under the jurisdiction of Québec during the French period: Cahokia (the present St. Louis), Kaskaskia, Fort-de-Chartres, Prairie-du-Rocher, Ste Geneviève and. Détroit – almost all of which still retain their French names. We must also mention the names of two friars well worth remembering but erroneously presented as brothers, Callet and Collet; we find also a martyr, the first pastor of Détroit, Constantin Die l'Halle (1706) a saintly friar to whom miracles have been attributed.

The last names we mentioned were no longer those of explorers but of army chaplains, the Récollets being with the troops in Canada as in France. Here we find them at the posts of strategic importance all over the country from the extreme east of Acadia to the Mississippi, most of them along the Richelieu River down to Lake Champlain, at Chambly, Île-aux-Noix, Sorel or Cap-des-Victoires, Crown Point N.Y. and Ticonderoga or Carillon. During the battle named after this last fort, Fr. De Berey saved the famous flag of Carillon, later brought to the Récollets church in Québec; brother Louis Martinet saved it again from the flames in 1796 ...

Further west, the Friars ministered the army at the following forts: Frontenac (Kingston, Ont.), Niagara (Youngstown, N.Y.), Presqu'île (Erie, Pa.) Le Boeuf (Waterford, Pa.), Duquesne (Pilis burg, Pa.), and Pontchartrain (Detroit, Mich.). These were dangerous

ministries not only on account of the continuous wars with the Indians or the British, but because of epidemics' among the soldiers. We know, for instance, that in 1757, more than 500 soldiers had to be brought to the General Hospital in Québec. In fact, three Récollets died from contagion after helping the sick.

Now all these activities would have been impossible without the existence of the three friaries in Québec, Trois-Rivières and Montréal, I lack the time to recall the history of each of these centers of formation, prayer and planning for the Canadian Church. I must forego the pleasure of quoting some of the witnesses of the Franciscan life of many lay brothers who were, so to speak, the support of the priests in their ministry and often their collaborators. There was certainly a danger for the religious life of the Récollets, because they were forced to live more often than not outside, rather than inside, their monasteries. But the need for priests was urgent, and it was, there as now, the task of the superior, "father Guardian", to have his subjects alternate between contemplation and work. When Governor Frontenac became angry because of the limitations imposed on the friars by bishop Laval for eight years (1670-1678), he wrote to the Récollets — he was their syndic: "When you were called to this country, it was not to live a contemplative life but to help in the Lord's Vineyard, where, unfortunately, some parties don't want to give you much of a role".

How many parishes did the Récollets take care of? We can enumerate at least 117, full-time or part-time. Most of these parishes were along the St. Lawrence River, North and South shores, and extended East to Percé in the Gaspé peninsula and Placentia in Newfoundland. At Trois-Rivières, they were in charge of the one parish for almost 100 years, besides living in their small monastery (which; by the way, is the only complete structure still standing that dates from the French régime, apart from some sections of the Hôpital Général of Québec). Some 300 miles southeast of Québec, they ministered to the parishes of Rimouski, Trois-Pistoles and Ile-Verte for 68 years (1701-1769). Not surprisingly, we quote the impressive testimony of governor Callières in 1702: "If we want to tell the truth, the Récollets have always administered the parishes which are the poorest, the most forgotten and the most difficult. I can testify that in their monasteries, there remain only the sick, the invalids, the old, and the young not yet approved for preaching and hearing confessions".

In Montréal, the Récollets never had any parish, but they gave a lot of assistance. For example, there was Fr. Constantin de l'Halle, from 1706 to 1730, that is when he was 42 to 67 years of age, who was known to be always available and so faithful that some pastors considered him as their regular assistant. And do not think that parish work meant a sedentary life; many parishes covered a large territory, some were two or three hundred miles apart for only one traveling pastor ... With the poor transportation of the time, you can imagine what this ministry meant especially in winter and early spring ...

Did all this activity have a Franciscan identity? That's the sort of questions which were not asked in those days. Nevertheless, we can answer YES, when we consider the poverty in the life of these pastors and the devotions they promoted among their parishioners: devotions to Christ' life and passion, to Mary in the mystery of her Immaculate Conception, and to St. Joseph. On this latter point, it is worthwhile to mention that it was the Récollets who as early as 1624 consecrated Canada to St. Joseph. Here is the report from a secular priest, pastor in Yamachiche, near Trois-Rivières, writing in 1812: "We can say that having the Récollets as missionaries was a blessing for our ancestors. The sons of St. Francis of Assisi are at the very origin of most of our old parishes in Québec. We have too much forgotten the influence they had with our people. We can truly admit that it is from them that we have inherited this living faith, that simplicity and honesty of life which have been our glory until recent times, and the reason for distinguishing our people from other groups".

III

All that kind of work gradually diminished for 50 years as to come to naught. In the fateful years of 1755 to 1760, the Récollets lost six priests who died or returned to France. Seventy remained: 46 brothers (19 in Québec, 9 in Trois-Rivières, 21 in Montreal), 24 priests working in 9 parishes. About 70% of them were of Canadian origin and the average age was about 46. They were more numerous than the Jesuits who had only 26 priests and all of them came from France. Unfortunately the Récollets were not granted exceptional status by the British authorities after the conquest. They could hardly survive since they were not granted permission to receive novices, despite the special request by Msgr Briand, the future bishop of Québec, who pleaded for their survival: "They were the first to come here, they have sacrificed themselves for the colony – both among the French and the Indians - they have been very useful. They have the trust of the population; they are submissive to authorities, they do not interfere with civil affairs. They cost nothing to the State, since they have no real possessions, receiving as they do voluntary offerings from the people they serve with zeal; they are always ready to do good; they have difficulties with no one, because they are content to serve God; they live by alms, yet no others surpass them in helping the poor, being themselves without need".

Lord Egremont, Secretary of State in England, wrote to Governor Murray in 1763: "Try to prevent vacancies from being replenished in the religious Orders". Nevertheless, the Récollets maintained good relationships with the British authorities. They allowed their monasteries to be used in part for civil needs, and their churches for Protestant services, yet they showed themselves friendly and courteous.

Governor Murray, right after having written unfavorably about the Jesuits, states: "The

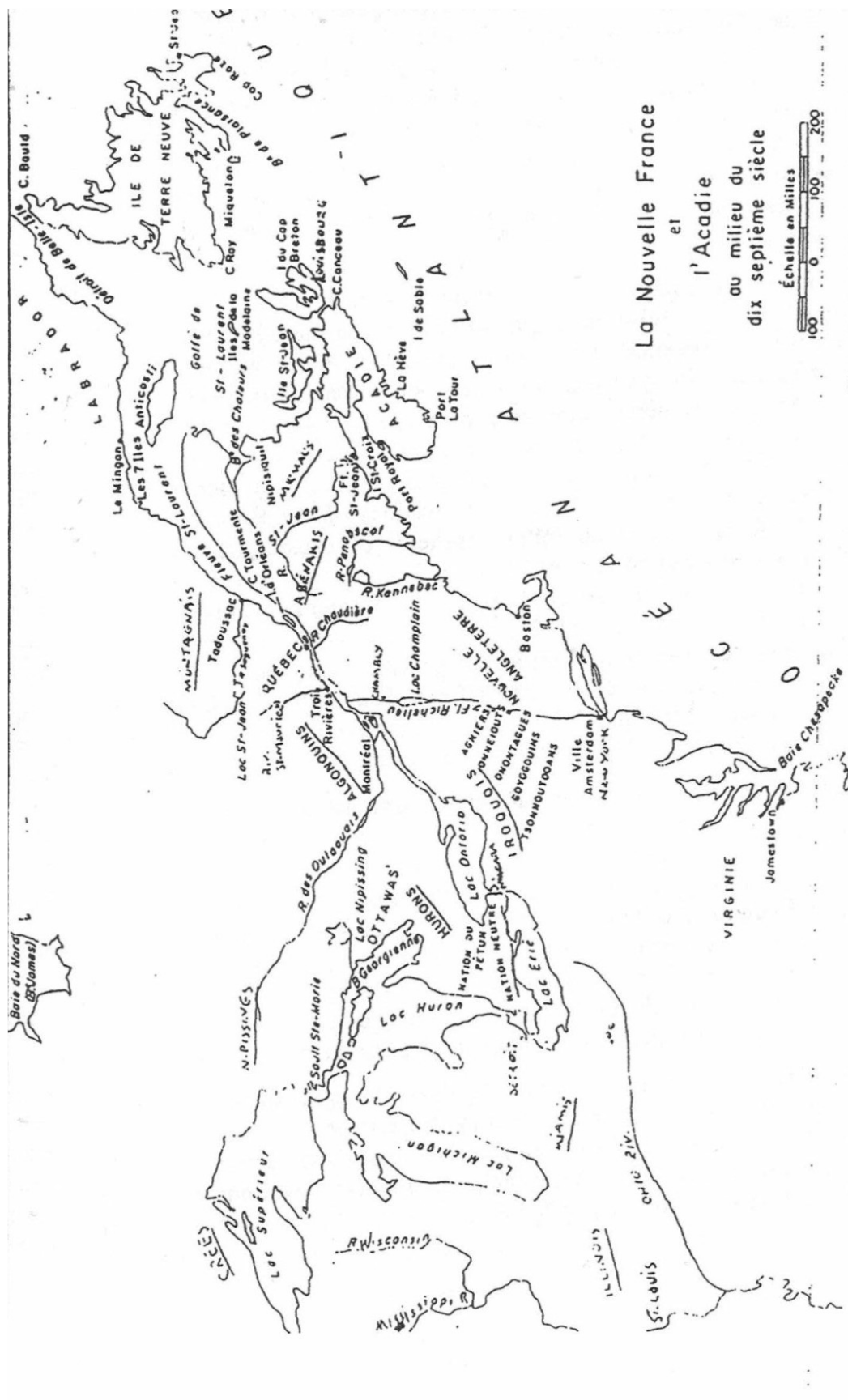
Récollets strive not to give any occasion for blame". Governor Gage of Montréal, had great esteem for them: "They are not intriguing. Their simple and honest manners have nothing of the seditious talks others entertain around in secret. They think only of obeying and pleasing". Haldimand in Trois-Rivières, who is known for his dislike of priests, even contributed money to the Superior who had to beg to buy clothing for his nine religious (300\$ in our money) and defended himself with Governor Murray by saying: "They are such good people in never having spoken against us in their perfect obedience, that I considered myself to be acting in this gesture according to your intentions".

This attitude may explain why the recruiting of novices continued for some time in Québec, despite the strict orders from London. But the end would come soon. In 1796 a great fire destroyed the church and the monastery of Québec. Bishop Hubert seized that occasion to declare that the Order existed no more in Québec, even for the Catholic Church; he had, some time before, received permission from Rome "to secularize" the Friars. Only those professed before the year 1784 were to continue to live in the world and keep their vows as best as they could. It was a signal of dispersion and death. Many continued to serve the people in various capacities, the brothers as school teachers, the priests in the parishes. This somewhat arbitrary decree of the bishop forbade brilliant subjects to serve the Order, for instance the cleric Lyonnet who became an effective superior of the Québec Seminary ... The last priest died in Montréal in 1813; the last brothers in 1848 and 1849.

This whole story, at times sad, should be told in all its details. But I have said enough to honor the pioneers, the writers, the pastors, the humble servants of God and the saints ... They were generally speaking living examples of a Church of liberty and dedication to the people, of service for the best interest of the communities. Our presence in the Canadian Church of to-day may be and should be different in form from theirs, I suppose. But we thank God that, despite defects and errors of his followers, St. Francis has still today as in the past something to say to the Canadians; and it is our task to continue The dialogue in the same spirit.

Toronto, May 15th, 1981

Fr. Léandre Poirier, O.F.M.



SUMMARY (1615-1849)

15-1629: Radiating from Quebec as a center, 20 Récollets friars, priests and brothers, travelled laboriously, exploring, learning Indian languages and customs, teaching: from Quebec and Tadoussac to Northern Ontario.

Help was required from the Jesuits in 1625.

170-1796: Return after the Jesuits (1632) after bishop Laval (1659)

CENSUS

| | French-born | Canadian | priests | brothers |
|--|-------------|----------|---------|----------|
| | 294 | 77 | 238 | 36 |
| | | | 43 | 34 |
| | 351 | 281 | | 70 |

FRIARIES (center for prayer and work and rest)

QUEBEC: Our Lady of the Angels, with noviciate (1677)

St. Anthony (upper town):

1692-1796

TROIS-RIVIERES

friary: 1678-1823

parish: 1671-1683; 1693-1776

MONTREAL friary on Notre-Dame St.:

1692-1867

MINISTRY at residence

confessions & spiritual direction

Third Order

school teaching

PARISH WORK (mostly 1700-1800) on North and

South shores of St. Lawrence

River: 117 parishes

ARMY CHAPLAINS IN FORTS

center: on Richelieu River

west: Great Lakes area

east: Acadia (NS,NB,PEI)

south: Illinois & Louisiana

EXPLORERS & MISSIONARIES

with Cavelier de La Salle:

1679 / 1681 / 1684

III — 1796-1849 (after British conquest 1759) still recruiting novices (against the law) QUEBEC: fire and secularization: 1796 TROIS-RIVIERES: Anglican Church 1822- MONTREAL (1776-1867) demolished after being used for various purposes

Continuation

IV — 1880-1890 Calls from Canadian to French Observants

Projects & mission of Good Father Frederic for Holy Land (1881 / 1888-1916)

V — 1890-1920 New French Foundation in Montreal (1890)

Extension in the West (1909-)

VI — 1920-1980 Independent Commiss. (1920)

& Province (1927): St. Joseph

Western Commiss. (1936) & Custody

(1954): Christ the King

Extension in NB, USA, Ont. / Missions

in Japan, Korea, Peru