



From A Bishop's Journal (689)

Moved by the Spirit (5) "From Europe to America"

I have much admiration for genealogists who can trace family roots easily, with simplicity and self-assurance. It is important to know where we come from so as to better know where we are heading. In some countries, history courses have been voluntarily omitted, but it seems to me that history is very much an essential part of every person and every people.

A Faith That Comes from Overseas

It is the same with our faith, with our Christian origin. According to the most recent studies, the first Christians in America were fishermen and explorers. The first Christians in our land were the Vikings, around the year 1035. They came from Scandinavia and Greenland, and settled down in Corner Brook, Newfoundland. The explorers Christopher Columbus, Hernán Cortés and Jacques Cartier were believers. In Acadia, evangelisation started with the coming to St. Croix Island, in 1604 and the following year to Port Royal, of colonists led by the Sieur Pierre du Gua de Monts and Samuel de Champlain. A layman, Marc Lescarbot, became an evangeliser and catechist. After the founding of Québec, the Recollect Franciscans and the Jesuits settled in New France, and learned the languages and culture of the Native people.

Missionary Current

Throughout France, thanks to the writings of the Jesuits, there developed a strong missionary spirit. Several laymen, religious, and priests decided to devote themselves to evangelising the Natives. Beginning in 1639, the first missionary sisters established a house in Québec: they were three Augustinian Hospitaller Sisters and three Ursulines among whom was Blessed Marie de l'Incarnation. Through their effort the first hospital and the first school were opened. Catherine de Saint-Augustin, a 16-year-old Augustinian nun, left her country and made a vow to dedicate her whole life to Canada. The years 1647-1650 gave us our first Canadian martyrs, Jesuit priests and laymen who lay down their lives for Christ. "The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians." We must also mention Marguerite Bourgeoys who opened the first school at Montreal in 1652 and who founded the Congregation of Notre Dame which is dedicated to education.

The Historical Year of 1659

While the year 1659 marks the arrival in Montreal of the first Religious Hospitallers of St. Joseph, a community founded in France in 1636 by Jérôme LeRoyer de la Dauversière, a layman involved in the founding of Ville-Marie [Montreal], 1659 is also the year of the arrival of the first bishop of New France, François de Montmorency-Laval. At the time, Québec barely had two thousand inhabitants. Bishop Laval founded a parish, opened a trade school, and founded the Québec Seminary for the training of local clergy. The Diocese of Québec was founded in 1674, the mother of all the dioceses in Canada.

Atlantic Dioceses

Many years went by before the first diocese in the Atlantic region was established, due especially to the Acadian Deportation and the British conquest of the colony. Missionaries from Québec travelled to Acadia and New Brunswick. This is how the first parish of the Madawaska region, Saint Basile, was established in 1792. Eventually, our population would be ministered to by the dioceses of Québec (1785-1829), Charlottetown (1829-1842), Fredericton (1842-1852), Saint John (1852-1860), Chatham (1860-1938), and Bathurst (1938-1944). On December 16, 1944, Pope Pius XII announced the creation of the new diocese of Edmundston which comprised the territories of Madawaska, Southern Victoria, and Western Restigouche. On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of our diocese (1994-1995), the Société historique du Madawaska published a very interesting souvenir album by Jacques G. Albert. We find in the album notices on the five bishops and the parishes of the diocese.

1996-2000: Pastoral Visits

During the Lenten season of 1996-2000 I had the privilege of visiting each of the pastoral zones, celebrate Chrism Mass, and preside Eucharistic Congresses. These times were for me exceptional moments of grace which allowed me to meet over 90% of the population. At the end of every parish visit I sent a communique to the Edmundston newspaper *Le Madawaska*. Each of these communiqués contains a historical summary of the parish and a report of its pastoral activities. I referred very much to the many parish souvenir albums that were published over the years. Each of these albums helps us better understand where we come from and where we want to go.

Springtime of the Church

On the day he took office, Pope Benedict XVI exclaimed, “The Church is young!” In *Redemptoris Missio* Pope John Paul II wrote that the Church is only in its springtime. Therefore, Jesus’ directive is still timely: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit is active in our midst, we only have to cooperate with Him.

+ François Thibodeau *gm*

+ François Thibodeau, C.J.M.
Bishop of Edmundston

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