

### **Early Canadian Church History (3)**

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In the previous instalment, we looked at developments in the St. Lawrence Valley. Let us now briefly turn to what happened in Acadia (or Nova Scotia as we know it today) from about 1603 onwards. Pierre Du Gua de Monts gathered about 120 people from France who were willing to migrate across the Atlantic. Eventually they came to Acadia and in 1605 built Port Royal, at the site of present-day Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia. They also established a friendly relationship with the Micmac nation. Following French policy, de Monts was accompanied by Roman Catholic priests. However, he and his colonists were also served by some Huguenot pastors.

While travelling overseas, one of the priests constantly debated a Reformed pastor about the true scriptural religion. Once they settled in Acadia, these debates dragged on. Sometimes the two men would even get into physical fights. When this happened, the victor would be supported by those who had been eagerly watching. The natives applauded these conflicts as well and would cheer for the victor, especially when he made an ostentatious display at the end. In the end, both church leaders died and colonists buried them in the same grave saying, "Let them have peace together now."

De Monts went back to France in 1606. He left Jean de Poutrincourt in command as governor of Port Royal. De Poutrincourt made more progress in the fur trade. In that same year, 1606, de Poutrincourt persuaded a notable Frenchman, Marc Lescarbot, to visit Acadia. Lescarbot was a well-educated lawyer, a politician, and appears to have been a Huguenot. He was mandated to teach the colonists – men, women, and children – and also the local First Nations. The idea was that Lescarbot would purposely and actively spread the gospel. Every Sunday he conducted worship services at Port Royal. He taught the Bible and gave a Christian education to all the colonists who wanted to be taught in the fear of the Lord God. Lescarbot did not spend long in Acadia, however. In 1607, together with most of the other colonists, he went back to France.

The efforts just outlined met with opposition from the Jesuits. The governor of the Port Royal settlement was obligated to not merely tolerate, but also accommodate the Jesuits and their activities. Here we must be aware of the situation back in France. The Reformed churches were divided into two parties at this time, particularly among those holding leadership positions in society. Some Huguenot noblemen argued that a Christian was to aggressively oppose the Roman Catholic government wherever and however possible, even by the sword if necessary. They became known as a Reformed party endorsing a politicized religion similar to the Roman Catholics. However, de Poutrincourt and other Huguenots in Canada belonged to what was known as the "prudent" party. They were more pragmatic in their approach to these issues. They were called "prudent Huguenots" because they rejected aggressive political opposition to the ruling authorities as being disobedience to the Fifth Commandment.

With that "prudence" in mind, the Huguenots allowed Jesuits to shape the religious culture of Acadia. At the same time, Lescarbot and others were encouraged to conduct Huguenot

meetings. Huguenot chanteries (song-services) would be held with regular Bible preaching, the study of Scripture and, especially, the singing of Psalms. Yet when someone needed to be baptized, the Huguenots were required to make use of and attend the Roman Catholic Church. Their children had to be baptized by a priest. Because of their moderate politics, the Acadian Huguenots recognized and accepted Roman Catholic baptism. Something similar happened with the mass. They received bread and wine out of the hands of the priests because they acknowledged them to be servants of Christ. The Huguenots recognized that the Roman Catholics also believed in the person of the Lord Jesus, his crucifixion, death, and resurrection. They argued that the strengthening of one's faith did not depend on the person administering the sacraments, but on the gospel and the working of the Holy Spirit – so long as they personally used the sacraments in faith. The Huguenots would go along with the Roman Catholics as long they could personally read the Bible and receive Bible teaching in their chanteries. The Huguenot leaders in Acadia urged their people to accept the true teaching of the Bible and endorse the true religion (the Reformed faith) in their hearts.

So, from the outset the Reformed religion was spread in some limited way in Acadia. Yet, churches were not instituted and church buildings were not raised. Owing to a lack of pastors and to a conscious non-aggressive policy, the Huguenots laid a foundation for nominal Christianity in Canada both in the St. Lawrence Valley and in Acadia during the first period of 1598 to 1629.

#### *A Remarkable Interim Period*

In 1629 something remarkable happened. The Huguenots gained some authority in Canada. How did this come to pass?

Étienne Brûlé was a young Roman Catholic explorer in early Canada. He had lived among the Hurons for quite a while. This caused some consternation amongst the Jesuits and civil authorities in New France. Consequently, in 1625, Samuel de Champlain had him expelled from Canada. He went back to France and ended up among the Huguenots in the Reformed stronghold of La Rochelle. The Scottish merchant family of Gervase Kirke had also settled in that area some years earlier. In 1627-1628, La Rochelle was besieged by Cardinal Richelieu and French royal troops. The siege was successful and La Rochelle fell to the Roman Catholic forces. Along with many Huguenots and Brûlé, the Kirke family was forced to flee. They went to England and there became involved with a plot to take Acadia and New France away from the French. Gervase Kirke and some others sent out three small armed ships – they were commanded by the Kirke sons, David, Lewis, and Thomas. They set sail with orders from the English king Charles I to take the French possessions in the name of England. With the navigational assistance of the disaffected Étienne Brûlé, Quebec and Acadia were successfully invaded by the Kirke brothers. David Kirke became the commander of Quebec. He was able to pacify the French in the area so that they did not flee New France. He arranged for a new Council in which Huguenots held the majority – his captain, Jacques Michel, became one of the councillors.

But then David Kirke became too friendly with the Roman Catholic clergy. The ardent Huguenot captain Jacques Michel protested, but there was no stopping the chain of events. Quebec was eventually lost due to conciliatory attitudes and actions. Also, the English made peace with the French in 1632 and this led to the English pulling out of New France. From that time forward, the star of Richelieu and de Champlain continued rising. The Huguenots hardly had any more opportunity to continue and maintain their religious education in Canada – the exception being in Acadia. This was a new era.

This era would continue until 1685. That was the year King Louis XIV prohibited any Huguenots from practicing their Reformed religion. As a result, a stream of refugees spread all over the world from France – many of them would eventually end up on the east coast of North America, especially in present day New York state and New Jersey.

In our last instalment, we'll look at the end of the Huguenot experience in New France and Acadia.