

## Early Canadian Church History (4)

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With the support of Cardinal Richelieu, Samuel de Champlain was appointed governor of New France. Both Richelieu and de Champlain were ardent supporters of the Jesuits in colonial Canada. The policy of the Jesuits was to identify the rule of the king with the power of the Church. They also actively supported the notion that all the colonial inhabitants and native peoples were French subjects and, as such, de facto under and within the Roman Catholic Church. To be French was to be Roman Catholic. It was virtually impossible for people to separate French identity from Roman Catholicism. However, within the Roman fold, there was some room for diversity as long as the authority of the clergy was recognized.

One of the prominent Roman Catholic clergy from this period was Paul Le Jeune, a Jesuit missionary and eventually superior of the order in New France. He made efforts to infiltrate and co-opt the fur trade. Beginning around 1638, Jesuits began training young Hurons. They were being educated to become commercial agents who would cooperate with French interests in New France and beyond.

The Jesuits not only promoted education for First Nations, but also for the colonists. Those living on the frontier without European-style orderly governments and laws were in danger of becoming “wild, barbarous, and disorderly peoples.” In 1493, Pope Alexander VI issued a papal bull entitled *Inter Caetera*. This bull mandated the education of both native peoples and colonists, so that all would be brought “to good morals.” On this basis, the seventeenth-century Jesuits wanted Latin and Greek to be taught in their schools in New France – this would promote the cause of civilization. This provoked a debate. Richelieu argued that this kind of education was unnecessary for the inhabitants of New France. The Jesuits, however, argued that unless someone leads an orderly life, receives written laws, and knows how to communicate in a civilized language, he will remain barbarous. In their view, *Inter Caetera* had been clear enough on this point.

Around the same time, the idea developed among the French that the Hurons could only participate in the fur trade if they became “Christians.” To be a trader one had to be a Christian, i.e. a baptized Roman Catholic. The Hurons were amenable to this, but in return asked for soldiers to provide protection from the Iroquois. Consequently, both soldiers and Jesuits began living in native villages. The Jesuits taught the Hurons to pray and worship in the Roman manner. Paul Le Jeune also helped the Hurons to become skilled labourers. They became particularly adept at making copper kettles. The Hurons became involved in all kinds of trade and were developing up to French standards.

After 1645, we find Jérôme Lalemant as the superior of the Jesuit order in New France. He was a remarkable missionary strategist. His thinking developed along the same lines as his predecessors. He promoted a greater degree of discipline among the clergy. He argued that the Jesuits should build their own villages next to the aboriginal villages. This led to the establishment of settlements such as Sainte-Marie among the Hurons (near present-day

Midland, ON) and Fort Ville-Marie (in present-day Montreal). In such places, the Jesuits erected stone houses and wooden church buildings; they also planted large vegetable gardens and established cemeteries. Lalemant also encouraged intermarriage between the French and First Nations as a means of bringing people into the Church. He employed Hurons as church workers and that also advanced his missionary agenda. Roman Catholicism was becoming deeply entrenched in the new world. Prospects were growing dimmer for the establishment of the biblical gospel.

There were further developments around 1659 with the arrival of the first bishop for New France, François de Laval. Laval was not a friend of the Jesuit agenda. For their part, the Jesuits did not trust him. However, in due time, through some adept political manoeuvring he gained the authority he wanted in Quebec. He took a powerful role in the governance of the region and, as a result, any remaining Huguenot influence disappeared, whether in trade or in politics. Under Laval, the colonial Quebec identity became even more intertwined with Roman Catholicism.

Back in Acadia, the Huguenots still had some room for trade and their tobacco plantations. The governor of Acadia at this time was Charles de Saint-Étienne de la Tour, the son of a prominent Huguenot. La Tour resisted the Roman Catholic clergy wherever he could. He made it difficult for Jesuits and Capuchins to hold their masses and have people baptized. La Tour was married three times. His second wife was a remarkable Huguenot lady named Françoise-Marie Jacquelin – she aggressively supported her husband's efforts. She had no patience for the "prudent Huguenots." She became involved with the battle to control Acadia. La Tour was in a power struggle with Charles de Menou d'Aulnay. Jacquelin went back to France to muster Huguenot help, but many feared to join her. D'Aulnay attacked Fort La Tour (near present-day Saint John, NB) while La Tour was away on business in 1645. Jacquelin took command of the Fort while it was under siege. Unfortunately, after four days the Fort was breached and all of its inhabitants captured. All were executed in front of Jacquelin and she herself died three weeks later. The Huguenot cause in Acadia suffered a loss with this defeat. After d'Aulnay's death in 1650, La Tour was able to again become the governor of Acadia until 1654. However, the Huguenot presence never recovered.

### *Conclusion*

During the seventeenth century, Huguenot merchants may have had the money to build and develop Reformed churches in Canada. Yet they never did. It is true that they took their religion with them over the Atlantic. However, it had no lasting effect whatsoever in the St. Lawrence Valley or in Acadia.

This can be partly explained because of French royal policy and the notion that the Roman Catholics were the only representatives of Jesus Christ among the nations. The Roman Catholic Church fostered an ecclesiastical colonialism. Backed with military power, it introduced an aggressive (but nominal) form of politicized Christianity in Canada that lasted centuries. As a result, Québécois identity would long be intrinsically tied up with Roman Catholicism.

The other part of the explanation rests with the Huguenots themselves and the politics of accommodation that prevailed among them. They failed to establish Reformed Christianity in Canada due to their willingness to compromise on certain key points. Because of French royal policy, they were content to enjoy informal worship services with simple Bible teaching and the singing of Psalms – the chanteries. They even went so far as to utilize the sacraments in the Roman Catholic Church, just as French policy required. Moreover, while they believed they were holding to the true Christian religion, they did not aggressively promote their beliefs either by missionary efforts or with the sword. Instead, they took a merely defensive stance and even that was comparatively weak. Given all of that, it is not surprising that the Reformed faith failed to prosper in Canada during this era.