

2-13-1952

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### Recommended Citation

Carr, Aidan (1952) "Notes on the Origins of Marian Devotion in Canada," *Marian Studies*: Vol. 3, Article 15. Available at: [https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian\\_studies/vol3/iss1/15](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol3/iss1/15)

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## NOTES ON THE ORIGINS OF MARIAN DEVOTION IN CANADA

### I

The roots of French Canadian culture, religious, political and economic, are struck deep in land and water. Specifically in the land that is the Province of Quebec and in the water that is the St. Lawrence River. When one uses in a general sense the phrase "French Canadian" one means all French Canadians, wherever they may be: perhaps almost unnoticed among the bustling and English-speaking people of British Columbia and Alberta; perhaps holding tenaciously to a hard-won place among the industrious Acadians of Prince Edward Island. But in a more exact and special sense "French Canada" is synonymous with the tradition-seeped old Province of Quebec, from whose two chief cities, Quebec and Montreal, has sprung the Catholic life of Canada,<sup>1</sup> and where dwell more than three-quarters of all French Canadians. The Province is large enough to provide ample space for their expanding families, for it is an area six times the size of England, twice that of Texas and twelve times that of New York State.

The St. Lawrence—"the Road of Canada"—is more than a great river. It is the blood in the veins of the Province of Quebec and a symbol to its people of all that is precious in the surges of their history. Blood is thicker than water surely, but there is a little of the St. Lawrence in the blood of every French Canadian, the vast majority of whom live within an easy day's march of its historic banks.

There is about French Canada an indefinable quality; an elusive charm that cannot be described—it can only be expe-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. John Gilmary Shea, *The Catholic Church in Colonial Days*, New York, 1886, p. 226.

rienced. There is something about New France that escapes one. It is not simply that it is old, or quaint, or unartificial or Catholic. It is not simply that one is enthralled by the sturdy character of its people; by their contagious *joie de vivre*; by their somewhat provincial contentment; by the charm of the rural countryside, picturesque and fruitful. It is not the ubiquitous church, chapel or shrine dedicated to the Blessed Mother; nor the blue Laurentians; nor the *Ile d'Orléans* above Quebec; nor the brooding capes of the mysterious Saguenay beyond Tadoussac. It is all these and more.

Quebec has a soul and a song, and neither the roar of the gigantic hydro-electric developments in the Lake St. John region, nor the brash movements of Montreal to cosmopolitan pretensions can drown out its song or obscure its soul. God's sweet Providence will prevent that! The soul and the song of Canada are intelligible only in terms of the French Canadian's love for Mary and his childlike and unshakable confidence in Her maternal protection.

It is the aim of this paper to reach back to the pristine founts of that devotion; to search out the rivulets that down through the arches of the years have grown into a mighty torrent of love for Our Lady in Canada; to examine—albeit briefly and imperfectly—the Marian characteristics of those first heroic pioneers whose lives were redolent with zeal for Mary's cause, and who have therefore left an indelible impress upon Canadian spirituality. Within the confines of this paper we can do no more than that.

## II

The genius of Marian devotion in New France is largely found in the personal history of those courageous souls who left the comforts and security of a flourishing French civilization to bring a light to those who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death. Whatever mercenary motives attended the

efforts of some of the first French who visited Canada,<sup>2</sup> it is undeniable that the religious and civil leaders of the early colonists were inspired with a genuine zeal for the conversion of the natives and the implanting of Christian truth in the newly discovered lands, an undertaking providentially placed under the patronage of Our Lady. Samuel Champlain, who founded Quebec City in June, 1608, on a site commanding the way into the heart of North America,<sup>3</sup> was of a section of France renowned for its love of Mary.<sup>4</sup>

Just thirty years after the foundation of this first Canadian city by the "Father of Canada," when France had begun to play a notable role in the conquest and settlement of the New World, King Louis XIII officially consecrated his great nation to the Blessed Virgin, thereby establishing France's position as a world power under the banner of Our Lady of Victories. "As Spain came to the New World with a sense of a Divine Mandate, so France came to the New World with the sense that she was assuming or reassuming a Christian vocation, for France's consecration to Our Lady was not merely an appeal for help: it was an offer of service."<sup>5</sup>

How fitting it was that the first bishop of Canada, François

<sup>2</sup> The first Frenchmen to reach Canada appear to have been Norman and Breton fishermen, who came to Newfoundland as early as 1500, but the first expedition under government sanction was that of Verrazano, sent out by Francis I in 1524.—Cf. Bolton-Marshall, *The Colonization of North America 1492-1783*, New York, 1920, p. 81. Sieur de Monts, a French Protestant, explored eastern Canada with Champlain at the very start of the 1600's. His object was frankly the discovery of legendary copper mines.—Cf. T. J. Campbell, *Pioneer Laymen of North America*, vol. I, New York, 1915, pp. 106-107.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Carl Wittke, *A History of Canada*, New York, 1939, p. 7. Daniel Sargent in *Our Land and Our Lady*, New York, 1939, p. 67, gives the date 1607. This seems erroneous.

<sup>4</sup> He was born at Brouage, a small French seaport on the Bay of Biscay, in 1567.—Cf. John O'K. Murray, *The Catholic Pioneers of America*, New York, 1885, p. 184.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Sargent, *op. cit.*, p. 66.



de Laval de Montigny, was consecrated in Paris on Dec. 8, 1658;<sup>6</sup> that Montreal was once called "Ville-Marie";<sup>7</sup> that the first grant of land from the Duc de Ventadour to the Jesuits was the seigneurie of Our Lady of Angels;<sup>8</sup> that Jacques Cartier, poised upon the threshold of his discoveries in Canada, inaugurated his arrival there by giving the name "l'Assomption" to the island of Anticosti in the Bay of St. Lawrence on August 15, 1535. When later this adventure-some client of Mary called the Indian settlement of Hochelaga "Mont-Real,"<sup>9</sup> he seems to have been prompted more by fealty to his earthly sovereign than by fidelity to his heavenly Queen. But even that decision was altered in favor of Our Lady by Chomedey de Maisonneuve, who proclaimed Ville-Marie a permanent foundation on May 18, 1642.<sup>10</sup>

That change was certainly consonant with the designs of Jean Jacques Olier, the founder of the Sulpicians, and Jerome de Dauvversière who had, that same year, on the Feast of the Purification dedicated the island to the Holy Family under the special protection of Mary. Extraordinarily devoted to the Blessed Mother and convinced that it was at Her bidding they would go to Canada, the Sulpicians had laid plans for the city of Ville-Marie in a mood of missionary zeal and a spirit of Christian adventure.<sup>11</sup> The seal of the Sulpician-inspired *Compagnie de Montréal* represented the Virgin standing on a mountain and holding the Infant Jesus in Her arms, while under this figure was the legend "Notre Dame de Montréal."

<sup>6</sup> Wm. Bennet Munro, *Crusaders of New France*, New Haven, 1920, p. 124.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Olivier Maurault, *Saint-Sulpice et les Missions*, in *le Séminaire*, vol. 6, n. 4, Montréal, 1941, p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> Bolton-Marshall, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Carl Wittke, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> George M. Wrong, *The Rise and Fall of New France*, New York, 1928, vol. I, p. 291.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. T. J. Campbell, *op. cit.*, pp. 197-198; R. P. Duchaussois, *Rose de Canada*, Montréal, 1932, p. 15; Wm. H. Atherton, *Sulpicians of Paris and Montreal*, in *le Séminaire*, vol. 6, n. 4, p. 74; Daniel Sargent, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

Probably influenced by this seal, Maisonneuve in 1649 carried a cross to the top of Mount Royal and planted it firmly there, inserting in a niche at its base an image of Mary.<sup>12</sup>

### III

Of salient importance in any interpretation of the history of Marian devotion in Canada is the contribution made to it by the Sulpician Olier (1608-1659). Ironically enough he himself never set foot on the soil of New France, but his spirit and ideals have been perpetuated by the priests of the Society of St. Sulpice who succeeded the Jesuits as pastors of Ville-Marie by 1657.<sup>13</sup> Olier's father, secretary to King Henry IV, was an intimate friend of St. Francis de Sales, and fostered in his son a tender and profound love for the Mother of God. In his studies Jean Jacques relied more upon the help of the *Sedes Sapientiae* than upon his own abilities, and when afflicted with a serious eye condition while a student in Rome, he made a pilgrimage to Loretto and successfully besought the aid of his Patroness. Thenceforward his dedication to Her service became his sole preoccupation.<sup>14</sup> He offered his first Mass at the church of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel; used all his possessions in Her name; made a vow of perpetual servitude to Her, and, with a symbolism proper to those times, wore about his neck a silver chain to show himself a bondman of Our Lady.<sup>15</sup>

The Marian quality of Olier's spirituality and its concomitant dynamism accounts in great measure for the orientation given Canadian devotion by the Sulpicians in their ecclesiasti-

<sup>12</sup> Xavier D. Macleod, *History of the Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary in North America*, New York, 1866, p. 92.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. John Gilmary Shea, *The Catholic Church in Colonial Days*, p. 226; Charles G. Herbermann, *The Sulpicians in the United States*, New York, 1916, p. 35.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Henri Garrousteigt, *L'Oeuvre de M. Olier*, in *le Séminaire*, vol. 6, n. 4, p. 37.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Xavier D. Macleod, *op. cit.*, p. 72.



cal seminaries. How can such an influence be adequately weighed when one remembers that thousands of Canadian priests and scores of Bishops have been formed according to a venerable pattern that is very simply *ad Jesum per Mariam*?<sup>16</sup>

No other characteristic is so distinctive of the Sulpician spirit as its emphasis on devotion to the "Inwardness of Mary." In reality the pristine conception of this devotion is of comparatively recent origin since it corresponds to the loftiest aspirations of post-Tridentine Catholicism. While it was not first developed by Olier, but rather by de Bérulle and Charles de Condren, yet the actual diffusion of the devotion is especially owed to the founder of the Sulpicians. In a certain sense it is therefore identified with him.<sup>17</sup>

This doctrine stresses dynamic activity in union with Mary and so with Him Whom She bore. It envisions the Virgin at the instant of the Incarnation as not in action, but in a state, insofar as Her divine maternity is permanent and not transient. Yet She is not in a state but in activity, for what takes place within Her is swift and penetrating to the marrow of Her soul. And again She is neither in a state nor in activity, but in a new being. For That Which is within Her is the Very Life, something substantial, intimate and as profound as very being. What of this Virgin's life, source of the life of Very Life? What of the might, plenitude and actuality of this life that will co-operate worthily with the Holy Trinity to form a new principle of life and grace for the world? There is, then, after the Deity's Self, nothing greater or more excellent in the universe than Mary. She is a new Creature of the new

<sup>16</sup> Sulpician seminaries reflect on all sides the presence of Mary. Each door bears Her initials; the Presentation is the patronal day; images of Her abound; conferences regarding Her are frequent.—Cf., v.g., Phillipe Perrier, *M. Olier et les Séminaires, in le Séminaire*, vol. 6, n. 4, pp. 12-18.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Henri Bremond, *A Literary History of Religious Thought in France*, London-New York, 1936, vol. 3, p. 421.

world of grace, and more, the first creature of this new world of grace.<sup>18</sup> In another sense, as historical as it is theological, She is the first creature of this New World.

#### IV

No less conspicuous for the intensity of their love for Mary and their consequent dedication to the diffusion of Her cult were the pioneer Jesuits of Canada, who were its most celebrated missionaries but not its first priests. That distinction belongs to the Recollect Franciscans, those austere but gay troubadours of Mary,<sup>19</sup> who together with Champlain reached Tadoussac on the Feast of the Annunciation, March 25, 1615.<sup>20</sup> These religious embarked upon the most difficult type of missionary apostolate among the nomadic Algonquins of the Saguenay, the Ottawa and the St. Lawrence, as well as among the more settled Wyandots and Hurons on the shores of Lake Huron. But the limited numbers and resources<sup>21</sup> of the Friars sharply curtailed the effectiveness of their activity. In ten years they made but slight inroads upon the heathenism of the natives.<sup>22</sup> The Jesuits, from the moment of their arrival at Quebec in June, 1625,<sup>23</sup> were harbingers of a militant faith implemented by brilliant organization and efficient methods of evangelizing the Indians. Every Jesuit mission station was

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>19</sup> Franciscan spirituality has ever been notably Marian.—Cf. *The Essence and Characteristics of Franciscan Spirituality*, in *Guidance Through Franciscan Spirituality* (1948 Report of the Franciscan Educational Conference), Washington, D. C., 1948, pp. 19-20.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. John Gilmary Shea, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. John J. Wynne, *The Jesuit Martyrs of North America*, New York, 1925, pp. 41-42.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Xavier D. Macleod, *op. cit.*, p. 60; Theodore Maynard, *The Story of American Catholicism*, New York, 1942, pp. 42-45; Carl Wittke, *A History of Canada*, p. 18.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Martin P. Harney, *The Jesuits in History*, New York, 1941, p. 254.



not only an outpost of French influence on the unfolding continent,<sup>24</sup> it was also a center of Marian devotion.

The Blackrobes<sup>25</sup> toiled with incredible energy for the interest of Mary, and even a cursory survey of their efforts on Her behalf would take a volume. They formed sodalities of the Blessed Virgin among the Onondagas, Hurons and Neuter Nation. Father Claude Allouez, who taught the Angelus to the Chippewas at Sault St. Marie, carried the name and fame of the Virgin from Green Bay to the head of Lake Superior.<sup>26</sup>

James Marquette, the "Angel of the Ottawa Mission," who had longed to explore the mighty river that flowed for measureless miles to the south, was entrusted with precisely that task on December 8, 1673, when Jolliet—with instructions from Marquette's superiors—arrived at the mission of St. Ignatius on the north shore of the straits of Mackinac.<sup>27</sup> The discoverer of the Mississippi was most renowned for his devotion to Our Lady under the title of the Immaculate Conception,<sup>28</sup> and *en route* westward he availed himself of every opportunity to further the expansion of Her cult among the Indians he visited, often preaching surrounded by banners emblazoned with the image of Christ's Mother.<sup>29</sup> He had originally placed the success of the expedition under the special patronage of Mary, and as soon as his expedition had floated from the Wisconsin into the Mississippi, the party

<sup>24</sup> Carl Wittke, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>25</sup> A generic name given the Jesuits by the Indians.—Cf. *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, introd. by Reuben Gold Thwaites, New York, 1925, p. xliv.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. John Gilmary Shea, *op. cit.*, pp. 267-268.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Marquette's own words in *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, p. 335-336: "The feast of the IMMACULATE CONCEPTION of the BLESSED VIRGIN whom I have always Invoked . . . was precisely the Day on which Monsieur Jolliet arrived with orders from Monsieur the Count de frontenac . . . to accomplish This discovery with me."

<sup>28</sup> Cf. John O'K. Murray, *The Catholic Pioneers of America*, p. 255.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. John Gilmary Shea, *op. cit.*, 317.

commenced yet a new devotion to Her to implore Her continued favor. As a youth Marquette had composed and recited daily a prayer he called "the Crown of the Immaculate Conception,"<sup>30</sup> and when at last it was clear that the great river had indeed been reached, he named it "Immaculate Conception."<sup>31</sup> Even the noted Francis Parkman, no advocate of Mary, recognized<sup>32</sup> the results of these unceasing efforts to bring the love of Mary to the natives and to keep it firm among the transplanted Europeans,<sup>33</sup> when he declared that the Christians of early Canada had great confidence in the Queen of Heaven because the Son of Mary refuses nothing to His holy Mother.

It seems more than coincidental that René Goupil was saying the rosary when he was martyred while returning to Ossernenon;<sup>34</sup> that Anne de Noué was found kneeling upright, crucifix clasped to his breast, frozen stiff on the banks of the St. Lawrence, on the Feast of the Purification (1646) of Her Whom he loved and served so gallantly;<sup>35</sup> that Charles Garnier, who had vowed to defend to the death the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, was tomahawked by the Iroquois on the eve of that Feast, December 7, 1649;<sup>36</sup> that Antoine Daniel was martyred at the sacking of St. Joseph's mission

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, p. 386.

<sup>31</sup> Carl Wittke, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>32</sup> The Jesuits' apostolate was mainly among the Indians, but by no means exclusively so.—Cf. Martin P. Harney, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

<sup>33</sup> *The Old Regime in Canada*, Boston, 1880, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Father Isaac Jogues' account in *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, p. 207: "We accordingly return toward the Village, reciting our rosary, of which we had already said 4 decades . . . one of (the) Iroquois draws a hatchet . . . and deals a blow with it on the head of René, who was before him."

<sup>35</sup> *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, p. 454.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232: "It is she (the Virgin) who has carried me (Garnier) in her arms all through my youth, and who has placed me in the Society of her Son."

during the octave of the Visitation (1648);<sup>37</sup> that Noel Chabanel was struck down by the axe of an apostate Huron near St. Mary's mission on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.<sup>38</sup> The blood of Jesuit martyrs was the seed of devotion to Our Lady. Before 1690 thirteen of them had baptized the pagan soil of New France with their life's-blood, and countless others had fallen victim to the rigors of Canadian climate, to starvation, to exposure.<sup>39</sup>

Deep piety in all that concerns the Blessed Mother has unfailingly characterized the sons of St. Ignatius, and a study of the spiritual currents flowing strong in the schools of the French Jesuits during the period of the foundation of their missions in Canada would shed considerable light on their Marian bent. Thus, for example, the celebrated Jesuit master of the spiritual life, Père Jean-Baptiste Saint-Jure (1588-1657) taught that the whole secret of the spiritual life is contained in the mysterious words "the Word was made Flesh." Divinity is personally united to humanity through the pure instrumentality of Mary, and the result is the ineffable union—the Incarnate Word—the principle and cause of all sanctity.<sup>40</sup> Does not this emphasis impart a special Marian modality to Ignatian spirituality?<sup>41</sup>

## V

It borders on the invidious to single out—among the cavalcade of the pioneer Canadian clients of Our Lady—a few heroic figures whose hearts and hands have woven Mary's

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. John Gilmary Shea, *op. cit.*, p. 230 ff.; Xavier D. Macleod, *History of the Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary in North America*, pp. 64-65; John J. Wynne, *The Jesuit Martyrs of North America*, *passim*.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Henri Bremond, *op. cit.*, pp. 223-242.

<sup>41</sup> For a brief but lucid interpretation of the Jesuit "school" of spirituality, cf. James J. Daly, *The Jesuit in Focus*, Milwaukee, 1940, p. 52. ff.



name into the warp and woof of the Catholic life of New France. And it would be no less futile than naive to say just who has contributed most to sow and nurture the seed of devotion to Her that has matured into a perennially blooming tree. But yet one cannot, for example, leave unmentioned the luminous character of the Blessed Marguerite Bourgeoys, the foundress of the Congregation of Notre Dame. Called to the apostolate in Canada by a vision of the Blessed Mother in 1640,<sup>42</sup> she later became a coadjutrix of Maisonneuve in Ville-Marie, dedicating herself to establishing the empire of Mary among the French and Indians of that primitive Marian citadel.<sup>43</sup> Her Congregation solemnly chose Our Lady as its first and perpetual Superior, and Marguerite Bourgeoys instructed her daughters in religion to pattern their apostolate on the dispositions of the Blessed Mother in the mystery of the Visitation: sanctifying the children—as John the Baptist was sanctified through the coming of Mary—and thereby indirectly influencing the families.<sup>44</sup> Together with Fathers Chaumonot and Souel, Marguerite laid the foundations of the Confraternity of the Holy Family, which was attached even to every chapel in the Iroquois country and beyond. This society spread a mantle of Marian influence in the colony, sustaining the faith and Christian life of the early settlers and Indians.<sup>45</sup>

The development of devotion to the Holy Family, with the stress of Mary's place in it, is perhaps the distinctive contribution of French Canada to North American Catholicism.<sup>46</sup> The unsurpassed attachment of the people of the Province of

<sup>42</sup> John O'K. Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 300.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. the praise accorded her by Francis Parkman in *The Old Regime in Canada*, p. 358.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Xavier D. Macleod, *op. cit.*, p. 82 ff.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. John Gilmary Shea, *op. cit.*, p. 302.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *Breviarium Romanum*, feast of the Holy Family, Sunday within the octave of Epiphany, *Lectio VI*: "... in America per Canadensem regionem sese extendit. . . ."



Quebec to the *foyer* (and to all that the word stands for) is inextricably bound up with that devotion.

## VI

Mademoiselle Jeanne Manse, entirely consecrated to the Blessed Virgin, labored for more than thirty years among the sick and poor of the new colony, establishing at Montreal in 1642 its first hospital.<sup>47</sup> Jeanne le Ber, "the Hermit of Montreal," passed the last nineteen years of her life (1695-1714) in a tiny cell modelled upon the *Santo Camino* of the House of Loretto, and her remarkable devotion to the interior life of Mary has been a by-word and a source of inspiration for countless Canadians who have found in her motto: "With Mary—By Mary—in Mary," a rule of life.<sup>48</sup> Mother Marie of the Incarnation, that intrepid Ursuline of Quebec, heeding an invitation given her personally by Mary, exchanged the ease and gaiety of the salon society of Tours for the hardships and hazards of the Canadian missions. Her own love for Our Lady and her indefatigable efforts to foster a similar love and a knowledge of Christ's truths among the savages, are proverbial in French Canada.<sup>49</sup>

These devotees of Mary and others like them have bequeathed to succeeding generations an undying heritage; a noble Christian tradition; a vigorous spiritual awareness of the meaning of human life in terms of man's Redemption by Mary's Son, Who is God too. We of the mid-Twentieth century have somehow lost—in great measure—our consciousness of man's origin and destiny, and that loss remains irreparable so long as Our Lady's place in the divine economy is denied or ignored.

<sup>47</sup> John O'K. Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Xavier D. Macleod, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. the popular biography by Agnes Repplier, *Mère Marie of the Ursulines*, New York, 1931; Parker-Bryan, *Old Quebec—The Fortress of New France*, New York, 1903, p. 52.

Today a frightened Christian West (at least Christian in an historic sense) stands at bay before a force of titanic power that is thoroughly materialistic and utterly ruthless. Already this godless enemy has subjugated vast regions of the earth under the iron heel of its despotism, and its lust for world conquest is insatiable. In the corner of our own North America that is Quebec, there is an unique civilization based on the firm foundation of religion, genuine democracy and the best of French culture. Its way of life is the very antithesis of all that Communism stands for. To where, better than Quebec, may one look for inspiration and even leadership in the death struggle of conflicting ideologies? To furnish that leadership and that inspiration might well be the new mission of old French Canada.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. Wilfrid Bovey, *The French Canadians Today*, New York, 1942, p. 146.