

Relationships between the Fathers, 1997-5
Brothers and Sisters of Holy Cross
at the beginning of the Canadian
Foundation

1841 HOLY CROSS

...three missions which have just been founded, holding such close mutual relationships as to constitute but one work because of the common interests and unity of spirit.

1847

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INTRODUCTION

The year 1997 marks the 150th anniversary of the arrival of Holy Cross in Canada. In fact, it was on May 27, 1847 that the first contingent of missionaries, sent by Father Moreau to Canada, landed at the Port of Montreal in the company of the bishop himself.

This event was solemnly commemorated at the church of Notre Dame de Montréal, the Mother Church of the Diocese, this past May 25. Other celebrations are planned, in particular that of August 10 at the parish church of Saint Laurent, and that of September 14 at Saint Joseph Oratory in Montreal.

This presentation is set in the historical context of the 150th anniversary of the foundation of Holy Cross in Saint Laurent, "*en Canada*" as it was referred to at the time, a foundation that equally concerns the Fathers, Brothers and Sisters of Holy Cross.

After a period of one hundred years, using the documents that are available, I will try to relivethe astonishing paths travelled by the pioneers of the Canadian Mission, pioneers who paved the way to *union* and *collaboration* so desired by the Founder. Thus, Holy Cross in Canada, at its very beginning responded faithfully to the ideals set forth by Father Moreau:

"Three congregations (...) founded on such close mutual relationships as to constitute but ONE by their common interests and unity of spirit!..."

Circ. 14, I. p. 43

In my presentation, I will deal only with the period 1847-1849.(1)
I will proceed a little like leafing through a family album, with a few comments on the side..

I. SETTING UP THE MISSION

-The missionaries named:

First of all, we have the missionaries of 1847. They number fourteen: two priests, eight brothers and four sisters. This was the most important contingent that had left Le Mans since the foundation in Algeria in 1840.

It was the most important in terms of numbers and also in the complementarity of the resources it offered from the very beginning.

1. In 1849, after two years of experience, Father Moreau recalled and replaced the two superiors of the mission, Father Louis Vérité and Sister Mary of the Savior.

At the heart of the group was Father Louis Verité, superior of the colony and personal representative of the founder concerning the establishment of the mission in Saint Laurent. He was thirty-two. Entering Holy Cross after having already served as a priest and a parish curate, he had now been a professed religious for six years. After a short period of teaching experience at Holy Cross, he had been designated for a foundation in Oregon. This project having been abandoned, he was now available for the setting up of the Canadian contingent - so Father Moreau and the members of the chapter appointed him to the Canadian mission.

Father Lyonnet was then assigned to serve as his assistant. He was a priest who had joined Holy Cross two months earlier. He would stay in Canada but a few months. (2)

So much for the priests. Now the Brothers!

They were eight in number. (3) Their ages varied between 15 and 22... Six were professed, but two were still novices. Among them, some were prepared for teaching and thus accomplished their task. Others were called "*working brothers*" (4) - These Brothers used their talents for whatever tasks were assigned to them. Only one of the Brothers had already lived the experience of a missionary foundation: Brother Euloge. He had been teacher and director of a school at the beginning of the mission in Algeria.

Then, of course, there were the four Sisters! (5) The superior, Mary of the Savior, was 41. She had entered Holy Cross the preceding year, and made profession the day before leaving for Canada - after only eight months of formation. To the three traditional vows, she had added the vow of Foreign Missions... In spite of her short experience in religious life, Moreau, trusting her, named her superior of the group. Her three companions were 20 and 22. Two among them were novices...

2. The documents of the time tell us that the country had betrayed him: he had counted on finding there an "uncivilized" milieu and Indians to be converted! Cf. Frère Flavien, "*Les débuts de la Congrégation de Sainte-Croix au Canada*," reproduced by *Analecta*, p. 357

3. They were Brothers Urbain, Antoine, André, Euloge, Flavien and Epiphane.

4. The term used by Brother Flavien

5. They were: Mary of the Savior, Mary of Egypt, Mary of the Desert, and Mary of Jésus Mourant.

Surprisingly enough, one of the missionaries, Sister Mary of Egypt, was the blood sister to one of the missionary Brothers, Brother Urbain, a member of the first group of missionaries. (6)

-Preparing the mission

Two aspects are to be considered. First, *the work of education*, for which the bishop of Montreal had appealed to Holy Cross. He and the pastor of Saint Laurent had already implemented the terms in advance: The Brothers would establish a college for boys, the location of which the pastor of Saint Germain offered for this purpose. Father Vérité, in addition to his task as rector would serve as curate in the parish. As for the Sisters, they would open a Boarding School which would also serve as a Day School for girls, a house that would be set up for them at the expense of the pastor of Saint Germain - this still remained to be done.

With the participation of Holy Cross in the diocesan project and in that of the parish as well, terms of which had already been negotiated on the spot by Father Moreau, the bishop and the pastor, the Sisters would simply adapt to the arrangements already made, and in the context created by them, should also respond to the expectations of the people and the pastor. The early days of the mission were not without surprises! (7)
This was all the more necessary because only Father Vérité and Brother Euloge had experience in teaching, and, for the most part, the others had very little knowledge - they only knew what was *essential* in the circumstances.

The second aspect, that which is the object of this talk, concerns *the life of the group, as Holy Cross Community* - mutual relationships, sharing of resources, unity of direction in terms of the work to be done - all according to the Rules that the community would experience wherever they missioned. (8)

6. Both returned to France together in 1859, after twelve years of service in Canada.

7. To guide them, the missionaries would find the Rules, that they brought with them, many articles concerning their mission of education. Father Vérité would assume the role of professor for his young compsnions.

8. Bishop Bourget had approved these Rules, as they were edited at the time..

Experience was lacking in this area as well - except for the two superiors, the Priests and Brothers were very young, ages ranging between 15 and 22 as we have seen previously. On the other hand, none had had the occasion to live the totality of the mission in the perspective proposed by Father Moreau: ***"union and collaboration among the men and women religious in a common work, with a common Rule!...(9)"***

This lack of experience brought a real challenge which is easy to understand. To this was added the image that each one had of the milieu that was awaiting them... an image that was rather removed from reality. Here is an example:

Brother Alderic pictured Canada as a ***mission country, hardly civilized, if not barbaric (10)***... This same Brother admitted: ***"We believed that America was less advanced in terms of civilization...this is the opinion shared by all Europeans!"(11)***

This culture shock experienced by those who had just arrived required to go from this mind set to the reality of the country. Nevertheless, this image of an uncivilized country was soon to change- an image in which it would be more difficult to see the different shades: the image of a Canada seen as ***"A new France!" (12)***

A certain number of trials as well as bad luck, which we will speak about later, would find its source in the perception that, on the part of the new missionaries was both a service and a trap. (13) Having said this, let us go on the main topic of this talk: the relationships between the men and women of Holy Cross in the early days of the Canadian foundation...

9. Rules that were still in the experimental stage.

10. Frère Michel, CSC, *Notice biographique sur le T. H. Frère Alderic, 1923, p.6*
Father Lyonnet had this image. cf Supra, p.3, note 2.

Sister Mary of the Savior seems to have had another vision. In the face of poverty that she soon experienced, she exclaimed, ***"and they sent us into a country that they said was rich!"***
 Letter to Father Sorin May 5, 1848.

11. Brother Alderic in a letter to his mother, July 22, 1847. Quoted by Brother Michel, Op.Cit., p. 32.

12. *Annales des Soeurs de Sainte Croix*, I, p.84. This was because French was spoken, but also because the people seemed to have preserved some of the happy traits of their French heritage and this made them sympathetic from the very first. (Frere Michel, Op.Cit.,p.32)

13. A trap if one forgot that between the France and the Canada of 1847, there was a distance of eighty years of history and of an ocean!

II. THE MISSIONARIES AND THEIR FIRST 'GROUP EXPERIENCE'

The appointment of the men and women religious for the Canadian foundation took place between the end of March and April 25, 1847, the date set for the departure. (14) One can see that the group was not really formed as a group until the moment of the missioning ceremony on April 25. (15) Until then the Brothers and Sisters were not or were very little acquainted with one another; (16) The two superiors, Father Vérite and Mary of the Saviour certainly did not know one another in France states Brother Flavien. (17) It was on the trip to Montreal that the first occasion of communication within the group would occur: a relationship that would be experienced with *few* words, based on a rule of life to which they mutually agreed. Their obedience to the Rule would fashion their identity as men and women religious. (18)

From the very beginning of the trip, that which brought the colony from Le Mans to Le Havre, (19) the chronicler wrote:

"... The trip to Le Havre was exceptionally happy and proceeded with great piety; care was taken that no spiritual exercise was set aside(...) As perfectly as possible, poverty and sobriety were also practiced, for meals were taken while riding on the coach with some provisions which had been made at the Mother House before leaving. (20)

Upon crossing the Atlantic, the same spirit was found to such an extent that, in his book, Catta entitled the section he dedicated to the journey, "THE PIOUS CROSSING." (21) That says it all!

14. Brothers Antoine, Flavien and Epiphane were destined for a foundation at Terrebonne.

15. Brother Flavien: the departure took place at 9 o'clock - *Analecta*, p. 363.

16. Except, of course Brother Urbain and his sister, Mary of Egypt.

17. *Analecta*, p. 378.

18. In a letter the men received before leaving, Father Moreau wrote: *"Be united with us, beloved brothers in Jesus Christ, and follow my recommendations and your rules well."* *Analecta*, p. 365.

19. *The journey took place on stage coach from post office to post office...*

20. *Exception was made in Lisieux, "where we arrived at 11 o'clock at night and where we took a light meal at the hotel."* Cf. *Analecta*, p. 378.

21. *Catta*, I, p. 490.

"Well regulated Spiritual Exercises, daily Eucharist (22) and Prayers of the Month of Mary were carried out exactly and with solemnity." (23) In this context, the stage coach or the ship, for all practical purposes, became an extension of the religious house.

The exterior frame work mattered little: they arrived with them and within them..., the same will to be faithful to the commitments that gave a religious character to the unfolding of each day, no matter what happened.

But what about getting to know each other and the interpersonal relationships that developed during the journey across???

The records that have come down to us tell us very little. One can presume that the rule of silence and especially that of the cloister which fulfilled the condition at that time, the relationships between men and women within religious communities, would not make it easier to form interpersonal relationships except, perhaps, between superiors. To establish true communication, there must be "*foreseen necessities*" imposed by the rule. (24)

22. Some days they assisted at four masses: as many as there were priests on board, wrote Father Vérité (Analecta, p.389). The captain of the ship had authorized the erection of a stationary altar.

23. Brother Flavien in Analecta, p.365.

24. In the rules of 1847, among other directives, we read: "The Sisters will treat the Brothers with all possible respect, with honesty, modesty and gratitude for the least service rendered, but they will have no unnecessary dealings with them, scrupulously observing cloister with regard to them..." (Rules of 1847, p.403). The Brothers were submitted to a similar rule, with one exception: "in case of an urgent necessity when it is a matter of going to the aid of the Sisters." (Rule 244)

Therefore, Father Vérité, observing the behaviour of Sister Mary of the Saviour and, "fearing that she lacked zeal and experience in requiring that the rules be lived accordingly,"(25) decided to put her to the test as soon as they were installed in Saint Laurent. On the other hand, Mary of the Saviour, perhaps feeling that she was being scrutinized by Father Vérité, judged him to be "suspicious and distrustful!" (26)

According to Brother Flavien, they had to wait until the superior "***began to have frequent and necessary communication with her,***" (27), that is to say, once the work of the mission was on the way, in order to change his views and his judgement of her...

The above constitutes a kind of introduction to the history of relationships at the heart of the founding group in Canada.

As we can see, unity happened from a common desire for fidelity to the rule of religious life that bonded them together and to the Founder, and identified them as a group.

25. Brother Flavien, in *Analecta*, p. 378

26. Brother Flavien, in *Analecta*, p. 378.

27. Brother Flavien, in *Analecta*, p. 378.

III. INSTALLATION AT SAINT LAURENT AND THE FORMING OF THE COMMUNITY

- The retreat

The group arrived in Montreal on May 27, but it was only in mid-August that the whole group was able to come together in Saint Laurent. Until then, they were dispersed, awaiting the places of residence of both Sisters and Brothers, to be set up at least for the time being. (28)

How could they get some kind of cohesion in the group before setting up the mission? Father Vérité decided to put all his people on a seven day retreat. (29)

In the Chronicles, we read:

On the feast of the Assumption, Father Superior, who had finished his retreat the evening before, and who had renewed his vows in the morning, according to the ordinary ceremonial, at the Mass of the the pastor, opened the retreat for the Brothers and the Sisters in the Village Church! (30)

The rest of the retreat was given in the sacristy. (31)

Why bring together these men and women? No doubt, it was for practical reasons, but also for reasons of unity and communion "*thus to facilitate for both, Sisters and Brothers, the hearing of the same sermons.*"(32) This was the preferred way as well as the only way of doing it!

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28. Father Vérité and the Brothers stayed at the rectory for a while; the Sisters had been welcomed by Sisters of the Congregation of Notre dame and then in a family in the village.
29. He was inspired for this, no doubt, by Father Moreau, who had tightened the first bonds of community with his companions, in a retreat at la Trappe de Montagne in October, 1836.
30. Analecta, p.367.
31. Annales of the Soeurs de Sainte-Croix, I, p.94.
32. Id., p. 94.

Father Superior seems to have had another goal in mind. By means of a spiritual event experienced together, he wanted to "strengthen the religious in the spirit of the Rules that so much traveling and emotion might have dissipated!...(33)

It is interesting to note that to this collective retreat the superiors had deemed it appropriate to admit the Canadian postulants (34) who had already joined the community; "the superiors wanted all members to make the retreat so that they could better grasp the spirit and especially live their life in that same spirit." (35)

On the occasion of the retreat itself, and in circumstances related to it, we can feel the major preoccupation of Father Vérité, i.e. to make of a rather heterogeneous group, a community of Holy Cross united and fervent, living according to the spirit of the Founder and faithfully observing the rules that had been given to them.

Now the work could begin. The superior felt that he was really in the line traced for him by Father Moreau: "*I recommend above all, that you consolidate within, before spreading outside...*" (36)

IV. FIRST EXPERIENCE OF COLLABORATION

There would be many, harmonized by the circumstances of the foundation, and would present a panorama of initiatives and services:

- between the Sisters and the Brothers

During the first three months, (37) the Brothers had done some work on the house that the pastor had designated for the Sisters; those things that were necessary to make it habitable. They became excavators, carpenters, painters, etc...As soon as repairs were over, the services of the Brothers became less frequent.

33. Id.,p. 93. "His zeal made him uneasy - during the journey, the spirit may have been dampened. Cf.,Catta, I, p.55.

34. 3 for the Sisters - 3 for the Brothers.

35. Brother Flavien. Op.Cit., p.377.

36. Letter, May 2nd, 1847.

37. That is in June, July and August. Cf.Brother, Flavien, Op.Cit.,p.379

.For example, it took a whole day to go to Montreal and another to return - because of this dilemma, a Brother was authorized by the superior, as the need arose, to drive Sisters there.(38) It was also said that a Brother could, from time to time, be a messenger for the Sisters. Thus, for example, we read that Brother Urbain brought mail to the superior of the Congregation of Notre Dame in Montreal. (39)

Father Drouelle, in his report that closed his visit to the mission in Canada, in June of 1848, noted that the Sisters "would count on the Brothers, (...) for purchases and other necessary work." (40) Having the Brothers close, as we can see, was the occasion for fraternal services rendered to the Sisters and also provided a certain security. They were there and they could be called upon. (41)

What the Sisters brought was something different: "*permanence*" (42) In fact, very early during the first year of the foundation - and that, in spite of their small number - the Sisters were called to task as nurses - also taking care of the washing - and served as cooks for the Brothers (43), somewhat as it was practiced at the College of Holy Cross in Le Mans. They travelled morning and evening from their convent to the Brothers' college. Also, as at Le Mans, their contribution to the quality of life at the College was noteworthy:

38. Because the Brothers had acquired a horse and buggy for the needs of the mission. Cf.: a letter from Father Verite to Father St.Germain, quoted by Brother Flavien. Op.Cit., p.379

39. Cf. Letter from Sister Madeleine, CND, to Mary of the Saviour, CSC, June 17, 1847.

40. Quoted in "Annales des Soeurs de Sainte-Croix, I, p.100

41. In his letter to the men religious, Basil Moreau wrote: "*Take good care of our Sisters, and especially of their excellent superior.*" Cf. Brother Flavien, Op.Cit., p.365

42. *Les Annales des Marianites* express thus the "normality" of their presence, "the Brothers, accustomed to seeing the Sisters at the mother House, responsible for the house keeping, would have difficulty refusing to help them in the Canadian foundation where a novitiate and a boarding school had to be built." p. 49.

43. Marie du Couronnement and Mary of Saint Augustine, the latter a Canadian novice. On the subject of this obedience, Mary of the Saviour wrote: "The pastor is upset with me since I gave Sisters to look after the Brothers' kitchen." To Sorin, March 20, 1848.

The presence of the Sisters, in the eyes of the parents of the boarders, gave the house a new lustre, because of the cleanliness, the lavish care given their children and better prepared food. (44)

So much for the main aspects of collaboration between the Brothers and the Sisters, in the early days of the Canadian foundation. (45)

- between Father Vérité and the Sisters

The services of Father Vérité were of another nature. I purposely leave aside what is linked to the fact that he is the Superior and the Administrator of the mission, (46), the priest who acts as chaplain and confessor for the Sisters and the Aspirants, in order to limit myself to his direct contribution to the establishment of the Sister's boarding school.

Besides regularly presiding over the council meetings, during which decisions were taken with regard to the orientation and the progress of the boarding school, (47) he came three or four times a week to give lessons in grammar and arithmetic to the teachers; once a week, he gave a course in religion to the older students. (48) Also, once a week, on Sundays, he gave a conference to the Sisters.

What this kind of presence supposes in different activities, and what it expresses in terms of dedication can only be evaluated in terms of fraternal charity and solidarity in Holy Cross. Yet, Father Vérité's action toward the Sisters and their works (49) was negatively judged by some of the elements of the population and even to some extent by the pastor of Saint Germain.

44. Brother Flavien, Op.Cit., p.372. The chronicler adds. "they also contributed to the establishment of silence in the rooms."

45. In his report, quoted above, Father Drouelle had written: "the Brothers go to the Sisters for sewing, bleaching, etc."...This could mean all kinds of little services imaginable!

46. Under this title, it is on him "that falls the great worry of all material things: food for the two houses, wood for heating, etc...Cf. Annales des Soeurs de Sainte-Croix, I, p. 128

47. Cf. The minutes of the time

48. Cf. Annales des Soeurs de Sainte-Croix, I, p. 97

49. As were the mutual services rendered by the Brothers and the Sisters.

V. COLLABORATION QUESTIONED

From documents of the day, (50) the following can be deduced: "the frequent meetings between the men and women of Holy Cross, astonished, even scandalized some people who spoke to the pastor about it. The goings and comings between the two houses were deemed to be unusual and unsuitable for men and women religious (51)..... This proved to be a certain malice expressed by some "good" souls. It was but one step. (52) Father Verite had to justify himself before the pastor and as well as before Father Moreau himself.

Let us look at some of the points of his defense: first of all, the inexperience of the newcomers and their lack of knowledge concerning the milieu: "because since this was done at Le Mans, why not at Saint Laurent???" Many similar comments are found in Father Verite's letters: "We did not know the mind set of the country"..."it is because of this lack of knowledge that..." "We never thought that we were scandalizing people..." "I, myself, disedified..." He also wrote that the people who were uneasy "were not very charitable, to let nothing go by for the poor people who had just arrived and knew nothing about the customs of the country." (53) It was important, above all, to make the pastor understand that the family of Holy Cross had its Rules, approved by the Bishop of Montreal and that these Rules supposed mutual relationships between the members of this religious family, (54) a relationship that was faithful to the rule of a cloistered community.

For example, on the subject of the novitiate of the Sisters, there was question of moving it to Saint Martin: "I don't think that the novitiate can stay here if relationships are forbidden, because our Rules suppose and command some relationships..."

50. Notably the letters of Father Verite to the pastor of Saint Laurent and to the Founder, quoted in full or in part in the chronicles of Brother Flavien.

51. ..."The pastor opposed the Brothers too frequent visits from one house to the other."

52. "I don't know if these are really praiseworthy and influential people,"...wrote Father Verite.

53. The image of the New France was at work here!

54. The Sisters who worked at the college would soon be residing there during the week, for they were building a few rooms for them...

At the same time, as he justified himself, Father Verite was careful in the arrangements he was making to restrict to bare necessity, the coming and going of the Brothers, and to assure a more rigorous respect of the cloister. This storm would soon be over, he thought. One fact escaped him in his letter to Father Moreau:

"When I will have completed the linen room, as our furnishings grow and you will have sent us a first rate religious as tailor, visits to the Sisters' house will be less frequent and gossips who have nothing to do but mind their neighbors' business will have less to trifle with." (55)

In reality, all this seems to be a bit legendary, but Father Verite, vulnerable as he was, and anxious to enter into all the views of the Founder. (56)
We certainly owe him endless gratitude: his manner of coping with situations must be noted in our history. He succeeded in spite of the inevitable difficulties and set-backs (57), given the newness of the experience. He succeeded in creating within the group of Holy Cross, a real concern for union of hearts and collaboration in the spirit of the Founder.

This concern played an important part in his relationships with Mary of the Saviour. Time was in his favor - relationships became more cordial and bonds were established between the two superiors. "He soon recognized that she would be an excellent Superior and he constantly admired her wisdom, her firm kindness, her zeal for the Rule and her piety." (58)

In 1849, Father Verite and Mary of the Saviour left Saint Laurent. Theirs was a mission of precursors; others would consolidate what they had created so beautifully.

55. Father Verite to Father Moreau as quoted by Brother Flavien, Op. Cit., p. 392.

56. "I only want to do your will and consequently, keep the spirit of the Rules," I., p. 394

57. Cf. Brother Flavien, Op.Cit., p. 397

58. Cf. Brother Flavien, Op.Cit., p. 378

- And Life goes on...

Under the direction of Father Rézé and Sister Mary of the Seven Dolors who came after them, union and collaboration were more than ever part of the life of the community. Father Rézé continued and emphasized, among the Sisters and with the Community as a whole, all that had been started by his predecessor. (59)

In several of the villages, the Sisters and Brothers had their own school, (60) independent of each other, but functioning in the same spirit. The students, both boys and girls, participated in the same parish life, wrote the same scholastic exams, were trained according to the same pedagogy: that of Basil Moreau. Brother Flavien notes that "the suspicions no longer exist...!" (61)

59. Alice Giroux, CSC, *Histoire du Pensionnat Notre-Dame-des-Anges*, p. 31.

60. Notably at Saint Martin and Sainte Scholastique.

61. Op. Cit., p. 401

CONCLUSION

Today, what remains of this first page of our history - this groping, this suffering??? Father Vérité and Mary of the Saviour remain in the background, in our memories! They have gone and have been replaced by successors who were more experienced and more visible. However, without them, without the price they had to pay, the mission of Canada would have experienced a difficult orientation, especially concerning the relationships existing among religious men and women in the matter of collaboration - in Canada...

Beyond the events, favorable or unfavorable, that outline our history, beyond persons, their bonds or their prohibitions, union and collaboration between the members of Holy Cross in Canada have always remained an ideal to be attained, a desire of Father Moreau to be realized.

What pioneers of 1847 planted still grows in the garden of the community - a plant that is ever fragile, always trying to find its sunny space, yet a plant still living and fully alive after one hundred and fifty years...!

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