FISKE HALL GRADUATE PAPER AWARD

CATHOLICISM'S MILITANT PIONEERS TO NORTH AMERICA

THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY JESUITS OF NEW FRANCE

BY
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It is a romantic image endemic to the American psyche. Men possessed of an almost superhuman will to fulfill their mission. Superbly trained and motivated, physically and mentally prepared to overcome any obstacle and pay any price, including the "ultimate price" to accomplish the seemingly impossible. For a good many Americans that image is clothed in military uniform or pioneer buckskin. Outmanned and outgunned, they fight to the bitter end. But perhaps the members of the first such organization in Euro-American history were not soldiers or embattled Indian fighters at all. Yet, given the military background and early pretensions of their founder it is not surprising that they approached their mission in a military fashion. Not warriors, in fact unarmed, these men were Roman Catholic priests, members of the elite Society of Jesus, the Jesuits of New France.

These Jesuits served a foreign enemy regime, France.[1] They served a religion, Roman Catholicism, which was anathema to Britain and British North America. Despite the feelings of their British colonial contemporaries, many historians have bestowed upon these men, sometimes grudgingly, a certain level of respect. They earned this respect for their dedication, courage and sacrifice, if not always for their methods and motives, the masters they served, or the end results of their labors.

Nineteenth century American historian Francis Parkman, no proponent of French Canada or the Catholic Church, described their mission thus: "From their hovel on the St. Charles, they surveyed a field of labor whose vastness might tire the wings of thought itself; a scene repellent and appalling, darkened with omens of peril and woe."[2] Parkman described their devotion to their mission in these terms. "One great aim engrossed their lives. "For the greater glory of God"—*ad majorem Dei gloriam*—they would act or wait, dare, suffer, or die, yet all in unquestioning subjection to the authority of the Superiors, in whom they recognized the agents of Divine authority itself."[3]

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[1] Francis Parkman, France and England in North America, vol. 1, The Jesuits in North America, The Library of America Series (Boston: Little, Brown, 1880; reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 576 (page citations are to the reprint edition). Not all of the Jesuits in New France were French-born. At least one, Francisco Giuseppe Bressani, was Italian having been born in Rome.

[2] Ibid., 406.

[3] Ibid., 407.

The modern-day Canadian historian W. J. Eccles described these men and their mission in this fashion: "These men ... had only one aim, to save the souls of the Indians by converting them to Christianity. To this end they lived among them, learned their languages, devoted themselves completely, and on occasion sacrificed their lives."[4]

College of William and Mary ethnohistorian, James Axtell, explained their impact on early America in this way. "If diseases were the shock troops of the invasion of America, Christian missionaries were its commandoes, disguised in feminine black robes as members of a Peace Corps. ... Perhaps the best ... were the Jesuits. By history and design, the Society of Jesus was destined to change the American world. It was a fraternity designed for war, the greatest engine of social change."[5]

In their book, *Colonial America in an Atlantic World*, American historians T. H. Breen and Timothy Hall also chose a military metaphor to describe these men. "The Jesuits became effective foot soldiers in the campaign to reform the Church and restore people to the Catholic fold. The Jesuit "Black Robes" ... spurred a powerful new thrust of missionary outreach to the Americas, Africa, and Asia."[6]

Though not soldiers, these dedicated men were indeed the product of military-style training and discipline. The Society of Jesus was founded by a Spanish-Basque former soldier named Ignatius Loyola.[7] Born Inigo Lopez de Loyola, probably in 1491, in the Basque province of Guipuzcoa at Loyola castle,[8] Loyola was reared to tales of his family's martial glory. His grandfather, father and older brother had fought in the *Reconquista*.[9] His eldest brother had equipped and sailed a ship on Columbus's second expedition to the New World in 1493. Three years later, this same brother perished during the Spanish conquest of the Kingdom of Naples.[10] It seems only natural that Ignatius would dream of attaining his own measure of military glory. He would say of himself: '... above all he loved exercises in the use of arms, drawn by an immense desire to acquire vain honour...'[11]

As events, fate, or as he himself believed God would have it, Ignatius was not destined to achieve immortal martial glory. At the tender age of seven he received the clerical tonsure and with the help of familial influence was appointed as a page to Juan Velasquez de Cuellar,[12] the Treasurer of Castile. From there he rose to the position of gentleman-retainer to the Viceroy of Navarre,[13] the Duke of Najera, Don Antonio Manrique de Lava.[14]

His training for these positions undoubtedly included horsemanship and the use of arms. Court retainers of this period were expected to be proficient with a sword and to practice the 'affairs of honour.' This did not however make Ignatius a professional soldier.[15] Still, his

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[4] William John Eccles, The Canadian Frontier: 1534-1760, Histories of the American Frontier Series (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969; reprint, Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 2 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

[5] James Axtell, Beyond 1492: Encounters in Colonial North America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 155.

[6] T. H. Breen and Timothy Hall, Colonial America in an Atlantic World: A Story of Creative Interaction (New York: Pearson Education, Inc., 2004), 21.

[7] Ibid.

[8] David Mitchell, The Jesuits: A History (London: Macdonald Futura Publishers, 1980; reprint, New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1981), 23 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

[9] Soldier (Jesuit Conference: Society of Jesus USA, accessed 20 November 2006); available from http://www.jesuit.org/

[10] Mitchell, 24.

[11] J. C. H. Aveling, The Jesuits (New York: Stein and Day Publishers, 1981), 62-63.

[12] Martin P. Harney, The Jesuits in History: The Society of Jesus Through Four Centuries (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1962), 27.

[13] Aveling, 60.

[14] Harney, 27.

[15] Ibid., 63.

service to Navarre would eventually lead to the battlefield. In 1521 he was wounded at the Battle of Pamplona and his spiritual conversion began.[16]

Ignatius' wound left him with a permanent limp and led him to search for a new direction for his life. During his long recovery he read and reflected on *The Golden Legend*, a book on the lives of the saints, and the *Life of Christ*, by the German Carthusian monk Ludolph. In *Life of Christ* he read that Christ was the true Liege Lord who beseeched his followers to serve as "holy knights" in the struggle against the Prince of Darkness, Satan.[17]

Humbled by his physical pain and deformity, Ignatius experienced remorse for his past sins and received a vision of the Virgin and Child. He made a personal vow of loyalty and chastity and contemplated a future as a monk. He traveled to the Benedictine Abbey at Montserrat in Catalonia, confessed his sins and adopted the dress of a penitent pilgrim.[18]

This proved to be the beginning of a long period of education and spiritual formation. He realized that his court training had left him with little technical knowledge and his search for this learning led him from basic education at the High School in Barcelona to universities in Spain and France. As he gained worldly knowledge he never lost sight of his true calling, the saving of souls. As he traversed Europe he preached openly and begged alms. His zeal and pilgrim dress drew the attention of the religious authorities and on more than one occasion, he was imprisoned out of fear that his teachings were just one more manifestation of the amateur unorthodox fervor that swept across Europe following the Reformation.[19]

He experimented with different monastic orders but failed to find the satisfaction he yearned for. It was during this period that he wrote his *Spiritual Exercises* which would become a cornerstone of Jesuit training and teaching. As he drew attention and opposition, he also began to draw his own group of loyal followers. He decided to take his *Exercises* and his idea for a new priestly order to the one man who could sanction his plans, the pope in Rome.[20]

Despite opposition from preexisting orders, especially the Dominicans[21], Ignatius' new Society of Jesus was sanctioned by Pope Julius III[22] in 1540 in a papal bull entitled *Regimini militantis Ecclesiae*, "which accurately reflected its pugnacious stance toward the Protestant Reformation and international "paganism.""[23] The bull referred to the members of the new order as *militare deo* or soldiers of God.[24]

> Thus was born an order about which the Austrian historian Egon Friedel wrote: They were the most brilliant courtiers, the sternest ascetics, the most self-sacrificing missionaries and the sharpest traders, the most devoted footmen and the shrewdest statesmen, the wisest confessors and the greatest impresarios, the most gifted physicians and the most skillful assassins. They built churches and factories, proved theorems in mathematics and stated propositions in church dogmatics, worked to suppress the freedom of enquiry and made a host of scientific discoveries. They were—in the broadest possible sense of the term—truly capable of anything.[25]

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[16] Jacqueline Peterson, Sacred Encounters: Father DeSmet and the Indians of the Rocky Mountain West (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 43.

[17] Mitchell, 27.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 30-32.

[20] 33.

[21] 37.

[22] Carole Blackburn, Harvest of Souls: The Jesuit Missions and Colonialism in North America, 1632-1650, McGill-Queen's Native and Northern Series, ed. Bruce G. Trigger. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 123.

[23] Axtell, 155-156.

[24] Blackburn, 123.

[25] Manfred Barthel, The Jesuits: History and Legend of The Society of Jesus, trans. Mark Howson (Federal Republic of Germany: Econ Verlag GmbH, 1982; reprint, New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1984), 10 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

Loyola drafted *Constitutions* to complement the *Spiritual Exercises* for the regulation of the society which promoted the image of the Jesuits as soldiers of God at war with the forces of Satan.[26] The *Exercises* mandated month-long retreats for initiates and yearly retreats for the duration of a Jesuit priest's career. The retreats involved meditations, including the Two Standards, wherein "the supreme commander of the good people is Christ our Lord; ... the leader of the enemy is Lucifer."[27] These two opposing principals dispersed their followers throughout the whole world to do battle for souls.[28]

The Jesuits of New France reflected this imagery in their annual correspondence to the superior of the Jesuit mission in New France. These letters, known as *Relations*, were the product of a directive originally issued by Loyola.[29] The superior in Quebec edited the letters, added his own report in the form of an introduction, and forwarded it on to the order provincial in Paris. The provincial performed a final edit before sending the document on to the printer. These exciting firsthand accounts of the triumphs and travails of the missionaries enjoyed a wide audience among the educated devout and no doubt prompted their financial support for the mission effort.[30] The *Relations* further served as illustrations of the moral lessons learned in the missionary field.[31]

The Jesuit Paul Le Jeune wrote in his first *Relation* from New France, "it is my opinion that I come here like the pioneers, who go ahead to dig the trenches; after that come brave soldiers, who besiege and take the place."[32] Further *Relations* beseeched their readers to pray for the priests as they fought "the combats and battles we have to give and sustain every day, in order to establish in this country a Sovereign other than he who, since all ages, had tyrannically usurped the empire of God and of Jesus Christ".[33] Their training and labors were "the arms necessary for war"[34] and their sermons and instructions were the "batteries"[35] that would ultimately "destroy the empire of Satan, and shall unfurl the banner of Jesus Christ in these regions."[36]

Although sanctioned by the Pope in 1540 the Jesuit order maintained no official presence in France until 1556. A small number of young Jesuits, dressed as laymen, attended the university in Paris beginning in 1540 and the order held the support of King Henry II and the Cardinal of Lorraine. Still, Gallican-leaning members of the French *Parlement*, the educational establishment, and powerful members of the French clergy viewed the papal bull authorizing the society as a violation of French sovereignty and openly condemned the Jesuit order.[37]

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[26] Parkman, 408.

[27] Ignatius Loyola, Ignatius of Loyola: Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works, The Classics of Western Spirituality, ed. George E. Ganss, S. J. (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 154, also referenced in Parkman, 124.

[28] Ibid., 155.

[29] Joseph P. Donnelly, S. J., Thwaites' Jesuit Relations: Errata and Addenda (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1967), 1-2.

[30] William John Eccles, The French in North America 1500-1783, 3rd ed. New American Nation Series (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1998), 42-43.

[31] Jose Antonio Brandao, Your Fyre Shall Burn No More: Iroquois Policy Toward New France and Its Native Allies to 1701 Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 136.

[32] Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents, vol. 5, Le Juenes Relation, 1632, by Paul Le Juene, S. J. (New York: Pageant Book Company, 1959), 21, also referenced in Blackburn, 124.

[33] Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents, vol. 17, Le Juenes Relation, 1639, by Paul Le Juene, S. J. (New York: Pageant Book Company, 1959), 215, also referenced in Blackburn, 124.

[34] Ibid., 9, again referenced in Blackburn, 124.

[35] Ibid., 115, Blackburn, 124.

[36] Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents, vol. 14, Le Juenes Relation, 1638, by Paul Le Juene, S. J. (New York: Pageant Book Company, 1959), 127, also referenced in Blackburn, 124.

[37] Harney, 86.

Loyola appealed to the rest of Catholic Europe to gather support for an official presence in France. An impressive array of Catholic luminaries pledged their support and the Gallican opposition finally relented in 1555. The first Jesuit college in France was founded at Billom by Guillaume du Prat the following year.[38]

France entered the European competition for the conquest of the Americas at a relatively late date. Cortes had already completed the Spanish conquest of Mexico before French and Italian bankers financed the Florentine navigator Giovanni da Verrazano's 1524 voyage along the North American coast. It was 1534 before Jacques Cartier, a Breton sea captain, embarked on the first of his voyages in the service of France. By this date, Spain's Pizarro had conquered Peru.[39]

The Jesuit community viewed the European invasion of the Americas as a golden opportunity to win souls from Satan. They viewed the North American continent and its population as abandoned and lost, ripe for conversion and salvation at Catholic European hands.[40] Like the Spanish conquistadors, Spanish priests beat their French counterparts to the punch in the competition for Native American converts. Priests accompanying Ponce de Leon's Florida expedition celebrated the first Catholic Mass within the present boundaries of the United States in 1521. The first Spanish Indian mission on modern American soil, San Miguel de Guandape, was founded by the Dominican priest Antonio Montesino in 1526 just north of the present-day location of Charleston, South Carolina.[41]

This great era of European exploration and expansion, not only in the Americas but Asia and Africa as well, was also viewed by the various Catholic orders as a golden opportunity to replenish the losses incurred from Protestant heresy. The Society of Jesus pursued foreign missionary opportunities from its very infancy. In 1540 Loyola designated four of his original ten Jesuits as foreign missionaries.[42] The Jesuits launched their foreign missionary effort in 1541 when Francis Xavier sailed from Lisbon for Goa.[43]

By the time the first French Jesuits set foot in North America the order had gained a reputation for educational excellence. Loyola himself had come late to the academic world. He viewed teaching as a mundane affair and an obstacle to what he termed "apostolic poverty."[44] None the less, by the time of the death in 1615 of Claudio Aquaviva one of Loyola's successors to the position of Jesuit General, the Jesuit educational system had become the envy of Europe.[45]

The system had nearly doubled under Aquaviva and included eight complete universities, thirty Academies or small universities, more than 400 colleges (Grammar schools), a dozen seminaries, as well as various Jesuit societies whose membership boasted many of Europe's brightest minds. The Jesuits counted among their members the theologians Bellarmine and Lessius, the historians; Sirmond, Petau, Labbe and Rosweyde, the moralist, Sanchez, and the philosopher, Suarez. The Jesuit training school for mathematicians and astronomers in Rome provided instructors for colleges across Europe. Jesuit schools were located in every Catholic state in Europe from the Russian border to Sicily except the Republic of Venice.[46]

The curriculum at these schools would likely not pass the inspection of modern secular scholars. Only those subjects and opinions that held the full endorsement of the Catholic Church were included. "Intellectual curiosity and independent-mindedness, rarely at a premium in any educational system, were strongly discouraged in the colleges. A great deal was forbidden; very

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[38] Ibid., 87.

[39] Eccles, The Canadian Frontier, 12.

[40] Blackburn, 15.

[41] Margaret and Stephen Bunson, Faith in the Wilderness: The Story of the Catholic Indian Missions (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 2000), 25.

[42] Mitchell, 75.

[43] Harney 93.

[44] Aveling, 117.

[45] Ibid., 215.

[46] Ibid.

little was allowed."[47] Still, Axtell contends that, "Man for man, the Jesuits were the best and most rigorously trained minds in Europe."[48] Axtell points to their "formidable education in logic, languages, and the arts of verbal argument and persuasion."[49] The Jesuits brought their order's commitment to education with them to New France. In 1635, a year before Harvard was founded in the English colonies; the Jesuits opened their college in Quebec. For the next 124 years this college provided the Canadian colonists with an education equal to that of any offered in France.[50]

The first French priest to arrive in New France was not a missionary. This first priest was sent to minister to the Catholics among the French traders at Port Royal in Acadia. Not all of the Frenchmen at Port Royal were Catholic, some were Huguenot and they too were supplied with a clergyman. It appears that these two unfortunate souls spent most of their time and energy battling each other until both perished due to scurvy. Their parishioners deposited their respective remains in a common grave so the two clerics could continue their bickering post mortem.[51]

The first French missionary to New France was not a Jesuit, but rather a secular priest named Jesse Flesche. Within a few short weeks of his arrival at Port Royal in 1610, Flesche had baptized more than 80 of the nearby Micmacs. The good father, totally ignorant of the Micmac language, had provided his converts with the briefest of instruction with the aid of an interpreter.[52] Just how much of their new faith these first Micmac Catholics truly comprehended can only be guessed at. It's a good bet that this interpreter was among those who had buried Flesche's predecessor, and the good people of Port Royal had already given example of their sense of humor with the interment of their first two pastors. Whatever their level of comprehension, these Micmacs were the first fruits of France's evangelization effort in New France.[53]

As Flesche labored in the mission field, his sovereign Henri IV was assassinated in France. The queen mother, Marie de Medici, took up the torch for the continuation of the missionary effort. With the able assistance of Madame de Guerchville, she insisted that the Jesuits be introduced into the Port Royal trading station. The man responsible for the post, Jean de Biencourt, Sieur de Poutrincourt, loathed the order, but he was in desperate need of funds to stay in operation. The Jesuits agreed to fund the post's operation and Poutrincourt relented. Thus two Jesuit priests were dispatched to Port Royal. Poutrincourt in France, and his son, Charles de Biencourt at Port Royal, continuously harassed the Jesuits and leveled baseless allegations against them. Eventually Madame de Guercheville withdrew her support and the priests returned to France.

Madame de Guerchville had not however given up on mission work. In 1613 she provided funds and a ship for a new mission on the Penobscot River. The ship never reached the Penobscot and the mission was instead established at Saint-Sauveur across from Mont Desert Island.

The mission at Saint-Sauveur proved to be short-lived. Alarmed by the presence of a French settlement in territory disputed between France and England, Samuel Argall of Virginia with sixty soldiers, sailed from Massachusetts on the fourteen-gun *Treasurer* and launched a surprise attack on Saint-Sauveur. Taken completely unaware, the French were quickly defeated. Two Frenchmen were killed and four wounded.[54] One of the dead was the first representative of the French Jesuits to die violently in New France, the lay brother, Gilbert du Thet.[55] The Jesuits would not return to New France until 1625.[56]

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[47] Barthel, 115.
[48] Axtell, 156.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Eccles, The French in North America 1500-1783, 44.
[51] Ibid., 17. footnote
[52] Ibid., 17.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid., 18.
[55] Bunson, 52.
[56] Eccles, The French in North America, 28.

The Argall raid was the opening shot of an armed struggle between the French and English colonies that would continue off and on for a century and a half. Even when their mother countries were at peace, the colonists would continue their struggle. "Much blood would be shed and many gallant deeds would be performed (and many black and terrible deeds as well) on both sides before the struggle came to an end when Wolfe captured Quebec."[57]

In 1614 the Estates General at Paris provided 1,500 livres to fund four Recollects missionaries at Quebec.[58] Unlike the Jesuits, the Recollects, sometimes known as the Franciscans of the Strict Observance, were virtually penniless and depended upon charity for even their daily sustenance.[59]

Soon after their arrival at Quebec two of the Recollects left for the Indian mission field with little knowledge of Indian culture and practically no knowledge of Indian languages. Jean d'Olbeau journeyed to Tadoussac to minister to the Montagnais and Joseph Le Caron left for Huronia.[60] Father Le Caron spent only one winter with the Hurons before returning to Quebec in 1616. He returned to Huronia in 1623 with two companions Father Nicolas Viel and Brother Gabriel Sagard and established their mission at the Huron village of Quienonascaran. The Recollects' efforts bore little fruit. In this first decade of the French missionary push there were never more than four missionaries in the field at one time and less than fifty Indians accepted baptism, nearly all at the point of death.[61]

In 1625 the Society of Jesus returned to New France. Five Jesuits arrived in that year and three more the next year. They immediately ran into problems with the Huguenots who controlled the French port of La Rochelle. The Huguenots were particularly hostile to the Jesuits above all the Catholic orders and refused to ship their supplies. The bitter conflict between Catholics and Huguenots in France had spilled over to the French possessions in the New World. The Huguenots had no intention in aiding the Catholic effort to evangelize and convert the inhabitants of the New World. The Huguenots' resistance to the missionary effort led eventually to an order from Cardinal Richelieu, the King's first minister, barring them from New France.[62]

At Richelieu's direction, the Company of New France, frequently called the Company of One Hundred Associates, "was formed to develop and exploit the resources of New France, establish self-sufficient agricultural settlements, and foster missionary activity."[63] The Company got off to a disastrous start as its convoy of 400 new settlers was bottled up and captured in the St. Lawrence River by an English and Huguenot privateering fleet. France and England had gone to war shortly before the company's fleet had sailed. Without the new settlers and the supplies carried aboard the fleet, the struggling colony of New France was forced to surrender.[64]

In 1632 Louis XIII of France and Charles I of England signed the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye. The treaty returned all the French possessions in North America captured by the English to France.[65] Forty French laymen and three Jesuits returned to Quebec in 1632.[66] The next year Samuel de Champlain, who had led the colony at the time of its surrender, now serving as both the King's and the Company of New France's governor, returned with three ships of supplies, soldiers and workmen, some with their families. Even with the arrival of Champlain's fleet the French population at Quebec counted barely one hundred souls.[67]

Despite the terms of the Saint-Germain treaty, France's hold on the colony was still tenuous. While settlers poured into the English colonies to the south, Quebec's population would

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[57] Thomas B. Costain, The White and the Gold: The French Regime in Canada (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1954), 113.

[58] Eccles, 27.

[59] Costain, 87.

[60] Ibid., 87-88.

[61] Eccles, The Canadian F rontier, 26.

[62] Eccles, The French in North America, 28-29.

[63] Ibid., 29-30.

[64] Ibid., 30-31.

[65] Ibid., 32.

[66] Ibid., 35.

[67] Ibid., 36.

only increase to approximately 2,500 people in the next thirty years.[68] Further hindering the colony's security was the dire need for cash. The French court was embroiled in The Thirty Years' War in Europe and was thus disinclined to spend money on distant New France. The money necessary to keep the colony afloat was supplied by private enterprise, mainly the fur trade, and the Catholic Church.[69] The colony was not to receive any funds from France's royal treasury until 1663.[70]

The most pressing threat however, was that of death at the hands of the Iroquois. Compulsory military service was absolutely necessary for physical survival. Although most of the colonists were probably ignorant of firearms before their arrival in New France, they quickly became experts at the very guerilla warfare practiced by their foe. This type of warfare was desperate and bloody to the extreme, as death in combat was infinitely preferable to death by torture as a captive. No quarter was asked, and none was given. Between 1633 and 1700 New France benefited from fewer than fifteen years of peace. "This military tradition early became one of the dominant features of the emerging Canadian society."[71]

Upon the Jesuits return in 1632 the situation on the ground in New France could aptly be described in this fashion: A small European population; mostly male, strapped for cash, threatened by powerful and fierce enemies, dependent on the fur trade, trained in the military arts and operating on a constant war footing. One other vitally important facet of the colony's existence must be noted. This was that if private enterprise and the Church, who were after all footing the bill for the colony, were to see a return on their investment both needed the cooperation of the Indians. The fur trade needed the Indians as partners, suppliers, and customers. The Church needed their immortal souls.[72] Before too long the colony itself would depend upon them as auxiliary troops in the North American theater of the European wars of empire.[73]

This was the nature of New France when the Jesuit effort to fulfill their mission as stated in the charter of the Company of New France finally achieved a level of success. The company's associates and directors had boldly written into their charter that they were committed to establishing in Canada, "a New Jerusalem, blessed by God and made up of citizens destined for heaven." These "citizens" included any Indians who converted to Catholicism. Any practicing Catholic Indian was to enjoy all the rights and privileges of French citizenship.[74]

With the aid of Jean de Lauson, the company's intendant, the Jesuits lobbied Richelieu to obtain a monopoly on New France's mission field. Richelieu's Capuchin adviser, Father Joseph, managed to secure the eastern coast for his order, but the Jesuits succeeded in acquiring exclusive rights to the environs of the St. Lawrence River. The Recollects were locked out, and the Jesuits would hold their monopoly on the St. Lawrence until 1657.[75]

Free from competition, the Jesuits took to their task with all the fervor and dedication their order was famous for. When a party of Hurons journeyed to Quebec in 1633 to resume trade with the returned French the Jesuits endeavored to have three of their priests join them on their return to Huronia. Champlain informed the Huron traders that acceptance of the priests presence in Huronia was necessary for the renewal of the French-Huron trade alliance. The Hurons managed to resist this initial Jesuit thrust, but relented the following year. In 1634, three Jesuit priests, Jean de Brebeuf, Antoine Daniel, and Ambroise Davost, joined the Hurons on their trip home from Quebec. From the next sixteen years Huronia would be the focal point of the Jesuit effort in New France. By 1648, there were eighteen Jesuit priests and as many as forty-six

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[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Blackburn, 27-28.
[71] Eccles, 40-41.
[72] Ibid., 36.
[73] Eccles, The Canadian Frontier, 6.
[74] Eccles, The French in North America, 43.
[75] Blackburn, 30-31.

lay assistants residing in Huronia. The main Jesuit base was established at a European-styled fortified residence at Sainte-Marie.[76]

The lay assistants were known as *donnes*. The *donnes* worked without payment and toiled under restrictive conditions. The Jesuits provided these volunteers with food, clothing and shelter and ministered to them in sickness and old age. The *donnes* agreed to obey the mission superior, practice celibacy and relinquish their material possessions.[77]

The priests that the Society of Jesus dispatched to the missions of New France were on average thirty-four years old and had spent half of their lives in Jesuit colleges or universities.[78] In contrast to the Recollects, who had plunged into the Indian villages totally ignorant of the Indians' languages, the Jesuits followed the instructions given them by Loyola's *Constitutions*. "Indian, would be proper for those about to go among the Indians."[79] The first Jesuit Indian mission veterans prepared grammars, dictionaries and phrase books in the Indian languages for their successors. Some would even use these manuals to begin their language instruction in France before sailing for Canada.[80] Still, the Indian languages were so totally different from the French dialects, or Latin, of their previous experience that mastery of these languages was elusive. Even Father Jean de Brebeuf, who had been especially selected to work among the Hurons because of his linguistic talents, needed nine years to learn their language and compose a grammar.[81]

After acquiring at least some basic knowledge of the language of the people he was to minister to, the new Jesuit missionary was set to make the arduous, not to mention perilous, journey to the Indian's home country. If he had any sense at all he had also prepared himself physically for what would surely be the biggest physical challenge to his life so far. Prior to Father Paul Le Jeune's journey to the Montagnais homeland in 1633 his native companions warned him, "we shall be sometimes two days, sometimes three, without eating, for lack of food; take courage, *chichine*, let thy soul be strong to endure suffering and hardship; keep thyself from being sad, otherwise thou wilt be sick."[82]

The Montagnais were not exaggerating in the least. The trip to the Indians homeland was often hundreds of miles in length through trackless wilderness with most of the journey accomplished by canoe along New France's best highways, the rivers. Eccles described the missionary's journey with these words:

> Sitting cross-legged all day in a canoe wielding a paddle was agony for unaccustomed muscles. Stumbling across a portage in a cassock with a heavy load amid a cloud of mosquitoes and black flies was bad enough, but the Indians, too, showed no mercy. If the monks failed to keep up, they were left behind. Sleeping on the bare ground in all weather and ... in smoke-filled, drafty, flea-ridden bark lodges, racked their aching bodies.[83]

The physical exertions of the journey were bad enough, but danger in the form of Iroquois raiders also lurked in the forests and along the rivers. The motivation behind the Iroquois raids on such parties varied from acts of war, to revenge, to the acquisition of plunder

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[76] Ibid, 38-39.

[77] Bruce Trigger, The Children of Aataentsic: A History of the Huron People to 1660 (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987), 575.

[78] James Axtell, The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 75.

[79] Ignatius Loyola, Ignatius of Loyola: Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works, The Classics of Western Spirituality, ed. George E. Ganss, S. J. (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 299, also referenced in Axtell, The Invasion Within, 81.

[80] Ibid., 82.

[81] Olive Patricia Dickason, Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times, The Civilization of the American Indian Series, vol. 208. (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 127.

[82] Ibid., 103.

[83] Eccles, The French in North America, 27-28.

and captives. On August 3, 1642, Mohawks attacked a party of Huron converts escorting Father Isaac Jogues and two *donnes*, Goupil and Couture to Huronia.[84] In addition to capturing the priest, the Mohawks confiscated firearms and eight thousand livres worth of other trade goods and supplies.[85] Jogues was horribly tortured by his captors. His ordeal presented an opportunity to display the courage that Jogues and his companions became renowned for, and more importantly to put that courage prominently before a people who held courage above all other virtues. "When gentle fathers endured the most hideous torments as stoically as the most hardened warrior, the Indians knew they were pitted against men of uncommon spirit.[86] The mutilated Jogues survived his torture and with the aid of Dutch traders was smuggled to Albany, made his way back to France, and eventually returned to Canada.[87]

If the destination was Huronia, the missionary would usually find himself in a village of around two thousand souls. The village was normally situated atop a hill and surrounded by up to three palisades as high as twenty-five feet for defensive purposes. The dwellings, called longhouses, were located inside the palisades and were shaped roughly like modern Quonset huts. These were constructed of supple branches lashed together with twisted elm bark and sided with sheets of either elm or birch bark.[88]

Quite often the priests encountered other Frenchmen, besides their brother priests and their *donnes* at the villages. These fellow Europeans were not of much help to the missionaries, nor their labors. These were the fur traders, mostly younger men who preferred Indian morality to that preached by the Jesuits. Their actions, especially their sexual liaisons with Indian women and their fondness for brandy, seemed to the Indians to give the lie to the Black Robe's preaching of the superiority of Christian mores to their own.[89]

Unscrupulous traders could realize huge profits by plying the Indians with rum. The battle between the Church and the trading interests over the use of brandy in the fur trade was a constant struggle.[90] The missionaries also sought to change the mobile lifestyle as practiced by many native peoples. They believed that a more stationary existence would make the job of conversion much easier. This idea too, clashed with the designs of the fur interests. The traders needed the Indians to continue to roam in search of furs. As much as they needed converts to accomplish their aims, the Jesuits also realized that New France needed the fur trade to survive economically. This dichotomy remained an unresolved truth of the colony's existence.[91]

The first French settlers in New France came to the misconception that the Indians possessed no religion of their own. The Indians had no church buildings, hymnals, statues or vestments; none of the trappings that Europeans associated with religion. How could they have any religion without these necessities?[92] The Jesuits soon came to the understanding that the Indians' religious beliefs were imbedded into every aspect of their cultural and daily life. Every object, animate and inanimate alike, possessed a spirit. They also had their own priests, the shamans.[93]

The shamans had to be supplanted in order for the missionaries to succeed. The Jesuits set out to prove that the shamans' supposed powers were nothing more than chicanery. They also sought to replace the shamans' practice of service for profit with a willingness to offer their own brand of social and religious services free of payment.[94] Though forbidden to carry weapons the Jesuits were well armed to engage in verbal combat with their Indian clerical counterparts. [95] In a

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[84] Costain, 148.
[85] Brandao, 55-56.
[86] Axtell, 86.
[87] Costain, 149.
[88] Eccles, The Canadian Frontier, 28.
[89] Eccles, The French in North America, 46.
[90] Eccles, The Canadian Frontier, 57.
[91] Dickason, 127.
[92] Eccles, The French in North America, 47.
[93] Ibid., 47-48.
[94] Axtell, 93.
[95] Axtell, Beyond 1492, 156.

land where the spoken word was extremely powerful, their Jesuit education and training served them well. Nearly all of the Jesuits sent to New France had served in Europe as debate coaches and professors of rhetoric.[96]

Guided by the *Constitutions*, the Jesuits realized that the best strategy for winning converts lay in converting the tribal leaders. "The more universal the good is, the more it is divine. Therefore preference ought to be given to those persons and places which, through their own improvement, become a cause which can spread the good accomplished to many others who are under their influence or take guidance from them."[97]

The colony's government aided in this strategy; converted Indians were given preference in gifts and councils.[98] The government also adopted a policy of supplying only converts with firearms.[99] The fur interests also favored the Christian Indians. As converts were legally considered to be French citizens, they were paid for their furs accordingly. Frenchmen received a much higher price for their furs than did non-Christians. Half of the Hurons employed in the 1648 fur fleet were either preparing for baptism or had already converted, this at a time when only 15 per cent of the Huron population was Christian.[100]

How genuine were such conversions? How much of their new faith did the converts truly comprehend? Once again guided by the *Constitutions* the Jesuits sought to adjust conversion to the cultural realities of their intended converts. "Their anthropology was based on a supple brand of cultural relativism and their ministry on Christ's admonition to "be all things to all men in order to win all."[101] The Jesuits chose not to interfere with Indian customs where those customs did not interfere directly with Christian values. As it was, the missionaries' efforts created internal strife within the tribes as some converted and others resisted conversion.[102]

Some historians believe that many of the Indian converts practiced their new religion when in the missionaries' presence and reverted to their old customs once back in their own dwellings. Some Indians may simply have added Christian personages and beliefs to the belief system they had held before conversion. "For the Montagnais, the Christian God resembled their Atahocan. In their view, there was plenty of room in the cosmos for both sets of spiritual beings, each with its own requirements at the appropriate times and places."[103]

There were certainly some Indians who simply saw the Christian and French way as the wave of the future and decided to ride the wave.[104] There were undoubtedly also "true believers." There were those who adopted the new religion at some point, only to abandon it later. And just as certainly there were those who resisted any and all of the Jesuits' entreaties. As the Huron confederacy crumbled from under Iroquois assault, some of these apostates and holdouts would exact their revenge against the "would be saviors" of their immortal souls.

The Iroquois wars against the French and their Indian allies in the seventeenth century have been termed the "Beaver Wars" by many historians. This interpretation of Iroquois motives identifies domination of the fur trade as the root cause of these conflicts.[105] Newer interpretations have seen the wars as being fueled by more traditional motives; honor, revenge, control of hunting grounds, and to replace population losses.[106] Whatever their motives, there is no doubt that these wars spelled doom to the Jesuit missions of Huronia, and grisly death to a number of the Jesuits themselves.

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[96] Axtell, The Invasion Within, 87.

[97] Ignatius Loyola, Ignatius of Loyola: Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works, The Classics of Western Spirituality, ed. George E. Ganss, S. J. (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 308, also referenced in Axtell, The Invasion Within, 77.

[98] Dickason, 133.

[99] Ibid., 134.

[100] Ibid, 133.

[101] Axtell, 77.

[102] Dickason, 133.

[103] Ibid., 134.

[104] Ibid., 133.

[105] Brandao, 3.

[106] Ibid, back cover.

Beginning in 1642, Huron villages and fur fleets were victimized by Iroquois raiding parties.[107] It will be recalled that Father Isaac Jogues was captured in one of these early raids. The Italian-born Jesuit, Francisco Bressani, was taken captive in a similar raid in April 1644.[108] In 1646 the Seneca, the Huron's closest Iroquois neighbors, joined forces with the Mohawks to wage total war against the Huron confederacy.[109]

In 1648, Father Antoine Daniel became the first Jesuit to die violently in Huronia when he was killed during the Iroquois assault on the village of Teanoastaiae.[110] Most of the Huron warriors were absent at the time of the assault. Terrified women and children fled before the onrushing Iroquois, but Father Daniel remained in the village administering baptism to the wounded and dying before being cut down.[111]

Fathers Jean de Brebeuf and Gabriel Lalemant were taken captive during an assault on the village of Saint-Louis in 1649.[112] Both men were gruesomely tortured to death amid the ruins of Saint-Louis. Some of the Iroquois warriors who tortured Brebeuf and Lalement were Hurons who had been captured and then adopted by the Iroquois. Familiar with Catholic ritual from the Jesuit preaching in their former homeland, they improvised the torture of their Jesuit prisoners accordingly. Mocking Christian baptism, they poured boiling water over the tethered prisoners' heads and imitating a rosary they placed a string of fire-heated hatchet blades around Brebeuf's neck.[113] Fathers Charles Garnier and Noel Chabanel would also die by Iroquois hands in 1649.[114] Once the Huron defeat was judged inevitable the Jesuit residence at Sainte-Marie was abandoned and burned to keep it from being sacrilegiously violated by the Iroquois.[115]

The deaths of these men were dutifully portrayed in the *Relations* as martyrdoms. "Death by torture and the possibility of being eaten by the enemy during the enactment of cultural practices which the Jesuits found ... as the manifestation of savagery and lawlessness – was transformed into one of the most significant and triumphant acts of Christianity."[116] Trained to a strict discipline and total obedience to a higher mission, the Jesuits could proclaim to Indian adherents. "Know, my brethren, that people like us do not fear death. Why should they fear it? They believe in God; they honor, love, and obey him; and they are assured of eternal happiness in heaven after our death."[117] Many of these men believed that only martyrdom would assure the success of their mission to New France. The "Blood of the Martyrs" was to be "the seed and germ of Christians."[118]

Whether these priests died as martyrs or as casualties of war the fate of Huronia was sealed by the winter of 1650. Those who had not been killed or captured took refuge on Christian Island in Georgian Bay. The surviving Jesuits joined their charges on the island. After starvation claimed many over the winter, the remnants of the once powerful Huron confederacy fled to the Ile d'Orleans at Quebec or scattered among the Neutral and Erie nations.[119] There was one

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[107] Blackburn, 39.

[108] Brandao, 56.

[109] Blackburn, 39.

[110] Ibid., 65.

[111] Eccles, The Canadian Frontier, 54.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Ibid., 66-67.

[114] Canadian Martyrs and Huronia (Canadian Writers: Athabasca University); available from http://www.athabascau.ca/writers/martyrs.html, 2 December 2006.

[115] Blackburn, 40.

[116] Ibid, 66.

[117] Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents, vol. 52, Relation of 1668-69 (New York: Pageant Book Company, 1959), 177, also referenced in Axtell, The Invasion Within, 86.

[118] Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents, vol. 34, Relation of 1648-49 (New York: Pageant Book Company, 1959), 227, also referenced in Blackburn, 65.

[119] Ibid., 40.

consolation for the Jesuits, by their count nearly 1300 Hurons had received baptism in the year before the destruction of the Huron missions.[120]

The Jesuits would continue to maintain a presence among the Huron at Quebec and with the Montagnais along the St. Lawrence, but the focus of their energies now shifted to the Great Lakes tribes and even on to their enemies, the Iroquois.[121] Father Charles Garnier chose to see the destruction of Huronia as part of God's plan to force the order to expand their mission to encompass new peoples.[122] Another Jesuit posited that, "We are only at the entrance of a land which on the side of the west, as far as China, is full of Nations more populous than the Huron."[123]

During a temporary pause in the hostilities in 1645, the tragically courageous Isaac Jogues volunteered to return to the land of his former captors and tormentors, the Mohawks.[124] Jogues came to the Mohawks both as an ambassador for the government of New France and as a missionary. The new mission he was to establish was to be called the Mission of the Martyrs.[125] While trying to forge a peace agreement with the Mohawks, Jogues made the mistake of also trying to arrange a separate peace settlement with the Onondagas irrespective of Mohawk designs.[126]

Jogues returned to New France, but left a small black box in the Mohawk village. Shortly after his departure disease struck the Mohawks and their crops. Warned of the "power" of the Jesuits by their Huron captives, the Mohawks suspected that Jogues had bewitched them with the box in order to allow the French to continue their negotiations with the Onondagas without Mohawk interference. When Jogues attempted to return to the Mohawk country in October 1646[127] a party of Mohawks ambushed him and his companion, a *donne* named LaLande, along the trail.[128] Taken to the raiders' village, both men were severely beaten. Strips of flesh were cut from the priests back before he was finally killed by a tomahawk blow to the brain. The lifeless body was then beheaded. LaLande suffered the same fate the next day.[129] This mode of death was that reserved in Mohawk culture for sorcerers, not war captives.[130]

This inauspicious beginning of the Jesuit mission to the Iroquois did not presage the mission's future. There would be other fits and starts. Peace and the Jesuits returned to Iroquoia in 1653. Then war resumed once again in 1658 and the Jesuits serving the Onondaga barely escaped with their lives.[131]

By 1665 New France's very existence was threatened by the Iroquois. To not only meet the immediate threat, but to hopefully put an end to any future Iroquois threat the first French regular troops to serve in Canada set sail from New Rochelle on April 19, 1665.[132] In three campaigns these French regulars succeeded in forcing the Mohawks to sue for peace. The other four Iroquois nations, threatened by Algonquian nations to the west, soon asked for peace with New France also.[133]

The Jesuits returned once again to the Iroquois mission field. The Jesuit effort among the Iroquois would eventually lead to the migration of many Iroquois converts from Iroquoia to Christian Indian settlements around Montreal. The Mohawk nation provided the majority of these

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[120] Eccles, 54.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid., 55.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Brandao, 102.
[125] Costain, 149.
[126] Brandao, 102-103.
[127] Ibid., 103.
[128] Costain, 150.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Brandao, 103.
[131] Eccles, 56.
[132] Jack Verney, The Good Regiment: The Carignan-Salieres Regiment in Canada, 1665-1668 (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), 3.
[133] Eccles, 62-64.

emigrants. By 1679 nearly two-thirds of the tribe had moved to the Montreal area.[134] This Mohawk émigré population would produce the most famous of Native American converts to Catholicism, Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, known to millions of American and Canadian Catholics, Indian and non-Indian, as the "Lily of the Mohawks." It is an ironic twist of fate that Kateri's name is more widely known today than the names of the missionaries who first brought her new faith to her homeland.

The Jesuit's did indeed travel west in search of new souls to save for Christ. Jesuit priests would spread the word of their God to Hudson Bay, the Great Lakes, and on the Mississippi from its source to its mouth.[135]

The final judgment on the nature of the Jesuit impact on North America is still to be argued and written. It is a debate that began with Poutrincourt, continues today and will continue tomorrow. Someone once said that, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." Some modern historians believe that the Jesuits of New France laid the first paving stones on that road for the Indian nations that they came into contact with. Eccles wrote:

> This marked the beginning of the great missionary drive of the Counter Reformation French clergy to persuade the nomadic hunters of a vast continent to change their entire way of life, abandon their ancient customs, values, and religious beliefs, and live according to the precepts of a sophisticated European religion ill-adapted to their temperament and their needs. The efforts of these men of God, who sincerely believed that their ministrations were essential to save the Indians from an eternity of torment after death, to procure for them the bliss of a seventeenth-century Europeans concept of heaven were to contribute unwittingly to the final destruction of the North American Indian.[136]

But even as Eccles places blame for the result, he also exonerates the intentions of the missionaries and honors them with the label of "men of God." Axtell too finds reason for reproach. "In the Indians new world, colonial—particularly Jesuit—rule meant an acute loss of autonomy in virtually every facet of life."[137] But he also finds that the Jesuits did accomplish some good for their Indian charges. "On the other hand, it is obvious that those Indians who survived the dislocations and devastation ... also benefited from the Jesuit regimes. ... the natives received from the Jesuits and their missions crucial new intellectual powers of explanation and control for coping with those novelties. ... mission Indians gained at least a temporary measure of safety and protection from grasping miners, debauching traders, and trigger-happy settlers."[138]

It is nearly impossible for most of us reared in modern secular societies to come to grips with the mindset of the seventeenth-century Jesuit. We can not understand the level of commitment and devotion necessary to risk, let alone seek martyrdom in the course of a mission in a distant foreign land, among a foreign people. We can state, with confidence, that they truly believed that they were traveling the road to their heaven. Unfortunately the closest example of such a level of dedication to religion evident in our world today appears as a direct contradiction to the seventeenth century Jesuit model. Modern religious zealots are indeed willing to sacrifice their own lives, but all too often in an attempt to kill or maim as many innocent people as possible.

This modern bastardization of religious devotion and zeal should not however be allowed to tarnish the memory or image of these brave men. Their dedication and sacrifice freely offered in pursuit of a mission aimed at the salvation, as they understood it, of Native American souls remains unquestioned. This alone should reserve for them a place in our collective psyche alongside the pantheon of heroes in military uniform or pioneer buckskin for the black cassock uniform of the Black Robes.

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[134] Dickason, 131.

[135] Blackburn, 41.

[136] Eccles, The Canadian Frontier, 26.

[137] Axtell, Beyond 1492, 168.

[138] Ibid.