

Saint François de Laval



Issue 45 | December 2022

Centre d'animation François-De Laval Newsletter



A strong dose of humility

By Martina de Vries

Pope Francis, during his apostolic and penitential journey to the Indigenous peoples of Canada, reiterated an apology on behalf of the Church. On July 28, he also reminded Canada's bishops, priests, deacons, seminarians, consecrated men and women, as well as those who work in various church ministries, of the conditions needed for evangelization.

"And thinking about the process of healing and reconciliation with our Indigenous brothers and sisters, never again can the Christian community allow itself to be infected by the idea that one culture is superior to others, or that it is legitimate to employ ways of coercing others. Let us recover the missionary zeal of your first bishop, Saint François de Laval, who railed against those who demeaned the Indigenous people by inducing them to imbibe strong drink in order then to cheat them."

If Msgr. de Laval "railed", in the Pope's words, against anybody, it is because his love for the Indigenous peoples went well beyond his fight against the liquor trade—it was his everyday stance. And considering that he lived in the 17th century, his esteem, respect, and recognition for their human dignity are truly a source of inspiration.

The 17th-century approach

On May 3, 1698, Abbé Tremblay, the Quebec Seminary's procurator in Paris, wrote in a letter to Msgr. de Laval that the actions of the King and his ministers in the Church's missions in Asia were causing "the minds of all Orientals to revolt against the Christian religion by reinforcing their long-standing belief [...] that the Europeans are using religion as an excuse to seize kingdoms that do not belong to them."

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Detail of a low relief on the *Monument Laval* showing the baptism of Chief Garakontié.

Photo : Fonds Daniel-Abel





A strong dose of humility

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This quote highlights the sometimes legitimate confusion between two 17th-century European visions for the "new world". The vision of the missionaries was to evangelize local populations while respecting their culture, while that of the expansionists was to colonize new territories in order to subject them, while converting the population by any means possible.

Orders from Rome

The Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, known today as the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, published its Instructions to Apostolic Vicars in 1659. Our bishop was obviously aware of them, since his own Instructions to missionaries of 1668 present many of the same ideas.

The Sacred Congregation's 12th point is headed "Do not introduce the customs of European countries", and states: "Do not act with zeal, do not put forward

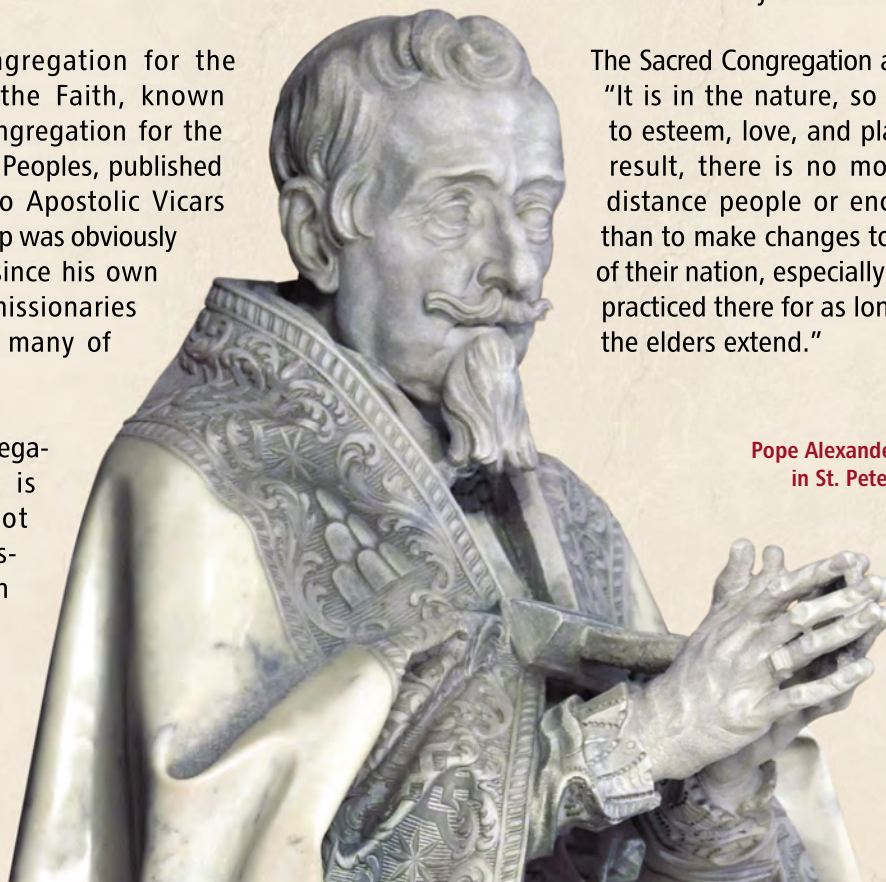
any arguments to convince these peoples to change their rites, their customs or their usages, except if they are evidently contrary to religion and morality. What could be more absurd than to bring France, Spain, Italy or any other European country to the Chinese? Do not bring them our countries, but instead bring them the Faith, which does not reject or undermine the rites and usages of any other people, provided they are not detestable, but on the contrary must be kept and protected."

The Sacred Congregation also issued a warning: "It is in the nature, so to speak, of all men to esteem, love, and place above itself. As a result, there is no more powerful way to distance people or encourage their hatred than to make changes to the specific customs of their nation, especially those that have been practiced there for as long as the memories of the elders extend."

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Pope Alexander VII. Funerary monument in St. Peter's Basilica, in the Vatican.

Photo : Fonds Daniel-Abel



FRANÇOIS
CENTRE D'ANIMATION
DE LAVAL

**Saint François
de Laval**
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Orders from France

Despite his fidelity to the Holy See, Msgr. de Laval also had to obey the King of France. Colbert, the King's Minister, wrote to the bishop on March 7, 1668 that "His Majesty [...] believes it is expedient to apprise you of his intentions concerning the Savages that are subject to his rule, and of the instruction their children must receive if they are to learn our language and to be raised according to the same customs and traditions as the French people."

In the fall of 1668, Msgr. de Laval admitted six Huron boys to the Minor Seminary but, as summarized by Gilles Bureau in *François de Laval, His Life and Times*, p. 122-124, "the prior experience of the Jesuits, Ursulines and Hospitallers showed that any hope of success was an illusion. [...] Six years into the experiment, only one conclusion was possible: the young Amerindians felt like prisoners, and escaped as soon as they could." The last Huron left on March 15, 1673, and Msgr. de Laval ended a project in which he had never really believed.

Excerpt of the letter from Laval to Poitevin, November 8, 1668, concerning the Hurons at the Minor Seminary

"This enterprise is not without difficulty, both for the children and for their fathers and mothers, who have an extraordinary love for their children and can barely resolve themselves to be separated from them or, when they consent, experience distress that is all the greater for the length of the separation, because in general the families of the Indians are not greatly endowed with children as are the families of our French people [...] However, we will spare no effort on our part to ensure the success of this enterprise, though we doubt strongly that it will succeed."

Sincere respect

Msgr. de Laval believed that "the quickest, and by far the most effective, way to establish our faith and instil it in their hearts is pure and simple exposure to God's truth". He advised missionaries to preach by example—by putting their words into action. His love for the Indigenous peoples was clearly reflected in his everyday actions, as reported in the *Relations* of the Jesuits.

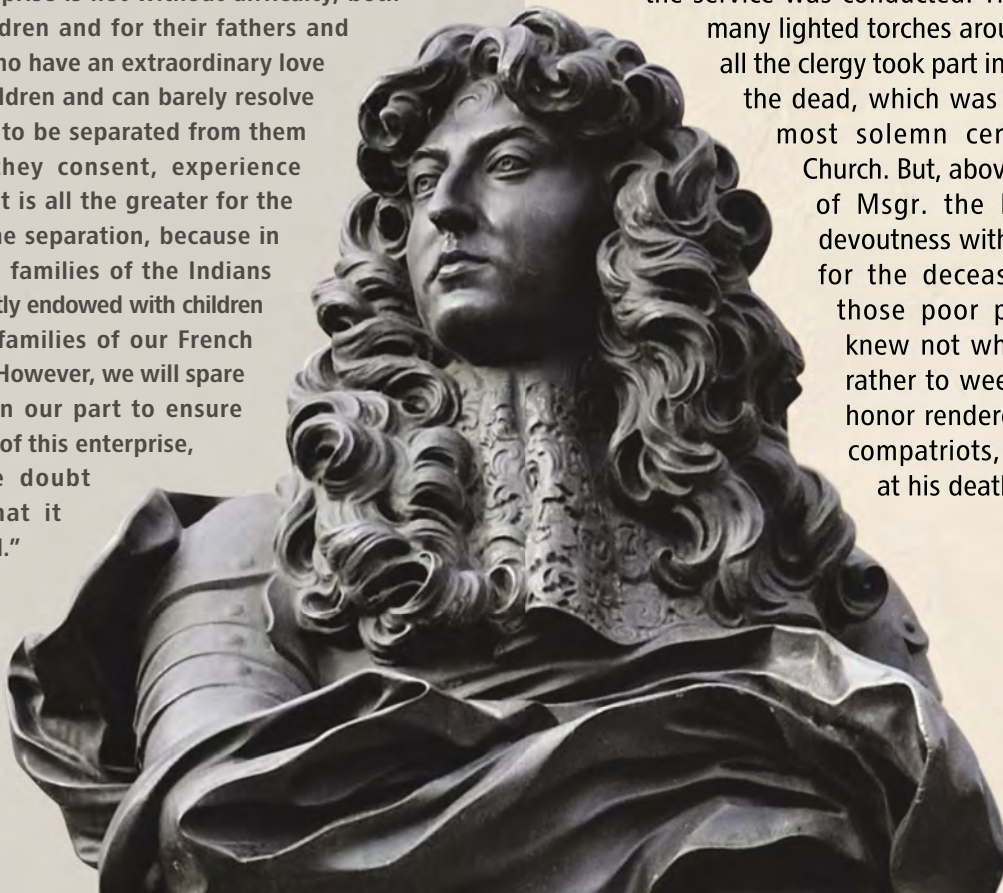
In the bishop's first year in Canada, in 1659, the *Relations* mention that he took part in feasts and gatherings with them, that he travelled by canoe for his pastoral visits accompanied by one or two Indigenous men, and that on November 1, 1659, he paid half of the ransom for a "young Agnieronon" captured by the Iroquois.

On several occasions, the *Relations* stated that he organized funerals for Indigenous people on the same scale as for the French: "By order of Msgr. the bishop, all the bells of the parish of Quebec were rung – *a thing which is not usually done on the death of a Savage*"; "The death of so many Savages has keenly touched the heart of Msgr. of Petra, our bishop, who serves as their protector and father. He caused the celebration of a solemn service for the repose of their souls"; "But when they arrived at Quebec, they were surprised at seeing the solemnity with which the service was conducted. There were a great many lighted torches around the body, and all the clergy took part in the high Mass for the dead, which was chanted with the most solemn ceremonies of the Church. But, above all, the presence of Msgr. the bishop, and the devoutness with which he prayed for the deceased, so charmed those poor people that they knew not whether they ought rather to weep with joy at the honor rendered to one of their compatriots, or with sadness at his death."

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**His Most Christian Majesty Louis XIV.
Bust in Place Royale,
Quebec City.**

Photo : Fonds Daniel-Abel





A strong dose of humility

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Similarly, the *Relations* report that he visited the sick of both nations. In his visit to Prairie de la Madeleine, he participated in the “addresses, songs and ceremonies” and was insistent that he needed “to visit each family, and each individual in his own cabin.” When a Huron woman was near death, “Msgr. of Petra, our bishop, visited her, and supplied her with food while she was in her cabin; and, when she was in the hospital, he continued his usual charity without intermission, furnishing her with food of all kinds.” “All our French people and our Savages, whose hearts he has won by the holiness of his life, and the abounding charity wherewith he is continually aiding them in all sorts of necessities.”

The Jesuits mention that, on a trip to Tadoussac in 1676, “the charity of this worthy bishop charmed them when, upon leaving the chapel, they saw him enter their cabins, one after the other, to visit the sick therein, and the captains, – comforting the former by his presence, at which they were embarrassed, and by the manifestations of his love which extended to them, to their poor widows, and to their orphans.”

As Father Jérôme Lalemant wrote to his Provincial in Paris, Father Renault, on September 12, 1659: “He indeed loves them with an affection worthy of a heart coming to seek them from so far away. God soon contrived opportunities for him to show them his love. [...] In this same spirit of affection, he wished to begin the whole ceremony with some Savages. [...] Then they were all admitted to the great hall of the hospital, they were served there by the hands of this same prelate [...]”

And, in a letter to his dear friend Armand Poitevin, Msgr. de Laval expressed his love in the following terms: “I confess that their joy in seeing us there was matched only by the joy we felt ourselves during this visit.”

Reciprocal respect

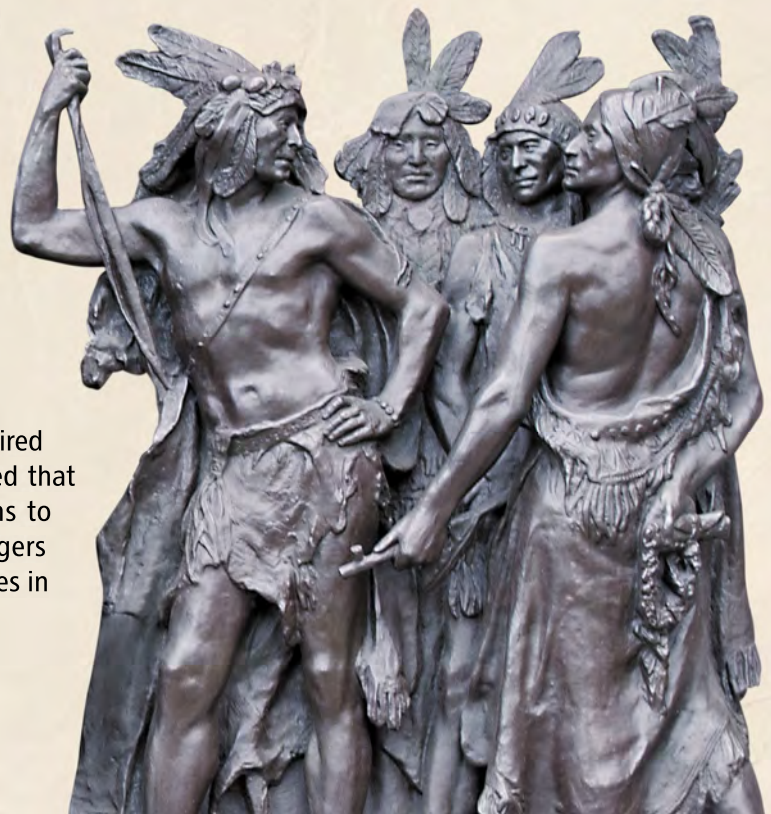
We have several accounts of the love that he inspired in Indigenous people. Father Lalemant explained that “But – as it is the custom among these nations to acknowledge the rank of recently-arrived strangers by the magnificence of the feasts which one makes in

their behalf – our Savages would not have conceived a worthy idea of Msgr. the bishop if he had not adapted himself to their way of doing, and had not regaled them with a solemn feast” and wrote to his Provincial that the Hurons had given the bishop a nickname: “*Ô Hariaouagui!* –this is the name which they give Monseigneur, and which signifies in their language ‘the man of the great work’.”

However, my favourite story is that of the Huron boy who, in 1664, asked to be admitted to the Seminary. “His mother answered him that the little French boys in the Seminary would beat and maltreat him, as one not of their own nation. ‘Well,’ he returned, ‘let me then go and live with *Hariaouagui!*’ The boy was so urgent that he had to be taken there, where he was assured by Msgr. the bishop that he would be admitted when he was larger, if by the grace of God he continued in this good desire.”

Taking our lead from the bishop

As Cardinal Lacroix mentioned in this thanks to the Pope following Mass at Basilica of Sainte-Anne de Beaupré on July 28, 2022, “Every move towards reconciliation requires a large share of renunciation and a strong dose of humility, understanding and openness to the life and culture of other people.” Let us turn to **Saint François of Quebec** to find the model of “missionary ardour” suggested by the Pope. ■



Detail of a low relief on the *Monument Laval*

Photo : Fonds Daniel-Abel



"He belongs to us"

By Martina de Vries

During the papal visit, Cardinal Lacroix referred to our bishop twice as **"Saint François of Quebec"**. This may have surprised some people, but the name carries echoes from the past.

In 1978, Roger Leclerc, producer of the *Second Regard* TV show, wrote a poem laying claim to the name:

He was called François.

François of Quebec.

He walked, like us, on dusty roads.

*He came to know the tempestuous sea, at a time
of heroic ocean crossings.*

History has left us a severe official portrait.

*But did he not, like us, spend time with the poor
and care for the sick?*

*And how could he not have listened, for hours at a time,
to the wild geese at his haven in Saint-Joachim?*

A colossus like Abraham.

*He is our spiritual father, the father of the French
Canadian people.*



Saint François de Québec by Daniel Abel, 2015.
Giclée printouts are available in our online store in large
and small sizes. Photo : Fonds Daniel-Abel

Msgr. Pierre-André Fournier, former bishop of Rimouski, often called him by this name, in the same way as Saint Francis of Assisi, named after the city where he lived and worked.

In 2015, artist and photographer Daniel Abel created a portrait entitled **Saint François de Québec**. He gifted it to the Quebec Seminary and it now hangs in the entrance hall. He stated that although the title was perhaps surprising, it had meaning: "François de Laval dedicated the most important part of his life to Quebec, and did great things here. He insisted on coming back to these shores to live out his final days. The saint belongs to us. What's wrong with wanting to flaunt this and take pride in the fact that a saint chose this place?" ■



400th anniversary celebrations

By Jean Duval

Various activities will take place from April 30 to September 30, 2023 to mark the 400th anniversary of the birth of François de Laval, framed by the end of the festivities for the 350th anniversary of Marie de l'Incarnation and the 350th anniversary of the founding of the diocese of Quebec (to be launched on December 8, 2023). More details will be made available on the website www.francoisdelaval.com

Saint-Martin of Montigny-sur-Avre, in France, where François de Laval was baptized

Photo : Fonds Daniel-Abel



NEWS

By Jean Duval

A number of the events held to commemorate St. François de Laval are often unknown and deserve a mention. Feel free to share them with us.

1 Letters in Latin

The letters and other documents written in French by François de Laval are generally well known. The same cannot be said of his Latin texts. Paul-Hubert Poirier, Emeritus Professor at Université Laval, has begun the immense task of translating them, as part of the DOC project. On September 27, he shared some of the observations he has made in a talk entitled “François de Laval as seen through his Latin correspondence—some aspects of his personality and activities”. The letters concerned, mostly addressed to the Holy See, reveal his penetrating mind, his patience, and his determination.

2 Non-standard delivery

Last May, after a delay of several months caused by COVID-19, Msgr. Poisson of the diocese of Saint-Jérôme and Mont-Laurier and Msgr. Douglas Crosby, bishop of the diocese of Hamilton, at last received their 100-cm statue of François de Laval, the work of artist Jules Lasalle. The outsize delivery required some expert handling, but we are getting more experienced.

The cathedral Notre-Dame de Québec received a similar statue last July, just before the Pope set foot on Canadian soil.

3 Msgr. de Laval and Queen Elisabeth II

People come, every day, to pray at the tomb of Saint François de Laval, and many of them leave a request for intercession for a family member facing a serious illness, infertility, addiction, relationship problem, etc. Abbé Pierre Robitaille, a priest with whom we collaborate, was surprised to find this Corgi lying at the foot of the effigy. Like him, we can only assume that it constitutes a request for intercession for the soul of the late Queen Elisabeth II. Photo: Fonds Daniel-Abel

4 Inauguration of the new Centre

On November 10, the new exhibition at the Centre was officially inaugurated in the presence of priests from the Quebec Seminary, members of the Major Seminary and our two bishops. At the end of the meeting, the Superior of the Quebec Seminary asked the Archbishop, Msgr. Lacroix, to bless the building. Looking back, the renovations were only two weeks away from completion when the public health emergency was declared in the province on March 13, 2020. The exhibition opened to the public in the summer of 2021.



Photo : Fonds Daniel-Abel



Photo : Jean Duval



Photo : Jacques Gourdes

5 François de Laval in Saint-Hyacinthe

A relic of Saint François de Laval was brought to Saint-Hyacinthe to be placed under the new altar of the cathedral. The ceremony of Dedication had been set for 2020, but had to be postponed to September 11, 2022, because of the pandemic. The new rite of Dedication clearly states that, to better demonstrate the truth in the gesture, relics are no longer placed on the altar (in the past, inside the altar stone) but under the altar, in a sepulcher prepared for this specific use, which will be deposited and sealed. This ritual brings us back to the very first Eucharist celebrations that were done on the tombs of martyrs. The choice of a relic from Msgr. de Laval is easy to understand. As first bishop of New France, his territory spread well beyond the limits of our diocese, founded in 1852. Msgr. de Laval's relic has been laid, among others, next to those of Blessed Louis-Zéphirin Moreau, first Canadian bishop to be beatified and fourth bishop of the diocese. (Pierre Cordeau, priest)



Photo : Diocese of Saint-Hyacinthe

6 François de Laval in Gaspé

Last September, the Assembly of Quebec Catholic Bishops (Assemblée des évêques catholiques du Québec, or AECQ) held a plenary meeting in Gaspé to mark the first centenary of the diocese. During a Mass in the cathedral, the bishops unveiled a statue of François de Laval as a gift to the members of the diocese. As a historical note, Gaspé was the first place where our Saint landed on the American continent in June 1659, giving the confirmation to 140 people.



7 Recovering its former glory

This processional cross, restored and returned to service on December 7, 2021 was apparently used by Msgr. de Laval at the consecration of the parish church in Quebec City on July 11, 1666 (the church is today the cathedral Notre-Dame de Québec). It is one of only three processional crosses from the 17th century that have survived in Canada. The project was instigated by Msgr. Denis Bélanger, the parish priest at the time, and Yves Garneau, a volunteer who was able to raise the necessary funds. It is moving to think that this processional cross has by now accompanied generations of believers since its creation in New France.

Photo : Fonds Daniel-Abel



Photo : AECQ



Pope Francis before the tomb of Saint François de Laval, July 28, 2022

Photo : Fonds Daniel-Abel

ICONOGRAPHY

Saint-Pie X church, Trois-Rivières

The Saint-Pie-X church in Trois-Rivières was built in 1963-1964 to plans by Montreal architect Donat-A. Gascon (1886-v.1966). The stained-glass windows in the upper portion of the nave pay homage to the founders of the faith in Quebec. They come from the former Maison Saint-Joseph of the Frères de l'Instruction chrétienne in Pointe-du-Lac, which burned down in 1994. Some were produced in 1937 at the studios of J. Nouvellet in Lyon, France, while others were made in 1963 and 1964 by Guido Nincheri (1885-1973) in Montreal. The entire set was restored by J. Déry of Verrières du Québec inc. and unveiled on October 17, 1999. Photos : Fonds Daniel-Abel

QUOTE

François de Laval as seen by Pope Francis

Let us put into practice these words that we now address to Saint François de Laval: You were a man for others, who visited the sick, clothed the poor, defended the dignity of original peoples, supported the strenuous efforts of the missionaries, ever ready to reach out to those worse off than yourself. How many times were your projects frustrated! Each time, however, you took them up again. You understood that God does not build in stone, and that in this land of discouragement, there was a need for a builder of hope.

Excerpt from the homily of Pope Francis at Vespers with bishops, priests, deacons, consecrated persons, seminarians and pastoral workers in the cathedral of Notre-Dame de Québec on July 28, 2022 during his apostolic journey to Canada.

