

# Saint François de Laval



Issue 46 | May 2023

Centre d'animation François-De Laval Newsletter



## On the shoulders of giants

By Gilles Routhier, Superior General of the Quebec Seminary

"Nanos gigantum umeris insidentes" – we are dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants. This metaphor, attributed to Bernard of Chartres (12<sup>th</sup> century), was probably familiar to François de Laval, who came from the diocese of Chartres. It explains how we all rely on the work of the great thinkers of the past, the "giants".

François de Laval was one of these giants, and he helps us see the Church's current issue, namely its switch to a missionary focus, with more clarity and lucidity. This is not because we can see further or better than him—we are simply raised up by his own giant stature as a visionary, missionary and apostle of the Americas.

On April 30, 2023, this giant will reach the age of 400. I speak of him in the present tense, because his penetrating and far-seeing view of the situation of the Church, when he first landed in Quebec, remains as convincing and inspiring as ever. This is another reason to celebrate the anniversary, as his influence continues through the centuries and eras.

Between April 30 and September 30, a series of activities (<https://400e.francoisdelaval.com/>) will provide an opportunity to consider the current situation of our Church and to share in its missionary spirit. The goal is not simply to commemorate the glorious past, but to look to the future with courage and vision, with help from François de Laval. This will be a time for going back to our missionary roots and updating his intuitive insights, which can still be enriching for the Church. This is a time for celebration and meetings in which the past, the present and the future will mingle, drawing strength from the missionary heritage bequeathed to us by François de Laval, a giant carrying us on his shoulders and helping us to see into the distance, beyond the present day.

We must celebrate François de Laval as a Giant, an Apostle of the Americas. ■

François de Laval, as played by actor Jean-Michel Déry  
in the video *François, Apostle of America*

Photo : Fonds Daniel Abel



# An advance view of the celebrations

By Martina de Vries

EVENT

From April 30 to September 30, you will have several opportunities to re-discover the missionary dimension of Saint François de Laval's work. Most activities are for groups, but the general public will also have free access to two unique exhibitions.

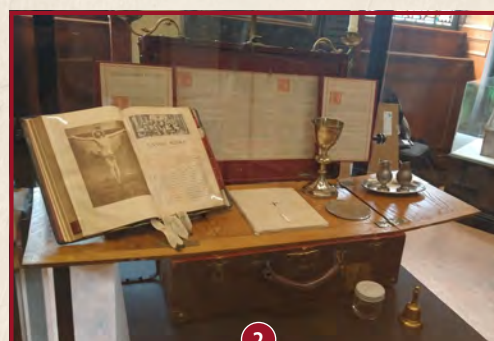
First, at the Centre d'animation François-De Laval, visitors will discover a temporary exhibition of period objects, some of which belonged to Msgr. de Laval. The artifacts in the exhibition, organized jointly with the Musée de la civilisation and Musée Notre-Dame, come mostly from the collections of the Quebec Seminary and the parish of Notre-Dame-de-Québec. They reflect the missionary spirit that drove the actions of the first bishop.

The key item in the exhibition is a portable altar which the Seminary priests, "sent out to meetings of all kinds", used to celebrate Mass in settlers' houses in a period where churches were rare. The exhibition also includes books on spiritual matters which belonged to François de Laval, personal letters in his own hand, official documents bearing his signature and seal, his lead casket from 1708, and the papal bull officialising his canonization in 2014.

A second, travelling exhibition features the work of painter Daniel Abel. It comprises a series of paintings, along with little-known quotes from François de Laval, that encourage us to reflect on all aspects of his life from birth to death. The paintings will be exhibited in various places, depending on the schedule of activities.

For the full programs of celebratory events, see

<https://400e.francoisdelaval.com/>. The website is in French only, but the exhibitions are in both languages. ■



1. **Light from a candle** : François wrote of the priests of the Foreign Missions Seminary: "You are like a candle placed on a stand to lighten all these lands with holy doctrine and the example of your virtue. Since you are the firebrand for foreign countries, it is only reasonable that no region is not exposed to your heat and your zeal." Photo : Fonds Daniel Abel
2. **Portable altar from the Quebec Seminary**, kept at the Musée de la civilisation, no 1991.1257.1. The full set includes 16 objects: the portable altar, four altar cards, a missal stand, a missal, a tray for an altar cruet, two cruet stoppers, a crucifix stand, an altar bell, two candlesticks, a leaflet and a corkscrew. Photo : Courtesy of the Musée de la civilisation

**FRANÇOIS**  
CENTRE  
**DE LAVAL**

**Saint François  
de Laval**  
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# François the Younger

By Martina de Vries

*We are generally aware of the many achievements and virtues of Saint François de Laval—but not so much of the circumstances of his birth and the first fourteen years of his life.*

## Birth

On Sunday, April 30, 1623, at Montigny-sur-Avre in Normandy, 24-year-old Michèle de Péricard gave birth to her third child in six years of marriage: François de Laval. He may have been nicknamed Fanchon<sup>1</sup> or François the Younger, since he had an older brother with the same first name. For those who believe in astrology, he was born under the Taurus sign, and therefore belongs to a group of people considered to be especially stubborn in matters close to their heart.<sup>2</sup>

François was born during the reign of Louis XIII, a young king aged 21 who had been the sovereign for 13 years but had only just been released from his mother's tutorship. He created the company of the King's Musketeers, and shortly thereafter appointed Cardinal Richelieu and his 14 cats as his first minister.<sup>3</sup> In October of the same year, Pope Gregory XV was succeeded by Urban VIII, best known for his condemnation of the ideas of Galileo and of Jansenism.

## Early childhood<sup>4</sup>

From birth to the age of 2, Fanchon lived with his mother. This was a dangerous period in his life: during this period, one out of every three babies died before reaching the age of 1 and half of the remainder died before the age of 10. Poor hygiene and the tight swaddling to which young children were subjected were the main causes of the high death rate and physical deformities. He is not known to have had any disabilities; although some letters refer to his "poor health" and "the frequent infirmities afflicting [him]", this did not prevent him from "working tirelessly"<sup>5</sup> ... and dying at the ripe old age of 85!

## Middle childhood

Between the ages of 2 and 7, François acquired two younger brothers. In general, this period was a time of great freedom: boys and girls alike wore dresses to facilitate their movements and could play together with



*Louis XIV et Anne d'Autriche, (c. 1639), a painting kept at the Palais de Versailles. The child is wearing a biggin cap with feathers, a dress and an apron. Photo : Wikimedia Commons*

no distinction of class or sex within the household. The mother was responsible for the first lessons: catechism, reading, writing and arithmetic. François would also have learned riding, swimming and good manners—his life would have been free of worries.

Despite this, the 17<sup>th</sup> century was actually a time of upheaval. Europe was going through what is known as the "Little Ice Age". Winters were harsh, heat waves were brutal, and poor harvests were common, leading to famines and epidemics. Literal "witch-hunts" were conducted to identify scapegoats for all these problems.

From 1625 to 1627 the plague struck London, Cologne, and then Vigny, only 117 km from Montigny! During this latest plague, Jean Eudes, despite not being personally affected, noted the lack of priests in rural communities and set himself the goal of training priests to serve the people, an idea that led to the founding of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary in 1643.

(Continued on page 4)



# François the Younger

(Continued from page 3)

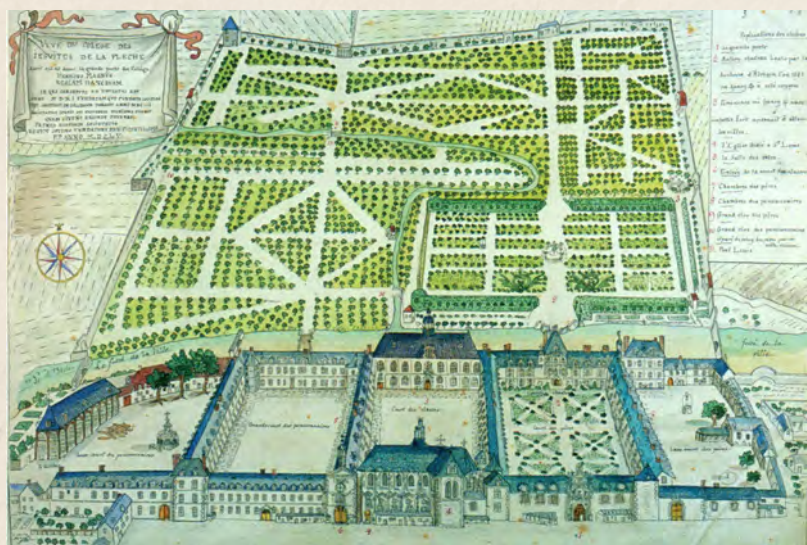
The year 1622 saw the creation, in Rome, of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith to structure the work of missionaries in newly discovered countries placed under the direct authority of Rome. The same year, Francis Xavier was canonized and became the patron saint of missionaries and an inspiration for François de Laval throughout his life. The Jesuit Alexander de Rhodes founded a mission in Tonkin in 1627. In 1645 he returned to Rome with an idea for a new position, apostolic vicar, in other words a bishop who could ordinate locally born priests in foreign lands. In 1653, he identified François as an ideal candidate for this new responsibility.

In North America, the tiny colony of Quebec had about twenty houses and a handful of Recollect and Jesuit priests. The Compagnie des Cent-Associés, created in 1627, was more interested in the fur trade than in settlement or the defence of the colony, which was lost to Britain in 1629 before being returned to France in 1632.



*La distraction de Richelieu, a painting by Charles-Édouard Delort (before 1885)*

Photo : Wikimedia Commons



*Perspective view of the Royal College in La Flèche at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Facsimile by Manesse of a drawing by Gaignières (Bibliothèque du Prytanée).*

Photo : Claude Aubert

## Late childhood

At the age of 8½, in October 1631, François “was sent away, far from his parents, to the college in La Flèche”.<sup>6</sup>

His vocation was clearly stated: he was tonsured and given a cassock. The same year, Marie Guyart entrusted her 12-year-old son to her sister and entered the convent in Tours. In 1632, Catherine de Longpré was born and Jeanne Mance, now an orphan at the age of 26, cared for plague victims and people injured during the Thirty Years’ War (France joined this major conflict in 1635, leading to the death of François de Laval’s two older brothers). The three women named, along with Marguerite Bourgeoys, born in 1620, went on to become founders of the Church in Canada.

For ten years, François received moral and spiritual instruction from the Jesuits, whom he described as the men who “taught me to love God and have been my guides in the path of salvation and the Christian virtues”.<sup>7</sup> His teachers included Jacques Buteux, who would later work in Trois-Rivières; René Gamache, founder of the college in Québec; Simon Le Moyne and Pierre Pijart, missionaries to the Hurons; and Gabriel Lalemant, a Canadian martyr. He also studied with Claude Dablon, later the Superior of the Jesuits in Quebec.

His future friends from his own age group, Henri-Marie Boudon, Pierre Lambert de La Motte, Michel Gazil and François Pallu, were studying during this period at colleges in Rouen and Tours. They later met in Paris in their early twenties and became the core group at the Foreign Missions Seminary.

(Continued on page 5)



The entrance to the village of Montigny-sur-Avre, where François was born

Photo : Fonds Daniel Abel

At the age of 11, François was admitted by the Jesuit Pierre Mesland to the college's Congregation of the Holy Virgin. It was also Mesland who, "more than anyone else, caused the noblest sentiments of faith and charity to penetrate deeply into his soul and heart. If his initial moral and religious outlook can be ascribed to the actions of Father Bagot, it grew and developed under the positive influence of Father Mesland who, for five years (1634-1639), directed his young penitent along the divine pathway. He quickly recognized all the hidden riches in the child's nature, which was true, steadfast and elevated, and he grew attached to him just as the saints grow attached to everything that bears a clear imprint of God's passage."<sup>8</sup>

The cult of the Virgin Mary was growing rapidly in France and, in 1638, received a major boost. The King and Queen, after completing novenas and pilgrimages to supplicate the Virgin Mary after 23 years of a barren marriage, at last had a child. The heir to the throne was named Louis-Dieudonné [Louis the Godgiven], the future Louis XIV. A few months later the Queen, Anne d'Autriche, who would support François in Canada, fell pregnant again and the King signed the Vow of Louis XIII, which dedicated France as a whole to the Mother of God and made August 15 a public holiday throughout the kingdom.

At the age of 14, François completed his classical studies in the same year his father died. From 1636 to 1641 he went on to study the humanities, rhetoric, philosophy,

logic, physics and mathematics. He later entered the college in Clermont to study theology. When his two elder brothers died in 1644 and 1645, his mother asked him to abandon the priesthood in order to manage the family property, but François finally chose the path of God and missionary work, which became his focus as bishop. ■

1. "Fanchon" and "Fanchonette" were nicknames used in the Normandy dialect for the second François or Françoise in a family. Although we cannot be certain whether this applied to Msgr. de Laval, it seems likely since his nephew was later known as François the Younger or Little François. Today, Fanchon is a name used only for girls. (Amédée Gosselin, "Les neveux de M<sup>re</sup> de Laval", *Le Canada français*, May 1925, p. 659)
2. As Marie de l'Incarnation wrote in a letter to her son in 1660: "His Excellency our Prelate is as I described him to you in my previous letters, zealous and inflexible; zealous to insure the observation of everything that he believes will increase the glory of God, and inflexible so as not to give way to any contrary action."
3. They were called Félimare, Gavroche, Gazette, Lucifer (the black cat), Ludovic le Cruel (the hunter), Ludovika, Mimi-Paillon, Mounard le Fougeux, Perruque, Pyrame and Thysbé (the reproducing couple), Racan, Rubis sur l'ongle, Serpolet and Soumise (his beautiful favourite). Yes, it was very important to name them all.
4. Philippe Ariès, in his book *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime*, 1960, described early childhood as the period from 0 to 2, when the child was breastfeeding; middle childhood as the period from 2 to 7, when the child was home-schooled, living in a universe of women; and late childhood as the period from 7 to 14, when the child was, if a boy, separated from his family and entered the world of men, and also the time when social and sexual distinctions began to matter.
5. Letter from Colbert to Laval, April 5, 1667; Letter from Marie de l'Incarnation to her son, September 17, 1660
6. Historian Jean-Marie Lebel, video *François, Apostle of America*
7. Letter from Laval to Nickel, August 1659
8. Camille de Rochemonteix, *Les Jésuites et la Nouvelle-France au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, vol. 2, 1895-1896, p. 242-243.



Footage taken during the filming of the episode on François de Laval

Photo : Martin Bolduc



## Divine Influence

By Martina de Vries

EVENT

At the initiative of Geneviève Riendeau and Chantale Lépine, ECDQ.tv, Multimédias Région Portneuf and TELUS Optik have been involved in a joint project to produce a TV mini-series called *Divine Influence*. Its ten episodes will focus on men and women who, after receiving a divine call, had a positive influence over Québec society and the Church. Episode 6 is about François de Laval.

The project takes an original approach, presenting the man—his personality and his motivation—rather than the bishop, the founder, the nobleman. It offers a brief introduction for the general public and for people who know little or nothing about him, while providing a new perspective for those who grew up with the severe figure so often depicted.

The episode also features images of François de Laval during childhood, running through the fields of his native village, Montigny, and then as a student with the Jesuit fathers, inquisitive and intelligent, quickly hearing the call to the priesthood and to service in missions overseas.



Photo : Martina de Vries

The narration is based on four interviews. François de Laval's charity, his love for others, and above all his love for the most underprivileged, are addressed along with his wish to live in a spirit of union with the "Gentlemen of the Seminary". He is depicted primarily as a man who was close to others, changing dressings for the sick, defending the Hospitaller nuns of Caen in court, consulting his fellow priests before making a decision, reducing or delaying the payment of tithes to take into account the poverty of the Canadian settlers, visiting each house, whether French or Indigenous, to ascertain the needs of the inhabitants, and so on.

Despite some filming difficulties – the noise of construction sites, the ringing of bells, the intense heat for the actor dressed in a woolen suit – the final product is very well made, and the episode is fluid and light. Congratulations to the team!

The episode is a great opportunity to soak up the atmosphere for the celebrations of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Saint François of Quebec! The series is available on myCommunity YouTube. ■



# From light to shade

By Cyrille-Gauvin Francoeur

EXPRESSION

*We asked ideaman and artist Cyrille-Gauvin Francoeur to tell us more about the creative process behind the graphic image for the 400<sup>th</sup>-anniversary celebrations and to explain its meaning. We thank him for taking the time to respond to our request.*

Standing in the inner courtyard of the Minor Seminary in Quebec, I aimed my camera lens at the light-dappled wall of the wing of the building known as the "Aile de la Procure". I hoped to get a photograph of the façade to use in the visual image I had been commissioned to produce. Although the building has been through both fire and bombardment over the centuries, it would still be recognized by the bishop who built it between 1678 and 1681. The dazzling reflection from the sun at the end of the day was visible in some windowpanes, contrasting with the clear shadows cast by the roof of the chapel.

This interplay of light and shade gave me an inspiration for the visual concept: a silhouette of François de Laval, in the foreground,

defying the rules of perspective, changing scale and growing to monumental proportions. He would cast an immense shadow covering the full height of the building.

I had all the ingredients I needed for an emblematic image. It seemed particularly appropriate to depict Saint François de Laval as a giant

figure to reflect his greatness. This imposing presence would reflect his place in Quebec's history, his key role in the expansion of the Church in North America, and his contribution to the foundations of Quebec society.

The shadow projected onto the historical Seminary building also symbolizes the ongoing impact of the heritage left by the first bishop of America, not only in terms of religion, but also in terms of education and the spread of knowledge.

I meditated on all of this as I headed home, humbly pleased by this glimpse of the fleeting passage of light over unbreakable walls: a way to evoke, in a simple image, both the importance of an outstanding figure and the size of a legacy that has endured for almost four centuries. ■



Artistic photo of the background  
by Cyrille-Gauvin Francoeur



Visual signature for the 400<sup>th</sup>-anniversary celebrations  
of the birth of François de Laval

Photograph of the character in the foreground taken during the  
shooting of *François, Apostle of America*, Fonds Daniel Abel

Suivez la programmation des célébrations entourant le  
400<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de naissance de François de Laval.

# François Apôtre de l'Amérique

30 AVRIL AU 30 SEPTEMBRE 2023

Visual signature for the 400<sup>th</sup>-anniversary celebrations of the birth of François de Laval by Cyrille-Gauvin Francoeur

## ICONOGRAPHY

### Three centuries of graduations

During the festivities for the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of François de Laval's death in 2008, painter Antoine Dumas (1932-2020) produced a screen print evoking the history of the Minor Seminary of Quebec, his old school, through changes in the uniform worn by students climbing the Saint-Joseph staircase.

Antoine Dumas, artist, 2008, Screen print, 28 cm x 55 cm  
The staircase still rises around the statue of St. Joseph.

Photos : Fonds Daniel Abel



## QUOTE

### Laval grateful for the instruction he received

*God alone, who gauges our hearts and bodily strengths and penetrates to the depths of my soul, knows the extent of my obligation to your Society, which took me in when I was a child, nourished me with its salutary doctrine during my youth, and since then has not ceased to encourage and strengthen me. [...] I feel that I cannot sufficiently express my gratitude to these men who taught me to love God and have been my guides in the path of salvation and the Christian virtues.*

Excerpt from a letter from Laval to Father Nickel, Superior General of the Jesuits in Rome (Quebec, August 1659)