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# The First Evangelization of Indigenous Peoples of New France: The Radical Way to Martyrdom of Jesuit Missionaries

During the arrival of Europeans in 1534, the territories later known as Acadia, Labrador, Canada (the lands on the shores of the St. Lawrence) and the islands in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, Cape Breton (Île Royale), and Prince Edward (Île St. Jean) Islands were inhabited by tribes and bands of Algonquian, Abenaki, Miq'maks, Huron and Iroquois nations. The latter maintained important trade networks; exchanging foodstuffs, pelts, fur, weapons, and household goods. When the French started moving into the New World, the delicately knit trade webs came under pressure as the French disturbed Iroquois trade interests in the Great Lake and the northern St. Lawrence region. The Iroquois League became a powerful foe of French colonization in the New France.<sup>2</sup>

There is no doubt that the history of the New France was heavily impacted by the growing trade at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The fur trade especially prompted the French to establish trading posts in Acadia and in the Saint-Lawrence Valley at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The great project of exploration of the New

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> S. Lachenicht, *Huron, Iroquois, French Agents and Processes of Transculturation in Seventeenth-Century New France* [in:] *Agents of Transculturation: Border-Crossers, Mediators, Go-Betweens*, ed. by S. Jobs, G. Mackenthun, Munster–New York 2013, pp. 53–54. D. Deslandres, in his book *Croire et faire croire. Les missions françaises au XVIIe siècle (1600–1650)*, Paris 2003, provides a complete study of the phenomenon. The third part *Au Nouveau Monde, une France nouvelle*? (pp. 200–446) effectively contextualizes the missions in North America.

World, resulting in the foundation of Quebec in 1608 by Samuel de Champlain, and the creation of the Company of One Hundred Associates under Cardinal Richelieu in 1627, had 3 main goals: encouraging settlement, commercial development and evangelization.<sup>3</sup>

In order to carry out their mission the first Catholic missionaries (beginning with the Capuchins, the Franciscan Recollects, and later the Jesuits) who arrived to the colony founded mission stations among the Hurons and later the Iroquois peoples with whom the merchants ran fur trade around the trading posts. Then, the missionaries set up missions in the interior of the country, in the Great Lakes region. The first part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century was undoubtedly the most intense phase of the evangelization effort in the New France. Enthusiastic, the missionaries dreamed of evangelizing the natives in large numbers and of reforming their traditions. The Jesuits were then at the heart of this apostolic work.<sup>4</sup>

## The Jesuit mission among the Hurons and the Iroquois nations

The Jesuits were invited by Samuel de Champlain to evangelize the Hurons and to assure the exclusive domination of the French fur trade. Like the merchants and settlers, the Jesuit missionaries had shown great interest in the New World. Nevertheless, the mandate to evangelize also presented certain ambiguities, since it risked portraying the missionaries as some kind of political emissaries or even agents. By being allied with France and its political objectives, the Jesuits found themselves in the middle of a game of commercial competition being played out by the Dutch, English and French, as well as caught up in hostilities between the Hurons and Iroquois. After the two initial short-lived missionary attempts at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, they eventually settled in 1643 in the Saint-Lawrence Valley. In 1636, they set in motion an important aspect of their evangelizing strategy, that is their educational project, involving the establishment of a seminary in Quebec. Simultaneously, they developed their mission especially with the Hurons among whom they settled in 1634 under the direction of Father Jean Brébeuf.<sup>5</sup>

In an atmosphere of rivalry and conflicting interests between colonists, the Jesuits had only one option: to focus completely on evangelization and dissociate

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Pastoral letter by the Permanent Council of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops *Celebrating the 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Canadian Martyrs*, September 14, 1999, *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English, 6 October 1999, p. 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> R. Major, *Les jésuites chez les Hurons en 1648–49*, "Canadian Journal of Native Studies" 26 (2006) 1, p. 54.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> L. Campeau, *Monumenta Novae Franciae*, vol. 2: *Établissement à Québec (1616–1634)*, Roma, Apud "Monumenta Hist. Soc. Jesu", Laval (Quebec) 1979, p. 121.

themselves from the commercial goals of the European nations. This is exactly what Father Jean Brébeuf did upon his arrival in the Huronia territory, "seeing them all together (the Hurons) we decided to preach publicly and make known to them the reason for coming to their country, not for their furs but to proclaim to them the true God and His Son, Jesus Christ, the sole Savior of our souls."<sup>6</sup> During the following twenty years, the Jesuits made a great effort to succeed in the Huron mission which in 1650 counted more than twenty missionaries. Among them, the most worthy of mention are: Antoine Daniel, François Le Marcier, François Du Peron, Simon Le Moyne, Pierre Chaumonot et Paule Ragueneau.<sup>7</sup>

In 1640, their evangelical work with the Hurons began to bear fruit: in the *Relation* of 1648, Fr. Paul Ragueneau reported nearly thirteen hundred baptisms.<sup>8</sup> However, the failure and decline of the mission of Sillery, and especially the decimation of the population of the Huronia by an epidemic, together with the devastating raids of the Iroquois in 1648 and 1649, caused the missions to fall into disarray. While taking care of the Huron refugees who sought support and protection from the Iroquois, they opened some new missions, first on the island of Gahoendoe (Christian Island), then on the Island of Orleans.<sup>9</sup>

In 1654, Father Simon Le Moyne began missions among the Onondagas and Iroquois. Thirteen years later, the Jesuits have succeeded in establishing their missions in the five Iroquois tribes. These new missions, however, less stable, were very dependent on the quality of the relationship between the French and Iroquois; the growing tensions eventually led to their abandonment in 1708.<sup>10</sup>

# **Meeting of cultures**

The missionaries were European and French, and so they found themselves confronted with a completely new culture. They would have only fifteen years to learn the Huron language and to discover what were to them the even more impenetrable mysteries presented by the customs of the country. The missionaries, in order to learn more about the indigenous peoples, especially the Hurons, chose to identify with them: to "be as a Huron in the eyes of the Hurons," they adopt-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Jesuits Relations of Paul Le Jeune, 1635, chapter of Brébeuf, http://museum.state.il.us/pub/ dmmweb/Jesuit%20Relations/JR06to15.HTM [accessed 6.04.2020].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> L. Campeau, *Monumenta*..., p. 121.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Relation des jésuites, vol. 4: 1648, Rome 1972, p. 47.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> B.G. Triggert, Les Indiens, la fourrure et les Blancs: Français et Amérindiens en Amérique du Nord, trad. G. Khal, Montreal–Paris 1990, pp. 371–374; M. Jetten, Enclaves amérindiennes, les "réductions" du Canada, 1637–1701, (Éditions du Septentrion, coll. "Les nouveaux cahiers du CÉLAT"), Sillery 1994, pp. 62–64.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> B.G. Triggert, *Les Indiens*..., p. 397–398.

ed the Huron ways of speaking (language), living and eating. The Jesuits never tried to naturalize the native people as French, additionally, they created for them a written language that did not exist before. The Huron language was not easy to learn, bearing no resemblance to European languages and it took the missionaries no less than six to eight years to learn it. It can be assumed that they have already *transculturated* and *inculturated* long before the terms even existed.<sup>11</sup>

Father Jean de Brébeuf, in the *Relation* of 1635, reports the conditions of living among the Hurons, "there is no difference between the house of Ihonatiria where the Fathers reside and the Amerindian huts. To live in the Huron way among the Hurons, is it not to conform to Christ by another form of kenosis, like the apostle Paul who put his only glory in the cross of Christ (Ga 4:14)?" This way of life both establishes an ethos and forges a discourse. Just as God was made man in Jesus Christ, the missionary must be made Huron for the love of Christ. The spirituality of *sequela Christi* transforms everything.

Meats would be very tasteless if the gall of our Lord did not make them sweeter and tastier than the most delicious dishes in the world. What a contentment to go by these jumps and to climb on the rocks, to the one who has before his eyes this amiable Savior exhausted by torments and climbing the Calvary laden with his cross; the inconvenience of the canoe is easy to suffer to whoever compares it to crucifixion.<sup>12</sup>

The most difficult challenge for the missionaries was understanding the Huron customs. Practically, in this regard they were second-guessing, making numerous mistakes and erroneous judgments. But with each day they understood those customs better and better. Father Paul Ragueneau, the third consecutive superior of the mission wrote, "one must be very careful before condemning a thousand things among their customs, which greatly offend minds nurtured and set in another world [...] I have no hesitation in saying that we have been too sever on this point [...] We see that such severity is no longer necessary, and that in many things we can be less rigorous than in the past."<sup>13</sup>

From the survival skills shared by Hurons and Iroquois, the missionaries were able to select the most valuable abilities and practices. Nevertheless, native peo-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> T.J. Fay, A History of Canadian Catholics: Gallicanism, Romanism, and Canadianism, Montreal–Kingston–London–Ithaca 2002, pp. 8, 12–13; See: J. Steckley, *The Warrior and the Lineage: Jesuit Use of Iroquoian Images to Communicate Christianity*, "Ethnohistory" 39 (1992) 4, pp. 478–509.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Introduction à Jean de Brébeuf, Écrits en Huronie, éd. G. Thérien, Saint-Laurent (Québec) 2003, p. 95.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Jesuits relation of Paul Ragueneau, 1648–1649, vol. 33, http://moses.creighton.edu/kripke/ jesuitrelations/relations\_33.html [accessed 7.04.2020].

ples not only made the Jesuits learn how to chase, catch, and eat birds, they also taught them how to turn "wild beasts into food," a must for getting through the long, cold and snowy winters.<sup>14</sup> The Jesuit mission in North America among the Huron and Iroquois nations, was one of the most difficult in the history of the Society of Jesus. The missionaries encountered what appeared to them as appalling conditions with regard to the climate, food and shelter. Finding themselves in a country of enormous proportions, they covered distances of many hundred kilometers in fragile bark canoes, through waterfalls and torrents, afflicted by the scourge of mosquitoes and black flies, the difficulties of getting fresh supplies and the fatigue of trekking through the wilderness. However, with several influential native leaders finally accepting the Gospel, the missionary effort was able to move forward, step by step. By 1649, at the time of the last Iroquois offensive against the Hurons, the majority of them (Hurons) had become Christian. It should be noted that conversion meant a transition to a heroic Christian life. The missionaries were convinced that the indigenous peoples were capable of reaching the heights of sanctity and humanity attained by the saints.<sup>15</sup>

#### Supreme expression of love

When the first Jesuits arrived in New France, they were only 30 years old. Captivated by Christ, they would not accept mediocrity. The basis of the Jesuit formation program at that time were the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola. By contemplating the mystery of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, the theme which opens the second week of the *Exercises*, these young Jesuits could discern and hear Christ's missionary call. They understood that the invitation to those who "will want to love more and distinguish themselves in his service" was addressed to them. They aspired, as we can read in their writings, only to give themselves completely to the Lord, to immolate themselves in His service, to abandon themselves entirely into Him. "I must walk before your face for the rest of my life," we read in the reasons to embark on a mission listed by Father Lalemant, "my heart humble and contrite, in the suffering of the evils that you first suffered for me." The example of Christ left no other choice to these men who had sworn, in the contemplation of the Kingdom, to imitate and to follow it "as close as possible, enduring injustices and all adversities, in true poverty both spiritual and even

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> S. Lachenicht, *Huron*..., p. 59.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> B.G Triggert, *Les Indiens…*, pp. 371–374; L. Pautasso, *The Holy Martyrs of Canada*, Toronto 1993, pp. 15–19; M.Ch. Gomez-Géraud, *Le corps à l'épreuve du voyage: chronique d'une mission en Huronie*, "Viatica" 1 (2014), updated 20.06.2019, http://revues-msh.uca.fr/viatica/index. php?id=363 [accessed 16.04.2020].

material." This is clear from Lalemant's words, in his prayer to the Lord, when choosing missionary life, "if you have abandoned your contentment, your honors, your health and your life to save me, miserable as I am, is it not more than reasonable that I abandon by your example all these things for the salvation of the souls you consider yours, that have cost you blood, that you have loved until death."<sup>16</sup>

These young men were passionate about the cross, not afraid to face the difficulties and dangers inherent in missionary life in the New France. Father Jean Brébeuf had warned them in his "Warning for Those Whom God Deigned to Summon to New France" (Avertissement pour ceux qu'il plairait à Dieu d'appeler en la Nouvellle-France). Aware of the reality, they became more sensitive to his call, "come, come, these are workers such as you are, that we are asking for here; it is for souls similar to yours, that God intended the conquest of so many others that the devil still holds in his power now". These men were really inhabited by the mystique of the cross, the cross according to Father Brébeuf, "which our Lord, by His grace, gives us to wear after Him."<sup>17</sup>

Their sole option was to be heroic or quit. The majority of them were driven by burning zeal. When Father Jérôme Lalemant expressed the reason there were still so few Christians in the Huronia at that time, he pointed to the fact that there had not yet been any martyrs. He was soon obliged to change his opinion. The truth is the missionaries were full-time martyrs. As he was later to say, most people would have preferred "to be hit suddenly over the head by a hatchet blow than live through years of the life which we must lead here every day."<sup>18</sup> Living only for Christ, continuously contemplating Him, in the end they resembled the Lord. The martyr is a witness, witness to the cross of Christ to whom he is committed, body and soul, to the point of shedding his blood, in communion with the Christ's Passion. By the grace of the Holy Spirit and by its human reach, this testimony can touch the heart of any person who knows how to hear it. The spiritual fruitfulness of martyrdom is a major reason for the extraordinary expansion of the Church, "the blood of martyrs is a seed of Christianity."<sup>19</sup>

The martyrdom of Canadian missionaries demanded no less than completely surrendering their lives in the ultimate offering. In the past Christian martyrdom has been talked about in terms of torture, execution and hatred of the faith, which completely misrepresents what is most profound about it. The Second Vatican Council made an important distinction in this regard. It taught that martyrs follow

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> G. Chaussé, *Les érris des saints martyrs*, "Cahires de Spiritualité Ignatienne. Le Supplément" Octobre 1999, p. 8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Ibidem, pp. 8–9.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Jesuits Relation of Paul Le Jeune 1639, chapter on Jérôme Lalemant, http://museum.state. il.us/pub/dmmweb/Jesuit%20Relations/JR06to15.HTM [accessed 14.04.2020].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> S.T. Pinckaers, La spiritualité du martyre. Jusqu'au bout de l'Amour, Versailles 2000, p. 71.

in the footsteps of Jesus to the point of making even their death a gift to Christ. As the Constitution on the Church states,

Since Jesus, the Son of God, manifested His love by laying down His life for us, no one has greater love than they who lay down their lives for Christ and for their sisters and brothers (see 1 Jn 3:16; 15:13) [...] Martyrdom makes the disciples like their master, who willingly accepted death for the salvation of the world, and through it they are made like Him by the shedding of blood. Therefore, the Church considers it the highest gift and supreme test of love.<sup>20</sup>

The Second Vatican Council does not consider hatred of the faith to be the only condition determining martyrdom. As an alternative, the decisive criteria for martyrdom are positive: giving one's life for Christ and for one's brothers and sisters out of overwhelming love. It is not the executioner, the persecutor or the historian who declares someone a martyr. It is a decision that the Church makes on the basis of what motivated the martyred person. Thus, we cannot separate the death of the missionaries in the New France from the meaning it had for them. In dying for us, Jesus is not put to death but chooses to lay down His life for us. In this light, we see that the Jesuits missionaries are martyrs for two reasons: because of their faith, and above everything else because they witnessed to the love they had for the native peoples for whose sake they gave up their lives, following in the footsteps of Jesus. In proclaiming Christ and the Gospel, they were fully aware they risked death, as they clearly stated on a number of occasions.<sup>21</sup>

## The Holy Martyrs of Canada

They were Jesuit: Jean de Brebeuf, Antoine Daniel, Gabriel Lalemant, Charles Garnier and Noël Chabanel, who died on what is now the Canadian soil in the region of Midland, Ontario, together with Isaac Jogues and two *donnés* or lay volunteer workers, René Goupil and Jean de La Lande, who died in what is today the United States, in the region of Auriesville, New York. They are part of that team of *the greats* who founded the Church in Canada, which also included Sisters Marie de L'Incarnation, Catherine de Saint-Augustin, Marguerite Bourgeoys and Marguerite d'Youville, Bishop François de Montmorency Laval and the Mohawk ascetic Kateri Tekakwitha. The Canadian Martyrs draw attention to an event that inspires and revives Christian zeal. They are models of Christians who lived the Gospel to the fullest, leaving a heritage of spiritual values and an example of intensive devotion

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church "Lumen Gentium", 1964, p. 42.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Pastoral letter...

to Christ. Beatified in 1925 and then canonized in 1930 by Pius XI, the Canadian Martyrs were proclaimed the secondary patrons of Canada by Pius XII on 16 October 1940. Commemorated on 26 September in the Canadian liturgical calendar, they are remembered on 19 October in the Church's universal calendar.<sup>22</sup>

First welcomed by the natives, they experienced periods of obstinate resistance, even persecution and death threats. The pace of conversions at first was hopelessly slow. It took Brébeuf six years to baptize the first adult who chose to become Christian (he previously baptized others who were, however, in danger of death). The adherence to the Gospel of several chiefs of great influence favored additionally the missionary efforts. But soon, in the period between 1642 to 1649, the Mohawks, supported and armed by the Dutch of the New England, who aimed at monopolizing the fur trade, defeated the Hurons in a war which ended in the annihilation of the mission. By Father Brébeuf's death, however, most of the Huron nation had become Christian. In such a context, one had to choose heroism or leave the mission. In fact, the missionaries of the Huronia were all men of exceptional intensity of interior life. Many of those who did not receive the grace of martyrdom were worthy of it and those who were martyred, were already authentic saints.<sup>23</sup>

The layman René Goupil had come to the New France in 1640 as a *donné* (he was not bound to the Society of Jesus by religious vows, but by a contract to help the missionaries). He was with Father Isaac Jogues and about 40 Hurons on Lake St-Pierre, a widening of the Saint Lawrence River between Sorel-Tracy and Trois-Rivières, when the group was attacked by the Iroquois. René Goupil was martyred at Ossernenon (Auriesville, NY), on September 29, 1642. Father Jogues was held prisoner in the Manhattan Island. With the help of the Dutch, he escaped and made his way to France and back to the New France. On September 24, 1646, with the lay *donné* Jean de La Lande he left Trois-Rivières on a mission to evangelize the Iroquois. They were met with hostility when they arrived at Ossernenon because the Iroquois blamed the *Blackrobes* (missionaries) for the epidemic that had killed many people in their village. Father Jogues was killed on October 18, 1646, while Jean de la Lande was killed the very next day.<sup>24</sup>

Father Antoine Daniel grew up in Dieppe, France, and arrived in Quebec City in 1633 where, for seven years, he was the director of a school for young Hurons. Then he went to the Huronia with Father Jean de Brébeuf. On July 4, 1648, the Iroquois attacked their residence at Ste-Marie-among-the-Hurons (near today's Midland, Ontario) and Father Daniel was killed while he was celebrating the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Ibidem. It seems that the Canadian bishops opted for an earlier celebration as in October the weather can be inclement and, therefore, hampering the annual pilgrimage to the Shrine of the Canadian Martyrs in Midland, Ontario.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> L. Pautasso, The Holy Martyrs of Canada..., p. vii.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> G. Laflèche, *Les saints martyrs canadiens*, vol. 1 avec collaboration de F.M. Gagnon, *Histoire du Mythe*, Laval 1988, pp. 32.

Mass. Father Jean de Brébeuf came from Normandy. He arrived in Quebec in 1625 and spent his first winter in the bush with Montagnai hunters in order to study their way of life. He was in the Huronia from 1626 to 1629, and again from 1634 until his death. He and fellow Jesuit, Father Gabriel Lalement were caught in a surprise attack in a village they had named St. Louis, and taken to another one, they called St. Ignace, where they were killed. Father Brébeuf met his death on March 16, 1649, while Father Lalement, who had arrived in Quebec in 1646 and been in the Huronia for only six months, was martyred on March 17, 1649.<sup>25</sup>

Charles Garnier was born in 1605 or 1606 in Paris. He came to Quebec in 1636 and went immediately to the Huronia, where he lived for the rest of his life. In 1647, he was sent to live on the edge of the Huron territory, in a village the Jesuits had named St. John. It was attacked by Iroquois raiders in March 1649. During another attack, on December 7 of the same year, Father Garnier was shot and killed while he was helping the wounded. His companion, Father Noël Chabanel, had arrived in Quebec in 1643. While he was en route to safety on Christian Island after the December 7 attack, he stopped in his journey because of exhaustion and was killed by a Huron apostate on December 8.<sup>26</sup>

## Conclusion

The Canadian martyrs have left us a legacy of values which have not lost their relevance.

1. They lived the reality of *inculturation* well before the concept was articulated. These missionaries, although deeply immersed into their French culture did not attempt to culturally colonize the natives, but deliberately adopted many features of their way of life, including dietary habits, habitation and especially the language. Even more, to the people of oral tradition with no written language, they brought in the vocabulary and grammar.

2. Christ is at the center of their lives, just as He is in Christianity. When we discover the intensity of their attachment to Christ, we are speechless. For them, Christ is present at all times: fellow traveler accompanying them in their solitude, apostolate, suffering, and martyrdom. Like Saint Paul, they were seized, grasped by Christ: given, consecrated to Him, in unconditional love, upsetting like the love of Christ Himself. Through imitating Christ, they resemble Him in every-thing, including His death (see 1 Cor 11:1).

3. Their apostolic zeal springs spontaneously from this love of Christ. A hundred times, these men would have been right to abandon everything to set out on

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Ibidem, p. 32–33.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Ibidem, p. 33.

an impossible mission. Father Jogues, for example, in 1642, was captured and tortured by the Iroquois, but ransomed by the Dutch and brought back to France, could have, or even should have stayed there. But his zeal was so great that he decided to return to the Iroquois country, where he was assassinated in 1646.

4. The group of missionaries from the Huronia is characterized by fraternal charity which is of the order of magnanimity. No smallness in them, no meanness, no jealousy. On the contrary, we find, notably in Brébeuf, texts in which he exalts his fellow workers, while displaying a delicious eagerness to be forgotten and to work in the ranks.

5. All these men were prayerful: contemplative in action. "God", said Brébeuf, "gave us the day to be of service to the neighbor, and the night to converse with him."<sup>27</sup>

## Summary

The French Jesuits played a significant role in the first evangelization of the indigenous peoples of North America in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. They focused on the evangelization of the Huron and Iroquois tribes which remained in constant conflict with each other. In their work they cut themselves off from the commercial interests of colonial countries, especially of France. After a dozen or so years, they were already able to convey evangelical values in tribal languages, being firmly immersed in the local culture. Thus, they were precursors of the inculturation of the Gospel. The missionaries were characterized by deep Christological spirituality, founded on contemplation of the cross, and, therefore, able to endure boldly the hardships of evangelization. As the result of the vile strategies of colonial powers stirring up tribal disputes, they faced numerous misfortunes, and, ultimately, many of them suffered martyrdom. Consequently, their missionary effort became a path to personal holiness and an irreplaceable contribution to the strengthening of the newly established Church communities on the American soil.

## Keywords

evangelization, indigenous peoples, New France, martyrdom, Jesuit missionaries

# Pierwsza ewangelizacja tubylczych ludów Nowej Francji. Radykalna droga do męczeństwa jezuickich misjonarzy

Francuscy jezuici odegrali znaczącą rolę w pierwszej ewangelizacji rdzennej ludności Ameryki Północnej na początku XVII wieku. Skupili się na ewangelizacji plemion Huronów i Irokezów, które pozostawały w ciągłym konflikcie ze sobą. Posługi ewangelizacyjnej nie łączyli z intere-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Jesuits Relations...

sami handlowymi krajów kolonialnych, zwłaszcza Francji. Po kilkunastu latach byli już w stanie przekazać prawdy ewangeliczne w językach plemiennych, będąc mocno zanurzonymi w lokalnej kulturze. Stali się prekursorami inkulturacji Ewangelii. Misjonarze charakteryzowali się głęboką duchowością chrystologiczną, zakorzenioną w kontemplacji krzyża, dlatego potrafili znosić trudy ewangelizacji. W wyniku przemyślanych strategii mocarstw kolonialnych wywołujących spory plemienne musieli stawić czoła licznym przeciwnościom, co ostatecznie wielu z nich doprowadziło do męczeństwa. Ich misyjny wysiłek stał się drogą do osobistej świętości i niezastąpionym wkładem w umocnienie nowo utworzonych wspólnot kościelnych na amerykańskiej ziemi.

#### Słowa kluczowe

ewangelizacja, rdzenni mieszkańcy, Nowa Francja, męczeństwo, misjonarze jezuiccy

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