

Saint François de Laval



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Centre d'animation François-De Laval Newsletter



Here lies St. François de Laval

By Jean Duval

One question we are routinely asked is: "Where exactly are the remains of St. François de Laval?" Most visitors are surprised when we tell them he is buried under the funeral chapel in the Quebec City cathedral... and has been for 25 years. Let's take a look back at history in this milestone anniversary year.



Inauguration

On May 29, 1993, Msgr Maurice Couture, then Archbishop of Quebec City, officially inaugurated the new chapel dedicated to Blessed François de Laval. The event is also marked by a commemorative plaque.

In delivering his homily, Msgr Couture said, 'As we celebrate the Feast of the Pentecost today, right here on the site of the first Notre-Dame church built in 1645; in this cathedral that has been expanded, caught fire, and rebuilt so many times... always on the same site, with

the remains of the venerable François de Laval nearby; his remains having been transferred a few times between his cathedral and his Séminaire, our saintly Bishop will now lie in repose – and, we hope, forever (he added, with a touch of humor) – in this chapel, which we will inaugurate at the end of this Eucharistic celebration. A chapel whose existence we now owe to the generosity of Msgr de Laval's direct heirs, the community of priests at the Séminaire de Québec."¹

Msgr de Laval's remains had previously been placed in the new chapel, following a brief ceremony conducted by Msgr Jean-Paul Labrie, auxiliary bishop in Quebec City, on April 30, 1993.

Missed by a few short months

Sadly, Msgr Couture passed away on January 19 this year – a few short months before this 25th anniversary. He was first approached by the Séminaire de Québec authorities to discuss moving Msgr de Laval's tomb to this site

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Detail of the recumbent effigy in the St. François de Laval funeral chapel, Notre-Dame cathedral, Quebec City



Here lies St. François de Laval

(Continued from page 1)

from their exterior chapel, which has now become a museum. The Archbishop, the parish priest, and the church wardens of the cathedral parish had already agreed to the plan.

Speaking at the November 10, 1992 press conference to announce the beginning of construction, canon Louis-Joseph Lépine, Superior general of the Séminaire, explained the choice of this site: "The main objective in transferring his remains to the cathedral is to make Msgr de Laval's tomb more accessible to the general population, thus encouraging devotion to this man, the founder of the Canadian Church and of a diocese running the length and breadth of America, who was beatified by Pope John Paul II on June 22, 1980."

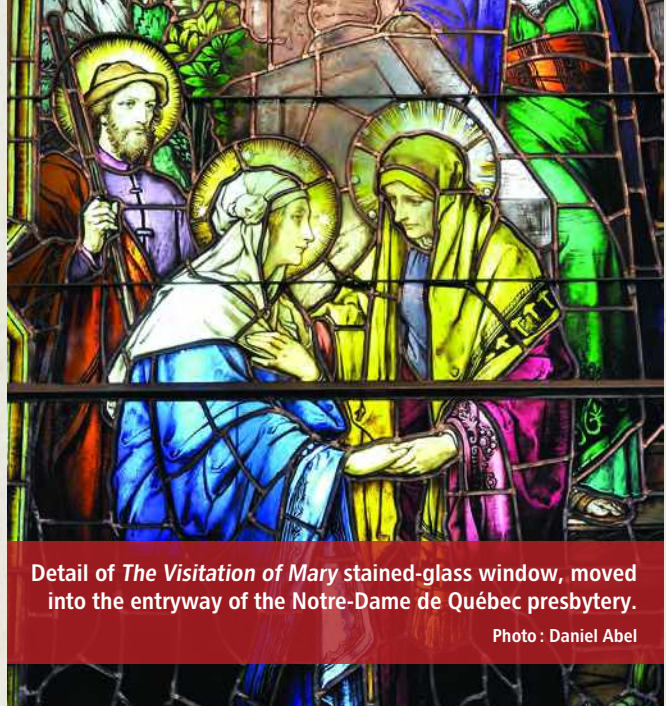
Architectural design

Architect Émile Gilbert was tasked with drawing up plans for the chapel, which was built by the firm Hervé Pomerleau Inc. Artists Jules Lasalle and Ducharme Marion were selected to design the theme and artistic elements.

An important aspect, in Mr. Gilbert's view, was architectural continuity between the new chapel and the cathedral. After analyzing three possible sites inside the cathedral, they settled on the idea of building it inside the Holy Family chapel, near the access point to the cathedral crypt, where most of the successor bishops of the Quebec City diocese lie in repose. This called for removal of a stained-glass window, drilling holes in the thick wall and digging to extend the foundations toward the side street.

Description of the 1993 chapel

At the May 25, 1993 press conference, canon Lépine stated, "We are proud to present the new chapel – the resting place of Blessed François de Laval (...) Note, first



Detail of *The Visitation of Mary* stained-glass window, moved into the entryway of the Notre-Dame de Québec presbytery.

Photo : Daniel Abel

of all, the floor of this chapel, made of polished black granite with a relief map of the emerging diocese that extended from the Gaspé region to Louisiana. Using a 17th century map, they raised a rectangle to form the litter on which lies the magnificent bronze recumbent effigy of Blessed François de Laval in his liturgical vestments, with his miter and his crozier. This is obviously the key exhibit. Observe how he is depicted: with his eyes open, and no sign of rigor mortis in his hands or feet. Inspired by recumbent effigies of the Middle Ages, they sought to recall the Blessed's new life, with his eyes looking to the heavens, toward the beatific vision."

Here is canon Jacques Lemieux's description of the interior wall elements, taken from an article presenting the chapel²: "Four bas-reliefs in thermoformed glass have been applied to the wall, suggesting to pilgrims that the various stages of our first bishop's life are also within their reach. The first one depicts François de Laval hearing the call to spread the Good Word of the Gospel in New France. The second one suggests the foundation of the

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work to which the bishop devoted his entire life: a Church extending the length and breadth of America.

“The third bas-relief helps us realize that this work, which sprang from very modest beginnings, deserved to expand and grow. And the fourth one depicts the last stage of François de Laval’s life – retreat and contemplation. Every visitor finds something to identify with. Each and every one hears a call, experiences a vocation that needs to be expressed by consecrating their life to a gradually developing work. We all reach a time, however, where we must divest ourselves of earthly ties to prepare for our return to God.”

“The band of glass at the back of the chapel, lit both inside and out, symbolizes Msgr de Laval’s spiritual life: in reaching for the sky, it bridges the gap between the temporal here and now and the spiritual above, and also symbolizes the Blessed’s power of intercession as he turns his gaze towards us from Heaven.”

Outside ornamentation

Canon Lépine points out another detail: “The artists also wanted to embellish the chapel’s outer walls with an imposing sculpture that could attract the attention of passersby. On each side of the glass band, illuminated by optical fiber, is a group of three people: a man, a woman, and a child – i.e., a family: a Native family on one side, and a (Canadian) family on the other. It reminds us that family was one of the great values that marked Msgr de Laval’s apostolic work (...) Finally, the composition is intended to highlight exchanges between two cultures, two different worlds, and the fascination each felt for the other – the Natives’ oral culture versus the Europeans’ written culture. Various items and symbols from each culture are engraved in the stone.”

A wish fulfilled

Abbé Lépine ended his speech with these words: “This chapel provides François de Laval with a new way to continue his proclamation to visitors: that we must



1



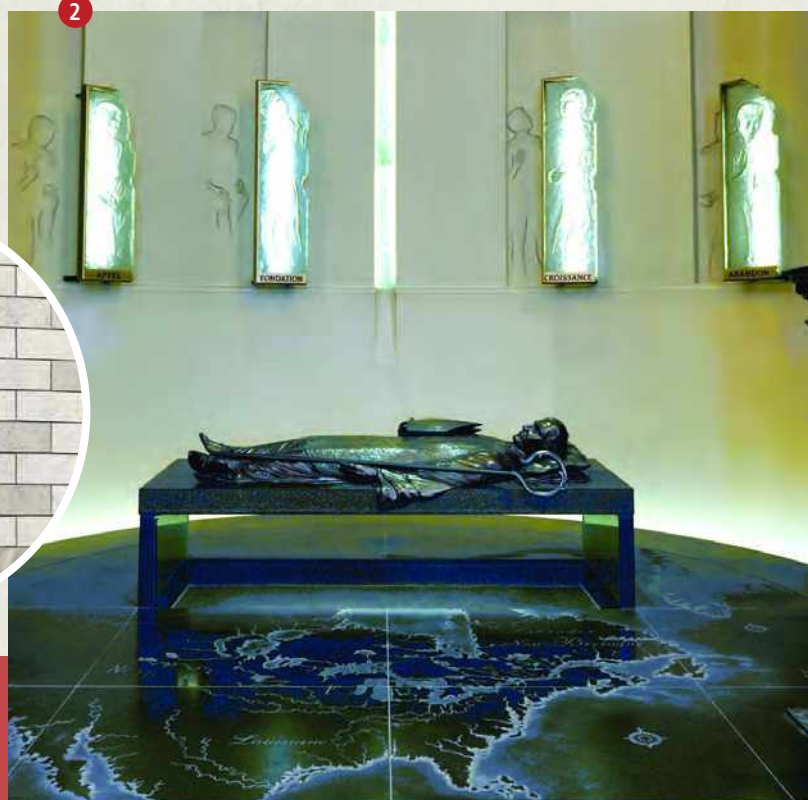
The tomb of François de Laval is buried under the slab holding the current recumbent effigy, April 1993.

Photo : Séminaire de Québec fonds

all listen to God and be ready to answer His call; that we need to accede to His wishes and develop a task equal to our capacities; that we need to commit our resources and summon up our energy to expand the reach of this work and ensure it is fruitful; that we should be able to commend ourselves to God and leave things up to Him in full confidence and serenity.” ■

1 Excerpt of the homily given by Msgr Couture in 1993, at the inauguration of Msgr de Laval’s funeral chapel, video recording *Sur la Place*, Program 77 “François de Laval,” Media 2000 inc., 27.30 min.

2 Jacques Lemieux, « Une nouvelle chapelle pour Mgr de Laval » (A new chapel for Msgr de Laval), *Pierres vivantes*, 1997, p. 5-7.



2

1 Ornamentation on the outside of the funeral chapel

2 The funeral chapel of St. François de Laval

Photos : Daniel Abel

ICI REPOSE
SAINT FRANÇOIS DE LAVAL
1623-1708



A colossal undertaking by Georges-Édouard Demers

Par Martina de Vries

PROJECT

In his April 3, 2014 address at the press conference held in conjunction with the Vatican's official announcement of François de Laval's forthcoming canonization, canon Jacques Roberge, Superior general of the Séminaire de Québec, said, "We are therefore witnessing today the culmination of a long process with numerous participants (...) I would like to recall one of them today: the late Msgr Georges-Édouard Demers, who spent a good part of his life on the Cause of François de Laval."¹ As part of the project *Keeping the memory of St. François de Laval alive*, we would like to present this man's tremendous work.

Georges-Édouard Demers (1906-1983) was ordained in 1931 at the Séminaire de Québec. Described as very discreet, even shy, the very incarnation of humility, he certainly does not stand out in photos of that time... but what a remarkable man he was!

In 1932, the Cause of François de Laval had reached an impasse in Rome, for the third time, due to various complications, including the insufficiency of historical documents. The problem was reported to Msgr Villeneuve, then Archbishop of Québec, who offered to send a priest from the Séminaire to Rome, to work under the direct supervision of the Relator in the Historical Section of the Congregation of Rites, which had been created in 1930 to handle Ancient Causes.² This priest would have to work long and hard, doing exhaustive searches for sources and analyzing them fully.

Who could be entrusted with this colossal mandate? Msgr Paul Bernier suggested the young Abbé Demers, who, in 1925-1926, went to Europe a first time to help the Postulator, Abbé Eugène Garnier. "And that's how I was led by Providence to contribute to the Cause of Msgr de Laval.

The *Altera Nova Positio* of 1956, most of which was written by Abbé Demers

Photo : Daniel Abel



Georges-Édouard Demers, studying a document

Photo : Séminaire de Québec archives

Being quite inexperienced in historic issues and research methods, all I could offer was my willingness to do the work," Abbé Demers told *La Nouvelle Abeille* magazine in February 1949 (Volume 5, Issue 3, p. 3).

Abbé Demers lived for seven years at the Canadian Pontifical College in Rome and at the Séminaire de Paris. He visited 45 different archives, as well as 5 public libraries. Searches in only 8 locations were done by local archivists, who sent him photostats of the documents he asked for. He faithfully transcribed almost 700 source documents and, as a precaution, sent carbon copies separately to Abbé Amédée Gosselin, Séminaire archivist and Vice-Postulator.

He maintained regular correspondence with Gosselin, often asking him for copies of letters to be sent to Rome, so he could do a more in-depth study of certain topics, especially the most delicate issues, which he tackled head-on. He deployed an exemplary scientific discipline while always defending François de Laval and demonstrating his saintliness.

This demonstration was nonetheless a difficult task, since, in Abbé Demers's words, "I wasn't studying the life of a good little nun who spent her entire life in a cloister³ – this was a bishop who had founded and organized the Canadian Church in the thick of ongoing religious and political difficulties. The research would, of course, be long and complicated." (*L'Abeille*, February 1949, p. 3)

(Continued on page 5)

1637 (25 septembre)

Arch. du Départ. de l'Évreux,
Pouillé du dioc. d'Évreux
3 25, A 9.35 f.606

Le vendredi 25 Septembre 1637 a une heure apres midy M. François perlecard Eveque d'Evreux a conféré de plein droit a François de Laval clere du Diocese de Chartres l'un des Canonicate a prebende Sur le Seeau de L'Evché vacant par la mort de Mr Noël Dupray ptre dernier possesseur.

Et Le Lundy 23 novembre 1637 mon ^{Se} François de Laval a été mis en possession des ^{Se} canonicate et prebende. Voyez Le Registre du chapitre pour Le ^{Se} Jour 23 novembre 1637.

Copié à Evreux, le 10 juillet 1935

Georges-Ed. Demers, ptre.

Georges-Ed. Demers, ptre.

Example of one of the 2,000 carbon copies of documents transcribed by Abbé Demers

The entire *Documenta* portion of the *Altera Nova Positio* (the texts and their annotations, which runs to over 600 pages) was ready by 1940. The start of World War II, however, led to the Cause being put on hold until 1948. From that year until 1956, Abbé Demers returned to Rome from time to time, to help finalize the ANP.

His 50th birthday in the fall of 1956 brought him two wonderful gifts: In September, Pope Pius XII appointed him Camerarius a secretis supernumerary,⁴ granting him the honorific title of Monsignor; and in November, his successor as Postulator, Father Romain Saint-Cyr, sent him a newly printed copy of the ANP. "Since tonight the first vespers of my feast day will be sung at the Séminaire," Abbé Demers wrote him on November 8, 1956, "and many of my brethren will do me the honor of visiting my room, as per the custom, I shall take that opportunity to show them this work, even if the contents are still officially cloaked in the secrecy of the Congregation of Rites."

After 80 years of effort, the decree of heroic virtues was finally read by Pope John XXIII on February 28, 1960. "Dear Father," wrote Msgr Demers to Fr. Saint-Cyr on this occasion, "our wishes are finally being fulfilled! (...) This is truly a moment of great joy for me, since it is the crowning achievement of all the work I have done for

the Cause since 1932 and – I must confess – the reward for a lot of sacrifices..."

The documentary record was therefore closed. Msgr Demers sent instructions to Rome on which documents of the Cause should be returned to Quebec City for preservation. His very humble pride is evident in this letter, dated March 22, 1960: "3) The 2,000 loose papers. I think these are the documents I copied in the Archives in Paris, Rome, Évreux, etc. The ANP does not contain all of this material.⁵ Additionally, I am inclined to request them for a somewhat sentimental reason... Since this is what I personally worked on for many weeks and months ... I almost want to write: Return to Quebec City..."

He started his well-deserved retirement in 1975, after several years of teaching at the Petit Séminaire. He felt his last "moment of great joy", no doubt, at being sent to Rome, as one of the Séminaire's delegates, to attend the beatification ceremony on June 22, 1980. He died in 1983, at the age of 77 years. Although he did not live to see the canonization of his beloved founding bishop, to whom he had devoted a large part of his life, we can be sure they have met each other in death... ■

1 Bulletin #29, p. 4

2 Ancient Causes are those supported by written documentation but with no eyewitness accounts by contemporaries legally gathered from the lifetime of the Servant of God.

3 He was referring, no doubt, to St. Therese of Lisieux, who was canonized in 1925.

4 Camerarius a secretis supernumeraries have been called "Chaplains of His Holiness" since 1968. This was an ancient duty of the Papal Household, where they were in charge of the Pope's so-called "secret" antechamber – a waiting room for private audiences. These chaplains were then granted the first and lowest of the three ranks of Monsignor.

5 Only 45% of Demers' work was published in the ANP. Until now, the rest has remained in his Collection at the Séminaire Archives, held by the Musée des civilisations in Quebec City. Our project will make it accessible to the public.

Our thanks to...

We take this opportunity to acknowledge the tremendous work of Fr. Roger Laberge, RSV, the last Postulator for the Cause of St. François de Laval, who spent more than 220 hours translating the Italian annotations into French, from the 1956 *Altera Nova Positio*, mostly compiled by Abbé Demers – a valuable source of information that will be accessible shortly.



Photo: Daniel Abel



Msgr Maurice Couture [1926-2018]

We are all aware of Msgr Couture's great attachment to St. François de Laval and his Church. Our contribution to this memory is a reproduction of the press release issued by the diocese of Quebec City at the inauguration of the funeral chapel on May 25, 1993, where the Archbishop shared his pastoral vision for the future.

At the dawn of the third millennium, the Universal Church is called to spread the Word for a second time. Those who have been baptized need to rethink their responsibilities as Christians emulating Christ, so the world knows that God sent His Son to lead us to the Promised Kingdom.

It became obvious to me, during a pastoral reflection, that someone came here more than 300 years ago to spread the Gospel for the first time, and was able to accomplish his mission.

This certainty emboldened me to revive, once again, the devotion to the founder of the Canadian Church, a devotion that must be promoted.

Was Msgr François de Laval not a man of genius who made our country's spiritual, humanist, and social history strong and imposing?

Above all, he was a pastor filled with the spirit of the apostles, the "perfect model for bishops," as Father Paul Ragueneau wrote. He saw his priesthood and episcopate as duties in the service of the community, rather than an honor. His pastoral stance was highly evangelical. In practicing his apostolate, his main goal was to reach people's hearts and open them up to the Good News lived in fraternity, faithfully, and radically.

Long before the UN wrote the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, he fought steadfastly – despite all opposition – for the respect of human dignity.

Msgr de Laval, who was beatified by Pope John Paul II on June 22, 1980, is a model of courage, lucidity and faith presented for our devotion, guiding us along the path of our personal vocations. Wouldn't this man, who launched our Church in a diocese as big as America, be the ideal figure to inspire pastoral action for the second evangelization in today's "de-Christianizing" world?



Msgr Maurice Couture, during the filming of *François de Laval, Apôtre de l'Amérique (François de Laval, Apostle of America)*, in the spring of 2014.

Photo : Daniel Abel

In the 17th century, he was seen as part of the tradition of "new priests" who devoted themselves entirely to their pastoral ministry (*Cap-aux-Diamants*, 1993, p. 16). His life was modeled on the pastoral duty that he chose for himself or the situation imposed on him. Isn't that the deepest meaning of what we seek in this synodic period?

Despite his attachment to the French spirituality of his era through mortification and devotions, he maintained a fortuitous internal freedom, as did Francis de Sales and Vincent de Paul, which impelled him to build the Church on this continent, drawing on inspiration handed down through the centuries that can be adapted, today, to the directives of Vatican II.

Msgr de Laval had a grand vision, as grand as the country he was discovering; he had a successful approach in training priests whom he then appointed to the evangelization at the time, in the educational and charity institutions he had launched; and he had a far-reaching view of the future, setting up the ecclesiastical structure he bequeathed to the diocese of Quebec – the springboard of almost 250 (Catholic) dioceses set up in Canada and the U.S. ■

Maurice Couture, Archbishop of Quebec

ALBUM

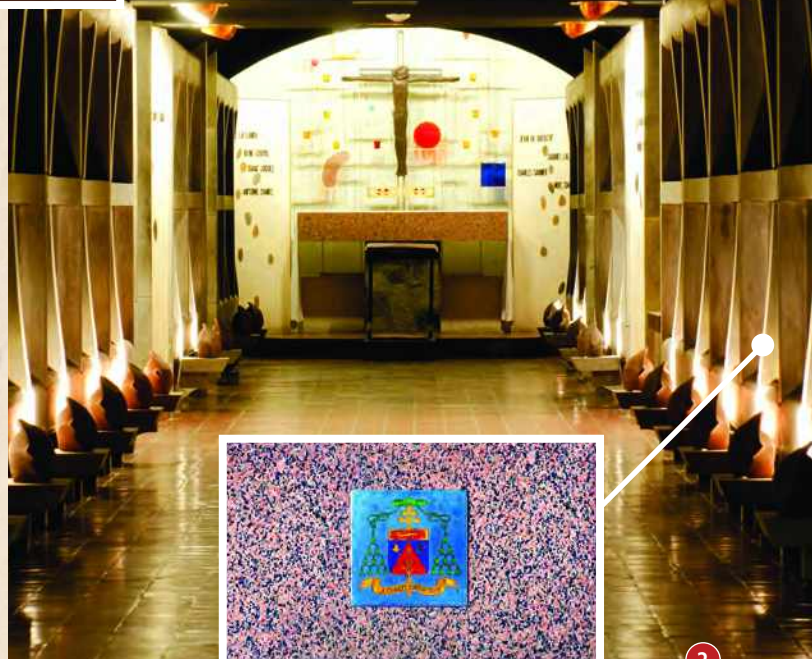
1 Civil recognition

On February 9 this year, Quebec Premier Philippe Couillard designated François de Laval as a person of historical importance under the Cultural Heritage Act, at the launch of festivities marking the 350th anniversary of the Collège François-de-Laval. Photo: Daniel Abel



2 Rejoining the family

The remains of Msgr Maurice Couture are now in the crypt at the Notre-Dame de Québec cathedral, along with most of the other successors to Msgr de Laval. Photo: Daniel Abel



3 Well-worn with fervor

In addition to the usual maintenance work on the funeral chapel, the Séminaire de Québec will take on another task in autumn: a thorough clean-up, using the appropriate solvent, applying two layers of wax to the recumbent effigy and restoring the well-worn brass on the balustrade. Photo: Daniel Abel



4 Congratulations

Msgr Antoine de Romanet, Bishop of the Diocese of the French Armed Forces, will ordain Pascal Champion as a priest on May 8. Mr. Champion was the *Marab* (2009 to 2016) at the Collège du Prytanée national militaire de La Flèche (formerly the school attended by François de Laval). He commissioned the bas-relief *Msgr de Laval serving the poor* (Newsletter no. 26). He is pictured below, as part of the group on hand to welcome Cardinal Lacroix and some Canadian pilgrims on October 8, 2014. We wish him a successful ministry, and may St. François protect him. Photo: Daniel Abel





Recumbent effigy in the St. François de Laval funeral chapel

A stop at the Hôtel-Dieu

In late May 2017, Ms. Ariane Blanchet-Robitaille, Curator at the Monastère des Augustines de Québec, advised us of an immense canvas depicting Msgr de Laval's coat of arms, part of the Monastère's collection. Upon learning of our project – the inventory of all images and documents related to St. François de Laval – she invited us to record the details of this painting.

Our research revealed that this painting adorned the outside wall of the Hôtel-Dieu chapel at the time of the 1878 relocation: "The all-pervasive delicacy and taste of the Hôtel-Dieu ornamentation would be hard to surpass. (...) Above the gate was a green foliage cross adorned with a floral wreath. White drapery hung from the foot of the cross, embellished by wreaths also made from green foliage, running the full length from the roof to just above the wall. Decorating the top of the gate is a painting of Msgr de Laval's coat of arms; this work was surrounded by crosses of white roses and violets, which in turn were topped by wreaths of the same colors. Beneath the coat of arms was an inscription that read, *A tribute to Monsignor de Laval.*"¹

Monsignor de Laval's coat of arms
 McDonald
 Oil on canvas, 1878, 51 X 74 inches
 Monastère des Augustines Collections,
 Hôtel-Dieu de Québec



No sooner had Monsignor the Bishop of Petraea learned of this plan than we embarked on this mission; he appeared seized with an affection beyond all belief. His all-embracing zeal, unlimited even by the ocean, instilled in him a wish to become one of those with the good fortune to witness it and, at the expense of a thousand lives, seek the lost sheep, for whom he had traversed the seas, in the very heart of these forests.

(Jérôme Lalemant, Jesuit)

Excerpt from the Jesuits' *Relations*, 1659-1660, describing the last mission opened in 1660. (Thwaites edition, vol. 45, p.77-79)

¹ The relocation of Msgr de Laval's remains to the Séminaire de Québec chapel. A complete account of all events from the time Msgr de Laval's bones were exhumed on September 19, 1877, to the re-interment at the Séminaire on May 23, 1878, Thomas-Étienne Hamel, Typographie d'Augustin Côté et Cie, 1878, p. 62.