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The Sillery Experiment: A Jesuit-Indian Village in New France, 1637-1663

James P. Ronda

The Age of Discovery brought to western Christianity a missionary challenge of epic proportions. Medieval Christianity had always claimed to be universal, but it was the geographical discoveries of the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries that moved the claim towards reality. By the seventeenth century the frontier of the Christian mission stretched from China to Paraguay, and from Mexico City to Quebec. On that frontier the Society of Jesus was perhaps the best organized and most effective force for the spread of Christianity. Jesuit missions in the New World were a major institution on the frontier and a crucial arena for the confrontation of European and Native American cultures. It is that arena and the meeting of cultural values in one mission region that is the subject of this essay.

While historians of the Christian mission and of Indian-white relations have been quick to see the importance of Jesuit missionaries on the frontiers of the Americas, these same observers have done little to explore the theories and methods of the missionaries, and even less quick to examine the impact of the mission on Native Americans. This historiographical failure is nowhere more evident than in studies of the Jesuit missions in New France. From Francis Parkman to the most recent comprehensive history of the Christian mission, the treatment of the missionaries and the Indians has been remarkably similar. The Fathers, so goes this interpretation,

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brought the blessings of Civilization and Christianity to the savage barbarians of the Canadian wilderness while themselves suffering terrible tortures at the hands of the pagans.¹ A new and supposedly scholarly study of the Society of Jesus perpetuates this stereotype by depicting the mission in terms of "cultured and refined Black Robes squatting in a circle of filthy savages . . . or standing as an object of derision before jeering Indians."² This is not history; this is hagiography, the lives of martyred saints. As such, it does justice neither to Jesuits nor Indians. The mission as a center of culture contact was far more complex than a simple struggle between civilization and barbarism, Christianity and paganism.

What is needed is the creation of an approach to mission history which blends the insights of history and anthropology in such a way as to analyze the mission as a major point of encounter between Europeans and Native Americans. The essential element in such an approach must be the realization that the mission was much more than simply an instrument for the spread of Christianity. Missionaries, whether in New France, New England, or New Spain, conceived of their task as going far beyond obtaining converts. The Christian mission was an attempt to effect massive culture change upon Native Americans by the introduction of European social and cultural values and institutions into Indian life. Christianization really meant Europeanization, whether at the hands of the Spanish, English, or French. Historians of the Spanish colonies, following the pioneer work of Herbert Eugene Bolton, have long viewed the mission in such a perspective. Bolton's influential 1917 essay "The Mission as a Frontier Institution in the Spanish American Colonies" indicated the methods used by missionaries to make Native Americans into European Indians.³ What must now be added to Bolton's approach is an understanding of how Native Americans accepted some things the mission had to offer, while often rejecting or modifying the ideological message of Christianity.⁴ The application of this perspective—the mission in culture contact—to New France can suggest, in microcosm, many of the broader patterns of Indian-white relations in the New World.

In 1632 three French Jesuits, led by Superior Paul Le Jeune, arrived in Quebec to establish a mission field. The missionaries were immediately faced with a vast undertaking. Le Jeune soon discovered that the semi-nomadic Montagnais Indians of the St. Lawrence Valley were very difficult subjects for conversion. Their constant wandering in search of food forced the Jesuits to travel with them, placing severe strains on mission man power and

finances. During the winter of 1633–1634 Le Jeune spent all his time with the Montagnais, learning their language and trying without success to convince them of the truths of Christianity and European values.⁵ The experience of that winter and its frustrations forced Le Jeune to re-think his whole approach to missionary work. He had never doubted that Indians were human beings with normal intellect. What Le Jeune did believe was that the social environment of the Montagnais was so unstable and so uncivilized that unless it was changed, Christianity would never grow in New France. What was required, so it seemed to the Superior, was the creation of European-styled agricultural communities where the Montagnais could become both Christianized and Europeanized.

It was in his *Relation* for 1634 that Father Le Jeune enunciated his master plan for conversion and culture change. Chapter Three of the *Relation*, significantly titled “On the Means of Converting the Savages,” contained the basic elements of the scheme. Equating civilization and Christianity with stable village life, Le Jeune declared that methods had to be found to make such life attractive to the Montagnais. He suggested that hired workmen be sent to help the Montagnais clear farm land and build a small village. Le Jeune also felt that the presence of a few pious French families would serve as a good example to the Indians. He envisioned orderly and peaceful Indian communities founded on true religion and European ways. Le Jeune insisted that once Indians were Europeanized, they “could be more easily won and instructed.” Within such Indian communities all the European institutions of church, home, school, and marriage could be brought to bear on the Native American personality. Le Jeune was certain the result would be beneficial both for the Indians and the French colony.⁶

In 1635, Le Jeune began to make specific plans for the development of a Montagnais village. He was convinced that “it would be a great blessing for their bodies, for their souls, and for the traffic of these Gentlemen, [the Company of New France] if those tribes were stationary, and if they became docile to our direction, which they will do, I hope, in the course of time.” Knowing that it would demand considerable money and labor to develop a village, Le Jeune turned for help to the colonizer and explorer Samuel de Champlain. Le Jeune suggested that if the Jesuits provided three hired workers and Champlain offered an additional two, this labor force could clear and plant land, thus encouraging at least one Montagnais family to become sedentary. Aware of Champlain’s activities in the Three Rivers region below Quebec, the Superior

believed that Three Rivers would be an ideal site for the future village. While the missionaries were convinced that their plan "would be the true way to gain the savages," both Champlain and the Montagnais were unimpressed. Champlain evidently felt that the whole effort was too expensive. Even more serious a blow for the project, no Montagnais families seemed at all interested in becoming Frenchified farmers.⁷ Far from abandoning the idea, Le Jeune renewed his drive to find adequate financial support for the undertaking.

It was not until 1637 that the Jesuits were able to make real progress with their village plans. On April 27 a Montagnais representative came to visit Le Jeune at Quebec. The Indian discussed with the Superior the possibility of obtaining French aid to build a village in the Three Rivers area. What is clear from the records of the discussion is that the change in the Montagnais position from 1635 was due in large part to their growing fear of the Iroquois and a rapidly declining food supply. Some Montagnais quite realistically saw a French supported village as an answer to a very serious set of military and economic problems. However, when Le Jeune introduced the idea of Christianity and religious instruction into the meeting, Indian enthusiasm suddenly cooled. The Montagnais were especially unhappy about the prospect of having their children taken from them and educated at the Quebec seminary. All the elders favored French aid but there was a nearly uniform rejection of any moves towards accepting Christianity. This opposition and the ever present problem of insufficient funds again forced the postponement of the venture. Le Jeune, deeply disappointed, bitterly declared "it is a pitiable thing, I cannot repeat too often, that the spiritual welfare of these barbarians should be retarded by the lack of temporal resources."⁸

Undaunted by two failures, Le Jeune was still convinced of the workability of his plan. The Superior was optimistic that Montagnais opposition would be easily overcome once sufficient funds were found to clear land and build at least one house. From internal evidence in Le Jeune's *Relations* for 1637 and 1638 it can be inferred that during 1637 he carried on an extensive correspondence with laymen of the French nobility who might provide funds for the village. Sometime during 1637, perhaps in the spring, Le Jeune's letter campaign bore fruit. News came to Quebec that Noël Brûlart de Sillery, Commander of the Order of Malta and formerly a minister and ambassador of the king, had decided to furnish funds to hire workers for the village project.⁹ Armed with this

information, Le Jeune moved quickly to implement his plans. Having abandoned a Three Rivers site as being too open to Iroquois attack, Le Jeune selected a location at the foot of the cliff of Cape Diamond, about a league and a half from Quebec. The Jesuits hoped that Montagnais familiarity with the place—the Indians often used its sandy bay—would be an additional attraction for the settlement.¹⁰ Committing himself even further, the Superior ordered that in July work be commenced on a Jesuit residence house at the village site.¹¹ Finally, Le Jeune made arrangements with François Derré de Gand, owner of the Cape Diamond property. De Gand agreed to give the Jesuits 10,584 arpents (8,820 acres) for a village and adjoining farm land.¹² The remaining task, surely the most difficult one, was to find one or more Montagnais families willing to abandon their traditional ways to become Christian farmers.

Early in 1638 Paul Le Jeune began to search among his handful of Montagnais converts for prospective inhabitants of the village now named St. Joseph de Sillery. The Jesuit found two baptized family leaders interested in occupying the first house at Sillery. These men, Noël Negabamat and François Xavier Nenaskoumat, met with Le Jeune in the winter of 1638 to discuss settlement plans. The two Montagnais approached the subject of living permanently in a village very cautiously. Negabamat warned Le Jeune that if the promised house and lands were taken away from the Indians after a short period of time, the Jesuits would suffer a severe loss of prestige. Assured by the missionary that such an action would never be taken, the Montagnais then pursued the question of house occupancy after they died. Noël Negabamat asked pointedly, "we are already old, if we happen to die, will you not drive our children from this house, will you not refuse them the help that you will have given us?" Again Le Jeune offered assurances that their fears were unfounded. With these problems resolved, the two Indians agreed to bring their families to Sillery in the spring of 1638.¹³

By the summer of 1638 about twenty Montagnais were living, in rather close quarters, in a one-room house at Sillery. In spite of such crowded conditions, Le Jeune was proud to report that he had "yet to notice the least quarrel or the least dispute among them."¹⁴ The residents of the village of Sillery were not the only Indians living on Sillery land during the first summer. Other Montagnais, hearing about the project, came to the reserve and settled for the season in their bark cabins. Le Jeune was certain that this

would mean more converts and more human material for his Sillery experiment. The Superior wrote, "notice, if you please, a great blessing in this matter; not one of them hopes to be lodged and assisted who does not resolve to be an honest man, and to become a Christian, so much so that it is the same thing in a savage to wish to become sedentary and to wish to believe in God." The possibilities for conversion and culture change now seemed limitless and Le Jeune lamented only a lack of funds and workers for his growing village.¹⁵

The Jesuits of New France expected great results from the Sillery experiment. In an analysis of the major mission institutions in the colony, Le Jeune declared that everything depended upon the success of the village effort. "Let these barbarians always remain nomads," wrote the missionary, "then their sick will die in the woods and their children will never enter the seminary." Thus, as Sillery entered its first full year of life, Jesuit hopes were high. Those expectations were bolstered by two important events. First, the Jesuits convinced the Company of New France to extend special trading privileges normally reserved to French *habitants* to the Christian residents of Sillery. The missionaries assumed that such rights would be a powerful economic incentive for additional Montagnais to accept Christianity and village life.¹⁶ Second, and even more important for the physical development of Sillery, the great landowner de Gand promised Le Jeune funds to hire more French construction workers.¹⁷ But suddenly in 1639 Le Jeune's dream was shattered by the ever-present companion of European expansion, smallpox. Fearing that all the Indians of Sillery would sicken and die, Le Jeune ordered the village abandoned. Seeing the house and lands empty, Le Jeune described his mood as "disconsolate indeed." Yet, he was convinced that this trial came from God and was a proper test for the faith of the new converts.¹⁸

As the epidemic began to subside in 1640, the Jesuits worked to re-establish Sillery. Once the village was reoccupied, the missionaries urged those Indians who were to live at Sillery to create their own civil government and code of moral conduct. A careful analysis of those actions and their consequences will be offered later in this study. Suffice it to say that the Jesuits were highly pleased with the results, since Christian Indians dominated the civil administration and promptly enacted a very rigid moral code based on European social values.¹⁹ Once again all seemed promising at Sillery. For the first time the Montagnais began to be involved in agricultural labor, clearing land and planting crops.²⁰

During the winter of 1640–41 the Sillery Christians met again and strengthened their hold on village administration.²¹ Finally, Le Jeune saw his village blessed at the end of 1640 by an unexpected event. After a serious fire gutted their building at Quebec, the Hospital Nuns decided to rebuild at Sillery.²² Thus the village now had both a Jesuit residence and a hospital.

When Barthelemy Vimont, Le Jeune's successor as Superior, described the physical development of Sillery in his *Relation* for 1642–43, it was plain that the village had grown considerably since those first precarious years. Vimont reported a population of thirty-five to forty Christian families with a much larger number of non-Christians also living on the Sillery reserve. The Montagnais had now been joined by some Algonkians although Vimont suspected that the latter were more interested in free food and shelter than in religious instruction. Population growth was matched by an increased number of village dwellings. The Superior noted that Sillery now had four one-room houses "built on the French plan," with two more under construction, and an additional house planned for the following spring. Yet, housing remained a major problem for the village. Vimont observed that most Sillery residents still lived in the traditional bark cabins and, with a lack of funds and workmen, the Jesuit saw little hope that the situation would soon change. From Vimont's *Relation* it is possible to construct a fairly accurate picture of Sillery as it must have appeared in the early 1640s. The village was laid out in two loose wings. At the center of the wings were the Jesuit residence house and the hospital. The Montagnais, both those living in houses and cabins, lived together in the wing closest to the Jesuit residence. The Algonkians occupied the wing on the hospital side.²³ The agricultural lands outside the village were not well developed, apparently due to danger from Iroquois attack and the Indian desire to maintain the traditional economic habits of the hunt.²⁴

Problems with farming aside, Sillery appeared to be moving in the direction Le Jeune and the Jesuits had hoped when the village was created. However, the people of Sillery, Christians and non-Christians alike, were not immune from the violent events of the 1640s and early 1650s. In those years the French colony and its allies, especially the Huron, were assaulted and battered by intermittent Iroquois attacks. Such warfare eventually decimated the Huron.²⁵ Sillery also paid a high price. Throughout the 1640s the village lived under the constant threat of attack, which meant that village men frequently formed war parties, leaving for long

periods of time and forcing those left behind to abandon the town for the safety of Quebec. During the war season of 1643–44, for example, Sillery was virtually abandoned as the men went to war and the women, the old, and the sick sought shelter in Quebec. Superior Vimont wrote bitterly, “we have greater trouble in keeping our Christians than in acquiring them. Their wandering life is a great obstacle to virtue, and still the difficulties that exist with respect to their becoming settled are almost insurmountable. The land that we clear, the houses that we build for them, and the other aid, spiritual and material, keep them stationary for a while, but not permanently.”²⁶ Disease joined war to thwart progress at Sillery and when it was necessary to abandon the hospital in 1644 because of the Iroquois menace, Sillery lost much of its appeal for many Indians.²⁷ Throughout the 1640s the story remained much the same. In times of war, Sillery was a ghost town. During those brief moments of peace, the village came back to life. December, 1645 found 167 Christians living on Sillery land with a larger number of non-Christians also present.²⁸ The following year Sillery was unoccupied from February to April.²⁹ In April the missionaries were able to convince some Indians to begin farm work and fifteen arpents of land were prepared for planting.³⁰ When the Jesuits counted the population of the village in November, 1646 they recorded 120 Christians and an uncounted number of non-Christians.³¹ Later in November, as food supplies ran low, the Indians left Sillery and once again it was empty.³²

During the last years of the 1640s, as war, hunger, and disease swept through Sillery, the missionaries continued their efforts to develop the village. In 1647 the Jesuits undertook a major building project—the construction of a village church. When completed, the church of St. Michael was viewed as a primary means to maintain piety and proper worship in the village.³³ This building and so many others in Sillery were destroyed by three sudden crises. During the war season of 1649–50 many Sillery Christians went off to battle against the Iroquois and were killed. Their deaths deprived the village of its leadership elite.³⁴ As the Iroquois war intensified, Sillery became more and more a French military outpost for the defense of Quebec. During 1649 masonry fortifications were built in the village.³⁵ A few short years later Sillery itself was attacked. On May 29, 1655, Iroquois raiders attacked a work party of Indians who were preparing a site for a fort on Sillery land. In the fighting that followed, Jesuit brother Jean Liegeois was

killed and several Sillery Indians wounded.³⁶ The third crisis came to the village in the afternoon of June 13, 1656. A fire, started in the kitchen chimney of the Jesuit house and whipped by a high wind, raced through the village destroying the mission residence, the church, and most of the small houses.³⁷ The fire was a disaster from which the experimental village of Sillery would never recover.

In 1663 the Jesuits of New France prepared a report listing all lands under their control. The report reveals the final dissolution of Indian Sillery. Most of the Sillery land was now occupied by French farmers. The two Jesuits living at the Sillery site were primarily involved in caring for the needs of French settlers.³⁸ The Indian village of St. Joseph de Sillery was dead.

What has been offered thus far has been a traditional picture of a mission idea—its genesis, growth, and decline. The analysis has been a physical one in terms of fund raising, building construction, and numbers of converts. While important, such an external examination cannot penetrate to the inner history of Sillery. The most important questions have yet to be posed. What effect did village life and European morality have upon the Montagnais and Algonkians? How successful were the Jesuits in re-modeling Native American life and producing Europeanized Indians? How much resistance was there to such efforts and what forms did the resistance take? Exploring these questions takes us beyond mission-centered history to the inner, Indian life of Sillery and to the essence of the mission as an arena for culture contact.

Paul Le Jeune and the Jesuits of New France dreamed of Indian villages populated by hard working farmers whose lives were regulated by the wise decisions of Christian Indian magistrates and their missionary mentors. A village like Sillery could not prosper unless Christians dominated its civil life. As early as 1637 Le Jeune wrote "if some one could . . . give authority to one of them to rule the others, we would see them converted and civilized in a short time."³⁹ What Le Jeune was asking for was the destruction of traditional Indian polity and the establishment of new civil-political relationships based on European models of authority and leadership. Consensus was to be replaced by coercion. The Jesuit did not realize that to begin such a process would unravel the bonds of Montagnais culture and introduce new conflicts into Indian life.

In 1640, after the smallpox epidemic of the previous year had abated, Montagnais Indians began to gather at the Sillery reserve.

Le Jeune and Vimont were eager for the process of accepting village life and civil order to begin quickly. Thus they encouraged the Christian minority to hold mass meetings for the purpose of village organization. Even before the meetings were held, Sillery Christians had agreed on the exclusivistic course they planned to pursue. Reflecting the Jesuit position which demanded a total rejection of the Indian past, the Montagnais Christians declared "that if any one showed himself an open enemy to the faith, they resolved to drive him away from the village."⁴⁰ When the first tribal meeting was held, Christians dominated much of the discussion. Estienne Pigarouik, a former traditional religious leader and now a zealous recent convert, demanded that all those who were not Christians be expelled from the village. Pigarouik levelled his harshest criticism at those who practiced the Montagnais tradition of polygamy. The message to the non-Christians was simple and blunt—either believe or separate. Not all the Sillery Christians spoke with such harshness or made such rigid demands. At the same meeting Noël Negabamat urged a more moderate course. Steering clear of ideology and demands for immediate conversion, Negabamat argued that as all planned to live in one village, it would be most practical for all to accept one religion. Jean Baptiste Etinechkavat, a Montagnais leader by birth and another recent convert, rounded out the Christian position by maintaining that the acceptance of Christianity and French aid was the only means to halt the eventual destruction of the Montagnais people. The stance of the Sillery Christians was a blend of zealous coercion and pragmatic persuasion. What it amounted to was a broad attack on the traditions and values of Montagnais life.⁴¹

Christian voices were not the only ones heard at the crucial gathering. The Christian challenge quickly produced a Traditionalist, or as the Jesuits styled it, a "pagan," faction of considerable size and power. Montagnais Traditionalists effectively countered the Christian minority by portraying the converts as petty, power-hungry men bent on dividing the Montagnais. Replying to the attack on polygamy, the Traditionalists observed that having several wives was a very ancient practice and they saw no reason to abandon it now. Finally, the Traditionalists charged that Christian doctrine was both too complex to understand and ill-suited to Indian life. The meeting was deadlocked. The Montagnais were divided for the first time in their history into two rival and hostile ideological factions. The Christians were in the minority and as

the assembly broke up, the new converts had to find ways to gain power and influence if their cause was to succeed.

In the days that followed the meeting, representatives of the Sillery Christians sought French support to enhance their position. First visiting Governor Montmagny, they asked him to appoint only Christians to the civil administration of Sillery. The governor replied with a general declaration of support, but hesitated to grant such large amounts of power to a minority, even a Christian minority. The Sillery Christians found the aid they were searching for when they went to the Jesuits. Le Jeune and Vimont wanted the Christians dominant in village government. For that reason the Jesuits apparently suggested that a large number of Montagnais men gather at the mission residence house to hold an election for village officers. Such an election had no precedent in traditional Montagnais culture. After the votes were counted by the missionaries, it was declared that four men—three Christians and one Traditionalist—had been elected village magistrates. To these posts were added two men—one Christian and one Traditionalist—who would enforce proper moral conduct among Montagnais young men. Finally, one man was selected as Captain of Prayers to act as a lay teacher in Sillery. These seven men were to serve for one year after which a new election would be held.⁴² What emerged from all these events was a village government dominated by the Christian minority, supported by powerful outside allies, and bent on imposing new values and beliefs on a reluctant and often hostile majority.

Sillery quickly became a divided and suspicious community. The suspicion and division was the product of the tactics used by the Jesuits and the Sillery Christians to re-make Montagnais life. The most explosive points of confrontation proved to be questions of sexual behavior, polygamy, and the nature of the marriage institution. The Jesuits had always been highly critical of Montagnais sexual customs and marriage patterns. Missionary preaching repeatedly insisted that conversion and true Christianity demanded monogamous marriage and European courtship practices. One of the first acts of the new Sillery Christian officers was to round up all the women and young people and verbally assault them for their supposed transgressions. The Christian men charged that the women, most of whom were not Christians, had been the source of all Montagnais troubles. Demonstrating the means they would use to hold their power, the Christians declared

"now know that you must obey your husbands, and you young people, you will obey your parents and our Captains, and, if any fail to do so, we have concluded to give them nothing to eat."⁴³

When the Christian officers attempted to enforce the European-based moral code, there was great uproar, confusion, and resistance. One young wife, after having an argument with her husband, fled into the forest for fear of punishment. Sillery officials hunted her down and then requested the Jesuits to supply a chain so that the woman could do four days of fasting chained to a post.⁴⁴ Another incident further reveals the depth of division in Sillery. A Christian couple engaged in a fierce argument, eventually coming to blows. Their quarrel was so noisy that it soon attracted a large crowd of Sillery residents. The neighboring Christians complained that this couple was not honoring the marriage vows. More important as an indicator of village conflict, many opponents of Christianity used the event to attack the faithful and mock their convictions.⁴⁵ When village officers tried to stop the courting of Christians by non-Christians, the results were less than satisfactory.⁴⁶ All the conflict and divisiveness caused by the efforts of the missionaries and their converts can be best summed up in one last example. Two young boys, one a Christian and the other a Traditionalist, fell to fighting outside a Sillery house. The Jesuits present proudly reported that they were fighting "on account of their beliefs."⁴⁷ Which lad emerged the victor from the theological scrap was not recorded.

It was clear by the winter of 1640–41 that the Jesuit expectations of a peaceful, united, and Christian Sillery were not coming to pass. The experiment was failing not only because of a lack of food or funds but because of the tensions and animosities produced by Christianization and culture change. The Jesuit answer to these failures was to encourage the Sillery Christians to re-double their efforts in compelling piety and virtue. During the winter of 1640–41 the Sillery Christian faction met to discuss their problems. They were confronted with a Traditionalist majority who wanted to enjoy some of the material advantages of village life while stoutly refusing to accept any real changes in cultural values. After considerable debate, the Christians decided to use prison sentences and even the threat of execution to force adherence to their orders. The Jesuits, concerned that talk of chains and prisons might drive away potential converts, cautioned moderation. Their advice was rejected as the Indian Christians accused the missionaries of cowardice and backsliding!⁴⁸

The Sillery Christians acted promptly to implement the new order. Their first targets were young Montagnais who courted each other in the traditional manner. Montagnais courting centered on evening meetings of a couple or small group of couples. These meetings sometimes involved sexual intercourse but this was not always the case. Such liaisons shocked the newly-found European sensibilities of Sillery Christians. They flooded the French governor with requests to accept violators in Quebec dungeons.⁴⁹ When Governor Montmagny showed some reluctance to over-populate his cells, the Christians obtained permission in 1642 to build their own prison in Sillery.⁵⁰ Soon a number of young women found themselves incarcerated for short periods of time. There is no record of any young men being imprisoned. On this point at least, Jesuit and Indian attitudes coincided conveniently; both cultures decreed that women bear the burden of guilt in matters of sex. As old courting practices persisted, Sillery Christians moved to even harsher methods to force acceptance of their moral code. Public floggings of young women by village officers became a common sight. While such punishments served only to widen the gap between Traditionalists and Christians, one Jesuit later defended them as necessary in order to teach "savages" the principles of justice and government.⁵¹ Yet the intensified moral puritanism of the Christian minority, employing even the most extreme measures, failed to alter old habits and customs.

It was the purpose of Sillery to re-mold Montagnais life-style and religion. The Jesuits were convinced that such goals were both possible and desirable. Sillery was to be a proving ground for the future. Barthelemy Vimont once described Sillery as "the seed of Christianity amid this great barbarism."⁵² How successful were the missionaries and their convert allies? Was the Montagnais culture significantly transformed along the desired lines by the village experience? Did the Montagnais give up or even modify traditional religious beliefs and practices? Certainly the Christians of Sillery wanted outsiders to believe that they were living new lives. One Christian boasted that "we are no longer what we once were, we have given up our old customs to accept better ones."⁵³ This claim was hardly borne out in fact. In something as basic as the economy, nearly all Montagnais remained firmly rooted in the indigenuous past. There is no evidence to suggest that agriculture ever became an important part of Sillery life. The most farm land ever planted was fifteen arpents or about twelve acres, and that was done in one year only. On the other hand, there is considerable

evidence that most Montagnais simply viewed the village as a convenient base camp for their yearly hunts. The constant hunger at Sillery also indicates the failure of agriculture to take hold in Montagnais life.⁵⁴

While the purpose of Sillery was to effect massive social change, the Jesuits ultimately wanted to reap a harvest of converts. How successful were the missionaries in destroying Montagnais religion and replacing it with Christianity? The Jesuits were not foolish enough to think that the Montagnais had no religion. Early field experience had taught them that the Indian religious universe was populated with many spirits and gods, interpreted through Indian priests and prophets. Montagnais religious practice was distinctly Iroquoian in structure, emphasizing dream interpretation, communal rituals, and the supernatural value of small sacred objects. That the mission obtained a few dedicated converts is undeniable. However, the evidence suggests that most Montagnais clung tenaciously to their own beliefs and rituals. The Sillery Montagnais, both Christians and Traditionalists, occasionally participated in Christian pageants and processions, but even such public manifestations of piety were rare. What happened in Sillery, in a religious sense, can best be described as interior survival or the persistence of pre-contact religion.⁵⁵ In Sillery the Traditionalists maintained an active religious underground. Le Jeune reported that "there are savages who come to inform us of superstitious rites which are performed secretly in the cabins."⁵⁶ The continued presence of traditional ceremonies was both an embarrassment and a challenge to the authority of Sillery Christians. At the very time when Christian officers were using strong measures to enforce holy living, one Christian was forced to admit that "it is a matter of deep regret to see our relatives and friends so persistent in their slavery to Satan."⁵⁷ Traditional religious leaders scored their greatest success in keeping alive a belief which had hindered mission growth from the beginning. Because the Jesuits frequently baptized those on the verge of death, a popular folk belief emerged that death was the sure consequence of that sacrament. Traditionalists effectively used this pervasive belief to challenge both the converts and the missionaries. Since baptism often meant contact with Europeans and their diseases, it was very difficult to counter the arguments offered by the shamans.⁵⁸ With the Traditionalist religious underground flourishing, the Jesuits began to preach sermons urging converts to search Sillery cabins and destroy all non-Christian religious objects.⁵⁹ In spite of these efforts, the old ways hung on.

As one of the Sillery faithful put it, "there appear only too many among us who grow deaf and blind. They close their ears to the instructions which are given them. They put a vail before their eyes for fear of seeing what prayer and the faith command them."⁶⁰ Christianity in Sillery was always a minority belief rejected by most Indians as a strange, complicated, and potentially dangerous ideology.

The Jesuits attempted to create in Sillery a harmonious Christian community. What resulted instead was a Montagnais people sharply divided into two ideological factions. Jesuit reports about Sillery always contained references to the fundamental division between "our Christians" and the "pagans."⁶¹ Christian piety and European values were enforced by prison sentences and public beatings. The Jesuits and their converts demanded what was unthinkable to most Native Americans—that they cease being Indians. In the Indian mind, to become a Christian was to lose one's identity as a Montagnais. As one Traditionalist put it to a Christian, "go then thou Frenchman, that is right, go away into thine own country. Embark in the ships, since thou art a Frenchman. Cross the sea and go to thine own land."⁶² The missionaries never seemed to understand that most Montagnais were unwilling to give up their own traditions and beliefs, no matter what the promised rewards. The Sillery experiment failed not simply because of war, disease, and lack of funds but because it demanded cultural suicide.

NOTES

1. Stephen Neill, *Christian Missions* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1965). Francis Parkman, *The Jesuits in North America* (Boston, 1867). One indication of the serious nature of this historiographical problem is that Neill cites Parkman in his bibliography as the best source for the study of the Jesuit mission in New France and of New France history in general.

2. William V. Bangert, *A History of the Society of Jesus* (St. Louis, 1972), p. 265. This interpretation is also offered by Christopher Hollis, *The Jesuits: A History* (New York, 1968), p. 85.

3. Herbert Eugene Bolton, "The Mission as a Frontier Institution in the Spanish American Colonies," *American Historical Review*, 23 (1917), pp. 42-61.

4. There are few guides for the historian in undertaking the development of such an approach. Certainly one of the best places to begin is with Edward H. Spicer, *Cycles of Conquest: The Impact of Spain, Mexico, and the United States on the Indians of the Southwest, 1553-1960* (Tucson, 1962). Spicer's book is a

model of what can be done with the blending of history and anthropology. The blending of those two disciplines into ethnohistory is discussed and illustrated by James Axtell, "The Ethnohistory of Early America: A Review Essay," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 35 (1978), pp. 110-144. Mission historiography is traced in James P. Ronda and James Axtell, *Indian Migrations: A Critical Bibliography* (Bloomington, 1978).

5. Paul Le Jeune, Relation for the Year 1634, Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610-1791*, 73 vols. (Cleveland, 1898-1901), v. 6, pp. 177-181. Hereafter cited as JR. Le Jeune's letter to his Provincial, 1634, JR., v. 6, pp. 57-65 is valuable for showing changes in Le Jeune's thought.

Note: Some of the Thwaites translators did a less than thorough job with the *Relations*. For that reason, all the translations have been checked with Joseph P. Donnelly, *Thwaites Jesuit Relations: Errata and Addenda* (Chicago, 1967).

6. Le Jeune, Relation for the Year 1634, JR., v. 6, pp. 145-155. This idea was by no means unique with Le Jeune. The reduction-congregation system was widely used in the Americas and elsewhere. For good analyses of this approach, see Robert Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico: An Essay on the Apostolate and the Evangelizing Methods of the Mendicant Orders in New Spain, 1523-1572* (Berkeley, 1933); J. E. Groh, "Antonio Ruiz de Montoya and the Early Reductions in the Jesuit Province of Paraguay," *Catholic Historical Review*, 56 (1970), pp. 501-533; James P. Ronda, "The European Indian: Jesuit Civilization Planning in New France," *Church History*, 41 (1972), pp. 385-395.

7. Le Jeune, Relation for the Year 1635, JR., v. 8, pp. 57-59; Marcel Trudel, *The Beginnings of New France 1524-1663* (Toronto, 1973), p. 185.

8. Le Jeune, Relation for the Year 1637, JR., v. 12, pp. 161-167.

9. For a biographical note on Sillery, see JR., v. 14, p. 286.

10. Trudel, *Beginnings of New France*, pp. 232-233.

11. Introduction to the Register of Baptisms at St. Joseph de Sillery, 1638-1640, JR., v. 20, p. 309.

12. Le Jeune, Relation for the Year 1638, JR., v. 14, p. 205.

13. Le Jeune, Relation for the Year 1638, JR., v. 14, pp. 207-213.

14. Le Jeune, Relation for the Year 1638, JR., v. 14, p. 213.

15. Le Jeune, Relation for the Year 1638, JR., v. 14, p. 217.

16. Le Jeune, Relation for the Year 1639, JR., v. 16, p. 33.

17. Le Jeune, Relation for the Year 1639, JR., v. 16, p. 75.

18. Le Jeune, Relation for the Year 1639, JR., v. 16, pp. 101-103. Le Jeune was deeply convinced that the massive epidemic of 1639 was part of God's plan to test the faith of the Canadian church. Le Jeune believed that Christianity needed adversity to flourish and that, in the absence of anti-Christian tyrants to persecute the new Christians, God provided the necessary test in the form of disease. This view of epidemic as test was common among missionaries in the Americas. See John Leddy Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World*, 2nd edn., (Berkeley, 1970) chapter 10.

19. Le Jeune, Relation for the Year 1640, JR., v. 18, pp. 95-107.

20. Le Jeune, Relation for the Year 1640, JR., v. 18, p. 109. There is some evidence that French settlers donated their labor in the Sillery fields. Corn was probably the crop planted.

21. Le Jeune, Relation for the Year 1640, JR., v. 18, pp. 143-155.

22. Le Jeune, Relation for the Years 1640-41, JR., v. 20, p. 241.

23. Barthelemy Vimont, Relation for the Years 1642-43, *JR.*, v. 23, pp. 303-307.
24. Vimont, Relation for the Years 1642-43, *JR.*, v. 23, pp. 317-319.
25. W. J. Eccles, *The Canadian Frontier 1534-1760* (New York, 1969), pp. 53-56; Bruce G. Trigger, *The Huron, Farmers of the North* (New York, 1969), pp. 1-3.
26. Vimont, Relation for the Years 1643-44, *JR.*, v. 25, p. 113.
27. Vimont, Relation for the Years 1643-44, *JR.*, v. 25, pp. 107-109, 193.
28. Journal of the Jesuit Fathers, December, 1646, *JR.*, v. 27, p. 121.
29. Journal of the Jesuit Fathers, April, 1646, *JR.*, v. 28, p. 183.
30. Journal of the Jesuit Fathers, April, 1646, *JR.*, v. 28, p. 185.
31. Journal of the Jesuit Fathers, April, 1646, *JR.*, v. 28, p. 247.
32. Jerome Lalemant, Relation for the Years 1645-46, *JR.*, v. 29, p. 75.
33. Lalemant, Relation for the Year 1647, *JR.*, v. 31, p. 139.
34. Paul Ragueneau, Relation for the Years 1649-50, *JR.*, v. 35, p. 217.
35. Journal of the Jesuit Fathers, 1649, *JR.*, v. 34, p. 63.
36. Anon., The Death of Brother Liegeois, *JR.*, v. 42, pp. 263-265.
37. Journal of the Jesuit Fathers, June, 1657, *JR.*, v. 43, pp. 49-51.
38. Declaration of the Lands which the Jesuit Fathers possess in the Country of New France, 1663, *JR.*, v. 47, p. 263. This document reveals that the stone fort begun in the 1650s had been completed by 1663 and that two Jesuit priests and their domestics were living inside. The report also notes that Indians claimed only 7 arpents of Sillery land out of the original 10,584 arpents.
39. Le Jeune, Relation for the Year 1637, *JR.*, v. 12, p. 169.
40. Le Jeune, Relation for the Year 1640, *JR.*, v. 18, p. 95.
41. Le Jeune, Relation for the Year 1640, *JR.*, v. 18, p. 97.
42. Le Jeune, Relation for the Year 1640, *JR.*, v. 18, pp. 95-105. There is no evidence that additional elections were ever held. My analysis of the impact of change on social groups owes much to Robert A. Nisbet, *The Social Bond* (New York, 1970), chapter 14. I have found Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., "Protestants, Pagans, and Sequences among the North American Indians, 1760-1860," *Ethnohistory*, 10 (1963), pp. 201-216 to be helpful in defining the various groups or factions produced by missionary activity in Native American societies. My analysis of post-contact Montagnais factionalism does not imply that Montagnais life was free of factions before contact but only that the post-contact factions were new and unique in their ideological content. The surviving records do not allow speculation on pre-contact factions.
43. Le Jeune, Relation for the Year 1640, *JR.*, v. 18, p. 107.
44. Le Jeune, Relation for the Year 1640, *JR.*, v. 18, pp. 105-107.
45. Le Jeune, Relation for the Year 1640, *JR.*, v. 18, pp. 155-157.
46. Le Jeune, Relation for the Year 1640, *JR.*, v. 18, pp. 173-175.
47. Le Jeune, Relation for the Year 1640, *JR.*, v. 18, p. 163.
48. Le Jeune, Relation for the Years 1640-41, *JR.*, v. 20, pp. 143-155.
49. Vimont, Relation for the Year 1642, *JR.*, v. 22, pp. 81-85.
50. Vimont, Relation for the Years 1642-43, *JR.*, v. 24, pp. 47-49.
51. Vimont, Relation for the Year 1642, *JR.*, v. 22, pp. 117-127; Lalemant, Relation for the Years 1645-46, *JR.*, v. 29, p. 81.
52. Vimont, Relation for the Years 1642-43, *JR.*, v. 23, p. 303.
53. Le Jeune, Relation for the Year 1640, *JR.*, v. 18, p. 179.
54. Lalemant, Relation for the Years 1645-46, *JR.*, v. 29, p. 75.

55. The useful literature dealing with the religious consequences of culture contact is not as large as it should be. I have found considerable help in R. C. Padden, *The Humming Bird and the Hawk: Conquest and Sovereignty in the Valley of Mexico, 1503-1541* (Columbus, 1967), chapter 13; John Leddy Phelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines: Spanish Aims and Filipino Responses, 1565-1700* (Madison, 1959), chapter 6; Arnold H. Rowbotham, *Missionary and Mandarin: The Jesuits at the Court of China* (Berkeley, 1942), pp. 292-293; Spicer, *Cycles of Conquest*, chapter 17; Bruce G. Trigger, "The Destruction of Huronia: A Study in Economic and Cultural Change, 1609-1650," *Transactions of the Royal Canadian Institute*, 33 (1960), pp. 14-45; Trigger, *The Children of Aataentsic A History of the Huron People to 1660*, 2 vols. (Montreal, 1976), chapter 10.

56. Le Jeune, Relation for the Year 1640, *JR.*, v. 18, p. 203.

57. Vimont, Relation for the Year 1642, *JR.*, v. 22, p. 51.

58. Le Jeune, Relation for the Years 1640-41, *JR.*, v. 20, pp. 157-159; Vimont, Relation for the Years 1642-43, *JR.*, v. 24, pp. 25-27; Vimont, Relation for the Years 1643-44, *JR.*, v. 25, pp. 137-139, 149-151.

59. Vimont, Relation for the Year 1642, *JR.*, v. 22, p. 73.

60. Lalemant, Relation for the Year 1647, *JR.*, v. 31, p. 141.

61. For examples, see Le Jeune, Relation for the Years 1640-41, *JR.*, v. 20, pp. 157-159; Vimont, Relation for the Year 1642, *JR.*, v. 22, pp. 43-45; Vimont, Relation for the Years 1643-44, *JR.*, v. 25, pp. 135-137; 145-147, 157.

62. Le Jeune, Relation for the Years 1640-41, *JR.*, v. 21, pp. 77-79.