

THE DOMINICAN ORDER IN CANADA

The history of the Dominican Order in Canada reveals to us, on the part of the Canadian ecclesiastics and laity, a zeal, devotion, and patient spirit which appear truly supernatural. It seems a well-established fact that few great projects, undertaken with God's benediction, are ever brought to a successful issue without undergoing some severe trials and disappointments. And the founding of the Dominican Order in Canada was no exception to this unwritten law.

The Dominicans probably owe the first idea of their foundation in Canada to Mgr. Sabin Raymond, Vicar General to Mgr. Prince, the first Bishop of St. Hyacinthe, Province of Quebec. Mgr. Raymond had become interested in the Order of Preachers through Père Lacordaire, with whom he had become acquainted in Europe. After many conferences with that celebrated Dominican, the Monsignor imbibed a love and esteem of his Order that was never to diminish during his long career. And these sentiments were, on his return, immediately adopted by the Monsignor's superior.

In 1855 the Bishop wrote to Père Jandel, then General of the Dominicans, concerning his ardent desire to bring the Friars Preachers to his diocese, and expressed the hope that, sooner or later, St. Dominic would send some of his children to assist his son, St. Hyacinth, in saving souls there. The plans he had then formed he never changed. He would offer the Dominicans the Notre Dame parish, with a church and large presbytery. At the same time, he counted upon them to give missions and retreats, besides doing other necessary work in his diocese.

As at that time there were in Canada certain Methodist and Biblist sects, originally from Switzerland, who were endeavoring to shake the strong, lively faith of the Canadian Catholics, it struck the Bishop that he could do no better than to call upon the sons of St. Dominic to overcome these modern Albigenses. He also desired to entrust to the Preaching Friars all his diocesan schools, to be taught either by the Brothers of the Order or by the teaching Third Order.

Then began a correspondence between the Master General and the Bishop of St. Hyacinthe, in which the latter, undaunted

by the repeated refusals of Père Jandel, besought him untiringly to grant him a foundation. This wonderful affection for the Order shown by Mgr. Prince ought to render his memory forever blessed and imperishable in the hearts of all Dominicans.

After postponing the Canadian foundation for eighteen months because of circumstances over which he had no control, Père Jandel felt himself obliged to forego the whole project for an indefinite period. This decision was indeed painful to the good Bishop, but he recognized in it the expression of the Divine Will. He felt that he could not well open negotiations with other Orders as all knew of his preference for the Dominicans. About that time he wrote: "I have told you that it is the children of St. Dominic, the brothers of St. Hyacinth, whom I have always desired for my diocese, who appear to me to be singularly called there by the will of God. If really you cannot come this year, I will wait another; then, if you still delay, I will complain of it to Heaven and Earth. I will even carry my desires to the feet of the Vicar of Christ. So, you see, Reverend Father, I do not renounce the contract."

After three years had passed, Mgr. Prince believed that his hopes would be realized. He had written Père Lacordaire, who was then Provincial of France, telling him of the arrangements for transporting the Fathers who were to come to Canada. But the great Dominican, in his turn, was forced to apologize for not being able to send even one Father to the Diocese of St. Hyacinthe. It seemed that the zealous Bishop did not wish to leave this world without doing everything in his power to obtain some religious for his diocese. Several months before his death he besought Père Jandel to send at least a Visitor, who could judge of all the circumstances. Finally, on his death-bed, it is said that he kept repeating: "Yes, we shall have a community of Dominicans, and I offer my life to God that He may grant us that grace."

He was succeeded by Mgr. Joseph Laroque, who through a most intimate and tender friendship with Mgr. Raymond entertained and manifested the same sincere affection towards the Order of St. Dominic. He had been received as a Tertiary by the venerable Monsignor. Indeed, however many changes there may be in the see of St. Hyacinthe, the same good will, protection and fidelity will always continue with respect to the children of St. Dominic.

Although the new Bishop repeated the requests of his predecessor, unsurmountable obstacles arose and hindered the carrying out of Père Jandel's good intentions. In 1860 those on whom he depended fell ill, while in the next year the council of the Fathers at Lyons voted unanimously against the project of accepting parishes. Negotiations were then suspended until 1873, when Mgr. Charles Larocque, who had taken possession of the see after the resignation of his cousin, saw the ardent hopes and desires of twenty long years fully realized.

It was Père Chocarne, the author of the "Inner Life of Lacordaire," to whom God had reserved the pleasure of finally responding to those ceaseless petitions of the Bishops of St. Hyacinthe. During his many apostolic journeys to America, he had visited Canada at least three times, and had been deeply touched by the hope that the clergy and faithful of St. Hyacinthe had never ceased to entertain of eventually possessing the children of St. Dominic—a hope which two decades of delay had not been able to shake or discourage. Having been made Provincial of France, he accepted, in 1873, with the permission of the Vicar General—Père Jandel having died Dec. 2, 1872—the parish of Our Lady of the Rosary, St. Hyacinthe. On the arrival of the Friars Preachers, Mgr. Larocque did not hesitate to say that their establishment in his diocese was one of the most important acts of his reign.

The first religious assigned to the Canadian foundation were received with cordial generosity and great enthusiasm. Their installation in the Church of Our Lady of the Rosary—the same parish which Mgr. Prince had offered them in 1855—took place October 5, 1873. A reception was tendered them after which the Fathers inaugurated their ministry by a triduum of preaching and prayer which was followed with marvellous fervor by the whole parish.

The priests, religious and the faithful of St. Hyacinthe rivalled each other in their efforts to make things comfortable for the new apostles. Religious communities furnished abundant alms, and for a while food was sent gratuitously to the Fathers. Their chapel was artistically decorated and the sacristy filled with rich and beautiful vestments. Meanwhile, demands for preachers came in from all sides, and within eighteen months the Fathers had preached in all the religious institutions and more than twenty-five parishes in the Diocese of Quebec. Montreal, Three

Rivers and Rimouski had, in turn, called them to their largest churches and cathedrals. Bishops entrusted them with pastoral retreats. Surely those Fathers could have said that the only cause for anxiety they had in their first days in Canada was that they were unable to respond to all the calls made upon them.

The means of meeting this difficulty had been long foreseen. In fact, one of the main reasons why Mgr. Prince in 1857 was so insistent in his request for Dominicans was that he feared the loss of prospective vocations. On the other hand, this was one of the conditions laid down by the Chapter and Council of the French Province when the invitation to establish the Fathers in Canada was accepted. Having been invited to Louisiana at the same time, they chose Canada because with its French population they believed it would furnish more vocations. It was some years before this most necessary part of the establishment was realized, but in the meantime, several young men from Canada gained admission to the novitiate at Abbeville.

In 1877 Father Mathieu was sent to St. Hyacinthe to open a novitiate and act as novice master. Owing, however, to many unforeseen obstacles, work on the novitiate was not started until 1884. By this time the presbytery of Our Lady of the Rosary had been erected into a canonical convent, and the old one becoming too small, a larger edifice was built. On December 8, 1886, four postulants were vested in the white habit, the ceremony being attended by many Canadian ecclesiastics, including Mgr. Raymond. Père Fortier was the first master of novices in Canada. Many young men entered the Order, all the seminaries and colleges furnishing subjects. In 1889 the course in philosophy, preliminary to the study of the Summa of St. Thomas, commenced at St. Hyacinthe. As the number of novices increased each year, the need of a college teaching complete courses in sacred sciences became evident.

This project began to materialize in 1894, when Mgr. Duhamel, first Bishop of Ottawa, offered the Dominicans the parish of St. John the Baptist on the condition that they establish there a House of Studies. They accepted, and six years later one wing of the proposed structure rose on the heights of Primrose Hill. This was opened with appropriate services on November 8-9, 1900. Two years later the philosophers left St. Hyacinthe to complete their course at Ottawa. This House of Studies was elevated to the dignity of a formal college by Father Cormier

on June 2, 1909, and now enjoys all the privileges determined in the Dominican Constitutions.

Meanwhile, owing to the renewed persecutions in France, the French Provincial was forced to look for a place of refuge for his religious. For this purpose a Father was sent to the United States. He was unsuccessful in his attempts to gain admission for his Order in the Archdiocese of Boston, but obtained a hearing in Lewiston, Maine. Many French Canadians had settled there, and in ten years the little flock numbered 2000 souls. Having united them into one parish, Bishop Heavy received Father Mathieu as a messenger from God to his little French flock. On October 2, 1886, some Fathers from St. Hyacinthe took possession of the church, presbytery and parish confided to their care forever by the Bishop. Hardly had they arrived in Lewiston when they started work on a school which soon afterwards was able to accommodate over seven hundred children. This school is now in charge of the Dominican Sisters of Nancy. In 1889 the Grey Nuns, abandoning teaching, opened **in the parish a beautiful hospital and three years later took charge of the Heavy Orphanage.** As, owing to the increasing number of parishioners, a new church was needed, on May 24, 1908, a basement chapel was blessed, the the only objection to which seems to be that it delays the completion of the Temple, which is to be of purest Gothic type.

In the year 1889 the Fathers were called by Bishop Harkins to take charge of the parish of St. Ann, Fall River, Mass. After accepting the parish in the next year, as in Lewiston, they immediately began work on a school for children which was blessed on May 3, 1891. Today it educates over 1700 children, under the direction of the Christian Brothers and the Dominican Sisters. Later, in 1906, the Dominican Sisters of the Presentation of Tours opened there a large hospital. In Fall River, as in their first foundation, the church became too small to accommodate the people who attended it, so work on a new edifice was begun. July 4, 1907, saw the opening of one of the most beautiful churches in New England. The convent attached to St. Ann's, originally a vicariate, became the third formal convent of the Canadian Fathers in 1910, having now a prior and fifteen ministering religious.

Fifteen years after their establishment in Canada, the Fathers, at the request of the Archbishop of Montreal, accepted

the Church of Our Lady of Grace in that diocese. In five more years was founded a convent of the sons of St. Dominic in the city of Quebec. In these two places, as in all the others, the Dominicans were heartily welcomed, and there, also, they labored in the vineyard of the Lord with the same zeal that has ever characterized the sons of the saintly Dominic.

It was the ardent desire of the Fathers to erect, as soon as their numbers warranted it, a distinct Canadian Province. In 1908, Father Cormier, Master General, unable to make it a Province properly so-called, organized the six houses into a Congregation, governed by a Vicar. However, after three more years, the Fathers saw their fondest hopes realized when the small Congregation was transformed into the Province of St. Dominic of Canada. Father Cormier thanked God that he had been permitted to see the Dominican plant, transplanted only thirty-five years before, become a living, self-sustaining tree, promising abundant fruit in the future.

Some might wonder why the Dominicans were so late in coming to Canada. Were they not attracted to the kind of work which the early Canadian missions demanded? Indeed, such work has always been held in honor by the Order of Dominic. At the beginning of the seventeenth century it might be said of them, that the sun never set on the white robes of the Friars Preachers. Did not their holy Father on his death-bed bid them go forth to teach all nations? This they did faithfully, and many of them sealed their labors with their blood. The greater part of these missionaries were Spanish, but the French also sent men to Guinea, Africa and the Antilles. In bringing the Dominicans to Canada God willed to wait for the time when the circumstances of the Canadian Church and people demanded them as the strongest safeguard against the diffusion of impious science. It also pleased Him to choose a time when the spirit of St. Dominic was flourishing in the Order, due to the powerful influence of Père Lacordaire and Père Jandel.

The Dominican must be and is a preacher. His vocation demands that he be familiar with every kind of preaching. Thus, the high confidence of the bishops and curés of Canada has called and still calls them to give their pastoral retreats, Lenten and Advent sermons, their convent and college retreats, and missions to all classes of Catholic Canadians. It is true that they have departed somewhat from the traditions of the Order in accepting

parishes, but that is a necessity of the times, having, indeed, its inconveniences, but also many advantages. Restricted to proper limits and directed by grave and competent superiors, it gives the young Friars, especially, a wonderful opportunity for completing and perfecting their religious characters. Constant contact with the faithful furnishes them with an experience which much reading and study could never give.

Scarcely forty years in existence, the young Canadian Province is still in the age of "fervent desires." What has Providence in store for it? Will it be accorded that glory which so many other Provinces have achieved during the last seven centuries—furnishing many saintly and learned Dominicans from the "many mansions" of the religious life? The accomplishments of the Dominican Fathers in Canada in their short term of existence surely gives reason for the thought and ardent desire that God will bestow upon them those particular favors.

—Bro. Reginald Hughes, O. P.

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CHRISTMAS BELLS

Ring, Christmas bells!
 Your music tells
 Of the song the angels sung
 In jubilant swells
 Of Him who dwells
 Still our little welcome Son.
 From dark to light
 All through the night
 To the lone stars you ring:—
 From heaven's height,
 Swathed in white
 Is the longed-for Infant King.
 Cease not your song
 The whole day long:
 The song your singing tells,
 Is war's surcease,
 To nations peace—
 Ring on, ring on, sweet Christmas bells!

—Bro. Gabriel Knauff, O. P.