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Seneca Iroquois, 1668-1709

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By

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THE JESUIT MISSION AMONG THE SENECA IROQUOIS, 1668-1709

BY HUGH J. BIHLER, S.J.*

The year 1656 was an important one for the history of the Church in the Rochester, New York, area. In late August or September the first missionary, Peter Chaumonot, S.J., then stationed at the Onondaga Mission, entered the Seneca country to bring consolation to captive Hurons, whose enclave among the Senecas lay near the present site of East Bloomfield. While it is possible that Father Chaumonot offered Mass on this occasion, he has left only an account of the effect of his sermons on the pagan Senecas.¹

His preaching on the Ten Commandments left the Senecas ready to accept all except the prohibition of divorce and polygamy. An old sachem pleaded that without polygamy it would be impossible to people the land. The missionary countered with the observation that France was a much more populous area than the Seneca country and yet allowed neither divorce nor polygamy. If the Senecas abandoned the practice of leaving their wives, when they became pregnant, the squaws would soon lose their fear of conception, and the birth rate would rise. The men were silenced by this argument; the women applauded and offered a feast in gratitude. Shortly thereafter Father Chaumonot departed, but it is probable that he returned at other times until the temporary abandonment of the Onondaga Mission in 1658.²

During his second sojourn at Onondaga from 1661 to 1662, Father Simon LeMoynes visited the Cayuga settlements for a month, and it is quite possible, although he has left no account of it, that he went to the Seneca country as well. On July 31, 1663, he left Quebec for a visit to the Senecas to negotiate peace between them and the French and to reconnoiter the field for

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¹ *La Vie du R. P. Pierre Jos-Marie Chaumonot, de la Compagnie de Jesu: écrite par lui-même par ordre de son Supérieur l'ann. 1688* (New York, 1858), pp. 70-77.

² Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents* (72 vols., Cleveland, 1896-1901), 47:103.

missionary activity. Since he returned to Quebec only in late April of the following year, he had ample opportunity to minister to the Huron captives. Again it is probable that he celebrated Mass for the Hurons, as he had daily during his Onondaga sojourn two years previously.³ Upon his return to Quebec, Father LeMoynes had high hopes for peace and the opening of the mission in the Seneca country. But an accident was to delay the former; and other events prevented the establishment of the mission until 1668.

The Seneca homeland, when visited by Jesuit missionaries, lay between the eastern drainage lands of the Genesee River and the highlands between Lakes Seneca and Cayuga. To the east were the Cayugas. West of the Genesee lay the Wenro country.⁴ The southern boundary of the canton ran along the headwaters of the Lesser Finger Lakes, and beyond this the Senecas dared not settle until they had finally defeated their enemies the Susquehannas.

The Senecas had been advancing northward for some 150 years, and their historic village sites are known.⁵ A large eastern town stood on Boughton Hill, and here the Jesuits located their Mission of St. James. At the great western town, on a terrace above a bend in Rush Creek, now Rochester Junction, the mission bore the title of La Conception. A third village, inhabited by captive Hurons, neutrals, and other defeated peoples and under the patronage of St. Michael, lay at East Bloomfield. St. John's Mission was located at a smaller western town called Gandachiragon, now Lima. There may have been another village, Keiathe-Gannondata, slightly north of Gandachiragon, but after the devastation of their towns by General Denonville in 1687, the Senecas no longer permanently occupied these village sites. Some of them gradually moved toward the Niagara and beyond.⁶

On November 1, 1668, Father James Frémin, S.J., moved into this vast missionary territory.⁷ His first consolation in a sea of

³ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁴ William N. Fenton, "Problems Arising from the North-eastern Position of the Iroquois," *Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections*, No. 100 (Washington, D. C., 1940), pp. 186-188, 201.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 189, 203, 226-231.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 241-242.

⁷ Frémin was born at Rheims, France, in 1628. In 1646 he became a Jesuit and ten years later came to Canada, where he labored first among

paganism was the fervor of some of the Huron captives, among whom he found forty fervent Christians and at least two exemplary catechists.⁸ It is not surprising, therefore, that the Hurons built him a chapel in the following year. But the Seneca pattern of life constituted a real challenge: each year at the beginning of September one-half of the younger braves set out on the war path; the other four or five hundred, with their families, departed for the beaver hunt. These occupations engaged them for nine months of the year. Moreover, for one month before the September exodus, owing to drunken orgies, the Indians were practically deaf to instruction. It was some consolation, however, that only the young men were given to "blood and brandy"; the women and older men had not yet fallen victims to drink.⁹

Almost upon his arrival Father Frémin found himself ministering to a sick community: a plague was ravaging not only the Senecas but even more distant peoples, with such dire effect that one priest alone could not cope with the task of visiting the cabins to seek out the sick and dying. Frémin therefore summoned Father Julian Garnier from the Onondaga Mission. At the latter's arrival the plague had abated, but not before having claimed a toll of 150 among those who were out hunting and fishing. How many succumbed at home, Frémin does not record.¹⁰ Within the space of four months he baptized 60 persons and later, probably within the next half-year, between 20 and 25, with another dozen converts in prospect. He noted a number of extraordinary conversions and the consolation of preparing for torture and death the victims of Seneca warfare.¹¹ But one great obstacle to conversion persisted: dream superstition. No matter how bizarre or criminal the consequence might be, the Indians believed that every dream had to be implemented. While some of the sequels were ludicrous others might well have terminated in the death of the

the Algonquians. In 1667 he founded the Mission of the Mohawks. The following year, now superior of all Iroquois missions, he founded the Seneca Mission. In 1671 he became superior of the Iroquois Mission of St. Francis Xavier at Caughnawaga, near Montreal. He died at Quebec in 1692 with the reputation of a saint.

⁸ *Relations*, 54:79-93.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 79-81.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 105-107.

missionary, who had to regard himself as a victim who might be tortured at a moment's notice.¹²

With the establishment of the Seneca Mission all the Iroquois cantons were now supplied with missionaries. The latter had encountered similar problems, and it was now time to outline some common strategy. Consequently, Father Frémin summoned the first clerical conference to meet, owing to its central location, at the Onondaga Mission. On August 26, 1669, the priests convened. For the next six days they planned measures to be taken and debated how they could cope with the obstacles that were checking their efforts to establish the faith in the land of the Iroquois.¹³

On the return journey to the Seneca Mission, Frémin had as companion Father Julian Garnier,¹⁴ who was to be identified with this mission longer than any other priest. Almost at the start his missionary career was perilous: at the future St. James Mission a drunken Indian tried to assassinate him. Only the quick intervention of Frémin and an Indian woman averted the tragedy. For long months Frémin bore the marks of the wounds received in shielding his young confrere, although in his own account of the ordeal he mentioned only his admiration for the courage of Father Garnier, who never flinched or paled during the ordeal.¹⁵ For nearly two years the missionaries labored together, with Father Garnier conducting a new mission in the small western village of Gandachiragon, later the Mission of St. John. Here he perfected himself in the Seneca tongue in order to write a dictionary and grammar for the benefit of future missionaries. Although only three or four fervent Christians greeted him at his arrival, he soon had twenty converts. Nevertheless, he learned that the portion of the apostolic missionary is suffering and a total

¹² *Ibid.*, 95-103.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 109-113.

¹⁴ Garnier was born at St. Brieuc, Brittany, in 1643. Entering the Society at the age of 17, he made his studies in Canada, where he was the first Jesuit to be ordained. In 1668 he became attached to the Oneida Mission, later to the Onondaga; and in 1669 he became identified with the Seneca Mission until its close in 1684. In 1702 he returned to reopen the Seneca Mission. After its definitive closing he labored at Caughnawaga. At his death, Jan. 31, 1730, he had been a priest over 63 years.

¹⁵ *Relations*, 54:117.

surrender of self to God's Providence, a life that may be called a continual death.¹⁶

In 1671 Frémin left the Seneca Mission for a new assignment at Caughnawaga, and Garnier labored alone for a year or more, during which he is credited with one hundred baptisms. Meanwhile a great trial came to the Hurons at St. Michael's when fire destroyed their settlement and chapel. They regarded the calamity as punishment for infidelity: many were being deterred from baptism by the compulsive dream superstition. Daily the priest made the rounds of the cabins to instruct and to watch that no one died without baptism.¹⁷ When Father Frémin had reported occasional bouts of drunkenness he had been careful to note that only the young men were addicted to "blood and brandy." Now even women indulged; and the debauches lasted from twelve to fifteen days after the arrival of the liquor caravans. During this time not a fire was lighted, not a meal cooked in the cabins. Those who abstained had to flee to the woods to save their lives or to escape molestation.¹⁸

After three years on the Seneca Mission, Garnier noted a decided change in attitude. Upon his arrival at St. John's the chiefs had assured him that they wished to embrace Christianity and had influenced the rank and file to attend instructions. Now the people absented themselves, railed against Christianity, and called the missionaries spies. When the latter approached their cabins, the people appeared indifferent or even hostile. They believed that a French army was about to invade the land, and Garnier observed: "The spiritual interests of these missions depend largely upon temporal affairs and above all upon men's attitude towards peace with the French."¹⁹ Yet there were still other obstacles to conversion. Garnier gives a rather comprehensive litany of them:

Liberty, which they cherish more than life; pride, which is natural to them, as well as inconstancy in their resolutions; the impurity wherein they have been reared; their extreme attachment to their dreams and superstitious customs; their diversions and their ordinary pursuits of the chase and war,

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 55:91-93.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 56:91.

which render them far from settled and keep them most of the time in the woods and on the warpath; furthermore, the demon of intemperance which has possessed them for years—these are certainly hindrances to the permanent establishment of religion among them. After all, it must be remembered that these people are strongly opposed to the Faith and that a savage's conversion is a stroke of Heaven.²⁰

Father Garnier, however, did not intend to indict all the Senecas:

I have observed that it is not so much depravity of morals that prevents our savages from becoming Christians as the prejudices they have about Christianity. I know nearly two hundred families among them, who maintain inviolate the marriage bond and rear their children in morality, who keep their daughters from undue freedom of intercourse abroad, and from plunging into riots of sensuality, and who would be inclined to live Christian lives, if they had the faith.²¹

Writing of the Iroquois Missions in the Relations for 1670-71, Father Dablon believed that there had been real progress. The missionaries were esteemed and trusted. And while some Indians lacked the courage to embrace the faith in time of health, they were concerned not to be deprived of baptism when they fell ill. Despite the difficulties to which Garnier alluded, even if they existed at the time Dablon wrote, the latter could confidently assert that in all the cantons of the Iroquois there was not a family which had not been adequately instructed in the principal mysteries of the faith.²²

At the end of July 1672 Father Peter Raffeix joined Garnier on the Seneca Mission.²³ He assumed the care of the western towns with headquarters at Totiakton,²⁴ the Mission of La Conception, while Father Garnier confined himself to the eastern missions of St. Michael and St. James. Garnier begged superiors in Quebec

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 55:91.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 56:69.

²² *Ibid.*, 55:91.

²³ Raffeix was born in 1633 at Clermont, in Auvergne. He arrived in Canada in 1663 and served as chaplain on the two French punitive expeditions against the Mohawks in 1666 and 1667. Most of his sixty years in Canada were spent as treasurer of the Quebec college and the missions; but he had several stints of missionary work: one year at Cayuga and eight on the Seneca Mission. He was an accomplished cartographer. He died at Quebec in 1724.

²⁴ About 12 miles south of Rochester, at Rochester Junction.

for a resident missionary at St. James' Mission: the pagans there could not be instructed satisfactorily without another priest; some of them died without baptism; and the Senecas there complained that Garnier spent more time with the Hurons at the nearby mission of St. Michael than he did with them. The population at St. James was double that of St. Michael's, and, if there were a chapel and resident missionary, the priest would be relieved of the excessive burden of visiting the individual cabins for instruction.²⁵

Father Garnier reported flourishing conditions in 1672-73. The priests were now granted a hearing, and the Hurons showed marked steadfastness in the faith. One account noted a total of 60 baptisms for Garnier: 43 children and 12 adults. Raffeix administered the sacrament to 38.²⁶ The fact that most of those baptized died pointed up a serious problem: since so many baptisms were deferred until illness or death, the Indians began to regard the sacrament as assurance of death. Naturally they shrank from it, much to the concern of the missionaries.²⁷ Yet, according to Father Raffeix, a greater obstacle existed: public morality was at a low ebb among the Senecas. Many of them possessed a very good character and, he believed, the majority of them were much less subject to their passions than were Europeans. But with the corruption that surrounded them, they allowed themselves to be engulfed and swayed by evil example and while he entertained great hope for the future, he had to admit that they were still too weak to resist human respect. Some were ashamed to be considered Christians.²⁸ It is easy, consequently, to understand why Raffeix could report only ten baptisms for his second year on the mission and why it was that some Indians contemplated moving to Caughnawaga, where they could practice their faith in a truly Christian milieu. At St. Michael's, among the Hurons, Father Garnier proudly reported in 1673-74 that his Christians had preserved themselves from the scourge of drunkenness. Yet persistent addiction to dream superstition and the mummery of magical cures kept many pagan Hurons from baptism. The majority

²⁵ *Relations*, 57:193-195.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 199.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 56:59-61.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 58:237-239.

of them now requested baptism but had to be refused until they satisfied the missionary that they would resist these superstitions. They were, however, solicitous not to die without baptism. Indeed, one influential and intelligent man eloquently counseled his relatives when they fell ill to receive baptism, although he himself had not asked for it, alleging his unworthiness. Normal instruction routine and alert search for the sick and dying consumed most of the missionary's energy. He regretted that he could not devote more time to the poor captives before their agonizing ordeals; their misery and abandonment induced them to listen so eagerly to the faith.²⁹

The Relation for 1675, which chronicles events of the previous year, speaks of wars and rumors of wars in the Seneca country. The Senecas had worsted the Susquehannas, their enemies of long standing to the south. The resulting victory, however, so inflated them with insolence that they now planned wars against the Indian allies of the French and openly talked of attacking the French themselves. They even deputed an assassin to deal with Father Garnier; and the priest again narrowly escaped the danger, as he had two years previously. At that time, since it was Garnier's custom to pass the late hours of the night in his chapel in prayer, the Indians, noting that he did not retire when they did, concluded that he was a sorcerer. Did not their own sorcerers employ these very hours to concoct their evil portions and nefarious designs? Yet the missionary was not intimidated:

Therein, my Reverend Father, I am happy; and therein do I recognize the blessedness of my mission, which forces me to regard each moment as the last of my life, and to labor joyfully in this condition for the salvation of these poor souls. The sending of a single child to Heaven by holy baptism is enough to change all this bitterness into sweetness.³⁰

And reporting on the work of the Seneca missionaries, Father Dablon wrote:

All these insolent acts do not prevent the Fathers from performing their duties with heads erect; or from teaching in the cabins and in their chapels, wherein they have baptized

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 229-235.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 56:61-62.

over one hundred within a year, half of whom died after baptism.³¹

The story for 1676 echoes conditions of the previous year. Dablon reported that the missionaries had more to contend with on the Seneca and Cayuga Missions than elsewhere. Arrogance and insolence abounded to such an extent that death seemed imminent: the Indians pursued the missionaries with hatchets in their hands, ran after them with stones, overturned their chapels and cabins and, in a thousand ways, subjected them to infamous treatment.³² But the Fathers were prepared for suffering, realizing that only through persecutions and suffering could the Faith be planted.³³ Unrelentingly, in the following year, the unbloody martyrdom continued; as did the heroic labors of the missionaries. Father Garnier is credited with 55 baptisms. At St. James' Mission, Father Pierron, the first resident missionary, had 90 baptisms.³⁴ In the following year, 1678, when Father Pierron departed, Father Garnier and Father Raffeix baptized 212 Indians, of whom only 70 were children.³⁵ In 1679 insult and attack continued. But what especially distressed the missionaries was the increasing drunkenness:

One may witness for many days in succession an all-prevailing drunkenness in the villages; that means that the greater number of the men being drunk, behave like madmen, and run about everywhere through the streets and cabins, as if possessed. They commit at these times a thousand insolent actions; they fight, and actually tear each other with their teeth; you behold wounded, dead and children cast into the fire. And when the women take upon themselves to get drunk—as is often the case; for they even bring up their children in this vice, taking pleasure in leading through the

³¹ *Ibid.*, 59:251.

³² *Ibid.*, 60:173.

³³ *Ibid.*, 173-175.

³⁴ Pierron was born at Duns-sur-Meuse in 1631. From his earliest years in the Society, which he entered at 19, he aspired to the missions. The extraordinary success of the Abbé de Nobletz with religious paintings in his missionary and catechetical work in Brittany inspired young Pierron to use similar visual aids in his apostolate among the Mohawks, with great success. Despite a strong natural aversion to the Iroquois way of life, he asked to take a vow to remain on the Iroquois mission. He labored among the Senecas at St. James' from 1674 until 1678. Returning to France, he died at Domas in the Vosges in 1700.

³⁵ *Relations*, 61:21.

streets a young boy or girl, 10 or 11 years of age, completely drunk—when, I say, the women, as well as the men, take part in it, it can be imagined what confusion and disorder that produces.³⁶

When such reveling and orgies prevailed the Fathers prudently kept to their chapels. But the drunken savages pursued them even there.

Nevertheless, a number of fervent Christians, great chiefs among them, were to be found on all the Iroquois missions. The minds of these Christians had been weaned from their dream superstition and their pagan divinities and were thoroughly instructed in the mysteries of the Faith:

In fine, they [the missionaries] have brought things to such a condition that, in order to see Christianity thoroughly and finally established among the Iroquois, nothing more is needed than to eradicate their intemperate habits.³⁷

It can be truthfully said that it would be difficult, at the present time [1679], to find an Iroquois who is not imbued with a sufficient knowledge of our mysteries to be baptized whenever God shall be pleased to touch his heart and grant him the desire for it.³⁸

Writing on October 21, 1683, the Superior of the Missions of New France cast some further light on the state of the Seneca Mission, where Father Garnier was now laboring alone:

Hardly anyone died at Sonuontouan,³⁹ where Father Garnier is, without having previously received baptism, although they with those of Goioguen [Cayuga], are most averse to Christianity. He has baptized as many as 138 in one year, among whom are many adults. It is true that most of the children are baptized in secret only and that many rebuffs have to be endured before it is possible to approach and win adults, but nevertheless, there are so many gained for heaven and so many intercessors who there pray for their nations.⁴⁰

If the increase in adult conversions can be taken as index of progress, it would seem that there had been a decided advance, despite

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 159-163.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 163.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 237.

³⁹ A name often used by the French for the Seneca country.

⁴⁰ *Relations*, 62:227.

adverse conditions and the dearth of missionaries.⁴¹ In any event, this record affords ample evidence of the heroic zeal and persevering courage of Father Garnier.

Yet within a year the Seneca Mission was to be closed. In 1684 all Jesuit missionaries, except the Fathers de Lamberville at Onondaga, were withdrawn.⁴² In relation to the missions, it was a tragic step; the Mohawks at least, previously so recalcitrant, were now entering the Church in large numbers both at Caughnawaga and in the Mohawk homeland.⁴³ The underlying cause was the ambition of both the British and the French for empire. More proximate was the struggle for the control of the fur trade, and of the Iroquois, who controlled that trade. After having defeated the Susquehannas, the Iroquois were carrying war to the Illinois and other tribes to the west,⁴⁴ thus challenging the French, who, at Quebec in particular, considered Iroquois supremacy a threat to their own existence and to the permanence of the missions among the Iroquois and other tribes. At a conference in Quebec on October 10, 1682, it was decided that war with the Iroquois had become inevitable. What delayed its commencement for five more years was the colony's state of unpreparedness. Appeal was made to the King for sufficient reinforcements, under the plea that the British were abetting the ambition of the Iroquois and poisoning the minds of the savages against the French.⁴⁵ Indeed, Governor Dongan resented the influence of the French missionaries upon the Iroquois and, in an effort to counteract it, asked his King to send English Jesuits to man the missions which the French Jesuits had started in New York.⁴⁶ His attitude is clear from his refusal to allow the Jesuits to return to their missions after Denonville's war on the Senecas,⁴⁷ whose punishment, the French hoped, would overawe the other Iroquois, who were less numerous and warlike.⁴⁸

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Edmund B. O'Callaghan, ed., *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York* (45 vols., Albany, 1853-87), IX, 227, 256. Hereafter *DRCHNY. Relations*, 62:227.

⁴³ *Relations*, 62:237.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 159-161.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 157-165.

⁴⁶ *DRCHNY*, III, 394, 463, 465, 511, 519.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, III, 511.

⁴⁸ *Relations*, 64:241-243.

Denonville's campaign against the Senecas materialized in 1687. For eighteen years there was no Seneca Mission. In 1702, a year after peace had been reestablished, missionaries once more returned to the Seneca country,⁴⁹ Father Julian Garnier and Father Francis Vaillant de Gueslis.⁵⁰ An extant report describes their reception by the Senecas.

We take this occasion to inform you that Sieur de Callieres had received through the French returning from the establishment of the missionaries among the Senecas, letters from Father Vaillant, in which the latter notes that upon their arrival, there had been some discussion among the chiefs of these villages, because of the failure to consult them in regard to the request that had been made to Sieur de Callieres for these missionaries; since they had been absent from the villages at the time that the envoys departed; but finally they all testified to their very great joy at having the missionaries; and, if the English attempted to abuse them [the missionaries] they would take no less effective measures to defend them than did the Onondagas.⁵¹

At a conference held in the following year with the new Governor of Quebec, the Seneca chief Oroniatez, speaking for himself and another Seneca chief, La Grande Terre, thanked the French governor for sending the missionaries and solemnly averred that no matter what attempts the English made to seize them, the Senecas would rather die than allow them to be driven from the villages.⁵² This attachment to the Faith and to the missionaries is all the more remarkable since the Iroquois considered the punitive expedition of 1687 an act of treachery and were constantly urged to war against the French and to expel the missionaries. The English had even offered bounties for the deliverance of the missionaries into their hands.⁵³

It is not known exactly when Father Garnier left the mission. He was there in 1704. Father Vaillant remained until 1707, when he was replaced by Father James d'Heu, the last of the missionaries resident among the Senecas. The mission closed finally in

⁴⁹ DRCHNY, IX, 750, 762.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, IX, 737, 750.

⁵¹ Archives of St. Mary's College, Montreal: *Fonds de Rochemonteix*, 4006:45.

⁵² DRCHNY, IX, 746.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, IV, 737.

1709, when the machinations of the British made it impossible to stay longer. Father d'Heu was escorted back to Canada by forty Seneca braves.⁵⁴

With the departure of Father d'Heu, the story of the established Catholic mission among the Senecas comes to an abrupt close. Except for meager details of the arrival of the missionaries in Canada and indications of unrest in the Iroquois country,⁵⁵ there is no detailed account of the successes or failures of the missionaries in the last period, 1702-09. It was a blessing indeed that Dongan's grandiose plan to replace the French Jesuits with their English brethren had not materialized. As soon as Dongan was superseded in 1688, and especially after William and Mary restored the Protestant supremacy, there was no further tolerance for Jesuits or any other priests in the New York colony. The Iroquois missions could not have enjoyed their brief new lease in 1702 had Dongan been successful in his plan.⁵⁶ Coming from an enemy, the indirect tribute which Robert Livingston paid to the work of the Jesuits, even in 1703, is eloquent. After urging the Lords of Trade in London to send ministers to take over where the Jesuits would soon leave off, if the British had their way, he remarked: "The nations of the Senecas and the Onondagas have received such impression of the Christian religion that, if ministers were placed among them to convert them to the Christian faith, it would be of great advantage to her Majesty's plantations."⁵⁷

After 1709 the Indians were deprived of resident missionaries, contrary to their desires. Replying to New York Governor Burnet's complaints in 1721, French Governor Vaudreuil wrote:

You observe to me that you have also been notified that the Indians of the Five Nations were about to receive French priests and a blacksmith; and that M. de Longueuil had gone to that country for such purpose, and to put a finishing hand to persuade the Indians to withdraw from their ancient dependence. In reply to this, I have the honor to observe to you that M. de Longueuil is adopted by the Onontaguez

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, IX, 829-830.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 815-816.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, IV, 609-610, 737-738.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, IV, 1067; III, 579-580.

Onondagas. . . . The Senecas have twice sent me delegates from their villages urgently to entreat me to send them two missionaries, having expressed to me their regret at the withdrawal of those they formerly had. I told them by M. de Longueuil that if they would come to get some, I would have them supplied, not considering myself at liberty to refuse this favor to Indians who believed themselves to be independent.⁵⁸

As a matter of fact Jesuit missionaries stationed at Caughnawaga often visited the Onondagas and Senecas, as well as the other Iroquois.⁵⁹ And as the Senecas gradually moved farther westward toward the Niagara and its French fort, those who cared to avail themselves of the ministry of the chaplains at the fort could do so. Father Emanuel Crespel, for instance, while acting as chaplain at the fort from 1729 to 1732, learned the Seneca language and conversed with the Indians.⁶⁰

In 1788 Samuel Kirkland, a Presbyterian missionary, who before his ordination had lived briefly among the Senecas at Kanadesgea, went as an invited guest to a great meeting of the Six Nations⁶¹ and some western Indians at the Seneca center on Buffalo Creek. His purpose was to learn whether the Senecas would accept missionaries. He met many old friends, who greeted him cordially:

With some he had a long conference respecting a missionary, if one could be provided. They declined giving a decisive answer; but observed that, as they had long been acquainted with me, it would be well if I should visit them again and converse freely with them on the subject, and give them an opportunity to do the same; and that there were many among them who were fond of the English customs and some carried their children to Niagara for baptism; but that they had heard that I declined administering baptism to children, unless the parents would renounce their wicked practices and promise to embrace the whole of Jesus' religion. They had never been accustomed to make such promises but were told that

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, IX, 902.

⁵⁹ Edward J. Devine, S.J., *Historic Caughnawaga* (Montreal, 1923), p. 167.

⁶⁰ Frank H. Severance, *An Old Frontier of France: The Niagara Region and Adjacent Lakes under French Control* (Buffalo Hist. Soc. Publications), I (New York, 1917), 296-297.

⁶¹ With the admission of the Tuscaroras to the league, the Iroquois became the Six Nations.

their children should have Jesus' mark set upon them, as they were not to blame for anything the parents had committed.⁶²

Kirkland's grandson-biographer comments on this experience:

It would seem from the whole account of this conference that the Senecas, while they had a great regard, and some of them a strong affection for himself personally, did not like his form of Christianity; they evidently were not disposed to receive a missionary of his order; they preferred an Episcopal or Roman Catholic, who would baptize their children without any evidence of personal regeneration in the parents.⁶³

The Jesuits at Caughnawaga had other effectual means of preserving the faith among the Iroquois. In a report to France, dated October 25, 1729, Governor Beauharnois wrote from Quebec of a plan proposed by the superior of the Caughnawaga Mission. For some time deputations of Catholic Iroquois Indians had been sent from Caughnawaga into the Iroquois cantons to try to persuade their relatives to emigrate to Caughnawaga. The response had been good. But the poverty at Caughnawaga made it at times impossible to supply the needs of the number that came, and as a result some Indians returned home. Father de Lauzon, the superior at Caughnawaga, pleaded with the governor for funds to care for all who should come. The governor approved of the suggestion and tried to enlist the home government.⁶⁴

Another zealous priest, the Sulpician Father Francis Picquet, also concerned himself with the Senecas and other Iroquois. Remembering his experiences as chaplain on a French expedition to the Mohawk country, when he had seen for himself how much the Indians longed for and needed spiritual care, he established in 1749, at what is now Ogdensburg, a mission which he called Fort Presentation. At the start there were only six heads of families there. In the following year he had 87, while in 1751 the number had mounted to 396. At its peak the mission counted 3,000 Iroquois. At first the Indians were recruited mostly from the Cayugas and Onondagas, but in 1751 Father Picquet organized an expedition to the various Iroquois cantons, including that of the Sene-

⁶² Samuel K. Lothrop, "Life of Samuel Kirkland," in Jared Sparks, ed., *The Library of American Biography* (Boston, 1848), pp. 137-364.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 286-287.

⁶⁴ *DRCINY*, IX, 1041.

cas, who were now to be found along the Niagara and in the old homeland along the Genesee. Some of the Senecas eventually settled at Fort Presentation.⁶⁵

As early as 1657 Father Paul Le Jeune, voicing high hope for the Senecas, had outlined the conditions under which that hope could be realized:

A former captain of the Oiogoen [Cayugas] came to see me on behalf of his whole nation. He requested Achiendase⁶⁶ to give them some of our Fathers, assuring him that they would erect a chapel for them, and that the people desired to be instructed in our faith. He was given Father Rene Menard and two Frenchmen; notwithstanding our scarcity of workmen. Father Chaumonot is to accompany him as far as Oiogoen; from there he will go to Sonnontouan [Seneca country] to lay afar the foundations of a fine mission; and to sow the seeds of a great harvest, which we hope to gather, if it please God to preserve peace for us and to send us workmen.⁶⁷

It is difficult to determine how great the harvest was. Until the discontinuance in 1673 of the publication in France of the Relations, the data, although fuller than after that date, were still largely selective. They could scarcely have been otherwise, since the annual letters or reports, which constituted the Relation, were accounts of missions that at one time extended 800 leagues west of Quebec⁶⁸ and from Hudson Bay to Louisiana. After 1673 an adequate picture of the mission is impossible.

Indications of mission success were, in the first place, the number of converts, as shown in the number of baptisms administered, and, secondly, the extent and effectiveness of religious instruction, even though baptism did not result. For baptism, except in danger of death, was not conferred except when there was the best warrant that the neophyte would persevere, in spite of the multiple, major difficulties that were all too evident in his pagan surroundings. But it was not only the difficulties inherent in pagan-

⁶⁵ Edmund B. O'Callaghan, ed., *Documentary History of the State of New York* (4 vols., Albany, 1850-51), I, 280ff.

⁶⁶ The Iroquois referred to the superior of all the missions of New France as Achiendase, a name inherited with the office.

⁶⁷ *Relations*, 43:185.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 65:181.

ism that made conversion difficult. The Senecas, during the mission period, were almost constantly engaged in war. It was really a question, not of peace, but of more or fewer wars.

In addition, the number of baptisms is difficult to determine. For the second period of the mission, there is a total blackout of such information from the three missionaries, and even during the first period their predecessors made no complete record each year. In all, omitting one baptism performed by Father Chaumonot, there is a grand total of 969 baptisms.⁶⁹ At first glance, the number does not seem impressive for seven priests who, for different lengths of time, labored for a total of 23 years. But, except for Raffeix and Garnier, they were there for comparatively short periods. Moreover, even the figures scarcely revealed the actual number of Christians; many baptized Hurons preceded the missionaries, and many of those baptized died soon after baptism. Whatever the number, it represented exemplary Christians. A "goodly number of fervent Christians" was to be found among the Iroquois according to the estimate of Father Dablon, who further remarked that by 1679 over 4,000 Iroquois had received baptism.⁷⁰

A second criterion for judging the success of the mission is the extent to which even the pagans were instructed in the Faith. In the Relation for 1679 Father Dablon observed:

But again it is no inconsiderable fruit of the labors of our missionaries to have published the gospel so widely among all the five nations [Iroquois] that we can truthfully say that it would be difficult, at the present time, to find an Iroquois who is not imbued with a sufficient knowledge of our mysteries to be baptized whenever God shall be pleased to touch his heart and grant him the desire for it.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Reported baptisms for:

Frémín	97	Chaumonot	1
Garnier alone	372	LeMoyne	0
Garnier & Raffeix	212	Morain	0
Garnier, Raffeix, & Pierron	100	Vaillant	0
Raffeix alone	98	d'Heu	0
Pierron alone	90		1
	<hr/>		
	969		

⁷⁰ *Relations*, 61:163.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 237.

In the light of conditions under which the missionaries labored, this achievement is truly astounding. Father Beschefer, who had served on the Mohawk mission and therefore knew the ground, considered the Iroquois missions the hardest of all, not so much because of physical hardships, in which the Algonquian mission excelled, but for the unbloody martyrdom which the mission entailed. Practically at all times the priests lived in peril of their lives from hostile pagans, instigated at times by the British, and from drunken savages. If there were no actual martyrs, the Seneca mission, in the opinion of Beschefer, was "most fruitful in crosses."⁷²

Long before there was a Seneca mission, St. John de Brebeuf, then laboring among the Hurons, voiced the keynote of Jesuit mission strategy:

The deputies of the whole [Huron] country have gone to Sonnontouan [Seneca country] to confirm the peace made last year, and it is said that Onondagas, Cayugas, and Mohawks wish to become parties to it. But it is not certain; if it were true, a noble door would be open to the Gospel. They wanted me to go to Sonnontouan, but I did not judge it wise to go yet into any other part, until we have better established here the foundation of the Gospel law, and until we have drawn lines by which the other nations that shall be converted may guide themselves. Indeed, I would not go any place where we would not be immediately recognized as preachers of Jesus Christ.⁷³

A similar ideal inspired the missionaries among the Senecas. Without it they could never have endured. Realization of the full harvest was denied them; and, except for the Senecas who eventually became Protestant or found haven at a Catholic mission elsewhere, their charges lapsed back into paganism late in the 18th or early in the 19th century. But if the Jesuits could not remain long enough to make wholesale conversions, they at least forever changed many native religious and moral ideas. Frederick Houghton concludes his excellent study of the Senecas with words attributed to John Gilmary Shea:

But it is a remarkable fact that the Jesuit Missionaries, while they did not succeed in making the Five Nations Christian,

⁷² *Ibid.*, 62:223.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 8:117.

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overthrew the worship of Agreskoue or Tharouhiawagan, their old divinity, so completely that his name disappeared, and even those Iroquois who to this day refuse to accept Christianity nevertheless worship Hiiio or Hawen-niio, God or Lord, Who is no other than the God preached by the Jesuits in their almost hopeless struggle in the seventeenth century.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Frederick Houghton, "The Seneca Nation from 1655 to 1687," *Bulletin of the Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences*, X, 2 (Buffalo, 1910), p. 464. A diligent search of Shea, *History of the Catholic Missions in the United States*, did not reveal this passage. But the ideas expressed are clearly indicated on pp. 25, 255, 267, 276, 279, and 316. The passage could not be found in Shea, *History of the Catholic Church in the United States*.

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