

From Finistere to Vermont (from the origins of the Church at U.S.A.)

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In 1976, the United States of America celebrated the second centenary of their independence. On this occasion, the President of the Episcopal Conference at U.S.A. addressed to Bishop Etchegaray one letter expressing the gratitude of the Church of his country to the Church of France. "While the French clergy provided many priests and even bishops to the American Church of the nineteenth century, the laity provided financial assistance through the work of the Propagation of the Faith." From our diocese many religious men and women have worked in the United States. Some are still there ... However, from this Finisterian presence in the United States, there was an illustration of which it is worth remembering: Bishop de Goesbriand's episcopacy and the ministry of priests who accompanied us to Burlington, Vermont.

It is well known that the Church of France has provided important and effective assistance to the birth and development of the young American Church. Many dioceses were founded in the United States in the course of the nineteenth century, as the nation populated and developed. Of the multiple contributions of the diocese of Quimper to the Church of America, there is one more original, which should be remembered, on the occasion of the bi-centenary of the independence of the United States. It is the foundation of a brand new diocese: that of Burlington, within the boundaries of the state of Vermont. The founding bishop and half of the first team of priests assigned to this diocese from clergy of Quimper.

THE BISHOP: Louis de GOESBRIAND

He was born at St. Urbain on the 4th of August, 1816. First educated

at Sainte-Anne d'Auray, he continued his studies at Pont-Croix, where he finished his rhetoric in 1834. • A seminarian at Quimper, he was part of the small group which the bishops, since the Concordat, regularly sent to Saint-Sulpice to study theology. This seems to have been where his vocation for distant missions became clearer. In any case, he met Bishop Purcel, bishop of Cincinnati, in Ohio. The latter, at the request of Louis de Goesbriand, a subdeacon at the time, wrote a poignant letter to Bishop Poulpiquet in 1839, supplicating him "for the love of Jesus Christ and the advantage of his poor church, to give him this young seminarian". He was told that no one could have Mgr. Goesbriand. He thought that what could not be achieved by the reports of bishop to bishop, could be by the grace of the relations between Goesbriand and Poulpiquet. He had his father act, who was probably cousin with the bishop.

The father of the seminarian wrote, asking for the bishop's opinion on the matter, but he was especially eager to give his first: if his son had the vocation for missions abroad, it was not necessary to oppose it, "out of fear, in such a serious matter, to oppose the views of God". He wished, however, that the seminarian should finish his studies in France, and receive the priesthood. Thus was done, and the day after his ordination, in July 1840, Louis de Goesbriand embarked for America in the service of the diocese of Cincinnati. He remained there for seven years, cure of the parish of Louisville. In 1847, at the founding of the diocese of Cleveland, the first bishop of this place asked him to come and lead the poor seminary he was setting up in a neglected barn. Two years later, wishing to appoint Louis de Goesbriand vicar general, the bishop of Cleveland obtained for him the excardination of Quimper;

(freed from the jurisdiction of one bishop and is transferred to that of another.) Louis de Goesbriand became an American. In 1853, the bishops of the New England region demanded the creation of a new diocese for the state of Vermont. Louis de Goesbriand was appointed to this new post. Ordained bishop in New York on October 30, 1853, at the age of 37, he inaugurated an Episcopate of 46 years.

THE NEW DIOCESE OF BURLINGTON

A few weeks after his appointment, the new bishop wrote to Bishop Graveran describing his apostolate field: "Burlington is a pretty town containing about 6000 souls, and built on Lake Champlain, which extends from north to south throughout of the state of Vermont. The Bishopric of Burlington is a part of the diocese of Boston, and includes the whole state of Vermont, whose average width is about 17 leagues and the length of about 50. (Note: 1 league = 3 miles)

We are neighbors to Canada and we can, in a few hours, go to the pious city of Montreal. The country is very mountainous, very cold but very healthy and most picturesque. The population of Vermont exceeds a little 300,000. Among this growing population, I do not think there are more than 15,000 Catholics. The others, that is, the Americans proper, are descendants of the English and profess different religions, or profess none; but are said to be remarkable for their frankness, intelligence, and economy. The cities of Vermont are small, but tastefully built: all contain a small college or university; and as the soil is not very fertile, they have used their rivers and waterfalls for the construction of manufactures of different kinds... I found, all things considered, in my diocese five priests, two of whom are at Burlington...

Most of my diocesans are Irish. Some have acquired small lands, but most are laborers in quarries of marble and slate which are here very common, or are domestics among the Americans. A good part, at least a third of our Catholics are Canadians and speak French. They are men of faith, good and simple, but who all the more need priests they have not been persecuted for their faith, like the Irish ... There are nine chapels only in the diocese " .

CALL FOR THE DIOCESE OF QUIMPER

Bishop de Goesbriand's great concern is to find, in the short term, a few priests to help him in his apostolic mission. The last part of his letter is an urgent plea to the bishop of Quimper: "I would need a dozen priests, for there are at least twelve Catholic congregations that would need a priest resident in their midst. Young men in the sacred orders who would come here, with piety, zeal, and ordinary ability, could be employed immediately among Canadians whose language they know; after a few months, they would know enough English to hear the confessions ...

What if so many young ecclesiastics who in France are as constrained to remain idle, knew that consolations are experienced in mission countries, they would hasten to leave parents and fatherland, to follow a career so glorious to God. May I hope, Monseigneur, that you will communicate this letter to these good gentlemen of the seminary, so that they may use it near their pupils as they think fit? I know that your Greatness will not prevent any vocations that may arise, but I would like to see you embrace my cause, doing what might be in your power to bring about vocations. Although no one is a prophet in his own country, nevertheless, according to the ordinary course of Providence, relations of kinship, friendship, common origin are destined to produce associations of apostolate. I imagine that providence made me born in Lower Brittany and then attracted me to America, so as to bring in this vast part of the vineyard of the Lord other workers from Lower Brittany...

A FIRST TEAM OF FINISTERIANS

Eighteen months later, in the spring of 1855, Louis de Goesbriand was at Quimper. It seemed to me that the ground had already been prepared, since five volunteers presented themselves, ready to leave for Vermont: three priests, a deacon, and a cleric. Here are their

names.

Pierre-Jean Le Calvez, Plobannalec (Plonivel), priest of 1854 and teacher at Grand Ergue. He entered the monastery of Oka near Montreal in 1890, where he died on March 27, 1907.

Francois Marie Picart, of St Pol, priest in 1855. He died a Burlington, age 39, June 22, 1870.

Jean-Francois Salaun, Landevennec, priest of 1843, vicar at La Martyre. Arrived in Burlington in 1855, he was assigned in 1875 to the diocese of Newark. At the age of 70, he retired to St. Clair in Nantes where he died on October 19, 1895.

Stanislas Danlelou, from Ploare. He was a deacon when he left for Vermont. He died there on April 2, 1897.

Jerome-Marie Cloarec, of Saint-Sauveur. He continued his seminary in America and was ordained a priest in 1858. Initially a cure in company among the Irish, he later became a cure in Burlington. He was the most immediate collaborator of the bishop, who made him vicar general. "One even wanted to make a bishop of the brave cure, but he was recalcitrant," says the author of his necrological notice. He was an Apostolic Protonotary in 1908. Jerome Cloarec, a laborer of the first hour, was really the "permanent": he attended the arrival in Vermont of all the Finisterians, saw them die one after the other, with one exception. After the death of his bishop, who survived for a long time, he became the correspondent with the families of his Breton confreres. He died, 87, at Burlington on February 10, 1920.

This first team, part of 1855, counted, two years later, two more units. Herve Cardinal, of Guiclan was 46 years old when he rejoined Vermont; He had already held four posts in the diocese, vicar at Recouvrance, chaplain of the hospice of Brest, rector of Plouezoc'h, then of Logonna-Daoulas. On his arrival there in December 1857, Louis de Goesbriand entrusted him with the parish of the Burlington Canadians, where the bishop himself had been in charge for four years. Herve Cardinal was, much later, cure of Mitter. He had left

without "Exeat". He returned to France in 1878, was chaplain at Treflevenez for some time, and spent the last five years of his life at St. Joseph in St-Pol where he died in 1883.

Louis Le Cam, of Kersaint-Plabennec arrived in Burlington some weeks after Herve Cardinal. The bishop kept him near him all winter to learn English. He then practiced in various parishes. He ended his life in the chaplaincy of the Burlington Hospital, where he died on October 24, 1903. Thus, in the year 1858, seven Finisterian priests were on mission in Vermont and Louis de Goesbriand, in a letter of thanks to Bishop Sergent, reported that more than half of his priests were leaving the diocese of Quimper.

DEPARTURE OF A SECOND TEAM

However, the number of Catholics was steadily increasing, communities were organizing. Twenty years after the foundation of the diocese, Bishop de Goesbriand was again at bay. He needed, urgently, a few more priests. He returned to Quimper at the beginning of 1874 to solicit further help from his compatriots. His call was heard. Two young priests volunteered for him.

Joseph Donnart, of Langolen, vicar to Guimiliau; he remained only four years in Burlington. In 1878 he was placed in the service of the diocese of New Orleans where he practiced for twenty years. He probably died around 1900.

Joseph Kerlidou, of Landerneau, had been curate at Audierne for a year. He left for Vermont in 1874 and died in Burlington on December 27, 1899, age 55.

Four seminarians also presented themselves to the bishop of Burlington. Having obtained their excommunication, it was decided that Bishop de Goesbriand should proceed to a special ordination "for Burlington", in the chapel of the great seminary of Quimper. On March 8, 1874 he imposed the first tonsure to Francois Yvinec,

ordained to the sub-diaconate Jerome Gelot, to the diaconate Joseph Brelivet, to the priesthood Jean-Marie Coathuel. Francois Yvinec was from Guiclan: he continued his seminary in America, practiced the ministry in Burlington where he died, age 39, May 31, 1892.

Jean-Marie Coathuel, of Briec, ordained priest at Quimper, occupied only one position: that of curate at St-Joseph de Burlington. He died of heart disease and died on December 7, 1902.

Joseph Brelivet, native of Locronan, deacon on leaving, was ordained in America. He was in Vermont 25 years. Jerome Gelot, of Pluguffan, also ordained in America in December 1875; was successively cure of Rutland and Poutney, in Vermont; he was a very active and dynamic man. He died there on December 5, 1904. But in 1881 he had brought his brother Jean-Marie Gelot to the diocese of Burlington, who had been vicar at Huelgoat since 1879. He was vicar of his eldest brother; he died at Burlington Hospital on May 27, 1907. In the year 1881, there were eleven Finisterian priests in this diocese whose clergy were still very few. Indeed, when the dedication of the cathedral of Burlington, in 1867, the diocese still had only 19 priests in activity; in 1900 they were 88. Our compatriots were not, it seems, too much lost when they arrived in Vermont. First there was the bishop, who was one of them, speaking as well in Breton as in French: his father, a literate Breton - he had published a Breton translation of fables of La Fontaine - had held to him to learn, from childhood, the language of the ancestors. There were also Canadian communities of French expression: one could begin, in the middle of them, an immediate ministry, without being stopped by a question of language. Of course we also learned English, the official language of the country: but we could take our time to achieve it, without being bound by binding constraints. These priests were assigned to already existing communities, whose type of expression of faith did not differ much from that of our Breton communities. It must be recognized, however, that pastoral care in Vermont was, despite everything, marked by the American mentality: foundations, constructions, creation of schools, hospitals, efficiency ...

The fiery temperament, such as that of Jerome Gelot for example, were very comfortable with these types of projects. The great factor of disorientation was the Protestant environment. The proportion of Catholics in this population did not exceed 10 to 15%. In this situation, it was necessary to adapt well; some of them, at the beginning, had difficulty getting used to this context. But, all in all, no one among the Breton priests had serious difficulty to find his place in the diocese of Burlington.

DEATH OF THE BISHOP; END OF THE "MISSION"

In 1892, Louis de Goesbriand asked a coadjutor. For this function, there was a question of Jerome Cloarec, the bishop's right hand. But it was evaluated, all things considered, that the period of the "mission" was over. It was necessary to choose a native: the Vermont church could now stand on its own. The clergy counted 70 priests and some religious. It was Bishop Michaud, born in Burlington, who became coadjutor. Louis de Goesbriand, however, advanced in age, the weight of the infirmities became more and more heavy. Retired from the sisters of St. Joseph in Burlington in the last months of his life, he died on November 3, 1899, age 83, Dean of the American Episcopate. He bore a special interest in the Church of the United States.

It can be said that he was indentified with it, because he had been contemporary with the founders of most Episcopal seat in this country. But the portion of this American Church which was dearest to him, after his diocese of Burlington, was undoubtedly that great ecclesiastical province of New England, of which his diocese was a part, and of which he was the dean. His wise counsel, his encouraging suggestions, his conduct always inspired by his mission of bishop, those who knew him will always remember ... Your dear father and guide can not be forgotten ... 46 years ago when he arrived here, he found there five priests and nine humble chapels. When he closed his eyes in the light of this world, his clergy reached the figure of 70;

There are 90 churches and a population of 55,000 faithful. In each hamlet, village, quoted from this diocese, he has left the memory of his zeal and his labors ... "(Funeral prayer, by the bishop of Manchester, U.S.A.).

With the death of the bishop was ending the sending of Finisterian priests to Vermont. There was one exception, however. In 1903, at the request of Jerome Cloarec, Jean Billon, deacon of Locronan left, the last, for Burlington. There was no vicar for Jerome Cloarec; Jean Billon will be vicar until the death of the Cure. He was then Cure of Winooski where he died March 19, 1926.

The Breton priests of Burlington would die one after the other. Jerome Cloarec remained a long time, until 1920, only living witness of the distant time when a Lower-Breton bishop arrived, soon accompanied by a group of priests Leonards and Cornouaillais (Note: These are Breton dialects), founding the Church in the state of Vermont.

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Source: Archives of the diocese of Quimper, France

This translation by John Fisher August 2019