

Pierre Biard, *Relation de la Nouvelle France*, 1616, excerpt from chapter X « On the Necessity of Thoroughly Catechizing These People Before Baptizing Them », in Reuben Gold Thwaites, *The Jesuit Relation and Allied Documents* vol. III (Cleveland, Burrows Brother Company, 1897), p.143-149.

For our spiritual life depends upon the Doctrine and the Sacraments, and consequently upon those who administer them, according to his holy institution.

But if it is necessary throughout the world to diligently Catechize the people before introducing them into the Church, and to communicate to them the Sacrament of regeneration, it is necessary above all to do it in these places; the reason being that the Canadians are a wandering people (as we have said) and pass their lives here and there without permanent settlements; therefore they cannot ordinarily attend mass nor prayers nor public services, nor hear sermons, nor receive the sacraments nor have Priests with them. How then do you think that they can maintain themselves in the faith and grace of God, if they do not receive instruction, and twice as much of it as the others? For we who are surrounded by the Religious, and are under the care of so many Pastors, and have such an abundance of good books, examples, laws and polity, can scarcely do it ourselves, who are old and, so to speak, naturalized Christians; then how can they do it, all crude as they are, alone, without care, without letters, without precepts, without practice? Now to say that it is enough to beget, without thinking of how to maintain, is really saying that it is good to give life in order to take it away cruelly, which is not the act of a Father, but is worse than that of a murderer. Nevertheless this is done in the spiritual regeneration which is accomplished through Baptism. For to give it without providing for the nourishment of the regenerated, is doing what our Savior has said; driving the Devil out from a house so that when it is swept and garnished the vanquished enemy may reenter, not alone but accompanied by seven others, more wicked than himself; and thus bring it about that the unhappy regenerated is after Baptism in a much more pitiable state than he was before being baptized. Furthermore, experience has already shown this need of properly catechizing before Baptizing, in a country where the people are not Savage but civilized: not wandering, but stationary; not abandoned, but under the watchful care of Pastors, namely in Peru and Mexico. For at first they baptized them very readily. What happened then? They unexpectedly found on their hands a Synagogue of Samaritans rather than a Church of the faithful. For these who were too soon Baptized willingly came to Church, but it was to mutter there their ancient idolatries. They observed the appointed saints' days, but it was while carrying on their ancient sacrifices, dances, and superstitions; they went to holy Communion, if it was desired, but without knowing either the *Creed* or *Confession*, and emerging from there, they went off to get drunk and to sing to the Devil their usual sorceries. What remedy for these evils? What cloak for these infamies? O how those who have come since, have been obliged to toil there where these tares might quickly and easily have been eradicated at first, if the field had been well ploughed before sowing it. I mean by observing the ancient practice of the Church in giving Baptism cautiously, first having Postulants and Seekers, then Catechumens, and at last Baptism. For the master of all Wisdom has said very wisely: *That the earth first bringeth forth the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear.* Joseph Acosta has very properly observed this fault, which I have mentioned above, and it is not excusable, after the formal judgment and decree

of the Church. See the Canon, *Ante baptismum. de consec. distinct. 4.* and what follows. I am truly grieved to say it, and would willingly be silent were it not necessity which constrains me, because, either through malice or very gross ignorance, they accuse the Jesuits of things in which nevertheless they have seemed truly sincere and faithful servants of God. But it is true that when they arrived in new France, they found that about eighty persons had already been baptized there (as they said); but they could not get the list of names, although they put themselves to some trouble to do so. Now, encountering some of these new converts, they tried to find out the extent of their knowledge, and for all found out that they did not know even how to make the sign of the Cross; some did not know their Baptismal names, and when asked if they were Christians, they made signs to show that they had never heard the word. They did not know any prayers, nor articles of faith, and gave no evidence of any change from the past, always retaining the same old sorceries, coming to Church moreover, only as the unbaptized, that is, occasionally, for company's sake, or through curiosity, and not in a devotional spirit. Indeed some of our countrymen tell us, that when they were by themselves, they insolently made sport of our ceremonies, and that really, when they were well sounded, it was learned that they had accepted Baptism solely as a sign of friendship with the Normans, for thus they call us. An exception to this number was the great Membertou, for truly he was a Christian at heart, and desired nothing better than to be able to receive thorough instruction so he could teach the others. Now the Jesuits, perceiving all these things, resolved not to baptize a single adult, unless he had, according to the Holy Canons, been well initiated and catechized. For they well understood that to do otherwise would not only be a profanation of Christianity, but also an injustice towards the Savages. For, inasmuch as it is an injustice to induce any one to sign a promise, or compulsory oath, without giving him to understand the conditions to which he binds himself: how much worse is it to force a rational being of competent age to make a solemn profession of the law of God (which is done through Baptism), when he has never before been a novice, nor been made to understand the rules and duties of this profession? The Savages were not so stupid but that they knew enough to reproach us for this injustice, inasmuch as, after these baptisms of which we have spoken, when the Jesuits requested that they should give up Polygamy, and should live like Christians, since they were in duty bound to do so; they told them that we were wicked people, that we had tried to make them believe that they should agree to conditions that they had never understood, nor been able to understand. Now for these reasons the Jesuits, delaying the Baptism of those who desired it, put themselves to work with all possible diligence to translate into Canadian the Lord's prayer, the Angelic salutation the Creed, and the Commandments of God and of the Church, with a brief explanation of the Sacraments, and some prayers, for this was all the Theology they needed. However, there was no way of accomplishing either a third or fourth of all this, as we shall show by and by.