

- Chrestien LeClercq, *New Relation of Gaspesia*, 1691, excerpts from chapter VII, "On the Ignorance of the Gaspesians". William F. Ganong, trans. (Toronto, The Champlain Society, 1910), p. 131,133-135.

Our Lord inspired me with the idea of them the second year of my mission, when, being much embarrassed as to the method by which I should teach the Indians to pray to God, I noticed that some children were making marks with charcoal upon birch-bark, and were counting these with the finger very accurately at each word of prayers which they pronounced. This made me believe that by giving them some formulary, which would aid their memory by definite characters, I should advance much more quickly than by teaching them through the method of making them repeat a number of times that which I said to them. I was charmed to find that I was not mistaken, and that these characters which I had formed upon paper produced all the effect that I could wish, so that in a few days they learned without difficulty all of their prayers. I cannot express to you with what ardour these poor Indians competed against one another, with an emulation worthy of praise, as to which would be the most learned and most clever. It is true that it costs much time and trouble to form as many of them as they ask, and especially since I have enlarged the number in order to teach them all the prayers of the Church, with the sacred mysteries of the Trinity, of the Incarnation, of the Baptism, of the Penitence and of the Eucharist. But indeed, what ought we not to do for God? And what matters it, I pray you, at what and in what manner we employ our time, provided that the Lord is glorified, and that one promotes with His glory the salvation of souls, by explaining with Christian simplicity the mysteries of our religion to sundry poor Indians who have spent sixty to eighty years without ever having once during their lives invoked the sacred name of the Lord? It is by such means that these evangelical workers snatch away from the gates of Hell numbers of souls which would never have enjoyed a blissful eternity without the charitable aid of these generous missionaries.

As I have sought in this little formulary only the good of my Indians, and the readiest and easiest method for instructing them, I have used it always with so much the more pleasure because several persons of merit and virtue have been pleased, both orally and by letters, to exhort me to persevere. And they have even obliged me to send examples to them in France, in order to exhibit to the curious a new method of learning to read, and the way God makes use of the smallest things in order to manifest the glory of his holy name to these peoples of Gaspesia. The approbation of Monseigneur de Saint Valier, at present Bishop of Quebec, has more than sufficiently authorised the use of them. And this worthy prelate has acquired so much esteem for them, that after having recognized for himself their advantages and usefulness in the very arduous voyage which he made to la Cadie, he was pleased to ask samples of them from the Reverend Father Moreau, to whom I had communicated them several years before. His Grandeur received with pleasure, from this zealous missionary, our leaflets, and our instructive characters, in order to give them to one of his missionaries; and I do not doubt that this good servant of God is receiving much aid from them in the instructions which he will give to the Indians of his mission.

Our Gaspesians have so much veneration and respect for these characters that they scruple to throw them into the fire. When these are torn or spoiled, they bring the fragments to me. They are more religious, a hundred-fold, than the Iconoclasts who, through a sacrilegious impiety, broke the most sacred images. These people were even unable to view without scandal the madness of a young Indian woman who threw the characters into the

fire, in vexation because I had excluded her from prayers on account of a considerable fault which she had committed.

Her insult being too unusual and too scandalous to be overlooked among a people who were already commencing to have much veneration for the instructions of Christianity, I believed that I was bound to testify, through certain forms suitable to the genius of the Indians, the resentment I had conceived against her act, in order that my silence might not give occasion to some other to do as much.

I went then to her wigwam, where I found her father, together with certain other Indians, who were much surprised to see me enter with a countenance which expressed the grief that I had in my heart. They begged me several times to tell them the subject thereof, which I pretended to conceal from them by my silence. They were astonished to see me rummaging in the cinders of their fire with as much diligence as if I had lost something of the utmost importance, and taking two or three pinches thereof into my handkerchief, whilst sighing in the Indian fashion and saying *akahie, akahié*. In leaving the wigwam, I said to him that they were not to be surprised at my silence, since my heart wept bitterly: that it shed tears of blood because his daughter had thrown into the fire the *oukate guenne Kignamatinöër*: that in truth I would appear little touched by the insult if this were only simple paper, but that I was inconsolable for the injury which she had done to the prayer of JESUS, who had been grievously offended by this scandalous action: and that, in fact, I would expose these ashes, which I believed to be those of my *oukate guenne*, at the door of the chapel, which his daughter should never enter more until she had washed them away with her tears, and until with her grief she had blanched the handkerchief, which, by the blackness it had contracted, signalized evidently the enormity of an outrage which was capable of drawing the hatred and the anger of God upon the whole nation: and that, for my part, I had a mind to leave them, since I could not live if the prayer was not resuscitated which had been made to die in the fire.

These words, pronounced in the manner in which it is necessary to speak to the Indians on such an occasion, had all the effect that I expected therefrom, for they all appeared as dismayed as if they believed that I had already permanently closed the door of the chapel, which they called the Wigwam of JESUS, and that I was absolutely resolved to refuse Baptism to the Indians whom I had previously prepared to receive worthily the first of our Sacraments. They assembled all together and came in a crowd to implore me, in the name of the God whom I had announced to them, not to abandon them, saying to me that my annoyance in truth was justified, but that I knew very well this girl had no sense, and that in fact they would so arrange everything that she would make entire reparation for the fault she had committed. And, in fact, they compelled this Indian girl to come and find me very early the next day in order to testify to me in public, in the presence of all the Indians, the keen regret which she had in her soul for having burned her *Oukate guenne*, in which was the prayer of JESUS, and her wish, as she told me, to make Him honourable amends and a reparation of honour, by a conduct entirely holy, and quite the opposite of the irregularities of her past life. She implored me, with all possible earnestness, to be willing to permit her to assist with the others at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, but I refused her this favour for some days in order thereby to make her better understand the scandal which she had brought upon all the nation.