

The Oblates

Expansion to Western Canada

In this issue, we will examine the expansion of the Oblates to Western Canada. Let us follow them, therefore, in their apostolate in Oregon. Oregon, you wonder? An American state? What does it have to do with Canada? Father Donat Levasseur provides the answer in his book " Histoire des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée".

Rev. Fr. Roger Guéguen

Two requests for missionaries to Oregon were sent to the Oblates simultaneously. The first was addressed to Bishop de Mazenod himself by Bishop Norbert Blanchet, Archbishop of Oregon City in 1845 and 1846. The second was addressed to Father Bruno Guigues in Montreal, superior of the Oblates in North America, by Bishop Magloire Blanchet, brother of the Archbishop of Oregon City, who had recently been appointed bishop of the diocese of Walla Walla in Oregon.

The founder, Bishop de Mazenod, had not granted the first request, but when Fr. Guigues agreed to send missionaries to Oregon for the Bishop of Walla Walla, he honoured the promise of his North American representative. In 1847, Oregon was a vast territory comprising the

present states of Oregon and Washington, with ecclesiastical jurisdiction over British Columbia as well.

Fr. Ricard, the scholastics Pandosy, Chirouse, and Blanchet, and Br. Verney were chosen for this mission. They left Le Havre, France, on February 4, 1847, but only arrived in Walla Walla on September 5th.

Oregon

The newcomers opened several missions among the Yakima Indians, but I will skip the details. In 1852, Fr. Chirouse began missionary work among the Cayuses, another Indian tribe.

As Fr. Levasseur explains in his history, the activities of missionaries in Oregon bore little



Fr. Jean-Marie Lejacq

fruit due to various factors: the lack of resources, the propaganda that Protestant ministers spread against them and the American Indian war of 1855-1858. The main difficulty, however, was caused by two Oregon prelates who insisted on treating the missionaries as diocesan priests at the expense of their prerogatives as religious. Because of these circumstances, the Oblates decided to move to the diocese of Bishop Modeste Demers, whose diocese included Vancouver Island, the archipelago of Queen Charlotte and the mainland of British Columbia.

British Columbia

Fr. d'Herbomez, vicar of the missions, opened the OMI's first establishment in Esquimalt in 1858, on Vancouver Island. In 1859, the mainland of British Columbia benefited from the presence of the Oblates, who founded their first mission in the region of Lake Okanagan, run by Fr. Pandosy, Fr. Richard and Br. Surel. Missions were held in following years in the north and west of Vancouver Island and on the mainland at New Westminster. Based at New Westminster, the Oblates also ministered to the Indians in the surrounding regions.

In an agreement signed September 1st, 1860, Bishop Demers gave the Oblates the responsibility of evangelizing the Indians in British Columbia and caring for the Whites in various parts of his diocese. In 1858, Bishop de Mazenod petitioned the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome to create an apostolic vicariate in British Columbia that would be entrusted to the Oblates with one of them acting as pastor. His petition was only granted at the end of 1863.

The next issue will cover the establishment and growth of the Oblates throughout the vast territory of Canada (1861-1898); however, first allow me to conclude this article with a few anecdotes. These anecdotes are excerpts from Fr. Andre Dorval O.M.I.'s book "La petite histoire oblate" [Anecdotes of the Oblates].

Fr. Jean-Marie Lejacq

A Breton from Finistère (where are they not found!), this priest spoke five to six Native tongues, as well as French and English. The stories told of him border on legend. The best-known anecdote tells of a bear who accompa-

nied him on a trail. One day, the reverend Father and four Native Americans set out to walk 240 miles to Lake Ootsa. The Natives were walking in front and Fr. Lejacq behind, absorbed in his breviary. Suddenly, the leader saw a large grizzly bear coming straight towards them. The four Indians bolted as fast as they could while the missionary, unaware of the danger, continued forward. The bear kept on toward him. When the bear was only a few feet away, the missionary looked up from his breviary quite naturally and held it out to the bear's nose, as if inviting him to smell it. The animal sniffed loudly, turned around and began to walk in front of him, as if to lead the way. He only left when houses began to draw near. During all this time, the Natives watched the scene curiously, following cautiously from afar. When they arrived at the camp, they hastened to tell, in great detail, the amazing adventure of Fr. Lejacq and his bear.

Another time, the missionary was sent for, in the middle of a cold night, to baptize a Native woman in Soda Creek. The poor woman was not baptized because, unmarried, she had been living with a white man. It was 30° below zero, and the missionary left on horseback. Halfway there, he stopped at a camp to warm up a little. His legs were stiff and already covered in frostbite. The Natives did their best to persuade him to stay the night, but he would not hear of it. As stubborn as any Breton worthy of the name, Fr. Lejacq was determined to reach the sick woman that very night. When he arrived, a few men came to meet him and told him: "It is too late, she is dead." The priest indeed found the woman in a state of apparent death. He did not give up, however. "Agatha, amota!" Agatha, get up," he ordered her. The old native woman opened her eyes and sat up in her bed. The Oblate baptized her and began a few prayers. Suddenly, Agatha fell back, dead.

Fr. Chirouse

A great missionary before God, he founded several missions among the Cayuses and Snohomish. He was the author of a grammar, a dictionary and a catechism in the Snohomish tongue. He was nicknamed "The good old Father," and a surprising adventure is told of the daring missionary. In the region of Puget Sound, Oregon, canoes were the most common form of travel. One day, Fr. Chirouse began a long jour-

ney to meet his superior, Bishop Blanchet. Wishing to be dressed suitably for such an important interview, he wore his best cassock, made from a white blanket that he had dyed a most beautiful shade of black, using the finest blackberries he could get. He left the mission with three Native paddlers. Shortly after their departure, the sea grew stormy and then furious. The crew fought as best they might against the raging waves, but to no avail.

The canoe capsized and the occupants were thrown into the water. By sheer strength, they succeeded in righting the canoe. Everyone climbed on board unhurt. But alas! The salt water had damaged the missionary's cassock. It was no longer the traditional black cassock of an ordinary priest. It looked more like the purple cassock worn by the Bishop himself!

The priest was appalled. He, a poor missionary, how could he appear in the presence of his bishop, wearing episcopal clothing? Would it not be presumptuous? While he considered his plight, the canoe capsized again and the "good old Father's" cassock was soaked in the salt water once again. When he climbed back into the canoe, all traces of the dye were gone. The cassock was as white as it was to begin with. Imagine—he was dressed in white, a prerogative reserved to the Sovereign Pontiff himself! Would he never come to the end of his troubles!

In the evening, the travellers camped on the banks of the river where they spent a pleasant night. Happily, when he awoke, Fr. Chirouse saw at hand a bush of beautiful wild blackberries.

He had never seen such an abundance of these invaluable berries, and he had never seen them so big, so juicy, or so black. Clearly the Lord was with him. He succeeded in restoring his cassock to the exact color he wanted and appeared before his superior without any apprehensions—wearing a black cassock freshly soaked in blackberry juice!

Fr. Pandosy

During the American Indian War (1854), his mission in Oregon burned down, and so he moved to the Jesuit house in Colville. In 1859, his superiors sent him to British Columbia to set up a mission at Sandy Beach.

Accompanied by a dozen settlers, he arrived one day on the beautiful shores of the wide Lake Okanagan. They promptly set up a temporary shelter and rolled up in their blankets for the night. As he was about to fall asleep, the priest heard a strange noise outside the tent—a sound like a dry branch crackling under an animal's paw. It did not disturb the settlers, already asleep, but the Oblate became suspicious.

Without a sound, the missionary left the shelter. In the darkness, he saw their camp was surrounded by a band of Sushwap Indians who were eyeing the newcomers suspiciously. Fr. Pandosy had already experienced this kind of ambush during his stay with the Yakimas. He coolly returned to his tent, took a long knife from his luggage and stepped out slowly. He walked calmly towards a tree and began to carve a circle out of the trunk at about shoulder height. Puzzled, the natives watched him, carefully observing his movements. The priest then turned and walked about ten steps away from the tree, took his knife by the blade, and dexterously threw it so that it stuck in the very middle of the circle. Unperturbed, he calmly walked back to the tree, pulled out the knife and threw it a second and then a third time, hitting the circle in the middle each time. As he pulled out the knife for the third time, he noted that not a single Native remained! Laughing in his long beard, the missionary returned quietly to his shelter, packed his knife in his bag,

rolled up in his blanket and fell peacefully asleep, without even waking up his companions. From that time on, all the Okanagan Valley natives were deeply respectful of the priest with the long beard.



Fr. Pandosy

