

## Études d'histoire religieuse



Robert Toupin, *Les écrits de Pierre Potier*, Ottawa, Les presses de l'université d'Ottawa, 1996, xii, 1329 p.

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tion des futurs prêtres mexicains; l'événement a une autre portée et une autre signification. Car les missionnaires et les Espagnols ont commencé le travail d'évangélisation dès leur arrivée au nouveau monde, convaincus que les «Indiens» étaient des hommes comme eux possédant une âme immortelle. Il est dommage que l'on soit obligé de souligner cela dans une publication scientifique. La mention est aussi ridicule que celle du fameux concile gaulois du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle qui reconnaissait, dit-on, l'existence d'une âme chez la femme, parce qu'il condamnait quelqu'un qui avait jugé bon de le nier.

La publication de Gilles Thérien regroupe donc en un *corpus* les Écrits du P. de Brébeuf, ce qui permet à tous un accès facile à cet ensemble d'une richesse documentaire exceptionnelle. L'auteur a rendu ainsi un éminent service au patrimoine littéraire francophone canadien en faisant connaître ces écrits à un large public.

Guy-M. Oury,  
Monastère bénédictin de Westfield.

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Robert Toupin, *Les écrits de Pierre Potier*, Ottawa, Les presses de l'université d'Ottawa, 1996, xii, 1329 p.

Pierre Potier was a Belgian-born Jesuit who served as missionary to the Wyandot of the Detroit area from 1744 to 1781, as well as parish priest to the local French community. His extensive writing provides a rich source of information, primarily on the Wyandot, but also on his French parishioners. Robert Toupin has made that source even richer, creating a document of major importance for scholars from a number of different disciplines: religious studies, history, anthropology, linguistics and Native studies.

*Les Écrits de Pierre Portier* is a masterful, meticulous and massive (1239 pages) effort that brings together and carefully annotates most of Potier's writings, excluding only the Huron-French dictionary and religious works in Huron he copied, earlier published in an archive report for the province of Ontario (Potier 1920)\*. It consists of two volumes. The first is a collection of a broad variety of material including such diverse works as the ethnographic gem "Recensement des villages hurons", a listing of two 1747 census records that detailed who lived in each of the longhouses, their relationship to each other, and sometimes their ages, and the linguistically significant "Façons de parler et termes français", a journal kept of French terms that Potier first encountered in Nouvelle France. The second volume centres on the copious religious records of baptisms, burials, and other services held in Potier's two communities.

It doesn't take long for stories to emerge from this book. Moving from census to religious records, I quickly learned that although many members of the Wyandot community were very devout in their observances of Catholic ritual, they also seem to have maintained the high divorce rate that Potier's predecessors recorded for the Huron during the 1630s and 1640s.

The book contains some very minor flaws, in part reflecting some of Potier's weaknesses. As Toupin is not knowledgeable in the Huron language, he sometimes makes copy errors in writing down Wyandot names, and he is not always able to correlate different spellings of these names. (Potier was not initially skilled in the language, so his writing of the names is inconsistent and often inaccurate). He also mistakenly follows Potier in assigning the authorship of "De Religione", the longest Christian text ever written in Huron to Father Daniel Richer, an eighteenth century missionary, where a translation of that text\*\* reveals that it was written by seventeenth century missionary Father Philippe Pierson. Further, Toupin's "Index onomastique" is hard to work with as he references the names using such initials as "B" for "baptêmes" and "SA" for "services anniversaires" followed by their number rather than using the more straightforward page number. However, these small dark clouds should not be seen as detracting in any serious way from the generally bright light of scholarship that Father Toupin has brought to previously obscure manuscripts.

\* Pierre Potier, *Fifteenth Report of the Bureau of Archives for the Province of Ontario*, Toronto, 1920.

\*\* John Steckley, "The warrior and the lineage: Jesuit use of Iroquoian images to communicate Christianity", *Ethnohistory*, vol 30, no 4, 1992, p. 478-509.

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Odoric Jouve, *Dictionnaire biographique des récollets missionnaires en Nouvelle-France, 1615-1645, 1670-1849*, Montréal, Bellarmin, 1996, lxxxi, 903 p.

Il nous faut ici souligner l'heureuse initiative du père René Bacon, o.f.m., qui présente sous la signature des pères Odoric-M. Jouve, Archange Godbout et Hervé Blais, aujourd'hui décédés, le *Dictionnaire biographique des récollets missionnaires en Nouvelle-France*, dont il a lui-même rassemblé, actualisé et complété les notices. Cet ouvrage, hommage au père Jouve (1875-1953), rappelle que ce religieux a consacré toute sa vie à écrire l'histoire des récollets, ancêtres des franciscains d'aujourd'hui et premiers mis-