

Fifteen Years in the Propaganda and Other Roman Archives, 1975-1990: Was It Worth It?

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Over the past fifteen years, an array of calendars, inventories and finding aids have been produced that have thrown much new light on the relations between North America and the Holy See, on the development of the Catholic community on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, and on the history of English- and French-speaking North America as a whole. These are due to a number of researchers, both Italian and Canadian, who have systematically investigated the Roman ecclesiastical archives with the constant and unfailing assistance from the National Archives of Canada, the Université Saint-Paul, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. These researchers are Monique Benoit, Luigi Bruti Liberati, Giovanni Pizzorusso, Gabriele P. Scardellato, Matteo Sanfilippo, Nicoletta Serio, and this writer. Together, they have examined the archives of the Sacred Congregation “de Propaganda Fide” from 1622 to 1830 and from 1878 to 1914, and various fonds of the Vatican Secret Archives proper for the years 1600-1799 and 1878-1914.¹ In this short paper, I will not list common achievements, ongoing projects, and future developments, since this

¹ The various fonds at the Vatican Secret Archives include the following series: Nunziatura di Francia, Dataria, Segreteria di Stato, Archivi della Congregazione Concistoriale, Archivi della Congregazione per la Disciplina dei Regolari, Delegazione Apostolica Canada, Delegazione Apostolica Stati Uniti, Epistolae ad Principes, Epistolae Latinae, Spogli dei Cardinali, Congregazione Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, Congregazione dei Riti, Segreteria dei Brevi, and Fondo Monsignor Benigni.

has been done several times in the past few years.² Instead, I will try to assess how this long and intimate link with the Roman sources has affected my own professional achievement as an historian. Were I to be given a choice, would I do it all over again, or would I rather select other archival sources to exploit or different historical questions to answer? In other words, was it worth it?

The year 1975 certainly was my own starting point. On 27 January I met with Lajos Pásztor, then archivist with the Vatican Secret Archives and the author of a monumental guide to Latin American sources (including Canada) in Italian ecclesiastical Roman archives.³

The occasion of my visit to the Vatican had been prompted by a major project, devised by the Italian historians of North America, for the upcoming celebration of the 1976 Bicentennial of the American Revolution. Roman documents seemed to be an untapped source of documentary evidence that should at least be attempted, and I was entrusted with the task.⁴

Pásztor suggested that the historical archives of the Sacred Congregation “de Propaganda Fide,” and not the Vatican Secret Archives, were the place to start, because the Propaganda had been officially responsible for the United States and Canada until 1908,⁵ and most of the administrative

² Luca Codignola, “Roman Sources of Canadian Religious History to 1799,” Canadian Catholic Historical Association, *Study Sessions* (1983), pp. 73-88; Codignola, “L’Archivio della Sacra Congregazione ‘de Propaganda Fide’,” *Storia nordamericana*, II, 1 (1985), pp. 92-93; Jean-Claude Robert, “La recherche en histoire du Canada,” *International Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue internationale d’études canadiennes*, I, 1-2 (Spring/Fall 1990), p. 26; Codignola, “The View from the Other Side of the Atlantic,” *ibid.*, pp. 217-258, especially pp. 230-231; Victorin Chabot, “Les sources d’intérêt canadien dans les archives italiennes et vaticanes,” in Matteo Sanfilippo, ed., *Italy-Canada-Research, II: Canadian Studies*, Ottawa: Canadian Academic Centre in Italy, 1991, pp. 5-9; Codignola, “Roman Sources of Canadian History in the Seventeenth and the Eighteenth Centuries: Assessment and Future Perspectives,” in *ibid.*, pp. 11-20; Sanfilippo, “Les études canadiennes en Italie: la recherche historique, 1974-1988,” in *ibid.*, pp. 185-190 (especially pp. 186-187).

³ Lajos Pásztor, *Guida delle fonti per la storia dell’America Latina negli archivi della Santa Sede e negli archivi ecclesiastici d’Italia*, Città del Vaticano: Archivio Vaticano, 1970.

⁴ This project, sponsored by the Italian Committee for North American History, led to the publication of the following collections of essays: Giorgio Spini, Anna Maria Martellone, Raimondo Luraghi, Tiziano Bonazzi, Roberto Ruffilli, eds., *Italia e America dal Settecento all’età dell’imperialismo*, Venice: Marsilio Editori, 1976; Spini, Gian Giacomo Migone, Massimo Teodori, eds., *Italia e America dalla Grande Guerra a oggi*, Venice: Marsilio Editori, 1976.

⁵ Codignola, “Roman Sources of Canadian Religious History,” I, p. 78.

material would be found there. Later, on the same day, I met with the Archivist of the Propaganda, Josef Metzler (later Prefect of the Vatican Secret Archives), who greeted me with the unwelcome information that I had been preceded there by the Academy of American Franciscan History. In fact, Anton Debevec (d.1987), on behalf of the Academy, had been, for a long time, inventorying Propaganda documents of interest for the history of the United States.⁶ As I was later to discover, a number of American and Canadian historians had already made good use of the Roman archives.⁷ The historian's principle, however, is that there is more than one way to use a document. Almost three years later, in October 1977, through Robert S. Gordon and Victorin Chabot, the National (then Public) Archives of Canada asked me to prepare a calendar of North American documents preserved in the Propaganda from the Sacred Congregation's inception in 1622 through 1799, and later still another calendar that would include the years from 1800 to 1830. My task was to find, calendar, describe, explain, cross-reference and microfilm every single document contained in the archives of the Propaganda that had a bearing upon the history of French and British North America (1622-1799) or specifically on Canada (from 1800 onwards).⁸ From the point

⁶ Anton Debevec's work was edited in Finbar Kenneally, *United States Documents in the Propaganda Fide Archives. A Calendar. First Series* (7 vols. and Index), Washington: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1966-1981. See Codignola's review of vols. 1-6 in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, XXXV, 2 (April 1978), pp. 419-420; and in *Rivista Storica Italiana*, LXXXVIII, 3 (settembre 1976), pp. 599-605; also, Codignola, "L'Amérique du Nord et la Sacrée Congrégation 'de Propaganda Fide', 1622-1799. Guides et inventaires," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, XXXIII, 2 (septembre 1979), pp. 197-214; reprinted in Codignola, *Guide to Documents Relating to French and British North America in the Archives of the Sacred Congregation "de Propaganda Fide" in Rome, 1622-1799*, 6 vols. [partially in book form], Ottawa: National Archives of Canada, 1991, pp. 41-61. For the Second Series, see Anton Debevec, Mathias C. Kiemen, Alexander Wyse and James McManamon, eds., *United States Documents in the Propaganda Fide Archives. A Calendar* (vols. 8-11 to date), Washington: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1980. After his death, Debevec was replaced in Rome by Mrs. Giovanna Piscini.

⁷ Codignola, "Amérique et Propagande. Guides et inventaires"; Codignola, "L'Amérique du Nord et la Sacrée Congrégation 'de Propaganda Fide', 1622-1799. Études," *Bulletin du Centre de recherche en civilisation canadienne française*, 21 (décembre 1980), pp. 1-12; the latter is republished in Pierre Savard, éd., *Aspects de la civilisation canadienne- française*, Ottawa: Éditions de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1983, pp. 325-336; and in Codignola, *Guide*, pp. 46-61.

⁸ To date, I have completed research in the archives of the Sacred Congregation "de Propaganda Fide" for the whole of French and British North America from 1622 to 1799, and for Canada only from 1800 to 1830. Documents have been calendared in Codignola, *Guide*, to which a Calendar is appended,

of view of the actual archival work, one's performance can only be assessed on the basis of the thoroughness with which he or she has completed his or her task. The historian's work, however, consists not so much of finding a document, but of using it. From this point of view, then, each case-study requires a special assessment.

As I believed that there was not much of an Italian audience for the article on the Propaganda that I had written for the American bicentennial collection,⁹ I translated it into English and on 24 April 1976 submitted it to *Archivaria*, the journal of the newly-founded Association of Canadian Archivists.¹⁰ The three referees' reports are worth noting, because their opinions touch upon all of the problems and questions that I was to face in the following fifteen years – indeed to this date.

One referee stated bluntly that my article did not contain “enough substantially new information to warrant publication,” and did not elaborate further. My later acquaintance with the historical literature on the topic would now compel me to agree with a harsh judgment that, at the time, had certainly taken me aback. With reference to the Roman archives, then, the first important question is: Should Roman archives be used mainly to supplement documentary evidence that is unavailable in more traditional or well known repositories?

The second referee pointed out that he favoured publication of my article because it revealed “the inner working of the Propaganda, which [he found] fascinating, and which should arouse interest in the Vatican Archives.” As

available in microform [the whole work is in six volumes: the *Guide is vol. I*, the *Calendar* vols. II-VI]; and in Codignola, *Calendar of Documents of Interest for the History of Canada in the Archives of the Sacred Congregation "de Propaganda Fide" in Rome, 1800-1830*, Ottawa: Public Archives of Canada and Université Saint-Paul, 1987, 6 vols. (preliminary finding aid available at National Archives of Canada). I am currently working on the period from 1831 to 1846. A calendar based on the entire manuscript holdings of the Biblioteca Casanatense is being prepared, covering the years from 1622 to 1799. A preliminary list is available in Codignola, "The Casanatense Library", *Annali Accademici Canadesi*, VII (1991), pp. 99104. As for the Archivio Generale dell'Ordine dei Carmelitani Scalzi, a list of documents consulted is available in Codignola, *The Coldest Harbour of the Land: Simon Stock and Lord Baltimore's Colony in Newfoundland, 1621-1649*, Kingston and Montreal: McGillQueen's University Press, 1988, p. 193. I have also, at various times, worked in the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, in the Archivio Segreto Vaticano, and in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.

⁹ Codignola, “L’America del Nord nei documenti dell’Archivio della Sacra Congregazione ‘de Propaganda Fide’ (1754-1784),” in Spini et al., eds., *Italia e America dal Settecento*, pp. 127-147.

¹⁰ Codignola to Peter Bower, General Editor, *Archivaria*, 24 April 1976.

I discovered later (not from anyone's breach of confidence, but because of a distinctive handwriting), the second referee was Roberto Perin, then with the University of Edinburgh (later with York University). Shortly before myself, Perin had used the Propaganda documents for his ground-breaking doctoral dissertation on Bishop Ignace Bourget (1799-1885).¹¹ He certainly was in a position to advocate that the importance of the Roman archives for the history of Canada be fully recognized. Yet Perin's commentary also implied that the value of the article mostly resided with its description of the Roman bureaucracy. Hence the second important question: Do Roman documents tell us something of the country, event or topic that is being examined by the historian, or are they mostly useful to understand the functioning of the Roman bureaucracy itself?

The third referee suggested that my article be published, although with some revisions. More emphasis, he or she argued, was to be placed on British North America. This was also Perin's opinion, who did not understand why I dealt "in the same article with the Catholic Church in the United States and Canada," their status being "completely different." He suggested that I restrict myself to Québec.¹² Hence, the third question: Is there "a Roman perspective" that can, at times, justify a larger continental framework?

As for the first question, namely, whether Roman archives should be used mainly to supplement documentary evidence unavailable elsewhere, the most obvious answer is that historians must find their documents wherever they are, independently of where they are stored. In fact, at the launching of the preliminary edition of my *Calendar of Propaganda Fide 1622-1799*, which took place in Ottawa on 16 September 1984, the Archivist of the Archives de l'Archidiocèse de Québec, Armand Gagné, rightly pointed out that copies of the letters to Rome written by the bishops and archbishops of Québec are in the Archives de l'Archevêché de Québec, whereas the originals are in Rome, and that the opposite, of course, is true of the letters sent from Rome to Québec. Clearly enough, however, not all documents are

¹¹ Roberto Perin, "Bourget and the Dream of a Free Church in Quebec, 1862-1878," Ph.D., University of Ottawa, 1975. This dissertation was the first step in a long project that eventually led to the same author's *Rome in Canada: The Vatican and Canadian Affairs in the Late Victorian Age*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990.

¹² The three referees' opinions are given as cited in Bower to Codignola, 10 January 1977. Perin's opinion is in [Perin] to Bower, [date and signature erased], but late 1976.

still available in both places, and the two repositories do supplement each other well.¹³

The historian's dream is always to find a new, previously unknown, sensational document or, as American writer Samuel Clemens, *alias* Mark Twain (1835-1910), remarked of travellers, "To be where no one has been, to be the first who has the idea." Yet in this century the professionalization and the widening of historical research has slowed down almost to a halt the discovery of individual written documents of extraordinary importance. Yet, under the patriation program of the National Archives of Canada, striking discoveries were made by British historian Selma Huxley Barkham in the Basque countries. The consequent new awareness of the importance of the Basque fisheries in the North Atlantic led not only Barkham herself to the glossy pages of *en Route* magazine¹⁴ and to her recognition by the scholarly community, but also to the development of a major historical park, such as Red Bay, Newfoundland. The patriation programme was started by the National Archives in the 1870s with the intent to identify and to make

¹³ Documents in Propaganda can be cross-referenced with those of the Archives de l'Archevêché de Québec, by comparing Codignola's *Guide and Calendar 1800-1830* to the various calendars edited by Ivanhoë Caron (1875-1941) and L.-Adélarde Desrosiers. Those edited by Caron are: "Inventaire des documents concernant l'église du Canada sous le régime français [1610-1729]," *Rapport de l'Archiviste de la Province de Québec* [hereafter cited as *RAPQ*] (1939-40), pp. 155-353; (1940-41), pp. 333-473; (1941-42), pp. 179-298; "Mgr Jean-Olivier Briand. Inventaire de la correspondance de Mgr Jean-Olivier Briand, évêque de Québec, de 1741 à 1794," *RAPQ* (1929-30), pp. 45-136; "Mgrs Louis-Philippe Mariauchau D'Esgly, Jean-François Hubert et Charles-François Bailly de Messein," *RAPQ* (1930-31), pp. 183-351; "Mgr Pierre Denaut. Inventaire de la correspondance de Mgr Pierre Denaut, Évêque de Québec," *RAPQ* (1931-32), pp. 127-242; "Mgr Joseph-Octave Plessis. Inventaire de la correspondance de Mgr Joseph-Octave Plessis, Archevêque de Québec," *RAPQ* (1927-28), pp. 213-316; (1928-29), pp. 87-208; (1932-33), pp. 1-244; "Mgr Bernard-Claude Panet. Inventaire de la correspondance de Mgr Bernard-Claude Panet, Archevêque de Québec," *RAPQ* (1933-34), pp. 233-459; (1934-35), pp. 319-420; (1935-36), pp. 155-262; "Monseigneur Joseph Signay. Inventaire de la correspondance de Monseigneur Joseph Signay, Archevêque de Québec," *RAPQ* (1936-37), pp. 123-330; (1937-38), pp. 21-146; (1938-39), pp. 180-357. Calendars edited by Desrosiers include: "Correspondance de cinq vicaires généraux [of Montreal] avec les évêques de Québec, 1761-1816," *RAPQ* (1947-48), pp. 73-133; "Monseigneur Jean-Jacques Lartigue. Inventaire de la correspondance de Mgr J.-J. Lartigue," *RAPQ* (1941-42), pp. 345-496; (1942-43), pp. 1-174; (1943-44), pp. 207-334; (1944-45), pp. 173-266; (1945-46), pp. 37-334.

¹⁴ Dane Lanken, "Selma Barkham traces our Basque Heritage," *en Route* (May 1984), pp. 46-49, 74-75, 78-80.

available documents of interest for the history of Canada that, on account of historical vicissitudes, were preserved abroad.¹⁵

When this program was extended to the Vatican in 1975, I, for one, would have liked to strike gold and find there, for example, the hard evidence that would substantiate British historian David Beers Quinn's contention that America was indeed discovered by Bristol fishermen in the decade preceding the 1492 voyage of Christopher Columbus (1451-1506).¹⁶ Although, to date, this has not been the case, the cumulative effect of so many documents found, described and put in their context has certainly added much to our knowledge and understanding of the early history of Canada and of North America. Furthermore, details about the Avalon colony, established by George Calvert, Baron Baltimore (1580-1632), in the 1620s, the number of Newfoundland fishermen in the same area in the 1660s, the lists of Capuchin fathers in Acadia in the early seventeenth century, the reports on seventeenth century Franciscans Recollet in Canada, the secret negotiations that led to the erection of the bishopric of Québec in the seventeenth century and of Baltimore in the eighteenth century, the presence of Catholics amongst the disbanded German mercenaries who settled in Nova Scotia after the War of American Independence, the private letters on the dispute between the Séminaire de Saint Sulpice and their former confrère, Bishop Jean-Jacques Lartigue (1777-1840),¹⁷ and many other items of similar interest certainly proved to be an unexpected bonus. In this context, what we must look for is not major "discoveries," but a patient accumulation of new documents, the many components of an historical jigsaw puzzle that will never be completed, but that can certainly be improved. Historians will then verify the "importance" of each document against all existing primary and secondary sources and a full knowledge of the related events.¹⁸

An interesting case of this traditional, or cumulative, approach to the Vatican sources is represented by the pioneering effort of the Franciscan Conrad-Marie Morin (d.1984), whose eight years in Rome as a student and later as a graduate at the Gregorian University (1937-45) convinced him of

¹⁵ Codignola, "View from the Other Side," pp. 230-231.

¹⁶ David Beers Quinn, "The Argument for the English Discovery of America between 1480 and 1494," *Geographical Journal*, 127 (1961), pp. 277-285.

¹⁷ See entries in Codignola, *Guide and Calendar 1800-1830*.

¹⁸ Cross-references are an essential part of Codignola, *Guide and Calendar 1800-1830*. After 1830 the increase in the volume of the documents to be calendared does not allow for either long descriptions of each item or extensive and satisfactory cross-referencing.

the opportunities offered by the Roman archives. His dissertation should have been the first volume of a major work entitled *Le Saint-Siège et l'établissement de l'Église au Canada sous le régime français*, which was to be coupled with a documentary collection entitled *Les sources de l'Église canadienne aux Archives du Vatican*. Illness prevented Morin from ever completing his ambitious plans, and all we are left with are some articles. According to Morin, the archives of the Holy See contained unknown documents that could supplement the documentary evidence on which the ecclesiastical history of Canada was based. His approach to the Roman documents, then, was fully in line with the tradition— the more we look, the more evidence we find, a better knowledge of history we acquire. As his biographers, Charles Poirier and Jean Hamelin, explain, for Morin “Les faits ne sont pas un construit, mais des perles rares qu'on ramasse dans les archives.”¹⁹ The Roman archives are simply among them.

Another negative comment on some of my writings could again help in this discussion. My book *The Coldest Harbour of the Land*,²⁰ indeed a by-product of research mainly in Rome and London, received a blatantly negative review in *The Newfoundland Quarterly*. It was signed by Peter Pope, then a doctoral candidate at Memorial University who, according to the magazine caption, was “working on the history of archaeology of seventeenth-century Ferryland.”²¹ Ferryland was the centre of Lord Baltimore's Avalon colony in Newfoundland, and my book dealt with the activity around that colony in the 1620s. Pope described my book as

¹⁹ Conrad-Marie Morin, OFM, *Le Saint-Siège et l'établissement de l'Église au Canada sous le régime français d'après les archives romaines. L'affiliation au Saint-Siège ou la mission apostolique (1615-1658)*, laurea dissertation, Università Gregoriana (1942). See also Morin, “Les tentatives du secrétaire François Ingoli pour l'érection d'un évêché au Canada (1631-1641)”, in Société Canadienne d'Histoire de l'Église Catholique, *Rapport* (1944-45), pp. 69-82; Morin, “Les archives du Saint-Siège, importantes sources de l'histoire politico-religieuse du Canada,” *Culture*, VII, 2 (juin 1946), pp. 151-176; Morin, “La naissance de l'Église au Canada,” *Revue d'Histoire de l'Amérique française*, I, 2 (septembre 1947), pp. 243-256; 3 (décembre 1947), pp. 331-341; Morin, “Éclaircissements inédits de Faillon sur son *Histoire de la colonie française*,” *Revue d'Histoire de l'Amérique française*, V, 4 (mars 1952), pp. 585-588. On Morin's projects, see Codignola, *Guide*, pp. 47-48. On his achievements, see also Léandre Poirier and Jean Hamelin, “Hugolin Lemay et Conrad Morin, pionniers en histoire et en bibliographie,” in Hamelin, éd., *Les Franciscains au Canada 1890-1990*, Sillery: Éditions du Septentrion 1990, pp. 285-294 (on Morin, pp. 291-294, quotation from p. 292).

²⁰ Codignola, *Coldest Harbour*. This book is a revised translation into English of Codignola, *Terre d'America e burocrazia romana. Simon Stock, Propaganda Fide e la colonia di Lord Baltimore a Terranova, 1621-1649*, Venice: Marsilio Editori, 1982.

“disappointing,” containing but “limited information about the Avalon colony ... not substantial enough to support the scholarly apparatus draped around it.” He felt it necessary to warn his Newfoundland readers not to buy my book, but to only “consult [it] at [their] library.”²¹ The point here is that Pope was looking for hard evidence, probably of an archaeological kind and similar to that which had led Selma Barkham to her major breakthrough in the Basque countries. What disappointed him was that those “nuggets” of hard evidence were “few and far between.” Yet, my book was not about hard evidence of that kind, although some new facts were added to our knowledge of the history of the Avalon colony, but about the interplay of three elements – Lord Baltimore, the Discalced Carmelite Simon Stock (Thomas Doughty, 1574-1652), and the Propaganda – with regard to the early history of the North Atlantic. I was indeed happy and relieved to see this recognized by most reviewers.²² To my first question, whether Roman archives should be used mainly to supplement documentary evidence unavailable elsewhere, Pope would have given a unremittingly positive answer. He would have added that this was the *only* possible use for such documents. On this last point, however, I would disagree.

Let us now tackle the second question, namely, whether Roman documents tell us something about the country, event or topic that is being examined by the historian, or whether they are mostly useful for understanding the functioning of the Roman bureaucracy itself. There again a very negative review might provide a good starting point for the discussion. In 1982, after some eight years of experience in Roman archives, I completed the first *Calendar* of Propaganda documents dealing with the years 1622-1799 and with the whole of French and British North America. I had also written a number of review articles on Vatican sources, besides the book on early Newfoundland. The time had come, I believed, to provide some

²¹ Peter Pope’s review is in *The Newfoundland Quarterly*, LXXXIV, 2 (Winter 1989), p. 45.

²² For example, Piero Del Negro in *Rivista Storica Italiana*, XCVI, 1 (gennaio 1984), pp. 242-244; Quinn in *The English Historical Review*, C, 1 (February 1985); John M. Bumsted in *The Journal of American History*, LXXV, 3 (December 1988); John D. Krugler in *The International History Review*, XI, 1 (February 1989), pp. 132-134; Terrence Murphy in *The Canadian Historical Review*, LXX, 2 (June 1989), pp. 258-259; John A. Dickinson in *Revue d’histoire de l’Amérique française*, 43, 4 (printemps 1990), pp. 569-570; Jacques Portes in *Revue française d’histoire d’Outre-mer*, LXXVII, 289 (1990), p. 229; John G. Reid in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, XLVI, 1 (January 1989), pp. 174-175. Less enthusiastic were Raymond J. Lahey in *The Catholic Historical Review*, LXXV, 2 (April 1989), pp. 318-319; and Olaf Janzen in *International Journal of Maritime History*, I, 2 (December 1989), pp. 405-408.

theoretical frame of reference to this voluminous documentation. For this reason, I wrote “Rome and North America, 1622-1799. The Interpretive Framework,” in which I tried to answer some fundamental questions – how the Holy See shaped its North American policy, whether and how this policy changed over time, and whether it was possible to determine the impact of the Holy See upon the history of North America.²³ At the time, I believed I had given sound answers to these questions. Even today, almost ten years later, I would change very little of it. Somebody, however, was of a different opinion.

Articles are very rarely reviewed, but mine was, since it appeared in the first issue of the journal of the Italian Committee for North American history, *Storia nordamericana*. The entire issue was reviewed by American historian Robert Kelley and appeared in the influential and authoritative journal *Reviews in American History*. Although “lucid and well written,” “lengthy and well-documented,” “the product of assiduous scholarship pursued over many years,” Kelley described my article as “an unfortunate selection” as the opening item of the issue. While my aim was to provide an “interpretive framework,” Kelley maintained that the article was an “archive-centered essay” that “lack[ed] substance,” an “extended description of Vatican inattention” which informed the reader “that there [was] little to report.” Essentially, “a picture of America as seen in how the Vatican organized its files.” In conclusion, Kelley accused me of “patently absurd comment[s],” of “most curious judgment[s],” of not being “a serious student of North American history,” and finally, of “lack[ing] the requisite breadth of historical understanding.”²⁴ The 1,400-word answer to Kelley’s review, which I wrote in self-defence, was not published by *Reviews in American History*. But what should interest us here is not the disparaging comments of a hasty and ill-informed reviewer, but his remarks about the article being an “archive-centered essay.” Kelley’s answer to our second question, then, would be a negative one, namely, that Vatican documents might be useful to understand the functioning of the Roman bureaucracy, but they tell us very little about the history of French and British North America.

Although, to say the least, I did not welcome Kelley’s negative review, this provided me with an additional challenge to my work as an historian. In future, I would always ask myself, “Is this an archive-centered essay?”

²³ Codignola, “Rome and North America, 1622-1799. The Interpretive Framework,” *Storia nordamericana*, I, 1 (1984), pp. 5-33 (specifically p. 6); reprinted, with minor revisions, in Codignola, *Guide*, pp. 1-24 (cf. p. 2).

²⁴ Robert Kelley, “The Study of American History Abroad,” *Reviews in American History*, XV, 12 (March 1987), pp. 140-151 (quotations are from pages 147-148 and 150).

meaning, “Is this an essay that is limited by its dependence on one single source, or an essay that is enhanced by its usage of an additional source?” In this fashion, for example, I returned to my earlier interest in the age of the Conquest and of the American Revolution, roughly from 1750 to 1830, and produced a number of articles that tried not only to make good use of previously unknown Roman documents, but also to show how the role of the Holy See was an important part of the overall picture. As Canadian historians Roberto Perin, Lucien Lemieux and Pierre Savard made clear for the ensuing nineteenth century,²⁵ very early Rome became the third capital of the Catholics of Canada, together with Paris and London. Immediately after the Conquest the Catholic community looked upon the Holy See for a solution to their institutional crisis. In the meantime, while London replaced Paris as the political capital of the Canadians, the trauma of the French Revolution severed Québec’s ideal relations with Paris and closed the door, once and for all, to any thought of re-unification with France. This political process was coupled and indeed substantiated by the numerous Catholic immigrants that flooded Atlantic Canada and later Upper Canada at the turn of the century. The fact that they did not feel represented by the Québec hierarchy made them strongly dependent on the Holy See. As for the United States, although Catholics were a small minority, their dependence on Rome grew as internal struggles and rivalries could not be solved except by referring to an outside agency, namely, the Holy See.²⁶

²⁵ Pierre Savard, “Voyageurs canadiens-français en Italie au dix-neuvième siècle,” *Vie française*, XVII, 1-2 (septembre-octobre 1961), pp. 15-24; Savard, “Voyageurs, pèlerins et récits de voyage canadiens-français en Europe de 1850 à 1960,” in *Mélanges de civilisation canadienne française offertes au professeur Paul Wyczynski*, (Ottawa, 1977), pp. 241-265; Savard, “L’Italia nella cultura franco-canadese dell’Ottocento,” in Codignola, ed., *Canadian. Problemi di storia canadese*, Venice: Marsilio Editori, 1983, pp. 91-106; Lucien Lemieux, *L’établissement de la première province ecclésiastique au Canada, 1783-1844*, Montréal: Fides, 1968; Lemieux, *Les années difficiles (1760-1839)*, Montréal: Les Éditions du Boréal, 1989; Codignola, “The Rome-Paris-Québec Connection in an Age of Revolutions, 1760-1820,” in Pierre H. Boulle and Richard A. Lebrun, ed., *Le Canada et la Révolution française. Actes du 6e colloque du CEIC*, 29, 30, 31 octobre 1987, Montréal: Interuniversity Centre for European Studies, 1989, pp. 115-132; Perin, “Rome as a Metropolis of Canada,” in Sanfilippo, ed., *Italy-Canada-Research*, II, pp. 21-31. See also Yves Tessier, *A l’ombre du Vatican. L’histoire des relations entre l’Église canadienne et le Vatican de l’époque amérindienne à nos jours*, Sillery, Québec: Les Éditions Tessier, 1984; Nive Voisine’s review of Perin’s book in *Revue d’histoire de l’Amérique française*, 43, 2 (1990), pp. 281-283; Sanfilippo, “L’image du Canada dans les rapports du Saint-Siège, 1608-1908” (forthcoming, 1993).

²⁶ Codignola, “Conflict or Consensus? Catholics in Canada and in the United

None of these articles, I believe, can be described as “archive-centered essays,” although all of them do make good use of Roman documents that have not previously been investigated in a systematic manner. Furthermore, my view that Roman documents can do more than just explain the functioning of the Holy See bureaucracy received a most welcome, although indirect, support from Canadian historians Lucien Campeau and Dominique Deslandres and by a French team of scholars who, since 1986, have worked in Rome on a major project sponsored by the *École Française de Rome*. Campeau’s scholarly edition of the Jesuit sources not only completely supersedes the now century-old so-called *Jesuit Relations* edited by American archivist-historian Reuben Gold Thwaites (1853-1913), but also shows how the proper use of Roman sources can lead to a reinterpretation of the early history of New France. Roman items indeed constitute the vast majority of documents edited by the Jesuit historian.²⁷ As for Deslandres, her formidable doctoral dissertation introduced a completely new “European” perspective in the history of Catholic missions in North America. This most likely would not have been possible outside of the ideological framework provided by the Propaganda and the constant use of its documents. Her dissertation was defended only recently (27 November 1990), but I am certain that it will not be long before the influence of her work is felt among historians.²⁸ As for the *École Française*, the first result of its major project on “Ethnohistoire et archives” (begun in 1986) was only recently made available in the “Anthropologie et histoire” section of the School’s most recent *Mélanges*. It contains one introduction and eleven articles – four on the Americas, one each on Africa, the Middle East, India, Borneo, and Chinese

States, 1780-1820,” Canadian Catholic Historical Association, *Historical Papers* (1988), pp. 43-59; Codignola, “Rome-Paris-Québec Connection,” Codignola, “Le Québec et les prêtres savoyards, 1779-1784: Les dimensions internationales d’un échec,” *Revue d’histoire de l’Amérique française*, 43, 4 (printemps 1990), pp. 559-568; Codignola, “The Policy of Rome towards the English-speaking Catholics in British North America, 1760-1830,” in T. Murphy and G. Stortz, eds., *Creed and Culture: The Place of English-speaking Catholics in the Canadian Mosaic*, Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992, pp. 210-257.

²⁷ Lucien Campeau, ed., *Monumenta Novae Franciae*, 5 vols. to date, Rome, Québec and Montréal: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, Les Presses de l’Université Laval and Les Éditions Bellarmin, 1967-1991; Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents. Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610-1791*, 73 vols., Cleveland: The Burrow Brothers Company, 1896-1901. On Campeau’s vol. IV, see Codignola, “Note critique,” *Revue d’histoire de l’Amérique française*, 44, 1 (été 1990), pp. 97-103.

²⁸ Dominique Deslandres, *Le modèle français d’intégration socio-religieuse, 1600-1650. Missions intérieures et premières missions canadiennes*, Thèse de Doctorat, Université de Montréal (1990).

Mongolia, and two on China proper. In the general introduction, French historian Serge Gruzinski stresses the importance of the Roman archives and the usefulness of a comparative approach.²⁹ In conclusion, there appears to be no doubt that there is more to Roman documents than the daily routine of some ill-informed bureaucrats.

One of the problems two referees had with my 1976 article was that it dealt, at the same time, with Canada and the United States. Whereas they might have been right in that particular instance, our third question remains, namely, whether there is “a Roman perspective” that can, at times, justify a larger continental framework. Proximity to events does not always favour comparisons and perspective. Very seldom did Canadian or American Catholics make reference to other, similar situations that were taking place in their geographical area. Rome, however, did. Although we should certainly dismiss the image of a long-term decision-making process perfectly geared to a grand overall plan, we must always remember that, no matter how narrow-minded and Romano-centric the Holy See officials could be, they indeed *were* at the centre of the world.³⁰ The simple list of places with which they entertained some kind of relations, touching all known continents, from Greece to Sweden, from Japan to Russia, from Australia to Arabia, from Labrador to Chile, is telling. In order to save the world from heresy, to reclaim the Protestants and to convert the heathen, the Holy See sent and kept emissaries all over the world. Finances, manpower, alliances were always weighed against options that existed in apparently remote and unrelated parts of the world. For example, at the turn of the eighteenth century, only an outside perspective, such as Rome's, can show that, no matter how conflictual the state of the Catholics of Canada, they enjoyed a state of quasi-consensus when compared to their litigious fellow Catholics in the United States.³¹ And in the same period, a comparison between Catholic

²⁹ “Anthropologie et histoire,” *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome*, CI, 2 (1989), pp. 733-1035. See the introduction by Serge Gruzinski, “Christianisation ou occidentalisation? Les sources romaines d'une anthropologie historique,” pp. 733-750, and the following articles by Dominique Deslandres (Canada), Carmen Bernand (New Granada), Carmen Salazar-Soler (Peru), Nathan Wachtel (Peru), Paule Brasseur (Africa), Berbard Heyberger (Middle East), Anne Kroell (India), Clause Guillot (Borneo), Frédérique Touboul-Bouyeure (China), Jean-Claude Martzloff (China) and François Aubin (Mongolia).

³⁰ Codignola, *Guide*, pp. 2-16. Some plans did exist, however. See, for example, the one recalled in 1823 by Francesco Saverio Castiglione (1761-1830), later to become Pope Pius VIII (1829-1830), for the ecclesiastical organization of Canada and the United States in the 1820's, in Codignola, “Policy of Rome,” p. 237.

³¹ Codignola, “Conflict or Consensus.”

missionaries active in North America shows that the poor quality of some of them was due not so much to local situations, but to their European origin.³²

The usefulness of a “Roman perspective” is particularly evident in the first half of the seventeenth century, the golden era of Catholic revival, when missions were promoted within the Catholic countries, all over Europe and in the new worlds.³³ For example, Rome’s lack of support to Lord Baltimore’s colony can only be explained by the Propaganda’s realization that any assistance would have hampered its relations with the Discalced Carmelites of the Middle East, who opposed the new colony.³⁴ Even more telling is the *curriculum vitae* of the visionary Capuchin Pacifique de Provins (René de l’Escale, 1588-1648). In the 1620s he travelled extensively in Muslim lands, preaching or establishing missions in present-day Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Egypt, Iraq and Iran (1621-23, 1626-29). Although he was confined to France from 1629 to 1645, he was appointed prefect of Acadia in 1641 and a year later of the whole of French America. He then lived in Guadeloupe for one year between 1645 and 1646, visited Martinique, Dominica and Marie Galante, and died on the Guiana coast in 1648.³⁵

Finally, two narrower case studies, on which I have more recently written, may be considered two good cases in point. The story of the Dutch captain, Laurens van Heemskerk (c.1632-1699), who in the years 1668-72 enjoyed a certain notoriety as an Arctic navigator, surfaces in the Roman archives at the time that he was trying (unsuccessfully it turned out) to play the role of the promoter of a Catholic colony in Hudson Bay. Rome became

³² Codignola, “Northern Climate, European Origins and Human Fraility. Catholic Priests in Newfoundland and the North Atlantic Area, 1760-1830” (forthcoming 1993).

³³ Codignola, “The French in Early America. Religion and Reality,” in Deborah Madsen, ed., *Visions of America: The European Impact Since 1492*, Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992; Codignola, “The Holy See and the Conversion of the North American Indians, 1053-1760,” in Karen Ordahl Kupperman, ed., *America in European Consciousness, 1493-1750*, Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press (forthcoming 1994).

³⁴ Codignola, *Coldest Harbour*, pp. 25-31.

³⁵ Codignola, “A World Yet to be Conquered: Pacifique de Provins and the Atlantic World, 1629-1648,” in Codignola and Raimondo Luraghi, eds., *Canada ieri e oggi. Atti del 6° Convegno Internazionale di Studi Canadesi. Selvia di Fasanol 27-31 marzo 1985*, III: Sezione storica, Fasano: Schena, 1986, pp. 59-84; Codignola, “Pacifique de Provins and the Capuchin Network in Africa and America,” in Patricia Galloway and Philip P. Boucher, eds., *Proceedings of the Fifteenth Meeting of the French Colonial Historical Society. Martinique and Guadeloupe, May 1989*, Lanham: University Press of America, 1992, pp. 46-60.

part of a story that, until then, had been bouncing back and forth between London and Paris.³⁶ Given the international events with which van Heemskerck was connected, historical evidence must then be pieced together in Rome, London and Paris. Equally unsuccessful is the story of the four Savoyard priests, Joseph-François Du Clot de La Vorze (1745-1821), Joseph-Vincent Bosson (1743-1819), Joseph Masson (1746-1823), and Jean-Pierre Besson (1751-1836), who left for Québec in 1782 to supplement the diminishing number of the priests in the province. Again, Roman documents provide not only unknown and interesting details, but also a larger frame of reference, or a “Roman perspective,” that help explain the roles played in the events by London and Québec. In this case, historical evidence is available in Rome, London and Québec.³⁷ According to my own experience, then, a “Roman perspective” is often very useful to place people and events in their more general and significant context, although other available sources should always be used, lest the “Roman perspective” be reduced to the simple category of a “Roman view” of a certain event. In conclusion, my answer to the third question is that to be able to use the larger “Roman perspective” is indeed an asset that, when available, should be exploited to its fullest extent.

The main initial question must now be answered, namely, whether I consider the past fifteen years of acquaintance with the Roman archives a rewarding professional experience. At first, inexperience led me to believe that Roman sources were untouched reserves of unknown documents. My initial hope had been to find sensational evidence that would have thrown new light on some major and contentious historical issue. With time, the realization came that the cumulative effect of so many documents read, described and explained was not only to add names, dates and facts to the overall description of the historical development of North America. New questions would be asked, new perspectives imagined, new answers given.

Some questions concern the “religious emigrants,” the missionary clergy. Who were the missionaries, why would they choose to go to North America or somewhere else? Were they fleeing something back home, or were they called? What previous knowledge did they have of their mission stations, how conscious were their choices? How thorough was their training, did they know the language, did they adapt well? How did they relate to authority – the superiors, the bishops, the Pope? Other questions touch upon those who, at the centre of the Catholicism, in the eternal city of Rome, were entrusted with coordinating the efforts of thousands of individual priests in

³⁶ Codignola, “Laurens van Heemkerk’s Pretended Expeditions to the Arctic, 1668-1672: A Note,” *The International History Review*, XII, 3 (August 1990), pp. 514-527.

the final hope of converting the whole world. Were they active agents of change or passive recipients of somebody else's history? Did they manage to sort the useful projects from the detrimental ones, the good missionaries from the bad? Did they really care? Did they understand the many diverse worlds with which they dealt? New questions concern the people about whom this was all about, the recipients of the evangelical message, the inhabitants, old and new, of North America. For the Amerindians, what did conversion mean? How deep were these conversions? What is the difference between culture and religion, between societal assimilation and individual faith? As for the Euroamericans, did they cling to their old faith and customs? What is the relationship between language and religion, between religion and religiosity? How did they regard the coordinating role of Rome, of the Pope, of the Holy See? Lastly, countries, states, and governments were affected by the presence of the Holy See. Were international relations affected by this supernatural political presence? Did they exploit it, did they suffer it, or did they realize its waning importance? So many questions are raised, so many remain unanswered that, were I given a choice, whether to start it all over again, my answer would be, unequivocally, an affirmative one.