

FRANÇOIS LE MERCIER (1604–1690)

OF THE MISSION OF STE. MARIE AMONG THE MOHAWK (1668)

Fathers Fremin, Pierron, and Bruyas set out in July . . . 1667 for the land of the lower Iroquois . . . to re-establish the missions there which had been interrupted by the wars.

Since the whole country of the Iroquois was at that time greatly in fear of a renewed French invasion, fourteen warriors had been at the entrance to this lake for several days, constantly on the lookout for an army on the march . . . But, by great good fortune for them and for us, we came to them not as enemies, but as angels of peace.

We were received there with the customary ceremonies and with all possible honors. We were conducted to the cabin of the foremost captain, where all the people crowded in to look at us, quite delighted to see among them such peaceable Frenchmen, when the French had appeared there not long before as though in a fury, putting everything to the torch. The first care of Father Fermin was to go through the cabins looking for Huron and Algonquin captives, who alone constitute two-thirds of the town. He baptized at once ten of their children, presenting to God these blessed first fruits of the new mission . . .

Our chapel was built by the efforts of the Iroquois themselves, who applied themselves to the task with incredible ardor. We opened it, and our old Christians, who had formerly been instructed in their own Huron country by our fathers, could once again hear the holy Mass. Here it must be confessed that we could not help shedding tears of joy at seeing these poor captives so fervent in their devotions and so constant in their faith after all the years they had been deprived of all instruction. Such is the reward that God gives us in advance for the little labors which this barbarous life imposes on us for love of Him.

The mothers bring us their little children, that we may make the sign of the cross on their foreheads, and they themselves adopt the habit of doing the same thing before putting them to bed. Their ordinary conversation in the cabins is about hell and paradise, subjects on which we often speak to them.

There are many obstacles to the establishment of the faith among these peoples which have been amply discussed in earlier *Relations*, but one of the greatest has not yet been mentioned. Drunkenness, caused by the brandy that the Europeans of these coasts began to sell to the natives some years ago, has proven very useful to the Devil.

It is so common here, and causes such disorders, that it seems sometimes as if all the people of the town have gone crazy, so great is the license they allow themselves when they are under the influence of liquor. Firebrands have been thrown at our heads and our papers set on fire; our chapel has been broken into, and we have been often threatened with death.

Taken from François le Mercier, “Of the Mission of Ste. Marie among the Mohawk Iroquois,” in *The Jesuit Relations: Native and Missionaries in Seventeenth-Century North America*, edited by Allan Greer (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2000), 138–140.