

PIERRE E. LACHANCE, O.P.

Autobiography

It is customary in religious communities, when a member dies, that someone writes a more or less elaborate story describing the life and personality of the deceased. This biography is then circulated throughout the houses of the community. I did this for my classmate, Father Paré, after he passed away October 5, 1999.

After reading this biography, my pastor, Father Bergeron raised the question: "When you die, who will write your life story? You are the last survivor of the Dominicans at Fall River."

I observed that I had all the useful information in my files and that anyone could find there my "curriculum vitae" and the chief events that have marked my life.

"But why not write yourself your autobiography?" After a moment of reflection, the suggestion seemed reasonable. I then remembered that in 1986 Father Jean Marc ^{Gay} ex-Provincial, preached our coventual retreat in Fall River, during which he invited us to reflect on how the hand of God had directed our lives over the years. Following my personal inclination, I began to write. As a result I had a short autobiography that I could easily elaborate further. I shall use these notes to write this biographical essay in a spirit of thanksgiving to proclaim the goodness of the Lord toward me. It will be my "Magnificat."

FAMILY ORIGINS.

I was born in a deeply Christian family on the 30th of December, 1915. I was the eldest of twelve children of Émile Lachance and Hélène Robitaille. I was baptized in St. Anne's church the 2nd of January, 1916, by Father Joseph Terrien, Dominican.

At that time large families were the norm among the French Canadians. Mother once told me: "The day of my wedding, your father said to me: I dream of having a dozen children around the table." Mother, newly married, could not help exclaiming: "Do you realize what you are saying?" My paternal grandparents had twelve children, and mother's parents still more.

Those were the days when a house full of children was more highly regarded than all the material wealth, My father had a grocery store that enabled us to live with no great luxury but comfortably, up to the great "Depression" of the thirties. In November 1930, a 12th child was born, Roland. How could we provide for all these children? We had to tighten our belts. Like everybody else, for a large portion of America was unemployed. No jobs available.

My father was a man with a big and compassionate heart. He could not refuse to feed on credit customers who had provided for his needs during the more prosperous years. While he was doing charity, the family revenues were diminishing and my father sank into debt in an alarming way. With a dozen children on his hands, he worried so much that he had a nervous breakdown.

Often times we saw him leave for work in the morning and return home in less than an hour, discouraged and weeping uncontrollably. "What shall we do? If I lose my store, I lose my house, too" (still mortgaged).

Mother, a rather small woman, had great moral strength and a dauntless faith. She would try to encourage him by words like these: "God is not a savage; He will not abandon us."

After a few years the children grew up and went to work one after another, each one taking home a small salary which, according to the custom of the time, was deposited into the family coffer, after the son or daughter was given a small allowance. Eventually, the family debt was paid in full. We have learned during those hard times, how trials that are shared strengthen the bonds of affection between spouses and between parents and children. The cross carried with love transforms noble souls.

ELEMENTARY STUDIES.

I began my studies at St. Anne's School in September of 1922. From grade 1 to 8 the Dominican Sisters and a few young ladies, were the basic school teachers, while we had Brothers of Christian Schools teaching the older boys in 7th and 8th grades.

I have always liked study. On the other hand, sports have never had a great attraction for me. When a young school boy, I remember that I learned all that I could: reading, writing, spelling and grammar, history and geography, and, of course, catechism and "Sacred history" (Bible story.) All those studies delighted me, as later philosophy and theology. With such natural dispositions, I always liked study and learned easily. I graduated from eight grade in June of 1929.

A vocation dawns. Very early I thought of the priesthood. The ideal of a life consecrated to God attracted me. Many factors in my life reinforced that appeal. My parents were special friends of the Dominican Fathers, who visited in our home now and then. I also had several examples of consecrated lives in my family. Two Lachance cousins, Georges-Émile and Gérald, preceded me in the seminary and in the priesthood. The former became a Sulpician Father, the latter a "White Father" of the African Missions. Two sisters of father joined the Dominican Sisters in Canada, and a brother of my mother was a Brother of the Sacred Heart, teaching in boys' schools.

Local influences on my vocation: St. Anne School and Parish, The influence of the Dominican Sisters at St. Anne School cannot be overstated. There was also the Dominican Fathers, whose presence at church and at school and among the altar boys, bore a definite if discreet witness. Consider this fact, of the twenty-three boys who graduated from eight grade in 1929, five became priests: two Dominicans and three Montfortains. Extraordinary proportion.

We had at St. Anne a Father Brosseau who applied himself to discern and encourage vocations in the parish. He observed students and mass servers and when he saw a young man whose piety seemed to offer signs of a priestly vocation, he would visit the parents and ask them to think of sending him to college after graduation. When the parents said they were not able to

pay for a college education. Father Brosseau put them in touch with the Dominican Father who was the Director of vocations office and could offer financial assistance. That is how I, for my part, began my studies at Montreal College in September of 1929.

COLLÈGE DE MONTRÉAL (1929-1935).

The college was directed by the Sulpician Fathers. It was not a "Junior Seminary", still less a "Juniorate", where young boys learned to live the life of a religious. The "Collège de Montréal" provided a broad liberal education, that prepared young men who might later study law, medicine, science or literature. Like so many other colleges in the province of Quebec, it was a most appropriate environment for the formation of mind and character of future priests.

I arrived at college accompanied by my cousin Gérald Lachance, who was five years my elder. We had grown up close by in Fall River. His presence was a comfort to me as I arrived at a boarding school away from home. Gerald was for me not only a dear friend and companion; he soon became my mentor in the spiritual life.

My first year at college went smoothly and happily. My love of studies only became more pronounced. But suddenly, on the 29th day of October 1929, the entire country was taken by surprise by the "Wall Street Crash" that set the New York Stock Market tumbling. Come September 1930, there was no more question of my going back to college. I was the eldest of eleven children and a twelfth one was on the way. So I stayed at home and began to help dad in his grocery store.

Meanwhile, Father Pierre Granger, a former pastor of Saint Anne and a very dear friend of my father, found out that I had not gone back to college. He immediately suspected that money was the problem and he intervened so as to allow me to continue my studies. He noted the fact in his diary in these words: "During my first term as Prior at St. Hyacinthe, I was counseled by Father Ceslas Côté to publish my "Novena to Saint Anne on Piety", a novena I preached at Fall River in 1918. With the money obtained by this publication I was able to turn in \$1.000 to the vocations fund and to help him who today has become the Rev. Father Pierre Lachance, to pursue his classical studies."The hand of God was visibly at work in my life.

My studies were interrupted from September to December 1930. I was then admitted to resume my classes, come January. Father Silvio Gascon, professor of Syntaxe (2nd year of college), volunteered to tutor me to enable me to catch up with my classmates, who had just begun studying Greek. I completed my college years and was planning to enter the Dominican Order. But, during my last year of college, I experienced a lingering fatigue and my parents decided it was best for me to take a year off to rest and restore my health before entering the noviciate.

Much later, mother confessed that an ulterior motive led my parents to delay my entrance at the noviciate. After spending six years as a boarder at college in a sheltered environment, it seemed important that I be exposed to life outside, with my family, before entering the cloister.

this detail revealed to me the wisdom of my parents. I was then able to join the Dominican family and make a more enlightened choice.

Inspired by the same concern, the Dominicans of the Canadian province always refused to have a juniorate as a means of recruiting vocations while they were still young teenagers. That meant withdrawing adolescents from their natural milieu, the family, and confine them to a closed environment: a boarding school. Our Fathers had an aversion to a "hot house" formation, that does not foster human growth and maturity.

FAMILY MEMORIES.

A deeply Christian family is one of the greatest blessings you can have. The family spirit unites in love and mutual cooperation both parents and children. When God is at the center of these natural relationships, there is peace and joy, mutual support and happiness, even if at times sacrifice has its place. Love flourishes in self-forgetfulness. As St. Augustine said: "Where there is love, nothing is difficult; or if you encounter difficulties, crosses, the cross itself is welcomed." You willingly accept to suffer for those you love. A beautiful thought from St. Francis of Assisi reminds us that to love is not to receive but to give of yourself. "It is in giving that we receive; it is in loving that we are loved."

In a family well trained by good parents, there is not only union of hearts; there is cooperation in doing family tasks. All help one another, not as an unwelcome burden, but as a normal part of family life. Thus the older children supervise and help the younger ones to dress, eat, etc. Saturday evenings my brother Hector and I washed the kitchen floor or waxed the linoleums; the girls worked in the kitchen, or did some sewing and mending, etc. When we considered the hard work of father and mother, we willingly did our share of the family chores. All that seemed normal. That's family life.

Family Prayer was part of life in the traditional Canadian family. Something we did at home when I was growing up. After supper, before clearing the table and washing the dishes, mother would call us for the evening prayers: "Everybody on your knees." If at times relatives or friends came during the family prayer, they knew our ritual and knelt with us. Together we proceeded with the evening prayer. A testimony of faith.

Such a heritage of piety and Christian virtues came to us from our ancestors. Without going too far back into the past, I think of my grandparents. I have not known my father's parents. They were already dead when my father married, but I cherish certain souvenirs that were reported to me about them.

Grandma Lachance had twelve children. When her family obligations permitted her she would visit the sick of the parish to bring them "nature remedies" derived from herbs, which she ordered from France through the Dominican Fathers of Saint Anne. Today many Medical Doctors are taking a second look at herbal medicines which, in certain cases, they prefer to chemical products. An interesting return to the historical origins of modern medicine. Grandma's intention when visiting the sick was to comfort or heal them with the popular and inexpensive remedies of the time.

Grandfather Lachance, an unpretentious mill worker. Dad offered me an insight into the kind of a man his father was. In Canada, he said, my dad was a farmer, like most of the French people who emigrated from the Province of Quebec to the United States. When he came to this country, he lived in a tenement house in Fall River, and got a job in a mill as floor sweeper.

A menial job if there was any. But on Sunday he was a gentleman as he went to mass with frock coat and top hat. Those dear people were poor, had a simple life style, but in their own way they had class, peasant pride.

On mother's side of the family, my grandparents were also of French-Canadian origin. My grandfather Michel Robitaille was a widower, aged only 31, when he married his second wife, Georgiana Gauthier, a young girl of sixteen. She had a very large family: twelve children lived to an adult age, a couple were miscarried, and a couple died in infancy, a fairly frequent occurrence at a time when prenatal care was unknown as well as modern hygiene.

Michel Robitaille was also a farmer up to the day when he decided to emigrate to the "States". Here he first lived in Central Falls, Rhode Island, and learned a trade: he became a carpenter and woodworker. In his youth, he had had the good fortune to study for three years at the "Petit Séminaire" of Quebec. He read a lot all his life and was a delightful conversationalist. He could entertain adults, even cultured, and at the same time fascinate children by his marvelous stories and tales. In family gatherings and other occasions, people enjoyed his company.

Grandma Robitaille had a very different background. I think she never spent a day in school. I remember reading short letters she would write to mother on occasion. She had no spelling, just writing as it sounded to her. She acquired a certain culture through living with grandpa. But a virtue she possessed to a marvelous degree was her kindness and most gracious hospitality. She had little of this world's possessions, but had a big heart and a warmth in dealing with people, and gracious manners that surpass all the rules of etiquette.

And now, what shall I say about my father? A man with a big heart, tender and affectionate. He lived above all for his family. He worked hard and worried for his family, especially during the years of the great depression. He was happy at home with his wife and children. I can still see him after meals, rocking one and sometimes two little ones on his knees. One day, contemplating his many children, he said with glee: "To think that I am responsible for all that!" Which brought to my mind the satisfaction of the Creator as he contemplated his work: "He saw that all that was good."

And what love he had for mother all his life. I can still see him, in his old age, when his heart was sick and he was dragging himself painfully while mother was busy in the kitchen. He drew close to her and put his arms affectionately around her neck. Like a young lover. Such action spoke more eloquently than words.

Yes, he was affectionate and tender. A personal souvenir: whenever I left for college or returned home, he was there with the family at the railway station, eager to see me. He would embrace me and start weeping for joy.

Another detail that says a lot about his spiritual life. Mother told

me one day how she admired the deep recollection of dad at prayer. "How your father prayed well! How I would like to pray like him!" What a beautiful testimony to his faith and piety!

Mother was no less loving and faith-filled. What distinguished her was her strength of character, the ability to remain strong under pressure. She displayed this kind of strength we call the virtue of fortitude during the great depression and father's nervous breakdown.

Mother had a well organized mind and a remarkable ability to govern her household. She often felt inadequate because she never had a chance to get even a high school education. But she learned at home how to rear her children. She had a lot of common sense to impart a good sense of values to her family. A priceless gift you cannot get in school.

Mother taught us to love one another and to help one another so that the house work would be done and the family needs would be met. Thus we learned the value of cooperation and how concern for others turns to the advantage of all. You reap what you sow.

It is fair to recognize the long hours mother worked while raising her family. I have seen her, after a normal day's work, spending evening hours making little suits and dresses for the children to wear at school. She could not afford to buy ready-made clothes in the stores. She collected cotton sugar bags from father's store, bleached the cloth, died it different colors, then tailored it as best she could figure, and finally produced children's suits and dresses. She had not learned to be a seamstress. She simply figured things out and did her best. "Necessity is the mother of invention."

Helen Fletcher enters our family. In those days, a friend of dad's, seeing the tremendous workload of mother, suggested to my father that he hire a niece of his to mind our children and free mother to do her work. The girl was 16, loved children and had a nice way with them. She was also very pious. After a few weeks she chose to live with the Lachance family and became like a big sister to us. Eventually, she became a Dominican Sister in Canada.

It is during that time that the famous "Wall Street Crash" occurred and businesses went bankrupt across the country. Dad was in financial distress as we explained above. One day he decided to discuss the situation frankly with one of the chief officers of the Fall River National Bank with whom he had done business for years. If I lose my store, he said to himself, I also lose my house, still mortgaged. What will I do with my numerous family?

The Banker knew my father well and knew him as an honest man, hard-working, and a man of heart. He told him not to worry, that he would not press him to repay the bank. It was reassuring. In that hour of crisis, divine Providence was there.

Eventually my younger brothers and sisters grew up, found employment and, according to the custom of the time, they turned in their modest earnings and eventually the family debt was paid. It was a great relief!

During those years mother suffered much from migraine headaches caused undoubtedly by stress. She would be totally disabled for two days every week with splitting headaches and upset stomach, until she expelled the excess bile that had made her sick. Then the nausea disappeared and mother returned to her daily work almost as if nothing debilitating had happened. These bouts with migraine headaches continued for years until the family had grown up and mother was able to slow down and be more relaxed.

It is fitting here to mention another aspect of our family life. We have learned not only to work together, but to enjoy lighter moments as a family. Music and singing were always a prominent form of family recreation. We all liked to sing, while some would play the piano and other instruments. All amateur musicians, who had sung in the church choir. Sunday afternoons, there was so much joy and happiness in our family that we always had friends and neighbors eager to join us. Such gatherings were encouraged by my parents who saw how wholesome they were.

Those were the days when few people spent much time listening to the radio and there was not yet any TV entertainment to fill our leisure moments. There was on the other hand more time spent enjoying personal relationships within the family. That sort of family life was more feasible than today, when working hours were more uniform. A variety of factors in our time have contributed to the frittering away of the family, and that is a great loss.

The heart of mother was revealed to me in a special way when I was away at college, then at the noviciate. After her day's work, she would sit at the family table and write to me every week to give me news of the family, of father and of my brothers drafted into the war, etc. A very effective way to encourage everyone and maintain the family unity when we were away. But it took time and much love to do that instead of resting quietly after a day's work.

When I was at college, mother felt bad that she could not give me all that she would have wanted, like money to buy goodies at recreation time, which some others could afford. As for me, I was more than happy to be able to pursue my studies, and, to tell the truth, I did not miss those "extras". I had developed the habit of being satisfied with what I had and was never unhappy or envious. St. Augustine expressed this important truth very well when he wrote: "It is better to have fewer needs than goods in abundance. (Or, in his succinct latin words: "Melius est minus egere quam plus habere.)"

Brother Romuald, Brother of the Sacred Heart and brother of mother. He too sought to encourage me during my college years and during my noviciate. He would write now and then to impress the importance of sacrifice and prayer. That is how a true vocation develops.

Another family influence impressed me in my youth. Once in a while I would visit at my uncle Josaphat Lachance, better known as Uncle Joseph. He was one of dad's older brothers and the father of Gerald and Georges-Emile, the two priests. Whenever we were invited to partake of a meal with the family, uncle Joe would stand up at the head of the table, trace reverently the sign of the cross and recite the "Angelus" before calling God's blessing,

Mother had a fine sense of her priorities as wife and mother. She was faithful to attend the Sunday mass, to say her daily prayers, to attend the annual parish mission or "retreat", as we French people called it. But she well understood that with her family responsibilities she could not attend weekday masses and other devotional practices, as some devout people do.

To conclude these reflections on the family, I want to proclaim loud and clear that the Christian family is the seedbed of vocations to the priesthood and the religious life as well as other forms of service in the Church.

A SPIRITUAL LIFE DEVELOPS.

My spiritual life with God began at home with the examples and teachings received from my parents and relatives. I gladly mention here some special events and people who have influenced my spiritual life in a significant way.

When I was fifteen years old, my cousin Gerald got me a copy of "The Story of a Soul", the autobiography of St. Theresa of Lisieux. This early edition also contained letters, recollections, poems and religious hymns. This reading awakened in my adolescent heart a thirst for God hitherto unknown. The discovery of Saint Theresa has influenced my spiritual life to this day. I learned to seek union with God in very simple ways, seeking to please him in all things, especially in performing the ordinary duties of one's life. Holy abandonment to His will became a centerpiece of my spiritual life. This attitude, I realized, gives joy and peace to the soul.

Later, at college, Gerald who had a rare spiritual maturity for a young man, introduced me little by little to the secrets of a life of intimacy with God. From his early years at college, he would read the lives of saints, in his free time. This was so well known that when someone was looking for him, his confreres would say: "Go to the library. You will probably find him there reading the life of a saint." As the old latin saying goes: "Verba volant, sed exempla trahunt" - words flee, but examples move us forward to action.

Gerald's godly spirit was revealed to me in many ways. Every evening after supper, he and a few students made a short visit to the chapel to greet our Lord. We then proceeded to go around the fourteen stations of the Cross, making only a brief prayer at each station. That is how I developed a special devotion to Jesus in the mystery of his passion and death. I could hear the words of St. Paul, the great lover of Christ: "Dilexit me et tradidit semetipsum pro me - He loved me and gave himself up for me!" (Galatians 2:20)

Thanks to the influence of Gerald and the friendship that united us, the Lord prepared me for my vocation to the religious life and the priesthood.

RELIGIOUS LIFE IN THE DOMINICAN ORDER.

In July of 1936 I entered the noviciate of the Dominican Fathers at St. Hyacinthe, in Canada, and the 3rd of August I received the habit of the Order. My noviciate was a marvelous year under the wise direction of Fr. Emile-Alphonse Langlais,

Father Langlais took charge of the formation of Novices at the age of 64, after rendering important services to our Province. Twice he had been elected Provincial. In 1915 he became the first Canadian to hold this office. During his second term, he founded our mission in Japan, at the request of Rome and had the novices say daily prayers for that difficult mission.

Fr. Langlais was a rather austere man. He believed in the traditional monastic observances of the Order, and practiced what he preached to others. He was intelligent and serious. He was joyous, if not exuberant. Those who knew him as a young Provincial thought he was severe, but later, as Master of Novices, we thought he was most kind, gentle and affectionate, even "maternal." On one point he was intransigent: religious obedience. Life at the noviciate was both austere and joyous.

Reflecting later on my experience of life at the noviciate I greatly admired the pedagogy of Father Langlais. He sought always to motivate us rather than command us. In his spiritual conferences, he described our Dominican life and ideal with such appeal that we just wanted to live it. With that approach, there was no need for him to act as a prefect of discipline, but rather as a spiritual guide. In such a context, life at the noviciate was joyous, in the true Dominican tradition.

During my noviciate I was led by God to read little books of spirituality that centered my spiritual life squarely on God rather than on good moral behavior. Several such books were written by Father Piny, a Dominican of the 17th century. All extol holy abandonment to the will of God as being the most direct and surest way to progress in the way of holiness. I marvelled as I realized how a God-centered spirituality simplifies our life. "Thy will be done!" And, as we grow in the love of God, we become more and more detached of self and of the things of this world. My experience of life at the noviciate was a great blessing and I enjoyed it immensely. It has been compared to a time of courtship with the Lord, a time to fall in love.

Years of study at Ottawa (1938-1944).

Upon completion of my noviciate I took my first vows the 4th of August 1937, on the feast of Saint Dominic. The next day, the newly professed left for Ottawa and the Dominican House of Studies. Even before my first class in philosophy, I had had for a long time the presentiment that these studies would satisfy in me a deep hunger to know God and his works, the world and man. And I was not disappointed. I was a student eager to know.

I had excellent professors in philosophy and theology, as well as in Sacred Scripture, In particular, Fathers Régis in Metaphysics, Father Mailloux in Experimental Psychology, Father Brunet in Sacred Scriptures, etc. Even Metaphysics had a powerful way of lifting my mind and heart up to God contemplated as First Cause and creative source of all that exists. As such, he had to be intimately present in me. All those teachings delighted me. For me they were not abstractions but the living reality of God present in me, of which Saint Paul said: "In Him we have life, movement and our very being." All such thoughts placed me at the very center of my relationship to God.

Discovering Theology. I was soon enthused upon discovering the magnificent synthesis of theology presented by Thomas Aquinas in his "Summa Theologiae". What impressed me most is that everything: Dogma and morality, is centered in God. We come from God our Creator - that is dogma; we return to God through the free choices of our will - that is our moral life. Thanks to this Thomistic theology I developed an intellectual and spiritual theology squarely God-centered and open to prayer and contemplation.

When I came to Ottawa, there was among the students and professors a marked interest in the contemplative element of our Dominican heritage. This is our Dominican heritage in its totality: first, to contemplate, then to share with others the fruit of our contemplation. "Contemplata aliis tradere." Our apostolate flows from our contemplation of God. There was here a healthy reaction against the "voluntarism" of another school of spirituality that put the accent on the human effort aided, of course by divine grace, to practice virtue and overcome our weaknesses.

Our intellectual horizons at the time, were limited. As young students, we lived in an ideal and abstract world. We then had no idea nor any preoccupation with the problems of the real world that some day we would have to face. But we had received a solid foundation to live a godly life.

ORDINATION AND MINISTRIES.

I made my Solemn Profession with perpetual vows at Ottawa, on the 4th of August, 1940, I was well on the way to the great day of my priestly ordination. I received the ~~priestly~~ anointing in the Cathedral church of Fall River, at the hands of Bishop James E. Cassidy. Another Dominican, Joseph Fulton, who had taken theology with me at Ottawa, was ordained with me to accommodate his mother and other acquaintances who lived in the New York area. That was the 27th of June 1942.

I shall never forget the graciousness of Bishop Cassidy on this occasion. As we returned to the sacristy after the ordination, he told me: "Father, don't give your first blessing to anyone before you have blessed your parents; not even to your bishop."

After completing my basic course of theological studies, I was assigned to teaching. I had been asked to write a thesis on the liturgy to prepare for my teaching. Normally, when a religious was destined to teach, he was sent to some university, usually in Europe, for complementary studies. But it was war time and it was out of the question to cross the Atlantic. That is how I became a professor with no further preparation.

I taught a course on pastoral liturgy. At that time the liturgy that was taught in seminaries was often little more than the study of ceremonies and rubrics. What was asked of me was rather to explain in the light of history, the meaning and symbolism of the actions and words that make up the liturgy. The course taught me by Father Richard Tremblay, O.P. prepared me to look at the Liturgy in a pastoral way as the worship of the people of God, the public worship of the Church. That is how my teaching career began (from September 1944 to January 1956).

At first, preparing classes was difficult. I had no textbook to guide me, so I had to put my thoughts together to present a 50-minute lecture worth hearing. One hardly realizes today the scarcity of books available at that time to a young professor in the field of the Liturgy. To be sure, there were a few big books on the history of the liturgical rites, mostly written in German. These were especially useful for scholars but not very practical for a young professor who wants to prepare a course of initiation to the liturgy.

Besides that, we had several worthy reviews published monthly on pastoral liturgy, that kept us abreast of the new "Liturgical Movement" that was growing with youthful enthusiasm in Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany, in and in the U.S.A. with Dom Virgil Michel and Dom Godfrey Diekmann and the Benedictine Abbey of Collegeville, Minnesota. I organized my classes around the experiences of the Liturgy made in Europe and in America, seeking to bring out the benefits of "active participation" of the people of God in the divine worship: the Mass, the Sacraments and the Divine Office. This active participation of the people in the liturgy would be facilitated by the acceptance of the vernacular language in the liturgy, one of the major thrusts of the liturgical movement. The first notable fruit of the liturgical movement was the restoration of the Easter Vigil.

Other subjects I taught.

After the Sacred Liturgy, I was asked to give a special series of classes to serve as "An historical and doctrinal introduction to the works of Saint Thomas Aquinas." Later on I was entrusted with Dogmatic treatises on subjects like God: his existence and attributes, his work of creation on the angels, and man. I also taught a series on the Sacraments and one on Mariology. In another context, I gave a course on "Grace", at the Superior Institute of Religious Sciences, at the University of Montreal. This course was addressed especially to men and women religious, and lay persons having a certain religious culture.

In my teaching of theology I was always concerned with showing how to relate theology to actual life. Theology speaks to us of God. It should therefore help us live our life of faith and charity and encourage us to serve the Lord in the Apostolate. A true theologian is never a pure intellectual. St. Thomas Aquinas, like St. Augustine, his illustrious predecessor, was also a saint, a contemplative. We are all called to be witnesses to Jesus Christ.

Other ministries during my years at the House of Studies.

Series of Spiritual Conferences on the theme: "Seeking God", given to the Joan of Arc Sisters in Westboro, Ontario. Reflections on the Hunger and Thirst for God we should have.

IN THE MISSIONS OF SASKATCHEWAN (January 1956 to August 1958).

One evening, I took the transcontinental train "Canadian Pacific", on my way to Regina and Prince Albert. An endless journey across the immense forests of northern Ontario and the prairies of Manitoba. I had just received word from my Provincial asking me to replace Father Arthur Robert in the

missions of Prince Albert. I soon encountered harsh realities. First, I arrived in the dead of winter, when the days were very short and the cold often bitter. We experienced the frigid climate upon arriving at Regina, the capital city of Saskatchewan. A wheel of our car was cracked and had to be replaced. We had to leave the comfort of our car, step down into the cold in the middle of the night and wait for a replacement car. This car was soon connected to the train's heating system so as to boost the temperature from a freezing 30 degrees below zero. We had been told before leaving Ottawa to bring warm clothes with us, but this adventure in northern Canada caught us by surprise.

Traveling from Montreal to Prince Albert was a long and monotonous journey. Happily, I had a companion who was also going to Prince Albert with a fresh assignment, Brother Ceslas Brisson, a Dominican Lay Brother. He was to be our next cook. Together we travelled from Montreal through the forests of northern Ontario, about 1150 miles; then through the prairie land of Manitoba and Saskatchewan. The first large city we encountered was Winnipeg, the capital of Manitoba, situated at 1240 miles from Ottawa by rail. The next city of some importance we crossed was Saskatoon, the most important city in Saskatchewan after Regina, and a business center. We left the transcontinental train that we had boarded at Ottawa to take the local train that went to Prince Albert, 90 miles to the north. Here we could enjoy the scenery with its hills and valleys, and the pine trees that never grew very tall, and fresh water streams flowing down the hills.

Learning to be a missionary.

On arriving at Prince Albert I was welcomed by Father Arthur Robert and Brother Ange Bédard to our new residence. It was a sizable house, set on a hill, a short distance from the city's business district.

Father Robert, well known as Father Bob, was a kind and jolly companion, always ready to tell a story or crack a joke. It is he who introduced me to the four "missions" I would now serve. But first I had to learn to drive the car, at the mature age of 39. I was soon impressed by the contrast between the availability of church services in the cities where I had lived, with a church on almost every corner, and the situation of Catholics living in rural areas, on the farm. These were few and far between.

I loved my work in the missions. It seemed to respond to such a need of priests to celebrate the mass and bring the sacraments to the people. I worked out a schedule that enabled me to visit two communities every weekend, weather permitting.

In two missions we had a small wooden church, with an enclosed area behind the altar, furnished with a table, a chair and a bed. There was also a wood stove with logs of firewood to heat the church in the winter.

In the two other missions I would arrive with my portable altar, enclosed in a valise, with all that was needed: bread and wine mostly, I would celebrate the mass in a public hall of the village. Those who desired to go to confession before the mass would come and sit next to me in a corner of the hall. That was the confessional,

The rigorous climate did not always permit the dear farmers to come and "practice their religion". If it had just snowed or rained, the roads were often impassible, and Catholics, in spite of their good will, could not get to the place where the mass was to be celebrated. For such reasons, a number of Catholic families were deprived of the Sunday mass for a good part of the winter. And I thought to myself: how often we take for granted the church facilities we enjoy!

An adventure in the missions. A few weeks only after I arrived at Prince Albert I got into my car and was on my way for the weekend ministry. It was a Saturday afternoon. The sky was overcast and a light snow was falling. Father Bob had warned me not to leave the city under such circumstances. But in my innocence and the fervor of a young missionary, I took the risk of going to the mission nearest to Prince Albert. This was about 20 miles from the city. It was about three o'clock in the afternoon. I figured I could be back home after saying mass, within little more than one hour. But in no time it became clear that a big storm, a "blizzard", was coming. At a turn of the road snow had already accumulated, rendering the road impassable and the visibility null. Unable to see a thing outside because of the snow blowing on all sides, I froze and the car stopped. In the maneuver I unwittingly veered to the right of the road. This proved to be an unplanned blessing in disguise. When later a few truck came to rescue us, my car was not in the way.

In this crucial situation I did not know what to do. I could only sit still in the cold car, and pray that somehow God would send us help. In a short while, three other vehicles got stuck with us in the deep snow. At least I had company. This was mild comfort for us as we sat in our cars, shivering for the cold and hungry.

The help we prayed for finally arrived. In our stranded group there was a resident of that area who was sure a friend of his lived nearby. He ventured on foot to reach his house. That man telephoned another friend who had heavy farm equipment, including a big bulldozer. This enabled him to clear a path in the snow and lead the other vehicles to the farmer's house. There we all the stranded ones - maybe a dozen in all - we were served an improvised supper. We ate all the bread they had in the house. The Good Samaritan who welcomed us, spread several blankets on the floor and there we rested that night. During the night, the lady of the house baked bread, so that we might have something to eat for breakfast in the morning. Oh! the charity of these people! It was like a Gospel story.

Other ministries entrusted to me in the diocese of Prince Albert.

An Inquiry Forum. When I arrived at Prince Albert, Bishop Leo Blais headed the diocese. He had recently succeeded Bishop Duprat, Dominican, who had been sent to Prince Albert to deal with the financial woes of the diocese. There was no money in the bank, and the diocese was unable to borrow money for apostolic works. Little by little, a diocesan bank account was restored, reconstituted through the hard work of priests and faithful, and with the financial help of the "Home Missions" in some cases. Help provided by bigger dioceses to poorer ones. During his episcopate, Bishop Duprat was concerned mostly with with paying off the debt he had inherited. At the arrival of Bishop Blais, clergy and faithful were eager to spend their savings on apostolic works and impart new life to their church.

A great apostolic zeal burned in the heart of the Bishop. He soon set up a Catholic bookstore with catechetical materials capable of enlightening and building the faith of people. He entrusted this service to dedicated young ladies who belonged to a Secular Institute.

Bishop Blais, realizing that I had come to his diocese after years of teaching theology, soon asked me to conduct an "Inquiry Forum" on the Catholic faith. This involved a series of 24 conferences on the faith and religious practices of Catholics. This was meant to explain our faith to outsiders but secondarily to members of our own flock who wanted to gain a better understanding of their faith. In addressing such a group, I found it most helpful and simple to use the popular book written by Bishop Noll: "Father Smith Instructs Jackson." The format was simple: A dialogue on the Catholic faith between a priest called Father Smith and a non-Catholic, called Jackson, who seems interested in knowing more about his Catholic neighbors. I presented a point of the Catholic faith, then answered questions. Those who attended this "Inquiry Forum" were mostly Catholics, but for me this teaching is what first opened my mind to consider Protestant beliefs in the light of our Catholic tradition. After that I felt more at ease to share my faith with Protestants and other Christians.

In 1958-59 I gave a course of Introduction to the Sacred Scriptures to the "Sisters of Notre Dame de la Croix" at Prince Albert. As often happens, I was the first to benefit by these reflections on the Sacred Books.

MY LAST ASSIGNMENT: TO SAINT ANNE IN FALL RIVER.

On the 19th of September 1959 I received a letter from Father Thomas Rondeau, my Provincial, informing me that the recent Chapter had decided to assign me to our convent in Fall River, to replace Fr. Bédard as Director of St. Anne Shrine.

"The Provincial Chapter has instituted you as spiritual moderator of pilgrimages to St. Anne of Fall River to replace Fr. Raymond Bédard; and you will have as assistant Fr. Raymond M. Corriveau, another son of St. Anne. The reason for this: it is imperative that we have at the Shrine priests who speak English fluently since the majority of pilgrims who go to the Shrine are of the English language.

"I have said that you would be the "spiritual" moderator, for the Chapter decided that the temporal moderator, general Director of St. Anne Shrine, would be the Pastor, Henri Laporte. In other words, Father Laporte, while remaining Pastor, will be responsible for the entire temporal administration, including the gift shop. You and your assistant will be responsible for all spiritual activities."

New organization of the ministry at the Shrine. (Letter of Father Rondeau, Provincial, September 11, 1963)

"The Definitorium of the last Provincial Chapter decided to dissociate the function of Director of the Fall River Shrine from that of Pastor of the parish. Therefore, by the present letter I appoint you as Director of Saint Anne Shrine, and request you to entrust the financial administration to Fr. Corriveau, who is quite competent in this area, as you know.

I have asked Fr. Corriveau for the time being not to expand the work of the Shrine or to make additional expenses. As long as we do not know what the future has in store for us, better stick to what we have.

Ministry at the Parish, Shrine and School.

- Regular parish work as "vicaire" (from August 1959 to Sept. 1978).
Including funerals and weddings.
- Director of St. Anne School, at the request of Fr. Thomas Landry, Pastor. This involved religion classes for the students in higher grades, plus individual interview of students, providing an opportunity to discuss any issue of concern, one to one, questions about student's prayer life and vocation.
- Back to the Shrine, as Director. (July 3rd 1978)

Besides my major involvements in ministry at St. Anne Parish and Shrine, I was involved in many church-related activities. For example:

1. The Greater Fall River Clergy Association (1964-1975) Panel dis-
ussions, Spring and Fall 1967 and 1968, organized by Fr. Blain
and myself; Substantial reports each time in F.R. Herald News.
2. The Charismatic Renewal (1974...)
3. Healing Services at S.A. Shrine (I introduced them in September 1978.
We had them every Sunday afternoon, except during July and August. We
had three teams of people praying and many healings resulted.)
4. Saint Anne Fellowship (1975...) A group that put on Youth and Adult
retreats. This brought many people back to God and spiritual life.

Other activities and interests during my years at Saint Anne:

1. Spiritual conferences (monthly) to Lay Dominicans (Third Order) and to
Rose Hawthorne Dominican Sisters, for many years.
2. I have preached and written much over the years.
 - 1o Preached Holy Hours every First Friday at the Shrine for years.
 - 2o Written many articles published in "The Anchor" and the Fall River
River Herald News.
 - 3o Written the biography of many of our Dominicans who died here at
Saint Anne.
 - 4o I became unofficially the historian of the Dominican family in Fall
River.
 - 5o I preached homilies Sundays and Weekdays at S.A Church.
 - 6o Also, 14 annual novenas to St. Jude at the Shrine.
(I have preached a lot over the years and enjoyed this ministry)
 - 7o Today, at the age of 84, I cannot do much. but go to my office at
at the Shrine daily from 2 to 4 p.m., if not prevented, by a Doctor's
appointment or otherwise, and am available for confessions or spiri-
ritual counseling. This I can do sitting at my office now that
I have difficulty walking or standing.

CONCLUSION: I end this story as I said I wanted to by giving thanks to God:
"Magnificat." He has blessed me more than I can say through family, and so many
people ~~wh~~ have touched my life and enriched it by revealing God's love for me.
I have tried to share his love with others and that has been my joy. I have
been a happy priest, have always believed as a profound truth the words attributed
to Jesus by the Apostle Paul: "There is more happiness in giving than receiving."
(Acts 20:35)

P.S.

SERVING THE CHURCH IN THE FALL RIVER DIOCESE.

Since my coming to Fall River in August of 1958, my lifestyle has changed considerably. For many years we continued our life as a Dominican community. We said the Divine Office in choir, a bell was rung summoning the us us to the dining room twice a day, we had Chapter meetings to discuss the affairs of the community. We even had the chapter of faults.

Then, in the sixties, vocations to the priesthood and the religious life began to decline throughout the western world. Our Provincial Council made it known that we would have to restrain our commitments; that religious who died in Fall River and Lewiston would not automatically be replaced; that we were to reserve our human resources for our Canadian houses. The French Dominicans came to New England, we were reminded, to respond to the needs of emigrants from Canada who spoke little or no English. Today, their descendants all understand and speak English, the common language. That explains why the Canadian Dominicans felt free not to replace the members of their Order in Fall River as they died and I am the last survivor of those Dominicans at Saint Anne.

When the dwindling community^{was} no longer able to maintain our priory, the diocese came to our rescue and purchased the property. From then on, diocesan priests assigned to St. Anne's parish occupied a part of the building.

I was asked recently how it felt living with diocesan priests instead of a normal Dominican community. I long missed the community life I was accustomed to and the presence of Dominican confrères with who I had so much in common. But living and working with the diocesan clergy was never a problem with me. I preserved my Dominican spirituality to serve the Church in the Fall River diocese. No conflict at all. I brought my gifts to the local church. I have always shared as much as I could in my life and ministry with my diocesan confrères and have been well accepted by them. I have attended their Deanery meetings, served at the Bishop's invitation on the Diocesan Priests' Council, attended priests convocations, and got to know a good number of diocesan priests personally. We form a community of sorts, even though we are rather few and meet only sporadically, mostly at meal time. But there is a concern for one another which creates a sort of family atmosphere.

I have nothing but praise for the diocesans I have been associated with. In recent years they have been especially kind and considerate for an old man with physical limitations. After the demise of our Dominican community we developed a new sort of community with the diocesan priests living with us, all serving the Church in Fall River.

At last visible presence of the Dominican Order at Saint Anne is that of two Dominican Sisters, who have worked with us for many years: Sister Julie Pintel, receptionist at the rectory, and Sister Lorraine Beauchesse, secretary at the parish office.

Pierre E. Lachance, O.P. (6-24-00)