

The Missionary Link

The French Canadians

There has long been a vague feeling in Quebec that French Canada and Latin America are naturally linked.

The link has been largely religious and linguistic—both are overwhelmingly Catholic and both speak Romance languages.

The first few Canadian nuns, five Sisters of Providence, stopped in Valparaíso, Chile, in 1853 while sailing from British Columbia to their mother house in Montreal and the Archbishop of Santiago persuaded them to stay. "It is certainly Divine Providence who has led you here where you are longed for," he wrote.

Today most of the 1,409 Canadian priests and nuns in South and Central America are Francophones.

Modern involvement began when a few Canadian priests volunteered in response to requests from the Vatican and from Latin-American bishops. The Franciscans were sent to the Amazon in 1945 and Oblate Fathers to Iquique, Chile, in 1947.

One hundred and fifty-four missionary com-

munities were established in eighteen countries between 1957 and 1970. Seventy-one per cent of the centres are served by French Canadians. The *Ottawa Citizen* noted that "the adaptation of French Canadian priests and religious to South America has been markedly different from that of priests and religious from the United States." It said French-speaking Canadian priests are not absorbed into the local English-speaking communities and they seem less prone to pressures than their American counterparts.

Both French and English-speaking Canadians have had striking successes.

Father Jean-Marie Paiement from Sturgeon Falls, Ontario, founded a coffee marketing co-operative at La Unión in the mountains of Guatemala in 1966. Within four years the farmers were receiving \$26 a bag, up from \$5.

In 1967, Father André Godin, who had been working in a shanty town on the edge of Lima, Peru, bought forty-six acres of mountain jungle at Aucayacu, at the end of a highway. With two other priests he cleared twenty-nine acres, built a house and several sheds and planted corn, rice, pistachio nuts and soybeans.

