CHAPTER FOUR

ORGANISING A MISSION FOR A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY:
MISSIONARY RÉDUCTIONS RECONSIDERED

In order to convert Amerindians who lived and hunted in lands far away from French settlements in North America, the Jesuit missionaries sought to gather these Amerindians into native Christian reserves near the French colonial settlements along the Saint Lawrence River. The missionaries encouraged the Algonquian and Iroquoian peoples to settle down in these missionary settlements to live as neophytes. Father Paul Le Jeune called such Christian settlements ‘réductions’ following the example of Jesuit predecessors in South America, who labelled the Paraguayan reserves ‘reducciónes’.

Two interrelated issues arise from this evangelistic approach to settling Amerindians in réductions. The first issue is whether the idea for the Paraguayan reducciónes was created without precedent before it was introduced into North America. Or were the reducciónes based on models found elsewhere? In other words, is it possible to trace the prototypes—if not the origin\(^1\)—for the Canadian réductions beyond Paraguay? The second issue is to what extent the New France réductions emulated the Paraguayan models. Alternatively did the ‘réduction’ scheme of New France originate only in a Paraguayan model and in no other missionary models?

To seek answers to these two issues, a reconsideration of the Jesuit réductions should go as far back as the pioneer Christian communities in sixteenth-century Japan, beyond the Paraguayan models that began in the early seventeenth century. This consideration should also search for the missionary achievements beyond Europe. The initial step for such analysis is to establish the interconnection between the Paraguayan and Japanese missions. Then, the native Christian communities in New France can be discussed in the light of earlier experiences.

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\(^1\) This ‘prototype’ means the prototypical establishment of a Christian community in formerly non-Christian regions. Because a simplistic search for the ‘origin’ of reductions may reach as far back as the ancient centuries, the search will complicate the current argument or even obscure the vital aspect of analysis.
in both Paraguay and Japan. Using this approach, features common to
the two types of Amerindian missionary communities in New France
and Paraguay may be seen to have their prototypes in the earlier Jesuit
experiments in Japan. Other features that seem to have been unique to
New France may, in fact, have been based directly on the prototypical
experience in Japan.

A. THE PROTOTYPES FOR AMERINDIAN RÉDUCTIONS

1. Existing Interpretation of the Laurentian Réductions

Father Le Jeune, the Superior of New France during the 1630s, was
the first missionary to mention the Paraguayan mission. He did so
in order to justify his plan for establishing a settlement for nomadic
Amerindians. When the Jesuits renewed the mission in New France
in 1632, the superior was already familiar with the Jesuit experience
in colonial Paraguay,\(^2\) an enormous region that encompassed today’s
Paraguay as well as eastern Bolivia, Argentina, southwest Brazil,
Uruguay and Chile. In the Relation of 1637, for example, he referred
to the Paraguayan experiment as a model for native settlements in
New France. Later he used the Latin term ‘reduximus’ in 1638 and the
French term ‘réduction’ in 1639 to refer to the first native mission of
Sillery, which the Jesuits arranged for an Innu group.\(^3\)

These Jesuit references to Paraguay influenced later interpretations
of the Amerindian missionary settlements. In the historiography of
the Jesuit missions in New France, a wide range of historians from
the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries maintain that the system
of Canadian réductions was an emulation of the Jesuit reducciones in
colonial Paraguay. Those who so argue include the Ursuline Mother
Sainte-Croix, Gabriel Gravier and Joseph Edmond Roy, in the nine-
teenth and early twentieth centuries. More recently Lucien Campeau,

\(^2\) Henceforth, ‘Paraguay’ means ‘colonial Paraguay’ unless specified otherwise.

\(^3\) Paul le Jeune’s Relation of 1639, in Reuben Gold Thwaites et al (eds.), The Jesuit
Relations and Allied Documents (73 vols., Cleveland, OH: Burrows Brothers, 1896–1901),
vol. 5, 31–33 [Relations 5: 31–33, henceforth]; Relations 12: 219–23; 14: 205–07; & 16: 
135–141; and Le Jeune to Mutius Vitelleschi, general superior, at Rome, from Trois
Rivières, 1st August 1638, in Lucien Campeau (ed.), Monumenta Novae Franciae
(Roma: Monumenta Historica Soc. Iesu; & Montréal: Les Éditions Bellarmin; or
Monumenta, 4: 54–55, henceforth], esp. 55.