

Boucherville Iconoclasm and restoration

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BOUCHERVILLE

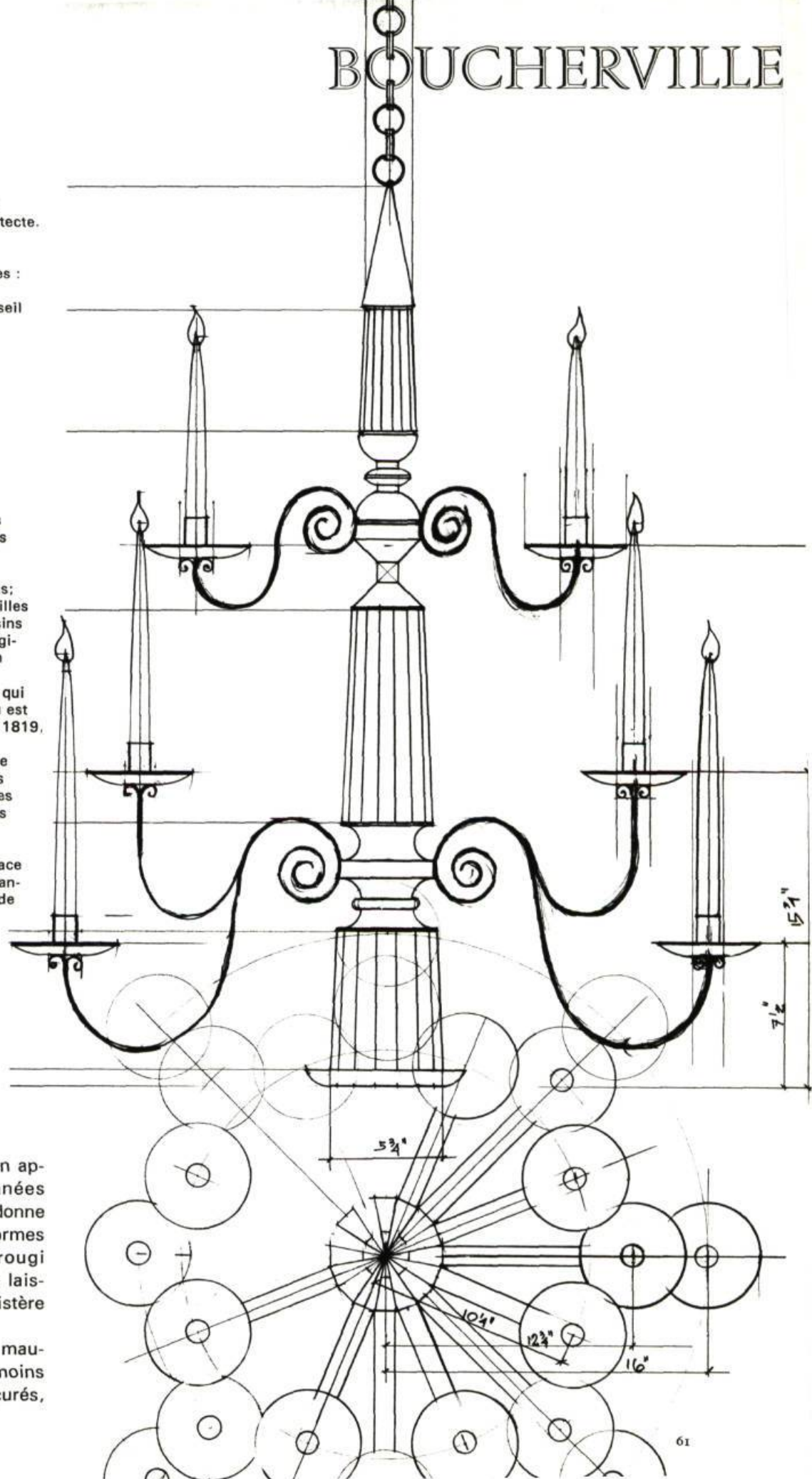
Programme de la restauration:
 Aménagement de l'architecture et de
 la décoration : Claude Beaulieu, architecte.
 Menuiserie et peinture décorative :
 Honoré Bonnamy, entrepreneur.
 Restauration sculpturale et candélabres :
 Maurice Boisvert, artisan-sculpteur.
 Éclairage : Yves D'Allaire, expert-conseil
 en illumination.
 Mgr Joseph Poissant est le curé de
 la paroisse.

Le chœur — L'ordonnance, de style
 corinthien, en bois, date de 1801. Les
 plans et devis de l'église furent établis
 par l'abbé Pierre Conefroy, curé de
 Boucherville de 1790 à 1816.
 Le maître-autel est entièrement en bois;
 le retable fut sculpté vers 1745 par Gilles
 Bolvin, probablement d'après les dessins
 du Père Augustin Quintal, récollet origi-
 naire de Boucherville; Louis Quévillon
 est l'auteur du tombeau à la romaine
 (1802-1803) et des beaux bas-reliefs qui
 flanquent le grand tableau. Ce tableau est
 une copie exécutée par Roy-Audy en 1819,
 d'après un original attribué à Carle
 van Loo, qui se trouve au Séminaire de
 Québec. Derrière la balustrade en bois
 qu'on aperçoit au premier plan, une des
 deux jouées cache les bancs modernes
 dont les dossiers furent réduits pour
 dégager la base de l'ordre;
 à droite, le tombeau, servant d'autel face
 aux fidèles, fut récupéré chez un brocan-
 teur; il provient du trésor des Dames de
 la Congrégation.

par Norman PAGÉ

La réforme liturgique mise en ap-
 plication depuis quelques années
 dans les églises du Québec donne
 lieu à un vandalisme et à des formes
 d'iconoclasme dont aurait rougi
 Savonarole, mais qui semblent lais-
 ser assez indifférent notre Ministère
 des Affaires Culturelles.

Plus par ignorance que par mau-
 vaise volonté ou simonie - du moins
 faut-il l'espérer - nombre de curés,



voulant opérer à bas prix le renouveau liturgique préconisé par le Concile, ont laissé aux griffes de brocanteurs astucieux et d'antiquaires affamés les plus précieuses œuvres d'art liturgique égarées parmi tous les objets de pacotille et les pastiches qu'une poussière séculaire recouvrait d'un même gris désolé.

Pour s'en convaincre, certains conservateurs de musée devraient avoir la curiosité de lécher les vitrines des boutiques d'antiquités de Montréal, de Québec ou des villes situées à la frontière américaine, pour y découvrir de nombreux chandeliers de bois sculpté, des bronzes rares, ou encore ces admirables chasubles tissées d'or que s'arrachent aujourd'hui hippies et *hippettes* de luxe, en mal de sacré! Il n'est encore que d'entrer dans l'un ou l'autre salon chic pour découvrir, pendu par un pied, un magnifique angelot joufflu de bois peint, tout heureux de n'avoir pas subi le sort de son jumeau jouant le rôle de Cupidon dans la chambre à coucher d'à côté.

Quelques rares églises ont cependant échappé au pillage et aux restaurations improvisées. L'église de la Sainte-Famille, à Boucherville, est un de ces monuments privilégiés.

Il suffit d'emprunter un jour la route pittoresque qui longe le fleuve, au sud-est de Montréal, pour découvrir au cœur de l'ancienne seigneurie du Gouverneur Pierre Boucher, avec quelle singulière habileté, un architecte de qualité et quelques prêtres responsables (on ne leur demande d'ailleurs pas davantage!) ont réussi à restaurer le gracieux intérieur de cette église et à l'adapter à la liturgie nouvelle sans nuire à sa valeur artistique.

La sobre apparence extérieure de ce monument, érigé en 1801 sur les plans et devis de l'abbé Pierre Coneyfroy, ne laisse guère présager la magnificence très *versailleuse* dont s'inspire nettement la savante décoration intérieure; il est même stupéfiant de découvrir en pleine campagne canadienne ce que la France réservait à ses rois!

L'ordonnance générale, et plus particulièrement celle du sanctuaire

et du jubé, est d'une noblesse remarquable. Des pilastres de style corinthien, en bois sculpté et doré, supportent l'entablement qui ceinture le chœur; sous les modillons, court une frise d'entrelacs délicats également en bois sculpté et doré. La voûte Louis XVI est décorée de panneaux peints et, surtout, de médaillons sculptés d'une qualité exceptionnelle. Au centre du sanctuaire, le retable du maître-autel: un chef-d'œuvre de composition, réplique de grande taille de celui que le Père Augustin Quintal avait dessiné en 1737 pour l'église de Lachenaie, sculpté vers 1745 par Gilles Bolvin. Les deux autels latéraux, en bois sculpté, peint et doré, sont l'œuvre de Louis Quévillon et ont été exécutés en 1802. La chaire, d'une ordonnance parfaite, est du même sculpteur et date de 1803, comme aussi les deux bas-reliefs en bois sculpté, situés de part et d'autre du tableau central intitulé *Le Repos de la Sainte Famille*, copie faite en 1819 par J.-B. Roy-Audy d'après une peinture attribuée à Carle Van Loo.

En 1964, le Ministère des Affaires Culturelles, par sa Commission des Monuments Historiques, a officiellement classé cette église parmi ses monuments historiques et reconnu, par deux subventions successives, les travaux de conservation et de restauration déjà entrepris depuis 1958 mais plus radicalement, en 1969, sous la direction de l'architecte Claude Beaulieu, à l'heure où il s'agissait d'abord de libérer judicieusement l'architecture et la décoration de cette église d'additions gênantes et d'attributs malencontreux. La restauration consistait plus précisément à supprimer les tribunes latérales et celles du jubé butant sur l'orgue, à rétablir les transepts dans leur état primitif et à réaménager les accès, à remettre la chaire dans la nef, à dégager, dans le sanctuaire, les deux magnifiques fenêtres obstruées par des niches, à enlever de nombreuses statues de plâtre, à restaurer le retable de l'autel latéral de Saint-Généreux, à refaire le luminaire du sanctuaire et

de la nef, à repeindre le chœur et la nef en conservant certaines tonalités de base, à équilibrer l'ensemble de la décoration, et ce, en prenant soin de réaménager le sanctuaire selon les nouvelles exigences liturgiques.

Tous ces travaux ont été exécutés avec un sens raffiné de l'art et un immense respect pour l'œuvre originale. Chapeau bas. Les dominantes bleu, chamois et or s'harmonisent admirablement. Les boiseries sculptées chantent à nouveau dans la lumière que laissent maintenant pénétrer les quatre fenêtres aux fins carreaux. Le tableau central a été légèrement baissé de façon à dégager la corniche; les deux autres imposantes peintures de J.-B. Roy-Audy, autrefois de chaque côté du maître-autel, ornent maintenant les transepts: à gauche, *Saint-Pierre secouru par un ange* (1819), d'après Ch. de Lafosse, et, à droite, *Le Christ en croix* (1826), d'après J. Monnet. Tous les lambris, modillons, rinceaux et volutes ont été restaurés, les jouées, allongées, la balustrade, complétée; le luminaire a été réalisé sur place d'après un dessin original de l'architecte. Dans la nef, on a en plus délogé le chemin de la Croix en plâtre pour remettre en place une œuvre d'époque plus dépouillée que l'on a déterrée dans les hangars. Dommage qu'on n'ait pu substituer aux confessionnaux récents ceux qui sont relégués à la sacristie. Dommage également que les portes intérieures n'aient pas reçu le traitement des portes extérieures, reconstituées de main de maître. On pourrait encore regretter le bleu trop ardent... et trop royal de la moquette du sanctuaire, les fauteuils frêles des célébrants et les bancs même tronqués que l'on a maintenus au pourtour du sanctuaire, mais il faut s'incliner devant le nouvel autel face au peuple qu'un clerc astucieux a su repérer à temps. Il s'agit d'un magnifique tombeau à la romaine, en pin sculpté et doré, longtemps propriété des Dames de la Congrégation et provenant sans doute d'une chapelle de religieuses du Vieux Montréal.

Il est souvent très difficile d'amé-

nager un sanctuaire d'époque selon les nouvelles normes liturgiques sans briser radicalement l'équilibre d'un volume architectural et détruire l'unité de l'ensemble; toutes les églises où, par exemple, le lieu de la célébration était l'autel-retable, posent un problème. L'adjonction d'un deuxième autel peut être une solution mais encore faut-il qu'il s'intègre dans l'ensemble. Dans l'église de Boucherville, ce deuxième autel, d'une rare qualité, est un heureux doublement: l'harmonie est sauve; le maître-autel — gloriette prestigieuse! — joue alors le rôle de majestueuse réserve eucharistique. Par ailleurs, le lieu de la proclamation de la parole a été ici réduit à sa plus simple expression... et pêche par sa légèreté! Un lieu n'est pas un meuble! La célébration communautaire comporte aujourd'hui deux pôles: liturgie de la parole et liturgie eucharistique, et l'on remarque que, de plus en plus, l'importance de la liturgie de la parole va s'amplifiant. Le sanctuaire de l'église de la Sainte-Famille n'a vraiment qu'un foyer! A tout mesurer, cependant, et mes réserves maintenues, je suis porté à croire que l'on ne pouvait faire autrement sans compromettre l'essentiel.

Compte tenu des difficultés inhérentes à toute restauration, l'église de Boucherville, par la qualité de ses résultats d'ensemble, est une réussite remarquable, et elle pourrait même accentuer son rayonnement si la Commission des Monuments Historiques réussissait à grouper autour d'elle quelques-unes des très anciennes maisons typiquement canadienne qui languissent et dépérissent d'ennui à l'entrée du village. Nous aurions alors le «Carré historique de Boucherville». Mais ce doit être là rêver en couleur! Et les jeunes qui ont mis le feu à l'une de ces maisons sans défense doivent déraisonner ainsi!

English Translation, p. 97

Détail du retable de Gilles Bolvin.
Vers 1745.



Vue de la nef vers l'entrée



The Canadian Cultural Centre

By Guy WEELEN

The Canadian Cultural Centre in Paris which was opened in April, 1971, truly began its activities in October, 1971. It was installed with taste and refinement in a beautiful building situated in a geographical location — the Esplanade des Invalides — chosen with discernment. It is pleasant and harmonious, but yet easily accessible. Articulated in such a way that each activity finds a favourable space there, and also specific or flexible at will, comfortable, it is physically pleasing. But this ease would not be a criterion of quality in itself if the atmosphere, the welcome, did not have corresponding versatility and warmth. Everything is an accord, it seems to me, so that the style of the human relationships is not ponderous, so that everyone, conscious of the other person or persons, can discover his place. Culture — since that is what this is all about — does not need to be tiresome, as has been, and too often continues to be the case, in such institutions. For alert minds, the time of the mandarinat with its pomp and works is ended! Culture is a style of life. Such is the position taken by the director of the centre, Guy Viau, who is trying to apply this in the best possible way, assisted in his task by Guy Plamondon, official in charge of the animation services.

If culture uses information, and we would not be able to understand it without extensive information, it also exceeds it. We could even say it stabilizes it. Like humus composed of an infinity of twigs and leaves piled up by succeeding seasons, thus by time, it supposes a duration. But actually, like the leaves and twigs, cultural events are superimposed with a great rapidity. To extend the image, in our time, culture would no longer be only some sort of humus, but also a dynamic force. Its richness would be judged much more by its dynamism than by the deposit it tends to build.

Thus in a year of operation, many Parisians of every description visited it, but the displays were equally numerous and varied: music in its classical, contemporary, and popular aspects; recitals of music and song; exhibitions of painting, sculpture, ceramics, covering the various perspectives of Canadian creation; theatre, poetry; films showing the different directions of the cinema; discussions with illustrations, and two important conferences, *Mécanologie and Art and Communication*. Devoted to problems that surpass the Canadian setting but which concern the conscience of everyone. As we can realize, the rhythm was rapid, the diversity of expressions and disciplines was great. Intentionally, the traditional, academic categories were involved to the benefit of a wider and more general view. In fact, there is no longer any cause to maintain the formerly classical distinction between major and minor art. Henceforth, and this is a contemporary phenomenon, the arts are interdependent. The sources which inspire the creators are multiple and they come from different levels: pub-

licity and design fertilize painting, the spoken language transforms the structures of written language; the music of films and pop take classical themes, chamber music takes up the popular melody. Individualism breaks out. In our society, all creative activities at all levels intersect, and all their influences interfere to make up a manner of being, the expression of a culture.

The action undertaken here does no so much attempt to display something specifically Canadian, as to allow Parisians to become aware of Canadian life, of Canada as it really is. That is to say, there is no question here of giving a look at Canada, prepared in advance, or corresponding to some prefabricated model, but of showing and conveying its exciting richness, the abundance of its endeavours, the dynamism that animates it.

Maurice Fleuret, the well-known music critic, was right to say in his account, *The place of Canadian music in contemporary production*, which is being presented at the Cultural Centre now:

"What is most striking on arriving in Canada for the first time, is that the country is completely turned towards its future which is embodied in its dynamic youth, freed of social, religious, and cultural prejudices, a youth impatient to make its own music, and to lead its own destiny away from the beaten track of conformity.

Exactly, the new music in Canada is a matter of men and not principles. There are so many creators, so many distinct personalities. So many works, so many indications given to the four corners of the world. Each of us has only to understand this at the right moment. Indeed it comes on like a great and fertile disorder."

So Canada without disguise, beyond the cares of propaganda — which may be honourable but which cultivate too much a narrow nationalism — is approachable for everyone. The first concern of a sound cultural action is that every person be free to consider, to choose, to find what suits and excites him in the rich material that he is shown, and finally, to form a judgment. On the other hand, we expect that each one will show discernment, and will express an uncompromised reaction. It is not fitting to hope for or to expect compliments, but we wish to have real exchanges which are beyond wordly complacencies and kind words suited to the occasion. If the Parisian is led to lose his illusions about Canada, and we certainly know what these conventional illusions are worth, whether for better or worse, he will have had the opportunity to discover what Canada is, to feel the sheer force of it. Veracious confrontations have never obliterated the human qualities of the imagination, sensitivity, and poetic emotion. If, during a few decades, in the framework of an industrial civilization, some fine minds have been loath to taking these qualities into consideration, they are noticing their error today, and in many areas we can regret their short-sightedness. Something was behind the international success of the slogan: "Power to the imagination."

Every true cultural action must furnish the individual pursuing his search with an ever greater variety of possible choices.

The prodigious dissemination of information which will shortly be even greater, inevitably leads to this, as it pushes us irresistably towards a constant widening of meanings. In this too, the times has ended when one could declare, with some inconsistency and much egoism, that for something to be universal it necessary had to be very uncouth and very coarse.

A culture can only validly accomplish its action if it becomes aware of its universal vocation. Addressing itself to man, all things considered, it addresses itself to all men. For some, that will probably seem a common place remark, but a quick glance around one is enough to realize that this notion, which we like to think is elementary, has not yet penetrated into the customs of governmental institutions.

It is pleasant and even more, fortunate to note that Canada has understood very well the meaning of its cultural action whose first quality is generosity.

(Translation by Yvonne Kirbyson)

Iconoclasm and restoration

By Norman PAGÉ

The liturgical reform implemented in the last few years in the churches of Quebec has given rise to a vandalism and to forms of iconoclasm that would have made Savonarola blush, but which seem to leave our Minister of Cultural Affairs rather indifferent.

More by ignorance than ill-will or simony, at least we should hope so, many priests, wanting to carry out at a low price the liturgical renewal recommended by the Council, have let fall into the clutches of wily second-hand dealers and ravenous antique dealers the most precious works of liturgical art that have gone astray among all the shoddy and imitative stuff which a secular dust had covered in the same desolate grey.

To be convinced of this, certain museum curators should be curious enough to go window-shopping in the antique shops of Montreal, Quebec, or cities situated on the American border; they will find many sculpted wood candlesticks, rare bronzes, or even these beautiful chasubles woven in gold that are in great demand these days with flamboyant hippies, degrading what is sacred! One only has to go into any chic living room to discover some magnificent chubby little angel of painted wood hanging by one foot, quite happy at not having shared the fate of its twin, hanging up like some Cupid in the adjoining bedroom.

A few rare churches have, however, escaped pillage and improvised restorations. The Sainte-Famille church in Boucherville is one of these privileged monuments.

All one need do is someday drive down the picturesque road that goes along the river, south east of Montreal, to discover in the heart of the former seigneurie of Governor Pierre Boucher, with what singular skill an excellent architect and a few responsible priests (we can not ask more of them) have succeeded in restoring the gracious interior of this church and adapt-

ing it to the new liturgy without harming its artistic value.

The sober appearance of the exterior of this monument, erected in 1801 according to the plans and specifications of abbé Pierre Conefroy, hardly suggests the very Versailles-like magnificence which clearly inspired the tasteful interior decoration; indeed it is amazing to discover in the heart of the Canadian countryside things that France reserved for its kings!

The general arrangement, and more particularly, that of the sanctuary and rood-loft, is of a remarkable grace. Corinthian style pilasters in sculpted, gilded wood support the entablure which surrounds the choir; beneath the modillions, runs a frieze of delicate interlacing of both sculpted and gilded wood. The Louis XVI arch is decorated in painted panels and especially with sculpted medallions that are unusually fine. In the centre of the sanctuary is the retable of the High altar: a masterpiece of composition, it is a large replica of the one which Father Augustin Quintal had planned in 1737 for the church at Lachenaie, sculpted around 1745 by Gilles Bolvin. The two side altars in sculpted wood, painted and gilded, are the work of Louis Quévillon and were executed in 1802. The pulpit, which is perfectly arranged, is by the same sculptor and dates back to 1803, as do the two bas-reliefs in sculpted wood that are situated on both sides of the central tableau entitled *The Repose of the Holy Family*, a copy made in 1819 by J.-B. Roy-Audy from a painting attributed to Carle Van Loo.

In 1964, the Department of Cultural Affairs, through its Committee of Historical Monuments, officially classed this church among its historical monuments and recognized, through two successive grants, the work of conservation and restoration which had already been undertaken since 1958, but more completely since 1969, under the direction of architect Claude Beaulieu, at a point when the architecture and decoration of this church had first to be freed of unfortunate characteristics and cumbersome additions. The restoration consisted more precisely in suppressing the galleries on the side and those of the rood-loft near the organ, in restoring the transepts to their original condition and refitting the aisles, in putting the pulpit back in the nave, and, in the sanctuary, freeing the two magnificent windows obstructed by niches, in removing the numerous plaster statues, in restoring the altar-piece of the side altar of Saint-Généreux, in changing the lighting of the sanctuary and the nave, in repainting the choir and the nave while conserving certain basic tonalities, in achieving a careful balance in all of the decoration, by carefully refitting the sanctuary according to the new liturgical needs.

All this work was executed with a refined sense of art and an immense respect for the original work. The predominant colours, blue, buff, and gold harmonize admirably. The sculpted woodwork gleams once more in the light which now streams from the four finely paned windows. The central tableau was slightly lowered so as to free the cornice; the two other impressive paintings by J.-B. Roy-Audy, formerly on each side of the

High-altar, now decorate the transepts: to the left, *Saint Peter succoured by an angel* (1819) after Ch. de Lafosse, and on the right *Christ on the Cross* (1826) after J. Monnet. All the panelling, modillions, foliated scrolls and helixes have been restored, the window reveals lengthened, the balustrade completed; the lighting arrangement was modified according to an original design of the architect. In the nave, the stations of the Cross done in plaster was replaced by a less complex period work that was taken out of storage. A pity that the recent confessionals could not have been replaced by those relegated to the sacristy. It is also a shame that the inside doors did not receive the same treatment as the outside doors which were restored by a master. We might also have regrets over the too deep royal blue of the sanctuary carpet, the fragile armchairs for the celebrants and the truncated seats were retained in the enclosure of the sanctuary, but we must admire the new altar facing the people which an astute clergyman was able to spot in time. This is a magnificent tomb in the Roman fashion, of sculpted and gilded pine; for a long time the property of the sisters of the Congregation, no doubt, it came from a chapel of a religious order in Old Montreal.

It is often very difficult to arrange a period sanctuary according to the new liturgical standards without radically destroying the equilibrium of an architectural volume and the unity of the whole; every church in which, for example, the area for the celebration of the ceremony was the retable of the altar poses a problem. The adding of a second altar may be a solution but still it must be integrated into the whole! In the Boucherville church, the second altar, of a rare quality, is a favourable match; the harmony is retained; the High-altar — a marvelous harbour! — thus serves as a majestic Eucharistic Reservation. In other respects, the area for spoken pronouncements has been reduced to its simplest expression and is too small! An area is more than a piece of furniture! Group celebration of a service today includes the spoken liturgy and the Eucharistic liturgy, and it may be noted that more and more the importance of the spoken liturgy is increasing. The sanctuary of the Sainte-Famille church has really only one foyer! In considering everything, however, and maintaining my reservations, I am led to believe that nothing else could have been done without compromising something essential.

Considering the difficulties inherent in any restoration, the Boucherville church, by the excellence of the complete results is a remarkable success, and its influence could even be increased if the Committee of Historical Monuments succeeded in grouping around it a few of the very old, typically Canadian houses that are abandoned and falling into ruin at the entrance to the village. We would thus have the "historical Boucherville town square". But that must be dreaming in full colour! And the young people who set fire to one of these unguarded houses must be thinking in similarly unreasonable terms!

(Translation by Yvonne Kirbyson)

Very Mexican : Toys

By Kildare DOBBS

Toy vendors in Guanajuato's great covered market are never surprised that I, a grown man, should be so regular and faithful a customer. Little the gringos do can surprise these disillusioned matriarchs. They shrug and adjust their rebozos. Besides, they understand this lust of mine for pottery so tiny that three dozen pieces can be contained in a single matchbox, for minute jugs and pots of beaten copper, lilliputian dolls and utensils and furniture. They feel the same way themselves.

Nothing could be more characteristic of Mexicans than this passion for the miniature. Even the way they use Spanish reflects it: their speech twitters with diminutives. "*Momentito!*" pleads the waiter, thumb and forefinger at eye-level measuring off an instant of time as he plots some monstrous procrastination. In a tiny moment your eggs will be ready. Not just *ahora* (now), but *ahorita* (a little now), or even — heaven help you! — *ahoricita* (a wee little now). It takes the harm out of reality to diminish it in this way.

In *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, Mexico's philosopher-poet Octavio Paz confesses: "We vie with one another in the difficult, exquisite and useless art of dressing fleas." He means it literally. Mexican craftsmen actually risk going cross-eyed putting coats and pants on the all-but-invisible corpses of *pulex irritans*. You can buy them in Mexico city for five or six pesos.

Prisoners in Guanajuato's state penitentiary beguile their captivity making diminutive tableaus inside walnut shells, preferring rare spectacles like bullfights and weddings. Not every Mexican can afford a ticket for the corrida, or the luxury of a church marriage, but for two or three pesos anyone can have the dream — literally, in a nutshell. Which is more or less why I have become a collector of Mexican toys. Thanks to this marvellously expressive folk-art, I can carry the Mexican culture home with me in microcosm.

I call them toys, but not everything in my collection is meant for children. The tin shrine in which a bleeding Christ is nailed to his cross among red, green and blue flowers of shiny foil is no more than six inches high. But, like the miniature Virgin of Guadalupe, it's a genuine holy image. I like to think it might work a miracle one of these days. Back in 1938, Graham Greene reported seeing a miraculous San Miguelito in a small box in Sano-yo, Chiapas. The saint, a microscopic intaglio head stuck on a nail, was alleged to have spoken, recommending patent medicines in a high, piping voice; and I think Greene had some idea of interviewing him. But San Miguelito, perhaps with saintly insight into Greene's craving for disappointment, failed to give tongue.

Many of my toys are associated with religious fiestas. There are tiny nativity scenes, the holy babe, pink as a shrimp in his straw, while a green and yellow Joseph leans on his staff and Mary, a stout figure in white and blue, kneels stiffly beside him. Ox and ass look knowingly on. The group is surrounded by tiny