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“Divine Providence Has Plainly Blessed Our Efforts”

TWO LETTERS FROM BISHOP LAMY

Thomas J. Steele and Florence Byham Weinberg

The well-known French bishop and archbishop Jean Baptiste Lamy of Santa Fe wrote many letters to the Lyon headquarters of la Société de la Propagation de la Foi, but the ones he sent in 1855 and 1866 are especially interesting. Writer Willa Cather discovered Fr. William J. Howlett’s biography of Lamy’s vicar-general, Joseph P. Machebeuf, with some prime examples of an obscure genre of literature known in a few languages as “edifying letters,” and composed the novel *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927).¹ The long-term political and sociological fallout from her highly imaginative fiction continues to echo raucously in the halls of history.

These edifying letters sent home to France targeted two goals. First, the bishop or priest wrote of his labors in the more obscure acres of the Lord’s vineyard, such letters appeared in the periodical of la Société, and the faithful donated money, which financed the missionaries’ work. Second, those letters were read during dinner and supper in the refectories of seminaries

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and convents. The seminarians and nuns back in Europe were thought to achieve as much good by their prayers for the conversion of pagan nations as the missionaries did by their arduous efforts in the field. Cather was totally enamored with French culture, and after writing *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, she turned four years later to materials of the same sort, Reuben Gold Thwaites' better-known *Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents* (1896–1901), to compose *Shadows on the Rock* (1931) about the colonial experience in New France.²

This article offers the English translation of Lamy's letters, which describe for contemporary readers the frustrating difficulties and eventual successes of New Mexican missionaries in the 1850s and the 1860s.

Editors' Introduction to the Letter of 1855

Lamy dated his Santa Fe letter to the Lyon headquarters of la Société de la Propagation de la Foi on 1 January 1855. He had visited Lyon in July 1854 and had narrated his travels from the time he left New Mexico in late January as he went east to Missouri, Ohio, and Kentucky. He then took a ship from Boston to England and thence across the English Channel to Boulogne, Paris, and Rome. After Lyon he visited the Auvergne and passed through Paris to embark at Le Havre for the United States.

In this letter, Lamy deliberately avoids describing either the return voyage across the ocean or the jaunt through the states of the Union, preferring to concentrate on the territories of Kansas and New Mexico, where more exotic landscapes and inhabitants abounded. The main source of the "active ingredient" of Lamy's 1855 letter stems from a book by philosopher Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1759). Burke's central theme created the romantic sense of sublimity that soon swept England, the Continent, and the British colonies. Burke encouraged a grandeur, refinement, and loftiness of thought, language, ethics, and human life, and he specifically recommended to his readers that they experience "ideas of pain and danger" and "the terrible." As Burke's ideas spread, "the beautiful" divided into "the sublime" and "the beautiful in the strict sense." The latter concentrated on domesticity and the survival of the species (*eros*, sexuality leading to birth), whereas "the sublime" became the preserve of adventure, the danger of death, and concern with the survival of the individual (*thanatos*, death awareness and even death wish).³

Lamy's account of travel beyond the settled region features the sublime of the western plains—oceanic prairie, a world of wilderness that demands bravery, night scenes, attacking Indians, wild animals innumerable, and scenery that is “fairly monotonous but nonetheless magnificent: vast and undulating like the ocean.” The source that inspired his description lay fifty years back in time in French author François-René de Chateaubriand's “Prologue” to *Atala* (1801), which every literate Frenchman knew:

The two banks of the Mescacebé [Mississippi] offer the most extraordinary tableau. On the western bank, prairies unfurl as far as the eye can see; their waves of green, as distance increases, seem to rise into the azure of the sky, where they evanesce. One sees herds of three or four thousand buffalo wandering aimlessly on these boundless prairies. Sometimes an ancient bison heavy with age, breasting the waves as he swims, lands to lie down among the tall weeds on an islet of the Mescacebé. From his brow, adorned with two crescents, and from his antique and muddy beard, you would take him for the god of the river, who casts a satisfied eye on the grandeur of these waves and the abundance of these shores.⁴

Similar settings appear in James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking novels. In chapter 1 of *The Prairie* (1827), Cooper wrote:

From the summits of the swells, the eye became fatigued with the sameness and chilling dreariness of the landscape. The earth was not unlike the Ocean, when its restless waters are heaving heavily, after the agitation and fury of the tempest have begun to lessen. There was the same waving and regular surface, the same absence of foreign objects, and the same boundless extent to the view. Indeed, so very striking was the resemblance between the water and the land that, however much the geologist might sneer at so simple a theory, it would have been difficult for a poet not to have felt, that the formation of the one had been produced by the subsiding dominion of the other.⁵

Washington Irving's *A Tour on the Prairies* (1835) elicits much the same rapture with scraps such as “An Indian hunter on a prairie is like a cruiser on the ocean”; “Seeing a horseman prowling along the horizon is like describing a sail at sea”; and “A clump of trees dimly seen in the distance [is]

like a ship at sea, the landscape deriving sublimity from its vastness and simplicity.”⁶ In his first three paragraphs, Lamy presents his fellow travelers and himself as sublime characters ready for adventure, patriotism, or martyrdom: “My little band of missionaries showed extraordinary bravery in every circumstance during the five weeks the trip lasted.”

Lamy’s party was a troupe of the religious. Of the twenty-eight persons who composed the bishop’s caravan, we can name only ten: Lamy; four priests, Etienne Avel, Pierre Eguillon, Antoine Juillard, and Dámaso Taladrid; Deacon Jean Baptiste Guérin; two subdeacons, Eugène Paulet and François Xavier Vaur (who died the night the caravan arrived at Santa Fe); and Vaur’s brother Jean Baptiste and his cousin Sébastien Rember, both of whom had toyed with the idea of joining Lamy’s seminary and becoming priests.⁷

In his final substantial paragraph, Lamy fails to clarify for the average reader the two general groups of Native Americans in New Mexico. The eight to ten thousand Catholic Indians were the Pueblos, sedentary Indians of New Mexico and Arizona who had been agricultural and architectural town-dwellers since around 750 AD. Although embracing and practicing Catholicism for centuries, they also continued to practice their original Pueblo religions without mixing the varied cults—what anthropologists call compartmentalization. Although the Navajos were semisedentary pastoralists, the Utes, Comanches, Pawnees, and Apaches were by contrast nomadic hunters and gatherers. These latter tribes intermittently dabbled with Catholicism, and Lamy’s mentioning their request for “Black Robes”—Jesuit missionaries such as the archetypal Pierre De Smet—likely stemmed from the fact that De Smet, the longtime province treasurer in St. Louis, served as Lamy’s purchaser, shipper, and financial agent.⁸

Bishop Lamy’s original French narrative covers the period from mid-September to 18 November 1854 and includes camping at Willow Springs in Douglas County, Kansas, to the group’s arrival in Santa Fe.

First Letter, Dated 1 January 1855

Letter of Monsignor Lamy, Bishop of Santa Fe (New Mexico), to Gentlemen Directors of the Work of the Propagation of the Faith.

1 January 1855

Gentlemen:

Here I am, back at my mission, with the priests and sisters whom I went to recruit in Europe. I will say nothing about our ocean voyage and our trip

through the United States and will limit myself to telling of our travels across three hundred leagues [750 miles] of the immense plains of the North American West.⁹ Before embarking on that oceanic prairie, we spent nearly a month in tents, either making our preparations or waiting for those persons who were to come with us. On October fifth, I gave the order to move forward. Mules pulled our ten wagons, which were covered with canvas to serve as a shelter during bad weather.

Our caravan was composed of twenty-eight persons, and I was the only European who had previously crossed that wilderness, but my little band of missionaries showed extraordinary bravery in every circumstance during the five weeks the trip lasted. Other than the inevitable exhaustion during such a crossing, at times we had to travel the entire day and most of the night, unable to stop because there was no water to be had. We constantly had to be on the alert because of the Indians who range the countryside and monitor the progress of the caravans so as to fall upon them unexpectedly. Many long nights we could see the fires of their bivouacs a kilometer or two from our camp. We expected them to attack us at any moment, but divine Providence protected us in a very special way, for despite the very fresh tracks of their passing that we could see quite clearly, we never encountered a single band of the untamed hordes.

The plains that we had to cross from the Missouri River to reach New Mexico are fairly monotonous but nonetheless magnificent: vast and undulating like the ocean. They are also extremely rich in good pasture. Buffaloes or rather bison abound, as do all the species of large game and fowl. During a whole week we traveled among their immense herds [of bison]. Having seen them, I do not speak of thousands but of hundreds of thousands; the prairie was completely black with them. Providence has populated the wilderness with these animals to provide food for the Indians and to offer travelers some fresh provisions.¹⁰ Horses must be extremely swift and agile to overtake them, and marksmen must be skillful to slay them. Our little caravan was fairly lucky in its bison hunts.

Every Sunday and feast-day, we offered the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass under our tent, and the entire caravan [including travelers other than Lamy's group] came together to adore and implore God, who protects pilgrims. As we drew near the mountains of New Mexico, we met a number of my good diocesan priests, who had hurried out to meet us. We enjoyed a very warm welcome everywhere, but Santa Fe gave us the most brilliant reception. The population of the city came out several leagues to meet us. All the civil

and military authorities and an escort of dragoons preceded us. I hope that these signs of respect for the church authority will help us achieve the good of souls.

I have opened a minor seminary to prepare New Mexicans for the priesthood: it numbers a dozen students. Apart from that operation, our two schools in Santa Fe are flourishing, especially that of the sisters.¹¹ Every one of our missionaries is already placed, and I need many others to provide for the most pressing needs. Our [sedentary] Catholic Indians number some eight or ten thousand but are nearly without priests to minister to them and instruct them. If we had more resources and more fellow workers, how rapidly the nomadic tribes would receive the Gospel! A number of them have already asked for Black Robes [Jesuits] to teach them how to please the Great Spirit—that is their name for God. This is their request for me, which without you I cannot satisfy. So I transmit this [letter] with complete confidence to your charity.

I have the honor, etc.

+ Jean Lamy,
Bishop of Santa Fe.

Editors' Introduction to the Letter of 1866

When Bishop Lamy dated this letter in Santa Fe on 25 August 1866, he was preparing to attend the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore, a meeting of all the United States bishops. From there his itinerary took him to Paris and Rome, and then he doubled back to Clermont-Ferrand, Le Havre, New York, and Baltimore, where he dropped off six seminarians. Then he went to Cincinnati, Ohio, Nerinx, Kentucky, St. Louis, Missouri, Leavenworth, Kansas, and Santa Fe, New Mexico.

The gentlemen of la Propagation de la Foi at Lyon wrote the introduction to this letter, and they composed the footnotes, which are indicated by symbols in the text presented here.

Preface by the Gentlemen of Lyon. Diocese of Santa Fe (New Mexico)

Before the annexation to the United States (1847 [the correct date is 1848]), New Mexico, one of the provinces of the Mexican Republic, was dependent on the bishopric of Durango. The new territory's erection as a diocese dated from 1850. Established in Santa Fe, the capital of the Territory, the

new see received Msgr. Lamy as titular; he was a French priest attached for some dozen years to the Diocese of Cincinnati. Two other territories have been successively placed under the jurisdiction of Santa Fe: to the west Arizona in 1858, and to the north Colorado in 1861.² The diocese is thus bounded today by California and Utah on the west, Sonora [and Chihuahua] (Mexico) on the south, Texas and Kansas on the east, and Nebraska and Dakota on the north [Wyoming was still part of Dakota Territory].

Msgr. Lamy has twice traveled to Europe to acquire missionaries. He first came in 1854. At that time, he had only fourteen priests for 60,000 Catholics scattered over a territory two hundred leagues [five hundred miles] in diameter, and Santa Fe, a town of six thousand souls, had only one priest. Rapid population growth and then the annexation of Colorado and Arizona rendered the number of missionaries more and more insufficient. At the beginning of the year 1867, Msgr. Lamy was instructed also to carry the acts of the National Council of Baltimore to the Sovereign Pontiff; he also came to seek out apostolic laborers. He departed [from France] on 9 May last, taking with him fifteen new collaborators to help evangelize a domain which already numbered 143,000 Catholics.*

The reader will find the following letter interesting. In it, Msgr. the Bishop of Santa Fe makes known in detail the situation of a diocese that is quite new but which will doubtless achieve great importance as soon as the railroads, under construction at the moment, directly connect its vast expanse with the two oceans that wash the American continent.

Second Letter, Dated 25 August 1866

Letter of Msgr. J.-B. Lamy, Bishop of Santa Fe (New Mexico), to the Gentleman Members of the Central Councils of the Work of the Propagation of the Faith.

* As listed by The Gentlemen of Lyon, the personnel who crossed the ocean were Bishop Jean Baptiste Lamy and Fr. Jean Baptiste Coudert; Frs. François-Marie and Jean-Noël Paoli; Deacon Jean Baptiste Brun with his father, mother, and sister Marie; six seminarians, Antoine Fourchégu, Jean-Eugène Novert, François-Félix Lestra, Joseph-Lucien Rémuzon, Louis Chabrier, and Antoine Lamy, the bishop's nephew; another nephew of the bishop was layman Jean-Baptiste Lamy; and finally there were four Jesuits, Frs. Donato Gasparri and Raffaele Bianchi and Brs. Prisco Caso and Raffaele Vezza.

Santa Fe, 25 August 1866

Gentlemen:

When I arrived in Santa Fe sixteen years ago, my first effort was to acquire missionaries and to open schools. Divine Providence has plainly blessed our efforts, despite difficulties of all sorts that had to be overcome.

We have already been able to repair most of the ancient churches and build eighty-five new ones. These churches, all built of large sun-dried bricks, are of very modest size, in no architectural style, and as poor inside as out. But by the grace of God they are well attended; the great majority of our Catholics receive the sacraments, and First Communion is celebrated wherever a priest resides. The total number of churches and chapels is 135.

We have three prospering schools, staffed by the Brothers of the Christian Doctrine [Christian Brothers]. Those of the episcopal town never have fewer than two hundred students, and they often number as many as three hundred. They teach English and Spanish, penmanship, geography, history, arithmetic, and so forth. Almost all of our missionaries have one school at least under their sponsorship; some have more, according to the number of villages that they visit.

The Sisters of Loretto have five houses in the diocese, the first established on the first of January 1853. There are many novices, not a few from the leading families of the territory.

On the first of January 1866, four Sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul [Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati] opened an orphanage and a hospital in Santa Fe; I have turned over to that work the house where I lived.

[Travel]

Among the special difficulties of our mission, I must put foremost the rigors of crossing the immense plains which isolate us from the United States. After having crossed the ocean, after having gone six hundred leagues [fifteen hundred miles] by railroad, the most difficult and the most costly part of the trip is still to be made. Up to that point, indeed, one has access to the comforts of civilized lands; henceforth he must journey three hundred leagues [750 miles] without encountering a hostel along the road or a bridge over the rivers, and always exposed to Indian arrows.* It is rare that the savages do not rob even large caravans each year. One can guess the number [of attacks] from the following account: During the summer of 1855

* See in the *Annales* volume 27 (1855), 318–21, a letter of Msgr. Lamy on crossing the desert.

[1859 is correct], six of our Christian Brothers, who came to Santa Fe by crossing the prairies, were prudent enough to join a caravan of five hundred ox-carts loaded with provisions and merchandise for New Mexico. They spent two months and a half making the trip, and they were attacked several times by the Indians who, challenging the twelve hundred well-armed men in the caravan, killed or wounded a number of persons.

The outlays for equipping a caravan are enormous. Animals and wagons must be bought, the missionaries' baggage and the furnishing for churches and schools must be hauled, as well as a two-month supply of food and camping equipment. Since the Civil War, the price of transport across the plains is a franc and a half to two per kilogram. Therefore, we have nothing in New Mexico beyond the absolute necessities of life such as bread and meat. Nothing is manufactured. The majority of the inhabitants breed sheep, horned cattle, and horses, but they make little profit, perhaps because there are no markets or perhaps because the nomadic Indians steal the flocks and herds, killing the herdsmen or taking them captive.

Providence has placed innumerable herds of buffalo, deer, and antelope on the beautiful vast prairie that provide meat for nourishment and skins for clothing for a half-million savages.

Since these savages declared war on the government, crossing the plains is more dangerous than ever. It was not without the special protection of God that in [March] 1865 ten young missionaries, whom one of our priests [Gabriel Ussel] was bringing from Lyon, were able to cross these three hundred leagues. They were twice attacked by the savages and almost died of cold and hunger.¹³

[The Greater Southwest]

New Mexico is the most populous of the three territories that today form the diocese of Santa Fe. We reckon 110,000 Mexicans and 15,000 Catholic Indians. Colorado has 10,000 Catholics in a population of 40,000 souls. Arizona has 8000 Catholics. The present number of our priests in missionary work is forty-one, with five of them in charge of Colorado, three in Arizona, and the rest in New Mexico.

I have made three pastoral visitations to Colorado and only one to Arizona, but that one took six months, from the first of November 1864 to the first of May 1865.¹⁴ I rode more than a thousand leagues [twenty-five hundred miles] on horseback in new locales, having to sleep under the stars, travel distances of twenty or twenty-five leagues [fifty or sixty-some miles] without finding a drop of water, having to walk on foot at times to rest my

horse. But one is well compensated for his fatigue when he finds believers who, not having seen a priest for many years, benefit from the visit of the missionary to receive the sacraments with fervor and gratitude.

On Christmas Day, we were able to celebrate the holy Sacrifice, attended by twenty or twenty-five persons kneeling on ground still damp from the snow fallen the day before. We were on the slope of a mountain, surrounded by forests of osage orange trees, firs, and cedars. The altar, set up under a shelter of green branches, had been improvised with the materials we had at hand. They were parts of trees and some old planks that had earlier served as seats and tables. There were only two or three wretched sheds in the area [in Prescott] at that time, but today it is the capital of Arizona, and the exploitation of mines could turn it into an important city.

On the great Colorado River, we found a village only a year old that already boasted a population of eight hundred souls, nearly all of them Catholic. There were baptisms and marriages to perform, and a goodly number of the faithful received the sacraments.

Continuing our way to the east after a hundred and fifty leagues [375 miles] of travel, we arrived at the villages of the Pima and Maricopa Indians. These Indians, some nine or ten thousand, are partially civilized, industrious, living the simple life, but they have not yet heard the word of the Gospel.

The ancient mission of Saint Francis Xavier is five days' march [toward the east] from the Pimas, a hundred or a hundred and twenty-five leagues [250 to 310 miles]. The Jesuits converted these people at the beginning of the last [eighteenth] century. There are about 4000 Catholics. Two Jesuit fathers who lived there for eight months in 1864 had the consolation of baptizing many adults. The mission church, constructed of large bricks and well cared for, has two cupolas, visible for many leagues. The interior is decorated with paintings in fresco and statues tolerably well executed. For a year now we have had two priests who administer not only the mission of Saint Francis Xavier [San Javier del Bac] but also the village of Tucson, inhabited by 1200 persons who are almost all Catholic. The missionaries have just built a church there.*

* Tucson, situated two leagues [five miles] north of Saint Francis Xavier, had at some times three thousand inhabitants whom the Indians had occasionally chased out. At the time of the annexation of [southern] Arizona to the United States (1853), only two hundred souls lived at Tucson.

In Arizona there are the ruins of monuments raised by the Aztec race, whose dominion extended over all the peoples of Mexico from the fourteenth century until the Spanish conquest. Other more recent ruins witness the passage of the Spanish, driven out in their turn by the Apache Indians.*

[Flora]

The flora of that region offers an extremely queer plant, the *cactus giganteus*. The cactus grows in such abundance that the land takes the name “Arizona,” for in the Indian language it means “land of cactus.” The etymology seems quite likely.† Be that as it may, the giant cactus for its beauty, its form, and its loftiness is the most engaging of the species. We have seen many of them as tall as eleven or twelve meters [thirty-five or forty feet]. At a certain height, three, four, or five branches sprout from the main trunk, giving the plant the true form of a candelabrum. The circumference is a meter or so [forty inches]. The plant produces an excellent fruit which the Indians harvest by means of long poles armed with a fork. From the Great Colorado River (the Red River of the west) to the mission of Saint Francis Xavier, we traveled every day in immense forests of these cacti, which from a distance look like an army of giants in battle array.

Arizona enjoys a very healthy climate, though with a high temperature. Its resources consist of gold mines, pasture, and arable land.

The Colorado Territory is much colder, but the great rivers that water it make the prairies bloom, and the soil is better suited for farming. Thousands of cultivators and farmers have already taken possession of the beautiful valleys. The principal resources of Colorado are gold and silver mines and pastures and valleys where all sorts of grains are grown. The mountains are covered with firs and cedars.

* “The letter drawn up by the Jesuits and dedicated to the King of Spain in 1757 attests that this part of Mexico—Arizona—contained an active and hardworking population. Included were towns, villages, and rural establishments that today have vanished” (*Bulletin de la Société de Géographie*, June 1862, p. 335). Mr. Sylvester Mowry, in a letter addressed to the Society of Geography of New York and reprinted in *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie de Paris* [June 1862], avers that in 1687 the first exploration of these areas was due to a Jesuit of the Sonora Province [Eusebio F. Kino] who descended the valley and river of Santa Cruz as far as the Gila, a tributary of the Colorado. It was that religious who established the first Arizona mission.

† Other travelers want to derive “Arizona” from the Aztec “arizuma,” which means “containing silver.” Silver mines indeed abound in the mountains of this Territory (*Bulletin de la Société de Géographie*, June 1862, p. 333). [Editors’ note: Learned guessing at the etymology of “Arizona” continues to this day.]

Compared to the other two territories, New Mexico has the advantage of being populated with native-born people with their families, properties, and herds. Its climate is more temperate. Like Arizona, the Territory is rich in veins of metal ore, in domesticated animals, in grain, and in fruit. The southern area produces excellent grapes.

[New Mexican Religion]

The New Mexicans are very well disposed toward religion. There are few villages where the people themselves have neither built a chapel nor spontaneously contributed to maintain a missionary. In one village, the church and rectory were built at the cost of a single family, and that example has found emulators. Even Protestants have come to our aid; for example, the military commander of New Mexico gave us five thousand francs to open an orphanage in Santa Fe.

In general, our Mexicans have lots of children; they say that the more [children], the richer they are. It is not at all rare to meet with families of ten or a dozen children or even more. Also, during the sixteen years we have been among them, we have seen columns of fifty, a hundred, or two hundred families emigrating to establish themselves in the fertile valleys of the west. Their principal concern is always to decide on the site of the church. The missionary decides the plan of construction, and then in the right season each family sends a few workers, and in a year or two the church is finished. This church is doubtless, as we have said, of a humble style, but it is nevertheless the finest structure in the village. The lively faith of our Mexicans, their respect for religion, especially for the Holy Eucharist, and their devotion to the Holy Virgin are truly admirable. They understand that the priest is the representative of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and they offer him the greatest veneration.

We must say the same thing of the Catholic Indians. In the *pueblos* (villages) where no missionary resides, they meet regularly to say their prayers together. They are very attached to their priests. Here is an example provided in July 1865 by the Indians of the village of Isleta. I had decided to confer a more important mission upon Father Félix Andreas Jouvét.

As soon as the news of the likely change of their missionary became known to the Indians, they came together *en masse*, and the chiefs came with tears in their eyes to find their priest. The most elderly said, "Is it true," he asked sobbing, "that you are going to leave us? With your permission, I am going to gather all our people, old and young," there are more than two thousand, "and if there is one single person who has a complaint to make against you,

we will consent to your going. But if you want to remain with us, now that we know you and you have earned our confidence, we will go to Santa Fe to find the bishop, and we will petition on our knees that he leave you among us, and we will not rise until he grants us that gift.”

Father Jouvét could not but join his request to that of his parishioners, and he remained among them until the moment—no one guessed it would be so soon—when God called him. On the fourth of the following November, the young missionary died of cerebral fever. Father Félix Jouvét had arrived in New Mexico in 1861 as a sub-deacon.¹⁵

[Nomads]

Even nomadic tribes greatly respect their priest. One of our missionaries, Father [Pierre] Martin, barely recovered from a very serious illness, left with a caravan to visit a neighboring priest. It was 4 March 1863. It was cold, his fever recurred as he went, and so as to arrive sooner he left the caravan behind. As he proceeded without precaution, a bullet fired by an Indian struck him in the chest.

Seeing him dead, the savages came from their ambush intending to divide the spoils among them, but as soon as they realized that their victim was a priest, they were seized with terror, and contrary to their habits they covered the body without touching it and only took his horse. Shortly afterward, we learned that the chief of that Indian band had put the guilty man to death, since the murder of a priest had angered the Great Spirit and, according to the ideas of the savages, he exacted a victim in expiation.¹⁶

In the entire diocese, the number of uncivilized Indians must reach 80,000, counting the Comanches of Texas and their allies, who spend much of their time in our territory.

It seems that the government in Washington intends to adopt for them a plan that—if presented with practicality, prudence, and kindness—will favor the conversion of the Indians or at least their children. The plan would assign them a certain vast expanse of land and oblige them to live there. This attempt at colonization was tried with the Navajos, and it succeeded.¹⁷ Toward the end of 1864, I sent Father [Michel] Fleurant as envoy to the Indians along with two clerics in minor orders to begin a mission and establish a school. By the end of some months, the priest had gained the respect, esteem, and affection of the tribe, but at the moment when he hoped that to gather the first fruits of his zeal, death removed him from his dear savages on 25 October 1865. Father Michel Fleurant had left France on 17 April

1861, being then a mere cleric in minor orders. My intention is to grant him a successor as soon as I can do so.¹⁸

[The Future]

Up to the present, communication between New Mexico and the remainder of the United States is difficult, and cartage is exorbitant. But railroads are being built in California to the west and in the east from Missouri and Texas. When the lines are finished, the exploitation of the mines, animal husbandry, and viticulture will totally change the present state of things. Then it will be possible to have workers at an acceptable wage to build churches and homes like those of the eastern states. It is likely that we will see textile factories established in a land that produces woolly sheep in such great numbers.

With the general development of resources, the mission will surely find the means to grow and shoulder the heavy responsibilities that weigh down all new institutions. Providence will not abandon us, and the work of *La Propagation de la Foi* will continue, we hope, to come to our aid as it has done since the establishment of the See of Santa Fe, of which, despite our personal unworthiness, we have the honor of being the first bishop.

I am, gentlemen, your most humble and grateful servant,

+ Jean-B. Lamy,
Bishop of Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Afterword

An extremely young thirty-seven-year-old bishop in a newly established frontier diocese had a Sisyphean task ahead of him. He made mistakes, as everyone does. But during the fifteen years from his arrival in Santa Fe to his second letter in 1866, he became more adept in administering his priests, more easygoing with his parishioners, and greatly beloved by the vast majority of New Mexicans—Pueblos, Hispanos, and Anglos alike.

Perhaps the twin hurricanes of the Reign of Terror and Napoleon froze most nineteenth-century French clerics into Romantic escape (*à la Chateaubriand*), reactionary authoritarianism (Joseph Marie de Maistre and François de Bonal), or exaggerated Romanism. But not Lamy. A Myers-Briggs “autopsy” of his personality identified him as a guardian—an ESTJ: extravert, sensor, thinker, and judger. He certainly spread the lifeways of civilized living (which France claimed to have in abundance): he was practical, obedient and demanding obedience, consistent, conservative, and persevering.¹⁹

During Lamy's twenty remaining years of life after the 1866 letter, the bishop and archbishop never had enough priests and sisters or enough money to implement the improvements he strove for. But despite all obstacles, Lamy's tireless efforts often brought him close to achieving his goals.²⁰

After the U.S. annexation of the Southwest in 1848, the need to move persons and things from east to west was the United States' great, difficult, and wonderful problem. Absorbing all of Kansas and Nebraska, Colorado and New Mexico, Arizona and Utah, and Nevada and California was the urgent aim of the immediate future. Bishop Lamy's two letters mark different stages in this historical process and are particularly valuable because they show us the perspectives and insights of one living with and enduring the harsh conditions of the time. Both letters describe the arduous crossing of the Great Plains: the lurking chance of sudden death, the toll exacted by unremitting tension, the constant danger of Indian attack, lack of water and deprivation of all kinds, and epidemic cholera and other diseases.

The second letter also dwells upon the rudeness and simplicity of life in New Mexico, where "nothing is manufactured." Bishop Lamy hankered for the goods and refinements of civilization and looked forward to the future arrival of rail transport once the railroad lines from the east and west were joined. He foresaw healthy growth of the diocese thanks to greater wealth from mining, viticulture (of special interest to a Frenchman), textile factories, and animal husbandry. Thanks to rail transport, it would be possible to build churches and homes "like those of the eastern states." Clearly Lamy had no sentimental regard for adobe architecture. Little evidence indicates that he foresaw the problems that ease of travel would bring: an influx of adventurers and ne'er-do-wells from the East looking for easy opportunities and wealth on the frontier. He rather pictured the refinements and cultural changes that the easterners and Europeans riding in parlor cars would bring.

As historical writings, therefore, these two letters document a transitional point in the development of the West. Indeed, the railroad was arguably the agent of greatest change that New Mexico has ever experienced. Just as the work of the poet and novelist Chateaubriand colored Lamy's perception of the Great Plains, literary works continued (and indeed continue) to influence historical writing and perceptions.

During twenty years in the early twentieth century, a sequence of five events transformed America's previous image of the Southwest: Fr. William Howlett wrote a well-received biography of Bishop Joseph P. Machebeuf of Denver (1908); Rómulo Ribera, a former priest whom Lamy had ordained,

wrote a fine *décima* ode that glorified Archbishop Lamy (1914); the wealthy Miguel Chaves commissioned the casting of a fine European bronze of the archbishop (c. 1914); the Albuquerque publisher-politician Nestor Montoya declaimed Ribera's ode at the unveiling of the statue (1915); and Willa Cather saw the statue and conceived the idea of a novel.²¹ She eventually discovered Father Howlett's biography, and she finally finished the novel in 1927—creating a book of fiction so persuasive that Cleofas Martínez Jaramillo, foundress of the Sociedad Folklorica, declared that “Father Valiant” had come to Taos carrying “the Bishop's decree of excommunication for the padres Martínez and Lucero.” “Valiant” was Bishop Latour's vicar in Cather's novel.²²

In *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Patricia Clark Smith of the University of New Mexico has uncovered a great deal of Homer's *Odyssey*, a few touches of Alfred Tennyson's “Ulysses” (1833) and “Lotus Eaters” (1832), and a covert but substantial amount of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922).²³ Cather, a committed devotee to the culture of France, decided to invent a bishop who would transfer French refinement into the nineteenth-century frontier. A great majority of readers would declare that *Death Comes for the Archbishop* is the best novel Cather ever wrote and that until now it has been the best novel about New Mexico yet written—despite her thoughtless and slanderous use of the New Mexican priests' real names.

Notes

1. William J. Howlett, *Life of the Right Reverend Joseph P. Machebeuf, D.D., Pioneer Priest of Ohio, Pioneer Priest of New Mexico, Pioneer Priest of Colorado, Vicar Apostolic of Colorado and Utah, and First Bishop of Denver* (Pueblo, Colo.: The Franklin Press Co., 1908); and Willa Cather, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1927).
2. *Hurons, Lower Canada, Algonkians: 1650*, comp. and ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites, vol. 35 of *Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610–1791*, 73 vols., ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites (Cleveland, Ohio: Burrows Brothers Co., 1896), 146–61; and Willa Cather, *Shadows on the Rock* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1931).
3. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 2d ed. (1759; repr., New York: Garland, 1971).
4. François-René de Chateaubriand, *Atala* (1801; repr., Paris: Garner-Flammarion, 1964), 72. The Marquis de Potherie's *Histoire de l'Amérique septentrionale* (1722) states, “On voit dans les prairies à perte de vue des troupeaux de quatre à cinq mille boeufs qui y paissent [Herds of four to five thousand bison graze on the prairie as

- far as the eye can see].” This may well be the origin of François-René de Chateaubriand’s passage in his “Prologue” to *Atala*. See M. de Bacqueville de la Potherie, *Histoire de l’Amérique septentrionale: Relation d’un séjour en Nouvelle-France*, 4 vols. (Paris: J. L. Nion et F. Didot, 1753), 3:238.
5. James Fenimore Cooper, *The Prairie: A Tale* (1827; repr., Laurel, N.Y.: Lightyear Press, 1984), 14.
 6. Washington Irving, *A Tour on the Prairies* (1835; repr., New York: Time-Life Books, 1983), 26, 115, 153.
 7. Both Jean Baptiste Vaur and Sébastien Rember appear in the census of Santa Fe County in 1860 as carpenters at the Cathedral. In the census of 1870, two of Vaur’s daughters appear in a Mora County Catholic school at La Junta (now known as Watrous), and in the census of 1880 the whole family appears with Juan Baptiste, his wife Matilde, five kids, and a servant. Rember and his wife Deruvina appear in the town of Mora with two young children in 1870. Santa Fe County, *Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States 1860: New Mexico*, Microcopy 653 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Service, 1967), Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, National Archives; Mora County, *Population Schedules of the Ninth Census of the United States 1870: New Mexico*, Microcopy 593 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Service, 1965), Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, National Archives; and Mora County, *Population Schedules of the Tenth Census of the United States 1880: New Mexico*, Microcopy T9 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Service, [1962?]), Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, National Archives.
 8. Paul Horgan, *Lamy of Santa Fe: His Life and Times* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975), 59–60, 182, 210.
 9. In 1854 the states west of the Mississippi River were Iowa, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, and California. Federal territories included New Mexico, Utah, Kansas, Nebraska, and Minnesota. The remainder of the frontier West was not yet organized.
 10. Writing to Mexican president Antonio López de Santa Anna in 1843 and to Sen. James R. Doolittle as part of the Doolittle Committee in 1865, Padre Antonio José Martínez predicted that, because of the uncontrolled hunting of bison and especially the killing of the majority of the newborn calves, “the bison must greatly diminish, and the constant slaughter will finally result in the extinction of the species in a very short time.” Antonio José Martínez, *Exposición que el presbítero Antonio José Martínez cura de Taos en Nuevo México, dirige al gobierno del exmo. General D. Antonio López de Santa-Anna: Proponiendo la civilización de las naciones bárbaras que son al contorno del departamento de Nuevo-México* (Taos, N.Mex.: Imprenta del mismo a cargo de J. M. B., 1843); and *Congressional Globe, Appendix*, 39th Cong., 2d sess., 1867, S. Rep. 156, 486–90. While others suggested a military approach to the Native Americans, Martínez, academic that he was, preferred peace through education.
 11. Several Loretto Sisters from the Nerinx, Kentucky, motherhouse had come with Lamy in 1852, and some of the persons for whom Lamy had waited in Kansas

- Territory were three Lorette sisters who unaccountably failed to arrive; Fr. Joseph P. Machebeuf, Lamy's vicar-general, convoyed them to Santa Fe the following year. Lynn Bridgers, *Death's Deceiver: The Life of Joseph P. Machebeuf* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 118–19.
12. The territory of Colorado was formed in 1861 from various parts of Kansas, Nebraska, Utah, and New Mexico. Mexico ceded the area of present-day southern Arizona to the United States in 1853.
 13. Four seminarians who all survived to be ordained on 25 March were Jean P. Faur, Pierre Lassaigue, Camille Seux, and Pierre Antoine Vermare. See Horgan, *Lamy of Santa Fe*, 319.
 14. For a much more extensive account of the journey to the West Coast and back, see chapter 15 in James H. Defouri, *Historical Sketch of the Catholic Church in New Mexico*, ed. Thomas J. Steele, rev. ed. (1887; Las Cruces, N.Mex.: Yucca Tree Press, 2003), 122–50.
 15. Félix Andreas Jouvét was born 21 June 1837, received his subdiaconate in Clermont and his priesthood in Santa Fe, and died of cerebral fever in Isleta on 4 November 1865. See Nancy N. Hanks, *Lamy's Legion: The Individual Histories of Secular Clergy Serving in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe from 1850 to 1912* (Santa Fe, N.Mex.: HRM Press, 2000), 67.
 16. Pierre Martin was born in France in 1835, arrived in New Mexico with Fr. Pierre Eguillon in 1859, and was ordained a priest on 22 September 1860. While pastor of Seboyeta, he fell ill of a fever, seemed to recover, and, on 4 March 1862, left on horseback in the company of four men who were in a wagon. Father Martin decided to gallop ahead and enjoy a brief siesta, but one member of a band of nomadic Indians spotted him and shot him as he slept; the group realized their blunder in killing a priest and immediately left the scene. See James H. Defouri, *Martyrs of New Mexico: A Brief Account of the Lives and Deaths of the Earliest Missionaries in the Territory* (Las Vegas, N.Mex.: Revista Católica Press, 1893), 74–76; Horgan, *Lamy of Santa Fe*, 300; and Hanks, *Lamy's Legion*, 81.
 17. The Long Walk from the area around Canyon de Chelly in northeastern Arizona to Fort Sumner in east-central New Mexico was a difficult journey. The Navajos' imprisonment at the Bosque Redondo was equally trying. Neither was successful except as a punishment and a threat. Lynn R. Bailey, *Bosque Redondo: The Navajo Internment at Fort Sumner, New Mexico, 1863–1868*, Great West and Indians series, vol. 69 (Tucson, Ariz.: Westernlore Press, 1998).
 18. Michel Fleurant was the chaplain to the Navajos and Mescalero Apaches at the Bosque Redondo, a federal reservation or a sort of concentration camp for Indians during and immediately following the Civil War. He died of cerebral fever on 25 October 1865, while traveling up the Pecos and Gallina rivers toward Las Vegas, New Mexico. See Hanks, *Lamy's Legion*, 49.
 19. Thomas J. Steele, *Archbishop Lamy: In His Own Words* (Albuquerque, N.Mex.: LPD Press, 2000), 42–43, 54–68. Steele suggests that Willa Cather's Meyers-Briggs psychological profile was identical to that of her fictional Bishop Latour (which was exactly the opposite of the historical Lamy's) and that Cather created precisely

the fictional Frenchman that she always wanted to become. Steele, *Archbishop Lamy*, 13–20.

20. See Nancy Hanks, “Lamy’s Legacy: Catholic Institutions of New Mexican Territory,” in *Seeds of Struggle, Harvest of Faith: The Papers of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe Catholic Cuarto Centennial Conference on the History of the Catholic Church in New Mexico*, eds. Thomas J. Steele, Paul Fisher Rhett, and Barbe Awalt (Albuquerque, N.Mex.: LPD Press, 1998), 384–414.
21. Howlett, *Life of the Right Reverend Joseph P. Machebeuf, D.D.*; José Romulo Ribera, “En La Llegada de Su Señoría Ilustrísima Don Juan Bautista Lamy á Santa Fé,” in *Folk and Church in Nineteenth Century New Mexico* (Colorado Springs: The Hulbert Center for Southwest Studies, Colorado College, 1993), 109–11; and Cather, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*.
22. Cleofas Martínez Jaramillo, *Shadows of the Past* (Santa Fe, N.Mex.: Seton Village Press, 1941), 112. Cather probably had access to the archdiocesan library at the cathedral, for she borrowed the surname of a short-lived priest, Louis Simon Latour, who arrived in 1862 and died two years later; she then borrowed Émile Vaillant’s surname from a donor whose stamp remains in Jacques P. Migne’s multivolume *Theologiae cursus completus, ex tractatibus omnium perfectissimis ubique habitis, et a magna parte episcoporum necnon theologorum Europæe catholicae, universim ad hoc interrogatorum, designatis, unice conflatus* (Paris, 1837–1845), formerly located in Santa Fe and presently at the Regis University Library in Denver, Colorado.
23. Patricia Clark Smith, “Achaean, Americanos, Prelates, and Monsters: Willa Cather’s *Death Comes for the Archbishop* as New World Odyssey,” in *Padre Martínez: New Perspectives from Taos*, ed. E. A. Mares (Taos, N.Mex.: Millicent Rogers Museum, 1988), 101–24.