

CATHOLIC MISSIONARIES AND MISSIONS

By Karen Lesiak, Digitizing Partner, Hartford, Connecticut

The resources in the Catholic News Archive provide primary source material and show how perspectives on history have changed through the decades. In the following column, I only scratch the surface of the wealth of information available on specific topics in the Catholic News Archive. Individual searches yield thousands of titles, text, and illustrations in a collection that has nearly 25,000 issues comprising approximately 546,250 pages. To learn more about being a partner with CRRA in the digitization of collections in your library and archives, send an inquiry to Todd Jensen at tjensen@catholicresearch.org.

Search Terms: *Catholic missions, St. Patrick, North American martyrs, Kateri Tekakwitha, Catherine Tekakwitha (Tekawitha), California missions, Jesuits, Jesuit missions, secularization missions, missionary work, lay missions, lay missionaries, laity missions, Mission Sunday.*

When thinking about missionaries, we often remember two early missionaries, St. Paul the Apostle and St. Patrick, both historically important to the spread of the Christian faith. The significance of St. Paul the Apostle's missionary journey throughout the Roman Empire was revelatory. Paul was the first Christian missionary to spread the message of Christ's life and teaching to the Jews and Gentiles, planting fourteen churches beginning at Cyprus to the coastal region of what is now Turkey and Syria, then traveling to Jerusalem, knowing he would be arrested, and later meeting his martyrdom in Rome.

Through the message of Christ, Paul was intent on the conversion of others to the way of Christ, promoting the attributes to love and serve one another as Jesus taught, despite the possibility of danger and even death at the hands of those who refuted and despised Him. Many who have followed this

example have done so with great fervor and profound dedication and courage.

During the fifth century, St. Patrick, often called the Apostle of the Irish nation and its primary patron saint, was a Christian missionary. Though his origins have been debated over the years, evidence points to his thirty-year apostolate in Ireland. He is associated with many monasteries, churches, and other locations throughout Ireland's region. Boston's Richard Cardinal Cushing referred to St. Patrick as "the ideal missionary," because of his great personal commitment to God, having "come to his mission through the direct call of his master."¹

Missions Begin in North America

Between 1625 and 1649, eight Jesuit missionaries, including six priests and two lay brothers, set out to the New World to evangelize the Huron tribes in New France. The first to arrive in 1625 was Father John de Brebeuf, founder of the Huron missions. The other seven missionaries followed. Though there were many victories of conversion among the natives, they were short lived as a previous epidemic resurfaced and suspicions were aroused that it was the Jesuits who were responsible for its spread. Hostilities towards the missionaries became severe. For a time, the apostolate continued to grow, but by 1642 the Huron missions were ravaged due to war with the Iroquois, and necessities had become scarce. It was during this time that a brutal martyrdom of the missionaries began to unfold. These North American martyrs were canonized on June 29, 1930, by Pope Pius XI in Rome.² The Catholic News Archive contains primary source materials from around the time of their canonization.

Being resolute in their belief that this was what God had called them to do, they dedicated their lives as missionaries with loyalty and determination and even gladness, though inevitably they met with

imprisonment, torture, and death, a consequence they had become well aware of.

In 1925, Francis Parkman, noted New England historian, wrote, referring to the martyred missionaries, that, "Those men aimed at the conversion of a continent... One great aim engrossed their lives, 'for the greater glory of God'— '*Ad majoram Del gloriam,*' they would act, or wait, dare, suffer or die."³

Nearby is the site of the Native American reservation where Saint Kateri Tekakwitha lived. She was born in 1656, among the Mohawk tribe, part of the powerful Iroquois league. Her conversion by the Jesuits, known as the "Black Robes," led to anger and ostracism as an outcast among her family and the tribespeople of her village. She suffered greatly, yet her triumph in the face of those who persecuted her is evidence of a life transformed for a Native American woman after the arrival of the missionaries. Kateri Tekakwitha was the first, and is still the only Native American who has been canonized.

Missions in the U.S. West and Southwest

While the first missionaries to North America were from France and settled on the east coast, subsequent groups traveled from Mexico north along the west coast. In 1749, an expedition led by José de Gálvez, Visitor General of Mexico, began a journey at La Paz, Mexico, destined for California, with a band of Franciscan Fathers, which included at their head, Father Junipero Serra. In 1769, Fr. Serra, along with Don Gaspar de Portola, who remained only for a short while, founded the first mission at San Diego Bay, San Diego de Alcalá. Between 1769 and 1823, twenty-one missions were established. Nine of the missions were founded by Serra, who died in 1784 at San Carlo's mission, Carmelo Valley. He was canonized in 2015, amid controversy in that as leader of the missions, he took part in the enslavement of the



"Honor Jesuit Martyrs of North America," *The Catholic World in Pictures*, September 30, 1946: 1.

native people. These allegations have been disputed by those who have championed his cause, and by the historical evidences of his dedication and calls for mercy towards those being evangelized. Other missionaries who were instrumental in the creation of the California missions were Francisco Palou, Juan Crespi, and Fermin Lasuen.

The twenty-one missions were situated along the El Camino Real from San Diego to the last mission, San Francisco de Solano. The California missions are considered

a major chapter of the Catholic Church and the history of the United States. The missions were "marvels of organization," serving the Native Americans not only spiritually, but with life essentials such as food and housing and providing work and education. The adobe structures also contributed to the California Mission architectural style.⁴

In 1833, the Mexican Congress passed legislation that all the missions of the territory of Mexico be secularized, and later seized all of the properties belonging to the

California missions. This was to avert Spain's power and influence in California, as California's Catholic missions continued to be loyal to the Roman Catholic Church in Spain. A 1921 article found in Catholic News Archive reveals early twentieth-century perspectives on that history, noting that, "Helen Hunt Jackson, author of *A Century of Dishonor* and that classic novel *Ramona*, tells us in her work, *California and the Missions* of the pitiful condition of the Indians after the missions had been secularized."⁵

The next twelve years brought about the ruination and deterioration of the missions. The de-missionizing of the Native Americans was thought to be premature and executed for the purpose of those who sought only personal gain.⁶ On March 18, 1865, just twenty-seven days before he was assassinated, Abraham Lincoln signed the Lincoln document, also known as the "Patent of Title," for Mexico to return all mission lands illegally taken and sold, back to the Catholic Church.

Missions From the Nineteenth Century Forward: Focus on Social Welfare

Despite many setbacks, the charity of mission work has continued to evolve over the centuries. At the forefront were many women's religious orders that were first sent to the United States from the confines of their communities abroad to establish hospitals, schools, and orphanages in the Americas. Born in 1850, in Sant'Angelo, Italy, a nun, frail due to her health, Saint Maria Francesca Cabrini, "was made of steel when it came to her vocation."⁷ Mother Cabrini founded the first missionary order of women, the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Her goal, even in her youth, was to become a missionary, a challenge she rose to the heights of, upon arriving in America, where she vigorously committed herself to the plight of a growing community of orphaned



Madigan, Gertrude D., "The Catholic Woman: The Mission Health Sisters," *The Catholic Transcript*, vol. XXXVIII, no. 33, January 16, 1936: 6.

and poor immigrant children. In her lifetime she established sixty-seven schools, hospitals, and orphanages throughout the country.

In 1921, the Society of Missionary Catechists of Our Blessed Lady of Victory, now Our Blessed Lady of Victory Mission Sisters located in Huntington, Indiana, was established to catechize impoverished children throughout the districts, who had no possibility for access to religious instruction and the learning of Christian doctrine. This missionary order, though it has grown smaller, is still guided by its founding principles of prayer and outreach in solidarity with those who live in poverty and oppression.

In 1936, the Daughters of Mary was a community for helping the home

and foreign missions, also known as the Mission Health Sisters because of their cooperation with the work of the Catholic Medical Mission Board. They ranged in ages from sixteen to thirty years old.

In 1961, the leading women's community was the Maryknoll Sisters. Involvement of the laity in the missions also became prevalent. International Catholic Auxiliaries

had women studying and training for missions in the United States and overseas to include Africa and Australia. Those with special skills such as teachers, doctors, nurses, architects, and electricians were in demand, as they are today. Catholic laypeople and numerous societies were urged to take the lead in serving in the Peace Corps to "fill the void on a grassroots level" as the need overseas was tremendous.⁸

The Society for the Propagation of the Faith is a Pontifical Missions Society of the United States Congregation that still exists today, and was founded in Lyon, France, in 1822 by Venerable Pauline Jaricot. The society has a universal mission, to inform Catholics of the life and the needs of the Catholic Church in the Missions, and to encourage prayer and financial support for those mission churches. Another Catholic non-profit is Catholic Relief Services, founded by the Catholic bishops in 1943 to serve veterans in Europe and today serves 130 million people in over 100 countries across five continents.

Catholic Extension Services was founded in 1905 to assist small rural towns without parishes. In 2006, in a Catholic Extension Home Missions appeal, Most Reverend Alfred Hughes, Archbishop of New Orleans, made a plea for post-Katrina disaster relief, help for poor parishes, work with growing populations of minorities, and other essential needs.⁹ Catholic Extension Services thrives today, serving over fifteen million American Catholics.

The Church's Evangelizing Mission Transforms Our World

In "The Message of His Holiness, Pope Francis, for World Mission Day 2021," the pope asserts that during these times of the pandemic, we have seen the poverty and injustice of many, and the shattering loss of life and livelihood amid isolation and loneliness within family life and individually. Despite the many tragedies and hardships, as were experienced by the first missionaries, we are called

to have courage to bring God's message of hope in the Gospel to others in ways that bear witness creatively in action to the scriptural and doctrinal teachings of Christ and the Church. The theme of this year's World Mission Day is, "We cannot but speak about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20), and that "as Christians...the Church's evangelizing mission finds outward fulfilment in the transformation of our world and in the care of creation." ■

The Catholic News Archive and the **Catholic Portal** are valuable resources to which librarians can easily add a link on their own library and institutional websites, to provide open and free access by students and researchers.

CRRA would like to hear stories about research in the Catholic News Archive (the catholicnewsarchive.org) and the Catholic Portal (catholicresearch.org/catholic-portal) that have provided insight and been instrumental in research projects.

Contact Jennifer Younger at jyounger@catholicresearch.org, and visit CRRA's website at catholicresearch.org.

Additional Sources in the Catholic News Archive

- "Readers Speak to Readers: New Society of Religious Women," *Our Sunday Visitor*, Sept. 18, 1921: 2.
- "Great Personalities of the Catholic Church: No. 40—Kateri Tekakwitha, the 'Lily of the Mohawks,'" *N.C.W.C. Newsfeeds* (Editorial Sheet), vol. 3, no.5, Sept. 4, 1922:1.
- "181-Year-Old History Of Southwest Missions Now Being Translated," *The N.C.W.C. News Sheet*, vol. 8, no. 10, June 13, 1927:4.
- "It's an Indian Handshake," *Catholic World in Pictures*, July 26, 1941 [Illus.]: 1.
- "Training Lay Apostles for China," *Catholic World in Pictures*, Oct. 1, 1948 [Illus.]: 1.
- "Advance Cause of the Leper Priest," *Catholic World in Pictures*, Feb. 21, 1955 [Illus.]: 1.
- "Lay Women Serve In the Missions," *The Advocate*, Nov. 14, 1958: 10. (This title is listed under *The Catholic Advocate* in The Catholic News Archive.)
- "Recruiting Laymen for Home Missions," *The Advocate*, Jan. 5, 1961: 8.
- "Our Missions: US Sent 550 Missionaries Overseas During Past Year," *Catholic Transcript*, Sept. 21, 1961: 15.
- "Not as a Stranger," *The Advocate*, Oct. 21, 1965: 6.
- Abbott, Falter M., SJ, "First Missionary Journey of St. Paul,"

The Voice, vol. XII, no. 26, Sept. 4, 1970: 14.

Other Related Resources

Missionary Catechist—published by Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters from December, 1924, through October, 1964. This publication covered OLVM's mission to bring the catechism to those who did not have the opportunity. Search Missionary Catechist in the Catholic Portal <https://www.catholicresearch.org/catholic-portal>

Catholic Missions in North America—Subject guides for the Catholic Portal: <https://guides.catholicresearch.org/>

Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions Collection, (Black and Indian Missions), Marquette University, Raynor Memorial Libraries. This collection contains over 1,800 images of Native Americans and related Catholic churches, schools, clergy, and religious from across the United States. It includes the *Indian Sentinel* containing featured articles about Native Americans across the United States and their evangelization by the Catholic Church that include first-hand accounts by lifelong missionaries in the field and feature photographs they had taken. Also featured are articles, essays, and letters by Native Americans, many of whom were students in Catholic schools. Digital Catholica—<https://guides.catholicresearch.org/digital-catholica> ■

Endnotes

- 1 "Of All Life: St. Patrick: Zimmer and O'Rahilly," *The Catholic Transcript*, vol. LXIV, no. 46, March 15, 1962: 4.
- 2 "Miracles of American Martyrs Recognized in Rome," *The Catholic Transcript*, vol. XXXII, no. 49, May 15, 1930: 9.
- 3 "The Counselor: The Martyrs of North America. The Shrine of Our Lady of

- Martyrs, at Aurisville, N. Y. Some Passages from a Letter of Isaac Jogues," *The Catholic Transcript*, vol. XXVIII, no. 14, September 10, 1925: 4.
- 4 Liptak, David Q., "California's 21 Historic Missions," *The Catholic Transcript*, vol. LXIX, no. 5, May 28, 1976: 4.
- 5 O'Hagan, Thomas, in the *American Catholic Quarterly Review*, "The Poetry and

- Romance of the Spanish Missions," *The Monitor*, vol. 63, no. 32, December 17, 1921: 14-15.
- 6 "Father Weber: California's Catholic Heritage: Secularization of the Missions," *The Monitor*, vol. CV, no. 16, July 16, 1963: 16.
- 7 Donze, Beth, "Cabrini Family Celebrates Foundress' Legacy

- of Service," *The Clarion Herald*, March 25, 2006: 4.
- 8 "Lay Role in Peace Corps, PAVLA Cited," *Catholic Standard and Times*, vol. 67, no. 2, September 29, 1961:17.
- 9 "Catholic Home Missions In Need of Help to Continue Vital Services," *The Clarion Herald*, vol. 45, no. 15, April 22, 2006: 14.