

Jesuit Missionaries and the Multifaceted North America: Past and Present in the Italian Magazine *Le Missioni della Compagnia di Gesù (1915-19)*

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Abstract The article aims to define the image of North America that Jesuits missionaries conveyed through the fortnightly *Le Missioni della Compagnia di Gesù*, that of a *sui generis* missionary field (compared to Asia and Africa), whose ethnic and socio-cultural heterogeneity required an equally multifaceted effort. The magazine presented two coexisting models of missionary commitment in North America, as a result of different adaptation strategies: the pioneering model, carried out among the native populations, and a 'modern' one, that of an apostolate in a highly 'civilized' society aimed mainly at protecting the Catholic emigrants' religiosity.

Keywords North American missions. Jesuit missions. Catholic missionary press. Jesuit periodical. Catholic evangelization.

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1 A Completely Different Missionary Field

L'America si presenta al Missionario come un campo del tutto nuovo. L'America reale è molto differente da quella che, noialtri Italiani almeno, siamo avvezzi a foggjarci. [...] L'America è un gran caos.¹

Writing in 1915, the Jesuit missionary in El Paso (Texas) Carmelo Tranchese (1880-1956) warned the readers of the Italian fortnightly *Le Missioni della Compagnia di Gesù* against a traditional concept of the missionary apostolate in North America, for which, he argued, even the young missionary was unprepared. This one, in fact, who left “in uno slancio sublime di generoso zelo” to evangelize the masses of heathens buried in the darkness of idolatry, expecting misery and persecution, difficulties of language, climate and customs, inevitably ran into “un cumulo di disillusioni, di scoraggiamento, di isolamento”.²

From its origins (the *Edifying and Curious Letters*, a specific literary genre consisting of Jesuit missionaries' letters and reports published in the eighteenth century), missionary literature had familiarized the European public with the magisterial conception of missionary commitment aimed at the evangelization and conversion, at the foundation of a local hierarchy (*plantatio ecclesiae*) and of a native clergy.³ At the same time, it contributed to settle the link between evangelization and civilization, associating the spiritual conquest with the moral and civil progress of populations still enslaved by ‘ridiculous superstitions’,⁴ as they were frequently described. Even in the first half of the twentieth century, the geographical, socioeconomic, and cultural conditions of the missionary territories justified the image of the European missionary as the herald not only of the true faith, but also of a cultural and technical superiority that paved the way for the Christian civilization through a first and effective apostolate (hospitals, orphanages, dispensaries, schools, etc.). As emerging from the letters and reports sent from the missionary front and published by the Society of Jesus' missionary magazine, this was actually the theological, cultural and operative framework in which the 3,214 Jesuit missionaries (on a total of 3,639 in 1914) worked, scattered across Central and Latin America (1,296), Asia (1,239), Africa (354), and the Oceanic Islands (352).⁵

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- 1 Tranchese, “Dall’Oregon”, 286.
 - 2 Tranchese, “Dall’Oregon”, 286.
 - 3 Cf. Bevans, Schroeder, *Teologia*, 389.
 - 4 Gil, “L’ora di Dio”, 344.
 - 5 “Prospetto”, 2.

Le Missioni della Compagnia di Gesù was first published in 1915 by the Jesuit Provinces of Veneto and Turin but soon adopted as the Society's official missionary magazine in Italy, providing for the first time a worldwide perspective of the Jesuit missionary work to the Italian-speaking public. It represented also a pioneering contribution to the Italian Catholic missionary press, preceded in 1872 only by the Africa-centered *Annali dell'Associazione del Buon Pastore* (then *Nigrizia*) published by the Comboni Missionaries of the Sacred Heart in Verona, and by the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions' magazine *Le Missioni Cattoliche*.⁶

Following the tradition of the *Edifying Letters*, the greater space and visibility was reserved to the missionaries' writings, in which, as the first director Giuseppe Maria Petazzi explained, the reader could find "notizie sulla vita di Missione, sui risultati ottenuti [...] sui metodi, sulle speranze di evangelizzazione".⁷ Thanks precisely to this approach, North America emerged as a *sui generis* missionary field.

For the 259 Jesuit missionaries working there in 1914, the mass conversion of the heathens was no longer a realistic goal: the small native enclaves (the decimated and scattered Native American population, the native Alaskans, and the Tarahumara in Mexico) were practically evangelized at that point, while the United States was no longer considered a mission territory because it had not been subjected to the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith since 1908, when it recognized the American Catholic Church as definitively established.⁸

According to the aforementioned Tranchese, the unprecedented difficulty that the European missionary in the United States had to face in the first half of the twentieth century was the apostolate in an undoubtedly devout society - as the sumptuous temples and the impressive charity evidenced - but also a materialistic one, where the constant focus on the worldly progress resulted in a "febbre quasi universale del negozio": "Sia però detto a onore e gloria di quest'America, che in nessuna parte del mondo forse la Chiesa Cattolica gode tanta libertà e protezione quanto in questo suolo, dove sventola la bandiera stellata della libertà".⁹

The Italian Jesuit brought up (and implied at the same time) many issues that widened, redefined and even complicated the traditional concept of the missionary apostolate. The modern, democratic and technologically advanced North American context not only undermined the civilizing dimension but also deprived the missionary

⁶ For a comprehensive excursus, cf. Menti, "Jesuit Missionaries".

⁷ Petazzi, "L'opera delle Missioni", 3.

⁸ Ferlan, *Storia delle missioni*, 184.

⁹ Tranchese, "Dall'Oregon", 286.

of that sacrificial and even martyrial aura that had fed the missionary rhetoric for centuries, which was justified by the encounter – often from a vulnerable position – with a challenging otherness (both environmental and cultural).

From a religious perspective, in an already predominantly Christian scenario, the real challenge for the Society and the Catholic Church in general was to face the Protestant predominance on an equal – if not numerical, at least by right – basis. The point of contention were the Catholic immigrants: evangelization must be readdressed from the primitive heathens to the modern apostates, attracted by the social network and services offered by Protestant institutions, while the detachment from religious practice as a consequence of secularization anticipated the debate about the mission – no longer just *ad gentes*, but also aimed at the Western re-Christianization – that the missionary press dealt with in the second half of the twentieth century.

This article is not intended to be another contribution to the history of the Society of Jesus' missionary activity: as the first eminently Catholic missionary order – founded by Ignatius of Loyola in 1540 – and still the largest one,¹⁰ this topic is already greatly explored.¹¹ The article rather deals with the representation and self-representation of the missionary apostolate as it was conveyed to the Italian-speaking public between 1915 and 1919, focusing on a missionary territory where the Roman authorities and the Society itself had to face very specific dynamics.

Therefore, the perspective adopted is predominantly editorial. Several studies have recently revised the overall reductive evaluation that had limited the academic interest in popular missionary periodicals as worthy historiographical sources.¹² Actually, these publications (a plentiful and heterogeneous collection of magazines, bulletins, hagiographies, children's fiction) are generally poorly considered mainly because of the so-called 'missionary romanticism',¹³ whose main features were the exoticism, the devotional language, as well as the traditional missionary propaganda. Originally conceived with the aim of encouraging the believers to contribute spiritually and financially to the evangelizing effort, this editorial genre has also familiarized the public opinion with a missionary approach imbued with Western – religious and cultural – superiority, thus strengthening long-term stereotypes in the collective imagination. The evangelization approach, presented to readers as a battle

10 O'Donnell, *Jesuits*, 100.

11 Cf. McGreevy, *American Jesuits*; Fabre, Goujon, Morales, *La Compagnie de Jésus*.

12 Cf. Barringer, "From *Beyond Alpine Snows*", 169.

13 Gheddo, *Giornalismo missionario*, 41.

between good and evil, was gradually reformulated along with the ecumenical and interreligious perspectives opened by the Second Vatican Council.

Historiography has recently pointed out a successful communications strategy, the result of an original mix of elements from the Catholic 'good press'¹⁴ and the popular lay publishing. This material served as an affordable - economically and culturally - channel through which a wide, popular audience in the early twentieth century could acquire information about distant and quite different societies. Furthermore, it is useful not only for enriching the missionary history of the different institutes, but also for understanding the inner dynamics of the congregations and the missionary context as a whole, including their potential evolution. These periodicals in fact soon confirmed themselves as valuable means for the communication, discussion and even theological orientation for the missionary base itself.¹⁵

Le Missioni della Compagnia di Gesù represents an interesting case study, as a pioneering contribution to the promotion of missionary culture in Italy and the result of an original and ambitious editorial project, aimed at supporting the Society's authoritative reputation, both in the missionary field and in the press apostolate. This ensured the magazine a wide circulation almost from the beginning and a long-lasting success.¹⁶

The modest forces assigned (as the numbers previously mentioned attest) justify the magazine's limited coverage of the missionary apostolate in North America, compared to that in Asia, for example, which was predominant until the 1950s. Nonetheless, already in its first years (1915-19), the editorial staff strived to provide the Italian readers with an exhaustive picture of the Society's multifaceted strategy even in a *sui generis* missionary field, thanks in particular to the collaboration of several missionary correspondents, with their respective skills, experiences, and perspectives.

14 Vigni, *Storia dell'editoria*, 31.

15 Cf. Ciciliot, "Il laboratorio missionario".

16 Menti, "Jesuit Missionaries", 2.

2 Fulfill the Romantic Expectations

Depicting the heartfelt participation of the new Christians in religious ceremonies, especially those of festive solemnities, was a recurring topic in the missionary correspondence of the time, a sort of evidence of the results achieved. The image that the Genoese Father Gian Luca Lucchesi (1858-1937) gave of a varied pious assembly, composed of “good Indians” and gold miners of different nationalities, gathered to celebrate Christmas at the Holy Cross Mission in Alaska, was the first approach to the North American missions that *Le Missioni* offered to the Italian public.¹⁷ The letter of this Jesuit missionary in Alaska to the superior of the Roman province Ottavio Turchi, published in the first issue of January 1915, gave a positive image of missionaries “che lavorano allegri e felici in quel deserto”,¹⁸ even if their apostolic zeal in such a “desolate country” was severely tested by the intense cold (“per otto mesi qui non si vede la terra, ma soltanto ghiaccio e neve”)¹⁹ and the distances that forced them to undertake long and dangerous journeys on dog sleds in search of souls among many little villages scattered across that immense region.

The magazine’s inaugural issue opened with the “most difficult missions”²⁰ in North America, the Alaskan ones, settling the topics which defined a traditional and cross geographical model of missionary apostolate for the first half of the twentieth century. Actually, the challenging environmental conditions fueled both the adventurous and sacrificial dimensions, testing the missionaries’ ability to adapt – physically and psychologically – to a context almost unchanged from that their predecessors experienced in the second half of the previous century.²¹ Nevertheless, Lucchesi’s perspective was encouraging: the “apostolic strains” were well rewarded by other “consolations”, such as the Mass attendance and the trust the missionary earned by dedicating himself to his communities “like a real father”.²²

While Lucchesi shed a favorable light also on some cultural peculiarities (he was delighted with the “magnifico paio di stivaloni di pelle di salmone con soles di pelle di foca”),²³ the American Jesuit missionary, linguist and historian Francis Barnum (1849-1921),

17 Lucchesi, “Il Natale in Alaska”, 4. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are by the Author.

18 Lucchesi, “Il Natale in Alaska”, 23.

19 Lucchesi, “Il Natale in Alaska”, 5.

20 Gil, “Stato attuale delle Missioni”, 122.

21 Cf. Ferlan, “Frozen Frontiers”, 176.

22 Lucchesi, “Il Natale in Alaska”, 23.

23 Lucchesi, “Il Natale in Alaska”, 5.

gave a more vivid and quite troubling version of his experience. His report was certainly published in order to complete Lucchesi's edifying sketches: it in fact introduced the readers to the housing, clothing, eating habits etc. of a people who finally acquired the Eskimo identity (*Eschimosi* or *Esquimali*, instead of "Indians" or "our Christians" but also the status of "la gente più sordida che si trovi al mondo".²⁴ Barnum reviewed many aspects ("horrors") of a "nomadic and painful" mission: the dirt (countless lice "radunati a miriadi nei cenciosi indumenti degli *Eschimosi*"); the food (a hash in front of which the poor missionary was able to "reprimere lo sdegno di stomaco solo per l'amore di Dio e lo zelo delle anime");²⁵ the obstacle of the local languages, extremely difficult to learn due to the absence of some consonants (the frequent misunderstandings "drive one crazy",²⁶ and so on.

Barnum's description aimed at striking the readers' sensitivity (or better, their five senses), stressing the civilization gap and consequently highlighting the missionaries' hardships. The focus on their daily challenges and personal difficulties (loneliness, discouragement, illness) was another recurring feature of this periodical genre, which helped the benefactors' emotional engagement.

Other information, such as the date and location (usually the mission station) at the top of these letters and reports, the photographs, or the publication of a letter addressed to a superior (that was so in Lucchesi's case) or a relative (usually the missionary's mother), support their reliability as sources testifying a firsthand experience. Moreover, the serialization of a single report helped readers to familiarize and also sympathize with the different missionaries' points of view offered by the missionary press of that time.²⁷ This further key aspect is evident for example in Barnum (1915) and Lucchesi's (1917) respective considerations on the Alaskan environment, which restated their approach – quite poles apart – to this missionary field:

Il panorama in questa immensa regione non solamente è monotono, ma triste e tetro oltre ogni credere. E se il missionario non ha virtù, al primo aspetto dà indietro e rifugge come da terra maledetta. [...] Io trasecolo, leggendo le meraviglie e le grandezze del panorama dell'Alaska [...]. Bugiardi! S'ingannano così i lettori?²⁸

Questa contrada, in apparenza così ributtante, ha invece una

24 Barnum, "Dall'Alaska", 406.

25 Barnum, "Dall'Alaska", 406.

26 Barnum, "Dall'Alaska", 425.

27 Cf. Acke, "Missionary Periodicals", 226-35.

28 Barnum, "Dall'Alaska", 389.

speciale attrattiva, direi quasi magnetica, per cui quelli che vi dimorano per un certo periodo, vi si affezionano tanto che non vorrebbero poi lasciarla, e anche lasciatala, vi ritornano appena possono. Forse ciò avviene [...] per la grande pace che qui si gode [...] libera dal frastuono e dall'eccitazione che regnano nelle grandi città dei paesi inciviliti [...]. Sperduti in questo bianco deserto, specialmente quando si viaggia per giorni interi, in un silenzio profondo, senza incontrare creature umane, facilmente si prega e si sta uniti con Dio.²⁹

The magazine quickly attracted the collaboration of many other missionaries, even of different nationalities. Regarding Alaska, however, the Italian born Jesuit missionary Anthony Keyes' (also known as Antonio Chiavassa, 1866-1928) new anecdotes and reflections from Pilot Station on the Yukon River, exposed a rather static situation over the years: few missionaries whose main task was to find the few souls "sepolte nel tetro buio delle loro tane" and keep them in the faith.³⁰ The establishment of the Apostolic Vicariate of Alaska in 1916, Angelo Pasinetti explained, was not justified by any real progress (there were still no parishes or secular clergy), but rather to dignify that mission and silence the Protestants' contempt.³¹

The missionary apostolate *stricto sensu*, seemed at its final act in North America. Native enclaves were small and further reduced by the Spanish flu.³² In 1919, Father Keyes (Chiavassa) reported the pandemic led to the death of 1,500 Alaskan natives, a dramatic number considering an already small population,³³ while according to Father Felice Ziccardi (1890-1964) the epidemic provoked a "massacre" among the Sioux of South Dakota.³⁴ The great hopes the Society of Jesus had once placed in the missions among the "Redskins" ("Pelli Rosse") were then dashed.³⁵ In the regions between Canada and the Rocky Mountains, a handful of Jesuits undertook long and tough journeys to assist the few Catholic natives (24,000), scattered over great distances and suffering from a very high mortality rate. The brief mention of "the whites' violence and vices" that had drastically reduced the Native American population during the Age of Discovery

29 Lucchesi, "Dall'Alaska", 183.

30 Keyes, "Dall'Alaska", 359.

31 Pasinetti, "Erezione del Vicariato", 242.

32 News about the missions among the Mexican native population of the Tarahumara was published only starting with the 1920s, because of the Mexican Revolution (1910-17) and the Jesuits' escape.

33 Chiavassa, "Dall'Alaska", 230.

34 Ziccardi, "L'influenza", 122. He wrote from St. Louis (Missouri).

35 Gil, "Stato attuale delle Missioni", 121.

was aimed at increasing the missionary's merit towards those "reliquie di poche tribù che vanno lentamente spegnendosi, lasciando dietro a sé il solo ricordo di una razza che fu".³⁶ Although, as the French Jesuit Charles Richart argued in 1917, there was no longer any hope of a "splendid future" for its converts, the Church cared for those outcasts - not "solid Christians", but devoted at least - like a "loving mother", preparing them for a Christian death.³⁷ The missionaries' letters sound like painful testimonies of the disappearance, year after year, of a "good people", described while splendidly honoring religious ceremonies in its own way, wearing traditional costumes and singing hymns in the native language.

3 The American Debt

Le Missioni che ai giorni nostri vi [nelle due Americhe] fioriscono ebbero origine da Padri europei, ai quali pur debbono in gran parte i loro felici progressi, perché con molte fatiche e sudori, anzi talvolta sacrificando la vita stessa, portarono la Fede cattolica in molte di quelle regioni, e ve la stabilirono in modo che anche ai nostri giorni vi perdura felicemente incorrotta.³⁸

Starting with issue no. 17 of 1916, *Le Missioni* published the translation of Father General's letter to the Jesuit provinces of the American Assistancy, *De missionis exteris adiuvandis* (30 June 1916): Włodzimierz Ledóchowski (in office 1914-43) encouraged the US Jesuits to contribute to the Society's missionary effort beyond their national borders. Actually, the ongoing European war had worsened the economic difficulties of the missions - deprived of traditional aid from the Catholic countries (France in particular) - and the chronic shortage of missionaries, who were conscripted as military chaplains and even arms-bearing combatants.³⁹

First of all, the full publication of an internal or even magisterial document says a lot about the type of readership this popular missionary press aimed at. The long-term goal of *Le Missioni* in particular was precisely, according to the first director Petazzi, to

36 Cassiani, "Dalle Montagne Rocciose", 405.

37 Richart, "Dal Canada", 109.

38 Ledóchowski, "Un nobile e autorevole appello", 321.

39 Cf. Paiano, "Italian Jesuits". *Le Missioni* intentionally avoided any reference to political issues that didn't directly affect the missionary effort. During the First World War, it expressed its concerns about the lack of money and missionaries, which affected also the management of the magazine itself.

be accessible to “all kinds of people”,⁴⁰ that is, to engage a diverse lay audience, thus including well-read people, the clergy, and the missionary base in particular.

The peoples of America, Ledóchowski argued, would play a leading role in the new era that this “unprecedented war” would open for the world and the Church. The geographical location (“nobile e vaste regioni, fornite da Dio di tanti doni di natura”), the Americans’ temperament (that “indole alacre e industriosa nell’imprendere e nel condurre a termine grandi opere”), the freedom granted to all citizens, but also the need for missionaries who mastered the English language: all these aspects would have made America the center of the apostolic works to be pursued in heathen lands.⁴¹ This prediction would soon prove to be true, economically at least: by the mid-Twenties, Rome depended upon the US Catholics for half the funds it expended on missionary work worldwide.⁴² According to Ledóchowski, three reasons must have encouraged the American Jesuits’ zeal for foreign missions: first, the rivalry with the “Protestant sects that abound in men (so-called ministers) and resources”.⁴³ Secondly, the “purely missionary” nature of the Society, an aspect that he often emphasized: what for members of other religious orders depends on personal zeal, for the Jesuits is an obligation linked to the fourth vow.⁴⁴ However, the Father General especially insisted on a third point, that is, the debt of gratitude toward the European provinces, whose “excellent men” and large financial subsidies had guaranteed the American ones the prosperity they enjoyed as well as the results they achieved in the missionary field, thanks to the European missionaries’ great efforts in the past. Until then, evangelization had actually been a burden fallen almost exclusively on Europe alone, and, for the first three quarters of the Society’s history in North America (since the mid-sixteenth century), its activity was largely a European enterprise.⁴⁵

However, the stress on the European Jesuits’ fundamental contribution to the American civilization acquired a particular

40 Petazzi, “Ai nostri lettori”, 221.

41 Ledóchowski, “Un nobile e autorevole appello”, 386.

42 The magazine confirmed the United States as the leading benefactor of the Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith for the years 1923-24 with 13,800,000 lire, followed by France with 6,600,000. Italy placed fourth after Netherlands. Cf. Gasperment, “La macchia nera”, 226; McKevitt, *Brokers of Culture*, 295.

43 Ledóchowski, “Un nobile e autorevole appello”, 307. His notes to the Vatican Secretariat of State illustrated the state of siege climate that, in the early postwar period in particular, characterized the attitude of the Catholic authorities toward Protestant proselytism: cf. Zanini, *The “Protestant Peril”*, 27.

44 Ledóchowski, “Un nobile e autorevole appello”, 337. Cf. Colombo, “*Le Indipetae*”, 241-3.

45 Cf. Collins, *The Jesuits*, 7.

relevance if related to the Society's internal structure and dynamics. Actually, Ledóchowski's letter followed the decision, implemented in 1915, to organize the four US provinces into their own assistancy.⁴⁶ Not a merely administrative reconfiguration though: the creation of an American Assistancy was the latest acknowledgement of a growing tension between the center and the periphery that had progressively led to the elevation of the American missions to the status of provinces at the outset of the twentieth century.⁴⁷ The measure further reduced the formal connections with Europe, thus recognizing specific identity, aspirations and challenges of the multifaceted North American scenario.

Le Missioni didn't address the recent reshaping of the Jesuit institutional map in North America, but the European - and Italian in particular - fathers' fundamental contribution to the development of the Society's works emerges as a leitmotiv from the correspondence and articles with which the magazine covered this missionary field in these early years. Among the different columns that structured the fortnightly, the *Florilegio Apostolico* (Apostolic Anthology) was a collection of biographies of the Jesuit missionary saints and blessed, aimed at offering notions about the history of the missions in general and vocational model. Ledóchowski himself encouraged the editorial team to improve this genre (*viterelle*) as one of the most valuable to highlight the Society's great missionary work and "to entice the honest youth to the perfect life, to the heroism of a holy apostolate".⁴⁸

From 1916, the column presented bio-hagiographical profiles of the so-called *I Pionieri della Civiltà nell'America del Nord*: Giammaria Salvaterra (1644-1717), the apostle of California; Giuseppe Giorda (1823-1882), missionary among the Native American and then superior of the Rocky Mountain Mission; Pasquale Tosi (1837-1898), founder and first apostolic prefect of the Alaskan missions. The collection continued until 1919 with a selection of profiles from the three-volume *Pioneer Priests of North America*, by the American Jesuit Thomas Joseph Campbell, translated for the magazine by the Piedmontese Jesuit Celestino Testore (editor of the children's missionary fiction pages, *La Pagina dei Fanciulli*), and with *I Martiri del Canada* (Gabriel Lalemant, Jean de Brébeuf, Isaac Jogues). These biographies emphasized the adventurous, heroic and sacrificial dimension of past missionary commitment, sparing no gruesome

46 The four provinces of Maryland-New York, Missouri, California (which included extensive missions in Alaska) and New Orleans increased to ten by mid-century. Cf. Collins, *The Jesuits*, 95-6.

47 Cf. McKeivitt, *Brokers of Culture*, 294; Schroth, *The American Jesuits*, 115.

48 Menti, "Jesuit Missionaries", 8.

details related to the torture endured by these “anime grandi che la Vecchia Europa ha donato alle terre selvagge d’America”.⁴⁹

Faith and civilization were the two terms of a *topos* that has supported missionary activism and rhetoric until the second half of the twentieth century: facing even very primitive realities, European missionaries fueled the concept of evangelization as an effort to regeneration and moral and material progress. In North America, however, this aspect acquired a further connotation compared to Asia and Africa, that is, aimed at “riparare in parte al male portato al Nuovo Mondo con le armi e i vizi nell’epoca delle scoperte”.⁵⁰ There, earlier and more than anywhere else, had been evident the harmful gap between an “abusive meaning” of civilization – the worldly, material one – guided exclusively by European cultural and technical superiority, and the “true civilization” – the evangelical one – aimed primarily at the overall development of moral and intellectual faculties, the source of all concrete and lasting progress, even the material one.⁵¹

The fathers also recalled the predecessors’ achievements in their letters to the magazine: those of the Neapolitan Jesuits, “pioneers of the faith” in the missions that later became the provinces of Maryland and Missouri;⁵² or Donato Gasparri’s efforts in the missions of New Mexico and Colorado, whose beginnings competed with those of China or Africa.⁵³ Yet, beside offering the scientific achievements (the development of grammars and vocabularies, and the geographical discoveries, such as the French Jacques Marquette’s exploration of the Mississippi River), the Jesuits also benefited the US Catholic culture which, for different reasons, “non era a quell’altezza che sembravano promettere le prospere condizioni e il gran nome del paese”.⁵⁴ They focused in particular on those institutes and initiatives (above all the Woodstock College for Jesuits in Maryland, but also Giuseppe Marra’s *La Revista Católica* in New Mexico etc.) founded or reinforced by the Italian Jesuit displaced academics, who had moved to the United States in successive waves from 1848, as a consequence of the harsh anticlerical season.

As evidenced in *Le Missioni*, the democratic and multi-confessional North America found both critics and admirers among the Italian Jesuits, then as in the past. Actually, their past dynamic role (what Jesuit historian Gerald McKevitt has defined as the “corrective

49 Lucchetti, “P. Pasquale Tosi”, 52.

50 Lucchetti, “P. Pasquale Tosi”, 52.

51 Valle, “Le Missioni e la Civiltà”, 15.

52 “Il Collegio di Woodstock”, 33.

53 Peluso, “Dagli Stati Uniti”, 83.

54 Lucchetti, “P. Giuseppe Giorda”, 288.

influence” of the Italian diaspora on American Jesuit education and culture)⁵⁵ didn’t solve the cultural clash between home-grown recruits and immigrants. The magazine in the 1910s dealt with an issue that had influenced even the past Society’s inner dynamics, from a current and more familiar perspective to the readers of the time: the impact of American society and lifestyle on immigrant Catholic communities and the resulting challenges for the Church.

4 **Missionary Revival in the Country of Peace, Freedom and Wealth**

Ai nostri giorni, insieme coi banditori del Vangelo, l’Europa continua a mandare all’America tanti e tanti dei suoi figlioli in cerca di pane. Oh, salvi Iddio questa moltitudine di infelici da quel veleno che il protestantesimo americano, facendosi loro avvocato e soccorritore, si studia con ogni mezzo d’iniettare nelle loro anime!⁵⁶

In the first half of the twentieth century, *Le Missioni* gave voice to the missionaries’ concern about the Protestant apostolate.⁵⁷ Obviously, the issue affected also the correspondence from the United States, the epicenter of a considerable effort, in terms of subsidies and men, which threatened the already precarious situation of the Catholic missionary clergy due to the First World War. The Church, Petazzi argued, was ready to face what he considered a provocation: “la croce, non il dollaro, è l’arma che Gesù Cristo ha consegnato ai suoi Apostoli per le divine conquiste”.⁵⁸ The director’s rather biting editorials could be read as compendiums of a recurring vocabulary with which the fortnightly dealt with the Protestant issue between the 1910s and 1920s: not a church, but a sect; not soldiers of Christ, but followers; not apostolate, but proselytism, or “satanic arts”.⁵⁹

Concerning North America, this apostolic competition necessarily took place among the rich diversity of immigrant Catholic communities, in the US big urban areas in particular. Facing the irreversible demographic decline of the indigenous population, the magazine pointed out this missionary field – not new, still neglected but demanding – as the most promising one, implying also the revival of the European clergy’s activism, especially that of the regular one.

⁵⁵ McKevitt, *Brokers of Culture*, 65.

⁵⁶ Lucchetti, “P. Pasquale Tosi”, 52.

⁵⁷ Menti, “Jesuit missionaries”, 12.

⁵⁸ Petazzi, “Una sfida?”, 285.

⁵⁹ Petazzi, “Valore Apologetico”, 201.

Nevertheless, the same problem afflicted the apostolic care of the fellow countrymen as well as that of the heathens: *messis quidem multa, operarii autem pauci*.⁶⁰ According to the aforementioned Carmelo Tranchese, the great majority of priests moved to the United States seeking adventure, “con l’esito che si può immaginare”.⁶¹

The topic was covered by the letters of Tranchese (missionary first in Albuquerque, New Mexico, then in El Paso, Texas) and Giovanni Battista Chabloz (1884-1919), who was passing through on his way to the Chinese missions (where he died shortly after). Therefore, they were not directly involved but rather outside observers, and their judgments were mainly based on the impressions gathered among the Italian immigrant communities.

The two Italian Jesuits praised Anglo-Saxon industriousness and the rapid and steady progress of American cities, but intellectual and religious development was not proceeding at the same speedy pace as the economic and material one. What Chabloz described as the “pitiful, pagan, and anti-Christian”⁶² condition - past and present - of Italian newcomers revealed the contradictions of the American society, a warning about the harmful effects that the relentless emphasis on material progress (“il dio quattrino”) could have on a traditionally faithful people. Despite the freedom granted to all citizens and the presence of many “sumptuous temples”, Italians in late nineteenth-century New York for example (who didn’t catch the religious authorities’ attention, as Tranchese argued),⁶³ had to beg for a place where they could worship in their mother language, ending up celebrating in the basement of St. Patrick’s Cathedral, almost like the first Christians in the catacombs. Nevertheless, indigence, the pursuit of profit, language barriers, and social ostracism had gradually led them to religious indifference. Left behind as a void that the Protestants, “the masters of error”,⁶⁴ hastened to fill, promising jobs, food, and education for their children.

The two Jesuits’ concern about the religious need of Italian immigrant parish communities potentially leaned on the readers’ interest for their compatriots’ conditions abroad. However, they also indirectly recalled many aspects that affected the debate about and inside American Catholicism during the so-called ‘Progressive Era’ (1900-20), a phase of progressive involvement of Catholicism into American public life during a period characterized by moral, political, and social reforms, but also by immigrant growth. This

60 Chabloz, “Lettera”, 111.

61 Tranchese, “Dagli Stati Uniti”, 422.

62 Chabloz, “A traverso gli Stati Uniti”, 257-8.

63 Tranchese, “Dagli Stati Uniti”, 406.

64 Tranchese, “Dagli Stati Uniti”, 407.

last aspect - with the different stages of settlement, conflict, and development of immigrant Catholic communities especially in the large urban areas - was actually a main concern for the Progressive Era Catholics: the Italians' adjustment to American Catholicism in particular, was far more difficult than that of other European Catholic immigrants, precisely because of the lack of national clergy and various forms of anticlericalism.⁶⁵

Furthermore, Tranchese and Chabloz's analysis of American society recalled many aspects of the disagreement between Americanists and anti-Americanists (even in the Society of Jesus itself), that followed Pope Leo XIII's condemnation of Americanism in 1899, an American excessive accommodationist stance toward modern culture, to the detriment of the spiritual message.⁶⁶ The two Jesuits actually praised the activist, optimistic, and democratic American society. Nevertheless they depicted the Italians' miserable spiritual condition ("many sheep without a shepherd")⁶⁷ as the outcome of a society that pursued modernity without the guidance of the Roman Catholic Church. Their skeptical impression of America translated, through popular and concrete terms, the more complex theological framework concerning the relationship between Church and modernity: actually, Leo XIII's apostolic letter *Testem benevolentiae* (22 January 1899) represented only one step between Pio IX's *Syllabus of Errors* (8 December 1864) and Pio X's encyclical *Pascendi dominici gregis* (8 September 1907).⁶⁸ The genealogy of modern errors that originated from the Protestant Reformation, inevitably found further evidences in the Anglo-Saxon North America, generally perceived as *ipso facto* Protestant: the US non-intervention policy (President Woodrow Wilson was described as "a fanatic Protestant to the core" ("protestante fanatico fino al midollo") in the Mexican Revolution (1910-17) - "a blood sister of the French Revolution" - confirmed that the opposition to the Catholic Church was the only common ground among the different Protestant sects.⁶⁹

In Tranchese and Chabloz's accounts, which recollected the predecessors' efforts (Nicola Russo, Luigi Romano, Enrico Longo) and personal anecdotes, US Jesuits and the American Catholic Church are missing. The recurring appeal to recruit European missionary forces for the so-called 'national' or 'linguistic' parishes was affected by

65 Carey, *Catholics in America*, 67-72. For a more exhaustive analysis, cf. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*; Di Gioacchino, *The Ruin of Souls*.

66 Leo XIII, *Testem benevolentiae*; Cf. Carey, *Catholics in America*, 55.

67 Chabloz, "Lettera", 111.

68 Cf. Menozzi, *I papi e il moderno*, 22-9.

69 Damilano, "Dal Messico", 55. Father Bernardo Damilano (1882-1941) provided some news of the Jesuits escaping from Mexico in the first issues of 1915.

and strengthened at the same time the missionary's role as defender of traditional and orthodoxy against the corrosion of modernity.⁷⁰ From a historical-theological perspective (with repercussions even within the Society itself), the European Catholicism stood out as the legitimate depositary and herald of the most authentic values of Christian civilization - whose Europe was the cradle -, the holder of a gold standard which enables it to balance the essentials of faith and the Church's inevitable accommodation to modernity.

5 Conclusions

The rapid and steady increase in subscriptions (5,000 by July 1915 to 10,200 at the end of 1919)⁷¹ despite the war and post-war financial and logistical difficulties, confirmed the audience's appreciation for "an instructive, edifying, and at the same time enjoyable reading for all kinds of people, especially the young ones".⁷² Its dynamism reflected the editorial effort to keep pace with the worldwide and multifaceted Society's missionary commitment, without neglecting its history as the first eminently missionary religious order.

As for North America, however, the magazine had more to say about the past than the present, let alone the future. The news coming from those missions further decreased during the 1920s: while Lucchesi and Keyes kept on corresponding rather frequently from Alaska, news about the missions among other native populations was sporadic, giving the discouraging picture of scattered groups suffering from an irreversible demographic crisis.⁷³

Although the North American missions still employed 150 Jesuits in 1922, they gradually disappeared from *Le Missioni*.⁷⁴ This cannot be explained by the progressive replacement of Italian fathers with American ones. The magazine offered a global coverage of the Society's missionary activity, and the American Jesuits' visibility increased proportionally to their contribution in foreign missions: in 1922, the mission of Patna in India - the only foreign mission dependent on an American province (Missouri) - had 6 Jesuits, raised to 68 in 1934.⁷⁵ The 1934 report, which *Le Missioni* compiled by nationality rather than provincial membership, listed 546 American Jesuit missionaries (priests, coadjutors, and scholastics, on a total

70 Pizzorusso, Sanfilippo, *Dagli indiani agli emigranti*, 14.

71 Costa, "La marcia ascensionale", 322.

72 Menti, "Jesuit Missionaries", 2.

73 Cf. Gontier, "Le Missioni fra i Pellerossa".

74 "Prospetto", 203.

75 "Prospetto", 519. Cf. McGreevy, *American Jesuits*; Dries, *The Missionary Movement*.

of 3,104), of whom 240 were engaged in ‘internal’ missions and 306 abroad (Patna, Baghdad, Sienhsien, the Philippines, and Japan). The formal detachment from the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith in 1908 can’t explain this eclipse either: even the Scandinavian missions, for example, subjected to the Roman Congregation until 1977, enjoyed little visibility despite the Society was the most represented among the religious orders and congregations.⁷⁶

The reasons were most likely editorial, according with the aspects of popular missionary literature of the time. In order to win over the readers to the evangelizing cause, the magazine may have favored the most fascinating accounts, coming from the most promising (in terms of potential conversions) but also challenging - both physically and psychologically - missionary fields. The wider the cultural and religious gap, the stronger the mix of adventure, exoticism, heroism, and paternalism that was the success key of popular missionary press in the early twentieth century. In Asia and Africa, there were still millions of heathens yet to be converted.⁷⁷ Furthermore, the primitive conditions (for example that of the pariahs in India) supported a deep-rooted multitasking missionary model: not only priest and evangelizer, but also explorer, doctor, teacher etc.: in short, a civilizer.

From this perspective, the history of Catholic missions in North America had already been written. Nevertheless, *Le Missioni* kept the readers’ attention, focusing on the United States in particular, as the driving force of Protestant activism worldwide. The crusading tones intensified during the 1920s, facing also the anti-Catholic activity of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) which, Tranchese argued, considered Catholics, along with Jews and “Negroes”, hostile to the supremacy of the white race.⁷⁸ Starting from the 1930s, the North American context also benefited from a new approach inspired by the so-called “missionary topicality”: beside missionaries’ correspondence - mostly descriptive and anecdotal texts, still linked to the local dimension and individual commitment - the fortnightly offered more detailed analysis of the Catholic missionary effort and challenges in the different countries (especially in Asia, due to a precocious anti-colonialist protest), considering socio-political, cultural, and religious specificities.⁷⁹

Therefore, *Le Missioni* anticipated the evolution of the popular missionary press from missionary romanticism to missionary journalism, intercepting the audience’s changing sensibilities, and

76 Menti, “The Scandinavian Catholic Missions”, 308.

77 Cf. Petazzi, “Dopo 25 anni”.

78 Tranchese, “Attività anticattolica”, 313.

79 Menti, “Jesuit Missionaries”, 14.

strengthening the foundations of a century-long editorial success, which ended in 2014 with the monthly *Popoli*.

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