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Valentina Ciciliot  
Giovanni Vian

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# JoMaCC

## Journal of Modern and Contemporary Christianity

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## Table of Contents

NORTH AMERICA. A MISSION LANDSCAPE (1820S-1910S)

edited by Valentina Ciciliot and Claudio Ferlan

### Editorial

Valentina Ciciliot, Claudio Ferlan 7

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

Daiana Menti 11

### **“Do Canadians Really Have Religion?”**

**The Mission of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Alberta  
(1910-40)**

Luca Sandoni 31

### **The Holy West and the Land of Perpetual Snow**

**Jesuit Missionaries in the Rocky Mountains and Alaska (1840-1912)**

Francesca Menelao 57

### **Shifting Identities: Alaskan Creoles and the Russian Orthodox Church in Post-Purchase Alaska**

Aglaia Gulakova 85

### GENERAL SECTION

### **Anti-Communist Broadcasting and Slovak Catholic Diaspora in the Context of the Post-War Pontificate of Pius XII: Vatican Radio and Radio Free Europe**

Beáta Katrebová Blehová 115





# **North America. A Mission Landscape (1820s-1910s)**

edited by  
Valentina Ciciliot and Claudio Ferlan



# Editorial

Valentina Ciciliot, Claudio Ferlan

The North American continent, between the 1820s and the early twentieth century, presents itself as a particularly complex and dynamic missionary landscape, one that cannot be reduced to a single confessional trajectory. Rather, it emerges as a plural and competitive field in which Catholic, Protestant (across multiple denominational articulations), and Orthodox Christian actors interacted and at times openly competed. This competition was especially visible in frontier regions, where geographic expansion, demographic mobility, and fragile institutional structures created a fluid religious environment and a constant negotiation of presence and authority. This complexity is particularly evident in Alaska, where interactions extended beyond interconfessional competition to include relationships with local populations, generating new reconfigurations of power and social status, as well as forms of syncretism and even usurpation.

In this special issue, the contributors approach this multifaceted context through a rich and diversified corpus of sources - archival as well as printed, including materials from ecclesiastical and civil archives, missionary correspondence, and periodical literature - thus offering a layered and nuanced reconstruction of Christian missionary practices, representations, and experiences.

Within this context, missionary activity was shaped by a wide range of material and cultural constraints. The environmental conditions of vast areas such as Alaska or the Rocky Mountains imposed forms of isolation that deeply affected the daily life of missionaries, affecting mobility, communication, and exposing missionaries to cultural dislocation, and limiting the very possibility of establishing stable pastoral structures. Chronic shortages of personnel, persistent economic fragility, and the need to organize educational and catechetical systems in dispersed and often transient communities further complicated missionary endeavors. The educational sphere, in particular, became a crucial site of interaction, where male and female religious - often belonging to different congregations - were called to collaborate in the establishment of schools, the transmission of doctrine, and the broader project of social and cultural formation. These conditions required continuous adaptation and contributed to redefining the very models of missionary commitment.

Indeed, the period under consideration reveals the coexistence of different missionary paradigms. On the one hand, a more traditional model, often imbued with a pioneering and, in some respects, romantic ethos, remained oriented toward the evangelization of Indigenous populations, frequently framed within categories of 'spiritual conquest' and civilizational transformation. In this framework, cultural mediation was of central importance, as missionaries were compelled to engage with unfamiliar languages, belief systems, and social structures, developing strategies of adaptation that were as necessary as they were complex. On the other hand, a more modern model increasingly focused on migrant populations and on societies perceived as threatened by secularization and religious indifferentism. This shift entailed new pastoral priorities, different forms of engagement, and a reconfiguration of missionary discourse itself - one that increasingly took shape through letters, reports, and journals intended for circulation within European religious milieus, where the 'mission field' was narrated, interpreted, and, in part, (de)constructed.

The subjects of this missionary landscape were correspondingly diverse. Alongside the central role of religious orders - foremost among them the Society of Jesus - a multiplicity of actors contributed to shaping missionary practice, including female congregations and lay collaborators, whose presence raises crucial questions regarding gender, authority, and the division of labor within mission contexts. The necessity of learning new languages and mediating between different cultural frameworks further underscored the importance of translation - both linguistic and symbolic - often leading to processes of hybridization that challenge rigid distinctions between 'missionary' and 'local' religious forms.

In this perspective, the contributions gathered in this issue place particular emphasis on the analysis of sources and representations,

highlighting how missionary experiences were not only lived but also narrated, interpreted, and re-elaborated.

Francesca Menelao's study reconstructs the development of Jesuit missions in the Rocky Mountains and Alaska by drawing on a wide range of archival materials, bringing to light both the institutional frameworks of missionary expansion and the concrete practices of linguistic and cultural adaptation that underpinned evangelization. More specifically, her contribution shows how the experience of the Rocky Mountains operated as a formative precedent for the Alaskan missions, revealing the transregional circulation of Jesuit missionary models and their capacity to be reconfigured in response to different environmental and cultural settings. Her analysis further highlights the transregional dimension of these missionary models, as well as the crucial - though often less visible - role played by female congregations within educational and medical contexts.

Aglaia Gulakova's article also covers Alaska, examining the relationship between the Alaskan Creole community - people of mixed Russian and Indigenous descent - and the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) after Alaska was sold to the United States in 1867. Her study shows how complex and in transition identities can be perceived within the missionary field. In fact, Creole identity underwent a major transformation in that period: from a privileged intermediary group within the Russian Empire to a marginalized community adapting to American rule. Specifically, under Russian rule, Creoles held a distinct and relatively privileged position as negotiators between Russians and Indigenous populations, benefiting from education and integration into Russian culture and Orthodox Christianity. After the transfer to the United States, their situation deteriorated significantly: they lost their socioeconomic status and faced legal and racial ambiguity in a system that did not recognize mixed identities. If ROC missionaries initially strengthened their ties with the Creoles, portraying them as 'Russians' and allies against Indigenous groups and American influence, as time passed, the Russian Orthodox Church shifted its focus toward Indigenous populations, who became more important for maintaining its presence in the country. As a result, Creoles tried to preserve a distinct identity by distancing themselves from Indigenous communities and increasingly aligning with American society.

Luca Sandoni's contribution focuses on a specific case study, the mission of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Dehonians) in Alberta, Canada, between 1910 and 1940, concentrating on its development and ultimate failure and pointing up the above-mentioned material and cultural constraints, but also the difficulties in understanding non-European viewpoints and different world conceptions. From the start, the missionaries faced serious challenges: lack of resources, harsh living conditions, language

barriers, and the need to travel long distances to reach small groups of believers. Although the mission initially expanded, it struggled to establish stable structures or attract new vocations. Over time, internal problems worsened the situation. Many missionaries were poorly prepared or lacked strong commitment, leading to conflicts, financial mismanagement, and departures from the congregation. A deeper issue was the mismatch between the missionaries' European religious mindset and the practical, individualistic culture of frontier society in Alberta, where material success often mattered more than spiritual life. In the end, the mission failed to take root: by the 1930s the Dehonians were gradually replaced, and their presence in Alberta ended in 1940.

Daiana Menti, by contrast, shifts the focus from practice to representation, examining the image of North America conveyed to Italian readers through the Jesuit periodical *Le Missioni della Compagnia di Gesù*. Her contribution highlights how the North American context was constructed as a *sui generis* missionary field, marked by heterogeneity and requiring differentiated interpretative frameworks. Rather than simply reflecting missionary realities, the magazine contributed to shaping them discursively, selecting and organizing experiences into recognizable narrative patterns for a European audience. In this sense, the coexistence of different forms of missionary engagement – already evident in practice – was re-elaborated within the missionary press into a structured and communicable representation, capable of mediating between the complexity of the field and the expectations of its readership.

By foregrounding all of these dimensions within the missionary world, the present special issue aims not only to revisit established narratives but also to open new avenues for research, encouraging a more nuanced historiographical approach to North American missions in the modern and contemporary age.

Finally, this issue ends with Beáta Katrebová Blehová's article, which explores the role of anti-Communist broadcasting in the early Cold War, focusing on the Slovak Catholic diaspora and the activities of Vatican Radio and Radio Free Europe during the pontificate of Pope Pius XII and highlighting the importance of radio as a key instrument in supporting faith and resisting communism during the Cold War. It shows not only how Vatican Radio became a crucial tool for communicating with believers behind the Iron Curtain, offering spiritual support, guidance, and information while carefully avoiding direct political confrontation, but also how it helped maintain a link between the Vatican and the persecuted Church in Czechoslovakia. This article also examines Radio Free Europe, which played a role in anti-Communist broadcasting, although it was often criticized by Slovak émigrés for lacking proper Slovak representation and for its political orientation.

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

Daiana Menti

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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.

**Summary** 1 A Completely Different Missionary Field. – 2 Fulfill the Romantic Expectations. – 3 The American Debt. – 4 Missionary Revival in the Country of Peace, Freedom and Wealth. – 5 Conclusions.



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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.<sup>1</sup>

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”.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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’,<sup>4</sup> 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).<sup>5</sup>

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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*.<sup>6</sup>

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".<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>

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".<sup>9</sup>

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

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<sup>6</sup> For a comprehensive excursus, cf. Menti, "Jesuit Missionaries".

<sup>7</sup> Petazzi, "L'opera delle Missioni", 3.

<sup>8</sup> Ferlan, *Storia delle missioni*, 184.

<sup>9</sup> 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,<sup>10</sup> this topic is already greatly explored.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> 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',<sup>13</sup> 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

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**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'<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup>

*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.<sup>16</sup>

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.

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**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.<sup>17</sup> 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”,<sup>18</sup> 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”)<sup>19</sup> 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”<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup> 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”.<sup>22</sup>

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 suole di pelle di foca”),<sup>23</sup> the American Jesuit missionary, linguist and historian Francis Barnum (1849-1921),

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**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".<sup>24</sup> 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");<sup>25</sup> the obstacle of the local languages, extremely difficult to learn due to the absence of some consonants (the frequent misunderstandings "drive one crazy",<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup> 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?<sup>28</sup>

Questa contrada, in apparenza così ributtante, ha invece una

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**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.<sup>29</sup>

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.<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup>

The missionary apostolate *stricto sensu*, seemed at its final act in North America. Native enclaves were small and further reduced by the Spanish flu.<sup>32</sup> 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,<sup>33</sup> while according to Father Felice Ziccardi (1890-1964) the epidemic provoked a "massacre" among the Sioux of South Dakota.<sup>34</sup> The great hopes the Society of Jesus had once placed in the missions among the "Redskins" ("Pelli Rosse") were then dashed.<sup>35</sup> 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

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**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".<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup>

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.<sup>39</sup>

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

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**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”,<sup>40</sup> 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.<sup>41</sup> 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.<sup>42</sup> 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”.<sup>43</sup> 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.<sup>44</sup> 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.<sup>45</sup>

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

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**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.<sup>46</sup> 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.<sup>47</sup> 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".<sup>48</sup>

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

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**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”.<sup>49</sup>

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”.<sup>50</sup> 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.<sup>51</sup>

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;<sup>52</sup> or Donato Gasparri’s efforts in the missions of New Mexico and Colorado, whose beginnings competed with those of China or Africa.<sup>53</sup> 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”.<sup>54</sup> 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

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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)<sup>55</sup> 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!<sup>56</sup>

In the first half of the twentieth century, *Le Missioni* gave voice to the missionaries’ concern about the Protestant apostolate.<sup>57</sup> 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”.<sup>58</sup> 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”.<sup>59</sup>

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.

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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*.<sup>60</sup> 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”.<sup>61</sup>

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”<sup>62</sup> 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),<sup>63</sup> 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”,<sup>64</sup> 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

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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.<sup>65</sup>

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.<sup>66</sup> 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")<sup>67</sup> 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).<sup>68</sup> 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.<sup>69</sup>

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

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**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.<sup>70</sup> 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)<sup>71</sup> 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".<sup>72</sup> 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.<sup>73</sup>

Although the North American missions still employed 150 Jesuits in 1922, they gradually disappeared from *Le Missioni*.<sup>74</sup> 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.<sup>75</sup> 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

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**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.<sup>76</sup>

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.<sup>77</sup> 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.<sup>78</sup> 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.<sup>79</sup>

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

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**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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# “Do Canadians Really Have Religion?”

## The Mission of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Alberta (1910-40)

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**Abstract** This article examines the mission of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Dehonians) in Alberta. It traces the mission’s development from difficult beginnings to its progressive crisis. It also considers the practical challenges of pastoral work among scattered, multilingual Catholic communities, and the pressure exerted on religious vocation by life in a markedly secularized and utilitarian society. The article concludes by analyzing why the mission failed to consolidate a stable Dehonian presence in Alberta.

**Keywords** Catholic missions. Alberta. Canada. Religious congregations. Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

**Summary** 1 A Late Missionary Commitment. – 2 At the Origins of the Mission: Dehon and the French Canada. – 3 An Anti-Protestant Mission? – 4 The Establishment of the Mission. – 5 Difficulties and Crisis of the Mission. – 6 Reasons for Failure: Religious Vocation and the Frontier Society.



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## 1 A Late Missionary Commitment

When it was founded in 1877, the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (better known as the ‘Dehonians’) had no particular vocation for missionary work. Its founder, the French priest Léon Dehon (1843-1925), pursued his ecclesiastical studies in Rome under the pontificate of Pius IX in the years immediately preceding the end of the papacy’s temporal power, thereby acquiring a solid Roman and ultramontane formation.<sup>1</sup> Upon returning in 1871 to his diocese of Soissons, in northeastern France, Dehon was appointed to the industrial city of Saint-Quentin as chaplain of the main parish. There he became actively involved in social and educational initiatives, establishing an association for working-class youth (the Œuvre Saint-Joseph, 1872) and a secondary school for the urban bourgeoisie (the Institution Saint-Jean, 1877).<sup>2</sup> He also became the confessor of a group of Alsatian nuns, the Sisters Servants of the Heart of Jesus. Through their charismatic superior, Maria Ulrich, he was introduced to the spirituality of the Sacred Heart; under her influence and guidance he resolved to embrace religious life and to found a congregation of priests.<sup>3</sup>

The institute was conceived with a distinct spiritual identity, centered on love and reparation to the Sacred Heart.<sup>4</sup> The first Constitutions, approved by the bishop of Soissons in 1885, stated that the purpose of its members was to procure “la plus grande gloire de Dieu par une dévotion spéciale au Sacré-Cœur qu’ils s’efforcent de consoler en réparant les injures qui lui sont faites, et en s’offrant à lui comme victimes”.<sup>5</sup> The fathers were permitted to run schools and seminaries and, more generally, to undertake “œuvres qui sont compatibles avec leur vie de réparation”, but they were not to assume “ministères qui les tiendraient éloignés de leurs résidences communes”.<sup>6</sup>

Although missionary engagement did not rank among the congregation’s priorities – and was never explicitly mentioned in the Constitutions – Dehon did not rule it out.<sup>7</sup> As early as April 1881, in a conference addressed to the novices, he stated that the congregation

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1 Sandoni, “Dall’ultramontanismo alla romanità”, 137-54.

2 Ledure, *Le père Léon Dehon*, 59-73.

3 Ledure, *Le père Léon Dehon*, 75-101.

4 Denis, *Le projet du père Dehon*, 2-21; Denis, “Les essais de prêtres-victimes”, 91-129.

5 *Constitutions de la Société*, 1.

6 *Constitutions de la Société*, 5.

7 On Dehonian missionary engagement, see Tessarolo, *Il padre Dehon e le missioni*; Neuhold, Tertünte, “La missione come fattore”; Neuhold, *Mission and Church*, 69-128.

would one day undertake missions.<sup>8</sup> The following year he wrote to Pope Leo XIII that his priests, “puisant dans le Cœur de Jésus l’esprit de sacrifice, [seraient] heureux d’être aussi bientôt représentés dans les missions, mais particulièrement dans les pays où la foi est depuis longtemps obscurcie par le schisme”, since the priestly reparation to which they were devoted constituted “un des premiers moyens de régénération” for such lands.<sup>9</sup> This interest in missionary activity was consistent with Dehon’s social engagement and his desire to contribute to the establishment of the Social Kingship of Christ – that is, to the re-Christianization of contemporary society<sup>10</sup> – a commitment that, in the last years of the nineteenth century, led him to become a prominent advocate of Leo XIII’s social teaching<sup>11</sup> and a leading figure in European Christian democracy.<sup>12</sup>

This interest also responded to specific needs for institutional consolidation and legitimation.<sup>13</sup> As Dehon wrote to his bishop in December 1885, “on aime beaucoup à Rome les congrégations qui demandent des missions”,<sup>14</sup> and he was keenly aware of the importance of gaining credibility in the eyes of the Holy See. Indeed, the congregation had faced significant difficulties in its early years. In December 1883, the Holy Office ordered its dissolution, condemning as false the alleged supernatural revelations on which its foundation was claimed to rest, and allowed its reconstitution in March 1884 only with significant reservations.<sup>15</sup> For many years thereafter, both the institute and its founder were regarded with suspicion in Rome. Missionary activity was therefore expected to dispel these doubts and demonstrate the congregation’s solidity and usefulness to the Church at a time of renewed Catholic missionary zeal.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, by the 1880s the Dehonians had begun to expand beyond France,<sup>17</sup> attracting new members in Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Germany, and later also in Italy and Poland. This

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**8** Falleur, *Cahiers*, vol. 5 (1880-81), 70, in AD, B. 6/2, Inv. 36.01: “Nous aurons des missions”.

**9** *Letter from Dehon to Leo XIII*, February 1882, in AD, B. 37/4, Inv. 655.01.

**10** On the relationship between devotion to the Sacred Heart and the doctrine of the Social Kingship of Christ, see Menozzi, *Sacro Cuore*, 107-240 and especially, on Dehon’s positions, 188-97.

**11** Ledure, “*Rerum novarum*” en France; Ledure, *Catholicisme social*.

**12** Tertünte, *Léon Dehon*.

**13** Neuhold, Tertünte, “La missione come fattore”, 4-5.

**14** *Letter from Dehon to Odon Thibaudier*, 21 December 1885, in AD, B. 21/3R, Inv. 373.04.

**15** Ledure, *Le père Léon Dehon*, 103-32.

**16** Ferlan, *Storia delle missioni cristiane*, part 4.

**17** Neuhold, *Mission and Church*, 369-70.

growth created increasing tensions with the diocesan authorities of Soissons, who were wary of the congregation’s internationalization and feared losing control over it.<sup>18</sup> Dehon, however, aimed to move beyond the original, limited diocesan framework, transforming his institute into a pontifical congregation, directly subject to Rome and thus fully international. Missionary activity was instrumental in achieving this goal, as it enabled the congregation to reach a global dimension.

The process, however, was slow and gradual, and Dehon’s first missionary undertakings were rather improvised. After an unsuccessful attempt to take part in the evangelization of New Guinea, in 1888 an Ecuadorian priest, Julio Matovel, who had also founded a congregation devoted to the Sacred Heart, proposed to Dehon merging their institutes and sending French missionaries to Ecuador, a young republic consecrated to the Sacred Heart in 1874 by its conservative president, Gabriel García Moreno.<sup>19</sup> The plan included building a basilica dedicated to the Sacred Heart in Quito, modeled on one at Montmartre in Paris, which was to be overseen by the new congregation. Dehon agreed, and in November 1888 the first two Dehonians departed for South America, where they assisted the local clergy in pastoral ministry for several years. The mission was short-lived, however, as in 1896 the missionaries were expelled from Ecuador following a revolution that brought liberal and anticlerical forces to power.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, in 1893, the Dehonians were invited by a Brazilian Catholic entrepreneur, Carlos Alberto de Menezes, to settle at his textile factory in Camaragibe (Pernambuco), and to provide spiritual assistance to his workers. Once again, the initiative was not launched by Dehon; yet on this occasion the new foundation proved lasting, and the congregation has maintained a continuous presence in northern Brazil ever since.<sup>21</sup>

The turning point came in 1897, when Dehon received permission from Rome to establish a mission in the Stanley Falls district, in the northern Congo Free State (renamed the Belgian Congo in 1908 and now the Democratic Republic of the Congo). It was a fully organized mission, negotiated with the political authorities in Brussels and, above all, established under the auspices of the Roman Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith.<sup>22</sup> For the first time, the Dehonians were not operating in already Christianized contexts, as in Ecuador and Brazil, but among populations still to be converted, thereby

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**18** Ledure, *Le père Léon Dehon*, 167-77.

**19** Menozzi, *Sacro Cuore*, 147-9; Henderson, *Gabriel García Moreno*, 145-76.

**20** On this short mission, see Grison, *Souvenirs de l’Équateur*; Driedonkx, *Ecuador*.

**21** A brief overview in Driedonkx, Da Costa Silva, “Our Mission in North Brazil”.

**22** Pizzorusso, *Propaganda Fide*.

facing the challenges and difficulties of a genuine *missio ad gentes*. Rome expressed satisfaction with the congregation’s missionary work in Congo and elevated the Stanley Falls mission first to an apostolic prefecture (1904) and then to an apostolic vicariate (1908), definitively consecrating Dehon’s missionary aspirations.<sup>23</sup> As a reward and the culmination of his efforts, in 1906 the institute received the long-awaited approval from Rome.

The Dehonians’ strong involvement in missionary work was not without consequences and generated deep tensions within the congregation. In July 1897, just as the first missionaries were departing for Congo, some members sharply criticized Dehon’s social and missionary activism, arguing that it distorted the original nature and aims of the institute, and they faulted him for directing the charity of its members toward “les pays lointains” rather than toward “les misères morales qui pullulent autour de nous”.<sup>24</sup> For a moment, a fracture seemed inevitable, but the crisis was ultimately contained and the institute remained intact. Nevertheless, this underlying tension between spiritual vocation and pastoral engagement would long trouble the Dehonian identity and affect Dehon’s own legacy.<sup>25</sup>

The congregation’s structures, however, were not fully adapted to the new demands generated by its growing missionary commitment. Over the years, Dehonian provinces established offices (the *procure*) to handle the financial and administrative management of their missions, but no specific schools or training programs were created to prepare future missionaries.<sup>26</sup> Vocational discernment for selecting candidates was likewise often cursory, especially in the early years, and the selection of missionaries, given the ever-pressing need to recruit new personnel, relied frequently on volunteering rather than on a careful assessment of their abilities and aptitudes, a practice that often affected the quality and effectiveness of their ministry, as we will see in the case of the Alberta mission.

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**23** On the Congo mission, see Jeanroy, *Vingt-cinq ans de mission*.

**24** *Mémoire de la maison du Sacré-Cœur au R.P. Dehon*, 6 July 1897, in AD, B. 48/4A, Inv. 787. On this *mémoire*, see Neuhold, *Mission and Church*, 113-18.

**25** On this issue, see Ledure, “Pensée sociale et projet fondateur”, 332-40; Neuhold, *Mission and Church*, 13-41.

**26** The Studentato delle missioni, founded in Bologna in 1912, was a partial exception, though for many years it effectively served only to train the priests of the Italian province; Vassena, “Short History”, 12-15.

## 2 At the Origins of the Mission: Dehon and the French Canada

Dehon's interest in Canada dated back at least to his years of priestly formation. While studying at the French Seminary in Rome, he was joined by several young Canadians, who first introduced him to the country's affairs and customs. He formed a particularly close bond with Louis-Nazaire Bégin, later archbishop of Quebec and cardinal,<sup>27</sup> with whom he maintained an ongoing correspondence even after Bégin returned to Canada. In his letters, Bégin praised the Canadians' deep and sincere Catholic faith, contrasting it with the anticlericalism and irreligiosity that had spread in France, the old motherland, after the Revolution and under the republican governments. For instance, in March 1889 he noted to Dehon:

Dans notre heureuse contrée, providentiellement soustraite aux influences néfastes de la grande Révolution française, la foi est encore très vive; [...] le sentiment religieux n'y est pas à l'état latent, mais il se manifeste au grand jour.<sup>28</sup>

The country Bégin referred to, however, was not the Canadian Confederation as a whole, but French Canada, that is, the province of Quebec, founded by French colonists in the early seventeenth century and brought under British rule in 1763, while remaining steadfastly attached to the language, culture, and Catholic faith of its founders.

Dehon embraced Bégin's extremely positive - if also idealized - image of a sincerely Catholic and French Canada, and helped disseminate it through his journalistic writings. Between 1889 and 1903, he wrote a monthly column, “Chroniques du Règne”, in the congregation's journal, *Le Règne du Cœur de Jésus dans les âmes et dans les sociétés*, where he commented on major social and religious issues.<sup>29</sup> These chronicles contain numerous enthusiastic references to Canada/Quebec, portrayed as a model country where tradition and modernity could be reconciled: French-Canadians, the worthy descendants of the “race française”, were presented as pioneers in political liberties and social progress, yet also as sincere and steadfast Catholics.<sup>30</sup> However, the picture was not without its shadows: according to Dehon, Anglo-Saxon Protestantism threatened French Canadians' cultural and religious identity, and tensions

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**27** Perin, s.v. “Bégin, Louis-Nazaire”; LeBlanc, *Dictionnaire biographique*, 238-42.

**28** *Letter from Bégin to Dehon*, 9 March 1889, in AD, B. 107/3, Inv. 1163.60.

**29** Ledure, *Le père Léon Dehon*, 139-40.

**30** Dehon, “Chroniques du Règne”, January 1889, 12; August 1889, 123-9; August 1890, 124; July 1894, 135; March 1898, 49; April 1901, 65-9.

between linguistic groups were intensifying.<sup>31</sup> He nevertheless trusted that the strength and vitality of Quebec’s citizens, together with their faith, would preserve their integrity.<sup>32</sup>

In light of this highly flattering image of Canadian Christendom, Dehon soon began to envisage the possibility of establishing his congregation there. As noted above, he could rely on several personal connections within the Canadian episcopate, and in December 1891 Bégin – then about to be appointed coadjutor bishop of Quebec – offered to assist him with the recruitment of his fathers or in any other matter within his future diocese.<sup>33</sup> The following year, a small group of seminarians from the United States was admitted to the Dehonian scholasticate in Lille. Dehon hoped to develop it into a “séminaire d’américains”,<sup>34</sup> thereby attracting vocations from beyond Europe, but the initiative proved short-lived. In 1894, he had to decline the offer of a large property in Canada, as the congregation lacked sufficient personnel to undertake such a venture.<sup>35</sup> He did not, however, abandon his plans, and two years later he informed Gabriel Grison – his principal collaborator in missionary affairs – of his intention to open a “maison de formation” in America, regarding the United States or Canada as the most suitable locations.<sup>36</sup> Dehon was convinced that his congregation could draw new resources and vocations from a country as deeply religious as Quebec, a conviction that was further reinforced in the autumn of 1901, when he delivered a series of sermons at the Canadian Pontifical College in Rome, remaining deeply edified by the piety of both students and professors.<sup>37</sup>

The need to establish a presence in Canada became particularly pressing for Dehon because of the French government’s increasingly anti-clerical policies.<sup>38</sup> In the spring of 1903, the Dehonians were expelled from France, like many other religious orders, their properties were confiscated, and they were forced to seek refuge

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**31** Dehon, “Chroniques du Règne”, February 1890, 31; Juin-July 1890, 90.

**32** For a more objective historical analysis, see Murphy, Perin, *A Concise History*, 190-260. The Canadian Catholic Church, in Quebec and elsewhere, was far less unanimous than Dehon believed; on these difficulties and the resulting expansion of the Holy See’s intervention in Canadian ecclesiastical affairs, see Perin, *Rome in Canada*.

**33** *Letter from Bégin to Dehon*, 14 December 1891, in AD, B. 21/3C, Inv. 360.05.

**34** Dehon, *Notes quotidiennes*, vol. 6 (1892-94), 33, in AD, B. 28/6, Inv. 528.06; *Letter from Dehon to Gabriel Grison*, 19 November 1892, in AD, B. 24/8, Inv. 500.10.

**35** *Letter from Dehon to Grison*, 19 November 1894, in AD, B. 24/8, Inv. 500.15.

**36** *Letter from Dehon to Grison*, 4 February 1896, in AD, B. 24/8, Inv. 500.24.

**37** Dehon, *Notes quotidiennes*, vol. 17 (1901-02), 32, in AD, B. 29/17, Inv. 529.05. On the Canadian College, see Racine St-Jacques, “*Mens sana*”.

**38** Sorrel, *La République contre les congrégations*, 94-119.

in Belgium.<sup>39</sup> In this context, Canada could naturally offer a second homeland and a new beginning for the French members of the congregation. Dehon therefore renewed contact with Bégin, who had in the meantime become archbishop of Quebec, but his diocese, already hosting around seventy congregations, did not require additional personnel, and no agreement could be reached.<sup>40</sup> Dehon then turned his attention to northwestern Canada, where hundreds of thousands of immigrants, mostly from Central and Eastern Europe, were settling in those years. In the autumn of 1909, through Bégin's vicar general, Cyrille-Alfred Marois, Dehon contacted Adélarde Langevin, archbishop of St. Boniface (Manitoba), and offered to begin a mission in his diocese,<sup>41</sup> but this attempt also failed.<sup>42</sup> Dehon's efforts to secure a Canadian mission thus once again appeared destined to come to nothing. Marois, however, did not give up: he forwarded Dehon's letter farther west to Émile Legal, bishop of St. Albert (Alberta),<sup>43</sup> who accepted the proposal enthusiastically.<sup>44</sup>

Dehon immediately set about organizing the mission, but faced several difficulties. He first had to convince the superior and councilors of the Franco-Belgian province of the congregation, who were reluctant to support the initiative.<sup>45</sup> He then struggled to find “hommes de bonne volonté”<sup>46</sup> to be sent to Alberta. At least three missionaries were required to launch the initiative, but the first candidates Dehon approached declined. Eventually, he succeeded in persuading Eutrope Gaborit (1873-1940), David Steinmetz (1875-1940), and Irénée Carpentier (1883-1953). They set sail from Le Havre for Canada in early July 1910, accompanied by Jules-Albert Soyer, a priest who did not belong to the congregation. Steinmetz had spent several years in Congo, but his companions had no prior missionary experience, and only Gaborit had some knowledge of English, which he had studied for a few months in London.

Financing the mission also proved problematic. Legal made it clear that he could not cover travel expenses or provide the missionaries with local financial support, since in Alberta the general rule was that “les populations soutiennent leurs prêtres et leur fournissent

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**39** Ledure, *Le père Léon Dehon*, 187-93.

**40** Ducamp, *Le père Dehon*, 455; “English-Speaking Canada”, 2.

**41** *Letter from Marois to Dehon*, 20 November 1909, in AD, B. 102/4, Inv. 1149.00.

**42** *Letter from Langevin to Marois*, 27 November 1909, in AD, B. 102/4, Inv. 1149.01.

**43** Huel, s.v. “Legal, Émile-Joseph”; LeBlanc, *Dictionnaire biographique*, 718-20.

**44** *Letter from Legal to Dehon*, 10 December 1909, in AD, B. 102/4, Inv. 1149.03.

**45** *Letter from Dehon to Gerlach Kusters*, April 1910, in AD, B. 74/3, Inv. 971.26.

**46** *Letter from Dehon to Falleur*, 19 April 1910, in AD, B. 16/6bis, Inv. 122.08.

ce qu'il faut pour vivre".<sup>47</sup> Dehon sought to obtain funding from two prominent French organizations that supported Catholic missions, the *Œuvre de la propagation de la foi* and the *Œuvre apostolique*, but both replied that they were unable to contribute.<sup>48</sup> It was therefore inevitable that the congregation itself should bear the full cost of establishing the mission.

### 3 An Anti-Protestant Mission?

The Canadian mission eventually launched by Dehon proved quite different from the one he had long imagined. His missionaries were not sent to Quebec - that French and Catholic Canada he had so strongly idealized - but to Alberta, a province which had entered the Canadian Confederation only five years earlier (1905) and was still sparsely populated and undergoing settlement. The two areas were separated not only by thousands of kilometers, but also by significant social, linguistic, and cultural differences.<sup>49</sup> Catholicism and the French language did not enjoy there the same predominance as in old New France: according to contemporary statistics collected by Dehon, the diocese of St. Albert counted just under 34,000 Catholics at the time, of whom only about 18,000 were French-speaking.<sup>50</sup> In northwestern Canada, Catholics were in fact mostly immigrants from Germany, Poland and Ukraine,<sup>51</sup> who did not speak French and mainly adopted English as their second language.<sup>52</sup> The Catholic clergy, by contrast, was predominantly French-speaking,<sup>53</sup> so that proficiency in several languages was indispensable for the exercise

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**47** *Letter from Legal to Dehon*, 24 May 1910, in AD, B. 21/9B, Inv. 472.12.

**48** *Letter from Olivier de Durfort to Dehon*, May-June 1910, in AD, B. 21/6.2, Inv. 424.14; *Letter from Alexandre Guasco to Dehon*, 16 August 1910, in AD, B. 21/9C, Inv. 473.13.

**49** In reply to Dehon, who had asked him to offer advice to his missionaries, a priest from Montreal frankly admitted: "Il me sera difficile de donner des renseignements sur l'Alberta. C'est trop loin de Montréal, environ la distance de Brest à Moscou"; *Letter from Adolphe Volbart to Dehon*, 1 June 1910, in AD, B. 21/6.2, Inv. 424.03.

**50** These data are drawn from Dehon, *Notes quotidiennes*, vol. 26 (1910), 38, in AD, B. 30/26, Inv. 530.01. On the history of Catholicism in Alberta, closely linked to the missionary activities of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, see Choquette, *The Oblate Assault*, 86-93 and *passim*; Levasseur, *Les oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 211-28.

**51** Perin, *L'Église des immigrants*.

**52** Murphy, Stortz, *Creed and Culture*, xx-xxi.

**53** Noll, *A History of Christianity*, 256, notes that, "at the beginning of World War I, all of the Catholic bishops in western Canada were French-speaking".

of pastoral ministry in those territories.<sup>54</sup> The presence and activism of Protestant denominations were also significantly greater.<sup>55</sup>

In Alberta, the Dehonians were therefore tasked with a ministry fundamentally different from what they would have undertaken in Quebec, where Catholic institutions already structured much of social life. Instead of focusing on prayer, education, and the recruitment of new vocations for the congregation, they were required to provide spiritual and pastoral care to large numbers of Catholic immigrants from various parts of Europe, while seeking to preserve their faith against religious indifference and Protestant proselytism. From his very first letter to Dehon, Legal had explicitly defined this objective, asking the Dehonian missionaries to cooperate in what he described as “l’œuvre de la préservation de ces peuples, que la propagande protestante s’efforce de nous ravir, en les arrachant à l’unité catholique”.<sup>56</sup>

The defensive and anti-Protestant character of the mission in Alberta<sup>57</sup> was further articulated by Dehon himself in the instructions he prepared for the missionaries, probably in early summer 1910.<sup>58</sup> After evoking the glorious history of French Canada – that “belle nation catholique” which had been able to defend its faith and culture even under British rule –, he explained that the congregation had been called to Alberta “pour contribuer à l’organisation paroissiale des colons qui arrivent en masse et parmi lesquels les catholiques sont trop mêlés aux protestants”. In carrying out their pastoral task, the Dehonian missionaries, he argued, would have to confront three major obstacles: “les sociétés secrètes, le protestantisme et le matérialisme”.

The true enemy, however, was Protestantism, of which secret societies – especially Freemasonry – and materialism were merely epiphenomena. “Le protestantisme, voilà l’ennemi!”, Dehon wrote emphatically, overturning Léon Gambetta’s famous maxim. Indeed,

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**54** Painchaud, “Les exigences linguistiques”, especially 54-64.

**55** On Catholic-Protestant relations, and tensions, in Canada, see Noll, *A History of Christianity*, 256-84.

**56** *Letter from Legal to Dehon*, 24 May 1910, in AD, B. 21/9C, Inv. 472.12. From the beginning, the Dehonian missionaries were assigned solely to parish ministry, while the apostolate among Indigenous peoples in northwestern Canada remained under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate; see Huel, *Proclaiming the Gospel*.

**57** For a historiographical overview of Catholic anti-Protestantism in the missionary context, see Berrettini et al., *L’antiprotestantesimo cattolico*, 5-20. In the British Empire, and therefore in Canada, this polemical attitude also emerged as reaction to widespread anti-Catholicism, on which see Miller, “Anti-Catholicism in Canada”; Vaughan, *Anti-Catholicism and British Identities*.

**58** Dehon, *À mes missionnaires. Pour le Canada* (circa June-July 1910), in AD, B. 38/6, Inv. 668.02, from which the quotations that follow are taken.

he devoted the second part of his instructions to demonstrating that Protestantism, especially Anglicanism, had an “origine honteuse”, that its principle was “ruineux”, and that, for this very reason, it was already “en pleine dissolution”. These arguments were characteristic of Catholic anti-Protestant discourse and were drawn in large part from Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet’s works,<sup>59</sup> explicitly cited in the instructions. Like Bossuet, moreover, Dehon urged his missionaries to distinguish between the “secte” and the faithful: they were to combat Protestantism relentlessly, as an “affreuse maladie morale, qui ronge certaines nations et les conduit peu à peu au matérialisme et à l’athéisme”, while at the same time showing compassion toward Protestants, who were to be treated with kindness and referred to from the pulpit as “nos frères séparés”.

Despite the strongly polemical tone of Dehon’s instructions, the everyday practice of the Dehonian missionaries in Alberta proved to be considerably more pragmatic and less confrontational and, in concrete terms, anti-Protestantism played only a marginal role in their daily activities. Faced with the immense logistical and material challenges of ministering to small and dispersed Catholic populations across a vast territory almost entirely lacking ecclesiastical infrastructure, the missionaries’ priorities were shaped less by confessional antagonism than by the pressing need to provide basic pastoral care and to ensure the survival of fragile communities. Protestant neighbors were not so much an abstract adversary as an inescapable social reality, and forms of practical coexistence and even mutual solidarity prevailed over systematic polemics.

So, for example, when Dehon visited his missionaries in Alberta in September 1910, during a journey to North America that turned into a veritable round-the-world tour, he noted with some surprise that Protestants of Wainwright contributed financially to the construction of the Catholic chapel, “pour l’accroissement du pays” – and that Catholics did the same for Protestant initiatives. He was similarly struck when a Protestant neighbor, aware that the Catholic missionaries were hosting guests, sent them a chicken and some cake; and he remarked: “Cela porte bonheur d’aider les missionnaires”.<sup>60</sup> A more substantial form of collaboration soon developed in Heath, where Catholics and Protestants shared the same building for their respective religious services, and in the early weeks at Elm Park, local Protestants offered Gaborit the use of their chapel for the celebration of Mass.<sup>61</sup>

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**59** For the intellectual background informing Dehon’s anti-Protestant discourse, see Sacquin, *Entre Bossuet et Maurras*.

**60** Dehon, *Notes quotidiennes*, vol. 27 (1910), 19-20, in AD, B. 30/27, Inv. 530.02.

**61** “English-Speaking Canada”, 10, 13.

To be sure, anti-Protestant prejudice remained deeply rooted among the Dehonian missionaries, and the goal of preserving Catholic faithful from conversion to Protestantism continued to be central.<sup>62</sup> Yet missionary practice was far removed from the harsh rhetoric of Dehon’s instructions, just as confessional boundaries proved to be more permeable in practice than they appeared on paper.

#### 4 The Establishment of the Mission

The mission’s first months were harsh.<sup>63</sup> Legal had not hidden from Dehon the precariousness of the situation in Alberta and outlined, from the outset, the difficulties the new foundation would face:

Le champ que je vous destine sera étendu. Votre principale maison sera une grande ligne de chemin de fer. La ligne du Grand Tronc Pacific. Je ne sais encore au juste quelle serait la meilleure place, Wainwright ou Toefield. Wainwright est appelé à devenir plus important. C’est un point divisional de la ligne. Il n’y a rien de construit encore, tout est à organiser: ni maison, ni chapelle.<sup>64</sup>

Shortly after their arrival in St. Albert, around 22 July 1910, the Dehonian missionaries learned that they had been assigned to Wainwright, about 220 km to the southeast. The town had been founded only two years earlier but, thanks to the presence of the railway, already had a population of some 1,200 inhabitants. There were no churches and no presbyteries: the fathers rented a small house and, during the first months, celebrated Sunday Mass in a grocery store.<sup>65</sup> Gaborit, whom Dehon had chosen as superior of the mission, promptly took steps to address this situation: he established a committee among local Catholics, organized a fundraising collection, and began construction of a two-story building that would serve both as residence and chapel.

As Legal had foreseen, the financial support of the mission depended largely on the offerings and contributions of the faithful; however, in Wainwright there were barely some fifty Catholics, and four priests were clearly too many for their spiritual needs.

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**62** For instance, *Letter from Jean-Baptiste Vianney Cochet to Dehon*, 26 July 1918, in AD, B. 102/4, Inv. 1149.26: “Le bien se fait quand même, on empêche bien des gens de se revirer protestants ou de tomber dans l’indifférence”.

**63** For general accounts of the history of the mission, see Caron, *Petite histoire*, 5-52; “English-Speaking Canada”, 1-25.

**64** *Letter from Legal to Dehon*, 24 May 1910, in AD, B. 21/9B, Inv. 472.12.

**65** Dehon, *Notes quotidiennes*, vol. 27 (1910), 18, in AD, B. 30/27, Inv. 530.02.

Within a few months it thus became evident that the missionaries would have to separate in order to cover a wider territory. When Dehon reached them in September 1910, he found only Gaborit and Carpentier in Wainwright, since Steinmetz and Soyer had already moved to Edmonton, the capital of Alberta, to replace a parish priest there. For his part, Gaborit traveled through the surrounding areas of Wainwright, seeking out new faithful and preparing the establishment of committees, churches, and parishes.

Taking advantage of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway, on which they were allowed to travel free of charge, the missionaries began serving around ten communities, mainly located along the line, with some as far as 170 km from Wainwright.<sup>66</sup> To move more easily to places where the train did not reach, they also acquired a horse-drawn carriage. From the autumn of 1910, the mission became itinerant: although their main residence remained in Wainwright, the Dehonians regularly traveled from one location to another to celebrate Mass and administer the sacraments. This work was demanding and dispersive, as the faithful were scattered across a vast territory, making it difficult to maintain regular contact with all of them. In a letter to Dehon dated February 1911, Gaborit described the challenges of these journeys in vivid terms:

L'autre jour j'ai visité des catholiques au nord de Wainwright à, à peu près, 25 milles. Ce fut un voyage très difficile, pas de route, rien que de la neige. Il m'a fallu me guider avec la lune et les étoiles pendant la nuit et le jour avec le soleil. C'est un voyage dangereux, dit-on, mais intéressant.<sup>67</sup>

Despite these difficulties, the mission grew rapidly. In December 1910, Legal proposed that the Dehonians take charge of a new parish in Elm Park, a district of Edmonton inhabited by hundreds of workers employed in railway construction. Gaborit accepted it enthusiastically, considering the parish highly promising,<sup>68</sup> and by the following February a provisional wooden chapel had already been erected. To cover the territory more effectively, in the spring of 1911 the four missionaries decided to split up, each establishing in a different center: Soyer went to Chauvin, populated almost entirely by French-Canadians; Carpentier remained in Wainwright; Steinmetz settled in Viking, where a community of Irish, German, and Polish

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**66** *Letter from Gaborit to Falleur*, 12 October 1910, in AD, B. 68/2, Inv. 904.23: “Nous avons 7 postes à visiter: Chauvin, Edgerton, Wainwright, Viking, Holden, Ryley, Tofield. Le mois prochain, nous allons créer 2 autres stations, Cooking [Lake] et Oxville”.

**67** *Letter from Gaborit to Dehon*, 9 February 1911, in AD, B. 21/6.1, Inv. 423.26.

**68** *Letter from Gaborit to Dehon*, 1 December 1910, in AD, B. 68/2, Inv. 904.03.

Catholics lived; and Gaborit took up permanent residence in Edmonton as parish priest. Each missionary would thus be responsible, both spiritually and materially, for a specific area of the mission, and would report to the local superior each month.<sup>69</sup>

Despite this reorganization, four missionaries were still too few for such a vast territory, and reinforcements were therefore needed. With a touch of bravado, Gaborit wrote to Dehon in early 1911: “Si vous aviez 10 prêtres de plus à nous envoyer, nous prendrions possession de la moitié de l’Ouest canadien”.<sup>70</sup> The remark was bold, but the need for additional personnel was real; consequently, a new group of Dehonians was dispatched to Alberta in May 1911. Given the many material demands of missionary life, this group comprised only one priest, Aubin-Marie Huet (1873-1934) – in fact still a deacon, who was ordained at St. Albert in November 1911 – and three religious brothers: Gabriel-Marie Lérigny (1893-1943), Georges Brégand, and Lazare Pierson. They were to manage all practical matters (such as cooking and other domestic tasks), thereby freeing the missionaries to devote themselves to pastoral ministry.

Arriving in Alberta in late June, the new missionaries were assigned to the existing missions: Huet and Brégand remained at Elm Park with Gaborit, Pierson was sent to Viking with Steinmetz, while Lérigny joined Carpentier in Wainwright. The new contingent was thus employed to consolidate the mission rather than to extend it further, since both Dehon and Gaborit wished to ensure the presence of at least two men in each location, so as to re-establish some form of community life. Moreover, once the initial momentum had passed, the situation of the mission stabilized and prospects for rapid growth appeared to have diminished. In a letter dated 12 March 1912 and written from Wainwright, Carpentier provided Dehon with a far from idyllic picture of the mission. He argued that the number of faithful was not increasing because the population was “instable”, that economic circumstances remained precarious, and that Legal – despite his goodwill – was unable to assign new posts in areas where the local population could support a priest and build a church. Carpentier’s letter also conveyed a degree of personal disappointment: life in northwestern Canada had proved harsher than expected, leading him to conclude that “bien peu de pères et de frères viendraient, s’ils connaissaient tout cela”.<sup>71</sup>

Perhaps for this reason as well, Dehon decided not to send additional missionaries to Alberta either in 1912 or in 1913. He explained to Legal that the congregation was struggling to recruit

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**69** *Letter from Gaborit to Dehon*, 3 April 1911, in AD, B. 68/2, Inv. 904.04.

**70** *Letter from Gaborit to Dehon*, 9 February 1911, in AD, B. 21/6.1, Inv. 423.26.

**71** *Letter from Carpentier to Dehon*, 12 March 1912, in AD, B. 102/4, Inv. 1149.22.

new members in France and that its African missions were absorbing all available resources, while also suggesting that no requests for further missionaries had come from Canada.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, a third group of missionaries was dispatched in May 1914. It comprised three priests – Honoré Lemaire (1880-1954), Jean-Baptiste Vianney Cochet (1883-1949), and Augustinus Koolen (1881-1956) – and one religious brother, François de Sales Berger (1882-1930), who had already gained some experience in Congo. Gaborit took advantage of their arrival to give renewed impetus to the mission. He established a new base at Tawatinaw, some 90 km north of Edmonton, to which Huet was assigned, and seriously considered a proposal from the apostolic vicar of Athabasca-Mackenzie to send missionaries to Peace River, in the far west of Alberta. He even envisaged the creation of a province of the congregation in Alberta within five years.<sup>73</sup>

## 5 Difficulties and Crisis of the Mission

These plans were disrupted only a few months later by the outbreak of the First World War. The younger French missionaries were called up for military service, and Pierson, who had not yet taken vows, left in August to return to France.<sup>74</sup> The others were initially uncertain how to proceed, but ultimately decided to remain in Canada, partly in obedience to Legal’s explicit instruction, thereby rendering themselves liable to prosecution for draft evasion. At the end of August 1914, Saint-Quentin – where Dehon and the congregation’s general council were based – was taken by the German army and remained under military occupation until October 1918.<sup>75</sup> Relations between Canada and France were completely severed, and for more than three years Dehon received no news from his missionaries in Alberta.<sup>76</sup>

Contacts were resumed only in January 1918, when Gaborit managed to send Dehon a long letter updating him on the situation.

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**72** *Letter from Dehon to Legal*, 12 December 1912, in AD, B. 110/3, Inv. 1170.92.

**73** *Letter from Gaborit to Dehon*, 24 March 1914, in AD, B. 21/6.1, Inv. 423.25. An account of the Dehonian presence in Alberta in the summer of 1914 is provided by Legal, *Short Sketches*, 40-1, 109-10, 112-13: at that time, the missionaries were based at Elm Park (Gaborit, Cochet, Pierson), Viking (Steinmetz, Koolen), Wainwright (Carpentier, Lemaire, Lérigny), Chauvin (Soyer) and Tawatinaw (Huet, Berger).

**74** *Letter from Gaborit to Dehon*, 15 August 1914, in AD, B. 102/4, Inv. 1149.06.

**75** For the impact of the war on Dehon’s life and his congregation, see Arnaiz Ecker, *Dehon e i dehoniani*, especially 21-41.

**76** In August 1917, for example, Dehon still did not know whether his missionaries had remained in Canada or returned to Europe; *Letter from Dehon to Bonifacius van Hommerich*, 21 August 1917, in AD, B. 19/7A.2, Inv. 266.13.

During the preceding years, the work in Alberta had developed only modestly, “en partie à cause de la guerre qui a paralysé les affaires au Canada comme ailleurs”,<sup>77</sup> and the financial situation remained precarious. Gaborit explained that he had tried to move personnel as little as possible, to avoid tensions, but he did not conceal that disagreements had emerged with some of the confreres under his supervision. Between the lines, it was clear that things were far from ideal, and Dehon received confirmation of this impression in Gaborit’s subsequent letter, which opened with a blunt assessment: “Notre mission au Canada n’a point beaucoup d’avenir, c’est certain”.

The difficulties were manifold, ranging from the economic crisis brought about by the war, which had erased the community’s modest investments in real estate, to the failure to recruit new vocations among the local population. The principal problem, however, lay in the inadequacy of the missionaries themselves. On this point Gaborit was particularly severe:

Ce qui fait le plus défaut, c’est des sujets dévoués qui voudraient faire quelques sacrifices pour l’œuvre. Or, je vous assure qu’ils sont rares parmi nous. Tous ceux qui sont venus au Canada manquent de cet esprit de corps et même je dirais qu’ils cherchent plutôt leur indépendance, au point de vue religieux.<sup>78</sup>

Concrete examples were not lacking. Soyer had been driven out by his parishioners in Chauvin, exasperated by his “maladresses”; Steinmetz was unable to keep his accounts in order, prompting complaints from the people of Viking; Koolen demanded “l’indépendance absolue” in Clyde and seemed governed by the most material impulses (“Il n’y a que la nature qui parle en lui et de la manière la plus brutale”, as Gaborit put it).<sup>79</sup> Carpentier lived “d’une manière très relâchée”, used the funds of the parish of Wainwright for personal needs, and was on the verge of leaving the congregation to join the secular clergy.<sup>80</sup> Notably, all of these were priests. Matters were no better among the brothers: Brégand had long since left; Pierson had returned to France – as we have seen; Lérigny was increasingly dissatisfied and left the congregation in July 1919, later marrying.

More generally, the mission offered little prospect of long-term consolidation. The missionaries’ deployment across the territory

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**77** *Letter from Gaborit to Dehon*, 28 January 1918, in AD, B. 102/4, Inv. 1149.07.

**78** *Letter from Gaborit to Dehon*, 4 March 1918, in AD, B. 102/4, Inv. 1149.08.

**79** *Letter from Gaborit to Dehon*, 28 January 1918, in AD, B. 102/4, Inv. 1149.07.

**80** *Letter from Gaborit to Dehon*, 4 March 1918, in AD, B. 102/4, Inv. 1149.08. Carpentier definitively left the congregation in 1919 and entered the clergy of the diocese of Prince Albert, in Saskatchewan.

depended entirely on the needs and decisions of the local bishop, who employed them to fill gaps in a diocesan clergy too small to meet all pastoral requirements. But once that need was satisfied, what would become of the Dehonians? They would be gradually replaced by secular priests, all the more since the churches and presbyteries they had built over the years belonged not to the congregation, but to the parishes (and thus to the diocese). This arrangement also left the missionaries largely dependent on episcopal discretion: Legal, who had called them to Alberta, had always been generous, but would his successors be equally so? This was the “péril canadien” – as Cochet labelled it in August 1914<sup>81</sup> – and it loomed threateningly over the mission. The only conceivable remedy lay in freeing the Dehonian activities in Alberta from exclusive reliance on diocesan decisions, for example by establishing a house or college of their own. Yet such a project required personnel and resources, and both were lacking after the First World War.

To revitalize the mission, Dehon considered broadening it. Up to that point, indeed, it had been an “œuvre française”,<sup>82</sup> hierarchically and financially dependent on the Franco-Belgian province of the congregation. After the war, however, that province was exhausted and Dehon turned to the better-resourced Dutch fathers in the hope of securing support for the Canadian enterprise. Such involvement would inevitably have altered the project’s original framework: it would no longer have been a Franco-Canadian mission, but an ‘American’ one, potentially extending across North America and, above all, English-speaking. A few tentative signs of encouragement from Alberta seemed to make such a shift desirable. For the first time in nearly ten years, a young Canadian, Joseph-Arthur Saint-Pierre, asked to join the congregation, and in March 1919 a provisional novitiate was opened for him at Elm Park.<sup>83</sup>

This hope, however, proved illusory. The collaboration with the Dutch province never materialized, while the arrival of the first novice, who took his vows in the spring of 1920, was largely offset by the loss of two other missionaries: Koolen decided to leave the congregation in 1921,<sup>84</sup> and Steinmetz abruptly returned to Europe in 1922 after taking all the funds from his post.<sup>85</sup> Dehon, who at the beginning of 1920 had contemplated sending reinforcements to

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**81** *Letter from Cochet to Dehon*, 16 August 1914, in AD, B. 102/4, Inv. 1149. 23.

**82** *Letter from Dehon to Lambertus van Halbeek*, 27 January 1919, in AD, B. 74/6, Inv. 974.19.

**83** *Letter from Dehon to Gaborit*, 17 March 1919, in AD, B. 18/6.12, Inv. 214.18.

**84** *Letter from Koolen to Dehon*, 19 July 1921, in AD, B. 98/1B, Inv. 1135.32. Koolen was officially secularized in April 1924.

**85** *Letter from Gaborit to Dehon*, 22 March 1922, in AD, B. 102/4, Inv. 1149.16.

Alberta,<sup>86</sup> chose not to proceed with this plan and deferred any such decision. In October 1921 he even dispatched Cochet to the United States to raise funds for the Basilica of Christ the King (*Cristo Re*), then under construction in Rome,<sup>87</sup> thereby depriving Alberta of yet another priest.

Above all, the death of Legal in March 1920 extinguished any remaining hope of sustaining the mission. His successor, Henry Joseph O’Leary, of Irish origin, showed goodwill towards the Dehonians, but he did not conceal his intention to replace them with English-speaking diocesan clergy as soon as it became possible.<sup>88</sup> The mission was no longer viable – Dehon himself had to admit it in August 1921<sup>89</sup> – but it lingered on for another fifteen years, gradually dwindling. In 1924, O’Leary removed the Dehonians from the populous parish of Elm Park, founded by Gaborit in 1910, and transferred them to Beaumont, some 30 km south of Edmonton.<sup>90</sup> In 1926, Wainwright followed: the parish was taken from Lemaire, and entrusted to an Irish diocesan priest, while Chauvin remained under Dehonian administration until Huet’s death in 1934.

Gaborit nonetheless sought to hold on at Beaumont, where he relocated the novitiate and founded a small school. A few novices arrived in 1927,<sup>91</sup> and between 1929 and 1931 two new priests came from France, Marcel Claude (1901-1957) and Paul Delplanque (1890-1949) – the first reinforcements in more than fifteen years. Relations with O’Leary, however, became increasingly strained, and in September 1931 the new superior general, Laurent Philippe, who had succeeded Dehon in 1926, travelled to Canada in person to clarify the situation. Within a few days he concluded that there was no longer room for the congregation in Alberta: the archbishop did not wish to have French missionaries in his diocese and demanded that the mission be placed under “des supérieurs américains”. Philippe

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**86** Letter from Dehon to Laurent Philippe, 10 March 1920, in AD, B. 22/12, Inv. 466.01.

**87** Letter from Dehon to Henry Joseph O’Leary, 16 October 1921, in AD, B. 16/1, Inv. 114.08.

**88** S.v. “O’Leary, Henry Joseph”; LeBlanc, *Dictionnaire biographique*, 395, 579, 677, 789, 887-9. On the struggle between French- and English-speaking clergy in northwestern Canada, see Huel, “The Irish French Conflict”. On ethnic and linguistic tensions within Canadian Catholicism, see Choquette, “English-French Relations”.

**89** Letter from Dehon to Falleur, 24 August 1921, in AD, B. 19/9A.1, Inv. 278.45: “Pour le Canada, nous l’abandonnerons probablement, le nouvel évêque désire un clergé séculier”.

**90** Caron, *Petite histoire*, 12-13.

**91** Caron, *Petite histoire*, 21-5.

judged these conditions unacceptable,<sup>92</sup> and it was therefore decided to relocate the last missionaries to Montreal, where a small house was purchased in 1936. Only Gaborit chose to remain in Beaumont, where he died in March 1940.<sup>93</sup> With him, the Dehonian presence in Alberta came definitively to an end.

## 6 Reasons for Failure: Religious Vocation and the Frontier Society

Despite its comparatively long duration (a full thirty years), the mission proved largely unsuccessful in institutional terms, since it failed to establish durable structures of formation, recruitment, and governance in Alberta. The congregation nevertheless remained present in Canada, notably in Montreal, and after the Second World War it managed to consolidate and expand this presence, largely through the efforts of Dutch fathers, ultimately creating two Canadian provinces in 1974, in Quebec and Ontario.<sup>94</sup> Alberta, however, saw no further Dehonian foundations, and the initiative begun in 1910 was not resumed. The reasons for this outcome were multiple.

Some of the mission's difficulties were inherent in how it was conceived and launched. The undertaking was organized hastily, without a clear objective or a sound understanding of the context in which the missionaries would operate. Dehon's desire to establish a foothold in Canada led him to seize the only concrete opportunity that materialized, even though the actual prospects for growth and consolidation in Alberta were uncertain from the outset. The anti-Protestant framework through which Dehon sought to justify the mission likewise proved, in practice, more rhetorical than operative. The personnel assigned to the mission were also unevenly prepared for this form of apostolate – linguistically as well as pastorally – and often proved ill-suited to the tasks they were assigned. Several missionaries, moreover, seemed to have crossed the Atlantic in pursuit of a second chance, or simply because few prospects remained open to them in Europe, rather than out of a sustained missionary vocation. Soyer, for example, sought to escape a situation of serious indebtedness; Carpentier had received an inadequate religious

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<sup>92</sup> *Letter from Louis Weiskopf to Ignace Devrainne*, 21 October 1931, in AD, B. 70/3, Inv. 927.70: “L’archevêque d’Edmonton serait content de nous avoir dans son diocèse, mais il ne veut pas de français, qu’il cherche à éloigner systématiquement. [...] Il voudrait avoir des supérieurs américains. Ces exigences paraissent inacceptables et l’on finira par quitter ce diocèse pour aller ailleurs”.

<sup>93</sup> For an account of the final phases of the mission, see “English-Speaking Canada”, 20-5.

<sup>94</sup> “English-Speaking Canada”, 26-48; “French-Canadian Province”, 1-10.

formation; Pierson had been unable to complete his novitiate in France; and Huet had to be ordained in Canada because he proved unable to master Latin. Even the superior general Philippe had to concede in 1931 that “ceux qu’on y avait envoyés [to Canada] étaient loin de répondre aux exigences du moment”.<sup>95</sup>

As we have seen, contingent circumstances compounded these structural weaknesses. The outbreak of the First World War undermined the modest investments undertaken by Gaborit to place the mission on a more secure financial footing and, for several years, made it nearly impossible for the congregation to send new missionaries and resources to Alberta. Equally important, the mission’s limited institutional autonomy made its fate heavily dependent on the orientations – and at times even the personal sympathies – of local bishops, so that the arrival in Edmonton of a markedly Anglophile prelate such as O’Leary delivered the final blow to an already precarious situation.

At a deeper level, however, the failure of the mission also stemmed from the Dehonians’ difficulty in understanding and engaging productively with the values and ways of life that prevailed in Alberta. Although they came from societies that were already profoundly secularized, the European missionaries found themselves disoriented when confronted with the starkly utilitarian ethos of North American pioneer society, in which money, success, and material prosperity seemed to function as the primary markers of social conduct. Religion certainly retained a visible presence and a degree of social relevance within this fluid and egalitarian society; yet, in the eyes of the Dehonian missionaries, what was largely lacking was a strong sense of transcendence and interior spiritual commitment. Church affiliation and adherence to religious norms appeared to be motivated more often by social convenience or communal belonging than by a deeply internalized act of faith. Nearly two years after his arrival in Canada, Carpentier still struggled to come to terms with this situation and described it to Dehon in scandalized terms:

Les canadiens ont-ils vraiment de la religion? Je réponds négativement, sans crainte de me tromper. La religion est pour eux une chose de surface. Ils ne vivent pas d’une vie catholique. Ils aiment le culte extérieur, les cérémonies; ils ne comprennent pas que le culte intérieur est plus important. Ils comprennent que le prêtre est un personnage très digne de respect; leur confiance en lui et en ses prières vont parfois jusqu’à la superstition [...]. Ils ont beaucoup de foi extérieure; mais comme cette foi ne pénètre guère leur âme, leur cœur, leur vie, un rien suffit pour l’ébranler.

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**95** *Letter from Philippe to Devrainne*, 26 March 1931, in AD, B. 70/3, Inv. 927.51.

Leur religion est un véritable paradoxe, un perpétuel contre-sens.<sup>96</sup>

Economic concerns and material success dominated everyday life. “Dans ce pays-ci c’est le dollar qui compte, le bon Dieu vient après, s’il peut”, Cochet observed in 1918, adding that conversations with the faithful revolved around “vache, cochon, poules, foin et blé, dollars en banque ou en espoir”, far more than around religious matters.<sup>97</sup> Being poor – or even merely appearing so – was regarded as “immoral”.<sup>98</sup> This pervasive preoccupation with business also contributed to keeping younger generations at a distance from religious vocations. At the same time, frontier society – deeply attached to individual freedom and egalitarianism – proved resistant to behavioral norms and ecclesiastical prescriptions perceived as impractical or arbitrary. Diocesan regulations prohibiting dancing at parish gatherings or banning membership in Freemasonry and secret societies thus remained largely unenforceable.

If the missionaries felt that they were building on sand, exposure to the frontier society also shaped their own conduct and tested their religious vocation. Despite their vow of poverty, Dehonians became soon involved in investments and real-estate ventures, and several – under the influence of what Gaborit termed as “l’instinct de propriété”<sup>99</sup> – managed entrusted funds with increasing latitude, at times even for personal purpose, depositing them in their own names rather than that of the congregation. Moreover, the necessity of living in isolation, often separated by great distances, made it impossible to observe the community life prescribed by the Constitutions and significantly weakened bonds of hierarchical obedience. Gaborit repeatedly lamented in his letters the excessive independence of the missionaries, a tendency he proved unable to correct. Not everyone viewed these developments negatively. Cochet, for example, welcomed the fact that Dehonians in Canada did not spend “leur temps à critiquer les supérieurs de la Congrégation comme dans telle ou telle maison d’Europe”, and that conflicts did not generate “des rancunes qui durent toute la vie”.<sup>100</sup>

Engagement with the frontier society deeply reshaped the missionaries’ lives and attitudes, and the resulting transformation often proved difficult to reverse. In 1922, Gaborit informed Dehon

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**96** *Letter from Carpentier to Dehon*, 12 March 1912, in AD, B. 102/4, Inv. 1149.22.

**97** *Letter from Cochet to Dehon*, 26 July 1918, in AD, B. 102/4, Inv. 1149.26.

**98** *Letter from Cochet to Dehon*, 17 June 1919, in AD, B. 102/4, Inv. 1149.28: “Apparaître comme miséreux ici est considéré comme immoral”.

**99** *Letter from Gaborit to Dehon*, 25 March 1914, in AD, B. 21/6.1, Inv. 423.25.

**100** *Letter from Cochet to Dehon*, 16 August 1914, in AD, B. 102/4, Inv. 1149.23; 26 July 1918, in AD, B. 102/4, Inv. 1149.26.

that none of his missionaries intended to return to Europe, regardless of the mission's future: “Leur mentalité est américaine – he explained – ce qui est bien différent de l'esprit d'Europe. Ils prévoient qu'ils ne pourraient plus se plier, non pas à la règle, mais aux manières et vues des maisons d'Europe”.<sup>101</sup>

Their religious vocation, too, did not emerge unscathed from this experience. Isolation, the near absence of community life and fraternal support, and daily immersion in a pragmatic and utilitarian social environment progressively eroded their sense of belonging to the congregation and their attachment to its original charism – namely, the consecration as victims to the Sacred Heart. Many missionaries increasingly regarded themselves as effectively autonomous, and leaving the order to join the diocesan clergy came to appear a natural option: six out of ten Dehonian priests were secularized, while four out of five brothers returned to the lay state. These high rates of departure among those serving in Alberta underscore the difficulty of reproducing a Dehonian form of religious life in northwestern Canada and, more broadly, the strain that frontier conditions could impose on a spiritual vocation embraced within markedly different religious and social settings.

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**101** Letter from Gaborit to Dehon, 22 March 1922, in AD, B. 102/4, Inv. 1149.16.

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# The Holy West and the Land of Perpetual Snow Jesuit Missionaries in the Rocky Mountains and Alaska (1840-1912)

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**Abstract** The paper examines the origins and development of Jesuit missionary efforts in the Rocky Mountains' territories (1841) and in Alaska (1886) highlighting the coordinating role of the Turin Province and some aspects of the contribution of female congregations. Situated within the nineteenth-century Jesuit missionary revival, it explores institutional frameworks, native language study as a tool for evangelisation and instruction. Moreover, it shows how the Rocky Mountains experience served as a precedent for Jesuit missions in Alaska, illustrating the circulation of missionary models despite geographic and cultural differences.

**Keywords** Rocky Mountains. Alaska. Adaptation. Evangelisation. Acculturation.

**Summary** 1 The Roots of Jesuit Missionary Expansion in the Northwest of the United States and Alaska in the Nineteenth Century. – 2 Language and Cultural Translation: Speaking the Language of the Natives. – 3 Synesthesias. Religious Instruction Between Listening, Vision and Daily Practice. – 4 People to Tame. Some Aspects of Indian Schools in the Rocky Mountains and Alaska. – 5 Final Remarks.



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## 1 The Roots of Jesuit Missionary Expansion in the Northwest of the United States and Alaska in the Nineteenth Century

In October 1833, the Concilium Provincialis Baltimorensi II confirmed the disposition of the Sacred Congregation de Propaganda Fide to entrust the spiritual care of the natives settled in the northwestern territories of the United States, yet to be established as dioceses, to the Society of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> In December of the same year, General Roothaan's epistle *De missionum externarum desiderio excitando et fovendo* helped to give new impetus to the Congregation's missionary vocation, following the difficult years after its reconstitution.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the foundations were laid for a renewed season of apostolate, which found its first concrete expression in the missionary zeal of the period 1840-41, when the Pacific Northwest emerged as one of the most sought-after destinations for foreign missions.<sup>3</sup> In this regard, the historian Gerald McKevitt has situated the competition of Catholic and Protestant missionaries to the American frontier territories within a broader "global migration", that also involved the religious world during the nineteenth century and was intertwined with the impulse towards *divisio apostolorum*, that had characterized the Society of Jesus since its origins.<sup>4</sup> In this context, at the urging of the bishop of St. Louis, Giuseppe Rosati (1789-1843) and thanks to the commitment of the provincial of Missouri, Peter Jan Verhaegen (1800-1868), on 27 March 1840, the Belgian Jesuit Pierre-Jean De Smet set out from St. Louis for Westport (Missouri), an important departure point for the West, with the task of verifying the willingness of the indigenous

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1 *Concilia Provincialia*, 91-116; Poponessi, *Mission*, 15.

2 De Jonge, Pirri, *Opera Spirituality*, 1, 347-56; cf. "Lettera del P. Giovanni Roothaan"; Lenoble-Bart, Spindler, *Spiritualités missionnaires contemporaines*, 141-51. See also Rochini, "Vocazione missionaria nel generalato", 208-17; Colombo, Rochini, "Ritorno alle missioni". Jesuits' biography in O'Neill, Dominguez, *Diccionario Histórico*; Mendizàbal, *Catalogus Defunctorum*; Archivio Storico della Provincia Euro-mediterranea della Compagnia di Gesù (AEMSI), fondo Provincia Torinese, Fascicoli Personali. For a general overview of missionary contexts: Županov, *The Oxford Handbook*; O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*; Markus, *The Jesuits*; O'Donnell, *Jesuits in the North American*; Ferlan, *Storia delle missioni cristiane*; Carrez, *Atlas Geographicus*.

3 Rochini, "La frontiera cinese", 278-9; Maryks, Wright, *Jesuit Survival*, 8.

4 *Costituzioni della Compagnia di Gesù*, 211-29; McKevitt, "Northwest Indian Evangelization", 689; United States Department of the Interior, *National Register of Historic*. <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/index.htm>.

peoples of the Rocky Mountains to welcome Catholic missionaries.<sup>5</sup> On 30 June 1840, the Jesuit reached the Green River following an expedition of the American Fur Company, and met the first delegation of the native Flatheads. Between spring and autumn 1841, De Smet established St. Mary in the Bitter Root Valley, the first Catholic residence in present-day Montana, with Gregorio Mengarini, Nicolas Point and three temporal coadjutor brothers.<sup>6</sup> Crucial were also the repeated requests of Flatheads delegations, who between 1831 and 1839 travelled to St. Louis to seek Jesuit missionaries, aided by Ignace Hatchiorauquacha, a Canadian Iroquois previously evangelized by the Jesuits.<sup>7</sup> Although Catholic missions in the Northwest began in 1838 at Fort Vancouver under Bishop François Norbert Blanchet and Canadian priest Modeste Demers, it was the Jesuits who established a systematic and enduring ministry to Indigenous nations.<sup>8</sup>

The founding of St. Mary's was soon followed by the Jesuit missions of Sacred Heart (Nez Percés and Coeur d'Alene), St. Ignatius (Pend'Oreilles) in 1846, and pastoral visits to the Blackfeet around Fort Lewis.<sup>9</sup> The consolidation of the Rocky Mountains missions was shaped by European political developments, especially the Italian Risorgimento. The expulsion of the Congregation from the Savoy territories (25 August 1848), followed by similar measures across the Peninsula, forced many Italian Jesuits into exile; many settled in the American provinces of Maryland and Missouri, strengthening the

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**5** De Smet, *Letters*, 135, 155-89; Mengarini, "The Rocky Mountains", 288-9; Ferlan, "From Ship to Shore", 448, 453-5.

**6** Ferlan, "From Ship to Shore", 456-60; Menelao, *Nella Terra delle nevi*, 19-21. On the Nation of the Flatheads: Johnson, *Encyclopedia of Native Tribes*, 163-4, 174.

**7** Ignace Hatchiorauquacha was also known as Old Ignace, Ignace La Mousse or Lamoose: Paterson, Peers, *Sacred Encounters*; Point, Donnelly, *Wilderness Kingdom*, 7; Palladino, *Indian and White*, 9-20; Garraghan, *The Jesuits*, 236-8; Buckley, "Overland with Optimism", 8.

**8** *Letter from Michele Accolti to the Father General*, 18 October 1852, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. Americana USA, Prov. Missouri., Mont. Sax., b. 1002, fasc. I, doc. 1; "Diocese of Oregon City".

**9** For geographical guidance within the mission territories in the Rocky Mountains, please see the online map (1890): <https://tinyurl.com/39hvba2j>. Néz-Percés or Pierced Noses, Blackfeet or Blackfoot, Coeur d'Alene or Heart of Aul and Pend'Oreilles or Earrings, cf. Johnson, *Encyclopedia of Native Tribes*, 93-105, 163-5, 174; Point, Donnelly, *Wilderness Kingdom*, 7. *Letter from Fr. Van Gorp to the Superior of the Rocky Mountains*, 23 January 1888, in AEMSI, Prov. Torin., serie Residenze e Collegi, b. Alaska-California-Montagne Rocciose, fasc. I, St. Ignatius Residence, doc. 3; *Catalogus Provinciae Missourianae*, 1845-7.

North American missions.<sup>10</sup> From 1849 onwards, the assignment of Italian Jesuits to the missions of the Rocky Mountains and California increased, until in 1851 their coordination passed under the direct control of the Jesuit superior general.<sup>11</sup> For over forty years (1849-93), the Rocky Mountains mission was led by Italian local superiors, mainly from the Province of Turin, which formally assumed patronage in 1854.<sup>12</sup> The leadership fostered a strong link, later recalled by Michele Accolti and Carlo Torti as an almost identity-defining bond between Italian Jesuits and the American Northwest.<sup>13</sup>

The creation of economically self-sufficient residences among the native peoples of the American Northwest drew on the Jesuit experience in Paraguay, reflecting the tendency of nineteenth-century Jesuit missions to look, at least initially, to an idealized past.<sup>14</sup> In *Il Cristianesimo felice* (1743-49), Ludovico Antonio Muratori had already portrayed the Paraguayan model as a realized Christian society; De Smet carried a copy to the Rocky Mountains as his personal guide.<sup>15</sup> As late as 1854, Michele Accolti recalled the hope “renewing the marvels of Paraguay”, that had inspired the pioneer fathers after

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**10** Dante, “I gesuiti e i nazionalismi”; Poponessi, *Mission*, 25; McKevitt, *Brokers of Culture*, 17-44; Morales, “Conflict and Reconciliation”; *Storia della Provincia di Torino*, in AEMSI, serie Tematica, b. 110; ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. Italiae, Registra, Prov. Taur., b. 1005 (1846-1868); Monti, *La Compagnia di Gesù*, 5: 53-61, 228-69; Melai, “Ancora il Paraguay”.

**11** Cf. *Catalogus Provinciae Missourianae*, 1849, 18-20; *Catalogus Provinciae Missourianae*, 1852; *Copy of the letter of Fr. Roothaan to Fr. William Murphy, vice provincial of Missouri*, in ARSI, Fondo Personale Jan Philip Roothaan, b. 13, fasc. LXI, doc.1023; AEMSI, Prov. Torin., Fascicoli Personali, fasc. XIV Congiato Nicolò, doc. 1.

**12** Poponessi, *Mission*, 16; *Catalogus Provinciae Taurinensis*, 1854, 23-4.

**13** *Letter from Father Carlo Torti to the Father General*, 2 June 1889, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. Italiae, Prov. Taur., b. 1011, fasc. II, doc. 37; *Letter from Michele Accolti to the General Beckx*, 5 May 1854, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. Amer. USA, Prov. Missouri, Mont. Sax., b. 1002, fasc. I, doc. 6.

**14** Fabre, “Rafael Pérez”, 100; Melai, “Elementi”; Romanato, *Gesuiti, Guarani*, 19-43. See also Garavaglia, “I gesuiti del Paraguay”. After the restoration of the Society of Jesus, a rich nineteenth-century bibliography, from Crétineau-Joly to Gothein and Graham, reworked earlier sources, shaping a historiographical tradition that framed the Paraguayan reductions within the enduring ‘myth of Paraguay’ as a Christian, even utopian, experiment.

**15** De Smet, *Letters*, 252.

the foundation of St. Mary.<sup>16</sup> Yet his assessment marked a break: the missionary, the character of the natives, their limited resistance to the influences and pressures of American colonists, and the difficulties in relations with the American government appeared to preclude the fulfilment of those early hopes.<sup>17</sup>

Although the high expectations were disappointed, the missions expanded again in the early 1880s. In 1886, when the Rocky Mountains mission comprised nine residences, Pasquale Tosi and Louis Robaut, urged by Giuseppe Maria Cataldo, joined the third Alaskan journey of Charles John Seghers, archbishop of Vancouver Island. Arriving on 7 September 1886 at Harper Post on the Stewart River, they inaugurated a long Jesuit presence in the region.<sup>18</sup> Just as the mission in the Rocky Mountains arose in the wake of the death of the Iroquois Old Ignace in 1837, so the mission in Alaska was inspired by the sacrifice of Seghers, later remembered as the ‘Apostle of Alaska’, who was killed by his companion Francis Fuller while on his way to Nulato to precede the arrival of a Protestant minister.<sup>19</sup> Thereafter, the mission attracted Jesuits from the United States and Europe, with Tosi serving as local superior until his death

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**16** Original excerpt in Italian: “Rinovellare le meraviglie del Paraguai”, *Letter from Michele Accolti to the General Beckx*, 5 May 1854, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. Amer. USA, Mont. Sax., b. 1002, fasc. I, doc. 6. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are by the Author.

**17** *Letter from Michele Accolti to the General Beckx*, 5 May 1854, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. Amer. USA, Mont. Sax., b. 1002, fasc. I, doc. 6.

**18** *Relazione di P. Canestrelli*, 27 August 1887, in AEMSI, Prov. Torinese, b. Alaska-Idaho, fasc. XXIV, doc. 1; “Lettera di padre Robaut a padre Ionkau (Vic. Apost.)”, Anvik sul fiume Yukon, 31 luglio 1887, in *Lettere Edificanti*, 1: 15; Barnum “Life on the Alaska Mission”, 39; Menelao, *Nella Terra delle nevi*, 31-4, 39; Vanstone, *Ingalik Contact Ecology*, 149; Renner, *Alaskana Catholica*, 4; Ferlan, “Frozen Frontiers”, 173-4, 179; Seghers, “Alaskan Missionaries”, 55-68.

**19** It can also be observed that elements of *parrhesia* can be identified in the edifying death of Seghers, cf. Barnum, “Life on the Alaska Mission”, 420-56; “Lettera di padre Robaut a padre Ionkau (Vic. Apost.)”, Anvik sul fiume Yukon, 31 luglio 1887, in *Lettere Edificanti*, 1: 19; Menelao, *Nella Terra delle nevi*, 39; Santos Hernandez, *Jesuitas*, 226-33; De Baets, *The Apostle of Alaska*, 234; “Castigo dell’assassino di mons. Seghers”, 104; “Mons. Arciv. Seghers trucidato nel deserto”, 1468-9; “Uccisione di Mons. Seghers”, 547.

in 1897;<sup>20</sup> a letter from Congiato (10 September 1887) records its formal acceptance.<sup>21</sup>

The initial foundations of St. Peter Claver (Nulato) and Holy Cross (Koserefski) along the Yukon River were soon followed by new stations between 1891 and 1896: St. Alphonse Rodriguez at Cape Vancouver, and St. Joseph, St. Ignatius Loyola and the Fort Miles miners' foundation.<sup>22</sup> By 1897 the mission had extended to Sitka and Juneau among the Canadian and American settlers, while the northern coastal stations among Eskimo natives weakened by the early twentieth century. Nevertheless, in 1902 the missionary Crispino Rossi reported that the mission extended as far as Cape Nome on the Bering Sea.<sup>23</sup>

Even before the archbishop of Vancouver Island's reconnaissance, in 1867 Nicola Congiato had viewed Alaska, newly purchased by the United States, as a vast field for Indian missions, "guided by the fathers of the Rocky Mountains for the great benefit of their minds".<sup>24</sup> Upon closer examination, the Jesuits had long considered the Far North as a promising area, untouched by the proximity of the American colonists, whose westward advance weakened Rocky Mountains mission stability.<sup>25</sup> Unlike in the Rockies, where they coexisted with Anglican and Protestant missionaries, in Alaska they also confronted Russian Orthodox ministers.

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**20** Faherty, Hennesey, McKevitt, O'Neill, "Estados Unidos de America", 1329; Menelao, *Nella Terra delle nevi*, 105.

**21** *De accipienda missionem Alaskanam*, (excerpt of Father Congiato's Letter), in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. Italiae, Registra, Prov. Taur., b. 1002 (1873-1906), 158-9.

**22** Menelao, *Nella Terra delle nevi*, 107-9; *Catalogus Provinciae Taurinensis*, 1896, 44-6; Tosi, *La Missione dell'Alaska*, 77.

**23** *Catalogus Provinciae Taurinensis*, 1903, 40-54. For geographical guidance within the mission territories in the Rocky Mountains and Alaska (1900): Carrez, *Atlas Geographicus*, 58. [https://archive.org/details/atlas\\_sj/page/n57/mode/2up?q=taurinensis](https://archive.org/details/atlas_sj/page/n57/mode/2up?q=taurinensis).

**24** "Qui a patribus Montium Saxosorum magno animarum emolimento excoli possit", in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. Amer. USA, Prov. Oregon., Missio Alaska, b. 1001, fasc. I, doc. 1; Lucchesi, *Gesuiti genovesi*.

**25** *Letter of Fr. Congiato to Beckx*, 20 May 1859, in ARSI, Ass. Amer. USA, Prov. Missouri, Mont. Sax., b. 1002, fasc. III, doc. 2.

## 2 Language and Cultural Translation: Speaking the Language of the Natives

Since the early modern period, mastering local languages was central to the Jesuits' missionary method. In multi-ethnic contexts, Jesuits sought linguistic uniformity to evangelize native groups. Both linguistic practice and ritual adaptation can be seen within the broader historiographical debate on Jesuit *accommodatio*, here understood not as a uniform method but as a flexible strategy shaped by local conditions, resources, and the need to communicate with indigenous populations.<sup>26</sup> Precedents, including Paraguay, had already shown the importance of linguistic competence in overcoming fragmentation among coexisting ethnic communities.<sup>27</sup> In the northwestern United States and Alaska, a striking contradiction emerged: local languages were employed for catechesis, but banned from everyday missions' life, while English was enforced in schools, also reflecting Jesuit adaptation to American norms.<sup>28</sup>

Jesuit humanistic formation and linguistic aptitude therefore became key criteria for missionary selection and deployment, as with Gregorio Mengarini, chosen by Roothaan to join De Smet's second expedition precisely because of his prior linguistic studies, and others, as Filippo Canestrelli, Giuseppe Giorda, Antonio Ravalli, Giuseppe Bandini, Antonio Morvillo, Urbano Grassi, Paul Muset and Julius Jetté, who produced grammars of various native American and

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**26** Romanato, "Le riduzioni del Paraguay", 58; El Alaoui, *Jésuites, morisques et indiens*; Maldavsky, "The Andes", 58-9; McKevitt, "Northwest Indian Evangelisation", 695. See also: Broggio, *Evangelizzare il mondo*; McManus, "Jesuit Humanism"; Zwartjes, Zimmermann, Schrader-Kniffki, *Missionary Linguistics V*; Poli, "Politiche linguistiche"; Zupanov, Fabre, *The Rites Controversies*.

**27** Wilde, "Le missioni del Paraguay", 82-3. See also: Piras, *Martin de Funes*; Maldavsky, *Vocaciones inciertas*.

**28** *Letter from Michele Accolti to the General Beckx*, 5 May 1854, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. Amer. USA, b. Mont. Sax. 2, fasc. I, doc. 6. On the linguistic distribution in the Rocky Mountains: Jacquin, *Storia degli indiani d'America*, 30-5; in Alaska, Krauss, Hoppel, *Native Peoples and Languages*. Although not exhaustive, this source provides a summary of selected diachronic trends in U.S. federal educational policy: <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/RL34205?>

Alaskan languages and catechisms.<sup>29</sup> However, it was not always possible to rely on missionaries who were willing to study Indigenous languages or had sufficient proficiency in English. As emigrants, many European Jesuits frequently found themselves required to learn or refine their English while simultaneously studying local languages or to prioritise indigenous idioms, hoping to be assigned solely to missions serving native communities.<sup>30</sup> In 1884, General Beckx encouraged the provincial of Turin to send Jesuits with English skills or previous experience in California to the Rocky Mountains.<sup>31</sup> Language, logistical, and financial challenges led the provincial in 1889 to consider transferring mission coordination to the Maryland province.<sup>32</sup> Missionaries of the Turin province debated the issue extensively, sending observations to the general of the Society of Jesus, to protect their mission camps.<sup>33</sup>

Language barriers were particularly acute in Alaska, due to its distance from European and American cultural horizons. By 1893, many of the elderly Jesuits were discouraged by the need to learn multiple indigenous languages, and Tosi requested that General

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**29** *Letter from Fr. Caruana to Fr. Casagrandi*, S. Cuore, 1882, in AEMSI, b. Fascicoli Personali, fasc. LXII Giorda Giuseppe, doc. 3; *Letter from Fr. Tosi to the General*, Holy Cross, 4 September 1894, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. Amer. USA, Prov. Oregon., Missio Alaska, b. 1001, fasc. II, doc. 1; McKeivitt, "Northwest Indian Evangelisation", 697; De Smet, *Letters*, 193. Ferlan, "From Ship to Shore", 447; Menelao, *Nella Terra delle nevi*, 106-7; Casassa, *Gesuiti Liguri*, 96; Jetté, "On the Superstitions"; Jetté, "On Ten'a Folklore"; see also: Jetté, "On the Medicine-Men"; Walter, "Father Joseph Jules Jetté", 2-7. An overview of the translations and works that the Jesuits produced in "Indian Language Collection" (Gonzaga University), cf. Schoenberg, *Jesuit Mission Presses*.

**30** *Letter of Fr. Tosi to Fr. General*, Holy Cross, 4 September 1894, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. Amer. USA, Prov. Oregon., Missio Alaska, b. 1001, fasc. II, doc. 1; *Letter from Fr. General Louis Martin to Fr. Sasia*, Provincial of Turin, 25 May 1895, in AEMSI, serie Tematica, b. Prov. Taur. 1 (Miscellanea); McKeivitt, "Northwest Indian Evangelisation", 696.

**31** *Letter from Fr. General to Fr. Provincial of Turin*, Fiesole, 1 January 1884, in AEMSI, serie Tematica, b. Prov. Taur. 1 (Miscellanea).

**32** *Letter from Fr. Bandini to Fr. General*, 2 June 1889, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. Italiae, Registra, Prov. Taur., b. 1002 (1873-1906), fasc. V, doc. 37 a.

**33** The Jesuits Fortunato Giudice, Franco Secondo and Giacomo Razzini agreed, cf. *Letters from Fr. Giudice, Fr. Secondo and Fr. Razzini to the Father General*, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. Italiae, Prov. Taur., b. 1011, fasc. II, docs. 37 b, c, d, e. An emblematic passage of Torti reads: "Per gli Indiani non si richiede lingua perfetta; è gente che si deve dirozzare, non perfezionare", cf. *Letter from Fr. Carlo Torti to the General*, 2 June 1889, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. Italiae, Prov. Taur., b. 1011, fasc. II, doc. 37.

Martin send two young Jesuits, Raphael Crimont and Louis Ragaru, to focus on language study and support the missions.<sup>34</sup> Conversely, Francis Barnum was recalled to Europe in 1894 after failing to master local languages and establish relations with the Yukon Valley natives.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, as late as 1895, William Judge noted to General Anderledy from St. Peter Claver that without a proper knowledge of the local languages, he could introduce only a few religious foundations and barely perceive the needs of Nulato natives.<sup>36</sup>

At least in the early phase of evangelisation in the Rocky Mountains and Alaska, missionaries relied on Indigenous intermediaries familiar with English to assist in religious instruction. An example was the 1883 *Corpus Christi* feast among the Néz-Percés, conducted in English with simultaneous translation into the native language, and later published in the *Edifying Letters*. While the account underscores behaviours perceived as extravagant and inappropriate by missionaries, it also highlights the central role of language and the extent to which Indigenous participants understood the basic of Catholic doctrine.<sup>37</sup>

The ability to understand and master local languages allowed the Jesuits not only to succeed in instruction more than Protestant and Orthodox ministers, but also to ensure missions' survival, particularly in challenging and unstable regions.<sup>38</sup> A striking case appears in an 1863 manuscript by Giuseppe Giorda, superior of the Rocky Mountains mission, who recounts being kidnapped by a group of unconverted Gros Ventres while crossing the Missouri River with other missionaries. Thanks to his communication skills, the Jesuits were not only released but also able to advocate for peace with the neighbouring Blackfeet community and "con Dio", by offering to

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**34** *Letter from Fr. Tosi to the Fr. General*, San Francisco, 17 May 1893, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. Amer., Prov. Oregon, Missio Alaska, b. 1001, fasc. I, docs. 15, 18.

**35** *Letter from Fr. Tosi to the General*, 4 September 1894, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. Amer. USA, Prov. Oregon., Missio Alaska, b. 1001, fasc. II, doc. 1.

**36** Judge, *An American Missionary*, 105-8, cf. Judge's letter to the Father General, 1895, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. Amer. USA, Prov. Oregon., Missio Alaska, b. 1001, fasc. VIII, doc. 5: 1; Menelao, *Nella Terra delle nevi*, 108-9.

**37** Cf. "La Festa del Corpus Domini fra gli Indiani. Da una lettera del P. Morvillo al P. Cataldo", Néz-Percés, 3 settembre 1883, in *Lettere Edificanti*, 1: 19-20.

**38** O'Donnel "Jesuit in the North", 7; McKevitt, *Brokers of Culture*, 123.

baptise their children.<sup>39</sup> The manuscript also reports that, in the following days, some Gros Ventres allegedly came to the mission seeking Catholic instruction, despite widespread beliefs that baptism endangered their children. This gave Giorda an opportunity to demonstrate the strength of his missionary vision. The episode and the natives' response reflect rhetorical patterns typical of edifying narratives, as shown in the following extract between the missionary (M) and the native (N):<sup>40</sup>

M: "Credete forse che sia così empio da volere la morte dei vostri figli? Qual utile me ne verrebbe? [...] Vi ha mai la Veste Nera domandato o un cavallo o una pelle per darvi il battesimo? E i Piedi Neri le hanno forse dato danaro perché uccida i bambini dei Grossi Ventri?"

A queste parole tutti i cuori furono cambiati.

N: "Noi siamo stati ingannati; non siamo rozzi e ignoranti, perdonaci, Veste Nera, domani ti condurremo i nostri bambini perché tu ne faccia tanti amici di Dio".<sup>41</sup>

On the one hand, the account demonstrates how the Jesuits sought to distance themselves from the practice of administering sacraments in exchange for gifts, a tendency they commonly attributed to Protestant and Orthodox ministers and considered one of the causes of the invalidity of such sacraments.<sup>42</sup> It also highlights their role as 'mediators' in local conflicts, crucial both for successful evangelization and for the survival of missions in a region strained by ethnic tensions and federal Removal Acts.<sup>43</sup>

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**39** *Estratto da una lettera di padre Giuseppe Giorda*, 4-5, in AEMSI, serie Manoscritti, nr. 519, Letters of Missionaries (1863-1866).

**40** The initials are a convention adopted by the Author.

**41** *Estratto da una lettera di padre Giuseppe Giorda*, 4-5, in AEMSI, serie Manoscritti, nr. 519, Letters of Missionaries (1863-1866). On the term 'Veste Nera' o 'Black Robe', cf. Jesset, "Origin of the Term Black Robe", 1-15.

**42** Cf. *Lettere Edificanti*, 1: 28; "Lettera del P. Robaut al P. Carlo Torti", S. Pietro Claver (Nulato), 27 agosto 1890, in *Lettere Edificanti*, 1: 78.

**43** *Letter from Fr. Filippo Canestrelli to Fr. Cataldo*, 13 July 1885, in AEMSI, Fascicoli Personali, fasc. Filippo Canestrelli, doc. 4. See also Boltanski, "A Jesuit Missio Castrensis".

### 3 **Synesthesias. Religious Instruction Between Listening, Vision and Daily Practice**

Knowledge of both local languages and English enabled the Jesuits to lay the foundations of the Catholic faith among native populations, structuring catechetical instruction around key elements of Ignatian pedagogy and the *Spiritual Exercises*, including daily collective exercises.<sup>44</sup> In the American Northwest, the first Jesuit residence in Montana provided a model of practices, later implemented in other Rocky Mountains missions. Soon after St. Mary's was founded, De Smet began translating Catholic prayers into the Flatheads language, assisted by Indigenous people familiar with French.<sup>45</sup> Daily group recitations in a circle reinforced learning and memorization of texts, and gradually fostered natives' autonomy. Mengarini himself was astonished that, among the Flatheads, the prayers taught by De Smet in 1840 were still remembered, demonstrating the model's success.<sup>46</sup> When adapted to different local conditions, religious instruction soon assumed a comprehensive educational role.<sup>47</sup>

In each Rocky Mountains residence, the missionary in charge of spiritual affairs celebrated Mass every morning, while instructing the gathered natives, who returned in the evening for prayers and a brief additional lesson.<sup>48</sup> Once the prayers were learned, the missionaries introduced natives to Catholic devotional and liturgical practices, effecting a translation that went beyond language. By drawing on forms, elements, and archetypes familiar to the Flatheads, they employed a mediatory strategy that made the sacred space of the celebrations and the dynamics of Catholic rites intelligible, fostering cultural and ritual hybridisation.<sup>49</sup> A notable example is Gregorio Mengarini, who attempted to recreate elements of the scenography and visual apparatus of the Forty Hours devotion, as he had seen it in the Roman College, carving wood covered with gold leaf and crafting candles from bison fat.<sup>50</sup>

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**44** For a contextual framework: Ferrer, *Indigeni e cristiani?*; Burkhart, "The Little Doctrine"; *Ratio atque Institutio Studiorum SJ*.

**45** McKevitt, "The Art", 55-7; Maldavsky, "The Andes", 52-9.

**46** Palladino, *Indian and White*, 25-7.

**47** McKevitt, "The Art", 49.

**48** *Letter from Michele Accolti to the General Beckx*, 5 May 1854, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. America USA, Prov. Missouri, Mont. Sax, b. 1002, fasc. I, doc. 6; *Estratto di una lettera di Giuseppe Caruana*, 3 April 1866, in AEMSI, serie Manoscritti, nr. 519.

**49** McKevitt, "Northwest Indian Evangelisation", 698.

**50** Mengarini, "The Rocky Mountains", 34.

Aware of the central role of music in indigenous ritual practices, the Jesuits attributed a prominent function to sound in religious celebrations. As already experienced among the Guaraní of Paraguay, similarly in the American Northwest the singing of hymns and the use of liturgical music proved effective in inspiring enthusiasm and participation among the natives, as well as attracting the interest of unconverted groups. Gregorio Mengarini translated some traditional liturgical compositions into Salish language, composed funeral laments and in 1845 established a small musical band of twelve young Flatheads.<sup>51</sup> In this context, music functioned as a link between European popular religious imagination and the sensibility of the Flatheads.<sup>52</sup>

To consolidate catechetical teaching among the youngest, the missionaries introduced recreational activities with prizes, in keeping with Jesuit pedagogical principles, structured as team competitions. These mirrored activities employed in earlier missionary context, such as those of New France, featuring a series of quizzes on religious themes accompanied by gifts offered by the missionaries. The combination of competition and reward also served to engage parents and native chiefs, who encouraged their children's participation.<sup>53</sup>

The experience gained in the Rocky Mountains provided both a model and the most immediate precedent for organizing missionary activity in Alaska from 1886 onward, where, at the Holy Cross and St. Peter Claver school, missionaries offered daily morning lessons in religious doctrine alongside the fundamentals of the English language.<sup>54</sup> In the vast, sparsely populated and particularly hostile territory, which strained the Jesuits' adaptive strategies, catechetical activity, when not conducted within permanent residences, coincided with the long apostolic visits undertaken by the fathers.<sup>55</sup> According to an 1893 report by Pasquale Tosi to the general of the Society of Jesus, the Holy Cross school was progressing to such an extent that it was soon able to admit other young indigenous children from the coastal regions of Alaska.<sup>56</sup>

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**51** Palladino, *Indian and White*, 76.

**52** McKeivitt, "The Art", 59-60.

**53** Deslandres, "New France", 133; McKeivitt, "Northwest Indian Evangelisation", 698.

**54** "Lettera del P. Judge al P. Cataldo", Koziorevsky, 19 giugno 1891, in *Lettere Edificanti*, 1: 68; Judge, *An American Missionary*, 105-8.

**55** Tosi, *La Missione dell'Alaska*, 50-9.

**56** *Letter from Fr. Tosi to the Fr. General*, St. Michael, 17 August 1893, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. Amer. USA, Prov. Oregon., Missio Alaska, b. 1001, fasc. I, doc. 18.

These efforts, however, encountered the limits of linguistic comprehension, as previously noted.<sup>57</sup> A particularly significant example of catechesis among the indigenous peoples of Alaska was that conducted by Giovanni Parodi at St. Joseph residence, as documented in a series of reports sent to the superior general between 1895 and 1896, which provide an example of successful religious instruction programme.<sup>58</sup> This catechetical lesson plan, beginning with the narration of Creation and extending to the coming of Christ and its moral implications for humanity, aimed to make intelligible to the natives, bearers of different cultural and spiritual horizons, the purpose of Christian life and the meaning of life and death.<sup>59</sup>

Beyond catechetical instruction, Jesuit educational activity extended to the regulation of gender roles and the reform of family structures, forming part of a broader project of moral, social, and cultural transformation aimed at integrating Indigenous populations into a Catholic way of life. Health, belief, and authority played a central role in shaping everyday life. In a letter dated 1896, Parodi informed the General of the Society of Jesus about a challenge facing missionary work: the need to limit the influence of shamans or 'Indian doctors'. Because of the authority they enjoyed as interpreters of reality, predictors of the future, and healers, the Jesuit found it difficult to establish European therapeutic practices among the native communities. In this regard, Parodi stated: "Si infirmi convaliscunt arte medica, non multum curant de magicis artibus; sed si Missionarius non potest eos adjuvare, tabescunt superstitionibus die ac nocte".<sup>60</sup>

As early as 1889, three years after the foundation of the Alaska mission, Joseph Tréca identified the role and the ritual practices of shamans as one of the principal obstacles to the Christian evangelisation of the Yukon natives. However, his assessment was marked by a notably severe tone, as he attributed to the shamans nothing more than venial motives and the skills of a quack and a

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**57** *Letter from Judge to the Father General, 1895*, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. Amer. USA, Prov. Oregon, Missio Alaska, b. 1001, f. VIII, doc. 5, p. 1; cf. Judge, *An American Missionary*, 105-8.

**58** Parodi, *Quid Ago inter Indos?*, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. Americana USA, Prov. Oregon., Missio Alaska, b. 1001, fasc. X, docs. 4-6.

**59** Parodi, *Quid Ago inter Indos?*, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. Americana USA, Prov. Oregon., Missio Alaska, b. 1001, fasc. X doc. 4.

**60** Cf. *Letter from Father Parodi to the Fr. General, St. Joseph, 1896*, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. Amer. USA, Prov. Oregon., Missio Alaska, b. 1001, fasc. I, doc. 5.

circus performer.<sup>61</sup> The therapeutic dimension thus assumed a central role in missionary activity, not only as a response to recurrent epidemics but also as a means of countering the traditional healing practices of shamans. Missionary intervention therefore operated simultaneously on the spiritual and material levels, contributing to a redefinition of the very meanings of illness and healing.<sup>62</sup>

Beyond the limited or absent therapeutic efficacy attributed to these practices, the Jesuits identified in the rites of the “medicine men” elements they regarded as superstitious, at times interpreting them as manifestations of diabolical influence, at others as the result of imposture and personal interests, exercised to the detriment of natives, considered naïve and easily impressionable.<sup>63</sup> Because the terminology employed by the missionaries to describe the Alaskan shamans closely resembles that used for indigenous healers in the French colonies of North America, Catherine O’Donnell has drawn parallels between these judgments and the assessments expressed by the most educated French elites towards popular healers in Europe. In this perspective, missionary efforts appear to reflect a broader attempt to reform certain aspects of European culture, through the correction of analogous practices in mission lands.<sup>64</sup>

On the one hand, linguistic practice facilitated the inculturation of missionaries and the evangelisation of the natives, enabling the reception and transmission of Catholic teachings. On the other hand, the abandonment of native languages by Indigenous peoples laid the foundations for the conversion of Indigenous peoples to the Catholic Church, encompassing both the material and spiritual dimensions of native belief systems.

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**61** “Lettera del P. Tréca al Rev. P. Cataldo”, Tunungamute (Capo Vancouver), 2 giugno 1890, in *Lettere Edificanti*, 1: 49.

**62** “Lettera del P. Crispino Rossi al R. P. Provinciale”, Holy Cross, Koserefsky P. O., 16 agosto 1900, in *Lettere Edificanti*, 2: 19-25.

**63** Clark, “Jesuit Missionaries”, 406-7; Ragaru, “Il mio primo viaggio”, 21; Menelao, *Nella Terra delle nevi*, 63-4, 86-7.

**64** O’Donnell, “Jesuits in the North American”, 8. For a reflection on “the outer and inner Indies”, see: Colombo, “Gesuitomania”, 50-1; Proserpi, *Tribunali della coscienza*, 551-99.

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#### 4 **People to Tame. Some Aspects of Indian Schools in the Rocky Mountains and Alaska**

In the long history of Jesuit missionary tradition, the native, far from being a mere recipient of evangelisation or a simple vehicle of Catholic teachings, was an otherness capable of stimulating processes of mediation and adaptation between two distinct cultural models. This dual status, both as an object of evangelisation and acculturation and as an active subject in the dissemination of missionary teachings, is further confirmed by the scholastic experience designed for young indigenous people of the Jesuit residences of the Rocky Mountains and Alaska. The instructional and educational activities drew on the formative experience of the Jesuits themselves, for whom education responded to a principle of the integral perfection of the individual.<sup>65</sup>

Fundamental to the development of educational activity were several women's congregations of active life, Belgian, American and Canadian, engaged in the management of schools and hospitals, often at the urging of the Jesuits themselves or the local American clergy.<sup>66</sup> Although often rooted in training where academic preparation outweighed practical experience of care and formation, which later became central to missionary work, the experience of religious women, particularly the Sisters of Providence and the Sisters of St. Anne of Lachine, in medical assistance proved crucial for managing St. Julian's Hospital at St. Ignatius in Montana, St. Patrick Hospital at Missoula and Holy Cross Hospital in Alaska.<sup>67</sup>

On 5 August 1844, a first group of six Belgian sisters of Notre Dame de Namur arrived at Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River, accompanying a group of Jesuits, among whom were Ravalli, Nobili and Vercruysse, and subsequently settled in Oregon, where they devoted themselves primarily to educational and missionary work. Twenty years later, a small community of the sisters of charity of Providence established the earliest organized Catholic educational initiatives at St. Ignatius Mission, followed in 1884 by a group of Ursuline nuns from Toledo, Ohio, who arrived at the invitation of bishop Jean-Baptiste Brondel.<sup>68</sup> In 1873 the same sisters of Providence, founded by Madame Émilie Gamelin in Montreal as

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**65** Haub, "Education Jesuite", 639-42.

**66** For each female congregation, please refer to the *Dictionary of Institutes of Perfection (DIP)*; McKevitt, *Brokers of Culture*, 14; Butler, *Across God's Frontiers*.

**67** Butler, *Across God's Frontiers*, 32.

**68** Flintham, "Leaves from the Annals", 322-39; Mengarini, "The Rocky Mountains", 77. Schrems, *Uncommon Women*, 5-8. See also: Colombier, *Annales de l'Ordre de Ste-Ursule*, 194; Garceau-Hagen, *Portraits of Women*.

the Daughters of Charity Servants of the Poor (1843), founded one of the most important hospitals at Missoula in Montana and the following year, they obtained the contract to provide care for the poor of Missoula County.<sup>69</sup> With the beginning of missionary activity in Alaska in 1886 and at the insistent request of Jonckau, on 13 March 1888, a first group of sisters of St. Anne of Lachine from Quebec was sent, arriving on 26 June of the same year at St. Michael, in the Norton Sound's Bay. These nuns would remain the only active women's congregation in the region until at least 1905.<sup>70</sup>

The nuns' willingness to aid in dangerous places others avoided underscores the substantial, not merely supplementary, role of their contribution in Catholic missionary history. Within the Jesuit missions, their influence in educational initiatives particularly regarded hygiene and the regulation of girls' behaviour. In his writings, Pasquale Tosi gave special emphasis on body care, which missionaries viewed as unfamiliar to local customs.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, Jesuits and nuns sought to differentiate practical and educational activities according to the gender of the children under their care, in accordance with the principle of Catholic complementarity, unknown to native populations, in which women instead held an active and leading role, even in activities considered physically demanding.<sup>72</sup> Thus, in their writings, the missionaries portrayed native women of the Rocky Mountains as "schiave condannate a faticosi mestieri".<sup>73</sup> While operating among different ethnic societies, both in the Rocky Mountains and in Alaska, religious women and Jesuits identified the 'liberation of women' as one of the goals achieved through their missionary work.<sup>74</sup> They interpreted as a positive outcome of their missionary action the transition of indigenous women to the status of morally protected person, respected by their husbands, according to Catholic values and norms and regarded as bearers of a virtue to be preserved. Missionary writings interpreted the regulation of women's presence in public spaces, the adoption of clothing deemed

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**69** Willms, Savitt, *Sisters' Hospital*, 30-1.

**70** Ferlan, "Frozen Frontiers", 181-3; Menelao, *Nella Terra delle nevi*, 49-51; Barnum, "Le Suore di Sant'Anna", in *Lettere Edificanti*, 2: 19-21; Renner, *Alaskana Catholica*, 261-2.

**71** Tosi, *La Missione dell'Alaska*, 23-4, 48-50.

**72** McKevitt, *Brokers of Culture*, 12, 120-4.

**73** "Missione delle Montagne Rocciose. Alcune notizie generali", in *Lettere Edificanti*, 1: 3; McKevitt, *Brokers of Culture*, 125; Menelao, *Nella Terra delle nevi*, 29.

**74** Extract from a letter from Fr. Caruana to Fr. Provincial of Turin, 3 April 1866, in AEMSI, serie Manoscritti, nr. 519, 12.

decorous, and the display of devotional symbols, such as medals of the Immaculate Virgin, as external signs of a renewed morality and as concrete evidence of the effectiveness of the evangelizing project. This representation of female respectability was accompanied by the idea that Catholic education had strengthened women's ability to resist behaviours considered harmful to their virtue, contributing to the limitation of even free unions. From this perspective, missionaries interpreted the reform of the institution of marriage, particularly the elimination of polygamy in favour of Christian monogamous marriage, especially in the Rocky Mountains regions, as a further and decisive step in the process of Catholic education.<sup>75</sup> While missionaries in Alaska did not have to contend with the issue of polygamy, they nonetheless considered certain female customs in that context to fall outside the Catholic horizon, notably what they perceived as a lack of prudence and reserve in interactions with men.<sup>76</sup>

The European conception of gender roles was also reflected in the organization of school instruction at Jesuits' residences. Regarding practical activities, Jesuits introduced the boys to agriculture, from basic principles to the care of plants and the harvesting of fruits, as well as to carpentry. The girls, on the other hand, were trained by the sisters in domestic work, including food preparation and daily cleaning, as well as in sewing, mending, embroidery, and lacemaking, skills introduced in Alaska by some Flemish nuns. The skills acquired in Indian schools were considered by both sisters and fathers to be valuable not only for strengthening and consolidating the mission as a self-sufficient community, but also for preparing students for integration into civil and 'civilised society', in accordance with Catholic values.<sup>77</sup> Generally, the nuns focused their care exclusively on indigenous school-age girls, except in exceptional or emergency circumstances. As evidenced by a report by Accolti in 1854, due to the lack of male staff and the reluctance to employ secular tutors, the missionaries contemplated assigning the sisters to the education of male children "in separate apartments and up to a certain age".<sup>78</sup>

Missionaries and nuns often encountered resistance from pupils' parents; according to Jesuit writings, this obstacle was overcome whenever the parents themselves saw the positive results of a

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**75** Menelao, *Nella Terra delle nevi*, 28-31.

**76** "Lettera del P. Perron ad un Padre del Collegio di Torino", Nulato, 11 giugno 1899, in *Lettere Edificanti*, 2: 50.

**77** Tosi, *La Missione dell'Alaska*, 48-72; Menelao, *Nella Terra delle nevi*, 113-15.

**78** *Letter from Michele Accolti to the General Beckx*, 5 May 1854, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. Americana USA, Mont. Sax., b. 1002, fasc. I, doc. 6.

Catholic upbringing in the changed behaviour of their children, which underscored the perceived necessity of converting the natives.<sup>79</sup>

Catholic Indian schools were strengthened especially under Giuseppe Cataldo, local superior of the Rocky Mountains Mission from 1877 to 1893, who actively recruited new Jesuits for the Northwest missions.<sup>80</sup> Despite these initiatives, the missions had to adapt to the changing federal educational policies.<sup>81</sup> Oversight by officials from the Bureau of Indian Affairs was ensured through inspectors and officials tasked with supervising school activities, as documented in the missionaries' correspondence.<sup>82</sup> Although the selection of the *Edifying Letters* presented clear examples of success, the results of government inspections were not uniformly positive: an official visiting the missions at Colville and the Sacred Heart in 1889 issued an unfavourable report.<sup>83</sup> However, a second visit by a different inspector contradicted the earlier assessment, ranking the Sacred Heart School as the finest Catholic educational institution examined.<sup>84</sup> Likewise, an excerpt from William Judge's account, published in the *Edifying Letters* and concerning the subsequent Alaskan mission, shows that federal agents considered Jesuits' schools capable of providing a comprehensive education, by combining practical instruction in trades with intellectual training in languages and sciences, alongside constant supervision of indigenous youth.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, precisely because it was provided by a Protestant, this testimony also served, from a Catholic perspective, to demonstrate the greater success of Jesuit evangelisation compared to that of other churches active in Alaska. The tone in which Judge reported Catholic these educational successes once again reflected the intention to uplift Indigenous populations according to Catholic values and to Western ideas of care, hygiene, and productivity.

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**79** Jung, *Jesuit Missions*, 28.

**80** McKeivitt, "The Jump", 430.

**81** For some questions relating to Federal Government funding, see also: Tosi, *Le nostre Scuole Indiane*, in AEMSI, Prov. Torinese, b. Alaska-Idaho, fasc. XXIV, doc. 3. See also McKeivitt, *Brokers of Culture*, 8-9; McKeivitt, "The Jump", 428-30. See also: Prucha, *The Churches*; Fritz, *The Movement for Indian Assimilation*.

**82** For further guidance, cf. Hill, *Guide to Records*, 24-40.

**83** *Letter from Fr. Carlo Torti to Fr. General*, Genoa, 2 June 1889, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. Italiae, Registra, Prov. Taur., b. 1011, fasc. II, doc. 37.

**84** *Letter from Fr. Carlo Torti to Fr. General*, Genoa, 2 June 1889, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. Amer. USA, Prov. Oregon., b. Missio Alaska, b. 1001, fasc. II, doc. 37.

**85** Judge, *An American Missionary*, 72-4; "Terza lettera del P. Judge a suo fratello", San Michele, 3 luglio 1895, in *Lettere Edificanti*, 2: 63-6.

Missionaries and sisters later extended Catholic educational activities, initially aimed at indigenous population, to the children of commercial officials and settlers, in buildings near their communities. They arrived in Alaska following the Klondike gold rush, reportedly impressed by the education imparted by Jesuits and nuns to indigenous children.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, each spring, when the Alaska Commercial Company steamer arrived at St. Michael, the young natives of the residence welcomed the agents with demonstrations of what they had learned at school up to that point.<sup>87</sup> As well as showcasing their academic abilities, such as science, and arithmetic, the program included music, theatrical performances and physical exercises. In this regard, below is an extract from the alleged testimony of one of the officers, once again reported by Judge:<sup>88</sup>

A welcome song by all the children; a little play by the girls [...]; then the boys came in as a company of soldiers with wooden guns and an American flag. After drilling for a few minutes, they sang three songs and six of them spoke pieces. Then they marched out and the girls marched in and performed the calisthenic exercises; after which they all sang the *Star-Spangled Banner*.

Within the missionary narrative, the indigenous peoples of the North-West and Alaska were portrayed as “poverelli famelici”, emerging from paganism and polygamy only with the arrival of the first Jesuits, gradually adopting a sedentary lifestyle, a moderate life guided by Christian values, and the benefits of formal schooling.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, from the earlier excerpt, it is clear that evangelisation served as a bridge for integrating indigenous peoples into American culture.

Within the horizon of edifying models, the figure of Louise Siuwheem (1800-1853), daughter and granddaughter of Coeur d’Alene chiefs, is particularly prominent. Also known as the ‘Apostle of the Coeur d’Alene’, Louise was among the first women in her community to be baptised by Pierre-Jean De Smet in 1842.<sup>90</sup> Not only does her story testify to the early processes of Christianisation among the natives

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**86** Menelao, *Nella terra delle nevi*, 71-9.

**87** Judge, *An American Missionary*, 72-3; Tosi, *La Missione dell’Alaska*, 28.

**88** Judge, *An American Missionary*, 73.

**89** Menelao, *Nella Terra delle nevi*, 27. Cf. Tosi, *La Missione dell’Alaska*, 69-70.

**90** De Smet, *Story of Louise Sighouin* (manuscript), in KADOC-KU, Conglomeraatsarchief met betrekking tot Pieter Jan De Smet S.J. en de Noord-Amerikaanse jezüetenmissies (1811-2007), Archive of the Society of Jesus in Flanders, Prov. Belgica Septentrionalis, b. Desmetiana, fasc. 16123, doc. 1. Cf. also Turner, *Wise Women*.

of Idaho but also highlights the active role of natives in translating and adapting the Christian message within their own community. Indeed, Louise Siuwheem, mother and wife, distinguished herself through her assistance to the needy and orphans of the mission, becoming a point of connection between new religious practices and pre-existing cultural traditions. This connection was reinforced by the oral tradition of the Coeur d'Alene, according to which Chief Circling Raven, Louise's ancestor, allegedly had a vision of "men wearing Black Robes who bid his work and will teach the Coeur d'Alene".<sup>91</sup>

As late as 1860, the French journal *Collection de Précis Historiques littéraires et scientifiques*, directed by the Belgian Jesuit Edward Terwecoren, reported on the death of the woman, "who died in 1852 in the odour of sanctity".<sup>92</sup> The account of her conversion and pious death reflected, on the one hand, a 'desire for holiness' within the missionary context and on the other, it could be interpreted by contemporary readers as an evidence of Jesuit missionary activity in one of the communities considered most resistant to evangelisation in the Rocky Mountains.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, behind the edifying narrative centred on Louise's life, the considerable difficulties faced by missionaries among the Coeur D'Alene in the early years of evangelisation become apparent. Emblematic in this respect are the epithets attributed to her: "Lys entre les épines", "Oasis au milieu de l'aridité stérile", "Lumière au milieu des ténèbres de la mort", which underscore her dual exceptionalism: as an indigenous convert and as an exemplary Christian.<sup>94</sup> Yet, the emphasis on sanctity and exemplary behaviour may equally reflect the author's rhetorical aim of presenting an idealised model of missionary life rather than providing objective proof. In this sense, the source operates both as a historical record and as a tool to shape audience perception and reinforce the legitimacy of Jesuit missions.

Also noteworthy is the paradigmatic story of little Marie Kolinzutén, likely belonging to the Flatheads community, who was brought to Rome by the Ursulines of the American Western Province to the Mother House and the Holy See, following the Congregation's accession to the Roman Union in 1900.<sup>95</sup> This episode aimed to strengthen the ties between the American missions and the Roman

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**91** New, *Cooperation in the Wilds*, 29.

**92** "Louise Sighouin", 274. Sources differ on Louise's date of death (1852 vs. 1853).

**93** Cummings, *A Saint of Our Own*.

**94** "Louise Sighouin", 274-5.

**95** "A Bright Page of a Sweet Life", 6.

center, ensuring continuity and the recruitment of new personnel for those in the United States. The episode also had a clear apologetic dimension: the figure of the young Marie Kolinzuten, also known as Mary Stuart, not only embodied the effectiveness of Catholic evangelisation but was also presented as a paradigm of religious fidelity in an explicitly anti-Protestant framework. Her story, therefore, confirmed how the educational and religious formation of indigenous children became a vehicle for narratives and symbolic representations of spiritual victory and institutional cohesion. The traditional framework, which sees individual experiences as evidence of missionary progress, also applies to conversions at the point of death of adults and young natives.<sup>96</sup>

After an initial period of difficulty for missionary work in the Rocky Mountains around the 1850s, evidenced by the closure of the St Mary's Mission in 1850 and by the difficulties in administering the St Paul Mission in 1858, Indian missions in the region experienced a slight decline towards the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>97</sup> In 1898, Sasia reported the closure of the St. Peter residence in Montana due to a lack of people to assist and began procedures to sell the land. As early as 1897, he had informed the general of the Society of Jesus that the indigenous population of the Rocky Mountains was steadily decreasing, making it likely that missionary activity would focus almost exclusively on the American population within twenty-five to thirty years.<sup>98</sup> Sasia recognised that, while the advance of American settlers was inevitable, missionary activity would continue to serve both Indigenous populations and the newcomers, thereby maintaining the Jesuit presence in the Rocky Mountains.<sup>99</sup> Meanwhile, the Alaska mission represented a new area of development for Jesuit Catholic efforts. This mission was under the administration of the Province of Turin until 1910, the year in which, the control of the missions in the Rocky Mountains and southern Alaska was definitively transferred to

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**96** Barnum, "Le Suore di Sant'Anna", in *Lettere Edificanti*, 2: 19-27.

**97** *Letter from Michele Accolti to the General Beckx*, 5 May 1854, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. Amer. USA, Mont. Sax., b. 1002, fasc. I, doc. 5; Jesuit Archives & Research Center (JARC), Roll 1 St. Mary in Montana, fasc. 2 Property Deeds and Sale; *Lettera di p. Congiato a p. Beckx*, Oregon City, 10 December 1858, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. Amer. USA, Prov. Missouri, Mont. Sax., b. 1002, fasc. III, doc. 1.

**98** *Letter from Fr. Sasia to the General*, Turin, 28 September 1897, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. Italiae, Prov. Taur., b. 1001, fasc. IV, doc. 115.

**99** "Unum facere et alterum non omittere", cf. *Letter of Fr. Sasia to Fr. General*, 28 September 1897, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Ass. Italiae, Prov. Taur., b.1, doc. 115.

the new-established Province of California.<sup>100</sup> As for northern Alaska, the territory was initially assigned to the Canadian Province (1907); however, from 1912 onwards, its incorporation into the Province of California was confirmed.<sup>101</sup>

## 5 Final Remarks

In analysing certain aspects of Jesuit missionary activity in the Rocky Mountains and Alaska, this study situates these experiences within the renewed missionary impulse of the nineteenth century, shaped both by the revitalising action of General Jan Roothaan and by the expectations of the American bishops of the Oregon district. Focusing on Italian Jesuits, particularly from the Province of Turin, the mission territories of the U.S. Northwest emerge as spaces of survival and reorganisation for the Society of Jesus following the European expulsions (1848), illustrating the composite nature of the initial missionary groups. At the same time, the Province of Turin was active in the Rocky Mountains, California and Alaska. In California, Fr. Congiato founded the College of Santa Clara (1851), and missionaries frequently moved between different fields, transferring models and experiences.

Drawing on earlier missionary models and emerging forms of inculturation, Jesuit *accommodatio* is understood here, also in light of Markus's observations, not as a retrospective classificatory framework, capable of unifying heterogeneous phenomena within a coherent interpretative scheme, but as a dynamic and historically situated practice, shaped by ongoing negotiations between local cultures and the missionary project.<sup>102</sup> However, adaptation did not imply syncretism or tolerance, but remained oriented toward the conversion of Indigenous peoples.<sup>103</sup>

In the Rocky Mountains and Alaska, educational activities led by Jesuits and female congregations show that missions functioned not only as sites of conversion, but also as spaces of mediation, where indigenous agency was negotiated and later reframed in missionary

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**100** *Catalogus Provinciae Californiae*, 1910, 44-5.

**101** *Catalogus Provinciae Canadensis*, 1908, 70; Menelao, *Nella Terra delle nevi*, 50-3; *Lettere Edificanti*, 2: 5. See also ARSI, *Collezione Acquaderni*, 1940, voll. 3 and 10. The collection also includes photos Fr. Tosi (voll. 3, 11) and Fr. Chiavassa in Inuit dress, as well as several photographs of pupils from the missions (voll. 10, 38).

**102** On the distinction between *accommodatio* and inculturation as categories of analysis, cf. Friedrich, "Accommodation", 146-70.

**103** Colombo, "Gesuitomania", 51; Romanato, *Gesuiti, Guarani*, 19.

narratives. Moreover, the prominent role of women, not only in healthcare but also in missionary schooling, invites further research into their substantial, not merely subsidiary, contribution. It also opens the possibility of reflecting on the spaces of negotiation that existed between the sisters and the Jesuit fathers at the administrative level.

Finally, one might explore the relationship between Catholic schools and federal government policies within the spaces and time frame considered in this paper. In territories where control was weak, government authorities may have relied on religious institutions to extend their influence and promote cultural assimilation. As federal education policies gradually took hold, potential tensions could have emerged between the government and the Jesuits' aims to Catholicize education, given that they viewed the advance of American settlers as a serious obstacle to consolidating Catholicism among Indigenous peoples.

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# Shifting Identities: Alaskan Creoles and the Russian Orthodox Church in Post-Purchase Alaska

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**Abstract** This article examines the relations between the Creole community and the Russian Orthodox Church after the 1867 transfer of Alaska to the United States, analyzing how Creole identity and 'Russianness' were reconfigured when imperial power receded, and American governance and missions expanded. Drawing on Homi Bhabha's concept of mimicry, the study explores the Russian Church's periodicals and the archival materials, showing how Creole mimicry redirected the group away from the ROC toward American institutions, producing growing mutual indifference and reshaping Orthodox Alaska's social and religious ecology.

**Keywords** Alaska. Creole. Russian Orthodox Church. Mimicry. Indigenous population.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Theoretical Premises. – 3 The Birth of the Colonial Estate and Its Enshrined Ambiguity. – 4 The Pre-1867 Encounters with ROC: Codifying the Creole Class. – 5 After the 1867 Sale. – 6 The Immediate Reproachment. – 7 The Native 'Rediscovery' of Orthodoxy. – 8 Preserving Distinctiveness. – 9 Americanization and Moral Decay. – 10 Creole Priests. – 11 Conclusion.



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And what's 'Russian' about them anyway?  
It is easier for God to create new human beings than  
to improve these ones.<sup>1</sup>

## 1 Introduction

The 1867 sale of Alaska to the United States undeniably marked a transformative event for countless individuals across both continents, sparking a quest for new solutions to the resulting turmoil, in both material and spiritual terms. Drawing on postcolonial theory, especially Homi Bhabha's concept of mimicry, this article explores the complex relationship between the Creole community and the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in Alaska following the sale of Alaska to the United States. The analysis is based primarily on archival materials from the Alaska Russian Church Archives (ARCA) and published clerical accounts, with the empirical focus falling largely on Sitka and with Creole perspectives often inferred indirectly from ecclesiastical records where direct testimony is limited.

In Alaska, the word 'Creole' referred to the offspring of Russian and Indigenous<sup>2</sup> individuals, akin to the *métis*/*mestizo* of the Spanish colonies, with the term being first used in the Alaskan context in 1805.<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting that Alaskan Natives could hardly be considered a monolithic group. The Tlingit, for instance, were a significant part of the local Orthodox parish, residing in the vicinity of Sitka. Other groups included the Aleuts (Unangan) from the Aleutian Islands and the Eskimo (Inuit-Yupik), who had limited contact with Russian missionaries in the northern regions due to logistical challenges. The Athabaskan peoples, on the other hand, were not extensively involved, and the ROC's presence in the interior of Alaska was mostly constrained to the Dena'ina.<sup>4</sup> Yet the term 'Creole' was applied

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The text largely draws on the Author's master's thesis titled *Identity Construction of the Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska (1867-1917)*.

**1** Kamenskii, *Report on the State of the Sitka Diocese*, 1895-98, in ARCA, D 335, reel 220, 1.

**2** In this article, the terms 'Indigenous' and 'native' are used interchangeably as synonyms. The capitalization of 'Indigenous' aligns with the standards of specialized organizations, such as the Arctic Council. This choice is meant to highlight political and historical communities, rather than merely identifying individuals from a specific location.

**3** Vinkovetsky, *Russian America*, 40; Lydia Black, however, asserts the term's later appearance in the Church records of the Novo-Arkhangel'sk (Sitka) parish in 1816. Black, *Russians in Alaska, 1732-1867*, 215.

**4** Znamenski, *Shamanism and Christianity*.

regardless of the Indigenous parents' belonging to one or another ethnolinguistic community.<sup>5</sup>

Under the Russian rule, Creoles occupied a distinct position, with specific privileges and responsibilities. However, after the territory was sold, they faced diminished socioeconomic position and legal ambiguity under the new American system, which, together with the novel necessities of the Russian Church, could not help but profoundly affect their relations.

## 2 Theoretical Premises

Postcolonial literature has suggested new ways of examining the agents of colonial processes, including those viewing the construction of their identities. Although this paper is mainly concerned with the evolving relations between the Creole community and ROC after the departure of the Imperial forces, traces of the colonial period remained, especially given the Diocese's persistent formal subordination to the Imperial institutions.<sup>6</sup> In this regard, Homi Bhabha's lens sheds new light on the interpretation of the dynamics between the two after 1867.

Bhabha delves into the notion of mimicry as a colonial strategy of control, encouraging cultural adaptation while deliberately preventing its full realization, with the colonized remaining "almost the same, but not quite".<sup>7</sup> The process is marked by ambivalence, as the appropriation of the behaviors, customs, and other aspects of the dominant culture is strategically limited within the authoritative discourse, despite the strong aspirations of the colonized to reinvent itself to become one with the dominant power. Referring to Lacan, Bhabha defines mimicry as merely camouflage, while "the desire to emerge as 'authentic'" through this process becomes "the final irony of partial representation".<sup>8</sup>

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**5** Smith-Peter offers a comprehensive analysis of the ethnic makeup of the early Creole mothers and their status within native society. Smith-Peter, "Creating a Creole Estate", 365.

**6** During the historical period in question, the Holy Synod held the supreme command. Following the abolition of the Patriarchate by Peter I in 1720, this body assumed responsibility for all Church matters. The tsar retained oversight of the institution through the lay Over-Procurator, who managed its operational functions, transforming the Church into a de facto ministry. This was reflected in the missionization efforts, and "the connection between Church and state has been so strong that it is almost impossible to separate the [two] elements". Neill, Chadwick, *A History of Christian Missions*, 182.

**7** Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man", 127.

**8** Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man", 129.

A colonial subject's cultural rapprochement is restricted by its threatening nature. Colonial authority relies on maintaining a clear distinction between the ruler and the ruled, as a closer resemblance to the colonial power's image would disrupt the hierarchy. The 'normative knowledges' of a colonizer's noble mission to educate the subjects are 'deauthorized' when mastered by the colonized to the point of appearing artificial, with this authority exposed as merely performative. Therefore, the mimicry represents a compromise "at the crossroads of what is known and permissible and that which though known must be kept concealed".<sup>9</sup> The fixed in-betweenness manages the contradiction between the colonial power's aim to produce a colonial subject similar enough to govern yet different enough to dominate.

Bhabha highlights the dilemma for the colonial agents of "mixed race who taken all round resemble white men but who betray their colored descent by some striking feature or other and on that account are excluded from society and enjoy none of the privileges".<sup>10</sup> Alaska Creoles' ambivalent position after the sale of the territory to the United States would place them under this very quandary.

### 3 The Birth of the Colonial Estate and Its Enshrined Ambiguity

The 1741 expedition led by Vitus Bering (1681-1741) and Aleksei Chirikov (1703-1748) to the coast of Southeast Alaska<sup>11</sup> marked the first documented Russian encounters with the local Indigenous population. Crew members formed alliances with native women, a practice perpetuated by the *promyshlenniki*,<sup>12</sup> who arrived in the subsequent years. However, these alliances inevitably left behind the breathing and walking traces designated as Creoles.

Creoles came to constitute a distinct colonial class absent in mainland Russia,<sup>13</sup> with their status being hereditary and passed

<sup>9</sup> Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man", 130.

<sup>10</sup> Freud, *The Unconscious* quoted in Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 127.

<sup>11</sup> Grinev, Bland, Solovjova, *The Tlingit Indians in Russian America*, 93.

<sup>12</sup> *Promyshlenniki* (plural) were the Russian fur traders and merchants, primarily of Indigenous Siberian descent, who usually banded in groups upon the arrival to Alaska. On the homelands and traditions of Russian pioneers in Alaska, the early *promyshlenniki*, see Black, "Promyshlenniki - Who Were They?".

<sup>13</sup> The absence of a Creole estate in Siberia was due to the lack of necessity to terminologically distinguish the mixed population, who possessed sufficient skills in hunting local fur-bearers and were independent from the natives. Schweitzer, Vakhtin, Golovko, "The Difficulty of Being Oneself"; Schweitzer, Golovko, Vakhtin, "Mixed Communities in the Russian North"; Znamenski, *Shamanism and Christianity*.

down primarily through the male line. Although they were similar to the *meshchane* (burgher, plural), Creoles enjoyed several special privileges, such as exemption from taxation and state or military service. A by-product of the private connections between Russians and local tribes, Creoles addressed the government's persistent failure to recruit enough men for long-term service and the disruptive effects of insubordination and misconduct among most Russian employees.<sup>14</sup> Their figures emerged as essential for the operations of the Russian American Company (RAC), a joint-stock corporation, licensed in 1799 by Paul I of Russia (1796-1801) and endowed with a monopoly through charters granted for 20-year periods, specifically in 1799, 1821, and 1844. Operating under the aegis of the Russian government, RAC exercised authority over all Russian colonies in the New World.<sup>15</sup> This would underline the Creoles' image as one of the key elements in sustaining its commercial endeavors in Alaska.

Creoles acted as vital intermediaries between their Indigenous and Russian communities, as well as a crucial source of intelligence, especially important amid heightened concerns following the 1802 Tlingit attack on Fort St. Michael, the first Russian settlement on Sitka Island.<sup>16</sup> Through their blood ties to the natives, they established connections that bolstered the Company's influence over local tribes, which was essential for maintaining stable trade relations. Despite instances of escape to the Indigenous relatives, the mixed marriages integrated the resulting families into the societal structure of the Russian *promyshlenniki*. This integration, in turn, included their conversion to Orthodoxy, with fathers baptizing their children and providing them with the relevant religious education.

The instruction of offspring from non-affluent families, incapable of providing high-level education, was funded by the RAC. These children either attended local schools or were sent to institutions in Russia to study navigation, medicine, mechanics, shipbuilding, or receive religious training. However, the Company's expenses had to be paid off, and upon graduation, Creoles were required to commit to a stay of at least ten years, during which they would serve the local residents for a suitable salary and living allowance provided by the Company.<sup>17</sup> Although entitled to leave the colony for Russia after fulfilling their contracts, most Creoles, either owing debts to the RAC or bound to Alaskan territory by family ties, chose to remain. This pattern would align perfectly with the government's

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**14** Oswalt, *Kolmakovskiy Redoubt*, 36.

**15** Grinëv, "Natives and Creoles of Alaska", 332.

**16** Vinkovetsky, *Russian America*, 81-3.

**17** "Ukaz on the Renewal". All translations from Russian are by the Author unless otherwise indicated.

intention of cultivating a segment of permanent, loyal, Russian-in-culture residents.<sup>18</sup>

Creoles occupied lower management offices, assuming the duties of the original Russian traders, ship masters, and clerks, and occasionally advancing to prominent positions. Meanwhile, they should not have interfered with the natives' activities, specifically sea otter procurement, as the latter were uniquely skilled in it, and kept aside from the Indigenous community. The natives, in turn, were deemed unnecessary to educate, since their hunting skills were the only expertise required to meet the RAC's objectives, which concluded the establishment of a strict labor separation between the two communities.<sup>19</sup>

Exposed to Russian culture through their living arrangements, while fluent in the languages of their Indigenous relatives and still linked to their matrikin, Creoles were devised to embody the traits of both groups, yet not fully belonging to either. Lydia Black characterized them as "the social class deliberately created in order to have a bicultural stratum, members of which would be loyal to their native land, Alaska, and to the Russian cultural heritage brought to Alaska by an ancestor or ancestress".<sup>20</sup> Notwithstanding the recurrent cases of intermarriages with Indigenous people, the separation in labor and residence often fostered a sense of exceptionalism among Creoles. In the 1860s, when the Company's management encouraged them to hunt to compensate for the shrinking Indigenous population, they would resent: "the Creole, feeling European blood in himself, considers himself superior to the Aleut and does not want to live or work alongside him".<sup>21</sup> Thus, Creoles found themselves caught between the Russian and Indigenous communities, never fully accepted by either.

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**18** Vinkovetsky, *Russian America*, 146-7.

**19** Smith-Peter, "Creating a Creole Estate", 446.

**20** Black, *Russians in Alaska, 1732-1867*, XV.

**21** *Doklad Komiteta ob ustroistve*, 160.

#### 4 The Pre-1867 Encounters with ROC: Codifying the Creole Class

Until the adoption of the second charter in 1821, the Company had the opportunity to extensively exploit the natives. However, the revised provisions limited its discretion by clearly defining the status of various groups of Alaskan residents, including the introduction of the Creole class. This initiated a shift from spontaneous and unsystematic to purposive imposition of Russian culture on the offspring of mixed unions, implying an intensification of Orthodox missionization intended to cement their distinction from the Indigenous ancestry. In response to claims about Veniaminov's<sup>22</sup> focus on spreading religion among the natives, Murray suggests that Veniaminov's educational efforts in the school supported by the Russian American Company were intended to train Creole students for employment with the Company and to enhance Russian language proficiency among prospective church workers.<sup>23</sup> Before switching to the vigorous Christianization of natives, the state's demand for a base of permanent Russian-cultured citizens should have been met.

However special the Creole category was in terms of their official status, they were often addressed in a rather derogatory manner by the Russian clergy, even before the territory was sold. Creoles were portrayed as more akin to the natives than to Russians: "in these half-Aleuts, the mother's character almost always prevails and sometimes even completely suppresses the father's character".<sup>24</sup> Despite his commitment to their education, Veniaminov harbored strong doubts about the Creoles' intellectual capabilities and their aptitude for absorbing information, claiming that

where intelligence and reason are required – perhaps one in fifty is suitable, and even then only after four or five generations. Their character (though it has its good sides) is far from corresponding to their higher calling. They seem to want to rise in rank primarily

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**22** Bishop Innokentii (Ivan) Veniaminov (1797-1879) was a key figure shaping the ROC's missionization endeavors in mid-nineteenth century Alaska. Drawing from his experience of serving among the Siberian Indigenous people and the Il'minskii System employed in mainland Russia, he introduced methods, which are believed to have ensured the success of the ROC's Christianization efforts in Alaska. Formulated by Nikolai Il'minskii (1822-1892) and his associates at the Kazan Theological Academy, the approach embraced the lower expectations and patience required by the constraints of the local environment, emphasizing vernacular worship and the recruitment of Indigenous teachers. After decades of service in Alaska and the Russian Far East, Veniaminov became Metropolitan of Moscow and Kolomna to be later canonized as a saint in 1977 by the Orthodox Church in America. Nordlander, "Innokentii Veniaminov".

**23** Murray, "Together and Apart", 100.

**24** Veniaminov, *Zapiski ob ostrovakh Unalashkinskogo otdela*, 2: 20.

in order to have the opportunity to live more freely. And at the same time, they do not value their advancement.<sup>25</sup>

Veniaminov was equally skeptical about their ability to serve as clergy. Creoles' upward mobility in the religious field was highly limited, and most held lower positions in the ecclesiastical hierarchy.<sup>26</sup> Even the brightest figures in the pre-1867 history of ROC were not immune to the Russian-born clergy's prejudice. Jacob Netsvetov (1802-1864), a Creole missionary who served in the same years as Veniaminov and later became a symbol of Orthodox Alaska, its Enlightener, canonized by the OCA in 1994, stressed the challenges he encountered in his work among the natives due to his mixed heritage, namely "tacit restrictions, heavy responsibility, conflicting loyalties, frustrated ambitions, and chronic self-doubt".<sup>27</sup> However, his very experience underscores the grounds for Veniaminov's concerns, and, faced with the need to maintain subsistence practices, Netsvetov would be observed permitting the omission of the rite during Lent. Thus, by employing more Creoles, the ROC risked inadvertently transforming their deep understanding of Indigenous lifestyles into a means of indigenizing the official Orthodox culture.

Veniaminov often provided positive evaluations of Creole characteristics. Yet these were not performed in isolation but were framed through comparisons among different Creole groups, particularly those with Indigenous ancestry linked to various tribes, thereby paralleling the language used to describe these tribes separately. This categorization was based on the extent of the groups' submissiveness, with the Aleuts, for instance, representing "exemplary Christians" for their simplicity, patience, nonmaterialism, and piety as compared to the Tlingits or Haida.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, the priest noted that "out of ten Creoles - especially those of Kolosh origin - probably four will turn out to be very respectable people; whereas among Creoles of other origins, it is unlikely that even among twenty-one could find that many respectable individuals",<sup>29</sup> which summarized the pre-1867 clergy's attitude to this group.

**25** Veniaminov, *Zapiski ob ostrovakh Unalashkinskogo otdela*, 1: 190-1.

**26** For this reason, despite a positive record of his previous efforts, Creole Shishkin's candidacy for the vacant position of the Nushagak missionary was rejected. Barsukov, *Pis'ma Innokentiya, mitropolita Moskovskogo*, 1: 190; Grinev, "Social Mobility of the Creoles", 26.

**27** Easley, "Creole Policy and Practice", 64.

**28** Vinkovetsky, *Russian America*, 169.

**29** The Tlingit people were referred to by the Russians as Kolosh. Veniaminov, *Zapiski ob ostrovakh Unalashkinskogo otdela*, 3: 119.

## 5 After the 1867 Sale

The sale of Alaska brought about drastic changes in the socioeconomic status of Creoles. No longer did they represent a privileged class with secure living conditions, such as the previously mentioned educational funding and subsequent guaranteed employment at the RAC. With the Company's departure, these individuals were left without a source of income, forced to resort to petty crimes, prostitution,<sup>30</sup> occasional odd jobs, or meagre wages for serving American newcomers. Many relied on US government rations<sup>31</sup> or pensions, if they were fortunate enough to obtain them.<sup>32</sup> Thus, Creoles found themselves subject to a miserable existence in economic terms, occupying an ambiguous position in the new social hierarchy.

The Creoles' diminished status was exacerbated by the confusion surrounding their legal definition. Under the U.S. system, which primarily categorized individuals as either 'white' or 'colored' and either discouraged or outright forbade interracial unions, there was no conceptual framework for such a group of people.<sup>33</sup> The idea of mixed marriages stirred anxieties in both public and scientific circles due to speculations about potential degenerating effects. Beginning with William H. Dall's influential *Alaska and Its Resources of 1870*,<sup>34</sup> the term 'half-breeds' became a persistent label in literature and public discourse, shaping the views of both military and civilian leaders. These uncertainties were reflected in the emergence of the citizenship issue. The 1867 Treaty entitled the Russian residents of Alaska to enjoy all the rights, advantages, and immunities of citizens of the United States, except for "uncivilized native tribes".<sup>35</sup> The latter were to be governed by laws and regulations that the United States may further adopt regarding the local aboriginal tribes (Article 3). Yet the document contained no clear regulations governing the Creole population, thereby creating unofficial criteria

**30** Most Americans who moved to Alaska were single men, which created a demand for women. Russian and Creole women were more accessible than natives due to their cultural proximity. An 1870 Sitka census recorded 35 prostitutes within a Russian and Creole population of 296, yet this might appear inaccurate, as not differentiating those living in unsanctified union with the American settlers. Lain, "The Decline of Russian America's Colonial Society", 150.

**31** With the municipal government unable to provide aid, the army distributed rations to one-third of Sitka's residents for nearly four years. When this support ceased, several Sitka Creoles petitioned the tsar for relocation to Russia, but their appeal was ignored. Lain, "The Decline of Russian America's Colonial Society", 151.

**32** Fr. Sebastian Dabovich lists Creoles who previously worked for the RAC and were left without a pension. Dabovich, "Alaska".

**33** Luehrmann, *Alutiiq Villages*, 3.

**34** Dall, *Alaska and Its Resources*, 12.

**35** "Treaty Concerning the Cession".

such as income, education, and moral character. Amid the general confusion following “the abandonment by Russians”, those who remained in Alaska did not occupy high positions in the colonial socioeconomic hierarchy and were largely unproficient in English. In the hierarchy established by British fur trader Emil Teichmann during his 1868 visit to Alaska,<sup>36</sup> at the top were a small group of respectable Americans, followed by traders, saloon keepers, and spirit dealers. The Creoles, in turn, were placed in the third class and lower (with only the natives below them), while a select few respectable “white” Russians were elevated to the second class. They were mostly viewed as “superstitious, filthy, drink-addicted, lazy, stupid, immoral, and generally unfit for United States citizenship”.<sup>37</sup> Indolent and idle, Creoles “lost all ambition”.<sup>38</sup> The misconduct of the low-class Americans stationed on the territory, bored in anticipation of combating the natives’ unrest, only compounded the humiliation emanating from the forfeiture of their “white” status.

The displayed prejudice exacerbated the existing tensions between the Creoles and the natives, as the former attempted to downplay their origins and distance themselves from the ‘savage’ facet of their ancestry,<sup>39</sup> both rhetorically and practically. A notable example is Sergei (George) Kostrometinov/ff, who, despite maintaining close ties with the ROC and becoming ordained, sought to erase his Indigenous heritage from public discourse. In this endeavor, Kostrometinov/ff was quite successful: the American press portrayed him as a “pretty thoroughly Americanized” gentleman.<sup>40</sup> This determination to associate oneself with a uniquely white origin would be passed on to further Creole generations.

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**36** Teichmann, *A Journey to Alaska*, 188.

**37** Lain, “The Decline of Russian America’s Colonial Society”, 148.

**38** Bailey, *Report Upon Alaska and Its People*, 24.

**39** Distancing occurred also in tangible terms. According to Lieutenant Huggins, stationed on Kodiak and Afognak from 1868 to 1870 during the military rule in Alaska, there was almost no interaction between the two communities despite their proximity. Huggins et al., *Kodiak and Afognak Life*, 9.

**40** Also, Elmer E. Montague, a then son of an American soldier dispatched in Sitka, recalled his childhood referring to Sergei Kostrometinov as white. Allan, *As the Old Flag*, 23.

## 6 The Immediate Reapproachment

The transfer of the territory could not but modify the relations between the Creole community and the Orthodox Church. The 1867 Treaty permitted the ROC to retain its land and maintain freedom of practice for its followers. Although the Orthodox Church in Alaska remained administratively subordinate to the Church in continental Russia and continued to receive financial support from it, this assistance was strictly limited, amounting to nearly \$60,000 annually to churches and schools.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, the RAC's dissolution entailed not only the sale of its property and the dismissal of surplus personnel, but also the termination of the unwavering backing of the ROC's operation. In the context of the US open religious market, the removal of the monopoly on proselytizing led to a sharp increase in competition among missions.

The main competitor was the Presbyterians, who focused their activities on Sitka and the surrounding area. The efforts of Sheldon Jackson (1834-1909), arguably the most influential Presbyterian figure in Alaska, would be described as possessing "a personality and philosophy that matched those of John Calvin himself", despising sin and remaining always resolute in his endeavors. Serving first as a missionary among native peoples in the West, he would eventually lead the Rocky Mountain District of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions and then expand his outreach to Alaska in 1877.<sup>42</sup> In the meantime, Jackson did not hesitate to leverage his extensive connections to federal high officials to advance his objectives. Among them were William Cleveland, a Presbyterian minister and President Grover Cleveland's brother, as well as John Eaton, Commissioner of Education and a devout Presbyterian. Following the enactment of the Organic Act of 1884,<sup>43</sup> these links appeared instrumental in securing Jackson's appointment as General Agent of Education in the Alaska Territory from 1885 to 1906.<sup>44</sup> At approximately the same time, Congress began to allocate funds for native education in Alaska, with Jackson coordinating the Moravian, Methodist, and Congregational high commands.<sup>45</sup> The endeavors would achieve their goal in the

<sup>41</sup> Kostrometinoff, *Scrapbook of George S. Kostrometinoff, 1879-1908*, in Alaska State Library (ASL), MS 4-6-6.

<sup>42</sup> Haycox, *Alaska Anthology*, 81-4.

<sup>43</sup> The Organic Act of 1884 established a form of civilian government, providing a governor, court officials, and General Agent of Education, appointed by the President and confirmed by Senate. The laws of Oregon applied insofar as they did not conflict with federal law, while reserving the natives' rights to their land, pending final disposition of land claims by Congress. Haycox, *Alaska Anthology*, xxii.

<sup>44</sup> Erickson and Brooks, *The Russian Orthodox Church*, 362.

<sup>45</sup> Haycox, *Alaska Anthology*, 146.

short term, and natives' interest in Orthodoxy declined dramatically. Thus, for instance, according to the Confessional Record of the Holy Trinity Church in Sitka for the year 1867, confession and communion were administered to only 60% of the approximately 500 baptized Tlingit, while Christian burials and church weddings were rarely performed that year, and most godparents remained Creoles.<sup>46</sup> In this regard, the latter emerged as a crucial element of the ROC's base for survival under new social-political conditions.

The ROC clergy's initial strategy would entail playing the racially divisive card and extensively favoring the Creole community. This stance starkly contrasted with the new dominant power's universally pejorative outlook on both Indigenous and Creole groups as nearly indistinguishable, reflecting the legislative ambiguity surrounding Creole identity. The ROC's attitude would manifest itself during the so-called '1879 Indian threat', a period of unrest that followed the American army's withdrawal, leaving a law enforcement vacuum and sparking fear among Sitka residents of a potential natives' attack. As an advocate for Creoles' interests, Fr. Nikolai Mitropol'skii, a priest in Sitka from 1875 to 1885 and a brother of Bishop Ioann Mitropol'skii (1870-77), played a pivotal role in shaping the rhetoric surrounding it.<sup>47</sup> The clergyman launched a broad campaign criticizing the behavior of the Indigenous people, both in public discourse and by submitting petitions to the government, under the threat of the Church's property being violated.<sup>48</sup> Natives' vandalism of St. Michael's Cathedral, according to the priest, extended to the "Russian" residents' belongings and posed a danger to their very lives. In his report, he requested a "guarantee against natives' abuses" and "more reliable protection and guard",<sup>49</sup> which he promised to substantiate, if needed, by the signatures of Sitka's Russian inhabitants. Later that same year, Fr. Mitropol'skii became the voice of his Creole parish, conveying their petition regarding the 1879 proceedings in a letter to the Ecclesiastical Administration. The plea to support them and intercede to ensure the safety of the parishioners constitutes the pinnacle in the post-sale rapprochement of the clergy with the "Russians" against both the "uncivilized natives" and the American

<sup>46</sup> Kan, *Memory Eternal*, 168.

<sup>47</sup> While his approach to natives and Creoles generally conformed to prevailing attitudes, personal factors also influenced Fr. Mitropol'skii's perspective. Married to the daughter of Andrew Kashevarov/ff, he had been involved in the social life of local "Russians" since his arrival in Sitka in 1875, extensively engaging with American residents and visitors, with his attitude towards the Indigenous reflecting "the fears prevalent among both the 'Russian' and the 'American' segments of Sitka's population". Kan, *Memory Eternal*, 196.

<sup>48</sup> "Iz istorii pravoslavnoi tserkvi".

<sup>49</sup> "Iz istorii pravoslavnoi tserkvi", 189.

forces deployed in the area but inactive in maintaining peace and order.<sup>50</sup> The wording demonstrates the unwavering support of the ROC for the Creoles' Russian identity - until circumstances shift the Church's priorities.

## 7 The Native 'Rediscovery' of Orthodoxy

A decade would pass, and the Orthodox revival among the Indigenous people would shift the clergy's focus away from Creoles. The latter steadily lost their relevance, being largely outnumbered by Indigenous parishioners.<sup>51</sup> What is more, the use of Russian declined,<sup>52</sup> as the anti-native sentiment discouraged many from attending joint classes at Russian schools,<sup>53</sup> complicating the priests' efforts to deliver their sermons effectively.<sup>54</sup> At the same time, Creoles entered marital unions with American settlers to secure a respectful place in the new political landscape and affirm their equally 'white' status. This, along with concerns about the younger generation's career prospects, further alienated them from the Church. Creoles' inability to reproduce themselves biologically and culturally would have inevitably clashed with the ROC's urgent need to sustain its viability through a sufficient congregation.

For Creoles, the Church became the last resort in post-1867 Alaska, assisting them in navigating socioeconomic changes and preserving unity, channeling their distress to officials, and providing a space to alleviate confusion. Therefore, the clergy's shift cast doubt on the ROC's ability to perform the function the Creoles had assigned to it, as evidenced by the case of Fr. Vladimir Donskoi (1886-1895), who succeeded Fr. Mitropol'skii. The new strategy entailed elevating the natives to secure their loyalty as a stable part of the parish, which had been weakened by the struggle against rival missionaries. Although the Indigenous people continued to practice their ancestral 'pagan' rituals, they were considered to possess superior personal qualities compared to the offspring of mixed unions. Manifest adulterers and apostates from the faith, their youth was marred by debauchery,

**50** "Iz istorii pravoslavnoi tserkvi", 190.

**51** The Creole birth rates were lower compared to those of the natives. Kan, *Memory Eternal*, 582.

**52** A distinguished lay brotherhood member noted that numerous fellows were no longer proficient in Russian and required the statutes printed in the "American" language. *Minutes of the St. Nicholas Brotherhood*, 1895, in ARCA, D 323, reel 213.

**53** Kamenskii, *Letter to Bishop Nikolai*, March 14, 1896, in ARCA, D 335, reel 220, 1.

**54** Kan, *Memory Eternal*, 275.

drunkenness, and disobedience, exacerbated by hypocrisy and falsehood in their older age.

Moreover, the Creoles exerted a harmful influence on the morals of the Orthodox Alaskan community, setting a poor example for the Indigenous parish. They were blamed for defiling the natives after their baptism, and with the removal of a strict hand of the Russian authorities, “the wicked instincts of the white people began to reveal themselves in all their ugly force and nakedness”.<sup>55</sup> The image of this *chosen flock* only deterred the natives from embracing Orthodoxy, yet, “having joined it, they immediately take in from their enlighteners everything bad”.<sup>56</sup>

Morally inferior to Indigenous people, Creoles were certainly incomparable to Russians, “worse than our Russian lower-class *meshchane* and peasants”.<sup>57</sup> In 1911, *Russian Orthodox American Messenger* would reference an article published in *Novoe Vremia*, which encapsulated the prevailing view of the Creole segment of the Orthodox parish:

Creoles, Métis, do not constitute, properly speaking, any distinct type or nationality. In the variegated amalgam that makes them up resides a feeble, motley, fragmented, mosaic-like soul, incapable of any form of greatness.<sup>58</sup>

An idealized Russian identity was rendered unattainable, thereby dissociating Creoles from part of their ancestry. Initiated by Fr. Donskoi and intensified during Fr. Kamenskii’s tenure, the dominant rhetoric stripped the Creoles of their Russianness, which they aspired to uphold. Never were the Creoles called ‘Russian’, since no ‘true Russian’ would have voluntarily remained in Alaska after its sale to the United States:

And what’s ‘Russian’ about them anyway? Only that a drunk man or woman might stumble by mistake into the church and is capable of speaking the worst dialect of Russian (broken and disgusting to the ear) – that is all. Not to mention lack of respect towards the Church, lack of fear of God, no idea of honor, noble behavior, moral and civic duties, or spirituality; there is also no sense of self-respect (and where would it come from, anyway). [...] Everything that is good and kind has been totally twisted and broken up, and uprooted. How can any good influence be made on such [...]

**55** Innokentii, “Otchet [...] za 1907 god”, 195.

**56** Innokentii, “Otchet [...] za 1907 god”, 195.

**57** Donskoi, *Letter to Fr. Antonii Dashkevich*, 1897, in ARCA, D 334, reel 218, 1.

**58** Kedrovskii, “Starozhily Alyaski”, 274.

creatures? It is easier for God to create new human beings than to improve these ones.<sup>59</sup>

By the late 1880s, the distinction between ‘Russians’ and ‘Creoles’ was no longer present in the parish records. Church members were now categorized as either natives or Creoles, while the term ‘Russian’ was exclusively used for Russian-born clergy and their families.<sup>60</sup>

Notably, Sonja Luehrmann<sup>61</sup> insists on the close resemblance of the Russian-born priests’ attitude to the Creole population and the American racially charged, derogatory rhetoric used in addressing the community by the salient expressions grounded in their social inferiority compared to the ‘whites’. These references pointed to the moral and physical attributes of the Creoles, stemming from the social, environmental, and hereditary conditions under which the community lived. Yet, although the language closely echoes Western racist ideologies that fueled colonial endeavors, this situation cannot be easily interpreted from the same perspective. The distinctiveness of the clergy’s discourse towards the Creole population becomes evident when contrasted with that towards the Indigenous population. Naturally pure, natives possessed the potential for improvement, lost in the case of the offspring of interethnic unions, hopelessly subject to rot in their moral and cultural decay.<sup>62</sup>

## 8 Preserving Distinctiveness

Adding to the Creoles’ dissatisfaction with the ROC-natives reproachment was the clergy’s unwavering stance on segregating participation in the service and the use of church facilities. The refusal to construct a separate burial ground for Creoles, despite their financial contribution to the Orthodox cemetery’s restoration, elicited strong resentment.<sup>63</sup> This was also the case with appointments to the parish council, with the clergy endeavoring to uphold the tradition of selecting an equal number of lay leaders and official council members from both Creoles and natives. Beyond the Church, this forced unity was superficial. The settlement pattern did not change, with the two

<sup>59</sup> Kamenskii, *Report on the State of the Sitka Diocese*, 1895-98, in ARCA, D 335, reel 220, 1.

<sup>60</sup> *Parish records confessional list, St. Michael Cathedral*, 1864-96, in ARCA, D 415.

<sup>61</sup> Luehrmann, *Alutiiq Villages*, 142.

<sup>62</sup> Surprised by the natives’ “knowledge and piety”, the clergy highlighted their natural “industriousness and moral laxity” compared to the Creoles’ dishonesty. Veniaminov, *Zapiski ob ostrovakh Unalashkinskogo otdela*, 3: 120.

<sup>63</sup> Erickson and Brooks, *The Russian Orthodox Church*, 359.

communities continuing to reside separately, like in Russian Town in Sitka or in the Creole *derevnia* (village) in Afognak.<sup>64</sup> Yet, these divisive lines should not have been present within the ROC's domain.

In light of the official objection to their separation from Indigenous parish members, Creoles opted for a more gradual and subtle path. They continued to fulfill their responsibilities as godparents, participating in major celebrations such as the annual Annunciation Day procession, covering the march across the entire city. However, their involvement in activities that fell outside their formal sacramental or godparental obligations diminished, as seen in the 1890 case, when Creole choir members began to withdraw, unwilling to share it with the natives.<sup>65</sup>

Another framework that could preserve the separation between the two ethnic communities was the system of Orthodox brotherhoods and their adjunct temperance societies. In cities with a significant Orthodox population, sodalities were divided along ethnic lines, with separate Creole brotherhoods established in Sitka, Juneau, and Afognak.<sup>66</sup> Although the first Creole entity was established already in 1885, long before its Indigenous counterpart, the Brotherhood of the Standard-bearers of Archangel Michael soon declined, only to be revived in 1892 as the reorganized St. Nicholas Church Brotherhood. The sodalities elected their own officers, with the parish priest serving as either the president or the "spiritual advisor",<sup>67</sup> and their statutes addressed the most exasperating problems of the time. The Brotherhood's primary aim was to enhance the spiritual and physical well-being of its members, providing support during illness and assistance to widows and orphans, while also addressing the challenges posed by persistent drunkenness and financial hardship. Additionally, it sought to strengthen members' commitment to the Orthodox faith and the Church, fostering a love for the Russian language and maintaining a connection to their Russian heritage.

The brotherhoods organized various extra-liturgical activities, such as the monthly "tea gathering", where members engaged in informal conversations about current affairs, collected and verified monthly dues, and addressed other matters.<sup>68</sup> On Sunday evenings, everyone gathered in the school hall for moral and religious discussions, gospel readings, and to raise awareness about the

**64** In Afognak, the Indigenous people lived separately in the so-called *zhilo*, an archaism that can be translated close to the settlement. Kashevarov, "Afognakskaiia Rozhdestvo-Bogorodichnaia Tserkov", 508.

**65** Donskoi, *Letter to Bishop Vladimir*, December 28, 1890, in ARCA, B 6, reel 10, 1.

**66** Innokentii, "Otchet o sostoianii [...] za 1907 god", 207.

**67** Kan, *Memory Eternal*, 306-7.

**68** Chubarov, "Novyi istoricheskii pamiatnik v Sitke", 108.

dangers of alcohol. During these sessions, the chairman, clergy, and schoolteacher presented religious articles and shared the lives of saints with the attendees. In July, a fraternal picnic was held, inviting all Sitka residents, while a special Christmas festivity (*iolka*) was held in December. Each sodality celebrated its patron Saint's Day with great enthusiasm, as demonstrated by the Sitka Brotherhood's "St. Nicholas Day" celebration, which began with a liturgical procession and extended into the evening with a fraternal dinner, accompanied by unceasing speeches and music.<sup>69</sup>

However, internal squabbles, factionalism, and declining interest in the Church led to low attendance and limited outcomes relative to native sodalities.<sup>70</sup> The opportunity to function separately from natives did not alleviate the tensions but, at times, intensified them, creating an insurmountable border.<sup>71</sup> This was particularly evident in the struggle over the distribution of insignia among members of both institutions, which underscored the efforts to reinforce the "naturally privileged" status of Creoles. So unthinkable it appeared to be relegated to the position of the natives via a joint usage of the sacred objects: "We are neither fools nor Kolosh to wear the same kind of badges; we do not wish to be equated with them".<sup>72</sup> The coexistence of the two sodalities entailed their vibrant competition, with their rivalry extending from organizing public festivities to attempts to secure superior patronage by forging special connections with the clergy. This, however, received nothing but repeated criticism from the priests, who accused the Creole Brotherhood of idleness for diverting their attention from issues requiring special treatment.<sup>73</sup>

The low membership was also attributable to the strictness of the statutes. The purpose of resolving the drunkenness issue conflicted with practices at the very core of the community and with the festivities that upheld unity. The January *sviatki* season, characterized by heavy drinking, was criticized by Russian-born priests. Creoles, in turn, saw it as an attack on their own "Russian" culture, viewing the celebration as "one of the few remaining authentic and unique cultural traditions that not only set them apart from the rest of the

**69** Kashevarov, "Otchet o deiatel'nosti", 192.

**70** The sodality also aimed to provide mutual aid, a crucial function during the challenging post-sale period. However, this alone was insufficient to foster widespread involvement in the brotherhood's activities. Kan, "True Heirs to a Heroic Russian Past" 21.

**71** See the case of the inadmission of Native Olga Tsakux in *Minutes of the St. Nicholas' Brotherhood*, 1895, in ARCA, D 323, reel 214.

**72** Kamenskii, *Letter to Bishop Nikolai*, December 23, 1897, in ARCA, D 432, reel 276.

**73** Innokentii, "Boi 'Variaga' v Chemul'po", 274.

Sitkans but were [...] partially appropriated by the latter as part of the town's special heritage".<sup>74</sup>

Yet whenever the brotherhood's operations aligned with the Church's needs, its members and the institutions themselves were deemed worthy of praise. The respective engagement could reaffirm their Russian identity, with statistical data on the composition of various sodalities recognizing them as Russian. The most pressing need was financial, with the clergy particularly valuing the generous donations that sustained local facilities. The Creoles' motives appeared intrinsically pure whenever they aided the poor and the sick or contributed funds to the procurement of church attributes.<sup>75</sup> They would advance the local Orthodox cemetery, support the construction of a road leading to it, make generous donations to the orphanage, regularly distribute allowances on the occasions of the Paschal and Christmas feasts, and offer one-time disbursements to those in need at various times.<sup>76</sup> In 1907, they contributed to the local Orthodox community by investing in the maintenance of the Sitka Cathedral and by extending support to those facing financial hardships following the 1906 San Francisco earthquake.<sup>77</sup>

The celebration of St. Nicholas Day in Sitka would be accompanied by a speech by the Bishop, who underscored the essential nature of charity, urging it to be seen as "the most natural obligation of every person".<sup>78</sup> The members of the Brotherhood of St. Cyril and Methodius in Juneau were acclaimed as the best part of the local parish, supporting the school and church facilities through all possible financial means and "trying to be a Russian and Orthodox element of the parish", thereby fairly bearing the name of a Russian sodality.<sup>79</sup>

Perhaps playing on the Creoles' dissatisfaction with being equated to the Indigenous population, the priests contrasted these achievements with the lesser contributions from the native brotherhoods, encouraging the Creoles to maintain their financial inputs.<sup>80</sup> These expectations might also shed light on the clergy's

<sup>74</sup> Kan, "True Heirs to a Heroic Russian Past", 22.

<sup>75</sup> See the money collection for the acquisition of the tabernacle in Kashevarov, "Sitkinskoe Sv. Nikolaevskoe Bratstvo v 1905 godu" 249. Also, in Kashevarov, "Otchet o deiatel'nosti", 192.

<sup>76</sup> Chubarov, "Novyi istoricheskii pamiatnik v Sitke", 108.

<sup>77</sup> Innokentii, "Otchet o sostoianii [...] za 1906 god", 168.

<sup>78</sup> Chubarov, "Novyi istoricheskii pamiatnik", 113.

<sup>79</sup> Innokentii, "Otchet o sostoianii [...] za 1906 god", 191.

<sup>80</sup> Unlike the native sodality, the members of the Creole Brotherhood in Juneau were said to have given up their last means to purchase full priestly vestments. Innokentii, "Boi 'Variaga' v Chemul'po", 273.

occasional appeals to the US government to take care of the Creoles' well-being. Yet, the general focus on the Indigenous parishioners as the prevailing population of Alaska, the derogatory rhetoric permeating the priests' records, and the absence of active efforts to engage the Creoles suggested that the Church's interest in their protection was mainly to secure their ability to donate. Strong recommendations were forwarded to Washington to increase access to the first-hand resources and to guarantee pensions for the retired Alaska Commercial Company's servants.<sup>81</sup> A bill would be compounded by the Creoles' request for their priest's intervention to contest American regulations on the indirect payment to the Alaskan population, thereby preventing the Creoles from donating to the Church.<sup>82</sup> They were portrayed as living rather challenging lives, with their "hearts rejoiced as we [they] gazed on the church, our [their] place of prayer and comfort, at the knowledge that we [they] were able, by our [their] own labor, to support the House of the Lord".<sup>83</sup>

Individuals who did not demonstrate a willingness to provide financial support faced, in turn, considerable criticism in turn. The Creoles in the north, for example, were claimed to stubbornly resist the ROC's influence, and "were it not for the stipend-paid priest, they would abandon Orthodoxy for whichever confession required nothing to be paid".<sup>84</sup> When a priest called upon them to assist in preserving the church from deterioration, the Creoles merely accused him of being demanding and meddling in their lives. Hence, although their financial contributions temporarily restored their Russian identity, their inaction led the clergy to conclude that "the best of the Russians returned to their homeland, the rest mingled with the Americans".<sup>85</sup>

## 9 Americanization and Moral Decay

Although the establishment of the brotherhoods offered a partial solution to the issue of alcohol abuse, they fell short of achieving their proclaimed goal of strengthening the Russian language proficiency and proximity to the Russian culture in general, reversing the ever-growing Americanization trend. The degree to which the ROC's discourse on American influence portrayed it as evil varied among priests. Fr. Donskoi attributed the issue to a misunderstanding of the freedom enshrined in the US Constitution, specifically to questioning

<sup>81</sup> Dabovich, "Alaska".

<sup>82</sup> "News from the Pribylof Islands", 256.

<sup>83</sup> "Orthodoxy in Alaska", 392.

<sup>84</sup> Innokentii, "Otchet o sostoianii [...] za 1907 god", 196.

<sup>85</sup> Innokentii, "Otchet o sostoianii [...] za 1907 god", 196.

Orthodox teachings.<sup>86</sup> Fr. Kamenskii went further in his criticism: “The children [...] are imbued with the spirit of the Americanized Creoles; [...] but the minute some effort is made to discipline them, they respond by saying, ‘this is not Russia where one can whip students’”.<sup>87</sup> Hence, the American rule would bring nothing but the unjustified permissiveness, “unbridled and falsely understood freedom”, resulting in the general “drunken bacchanalia”.<sup>88</sup>

The growing tensions with the clergy compelled Creoles to seek greater independence. Troubled by Mitropol'skii's priesthood, the parishioners advocated for amending society's statutes to remove the priest from his position as an overseer of the Brotherhood's order and to allow members to manage the treasury funds without requiring his or the bishop's consent. The 1867 Treaty was invoked and interpreted as granting lay Orthodox parish members ownership of the church's property. The claims were substantiated by references to the Presbyterian congregation, whose members could expel their ministers and exercise almost total control over the administration of their own church. In response, Fr. Vladimir Vechtomov, who took on the responsibilities in Sitka for just one month before the arrival of Fr. Donskoi in 1886, emphasized that only ROC authorities had the exclusive right to censor an ordained priest and were the sole owners of ecclesiastical property. Therefore, if the Creoles wished to take control, they had to involve the Indigenous people, since the treaty did not differentiate between the ‘Russian’ and ‘non-Russian’ Orthodox residents of Alaska.<sup>89</sup>

For the clergy, the incident became a demonstration of moral decay, a loss of discipline, and a harmful example set by the Creoles for the native parishioners, whose diligence and allegedly strong devotion were heightened to be compared to the Creoles' misconduct. The initiative was immediately attributed to the pervasive influence of lower-class American frontiersmen and soldiers, with the “American civilization” being claimed to “only plant bad seeds in such a soil”.<sup>90</sup>

By the turn of the century, resentment towards the Americanization of Creoles had taken on a tone of victimization. A successor of Fr. Kamenskii, Fr. Antonii Dashkevich (1898-1905) assumed, as he stated, the responsibility for the community revival of the “persecuted, abandoned Russian people, dying under the influence of a dry Americanism and utilitarianism, which devours and swallows

**86** Kan, “True Heirs to a Heroic Russian Past”, 25.

**87** Kamenskii, *Letter to Bishop Nikolai*, December 23, 1897, in ARCA, D 432, reel 276.

**88** Shalamov, “Kratkoe tserkovno-istoricheskoe opisanie”, 341.

**89** Kan, *Memory Eternal*, 245.

**90** Kamenskii, *Annual Report on the Conditions*, 1896, in ARCA, D 432, reel 276.

everything [good]”.<sup>91</sup> All the deficiencies present in Creoles’ behavior appeared to be a result of the detrimental impact of the Protestant pseudo-democratic American ethos, which sought to replace the Church and remove its influence on Creole youth. Following a conversation with the head of the Baptist orphanage, Bishop Tikhon stressed: “various sectarians, of course, are not going to raise their foster children in the Orthodox faith”.<sup>92</sup> In turn, poorly educated and lacking spiritual guidance, Creoles were viewed as vulnerable to the excessive freedom and insubordination resulting from the local individualism, as well as the confusion stemming from the overwhelming number of “sects” and “the absence of faith in God”.<sup>93</sup> Amidst the wave of cultural and linguistic Americanization, Creoles increasingly curtailed the clergy’s ability to maintain its authority. Russian priests denounced this shift as indicative of a moral decline, thereby widening the rift between the two.

## 10 Creole Priests

While Creoles faced biological and cultural barriers that discouraged them from having their children speak Russian, the unwavering loyalty and dedication of natives served as a significant counterbalance. In this context, however, a number of Creoles succeeded in gaining respect from American officials and a distinct stance in the eyes of the clergy. These were descendants of prominent families, local dynasties endowed with substantial economic and social capital, who timely ensured a quality education for their children. For ROC, these figures were considered invaluable given its aforementioned persistent manpower shortage and inability to produce such resources itself. Consequently, there was an increasing demand for the ordination of locally born priests, forcing reliance on occasional interpreters to maintain their Indigenous parish.

Individuals who had received religious education, were well-versed in Russian culture and Orthodox principles, and were fluent in Russian, English, Church Slavonic, and their native languages became crucial assets for the clergy to recruit as assistants, psalm readers, and diakons. Their relative economic independence was not merely an advantage but a quality that led Russian priests to turn a blind eye to the concomitant misconduct,<sup>94</sup> given the impossibility of

<sup>91</sup> Dashkevich, *Letter to Bishop Tikhon Belavin*, 1898, in ARCA, D 334, reel 218, 5.

<sup>92</sup> Popov, “Puteshestvie Ego Preosviashchenshestva”, 594-5.

<sup>93</sup> Kamenskii, *Report on the Sitka Parish*, 1897, in ARCA, D 335, reel 220, 2.

<sup>94</sup> One might consider the example of Andrew (Andrei) Kashevarov/ff. Kan, “Father Andrew P. Kashevaroff”, 3-20.

offering high salaries. Noteworthy examples of these Creole priests included Petr and Andrei Kashevarov/ff, Nikolai Rysev, and Petr Simeonov Dobrovolskii. Contrary to expectations that Creole priests would show favoritism towards their community over the natives, they exhibited a different approach. Their deep understanding and connection with the natives set them apart from the Russian-born priests. The latter, vigorously anticipating the return to mainland Russia, were more preoccupied with “contrasting the ‘golden days’ of the RAC rule to the unbridled exploitation of Alaska and its Indigenous inhabitants by greedy and unscrupulous Americans”.<sup>95</sup>

Yet, the ordination of Creoles was often met with resentment by the Russian-born clergy, and their concerns seemed justified, given the large concessions Creole priests made in their service. Netsvetov’s case was not isolated, and instances of self-will in the performance of ecclesiastical duties became increasingly common as the Creole church staff expanded. In their stronger grasp of the natives’ aspirations, Creole priests often became “agents of reverse influence by interpreting Christian doctrines in their own Indigenous manner”.<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless, the shortage of competent workers forced Russian-born priests to tolerate such transgressions, along with frequent instances of misconduct among the Creole clergy. While the Church assumed a more indigenized shape, the Creole would consistently appear less attached to their Russian ancestry.

## 11 Conclusion

The Russian American Company had cultivated Creoles as intermediaries essential to colonial governance and commerce, granting certain privileges, yet enforcing strict labor and residential separations from Indigenous communities, which produced both Creole exceptionalism and persistent non-belonging. The ROC, in turn, helped codify this estate through educational and missionization initiatives aimed at cementing Creoles’ distinction from Indigenous ancestry, while depicting them as intellectually and morally deficient, constraining their ecclesiastical mobility, and thereby solidifying their in-between position.

The 1867 transfer of Alaska from the Russian Empire to the United States would disrupt colonial social dynamics. Creoles experienced

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**95** Geraci and Khodarkovsky, *Of Religion and Empire*, 194.

**96** Znamenski, *Shamanism and Christianity*, 62. During his 1893 inspection of Alaskan missions, Bishop Nikolai Ziorov (1891-98) lashed out at Orlov and Bel’kov for their reckless and insubordinate conduct. Archbishop of Warsaw Nikolai, *Iz moego dnevnika*, 41.

a precipitous economic decline and legal ambiguity under US governance, as their status found no 'conceptual space' within the new system. At the same time, the intensifying competition with the rival missions weakened the Orthodox influence among Indigenous parishioners, and the ROC, as the only remaining imperial entity in the territory, came to rhetorically elevate Creoles as 'Russian' allies against 'uncivilized natives'. The ultimate departure of the colonizer offered a potential escape from the "almost the same, but not quite" status of the rightful successors of the Russian Orthodox community, inherently distinct from the native population.

Yet the Indigenous Orthodox revival shifted the clerical priorities. By prioritizing openness and tolerance towards the natives' occasional transgressions, the ROC sought to numerically strengthen its parish reversing the crystallization of the Creoles' 'Russian' identity, now uniquely associated with Russian-born clergy. Creoles' insistence on preserving distinction through selective, segregated participation only motivated the ROC's accusations of their insubordination and disrespect of the social hierarchy, which were seen as stemming from their gradual 'Americanization' and moral decay. Although locally educated Creole clergy and assistants became indispensable and contributed to an indigenized Orthodoxy, their presence reinforced anxieties about authority and 'reverse influence'.

The charm of camouflage would fade. While the Church proposed the unacceptable trajectory, the environment itself necessitated change. The aspiration of the colonized to reinvent itself to align with the dominant power came to be hardly contingent on their connection to the ROC. The supreme authority now shifted to the American state with its own acculturation agents and conditions for belonging. This new sociopolitical landscape would dictate the growing mutual indifference between Creoles and the ROC, ultimately shaping the nature of their interactions in post-purchase Alaska.

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## **General Section**



# Anti-Communist Broadcasting and Slovak Catholic Diaspora in the Context of the Post-War Pontificate of Pius XII: Vatican Radio and Radio Free Europe

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**Abstract** According to the newest research in the Vatican archives of Pius XII's post-war pontificate the paper deals with the special role the Slovak post-war emigration played in the creation of anti-Communist strategies of the Holy See in the nascent Cold War. It also examines the activities of the Vatican Radio as an instrument of anti-Communism and as an important tool of communication across the Iron Curtain. It focuses on the role the Vatican Secretariat of State had in this process. Current research confirms that the Holy See respected the religious broadcasts of Radio Free Europe, even though its overall attitude towards it was ambivalent.

**Keywords** Pius XII. Slovak diaspora. Vatican Radio. Radio Free Europe. Anti-communism.

**Summary** 1 The Slovak Post-War Diaspora in Rome. Primary Roles and Characteristics in the Light of the Post-War Pontificate of Pius XII. – 2 Vatican Radio as an Instrument of Communication Across the Iron Curtain. – 3 Religious Broadcast of Radio Free Europe. – 4 Conclusions.



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## **1 The Slovak Post-War Diaspora in Rome. Primary Roles and Characteristics in the Light of the Post-War Pontificate of Pius XII**

One of the most important features of Slovak emigration after the end of Second World War was its strong anti-Communist character. Anti-Communism resulted not only from the fact that the majority of the Slovak émigrés were Catholics (including former diplomats, politicians, deputies, journalists, soldiers, students and cultural figures), but also had to do with the influence the post-war pontificate of Pius XII. Pius XII watched with great concern the expansion of the Bolshevik ‘new Islam’ from the East, as well as the secularisation from the West. He understood Communist ideology in line with the encyclical of Pius XI *Divini Redemptoris* as an essentially perverse evil (*intrinsecamente perverso*) and perceived the struggle with communism as an eschatological “apocalyptic struggle with Evil”.<sup>1</sup> In the emerging bipolar world, the question for him was not taking the side of either bloc, but the question of “alliance with Christ” formulated in his well-known Christmas message of December 1947, in which he emphasised the neutral position of the Holy See as follows:

Our position between two opposing sides is free from all prejudice, free from all preference for this or that nation, this or that state, just as it is distant from any consideration of a worldly character. To be with Christ or against Christ, that is the whole question.<sup>2</sup>

After the Second World War, Pius XII re-evaluated his previous stance towards democracies, which he subsequently ‘rehabilitated’ and praised for their free religious environment that fostered the development of the individual. In 1949, in connection with the recent parliamentary elections in Italy – where the Italian Communist Party and the Christian Democratic Party were in competition – the Pope once again condemned communism.<sup>3</sup>

Pius XII was also well aware of the fact that the renewal of Czechoslovakia and its integration into the Soviet area of influence did not reflect the will of the majority of the Slovak, German and Hungarian population in the country. However, any other alternative arrangement of East Central Europe against the will of the victorious Allies was simply impossible.<sup>4</sup>

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**1** Hrabovec, “Svätá stolica a Československo”, 294.

**2** Hrabovec, “Svätá stolica a Československo”, 294.

**3** See more Chenaux, *Katolícká cirkev a komunismus*, 90-152.

**4** Hrabovec, “The Beneš Government-in-Exile”, 104.

Anti-Communism and the Atlantic alliance, characterised by close collaboration between the Holy See and the United States, constituted two central features of Pius XII's post-war pontificate, which contemporary historical scholarship appropriately recognises as global one.<sup>5</sup> These two orientations of the Pacellian pontificate overlapped and complemented each other, playing a significant role in shaping the emergence of the Cold War. The most recent research in Vatican archival sources demonstrates that Pius XII's anti-Communism was not intransigent; on the contrary, the Holy See repeatedly undertook initiatives aimed at establishing dialogue with Moscow.<sup>6</sup> The failure or impossibility of such dialogue resulted either from the policies of Communist governments or from direct interference by Moscow itself - not from any unwillingness on the part of the Roman Pontiff to engage with the Communist East.<sup>7</sup> Pius XII was open to negotiations and the possibility of an agreement, provided that the other side offered concrete guarantees for religious and civil liberties. However, when the Communist regimes broke off all dialogue, launched an overtly anti-Catholic campaign marked by brutal persecution, the Holy See discerned a deliberate intention to annihilate the Church and concluded that diplomatic efforts could no longer bring an end to the persecution. On the other hand, the pontificate of Pius XII represented a new political and religious initiative towards the Atlantic alliance, which may be regarded as significant innovation in the history of the papacy. Pius XII was convinced that "it is on the policy of the United States that the outcome of the fatal struggle between what remains of a free world and godless totalitarianism rests primarily" - as a letter from Pius XII to US President Truman in July of 1948 made clear.<sup>8</sup> Together with the historian Roberto Regoli, it can rightly be stated that the United States became the new point of reference for the Vatican on the international chessboard.<sup>9</sup>

Despite his clear anti-Communist stance, Pius XII did not view himself as part of the Western 'crusade' championed by U.S. President Harry S. Truman, who called for major Christian churches to unite in the fight against Soviet communism.<sup>10</sup> In his correspondence with the U.S. President, the Pope emphasised that true peace can only be attained when it is grounded in faith in the one true God, the

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**5** See more Valente, *A Vatican Atlantic Alliance*; Unger-Alvi, Valbousquet, *The Global Pontificate of Pius XII*.

**6** See more Pettinaroli, *La politique russe du Saint-Siège*.

**7** Regoli, "Vatican-US Relations", 21-6.

**8** Regoli, "Vatican-US Relations", 28-9.

**9** Regoli, "Vatican-US Relations", 33.

**10** Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy*, 111-56.

Creator of the world who has endowed humanity with inalienable natural rights. He was also convinced that a genuine global order would emerge only when governments recognise the supernatural origin of their authority. Should a state arrogate this God-given right, the individual is reduced to little more than an object to the selfish interests of power groups.<sup>11</sup> A key problem with Truman's vision of involving Christians in this "apocalyptic struggle" was his insufficient awareness of the divisions within the Christian churches. Another significant shortcoming was the excessive instrumentalization of the churches as political actors, thereby overlooking their primary identity as spiritual institutions. In the summer of 1951, as a joint declaration by Christian churches condemning Communism was being prepared, the long-planned initiative ultimately faltered due to a conflict between Rome and the Protestant churches regarding the declaration of the dogma of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, which was met with reluctance by the Protestant world.<sup>12</sup>

Pius XII was well acquainted with the Slovak question, was helpful to Slovak refugees and perceived their needs. In this relation the former Slovak envoy to the Holy See Karol Sidor<sup>13</sup> - a diplomatic representative of the Slovak Republic during Second World War - was a key person and a key source of information on the situation of the Church in Slovakia as well as in dealing with the complex issue of post-war Slovak refugees. At the end of the war, the Vatican granted him temporary political asylum until he left for Canada in February 1950 and the Holy See tacitly recognized him as Slovakia's representative even after 1945 and expected him to form a government-in-exile.<sup>14</sup> In the first post-war years, Sidor continued making use of the position he enjoyed with the Vatican Secretariat of State to help Slovak refugees, report on the situation of the Church

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**11** Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy*, 123.

**12** Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy*, 151.

**13** Karol Sidor (1901-1953) was a close associate of Andrej Hlinka, founder and lifelong chairman of Hlinka's Slovak People's Party, and, prior to 1938, belonged to its radical wing, a stance that was also reflected in his antisemitic statements. He served as the Commander-in-Chief of the paramilitary Hlinka Guard, was Minister without Portfolio between 1938 and 1939, and, in March 1939, became Chairman of the Slovak autonomous government. From June 1939 to May 1945, he served as the Slovak Republic's envoy to the Holy See. Being diplomat, he reconsidered his earlier radical views, adopted an anti-German and anti-Nazi stance, and acted as the Holy See's intermediary in efforts to mitigate anti-Jewish persecution in Slovakia. See more Sidor, *Šesť rokov pri Vatikáne*. For more on Karol Sidor post-war activities, see: Katrebová Blehová, *Slovenská emigrácia v Taliansku*, 21-62; Hrabovec, "Die III. Päpstliche Mission für die Flüchtlinge"; Sidor, *Dve cesty*. See also Sidor's rich post-war correspondence in the Slovak Institute in Cleveland.

**14** Hrabovec, "The Slovak Émigrés", 28. For Sidor's diplomatic activities during the war, see Sidor, *Šesť rokov pri Vatikáne*, 239-71. See also Karol Sidor's personal file in the Slovak National Archives, boxes 7 and 10.

in Slovakia, and submit memoranda and statements on Slovak issues. Thanks to the initiative of Sidor the Vatican Radio addressed the audience in Slovak for the first time in 1943, after 12 years of the Radio's existence. Seeing that Christmas was near, and with it also a Pope's annual message Sidor came up with the following idea:

Why should our people in Slovakia listen to Vatican Radio's Latin or Italian broadcasts, if they could hear Slovak as well? We need to go for it and we will certainly succeed. The Vatican Radio station will air in the Slovak language.<sup>15</sup>

Still, it took four years until the Slovak language became a regular component of Radio Vatican broadcasting. The Slovak broadcasting joined the common Czechoslovak section in 1947, so in the time when the post-war Czechoslovakia gradually became part of the Soviet bloc with a strong Communist domination and the Holy See had to react.<sup>16</sup> The establishment of the broadcasting was also the result of joint efforts of the Holy See and Czechoslovak diplomacy in the early post-war years. Despite all controversies, the notion was still present that relation between Czechoslovakia and the Holy See could be founded at least on the basis of a simple mutual respect – a fact that has been in historiography already well processed.<sup>17</sup>

The regular Czech and Slovak broadcasting started on the Christmas Eve 1947 together with two other Slavic languages – Croat and Slovene. While there were at that moment separate broadcasts for Slovenes and Croats respectively, the Slovak and Czech languages were included in a joint programme. It took more than a year and a half for the Slovak broadcast of Radio Vatican to become independent, and the road to this was not easy. The main credit for the independence of the Slovak service goes to the Slovak Jesuit Pavol Bajan, who since the summer of 1948 served as the Slovak editor of Vatican Radio and thus became the first person closely linked with the Slovak broadcasting. He later described this as the most difficult period of his life, as he refused to continue participating in the joint broadcasts conducted in a “rigidly Czechoslovak spirit” and consequently faced opposition from Czech priests in exile, who viewed his efforts to establish an

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**15** See more Petranský, “The Slovak broadcasting”, 92.

**16** Petranský, “The Slovak broadcasting”, 93.

**17** Petranský, “The Slovak broadcasting”, 92-5; Vodičková, “Slyšte to, všichni lidé, všichni obyvatelé světa, naslouchejte”; Vodičková, *Vatikánský rozhlas*, 77-84.

independent Slovak broadcast as “Slovak separatism”.<sup>18</sup> The spiritual counsellor of the Pontifical College of St John Nepomucene (the Nepomucenum college), Václav Feřt, Czech editor of Vatican Radio, considered the efforts of Slovak Jesuits to get an independent Slovak broadcast to be signs of “Slovak separatism”.<sup>19</sup>

Vatican Radio did not serve solely as an instrument for the dissemination of the apostolate, but also pursued important diplomatic and propagandistic objectives. It stood at the forefront of the Church’s struggle against communism and one of the primary objectives was to counter Soviet propaganda.<sup>20</sup> It was not created as the official radio of the Holy See, since the Pope and the Secretariat of State did not exercise a strict control on it. Since the Holy See was not directly involved and Vatican Radio was said not to be its official agency than formally the Secretariat of State could not have been accused by the Communist governments of being a tool of anti-communist propaganda. There was also no predetermined plan of how to use the Radio and Pius XII and the Secretary of State only gradually learnt and become familiar with it, so that the flexibility was characteristic for their attitude towards the broadcasting of the Vatican Radio.<sup>21</sup> The nature of the relationship between the Secretariat of State and the various broadcasts intended for the nations behind the Iron Curtain has not yet been fully clarified. A certain degree of oversight undoubtedly existed; however, it did not amount to censorship in the strict sense of the word.<sup>22</sup>

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**18** The Slovak Catholic community in Rome frequently faced accusations of “separatism” for nearly all their efforts to maintain an independent national identity in the diaspora. Some exiled Czech priests targeted Sidor’s political activities and sought to denounce him before the Holy See. Czech priest Petr Lekavý denounced Sidor for a column he started publishing in early 1949 in the Slovak-French journal, *La nation slovaque*, which served as the press body of the Slovak National Council Abroad in Paris. Later on, being responsible for the spiritual well-being of Czech emigrants in Germany, Lekavý opposed the aspirations of Slovak Catholic refugees for an independent pastoral care. *Attività politica del Sig. Sidor (1949)*, in ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pontificato Pio XII, Parte I, Serie Cecoslovacchia, pos. 253, ff. 208-16.

**19** Feřt translated even the most innocuous articles published in the Slovak exile press for the Secretariat of State, with the intent of undermining Slovak efforts for independence. Among these was Sidor’s article recounting a conversation with an Argentine bishop during his stay in Rome in June 1949. The discussion concerned the pastoral care of Slovak refugees in Argentina and carried no political implications. “Argentínský biskup”; *Attività politica del Sig. Sidor (1949)*, in ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pontificato Pio XII, Parte I, Serie Cecoslovacchia, pos. 253, ff. 24-5.

**20** See more Perin, “Vatican Radio and Modern Propaganda”, 67-71.

**21** Cf. Perin, “Vatican Radio and Modern Propaganda”, 74, 82-3.

**22** To clarify some aspects concerning relations between the Pope, the Secretariat of State, the management of the Vatican Radio, and the exchanges between the foreign diplomats see more Perin, *The Popes on Air*.

At present, we cannot fully clarify what was the position of the Vatican Secretariat of State in connection with the separation of the Slovak and Czech broadcasts. We have only one document so far, the author of which was Corrado Bafile, a high-ranking official of the first section of the Secretariat of State responsible for Czechoslovakia.<sup>23</sup> The document was dated December 1952 and it stated that: “Fino all’ottobre 1949 le trasmissioni in lingua ceca ed in lingua slovacca della Radio Vaticana avevano luogo l’una di seguito all’altra. Allora furono separate perché esigenze tecniche lo suggerirono”.<sup>24</sup>

From the content of the document, it is evident that the division had to be carried out in a manner that would not be construed as encouraging separatism (“come un incoraggiamento al separatismo”). Thus, the broadcasts did not use the nationality principle, but linguistic, and the call-sign of even the Czech broadcast did not mention Czechoslovakia as a state, but only the two languages, Czech and Slovak.<sup>25</sup>

Based on the documents available from the Historical Archives of the Secretariat of State, it appears that the main office in Rome was primarily focused on avoiding accusations of separatism or excessive nationalism in the broadcasts directed at nations behind the Iron Curtain. When the delegation of American Slovak Catholics visited Rome in June 1952 to participate in the consecration of the new altar above the tomb of St Cyril in St Clement’s Basilica and the Vatican media should inform about it, father Štefan Smržík, the Slovak editor of Vatican Radio, was instructed that “la Radio Vaticana deve essere al di fuori ed al di sopra delle contese nazionalistiche”.<sup>26</sup> One and half year earlier, when three Slovak bishops, Ján Vojtaššák, Michal Buzalka and Pavol Gojdič, had been convicted in a spectacular monster trial in January 1951, the Slovak Catholic Federation of America had sent a statement to the Vatican’s apostolic delegate in Washington, Amleto Cicognani, requesting a broadcast in Vatican Radio.<sup>27</sup> The request was refused on the grounds that the Holy See

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**23** Corrado Bafile served in the first section of the Secretariat of State from 1939 until the beginning of John XXIII’s pontificate. See “BAFILE Card. Corrado”. [https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/documentation/cardinali\\_biografie/cardinali\\_bio\\_bafile\\_c.html](https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/documentation/cardinali_biografie/cardinali_bio_bafile_c.html).

**24** *Trasmissioni di Radio Vaticana*, 3 December 1952, in ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pontificato Pio XII, Parte II, Cecoslovacchia, pos. 266, f. 33.

**25** *Trasmissioni di Radio Vaticana*, 3 December 1952, in ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pontificato Pio XII, Parte II, Cecoslovacchia, pos. 266, f. 33.

**26** *Pellegrinaggio di Slovacchi di America*, 4 June 1952, in ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pontificato Pio XII, Parte II, Cecoslovacchia, pos. 287, ff. 365-8.

**27** *A Protest by the Slovak Catholic Federation to the Czechoslovak Government*, in ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pontificato Pio XII, Parte II, Cecoslovacchia, pos. 287, ff. 424-5; *Protesta contro Governo Cecoslovacco*, 28 March 1951, Cicognani to Tardini (the letter was seen by Pius XII), f. 423.

did not wish to be accused of supporting separatism. Father Smržík was advised to exercise caution and moderation.<sup>28</sup>

## 2 Vatican Radio as an Instrument of Communication Across the Iron Curtain

When the Communists ultimately seized power in Czechoslovakia in February 1948, relations between Prague and the Holy See – which had been fraught with controversy since the end of the Second World War and the renewal of diplomatic ties – began to deteriorate.<sup>29</sup> Clear evidence that the Holy See had regarded Czechoslovakia as politically lost well before the Communist takeover of February 1948 is provided by the definitive departure of the Apostolic Internuncio, Saverio Ritter, at the beginning of January that year. In the subsequent months, the Apostolic Nunciature in Prague was headed by the Chargé d’Affaires, Gennaro Verolino, a diplomat with extensive knowledge of Central European affairs. Verolino assumed his new responsibilities with notable vigour at a time when the precise tactics the Communist regime would employ in its campaign against the Catholic Church had yet to be determined. Through protest notes he fought to save at least part of the rights of the Church, the preservation of church education in the Czech Republic (nationalized in Slovakia already in the autumn of 1944), the Catholic press, and other Catholic institutions, which the regime gradually began to liquidate.

Verolino’s diplomatic mission concluded approximately eighteen months later, coinciding with the regime’s initiation of an open offensive in June 1949 through the so-called Catholic Action. This initiative sought to sever the Church’s ties with Rome and to establish a ‘national’ Church, in effect schismatic, under the direct control of the Communist Party. The campaign ultimately failed owing to the resolute refusal of the Slovak and Czech episcopate, the opposition of the clergy and laity, and a widespread popular uprising in Slovakia, to which the regime responded with police repression and judicial persecution. Branded as one of the principal ‘culprits’ behind the collapse of the anti-Church campaign, Verolino was expelled from Czechoslovakia in July 1949.<sup>30</sup> He proposed to the Secretariat of State that the Slovak- and Czech-language broadcasts relating to the schismatic Catholic Action be extended in duration. Their

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**28** *The statement of Corrado Bafile*, in ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pontificato Pio XII, Parte II, Cecoslovacchia, pos. 287, f. 421.

**29** See more Hrabovec, “Udalosti roku 1948 v Československu”; Hrabovec, “Stratégie Svätej stolice”.

**30** Hrabovec, “Udalosti roku 1948 v Československu”, 143-55.

purpose was to expose the falsehoods of Communist propaganda, which alleged that a substantial proportion of the clergy intended to join the Communist Catholic Action – an assertion entirely without foundation.<sup>31</sup> In accordance with Verolino's recommendations, the broadcasts were extended, and Vatican Radio transmitted reports on an almost daily basis detailing the background of the Communist initiative, the position of the Holy See, and the responses of the Czechoslovak episcopate. These broadcasts proved highly effective in countering Communist propaganda on the matter.<sup>32</sup>

After Verolino's departure, the Internunciature was headed by the secretary Ottavio de Liva without diplomatic status. He lasted in this position only until March 1950, when diplomatic relations between Czechoslovakia and the Holy See were definitively broken, and thus also direct contacts with the local Church.<sup>33</sup> In this extremely difficult situation, when the Czechoslovak Communist regime took a series of harsh anti-Church measures, such as the anti-Church legislation in the autumn of 1949, the dissolution of religious orders and congregations and the liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church in 1950, it was necessary to look for new forms of communication across the Iron Curtain. Vatican Radio was one of the appropriate instruments.

One of the first to point out the lack of communication between the clergy and the isolated bishops in Czechoslovakia on the one hand, and between the local Church and the Holy See on the other, was Ottavio de Liva – himself isolated and under constant police surveillance, with very little possibility of communication, especially with the Church in Slovakia.<sup>34</sup> His recommendations that Vatican Radio replace the missing communications came at a time when the National Assembly in Prague passed a series of

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**31** *Radio Conversazioni della Radio Vaticana*, 23 June 1949, in ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pontificato Pio XII, Parte II, Cecoslovacchia, pos. 266, f. 181; f. 166, 14 June 1949, Verolino to Tardini (Emissioni Radio Vaticana). Verolino wrote in this connection in a letter to Tardini: "I giornali continuano a dare ogni giorno liste di sacerdoti aderenti alla pseudo azione cattolica. Ma la verità è che pochissimi sono quelli che scientemente e liberamente hanno dato il loro consenso. Appare sempre più chiaro che tutto il movimento è un cumulo di falsità, inganni e intimidazioni. Nelle liste figurano perfino dei sacerdoti morti e qualche tedesco già da tempo passato in Germania" (*Letter from Verolino to Tardini*, 21 June 1949, in AAV, Archivio della Nunziatura Apostolica in Cecoslovacchia, b. 88, f. 689).

**32** Archivio della Radio Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, Trasmissione Radio Vaticana, Lingua slovacca, broadcasts from 20, 21, 24, 25, 27 June and 11, 14 July 1949.

**33** For further details on Ottavio de Liva's mission in Czechoslovakia, see Hrabovec, "Stratégie Svätej stolice", 184-91.

**34** A good illustration of the police surveillance gave his journey to Slovakia in July 1949 when he was constantly monitored by the police. See *Viaggio nella Slovacchia*, 5 July 1949, *Letter from de Liva to Tardini*, in AAV, Archivio della Nunziatura Apostolica in Cecoslovacchia, b. 88, f. 689.

anti-Church laws in October 1949. According to these laws, an office for ecclesiastical affairs was established, priests in pastoral care became employees of the state, provided they took the oath of allegiance. De Liva characterised the legislation as a “diabolically insidious act”, recognising that priests, once disoriented, cut off from their bishops, and placed under existential threat, would eventually yield to the regime. He therefore recommended that the Holy See employ Vatican Radio as a means of communication. In the ensuing months, the Slovak section of Vatican Radio broadcast a series of programmes providing information on the Church’s situation and conveying instructions that urged priests not to sign any declarations in support of the regime.<sup>35</sup> The faithful were advised on methods of countering Communist propaganda:

Dear listeners, we again caution you about the grave danger threatening the Catholic Church in Slovakia and throughout the Republic. We urge you not to be deceived, and not to acquiesce in efforts to weaken and ultimately destroy you. As you acted with integrity only a few months ago, when the enemies of the Church sought to undermine you through the godless so-called Catholic Action, so act now: do not allow yourselves to be misled.<sup>36</sup>

Several instructions issued by the Secretariat of State had been implemented. They followed Ottavio de Liva suggestions and Pius XII acknowledged them.<sup>37</sup> In a confidential directive, Pius XII determined, first, that in order to avoid difficulties in communication between the ecclesiastical authorities and the clergy in Czechoslovakia, it was necessary to establish a service reserved for the clergy, comprising a small number of informative broadcasts, preferably in Latin. Secondly, to prevent Vatican broadcasts from being disrupted, it would be advisable – following the recommendation of the Apostolic Internunciature – to explore the possibility of linking the Vatican Radio Station with a foreign broadcaster, for example in the Netherlands. Thirdly, in view of the sensitive religious situation in the Czechoslovak dioceses, all Vatican broadcasts addressed to the

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**35** Hrabovec, “Stratégie Svätej stolice”, 186-7. See also the multi-part series of Vatican Radio’s Slovak Desk on the Congrua Law. Archivio della Radio Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, Programma slovacco, October 1949.

**36** *Kongruový zákon*, in Archivio della Radio Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, Programma slovacco, 1 October 1949, no. 466; Author’s transl.

**37** *Bafile’s positions*, 19 October 1949, in ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pontificato Pio XII, Parte II, Cecoslovacchia, pos. 266, f. 156. Pius XII acknowledged them on 21 October 1949.

clergy and public in Czechoslovakia should be submitted in advance to the Secretariat of State.<sup>38</sup>

The situation of the Catholic clergy in Czechoslovakia, however, was considerably more complex. In the end, the bishops, in a joint letter, instructed the clergy that they were permitted to accept a state salary and to take the oath of allegiance, provided that it was accompanied by the condition: “insofar as it does not contradict God’s law and the natural rights of man”.<sup>39</sup> The Holy See’s response was cautious and measured, allowing room for the initiatives of the Czechoslovak episcopate. Nevertheless, confusion arose when the press service *Informazioni Radio Vaticana* (IRVAT) reported that the Czechoslovak episcopate had authorised the clergy to take an oath of allegiance to the Republic. The Secretariat of State criticised the press service for its unfortunate presentation of the matter, and the broadcast of the report on Vatican Radio was subsequently discontinued. In response, the Secretariat of State issued detailed instructions governing communications between Vatican Radio, the IRVAT press service, and the Vatican’s official journal, *L’Osservatore Romano*.<sup>40</sup>

The Vatican Secretariat of State understood very well the importance of Vatican Radio as an alternative medium of information for Catholics behind the Iron Curtain. In the instructions for the broadcast, which appear regularly in the documents of the main office of the Roman Curia, Bafile stated in January 1951:

A ciò aggiungasi che, se oggi i nemici della Chiesa difficilmente possono riuscire a separare completamente i cattolici dell’Europa orientale dalla comunicazione con Roma, ciò sarà dovuto in parte considerevole all’esistenza della Stazione Radio Vaticana, ed alle trasmissioni nelle lingue di quei paesi.<sup>41</sup>

The statement formed part of the instructions addressed to Father Alois Kořínek, the Czech editor of Radio Vatican. In certain regions – particularly those areas of Czechoslovakia where the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans had left the faithful without priests – Father Kořínek initiated a series of broadcasts to guide listeners on how to live the Christian faith in the absence of clergy.

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**38** *Confidential statement addressed to Filippo Soccorsi*, 28 October 1949, in ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pontificato Pio XII, Parte II, Cecoslovacchia, pos. 266, f. 157b.

**39** Hrabovec, “Stratégie Svätej stolice”, 188.

**40** *Informazioni Radio Vaticano*, 31 October 1949, in ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pontificato Pio XII, Parte II, Cecoslovacchia, pos. 266, f. 135.

**41** *Istruzioni pastorali attraverso la Radio Vat.*, 31 January 1951, in ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pontificato Pio XII, Parte II, Cecoslovacchia, pos. 266, f. 113.

These broadcasts were in direct response to requests from listeners within Czechoslovakia. In this context, Bafile prepared instructions that were binding on Slovak and Czech broadcasts, which included recommendations to scrutinise specific developments carefully and, where necessary, to consult with the leadership of the Jesuit General Curia, especially Father Anton Prešeren, the Slavic assistant to the General of the Jesuits. Father Prešeren was well informed about Slovak affairs and served as an intermediary for the correspondence of Slovak Jesuits in exile.<sup>42</sup> In the case of particularly sensitive topics, individual broadcasts were to be submitted directly to the Secretariat of State for prior approval.<sup>43</sup>

Similar instructions appeared intermittently and addressed a range of contentious issues. In 1950, when the Communist regimes initiated a propaganda campaign for world peace (“campagna per la pace”) and the Catholic clergy came under renewed pressure to endorse it, Father Kořínek sought the opinion of the Secretariat of State. The resulting instructions emphasised that, although the Catholic Church had consistently upheld the cause of peace, Catholics should take care not to substitute the aspiration for genuine peace with Communist propaganda. The text of the instruction was personally approved by Pius XII.<sup>44</sup>

Among the records of the Secretariat of State are recommendations concerning the content of Radio Vatican broadcasts, conveyed through various channels from behind the Iron Curtain. The actual audience, however, could not be ascertained through correspondence, as such letters were intercepted by the Czechoslovak secret police, with some correspondents subsequently sentenced to forced labour.<sup>45</sup> It should be mentioned that listening to Radio Vatican broadcast was a criminal act in the whole period of the existence of the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia and particularly during the 1950s, when tuning in to Vatican Radio could result in harsh punishment. Interviews with priests who had succeeded in escaping across the barbed wire revealed that listeners desired catechesis on how to sustain their faith in the absence of priests, as well as reports on the life of the Church more generally. They also sought words of encouragement

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**42** Refer to the correspondence between Anton Prešeren and Slovak Jesuits in exile (Viliam Lacko, Frídrieh Osuský, Pavol Hnilica, Vendelín Javorka), in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Provincia Slovakiæ (Archivum Delegati P. Preseren), fasc. 1401.

**43** *Istruzioni pastorali attraverso la Radio Vat.*, 31 January 1951, in ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pontificato Pio XII, Parte II, Cecoslovacchia, pos. 266, f. 113.

**44** *Istruzioni circa “Campagna per la pace” ed altre questioni*, 21 September 1950, in ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pontificato Pio XII, Parte II, Cecoslovacchia, pos. 266, f. 128.

**45** *Letter from Augustín Záh, Vicar of the Catholic Mission of the Pontifical Auxiliary Commission for Slovak Refugees in Germany and Austria, to the Vatican Radio*, 17 October 1950, in ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pontificato Pio XII, Parte II, Cecoslovacchia, pos. 266, f. 110.

and sources of hope in those difficult times.<sup>46</sup> Other feedback on the broadcasts insisted that the atheistic nature of communism and the violations of the Church's rights be consistently highlighted. It was also deemed important to expose specific instances of persecution. The broadcasts, however, were not to voice direct criticism of the Czechoslovak government, which was highly sensitive to such attacks and dismissed them as "foreign propaganda", with the immediate consequence of intensifying persecution.<sup>47</sup> Particular care was to be taken in verifying reports, so that false or exaggerated accounts would not be broadcast, as these were exploited by Communist propaganda to discredit the Holy See.<sup>48</sup>

One letter from Slovakia merits particular mention, as it was exceptional in its own right. Addressed to the Slovak-language broadcast of Vatican Radio, it was sent by Greek Catholics from Eastern Slovakia approximately six months after the suppression of the Greek Catholic Church, in October 1950. The authors expressed great satisfaction at the broadcasting of the Sunday service in the Byzantine Rite. Following the suppression of the Greek Catholic Church and its enforced unification with the Orthodox Church, many Greek Catholics had begun attending Roman Catholic services which, owing to the differences in rite, were unfamiliar to them; as a result, they often refrained from attending Mass on Sundays altogether. The letter stated verbatim:

Siamo cattolici di rito greco. Voi sapete, che qualcuno [sic] dei vostri sacerdoti hanno sottoscritto l'adesione alla chiesa schismatica pravoslava [sic]. Noi non vogliamo più assistere alla loro messa e funzioni. Avevamo deciso di andare a Sabinov, nella chiesa romano-cattolica. Ma non ci piace assistere a questa messa, perché non ne capiamo nulla. Perciò adesso preferiamo rimanere a casa. Noi cattolici di rito greco vi domandiamo di trasmettere qualche cosa anche per noi, così come avete fatto la Domenica 8 ottobre 1950, quando avete trasmessa la nostra liturgia e predica alle ore 10 di mattina. Credeteci, abbiamo pianto dalla commozione. [...] Ripetetelo, per favore, più volte.<sup>49</sup>

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**46** *Letter from Alexander Heidler to Corrado Bafile*, 30 December 1950, in ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pontificato Pio XII, Parte II, Cecoslovacchia, pos. 266, f. 108.

**47** *Alcune osservazioni per la R.V.*, October-November 1951, *Confidential report*, in ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pontificato Pio XII, Parte II, Cecoslovacchia, pos. 266, f. 55.

**48** *Slovacchia notizie sulla situazione - Trasmissioni della Radio Vaticana*, 3 June 1957, in ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pontificato Pio XII, Parte II, Cecoslovacchia, pos. 266, f. 24.

**49** *A letter from Greek Catholics from Eastern Slovakia*, 18 October 1950, in ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pontificato Pio XII, Parte II, Cecoslovacchia, pos. 266, f. 127 b.

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The statement resembles the letters of Radio Vatican listeners during Second World War, who sought comfort in difficult times. Similarly, it confirms the role of radio as a new instrument of Apostolate.<sup>50</sup> It instructed the faithful on how to face communist propaganda, how to live a life of faith often without priests and sacraments, and, finally, provided them with important information about the functioning of the Church. In this sense, the role of Vatican Radio was both crucial and irreplaceable.

### 3 Religious Broadcast of Radio Free Europe

An important part of the anti-Communist campaign the West carried out in the first decade of the Cold War was psychological warfare in the form of radio broadcasting. Western intelligence circles called it 'white propaganda'.<sup>51</sup> In the nascent Cold War, the National Committee for Free Europe (later Free Europe Committee) was created in June 1949 as a nongovernmental organization responsible for the broadcasting of Radio Free Europe. In the same line, the Council of Free Czechoslovakia was formed in February 1949 within the Committee.<sup>52</sup> From the beginning, the Slovak exile organizations protested against the claims of the Council of Free Czechoslovakia to speak on behalf of Slovaks abroad as it was an almost exclusively Czech organization promoting Czechoslovak statehood and continuity with pre-Munich Czechoslovakia, as well as the 1920 Constitution of Czechoslovakia which in the post-war period was already outdated.<sup>53</sup> The Council of Free Czechoslovakia was also responsible for programming and staffing Radio Free Europe. The editors were supposed to promote the so-called Czechoslovak spirit and in this sense the broadcast ignored the national specificities in Central Eastern Europe. Further concerns were expressed as to whether the broadcasts would be prepared and carried out by exiles with clear anti-Communist views which was not always evident in the

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**50** Perin, "Vatican Radio and Modern Propaganda", 72-3.

**51** See Kennan, "The Inauguration of Organized Political Warfare", 30 April 1948. Wilson Centre, Digital Archive. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114320>.

**52** On the genesis of RFE, see Ross Johnson, *Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty*; Cummings, *Cold War Frequencies*.

**53** "Aide-Memoire concernant les visées politiques du soi-distant Conseil de la Tchécoslovaquie libre", October 1949. The text of memorandum published in Kirschbaum, *Slovakia. Nation at the Crossroads*, 327-30, document no. 55. See also "Aide-Memoire".

case of the prominent exiles from Czechoslovakia after the February 1948 coup d'état.<sup>54</sup>

The post-February exiles, their leftist orientation, and previous collaboration with the communists in post-war Czechoslovakia were well known within the Roman Curia. In this context, a noteworthy anonymous document from the Slovak exile community, entitled *History of the Council of Free Czechoslovakia and the Personnel of Radio Free Europe* (January 1953), likely prepared for American governmental authorities, was submitted to the Secretariat of State. The document contained information on prominent National Front politicians, detailing evidence of their pro-Soviet sympathies and collaboration with the communists between 1945 and 1948, which elicited considerable interest. Bafile observed in this regard:

Le persone che sono oggi a capo del Consiglio della Libera Cecoslovacchia ripetono quindi, la loro autorità inizialmente dai comunisti, e per di più, avendo partecipato fino al 1948 al Governo diretto dai comunisti, si sono resi responsabili di tutte le malefatte di questi ultimi.<sup>55</sup>

The former post-war Czechoslovak chargé d'affaires by the Holy See, František Schwarzenberg – himself sympathetic to the Council of Free Czechoslovakia – acknowledged openly that the exile organisation failed to take into account the interests of Czech and Slovak Catholics. Merely a few weeks after the Council's establishment, he wrote the following in a letter to the Secretariat of State:

Il est regrettable que ni le choix et le nombre des représentants catholiques (surtout dans le secteur slovaque) dans le comité de 30, ni la première déclaration du Conseil forment une garantie suffisante, que les désirs légitimes des catholiques seraient respectés en avenir. On espère de pouvoir corriger ces défauts d'enfance.<sup>56</sup>

The Secretariat of State did not view the Council of Free Czechoslovakia in a positive light and criticised the dominant

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**54** *Letter of the Slovak National Council Abroad to the National Committee for Free Europe*, Montreal, 18 September 1950, in University Ottawa, Special Collections Archives, Jozef Mikus X20-01, b. 15, f. 22.

**55** *History of the Council of Free Czechoslovakia and the personnel of Radio Free Europe (1953)*, in ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pontificato di Pio XII, Parte II, Cecoslovacchia, pos. 286, ff. 287-308.

**56** *Lisle – Francois de Schwarzenberg: circa costituzione, avvenuta a Washington, del "Council of Free Czechoslovakia"*, 12 April 1949, in ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pontificato di Pio XII, Parte II, Cecoslovacchia, pos. 286, ff. 612-15.

influence of “anti-clerical figures” within its ranks.<sup>57</sup> In 1952, when the leaders of the Council of Free Czechoslovakia considered appointing a permanent representative to the Vatican (the appointment of former chargé d'affaires Schwarzenberg was under consideration), the Secretariat of State rejected the proposal. The Roman Curia argued that such a move would, on the one hand, exacerbate the situation of Catholics in Czechoslovakia and, on the other hand, that the Council of Free Czechoslovakia did not constitute a sufficiently representative organisation, as it “did not enjoy the support of the majority of expatriates, particularly Catholics, due to its association with Beneš’s party”.<sup>58</sup>

The common Czechoslovak service of Radio Free Europe failed to attract most of Slovak émigrés.<sup>59</sup> From its beginning, the Slovak diaspora and the Slovak-American organizations demanded a Slovak broadcasting on equal basis, criticised the low representation of Slovaks and Slovak Catholics in the leading positions, and denounced the leftist and even Marxist nature of the programmes. Until the 1980s, the Slovak exile organizations submitted protest memoranda to the leaders of RFE.<sup>60</sup> The memoranda pointed out shortcomings in the staffing and overall policy of the Czechoslovak editorial office in Munich. These were seen as the main reasons why the broadcast failed to achieve the desired effect on the anti-Communist attitudes of Slovaks beyond the Iron Curtain. The different programme sections were mostly led by Czechoslovak-oriented left-wing émigrés. The low representation of Slovaks in the leading positions was not proportional to the share of Czechs and Slovaks in Czechoslovakia and failed to reflect the social stratification and political pluralism in the country.<sup>61</sup>

Challenges were also encountered in relation to Slovak religious programming within the RFE Czechoslovak service. Research in the Historical Archives of the Vatican Secretariat of State confirms that

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**57** *Carte sciolte, 1952, Circa l'Attività politica di esuli in America*, in ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pontificato di Pio XII, Parte II, Cecoslovacchia, pos. 286, ff. 480-8. See note by Bafile dated 18 November 1952 regarding the report.

**58** *Consiglio della libera Cecoslovacchia*, 6 October 1952, in ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pontificato di Pio XII, Parte II, Cecoslovacchia, pos. 286, f. 254.

**59** This position reflected in the correspondence of some leading Slovak exiles who had contacts in Slovakia and were familiar with the situation in the country concerning the reception of foreign broadcasts. *Letter from Konštantín Čulen to Peter Prídavok*, Montreal, 9 November 1950, in SNA, Slovak League in America, b. 9.

**60** *Memorandum from the Association of Slovaks in Great Britain to the National Committee for a Free Europe, N.Y. City*, (draft) London, 29 October 1951, in National Archives, Public Record Office, London, FO 371/94482.

**61** It was evident that of the 31 programme editors, 29 were Czechs and only two Slovaks, 27 had a socialist political background, and only four were non-Socialists. “Memorandum from the Association of Slovaks in Great Britain”, 1.

the Vatican's highest office was to some extent involved in this matter. The RFE's religious broadcasts began as soon as the radio was launched and one of its first and long-time editors was Czech priest Alexander Heidler, former Professor of Theology at Charles University in Prague. In 1949, Heidler emigrated to Bavaria and on 1 May 1951 he became editor of RFE's religious programmes – a position he held for almost four decades – and was director of the Czech Missionary Service in West Germany.<sup>62</sup> A month after the regular broadcasts started, he wrote a letter to Bafile saying that he needed help finding a suitable Slovak priest. He argued that Slovak priests in exile were according to his opinion either not sufficiently qualified or refused to cooperate with RFE because of its Czechoslovak orientation. He asked the Vatican official to support his initiative.<sup>63</sup>

It is not known how this initiative ended, but the fact is that an influential group of Slovak emigrants in France proposed Jesuit Father Fridrich Osuský – who was studying ascetics at Paray-le-Monial and sociology and political science at Sorbonne at the time and was the spiritual advisor of the Slovak Catholic group in Paris<sup>64</sup> – to host RFE's religious programmes in Slovak. Father Osuský's experience, intellectual formation and rhetorical skills made him the best candidate and the Jesuit General Curia immediately agreed to this proposal.<sup>65</sup> His religious programmes became popular in Slovakia.<sup>66</sup> Despite this obvious success, at the end of 1955 the Jesuit Superior General dismissed him from RFE. Not even the interventions by RFE Programme Director William T. Rafael and the chief of the Czechoslovak service Július Firt, who considered Father Osuský to be a “very important moral force”, bore any results.<sup>67</sup> Father Prešeren in his answer to Rafael argued that: “I must recall him for apostolic ministry in Canada, namely, for a post for which, as the frontiers of Slovakia are closed, I have no other subject among the Fathers at my disposal”.<sup>68</sup>

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**62** Vodičková, *Vatikánský rozhlas*, 110.

**63** *Lettera del sac. Dr. Alexander Heidler a Mons. Corrado Bafile, presenta di difficoltà dei sacerdoti cechi e slovacchi*, 31 May 1951, in ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pontificato Pio XII, Parte II, Cecoslovacchia, pos. 286, ff. 2-3.

**64** See more “Fridrich Osuský”.

**65** *Letter from Jozef Šramek to Anton Prešeren*, Munich, 14 December 1955, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Provincia Slovakiae (Archivum Delegati P. Preseren), fasc. 1401.

**66** *Rev. Bucko, cappellano capo dei profughi slovacchi in Germania*, 30 May 1952, *Statement of Corrado Bafile*, in ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pontificato Pio XII, Parte II, Cecoslovacchia, pos. 287, f. 3.

**67** *Letter from William T. Rafael and Július Firt to Prešeren*, 3 December 1955, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Provincia Slovakiae (Archivum Delegati P. Preseren), fasc. 1401.

**68** *Letter from Prešeren to William T. Rafael*, 12 December 1955, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Provincia Slovakiae (Archivum Delegati P. Preseren), fasc. 1401.

The General Curia sent Osuský to Canada, where he helped to build a centre for Slovak Jesuits in Galt.<sup>69</sup>

Father Osuský was not enthusiastic about leaving Munich. In this respect, he wrote to Prešeren in February 1956 the following:

Ich habe Ihnen offen geschrieben, dass ich keine Lust habe, nach Kanada zu gehen. Ich war überzeugt, dass das [sic] eine objektiv nicht gute Entscheidung ist, weil ich eine Arbeit verlassen muss, wo ich mehr leisten kann und wichtige Tätigkeit entfalten kann als in Kanada. In diesem Sinne schien mir diese Entscheidung nicht im Einklang zu sein mit unseren Ignazianischen Prinzipien.<sup>70</sup>

In his response, Prešeren emphasized that it was not the task of the young Jesuit to question the Ignatian principles or adapt them to his own wishes. He urged the father to obedience and advised him to depart for Canada as soon as possible.<sup>71</sup> Following the advice of his superiors, Osuský finally came round, helped to create a community for Slovak Jesuits in Canada and became its first superior.<sup>72</sup> From today's perspective, it seems questionable whether it might have been wiser to keep Father Osuský in the religious broadcasting of RFE. His successor, Felix Mikula, a priest with strong ties to the Czech environment, who worked as a religious editor from 1956 to 1973, could not, due to his predominantly pro-Czechoslovak orientation, serve the interests of Slovak Catholics and the Catholic Church in Slovakia to the same extent. It is therefore appropriate to ask whether the leadership of the Jesuit General Curia underestimated the importance of RFE's religious broadcasting as a tool in the anti-Communist struggle.

The attitude of the Slovak diaspora towards the broadcasts of the Czechoslovak desk was predominantly negative, particularly in West Germany. The management of Radio Free Europe was accused of including Catholic programming merely to create the false impression that the Slovak Catholic community in the diaspora maintained a positive attitude towards Czechoslovakia. In this context, Father Bucko – an exiled Slovak Catholic priest and, from August 1951, head of pastoral care for Slovak emigrants in Germany – wrote a letter to the Apostolic Nuncio in West Germany, Alois Muench, outlining the

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**69** See correspondence between Osuský and Prešeren in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Provincia Slovakiae (Archivum Delegati P. Prešeren), fasc. 1401, Osuský ad Assistentem, 1956, 1957.

**70** *Letter from Osuský to Prešeren*, 6 February 1956, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Provincia Slovakiae (Archivum Delegati P. Prešeren), fasc. 1401.

**71** *Letter from Prešeren to Osuský*, 23 February 1956, in ARSI, Nuova Compagnia, Provincia Slovakiae (Archivum Delegati P. Prešeren), fasc. 1401.

**72** For more details, see Ondruš, *Slovenskí jezuiti v Kanade*, 55-72; "Fridrich Osuský".

position of the Slovak Catholic community in the West. In the letter, he admitted that Osuský's religious programs were fully in line with the doctrine of the Church and free of any kind of political connotations. The issue, therefore, was not the Jesuit priest himself, but the overall line of RFE in the "service of Czechoslovakism".<sup>73</sup> During an audience with the Nuncio in Bad Godesberg, Bucko claimed that Osuský had agreed to cooperate with RFE despite the fact that the radio not only failed to serve the interests of Slovaks, but in his opinion also had an anti-Christian attitude.<sup>74</sup> The Secretariat of State did not share Bucko's concerns. On the contrary, it was convinced that Radio Free Europe's religious programmes commanded a significant audience in Slovakia and were not perceived as conflicting with national sentiment. To avoid any political implications, no further action was taken, and the matter was simply noted.<sup>75</sup>

Several months later, in January 1953, Bucko met Bafile at the Secretariat of State's office in the Vatican. During the audience, Bucko reported to a senior Vatican official on the challenges of providing pastoral care to Slovak refugees in West Germany. During the meeting, he requested that the Holy See prohibit Catholic clergy from participating in Radio Free Europe's religious broadcasts, arguing that, in his view:

è sconveniente che ecclesiastici cattolici collaborino a quest'organizzazione che ha una impronta tanto poco Cristiana; sia perché - per quanto riguarda la Slovacchia - la stessa organizzazione sostiene l'idea 'cecoslovacca', cosa anche la rende male accetta agli slovacchi.<sup>76</sup>

Bafile did not concur with Bucko's request. In a note to the Secretariat of State, he stated that there was no objection to religious broadcasts in Czech and Slovak, given that both religious editors, Father Heidler and Father Osuský, were regarded as capable and reputable priests. According to Bafile, the question of whether Catholic priests should collaborate with Radio Free Europe was open to debate, as there were valid arguments on both sides. He further cautioned against being swayed by the 'nationalistic excesses' of a faction of Slovaks,

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**73** *Letter from Vojtech Bucko to Alois Muench*, 7 May 1952, in ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pontificato Pio XII, Parte II, Cecoslovacchia, pos. 287, ff. 6-9.

**74** *Letter from Alois Muench to Domenico Tardini*, 17 May 1952, in ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pontificato Pio XII, Parte II, Cecoslovacchia, pos. 287, ff. 4-5.

**75** *Rev. Bucko, cappellano capo dei profughi slovacchi in Germania*, 30 May 1952, *Statement of Corrado Bafile*, in ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pontificato Pio XII, Parte II, Cecoslovacchia, pos. 287, ff. 3, 10.

**76** *Colloquio col rev. Adalbert Bucko*, 22 January 1953, in ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pontificato Pio XII, Parte II, Cecoslovacchia, pos. 287, f. 357.

emphasising that the issue concerned all nations behind the Iron Curtain. Although Bafile's stance appeared somewhat critical of Bucko's views, the Secretariat of State nonetheless requested the Jesuit General Curia to provide reliable information regarding Radio Free Europe's religious broadcasts.<sup>77</sup> The results of this investigation remain unknown.

## **4 Conclusions**

Slovak-language broadcasts by Vatican Radio were among the most popular foreign radio transmissions to Czechoslovakia during the Cold War. This popularity derived not only from the high degree of religiosity in Slovakia but also from the authenticity and relevance of the Slovak-language content. Of particular significance to members of the clergy were the Latin-language broadcasts, which provided timely updates on the internal affairs of the Church.

However, Vatican Radio's primary role extended beyond merely reporting on the anti-Church measures enacted by the communist regime, including the persecution of the faithful and other forms of interference in Church life. Above all, it sought to compensate for the absence of communication between the isolated bishops, clergy, and ultimately the laity, many of whom were compelled to practise their faith without the presence of priests. In a context where direct contact between the Holy See and the local Church behind the Iron Curtain was effectively severed, Vatican Radio functioned as the sole link - an alternative and indeed the only means of communication across the Iron Curtain. This reality remains insufficiently recognised and explored within historical scholarship. It should be there for interesting interviewing survivors or heirs on the topic.

Recent research into the archival records of the Vatican Secretariat of State - the body responsible for Vatican Radio broadcasts - reveals a notable degree of flexibility in both the procedures and content of these transmissions. Such adaptability was necessitated by the evolving tactics and strategies employed by the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia and contributed significantly to the credibility of this exceptional medium.

The approach adopted by Vatican Radio was characterised by prudence and moderation, with a strong emphasis on the rigorous verification of information. While deliberately avoiding direct attacks on Communist governments so as not to provoke further anti-Church reprisals, the broadcasts nevertheless articulated the

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**77** *Colloquio col rev. Adalbert Bucko*, 22 January 1953, in ASRS, AA.EE.SS., Pontificato Pio XII, Parte II, Cecoslovacchia, pos. 287, f. 357.

Church's doctrinal positions and its resolute opposition to atheistic communism with clarity.

The importance of Vatican Radio during the fraught early years of the Cold War remains insufficiently acknowledged and merits further scholarly attention within historiographical discourse.

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