

Portuguese Missions in Brazil and Asia

First Portuguese Missionaries in Brazil

Adapted from, Leading Events in Church History, Volume 4

Franciscans and secular priests began the work of evangelizing the Indians of Brazil, and this mission was at first productive of much fruit. But the ever-increasing cruelty and rapacity of the Portuguese were more than the missionaries could control. Eventually **John III of Portugal** asked **St. Ignatius** to send Jesuits to their aid. The Jesuit order was growing very fast during the mid-1500s and was able to supply many more recruits than the longer established Dominicans and Franciscans. The Jesuits had won considerable renown by their learning and their virtue, and in addition, it refused to enforce the 'racial purity' laws enacted by other orders which prohibited *conversos* from joining. In this way the order attracted Christians of Jewish descent and several of the earliest leaders of the Jesuits were *Conversos*.

The first Jesuits labored among the Portuguese, striving to stem divisions, tending the sick, and founding colleges, but, at the same time, befriending the unfortunate natives to the best of their power. Father **Ignatius d Azevedo**, who had seen the pitiable condition of the Indians when in Brazil as visitor, implored to be allowed to return as a missionary. His wish was granted by St. Francis Borgia, then General, and seventy members of the Society volunteered to accompany him. They set out, but, on nearing the coast of Brazil, a Dutch fleet bore down upon them. The missionary flotilla broke up, and the ships were separately attacked. Every Jesuit of the band was put to death except the novice cook, whom the Dutch carried off to serve them. He afterwards escaped to tell the tale.

Undaunted by this wholesale martyrdom, another band of Jesuits set sail the following year, this time under the intrepid **Anchieta**, deservedly styled the Apostle of Brazil. He traversed the country on foot, everywhere preparing the harvest which later corners reaped. Carrying his altar and his slender stock of food and clothes on his back, he penetrated into trackless forests, forded streams, scaled mountains, pursuing the Indians as they fled at the very sight of a white man, and winning them by his passionate tenderness and devotion.

Not only on the high seas did the Calvinists attack the missionaries, but on land they were their bitterest enemies—though it may be questioned whether their animosity did as much harm to the cause of the faith as the scandalous lives of the Portuguese and Spanish settlers.

Saints and Missionaries of Brazil and Paraguay

- **Forty Martyrs of Brazil** (died 1570) — Group of Portuguese Jesuits missionaries, including Ignatius de Azevedo, who were attacked at sea and killed by Huguenot Pirates while on their way to missions in Brazil.
- **Ignatius de Azevedo** (1527-1570) — Jesuit missionary who was put in charge of all Portuguese missions in Brazil. He returned to Europe and recruited more missionaries, but their ship was waylaid by pirates and all were killed.
- **Manuel da Nobrega** (1517-1570) — First Jesuit superior in the Province of Brazil. Worked to found colleges and seminaries. Helped found important towns including Rio de Janeiro, Recife, and San Paulo.

- **Jose de Anchieta** (1534-1597) — Known as the "Apostle of Brazil", he converted hundreds of natives, and worked with Nobrega to found towns, and establish missions. Wrote the first grammar/dictionary of Native language.
- **Roch Gonzales** (1576-1628) — Jesuits priest who was the first missionary among the Guarani people. He founded several missions in Paraguay but was murdered by a Chieftain who opposed the missions along with his fellow Jesuits **Juan de Castillo** and **Alfonso Rodriguez**.
- **Thirty Martyrs of Natal** (died 1645) — Group of Thirty Catholics, including two priests who were massacred in northern Brazil by Dutch Calvinist Pirates.
- **John III of Porgugal** (1502-1557) — King of Portugal who requested the newly formed Jesuits to establish missions in Portuguese colonies in the America and Asia.
- **Pedro Alvares Cabral** (1467-1520) — Portuguese navigator credited with the discovery of Brazil.

The Jesuit Reductions of Paraguay

Adapted from John Laux, Church History, pp. 472-473.

In villages, generally called "reductions," composed exclusively of Indians, the work of civilization advanced far more rapidly than in colonial settlements. These reductions existed throughout all South and Central America, in Mexico, and as far north as California. The Franciscans formed some of them, hut the most celebrated were those of Paraguay, whose founders and governors were Jesuits.

The first Reduction was established in 1609 in what is now southern Brazil, and by 1630 twelve more had been founded. The main part of the "Christian Indian State," as the Reductions were called, was formed by the thirty-two Guarani Reductions in Paraguay. The Spanish colonists opposed the Reductions, because they deprived them of cheap labor and potential slaves, but Philip III of Spain aided the Jesuits with subsidies and legal measures. The venture grew so successful that subsidies from the Crown were soon replaced by taxes to the Crown. "The site of a Reduction was chosen for its healthful climate and proximity to waterways. The plan of the village was square, with streets running in straight lines. In the center was the church, and nearby were the residence of the Fathers and the cemetery." The Indians, some of them, like the Caribs, just weaned from cannibalism, were taught to cultivate the soil, and, little by little, were instructed in all branches of industry. They cast bells and built organs; they made cannon; they were good carpenters, masons, blacksmiths, carvers, and printers; the women manufactured calicoes of the finest qualities. Commerce was developed. Education was general, so that illiteracy was practically unknown. Many Indians could read Spanish and Latin as well as their own tongue. Part of the land was set aside as the "property of God," which the whole community had to till, in order to make provision for times of stress and scarcity and for the maintenance of the sick and the aged.

The Indians were sincerely attached to their unselfish instructors and guides; they knew only too well that it was the missionaries alone who stood between them and abject slavery. Once—in 1631—12,000 Guarani Indians, under the leadership of two Jesuits, migrated from their ancestral lands before the Portuguese slave-hunters to the Reductions on the Parana, a distance of nearly eight hundred miles.

Among the many Jesuits who labored in the Reductions the most successful were Maceta, De Mendoza, Mazetta, Baraza, and De Montoya. De Montoya composed a dictionary, grammar, and catechism in the Guarani language, and wrote an excellent history of the Paraguay missions. Martyrs, too, grace the annals of the Reductions: three priests, Rocco Gonzales, a native of Paraguay, Alfonso Rodriguez and Juan del Castillo, were killed at the instigation of an Indian wizard in 1628. The heroic missionaries were beatified on Jan. 28, 1934, in a brilliant ceremony attended by hundreds of South American pilgrims.

In the 17th century the Reductions were the object of numerous attacks by the "Paulistas" or Portuguese settlers of Sao Paulo, who disrupted many villages and carried the Indians off as slaves. The fatal blow was dealt to the Reductions in 1767, when Charles III of Spain signed the edict expelling the Jesuits from the Spanish colonies in America. Thus ended one of the most remarkable experiments in the history of Christian missionary enterprise. Voltaire called the Reductions "the triumph of humanity," and a modern English writer, R. B. Cunningham-Graham, entitled his history of the Paraguay Reductions "A Vanished Arcadia."

Francis Xavier and Portuguese Missions in Asia

Adapted from John Laux, Church History, pp. ???.

In 1540 Francis Xavier bade farewell to Rome and set out on his long sea-voyage to India as Papal Legate. He landed at Goa, the capital of the Portuguese possessions. Ten years of intense apostolic labors followed, first at Goa, where in six months he accomplished the reformation of that corrupt city; then among the baptized but uninstructed pearl-fishers of Cape Comorin. Then the fisher-folk of Travancore, ten-thousand of whom he baptized in one month. Then among the inhabitants of Spice Islands (Moluccas), the farthest Portuguese outpost in the East. Finally as first messenger of the Gospel among the Japanese, and founder of the Jesuit missions of the Far East.

Francis Xavier was a shining model for all subsequent preachers of the Gospel until God called the soldier of Christ to rest in 1552, just as he was preparing for a new mission to China. Hundreds of thousands are said to have been converted by him and since Paul traversed the Roman Empire God's Church had seen no greater apostle. The great missionary lives on in his Letters, whose every line reveals a heart aflame for Christ. They have inspired thousands of every nation with enthusiastic love for the apostolate among the heathens and the desire to lay down their lives for the Gospel.

His labors in India were continued by his brethren in religion, but no great development took place until, in 1606, Robert De Nobili came to labor among them. The first Jesuits had worked exclusively for the lowest classes: they were thus cut off from all intercourse with any of the higher castes. The newcomer resolved to win the Brahmins to the faith, and for this end he isolated himself from his brethren, spent years in solitary penance and study, and, in fact, went through the training which the Hindu priesthood supposes. At length he began to discuss theological topics with the Brahmins; then he opened a school which was largely attended by the priestly caste. De Nobili was blamed for adopting the customs and clothing of the Hindus, and accused to Pope Gregory XV.

A Dominican of Goa undertook his defense, and the Jesuit was allowed to continue his self-denying life and labors. He is said to have won a hundred thousand Brahmins to the faith. When blind and worn out with age, he still labored for his neophytes, composing, in various Hindu dialects, books to facilitate the study of these languages to future missionaries. Great numbers of devoted men followed in the footsteps of Xavier and Nobili, and in spite of the Dutch, whose

action was calculated to wreck the missions in the Indies, the faith has never been wholly extirpated from among the native tribes.

Adapted from Sisters of Notre Dame, Leading Events in Church History, Vol IV.

Meanwhile Asia was beholding wonders of conversions. St. **Francis Xavier** had carried the faith into the Indies as early as 1542, and for seven years he gathered into the Church tribe after tribe of the poor outcasts of Southern India. The Fishery Coast, Travancore, and Meliapore, were the scenes of his early triumphs. Then his insatiable zeal carried him to Malacca, Amboyna, the Moluccas, and the island he calls of the Moro. Before he started for Japan, in 1549, he had already a numerous band of zealous workers around him, for whose well-being this man, greedy of suffering for himself, showed the most tender solicitude.

Ceylon was won to the faith by Franciscans and Oratorians as early as 1546; Cochin China by Father **De Rhodes**, S.J., a hundred years later. After laboring on the missions for thirty-nine years, this intrepid man was exiled from Cochin China. He then went to Rome to beg for help towards further labors. Pope Innocent X gave him leave to recruit associates and by his eloquent pleadings he gathered a large band.

Missionary Saints of Portuguese India and Asia

John III of Portugal, the same king who established the Jesuit missions in South America also called for missionaries to Portuguese colonies in Asia and Francis Xavier followed the call. He succeeded in converting thousands of natives to Christianity in dozens of ports throughout Asia and helped establish Churches in India, Ceylon, Indonesia, and Japan. This is a list of some of the prominent missionaries to Asia who followed in his footsteps

- **Francis Xavier** (1506-1552) (Goa, Malacca, Japan) — Early Jesuit missionary who traveled throughout Asia and made thousands of converts. Established Christian Churches in Japan, India, and China.
- **Gonsalo Garcia** (1556-1597) (India, Japan) — Franciscan lay brother from Portuguese India who was a missionary to Japan, and was martyred as one of the **Twenty-six Martyrs of Japan**.
- **Alexander De Rhodes** (1591-1660) (Vietnam) — French Jesuit of Jewish heritage who established the first Missions in Vietnam (Then Cochin-China). He wrote the first Portuguese-Latin-Vietnamese dictionary.
- **Robert de Nobili** (1577-1656) (India) — Jesuit Missionary to Southern India who adopted Brahmin dress and customs in order to effectively evangelize the Hindus.
- **John de Brito** (1647-1693) (India) — Portuguese Jesuit missionary who adopted Robert de Nobili's tactics of living according to native customs in order to convert the natives of India. Martyred by relatives of one of the local kings wives who had been dismissed after the king converted to Christianity.
- **Joseph Vaz** (1651-1711) (India, Ceylon) — Priest native to the Portuguese colony of Goa, who established an Oratory in Indian and then spent the rest of his life as a missionary to Ceylon, at a time the island nation was overtaken by Dutch Calvinists.