

## World Missions in the Age of Discovery

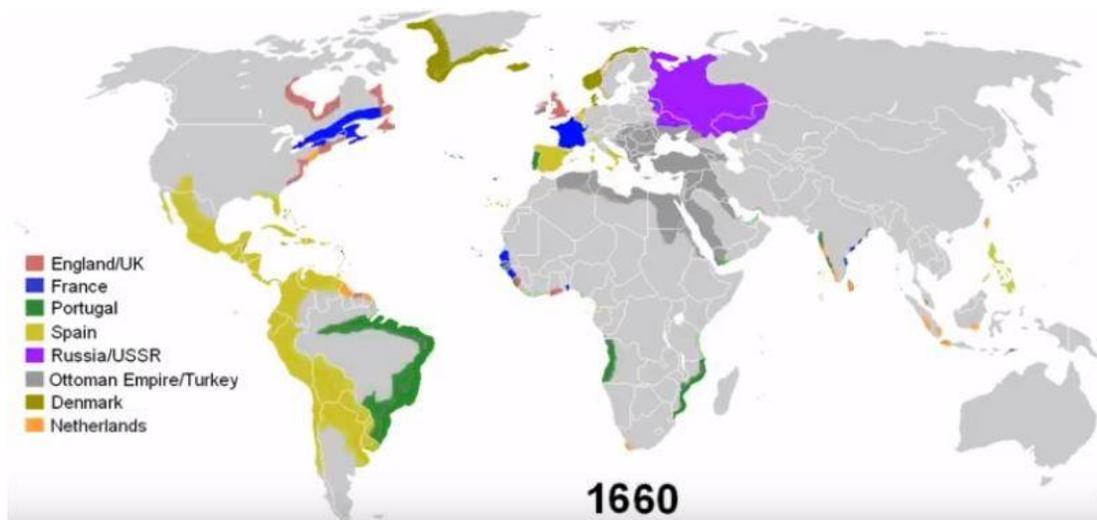
The age of Discovery saw a great expansion of Catholic Missionary work throughout the world which continued for centuries, especially in the colonial empires of Spain, Portugal, and France. The field of labor thrown open to Catholic missionaries during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was immense. The coastal areas of whole continents, inhabited by a wide variety of peoples, — some primitive, others highly civilized, — was suddenly accessible to missionaries. But their work of sharing the gospels and benefits of Christian civilization was greatly complicated by the fact that trading companies, pirates, and adventurers also had access to foreign lands, and their goals of conquest and economic exploitation were often in direct conflict with those of the evangelists.

The missionaries of the 16th century were mainly drawn from the Franciscans, Dominicans, and Jesuits, and there was a considerable difference in approach among the orders. In general, the Franciscans were in favor of baptizing all who were willing and educating the neophytes over time, while the Dominicans insisted on a longer probationary period before baptism. On the other hand, the legalistic approach of the Dominicans greatly benefited the natives, in that they also paid greater attention to the reform and enforcement of Spanish laws protecting the Indians, while the Franciscans tended to focus on conversion and civilization first, before attempting to rectify injustices.

Both Dominicans and Franciscans worked well with primitive peoples, but had less success adapting their methods to more complicated civilizations. Some of the most challenging situations, therefore, were handled by Jesuits who had the insight and patience to adapt themselves to the lifestyle and customs of more complex and ancient societies.

### Spanish, Portuguese, and French Colonial Empires

Although the work of conversion and civilization was done mostly by religious orders the work of the missionaries depended entirely on the form of colonial government in which they operated. During the 16th and 17th centuries, almost all Catholic missions operated under the protection of three colonial governments: Spain, Portugal, and France. The map below shows European colonial empires as of the Mid 1660s. Most of the territory in Asia held by the Netherlands was first colonized by Portugal but lost to the Dutch East Indies company in the early 1600s.



## Age of Discovery and World Missions

The following timeline provides important milestones in the discovery, colonization, and missionary activities of Spain (red), Portugal (green) and France (blue). As the timeline makes clear, during the 16th century, the Spanish and Portuguese colonial Empires were the primary mission fields. By the 17th century, France, the Netherlands, and Britain became increasingly influential.

- 1492 **Columbus First Voyage to the Americas—Claimed for Spain**
- 1494 **Treaty of Tordesillas** divides territories of Spain/Portugal along meridian.
- 1497-99 **Vasco de Gama** Voyage to India—Portugal Empire in established Asia
- 1500 **Pedro Cabral** Voyage to Brazil—Portugal claims territory in Americas
- 1501 First Slaves brought from Africa to West Indies
- 1510 **Goa** established as Portuguese colonial base in Asia.
- 1521 **Hernando Cortez** conquers Mexico for Spain
- 1524 **Twelve Apostles of Mexico** Arrive to convert natives of New Spain
- 1530 **Juan Zumarraga** appointed first Archbishop of Mexico
- 1531 **Our Lady of Guadalupe** appears to **Juan Diego** in Mexico
- 1532 **Pizarro** conquers Peru for Spain, silver and gold Mines found
- 1532 **Antonio de Mendoza** appointed First Viceroy of Mexico
- 1540 **John III of Portugal** recruits Jesuits to establish Missions in Brazil and Goa
- 1541-52 Voyages and missions of **Francis Xavier** in Goa, Ceylon, Malacca, Japan
- 1542 **New Laws for the Protection of the Indians** promulgated by Charles V.
- 1551 **University of San Marcos** in Lima and **University of Mexico** established.
- 1560 Inquisition established in Goa and Brazil
- 1565 Colony of **St. Augustine** founded in Florida
- 1582 **Matteo Ricci** and **Michele Ruggieri** establish first Jesuit Missions in China.
- 1597 Death of **Paul Miki** and 26 Japanese Martyrs in Nagasaki
- 1608 **Samuel Champlain** establishes Quebec colony in Canada
- 1608 First Jesuit Mission in Canada established in Acadia
- 1609 First **Jesuit Reductions** (Missions) established in Paraguay
- 1622 Urban VIII establishes the **Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith**
- 1632 Maryland founded as Catholic colony in the Americas
- 1642-49 Deaths of Jesuit missionary "North American Martyrs" at the hands of Iroquois
- 1674 **Francois Laval**, First Archbishop of Quebec

## Factors Influencing Missionary Work in the Americas

The Missionary work of the Catholic colonial powers varied greatly due to the economic activities in various regions, government relations, and degree of civilization of the native population. Mistreatment of natives by European powers that sought to enslave or exploit them, and wars between various religious sects greatly hampered conversion efforts in some areas. The most effective missionaries were mendicant orders who could be trusted not to exploit the natives for economic gain.

Efforts to Christianize native populations fared well in Latin America and French Canada, and the Philippines, but was not successful over the long term in China, Japan, India, and most of Africa. There are many reasons The following is a list of some of the factors that influenced the success of missionary efforts around the world during the world.

- **Colonies vs. Trading ports** — Efforts to evangelize nations were most successful in regions that had been conquered and colonized by Catholic powers. Missionary efforts in countries ruled by non-Catholic sovereigns were often undone by hostile governments.
- **Caste systems and ruling classes** — The spread of Christianity was hindered by Brahman, Mandarin, Shogunate and other privileged classes who opposed the Christian doctrine of egalitarianism.
- **Exploitation of Native Populations** — The abuse of natives Encomenderos, privateers, mercenaries, and slavers greatly hindered any attempts at evangelization. Only good treatment of natives resulted in their acceptance of the God of foreigners.
- **Religious Disputes among Christians** — Trading wars between Catholic and Protestant powers, or even doctrinal disputes between Catholic Religious orders greatly hindered missionary work. French and Spanish colonies that restricted non-Catholics from entering their dominions fared better than colonial ports that remained open to Protestant or Jewish influence.

## Council for the Propagation of the Faith

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

To regulate the rapidly increasing work of foreign missions, Pope Gregory XV. carried out an idea already suggested—that of establishing a congregation of cardinals to watch over and guide the work of the propagation of the faith (propaganda fidei) in heathen lands (1622). His successor, Urban VIII., added two very important sections to this great work: the first, an international college where young men from every converted nation (not of Europe), should be assembled and trained for the priesthood. There they still gain, as they could do nowhere else, a practical knowledge of the Catholicity of the Church, and of subordination and devotion to the Holy See. Thence they go forth to their own countries, and strive to win their own peoples to the one flock of Christ.

The second work, rendered absolutely necessary by the variety of tribes and nations flocking into the true fold, was that of multiplying books in each language for the use of the missionary and his catechumens. A series of presses was set up, and types of every description were gathered at an enormous cost. The work still continues in full vigor, and develops almost yearly. Side by side with the work of preaching, the missionary has always made it a point to study the people among whom he finds himself—literature, manners, customs, the productions of the country, natural and manufactured—nothing escapes his attention: he maps out his mission and its environs, he compiles vocabularies, he collects specimens of the work of his neophytes, and

sends all home to interest his religious brethren and their friends in the distant work, Hence a wonderful library and museum has grown up in Rome, where an almost unlimited store of treasures rewards patient investigators. The records of the earliest missionaries are still searched for data of political importance—e.g., the Venezuelan Court of Arbitration studied the letters of missioners to obtain information respecting the original boundaries of the States in question.

At every stage of the world's history the story of the contact of civilized with savage races is written in blood. There is nothing to choose in this respect between Spanish or Englishmen, Portuguese or Dutch. The French seem an honorable exception in their treatment of the North American Indians. But there is a great difference to be noticed between the action of Catholic and heretic missionaries. From first to last, from Catholic centers there has been but one unanimous protest against the cruelty of their co-religionists, and petitions to the Pope and representations to sovereigns. They have set on foot energetic measures of every kind on behalf of the helpless savage, and crowds of devoted men have sacrificed their comfort, their health, their lives even, in the attempt to soften the lot of the persecuted, or to die with them. It has been reserved for our own days to hear a non-Catholic proclaim in the face of the world that the white race has a duty to fulfill when it becomes master of a people in a lower stage of civilization.