

Spanish Missions in America: II (Peru, New Granada)

Adapted from Fr. John Laux's Church History

In the new world discovered by Columbus missionaries followed as eagerly in the wake of the explorers as they did in the Far East. They followed Columbus to Haiti and Cuba and Porto Rico (1493), Ponce de Leon to Florida, Balboa to the Pacific, Cortes to Mexico, Pizarro to Peru, Valdivia In Chile, De Soto to the Mississippi, and Coronado to New Mexico. Franciscans, Dominicans, and Carmelites were first in the field, and to these were soon added the Sons of St. Ignatius. Missions were established at once, thousands of natives were baptized, and in less than eighty years over thirty archdioceses and dioceses had been erected in the West Indies, in Mexico, Florida, Central America, and South America.

Great Saints added luster to the heroic bands of missionaries. St. **Louis Bertrand** (1526-1581) a Spanish Dominican, who landed in New Granada in 1562, baptized more than 25,000 pagans during the eight years that he labored along the coasts of Colombia and Panama. He is venerated as the Apostle of New Granada. St. **Francis Solanus** (1549-1610) a Franciscan of Andalusia, worked for twenty-seven years with wonderful success among the Indians of Peru, and no less successfully by his saintly life and his preaching of penance among the Spanish inhabitants of Lima and Truxillo. In 1610 the Catalonian Jesuit St. **Peter Claver** (1580-1654) landed at Cartagena, was ordained in 1616, and devoted his remaining days to alleviating the spiritual and bodily miseries of the Negro slaves, 300,000 of whom he baptized. He is the special patron of all the missions to the Negroes. The secular clergy were also represented among the saintly missionaries. St. **Turibius** (1538-1606), a Spanish noble and professor of law at Salamanca, was appointed Archbishop of Lima (Peru) in 1580. He traversed 50,000 miles in his diocese, teaching, baptizing, and confirming the natives. He founded the first American seminary. During his episcopate the first saint was born on American soil St. **Rose of Lima**. (1586-1617), whose name is so truly symbolic of the perfume of her virtue. She was canonized in 1667.

The identification of Christianity with the European conquistadores was a great drawback to the spread of Christianity. Both the Spanish and Portuguese adventurers, whom the tales of the fabulous wealth of the New World had attracted to its shores, were often cruel and unjust to the Indians, trampled upon their rights as human beings, and enslaved them. Pope Paul III, in two briefs, condemned the nefarious practices and cruelties of the conquerors, and the missionaries, foremost among them the Dominican **Bartolome de las Casas** (1474-1566), championed the cause of the natives. It was through the influence of Las Casas that the **New Laws** for the Indies were promulgated in 1542, which saved the Indians from extermination and improved their condition considerably.

"The legislation of Spain in behalf of the Indians everywhere," says C. F. Lummis, "was incomparably more extensive, more comprehensive, more systematic, and more humane than that of Great Britain, the Colonies, and the present United States combined. Those first teachers gave the Spanish language and Christian faith to a thousand aborigines, where we gave a new language and religion to one. There have been Spanish schools for Indians in America since 1524. By 1575, nearly a century before there was a printing-press in English America, many books in twelve different Indian languages had been printed in the City of Mexico, whereas in [the History of the United States] John Eliot's Indian bible stands alone. Three Spanish universities in America were nearly rounding out their century when Harvard was founded. A surprisingly large proportion of the pioneers of America were college men; and intelligence went hand in hand with heroism in the early settlement of the New World.

Saints and Notable Persons of South America

- **St. Louis Bertrand** (1526-1581) —Dominican monk who became a very effective missionary in Latin America, Baptizing thousands throughout New Granada (Columbia, Panama).
- **St. Turibius of Mongrovejo** (1538-1606) — Archbishop of Peru who worked to improve condition of natives and converted many to Christianity, including Rose of Lima and Martin de Porres.
- **St. Francis Solanus** (1549-1610) — Franciscan Friar who became a very effective Missionary in South America, especially in the southern regions of the Viceroyalty of Peru.
- **St. Martin de Porres** (1579-1639) — Mestizo of Peru who was taken in by a Dominican monastery and showed great piety in works for the poor. Thought to be a miracle worker.
- **St. Peter Claver** (1580-1654) — Jesuit missionary who worked in New Granada (Colombia and West Indies), tending to the care and ministry of the African slaves, while opposing slavery.
- **St. Rose of Lima** (1586-1617) — Latin American maiden who undertook severe penances including extreme fasts and self-mutilation. Admitted to a convent where she continued her penances until her death at 31.
- **St. John Macias** (1585-1645) — Humble Spanish monk who served as doorkeeper for the Dominican monastery in Peru and raised money to help the poor in Lima.
- **St. Mariana of Jesus** (1618-1645) — Ascetic holy women from a noble family in Quito, Ecuador who took private vows and lived a life prayer in mortification and denial.

Missionary Work in Peru and Ecuador

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Missionary Work in Peru and Ecuador — In a very few years after its discovery, Peru was flooded by Spaniards. The noble Incas, whom it is impossible to regard as savages—were subjected to the most inhuman treatment. Some amelioration in their condition was procured by the protests of **Bartholomew Las Casas**.

One of the most successful of the missionaries was **St. Francis Solano**, a Franciscan, who began to preach on the east coast near La Plata, and who had a gift of tongues similar to that enjoyed by St. Francis Xavier. He made thousands of converts, and at last reached Peru, where he preached to the people of Lima. He foretold the destruction of the city if the people did not repent of their misdeeds. A multitude of Incas, who shortly after entered the city, were converted to a man, and this example was not lost on the townsfolk. Faith was not dead in the souls of these unhappy men, and the whole town was stirred. The confessionals were besieged, and a real improvement was manifested, which **St. Turibius**, Bishop of Lima, strove to maintain. Jesuits were soon on the spot, and the Church of Peru became a very famous one. Colleges and schools were multiplied, and, for many years, in spite of varying systems of government—sometimes just, sometimes harsh—the faith continued to prosper **Rose of Lima** and **Juan Massias**, both of the Order of St. Dominic, were the first-fruits of sanctity produced by Peru.

Missionary Work in New Granada (Panama, Columbia, Venezuela) — Numbers of Spanish Franciscans and Dominicans first evangelized the southern shores of the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea. The most famous of the missionaries was the Dominican, St. **Lewis Bertrand**. Before starting for the New World he had shown himself a zealous master of novices, an indefatigable preacher, and a prudent superior. But the stories of the Indians and of their sufferings touched his heart, and he begged his superiors to allow him to join his brethren in the Far West. The stories of the seven years he spent in and around New Granada are almost incredible—his ardour for penance, startling even in a Dominican, his incessant miracles, and the conversions that followed his preaching, counted by tens of thousands. The ferocity and unbounded licence of the Spaniards proved such a hindrance to his labours that he returned to Europe to lay formal complaint against them at the Spanish courts. He was not allowed to go back to his beloved Indians. It was among the negroes imported to this part of Central America that the Jesuit, St. **Peter Claver**, devoted himself about fifty years later.