

The Church in Spanish America and the *Catholic Historical Review*

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The *Catholic Historical Review* is a journal edited by the American Catholic Historical Association and published by The Catholic University Press of America. It has been published since 1915 with quarterly editions. The primary aim of the *Catholic Historical Review* from its start was, and continues to be, the study of the history of the Catholic Church in the United States. The American Historical Association was started in 1884, one year after Pope Leo XIII gave a strong support to historical research of Church life by opening the Vatican Archives. In the face of ideological historiography he wrote «that the first law of history is, not to dare to utter falsehood; the second, not to fear speak the truth; and moreover, no room must be left for suspicion of partiality or prejudice»¹.

Many Catholic scholars felt the need for this type of publication following a host of European journals that had begun to provide abundant ecclesiastical historiography². A bibliography of texts on Church History, published between 1918 and 1920 indicates the absence of books on American Church History in general. It shows that the majority of books published during this period were on early Church History, Ante-Nicene and Post-Nicene Church History, the early Middle Ages and the High Middle Ages, the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. The bibliography suggests that the history of the Church in America

1. Pope Leo's letter to Cardinals di Luca, Pitra and Hergensroether found in English in the Ave Maria «Notre Dame» XIX (1883) 741, 761 and here cited from GUILDAY, Peter, *The American Catholic Historical Association*, in «Catholic Historical Review» VI, n. 1 (1920) 5.

2. Patrick J. Healey mentions among the mayor ones following publications²: the *Revue d'Histoire Ecclesiastique (accent to the right)* (Louvain, 1900-1913), *Revue des Questions Historiques* (Paris, 1866-1914), the *Revue Benedictine (on both e also)* (Abbaye de Maredsous in Belgium, 1884-1914), *Stimmen aus Maria-Laach* (Herder, Freiburg, Germany, edited since 1871), *Historisches Jahrbuch* (Munster, since 1880), *The Irish Theological Quarterly* (Dublin, since 1906), and *Revista Storico-Critica delle Scienze Teologiche* (Rome, since 1906). He also mentions a host of other publications which are review with a national character. Cf. HEALY, Patrick Joseph, *Recent Activities of Catholic Historians*, in the «Catholic Historical Review», New Series II, 2 (1992) 169-179, The Catholic University of America, Washington D.C.

was almost ignored³. It contains but a few references to short notes on the Pilgrim Fathers and to a book on Christianity in the modern world⁴.

The present day absence of journal articles on the Church History of the United States between the late 16th and mid 18th century, particularly the contribution of the Spanish orders and the *Patronato Real* is strikingly evident. Some historians have even condemned as a whole the Spanish enterprise in America. Popular knowledge echoes today what one wrote in the first quarter of this century: «It is not often that a school history of the United States fails to describe the inhumanity of the Spaniards. That those conquerors destroyed most of the natives of the West Indies is perfectly true. Their own historians attest it. It likewise is a fact that on the mainland the *repartimientos* or allotment system was often pitiless in its waste of aborigines»⁵. Although the same author later praises the achievements of some men such as Las Casas he fails to give credit to many other Spanish missionaries, bishops, and at times governors, who denounced the abuse of the natives, sought their protection, and introduced important spiritual and cultural contributions to the Indian cultures.

The journal articles of the *Catholic Historical Review* deal with Church History mainly in three geographical areas, the United States, Europe and Spanish America. The articles from the third group are predominantly on Mexican and South American Church History. There are very few articles on the Church in Central America. Since the start of the journal there have been over eight hundred articles. Fifty-six articles are related to the Spanish evangelization of America and out of these thirteen are directly related to the work of Spanish missionaries within the present day territory of the United States.

The missionary work of Spanish religious orders in the United States constitutes a long and important chapter of the history of the Catholic Church in the United States. However, most textbooks of Catholic Church History do not describe the Spanish missions in the current territory of the United States, and devote very few pages to the Church in United States. The *Catholic Historical Review* has supplied some of the information lacking, and provided a necessary source for the publication of research on these missions. Most of the articles on the missions are from the first half of the century. In general their tone is not polemical or partial, and they present valuable archival records. Seven of the thirteen articles on Spanish American missions are on the work of Franciscan and Jesuit orders that worked in Florida, New Mexico, Texas and California.

Oddly there are no articles on Fr. Junipero Serra, the great Spanish Evangelizer of Upper California or on the Jesuit Martyrs under Fr. Segura who traveled from Florida to the Chesapeake Bay in 1566. There are only a few articles on some of the most outstanding missionaries such as Fr. Fermin Lasuen. The *Catholic Historical Review* has no articles on the

3. WHITMAN, W.F., *A Church History Bibliography 1918 to 1920*, in the «Catholic Historical Review», *ibid*, n. 3, 333-336.

4. MOORE, E.C., *The Spread of Christianity in the Modern World*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1919.

5. MCCARTHY-Charles HALLAN, *The Importance of stresses and omissions in the writing of American History* in the, «Catholic Historical Review» IV, 1 (1924) 30.

Franciscan priests who opened and directed the missions of New Mexico at the start of the 17th century and the ones of Texas at the close of the same century.

The subject matter of the articles on the Church History in Spanish America vary greatly, including the *capellanías*, the black legend, the Bull *Inter caetera*, and nuns in colonial Mexico. There are three articles on the work of the Jesuits in different countries. Four articles are devoted to Christopher Columbus and the motives for voyaging to America, his writing on prophecies and the funding for his voyages. In light of the large number of institutions and figures in the history of the New World, this interest in Columbus seems disproportionately high.

The articles on the history of the Catholic Church in the United States often begin with the first quarter of the 1800's. Many articles are on historiography, individual bishops, and outstanding Catholics. A number of articles are devoted to Bishop John Carrol, some to Catholic European immigrants, and a few to the French Jesuits. In these there is scant if any reference to the work of earlier Spanish missionaries. There is a marked absence of articles on the religious and social conditions of Indian tribes and especially the Indians partially evangelized by the Spanish.

A review of this publication indicates that the early history of the Church in the United States is almost entirely limited to the history of the European immigrants who settled in the Eastern coast of North America. In addition, it suggests that the Spanish American missions in Florida, New Mexico, Texas and California are poorly known and have gained little attention among Church historians. A similar conclusion could be reached with regard to the religious fate of the Indians of these regions during the 19th century.

In an address to the Catholic Historical Society in 1943, Richard Pattet said that «Hispanic America has been dominated by the heritage and tradition of Spain. The *patronato* is an excellent example. Yet, how little is it studied or even mentioned except in passing and, as a result what do we have?»⁶. When it is, «The wealth of the Church is studied..., but not its role in the education and welfare which she bore almost exclusively for centuries»⁷. There are a number of plausible reasons for this omission: historians have been biased against Spanish heritage in America due to the criticism raised by Las Casas and other early missionaries; most scholars have placed their attention on the European Catholics who settled North America; little importance has been paid to the Spanish missions because they involved Indians who soon became a small percentage of the population.

In sum, the *Catholic Historical Review* has relatively few articles on the Spanish American Missions in the present territory of the United States and on the Catholic Church in Spanish America, and none dealing exclusively with native Americans. However, the articles published provide valuable insight and an objective outlook into the Spanish contribution to the first Evangelization of the American continent. The ones on the missions in the United States offer a useful bibliography for future studies, and are of greater historical interest than the brief general accounts on the Catholic Church in various countries of Spanish America.

6. PATTEE, Richard, *A Revisionist approach to Hispanic American Studies*, XXIX, 4 (1944) 441.

7. *Ibid.*

I. *Titles of articles on Spanish American Missions in the United States that have appeared in the «Catholic Historical Review» from 1915 to 1999.*

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GANNON, Michael, *Sebastian Montero, Pioneer American Missionary, 1566-1572*, 1965, vol. LI, n. 3, 335-353.

SPELLMAN, Charles W., *The «Golden Age» of the Florida Missions, 1632-1674*, in the «Catholic Historical Review» 1965, vol. LI, n. 3, 354-372.

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Conversaciones

