

## A FAVOURABLE CONTEXT FOR RELIGIOUS EMIGRATION

The Abbey of Saint-Maurice opened its doors in 1607 to the first Capuchin missionaries who had come to oppose the spread of reformed ideas in the Valais. Later it was also the first religious institution in the Valais to send missionaries abroad to evangelise distant lands.

Three major transformations on a worldwide scale helped to explain and make the abbey's new ambition possible:

- First, in the wake of the French Revolution and the capture of the Valais by Napoleon's army, the Abbey of Saint-Maurice was stripped of all of its seigneurial privileges in 1798, some of which were over a thousand years old.
- Second, the emergence throughout Europe of nation-states in full industrial development and mutual competition in the 19th century led to colonial wars, the objective of which was to appropriate the natural resources of vast geographical areas, in particular in Africa and Asia.
- Third, the Catholic Church adopted during the same period a missionary doctrine with the goal of evangelising vast territories considered to be populated by pagan souls that needed to be conquered and civilized. The first missionary societies appeared in Europe at the beginning of the 19th century; their activities were greatly expanded as a result of the colonial conquests and helped to establish foreign domination. In Lyons in 1822 was founded the Œuvre de la propagation de la foi, which later became the Œuvre pontificale de la propagation de la foi, with headquarters in Rome.

The articulation of these three joint factors?political, economical and ecclesiastical?make it possible to understand how the Abbey of Saint-Maurice, which could no longer assert any legitimate pretensions to territorial expansion in a now-confederated Valais and already won over to the Catholic doctrine, was to invest its evangelist energies beyond the borders of the country.

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