

RELIGIOUS EMIGRATION

From "sacred imperialism" to the "ambassadors of the Valais"

During the 20th century many families of the Valais saw one or more of their members go abroad in the context of Catholic missions. Whether as priests, nuns, or laypersons, this type of emigration took place on an individual basis or sometimes on a collective basis in the case of religious congregations. In all cases, there was nothing haphazard about the departures: they were subject to an increasingly organized supervision, at both the cantonal and international levels.

MISSIONARIES IN THE VALAIS

The history of missionary work in the Valais goes back to a much earlier period.

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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.

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THE COLONY AND ORPHANAGE OF MEDJEZ-AMAR IN ALGERIA (1855)

The first opportunity for an organized Valaisan missionary expedition was given by the conquest of Algeria by French troops in 1830. Starting in 1850, France adopted the policy of populating the new territory under its control with colonists.

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A POLITICAL INSTRUMENT TO ASSERT THE GRANDEUR OF THE CHURCH

Not before 1918 did the canons of the Abbey of Saint-Maurice again envision undertaking missionary activity.



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THE VALAISAN MISSIONS OF THE 20TH CENTURY

Responding largely to this pontifical marching order, starting in the 1920s many missionaries went out into the world to evangelise remote populations.

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FROM CONQUEST TO HUMANITARIANISM

After the Second World War, the missions continued to develop. This worldwide conflict was followed by wars of independence in Africa and Southeast Asia, which made the association between missionary activity and colonialism appear in a more ambiguous light.

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