Environmental Impacts of Catholic Missions (Paris/Montréal, 9-18 Mar 24)

Mar 9–18, 2024
Deadline: Dec 31, 2023

Alysée Le Druillenec, Paris

The Environmental Impacts of Early Modern Catholic Missions in the Atlantic Space.

Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, 9 March 2024
Université du Québec à Montréal, 18 March 2024
Organizers: Isabel Harvey (Université du Québec à Montréal), Alysée Le Druillenec (University of Paris 1 Pantheon-Sorbonne), Wenjie Su (Princeton University)

These series of workshops aim to explore the role of the Catholic Church, through its missionary undertaken, in the global environmental upheavals and discoveries of the Early Modern period. Venturing wide and far beyond the familiar European sphere, early modern missionaries frequently used the rhetoric of Theatrum Mundi to reflect on their encounters with previously unknown cultures. What has escaped scholars' attention, however, is how these rapidly evolving dramas of evangelization in turn shaped the seemingly timeless backstage setting of Nature. As the missionaries voyaged away and established new religious communities, they were not only faced with social and cultural challenges raised by the vastly different linguistic, political, and philosophical traditions, but they also had to adapt to unfamiliar geographical, climate, and material conditions as they sought to construct churches or realize liturgical rituals, not to mention the extensive agricultural and medical activities they had to pick up for personal survival in often severe natural conditions.
We would like to ask and try to answer questions such as:
- How did the missionaries adapt to local conditions of climate, sunlight, and building technologies when constructing churches?
- How did the missionaries accommodate rituals and its theological implications (such as the presence of wine and bread in the Mass) in reaction to local natural resources?
- How did early modern missionaries develop survival precautions over time to adapt to the dangers of these new natural environments?
- To what extent were the early modern global missionary activities impacted by major environmental crisis of this period, such as the epidemics or the Little Ice Age?
- How did the missionaries' encounters with new geographical spaces and conditions stimulate knowledge creation and circulation, such as in the areas of cartography, botany, zoology, and medicine?
These are a few of the many possible new questions we hope to explore in this workshop. One overarching method we want to propose is to think about early modern Catholicism in the plural term, as theorized by Simon Ditchfield. Studies on post-Tridentine missions tended to emphasize

the central authoritative role of Rome, focusing especially on the role of the missionary as leader in the creating of new religiosity, new economical exchanges, or new societies. The new attention paid to missionaries' interactions with local natural conditions will complexified our understanding of Rome as one of the few truly global institutions of the early modern period acting not only as a religious and evangelist force but also in the colonialist expansions.

These two workshops will be consecrated to the missions in the Atlantic Space. It will be followed by a second series of workshop in 2025 to look over the Pacific space and will be concluded by an edited volume.
Please send an title, a short abstract (300 words) and a one-page CV to: harvey.isabel@uqam.ca, Alysee.Le-Druillenec@univ-paris1.fr, wenjies@princeton.edu, before December 31, 2023.

Reference:

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