Prayer
Scripture: Ephesians 2:11-22
Hymn: 504 "The Church's One Foundation"

The first churches in America were imports from Europe. They were the churches of the Catholics of Spain and Portugal. The churches and the missionaries that established them were parts of the colonial empire building of Spain and Portugal. The Franciscans were among the first to plant churches in the New World. Very soon the Dominicans were worthy rivals of the Franciscans. Most extensive was the work of the Jesuits, Augustinians, Carmelites, Benedictines and the Order of St. John of God sent missionaries. The Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith sought to assign fields and to keep down bitter rivalry between the various Catholic orders.

French Catholics—largely the Jesuits—played a major role in the efforts to build a French colonial empire as France rose to a position of leadership among the European nations as Spain and Portugal declined.

The colonial empires of the Catholic countries and the spread of the Catholic Church played a major part in awakening the Protestants and provoking them to missionary efforts. The various Protestant churches had been too busy defending themselves against the Catholics in Europe, in fighting among themselves, and in trying to perfect their theologies and creeds to give attention to missions. The spread of the Catholics provoked Protestants to jealousy that led to missionary efforts lest the whole New World be captured by Papists. The English took the lead among the Protestants in establishing churches in the New World. The English churches were a part of the plan for a colonial empire before all the territory was occupied by the Catholics. The Church of England, Puritans, Separatists, Presbyterians, Baptists and Quakers all had a part in planting English churches in the New World. The Dutch and the Danes planted early churches. French Huguenots had a part. German Lutherans and German Reformers, Schwenckfelders, Mennonites, German Baptists or Dunkards, and splinter groups sought a place in the New World. Almost every religious group in Europe soon had representatives in America.

THE PLANTING OF CHRISTIANITY IN SPANISH AMERICA

Spanish missionaries planted churches on most of the major islands of the West Indies, in Mexico, in almost all of Central America, in Florida, and in South America—in the northern and south-eastern portions and all along the western coast. Settlements and churches were attempted in southern portions of what would become the United States (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California).

The Franciscans planted churches in Venezuela, Mexico, Peru, Argentina and in Portuguese Brazil in the first half of the
sixteenth century. By the end of the century they had churches in what is now New Mexico and Texas. The Dominicans in the sixteenth century established churches in Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, and Peru. The Jesuits worked with success in Colombia, Peru, Mexico, Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile, and Paraguay.

The Spanish missions were under the direction of the crown. The pope had almost no voice in Spanish America. No papal decrees could be published without royal consent. The crown appointed the bishops. Most of the bishops and missionaries for many years were imported from Spain. Early successes came in Hispaniola and Cuba. The most successful works so far as numbers were concerned were in Mexico and Peru which had had the most highly developed cultures before the arrival of the Spaniards and the territories richest in the gold and silver sought by the Spaniards. Conquest and conversion were assumed to go together. Every ship brought soldiers, traders, settlers, and priests. The early Spanish Catholics were people of fierce orthodoxy and ardent piety that had been forged in the Counter-Reformation and in the wars with the Moors and the Jews. Isabella, Charles V, and Philip II (their combined reigns covered over a century) took seriously the Great Commission to baptize all nations. Most of the conversions were mass conversions. Quite typical of the attitude of the Spanish crown were the instructions given by Charles V in 1523 to Vásquez de Ayllón when he was sent with the Dominican Friar, Antonio de Montesinos to plant a church and colony called San Miguel near the site where later the English would establish Jamestown:

Our principal intent in the discovery of new lands is that the inhabitants and natives thereof who are without the light of the knowledge of faith may be brought to understand the truths of our holy Catholic faith, and that they may come to the knowledge there of and become Christians and be saved, and this is the chief motive you are to bear and hold in this affair, and to this end it is proper that religious persons should accompany you . . . and I command that whatever you shall thus expend in transporting the said religious, as well as in maintaining them and giving them what is needful. . . and for the vestments and other articles required for the divine worship, shall be paid entirely from the rents and profits which in any manner shall belong to us in the said land.

The colony failed to survive a cold winter, mutiny, a slave revolt, fever, and Indian attacks.

The Spanish failed a half-dozen times or more in efforts to establish permanent colonies in what would later become the United States before they succeeded in planting Saint Augustine. Pedro Menéndez de Avilés established Saint Augustine to protect the sea route of the treasure ships. The Spanish massacred the French Huguenots who had settled at the mouth of the Saint Johns River north of Saint Augustine. The Spanish built a chapel, a
mansion for the governor, two hospitals and a convent. They began missions among the Indians. The efforts of Menendez failed but permanent labors were resumed in 1563 and expanded in 1595 in many directions. By 1634 thirty-five Franciscans were maintaining forty-four missions and ministering to twenty-five to thirty thousand Indian converts. Schools were established for the Indians. After the War of Spanish Succession in 1701 the work in Florida began to crumble. A resident bishop was provided for Saint Augustine in 1709 but this failed to halt the decay. When the third bishop, Ponce y Carasco, arrived in 1751, in the area of Saint Augustine there were only four Indian missions with some 136 souls.

The Jesuits failed in their attempt to plant a mission in the Chesapeake area in 1570/71. In 1598 Don Juan de Ónate founded San Juan de Caballeros in New Mexico. When Pedro de Peralta replaced Ónate as governor in 1609 he moved the capital to Santa Fe but a fierce revolt by the Indians in 1680 drove the Spanish back to El Paso. Eusebio Kino established a mission at Pimeria Alta in the Gila Valley in Arizona in the 1680's and before his death had baptized four thousand Indians. In 1690 the Franciscan Father Damian Massanet founded San Francisco de los Tejas but this Texas mission was abandoned three years later.

The Spanish were most successful in mass conversions in Mexico. Cortés, leader of the conquest, in 1523 received a royal letter that declared the conversion of the Indians was the king's chief interest in Mexico. By 1531 the Franciscans had baptized over a million people. By 1536 they claimed they had baptized between four and nine millions. The Franciscan, Peter of Ghent, a relative of Charles V, declared that he and a colleague often baptized fourteen thousand a day. They claimed that the two of them had baptized more than two hundred thousand.

The success in Peru was similar. The second Archbishop of Lima, Toribio Alfonso de Mogrovejo y Robles, learned the Indian language and baptized about eight hundred thousand. He built roads, hospitals, chapels, and schools. He championed the rights of Indians and Negroes to fair treatment. The Franciscan Francis Solanus, learned several Indian languages and travelled widely teaching and baptizing.

After the passing of the first generation of missionaries complaints began arising that many of the clergy were ignorant, immoral and corrupt. There were growing charges that Indians and Negroes were mistreated and exploited. Bartolomé de Las Casas who worked in Hispaniola, Cuba and Peru worked unceasingly to end cruelty to the Indians. He made repeated trips back to Spain to make appeals to the crown to issue new laws to protect the Indians. Others who worked to end cruelty were the Dominican, Domingo de Salazar, and the Jesuit, Pedro Claver. Claver took a special interest in improving the lot of Negro slaves. Several missionaries lost their lives—some from savage tribes and some from greedy and unscrupulous Spaniards.
As the Spanish missionaries of the second and third generations moved to the interior often they went with little or no armed protection. Sometimes they offered food and clothing. They offered instruction in religion, in agriculture and simple industries.

THE PLANTING OF CHRISTIANITY IN PORTUGUESE AMERICA

The mission work in Brazil was also under the crown and was carried on by Jesuits, Capuchins, and Franciscans. The missionaries labored to keep the Portuguese from forgetting their religion in their quest for riches. They also worked to convert the Indians and the Negro slaves. Much labor was spent combating the exploitation of both Indians and Negro slaves. Mem de Sa who became governor in 1558 forbade any converted Indian being sold as a slave. Runaway slaves were not to be restored to their masters by the missionaries. One of the most famous of the missionaries in Brazil was the Jesuit, Antonio Vieira. Once he was deported by irate land owners for his protests against cruelty to Indians and Negroes. He returned to continue his battle for Christian treatment. The work in Brazil suffered for lack of trained priests and education was woefully inadequate.

ROMAN CATHOLIC CHRISTIANITY IN FRENCH AMERICA

The French were late and dilatory in establishing a colonial empire in America. In the late 1400's French fishing fleets made repeated trips to Newfoundland and the Grand Banks. In the 1500's the Huguenot, Admiral Coligny sent out small colonies of Huguenots to the New World. Settlements were made in Nova Scotia. In 1564 Huguenots settled at the mouth of the Saint Johns River in Florida--the colony that was annihilated by Menendez, the Spanish founder of Saint Augustine. When the French Catholics settled in Canada the Huguenots were driven out. By the time the French Catholics took up colonization and mission work in Canada, in Mexico the Spanish already had a beautiful cathedral with the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City, a university, and two theological seminaries.

The real beginning of French Canada was the De Monts colony on the little island of Saint Croix in Passamaquoddy Bay in 1604. During the fierce winter of 1604-05 the little colony was almost wiped out by scurvy and other diseases. One of the survivors, Samuel Champlain, would not give up and continued to arouse interest in French colonization. In 1608 he founded Quebec. Early French settlements were little more than fur trading posts. Richelieu gave New France a semblance of support and organized a company to support colonists in Canada. Mazarin continued his policy. Louis XIV assumed control of colonization as a part of French foreign policy. In 1661 he made Canada a royal domain. Under Colbert France became a serious competitor in the race for empire. Even so New France consisted of about twenty-five hundred traders, officials and priests scattered in small, isolated settlements at the mercy of the fierce Iroquois.
Real expansion began with Rene Robert Cavalier, Sieur de la Salle (1648-87) who dreamed of a French empire stretching from Quebec to the Rocky Mountains and from the Great Lakes to the mouth of the Mississippi. In extent the French empire would rival that of Spain. The Jesuit, Jacques Marquette in 1673 discovered the Mississippi River.

La Salle attempted to plant a colony at the mouth of the Mississippi, but the attempt was a failure. Pierre le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville, established Fort Maurepas on Biloxi Bay in 1699. His brother, Jean Baptiste le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville, planted New Orleans in 1718. A series of forts were established at crucial points: Louisbourg on Cape Breton (1720), Niagara on Lake Ontario (1720), Vincennes on the Lower Wabash (1724), Fort Duquesne (Pittsburgh) in 1753. Settlements were made along the Missouri and the Mississippi.

The Jesuits took the lead in establishing Catholicism in New France. They gave it a centrality and importance that was not equalled in any other colonial empire, not even in New Spain. The first Jesuit team, consisting of Pierre Biard and Emnemond Masse, arrived at Port Royal (Nova Scotia) in 1611. Two secular priests had already baptized over a hundred Indians there. In 1615 the Franciscans began a mission out of Quebec with four priests. LeCaron and Jamet set off up the Saint Lawrence River to work among the Hurons. The Franciscan Viel was drowned or murdered among the Hurons. The Jesuits soon began a famous mission among the Hurons. By 1649 eight Jesuits had won martyr's crowns. Most famous of the missionaries among the Hurons was Jean de Brébeuf from a prosperous family of Normandy and a college administrator whose consuming passion became the conversion of the Hurons. After nine fruitful but harassed and plague-ridden years, he was burned by the Iroquois and the Huron nation was driven to Wisconsin. The Jesuits followed and carried on mission work among the Hurons.

Capuchins worked among the Abenakis of Maine between 1632 and 1655. The Jesuit Sebastian Râle took up and revived the work in 1694 and won the nation to the Christian faith.

Work among the Indians was scattered and numbers of converts remained small. The growth of the Catholics in New France was largely the result of immigration. A Sulpician, Jean Jacques Olier, persuaded a pious military officer, Paul Chomedey, Sieur de Maisonneuve, to join a Sulpician group in founding a colony on the island of Montreal in 1641. Reinforcements came in 1653 that included four Sulpician priests and the Sulpician Sister Marguerite Bourgeoys, who founded the Congregation de Notre Dame with its school for girls. In 1659 six nuns and two Sulpician priests came from France to join the work.

In Quebec in 1639 Madame de la Peltrie, a noble lady from Normandy, devoted herself and her fortune to work among the
Indian women of Canada. She enlisted the help of the Ursulines, the great teaching order among women and girls. The Mother Superior of the Ursulines, Marie de l'Incarnation, began a school for Indian girls. The Duchess d'Aiguillon and a group of nuns began a hospital.

The Jesuits made Sault Sainte Marie in the Western Great Lakes region a center for exploration and mission work among the Indians. One of the greatest of the Jesuit explorers and missionaries was Jacques Marquette (1637-1675). With Louis Joliet he travelled some twenty-five hundred miles in a birchbark canoe. From the Mackinac Straits they passed through Green Bay and up the Fox River. They travelled overland to the Wisconsin River and down the Mississippi to the mouth of the Arkansas River. Marquette founded a colony at Kaskaskia (near Utica) in Illinois. He died of Dysentery the following spring.

The disbanding of the Jesuits by the pope was a great blow to the French colonization. Increasingly it suffered from attacks from the Dutch and the English and from Indian raids encouraged by the Dutch and English.

THE AWAKENING OF THE ENGLISH TO MISSIONS

It was the growing and prospering colonial empires of the Spanish, the Portuguese, and the French that aroused the English to colonization and the accompanying mission work. The English set their eyes on the middle tract of land between the Spanish and the French empires. The desire for a portion of the land in the New World was accompanied by deep feelings of horror at the thought of Spanish and French winning the Indians to the religion of the pope.