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A Light to the Nations: The Catholic Church and Japanese Confinement in Canada and the United States

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Abstract

The reaction of North American Catholics to the mass official confinement of Japanese Americans and Japanese Canadians during the 1940s (often called the Japanese internment) represents a fascinating and largely unexplored aspect of these events. While the largest fraction of whites, including Catholics, demonstrated indifference or even hostility towards those forced from their homes, various Catholic clergy and institutions stepped up to offer assistance to displaced Japanese community members, first at the time of their official confinement and mass dispossession, then later in their resettlement outside the camps. Still, the involvement of Catholics was quite different on the two sides of the border. In the United States, the most prominent supporters of Japanese Americans were smaller Catholic societies, such as Maryknoll Missions, while it was the lay group The Catholic Worker that offered the most outspoken criticism of mass confinement. In Canada, it was the Catholic Church mainstream, French-speaking and based in Quebec, whose members stepped up to aid the *Nikkei*. Catholic religious men and women travelled on missions to British Columbia to open schools for children abandoned by the state. These teachers and supporters ultimately inspired a significant fraction of community members, both Catholics and others, to move east to Montréal.[1]

Introduction

The Catholic Church was a visible presence amid Japanese communities on the Pacific Coast of both nations from the time of their first founding. While Catholics were themselves a

[1] For transnational North American views of race and Asian Americans, which underscore the usefulness of such U.S.- Canada comparisons, see for example, Andrea Geiger, *Subverting Exclusion: Transpacific Encounters with Race, Caste, and Borders, 1885-1928,* New Haven, Yale University Press, 2011*;* Stephanie Bangarth, *Voices Raised in Protest: Defending North American Citizens of Japanese Ancestry, 1942–49,* Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008.

minority throughout the region, and their churches primarily served other marginalized immigrant communities such as Irish, Italians, Slavs, and Latinos, the Church was active in missionary activities in prewar Japanese communities in both the United States and Canada. Catholic schools opened their doors to Nisei (American-born) children to better their education, and a handful went on to attend Catholic universities, such as Creighton and Gonzaga. Some, such as the Nisei Thomas Takahashi, took vows and devoted their lives to the priesthood. Although only a small fraction of Japanese immigrants and their children actually embraced Catholicism, a series of community leaders who married Catholics or converted to Catholicism served as bridges to the faith. Some notable converts were early 19th century migrant Joseph Heco; Nisei newspaper editor Harry Honda; Joseph Kurihara, World War I veteran and leading dissident in Manzanar; and Chicago-based attorney Franklin Chino (who even became an officer of the local branch of the Knights of Columbus). In Canada, journalist and community activist Muriel Kitagawa was a prominent convert.[2]

Especially active were the members of the Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America, commonly known as the Maryknoll Missioners. Maryknoll missionaries, drawing from their own experiences in the Far East, taught English to adults and organized education for children in Asian immigrant communities. By the 1930s, some visible Japanese congregations had come into being on the West Coast. In Los Angeles and Seattle, Maryknoll ran churches and schools,

[2] On Joseph Heco, see for example Hsuan L. Hsu.,"Personality, Race, and Geopolitics in Joseph Heco's Narrative of a Japanese." *Biography* 29, No. 2 (Spring 2006), 273-306. On Joseph Kurihara, see Eileen Tamura, *In Defense of Justice: Joseph Kurihara and the Japanese American Struggle for Equality*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1023; On Franklin Chino, see Greg Robinson, *The Great Unknown: Japanese American Sketches*, Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2016, 31-2. On Kitagawa's life and work, see Muriel Kitagawa, Wesley Fujiwara and Roy Miki, *This Is My Own: Letters to Wes & Other Writings on Japanese Canada, 1941-1948*, Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1985.

which also served as community centres.[3] In Los Angeles, under the leadership of Father Hugh Lavery, Maryknoll operated an orphanage and a tuberculosis sanitarium for Japanese Americans during the 1930s. Under Lavery's direction, the Maryknoll order in Los Angeles established a free busing program to help transport distant students to and from their school.[4] Brother Theophane Walsh both drove the school bus and in 1926 organized Boy Scout Troop 145, the first such troop for Nisei youth.[5]

In 1935, Father Leopold Tibesar, who had also been serving in Los Angeles, was sent to Seattle as pastor for both the Japanese American and Filipine American communities. There Tibesar oversaw the expansion of Our Lady Queen of Martyrs Church. The famed architect and furniture designer George Nakashima, who was also attracted by Catholicism, designed a Lourdes Grotto for the Seattle Japanese church.[6] Tibesar took a lead role in converting key members of the Japanese American community, most notably James Sakamoto, editor of the *Japanese American Courier* newspaper and founder of the Japanese American Citizens League, the most important Nisei organization.[7]

On Canada's West Coast, the Catholic Church was less of an established presence. Catholics generally lacked the means and personnel to reach out effectively. Nonetheless, a

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[3] A useful reference for the work of the Maryknolls on the West Coast, and the reporting of it in the Maryknoll magazine *Field Afar*, is the unpublished study of Kevin Dargan, "The Maryknoll Congregation and the Maryknoll Society and their work on the West Coast with the Japanese 1920 - 1992" (copy provided by the author)

[4] Jonathan van Harmelen, "Father Hugh Lavery and the Ten-Thousand Mile Parish," *Discover Nikkei*, June 15, 2021, https://discovernikkei.org/en/journal/2021/6/15/father-hugh-lavery/.

[5] On the Maryknolls in Los Angeles, see Jonathan Van Harmelen, "Japanese Culture and Catholic Faith: Maryknoll's Long History in Little Tokyo," *Doscvoer Nikkei*, June 1, 2021, https://discovernikkei.org/en/journal/2021/6/1/maryknolls-history-in-little-tokyo/; Greg Robinson and Jonathan van Harmelen, "Brother Theophane Walsh," *Discover Nikkei*, April 9, 2019, https://discovernikkei.org/en/journal/2019/4/9/brother-walsh/.

[6] Jonathan van Harmelen, "Father Leopold Tibesar—the Shepherd of Seattle," *Discover Nikkei*, May 18, 2021, https://discovernikkei.org/en/journal/2021/5/18/father-leopold-tibesar/

[7]On Sakamoto, see Yuji Ichioka. "A Study in Dualism: James Yoshinori Sakamoto and the *Japanese American Courier*, 1928-1942." In *Before Internment: Essays in Prewar Japanese American History*, eds. Gordon H. Chang and Eiichiro Azuma (Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. 92-93, 100-09.

British-born Franciscan nun, Sister Mary Stella, a.k.a. Kathleen O'Melia, founded a Catholic Japanese Mission on Dunlevy Street in Vancouver. In addition to preaching her faith, she offered services for the community, including English classes, and kindergarten. O'Melia also established a convent in the Japanese fishing village of Steveston, where they offered daycare to immigrant mothers.[8] In 1931, the Franciscan Sisters and Friars of the Atonement from Graymoor, New York, opened another Japanese Catholic Mission in Steveston. Fr. Peter Baptist Katsuno became the first Japanese Canadian who was ordained in the Franciscan Order. By 1941, the overall "Japanese" population had risen to 2,000 out of 2,500 in Steveston.[9]

Conversely, in French Canada, where Catholicism was the dominant religion, missionaries reached out to Japan and welcomed Japanese students. Alphonse Cloutier, a young man from Trois-Rivières who attended a Franciscan seminary in Montreal, left for Japan as a missionary in 1918. Once settled in Japan, he took Japanese citizenship, changing his name to Masanori Urbain-Marie Yonekawa. Under his new name, Yonekawa published several works on religion and Japanese society, notably the books *Propos Japonais* (1922) and *Le Raffinement Japonais* (1934). Fr. Paul-Émile Leger, sent to Japan by the Sulpicians in 1932 to serve as a priest, opened a seminary in Fukuoka. Presumably with Leger's encouragement, two Japanese students from Fukuoka, Denyemon Fukahori and Thomas Hirata, migrated to Canada shortly after and pursued their theological studies at the Grand Seminary in Montreal. Following their graduation in 1936, they returned to Japan for ordination—Fukahori would be consecrated some time later as bishop of Fukuoka. In spring 1940, two further Japanese, Marie-Alphonse Masuda

[8] Eiji Okawa, "Associational Lives of Women in the Prewar Japanese-Canadian Community" https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/meijiat150/chapter/associational-lives-of-women-in-the-prewar-japanese-canadian-community/
[9] Chuck Tasaka, "Greenwood, B.C.: First Internment Center," *Discover Nikkei*, January 29, 2016, https://discovernikkei.org/en/journal/2016/1/29/greenwood

and Alphonse (Gendji) Murata, arrived in Quebec and enrolled in seminary in the city of Joliette.[10]

The Church in the United States

In the weeks that followed the Japanese raid on Pearl Harbor and the outbreak of the Pacific war in December 1941, pressure built up among white nativist and commercial lobbying groups on the West Coast of the United State for official action against Japanese Americans. In response to the pressure, amplified by opportunistic California political representatives, President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942. The order authorized mass removal of citizens of Japanese ancestry and eventually was used to justify their mass confinement. Japanese Americans were first incarcerated in a series of "Assembly Centers," abandoned fairgrounds and racetracks on the West Coast where families of inmates were held in (barely) converted animal stalls. After several weeks or months, they were sent under military guard to a set of hastily-constructed government camps inland, where they were confined—in most cases for the remainder of the war.[11]

In the wake of Executive Order 9066, the national Catholic Church hierarchy in the United States remained officially silent. The mainstream Catholic press passed almost entirely over the removal of Japanese Americans.[12] Nevertheless, many individual members of the Catholic clergy redoubled their support of the *Nikkei* and decried the prejudices that the

[10] On the French Canadian presence in Japan, see generally Richard Leclerc, *Des Lys à l'ombre du mont Fuji: Histoire de la présence de l'Amérique française au Japon*, Montreal, Éditions du Bois-de-Coulonge, 1995

[11] On the lead-up to mass removal, see for example, Greg Robinson, *By Order of the President: FDR and the Internment of Japanese Americans*, Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 2001, pp. 73-124.

[12] There were two minor exceptions: In January 1942 the magazine *The Catholic World* ran a photo of Nisei leader James Sakamoto praying for American victory, while in late May 1942, the *St. Louis Review* praised the support that the Maryknollers had offered "evacuated" Japanese and deplored the ban on their residence in camp.

community had to face. The Los Angeles Maryknoll community mobilized in support of the *Nikkei* community and worked, though without success, to help Japanese Americans avert confinement. Father Lavery and Brother Walsh, working together with two Nisei teenagers, Masamori Kojima and Setsuko Matsunaga (later Nishi), organized a bureau to send speakers to hold talks with community groups and make the case for the loyalty of Japanese Americans. In conjunction with Lavery and Tibesar, Walsh met with government officials and proposed to move with his *Nikkei* parishioners to a settlement outside the West Coast. He furnished to the Tolan Committee—the congressional group studying mass removal—a list of names of potential resettlers, though in the end nothing came of the idea.[13] Brother Walsh also helped organize temporary shelter for *Nikkei* families from the Japanese fishing community of Terminal Island, following their forced eviction by the Navy in February 1942.[14]

Once mass removal was decreed, the Maryknoll missionaries turned their energies to supporting the faithful as they were forced to dispose of their belongings and pack whatever they could carry to camp. Dozens of *Nikkei* volunteers came to the Maryknoll church to aid with the registration process. The majority of Maryknoll Missioners remained in Los Angeles, where they took charge of some of the remaining property of the community.[15] Other Maryknollers followed their parishioners to camp. A group of missionaries, including Father Lavery and Brother Walsh, moved to the area of the Manzanar camp. Meanwhile, Father Leopold Tibesar and Sisters Thomas Marie (Regina) Johnson and Sister Marie Rosaire Greaney went along with the people

[13] See Greg Robinson and Jonathan van Harmelen, "Brother Theophane Walsh," *Discover Nikkei* , April 9, 2019
[14] "Brother Theophane Toasted Tomorrow," *Rafu Shimpo*, August 25, 1971
[15] Forced to leave behind the mass of their property upon their exile to camp, many Japanese American families stored their belongings in Buddhist and Christian churches or with such neighbors as they could trust. Army officials procured unguarded warehouse space for the belongings of Japanese Americans, which the WRA then took over on assuming control over inmates in the camps they ran. Both the private facilities and the government storage spaces were subjected to theft and vandalism, and much of the movable property of Japanese Americans disappeared during the war. See generally United States. War Relocation Authority, *The Wartime Handling of Evacuee Property*, Washington DC, GPO, 1946.

from the Seattle area. The Northwest community was first confined at Camp Harmony Assembly Center (located in the Puyallup Fairground outside Seattle) and then moved to the Minidoka camp in Idaho, where they remained during the war years. Other Maryknolls, such as Fathers Joseph Hunt MM, Leo Steinbach MM and Brother Bernard Hansan MM, were repatriated from Japan on the SS Gripsholm, arriving in the United States in 1942 and thereafter began their assignments. The Maryknollers, like other white clergy, were not allowed to live inside the camps. However, they soon established living centers outside the camps or in parishes nearby, in order to help families adjust to camp life. Brother Walsh not only assisted the inmates at Manzanar but maintained correspondence with Nisei friends dispersed in other camps. In particular, he corresponded with a number of his parishioners from Los Angeles who were sent to the Heart Mountain camp in Wyoming. Father Lavery not only visited Manzanar but toured other camps, In September 1942, he baptized the first Catholic baby at Poston camp. He likewise officiated at weddings, and delivered films to the various camp communities. He and the other Maryknollers assigned to Manzanar established a newspaper, the *Manza-knoll,* to keep people outside informed of their activities.[16]

Despite the official prohibition on white clergy residing in camp, two Japan-born Maryknoll nuns, sisters Mary Bernadette [born Sute] Yoshimochi and Susanna [born Otome] Hayashi, decided to accept incarceration rather than transfer outside the West Coast. The two nuns worked together to maintain the operations of the Catholic Church in camp. In particular, they cared for fifty orphans who had been transferred from the prewar Maryknoll orphanage to a "Children's Village" that they formed in camp. In the letters they wrote back to their Maryknoll superiors (which are now housed at the Maryknoll archives in Ossining, New York) they

[16] van Harmelen, Father Hugh Lavery and the Ten-Thousand Mile Parish."

described the various activities they engaged in to propagate the faith. Although the sisters could not celebrate mass (an act that was reserved for priests), Sisters Bernadette and Susanna provided Sunday school classes for students, and helped organize picnics and other such activities for children.[17]

Outside the West Coast, the most powerful example of Catholic engagement with Japanese Americans was that of the Catholic Worker movement. Founded in 1933 by Dorothy Day, and directed by her until her death in 1980, the Catholic Worker is a progressive lay spiritual movement known for its hospitality centers in poor areas of American cities, where volunteers offer food and shelter to the poor. Dorothy Day mobilized rapidly after Executive Order 9066 to support the Nikkei and criticize their mass removal. As early as the April 1942 issue, *The Catholic Worker* published an open letter from Dwight Larrowe, who was confined in a Civilian Public Service camp in Stoddard, California. Larrowe spoke in passing about the fate of Japanese Americans, though he did not elaborate what steps to take for them:

> [W]e are doing this forest work —work which will be of great benefit to future generations. But there are other works, perhaps more immediately important to do. There are the broken victims of the war itself—there are millions in Europe and Asia who need food, clothing, shelter —there are the evacuated Japanese in California who need homes and work—there are the sharecroppers of the South who still need help.[18]

During the late spring of 1942, Dorothy Day toured the West Coast. She later claimed that she asked to visit Camp Harmony (AKA, Puyallup), but was refused permission by Army authorities (who no doubt wished to avoid criticism of their arrangements) to enter the camp or to speak to anyone inside. Nevertheless, she gathered information about living conditions there

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[17] Jonathan van Harmelen, "The Sisters of Maryknoll and Manzanar," *Discover Nikkei* , June 29, 2021, https://discovernikkei.org/en/journal/2021/6/29/sisters-of-maryknoll/

[18] Dwight Larrowe, "Letter From Stoddard, Civilian Camp No. 15," *The Catholic Worker*, April 1942.

by corresponding with people in camp and with outside friends. In the June 1942 issue of *The Catholic Worker,* Day offered an uncompromisingly negative account of her tour: "I saw a bit of Germany on the west coast. I saw some of the concentration camps where the Japanese men, women, and children are being held before they are resettled in the Owens Valley or some other place barren, windswept, inaccessible."[19] She noted that there were floodlights on all night, and cited a long passage from a letter she had received from a Nisei supporter: "There is no privacy [….] There are long rows of toilets, all facing each other, with no partitions in between, and rows of showers. It is very cold out here, because the building is full of knot-holes. There is no place for the children, we hear their crying all night and all day."[20]

Day continued her reporting in the July issue of her journal, telling the shocking story of a young Japanese American boy who was shot to death when he tried to retrieve a ball that had rolled outside the fence of the camp where he lived.[21] All those details about life in the camps led the Office of Censorship in Washington to send a letter to *The Catholic Worker* criticizing it for disobeying the Code of Wartime Practices of the American Press. Even though Day apologized for not respecting the Code, she continued to publicly denounce Executive Order 9066.[22]

As 1943 dawned and President Roosevelt authorized the formation of an all-Nisei volunteer army combat unit, which ultimately took the form of the celebrate4d 442nd Regimental Combat Team, the government also authorized Japanese Americans to leave camp and take up work or studies outside, In the process, the WRA changed its orientation from rounding up and confining West Coast Japanese Americans to encouraging their resettlement in

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[19] Dorothy Day, "Grave Injustice Done Japanese On West Coast," *The Catholic Worker,* June 1942.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Dorothy Day, "On Pilgrimage," *The Catholic Worker,* July 1942.
[22] Greg Robinson and Matthieu Langlois, "Japanese Americans and Catholicism," *Discover Nikkei,* August 14, 2018.

small groups outside of the still-excluded West Coast. Government agencies and private Fair Play groups worked to shift public opinion nationwide from ambient hostility towards Japanese Americans (especially on the West Coast) towards more equal and 'democratic' treatment of minorities.

Catholics around the country became active in supporting the rights of Japanese Americans and encouraging resettlement. Most notably, Father Edward J. Flanagan, founding director of the orphanage Boys Town in Nebraska, recruited several dozen Japanese American families for work and residence in his institution.[23] Nationwide, members of the Catholic Interracial Councils and liberal Catholic journals such as *Commonweal* expressed support for resettlement and aid for Japanese Americans.[24] Nisei college students, as bearers of the future, formed the vanguard of resettlers. Through the efforts of the nonprofit National Japanese American Student Relocation Council, which arranged admission and scholarships, beginning in mid-1942 students started leaving camp and enrolling at institutions of higher education outside the West Coast. By the end of the war, over 4000 students had been able to leave camp to attend college. This total included students who attended a select number of Catholic institutions.[25] Father Lavery encouraged Nisei students to enroll at various Catholic universities outside the West Coast. In particular, he released a call inviting forty Nisei women to enroll at Quincy College in Quincy, Illinois.[26]

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[23] Blake Ursch, "During WWII, Boys Town housed Japanese-Americans escaping forced internment. The homes are coming down, but the story endures" *Omaha World-Herlad,* June 27, 2017, https://www.boystown.org/locations/nebraska/news-and-events/Pages/during-wwII-boys-town-housed-japanese-americans-escaping-forced-internment.aspx

[24] See, for example, Ina Sugihara, "I Don't Want to Go Back," *Commonweal* , July 20, 1945, pp. 330-2.

[25] On Nisei student relocation, see for example Allan W. Austin, *From Concentration Camp to Campus*: *Japanese American Students and World War II*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2007.

[26] van Harmelen, "Father Hugh Lavery and the Ten-Thousand Mile Parish."

As previously, during the period of mass removal, the Maryknollers proved to be the most active Catholic supporters of Japanese Americans during resettlement. Brother Theophane Walsh followed the migrants released from camp to Chicago. There, with the support of Bishop Bernard James Sheil, he opened a Nisei Catholic Youth Organization Hostel for Japanese Americans of all backgrounds.[27] Father Tibesar worked alongside Walsh in Chicago for a time, and even wrote letters to his former parishioners in camp encouraging them to resettle in the Midwest. Following the surrender of Japan in September 1945, Father Tibesar returned to Seattle to continue his work with resettlement.[28] Meanwhile, the Maryknoll nuns who had remained in Los Angeles reopened their schools for Nisei pupils once they were able to leave camp, offered employment and housing aid for resettlers—advocating for them with prospective employers and landlords—and visited the sick in hospitals.

The Catholic Church in Canada

The events surrounding the mass removal of Japanese Canadians had many parallels with those south of the border. The Japanese raid on Pearl Harbor, which triggered war between Canada and Japan, also unleashed a round of popular hostility against West Coast Japanese Canadians. The political pressure from the West Coast caused the government in Ottawa to act. On January 14, 1942, Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King and his Cabinet ordered all adult males of Japanese ancestry to be sent for work in road labour camps. Though meant as a compromise to reassure West Coast opinion, the action only inspired white leaders in British Columbia to press for removal of all Japanese Canadians. King feared mass riots that would lead

[27] Robinson and van Harmelen, "Brother Theophane Walsh."

[28] van Harmelen, Father Leopold Tibesar—the Shepherd of Seattle,"

to reprisals against Canadians held by Japan. He also shared popular views of all Japanese as treacherous. On February 24, 1942, King announced that by authority of Order in Council P.C. 1486, the Cabinet granted the Minister of Justice special powers within a "protected area" extending 100 miles inland from the Pacific Coast of British Columbia.

The order led to the expulsion from their homes of some 22,000 Canadian Japanese, of whom 61% were Nisei. Seventy percent of the Canadian-born were under 21 years of age. A new government agency, the British Columbia Security Commission, was created to run the removal operation. By October 1942, all Japanese Canadians had been moved off the West Coast. Approximately 1000 single men were sent to work on road labor camps. Another 3,500 Japanese Canadians opted to sign contracts to work on sugar beet farms outside British Columbia, where they served as exploited labor. Approximately 1,000 Japanese Canadians were permitted to settle in so-called "self-supporting projects" at their own expense. The majority of the Japanese Canadians, over twelve thousand people, were sent to internal exile in B.C.'s Slocan Valley. There they were housed in what were euphemistically known as the interior housing centres, mainly in largely-abandoned mining towns, or in a government-built camp called Tashme.

The exclusion of West Coast Japanese Canadians led to a surge of activism among religious groups. First, representatives of the Roman Catholic Church in Vancouver proposed to the British Columbia Security Commission (BCSC) that the Church arrange for the move, en masse, of all Japanese Catholics to a Catholic-specific settlement in the interior. The Anglicans, the Salvation Army, and the United Church of Canada then joined the proposal, with the goal of caring for their own faithful. BCSC officials were aware that voluntary church-led efforts would supplement their meager official budget. While they retained control over the logistics of

removal, they agreed to divide inmates between different settlements based on religion, and agreed that each Christian denomination would have exclusive missionary privileges in its own camp or settlement. Thus, during 1942, the BCSC segregated the Japanese Canadians by religion. Declared Catholics were sent to the Greenwood settlement, though it also housed a large Buddhist population. Of the 1,200 residents that eventually ended up there, only 120 families were Roman Catholic.[29]

Not only did the Church organize efforts (both separately and in partnership with other denominations) to meet the religious needs of their faithful in the confinement sites, but it took on a more central function. Since the Canadian government refused to offer secondary education to students in the sites, religious groups mobilized to open high school buildings. Anglican and United Church authorities hired Nisei teachers to work in their schools.[30] In contract, the Catholic church dispatched French Canadian Franciscan priests from Quebec, led by Father Grégoire Léger, and nuns from the Sisters of the Atonement, to come west and open Catholic schools in Greenwood.[31] Nuns from the Sisters of the Assumption, under Sister Superior Marie-du-Crucifix meanwhile opened the Slocan Private Catholic High School for the Nisei there.[32]

During the war, there was a flow of migrants east from the confinement sites, especially following the government's 1945 Order-in -Council, which required Japanese Canadians to

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[29] On wartime removal and the role of religious groups, see for example Ken Adachi, The *Enemy That Never Was* : *A History of the Japanese Canadians*, Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1976, p. ; Ann Gomer Sunahara, *The Politics of Racism: The Uprooting of Japanese Canadians During the Second World War*, ebook version, 2020, https://japanesecanadianhistory.ca/ p. 391-393.

[30] On education in the confinement sites in Canada, see Frank Moritsugu, *Teaching in Canadian Exile: History of the Schools for Japanese-Canadian Detention Camps during the Second World War*, Toronto, Ghost-Town Teachers Historical Society, 2001.

[31] Gregoire Léger, *En Mission dans les Camps d'Internement Japonais de la Colombie Canadienne*, pamphlet, Montréal, Missions franciscains, 1944.

[32] Jacqueline Gresko, "Mission and History: The Sisters of the Assumption and Japanese Students in Canada During World War II," Paedagogica Historica, Vol. 49, No. 4, (2013) pp. 531–546; Jacqueline Gresko, "Roman Catholic Sisters and Japanese Evacuees in British Columbia : A Research Note," J*ournal of the Canadian Church Historical Society*, April 1996, pp. 123-126; Chuck Tasaka, "Greenwood, B.C"

relocate outside of British Columbia under threat of being deported to Japan if they refused. While the largest fraction of migrants, most of whom were young, unmarried Nisei, settled in Ontario, approximately one-tenth of the migrants resettled in Quebec—especially *Nikkei* Catholics and others from Greenwood who were encouraged by the missionary teachers to come there. In the end, the newcomers to Quebec settled almost exclusively in the Montreal area, which became a migrant centre: Montreal's Japanese population reached 1,247 by the end of 1946 and over 1,300 in 1949, making it the largest Japanese community in the Francophone world. A smaller number resettled in Farnham, in the Eastern Townships, where the federal government opened a hostel for resettlers, though all but a small fraction ultimately settled in Montreal or left the province.

Catholic missionary groups, especially those cut off by the war from their work in Asia, devoted their efforts to assisting Asian Canadian refugees in Montreal. Under the leadership of Mother Saint-Pierre, the Sisters of Christ the King worked to find housing and employment for the migrants. In 1945, they opened a hostel for young Nisei women. Even as Catholic groups took the lead in resettling migrants within the francophone community, a few Nisei students were admitted to Université de Montréal.[33] Despite these efforts, the migrants faced significant discrimination in housing and employment, and the church groups made little progress. Rather, a significant fraction of Issei and Nisei were given opportunities by Jewish landlords and factory owners, who knew something about being victims of prejudice.

[33] In 1943 McGill University, the largest English-language university on Quebec, enacted a policy, initially secret, to refuse admission to all students of Japanese ancestry. Following protest by Japanese Canadians and their allies, the policy was gradually rescinded. See Tess Elsworthy « McGill University's Racial Exclusion of Japanese Canadians, 1943-1945", MA thesis, history, McGill University, 2020; Greg Robinson, "One mistaken and semi-Fascist regulation' : The Debate over McGill University's Wartime Exclusion of Japanese Canadians" *Discover Nikkei*, April 6, 2021 **http://www.discovernikkei.org/en/journal/2021/4/6/mcgill/**

Although Quebec remained the only province with a large Japanese population that did not impose any legal restrictions on them during the wartime era, Japanese Canadians in Montreal nevertheless encountered expressions of religious prejudice, both official and unofficial. Most notably, Premier Maurice Duplessis, the right-wing French Canadian nationalist, refused to grant Buddhism official recognition as a religious institution. As a result, most notably, Buddhist ministers could not officiate marriages, and Buddhists who wished to marry instead had to rely on Christian or Jewish clergymen to sign their wedding contracts.

The support offered by the Catholic Church to Japanese Canadian migrants to Montreal during World War II continued in the postwar era. When Father Jean-Claude Labrecque returned to Montreal from a mission to Japan in 1950, he devoted himself to assisting Japanese Canadians. Out of his own pocket, he helped fund the purchase of a building on Sherbrooke that housed a kindergarten and French classes, and served as the first community center. Later the Grey Nuns donated land for the building of the mission St. Paul Ibaraki. When the building opened in 1964, Paul-Emile Leger, by then Cardinal of Montreal, officiated and delivered a speech in Japanese. The mission (which closed in 2023) later became the site of the Japanese Canadian Community Centre, which still stands.

Conclusion

Catholics in both Canada and the United States, like other Christian communities, reacted to the wartime confinement of ethnic Japanese on the West Coast in a wide variety of ways.[34]

[34] On the reaction of Protestant Churches in the United States to Japanese American wartime confinement, see for example, Anne M. Blankenship *Christianity, Social Justice, and the Japanese American Incarceration during World War II* Chapter Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2016; Beth Shalom Hessel, "Let the conscience of Christian America speak: religion and empire in the incarceration of Japanese Americans, 1941-1945", Ph.D. dissertation, History, Texas Christian University, 2015, https://repository.tcu.edu/handle/116099117/8635. On Canadian churches, see for example David Dowe, "The Protestant churches and the resettlement of Japanese Canadians in urban Ontario, 1942-1955," *Canadian Ethnic Studies Journal*, vol. 39, no. 1-2, spring-summer 2007, pp. 51+. *Gale Literature Resource Center*,

Most were indifferent, some were cautious, and a minority were actively hostile. However, a number of Catholics in the two countries, including *Nikkei* converts, stepped in to help inmates survive official confinement, and in the process took up residence in remote and uncomfortable surroundings. The Catholic Church in Canada, like its Protestant counterparts, took up the task of educating teenagers in confinement. In relation to their resources, the Catholics were disproportionately active and generous in building schools. Once resettlement began in earnest, the Catholic activists helped those free from confinement to begin rebuilding their lives. At a moment in history when the Catholic Church faces justified scrutiny over its legacy of paternalism and racism in its operation of residential schools for First Nations in Canada, as well as the widespread sexual abuse of vulnerable populations by its clergy internationally, it is important to recognize the work of the clergy and lay Catholics who preached love and inclusion and stepped in to support ethnic Japanese amid a hostile prevailing racial climate.

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