

## Post-colonial American Imperialism (1900–1920)

At the start of the twentieth century the United States foreign policy was designed to lead the country forward in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War. Cuba had just gained its independence and the Spanish territories of Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Guam were ceded to the United States. President William McKinley wrote, “We cannot be unmindful that without any desire or design on our part the war has brought us new duties and responsibilities which we must meet and discharge as becomes a great nation on whose growth and career from the beginning the Ruler of Nations has plainly written the high command and pledge of civilization.”<sup>1</sup>

At the same time on the other side of the globe Chinese activists were killing hundreds of foreign missionaries and converts to Christianity in the Boxer Rebellion. Great Britain, France, Japan, Germany and Russia sent armed troops into China to negotiate terms of peace. United States Secretary of State John M. Hay proposed a new national foreign policy to create opportunities for rapid expansion in Latin America and an “Open Door” policy for international trade and commerce in Asia to meet that challenge.

Plans to open up trade to Latin America and China were temporarily derailed when President McKinley was assassinated while promoting this agenda at a public meeting during the Pan-American Exposition held

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<sup>1</sup>McKinley (1988).

in Buffalo, NY in 1901. Theodore Roosevelt succeeded McKinley as President and his passionate interest in building a canal through Panama to shorten the trade route and improve the economic situation of the United States dominated United States foreign policy.<sup>2</sup>

In the twentieth century the United States emerged from isolation and became a significant player on the world stage. At the start of the American century the Vatican had no diplomatic ties with the United States. Anti-Catholic sentiment in the United States was strong and deep animosity existed between the Vatican and all the major governments in Europe. The Italian government had seized all of the papal territories outside the Vatican in 1870. Pope Leo's predecessor had been virtually imprisoned in the Vatican and forced to rely on secular forces for protection of the sovereignty of the Vatican.<sup>3</sup>

Pope Leo XIII took a conciliatory approach toward anti-Church policies in Europe and the United States and tried to bolster the political position of the Church by appealing to the working class and developing Catholic political parties that supported reforms in favor of worker rights. He called for universal social reform to ensure a minimum wage and minimum standards of living for all workers.

By the time of his death in 1903, many labor movements, Catholic political parties and labor syndicates were founded on the principles he set forth in *Rerum novarum*. Pope Leo XIII was succeeded by Pope Pius X who built on his foundation using Christian concern for worker rights as a basis for the Church's political involvement in international relations.<sup>4</sup>

In 1904 President Theodore Roosevelt issued a corollary to the Monroe Doctrine to ensure the sovereignty of the United States by preventing Latin American countries from being taken over by European creditors to which they were deeply in debt, placing their newly won independence in peril. President Roosevelt promised that the United States would not intervene in the affairs of any Latin American country so long as it adhered to "acceptable international standards of behavior."

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<sup>2</sup> Milestones: 1899–1900 Secretary of State John Hay and the Open Door in China (2016).

<sup>3</sup> Pope Pius XI (2004).

<sup>4</sup> Leo XIII (2004).

However, where “chronic wrong-doing” or “impotence” threatened the establishment of a civilized society, he insisted upon the right of the United States to act as “an international police power.”<sup>5</sup> The perception of the United States as a global police force persisted throughout the twentieth century and continues to shape international perception of American foreign policy to this day.<sup>6</sup>

In 1907 Pope Pius X issued documents reinforcing worker rights and condemning modernism as “the synthesis of all heresies.” He encouraged leaders of nations to establish a fair and just wage and exhorted Catholics to embrace the poor with charity. President Roosevelt sought an audience with the Pope on his state visit to Rome in 1910. The Pope agreed on the condition that the President not visit the Methodist missionaries in Rome at the same time. President Roosevelt refused, and the Pope denied him an audience. President Roosevelt referred to this chain of events as an elegant row.<sup>7</sup>

Pope Pius X knew that the heightened level of tension that existed between European nations at that time indicated an armed conflict was inevitable unless the bombastic rhetoric could be toned down. He signed a concordat with Serbia just four days before World War I was ignited by the assassination of the Austrian heir-apparent, Franz Ferdinand. Pope Pius X died of a heart attack within a few hours after Italy’s declaration of war reached the Vatican. He was succeeded by Pope Benedict XV.<sup>8</sup>

The American imperialist paradigm of mission emerged in the midst of this tumultuous period when the ancient dynasties of Europe and the puppet regimes they set up in the Caribbean and Mexico were crumbling. Into this enormous power vacuum a succession of revolutionaries, rebels, guerrillas and bandits rushed to stake their claims. Meanwhile, in religious communities of women belonging to the Dominican Order, life remained basically the same.

Dominican Sisters in the United States followed the same Rule and Constitutions that their predecessors in Europe had followed for seven centuries. The four Dominican pillars of prayer, community, study and ministry kept the life balanced between contemplation and action.

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<sup>5</sup> Milestones: 1904 Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine (2016).

<sup>6</sup> Milestones: 1904 Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine (2016).

<sup>7</sup> Durant (1955, p. 216).

<sup>8</sup> Pope Pius X (2014).

**Table 2.1** Missions founded before World War I

<i>Founded</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Founding congregation</i>	<i>Current status</i>
1900	Germany	Mission San Jose Dominicans	Withdrew in 2014
1901	Cuba	St. Catherine de' Ricci Dominicans (Peace)	Withdrew in 1962
1909	Mexico	Mission San Jose Dominicans	Still active
1910	Puerto Rico	Amityville Dominicans	Still active
1911	Jamaica	Blauvelt Dominicans	Still active

The Sisters kept a strict *horarium* of liturgical prayer, separated from “the world,” and forbidden to associate with seculars, read secular news or involve themselves in social events or politics.

Most Sisters were literate and many were well-educated, but they were not permitted to read anything outside of a narrow body of prescribed literature. Texts approved by the Vatican were read aloud to them at meals and discussion was not encouraged. Sacred Scripture was interpreted for them through canonically approved theologians. Although contact with the secular world was strictly controlled, some individuals had a higher degree of awareness of political events due to experience prior to entering religious life, and second hand reports from family, priests and other members of other congregations.

A desire for increased access to the news of the day and deeper involvement in the concerns and needs of the people around them began to stir in them at the end of the nineteenth century. The Vatican responded affirmatively by lifting the restrictions of enclosure and the way of life of the Dominican Sisters in the United States was transformed in the course of a decade from the monastic style of life of the Dominican nuns to the apostolic way of life of the Dominican friars (Table 2.1).

GERMANY (1900)

The Dominican Sisters of Mission San Jose were founded in 1876 in response to a call by Bishop Joseph Sadoc Alemany, OP, first Bishop of California, for Sisters to be sent from New York to San Francisco to teach the children of German immigrants. By the start of the twentieth century the congregation was greatly in need of German-speaking Sisters for this mission. The foundress of the congregation Mother Maria Pia

Backes requested the approval of the Order for a novitiate in Europe. In 1897 she scheduled a trip to Europe in order to obtain “mission-minded postulants” and to study constitutional adaptations made by Dominican Sisters in Europe to adjust to an apostolic way life.<sup>9</sup>

Mother Pia visited Rhoendorf on the Rhine to discuss the prospect of establishing a house of formation in Europe with her Vicaress Mother Seraphina Maerz. By January 1899 she had concluded that Holland would be better place for a new novitiate than Rome. However, the following May she received a letter from Rome indicating that hospitality would be provided for her at the convent of Santa Sabina in Rome. Therefore, she went to Rome to discuss her plans with the Master General of the Order. At the same time, she sent Mother Seraphina to Holland.<sup>10</sup>

Regarding the congregation’s mission, Mother Pia wrote, “We read that in the very beginning of our Order, Our holy Father, Saint Dominic, founded his first convent of Nuns at Prouille in France, for the instruction of young girls, exposed to the danger of heresy; whence we gather that it entered into the original design of our holy Patriarch, that the religious women of his Order should occupy themselves with the instruction of others in the Faith, when this might be required by the necessities of time and place. In this spirit, therefore, we have embraced the work of teaching.”<sup>11</sup>

Mother Pia did not take this responsibility lightly and clearly understood the challenges the mission of teaching would present as her Sisters embraced this vocation for life. “The Christian education of children, being that particular work with God has entrusted to them among all the works practiced in the Church, they ought always to be disposed to perform it courageously, even though certain that the fatiguing labor will, in the end, exhaust their strength.”<sup>12</sup>

Soon after their return to California Mother Pia sent Mother Seraphina back to Europe to find a suitable location for a novitiate in the German-speaking lands redistributed after the defeat of Napoleon.

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<sup>9</sup>Backes, *Her Days Unfolded: Woman of the Word*, 2nd edition, Julie Distel, editor (1991, p. 167) (Backes 1991).

<sup>10</sup>Backes, *Unpublished Draft of Diary* (1903, p. 287) (Backes 1903).

<sup>11</sup>M. M. Backes (1895, p. 35).

<sup>12</sup>M. M. Backes (1895, p. 101).

Their objective was to found a vocation house and novitiate where women could receive religious formation and be educated to teach the children of German families who had immigrated to California and care for orphans from many cultures including the indigenous Ohlone and Coast Miwok of the San Francisco Bay area.

In October of 1899 Mother Pia received a letter from Germany informing her that two candidates were already prepared to enter, but Mother Seraphina had not been able to secure a suitable place for the novitiate.<sup>13</sup> She wrote that religious vocations were plentiful throughout Europe, but massive secularization campaigns had succeeded in destroying most of the monasteries and convents in Germany, Spain, Italy, France and Portugal and no new convents could be built to receive them due to the enactment of anti-Catholic legislation.

Although Europe was not officially designated as a “mission land” by the Catholic Church, European Catholics in the former Holy Roman Empire were very much in need of the help of Apostolic Sisters from the young Catholic Church in America. Mother Seraphina was keenly aware of this situation and determined to do whatever they could to recruit and train European vocations eager to join the growing mission in California.

Toward this end Mother Seraphina accepted the donation of a property in Rhoendorf on the Rhine in 1900, and entreated the emperor Kaiser Wilhelm II for permission to establish a house of study where religious women could be trained for German-American schools in California.<sup>14</sup>

Unwavering in her resolve to found a novitiate in Europe, Mother Seraphina took possession of another property in a neutral territory outside the emperor’s jurisdiction next to a church in Altenberg in neutral Moresnet (now part of Belgium). There she established a convent and moved the novitiate from Rhoendorf to Altenberg 1901.

In the Constitutions written by Mother Pia in 1908, the primary end of the congregation is given as the sanctification of the Sisters. In fact, this was the primary end of all congregations prior to the Second Vatican Council. The secondary end of the congregation was its special purpose and the corporate ministry the members would undertake.

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<sup>13</sup>Backes, *Her Days Unfolded: Woman of the Word*, 2nd edition, Julie Distel, editor (1991, pp. 234–235) (Backes 1991).

<sup>14</sup>Lillis (2012).

The Dominican Sisters of Mission San Jose were founded for the special purpose of the Christian education of youth motivated by Mother Pia's special concern for the young, the poor and the vulnerable.

The Sisters were to accomplish this mission by means of education, which "comprises all the means which enable us to sow, cultivate, strengthen and render fruitful the Christian spirit in souls, in order to lead them to a sincere and open profession of true Christianity," and by religious instruction, which Mother Pia believed to be "the first, the most necessary, the most practical, and from every point of view the most useful of all branches of teaching."

However Mother Pia did not believe that education was strictly intellectual. She wrote that "both the temporal and the spiritual welfare of a child depend in a great measure on the dispositions of mind and heart."<sup>15</sup> For this reason she advised her Sisters to foster a love for study by making it interesting so that it would be held in high esteem.

The foundation of the Catholic school system in the United States took place simultaneously with the establishment of an American public school system which was imbued with Protestant values and beliefs. Freedom of religion was protected by law, but Catholics often came under suspicion and were discriminated against in public schools in many ways. The public school system openly colluded in discrimination against Catholics through the use of text books with anti-Catholic pictures and statements. Many Protestant school teachers were biased against Catholic children, and Catholic teachers were refused employment in the public schools.

To counter anti-Catholicism in the public school system, Apostolic Sisters were commissioned by the Catholic Church to establish schools in every Catholic parish in order to prevent the faith of the children from being systematically undermined. The parochial school system integrated religious instruction with general education so that children would grow up understanding that God and the Church were part of their whole life.

Mission San Jose Dominicans and many congregations in the United States were founded for the special purpose of establishing and sustaining a Catholic educational system that was equal, if not superior, to the American public school system. Toward this aim they were highly successful.

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<sup>15</sup>M. M. Backes, *Constitutions of the Sisters of Third Order of St. Dominic in California* (1908, pp. 96–98) (Backes 1908).



Fig. 2.1 Students at Saints Peter and Paul School, Altenhohenau, Bavaria 1930

A change made in the 1923 Constitutions of the Mission San Jose Dominicans reflected the need to clarify the Catholic identity of their schools. Rather than leading children to a “profession of Christianity” as stated in the previous Constitutions the purpose of religious instruction described in the 1923 version was leading children to “profession of the Catholic Faith.” Several pages are dedicated to exactly how this was to be accomplished. The purpose of the educational mission was to form souls that were strong in faith and well instructed in the doctrines of the Church and the practice of virtue. Lest they be lured into theological solipsism by becoming too introspective, Sisters were expected to attend to the duties of their way of life but not to be overly scrupulous in order to instill true piety in others. Mother Pia cautioned that “all piety not founded on this principle is but a most dangerous delusion.”<sup>16</sup>

The Mission San Jose Dominicans were petitioned by German priests at a Bavarian parish to take possession a secularized thirteenth century

<sup>16</sup>Dominican Sisters of Mission San Jose (1923, pp. 162–163).





**Fig. 2.2** Dominican novices studying home economics at Altenhohenau, Bavaria 1930

monastery in Altenhohenau. Mother Pia took over the monastery and transferred the Altenberg novitiate there in 1924. Between 1901 and 1924 over 200 women entered religious life at Altenberg and were sent as missionaries to California. At Altenhohenau the Sisters provided care for orphans and Catholic education to children. Altenhohenau frequently served as a house of refuge for migrating and displaced peoples (Fig. 2.1).

Most of the Sisters sent to California from Altenhohenau were certified in housekeeping by the Bavarian government and ministered as cooks and housekeepers in boarding schools and convents in California. Sisters remaining at Altenhohenau during World War II (1939–1945) were temporarily conscripted into war service as domestics and survived the war. Some served in an army hospitals and others at *Pax Heim*, a mountain resort for clergy in Wallgau.

Unlike many monasteries in Europe, Altenhohenau was never occupied by German troops or bombed by the Allied forces. However, the Catholic Church never fully recovered in Germany after war. “Germany itself has seen a decrease of more than two-thirds since the Second World War, including a decline in the number of baptisms, confessions, marriages and funerals. This has inevitably contributed to the dramatic

decrease in religious vocations and the ever more noticeable lack of priests.”<sup>17</sup>

The Dominican mission in Germany was different from the missions that followed because its purpose was to recruit and form Sisters for missioning in the United States. In this regard the mission was highly successful until World War II and the decimation of religious life by Adolf Hitler. After World War II there were only a few German speaking Sisters remaining at Altenhohenau. They ran a school, taught catechism and provided religious instruction to local youth. Catholic Charities eventually took over the school for its program preparing certified caregivers for the elderly and handicapped (Fig. 2.2).<sup>18</sup>

After the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989–1990), the Sisters at Altenhohenau helped with the repatriation of people of German ancestry who had lived under Russian occupation in East Germany. In 2014 the Mission San Jose Dominicans withdrew from Germany. The German Sisters were moved into assisted living with other religious in Germany or went to the Motherhouse in California. The Archdiocese of Munich and the local parish took over responsibility for the church and monastery. Catholic Charities still holds the lease on the school for its programs.

## CUBA (1901)

The Catherine de’ Ricci Dominicans began a mission in Cuba in 1901. The congregation was originally founded as a pontifical institute in 1880 by Lucy Eaton Smith, later known as Mother Catherine de’ Ricci, for the special purpose of offering spiritual retreats for women. The congregation later took up the work of caring for orphans and teaching. Mother Catherine died in 1894, and her sister Lillie, (Mother Mary Loyola) succeeded her as Mother General.

The end of Spanish-American War opened up many new opportunities for missionaries in the Caribbean and Latin America. Mother Loyola shared her desire to establish a mission in Cuba with her confessor. After a period of discernment, Mother Loyola’s wish was fulfilled. Donato Raffaele Sbarretti Tazza was named Bishop of Havana in 1900,

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<sup>17</sup>Kaspar (2015).

<sup>18</sup>Moses, Donna Maria (2012).



**Fig. 2.3** Sister M. Imelda Teresa, Mother M. Loyola Smith, Sister M. Henry Susa Lalime and Sister M. Rose of Lima Bouchard with orphans in Havana, Cuba 1901

and invited the Catherine de' Ricci Dominicans to send Sisters to set up an orphanage for abandoned black and mestizo children. Mother Loyola visited Havana to determine what would be needed for this endeavor and secured approval to revise the Catherine de' Ricci Dominicans Constitutions in order to take up this apostolic work.

President Theodore Roosevelt gave Mother Loyola a letter of introduction and wished her success in founding a mission in Cuba in 1901.<sup>19</sup> There was disagreement at the diocesan level about whose jurisdiction the new foundation would be under, but neither the Diocese of Brooklyn nor the Diocese of Havana offered funds to support it. Mother Loyola petitioned the Philadelphia heiress Mother Katherine Drexel for

<sup>19</sup>McManus (1980, p. 8).

funds for the purpose of establishing an orphanage for black and mestizo children in Havana, and Mother Drexel sent her \$5000 in gold.

The Sisters befriended wealthy families in Havana by providing education in English for their daughters and petitioned them to contribute financial support for the orphanage. Whereas the local elite readily accepted the idea of a private school to provide advanced education for young ladies of the upper class, they could not be convinced to support the care and education of orphans (Fig. 2.3).<sup>20</sup>

With congregational funds Mother Loyola opened an asylum (orphanage) for orphaned black and mestizo girls with a home school in religious, secular and domestic subjects. The asylum ran a laundry service that gave the girls skills that would help them become self-supporting and allow them to contribute to their own education. At the same time the Sisters provided religious instruction for black children and worked toward establishing a free school for blacks. The Sisters gave private lessons in English, French and German and ran retreats for women hoping to develop interest in them to join in supporting the charitable works of the congregation.

The Ursuline Sisters withdrew from Our Lady Help of Christians Academy, a successful private girls' school in the well-to-do neighborhood of Vedado, Havana, and the Bishop entreated the Catherine de' Ricci Dominicans to take it over. He arranged for the Sisters of Providence from Baltimore, MD to take over the work at the asylum so that the Catherine de' Ricci Dominicans could concentrate on staffing and running Our Lady Help of Christians School. The school grew in prestige and reputation, and the Sisters were highly valued for the quality of education and instruction in virtue and social decorum they provided. The academy grew steadily in enrollment and the Sisters added additional property to expand the work.

"By 1908 the enrollment was so large that the Maximo Gomez mansion at 45th Street was purchased. Years later the son of that great historic leader told the Sisters that his father had died in the very place where their chapel was."<sup>21</sup> Within a few years the Sisters purchased another property on 23rd Street, and another branch and a second floor was added onto the building at 45th Street to make more space for the

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<sup>20</sup>(Kelly (1979), p. 15).

<sup>21</sup>(Kelly (1979), p. 15).

ever-expanding enrollment. That same year they opened an asylum and Holy Rosary Academy for girls in Cienfuegos. Once again the asylum soon had to be closed so that the Sisters could staff and run the academy which grew by leaps and bounds in enrollment.

The Catherine de' Ricci Sisters' schools operated with a two-tiered program, a *Bachillerato* program for girls intending to go to a university in Cuba, and a commercial program teaching business classes. In 1944 the Sisters bought another property in Havana and opened a private girls' academy there called La Coronela in 1949. Our Lady Help of Christians in Vedado, Havana became a day school and La Coronela took in both day students and resident boarders.

High school students commuted to Vedado until an adjoining property was purchased and a high school was added to La Coronela.

By the late 1940's the three highly successful schools became known collectively as the American Dominican Academies and were affiliated with the Catholic University of America. This improved their graduates' success of gaining acceptance to universities in the United States. Many Catherine de' Ricci Sisters were assigned to teach in the academies in Cuba between 1901 and 1951, and many Cuban vocations were received by the congregation and formed in religious life.

This mutually beneficial arrangement ended in 1952 when President Fulgencio Batista, backed by the Cuban army, staged a coup and established a dictatorship which lasted for 7 years. In 1958 another revolution took place and the situation became increasingly tense. The Sisters were forced to close their convent in Cienfuegos. Holy Rosary Academy graduated its last class in 1958 when President Batista was ousted during the revolutionary *July 26th Movement* and forced to flee the country.

Communist guerillas executed thousands of dissenters and took control of the army and the government. Many Cuban refugees fled to the United States and relations between the two countries became strained. In February of 1960 Fidel Castro took over leadership and established a dictatorship based on an atheistic form of Communism in Cuba. He signed a formal agreement with the Soviet Union that raised American fears of communist encroachment. President Dwight Eisenhower was succeeded by John F. Kennedy, the first Catholic President of the United States.

President Kennedy tried to break Fidel Castro's hold on Cuba by launching the hasty and ill-advised Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba from Guatemala. American troops were captured, forced to surrender and were publicly interrogated and put into Cuban prisons. Fidel Castro's

ties with the Soviet Union were strengthened leading eventually to the events of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962.

During these years it was difficult to know whom to trust either in Cuba or the United States. News and information were often unreliable. Many Sisters were transferred immediately from Cuba to the United States. By December of 1960 there were only six Sisters left in Havana. Three were at La Coronela and three at Our Lady Help of Christians. As tensions mounted between the United States and Cuba, the embassy advised all United States citizens to leave the country. "In January 1961 when the United States officially broke off diplomatic relations with the Cuban government, the last six Sisters flew to Miami."<sup>22</sup>

Dominican Sisters remained in Miami to work with refugees and migrants at the Centro Hispano Catolico. Cuban refugees were legally allowed to take only \$5 and whatever they could carry when they migrated. Sisters provided food, clothing, emergency relief, medical care and rent assistance to help people get started and ongoing support as needed. The center expanded as the flow of refugees increased and Dominican Sisters provided leadership to these efforts, organized volunteers and developed fundraising programs to support it.

All of the property belonging to the Catherine de' Ricci congregation in Cuba, was confiscated by the Castro regime. The running of the highly successful American Dominican Academies they had built mostly with their own funds was taken over by the Apostolado Sisters, a Cuban congregation. Unfortunately the atheistic policies of Fidel Castro's government undermined the quality education the Sisters had formerly provided. Despite following lengthy convoluted processes to submit legal claims through the courts, the properties built and owned by the Catherine de' Ricci Dominicans in Cuba have never been returned and no financial restitution has ever been made.

The Sisters remain dedicated to the Cuban families they came to know and love in their time there. Many former graduates of the American Dominican Academies who fled to Miami with their families during the revolution and the ensuing years remain in contact with one another and with the Sisters who had taught them. They established a group called the American Dominican Alumnae (ADA) that continues the legacy of providing quality Catholic education for girls. They fund

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<sup>22</sup>(Kelly (1979), p. 17).



**Fig. 2.4** Dominican Sisters at Santa Rosa Primeria in Atzacapotzalco, Mexico 1910

scholarships for young women at a Catholic high school in Miami, and provide financial and spiritual support for single mothers.

In recent years as President Barak Obama and Pope Francis worked to lift the embargo on trade with Cuba, and re-establish United States relations with Cuba, the Catherine de' Ricci Congregation and the members of the ADA watched with interest to see what this might mean for a return of missionaries to Cuba.

In 2012 the Catherine de' Ricci Dominicans merged with the Dominican Sisters of Peace, a new religious institute formed by the reconfiguration of seven other Dominican communities in 2009. The other congregations belonging to the Dominican Sisters of Peace are the Dominicans of St. Catharine in Kentucky, the Dominican Sisters of St. Mary of the Springs in Ohio, the Congregation of St. Mary in New Orleans, the Dominican Sisters of Great Bend in Kansas, the Eucharistic Missionaries of St. Dominic in Louisiana, the Sisters of St. Dominic of



the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Akron, Ohio, and the Congregation of St. Rose of Lima in Oxford, Michigan.

### MEXICO (1909)

The Mission San Jose Dominicans' mission in Mexico began when Raquel Torres, a young Mexican woman studying at Immaculate Conception Academy in San Francisco convinced Mother Maria Pia Backes, the foundress of the congregation, of the need for a similar school in Mexico. Señor Angel Sebastian Torres, Raquel's father, agreed to provide funding for the school if the congregation would agree to send Sisters to staff it (Fig. 2.4).

Mother Seraphina and Raquel traveled to Mexico City on September 28, 1906 and were met at the depot by Señor Torres who escorted them to the Dominican Fathers, where they met the Vicar Provincial, Friar José Bayon, OP, and his assistant Friar Joaquín Rodríguez, OP. Mother Pia wrote to the Dominican Vicar Provincial in Mexico and confided to her diary, "He thinks it will be well to have a few Sisters in Mexico for 6 months preparatory to the opening of the school, so that they may accomplish the necessary preliminary work. Father Provincial is building a Day School in Atzacapotzalco, a suburb of Mexico City, for the poor children. We are to go daily from our convent to this school. At the convent we should have a pay school."<sup>23</sup>

The Dominican Friars built a school and convent in Atzacapotzalco, Mexico and Mother Pia sent her Vicaress Mother Seraphina Maerz to open it. The school had just opened when rumors of a revolution began to circulate. By March 1911 a civil war broke out between revolutionists and the federal army. President Porfirio Díaz was forced to resign a few months later. Meanwhile the Sisters' mission was beginning to thrive. New postulants were arriving and a local benefactress had donated property and funds to found another school and convent in Tlalpan, but political unrest continued to escalate, and the Sisters were forced to close Atzacapotzalco because of rebel incursions in 1912.

The Mission San Jose Dominicans transferred nine professed Sisters and three postulants to Tlalpan where they managed to secure a letter of

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<sup>23</sup>Backes, *Her Days Unfolded: Woman of the Word*, 2nd edition, Julie Distel, editor (1991, p. 315).



protection from the American consulate. For the next 2 years Zapatistas and Carrancistas each sought permission to mount guns on the roof of the well-constructed school and convent. Both groups considered it an ideal fortification. The Dominican Nuns at the Monastery of Santa Catalina were forced out of their monastery in Mexico City and were given refuge by the Mission San Jose Dominicans at Tlalpan. From 1915 to 1916 the Zapatistas and Carrancistas continued to fight for control of the country. Priests throughout Mexico were imprisoned and the Dominican Friars were dispersed.

Inside the convent relations between American and Mexican members of the congregation became strained. Several Mexican Sisters left during these tense years and eventually founded six offshoot congregations in Mexico. Despite the trials of separation, an ongoing war and a violent revolution, the Mission San Jose Dominicans persevered. They opened another school and convent in San Angel in 1916 that remained open until the property was seized by the Mexican government in 1926. They opened a school in San Rafael in 1918 and two more in San Felipe, Guanajuato in 1923.

In San Miguel de Allende they opened Colegio Santo Tomás de Aquino on the property of *El Beaterio de Santo Domingo* in 1924. This property was originally a house for *Beatas*, a group of pious women recognized by the Vicar Provincial of New Spain, though not formally affiliated with the Dominican Order. By affiliating with the Mission San Jose Dominicans, the *Beatas* became official members of the Order.

A wealthy friend of the *Beatas* named Señor Alvarez gave a building that he owned in San Miguel to the Mission San Jose Dominicans for use as a convent and dedicated the chapel to Santo Domingo. Señor Alvarez wisely set up a legal plan whereby his family would retain ownership of the property, while the Dominican Sisters would have the use it in perpetuity. This arrangement guaranteed that if the Mexican government were to confiscate the property, it would have to be returned to the Alvarez family, who in turn would give it back to the Dominicans Sisters for use as a convent and school.

Two years later President Plutarco Calles, successor to President Díaz ordered the closing of all the convents and monasteries in Mexico and confiscated numerous properties. Santo Domingo convent and chapel and Colegio Santo Tomás de Aquino were confiscated among other convents and schools operated by the Mission San Jose Dominicans in Mexico including the Dominican school at San Rafael. “Though

Catholics and the country were divided on whether to intervene in Mexico, in 1934 the U.S. Bishops issued the document ‘Tyranny in Mexico’ in an attempt to persuade American Catholics to pressure the American government to address the situation.”<sup>24</sup>

The Claretian Fathers built a large school in San Antonio, Texas for Mexican families fleeing the persecution, and invited the Mission San Jose Dominicans to staff it in 1926. The Dominican Sisters novitiate and two schools in Tlalpan remained open under the letter of protection from the American consulate until 1935.<sup>25</sup> Due to the foresight of Señor Alvarez, Santo Domingo and Colegio Santo Tomás de Aquino in San Miguel de Allende were returned to the Alvarez family who gave it back to the Mission San Jose Dominicans in 1936. The San Rafael property was returned in 1943. By 1947 the San Rafael school had so increased in enrollment the Sisters were forced to find a new location for it.

In 1950 the Maryknoll Sisters joined the Maryknoll Fathers in their mission in Mérida, Yucatan and worked in parishes in Mexico City and Puebla throughout the 1960 and 1970’s. Other congregations began taking up missions in Mexico and congregations founded by Mexican Sisters were beginning to grow in influence.

The Mission San Jose Dominicans built a regional house and novitiate in Atizipán de Zaragoza, Mexico in 1968 and added a missionary apostolate for diversified ministries with and for indigenous poor of the Náhuatl, Maya, Zapotec, Otomi, and Mixtec Congregational directives of 1968 stated that “Indian missions be continued as long as we have personnel available for the work.”<sup>26</sup> Missions established in Chiapas in 1975 and in Chalma in 1978 are still active. In the 1980 and 1990’s the Maryknoll Sisters joined in outreach to the indigenous in Chiapas.

In addition to Yucatan, Mexico City and Puebla, Maryknoll Sisters served in Guanajuato, Oaxaca, Campeche and Cuernavaca. The Mission San Jose Dominicans opened a house of studies and formation in Tacubaya in 1992. Between 1945 and 2005 the Mission San Jose Dominicans established over thirty schools in Mexico. Because of rising violence due to increased activities of drug cartels several congregations

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<sup>24</sup>Dries (1998, p. 96).

<sup>25</sup>Hernandez (2002, F-2).

<sup>26</sup>Dominican Sisters of Mission San Jose (1968, p. 38).



Fig. 2.5 Amityville Dominican Sister with families in Puerto Rico c. 1920

collaborated in efforts to help women and children in the violent border area of Juarez.

Human trafficking and other horrific injustices remain an ongoing concern in Juarez, and individual Sisters with knowledge of the local situation continue working for human rights, but there is no congregationally sponsored mission in Juarez at this time. The Mission San Jose Dominicans have five schools in Mexico and are active in variety of ministries in Atizipán de Zaragoza, Maravatio, Michoachan, Chihuahua, Guanajuato, Chalma and Chiapas. Their house of formation and study in Tacubaya remains open.

### PUERTO RICO (1910)

The Amityville Dominicans founded a mission in Puerto Rico in 1910. Mother Catherine Herbert assembled the Sisters in the school hall of the church of the Most Holy Trinity to receive the news. “You are probably aware of my object in appearing before you this morning. Sent by your bishop, I come to bring you the news that it is the sincere wish of His

Holiness, Pope Pius X that you the Dominican Sisters of the Diocese of Brooklyn take up missionary work in Puerto Rico.”<sup>27</sup>

Bishop Charles Edward McDonnell prepared the Sisters volunteering for the mission with these words of caution, “The Sisters who go must lead a saintly life, because the inhabitants of the Island who have by degrees left the fold of Christ and are daily becoming more and more tepid, will watch you as a cat watches a mouse, and whatever defect they notice in you, they will use for their own defense.”<sup>28</sup>

The first Dominican Sisters of Amityville sailed from New York on the steamship Coamo at noon on August 20, 1910. As soon as they arrived in Bayamón, Puerto Rico they opened schools and the educational work took off quickly. The second foundation in Yauco opened in 1912. In the summer of 1914 more Sisters arrived from Brooklyn to staff the schools. In 1918 they established a third foundation in San Juan next to the Cathedral. They went on to build and staff schools in Isabela, Cataño and Narañito, and two Sisters taught at Universidad Santa Maria, the Catholic University in Ponce.

The first convents had little or no electricity, no flush toilets, nor refrigeration and the tropical heat made life uncomfortable for much of the year. The Sisters had difficulty adjusting to the climate and contracted the diseases of the poor with whom they worked. Nevertheless, a few Sisters were assigned to the Puerto Rican mission from New York each year.

The plan from the beginning was for the mission to be turned over to the native inhabitants once they were trained and could manage successfully on their own. From 1910 to 1960 Dominican Sisters of Amityville were regularly assigned to Puerto Rico. Mother Mary Hilaria Droesch was one of the pioneers who went to Puerto Rico in 1910. She returned to Brooklyn in September, 1926 because of ill health and did not return. She died in 1948 at the age of 87 (Fig. 2.5).

By the start of World War II over one hundred Sisters had served there. Native vocations were trained in the United States and then sent back to serve in the schools in Puerto Rico. Sisters expanded their ministries to include direct service with the poor and basic health care. Several Sisters with nursing degrees were sent to set up make-shift clinics.

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<sup>27</sup> Dominican Sisters of Amityville (1910).

<sup>28</sup> Crawford (1937, p. 278).

After World War II other congregations sent Sisters to serve in Puerto Rico. Adrian Dominicans sent Sisters to teach at Colegio San Antonio, a twelve grade co-ed school owned by the American Redemptorists in Guayama in 1946. They worked long hours and taught catechism after school in the *campos*. In 1948 the Adrian Dominicans extended their service as educators to Academia Sagrado Corazón, another twelve grade co-ed school in Santurce. Two Sisters with doctorates were sent to teach at the University of Santa María in Ponce.<sup>29</sup>

In 1966 the Dominican Sisters of Saint Mary of the Springs, Columbus, OH sent Sisters to staff a new elementary and high school that had been built by the Passionist Fathers in San Juan. The congregation signed a 6 year contract with the Passionist Fathers agreeing to send three Sisters in 1966 and one more each year. After the Second Vatican Council there was a scene change in the mission in Puerto Rico. While some Sisters chose to remain in schools teaching or administration, others chose to integrate with the people and work in a variety of ways helping to improve their quality of life.

By 1960 the number of Puerto Rican Sisters serving in the mission exceeded the number of those sent from the United States. Adrian Dominican Sister Rosario Martín, OP was born and raised in Guayama, Puerto Rico and was assigned there when her mother became ill in 1969. She taught at her “Alma Mater,” Colegio San Antonio, for 2 years and then became principal for the next 3 years. Her move into pastoral ministry in the 1970’s was part of a general trend at the time. Many Sisters who had been serving in schools chose to move into other areas of work. Adrian Dominican Sisters did pastoral work in Trujillo Alto and Gurabo, counseled drug addicts and served as prison chaplains in metropolitan San Juan.

When vocations began to drop in the 1980’s, staffing the schools became a serious concern. The Amityville Dominicans elected to withdraw from institutions where the work could successfully be continued under lay leadership. The Sisters who remained in Puerto Rico opened day care centers in Santa Cruz to support the spiritual and physical needs of the elderly and teach children from poor families to read and write.

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<sup>29</sup>Ryan (1977, pp. 4–5).

On the isolated island of Culebra they provided basic education and spiritual care.<sup>30</sup>

Over 300 Amityville Dominican Sisters have served in Puerto Rico as teachers, catechists, pastoral workers, ministers to the poor and elderly, and counselors to families in need. Each has been a missionary in the true sense of the word. In ten decades' time this Mission has grown in ways those first Sisters could have never imagined. The Amityville Province in Puerto Rico is self-governing and self-supporting, and home to 50 Sisters who minister to local communities."<sup>31</sup>

In 2010 the Dominican Sisters of Amityville marked their 100th anniversary in Puerto Rico and entered into a collaborative venture with the province to begin a new mission in the Dominican Republic.

### JAMAICA (1911)

Mother Mary Ann Sammon, the foundress of the Blauvelt Dominicans was so moved by the plight of homeless children wandering the streets of New York that she established an orphanage to care for and educate them. The congregation's reputation for providing care and education for orphans grew and soon she was invited to found similar establishments in New York, New Jersey, Rhode Island and Florida.

The Dominican Sisters of the Perpetual Rosary in West Hoboken, NJ were asked by the Bishop John J. Collins, S.J., Vicar Apostolic of Jamaica, to staff St. Joseph's Hospital in 1911. Mother Mary Ann agreed to send Sisters to provide care and education for the abandoned children of native Jamaicans sent to do manual labor on banana plantations in Central America and Cuba, and in the construction of the Panama Canal. Jamaican children were frequently left unattended or worked in the fields alongside their parents.

As a result of unfair labor practices, and the lack of day care for children, unemployment soared.

There were a series of violent labor rebellions protesting the hardships native workers suffered. In 1939 seventeen Blauvelt Dominicans serving in Jamaica asked to separate to form a new congregation, but they found

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<sup>30</sup>Marschhauser (2015).

<sup>31</sup>Hughes (2010).

it difficult to be financially self-sustaining, and in 1942 they merged back into one congregation.

The Blauvelt Dominicans opened St. Theresa's Preparatory School in Kingston in 1953, and it soon became the largest school on the island. St. Elizabeth's and Sacred Heart Academy opened soon afterward.

After Jamaica gained independence in 1962, the country experienced rapid economic growth. Although there was a tremendous boom in tourism, the profits from the tourist trade went mainly to foreign investors and did little to improve the economic situation of Jamaica's working poor. The disparity in wealth distribution grew and the import of goods and services began to outpace exports.

Economic instability led to more riots, political demonstrations and civil disobedience. The educated segment of the Jamaican population that did not belong to the top echelons of the elite began migrating to the United States and elsewhere. This diaspora continues to rob Jamaica of the working class needed to help the country stabilize its economy.

The Blauvelt Dominicans moved out of school ministry and into programs providing direct services to the poor and displaced. Well trained lay leadership or native congregations took over the schools and the Sisters started a program for destitute children. This work expanded to include a women's group that met for faith sharing and skills development. In the 1990's Sisters helped to staff the Rev. Roy Campbell, SJ. Memorial Health Clinic providing free health care for the poor families in Kingston.<sup>32</sup>

Dominican Sisters working in Jamaica reported that, "The problem of violence in Kingston, Jamaica, is multifaceted and includes issues related to lack of education, unemployment, competition for basic needs, and the culture itself with corruption, drugs, and gangs. One of the goals of the Jamaica Outreach Collaborative is to build peaceful partnerships and to demonstrate to the youth that there is an alternative to violence."<sup>33</sup>

A few other American congregations sent a few Sisters to Jamaica since 2000. In 2010 two Dominican Sisters of Peace from Columbus, Ohio worked with Students Crossing Borders from Toronto, Canada. With the help of a grant from Catholic Health Initiatives they began a program focused on education, health care, inter-community youth

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<sup>32</sup>Flaherty (1993).

<sup>33</sup>Poore (2010).

projects, partnership, and community development. These efforts continue and Sisters and volunteers are welcome to join these efforts.

### SUMMARY

The Dominican Sisters' missions to Germany, Cuba, Mexico, Puerto Rico and Jamaica began during the post-colonial era when Europe had lost its hold on colonies in the New World. In Europe as well as in the Caribbean and Latin America the ranks of the poor grew exponentially in the absence of good government as various political factions struggled to gain control after independence was declared.

Catholic missionary efforts to provide humanitarian relief and education were frequently met with suspicion and resistance by wealthy land owners who profited from the labor of the disenfranchised peoples the Sisters were endeavoring to lift out of poverty. The Sisters lacked in-depth knowledge of the cultural, social and political situation into which they had been sent, but their understanding and love of the Gospel and mission of Jesus Christ impelled them to eradicate poverty and injustice. Despite this altruistic motive, in the Caribbean and elsewhere in Latin America, Sisters were frequently perceived by local governments as pawns in imperialist strategies of the United States and the Catholic Church.

Despite the noble intention of providing Catholic education and basic health care to the poor, many congregations struggled internally to create communities in which there was no room for social bias based on privilege, race or class. The post-colonial American imperialist paradigm gave way to a paradigm based on belief that acceptance of the Catholic faith was pre-requisite for salvation and evangelization meant converting pagans in heathen lands.

American Catholic Women Religious enthusiastically joined in efforts to win souls for Jesus Christ and educated people to build democratic societies governed by Christian values. Meanwhile the ancient dynasties that gave birth to democracy teetered on the brink of collapse, clashed briefly, and fell into an uneasy peace.

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