



INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED JESUIT STUDIES
BOSTON COLLEGE

JESUIT SOURCES

International Symposia on Jesuit Studies

ISSN: 2766-0664

Introduction

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Source: *Circa Missiones: Jesuit Understandings of Mission through the Centuries*
(Proceedings of the Symposium held at Lisbon, Portugal, June 12–14, 2023)

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ISBN: 978–1–947617–35–3

Published by: Institute of Jesuit Sources

Originally Published: September 30, 2025

<https://doi.org/10.51238/ISJS.2023.01>

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Introduction

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Land. Sea. Another land. And other lands with men who have not yet known the word of the Lord, or who, if they have known it, have chosen to forget it and therefore need to rediscover it. These brief images succinctly summarize the evangelizing drive that has ignited and still ignites the spirits of thousands of members of the Society of Jesus, a religious order that includes the mission for evangelization in its core identity.

As we know today, most of them never had the chance to fulfill their desire to leave their homeland for new and unknown places. Even forwarding the request to superiors by writing an *indipeta* with their own blood did not guarantee inclusion in the next expedition. But for those who were approved by the Superior General, there was a privileged place steeped in their excitement about leaving the mainland. That place was the port. In particular, the port of Lisbon. Protected by the bend naturally created at the meeting of the Tejo River and the Atlantic Ocean, the port saw the first Jesuit missionary, Francis Xavier, set sail on April 7, 1541, his 35th birthday.

Nearly five centuries later, scholars from around the globe gathered in Lisbon, not far from that place, to discuss, analyze, and understand a global phenomenon that involved thousands of people reached around the world by the members of the Society of Jesus. As the event program shows, during the days of the Symposium entitled *Circa Missiones: Jesuit Understandings of Mission through the Centuries*, scholars from numerous research fields showcased the complementarity of the sciences, often only hoped for in such circumstances.

The historiographical debate on the Jesuit missionary movement has reached its peak over the past five years. As the articles in this issue also demonstrate, it has not been confined to the world of Jesuit Studies alone. The possibility of examining, on a global scale, the tensions and displacements generated by the evangelizing impulse allows us to uncover identity-forming elements of the European men in both the early modern and contemporary periods. This involves a fusion of the religiosity intrinsic to the very idea of mission, the desire for the exotic and for discovery, and the political and economic interests orbiting the (spiritual and non-spiritual) conquest or reconquest of the Other.

The beginning of this journey was, for the Jesuits, primarily an internal one. It was accomplished through the recognition of that desire, to be explored through those post-Tridentine practices of *cognitio* in the form of the Spiritual Exercises within the Society of Jesus. Therefore, for those who have been called to set out on this journey, the encounter with the global becomes an essential moment in the recognition of the fundamental values that constitute their cultural and existential horizon.

Within this collective movement—which, we should remember, involves both the Catholic and Protestant fronts—the Society of Jesus represents an indispensable point

of reference. Embedded in the very nature of its institute, the Society has recognized from its earliest moments that mission is one of its foundational pillars. From the foundation of the Order, the Formula of the Society of Jesus provided for a special vow to the Pope, the fourth vow, according to which “all the companions should realize and ... they should reflect every day upon the fact that this entire Society and each its individuals are campaigning for God under faithful obedience to His Holiness Paul III.”¹ Every Jesuit was obliged to be ready to go “whatever His Holiness may order pertaining to the progress of souls and the spread of the faith, ... without any shirking or excusing, whether he decides to send us among the Turks or to the New World, or to the Lutherans, or to any others whether infidels or faithful.”² Travel is an integral part of the individual’s spiritual experience, according to the vision of its founders. A journey that diverges from the medieval *peregrinatio* to Jerusalem—which they themselves longed for, though were not granted—and instead opens toward the edges of the known world, gradually reshaping the contours through which human geography was conceived.

The 2023 IAJS Symposium has been an important event. The reaction of the scientific world to the call for papers launched by the organizers, the Institute for Advanced Jesuit Studies and Brotéria, told us so. The arduous selection of more than 170 proposals, all of the highest profile, resulted in over 100 papers delivered during the three days, which animated the debate on a topic at the center of historiographical debate. These were joined by plenary sessions, with contributions from Camilla Russell, Malik Gachem, Danielle Terrazas Williams, Francisco Malta Romeiras, and Florence Hsia.

Further evidence was the printed fruits of this three-day event, including the publication of a volume dedicated to the history of the missions in the Society of Jesus after the restoration of 1814. Edited by Emanuele Colombo and Claudio Ferlan, the book brings together research presented in three thematic panels at the conference in Lisbon, as well as other contributions intended to enrich the perspective. Secondly, the monographic issue of *Jesuit Educational Quarterly*. And finally this collection, which contains a selection of the revised versions of the presentations that were given during the symposium.

Following the criteria that guided the selection of contributions for the symposium, the papers have been organized geographically, tracing the chronological path of the Jesuit missionary movement. The point of departure—Europe—is followed by the Society’s first destination, Asia, and finally by the Americas, with some papers addressing twentieth-century missions.

1. See Barton T. Geger, SJ, ed., *Constitution of the Society of Jesus: A Critical Edition with the Complementary Norms* (Chestnut Hill, MA: Jesuit Sources, 2024), 54.

2. *Ibid.*