

St. Francis Xavier, Patron of the Missions



St. Francis Xavier is noteworthy for his missionary work,

both as organizer and as pioneer, reputed to have converted more people than anyone else has done since Saint Paul. Pope Benedict XVI said of both Ignatius of Loyola and Francis Xavier: "not only their history which was interwoven for many years from Paris and Rome, but a unique desire — a unique passion, it could be said — moved and sustained them through different human events: the passion to give to God-Trinity a glory always greater and to work for the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ to the peoples who had been ignored." [31] By consulting with the earlier ancient Christians of St. Thomas in India, Xavier developed Jesuit missionary methods.

His success also spurred many Europeans to join the order, as well as become missionaries throughout the world. His personal efforts most affected Christians in India and the East Indies (Indonesia, Malaysia, Timor). India still has numerous Jesuit missions, and many more schools. Xavier also worked to propagate Christianity in China and Japan.

However, following the persecutions of Daimyo Toyotomi Hideyoshi and the subsequent closing of the Japanese Empire to foreigners, the Christians of Japan were forced to go underground to develop an independent Christian culture. Likewise, while Xavier inspired many missionaries to the Empire of China, Chinese Christians also were forced underground and developed their own Christian culture.



Francis Xavier is the patron saint of his native Navarre, which celebrates his feast day on 3 December as a government holiday. In addition to Roman Catholic masses remembering Xavier on that day (now known as the Day of Navarra), celebrations in the surrounding weeks honor the region's cultural heritage. Furthermore, in the 1940s, devoted Catholics instituted the Javierada, an annual day-long pilgrimage (often on foot) from the capital at Pamplona to Xavier, where his order has built a basilica and museum and restored his family's castle.