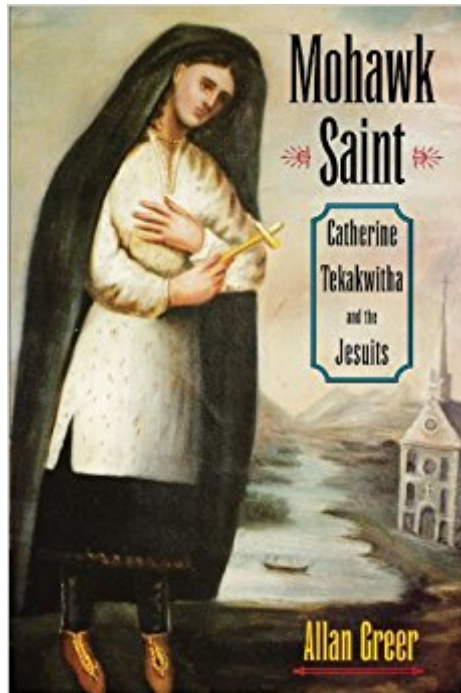




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Mohawk Saint: Catherine Tekakwitha And The Jesuits



Synopsis

On October 21, 2012, Pope Benedict XVI canonized Saint Kateri Tekakwitha as the first Native North American saint. *Mohawk Saint* is a work of history that situates her remarkable life in its seventeenth century setting, a time of wars, epidemics, and cultural transformations for the Indian peoples of the northeast. The daughter of a Algonquin mother and an Iroquois father, Catherine/Saint Kateri Tekakwitha (1656-1680) has become known over the centuries as a Catholic convert so holy that, almost immediately upon her death, she became the object of a cult. Today she is revered as a patron saint by Native Americans and the patroness of ecology and the environment by Catholics more generally, the first Native North American proposed for sainthood. Tekakwitha was born at a time of cataclysmic change, as Native Americans of the northeast experienced the effects of European contact and colonization. A convert to Catholicism in the 1670s, she embarked on a physically and mentally grueling program of self-denial, aiming to capture the spiritual power of the newcomers from across the sea. Her story intersects with that of Claude ChauchetiŃre, a French Jesuit of mystical tendencies who came to America hoping to rescue savages from sin and paganism. But it was Claude himself who needed help to face down his own despair. He became convinced that Tekakwitha was a genuine saint and that conviction gave meaning to his life. Though she lived until just 24, Tekakwitha's severe penances and vivid visions were so pronounced that ChauchetiŃre wrote an elegiac hagiography shortly after her death. With this richly crafted study, Allan Greer has written a dual biography of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha and ChauchetiŃre, unpacking their cultures in Native America and in France. He examines the missionary and conversion activities of the Jesuits in Canada, and explains the Indian religious practices that interweave with converts' Catholic practices. He also relates how Tekakwitha's legend spread through the hagiographies and to areas of the United States, Canada, Europe, and Mexico in the centuries since her death. The book also explores issues of body and soul, illness and healing, sexuality and celibacy, as revealed in the lives of a man and a woman, from profoundly different worlds, who met centuries ago in the remote Mohawk village of Kahnawake.

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Customer Reviews

"The finest scholarly treatment to date of Catherine (Kateri) Tekakwitha."--Lisa Poirier, Church History
"The finest scholarly treatment to date of Catherine (Kateri) Tekakwitha.... No university library should be without it. It is sufficiently accessible for undergraduates, and sufficiently sophisticated for specialists."--Lisa Poirer, Church History
"Greer masterfully sheds light on everything he writes about."--CHOICE
"Mohawk Saint is quite simply the best book I have read on the momentous and vexed encounter of Europeans and Native Americans in the Early Modern world. A must-read for anyone interested in New France or colonial Native Americans, it provides an intimate and imaginative portrait of both the Mohawk Catherine and the French missionaries with whom she interacted in the seventeenth-century Praying Iroquois community of Kahnawake."--H-Net
"In rescuing the "lily of the Mohawks" from her hagiographers, Allan Greer has produced an utterly fascinating volume."--Michael Walsh

Allan Greer is Professor of History and Canada Research Chair at McGill University. He is the author of *The People of New France, Peasant, Lord, and Merchant: Rural Society in Three Quebec Parishes, 1740-1840*, *The Jesuit Relations: Natives and Missionaries in Seventeenth-Century North America*, and co-editor of *Colonial Saints: Discovering the Holy in the Americas, 1500-1800*.

Professor Greer's book is not a hagiography; he shows the historical period the saint was born into. I found it to be an excellent book about Kateri and the people who knew her, Jesuits and Iroquois alike. Most interesting are the drawings by the Jesuits showing life at Canawagha. The author also goes into the early period of devotion to Kateri. I am especially happy that the publishers used the real portrait of the saint on the cover, not a saccharine illustration. Great book, looking forward to reading his others!

Interesting look into St Kateri's life. It vividly explains the culture and the different points of view of the French and the Mohawks.

I was hoping that I would like this book. After all, it is about one of my favorite saints - a long time before she was canonized. While I know that this book allows the historical context of the era in which it was written, I am sorry to say that I do not like it. The author chooses to take a patronizing and condescending tone. Other reviewers are right when they say that the author brings her down. It does not talk about some of the reasons she became a saint. Kateri - and yes, I am calling her Kateri, not "Catherine", a name which I had never heard used until this book - had an amazing devotion to the Eucharist. She walked to Mass every day despite the weather. She served others, Christian and non-Christian alike. She is a shining example of a good Christian for every age. Why couldn't the author focus on what matters? Honestly, it was a book that I had to read for class. Otherwise, I think I wish I wouldn't have gotten it.

This gem of a book approaches all of its subjects with deep humanity and keen intelligence. Some of Greer's conclusions will inevitably be controversial, given the subject matter. But having read dozens of academic history books on natives and Europeans, I know of only a few that unfold with such wisdom and scholarly maturity. Last point -- my college students love this book as well.

A book about a saint by an unbeliever, no matter what a good researcher he is, is bound to miss some of the most important elements there and that is exactly where this book falls short. Allan Greer doesn't understand Catholic thinking, despite his being very convinced he does. He bends over absolutely backwards to try to ascribe a mundane or base motive for everything everyone did (that might otherwise be considered holy or virtuous or even just commendable). e.g.: "Writing for a French audience, Chauchetiere gives the impression that Tekakwitha played the part of the selfless and humble servant, fetching meals for the men of her household. Yet her dispensing duties could be interpreted quite differently. Among the Mohawks, food was under the control of women, and so the gesture of serving may well have contained an element of asserting female power over male appetites." p. 43 The premise of the book is promising and the history well researched but if you are looking for a book to help you understand the true motivation behind the actions of these saintly people, this is not it.

This is not a biography of the humble young Mohawk woman whose courage, holiness, faith, and

purity earned her (as thousands who know and love her truly believe) that place in Heaven. This book, in the author's own paraphrased words, is meant to "bring Tekakwitha down from heaven." (And it is part of a gloomy trend to do just that - to as much as one can to bring one's subject down.) And, thankfully, despite over two hundred pages of trying, he has not succeeded in dragging her down. There are people who were primarily historic figures and those whose lives are mainly of religious significance. Blessed Kateri (or Catherine, as the author prefers to call her) Tekakwitha was very clearly the latter. But this book approaches her from the former point of view, making her a postmortem pawn in the Jesuit's missionary work among the natives in Canada. The mystical and the supernatural (from a religious view) are ignored. The author seems even unwillingly to use the title of "Blessed" in reference to her. At one point, the author even seems - in a very subtle way - to imply the Kateri and her closest friend (Marie-Therese Tegaiaquenta) were lovers. If, as he writes, there is "no reason to think they were lovers," why mention it at all? What does it serve? The author dwells on each and any discrepancy in the original accounts by the two missionaries who knew Kateri during the last years of her life. (Even the Bible - in all its various popular translations - has its discrepancies.) Any story of any person, any account of any event is bound to have differences when told by two different witnesses. That alone is not enough reason to discount the differences. His grim portrait of Kateri in no way accounts for the great numbers of people (not only Native Americans, but from around the world) who have a profound love for this holy young woman. I can speak from my own experiences and observations that she has had a great impact even on people who knew little or nothing of her. Historians may find this book of interest, but for those who have a devotion to this wonderful saint-to-be, there is little to recommend it. On a personal level, I have been studying the life of Blessed Kateri for a number of years. My personal collection includes nearly a hundred works of literature on her. These range from reprints of the original biographies by Fathers Chauchetiere and Cholonc to fluffy, sentimentalized (to the point of being quite ridiculous) books for young readers. I am also the creator of the web site mentioned on page 241 of this new book. I work for and look forward to the day when she is finally declared a saint. I pre-ordered this book many months ago and read it with an open mind as I am always eager for new details on her life. For me, it was a dull read (the narrative flow seems uneven) with left me unimpressed (not with Catherine Tekakwitha) and with a very unpleasant taste. Historians, cultural anthropologists, and the politically correct may find something of interest in this dry and dreary book, but for those who have a devotion to this wonderful saint-to-be, there is little to recommend it. (I gave it one star because there is no lesser option and, well, my site was mentioned in the Notes to Chapter 9. I suppose I owe it something.)

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