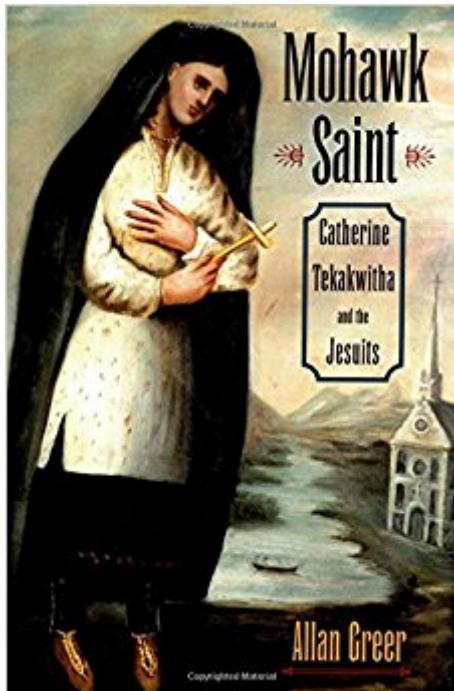


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Mohawk Saint: Catherine Tekakwitha And The Jesuits



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 Chauchetière, 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 Chauchetière 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 Chauchetière, 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

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.

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 Canawagh. 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.

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