

Part 2: The Maryknoll Mission Society Comes to Japan

— Father Walsh and the “Land of the Rising Sun” —

In Part 1, we traced the plan of Bishop Castanié of the Diocese of Osaka to establish a new mission territory in Kyoto and Shiga and entrust it to another missionary society. At that point, however, no missionary society had yet agreed to answer his appeal. In time, his hope crossed the Pacific and reached the United States. In this installment, we turn our attention to the Maryknoll Mission Society and its co-founder, Father James Anthony Walsh, M.M. (1867–1936), who later became a bishop. The path toward the birth of the Diocese of Kyoto gradually became a reality through the encounter between the hopes of the Church in Japan and the commitment to overseas mission that had been growing within the Church in the United States.

The Founding of Maryknoll

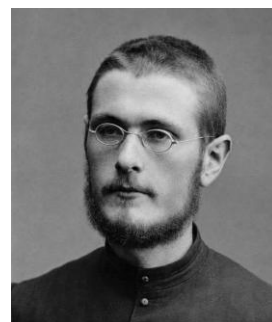


Father James
Anthony Walsh, M. M.

The name “Maryknoll” means “Mary’s Knoll.” It derives from the hill near Ossining, New York, where the society established its headquarters. In 1911, Father Walsh and Father Thomas Frederick Price, M.M., founded the Maryknoll Mission Society out of their conviction that the Church in the United States should also share in the mission of evangelization overseas. Until then, the Church in the United States had largely received missionaries from other countries; now it began sending out missionaries of its own. As Maryknoll’s first Superior General, Father Walsh sent members of the society to China, Korea, Manchuria, and other parts of Asia. Mission on the Japanese mainland, however, remained a new and unopened door.

Father Walsh’s Encounter with Japan

One of the encounters that led Father Walsh to turn his attention toward Japan was his meeting with Father Jean-Baptiste Joseph Deffrennes, M.E.P. (1870–1958), of the Paris Foreign Missions Society. On October 12, 1917, during his first journey of inspection through East Asia, Father Walsh visited Fukushima and stayed with Father Deffrennes. The two spoke about the state of the Church’s mission in Japan. On that occasion, Father Walsh is said to have been encouraged to send missionaries to Japan—the “Land of the Rising Sun.” This encounter awakened in his heart a deep and lasting interest in Japan.



Father Jean-
Baptiste Joseph
Deffrennes, M. E. P.

The Road to Kyoto and Shiga

Then, in 1929, the plan began to move decisively forward. While staying in Tokyo, Father Walsh met Archbishop Edward Aloysius Mooney, who would later serve as Apostolic Delegate to Japan. As he received advice about the circumstances facing the Church in Japan, Father Walsh sought to discern what mission



Archbishop Edward
Aloysius Mooney

might be entrusted to Maryknoll. Archbishop Mooney promised to look for a suitable mission territory for the society within Japan. Following discussions with Bishop Castanié of Osaka, Kyoto and Shiga were proposed as a new field of mission. Kyoto, the ancient capital, and Shiga, home to Lake Biwa, formed a region with a long history, a rich culture, and deep religious traditions. It was here that a new mission for the Maryknoll Society began to emerge. Thus, a path from “Mary’s Knoll” in New York, across the Pacific to Kyoto and Shiga, gradually took shape. An American missionary society and Japan’s ancient capital, which until then had known almost nothing of one another, were quietly being drawn together under God’s guidance. This journey laid the foundation for the future

Diocese of Kyoto through the establishment of the Apostolic Prefecture of Kyoto in 1937 and the incorporation of Nara and Mie Prefectures into its territory in 1939.

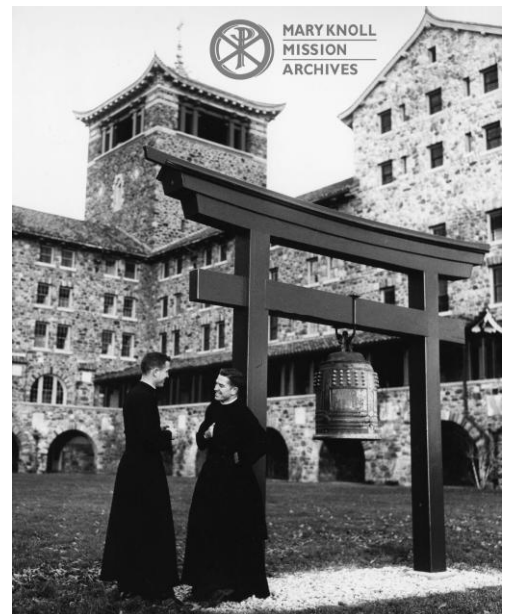
Mission Begins with Encounter and Discernment

Mission does not begin only when missionaries arrive in a particular place. It begins when people listen to the needs of the local community and prayerfully discern the mission entrusted to them. Missionaries do not bring God to a place where God is absent. Rather, they are sent to encounter God already at work in the lives, joys, and sorrows of the people and to serve together in God’s work. Father Walsh, too, through many encounters and conversations, gradually came to recognize and confirm God’s call drawing him toward Japan.

The Path God Had Prepared

The journey of the Diocese of Kyoto did not begin through the efforts of one missionary or one missionary society alone. Many people responded to God’s guidance, accepted the roles entrusted to them, and worked together, allowing the path of mission to open little by little. This spirit of collaboration, present at the origins of the Diocese of Kyoto, continues today in our collaborative ministry for mission. Each of us is called to make use of our own vocation and gifts, to listen to one another across differences of region and generation, and to support one another as we seek together the path that God continues to prepare for us.

In the next installment, we will follow Maryknoll’s formal decision to send missionaries to Japan and the journey of the first missionaries as they crossed the Pacific with both hope and uncertainty in their hearts.



A stone Maryknoll seminary on a hill in Ossining, New York, and an Asian-style field