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THE MARIAN SPIRITUALITY OF SAINT KATERI TEKAKWITHA (1656-1680)¹

IROQUOIS VIRGIN AND CO-PATRONESS
OF THE UNITED STATES ASSOCIATION
OF CONSECRATED VIRGINS

*Lynn Marie Busch, S.T.L.**

Focused on a person whose life of faith can contribute to an understanding of Marian devotion and Marian spirituality found in the United States and Canada prior to the year 1900, this presentation will reflect upon the life and spirituality of St. Kateri Tekakwitha, a seventeenth-century Iroquois virgin from the Mohawk Nation who sought baptism and entered the Catholic Church at the age of twenty. Kateri lived the first

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¹ In the time since this paper was presented at the 2011 meeting of the Mariological Society of America, Kateri Tekakwitha has been raised from being a blessed in the Church to sainthood; therefore, where her title is used in this paper, it has been corrected to read St. Kateri. Her canonization occurred on October 21, 2012, after the final approval of a miracle obtained through her intercession for the 2006 cure of Jake Finkbonner. Jake, a member of the Lummi tribe in the state of Washington, was then five years old and near death due to a flesh-eating infection on his lip. Kateri's relic was placed on his leg. Though he was left with some scarring on his face, the infection stopped. Facial scars from the infection were something that Jake shared in common with his intercessor who, throughout her lifetime, carried scars on her face from the smallpox virus she contracted at the age of four. While Jake's healing was the miracle accepted by the Vatican as the last required proof of Kateri's presence in Heaven for her 2012 canonization, seventeenth-century witnesses surmised Kateri's heavenly presence a mere fifteen minutes after her death as they observed the first post-mortem miraculous event surrounding the saint when the smallpox scars on her face disappeared leaving her in radiant beauty.

twenty years of her life along the Mohawk River in upstate New York before fleeing from her native village, several months after her baptism, to live the last four years of her earthly life in a Catholic mission for Native Americans on the St. Lawrence River near Montreal, Canada, where she could be free of the persecutions that she endured for her faith living in her Mohawk village. This brave virgin, who consecrated her life to God out of love for Jesus Christ, dedicated herself to a life of prayerful union with God and austere penances in spiritual union with Christ Crucified for the eternal welfare of her soul and for the souls of her people. She grew in holiness and was present to both heaven and earth as she diligently performed the duties expected of a young Mohawk woman, in the fields and in her lodging, despite the ocular handicaps caused by the smallpox virus she had endured as a child.

The scholarly review of St. Kateri's Marian devotion and spirituality is made possible by the documentation of Jesuit missionaries who served in upstate New York and Canada. The details of Kateri's life they provided have not only attracted many within the Roman Catholic Church who look to her as a model of Christian living, but have also attracted the attention of historians, due to the fact that her "short life happens to be more fully and richly documented than that of any other indigenous person of North or South America in the colonial period."² This being the case, St. Kateri Tekakwitha³ will be the

² Allan Greer, *Mohawk Saint: Catherine Tekakwitha and the Jesuits* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), vii.

³ It is difficult to choose a particular form of Kateri's name to be used consistently throughout this study, as her name shows up differently (and with varied spellings) throughout the quoted material. When Kateri was a child living with her parents before smallpox took them from her, she was called Ioragode ("little sunshine"). After she moved in with her paternal uncle's family, she was given the name Tekakwitha which means "one who pushes things with her hands," most likely because of the way she walked with her troubled eyesight. Tekakwitha could also be translated "one who orders things before her." For Tekakwitha's Christian baptism, the name Katharine, meaning "pure one" (after St. Catherine of Siena), was chosen. The Mohawk pronunciation of the French word Katharine was expressed "Kateri." Aside from quoted material, the current presentation will use the name Tekakwitha to emphasize the period prior to her baptism. Quotes from her *Positio* consistently use the name Katharine or Katharine Tekakwitha. The remainder of the paper will use Kateri or Kateri Tekakwitha to acknowledge her Mohawk culture and her Christian faith.

focus of this study that will: (1) begin with an introduction to the Mohawk culture and context of Kateri's life; (2) engage in a general discussion of her spirituality; and (3) conclude by examining the particular Marian devotions that Kateri practiced, as well as the dimension of Marian spirituality that she lived in the seventeenth-century territory then claimed as New France.⁴

The body of historical documents that describe the people and events that the French Jesuit missionaries experienced in the new world are called the *Jesuit Relations*. Between the years of 1632 and 1673 (years preceding and coinciding with the first seventeen years of Kateri's life), French Jesuit missionaries sent reports to Jesuit houses in Paris that contained descriptions of the new world, its people, its daily life, as well as various details of evangelization, catechesis, missions, martyrdoms, colonization, epidemics, wars, peace treaties, and various other events of interest. The reports were published annually to keep European readership informed on the findings and events in New France.⁵

Most of the primary source biographical information available on Kateri Tekakwitha is recorded by three Jesuit missionaries who knew her personally. Fr. James de Lamberville, S.J., met Kateri at her Mohawk village in Fonda, New York, in the fall of 1675, when he was making his rounds to visit the sick. Kateri, then nineteen years of age, stayed back from her work

⁴ "New France" was the name given to the land in North America that was colonized by France. It was named after King Francis I by Jacques Cartier. New France grew through the fur trade and colonization to cover sections of southeast Canada, the Great Lakes area of the United States, and the Mississippi Valley. New France existed until 1763, when the Treaty of Paris that ended the French and Indian War divided French possessions between England and Spain. Kateri lived in the period when New France was colonizing her Mohawk region of North America.

⁵ The *Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents* were originally published in French. Between 1896 and 1901, R. G. Thwaites edited a bilingual French and English edition of seventy-three volumes (over 21,000 pages). While there are other published compilations of the *Jesuit Relations* (of varying extents and with various advantages/disadvantages), Thwaites' edition remains the most extensive and well known. Cf. Allan Greer, ed., *The Jesuit Relations: Natives and Missionaries in Seventeenth-Century North America*, The Bedford Series in History and Culture (Boston/New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000), v-vii.

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in the field that day because of a foot injury, and Fr. de Lamberville—who rarely entered Kateri's longhouse since there were no sick lodged there—felt a strong inspiration to check if anyone in that particular lodge needed his assistance.⁶ This was the encounter with a missionary that resulted in Kateri's request for instruction and baptism. Fr. de Lamberville had the privilege of administering the sacrament of baptism to Kateri on Easter Sunday of the following year (1676). *The Positio* prepared to introduce the cause for beatification and canonization of Katharine Tekakwitha contains excerpts from three letters written by Fr. de Lamberville describing Kateri's virtuous life in her Mohawk village and briefly discussing her baptism. It was Fr. de Lamberville who advised Kateri to flee the persecution she endured in her village and to move to a Native American Christian community near Montreal.

Fr. Claude Chauchetière, S.J., was Kateri's first biographer; he arrived at the St. Francis Xavier Mission at the Sault near Montreal a few months before her arrival. He was present at the mission while Kateri was there and he was a witness to her death and its surrounding events. Fr. Chauchetière received apparitions of the saint after her death. Along with his biography, *The Life of the Good Katharine Tegakouiita*, he wrote about Kateri in various other letters and in the 1686 *Annals of the Missions*.⁷ Fr. Chauchetière produced an oil painting of Kateri after her death that is now housed in the Church of Saint Francis Xavier on the Mohawk reservation in Kahnawake, Qc., Canada. This missionary was also asked to render drawings on prayer cards for natives and colonists alike; many cures were attributed to the invocation of Kateri's intercession.⁸

⁶ The Historical Section of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, *The Positio of the Historical Section of the Sacred Congregation of Rites on the Introduction of the Cause for Beatification and Canonization and on the Virtues of the Servant of God, Katharine Tekakwitha, The Lily of the Mohawks* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1940), 19 (henceforth, *The Positio*).

⁷ *The Positio*, 8.

⁸ Rev. Edward Lecompte, S.J., *Glory of the Mohawks: The Life of the Venerable Catherine Tekakwitha*, trans. Florence Ralston Werum, F.R.S.A. (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publ. Co., 1944), 130-131.

Fr. Peter Cholenec, S.J., also was a missionary at the Sault during the time Kateri was there. He was recommended to become Kateri's spiritual director and confessor by Fr. de Lamberville. Fr. Cholenec published two biographies on Kateri—one for a general readership, published in Paris in the *Edifying Letters of 1717*, and the other prepared for the Father General of the Jesuits. Prior to the publication of these biographies, he wrote an account (circa 1682) of Kateri's spiritual life at the Sault and the account of her death and the events that followed. There were three other documents written by Fr. Cholenec that contained excerpts on the life of Kateri—one was written in 1695 and two were written in 1715. Fr. Cholenec's accounts of Kateri's life are known for their great detail.⁹

Tekakwitha's Life as a Mohawk

In order to appreciate the depth and authenticity of Kateri's spirituality and its Marian dimension, her life must be seen in its cultural context. In the "Prologue" to Fr. Edward Lecompte's book entitled *Glory of the Mohawks: The Life of the Venerable Catherine Tekakwitha*, Florence Ralston Werum writes: "For a true appraisal and appreciation of [Kateri], as well as for an understanding of many events in her life, a knowledge of the origin, customs, and psychology of her race and people will be necessary."¹⁰ Mention must be made regarding some of the terminology used to describe the seventeenth-century Mohawk people or their actions in a few of the historical references that are quoted in this paper. The words "savage" or "barbarian" are uncomfortable terms, because the Mohawk people of Tekakwitha's time, who are being referred to in this manner, had many good and wise qualities that demand respect. There are, however, some seventeenth-century Mohawk ritual practices that do have a "savage" quality to them—such as the torture of captives and ritual cannibalism. It is in their regard that these terms are admitted into this paper—and, even then, sensitivity is used to try to briefly introduce the philosophies operating behind them.

⁹ *The Positio*, 8-9.

¹⁰ Lecompte, *Glory of the Mohawks*, 1.

Tekakwitha was born in Ossernenon (present-day Auriesville, New York) in the same village where, ten years prior to her birth, three Jesuit missionaries—René Goupil, John LeLande, and Fr. Isaac Jogues—were martyred by the people of her village.¹¹ She was born into the Mohawk Nation that was then part of the Iroquois Confederacy of Five Nations—the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca.¹² The Confederacy of Five Nations extended from the Mohawk River near Albany on the east to Lake Erie on the west. At the time of her birth, the Native American people of upstate New York and Canada were in the midst of a difficult historical period, facing European colonization and the first missionary efforts in their territory. As the eastern-most tribe of the Iroquois Confederation, the Mohawks were geographically closest to the Dutch (Protestant) Fort Orange that is now modern-day Albany, New York. The Mohawks were the last nation in New France to be brought the Good News of the Gospel by the Jesuit missionaries, who had already set up missions among the Hurons, Algonquins, and Montagnais (three Native American nations who were enemies of the Iroquois), as well as, the other Iroquois nations of the Confederacy. The Mohawks were the last and the most challenging.

Several dynamics—social, religious, and political—contributed to the difficulties that the missionaries encountered among the Mohawk people who called themselves “people of the longhouse” (*Haudenosaunee*). This is how they lived—in long houses that were structured so several married couples could live with their children in sectioned-off compartments of the same longhouse. The living compartments extended down each side of the longhouse, with campfires in the middle aisle that were spaced so at least four surrounding compartments could share one fire. Over the fire, there was a hole in the roof to let out smoke and let in light. This was the only light that

¹¹ Close by in other native nations, the Jesuit missionaries—Anthony Daniel, John de Brébeuf, Charles Garnier, Gabriel Lalemant, and Noël Chabanel—gave their lives for the preaching of the Good News of Jesus Christ to the native people of North America.

¹² Later, in the early 1700s, the Tuscarora Nation joined the Iroquois Confederacy, making it the Iroquois Confederation of Six Nations.

entered the bark-covered longhouse. The small compartments had shelves built on the wall and deerskin curtains to protect what little privacy was available for each unit.¹³ It was in a longhouse that Tekakwitha spent most of her time, because, after surviving smallpox, her eyes became very sensitive to the bright light outdoors. Her people called themselves “people of the longhouse,” but they were called *Mohawk* by other Native American nations because they were “man eaters” or “eaters of men.”¹⁴

The Mohawks were the warriors most feared, both by European colonists and other Native American tribes, even though they only comprised one-fifth of the total 2,500 Iroquois warriors at that time. What were some of the reasons the “people of the longhouse” were so feared, even among their peers, that they would be called “man-eaters”? The answer to this can best be understood by briefly mentioning a few of their commonly held beliefs and practices. The Mohawks approached the spiritual world in a manner that spirits (that the Jesuits recognized as *demons*) could be won by appeasement, in a way that one could gain a particular spirit’s favor. This philosophy, in the context of war and its battles, translated into an appeasement of the spirits by voluntary sacrificial acts offered by the braves themselves or by sacrifices (tortures and death) they inflicted upon their captives. The Mohawks believed that the more their captives were tortured, the more the Mohawk Nation would be granted good fortune in future battles. Thus, torture of captives was a ritualistic practice to ensure future victories.¹⁵

Ritual cannibalism was another feared Mohawk practice. It was inspired by the Mohawk belief that if one were to eat the heart of an enemy who was held in respect for his bravery, the executed person’s courage would live within the one who consumed the heart of that person. Mohawk children would be encouraged to participate in the feasting upon the hearts of

¹³ Lecompte, *Glory of the Mohawk*, 14-15.

¹⁴ This is the Canadian Algonquin translation of the word *Mohawk*.

¹⁵ For an account of Iroquoian polytheism and the involvement with spirits that the natives called *okis* or *manitus* (but the Jesuits called *demons*), see Daniel Sargent, *Catherine Tekakwitha* (New York/Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1937), 59-63.

their courageous enemies. Practices such as these earned for the “people of the longhouse” the name Mohawk, “man-eater,” from their enemies, most of whom they annihilated.

Mohawk culture was much different than the seventeenth-century European culture that the French missionaries had lived in. Despite the cultural differences, there were other challenges present to Jesuit-Mohawk relations. While the “Blackrobes” (the name the natives called the Jesuits) were often welcomed into native villages as a sign of peace between the Mohawks and the French colonists, the missionaries had to overcome the difficulties that their connection with the French colonists caused. There was a history of strained relationships between the Mohawk Nation and the French who had already colonized and set up missions in the camps of their enemies—the Huron, Algonquin, and Montagnais. These enemy nations had allied with the French (often for protection against the Mohawks), leading to a Mohawk distrust of the missionaries who had already befriended their enemies. The fact that the Jesuit missionaries traveled with the French colonists for protection and for finding open doors to the native world caused suspicion in the natives as to the missionaries’ intentions. The natives often connected the evangelizing efforts of the missionaries with an imposition of French culture that would lead them to abandon their Mohawk culture.¹⁶

Feeding the Mohawk mistrust of the Jesuits from another angle was the influence of the Dutch Protestants from Albany, who in Europe were poised against the Catholics during this period of the Protestant Reformation. Their opposition to Catholicism continued in the new world as they tried to convince the Mohawks that the Blackrobes were sorcerers and would bring many bad things upon their people. This is the

¹⁶This example proves the importance of making it clear to missionaries and to those being evangelized that the process of evangelization recognizes the good in a particular culture and elevates that good to its fullness—perhaps even learns from it. Likewise, what is contrary to the Gospel and contrary to human dignity in a particular culture needs to be corrected for the sake of the authenticity and survival of that culture. Evangelization does not annihilate a culture or impose another culture upon it. Unfortunately, the Jesuit missionaries’ intentions were often interpreted as an imposition of French culture because of their close alignment with colonization.

reason behind Fr. Isaac Jogues' martyrdom. It was thought that his black box of supplies brought disease to the natives. Similarly, the Jesuit practice of baptizing people before death—especially children—led to a suspicion on the part of the natives who connected baptism with death as the Hurons did. While the Mohawks did not think baptism caused death, they were suspicious that the Blackrobes were stealing the souls of their children.¹⁷ René Goupil was martyred for making the Sign of the Cross over a young boy. An elderly native man saw this action, and ordered his death. These few examples, while there are many more, should give evidence of unfortunate misunderstandings and logical suspicions that were held by the Mohawks in their relations with the Blackrobes. It was into this dynamic of the meeting of two cultures that Tekakwitha was born.

Tekakwitha's father was a traditional Mohawk chieftain and her mother was a baptized Algonquin who had been taken captive in a Mohawk raid of her village at Three Rivers near Montreal. Tekakwitha's mother fared much better than many Mohawk captives because she was adopted into the Mohawk tribe and one of the chieftains desired to marry her. From this union were born Tekakwitha and her younger brother. When she was only four years old, a smallpox epidemic, brought to her village through European colonists, claimed the lives of many in her tribe—including her mother, father, and younger brother. Tekakwitha also contracted the disease that left her face scarred, her vision weakened, and her eyes extremely sensitive to light. It was in this condition that her paternal uncle, also a chieftain of the Mohawk Nation, took her into his care. Under her uncle's care, she moved with their entire village from the spot where smallpox had struck to a new village further along the Mohawk River, in order to leave the spirits that had troubled their Ossernenon village with this illness. Tekakwitha endured another move along the Mohawk River in 1666, when her village was destroyed by the French who burnt it to the ground in response to Mohawk attacks that continued

¹⁷ Greer, *Mohawk Saint*, 6.

even though all the other Iroquois nations had made peace.¹⁸ This move took Tekakwitha to what is now Fonda, New York, where she was baptized at the age of twenty and then, a few months after her baptism, fled to the Christian Mission of the Sault near Montreal approximately two hundred miles away.

Just as the period of colonization was a challenging time for the indigenous people of North America, it was also a challenge for the seventeenth-century French Jesuit missionaries who longed to bring the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ to many of the non-Christian native territories of New France opened by colonization. The missionaries were well aware of the Mohawks' suspicion of them, and they were aware of the risks they were taking to bring the Gospel message of Jesus Christ to these people. An excerpt from the *Jesuit Relations* will help to reveal the inner thoughts of a missionary on the eve of his entrance into Mohawk territory. This letter was written in 1657 (one year after Tekakwitha was born) by Fr. François Le Mercier, S.J. It was written to the Provincial of his Society, and it conveys the reality of the clash of the different cultures as experienced by one missionary about to face a nation of warriors who had martyred some of his brothers in religion. This quote displays the brave love of a missionary who chooses to present the Good News to the Mohawk people, while being aware of the possibility of martyrdom which he describes as a "happiness"—that he could offer such a gift as his life for the Gospel:

We are on the eve of our departure to go and collect what remains of the blood of the Son of God among those peoples, where we have had the happiness of shedding our own and of carrying the light of the Faith to them, although their sole design hitherto has been to extinguish it; that is, we go to establish ourselves among the Iroquois [other translations specifically say Mohawk]. I think that, in mentioning those Barbarians, I say all that can be said; for their name alone shows the risk which we run and the glory which will accrue to God from the execution of that design.

We are not ignorant of the fact that these Savages have eaten us with relish and have drunk with pleasure the blood of the Fathers of our

¹⁸ Greer, *Mohawk Saint*, 29.

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Society; that their hands and their lips are still wet with it, and that the fires in which they roasted their limbs are not yet quite extinguished. . . . no Nero or Diocletian ever declared himself more strongly against the Christians than these bloodthirsty Savages have done against us; and that the Faith would at the present moment be received among many Infidel Nations, had they not surpassed in rage and fury the greatest persecutors of Jesus Christ.¹⁹

It was into this culture with tortuous philosophies toward its captives that the Blackrobes ventured, risking their lives in order to collect any fruitfulness of the Blood of Christ that could be found among these people. In the midst of this culture, Tekakwitha was already living what the Blackrobes (borrowing from Tertullian) described as a “natural Christianity,” present in her before she was schooled by the missionaries in the Faith or before she received the grace of the Sacraments.

General Introduction to St. Kateri’s Spirituality

Tekakwitha’s spirituality was rooted in her contemplative nature. While by no means a recluse, for she joyfully did her share of work supporting her longhouse and her village—out in the fields tending the crops, collecting firewood, drawing water, and cooking, Tekakwitha did spend her free time inside her longhouse—crafting decorative clothing, carrying straps, baskets, and wampum belts, in order to avoid the bright sunlight that was too strong for her weakened eyes to tolerate. Her interaction with others was kind and patient. Her spirit and contemplative nature grew in the silent atmosphere, as she refrained from many of the social activities of Native American girls her age and withdrew from the Mohawk practices that disturbed her.

¹⁹ François Le Mercier, S. J., “Letter Written to Reverend Father Louys Cellot, Provincial of the Society of Jesus of the Province of France, by Father François le Mercier of the Same Society,” in *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610-1791*, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites (73 vols.; Cleveland: The Burrows Brothers Co., 1896-1901), vol. 44 (1898): *Iroquois, Lower Canada, 1656-1657*, Chap. 21; computer transcription by Thom Mentrak found at http://puffin.creighton.edu/jesuit/relations/relations_44.html (accessed October 15, 2013).

One particular orientation that Tekakwitha possessed that stood out as being very unusual in the midst of the norms of her culture was an inclination to live a life of virginity. This is seen in her refusals to marry that caused her much suffering at the hands of her family, who did not understand her desire and worried how she would be provided for in a matriarchal culture where being wed to a young hunter would bring many provisions to the young woman's family and longhouse. Despite reaching the point of persecution from her family on this issue, Tekakwitha stood strong in her desire to remain unmarried. Her *Positio* states that her biographers "give evidence of her love of virginity, a fact which appeared to be in such absolute contrast with the habits and traditions of the country that it was believed impossible of explanation short of attributing it to a special grace of the Holy Ghost."²⁰

What Christian influences did Tekakwitha have prior to her conversion and baptism? Living in the midst of her people, she would have observed traditional Mohawk beliefs—both virtuous and pagan. In her village, she would have also witnessed Mohawk Christians who had converted to the Faith before her. She would have observed Native American Christians from other tribes who were adopted into the Mohawk tribe or who were tortured and killed as captives. As was mentioned earlier, Tekakwitha's own mother was an Algonquin Christian. It is said of her that "[t]he pious mother had a very good influence on the children. She is said to have remained faithful to Christ and to have kept until her dying breath a great love for the daily 'Common Prayer,' deploring only the fact that she could not secure for her children the grace of Baptism; and some there are who assert that such a child was the reward given to such a mother."²¹

It remains unknown as to why it took Tekakwitha a few years to ask for baptism after opportunities were present before her. Some mention it may have been because of her timid nature or her respectful fear of her chieftain uncle's displeasure with the Mohawks who converted to Christianity and

²⁰ *The Positio*, 3.

²¹ *The Positio*, 16.

joined the native Christian community near Montreal, leaving their village behind with dwindling numbers. As soon as Tekakwitha asked Fr. de Lamberville for baptism, however, her dedication did not waver: "From that time forward, Tekakwitha was constant in her attendance at the usual instructions for the catechumens."²²

Fr. de Lamberville saw that Tekakwitha could be taught more than the usual catechesis on heaven and hell and the avoidance of the sins the Jesuits found common in her Mohawk village. *The Positio* states that "Father de Lamberville soon perceived that the soul of the Servant of God was, so to speak, naturally Christian; and when, upon careful investigation, he found that Tekakwitha had won the esteem of all, he gave her a private catechetical course in the winter of 1675-76, with the result that she made wonderful progress in the knowledge of the faith and in piety."²³ It was a common practice for the Jesuits who had been in the North American missions to be cautious when admitting adult Native Americans to baptism until their faith had been tested by time. The missionaries wanted to have a reasonable certitude that the new converts would not turn back to pagan practices that they were comfortable with if difficult times came upon them, as was often the case. The Jesuit Fathers made an exception for Kateri because of her noticeable dedication to the practice of the Faith. Her pre-Christian virtues and disposition provided a fertile ground for grace and her baptism bore great fruit in a short time:

The Servant of God had scarcely received the grace of Baptism when she shaped her manner of life to a perfection beyond all expectation. As a result of this, Father de Lamberville, who, according to the general practice of the mission, tried to form his neophytes to the ordinary Christian life with the help of certain general rules, worked out for Katharine's personal use a plan of a higher life, which included a more frequent practice of prayer. . . . According to this plan of life, the Servant of God performed her domestic duties with all diligence, and devoted to prayer whatever time remained.²⁴

²² *The Positio*, 19.

²³ *The Positio*, 19-20.

²⁴ *The Positio*, 20.

Being faithful to the rule of life given to her, Kateri's spiritual practices were noticed in her Mohawk village as the life of holiness is noticed in any culture. This caused her to be the subject of ridicule by adults and children alike who mockingly called her "The Christian." It was not only non-Christians, but also, lukewarm Christians who had fallen from their practice of the Christian life who hurled insults against her:

But this exemplary way of life soon irritated alike the obdurate pagans and the more lax among the Christians, and gradually a sort of general persecution grew up on every side against the Servant of God. Her pagan relatives were angry that Katharine should abstain from her usual daily tasks on Sundays and Holydays to devote herself entirely to prayer, and they did not hesitate to use energetic measures, commanding her, threatening her and finally depriving her of food. Others of the savages hooted and jeered at the pious girl as she went to church, and even the children threw stones at her. The crowd hurled mocking catchwords at her, and called her "the Christian." Things went so far that a fierce young brave broke into Katharine's house and threatened to cut off her head. To this universal persecution the Servant of God opposed her sweet and indomitable patience, with which in the end she conquered all her opponents.²⁵

In addition to the above-mentioned persecutions, Kateri's aunt, with whom she lived, accused her of sinful relations with her uncle, based on the fact that Katharine used a familiar term "uncle" rather than the proper term "father" as was the customary law for Mohawk children. Fr. de Lamberville, who investigated this incident, found the accusation of sinful relations untrue; but he also saw the persecutions that Kateri would endure living the Christian life in her native village. He suggested she go to the Native American Christian community in Montreal. The plan for her escape with her adopted sister's husband and another brave from the Montreal community was made and, although they were indeed pursued by her uncle, their journey proved successful.

In Canada, Kateri lived with her adopted sister and her adopted sister's husband, as well as with her deceased

²⁵ *The Positio*, 20-21.

mother's Christian friend Anastasia Tegonhatsiongo. Kateri befriended a young widow named Marie-Thérèse Tegaiguenta who had been a lax Christian until the death of her husband, and the two spiritual friends challenged each other in the Faith and in their penitential practices. On the two hundred-mile journey from modern-day Fonda, New York, to the St. Francis Xavier Mission at the Sault St. Louis near Montreal, Kateri had encountered an order of nuns (the Hospitaliers) and discovered their way of life. This was a life that Kateri, Marie-Thérèse, and a third Christian woman asked the Jesuit Father if they could imitate on Heron Island not far from the Sault. The request of Kateri and her spiritual friends was refused; but, as a result of this request, a rule of life was designed for Kateri to follow—one that was “adapted to her outstanding gifts and pious inspirations.”²⁶ Kateri faithfully followed this rule and dedicated all her free time to prayer, so much so, that “the inhabitants of the Sault began to describe a sort of proverb, saying ‘Katharine knows only two paths, the path to the fields and the path home; she knows only two houses, her own home and the church.’”²⁷

Due to her spiritual progress at the Sault, Kateri was admitted to the Eucharist that Christmas (1677) rather than the usual waiting period of a few years after baptism in order to prove one's adherence to the Faith. Reception of the Eucharist caused Katharine to “derive [a] new and evident increase of spiritual life.”²⁸ Fr. Cholenec, in his 1696 biography, described Kateri's reception of her First Holy Communion and the effect it had upon her:

The ground was so well prepared that only the approach of this divine fire was necessary, to receive all its warmth. She approached or rather surrendered herself to this furnace of sacred love that burns on our altars, and she came out of it so glowing with its divine fire that only Our Lord knew what passed between Himself and His dear spouse during her First Communion. All that we can say is that from that day

²⁶ *The Positio*, 24.

²⁷ *The Positio*, 24.

²⁸ *The Positio*, 25.

forward she appeared different to us, because she remained so full of God and of love of Him.²⁹

After Christmas (and Kateri's First Communion), it was the practice of the Native Christian community to go on the winter hunt. To please her sister, she agreed to go. Kateri was not interested in the feasting; she would have much rather been present back in the mission chapel where she could partake in daily Mass. In order to be spiritually present at the Mass, Kateri constructed a cross in the woods that she would pray before, while spiritually uniting herself to the intention of the Mass being said and asking her Guardian Angel "to assist at Mass for her and to bring her the graces."³⁰

Another calumny awaited Kateri before her journey home from the winter hunt. This time Fr. Cholenec investigated the accusation and found it untrue. The woman who accused Kateri of having immoral relations with her husband repented of having made these accusations after the virgin's death.³¹ Kateri endured this trial patiently and returned to the mission in time for Easter to receive her second Holy Communion. She resolved not to leave the village for the winter hunt again, even if it meant fewer provisions for her back in the near-empty village. She did not want to leave the chapel again.

Kateri's desire to consecrate her virginal life continued. Her desire for a life of virginity was challenged not only by her family in her Mohawk village in New York, but also now at the Christian community near Montreal by her adopted sister and by her catechetical instructress, Anastasia. Even Fr. Cholenec

²⁹ Peter Cholenec, S.J., and Francis Le Brun, S.J., "The Life of Katharine Tegakoüita, First Iroquois Virgin, by Father Cholenec, S.J., 1696. From the original MS kept in the Archives of the Hotel Dieu Monastery, Quebec; transcript with additions by Father Francis Le Brun, S.J., between the years 1707-1721, described and kept in the Archives of St. Mary's College of the Society of Jesus, Montreal, number 47," in *The Positio*, Document X, 256.

³⁰ Claude Chauchetière, S.J., "The Life of the Good Katharine Tegakoüita, Now Known as the Holy Savage, written by Father Chauchetière, 1685, 1695, from original MS kept in the Archives of St. Mary's College of the Society of Jesus, Montreal, series A, number 343," in *The Positio*, Document VIII, 179.

³¹ Cholenec and Le Brun, in *The Positio*, Document X, 260-262.

asked Kateri to take three days to pray about her request to make a perpetual consecration of virginity to the Lord. Kateri agreed “[b]ut after scarcely ten minutes, Katharine cast aside all hesitation, presented herself before the Father, and said that she wished to bind herself to Christ Our Lord alone, by an irrevocable vow.”³² Fr. Cholenec granted Kateri’s request. It is at this point that the general introduction to Kateri’s spirituality has served its purpose to establish the historical events and context for a focused exploration of the Marian dimension of Kateri’s spirituality.

The Marian Dimension of St. Kateri’s Spirituality

The chief biographers of the Servant of God, Fathers Chauchetière and Cholenec, “both paid the highest tribute to Katharine’s constant, tender, and fervent devotion to the Most Holy Virgin.”³³ In the various documents included in *The Positio* can be found detailed accounts of how Kateri lived this devotion to Mary both in deed and in interior disposition. Most often these passages convey the Iroquois virgin’s relationship to Mary in the context of (1) Kateri’s desire to know and live God’s will most perfectly as Mary did; (2) Kateri’s imitation of Mary, especially with regard to Holy Virginity; and (3) Kateri’s filial love for Mary as Mother and Protectress. The current section of this presentation will draw from the historical writings used in *The Positio* to bring to the fore Kateri’s lived relationship to Mary in the overall context of this Mohawk maiden’s life of faith.

Biographer Fr. Claude Chauchetière describes Kateri’s initial attraction to the Mother of God. He writes: “Katharine had a tender devotion to the Mother of God from the very first she had learned the prerogatives, power, and glory of Our Lady and how worthy she is of honor.”³⁴ Along with the missionaries’ catechetical instructions, Marian devotions that Kateri learned and practiced—such as, the Angelus, the rosary, the litany of Mary, the imitation of Mary’s virtues and the practice of austerities on

³² *The Positio*, 46.

³³ *The Positio*, 34.

³⁴ Chauchetière, “The Life of the Good Katharine Tegakouïta,” in *The Positio*, 188.

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her feast days—continued to place doctrinal and catechetical truths about the Mother of God upon her heart and provided Kateri with means of expression of filial love for her heavenly mother. Kateri's embrace of the person of Mary occurred alongside a great desire to imitate Our Lady and to rely on the Mother of God for help and protection in her own walk of faith: "Katherine had with singular love chosen the Blessed Virgin Mary as her mother, and honored her as a shining exemplar and a safe refuge in this life."³⁵

Together with the fact that Mary was the most perfect disciple of the Lord who knew the will of God and kept it as Kateri desired to do, the specific Marian virtue that most attracted her to Mary was Mary's state of holy virginity offered to God. Kateri's biographers often speak of the relationship between Kateri and the Most Holy Virgin that revolved around this virtue. Father Chauchetière writes: "The virginity that Katharine always loved, that she preserved at the cost of her bodily life, was the reason of her frequent recourse to the Blessed Virgin; for she regarded her life as a model to be imitated as much as possible."³⁶ Fr. Choleneq, in amazement of the fact that an Iroquois maiden had the desire and the strength to live a virginal life in the midst of a culture that was contrary to such a state (even prior to her conversion to Christianity and her baptism), wrote:

In short, there was nothing more remarkable in Katharine than this evangelical purity, of which she was so jealous, and which she preserved even to her last breath. It was indeed a miracle of grace that a young Iroquois should have had so strong an attachment to a virtue so little known in her own country, and that she should have lived in such innocence of life during the twenty years that she remained in the very midst of

³⁵ *The Positio*, 34. Kateri's Marian devotion follows the path that *Lumen Gentium* (no. 67) describes regarding the dynamics of authentic devotion: "True devotion consists neither in sterile or transitory affection, nor in a certain vain credulity, but proceeds from true faith, by which we are led to recognize the excellence of the Mother of God, and we are moved to a filial love toward our mother and to the imitation of her virtues." See also, Johann Roten, S.M., "How Can Spirituality Be Marian?" *Marian Studies* 52 (2001): 7-52.

³⁶ Chauchetière, "The Life of the Good Katharine Tegakouïta," in *The Positio*, 189.

licentiousness and dissoluteness. It was this love of purity which produced in her heart so tender an affection for the Queen of Virgins. Katharine could never speak of Our Lady but with transport. She had learned by heart her litanies, and recited them all, particularly in the evening, after the common prayers of the cabin. She always carried her rosary, which she recited many times in the course of the day. Saturdays and other days particularly consecrated to [Mary's] honor, [Kateri] devoted to extraordinary austerities, and applied herself to the practical imitation of some of her virtues. She redoubled her fervor when one of these festivals was celebrated, and she selected such holy days to offer to God some new sacrifice, or to renew those which she had already made.³⁷

Kateri's practice of the faith was "real" in the sense that the transcendent aspects and relationships of her faith were lived in the midst of her life in this world. There was a blend of her participation in temporal matters that were coincident with dedication to eternal realities. There was no dualism or separation between her life in this world and her life of faith; rather, her life in this world was her life of faith as she participated in eternity in the duties and devotions of her earthly life. There was also no separation between her Marian devotions and the rest of her faith. Kateri's relationship to the Mother of God led to—and was based upon—her relationship to God. The following passage presents the blend of temporal and eternal, as well as Kateri's simultaneous devotion to Jesus as Lord (with emphasis on the Crucified Lord and the Eucharistic Lord) and proper devotion to Mary, His graced human Mother:

In winter the women in these parts are engaged in looking for firewood in the nearby groves and in bringing it home. Katharine did this too, but put a Christian method in it. She wore a crucifix hung around her neck and carried a rosary in her hand. She thus adored Christ crucified while she worked and saluted His Blessed Mother in all her goings and comings; and since she made many trips back and forth in the course of the day,

³⁷ Peter Cholenec, S.J., "Letter of Father Cholenec, S.J., to Father Le Blanc, S.J., containing a *Life of the Servant of God Katharine*, August 27, 1715. From the Original MS preserved in the monastery Hotel Dieu, Quebec," in *The Positio*, Document XII, 374-5.

she was always mindful of the Holy Eucharist and made a visit to enkindle her heart at that holy fire.³⁸

Marian Devotions of St. Kateri

Having caught a glimpse of the spiritual dynamics of Kateri's Marian devotions, it will be advantageous to look at the specific devotions she practiced and the Marian mysteries she encountered in them. The Angelus was a prayer offered three times a day by all Native American Christians at the Sault. Father Chauchetière writes of Kateri, "No need to remark the exactness with which she said the Angelus, wherever she was, even in the forest, because it is a praiseworthy custom of all the savages of the Sault to say it three times a day without fail."³⁹ The Marian mysteries that are present in the praying of the Angelus—the Annunciation, where Mary is called the "Handmaid of the Lord"; Mary's *fiat* response of "Be it done unto me according to Thy word"; and the fruitfulness of Mary's virginity, that brought forth the Incarnate Word to dwell among us—were placed before Kateri's spirit, along with the scriptural portrait of Mary painted in the "Hail Mary" that is said in the Angelus. Thus, the Angelus and its inclusion of the Hail Mary served the natives as a Marian catechesis as well as a devotional prayer.⁴⁰

Another Marian devotion practiced by Kateri is the rosary with its reflections on the mysteries of the life of Jesus Christ and His Mother, along with the truths expressed in the "Hail Mary" that conclude with asking Mary's motherly

³⁸ Peter Cholenec, S.J., "Letter and Life of Katharine Tekakwitha, first to vow virginity among the Iroquois barbarians, by Father Cholenec, S.J., to Father Michael Angelo Tamburini, General of the Society of Jesus, Sept. 26, 1715. From the autograph copy in the Archives of Saint Mary's College, S.J., Montreal, Series A, Portfolio 11, No. a," in *The Positio*, Document XIII, 390-91.

³⁹ Chauchetière, "The Life of the Good Katharine Tegakoüita," in *The Positio*, 189.

⁴⁰ On the Website *The Mary Page* can be found an article entitled "The Angelus: An Artistic Rendering" by Bro. John M. Samaha, S.M., with adaptations by Johann Roten, S.M., that states: "In our time Pope Paul VI has expounded, at great length, the value of the Angelus in the last section of his apostolic exhortation on proper devotion to Mary, *Marialis Cultus* (1974)." This adapted article can be found at campus.udayton.edu/mary/gallery/artists/angelus.html (accessed October 16, 2013).

intercession.⁴¹ Fr. Chauchetière states that Kateri “was never without her rosary.”⁴² She would often combine the recitation of her rosary with a penitential practice, such as, walking “around the fields in the snow, saying the rosary many times.”⁴³ She saw the rosary as a way to keep her mind focused on the things of God rather than to have idle thoughts and participate in gossip.

Kateri recited the litanies of Mary by heart every evening in private after Common Prayer. Fr. Chauchetière wrote of her: “She had learned by heart the Litany of the Blessed Virgin and never failed to say it in private after the night prayers were said together in the cabin.”⁴⁴ Fr. Cholenec places Kateri’s devotional practice of the litanies of Mary in the context of her virginal life and in her love for the Holy Virgin:

From this source [her purity lived through life] resulted her tender affection for Our Lady, the Queen of Virgins, and the Mother of Purity. As soon as Katharine learned about her, she loved her ecstatically, and spoke of her with enthusiasm. She learned by heart the litanies composed in her honor, and said them every evening in private after the common prayers of the lodge. She never went about without her beads, which she recited in all her goings and comings. She signalized Saturdays and the other days dedicated to the Mother of Mercy by some mortification or extra act of virtue.⁴⁵

Kateri’s recitation of the litanies of Mary not only served to call to mind the descriptive titles of Mary and their corresponding meanings, but was a movement of love toward the Queen of Virgins.

⁴¹ By the 17th century, the rosary, as passed on to Kateri by the French Jesuits, would have already had its “150 Hail Marys with appended references to the lives of Christ and Mary . . . in three groups of mysteries related to the Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection of Christ.” This information is drawn from the Website of the Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute, *The Mary Page*, under “Rosary Markings” and can be found at campus.udayton.edu/mary/rosarymarkings23.html (accessed October 16, 2013).

⁴² Chauchetière, “The Life of the Good Katharine Tegakoüita,” in *The Positio*, 189.

⁴³ *The Positio*, 189.

⁴⁴ *The Positio*, 189.

⁴⁵ Cholenec and Le Brun, in *The Positio*, 298.

Present in the Jesuit descriptions of Kateri's Marian devotions are references to the penitential practices and the dedication to practice particular virtues that Kateri would exercise on Saturdays and other Marian feasts. Fr. Chauchetière writes how she "marked the days of the week dedicated to the Blessed Virgin by performing on them some penance or some act of virtue."⁴⁶ Fr. Cholenec says of Mary's solemn feast days:

Katharine prepared herself with redoubled fervor for the most solemn feast days, which were for her a time of spiritual renovation, so much pleasure did she take in them, so many graces did she receive. We have also seen that she always chose them when she wished to offer some great sacrifice to Our Lord, as her vow of virginity, which she made partly to imitate the Holy Virgin, and to give her this eminent proof of her admiration and love. From the moment she took the resolution at the Sault to take Jesus Christ for her Spouse, she took Mary for her mother, throwing herself into her arms and abandoning herself entirely to her guidance with perfect filial confidence, worthy daughter of such a mother, who, we may believe, obtained from her Divine Son such a marvelous and rare gift of purity by a reciprocal love.⁴⁷

The above quote, that highlights Kateri's spiritual practices on solemn Marian feast days, also mentions the new relationship that Kateri experienced in Mary's Motherhood after she dedicated her perpetual virginity to the Son of God as His spouse. It presents the blend of Marian devotion and worship of the Lord that coincide in one action in Kateri's spirituality. Her consecration to a life of virginity was for the love of the Lord. It was also "to imitate the Holy Virgin, and to give her this eminent proof of her admiration and love."

Kateri's Vow of Virginity

Many of the documents presented in Kateri's *Positio* refer to her unique love of purity in the midst of a culture contrary to that virtue. It was mentioned prior, that as she was fleeing to the Mission of St. Francis Xavier at the Sault, Kateri witnessed religious sisters who offered their virginal lives as

⁴⁶ Chauchetière, "The Life of the Good Katharine Tegakouïta," in *The Positio*, 188.

⁴⁷ Cholenec and Le Brun, in *The Positio*, 299.

spouses of Jesus Christ. Similarly, Kateri desired to offer her virginity in the context of spousal union with Our Lord. Her lifelong desire for virginity had found its fulfillment in Christ. Many quotations that have been presented thus far in this paper, also speak of how Kateri's love of virginity was a strong draw in her relationship to Mary, the Queen of Virgins. It has been impossible to save the content of Kateri's vow of virginity for this section of the presentation alone without having mentioned it many times prior in various contexts. This is the case because Kateri's love for virginity and her relationship with Mary that surrounds it are inseparable from the rest of her spiritual journey to union with Christ. Kateri's virginal life and its corresponding Marian spirituality permeate her devotional life, her faith life, and her temporal life in a living way that exists so simply—but profoundly—in the depths of her person. The current section of this presentation will lead up to and focus upon Kateri's vow of virginity in 1679 and two other vows that she took on the first anniversary of her initial vow of virginity in 1680. The devotional practices behind these two additional vows were important elements of Kateri's life of faith that took on a new ardor and depth after her vow of virginity—they are vows to Christ Crucified and to the Eucharistic Presence of the Lord.

To begin this reflection dedicated to Kateri's vow of virginity and its progression into the two successive vows she made the following year, it will be important to step back and view the fervor and diligence with which the young Mohawk maiden longed to imitate the Virgin of Virgins in her daily life:

Not long after she arrived from the Mohawks, her instructress remarked that she had some little beads strung back of her hair, and asked her if she would be willing to give up these vanities to imitate the Blessed Virgin. Katharine obeyed at the first word and never wore them again; on the contrary she wished to cut her hair to prove that she was dedicating herself forever to the service of the Virgin of Virgins.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Chauchetière, "The Life of the Good Katharine Tegakoüita," in *The Positio*, 188-89.

Her desire to imitate the Virgin Mary moved from a life of practicing the virtue of virginity to pursuing the vowed state of perpetual virginity. Fr. Cholenec gives his account of Kateri's desire for this vocation and the actual perpetual vow that took place at eight o'clock in the morning on the Feast of the Annunciation in 1679:

On learning that they [the sisters she encountered in Montreal] were Christian virgins consecrated to God by a vow of perpetual chastity, she gave me no peace until I had granted her permission to make the same sacrifice of herself, not by a simple resolution to guard her virginity, such as she had already made, but by an irrevocable pledge which would oblige her to belong to God beyond recall. . . . For this great event she chose the day on which we celebrate the festival of the Annunciation of the Most Holy Virgin. The moment after she had received Our Lord in Holy Communion, she pronounced with admirable fervor her vow of perpetual virginity. She then addressed the Holy Virgin, for whom she had a most tender devotion, praying her to present to her Son the oblation of herself which she had just made; after which she passed some hours at the foot of the altar in holy meditation and in perfect union with God.⁴⁹

Kateri's desire for the things of heaven increased to new heights after her consecration to perpetual virginity. Her love for God impelled her "to keep herself in contemplation in His presence, to meditate on His majesty and mercy, to sing His praises, and continually to desire new ways of pleasing Him."⁵⁰ She practiced even greater penances and accepted the illnesses that her body was often troubled by—especially the steadily recurring and growing abdominal pain and fever that would eventually cause her death just over a year after her vow of virginity.

On the first anniversary of her perpetual vow of virginity, Kateri made two more vows that would express her love for Jesus. On the Feast of the Annunciation of the Most Holy Virgin (1680), Kateri vowed herself to Christ in the two areas where,

⁴⁹ Cholenec, "Letter of Father Cholenec, S.J., to Father Le Blanc, S.J., containing a *Life of the Servant of God Katharine*," in *The Positio*, 370-71.

⁵⁰ *The Positio*, 371-72.

throughout her life, she most felt His love for her and for all humankind. She vowed her soul with its dedication to contemplation to the Eucharistic Lord, and she vowed her body with its severe austerities to Christ Crucified. These had been two of her favorite devotions that had increased to new heights since her diligent living of her vow of virginity. The following two quotations taken from Fr. Cholenec's writings provide a glimpse of the depth of each of these devotions that evolved into vows for Kateri. The first excerpt describes her contemplative union and devotion to her Eucharistic Lord:

Every day she was seen to pass whole hours at the foot of the altar, immovable, as if transported beyond herself. Her eyes often explained the sentiments of her breast by the abundance of tears she shed, and in these tears she found so great delight that she was, as it were, insensible to the most severe cold of winter. Often seeing her benumbed with cold, I have sent her to the cabin to warm herself. She obeyed immediately, but the moment after returned to the church, and continued there in long communion with Jesus Christ.⁵¹

In this same document, Fr. Cholenec describes Kateri's living out the Passion with Christ Crucified—the second vow she made in 1680:

To keep alive her devotion for the mystery of Our Savior's Passion, and to have it always present to her mind, she carried on her breast a little crucifix which I had given her. She often kissed it with feelings of the most tender compassion for the suffering Jesus, and with the most vivid remembrance of the benefits of our redemption. . . . [She also] made a perpetual oblation of her . . . body to Jesus attached to the cross; and thenceforth, she was ingenious ever to invent new ways of afflicting and of crucifying her flesh.⁵²

To Kateri, uniting herself to Christ on the Cross and enduring the greatest sufferings for Him, was proof of her great love for God that also kept her in prayer for hours before His Eucharistic Presence. These two vows were branches that

⁵¹ *The Positio*, 372.

⁵² *The Positio*, 372.

grew out of Kateri's practice of the vow she had made of her virginity as a spouse of Jesus Christ and an imitator of the Virgin of Virgins. Kateri made these vows in March and died in April (1680), but she had lived these devotions throughout her life—especially, with increased fervor, since her vow of virginity.

On her deathbed, Fr. Cholenec questioned Kateri's life of purity. Her response of gratitude for the strength to live a virginal life was directed to the Blessed Virgin and her protection: "There was of necessity a connection between her great love of Mary and her not less conspicuous love of chastity; and the Servant of God, on the day before her death, ascribed to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin the precious grace of a chastity preserved intact throughout a lifetime, amid numerous and serious difficulties."⁵³

Kateri's chastity was a blessing recognized by many, especially by those who would come to her for advice on living pure lives. Kateri's counsel would always be to direct these souls to the Blessed Virgin Mary: "Virginity, continency, chastity were the balm she spread everywhere. She never spoke of this virtue, to lead others to embrace it, nor of the contrary vice, to make them avoid it, without speaking of the Blessed Virgin, her refuge and her model."⁵⁴ After her death, many have been aided in transforming their lives from impure habits and sins. Immediately after her death, miracles began happening and it continues to this day. A quote from Fr. Chauchetière regarding the events after Kateri's death is the beginning of a new chapter in the life of the Mohawk saint:

During the past two years their fervor has greatly increased since God has removed from this world one of these devout savage women who live like nuns, and she died with the reputation of sanctity. We cease not to say Masses to thank God for the graces that we believe we receive every day through her intercession. Journeys are continually made to her tomb; and the savages, following her example, have become better Christians than

⁵³ *The Positio*, 35.

⁵⁴ Chauchetière, "The Life of the Good Katharine Tegaköüita," in *The Positio*, 189.

they were. We daily see wonders worked through her intercession. Her name was Catherine Tekakwitha.⁵⁵

Conclusion

The life of St. Kateri Tekakwitha is an edifying and informative example of Marian devotion and spirituality in the United States and Canada prior to the year 1900. The detailed documentation of Kateri's life by the Jesuit missionaries allows a significant study of the various Marian devotions she practiced and the Marian spirituality that she lived. Kateri filled her days with heartfelt Marian devotion that led to an imitation of Mary in the context of a filial entrustment to her heavenly mother. Kateri's Marian spirituality was Christocentric in that it occurred in the context of her relationship with Jesus Christ. At the same time that Kateri's Marian spirituality *led to* her relationship with Jesus Christ, it was held in its proper authentic place as it simultaneously *flowed from* her union with Christ. Kateri's relationship with Mary possessed an anthropocentric dimension as well. Kateri's love of the virginal life and imitation of Mary as the best disciple of the Lord drew her to the person of Mary. In Kateri's spirituality, the anthropocentric elements of her Marian devotion are infused with the Christocentric in a very natural lived relationship with Jesus and Mary, giving each their proper due. While not studied in this presentation, the ecclesiocentric dimension of the Marian presence among the Native Americans peeked through in the Jesuit writings. Missions, chapels, or posts were often named after Mary and there was an implicit embryonic sense of Mother Church in Mary's presence among the villagers. An example of this can be seen in a pilgrimage designed around one of the replicas of the miraculous statue of Notre-Dame-de-Foy that was sent to the mission from France, based on the original miraculous sandstone statue found in a hollow tree trunk. The replica was made of the wood of the tree in which the original was found. "In 1675, Father Jacques Bruyas had received a replica of the

⁵⁵ Sargent, *Catherine Tekakwitha*, 3, quoting a letter written by Fr. Claude Chauchetière that is found on pp. 167-89 in vol. LXII of *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, ed. R. G. Thwaites.

statue, for Saint Mary's Chapel in Tionnontoguen [a reachable journey from Kateri's Mohawk village in Fonda, New York]. And he had written that the unbelievers told him, from the time Mary's image is in their village . . . they are without fear and have received very evident marks of her protection."⁵⁶ This experiential witness to Mary from the community of natives is an implicit witness to Mother Church in its simple but profound form.

Kateri lived a life of holiness in the midst of her people in New York and Canada. Her holy life is an example of her human receptivity to God. The fruit of this can be seen in her continually increased life of grace and action based on her heart's desire to receive (know) God's will and do it as she so often said, "Show me what God wants and I will do it." Her life was an echo of the Marian *fiat* "I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to Thy word" that Kateri brought to life in her non-Christian nation and in her Christian community. The life of the Spirit of God won for humankind by the Blood of Christ that Kateri loved so dearly in the Eucharist and on the Cross (even to the point of vowing herself to these mysteries) was alive in the Mohawk virgin and now shines as a witness to the world. As St. Thomas Aquinas teaches, nature is not destroyed by grace but, rather, grace elevates nature; so too, Kateri's Mohawk nature, with its dedicated pursuit of her goal and heroic bravery, was not destroyed but elevated by grace and is a witness to the world.

A special comment must be made before concluding this research paper. It is in relation to the vocation that St. Kateri so desired and loved—consecrated virginity in the midst of the world. Kateri was chosen as co-patroness of the United States Association of Consecrated Virgins (USACV). She is co-patroness alongside the Blessed Virgin Mary. The combination of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Kateri as co-patronesses holds a wealth of spiritual wisdom and grace as Kateri always pointed to Mary when people would approach her with their desire to

⁵⁶ "Notre-Dame-de-Foy (Montaigu)," as found on Tekakwitha.info at <http://www.tekakwitha.info/articles/notre-dame-de-foy.php> (accessed October 17, 2013).

live a pure life. Mary was the one who protected Kateri's virginity and modeled the virginal life to her. Kateri's example can enlighten those, who live the call to a life of consecrated virginity for women in the world, to the great mystery to which they have been called and consecrated in the midst of non-Christian or Christian cultures alike—as Kateri experienced both in her Mohawk village and in her Native American Christian community.

While the vocation to consecrated virginity in the world is gaining more popularity, it is still in its infant stages; its Rite was restored by Paul VI in 1970, and it is recognized as a form of consecrated life in the Church. St. Kateri's example can show the virtues of this vocation when it is lived faithfully. Her example can encourage those living this vocation in the world today to trust in God's grace to bear fruit through their virginal life that is consecrated to Him—fruit that will speak Marian beauty to the culture they live in as was seen in the life of the Lily of the Mohawks.

It is important to note, however, that St. Kateri's influence extends well beyond a particular vocation, geographic location, or historical era in order to offer a valuable contribution to Marian devotion and spirituality for people of all times and places who hold common bonds or interests with the young maiden—especially Native Americans, youth, artisans, people who endure loss and handicaps, the persecuted, those who work in evangelization, those who experience evangelization, those who have offered their lives to God through consecrated virginity, those in any state of life who struggle with purity, those with addictions, those with eye conditions, and, most generally, those who wish to live a simple, humble, authentic, and total love for Jesus Christ and Mary in the midst of the activities of daily life and committed prayer. Kateri's influence is an encouragement placed before the eyes of the world during this time of the New Evangelization with its call to shine the light of Christ to the nations, as St. Kateri did so well. Gratitude for this saint is owed to God, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Church, the Jesuit missionaries and martyrs, the Mohawk and Algonquin Nations, and to St. Kateri herself for her openness to know the will of God and do it.