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A RUSSIAN PRIEST IN ALTA CALIFORNIA

Father John Veniaminov's Visit to Fort Ross and the Spanish Franciscan Missions

by Mother Nectaria McLees

With 2016's historic meeting of the Russian Patriarch Kirill and Pope Francis in Cuba, it is timely to recall an earlier New World meeting between a seasoned Orthodox missionary to Alaska (who himself would lead the Russian Orthodox Church) and Spanish Franciscan friars in California.

I have strong reasons for maintaining my assertion that this missionary priest, John Veniaminov, also landed on our shores here, and—how I love to dwell on the thought!—he bestowed God's blessing upon our beautiful California.

St. Sebastian Dabovich
August 15, 1897

Known to the Orthodox Christian world as St. Innocent, Apostle to Alaska, the 26-year old Rev. Ioann (John) Veniaminov arrived in Russian America in 1823 after five years as a Siberian parish priest, with his wife, son,

Opposite: Chapel. Fort Ross, Sonoma, California.

mother and brother. He was to extend the work of the first-generation Valaam Monastery missionaries who, three decades before, had evangelized native Alaskans and pastored Russian-American Company employees. Father John would serve Russian America for thirty years, as a priest in Unalaska and Novoarchangelsk (Sitka) and later as bishop of the Aleutian Islands.¹

Father John and his family were first assigned to the island of Unalaska. Covering 1000 square miles, Unalaska is the largest of the Fox Islands and his immediate parish included both the Fox and Pribilof chains, extending over 500 miles along the Aleutian peninsula. Father John soon endeared himself to the local Aleuts and worked hard to give them their first written language. After a dozen years of evangelization in Alaska's icy waters he was reassigned to the colonial headquarters of Russian-America. Known as the "Paris of the Pacific," Novoarchangelsk (Sitka) was the most important port on the West Coast, and with his arrival came responsibility for the far-distant outpost of *Krepost Rus'* (Fort Ross) in Old California. Over 1300 miles away and without a resident priest, the settlement's employees and their families were in great need of a pastoral visit.

On Tuesday, June 30, 1836, Fr. John embarked on a company ship bound for "New Albion," now northern California. His journal entry for the day reads:

I celebrated the customary prayer service for those desiring to travel by sea and then moved onto the ship, taking the cantor with me. I placed Filipp Kashevarov, the teacher of the local school, in charge of conducting services on holidays and baptizing newborn infants in case of emergency.ⁱ

At first the ship sailed steadily down the coast, and on July 2, Fr. John remarked, "As usual, I suffered from seasickness for the first three days." After making good time, a windless sea left the crew and passengers stranded for a week before anchoring in Bodega Bay on July 15, about 25 miles from the fort. A half-day's ride on horseback brought the priest and his cantor to the bluff-top Russian fort overlooking the Pacific, and that night Fr. John noted his first impressions of California in his journal:

¹ In 1840, after his wife's death, Fr. John was tonsured a monk and consecrated as Bishop of Kamchatka and the Kuril Islands (Russia) and the Aleutian Islands (Russian America), with his headquarters in Novoarchangelsk (Sitka). He died in 1879 as Metropolitan of Moscow, the head of the entire Russian Orthodox Church.

I admit that the healthful air, the pure blue skies, the geographical position and the native vegetation all immediately strike and captivate one who was born north of 52 degrees and has never been south of that latitude, especially one who has lived on Unalaska and Sitka!ⁱⁱ

The ride from Bodega Bay to Fort Ross would have carried Fr. John through a backdrop of grassy hills rising to pine and shrub slopes and then to giant stands of evergreens and tan-bark oak trees, set against a sun-dappled Pacific dotted with tiny islands. Ten miles south was the Reka Slavianka (now the “Russian River”).ⁱⁱⁱ The settlement had been built in 1812 to shelter fur trappers, develop trade with Spanish California, and to grow the hemp, grain, vegetables, and fruit so sorely needed in Alaska. At the time of Fr. John’s visit the fort and three outlying rancheros were inhabited by 260 people: 120 Russians, 51 Creoles, 50 Kodiak Aleuts, and 39 California Indians, mostly of the local Kashaya Pomo tribe—all employees and families of the Russian-American Company.^{iv} This three-way culture was one of genuine cooperation, attributed by chroniclers to the influence of Orthodox clergy on the Russians and Aleuts of Alaska. In 1821, the only known treaty between natives and Europeans in California was signed at the outpost, transferring the territory of Fort Ross to the Russians, whose presence the Kayasha viewed as a safeguard against the ingress of both Spanish and other California Indian tribes.^v

On his arrival, however, Fr. John fell ill:

It is so easy to catch a cold here that even the native residents fall ill almost every year. This propensity is due to the quick shifts from hot to cold found here. These shifts may take the temperature from 28 to 8 degrees [82 - 46° F.] in approximately two hours. Sometimes the change is even greater. Other times one may encounter unbearable heat while up in the mountains and then come down out of the hills to face a fog and temperatures of as low as 7 [44° F.] degrees.

His mention of the area’s sudden change of temperatures causing illness is a reminder of the general hardiness of people of his time—“*even the native residents fall ill almost every year,*” and highlights the common precautions before the advent of antibiotics, when any infection might take a serious turn.



Fort Ross Ministry and Translations

Although in bed for two days, Fr. John called for a strict fast for those who wished to receive the sacraments and established a cycle of services in the bare wooden chapel. Along with offices, workshops, housing for the manager and employees, bath houses, and two windmills, there was also a chapel, initiated in the 1820s by the outpost's "Russian, Creole and Aleut employees," who pledged to build a church dedicated to St. Nicholas at their own expense. Officers and crews of Russian naval vessels visiting San Francisco also made donations, and the Russian-American Company commissioned four icons to be sent from Russia. Without a resident priest, however, the Orthodox could only conduct reader's services with a sacristan.

Only two Orthodox priests are known to have visited the chapel, the second being Fr. John, who brought with him a large chalice and a Gospel book that he left for future visits.^{2 vi} He immediately began catechetical instruction, chrismated children and adults, and performed church blessings for the common-law marriages, often with local Kashaya women, contracted in the absence of a priest. During his time in the fort he worked in Russian with the Russian adults and children, and according to his journal through translators with the Aleuts and local Indians. For the thirty-six days of his stay from July 16 to August 23, Fr. John not only presided over the full cycle of daily services—matins, vespers and hours, but he also celebrated 7 liturgies, chrismated 49 people (including one Catholic and one Lutheran), celebrated 14 marriages, and did both water blessings and a moleben (supplicatory prayer service) for Tsar Nicholas I. Confessions were heard almost daily in preparation for chrismation and for receiving Holy Communion, often through interpreters. Regarding his catechesis on August 8, he recounts:

During the Hours, I instructed together all those preparing for the sacraments, and then after the Hours I spoke through an interpreter to those Aleuts who did not know Russian. Before Vespers I heard Confession from thirty-seven people, both men and women.^{vii}

² After the sale of Fort Ross in 1841 to John Sutter, the chalice was returned to Novoarchangelsk, where it is displayed in St. Michael's Cathedral as the "Sonoma Chalice".

The missionary's note about his use of a translator to catechize "the Aleuts who did not know Russian" is illuminating. Alaskan native dialects are among the world's most difficult languages, and here it is clear that after thirteen years of studying the native Unangan Aleut dialect and establishing a written Cyrillic alphabet for it Fr. John did not yet feel himself competent to catechize the Aleut in their native tongue, and in fact preferred the more exact catechesis he could offer through a translator. At the end of his California entries dated, "April 29, 1837, Sitka," he states:

From the very first day of my return from California, i.e., from October 15, up until the 1st of April, I was continuously involved in daily work on checking my translations into Aleut: the Catechism, the Gospel of Matthew, and a sermon that I had written entitled "A Brief Indication of the Way to the Heavenly Kingdom." I checked these texts strictly, correcting them for grammar. I also wrote them over. Now, I dare to say that these translations are as correct and as clear and flawless as possible, given the present state of the Aleut language.^{viii}

A footnote clarifies his work:

"The Aleut grammar rules which I had compiled allowed me to see new aspects of the language. I myself was surprised to see how I had sometimes pronounced words, or written them in translation, in forms corresponding to their direct meaning, but incorrect because of my misunderstanding of their roots. Now, however, to check this work on a larger scale, I am sending the translations to the priest on Atka, Iakov Netsvetov [later canonized as St. Jacob of Alaska], who knows both languages perfectly....^{ix}

As with all oral cultures, there were serious theological limitations with the native languages, and Fr. John served the daily cycle of services and the Divine Liturgy in Slavonic. The church readers he trained all read and understood Slavonic, as well as their own languages, and as translations developed they were introduced into the Slavonic services. Father John's primary use of Russian and Slavonic seems not to have dampened his effectiveness, for he describes the residents of Unalaska as standing on the shore weeping as he and his family departed.

Visiting California's Spanish Missions

Part-way through his stay, Fr. John's ship left for Monterey and San Francisco. He was to have been picked up as the vessel returned up the coast, but was informed that, instead, he was to meet the ship in San Francisco. Accompanied on horseback by an American sea captain named Becker, a guest of the Russians, the priest spent the night of August 23 in the open, his first ever outside the empire: "In the evening we stopped for the night in a deserted spot already outside the borders of Russia."^x

The trip also afforded him the opportunity to visit the Spanish missions along his route. Nor was this the first recorded meeting between the Russian Orthodox and Spanish Catholic missions, for with the 1823 founding of the northernmost Franciscan mission at Solano, mission tradition says that Fort Ross sent a mule train with gifts, including a bell. Kyrill Klebnikov, a company manager who sent detailed reports on Fort Ross in 1825, concurs: "[The Spanish] established two new missions, one at San Rafael in 1819 and the other at Solano in 1824. At the establishment of these institutions, the missionaries being in need of various materials and instruments for their missions, had frequent intercourse with Fort Ross. There was a continuous trade between the two."^{xi}

August 24. Monday

At four o'clock in the afternoon we arrived at the first California Mission, San Rafael. And here for the first time I saw a Catholic church and a monk of the Franciscan Order. This monk, or padre as they are usually called, by the name of Quijos [Jose Lorenzo de la Concepcion Quijas]. Our acquaintance was quite brief because we were hurrying to meet the ship.^{xii}

On Tuesday the 25th of August, Fr. John left San Rafael by boat to cross San Francisco Bay. Severe winds, however, caused them to make "a dangerous landing," and the small company spent the night on an abandoned island. The following day they discovered on arrival that the ship had not yet reached the port. Father John spent the night with Captain Becker on his vessel, and the following day was informed that the voyage home was now



delayed until mid-September. He immediately left to meet more Spanish missionaries. Paul Garret recounts, “[The missions’] fertile fields, well-tilled and bountiful, and graced with clean white buildings, were the envy of every Russian who saw and spoke of them. But these same visitors told other stories, too, of despotic cruelty towards the Indians—a cruelty so out of keeping with the manner of the one priest Fr. John had met at San Rafael that he was filled with curiosity....”^{xiii} If Fr. John had indeed heard these stories, which are not referred to in his journals, he wanted to see for himself:

September 2. Wednesday

It was clear from the circumstances that we would not be sailing until the middle of September. Therefore, I decided to visit the neighboring missions. On the evening of the 2nd the captain and I left in a launch, headed for the mission of San Jose (i.e., St. Joseph, the husband of Mary). This mission is located on the left-hand shore of southern San Francisco Bay.

September 3. Thursday

We arrived on land at four o’clock in the morning and set out for the mission on horses that belonged to that mission. At nine o’clock we reached the home of the padre, who received us very warmly. We stayed with him until Monday, or until Sunday by their calendar, and shared his table. I would say that this priest and monk, Jose Maria de Jesus Gonzalez, is the most educated and kindly of any of his brethren in all of California. At this mission I observed the rites of burial and infant baptism, attended Mass four times, and saw all of the [Roman Catholic] religious implements and how they differ from ours. The priest and I conversed about religious matters.

We saw all of the public institutions of the mission, its workshops and its beautiful fruit orchards. In short, the padre, out of favorable feelings toward me, omitted almost nothing from what he showed

Opposite: Mission San Jose, where Fr. John Veniaminov met Friar Jose Maria de Jesus Gonzalez. Fremont, California.



Mission San Rafael, the first mission visited by Fr. John Veniaminov. San Rafael, California.

me. This mission and the one most nearby are the only two missions that still exercise a right carried over from earlier times: they own and command the Indians as slaves.³ The Mexican government has taken the Indians away from the other missions and given them the rights of citizenship, in other words, the freedom to loaf.⁴ The San Jose mission, though, is very well run and the Indians are very satisfied with the present padre, who feeds and clothes them quite adequately. The mission has a primary school which serves as many as fifty Creole and Indian boys.

September 7. Monday

We set out at three o'clock for the next Mission, Santa Clara. Padre Gonzalez himself accompanied me all the way to the mission. At Santa Clara, Padre Jesus Moreno received us, again with great cordiality. We also met another priest, who was not a monk.

³ The English translation in the Bancroft Library and University of Alaska version of the diary is "slave," a word that Fr. John Veniaminov would not have used in the modern sense, but with the Russian connotation of *krestyanin*, that is "a serf". Serfdom was an arrangement by which landless Russian peasants received food, clothing, education, medical care, access to church and sacraments, due judicial process, a pension when they could no longer work and burial for themselves and their families in return for working a landowner's holdings as long as they were physically able. This was analogous to California natives who converted to Christianity and came to live and work in the mission villages.

⁴ See the Appendix on the forced closure of the Missions.



Old Mission San Francisco, circa 1880.

September 8. Tuesday

Here I saw three priests concelebrate the Liturgy at the same time, but at different altars and, of course, in a whisper; in general, these priests always whisper during the Liturgy except on certain holidays.⁵

September 9. Wednesday

We set out to return to the ship and arrived there safely on the night of the 11th. Before doing anything else, I attended the Liturgy at the San Francisco Mission. While in California, then, I managed to visit four missions and meet five priests.

The missions are all constructed quite uniformly according to a single plan: the central building, called the mission, is a large quadrilateral, one-story building with a door in the center. The building is constructed of unfired brick and roofed with tile. One side is designated for the church, another for the padre, and the others for storerooms

⁵ "Private" masses are still commonly celebrated, often daily, by Catholic priests, who are not canonically required to have others in attendance; for instance, while traveling or if there are many priest monks who want to say mass in a single monastery. Thus the "whispering" that Fr. John refers to was the liturgy recited in a low tone by the friars at different side chapels, so as not to disturb neighboring masses at adjacent altars. Public masses for the local Christians were undoubtedly held in the same church.

and workshops. Several blockhouses made of the same material extend out next to the mission; these are for the Indians. The married and single Indians are housed separately.

September 13. Sunday.

I celebrated the Hours.

September 14. Monday.

I celebrated the Hours. At seven o'clock in the morning, we weighed anchor and headed for Sitka. At four o'clock on October 13th, we dropped anchor in Sitka after a voyage that we could consider fortunate, given the time of the year.

The 1768 Diplomatic Ball

At the time of his visit, neither his Franciscan hosts nor Fr. John himself were aware that their meeting in Alta California was the result of a fascinating diplomatic incident seventy years earlier. At Empress Catherine the Great's 1768 Royal Diplomatic Ball in St. Petersburg, a customary venue to announce changes in Russian foreign policy, guests were informed of Russia's newly-created permanent settlements in North America.⁶ A bombshell for European courts, within hours the news was on its way. A nervous King Carlos III immediately sent out a Spanish expedition under the command of his viceroy in New Spain, Gaspar de Portolá, to ascertain how far south the Russians had settled, and ordered the extension of Franciscan missions under the highly-educated Spanish theologian, Friar Junipero Serra. There was no time to spare; Alta California had to be colonized as a province of New Spain before Russia could lay claim. In short, as a result of the 1768 diplomatic ball, twenty-one Spanish missions were founded between 1769 and 1823, the northernmost being San Francisco Solano, only sixty miles south of Fort Ross.^{xiv}

⁶ With encouragement from Empress Catherine II, Gregory Shelikov had founded Russia's first permanent colonial settlement in Alaska at Three Saints Bay on the southeastern side of Kodiak Island in 1784. Others quickly followed.

Opposite: Santa Clara Mission church as it stands today. Santa Clara, California.



A very similar scenario was taking place in Russian Alaska, where a chain of churches and chapels would shortly be established. While both Spanish Catholic and Russian Orthodox missionaries took advantage of their governments' support to evangelize, their primary allegiance was to the souls under their care. Missionaries of both creeds were outspoken in their defense of Native peoples, and often suffered for this at the hands of their compatriots. The letters of both Roman Catholic and Orthodox missionaries provide shrewd assessments of colonial policy and individual administrators.^{7 xv xvi}

Although he had not previously met Roman Catholic clergy, there was an earlier point of contact with the California fathers that Fr. John had found amusing. After hearing from traders of his skill at crafting barrel organs, Spanish Franciscans from one of the missions had put in an order. The priest gladly obliged and sent the barrel organ with two rolls of Russian music—sacred and secular. Reportedly, the padres' pleasure turned to unabashed joy when the second roll was inserted, and in amusement Fr. John wrote that, "those Jesuits are probably still praying to God to the strains of our merry dance music!"⁸

He was pleased to use his hard-learned Latin to speak with them and eager to see what the Franciscans had accomplished. Not only did he eat at their table and sleep under their roof, but as he remarks, he closely observed their worship, admired their dedication, sympathized with their political plight under the new Mexican Republic, and enjoyed their company.

He was free enough to satisfy his curiosity about their missionary endeavors and to give credit where it was due. The Franciscans were equally curi-

7 Although the Alaskan natives were at times exploited by Russian-American Company employees, it is unjust to portray the company's support for Orthodox mission as an entirely duplicitous maneuver to render the natives more docile. There were also decent, responsible, and faithful Orthodox Christians among the fur traders and administrators, and Fr. John Veniaminov credits his decision to become a missionary to a pious Russian explorer, John Kriukov, who begged him to consider missionary work among the Alaskan natives, especially the Aleut tribe, who were particularly open to the Gospel.

Gregory Shelikov and Ivan Golikov, whose company founded the first permanent settlements in America, had initiated Alaskan missionary work in 1793 by seeking the sanction of Empress Catherine II to subsidize and support missionaries to Russian America. With some clear-sighted observations about proper treatment of the native peoples and limiting the import of alcohol, the empress agreed and referred the organization of monastic volunteers to Metropolitan Gabriel of Moscow. The following year, eight missionaries from Valaam Monastery arrived in Alaska, including St. Herman of Alaska, St. Ioasaph, and St. Juvenaly. Later Shelikov requested an episcopal seat in America at Kodiak, for which he assumed financial responsibility. The Kodiak request was granted but never filled, due to the untimely death of the first bishop before he reached Kodiak.

8 This period of barrel organ making and his mistaken remark about "Jesuits" was prior to Fr. John's visit to California. When he met the Spanish friars there, he clearly identified them as Franciscans. Beginning in 1663, however, members of the Jesuit order had founded 16 missions and 32 stations in Baja California, but the Order was expelled in 1767 from Spain and its colonies, and replaced by Franciscans. There were no Jesuits in Alta (Upper) California and no Jesuits in New Spain during Fr. John's time in Alaska.

ous about the Russian priest's experience, as Fr. John notes: "This marked the first occasion on which I have ever used the Latin language, in which I explained my ideas to the best of my ability."^{9 xviii}

Unfortunately, there isn't a corresponding Spanish account of Fr. John's conversation, although his own letters provide a glimpse of the work he was just beginning among the Tlingit:

If they did not immediately become Christians they, at least, listened or began to listen to the words of salvation. Few were baptized then, for, while I proclaimed the truth to them, I never urged upon them or wished to urge upon them the immediate reception of Holy Baptism, but, seeking to convince their judgment, I awaited a request from them. Those who expressed a desire to be baptized I received with full satisfaction. I always obtained from the *toens* or chiefs and from the mothers of those desiring to be baptized a consent which was never denied, and this greatly pleased them."^{10 xviii}



Bishop Innocent with Governor A. K. Etolin who built the Bishop's House in Sitka.

There are no disparaging remarks about Roman Catholics or about the Franciscan missionaries he met, nor does Fr. John register dissatisfaction over their serving in Latin rather than Spanish or local native dialects. He does

⁹ Under Tsar Peter the Great, reforms in seminary training had students mastering Latin as well as Greek and Church Slavonic.

¹⁰ A few years later he writes, "...The Koloshes [Tlingit], our neighbors, thank God, continue to come to Holy Baptism.... In the Lent just past those already baptized, who all lived near the fort, were very particular in keeping the fast and that without any special suggestion on my part -- indeed they were not a whit behind the Russians in their observance." Along with the Russian American company boy's school and two girls schools, a theological school soon opened in Novoarchangelsk to an older class of 23 Creoles and natives, directed by a graduate of Moscow's Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra Theological Academy. These schools accommodated 140 students, and twice a week the bishop assembled 150 other children, boys on one day and girls on another, to teach them catechism.

record his approval of Franciscan hospitality and well-ordered missions, and praises their treatment of the Indians. As George Schazner says, “Whatever [Fr. John’s] later attitude may have been, the 1836 *Diary* of the Russian leader is interesting, for it contains no evidence of friction between the Spanish-speaking and the Russians, nor allusions to ill feeling on either side.”^{xix}

Also, like the Orthodox St. Makary Glukharev, the “Apostle to Altai,” Fr. John seems to have approved of the Spanish missions in which Christian natives lived apart from the influence of their non-Christian native villages and families, and he calls the Mexican “emancipation” of the natives, “the freedom to loaf.” This is not quite the politically correct version that we are taught today, but then we were not there. Father John was the missionary in the field.

The End of the Spanish California Missions

Although he rarely comments on political matters in his journals, Fr. John notes in footnote 5 in his entry for Thursday, September 3:

Soon after our visit, the Californians seceded from Mexico, and then drove out all of the Mexicans. There were so few native-born Californians, however, that there was almost no one to fill the unofficial ranks in the government and to occupy military and civilian positions, beside the Indians.

Before he even arrived home in Sitka, within days or weeks of his departure from San Francisco, the northernmost Franciscan missions were confiscated and Frs. Quijos and Gonzalez, along with the other Franciscans who had extended the Russian cleric such warm hospitality, were expelled from California. With the forced secularization, 15,000 native Indian Christians lost the protection of the mission system. As Charles Lummis, a 19th century journalist, wrote: “Disestablishment—a polite term for robbery—by Mexico in 1834, was the death blow of the mission system. The lands were confiscated; the buildings were sold for beggarly sums, and often for beggarly purposes. The Indian converts were scattered and starved out; the noble buildings were pillaged for their tiles and adobes...”^{xx} Fr. John neither anticipated the withdrawal of Russians from Fort Ross five years later nor could he have

Opposite: Old Mission Santa Clara, 1899. Santa Clara, California.



foreseen that California would be summarily “annexed” by Americans in 1848 and incorporated as a U.S. state in 1850.¹¹

Charles R. Hale, an Episcopalian clergyman, who wrote the first biography of St. Innocent notes the close of Fort Ross:

A fact in this connection, not generally known, may here be mentioned that a Russian settlement, under the name of Russ, was made under the auspices of Baranoff, in California, on the coast about forty miles northwest of San Francisco. A number of Indians here became members of the Orthodox Church, and when the colony was removed to Sitka, went northward with it.^{xxi}

Father John left San Francisco on September 23, 1836 and arrived home in Sitka on October 13. After the death of his wife, he was tonsured in 1840 with the monastic name of Innokenty (Innocent), and consecrated as bishop of Russian Alaska. Now his years of pastoral experience and study of native languages came to fruition in an inspired episcopal administration that built a cathedral and numerous churches, supported missionaries throughout Alaska, and launched native schools and seminaries.

It has been claimed that it was during St. Innocent’s episcopate that the first Catholic priests were admitted to Russian America, and H. H. Bancroft adds: “During Veniaminov’s administration a Lutheran clergyman was welcomed at Sitka and the same spirit of tolerance was extended later to the Jesuits, several Poles of that order being transferred from Canada!”^{xxii xxiii}

Bancroft, however, was mistaken on one point. Unless these were passing visitors, according to Roman Catholic records the first Catholic missionaries only came to Alaska in 1872, and Jesuits from Canada in 1898.^{xxiv xxv}

In regards to “a Lutheran clergyman,” today’s Sitka Orthodox tradition relates that after Sitka’s Finnish Lutheran boat-builders helped build the Cathedral of Archangel Michael, Bishop Innocent in turn designed the Lutheran Church to be built across the street from the cathedral. Lutheran oral history, however, claims that the Russian bishop asked that the Lutherans confine their proselytizing to their own premises and that as they were so close to the Russian cathedral, that they not build a second bell tower.^{xxvi}

11 Fort Ross was sold by the Russians in 1842 to John Sutter, on whose land the Gold Rush began in California. The fort had never been able to raise enough grain to feed Russian Alaska, and the political anarchy of the Mexican Republic had made trade conditions increasingly unstable.

Whether or not these details are true, it is not to be expected that the bishop was overjoyed at the prospect of Lutheran clergy in Orthodox Russian America. However, with a Lutheran governor headquartered in Sitka along with 130 Lutheran shipwrights and their families, he would have understood their desire for their own minister. In fact, the hierarch was indebted to his Lutheran colleagues, particularly to Russian-American Company General Manager A.K. Etolin, as we see from a letter to Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, describing his return to Sitka as the newly consecrated bishop.

... September 27th [1841] I went ashore, where I was received by all the chief authorities, the officials and the entire body of the Orthodox, amongst whom were some baptized Koloshes standing by themselves. In a partly official dress I went to the Church, where I delivered a short address to my new flock and offered up a prayer of thanksgiving to our Lord God.

The Church, at New Archangel, which is growing old and will need to be rebuilt in four or five years I found otherwise in fair condition and handsomely ornamented as if they really expected a Bishop to come. But all this is to be ascribed to the zeal of the principal warden, Etolin, who from the time of his coming to the colony has been earnest to have the church in good order.

This was followed by an 1844 letter about his new Bishop's House:

1) The Chief Administration instructed (Gov. Etolin) to build a small house for me, and he built, so to speak, a mansion; [moreover he was told] to build after the Company work was all finished, but he built in the midst of work. 2) I of course have no right to demand of the Company heat and light and servants; but I am enjoying the use of all these things, and of course, by his direction. 3) Finally, though, I must admit this somewhat shamefacedly, for my own support here I received very much from his own provisions. In view of this it would be unjust of me not to mention the outstanding treatment shown me by Mr. Etolin.^{xxvii}

Orthodox today regard 19th-century Russia as a pure and conservative religious tradition, and it may have been so, yet there was also a marked willingness among many Orthodox churchmen to engage those of other faiths in theological conversation and to give credit where it was due.

Appendix: The Forced Closure of the California Missions

From the first mission's founding at San Diego in 1769, each of the twenty-one California missions was intended by the Franciscan authorities to be turned over to "secular" (celibate non-monastic) clergy, and the common lands to be distributed among the native population within ten years of the mission's founding. This policy was based on Spain's experience with more advanced tribes in Mexico, Central America, and Peru, and was welcomed by the Franciscans as a measure to free the monks to evangelize more remote territories. Within a few years, however, it became apparent to Friar Junipero Serra and his associates that the new Christians of Alta California would need a longer period of support than their southern co-religionists. None of the California missions ever attained self-sufficiency as had missions in Mexico, and all required continuing financial assistance from Spain.

Following the Napoleonic Wars, the high cost of sustaining remote outposts was no longer feasible and Spain was forced to reassess its position in the New World. Increasing revolutionary ferment finally brought about an overthrow of the Catholic monarchy of New Spain, and in 1823 Mexico, including Baja and Alta California, became a republic. The prosperous mission lands were targeted by the new republic's politicians, powerful landowners, and incoming immigrants, and calls for the "disestablishment" of the missions increased until 1826, when a "Proclamation of Emancipation" was issued that affected both Baja and Alta California.

At first glance, natives within the military districts of San Diego, Santa Barbara, and Monterey were now "free" to leave missionary rule and allegedly become Mexican citizens. When the spurious offer was ignored by the majority of the 15,000 native Christians who populated the California missions, the Mexican government showed their hand by expelling all Spaniards under sixty years of age from Mexican territories, thus robbing the missions of their experienced Spanish Franciscan pastors and administrators.

Opposite: Chapel interior today, Mission San Jose. Fremont, California.



Although a few elderly monks were at first exempt from this 1827 expulsion, in 1833 the Mexican Congress ratified the *Act for the Secularization of the Missions of California*, providing for colonial development of both Alta and Baja California with proceeds gained from the sale of the mission property to private individuals. Mission San Juan Capistrano was the first to feel the effects of this legislation the following year when, in August of 1834, a decree of confiscation was issued. Nine other settlements quickly followed, with six more in 1835: San Buenaventura and San Francisco de Asís were among the last to succumb, in June and December 1836, respectively, the year of Fr. John's visit. The Franciscans were forced to abandon the missions, taking only the ecclesiastical treasures they could carry. Local landowners quickly rounded up livestock and plundered the buildings for construction materials. Within a few years the missions were neglected ruins.

When California was granted U.S. statehood in 1851, Catholic Bishop Joseph Alemany of Monterey petitioned the Public Land Commission for the return of California mission lands that had been confiscated and sold by the Mexican government.^{12 13} The Public Land Commission decided in favor of the Roman Catholic claims to 40,000 acres, which included land occupied by former mission buildings, cemeteries, and gardens, exclusive of agricultural and grazing land. The commission's decision was ratified by President Abraham Lincoln on March 18, 1865, who signed the deeds over to the Catholic Church as his last official resolution prior to his assassination on April 15.^{xxviii xxix}

As the president put his pen to the document, Fr. Ioann Veniaminov (now resident in Yakutsk, Siberia as Archbishop Innocent of Kamchatka, and the Kuril and Aleutian Islands) was only a few short years away from being elected Metropolitan of Moscow, the ruling hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church. Notice of the land's return would certainly have reached him from his auxiliary bishop in Novoarchangelsk, bringing with it memories of his short yet pleasant visit to the California missions. And, we think, the news would have pleased him. ✦

12 The commission was set up by the U.S. Congress to rule on the validity of Spanish and Mexican land grants prior to statehood.

13 At this time the diocese of Monterey encompassed the entire former Mexican province of Alta California. Alemany was concurrently elevated as the first Roman Catholic archbishop of San Francisco, which included all Catholic churches and properties north of Monterey, along with Utah and Nevada.

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