

commitment of many Oblate religious. It is also clear that, in addition to their recent apology, the Oblates intend to remain with the Native people—now more than ever and as long as they can—as friends, advocates, and students.

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JOURNALS OF THE PRIEST IOANN VENIAMINOV IN ALASKA, 1823–36. Translated by JEROME KISSLINGER, with introduction and commentary by S.A. MOUSALIMAS. The Rasmuson Library Historical Translation Series, Vol. VII. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1993. xxxix + 220 p., notes, index. Softbound. US\$17.50.

Reading diary accounts of others does not guarantee inspiration. At first assessment, Veniaminov's journals, written in the careful, spare form presented here, do not lend to much excitement. His short, almost daily entries of tireless missionary activity covering close to eleven years on Unalaska and other Aleutian islands (plus added recordings of trips to Sitka and California) first struck this reader as rather mundane.

However, when these journals are studied within the larger context of the life and service of this "model northern missionary" of the Russian Orthodox tradition, his accounts become noteworthy and revealing. With the publication of this firsthand collection, we now have a work through which to read Aleut history as it was taking place. It records how a missionary and his Native associate co-produced the first literature published in the local Aleut languages. Petrivelli summarizes: "This history pertains particularly to the Aleut religion, and it is their religion that has sustained our people" (Petrivelli, Foreword, p. vii).

It seems appropriate to provide a certain backdrop to this documentation. Following the European discovery of Alaska in 1741, Siberian adventurers frequently visited the Aleutians. Quite a number remained permanently and married Alaskan women. They brought their Russian Orthodoxy with them, and their children were raised with a modicum of Christian piety (e.g., baptism and basic prayers). When the first Orthodox missionaries arrived from Valamo, Finland in 1794, they found, to their surprise, that most Aleuts were already "pre-evangelized" Christians. What they lacked were essential church teachings, liturgical disciplines, and pastoral ministrations. In many ways, Veniaminov's missionary style provided just the kind of benign "law and order" that was required by a people that, for several generations, had been integrating its traditional native spiritualities with Eastern Christianity.

Soon after his arrival in Unalaska in 1824, Veniaminov (who eventually became the Metropolitan of Moscow)

developed a writing system and started translating scriptures, creeds and liturgies into the local Aleut dialects. Being of a practical as well as a spiritual bent, he founded several schools, constructed two churches, decorated them with icons, and built organs to accompany worship. He was instrumental in evangelizing indigenous peoples on both sides of the Bering Sea, thus providing a Christian spiritual solidarity that linked the continents. He was both a teacher and a disciple of those he served.

Perhaps most significantly, Veniaminov established a contextualized or enculturated form of evangelization that was not to become commonly accepted by the majority of Christian missionaries for nearly a century and a half.

When Veniaminov later became bishop, he would ensure that principles he had developed as a missionary priest were practiced in every station founded in the Aleutians. Workers would strive to master the local tongues and use them in their pastoral service. Wherever possible, traditional Native qualities and spiritual customs would be affirmed. Compare this to Christian missionary activity exercised almost anywhere else, where Native languages, practices and spiritual traditions were demonized and denigrated, and it is not surprising that the Aleutian church developed a loyal, stable following that has survived to the present.

From those foundations of demonstrated priestly holiness and education—characteristics highly venerated among Orthodox Christians everywhere—emerged two generations of Native Alaskan lay missionaries. These aboriginal leaders were responsible not only for the survival, but also for the growth of the church in Alaska after the colony was sold to the United States in 1867. At that time most Siberian clergy returned to Russia, and the diocese shifted its attention and focus from Asia to America.

These eleven journals (plus addenda) reflect the busy schedule of a devoted priest whose overriding concern was to communicate and to understand the folkways of his flock. He notes these endeavours routinely and simply. Also included are observations of flora and fauna. Veniaminov expressed a concern for the protection of endangered species long before it became common or fashionable to do so. Behind the notation of celebrating daily services, preaching, teaching, baptizing, hearing confessions, and visiting the sick is reflected the devotion of a man with a healthy spirituality. "Everything in life is linked to everything else" is clearly the philosophy recorded here, and this is no doubt one of the qualities that endeared him to the people.

The introduction by S.A. Mousalimas provides a frame of reference to help the reader understand the journals; an explanation of technical terms and concepts; an outline of how Veniaminov conceived and developed his parish; assistance to make the journals a useful resource in the study of Aleut history; and an overture to a fuller appreciation of Veniaminov's ministry and character.

With valuable Foreword, Afterword and introductory support, these rather mundane records assume a special vitality. Reread, with appropriate clarification, at least some casual notations take on a serendipitous quality. In many cases,

Veniaminov provides his own footnotes, which are often quite colourful. Editorial work is of good quality. Undoubtedly, with the literary backup that is provided, these journals impart a significance well beyond their otherwise pedestrian character.

A basic weakness of the book is its almost total lack of maps or related illustrative content. The reader is left to work with locations and images from memory.

The purposes of the book—to provide a work through which to read Aleut history and to introduce readers to the development of Aleut literature—are well served. However, it is clear that these stand as mere supplementation to the newly emerging fields of traditional history writing and aboriginal oral culture. As much as the editors wish to suggest that Veniaminov was a visionary and an innovator (which he was), it is also clear that he was a man of his time and culture. His personal reading (often noted at the end of each month's entries) was essentially from the Russian and Western classics. There is clear indication (e.g., his failure to refer to his wife, even at the time of childbirth) that he saw himself in the traditional male priestly mode. So, it may be claimed that these journals portray an exceptional person who was at the same time historically and culturally confined.

All of this should not deter anyone from consulting this rather remarkable collection. It comes recommended for its lucidity and value as a literary period piece. Nor should we underestimate the long-term contribution of Veniaminov himself. He was a Renaissance person of sorts, whose field of service was the North and whose interests and journal recordings ranged widely and—in the end—provocatively.

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