

## CHAPTER ONE: PROLOGUE (1794 - 1900)

On the 2nd of October 1794, eight missionary monks from the monasteries of Valaam and Konev of the Russian Orthodox Church under the jurisdiction of Metropolitan Gabriel of St. Petersburg arrived in Kodiak Alaska.<sup>1</sup> This missionary band, led by Archimandrite Ioasaph (Bolotov), included Hieromonk Juvenaly, Hieromonk Afanassy, Hierodeacon Nektary, Monk Ioasaph, and Monk German—all from the Valaam Monastery—as well as Hieromonk Makary and Hierodeacon Stephan, who were from the Konev Monastery. They had left St. Petersburg around Christmas of 1793 and the long trip, taken with the approval of Empress Katherine and the Holy Governing Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church took over ten months to complete.<sup>2</sup>

The situation of the new mission in the first weeks and months was far from what might have been hoped for. The relations between the monks and Alexander Baranov, the new manager of the Russian American Company in Kodiak, left much to be desired and there were complaints by both sides to their respective superiors in Russia. More seriously, the effectiveness of the new mission was seriously threatened when Juvenaly was martyred by natives on the mainland due to his efforts to convert them to the Orthodox faith.<sup>3</sup> Further—Archimandrite Ioasaph who had returned to Russia to get more support for the mission—had been consecrated as Bishop for the new missionary territory but on the return trip together with three other monks lost his life in a shipwreck.<sup>4</sup> Thus in the first five years of the mission half of the staff had been lost including its superior. It was a most grievous blow for the newly-established mission.

The Monk German now shouldered the responsibility for the continuance of the mission with the assistance of Hieromonk Afanassy.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless after

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<sup>1</sup> One Hundredth Anniversary of Orthodoxy in America 1794-1894, The Kodiak Mission 1794-1838, St. Petersburg, 1894, p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. pp. 66-68.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. pp. 72-73.

<sup>4</sup> "History of the Russian Orthodox Church in America" by Archbishop Leonty (Turkevitch) FROC Journal, June '43, p. 10<sup>3</sup> passim 100th Anniversary of Orthodoxy in America, St. Petersburg, 1894.

two years of intensive missionary endeavor the number of baptized natives had reached the figure of twelve thousand.<sup>6</sup> In addition to simple instruction in the catechism, schools were set up and a Father Gideon (a well-educated priest and seminary teacher in Russia) stayed three years on Kodiak and organized the first school which boasted one hundred pupils divided into two classes and made up both of natives and children of the Russian American Company. One of the best native students, Prokopy Laritsev, returned to Russia to attend Seminary at St. Petersburg and after being ordained a priest in 1810 returned to Alaska. Unfortunately some of the Russian hunters attached to the Russian American Company were not willing to accept the priestly ministrations of a native Alaskan priest and after several years, at his own request, Father Prokopy was transferred to a parish in Siberia.

Missionary endeavors on Kodiak suffered another setback when the Russian American Company established their main base of operations at New Archangel—what is known today as (and even in the early days was occasionally called) Sitka.

The Monk German (who was canonized on the 9th of August 1970 as “St. Herman of Alaska” by the Autocephalous Orthodox Church in America) soon retired to a hermitage on the uninhabited island known as Spruce Island near St. Paul’s Harbor. There he built a little chapel and called his hermitage “New Valaam.” At the age of sixty three he returned to New Valaam permanently and spent a life of holy asceticism until he fell asleep in the Lord in 1837.<sup>7</sup>

In 1824 a young Siberian priest and his family came to the large Alaskan island of Unalaska and his accomplishments over a quarter of a century earned him the title of “The Apostle of Alaska.”<sup>8</sup> It is generally agreed that he was the greatest of the missionaries sent by the Orthodox Church of Russia in the 19th century and some would go further and call him the greatest missionary in all Russian history.<sup>9</sup> His name was Father John Veniaminov, who was born of very humble circumstances in 1797 and being endowed with a number of remarkable talents, the last eleven years of his life were spent as Metropolitan Innocent of Moscow and All Russia.

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> The best sources on the life of St. Herman of Alaska are: (a) The 100th Anniversary of Orthodoxy in America—already cited, which is outstanding; (b) The Life of the Valaam Monk German the American Missionary, St. Petersburg, 1894, a brochure; Also see “St. German of Alaska, the Wonderworker” by Archbishop Michael of Voronezh and Lipets in the “Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate,” No. 11, 1970, pp. 60-72. For a description of the canonization, see “Glorification of the Elder German of Alaska” by P. Urzhumtsev also in the No. 11, 1970 issue of JMP pp. 48-50.

<sup>8</sup> The Life and Work of Innocent the Archbishop of Kamchatka, the Kuriles, and the Aleutian Islands, and later Metropolitan of Moscow, by Ivan P. Barsukov, San Francisco, 1897.

<sup>9</sup> The Foreign Missions of the Russian Orthodox Church by Sergei Bolshakoff, London, 1943, p. 86.

## Prologue

Father John had received a good seminary education at the diocesan Seminary at Irkutsk and had been recommended to attend the Moscow Theological Academy but he felt an inner calling to accept the work of a missionary priest in Alaska. Even from the first days of his arrival in 1824 Father John made an excellent impression on all who dealt with him.<sup>10</sup> More importantly, he was a man of action. When he first arrived in Unalaska there was neither a temple nor school and there had been no priest for almost thirty years after Father Makary had baptized nearly all the inhabitants in 1795. Outward religious customs were still adhered to, although to use Father John's words: "The people pray as if to an unknown God."<sup>11</sup> Within a year of Father John's arrival both a chapel and school had been established and he began to learn the native language and customs of the people to the extent that eventually over the years, a work of two volumes which included linguistic, ethnographic, geographic, and even meteorological material was published in 1840 in St. Petersburg with the enthusiastic recommendation of Alaska's scholarly governor Baron von Wrangel.<sup>12</sup>

Father John became the father of the literary language of the Fox-Aleut dialect: —he created the alphabet, wrote the grammar, collected the words, and then began to produce a religious literature in the native language. In this he was given substantial help by Father Jacob Netsvietov, a native Aleutian Creole who had been trained at the Diocesan Seminary at Irkutsk, and who was a true spiritual leader and loved by his people. During the ten year stay in Unalaska, Father John translated into the Fox dialect the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom (not including the private prayers of the priest), the Catechism, the Gospel of St. Matthew, and also a small book about the basic truths of salvation entitled "The Way Into the Kingdom of Heaven."<sup>13</sup>

As a reward for his spiritual, missionary, and linguistic labors, Father John was awarded the Archpriest's Cross by the Holy Governing Synod and given a thousand rubles by the Russian American Company.<sup>14</sup>

In 1834 Father John moved to Sitka because it was felt he would be more effective as a missionary among the warlike, proud, and independent Tlingit (Kolosh) Indian tribe. In 1836 an important Imperial Ukaz was issued by Tsar Nicholas I concerning primary education in Alaska and stipulating that the primary goals were to serve the following ends: (a) to train students to become

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<sup>10</sup> The Russian Orthodox Church in Russian-America by Michael George Kovach, Ph.D. thesis, University of Pittsburgh, Pa. 1957, p. 136.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 145.

<sup>12</sup> "Education and the Schools in Russian Alaska" by Toivo Harjunpaa at Berkeley, California, *Eripainos Historica II Studia Historica Jvaskylaensia*, Jvaskyla 1967, p. 97.

<sup>13</sup> *Die Russische Orthodoxe Heidenmission seit Peter dem Grossen*, Munster, Westfallen, 1954, p. 147, by J. Glazik.

<sup>14</sup> Kovach, op. cit. p. 152.