

By Seth Grant, 1st place winner, 2018

there in the 1770s . Over the next fifty years, several Orthodox missionaries (most notably St. Herman) would come to Alaska, often clashing with the Russian-American . Christianity did not gain much ground with the Unangan people (as they called themselves) until the arrival of Father Veniaminov in the 1820s (Black 239).

John Veniaminov was not born a Father, of course. Rather, he was Irkutsk province to a father who died when he was six. Veniaminov was sent to study at Irkutsk Seminary, where he remained over a decade. In 1817 he married Catherine Sharina, and in 1818 he graduated. He taught in an Irkutsk parish school until 1821, at which point he was ordained a priest for the Church of the Annunciation, where he served a further two years . Early in 1823, however, the Holy Synod of Russia sent orders to Irkutsk to commission a priest to Unalaska. His bishop asked Veniaminov. Veniaminov, feeling in his heart that this was from the Lord, gathered his family his mother, his wife, and their two young children and went. The journey took fourteen months. By the time they arrived on Unalaska Island, July 1824 had drawn to an end .

Almost as soon as their boat reached the dark shore, Father Veniaminov set about preparing the island for Christ. He built a house for his family, a chapel, even a meteorological station (Graves). All the construction was done with the help of the native Aleuts, whom Veniaminov trained in the arts of carpentry, blacksmithing, and masonry . The chapel, begun

Russian Orthodox churches in America. Parts of the chapel remains and services are still conducted in Slavonic and Aleut a practice that also arose from the efforts of Veniaminov .

Father Veniaminov prioritized language learning from the beginning, and he learned quickly. By 1826, only two years after his arrival, he knew enough of the Unagan dialect to begin

(Ivanov 6). The result

was a version of Cyrillic script adapted to the phonic peculiarities of Aleut. It is interesting to note that this effort keeps up with the Orthodox linguistic tradition, as Cyrillic itself was developed by Byzantine missionaries (Saints Cyril and Methodius) in the ninth century A.D. to reach the Slavic people with the Gospel . Like Cyril and Methodius,

Veniaminov aimed to make the Aleuts more receptive to Christianity by translating Scripture, hymns, and the Orthodox catechism into their own language. This effort was aided by culture and his consequent ability to translate Russian phrases and liturgical terms into an Aleut equivalent that made sense

Gospel of Matthew to Houston Baptist University, and it is now on display in the Dunham Bible Museum.

In 1840, Father John Veniaminov was transferred to Sitka, where he picked up another language and became the Bishop of Kamchatka, the Kurils, and his beloved Aleutian Islands. After ten years of service as bishop, he was called back to Russia to become first an archbishop and later the Metropolitan of Moscow, head of the Russian Orthodox Church. He served in that role from 1868 until his death in 1879 (Black 240). He published many works over the course of his life; *An Indication of the Pathway into the Kingdom of Heaven*, his catechism and accompanying treatise on the Aleut people and language, is a landmark work of both Orthodoxy and anthropology (see

News, June 2007. www.hbu.edu/publications/hbunews/NewsV-45_N1_07-07-original.pdf. Accessed 23 Feb. 2018.

The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in America. Edited by Paul Gutjhar, Oxford University, 2017.

Bishop

Orthodox Church in

America, oca.org/holy-synod/past-primates/innocent-of-alaska. Accessed 21 Feb. 2018.