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INTRODUCTION

The Representation of Junípero Serra in California History

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Junípero Serra was the subject of the first published book written in Alta California. In September 1784, a week or so after he had celebrated Serra’s funeral Mass, Francisco Palóu, Serra’s former student and closest friend, returned to his post at Mission San Francisco de Asís. He spent the next months writing Serra’s biography which he entitled Historical Account of the Life and Apostolic Labors of the Venerable Father Fray Junípero Serra. Palóu took this manuscript with him when he returned to Mexico City in the summer of 1785. He circulated it among a number of his companions at the Colegio de San Fernando. At their suggestion he added a final chapter that dealt with Serra’s virtues. The completed book was published by the Mexico City publishing house of Don Felipe de Zúñiga y Ontiveros in 1787.¹

Palóu had a number of purposes in writing this biography. One was personal. Junípero Serra had been his teacher, mentor, and friend. Palóu’s preservation of his memory in this volume was an act of personal homage, what the ancient Romans might have called “pietas.” The relationship between Palóu and Serra had been extremely close. At the beginning of

¹ Francisco Palóu, Relación histórica de la vida y apostólicas tareas del venerable padre fray Junípero Serra (Mexico: La Imprenta de don Felipe de Zúñiga y Ontiveros, 1787).
the final chapter Palóu spoke of “the intimate friendship and love I owed him” from the time they first met in Mallorca almost half a century before. Palóu was the first person to whom Serra had confided his desire to go to America as a missionary. They worked together in the Sierra Gorda for eight years. They were slated to go to Texas together but the destruction of Mission San Sabá in 1758 by a Wichita, Comanche, and Caddo force thwarted that assignment. They both worked out of the Colegio de San Fernando for the next eight years. They spent a year close to each other in Baja California before Serra left for Alta California in 1769. When the Franciscans transferred the Baja California missions to the Dominicans in 1773, Serra begged Palóu, then in Baja California, not to go back to Mexico City. He hoped, he wrote, that Palóu would go to Alta California so that “we should live and die there together.” They spent considerable time together at Mission San Carlos before Palóu founded Mission San Francisco in 1776. When the two were at Santa Clara a few months before Serra’s death, Palóu wrote that Serra “shed many tears; nor did I shed any fewer tears, for I feared this would be the last time we would see each other.” For Palóu, writing Serra’s biography was an act of devotion to his closest companion. He presented Serra as a dedicated and selfless priest, impelled only by love for all of God’s children, to spread the message of salvation and civilization to the farthest corners of the globe.2

But Palóu’s purpose went beyond the personal. He also hoped that he could create a compelling picture of Serra as a dedicated and successful missionary and that this picture would inspire younger Franciscans from Mallorca and Spain to volunteer for the California missions. In the volume’s dedicatory letter, Palóu stated that a mere three days before Serra’s death the two of them were lamenting the lack of new recruits for the missions. Serra remarked that Juan Crespi’s diaries ought to be sent back to Europe since they might inspire young religious to volunteer for California. Palóu agreed and sent Serra’s own diary off to Mexico as well. He hoped that the biography might also serve as an effective recruiting

tool. To that end he dedicated the book to the Franciscan Province of Mallorca.³

There was still a wider purpose to the biography. Serra had spent a good part of the last seven years of his life struggling against Governor Felipe de Neve, a colonial official who believed that missions were anachronistic institutions that retarded the civic development of the Spanish empire by inhibiting the assimilation of the native peoples. Neve tried to restrict the number of missionaries and to limit their power over the Indians. He also tried to stimulate the development of secular pueblos as a counterweight to the influence of the missions. In these moves, Neve was implementing in Alta California the Bourbon policy of curtailing the influence of autonomous religious actors in the development of New Spain. This policy had already begun to be put in place in central Mexico with the secularization of the curatos in 1749. The same policy was evident in the de-emphasis of missions as principal colonizing institutions in the government-sponsored colonization of Nuevo Santander in the 1750s. When Neve left the governorship in 1782, his successor Pedro Fages continued to implement these Bourbon initiatives.⁴

Palou attempted to create a master narrative to contest these official policies. His biography made Junípero Serra the central character in the establishment of the Spanish Empire in the far northwestern frontier. Towards the end of his book, he anointed Serra as the founding father of Alta California: "In this northern and new California, previously inhabited only by gentiles, he left fifteen settlements [poblaciones], six inhabited by Spaniards or gente de razón, and nine by full-blooded native neophytes baptized by His Reverence and his missionary companions." The "nine" settlements were the missions and Serra was indeed their founder. But the rest of Palou's sentence was a dramatic overstatement. For the "six"

³ Palou, Life of Fray Junípero Serra, xxiv–xxv.
settlements "inhabited by Spaniards or gente de razón" were four presidios and two pueblos. In fact, Serra had endured a frosty relationship with the presidios and he had opposed the foundation of the pueblos.5

However, Palóu had an important political purpose in arguing that Serra was responsible for the entire Spanish presence in Alta California. In the mid-1780s, the Colegio de San Fernando was vigorously lobbying in Mexico City to have the restrictions on the number of missionaries allowed at each mission lifted and the authority of the missionaries over the mission land and population restored. Palóu's argument supported these efforts, for he was maintaining that those who were opposing missions and missionaries were actually opposing those people and institutions who were primarily responsible for Alta California's remarkable growth. The Colegio's efforts were successful. In 1786 the Guardian reported that the Colegio had received permission from the viceroy to found Mission Santa Bárbara under the system Serra had championed and Neve had sought to replace. There were to be two priests at the new establishment and they were to exercise expansive control over the temporal affairs of the mission. That same year the Colegio elected Palóu, the living embodiment of Serra's missionary ideas, as its Guardian. The next year, with the publication of the Serra biography, the Colegio was attempting to ensure that its victory be permanent.6

Palóu's biography of Serra thus combined three purposes. As a personal document, it was an emotional and heartfelt tribute to a dear friend. As a religious document, it was an attempt to convince more Spanish Franciscans to become missionaries. As a political document, it was an attempt to convince the government to change its colonial policies. The biography succeeded in all three purposes. First, the personal picture that Palóu painted of his friend quickly became the normative picture of Serra and it has shaped much of the writing about him since that time. Second, enough missionaries came to Alta California so that many of the twenty-one missions often had two resident priests, usually from Spain, until secularization in the 1830s. Finally, by the turn of the

5. Palóu, Life of Fray Junipero Serra, 257.
nineteenth century, the missions had become the dominant institutions in Alta California and they shaped its economic and social life.

Palóu's book quickly became the master narrative of early Alta California. Works about California written from within the Spanish context generally accepted Palóu's picture. For instance, the first English book written about California was published in 1839 by Alexander Forbes, a British merchant resident in Tepic, Mexico. Forbes's treatment of the founding of Alta California relied heavily on Palóu and concluded with a direct quote from the biography that praised Serra's "glorious actions." Similarly, an 1846 volume, *Life in California*, by Alfred Robinson, who spent fifteen years in Mexican Alta California, described early California as exhibiting "the success and triumph of the Cross." Robinson spoke of the mission system in very positive terms: "The neophyte was protected, conquests increased, and the abundance of the warehouses and granaries continued to be distributed with ... liberality." The author of the first history of Mexican Alta California, Antonio María Osio, told his readers in 1851 that if they wished to know what had occurred in Alta California before the beginning of Osio's narrative in the early nineteenth century, they should consult the biography of Serra.7

During the first half of the nineteenth century, Palóu's book was the only published volume available on Spanish Alta California. By the 1830s, the achievement of Mexican independence and the secularization of the missions had created a situation in which the religious and political aims that had animated Palóu no longer applied. What was left was the personal picture he had painted of Junípero Serra—a dedicated, selfless missionary who did not allow personal hardship or pain to interfere with his desire to bring salvation and civilization to the Indians whom he loved. That picture persisted even after the American conquest fundamentally changed the nature of California historiography.

When Americans began to write the history of California their perspective was quite different from those whose views have been shaped by

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the Spanish and Mexican experiences. For nineteenth-century Americans, the defining events of California's history were the American conquest and the Gold Rush. Thus, early historical efforts tended to focus on the events after 1846. Franklin Tuthill's *History of California*, which Kevin Starr has termed "California's first mature work of history," and which was published by H. H. Bancroft and Company in 1866, was a good example of this. The volume contained forty-three chapters, only thirteen of which dealt with California before the arrival of the Americans. Spanish California was not emphasized, and Serra, mentioned on only a few pages, was not a major figure. However, where he did appear, the treatment was positive. Tuthill relied on Palou and remarked at one point that "Father Junipero learned to love [the Indians] as if they were his own flesh." In the main, however, anticipating generations of subsequent California history textbooks, Tuthill sped through the Spanish and Mexican eras so that the real action—the arrival of Frémont, the Bear Flag Rebellion, and the Gold Rush—would not be overly delayed.8

A dozen years after Tuthill, John S. Hittell published *A History of the City of San Francisco*. In this work he introduced a number of themes that would come to characterize a good amount of nineteenth-century American historical writing on Serra and the missions. While he regarded Serra as personally honorable, he thought that his behavior and his brand of Catholicism were a bit unusual. He wrote: "Junipero Serra was a typical Franciscan, a man to whom his religion was everything. . . . Art or poetry never served to sharpen his wits, lighten his spirits, or solace his weary moments. . . . He knew nothing of the science and philosophy which threw all enlightened nations into fermentation a hundred years ago." A man with such views was basically incapable of establishing a system that would benefit anyone, especially California's native peoples. Hittell wrote, "The Indians of California did not thrive anywhere under the care of the Friars." He continued, "It is a mistake to suppose that the Missions were prosperous institutions until their secularization. They were not even self-supporting. They were for a long time a burden on the government." Hittell believed in enlightenment and progress, and he did

not see how a man with Serra's closed and retrogressive views could have made much of a contribution to California.⁹

The next significant work of California history to appear was Bancroft's monumental seven-volume *History of California*. The volumes were written by multiple authors, which perhaps accounts for the somewhat variant assessments of Serra that appear in their pages. Serra appears most completely in the first volume. There Bancroft tends to replicate John Hittell's judgments—a decent man with bizarre ideas in the service of a flawed system. Bancroft wrote that Serra was "a great and remarkable man. Few who came to California during the missionary regime were his equal in devotion to and success in his work." He continued, "His faults

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were those of his cloth, and he was not much more fanatical than others of his time, being like most of his Californian companions, a brilliant exception in point of morality to friars of some other lands and times.”

Bancroft’s view of the mission system was at times contradictory. At one point he argued that “down to 1800 and considerably later the natives were as a rule most kindly treated.” But he also agreed with La Pérouse’s severe criticism of the amount of coercion that existed within the missions, and he criticized Serra for never doubting “his absolute right to flog his neophytes for any slight negligence in matters of the faith.”

Bancroft occasionally tempered his praise of Serra’s personal characteristics. He commented upon Serra’s “pride” and his “stubborn pertinacity.” Bancroft, or at least the writer of his second volume, often found Fermín Francisco de Lasuén more congenial than Serra, and Serra suffered by contrast. Bancroft wrote of Lasuén, “There was in him nothing of the bigot, ascetic, or fanatic; he was not the man to live through life on a sore leg if a cure could be found; and we hear nothing of fasting and the scourge.” It is pretty clear to whom Bancroft was comparing Lasuén. In another passage in the same volume, Bancroft spoke of “the arbitrary and un-conciliating spirit of Serra.” Elsewhere he expressed relief that Mariano Payeras had “none of Serra’s bigotry.”

In California Pastoral, which was published after the early volumes of the History of California had been completed, Bancroft tended to soften his personal critiques of Serra while at the same time, sharpening his critiques of the mission system. “Father Junípero, blessed and just!” he exclaimed in the overwrought prose that consistently marred this volume. “Serra was,” Bancroft summarized, “a good and great man.” But his role as a missionary overseeing a number of landed estates tended, in Bancroft’s perspective, to stain his virtue: “There was something more than piety in Serra’s California life—there was wealth and power, power and wealth for the church, of course—the Almighty not having retained as much property on this planet when he made it as he now desired to have.” Bancroft’s judgment was that the effects of the mission system were disastrous: “Those first pure priests who came hither, devoted ministers of the living

11. Ibid., 1: 322, 327; 2: 9, 163, 490.
God, who really desired the welfare of the aboriginals, desired them to live and not die; these with their comforts and their kindness killed as surely as did Cortés and Pizarro with their gunpowder, steel, and piety.”

The last of the great nineteenth-century California historians was Theodore H. Hittell, brother of John S. Hittell. His four-volume History of California appeared between 1885 and 1897. Relying on Palóu, Hittell offered a version of the positive view of Serra’s character that had appeared in Tuthill. For Hittell, Serra “was very much such a man as St. Francis might have been if he had lived in the eighteenth century. There was the same earnestness, the same persistency, the same devotion.” Hittell said Palóu believed that Serra deserved canonization, and he stated that he agreed. But his judgment on the missions repeated the negative assessment that had come to characterize the work of California’s first generation of historians. He argued that “the work of the missionaries in California . . . looked only to the aggrandizement of a system and dominion that has long outlived their usefulness. It did not contemplate or in any proper sense regard the progress of a true civilized nation. It evolved no germs out of which were to spring higher and better forms. It was barren and unprofitable.”

Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century a clear historiographical consensus about Junípero Serra had emerged in California. He was a good man, perhaps flawed, but still basically good. But he worked in a system whose bad effects far outweighed the good intentions that he and his fellow missionaries brought to it. However, by the end of the nineteenth century this consensus was already in the process of being challenged. The challenge did not come from within the historical profession, but rather from a cultural movement that we have come to know as the Spanish Revival.

The groundwork for this movement was laid in the 1880s by Helen Hunt Jackson. She regarded herself as a crusader for the rights of Indians and her 1881 work Century of Dishonor powerfully chronicled their mistreatment by the American government. In 1883 she wrote a report for the Department of the Interior on the state of California’s Mission Indians. She hoped that her novel Ramona, which was published in 1884,

would galvanize a protest movement against their mistreatment much as she believed *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had done in relationship to slavery in the 1850s. Instead, the novel became widely read for its idyllic description of mission life and it became one of the founding documents of the emerging Spanish Revival movement.

In some ways, the novel was not read in the manner that Jackson had intended because of an essay she herself had composed a year before its publication. The essay was entitled "Father Junípero and His Work" and was published in *Century Magazine*. Jackson's disapproval of the American betrayal of the Indians led her to project the California missions as an idealized alternative. Serra benefitted from that projection. In the essay, she described his fifteen years in Alta California as "a history of struggle, hardship, and heroic achievement. The indefatigable Serra was the main spring and support of it all. There seemed no limit to his endurance, no bound to his desires; nothing daunted his courage or chilled his
faith.” She acknowledged that “the later years of Serra’s life were marred by occasional collisions with the military authorities in the country.” She allowed that he could sometimes be “hot in resentment and indiscreet of speech.” But in her estimation the main source of conflict came from a difference in perspectives between Serra and his adversaries. As she wrote, “the single-hearted, one-ideaed man, with a great moral purpose, is sure to be often at swords’ points with average men of selfish interests and mixed notions.” Serra was, in short, “the foremost, grandest figure in the mission’s history. If his successors in their administration had been equal to him in spirituality, enthusiasm, and intellect, the mission establishments would never have been so utterly overthrown and ruined.”

Jackson moved from this effusive praise of Serra to creating an almost iconic picture of life at the missions as it was understood during the Spanish Revival:

The picture of life in one of these missions during their period of prosperity is unique and attractive. The whole place was a hive of industry: trade plying indoors and outdoors; tillers, herders, vintagers by hundreds, going to and fro; children in schools; women spinning; bands of young men practicing on musical instruments; music, the scores of which, in many instances, they had themselves written out; at evening, all sorts of games of running, leaping, dancing, and all throwing, and the picturesque ceremonies of the religion which has always been wise in availing itself of beautiful agencies in color, form, and harmony. . . . At every mission were walled gardens with waving palms, sparkling fountains, groves of olive trees, through a Vineyard, and orchards of all manner of fruits; over all, the sunny, delicious, winterless California sky.

Jackson’s writings sparked an outpouring of celebration of Serra and the mission system in popular culture. A year after her essays were published, the centenary of Serra’s death was marked by the publication of a very loose summary, inaccurately termed a translation, of Palóu’s biography. The very first words of this volume accurately indicated the tone which was to follow: “Among the saintly sons of the Seraphic St. Francis, there are few more remarkable than the first Apostle and evangelizer of Califor-

nia, the Ven. Fr. Junípero Serra.” Dedicated to Archbishop Joseph Sadoc Alemany of San Francisco, and with the preface by Bishop Francisco Mora of Los Angeles, the book demonstrated the degree to which California’s Catholics were eager to celebrate an idealized version of Father Serra.  

They found a very receptive audience. Mrs. Jane Stanford, who had contributed money for the restoration of Mission San Carlos in Carmel in the 1880s, commissioned a statue of Serra, which was dedicated in Monterey in 1891. Helen Hunt Jackson’s essay was republished in 1902 and included a series of drawings by Henry Sandham. That same year Charles Fletcher Lummis published a translation of Serra’s diary from Baja California to San Diego in Out West. In his introduction to the translation, Lummis wrote: “It is full, not only of the humility and faith and quenchless courage of the greatest missionary who ever trod the soil of the United States, it is also vital with his quiet humor.” Former San Francisco mayor James Phelan spearheaded an effort to have a statue of Serra placed in San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park, and the heroic representation of the missionary was dedicated in 1907. That same year, Frank Miller, owner of the Glenwood Mission Inn in Riverside erected a “Serra Cross” at the summit of Mount Rubidoux outside of Riverside. In 1913 both Phelan and Miller helped George Wharton James fund and publish the first complete English translation of Palóu’s biography, which was done by C. Scott Williams.

A plethora of laudatory popular biographies of Serra soon appeared. Racine McRoskey’s 1914 volume The Missions of California, in which Serra was described as “the greatest and most wonderful disciple of Saint Francis,” was heavily dependent upon Helen Hunt Jackson’s 1883 essay. Some of these biographies were influenced by contemporary American politics. After the Spanish-American war, some Americans had ironically and probably unknowingly adopted the rationale of the Spanish empire to justify annexation of the Philippines. A remark attributed to President McKinley by one of his supporters in 1903 may not actually

have been spoken by the president, but it did express widespread public sentiment. The president is said to have told a group of ministers that it was America's task to "civilize and Christianize" the Filipinos, who were "our fellow men for whom Christ also died." 18

In this context Serra was Americanized as the person who first did in California what the United States was said to be doing in the Philippines. As a 1914 work by A. H. Fitch, Junipero Serra: The Man and His Work, stated, "What ever was done to further the cause of civilization in California was done by him." While some historians such as James M. Guinn struggled to keep alive the complex version of Serra that had become prevalent in nineteenth-century California histories, the popular picture of Serra became even more heroic and one-dimensional. 19

The great Franciscan historian Zephyrin Engelhardt provided an impressive scholarly foundation for some of these popular perceptions. Engelhardt spent two decades as a missionary to Indians in Wisconsin and Michigan. At Holy Child Indian School in Harbor Springs, Michigan in 1897, he published The Franciscans in California and he followed that two years later with The Franciscans in Arizona. Both works were based on Spanish and English published sources, as well as manuscript material from Santa Bárbara to which he had obtained access when he visited the west for health reasons in the mid-1880s. He was eventually assigned to the Indian school in Banning, California, and he moved to Santa Bárbara in 1901. He began intensive research almost immediately. A five-year (1905–1910) assignment at St. Francis Orphan Asylum near Watsonville allowed him to make frequent research trips to Berkeley and San Francisco. His master work, the four-volume Missions and Missionaries of California, was published between 1908 and 1915. He followed that with a series of local studies, and he was able to complete sixteen volumes in this series before his death in 1934. 20

Engelhardt used the documents that had come to Mission Santa Bárbara as the backbone for his many studies. Herbert Eugene Bolton shared with him many documents that Bolton collected on research trips to Mexico. Engelhardt also researched the Archive of California, which was in San Francisco and from which the Bancroft staff had made a series of abstracts that filled sixty-three handwritten volumes in the 1870s. Engelhardt may have been one of the last scholars to use that original collection before it was destroyed in the fire following the San Francisco earthquake of 1906.

Engelhardt was upset at what he took to be the anti-Catholic bias in the writings of the California historians of the later nineteenth century. As we have seen, many of those historians were critical, in varying degrees, of both Serra and the mission system. Bancroft was the author whose assessment of the missions and missionaries Engelhardt most desired to contest. The very design of Engelhardt’s work mimicked Bancroft. Missions and Missionaries was constructed chronologically, as the History of California had been. And the “Local Studies” which Engelhardt then undertook were modeled after the “local annals” sections of Bancroft’s volumes. As was the case with some of Bancroft’s chapters, Engelhardt’s text tended to be driven by the narrative he was expounding and his sharpest judgment often appeared in his notes. A number of the notes were specifically directed at Bancroft. In one section of the History of California, speaking of Palóu, Bancroft stated, “There was no man so well qualified by opportunities and ability to write the early history of California as Palóu, and he made excellent use of his advantages.” Then, apparently intending something of a joke, he said, “I have sometimes been tempted to entertain a selfish regret that Palóu wrote, or that his writings were ever printed, yet all the same he must be regarded as the best original authority for the earliest period of mission history.” Engelhardt reacted in a note, saying, “It was providential that Fr. Palóu provided us with an authentic account. We can surmise what Bancroft and others would have made of that had not Fr. Palóu’s writings compelled them not to deviate from the truth more than they did.” Engelhardt sometimes worked his opinion of Bancroft into his text, such as his statement that Bancroft “judged the missionaries, their aims and their work, from
Fr. Zephryn Engelhardt and Herbert Eugene Bolton at Mission Santa Bárbara in 1914.

COURTESY OF THE SANTA BÁRBARA MISSION ARCHIVE-LIBRARY.
the standpoint of selfish commercialism, of which he is an adept beyond comparison.”

Serra was not an actor in those sections of his volumes where Engelhardt wrote most passionately. These sections involved the secularization of the missions in the 1830s, which Engelhardt interpreted through the prism of the anti-clericalism of the Mexican Revolution of the 1910s. He regarded secularization primarily as an attack on the Catholic Church and secondarily as a betrayal of the Indians. But Serra was the dominant figure in Engelhardt’s treatment of the first fifteen years of the Alta California missions. Engelhardt’s Serra was the selfless and dedicated hero depicted by the Spanish Revival authors. He termed Serra “guileless.” His devotion to the missions and to the Indians was boundless. At one point, describing life at Mission San Carlos, Engelhardt said that Serra was “thoroughly at home in philosophy and theology, and turn[ed] to something altogether outside of his sphere as a priest, but under the circumstances of more urgent importance—to cereals, vegetables, and livestock. How he must have loathed it; yet for the sake of his beloved Indians, he devoted himself to that department of Indian missionary existence as though he loved that too.” He also remarked that Serra’s “forbearance of Neve’s impertinence bordered on the heroic.”

The other side of the coin of Engelhardt’s glorification of the missionaries was his denigration of the culture of the California Indians. Most nineteenth-century American writers regarded the Native Californians as uncivilized and brutish, and Engelhardt cited such opinions about the Indians offered by Tuthill, Bancroft, and Theodore Hittell. But Engelhardt also had his own purpose in emphasizing what he took to be the lack of genuine culture among California’s native peoples. For, the lower the Indians were on the scale of human development, the more heroic the missionaries could become in his pages, as he described their leaving their homelands and giving up everything as they embraced their ministry to such people who were widely regarded, he said, “as among

the most stupid, brutish, filthy, lazy and improvident of the aborigines of America." The only exception were the Chumash along the Santa Bárbara Channel, who "seem to have been somewhat brighter and more industrious." Among such a desolate landscape, the missionaries were indeed heroic. Their aim was "none other than the conversion of the savages to Christianity," and "they have given up relatives, friends, property, prospects, and mother country for the sake of attracting souls to Christ," a task that was, in Engelhardt's view, "superhuman."23

Junípero Serra was not the California missionary in whom Engelhardt was most interested when he was conducting his research. That distinction went instead to Magín Matías Catalá, who served at Mission Santa Clara from 1794 until 1830. The Jesuits at Santa Clara College began the process of seeking Catalá's beatification in the 1880s. In 1908 Engelhardt was appointed Vice Postulator of Catalá's cause. As part of his activities he published a biography of Catalá in 1909 entitled *The Holy Man of Santa Clara*. Various ecclesiastical hearings were held at Santa Clara in 1909 and 1910, and a number of documents were delivered to Rome shortly thereafter. The General Postulator of the Franciscans oversaw the publication of the *Summarium* in 1911, but the case seems to have advanced no farther. In 1966 the Vatican Secretary of State wrote to the President of Santa Clara University, "Since then [1911], no further progress has been made because neither the Franciscan Fathers of California nor anyone else has taken an interest in it."24

One result of Engelhardt's prodigious research in primary sources was to provide additional documentation on the missions which could be used to assist in enhancing Serra's burgeoning reputation. In 1927 Willa Cather worked into her novel *Death Comes for the Archbishop* Palóu's story about Serra's encounter with an hospitable family that he took to be an apparition of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus. In the same year, the California legislature established a commission to select who should represent California in Statuary Hall, and Serra, along with Unitarian minister Thomas Starr King, was chosen. The statues were unveiled in 1931.

speaker for Serra was prominent Los Angeles Catholic layman and lawyer Isidore Dockweiler. While acknowledging that “Serra represented a theory of colonial government, which is obsolete today,” Dockweiler eulogized Serra as “our country’s first civilizer of our western coasts.” He stated, “Serra found in California a native whose only knowledge of a home or structure was expressed by the primitive ‘lean-to’ of willow branches covered with mud as a protection from inclement weather.” In this situation Serra “chiefly attracted the Indians by his just and paternal treatment.” In sum, he was “no military conqueror, no dominating overlord, no ambitious statesman, no wizard of any sort, but a sympathetic, zealous, painstaking, able, cultured, highly educated, quiet mannered, undaunted, and an ostentatious worker in a pioneer field among primitive peoples, his spirit saturated with love for Jesus Christ and with an eye to the eternal salvation of these people and their earthly welfare as well. What a lesson to the vainglorious!”

The Serra Cause, which began in 1934, was a direct outgrowth of Serra's growing prominence in popular culture. The cause owed a great deal to romantic writers like Helen Hunt Jackson, Spanish revivalists like Lummis, and influential and wealthy Catholic laymen like Dockweiler. It owed little directly to Engelhardt, who, as we have seen, was not especially interested in Serra as an individual. But the cause sparked a tremendous outpouring of scholarly activity, notably in the person of the modern founder of Serra studies, Father Maynard Geiger, OFM. As Engelhardt's successor at Santa Bárbara, Geiger undertook a Herculean series of journeys seeking Serra documentation on three continents. These journeys were supported by wealthy Catholic lay people and foundations. The hundreds of documents that he collected and copied form the core of the invaluable Junípero Serra Collection at the Santa Bárbara Mission Archive-Library. Geiger published a series of articles in the late 1940s in *The Americas*, the journal of the Academy of American Franciscan History. He published a new translation of *Palou's Life of Junípero Serra* in 1955, and his monumental two-volume biography of Serra appeared in 1959. During the same time period the Academy initiated its bilingual publication of Serra's correspondence, which still forms the indispensable foundation for all studies of Serra.26

Geiger's scholarship was prodigious. His notes and annotations on Palou's *Life* amounted to 300 pages, almost as long as the translation itself. They are packed with information that can be found virtually nowhere else. His bibliography at the conclusion of the second volume of his biography of Serra is eighty pages long and is still an indispensable starting point for anyone interested in Serra or the first fifteen years of Alta California's history. While much of his research was occasioned by the movement for Serra's beatification and eventual canonization, Geiger always brought a critical distance to his subject. He insisted on using exacting historical research methods in all of his studies. He did not believe that even potential saints were completely perfect. Thus, he saw no reason to romanticize or sentimentalize Serra or his activities. He

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and Father Eric O’Brien, OFM, who served as vice postulator for much of the period during which Geiger was engaged in his multi-continental researches, insisted on approaching Serra’s life in as rigorous a fashion as possible. O’Brien, for instance, published a long negative review of a romantic volume written by Omer Engelbert, which had termed Serra “The Last of the Conquistadors.”

Geiger broke little conceptual new ground on Serra, for his volumes followed the broad outlines of Palou’s account, but he created a picture of Serra and his times that was broader, deeper, and much more nuanced than anything that had come before. Serra’s experiences as a young boy in Mallorca, his religious formation, his academic training, and his career as a professor were more thoroughly examined by Geiger. Likewise, Serra’s time in the Sierra Gorda was treated in greater depth than had been the case with Palou. The same was true for the years Serra spent at the Colegio de San Fernando, his work as an itinerant preacher of domestic missions, and the time he spent as president of the Baja California missions.

In describing Serra’s experiences in the Californias, Geiger was able to use a wide variety of primary sources, which, of course, had been unavailable to Palou, such as the correspondence of José de Gálvez, Felipe de Neve, and Viceroy Antonio María Bucareli y Ursúa. Geiger employed all of this material to come to sophisticated and independent judgments. He wondered, for instance, if Fernando de Rivera y Moncada had actually incurred the excommunication the missionaries had decreed. Geiger also used a wide number of anthropological studies in depicting the condition of the California natives before the arrival of the Spaniards, and his descriptions were much more appreciative of native culture than had been the case with most early twentieth-century writings on Serra.

It is perhaps appropriate that Geiger’s magisterial biography was published in 1959, for the decade that began the following year witnessed a seismic shift in many aspects of the writing of history in the United States. As the title of one anthology of the late 1960s said, Americans were beginning to construct a “new past.” Groups who had hitherto been acknowledged only on the margins of historiography began to claim much

more central spaces. Native Americans were one such group, and early California history was dramatically altered by their being restored to the foreground. As native Californian historians, anthropologists, and others influenced by this change in perspective began to produce scholarly works, much of the conventional history of the California missions was called into question. Since Junípero Serra had become the pre-eminent emblem of the mission era, the re-evaluation of the missions resulted in a re-evaluation of him.  

In California this development had been anticipated in the writings of Sherburne F. Cook. Research that he conducted early in his career on diseases suffered by native peoples of Baja California led him to a wider investigation of population trends among California Indians. Cook published the results of this research in a series of seminal articles in the early 1940s. Cook documented the rapid and consistent population decline experienced by the native peoples of California during the mission era and the ways in which that decline was especially pronounced among Indians who were part of the mission system. He was critical of what he argued were systematic forced conversions of Indians by the missionaries and by the use of excessive corporal punishment within the missions. In 1946 Carey McWilliams seized upon Cook’s research and compared the missions to “concentration camps.” The California Indian occupation of Alcatraz from 1969 to 1971 brought the California Indians’ loss of their lands into greater public consciousness and spurred even more Californian historians to take a fresh look at this issue.  

Native American historian Jack D. Forbes was already a pioneer in this endeavor. A series of articles about native peoples in Sonora and the American Southwest in the late 1950s served as a background for an important essay he published in The Americas in 1963, which was entitled “The Historian and the Indian: Racial Bias in American History.” This was followed by a series of seminal books and articles on California and Southwest Indians over the next two decades. One of the earli-

est scholar-activists, Forbes was a leader in the development of Native American Studies programs. He also wrote fiction and poetry.\textsuperscript{31}

A number of scholars who followed Forbes focused their attention upon the relationship between the missions and the native peoples. Notable among them were Florence Shipek and Robert H. Jackson. Starting with her 1977 dissertation at the University of Hawaii on the Luiseño people, Shipek devoted her entire career to the experiences of the native peoples of Southern California. She focused her work on the Kumeyaay. Jackson began his publishing career with studies of what the mission registers in northern Mexico and Baja California revealed about the Indian presence in those regions. He centered his research on the incidence of disease and the death rates of the native peoples and he published a series of important studies on the catastrophic decline of the Indian population in California and elsewhere. In 1995 Jackson collaborated with Cahuilla-Luiseño historian Edward D. Castillo on the volume \textit{Indians, Franciscans, and Spanish Colonization: The Impact of the Mission System on California Indians}. Castillo himself had published in 1989 the reminiscences of Lorenzo Asisara, a former mission Indian at Santa Cruz, and had drawn special attention to Asisara's account of the assassination of Father Andrés Quintana in 1812.\textsuperscript{32}

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During the 1980s, other scholars such as Randall Milliken and John Johnson were beginning to investigate the mission registers. This research demonstrated how much information about pre-contact and non-mission Indians could be extracted from these documents. Since much of this scholarship ranged widely over time and space, Serra himself did not figure prominently in a good deal of this research. Yet, as a result of the Serra Cause, the writings of Geiger, and the work of the Academy of American Franciscan History, there was more information available on Serra than on any other California missionary. This solidified his popular status as a symbol of everything that had happened during the entire mission era. Serra's centrality was reinforced when, as the 200th anniversary of his death approached in 1984, a number of California Catholics organized the Serra Bicentennial Commission and sought, among other things, to move the Cause forward.33

The mid-1980s was a period of great contention as this new scholarship and a renewed emphasis on Serra's beatification and canonization coincided with international planning for the Columbus quincentenary in 1992. Native peoples and others throughout the Americas were determined to ensure that this anniversary be commemorated not as a celebration of European expansion (as the 1892 anniversary had been), but as a stark remembrance of the catastrophic (some preferred the term "genocidal") population decline and extreme cultural dislocation that many Native American groups experienced after 1492. In California, Carey McWilliams's "concentration camp" analogy was widely employed, and Serra was sometimes portrayed as the grisly architect of a death-dealing system. One professor in the California State University system was quoted as saying that Serra was a "sadist" and a "fanatic." A native Californian, who taught at a community college near Santa Cruz, stated,

"The missionaries were sent here by the Spanish monarchy along with the military to work hand-in-hand to colonize this so-called virgin territory and to bring the Indian people through the baptismal into slavery." Another opponent stated, "To make a man a saint after he helped in the genocide of Native Americans in this part of the country is a contradiction of the words the religion preaches." 34

As this controversy began to intensify, the Academy of American Franciscan History decided to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Serra's death with a conference at the American Historical Association meeting in Chicago in December 1984. The American Catholic Historical Association and the Conference of Latin American Historians co-sponsored the gathering. The Academy decided to try to broaden the focus away from Serra himself. As Father Antonine Tibesar, OFM stated, the focus was "on the frontier of Northwestern New Spain during Serra's time, 1750–1825, as well as on his work in Upper California." The conference proceedings were published in _The Americas_ the next year and also as a separate volume by the Academy. The controversy was certainly present in the proceedings, especially in the sharply opposing essays by Florence C. Shipek and Harry Kelsey, but the thrust of the conference as a whole adopted a much broader framework. The keynote address, by Miguel León-Portilla focused on the interrelationship between Serra and Gálvez, while the contributions of Iris H. W. Engstrand, Susan M. Deeds, and Robert H. Jackson focused upon events in Spain and over the entire reach of Northwestern and Northern New Spain. The essay by Louis J. Luzbetak, S.V.D., focused upon the manner in which aims and methods of Catholic missionary activity had dramatically changed since the eighteenth century. 35


This broad approach was the hallmark of the third great Franciscan archivist-historian, Father Francis Guest, OFM. The first of this group to receive historical training in a secular university, he earned a doctorate from the University of Southern California. Significantly, his dissertation was not on one of the missions or one of the friars. Rather, in “Municipal Institutions in Spanish California, 1769–1821,” he chose to focus on the entity in Alta California that most displeased Serra—the pueblo. Guest’s masterwork was his authoritative biography of the often underappreciated Fermín Francisco de Lasuén, who was Serra’s successor as president of the missions. Guest’s interests, however, were wide ranging. For instance, his contribution to Msgr. Francis J. Weber’s volume Some California Catholic Reminiscences for the United States Bicentennial was an essay on California’s soldados de cuera. An extensive essay he wrote for the Southern California Quarterly in 1979 demolished the notion that forced conversions of native peoples were an integral part of the California mission experience.36

Guest was much more involved in contemporary historiography than his predecessors Engelhardt or Geiger had been. Part of it was due to his training at USC, and part of it was because he had to engage a much more complicated historiographical landscape than his predecessors had encountered. Much of Guest’s writing was motivated by a desire to understand the mission experience in the light of the entire range of historical, anthropological, and theological studies that have developed in the twentieth century. This was certainly an imposing task, yet one cannot read his essays and books without being enormously impressed at the range of research that went into them. His special concern was to employ this research to understand the California mission experience in the way in which eighteenth and nineteenth century Californians of all backgrounds understood it. He did not shrink from the hard questions that the developing controversy over the missions and Serra posed. “How do we reconcile the use of the whip to punish,” he asked in one

essay, “with the patience, tact, and charity which were supposed to play so vital a role in the proper approach of the friars to both the Christian and the non-Christian Indians?” Guest attempted to employ as much contemporary knowledge as he could to understand the California mission experience as the missionaries themselves understood it. This sometimes led him into dubious analogies, such as his notion that the flogging of Indians at the missions might be understood as a kind of parental spanking. Overall, however, he did not think the missionaries were perfect. Indeed, the title of his last published essay was “The California Missions Were Far from Faultless.” He consistently argued that the world view of the Franciscan missionaries was crucial to gaining a complete picture of Hispanic California. He wrote, “Because of the development of anthropology, abundant information on the intellectual, religious, and cultural heritage of the California Indians has been accumulated, whereas that of the Franciscan missionaries has been insufficiently investigated.” His dense but highly accessible and well written essays offered the most nuanced and complex picture of the strengths and weaknesses that the successive generations of missionaries brought to their ministry in Alta California.37

However, as the beatification process moved forward, this broader approach was overshadowed for a time by a more consistent and tight focus on Serra himself. In 1986 Monterey Bishop Thaddeus Shubsda arranged for the publication of “The Serra Report,” whose core was interviews of eight leading historians and anthropologists. They all attempted to place Serra in a wide context, but the thrust of the interview questions generally tended to direct the discussion back to Serra’s personal behavior as a missionary and his personal relationship to the Indians. The interviewers insisted, correctly, that there was little evidence that Serra himself personally abused the Indians with whom he directly dealt and that there was also little evidence of widespread forced conversions during the time he was missionary president. Those interviewed tried to

keep a distance from the controversy. One said, "I don’t know whether Serra's a saint or not. That's not my business to judge." But since the aim of the Report was to clear the ground for Serra's eventual beatification, the parts of the Report that most focused on Serra himself earned the most widespread public attention.  

The Report was answered the very next year with the publication of the provocatively entitled volume, *The Missions of California: A Legacy of Genocide*. The volume vigorously argued that Spanish colonialism had an extremely negative effect upon California's indigenous communities, which were numerous and thriving before the arrival of the Europeans. As enthusiastic agents of Spanish colonialism, and as the founders and directors of the twenty-one places along the California coast in which the Indian death rates dramatically and routinely exceeded birth rates, Serra, along with the missionaries, bore primary responsibility for this

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demographic catastrophe. The volume was a mix of scholarly articles and powerful personal testimonies by a number of native Californians, including one who was a Catholic priest.

After Pope John Paul II beatified Serra in Rome in 1988, the controversy continued to rage for a few years. But it quickly took a series of different directions as scholars began to look at Serra from the wider perspective that the Academy of American Franciscan History had urged in the mid-1980s. Some historians examined the controversy itself. James Sandos, for example, investigated the role of historians, especially Herbert Eugene Bolton, in the Church’s research as part of the beatification process, and issued a sharp warning about the dangers that “advocacy and presentism” pose to critical historical study. This warning, of course, applied equally to all sides in the controversy. Daniel Fogel attempted to relate the Serra controversy to contemporary religious debates about liberation theology. George E. Tinker placed Serra in the context of other missionary efforts aimed at native peoples in North America. He offered sharp but compelling suggestions about what the entire history of the missionary experience in the continent could teach contemporary Christians about cross-cultural ministry.39

Works devoted specifically to Serra since that time have often tried to fill in the picture of the man and his times by looking at parts of his life that were not so fully covered in Palóu’s biography or subsequent studies. Martin J. Morgado, author of a very informative study of the material and religious items that Serra used, offered a good example of this new tone in his 1991 biography. In that work, over forty percent of the pages devoted to Serra’s life treat his experiences in Mallorca, the Sierra Gorda, Mexico, and Baja California. In contrast, Palóu had devoted only one quarter of his biography to the same periods. A reproduction of the final page of one of Serra’s philosophy notebooks, replete with some drawings that the eighteen-year-old Serra did on the paper, helps his early life come alive for the reader in a fresh way. And Serra’s sketch of the Ptolemaic universe, also done while he was on Mallorca, reminds

us of how complicated a man he was, as he juggled late medieval and early modern systems of thought, as many eighteenth-century Catholics, especially members of religious orders, were forced to do.\textsuperscript{40}

The 1992 volume by Bartomeu Font Obrador and Norman Neuerburg, \textit{Fr. Junípero Serra: Mallorca, México, Sierra Gorda, Californias}, was in the same vein. This trilingual work (English, Spanish, and Catalán) delved even more deeply into Serra’s Mallorcan roots. Obrador and Neuerburg placed Serra’s youth in the context of popular devotion on that island. They also summarized a series of sermons that Serra gave to the Poor Clares in Palma in 1744. They offered a series of excerpts from the seventeenth-century missionary handbook \textit{Itinerario para párrocos de indios}, which exercised so profound an influence over Serra and his fellow missionaries. Obrador and Neuerburg offered a rounded picture of the range of experiences, devotions, and ideas Junípero Serra brought with him to Alta California in 1769.\textsuperscript{41}

A number of works about Serra have appeared in Spain and Mallorca over the last 15 years as well. Some of them were based on sources that are in the United States or Mexico and aimed to introduce the latest scholarship on Serra and the California missions to readers across the Atlantic. Others filled out the picture, sometimes by situating Serra in the context of Spanish historiography, especially the historiography of exploration and colonization. A good example of this was a quincentenary-related volume written by Madrid historian Sylvia Hilton, \textit{Junípero Serra}. Other works made a contribution by introducing readers to primary sources that are available in Mallorca or Spain. Two individuals were pre-eminent in this respect. One was Bartomeu Font Obrador. Besides working on the important volume with Neuerburg, Font Obrador published a series of significant works on Serra. Chief among them is his \textit{El apóstol de California, sus albores}, published in 1989 in both Spanish and English. This book contains the entire text of Serra’s 1744 sermons, which had only previously been published in Catalán by Mallorcan priest Francisco


\textsuperscript{41} Bartomeu Font Obrador and Norman Neuerburg, \textit{Fr. Junípero Serra: Mallorca, México, Sierra Gorda, Californias} (Palma: Comissió de Cultura Consell Insular de Mallorca, 1992).
Torrens y Nicolau in connection with his 1913 volume *Bosqueo histórico del insigne franciscano v.p.f Junípero Serra*. The other was the Franciscan Salustiano Vicedo, who published a Spanish edition of Serra’s writings, which closely followed the Academy of American Franciscan History edition. Vicedo also published local works on Mallorcan history, which contributed greatly to our knowledge of Serra’s earlier years. These include *La casa solariega de la familia Serra* and *Convento de San Bernardino de Sena: la escuela del Beato Junípero Serra.*

Msgr. Francis J. Weber’s 2007 biography, a reworking of his 1984 “Bicentennial Compendium” of Geiger’s biography, fills out the picture of Serra in another direction. Based upon his lifetime of study, Weber juxtaposed Geiger’s historical research to the variety of ways in which Serra has been interpreted in the two centuries since his death. The reader sees Serra on a series of postage stamps from Spain, Mexico, Vatican City, and the United States, and on wine labels in Mallorca and Mexico. The reader also encounters representations of Serra from around the world, in Mallorca, Mexico, Texas, and Los Angeles. Finally, nineteenth-century pictures and photographs of native people, the missions, and the landscape allow readers to place themselves more completely in the world of Serra and his fellow missionaries.

Two recent Franciscan historians have made important contributions to the study of Serra and his work. Lino Gómez Canedo’s study of the Franciscan missions of the Sierra Gorda and of what he termed Serra’s “missionary noviceship” there shed new light upon a period of Serra’s life for which very few primary sources have survived. The disputes that Serra and his fellow missionaries had with José de Escandón in this region influenced the way in which they approached their missionary endeavors in Alta California. Gómez Canedo enabled readers to understand clearly


the issues over which they struggled. Escandón envisioned an assimilation process for the native peoples of the Sierra Gorda in which the missions played only a minimal role. It is impossible to understand the intensity of Serra’s later struggle with Felipe de Neve without appreciating the threat he thought the Escandón method posed for the missions.  

The second Franciscan historian, José Luis Soto Pérez, edited the letters of Francisco Palou from Baja California between 1768 and 1773. This correspondence, along with the extensive annotations that Soto Pérez included in this volume, illuminated the concurrent Franciscan missionary experiences in both Californias during these years. Palou’s struggle with Governor Felipe de Barri in Baja California prefigured and influenced Serra’s own struggles with Fernando de Rivera y Moncada and Neve. Soto Pérez also edited a two-volume Spanish version of Palou’s Recopilación de noticias de la Antigua y de la Nueva California (1768–1783), in which he also included a good number of other Franciscan primary sources from this period, including an earlier and longer draft of Pedro Font’s diary of the second Anza expedition, and Serra’s own diary from Loreto to San Diego. The annotations in this volume, based upon Soto Pérez’s extensive research in a variety of Franciscan archives, are superb, and greatly increase the reader’s knowledge and understanding of California and mission history.

More recent work on California and the missions has generally tended to be less focused on Serra personally and more focused upon the overall relationship between the native peoples and the variety of Spaniards and Mexicans—military, civilian, and religious—who also lived in pre-US Alta California. For instance, Serra was not a major figure in three of the most important volumes about early California published in the 1990s, by Douglas Monroy, Lisbeth Haas, and Randall Milliken, nor in the


This portrait has come to be one of the standard representations of Junipero Serra. It was done in the early twentieth century by a Mexican priest, Fr. José Mosqueda, who said that he copied it from a work which had hung in the Colegio de Santa Cruz in Querétaro. If the painting to which Mosqueda referred was genuine and originally done in Querétaro, it may have dated from the 1750s when Serra served as president of the missions in the Sierra Gorda, near Querétaro; or from 1767 when Serra stopped at Santa Cruz on his way to Baja California; or from 1774 when Serra stopped there again on his return from Mexico City to Alta California. COURTESY OF THE SANTA BÁRBARA MISSION ARCHIVE-LIBRARY.
essays in the influential collection *Contested Eden: California before the Gold Rush*. Kent Lightfoot’s study, *Indians, Missionaries, and Merchants: The Legacy of Colonial Encounters on the California Frontiers*, concentrated on the area north of San Francisco, an area Serra never visited. Steven W. Hackel’s *Children of Coyote, Missionaries of St. Francis* focused on the Monterey Bay region during the Spanish and Mexican periods. Serra appeared often, especially towards the beginning of the volume, and his writings and actions were taken as emblematic of the larger Franciscan approach to the native peoples. Hackel’s main concern was what he called the “dual revolutions”—demographic and ecological—which dramatically transformed the experiences of the native peoples of California. Craig Russell devoted a chapter to Serra in *From Serra to Sancho: Music and Pageantry in the California Missions*. Russell demonstrated how music was central to the rituals and conventions associated with the founding of the missions. He analyzed the religious background and evangelical meaning of the hymns that Serra indicated were sung on those occasions. Kristin Dutcher Mann’s recent volume dealt with music throughout the northern frontier of New Spain and she employed Serra’s writings to set the context for her treatment of Alta California. Recent work by Quincy Newell and María Wade mentioned Serra, but he had a more minor role in the larger processes of native-Spanish/Mexican interaction that these authors analyzed.46

The volume in which Serra played a more central role was James SANDO’S pioneering study *Converting California*. Sandos sharply distin-

guished between baptism and conversion, and sensitively examined the
different fashions in which the missionaries and native peoples under­
stood what was happening when native people became members of vari­
ous mission communities. In an essay published a year before the book,
he presented the famous scene at the founding of Mission San Gabriel as
symbolic. As Palóu recounted the story, missionaries unfurled a canvas
painting of Our Lady of Sorrows before a group of armed natives, who
immediately threw down their weapons and began to venerate the paint­
ing. The missionaries interpreted this as the intercession of Our Lady
to assist them in their efforts. Sandos pointed out that the picture reso­
nated with important elements within the Tongva religious tradition.
The picture had significantly different meanings to the missionaries and
to the indigenous people.47

In his book, Sandos closely analyzed Serra’s missionary strategy and
placed it in the tradition of early Franciscan evangelization efforts, the
theological and philosophical views of Duns Scotus (1266–1308), and the
mystical writings of María de Jesús de Agreda (1602–1665). He viewed
Serra as being in the tradition of the sixteenth-century Franciscan mis­sionaries in New Spain, who brought a millennial perspective to the New
World and who sought to re-create there the fervor and simplicity of
the primitive apostolic Church. In Sandos’s interpretation, Serra’s views
were formed by his own marginalization from the larger Spanish society
of which he was a part and by his adherence to late medieval theological
systems and devotional practices, such as self-flagellation. Sandos dem­
onstrated how Serra’s views continued to affect the California missions
after his death, although subsequent missionaries introduced different
ideas and strategies as they dealt with the massive diseases the colonial
order had introduced into native society. Sandos analyzed the way in
which music and ritual became important conversion strategies, and he
demonstrated that consistent active and passive resistance among the
native peoples was never far from the surface.48

47. James A. Sandos, Converting California: Indians and Franciscans in the Missions (New Haven: Yale
University Press, 2004); James A. Sandos, “Converting California: Indians and Franciscans in the
This painting was done in 1785 in Mexico City by Mariano Guerrero on the basis of the description of Serra's receiving the Viaticum, which was penned by Francisco Palou on September 13, 1784, in a letter to Juan Sancho, Guardian of San Fernando.
COURTESY OF THE SANTA BÁRBARA MISSION ARCHIVE-LIBRARY.

The present volume on Junípero Serra is being published 223 years after the first book on him saw the light of day. During these past two and a quarter centuries, Serra has been interpreted in a wide variety of ways. The interpretations were often guided by the cultural concerns of the eras in which they were constructed. Serra has been interpreted through the lens of eighteenth-century Bourbon reforms, the nineteenth-century American conquest, the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Spanish Revival, and the mid-twentieth-century emphasis on social,
cultural, and ethnic history. Twenty-first-century developments that none of us can yet foresee will doubtless shape further interpretations of Junípero Serra.

This is not surprising. Historical figures are inevitably interpreted through the prism of the present, whenever that present might be, and even canonized saints are not exempt from this rule. This is especially the case for figures whose lives embraced large and enduring concerns. Junípero Serra's life encompassed a range of issues that continue to perplex our global communities, such as the relationship among different economic and social systems around the world, the relationship among different ethnic and religious groups sharing the same physical space, and the relationship between religious belief and civil society in different regions of the world. The fact that Junípero Serra wrestled with these significant and persistent questions insures that he will continue to be reinterpreted again and again in the future.