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Rose Marie Beebe

Santa Clara University, rbeebe@scu.edu

Robert M. Senkewicz

Santa Clara University, rsenkewicz@scu.edu

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Junípero Serra and the Santa Bárbara Channel

Rose Marie Beebe and Robert M. Senkewicz
Santa Clara University

 ONE OF THE GREATEST REGRETS OF JUNÍPERO SERRA'S life was that he was never able to establish a mission in Santa Bárbara. He never really lived there. He spent some time at the presidio during its first few years, but for the most part he was somewhat like a contemporary tourist—passing through, hoping that maybe some day he could put down roots, but never quite succeeding in doing this. However, it is important to study and understand the experience Serra had in the Santa Bárbara Channel with the peoples who had lived there for thousands of years before he arrived, as well as with others who had arrived in Alta California even more recently than Serra himself. This experience sheds a special light on the challenges that Serra faced as a missionary in the Alta California missions and it illustrates a number of crucial aspects of the Alta California mission experience.

THE CHUMASH

Serra came into the vicinity of the Santa Bárbara Channel nine or ten different times. He most likely did not get very close to the channel area

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during his first voyage north from San Diego in 1770 aboard the *San Antonio* because the vessel was driven far south by the winds and was forced to make a large circle to reach the Farallon Islands before heading south to Monterey. The first time he traveled through the channel area by land was in 1772 when he journeyed south with Pedro Fages. They reconnoitered a site near the village of Shisholop. Juan Crespí had recommended this site for the founding of Mission San Buenaventura. Fages's refusal to allow the founding of that mission was a principal reason why Serra continued on to Mexico City. On his way back from Mexico in 1774, Serra passed through this territory and met Juan Bautista de Anza near Point Concepción.

Serra sailed through the channel in 1776 on his way to San Diego to take charge of the reestablishment of the mission after the indigenous revolt. He returned by land through Santa Bárbara the next year. He passed through again in 1778 during his first confirmation journey. He founded San Buenaventura in 1782 and was also present for the founding of the Santa Bárbara Presidio. His final contact with the area was during another confirmation journey in 1783—the year before his death.¹

In all of these journeys the people who lived in the Santa Bárbara Channel were the overwhelming attraction for Serra. As early as 1770, a mere week and a half after the founding of Mission San Carlos, he wrote his best friend Francisco Palóu and said that his next task would be "to establish the mission of San Buenaventura along the Santa Bárbara Channel. It is a section of greater value than San Diego or Monterey, or of the entire territory thus far discovered." In a letter written to the *guardián* of the *Colegio de San Fernando* the day before, Serra had described the Santa Bárbara Channel as "full of a huge number (*numerísimos*) of formal pueblos, and a most wonderful (*provehidísima*) land." The two superlatives joined so closely together testified to the tremendous enthusiasm he had developed at the prospect of evangelizing the area.²

Where did Serra get this notion of Santa Bárbara's importance?

1. Maynard J. Geiger, *The Life and Times of Fray Junípero Serra, OFM; or, The Man Who Never Turned Back, 1713–1784: A Biography* (Washington, D.C.: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1959), 1: 247, 324–25, 413; 2: 99, 118, 170, 286–89, 338.
2. Junípero Serra, *Writings of Junípero Serra*, ed. Antonine Tibesar (Washington, D.C.: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1955), 1:178, 172. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Serra's writings are our own.

Clearly, it came from talking to his former student and fellow Mallorcan Juan Crespi, who had accompanied the overland expedition from San Diego to San Francisco Bay in 1769. This expedition had passed through Chumash territory twice during that journey and Crespi had interacted with many of the inhabitants.

Two aspects of Chumash society stood out in Crespi's mind: the character of the people and the orderly structure of their villages. He reported that the character of the Chumash was marked by a deep hospitality to the expedition that was passing through their territory. He interpreted that hospitality as an indication that a concerted missionary effort might be richly rewarded. In a letter to José de Gálvez, Crespi reported that the Chumash would make a great point of approaching the expedition's two priests and would try to engage them in conversation "in an extremely friendly way." Crespi often commented on the affability and good humor of the native people he met. They greeted us, he wrote, "with uproar and laughter," creating a picture of a group that could hardly contain itself at the site of the Spanish. Crespi described the people as "very gentle and friendly" and "very good people." Even Pedro Fages was affected by Crespi's enthusiasm. Fages was not a person to whom the vocabulary of "mission" and "conversion" came easily. However, he did write that "the docility and good disposition of the Indians give good reason for entertaining a moral certainty of their reduction as soon as the word of God is preached to them."³

Crespi's descriptions of the people played into some of Serra's deepest desires. Indeed, Crespi, whose relationship with Serra went back decades, may have been influenced by what he knew of Serra's background and hopes when he formulated his own descriptions of the Chumash character. Serra had originally become a missionary to work among non-Christian people. Serra's closest friend, Francisco Palóu, described Serra's own decision to leave the academic life in 1749 and enter the missionary field as a desire "to employ his talents for the conversion of the gentiles," and "to attain the salvation of the poor gentiles." As a Franciscan from Mallorca, one of Serra's missionary models was Ramón Llull, who had

3. Juan Crespi, *A Description of Distant Roads: Original Journals of the First Expedition into California, 1769–1770*, ed. Alan K. Brown (San Diego, CA: San Diego State University Press, 2001), 61, 414, 390; Pedro Fages, *A Historical, Political, and Natural Description of California*, trans. Herbert Ingram Priestley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1937), 26.

crossed the Mediterranean to preach Christianity among the Moslems and established a school for the study of Arabic on Mallorca.⁴

Serra's missionary identity revolved around converting non-Christians. However, in 1769, after living in America for nineteen years, Serra had yet to engage in this activity. He had worked in the Sierra Gorda for eight years among the Pame people, who had been evangelized well before he arrived in 1750. The Sierra Gorda was not filled with non-Christians and it was a well-established mission field before Serra began to work there. Indeed, one of the complaints of missionaries from the *Colegio de San Fernando* was that Indians would flee their missions and seek to enter nearby parishes and missions run by other Catholic *colegios* and religious orders. After leaving the Sierra Gorda, Serra spent another eight years preaching domestic missions in a number of regions in New Spain. His goal was to rekindle fervor among various congregations who were already Christians but whose enthusiasm had perhaps dimmed. Finally, the native peoples of Baja California, who constituted his most recent congregations, had been introduced to Christianity by the Jesuits decades earlier.⁵

The basic reason why Serra was so excited about José de Gálvez's project to expand the Spanish frontier from Baja California to the north was that he hoped it would finally give him the opportunity to engage non-Christians in their own territory. This was the fundamental motivation that had driven him to America in the first place. Near the beginning of Serra's journey toward San Diego, it seemed to him that his hopes might be realized. On May 11, 1769, Serra left Mission Santa María de los Angeles Cabujakaamung, the most northern mission founded by the Jesuits in Baja California. Serra's excitement began to mount. On May 12 he wrote, "We arrived at the spot called 'The Pool of Fresh Water.' Along the way we saw a number of small *rancherías* of gentiles and fresh footprints but nobody, young or old, would come out so we could see them. Their not wanting to come out thwarted the hopes that I had of

4. Francisco Palóu, *Palóu's Life of Fray Junipero Serra*, trans. Maynard J. Geiger (Washington, D.C.: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1955), 8; Edgar Peers, *Ramon Lull: A Biography* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1929).

5. On the long history of missions in the Sierra Gorda, see Lino Gómez Canedo, *Sierra Gorda, un típico enclave misional en el centro de México (siglos XVII–XVIII)*, 1st ed. (Querétaro: Ediciones del Gobierno del Estado de Querétaro, 1988); the best treatment of the Jesuit period in Baja California is Harry Crosby, *Antigua California: Mission and Colony on the Peninsular Frontier, 1697–1768*, 1st ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994).

seeing them, of speaking to them, and of cherishing them." On the next day he recorded, "We also saw a number of small huts and gentile footprints, but no one appeared." On May 14 he arrived at the site of Velicatá and founded Mission San Fernando Rey de España de Velicatá, the only mission founded in Baja California by the Franciscans. Serra was disappointed that no non-Christian Indians were present for the ceremonial founding and wrote that they were "perhaps frightened" by the firearms the soldiers discharged as they celebrated the initiation of the mission.⁶ Then, on May 15, 1769, as he was about to leave San Fernando de Velicatá, an event occurred that he described in his diary:

Since candles had already arrived on the pack train, the two priests and I celebrated Mass in succession. For me, it was a day of great consolation. Soon after the Masses were said, while I was quiet with my thoughts in the small hut which was my dwelling place, they alerted me that the gentiles were approaching and that they were close. I praised God, kissed the ground, and gave thanks to Our Lord for granting me this opportunity to be among the gentiles in their land, after longing for this for so many years.

For Serra, this intense emotion ("I kissed the ground.") stemmed from his feeling that after so many years among people who had already been converted, he was finally beginning his true missionary life. He could hardly contain himself:

I quickly went out and there I saw twelve gentiles, all of them grown men, with the exception of one boy who was about ten years old and the other who was about sixteen years old. I saw what I could hardly believe when I would read about it or when I would be told about it, which was that the gentiles were totally naked, like Adam in paradise before the fall. That is how they went about and that is how they presented themselves to us. We interacted with them for quite some time and not once did they show any sign of embarrassment seeing that we were clothed and they were not. I placed my hands on the head of each gentile, one at a time, as a sign of affection. I filled both of their hands with overripe figs, which they immediately began to eat. We received a gift from them and with signs we showed them how much we appreciated it.⁷

Serra had to leave Velicatá and head north with Portolá, but a letter he received a few days later confirmed his hopes:

6. Serra, *Writings of Junípero Serra*, I: 58, 60.

7. *Ibid.*, I: 60.

I took great comfort from the letter I received from Velicatá in which the Father from that mission informed me that the same gentile chief whom I had seen and warmly received along with eleven of his people, had already gone [to the mission] with a larger number of men, women, boys, and girls—forty-four all together. They all were requesting holy baptism and on that very day they began to receive instruction. I was overjoyed and I wrote back to the Father congratulating him a thousand times over. I begged him to baptize the chief first because he was such an important person and to give him the name Francisco in honor of our Seraphic Father. I piously believe that through his intercession such a happy event came to pass as fulfillment of the promise that the Lord Our God made to him during these last days which, according to what the Venerable Mother María de Jesús de Agreda affirms, is that at just the sight of his sons, the gentiles will convert to our Holy Catholic faith.⁸

The reference to Sor María de Jesús de Agreda was telling. She was a seventeenth-century Spanish Franciscan nun who had been credited with having been miraculously transported from Spain to New Mexico, where, according to tradition, she had preached to the Jumano Indians. A former New Mexico missionary interviewed Sor María in 1631 and wrote that she had told him that it had been revealed to her that Saint Francis had received from God the special favor "that the Indians, on merely seeing our friars, would be converted."⁹ The possibility that Serra himself might now be participating in the fulfillment of Sor María's words thrilled him. A few months shy of his fifty-sixth birthday, he felt that he had finally encountered his life's true purpose. He did not know that the Cochimí people whom he was describing belonged to a group whose territory the Jesuits had entered when they founded Mission San Francisco de Borja in 1762 and Mission Santa María de los Angeles de Cabujakaamung in 1767. They had been expecting the arrival of the Spanish for at least seven years and had no doubt already decided how they would accommodate this new presence in their area.¹⁰

8. Serra, *Writings of Junípero Serra*, 1: 64.

9. On Sor María de Agreda, see Clark Colahan, *The Visions of Sor María de Agreda: Writing Knowledge and Power* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994); Marilyn Fedewa, *María of Agreda: Mystical Lady in Blue* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009). Palóu thought the 1631 document was so important that he included it in his biography of Serra: Geiger, *Palóu's Life of Fray Junípero Serra*, 302.

10. Luis Sales, *Observations on California, 1772–1790* (Los Angeles: Glen Dawson, 1956), 63; Crosby, *Antigua California*, 191, 348–49.

Serra brought to Alta California this enthusiasm for engaging with non-Christians. When he finally arrived at Monterey Bay in June 1770 his major concern was how to get closer to the local native people. Less than a month after his arrival, in a note to a nun in Spain, Serra expressed his frustration that the inevitable necessities involved in setting himself up were getting in the way of his interacting with the native peoples:

Here I am, having just arrived, with so much to do building a small house of wooden poles in which to live. It will also serve as a place to store food or to store the items for the church, the house, and the supplies that were brought on the ship. It will also serve as a church where we can say Mass. All of these inconveniences are inevitable in the beginning stages.

I have barely been able to find time to meet the gentiles who live at some distance from here, even though they have come to see us a number of times. They very humbly and generously have given us some of their food.¹¹

He had already scouted out the surrounding settlements in the area and had developed a strategy to engage the Rumsen.

There is no *ranchería* at all in the vicinity of this port. Because of this, if we see that they are determined to accept our holy faith, we need to recognize the special difficulty they will have in taking up residence here. It might be necessary to leave the presidio here and, with a few soldiers of the escort, move the mission close to the Carmel River, two short leagues to the south. It is a truly splendid location, capable of producing abundant crops because of the plentiful and excellent land and water.¹²

Serra's initial reason for questioning Monterey as a place for a mission was not the infertility of the land or the proximity of the soldiers—two reasons commonly adduced to explain his desire to move from Monterey.¹³ Rather, the basic reason was that Monterey was far away from existing native villages. Serra wanted the mission to be close to the existing settlements so that people could easily visit the mission.

Crespi's description of Chumash hospitality could easily be interpreted by a man with Serra's background as indicating a deep eagerness on the part of the Indians to embrace the gospel. This in itself made Serra enor-

11. Serra, *Writings of Junípero Serra*, 1:180.

12. *Ibid.*, 1:170.

13. Zephyrin Engelhardt, *Mission San Carlos Borromeo (Carmelo). The Father of the Missions* (Santa Barbara, CA: Mission Santa Barbara, 1934), 28–29.

mously anxious to place a mission among them. The second aspect of the Chumash society that struck Crespi, his description of the structure of the Chumash villages, increased Serra's eagerness to initiate missionary work among them as soon as he could.

Crespi was quite taken by the spatial arrangements of the Chumash settlements, especially how orderly they were. When he first reached Shisholop, which he called Asunción, he referred to it by the normal term *ranchería*. But in an early revision of his journal, he called it the first "formal pueblo" on the channel. A bit later at Mishopshno, Crespi saw "thirty-eight very large round grass roof houses . . . some of them so large inside that they hold a vast number of families." Pedro Fages explicitly referred to this village as a "pueblo." When the expedition reached Syuxtun, the place which was to become Santa Bárbara, Crespi noted that "there is a very large number of gentiles at this spot; the villages we have been encountering are becoming larger every day . . . these gentiles lived gathered into formal pueblos."¹⁴

The manner in which the Chumash lived in these well laid-out pueblos also impressed Crespi. The expedition's soldiers gave the village of Mishopshno the name "*La Carpintería*" (The Carpentry Shop) because they witnessed a *tomol* being constructed there. Crespi had already been impressed with these vessels: "Some canoes are quite long, about eight yards . . . two or three Indians with two or three paddles travel in each and when they wish, they make them go so that they seem to be flying through the water." He also noted the musical instruments that the people had made. More than once, he referred to the flutes and pipes as "very well-carved," and he noticed that a number of Chumash were very interested in the way his wooden rosary had been carved. Crespi continually referred to the importance of music and dance in the lives of the people.¹⁵

Iberians had long associated being engaged in domestic manufacturing and living in orderly pueblos with civilization and culture. Crespi, Serra, and Fages were saying that in their judgment the Chumash had already advanced considerably towards that European model. For centu-

14. Crespi, *A Description of Distant Roads*, 388, 406, 422; Fages, *A Historical, Political, and Natural Description of California*, 26.

15. Crespi, *A Description of Distant Roads*, 61, 403, 406, 422 (Brown translation).

*Reconstructions of
Chumash tomols.
Photograph by
George Huey.*

COURTESY OF THE
SANTA BÁRBARA
MUSEUM OF
NATURAL HISTORY.

ries a basic Christian missionary strategy had been to attempt to convert non-Christian societies by enticing the society's leaders to affiliate with the church.¹⁶ Serra quickly came to believe that the Chumash were the societal leaders of indigenous Alta California. For the rest of his life the Chumash were a primary object of his missionary concern.

For Serra the greatest validation of these opinions occurred in 1778. During the winter, as he was heading overland from San Diego back to Carmel, Serra arrived at the channel. He described what happened in a letter to the viceroy:

On this, my third and most recent land journey along the Santa Bárbara Channel, strong winds, heavy rains, much mud, and rough, high seas did not allow us to set foot on the beach, which would have made for a shorter and easier walk. By their actions, those poor gentiles proved themselves worthy of receiving all that is good, which has taken so long to reach them. In the midst of my half-heartedness, tears came to my eyes when I saw how eager they were to help me. Since I could not travel on foot or on horseback, with one person on each side, they took hold of my arms and carried me over the muddy hills. I was not able to repay them for their efforts and their act of compassion, nor do I think I will ever be able to repay them as I would hope to do. When I was able to sing, a large number of them would happily join in and accompany me. When we stopped, I blessed those who

16. Richard Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion: From Paganism to Christianity* (New York: H. Holt and Co, 1998), 97–129.

had helped me and then a second group came over and asked me to bless them as well. A number of them accompanied us for many days. And for me, this served to deepen the compassion I have felt for them for quite some time.¹⁷

He elaborated on this in another letter five months later:

I have sailed to these islands three different times and have had the pleasure of seeing some of their inhabitants. They would approach us in their canoes. Some would come aboard our boat. Their very pleasing behavior, their features, and their disposition made it that much more painful for me to see them lacking the light of the holy gospel.

On other occasions I have traveled along the coast of the mainland among thousands of its inhabitants. I have always found them to be very loving. One time, when the ground was so muddy (because shortly before it had rained heavily), since I could not travel on foot or on horseback, with one person on each side, they took hold of my arms and carried me a great distance until they could set me down on firmer ground.¹⁸

When he was finally able to establish Mission San Buenaventura at Shisholop in 1782 (on the spot he had reconnoitered ten years earlier), Serra described in two different letters the behavior of the local population as a final confirmation of his deep hopes for them:

We arrived at the site and carefully inspected it again. We prepared what was necessary and on Easter Sunday (the day of the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ), much to the delight of all who were present, the mission was founded with all of the customary ceremonial acts associated with such a solemn and glorious event.¹⁹

[The founding of the mission] took place on Easter Sunday; all the officials were there, as well as the soldiers and their families, that is, those who were intended for this mission, and also for the presidio and mission of Santa Bárbara. The people from La Asumpta, the *ranchería* in the vicinity, were present and seemed pleased. With all due formality, by means of interpreters, we asked for their permission to found our establishment.²⁰

For Serra, it was important that this first mission in the vicinity was being established on what he considered to be the permission of the local

17. Serra, *Writings of Junípero Serra*, 3: 112–14.

18. *Ibid.*, 3: 250–52.

19. *Ibid.*, 4: 150.

20. *Ibid.*, 4: 112.

people. That permission gave a promise of future success and also indicated that the people themselves were already advancing on the road to progress. That is what made them so central, in his mind, for the evangelization of Alta California.

GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

Serra also interacted with a second group of people—Spanish military officers and government officials—as he was attempting to establish a presence on the Santa Bárbara Channel. His relationships with them throw the dilemmas associated with founding Alta California into sharp relief. These relationships reminded Serra that Alta California could not be as isolated as he wished and that it would be shaped by ideological crosscurrents emanating from Europe and the rest of New Spain.

The Alta California missions were founded in spurts. Five missions were founded in the first three years, but San Buenaventura was not among them. Serra did not object to starting these missions because he wanted to send the missionaries he already had into the field, but the Santa Bárbara Channel continued to be his major goal. The military, however, consistently refused to cooperate. The province's military leadership, Pedro Fages and Fernando Rivera y Moncada, believed that Serra was being swept along by naïve enthusiasm. Where Serra saw the channel as a fertile field, the military regarded the Chumash's numbers and sophistication as potential threats. They argued that any Spanish presence in the channel—military or religious—would require more soldiers than Serra realized.

Serra believed that his experiences at Carmel proved the opposite. He had started to lay the foundations for what he hoped would be a vibrant native Christian community there even before he moved the mission to the banks of the Carmel River. He began on March 19, 1771, the feast day of San José, the patron saint of the overland expedition. It was also exactly one year to the day when the relief ship *San Antonio* arrived at San Diego just as Gaspar de Portolá was about to order the abandonment of Alta California. Serra, who loved anniversaries, used that day to lay the symbolic foundation of his hoped-for new community at Carmel

by baptizing three boys. One nine-year-old boy, to whom he gave the name Juan Evangelista José, was from Achasta, a village somewhere on the north side of the Carmel River. A second boy, Fernando José, slightly younger than Juan Evangelista, hailed from Tucutnut, which was located farther up the Carmel River. A third boy, six years of age, whom he christened Diego José, was from Ichxenta, a village in the vicinity of San José Creek near Point Lobos. Even before Mission San Carlos Borromeo was established, Serra was already envisioning a new multi-village Rumsen community as its congregation.²¹

Serra resumed this process after he returned from his trip (1773–1774) to Mexico City. For Serra, this had been a very successful journey because Viceroy Bucareli accepted most of the recommendations he proposed for Alta California. Serra arrived back at Carmel on May 11, 1774. He was in high spirits because a long-awaited supply ship had arrived two days before. Also, conversations between Serra and Juan Evangelista José, whom he had taken to Mexico City, had convinced him that the gospel was taking root among the Rumsen.²² On May 23, Fernando Rivera y Moncada, in whom Serra had great hope, arrived to take over as commander. On July 19, Pedro Fages, whom Serra had asked to have removed from his position as military commander of Alta California, departed.

In August, Serra offered this description of life at Mission San Carlos along the Carmel River:

The new Christians of this mission, adults, who with the example of the few laborers that I have been able to obtain up to this point, are beginning to work harder at their jobs. Some, with hoes in hand, break up the ground to widen the area for sowing; others dig in the garden; others make adobe bricks; while others use saws. During these last weeks, everyone has been involved with the wheat harvest, hauling the sacks to the granary and doing whatever else they are told to do.

21. The location of the villagers was taken from Gary S. Breschini and Trudy Haversat, "Rumsen Seasonality and Population Dynamics," in *The Oblone: Past and Present: Native Americans of the San Francisco Bay Region*, ed. Lowell John Bean (Menlo Park, CA: Ballena Press, 1994), 85; Randall Milliken, *Ethnohistory of the Rumsen*, Papers in Northern California Anthropology 2 (Berkeley: Northern California Anthropological Group, 1987), 52–58. The baptismal records were taken from the Early California Population Project database at the Huntington Library, at <http://www.huntington.org/Information/ECPPmain.htm>. The three boys' baptisms were recorded in baptismal records 00015–00017 at Mission San Carlos.

22. Serra, *Writings of Junípero Serra*, 2: 87–89.

The harvesting began on July 18. It had to be prolonged until August 11 because as soon as the harvesting began, so many sardines appeared on the beach near the mission that we found it necessary to harvest wheat until noon and then gather sardines in the afternoon. This arrangement lasted for twenty consecutive days. Besides the sardines that so many people ate during that time (even people who came from remote areas ate sardines) and what we and our people ate fresh, we were left with the fish that was given to us. This consists of twenty barrels packed full of sardines in brine. At first we had more, but as the fish began to settle in the barrels, three barrels full would become two.

Ten barrels were prepared for some other people but seeing that we were running out of barrels and salt, it occurred to us to open up the sardines, debone them, and set them out to dry in the sun, which is how the gentiles who live in the Santa Bárbara Channel do it. We give away the sardines that we have dried in this manner to anybody who asks for them.

After two weeks of meatless meals, the following Sunday the Indians took a break from eating sardines and went out as a group to look for the nests that fish-eating birds build between the rocks. They pulled out large numbers of young birds which were the size of a large hen. They spent that Sunday camped out on the beach of Carmel, divided up into countless little groups, each with its own fire upon which they roasted the birds, and then they ate. I went with two other Fathers to see the gathering. It was a period of contentment, a beautiful setting.²³

This picture—of native peoples gradually learning the techniques of European agriculture, of a mission work schedule divided evenly between imported and traditional occupations, of Europeans appreciating the skill of California fishermen, and of priests appreciatively watching a Rumsen community gathering—may well have been an idealized one. However, it is most significant that the soldiers played no role in Serra's description. He and his fellow missionaries always had an ambivalent relation with the military. They knew they needed military protection, especially during the first years of a missionary establishment. But they resented that need, since it demonstrated that one of their core self-perceptions, that they were bringing to the Indians what the Indians really wanted, was somewhat flawed.

As Serra recorded what he regarded as the great initial success of the missionary effort at Carmel, he found the military refusal to allow the

23. *Ibid.*, 2: 142–44.

*This map of the west coast of North America by Portolá expedition
member Miguel Costansó placed special emphasis
on the coastal features between Cabo San Lucas
at the tip of Baja California and the Santa Bárbara Channel.*

COURTESY OF THE BANCROFT LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY.

establishment of an additional mission along the Santa Bárbara Channel more and more frustrating. Missionary Fermín Francisco de Lasuén reported that at one meeting in which Rivera y Moncada refused to allow the founding of a channel mission, Serra became so angry that he banged on the table and shouted at Rivera y Moncada.²⁴

24. Fermín Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, ed. Finbar Kenneally (Washington, D.C.: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1965), 1: 57.

In 1775 Serra finally received permission from the viceroy to begin another mission, yet he was still deeply upset. He grumbled that the approval was "to start the foundation of Mission San Juan Capistrano, although my intent was to start San Buenaventura."²⁵ Then, in 1776, attention shifted to the San Francisco Bay area, as the authorities in Mexico City ordered the establishment of a presidio, two missions, and, to Serra's great irritation, a pueblo. He expressed his deep dissatisfaction with this arrangement in a letter to the Comandante General of the Provincias Internas:

All right, establish those pueblos, if that is what the superiors decree, and stop building missions. But let it be known that I will end as I began, expressing nothing more than what seems fair and appropriate based on the wisdom that Our Lord God has seen fit to bestow upon me.

Missions, Señor, missions are what this territory needs. They will provide the territory not only with what is most important, that is, the light of the Holy Gospel, but also with food for the missions themselves and for the royal presidios, which is better than what these pueblos without priests can do, among other things that they cannot provide.

I maintain that settlements populated by fine Spanish citizens who are models of good behavior can be established only after the gentiles who are scattered across the territory have become Christians and have been brought together in their respective reducciones or missions. That is when there will be plenty of valuable uncultivated and uninhabited lands or possessions of the crown. But for now, this is very repugnant to me for various reasons.²⁶

In the mid-1770s, when much attention was being directed at the San Francisco Bay area and the rebuilding of San Diego, the Santa Bárbara Channel remained at the forefront of Serra's concerns. He was originally quite taken with the new governor Felipe de Neve. The governor had been ordered to scout out the channel as he proceeded north from Loreto to Monterey. When he arrived, he talked to Serra about the channel area. Serra reported:

But it has been very comforting to me to hear the Señor Gobernador say that after he traveled through this same territory and saw the native peoples, he has deemed their conversion to our holy Catholic faith to be of utmost importance. This can be accomplished by constructing a fort or a presidio in the middle of the Santa

25. Serra, *Writings of Junípero Serra*, 2: 316.

26. *Ibid.*, 3: 254.

Bárbara Channel area, where ships could call. There would be a mission nearby as well as one mission at each end of the channel—San Buenaventura at one end and another at Point Concepción. The fort at Santa Bárbara would defend the area. And there would be a notable increase in the number of Christians and subjects of the crown. The fort would also provide a very important service, which would be a greater sense of security for those traveling from one new establishment to another. Because the Señor Gobernador's plan is literally so in keeping with my longstanding aspirations, when I heard it, I realized once more, in the midst of my joy, that reason and truth resemble one another.²⁷

But Serra was soon to discover that what Neve meant by missions was not what he had in mind. Unlike his predecessors Fages and Rivera y Moncada, Neve had extensive administrative experience on the Mexican mainland before he came to California. He had worked with the Marqués de Rubí in Querétaro and had supervised the former Jesuit properties in Zacatecas. When he came to California, Neve brought with him a series of more contemporary ideas. These included the notion that the traditional mission system, and the religious orders who administered it, had seen their day. A royal decree had secularized a number of Franciscan parishes in Mexico in 1749. A number of royal officials in New Spain felt that the mission system had proven too expensive. In addition, these officials argued that one of the mission system's principal goals, the assimilation of indigenous people into Hispanic society, never seemed to be attained.²⁸

Serra had struggled against these ideas for eight years in the Sierra Gorda. The attractiveness of California for him lay in its extreme isolation from the metropolitan center. Serra genuinely believed that the Hispanic inhabitants of the frontier—soldiers and settlers—would exploit the native populations and that only autonomous missions could protect them. If missions were under attack elsewhere in New Spain, in California Serra hoped he could turn back the clock.²⁹

27. *Ibid.*, 3: 114.

28. Edwin Beilharz, *Felipe de Neve, First Governor of California* (San Francisco: California Historical Society, 1971), 10–12; María Velázquez, *El marqués de Altamira y las provincias internas de Nueva España* (México: Colegio de México Centro de Estudios Históricos, 1976), 33–65; William Taylor, *Magistrates of the Sacred: Priests and Parishioners in Eighteenth-century Mexico* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 83–86; David Weber, *Bárbaros: Spaniards and their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 107–109.

29. For a sampling of Serra's assessment of soldiers and settlers for the late 1770s, see Serra, *Writings of Junípero Serra*, 3: 159, 181, 199, 253–55, 305, 367.

Neve thus represented a challenge to Serra's hope. Neve represented a new school of thought—one which argued that the development of the native peoples was being inhibited by the missions and that indigenous people ought to be enabled to engage Hispanic society more directly. But in Serra's eyes, Neve's program for the missions was a direct attack on the authority of the priests, who were the only ones standing between the Indians and ruthless exploitation.

This conflict colored discussions about the Santa Bárbara Channel. Serra finally was able to found a mission on the channel but it was a bittersweet moment for him because he knew that he was reading from Neve's script. By the early 1780s, Serra had been forced to accept Neve's insistence that mission Indians be allowed to elect a set of officials for themselves. Native elections for a variety of posts had long existed in many other areas of New Spain. Serra encouraged the missionaries to try to manipulate these elections as best they could. But he was consistently disappointed in the results since native officials often used their own authority to restrict the power of the Fathers.³⁰ Also, Neve's *Reglamento* had been approved in 1781. This document was designed to weaken the missions by gradually reducing the number of priests and soldiers at each mission. In the specific case of San Buenaventura, Neve issued orders that would have forbidden the congregation of Indians at the mission and mandated that they remain living in their own villages and towns.³¹

In 1782 Neve and Serra left San Gabriel together and headed for San Buenaventura. One day into the journey Neve was called back to Mission San Gabriel to confer with Pedro Fages about events along the Colorado River. Fages had just arrived at the mission. Serra was allowed to continue towards San Buenaventura. Some soldiers went with him, while others were assigned to return to San Gabriel with Neve. Serra could not resist recording what he said was the reaction of the soldiers who were chosen to accompany him: "Those who were chosen to go with us for the founding were dancing with delight, not so much because of their

30. Serra, *Writings of Junípero Serra*, 3: 292–301, 408–18.

31. Felipe de Neve, *Regulations for governing the province of the Californias, approved by His Majesty by Royal order, dated October 24, 1781*, trans. John Everett Johnson (San Francisco: Grabhorn Press, 1929), 50–53.

devotion to the saint but more so because of their lack of devotion to another master."³² Thus, San Buenaventura was founded without Neve's presence. The senior military officer in attendance was José Francisco de Ortega, an old friend of Serra's. Neve's orders about not congregating the Indians were not implemented and Serra was able to found his last mission under the older system.³³

At the conclusion of his consultations with Fages, Neve went to San Buenaventura. He let matters stand there but he was not about to countenance the establishment of what he considered another old-fashioned mission. The expedition then proceeded to Santa Bárbara where the presidio was established. Serra assumed that a mission would soon follow and he signed his first letters from there as being from the "Mission-Presidio of Santa Bárbara."³⁴ However, after a few weeks Neve made it crystal clear that the mission would not be founded, so Serra left for Carmel. He was in a very sour frame of mind and later wrote:

On the same day that I left, the 15th, the Señor Gobernador and I arrived at the site that His Lordship had chosen for the presidio of Santa Bárbara. In my humble opinion, this site is not good for a presidio or for a mission.

I am not in the mood to describe the calamity surrounding the founding of the mission, and what I saw and heard during the three weeks that I stayed at the site. I witnessed the Señor Gobernador acting as a missionary. He said that we do not have the expertise for this and he promised Father Cambón that he would provide him with a method for how to be a missionary.³⁵

Neve was referring to what he had done at San Gabriel in 1781. To prepare for the founding of Los Angeles, he engaged in systematic diplomacy with the Tongva people, especially those in the village of Yabit, or Yangna. During the spring of that year, the governor was the godfather at the baptisms of a dozen Tongva, most of who were given "de Neve" as part of their Christian names. Two were even called Felipe and Felipa.³⁶

32. Serra, *Writings of Junípero Serra*, 4:150.

33. Richard Whitehead, *Citadel on the Channel: The Royal Presidio of Santa Barbara, its Founding and Construction, 1782–1798* (Santa Barbara, CA, and Spokane, WA: Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation and Arthur H. Clark Co., 1996), 78; Beilharz, *Felipe de Neve*, 120.

34. Serra, *Writings of Junípero Serra*, 4: 123, 134, 141.

35. *Ibid.*, 4: 152.

36. San Gabriel baptisms 00589, 00634–00641, 00726, and 00732–00733, Early California Population Project database.

Santa Bárbara Presidio Chapel, 1855, *by James Madison Alden.*

COURTESY OF THE SANTA BÁRBARA MISSION ARCHIVE-LIBRARY.

So at Santa Bárbara, Neve was telling Serra that he thought that what he had accomplished at San Gabriel provided a model for future conversions. California natives would be attracted to the Gospel through contact with soldiers and settlers, not necessarily missionaries. Neve had a way of getting under Serra's skin and he knew it. He undoubtedly intended that his comment that he would be happy to teach the Franciscans how to be real missionaries would irritate Serra. He succeeded.

SOLDIERS

The Alta California Franciscans consistently denounced the behavior of the leatherjacket soldiers towards the native peoples, especially against women. Separating the missions from large groups of soldiers was one reason the missions at Monterey and San Diego were relocated in the

1770s. Denunciations of military sexual aggression at San Gabriel and San Diego became powerful chapters of the missionary narrative.³⁷

In the 1770s, Serra argued that the behavior of military convoys and pack trains in the channel area was poisoning the Chumash against Christianity. He referred especially to a 1775 episode in which three missionaries who were accompanying a military party through the area were attacked. According to one of the missionaries, Fermín Francisco de Lasuén, the trouble began when a soldier struck an Indian with the flat side of his sword. The confrontation escalated and the military party had to flee. Lasuén wrote, "I was able to make my escape on foot and, although it was very difficult because of my weight, with God's help I found myself very shortly beyond the range of their shafts." Lasuén reflected: "I am of the opinion that these channel Indians know that they are strong, and that they act on the principle that whoever harms them will have to pay the price."³⁸ Two years later, as Serra was preparing to go south, he wrote:

The idea of traveling through the Santa Bárbara Channel again causes my weakened flesh to tremble. But some day, the Holy College will deem it more honorable to have martyrs there instead of missions. The truth is that I have always found the poor gentiles to be very loving. The greatest danger occurs when an unjust act on the part of the soldiers incites the gentiles, which has happened. Danger is always present at every turn. However, each journey through areas that are heavily populated by gentiles has been without incident. If this is not attributed to a miracle, then it is due to a very special form of Divine Providence.³⁹

Lasuén put the matter clearly:

Due to this delay in establishing a mission, the Indians are becoming more arrogant; and with their more frequent opportunities of observing our men in their frequent and necessary trips—trips during which unfortunately they are often attacked—there is danger that in time, the conversion of these Indians will be rendered more difficult and more costly.⁴⁰

37. Palóu, *Palóu's Life of Fray Junípero Serra*, 119–20; Luis Jayme, *Letter of Luis Jayme, OFM, San Diego, October 17, 1772.*, ed. Maynard J. Geiger (Los Angeles: Published for San Diego Public Library by Dawson's Book Shop, 1970).

38. Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1: 45–47.

39. Serra, *Writings of Junípero Serra*, 3: 234.

40. Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1: 47.

Lasuén and Serra believed that the acts of the soldiers made the establishment of missions more urgent. In Serra's mind, the soldiers represented the dark side of the Spanish colonial presence in California, while the missionaries represented the bright side. But the dichotomy was hardly so simple. As we have seen in the founding of San Buenaventura, a military presence was an integral part of each mission from the start. The mission system itself, especially the congregation of Indians which Serra deemed so essential, necessarily involved coercion and force. It would be left to later generations of Chumash and to Serra's and Neve's successors, to try to sort out these contradictions.

PRIESTS

The California missionaries did not always speak with one voice. Tensions among them were far more common than is realized. The task of staffing his first Santa Bárbara Channel mission presented Serra with a number of challenges.

Serra and the Alta California missionaries were all attached to the *Colegio de San Fernando* in Mexico City. This institution had been founded in 1733 by a group of friars from the *Colegio de la Santa Cruz* in Querétaro. San Fernando staffed three distinct mission fields during its existence: the Sierra Gorda (1740–1770), Baja California (1768–1773), and Alta California (1769–1833). The *Colegio's* entire history was marked by recruiting difficulties and internal instability.

The *Colegio* undertook a recruiting expedition to Spain in 1739, but this effort resulted in the arrival of only twelve men in 1742. Another recruiting effort in 1749 was more successful, as thirty-three men, including Serra, Palóu, and Crespi, joined the *Colegio*. A 1759 effort resulted in eighteen new recruits. The most successful trip was in 1770, when forty-two friars joined the *Colegio*.⁴¹

These new members were not always willing missionaries. One *guardián* complained that too many Fernandinos were enchanted by Mexico City

41. Rose Marie Beebe and Robert M. Senkewicz, "Uncertainty on the Mission Frontier: Missionary Recruitment and Institutional Stability in Alta California in the 1790s," in *Francis in America: Essays on the Franciscan Family in North and South America*, ed. John Schwaller (Berkeley: Academy of American Franciscan History, 2005), 307.

and did not want to submit themselves to the rigors of frontier mission life. Further, a series of ecclesiastical visitors constantly complained that discipline in the *Colegio* was too lax, that friars were constantly having visitors in from the city, and that they were spending too much time attending to local people, rather than preparing themselves for the missions. Serra was aware of these issues, and constantly begged the *guardián* not to send him these types of people.⁴²

In 1781, as a protest against Neve's *Reglamento*, the *Colegio de San Fernando* decided to stop sending men to Alta California. As a result, when Serra was allowed to start San Buenaventura, he did not have fresh missionaries to assign to it so he had to scour around. He was not happy with the result. He wrote:

I was hoping that with the new priests, the spiritual and temporal nature of the mission would have developed very much to my expectations. They have not arrived and I have had to assign others there since there were no new priests. I had hoped for much gentler men.⁴³

The two men whom he unwillingly sent to San Buenaventura were Francisco Dumetz and Vicente de Santa María. Dumetz had arrived in California in 1771 and was sent to San Diego, but the very next year Serra removed him from there. He reported to the *guardián* that "I found by letters I received that it was advisable to move Father Dumetz to another mission." Serra never said why. When another *guardián* a few years later questioned Serra about his reasons for transferring people, he said only this about Dumetz: "I know why I brought him to this mission." Serra assigned Dumetz to Mission San Carlos, but he never really involved him very much in the affairs of the mission. He was usually given auxiliary tasks such as saying Mass at the Presidio or going to Baja California to pick up various items and bring them north.⁴⁴

Santa María had come to Alta California as a ship chaplain in 1775 aboard the *San Carlos* when it entered San Francisco Bay. He returned to

42. Gómez Canedo, *Sierra Gorda, un típico enclave misional*, 115; Beebe and Senkewicz, "Uncertainty on the Mission Frontier," 310; Serra, *Writings of Junípero Serra*, 1: 173; 2: 5, 321; 4: 195, 249–51.

43. *Ibid.*, 4: 152.

44. Maynard J. Geiger, *Franciscan Missionaries in Hispanic California, 1769–1848: A Biographical Dictionary* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1969), 66–68; Serra, *Writings of Junípero Serra*, 1: 253; 2: 427.

California the next year, and Serra asked him to staff San Diego during the reconstruction after the Kumeyaay revolt. According to Serra:

I went to his [Santa María's] room with Father Fuster, and put before him the plan that he should be a companion of the Father and Minister of that mission [San Diego]. He got so red in the face, as if I had insulted him. He answered that he regretted that he had been asked at so late a date; that he could have gone to San Francisco and continued on with his chaplaincy . . . that all his belongings were in San Gabriel, and that he was handed a mission that nobody else had any use for . . . seeing that he did not yield an inch, I left him and went on with my work. The Father refused to speak to me anymore.⁴⁵

Santa María ended up at San Francisco where Francisco Palóu agreed to have him, even though Serra called him "superfluous" and "difficult to manage."⁴⁶

Serra was not happy with having to put this pair at San Buenaventura. When two new missionaries did arrive in 1783, Serra assigned them to San Buenaventura in place of the two there, but both Dumetz and Santa María wrote to Mexico City protesting this. In a letter to the *guardián*, Serra just threw up his hands:

I know very well that the two priests from San Buenaventura have written to you. They are speculating about the damage to their reputation and are distressed that they might be moved. But if Father Dumetz is to remain here, I have already said that I will not be responsible for that mission or for whatever that priest feels like spending. Nor will I answer the complaints that will arise from the other missions when those other two priests take charge of them, whether those missions like it or not.⁴⁷

As it turned out, Dumetz and Santa María remained together at San Buenaventura for fifteen years. In fact, Santa María remained there until his death in 1806. Dumetz served at San Fernando Rey and San Gabriel until his passing in 1811. During their lifetimes, other missionaries quarreled with their superiors over the treatment of the native peoples and the goals of the mission system itself. Sometimes these quarrels reverberated all the way to Mexico City. These episodes became important

45. Geiger, *Franciscan Missionaries in Hispanic California*, 225–28; Serra, *Writings of Junípero Serra*, 3: 100–102.

46. Serra, *Writings of Junípero Serra*, 3: 317.

47. *Ibid.*, 4: 190.

crucibles in which much of the nineteenth-century California mission system was forged.⁴⁸

CONCLUSION

In dealing with the Santa Bárbara Channel, Junípero Serra interacted with native people, colonial officials, leatherjacket soldiers, and other missionaries. His complex interaction with all of these groups underscores the fact that California was a frustrating place for Junípero Serra. He had come to the Americas to interact directly with non-Christians. Alta California was the first place in which he was consistently able to do that. However, the complexity of the political and social environment there meant that he had to spend much of his time in administration rather than in evangelization or in direct ministry to the native peoples. "I spend half my life at a writing desk," he complained in 1775. As Steven Hackel's essay in this volume demonstrates, Serra took every opportunity he could to engage in direct sacramental contact with the native peoples, especially at Carmel. A similar desire was probably a principal reason why Serra quarreled with Neve so bitterly over the governor's attempt to restrict Serra's ability to administer confirmation.

Junípero Serra has sometimes come to be regarded as the symbol of the California missions, and almost as the embodiment of Spanish California. Such a picture would have greatly surprised Serra himself. His experiences with the Santa Bárbara Channel demonstrated the inadequacies of such a simplistic vision of California's Spanish era. Those who controlled the channel frustrated Serra's hope of spreading the gospel among a leading group of native Californians. The California missions were contested terrain from their very beginnings and Spanish settlement of Alta California was too complex a process for even a man as dynamic, eager, and determined as Junípero Serra to be able to shape it completely.

48. Beebe and Senkewicz, "Uncertainty on the Mission Frontier," 310–14, 320–26.