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## **PROTESTANT AND ORTHODOX MISSIONS IN ALASKA: SHELDON JACKSON'S AND IVAN VENIAMINOV'S ACTIVITIES**

**Abstract.** *During a recent fieldwork in Anchorage and Kodiak, Alaska in summer 2017, the name of Sheldon Jackson, the general agent of education in Alaska constantly came up, in particular, while discussing punishments for speaking Native languages at schools and their consequent loss. In 1982, the anthropologist Richard Dauenhauer compared in his article two missionary strategies in Alaska in the 19th century: that of Sheldon Jackson, the Presbyterian missionary, and that of Ivan Veniaminov, the Russian Orthodox missionary. The same year, Stephen Haycox wrote an article arguing that Dauenhauer had failed to develop a sufficient historical context for the two missionaries and provided more details on Sheldon Jackson's strategy. The goal of both missionaries was to convert Native people to Christianity, thus, to eliminate their traditional religious beliefs. To reach the goal, both of them gathered ethnographic material, carried out missionary work, founded schools. In Veniaminov's and the Russian Orthodox Church's case, the elimination of Native traditional customs and beliefs was progressive and the approach was bilingual while Sheldon Jackson, like many other Protestants, insisted on Christianization, civilization and the exclusive use of the English language as the only possible means for indigenous people to become 'citizens' of the United States. This work acts as a survey over the existing literature and compares the respective missionary approaches.*

**Keywords:** *Orthodox, Protestant, Alaska, Church, missionary.*

In August 2017 during our first field work in Alaska, we had a opportunity to listen to two presentations of the Orthodox Church of America's Archivist Alexis Liberovsky about the relationships between the Orthodox Church and the government agent and Presbyterian missionary Sheldon Jackson after the sale of Alaska to the United States by Russia in 1867. The presentations took place in the Holy Resurrection Cathedral in Kodiak and in the Saint Innocent Cathedral in Anchorage.

There were several negative reactions parishioners manifested while the complicated relationships between Sheldon Jackson and the Russian Orthodox Church were being presented. During the same field work, in particular, during interviews with Native Orthodox parishioners and with Native clergy, the subject of Sheldon Jackson's missionary and education policy regularly came up. In particular, several interviewees spoke about their education, punishment for speaking their native languages and their consequent loss, as a result of Sheldon Jackson's education policy. In spring

1982, The Pacific Historian published an article by Richard Dauenhauer that compared Sheldon Jackson with the early Russian Orthodox missionary, Father Ivan Veniaminov, Bishop Innocent (canonized in 1977 as Saint Innocent). In this article, the author argued that “Veniaminov, with his emphasis on bilingualism, epitomized a positive, culturally supportive approach to proselytizing and education which was characteristic of the Russian Orthodox mission in Alaska” and that, by contrast, Jackson and other Protestants insisted on the elimination of native languages and their replacement by English which was “individually and culturally destructive” to Native people [4].

Stephen Haycox claimed that Dauenhauer failed to develop a sufficient historical context for the two missionaries in comparison, as they appeared isolated from the historical background. Haycox emphasized that in Jackson's case it led to important misunderstanding of his activities and motivation [4].

In the present article, two missionaries' strategies is going to be compared and reexamined in order to give a new interpretation of those strategies in the given historical context. In the first section, the historical background will be examined. The second section is going to be dedicated to the missionary approach comparison and the relationships of the Protestant and the Orthodox Churches, while the third section is going to focus on the main differences in these missionary strategies.

As for the historical background, the future Russian Orthodox Church missionary and Metropolitan of Moscow, Ivan Veniaminov was born in the Irkutsk province of Siberia in 1797 and was first named Ioann Evseevich Popov. At age nine he was sent to Irkutsk Seminary where his name was changed to Veniaminov. After his graduation from the Seminary in 1823, he was sent to Unalaska Island, Alaska as an ordained priest [15].

Veniaminov had stayed in the Eastern Aleutians for ten years and became fluent in the Eastern Aleut language [12]. Not only he became bilingual, he also “developed kinship ties through the marriage of a brother to an Aleut woman and the marriage of a daughter to a Russian-Aleut man” [9]. In parallel to his duties, such as converting the Aleuts to the Orthodoxy, founding a boys' school, he learned Aleut, invented an Aleut alphabet, translated the liturgy, catechism and the gospel of Matthew into Aleut [15].

In 1839, after the death of his wife, he became a monastic and was chosen to be the bishop [9]. Veniaminov moved to Sitka in 1834 to continue his missionary work among the Tlingit [8]. He learned the language, carried out translations. He also wrote the first large Tlingit ethnography published in 1840 [3].

In 1841-1842 Veniaminov carried out his first tour through his diocese. In 1868 Veniaminov was chosen to the Metropolitan of Moscow that he held until his death in 1879 [9].

In 1834, the same year when Veniaminov started his missionary work in Sitka, the future first general agent for education in Alaska and a Presbyterian clergyman, Sheldon Jackson was born in New York.

Jackson was educated at Union College and Princeton Theological Seminary [15]. Before his work in Alaska, he worked as a missionary among Indians in the west of the country for more than ten years; he was one of founders of fourteen schools and of numerous churches.

After 1877, Jackson carried out education and missionary work in Alaska. He founded Presbyterian mission schools in six Alaska communities and raised funds among religious and political circles for education in Alaska [4]. To raise funds, he had to be very persistent and energetic. For instance, in 1880 he “*personally invited every member of Congress to attend one of three different lectures*” he was going to give on Alaska's resources, climate, inhabitants, living conditions and needs [5].

In 1880, under Jackson's supervision, the “comity agreement” took place with the participation of Protestant missionaries in order to divide Alaska into several different missionary areas to set up missions and schools. Alaska was divided among the Presbyterians, the Episcopalians, the Baptists, the Methodists and the Moravians and the Congregationalists [16]. The Catholics and the Orthodox were not invited to the meeting. This goes into contradiction with the statement that “Orthodox, Protestant and Catholic clergy seem to have agreed quickly on a division into zones of influence” [2].

In 1885 Jackson was appointed as the general agent for education in Alaska [16]. When he became the general agent, he discovered Russian-Greek Orthodox churches throughout Alaska. Initially, the Protestants thought of not “*interfering with the Russian-Greek Orthodox work among the Natives*” [13]. Moreover, Jackson considered Ivan Veniaminov to be “the one among all the Russian priests to Alaska that has left an untarnished reputation and seemed to possess the true missionary spirit” [6]. Jackson thought of Veniaminov as a remarkable missionary on the north-west coast of America, among other two Protestant missionaries, starting as a priest in Alaska and having become the Metropolitan of Moscow.

However, Jackson's attitude towards the Orthodox Church was not favorable upon the whole: “*And in response to that call it was to be expected that the churches of the United States, with their purer religion and greater consecration, would send in more efficient agencies than Russia had done*” [6]. Hence, Jackson considered the Russian Church as an inferior one as compared to the Protestant Churches. In this respect, the question of Nicholas, a bishop of the Orthodox Church, late of Alaska and the Aleut Islands in his demand to the President William McKinley dated from October 5th, 1898 is notable: “*It was the Orthodox Church which brought the light of truth to that country; why then try to drive her out of it*”

*by every means, lawful or unlawful?*” [17]. Hence, the relationships between Jackson and the Orthodox Church clergy were adversarial and they had tensions.

While comparing the Protestant and Orthodox missionary strategies and speaking about Christian denominations' adversary, it should be noted that it also might be natural for Veniaminov to 'defend' the Orthodox Church from other Christian denominations' missionary interference to the Alaskan Territory. For instance, he agreed with Governor Etholin's decision to build a Lutheran church for the Finns in Novo-Arkhangelsk (today Sitka) but he forbade any Lutheran missionary work among the Tlingit, thus, maintaining the “exclusivity” of the Orthodox Church in the area [10]. Thus, Jackson and other Protestants' intentions to dominate the area and to protect it from their 'Christian adversaries' might not be that different of that of Veniaminov's and of the Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska.

Like Veniaminov, Jackson was a missionary, he also founded schools, and at the time of his death occupied the highest position in his church [1]. Being Christian missionaries, both of them disapproved of original 'pagan' beliefs and both of them might contribute to the destruction of indigenous religious systems.

To understand these religious systems, Veniaminov published his first large Tlingit ethnography in 1840 that primarily contained the description of social organization, customs and beliefs and might be of particular interest for him, as a priest [3]. Indeed, in his instructions to the Missionary at Nushagak, Theopahnus, Veniaminov emphasized that the latter one should “make it [his] business to find out all about the religion, rites, customs [...] of [his] parishioners, more especially in order to be able the more surely and easily to influence them [17].

Jackson also traveled a lot in Alaska; he described indigenous customs and religious beliefs [6, 7]. However, most of his descriptions were taken from other sources for public relations purposes [5].

In the 1880s Jackson, established an anthropological museum in Sitka with collections of Native Alaskan artifacts. In 1892, for the purpose of Eskimo subsistence, Jackson organized the importation of domestic reindeer from Siberia. He continued his duties as the general agent inspecting schools and reindeer herds in Alaska until his resignation in 1906 [15].

As for differences in Jackson's and Veniaminov's strategies, the most important one was that Veniaminov's approach to proselytizing and education was bilingual, it was based on the preservation of native languages, while Jackson, like other Protestant missionaries insisted on the elimination of native languages and their exclusive replacement by the English language [1].

Concerning the bilingual approach, Veniaminov learned the Aleut language together with the Aleut chief, Ivan Pan'kov and invented an Aleut

alphabet to elaborate liturgical translations [11]. As not all other Orthodox priests were as good at learning Native languages as Veniaminov was, the bishop opened a seminary in Novo-Arkhangelsk in 1845 to bring up the Native bilingual clergy [10]. As a nowadays result of this bilingual strategy, one of our interviewees (Taisia A., Yupik, in her sixties) managed to revive her mother language (lost because of Jackson's strategy) by going to the Orthodox Church where the services were conducted in this mother tongue (as a result of Veniaminov's strategy).

As for Native customs and traditional religious beliefs, according to Veniaminov, “*ancient customs, so long as they [were] not contrary to Christianity, [did not] need to be too abruptly broken up; but it [needed to] be explained to converts that they [were] merely tolerated [...] for nothing [insulted] and [irritated] savages so much as showing them open contempt and making fun of them*” [14]. Thus, his goal was a consistent and progressive elimination of Native traditional customs and beliefs while tolerating some of them and, hence, showing respect to the Native people.

On the contrary, Jackson did not differ from many Protestant reformers and missionaries in their conviction (like the Board of Indian Commissioners established in 1869) that “the only hope of survival for the American Indian was his rapid adoption of Christianity and Anglo-American culture” [13]. Indeed, Charles Bryant from Special Agent Treasury Department cited in Jackson's Report on Education in Alaska, published in 1886, described the Aleuts as having “natural gifts” that made him believe that “*the Aleuts might become as good as American citizens as any admitted under the 15th amendment to the Constitution*” [7]. According to many Protestants' opinion, “Christianization” and “civilization” were indispensable for the Natives to become “citizens” of the United States and “*the only mean by which Indian people would achieve some form of parity with whites*” [13].

Because of all these reasons, the Protestants believed in very strict English-only policies and punished the disobedience [16]. Native languages were supposed to disappear as quickly as possible. “*The Tlingit language is doomed to speedy extinction, the sooner the better for the Natives*”. Children “*were required to speak and write English exclusively*” and “*the use of Indians dialects was prohibited*” at schools [1]. One of our interviewees of Alutiiq origin, Rosabel B. (in her eighties) mentioned that not only Native children in her class were physically punished for speaking their Native language but their parents were threatened to speak it either. As a result, she lost her Native tongue as the majority of all Natives.

Hence, Jackson's and other Protestants' language policy was destructive for indigenous people as compared to that of Veniaminov and of the Orthodox Church in that it imposed on Native people the Anglo-Saxon model without any compromise. Jackson, like other Protestants,

believed that it was the means to protect the Native people by making them equal to the white population of the American society.

However, Jackson's education policy was still different from Indian Office policy: the commissioner of Indian affairs assessed Jackson's policy at the transfer of Alaska native services from Bureau of Education to the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1931 in the following way: “*The Alaskan education enterprise has been carried out in the past with a different philosophy and a different practice [than that of the Indian Office]. In contrast to the Indian Service, with its boarding schools, the office of Education in Alaska [...] confined its effort to local community schools and a program of education that took into account in an amazing way the health and social and economic life of the native group*” [4].

Thus, Jackson avoided sending Alaskan Native children to remote boarding schools preferring local schools organized by the Protestant missionaries.

We consider that, while the missionary strategies of Ivan Veniaminov and of Sheldon Jackson were both aimed at the elimination of Native traditional religious beliefs by converting them to Christianity and by educating indigenous people according to Christian standards, Sheldon Jackson's approach, in the context of the Protestant missionary strategy, had a more destructive character. Veniaminov's approach was based on using Native languages, on tolerating and showing respect to some of pre-contact religious beliefs of the Native population. The Orthodox approach was to proselytize more gradually by using the Native languages at school and in the Church.

Like the majority of the Protestants, Sheldon Jackson saw Christianization and civilization as the only means of protecting the indigenous people. In order to protect the Native population, he aimed at shaping out of them the citizens of the United States, equal to the white Americans. For him, one of the measures to undertake was the immediate abolishment of Native languages and the exclusive use of the English language. However, in contrast to many other Protestant fellows, Jackson insisted on building local schools rather than sending the Alaskan Native children to remote boarding schools. Hence, his strategy was more tolerant in this respect as compared to other Protestant missionaries.

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