



THE SPREAD OF RUSSIAN ORTHODOXY IN ALASKA: IOANN VENIAMINOV AND IAKOV NETSVETOV

The Russian Bishop's House and St. Michael's Cathedral in Sitka are visible reminders of an important living legacy of Russian America: the Orthodox Church. Sitka, or Novo-Arkhangel'sk as it was known in the Russian period, was from 1840 the center of a vast bi-continental diocese, charged by the imperial crown to work hand-in-hand with the Russian American Company (RAC) to bring the Orthodox faith and Russian civilization to the Native peoples of Alaska. Two figures were crucial to the success of the Orthodox Church in Russian America: the priests Ioann Veniaminov (1797-1871) and Iakov Netsvetov (1804-1864). Veniaminov, a simple Siberian priest, reshaped missionary philosophy, strengthened and expanded the administrative structure of the Church in Alaska, and ultimately rose to the highest ecclesiastical office in the Russian Orthodox Church as a whole. Netsvetov, the first Creole priest and missionary, adapted the same missionary philosophy in the field for more than 35 years, tending to the spiritual and material needs of diverse Native Alaskans. Both prioritized learning and recording Native languages, and understanding, if not defending, traditional Native culture. Both similarly encouraged the development of Native leadership and management of local churches and chapels. In this way, many Alaska Natives made Orthodoxy their own. Such Native and Russian cultural fusion is evident today in the numerous Orthodox churches and active Native faithful across the state.

Veniaminov was born Ioann Evseevich Popov in the Siberian province of Irkutsk, to an Orthodox sacristan. Upon the death of his father in 1803, Popov was taken in by his uncle, who educated him at home on the tenets of the Orthodox faith and later taught him a variety of artisanal and mechanical crafts. At the age of nine, Popov was sent to study at Irkutsk Theological Seminary. At the seminary, Veniaminov undertook a curriculum that fed a particular type of missionary philosophy, much discussed in Siberia but as of yet untested in the field. The missionary was urged to learn the local vernacular language, in order to better understand his target audience. Conversion required a long and patient conversation, well before corrections and religious instruction began. The missionary was not to condemn or eradicate traditional Native religious practices at once or wholesale, but gradually and slowly, by means of persuasion. Conversion must be voluntary, and the missionary must be mindful of local conditions that might preclude strict Orthodox religious observance. By all accounts Popov was an outstanding student, and an already skilled craftsman. When Bishop Veniamin died in 1814, the boy took the name Veniaminov to honor his memory. Veniaminov married Ekaterina Ivanova Sharin in 1817, to the disappointment of his teachers. In the Orthodox Church, a married priest ("white" clergy) was not eligible for promotion in the ecclesiastical hierarchy; that route was open only to celibate monks

("black" clergy), and Veniaminov showed considerable leadership promise. A deacon in 1820, Veniaminov graduated from the seminary in 1820 and was ordained a priest in 1821.

Veniaminov likely would have lived out his days in Irkutsk had it not been for a fateful encounter with Ivan Kriukov, a fur trader from the Aleutian Islands. For some time the Holy Synod had been searching for a priest to take up a parish centered on the remote island of Unalaska. Legend holds that Kriukov described the Aleutian (Unangan) people's character and need in such moving terms that Veniaminov volunteered for the position. In 1823, Veniaminov, his mother, his wife, and a younger brother (six children were born in Alaska) journeyed from Siberia, across the Pacific, to arrive in Novo-Arkhangel'sk five months later. Awaiting a ship to the Aleutians, Veniaminov set about studying the Aleut language. In summer 1824 the family settled into Unalaska. Veniaminov taught some of his new parishioners the building crafts he had learned as a young man, and with their help built a rectory, a house, and in 1826, a chapel.



Consistent with his seminary training, Veniaminov addressed his efforts toward learning the Unangan Aleut language and educating his parishioners. He opened a boys' school, and with Ivan Pan'kov, a bilingual Aleut leader, devised an Unangan alphabet. In order that his flock might worship in their own language, he translated a catechism and the Gospel of St. Matthew. Perhaps his most famous publication in Aleut (ultimately translated into many languages and 40 editions) was "The Way into the Kingdom of Heaven," a summary of Orthodox doctrine. Veniaminov traveled regularly across his large parish, performing his pastoral duties but also keeping meticulous records on a wide array of subjects, from vital statistics to ethnographic study and meteorological data. Veniaminov also began to compile his *Notes on the Islands of the Unalaska District*, ultimately published in 1840. With an eye toward promoting the fortunes of the small mission at home in Russia, Veniaminov presented the Aleuts as potentially outstanding Christians. Their conversion, moreover, could be linked to their integration as loyal imperial subjects. In his *Journals* (1825), Veniaminov insisted that Natives must respect secular authority. That meant both the imperial Russian state and the Russian American Company. Priests should refuse to accept gifts of fur from their parishioners, and "assist the Company, which provides for their subsistence."¹

¹ Quoted in Ilya Vinkovetsky, *Russian America: An Overseas Colony of a Continental Empire, 1804-1867* (Oxford and New York: 2011), 168.



In 1828 Veniaminov made the acquaintance of the young priest Iakov Netsvetov (1804-1864), a fellow graduate of the Irkutsk Theological Seminary now assigned to Atka parish. Their collaboration, of signal importance for the Alaska mission, lasted until Netsvetov's death in 1864. Netsvetov was a Creole, or a person of mixed Native Alaskan and Russian ancestry. For Russian policymakers, Russian American Company officials, and the Russian Holy Synod, Creoles were crucial to the success of the Alaskan colonial enterprise. The RAC faced a desperate shortage of Russian employees throughout its existence, and thus came to rely upon the Creoles to staff its skilled labor pool. The monopolization of Native labor in hunting furs, the immobility of Russian peasants, the remoteness of Alaska, and poor working conditions in the colony meant that nurturing a home-grown workforce was desirable to a Company that had been directed from the beginning to "civilize" native Alaskans. The Orthodox Church faced the same exigencies. There were few Russian priests willing to travel to Alaska, and the need for them was great, given the vast expanse of as-yet "unenlightened" Alaska. Accustomed to the languages and conditions of their native land, Creoles could adapt and spread the Orthodox faith in simple and familiar ways that no Russian priest, tainted by European civilization, could match.

Iakov Netsvetov was born in 1804, likely on St. George, an island in the Pribilof Islands. He was the eldest son of Egor Vasil'evich Netsvetov, originally a Siberian teamster now in the service of the RAC, and Mariia Alekseeva, a Native of the Aleutian Atka Island. Iakov Netsvetov entered Company service at the age of fifteen and served until 1823. But Egor Vasil'evich intended his eldest son for the priesthood. The institutions of the RAC and the Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska were linked by the imperial charter of 1821, which required the RAC to allow for "an adequate number of priests and clergy," and to provide "everything they need to live decently."² Based on this promise, in 1824 the Netsvetov family moved across the Pacific to Irkutsk, in order for young Iakov to enroll at the Irkutsk Theological Seminary. Bishop Mikhail assented, so long as Netsvetov "planned to serve in his native land."³ Netsvetov graduated from the Irkutsk seminary in 1826 and was elevated to the priesthood in 1828. He was recommended to serve Atka parish in the Aleutian Islands.

In 1829, Netsvetov arrived at Atka and, like Veniaminov, began an official journal of his daily activities.⁴ His first years consisted of establishing a church there, chrismating the already baptized

²Basil Dmytryshyn, E.A.P. Crownhart-Vaughan, and Thomas Vaughn, eds. and trans., *The Russian American Colonies, 1798-1867: A Documentary Record*, vol. 3: *To Siberia and Russian America* (Portland, OR: 1989), 359.

³ Antoinette Shalkop, "The Russian Orthodox Church in America," in *Russia's American Colonies*, ed. S. Frederick Starr (Durham, NC: 1987), 213.

⁴ Iakov Netsvetov, *The Journals of Iakov Netsvetov: The Atka Years, 1828-1844*, trans. Lydia Black (Kingston: 1980).

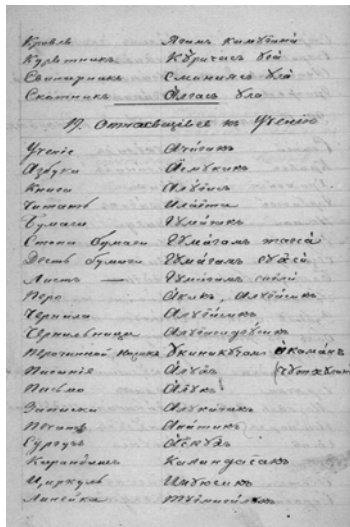
Russian, Creole, and Aleut (Unangan) residents, and taking over management of the Company school. The parish extended some 2000 miles to the Kurile Islands, and so Netsvetov's duties required much harrowing sea travel. In each Native community, he set up travel prayer tents for church services and ministrations, and gathered careful vital statistics. A fundamental pastoral duty was legitimizing appropriate marriages, particularly because legitimate Creole children were officially recognized as imperial citizens and entitled to Company support.

From the first, Netsvetov's deep concern for his Atkan parishioners was evident. Consistent with his training in Irkutsk, he was sympathetic to their traditional subsistence patterns, which often kept them from their necessary religious duties. He persuaded the Atkans to submit to smallpox vaccinations, and nursed their ailments himself when his small cache of Russian medicines allowed. Of greatest concern to Netsvetov, of course, was the spiritual health of his flock. He was vigilant in locating nonbelievers, heretics, and backsliders, whom he sought to bring back into the fold by means of reasoning and persuasion, or, when necessary, scolding and correction.



At the school on Atka, he began bilingual classes in reading, catechism, ethics, and Biblical studies. Netsvetov's interest in education and in languages was honed by his collaboration with Veniaminov. Between 1837 and 1842, the two priests began a correspondence dedicated to translations that would serve all of the local Unangan dialects. In his introduction to an Aleut catechism the two co-published in 1840, Netsvetov explained to his Native readers, "Now your speeches are different, but they will be unified. You are now like brothers through your common origin, but I say that you may become like brothers through the teachings of the Gospel, through the mind."⁵ Netsvetov independently compiled a grammar in Atkan and an extensive thematic dictionary of the Unangan language. By 1842, Netsvetov conducted church services using his own translations. Veniaminov and Netsvetov cooperated on ethnographic study, too. Veniaminov added a separate appendix to the *Notes on Atkan Aleuts*, presented synoptically from ethnographic data supplied directly by Netsvetov. Netsvetov's account, like Veniaminov's, included aspects of Atkan life that seemed compatible with Christian and Russian virtues, such as industry, honesty, and respect for elders and benefactors.

⁵ Vyacheslav Ivanov, *The Russian Orthodox Church of Alaska and the Aleutian Islands and its Relation to Native American Traditions: An Attempt at a Multicultural Society, 1794-1912* (Washington, D.C.: 1997), 7-8.



Like all of the Alaskan clergy, Netsvetov was expected to look out for the interests of the imperial state and of the RAC as well as the Orthodox Church. In the years to come, Netsvetov regularly celebrated major events in the lives of the royal family, and welcomed visiting state or Company dignitaries. Netsvetov also assisted in Company record keeping, personnel decisions, peacekeeping, and supply. Often he was called upon to act as mediator in local disputes among secular officials.

The success of Netsvetov's Atka parish caught the attention of officials. RAC Chief Manager Wrangell, in a special letter of commendation, noted Netsvetov's "exemplary zeal" and efforts, which resulted in the "highly good order" of the Atka School.⁶ In 1835 he was honored with the ritual skull cap, and in 1842 the thigh shield, both awards of excellence for priests. In his report for 1840, Veniaminov wrote, "'One might even say that the Atka church is superior to the Unalaska church, in that the parish priest there is a Creole, that is, born of a Russian and an American; a pious and energetic person; in a word, a true Christian. As a native and thus in full command of the Aleutian language, he was able from the very beginning to communicate with the Aleuts...'"⁷ Netsvetov mentored two outstanding future priests and linguists from among his Atka congregation: Lavrentii Salamatov (priest at Atka, 1844-1865) and Innokentii Shaiashnikov (priest at Unalaska, 1848-1883).

Unfortunately the pride Netsvetov must have felt in these accomplishments was overwhelmed by personal tragedy. Netsvetov's wife died in 1835, and his father soon after. The new house that Netsvetov had built for the family burned to the ground. In June 1837 Netsvetov requested permission to enter monastic orders in Irkutsk, either out of grief or ambition. Permission was denied until a replacement priest could be found. None arrived until Netsvetov himself was reassigned eight years later.

Veniaminov's personal life was also changing in ways that greatly affected his professional trajectory. In 1834, in recognition of his outstanding work on Unalaska, he was transferred to Novo-Arkhangelsk to minister to the Tlingit and to other Native and Creole people who were working there. Despite his attempts to learn the Tlingit language, he had little success in conversions until 1837, when a

⁶ Quoted in Mitropolit Kliment [Kapalin], *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov' na Aliaske do 1917 goda* (Moscow: 2009), 194.

⁷ Quoted in Iakov Netsvetov, *The Journals of Iakov Netsvetov: The Atkha Years, 1828-1844*, trans. Lydia Black (Kingston: 1980), xv.

smallpox epidemic convinced many of the efficacy of Russian medicine, and, perhaps, the Christian religion. Beyond his missionary work, Veniaminov's linguistic studies continued to absorb his attention, and in 1837 he requested permission to travel to Russia to publish his translations.

In St. Petersburg, Veniaminov exercised his extraordinary skills as a politician, publicizing the Alaskan mission and seeking to raise funds for it. He understood that the support of both Russian imperial and RAC officials was necessary for the success of the Alaska mission. He also hoped to garner support for the creation of a new Siberian/Alaskan diocese. The RAC paid for publication of his *Notes on the Islands of the Unalaska District* in 1840, and his Aleut grammar was published there in 1846. While attending to a busy schedule of writing booster literature, delivering speeches, and granting interviews (including a meeting with Tsar Nicholas I), Veniaminov learned that his wife had died. Metropolitan Filaret, one of Veniaminov's greatest supporters, urged Veniaminov to become a monk. After securing his children's upkeep at imperial expense, he complied. In 1840 he became Archimandrite Innokentii. Almost immediately his plan for the Diocese of Kamchatka, the Kurile Islands, and the Aleutians came to fruition, and he was appointed its first bishop. By 1841 he was once again on his way to Novo-Arkhangel'sk.



Novo-Arkhangel'sk was now the center of a vast, bi-continental diocese, and Bishop Innokentii set out to make it function and appear as such. Though much of his time was spent traveling across and overseeing the pastoral work in his enormous bishopric, Innokentii's interests in building and craftsmanship remade Novo-Arkhangel'sk into a thriving and visually stunning colonial city, financed at least in part by the RAC. In 1843 he consecrated the chapel at his new administrative offices and home, now known as the Russian Bishop's House. The house, he wrote, "can serve as a visible and new proof of the generous charity of the Russian-American Company, its patriotic readiness to cooperate with the aims of the government and its complete attention to the Christian faith and its servants."⁸ The building also housed a school for Native and Creole children. Two years later he secured permission to found a seminary, the primary function of which was to train Creole and Native clergy but also produced a corps of middle managers for the RAC. Innokentii later oversaw construction of a Tlingit church, the Church of the Holy Trinity (1849). In 1850 he consecrated the magnificent Cathedral of St. Michael (Innokentii built the belfry clock himself). The Church's institutions and personnel were now much broader, and

⁸ Quoted in Vinkovetsky, *Russian America*, 179

more efficient. Church offices now paralleled those of the RAC, a demonstration of the essential teamwork Innokentii had forged for governing the Russian American colony.



With the financial and institutional backing of all three interlocking colonial institutions—Church, Company, and state—Innokentii was now in a position to strengthen a larger Alaskan mission. Already in 1843, as part of a tour of his new diocese, Innokentii visited Atka and invited Netsvetov, “the best and most experienced missionary” in the colonies, to join him on a journey to Kamchatka.⁹ He convinced Netsvetov to take up a new missionary post on the Yukon, where his self-reliance (as well as, no doubt, his capacities as a Creole) would serve the remote position well. By December 1844, Netsvetov was on his way to create the Kvikhpak (Yukon) Mission in the Yupik village of Ikogmiut (near present-day Russian Mission).

Life in the interior was entirely different for Netsvetov. The decline of furbearing animals in the Aleutians and the Gulf of Alaska led the Company to found three redoubts between Norton Sound and Bristol Bay: Alexandrovskii (1819), Mikhailovskii (1833); and Kolmakovskii (1832). Instead of securing a Native workforce and controlling trade, as in the Aleutians, here the Company had to fit into a preexisting Native trade network. The population of the huge new parish was highly mobile, the vast majority unfamiliar with Christianity. There had never been a resident cleric in the Kuskokwim/Yukon region. Nor was there a Company presence at Ikogmiut, meaning that the mission would be maintained distantly by the Church alone. The Company was obliged only to transport clergy and goods, when conditions allowed.

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Bishop Innokentii drew up a list of instructions for Netsvetov, which were given to all missionaries across the Russian Empire from then on. The new guidelines emphasized developing Native clergy and local church lay leadership; learning and recording Native languages, and translating religious texts; and patient and non-coercive conversion. The missionary must present himself as a simple “wanderer and well-wisher.” Those Native customs not in “violent conflict” with the Christian sacraments were to be tolerated in the short term; Orthodox religious observances were to be interpreted liberally, according to local conditions.¹⁰ Innokentii believed that every culture had an innate understanding of Christian truth, though buried deep beneath “savage” customs and stories. By

⁹ Quoted in Barbara Smith, *Orthodoxy and Native Americans: The Alaska Mission* (Syosset, N.Y.: 1980.), 14.

¹⁰ Quoted in Sergei Kan, *Memory Eternal: Tlingit Culture and Russian Orthodox Christianity through Two Centuries* (Seattle: 1999), 33.

drawing analogies between select elements of Native and Orthodox religious belief and practice, the missionary could foster this primitive spiritual understanding. Of course Innokentii did not intend to promote a fused Orthodox and Native culture; he believed Orthodoxy to be the one true religion for all people, even if it was expressed in diverse, culturally-specific ways. He also was convinced that Natives should be drawn into Russian culture in order to facilitate colonial Russian rule. But his instructions did imply a new respect for Native cultures and lifeways in the process of conversion, and a new emphasis on training and promoting Native and Creole clergy to serve Native congregations. It was primarily these last two groups, not Russian officials or theologians, who shaped Russian Orthodoxy in ways unique to the region and its people.

Over the next seventeen years in Ikogmiut, Netsvetov attempted to implement all of Innokentii's strategies, many of which he had already practiced on Atka. But the Yukon was remote from policy makers, Church, state, or Company. The more urgent needs of his new Native flock, the severity of the interior climate, and his own worsening health hindered central guidance and directives, though Netsvetov did his best. It took six long years before the church at Ikogmiut was completed. Netsvetov traveled between the redoubts in winter and in summer, visiting villages along the route and collecting supplies left for him by RAC ships. He took advantage of the Natives' own travel patterns for religious instruction and services, especially when they were gathered at the redoubts for trade. For river or coastal trips, Netsvetov and his imported laborers built Aleut-style *baidaras* and *baidarkas*; in winter, he hired dogsleds and Native guides to drive them. Finding local men to assist in his travel could be difficult, given their own constant subsistence activities, and the fact that Netsvetov was expected to pay them wages out of his own austere budget. Travel in winter was miserable and dangerous, owing to the terrible cold and poor trails.

Netsvetov's new mission included Yupik Eskimos and Athabaskans of the southwest Alaskan interior. His visits to the Native settlements consisted of religious dialogues and instruction, regular church services, baptisms, weddings, funerals, as well as medical treatments and resolution of local disputes. Logical arguments and personal example did not always encourage Natives to convert; frequently, the Natives "postponed" scheduled meetings or failed to appear at all. Sometimes they listened "with obvious reluctance," or simply ignored Netsvetov outright: "We did not know God before, and now have no wish to know him."¹¹ Still Netsvetov refused to baptize anyone except at his or her express wish. In January 1846 the Ikogmiut villagers hosted a potlatch. Netsvetov allowed them to postpone their preparations for communion, but declined to attend. Similarly, the village hosted a commemoration of the dead ceremony in September 1847, followed by a festival and dance. Netsvetov did not interfere directly. He was convinced of the ability of the faith to unite cultures and transcend old rivalries and divisions: "One must imagine the joy in my heart at the sight of so many souls gathered in one place (there were more than 300), praying to God, people of various nations, formerly living in strife with each other, enemies, now united as Christ's Church's flock, offering prayers to the true God."¹² Netsvetov's message began to spread. People from outlying regions began to travel to Ikogmiut for baptism, or to intercept Netsvetov on his travels. Whole kinship groups now asked for religious instruction. Innokentii reported that Netsvetov converted 1516 people between 1845 and 1852 alone.¹³

¹¹ Iakov Netsvetov, *The Journals of Iakov Netsvetov: The Yukon Years, 1845-1863*, trans. Lydia Black (Kingston: 1984), 17, 22, 44.

¹² Netsvetov, *Yukon*, 350.

¹³ Ivanov, *Russian Orthodox Church*, 31.

Netsvetov spent nearly as much time fighting perennial famine and disease as he did proselytizing. The Company supply ship was often late, or short on supplies. Netsvetov could manage the shortfall by borrowing from the redoubts, harvesting his own few vegetables, sending his staff out to hunt, or trading with local Natives. This last was often impossible, as Native peoples faced outright starvation in many years. Disease was not far behind, and Netsvetov distributed food and medicine to the sick. He understood that his parishioners could not attend to their religious responsibilities in such times. As Veniaminov's experience in Novo-Arkhangel'sk showed, epidemics often led to increased conversions.

The Company employees at the redoubts relied on Netsvetov as much as he relied on them. His relations with the officials of the RAC were generally cordial, and particularly warm with the Creole Lukin family at Kolmakovskii. The Lukins shared supplies with the mission, assisted in Netsvetov's travels, and brought the missionary news. Konstantin Semenovich Lukin served as Netsvetov's sacristan, interpreter, and closest companion. Kolmakovskii redoubt could do little to actively protect the undefended mission from Native raids, however. In 1851, Lukin warned Netsvetov that unfamiliar Natives had killed several Company officials at the Nulato outpost, and that they could be headed for Ikogmiut next. Attacks from angry or simply starving Natives were not the only violent incidents in which Netsvetov was called upon to intervene. In July 1851 he received a report from Kolmakovskii that a musket accidentally discharged and killed Ivan Lukin's wife. Netsvetov ordered an investigation, and reported its findings. Employees of the Kolmakovskii redoubt mutinied in 1860; Netsvetov brokered their surrender. He was ordered to apprehend a Company employee accused of murder in the following year.



When his travel schedule and health allowed, Netsvetov continued his scholarly pursuits. He maintained an extensive private library, and borrowed books from the Novo-Arkhangelsk library. Netsvetov ran a Sunday school at Ikogmiut, and offered regular lessons for church servitors. He began to study the Yupik and Athabaskan languages, and by 1848 he offered services in Russian and two Native languages. Ultimately Netsvetov oversaw the creation of a Yupik script so that he could teach local students in their own language. Many of his students went on to become clergymen themselves, as did their students, children and grandchildren. Notable among his Yukon students was the Kvikhpak priest (1877-95) and linguist Zakharii Bel'kov, who had originally traveled with Netsvetov from Atka to Ikogmiut.

Netsvetov had not forgotten his duties as imperial servitor, either. In his sermons, Netsvetov frequently announced imperial decrees and honored royal events. In 1847 he explained to his flock “the meaning of the Imperial Authority and the proper behavior toward Him of them, his subjects.”¹⁴ Bookkeeping, reports, personnel actions, and correspondence, in addition to his service journal and compilations of vital statistics, occupied increasingly large amounts of Netsvetov’s time. Netsvetov did not enjoy such work, but he understood its importance in administering the colony.

By 1850, Innokentii’s duties had taken him away from Alaska and back to Siberia. In part that was because of the new importance—and relative underdevelopment—of the Church in the Siberian Far East. The Holy Synod promoted Innokentii to archbishop in that year, with a seat at the Kamchatkan port of Aian (the former diocese was divided in two in 1858, with a vicar bishop at Novo-Arkhangel’sk). Far beyond the role of simple parish priest, Innokentii was now a participant in large scale imperial events. Innokentii enjoyed the confidence of Nikolai Murav’ev, governor-general of Siberia. He played a minor part in the Crimean War, when he was received respectfully on an English flagship under the command of Sir Charles Elliot in 1854, and a more important role in the signing of the Treaty of Aigun (1858), which secured the Amur River valley for Russia. In 1852 Yakutia was added to the Kamchatka Diocese, and Innokentii took up residence in Yakutsk. Despite participation in these high profile events, Innokentii continued to travel to the smallest settlements in Siberia, encouraging the translation of Christian texts into indigenous languages. He personally undertook translation of holy texts and devotionals into the Sakha language of the Yakuts.

Innokentii and Netsvetov were no longer young. For Netsvetov, the privations of life on the Yukon weakened his body and, increasingly, his resolve. In September 1852, Netsvetov sent the first of several requests for retirement. Innokentii noted at the top of the letter, “I do not dare to take upon myself to discharge you from the Apostolate and by so doing—among other things—to deprive you of the crown for your labor and your illnesses.”¹⁵ Trained specifically for work in his Native Alaska, the Church intended for him to stay there. Innokentii did send a series of “assistants” to take on part of the mission, but they caused Netsvetov even more distress. The first, Hieromonk Filaret, proved to be of unsound mind, and was promptly returned to monastic life in Russia. Netsvetov sent Hieromonk Gavriil, who arrived at Ikogmiut in 1853, almost directly to Mikhailovskii redoubt; he was incoherent, paranoid, and sometimes violent. In 1855 or 1856, Gavriil sent a report to the Consistory accusing Konstantin Lukin of murdering local Natives, with Netsvetov’s collusion. The third assistant, Hieromonk Theoktist, arrived at Mikhailovskii in 1858. His “feelings of resentment” toward Creoles and Natives serving the Church led them to refuse to live near or serve with him.¹⁶ Despite—or because of—the fact that Netsvetov had been elevated to the rank of archpriest, and admitted to the Imperial Order of St. Anne, Theoktist refused to keep records or report on his activities to Netsvetov. Worse, he revived Gavriil’s deranged accusations against Lukin and Netsvetov. In 1861, Theoktist was ordered to return to Russia.

But Gavriil’s accusations, supported by Theoktist, bore fruit in 1861. The new Vicar Bishop Petr, unfamiliar with Alaskan conditions and personnel, ordered that an investigation into Lukin’s activities be carried out by a fourth assistant, Hieromonk Illarion. Although Illarion’s investigation did not substantiate the murder charge, he did discover Lukin’s ten-year common-law union with an already married Ikogmiut woman. Netsvetov had apparently tolerated the illegal union for years. As a result of

¹⁴ Netsvetov, *Yukon*, 49; see also 66.

¹⁵ Antoinette Shalkop, “The Russian Orthodox Church in America,” in S. Frederick Starr, ed., *Russia’s American Colony* (Durham: 1987), 214.

¹⁶ Netsvetov, *Yukon*, 394, 417.

the investigation, Netsvetov was finally granted his wish for retirement, though to Novo-Arkhangelsk, not to monastic solitude. He was assigned to serve as priest at the Tlingit Church of the Holy Trinity in Novo-Arkhangelsk, though his strength was nearly spent. He died on 26 July 1864, leaving a debt of 6,573 rubles.¹⁷ All of his personal property except books (which were kept in the Consistory or given to other clergy) was auctioned. Innokentii paid the remainder of the debt from the Church treasury. Netsvetov was buried near the entrance to the Tlingit church, not far from the grave of his wife. For his deep piety, missionary success, and devotion to the people of Alaska, he was glorified as Saint Iakov, Enlightener of Alaska, in 1994.



Innokentii's star continued to rise. In 1865 he was admitted as a member of the Holy Synod, the highest governing body of the Russian Orthodox Church. By then, under his leadership the mission in Russian America had grown from 4 churches and clergymen to 9 churches (including a cathedral), and 35 chapels, with 32 members of the clergy. The sale of Russian America to the United States in 1867 was a worry for Innokentii, but he helped to insure that the Russian Orthodox Church maintained an independent role in the new American territory and in the United States as a whole. In that same year the scope of his responsibilities grew enormously when Tsar Alexander II appointed him Metropolitan of Moscow and All Russia. Metropolitan Innokentii devoted the remaining decade of his life to promoting missionary work and education across the empire. He died in March 1879, and was buried at the Trinity St. Sergius Lavra outside Moscow. He was glorified as St. Innokentii, Enlightener of the Aleuts and Apostle to America in 1977.

Veniaminov and Netsvetov ingested a particular missionary philosophy as students in Irkutsk, and both endeavored to implement it in Alaska: the necessity of rational and non-coercive conversion, based on cultural analogy; the development of literacy and education, in Native languages; and the promotion of Native local leadership, clerical and lay. Veniaminov's political and administrative skills insured that the Church had the resources and support it needed to grow. Netsvetov, the first priest of Native heritage in Alaska, took the missionary philosophy with him into new territory for the Church. He trained a generation of Native and Creole students to succeed him in the Church, and they shared the faith in their home parishes with future generations of Native clergy. In adopting Orthodoxy, Native peoples made it an important part of their own culture. After the sale of Alaska to the United States in 1867, the Orthodox Church no longer needed to partner with the RAC or the Russian government. It became an important advocate for Natives who hoped to maintain some measure of cultural identity under American rule. Today, the lives and work of Veniaminov and Netsvetov are not widely known. Their influence, however, is apparent in the primarily Native congregations who worship in more than eighty Russian Orthodox parishes across Alaska.

¹⁷ Ivanov, *Russian Orthodox Church*, 39, n. 17.

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