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Padres Descontentos: Spanish Imperial Policy, Franciscan Decline, and
the California Mission System, 1784-1803

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in History

by

Jeremiah John Sladeck

2020

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Padres Descontentos: Spanish Imperial Policy,
Franciscan Decline, and the California Mission System,
1784-1805

by

Jeremiah John Sladeck

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2020

Professor Stephen Aron, Chair

So long has the shadow cast by Junípero Serra been that it has obscured the history of the California mission system as it developed after the founding father's death in 1784. In both the scholarly and popular imagination, Father Serra has become the lasting symbol of the California missions. He acts as an escutcheon, shielding the eras that followed from careful scrutiny. The intense scholarly focus on Serra leaves the impression that he either led the Franciscans throughout their time in California or that nothing significant occurred after his passing.

Shining a light on Serra's shadow, my dissertation explores the world of California missions and missionaries, their Indian converts, and their secular rivals in the twenty years following Serra's death. It exposes the chaos, conflicts, and cover-ups that characterized the California missions in the period from 1784 to 1805, the years in which the mantle of leadership was taken up by Fermín Francisco de Lasuén. Focusing on this era broadens our understanding

of the California mission system in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the nature of Spanish colonialism.

Another gap in scholarly understanding is the role imperial politics played shaping the missions. Too often, California is studied in isolation, treated as if it was the island it was presumed to be on early maps. Its connections to Spanish America and to Spain get lost. Yet anti-clerical policy enacted by the Spanish crown in the mid-eighteenth century had a profound impact on California, sending the Franciscans into a period of decline in both zeal and competency just as they became the vanguard of the California colonial project. Lasuén and his priests trained during that period and developed a different posture towards missionary life and the Indians they baptized. Gone was the desire to martyr themselves for the spiritual uplift of neophytes that marked Serra's group, replaced by a deep cynicism born of their order's decline. The order's problems with Indigenous Californians under Serra metastasized during Lasuén's presidency, as the missions became marked by disease, violence, and forced recruitment. After Lasuén's death in 1803, his administration's cynicism became the prevalent attitude of Franciscan leadership and much of the rank-and-file priests that followed, spurring increasing Indigenous resistance in the nineteenth century.

The dissertation of Jeremiah John Sladeck is approved.

Benjamin Madley

Sanjay Subrahmanyam

Marissa López

Stephen Aron, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2020

For Jacquelyn Sladeck,
and the pep talk you gave me at
Picca,
this was not possible without
you

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Acknowledgements

Nearly all acknowledgement pages begin with the declaration that the author never intended to write a book on the chosen topic. This is especially true in my case. When I went back to school in 2005, attending City College of San Francisco as a thirty-year-old, my intention was simply to earn a bachelor's degree in History. After transferring to California State University, Northridge, I realized graduate school might be in my future. I envisioned myself becoming a Cold War scholar, focusing on Vietnam, or perhaps United States-Latin American relations. Then I read the journalist Carey McWilliams' seminal text, *Southern California: An Island on the Land* and pivoted to California history. My chosen topic as a master's student at CSUN was the vigilantism that plagued gold-rush era Los Angeles. While applying to doctoral programs, I learned that the Yale scholar John Mack Faragher's next book, which eventually became *Eternity Street: Violence and Justice in Frontier Los Angeles*, overlapped with my topic. I found myself in an unenviable position. The University of California, Los Angeles accepted my application, and Stephen Aron graciously agreed to be my advisor, yet I was a graduate student with no subject for my hypothetical dissertation. In my second quarter, Benjamin Madley suggested that I investigate the California mission system, and, as they say, the rest is history.

The seven years I spent at UCLA were among the most intellectually rigorous, humbling, and rewarding of my life. This project owes its existence to Stephen Aron's patience, insights, and preternatural gift for asking questions. I am forever grateful for his guidance and wisdom. I can never thank Benjamin Madley enough for his support and belief in my abilities as a historian, especially as my own waxed and waned. There are a host of other committee members, professors, History Department staff, and fellow graduate students that assisted me, supported

me, inspired me, and generally put up with me, which is not always easy. I cannot imagine my journey without Sanjay Subramanyam, Marissa López, Mary Corey, Robin Kelley, Carla Pestana, Toby Higbie, Vinay Lal, Teofilo Ruiz, Matthew Fisher, Scot Brown, Hadley D. Porter, Sarah Johnson, Iris Clever, Preston McBride, Elle Harvell, Peter Chesney, Rhiannon Koehler, Ryan Hilliard, Nicole Gilhaus, Sohaib Baig, Michael O’Sullivan, Dan Lynch, Max Flomen, Sa Whitley, Marissa A. Jenrich, and Marques Vestal. Thank you all. A special thanks goes to the Friends of the UCLA History Department and their gracious funding of my final year. Their financial assistance provided much needed peace of mind and the space to finish this dissertation on my terms.

My four years at CSUN changed the trajectory of my life and my future as a historian. The historians I met there believed in me and worked to prepare me to apply to Ph.D. programs and for success when I was eventually accepted. I am honored that Thomas W. Devine, Miriam Neirick, Merry Ovnick, and Josh Sides wrote letters for my applications. I still feel like they were the reason UCLA accepted me. I will always fondly remember the nurturing community of scholars and students who came through my life while at CSUN. Thank you, Joyce Broussard, Clementine Oliver, Susan Fitzpatrick Behrens, Thomas Maddux, Nan Yamane, Christopher Magra, Donal O’Sullivan, John Paul Nuño, Michael Ward, Richard S. Horowitz, Jefferey D. Kaja, Natale A. Zappia, Andrea Headley, Armig Manoukian, Maite Peterson, Jorge N. Leal, and Matthew Lucas.

This journey began fourteen years ago on the foggy and windswept campus of CCSF. It was there, in my second semester, that Paolo Sapienza suggested that I would one day defend a dissertation. I thought he must have hit his head that morning. I am not sure if I can ever communicate how much those words meant to me. Without the support of Mitra Sapienza,

Cynthia Slates, Alisa Messer, Hal Huntsman, Darrel Hess, Richard Oxen, Mary J Adams, Tarik Farrar, Edward Moreno, Richard Compean, Alexandria R. Leyton, Guillermo Turcios, and Martino Poggio, I am not sure that I would have found the strength to successfully transfer to a university.

I researched the bulk of this dissertation at the Bancroft Library, on the campus of the University of California, Berkeley. Some of my happiest and most anxious times during this journey were spent quietly searching through manuscripts and microfiche in the Heller Reading Room. I hope to be back sometime soon. This project was the beneficiary of the helpfulness and expertise of the Bancroft's archivists, librarians, and student workers. I would like to especially thank Theresa Salazar for taking the time to answer a frantic graduate student's emails.

I also spent time researching at the Santa Bárbara Mission Archive Library, in Santa Barbara, California. SBMAL is a comforting, intimate setting with an astonishing California History library. Everyone at the archive was welcoming and helpful, including Rebecca Vasquez, Bryan Stevenson, and Brittany Bratcher. They never asked too much about my research, despite seeing the particular documents I requested. I hope to return someday if they will have me back.

Finally, there are my family and friends who provided emotional (and financial) support and cheered me on while on this marathon. Foremost among them is my mother, Elaine Sladeck, who has been there for anything I needed when I was a broke, and fully-grown, college student. I cleared so many hurdles because of your help. Thank you. Then there are those who are not here to share in this accomplishment, my father, James L. Sladeck; my grandmothers, Irene Wilson and Grace Marie Allen, both of who stoked my love of history at a very early age; my aunts, Morag "Sally" Crawford, Katrina Wilson, and uncle, Ian Robert Wilson. We love and miss you,

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Book Reviews

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A Call for Reform: The Southern California Indian Writings of Helen Hunt Jackson. By Valerie Sherer Mathes and Phil Brigandi, eds. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*: Vol. 40, No. 1 (Summer 2016): pp.195-198.

The Army Surveys of Gold Rush California: Reports of Topographical Engineers, 1849-1851. Edited by Gary Clayton Anderson and Laura Lee Anderson. *Southern California Quarterly* Volume 98, Number 1: pp. 130-132.

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“The Californio Quest for Authority, 1837-1846,”

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Introduction

From its inception in 1769 to its formal end in 1834, the California mission system, a series of Franciscan missions founded by imperial Spain, produced a human catastrophe. Under the guise of spiritual uplift, missionaries sought to eradicate the cultures of Indigenous Californians. Although they did not succeed in this cultural erasure, missionization produced traumas that have endured to the present. As the vanguard of Spain's invasion of California, Franciscan missionaries promised Indigenous Californians the spiritual benefits of Christian life along with the material benefits of European culture and technology. They delivered something else. In stark contrast to the image of bucolic tranquility perpetuated by late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century California civic boosters and the Catholic Church, mission life was hard and oftentimes proved fatal for California Indians. During the mission period, at least 66,100 California Indians died in the system, nearly a quarter of the 300,000 souls living in the region before the Spanish invasion.¹ Disease was the most common killer, with the missions increasingly becoming vectors over time, as cramped quarters and poor nutritional regimes allowed pathogens to spread.² There were other lethal aspects of Spanish religious colonialism. Reckless Spanish soldiers, in the early years of the mission period, killed California Indians for

¹ For the information regarding number of deceased baptized California Indians, see Zephyrin Engelhardt, O.F.M., *Missions and Missionaries Volume III: Upper California* (San Francisco, 1912), 653; Precontact California Indian population estimates are highly contested, this dissertation employs estimates found in Sherburne F. Cook, *The Population of the California Indians, 1769-1970* (Berkeley, 1976); For a summary of earlier estimates, see A. L. Kroeber, *Handbook of the Indians of California* (New York, 1976), 880-882.

² European pathogens hit California Indian populations before the 1769 invasion, but epidemics seem to have increased after 1800, see Robert H. Jackson, *Indian Population Decline: The Missions of Northwestern New Spain, 1687-1840* (Albuquerque, 1994), 85; Disease chronology is cited in Larson, Johnson, and Michaelson, "Missionization among the Coastal Chumash of Central California," *American Anthropologist*, 96. no. 2 (June, 1994), 286; Robert H. Jackson, "The Population of the Santa Bárbara Channel Missions (Alta California), 1813-1832" *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 12, No. 2 (1990): 271; Deana Dartt-Newton and Jon M. Erlandson "Little Choice for the Chumash: Colonialism, Cattle and Coercion in Mission Period California," *American Indian Quarterly* 30, No. 3 (Summer–Autumn, 2006): 422.

trifling offenses and routinely sexually assaulted California Indian women.³ Baptized Indians also lost their lives in conflicts with other California Indians outside of the mission system who saw them as traitors.⁴

Between 1769 and 1834, the California missions altered myriad Indigenous cultures and lifeways. Once Indigenous Californians received baptism, Franciscan missionaries expected them to renounce their old lives and become quasi-Europeans; quasi because the missionaries still considered them Indian savages, and no amount of acculturation ever ended that chauvinism.⁵ California Indian peoples' attempts to retain their Indigenous customs were met with physical punishment that often became torture, particularly those the Franciscan missionaries found the most offensive. Engaging in their own religious traditions, leaving the missions to harvest traditional foods, or acting against Christian sexual mores all warranted, according to Franciscans in California, whippings, time in shackles or stocks, and at times withholding food.⁶ The Franciscans indefatigably punished "Indianness" for sixty-five years during the California mission period, always in the name of Christ and Spain.

This dissertation argues that ambiguous and short-sighted Spanish policy decisions, most notably a return to the primacy of missionaries over civil authorities, created conditions for a human catastrophe. The second father president of the missions, Fermín Francisco de Lasuén

³ Instances of this type are too numerous to recount here; for one episode in 1771 at Mission San Gabriel, see Kelly Lytle Hernández, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771–1965* (Chapel Hill, 2017), 24-25.

⁴ On April 29, 1795, Saclan Indians killed seven baptized Indians from Mission San Francisco while searching for Indians who had escaped that mission. For a description of events see chapter four of this dissertation; see also, Randall Milliken, *A Time of Little Choice: The Disintegration of Tribal Culture in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1769-1910* (Menlo Park, 1995), 139-141.

⁵ In 1813, Secretary of the Department of Overseas Colonies, Don Ciriaco González Carvajal sent the California missionaries a questionnaire regarding the spiritual and cultural progress of California Indians in the mission system. Throughout the work the respondents make claims like the following: "We are uprooting some of these ideas in the neophytes, yet they always remain Indians," see Maynard J. Geiger, O.F.M., *As the Padres Saw Them: California Indian Life and Customs as Reported by the Franciscan Missionaries, 1813-1815*, (Santa Bárbara, 1976), 79.

⁶ Zephyrin Engelhardt, *Missions and Missionaries of California Volume II* (San Francisco, 1912), 501.

accelerated and entrenched this process while performing his duties from 1785-1803. This argument sharply contrasts much of the prevailing literature regarding this period. Lasuén's English language biographer and fellow Franciscan, Francis F. Guest, O.F.M. called Lasuén's presidency "the most dynamic...of [the California mission system's] development."⁷ Mission scholars Rose Marie Beebe and Robert M. Senkewicz similarly called the 1790s the California mission system's developmental stage, and the Catholic scholar Gerald J. Geary termed that decade the California mission's "golden age."⁸ Guest, Beebe, Senkewicz, and Geary made these assessments in light of the California mission system's expansion during the 1790s. Indeed, Father President Lasuén founded nine new missions, baptized 16,100 California Indians, increased herds of cattle and horses by 45,000 head, increased flocks of sheep by 60,000 head, and increased agricultural output by 45,000 bushels.⁹ If the California mission system is viewed simply in quantitative metrics, the 1790s were a period of dynamic growth.

However, the Franciscans' stated goals went beyond numbers of missions, head of cattle and sheep, and high baptismal registers. The missionaries intended to transform California Indians into quasi-European subjects loyal to the Spanish crown and the Roman Catholic church. The cost, in terms of human life, was extreme. While Franciscans in California baptized 16,100 Indians in the 1790s, 9,300 men, women, children, and elders died in the missions during that same period.¹⁰ Under the previous father president, Junípero Serra, death rates were substantially lower. From 1769 to 1784, Franciscans baptized 10,807 California Indians while 3,569 died.

⁷ Francis F. Guest, O.F.M., *Fermin Francisco de Lasuen: A Biography* (Washington, D.C., 1973), xviii.

⁸ Rose Marie Beebe, 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 F. Schwaller (Washington, D.C., 2008), 298; Gerald J. Geary, *The Secularization of the California Mission System, 1810-1846* (Washington, D.C., 1934), 52.

⁹ Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft Volume XVIII, History of California Volume 1* (San Francisco, 1886), 576-577.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 576-577.

Under Serra, an average of 0.65 deaths occurred per day. In the 1790s under Lasuén, 2.8 deaths occurred every day.¹¹ That represents a 400 per cent increase in average deaths per day. Furthermore, in the 1790s, roughly 800 baptized California Indians permanently fled the missions.¹² These numbers paint a grim picture of life within the mission complex. Numbers documenting loss of life and resistance to missionization imply that a story more important than crop yields and cattle herds must be told. However, numbers alone do not explain the processes that caused a 400 per cent increase in average deaths per day. Policy decisions in California, Mexico, and Spain are at the root of these lethal spaces. Yet scholarly understanding of the Spanish political processes that produced skyrocketing death rates in the California missions remains dim. It is the goal of this dissertation to illuminate them.

This illumination is necessary, particularly in the period after 1785, as Junípero Serra's immense shadow has obscured the history of the California mission system following his death in 1784. In both the scholarly and popular imagination, Serra has become the lasting symbol of the California mission system. Serra acts as an escutcheon, shielding the eras that followed from careful scrutiny. The intense scholarly focus on Serra leaves the impression that he either led the Franciscans throughout their time in California or that nothing significant occurred after his passing. Shining a light on Serra's shadow, this dissertation explores the world of California missions and missionaries, their Indigenous converts, and their secular rivals in the twenty years following Serra's death. It exposes the chaos, conflicts, and cover-ups that characterized the California missions from 1784 to 1805 – the years in which Lasuén took up mantle of leadership.

¹¹ Franciscans recorded numbers of baptized Indians and their deaths in registers at each of the California missions. The records for the years 1785 to 1803 are translated and reprinted in *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, Finbar Kenneally, trans. and ed., (Washington, D.C., 1965), 394-423.

¹² Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:576.

Focusing on this era broadens our understanding of the California mission system and the nature of Spanish colonialism throughout the Spanish-Indigenous borderlands.

Spanish imperial politics and their connection to the California missions need a reassessment. Too often, California is studied in isolation, treated as if it were the island early cartographers presumed it to be on early maps, ignoring its connections to Spanish America and to Spain. Yet, the Spanish crown's mid-eighteenth century anti-clerical policies had a profound influence on California, sending the Franciscans into a period of decline in both zeal and competency just as they became the vanguard of the California colonial project. Lasuén and the priests trained during that period developed a different posture towards missionary life and the California Indians they attempted to convert. The desire to martyr themselves for the spiritual uplift of baptized Indians that marked Serra's group receded. In its place emerged a deep cynicism born of their order's decline. The order's problems with Indigenous Californians under Serra metastasized during Lasuén's presidency, as the missions became marked by disease, violence, forced recruitment, and mass death. After Lasuén's death in 1803, his administration's ethos became the prevalent attitude of Franciscan leaders in California and much of the rank-and-file priests that followed, spurring increasing Indigenous resistance in the nineteenth century.

Since the end of the nineteenth century, when California mission history became a subject of historical inquiry, both scholars and the public have debated the California missions' legacy. They debate whether the California mission system served as an example of a positive case of social engineering, or if the system was more akin to forced servitude. There are three scholarly camps, the mission defenders, the critical mission scholars, and those scholars taking a middle-ground approach. However, scholars are not the only force driving the perception of the

California mission system, as public and private interests also shape them in the minds of Californians and U.S. citizens. The earliest California historians, Alexander Forbes, Hubert Howe Bancroft, and Theodore Hittell all wrote about the mission in an even-handed manner but offered appropriate critique of the Franciscans.¹³ In the early twentieth century, Franciscan and Catholic scholars dominated the field and they responded to the previous generations' work with a mission defense. These scholars typically praised Franciscans for toiling under difficult circumstances in California and for bringing Christianity and European technology to Indigenous Californians.¹⁴ Around the same time, early historians of the borderlands generally worked from the premise that the Franciscans raised California Indians out of barbarism and were therefore praiseworthy.¹⁵ In the first half of the twentieth century, this view of the California missions prevailed in the minds of the public at large, following decades of public relations campaigns promoting the missions as tourist destinations.¹⁶ Moreover, by the 1930s California business and civic leaders promoted an aggrandized and wholly fictitious view of California's pre-United States' past now derisively known as the Spanish fantasy heritage.¹⁷ Between the Automobile Club of America's adoption of the missions as California's premier historical tourist destinations and festivals such as Santa Barbara's "Old Spanish Days," the image of the idyllic mission with

¹³ Alexander Forbes, *California: a History of Upper & Lower California: From Their First Discovery to the Present Time, Comprising an Account of the Climate, Soil, Natural Productions, Agriculture, Commerce, & a Full View of the Missionary Establishments and Condition of the Free & Domesticated Indians* (Baja California, 1839); Theodore Henry Hittell, *History of California Volumes I-IV* (San Francisco, 1898).

¹⁴ Zephyrin Engelhardt, *Missions and Missionaries of California Volumes I-III* (Santa Barbara, 1929); George Wharton James, *Francisco Palóu's life and apostolic labors of the venerable father Junípero Serra: Founder of the Franciscan Missions in California* (Pasadena, 1913); Maynard J. Geiger, *The life and times of Fray Junípero Serra, O.F.M.; or, The man who never turned back, (1713-1784), a biography* (Washington, D.C. 1959); Louis J. Luzbetak, "If Junípero Serra Were Alive: Missiological-Anthropological Theory Today," *The Americas* 41 no.4 (April, 1985), 512-519; Geary, *Secularization of the California Mission System*; Guest, *Fermin Francisco de Lasuen*.

¹⁵ Herbert E. Bolton, *The Spanish Borderlands: A Chronicle of Old Florida and the Southwest* (New Haven, 1921), 278-279; Herbert E. Bolton, "The Mission as a Frontier Institution in the Spanish-American Colonies," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (October, 1917), 42-61.

¹⁶ Mike Davis, *City of Quartz* (New York, 1990), 22.

¹⁷ Carey McWilliams, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-speaking people of the United States* (New York, 1949).

kindly missionaries passing the Catholic doctrine to willing California Indians became foundational to California's identity. Although much of this took place outside of the academy, this perception of the missions guided the hand of historians and educators for decades.¹⁸

By the 1980s, a new generation of activists and historians offered a fresh perspective on the California missions and Indigenous Californians. There were, of course, those who came before, such as Helen Hunt Jackson's work to illuminate the plight of the former mission Indians in the late eighteenth century and Manuel Servín's call to consider California as part of the larger Spanish American world in the 1960s.¹⁹ In 1987, Rupert and Jeanette Costo punctuated decades of their activism arguing that Franciscans missionaries committed physical and cultural genocide.²⁰ Their work prompted a sea change in the mission debate, facilitating a wave of highly critical scholarship that focused on the Indigenous experience in the missions and treated the California missions as social, political, and economic institutions, rather than mythological spaces.²¹

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, scholars further developed the understanding of the Indigenous experience in the missions. Recent mission scholarship focuses on the circumstances and outcomes of California Indian responses to the European labor regimes and the social mores imposed upon them by the Franciscans, as well as the inter-Indigenous political dynamics within the missions themselves. New methodologies have incorporated Indigenous histories and perspectives and demonstrate that California Indians, through their labor and

¹⁸ Michelle M. Lorimer, *Resurrecting the Past: The California Mission Myth* (Pechenga, 2016).

¹⁹ Helen Hunt Jackson, *A Call for Reform: The Southern California Indian Writings of Helen Hunt Jackson*, eds. Valerie Sherer Mathes and Phil Brigandi, (Norman, 2015); Manuel P. Servín, "The Secularization of the California Missions: A Reappraisal," *Southern California Quarterly* 47, no. 2, (June 1965); 133-149.

²⁰ Rupert Costo and Jeannette Henry Costo, *The Missions of California: A Legacy of Genocide* (San Francisco, 1987).

²¹ *The New Latin American Mission History*, Erick Langer and Robert H. Jackson, eds. (Lincoln, 1995)

participation in missions over decades, shaped individual missions into Indigenous spaces that reflected the particular culture, or cultures, of the groups at a given mission. Recent scholarship also shatters the notion of California Indian people as “pre-political,” revealing that California Indians deftly maneuvered through a shifting web of colonial politics. Included in this new wave of mission scholarship are explorations of the intimate and family lives of California Indian people both within and beyond the missions, articulating the distortions Spanish colonialism caused to the most personal aspects of daily life, and Indigenous strategies of adaptation and resistance to them.²² Though they deal with their own specific regions, themes, and timeframes, one through line that links these modern works is the primacy of both California Indian agency, and crucially, survival in the face of Spanish colonization. These scholars have shown that despite the increasing levels of disease, coercion, and cultural oppression, California Indians successfully retained their traditions and dignity.

Another transformation in California mission scholarship over the last thirty years has been scholarly demonstrations of the missions’ multifaceted forms of violence. In these works, Franciscan missionaries failed to recognize - out of ignorance or single-minded determination to convert Indigenous peoples - the many ways in which their style of colonialism caused profoundly negative consequences for California Indians. These critical works describe how the Franciscan missionaries’ lack of understanding regarding the intensely diverse California Indian population led to massive demographic decline. These scholars argue that, at times, the

²² Steven W. Hackel, *Children of Coyote, Missionaries of Saint Francis: Indian-Spanish Relations in Colonial California* (Chapel Hill, 2005); Sandos, *Converting California*; Lizbeth Haas, *Saints and Citizens: Indigenous Histories of Colonial Missions and Mexican California*, (Berkeley, 2014); Randall Milliken, *Time of Little Choice*; Erika Pérez, *Colonial Intimacies: Interethnic Kinship, Sexuality, and Marriage in Southern California, 1769-1885* (Norman, 2018); Chelsea K. Vaughn, “Locating Absence: The Forgotten Presence of Monjeríos in Alta California Missions,” *Southern California Quarterly*, 93, no. 2 (Summer 2011), 141-174; Albert L. Hurtado, “Sexuality in California’s Franciscan Missions: Cultural Perceptions and Sad Realities,” *California History* 71, no. 3, “Indians in California,” (Fall, 1992) 370-385; Albert L. Hurtado, *Intimate Frontiers: Sex Gender and Culture in Old California* (Albuquerque, 1999).

California mission system functioned more like a slave colony or an early system of mass incarceration than as an institution of religious instruction.²³ These recent histories paint a grim picture of California mission life.

This dissertation departs from those models in significant ways even as it is filtered through them. Indian agency and the destructive nature of the missions both have their place in this work and are highly influential to it, but neither are the primary object of investigation. The California mission system was a Spanish religious-political institution, supported by Spanish military governors and soldiers of mestizo ancestry. Spanish political will and old European dynastic rivalries created the system, as did European cultural chauvinism and religious extremism. While modern scholars correctly argue that California Indians resisted Spanish power, and that indigeneity helped to shape the California mission system, those are only part of the story. Had it been the whole story - if California Indian people had crafted the mission system - it likely would not have resulted in 2.8 deaths per day in the 1790s. Spanish politics and inter-institutional rivalries produced this lethal system. In the last thirty years, while scholarly understanding of the difficulties California Indian people faced and their responses and resistance to Spanish colonialism have deepened, our understanding of why the missions became such dangerous spaces remains incomplete. To gain that understanding, an investigation of Spanish colonial policy, Franciscans as a function of that policy, and the struggle for control of Alta California and its Indigenous population between Franciscan missionaries and civil-military leaders is paramount.

²³ Robert H. Jackson and Edward Castillo, *Indians, Franciscans, and Spanish Colonization: The Impact of the Mission System on California Indians* (Albuquerque, 1995), Robert H. Jackson, *Indian Population Decline: The Missions of Northwestern New Spain, 1687-1840* (Albuquerque, 1994), 164, Benjamin Madley, "California's First Mass Incarceration System: Franciscan Missions, California Indians, and Penal Servitude, 1769-1836," *Pacific Historical Review* 88 no. 1 (January, 2019), 14-47.; see also Elias Castillo, *A Cross of Thorns: The Enslavement of California's Indians by the Spanish Missions* (Fresno, 2017), Michelle M. Lorimer, *Resurrecting the Past: The California Mission Myth* (Temecula, 2016).

This dissertation analyzes the contradictory nature of Spanish colonial policy during the era of the Bourbon Reforms, offers close readings of Franciscans' correspondence both to Spanish civil officials and between the missionaries, and focuses on father president Lasuén's leadership in an era of increasing tumult and scandal. As previously noted, the status of missionaries in Spanish America in the second half of the eighteenth century waned as a result of the 1749 secularization decree and efforts to limit the numbers of new missionaries operating in the western hemisphere. Inspector General José de Gálvez's decision to send Franciscan missionaries to California to lead the invasion represented a significant shift in direction that caused tension and enmity within the province throughout the entirety of the mission period.²⁴ That choice, along with geographic isolation, created a sense of autonomy in the Franciscans sent to California. Serra's quest for total control over mission Indians and anti-reformist position appeared profoundly anachronistic to California's first military governors, particularly Felipe de Neve, who knew of other situations on the northern border where missionaries did not wield such power.²⁵ Although many volumes recount Serra and Neve's battles, there exists a paucity of analysis regarding Lasuén and his important feuds with governors Pedro Fages and Diego de Borica. These conflicts are key aspects of this dissertation and to fully appreciate them requires a fresh, deep reading of familiar sources.

The most crucial intervention this dissertation offers to the preexisting California mission literature is a close reading of many key documents from Lasuén's presidency. Franciscans were writers, especially the second father president. Lasuén wrote letters to governors, soldiers,

²⁴ David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven 1992), 242.

²⁵ For more on the feud between Serra and Neve see, Edwin A. Beilharz, *Felipe de Neve: First Governor of California*, 45-66; Steven W. Hackel, *Junípero Serra: California's Founding Father* (New York, 2013), 197, 211-218, 225, 226; Rose Marie Beebe and Robert M. Senkewicz, *Junípero Serra: California, Indians, and the Transformation of a Missionary* (Norman, 2015), 21-22, 27, 348, 352-353, 358-360; Sandos, *Converting California*, 69-78.

viceroys, his missionaries, and his superiors at the Franciscan apostolic College of San Fernando in Mexico City. He crafted reports detailing mission herds and agricultural output, he penned defenses of his missionaries when accused of scandal, and withering critiques of civil authority. Lasuén and the Franciscans left behind thousands of pages of documents detailing their methods, philosophies, fears, prejudices, hopes, and goals. They wrote because the isolation of colonial California compelled them to communicate with each other and with the outside world. They wrote because the bureaucratic nature of the Spanish empire demanded it. These documents offer insights into the collective mental space that the Franciscans occupied between 1784 and 1805. Many of the documents employed in this dissertation have been cited in existing scholarship. However, this dissertation builds a new framework using old materials.

Methodological and theoretical currents have shifted in history in the last thirty years. A reexamination of these documents filtered through those changes is in order. For example, two of the documents receiving intense scrutiny in this dissertation act as bookends to Lasuén's presidency. The first are the transcripts of Lasuén's investigation of murder charges made against Fray Tomás de la Peña at Mission Santa Clara de Asís in 1785. After weeks of investigation in California, and years of languishing in a bureaucratic quagmire in Mexico City, jurists exonerated de la Peña. A reevaluation of those transcripts does not prove de la Peña's guilt, nor confirm his innocence. Yet, it reveals the lengths to which Lasuén went in attempting to maintain the good name of the missionaries, a refrain he often repeated, regardless of the damage done to his relationships with California Indians, governors, soldiers, and younger Franciscans. The second is a near chapter-length analysis of arguably the most important document Lasuén or any other California missionary produced. From 1795 through 1797, a protracted crisis unfurled at Mission San Francisco de Asís, resulting in mass defections, forced labor, withholding of food

from baptized Indians, and their severe physical abuse. Due to this crisis and an increase in Franciscans themselves criticizing management of the missions, the viceroy in Mexico City compelled Lasuén to write a defense of the California mission system. Some historians have heralded Lasuén's defense, called the *Refutation of Charges*, as the most important document he ever produced, as it delineates dozens of facets of mission life.²⁶ Lasuén's *Refutation* remains crucially important, but for a wholly different set of reasons. When read through the lens of recent scholarship, Lasuén's refutation becomes a Rosetta Stone of sorts, allowing for the translation of the Franciscan rhetoric of spiritual and cultural uplift of their Indian wards into the cold, bitter resentment many Franciscans felt about their place in the world and the California Indian people they were meant to transform.

The Spanish military governors and soldiers stationed in the remote province are the second facet of late-eighteenth century California that deserves reconsideration. These historical actors pose a moral dilemma for scholars, largely due to their contradictory and counterintuitive attitudes and actions. As this dissertation will detail, California's Spanish governors were both Indian fighters who violently enforced Spanish colonial desires throughout the northern reaches of New Spain, and administrators who sought to maintain stability, as they feared a general uprising would wipe out the Spanish enterprise in California. They may have sought to reform the mission system, but they were colonial agents who also sought the transformation of California Indians into quasi-Europeans. For example, Neve, whose time as governor ended as Lasuén came to the presidency, often appeared sympathetic to Indians both within and outside the bounds of the missions. He compared their existence in the missions to "vassalage" and "slavery."²⁷ In 1782, Neve brokered deals with Chumash leaders to maintain their autonomy and

²⁶ Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:589; Guest, *Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 218-248.

²⁷ Beilharz, *Felipe de Neve*, 51, 52.

to keep Franciscans from proselytizing in their towns.²⁸ Despite this, Neve also envisioned a second chain of missions in California's interior, a series that would be fourteen to twenty leagues east of preexisting missions.²⁹ Pedro Fages, the governor who followed Neve, is a far more challenging figure. Fages too worked to constrain the worst aspects of the Franciscan missions. He contested the severity of missionary discipline and Franciscans' desire to take soldiers into California Indian villages to proselytize. Fages worked with Ohlone leaders to provide better working conditions at Spanish construction sites around the San Francisco Bay. Fages also brought a young Quechan girl back to Monterey from the Colorado River as his concubine. He denied the accusation, yet had his wife held prisoner at Mission San Carmel until she recanted her claim that she found him on top of the girl.³⁰ Diego de Borica became governor in 1795 as the crisis at Mission San Francisco began. His correspondence shows the crisis emotionally affected him, which drove him to hold the Franciscans accountable for the terrible circumstances. However, in the aftermath of the crisis at Mission San Francisco, Borica also presided over the largest armed conflict between Spanish troops and California Indian people during the eighteenth century, when his men went to the East Bay to recapture escaped baptized Indians.

The rank-and-file Spanish troops stationed at California's presidios and working as mission guards, like their governors, were both foes and allies of Indigenous Californians. In the earliest years of the Spanish occupation, some soldiers raped Indian women and, in some cases, murdered the men who sought to protect or avenge them. However, by the mid-1790s, after Neve, and to a lesser degree, Fages, took steps to root out violence against Indigenous

²⁸ Haas, *Saints and Citizens*, 16; Maynard Geiger, *Mission Santa Barbara, 1782-1965* (Santa Barbara, 1965), 10.

²⁹ Beilharz, *Felipe de Neve*, 94.

³⁰ Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:391-392.

Californians among the soldiery, baptized Indians sometimes looked to Spanish soldiers for protection against missionaries. This dissertation does not seek to redeem the Spanish military in California. Yet understanding both the contradictions and changes in officers and soldiers is crucial to understanding the trajectory of the mission system and the human catastrophe endured by California Indian people. The soldiers' motivation may have stemmed for the desire to avoid large-scale confrontations with Indigenous Californians rather than humanitarianism, but their efforts to stop missionaries from abusing baptized Indians were legitimate.

A third facet of this period that requires a fresh investigation and close reading is Lasuén himself. Despite his presidency being heralded as a golden age or a dynamic period of the California mission system, little scholarship exists on Lasuén. In his nineteenth century history of California, Bancroft remarked that Lasuén performed his duties as father president "to the satisfaction of all classes, [he was] loved and respected by all friars, officers, soldiers, settlers, and neophytes."³¹ In more recent work, Serra, or the turbulent era of Mexican independence and its effect of the mission system and California Indians after 1824, typically eclipse Lasuén. When Lasuén does appear in scholarship, it is usually a brief entry, often a single quotation, and very rarely as a fully fleshed out individual or policy maker.³²

To find an English-language secondary source dedicated to Lasuén and his presidency, one must return to fellow Franciscan and historian Francis F. Guest's 1973 biography. Guest is effusive in his praise, as might be expected. In Guest's telling, Lasuén emerges as a sensitive man of peace, a quiet administrator who sought consensus among the Franciscans and with California's civil-military leaders.³³ Guest argued that when Lasuén took the mantle of father

³¹ Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:578.

³² For examples see, Hackel, *Children of Coyote*, 84,85, 88-89, Haas, *Saints and Citizens*, 24, 26-27

³³ Guest, *Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 345.

president, he “corrected one of Serra’s mistakes: he established and successfully maintained a policy of peaceful cooperation with the military governors of California.”³⁴ In fact, after Guest coyly hesitates to argue that Lasuén was a more effective leader than Serra in his introduction, he comes close to saying exactly that in his conclusion. Guest muses openly throughout Lasuén’s biography that things might have been different in California if Lasuén had been the first father president.³⁵ Guest admitted that Serra was made of stronger stuff than Lasuén, but suggested that Lasuén’s pliability was not a weakness, but one of his great strengths. Guest took Lasuén’s views on California Indian people, something that will be analyzed extensively throughout this dissertation, at face value. Guest argued that because Lasuén spent nearly forty years of his life working among American Indians in the Sierra Gorda region of Mexico, Baja, and Alta California, “his judgment on the presence of quiet, peace, and happiness among the Indians at the missions must be accepted.”³⁶ However, Guest is an unreliable biographer. He also wrote an extensive piece about violence in the California missions and Indigenous Californian’s responses to it. He argued that because Franciscans described the whippings they administered to baptized California Indians as *azotes* in Spanish, a word that can mean both “blows” and “spankings,” they were similar to the light spankings that a father would give his misbehaving children.³⁷ It is difficult to imagine an argument stranger than Guest’s - that the Franciscans and their Indian agents gave adult Indian men and women light spankings when they transgressed Franciscan values, and this was the discipline that held the system together. Guest’s portrayal of Lasuén as

³⁴ Guest, *Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 354.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 346, 351,

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 287.

³⁷ Francis F. Guest O.F.M., “An Inquiry into the Role of the Discipline in California Mission Life,” *Southern California Quarterly* 71, no. 1 (Spring, 1989), 34.

both a quiet administrator who sought consensus and an expert on California Indians has stood for decades.

This dissertation makes a different argument regarding Lasuén's place in California mission history. While it is true that the Spanish government's ambiguous and shifting colonial policy made administering the religious colony of California difficult at best, based on his words and record, Lasuén was the wrong man for the job at a time when the missions were rotting from the inside out. Unlike Bancroft and Guest's characterizations, this dissertation argues that Lasuén bullied, intimidated, obstructed, engaged in cover-ups, invented imaginary conspiracies, lied to his superiors, labeled his enemies insane, despised California Indian people, and life in the remote province. A close reading of his correspondence reveals a deeply frustrated, bitter man at odds with the physical space he occupied and desperate to try to save the reputation of the Franciscans in California. Rather than facing the reality that the order decayed from deep systemic issues, Lasuén invented conspiracies and engaged in character assassinations of anyone who attempted reform or complained about the missions or missionaries. He created a culture in which his loyal rank-and-file missionaries took on his prejudices and vilified the younger generation of missionaries while fighting bitterly with soldiers and governors. The California mission system facilitated a human catastrophe. However, as this dissertation argues, Lasuén's inability to lead the Franciscans in California through a series of crises intensified and accelerated the system's most disastrous qualities, making the missions more dangerous to California Indian people after his presidency.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter one serves as a prehistory and begins in late 1777. It details the state of Spanish colonialism in California during shifts in Franciscan and military leadership. Lasuén's early

period as a troubled missionary foreshadowed much of his time as father president. Returning governor Pedro Fages dealt with his soldiers' brutal repression of a planned Kumeyaay revolt near Mission San Diego de Alcalá, the type of retributive violence former governor Felipe de Neve tried to curtail. Lasuén's early years in California were filled with despair and the desire to return to Mexico, which serves as historical foreshadowing of how a younger generation of Franciscan felt about life in the colony. It concludes with the attempted Tongva revolt at Mission San Gabriel Arcángel in 1785. While the attack demonstrated the destructive nature of Spanish colonialism on traditional lifeways, inter-tribal alliances and rivalries, and social mechanisms, it also revealed the scant understanding the Franciscan missionaries had of the peoples they attempted to convert.

Chapter two begins with charges that a missionary at Santa Clara, Tomas de la Peña, murdered a baptized Indian. Although investigators in Mexico City eventually exonerated de la Peña, his extra-legal "trial" in California raises fundamental questions regarding Lasuén's leadership and set the template for his reactions to future scandals. A close reading of Lasuén's turn as both defense counsel and judge reveal his single-minded dedication to protecting Franciscans in California at all costs. The second half of the chapter analyzes Fages' code of conduct for the military and colonists' dealings with Tongva Indians in Los Angeles. Fages' code reacted to a massacre of Spaniards on the Colorado river and the attempted Tongva uprising against Mission San Gabriel. Fages pursued a flawed attempt to stabilize relations between Spanish colonists, soldiers, and Tongva Indians. His decree curtailed Tongva freedom of movement and choice while also protecting them from the depredations of Spanish colonizers.

Chapter three focuses on the major shifts occurring throughout California at the start of the 1790s. Mexico City ruled in favor of the Franciscans in their struggle with the civil

governors, which prompted expansion of the mission system, particularly around the Santa Barbara Channel and San Francisco Bay. The expansion put pressure on both the Ohlone peoples living there and on Franciscans. The earliest moments of expansion offered new opportunities for peaceful relations between Indigenous peoples and colonizers, as Fages used new construction projects to facilitate peace with people around the bay. However, this moment was brief. As a new generation of missionaries soon came to California and balked at the system of missionization they encountered. Their Franciscan peers styled them *temporalistas* or *padres descontentos* for their rejection of the missionary management of the wealth the missions generated. Many of these new priests became disgruntled and a prolonged period of inter-missionary strife began. Moreover, Fages retired, ushering in a four-year period of Franciscan autonomy in California.

Chapter four begins in late 1794 and details the disastrous consequences of Franciscan autonomy, expansion, and infighting that culminated in the Mission San Francisco crisis. Two of the *temporalistas* managed that mission with almost no oversight. As the combined forces of drought and disease caused major fluctuations in the mission population, the priests deployed squads of mission Indians to kidnap and return baptized Indians who fled San Francisco. The massacre of one squad in the East Bay led to a state of near warfare between East Bay Miwoks and the Spanish. It also prompted the new governor, Diego de Borica, to open a full investigation into San Francisco with the aid of new priest who broke ranks to confirm that forced labor, starvation, and physical abuse were the norm there. Lasuén responded by branding the man insane and exiling him to Mexico.

The final chapter focuses on the fallout from the Mission San Francisco disaster. A second Franciscan whistleblower emerged in the aftermath, charging his Franciscan brothers

with a host of transgressions. When Lasuén exiled a second allegedly insane missionary to Mexico, viceroy Miguel José Azanza y Alegría demanded an inquiry. Lasuén wrote a lengthy defense of the system that remains one of the clearest views into the Franciscan mindset in California. The process of crafting that defense revealed the depths of Lasuén's propensity for covering up Franciscan scandals and abuses and casts serious doubts on the manner in which he managed and developed the mission system during his tenure.

Peeling away layers of mythology and assumption, this dissertation offers a critical reinterpretation of the California mission system and its second father president, Fermín Francisco de Lasuén. The period of its inquiry, 1784 to 1803, proved turbulent for California Indians, Franciscan missionaries, and the Spanish military. Understudied by previous scholarship, this dissertation offers a different view of Spanish religious colonialism in California. First, it demonstrates that inchoate Spanish imperial policy in the time of the Bourbon Reforms set the stage for an ungovernable province. Neither California's military governors nor Franciscan leadership understood the chain of command, leading to decades of animosity. Second, it reveals how Franciscan missionaries ceaselessly pursued their vision of transforming Indigenous Californians into quasi-Europeans, even as the consequences of that pursuit became more violent and more destructive to California Indians, their cultures, and their environment. As the first generation of missionaries gave way to the second, internal conflicts over the fundamental nature of religious conversion and management of these missions became the norm. Despite the fissures developing between the missionaries in California, Lasuén rejected any notion of reform or rehabilitation of the Franciscans or their missions. This rejection led not only to deteriorating conditions for baptized Indians, but ironically, for the Franciscans themselves. Mission scholarship has, in the last thirty years, provided new understandings of Indigenous

Californian's experience within the Franciscan missions, and their resistance to Spanish colonialism. This dissertation demonstrates how Spain's lack of a coherent vision to control a distant land, inhabited by sovereign, diverse peoples for millennia, led to shocking levels of cultural and physical destruction for Indigenous Californians.

Spanish Insecurities in Indigenous California, 1777-1786

On Sunday, August 29, 1784, the small Spanish population of Monterey, California - along with several hundred baptized Ohlone Indians - gathered for the funeral of the founder and first father president of the California mission system, Fray Junípero Serra. The seventy-one-year-old Serra had died the previous day in his bed at Mission San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo. According to Serra's friend and biographer, Fray Francisco Palóu, some 600 people of all ages came together to pay their last respects, a massive crowd for the time, when only 200 Spanish souls lived in Monterey.³⁸ Some Franciscans from more distant missions, like Fray Buenaventura Sitjar, received word of Serra's impending death late and arrived only on the morning of the service. One notable absence emerged among the throng of attendees. Pedro Fages, the governor of the province and a known thorn in Serra's side, was not present. The lieutenant inspector of Las Californias attended in Fages' stead. Throughout the day, a Spanish ship in Monterey Bay fired its cannon every half hour, with a cannon at the presidio responding in kind. These sounds in concert with the toiling of the mission bells, "melted everyone's heart," according to Palóu.³⁹ The spectacle represented the importance that Serra held for many Catholic Spaniards in California.

Serra's death and the search for his replacement opened a new era for the Spanish colonial project in California. Serra was the only leader the Franciscans knew in their fifteen years in the remote province. The order's most pressing concern was finding the appropriate man to take his place. Over the coming months, the College of San Fernando in Mexico City, the Franciscan institution that acted as a headquarters for the Alta California missions and supplied

³⁸ Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:267.

³⁹ Palóu quoted in George Wharton James, *Francisco Palóu's life and apostolic labors of the venerable father Junípero Serra: Founder of the Franciscan Missions in California* (Pasadena, 1913), 275-276.

their missionaries, chose Fermín Francisco de Lasuén as Serra's successor. Lasuén was twenty-three years Serra's junior and this shift in age foreshadowed changes that were looming for the order.⁴⁰ Serra's generation of missionaries neared retirement and some, like Fray Juan Crespi, who had come with Serra to California in 1769, had already passed. A new generation of missionaries would arrive in California over the next decade, and, as new generations often do, developed their own ideas and discontents as they proselytized on the remote western shore of North America. Although Lasuén would struggle with the young missionaries' values and philosophies, he could share in their discontent. As a younger man, Lasuén too found deep dissatisfaction with life on the spiritual frontier and often pleaded to return to Mexico City. Instead, he became the leader of the Franciscans in California.

Pedro Fages also knew dissatisfaction with life in California, though his emerged from his dealings with Franciscans and California Indians, rather than the ennui suffered on the edges of the Spanish empire. Fages was also a veteran of Spain's colonization effort in California, coming to the region with the initial invasion of 1769. After taking the governorship in 1782, Fages inherited the fallout from his predecessor Felipe de Neve's feuding with Junípero Serra. Both sides of the Spanish colonial project – the military and the missionaries – blamed the other for the struggles they endured as they worked to convert California Indians into quasi-Europeans. After Serra's death, Fages sent a list of five complaints to his superiors in Mexico City, detailing the ways in which the Franciscans obstructed their own so-called spiritual conquest and sought autonomous control of the colony. Fages had experienced the aftermath of a serious Indigenous uprising, the 1781 Quechan attack on Spanish outposts on the Colorado River along the border of

⁴⁰ Maynard Geiger, *Franciscan Missionaries in Hispanic California, 1769-1848* (San Marino, 1969), 136, 239.

what is now California and Arizona, and crafted policies to minimize tensions between California Indians and Spaniards.

Of all the groups in the region in 1784, California Indians inherited the most problems and discontent. Over the previous fifteen years, Spanish invaders had claimed pockets of land along California's coast and founded ten missions. California Indian responses to Spanish encroachment on their lands and religious conversion were as varied as their many nations. The Chumash, living in a large swath of territory from what is now Malibu to San Luis Obispo, were often eager to show the strange newcomers their populous towns and wealth.⁴¹ The Ohlone, living in an area from what is now Monterey Bay to the San Francisco Bay east hills greeted the Spanish with a mixture of curiosity and caution in the earliest days of contact. Two groups that faced the most consistent, early pressure from the Spanish invasion were the Tongva, who call what is now the Los Angeles basin home, and the Kumeyaay, who live on both sides of what is now the United States' border with Mexico near San Diego, were wary from the start. Both groups harried the original invasion force as Spaniards claimed land in the south and made their way north searching for Monterey Bay. In 1784, at the time of Serra's death, the California missions had not made great progress in winning over the region's Indigenous peoples. Perhaps 300,000 people resided in California before the founding of Mission San Diego in 1769.⁴² About 5,000 California Indians lived in the system during its first fifteen years. By 1784, of the more than 7,500 Indians baptized at the missions, around 2,000 had already perished.⁴³ Apart from the

⁴¹ Pedro Fages, *A historical, political, and natural description of California by Pedro Fages, soldier of Spain (Dutifully made for the Viceroy in the year 1775)* Herbert Ingram Priestley, trans., (Berkeley, 1937), 7.

⁴² Sherburne F. Cook, *The Population of the California Indians, 1769-1970* (Berkeley, 1976), 43.

⁴³ Fermín Francisco de Lasuén, *The Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén Volume II*, Kenneally, Finbar, O.F.M. trans. and ed. (Washington, D.C., 1965), 394.

small number of California Indians investigating the newcomers, others had already begun resisting Spanish colonialism. One of the first to do so were the Kumeyaay.

The Kumeyaay Indians

The first people the Spanish met in the land they would eventually call Alta California were the Ipai and Tipai people, collectively known as Kumeyaay. Archeologists continue to debate when the modern Kumeyaay emerged and whether they are related to the La Jolla culture group that lived in the same region about 8,000 years ago.⁴⁴ One theory posits that the Kumeyaay are a Yuman group that travelled west and settled their territory about 1,000-2,000 years ago. Another that their ancestors lived on the coast, then travelled east to the desert, only to return to the coast centuries later.⁴⁵ Like many Indigenous Californian peoples, they were a confederation of tribal bands bound together through kinship, culture, trade, and language. Two sub-groups constitute the Kumeyaay people, the northern Ipai, and the southern Tipai. Together their territory, at the eve of the Spanish invasion, spanned from modern San Diego County in the north, east to the Colorado River in Sonora, and to Ensenada in the south.⁴⁶ The Kumeyaay lived a semi-nomadic lifestyle, building settlements but alternating between them during summers and winters.⁴⁷ They were agriculturists, stargazers, and traders.⁴⁸

For the Kumeyaay people, creating communities was a process of balancing family or clan interests against those of the larger band. Their clan groups, or *shimull*, intersected with

⁴⁴ Florence Shipek, "Myth and Reality: The Antiquity of the Kumeyaay," in Papers from the 1983, 1984, 1985 Hokum-Penutian Languages Conference, ed. James E. Redden. *Occasional Papers on Linguistics, no.12* (Carbondale, 1986), 5.

⁴⁵ Katherine Luomala, "Tipai-IPai," in *Handbook of North American Indians Vol. 8, California*, ed., Robert F. Heizer (Washington, 1978), 594.

⁴⁶ Richard Carrico, *Strangers in a Stolen Land: Indians of San Diego County from Prehistory to the New Deal* (San Diego, 2008), 9.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁸ Florence Shipek, "Kuuchamaa, the Kumeyaay Sacred Mountain," *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (1985), 72

territorial band structures to weave a tapestry of connections, which engendered stability and prosperity. Each band could have contained more than a dozen *shimull* affiliations. A somewhat egalitarian political system emerged from this structure, embracing the balance between multiple families and the larger band. While a *shimull* had no official leadership, the band selected a leader, or *Kwaaypaay*, usually a man, who was the only member of a particular family in that band. This ensured that an influential *shimull* could not dominate a band.⁴⁹

Aside from leadership positions, there were many roles available in Kumeyaay society for women and men. Some Kumeyaay worked to assist the *Kwaaypaay* as messengers. The role of a carrier or runner, transporting information quickly over long distances, was a position of great importance, as was the *Kwaaypaay*'s Speaker, who acted as the liaison between the people and their leader. Women were responsible for their band's and family's physical and spiritual wellbeing, often serving as shamans, herbalists, midwives, and healers. Men, too, were shamans, though their other jobs typically focused on the physical world. They were sky watchers, flora and fauna experts, and religious specialists who managed ritual and ceremonial life.⁵⁰ Both men and women worked to maintain a stable food supply, with men hunting small to mid-size game, while women and girls collected and processed a variety of seeds and plants.⁵¹

Despite Spanish claims to the contrary, some Kumeyaay were dedicated planters. Though they were not agriculturalists in the European sense and cultivated foods were never their primary source of subsistence, Tipai people grew corn, beans, and melons along with tobacco in what is now known as the Imperial Valley.⁵² There is also evidence that the Kumeyaay may have

⁴⁹ Florence Shipek, "Kumeyaay Socio-Political Structure," *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 4, no. 2 (Winter 1982), 297.

⁵⁰ Shipek, "Kuuchamaa, the Kumeyaay Sacred Mountain," 72.

⁵¹ Information on spiritual roles from Shipek, "Kumeyaay Socio-Political Structure," 298-299; information about food gathering from Luomala, "Tipai-Ipai," 600.

⁵² *Ibid.*

grown grapes and wheat. Wheat was a non-native plant probably obtained through trade with their Quechan neighbors, in the years before the Spanish invasion.⁵³ However, the Kumeyaay also transplanted plants, for sustenance or medicinal purposes, from their natural ranges to gardens in Kumeyaay villages. Additionally, they employed some flora as a natural defense system for those villages. One town, that the Spanish called Los Chollas, was surrounded by cacti. At least one other village reportedly used cactus and thorny bushes to keep aggressors at bay.⁵⁴

By 1785, California Indians already began to violently resist Spanish encroachment. The Kumeyaay people around Mission San Diego attacked it twice in sixteen years. In August 1769, Kumeyaay raiders burned the fledgling mission, taking clothing and bedsheets. Tensions simmered around the mission as the Franciscans became more entrenched. Increased Spanish strength forced the Kumeyaay to wait for an opportune moment to strike. It came in the fall of 1775. On October 19, soldiers from San Diego's presidio marched north to assist with the establishment of Mission San Juan Capistrano. Four men stayed behind to guard both presidio and mission. On November 4, the Kumeyaay exploited the meager defenses and stormed Mission San Diego. Kumeyaay warriors, numbering at least 600, sacked the mission, reduced it to cinders, and killed Fray Luis Jayme and a blacksmith.⁵⁵ Two years later, to the north, the Acjachemen people living near Mission San Juan Capistrano clashed with Spanish soldiers at their village of Alocuachomi, avenging some soldiers' sexual violence against women there.⁵⁶ The following year, three Acjachemen villages again threatened a strike in response to soldiers'

⁵³ Carrico, *Strangers in a Stolen Land*, 21.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵⁵ Bancroft, *History of California* 1:249-252.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 314.

continued sexual aggression against women. This time the Acjachemen also claimed the Spanish were devils who used drought to destroy their food supply.⁵⁷

Fifteen years into Spain's colonial invasion, California Indians in the south had staged several assaults against the newcomers. These planted the seeds for larger and more frequent uprisings against Spanish colonialism. For their parts, Franciscan missionaries and Spanish military officers accused each other of stoking Indigenous enmity. It was one of many aspects of administering the province that prompted enmity between them.

The Struggles between Church and State

The issues Indigenous Californians, Spanish soldiers, and Franciscan missionaries faced did not originate with Serra's passing in 1784. Of these issues, the military's and missionaries' contest for control of Spanish California profoundly shaped the contours of the mission system. Most of that conflict stemmed from the inability of Mexico City or the crown to shape a coherent colonial policy throughout New Spain. Since the middle of the eighteenth century, the military had once again become the prominent institution in most of New Spain, with the exception of Alta California. This exception was at the root of the human catastrophe caused by Spanish colonization. Acting alone, the military governors would not likely have created a utopian colony free of disease and violence. The problems of Spanish colonies the military controlled, such as Texas and New Mexico, would likely have occurred in California.⁵⁸ Yet an institutional infrastructure with a clear chain of command would have reduced the Franciscan belief that they

⁵⁷ Bancroft, *History of California* 1:315.

⁵⁸ For more on Spanish colonialism along the northern border of New Spain see, David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven, 2009); Ned Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge, 2006); Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven, 2008); Natale A. Zappia. *Traders and Raiders: The Indigenous World of the Colorado Basin, 1540-1859* (Chapel Hill, 2014).

were in total control of the colony, along with their resistance to reform and the military governor's authority.

Upon his arrival in Baja California in 1767, Las Californias' first military governor, Gaspar de Portolá, immediately constrained the authority of Franciscans who took over the Jesuits' now-vacated missions, as the crown had expelled them from New Spain that year. Two factors drove Portolá's decision. The first was the precedent established by the crown's secularization policy, in effect since 1749, which whittled away the mendicant orders' numbers and influence while transferring their missions to secular clergy. For nearly three decades, Spanish policy had reordered the administrative structure on its northern border, with the mendicant orders waning, and the military regaining its preeminent position.⁵⁹ The second was the crown's Inspector General José de Gálvez's prosecution of the Jesuit expulsion from the Spanish empire in 1767. Gálvez offered no mercy to the Jesuits and their supporters, violently suppressing dissent from both Spanish and Indigenous quarters. His actions represented a total repudiation of the order. Though the crown exiled the Jesuits, it was not prepared to secularize all of their missions in New Spain and tapped the Franciscans from the College of San Fernando in Mexico City to manage them. In December, 1767, When Portolá and his men reached Baja California to secure the Jesuit establishments and prepare the Franciscans for the transition, the governor gave Spanish officers control of the mission temporalities, or the wealth and agricultural products produced at the missions, rather than allowing the Franciscans to manage their new missions as tradition dictated. Leadership at the college balked at what they perceived to be a power play and considered refusing the transfer. In a short period, Gálvez found Portolá's appointees to be poor administrators, so the Franciscans quickly regained their customary role as

⁵⁹ David J. Weber, *Bárbaros: Spaniards and Their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven, 2005), 140-143.

managers of mission products and finances. While Portolá's experiment quickly failed, it foreshadowed the contours of the remainder of the mission period in Alta California: a military governor acted in what he considered accordance with the crown's missionary policy, then was overruled by a superior with broader goals who capitalized on the ambiguity of those same policies in order to forward their agenda.⁶⁰

The relations between Franciscan missionaries and the Spanish soldiers had never been strong in California. As early as 1771, Fages reported to his superiors in Mexico that the Franciscans, at Serra's behest, were too reliant on the lash, and punishment in general, in their conversion efforts. Serra resented Fages' "meddling" and tried to outmaneuver him.⁶¹ Serra travelled to Mexico to lobby on behalf of the Franciscans' rights to punish baptized Indians. In 1773, the Office of the Exchequer in Mexico delivered Serra's victory. They determined that "the missionaries were to have the right to manage the mission Indians as a father would manage his family."⁶² That crucial administrative decision prompted decades of fighting between the military and Franciscans for control of the province. It also inhibited secular authorities' abilities to curb Franciscan excesses.

One of the biggest divides between church and state in the 1770s was Mexico City's desire to establish missions in the Santa Barbara channel region of California, home to the Chumash Indians. The establishment and location of the third mission among the Chumash people caused much friction between Serra and Governor Neve. Since 1769 and the first land expeditions from San Diego to Monterey, the Chumash had fascinated Spanish colonizers such

⁶⁰ For more on Gálvez and Portolá's actions in Baja California following the Jesuit expulsion see, Zephyrin Engelhardt, *Missions and Missionaries of California* 1:307-309; Harry W. Crosby, *Antigua California: Mission and Colony on the Peninsular Frontier* (Albuquerque, 1994), 371-386; Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft Volume XI: History of Mexico Volume III* (San Francisco, 1883), 426-449.

⁶¹ Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:191.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 209.

as Fages, Crespí, and Palóu. Serra lobbied for three missions in the Santa Barbara region in 1777, as there were as yet no missions between San Gabriel and San Luis Obispo de Tolosa. There were several reasons for the delay. The first was the lack of sufficiently trained ministers at the College of San Fernando to staff three new missions.⁶³ The second was the college's anger that Quechan Indians killed four ministers in an uprising in the New Mexico province in 1781.⁶⁴ The third was the order's frustrations with Neve's reglamento. Despite the delays from the Quechan attack and other Spanish military troubles along New Spain's northern borderlands, Neve privileged building mutual accommodation between the Spanish military and the powerful Chumash chief Yanonali who ruled the area around the proposed site.

The Chumash Indians

In 1769, the Chumash were a populous, commercial people with a currency-based, diversified economy, who had occupied the region for millennia. The modern Chumash inhabited their lands, an area stretching from modern Malibu, north to San Luis Obispo, inland to Mt. Pinos, and west to the northern Channel Islands, since at least 6000 years before the birth of Christ.⁶⁵ Although the Chumash were neither linguistically nor politically homogenous, they were not an amalgamation of various tribes.⁶⁶ They forged separate identities based on their geography, but were bound together by the Hokum language family and shared economic, political, religious, and familial lifeways.⁶⁷ The Chumash managed the varying landscapes within their territories with such success that relatively large towns, some with as many as 600 people,

⁶³ Please see the introduction of this dissertation.

⁶⁴ Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:382.

⁶⁵ Haas, *Saints and Citizens*, 18-19; Lynn H. Gamble, *The Chumash at European Contact: Power, Trade, and Feasting among Complex Hunter-Gatherers*, (Berkeley, 2008), 6.

⁶⁶ Gamble, *Chumash at European Contact*, 6.

⁶⁷ Thomas C. Blackburn, ed., *December's Child: A Book of Chumash Oral Narratives* (Berkeley, 1875), 8.

were not uncommon.⁶⁸ In total as many as 20,000 Chumash people lived in this region before the Spanish invasion. The Chumash organized a mixed economy, relying on trade in goods and currency, combined with a reciprocity-redistribution model. Their prodigious output of shell-bead currency drove a dynamic system of trade within their own federations and with other Indians throughout the modern North American Southwest.

The organization and scope of the Chumash economy was the center around which much of their social world and day-to-day life revolved. Their society stratified along economic lines and a woman or man's prestige in their town or within the larger inter-village alliance depended on their participation in, or management of, wealth generation.⁶⁹ Plentiful food supplies and storage systems allowed specialized jobs to emerge. In larger towns, like the economic and political center *Syuxtun*, there were basket weavers, net makers, tobacconists, astrologers, and morticians.⁷⁰ People in the town of *Mishopshno* built the *tomols*, or sea-faring canoes, essential to Chumash life.⁷¹ The *tomols* generated significant wealth and power for their owners, as they were employed for fishing, freight hauling, and ferrying people between the Channel Islands and the mainland. Those islands were perhaps the most important Chumash economic zone, yet ironically produced workers of low status. Specialists there churned out millions of beads primarily from *olivella biplicata* shells to use as currency both locally and hundreds of miles away from the Pacific coast.⁷² The island Chumash needed food shipped in from the mainland to keep this crucial aspect of their economy viable.⁷³ Chumash society created these economic

⁶⁸ Gamble, *Chumash at European Contact*, 241-242.

⁶⁹ Blackburn, *December's Child*, 49.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁷¹ Alan K. Brown, ed., *A Description of Unpublished Roads: Original Journals of the First Expedition into California, 1769-1770 by Juan Crespi* (San Diego, 2001), 407.

⁷² Gamble, *Chumash at European Contact*, 227.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

dependencies, fostering a hierarchical system based on a person's ability to produce wealth and facilitate commercial exchange.

On the eve of the Spanish invasion, the Chumash were a formidable nation. They controlled a large coastal region, and through both the individual power of some leaders and the political, social, and kinship networks Chumash people formed, they developed a dynamic, thriving society. Political and economic concerns were a daily reality for Chumash leadership and the general populace, but these challenges were met and their world remained relatively stable and prosperous for over 400 years before the arrival of Franciscan missionaries.⁷⁴ In fact, when the Spanish arrived in 1769, they recorded that despite a language barrier, they had the distinct impression that Chumash leaders were proudly demonstrating their wealth and power to them.⁷⁵

Despite Serra and the Franciscans' hunger for missions in the Santa Barbara channel zone, Neve took a cautious position on expansion. He did not want to antagonize the Chumash and harbored doubts regarding the effectiveness of missions. However, the crown still considered them the chief means of conquest in California, so Neve worked within those parameters, even as he worried about the tenor of Chumash-Franciscan relations. On July 3, 1777, while preparing for the proposed missions, he advised the Commandant General of the Interior Provinces, Teodoro de Croix, that the Channel Island region alone required three missions and a presidio.⁷⁶ Croix accepted the basis of Neve's plan, which eventually resulted in the construction of missions San Buenaventura in 1782, Santa Barbara in 1786, and La Purísima Concepción in 1787, as well as a presidio at Santa Barbara in 1782. Neve still considered diplomacy with the

⁷⁴ Gamble, *Chumash at European Contact*, 6-7, 262.

⁷⁵ Fages, *A historical, political, and natural description of California*, 7.

⁷⁶ Beilharz, *Felipe de Neve*, 112.

Chumash a priority and increasing the Franciscan presence in their midst remained a source of concern for him.⁷⁷ He set out to undermine the missionaries' control in order to stabilize relations with the Chumash around Santa Barbara, while also demonstrating the benefits of accepting the crown's friendship.

As Neve worked his plan for Santa Barbara and the Chumash, a failed uprising in 1778 centered on the Kumeyaay village of Pamó, north of Mission San Diego proved instructive for him. The Kumeyaay plan demonstrated the coordinated efforts already emerging among separate bands of Kumeyaay against the Spanish. The people of Pamó, along with three other groups, stockpiled bows, arrows, and clubs. Word of the planned uprising reached Juan Francisco Ortega, the commander of the San Diego presidio. Ortega ordered the leader at Pamó, Aaaran, to destroy their arms. Aaaran instead challenged the Spanish to a battle. Nine soldiers travelled to the village and caught the coalition unawares. The fighting ended quickly, and the Spanish captured four Kumeyaay captains, Aachil, Aalcurin, Aaaran, and Taguagui along with eighty bows and 1,500 arrows. Ortega unilaterally decided to execute all four men, without consulting Neve. Ortega's proclamation read: "Deeming it useful to the service of God, the king, and the public weal, I sentence them to a violent death by two musket shots."⁷⁸ When a young Fray Lasuén attempted to check the commander Ortega replied, "you will cooperate for the good of their souls in the understanding that if they do not accept the salutary waters of holy baptism they die on Saturday morning; and if they do – they die all the same."⁷⁹ Though Neve overruled Ortega, the decree illustrated the tense and often violent situation in California around Serra's death, as well as the need for Neve to control the officers under his command.

⁷⁷ Beilharz, *Felipe de Neve*, 70.

⁷⁸ Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:315-316.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 316.

Following the trouble near San Diego, Neve imposed several regulations on both the Franciscans and soldiers intended to maintain friendly relationships with the Chumash. Neve started with the roughly 205 soldiers stationed in the presidios and as mission guards.⁸⁰ Because Spanish soldiers threatened the colony's stability in the early period of Spanish occupation more than missionaries, Neve needed his troops to show restraint and discipline. Therefore, soldiers were not to enter Chumash towns unless a missionary requested an escort. Even officers required a permit to enter Chumash villages. Neve also moved to maintain Chumash autonomy. Therefore, baptized Chumash from Yanonali's towns could continue living in their homes after receiving baptism. Chumash economic activities and social lives remained untouched under Neve's plan. The mission served only as religious sites where people could come and go as they pleased.⁸¹ Neve further promised Yanonali that he would retain his autonomy, and that his people could freely choose or reject baptism. The chief agreed to loan the Spanish some of his men to construct the presidio at Santa Barbara in exchange for access to their trade goods, such as string, needles, and other manufactured items.⁸² Spanish acknowledgment and confirmation of Chumash power and autonomy in the region solidified this arrangement. Without that recognition, Spanish encroachment into the area may have necessitated warfare, something Neve hoped to avoid.

Aside from Neve's concerns, his reformist *reglamento* for California further delayed expansion into the Santa Barbara channel area. Approved by the Royal Government in 1781, Governor Neve's ambitious legal code generated strife between church and state in the colony.

⁸⁰ Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:389.

⁸¹ Haas, *Saints and Citizens*, 16; John R. Johnson, "Social Responses to Climate Change among the Chumash Indians of South-Central California." in *The Way the Wind Blows: Climate, History, and Human Action*, Robert J. McIntosh, Joseph A. Tainter, and Susan Keech McIntosh, eds., (New York, 2000), 316.

⁸² Haas, *Saints and Citizens*, 16.

Viceroy Croix tasked Neve with reorganizing California's presidios, but the governor went much further.⁸³ He wrote a new *reglamento* for the province. Serra had overseen most of the previous *reglamento*, a document quite favorable to the Franciscans.⁸⁴ While founding pueblos occupied Neve's vision for California's future, he engineered a plan including the missionaries but dramatically diminishing their autonomy, which aligned with Spanish policy at the time. For Neve, California's Indians were not the Franciscans' spiritual pupils. Rather, they were victims of a carceral paternalism that bound them to the missions and reduced them to the status of dependents. Neve sought to change their circumstances. His *reglamento* represented the stiffest political challenge to Franciscan autonomy since Mission San Diego's founding in 1769.

Neve's *reglamento* included a wide range of reforms designed to reduce Franciscan control over baptized California Indians, which he argued condemned them to a miserable servitude.⁸⁵ "The unhappy treatment which [the Franciscans] give the Indians," he wrote in 1781, "renders the Indian's fate worse than slaves."⁸⁶ He argued that the Franciscans were more interested in autonomy than creating Spanish subjects. They aimed to be "sovereign in their control over the Indians and the Indian's wealth," he explained, "without recognizing any other authority than that of their own religious superiors."⁸⁷ Neve crafted a policy designed to break Franciscan power and force better treatment of baptized California Indians. The order would establish new missions in the Santa Barbara channel, but Neve would choose the sites. The *reglamento* also constrained future mission development by limiting both the amount of funding they received and the number of missionaries at each mission to a single priest.⁸⁸ Neve restricted

⁸³ Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:317-318.

⁸⁴ Beilharz, *Felipe de Neve*, 85.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Gerald J. Geary, *Secularization of California Missions*, 47; Beilharz, *Felipe de Neve*, 94.

the missionaries' activities to religious instruction only, forbidding them from managing mission temporalities, as Portolá had done in Baja California in 1767.⁸⁹

Aside from constraining missionary power, Neve also offered an alternative route to Spanish-Indigenous co-existence in California. Despite his colonialist desire to see Indigenous Californians transformed into imperial subjects, he believed meaningful participation in Spanish society provided a better path to this goal than missionization. This philosophy undergirded Neve's plan to build towns that would serve as alternative cultural contact points between the Spaniards and Indigenous Californians. Additionally, he thought treating California Indians as something approximating equal partners ensured Spanish longevity in California. In 1782, the powerful Chumash chief Yanonali ruled as many as fourteen towns and controlled a sizable labor pool. Neve respected the chief's power, which could easily wipe out the Spanish presence around Santa Barbara. If Yanonali's people helped the Spanish construct their new presidio and missions, Neve agreed that the Spanish would cease interference with his authority and stop Franciscan evangelization in his towns.⁹⁰ Neve's policies continued to offer Indigenous interests a place in California's development. However, Neve's *reglamento* engendered fierce opposition from Franciscans, damaging relations between church and state in Spanish California.

The most pressing cause for delaying a new mission in Chumash territory was the Quechan attack on Spanish colonial outposts on the Colorado River, near what is now the California-Arizona border. The bloody and total rebuke of Spanish colonialism took place in 1781 as Neve pondered the antidote to Chumash strength. A year before the uprising, Croix ordered two colonial outposts, Purísima Concepción and San Pedro y San Pablo de Bicuñer, to be established at the confluence of the Colorado and Gila Rivers. Like Neve on the Santa

⁸⁹ Engelhardt, *Missions and Missionaries*, 2:331-332.

⁹⁰ Haas, *Saints and Citizens*, 16.

Barbara Channel, and Portolá in Baja California, Croix acted within the paradigm of the Bourbon Reforms, which reduced missionary influence throughout New Spain. As a result, these outposts were a new concept. Rather than constructing missions with a presidio and town nearby, Spanish planners combined all three elements in one space. Croix allowed for only four Franciscans among the colonists and stipulated that the order could not found a mission, nor could they induce the Quechans to work for them.⁹¹ Even with these policies in place, the Quechans at the Yuma Crossing quickly determined that the Spanish presence dangerously altered their way of life. Colonists bound for California stopped at the two towns, led by the veteran soldier, and friend of Lasuén, Captain Fernando Rivera y Moncada.⁹² Under his watch, Spanish livestock roamed beyond arranged pasturage, angering the Quechans. The colonists also made unsustainable demands for land and food. They treated the Quechans as inferiors, and frequently behaved violently towards them. The soldiers' behavior created significant tensions. Franciscan evangelization added to those tensions.⁹³

When the Quechans struck, they targeted the Franciscans as the symbol of colonization. During mass on June 17, 1781, Quechan warriors attacked the missionaries and killed the priests with clubs.⁹⁴ The warriors then turned to the remaining colonists. The fighting lasted three days. When it ended, the two outposts lay in ruins with one hundred Spanish men dead. The Quechans largely spared women and children. Both Neve and Fages received orders to hunt and capture the

⁹¹ David J. Weber, *Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven, 1992), 257 argues that “Rather than establish presidios or missions on the Colorado, Croix authorized two fortified villages, each with twenty-five government subsidized families of soldiers, colonists, and artisans, as well as two Franciscans. Croix limited the friars’ authority to the spiritual realm.”

⁹² Weber, *Spanish Frontier in North America*, 257.

⁹³ Mark Santiago, *Massacre at the Yuma Crossing: Spanish relations with the Quechans, 1779-1782* (Tucson, 1998), 87.

⁹⁴ Zappia, *Traders and Raiders*, 74.

leaders of the attack but were unsuccessful.⁹⁵ After returning to California from the failed punitive expedition, Fages began his term as governor, as Neve returned to Mexico following his promotion to Commander General of the Internal Provinces.⁹⁶

The outgoing governor penned a letter debriefing Fages on the situation in California. His correspondence demonstrated the lessons he learned from Spanish invaders pushing Indigenous people too hard. The survival of the yet-to-be established mission at Santa Barbara and the fledgling pueblo of Los Angeles gnawed at Neve. Chumash numbers and the Spanish perception that they were a quarrelsome people made peaceful relations Neve's top priority. Neve reminded Fages that Yanonali once demonstrated hostility, but had become friendly, even helpful, as the result of gift giving and concessions. Attempting to forcefully pacify the Chumash or any powerful nation in California would make them "aware of our weakness and small numbers," Neve reminded Fages.⁹⁷ Neve then shifted to the protection of the towns in California, like San José and Los Angeles. "It is most essential that special watchfulness be maintained with respect to the pueblo of...Los Angeles," he reminded Fages.⁹⁸ Its location gave the town material advantages with access to water and productive land, but Neve worried that without proper leadership Los Angeles would not develop. The pueblo existed surrounded entirely by Tongva people who had bristled at its presence since its establishment. Neve impressed upon Fages that the future of Spain in California depended on success in Santa Barbara and Los Angeles. Neve's warnings and the failure among the Quechans informed Fages' policy decisions throughout his term as governor.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ *Felipe de Neve al Commandante General*, October 16, 1782, *Espedición contra los Yumas*, BANC MSS C-A 22, 270.

⁹⁶ Beilharz, *Felipe de Neve*, 127, 135.

⁹⁷ Felipe Neve, *Instrucción, Saucillo*, September 7 1782, quoted in Beilharz, *Felipe de Neve*, 161.

⁹⁸ Neve quoted in Beilharz, *Felipe de Neve*, 161.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 158.

Neve also warned Fages about the missionaries' unwillingness to cooperate with civil administrators and their desire to use the Spanish military for their own ends. Neve explained that Serra and the rank-and-file missionaries refused to deliver the annual reports on the missions, meant to inform both the governor and Mexico City of the missions' populations and the growth or decline of animal herds and crops. Neve envisioned a time when California could become self-sufficient and no longer rely on supplies from Mexico. Any surplus food could serve as diplomatic gifts to Indigenous Californians during times of increased tensions. For the outgoing governor, the Franciscans' reluctance to share information was another sign of their propensity for secrecy and autonomy. Neve also shared his exasperation with the missionaries' short-sighted use of punishment. Franciscans punished baptized California Indians for minor offenses, which prompted them to flee the missions. The priests expected the military to recapture escapees. This caused friction between California Indians and soldiers that Neve considered dangerous and avoidable. Neve admonished Fages to limit the number of excursions into California Indian villages and advised him to send baptized California Indians to go after runaways with gifts and kindness.¹⁰⁰ Neve's advice prepared his protégé to establish Mission Santa Barbara. Stalling the new mission's founding to build alliances with Chumash leaders could not last forever, but Neve provided a positive foundation.

In 1782, Fages became governor, but Neve's quick departure to manage the deteriorating situation in the east left Fages with two problems.¹⁰¹ First, Neve had split the powers of the governor and gave Nicolás Soler, the provincial inspector and physician, control over military forces in California, while handing the administrative duties to Fages.¹⁰² This produced

¹⁰⁰ Beilharz, *Felipe de Neve*, 160-161, 168-169.

¹⁰¹ Bancroft, *History of California*, 393.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

squabbles over jurisdiction and official powers leading to differing agendas for the province's development. The second problem Neve left for Fages was extreme bitterness between government officials and Franciscans in California. As governor, Fages continued to challenge Franciscans on matters large and small. He consistently derided Serra's defiant attitude towards Spanish officials. "Fr. Serra's opposition to all governmental measures has already been declared," Fages wrote in March of 1783, "not only in words but with works and in writing."¹⁰³ Later that year he announced that Serra "tramples upon the measures of the government and bears himself with much *despotiquez* and total indifference."¹⁰⁴ Serra's refusal to pay postage for their letters to their college in Mexico City incensed the governor.¹⁰⁵ Central to Fages' attack was an increasing series of accusations that Serra and the Franciscans were cruel towards baptized California Indians. In 1783 he wrote two separate letters highlighting Serra's severity with California Indians, and Mission San Carmelo's missionaries' propensity for shackles and forced labor.¹⁰⁶ Serra's death and Lasuén's ascension to father president had little impact on Fages' distrust of the missionaries. Indeed, his relationship with the Franciscans only deteriorated further after their change in leadership.

The confrontations over Neve's reglamento, the sites for the planned Santa Barbara Channel missions, and the 1781 Quechan uprising on the Colorado River had profound implications for the relationship between Spanish soldiers and missionaries in California. Franciscans had used obstructionism successfully when Portolá placed his men in charge of mission temporalities in Baja California in 1767. They employed it again in the mid-1780s to

¹⁰³ *Fages á Inspector Gral Quejas contra el P. Serra*, Monterey, March 1, 1783, BANC MSS C-A 23, 87.

¹⁰⁴ Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:399n17.

¹⁰⁵ *Fages á Hermenegildo Sal. Sobre resistirse á pagar franqueo de cartas el P. Serra*. Monterey, January 12, 1783, BANC MSS C-A 23, 81-82.

¹⁰⁶ *Fages á Inspector Gral Quejas contra el P. Serra*, Monterey, March 1, 1783, BANC MSS C-A 23, 87; Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:400.

fight Neve's *reglamento*, resisting Mexico City's desire for more missions in the Santa Barbara Channel as long as the offensive legal code remained in effect. Before the 1781 Quechan uprising, Chumash strength concerned Neve, as did their ability to wipe out the Spanish presence around Santa Barbara. After the uprising, he and Fages both pivoted towards accommodationist positions. They envisioned a Spanish California where the Indian population had enough of a place at the table that they would not revolt against their transformation into quasi-Europeans. There were good reasons for the military governors to take this position. The Spanish presence remained fragile in California after little more than a decade of colonization. In 1780 the Spanish population amounted to 500 souls, compared to the hundreds of thousands of California Indians in the province. Moreover, there were only 155 soldiers stationed there.¹⁰⁷ Correctly or not, Neve and Fages both saw the Franciscans in California as arrogant and stubborn. They both feared their potential to bring the colony to ruin. Fages' relationship with the new father president, Fray Fermín Francisco de Lasuén, became critically important to the Spanish future in California.

The Second Father President

Lasuén was born in Vitoria, in the Basque region of Northern Spain, in 1736. He entered the Franciscan order as a novice at their monastery in Vitoria at fourteen. In 1759, he answered the call of a Franciscan recruiter, Fray Gaspar Gómez, who travelled to Spain from the College of San Fernando in Mexico City, hoping to add to the dwindling numbers there. Lasuén embarked for the Americas that year and never returned to his homeland.¹⁰⁸ In 1763, Lasuén travelled with Serra to the Sierra Gorda region of northern Mexico and served at Mission San Borja for five years. In 1768, he ventured to Baja California when José de Gálvez chose the

¹⁰⁷ Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:332.

¹⁰⁸ Francis F. Guest, *Fermin Francisco De Lasuen (1736-1803): A Biography* (Washington D.C., 1973), 3-9.

Franciscans to administer the missions vacated after the Jesuit expulsion.¹⁰⁹ Still following in Serra's wake in 1773, Lasuén arrived in Alta California with Palóu and a group of Franciscans.¹¹⁰ After a decade in the north of New Spain, Lasuén yearned for a return to Mexico City and the College of San Fernando. Instead, his mission work kept him on the northwestern fringe of Spain's imperial claims in North America.

Like many of the Franciscans he would eventually lead, Lasuén quickly cooled towards life in Alta California. His correspondence with superiors at the College of San Fernando suggested he despised his frontier circumstances. In April, 1774 Lasuén confided to the father guardian of the college, Fray Francisco Pangua, that his transfer to Alta California had "robbed me of the pleasure" of returning to Mexico City.¹¹¹ Arriving at Mission San Gabriel, just east of what is now Los Angeles, Lasuén held the false impression that the mission had a surplus of ministers, rendering him superfluous. The long-time California missionary and friend of Serra's, Palóu, refused Lasuén's request for early retirement, as the Franciscans faced pressure from an impatient Mexico City to establish two new missions in California.¹¹²

Lasuén's quality of life added to his dim view of California. He sent multiple letters to the college requesting new clothes, reporting that his habit had worn down to "the stage of indecency."¹¹³ Worse news came as the two still-theoretical missions were in the planning stages. Lasuén learned that neither of the two priests scheduled to administer them, Palóu and Fray José Murguía, wanted him as a partner. "It is clear that the only talent I have (it's the plain truth) is to act as a supernumerary, and that the other ministers do not want me," he confided to

¹⁰⁹ Fermín Francisco de Lasuén, *The Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén Volume I*, Kenneally, Finbar, O.F.M. trans. and ed. (Washington, D.C., 1965), 37.

¹¹⁰ Guest, *Fermín Francisco De Lasuen*, 61.

¹¹¹ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:37.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 37.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 38.

Pangua.¹¹⁴ As a supernumerary, Lasuén was the third missionary at any establishment, leaving little meaningful work for him. While the months turned to years, Lasuén's frustration turned to despair. The college would not recall a missionary of Lasuén's experience and tenure, particularly when the order's paucity of ministers failed to slow the crown's desire to consolidate their control over California. Although the need for six more missionaries seemed innocuous, it strained the resources for the thinly staffed College of San Fernando. The college repeatedly denied the requests of missionaries for retirement, as they had Lasuén's.

Lasuén's response to his early days in Alta California is instructive for three reasons. First, it casts doubt on the once-popular notion that Franciscans in California were selfless aesthetes, toiling for the glory of God with Christian patience and love. Second, Lasuén's was not a unique case. Many Franciscans in Alta California, both those reaching retirement age and those coming from New Spain to replace them, found service in the remote colony distasteful. It was a lonely place, far removed from the monastic, academic life at the college in Mexico City. Many missionaries despised the California Indian people they met and rued their placement among nomadic hunter gatherers, rather than the more "civilized" Indigenous peoples of Mesoamerica.¹¹⁵ Finally, Lasuén's personal feelings regarding his inability to leave Alta California informed both his attitudes when the College of San Fernando promoted him to father president of the missions and his manner of handling missionaries who expressed similar distaste towards serving on the imperial frontier. Managing missionary frustrations with life in California consumed much of Lasuén's attention and energy as father president.

"My hopes have been frustrated," Lasuén wrote to Fray Pangua from Monterey in 1775, "The things I foresaw as reasons for not coming to these missions and later for not staying here,

¹¹⁴ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:39.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 78.

have come to pass.”¹¹⁶ He often felt that this situation should give him the flexibility to choose his assignment, if he could not retire. One such opportunity arose when his good friend Rivera y Moncada asked Lasuén to join him at Mission San Luis Obispo that year. Serra rejected his request and sent him back to San Gabriel “a place for which I have the greatest aversion,” Lasuén told Pangua.¹¹⁷ Moreover, even as the understaffed order prepared to establish two new missions near the San Francisco Bay, the brooding Lasuén received no new assignment. His malaise increased when he realized that neither his inability to peaceably live with other missionaries nor his lack of a permanent position at a mission would hasten his return to Mexico City. “What grieves me is that they did not recognize my uselessness at a time when I was doing my utmost to return to the college,” he wrote.¹¹⁸ Lasuén’s response to Serra during their meeting regarding his request for transfer revealed much about the burgeoning Franciscan mindset in California. “I then drew attention to my own limitations as compared with so many other Fathers,” he admitted, “all of whom are available; and each and all of those who volunteered for this kind of work were more fitted for it than I.”¹¹⁹ Lasuén’s remarks remain illustrative. Lasuén’s comments demonstrated that not all missionaries trained at the College of San Fernando were up to the burden of work in California. In his distaste for California, as will be demonstrated throughout this dissertation, he was hardly alone.

After a 1775 uprising by Kumeyaay Indians on Mission San Diego, which left Fray Luis Jamie and a blacksmith dead, Lasuén renewed his quest to retire. During the ensuing chaos, Lasuén wrote: “Everything will have to suffer considerable delay. Consequently, I am applying

¹¹⁶ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:50.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

to the Reverend Father Guardian for permission to return to the college.”¹²⁰ The longer his superiors rebuffed his efforts, the darker Lasuén’s moods became. “I assure you that from the day I arrived in Monterey up to the present,” he revealed to Pangua, “I have suffered more than in all the other years I have devoted to the missions.”¹²¹ Lasuén flatly admitted to his superiors that he felt unqualified and unappreciated: “I would not withdraw from this undertaking did I not foresee, from the failure of my superiors to appoint me, that I am unsuitable for this kind of work.”¹²² He continued, “I think you can deduce from this that a mission incurs a liability under the present administration if it becomes known that I am the founder or administrator of it...What is there I can look forward to but more time wasted, over and above the two years that I have already spent without employment?”¹²³ When his protestations failed to move Pangua or Serra, Lasuén lashed out: “the assignments given to me since (against my will) I have left the college have not, as a rule, brought me any pleasure, satisfaction, or peace of soul, save what obedience affords.”¹²⁴ He made one last petition from San Diego in 1776, begging, “I humbly beg Your Reverence and the Reverend Fathers of the council that you grant me permission to retire to the college.”¹²⁵ Once more, they denied his request. Finally, after a half-decade of requesting, beseeching, and cajoling, Lasuén accepted his position. Although he did everything possible to convince the council at the College of San Fernando of his ineptitude and despair, the lack of suitable replacements sealed his fate.

Lasuén’s colleagues, particularly those of Serra’s generation, did not understand his desperation and self-depreciation. In January 1780, Fray Rafael Verger, a veteran missionary,

¹²⁰ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:60.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*, 62.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 62-63.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

wrote to Lasuén regarding his defeatist outlook. His letter demonstrated why the Franciscans chose Lasuén as Serra's successor five years later. "I feel in my soul the affliction and hardships of Your Reverence," Verger wrote, "but, my friend, the consolation for it all must be that you are toiling for the glory of the lord and for the welfare of souls."¹²⁶ "Great undertakings," he reminded his doubting colleague, "have always encountered great contradictions. What we have in those missions is of ample magnitude, and therefore I do not wonder at your anxieties; but, my friend, you must not imagine that we here fail to do what we can."¹²⁷ Verger sought to repair his friend's flagging confidence. "Your Reverence is very important in that service; even though your modesty will smile somewhat, it is necessary to tell you," he counseled Lasuén. "Your Reverence has more experience, more deliberation in thought, etc., and so you will sacrifice yourself for the lord."¹²⁸ Verger's support, along with repeated refusals from the college, produced a shift in Lasuén. At Mission San Diego in 1780, he finally conceded: "I humbly submit, dear Father, and (Thanks be to God) I am determined to silence forever any urge to seek a different assignment."¹²⁹ Although he made peace with the college's decision, Lasuén later found himself inundated with letters from his peers expressing similar feelings and arguments during his term as father president.

Even after his acceptance of life in California, Lasuén's ascendancy to father president was by no means foreordained. When Serra died, many of his presumptive heirs also neared the end of their time in California and on earth. Perhaps the most obvious candidate, Fray Juan Crespi, died a few months before Serra. Serra's long-time friend and advisor, Palóu, another obvious candidate, took the post briefly, but an illness dictated that he could only fill the position

¹²⁶ Fray Rafael Verger quoted in Engelhardt, *Missions and Missionaries*, 2:389.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:77.

on an interim basis.¹³⁰ By 1784, fifteen years after Franciscans established the first California mission at San Diego, many of the original missionaries were nearing retirement. Further complicating matters, about two weeks before his death, Serra, still working to convert California's indigenous people to Roman Catholicism, received word from his superiors at the College of San Fernando in Mexico City that they could not send more missionaries to California. There were simply not enough men.¹³¹ Many of the Franciscans at the college had recently retired. Moreover, the Spanish crown's 1749 secularization decree, and the policies that followed it, constrained the missionary orders, and diminished their power and numbers in New Spain.¹³² Those policies' efficacy now threatened the very existence of Alta California missions.

In the six months after Serra's death, the College of San Fernando had not found a new father president for California. A recent spate of deaths of elderly Franciscans at the college confounded matters further. On October 27, 1783, less than a year before his own death, Serra wrote to Lasuén about their woes: "Serious it is that five more of our friars at the college died in little more than a month!" "And the trip to Spain has yet to be made for getting more missionaries," he continued, "and our Commissary is dead."¹³³ On November 5, he wrote Lasuén again in even worse spirits: "We must also offer to each other what consolation we can in the heavy blow we have experienced by losing, in death, so many of our friends in the religious life."¹³⁴ With the loss of five missionaries at once, and with no relief from Spain, the future of the California missions balanced precariously. In January 1785, the new father guardian at the College of San Fernando, Fray Juan Sancho, nominated Lasuén to succeed Serra. The father

¹³⁰ Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:416-417.

¹³¹ Junípero Serra, *Writings of Junípero Serra Volume IV*, Antonine Tibesar, ed. (Washington, D.C., 1966), 284-285.

¹³² See the introduction to this dissertation.

¹³³ Serra, *Writings of Junípero Serra*, 4:179.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 182.

guardian informed Lasuén that they selected him “in view of the qualities of knowledge, piety, and prudence that combine in you.”¹³⁵ On February 7, almost by default, the council chose Fermín Francisco de Lasuén as Alta California’s second father president.¹³⁶

Lasuén and Fages

Lasuén first needed to manage the aftermath of Serra’s feud with Fages over Neve’s regulations for the missions. In his last years, Serra steadfastly opposed Neve’s reforms. Thinking a new father president might be more pliable than the intractable Serra, Fages sought to create leverage for himself. In September 1785, while Palóu served as interim president, Fages drew up a list of complaints against the missionaries in California. He forwarded it to the viceroy, Martín de Mayorga, who received the document in January 1786. Five of Fages’ complaints were indicative of long term, systemic conflicts between the Franciscans and civil authorities in California. Fages’ first complaint was that the missionaries in San Francisco refused to perform Mass for the soldiers in the presidio for nearly three years.¹³⁷ Second, the priests refused to recognize the governor’s authority over the management of mission temporalities. Fages’ third complaint charged that prices for foodstuffs at the missions were often higher than those the king approved. Fourth, the missionaries were delinquent in reporting inventories and population statistics to the government, as required by law. Finally, some Franciscans returned to Mexico via the seaport at San Blas without permission.¹³⁸ Mayorga

¹³⁵ Fray Juan Sancho quoted in Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:97, Lasuén to Rengel, San Diego, October 11, 1785, SBMAL C.M.D. Doc 19.

¹³⁶ Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:417.

¹³⁷ Fages had complained about missionaries refusing to perform mass as early as 1783. See *P.P. de Mision Sn. Franc. á Fages, Sobre no dar Misa en el Presidio*, March 5, 1783, San Francisco, BANC MSS C-A 23, 92.

¹³⁸ Engelhardt, *Missions and Missionaries of California*, 2:416-417.

forwarded the document to Fray Sancho at the college with the command that the Franciscans must follow the law.¹³⁹

Fray Sancho requested that Palóu refute Fages' claims in writing. Palóu argued that Neve's regulations were not published until September of 1784, were not observed by Fages, and, most important, were not followed because California missionaries found Serra's previous regulations, ratified by the former viceroy Antonio María de Bucareli y Ursúa in 1772, more favorable. Palóu argued that Neve's regulations did not compel the missionaries to perform Mass, and because Neve wanted only one padre at each mission, they could not leave Mission San Francisco to perform Mass at the presidio. Besides, Palóu reasoned, the presidio's close proximity meant that if soldiers wanted to hear Mass, they could do so at the mission. Palóu then claimed that the mission temporalities were the products of California Indian labor, and therefore the civil authorities had no jurisdiction over them. Palóu also argued that he never saw evidence that the king fixed the price of foodstuffs grown at the missions, and that it should be the father president who decided rates. Finally, he informed Mexico City that missionaries did not require permission from the governor to return to the college, they only needed notification that the College of San Fernando approved their retirement.¹⁴⁰

While Mexico City deliberated on the matter, Lasuén and Fages continued their debate. Fages wrote Lasuén on November 8, 1785 to notify him about the complaints to the viceroy. The governor's anger centered on Fray Tomás de la Peña, a veteran in California, and one of the founders of Mission Santa Clara. De la Peña was born in Spain and came to Mexico as a Franciscan in 1770. His first assignment was in Baja California a year later, working at

¹³⁹ Engelhardt, *Missions and Missionaries of California*, 2:417.

¹⁴⁰ Palou's response is summarized in the *Audiencia's* report and quoted in Engelhardt, *Missions and Missionaries of California*, 1:419.

Comondú Mission. He arrived at Mission San Diego in 1772 and moved between San Luis Obispo and San Carmelo as a supernumerary until 1774.¹⁴¹ De la Peña's greatest achievement as a missionary in California was holding the inaugural mass at the founding of Mission Santa Clara on January 12, 1777.¹⁴² De la Peña had a fiery personality, and the results of his notorious temper eventually revealed Lasuén's habit of secrecy and obfuscation, which marked his tenure as president of the California missions.

According to Fages, de la Peña refused "to send the corn that was requested by the Presidio of Santa Barbara if he was not paid more than the original price set by the Royal tariff." Fages also simmered over missionaries selling soldiers inferior grain. "You do not choose it from the leftover [mission] seed," the governor charged, "but from the shipments from San Blas, which is of inferior quality, this is not in the spirit of the tariff, which has been sanctioned by the King's authority."¹⁴³ On November 22, Lasuén responded to the governor about prices. Lasuén's argument proved curious considering Palou's claims. "I share deeply in the displeasure in which Father Tomás de la Peña occasioned your lordship when he declined to supply corn at the price fixed by law," Lasuén wrote. He conceded that he "already knew...in this province Your Lordship alone has the power to enforce prices set by law, or to vary them as time and circumstance demand."¹⁴⁴ Here, Lasuén directly contradicted Palou's claim that the father president alone had authority to set and change prices on mission goods. Lasuén found de la Peña at fault and told Fages that he "sent Father Peña appropriate admonitions for his future guidance, and that I am placing on him the obligation of seeking my approval and permission in

¹⁴¹ Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:772.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ *Fages a P. Lasuen Quejas contra P. Peña*, November 8 1785, BANC MSS C-A 23, 59.

¹⁴⁴ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:101-102.

regard to matters of that nature.”¹⁴⁵ Despite Lasuén’s conciliatory tone, conflicts between the leaders were only beginning. The rift would soon widen into a gulf.

On December 7, 1785, just a month after his encounter with de la Peña over corn prices, Fages aired his grievances in a long, emotionally charged letter to Fray Pedro Cambón, Palóu’s partner at Mission San Francisco. After his years in Alta California battling with Serra, Palóu, and now Lasuén, Fages feared the reputation he forged while governor, which positioned him as an opponent of the Franciscans. “I only want to do my duty,” he wrote to Cambón. It was that impulse “that the ignorant masses call ‘persecuting the friars,’” Fages claimed.¹⁴⁶ The governor believed that the missionaries did not respect him and complained to Cambón that Palóu, once a friend to Fages, had become moody and cold with him. When he experienced trouble with Franciscans at Mission Santa Clara over livestock, Fages wrote that “afterwards I went to the mission several times and with surprise, I experienced several slights” that included Fray Matias Noriega stamping his feet loudly on the ground and shouting.¹⁴⁷ Fages bitterly complained that Father Caballero at Mission San Luis Obispo sent letters on ragged, uncut paper and lacked proper etiquette. Cambón, too sent them “without ‘my good Lord,’ without ‘kissing your hand,’ and with an impertinent tone.” Fages admitted “that I ashamedly keep [these letters] for an opportune occasion.”¹⁴⁸ He closed his screed with uncharacteristic introspection. “It is not in my character to do what the ignorant masses qualify as persecution,” he mused, particularly to the missionaries who “I venerate with all my heart.” Fages told Cambón he had the “determination not to give up...[on] the path that guides me. In walking that path I do not know how I could be

¹⁴⁵ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:102.

¹⁴⁶ *Fages a P. Cambón, Dificultades con P. Palou*, December 7 1785, BANC MSS C-A 23, 63-64.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

ashamed, because my conscience justifies me.”¹⁴⁹ Fages needed that determination as his relationship with the Franciscans deteriorated.

Fages’ troubles with de la Peña and Lasuén continued in early 1786. De la Peña again defied Fages when he refused to produce Mission Santa Clara’s inventories. The missionary failed to give the reports to Lieutenant Diego Gonzales, because the soldier did not request them “in the appropriate terms.”¹⁵⁰ Lasuén understood that de la Peña caused friction at a time when tensions were already running high. In April, Lasuén mollified the governor over corn prices. “I advised the Revered Fathers from Santa Clara to San Luis [Obispo] that they were under obligation to help [the presidios],” Lasuén wrote, “even to the point at which they could help no further.”¹⁵¹ The presidios’ need put Lasuén in a bind. If the missions sold provisions to the presidios, some might not have enough food for baptized California Indians. This necessitated Indian people returning to their homes for food. Lasuén argued that his policy harmed the spiritual conquest. He warned the governor “not only would we be opposing the pious wishes of the King, but we would be introducing a base form of tyranny,” by allowing newly baptized California Indians such autonomy.¹⁵² For his part, de la Peña informed the baptized Indians at Santa Clara that the soldiers were starving and that the missions needed to help them. When given the choice, they reportedly agreed to return to their rancherias to find food. De la Peña contended that this path led to the mission’s ruin, telling Lasuén, “if the Presidio of San Francisco does not obtain help from some other source it will be impossible to maintain it until the wheat harvest.”¹⁵³ Yet, on May 12, Lasuén assured Fages that de la Peña now “is so resolute

¹⁴⁹ *Fages a P. Cambón, Dificultades con P. Palou*, December 7 1785, BANC MSS C-A 23, 64.

¹⁵⁰ De la Peña quoted in Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:104.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

in helping that no one could ask more of him.”¹⁵⁴ Fages allowed Franciscans to raise prices on provisions sold to the presidios, and though some missionaries grumbled over empty stores, the corn controversy subsided, while Fages’ complaints against the missionaries languished in Mexico City.¹⁵⁵

Imperial Spain’s lack of a cohesive policy for governing California created the problems that led to Fages’ five complaints against the Franciscans and the dispute over food prices. No formal chain of command determined who held ultimate authority in Spanish California. Lasuén, like Serra before him, believed that the Office of the Exchequer’s 1773 ruling, which gave them the exclusive right to manage baptized California Indians, was clear. Fages, like Neve before him, argued that despite that ruling, the Franciscans in California were not qualified to manage and develop a colony. Fages also experienced the aftermath of the Quechan uprising on the Colorado River and understood Spain’s fragility in California. For the governor, the items in his five complaints along with Franciscan stubbornness and duplicity over food prices indicated that the missionaries wanted full autonomy in California. As Lasuén’s presidency was in its earliest stages, problems arose with the Tongva people around Mission San Gabriel and the pueblo of Los Angeles that would confirm his anxieties.

The Tongva and Nicolás José and Toyipurina’s Rebellion

During the summer of 1785, a situation representing the sum of Neve and Fages’ fears fomented around Mission San Gabriel, which the Spanish established deep in Tovaangar, the territory of the Tongva Indians. Fourteen years of Spanish incursion into their lands along with violence against their people and their way of life pushed some Tongva, both baptized and non-baptized, to the breaking point. Only four years after Quechans destroyed Spanish outposts on

¹⁵⁴ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:106.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 108.

the Colorado River, Fages understood Spain's tenuous position in California.¹⁵⁶ The desire for security and stability in California was nearly an obsession for Neve that he passed on to Fages. Security must be his top priority. Spanish soldiers, well-known for their own abuses against California Indian people, needed to fall in line. Spanish soldiers had a bad reputation among the Tongva after raping women and killing men in the first years after Mission San Gabriel's founding. While Neve had focused much of his attention on creating stable relations with the Chumash, potential disaster loomed for the California missions in 1785, not with the Chumash, but with the Tongva as its potential authors.

In 1771, the Franciscans founded Mission San Gabriel in Tovaangar, which spread from Topanga Creek in the west, to the Santa Ana Mountains in the east, and included all of modern Los Angeles.¹⁵⁷ The Tongva occupied that region for over 4,000 years before the Spanish invaded their lands.¹⁵⁸ Nearly one hundred Tongva villages dotted the area, with populations ranging from fifty to one hundred in each. They spoke a Cupan language, of the Takic family, which comes from the Uto-Aztecan language stock. According to early Spanish reports of the Tongva people, they rivaled the Chumash in craftsmanship of steatite tools, ritual objects, shell-bead currency, and in splendor. Tattooing, sometimes from the face to the sternum, was not uncommon for women or men. Women and children also wore accessories made of seasonal flowers. Although Franciscans often portrayed California Indian people as wretchedly poor and dirty, the Tongva were obsessed with cleanliness. Most Tongva people bathed every day. Their trade, too, was thriving and widespread. They engaged with the Serranos to the north and used

¹⁵⁶ *Felipe de Neve al Commandante General*, March 28, 1782, San Gabriel, *Otra.de Ataque á Yumas* BANC MSS C-A 22, 274; *Felipe de Neve al Commandante General*, October 16, 1782, *Espedición contra los Yumas*, BANC MSS C-A 22, 270.

¹⁵⁷ Lowell John Bean and Charles R. Smith, "Gabrielino," *Handbook of North American Indians VIII: California*, Sturtevant, William C., ed., (Washington D.C., 1978), 538.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 538, 540.

Cahuilla and Mojave agents to facilitate trade with groups as far east as the Pueblos in New Mexico. On the eve of the Spanish invasion, the Tongva were a dynamic group living in a manner that had sustained them for nearly six centuries.¹⁵⁹

The Tongva were also a martially focused people, who valued masculinity, courage, and victory. A nearly constant state of hostility existed between the Tongva of the coastal plain and those living further inland. Much of the enmity stemmed from controlling coastal resources including fishing, steatite, and shells for making currency. Tongva warriors wore armor made of reeds and carried war clubs, swords, and bows. Aside from controlling resources and trade, Tongva groups warred with each other for culturally specific causes, such as a chief failing to return gifts given during ceremonies, acts of sorcery, and kidnapping women. Engaging in war with another group prompted a meeting of a Tongva war council, sometimes consisting of several villages, depending on the coalition formed by the belligerents. A consensus was necessary as the all members of a given Tongva town helped prepare for conflict. Elders, women, and children all had a role to play if violent conflict erupted. Tongva war chiefs privileged the secret attack over all other tactical concerns, and always sought a swift, decisive strike to win the day. When tensions arose between allied groups who sought an alternative to violence, they employed a ritualistic form of combat. The two parties fought through song and dance, with each group singing vulgar songs about their rivals while dancing and stomping their feet.¹⁶⁰ While martial prowess played an important role in Tongva society, there were pathways to avoid armed conflict and draw disparate lineages together.

Tongva people used inter- and intratribal marriages to forge alliances with other Indigenous people around Southern California. Although Tongva generally did not marry outside

¹⁵⁹ Bean and Smith, "Gabrielino," 541-546.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 546-547.

of their social rank, coupling with partners from disparate villages and lineages was not only common but mandatory for elites. Furthermore, for those villages on the Tongva borders, marriage to other groups, such as the Chumash, Cahuilla, Serrano, or Payómkawichum, called Luiseño by the Spanish, occurred regularly.¹⁶¹ Marriage knitted people together for both the Tongva and Spaniards, yet how those similarities manifested once Spain invaded their land remains unclear. These unions also confirmed the importance of women in creating political stability and demonstrated why Tongva women initially resisted Spanish men's sexual advances. The first incidences of sexual contact between Spanish soldiers and Tongva women were violent, causing hostility between the two groups. Tongva women raped by Spanish men put themselves through a purification process and pregnancies were either aborted, or the children "strangled and buried" according to one report.¹⁶²

The first years after Mission San Gabriel's 1771 founding produced more discord than harmony. Like so many early encounters between Spanish invaders and Indigenous peoples throughout the Americas, the Tongva were impressed by Spanish technology and control of horses, and thought they were perhaps deities or spirits. Spanish avarice and violence quickly disabused them of that notion.¹⁶³ After searching Tovaangar for two years for an appropriate spot for a mission, a large contingent of soldiers, animals, and two priests prepared to cross the Rio Hondo. The Tongva responded by sending a large war party to confront the invaders. According to the Spanish version of the story, the warriors had the Spanish party pinned down, until one of

¹⁶¹ Bean and Smith, "Gabrielino," 544, 547; Kent Lightfoot, *Indians, Missionaries, and Merchants: The Legacy of Colonial Encounters on the California Frontiers*, (Berkeley, 2005), 199.

¹⁶² Hugo Reid quoted in Robert F. Heizer, *The Indians of Los Angeles County: Hugo Reid's Letters of 1852* (Highland Park, 1968), 70.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

the priests, Fray Cambón, produced a religious icon that transfixed the Tongva war party and cooled tensions. The détente did not last long.¹⁶⁴

Within months of San Gabriel's establishment, the Spanish soldiers and priests' violent behavior revealed their status as invaders. When soldiers at the mission limited the numbers of Tongva traders allowed near the mission, the traders responded by storming the stockade around San Gabriel. The loud report of Spanish muskets held them off. A soldier raped the wife of a Tongva leader, prompting a retaliatory attack on the mission. Again, the warriors had the Spanish in a perilous position until a soldier managed to kill a Tongva leader, prompting their retreat. The soldiers beheaded the man's corpse and displayed his severed head, further enraging the Tongva. They launched several more attacks during the following weeks, but Spanish reinforcements held them off.¹⁶⁵ The priests also employed violence as a means of social control and forced religious conversion. Tongva people tell a story of an unnamed priest leading a group of soldiers and servants, who "tied and whipped every man, woman and child in the [village], and drove part of them back" to the mission.¹⁶⁶ This use of force resulted in low numbers of baptisms at San Gabriel during the first decade of its existence, and Tongva people moving to avoid the Spaniards.¹⁶⁷

In the summer of 1785, as the Franciscans transitioned from Serra to Lasuén, a situation ripe with the possibility of violence brewed in Mission San Gabriel. A group of Tongva plotted an attack against the Franciscans to halt the physical and cultural damage brought by colonization. On the night of October 25, 1785, Spanish soldiers arrested twenty-one Tongva people just as the attack began, thwarting their plan. Two of the Tongva leaders' stories

¹⁶⁴ William McCawley, *The First Angelinos: The Gabrielino Indians of Los Angeles* (Banning, 1996), 189.

¹⁶⁵ McCawley, *First Angelinos*, 190-191.

¹⁶⁶ Heizer, *Indians of Los Angeles County*, 75.

¹⁶⁷ McCawley, *First Angelinos*, 190-191.

illustrated the growing realization for some California Indians that coexistence with the invaders was impossible. One of the leaders, Nicolás José, was a trusted Christian convert who lived at the mission for nearly a decade. The other, Toypurina, was a twenty-five-year-old female shaman from the nearby village of Japchivit. Though their planned uprising failed, the two, along with their compatriots, demonstrated the strong connections that could still exist between baptized and non-baptized California Indian peoples. Nicolás José and Toypurina fused their experience gained from living and working with the Spanish with the idea of cultural revitalization, that a return to traditional practices and lifeways could defeat the occupying Spaniards to inspire an uprising.

Nicolás José started his relationship with the Franciscans as a quick convert to Christianity, and over time earned their trust. On September 27, 1774, just three years after San Gabriel's founding, he was baptized at the relatively older age of twenty-six.¹⁶⁸ His baptism was only the eighty-seventh recorded at that mission during the first three years. Franciscans found converting adult California Indians difficult and often baptized children in hopes that their older relatives would follow suit. An adult male's conversion represented a victory for the order and created Nicolás José's opportunities for advancement within the mission. His Christian marriage to the Tongva woman Augustina María later that year seemingly solidified his commitment to the new faith. Nicolás José accepted the power and prestige that came with currying Franciscan favor. He was among the first Indigenous Alta Californians to act as a marriage witness for the missionaries. He served in this role both at the mission and in nearby Tongva villages, demonstrating his ability to walk in two worlds. Earning the respect of non-Christian Indians and

¹⁶⁸ Steven W. Hackel, "Sources of Rebellion: Indian Testimony and the Mission San Gabriel Uprising of 1785," *Ethnohistory* 50:4 (fall 2003): 652; Edward D. Castillo, "Gender Status Decline, Resistance, and Accommodation among Female Neophytes in the Missions of California: A San Gabriel Case Study," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 18 no. 1 (1994): 67-93.

the missionaries, Nicolás José became involved in more religious roles, acting as godfather for newborn Tongva children, and for the child of a Baja California Indian who came with the founders of San Gabriel in 1771. Nicolás José thus found a space in which he could dictate the shape of his life in the new world colonialism created.¹⁶⁹

Nicolás José's rise culminated in 1778 when he became San Gabriel's first Indian *alcalde*, a position of authority created by Neve and resented by Franciscan leaders. Neve created the position of *alcalde*, a secular Indian leader at each mission, to act as a liaison between recently baptized California Indians and Spanish civil administrators. Theoretically, *alcaldes* would report troubles or abuses directly to the governor without a Franciscan interlocutor. Serra bitterly opposed this reform. He fought against its implementation, arguing that California Indian people lacked the sophistication to manage their own affairs.¹⁷⁰ When he could not stop it, Serra made sure the most friendly and pliable baptized Indians earned the position. Thus, the missionaries at San Gabriel appointing *alcalde* Nicolás José demonstrated his value to them, and their confidence in his dedication to Christianity.

After becoming *alcalde*, Nicolás José's comfort with existing in two worlds became troubling for the missionaries. On January 7, 1780, Serra wrote a long letter to Neve, citing the many problems he had with the position of *alcalde* at the missions. Much of Serra's ire came from Neve's ban on Franciscans punishing the *alcaldes*. Neve ordered that only the corporal at a presidio had the authority to punish an *alcalde*, and only after they informed the governor. Serra jealously guarded the Franciscans' right to punish all recently baptized regardless of station. He

¹⁶⁹ Hackel, *Children of Coyote, Missionaries of Saint Francis*, 262-263.

¹⁷⁰ Serra, *Writings of Junípero Serra*, 3:407-411.

was particularly incensed about the behavior of Nicolás José.¹⁷¹ Serra accused him of “supplying women to as many soldiers as asked for them.”¹⁷² The corporal of the guard chastised Nicolás José, though it is unclear if he remained *alcalde* after his punishment.¹⁷³

Nicolás José’s willingness to facilitate relationships between Tongva women and Spanish soldiers demonstrated his propensity for cross-cultural coalition building, and his confidence in his own position in the Spanish and Tongva spheres. Indeed, his behavior indicated that he blended cultural traits common to many Indigenous Californians with his responsibilities as a marriage witness and godparent in the mission. Though Serra made Nicolás José’s activities appear unseemly, there is no proof of anything nefarious in these liaisons. Before the Spanish invasion, Tongva used inter-tribal marriage to build alliances and soothe tensions over water and hunting rights, as well as slights between groups. Intermarriage was routinely included in political exchanges between tribes.¹⁷⁴ Instead of engaging in lewd acts, as Serra claimed without evidence, Nicolás José behaved as an Indigenous Californian power broker would. He brought groups closer together to ease the tensions brewing between them.

Nicolás José turned against the Franciscans because of their sharp rebuke, and also as a result of the personal and cultural loss he experienced. In 1783, his first wife, Agustina María, died of unknown causes. His son, Cosmé María died before reaching his second birthday. He remarried, but his second wife, María Candelaria, died eight months after their nuptials. Their deaths were not isolated misfortunes. Rather they were a part of a larger trend, as Mission San

¹⁷¹ Though Serra does not give Nicolás’ last name in the letter, Steven Hackel has demonstrated that there was no other *alcalde* in the mission system in 1780 named Nicolás and believes that this is the same man. See, Hackle, “Sources of Rebellion,” 652.

¹⁷² Serra, *Writings of Junípero Serra* 3:415.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Gamble, *Chumash at European Contact*, 56-57; Shipek, “Kumeyaay Socio-Political Structure,” 298; Levy, “Costanoan,” in *Handbook of North American Indians* 8:488; Bean and Smith, “Gabrielino” 544-545.

Gabriel became increasingly lethal in the 1780s. By the time of the Tongva uprising, approximately 30 per cent of the baptized adults from Nicolás José's village had perished.¹⁷⁵ Spanish colonialism inflicted cultural losses as well. In 1782, Governor Fages outlawed Tongva tribal dances and rituals such as their annual Mourning Ceremony.¹⁷⁶ As the decade progressed, the benefits of parlaying his position to accrue political capital and station could not outweigh the costs of Spanish colonialism. Nicolás José's solution, as was his way, was building a coalition.

He recruited Toypurina, a twenty-five-year-old woman living outside Mission San Gabriel, whose prophetic wisdom had already earned the respect of her peers. Like Nicolás José, Toypurina recognized the deleterious effects of the mission and sought to destroy it. She later explained, through an interpreter, that she felt "angry with the priests and all the others at the mission, because they were living on their [Tongva] land."¹⁷⁷ Her convictions and strong reputation made her a natural choice as a recruiter. She had good connections to neighboring Tongva leaders, as her brother led the village of Japchivit. She reached out to another chief, Temejasaquichí, from nearby Juvit, to turn some baptized Tongva people against the Franciscans.¹⁷⁸ Toypurina's value to the planned rebellion went beyond being a recruiter. As a Tongva spiritual leader, she also commanded the respect of local warriors. When Temejasaquichí attempted to turn the mission Indians to their cause, he urged the baptized Tongva to believe in Toypurina rather than the Franciscans. Moreover, on the night of the attack, she would be there not to fight, but to increase the morale of the combatants.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ Hackel, *Children of Coyote, Missionaries of Saint Francis*, 264n72.

¹⁷⁶ *Fages á José Zuniga* October 17 1782, Monterey, BANC MSS C-A 15, 152.

¹⁷⁷ Toypurina's testimony quoted in Rose Marie Beebe and Robert M. Senkewicz, *Lands of Promise and Despair: Chronicles of Early California, 1535-1846* (Berkeley, 2001), 248.

¹⁷⁸ Beebe and Senkewicz, *Lands of Promise and Despair*, 248.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 249.

As with many anti-mission uprisings, Nicolás José and Toypurina's insurrection failed before it began. The mission guards received word before the attack and were prepared to quash it. Spanish soldiers captured all twenty-one Tongva without any fatalities. Seventeen members of the force were warriors, including six converts from the mission that Temejasaquichí persuaded to join the cause. Spanish soldiers captured a fourth leader, Aliyivit, though he remarked that he only came along to test his warriors' bravery.¹⁸⁰ Governor Fages ordered the rank-and-file warriors to receive fifteen to twenty-five lashes depending on their past as anti-mission agitators. Fages declared they were to be whipped in public, as a demonstration of the powerlessness of "their practices against we who are Catholic."¹⁸¹ All were eventually released. Fages tried the leaders and found them guilty of plotting against the mission. After two years of imprisonment while awaiting their final sentence, Fages exiled Nicolás José and Toypurina to distant Northern California missions, San Francisco, and Carmel, respectively. Temejasaquichí and Aliyivit regained their freedom after two years, as Spanish officials were content with their time served. The Spanish sentencing demonstrated restraint, especially when compared to the Pamó people's planned attack on Mission San Diego in 1778, when Juan Francisco Ortega attempted to execute the uprising's leaders.

Nicolás José's aborted uprising demonstrated that profound problems existed in the Franciscan administration of California. His turn against the Franciscans, which appeared to be as complete as it was sudden, showed the fragility of conversion. More importantly, it revealed how little Franciscans understood the people they struggled to convert. Nicolás José by all measures had been a Franciscan success story. Yet he had no trouble plotting to kill the Spanish at San Gabriel and perhaps even the baptized Indians who opposed his force. Nicolás José's turn

¹⁸⁰ Hackel, "Sources of Rebellion," 655.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

defied the Franciscans' nearly ubiquitous claims that baptized California Indians were happy in the missions. Nevertheless, Lasuén repeated this claim throughout his tenure.

In winter 1786, despite almost a decade's delay owing to Neve's machinations and the Franciscans bitter responses to them, Lasuén's first mass ushered in a new era for the Chumash around Mission Santa Barbara and the Spanish colonial project in California. On New Year's Eve, Lasuén recorded the first three baptisms conducted at the new mission. One was a twenty-two-year-old man named Catayu from Guainonase; the second was called Siocre from Sisabanonase, who was fifteen years old; and the last was a twelve-year-old boy, named Mumiyaüt from the village of Janaya.¹⁸² As the New Year dawned, the mission's construction began, built by Yanonali's people. While the construction of the mission in the Santa Barbara Channel region that Serra so desired before his death represented a great victory for the Franciscans, it became an added source of concern for Fages. He presided over an expanding colonial field, which brought more people and territory into New Spain and presumably held off the advances of imperial rivals like Russia and Britain, as was the original intent for Spain's northward thrust. However, for the aging soldier, the expansion also brought new tensions as soldiers, missionaries, and now colonists encroached further into Indigenous spaces. He knew the sort of trouble that portended.

¹⁸² Zephyrin Engelhardt, *Santa Barbara Mission* (San Francisco, 1923), 54.

Maintaining the Good Name of the Missionaries, 1786-1790

On May 2, 1786, just over a year into his term as father president of the California missions, Fermín Francisco de Lasuén received a shocking letter from Mission Santa Clara. One of the priests there, Fray Diego de Noboa, informed Lasuén that governor Pedro Fages ordered an investigation into a possible murder at Santa Clara. Despite the efforts of Fages and his predecessor Felipe de Neve to minimize violence in California, murders still occurred. However, this charge was unlike any other in the short history of the colony. The suspect in this case was one of the founders of Mission Santa Clara, Fray Tomás de la Peña - the same insubordinate missionary who fought with Fages over food prices weeks before the unprecedented allegation. Lasuén, still finding his footing as father president, now faced grave circumstances.

The de la Peña affair served as an inflection point for the Franciscans in California and particularly for Lasuén's presidency. Just as Fages and Neve fretted over the possibility of California Indians overwhelming the thin belt of Spanish control in the region, Lasuén worried what the tarnished reputation of a single missionary, and by proxy the entire order, would do to its position both in California and in Mexico City. As he demonstrated throughout the length of his tenure, Lasuén cared most about protecting the order's reputation. Indeed, maintaining the good name of the missionaries was a hallmark of his administrative ethos. During the de la Peña investigation, Lasuén served as defense counsel and judge, while believing not only that the missionary was innocent but that he was also the victim of a vast conspiracy. Lasuén intimidated witnesses, relied on hearsay, never questioned Fages' key witness, and obfuscated facts of the case to the point of a cover-up. Mexico City eventually accepted his version of events and exonerated de la Peña. There are many aspects of the de la Peña affair that remain elusive, even today. One is whether or not Lasuén brought a propensity for cover-ups and conspiratorial

thinking to this case, or if his desire to protect his missionaries intensified to such a degree that the ends justified his means.

The case also served as an early window into Lasuén's attitudes towards California Indian people and their basic humanity. Throughout his investigation and response to the charges against de la Peña, Lasuén accepted everything Noboa told him about the Ohlone Indian accusers at Mission Santa Clara while failing to interview several of them himself. He repeatedly stated that Indians always gave answers they thought the Spanish soldiers wanted to hear. Similarly, for Lasuén, Indians hated missionaries' teaching so much that they looked for opportunities to lash out at Franciscans. As the de la Peña affair demonstrated, Lasuén constructed his own versions of "Indianness" as needed. At this time, the image of the lying, naïve Indian suited his purpose. It mattered not if his image bore any resemblance to reality. He understood that the civil authorities in Mexico City that would review de la Peña's case were wont to believe Lasuén's analysis of so-called "heathen" Indians, particularly because imperial Spain had few options for occupying and controlling California. Imperial Spain needed the Franciscans to successfully transform California Indians into quasi-Europeans. They did not have sufficient numbers of troops to take and hold California. Additionally, the Quechan uprising in 1781 permanently closed the overland route from Mexico to California, making settler colonialism impossible. Once Inspector General José de Gálvez decided to take California in 1768, the Franciscans were the only hope for holding the remote province. When Lasuén reported that Fages' Ohlone witnesses lied about de la Peña, civil authorities in Mexico were satisfied with his findings.

The Ohlone Indians and Fray Tomás de la Peña

In 1777, the Spanish founded Mission Santa Clara in the territory of the Tamyen peoples, one of the language families that makes up the wider Ohlone culture group of northern

California. Ohlone people typify the seemingly paradoxical interplay of California Indigenous peoples' diversity, autonomy, and interconnectedness. Language and culture connected over fifty distinct, politically autonomous bands, who created permanent settlements throughout the larger Northern California coastal area. Their intense autonomy led to political and social patterns that were not typical of their neighbors along the west coast. Ohlone speakers migrated into the area roughly a thousand years before Columbus reached the Caribbean. Over that millennia, the Ohlone became experts at processing the plant food sources in their various ecological zones. Their methods extracted such high levels of nutritional value from vegetable matter that unlike most other California Indians, the Ohlone diet prized plant-based foods over animal protein.¹⁸³ Food and plant processing was central to Ohlone life. Indeed, it shaped their economic and social worlds.

The Ohlone lived in relatively small groups, which allowed them to govern on a village-by-village basis, eschewing regional governance. Moreover, the Tamyen, Awaswas, Chalon, Chochenyo, Karkin, and Rumsen spoke distinct Ohlone dialects, and these linguistic connections were often the basis upon which larger groups coalesced.¹⁸⁴ There were nearly fifty small tribes living in their territory at the time of the Spanish invasion.¹⁸⁵ Within this structure, Ohlone households consisted of large family units, sometimes numbering as many as fifteen people. Sororal polygynous marriages partially explain large household size, as multiple wives and their children often lived together.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ E. Breck Parkman, "The Bedrock Milling Station," in *The Ohlone Past and Present: Native Americans of the San Francisco Bay Region*, Lowell John Bean, ed. (Menlo Park, 1994), 43.

¹⁸⁴ Lowell John Bean, "Introduction," in *The Ohlone Past and Present*, xxi.

¹⁸⁵ Bean, "Introduction," in *Ohlone Past and Present*, xxi.

¹⁸⁶ Sororal polygynous marriages are those in which two or more sisters are married to one or more men. Levy, "Costanoan," in *Handbook of North American Indian* 8:488.

Ohlone towns were an important cog in a network of milling activity. Processing plants into food was crucial for all Ohlone groups, and the economic geography created to facilitate it ordered Ohlone society. The focal points of the village-processing center complex were the many bedrock milling stations in Ohlone territories. The Ohlone were not unique in their use of milling outposts, yet their importance helped shaped regional lifeways. In some areas, such as the southeastern portion of the San Francisco Bay, a milling station's location became the center of gravity for Ohlone seasonal camps and villages. During winter months, some Ohlone people lived in a permanent location, generally a village large enough to house 200 people. In the spring, many left to form smaller, dispersed base camps for collecting plants that were ready for processing at the milling stations. A triangular flow of raw materials went from basecamp to milling stations, and then from the mills back to the winter village. In the fall, this network expanded to include the hillsides around the bay to harvest and process acorns. The number of individual milling bowls at the various stations in the southeastern portion of the bay suggests that this was a family or tribal activity, rather than a regionally controlled small industry, which maintained autonomous, decentralized Ohlone life.¹⁸⁷

Ohlone people interacted amongst themselves and neighboring tribes through trade, intermarriage, and conflict. Their partners included Sierra Miwok, Plains Miwok and the Yokuts, who received Ohlone milled goods, mussels, abalone, and salt, amongst other items, for tools and materials such as bows, obsidian, tobacco, and pigments.¹⁸⁸ As in much of Indigenous California, Ohlone people married to solidify bonds between families and tribes to stabilize trade and territorial rights.¹⁸⁹ However, for some Ohlone groups intermarriage also provided a source

¹⁸⁷ Parkman, "The Bedrock Milling Station," 48-49.

¹⁸⁸ Milliken, *Time of Little Choice*, 16; Levy, "Costanoan," in *Handbook of North American Indians VIII*, 488.

¹⁸⁹ Chester King, "Central Ohlone Ethnohistory," in *The Ohlone Past and Present*, 221.

of conflict, as female captives, whether already married or not, were a primary goal for inter-village raiders. Salinan warriors, for example, would burn their enemies' village (another tactic common throughout California), loot their valuables, and seize female captives.¹⁹⁰ Wife stealing, along with infractions of territorial rights were the main sources of conflict for Ohlone peoples.¹⁹¹

The Franciscans established Mission Santa Clara on January 12, 1777, causing immediate tensions over Spanish-owned animals encroaching into Indigenous spaces. Conflict characterized the first weeks and months after the founding, which engendered Tamyen resistance against the Spanish invaders. To resist Spanish encroachment, Tamyen raiders chose the foreign animals the Spanish brought into their lands. An attack on some mules ignited Spanish anger and provided an opportunity for a demonstration of force. The mission guards reported the incident to the presidio at San Francisco who dispatched reinforcements to the new mission. After locating the village where the raiders stored and cooked the mule's meat, they attacked at daybreak and fighting ensued. In the aftermath, Spanish forces killed three men and took an unknown number back to the mission and flogged them. Despite the soldiers' violent retribution, raiding continued throughout the mission's first years.¹⁹²

Franciscans, like Fray de la Peña, also engaged in dubious evangelical practices during the first months of Santa Clara's founding. Throughout their time in the Americas, critics, usually from other mendicant orders, accused Franciscans of inflating baptismal numbers by

¹⁹⁰ King, "Central Ohlone Ethnohistory," 221-222.

¹⁹¹ For recent works on this phenomenon, see Natale A. Zappia, *Traders and Raiders: The Indigenous World of the Colorado Basin, 1540-1859* (Chapel Hill, 2014); Ned Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West*, (Cambridge, 2006); Pekka Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire* (New Haven, 2008).

¹⁹² Milliken, *Time of Little Choice*, 66-67.

baptizing California Indians without the religious training to understand the ritual.¹⁹³ In June, 1777, an epidemic cut through the communities surrounding the mission and it hit one- and two-year-old children the hardest. De la Peña used the opportunity to prey on Ohlone parents' fears and suggested baptism for sick children. In just three weeks, the missionaries baptized fifty-four children, ranging from less than a year to ten-years-old.¹⁹⁴ It is unclear if any of the children or parents understood what the baptism portended for their future. De la Peña's tactics were not new, as baptizing young children to attract older relatives was a tactic Franciscans used throughout their time in the Americas.¹⁹⁵ It often served as a flashpoint of conflict between Franciscans and Indigenous communities.

In late spring, 1786, dark rumors began to circulate around Mission Santa Clara. De la Peña, the missionary who irked governor Fages and Spanish soldiers over food prices, reportedly murdered two baptized California Indians. Despite the many accusations of cruelty against Franciscan missionaries in California, a formal murder charge was unprecedented. The de la Peña affair became a tangled web of inconsistency, cover-up, accusations of calumny and conspiracy, and witnesses contradicting their own testimony on both sides of the case. The entire process lasted nearly a decade before a court in Mexico City declared de la Peña innocent in 1795.¹⁹⁶ Fages himself even came to believe that de la Peña, though certainly violent towards Indians, did not commit murder.¹⁹⁷ Although the truth of the affair is lost to time, it remains illustrative of the Franciscan disposition towards Indians and of Lasuén's tendencies as father

¹⁹³ Robert Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico: An Essay on the Apostolate and the Evangelizing Methods of the Mendicant Orders in New Spain, 1523-1572* (Berkeley, 1966), 90; Guy Stresser-Péan, *The Sun God and the Savior: The Christianization of the Nahuatl and Totonac in the Sierra Norte de Puebla, Mexico* (Boulder, 2009), 17-18.

¹⁹⁴ Milliken, *Time of Little Choice*, 67-68.

¹⁹⁵ Francisco Morales, "The Native Encounter with Christianity: Franciscans and Nahuatl in Sixteenth-Century Mexico," *The Americas* 65, no. 2 (Oct., 2008), 146.

¹⁹⁶ Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:348-349.

¹⁹⁷ Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:241-242, and Guest, *Fermin Francisco De Lasuen*, 168.

president. The affair shared characteristics with many conflicts between civil authorities and the Franciscans in Alta California. A provincial governor found fault in missionary behavior, gained some momentum in curbing their power, only to have a powerful (and often shrill) defense accepted by the order's allies in Mexico City.¹⁹⁸

While historians have deployed the de la Peña affair in larger histories of the California mission system, due to the ambiguous nature of the case, along with the threats of torture and the sloppiness of investigations on both Fages and Lasuén's sides, it has rarely been interrogated on its own terms.¹⁹⁹ Shining a light on the trial illuminates Lasuén's leadership in his first brush with a crisis. Under his direction of the case, inconsistencies and obfuscation emerged from the documentary record. Many of Lasuén's witnesses made contradictory claims and engaged in behavior that pointed to a cover-up. Lasuén served as both defense attorney and judge, and many of his conclusions in both roles were illogical and self-serving. He conducted a trial that in the modern vernacular would be termed a sham. Lasuén consistently led witnesses with his questioning, while repeatedly accusing Fages and his investigators of the same behaviors. Moreover, as the self-appointed judge, Lasuén believed in de la Peña's innocence and demonstrated little interest in contradictory evidence. Lasuén's trial may have arrived at the proper conclusion, although his process had little to do with that outcome.

On March 12, Governor Fages put the Spanish military officer Diego Gonzales in command of a secret investigation. He ordered Gonzales to go to Mission Santa Clara and use

¹⁹⁸ As previously mentioned, this pattern existed during difficulties between Serra and Fages in 1771, for the resolution of the dispute between the Franciscans and Neve's *reglamento* in the missionaries favor see, Engelhardt, *Missions and Missionaries of California*, 2:427; for the Mexican National Congress' efforts to slow Governor José Maria Echeandía's secularization efforts in 1830, see Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft Volume XX, History of California Volume III* (San Francisco, 1886): 188-201.

¹⁹⁹ For previous work on the Tomás de la Peña trial see Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:476n63, Guest, *Fermin Francisco De Lasuen*, 158-172, Steven W. Hackel, *Children of Coyote*, 326-329, and Milliken, *A Time of Little Choice*, 93-95. It should be noted that the dean of California Franciscan chroniclers, Zephyrin Engelhardt, made no mention of the de la Peña case in his three-volume work.

discretion and diligence to determine whether or not de la Peña had beaten four local men to death.²⁰⁰ Three Indians, Plácido Ortiz and Anecleto Valdez, both from Baja California, and Antonio, a local man, accused the missionary of killing four baptized Indians at that mission in a single year.²⁰¹ The governor found two of the accusations credible and promptly launched an inquest. Fages wrote long-form instructions to Gonzales for handling the investigation. The governor understood that a murder charge made against a missionary would meet opposition, not only from the Franciscans, but also from the so-called ignorant masses that termed him the “persecutor of the Friars.”²⁰² The five complaints regarding Franciscan management of California Fages sent to the viceroy in 1785 had so far gone nowhere. Fages did not want the viceroy or the *Audiencia*, or the royal court in New Spain, to think he took every available opportunity to accuse the missionaries of misconduct. He knew the utmost care must be taken to discover what happened at Mission Santa Clara.

Fages needed at least two Indian men to testify that they saw de la Peña kill two men, but he also knew that Indian testimony was not credible to most Spanish jurists. Fages demanded some level of literacy in the witnesses because they must sign their names, or at least their mark, on their testimony’s transcript. Gonzales also needed to find a *persona de razón*, or a person of European descent, to interpret for the witnesses.²⁰³ The interpreter must understand the gravity of their role, so Fages commanded Gonzales to “make him aware of the consequences he may incur if he fails the sacred oath.”²⁰⁴ Corporal Gabriel Antonio Peralta, a guard at Mission Santa Clara,

²⁰⁰ *Gob. Fages. Sobre muerte de indios azotados por P. Peña*, March 12 1786, 34.

²⁰¹ Milliken, *Time of Little Choice*, 93.

²⁰² See chapter one of this dissertation.

²⁰³ This phrase translates as “person of reason,” which was the designation for people of European descent in the colony.

²⁰⁴ *Gob. Fages a Gonzales, Diligencias en averiguación de indios azotados por P. Peña*, March 12 1786, BANC MSS C-A 23, 34-35.

initiated the proceedings and examined the two witnesses. Fages wanted Peralta to “ask them if they know that Father Peña gave the blows that killed their countrymen.”²⁰⁵ If they confirmed it, the interrogators should seek out other witnesses “and if...others knew it, examine them and all those who have knowledge of the fact, seeking to make it clear...that the Indians died, and carry this out with prudence.”²⁰⁶ Fages instructed Gonzales to threaten the Ohlone witnesses to ensure their honesty: “As to the Indians, make them understand through the interpreter the punishments they will suffer if they lie.” He continued, “and if they disagree on something...if it all comes from a lie, warn them that the culprits will be imprisoned, and that they undermined...the process.”²⁰⁷ Fages believed this heavy-handed approach would secure honest testimony.

On April 23, 1786, in the middle of the row over corn prices, Fages wrote to Diego Gonzales to “warn him quietly that Ensign Hermenegildo Sal was going to make an inquiry about the two Indians who it is said were killed by Fray Peña.”²⁰⁸ Ensign Sal’s cover was to pretend to investigate the missionary’s adherence to pricing regulations.²⁰⁹ Given the timeline of these events, it is possible that Fages used the issue as a cover to investigate de la Peña’s reputation for an explosive temper.

The Indian informants’ testimony painted a picture of de la Peña as a man prone to intense violence in response to trivial events. Reportedly, de la Peña often beat baptized California Indians until they bled. Minor mistakes or general carelessness triggered abuse from the missionary. In one incident, the witnesses said de la Peña broke an old man’s neck because he wore a blanket instead of his shirt. Some witnesses claimed de la Peña beat an old man to

²⁰⁵ *Gob. Fages a Gonzales, Diligencias en averiguación de indios azotados por P. Peña*, March 12 1786, BANC MSS C-A 23, 35.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ *Fages a Gonzales, Sobre indos azotados por P. Peña*, April 23 1786, BANC MSS C-A 23, 36.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

death who was ill and could not work.²¹⁰ Plácido testified that a fourteen-year-old boy, Sixto Antonio, regularly irrigated the fields at Santa Clara. De la Peña checked on the boy's progress and found he had flooded a portion of the field. Plácido said the missionary became enraged, ripped a hoe out of Sixto's hand and "struck him with some blows that were mortal."²¹¹ Fray Diego de Noboa, according to witnesses, gathered up Sixto and cared for him, but the boy died after a few days. Fages had what he needed to move forward, multiple witness confirming de la Peña had killed two men, an old man, and a teenager. How Fages' threats of torture affected these witnesses is unknown. On May 11, after Spanish soldiers collected statements, Fages proceeded with the case, as he believed that de la Peña chastised Indians with "his own hands," rather than using a whip, or an Indian proxy, and had killed one or perhaps two of them.²¹²

On May 2, 1786 Lasuén received a shocking letter from Noboa, de la Peña's partner at Santa Clara. "In the beginning of January," Noboa confessed to Lasuén, "I heard a rumor that Father Tomás de la Peña had been accused or denounced to the lieutenant at San Francisco of having killed an Indian irrigation worker with blows of a stick."²¹³ Lasuén was not yet named father president at that time, although that did not seem to be the cause of Noboa's silence. "As the knowledge, information, and experience I have of his way of life, are proofs to me that he is innocent," Noboa explained, "I did not regard the report as worthy of attention."²¹⁴ However, others did. Lasuén now discovered that "this rumor...was made the object of a very solemn investigation."²¹⁵ Anticipating Lasuén's distress, Noboa presented the story as baseless. He

²¹⁰ Hackel, *Children of Coyote*, 327.

²¹¹ Fray Diego de Noboa of Mission Santa Clara gave a summary of Plácido's testimony, which is quoted in Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:109.

²¹² *Informe al Comandante General*, May 11 1786, BANC MSS C-A 22, 353.

²¹³ De Noboa quoted in Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:109.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

assured Lasuén that the charges were “so vague and improbable as to be worthy only of contempt.”²¹⁶ Noboa thought he knew the source of the accusation.

According to Noboa, Plácido, Fages’ chief witness, spread false rumors about de la Peña out of malice. Plácido earned the missionaries’ and soldiers’ trust enough that he carried keys to the mission’s storehouse and granaries. Though Noboa gave no specific reason, he told Lasuén that Plácido “had given proof that he could not be trusted, he was required to give up the keys.”²¹⁷ Noboa also informed Lasuén that the men who testified for Fages were Plácido’s friends or indebted to him, and therefore gave false testimony. Noboa assured Lasuén that in the nearly two years he had been at Mission Santa Clara, he had never seen de la Peña strike anyone with a hoe or a stick, “and that when he chastises the Indians he uses the same moderation with which parents generally chastise their own children.”²¹⁸ It is important to note two key omissions in Noboa’s letter that, if included, would have legitimized his declaration of de la Peña’s innocence. First, despite qualifying the affair as “so false and so mischievous,” Noboa never countered the claims that Sixto was mortally wounded or that he tended to Sixto’s head wounds.²¹⁹ Second, neither Noboa nor de la Peña recorded Sixto’s cause of death, leaving it a mystery.²²⁰ Noboa’s failure to include these key pieces of information gave credence to Fages’ investigation.

Lasuén now confronted the greatest scandal the missionaries yet faced in California. To make matters worse, the Spanish military, the Franciscans’ constant adversary, brought the situation to light. As a younger man, Lasuén maintained friendly relations with the military side

²¹⁶ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:109.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 110.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ Milliken, *Time of Little Choice*, 93.

of the Spanish colonial project, as his best friend for a time was Fernando Rivera y Moncada, a veteran of Spain's California invasion, who died in the Quechan uprising in 1781.²²¹ The two men had a bitter falling out after Lasuén disapproved of Rivera's shifting opinion of the missionaries.²²² That experience, coupled with Serra's feuding with Rivera y Moncada, Neve, and Fages, changed his attitude towards the military to match Serra's. Though they may have harbored the same opinions regarding the military's meddling in mission affairs, Lasuén did not have Serra's experience or habit of confrontation. Yet, Lasuén had learned some methods from Serra, namely that secrecy, misdirection, and obfuscation were the best means of dealing with Spanish governors.²²³ Lasuén's use of these methods, along with his sharp mind and rhetorical skills, cemented them as hallmarks of his presidency.

On May 26, 1786, twenty-five days after receiving Noboa's first letter, Lasuén began investigating the charges against de la Peña. He titled the record of the trial "Judicial Proceedings." Lasuén was no jurist and had little respect for impartiality, as his methodology throughout the proceedings demonstrated. Because he never heard the charges from Fages or anyone other than Noboa, Lasuén refused to believe one of his missionaries killed anyone. "I had to presume, and did presume," Lasuén recorded, "that the father presumed was entirely innocent."²²⁴ Lasuén, acting as both defense counsel and judge, began with the supposition that the accusation was fraudulent. Lasuén argued that the conflict over corn prices concluded

²²¹ Santiago, *Massacre at the Yuma Crossing*, 121.

²²² Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:48-66.

²²³ The California Franciscans' propensity for secrecy and obfuscation appears to be a cultural issue. For the father guardian ordering Serra not to make inventories for Governor Felipe Neve, see Beilharz, *Felipe de Neve*, 51, and James A. Sandos, *Converting California: Indians and Franciscans in the Missions* (New Haven, 2004), 70; for the father guardian ordering the California Franciscans to punish baptized Indians in secret, see, Guest, "An Inquiry into the Role of Discipline in California Mission Life," 40; for Serra instructing his missionaries to continue punishing California Indians secretly against Neve's orders while he was away, see Serra, *The Writings of Junipero Serra*, 1:5.

²²⁴ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:110.

favorably for de la Peña, and the missionary had convinced Lasuén that he had been justified in his actions. In Lasuén's logic, the man who protected the Indians at Santa Clara through price manipulation could not murder any of them. He kept the proceedings quiet while working to prove de la Peña's innocence. In fact, Lasuén wrote that he only enacted the investigation because word of it had gotten out. "Fearing that intemperate language of this nature would give rise to some charge, suspicion, or question which my immediate or other superior could direct me as President of these Missions," he declared, "I determined to take action."²²⁵ Saving himself and the mission from a loss of prestige concerned Lasuén more than discovering the truth.

The next day, Lasuén' began his examination of Fray Noboa. Noboa claimed he barely knew Sixto's name, but that he had been with him when he died. "Between the sixteenth and the nineteenth of July (to the best of my belief) of the year 1784," Noboa testified, "the Indian named fell sick of a malignant fever of which there was an epidemic at this mission... On the twenty-eighth of the same month... he died of it, as did several others."²²⁶ Had there been someone else present to cross-examine Noboa, they might have asked what else in his testimony was to the best of his belief. However, with no cross-examiner present, Lasuén continued. He pressed Noboa on Plácido's contention that the padre tended to Sixto's wounds. "Did you on that occasion take this Indian... to the house for the purpose of attending a wound or blow given to him by Father Fray Tomás?" Lasuén asked. Noboa replied simply, "No."²²⁷ Again, a cross-examiner might have asked why Noboa did not state that fact in the letter he wrote to Lasuén twenty-five days before. Why did Noboa not consider that fact, which would have discredited the charges against de la Peña immediately, worthy of inclusion in his letter? Why did it only come

²²⁵ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:110.

²²⁶ Noboa quoted in *Ibid.*, 111.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 111-112.

up a month later, after the father president arrived at the mission? The answers to these unasked questions are now forever unknowable.

Lasuén next turned to a story regarding de la Peña's violent temper. "What do you know of another incident, reported to me by various sources," Lasuén inquired, "of an injured or broken ear which Father Tomás caused to a boy?" Noboa responded that de la Peña had pulled the ear of a young Indian boy name Bernábe "because he was playing or making noise in the church." He continued, "and as the boy had a pimple or a scab on his ear, it began to bleed a little." Noboa had been unconcerned with the incident because Fages apparently witnessed the attack and did nothing at the time. Regardless, "the ear was not injured or broken, as I am convinced, if I had a mind to call him and examine it," he concluded. Noboa's testimony suggested that Bernábe still lived at or near the mission, and yet neither he nor Lasuén thought to investigate further. Noboa's conjecture satisfied Lasuén.²²⁸

Next, Lasuén interrogated Noboa about Plácido losing his keyholding privileges, which the missionary believed to be at the heart of the false charges. First, Lasuén asked about Plácido's relationship with the other Indian men who had provided testimony to Gonzales back in April. In the original May 2 letter, Noboa intimated that all of the men were Plácido's friends or were indebted to him in some way. When Lasuén pressed him, Noboa said "Within the previous two months, he had frequently been seen playing with these Indians, although previously he had never been seen with them; he had sought their companionship and friendship; and he gave them whatever gifts he could." He also affirmed that these new relationships emerged after the missionaries stripped Plácido of the storeroom keys. No timetable was given. It is impossible to confirm the length of time between Plácido losing his privileges and Sixto's

²²⁸ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:112.

death, a fact of some importance. Particularly if Plácido approached a group of little-known men and convinced them to falsely accuse a Franciscan of murder. Lasuén did not find these facts worth gathering.

Before concluding the interview, Lasuén asked Noboa to explain how the charges against de la Peña related to Plácido's lost keyholding duties. The missionary did not reveal why Plácido lost them, only that afterward Noboa saw him "look spitefully at Fray Tomás." Plácido's relationship with de la Peña also dramatically changed, as he no longer spoke to the missionary, according to Noboa. On another occasion, de la Peña admonished Arellano, a soldier, for striking an Indian. Noboa testified that Plácido took the soldier's side "and falsely accused the Indian." Then, Noboa included admitted hearsay, informing Lasuén that "the man named Arellano threatened (so he had been told) that he would draw up one or two charges in writing against Father Fray Tomás, and it would seem that it was from then on that Plácido began to fabricate these falsehoods."²²⁹ Noboa claimed that a soldier's off-hand remark inspired Plácido to fabricate false charges and then to recruit men he did not know to frame de la Peña. Noboa concluded his testimony by reiterating de la Peña's fitness to serve at the mission.

Noboa's testimony and handling of serious charges were riddled with conjecture, inconsistencies, and time gaps. In his original letter, he told Lasuén that he first heard the rumor that de la Peña killed two men in January of 1786 but failed to report it. The Franciscans in California had a history of charges that they physically abused Indians. Fages and Neve both challenged them on the practice and took their concerns to civil authorities. Yet no one had ever before accused a California missionary of murder. Even in a culture that devalued Indigenous lives, a Franciscan killing one, or perhaps two, Indians was an act of major consequence. Yet

²²⁹ Noboa quoted in Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:112.

Noboa sat on the information, when he could have testified in January that he never cared for an Indian with mortal wounds. Moreover, Fages, Gonzales, Sal, and the others conducted their investigation at and around Mission Santa Clara through late March and April, and still Lasuén remained unaware. Only after the military's investigation neared conclusion did Noboa finally contact his superior yet failed to provide the singular piece of evidence - that he never tended to a mortally wounded Sixto - that could thwart the investigation. He did not deny that he tended to Sixto's wounds until May 27, 1786. Noboa and de la Peña had enough time to concoct a cover-up, even if the clock started when Gonzales first began investigating in mid-March. One can credibly wonder whether or not Lasuén had to explain to Noboa that a denial regarding Sixto's wounds was a crucial piece of evidence. There were enough issues with Noboa and his testimony to reasonably doubt his credibility. Yet, he was Lasuén's key witness as the inquiry unfolded.

Lasuén now waited to see which direction the de la Peña affair took. He had not heard anything from Fages, Gonzales, or anyone else investigating the case by May 28. Though Noboa's testimony "firmly supports my opinion that there has been neither fault nor excess on the part of Father Fray Tomás de la Peña," Lasuén surmised, because there were "some very peculiar circumstances, which I continue to uncover in our case, for me the conclusion is that it is necessary to take every possible precaution in order to attain the objectives laid down at the beginning of the inquiry."²³⁰ One such circumstance occurred when Fages and Gonzales, weeks earlier, brought six Indian men into custody during the April investigation and released three of them. No one at Santa Clara knew exactly why this happened, but it solidified Lasuén's belief in de la Peña's innocence. Why continue to hold the three of them unless they gave false testimony? Lasuén believed he had discovered the key to protect the Franciscans' reputation.

²³⁰ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:112.

On May 30, Lasuén interviewed the first Indian witness who could corroborate Noboa's claim that Sixto died of an illness. Lasuén recorded the testimony and the instructions given to Silverio, Noboa's witness. Silverio "[had] been warned of the obligation to tell the truth regarding what he knew and would be asked and [had] been warned too regarding the punishments which he could incur for the contrary."²³¹ Though Lasuén did not enumerate those punishments, Silverio was likely aware of the whip, stocks, and irons he might face if the Franciscans decided he lied to them. Fearful of being tortured, Silverio responded to Lasuén's queries with terse one sentence answers. He was Sixto's uncle by blood. He was with the boy when he died. Sixto's death was caused by "a headache." When asked if Sixto suffered "from something besides a headache," Silverio reiterated that there was "nothing more." Lasuén remained unsatisfied and asked more pointedly, "Did not the sick man say that some other part of the body caused pain?" Silverio acknowledged that Sixto "also said his stomach pained him." Lasuén repeated the question in another way, "Did he not complain that he felt pain in some other part?" Silverio answered, "Only in the head and stomach." Silverio also remarked that his nephew said, "I have now caught the disease." Lasuén asked a final question: "Did some die?" "Many died," Silverio responded.²³² Silverio affirmed his testimony with a mark and the missionaries allowed him to leave.

Silverio's testimony is difficult to navigate. On one hand, he confirmed Noboa's argument that Sixto died of an illness. He answered Lasuén's questions simply, without embellishment or obfuscating phrases. On the other hand, he testified under the direct threat of torture. Silverio's fear may have increased due to de la Peña's reputation for being quick tempered, and the solemnity of the proceedings. Testimony given under these circumstances is

²³¹ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:112.

²³² *Ibid.*, 114.

questionable in its veracity.²³³ Coupling the threat of torture with Lasuén's leading questions, such as "Did he suffer from something besides a headache?" raised doubt regarding the truth of Silverio's testimony. The transcript reads as though the missionaries prepared Silverio in advance and that he needed to be reminded what to say.

Immediately after Silverio gave his testimony, Lasuén brought in another Indian witness, a fifteen-year-old boy named Diego. Like Silverio, Diego was "a cousin or blood relative" of Sixto. His interrogators warned him that he faced punishment for giving false testimony, yet Lasuén noted that Diego knew Spanish and was better informed than the previous witness. "Are you a relative of the deceased Sixto?" Lasuén asked. "Yes, I am his brother-in-law," Diego responded. Lasuén continued, "Where were you when Sixto died?" "I was here," the boy answered. Lasuén followed with the key question, "Do you know what caused his death?" Diego testified that "Father Fray Tomás struck him." Diego confirmed that de la Peña struck Sixto with a hoe and some rocks. "Did you see this?" Lasuén asked the boy. "Yes, I saw it," he responded. Lasuén challenged Diego's assertion: "How could you see it from that distance? Does not the entire orchard with its enclosure of high trees with thick foliage come in between?" Diego had no response. Lasuén circled Diego with questions, knowing the boy neared breaking. Finally, upon asking Diego once more how he could have seen the incident, the boy responded, "I did not see it, but Plácido said he saw it." Lasuén told Diego that lying offended the Christian god, and that the must be honest. Fray Cambón, still acting as witness, reminded Diego that he spoke to the father president, and that Lasuén would punish any of the missionaries that had done wrong.

²³³ For more on the use of torture and its effects on testimony in Spanish America, see Anton Daughters, "Torture in Colonial Spain's Northwestern Frontier: The Case of Joseph Romero 'Canito,' 1686," *Journal of the Southwest*, 56, no. 2, "O'odham and the Pimería Alta," (Summer 2014), 233-251; Shirley Cushing Flint, "Treason or Travesty: The Martín Cortés Conspiracy Reexamined," *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 39, no. 1 (Spring, 2008) 23-44; Geoffrey Galt Harpham "So... What Is Enlightenment? An Inquisition into Modernity," *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 3 (Spring, 1994), 524-556.

Once again, Diego responded, “I did not see it; Plácido told me I saw it.”²³⁴ Having what they needed, the missionaries read the transcript back to Diego and sent him away.

Like Silverio’s, Diego’s examination presents a tangle of inconsistencies and was clouded by the threat of torture. The boy retracted his statement that he saw de la Peña beating Sixto with a hoe and rocks. He then repeatedly stated that Plácido told him what he saw. It is impossible to know Diego’s emotional state during his interrogation. He was alone in a room with two unfamiliar Franciscans who threatened him with physical punishment if he lied. Lasuén, as the defense counsel, aggressively pursued the outcome he desired, and he got it when a terrified witness recanted his earlier testimony.

By May 31, without questioning Plácido, Lasuén believed the case was closed. “After having conducted a sufficient number of judicial proceedings according to the best form which I knew, and could, and thought necessary to attain the objectives expressed and to arrive at a judgement,” he concluded, “I now give as my judgment that I find no cause and no reason for correcting, reprehending or summoning to judgment the Reverend Father Fray Tomás de la Peña.” Although he conducted a “sufficient number” of examinations, Lasuén came to this judgment without questioning the key witness for the accusers, or the man accused. He only spoke to three men. Regarding Plácido, Lasuén wrote that Fages’ chief witness was “a mean fellow of disreputable conduct, antagonistic to the Fathers, and acceptable to those who persecute them.” Lasuén believed his judgment of Plácido though he only ever heard about these qualities secondhand. Moreover, he again asserted that he only engaged in these proceedings to achieve his predetermined outcome: that de la Peña be pronounced wholly innocent. Without

²³⁴ Diego and Lasuén’s exchange quoted in Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:115-116.

ever contacting Fages or his superiors at the college, Lasuén declared he had reached the truth of the matter.²³⁵

Despite his confidence that de la Peña required no reprimand, he summoned the missionary to remind him of his duties and to inspire him to carry on with the spiritual conquest.

Lasuén recorded his words:

I pointed out to him that perhaps by giving an ear pulling, a punch, a rap on the head, or a slap with the hand, it would be possible to give, now or in the future, an occasion or an excuse for similar false charges, being, as we are, especially in appointments such as these, the center for observation for all men, and not all of them look on us with kindly eyes. And so, he should refrain from such action, even though such punishment is commonly given by the most indulgent fathers to their own sons.²³⁶

Lasuén's admonition is instructive. First, it suggests that de la Peña physically punished Indians himself. Punching, ear pulling, rapping, and slapping are intensely personal actions that were off limits to the missionaries based on their own precepts. Second, in most defenses of Franciscan discipline, punishment consisted of lashings, wearing stocks, or being fitted with a hobble or boot. De la Peña's punishment style was apparently unorthodox and closer to hand-to-hand combat than officially sanctioned Franciscan discipline.²³⁷ Third, Lasuén's chief concern, while being aware of de la Peña's excessive use of force, was not with the Indians taking these beatings, or with the damage they might do to missionary-Indian relations. Rather, he was chiefly concerned with the scandal these actions might cause if made public.

Notably, instead of recording their exchange, as he had with previous witnesses, Lasuén only provided his version of what de la Peña said in response, rather than a transcript. Lasuén

²³⁵ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:117.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 117.

²³⁷ Junípero Serra cites the lash and the stocks as traditional punishments in Junípero Serra, *The Writings of Junípero Serra III*, Tibesar, Antonine ed., (Washington D.C. 1955), 411; the third father president, Fray Estevan Tapis also cites these punishments in Engelhardt, *Santa Barbara Mission*, 80.

completely controlled the accused missionary's recorded response. First, de la Peña promised Lasuén that he would no longer strike Indians at the mission, which contradicted Noboa's account that de la Peña did not engage in such behavior. Unlike Diego's case, this inconsistency was not unpacked and examined. De la Peña, according to Lasuén, claimed that mission Indians did not make these accusations, but rather they came from the Spanish colonists. De la Peña admitted that the accusation of murder against him came after he was violent with baptized California Indians. De la Peña believed that the region's colonists, or the *gente de razón*, linked him with the older, mysterious death of Sixto in order to frame him. He failed to provide motivation for this supposed conspiracy. What Lasuén recorded next was shocking in its irony, which was clearly lost on the father president, the accused missionary, and Fray Cambón, the witness. The conspiracy "[relies] solely on the evidence of Indians," Lasuén wrote, "who can be easily influenced and instigated against the missionary, for it is he who curbs their excessive liberty, subjects them to justice, and punishes their excesses."²³⁸ The missionaries ignored the idea that their own witness might also be influenced by the threat of torture.

Before finishing his report, Lasuén noted that de la Peña feared the accusations getting out a second time. He asked Lasuén to record that he requested a formal investigation the moment that Lasuén arrived at Mission Santa Clara. In response, Lasuén shared the reasons he preferred covering up the situation. "There was no clear evidence of such proceedings," Lasuén reminded de la Peña, "since nothing specific had been brought to my notice which would be prejudicial to his good conduct and...because the subsequent imprisonment...of the witness should effectively dispel the scandalous public rumor and give rise to one rooted in well-merited

²³⁸ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:117.

esteem for his blameless reputation.” Finally, de la Peña promised to tell the truth if reports of Sixto’s possible murder reached Mexico. With that, Lasuén closed his judicial proceedings.²³⁹

In July, dissatisfied with Gonzales and Sal’s investigations, Fages began his own. The governor discovered his Indian witnesses gave contradictory testimony. He found three of the six Indian men guilty of perjury and sentenced them to prison in Monterey’s presidio, where they languished for ten years.²⁴⁰ As his case unraveled, and perhaps concerned about his reputation as the persecutor of the friars, Fages issued a harsh decree banning the public from gossiping about the Franciscans and threatening the arrest of any soldiers who denounced the missionaries.²⁴¹ This represented a profound reversal for the governor, as he had brought attention to Franciscan violence throughout his career in Alta California. As Fages’ momentum slowed, Lasuén’s confidence in his defense grew. Throughout June 1786, Lasuén continued his own research and in early July wrote a document that resembled a manifesto more than a report on his juridical proceedings.

On July 3, 1786, Lasuén sent two documents to the acting Commander General of the Internal Provinces, Don José Antonio Rengel. Word of the de la Peña case finally made its way to Mexico City and Lasuén revealed his findings to the imperial government. Lasuén first acknowledged that there were “certain rumors” swirling around de la Peña. Lasuén knew that Serra had found his greatest support against reformist or oppositional governors from officials in distant Mexico and endeavored to find the same support with Rengel. “So annoying a report,” he wrote, “must naturally have moved Your Lordship to indignation, and must have offended your Christian zeal; but the truth which, on my priestly honor, I impart to you will at least serve to

²³⁹ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:117-118.

²⁴⁰ *Branciforte á Borica, Mexico*, October 8 1795, BANC MSS C-A 7, 308-314.

²⁴¹ Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:399n17.

hold such sentiments in suspense.”²⁴² After promising to provide proof of the missionary’s innocence whenever requested, Lasuén closed the introduction and moved on to a document that revealed much about the institutional culture of the Franciscans in California, and Lasuén as their leader.

Lasuén began by describing the terms of his probe, to demonstrate to the civil authorities in Mexico that his findings were reliable. “I instituted certain investigations of a judicial nature,” he wrote, “observing due procedure according to the best of my knowledge, capacity, and training.”²⁴³ However, in the process he revealed that his own methods were problematic. First, Lasuén argued that “the charges against the Reverend Father Peña should be regarded from beginning to end as nothing but a plot inspired by malice, concocted much earlier behind a façade of investigations and inquires that were at once irregular, heated, and prejudiced.”²⁴⁴ Despite his claims that Fages instituted a corrupt investigation based on falsehoods, Lasuén announced that he took “for granted the favorable results I had anticipated would follow from the judicial inquiry I instituted...I dispensed with legal formalities in many cases when the evidence in vindication of the father was cumulative and well authenticated.”²⁴⁵ Moreover, because these allegedly just principals guided him, it did not matter that his own inquiries “were extrajudicial.”²⁴⁶

Much of what Lasuén offered early in the July report mirrored what he wrote in late May. During that time, the supposed conspiracy against de la Peña had grown larger. It no longer was Plácido and his cronies in cahoots with Spanish soldiers, but now included some of California’s

²⁴² Lasuén to Rengel, Carmel, July 3, 1786, SBMAL, C.M.D. doc 32.

²⁴³ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:119.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 120-121.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 120.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

more important civil and military figures. Lasuén revealed he had secret testimony that he had not written down before July for fear of the word getting out. Fray Matias Noriega of Mission San Carlos reported to Lasuén that in October 1785, Captain Nicholas Soler, adjutant inspector and physician, “asserted with indignation that Father Tomas de la Peña had become demented and turned his rage against the Indians, and that the latter were presently oppertuning the corporal of that escort and all the guards; and for that reason the mission was in evident danger of revolt.”²⁴⁷ Soler repeated the same story at Mission San Antonio de Padua to Fray Buenaventura Sitjar. Soler told Sitjar that “Father Peña frequently punished the Indians by inflicting on them one hundred or two hundred lashes, and this he did after he had exhausted himself by administering buffetings, and thrashings, and kicks to them,” to which Lasuén interjected, “What Nonsense! May God forgive him for what he said.”²⁴⁸ He blasted away at the physician’s motives, declaring that Soler’s “dastardly fabrications were calculated to stir up clamorous and sacrilegious accusations against the missionary in question,” while offering no corroborating facts or testimony.²⁴⁹ The only evidence Lasuén used to buttress his accusation was that he spent some time with Soler at the Santa Barbara presidio in December 1785 and the physician kept silent about De la Pena’s alleged crimes. To Lasuén, “this coincidence by itself is enough to help us draw a conclusion,” but he remained committed to revealing all of his evidence.²⁵⁰ Considering the cryptic statement contained in Lasuén’s initial report, regarding peculiar circumstances in the de la Peña case, his response to Soler’s silence is instructive.

Back on May 23, Lasuén made an intentionally vague comment before the transcription of Silverio’s testimony. “Nevertheless, some very peculiar circumstances, which I continue to

²⁴⁷ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:121.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 122.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

uncover in our case, force me to the conclusion that it is necessary to take every possible precaution to attain the objectives laid down at the beginning...I therefore considered that I should continue...this inquiry.”²⁵¹ Lasuén referred to Soler’s gossip on May 23. Frays Noriega and Sitjar spoke to him after he received Noboa’s original letter dated May 2, as he had never heard any details of the case before that day. Sometime around that report, Lasuén found out about the gossip, realized he had seen Soler since the two incidences recounted to him, and because the physician stayed silent, Lasuén determined that he lied. It never occurred to Lasuén that Soler might have his own non-conspiratorial reasons for concealing damning accusations from the new father president. Perhaps he did not feel the evidence sufficed to begin official proceedings. Perhaps he wanted to go to Fages first. Perhaps, like Lasuén, he held on to his best evidence until the proper moment. Regardless of Soler’s reasons, Lasuén’s denunciation of his silence in Santa Barbara was strange considering his own stance on secret evidence.

Soler was not the only agent conspiring against de la Peña, according to Lasuén. There were two other men, both presidio soldiers. One of them, the previously mentioned Arellano, became angry with de la Peña when the missionary allegedly admonished him for striking a neophyte at Santa Clara. Plácido overheard the exchange and took Arellano’s side. “Then, as is known,” Lasuén claimed, “Arellano threatened that he might have one or two cards to play against Father Peña.”²⁵² Plácido and Arellano then became fast friends. Lieutenant Gonzales, another friend of Arellano’s, allegedly began pressuring a second soldier, Mariano Cordero, to make false murder charges against de la Peña. Cordero repeatedly told Gonzales he knew of no such event and would not say that he did. When asked to testify, Cordero told Lasuén he never heard of de la Peña “administering blows, or...inflicting punishment” on baptized California

²⁵¹ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:114.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 123.

Indians. He went further, claiming there was never “discontent, hostility, or insubordination” at Mission Santa Clara.²⁵³ Cordero’s testimony stood in stark contrast to the facts established by Lasuén’s defense. First, de la Peña admitted to striking Indians and second, Noboa’s testimony rested on Plácido’s discontentment, hostility, and insubordination at Mission Santa Clara over losing his keyholding privileges. Cordero may have told the truth regarding not hearing about de la Peña killing Indians, but his demonstrably inconsistent testimony undermined his credibility as a witness. He either lied about de la Peña’s violence, or he was so unaware of daily life at the mission that his statements have no relevance.

The rest of the Lasuén’s conspiracy followed a pattern similar to Cordero’s inconsistent testimony. Much of it focused on uncorroborated statements. Lasuén interviewed Gabriel Peralta, the father of the Spanish soldier Corporal Juan José Peralta because he was god-fearing and pious. The senior Peralta said that he never saw de la Peña strike anyone, or punish Indians at all, “except after the manner of a parent,” which in the Franciscan parlance included twenty-five lashes with a whip, or time in the stocks or chains.²⁵⁴ Isabel Peralta, Juan José’s wife, also stated that Gonzales pressured her, and that she “know[s] nothing about a death, or blows, or insults. All I know and hear is that the Father disciplines the Indians as the other Fathers do.”²⁵⁵ Again, another witness testified that de la Peña physically punished Indians. Finally, Juan José Peralta testified that he was unaware of discontent among the Indians at Santa Clara and that he never saw de la Peña strike anyone, let alone kill an Indian. Another soldier, Sergeant Juan Pablo Grijalva, asserted that during Gonzales’ interrogation of the six Indians back in April, Fages’ primary investigator asked leading questions that the witnesses happily answered in the

²⁵³ Cordero quoted in Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:123.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 124.

²⁵⁵ Isabel Peralta quoted in *Ibid.*, 125.

affirmative.²⁵⁶ After recounting the details of the conspiracy against de la Peña, Lasuén moved to the Church's opinion on Indian testimony. This was the first window into Franciscan mentalities that Lasuén truly offered during his tenure as father president. These windows ultimately became a hallmark of his administration.

Lasuén illustrated Franciscan disregard for Indigenous peoples' basic humanity when he argued against the validity of Indian testimony in cases against Europeans and particularly against members of the Church. He recounted that Plácido lost keyholding privileges and received a "light punishment" which led "in typical Indian fashion" to bringing false murder charges against de la Peña.²⁵⁷ After discussing Grijalva's description of Gonzales' examination of the witness against de la Peña, the father president turned to the fundamental trustworthiness of Indian testimony. Lasuén cited a seventeenth-century Spanish bishop, Alfonso de la Peña y Montenegro. Montenegro recounted a story about a nameless missionary visiting a town where the Indigenous residents accused a priest of an unknown crime. The visitor asked one of the Native witnesses "So on one Sunday after prayers your pastor killed King David?" to which the witness replied, "Yes, Sir, I myself saw him kill him," implying that all Amerindians, regardless of time or place, simply told missionaries what they wanted to hear.²⁵⁸ Lasuén supported this claim with provisions from the Third Council of Lima, held from 1582-1583 which stated:

Since it is well known...that Indians can be led by deepseated [sic] malice, while the missionaries are at the mercy of false charges in proportion as they reprove the vices of the Indians, or oppose the avarice or cruelty of the Spaniards, the Holy Synod, desiring to make provision for the good name and stability of the priests who labor among the Indians and are in charge of them decrees:
"Where there is an urgent reason for obtaining evidence and the decision will have to be based on the evidence of Indians, let the judges weigh carefully the amount of credence that should be

²⁵⁶ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:126.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 122.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 126.

given to the evidence of people such as these, for, as is well known, they can easily be induced to testify falsely.”²⁵⁹

Again, Lasuén failed to realize that his efforts to discredit the presidio’s investigation of de la Peña undermined his own. During his interviews of the witnesses, he employed leading questions and the threat of physical punishment, a very real threat for baptized California Indians who had seen or experienced it before. Lasuén’s sense of moral indignation clouded his judgement, and he believed that knew what transpired. From Lasuén’s perspective, his admittedly extrajudicial tactics produced the truth, whereas Gonzales’ use of them led to lies and slander.

Reaching back further in time to establish the Church’s misgivings regarding credible witnesses against the clergy, Lasuén referenced Pope Innocent III’s 1212 declaration that only charges against missionaries “presented by those who are upright and honorable and not by those who are vindictive and depraved” should be honored by a court.²⁶⁰ Innocent III continued: “Should some information in regard to any particular cleric come to your knowledge, and should it be of such a nature as to afford you good reason for taking action, do not readily believe it; and unless it is readily proved, let it not move you to punishment.”²⁶¹ Lasuén chose this last passage well. The father president believed that there was nothing more important in a given missionary field than the unspoiled reputation of the missionaries, regardless of their behavior.²⁶²

To that end, Lasuen undermined the entire premise of Fages’ investigation, reminding Commander General Rengel that aside from ecclesiastic opinion, Spanish law also held provisions meant to protect priests from legal proceedings. He complained that Fages failed to

²⁵⁹ Quoted in Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:126-127.

²⁶⁰ Pope Innocent III quoted in *Ibid.*, 127.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 133.

follow protocol because he never allowed de la Peña to defend himself against the charges. The aspect of Fages' process that distressed Lasuén the most was the case's public nature. It was "the sympathy and understanding of our Catholic Sovereigns for the dignity of the ecclesiastics, even when they are unworthy," according to Lasuén, that ordered all inquiries against the clergy to be secret rather than in "the noisy legal proceedings of ordinary court trials." Lasuén claimed that "even if it is conceded that the murders imputed to the father were real, and were the consequence of excessive severity and of indiscreet and frenzied zeal," there could be no case against de la Peña because the governor failed to follow the law in his investigation. Having made his point, Lasuén cited Spanish precedence that resonated with the crux of his defense of the accused missionary: "For it is neither right nor fitting that the shortcomings of ecclesiastics be made public." In matters such as these, Lasuén wrote that maintaining "the good name of the missionaries" should always be the primary goal of Spanish authorities.²⁶³

With Lasuén's vigorous defense and the collapse of the testimony offered by Fages' Indian witnesses, the case eventually fell apart, and the Audiencia exonerated de la Peña. It was a lengthy affair that changed venues from California to Mexico City. During that time, the Audiencia officially rebuked Fages, which informed him that any further unproven allegations against the Franciscans in California would earn him a loss of position and honors.²⁶⁴ A year later, in 1787, the governor conceded that de la Peña was likely innocent, though he continued to believe that the missionary treated the Indians at Santa Clara cruelly.²⁶⁵ In 1791, de la Peña travelled to Mexico as the Audiencia began to process his case. Two years later, some Spanish witnesses who lived in California at the time of the alleged crime testified to the missionary's

²⁶³ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:132.

²⁶⁴ Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:399n14.

²⁶⁵ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:241-242.

character. All involved answered the questions favorably for de la Peña. No California Indian people were questioned. The missionary wrote his own defense, and despite all the claims made by Lasuén's witnesses that the priest never acted violently towards baptized California Indians, de la Peña admitted pulling young Barnábe's ear, causing it to bleed, and to hitting an Indian in the head with his wooden cane. This second act was at the very root of the murder charges against him. His admission that he had at least on one occasion struck an Indian in the head with a heavy piece of wood mattered not, and de la Peña was exonerated. Now in poor health, he retired to the College of San Fernando where his peers elected him to its council in 1795.²⁶⁶ That same year, the three Indian men who were jailed in San Francisco's presidio on perjury charges for ten years took the knee in front of the new Franciscans at Mission Santa Clara. All three men said they had given false testimony and confirmed de la Peña's innocence. The missionaries then released them.²⁶⁷

Although the de la Peña murder trial remains as opaque and dissatisfying today as it was during the summer of 1786, it revealed the frustrations civil authority had with Franciscan control of California. Governor Fages, who considered himself a religious man, nevertheless saw an opportunity to curb missionary power when he perceived that it threatened the balance of power too far in Franciscan favor. He was a colonial administrator who spent most of his life dedicated to the transformation of California Indian people into quasi-Europeans. Yet, he pushed back against Franciscan tendencies towards autonomy or outright independence. Franciscan arrogance remained a consistent issue for the governor. He was concerned that Franciscans, from Serra, Lasuén, and Palóu, to the rank-and-file priests at the missions, held him in contempt and

²⁶⁶ Lasuén to Arrillaga, Carmel, August 1, 1794, SBMAL, C.M.D., doc 201, Maynard J. Geiger, "The Internal Organization and Activities of San Fernando College, Mexico (1734-1858)," *The Americas* 6, no.1, (July, 1949), 23.

²⁶⁷ *Borica á Comisionado a Pueblo de San José, Monterey septiembre 15 1795*, BANC MSS C-A 7, 315-317.

were overtly disrespectful in letters and in person. By the time he brought charges against de la Peña in late March 1786, his frustration intensified so that his disaffection with the missionaries was a constant topic of his correspondence. He knew of de la Peña's temper, as he saw the priest bloody Barnábe's ear for playing in church. When the rumors the priest beat multiple Indians to death made it to the governor, he had his chance to make a real move against the Franciscans. He put his reputation on the line based on testimony from witnesses that he and Lasuén both threatened, the latter with torture, the former with prison. It was a bold play over which Fages quickly lost control. That miscalculation followed him for years.

Lasuén probably never imagined his first several months as father president would be consumed by a scandal unlike any that Serra had confronted. He found himself immediately at the nexus of tensions that existed between church and state in New Spain since the mid-eighteenth century, and in California from the founding of Mission San Diego. The missionary that once described himself as useless and had begged to leave California had become the most powerful colonial in the province. Faced with Fages' investigation, Lasuén used the lessons Serra taught him to protect the Franciscan order's reputation at all costs. He operated in secrecy when necessary. He attacked the character of everyone who made accusations against de la Peña. To Lasuén, the entire affair seemed nothing more than a spiteful attack on the spiritual conquest of California. Even if it meant holding extralegal proceedings, Lasuén would not only fight to exonerate de la Peña, but to demonstrate that he had Serra's mettle. If Spanish governors looked to limit the power of the missionaries, they would find their new opponent as obstinate as his predecessor.

Fages' 1787 Code of Conduct

In January 1787, with the aborted uprising on San Gabriel and the de la Peña affair behind him, Fages faced a new dilemma. In his time as governor, the little pueblo of Los Angeles expanded, in tandem with Mission San Gabriel, the mission nearest the town. Nicolás José and Toypurina demonstrated that the growth of both town and mission represented potential conflict between the baptized and unbaptized California Indians, unbaptized Indians and soldiers, and the Franciscans with all parties. Fages spent most of his life in the Spanish military, and most of that on the northern borderlands of New Spain and Indigenous country. Fages had experienced the violent results when soldiers, colonists, and missionaries had disparate agendas that pushed Indigenous people to resist colonization. Aside from his sorties against the Quechans in 1781, as a lieutenant he had two different assignments in Senora, battling the Seri people, known for their martial prowess.²⁶⁸ Fages' units also clashed with Apaches in New Mexico.²⁶⁹ By 1787, these experiences, coupled with Los Angeles' and San Gabriel's growth, concerned Fages.

Fages responded to the expansion of the California mission system and the intensification of tensions around Los Angeles by issuing a code of conduct to manage relations between secular Spaniards and Southern California Indians. Like Portolá and Neve before him, Fages created a structure similar to that in use throughout northern New Spain. He established that the military, not the pueblo's *alcalde*, or mayor, nor the *regidores*, or town council, held real power. He decreed that the acting corporal of the pueblo, Vicente Félix, become the *comisionado*, or the de facto leader of Los Angeles. The governor placed great responsibility in Félix's hands. He

²⁶⁸ For notes on Fages' military career see, William Marvin Mason, "Fages' Code of Conduct Toward Indians, 1787," *The Journal of California Anthropology* 2, no. 1, (Summer, 1975): 90-94; for information on the Seri as warriors see, Thomas Bowen, "Seri," in *Handbook of North American Indians Volume X, Southwest*, ed., Robert F. Heizer (Washington D.C., 1978), 232.

²⁶⁹ Mason, "Fages Code of Conduct Towards Indians," 90-94.

maintained security for the town, oversaw farming and small-scale production, and communicated matters of military importance to his superiors. Félix reported to the corporal at the Santa Barbara presidio, who reported to Fages. This ensured civil authorities' goals for the town's development would not be overshadowed by townspeople's concerns or those of the missionaries. At Purísima Concepción and San Pedro y San Pablo de Bicuñer, disparate agendas led to disaster for Spain, an outcome Fages strove to avoid in California.²⁷⁰

Fages wrote several rules regulating contact between the townspeople and non-baptized Tongva Indians. Fages argued in his code that the people of Los Angeles and the Tongva were too familiar. According to Fages, Los Angeles' denizens' dependency on Tongva labor bred a complacency that could lead to disaster. He ordered Félix to correct this behavior, but very carefully, so as to not insult or offend the Tongva. Despite those instructions, Fages severely limited Tongva people's freedom of movement and to procure work. For example, Indian men or women hired to work in the pueblo were barred from working indoors, and they could not sleep in Spanish people's homes. If they had travelled from a significant distance, they could sleep outside, near the guard house, where they could be watched. Fages projected the violence of the Quechans onto the Tongva people. He did not want another surprise attack.²⁷¹

Fages' decree also dictated Spaniards' travel to Tongva towns to recruit laborers. Anyone who did so must obtain permission from both the *comisionado* and the *alcalde*, who would only agree if the petitioner enjoyed good standing in the town. Men from the pueblo were forbidden to travel to the *rancherías* alone, and women and children could never visit them. Anyone breaking this rule would face a week in the stocks and perhaps a significant fine. When in the *ranchería*,

²⁷⁰ The disparate agendas of the Spanish military and Franciscan missionaries in the New Mexico province that informed Fages' decision making are discussed at length in Santiago, *Massacre at the Yuma Crossing*, 55-75.

²⁷¹ Pedro Fages, *Instrucción para el cabo de la Escolta del pueblo de Los Ángeles como Comisionado por el gobierno para dirigir al alcalde y los regidores*, January 13, 1787, Monterey, BANC MSS C-A 3 145-149.

the recruiter could speak only to the village leader. Fages specifically ordered that no Tongva person should be compelled to work against their will, and that the Spaniards could never cheat workers, or promise them payment and then refuse it. Moreover, when the recruiters brought Tongva laborers to Los Angeles, those workers should have an overseer. Not because they needed one to work, or to keep them from stealing, but because Fages argued that he wanted someone to stop Indians from being abused or treated unjustly in the town. Spanish violence against Tongva men and women for trifling offences engendered the resentments Fages feared.²⁷²

Mitigating violence against California Indians was at the core of the governor's code of conduct. The Quechan uprising in 1781 made Fages worry that the aborted Nicolás José-Toypurina uprising could have led to the destruction of both Los Angeles and Mission San Gabriel. Spanish arrogance and violence sparked the massacre on the Colorado River. He did not want that to happen again in California. Fages turned to draconian methods, against his own people and the Tongva. For example, any townsperson who abused Tongva people for any reason would be injured in the same manner as their victim. Moreover, it would be done in the aggrieved Indian's presence, to end the need for retribution. If an Indian transgressed in a way that warranted punishment, such as stealing or killing animals, damaging persons, or property, they could face punishment. Even then, the leader of their *ranchería* needed to be notified to act as a witness during the lashing. In an interesting twist, to position secular authorities as more compassionate than their Franciscan counterparts, Fages stipulated that the transgressor should not receive any more than fifteen to twenty lashes – fewer than the typical Franciscan sentence of twenty-five – and ordered that they were to be given with humanity. Most important, the Tongva

²⁷² Fages, *Instrucción*, 147.

person should not face humiliation during the punishment to avoid creating a cause for vengeance.²⁷³

Fages used his authority and experience to minimize potential flashpoints between colonists and California Indians, but as an occupying military commander he nonetheless forged policies that created more tensions. For the security of Los Angeles, Fages ordered the closest rancherías to the pueblo relocated to a safer distance. The governor viewed security through the eyes of his military experience. He crafted policy to curb familiarity, physical violence, labor exploitation, and arbitrary punishment. These represented concrete factors that led to retributive violence. What Fages' did not find important were the alliances and rivalries between the Tongva people surrounding Los Angeles, or the importance of geography. One of the sparks of conflict for Toyapurina and Nicolás José just a little over a year prior was the indiscriminate mixing of peoples at the mission. Subtle cultural distinctions between rancherías did not affect Fages' plans for stability. Similarly, he ordered that soldiers should place sentries around the areas where the Tongva held their dances, or wherever they congregated in large groups, as these were moments that they could plan and execute a revolt. With this order it appeared that the governor understood the total ban on dances in 1782 caused resentment among the Tongva. Yet he worried that leaving them unobserved opened the door to revolt. The governor sought to maintain a delicate balance.²⁷⁴ Fages' experience on the front line taught him to plan for Indian uprisings and try to understand the root cause behind them, though he was not always successful. Lasuén lacked that experience and worked only to better the Franciscan position, even if that meant arming some baptized California Indians and teaching them to ride horses.

²⁷³ Fages, *Instrucción*, 147-148.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 145-149.

Neve's reglamento Repealed

In the summer of 1787, the Royal Audiencia requested that Lasuén respond to the memorandum Governor Fages sent them in 1785 regarding his five complaints about Franciscan leadership in California. Lasuén used the opportunity to address his specific concerns.²⁷⁵ Throughout the final years of the 1780s, two issues became a point of major contention between the civil government and the Franciscan missionaries. The first was that of armed and mounted baptized California Indians. Because Fages included this topic in his five complaints, Lasuén had a forum to share the Franciscan view on the matter. Lasuén noted that each mission relied upon mounted horsemen to drive and look after their cattle and sheep herds. There were not enough colonists who could take this responsibility away from baptized California Indians. Fages heard this argument earlier in the summer and attempted to ban the practice, based on his encounters with Apaches. He also charged that some missionaries taught Indians the arts of riding “to excess.”²⁷⁶ Lasuén reminded Fages that the king ordered the missions to breed herds of cattle and that horsemen were therefore necessary. Furthermore, Lasuén continued, it was Fages and Neve that limited the military’s assistance to the missionaries. If training baptized California Indians to ride horses was an excess, as Fages had put it, that excess was the responsibility of the last two governors. Anticipating another potential complaint from Fages, Lasuén admitted that some of the baptized caballeros may have carried sharp weapons (only to carry out specific harvesting tasks), but again, if the military provided more escorts, the missionaries would not need to rely on them.²⁷⁷ With the memory of the Audiencia’s warning the year before hanging over him, to avoid friction with the missionaries, Fages relented and apologized for being overzealous.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁵ See chapter one of this work.

²⁷⁶ Fages to Lasuén, Monterey August 20, 1787, *No permitir cabalgar á indios* BANC MSS C-A 23, 65

²⁷⁷ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:151.

²⁷⁸ Fages to Lasuén, Monterey August 23, 1787, *Sobre no permitir cabalgar á indios*, BANC MSS C-A 23, 65.

When Lasuén addressed the Audiencia in September regarding Fages' five complaints, he already knew the governor had backed off the issue of mounted mission Indians.

Having dealt with the bulk of Fages' 1785 complaints, Lasuén turned to the second major issue, that of missionaries boarding ships to return to Mexico without notifying civil authorities. Lasuén, once himself eager to leave California and return to the College of San Fernando in Mexico City, held strong opinions regarding this subject. Both he and Palóu claimed this policy was beyond the powers of the provincial governor. Lasuén cited precedent going back to the beginning of the Franciscans' time in Alta California. He noted that during Neve's time as governor, missionaries could leave the province if the father president or the father guardian at the college allowed it. When Fray Juan Riobó asked to retire, Fages informed Lasuén that the missionaries simply needed a replacement, and the priest could depart. Only after Bernardo de Gálvez became the viceroy of New Spain was there a policy prohibiting missionaries from leaving, or entering, California without his permission.²⁷⁹

As Lasuén questioned the viceroy's decree, he argued that few missionaries would volunteer to serve in California if they understood the conditions in the province. Lasuén's claim illuminated the wide gulf in religious zeal that existed between the new generation of Franciscans and Serra's cohort. "There is no religious who makes up his mind to depart from his college for a destination like this," Lasuén declared, "who does not experience deep misgivings, and there is nothing which can overcome them more effectively than the assurance that it would be possible to return, should climate or occupation prove unsuitable."²⁸⁰ This was an astonishing admission coming from any missionary, but particularly from a Franciscan. The order was founded upon the principal that intense hardship and suffering was the path to a Christ-like life.

²⁷⁹ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:152.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 165-166.

Franciscans often welcomed martyrdom while evangelizing.²⁸¹ Lasuén's defense of a missionary's right to opt out of service because they did not enjoy California revealed much about him and the dramatic change that occurred in the Franciscan order after the 1749 secularization decree and other mid-century anti-missionary policies. Finally, he suggested that sending more missionaries to California would solve any problems that arose if one chose to depart. If this was the case, then Gálvez's decree "and our well-merited convenience could be secured at one and the same time."²⁸²

In late summer, 1787, Mexico City gave its ruling on Fages' complaints. Just after his defense against Fages' charges, Lasuén received positive news from Fray Palóu at the College of San Fernando. He wrote to tell Lasuén that King Carlos III repealed most of Neve's regulations for the missionaries because they were "unjust."²⁸³ First among the rulings was that the missionaries would continue to staff the missions in pairs. Additionally, the fathers "have no obligation to go and celebrate holy Mass at the presidio," though he encouraged them to celebrate it there "when they found it convenient."²⁸⁴ With something resembling glee, Palóu also informed Lasuén that Fages, as the chief defender of Neve's policy and the governor who brought murder charges against de la Peña, suffered a sharp rebuke. "They tell me that he will see how to behave himself," he quipped, "and that at the least complaint of the Fathers he will be deprived of his office and honors."²⁸⁵ With one ruling from the crown, the work of two governors to constrain missionary power in California, which was carried out in the spirit of Bourbon Reforms, came to a halt.

²⁸¹ Beebe and Senkewicz, *Junípero Serra*, 60-61.

²⁸² Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:166.

²⁸³ Palóu quoted in Engelhardt, *Missions and Missionaries of California* 2:428.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 427.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 428.

Fages' five complaints to the Audiencia remain significant because they are at the core of the dispute between the civil government and the Franciscans in California, and the issues enumerated only intensified as time passed. The Franciscans' haughtiness regarding Mass at the presidios, control of the mission temporalities, the treatment of and relations with California Indian people, refusal to produce mission inventories, and the missionaries' right to retire were a constant source of tension between the church and the military throughout California's mission period. They were the symptoms of Spain's ambivalent colonial policy in one of its most remote outposts. The Bourbons took the Spanish throne, and over the course of a century, worked to reduce the power and influence of the mendicant orders within the Americas. Yet, when Russian encroachment threatened the Spanish Pacific in the 1760s, the crown turned to one of those orders, whose numbers and commitment had dwindled, to secure their territorial claim of North America's western shore. And though the Spanish monarchs had, on paper, long ago turned away from military conquest as the sole means of expanding their empire, their experience along the northern frontier mandated the military's necessity in California. This coupling unintentionally created a contest for jurisdiction between the two groups. Franciscans controlled baptized California Indians and the mission temporalities while civil government managed commerce, colonists, and soldiers. However, in California, particularly before 1780, there was little more Spanish infrastructure than the Franciscan missions. Early governors like Neve and Fages, buttressed by Spain and Mexico City's coolness towards missionary power, acted as though it was their duty to curb missionary autonomy. The Franciscans in turn resented what they considered the military meddling in their affairs. Because there was no clear direction or chain of command in California, the two institutions clashed over authority. The longer the situation festered, the more hostility and resentment grew between them.

Fages After the Nullification

Lasuén thought he and his missionaries were free of Fages' obstructions, and attempted to go on the offensive, only to find the governor unchanged. Embedded within the crown's ruling was the notion that provincial governor must give all necessary assistance to the missionaries in carrying out their duty of converting California Indian people to Catholicism. Lasuén imagined that this vague clause could force the presidio to acquiesce to Franciscan demands for armed escorts. When Fages continued denying the father president's request, Lasuén reminded him "courteously and by word of mouth," of his obligations, he later reported to Palóu.²⁸⁶ The governor responded that the crown gave him secret orders to continue with his escort policy and that Lasuén was the first person to inform him otherwise. Fages' behavior incensed Lasuén. He complained to Palóu that "Don Pedro Fages will always do what he pleases with us, and that no matter the concessions we get...they will carry no weight with him."²⁸⁷ Fages' position regarding armed escorts went further. From the lieutenant at San Francisco presidio, Lasuén learned that the governor ordered his men to bring baptized California Indians who had fled the mission back to the presidio to work, rather than returning them to Franciscans. If this policy held, "they will become as wild as before, with the same lack of instruction as in the forest," he warned Palóu.²⁸⁸

Despite being ordered to avoid conflicts with the Franciscans, Fages continued pressing them on security and relations with Indians. Two new problems concerned Fages. One was the practice of transferring baptized California Indians from one mission to the next as a means of punishment. Invariably, the exiled man or woman's family abandoned their homes and followed them to their place of banishment.²⁸⁹ Aside from being an inconvenience, it was the sort of

²⁸⁶ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:179.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 180.

²⁸⁹ *Fages á Lasuén*, Monterey, June 15, 1788, *Traslación de indios* BANC MSS C-A 23, 67.

behavior that not only bred resentment, but also spread discontent. The second problem was the missionaries locking up baptized California Indians for more than ten days, whether at the mission or the presidio.²⁹⁰ Fages did not want the missionaries to have the power to confer sentences of that length. Though it angered Lasuén, this mandate resonated with much of Fages' previous decisions. He continued to shape a policy that strove for stability and security, even when it meant risking his rank and privileges.

In early August 1788, just a month after the leaders of the military and missionaries squabbled over the king's decree, another serious charge of abuse against the Franciscans emerged. It came from the commander of the presidio at San Diego, José de Zúñiga. He revealed to Fages that the Franciscans at that mission, Frays Hilario Torrent and Juan Mariner, forced baptized California Indians to labor far past the point of fatigue, and sometimes for no discernable reason. Zúñiga also reported that the missionaries punished them using "very hard" lashings.²⁹¹ When he had two Indians accused of stealing cattle moved from the mission to the presidio, the missionaries became enraged with the soldier, who acted on Fages' wishes. Usually somewhat cordial in his communication with Lasuén, the governor told the father president exactly why he had the men relocated. Perhaps their bickering over armed escorts in July still angered him, or perhaps it was Lasuén's smug demeanor after the king's decree negating Neve's reglamento. Fages leveled a withering attack at Lasuén. "It was to prevent you from intervening with your authority as to avoid these abuses," he seethed, "and from demanding that the said padres interfere with the investigation."²⁹² Fages directly confronted Lasuén's tendency for unconditionally defending missionaries' behaviors and for tampering with investigations.

²⁹⁰ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:180.

²⁹¹ *Fages á Lasuén*, Monterey, August 6 1788, *Quejas contra los P.P. de Mision de San Diego*, BANC MSS C-A 23, 68.

²⁹² *Ibid.*

In his response to Fages, Lasuén addressed the issues plaguing military-missionary relations, along with those specific to San Diego. He rationalized the missionaries' anger at having the Indian prisoners moved. They were only disrespectful because they felt ignored by the soldiers. It was yet another example of Lasuén protecting the good name of the missionaries. The Franciscans asked the soldiers to break a direct command, and then berated them when they refused. Yet, to him, the missionaries were the aggrieved parties. Regarding the movement of Indians accused of wrongdoing between the mission and the presidio, Lasuén reminded the governor of the 1773 ruling that made the "management, control, discipline, and education" of the Indians the sole purview of the Franciscans.²⁹³ The military should only involve themselves in the punishment of Indian converts when they were charged with major crimes. This sentiment also applied to the soldiers' complaints regarding excessive floggings. Lasuén informed Fages that he and his missionaries never issued a more severe punishment than "keeping them under instruction for long periods each day when they are being prepared to become Christians."²⁹⁴ The entire tenor of Lasuén's response emphasized that he was prepared to be as obstinate and aloof as Fages had become with him. All the controversies of the last year, recapturing runaways, armed escorts for the missionaries, abuse of the Indians, were simple cases of Fages overstepping his jurisdiction, according to Lasuén. Their ability to collaborate as the two most influential Spanish officials in California had completely eroded.

Lasuén's response served its purpose, as Fages admitted defeat and issued a warning to Zúñiga to respect the missionaries at San Diego. His note was brief, but it demonstrated Fages' repositioning after a series of defeats and Lasuén's newfound confidence. The governor ordered Zúñiga not to "get mixed up with the padres in their handling of the Indians." If he had to make a

²⁹³ See chapter one of this dissertation.

²⁹⁴ Lasuen to Fages, Carmel, August 18, 1788, SBMAL, C.M.D., doc 84.

complaint regarding abuses at the mission, the commander must be sure it was serious, and from a reliable source. Complaints could go both ways, Fages reminded the soldier, as Lasuén had marked Zúñiga as obstinate and unhelpful to the spiritual conquest. The commander needed to stop complaining about accompanying the missionaries when they went to rancherías to hear confessions, and the soldiers should not tell the missionaries when it was time to return. Mexico City did not approve of these actions and threatened serious measures if they continued.²⁹⁵ After writing the presidio commander, Fages, looking to avoid said measures, informed Lasuén that he had admonished Zúñiga.²⁹⁶ For now it seemed, the Franciscans had full control of baptized California Indians.

The rhetorical battles between Fages and Lasuén were more than petty cases of political intrigue in the furthest reaches of the Spanish Empire. They were indicative of a new phase of the California mission project. These contests were, in one sense, as old as the empire itself, and in another, represented the changing perspectives brought by the European Enlightenment.²⁹⁷ The conversion, management, and relationships with Indigenous Americans had been debated since the mid-sixteenth century. Scores of kings, jurists, missionaries, bishops, nuns, and soldiers fought over the place that Indigenous people held under Spain occupation. A dynastic shift from the Hapsburgs to the Bourbons brought a modernizing impulse to the empire, and a focus on

²⁹⁵ *Fages á Zuñiga* Monterey, August 13 1788, *Conducta que. Debe observar respect á los Padres* BANC MSS C-A 23, 267-268.

²⁹⁶ *Fages á Lasuén* Monterey August 16 1788, *Escoltas á Padres* BANC MSS C-A 23, 68.

²⁹⁷ For the debate over Spain's relationship with Indigenous Americans see, J. H. Parry, *The Spanish Theory of Empire in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1940); Lewis Hanke, *The Spanish Struggle for Justice in the Conquest of America* (Philadelphia, 1949); Anthony Pagden, *Spanish Imperialism and the Political Imagination: Studies in European and Spanish-American Social and Political Theory, 1513-1830* (New Haven, 1990); Wolfgang Reinhard, "Missionaries, humanists and natives in the sixteenth-century Spanish Indies – a failed encounter of two worlds?" *Renaissance Studies* 6, no. 3/4 (September, 1992), 360-376; James Muldoon, *The Americas in the Spanish World Order: The Justification for Conquest in the Seventeenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1994); Nicholas Griffiths and Fernando Cervantes, *Spiritual Encounters: Interactions between Christianity and Native Religions in Colonial America* (Lincoln, 1999).

limiting the power of the mendicant orders in the Americas. Missionaries became too expensive, too rooted in a medieval past, and too autonomous to justify. As demonstrated throughout this chapter, imperial Spain, after centuries of colonial domination, still did not have a coherent policy for Spanish-Indigenous relations, and in a land thousands of miles from the imperial capital, the effects of that unfocused policy became apparent.

Spain's desire to control California and keep it from the Russians led to a series of increasingly untenable outcomes. King Carlos III's Inspector General José de Gálvez ordered the invasion of Alta California, and rather than attempting creative innovation, he relied on a missionary order whose decline the crown had intentionally set in motion twenty years earlier. The royal government was fortunate that in 1769 there were still missionaries capable of carrying out their colonial designs at the College of San Fernando, like Serra, Crespí, and Palóu, who craved a difficult life on the edge of Christendom. By the end of Fages' tenure, those fortunes were about to shift. With the struggle for control of the province ended, for a time, in favor of the Franciscans, the expansion envisioned by Serra and craved by Mexico City could finally begin. Franciscans founded two new missions, Mission Santa Cruz, and Nuestra Señora de la Soledad, both in 1791. New priests arrived more frequently in California. All of them came through the College of San Fernando after the policies of secularization reduced their numbers, and as will be discussed in the next chapter, also reduced their abilities and commitment to life in California. The Franciscan victory over Neve was pyrrhic. The decline of the order had already begun, and it started at the source. The College of San Fernando now trained priests who would cause significant problems for Lasuén, the civil administrators, and California's Indigenous peoples attempting to find their way in this ever-transforming world.

Rubí, Gilí, and the Padres Descontentos Come to California, 1790-1794

By 1790, following Mexico City's nullification of Felipe de Neve's 1781 reglamento, the Franciscans had a period of autonomy and resumed cooperation with the imperial government's desire to found new missions in California.²⁹⁸ From Seville's perspective, Spain's hold on North America's west coast grew increasingly tenuous. Imperial Russia was moving into the Pacific Northwest, but they were no longer the only threat. In 1786, the French navigator Jean François de La Pérouse's journey around the world brought him to Monterey where he met California Indians, missionaries, and the military before continuing his voyage. Englishman George Vancouver's appearance several years later in 1791 only reinforced Spain's anxiety, when he landed in Chumash territory and visited Mission San Buenaventura.²⁹⁹ While Seville and Mexico City might have preferred sending the military to fortify the remote province, they still had too few troops in reserve to do so.³⁰⁰ The colonial government admitted as much when they put a halt to attempted clerical reforms in California and reaffirmed their commitment to both Franciscan institutional supremacy and the spiritual conquest.

In response to imperial anxieties, the Franciscans founded three new missions in central and Northern California, creating heightened expectations and new staffing problems for the Apostolic College of San Fernando. In December of 1788, they founded the third mission in the Santa Barbara Channel region, and the fourth in Chumash territory, La Purísima Concepción.³⁰¹ In August 1791, Mission Santa Cruz began operations on the north shore of Monterey Bay, the

²⁹⁸ Felipe de Neve, *Reglamento para el gobierno de la provincia de Californias, 1781*, ed., Salvador Bernabéu Albert (Madrid, 1994).

²⁹⁹ Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:521-522.

³⁰⁰ In 1790 the four southern presidio districts, San Diego, Santa Barbara, Monterey, all had about fifty soldiers and officers to man the garrison and act as mission guards. San Francisco housed roughly thirty-five soldiers, see Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:452, 462, 467, 472.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 423.

third mission in Ohlone territory. Mission Nuestra Señora de la Soledad followed two months later in October. Soledad was the furthest inland mission to date, founded near the confluence of traditional Esselen and Salinan peoples' homelands, as Spain attempted to deepen its influence among California's Indigenous people.³⁰² This fairly rapid expansion strained the Franciscans' limited resources and manpower. The new establishments required at least six additional missionaries and half that number in supernumeraries if they were to run effectively. While not appearing onerous, filling the new openings while also replacing the priests in California of retirement age proved a significant challenge to the College of San Fernando. The order struggled to find capable missionaries in Spain after decades of secular reforms and limitations decreased the numbers of their recruits. Several of the new missionaries, known at the College of San Fernando as the *padres descontentos*, sent to California during the period of 1791 through 1795, were among the least capable to work in the region.³⁰³ They caused scandals for Lasuén, abandoned their posts, fought with one another verbally and threatened each other with physical violence. Two of them, Frays Manuel Fernández and Antonio Dantí, represented real danger for California Indians both within and beyond the mission, and the soldiers who faced the danger Franciscan hubris created. Following Fages' retirement in 1791, two ineffectual governors served through this same period, causing Franciscan leaders to handle these crises internally, with varying degrees of success. By late 1794, Lasuén purged some of the troublemaking priests from the system, yet the problems they caused and the tensions within the order these men represented revealed the decline of Franciscan leadership in California and at the College of San Fernando during the critical expansion phase.

³⁰² Thomas Roy Hester, "Esselen"; "Salinan," in *Handbook of North American Indians* 8:496, 500.

³⁰³ For more on the *padres descontentos* see, Beebe and Senkewicz "Uncertainty on the Mission Frontier," 295-322.

The period of missionary autonomy also reduced the opportunities for California Indians to use tensions between the military and missionaries to their advantage, like the Chumash did before them. Yanonali, the powerful Chumash chief near Santa Barbara, had successfully negotiated with Governor Neve to keep some physical and spiritual independence for his people in return for helping to construct that mission. But after Fages' last unsuccessful bid to report physical abuse occurring at Mission San Diego resulted in a gag order, Indigenous Californians' leverage against missionary authority diminished. The addition of two new missions among people already under heavy pressure to accept Christianization caused immediate animosity, which led to an attack on the newly established Mission Santa Cruz. Spanish policies during this period demonstrated little ingenuity and emboldened Franciscans against the strenuous objections voiced by nearly every governor that served in the province. Spanish policy also increased the resistance of Indigenous Californians against their Spanish invaders.

Ohlone Relations with the Spanish Military

One of Fages' last actions as governor demonstrated the importance of negotiating with the military for California Indians, in this case, Ohlone peoples. In 1789, Ohlone people living in the Santa Clara Valley gained several concessions from Fages, using his fear of instability and potential violence to their advantage. Ohlone leadership ensured Spanish townspeople in San José could not employ men and women without permission. This stopped Spaniards from overworking Ohlone laborers and ensured that they paid workers the promised amount. Tribal leaders also secured a promise from Fages barring Spanish employers from offering advanced loans to Ohlone people, removing the possibility of debt peonage. These agreements between tribal leaders and Spanish military officials allowed for a rare instance of positive exchange between the two groups. For a time, Ohlone men and women traded their labor of their own

accord for Spanish goods and learned new skills outside of Franciscan influence. The arrangement worked for both groups. Fages did not need to ask the missionaries for laborers, and the Ohlone benefited materially without converting to Catholicism.³⁰⁴

In 1790, Fages' plans to modernize the Monterey presidio provided further opportunity for Ohlone people to enter into this arrangement. Leaders of several tribes around San José negotiated successful terms with the governor. They possessed the skills necessary for his project and spoke Spanish. Fages dictated the size of the work crews and their compensation. But Ohlone leaders demanded protection while they traveled between San José and Monterey, a space where some of their rivals lived. They similarly sought protection for the women and children left behind in San José while they worked in Monterey. Ohlone laborers also negotiated for meals as well as rest days. The arrangement worked so well that the men told Fages that they would work for him again in the future.³⁰⁵ Fages took this relationship seriously and castigated his men if they broke its terms. For example, the commissioner of the Pueblo of San José, Macario Castro, raided a traditional dance in a village outside of town to capture workers. The governor was incensed. He wrote to Castro, "This incident with these pitiful Indians has been an unwelcome cause of grief to me, this going to surprise them at their dance. . .in no way did I desire these outrages, and much less than when they are at their *fiestas*."³⁰⁶ Fages' anger slowed military attempts to compel Ohlone people to work for several years.

The cooperation between Ohlone peoples and Spanish soldiers continued through the early years of Mission Santa Cruz. When the Spanish scouted for an appropriate mission site, they paid respects to local tribes and their leaders, such as Suquel of the Uypi people. Suquel's

³⁰⁴ *Sobre Obras de Monterey*, Monterey, August 12, 1793, BANC MSS C-A 7, 405-407.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 408.

³⁰⁶ *Fages á Macario Castro*, Monterey, July 22, 1790, BANC MSS C-A 44, 39.

two daughters had already received baptism, which fostered peaceful relations between the two groups. Because Lieutenant-colonel Hermenegildo Sal, who led the search, shared Fages' anxiety over the strength and numbers of the people around the proposed mission site, he acted within the cultural expectations of Suquel and his people. The meeting went so well that Suquel and his wife promised to receive baptisms themselves and the leader gave his blessing to the construction of Mission Santa Cruz.³⁰⁷

Spanish regulations for conduct and trade with the people living near Mission Santa Cruz revealed the military's awareness that they did not hold the balance of power in their relationship with Ohlone. Sal's caution represented the legacy of Neve and Fages' concern that Indigenous power could undo the colonial project in California if soldiers and colonists antagonized local residents. Sal ordered his men to treat the Ohlone well, but to be ready for surprise attacks. If fighting did break out, he ordered his soldiers to immediately cease hostilities if belligerent Indians requested a truce. Sal wanted no retributive violence that could lead to vendettas. Furthermore, he ordered his men to stay away from Ohlone villages and promised to punish those who disobeyed. Sal's orders at Santa Cruz represented a continuation of the policies enacted in Fages' codes of conduct for Los Angeles and San José. The older generation of Spanish soldiers understood that they were profoundly outnumbered in this territory and should conduct themselves in a matter befitting their position.³⁰⁸

Positive relations between the military and Ohlone people during Mission Santa Cruz's founding demonstrated the possibilities of cooperation and coexistence when Spaniards

³⁰⁷ *Reconocimiento de la Mision de Santa Cruz*, Hermenegildo Sal, San Francisco Presidio, September 21, 1791, BANC MSS C-A 54, 271-272.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

respected Indigenous peoples.³⁰⁹ These negotiations reflected the military's ideology that towns and business offered a better path to assimilating California Indians into Spanish society. The Ohlone used the military and their projects as a means to learn new skills and acquire trade goods. Their leadership used the threat of overwhelming numbers to gain concessions and autonomy that were not available within the Franciscan missions. Mission Indians could work at the presidio, although the priests deeply resented it. The missionaries also blocked baptized California Indians from working for the townsfolk. They argued that the soldiers and colonists negatively influenced the converts, allowing them to engage in non-Christian activities. While some Spanish soldiers did take advantage of Indigenous men and women, these labor arrangements challenged the Franciscan notion of the monolithic Spanish soldier bent on exploiting Indigenous Californians.

During the summer of 1790, a change in Spanish policy facilitated the movement of baptized Indians in and around the missions and illustrated how some California Indians used the military to counter Franciscan domination. Initiated by the Commander General of the Interior Provinces of New Spain, Jacobo Ugarte y Loyola, the royal decree demanded that civil and religious authorities ease existing restrictions on California Indians' freedom of movement, and thus opportunity, across most of New Spain's northern reaches.³¹⁰ This new law affected Fages' building plans by allowing mission Indians to travel to work sites. Lasuén supported the move as it pertained to non-Christian Indians, but vehemently opposed it for mission Indians. He declared that limiting the movement of baptized Indians ensured the success of the spiritual conquest. Before coming to the missions, Lasuén asserted that California Indians existed "scattered

³⁰⁹ Although only Fages' version of events exists, he gives examples of Ohlone leadership's satisfaction with this arrangement in *Sobre Obras de Monterey*, Monterey, August 12, 1793, BANC MSS C-A 7, 405-413.

³¹⁰ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:210-211.

throughout the hills and beaches like animals, or. . .in a society far from civilized and scarcely human.”³¹¹ Lasuén believed constraining freedom was the chief mechanism in breaking baptized Indians’ connection to their homeland and desire to see their families and that “the type of liberty we are speaking of is either directly opposed to this essential undertaking, or destroys it,” he wrote to the commander general.³¹² In a letter to Ugarte y Loyola, Lasuén explained, “It is not my understanding that our Indians can be transferred either to the presidio or to the pueblos for in neither the one nor the other is there a resident priest. Instruction will not be given there; they will forget what they have learned.”³¹³ One concession the missionaries made was sending converts to missions closer to their homes if a new establishment was founded there, for example, transferring some Chumash people from Mission Santa Barbara to La Purísima after it opened. Lasuén informed Ugarte y Loyola that the Franciscans would attempt to follow the law, but only if potential transfers did not cause great inconvenience and only “insofar as it agrees with our Indian’s way of thinking.”³¹⁴ Lasuén refused to abide by the new law directly challenged civil authority. He followed with a secret memo to the California missionaries asking them not to protest the new law, but to refuse any outsider’s transfer requests without his permission. Lasuén then promised to fully support them if they chose to block a transfer.³¹⁵

By early 1790, the constant struggles against the Franciscans in California became a series of defeats for Pedro Fages, and the governor prepared for retirement. He wanted to leave the Americas and return to Spain. In May of that year, the new viceroy, the second Count of Revillagigedo, Juan Vicente de Güemes Padilla Horcasitas y Aguayo, accepted Fages’

³¹¹ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:211

³¹² *Ibid.*

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 212.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 213.

resignation. In preparing to leave the province in which he had spent so much time, he composed instructions for his successor, José Antonio Roméu, as Neve had for him. In fact, much of what Fages wrote to Roméu mirrored Neve's earlier instructions to Fages. It was his last attempt at continuing Neve's work to stabilize relations with Indigenous Californians. Fages reiterated that sending soldiers after runaway baptized California Indians should only occur when all other means of recapture, such as using gifts and kindness, had failed. And though the missionaries would complain, Roméu was not to allow armed escorts to stay with them away from the mission overnight and escorts should be limited even during the day. Fages repeated to Roméu what he told Lasuén: there were secret orders from the king that supported these measures. Similarly, mail carriers needed armed escorts but were to avoid conflict with unbaptized California Indians, as they deserved humane treatment. In a second letter to Roméu, he went into detail about the missionaries in Baja and Alta California. Fages praised the Dominicans in Baja but warned that the Franciscans in Alta California constantly quarreled with the government and wanted total autonomy. As an example, Fages suggested that the priests in San Francisco and Santa Clara were creating their own establishments away from the missions and should be watched. Additionally, some baptized California Indians were becoming skilled horsemen under Franciscan tutelage and had developed an "Apache insolence."³¹⁶ With that message, he left control of the military and civil government to his successor.

Pedro Fages was an embodiment of the contradictions and violence inherent in the invasion and subsequent colonization of California. He was a colonial to the core and spent his adult life serving Spain in the attempted conquest of what is now the American Southwest. He was an Indian fighter who felt that dispossessing the "heathens" or "gentiles" as the Spanish

³¹⁶ Bancroft, *History of California* 1:483-485.

termed unbaptized California Indians, was a noble, if not a natural, aim. As governor, he raped a young Indian girl in his family home while residing in California's capital of Monterey, while charging his own soldiers with sexual assault against Indian women.³¹⁷ Despite all of this, he appeared earnest in his desire to protect California mission Indians from abuse at the hands of the missionaries.³¹⁸ Fages admonished the soldiers under his command to treat those same Indians with kindness. He dutifully followed Neve's policies and put his professional reputation on the line to enforce them. He believed in not pushing California Indian people towards open conflict. Fages worked to avoid bloodshed in California, having seen its results time and again on New Spain's northern frontier.

In November 1792, Lasuén again chafed at secular authorities meddling by creating new opportunities for baptized Indians to learn skills applicable in the towns or presidios. Eight Spanish workers came to California from Mexico to teach Indigenous men masonry, stonecutting, construction, tanning, blacksmithing, and cobbling, among other skills. Lasuén followed the orders issued by commander at San Francisco's presidio, José Argüello, and assigned five of the workers to Missions Santa Clara, San Carmelo, and San Francisco, but not without complaint. Several days later, he wrote the interim governor, José de Arrillaga, to air his anxieties. Three tailors were part of the contingent, which perplexed Lasuén as the Indians made their own clothes at the missions and only wore a small range of garments. This was also true for the soldiers at the presidio. Lasuén wrote the governor that he preferred the soldiers made their own clothes rather than sending Indians to the presidio. "For there is no priest there," he wrote, "and because the soldiers. . .use them for work around the house."³¹⁹ Furthermore, he argued that

³¹⁷ Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:391-393.

³¹⁸ *Fages á P. Matias, Sobre crueles castigos á indios*, Monterey June 11, 1785, BANC MSS C-A 23, 52.

³¹⁹ Lasuén to Arrillaga, Carmel, December 21, 1792, SBMAL C.M.D., doc. 154.

no market existed for a tailor's products or services because of the small number of Spaniards in California. Thus, Lasuén saw no point in teaching the Indians tailoring skills that "they would quickly forget through lack of practice."³²⁰ Lasuén found the tailors useless, felt their presence drained resources, and believed that their presumed idleness was a negative influence. Lasuén had learned from Serra to be wary of secular teachers interacting with baptized California Indians. Franciscans allowed interactions with soldiers, despite it being distasteful and often problematic, as they were sometimes necessary in cases of baptized Indians accused of committing violent crimes. However, the missionaries saw little to gain from townspeople mingling with baptized Indians. Now, workers from Mexico, with whom the missionaries had no experience, opened new possibilities for California Indian people to backslide into paganism. Lasuén concluded by reminding the governor "not only are they acquiring training they are not supposed to, but they lose the greater part of what they had acquired in religion."³²¹ Despite his protests, Lasuén lost this battle to Mexico City's desire for California's economic self-sufficiency.

The controversy over mission Indians' freedom of movement and control of their own labor demonstrated how Indigenous people counterintuitively experienced more agency with the military than with Franciscan missionaries. Since the time of Serra, the Franciscans loathed the military's desire to use Indian labor for its own ends.³²² Outwardly, they denounced soldiers as bad influences who undid spiritual progress achieved at the missions. Once Neve founded towns, Franciscans added the settlers to their list of undesirables. Inwardly, Lasuén knew that many baptized Indians never wholly embraced the Catholic faith and would gladly free themselves

³²⁰ Lasuén to Arrillaga, Carmel, December 21, 1792, SBMAL C.M.D., doc. 154.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² For a discussion on Serra's opinion on the Spanish military employing baptized Indians, see Beebe and Senkewicz, *Junípero Serra*, 285.

from the fetters of Christian life if given the opportunity. Founding new missions put Lasuén in a difficult position. New establishments required labor, more than the small Spanish population could provide. However, building projects using Indians who did not know much Spanish and did not possess the skills needed for building proved difficult and slowed progress. Fages had wanted access to relatively skilled workers to expedite construction and renovation. Thus, Indigenous men and women who wanted to leave the missions found an outlet that fostered autonomy and access to both new skills and trade goods. Though this relationship provided good results in Ohlone and Chumash territories these opportunities diminished after Fages retired in 1790.³²³

Although founding the new mission at Santa Cruz allowed for a brief period of positive relations between Natives and Spaniards, staffing the three new missions presented a host of new problems. Just as the mission system expanded in California, the strain of nearly a half-century of weakening missionary power in the Americas brought younger, less capable missionaries to the province, ushering in a period of turmoil that hastened the decline of the Franciscan order in Mexico and California.

The Padres Descontentos in Mexico City and California

In 1790 and 1791, four new missionaries arrived in California. Three of them typified the systemic issues emanating from the Spanish crown's mid-century anti-missionary policies. On August 2, 1790, Antonio Dantí and Mariano Rubí landed in Monterey.³²⁴ Several months later another much-needed influx of missionaries came to the province, including Bartolomé Gilí.³²⁵ Frays Dantí, Rubí, and Gilí all earned infamous reputations while in California. Of the three,

³²³ *Sobres Obras de Monterey*. Monterey, August 12, 1793. BANC MSS C-A 7:408.

³²⁴ Lasuén to Fages, Carmel, August 3, 1790, SBMAL C.M.D., doc 116.

³²⁵ No exact date is given for Gilí's arrival in either Maynard Geiger, *Franciscan Missionaries in Hispanic California*, 106-108; or Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén* volume 1.

Dantí became the most dangerous to California's Indigenous peoples. However, Rubí and Gilí's placement at San Antonio and Soledad demonstrated the decline in missionary leadership and character that ultimately led to a California mission system far more dangerous for baptized California Indians in the mid-1790s.

Mariano Rubí and Bartolomé Gilí arrived in New Spain in 1786 and 1788 respectively, nearly forty years after the crown placed limits on both the number of acolytes the mendicant orders could recruit and the age that those entering could take their vows.³²⁶ Like Junípero Serra, both men were born on the island of Mallorca in Spain and joined the Franciscan brotherhood before their eighteenth birthdays.³²⁷ Little is known of the pair before they came to New Spain, but nothing indicated the problematic behavior or the rebelliousness that they evidenced upon their arrival at the College of San Fernando. While their earliest months in Mexico City are also obscured, something about the institution or the realities of missionary life caused them to reportedly engage in behaviors that ranged from peculiar to disturbing.

Both Rubí and Gilí became a part of the group at the college known as the "*padres descontentos*."³²⁸ These seven missionaries chafed at the college's condition and its policy on mission temporalities. Missionary control of temporalities caused both an ongoing internal debate within the Franciscan order and between church and state within New Spain.³²⁹ This evidenced the crown's desire to constrain and minimize missionary power, but civil administrators remained quiet about temporalities. The closest thing to a decision for California was Inspector General José de Gálvez's overruling of Governor Gaspar de Portolá's decision in

³²⁶ Francisco Morales, O.F.M., "Mexican Society and the Franciscan Order in a Period of Transition, 1749-1859," *The Americas* 54, no. 3 (January, 1998), 326-327.

³²⁷ Geiger, *Franciscan Missionaries in Hispanic California*, 106, 210.

³²⁸ Beebe and Senkewicz, "Uncertainty on the Mission Frontier," 308.

³²⁹ See chapter two of this work.

Baja California to hand control of mission temporalities over to civil administrators after the Jesuits' 1767 expulsion.³³⁰ New Spain's former Viceroy, Martín de Mayorga, also wanted to relieve the missionaries from their temporal powers in the early 1780s.³³¹ Though the crown made no direct ruling, imperial officials favored missionary management of all mission spheres. However, control over a mission's material products was an issue that Franciscans debated internally since the beginning of their time in New Spain in 1524.

The first Franciscans that came to proselytize in the Americas, the so-called Twelve Apostles, brought the temporalities debate with them. It continued in various forms through the arrival of the *padres descontentos* in the late eighteenth century. The Twelve Apostles represented a reformist, millenarian branch of the order that sought a return to the "primitive" state of St. Francis himself, who sought to recreate the life of Jesus Christ. The Observants took their vows of poverty literally, as opposed to the Conventuals, who believed that property and some accumulation were necessary to increase the scope of their evangelical goals.³³² The Twelve Apostles sought a double conversion in the Americas, both for Indians, and of their missionary brethren, whom they hoped to return to a fundamentalist, medieval worldview that accepted the poverty envisioned by St. Francis.³³³ Though the Observants failed to reinstitute the virtue of poverty in their peers, the debate over temporalities and wealth continued due to the behavior of Franciscans in New Spain and Peru.

In the mid-eighteenth century, the Spanish crown became wary of Franciscans amassing too much wealth and autonomy after receiving disturbing reports of missionaries acting outside

³³⁰ Peter Masten Dunne, *Black Robes in Lower California* (Berkeley, 1952), 417; Bancroft, *History of California* 1:174.

³³¹ Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:380.

³³² Stresser-Péan, *The Sun God and the Savior*, 5; John Leddy Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World* (Berkeley, 1970), 49.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 14.

the norms of religious behavior. In 1735, Ferdinand VI dispatched Spanish naval officers Jorge Juan and Antonio de Ulloa to secretly monitor Franciscan behavior. The men uncovered a series of scandals in Peru, where Franciscans had accumulated both wealth and power. One group of missionaries had enacted a system of spiritual debt peonage on saints' days, charging Indians for saying mass, conducting sermons, and for the materials necessary for religious festivals.³³⁴ Some Franciscans were so well off that in Peruvian cities, they kept houses for their concubines and did not live at the monastery. "In large cities," Juan and Ulloa reported, "monasteries serve only those [priests] who have no possible way to maintain a house."³³⁵ These scandals spurred the 1749 secularization decree and the crown's policies reducing both the influence and numbers of missionaries in the Americas. Now at the College of San Fernando in the 1780s, the *padres descontentos*' alternate designation, *temporalistas*, represented a new challenge to Franciscan control of wealth produced at the missions. Rubí and Gilí's actions at the college and in California illustrated the bitterness of the struggle.

In the late 1780s, veteran Franciscans at the College of San Fernando in Mexico City were uninterested in debating control of temporalities with newcomers. Leadership at the college argued that strict adherence to poverty was an extremist position that infected a younger generation of recruits from Spain. The college's leader, or father guardian, Tomás Pangua argued that their recruitment of new missionaries needed to filter out possible malcontents before they arrived in Mexico. He wrote to Lasuén in California, describing the situation at the college, "some have become discontented and scrupulous over the smallest details, convincing

³³⁴ Jorge Juan and Antonio de Ulloa, *Discourse and Political Reflections on the Kingdoms of Peru: Their Government, Special Regimen of Their Inhabitants, and Abuses Which Have Been Introduced into One Another, with Special Information on Why They Grew Up and Some Means to Avoid Them*, John J. TePaske ed., John J. TePaske and Bessie A. Clement trans., (Norman, 1978), 104.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, 282.

themselves that the management of the temporalities is against the first of our rules.”³³⁶ Pangua complained that he desired a better group of missionaries, “not like those of the new system of temporalities who balk at swallowing a mosquito, then turn around and gulp down elephants.”³³⁷ Finally, he asked Lasuén to remain vigilant against anti-temporalities sentiments spreading in California. “Your reverence will endeavor” to “make them see the fatal consequence of their opinion,” he ordered, “and that far from being opposed to our religious state, the management of temporalities for the Indians is very acceptable to God.”³³⁸ While the father guardian believed he knew what God would accept, the debate over temporalities tore at the fabric of the college and California missions.

In April 1788, all seven of the new recruits known as the *padres descontentos*, including Rubí and Gilí, suddenly petitioned leadership at San Fernando for transfer to the Franciscan Apostolic College of Santa Cruz de Querétaro in Michoacán, Mexico. Though they were dissatisfied with conditions at San Fernando and the college’s stance on mission temporalities, they claimed ill health due to living in Mexico City. Three of the friars, Pedro Pinedo, Antonio Seguí, and Martín de Landaeta, who eventually went to California, secretly fled to the College of Santa Cruz, angering San Fernando’s leadership. Though Rubí and Gilí did not abandon San Fernando like their peers, Gilí drew ire for leveling complaints against the college in his petition to transfer. Aside from his poor health, he wrote that he experienced depression and frustration at not yet receiving assignment to a missionary field after two years in Mexico City. If San Fernando refused to assign him to a mission, perhaps the leadership in Santa Cruz would.³³⁹ Gilí never found out, because in June, the viceroy refused all seven petitioners and ordered the three

³³⁶ *Tomás de Pangua á Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, Mexico City, April 29, 1795, SBMAL.

³³⁷ *Tomás de Pangua á Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, Mexico City, August 13, 1794, SBMAL.

³³⁸ *Tomás de Pangua á Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, Mexico City, September 30, 1794, SBMAL.

³³⁹ Beebe and Senkewicz, “Uncertainty on the Missionary Frontier,” 305.

who ran away to Santa Cruz back to San Fernando. The college was not yet rid of its group of agitators, and over the coming two years, Rubí and Gilí's behaviors became much more disruptive.

The leadership at San Fernando, both the advisory council known as the *discretos* and Father Guardian Pangua, wrote to the viceroy to discredit and expose the two “sons of darkness,” as Pangua called Rubí and Gilí.³⁴⁰ Pangua informed the viceroy that Rubí and Gilí “manifested repugnance at the regular life” at the college.³⁴¹ He wrote that both men were malingerers and actually suffered from no illness. In his mind, because the duo found “no other excuse for withdrawing from the religious exercises, they took advantage of the charity with which our infirmary treats the sick.”³⁴² Moreover, they engaged in disruptive activities. According to Pangua's letter, they loosened bolts on storeroom doors to steal items, such as chocolate. They also stole balls that their fellows used during recreational periods. One or both men then rolled the balls up and down the floors of the missionaries' dormitories “at unseemly hours of the night,” Pangua revealed.³⁴³ The two even took kettles back to their quarters to play like drums. But Rubí and Gilí did not stop at school-boy pranks. Pangua informed the viceroy that the duo refused to participate in religious life by failing to meditate or attend choir. And when they did attend Mass, they behaved like rowdy children according to their peers. Worst of all though, Pangua reported, much like the Franciscans in Peru in the 1740s, at night Rubí and Gilí “scaled the walls of the college and went out, likely not for any virtuous deed.”³⁴⁴ The father guardian wanted the men exiled back to Spain, not rewarded with a transfer to another college.

³⁴⁰ Engelhardt, *Missions and Missionaries of California*, 2:480.

³⁴¹ *Tomás de Pangua al Conde Revillagigedo*, September 13, 1793, SBMAL, doc. 173.

³⁴² Pangua quoted in Engelhardt, *Missions and Missionaries of California*, 2:479.

³⁴³ *Tomás de Pangua al Conde Revillagigedo*, August 28, 1793 SBMAL, doc. 173

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Leadership at San Fernando implored the viceroy to ignore the duo's complaints and to refuse any future requests for a transfer. If the viceroy granted their request, "others will want to follow [their] example," he admitted, "This would open the door for everyone else to leave."³⁴⁵ The *discretos* also warned: "If this religious [Rubí] is granted his petition, others will want to follow his example...the Colegio would be left without ministers and the King's goals would be hindered."³⁴⁶ Pangua's and the *discreto*'s pleas to the viceroy revealed an anxiety embedded in their condemnation of the *padres descontentos*. The father guardian asserted that personal flaws in Rubí and Gilí were to blame for their outlandish behavior. The controversy led to a fundamental question. Were the seven frustrated missionaries the problem at San Fernando, or were they symptoms of something deeper?³⁴⁷

An April 1789 audit of the College of San Fernando conducted by Fray Romualdo Cartagena further deepened the ambiguity surrounding the college. He reported to the viceroy that San Fernando "has deteriorated from the state which I found it in nine years ago." Cartagena, like the college's leadership, found Rubí and Gilí at the heart of the current problems, as they were "filled with disgust, ill will, and desire to leave the Colegio." Moreover, Cartagena reported that "it will be impossible for the Colegio to restore itself to its former state unless Frs. Mariano Rubí and Bartolomé Gilí...leave the Colegio." However, Cartagena had also visited in 1780, and noted the college's disarray. The library and archive had gone to ruin, and the brothers were in the habit of inviting young boys to the college, which disrupted the serenity necessary for religious life. Even in 1780 Cartagena's complaints were not new. Auditors filed similar reports in 1764 and again in 1774. Another item missing from the 1789 audit was the mental

³⁴⁵ *Tomás de Pangua al Conde Revillagigedo*, August 28, 1793 SBMAL, doc. 173.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁷ Beebe and Senkewicz, "Uncertainty on the Missionary Frontier," 306-307.

health of the father guardian before Pangua, Palóu. He was an old man, who, according to Pangua, had “already approached his second childhood. In the face of the calamities, he found nothing else to do than to weep like a child and lock himself in his cell from fear.”³⁴⁸ Despite this, Cartagena concluded that he did not know what to do with the two men, because punishing them would produce no other result than infamy for the Franciscans.³⁴⁹ The college was in turmoil. But the 1789 audit did not resolve whether this outcome resulted from long-standing, systemic issues, or Rubí and Gilí’s sabotage.

That the two missionaries acted outside the bounds of acceptable behavior for Franciscan brothers at San Fernando cannot be disputed, however, their actions remain open to interpretation. Were they the incorrigible malcontents that Pangua, Cartagena, and the *discretos* described? Or did the state of the college frustrate the two priests? The answers probably lay somewhere in the middle. In their brief time in San Fernando, they went to great lengths to annoy and frustrate not only the leadership there, but their peers as well. And if the stories about their late-night forays over the college walls were true, they were reluctant to embrace the monastic life. But if they hated the Franciscan life, why did they only ask for a transfer to another college, or assignment to a missionary field? Why did they not simply abandon the order? Their correspondence indicated that both men wanted to remain Franciscans. They just wanted to be Franciscans somewhere other than the College of San Fernando. Moreover, their actions can be read as a protest. A sloppy, short-sighted form of protest, but protest, nonetheless. The two men had three basic complaints. Rubí and Gilí opposed missionary control of mission temporalities because of their views on Franciscan poverty. They chafed at the decaying state of the college. Finally, they wanted an assignment in a missionary field. They may have found their

³⁴⁸ *Tomás de Pangua al Conde Revillagigedo*, August 28, 1793 SBMAL, doc.173.

³⁴⁹ Beebe and Senkewicz, “Uncertainty on the Missionary Frontier,” 306-307.

position particularly frustrating as they understood the college's need to staff Alta California. Any of these issues may have engendered willful protests. In the aggregate, perhaps they stimulated a poorly conceived mutiny.

With no solution at hand, in 1790, Viceroy Juan Vicente de Güemes, the second Count of Revillagegido, forced Father Guardian Pangua to send Rubí and Gilí to Alta California. Revillagegido sought to establish the two new missions he ordered in October, 1789.³⁵⁰ These new missions needed priests and he hoped sending the men there might give them the purpose they craved. That same year, Gilí renewed his appeals to go to the northern province, bypassing his superiors at the college and appealing directly to Revillagegido. The viceroy knew the two men's reputation well at this point but was loath to waste the money and resources already invested in them, and refused to return them to Spain, as Pangua desired. Pangua had little choice but to send the men to Lasuén. Though he thought little of either man, he hoped that their assignments might settle the situation.³⁵¹ Of Gilí, Pangua later wrote, "It was believed that by transplanting him to a different climate and different interests he might be of some use." Pangua remained unconvinced, claiming that "Gilí is better suited for destruction than construction."³⁵² Without warning Lasuén, the college transferred both *padres descontentos* to Alta California in 1790 and 1791.

About a year after the two men arrived at their missions, Gilí at San Antonio and Rubí at Soledad, news reached Lasuén that Rubí terrorized his partner, Fray Diego García. On February 5, 1792 while at Mission Santa Clara, Lasuén received a letter from García describing the "violent friction" between himself and Rubí.³⁵³ The discord fomenting between them came to the

³⁵⁰ Juan Vicente de Güemes, Mexico City, October 31, 1789, SBMAL C.M.D., doc 99.

³⁵¹ Geiger, *Franciscan Missionaries in Hispanic California*, 106.

³⁵² Pangua quoted in Beebe & Senkewicz, "Uncertainty on the Missionary Frontier," 307.

³⁵³ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:239.

surface when the two berated each other in front of Fages' replacement, Governor José Antonio Roméu. After Roméu left Soledad, García abandoned his post and fled to Mission San Carmelo. According to García, their previous arguments became so vicious that he asked the corporal of the guard to escort him home as he feared, according to Lasuén's report, that Rubí "might lay violent hands on him, or even do worse."³⁵⁴ According to García, Rubí "carries side-arms, and that a horrible secret is attached to one of them, for he boasts that he had it with him in the college on the occasion of some disturbance."³⁵⁵ Like his superiors at the college of San Fernando, Lasuén thought the worst of Rubí. "There is no hope," he surmised, "judging by what one can see and by what all who know him report."³⁵⁶ Again, Franciscan leaders could not simply strip the man of his habit. The California mission system finally expanded, yet missionaries remained scarce.

Governor Roméu urged Lasuén to transfer Rubí away from García. Lasuén took his usual position that the good name of the missionaries must be protected above all other concerns. He seethed when Rubí broke the chain of command and asked the governor to intervene at Soledad. Both he and the governor wished to avoid making a "noisy scene" as Lasuén described it, but he worried that any veteran missionary would balk at pairing with Rubí, a known malcontent.³⁵⁷ The governor agreed with Lasuén and pledged to support any decision that he made to solve the situation. Wanting to spare his veterans from García's experience, Lasuén made a spectacular move. He paired Rubí with another of the newer men in California: Bartolomé Gilí.³⁵⁸ For a

³⁵⁴ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:241.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 240.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

time, the duo kept themselves out of trouble. Yet the peace did not last. Lasuén's reshuffling of the missionaries would produce far-ranging consequences.

Though Lasuén knew the duo caused trouble in California during their brief tenure, there is no indication in his correspondence that his superiors at the college ever told him about their behavior there, which made his choice defensible. He did not plan to pair the men for long, as there were more missionaries arriving on the next boat from Mexico. Still, that Lasuén never learned of Rubí and Gilí's antics illuminates the many problems plaguing the College of San Fernando and the missionaries they sent to California. By 1791, when Rubí and Gilí arrived, Lasuén and the California Franciscans dealt with myriad scandals and near constant fighting with the civil authorities over every aspect of mission administration. The colonial project in California needed missionaries, even if they were substandard. Furthermore, Mexico City refused to waste the king's coin by shipping the pair back to Spain, but that only explains how they ended up receiving an assignment. It does not explain why the leadership at the college never communicated Rubí and Gilí's disruptive acts and bitter attitudes to Lasuén. His previous record, particularly his concern regarding the good name of the missionaries, suggests that Lasuén would have resisted the disruptive duo coming to his missions. Even if forced to accept them, he could have prepared. Instead, the lack of information forced his hand, and he made a choice that was understandable from his position, even if it appears doomed to fail with the clarity of hindsight.

Lasuén's decision to pair Rubí and Gilí at Soledad meant finding a new home for Fray García. The aftermath of his fights with Rubí seemed more like punishment than relief. Lasuén assigned him to Mission San Antonio, which already had two men serving there, Frays Miguel Perras and Buenaventura Sitjar. This represented a demotion, as García became a supernumerary.

Lasuén understood García's unhappiness and reported to the college that the missionary now occupied "a position little in harmony with his disposition."³⁵⁹ It was not simply the new position García chafed at, but also his new home. García complained to Lasuén that he had developed a "horror and dislike" for Mission San Antonio "because of the many hazards and experiences he met there."³⁶⁰ Still he accepted the Father President's decision. Lasuén realized that the priest suffered and that García's feeling of having unjustly received harsher consequences than Rubí - the root of the Garcia's discontent - was fair. He told García to rest at San Luis Obispo until he regained his health. Then Lasuén promised him that if the situation at San Antonio proved too difficult, he would receive another transfer. García accepted these terms and vowed to work on fitting in at his new mission.³⁶¹

On April 9, 1792, while Lasuén worked out the situation of the feuding missionaries, disaster struck. Governor Roméu suddenly died. Roméu, one of the friendliest to the missionaries during the eighteenth century, only served a year in California before succumbing to an unknown illness. On his arrival, he wrote to Lasuén pledging his cooperation with the Franciscans – a message that pleased Lasuén after years of struggle with Fages.³⁶² Unfortunately, continual maladies marred Roméu's brief time in the province. Though he assisted Lasuén with the first troubles amongst the missionaries, Roméu's health stopped him from fulfilling many of his functions as governor. In March 1792, he declined rapidly and Lasuén arrived to take his last confession and give him his last rites. Roméu died in Lasuén's arms in the late morning of April 9. Many of the Spaniards in the province grieved for the fallen governor. The Franciscans welcomed Roméu because they assumed that his arrival meant a new era in relations between the

³⁵⁹ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:244.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*

³⁶² Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:489n13.

civil government and the missionaries, something they desired since Serra's time. The military grieved because Roméu was a highly respected and decorated veteran of New Spain's campaigns. Sal wrote upon the governor's death that California was not good enough for a man of Roméu's caliber.³⁶³ A council of California soldiers headed by Sal named Captain José Joaquín de Arrillaga interim governor.³⁶⁴ He followed his predecessor's lead and promoted harmony with the missionaries. Arrillaga made no attempt to manage or reform the Franciscans.

In late December 1792, Rubí and Gilí again became a problem for Lasuén. Both men reported being ill.³⁶⁵ In response, Lasuén began the process of exiling the two men from California. It is unclear how both men's history of feigned illnesses played into their exit. They once successfully turned malingering into an exit strategy. There is nothing that transpired during their time under Lasuén that suggested they did not feign illness again. Ironically, the physician Pablo Soler became Lasuén's chief aid in declaring the men unfit for their duties. He was the doctor Lasuén had charged with conspiring against the missionaries during the 1785 de la Peña affair. Lasuén smeared the doctor's medical reputation at that time. Now, in January 1793, Lasuén used the word of a colonial official he distrusted to rid himself of two missionaries that he not only wanted banished from his mission field, but also clearly came to despise.³⁶⁶

At the start of 1793, Lasuén moved forward with Rubí's removal. He wrote Soler just after the new year to ask if he believed Rubí's "illness will render him incapable of carrying out the particular duties of his ministry or make it very difficult for him."³⁶⁷ Lasuén never mentioned Rubí's particular condition and symptoms in his correspondence with the college or the

³⁶³ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:490.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 501.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 265.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 266.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

physician, only that he was ill. Even though he needed the royal government's permission to send Rubí back to Mexico, a fact of which he conspicuously reminded Soler in his letter, Lasuén did not create a paper trail documenting Rubí's malady. Soler responded that with proper medical care and medicine unavailable in California, the priest could recover in two months. The doctor bemoaned the policy that forbade Rubí from leaving for Mexico without the governor's permission since, in his estimation, Rubí could be quickly cured there. With only an interim governor in California, Lasuén felt unsure if they could send Rubí back to Mexico. Lasuén quickly mailed a copy of Soler's letter to Pangua at the college – the same father guardian who labeled the man a malingerer before sending Rubí to California.³⁶⁸

The validity of Rubí's illness remains more important than a single missionary's health on the edge of empire in the late eighteenth century. Like everything about the *padres descontentos*, the players' handling of Rubí's alleged illness illuminates the decay of Franciscan leadership in California and at the College of San Fernando, both of which had real consequences for the Indigenous peoples. First, it demonstrated imperial Spain's lack of imagination or flexibility in managing a deteriorating situation in a remote but strategically important province. Several colonial governors saw the decline firsthand and worked both to alert the royal government in Mexico City to the problems and to institute reforms. Each time, Mexican administrators with no experience in California blocked reform efforts, and even threatened Fages with a loss of title and stature if his harassment of the missionaries continued. Those same officials now worsened the situation in California when they insisted that Rubí and Gilí go there, for no other reason than to save the king's coffers from wasted expense. The royal government so desperately needed priests in California that it turned a blind eye to the

³⁶⁸ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:267.

malcontent priests' behavior, although it mirrored the problems that Juan and Ulloa reported in Peru in the 1730s. Nor did the notion that Rubí and Gilí's behavior may have threatened the fragile Spanish presence in California by angering Indigenous peoples. In the end, saving money and not upsetting the missionaries seemed to be Spain's two most important policy directives in California after 1785.

Second, the manner in which Lasuén handled Rubí's illness again demonstrated Lasuén's tendency towards cynical leadership. Though his choice to pair the men in Soledad was defensible given what is known about the situation in early 1792, once it became clear that Rubí, and later Gilí, refused to fall in line, Lasuén once again used any means necessary to rid himself of a problem and save face. That he turned to Soler, holding his medical opinion up as valid years after assassinating the doctor's character by nearly accusing him of treason and heresy in the de la Peña affair was cynical enough. That he did it at the same moment the Audiencia reviewed the 1885 charges against de la Peña in Mexico City is a historical coincidence that casts a floodlight on his hypocrisy.³⁶⁹ Lasuén probably did the right thing when he removed Rubí and Gilí from his missionary field, but his reasons were suspect. He moved to both save his men from the frustration of working with them and to save the order from further scandal, rather than removing the men from a position where they might harm Indigenous Californians, or at the very least harm the spiritual conquest. The methods he employed demonstrated a tendency towards cynicism during an era increasingly defined by upheaval – an era that demanded open-minded, flexible leadership.

In the early weeks of January 1793, Lasuén wrote a series of letters to multiple authorities in a bid to hasten Rubí's departure. He wrote the father guardian at the College of San Fernando,

³⁶⁹ See chapter one of this dissertation.

San Francisco presidio's commander, and finally governor Arrillaga. Institutional distrust immediately bogged down the process. Lasuén informed Argüello at San Francisco that Soler deemed Rubí "entirely unfitted for the duties of missionary in these parts," and had "begged" the physician to let Rubí depart.³⁷⁰ For, even if demoted to supernumerary, "he runs the risk. . .of being unfit for any kind of work," he concluded.³⁷¹ Argüello reminded Lasuén that he needed a copy of the doctor's certification before Rubí's transfer. Though the soldier told Lasuén his word was good, Argüello required documentation. When Lasuén wrote Soler to request the certificate, he asked the doctor to hurry "so that I may make the necessary arrangements with the naval personnel. . .so that we may reap the most benefit."³⁷² Soler quickly produced the certificate, which stated Rubí "has been suffering from an infirmity which has grown worse and for which a protracted treatment is necessary."³⁷³ Finally, Lasuén and Soler contended that Rubí had contracted syphilis. He had not, as doctors in Mexico later confirmed, but the priests' immoral reputation at the college made their false accusation believable.³⁷⁴ By January 31, 1793 Rubí boarded the frigate *Aránzazu* heading for San Blas, and ultimately back to the college once so eager to be rid of him.³⁷⁵

With Rubí back in Mexico, Lasuén now turned his attention to Gilí, who claimed illness kept him from his duties. Gilí continually burdened the Father President. The allegedly sick priest abandoned his post and travelled to San Carmelo and only informed his superior after he had spent several days there. Much like Rubí, no specific information regarding Gilí's medical condition emerged. The attacks that plagued him reoccurred and Gilí blamed the climate at

³⁷⁰ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:267.

³⁷¹ Lasuén to Argüello, Carmel, January 9, 1793, SBMAL, C.M.D., doc 156.

³⁷² Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:269.

³⁷³ Certification on ineptitude of Rubí, Soler, Monterey, January 10, 1793, SBMAL, C.M.D., doc 157.

³⁷⁴ Beebe & Senkewicz, "Uncertainty on the Missionary Frontier," 308.

³⁷⁵ Lasuén to Arrillaga, Santa Clara, January 31, 1793, SBMAL, C.M.D., doc 160.

Soledad. Lasuén confided to Pangua, “This made me sad, and I felt more sorry still for the fact that his sickness is always of a nature that makes it necessary for him to leave the mission to which he is assigned.”³⁷⁶ Though Lasuén once argued, rather surprisingly, that missionaries had the right to transfer if their assignment caused undue suffering, he understood malingering priests could abuse the system. He doubted that any mission in California had the climate or missionaries suitable for Gilí’s constitution or temperament. Lasuén saw Gilí as a failed missionary. Lasuén thought that neither the priest’s “mind nor his spirit is inclined to this kind of work. . . according to what I have seen or found out in the short time he has been in [California].”³⁷⁷ Lasuén requested that Pangua begin the process of allowing Gilí to retire early, but the father guardian refused, not wanting both Rubí and Gilí back at the college.

Lasuén now struggled to find a place for Gilí but managed to get the truth out of the man regarding his “condition.” In February 1793, Gilí returned to Soledad, where Rubí’s old nemesis, Fray García, now resided. The two men immediately clashed, though Lasuén never reported the cause.³⁷⁸ Gilí left Soledad and returned to San Carmelo, then wrote Lasuén in San Francisco. According to Lasuén, Gilí confessed to “an aversion to living in this country; and for this there is no remedy but to remove him from it.”³⁷⁹ The man simply wanted to leave California. Whether that was due to the country or his fundamental disagreement regarding temporalities, or any number of other factors, is unknown. Despite his Father President similarly attempting to leave the remote province decades earlier and therefore perhaps sympathizing with Gilí, legalities constrained Lasuén’s options. Dissatisfaction with the country was not enough reason to grant his retirement. In March, Lasuén advised Gilí to accept his new assignment at San Luis Obispo

³⁷⁶ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:271.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 272.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 241.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

and work hard there. This was his best hope for rehabilitating his reputation and receiving permission to retire.³⁸⁰ The disgruntled missionary followed the advice and eventually went back to Mexico in summer 1794.³⁸¹

For Lasuén, Rubí and Gilí's presence in California, and quarrels among the missionaries generally, were yet more circumstances that threatened the good name of the missionaries with the military, civilian colonists, and baptized California Indians. He knew that shifting the missionaries from one establishment to another alerted outsiders to instability within the order.³⁸² More than that, public disputes and feuds gave civil authorities like Neve and Fages the justifications needed to intervene in missionary affairs. In more populous missionary fields, where anonymity among the crowd existed, these issues could remain comparatively private. In California, where there were so few Spaniards, "everyone knows us," Lasuén bemoaned, "and if you were to shout in San Francisco the echo would quickly be heard in San Diego."³⁸³ Anxiety over this subject plagued Lasuén, and he admitted to Pangua that infighting between his missionaries continued. In September, Fray Miguel Sanchez accepted his transfer to Soledad to replace Gilí, but he too detested García, and let Lasuén know it. Lasuén begged Sanchez to swallow his pride and his distaste for the man behind closed doors, and the missionary reluctantly agreed.³⁸⁴ Though it seemed by January 1794 that Lasuén had contained the worst infighting between his missionaries, his days combating the *padres descontentos* and the *temporalistas* were not over.

³⁸⁰ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:278.

³⁸¹ Lasuén to Arrillaga, Carmel, June 7, 1794, SBMAL, C.M.D., doc 195.

³⁸² Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:272.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 288.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 289.

Though Rubí and Gilí's quarrelsome natures kept Lasuén busy putting out fires and transferring his missionaries, they were not the only frustrated priests causing him problems in the early 1790s. Frays Alonso Isidro Salazar and Baldomero López, the first two at Mission Santa Cruz, also could not get along with each other. Once again, the missionaries feuded over mission temporalities. In August 1793, both men requested a transfer simultaneously. Salazar demanded his in a tirade Lasuén termed "obscure, confused, and extreme."³⁸⁵ He wrote both men in one letter to tell them of his "great surprise" and that he had "never come upon, or seen, anything like this."³⁸⁶ Lasuén knew that their problems stemmed from the material aspects of the mission and attempted to head them off. He warned them: "Bear in mind that if all your troubles and demands spring from the temporal affairs, there is not even one mission in which I could place you without imposing upon you at the same time the management of such affairs."³⁸⁷ Lasuén did admit that temporal affairs were "burdensome. . .hindrances. . .[and] a nuisance," but they were not a problem for men "with true zeal."³⁸⁸ In another letter to Pangua in 1794, Lasuén lashed out against what he perceived as their hypocrisy. "I shall observe the disposition of the Fathers at Santa Cruz," he wrote, "who go keenly after temporal things, and then disclaim loudly against them."³⁸⁹ His superiors at the college ordered Lasuén to transfer Salazar to another mission to separate the men and "reduce their pride."³⁹⁰ By 1795, López and Salazar retired without serving their ten-year term in California. When they returned to Mexico, the viceroy's office tapped Salazar to, ironically, report on the material prospects of California. He reported that the province had rich mineral wealth that remained neglected for fear of foreign prospectors.

³⁸⁵ Geiger, *Franciscan Missionaries in Hispanic California*, 215.

³⁸⁶ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:286-287.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 287.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 308.

³⁹⁰ Pangua quoted in Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:497n35.

He also stated that the missions received less favorable treatment than the pueblos in terms of commercial trade.³⁹¹ Fray López, whom his peers labeled an ill-tempered hypochondriac, also sought a return to Mexico before his ten-year service period ended. Finally, in the summer of 1795, Lasuén tired of López's malingering and gave the man permission to retire. López forged a noteworthy career after leaving California, eventually becoming the father guardian at San Fernando.³⁹² In 1799, Salazar transferred from the College of San Fernando to the Franciscan province in Michoacán, something many of the *padres descontentos* desired.

The *temporalistas* were a source of turmoil in California, but did their behavior effect the stability of Spanish relations with California Indians at and around their respective missions? Did the quarreling between the priests damage mission operations, cause potential converts to avoid the establishments, or increase hardships for Indians dealing with these unstable missionaries? Though the missionaries kept records of baptisms, population, deaths, marriages, and the amount of livestock and foodstuffs produced at each establishment, the numbers do not contain the context needed to understand the impact missionary instability had on Indigenous people. For example, Santa Cruz reported eighty-seven baptisms in their first four months, while Soledad claimed nine conversions in a similar period. Both of these missions suffered from schisms between their missionaries.³⁹³ Owing to a paucity of information regarding Soledad's first decade, it is impossible to determine the effect of their quarrelling on the mission population.³⁹⁴ More is known about Santa Cruz's early development. Did Santa Cruz's placement between preexisting missions at Monterey and San Francisco engender more Ohlone trust in Spaniards, accounting for the higher conversion rate? Chief Suquel's daughters were baptized before Santa

³⁹¹ Geiger, *Franciscan Missionaries in Hispanic California*, 215.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 143-144.

³⁹³ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén* 2:404.

³⁹⁴ Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:499.

Cruz's founding and he and his wife were among the first baptized at that mission. However, this apparent friendliness towards the Spanish on the north coast of Monterey Bay did not spare the mission from attack two years after its founding. Tensions increased in the face of Spanish encroachment and missionary instability did not help the situation.

In 1793, after two years of building up a force of disillusioned mission Indians and hostile Ohlone people from around the San Francisco Bay Area, Charquin, a leader of the Quirostes band of Ohlone people and a baptized Christian, influenced an attack on Mission Santa Cruz. Charquin was among the first groups of adults baptized after Santa Cruz's founding. He quickly escaped the mission after only eight days in the Christian life and never returned.³⁹⁵ His reason for fleeing is unknown. According to Sal, after the missionaries failed to bring him back, soldiers hunted for him to no avail. He even bested a squad of converted Indians sent to recapture him. Charquin set up camp in a spot central to Missions Santa Cruz, Santa Clara, and San Francisco to recruit disgruntled converts into his fighting force.³⁹⁶ Tensions simmered until February 1793, when Charquin captured two baptized Quirostes couples. He captured the women, Tuiguimemis and Miscamis, and sent their husbands, Uetex and Vayas back to the mission without their weapons.³⁹⁷ The Spanish military found themselves at a crossroads. Neve and Fages avoided direct confrontation with Indigenous forces, in a bid to keep the peace around the mission and presidios. They feared the capabilities of Indigenous power if fully aroused against them. Now, without leadership focused on stability in an era when the missionaries held more power in the province, the military responded belligerently.

³⁹⁵ *Informe á Gobernador interino Joaquín de Arrillaga*, San Francisco Presidio, February 27, 1793, BANC MSS C-A 55, 163.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 164.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 161

The Spanish victory did not stop the Quirostes rebels from attacking Mission Santa Cruz on December 14, 1793. That night, a group of escaped converts and non-converted Indians surprised the mission guards. They wounded three guards and burned the guards' house and a corral. The guards managed to fire a few shots, after which the attackers fled. Neither side killed anyone, and the small skirmish ended as quickly as it began.³⁹⁸ For the next six weeks, soldiers led by Sal and Pedro Amador from San Francisco searched for the attack's leaders. During that time, they heard from informants that the hostilities stemmed from the missionaries involving themselves in local marriage arrangements. Like the Tongva people at Mission San Gabriel in 1785, bands near the Bay Area missions bristled at the intrusion into their mechanism of political alliance and social mobility.³⁹⁹ Eventually, Spanish soldiers captured their leader, a man named Pella, and sent him along with a large number of Indians from Santa Cruz to Monterey for trial and punishment. This example, an attack on a mission within its first two years by a group already familiar with Spanish culture, emerged from standard missionary practice rather than the instability caused by infighting between Salazar and López over the mission's temporal affairs.

Linking Franciscan instability directly to negative effects on newly baptized Indigenous Californians is difficult, but there is evidence that missionary autonomy under Roméu and Arrillaga produced dangerous situations, which Neve and Fages had worked to avoid. On October 31, 1794, the commissioner of San José, Gabriel Moraga, informed Argüello that one of the missionaries at Santa Clara, Fray Manuel Fernández, chased off local Ohlone people living around the pueblo with his aggressive proselytizing. Fernández was another new recruit. He arrived in California three months before Moraga's report. Indian witnesses complained to soldiers, who then observed the behavior themselves, that the priest "severely threatened"

³⁹⁸ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:299.

³⁹⁹ Please see chapter two of this dissertation.

Ohlone men and women who refused to convert.⁴⁰⁰ Fernández flogged a man with a horse whip. Local Ohlone Indians feared Fernández and told Moraga that he would burn their villages if they did not accept baptism.⁴⁰¹ An old man, known as El Mocho told the commissioner that Fernández tied him up and beat him with multiple implements. The assault left El Mocho's buttocks and waist covered with wounds and rendered him unable to walk without a cane. Moreover, Ygnacio Castro informed Moraga that an unidentified Indigenous man warned him that a large force of Indians had gathered not far from San José "determined to come and kill all the people of the pueblo and the mission," according to Moraga.⁴⁰² It was then that he contacted Argüello.

A day later, Argüello moved to stabilize the situation brewing around San José. He wrote to Sal, warning that the Indians around the pueblo were mobilizing because Fernández "set upon them with violence to make them Christians."⁴⁰³ Argüello first ordered Sal to San José, to determine what response the situation required. Once finished there, Sal headed to Santa Clara to "make the ministers understand that the disturbances provoked by the temerity and lack of prudence by [Fernández] are likely to result in an insurrection by the neighboring pagans."⁴⁰⁴ Here, Neve and Fages' fears manifested: Franciscan hubris and abuses sparked the wrath of Indigenous people. In a bid to stop a disaster before it began, Argüello sent two soldiers with Sal to escort both ministers to Mission San Francisco, hoping it would soothe some of the local's anger. Most important, Sal's actions should not further complicate the situation. Sal completed his orders and informed Argüello that when he arrived in San José some men were waiting for

⁴⁰⁰ *Informe al Teniente José Argüello*, San Jose, October 30, 1794, BANC MSS C-A 7, 125.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, 127.

⁴⁰³ *Instrucciones al Alférez Hermenegildo Sal*, Monterey, October 31, 1794, BANC MSS C-A 7, 130.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 131.

him. He persuaded them to bring their leaders to talk. The leaders, who went unnamed in Sal's report, arrived and informed the soldier that they also attempted to assuage their belligerent warriors. He reported that no uprising seemed imminent, and that local leadership felt content. Sal then offered an editorial that may have come from the stiff rebuke the military in California received during Fages' term. Revillagigedo warned Fages and his men that if they levied any false charges against the missionaries, they would receive stiff penalties. Sal told Argüello that if Fernández punished El Mocho, he probably had a good reason.⁴⁰⁵ Argüello believed the soldier, and reported the facts to the new governor, Diego de Borica, including Sal's reprimand of Moraga for reacting so quickly without checking the facts of the case. Argüello also informed Borica that he discussed the matter verbally with Lasuén, who promised to talk with Fernández and tell him to "moderate the zeal" of his proselytizing.⁴⁰⁶

The situation surrounding Fernández and the violence he employed signaled a transformation taking place within Franciscan ranks, one that the military was not prepared to confront. Fernández's accusers did not report retributive violence, which the fathers vigorously defended as an important part of religious instruction, but rather violence used to coerce Indigenous people into accepting Christianity. This was new territory for the California missionaries. Additionally, this report of violence came from Castro, a pueblo commissioner. This may explain why the penalties for falsely accusing the missionaries of wrongdoing against the Indigenous population failed to stop him. Once Sal arrived and decided that the reports were overblown, he immediately deferred to Fernández's version of events, as his experience taught him. There are many reasons leaders around San José may have preempted an attack on the town

⁴⁰⁵ *Informe al Teniente José Argüello*, San Jose, November 2, 1794, BANC MSS C-A 7, 132-133.

⁴⁰⁶ *Informe al Gobernador Diego de Borica sobre de gentiles*, Monterey Presidio, November 4, 1794, BANC MSS C-A 7, 125-126.

and mission. Many of them probably worked on Fages construction projects a few years earlier and might not want to eradicate a source of material goods and wages. Fear of the Spanish military's firepower is another likely reason. It is entirely possible that local leaders called off the attack on their own, and Sal's determination that the event held no danger did not accurately capture what occurred.

Though no attack occurred in the late autumn 1794, the credible threat revealed the growing instability in California as the Spanish province welcomed its first capable governor, Diego de Borica, since Fages' retirement in 1790. Though the military and missionaries alike admired Roméu, his health constrained his abilities nearly from the beginning of his tenure. As interim governor, Arrillaga never put his imprint on the region. For nearly half a decade, the Franciscans operated as the most prominent institution in California, with the military and its administrators working as their functionary, rather than as autonomous secular officials. In searching for a new governor Revillagigedo set a high bar, writing that the next governor in California needed "good talent, military skill, and experience, robust health. . . prudent conduct, disinterestedness, energy, and a true zeal for the service."⁴⁰⁷ The viceroy settled on Lieutenant-colonel Diego de Borica to fill the vacancy. Borica served as adjutant-inspector of presidios in Chihuahua and had experience as a Spanish military officer and an administrator.⁴⁰⁸ Whether or not Borica could live up to his superior's lofty expectations, he took the office in November 1794, just after the scare around San José and Mission Santa Clara.

Creating and maintaining harmonious relations with the missionaries topped Borica's agenda. That the missionaries in California were in the middle of a demographic shift complicated Borica's task. Between 1791 and 1795 fifteen new missionaries emigrated to the

⁴⁰⁷ Revillagigedo quoted in Bancroft, *History of California* 1:532.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

province, a substantial number considering that a total of twenty-six came between 1769 and 1790.⁴⁰⁹ In the same period, the Franciscans lost ten missionaries either due to death, retirement, or exile to Mexico. The transition caused serious internal strife among the missionaries over managing the material aspects of the missions. For the first time since coming to California, some within the Order publicly challenged the methods used in the province. A good portion of those men arriving between 1791 and 1795 objected to the College of San Fernando's stance on mission temporalities. These protesters sought transfer to another Franciscan province in Mexico. Instead, they were sent to Alta California, where the debate over temporalities became concrete rather than abstract. Following all of this were the disturbing reports about Fray Fernández and his use of violence to bring Ohlone people to the baptismal font. Managing this unprecedented situation became one of governor Borica's most important tasks.

The period between Fages' and Borica's administrations represented the only time the Franciscans in California had little to no check on their authority. Rather than being a golden age or a developmental period, discontent, strife, and decline characterized the brief interlude between governorships.⁴¹⁰ Mexico City's demands for the California mission system's expansion burdened both the waning College of San Fernando and the Franciscans in the remote province. By the late 1780s, the college was no longer the robust institution it had been when Serra, Palóu, and Crespí lived and worked there during the mid-century. As was the Spanish crown's aim, the decades of reforms and constraints on missionary power and influence took their toll, even as the government expected the College of San Fernando to spearhead the colonial project in

⁴⁰⁹ The comings and goings of the missionaries from 1791-1795 are documented throughout Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, Volume 1, and a comprehensive list is found in Bancroft, *History of California* 1:575-576n2.

⁴¹⁰ For the developmental stage argument, see Beebe & Senkewicz, "Uncertainty on the Missionary Frontier," 298, for the golden age argument, see Geary, *Secularization of the California Missions*, 52.

California. A disconnect existed between the imperial government's imagination of the spiritual conquest and the reality of the downtrodden Apostolic College of San Fernando it tapped to lead the invasion and occupation of California. Moreover, the warnings repeated by governors sent to California, that the Franciscans mismanaged both the spiritual conquest and the colony itself, failed to move Mexico City or Seville. The crown, the Audiencia, and viceroy approved of only one method for colonizing California: more missions and more missionaries, regardless of the situation on the ground. If the Spanish military opposed this plan too vociferously, the imperial government responded with a threat of heavy sanctions. Their policy of willful ignorance ultimately led to disaster.

The controversy within the California mission system regarding the management of mission temporalities surprised Lasuén, causing real problems for him and the missionaries he supervised. Just when a group of younger missionaries enflamed with ancient notions of evangelical poverty entered the order and older missionaries retired or died, Lasuén confronted the *padres descontentos*. No one in Mexico took the blame for allowing men like Rubí and Gilí, Salazar, and López, into the order; in fact, they refused to take responsibility and passed the problem on to Lasuén and the unsuspecting baptized Indians at Missions Soledad and Santa Cruz. Lasuén, to his credit, attempted to rectify the situation quickly, but bureaucratic indifference slowed his efforts. Lasuén's frustration at that indifference led him to ironic decisions, such as using Soler's word to exile Rubí after besmirching the physician's reputation several years earlier. He and Soler likewise lied about Rubí's syphilis to get him out of California. All of this served to eliminate the problem before it harmed the good name of the missionaries, rather than confronting the effect Rubí and the other *padres descontentos* had on the spiritual conquest.

Finally, the era of missionary autonomy meant fewer opportunities for California Indians throughout the region, which the experience of the Ohlone people in the southern San Francisco Bay Area demonstrated. The Spanish imperial project required Indigenous labor to build the missions, remodel presidios, and labor in towns. Some leaders, like Yanonali of the Chumash, used their positions to protect their cultural and spiritual autonomy. Others, like the unnamed Ohlone leaders around San José, demanded protection from townspeople and their Indigenous rivals for their laborers and the women and children they left behind while working on Spanish projects. Since the days of Serra, Franciscans in California sought to control Indigenous labor and argued that working for soldiers and townspeople eroded the baptized Indians' Christian teachings and should be avoided. Lasuén demonstrated these tendencies when he attempted to block new opportunities for Indigenous peoples' freedom of movement and ability to get work away from the missions.

This fight for control of Indian labor only worsened after 1795. Around the San Francisco Bay, that struggle for control, exacerbated the instability of the missionaries, heightened tensions between the Indians, soldiers, and missionaries and led to alliances between Indigenous peoples within and outside the mission sphere. These tensions, among others, and the increased missionary autonomy from 1791 through 1795 resulted in a mass exodus of converts in Mission San Francisco. It also led to bands of escaped mission Indians, along with their non-baptized allies, engaging in protracted armed conflict with Spanish forces in the most intense episode of Indigenous resistance during the eighteenth century.

The Crisis at Mission San Francisco, 1794-1797

Between 1794 and 1797, Indigenous Californians living in and around Mission San Francisco suffered the largest and most protracted calamity since the founding of Mission San Diego in 1769. During these years, a series of natural and human disasters befell local Ohlone people. First, a failed harvest drove hundreds of men, women, children, and elders to Mission San Francisco, with disastrous results. Many of the newcomers died in their first months at the mission from a swift-acting pathogen.⁴¹¹ By the spring of 1795, both newly baptized Indians and veterans fled to escape the disease. The response of the ministers at Mission San Francisco, Frays Antonio Dantí and Martín Landaeta, demonstrated the results of Franciscan primacy in California, which emerged from the period of waning civil authority in California from 1790 to 1794. The two priests unilaterally dispatched a squad of mission Indians to search for escapees in direct violation of Spanish policy in California.⁴¹² On two separate occasions, these sorties led to disaster. The first, in 1795, resulted in the massacre of seven unarmed converts; the second, occurring weeks later, provoked violence between Spanish soldiers and a coalition of East Bay tribes and Mission San Francisco escapees. As the process unfolded, baptized Indians sought assistance from the military and accused the missionaries at San Francisco of forced labor, starvation, beatings, and confinement in stocks and shackles for trivial offenses. Five years after Mexico City effectively positioned the Franciscans as the dominant institution in California after nullifying Governor Filipe de Neve's 1781 reformist legal code, the priests at San Francisco had forged an autonomous theocracy there. It was precisely the situation that former governor Pedro Fages had warned his replacement, José Antonio Roméu, about.⁴¹³

⁴¹¹ Milliken, *A Time of Little Choice*, 138.

⁴¹² Former governor Filipe de Neve's policy, *Instrucción, Saucillo*, is quoted in Beilharz, *Felipe de Neve*, 160-161, 168-169.

⁴¹³ Fages in Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:483-485.

The disaster at San Francisco was unlike any of the problems engendered by Spanish religious colonialism in California to date. The tumult tested the leadership abilities of both Father President Lasuén and Governor Diego de Borica. The crisis was not a simple case of misbehaving or malingering priests making life difficult for their peers and Father President Lasuén. Although Lasuén had successfully defended his men against accusations of cruelty due to a lack of evidence in the past, this time, a series of witnesses - both Indigenous and of Spanish decent – gave testimony revealing Frays Antonio Dantí and Martín Landaeta’s cruel treatment of baptized Indians at San Francisco. Governor Borica, who considered himself friendly to the missionaries, was aghast when he learned the scope of their violent behavior. During the two years Borica spent stabilizing the situation at San Francisco, his mental health deteriorated, and he entered a deep depression. The events at San Francisco also wore Lasuén down. The loss of so many Indian lives did not cause him to suffer, rather, the Indians’ and soldiers’ public reports denouncing his priests mortified Lasuén. He turned to the same methods he had employed to protect rank-and-file Franciscans in the past: cover-ups, bullying, and passionately defending his priests despite their violent and reckless behavior. This time Lasuén’s tactics failed, as one of Borica’s informants was the missionary Fray José María Fernández, who gave an unprecedented view inside the Franciscan order. Fernández’s whistleblowing kept Lasuén from controlling the narrative as he had in previous scandals.

In 1795, for the first time in California, a Franciscan missionary accused his peers of violence and cruelty against mission Indians.⁴¹⁴ The importance of this turn cannot be overstated. A series of young, idealistic Franciscans began arriving in California starting in about 1790. Many were *temporalistas*, or those who venerated extreme poverty as a central tenant of the

⁴¹⁴ *Fernández á Borica*, Mission San Francisco, June 27, 1797, SBMAL doc. 330.

Franciscan order and chafed at their management of the mission's material aspects. However, Fernández found new problems upon arriving in California. He protested against the treatment of baptized Indians and Lasuén's leadership. Fernández took his accusations directly to the governor, enraging Lasuén. Though Lasuén turned to his time-tested strategy of claiming that the priesthood was the victim of a vast conspiracy, that tactic now fell flat. He and Fray Buenaventura Sitjar next claimed that Fernández became demented after a blow to the skull.⁴¹⁵ Based upon the sequence of events, and Fernández's correspondence after the fact, it appeared that Lasuén punished Fernández's whistleblowing by branding him insane and exiling him to Mexico. Despite returning to Mexico, Fernández's efforts were not in vain. His reports, along with the testimony from soldiers and Indians from Mission San Francisco, formed a credible case that Dantí and Landaeta were out of control, and that Lasuén appeared either unaware or unmoved by the damage they wrought. The disaster at San Francisco revealed, finally, and completely, that Lasuén would lie, slander, and obstruct investigations to maintain the good name of the missionaries, even when they undermined the spiritual conquest in California.

The troubles at Mission San Francisco during this period also illuminate a pattern in the missionaries that Lasuén chose to protect. After assuming the presidency in 1785, Lasuén protected Tomás de la Peña from murder charges and Manuel Fernández from claims that he used violence to coerce California Indians into baptisms. Moreover, he had shielded Pedro Cambón after the missionary feuded with former governor Pedro Fages, in addition to other priests accused of price gouging or being too harsh with baptized Indians. However, Lasuén refused to defend the malcontents Mariano Rubí and Bartolomé Gilí and exiled them both to the College of San Fernando after a brief time in California. Though those two men were

⁴¹⁵ Geiger, *Franciscan Missionaries*, 84.

troublemakers for the order both in Mexico and California, their actions did not match those of de la Peña or Fernández. As the crisis at Mission San Francisco played out, Lasuén again found two of his men, Frays Dantí and Landaeta facing significant charges, such as instigating a massacre of baptized California Indians, forcing mission Indians to work with little or no food, and torturing those who resisted or escaped. Instead of distancing himself from Dantí and Landaeta, he, for a time, denied that there were any problems at Mission San Francisco. Instead, he turned his ire upon a third missionary, the whistleblower Fernández, who alerted Borica to the problems at the troubled mission. This pattern of protecting violent, rogue missionaries and ostracizing priests he found disturbing would continue through the end of his life.

The Beginning of the Crisis

The swift series of events leading to the disaster that engulfed Mission San Francisco from 1795 to 1797 began in late in 1794. The destabilization of traditional tribal cultures in and around the San Francisco Bay intensified after the founding of the San José pueblo, Mission Santa Cruz and the other Spanish outposts in the region that reconfigured Indigenous lifeways. Ohlone people of many tribes moved to find work, convert to Christianity, or avoid the Spanish invaders altogether. Spain's colonial machinations and Indigenous responses to them formed a new network of Native alliances and rivalries, subsistence needs, and opportunities for the spread of disease. These factors coalesced in the late fall in 1794 when coastal Northern California suffered a loss of crops due to drought, severely affecting the region around Mission San Francisco. During the following winter, two hundred local Ohlone Indians came to the mission seeking food. The influx nearly doubled Mission San Francisco's population.⁴¹⁶ Several years of

⁴¹⁶ Lasuén *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:361; Milliken, *A Time of Little Choice*, 137, Randall T. Milliken, "An Ethnohistory of the Indian People of the San Francisco Bay Area from 1770 to 1810" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1991), 555.

rapid change combined with an unexpected loss of food set off a small-scale migration of hungry and desperate people. An unknown epidemic infecting both Missions San Francisco and Santa Clara in March 1795 became the spark that ignited the conflagration.⁴¹⁷

After the epidemic subsided in early April, many newcomers to Mission San Francisco left the site and returned to their homes, prompting Fray Antonio Dantí to act. Mission policy dictated that baptized California Indians required permission to go on *paseo*, or a short trip to visit relatives. A group of Saclan Indians, a tribe of East Bay Miwok people, returned to their homeland in the hills east of present-day Oakland but failed to return when their *paseo* ended. Their failure to return caused Dantí, one of the few remaining *temporalistas* in California, to take matters into his own hands. Dantí was a Catalonian Franciscan born in 1760, who came to California in 1790 with Bartolomé Gilí. The Spanish military considered him a hothead. Governor Borica called him *genio de pólvora* – or explosive tempered - and even Lasuén hoped to avoid his “querulous” nature.⁴¹⁸ Dantí’s temper led to a reckless decision directly opposed to the peace in California that Neve and Fages worked to maintain. He ordered a group of fourteen Christian Indians on a secret mission to search for the missing Saclans and forcibly return them to San Francisco.⁴¹⁹ Dantí, revealed both his inadequate knowledge of the tensions simmering around the Bay after six months of hardship and dislocation, and of military tactics, when he told his squad to only bring ropes to tie up the truant Saclans.⁴²⁰ He forbade them to bring weapons,

⁴¹⁷ Erwen H. Ackerknecht, *History and Geography of the Most Important Diseases* (New York, 1965), 32.

⁴¹⁸ Geiger, *Franciscan Missionaries*, 62; Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:344.

⁴¹⁹ *Sobre persecución de Indios Cristianos*, Monterey, May 29, 1795, BANC MSS C-A, 489.

⁴²⁰ José Pérez-Fernández, *Informe al Gobernador Borica sobre persecución de Indios Cristianos*, San Francisco Presidio, May 29, 1795, BANC MSS C-A 7, 490.

“assuring them that the pagans would not be able to do any harm to the Christians,” according to Governor Borica’s later report.⁴²¹

In late April, as Father Dantí’s squad prepared to cross the bay, they were unaware that the Saclan runaways and their allies would fight rather than return to Mission San Francisco. Two *alcaldes*, Pasqual and Rogerio, led the operation, along with three veteran mission Indians and nine newcomers, all hailing from the East Bay. After crossing the frigid water in small crafts, the squad rested for the night and continued hunting the missing Saclans the next morning. At mid-day on April 29, they found an empty Chaclanes village. The group split up as it began to rain, some staying at the Chaclanes’ village, and the others heading out into the storm, searching into the night. The next day, with no sleep and little rest, the mission squad arrived at a Chimenes town. By this time, the group had regained all its members. Unlike the Chaclanes village, the Chimenes town contained nearly a thousand people. Immediately upon their arrival, a group of men sprang from a dance house “with such force that they broke down the walls,” according to an eyewitness.⁴²² While shouting “these men are our enemies,” the Chimenes fired arrows at Pasqual and Rogerio’s men.⁴²³ As the arrows flew, Pasqual and Rogerio ordered their men to flee and tried calming their assailants. They shouted that the group was unarmed and did not seek violence. Their words had no effect. The East Bay warriors attacked, leaving seven baptized Indians, unarmed and unable to defend themselves on Dantí’s orders, dead in the Chimenes town.⁴²⁴

⁴²¹ José Pérez-Fernández, *Informe al Gobernador Borica sobre persecución de Indios Cristianos*, San Francisco Presidio, May 29, 1795, BANC MSS C-A 7, 490.

⁴²² Diego de Borica, *Borica al Virrey Miguel de la Grúa Talamanca y Branciforte*, Monterey, June 23, 1795, translated in full in Milliken, *A Time of Little Choice*, 287.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, 287.

When the survivors made it back to San Francisco, Dantí reeled at the news of the calamity he had authored. His orders resulted in the loss of seven baptized Indians. One survivor, Oton, who fled as the killing commenced, informed the missionary of the slaughter. Dantí's response demonstrated that Lasuén's tactics had trickled down to the rank-and-file Franciscans: he immediately called Oton a liar. Oton insisted that he told the truth, and that half of the squad lay dead in the East Bay hills. Unable to deny the man's emotional recounting, Dantí relented, but ordered Oton to cover up the secret mission. "Then be careful about what you say to any soldier or the commander will find out," he warned, "Be careful to say nothing."⁴²⁵ Dantí's cover-up failed, as the news spread quickly through Mission San Francisco. The Spanish soldier, Second-Lieutenant José Perez-Fernández, later captured the mood around the mission in his report to Governor Borica, writing, "But the occurrence was already known to all, as the women were crying inconsolably."⁴²⁶

By May 3, Dantí realized that news of the calamity had spread beyond his control and acted. Dantí did not first write to Lasuén. Instead, against the father president's wishes, he broke the chain of command and informed Borica. Dantí wrote that the squad, made up of "old-timers here," disobeyed his orders when they continued searching for the missing Saclans after finding the first village empty.⁴²⁷ Oton's testimony to both Perez-Fernández, and later to Borica, made no mention of Dantí's orders. The missionary also expressed remorse over the needless loss of life and admitted his "terrible transgression." Turning sympathies back on himself, Dantí declared the news of the baptized Indians' deaths "a great pain for me" and "the most abundant

⁴²⁵ Pérez-Fernández, *Informe al Gobernador Borica sobre persecución de Indios Cristianos*, BANC MSS C-A 7, 490.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁷ Fray Antonio Dantí, *Dantí al Gobernador Diego de Borica*, Mission San Francisco, May 3, 1795, translated in full in Milliken, *A Time of Little Choice*, 285.

harvest of sorrow that I could expect in my life.”⁴²⁸ His decision to send an unarmed group of men to capture escaped mission Indians, and his attempted cover-up of the resulting massacre demonstrated the hubris that typified the Franciscans in California since the nullification of Neve’s *reglamento* in 1787.

Dantí’s actions throughout the spring of 1795 are a coalescence of several tensions that led to the decline of the California mission system. First, his presence in California resulted from the 1749 royal secularization decree and the policies that followed aimed at reducing the numbers and influence of the mendicant orders in New Spain. Dantí was a part of the *padres descontentos* cohort recruited after 1749. Decay had set in for the Franciscan order in both Mexico and California. It is difficult to know how the situation at the College of San Fernando affected the recruits that came through it, but many of that cohort proved unfit or too unstable for life in California. Second, Dantí’s operation demonstrated the lack of respect the Franciscans had for civil authority in California. The missionaries began their feud with provincial governors and Spanish soldiers during Serra’s period and relations became icier after Lasuén’s ascent to father president in 1785. A decade later, and after a period of four years of almost total autonomy in California, disrespect of civil authority was embedded in Franciscan institutional culture. It mattered little to Dantí that the governor and viceregal government both disapproved of forcible recapture missions; he wanted the baptized Indians to return. Finally, Dantí’s recapture operation is a function of the increasing use of violence to enforce even the most basic elements of missionization. Franciscans had often claimed that they only resorted to punishment to correct serious religious or social transgressions. Dantí’s actions when combined with Fray Manuel

⁴²⁸ Dantí in Milliken, *A Time of Little Choice*, 285.

Fernández's forced recruitment illustrate the Franciscans' reliance on coercion to recruit new converts and to keep baptized Indians in the fold.

Governor Borica's Response

In the weeks following the disaster, Governor Borica prepared for the violence that he expected in the wake of Dantí's ruinous plot. Only a year passed since the governor learned about Fray Manuel Fernández's threats of violence near San José.⁴²⁹ He now had another Franciscan provoking Ohlone people. Though the rumors of an attack on Spanish settlements never materialized, Borica now had mounting evidence that missionaries were actively destabilizing the San Francisco Bay region and antagonizing the California Indian people there. He feared that the violence in the East Bay hills might trigger large-scale fighting. On May 4, he informed Dantí of an official investigation.⁴³⁰ That same day, Borica notified Viceroy Miguel de la Grúa Talamanca y Branciforte in Mexico City of the failed recapture operation and resulting slaughter. Two days later, he wrote the San Francisco presidio warning soldiers that "we should go about our business as though the enemy were really in view."⁴³¹ On June 6, he again notified the Viceroy that he had taken precautions with his soldiers who went out to various Indian settlements around the San Francisco Bay. He also reiterated orders to the soldiers that they must treat Indians respectfully as to maintain peace and tranquility. Borica instructed them to leave villages if any Indians demonstrated hostility, because the small patrols could be easily overwhelmed.⁴³² Even as weeks went by without any attacks, Borica remained vigilant.

⁴²⁹ *Informe al Teniente José Arguello*, San José, October 30, 1794, BANC MSS C-A 7, 125.

⁴³⁰ *Borica al P. Ant. Dantí*, Monterey, May 4 1795, BANC MSS C-A 24, 145.

⁴³¹ *Borica al commandante de San Francisco*, Monterey, May 6, 1795, BANC MSS C-A 24, 46; Borica gave a similar order on July 6, 1795, see *Borica al commandante de San Francisco, sobre quella tropa este siempre con mucha vigilancia*, Monterey, July 6 1795, BANC MSS C-A 25, 58.

⁴³² *Borica al Virrey Precauciones pr. Mantener los Indios en respecto y en paz*, Monterey, June 3 1795, BANC MSS C-A 24, 52.

After visiting Mission San Francisco and conducting his own interviews, the governor briefed the viceroy in full, revealing his plan for containing tensions in the region. The governor's interrogation of Oton, the survivor from Danti's squad, contradicted the Franciscan's claim that he had ordered the squad to search only one village for the runaway converts.⁴³³ Demonstrating the deep Spanish distrust of Indigenous informants, Borica accepted the priest's version of events. He informed Branciforte: "this tragedy must be attributed to the failure of the *alcaldes* to follow the direction of their ministers" to stop searching if the escaped mission Indians were not in the Chaclanes village, "according to what they told me."⁴³⁴ However, Borica chose to believe the intelligence Oton provided regarding the Chimenes. Oton told the governor that they were a "rough and valiant lot...they are continuously at war with neighboring groups."⁴³⁵ Borica looked to avoid hostilities with the Chimenes, citing their great numbers, martial prowess, and distance from the mission as reasons to avoid engagement. He divulged to Branciforte that he feared angering the Chimenes because their territory included Bodega Bay "where in the course of time they could do quite a lot of harm to us as declared enemies," by assisting any foreign powers, such as the Russians or the British, attempting to gain a foothold in California.⁴³⁶ Also, he reminded the viceroy that the Chimenes had not attacked "vassals of the king, but [only] Indians."⁴³⁷ Borica sent assurances that missionaries never again would send a search party across the bay after escapees from Mission San Francisco. Suspecting that Lasuén might not comply, Borica instructed the commander at San Francisco Presidio to inform him immediately of any transgression.⁴³⁸

⁴³³ Borica in Milliken, *Time of Little Choice*, 287.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 288.

Borica's hunch that the missionaries would not follow his orders proved correct. On July 6, the governor learned that the San Francisco priests had sent out another squad of converts to hunt more escaped baptized Indians in the East Bay hills. Borica wrote to Fray Landaeta to admonish him and to once again warn him not to engage in such provocative and dangerous actions. The governor was "very uncomfortable about the matter of having sent Indians to the other band in spite of the instructions against it."⁴³⁹ In a veiled threat, Borica told Landaeta that he and Dantí would be wise to honor the agreement made between the Franciscans and the military regarding runaways and proselytizing with escorts. In Borica's view, keeping the province safe and quiet was as much the Franciscans' responsibility as the military's. The two priests at San Francisco abdicated that responsibility when they sent Dantí's squad into a heavily populated and possibly hostile area. In a less veiled threat, Borica warned Landaeta that if he and Dantí continued to send baptized Indians to the East Bay, his next steps would cause scandal for the mission. "I beg," he concluded, "with the highest urgency and with the authority of my position that you absolutely refrain from dispatching Indians under any pretext to the other shore."⁴⁴⁰ On July 23, he contacted Landaeta again, reminding the priest to always treat the Indians with patience.⁴⁴¹ These letters, written well after the events, demonstrate the lingering concerns Borica held regarding the province's peace and stability and the fragility of Spain's presence in California.

While Borica, Lasuén, and Dantí closed ranks and blamed the squad's refusal to follow orders for the massacre of seven unarmed men, the Indians at San Francisco mission rejected that version of events. Even before Dantí's ill-fated raid, the newest arrivals, many of whom had

⁴³⁹ *Borica a P. Martín Landaeta*, Monterey, July 6, 1795, BANC MSS C-A 24, 470.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 471.

entered the mission after the failed harvest in 1794, evidenced disillusionment with Christian life. After the events of April 29, what started as a trickle of people fleeing the mission turned into a deluge. In late summer of 1795, Fray Landaeta confided to the Spanish soldier José Perez-Fernández that a mass exodus was underway at San Francisco. No less than 280 baptized Indians had abandoned Mission San Francisco by August. Even long-time mission Indians fled. Moreover, women and men from tribes throughout the peninsula left for the east and north bay shores, dramatically redrawing lines of alliance and rivalry throughout the region. Perez-Fernández spoke to a converted man named José Miguel, who returned to the presidio with two other men from the East Bay. José Miguel said a runaway named Enrique was killed in that area, and that seven long-time converts, along with thirteen women and their children now lived in a village called Pucac. Perez-Fernández asked José Miguel to tell the leader of Pucac that if the escapees harbored there returned, the Spanish military would give them gifts and release an East Bay prisoner they held. For his part, José Miguel accepted his punishment for fleeing San Francisco, but he insisted that he not receive it “at the mission.”⁴⁴² José Miguel’s motives for taking his punishment at the presidio rather than the mission remain a mystery. Did he not want to give the Franciscans the satisfaction of punishing him? Did he think that the lashing would be less brutal at the presidio? Whatever the reason, his request, along with the mass exodus of 280 converts demonstrated that the Indigenous people of the Bay Area were rejecting life at Mission San Francisco.

The crisis at Mission San Francisco did not mark the first time Indigenous Californians left their missions against the missionaries’ wishes, however, it did mark an inflection point in the scope and in the types of escapees. Newly baptized Indians, and even some veterans, often

⁴⁴² José Pérez-Fernández, *Informe al Gobernador Borica*, San Francisco Presidio, September 13, 1795, BANC MSS C-A 7, 360-361.

chose returning to their homes, or another friendly locale, over continuing their lives at a mission. Estimates of the number of mission Indians who abandoned their mission either temporarily or permanently are useful but imperfect and range from between 5 per cent to 10 per cent during the mission period, from 1769-1834.⁴⁴³ Moreover, groups of mission Indians escaping had occurred before. In 1782, for example, Pedro Fages persuaded a group of escapees to return to Mission San Diego through the promise of pardons and the threat of torture.⁴⁴⁴ Before the crisis, escapees from the missions tended to be individuals or small groups over longer periods or time, rather than scores of people fleeing in mere weeks.⁴⁴⁵ After 1797, this changed. In 1799, Spanish soldiers captured fifty escapees and returned them to Mission San Juan Bautista.⁴⁴⁶ In 1800, Sergeant Pedro Amador captured twenty runaways during a violent raid on a Saclan village.⁴⁴⁷ In 1804, the future father president of the missions, Estevan Tapís claimed, “fugitives are increasing and the only remedy is an immediate increase of military force.”⁴⁴⁸ Although these escapes from several Northern California missions may not have been directly influenced by the 280 who fled Mission San Francisco, in concert, these defections speak to an increasing dissatisfaction with Christian life. That dissatisfaction resulted from declining circumstances wrought by both the rapid growth of the California mission system in the 1790s and the violent and reckless new missionaries arriving in the region.

⁴⁴³ For an argument for the lower estimate, see Hackel, *Children of Coyote, Missionaries of Saint Francis*, 326-329, and Milliken, *A Time of Little Choice*, 95; for an argument for the higher estimate, see Sherburne F. Cook, *The conflict between the California Indian and white civilization* (Berkeley, 1943), 59-61.

⁴⁴⁴ Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:384.

⁴⁴⁵ For arguments supporting this view, see Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:584-584; and Benjamin Madley, “California’s First Mass Incarceration System: Franciscan Missions, California Indians, and Penal Servitude, 1769–1836,” *Pacific Historical Review* 88, no. 1, 38-40.

⁴⁴⁶ Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:558-559.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 712.

⁴⁴⁸ Hubert H. Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft Volume XIV History of California II* (San Francisco, 1886), 26-27.

Father President Lasuén's Response

After nearly a month had passed, Father President Lasuén acknowledged the massacre and defended Dantí's methods. Lasuén accepted his subordinate's version of the events, including Dantí's assertion that he ordered the squad to search one village and then return. Lasuén remained certain that Dantí's orders protected the priest from formal accusation.⁴⁴⁹ He also reminded Dantí that recruiting Indians into the Christian fold worked best when they came to the missions on their own. He felt sending converts, particularly recent ones, to recruit new Indians to the missions would result in them rejecting Christian life in favor of their traditions. While emphasizing the free will of potential converts, Lasuén refused to unequivocally ban Dantí from sending out search parties. On one hand, he understood that the most successful path to conversion involved curious men and women approaching the missions on their own. On the other, he told the priest that raids might still be necessary, and that they could be successful if "executed on a larger scale, and [with] more suitable protection."⁴⁵⁰ Lasuén's continual refusal to prohibit recapture raids, particularly after a massacre, had immediate effects, as Fray Martín Landaeta, Dantí's partner at San Francisco, sent out another squad in late June.⁴⁵¹

On June 15, Lasuén finally discussed the massacre with Governor Borica. He immediately denied Dantí's culpability. Rather than focusing on the massacre, he emphasized his displeasure with Borica's ban on presidio soldiers or mission guards escorting missionaries on overnight proselytizing journeys. Lasuén implored that "this assistance not be denied us so that we may carry out our ministry when emergencies of major importance arise."⁴⁵² He argued that without military protection, the missionaries' lives were in jeopardy. Although no good

⁴⁴⁹ Lasuén quoted in Engelhardt, *Missions and Missionaries of California*, 2:499-500

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ *Fernández á Borica*, Mission San Francisco, June 27, 1797, SBMAL, doc. 330.

⁴⁵² Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:338.

missionary feared for his own life, Lasuén worried about “the vengeance that will be meted out to the Indians” if they killed a priest.⁴⁵³ He similarly expressed concern for the well-being of soldiers, who would be overworked, thereby undermining the spiritual conquest and threatening the province’s stability. In short, Lasuén took no responsibility for Dantí’s actions, nor offered any thanks to the governor for the services rendered by soldiers in the weeks after the April 29 raid into East Bay Miwok territory. Lasuén’s response, one of complete denial, stood in stark contrast to Borica’s. The only indication of Borica’s opinion regarding Lasuén’s complaints was his total lack of response to them.⁴⁵⁴

On June 30, Lasuén acknowledged the massacre to his superior at the College of San Fernando in Mexico City. He wrote to Fray Antonio Nogueira, the new guardian there, complaining of the “evil results and inconveniences” of Borica’s decision to ban overnight escorts for the missionaries.⁴⁵⁵ Lasuén claimed that Borica’s motive for the ban was a “chance misfortune that happened in San Francisco.”⁴⁵⁶ Lasuén reported that “ten or twelve” mission Indians went across the bay to bring back some runaways. According to Lasuén’s version, both Dantí and Landaeta warned the squad “strongly on no account to go beyond a certain ranchería.”⁴⁵⁷ Lasuén’s sanitized account bore little resemblance to the actual events. Lasuén assured Nogueira: “there was no risk involved in the enterprise, if only it had been carried out according to the instructions of the Fathers.”⁴⁵⁸ Lasuén’s account stood in stark contrast to

⁴⁵³ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:338.

⁴⁵⁴ Lasuén reported to Nogueira that he received no response in *Ibid.*, 341.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Borica's, who reported the affair in exacting detail. Lasuén only informed the college in case "some recrimination be made in regard to it."⁴⁵⁹

While Lasuén remained quiet regarding the massacre for the rest of 1795, Governor Borica continued investigating the problems that caused so many baptized Indians to flee Mission San Francisco. He again contacted Dantí directly, who had transferred away from San Francisco after the massacre. Borica accused Dantí of creating living and working conditions that Indigenous Californians refused to accept. "Let us stop fooling ourselves," Borica chided the priest, "If their lives do not improve after they come to the mission they will remain in their lands."⁴⁶⁰ He also suggested that the missionaries at San Francisco "treat [the converts] with love by having them work in proportion to how much you can feed them."⁴⁶¹ His last admonition was instructive. A secular official – the exact type which Serra, and to a lesser degree Lasuén, had both repeatedly denounced as being opposed to the Indians' well-being – reminded a priest of the Christian faith to feed the men, women, children, and elders in accordance with their labor.

More Missionary Troubles around California

During the first half of 1796, tensions between Borica and the missionaries in Northern California eased, but by the summer conflict between the governor and the priests again escalated. On May 27, Lasuén wrote an angry letter to Fray Manuel Fernández, the priest accused of resorting to forced recruitment of Ohlone people around Mission Santa Clara in 1794.⁴⁶² In the days leading up to the angry missive, the governor confronted Lasuén over the missionary's violent reputation. According to the governor, Fernández admitted to a soldier that he ran down a runaway convert with his horse, knocking him violently into the mud. Another

⁴⁵⁹ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:341.

⁴⁶⁰ *Borica á Dantí*, Monterey, November 3, 1795, BANC MSS C-A 24, 474.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶² See chapter three of this dissertation.

Indian man hid in the bushes and fired an arrow at Fernández but missed by the narrowest of margins, leaving the arrow in the Franciscan's habit. Incensed, Lasuén recorded his "great humiliation" at "being reproached in regard to these matters by His Lordship."⁴⁶³ Furthermore, Borica charged that Fernández took a soldier, an Indian auxiliary, and some converts out on this covert mission that lasted three days and two nights. The matter of missionaries bringing soldiers out with them on overnight proselytizing missions remained a continuing source of tension between the government and the Franciscans. Lasuén refused to believe that these accusations were true, citing Fernández's "intelligence enough to know that such enterprises require...a justifiable necessity."⁴⁶⁴ He demanded that the priest tell him everything he knew regarding the situation, as formal charges were being prepared against Fernández, something that had not occurred since the de la Peña murder case at Mission Santa Clara in 1785.

That same day, Lasuén wrote to Nogueira in Mexico City to prepare the father guardian for the military's planned inquest. After complaining of "a government which institutes juridical inquires because of a simple conversation of no great importance," Lasuén informed his superior that one of their priests at the very least had tried to kill a baptized Indian who fled the mission.⁴⁶⁵ Lasuén's contempt of civil authority was clear, but by this point in 1796, Borica had enough experience in California to see a pattern of Franciscan belligerence that destabilized the province. At multiple missions over a year and a half, a group of newer missionaries' recklessness threatened to spark conflict between Spaniards and Indigenous peoples around the San Francisco Bay. Borica now had a priest admitting that he committed assault, if not attempted murder. Lasuén adopted a stance of dispassionate indifference with Nogueira, but his tone with

⁴⁶³ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:380.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 381.

Fernández illustrated his mounting concerns. Lasuén confirmed the widening gulf between himself and the governor when he informed Nogueira that Borica would not let Lasuén accompany him to Santa Cruz to begin the investigation. Lasuén admitted he did not know how this episode would end, as “some similar examples of inconsiderate haste have been observed in [Fernández].”⁴⁶⁶ In previous instances of this kind, Lasuén resisted admitting that any of his priests were guilty of wrongdoing. Borica took swift action because he had a confession. The governor had Lasuén on the defensive.

During his conflict with the governor that occupied Lasuén in 1796, some missionaries continued pressing for retirement and fighting among themselves. In the wake of his scandal, Dantí repeatedly requested that the father president grant his retirement. Several of his colleagues did the same. Tensions brewed when no immediate word on the retirement requests came from Mexico City. Lasuén and the Franciscans still faced the same labor shortage that existed before the mission system’s expansion. There simply were not enough priests at the College of San Fernando in Mexico City to immediately replace outgoing Franciscans from California. Some missionaries, such as the aforementioned Dantí and Fray Baldomero Lopez, were “despondent” with life in California, according to the father president.⁴⁶⁷ Some of the missionaries’ unhappiness with any assignment added to these frustrations. A few Franciscans had moved from mission to mission, without satisfaction, as was the case with Fray Antonio Jayme. Jayme asked for a transfer away from Santa Cruz and Lasuén relocated him to Mission San Antonio. Jayme then confessed to Lasuén that he held “a thousand fears lest in that mission he would again become morose, become ill, and end up . . . becoming incapacitated.”⁴⁶⁸ Earlier in the year, Fray

⁴⁶⁶ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:281.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 372.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Juan de la Cruz Espí also resisted a transfer to San Antonio. That mission was the home of Fray Buenaventura Sitjar, who was advanced in age by 1796, and a close friend of Lasuén's. Though no one ever mentioned it directly, the younger generation of missionaries' correspondence revealed no joy in pairing with the older stalwart. The lack of a solution pained Lasuén.

After the accusations against Fray Fernández came to light in the summer of 1796, Lasuén scrambled to find pairings of men that would stabilize life at the affected missions. By June, two more men, Frays José de Arroita and José Calzada, both of Mission La Purísima Concepción, near Santa Barbara, vehemently demanded to return to the college. "Neither have I been able to retrain despite all my pleadings, prayers, and requests," Lasuén wrote, "and I made them as forcibly as I could."⁴⁶⁹ He admitted defeat to Nogueira, "I cannot do otherwise than give them permission to retire to the college."⁴⁷⁰ These requests compelled another reshuffling of priests. While at Mission San Francisco in late June, Lasuén replaced Dantí with a new missionary, a twenty-three-year-old named Fray José María Fernández, who had just arrived on the frigate *Aránzazu* from Mexico.⁴⁷¹ This assignment of a new priest in his most problematic mission engendered consequences Lasuén could not foresee.

In July, Lasuén sent a formal retirement request for four of his missionaries, Dantí, López, Calzada, and Arroita to Governor Borica and to the College of San Fernando.⁴⁷² The first three men complained of maladies that prohibited them from completing their duties as missionaries (though Lasuén noted López's hypochondria and unfitness for missionary labors), and Arroita had completed his ten years in California. He immediately followed that request with another letter to the college expressing his concern that Borica would cause an "inopportune

⁴⁶⁹ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:384.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷¹ Geiger, *Franciscan Missionaries in Hispanic California*, 84.

⁴⁷² Lasuén to Borica, Carmel, July 20, 1796, SBMAL C.M.D., doc 271.

and...noisy scene” over the requests.⁴⁷³ He also revealed that Frays Francisco Sánchez and Pascual Martínez de Arenaza had asked to retire, but that he had negotiated one more year of service from both of them. Despite his fears regarding Borica’s obstinance, the governor did not interfere with the retirements, because larger and more pressing concerns occupied his attention.

Throughout the summer, an unrelated issue of trained artisans from Mexico coming to California had also increased tensions between Borica and Lasuén. Lasuén opposed baptized Indians working with civil elements. A new development emerged over the course of 1796. The viceregal government now wanted mission Indians to learn new crafts at the presidio rather than sending the artisans to the missions. Moreover, Borica determined that the craftsmen might require full-time Indian servants to complete their work. Lasuén strenuously opposed this reform. He argued that the governor’s plan obstructed Christian instruction and placed the spiritual conquest in jeopardy.⁴⁷⁴ The tensions between Lasuén and Borica over the situation with Fray Manuel Fernández, the crisis at San Francisco, and the imposition of the artisans had the father president livid. The rank-and-file priests apparently shared Lasuén’s displeasure. The artisans themselves complained to Borica that the priests at Mission San Carmelo refused to cooperate with them. The men told Borica that one of the priests, Fray Arenaza, said they would only comply with the viceroy’s orders, not the governor’s. Once the artisans revealed that the orders for servants in fact came from the viceroy, Arenaza responded: “away with you, sir. The viceroy does not know what goes on here.” He continued, “As to all these matters, they pertain to the Father president. Speak to him.”⁴⁷⁵ Realizing the gravity of this insult, Lasuén attempted to control the damage. “As regards my obedience, submission, and reverence for authority...of this

⁴⁷³ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 385-386.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 391.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

I have given proof during the thirty-three years of my ministry, some twelve of them in the office of president, in contact with all types of superiors from the lowly corporal of the guard...to the Viceroy,” he fumed in a letter to Borica.⁴⁷⁶ After calling the artisans liars, Lasuén admitted that Arenaza was too quick with his tongue at times, though always in service to a joke. Arenaza spoke with the weight of Viceroy Revillagigedo’s 1787 nullification of Filipe de Neve’s *reglamento* behind him. Nearly a half decade passed since Revillagigedo threatened then-governor Fages and his men with severe penalties if they interfered with the management of mission Indians. Moreover, because Lasuén lived at San Carmelo, Arenaza likely spoke with the knowledge of the father president’s outlook in mind. Arenaza’s behavior epitomized the Franciscan arrogance that had so consumed Neve, Fages, and now Borica.

In August, Borica sought to learn firsthand what Arenaza said and what the priest actually meant. Borica went to San Carmelo to formally investigate Fray Arenaza’s treasonous statement. Borica examined two witnesses. One of them claimed that when Arenaza said “As to all these matters, they pertain to the Father president. Speak to him,” he literally meant that the father president stood nearby, and the artisan should speak to him face-to-face.⁴⁷⁷ Lasuén reiterated that the whole episode was a joke gone wrong. When the questioning ended, Lasuén informed Borica that the proceedings irritated him: “I assure you, if they [the English] attack us their bullets will not have to be as powerful, in order to drive us from this land, as the impact of seeing such matters reduced to judicial formality.”⁴⁷⁸ Unbeknownst to Lasuén, more judicial formalities awaited him. Ten days earlier, and without the father president’s knowledge, Borica received a letter from the new man at Mission San Francisco, Fray José María Fernández. Its

⁴⁷⁶ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:391.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 395.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

contents far outweighed Arenaza's flippant comments. For the first time in California, a Franciscan missionary leveled charges of abuse and neglect against his fellow missionaries.

A Franciscan Whistleblower Emerges

On August 11, 1796 Fray Fernández sent a secret message to Borica detailing the cruel treatment of baptized Indians at Mission San Francisco, prompting the governor into swift action. In the letter, Fernández specifically named Frays Landaeta and Dantí as the sources of the mass exodus of converts from the mission. Fernández claimed the Indians were deprived of warm meals, compelled to labor without rest, and were physically mistreated.⁴⁷⁹ After receiving Fernández's letter, Borica wrote to Pedro Alberni, a new Spanish officer at San Francisco Presidio. He informed Alberni that Fernández and Landaeta wrote him simultaneously regarding conditions there. He ordered Alberni to take what Fernández said seriously, as he dealt with the Indians in a moderate fashion. The governor also forbade the presidio soldiers from punishing a mission Indian unless both priests requested it.⁴⁸⁰ Governor Fages had attempted to enact the same policy after a Kumeyaay man complained that a Franciscan had beaten him in 1790. He immediately retracted it due to Viceroy Revillagigedo's pro-missionary agenda.⁴⁸¹ Borica's letter revealed that his patience with the Franciscans neared its end. "These are the only means we can employ on behalf of the poor and wretched Indians who have suffered so much and continue to suffer at that mission," he wrote. Moreover, "I have spoken to the person who should remedy the situation," he confided to Alberni, "he has not acted with the energy that the situation demands."⁴⁸² While Lasuén brushed off the massacre of seven mission Indians as a chance

⁴⁷⁹ Engelhardt, *Missions and Missionaries of California*, 2:501.

⁴⁸⁰ *Borica á Alberni*, Monterey, August 11, 1796, BANC MSS C-A 16, 9-10.

⁴⁸¹ See chapter two of this dissertation.

⁴⁸² *Borica á Alberni*, Monterey, August 11, 1796, BANC MSS C-A 16, 9-10; Borica reiterated the order five days later, in *Borica á Alberni*, Monterey, August 16, 1796, BANC MSS C-A 24, 91.

occurrence in the summer of 1795, Borica continually worked to mitigate the slaughter's wide ranging consequences. In the midst of that work, a Franciscan came forward to give him the evidence he needed to push back against Lasuén's indifference.

In early September 1796, Governor Borica ordered an official investigation into the problems occurring at Mission San Francisco to discover precisely what drove baptized Indians to abandon the site en masse. Alberni led the proceedings and interviewed Spanish soldiers both about conditions at the missions as well as the relationship Dantí and Landaeta had with baptized California Indians. Raymundo Carrillo reported that the defections "can be attributed to nothing other than the bitterness and harshness of the fathers."⁴⁸³ He stated that the two men at San Francisco overworked and underfed the converts and had no talent for managing people. Carrillo described a common occurrence at San Francisco. Men and women, driven by their hunger, left the mission to find food without permission from the missionaries. When they returned, he testified, "they were punished with numerous lashes, the stocks, the lock-up, or shackles."⁴⁸⁴ Carrillo continued, "And worst is that during their imprisonment, they forgot to give them anything to eat."⁴⁸⁵ He reported that escapees from the mission came to the presidio telling these stories and asking for food. Alberni then asked Carrillo if conditions improved after a change in missionaries at San Francisco. The soldier replied that since Fray Fernández came to the mission the baptized California Indians were "content and happy" and at least five of the people who fled several years prior had returned.⁴⁸⁶ Carrillo suggested that if Fray Landaeta retired, and another man like Fernández was sent to San Francisco, many of the Indians who left would return to the mission. Amador also agreed that Fernández improved conditions and morale, testifying that the

⁴⁸³ Carrillo quoted in Milliken, "Ethnohistory," 551.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., 552.

new priest had “a distinct manner, love, and gentleness.”⁴⁸⁷ In his brief time in San Francisco, Fernández ingratiated himself to the soldiers and the Indians there and appeared poised to alter the trajectory of Mission San Francisco.

Indigenous Testimony Regarding Life at Mission San Francisco

Many of the Indigenous men who fled the missions eventually gave accounts of the conditions at San Francisco, with soldiers transcribing their testimony. The soldiers did not interview every escapee, but those who testified painted a damning picture of life inside the mission. Their varied grievances fell into three broad categories. The first centered on violence they experienced at the hands of the missionaries or their proxies. A Huchiun man named Tiburcio testified that he received lashings five separate times when found crying over the deaths of his wife and daughter. Similarly, the informant Homobono reported being beaten for grieving the death of his bother. Another man, Roman, fled after his wife and son left the mission to return to their homeland rather than face excessive whippings. Claudio left because the *alcalde* Valeriano “clubbed him every time he turned around,” and forced him to work while ill.⁴⁸⁸ José Manuel also reported problems with an *alcalde*, Raymundo, who hit his hand so hard with a cane that two years later it showed damage and limited movement. One man reported that both the *alcalde* Luis and Fray Dantí had beaten him with a whip, and the latter with a cane as well. Dantí also whipped a tannery worker named Milan when, due to a lack of food after working all day, left without permission to gather clams for his family. Magno also left the mission without permission to gather food, and Dantí ordered him stretched out and beaten. He was flogged again a week later when he came back late from a *paseo*. These men’s accounts demonstrated that

⁴⁸⁷ Carrillo quoted in Milliken, “Ethnohistory,” 552.

⁴⁸⁸ Claudio quoted in “Testimony of Runaway Indians Taken by Lieutenant José Arguello, San Francisco, August 12, 1797, translated in Milliken, *Time of Little Choice*, 300.

physical violence was commonplace at Mission San Francisco and often drove new converts away.⁴⁸⁹

The other two categories of baptized Indians' reasons for fleeing the mission were inadequate food and diseases. One man, Ostano, fled the mission after he lost his wife, a child, and his two brothers living at San Francisco. Another man named Liborato reported to the soldiers that his mother, two brothers, and three nephews perished from hunger, and that he feared the same fate. Nicolas abandoned the mission after his father passed. Patabo's wife and children died, leaving him nothing at the mission. Three others, López, Otolon, and Mangin gave brief reports that they ran away from San Francisco because they did not receive adequate food from the missionaries. According to this testimony, the mission had become a tragic place where death was increasingly common, from both starvation and illness.⁴⁹⁰

The testimony from twenty-three Indians who fled San Francisco painted a harsh picture of day-to-day life at Mission San Francisco under Frays Dantí and Landaeta. First, it verified the presidio soldiers' claims that baptized California Indians escaped the mission because the priests withheld food. One informant, Milan, specifically mentioned being overworked and underfed, which soldiers' testimony corroborated. Second, based on these accounts, violence against mission Indians regularly occurred at Mission San Francisco. The Franciscans claimed that they only used punishment to correct severe transgressions and never used more force than a father would against his own children.⁴⁹¹ However, these men's reports substantiated the French navigator Jean François de la Pérouse's 1786 claim that the missionaries and their agents

⁴⁸⁹ Milliken, *Time of Little Choice*, 292-299.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁹¹ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 117.

punished mission Indians for “sins which in Europe are left to Divine justice.”⁴⁹² In the escapees’ accounts, the mission *alcaldes* at San Francisco had free reign to punish mission workers, and several of the informants testified that *alcalde* violence drove them to flee. Rather than assisting the converts who lost family members – sometimes even their whole family – Dantí and the *alcaldes* punished those grieving. These reports demonstrated both that conditions at the mission were in fact dangerous enough to merit a mass defection, and that baptized Indians found Fray Fernández a welcome addition.

Some historians investigating the California mission system have discredited or ignored the testimony of those fleeing Mission San Francisco. The dean of Franciscan historians, Fray Zephyrin Engelhardt, O.F.M. argued in 1912 that “fear of death at periods of epidemics and the disinclination to work,” were the chief reasons hundreds of men, women, and children fled Mission San Francisco. While the former was true, the latter is an example of Engelhardt’s general opinion of Indigenous Californians. However, he made another claim, quoting two fathers at Mission Santa Cruz who wrote in 1799 about a totally separate episode. They claimed converts ran away due to “the ungovernable passion for other women. Those at this mission cannot entirely gratify their lust because of the vigilance of the missionaries.”⁴⁹³ Engelhardt therefore concluded, despite seeing all of the testimony given by presidio soldiers and Indians, that “some complaints were made by some neophytes...because they hated work, or chafed under the restraint put upon their animal propensities.”⁴⁹⁴ In 1886, the early California historian Hubert Howe Bancroft also dismissed the escapees’ testimony, though he was more charitable than Engelhardt. Bancroft asserted that “the neophytes fled, not because they were flogged or

⁴⁹² Jean François de la Pérouse, *Monterey in 1786, Life in a California Mission: The Journals of Jean François de la Pérouse* (Berkeley, 1989), 82.

⁴⁹³ Engelhardt, *Missions and Missionaries of California*, 2:508.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

overworked, but because of the ravages of an epidemic.”⁴⁹⁵ In 1995, anthropologist Randall Milliken took the accounts seriously in his analysis of the consequences of Spanish colonialism, arguing that a combination of being overworked, underfed, along with physical punishment and disease forced baptized Indians to flee Mission San Francisco.⁴⁹⁶ For a century, the cultural chauvinism of early California historians and their own propensity to disbelieve Indigenous people obscured this testimony.

Mission San Francisco Briefly Stabilizes

On September 15, Borica wrote to Fernández to assure the priest that his actions were noble, and that the governor had no intention of maligning the missionaries as a whole. Borica approved of Fernández’s more compassionate approach with the baptized California Indians and shared his hope that Lasuén, in the face of complaints coming from his own priest, would now agree that Mission San Francisco needed a complete shift in its culture. “What those sad and unfortunate Indians have suffered awakens pity and compassion in my heart,” wrote the governor, revealing his frustration with his failure to ameliorate the situation. “On numerous occasions I have addressed the issue of their welfare, yet the situation has remained unchanged.”⁴⁹⁷ Despite blaming Lasuén’s inaction for the suffering of Indians at Mission San Francisco, the governor resisted major reforms. He feared reforms “might prejudice the favorable opinion that I want all the public to have of all religious men, which many of them justly deserve.”⁴⁹⁸ Still, while Borica, like his predecessor, considered himself a friend of the priesthood, he too felt compelled to correct missionary behavior when it became violent and neglectful.

⁴⁹⁵ Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:711-712.

⁴⁹⁶ Milliken, *Time of Little Choice*, 142-145.

⁴⁹⁷ *Borica á Fernández*, Monterey, September 15, 1796, BANC MSS C-A 24, 493.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

The same day he wrote Fernández, Borica also wrote to Lasuén with a decidedly different tone. After months of indifference to the plight of the Indians at San Francisco coupled with Lasuén's resistance to the artisans, Borica had stern words for his counterpart. He excoriated Lasuén for "lenient practices and compromises that have not served in any way to correct the excesses committed against the poor, pitiful Indians at Mission San Francisco."⁴⁹⁹ Borica referred to Lasuén's hope that transferring Dantí out of San Francisco would rectify the situation. It had not. Borica suggested that Lasuén "take rigorous measures to improve the way they are treated, to lessen their labor and to provide them with hot meals, or else they will be done for."⁵⁰⁰ This was yet another case of a governor, as both Neve and Fages had done before, urging Franciscan leadership to understand the connection between their treatment of baptized Indians and the success of Spanish colonialism in California. Borica continued, "203 deaths and about 200 fugitives are tragedies that would outrage any superior, whether secular or monastic."⁵⁰¹ Borica also tried playing to Lasuén's fear of scandal. "Would it not be a disgrace if the settlers were forced to become engaged in lawsuits," he threatened, "which would prove scandalous for the province?" After promising no further indulgences and demanding immediate action, the governor added, "it is a matter that keeps me from sleeping and has me talking to myself."⁵⁰² Borica wanted Lasuén to understand the importance of this matter, and that he would challenge the order in a way no official had since 1790.

On September 22, Lasuén wrote to José Argüello, the commander at the San Francisco Presidio, to acknowledge receipt of Borica's orders and his planned implementation. The letter was short and written with no direct mention of the nature of that mission's problems or the

⁴⁹⁹ *Borica á Lasuén*, Monterey, September 15, 1796, BANC MSS C-A 24, 495.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*

ministers involved. Earlier in the month, Argüello requested that Lasuén explain the situation in detail, which Lasuén refused: “It is not becoming that I should describe these disputes.”⁵⁰³ He informed Argüello that the missionaries heeded Borica’s order that “the work of the Indians be made light; that there be moderation in punishing them; and that they be given their rations cooked.”⁵⁰⁴ These were no small matters. They represented some of the same types of problems that Neve and Fages believed plagued the missions throughout Alta California. After nearly thirty years of warning Mexico City that the Franciscans’ methods were outdated and that their arrogance was dangerous, it took the complaints of a fellow missionary to force the order to accept some level of reform. Even then, Lasuén denied that there were deep, systemic problems in the system. He merely agreed to abide “what the Lord Governor wishes,” as he wrote to Argüello.⁵⁰⁵

Four days later, Lasuén wrote to Borica to follow up with the governor about the changes implemented at San Francisco. Lasuén’s tone had a discernable shift. Well over a year since the massacre in the East Bay hills and months after more than 200 Indians fled the mission, Lasuén’s mood matched Borica’s bleakness for the first time. Unlike many letters written to governors during his time as father president, which were often haughty and imperious, Lasuén’s correspondence after arriving in San Francisco revealed a tired, aging man. He confided that he came to the mission to “remedy an evil,” which was a “painful effort.”⁵⁰⁶ Acknowledging problems in a way that he had not done previously, Lasuén apologized for his earlier reactions when confronted by Dantí and Landaeta’s destructive actions. Lasuén now admitted “passion

⁵⁰³ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:400.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 401.

took over, Sir; it was given complete sway.”⁵⁰⁷ He then made a stunning confession about his mismanagement of the situation: “When [that passion] met with an obstacle, it sought to overcome it by methods and means it well knows how to devise.”⁵⁰⁸ Lasuén responded to the crisis in San Francisco early-on by blaming the massacre on Dantí’s squad, dismissing the massacre as a chance occurrence, and behaving as though the whole affair was of little consequence. This represented Lasuén’s standard procedure in times of crisis, and yet here, after a decade in his role, he admitted that his defense of the missionaries in his charge amounted to blind passion trying to bludgeon down any perceived obstacles. Rather than the bombastic stubbornness Lasuén typically offered, after observing life at Mission San Francisco, his words contained remorse.

Lasuén continued, addressing the long-term problems at the mission, and detailing his proposed solutions. “I am not trying to make saints out of the fathers who have been in charge of this mission,” he conceded, “They may have gone to extremes in disciplining.”⁵⁰⁹ However, Lasuén insisted that he had never witnessed any abuses nor had any been reported to him. Lasuén could not deny that the two priests overworked Indian laborers to get projects done quickly, conceding that “much of it was forced labor.”⁵¹⁰ Landaeta promised Lasuén that the laborers would now have their workloads reduced. They also served hot food to everyone at the mission and waited for more cauldrons to arrive from Mexico to insure this remained the case. Although Lasuén’s letter was conciliatory, he refused to agree that the men and women who fled the mission did so because of abuse from the ministers. Instead he claimed that no abuse occurred, but rather the fear of the illness that broke out in March 1795 caused so many to leave

⁵⁰⁷ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:401.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid.

at one time. Nevertheless, Lasuén agreed with Borica's contention that kindness and love would draw baptized California Indians back to the mission. Lasuén instructed Fernández and Landaeta that converts should visit their ranchería if the missionaries noticed someone seemed in poor spirits or health and allow them to stay there as long as they needed. Lasuén lastly asserted that he always worked to avoid public scandals and had no desire for lawsuits brought against the Franciscans by settlers or the governor, for "what chance has a poor Father Lasuén against a señor like Don Borica?"⁵¹¹ Lasuén had never been so contrite, perhaps signaling that he now realized there were times when his priests crossed the line from stern religious teachers into cruelty and abuse. On October 2, Borica responded and apologized for his previously harsh tone and explained that the changes Lasuén had instituted at San Francisco pleased him. It appeared that the two men found a path forward and both desired positive change at the beleaguered mission.⁵¹²

On November 2, a full month after writing his emotional letter to Borica, Lasuén wrote a quite different letter to Father Guardian Nogueira at the College of San Fernando to update his superior on the situation in California. He proclaimed that he had "returned from San Francisco, a place to which I was obliged to go because of the gravest and most trying problem I have ever faced in all my life."⁵¹³ Rather than detailing the terrible circumstances at the mission, Lasuén preformed a remarkable about-face, declaring "the Reverend Fathers Fray Diego García and Fray José María Fernández had plotted with fanatical zeal to expel Fray Landaeta from that mission."⁵¹⁴ Moreover, according to Lasuén, "The Indians joined in the conspiracy and the

⁵¹¹ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:401.

⁵¹² *Borica á Lasuén*, Monterey, November 2, 1796, BANC MSS C-A 24, 499.

⁵¹³ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 404.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*

officers of the presidio, Alberni and Arguello joined it or tended that way.”⁵¹⁵ The father president accused the soldiers of collecting “different unbecoming incidences” from their peers and Indians regarding Landaeta and Dantí and “giving them the appearance of cruel, enormous, and monstrous crimes.”⁵¹⁶ García was the same missionary that once quarreled with Rubí and Gilí earlier in the decade, and was not one of Lasuén’s favorite subordinates. He suggested that “a strict and rigorous silence be observed...until an occasion arises to withdraw Father Diego from the country, without making any reference to this affair.”⁵¹⁷ Less than a week after writing Borica with humility and sadness, Lasuén had fully recommitted to conspiratorial logic and propensity for cover-ups. First, he unequivocally backed the accused priests, as he had with de la Peña, even with credible evidence and testimony suggesting serious wrongdoing. Second, he resorted to accusations of conspiracy against the order rather than admitting he knew that the priests had engaged in neglectful and cruel behavior. Third, he made no mention of the changes that he had recommended to Borica, or that the priests at San Francisco engaged in forced labor practices. Instead, he only wrote that “everything ended in a peaceful solution and to the complete satisfaction of the governor.”⁵¹⁸ Lasuén did not directly lie to Nogueira. Rather he omitted the most relevant aspects of his settlement with Borica. Perhaps he believed that distance from the college would hide his misdirection.

Lasuén’s letter demonstrated his belief that he could maneuver out of any situation using the same tactics he employed in previous scandals. He refused to acknowledge that the disaster at San Francisco differed from the other problems during his tenure. When he responded to the de la Peña affair, Lasuén knew the accusers’ witnesses were shaky and could be broken in cross

⁵¹⁵ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:401.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*

examination. When he lied about Gilí's syphilis, he had the physician, Soler, willing to engage in a conspiracy to remove a priest no one wanted in the province. This time however, at San Francisco, the problems were multifaceted and well known by people in and around the mission. No one could deny that Dantí made a terrible, fatal decision that led to a massacre of seven unarmed men who had crossed the bay on his orders alone. Furthermore, that Landaeta sent another squad out weeks after Dantí's demonstrated not only Lasuén's complete lack of control at San Francisco, but also the disregard those two missionaries had for civil authority. Baptized Indians escaped the mission and went to the presidio, knowing they had broken the Franciscans' rules and could be punished, in order to get food and to tell the soldiers what transpired at the mission. What Lasuén labeled as conspiracy was merely an investigation into rapidly deteriorating circumstances.

A Second Mission Squad Invades the East Bay Hills

The situation at San Francisco stabilized for both the Ohlone people living there and the Franciscans managing the mission into the first months of 1797, but another controversy erupted that summer. On June 21, Lasuén transferred Fray José de la Cruz Espí from Mission Santa Cruz to San Francisco, following the missionary's repeated requests to retire back to the college.⁵¹⁹ Landaeta, still stationed there, also petitioned the father president to reassign his friend to San Francisco. While some of the converts who fled the mission in 1795 had returned, at least thirty former mission Indians remained in the East Bay. With Frays García and Fernández no longer stationed at San Francisco, Landaeta and Espí decided once again to form a search squad to capture and return the escapees. They did so in direct defiance of Governor Borica, who had banned the practice after the Saclans massacred Dantí's squad. On June 20, Raymundo, another

⁵¹⁹ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:34; Geiger, *Franciscan Missionaries in Hispanic California*, 76.

alcalde at the mission, led his group of thirty men across the cold waters of the San Francisco Bay in small craft to hunt down the missing baptized California Indians.

On the orders of the missionaries at San Francisco, Raymundo and his squad sought not to persuade the baptized Indians to return to the mission, but rather to kidnap them. The group quickly found some escaped men, women, and children in three different Cuchillones villages. Many of the residents were off at dances, and members of the mission squad worried that the Indians harboring the runaways would return from the dances and foil their raid. Raymundo and his squad quickly grabbed several escapees and attempted to force them on their small boats. Some of the escapees fought with the raiders long enough that their Cuchillones allies discovered the scene and attempted to frighten Raymundo. Most of the mission raiding party made it back to their boats with the captives. As opposition gathered, Raymundo decided to return to San Francisco immediately. During the melee, a storm had rolled into the East Bay, and the rain deteriorated their watercraft beyond the point of usefulness. However, the raiders found a village willing to supply them with materials to construct new watercraft. Raymundo and a few others returned to Mission San Francisco first, with the rest of the raiders trickling back in over the next several days.⁵²⁰ To Raymundo, Landaeta, and García, the recapture raid in the East Bay was a success. They returned some runaways and suffered no casualties. For the long-term stability of Spanish-Indigenous relations around the Bay though, the raid was a dangerous act of belligerence.

One escaped mission Indian, Bibiano Guitchu, a Cuchillon man who lived among the Huchiuns for nearly two years before Raymundo's raid, later detailed to Spanish soldiers the anger these kidnappings engendered among some Indigenous groups in the East Bay. Guitchu

⁵²⁰ *Borica al Virrey Talamanca y Branciforte*, Monterey, August 30, 1797 translated in Milliken, *Time of Little Choice*, 154.

reported that he observed Raymundo and his raiders while hunting seals along the shore. Had he been armed at the time, Guitchu claimed he would have shot the hated *alcalde* on the spot. He was not alone in this, as many of the mission Indians forcibly returned to San Francisco testified that *alcalde* violence had caused many of them to flee. Guitchu then yelled at the group, shouting that his friends would “tie up and hang” Raymundo specifically.⁵²¹ He ran for his weapons at about the same time his fellows returned from their dance. By the time Guitchu reached the shore, Raymundo and the rest of his group had already fled and searched to find passage back across the bay.

Two other Cuchillon men, Lajus and Oquema, also testified that they attempted to kill some of the mission raiders. Lajus told his interrogators that when he heard about Raymundo and his squad, he immediately set off after them. He intended to kill as many as possible. Like Guitchu, by the time he arrived at the beach, the group had fled. Oquema testified that when he and his brother learned of the raiding party, they gathered their weapons and made their way to Raymundo’s position. They arrived before the raiders had yet moved on, and Oquema’s brother fired arrows at the group. Oquema was armed with a spear and machete, but the mission squad was mostly in the water and out of his range. Both men freely admitted to their presidio interrogators that they wanted Raymundo’s blood. Their responses demonstrated the dwindling patience some people living across the bay experienced in the face of unceasing encroachment into their lands and conversion of their people. The series of raids ordered by missionaries who ignored government edicts served as flashpoints for the East Bay groups, such as the Saclans and Cuchillones. Anger of this type is what Neve and Fages had worked to avoid, fearing that an

⁵²¹ *Relación de los gentiles Sacalanes y los Indios Cuchillones*, San Francisco, August 9, 1797, translated in Milliken, *Time of Little Choice*, 297-298.

alliance of Indigenous Californians inflamed by missionary arrogance would threaten Spain's survival in California.

On June 27, several days after Raymundo's group returned from the East Bay, Fray Fernández wrote a letter to Governor Borica expressing his anger at his fellow missionaries. He charged that Frays Landaeta and García attempted to cover up the failed expedition, as Dantí had in the summer of 1795. According to Fernández's account, José Argüello at San Francisco Presidio discovered the squad's existence after Raymundo and his men returned. He confronted the two priests, asking for their version of events. Argüello waited twenty-four hours without their reply and then sent his own report to Borica. Fernández vehemently denied having knowledge of the raid and wrote "if I had been consulted, such an absurdity would not have been carried out, for I know...that the fugitive Indians harbor bad feelings toward Raymundo."⁵²² Furthermore, the priest claimed that the reason many of the baptized Indians fled the mission was not only due to being overworked, but also because of Raymundo's harsh punishments. Fernández's claim underscored Indian informants' testimony regarding abusive *alcaldes*. He argued that Landaeta plotted with Fray García because he was unaware of the many tensions at play between the Christian Indians at that mission and the tribes in the Easy Bay. Landaeta did not include Fernández in the plan because he would have reported it to the soldiers or the governor immediately. Fernández concluded with a withering critique of Father President Lasuén, without mentioning his name, writing, "Had I been listened to last year, everything could have been resolved. But I was not." He continued, "I was considered an imposter, a troublemaker. I was accused of becoming entangled with secular elements who had sinister goals."⁵²³ Unlike so many of the previous scandals when Lasuén charged Spanish soldiers and

⁵²² *Fernández á Borica*, Mission San Francisco, June 27, 1797, SBMAL, doc. 330.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*

Indians of conspiracy against the Franciscan order, Lasuén now accused his own priest. No comparable situation had occurred in the California mission system to date.

Fernández's letter to Borica remains important because it shed new light on the manner in which Lasuén defended his priests. He leveled a conspiracy charge at Fernández despite corroborating evidence coming from Spanish soldiers and baptized Indians at Mission San Francisco that Dantí and Landaeta were harming the Indians there. His assertion that Fernández plotted against Landaeta cannot be true, based on the preponderance of evidence at hand. That Lasuén only made this charge to his superior at the college, while refusing to "make saints" out of Dantí and Landaeta when corresponding with Borica reveals his duplicity.⁵²⁴ Therefore, the two-year crisis at Mission San Francisco is key to understanding Lasuén's willingness to lie, bully, and obfuscate when the men in his charge faced accusations of wrongdoing, whether or not they were guilty. Furthermore, because he used these same tactics throughout his tenure when missionaries were charged with physical abuse or other wrongdoings, Lasuén's entire history in this arena must be called into question.

In the midst of the unravelling situation at San Francisco, Lasuén took the time to eliminate the possibility of Fernández's continued whistleblowing. Throughout his tenure, Lasuén strove to maintain the good name of the missionaries. Above all else, he chafed at his men going public with their disputes or breaking the Franciscan chain of command by notifying a governor of their internal problems. Fray Fernández broke protocol several times in his brief time in California, but this last letter went too far for Lasuén. On July 8, Lasuén wrote to Borica to request Fernández's immediate retirement, along with three other missionaries. Fernández had not yet reached his ten years of service, but Lasuén concluded that "ever since he came to this

⁵²⁴ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:401.

province a year ago he has been suffering from attacks that render him entirely unfit for this ministry.”⁵²⁵ Fernández indeed complained of feeling unwell in his scathing letter to Borica, but he gave no indication of a desire to leave California. In fact, on June 29 Fernández wrote: “I dedicate what little health I have left and shall expend it to help them [the mission Indians] until not one drop of blood is left in my veins.”⁵²⁶ Those were not the words of a man seeking retirement days later. Lasuén learned a valuable lesson in the episode with Rubí and Gilí and applied it here. He knew the Franciscans in California had a reputation for malingering and hypochondria, and with the help of a pliant physician he could use health as a means to exile problem missionaries from the province. He successfully removed Fernández, who returned to Mexico in September 1797.⁵²⁷ Lasuén banished the first missionary who revealed awful conditions within the mission system from California before he could cause more problems. It was not the last time Lasuén declared one of his priests medically unfit for duty as a result of whistleblowing.

The Spanish Military Intervenes

On June 29, a few days after Raymundo’s raid, rumors of an attack on the newly founded Mission San José began to surface.⁵²⁸ Mission guards heard that some Huchiuns planned to strike at the Indian workers in and around the mission. Mission Indians, led by *alcaldes*, had invaded Huchiun lands and attempted to forcibly remove people and families the Huchiuns protected. The Spanish presence around the Bay Area had expanded since 1790 due in large part to the assistance of Indian labor, and in the case of the *alcaldes*, a group of baptized Indians willing to enforce Spanish religious and political mores through violence. Without their help, Spanish

⁵²⁵ Lasuén to Borica, Carmel, July 8, 1797, SBMAL, C.M.D., 328.

⁵²⁶ *Fernández á Borica*, Mission San Francisco, June 27, 1797, SBMAL, C.M.D., doc. 330.

⁵²⁷ Geiger, *Franciscan Missionaries in Hispanic California*, 85.

⁵²⁸ *Miranda al Teniente José Arguello*, Mission San José, June 29, 1797, BANC MSS C-A 9, 92.

colonial projects and further expansion were impossible. Attacking Indian workers made practical sense for the Huchiuns, as well. They were easier targets than the well-equipped soldiers and direct attacks on laborers might send the message to others that allying with the Spanish came with great risks. On July 3, additional reports of people from the East Bay hills planning to attack the new mission reached its guards. A few days later, the rumors intensified enough that Lieutenant Amador went to Mission San José to investigate.⁵²⁹

Unlike the situation in 1794, when rumors circulated about an attack on the pueblo of San José, Amador found the new reports credible and necessitated military action. A baptized Indian named Tilomeno told Amador that Indians beyond the missions engaged in serious infighting regarding providing labor for the Spanish. Saclans from the East Bay, one of the groups that participated in the massacre in 1795, warned an unnamed group near San José not to get involved with the Spanish. The Saclans told this group that they would kill everyone involved, including the Franciscans and soldiers. The leader of the pro-Spanish group told the Saclan attacking the soldiers would be folly, as they were well armed and rode horses. While the aggressors continued to make their threats, the unnamed leader told the few baptized Indians watching the altercation that he and his people would come to the mission and help them, causing the Saclans to angrily withdraw. Amador took this very seriously and wrote to Borica to inform him that “many rancherías are joining together. They are manufacturing arrows.”⁵³⁰ He connected the dots for Borica, informing him that the Saclans who came to give the warnings hailed from the village that committed the massacre against Dantí’s squad. The results that Borica feared from that ill-fated mission were now becoming a reality.

⁵²⁹ *Amador al Gobernador Diego de Borica*, Mission San José, July 8, 1797, BANC MSS C-A 8, 372.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*

Aside from the fallout from the kidnappings and incursions ordered by the Franciscans at Mission San Francisco, Indigenous raids on Spanish livestock in the same areas also increased tensions. In early July, unnamed Indigenous peoples from the Santa Clara area killed some Spanish horses. Borica ordered Amador to punish the horse killers. Amador agreed that such a course “was necessary to set the pagans straight.”⁵³¹ There was a lesson in this small event, in Amador’s estimation. “I think the same is necessary with...the Saclans,” he confided to Borica, “because they have the idea that we fear them.”⁵³² The soldier lost faith in diplomacy, which in his eyes only emboldened the East Bay tribes. His words and recommendations arose from a desire to end the threats, rumors, and livestock deaths happening in an area allegedly under Spanish control. He offered advice to Borica, writing, “In case you decide to cut the threads of the malignant cancer which these pagans are spreading...I would consider myself the least of your representatives.”⁵³³ Over the last two years, Borica sought to calm the tensions simmering in the region to avoid large-scale bloodshed. He took a long view, as he hoped to keep relations between the Franciscans and Indigenous Californians harmonious. Indigenous labor and general participation were integral to Spanish success in California. Without their assistance and cooperation, Spain’s presence in California was at best temporary. Therefore, Indigenous anger and frustration remained first in Borica’s concerns. That focus caused him to lose sight of his own men’s growing frustrations with the governor’s inaction. In the end, a large coalition of Indigenous warriors attacking one of the missions in Northern California did not set off the largest Spanish military action of the eighteenth century. Rather, the anger of his own troops at

⁵³¹ *Amador al Gobernador Diego de Borica*, Mission San José, July 8, 1797, BANC MSS C-A 8, 373.

⁵³² *Ibid.*, 372.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*

Borica's adherence to diplomacy with people they considered savages stoked the Spanish soldier's desire for a fight.

On July 10, Borica conceded to Amador's advice and ordered a military operation into the East Bay to apprehend the Saclans responsible for the 1795 massacre. The Spanish military lacked the necessary active-duty troops to engage the Saclans and other tribes in the East Bay, and therefore called on retired soldiers and two civilians to send an appropriately sized unit into hostile territory. Additionally, Borica ordered Amador and his men to capture and return any baptized Indians they found while in the field. The governor separated himself from his predecessors Neve and Fages with his willingness to forcibly capture Indigenous Californians who fled the missions. Although he tasked the unit with bringing back the Saclans and the escapees, the governor wanted to avoid unnecessary bloodshed. He knew that the 1795 massacre partially caused 280 Indians to abandon Mission San Francisco later that summer. Amador's forces walked a thin line between bringing back their targets without causing new reasons for the converts to flee back to their homelands.⁵³⁴

On July 13, Amador and his men began their search for the runaways and Saclans in the Easy Bay. The following evening, they came upon the Saclans' village and set up camp, satisfied they went undetected. In the morning, the Spanish force attacked the village, beginning the largest skirmish between Spanish and California Indian warriors in the eighteenth century. Amador followed Borica's orders, yelling to the Saclans that they did not want to fight; they only wanted the mission Indians to return. The Saclan warriors then opened fire on the Spaniards with a volley of arrows that killed one horse and wounded two others. The Spanish soldiers immediately responded, and a two-hour battle ensued. Within the village, the Saclans had

⁵³⁴ *Borica a Ignacio Vallejo, comisionado del pueblo de San José*, July 10, 1797, BANC MSS C-A 44, 82.

prepared for a Spanish attack, creating defensive structures, which Amador later praised for their effectiveness. During the fight, most of the non-combatants in the village fled unharmed. When the skirmish ended, seven of the defenders were dead, while the Spanish suffered no casualties. Amador and his men realized what they thought was one large town was actually three villages that sat near each other. The Saclans fled to the other two villages and the Spanish captured them without a fight. After the first battle, Amador repeatedly shouted that they wished no harm, and indeed, no more blood was shed that day. From the first two villages, the force captured thirty-two Saclan and baptized men, women, and children. Before they set off for the next target, Amador set free the Saclans who were not involved with the 1795 massacre. They encountered another large group of Saclan defenders and briefly clashed with them, causing one casualty. With that they travelled towards a Cuchillones village and camped far enough away not to be noticed in the dark of night.⁵³⁵

The next morning, Amador and his men once made themselves known to the Cuchillones. As their warriors prepared for a defense against the Spanish invaders, Amador ordered their interpreters to inform the defenders that the Spanish meant no harm, and only looked to return Christian Indians to their mission. The interpreters shouted that fighting only occurred the previous day because the Saclans shot first. This time, the Spanish message worked, and the Cuchillones warriors laid down their weapons without violence. With hostilities ended, some men from both tribal groups gave up the location of the rest of the runaway baptized California Indians and the Saclan fighters from 1795.⁵³⁶ The Spanish forces kept their promise

⁵³⁵ *Amador al Gobernador Diego de Borica*, San José, July 19, 1797, translated and reprinted in Milliken, *Time of Little Choice*, 290-291.

⁵³⁶ Amador in Milliken, *Time of Little Choice*, 290-291.

and no more fighting occurred as they prepared to take their now large contingent of captives back across the bay.

On July 18, Amador and his men returned to Mission San José with their quarry. The soldiers captured eighty-three escaped men, women, and children during their operation, a huge portion of those who fled in 1795. Additionally, they brought back nine Saclans and Cuchillones, all facing trial for their roles in the attack on Dantí's squad in 1795 and Raymundo's from June. Amador also brought back some unconverted children as hostages to maintain the peace between the East Bay tribes and the Spanish. The soldier reported to Borica that he told the parents to send the children willingly, not out of fear, and was proud that they came voluntarily. It is impossible to know the veracity of his report, as his sizable unit had killed eight warriors in less than twelve hours, a considerable number in the eighteenth century. Amador informed Borica that he had failed to apprehend the leaders of the group they clashed with days before, because "they are very haughty Indians. It is not easy to make them confess, either by persuasion or by severe force."⁵³⁷ Whether Amador referred to the severe force used in the fight at the first village, or to torture that occurred after, is unclear, but this detail undermined the idea that East Bay parents gave up their children without fear. From the Spanish perspective, the operation was a success. They rounded up scores of escaped baptized Indians, captured their Saclan targets, and demonstrated their military force in one mission. For the East Bay tribes and the escaped converts, the Spanish round up was an unmitigated disaster. The Spanish killed eight warriors and overran their defenses without much trouble. They had refused to bow to the Spanish for two years, but in the end, Spanish forces overcame their resistance.

⁵³⁷ Milliken, *Time of Little Choice*, 290-291.

On August 9, the Spanish held a military trial for the accused East Bay men. Borica judged all fourteen of the accused guilty, despite some of them claiming to have no knowledge of or involvement in the two separate episodes in 1795 and 1797. One man, Potroy, a baptized Indian and the leader of the Chimenes that massacred seven mission Indians, received a punishment of seventy-five lashes on three separate occasions, one year in shackles, and would receive no wages for his labor. Borica sentenced another man, Caguas, to fifty lashes on two separate occasions. Four other men received twenty-five lashes one time, and the remaining nine would spend time in shackles or stocks, some for as long as eight months.⁵³⁸ Though several of the sentences involved torturous physical punishment, Borica did not order any of the men executed, though likely because the accused had not killed any Spaniards. He continued his policy of avoiding bloodshed between the Spanish military and Indians unless his men were under attack. The Saclans, Chimenes, and Cuchillones only defended their homes and families from three separate invading forces and the rumors of an attack on missions or the pueblo of San José never materialized. Borica's sentencing acknowledged those facts while demonstrating Spanish power in the region. With that, the two-year crisis came to its conclusion.

The crisis that engulfed Mission San Francisco from 1795 through 1797 is the most important episode for understanding the decline of the mission system as a result of decades of inconsistent Spanish imperial policy and growing missionary opposition to any reforms from secular sources. Unlike the other scandals that occurred after 1785 and the transfer of power from Junípero Serra to Fermín Francisco de Lasuén, the San Francisco disaster generated testimony from multiple sources, including Franciscan missionaries. Some missionaries eschewed their chain of command and wrote directly to governor Borica, whether it came as a

⁵³⁸ *Castigos de criminales Indios*, Monterey, August 26, 1797, BANC MSS C-A 9:77-79.

confession, as in the case of Antonio Dantí, or to alert the governor to a host of problems at the mission, as in the case with José María Fernández. This gave Borica unprecedented access behind the scenes at the mission and an advantage that his predecessors Neve and Fages never enjoyed. Furthermore, unlike previous incidents, hundreds of mission Indians were involved in the problems at San Francisco, and some of them could tell their stories to soldiers without the fear of intimidation by the Franciscan missionaries or the *alcaldes*. Even father president Lasuén partially admitted to the systemic issues at the mission, and implemented a few reforms meant to improve conditions. Finally, the soldiers serving at Mission San Francisco and the nearby presidio stood their ground when giving reports or testifying about missionary behavior. These factors combined to present a clear picture of missionary culture gone wrong at San Francisco.

More than a decades' worth of allegations of mistreatment or neglect of mission Indians, disregard for Spanish soldiers, and insubordination leveled at the Franciscans were echoed in the events at San Francisco. Although this does nothing to prove that those cases were true, the manner in which Lasuén's typical defense of his missionaries unraveled is instructive. He immediately attempted to defend Dantí and Landaeta despite clear evidence of wrongdoing. Only when he could not bully or outmaneuver Borica did he admit that the Ohlone people at San Francisco were overworked and underfed. Furthermore, there remained incontrovertible proof that the father president deceived Father Guardian Nogueira at the College of San Fernando about Fernández and García conspiring against Landaeta. His letter accusing those missionaries of a plot against the minister at San Francisco came on the heels of his correspondence with Borica, which was the closest Lasuén came to admitting that some of his missionaries were out of control. Because Lasuén attempted once again to construct a web of secular conspiracy

against the missionaries as a defense against wrongdoing, only to have that assertion proven false, all previous scandals in which Lasuén used these tactics must be reconsidered.

Adding to the premise that Lasuén could not control his missionaries, or that he even emboldened their arrogance, were the circumstances of Frays Miguel Fernández and Arenaza, at missions Santa Cruz and San Carmelo, respectively. At the very moment the priests at San Francisco sent squads of Christian Indians on raids to capture escaped converts, Fernández again, for the second time, was accused of using intimidation and violence to coerce Indians into converting to Christianity. Lasuén was so upset he did not bother to offer a denial, and bitterly rebuked Fernández. And Fray Arenaza's alleged joke, that the viceroy had no power in California and that the father president ruled supreme in the region came at the worst possible time and place. Not only was it treasonous, but Arenaza was at San Carmelo, Lasuén's home. The idea that Arenaza had dozens, if not hundreds, of conversations with Lasuén is not without merit. That these two episodes occurred simultaneously with the events at San Francisco speaks to a culture of institutional arrogance in which the Franciscans imagined themselves beyond reproach in California. Franciscan attitudes and behaviors that their adversaries labeled arrogance entered full bloom after the nullification of Neve's legal code for governing the province in 1787. Borica believed that arrogance led to the crisis at Mission San Francisco.

Though the situation at San Francisco stabilized after the summer of 1797, Father President Lasuén contended with new problems among his missionaries - growing out of their treatment of Indians both within the mission system and without. In August 1797, Lasuén again faced a whistleblower within his ranks. Fray Antonio de la Concepción Horra, known commonly as Fray Horra, followed in the footsteps of Fernández and leveled a devastating series of charges against Franciscans in California. He revealed systemic issues throughout the entire mission

system. Horra's accusations forced Lasuén to draft what became the grandest defense of the California mission system ever crafted. It remains the deepest view into the culture of the Franciscans and inadvertently undermined much of their rhetoric regarding their love of the Indians in their care.

Refutation of Charges, 1797-1803

The period from mid-1797 through 1803 were the last years of Father President Fermín de Lasuén's life. They were also the most trying. The problems he wrestled with during the crisis at Mission San Francisco did not fade in its aftermath. Rather, they gained momentum, owing in large part to an unexpected newcomer to California, a priest named Antonio de la Concepción Horra. Fray Horra was another Franciscan in California with alleged behavioral, physical, or mental problems. In 1797, once Lasuén came to believe Horra was insane, he quickly sent the priest back to Mexico.⁵³⁹ Months later, the New Spain's viceroy, Miguel José de Azanza Alegría, demanded an explanation for the exile, prompting Horra to write a lucid, damning account of the innerworkings of the Franciscan missions in California.⁵⁴⁰ Because Horra was the second missionary in California to raise concerns regarding Franciscan management of the colony, and the second to be branded insane while doing so, the viceregal government in Mexico City determined to investigate the function and management of the California mission system.

Horra's denunciation of the Franciscans in California, coming in 1798, and the government's responses to it in Monterey and Mexico City marked a turning point for the perception of the missions. Horra charged his brothers with shocking degrees of mismanagement and misconduct. His accusations ranged from ecclesiastical lapses, to abusive punishments, and naked greed. The charges mirrored those many Spanish soldiers and nearly all of California's governors leveled at the order. Unlike those previous critiques, this condemnation came from a priest inside the order and could not be dismissed as inter-institutional animosity. Horra's

⁵³⁹ *Borica á P. Lasuén, Licencia de un P. loco*, Monterey, September 2, 1797, BANC MSS C-A 24, 519.

⁵⁴⁰ For Azanza's orders see Diego de Borica's questionnaire quoted from Archivo General de la Nación, Provincias Internas Legajo 219, Expediente 14, p. 9-11, translated in Rose Marie Beebe and Robert Senkewicz, *Tensions among the Missionaries in the 1790s* (Santa Barbara, 1996), 27-30; for Horra's letter, see Fray Antonio de la Concepción al Virrey, July 12, 1797, College of San Fernando, Mexico City BANC MSS C-A 10, 50-61, translated in Beebe and Senkewicz, *Tensions among the Missionaries in the 1790s*, 21-27.

indictment also covered far more of the Franciscan enterprise than what Fray José María Fernández had documented at Mission San Francisco two years prior. For the first time in thirty years, a viceroy demanded answers regarding the management of the missions and empowered the governor in California to find them. On December 3, 1798, Governor Diego de Borica produced a questionnaire for his officers that responded to Horra's charges and asked for their observations of missionary conduct. When those responses reached Viceroy Azanza, he decided that the Franciscans needed to answer for them. Lasuén produced a lengthy defense, titled *Refutation of Charges*, with 130 points in response to Horra's complaint. Lasuén's *Refutation* remains the most thorough examination of the mission system's innerworkings to date.⁵⁴¹

This chapter details Horra's letter, the charge of insanity against him, Borica's questionnaire, and Lasuén's *Refutation*. This final phase of Lasuén's presidency served as a microcosm of his entire tenure, offering an unprecedented window into his leadership style, his outlook on Indigenous Californians, and the means he employed to maintain the good name of the missionaries. Horra's mental state can never be proven, yet much of the existing documentation mirrored the questionable actions Lasuén took to remove Bartolomé Gilí and Mariano Rubí from California in 1794. While the truth is unknowable, the lucid, poignant, and damning letter Horra wrote after returning to the College of San Fernando in Mexico City undermined Lasuén's and Fray Buenaventura Sitjar's claims that he suffered a mental breakdown. Whether mentally ill or not, Horra's letter profoundly affected Franciscan California. Likewise, the questionnaire Borica crafted in response homed in on the problems civil leaders battled while governing California with the Franciscans. Despite some officers contradicting a

⁵⁴¹ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:194-234.

few of Horra's claims, they confirmed enough that the viceregal government moved to act. Mexico City demanded answers from Lasuén.

Completed in 1801, Lasuén's *Refutation* remains a critically important document for understanding the innerworkings of both the Franciscan missions and the attitudes of the missionaries towards California and the Indigenous people who had lived there for millennia. Although the first father president, Junípero Serra, wrote extensively on mission functions, he never matched the systematic delineation of Lasuén's *Refutation*. He covered almost every phase of mission life in his defense. Lasuén addressed the work demands, spiritual teachings, sexuality, clothing, eating habits, and resistance to colonization of baptized California Indians. Certainly, Lasuén's male, Catholic, and Spanish sensibilities distorted his representations. Nevertheless, that is exactly the document's value. Using it to gain an authentic understanding of Indian peoples' lives would be folly. However, employing it as a lens through which to analyze Lasuén's presidency is useful. This is significant because Lasuén's earlier reactions to scandals were shrouded in mystery and well-managed obfuscation. The *Refutation* lifted that veil. The *Refutation* reflects backwards on the scandals and tumult covered throughout this dissertation and sheds new light on questions that lingered about de la Peña, the *temporalistas*, and Mission San Francisco, amongst others. It does not paint a positive portrait of Lasuén or the Franciscans and their relations and understanding of California's Indigenous peoples. In fact, it ensured that successive governments continued to press the order to explain its methods and outcomes in California.

Fray Horra's Sanity in Question

Sometime in early August 1797, Father President Fermín de Lasuén learned that a missionary, just recently arrived in California, had reportedly gone insane. The afflicted man,

Fray Antonio de la Concepción Horra, was born in San Martín de Rubuales, Spain in 1767, making him one of the youngest Franciscans in California. He entered the order in 1784 and came to Mexico eleven years later in 1795. Horra spent two years at the College of San Fernando in Mexico City before transferring to California.⁵⁴² Lasuén assigned Horra to the newly established Mission San Miguel Arcángel with one of the oldest Franciscans in California, and good friend to the father president, Fray Buenaventura Sitjar. Sitjar was born in Mallorca, Spain on December 9, 1739 and arrived in Mexico in 1769. He arrived in California in 1771 and was the cofounder of Mission San Antonio, just outside modern Monterey County.⁵⁴³ Sitjar revealed Horra's concerning behavior to Lasuén less than a month after the young missionary's arrival. The experienced monk thought the situation so grave as to forego writing the father president. Instead, he travelled over 100 miles from San Miguel to San Carmelo to inform Lasuén directly.⁵⁴⁴

Sitjar told a frightening tale of Horra's mental state. He reported that Horra suffered a total nervous breakdown shortly after landing in California, and that his condition hindered the mission's chances to both recruit and maintain relationships with newly converted Salinan Indians who lived in the area. Horra raved like a maniac, according to Sitjar, and his unstable behavior drove some baptized Indians from missions San Antonio and San Luis back to their homes. Sitjar himself avoided being alone with Horra for any length of time, as the young priest's outbursts so frightened him. Moreover, according to Lasuén and Sitjar, Horra raved so intensely that well-armed veteran Spanish soldiers, wearing leather armor, were "terrified and perturbed."⁵⁴⁵ Lasuén took Sitjar's report seriously and contacted Governor Borica, informed

⁵⁴² Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:41; Geiger, *Franciscan Missionaries*, 122-123.

⁵⁴³ Geiger, *Franciscan Missionaries*, 245-246.

⁵⁴⁴ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:41.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

him of the situation, then requested that he call Horra to appear in Monterey, even if that meant bringing the afflicted missionary in chains. Lasuén hoped the governor would consent to send Horra back to Mexico for treatment.⁵⁴⁶ Rather than using force though, Lasuén wrote Horra and asked him to travel to Monterey for “a certain errand.”⁵⁴⁷ Unaware of the reason for the invitation, Horra complied and travelled to Monterey.

Lasuén’s response to one of his newest priests apparently losing his mind stood in stark contrast to his response to Fray Tomás de la Peña’s earlier breakdown. In that case, Lasuén evidenced concern for the missionary, who faced murder charges.⁵⁴⁸ He met with the accused missionary more than once to fully understand both the charges and to ascertain the status of his mental health. A decade later, Lasuén followed a different course. He never met Horra to observe the man’s condition. Instead, he wrote a letter to Governor Borica expressing his sorrow at Horra’s fate.⁵⁴⁹ Lasuén again refused to observe him when Horra went to Monterey to meet with the governor. The only information Lasuén possessed regarding Horra’s faculties was Sitjar’s word. On this scanty evidence, he had the priest quickly removed from the country.

Though the turn of events surprised both Borica and Horra, the governor eventually acquiesced to Lasuén’s demands. Back in July 1797, Borica had met the young monk shortly after the foundation of San Miguel yet failed to notice anything unusual about him. However, he later confided to Lasuén that perhaps he met Horra during a lucid moment.⁵⁵⁰ Borica allowed Horra to write Lasuén before the governor made his final decision regarding his status. Based on that letter, it is unclear if Horra knew exactly why he went to Monterey or why Lasuén removed

⁵⁴⁶ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:41-42.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁵⁴⁸ See chapter one of this dissertation.

⁵⁴⁹ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:41.

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 47

him from the province. Horra wrote that “by word of mouth” he heard that Lasuén sent a third missionary to San Miguel, and through similar means Horra learned of Lasuén’s request that he meet with Borica. He did so “without raising any objection – for I am a son of obedience, and have always accustomed myself to obey the least suggestion of my superior, blindly, as the saying goes,” Horra later wrote to Lasuén.⁵⁵¹ After telling Lasuén that he would embark for Mexico whenever they received word, Horra wrote that he was “suffering from a serious chest affection, as I told the governor. There is nothing else that occurs to me at the moment, except to pray that god may keep Your Reverence for many years.”⁵⁵² Horra’s letter indicated his ignorance regarding returning to Mexico, or that it pertained to his mental state. On September 2, 1798, after hearing Sitjar’s account, the governor signed off on Horra’s return to Mexico.⁵⁵³ In a fitting coincidence, Horra took the same ship back to Mexico as José María Fernández.⁵⁵⁴ Both of California’s only Franciscan whistleblowers were exiled to Mexico at the same time, each having been labeled insane.

Fray Horra’s Accusations

On July 12, 1798, after nearly a year of silence, Fray Horra wrote a letter to viceroy Azanza that rocked the governments and Franciscan order in both Mexico and California.⁵⁵⁵ Azanza, only viceroy for two months, demanded to know why, with California always desperate for missionaries, a priest returned so quickly to Mexico. In his letter, Horra leveled the most serious charges against his brothers in the distant province than anyone since former governor Felipe de Neve in the early 1780s. Fray Fernández’s withering critique from just a year before

⁵⁵¹ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:46.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵⁵³ *Borica á P. Lasuén, Licencia de un P. loco*, Monterey, September 2, 1797, BANC MSS C-A 24, 519.

⁵⁵⁴ Geiger, *Franciscan Missionaries in Hispanic California*, 85.

⁵⁵⁵ Fray Antonio de la Concepción al Virrey, July 12, 1797, College of San Fernando, Mexico City BANC MSS C-A 10, 50-61.

paled in scope. Whereas Fernández's accusations focused on two individual missionaries going rogue in a single mission, Horra's letter attacked the entire Franciscan order in California, starting with the leadership of Father President Lasuén and his trusted allies, such as Fray Sitjar. Horra also confirmed tactics Lasuén and his allies used to cover up abuses in the past: Horra insisted that Lasuén branded him insane, like Fernández, to undermine his credibility.⁵⁵⁶

Although only one of many charges detailed in Horra's letter, his accusations recounting Franciscan abuses against the Indigenous population generated great interest. Horra joined a long list of those who came to California through Mexico and alerted officials about problems in the missionaries' treatment of Indians. Accusations of Franciscan cruelty occurred through every stage of the mission period in the eighteenth century. In 1771, only two years after Mission San Diego's founding, Pedro Fages issued the first salvo against missionary malfeasance.⁵⁵⁷ In the mid-1770s, the short-term governor, Fernando Rivera y Moncada, made himself a pariah among the Franciscans in California for challenging Junípero Serra's methods. For Neve, exposing the missionaries' abuses and dramatically reforming the system proved a key issue of his administration. As governor from 1775 to 1783, Neve pulled no punches, comparing the Indigenous Californians in the mission systems to slaves.⁵⁵⁸ Fages' repeated clashes with the missionaries over abuses has been documented throughout this work.⁵⁵⁹ Governor Borica experienced the repercussions of Franciscan abuses more than any other governor in the eighteenth century, including the entire arc of the Mission San Francisco crisis. Among the chaos, violence, and death that resulted from that disaster emerged an unlikely voice joining the chorus of mission detractors, a fellow Franciscan, Fray José María Fernández. In his letter, Horra

⁵⁵⁶ Geiger, *Franciscan Missionaries*, 84.

⁵⁵⁷ Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:191.

⁵⁵⁸ Beilharz, *Felipe Neve*, 52.

⁵⁵⁹ Please see chapters two and three of this dissertation.

confirmed what accusers before him had claimed: “The manner in which the Indians are treated is by far more cruel than anything I have ever read about.” As Horra recounted, the baptized Indians “are severely and cruelly whipped, placed in shackles, or put in the stocks for days on end without receiving even a drop of water.”⁵⁶⁰ Charges similar to these circulated for decades. The potentially damning new development was that they came from a missionary, not a secular rival.

Horra echoed many governors’ complaints about the missionaries’ imperious nature and greed. He informed the viceroy that the veteran missionaries “do not even provide the [newly founded missions] with the most basic items to sustain ourselves for the first year, even though the older missions have thousands of head of cattle and horses.”⁵⁶¹ According to the disgruntled monk, veteran missionaries refused transfer to a newly established mission, knowing that their first years there would be bereft of material advantage. He detailed several specific cases of miserly behavior. First, when he and a group of priests arrived at Mission San Francisco the day before Easter, “they refused to give us wine to celebrate even though as I had heard it they had spent 200 pesos on a barrel of liquor.”⁵⁶² Similarly, some artisans, new to California and despised by Lasuén, travelled the long distance from San Diego to Monterey. After arriving at San Carmelo, the missionaries refused to feed the artisans’ families or even give them cabbages after their journey. In Horra’s account, the missionaries also refused to feed Spanish soldiers.⁵⁶³ He then confirmed one of Fages’ most bitter complaints about the missionaries: that they charged the military whatever they felt for food, rather than adhering to official prices. “If the purchaser

⁵⁶⁰ Fray Antonio de la Concepción al Virrey, July 12, 1797, College of San Fernando, Mexico City BANC MSS C-A 10, 56.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid.

⁵⁶² Ibid.

⁵⁶³ Ibid.

challenges them,” Horra penned, “they tell him to go and buy what he wants from the governor. The sailors are excellent witnesses of this practice because they observe it every year.”⁵⁶⁴

While he spent much of his letter to the viceroy describing systemic issues within the missions, Horra’s most passionate accusations targeted the long-time veteran of the California mission system and Lasuén’s good friend, Fray Sitjar. Sitjar by this time was fifty-nine years old and had worked in California since January 1771.⁵⁶⁵ By all Spanish metrics, Sitjar was a successful missionary, whom his fellow Franciscans held in esteem. At the time of his death in 1808, he baptized some 3,400 California Indians and raised over 4,000 cattle and 10,500 sheep. Sitjar also wrote a manuscript detailing some of the vocabulary of the Mutsun language.⁵⁶⁶ Yet Horra used this interest in Indigenous languages as his opening salvo against Sitjar. He reported that Sitjar taught the new converts Christian doctrine in their own language, defying the King’s laws.⁵⁶⁷ To twenty-first century sensibilities, this marks Sitjar as something of a progressive for his era. At the time, however, this practice offended the Catholic faith.

Teaching the gospel in native languages was not the only insult to the faith that Sitjar committed. The dissident priest accused Sitjar of a host of ecclesiastical transgressions. Some were familiar impeachments, which went well beyond Sitjar and California. Horra, for example, repeated the oft-made accusation that Franciscans baptized people who had little to no Catholic training, thus inflating baptismal numbers. Of Sitjar, in particular, Horra claimed that he “baptizes them without teaching them the very explicit and essential information that one needs to comprehend to receive this holy sacrament.” Horra further explained that Sitjar did this to

⁵⁶⁴ Fray Antonio de la Concepción al Virrey, July 12, 1797, College of San Fernando, Mexico City BANC MSS C-A 10, 56.

⁵⁶⁵ Geiger, *Franciscan Missionaries*, 245.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 246.

⁵⁶⁷ Fray Antonio de la Concepción al Virrey, July 12, 1797, College of San Fernando, Mexico City BANC MSS C-A 10, 53.

augment early baptismal numbers for newly founded missions.⁵⁶⁸ Indians who received quick baptisms often left the mission after a few days and were rebaptized, sometimes after many years, “a practice which occurs daily,” Horra contended.⁵⁶⁹ Horra confronted Sitjar about these issues and threatened to notify the government in Mexico of his misdoings if they continued. What happened next, at least in Horra’s account, set off a chain reaction that prompted Sitjar’s questioning of his sanity and his eventual exile from California. “His anger was so intense that he burst out with many offensive words against Our King and his ministers.”⁵⁷⁰ Sitjar’s indignation was not surprising, as charges of inflated baptismal numbers dogged the Franciscans in the Americas for centuries.

As Spanish colonization of the Americas began in earnest during the sixteenth century, the Franciscans reported extraordinary numbers of baptized Indians as the supposed results of their efforts. As early as 1524, immediately following Hernán Cortes’ conquest of Mexico, Franciscans claimed to baptize one million Nahuatl. Five years later, the missionary Fray Pedro de Gante boasted of 14,000 baptisms per day.⁵⁷¹ In 1531, the Franciscan general chapter announced 250,000 Indians had received the holy waters (a Spanish translation of the chapter’s report claimed 1 million).⁵⁷² In 1540, the Franciscan chronicler Toribio of Benavente, commonly known as Motolinía, claimed that the order had baptized 6 million individuals.⁵⁷³

These claims met with much skepticism from the other missionary orders. The Dominican missionary and colonial critic Bartolomé Las Casas denounced hasty Franciscan

⁵⁶⁸ Fray Antonio de la Concepción al Virrey, July 12, 1797, College of San Fernando, Mexico City BANC MSS C-A 10, 52.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁷¹ Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico*, 90.

⁵⁷² Stresser-Péan, *The Sun God and the Savior*, 17-18.

⁵⁷³ Ibid., 18.

baptisms as lacking proper religious instruction and the necessary materials.⁵⁷⁴ Motolinía admitted that adults were given only brief instructions before receiving the water, with friars essentially convincing the Indians that these rites were meaningful. Members of the other missionary orders and Pope Paul III denounced the Franciscans' focus on numbers over religious awakening.⁵⁷⁵ The First Council in 1555 specifically mandated that "no priest or monk administer the sacrament of baptism to any adult except he be sufficiently instructed in the holy faith."⁵⁷⁶ Even Serra in the early period of colonizing California taught his missionaries that baptism meant immediate conversion, and each conversion represented another victory in the spiritual conquest.⁵⁷⁷ The Franciscan zeal for immediate conversion remained an issue they contended with throughout their time in the Americas. Their efforts to convert as many Indians as quickly as possible in the face of consistent, though mild, opposition to the practice speaks to how deeply imbedded it was in their missionary endeavor.

While Horra's charges in totality painted a damning picture of life in and around the missions, Fray Sitjar's ecclesiastical lapses represented the sharpest departure from earlier complaints from civil authorities. Borica and Fages, particularly the latter, placed pressure on the Franciscans to reform spheres that overlapped with their secular responsibilities. Neve was the last governor who inserted himself into the inner affairs of the missionaries, and Mexico City repealed his reformist legal code after interpreting it as an overreach, or even a power grab. The two later governors warned Mexico City that some missionaries' actions hindered the spiritual conquest, but they went no further. Fray Horra observed no such constraints. And like the *temporalistas* that came before him, Horra had not lost faith in God, the church, or even the

⁵⁷⁴ Hanke, *The Spanish Struggle for Justice*, 87.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 97-98.

⁵⁷⁶ Charles S. Braden, *Religious Aspects of the Conquest of Mexico* (Durham, 1930), 229.

⁵⁷⁷ Sandos, *Converting California*, 82.

Franciscan order itself. The specific actions of Franciscans in California, such as the hasty or double baptisms, teaching the gospel in Indigenous languages, and beating the baptized Indians prompted him to worry for Spain's conquest of California.

Aside from his revelations regarding the inner workings and flawed culture existing within the Franciscan missions, Horra also described his harrowing final days in California. After their explosive argument, Sitjar left San Miguel for San Carmelo and told Lasuén that Horra became violently mad. "Without bothering to make an inquiry or even listen to me, that Priest [Lasuén] believed him and proceeded against me in the most tyrannical manner that one can imagine," he wrote.⁵⁷⁸ Lasuén ordered Fray José Miguel to go to Mission San Miguel to collect Horra. In his description of that event, Horra claimed Miguel "constantly spoke to me and treated me like I was insane" and refused to tell Horra why he must go to Monterey.⁵⁷⁹ When Horra tried to escape, Miguel insulted and struck Horra repeatedly, a claim he asserted two mission guards could confirm.⁵⁸⁰ Miguel beat Horra on his journey so badly that he fell ill. The physician at the presidio treated Horra, adding a second corroborating witness that he offered the viceroy.

This version of events stands in stark contrast to the version Lasuén gave to the interim Father Guardian, Pedro Callejas, at the College of San Fernando.⁵⁸¹ On September 28, 1797, Lasuén wrote that "I wish to report that Father Fray José de Miguel brought Father Fray Antonio de la Concepción to Monterey in a happy mood and without any difficulty, and without further

⁵⁷⁸ Fray Antonio de la Concepción al Virrey, July 12, 1797, College of San Fernando, Mexico City BANC MSS C-A 10, 52-53.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸¹ Fray Antonio Nogueira, the father guardian at the College of San Fernando, died before completing his term, and the college named Callejas interim superior before they elected Fray Martin Lull guardian on November 23, 1796, Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:16n1.

incident.”⁵⁸² When he finally heard from Lasuén, in writing rather than face-to-face, Horra was shocked when Lasuén only asked how long he had been mentally ill. Lasuén then ordered Horra back to the College of San Fernando.⁵⁸³

Horra vehemently defended his sanity, suggesting that multiple witness believed him, yet still participated in the charade. He stated that his lucidity confused his peers once he returned to the college. Lasuén informed them that he sent a missionary who suffered a mental breakdown and required their care. The leadership at the college told Horra that Lasuén’s letter ordering him to Mexico was the only information they received about his condition and the situation.

However, in his short time back, Horra heard the other missionaries discussing a second letter Lasuén wrote confiding to the father guardian that he believed Horra went insane. “Everyone is talking about this at the College,” he wrote, “Everyone is confused about this false charge since they have observed...no change or deviation in my behavior.”⁵⁸⁴ He added that Borica similarly did not agree with the accusations. Although Borica confided to Horra that he both believed the priest was of sound mind and that Lasuén’s actions were illegal, he refused to get involved in ecclesiastical disputes. As a favor to the priest, Borica signed a document confirming Horra’s sanity. When Horra produced that document along with others in an attempt to prove his soundness of mind, he claimed that the father guardian and the elders’ council “paid no attention to me and kept my three reports.”⁵⁸⁵ Despite all of the turmoil Horra lived through during his ordeal, he wished to remain part of the Franciscan order and requested that the viceroy grant him a transfer to the Franciscan province in Michoacán, “which in my opinion seems the most

⁵⁸² Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:47.

⁵⁸³ Fray Antonio de la Concepción al Virrey, July 12, 1797, College of San Fernando, Mexico City BANC MSS C-A 10, 53.

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

reformed,” he stated.⁵⁸⁶ Horra moved back and forth between the College of San Fernando and the college at Querétaro until 1803. A year later, he received permission to move back to Spain, settling in Castile.⁵⁸⁷

Horra’s letter to the viceroy began a chain reaction that reverberated from Mexico City to the provincial capital in Monterey. For the first time, the viceregal government demanded explanations from all involved. Both Lasuén and Borica responded to Horra’s charges to a degree not seen in California since the invasion in 1769. For his part, Governor Borica sent a thorough questionnaire to all four of his presidio commanders, with fifteen questions crafted to understand daily life at the California missions. Azanza also demanded a response from Lasuén, who composed a lengthy, expansive, point-by-point defense of every charge Horra made against the Franciscans in California. Of the two documents, Lasuén’s became more significant over time, as he provided the most intimate view of the inner workings of the California mission system ever produced. Regardless of historical stature, both documents proved to be informative not just as snap shots of the missions at the close of the eighteenth century, but because they represented a paradigm shift. From that time forward, the missionaries in California continued to face serious questions regarding the nature and effectiveness of their work until the end of the mission period in 1834.⁵⁸⁸

⁵⁸⁶ Fray Antonio de la Concepción al Virrey, July 12, 1797, College of San Fernando, Mexico City, BANC MSS C-A, 58

⁵⁸⁷ Geiger, *Franciscan Missionaries*, 124.

⁵⁸⁸ There are several instances of both religious and civil authorities requesting information on the duties of the Franciscans in California and the spiritual progress of baptized California Indians or said authorities reminding the Franciscans of their duties to the king, Spaniards generally, and mission Indians. For the 1815 request see Geiger, *As the Padres Saw Them*; for a summary of these requests and reminders see, Bancroft, *History of California*, 2:400-405.

Borica's Questionnaire

Governor Borica had already laid the groundwork for further investigations of missionary problems in California with the new viceroy before Horra's letter. Just weeks into office, Azanza contacted Borica seeking information about Mission San Francisco. Specifically, he asked Borica about baptized California Indians and if the problems they experienced were now corrected. Borica assured his new superior that conditions there had dramatically improved. "Since the month of Oct 96 [sic] they are given three hot meals a day they are not whipped or mistreated as before, and they assign work to the Indians more prudently," Borica reported. He sidestepped taking credit for the changes at San Francisco but made it known that Father President Lasuén was not behind the improvements either. Instead, Borica told the viceroy that Fray Fernández motivated the changes. According to Borica, Fernández was "filled with sensitivity and love and a strong obligation to his Indians," and was known for his "continuous disputes with his partner Fray M. Landaeta, to desist from the old method and follow another path more humane and rational." Unfortunately for all involved, Fernández "had to retire to his college last year due to madness."⁵⁸⁹ It seemed Borica had little confidence that Lasuén would find another priest to fill Fernández's role.

At the end of July 1798, Viceroy Azanza faced a problematic situation in the remote yet strategically significant province of Alta California and realized that no one in Mexico City understood the situation there. Within the last two years, missionaries at San Francisco narrowly avoided starting full-scale war with several Ohlone tribal groups living around the San Francisco Bay. In addition to misreading inter-tribal rivalries and stoking those tensions, there were beatings, starvation, and forced labor. Then, the person most responsible for stabilizing the

⁵⁸⁹ *Borica al Virrey, Trato de los indios en les miss.*, Monterey, July 1 1798, BANC MSS, C-A 24, 421.

situation within the mission itself reportedly went insane immediately following the reversal of fortune. Within weeks, another Franciscan emerged challenging the management of the missions, and he too went insane. Yet both men steadfastly denied these accusations. Moreover, upon their return to Mexico both were lucid and in full control of their cognitive functions. Ten years passed since Viceroy Juan Vicente de Güemes Pacheco de Padilla y Horcasitas, the second Count of Revillagigedo, threatened that any California governor who meddled in the affairs of the Franciscans faced condemnation and a loss of rank and privileges.⁵⁹⁰ The mood in Mexico City had shifted since that time. Azanza ordered Borica to investigate the California mission system, requiring the commanders of the presidios to record everything they knew about its innerworkings.⁵⁹¹

Borica created a list of questions for the presidio commanders that interrogated the Franciscans' institutional culture in California. The questions themselves were reactionary and spoke to the specific claims made in Horra's denouncement. The first five of the fifteen questions probed the veracity of Horra's claim that Sitjar and some of the other missionaries' actions hindered the spiritual conquest in California. Borica asked if the gospel was taught in Spanish or in Indigenous languages; if their religious instruction remained rigorous and thorough; if the converts were required to speak Spanish, or merely permitted to; if the converts were allowed to go back to their homes whenever they chose; and did evidence of rebaptism exist? The next five questions focused on the baptized Indians' living conditions at the missions. Did the missionaries provide sufficient hot food for the baptized Indians; did they have proper clothing for all seasons; what type of lodgings existed, particularly for young, unmarried women;

⁵⁹⁰ See chapter three of this dissertation.

⁵⁹¹ Diego de Borica's questionnaire quoted from Archivo General de la Nación, Provincias Internas Legajo 219, Expediente 14, p. 9-11, translated in Beebe and Senkewicz, *Tensions among the Missionaries in the 1790s*, 27-30.

how many hours of work did they perform in a single day and were pregnant or nursing women, the elderly, and the young required to work; and what sort of diversions and activities did the Indians at the missions get to enjoy when not working? The next two focused on punishments administered at the missions. Were baptized California Indians punished for going to the pueblos or the presidios, even during their free time; what specific punishments did the Franciscans mete out; was there any distinction as to age or sex, or the specific offense; did the padres have their own shackles, chains, stocks, and jails, or did they use the soldiers' equipment? The final three questions focused on the missionaries' wealth. The government wanted to know if the missionaries adhered to the official price list when selling animals, agricultural products, or other goods produced at the missions; did the missionaries buy expensive liquor and spirits for their own private use separately from what the government sends them; and finally, how much hard currency existed at each mission, presidio, and how much was in control of the synod in Mexico?⁵⁹² Borica's questionnaire represented the first thorough accounting of the missionaries' actions since they came to California in 1769. Despite a series of governors alerting an unconcerned government in Mexico City to the problems growing in the province, no one investigated. However, in the second half of 1798, the combination of the near ruin of Mission San Francisco and two whistleblowing padres became the tipping point against viceregal indifference.

The presidio commanders' responses varied based upon their locations and the specific padres and missions they knew. All four agreed that Horra falsely claimed that the baptized Indians could leave the missions for an indeterminate amount of time. The rules were the same throughout the mission field. Indians sought permission from the priests to go visit their families

⁵⁹² Borica, Expediente, in Beebe and Senkewicz, *Tensions among the Missionaries in the 1790s*, 27-30.

for a specified amount of time on *paseo*. If they did not return in the agreed upon time frame, the missionaries formed search parties and punished the truants. The commanders' responses regarding intensity of punishment and the offences that prompted it were embedded in the questions about how baptized Indians spent their free time. All four men agreed that the missionaries did not approve of Indians working in either the presidio or the towns and the Franciscans punished both offences. Felipe de Goycochea, the commander at Santa Barbara confirmed that "Christian Indians at these missions are not allowed to have any contact with the *gente de razón*, [or people of reason, their term for the Spanish population] but also any Indian who even during his free time associates with soldiers is deprived of food and punished."⁵⁹³ He replied that Indians were "made to somewhat suffer" if they helped a soldier that taught them skills such as making shoes or clothing for themselves or to sell.⁵⁹⁴ The four men also mostly agreed that the missionaries did not follow the price list, and that they had no way to know how much money the priests had tucked away.⁵⁹⁵

Although the respondents did not have much knowledge about the alleged ecclesiastical issues, their answers did offer confirmation that inappropriate levels of punishment were the norm around the California mission system. The Franciscans claimed since the time of Serra that they only punished baptized California Indians at the missions in the manner that a loving father would his misbehaving children.⁵⁹⁶ Serra and Lasuén both were forced to admit that in some specific cases certain missionaries may have gone too far in disciplining mission Indians, but

⁵⁹³ Goycochea to Borica, Santa Barbara, December 14, 1798, BANC MSS C-A 10, 70-79, quoted in Beebe and Senkewicz, *Tensions among the Missionaries in the 1790s*, 32.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁶ During the murder investigation of Fray Tomás de la Peña Lasuén wrote "I pointed out to him that perhaps by giving an ear pulling, a punch, a rap on the head, or a slap with the hand it would be possible to give, now or in the future, an occasion...for similar false charges...And so, he should refrain from such action, even though such punishment is commonly given by the most indulgent fathers to their own sons," in Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 1:117.

these cases were anomalies rather than the norm.⁵⁹⁷ Additionally, Franciscans also argued that they only punished severe transgressions, whether against civil law or Christian teachings. The testimony of the commanders offered a different picture. Taken as a whole, the examples given show a regime more concerned with containing individual liberty than punishing actual crimes. Men and women on their *paseo* who spent extra time with their families were hunted down and punished. Franciscans responded to California Indians fraternizing with soldiers and townspeople by withholding food. Learning new skills or looking to make a living on their own terms also provoked Franciscans to violence. Again, the commanders confirmed older reports regarding punishment. Since the earliest days in the missions, civil authorities alerted the government in Mexico City to the cruelty and abuse perpetrated by missionaries in California. Even visitors like Jean François de La Pérouse reported that the Indians were beaten for offenses that were left unpunished in Europe. Although the commanders could not confirm hasty baptisms or other ecclesiastical lapses, their responses in no uncertain terms solidified the fact that physical abuse for mundane actions occurred frequently at the missions.

Fray Sitjar's Letter

By the end of December 1798, Father President Lasuén heard whispers regarding the government's investigation into Horra's claims and began preparing a defense. To Lasuén's frustration, the governor played the situation close to his chest. In the spring, Lasuén wrote a letter to Martin Lull at the College of San Fernando that "some days ago I spoke about this to the governor in an effort to bring to light if he had been asked for some report regarding the remonstrance of the Father in question [Horra]." He continued, "but I found out nothing. He told me nothing. He merely tried to make me see that he was in favor of the retirement of this

⁵⁹⁷ Serra, *Writings of Junipero Serra*, 2:415.

religious.”⁵⁹⁸ Once again, Lasuén responded unilaterally to a serious situation. This time, he railroaded Horra out of California in such a haphazard manner it caught the attention of the viceroy. With the specter of a formal investigation into Horra’s charges, Lasuén requested that his longtime friend and Horra accuser, Fray Sitjar, make an official statement confirming the exiled missionary’s mental state. On January 31, 1799, Sitjar responded with a long letter recounting the worst manifestations of Horra’s alleged madness.

Sitjar’s account of Horra’s mental state was sprawling and filled with lurid details. “On the very day he arrived,” wrote Sitjar, Horra “was already demonstrating unequivocal signs of who he was and what one could expect from such a subject.” Lasuén was there that first day and dined with the two priests. Throughout dinner, Horra went on and on about a point Sitjar failed to mention, causing Lasuén to demand that Horra cease his argument. Sitjar wrote that he “paid close attention to his facial expression and his body movements. It looked as if he wanted to strangle Your Reverence.” The next night, Sitjar claimed that Horra confessed his desire to do something to Lasuén that would have “resounded throughout the land.” Horra, according to Sitjar, then proceeded to flail, beat his chest, and rant so much he nearly foamed at the mouth. This scene took place 100 paces from the guard house, in Sitjar’s estimation. Horra concluded his first night at San Miguel by screaming that the missionaries in California were tyrants, again and again. None of this caught the attention of the mission guards.⁵⁹⁹

Sitjar continued recounting tales of Horra’s violent temper. Horra, Sitjar alleged, became enraged when served a meatless dinner. He ordered Sitjar to whip the Indian servant, and Sitjar calmly convinced him that this particular instance required patience. Horra refused to relent and according to Sitjar, manipulated a soldier into lashing the Indian the next day. Sitjar reported an

⁵⁹⁸ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:117.

⁵⁹⁹ Buenaventura Sitjar quoted and translated in Beebe and Senkewicz, *Tensions among the Missionaries*, 33-34.

instance of Horra threatening to kill an Indian man with a knife or a lance because he thought the man insulted him in his native tongue. Horra later boasted about it to the mission guards, who all got a good laugh at the Indigenous man's expense. Another time he whipped a young boy with his cord so hard that Sitjar heard it ten paces away. Sitjar believed that Horra's violent outbursts drove converts away from San Miguel, particularly those from other missions who came to help with the new establishment's founding. The older man recalled a time when another new missionary, Fray Antonio Peyrí, expressed no surprise to hear that Fray Horra wanted to attack a man with a knife while angry. Sitjar saved the worst of the allegedly insane priest's behavior for last. According to the older priest, one day, Horra leapt up and shouted for all the world to hear, "This afternoon I am going off with a boy and I am going to order him to fornicate." Sitjar replied, saying, "Father, I do not intend to pardon you for those or similar, serious crimes."⁶⁰⁰ Sitjar added that soldiers heard Horra's declaration and others around the mission.

Sitjar continued his chronicle of Horra's alleged madness. Horra's condition not only caused him to attack people verbally and physically but manifested in his religiosity as well. At one point, Horra gave a sermon on the Franciscans' role in California as teachers and judges. Sitjar did not expound on the sermon, but emphasized that Horra waved his hands frantically, urging everyone to pray together. Horra then claimed that he possessed three royal decrees in his trunk that could prove he knew the king's orders for missionaries. Sitjar asserted that this sermon drove some recently baptized Indians to leave the mission and to stay away for some time. In a similar vein, Sitjar wrote, "I also noticed he would begin to pray for long periods of time and for no reason." Moreover, Sitjar claimed that he sometimes found Horra excessively praying, "swelled up like a toad." Another incident had Horra praying over a cross on the day of the

⁶⁰⁰ Sitjar quoted and translated in Beebe and Senkewicz, *Tensions among the Missionaries*, 34, 35, 37, 40.

Assumption of Our Lady so zealously he appeared to wrestle it. He also chanted prayers repeatedly and in a bizarre manner, enough that it caused Sitjar to observe him “with deliberation and concern.”⁶⁰¹

Sitjar’s description of Horra’s alleged insanity requires intense scrutiny for several reasons. First, it was the sole piece of evidence used to discredit a member of the Franciscan order who alerted the government to serious systemic issues in the missions. Moreover, this was the second case of Franciscan leadership in California labeling a whistleblower insane within a span of several months. Since the onset of Lasuén presidency, there were multiple instances when he falsified medical conditions to rid himself of problematic missionaries. Conversely, in the case of de la Peña, Lasuén used flagging mental health as a shield for a priest who faced murder charges. When coupled with the many cases of both hypochondria and malingering noted by Lasuén throughout the 1790s, understanding the veracity of Sitjar’s claims is of paramount importance. A related but different aspect that requires scrutiny was the way Sitjar’s letter and Lasuén’s instantaneous acceptance of its accuracy reflected on previous scandals and his management of them. Of all the major problems outlined in this dissertation, the cases of Frays Fernández and Horra gave the best glimpse behind the Franciscan curtain precisely because the accusers were themselves Franciscans. Between 1769 through 1795, there was no other case that allowed this view into the mechanics of relations between missionaries. The importance of this lens cannot be overstated. Finally, Sitjar’s letter offers an opportunity to understand the role of violence within the mission system. Sitjar allegedly witnessed extreme threats and acts of violence, which, if true, expose the ubiquitous nature of violence in the California mission system.

⁶⁰¹ Sitjar quoted and translated in Beebe and Senkewicz, *Tensions among the Missionaries*, 40.

Sitjar's first accusation against Horra was that he admittedly fantasized about killing Lasuén with his bare hands. In the venerable priest's telling, Horra rambled on about subjects he deigned not to share in his letter. After Lasuén admonished him, Horra looked at his superior with such murderous rage that Sitjar read it on his face. Then, the following evening, Horra reportedly insinuated he nearly killed Lasuén to Sitjar, one of Lasuén's oldest friends, and then raved and screamed. All of this took place roughly 100 paces from the mission's guard's quarters. If these events actually occurred, they raise several questions. First, why did the guards not hear the tumult and if they did, why did they not respond to it? There is no record of the mission guards contacting any presidio and reporting that a priest loudly proclaimed his desire to murder Lasuén. If the guards did not hear it, why did Sitjar not raise concern? Why did he not write to Lasuén that his life may be in danger? If he did, and the record is lost, why did Lasuén never write to Borica or to the College of San Fernando? Even if Borica, Lasuén, and Sitjar decided to keep the threats quiet, Lasuén would have reported the situation to his superiors at the college. Furthermore, based on the manner in which Franciscan leadership dealt with serious issues prior to this occasion, this inter-institutional silence would represent a significant break from precedent. It is difficult to discern a viable reason Borica and Lasuén would allow a dangerous man to continue operating freely at San Miguel.

Sitjar's letter also contained multiple accounts of Horra indiscriminately punishing converts at Mission San Miguel. He reportedly whipped a boy with his cord, ordered another baptized Indian whipped for his own mistake, kept a lance under his bed, and threatened to stab another man with a knife. All of these incidents happened at indeterminate times and intervals. Of all of Sitjar's claims, these are the hardest to unpack. As demonstrated throughout this dissertation, from the earliest days of the missions through to 1799, when Sitjar wrote his

account, Franciscans punished Indigenous Californians to levels described as cruel and abusive. It is entirely possible that Horra took part in this culture of abuse. If this was the case though, there is again no paper trail to prove it. Mission guards and presidio soldiers often noted particularly abusive missionaries. Even after Revillagigedo's proclamation that soldiers falsely accusing Franciscans of abuse would be met with stern repercussions, the men still reported cruelty to their superiors. Borica obsessed on the subject, as his questionnaire demonstrated. The bulk of Horra's concerns focused on Franciscan management of the missions, only briefly noting their treatment of Indians. Borica's questionnaire reflected his concerns and investigated conditions converts endured under the missionaries. Why did the governor not know about a new missionary behaving so violently? Finally, there was Sitjar's accusation that Horra openly bragged about his desire to rape a young boy. Twice Sitjar wrote that Horra exclaimed his various desires loud enough for guards and others to hear. As with all of Sitjar's other claims, there exists no backchannel communication about this incident. Why did no one write about or act against Horra's violence until after his peers exiled him and he denounced the California Franciscans?

Sitjar's final accusation, that Horra loudly proclaimed his intent to force himself on a young Indian boy, is troubling whether true or false. There were stories passed down from witnesses and victims of Franciscan sexual abuse in the missions, such as a Chumash man's account detailing an unnamed priest at Mission San Buenaventura's routine sexual abuse of Chumash girls.⁶⁰² And though it was not explicitly rape, in the early 1820s at Mission Santa Cruz, a missionary reportedly had sexual relations with baptized Indian women, which caused a

⁶⁰² Fernando Librado, John Harrington, and Travis Hudson, *Breath of the Sun: Life in Early California as told by a Chumash Indian Fernando Librado to John P. Harrington* (Banning, 1979), 52–53.

great scandal in the surrounding area.⁶⁰³ Although these two incidences were wholly separate and come much later in time, they remain instructive for Sitjar's accusation. First, they prove that there were cases of sexual encounters between Franciscans and Indian people, ranging from rape to unethical sexual liaisons. Second, they demonstrate that such relations were known, and, at times, documented. There is no other corroborating testimony in the case of Horra, despite having allegedly made his ugly boast in front of several people, according to Sitjar. Yet again, there is no evidence of Sitjar telling anyone about Horra's dangerous and potentially destructive words. Finally, there is the odd placement of the accusation in Sitjar's letter. It comes at the end, long after he finished recounting examples of Horra's violent behavior. Sitjar already moved into a description of Horra's last days at San Miguel and his transit to Monterey. Then, just before he signed his letter came the story about Horra's plan to sexually abuse a young boy. All of these questions about Sitjar's letter point to the document's possible lack of credibility.

There are two ways to interpret the silence surrounding Horra's alleged violence and assassination threats. The first is that Sitjar's claims are simply not true. Of all the witnesses Sitjar placed in these scenarios, not one came forward to report a murderously insane missionary who randomly beat baptized Indians and raved to such a degree that battle-hardened mission guards were terrified. It also fits within a larger pattern of Franciscan challenges to accusations against them. Serra and Lasuén both, against a host of varied charges, countered with false equivalency, claiming their accusers were as guilty as the Franciscans.⁶⁰⁴ Typically, they deployed this tactic against meddling soldiers and governors. Sitjar's letter contained examples of this pattern that will be discussed below. Therefore, the letter questioning Horra's sanity was

⁶⁰³ This is reported in by the town commissioner in a letter found in BANC MSS C-A 18, 179-180.

⁶⁰⁴ For an example of this during Serra's time as father president see, Serra, *Writings of Junípero Serra*, 4:205.

another link in a growing chain of evidence demonstrating Franciscan leadership's reliance on cover-ups and fabrication of evidence to manipulate the outcomes of unfriendly investigations.

The second interpretation is no less damning. The total inaction from all sides in the face of a homicidal, violent missionary speaks to the ubiquitous nature of violence in the California mission system. According to Sitjar, mission guards either ignored Horra's behavior, laughed with him or at him, depending on the situation, or were afraid of him. Sitjar claimed that Horra's violence disturbed him yet failed to alert anyone to it. Even Fray Peyr , a younger missionary of Horra's generation, only felt sad resignation about Horra's violent temper upon hearing that a fellow priest of the Catholic faith wanted to stab an Indian to death. That none of this warranted investigation or even mention would be a dire condemnation of everyday life in the missions. Franciscan leadership in California spent time and energy rigorously defending their practices and insisting that episodes of cruelty were the exception and not the norm. Yet, taken at face value, Sitjar, a man who had been in California for nearly the entirety of the mission period, provided testimony possibly describing the profoundly callous and violent nature of Franciscan missions.

Sitjar also attacked Horra's claims that he witnessed the older priest commit serious ecclesiastical transgressions. He did so by employing false equivalence, suggesting that Horra engaged in strange acts of religiosity. Of the issues Sitjar raised regarding Horra's mental health, this charge rings the hollowest. The Franciscan order widely practiced self-flagellation and other means of mortification of the flesh to achieve the Christ-like life of their founder, St. Francis of Assisi, deep into the nineteenth century.⁶⁰⁵ The founder of the California mission system,

⁶⁰⁵ For example, Fray Jos  Mar  Zalvidea who served in California from 1805-1846, whose "whole body was scarred by the *silicio* [lash] because he constantly whipped himself while shouting at Satan, to scare him off. His feet were in miserable condition because he had buried nails in them," according to Felipa Osuna, the daughter of a soldier at the San Diego presidio in 1878. Zalvidea was called "crazy" colloquially but was loved by the

Junípero Serra, practiced extreme versions of self-flagellation. Serra whipped himself with chains, wore a burlap undershirt with wire woven into it to create barbs that pulled at his flesh when he walked, burned himself, and then tore off the burnt skin as it healed. The leadership at San Fernando may have thought that Serra went further than “the prescribed regulations of the college,” but that did not stop them from allowing him to lead the Spanish colonization efforts in California.⁶⁰⁶ Therefore, Sitjar’s unease with the intensity and longevity of Horra’s prayers seems out of place with typical manifestations of Franciscan religiosity. In fact, it situates Horra among his younger generation of Franciscans coming from Spain through Mexico who sought a return to a more orthodox understanding of the order’s values and place in Catholicism.

Viceroy Azanza Demands Answers

By September 1799, Azanza processed Borica’s questionnaire and his soldiers’ replies and ordered a response from the Franciscans. The viceroy contacted Father Guardian Lull at the College of San Fernando and tasked him with reviewing the presidio commander’s replies and answering them. Lull in turn requested that Father President Lasuén respond to the charges.⁶⁰⁷ During the previous thirty years, distance and necessity shielded the Franciscans in California every time a governor accused them of mismanagement. Imperial Spain simply did not have the plan or the resources to radically alter its course in California. The spiritual conquest was, in theory, the most cost-effective form of colonization Mexico City had on the eve of the nineteenth century, so it was imperative that it did not fail.⁶⁰⁸ Spain did not have the military power to

Spanish speaking population of Southern California. Felipe Osuna quoted in *Testimonios: Early California Through the Eyes of Women 1815-1848*, Beebe, Rose Marie & Robert M. Senkewicz, eds., (Berkeley, 2006), 152.

⁶⁰⁶ For the examples of Serra’s mortification of the flesh, see Palóu, *Life of Fray Junípero Serra*, 41-42, 274. For the college’s view on Serra’s extremism, see Maynard Geiger, *Life and Times of Fray Junípero Serra O.F.M., or The Man who Never Turned Back (1713-1784)*, (Richmond, 1959), 146-147.

⁶⁰⁷ Beebe and Senkewicz, *Tensions among the Missionaries*, 40.

⁶⁰⁸ New Spain’s government was so desperate to settle California at this time that in December 1801 they debated sending convicts to California, Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:255-256.

conquer distant California. After a 1781 Quechan revolt wiped out the overland road from Mexico to California, settlers could not easily get to the distant province. Inspector General Gálvez's choice in 1768 to use missionaries to pacify California had painted Mexico City into a corner. Spain depended on the Franciscans in California. Therefore, Horra's situation was unusual enough that it commanded the government's attention in an unprecedented manner. Azanza needed to know the truth about the remote province, and Lasuén would provide the answers.

Lasuén began preparing his defense in late 1798, though he still faced many other issues. After thirty years, the problem of staffing the missions remained a constant burden, particularly after two recent arrivals returned to Mexico, both allegedly due to insanity.⁶⁰⁹ Moreover, the missionaries who were in California continued to behave in a manner that transgressed Franciscan norms. Rumors reached Lull at the college that some Franciscans went about dressed in secular garb. Lasuén assured the father guardian that the practice had escaped his notice and vowed to become more vigilant about rooting it out.⁶¹⁰ The old contest with the military over sending squads of baptized California Indians out to capture escaped converts also reemerged during this time. Lasuén argued that missionary-led expeditions "have always been very helpful both in general and in individual cases."⁶¹¹ Lasuén omitted the violent actions of Fray Fernández several years before at Mission Santa Cruz, for which he intensely reprimanded the priest in writing. Finally, two more Franciscans, Frays Agustín Merino and Benito Catalán, suffered mental breakdowns.⁶¹² Lasuén weakened under the pressure of Borica's questionnaire and his rebuttal amid all of the other problems he faced. In an unusual turn, Lasuén complained to Lull

⁶⁰⁹ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:118.

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁶¹² *Ibid.*, 127.

about Governor Borica's "annoying delays" and a letter from the Bishop of Sonora that proved to be "a very annoying document."⁶¹³ Lasuén's frustration came through in his correspondence.

In September 1799, Governor Borica abruptly retired due to health concerns, causing an unforeseen change in civil leadership in California at a crucial time. Unbeknownst to anyone but his officers, in April, the governor petitioned Azanza requesting medical leave. His superiors processed and granted the request in June and the news finally made its way to California that fall.⁶¹⁴ Borica's time as governor was perhaps the most tumultuous the region experienced in the eighteenth century and would be until after the emergence of the Mexican Republic in 1824. Like the governors who came before him, Borica rode a thin line between ensuring the success of Spain's colonial project and treating the Indigenous peoples' whose homelands Spain invaded with some measure of respect and dignity. As detailed in the previous chapter, he worked to ensure that the Spanish population did not unnecessarily provoke or harm Indigenous people throughout his tenure. In an ironic turn, Borica was less confrontational with the Franciscans than his predecessors yet was the first California governor to force the government in Mexico City to concede that problems existed with the order's management of the province. Unfortunately for Borica, his retirement did not halt his illness and he died in Durango, Mexico on July 19, 1800.⁶¹⁵ The same man who served as interim governor after Fages' retirement, José Arrillaga, again took the role. Arrillaga's previous stint was marked by his lack of involvement with the missionaries and their machinations. Regardless of Arrillaga's abilities and inclinations, the process set in motion by Borica and Azanza continued.

⁶¹³ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:116-117.

⁶¹⁴ Bancroft, *History of California*, 2:729.

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 730.

At the start of the new century, Lasuén struggled to both manage a missionary field bereft of labor and prepare his refutation of Horra's charges. On January 2, he wrote to Lull at the college, apprising him of the trying times in California: "I can hardly recall a time in many years in which I was so busy," he wrote. He indicated that he had finally seen Horra's list of accusations, though he evidenced knowledge about them months before. Although he called the priest's charges a "shock" and a "misfortune," Lasuén felt confident that Horra's accusations would come to nothing. "Much that we had to fear in these charges is removed precisely by the character of the accuser," he observed, adding his "hope in God that we shall be able to refute and rebut them." Lasuén's word choice is telling. First, he clearly suggested that the Franciscans had something to fear in Horra's charges. Second, Lasuén indicated that he was sure the charges would not stick because of Horra's alleged madness, not because they were false. He also promised Lull to slow his men's requests for retirement as there were no missionaries in Mexico ready to come to California. However, there were four retirements already approved, which placed additional strain on the mission system. The pressure that Lasuén faced at the dawn of the nineteenth century led him to self-pity: "As for myself, when do I retire? Alas, poor me!"⁶¹⁶

That same month, Lasuén corresponded with Viceroy Azanza regarding his previous efforts to block Christian Indians from learning artisanal skills from mechanics sent from Mexico. Lasuén had to tread lightly with the viceroy on the subject of the mechanics. Part of Horra's "dossier of charges" included the missionaries punishing baptized Indians who learned new skills outside of the missions. This had also been an issue in the early years of Borica's tenure. This time, the viceroy intervened directly in California's governance. Azanza requested that Lasuén create a system in which Indian people could learn new skills while not impeding

⁶¹⁶ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:143-144.

their Christian education. In response, Lasuén repurposed the logic he employed when Borica asked for the same thing years earlier. “They are neophytes,” Lasuén informed the viceroy, “and when removed from the missionaries and made independent, they forget much of what they learned.” Additionally, Lasuén admitted that baptized Indians preferred tasks that removed them from the missions or allowed them to work on their own and complained that soldiers knew this and took advantage of it. In Lasuén’s reckoning, this led to neophyte discontent with life at the missions and caused them to flee from their Christian teachings. Lasuén failed to recognize how this reflected on life in the missions. He favored constantly monitoring Indian students, a system in which “the missionaries are careful to select only the most docile youths to take part in the project – although in this regard there is not as a rule much room for choice.” The only other option, in Lasuén’s estimation, was to free up the missionaries from all their other tasks so that they could keep a watchful eye on the Indian’s training. Finally, he informed Azanza that the viceroy’s plan would lead to “very serious inconveniences.”⁶¹⁷ Lasuén believed he already faced enough of those.

Through the late spring and early summer of 1800, Lasuén’s correspondence with Father Guardian Lull took a strange turn, indicating that the pressure of Horra’s accusations, the need for a defense, and the mounting requests for retirement from the missionaries had a significant effect on him. Sometime in March, Lasuén received word from Lull at the college that he grew impatient waiting for Lasuén’s answer to Horra’s charges. Despite writing to Lull in early January about the shocking misfortune of Horra’s letter, even going so far as to suggest there were things to fear from it, in both April and May, Lasuén claimed no knowledge of the letter or

⁶¹⁷ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:147-148.

its contents.⁶¹⁸ On April 3 he wrote to Lull, “Since I have no knowledge of what the accusations are, it is impossible for me to answer them.”⁶¹⁹ On May 2, he wrote the following to his superior: “I have heard a rumor that a mail has been lost, and perhaps that was the fate of documents, or the copies of documents, containing the charges of Father Concepción and the reports that the governor and officials presumably sent to me.”⁶²⁰ Finally, on September 10, Lasuén confirmed with the new father guardian, Fray José Gasol, that he had received Horra’s letter.⁶²¹

Lasuén’s insistence that he did not know the contents of Horra’s letter raises several questions. If true, why did Lasuén profess to know the “dossier of charges” in his January correspondence? Why did Sitjar write a long letter about Horra’s sanity that clearly mirrored the charges in the exiled missionary’s report? At that point in 1799, Horra was already back in Mexico for nearly a year. Also, Lasuén knew of Borica’s questionnaire and had written about that in a previous letter. Was Lasuén lying to his superior at the college? His accounting of the situation, that he had somehow missed a packet of mail containing all the necessary information regarding Horra’s charges, does not add up. Lasuén usually became perturbed when forced to defend the missions. He also despised missionaries going to the civil government to complain about problems the father president felt should remain in-house. Perhaps something he wrote to Lull on April 3 revealed how he truly felt about the proceedings. “The result, I am convinced, will be in our favor; or at least it will make clear how utterly unnecessary was this crude and insulting appeal to civil authority in order that whatever is amiss may be corrected.”⁶²² Lasuén

⁶¹⁸ On January 2, 1800 Lasuén wrote to Lull the following: “Finally there came to Your Reverence, like a shock, the dossier of accusations from our brother, Concepción. What a misfortune! May God forgive him. Much that we had reason to fear in these charges is removed precisely by the character of the accuser; and I hope in God that we shall be able to refute and rebut them, *seeing they are what the good Father Vicar has kindly noted for me in Your Reverence’s letter* (emphasis added).” Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:143-144.

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁶²¹ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁶²² *Ibid.*, 152.

felt deeply angry and perhaps thought the defense that Lull, Gasol, and Azanza required was beneath him. Nevertheless, he could not avoid answering Horra's charges.

On September 14, 1800, to further develop his defense of the mission system, Lasuén sent a circular to his men throughout California informing them of the larger situation and requesting their assistance. Lasuén forwarded Borica's questionnaire and the answers the commanders returned. He also notified them that the military's inquiry sprung from a "digest of charges preferred against us before the central government by a brother of ours."⁶²³ While their initial response to the charges might cause "horror and indignation," Lasuén asked that they instead report everything they knew "with the greatest simplicity, modesty, and meekness." Lasuén worried that the constant infighting he and his fellow Franciscans experienced throughout the 1790s might show itself in this opportunity to air priestly grievances. He reminded them that they were Franciscans first and men second, because in Lasuén's estimation the last two major scandals got out due to inside leaks. This time, Lasuén collected the missionaries' information and compiled it himself. His would be the final word.⁶²⁴

By late October, crafting the *Refutation* had taken a toll on Lasuén. With increasing regularity, he became more like the young monk in California who refused to accept his fate on the extreme edge of Catholic civilization. He complained bitterly: "And now, poor me, what am I to do in regard to the Father Concepción [Horra] problem, with so much to write, so many summaries to make...and so much to arrange in such a fashion that it will not give offense, and yet be equal to the occasion," he confided to Gasol.⁶²⁵ On December 9, he wrote to Gasol that "the whole thing is a patent calumny concocted by men who were either prejudiced or ignorant

⁶²³ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:162.

⁶²⁴ *Ibid.*, 162-163.

⁶²⁵ *Ibid.*, 168.

of the facts. May God forgive them all.”⁶²⁶ It even appeared as his mind meandered in the face of his enormous task: “I began this letter using a large script and lines far apart with the intention of writing very little, and in the end, I have to crowd things so as to make the paper suffice.”⁶²⁷

Refutation of Charges

Finally, in July 1801, after months of labor, Lasuén completed his *Refutation of Charges*; a work that started as a defense against Fray Horra’s accusations but became a justification for the mission system’s existence. The document was sprawling, with 130 sections each relating to direct charges contained in Horra’s letter, Borica’s questionnaire, and the presidio commanders’ responses. Lasuén used the opportunity to answer some of the long-standing questions that past California governors had raised about the Franciscans’ management of the missions and the day-to-day experiences of the Indians living within them. Lasuén’s *Refutation* provided a clear view inside the California missionary field and into the inner workings of Lasuén’s values and decision-making processes. More than a century after its creation, it still fulfills Azanza’s request to document the missions’ functions and to explain, to a degree, how the California missions took their particular shape by the end of Lasuén’s time as president. At no other point in his tenure did Lasuén express his personal values and goals for the missions so plainly. Lasuén never wavered in his belief in the morality of Franciscan ends and means. He was proud of what the order created in California and was therefore unafraid to document some of the most damning aspects of Franciscan colonialism precisely because he considered them normal and appropriate. In short, Lasuén felt so sure of himself and the order that he was not afraid to write it all down.

Lasuén began his *Refutation of Charges* with a defiant tone, stating that that task came as the unnecessary result of the viceregal government believing men who wanted to damage the

⁶²⁶ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:176.

⁶²⁷ *Ibid.*, 168.

Franciscans and their missions. He first targeted the late governor, Borica. Although he always demonstrated fairness with Lasuén and the missionaries, even following the crisis at Mission San Francisco, Borica was a military man, and they were the most consistent enemies the Franciscans had in California. Lasuén considered Borica's questionnaire to be an antagonism that sprung from his removal of Horra from California. Lasuén also argued that the original source that prompted the *Refutation* was an insane man. According to Lasuén, Horra's removal to Mexico should have been an open and shut case had Borica not sent out his questionnaire and Horra not written a letter to the viceroy after arriving back at the college. It appeared lost on Lasuén that the viceroy himself had requested both documents.⁶²⁸

Adopting another well-worn defensive position, Lasuén argued that everything that transpired after Horra's departure was unnecessary because he followed procedure and that Borica himself had observed Horra's mental state. "His lordship took greater pains than did I to show that the measures taken were not only desirable but necessary," Lasuén stated.⁶²⁹ He claimed that Borica confirmed Horra's boastfulness and propensity to display his strength; that he carried a pair of pistols in a trunk; Horra's tyrannical approach with the soldiers; and that Horra even held target practice competitions with the soldiers and a group of "gentile" Indigenous men. Lasuén believed these were the actions of someone who "was mentally incompetent or had suffered from some very serious mental upset."⁶³⁰ This description of Horra's personality is crucial for understanding Lasuén's version of insanity or mental breakdown. The actions he attributed to Horra do not necessarily indicate an unsound mind. While they were not the expected behaviors of a good missionary, they did not include the

⁶²⁸ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:194-195.

⁶²⁹ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.*

ravings that appeared in Fray Sitjar's description of Horra. For Lasuén, Horra's insanity manifested in actions unbecoming of a Franciscan. Lasuén could only conceive of a missionary engaging in such behavior if they had gone mad. It is a telling insight into Lasuén's understanding of both deviant behavior and mental illness.

Lasuén undermined Horra's credibility by countering some of the claims the priest made about his last days in California, while unintentionally confirming them. Specifically, Lasuén denied that Fray José Miguel struck Horra repeatedly on their way to Monterey and that he became ill from the effects of Miguel's violence. Lasuén insisted that Horra remained silent regarding any abusive treatment. Similarly, he claimed that Horra never mentioned it to Borica, either. If he had, according to Lasuén's logic, Borica would have included it in the following passage in his report to the viceroy: "If we are to believe the soldiers who escorted them Fray José de Miguel treated Fray Antonio de la Concepción very harshly, and even tried to run him down with his horse, just because he fell behind a little."⁶³¹ Lasuén noted that this was "the only incident that is specified" despite the quotation confirming that Fray Miguel physically abused Horra, and may have tried to kill him, on their trip to Monterey. Continuing, Lasuén suggested that Fray Miguel's violent actions were justified because "he had in his charge one who behaved as he was demented; and everyone knows that this kind of diseased mind can as a rule be managed only by appeal to force."⁶³² This was another bombshell from Lasuén. If this represented his view on the appropriate means to handle the mentally impaired, especially considering his view that mental illness shows itself through people not behaving in an appropriate manner based on their station, it raises many questions regarding the Franciscans' philosophy of punishing Indians in the missions. With this attempt at discrediting Horra, Lasuén

⁶³¹ Borica quoted in Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:196.

⁶³² *Ibid.*

inadvertently corroborated Horra's claim that he was physically abused during his trip from Mission San Miguel to Monterey, then brushed it off because violence was the best means to deal with the mentally ill.

Lasuén then attacked Horra a final time. If Horra was so negatively affected by his exile to Mexico, Lasuén argued, he had the opportunity to appeal the decision before he left California. There were two physicians along with Borica when Horra embarked for Mexico and "it would have been natural for him to have consulted the latter as to how my previous report of his indisposition could best be disproved. This he did not do; instead, he set sail."⁶³³ It angered Lasuén that a missionary with "so many blotches on his good name" could make slanderous accusations and that the governor could use it to begin a "rigorous investigation of our conduct and our administration."⁶³⁴ Still, he painted himself as compliant: "but this is what was done, and I am ordered to give my views about it, and I am proceeding to do so in accordance with instruction."⁶³⁵

Lasuén finished his preamble by admitting defects in the system existed while still asserting that maintaining the good name of the missionaries remained more important than understanding the gravity of the problems. "At the outset I admit that defects exist, and inevitably so; but not one is in the category of a crime, not one is beyond the normal, not one remains uncorrected once it is recognized, and if any are permitted it is but to avoid greater evils." He also assured the government that no defect ever became a rule, or normalized, and it that it would be unreasonable to consider the behavior of one or two priests representative of the whole. His management of the system, in his estimation, "is undertaken in such a way that short

⁶³³ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:197.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*

comings will be kept at a minimum.” Moreover, when one or two problems occurred, Lasuén’s preferred remonstrance came in the form of a “charitable correction [rather] than by a blatant accusation.” Lasuén considered the entire affair unseemly, and he reiterated that he participated only because he always followed orders. It was a masterful redirect from Lasuén - to admit there were missionaries who acted outside of the norms of religious instruction. According to him, these deviations were to be expected but did not define the order in California. Lasuén knew the *Refutation* contained troubling revelations and rewrote the narrative from the start.⁶³⁶

Lasuén then began the defense in earnest, addressing the material concerns raised in Horra’s accusations. In the matter of the baptized California Indians’ clothing, Lasuén admitted that at Mission San Buenaventura converts received new clothing once every two years. While this concerned Lasuén, he was certain that no other mission handed out clothes at such a long interval and that the priests at Ventura felt the Indians from that area “had a certain neatness and cleanliness about them” and therefore did not require new clothes as often as other California Indian groups. He addressed the rumor that a similar situation occurred at Mission Santa Barbara. The presidio guards reported that the converts got new clothes once every two years and that they collected the old clothes. Lasuén argued that the clothes could not physically last two years, that they literally fell apart before then. Why then, he mused were there not hundreds of naked Indians and piles of old clothes to be found? And, he continued, if the soldiers could not be trusted to make such elementary observations, why should they be trusted at all? In two paragraphs Lasuén admitted the existence of a problem at one mission, while claiming that the identical problem was physically impossible at another.⁶³⁷

⁶³⁶ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:197.

⁶³⁷ *Ibid.*, 197-198.

Feeling that he had made his case about the clothing, Lasuén turned to the accusation that Fray Sitjar conducted Mass and other religious ceremony in the language of the local Indians whom he instructed. He recounted a story in which Fray Miguel Pieras specifically told him Sitjar never recited Christian doctrine in the church in any language other than Spanish. The same missionary told him that Sitjar prepared California Indians for baptism in their own language. When compared to the tenacity with which the Franciscans in California protected their generally medieval outlook on religion, it would be truly remarkable if in this one area they sought to enact progressive reform. It was so remarkable in fact, that Sitjar was the only priest in California that did so in the eighteenth century.⁶³⁸

Lasuén next moved to Sitjar's baptismal practices, and whether or not he rushed baptism and had to rebaptize certain converts who left and forgot their initial lessons. Lasuén asserted that to his understanding, no Indian received a baptism unless they had undergone eight days of teaching and, generally speaking, most had a month of instruction. He reminded the government that no one was a better judge than missionaries regarding when someone was properly prepared for baptism. Lasuén flatly denied that rebaptism occurred in the missions. He did admit there were three official cases among some 27,000 baptisms where it happened, but he insisted that those were unusual. "All the natives make it plain," he wrote "that the unlawfulness of rebaptism had, thank God, been impressed on them as deeply as old Christians." Considering that Lasuén spent the bulk of his *Refutation* reminding the government how easily converts forgot Roman Catholic teachings, or rejected them outright, it is unusual that in this particular instance he adulated the strength of their training and convictions.⁶³⁹

⁶³⁸ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:198-199.

⁶³⁹ *Ibid.*, 199.

Lasuén continued rebutting the material aspects of Horra's charges, turning to the amount of food available at the missions. First, he denied that Indians did not sell some of the food they raised for themselves. There existed a system of exchange, based on Chumash shell currency, and they often used their proceeds to buy Spanish grains, like barley. Despite that, he observed that many converts still preferred their native foods to what the missionaries offered. "The former is free and according to their liking, and the latter prescribed, and not according to their liking," he confessed. Lasuén's disgust with both the Indians' love of freedom and the proceedings again became evident. "Here, then, (and it cannot be otherwise) lies all the loss and harm which can be imagined or said to have befallen these natives through Christianity," he penned. Lasuén held the Indians in contempt for their ingratitude for the gifts of food and industry the Spanish offered them.⁶⁴⁰

Lasuén wrote at length about the core problems that he considered inherent to the Indigenous way of life and the difficulties missionaries faced while indoctrinating California Indians. Before the Spaniards arrived, he argued, all California Indian people disregarded "the law of self-preservation which nature implants in us," and were therefore incapable of "providing for what is indispensably necessary for existence." Before the missions, Lasuén argued that California Indians knew nothing of comforts. Yet he contradictorily believed that "they enjoy life as long as they can sustain it with ease, and without having recourse to what they regard as work." It was a startling revelation from Lasuén. He could not recognize non-European work regimes and the comforts they produced, even when describing them. Furthermore, according to Lasuén, California Indians knew no industry other than making bows and arrows; they did not cultivate the soil and gathered food in a manner "which differs little from that of the lower

⁶⁴⁰ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:199-202.

animals.” For the first time in all of his years of writing, Lasuén revealed his opinions of the people in California. “Here then we have the greatest problem of the missionary: how to transform a savage race such as these into a society that is human, Christian, civil, and industrious. This can only be accomplished by denaturalizing them.”⁶⁴¹

The previous passages provide a clear window into Lasuén’s mentality. They demonstrate both the extreme levels of cognitive dissonance and propensity for obfuscation that were hallmarks of Lasuén’s logical faculties and leadership style. On the one hand, he believed that the baptized Indians abhorred rebaptism as unlawful. On the other he described them as beasts of the field who lacked basic humanity. With total conviction he claimed that people who occupied California for millennia had no sense of self preservation and practiced no industry that might sustain them beyond their immediate needs. Lasuén lived and worked among the Chumash people for years. As previously noted, Spaniards praised and admired the Chumash for their watercraft, their currency-based economy, and their towns with hundreds of thatch structures and streets.⁶⁴² His accusations totally discounted the Kumeyaay and their crops and management of the land, also long observed by the Spanish.⁶⁴³ Similarly, it ignored the hundreds of millstones that existed in the Ohlone-speaking people’s lands around the San Francisco Bay.⁶⁴⁴ Lasuén knew of these Indigenous achievements and practices. Yet he chose to willfully ignore all of them in a bout of anger over Indigenous people’s preference for their traditional foods. In all of

⁶⁴¹ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:202.

⁶⁴² During the initial land expedition from San Diego to find Monterey, Pedro Fages was very complimentary of Chumash society in his diary, for example, “of good disposition, and average figure; they are inclined to work and much more to self-interest...they receive the Spaniards well, and make them welcome,” in Fages, *Historical, Political, and Natural Description*, 31, for his description of large numbers of houses and streets see, 25-30.

⁶⁴³ For evidence of pre-Spanish Kumeyaay planting see, Luomala, “Tipai-Ipai,” 600, Carrico, *Strangers in a Stolen Land*, 12, 21.

⁶⁴⁴ For Ohlone milling culture see, E. Breck Parkman, “The Bedrock Milling Station,” in *Ohlone Past and Present*.

his writings, rarely is Lasuén so plain in his biased selection of evidence or in his willingness to lie to protect the mission system.

Lasuén continued describing the missions' food delivery systems and philosophies. He explained that access to food could not be standardized across all missions because each establishment had varying levels of natural abundance and agriculture with which to feed its population. If, for example, a mission ran low on food for its laborers, the missionaries asked volunteers to gather food in surrounding areas. If one mission had the coin or other goods to trade, it would procure food from another with a surplus. While ignoring that just a few years earlier at Mission San Francisco, missionaries had purposefully withheld food as punishment and refused to serve hot meals, Lasuén did concede "it cannot be denied that among missionaries some are more generous and liberal in meeting the needs of their wards, just as in the case of good parents in a family."⁶⁴⁵

Despite making a case regarding the difficulties in feeding large populations, Lasuén stopped to editorialize, making assertions that revealed his meager understanding of Indigenous Californians as a whole and even less about specific groups. "They are helped to the best of our ability," he wrote, "nothing is kept from them, and despite that they run away." He argued that notwithstanding baptized California Indians' access to better material conditions than their "pagan" counterparts, their "untrained nature" and "affinity for the mountains" caused otherwise happy California Indians to flee the missions. He gave an example of a sick person, whom the missionaries excused from Mass and received special food in addition to regular rations, yet still left the mission to go home without permission. When they returned feeling better, Lasuén was incredulous that the unnamed person remained hungry. The unidentified California Indian

⁶⁴⁵ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:203.

responded that the food at the mission proved difficult to eat when ill, and that they needed to eat fish rather than atole. Lasuén assured the viceroy that the missionaries provided alternatives when people requested them. Lasuén then shared a remarkable observation. He wrote that a few men who got “hungry” (original quotations) asked permission to go to the mountains to gather for a week. With some annoyance, Lasuén suggested “if one were to give you a young bull, a sheep, and a fanega of grain every day you would still be yearning for your mountains and your beaches.’ Then the brightest of the Indians who were listening to me said, smiling and half ashamed of himself, ‘What you say is true, Father. It’s the truth.’”⁶⁴⁶ Lasuén failed to grasp the meaning behind this person’s words

This unnamed Californian’s brief, poignant statement encapsulated why Spanish colonization failed there. The many California Indians who came in contact with the missions eventually realized that for all their promise of technology and eternal peace in the Christian heaven, Spanish culture was not superior to their own. If given the opportunity to reject it without fear of reprisal, they would gladly do so. Rather than gleaning that from the “brightest one’s” statement, Lasuén attempted to use it as proof of their lack of humanity. “In the light of this, anyone can see whether or not complaints of this kind made by the Indians have a right to be considered by the authorities as accusations against the missionaries,” he concluded.⁶⁴⁷ For Lasuén, anyone who would choose the mountains and beaches over the missions had no right to complain about what they found at the latter.

Lasuén continued his assault on Indigenous humanity, attacking their gender roles, painting men as tyrants, and arguing that women were less likely to run away from the missions. “In their native state they are slaves to the men, obliged to maintain them with the sweat of their

⁶⁴⁶ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:203-204.

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 204.

brow,” he insisted. According to Lasuén, upon returning from a night of care-free carousing, Indian men (he does not name a group or a person in this passage) will beat their wives to the point of death if no food awaited them. Moreover, in Lasuén’s experience, women never complained about their work and rarely ran away, and if they did, it resulted from male influence. Unfortunately, some women succumbed and “often fall like the Israelites into the weakness of ingratitude.” Lasuén attacked these women’s character. “For them, not even the food of heaven...could...overcome the longing for grosser foods purchased at the price of cruel labor in the heartless slavery of Egypt.” He then noted that nothing the Franciscans provided stopped Indigenous men from pining for the “brutal” life they once knew. “It was free and it was lazy. Who can keep them from murmuring after it?”⁶⁴⁸

After constructing single Indian women as paragons of virtue, Lasuén described the chief method for maintaining that virtue: the *monjeria*. Since the start of the mission period, the Franciscans had dormitories known as *monjerías*, or nunneries, constructed to isolate single women from the predations of male California Indians and Spanish soldiers.⁶⁴⁹ To properly contextualize Lasuén’s statements, it must be noted that several observers of the Franciscan missions from both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries painted dire pictures of life inside the *monjerías*. As the French navigator La Pérouse recounted back in 1786, every night the missionaries “take care to secure all the women whose husbands are absent, as well as the young girls above the age of nine years, by locking them up.”⁶⁵⁰ In his response to Lasuén’s call for assistance with his *Refutation*, Fray Estevan Tapís at Mission Santa Barbara wrote that women

⁶⁴⁸ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:205.

⁶⁴⁹ Chelsea K. Vaughn, “Locating Absence: The Forgotten Presence of Monjeríos in Alta California Missions,” *Southern California Quarterly* 93 (2011): 143.

⁶⁵⁰ Jean François de Galaup comte de La Pérouse, *A voyage round the world performed in the years 1785, 1786, 1787, and 1788 by the Boussole and Astrolabe Volume II* (London, 1808), 201.

were flogged, shackled, and placed in the stocks for days within the *monjeria* walls. Another observer in 1824 wrote, “These dungeons are opened two- or three-times a-day, but only to allow the prisoners to pass to and from the church. I have occasionally seen the poor girls rushing out eagerly to breathe the fresh air, and driven immediately into the church like a flock of sheep, by an old ragged Spaniard armed with a stick.”⁶⁵¹ Finally, the *monjerías* were unsanitary places where the restrictive air flow and cramped quarters could spread disease with alarming swiftness.⁶⁵²

Lasuén’s description of the *monjerías* bared little resemblance to those of outside observers. “All possible care is taken so that nothing will be prejudicial to their health. It has actually been determined that death occurs but rarely among those who observe this rule of life,” he argued, adding that those who escaped for the mountains died far more often than anyone in a *monjeria*. Moreover, “at this present time it is the best room the mission has, except for the Church.” Finally, he knew that the *monjerías* achieved their goals because “the girls and spinsters [who live in them] . . . go outside the mission, but they do so less frequently than the married woman,” who were not locked up at night.⁶⁵³ It is difficult to know if Lasuén’s description of women and the frequency with which they escaped the missions at all reflected reality.

Lasuén also spent much of the *Refutation* denying the charge that his missionaries overworked the converts as a rule. As was the case throughout the document, Lasuén included his own prejudices against Indian work regimens and habits. He claimed that across the missions, converts only worked five to six hours a day during the summer and four to five hours during the

⁶⁵¹ Von Kotzebue, *New Voyage Round the World, in the Years 1823, 24, 25, and 26 Volume II* (London, 1830),94–95.

⁶⁵² Cook, *Conflict between the California Indian and white civilization*, 90.

⁶⁵³ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:206-207.

winter months. In addition, he noted that a visitor to any one of the missions would only ever see up to half of the population working, due to some receiving a *paseo*, or being ill or malingering, as “the healthy are clever at feigning illness.” Lasuén flatly denied, knowing full well the problems that occurred at Mission San Francisco, that Indian people were forced to work at the missions. “If they work, nobody goads them on. They sit down; they recline; they often go away and come back when it suits them.” No one gave them tasks they could not finish in their normal working hours, “and if they would overcome a little of their laziness, or be a little more active, many could finish in the morning the work of a whole day,” he wrote.⁶⁵⁴

Lasuén, dug in to undermine the credibility not only of Indian workers, but of the presidio commanders. He asserted that the soldiers took advantage of Indian labor. “It is not natural for the commandants to be so extremely sympathetic,” he maintained. Lasuén reported that the Indians worked under an overseer at the presidio who drove them hard from dawn until dusk. And when the soldiers were unhappy with an Indians’ work ethic, they allegedly yelled at them and cursed the missionaries under their breath, claiming “the Fathers” were to “blame for your laziness.” Lasuén did not report how he heard what soldiers muttered under their breath at the presidio.⁶⁵⁵

Lasuén used his discussion of Indigenous labor to launch an attack on Indian motherhood. He insisted that expectant and nursing mothers had their work reduced and were never physically punished. Like the other Indians, he claimed that women in this condition worked harder trying to avoid labor than engaging in the minor tasks the missionaries assigned them. He continued, “one is likely to meet one of these expectant mothers in the company of her young swain; but it is she who is weighed down like a mule with fish or shellfish.” Before

⁶⁵⁴ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:206-207.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 208.

moving on, Lasuén savaged the character of Indian mothers. He claimed it was “not unusual” that when a new mother’s baby cried too loudly she “abandons what she had been doing for the entire day . . . leaving her infant in charge of someone else, or locked in.”⁶⁵⁶ Worse than alleged child abandonment, Lasuén accused some mothers of infanticide. “Knowing full well the inhuman crimes these Indian women so often commit . . . how they commit abortion, and are guilty of suffocating their infants,” he reported, “we employ for their correction all the care and vigilance . . . a matter of such importance demands.” According to the Franciscans, the only thing an expectant mother brought to the missions was five years of additional problems for the missionaries.⁶⁵⁷

Lasuén’s anger towards Indian women who engaged in sexual relations was evident in the difference in descriptions he gave of the girls in the *monjerías* and those who were pregnant or give birth. Considering the level of ignorance he demonstrated throughout his fifteen years as father president regarding Indigenous Californians’ customs, traditions, and habits, Lasuén’s interpretation of new mothers abandoning their children for the day does not have credibility. Similarly, though there were known cases of Indigenous mothers in the missions aborting their pregnancy, there is only one documented case of infanticide in eighteenth century California, and many rumors and overreactions by the Franciscans in the nineteenth century. Moreover, there exists much scholarship demonstrating that groups facing genocidal conditions around the world have turned to infanticide to save their children from a world they believe has no future.⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁶ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:209.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁶⁵⁸ For infanticide as resistance in Spanish California see Sherburne F. Cook, *Conflict Between the California Indian and White Civilization*, 111-112, for one known case of infanticide after rape in Mission San Diego see, Maynard Geiger, trans., *Letter of Luis Jayme, O.F.M., San Diego, October 17, 1772* (Los Angeles, 1970), 42-44; for rumors of the same in Mission San Gabriel in the nineteenth century see, Hugo Reid, “New Era in Mission Affairs,” in *The Indians of Los Angeles County: Hugo Reid’s Letters of 1852*, Robert Heizer ed. (Highland Park, 1968), 87; For non-Indigenous cases see, Jeff Forret, “‘THE PRISONER . . . THINKS A GREAT DEAL OF HER VIRTUE’: Enslaved Female Honor, Shame, and Infanticide in Antebellum Virginia,” *The Field of Honor*

Lasuén's Catholic worldview caused him to distort these situations and inhibited his understanding of them as signs of people facing significant cultural and physical decline at the hands of a lethal colonial regime. He also manipulated the truth about the one case of infanticide on record in California during the eighteenth century to punctuate his screed against Indian motherhood.

After his digression about the inadequacies of Indian mothers, Lasuén returned to his consideration of the parameters of Indian work, particularly as it connected them to soldiers. "There is not a single mission from San Diego to San Francisco in which any Indian was ever punished simply because he associated in his free time with a soldier," he declared. He clarified that he did not refer to those who were "notoriously vicious, or those who solicit for evil purpose, or those whose background is especially suspicious," although he failed to identify who made those judgments. Similarly, mission Indians did not require permission to go to the presidios on feast days. In fact, according to Lasuén, since the earliest days of the mission system, one could find all manner of Indian workers at the presidio, both men and women. They learned no skills there other than learning how to waste more time, which, in his own words earlier in the *Refutation*, was something in which they were already well-versed.⁶⁵⁹

This particular topic, Indian men and women choosing to work at the presidio over the missions, bothered Lasuén for nearly a decade. He previously fought with both Fages and Borica over it and only deigned to approve it when the government in Mexico City demanded that baptized California Indians learned new skills. Again, he spat back at the commanders' responses to Borica's questionnaire, in which one of the men wrote about a system of

Book: Essays on Southern Character and American Identity, John Mayfield and Todd Hagstette, eds., (Columbia, 2017); James Kelly, "Infanticide in Eighteenth Century England," *Irish Economic and Social History* 19 (1992), 5-26.

⁶⁵⁹ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:211-212.

punishment the Franciscans instituted for Indians seeking work at the presidios. “Note that this is referred to as no less than a *system*,” he wrote. “This would not only be a disgraceful form of avarice but a refinement of envy. As for the existence of a *system*: may God forgive those guilty of so infamous a calumny...there is no such *system*; there is no such usage; there is no such thing.”⁶⁶⁰ Although the notion that it was common practice to punish Indians who sought work elsewhere, clearly offended him, Lasuén conceded, once again, that there were in fact instances when it occurred. “Sometimes, it is true, we discipline an Indian. . .when a missionary, after assigning him to a particular task find him missing. . .doing the same thing or something else. . .at the presidio.”⁶⁶¹ It is difficult to ascertain the truth of the matter, because Lasuén offered so many qualifiers to cover any instance of punishment that occurred.

Lasuén then took up the charge that the Franciscans granted too much liberty to the converts and allowed them to come and go as they pleased. He argued that stopping them was nearly impossible due to the call of the wild that they could not ignore. Moreover, he complained that families of baptized Indians were a troubling obstacle, as they constantly fought to keep their kin from returning. “We have to remember that the majority of our neophytes are so attached to the mountains that if there were an unqualified prohibition against going there, there would be a danger of a riot,” Lasuén warned. He referred to a Kumeyaay rebel who reportedly participated in the attack on the mission in 1775 because “Seeing all the gentiles were being baptized, and that as a consequence there would be no one” left living in their village.⁶⁶² Once more, Lasuén failed to perceive the meaning behind this statement. The Kumeyaay attacked San Diego not because they were lonely, but from a fear that invaders destroyed their way of life. He

⁶⁶⁰ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:212-213.

⁶⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 213.

⁶⁶² *Ibid.*, 215.

concluded, asserting that Franciscans often gave in to the desires of the converts, so as to not exasperate them and foment rebellion.

To this point during his rumination on labor in the *Refutation* Lasuén had not referred to the crisis at Mission San Francisco. Although he eventually acknowledged those events, he did not, as he might have, use the episode to demonstrate how Franciscans rectified problems when confronted with them. The issues at San Francisco, which included forced labor, purposeful withholding of food, limiting freedom of movement, and indiscriminate punishment were the same as those he spent so much time refuting. Here was an opportunity to prove Franciscan missionaries were capable of change and improvement. However, he chose to omit the truth: that the priests there sent armed men to chase down Indians who fled the miserable conditions there; that Borica forced them to make sure that Indians received appropriate food and that at least some of it was served hot; that Indians were whipped, and placed in the stocks and shackles to such a degree that it caused many to flee.⁶⁶³

Although he sidestepped the problems at San Francisco, Lasuén did spend the bulk of the *Refutation* on one issue that dogged the Franciscans throughout their time in California: their physical punishment of Indian men and women who converted to Christianity. In the process of “denaturalizing” Indigenous Californians, Lasuén, like Serra before him and Franciscan historians who followed, steadfastly defended their right to physically chastise baptized California Indians.⁶⁶⁴ “It is but natural...that we have the authority, the right, and the opportunity to correct and discipline them for their own good,” he argued. Lasuén cited Serra’s 1773 victory in Mexico City that allowed the “management, control, punishment, and education of baptized

⁶⁶³ Please see chapter four of this dissertation.

⁶⁶⁴ Guest, “An Inquiry into the Role of Discipline in California Mission Life,” 24-25; Engelhardt, *Mission Santa Barbara*, 80; Junípero Serra, *The Writings of Junipero Serra I*, Tibesar, Antonine ed., (Washington D.C. 1955), 307; Serra, *Writings of Junipero Serra*, 3:415.

Indians” as the unchanging precedent that should shield the missionaries from criticism of their methods, which he outlined for the viceroy.⁶⁶⁵

Decades after Serra had done it successfully, a second Franciscan leader in California struggled to convince civil authorities in Mexico City of the necessity of the various means the priests used to control and punish religious transgressions. First, Lasuén reported that on most occasions when an Indian faced the lash, they required soldiers’ involvement in the proceedings. This ended when Governor Neve found the practice objectionable and forbade his men to assist the Franciscans in whipping Indian men and women for religious offences. Lasuén also explained that the stocks were employed to stop offenders from fleeing the mission to escape their punishment. However, the charge that women were often placed in stocks required additional clarification. “In Santa Barbara . . . in that very mission and no other, are the stocks used for women,” he conceded. Because that form of punishment had been used there since the mission’s founding, he argued that there was no reason to reform the practice. Additionally, he remarked that if women were punished at Santa Barbara they were shackled, taken into the *monjeria*, and flogged by another woman. The commander at the nearby presidio likened the system to a dungeon, to which Lasuén protested: “He could just as well have called it a scaffold or a place of execution. God bless us!” Lest too bleak a picture emerge, Lasuén noted that around all eighteen missions, Indians outside the missions warmed to the Franciscans when they saw how kindly they treated baptized California Indians. This was particularly true at San Francisco according to Lasuén, where “in recent days . . . one hundred and thirty suddenly presented themselves for that purpose.” For Lasuén, this answered all questions outsiders raised regarding the severity of punishment at the missions, and specifically it “rendered null the hard and cruel

⁶⁶⁵ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:215.

dictate, sentence, or opinion which asserts: ‘The treatment generally given to the Indians is very harsh, and that accorded to them at San Francisco is actually cruel.’”⁶⁶⁶

Finally, he could no longer ignore the crisis at Mission San Francisco. In his typical style, Lasuén minimized the scope and intensity of the disaster, calling it a “senseless and noisy outbreak,” based on “fanciful charges of cruelty.” He reported that he “convinced the governor that this was nothing but a vindictive plot in favor of an unjust claim.” Lasuén argued that when hundreds of Indians fled the mission in 1796 “not one ran away through fear of work or punishment, but solely in terror of the . . . deadly epidemic.” The testimony California Indian men and women who fled the mission offered emphatically refuted Lasuén’s argument. However, as he demonstrated during the de la Peña affair, Lasuén discounted all Indigenous testimony out of hand.⁶⁶⁷ Finally, he argued that Borica never made an official pronouncement about the crisis, which “is the most conclusive proof the entire affair was without foundation, or had nothing but a weak and contemptable bias. . . in the final analysis it was found to be a fraud!”⁶⁶⁸

Throughout his time as father president, Lasuén demonstrated a cynical approach to defending his mission field and missionaries, using varying degrees of obfuscation and outright falsehoods to maintain the good name of the missionaries; however, his interpretation of the events at San Francisco may be the ugliest moment of his tenure. That he held Mission San Francisco up as a model of missionary success while ignoring the forced labor, beatings, starvation, and priests forming posses to capture escapees, finally, irrevocably, demonstrated that Lasuén would lie in the face of unimpeachable evidence to protect the Franciscan order. Even

⁶⁶⁶ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:216-218.

⁶⁶⁷ See chapter two of this dissertation.

⁶⁶⁸ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:218-219.

more damaging for Lasuén's credibility, because years before he went on the record and admitted to the failure of that mission, all of these problems were well-known by the soldiers in San Francisco, Borica, and the government in Mexico City. His utter disdain for Indian testimony allowed him to cling to the notion that the mass exodus resulted from an outbreak of disease. While the sickness played a role, there was enough evidence that many left the mission because of the violence of the missionaries and the *alcaldes*. Lasuén's attempted subterfuge was as ill-conceived as it was damning of his leadership. It revealed his defense of the missions, and all of his responses to the scandals during his time as father president, as untrustworthy at best, and total distortions of reality at worst.

Feeling confident that he had proven every charge made against missionaries as a fabrication born of conspiracy and hatred for the order, Lasuén expounded on the "gentle way" Franciscans in California punished transgressions. "Here are the aborigines whom we are teaching to be men, people of vicious and ferocious habits who know no law but force, no superior but their own free will, and no reason but their own caprice," he explained. Furthermore, "they look on their own most barbarous and cruel actions with an indifference foreign to human nature, and death is their customary way of avenging injuries," Lasuén claimed. He deployed a series of Spanish prejudices to create an image of the California Indian for the government in Mexico, despite it flying in the face of well-known truths regarding Indigenous life in California. "They are a people without education, without government, religion, or respect for authority, and they shamelessly pursue without restraint whatever their brutal appetites suggest to them...such is the character of the men we are required to correct, and whose crimes we must punish," Lasuén concluded. Trusting that he had constructed the true image of California Indian people as

deserving of the lash, he moved on to discuss the types of correction the Franciscans employed.⁶⁶⁹

“It is obvious,” Lasuén began, “that a barbarous, fierce, and ignorant country needs punishments and penalties that are different from one that is cultured and enlightened.” Additionally, if converts showed signs of recidivism, the punishments intensified, to break through their animal nature. Despite his lurid construction of Indigenous people as wild animals, Lasuén assured the government in Mexico City that patience was the Franciscans’ key precept. When patience did not suffice to correct aberrant behavior, they turned to stiffer penalties. If a priest thought a baptized Indian deserved a lashing, he argued they were never permitted to give more than twenty-one strokes, “no matter how grave or enormous the offence,” and that no blood should be drawn, or bruises given. For the most egregious criminals, the missionaries sought the assistance of the presidio, sending them there for punishment. This was ineffective according to Lasuén, because the soldiers “let them spend the time in relaxation, and they come out more insolent than before.” He then concluded, remarking, “The system here expounded is the system observed . . . it . . . is normally very mild.”⁶⁷⁰

Finally, after Lasuén attempted to demonstrate that Indians were “savages” who only understood force, he addressed long-standing charges of Franciscan cruelty. He admitted that the missionaries were not monolithic and that some may have been heavier handed than others. Was there the possibility that from time to time a priest might “fall a victim to uncontrolled passion,” while having a baptized California Indian flogged? Lasuén conceded this might be true, but because the stress of managing the missions weighed heavily upon them, accidents of this type were to be forgiven. “So, I do not deny that there ever was or ever will be an instance of

⁶⁶⁹ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:220.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 221-222.

harshness or even some threat of cruelty,” he wrote. Lasuén shared a story to demonstrate the care the missionaries took in punishing offenders. He spoke with an unnamed missionary about pulling baptized Indians’ ears and slapping their heads. They agreed it was appropriate because parents and teachers employed the same punishments. This same missionary, who Lasuén described as mild and wise, later hit a man who called him a liar over the shoulder with a stick hard enough to break it. Lasuén did not reprimand the priest because he reported the incident to the father president in tears. That tale of a missionary losing their temper over an insult and beating the man with a stick until it broke was the last bit of evidence Lasuén gave regarding the punishment of Indians. He believed it proved his point that missionaries were mild, stable men who rarely crossed disciplinary lines.⁶⁷¹

After his dissertation on the punishment of baptized California Indians in the missions, Lasuén turned to Horra’s charges regarding the Franciscans’ commercial transactions with the presidio. He announced that in the five years of Borica’s term as governor, he never reproached Lasuén for failing to follow the official price list for goods generated at the mission. Much as he had with his defense against punishments, Lasuén wrote of several instances where soldiers engaged in questionable business arrangements. He complained that the soldiers bought cows for low prices at the mission and sold them off to townspeople for a large profit, and that they would pay prices for an average cow, but then would make off with one of higher quality. Lasuén suggested the previous example demonstrated how some of the confusion over prices originated. When the missionaries noticed the soldiers’ alleged scam, they would ask for a higher price, and the soldiers complained that they had already agreed on the lower amount. In his conclusion, he asserted once more that the charges made against the missionaries obfuscated the true villains:

⁶⁷¹ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:222-223.

“the more exact and searching and rigorous the inquiry, the more unsullied will the missionaries emerge, and we shall see the accusers in the role of the guilty.”⁶⁷²

Throughout the *Refutation*, the father president continued to push the point that had Horra, an insane man in Lasuén’s estimation, never made his accusations against the Franciscans, the commanders would have never spoken up and his defense would be unnecessary. He argued that Horra had “no reason to hold or even dream what he reported” and that no singular instance of flogging had ever caused as much disturbance as his letter.⁶⁷³ Despite his alleged insanity Azanza, Borica, and the presidio commanders took Horra seriously. Even more troubling for Lasuén was that “the commanding officers in the matter have shown undue subservience to the officer above them.”⁶⁷⁴ He insinuated that the soldiers had little will of their own and simply repeated what senior officers reported. If one among them wanted to do the missionaries harm, it would be a simple matter to get the men in his command to corroborate his claims. Lasuén repeated the idea that this entire affair was essentially a witch hunt, started by an insane missionary and perpetuated by the military that was their continual adversary. He believed there was no merit to the exercise. Thus, he concluded the document.

Father President Lasuén’s *Refutation of Charges* was not the last time Lasuén needed to defend missionary practices in the last years of his life and tenure. In June 1802, word reached California that Mexico City debated a new missionary reform. Officials there wondered if baptizing and instructing new converts in their own villages and allowing them to remain there, rather than compelling them to move to the mission, represented a superior system to the one currently in place. Lasuén balked at the idea and reminded the father guardian at the College of

⁶⁷² Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:223-225.

⁶⁷³ *Ibid.*, 223.

⁶⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 225.

San Fernando of the massacre that took place on the Colorado River in 1781 to demonstrate the dangerous potential of this reform. He took up his well-worn argument that California Indian people could only truly learn the Christian faith in the isolated communities of the missions.⁶⁷⁵

To Lasuén, the presence of their friends, families, and traditional culture would always tempt the recently baptized to give up the faith. Lasuén argued that elders and parents were incapable of teaching their children anything “conducive to rational, social, and civil life. Everything is taught to them by the missionaries.” This need to justify the missions’ existence yet again, only a year and half after the *Refutation* revealed the depths of Lasuén’s frustrations. “What anxieties! What disappointments! What vigilance! What anguishes of mind! What labors day and night for the missionaries! What liberties! What excesses! What irregularities! What ignorance! What disorders!” he exclaimed to Gasol. It was an outburst unlike any other in his correspondence, veering into the realm of treason. He regained his composure and continued to give evidence that supported his belief that no Christian instruction was possible outside of the mission confines.⁶⁷⁶

Lasuén’s response to reforms suggested in 1802 was the last time he defended the system or to respond to a scandal. Though problems still arose during the last year of his tenure, none matched the level of Horra’s accusations. The missions retained their traditional form, and few reforms were enacted until the emergence of the Mexican Republic in 1824. However, it was not Lasuén’s *Refutation* that staved off new challenges for more than two decades. During the first decade of the nineteenth century there was no California governor akin to Borica, Neve, or Fages who challenged the Franciscan missionaries and their management of the province. Moreover, in 1808, Napoleon’s army invaded Spain, effectively ending the reign of Spanish monarchs in

⁶⁷⁵ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:277.

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 276-278.

the process.⁶⁷⁷ For sixteen years after that invasion, the Franciscans, despite all challenges to their authority during Lasuén's tenure, became the preeminent institution in California.

Fermín Francisco de Lasuén died at 2:00pm on June 26, 1803. He lived thirty years in a land that he never accepted as his home. The last eighteen of those years were spent leading two generations of men tasked with protecting and expanding the invasion of California and the so-called "spiritual conquest" of the people who lived there for millennia. His legacy is marred by the cynicism, moral certainty, and unquestioned institutional loyalty that undergirded his policies and judgment during his eighteen years as president. He was an intelligent man and a fine writer, but he was a leader of limited vision and capability for the position he reluctantly inherited after Junípero Serra's death. He left California more violent, contentious, and ripe for epidemics and famine than when he entered. Moreover, he obstinately fought against any reform from the secular government that might have mitigated those changes. He saw every attempt at reform as a direct attack on the Franciscan order and challenged every accusation against his men with all the force of will he could muster, whether they deserved it or not. Lasuén's tenure as president, and more specifically, his responses to the increasing hostility and tumult produced by his missionaries and their form of religious colonization, firmly entrenched these calamities as features of the California missionary field until its ultimate demise in 1834.

⁶⁷⁷ Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America*, 296; Timothy E. Anna, *Spain and the Loss of America* (Lincoln, 1983).

Conclusion

This dissertation began with the premise that Spain's colonial agents engineered a human catastrophe through their management of the California mission system that produced tens of thousands of fatalities, waves of disease, and significant cultural loss in California Indian communities. While California mission founder Junípero Serra's tenure as father president set these processes in motion, it was his successor, Fermín Francisco de Lasuén who intensified them. Under Lasuén's leadership, the deleterious effects of missionization accelerated and diversified. Despite a series of escalating crises, beginning with Fray Tomás de la Peña's murder trial, and concluding with the crisis at Mission San Francisco, civil authorities in Mexico City continued to support the Franciscans in California. That support led to disaster for California Indians.

During Lasuén's term as father president, from 1785 to 1803, a range of disparate figures, such as royal governors, military officers, rank-and-file soldiers, California Indians, and even Franciscan missionaries all attempted to alert Mexico City to the myriad issues plaguing the colony to no avail. Rather than investigating these accusations, a series of viceroys requested that the Franciscans in California defend their actions. Lasuén always met that task, and the imperial government always accepted his defense. Even after the crisis at San Francisco and Lasuén's *Refutation of Charges*, the royal government allowed the California missionaries to continue their management of the colony without reform or reproach. Spain had limited options in taking and holding California other than the Franciscan missionaries from the College of San Fernando. Spain did not have the troops to conquer California Indians by force. After the 1781 Quechan uprising against two Spanish outposts on the Colorado River made bringing large amounts of colonists to California impossible, converting the region's Indigenous population to Roman

Catholicism became their only option. Imperial rivalries with Russia and the English caused Spain to initiate a colonial project they could not maintain, outside of deploying an anachronistic form of religious colonialism that had largely fallen out of favor. Instead of closely monitoring the missionaries' management of the colony, the royal government allowed the Franciscans in California to operate with near total autonomy.

Just thirty-six years before Lasuén became father president, the circumstances in California might have seemed impossible. As part of the Bourbon Reforms, the Spanish crown deployed policies, such as the 1749 mission secularization decree and limits to the age and numbers of new missionaries, specifically crafted to erode the power and influence of missionaries throughout the Americas. These policies intentionally pushed the Franciscan order into a steep decline in both numbers and competency. During the same period, the Crown emphasized new approaches to managing the areas of its American empire where Amerindians heavily outnumbered Spanish colonizers. Civil government became more important than missionaries, and administrators considered towns and commerce as more humane paths toward integrating Indigenous peoples into Spanish society. This, of course, demonstrated the flawed logic of passive conquest as Spanish soldiers and colonists living in Spanish pueblos also committed depredations against Amerindians. Colonialism is a destructive force, regardless of the terms and approaches applied to the process.

The invasion of California forced Spain into an untenable position. The 1749 secularization decree and the policies that followed embodied the modernizing impulse at the core of the Bourbon Reforms. The royal government and its administrative-military apparatus had lost faith in Franciscan missionaries' abilities to convert and manage new Indigenous populations and to economically develop the empire's most remote territorial claims. As the rest

of Spain's American empire adopted new political and social forms, California became an exception – the last bastion of a medievalist Franciscan worldview doggedly opposed to reform.⁶⁷⁸ New Spain's viceregal government only further entrenched that worldview when it made California's Indian population wards of the Franciscans in 1773. From that point forward, Franciscan leadership took literally the mandate that only they had the jurisdiction to manage baptized California Indians. When New Spain's appointed administrators, the royal governors, pushed back against Franciscan management of California, the missionaries dug in and rejected all constraints to their authority. A pattern emerged: civil authority in California identified aspects of Franciscan management they deemed harmful to Spain's goals in the province and attempted to adopt new policies, only to have officials in Mexico City or Spain overrule them. Each time this happened, the Franciscans felt increasingly secure in their position and in their superiority to the local royal governors.

Beginning in 1790, this combination of distance, autonomy, and a new generation of missionaries unprepared for the realities of life in the remote Spanish province led to dangerous, lethal conditions for Indigenous Californians. Throughout the decade, missionaries increasingly engaged in forced religious recruitment, intentionally starved baptized California Indians, inflicted punishments that amounted to torture, and sent out squads of mission Indians to recapture baptized California Indians who had fled the missions. Moreover, some of the younger missionaries brought instability and chaos with them from the College of San Fernando in Mexico City. Two of these missionaries boasted that they carried weapons to California, while others balked at their older peers' practices and refused to work peacefully. By 1798, Lasuén's

⁶⁷⁸ For example, Lasuén argued "I have no power to permit the introduction into these missions of any notable innovation which might alter or modify the regime which has been set up in them by the holy college." Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:296.

discontented missionaries and their near-constant infighting overwhelmed him. He spent much of his last years searching for combinations of priests who could get along well enough to manage the missions without causing disgraceful tumult. He never solved that problem.

Lasuén's presidency was a turning point, not only for California Indians, or the mission system, but for all of California history. Despite his intelligence, passion for the Franciscan order, and decades of experience, the role of father president of the California mission system proved to be too big for Lasuén. The desire to protect his missionaries from any critique consumed him. It became the obsession of his tenure. Lasuén's provincial focus obstructed his view from the larger, systemic issues that the Franciscan order developed in California. When he took the office of father president in 1785, bad blood already existed between the Franciscans from the College of San Fernando and the Spanish civil government in California. Rather than accepting that the missionaries' obstructionist tendencies towards reform caused some of the problems they experienced in the modernizing Spanish empire, Lasuén took reform efforts as personal attacks. Lasuén imagined that enemies beset the order on all sides.⁶⁷⁹ These attitudes caused him to privilege maintaining the good name of the missionaries over all other concerns. If missionaries remained loyal to him, he defended them in cases of any wrongdoing, sometimes despite their own confessions. If their behavior became annoying, or if a missionary broke the chain of command and petitioned the governor for assistance, Lasuén exiled them to Mexico while labeling them insane, or syphilitic. As the California mission system expanded in size, geographic scope, population, and problems, Lasuén crafted an insular agenda, and let imagined conspiracies determine his course of action. The results, in terms of discord, violence, and death speak for themselves.

⁶⁷⁹ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:225, 238.

The critique of the Franciscan missionaries offered in this dissertation does not imply that there was a qualitatively better approach the Spanish could have taken to hold California. The key intervention this dissertation provides is a deeper understanding of two aspects of Spain's colonial project in California. First, it sheds light upon the political and administrative processes that led the California missions to take their specific shape. Second, it gives a clearer picture of the Franciscan missionaries in a key transitional period in the history of California's mission system. The former matters because understanding the nature of catastrophes like that which occurred in California allows us to critically examine our past and more clearly account for those who made the missions so destructive, even if they are long dead. The latter matters because of the place that the California Franciscans still hold in the state's firmament of cultural heroes and the ongoing veneration that European colonizers still receive in many parts of the Americas. While this dissertation focuses on Spain's invasion of California in particular, it illuminates the dark nature of colonialism and the manner in which many European-descended citizens throughout the Americas still embrace stories describing colonial endeavors as human progress.

The story of colonialism as human progress still wields powerful influence in California. Beginning in 1888, the California missions became a prominent symbol of California's pre-United States past. Amid a campaign to lure land-hungry Midwesterners to California with the promise of cheap real estate and a climate capable of curing health issues, civic boosters discovered an effective marketing gimmick: California's romantic Spanish history. In 1946, the journalist Carey McWilliams, who coined the term "Spanish Fantasy Past," explained the fantasy: "the Spanish residents of Alta California, all members of one big happy guitar-twanging

family, danced the fandango and lived out days of beautiful indolence in lands of the sun.”⁶⁸⁰

The idea of the loving, gentle Franciscan missionary tutoring the naïve, childlike California Indians in the ways of Christianity completed this idyllic fantasy. Like so many aspects of California’s past, the Spanish Fantasy Past camouflaged the violence and profound trauma that Spanish colonialism had imposed on Indigenous Californians from the historical memory. Once this process began, historical critiques of the California missions were “largely forgotten and the Franciscan version of the Indian was accepted at face value,” McWilliams wrote.⁶⁸¹ Lasuén would have approved of the Spanish Fantasy Past carrying on his legacy. The mythology surely maintained the good name of the missionaries.

The Spanish Fantasy Past remains a part of California’s identity in the twenty first century due to the labors of journalists, artists, policy makers, and historians. Nineteenth-century journalists such as Charles Lummis and Charles Nordhoff first perpetuated the Fantasy in fanciful stories and travelogues.⁶⁸² Artists like Edwin Deakin and William Keith’s late nineteenth-century hauntingly beautiful paintings of the California missions evoked a romantic, bygone era. Perhaps the most sturdy of the Fantasy’s earliest foundation stones was Helen Hunt Jackson’s 1884 wildly popular novel, *Ramona*, detailing a star-crossed love between a California Indian girl and her half-Indian suitor.⁶⁸³ In the 1930s, historical activist Christine Sterling fought to restore Los Angeles’ Olvera Street and turned it into a festive marketplace more at home in

⁶⁸⁰ For more on the economic and social factors behind California’s construction of the “Spanish Fantasy Past” see, Mike Davis, *City of Quartz* (New York, 1990), 22; Carey McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island on the Land* (Salt Lake City, 1973), 22.

⁶⁸¹ McWilliams, *Southern California*, 23.

⁶⁸² Martin Padget, “Travel, Exoticism, and the Writing of Region: Charles Fletcher Lummis and the ‘Creation’ of the Southwest,” *Journal of the Southwest*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Autumn, 1995), 421-449, Charles Nordhoff, *Nordhoff’s West Coast: California, Oregon, and Hawaii* (London, 1987), 148-154.

⁶⁸³ Helen Hunt Jackson, *Ramona* (New York, 1884).

contemporary Mexico than in Spanish-era California.⁶⁸⁴ Beginning in the 1920s architects embedded this romanticized Californian aesthetic in architecture during both the Mission Revival and Spanish Colonial Revival periods, enshrining a vision of a pleasing, romantic Spanish California past that never actually existed.⁶⁸⁵ Policy makers did their part in forwarding the Fantasy as well. In 1923, the California State legislature mandated that public schools teach the state's history to elementary-aged children. The state instructed teachers to pay special attention to California's colonial founders and pioneers, including Junípero Serra. During the Great Depression, educators required California's children to enumerate Fray Serra's good qualities and formulate a plan to incorporate them into their own lives.⁶⁸⁶ This curriculum birthed the sugar-cube mission diorama project that remained ubiquitous in California's elementary schools until 2016 when legislators recommended that educators abandon it.⁶⁸⁷ Despite this, the fourth-grade mission-building project continues. Even historians contributed to the fantasy's romanticized view. Regarding Serra, Herbert Eugene Bolton, the founder of *Borderlands History*, argued: "His humanity as well as his zeal found exercise in a fatherly interest in the children of the wilderness and in efforts to teach them innocent games and pleasures in the place of some of their native amusements which were less moral."⁶⁸⁸ Out of this confluence came a pervasive image that persists in many corners to this day: that of the kindly, paternalistic

⁶⁸⁴ William D. Estrada, "Los Angeles' Old Plaza and Olvera Street: Imagined and Contested Space," *Western Folklore* 58, no. 2, "Built L.A.: Folklore and Place in Los Angeles" (Winter, 1999), 107-129; Phoebe S. Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place* (Berkeley, 2008); Michelle M. Lorimer, *Resurrecting the Past*.

⁶⁸⁵ David Gebhard, "The Spanish Colonial Revival in Southern California (1895-1930)," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 26, no. 2 (May, 1967), 131-147; Harold Kirker *California's Architectural Frontier*, San Marino, 1960; Arthur B. Benton, "The California Mission and Its Influence Upon Pacific Coast Architecture," *Architect and Engineer* 24 (February, 1911), 35-75; George C. Baum, "The Mission Type," in Henry H. Saylor, *Architectural Styles for Country Houses* (New York, 1919); George Wharton James, *In and Out of the Old Missions of California* (Boston, 1905).

⁶⁸⁶ Zevi Gutfreund, "Standing up to Sugar Cubes: The Contest over Ethnic Identity in California's Fourth-Grade Mission Curriculum," *Southern California Quarterly* 92 no. 2 (Summer, 2010), 167.

⁶⁸⁷ "Good Riddance to California's 'Mission Project,'" *Los Angeles Times*, September 19, 2017.

⁶⁸⁸ Bolton, *Spanish Borderlands*, 278-279.

missionary lovingly passing on the precepts of Roman Catholicism to immoral, backwards California Indians.

Despite most serious scholars discarding this image in the twenty-first century, the imprint of the Spanish Fantasy Past remains ubiquitous today. Schools, public parks, streets and highways, professional and amateur sports teams, and businesses of every character are named after California missionaries like Lasuén and Serra, or the missions themselves. Some California towns and cities, such as Santa Barbara and San Juan Capistrano, dedicate their entire civic identity to the missions from which they derive their names. For over 100 years, Californians of multiple generations have embraced a colorful, romantic history that bears little resemblance to the lived past of Indigenous Californians and their Spanish and mestizo colonizers. Most of this rested on the assumption that Europeans would inevitably introduce civilization to North America's west coast and that the Franciscans used love and patience to propel California Indians into modernity.⁶⁸⁹

The Spanish Fantasy Past also granted the Franciscans a status for which Lasuén fought during his time as father president. Based on his term alone, it was a status that they never earned. This status is embodied in the canonization of Junípero Serra. Serra's reputation is more controversial in the wake of Pope Francis's 2015 decision than at any time since his feuds with Spanish administrators. Serra's elevation to sainthood is the culmination of several historical processes. Foremost among them are Roman Catholic historians' hagiographies. From Palóu's 1787 biography to the work of twentieth-century Franciscans such as Engelhardt and Guest, or the Roman Catholic historian Maynard Geiger O.F.M., a host of men prepared Serra for

⁶⁸⁹ Guest, "An Inquiry into the Role of Discipline," 22; Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:578; For nineteenth-century firsthand examples regarding loving missionaries see, Beebe and Senkewicz, *Testimonios*, 57-58, 101, 151.

canonization. California Indian people and many contemporary historians challenge Serra's positive image. News of Serra's canonization sparked demonstrations from Indians throughout the state, including a Tataviam mother and son who walked to all twenty-one missions, a 650-mile journey, in protest. California Indians repeated a simple refrain, "He was not a saint."⁶⁹⁰ The controversy surrounding Serra's canonization reveals the lasting power of the mythology surrounding the California missions.

The events detailed in this dissertation help to unravel that mythology. The Franciscans working in California between 1784 and 1803 do much of the unravelling themselves with their deeds. Consider some of the worst examples of missionary behavior presented in the preceding chapters. It is inarguable that sometime before 1786, Fray Tomás de la Peña pulled a boy's ear so hard it bled and that he struck an agricultural worker in the head with a cane. Ten years later, at the same mission, Fray Manuel Fernández flogged Indian men and used the threat of burning villages to the ground to coerce Ohlone people to accept baptisms. Antonio Dantí and his partner Martín Landaeta withheld food from laborers at Mission San Francisco. Dantí also sent a squadron of unprepared and unarmed mission Indians to kidnap escapees from Mission San Francisco, leading to a massacre of seven of them and to the largest confrontation between the Spanish military and California Indians in the eighteenth century. Despite overwhelming evidence and the confessions of the perpetrators, Lasuén denied any of these events took place.

The Franciscans in this dissertation also unravel the mythology surrounding the California missions with their words, particularly the words they used to obfuscate problems within the order. Dantí attempted to cover up the massacre in the East Bay hills before the

⁶⁹⁰ Samantha Clark, "Mother, Son Walk to Mission Santa Cruz to Protest Canonization of Junipero Serra," *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, September 23, 2015; Tatiana Sanchez "Junípero Serra Canonization Draws Protests," *The San Diego Union Tribune*, September 23, 2015.

situation spiraled out of his control. Lasuén repeatedly twisted reality or lied to governors and even his superiors at the College of San Fernando when it suited his purpose. He referred to the massacre in the Easy Bay as a “noisy disturbance.” Lasuén once remarked that no Indian ever received more than twenty-one lashes for punishment, when most Franciscans cited twenty-five lashes as the typical punishment, and the documentary record contains examples of California Indians receiving hundreds of lashes.⁶⁹¹ He intimated that he remained unaware of Fray Horra’s charges against the order weeks after referring to them in a letter. He labeled the two missionaries who broke ranks and revealed dangerous patterns of behavior in the missions insane and exiled them to Mexico. He and the physician, Soler, fabricated a syphilis diagnosis to remove the problematic missionary Rubí from California. Throughout his tenure as father president, Lasuén employed fabrications, cover-ups, and lied when he sought to maintain the good name of the missionaries. Lasuén’s actions while father president were not those of the mythological, loving Franciscan.

Lasuén also unraveled the mythology surrounding the California missions with his descriptions of California Indian people. His characterizations had little to do with the actual human beings surrounding him in the missions. Rather, they were the products of his presuppositions regarding “Indianness.” In his *Refutation of Charges*, Lasuén wrote that California Indians as a whole were “people of vicious and ferocious habits who know no law but force...they look on their own most barbarous and cruel actions with indifference foreign to human nature...they are a people without education, without government, religion, or respect for authority...such is the character of the men we are to correct, whose crimes we must punish.”⁶⁹² In the same dehumanizing paragraph, Lasuén accused (with no evidence provided) Indian

⁶⁹¹ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:221; Bancroft, *History of California*, 2:345.

⁶⁹² Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:220.

mothers of strangling their infants or having abortions, then chided other California Indian mothers for keeping their infants with them while working in the fields, which caused the women to work less than expected.⁶⁹³ These contradictions were not isolated cases. Throughout his *Refutation*, Lasuén characterized California Indians as sub-human brutes who must be “denaturalized” in order to become human.⁶⁹⁴

Franciscan actions and words continued defying their romanticized image through the end of the Spanish period. After 1800, cases of Franciscan abuse came to light as baptized California Indians increasingly resisted missionary violence. In 1805, at Mission San Diego, a man named Hilário threw a rock at one of the missionaries there. The governor, José Joaquín de Arrillaga, sentenced Hilário to be “kept in prison, where on nine successive feast days... he shall be given twenty-five lashes. On the other nine Sundays he shall be given thirty-five or forty stripes.”⁶⁹⁵ In 1811, also at San Diego, a Kumeyaay Indian cook, Nazario, poisoned Fray José Pedro Panto after the missionary ordered the cook to receive 124 lashes in a twenty-four-hour period.⁶⁹⁶ In October, 1812, a group of baptized California Indians at Mission Santa Cruz assassinated Fray Andres Quintana as revenge for his use of a horsewhip tipped with iron.⁶⁹⁷

Meanwhile, Franciscans continued to denigrate California Indian people in official communications with civil officials in Spain. In 1815, when asked about the history and traditions of the baptized Indians at Mission San Luis Obispo, Fray Antonio Rodriguez wrote, “Their traditions are imaginary, preserved among the men and these are without letters and these

⁶⁹³ Lasuén, *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, 2:220.

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁶⁹⁵ Zephyrin Engelhardt, *San Diego Mission* (San Francisco, 1920), 154–55.

⁶⁹⁶ Bancroft, *History of California*, 2:345.

⁶⁹⁷ Edward D. Castillo and Lorenzo Asisara, “The Assassination of Padre Andrés Quintana by the Indians of Mission Santa Cruz in 1812: The Narrative of Lorenzo Asisara,” *California History* 68, no. 3 (Fall, 1989), 121.

are so touchy that they cannot pronounce the name of one dead.”⁶⁹⁸ That same year, Fray Narciso Duran at Mission San José insisted “They should be looked upon as perhaps the most pitiable, backward, and uncultivated Indians in all America.”⁶⁹⁹ In a two year span, a new father president of the California missions, Fray Mariano Payeras, made two statements that best characterized the Franciscans’ willful ignorance to the terrible consequences mission life had on California Indian people. In 1818, when proposing a site for a new mission, Payeras described California Indians living freely in what is now the San Joaquin Valley as “a republic of hell and a diabolical union of apostates.”⁷⁰⁰ Then in 1820 he wrote of mission Indians, “They live well free...but as soon as we reduce them to a Christian community...they decline in health, they fatten, sicken and die.”⁷⁰¹ Though not intended to be a comprehensive accounting of all the acts of cruelty in the California missions between 1810 and 1821, these events were not the isolated acts of deviant Franciscan behavior. As Payeras’ confirmed at the end of the decade, the missions became more contentious, more violent, and more lethal.

Problems of the sort that led to Spain’s 1749 mission secularization decree such as Franciscans living in luxury, having concubines, and failing in their religious commitments, continued through the end of the Spanish period in California in 1821. In 1815, Fray Vicente Francisco de Sarría, in a new position as prefect of the California missions, wrote a pastoral regarding the spiritual duties of the Franciscan missionaries in the province. He reminded the priests of their obligation to strictly follow the rules of their order, and not to neglect annual religious exercises. Sarría also suggested that their management of mission temporalities should not distract them from their spiritual obligations. Two years later, after touring some of the

⁶⁹⁸ Geiger, *As the Padres Saw Them*, 140.

⁶⁹⁹ Duran quoted in *ibid.*, 142.

⁷⁰⁰ Payeras quoted in Bancroft, *History of California*, 2:331.

⁷⁰¹ Mariano Payeras to College of San Fernando, February 2, 1820, SBMAL doc. CMD 1869.

California missions, Sarría again chastised the missionaries. He had found some living in large, luxurious quarters that were not the “cells of poor evangelical toilers.”⁷⁰² Some of the California Franciscans engaged in relationships with women that could cause scandal if discovered, much like those in Peru in the 1740s. Payeras too admonished the missionaries that year, informing them of their spiritual obligation to the Spanish-speaking population in California. In 1820, the father guardian at the College of San Fernando wrote to the missionaries in California that reports had reached Mexico City that Franciscans in California rode in carriages and lived lives of idle luxury. The Franciscans either burned the carriages or scrapped them for parts.⁷⁰³ Thirty years after the temporalistas came to California, shocked at lives their Franciscan brothers lived in the remote province, Franciscan leadership acknowledged the institutional culture that privileged material comfort over mendicant traditions in the California missions.

These preceding examples both demonstrate that the consequences of Franciscan cruelty and autonomy intensified after Lasuén’s presidency, and that twenty-first century California mission scholars must take them seriously. For over a century, mission defenders either ignored Franciscan abuses or claimed these accounts were exaggerations. While father president, Lasuén maintained that nearly every charge of cruelty or avarice was an exaggeration or falsehood. Historian Francisco Altable argued that Gaspar Portolá’s 1777 admonition of Fray Palóu for being insubordinate and despotic was “a gross exaggeration to impress” civil authorities in Mexico City.⁷⁰⁴ In 1912, Engelhardt responded to the testimony of those who fled the appalling conditions during the crisis at Mission San Francisco: “Thus, complaints were made by some of the neophytes at all the missions because they hated work, or chafed under the restraints put on

⁷⁰² Bancroft, *History of California*, 2:401.

⁷⁰³ *Ibid.*, 400-402.

⁷⁰⁴ Francisco Altable, “De la Excepcionalidad Política a la Restricción Jurisdiccional en La California Franciscana (1768-1803),” *Historia Mexicana* 63, no. 2 (October-December, 2013): 575-576.

their animal propensities. If they discovered a willing listener, their tales would be correspondingly embellished.”⁷⁰⁵ Bancroft referred to the same testimony as “the pretended motive of the fugitives,” though he conceded that in some cases, complaints of ill treatment may have been true.⁷⁰⁶ Finally, in his 1989 apologia regarding the role of discipline in the California missions, Francis J. Guest wrote: “it does not seem that the punishments...aroused much resentment or damaged the reputation of the friars for charity and compassion.”⁷⁰⁷

What changes might occur in California mission scholarship if historians privileged the testimony of California Indians and other eyewitness to missionary cruelty, arrogance, avarice, and obstructionism or considered the Franciscans and their defenders’ rebuttals the exaggerations? Over the last three to four decades, some scholars have begun a shift towards this perspective. The primacy of California Indian experiences within and beyond the missions is a methodological turn that rejects the antiquated notions of European civilization’s cultural, and racial, superiority and the once seemingly self-evident truth that the colonizer’s version of history contained accurate representations of the lived past. This turn represented a crucial step away from the Eurocentric, triumphalist history of colonization in the Americas. Despite this, much work remains in decoding the rhetoric of colonization. This is true in all cases where the colonizers’ version of events is the dominant narrative. This dissertation is an effort to decode that rhetoric and unravel the mythology surrounding the California missions. These missions remain a powerful cultural force in twenty-first century California. That influence, filtered through the fantasies of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century journalists, architects, and capitalists as it may be, is still alive and well. Yet, there is another group that remains. The

⁷⁰⁵ Engelhardt, *Missions and Missionaries of California*, 2:508.

⁷⁰⁶ Bancroft, *History of California*, 1:584.

⁷⁰⁷ Guest, “An Inquiry into the Role of Discipline,” 22.

descendants of baptized California Indians. If the practice of believing Indigenous histories of the missions and critiquing Franciscan versions offers us any enlightenment, it is that the California missions and the continued civic veneration of them are a constant reminder of historical trauma for those descendants. The California missions forever altered Indigenous languages, traditions, religions, and people. Perhaps it is time to honor that past, rather than a romanticized fantasy that renders the painful truth invisible.

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