The proposed sainthood of the founder of California's mission system, Franciscan Junípero Serra, presents a challenging problem to the historian. It is the first canonization process that the Roman Catholic church subjected to its revised requirements. By the time it began, Father Serra had been dead so long that no living person knew him. Thus his public, as well as personal, history had to be carefully reconstructed before the case could be advanced. Fifteen years of research undergirded compilation of the historical record, which was sent to Rome in 1949. In 1985, the Sacred Congregation of Rites, after careful review of the documents in this record, recommended to the pope that Serra's cause be accepted officially for canonization by urging him to declare Serra Venerable, the first of three steps to sainthood. Pope John Paul II did so. The other two steps—beatification, which just occurred, and canonization—involves proof of miracles, which, in this case, are matters beyond the historian's province.

Because of a longstanding controversy over Serra's treatment of Indians, the central question for the historian is: what constituted the historical record? In December 1948, in Fresno, California, the Historical Commission for the Serra Cause, a triumvirate of scholars, testified before an ecclesiastical court and presented that record. Chief among the witnesses stood Herbert Eugene Bolton, former president of the American Historical Association. Bolton was a distinguished historian who had created the school of borderlands studies by publishing voluminously on Spanish activity in the Southwest and by training over one hundred Ph.D.s. A "Mayflower descendant and grandson of a Methodist minister," Bolton symbolized impartiality on a commission that included two priests. Moreover, he testified at a time when the Serra controversy had reached a pitch unmatched until the late 1980s. What he said and why he said it should help clarify what use of history was made in that religious inquiry and provide a context for the contemporary controversy over what historians, as expert witnesses, said about Serra in 1986.


FATHER JUNÍPERO SERRA, BORN OF HUMBLE PARENTS ON THE ISLAND OF MALLORCA in 1713, turned to a religious life early, took his vows in 1731, and continued his studies, securing a doctorate in theology. He earned a reputation for oratorical excellence and won a professorial appointment at the Lullian University in 1744. Five years later, at the age of thirty-five, he left his native island to work as a missionary in the New World. In New Spain, he served in the Sierra Gorda region of Querétaro as a missionary and as an administrator of the Franciscan College of San Fernando in Mexico City. After twenty years of these labors, at age fifty-five, he led the Franciscans into Alta California in 1769 both as missionary and as first Father President of the missions, positions he held until his death in 1784.

Serra brought with him to California the prevailing religious attitude toward Indians, their conversion, and their treatment. In Spanish law, the Franciscans' relationship to their Indian converts was that of parent to child or custodian to ward. Once an Indian accepted Roman Catholicism as symbolized by baptism, the neophyte had to live according to the church's precepts, and disobedience or backsliding was corrected physically. Ordinary corporal punishment included whipping, imposing shackles, or imprisonment in stocks. Fugitive converts were pursued and, when found, returned to the mission.5

Writing to the governor of California in 1780, Father Serra observed:

That spiritual fathers should punish their sons, the Indians, with blows appears to be as old as the conquest of these kingdoms [the Americas]: so general in fact that the saints do not seem to be any exception to the rule . . . In the life of Saint Francis Solano . . . we read that, while he had a special gift from God to soften the ferocity of the most barbarous by the sweetness of his presence and his words, nevertheless, in the running of his mission in the Province of Tucumán in Peru . . . when they failed to carry out his orders, he gave directions for his Indians to be whipped.

Serra saw no reason why the same practices should not be applied in California.6

Serra probably did not personally apply the whip, using instead an Indian supervisor as had St. Francis Solano. Still, he believed that a guard of soldiers would be necessary to prevent Indian reprisals for flogging.7 Some missionaries punished Indians excessively, and Father Serra tried to control their zeal. He wrote to his superior: “As to the question: do some ministers punish the Indian neophytes too severely? I copied out that part of Your Reverence’s letter, and sent it to all the missions; and I added to it a few directions of my own. I feel confident that where there may have been too much severity, things will be put right.”8 Nevertheless, disciplinary problems persisted and, in the 1780 letter to the governor, Serra candidly wrote, “I am willing to admit that in the infliction of the punishment we are now discussing, there may have been inequalities and excesses

7 Serra to Father Fermín Francisco Lasuén, July 10, 1778, Writings of Junípero Serra, 3: 202–09.
8 Serra to Father Francisco Panagua, October 7, 1776, Writings of Junípero Serra, 3: 41–55.
on the part of some Fathers and that we are all exposed to err in that regard.\textsuperscript{9}  

Three years later and a year before Serra's death, Governor Pedro Fages, an old antagonist of Father Serra, complained that all missionaries were guilty of excessive severity toward their neophytes. At Mission San Carlos, Serra's headquarters, the governor charged that Indian labor was forced, and the unwilling were put in irons.\textsuperscript{10}

The California missions persisted another fifty years after Serra's death, and charges of missionary mistreatment of Indians continued to surface. Following secularization, decreed by Mexico in 1834, the missions fell into decay and ruin, only to be revived under American and Protestant impetus beginning late in the nineteenth century.

Official permission from Rome to initiate Serra's case for canonization came in 1934, 150 years after his death in 1784. To begin the inquiry, the bishop of the Monterey-Fresno diocese, in which Serra's remains lay buried, appointed the Historical Commission. Besides Bolton, professor of Hispanic history at the University of California, Berkeley, it consisted of Monsignor James E. Culleton, chancellor of the diocese, and the archivist and historian of Mission Santa Barbara, Father Maynard Geiger.

As a practical matter, only Father Geiger had the time to do the field research in archives and collections in California, Mexico, and Spain. Original documents had to be collected then filmed or copied by some other photostatic process, collated, and certified. The copies had to be brought back to California, where the other members of the commission certified them also. Father Geiger, or his assistant, had to make four copies of each document, one for the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints, which would study the material to make a recommendation to the pope whether to continue the canonization process, and the remaining copies for the records of the Santa Barbara Mission Archive, the Monterey-Fresno diocesan archive, and the records of the Franciscan curia in Rome.\textsuperscript{11}

Bolton's importance to the commission lay in his extensive knowledge of the history of Spain in the New World, especially California, and of the archival sources for materials on Father Serra. Bolton's reputation as the premier scholar of the Spanish borderlands had been built on an impressive array of publications rooted in original archival research and on his wide-ranging approach to the recovery of the past. He accompanied his characteristic writings—translated and edited diaries and travel accounts of early Spanish explorers—with lengthy interpretive essays designed to relate the detail of local history to larger themes. He had early established his understanding of the role of the Indian in the panorama of the American West. As an enthusiast of anthropology, Bolton had

\textsuperscript{9} Serra to Governor de Neve, January 7, 1780, \textit{Writings of Junípero Serra}, 3: 413, 415.
\textsuperscript{10} Hubert Howe Bancroft, \textit{History of California}, 7 vols. (San Francisco, 1884–90), 1: 400–01 and n.19.
written, by 1910, over one hundred articles on aboriginal tribes in Texas and Louisiana for the *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico*.\(^\text{12}\)

In 1930, anthropologist John P. Harrington, who had already gleaned valuable ethnographic data from Bolton's translations,\(^\text{13}\) sent Bolton a copy of his essay "The Reaction of the American Indian to His European Conquerors," in which he criticized the impact of the mission on Native American culture, noted the deficiencies in history written from the victor's perspective, and, in a section headed "Civilization" Not Wanted, observed that "any amount of study of the American Indian only confirms the opinion that he was from start to finish a reluctant recipient of the European civilization brought to him by his discoverers and conquerors. The initial fear and awe produced by contact with the European passed rapidly through the cycle of loving and returned to a long twilight of dread, mistrust and suffering."\(^\text{14}\) Bolton had already read the article "with a great deal of interest and high approval." He replied, speaking to the deficiency in the historical record, "One of the great short comings in the early history of the western hemisphere is our lack of a record of what the Indians thought about things. If we only knew what he said and thought about our ancestors we probably would hang our heads in shame. This work of yours is in the right direction."\(^\text{15}\)

Two years later, Bolton, along with Berkeley colleagues Alfred L. Kroeber from anthropology and Carl O. Sauer from geography, founded *Ibero Americana*, a journal devoted to bringing an interdisciplinary approach to the historical study of the Americas. In 1943, *Ibero Americana* published the most comprehensive critique of the California missions yet written. By then, largely because of his success in finding Spanish-era documents in recondite archives, Bolton had become involved in the Serra cause.

Bolton's archival work since 1900 meant that he had collected (and later deposited in the Bancroft Library), literally thousands of Spanish documents, many of them pertinent to the Franciscans in California. Bolton had written positively of Serra. In 1921, while comparing the complaints made against the missions to their overall success, Bolton concluded that, "all in all, indeed, Serra was the outstanding Spanish pioneer of California."\(^\text{16}\) Five years later, Bolton translated, edited, and published the first history of California, which had been written by Serra's student and long-time companion, Father Francisco Palóu.\(^\text{17}\) Bolton's praise of Father Palóu proved significant because the Franciscan had also written the first biography of Serra, the basis for all subsequent study of Serra's life.\(^\text{18}\)


\(^{14}\) *Pan American Magazine*, 43 (October 1930): 221–34, quoted at 234.

\(^{15}\) Bolton to Dr. J. P. Herrington [sic], October 13, 1930, Outgoing, Bolton Papers.


When approached to testify, Bolton described himself as "deeply flattered . . . to serve on the committee for examining the Serra documents" and promised to "do my best to justify my appointment." But Bolton, always busy with other projects, proved irregular in answering requests. Geiger had to remind him repeatedly to send copies of promised materials. And, while scholars compiled the documentary base from which to reconstruct Serra's personal and public life, the California mission controversy took a new turn, informed by methodologies developed in a discipline not anticipated by Bolton.

The First World War had prompted medical study of human response to various forms of physical deprivation. Physiologist Sherburne F. Cook of the University of California, Berkeley, applied those studies to the California mission Indian population in a series of investigations published in Ibero Americana during World War II. Cook's work, followed by Germany's defeat and the subsequent revelation of the Nazi annihilation of six million Jews, combined to make the California Indian, Junipero Serra, and the missions the focus of intensified debate. All of these developments coincided with the advancement of Serra's canonization.

In his most important study, "The Indian versus the Spanish Mission," Cook proposed to examine the mission from the standpoint of the physical effect it had on the Indian, to treat the subject as a "study in human ecology." Data seemed sufficient, especially from the voluminous documents originally transcribed by American historian Hubert Howe Bancroft and his assistants, to permit application of statistical methods. Taking the decline of the neophyte population as his departure point, Cook sought to quantify and explain it within the context of Indian adjustment to Spanish settlement: "From the available data we find that from 1779 to 1833 there were 29,100 births and 62,600 deaths. The excess of deaths over births was then 33,500, indicating an extremely rapid population decline." That decline occurred primarily because of the introduction of European diseases into a defenseless population. It was an unintended consequence of colonization. Epidemics such as measles or flu spread more quickly because of the living arrangements at the missions that aggregated the aboriginal population. Spanish soldiers introduced syphilis, debilitating a population further weakened by an altered diet. One of the ways Indians responded was by running away. Throughout the mission system, a fugitive rate of 10 percent prevailed, with the highest rate, 15.6 percent, recorded at San Carlos, the mission most closely

20 For example, Maynard Geiger to Bolton, May 27, October 15, November 22, 1942, Incoming, Bolton Papers.
23 Cook, "Indian versus Spanish Mission," 16.
associated with Serra and the site of his remains.\textsuperscript{25} Punishment for recaptured fugitives included flogging.

Cook discerned the use of compulsory conversion emerging after 1790, after Serra’s death, in a pattern that persisted and grew. Invitations and moral suasion gave way to forays to the interior to bring back runaways and to recruit by force the unconverted.\textsuperscript{26} While Cook described labor at the missions as mild, he also found it forced. It was not slavery, but it was certainly labor mandatory for the survival of the mission.\textsuperscript{27} The chief means of enforcing discipline was corporal punishment—flogging—a practice employed “in the eighteenth century among all white civilizations, particularly when used upon so-called inferior races.”\textsuperscript{28} Cook acknowledged that the critical issue in the question of punishment was whether it was severe by the standards of the day. Citing Father Fermín Lasuén’s reply to charges initiated by another priest, Cook noted that the second Father President considered twenty-five lashes to be the upper limit for an offense. But other observers recorded instances of greater numbers of lashes administered at the missions. In these accounts, and in the tendency of mission superiors like Lasuén to censure priests for excessive flogging, Cook found a cumulative weakness in California’s mission history:

Had the clergy really been lenient, had punishment really been mild, fair, and just, the issue could never have been raised. The fact that the prefect gave ground, that he undertook to mitigate or even abolish corporal punishment, indicates an attempt to correct a situation which, in his writings at least, he admits was abhorrent to him, and this action establishes as basically justified (even after being trimmed of exaggeration) the charge of severe and unwarranted punitive discipline.\textsuperscript{29}

Cook ended his comprehensive scholarly inquiry into Indian adjustment to the mission with a gratuitous comment about Roman Catholicism appealing to “primitive emotions,”\textsuperscript{30} a remark that later engendered resentment against his entire work. While Cook had not singled out Serra for criticism, the implications were plain: as founder of the mission system, Serra bore responsibility for what had occurred. In Cook’s words, the Indian had been subjected to “severe and unwarranted punitive discipline.”

Unlike most scholarship read by only a few specialists, Cook’s work found its way into popular history within three years of publication. Carey McWilliams, in \textit{Southern California Country}, decided “to tell the story of the Missions not in the conventional manner, that is, from the point of view of the Franciscans, but from the point of view of the real parties in interest, namely the Indians.”\textsuperscript{31} To do that, McWilliams used Cook’s material and the emerging information about German

\textsuperscript{25} Cook, “Indian versus Spanish Mission,” 61.
\textsuperscript{26} Cook, “Indian versus Spanish Mission,” 73–90.
\textsuperscript{27} Cook, “Indian versus Spanish Mission,” 95–96.
\textsuperscript{28} Cook, “Indian versus Spanish Mission,” 122. Punishment is treated extensively from 113 to 134, and I will cite only direct quotations.
\textsuperscript{29} Cook, “Indian versus Spanish Mission,” 130. The prefect referred to was Father Francisco García Diego y Moreno, writing in 1833.
\textsuperscript{30} Cook, “Indian versus Spanish Mission,” 146.
\textsuperscript{31} Carey McWilliams, \textit{Southern California Country: An Island on the Land} (New York, 1946), vii.
domestic policy during World War II to attack the missions in terms that have remained prominent in some quarters ever since. "With the best theological intentions in the world, the Franciscan padres eliminated the Indians with the effectiveness of Nazis operating concentration camps."32 In a single sentence, McWilliams internationalized the California mission experience in an invidious way: Mission San Carlos and Dachau were the same.

Since McWilliams saw the missions as concentration camps, it followed that "from the moment of conversion the neophyte became a slave."33 He accepted the idea of forced conversion of Indians but moved the date forward to 1800. He cited statistics given by Cook on deaths, the role of disease in reducing population, and some of the information on punishment. But, exemplified by his description of the labor system as slavery, McWilliams departed from Cook in many ways. McWilliams thought that "the neophytes were kept in a state of chronic undernourishment in order to retard the tendency to fugitivism," a point far removed from Cook's scientific assessment of the mission diet as "suboptimal."34 And, while Cook may have agreed with the result, he would not have referred to the missions as "a series of picturesque charnel houses."35

McWilliams earned generally favorable reviews for Southern California Country, and such magazines as Survey Graphic, The Nation, The New Republic, and Current History all remarked on his discussion of the mission Indians.36 But not all publications reviewed it favorably. The Catholic World, offended by McWilliams's treatment of the Franciscans, called his viewpoint "bigoted" and criticized him for failing "to evaluate the monumental research initiated by Dr. Herbert Eugene Bolton."37 As Bolton prepared to give his testimony in the Serra case in late 1948, at age seventy-nine, the question of Franciscan treatment of Indians had been covered recently in both the popular press and the scholarly community.

The Diocesan Historical Commission gave evidence to the ecclesiastical court in Fresno from December 13th to the 16th, 1948, on two major areas of Serra’s life—his writings and his reputation for holiness and miracles.38 Supporting evidence included lists of all foreign and domestic archives and collections consulted, enumeration of individual documents culled from them, and lists of monuments to Serra, accompanied by a photograph and geographic location.39

To guide the commissioners through the case, a list of ten “suggested questions” had been prepared in advance. Several of them were sound historical queries. The fourth asked, in part, “Can you give Palou’s background as an historian showing

32 McWilliams, Southern California Country, 29.
33 McWilliams, Southern California Country, 30.
34 McWilliams, Southern California Country, 33; Cook, “Indian versus Spanish Mission,” 55.
35 McWilliams, Southern California Country, 29.
37 The Catholic World, 163 (September 1946): 570–71, quoted at 570.
38 “Officials of the Tribunals Diocese of Monterey-Fresno,” n.d.[1948], Serra Cause: Miscellaneous Serrana, Santa Barbara Mission Archive, hereafter, SBMA.
39 See the group of document summaries surrounding Geiger to Bolton, September 11, 1947, Incoming, Bolton Papers. File boxes containing the copies retained at Santa Barbara are in the SBMA.
that he was both able to know the truth and willing to tell it?" The eighth sought
the "historical setting of Serra's labors in California," including "the history of
California, the character and habits of her aboriginal population." Question 9
asked, "What methods did Serra and the missionaries employ in converting and
civilizing the Indians?"40

The answers provided to these questions lie in the transumptum, the collected
record of the Serra case. Complete copies ought to be in both the Chancery Office
of the Monterey Diocese and in the archive of the Santa Barbara Mission.41 In fact,
the consolidated holdings are at the Santa Barbara Mission but not in the archive.
All the original copies are stored in a locked, four-drawer file cabinet closeted
beneath a staircase located above the archive. This file is closed and claimed by
Serra's third Vice Postulator, the primary promoter of the cause, Noel F. Moholy.42
Repeated requests to Father Moholy to read this testimony have been answered
with silence.43 Nevertheless, sufficient material extant in the Bolton Papers permits
an assessment of the outline of the testimony.

The first two questions sought to establish Bolton's "researches on and
contribution to the documents collected on this cause of Junípero Serra" (Question
1), along with "a detailed list of the archives and libraries consulted" (Question 2).
Bolton wrote that his contribution had been general, part of his lifework. He
explained that he had "spent years writing and teaching the story of the Catholic
missionaries in founding missions, converting the natives, and training them in the
ways of civilized peoples." He then described some of his work and his publications
as "a partial indication of my competence to testify to the merits of Fray Junipero
Serra, the greatest of all this galaxy of Apostles to the heathen in North America."44

Bolton's responses reveal both a European cultural bias in favor of the
Franciscan missionary effort and unqualified praise for Serra as missionary. The
first view contradicted the sensitivity he had expressed to Harrington in 1930.
Bolton now used "civilization" in precisely the pejorative way Harrington had
disparaged. The second reaffirmed his initial praise of Serra in 1921. Together,
the responses proved consistent in testimony, but they stood at odds with his earlier
record and with Cook's criticism. One wonders what happened to Cook's analysis,
a critical perspective that ought to have been introduced to answer Question 9,
"What methods did Serra and the missionaries employ in converting and civilizing
the Indians?" and probably also applied to Question 8 on "character and habits of
her aboriginal population."

40 "Suggested Questions to be asked the Commissioners of the Diocesan Historical Commission."
[1949?], misfiled, Outgoing, Bolton Papers. I brought this to the attention of the staff at the Bancroft
Library, and this material should now be correctly filed with 1948.
41 Geiger, "Beatification of Fray Junípero Serra," 131, 133. In 1967, Fresno became a separate
diocese, and the materials relating to Monterey were transferred to Monterey.
43 Francis Guest placed two long-distance telephone calls from Santa Barbara to Moholy in San
Francisco on my behalf on July 29, 1987. Each time, Guest stated to the secretary who took the calls
my credentials, the nature of my request, insisting that it was important to secure Moholy's response.
Neither call was returned. A written request of August 17, 1987 has not been answered.
44 "Questions 1 and 2," [1949?], misfiled, Outgoing, Bolton Papers. In his handwriting is the
notation, above his initials, "Part of my testimony with the Serra Cause."
It seems impossible that Bolton did not know of Cook’s analysis, even if he may not have encountered it directly. Although Cook published in the interdisciplinary journal Bolton had co-founded, Bolton had left the editorial board by the time “The Indian versus the Spanish Mission” appeared.\(^45\) Bolton apparently had no correspondence with Cook, yet he did with other Berkeley colleagues. Bolton did not refer to Cook or Cook’s arguments in his letters. Bolton liked to collect and compose dichos, or aphorisms. Perhaps one of these pertains to his relationship to Cook’s scholarship:

No professor ever reads a book written by a colleague. In fact nobody ever reads a professor’s book except a student who has to pass the course.\(^46\)

But Bolton must have known of Cook’s arguments through conversation with his colleagues, through McWilliams, or through discussion with other members of the historical commission. As early as 1943, the year Cook’s study appeared, Father Geiger wrote to Bolton that he had “read the modern literature on the subject [Serra] of which our files, collected from various sources, are full. There are a few items I would like to discuss relative to certain character traits of Serra and viewpoints of Palou, which I feel can be discussed only at leisure and in an informal way.”\(^47\) Father Geiger had received and read both Cook’s study of the missions and Southern California Country, noting that McWilliams’s treatment of the Franciscan missions was based on Cook’s work.\(^48\) Despite his busy schedule, Bolton went to Santa Barbara at least twice to meet with Geiger and Culleton to certify documents and discuss the case before traveling to Fresno in late 1948.\(^49\)

In November 1948, Bolton received an outline of Geiger’s planned testimony. Bolton’s failure to respond drew a plea from Geiger: “I expected to hear from you whether you agree on all points as to my statements or if you object to some. Kindly let me know very soon if there are any reasons for disagreement. This is VERY IMPORTANT for the time is now short and the evidence we give must agree. Any difficulties must be ironed out ahead of time.”\(^50\) When the time came, each commissioner gave his evidence orally without the others present. The court secretary took it down verbatim and read it back so that corrections could be made before the commissioner left the court.\(^51\) Bolton later recalled the sarcasm of the devil’s advocate and the intensity of the questioning. He also noted that “as soon as the inquiry was finished the charge of secrecy was completely removed.”\(^52\)

\(^{45}\) Cook’s work appeared as nos. 21–24 of Ibero Americana. The editors for no. 21 and no. 24 were Carl O. Sauer, Lawrence Kinnaird, and Alfred L. Kroeber. For no. 22 and no. 23, Lesley B. Simpson replaced Kinnaird. Critical Entry Card, Ibero Americana, central catalog, main library, University of California, Berkeley.

\(^{46}\) “Dicho,” [1947?], Outgoing, Bolton Papers.

\(^{47}\) Geiger to Bolton, February 17, 1943, Incoming, Bolton Papers.

\(^{48}\) Entries for February 14, 1944 and May 9, 1946, Diary of Maynard F. Geiger, vol. 3, SBMA.


\(^{50}\) Geiger to Bolton, December 2, 1948, Incoming, Bolton Papers.

\(^{51}\) Geiger to Bolton, December 2, 1948, Incoming, Bolton Papers.

\(^{52}\) Bolton, “Confessions of a Wayward Professor,” 360.
Bolton clearly kept any disturbing discussion to a minimum, downplaying Cook's study, if it came up at all. Bolton's enthusiasm for Serra, reinforced by the enthusiasm of Geiger and Culloton, probably overbore the objections posed by historical scholarship. A year later, on December 12, 1949, Bolton "became the fifth scholar to receive the Serra Award, conferred by the Academy of American Franciscan History" in Washington, D.C., for his contributions to the Serra cause.53

Diocesan Historical Commission testimony, added to the other documents already gathered and certified in Santa Barbara, was assembled in Fresno for final review. The products of 125 libraries, archives, and personal holdings, gathered from travel encompassing 100,000 miles in North America and Europe came to some 8,000 total pages. All was sealed in a four-drawer legal-size file and shipped to Rome in 1949. The Vice Postulator took the file personally to present to the Franciscan General Postulator, who in turn presented it to the Congregation of Sacred Rites. Then began the congregation's lengthy process of carefully considering the case to determine Father Serra's worthiness to be recommended for canonization.54

In California, the gap in ascertaining Indian perspectives on mission life, noted by Bolton in his letter to Harrington, was being addressed. Cook's study represented not only the first systematic attempt to examine the mission from the Indian perspective but also the first published account of complaint from a mission Indian. Cook presented the testimony of Lorenzo Asesara, former neophyte at Mission Santa Cruz, whose reminiscences had been recorded by one of Bancroft's assistants. Asesara observed, "The Spanish padres were very cruel to the Indians; they treated them very badly; they kept them well fed . . . and they made them work like slaves."55 Cook cautioned that one Indian did not represent all; still, Asesara's testimony represented another viewpoint on the work of Serra.

Harrington continued working with mission Indian informants as he had been doing for the previous thirty years. A desire to preserve Indian languages and an appreciation of their material culture dominated Harrington's field work. To study their linguistics, he needed informants who would simply talk. Gradually, they came to reveal their thoughts about the missions. Harrington was secretive about his work, and his materials first became available after his death in 1961. Published accounts of some of his informants only began to appear late in the 1970s. The first came from the recollections of his former wife, Carobeth Laird. She had interviewed Maria Solares, an Inezeño Indian, who described her grandmother as "an esclava de la misión [slave of the mission]. She had run away many, many times and had been recaptured and whipped til her buttocks crawled

53 Bannon, Herbert Eugene Bolton, 235.
with maggots. Yet she had survived to hand down her memories of the golden age before the white men came. Now her descendants were all very good Catholics.”

Recollections of Fernando Librado, who falsely claimed to be a former mission Indian and who became Harrington’s chief source in the Ventureño language, appeared in 1979. Describing one aspect of life at Mission San Buenaventura, Librado remarked, “I remember how the Indians were treated unjustly by the order of the priests.” At about the same time as Librado’s remembrances appeared, Indian activists Rupert Costo and Jeannette Henry Costo of the American Indian Historical Society in San Francisco began gathering testimony from more recent Indian descendants.

When the Congregation of Sacred Rites, after nearly forty years of contemplation, recommended to the pope that the cause for beatification officially be accepted, thus deeming Junipero Serra worthy of sainthood, Indian activists responded angrily. On May 9, 1985, the pope acted on the congregation’s recommendation and declared Junipero Serra Venerable, the first step in canonization. The historical record of Serra’s life and work for sainthood was formally closed and the question of miracles opened.

Many Indians, activists or not, felt a sense of pain and anger, of frustration that the Indian side of California mission history had been omitted. Public complaint was voiced by California Indian activists such as the Costos and CheeQweesh Auh-Ho-Oh, an Aptos teacher and self-identified Chumash Indian. Indians were joined by people who identified with an Indo-Hispanic heritage, expressed a common sense of outrage at Serra’s canonization, and criticized the mission in terms reminiscent of McWilliams. Father Gilbert Hemauer, head of Tekakwitha Conference, a major organization representing 10,000 Native American Roman Catholics, expressed feeling “uncomfortable” with the pace of Serra’s canonization and said that Indians had not been consulted about it.

The outpouring of complaint against Father Serra and the Franciscans by Indian and non-Indian alike—charges of Serra enslaving and brutalizing Indians, of genocide, and of Serra’s being a fanatic and a sadist—prompted a response as combative as the attacks. On the anniversary of Serra’s birth in 1986, the bishop of Monterey, Thaddeus Shubsda, issued The Serra Report, a reply to Serra’s critics.

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57 He did not accurately recall his birthdate, which appears to have been around 1838 instead of around 1804. See John R. Johnson, “The Trail to Fernando,” Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology, 4 (Summer 1982): 132–38.
58 Travis Hudson, ed., Breath of the Sun: Life in Early California as Told by a Chumash Indian, Fernando Librado to John P. Harrington (Morongo, Calif., 1979), 17.
61 Pinsky, “To Many Indians, Serra Was No Saint.”
Drawing on interviews with eight scholars (six academics and two museum curators), seven of whom had earned the doctorate, the bishop wrote that no documentation had yet been produced “that Father Serra mistreated anyone.” He attacked the opponents of sainthood: “His [Serra’s] detractors are coming from an emotional point of view rather than using a scholarly approach; they are making historically unsound, unfounded allegations that reflect a lack of research and that neglect the facts . . . To the detractors we say: If there is proof, let us see it.” Bishop Shubsda specifically referred to statements from historians as vindicating Serra. These interviews were done by Valerie Steiner, “a media and public relations specialist . . . [who] said that no academics critical of Serra were consulted.” The five historians involved in the interviews all had earned doctorates and consisted of two women, Iris Engstrand and Gloria Miranda, and three men, Harry Kelsey, Michael Mathes, and Doyce Nunis, Jr. The same questions were not posed to each historian; the questions were frequently leading and often open-ended.

A sample of questions posed to the respondents revealed the tenor of the interviews. To Miranda, “Was Serra a fanatic?” To Nunis, “Was Father Serra a brutal man who enslaved the Indians and completely destroyed their culture?” and “If the mission system had not come to California, who would have?” To Engstrand, “In terms of the Indians and how they were being treated, how accurate are the comments from people today who appear to be hostile to the mission?” To Mathes, “Was Father Serra a cruel man?” To Kelsey, “You mentioned that he [Serra] had weaknesses. What were they?”

In the matter of punishment, the interpretation of cruelty or excessiveness depended on at least two standards: that of the dominant and that of the subordinate culture. None of these scholars mentioned Father Serra’s own attitudes on flogging and punishment, although Engstrand supposed punishments existed, and Nunis insisted that they were part of the era. None mentioned Governor Fages’s charges in 1783 against Serra and the Franciscans for abusive treatment according to the Spanish standard, and none mentioned Cook’s analysis and criticism, again from the Spanish perspective of the time. None mentioned published Indian accounts of complaint. This silence seemed surprising, since Father Francis F. Guest, three years before The Serra Report, had written about the missions of California: “It is certain that the whipping of delinquent Indians was an error in judgment on the part of the missionaries. It is not at all certain that it was an exercise in brutality.” Father Guest nevertheless went on to say that

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65 Valerie Steiner, ed., “Interview(s) with Dr(s). Gloria Miranda, Doyce B. Nunis, Jr., Iris Engstrand, Michael Mathes, Harry Kelsey,” The Serra Report.
Indians did not use corporal punishment on each other. The Spanish historical record established that corporal punishment was routinely used against the Indians; Serra used it, if not himself then through proxy; and complaint of excess on both sides of the frontier of Franciscan-Indian contact had been documented. The historians participating in *The Serra Report* did not present this material.

The sweeping agenda of *The Serra Report* in its response to criticism may have hurried the respondents into some incautious comments. When queried as to why the criticism of Father Serra was emerging now, Miranda and Kelsey attributed it to anti-Catholic, anti-mission bias. Engstrand had a different idea:

I don't think that the Indians themselves would have ever come up with any of this if it hadn't been for a few people that encouraged them.

*Outside people?*

You know, some amateur anthropologists and archaeologists, people from the '60s who want a cause . . . Since the Serra cause is receiving a lot of publicity, they think it is a good one to beat the drums about.

In defending Father Serra, these historians, excepting Mathes, who ignored the subject, resorted to historical stereotypes of pre-contact aboriginal culture to exalt Serra's accomplishment. Among the litany, but not encompassing all, and in no particular order:

*Indian possessions.* "They never did fully understand the concept of private property." [Engstrand]

*Indians' ability to survive in the wild.* "Life was very hard . . . They simply had to grub for a living." [Nunis]

"Until they came to the missions, they didn't know from one month to the next or one day to the next what they were going to eat, or how they were going to cure themselves from an illness, or what they were going to do in the event of some dire tragedy." [Kelsey]

*The impact of Roman Catholicism on the Indians.* "Father Serra has a very important role in at least initiating the whole family tradition in California." [Miranda]

"For the first time it [Roman Catholicism] dignified the individual. Up until that time the Indians had no sense of fidelity to each other, there was no spirit of loyalty. There was no spirit of commitment . . . they had no idea of a social compact, in the strongest sense of the word. They had no sense of morality." [Nunis]

All of these denigrating caricatures had long ago been set aside and these scholars would have avoided them by even a casual familiarity with the readily available works of, say, historian James Rawls or anthropologist Robert Heizer. Had the subject been Afro-Americans instead of California Native Americans, one wonders what the response to such scholarly insensitivity would have been.

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67 Steiner, "Engstrand Interview," *The Serra Report*.
Mathes concluded his remarks for *The Serra Report* with the challenge that Bishop Shubsda later assumed. “If you can’t support it with documents, if you don’t come up with absolute material,” Mathes said, “don’t sit there and mouth off. And so, that’s a challenge if you will, to the opponents of Serra.” The Costos took up the challenge. Drawing from their earlier field notes and working with Indian and non-Indian scholars, they prepared a comprehensive response to *The Serra Report*. In addition to replies to each interview and historical essays on Indian life and Indian-white relations, the Costos compiled testimony and resolutions from individual Indians, tribal units, and larger assemblies. The Tekakwitha Conference adopted a resolution charging that Shubsda’s report was “grossly inaccurate and totally misrepresents the native understanding of its own history and culture.”

The Costos published the book a month before the pope’s September 1987 visit to California and sent it to every bishop in the United States and to the Congregation of Sacred Rites in Rome. An emotionally charged volume, it carried the subtitle *Legacy of Genocide*, deliberately linking the Nazi death camps to the California missions while ignoring the differences in action and motivation between Nazis and Franciscans. And a promotional flyer erroneously proclaimed that “for the first time, the Indian voice is heard about the mission system in California.” But dismissing the study as a polemic because of its *ad hominem* arguments and exaggerated statements would overlook the real pain and anger that supported and informed it. Many Indians believed that they had become invisible in California mission history and that only dramatic appeals would win attention. The Costos believed that their efforts had stymied if not stopped Serra’s beatification. Actually, the pope had decided not to announce beatification during his visit because proper procedures had not been completed. Beatification, a papal response to a formal recommendation by the Congregation of Sacred Rites, based on its acceptance of proof of a candidate’s miracle, ostensibly had been stalled bureaucratically. At the time the pope left for the United States, the congregation had not yet met in plenary session to hear its medical commission recommend acceptance of the evidence of Serra’s first miracle.

During his visit to the United States, the pope met with representatives of Tekakwitha Conference. At the meeting in Phoenix, Arizona, he acknowledged that the church historically had committed “mistakes and wrongs” against Native Americans, but he praised Serra for his missionary efforts. In California, the pope visited Serra’s headquarters at Mission San Carlos and again praised the Franciscan missionary. Describing the roles people like Serra played in God’s plan, the pontiff observed that “although their story unfolds within the ordinary circumstances of daily life, they become larger than life within the perspective of

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70 Steiner, “Mathes Interview,” *The Serra Report*.
history . . . So it is with Junípero Serra.”75 Some Costanoan Indians demonstrated a mile away, as close as they were allowed to come during the papal visit, to protest what had happened historically at Carmel, the mission that Au-ho-oh had called “Auschwitz with roses.”76

On December 11, 1987, the pope accepted the Congregation of Sacred Rites’ recommendation for the beatification of Serra, and a two-hour mass of celebration was held in Rome on September 25, 1988.77 Sainthood requires proof of one further miracle, evidence of which, according to the Roman Catholic church, will bring “the final and definitive sentence by which veneration of the new saint is extended to the universal Church. The sentence, which infallibly declares the exemplariness of the saint’s life and exalts his sublime function of heavenly intercessor, is contained in the bull of canonization.”78

Compilation of the historical record in Serra’s case presents disturbing issues to the historian. If we are to avoid withering criticisms such as Voltaire’s that history is a trick played on the dead or Napoleon’s that it is a fable agreed upon, we must ensure that all sides of an issue are presented. Historians have been taught for well over a century that contradictory evidence ought to be evaluated, not dismissed; and, if it cannot be explained, then readers should be allowed to judge it themselves. In Serra’s case, precisely such an instance occurred when Hubert Howe Bancroft wrote the first modern history of California. In his study of Serra, Bancroft discovered documents indicating that Serra had behaved pettily in his dealings with the governor over the issue of his right to administer the sacrament of confirmation to Indians. Shocked by the discovery, Bancroft told his readers: “No ardent churchman entertains a more exalted opinion of the virtues of Junípero Serra . . . than myself. Nor would I willingly detract from the reputation of a man who has been justly regarded as an ideal missionary, the father of the church in California, but I am writing history, and I must record the facts as I find them and leave my readers to form their own conclusions.”79

A century after Serra’s death and sixty-four years before Bolton’s testimony, Bancroft did what a historian should have done, then and now.

Certainly, the Roman Catholic church, through the devil’s advocate and through the Postulator General of the Franciscan Order, sought to determine, not suppress, the existence of controversy. In reply to an inquiry about establishing the historical record, copies of which Bolton had, the Postulator General wrote that biographies of Serra other than Palou’s “if they include original or unpublished facts . . . are necessary.” Later, in the same letter, he continued: “Concerning the reputation of the Servant of God [Serra] during life and after his death, the report

75 Don A. Schanche and Maura Dolan, “Pope Stresses Varied Themes as He Moves up the Coast,” Los Angeles Times, September 18, 1987.
78 Molinari, “Canonization of Saints (History and Procedures),” 59.
should cover the entire period to our own day, without any distinction.” But Bolton apparently presented only a partial record in omitting Cook's comprehensive assessment.

When Bishop Shubsda turned to professional historians in 1986, their performance proved discouraging. Not only was Cook's analysis disregarded but so also were Serra's own words, the growing body of evidence from Indians, and the insights available from anthropology, all of which would have contributed to a balanced view of the past. Why were professional standards again suspended? One might understand a seventy-nine-year-old man succumbing to romantic rhetoric, much of it his own, but how are we to explain the failure of a group of five younger scholars, male and female, to present two sides of a story?

Tensions in the controversy presented here suggest two major difficulties in trying to use history in the service of religion: advocacy and presentism. Advocacy represents the suspension of the quest for objectivity in favor of a search for supporting material. In the case of sainthood, the operational hypothesis is not “What did the candidate do?” but rather “What did the candidate do that demonstrates proof of a holy (by Euro-American Christian standards) life?” The questions are fundamentally different: the first is speculative and historical, the second, which presupposes the conclusion, is utilitarian and pragmatic. The purpose of assembling a historical record for a potential saint is to generate, among other products, a life of the individual that stresses the candidate’s heroic virtues. This written product is hagiography. When serving a religious institution, the historian risks sacrificing a dispassionate reconstruction of the past in favor of justifying a foreordained conclusion.

Disregarding Cook's assessment that mission punishment of Indians constituted "severe and unwarranted punitive discipline" for the time suggests that a more difficult challenge than mere advocacy faces the historian. Here, the historical record is being manipulated, probably in an unconscious way, by a variation of the fallacy of presentism. Since historical writing is the act of reflecting on the past in the present, there is danger that the present can distort the historian's perspective. Because we now know how events turned out, it becomes imperative to maintain a sense of historical time lest the present moment be portrayed as inevitable and all sense of historical contingency be lost. In the quest for sainthood, an idealized past is sought in the present to be used as the basis for guiding the future.

When religious advocates of the Serra cause ask us to judge Junípero Serra by eighteenth-century standards, not twentieth, they strike a resonant note with historians. But their request is simultaneously disingenuous, given their purpose, which is canonization. Sainthood requires that Serra's experiences, especially those with the California Indian, transcend time and place. Sainthood means that his is

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a universal example for all Catholics to follow.82 Phrased another way, if Serra is canonized, the eighteenth century would judge the twentieth and all the centuries to come.

And Serra’s example would at best be ambiguous. Father Guest has demonstrated that Serra’s undeniable love of the Indians found missionary expression in activities that would not be pursued today. The process of immediate physical immersion in a mission has been abandoned in favor of the slow process of getting to know the subject for conversion and developing a basis for cultural rapport.83 But, if Serra’s hagiography ignores the controversy over Indian punishment, and if his missiology is today set aside,84 what then would Serra exemplify? Concern for the unfortunate? If so, it was concern administered with corporal punishment judged excessive at the time by both the Spanish and the Indians. Are we to believe that Serra’s concern, though expressed in a manner physically damaging to Native Americans, is nevertheless to be universally exemplary because his intention was to save immortal souls? Cannot the Indian interpretation also be applied, namely, that sainthood for Serra is yet another example of white over red, of European dominance over aboriginal culture, but this time not only justified but glorified in the name of religion?

Judging Father Serra by the standards of his time is what the historical record ought to permit. The failure of Bolton in 1948 and of the historians interviewed for Bishop Shubsda in 1986 to present both sides of Serra’s story profoundly challenges the ethics of the historical profession. Personal bias, either in advocacy or apology, seems to be preventing objectivity by historians in public service. These episodes demand that historians reexamine the role their colleagues play in the service of religion. At the very least, the lesson for us all is caveat scriptor.85

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85 Let the scribe [historian] beware.