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**CONTEXTUALIZATION AND UNIVERSALITY:
KEY THEMES IN THE WRITINGS OF ST. INNOKENTII
(VENIAMINOV)
IN THE 1830s – 1840s**

Abstract. The article explores the themes and imagery of Innokentii Veniaminov's catechetical writings of the 1830s which it sets in the context of his wider writings to show how he contextualized universal Christian truths for the Alaskan peoples. The article argues that Innokentii's writings were also influenced by broader spiritual currents affecting the entire Russian Church in the 18th and early 19th centuries, which led to a rediscovery of Orthodoxy's own spiritual heritage. Veniaminov's response to these currents makes him a figure of local and global significance.

В статье исследуются темы и образность катехизических трудов Иннокентия Вениаминова 1830-х годов. Чтобы показать, как он объяснял универсальные христианские истины народам Аляски, автор статьи опирается на его значимые труды. В статье приводятся доводы о том, что на работы Иннокентия оказали влияние духовные течения, также воздействовавшие на всю Русскую церковь в XVIII – начале XIX века, что заново привело к открытию духовного наследия православия. Реакция Вениаминова на эти течения сделала его фигурой местного и глобального значения.

Keywords: contextualization, universality, catechetical writings, Alaska, Russian Orthodox Church, 18th–19th centuries.

This article explores the key themes of St. Innokentii's most famous catechetical teachings preached and written down during the 1830s in Alaska, key teachings of the Christian faith about the Kingdom of Heaven, the Cross, the Holy Spirit, the Word of God in Scripture and its action on the human heart. These central themes of his writings, however, cannot be separated from his concern to contextualize these truths, to transmit them in a meaningful and relevant way among the peoples he served, what we could describe as his pedagogy. This contextualization involved the use of relevant imagery, translation into local vernaculars with the help of indigenous translators, and the encouragement of a holistic approach to teaching and education which focused on the heart as much as the mind, on practical application rather than rote knowledge. We shall read therefore Innokentii's catechetical writings and sermons in parallel with his broader writings: correspondence, instructional writings as a bishop, ethnographical notes, introductions to translations, writings which inform us of the many practical ways that Innokentii implemented his concern to contextualize the universal truths of the Christian faith.

Innokentii's desire and capacity to contextualize and make meaningful his message was a consequence of his role as an Orthodox priest and missionary of the wider Russian Orthodox Church. So while his writings of the 1830s arose in the context of his ministry

among the Alaskan peoples, the particular truths of the Christian faith on which he focuses were influenced by broader spiritual currents affecting the entire Russian Church in the early 19th century. These were to some extent the result of the Russian Church's encounter with Christian confessions outside Russia which led to a rediscovery of Orthodoxy's own rich spiritual heritage. There was, for example, a renewed emphasis on the reading of Holy Scripture in the vernacular which led to the founding of the Russian Bible Society, and a related emphasis on the acquisition of the Holy Spirit, God's direct revelation of Himself to the Christian believer and prayer of the heart. These were inspired both by contact with Western pietist and mystical trends, but also by a resurgence of the hesychast monastic tradition and spiritual eldership (*starchestvo*). Despite Innokentii's distant, isolated situation in Alaska, his writings and entire ministry reflect these broader trends and the second part of the article seeks to illustrate this.

Innokentii's ministry as the context of his writings in the 1820s – 1830s

Fr. Ioann Popov-Veniaminov, as he was then called, lived from 1824–1834 on the island of Unalaska, travelling through extremes of terrain and climate to minister as a priest on the Aleutian Islands. From 1834 he moved to serve as priest at the Cathedral of the Archangel Michael in Novoarkhangelsk, the central town of Russia's American colonies on the island of Sitka. Many of the Aleuts had been baptised into the Christian faith before Fr. Ioann's arrival but there had been little opportunity to give further instruction, so he devoted much of his time to teaching and giving practical instruction on what it meant to be a follower of Christ.

In Sitka Fr. Ioann faced a different challenge as the local indigenous inhabitants, the Kolosh, had not been baptised and were largely hostile to the Russian settlers. When a chicken-pox epidemic wiped out nearly half of the Kolosh population at the beginning of 1836, Fr. Ioann went with the colony's doctor to teach them how to carry out vaccinations. This gave him the opportunity to spend many long hours talking with the Kolosh in their tents, learning their language, customs and beliefs. He emphasizes in his reports at this time that he did not suggest to them that they should be baptised, but waited for them to take the initiative. When some of the Kolosh themselves requested baptism he asked the permission of their mothers and the indigenous leaders, the *toyons*, before baptising them. In 1837 he served the Divine Liturgy outside the walls of the fort of Stakhino in the presence of 1500 largely unbaptised Kolosh who watched curiously as the first Kolosh Christians took communion [1, p. 82–85]. This was the beginning for Fr. Ioann of a further period of giving catechetical instruction among the Kolosh, translating texts into their language and seeking to teach about the Christian faith in a way that was meaningful for them.

Fr. Ioann's catechetical teaching among the Aleuts and the Kolosh eventually reached written and published form in two main texts, his most famous *Indication of the Way into the Kingdom of Heaven*¹ [2, p. 168–234], written in 1833 in the Fox-Aleut language for the Aleutian islanders, and his *Teaching for those who are fasting or preparing for communion*², [2, p. 95–140] also written in the 1830s. Fr. Ioann's *Sermon for the Third Sunday of Lent*

1 Referred to hereafter as *Indication of the Way*.

2 Referred to hereafter as *Teaching before communion* or *Teaching*.

[2, p. 67–75; 24, p. 113–119] preached on the Sunday of the Cross in Lent 1838, is a more succinct version of the third and fourth parts of the *Indication of the Way*, and echoes many of the themes of his *Teaching before communion* as well as his other writings. These texts all focus on four themes: the Kingdom of Heaven, the Holy Spirit, the way of the Cross, the Word of God and its action on the human heart. We shall examine each theme in turn as well as showing how it is interconnected with the other themes through the overarching theme of God’s revelation of Himself to all peoples. Particular attention will be paid to the imagery used to make potentially abstract notions such as the Kingdom of Heaven and the acquisition of the Holy Spirit more readily understandable by Innokentii’s audience.

The themes of Innokentii’s catechetical writings

The Kingdom of Heaven

In Innokentii’s *Instructions to missionary priests*, he tells them to begin preaching the Gospel as Christ did, with the need to repent as the Kingdom of Heaven is near³ [24, p. 167]. In his *Teaching before communion* he identifies the Kingdom of Heaven with the state of blessedness for which all human beings were created, a Kingdom which, despite its name, can be acquired on this earth. Innokentii emphasizes that it is open to everyone in all walks of life, not just saints and monastics, and does not require withdrawal from the world or the abandonment of everyday tasks. He uses the everyday imagery of the Gospel when he compares the Kingdom to a seed within the soul which needs to grow through prayer, fasting, deeds of mercy, giving alms, but above all by receiving the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit [24, p. 77–85].

In Innokentii’s most famous catechetical text *The Indication of the Way into the Kingdom of Heaven*, it is Jesus Christ himself who by his life showed us the way into the Kingdom of Heaven, and desires that we follow him along this way of self-denial and the cross [24, p. 57–65]. The opening paragraphs of the *Sermon on the Cross* very forcefully echo this theme of the way of the cross leading to the Kingdom. ‘For the Christian as Christ’s follower who lives in expectation of the Kingdom of eternal life, there is no other way apart from the cross and self-denial’ [24, p. 113]. Yet on this rocky path towards the Kingdom, the presence of the Holy Spirit is an encouragement and reward, a gift that is increasingly received as trials along the way are faced with humility and courage. ‘What we can be sure of most of all is that when a person has already journeyed a certain distance along the path, he will be gradually filled with the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, just as the apostles were filled with Him, and then no cross will be heavy’ [24, p. 119].

The acquisition of the Holy Spirit

In the *Teaching* it is as a person is gradually filled with the Holy Spirit and becomes holy, that they receive the Kingdom of Heaven. Innokentii again emphasizes that the holiness granted by the Holy Spirit is not just for the saints as they were not born holy but needed to labour to become holy just like everyone else [24, p. 82; 3, p. 102]. Holiness is possible and necessary in all walks of life owing to the Holy Spirit’s all-pervasive presence:

³ Referred to hereafter as *Instructions to missionary priests*. The *Instructions* were written when Innokentii was appointed Bishop of Kamchatka in 1840 and received the approval of the Holy Synod in the Ukaz No. 42 of 10th January 1841.

You do not need to search for the Holy Spirit in some special place. He is always with us, always surrounds us and as soon as He finds in some person a simple and pure heart, immediately occupies it little by little, just as water fills a vessel immersed in it [2, Bk. 1, p. 106].

Innokentii continues this image of the vessel in one of his most contextually powerful passages for a people with great reverence for their ancestors:

If you had one single vessel, the only thing you had received as an inheritance from your ancestors, which you, in your negligence or laziness, had gradually allowed to be filled with all kinds of filth so that not only could you not use the vessel, but could not look at it without loathing. And if the king began to regularly and freely distribute some fragrant and precious balsam, one drop of which can heal all kinds of illness and preserve your health [24, p. 95–96].

The fragrant balsam, Innokentii explains, is the Holy Spirit who desires to dwell within the vessel of the human soul which can be cleansed through confession of sin to a spiritual father, an act which is likened to washing the vessel with water and burning it with fire. The imagery of a healing balm and of fire is further used in Innokentii's description of the sacrament of communion. 'It is a fire, burning and scorching the root and branches of sins. It is a universally healing remedy for all sicknesses and sorrows, and lays the foundation for our soul to be sanctified' [24, p. 95–96, 105].

In all of his texts, Innokentii emphasizes both the role of the Church's sacraments in receiving the Holy Spirit as well as the all-pervasiveness of the Spirit's presence owing to God's revelation of Himself through the created world and natural law. In the *Indication of the Way* Fr. Ioann stresses that the Holy Spirit is received through baptism and constantly fills the soul through partaking of holy communion, while according to the *Teaching* the Holy Spirit will gradually fill the one who makes true confession, forgiving and making up for all offences and loving enemies. Yet it is also in the *Teaching* that Innokentii points out that the Holy Spirit came down on the centurion Cornelius who, despite not yet being baptised, feared God the Creator of the universe, gave alms and prayed. Innokentii concludes that he was pleasing to God, was worthy of the gift of the Holy Spirit, and such an occurrence shows that any pagan, any unbaptised person, if he has hope according to his own law, that is, fulfils all that his reason and conscience tell him to do, can soon receive the Holy Spirit, such a person only needs to hear of Jesus Christ and come to know Him [2, Bk 1, p. 111].

In his *Instructions to missionary priests*, Innokentii likewise emphasizes this unwritten natural law which reveals the power, might and glory of God so that 'you can hear from the savages themselves echoes and affirmations of the truths of this law inscribed on the scrolls of the heart of each' [2, Bk 1, p. 244]. As an illustration he writes of the Aleuts' concern for the poor, their patience and generosity, and especially their hospitality as 'the supreme virtue is to receive the stranger and wanderer as their ancestors were once wanderers; and because we are all brothers among ourselves as we were all born from a common father and a common mother' [24, p. 234–236]. Consequently, he instructs priests to teach about the natural law first, using the creation to point to the Creator, and the creation of mankind as proof of God's creative power and wisdom among all peoples. Only after the natural law are priests to teach about the 'moral law of Moses which is the natural law written down by God' [24, p. 166–167].

The cross of Christ

One of Innokentii's most powerful affirmations of this knowledge of God in the natural world can be found in his *Sermon on the Cross* in which he argues that knowledge of the cross is built into the very fabric of reality owing to the crosses and sufferings which all of humanity and even inorganic nature experience.

There is no need here to say that a person's sufferings, his own crosses, are the fruit of the forbidden tree; but if we broaden our vision to take in not only human beings, but the lower beings and even inorganic nature itself, then we will see that everyone and everything is under the cross. The origin and beginning of the crosses we bear can be found in the very nature of things, and so the duty of the Christian to bear the cross is not a lot exclusive to him, but a lot common to each and every person. Everyone, whether they choose to or not, bears some kind of cross, if not the Christian cross, then the cross of the world or, as is more frequently the case, they suffer under the heavy yoke of their own passions. And when Jesus Christ preached about the cross, he was not presenting some entirely new teaching. He came to earth to teach human beings how to turn the earth's unavoidable evil into a source of healing, wisdom and spiritual endeavour, how to transform the cross hanging over humankind into the most effective means of salvation. How to fashion out of the bitter tree which crushes human beings and draws them down even to hell, a ladder leading upwards to the Kingdom of Heaven [24, p. 116].

Although Innokentii does not refer to the severe climate and terrain of Alaska and the Aleutian Islands, this passage was undoubtedly born out of the harsh realities and sufferings of life in the 'inorganic nature' of the Arctic. It was also born out of a profound understanding of the Cross acquired from the Orthodox liturgical texts for the feastdays of the Cross which is venerated as the life-giving Tree reversing the effects on the entire creation of Adam and Eve eating of the forbidden, bitter tree in Paradise. In the texts for the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross (14th September), it is not only all peoples, but the angels and creation itself which rejoice at seeing the Cross being raised high over all the earth.

The Cross is raised on high, and urges all the creation to sing the praises of the undefiled Passion of Him who was lifted high upon it. (...) Come, all ye peoples, and let us venerate the blessed Wood (...) For he who by a tree deceived our forefather Adam, is by the Cross himself deceived (...) For it was fitting that wood should be healed by wood, and that through the Passion of One who knew not passion should be remitted all the sufferings of him who was condemned because of wood [21, p. 133–134].

In accordance with this Orthodox understanding of the Cross, Innokentii emphasizes that the way of the cross and self-denial that Jesus walked is the means to overcome the fruit of the forbidden, bitter tree of Paradise, the means to turn the earth's unavoidable evil into a source of healing and wisdom. And this is why following Jesus Christ by taking up one's own cross is to walk along the way leading to the Kingdom of Heaven or, to use the imagery of this Lenten sermon, to climb a ladder⁴ leading upwards to the Kingdom.

⁴ This image of the ladder is most likely a reference to St John Climacus' text *The Ladder* which is read during the penitential season of Lent in the Orthodox Church.

The Word of God

Innokentii's emphasis on knowledge of God through the natural world and natural law is one aspect of another central theme in his writings as a whole, the need to read and live by Holy Scripture, the Word of God. If he considers the Mosaic law to be a written version of natural law it is because they are different manifestations, written and unwritten, of the Word of God. 'By the Word of God everything was created, and everything that has been created is held together by the Word of God' [2, Bk 1, p. 235–236] he reminds his readers in the *Foreword to the Gospel of Matthew translated into the Fox-Aleut language for the Unalaskans* [24, p. 261–262] written in August 1838.

Innokentii's understanding of the centrality of Holy Scripture in catechization and the Christian life as a whole led him to translate portions of Scripture into several Alaskan languages and later into the Yakut language, as for him the Word of God in Scripture was more important than catechetical texts. When commenting on why the Catechism in the Yakut language had little influence, he wrote

The main reason for this is, undoubtedly, that we forget that it is in the word of God alone that there is power which acts on the human heart and therefore you must catechize first of all using the word of God itself, despite it seeming incomprehensible to the catechumens and therefore untimely (...) and only then offer your catechetical teachings [2, Bk 2, p. 322].

He frequently emphasized the need to understand the spirit rather than the letter of Scripture as he does in the *Sermon on the Cross* after warning his listeners not to rely on their reasoning powers as they walk the path of salvation. 'A person's first guide is Holy Scripture, but not the letter, but the spirit of this Scripture, for the letter alone kills, and only the spirit gives life' [24, p. 115]. In the *Foreword* to the Fox-Aleut Gospel of Matthew, Fr. Ioann likewise warns 'in this book there are a few words which do not entirely express the words of the Russian language (...) therefore do not think that this translation will not ever need correction. And do not get attached to the words alone of the translation but enter into the very meaning and spirit of the Divine Word' [2, p. 236].

Education of the heart, not just the mind

Innokentii's emphasis on the inner spirit of the Divine Word is related to his concern for Christian teaching to reach the human heart and will, and not just the mind and reasoning powers, as we have seen above. In the *Sermon on the Cross* he says that part of denying one's self is 'to deny one's own reason with all of its knowledge, wisdom and judgment, however important and irrefutable these may seem' [24, p. 114]. While he assigns a role to reason in temporal and natural affairs and in testing the foundations of religion, he considers that in matters of salvation, reason is 'an ignorant and blind guide'. In reaction to the Enlightenment emphasis on the mind and rationality, Innokentii emphasizes instead the human heart. In his *Instructions* to missionary priests he emphasizes speaking from and to the heart in the reception of the word of God.

'Christianity is a requirement, satisfaction and comfort above all of the heart, and not of the mind alone, and therefore in teaching the faith you must seek to act more on the heart than on the mind. (...) but in order to act on the heart, you must speak from the heart' [2, Bk 1, p. 243].

This concern to act on the heart meant he recommended teaching through oral stories and conversations rather than through reading and rote learning of the catechism. ‘The school method, that is, learning the Catechism by rote and so on, will not be entirely useful’ [24, p. 196]. This would have been why he wrote his own *Indication of the Way* which reads like a conversation rather than the more formal language and structure of catechisms at the time.

Innokentii emphasizes the need to start education even from the age of two, as this is the time when the heart is most open.

This age is the most golden time for all that is good to be sown and take root in them, and also for all that is bad. It goes without saying that the heart of a person, as a field, cannot remain forever without plants. If good plants are not sown, then bad ones will inevitably grow [24, p. 185].

In his instructions on the preparations of adults for confession and communion, he likewise stresses prayer from the heart. It is more important for them ‘to pray to God as often as possible in their heart for forgiveness of sins’ and receive teaching from the Word of God, than attending long services where the prayers and psalms are incomprehensible [24, p. 172]. In the *Indication of the Way* Innokentii also writes of prayer of the heart, including the Jesus prayer, as among the ways of receiving the Holy Spirit [25, p. 151–152].

God’s self-revelation to all of humankind

These intertwined themes of Innokentii’s catechetical writings are held together by the overarching theme of God’s revelation of Himself to all of humankind: through the natural law written on human hearts, through the cross fused into the very structure of the natural world, through the Word of God revealed in creation and in Holy Scripture, and through the Holy Spirit dwelling in the heart of the believer. His listeners would have been encouraged by Innokentii’s assurance that they had as much access to knowledge of God and His indwelling presence in their hearts despite living at the distant, isolated ends of the earth where there had been little preaching of the Gospel of Christ, and almost no translations of Orthodox biblical and liturgical texts. Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware) has written that

When Innocent preached as the “Enlightener of the peoples of Yakutia and Alaska,” he was bearing witness to the Light of Christ that he firmly believed was already hidden within their hearts, in a seminal and implicit but nonetheless real and active manner. He came not to destroy but to fulfill [17, p. 558].

We could add that he not only believed that it was the Light of Christ hidden within their hearts, but the very rocks, seas, mountains, animals, birds, vegetation, and everyday objects they had themselves fashioned in order to survive, which constantly spoke to them of God. This is why Innokentii uses everyday imagery, some of it biblical, to speak to the hearts of his hearers: water or precious balsam filling a vessel or jar, sickness, bitterness, medicine and healing, filth and washing, seeds, trees, roots, branches, plants, fields, burning and scorching fire, ancestors and kings, buildings, foundations and ladders. He draws his imagery from everyday objects and experience as one of his core convictions was, as we have seen, that the Kingdom of Heaven and the holiness imparted by the indwelling Holy Spirit are accessible to people in all walks of life amidst their everyday tasks, they are not just for monastics and clergy or confined to church buildings.

Innokentii's writings in the context of spiritual renewal in the wider Russian Orthodox Church

We have seen above the main themes of Innokentii's teachings and how he made them accessible and relevant in the particular Alaskan context in which he was preaching. Yet his teachings also reflect broader trends within the Russian Church of the 18th and early 19th centuries. In this section we shall put Innokentii's writings into the context of these broader trends by examining the writings and spiritual experience of other Orthodox teachers, theologians and monastics of the time. Fr. Georges Florovsky characterizes this period saying that despite the influence of Western Protestantism on the Russian Church in the early 18th century, 'the century ended with a monastic revival and with an unmistakable intensification and increase of spiritual life (...) Thus the church replied to the shallowness of an Enlightened Age with a renewed spiritual concentration' [4, p. 156]. Innokentii's ministry and writings arose in the context of this early 19th century intensification of spiritual life in the Russian Church.

One of the most significant figures of the 18th century who contributed to this renewed spiritual concentration was St. Tikhon of Zadonsk (1724–1782) who as a bishop particularly emphasized the need for catechetical teaching among ordinary folk as Innokentii was to do. Tikhon recommended that clergy should teach with the help of stories and examples, 'concisely, clearly, so that the simple people can understand' [26, p. 117–118]. Many of the themes of Tikhon's teachings are likewise reflected in Innokentii's writings. He emphasized the need to teach from Holy Scripture interpreted by the Church Fathers in order to live the Christian life as 'The Word of God, as the rule of most true and perfect virtue, is necessary for all Christians' [28, Vol. 2, 4]. The first part of Tikhon's most famous book *On True Christianity* explains why Christians should read the Scriptures as he himself constantly did. His writings were written down at times when he felt particularly inspired by the Holy Spirit and he emphasized the need for all Christians to be led by the Holy Spirit, as did Innokentii [28, Vol. 1, ch. 1; 4, p. 158]. He particularly emphasized the human heart and the need for inward faith and love to overflow in outward actions. 'Every human action is judged not outwardly, but in accordance with the inner state and intention of the heart' [28, Vol. 2, 10]. Although Tikhon's writings were heavily influenced by the Protestant pietist Johann Arndt's book *On True Christianity*, Fr. Pavel Khondzinskii argues that Tikhon's own book of the same name differs owing to his sense of the individual believer being rooted in the wider life of the Church and Orthodox asceticism [18, p. 40]. We have seen how this was also true of Innokentii who did not divorce Orthodox teaching on the sacraments from an emphasis on the believer's direct inner experience of God.

Tikhon's emphasis on catechetical teaching for the ordinary people was continued by Metropolitan Platon Levshin (1737–1811) who was famous for his sermons and catechisms written in the Russian language, rather than Slavonic, so that they were accessible to all. These included his *Extended Catechism for the Instruction of youths in the Orthodox Christian Law* [20] published in 1786, which became the most widely used Catechism in early 19th century Russia and would have been familiar to Innokentii from his studies at Irkutsk Seminary where he graduated in 1818. As in Innokentii's instructions to teach first

about natural law, then the Mosaic law and the Gospel, Platon's Catechism is divided into two parts 'On natural knowledge of God' and 'On revealed knowledge of God'. Influenced by 18th century German natural theology, Platon turns to the natural world and the natural inclination of mankind to worship as proof of God's existence. Platon writes of the 'General agreement of all peoples on this [God's existence]. For everywhere, among all peoples, and what is more, wild peoples, altars could be seen from which smoke arose: and the feeling of the existence of the Divinity was so strong in man that he preferred to worship a stone or other mortal object as god, than think that there was no God' [20, p. 2–3]. So he writes positively of the beliefs and rites of non-Christian peoples, an attitude which would have helped prepare the ground for Innokentii's positive view of knowledge of God among the Alaskan peoples.

Platon Levshin is considered the most important contributor to church education in the 18th century as he sought to raise the educational level of the clergy. He emphasized education of both the mind and the heart, the reading of Scripture with the commentaries of the Church Fathers, and he used the Russian language in his preaching [4, p. 142–145]. Platon also invested much effort into the revival of monastic spirituality and asceticism, contributing in particular to the restoration of Optina Pustyn' which has become for many both within and outside Russia, the epitome of Orthodox monastic spirituality and its tradition of spiritual eldership (*starchestvo*).

Irina Paert dates to the 1770s – 1780s the emergence of a 'new monasticism' and increasing interest in traditional sources of Orthodox piety among church hierarchs such as Platon. This monastic revival emerged out of the spiritual experience of 18th century Russian hermits and ascetics who had withdrawn to the forests. It also owed much to the influence of Paisii Velichkovsky and his disciples who translated into Slavonic patristic texts on hesychastic prayer and the ascetic life, especially the Philokalia. Many of Paisii's disciples returned to Russia from the Balkans between the 1770s – 1790s, promoting the practice of spiritual eldership and guidance, use of the Jesus Prayer, and infusing new life into many monasteries throughout Russia [23, p. 31–40, 55–58, 74–77]. One reason that the monastic revival was encouraged by church hierarchs was that it was seen as an antidote to the influence of Western mystical and pietist writings and practices which became particularly popular during Alexander I's reign. Paert concludes that it is difficult to overestimate the impact of the mystical trends of the early 19th century on the monastic revival, although she emphasizes that despite the parallels between the two, 'hesychast spirituality did not separate sharply the individual from the community, that is, the private religious experience from the collective one' [23, p. 83].

A Russian spiritual elder whose life and teachings characterize this period is St. Seraphim of Sarov (1754/59–1833) who withdrew into the Sarov forest in 1799 to live a life of prayer and ascetic rigour, and until his death in 1833 served as spiritual elder to both the sisters of the Diveevo monastery and the many visitors to his cell [23, p. 77–78]. Innokentii's emphasis on the role of the indwelling Holy Spirit in the reception of the Kingdom of Heaven closely parallels the famous teachings of St Seraphim whose holiness and instruction on the need for all believers to acquire the Holy Spirit drew many to his

hermitage in the opening decades of the 19th century. It is surely no coincidence that Seraphim's life and teachings were published for the first time in the 1830s, the very same decade that Innokentii's catechetical writings with their emphasis on the indwelling Holy Spirit were preached, written down and published.

Although the two men lived at a vast distance from each other and would not have met, their common emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit and the interior life of the heart can be attributed to the common influence of the spiritual currents prevalent throughout Russia in the early 19th century. Both Seraphim and Innokentii restored balance to the one-sided emphasis of Western pietist and mystical writings about God's inner revelation to the individual soul by not divorcing individual spiritual experience from the collective experience of the church community. While Seraphim emphasized the illumination by the Holy Spirit of each individual believer, whether lay or monastic, he also served as spiritual father to a women's monastic community which lived the collective religious experience of the Orthodox sacraments and liturgical cycle. Innokentii likewise stressed the all-pervasive presence of the Holy Spirit which fills the soul in any place, yet also the role of the Church's sacraments in the acquisition of that presence.

A highly significant figure who contributed to the monastic revival and the spread of hesychast teachings in Russia was Metropolitan Philaret (Drozdov) of Moscow (1782–1867), who also played the greatest role in making the lives, ministries and teachings of both Seraphim and Innokentii known to the Russian public in the 1830s – 1840s. After the death of Seraphim in 1833, it was Philaret who edited the first biography of the elder and his spiritual instructions which were published in 1839 [23, p. 100]. It was also in 1839 that Innokentii travelled to European Russia for the first time and stayed with Philaret in Moscow. This was the start of a deep friendship between the two men and Innokentii's detailed reports on the Alaskan missions sent as letters to Philaret were published regularly after 1843 in the journal *Supplements to the Works of the Holy Fathers*, and thus became well-known to a wider audience across Russia [1, p. 186, 215, 220, 295, 304, 309, 313, 330, 337, 506].

A very strong connection between Innokentii and Philaret is a shared emphasis on the reading and application of Scripture in the life of the Christian and the need for vernacular translations of biblical texts. Despite the vast distances that separated them, both men had been strongly influenced by the Russian Bible Society and its promotion of biblical translations, literacy and schools. During the brief period of the Society's existence from 1812–1826, it was Philaret in St Petersburg and Moscow who oversaw translations into the Russian vernacular. In distant Siberia, the Irkutsk Bible Society Division opened in December 1819, the year after Innokentii's graduation from the seminary there. The Irkutsk Division was very active in promoting the translation and publication of Holy Scripture and literacy through schools across Siberia under its Vice-Presidents, Bishop Michael of Irkutsk and M.M. Speranskii, the Governor-General of Siberia [22, p. 5, 60–61; 3, p. 237–238].

After his graduation in 1818, the young Ioann Veniaminov became a teacher at a parish school in Irkutsk where he worked before his ordination as priest in May 1821. A letter written in 1845 shows that one of the reasons Innokentii went to Alaska in the early 1820s

was a frustrated desire to make education more widespread, ‘to teach all the children of the ordinary people.’ When none of his fellow clergy in Irkutsk supported his plan, he began to think ‘there [in Alaska] I shall be able to act on my own and I shall teach when and how I want’ [24, p. 193–194]. This explains why opening schools to teach literacy to children, the catechization of all age groups, and biblical translations into local vernacular languages were among Innokentii’s priorities in the Aleutian islands and then in the Kamchatka and Yakutsk dioceses where he served as bishop.

After his many years of life and ministry in Alaska from 1824 to 1838, Innokentii’s desire to make catechism, school teaching and Scripture reading more widespread by publishing his translations, ethnographical notes, and catechetical texts, and creating a permanent mission with more clergy, led him to set off on his first journey to St Petersburg and Moscow in November 1838. His journey took him around the world, sailing via Honolulu, the Sandwich Islands and Tahiti to Cape Horn, then through the Falkland Islands, Rio de Janeiro and across the Atlantic to the English Channel. His ship spent a few hours at anchor in sight of Falmouth on the south coast of Britain while it stocked up on provisions, before setting sail for Copenhagen and arriving at the port of Kronstadt near St. Petersburg on 22nd June 1839 [1, p. 105–106].

In St. Petersburg Innokentii published a Russian edition of his famous *Indication of the Way into the Kingdom of Heaven* in 1841 [25, p. 113], as well as scholarly works on the language and ethnography of the Alaskan peoples such as his *Notes on the Atka Aleuts and Koloshes* [14] published in 1840. As mentioned above, it was during this trip that he met Metropolitan Philaret for the first time and after the news of Innokentii’s wife’s death on 24th November 1839, it was Philaret who encouraged him to take monastic vows and later tonsured him with the name Innokentii [19, p. 135–142]. After serving as Bishop of Kamchatka, the Kuril and Aleut Islands from December 1840, and the broadening of his ministry to take in Yakutsk (Yakutsk) and the Amur region in the 1850s, Innokentii eventually became Metropolitan of Moscow after Philaret’s death in 1867 [1, p. 568–591].

Conclusion

If Innokentii’s activities in each region where he served are today the focus of scholarly research, and each region considers him ‘their own’, as is expressed in the title of this conference, it is undoubtedly because of his capacity to become rooted in each particular context, to become an insider who understood and shared local needs and concerns. This enabled him to communicate meaningfully among the peoples he served by learning their languages, but just as importantly by sharing and understanding their way of life and culture. This means that his explanations of the Christian life in his catechetical writings of the 1830s are models of contextualization as they are replete with imagery that made them understandable for the Alaskan peoples.

Yet his writings also reflect the broader spiritual trends of the 18th and early 19th centuries when the Russian Church’s encounter with the Western European Enlightenment and its effects on the Western churches, led to a rediscovery of Orthodoxy’s own profound spiritual heritage and a return to traditional forms of Orthodox piety, prayer and asceticism. This is why Innokentii’s writings have both many themes in common with Western pietist and

mystical writings of his time, and yet overcome their one-sided emphasis on private, inner religious experience through an understanding of the collective spiritual experience of the ecclesial community. This explains why St Innokentii Veniaminov and his writings have profound importance not only for the local contexts of Alaska, Yakutsk, the Amur, Moscow and St Petersburg, but also for English-speaking Orthodox communities and the wider Church. Innokentii was, and continues to be, in contemporary language, a profoundly 'glocal' figure, a figure of both local and global stature and significance.

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