

**Southern California  
TRIBAL CHAIRMEN'S  
Assoc., Inc.**



His Holiness, Pope Francis  
Bishop of Rome  
Vatican City

August 20, 2015

His Holiness, Pope Francis,

The Southern California Tribal Chairmen's Association (SCTCA) hereby opposes the canonization of the Franciscan Friar Junipero Serra. Fr. Serra was responsible for founding and building, by means of the forced labor of our Native ancestors, nine of the twenty-one Spanish Catholic missions that were eventually built on the traditional territories of our various Native nations in California. Pope Francis, you are evidently unaware of the deadly toll and devastating effect that the Catholic Mission system had on our nations and peoples here in California. How else can we make sense of you associating the image of "sainthood" with a Spanish Catholic missionary who instituted and imposed a Catholic mission system upon our ancestors with deadly and dehumanizing effects?

As just one example of the resulting death and destruction, demographer Robert Jackson, in *The Dynamic of Indians Demographic Collapse in the Mission Communities in Northwestern Spain* (1990), gave a grim sense of the devastation of the Spanish Catholic mission system: "...more than 90% of the children born in the missions died before reaching age ten." In his sampling of the Baja and Alta California missions, Jackson stated: "In other words, the population of the seven Baja California [mission] establishments experienced a mean rate of 83 percent [population] decline, and 90 percent in the Alta California missions." The life expectancy at birth, said Jackson, was 7.4 years for the seven Baja California mission[s], and 4.5 years for...20 Alta California establishments."

Tens of thousands of our people perished as direct result of the missions and as a result of efforts to achieve what the Catholic missionaries called "spiritual conquests" among our nations. This being the case, why is the Holy See today associating the idea of "sainthood" with the Catholic missions?

Research shows that Junipero Serra's missionary efforts to achieve the "spiritual conquest" of our ancestors was a result of carrying out what Pope Alexander VI, in a 1493 decree, called a "sacred and praiseworthy purpose." Pope Alexander VI explained that the Spanish monarchs had proposed "to *subject* and *reduce* the islands and mainlands," along with "their natives and inhabitants, to the Catholic faith." (emphasis added). Why would the pope call "sacred" and "praiseworthy" efforts to "subject" and "reduce" (dominate) our ancestors and our nations?

Cahuilla scholar Rupert Costo, and his spouse Jeanette Costo, aptly expressed the death and devastation that the Spanish Catholic missions imposed upon our nations. They did so with their book titled, *The Missions of California: A Legacy of Genocide* (Indian Historian Press, 1987). As Rupert Costo wrote in the book's Preface: "The architect of the mission system was Fr. Junipero Serra, who has become a symbol of 18<sup>th</sup> century feudal forced labor and abuse to the Indians, and a symbol of successful foreign domination to the establishment society" (p. ix). The devastation suffered by our ancestors, and the resulting intergenerational trauma that we continue to experience to this day, was a direct consequence of a number of papal edicts issued by the Holy See, which provided the conceptual framework for that foreign domination of our original nations and peoples.

Those edicts were issued by some of your predecessors in the mid-fifteenth century. Many of those documents are reproduced in *European Treaties Bearing on the History of the United States and Its Dependencies* (Carnegie Institution, 1917). The desire to subject and to reduce our nations was in keeping with Pope Alexander VI's call for "barbarous nations to be reduced" ("*barbare nationes deprimantur*") as part of "the propagation of the Christian empire" ("*imperii Christiani propagationem*").

Serra expressed a view in keeping with such imperial designs of the Holy See when he wrote of his "hope" that "before long," "new and immense territories" will have been "gathered into the bosom of our Holy Mother the Church, and subjected to the Crown of Spain." (*Writings of Junipero Serra*, ed. by Antonine Tibesar, O. F. M., 1955, p. 209). In several decrees issued by Pope Alexander VI, the pope wrote of lands "not under the actual temporal domination of any Christian dominators" ("*sub actuali dominio temporalis aliquorum dominorum Christianorum constitute non sint...*"). Clearly, this language reveals that the goal of the Holy See was to force the lands and territories of our original free nations "under the domination of Christian dominators."

In the book *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, Vol. I, translated and edited by Finbar Kenneally, O. F. M. (1964), we find information that helps us to better understand the context of the Spanish Catholic Missions in California during the time of Junipero Serra. In a letter to a Spanish authority, Don Jacob Ugarte y Loyola, Fr. Lasuén questions an edict that Ugarte y Loyola had "ordered to be proclaimed within the confines of your higher jurisdiction" (pp. 210-11). The edict, said Lasuén, allowed the Indians "to change their location" and "to journey from place to place" (p. 211).

Lasuén questioned applying such liberty to the Native people being held in the missions: "I would never believe that the law quoted in the first article of the edict would apply to the Indians of the missions," he wrote, "but only those [Indians] of the pueblos." Lasuén complained that "it is only with much difficulty that I can adapt them [the new rules] to mission Indians, especially *our own*" (emphasis

added), thereby referring to the Native people as “possessions” of the Church. (Ibid.) With dehumanizing language, Padre Lasuén then clarified the purpose of the Catholic missions:

Our basic work consists in the care of the native population of these new possessions, in converting them to *the bosom* of the church, and in *gathering* into the missions the barbarous pagans scattered through the hills and beaches like animals, or living in a society far from [being] civilized and *scarcely human*. (emphasis added) (Ibid.)

Pope Francis, the information contained in this brief letter ought to be more than sufficient to convince you to join us in opposing the canonization of Junipero Serra. While visiting Bolivia, you expressed contrition for the “sins, crimes, and errors” of the Church. It is our sense that your feelings of regret ought to extend to the Doctrine of Christian Discovery and to the papal documents of empire and domination issued by the Holy See for the expansion of the Christian empire, and for the domination of “barbarous nations.” Thus, we hereby call on you to revoke the series of papal bulls of the fifteenth century which set into motion the very activities of empire and colonization for which you recently expressed regret.

Most sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'R. Smith', enclosed within a large, loopy oval shape.

Robert Smith

Chairman of Pala Band of Mission Indians

Chairman, of the Board of Directors, SCTCA of all Federally Recognized Tribes in Southern California





**RESOLUTION**

Opposing the Canonization of the Franciscan Friar Junipero Serra & Opposing Justification Statement and Historical Evidential Records - Exhibit -A

**WHEREAS,** The Southern California Tribal Chairmen's Association (SCTCA) was established in 1972 to support and represent the sovereign Indian Tribal Governments, created by individual Tribal Government Resolutions, composed of nineteen Federally Recognized Tribal Governments; and

**WHEREAS,** The Southern California Tribal Chairmen's Association has been established as the oldest and largest solely controlled Tribal Chairpersons organization in the State of California; and

**WHEREAS,** The Southern California Tribal Chairmen's Association, on August 18, 2015, at SCTCA Board of Directors' Meeting, voted unanimously to oppose the canonization of the Franciscan Friar Junipero Serra; and

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED,** that the Southern California Tribal Chairmen's Association strongly opposes the canonization of the Franciscan Friar Junipero Serra.

**CERTIFICATION**

At a general called meeting of the Southern California Tribal Chairmen's Association's Board of Directors in which a quorum was present and held on August 18, 2015, the Resolution No. 2015-04 received a vote of 16 Support; 0 Opposed; 0 Absent; and 0 Abstained.

ATTEST:

Robert Smith  
Chairman of the Board of SCTCA

JoAnne Espinosa  
Recording Secretary