



PRIC Valentin Lopez

Amah Mutsun Tribal Band of Costanoan/Ohlone Indians
Historically known as "San Juan Bautista Band and San Juan Band" Indians of California
PO Box 5272 | Galt, CA 95622

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Dear distinguished members of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues,

miSmin Tuuhis, kan-raakat Valentin Lopez, tumsan-ak kannis riccami makke nii.

My name is Valentin Lopez and I am the Tribal Chairperson of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band. Our tribe is comprised of those who were taken to Missions San Juan Bautista and Mission Santa Cruz in the greater Monterey Bay area of California.

Today I speak for all Mutsun Ancestors who died at Mission San Juan Bautista and Mission Santa Cruz and who's voices have never been heard. We are here today to voice our opposition to the Catholic Church's announced intention to canonize Fr. Junipero Serra. In California, the mission system was brutal and had a disastrous effect on our ancestors. Nearly 100,000 Indians died during the mission period which lasted from 1769 – 1833. Our tribal oral history, the documented history of official Franciscan records and other official documents and correspondence attest to the brutality of the missions.

Many argue that Father Serra himself did not mistreat the Indians of California. This is not true; on July 31, 1775 Fr. Serra wrote a letter to Spanish Governor Fernando de Rivera Y Moncado requesting that he punish four Indians for attempting to run away from Mission Carmel. Fr. Serra wrote, "I am sending them to you so that a period of exile, and two or three whippings which Your Lordship may order applied to them on different days ... If your Lordship does not have shackles, with your permission they may be sent from here. I think that the punishment should last for one month."

This statement alone clearly shows that the natives were either prisoners or enslaved at the missions; that Fr. Serra did indeed order the whipping of Indians; his offer to send shackles, which is clearly a form of torture, shows this was an acceptable practice at the Mission; and that Fr. Serra used isolation and separation from families as punishment for not complying with the rules he established. Further, there can be no doubt that Fr. Serra stole the land that the missions were built on from the Indians. There are many, many documented incidents such as this in archives throughout the world. And yet, in California it has been taught for many decades that Fr. Serra brought God to the Indians. His actions were not saintly and his actions were not godly behavior.

There can be no argument that Fr. Serra instituted cultural genocide. It is clearly documented that Serra wanted to destroy native cultures, including their villages, their languages, their spirituality, and their way of life so the indigenous peoples would have no choice but to accept the Catholic faith.

Papal Bulls are official documents which are issued by the Pope of the Catholic Church. According to Papal Bulls, issued in 1452, 1493 and other Bulls, the Catholic Church declared all non Christian people to be heathens, pagans, and savages that have no soul. These Bulls promoted the conquest, colonization, exploitation, and domination of indigenous people. The Bulls also declared that non Christians were the enemies of Christ and therefore we should be put into perpetual slavery and they should take all our property and possessions. These Papal Bulls have never been rescinded, they are in effect today.

The Papal Bulls were the guiding principal for Fr. Serra's actions at California Missions. He was very successful in carrying out the directives of the Papal Bulls and for that Pope Francis is rewarding him with Sainthood. It is our belief that sainthood by the Catholic Church should only be granted to those who follow the teachings of Jesus Christ who came in peace and taught love and forgiveness.

Finally, it's important for people to understand that we are not opposed to the Catholic Church, some of our Tribal members are Catholic. Our opposition is to the canonization of Fr. Serra, his canonization can only add to our historic trauma.

We ask all people to join us in opposing the canonization of Junipero Serra and we ask that the Catholic Church reject and rescind the Papal Bulls referenced above.

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