

THE RETURN OF THE ARCHBISHOP

With the acceptance of his resignation by Pope Leo XIII on March 27, 1884, Joseph Sadoc Alemany, first Archbishop of San Francisco, pulled down the curtain on one of the great epochs in California's noble Catholic heritage. His thirty-four-year episcopate behind him,¹ the Titular Archbishop of Pelusium set out for his native Spain to spend his final years as a humble religious of the Order of Preachers.

Death came to the Dominican archbishop on April 14, 1888 in the City of Valencia where he had gone to re-organize his Order's ancient Province of Aragon. Although there is no evidence to determine his own wishes in the matter, Alemany's family asked that he be interred in Vich, his birthplace, in the Iglesia de Santo Domingo, the chapel of the convent where he began his novitiate sixty years before.

A local newspaper account noted that the archbishop's remains were sent by rail and arrived at Vich on April 18th where a mourning city waited in respectful silence. Met there by members of his family, ecclesiastical dignitaries and civil officials, the body was taken to the Cathedral where it lay in state the rest of the day.² At precisely ten o'clock the next morning, a solemn Pontifical Mass was celebrated by the Bishop of Vich in the presence of most of the city's clergy. A spirited sermon, preached by Canon Narciso Villarasa, reviewed the notable accomplishments of the "Apostle of California."

With the completion of the ceremonies, the remains of the archbishop were borne in procession some few blocks to the Iglesia de Santo Domingo where they were buried in a chapel to the epistle side of the main altar. When the vault of his tomb was closed on April 19, 1888, hardly any more attention was paid to the noble California pioneer for the next thirty-three years.

The first concerted attempt to remove Alemany's remains back to San

¹ Alemany was Bishop of Monterey from 1850 to 1853 and Archbishop of San Francisco from 1853 to 1884.

² Among those meeting the remains was Antonio Alamany y Comella. Senor Alamany is still living in Barcelona. Note that the family spells their name with "a" rather than "e" as the archbishop used.

Francisco seems to have taken place in the spring of 1921 when a formal petition was submitted to the Cathedral Chapter of Vich by Archbishop Edward J. Hanna. Apparently the proposal of Alemany's successor was received with some attention but the response was not favorable as is obvious from an examination of the decree from the Bishop of Vich:

We feel that it will be impossible at this time to accede to the wishes of Your Excellency which have been brought to our attention by the Reverend Antonio Santandru. After consulting with our chapter, the Alamany family and others, we find ourselves unanimously opposed to transferring the archbishop from the humble city where he is interred.³

Thirteen years later another attempt was initiated by the Very Reverend James B. Connolly, Dominican Provincial of Holy Name Province. It was Connolly's plan to have Alemany "re-interred beneath the Chapel of the new \$500,000 College of Saint Albert the Great at the Dominican House of Studies" in Oakland.⁴ With the enthusiastic support of Archbishop Hanna, Connolly sent two priests to Rome for consultation with the Dominican Master General, Very Reverend Martin Stanislaus Gillet. This second set of negotiations was considerably more productive but was thwarted by the advent of Spain's Civil War. By the time the hostilities were over, there was such confusion about the actual site of the tomb that the matter was indefinitely postponed.

With the subsequent location of the grave, whose marker had been removed by the family to prevent its desecration, there were additional sentiments aroused to remove the archbishop to his "Golden State" of California. It was at this juncture that the Alamany family filed a legal claim to the remains based on their contention that since they had paid the expenses of having the archbishop moved from Valencia to Vich after his death, they had a valid voice in determining whether the removal could take place, a claim that was judged valid by civil authorities. Antonio Alamany y Comella, grand nephew of the archbishop then disclosed his family's sentiments by stating that their consent would be given only "on the grounds that the process of beatification be taken up."⁵

A third overture was made by a certain Jaime Ensenat who was anxious that an exposition be staged in San Francisco of "the many and varied

³ Francis, Bishop of Vich to Edward Hanna, Vich, June 2, 1921.

⁴ Los Angeles *Tidings*, February 23, 1934.

⁵ Archives of the Archdiocese of San Francisco (AASF), Antonio Alamany to Manuel Montoto, O.P., Barcelona, December 7, 1952.

souvenirs and personal objects of the archbishop."⁶ It was also proposed that Alemany's grand niece, Ana Maria, come to the Bay City to supervise the exposition. The date of the event would coincide with San Francisco's centenary as an archdiocese.

About a year later, the matter came before Archbishop John J. Mitty of San Francisco and he showed no less enthusiasm about returning his illustrious predecessor than had Archbishop Hanna. It was pointed out that up until this time "the great obstacle to overcome in order to return the body of Archbishop Alemany to San Francisco was his family. . . ." Apparently Mitty was not advised at this time about the previous condition placed regarding the beatification although it was noted that the local bishop in Spain "may seek to intervene because of a rather faint possibility of a process for the Congregation of Rites."⁷

Archbishop Mitty was confident that the transfer would then proceed along normal channels and expressed his delight with the arrangements:

I am very happy to learn that there will be no difficulty with the Dominicans, with the relatives or with the local Bishop.

However, it was about that time that the family reminded Mitty about their reservations. It was their intentions that the Archdiocese would finance the cause. Apparently, to quote the rector of Rome's Angelicum College

The motive for consenting to the removal of the body together with the offer for the exposition of all the personal effects of the archbishop seem to indicate that there is a desire to stir up interest in the archbishop's cause.⁸

With the disclosure of the family's conditions, Archbishop Mitty cancelled further negotiations stating that such an undertaking "would have to be financed" by an archdiocese already confronted with a dire "shortage of priests." And with this Mitty concluded that "it looks as if I shall have to give up any hope of having the body of Archbishop Alemany here."⁹

Tempora Mutantur

There the matter rested for another decade until the summer of 1962 when the author visited Barcelona seeking information on the history of Southern California. At that time we were the guests of the Alamy family

⁶ AASF, Jaime Ensenat to Manuel Montoto, O.P., Barcelona, December 10, 1952.

⁷ AASF, Benedict Blank, O.P., to John Mitty, Rome, March 8, 1953.

⁸ AASF, Benedict Blank, O.P., to John Mitty, Rome, April 16, 1953.

⁹ AASF, John Mitty to Benedict Blank, O.P., San Francisco, April 21, 1953.

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for some weeks and discussed at length the possibility of reopening the whole question of moving the archbishop's remains. Antonio Alamany, grand nephew of the archbishop, still remembering quite vividly the details of his uncle's funeral in 1888, was extremely cordial as was his son Jose Alamany y Torner. Both of these gentlemen attended the Mass was celebrated at Sarriá when Bishop Francisco Mora y Borrell was dis-interred and both were eventually brought around to the logic of bringing the archbishop back to his California jurisdiction.¹⁰ At long last, it seemed as if the state's first metropolitan would return.

It had been our personal desire that Alemany could be interred in Los Angeles since that city lies within the territorial boundaries of Alemany's earlier jurisdiction of Monterey.¹¹ This matter had previously been discussed with the family but, as stated by Jose Alamany, "I can tell you that from my part I have no preference at all" although he did think "San Francisco has a right too."¹² We approached Bishop Timothy Manning of Los Angeles and were advised to consult with Archbishop Joseph T. McGucken before making and definitive plans about the final disposition.

Within a week after approaching Archbishop McGucken the matter was brought before the Consultors of the Archdiocese of San Francisco and "they were all in favor of taking the steps to bring back to San Francisco the body of Archbishop Alemany."¹³ McGucken authorized us to proceed as his agent in the removal process. That the decision to select San Francisco for the interment was well received by the family is obvious from their subsequent letter which stated that they were "very glad you have arrived to a final decision in a friendly arrangement."¹⁴

Senor Ernesto Tell, a prominent Barcelona lawyer, was engaged to arrange the legal technicalities. An earlier communication from Senor Tell indicated "there would be no difficulties in transferring the remains to California."¹⁵

A formal petition was drawn up and sent to San Francisco where it was translated into Spanish. Addressed to the Most Reverend Ramon

¹⁰ Francis J. Weber, "Search for a Bishop," *Southern California Quarterly*, XLV (March, 1963).

¹¹ Five of the prelates who governed the southern jurisdiction are buried within the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

¹² Jose Alamany to author, Barcelona, December 5, 1962.

¹³ Joseph T. McGucken to author, San Francisco, January 11, 1963.

¹⁴ Jose Alamany to author, Barcelona, February 1, 1963.

¹⁵ Ernesto Tell to author, Barcelona, December 22, 1962.

DOMINICANA

Masnou Boixeda, Bishop of Vich, the petition expressed the wishes of San Francisco's Catholics to see the first archbishop interred in California.

The undersigned, acting with the approval of his Archdiocesan Consultors, humbly petitions the Metropolitan Chapter of the Diocese of Vich for permission to move the remains of His Excellency, the Most Reverend Joseph Sadoc Alemany to San Francisco, California, United States of America.

Assurance is hereby given that the remains of the archbishop will be interred with those of his illustrious successors with all respect and honor due the memory of California's first Archbishop.

Senor Ernesto Tell has been commissioned by the undersigned as the official representative of the Archbishop of San Francisco in the removal process and is empowered to act in my name in all matters pertaining to the transfer of the archbishop.¹⁶

The petition was forwarded to Senor Tell on January 25, 1963 and was presented on February 2nd. It was at this juncture that complications again beset the process for, as the lawyer noted,

In the case of Archbishop Alemany, we will find complications from the fact that his remains . . . are publicly exposed in a church for many years.¹⁷

It had been suggested to Archbishop McGucken that the possibility of a refusal from either ecclesiastical or civil authorities would make it advisable "not to make any public announcement about this project until all the arrangements have been made."¹⁸ This advice was given to Tell who had thought earlier that a public campaign in the press of Vich would help our cause. However, news of the negotiations leaked out and Archbishop McGucken was forced to make a public announcement to the San Francisco papers on January 28, 1963.

The Archdiocese is planning to exhume the body of the first Archbishop of San Francisco—Friar Joseph Sadoc Alemany—from his family burial vault in Spain and fly it here. . . . Archbishop Alemany will then be buried again in a special chapel of the Holy Cross Cemetery Mausoleum next to the bodies of Arch-

¹⁶ Joseph T. McGucken to Ramon Masnov Boixeda, San Francisco, January 24, 1963.

¹⁷ Ernesto Tell to author, Barcelona, February 4, 1963.

¹⁸ Author to Joseph T. McGucken, Los Angeles, December 28, 1962.

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bishops Riordan, Hanna and Mitty. . . . The Archbishop said the Los Angeles historian, Friar (sic) Francis Weber returned from Spain recently and informed him that Archbishop Alemany's family was agreeable to bringing his remains to the United States.¹⁹

News of the press announcement was sent at once to Senor Tell who was advised, in view of the San Francisco release, "to remove the secrecy bond that was earlier imposed if you think it will work to the interest of everyone concerned."²⁰

However, it would seem that the newspaper publicity was poorly received in Spain. Difficulties began multiplying and when Senor Tell was received by the Reverend Ramon Valaro, Vicar General of the Diocese of Vich, he was told that the petition for removal would be refused on the "precedent" of the earlier denials. In our response, it was pointed out that the 1921 decision was based on the "unanimous refusal" of both the chapter and the family. The basis for that earlier decision had been altered for the family "has not only given their permission but are now eagerly in favor of the move."²¹ This response elicited no reaction from the Vich chancery.

Appealing to a higher ecclesiastical authority was ruled out by Archbishop McGucken who prudently pointed out that, "knowing the Spanish character, I do not think they will be much inclined to move on the basis of any challenge to jurisdiction. They are better than we are in arguing that field."²²

It was then suggested that the Bishop of Vich might "care to come to San Francisco with the remains and to participate in the solemn ceremonies of his interment." McGucken also suggested that "it might be a good idea to stress the Spanish contribution to the christianization and the civilization of California, and the need of keeping alive here the memory of the valiant Spanish missionaries and Archbishops," by securing a letter from the local Spanish embassy.

His Excellency, Senor Mariano Sanz-Briz, Consul General of Spain at San Francisco graciously acceded to this request and sent a cable directly to Doctor Don Ramon Masnou Boixeda, the Bishop of Vich, noting that

¹⁹ San Francisco *Examiner*, January 28, 1963.

²⁰ Author to Ernesto Tell, Los Angeles, February 11, 1963.

²¹ Author to Ernesto Tell, Los Angeles, February 18, 1963.

²² Joseph T. McGucken to author, San Francisco, February 20, 1963.

if permission was eventually obtained, "it will be an honor for me to participate and represent Spain in the sacred acts that will be celebrated to commemorate (sic) this event."²³

Early in May, Senor Tell informed the author that negotiations in Vich had progressed about as far as he could carry them and advised that a personal representative be sent from San Francisco with authority to confer with Bishop Boixeda. It was our hope that Archbishop McGucken might stop there on his way to Mallorca for the 250th anniversary of Junipero Serra's birth. The archbishop's facility with Spanish and his winning personality would have been forceful qualities in any private discussions with the local Spanish hierarchy. However, when the archbishop was forced to cancel his trip for other reasons, the whole question of the removal was suspended indefinitely.

Whether the gentle Dominican is ever moved back to San Francisco is a question that only time will resolve. But, to rephrase an old Latin adage, *deceat, ergo accedat!*

—Francis J. Weber

²³ Mariano Sanz-Briz to author, San Francisco, March 5, 1963.

Long interested in the cause of Archbishop Alemany, Father Weber is presently the archivist of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.