

# Vladivostok Sunrise Russia Mission

Mary Mother of God Mission Society: Reviving the Roman Catholic Church in Eastern Russia

Issue Number One Hundred Eighty Five September, 2025

#### **Love Blazes:**

### A Reflection on the Vocational Journey in the Fissures of History

By Rev. J. Hubert, C.J.D.

#### An Unforeseen Beginning: From Ruins to Grace

When I first followed Fathers Myron and Daniel as a novice in the community of Canons Regular of Jesus the Lord in Vladivostok, I did not realize my vocation would become a story of paradoxes: faith flourishing in soil plowed by atheism, hope sprouting amid spiritual famine, and love uniting nations under the shadow of a reclaimed cross. Here, at Russia's eastern edge—where sky meets sea and history whispers of suffering—I learned that God writes His Gospel not on parchment, but in the cracks of wounded souls. Here, where crosses were once toppled and prayers silenced, my calling began—not as a choice, but as a response to the deeper whisper of the Word. From Fathers Myron and Daniel, I learned faith is not a static monument but a seed growing in the fissures of



First public mass, November 11, 1991, on the steps of the old cathedral, then an archive

history, watered by tears of patience and martyrs' blood.

In this land where state archives once replaced the altar, God inscribed His Gospel with invisible ink: in the perseverance of Andre Popok posting ads seeking fellow believers, in the courage of sisters arriving from distant lands, and in the words of the first Mass Father Myron celebrated on frozen church steps. "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5). Communist philosophy sought to erase the Transcendent, yet in that void, thirsty souls found a living spring. A voice seemed to whisper from the church's weathered stones: "Here, we are not builders but spiritual archaeologists. Every rubble we lift bears silent witness to prayers left unspoken." Behind tales of dust and looted church walls, I saw the true face of the Church: not grand buildings, but Christ's wounded yet risen body—The Church ever reforming, ever-renewed in fragility.

# **Theology of the Cross: When Emptiness Becomes Holy Ground**

Communism tried to forge a godless world, yet in that void, *Deus absconditus*—the hidden God—revealed Himself unexpectedly. In Siberian labor camps, KGB interrogation rooms, or dim apartments where parents whispered prayers to their children, I encountered a living theology of the Cross. The Cross is no passive symbol; it is rebellion against despair.

When Fathers Myron and Daniel rediscovered the lost marble cross at the Art Academy, I realized it was no mere



The old marble crucifix, with broken fingers, beard, and crown of thorns

artifact but a silent witness to anamnesis—sacramental "memory" bridging ages. Christ's fractured body became the perfect metaphor for Russia's Church. In each missing finger, I saw wounds of a surviving Church. In the cracked crown of thorns, a promise: "I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt 16:18). The absent fingers echoed martyrs erased from history; the shattered nose and beard, battles against oblivion. Yet amid incompleteness, the cross stood—as the Church, though wounded, never loses its glory. "When I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor 12:10).

My reflection paused at this truth: "We are like the disciples on Emmaus. Christ walks with us, yet we often fail to recognize Him—until He breaks bread amid ruins." At every Mass celebrated in rebuilt churches, I felt this mystery: the Eucharist is not escape from reality, but the transfiguration of suffering into offering.

#### **Evangelization as Living Witness**

Teaching catechumens in Vladivostok, for Fathers Myron and Daniel, was transformative. Here, evangelization is no doctrinal monologue but a dialogue of witness. Teaching Confession, they embodied true repentance: steadfastness in unshakable faith. Like Augustine finding God in silence, I learned *kerygma*—the Gospel's joy—is revealed not in rhetoric but in a mother's tears as she "baptizes" her child.

To those who ask, "If God exists, why did He let Stalin rule?" my answer is not theodicy but the story of a marble cross returning after decades. "See—God does not erase evil but writes salvation over it, like gold refined in fire."

#### **Community as Living Eucharist**

Vladivostok's Church is a mosaic: Russians bearing historical wounds, Vietnamese diaspora resilience, Filipino Marian devotion, and American idealism. In multilingual Masses—Russian, English, Vietnamese—I witnessed a new Pentecost. The Spirit's flame transcends tongues, becoming love across cultures.

When sisters from Kansas opened a soup kitchen, one local remarked: "This is the first time since WWII that foreigners came not to take, but to give." At shared tables, former atheists broke bread with priests. Here, the Eucharist lives beyond the altar—in fellowship dissolving prejudice.

# **Suffering and Transformation: Traces of Self- emptying**

Vladivostok's winters test faith: -20°C cold, frozen pipes, and icy church walls mirror a mysticism of snow: "Only hearts aflame with love endure piercing cold." Blizzards trapping them inside, I sensed Jesus in the Tabernacle whisper: "I remain here—even when you feel abandoned." Here, I grasped kenosis, his "self emptying": God made small in the Host, as in the manger—His

presence hidden, like a mustard seed in communism's cracks.

#### **Vocation: Called to Dwell in Uncertainty**

Kierkegaard's words resonate here: "Faith is the tension between certainty and doubt." Like Abraham journeying blind, I learned from Fathers Myron and Daniel that fides quaerens intellectum (faith seeking understanding) requires stepping onto uncharted ground where faith and doubt walk hand-in-hand. A decade of empty pews, government pressure, and doubt asked: "Is this futile?" Yet in adoration's silence, a voice replied: "Stay. I am with you."

#### **Liturgical Music: Language of Memory and Hope**

In the restored cathedral's air, thick with paint and aged wood, an organ's notes echo—a cry long suppressed, voices of souls imprisoned by decades of silence. For Russians, this is no concert but reclaimed collective memory. I imagine a babushka murmuring: "I last heard this hymn in a village chapel before they burned it in 1937." Tears withheld for 60 years finally fall. When sacred music first resounded, the Fathers never anticipated such resonance. For many, it was a first encounter with forbidden beauty. Here, music is no mere art—it is a visible sacrament, divine love piercing ideology's walls. As Augustine said: "Song is prayer with doubled power."

Each Sunday, before Mass, the church buzzes with choir practice—off-key notes and awkward laughter. In imperfection, miracles unfold: harmony emerges from dissonance. Translating prayers into Russian became a theological pilgrimage. The *Ave Maria*, *Pater Noster*, and *Salve Regina* now resound in three tongues: Russian (restoring memory), Latin (universal unity), and English (embracing diversity). Here, every note is a living stone rebuilding the Temple—not of marble, but of restored memories, transfigured tears, and hope sung boldly. This is our true revolution: beauty no regime can destroy.

#### Epilogue: At the Eastern Edge, an Unfading Dawn

The Cathedral of Our Lady now stands majestic, its spire rising among modern towers. But its true splendor lies within: a babushka's rosary-clasped hands, children's laughter at Lesozavodsk camp, an elder's baptismal tears at life's twilight.

My vocation is a verse in this eternal hymn—of an undying Church, the Word made flesh in bitter history. As St. Pope John Paul II said: "We are an Easter people, and Alleluia is our song." In Vladivostok, that Alleluia rings in Russian cadence, with distinct notes—yet with hearts equally ablaze.

On Solemnity of the Ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ. 2025

# A Pilgrimage in Vladivostok

#### Fifth Station: The Bishop's Home

The pilgrims' path led to the house on the Sedanka River in the village of Sedanka, which became the place of exile of Bishop Slivovsky. Nine miles from Vladivostok. In a 2-story wooden house that once belonged to the Japanese consulate, the bishop found shelter and care from neighboring parishioner Kazimira Piotrovskaya. She was by his side until the last day. The bishop lived in a small annexed room with a separate entrance on the 1st floor for two and a half years.



The front side of the bishop's exile house. The blue and brown part on the left were not there in his day, but there was a sunporch attached to the house instead.

Information about the Sedanka period of the bishop's life in March 1931 was taken from the manuscript of Brother Zacharyusz Banas, OSF:. "On one side of this tiny room there was a bed and a washbasin, on the other there was a wardrobe and a large chest of drawers with the bishop's bathrobes, several suitcases and a small table. There was no free space. As I hugged him goodbye, I realized that I was saying goodbye to him forever."

The bishop died 1.5 years later in January 1933 at the age of 78. The death certificate lists cardiac paralysis. The funeral prayers were led by laypeople, as there was no priest, and took place the next day. The coffin with the body of the late bishop was taken to the nearby Sedanka Cemetery on a sleigh.

Nowadays, townspeople live in this house, but the fire that happened on November 29, 2022 ravaged it. The epicenter of the fire was in the very room where the bishop lived. (To be continued.)

Lord God, Your servant, our father and shepherd Bishop Karol SLIVOVSKY, was faithful to You and to his flock, despite dangers, confusion, and destruction, until exile and death took him from us. Reward your servant with recognized holiness for the joy of all God's people, and remember my request every time I ask Bishop Karol for intercession, through Christ our Lord. Amen

Loving and merciful God, in the revolutions, wars and cataclysms of the 20th century many of Your faithful people, like Bishop Karol, who had grown up and lived in a normal, religious society, found themselves in the later part of their lives with neither the consolation of the clergy to pray for them or the sacraments to console them and keep them in the grace of Christ. They could not confess their sins in the sacrament of penance or receive the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion. As their end approached, they faced the prospect of meeting You without the last rites of the Church nor even the familiar words of the Funeral Mass. We continue to pray for Bishop Slivovsky, although we think that he is probably now freed from sin and is happy with You eternally in heaven. But there are others--priests sent away to the GULAG where no one could practice their Faith, lay people who died with no sacraments or prayers. Here in this spot, close to the grave of Bishop Karol, we remember them all: the people who were deprived of the motherly care of Your Church, and who died with no religious funeral nor even anyone to offer a prayer for them. Mercifully gather them all in the Most Precious Heart of Your Son Jesus, and grant them eternal rest and peace with You in paradise forever and ever. Amen.



Fr Dan standing near the back entrance to the house—Bishop Slivovsky's entrance.

## Pre-Russia Catholicism in the "Russian Far East" (1845-1862) Part 2

We continue historical materials from Vladivostok Sunrise #184 about the presence of early Catholic missionaries in what is now the Amur region of the Russian Federation where Mary Mother of God Mission Society is helping today.

Let's return to the first expedition of the preacher Father Labruniere, which took place in 1845-1847 and covered the north of Manchuria, the banks of the Ussuri and Amur Rivers. The missionary's last letter was dated May 1, 1847, and alas! Not a single letter from him came for two years. What was he doing? Where was he? Can we have any hope of seeing him again? The tormenting questions that no one dared to answer caused great concern to the Apostolic Vicar of Manchuria, Bishop Emmanuel Verol. The bishop's concern was also caused by the fact that this territory had been an extremely unstable place in recent years as a result of the actions of the Russian government, which was trying to negotiate with China for the possession of Far Eastern land. In 1850, Russian advances in the Far East became evident. Under the leadership of Muravyov-Amursky, Captain 1st Rank Gennady Nevelskoy was sent to survey the coast of the Sea of Okhotsk and purchase a plot of land from the independent Gilyaks living north of the Amur Estuary on



Tribesmen of the Gilvaks

which a military outpost could be founded. That same year, Nevelskoy founded a winter hut in Schastya Bay (the southwestern shore of the Sea of Okhotsk), called Petrovsky. And in August of the same year, 60 miles upstream of the Amur, the Nikolaevsky outpost was established, which marked the beginning of the future city of Nikolaevsk. The first building of the outpost was simple a hut, and the first chief was the military topographer Pyotr Popov. In the presence of the local population, Nevelskoy raised the Russian military flag

and, on behalf of the Russian government, declared that "the coast of the gulf and the entire Amur region, up to the Korean border, constitute Russian possessions." Nevelskoy's arbitrary actions caused discontent and irritation in Russian government circles. However, Emperor Nicholas I called Nevelskoy's actions "brave, noble, and patriotic," imposing the famous resolution: "Where the Russian flag has been raised, it must not be lowered." The Tungus, Oroch, Golds and Gilyaks did not resist, frightened by the impressiveness of the Russian troops, and soon established attractive trade relations. These deployments did not go unnoticed in the Celestial Empire. China wanted to confront Russia with force, so the best Manchu soldiers were summoned and armed, whose military preparations Bishop Verol describes in expressions not devoid of piquancy: "Our troops went to guard the border. As prudent people, they stopped near the Nikolaevsky post, nearly a thousand mile border from the Russians. The instructions were strict: do not let anyone through! From here, all trade with the savages ceased completely. Therefore, the Muscovites could settle peacefully on Saigali (i.e. the Amur River). This territory, stretching for more than 160 miles from east to west and 80 miles from south to north, was left for the Russians."

It was 1850, and Bishop Verol finally decided to send an expedition to search for Father Labruniere. The expedition was led by the missionary Charles-Joseph Venot, who was assisted by two Manchu Christians who convincingly confirmed the version of Labruniere's death among the wild tribes on the banks of the Amur. Verol, in all likelihood, also foresaw the death of the missionary, but in his heart he still had a faint hope of seeing him again or, at least, knowing his fate for sure.

Charles-Joseph Venot (1806-1884), having a strong character, was endowed with outstanding virtues - mercy for others, a spirit of holiness and self-denial. He became the bravest traveler of the Manchurian missionaries, the most steadfast and enduring, when for forty-two years he endured the harsh climate of Manchuria, the food of an ascetic and the work of a pioneer. Charles Venot was born in Angers, in the diocese of Poitiers in western France in 1806. After being ordained a priest, he spent eleven years in the holy service in his native land, where he left unforgettable memories of piety, virtue and zeal. He entered the Seminary of the Missions in 1842. After a few months at the Seminary, Father Venot left for Manchuria. The Lord had prepared for him a long life, full of missionary work in the north of Manchuria. His zeal knew no bounds, his courage recognized no obstacles. Throughout his missionary service, at the cost of thousands of difficulties, despite constant dangers, he studied these inhospitable lands in every sense in order to bring consolation to several hundred new converts through his service. Christians highly appreciated his efforts; they honored and loved him like a father. The pagans called him nothing less than "good old Shien." In 1881, Father Veno celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood and his appointment as Vicar General of the mission. On January 12, 1884, the Dean of Manchuria, Fr. Charles Veno, peacefully reposed in the Lord at the age of 78.



A Nivkh Village

Thus, at the end of 1850, Fr. Veno, on the orders of Bishop Verol, interrupted his apostolic ministry and began preparing for an expedition. "It was," writes the missionary, "a journey of five hundred leagues, into a desert land, where even the Chinese are forbidden to appear." The priest and his faithful Christians left the village of Azhehe (a small village near the future Harbin) on a sleigh along the Sungari River and quickly arrived in Sansin, trying to avoid the numerous Manchu military posts at the confluence of the Sungari and Khurkha rivers. Then, by land, the travelers reached the Ussuri River, reaching it at the confluence of the Mulinghe River. Here, in a native settlement, in a wretched hut, they lived for two months, waiting for the thaw. Then, having bought a local boat made of tree bark, twenty-five feet long and two feet wide, having made an agreement with a pagan Manchu helmsman, they set off on April 31 to the Gilyak tribes. Having sailed the entire Ussuri without incident and entered the Amur, they parted with the Manchu with regret and sailed independently downstream to the mouth of the river and the sea coast. Their path lay to the settlements of the Gilyaks or Long-haired tribes (note: the modern name of the Nivkh people). Along the way, they stopped at native settlements, trying to find out about the fate of Labruniere through questions. Sometimes the natives entered into conversation with the missionaries and told them about a certain sorcerer who visited them and showed miracles by an effort of will. Most likely, this "sorcerer" could be the missing Fr. Labruniere. The stories of the natives worried Fr. Veno more and more. Once, in one of the camps, traders and fishermen told him a story

about the cruelty with which the Longhairs killed a stranger, whose name they did not know, but in whom it was easy to recognize Labruniere. Closer to the mouth of the Amur, the inhabitants of the camps increasingly met the missionaries with aggression. "Not a day, not an hour passed without scenes being made against us. I could not resist the natives, every new word angered them even more, and could lead to our journey for the glory of God and the salvation of souls ending in murder. Therefore, I remained silent, patiently enduring all the insults as best I could," writes Fr. Veno in his travel notes.

Local fishermen from the village of Aki persistently tried to dissuade the expedition from going further, frightening them with the fact that the worst could happen to them. To which Fr. Veno replied: "Do not be afraid for us, I must go to the sea. But I will certainly return." However, his Christian companions were far from sharing the preacher's confidence. They said nothing, but their faces showed that their courage was leaving them. Unexpectedly, the Lord sent Fr. Veno a young man from the Long-Haired tribe, who agreed to accompany him for ten days. This gave him at least some confidence, and soon the expedition entered the territory of the Gilyak Kilimi tribe. They had not yet sailed 100 miles along it when a terrible message overtook them. A Gilyak they met, waving his arms and shouting loudly, reported that the first village of Houtong, which they were soon to reach, was the place of Labruniere's death, and that eight boats were already waiting for the expedition to kill the annoying newcomers. "All my people refused to go further," wrote Fr. Veno, -"then I sent the young Gilyak who accompanied us to find out what was happening there and to get precise information about the dead missionary. My trembling Christians were going to flee as soon as the native boats appeared, quickly sliding along the water. The messenger spent six days on the trip. Finally, he returned, bringing the sad news that Fr. Labruniere had indeed been killed. As proof, he handed me some objects taken from the dead man's boat by those who had killed him." Thus, the fact of the priest's death was confirmed. In Fr. Veno's opinion, the preacher Labruniere had become a victim of his own courage. The goal of the search expedition had been achieved, and the missionaries could return to Manchuria to convey the sad news to Bishop Verol. But Fr. Veno intended to reach Sakhalin Island via the Amur Estuary and assess the possibility of evangelizing the local tribes. However, the Russian Petrovsky military outpost did not allow the missionary to reach the island. The expedition had to return to Manchuria by the same route.

To be continued...Translated from French by Alexander Litavrin; Text and editing by Tatyana Shaposhnikova; English translation by Google.

## **News Notes**

• Here it is!—The first car purchased by our benefactors to replace our wornout cars! Two more to go! We were delayed in purchasing the cars because of the sanctions which made our financial situation most difficult. Thank God those difficulties have mostly been overcome by our benefactors and parishioners. Thank you! A generous foundation has offered to buy another car if donors will buy the first one! So this is the "first one" that you bought! Our "state" of Primorye is as big as Wisconsin, and Mary Mother of God Mission Society takes care of all the parishes in the state, together with our CJD priests and deacons. That's why our cars are so important! We were getting to the point where every trip we took involved some problem with the car or car repairs. These "new" cars we buy are great, slightly used Japanese cars imported from Japan. They are sturdy and well made. This one is a Toyota Wish. Thanks for your help, and thanks to all the donors who donated to our car fund! Now working to get car number 2!



Our new seven passenger Toyota Wish

Maybe you still have time to remember Mary Mother of God Mission Society in your will!?

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How to Communicate with us:

To make a donation or order a Mass using your money card, go here:

http://vladmission.org/get-involved/donate/

Internet: English language: www.vladmission.org
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<u>Mary Mother of God Mission Society is listed in the Official Catholic Directory under the Diocese of Stockton, CA.</u>

# **Baby Talk**From the Women's Support Centers



"You've got to be kidding!"
Esenia December 11, 2024

## **Opportunities**

**♥** Giving Day! Giving Day!

Our parishoners in **Romanovka** are in need of a modest **church building** to celebrate Mass! Thanks to your generosity, we have reached three quarters of our goal of \$60,000 for Phase I of our building project. With this we have been able to start the rezoning of the land the parish owns, work on



permits needed and begin the design phase. If you would like to contribute to our 2025 Giving Day Project, choose the *Giving Day* option on the drop down menu on the Donate page of our website or note it with any mail-in donations. Thank you for continuing to help us reach our goal!

- **▼ Catholic Conferences** are important means for us to spread the word about our mission work in Russia. Our representatives pass out literature and man tables or booths at Catholic conferences throughout the United States. Our representatives have even attended conferences in Canada, Ireland and the Philippines! Attending Catholic Conferences helps us reach those we otherwise may not have met. Whether it is passing out one of our goldenrod mission brochures or selling an icon made in Russia, we are reaching more and more people. If you would like to volunteer as a representative for the mission at a conference, contact Vicky for additional information at vicky@vladmission.org or 209-408-0728. She will help with contacting Catholic Conferences near you, Or, take a look at some of the conferences we hope to attend this year and the beginning of 2026. We can only attend with your help! Are any near you?
  - Sept. 25-28 Catholic Answers San Diego CA
  - Sept. 27 Catholic Men's Conf. Waterbury CT
  - October 11 Catholic Women's Conf.- Lansing MI
  - Oct. 24/25 Marian Conference Denver CO
  - Oct. 24/25 Marian Eucharistic. Conf. Greenville SC
  - Nov. 7-9 Marian Conference Gaylord, MI

- November 20-22 National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM), Indianapolis IN
- December 6 Bethlehem Market Turlock CA
- January 1-5, 2026 FOCUS SEEK Conference
   Denver CO
- February 19-22, 2026 Archdiocese of Los Angeles Religious Educators' Congress – Anaheim CA
- ♥ By the time this newsletter reaches you, Fr. Dan will already be back in Russia. We hope you were able to hear him speak at one of the many parishes he visited on his US tour. We love hearing Fr. Dan and Fr. Myron give updates of their mission work in The Far East of Russia. There are still a few mission appeals for the 2025 Mission Co-op remaining for us. A special second collection will be taken for our mission. We hope you are able to attend if you are in the IN or MA area.
  - September 6/7 St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Richmond IN, Speaker: Fr. Doug Grandon
  - Sept. 27/28 All Saints, Evansville IN, Speaker: Marilyn Wassmer
  - Sept. 27/28 Blessed Andrew Phu Yen, Medford MA Speaker, Fr. Luis Van Dam
- ♥ Offering a mass is a great way to support our priests. You may **request Masses** or special intentions for your loved ones that will be celebrated by our Canons Regular of Jesus the Lord priests. You or your designated recipient will receive a Mass card. The suggested Mass stipend is \$15.

My Name
Please offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for the following people or intentions, include the address you would like your card sent to:
1
2

▼ We hope you received our New Mailing Address postcard. Our US mission office now receives all mail correspondence and donations at PO Box 576216 Modesto CA 95357.

Vladivostok Mission
Mary Mother of God Mission Society
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#### 185 ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

Love Blazes Page 1
Vladivostok Pilgrimage #5
Old Russian Far East #2
News Notes Page 6
Baby Talk Page 6
Opportunities Page 7
Development Desk Page 8

### From the development desk...

Dear Friends:

It's Fall time and that means 'tis the season for baking and cooking! You've heard about our Abundant Blessings Cookbook containing 498 mouth watering recipes from all over the world! Did you know our wonderful cookbook recipes are organized for you into 8 parts of the world? Australia & the South Pacific, Europe, Mediterranean & Africa, Mexico & the Caribbean, Russia, South & Central America, and USA & Canada. Our recipes take you all over the world! You can be dining in the Mediterranean and Africa, relishing Lamb Tajine with Shallots, Cinnamon and Dates. For dessert, why not zip over to Canada to delight in a batch of sweet Hermits! (A sweet and savory Canadian cookie). Lunch the next day can take you to Russia to enjoy mouth watering Vladivostok Sausage Soup! Each area of the world is packed with tantalizing recipes, fun to make! Many recipes are tried and true old family recipes (the best ever!) handed down through the generations and shared with us from our supporters, co-missionaries, priests, seminarians and so many friends from all over the world! We know

you will love our cookbook! Hundreds already do. We are on our second printing! Cost is \$35.99 which covers S/H in the continental USA. Proceeds from our cookbook directly support our Women's Centers and our Seminarian program.



Here's how you can get one or more copies of our cookbook, just in time for holiday cooking and unique gift giving! 1. Please call our mission office at 209-408-0728 to order over the phone and we will ship right away; 2. Send a check to PO Box 576216, Modesto CA 95357 with a note that it is

for a cookbook and where you would like it to be sent; 3. Order from our online store, <a href="www.store.vladmission.org">www.store.vladmission.org</a>; 3. Locals can purchase at our mission store, *Gifts of Faith*, in Modesto and

Many Blessings to all of you! Vicky Trevillyan USA Mission office usoffice@vladmission.org, 209-408-0728

save on the S/H. Thank you! Bon Appetite!