

"The Road Not Taken"

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler; long I stood
And looked down as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear ...

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Robert Frost

In the fall of 1870, for reasons that have never been documented, Don Bosco did not answer Archbishop Joseph Alemany's invitation to travel the El Camino Real in the land of El Dorado¹. What is puzzling is that at the onset

¹ The El Camino Real, known prosaically today as Highway 101, was the network of arteries that brought the lifeblood of western civilization into the early

Don Bosco had accepted the archbishop's call to send missionaries to the city of San Francisco in 1870: "It is our intention to dispatch our Salesians to St. Vincent's [Orphan Asylum] some time during the first six months of 1871 -- but certainly no later than November of the same year." Yet, not until 1875 would the first Salesian missionaries take "the road less traveled" en route to the Argentinean hinterland of Patagonia. Why was the road to California five years earlier not taken? What went wrong?

Our story begins in October of 1869. In that year California's first archbishop, Spanish-born Joseph Sadoc Alemany, on his way to Rome to attend the first Vatican Council, made a stopover visit among his Dominican confreres in Paris.²

Spanish colony of California. Contrary to popular tradition, there was no single Camino Real linking all the California missions, presidios, and pueblos of the Spaniards. The trail blazed by Gaspar de Portola and the Franciscan padres that linked all the missions varied little from the modern U.S. Highway 101. Traffic along the Camino at the beginning of the 19th century was chiefly by mule or foot; only occasionally could carts be used. The missions served as inns, since no such establishments had yet been introduced, and every traveler was gladly welcomed by the padres.

² Joseph Sadoc Alemany was born in Vich, Spain, on July 13, 1814. At an early age Joseph became a clerical candidate in Vich's diocesan seminary. After completing his preliminary studies, he decided to enter religious life. In 1829 he joined the Order of Preachers and made his vows on September 23, 1831. Shortly thereafter, Joseph, now also known as "Sadoc", after a thirteenth-century Polish martyr, began his philosophical studies. Two years later, however, secularization laws shut down the Spanish religious houses, and Joseph Alemany completed his studies in Italy. The youth's native ability and scholarly accomplishments enabled him to finish his studies eighteen months before reaching the canonical age for ordination. His Dominican superiors obtained the necessary dispensation, and Joseph Alemany was ordained in Viterbo, Italy, in March of 1837. He pursued further studies and pastoral work at the church of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva in Rome.

Though Alemany had previously volunteered for the missions in the Philippines, it was decided that his talents could better be used on the priestless frontier of Tennessee in the United States. In 1840, after receiving the lectorate in theology, he was sent to the U.S. to serve Dominican foundations in Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee. He quickly perfected his English and became an American citizen in 1845. It was during this time that he gained valuable experience in administering to Catholics scattered throughout the western frontier.

In 1849 Father Joseph Alemany was named American provincial of his order and left for Rome the following spring to attend a General chapter. After eighteen

months in office, he was informed of his appointment as bishop of Monterey in Upper California by Pope Pius IX. After remonstrating unsuccessfully with the Pope, Alemany was consecrated in the church of San Carlo al Corso in Rome, on June 30, 1850 (two months before California became a state).

En route to California he stopped in France and Ireland, seeking recruits and assistance for his distant see. He arrived in San Francisco in December 1850, and by the end of January 1851, he was established at Monterey, where the presidio chapel served as his cathedral. As bishop of Monterey, the 36-year-old Dominican had jurisdiction over both Upper and Lower California, as well as much of the land now comprising Nevada and Utah.

The Mexican Government protested his jurisdiction over Lower California and withheld the proceeds of the Pious Fund, an important source of income for the new bishop. Although he had few priests and fewer usable churches in the area, Bishop Alemany was still able to report some progress at the First Plenary Council of Baltimore. (1852).

On July 29, 1853, Joseph Sadoc Alemany was named archbishop of the new provincial See of San Francisco. Lower California was removed from his jurisdiction. As archbishop he attended Vatican Council I (1869-1870), where he was a member of the twenty-four man commission whose task it was to explore the teaching on papal infallibility.

At the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore (1884), he was made chairman of the commission of bishops, reporting on the expediency of a uniform catechism. His dedicated work on this issue led to the creation of the now-famed *Baltimore Catechism*. After directing his rapidly growing archdiocese for three decades, Alemany requested a coadjutor, and on September 16, 1883, Patrick William Riordan of Chicago, was consecrated for this post. In November, Alemany traveled 1,000 miles to Ogden, Utah, to meet Riordan and welcome him to San Francisco. From that meeting a close friendship between the two pioneer prelates developed.

On December 28, 1884, Alemany resigned his charge into the hands of his coadjutor and retired to Spain. He was appointed titular archbishop of Pelusium and devoted his efforts to restoring the Dominican Order in his native country. He served in the parish of Nuestra Senora de la Pilar, Valencia, until his death. At his request his remains were entombed in the ancient church of Santo Domingo in Vich, where he had been received in the Dominican Order 60 years before. In 1965 Alemany's remains were returned to San Francisco for interment in nearby Holy Cross Cemetery.

On that occasion an outstanding layman of San Francisco wrote of him in a way that would have won the assent of most of his fellow laymen when he said:

Though small in stature, and plain to a marked degree in appearance and dress, Bishop Alemany was indefatigable as a worker, though most ascetic in his own life. He had a composure and temper that nothing seemed to disturb. In

The archbishop drew attention to the fact that he was coming from a colorful and picturesque part of California. To illustrate, he exhibited, to the amazement of his confreres, a handful of gold nuggets from the California gold fields that he was bringing to the Eternal City as a gift to Pope Pius IX. Not to be outdone, his traveling companion, Bishop Eugene O'Connell, the first bishop of Grass Valley, California, proudly displayed some silver ingots from the Nevada mines that he was also bringing to the Holy Father.

Archbishop Alemany, of course, had no intention of flaunting the gold of El Dorado in the papal presence. Nor had he forgotten Pio's warning about the lure of gold when years before the young Dominican had attempted to sidestep his appointment as Bishop of Monterey. On that occasion the Pope had enjoined upon him a challenging task: "You must go to California; there is no alternative. Where others are drawn by gold, you must go to carry the cross. Don't worry. God will assist you."³

When the new archbishop of San Francisco arrived in his new see in 1853, the fever of the gold rush was waning. He did not find the streets of the city paved with gold. What he did find was a rowdy aggregation of human beings, and a raucous, lawless, vigilante-ruled community that has since been featured in many a Hollywood wild West scenario:

What a port! What a town! What a population! French, English, Germans, Italians, Mexicans, Americans, Indians, Canucks, and even Chinese; white, black, yellow, brown, Christian, pagan, Protestants, atheists, brigands, thieves, firebrands, assassins; little good, much bad; behold the population of San Francisco, the new Babylon, teeming with crime, confusion and frightful vice.⁴

adherence to principle he was absolutely inflexible, but personal motives seemed to find no place in his springs of action. (Byron J.Clinch, "The Jesuits in American California," *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia*, XVII (1906), 131.

³ On May 31, 1850, by the papal brief *Apostolatus Officium*, Father Joseph Alemany was named bishop of Monterey. The startled Dominican friar sought out his confessor who authorized him to "make a humble and modest resignation if it is agreeable with the Pope." Obviously the Pope was not agreeable. See Francis J.Weber, *Joseph Sadoc Alemany: Harbinger of a New Era* (Los Angeles, 1973), 26.

⁴ This unglossed reflection of the City by the Bay is taken from a letter of a

Poverty and simplicity would be the hallmarks of the lifestyle of California's first archbishop. Not for him were the grand episcopal palazzi of the Italian prelates he had observed during his travels in Italy and on the continent. In the early months of 1864 Father Herbert Vaughn, future cardinal archbishop of Westminster, was in California on a begging tour for a missionary society which he had founded in England. His penetrating eye and facile pen enriched the pages of the *Dublin Review* with his impressions of Archbishop Alemany's life in a frontier city. If Alemany had not struck it rich in the gold country, he did find a bonanza among the poor and disadvantaged of his new diocese:

Go, then, up California Street, turn round the cathedral of St. Mary's, and you will enter a miserable, dingy little house. This is the residence of the Archbishop of San Francisco and his clergy who live with him in community. To the left are a number of little yards and back windows of the houses in which the Chinamen are swarming. Broken pots and pans, old doors, window frames, remnants of used fireworks, sides of pig glazed and varnished, long strings of meat -- God only knows what meat -- hanging out to dry, dog kennels, dead cats, dirty linen in heaps, and white linens and blue cottons drying on lines or lying on rubbish -- such is the view to the left. The odors that exhale from it all who shall describe? A spark would probably set the whole of these premises on fire; and one is tempted to think that even a fire would be a blessing. To the right of the cathedral is the yard where the Catholic boys come out to play; and in this yard stands a little iron or zinc cottage, containing two rooms. This is where the archbishop lives; one is his bedroom, the other his office, where his secretaries are at work all day long. No man is more poorly lodged in the whole city; and no man preaches the spirit of evangelical poverty, a detachment in the midst of this money-worshipping city, like this Dominican Spanish archbishop of San Francisco. From ten in the morning to one in the afternoon, every day, and for two or three hours every evening, His Grace, arrayed in his common white habit, and with his green cord and pectoral cross, receives all who come to converse with him, to beg of him, to visit him, be they who they may -- emigrants, servants,

seminarian Joseph Venisse to his superior of the Propagation of the Faith, San Francisco, September 18, 1851, *Annales de l'Association de La Foi*, XXIV, 412. Two years later Alemany ordained Venisse for the Picpus Fathers on November 20, 1853. Quoted in *California's First Archbishop* by John Bernard McGloin, S.J., (New York, 1966), 10.

merchants, the afflicted, the ruined, the unfortunate. The example of such a life of disinterested zeal, holy simplicity and poverty has told upon the inhabitants of San Francisco with an irresistible power. It has been one of the Catholic influences exercised by the Church upon the population.⁵

When Alemany set out for Rome to attend the Vatican Council, he brought with him an urgent shopping list which reflected the needs of his growing diocese. Among his priorities were: financial assistance for his debt-ridden diocese; a search for zealous young priests for his rapidly expanding work; religious personnel to staff an orphanage in present-day San Rafael. His desperate lack of priests is reflected in a letter written several months before his departure to Father William Fortune, president of All Hallows College in Dublin. In it Alemany expresses his elation at the news that seven priests had recently been ordained at All Hallows for service in the California mission field. "They will be a great help. As our people is [sic] always on the increase, particularly in cities and in farming lands, I requested you in my last letter to always keep a good number – say twelve -- of good, steady, pious, zealous and talented young students for my diocese. Very few, especially those in my position, could realize my many necessities occasioned by the building of churches, the educating of so many students in a country so young and so rapidly filling up with population."⁶

At the Vatican Council, the archbishop of California devoted himself unstintingly to the task which had brought him to Rome. It soon became evident that Archbishop Alemany was to go down in history as an outspoken advocate of the definition of papal infallibility. In the second of his two speeches to the Council Fathers on June 20, 1870, he assured his listeners that the doctrine of papal infallibility was held firmly by Catholics in the United States.

It was a foregone conclusion, therefore, that Alemany's vote would be cast for the definition of papal infallibility on that celebrated July 18, 1870, when, under circumstances of thunder and lightning which accompanied the balloting, 533 bishops voiced their "placets" and only two voted against the

⁵ "California and the Church", in *The Catholic World*, II (March, 1866) pp. 808-809. This is a reprint of Vaughn's article which appeared in the January issue (1866) of the *Dublin Review*.

⁶ Alemany to William Fortune, San Francisco, August 11, 1868. Quoted in *California's First Archbishop*, by John B. McGloin, 236.

definition. Nor was Alemany slow to inform his flock as to the events which he had just witnessed.

The following excerpt from his pastoral letter "Given at Rome, out of the Falminian Gate, Feast of St. Symmachus, 1870" illustrates that its author was not without a sense of the dramatic.

Yesterday, for the first time in our life, we witnessed the clapping of hands and waving of handkerchiefs in a sacred Basilica -- yesterday was repeated in St. Peter's what over fourteen hundred years since took place in the Third General Council at Ephesus, where, as soon as the Fathers announced the decree proclaiming the Blessed Virgin to be the Mother of God, and to be honored as such, the faithful multitudes became seized with holy enthusiasm, and, unable to restrain their joy, rent the air with loud applause. ... One of the Fathers read aloud the Constitution on which the votes were about to be taken, and which had been the subject of discussion for a few months; after which the vote of each was distinctly asked and registered. This being ended, the Holy Father was formally informed that, out of 535 prelates, 533 voted in favor of its decrees, and 2 against them; and then the Sovereign Pontiff, with a clear and majestic voice, approved and confirmed the Constitution. No sooner was the word *Confirmandum* uttered, than the assembled multitude and Fathers, as if moved by one electric sentiment, gave vent to the feelings of joy which filled their hearts in repeated rounds of applause, filling the immense Basilica with their *evivas* and clapping of hands, which the Masters of Ceremonies had no small difficulty to subdue.⁷

Meanwhile, Archbishop Alemany had not forgotten one of the principal items on his shopping list -- finding a suitable group of religious who could staff his swelling orphanage in San Rafael. It was probably during his Roman sojourn that he must have learned of the spreading fame of Don Bosco, and the high esteem in which he was held by a number of the bishops and cardinals participating in the Council. No doubt, too, he made inquiries about the new Salesian Congregation which had as its avowed mission the caring of poor and neglected children.

On July 20, 1870, two days after the approval of the definition of papal

⁷ "Pastoral Letter on the Definition of the Infallibility of the Pope Addressed in Rome by Joseph S. Alemany, O.P., Archbishop of San Francisco, to the Faithful of his Diocese, San Francisco, 1870." (AUSF).

infallibility, the archbishop addressed a letter to Don Bosco who at the time was in Turin.

The Very Reverend D. Giovanni Bosco, Superior General

Rome, Minerva Ospizio, July 20, 1870

Most Reverend Father,

Among my numerous responsibilities in the diocese of San Francisco, California, is that of caring for numerous orphans. Under the present circumstances, this poor bishop is doing the best he can for their welfare, but his many obligations prevent him from doing more. In my attempt to provide these orphans with a good Christian education, I am in constant search for competent personnel, but such persons are not easy to find. And when I do find them, they do not always possess that religious zeal and commitment necessary for educating young people. In view of this, I have set among my priorities during my visit to Italy, the task of finding a religious congregation that will be willing to assume the operation of our diocesan orphanage. Several of my sources in Rome have advised me to contact you concerning my need. Consequently, the purpose of this letter is to ask if it would be possible for you to make available from three to six members of your congregation to take over the operation of our orphanage which houses the poorest children of our diocese. If possible, someone should accompany the group who has a basic understanding of the English language.

The orphanage I have alluded to above is located about twenty miles north of San Francisco and cares for about 200 children, ranging in age from four to sixteen. The site of the orphanage is located in the open countryside, and its facilities for the present are quite adequate. The weather there is always serene and healthy. The property surrounding the orphanage is quite extensive. It comprises fields and gardens; cattle and horses graze freely on the grounds. All that is lacking is a director and a staff who will educate these children and inculcate in them Christian principles, while at the same time training them in some skill or trade that will enable them to earn their livelihood once they leave the institution. Thus prepared for life, they will less likely fall prey to bad influences and evil companions.

I assure you that if you can find it within your possibility to send us a group of your confreres to San Francisco within six months, or at most

within a year's time, you will be performing a great work of charity. If you can see your way to assume the responsibility of the orphanage I have described above, I would be most grateful.

I would be most grateful if you could undertake the operation of our institution within the new few months. Hence I plead with you in the name of Our Blessed Lord and His Holy Mother to assist us in our moment of great need because the welfare of many young souls is at stake. At the moment we are speaking of only about 200 children, but I foresee this number easily reaching 500 or even 1000 in the near future.

Asking for your prayers, I have the honor of remaining your humble brother in Christ,

Fr. Giuseppe S. Alemany, O.P.
Arch. of San Francisco, California⁸

The archbishop's letter from Rome to Turin reached its destination, even by today's standards, with remarkable speed. It must have struck a responsive chord for within a week, Don Bosco informed Countess Callori of the archbishop's request. In a letter dated July 27, he writes that he is giving serious consideration to Alemany's request to send his Salesians to California:

Turin, July 27, 1870

Dear Countess,

... During your brief stay in Turin, I noticed in you a mixture of resignation, failing health, and longing for heaven. I wish that you will stay healthy in this world for your own family's good and -- see my selfishness -- that you may help me complete a series of projects which will gain souls for Our Lord. Among many requests to open new houses, I have one from Algeria, another from Cairo, Egypt, and a third from California. *The last may be given preference. ...*⁹...

⁸ Reference: Salesian Archives (Rome) 1.38305-1.38307

⁹ John Baptist Lemoyne, *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco* (English version, New Rochelle, N.Y., 1975), Volume 9, 434. In his next letter to the Countess, Don Bosco gently chided her for wishing to quit this world for a better one. "Do not think of anything but living cheerfully in the Lord, for God wants you to help build a church, a school, and a hospice at Porta Nuova." Countess Callori died in 1911 -- forty

The orphanage described in Archbishop Alemany's letter to Don Bosco was officially born on January 1, 1855, when two Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, led by Mother Frances McEnnis crossed San Francisco Bay to establish St. Vincent's Seminary.¹⁰ They made the trip in a rowboat manned by John B. Redmond and four American Indians. The first boarders at St. Vincent's were girls, but they did not stay long. The place was too inaccessible, and the Sisters were without the services of a priest. So in September 1855, the Sisters and the girls moved back to San Francisco. A few days before their departure, Archbishop Alemany found a priest who was willing to undertake the operation of St. Vincent's. He was an English convert, Father Robert A. R. Maurice. Within a few days after the Sisters' leaving, fourteen boys were sent from San Francisco in a schooner owned by a Captain Higgins. The St. Vincent's Orphan Asylum was born.¹¹

In its earliest days, St. Vincent's also provided elementary education for children of local ranchers and farmers. This service was discontinued in

five years after she had confided to Don Bosco that her "health was failing and she was longing for heaven."

¹⁰ In the 19th century the term "seminary" was commonly used to designate a school of secondary or higher grade usually designed to serve a particular rather than a general purpose. For example, *female seminaries* during the first half of the 19th century in the United States served only girls; *teachers' seminaries* trained only teachers; and *theological seminaries* even now train only students for the ministry.

¹¹ Two years before, on January 13, 1853, Don Timoteo Murphy, affectionately known as "the Irish Giant" (he was over six feet and weighed 300 pounds), died in an upper room of his hacienda in San Rafael attended by his faithful Indian servants. In his will Murphy deeded the land on which the orphanage stood to the Roman Catholic Archbishop of California, Joseph Alemany. The deed contained the "express condition that the grantee shall within two years from the date thereof, cause a school or seminary of learning to be established and maintained upon said land, and cause suitable buildings to be erected for the use of such school or seminary in the value of at least one thousand dollars, otherwise this conveyance will become void and the land granted hereby to revert back to the grantor or his heirs. The grantor hereby declares that the sole object of this conveyance is to establish and keep up a Seminary of Learning under the care and control of the Roman Catholic bishop ... " John T. Dwyer, *One Hundred Years an Orphan* (San Francisco, 1955), 10.

1863 when the Dixie School District in Marin County was founded. But the Asylum was by no means depleted. The Gold Rush, a lack of medical knowledge amidst the squalor and filth of the boomtowns of San Francisco and the Mother Lode, the Civil War, and the Great San Francisco earthquakes and fires, all contributed to an expanding orphan and "half-orphan" population at St. Vincent's. By 1870, when Alemany sent his appeal to Don Bosco to staff the institution, the orphanage had 200 children.

No doubt Don Bosco must have been favorably impressed by Alemany's almost idyllic description of a segment of what is now affluent Marin County north of San Francisco, where "the weather is always serene and healthy and where the property comprises fields and gardens, and cattle and horses graze freely on the grounds."

In his partial list of conditions which are still extant, Don Bosco anticipated the setting up of shops at the orphanage as well as initiating the beginnings of an agricultural training program which included the popular Piedmontese farm occupation of bee-keeping. In his mind's eye he foresaw his first Salesians eking out their existence by living off the land and by supporting themselves from the proceeds generated by the orphanage's workshops. But before this could come to pass, Don Bosco was practical enough to realize that an initial investment, in the form of a short-term subsidy from the archbishop, would have to be provided. He also hastened to explain that he had confident expectations that after three years the orphanage would become self-supporting.

Unfortunately, only the second half of Don Bosco's letter to Archbishop Alemany's appeal has survived. The first seven conditions or terms set down by Don Bosco for the takeover of St. Vincent's Orphanage have been lost. Don Bosco made it clear – perhaps in too business-like terms – that the initial efforts of his Salesians would have to be totally underwritten by diocesan funds, "since our Salesian Congregation is totally dependent upon Divine Providence through the charity of the faithful and contributions from benefactors; hence, it has no steady source of income."

Don Bosco had planned wisely, for unknown to him Alemany's fiscal position was shaky and beset with financial woes. Since 1842 the financial conditions of the Catholic Church in all of California had worsened with the suppression of the Pious Fund which had been seized by the Mexican Government almost thirty years before.¹²

¹² The Pious Fund, originally associated with the Jesuit mission field in Lower California, was opened in 1697. The Spanish Crown permitted the venture on condition

Don Bosco's letter to Archbishop Alemany (undated and incomplete), written some time between July 27 and August 17, follows:

[No date]

8. It is my confident expectation that with God's help our Salesian confreres will persevere in their management of St. Vincent's Orphanage. However, in the event that for some unforeseen reason they may have to relinquish their work there, our investment of money and resources expended upon the institution will be reimbursed in some equitable manner.

9. The value of the accumulated expenditures and assets alluded to above will be set no higher than the aggregate sum of the actual costs spent on the furnishings and construction invested by us in the institution. Since our Salesian Congregation is totally dependent upon Divine Providence, through the charity of the faithful and contributions from benefactors, it has no steady source of income. In view of this we shall have to be wholly dependent, for the first three years, upon the generosity of the archbishop.

10. Consequently we ask the archbishop to help defray the necessary travel expenses for the Salesian confreres who will make the journey from Torino to San Francisco. In the event that someone may have to return to his homeland, we request that the cost of the trip be shared equally by the diocese and by the Salesian Society.

11. Likewise, all expenditures needed to initiate our work, including

that it should not be supported out of the royal treasury. As a result, throughout the 18th century various benefactors offered gifts of money and land for the new missions. The contributions were used as capital, the interest of which supported the apostolic undertakings of the Jesuit missionaries in California. Eventually, the Jesuits became administrators of the holdings known as the Pious Fund of the Californias. Upon the expulsion of the Jesuits from Spanish dominions in 1767, the Crown assumed the management of the Fund to support the Dominican missions in Lower California and those of the Franciscans in the new field of Upper California. After the Mexican Revolution, the Fund was administered by the new government, which offered the income to support a bishop in California. In 1842, however, the Mexican Government withdrew this offer, sold the fund holdings, and placed the entire capital into the national treasury.

the purchase of equipment for the workshops and all necessary supplies, as well as for farm related projects, will be borne by the diocese. This arrangement should enable our Salesian confreres to get off to a good start and assist them in time to live off the produce of the farm as well as from the income generated by our workshops.

12. After a three-year period, all future expenses will become the responsibility of the Salesian Society. I feel confident that after that period, the archbishop will no longer have to shoulder the expenses outlined in number eleven above.

13. It is our intent to send our Salesian missionaries to St.Vincent's some time during the first six months of 1871 -- but certainly no later than November of the same year. They shall be undertaking this enterprise, first and foremost to gain souls for the Lord. Their work and activity will be circumscribed by the limits and intentions defined by the Ordinary of the diocese which he will deem proper to further God's Glory.¹³

But there were still some unanswered questions in Don Bosco's mind concerning the takeover of St.Vincent's Orphanage. It seemed that he had prepared a mental agenda for a vis-à-vis discussion on the matter with Alemany. This is evident in the marginal notations he made on the

¹³ This letter in Don Bosco's holograph is found in the Salesian Archives in Rome, cited as 1.885D10.

When one examines Don Bosco's positive, if tentative, commitment outlined in the conditions above for sending Salesians to San Francisco, the reader must question Teresio Bosco's assertion that in 1870 Don Bosco was not giving any serious consideration to sending missionaries abroad: "non pensava ancora *concretamente* alle missioni." Don Bosco's original commitment was very concrete indeed. As early as 1870 he affirmed that there was a strong possibility that he would be sending several Salesians to San Francisco. He had even outlined specific conditions for the operation of the orphanage in San Rafael, had proposed to send from three to six confreres there, and had even established a timeframe for their arrival. See Teresio Bosco, *Don Bosco, Una Biografia Nuova* (Torino, 1979), 369. One question too Pietro Stella's statement that "In 1870 Dominican Bishop Alemany of San Francisco, California, was visiting his confreres in Turin. While there, he entered into negotiations with Don Bosco for a hospice school of arts and trades." Actually, Alemany began his negotiations, not in Turin, but while still in Rome as is evidenced by his letter from the Eternal City, dated July 1870. See Pietro Stella, *Don Bosco: Life and Work* (English version, New Rochelle, N.Y.), 181.

archbishop's letter mailed from Rome on July 17. Don Bosco must have felt that there were some details that had still to be ironed out before he would send, sight unseen, a missionary group to California. The notations, in his very crabbed handwriting, read: "Language. Material needs. Artisans. Students, etc. Invite [Archbishop Alemany] to Valdocco for a visit."

Meanwhile Alemany had arrived in Turin in mid-August. He acknowledged Don Bosco's undated letter containing his terms and conditions with a brief note. Obviously, before making any concessions to his demands he wanted time to mull things over:

Torino, San Domenico, August 17, 1870

To the Very Reverend Superior General

I am requesting your indulgence to allow me a few days to think over the conditions you have set down in your recent letter. Meanwhile, I recommend myself to the prayers of your Salesians, and I wish you every spiritual and temporal blessing. I remain your humble servant in Christ.¹⁴

Giuseppe Alemany, Archbishop of San Francisco

There is no evidence that an encounter between the Archbishop and the Superior General in Valdocco took place. Nor is there any record of further correspondence between them. Why were all further negotiations broken off? Had the inability of the early Salesians to speak the English language become an insurmountable obstacle? A new language in the New World could have been a serious barrier. Had Don Bosco learned that St. Vincent's Orphan Asylum was saddled with a crushing debt of \$18,000?¹⁵

¹⁴ Salesian Archives, Rome. Cited as 1.438Gl. Archbishop Alemany was in an obvious hurry to return to his diocese in San Francisco. He prefaced his note to Don Bosco with the words: "Since I shall be leaving in a few days. ..."

¹⁵ In the mid-sixties, the Reverend Henry Lootens, the third director of St. Vincent's Orphanage (1859-1868), and later bishop of Idaho, had to face a sudden increase of orphans at St. Vincent's. The impact of the American Civil War (1861-1865) made itself felt upon the orphanage in San Rafael. The 369,000 deaths on the Federal side had their effect on California. Some of these men were Californians; many of the widows of the fallen soldiers traveled to California and died themselves leaving more orphans as their heritage. Thus Father Lootens felt the pressure from the aftermath of

Thus ended abruptly and inexplicably Archbishop Joseph Alemany's invitation to Don Bosco to take the road to the land of El Dorado. Meanwhile, St. Vincent's not only survived but went through a period of remarkable development under the able hand of Father Peter Birmingham. A tribute to his energy was paid in the local newspaper: "Great credit is due to Fr. Birmingham for his zeal. His management of the Asylum is truly admirable. There he has wrought almost a miracle." In fact, though Archbishop Alemany was in desperate straits for personnel, he sent the director of St. Vincent's an assistant in the person of Father John Quinn in March of 1871. In a few short years the enrollment of the orphanage mushroomed, and the limits of the property were expanded considerably. In a study of the agencies and institutions of that period, conducted by William H. Slingerland, Ph.D., it was reported that not many years later "the property included 1,800 acres of land, 300 under cultivation." The student population had also begun to shift away from predominantly orphan to abandoned and dependent children.¹⁶

Archbishop Alemany's appeal to Don Bosco to take the high road to California was the first but not the last summons extended to the Salesians to come to North America. A second request came four years later in 1874 when an American missionary, Father John Bertazzi, sought them out. Father Bertazzi had long nourished a plan to open a boarding school with an adjacent seminary in Savannah, Georgia. Armed with a promise of 700 acres of land from Bishop William H. Gross¹⁷ of Savannah, Father Bertazzi arrived in Rome

the war. As the orphan population increased, he did the only thing possible – he started a building project to expand the facilities of St. Vincent's. After his departure in 1868, his replacement, Father Peter Birmingham continued to make extensive improvements. By the time the orphanage was offered to Don Bosco, the indebtedness had reached \$18,000 - - a considerable sum for those days. See Dwyer, *op.cit.*, passim 29-34.

¹⁶ William H. Slingerland, Ph.D., *Child Welfare Work in California* (New York, 1915), 119-121. Slingerland's study of St. Vincent's reported at the time that "St. Vincent's now cares mainly for 500 dependents."

¹⁷ William Hickley Gross (1837-1898) was the fourth of seven children born to hardware merchant and customs inspector James and Rachel Gross. In 1857 he became a Redemptorist novice and made his profession in 1858. He was ordained on March 21, 1863. For a short time he was chaplain at a Civil War prison camp near Annapolis. He specialized as a pulpit orator preaching parish "mission-revivals" in the eastern U.S. His sympathy for the Confederate cause made him particularly successful in Georgia. He was named bishop of Savannah, GA. in 1873 and was consecrated in Baltimore of that

to negotiate with the Father General of the Jesuits to found an institution in Savannah. As luck (or ill fortune) would have it, the hapless missionary lost (or was relieved of) his wallet, passport, and personal papers. Bereft of his credentials he was unable to document his petition with the Jesuit superior. Sans passport and personal funds, in his predicament, he contacted Don Bosco who happened to be in Rome at the time. The Jesuits were quickly forgotten. The Salesians became the next object of his search. Bertazzi was quickly charmed by Don Bosco's winning personality and endearing ways. As he wrote later: "As soon as I met you in Rome, I was won over by your kindness. At that time I was on my way to the Jesuits with a letter for the Father General. As fate would have it, I lost it along with my wallet and money (a Godsend). Without it, I did not dare present myself to his secretary."¹⁸

It was in the early 1870s that Don Bosco was attempting to discover the identity of that land of destiny which he had seen in his first missionary dream. Was Georgia possibly the land of his dream? Not likely. The bustling port city on the Savannah River with its beautiful wide, shaded streets, delightful parks, and numerous antebellum houses hardly matched the hostile setting of Don Bosco's first missionary dream. It was Father John Lemoyne and Father Julius Barberis who wrote the first account of the land of his dream. According to their version, it had a desolate backdrop and a frightening scenario. They wrote that Don Bosco beheld a forlorn and vast steppe-like plain, forbidding and inhospitable, inhabited by fierce-looking, dark-skinned natives, rangy in size and swarthy in appearance. Those people of the plain, as Don Bosco saw them, were clothed in animal pelts and carried, what from afar, looked like spears and slings. Shortly after he described the terrain, Don Bosco witnessed a frightening scene. Some kind of missionary band attempted to approach the natives and to preach the Gospel to them. He also remarked that he had strained his eyes in an attempt to identify them, but none looked familiar to him. Meanwhile as these mysterious missionaries drew nearer to the wild men of the plain, the fierce aborigines suddenly ambushed them, hacking their

year on April 27. His diocese contained only 12 priests and its 20,000 Catholics constituted less than 2 per cent of Georgia's postwar population. It is easy to understand, therefore, his desperate need to establish a seminary when he sent Fr. Bertazzi to Rome to petition the Jesuits for their assistance in his priest-poor diocese. The development of the Savannah diocese and the growth of the Catholic population in Georgia can be found in J.J. O'Connell, *Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia 1820-1878* (New York, 1879).

¹⁸ Angelo Amadei, SDB, *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco*, (English version, New Rochelle, N.Y., 1977) Vol.X, 546.

bodies to pieces and brandishing them on the barbed tips of their spears.¹⁹ The verdant Savannah region and its famed reputation for Southern hospitality hardly qualified for such a setting.

As he had done to Archbishop Alemany, Don Bosco also invited Father Bertazzi to be his guest at the Oratory of Saint Francis of Sales upon the latter's arrival in Turin. There Don Bosco had planned to discuss in greater detail the American's offer and founding of a Salesian institution on the shore of the Savannah river. Father Bertazzi was no shrinking violet. He urged Don Bosco to return with him to Georgia and see things for himself. Failing to convince him to make the trip stateside, he next argued for two of Don Bosco's closest associates to sail back with him to Savannah and there make a complete assessment of the wonderful opportunities that lay in store for them. He was anything but reticent in his frank evaluation of the talents and personalities of those whom he had targeted to accompany him:

I insist [he wrote] that you [Don Bosco] make this sacrifice if at all possible. Otherwise I only know of three others who could take your place: Fathers Michael Rua, John Cagliero, or Angelo Savio ...

Father Rua's standing and discerning prudence, learning, refined ways, and knowledge of English [?] qualify him as the foremost candidate from every viewpoint. I personally place great trust in him, and this inclines me to be quite candid with him. Father Cagliero, a good spiritual director and theologian and a very discerning man, has the advantage of being already well known for his musical talents and would immediately win over the people. Father Savio is very wise, quite gracious, and a good businessman. You can judge whether he is up to par for the rest. Father Dalmazzo too, with his experience as director of Valsalice and his polished, charming manners (so valued in the United States), could also be considered for the task.²⁰

No doubt Father Bertazzi liked what he saw at the Oratory and was impressed not only by Don Bosco but also by some of the pioneer Salesians. After a brief stay in Valdocco he becomes an elusive figure in the pages of Lemoyne's *Biographical Memoirs*. He was also a man in a hurry. He was anxious to get back to Savannah, but not before assuring Don Bosco that he would become a Salesian himself, if allowed to continue his ministry in

¹⁹ For a full account of the missionary dream, see Angelo Amadei, *op.cit.*, 46-48.

²⁰ Angelo Amadei, *op.cit.*, 547.

Georgia. Ultimately, nothing became of the "Savannah project".²¹ And once again the road to North America was not taken.

Finally in 1875 Don Bosco's dream of sending Salesian missionaries to foreign shores was at long last realized. This time he took the road "less traveled" -- to the hinterland of Patagonia, via Buenos Aires. In this South American country the crucial language problem was minimized. Moreover, in Buenos Aires and in the nearby populated towns, many of their countrymen awaited the Italian missionaries. They were the thousands of immigrants and expatriates who had fled to Argentina to escape political oppression or to better their lives.

Led by John Cagliero, the first Salesian missionary band quickly inculcated themselves in an environment that was both congenial and familiar. This time Don Bosco was not forced to plead for funds to help defray the expenses of the long journey, as he had previously done with Archbishop Alemany. He was assured by his contact man in Buenos Aires, Father Peter Ceccarelli, that a fairy godfather, in the person of a wealthy octogenarian, was opening his heart and his purse strings to the new arrivals:

Mr. Francis J. Benitez, chairman of the committee, was thrilled at the thought of having the Salesians arriving soon. He wrote to him [Don Bosco] promising him a gift of the tickets for the voyage to Buenos Aires for the first five missionaries he hoped to welcome -- as well as a further promise of a check to cover all other travel expenses."²²

Don Bosco must have been both relieved and pleased with the favorable conditions that awaited the arrival of his first missionaries. His contact man in that faraway country had been quick to assure him that his confreres would land, not as strangers in an alien land, but would be made to feel right at home as soon as they disembarked. "They can stay at my home, and I will familiarize them with our customs, assist them during their first weeks, and help them to gain the people's confidence and trust."

²¹ At this point Father Bertazzi disappears as mysteriously as he had arrived a few months earlier -- but not before leaving a lengthy and detailed memorandum expressing his hopes and expectations. This fascinating document has been omitted in the English version of the *Biographical Memoirs*, but can be found in the original Italian, volume X, 1358-1371.

²² Angelo Amadei, op. cit., 553.

Moreover, unlike the ramshackle buildings that would have sheltered his first Salesians at St. Vincent's, Don Bosco was promised that the new arrivals could expect to find a "fine boarding school, and a magnificent church in the best part of town." Though he was no doubt elated with such glowing assurances, Don Bosco hastened to stress that "the principal objective of the Salesian Congregation is to take care of poor, endangered boys", and he was quick to express his hopes that his Salesians "would be free to run evening classes for these children and to gather them on Sundays for catechetical instruction."²³

Twenty-seven years after Archbishop Alemany's invitation, Don Bosco's Salesians at long last took the road to El Dorado. Again, the name "Rafael" would feature in the course of events. But this time that name would be borne by a man and not by a city. On March 11, 1897, Father Raphael Piperni, accompanied by Father Valentino Cassini, lay brother Nicholas Imielinski, and clerical student Joseph Oreni arrived in the City-by-the-Bay. The next morning William Patrick Riordan, archbishop of San Francisco, officially transferred the jurisdiction of Saints Peter and Paul parish, then located on what is now Grant Avenue, to the Salesians.²⁴

Their appearance in San Francisco was far from an auspicious event. Unlike their more fortunate counterparts in Argentina, they were greeted with threats and hostility. A fierce anticlerical campaign was mounted against the new arrivals, determined to run them out of town. A vicious antipapal rag, the *Asino di Roma*, took every opportunity to vilify the newcomers and to ridicule their ministry among the Italian immigrants of the North Beach district. But

²³ Angelo Amadei, op. cit., 553.

²⁴ Father Raphael Piperni would become a legend in his own time among the Italo-American community of San Francisco. His undaunted faith, fearless strict-to-itiveness would in time transform the large Italian community from an aggregation of indifferent, fallen-away countrymen, into a dynamic God-fearing community. He would work among the people he loved in San Francisco for the next 33 years. Father Valentino Cassini, who for many years had worked among the Italian immigrants in Buenos Aires, later became the first pastor of Corpus Christi parish (located, ironically, on Alemany Boulevard); he later returned to Argentina where he died in 1922. Joseph Oreni, the student seminarian, was ordained in San Francisco and became the first Salesian ordained in the United States; he returned to Italy shortly after his ordination. Polish-born Nicholas Imielinski, a man of unflappable patience and saintly life, remained at Saints Peter and Paul for the next fifty years as its devoted sexton.

Father Piperni was made of sturdy stuff:

His eloquence, his strength of character, and his persuasiveness impressed all those who came to attend Mass. Word spread throughout the Italian colony of his fearless zeal. Many came to hear him speak in their native tongue. The tireless efforts of these early Salesians began to show results as the parish community grew . . .

By Easter, 1898, Father Piperni's group had attracted more work than they could handle. Six hundred children from as far away as the Mission District were pleading for the services of the Salesians. . .

Father Piperni appealed for more help from Turin. He especially wanted priests who could speak English as well as Italian to care for the children then attending public schools. Father Bernard Redahan, an Irishman who had studied at Don Bosco's Oratory in Turin, seemed the perfect choice. With the assistance of the Sisters of the Holy Family, nearly 1,000 children attended Sunday School. Father Redahan began Americanization classes for the immigrants and English classes for the working people. These classes were the first of their kind in the city, and perhaps in the state. Saints Peter and Paul church's understanding of its role to initiate the process of security for the immigrant population created a landmark in community outreach.²⁵

Under the leadership of Father Piperni and his hardworking associates, the newly erected church of Saints Peter and Paul (1922) became known as "The Italian Cathedral of the West". With success came recognition.

²⁵ From *Saints Peter and Paul Church: The Chronicles of "The Italian Cathedral of the West, 1884-1984*. Edited by Rev. Gabriel Zavattaro, SDB, and Vicenza Scarpaci, Ph.D. Published by Alessandro Baccari, Jr. (San Francisco, 1985). This remarkable centennial publication, spearheaded by Father Zavattaro, SDB, is handsomely illustrated and expertly edited and incredibly enriched with rare dramatic scenes of "old San Francisco". It also contains numerous historical photographs of the early Salesian pioneers of the San Francisco Province. It remains, to date, the finest historical document of a Salesian foundation in the United States.

No major event in the Italian community took place without some kind of Salesian participation. For example, on October 7, 1904, at the request of the famed banker and financial tycoon, A. P. Giannini, Father Piperni blessed the new Bank of Italy -- later to be known as the Bank of America.

It had been a long, hard, and circuitous odyssey, but the road to North America, at first not taken in 1870, had at long last in 1897, borne the Salesians of Don Bosco to the City of Saint Francis.²⁶

Michael Ribotta, SDB

²⁶ Father Raphael Piperni retired to the newly erected seminary in Richmond, California in his declining years. He died in San Francisco on November 15, 1930, age 88. Both the Italian and American press were loud and generous in their praise and appreciation. On November 16, the *San Francisco Examiner* reported:

OLD SALESIAN APOSTLE OF THE ITALIANS DIES.

A great missionary died in San Francisco yesterday -- Father Raphael Piperni. To the younger Generation he was a feeble old priest. To the more discerning in his last inactive years, he was a man rapt in divine contemplation. Father Piperni is the Salesian who saved the Italians of Northern California for the faith. Other men worked valiantly with him. But they humbly concede to him the guerdon for starting the fight when it was hard to start.