

I. SOURCES PRIOR TO THE FIRST MISSIONARY EXPEDITION

The first seven documents offered here belong in some way to the first missionary expedition which sailed from Genoa on November 14, 1875.

In particular there are three letters sent to correspondents in Argentina. In the first of these, in December 1874, after having got the necessary information and essential contacts with the Archbishop of Buenos Aires and his Vicar General, Don Bosco put forward a proposal to the latter to send Salesians for two foundations one in the capital and one at San Nicolás de los Arroyos². He assured him that his personnel would be able to offer services superior to those requested by the Argentinian promoters (no. 91).

In the second letter, in summer 1875, once he had accepted requests coming from the founding committee for the college at San Nicolás de los Arroyos, and through the local Italian parish priest, Fr Pietro Ceccarelli, Don Bosco told them of variation to the personnel that was to be sent halfway through November, the name of the superior responsible for the early times, Fr John Cagliero and his immediate successor, Fr John Bonetti³. He had no scruples in asking payment for the majority of the tickets for the journey (no. 93).

Some things were still uncertain so he sent the parish priest a list of precise information he needed in advance, so there would be no problems on arrival and beginning the work in places so far away (no. 94).

Two important addresses of Don Bosco to the Salesians are added to this correspondence. The first is a circular telling them he had accepted the missionary project on behalf of the civilised population and the “uncivilised population” (his word was ‘savages’) of Argentina. He then appealed for anyone who wanted to be part of the expedition he was planning for October and indicated the formalities which had to be done and times and ways of preparing for departure (no. 92).

² A place 55 km south-west of Buenos Aires.

³ Fr Bonetti never left for Latin America. The successor to Fr Cagliero as Provincial was Fr Francis Bodrato (1823-1880).

The second is the moving farewell discourse of Don Bosco's on November 11 1874 (n. 97). The departure of the first missionaries was organised as a memorable event. The ceremony would have impressed itself on the minds of those present and readers of the Catholic paper that made reference to it. In the morning the community had their monthly exercise for a happy death and then with the boys present, took part in the administration of Baptism to a young Waldensian lad. The celebrant was the head of the missionary expedition, Fr Cagliari. Later in the evening, after solemn vespers, the moving farewell ceremony for those leaving took place, during which Don Bosco gave his address. Having reminded them of Jesus' mandate to go out to the whole world and preach the Gospel, he indicated that while requests for other missionary countries could not be accepted for lack of personnel, it did not happen this way for the request from Argentina where there was a worrying pastoral situation, both civil, meaning Italian emigrants who were losing their faith, and "savage", meaning the natives who had to be civilised and evangelised. Obviously he did not forget to thank benefactors, supporters and the group who were departing, a little seed that would become a big plant and was destined to grow. The future would prove him right.

To close this collection of documents is a request for favours, spiritual graces and material aid sent to Cardinal Alessandro Franchi, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide (no. 95) and a request for a papal audience for the departing missionaries, adding a possible recognition of two outstanding benefactors of the first expedition, Consul Gazzolo and Fr Ceccarelli (no. 96)⁴.

⁴ For the way Don Bosco went about his missionary activity, see Jesús BORREGO, *Estrategia misionera de don Bosco*, in Pietro BRAIDO, *Don Bosco nella Chiesa a servizio dell'umanità. Studi e testimonianze.* (= ISS - Studi, 5). Roma, LAS 1987, pp. 153-202. On the five missionary expeditions, see Luigi FRANGI, *Le prime cinque spedizioni missionarie nell'Argentina e nell'Uruguay dal 1875 al 1881*, in "Salesianum" 41 (1979) 819-856.

**91. To the Vicar General of Buenos Aires,
Monsignor Antonio Espinosa**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 366-360.

[Turin, 22 December 1874]

Very Reverend Monsignor Espinosa Vicar General of Buenos Aires⁵,

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ always remain with us.

Mr [*Commendatore*] Giovanni Battista Gazzolo, Consul for the Argentine Republic in Italy⁶, has often spoken of your Lordship's zeal and the tireless efforts that His Grace the Archbishop⁷ are making in that vast diocese. At the same time he pointed out the lack of Gospel workers especially those involved in the education and Christian instruction of the young. This worthy gentleman, with a view to supporting the spirit of the Salesian Congregation, and doing as much good as he could for the Republic which he represents here, decided to write to His Grace that the Salesians would not be adverse to offering him their feeble efforts where there was need and if it would please him. Your Lordship was kind enough to answer that the archbishop was pleased with the idea, and would willingly accept new missionaries and look after them.

Of course I keenly thank you both, and I am telling you that we are ready to accept the project and with this in mind I intend to take the matter up with you formally as the representative of the diocesan Ordinary.

To carry out this project we will be helped very much by what Fr Ceccarelli, parish priest of San Nicolás has written, that he is ready to offer a house, parish and his support to the Salesians, then they could go on, once set up in a stable way, to fulfil the many things that remained without fruit for want of workers.

⁵ Mariano Antonio Espinosa (1844-1923). In reality he was the archbishop's secretary and would become Vicar General only in 1879; appointed first bishop of La Plata (1898), he would then be transferred to the metropolitan see of Buenos Aires in 1900.

⁶ Giovanni Battista Gazzolo (Genoa 1827-1895), sea captain, migrated to Argentina in 1858, returned to Italy with the title of Argentine Consul in Savona and "immigration agent".

⁷ This is Mons. Léon Federico Aneiros (1826-1894).

That done we can come to this proposal that I intend to put to His Grace's enlightened wisdom:

1. I will send some priests to Buenos Aires to set up a hospice as a base. For this it would help very much to have a church, anywhere, for the sacred functions and to teach catechism to the most neglected youngsters in the city. Consul Gazzolo has suggested that the Church of Our Lady of Mercy, which is not in use, would be very good for this purpose. If there is no public church we could also make do with some local hall so we can gather and deal with these poor children.

2. I would then send to San Nicolás the number of priests, clerics and lay members needed for religious services, the choir, and also for a school if there is need.

3. From these two sites the Salesians could then be sent elsewhere to wherever the ordinary thinks best.

If it seems that these ideas could be the basis for making our project a concrete one, you could write to me and then I will begin to take care of matters.

As a guide for you I can tell you that our Congregation is definitively approved by the Holy See, and although its primary purpose is to look after poor youth, nevertheless it extends to every branch of the sacred ministry. Moreover the Holy Father, who has himself become our Protector, would like to see these details before we conclude them definitively. I know, moreover, that he is very happy with this proposal, because he has a special affection for those distant lands which were the object of his apostolic zeal when he was sent there as Nuncio for the Holy See.

I will also write to the vicar at San Nicolás regarding his letter.

I did not write in Latin or Spanish because I see that you write excellent Italian⁸.

⁸ He did his theological studies in Rome from 1865-1869.

I recommend myself and my families to the charity of your Lordship's holy prayers and those of His Grace the Archbishop, and with humble reverence for both of you, I have the greatest honour to declare myself,

Your Lordship's most indebted and humble servant,

Fr John Bosco

92. Circular to the Salesians

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 407-409.

Turin, 5 February 1875

To the Salesians,

Among the many proposals received to establish missions in foreign countries, the one from Argentina seems to be the best. Beyond civilized areas there are immense territories in that country that are inhabited by savage tribes. Among them, by the grace of God, the Salesians can exercise their zeal.

We shall begin by opening a hospice in Buenos Aires, the capital of that vast Republic, and a school with a public church at San Nicolás de los Arroyos, not very far from the capital.

Personnel for this new venture must be assembled, but it is my wish that this be done on a volunteer basis and not through obedience.

Therefore, those who wish to volunteer for the foreign missions should proceed as follows:

(1) Send in a written application expressing their desire to go to these countries as members of our Congregation.

(2) The Superior Chapter shall then meet, and after invoking the Holy Spirit, will proceed to examine the health, intellectual background, physical endurance and moral strength of all applicants. We shall select only those who, we have good reason to believe, will go to the missions with advantage to their own soul and for the greater glory of God.

(3) Those who have been chosen will then gather together for whatever time they need to study the language and customs of the people to whom they intend to bring words of everlasting life.

(4) The departure is scheduled for next October unless some serious unforeseen reason will force us to modify our plans.

Let us thank God with our whole heart for His goodness in bestowing new favours every day upon our humble Congregation, and let us endeavour to become worthy of them by the exact observance of our constitutions, especially those dealing with the vows, by which we have consecrated ourselves to God.

Let us not cease offering prayers to God so that we may exercise the virtues of patience and meekness. Amen.

Believe me always in Jesus Christ your affectionate friend,

Fr John Bosco

P.S. I ask the Directors kindly to read and explain the contents of this letter to the confreres.

**93. To the Parish Priest of San Nicolás De Los Arroyos,
Fr Pietro Ceccarelli**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 490-493.

Turin, 28 July 1875

Very Reverend Father and beloved in the Lord⁹,

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ always remain with us.

Taking account of the letters written by your Reverence and the two precious documents that the most excellent founding Committee for the

⁹ Pietro Ceccarelli (1842-1893), priest from Emilia, migrated to Argentina in 1871 and for twenty years was (1873-1893) parish priest of San Nicolás de los Arroyos, where he promoted various social works. He was a member of the Committee encouraging the project for a college to be entrusted to the Salesians.

College at San Nicolás was pleased to direct me, I decided that my sons should begin preparations to leave for the Argentine Republic as soon as things are ready.

I would now ask you to pass on to the gentlemen in this good Committee the following:

(1) I thank them with all my heart for the kind words they wrote me, and that the Salesians, with all their good will, hope to be able to correspond to their expectations concerning the running of the San Nicolás college and for the evening classes which have shown excellent results for us here.

(2) In keeping with the Constitutions of our Congregation I must to some extent make some changes in the personnel that had been requested. Five will be priests, all qualified teachers holding diplomas of this country. In addition, for the necessary church services and school activities there will also be a music teacher to play and also teach singing, piano, organ and other church instruments. I shall send also two lay Salesian Brothers, one to handle church maintenance, the other to look after the residential quarters at the school. For greater dependability I wish the whole domestic staff to be made up of members of the Salesian Congregation, so we can be very sure of their activity. But when things have begun you can write to me and I will see to what needs to be done.

(3) Father John Cagliero, Doctor of Theology, Provincial and Assistant Superior of our Congregation, will lead the Salesians and shall have full authority to negotiate and conclude any business with either civil or ecclesiastical authorities. Then, once the Salesians have assumed their respective duties, Father John Bonetti will take over. For many years he has been head of a college with more than three hundred pupils, and is already known for many of his published works. Father Cagliero will then return to Europe to make his report and provide whatever may still be necessary for the smooth running of the new college and other things that Divine Providence may see fit to entrust to us.

(4) Since this is the first long sea voyage ever undertaken by my Salesians, I am most anxious that the Argentine Consul at Savona, the Honourable John Gazzolo, should accompany them. He is someone who enjoys our full trust, he knows all about the sea and he knows the countries and many of the people amongst who, our men will be living. Our travellers then will be ten in number and I am having recourse to the municipal authorities to pay for these berths. Only three second-class berths are needed. Should there be any problems, I will take up the matter of the fares for anyone they feel they cannot pay for. I am ready for this and other sacrifices, because I keenly want everything to go well, especially regarding morality and that nothing will be lacking that can contribute to a solid start for the work at San Nicolás.

(5) The Salesians should leave here about the middle of November. I shall let you know the exact date as soon as it is definitely settled.

(6) As for the names to be assigned for tickets you could do a single [group] ticket with Fr John Cagliero's name as the leader, or you could put Consul Giovanni Gazzolo as leader to include the number he judges fit. This way we can avoid the difficulty that could eventuate if someone got sick and couldn't leave at the established time.

(7) Let the archbishop know whatever he needs to know of the matters dealt with here.

And to you, dear priest in the Lord, my humblest and warmest thanks for all your good work in this pious undertaking. If as I hope we can do some little thing for God's glory and for the boys at San Nicolás, you will certainly have the greater merit.

I am convinced that you will find the Salesians are good brothers to have and following your advice they will meet the expectations of the civil and religious authorities as we have done thus far amidst the difficult situation of public affairs here in our own country.

If there is anything, please write to me in all freedom and as soon as you need to. I will write back as soon as possible with a detailed account of the things we are preparing for the departure.

Finally, I recommend myself, my Salesians and all our pupils to the charity of your holy prayers. I have the honour of declaring myself, gratefully and respectfully,

Your Lordship's humble servant and friend,

Fr John Bosco

**94. To the Parish Priest of San Nicolás De Los Arroyos,
Fr Pietro Ceccarelli**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 503-504.

Turin, 12 August 1875

Dear Fr Ceccarelli,

I have received your letter of agreement with Consul Gazzolo and we have immediately replied to you and the city council at San Nicolás. Our departure will be no later than November 15 next, but we hope it will be earlier. Meanwhile to get our crew ready I need to ask you many details:

1. Regarding vestments, sacred vessels, furniture for the church will we find it there or must we provide it ourselves and bring it with us?
2. The same question goes for house items, kitchen, bedrooms, sheets, handkerchiefs, shirts, towels etc.
3. As for books e.g. missals, antiphonaries, benediction folders, masses for the dead, breviaries, catechisms, school books such as grammars, dictionaries and the like.
4. Do our men go to the college or the presbytery when they get to San Nicolás? Do we need to think of service personnel or will something be set up in this regard?
5. By classes in the college does that also include others in the city, or are these separate or entrusted to others?
6. Will it be necessary to provide a piano or is there one in the college? What about sheet music, methods for teaching organ, piano, Gregorian chant?

7. I am sending you the Regulations or rather the timetable we use for evening classes at Varazze and Turin. But the best regulation lies in the quality of the teacher.

8. Will our priests be involved in preaching, catechism, confessions of the faithful, as we do in our churches?

9. Do I need to write beforehand to the archbishop of Buenos Ayres and what do I need to say?

10. Since I am printing a prayer book for the youth in Spanish, and have already written it, and since I would like it to be as close as possible to what you usually do in the archdiocese, I need you to send me as soon as possible a small catechism for children where I can find daily prayers, e.g.: *I adore you, Hail Mary, Creed, Hail Holy Queen, Angel of God, Ten Commandments, acts of faith* and so on. This way our confreres can quickly follow the usual procedures in the diocese.

Right now I need you to be very patient, instruct me and help me.

I want you to cut a good figure so nobody says “It’s a shoddy operation.” Since the honour of a budding Congregation is at stake, I intend to spare neither personnel nor expense if this will contribute to the success of the undertaking.

I ask you to give me any advice you think is needed, and pass on my humble and respectful regards to the gentlemen in the founding Committee who kindly wrote to me.

May God fill you with his blessings. Pray for me. With true gratitude I have the honour of declaring myself,

Your humble servant,

Fr John Bosco

**95. To the Prefect of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide,
Cardinal Alessandro Franchi**

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 514-516.

[Ovada, 31 August 1875]

Your Eminence,

I turn humbly to Your Eminence and ask you to be a father and protector in the affair that I respectfully have the honour to put to you. With the blessing of the Holy Father, and having completed all necessary arrangements with the Archbishop of Buenos Aires and the City Council at San Nicolás de los Arroyos the Salesian Congregation has finalised its arrangements for opening a hospice in the capital, a college at San Nicolás, especially on behalf of the missions, and for taking up the administration of public schools with a church on behalf of the citizens.

The first departure of Salesians has been fixed for the last days of October, ten of them, and a similar number will leave not long after. This being the first time we are opening houses in the foreign missions, I turn to Your Eminence, asking you to:

1. Grant the Salesian Congregation (definitively approved on April 3, 1874) all the favours, spiritual graces and privileges that the Holy See usually gives to religious who go to the foreign missions both as Salesian individuals and religious houses.

2. This Congregation, although it is reasonably well provided for in personnel, is nevertheless at its beginnings and has few means, so is in serious need, so I ask Your Eminence if you could give us some financial aid, books especially in Spanish for the use of the church or school; sacred vessels, vestments and the like, as your well-known charity sees fit.

The City Council at San Nicolás is giving a place for the college and church and paying the journey for five missionaries. Other preparatory expenses for studying languages, personal effects, everything to do with the voyage, furniture, first setting up are borne by the Salesians.

Your kindness and charity on other occasions give me hope that now too you will be our father and protector. The Salesians for their part will try to correspond with the utmost zeal to the benefits received, recalling with indelible gratitude the one who gave them the means to exercise their evangelical ministry in the Argentine Republic. With divine help we hope to be able to extend from there to other parts of America.

It is our heartfelt prayer that God will fill you with heavenly favours and grant you a long and happy life for the good of the Church and civil society. In the name of all I kiss your sacred hand and declare with the greatest reverence that I am,

Your Eminence's most indebted and humble servant,

Fr John Bosco

96. To Pope Pius IX

Critical ed. in E(m) IV, pp. 534-536.

Turin, 27 October 1875

Most Holy Father,

The plan to open a hospice and college for the missions in the Argentine Republic which Your Holiness has deigned to bless, is about to come into effect. The departure of the missionaries is set for November 13 next. Amongst the many people who have worked so zealously for the good success of this enterprise it seems to me I could nominate:

1. Mr Giovanni Battista Gazzolo, Consul of that Republic in Savona. It was he who dealt with everything, smoothed out any difficulties that arose, took on teaching Spanish to our religious and the twenty Sisters whom he will accompany to Buenos Ayres and San Nicolás de Los Arroyos.

2. Fr Pietro Ceccarelli the only parish priest in the huge population of this latter city, who with no little trouble, expense and zeal has dealt with the Church authorities, then began and brought to a good conclusion dealings

with the city council, who are offering a college, public church to the new missionaries for the benefit of young people and adults.

For these two exemplary Catholics, Holy Father, for the charity they have shown, much more than the Salesians could have expected, I dare to ask Your Holiness to honour Mr Giovanni Battista Gazzolo with some pontifical title as Your Holiness should think fit, and for Fr Pietro Ceccarelli I ask the title of chaplain or some other honorary title at Your Holiness' pleasure.

Neither of them has made any request, and indeed they are completely ignorant of my petition; but I know that such a sign of benevolence from Your Holiness would be very pleasing to their respective families, would encourage them both to continue their care for the good of our holy Catholic religion and also to found other pious institutes in those distant countries.

Before leaving our Salesians would like to come to Rome to receive your holy Apostolic blessing and thus assure you they will work, live and die for this divine religion of which Your Holiness is the supreme head on earth. They hope that Your Holiness, in his unlimited mercy will kindly welcome them.

Kneeling humbly before you, I offer your filial homage of all the Salesians, begging you to bestow your holy blessing. In their name and with the greatest of gratitude I have the incomparable honour of declaring myself,

Your Holiness' most humble and indebted son,

Fr John Bosco, Rector Major

97. Don Bosco's Farewell to Departing Missionaries

Critical ed. in *Da Torino alla Repubblica Argentina. Lettere dei missionari salesiani per il sac. Cesare Chiala*. Torino, Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana 1876, pp. 43-57.

When vespers were over, Don Bosco went up into the pulpit to offer a brief farewell talk.

At his appearance a profound silence fell upon the church packed with people. A thrill of emotion swept through the congregation, this being the final time a beloved father would speak with his beloved sons, and the last time these would hear the echo of his dear accents!

One of our boys gifted with an excellent memory was able to partly recall this speech, which we could say was improvised and where the mind was struggling with the heart, because at every point when the speaker touched on the vitally important part of the argument, that is, the missionaries there present, his voice softened then died on his lips ... and with a visible effort he went on to a different topic, holding back his tears, but inevitably his listeners too were crying.

“Our Divine Saviour,” thus he began “when he was on this earth, before going to his heavenly Father gathered his apostles and told them: *Ite in mundum universum... docete omnes gentes... praedicate evangelium meum omni creaturae*. Go out to all the world ... teach all peoples ... preach my Gospel to all creatures.”

“With these words the Saviour gave not advice but a command to his apostles, for them to bring the light of the Gospel to all parts of the earth. This command or mission gave the name ‘missionaries’ to everyone who in our country or foreign countries go out to spread or preach the truths of the faith. *Ite, andate*.”

“When the Divine saviour ascended into Heaven the apostles carried out their Master’s command. Sts Peter and Paul went to many towns, cities and kingdoms in the world. Saint Andrew went to Persia, Saint Bartholomew to India, Saint James to Spain and everyone preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ, some here, some there, to the extent that St Paul already in his time wrote: *‘Fides vestra annunciat in universo mundo*. The faith of Jesus Christ has been preached throughout the world.”

“But would it not have been better for the apostles to stay put and win over the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all of Palestine, especially because it was easier to bring them together and discuss the fundamental points of the Catholic religion and ways to propagate it so there would be no one left in those regions who did not believe in Jesus Christ? No, they did not do this; the Divine Saviour had told them: *‘Ite in mundum universum: - Go out to all the world’* and so the Apostles, not being able to go out to all the regions of the globe by themselves, successively recruited more and more Gospel

workers whom they sent here and there to spread God's Word. St Peter sent St Apollinarus to Ravenna, St Barnabas to Milan, St Linus and others to France, and so did other apostles in governing the Church."

"The Popes who were St Peter's successors did the same and all those who went out into the missions left from Rome or went out with the permission of the Holy Father."

"All this is according to the dispositions of God our Saviour who established, as was necessary, a secure, infallible centre which everyone could refer to, on which everyone depended, and with which everyone had to be in accord if they were to preach his holy word."

"Now, studying what we could do as a small group, in accordance with our strengths, to carry out Jesus Christ's precept, various missions were presented in China, India, Australia, America itself, but for various motives especially since ours is just a budding Congregation, we preferred a mission in South America in the Argentine Republic. To follow this up and indeed to follow up the precept of Jesus Christ, as soon as we began to speak of this mission we immediately found out what was the thinking of the head of the Church and everything was done with His Holiness' full knowledge; our missionaries, before leaving for their mission, have gone to pay their respects to the Vicar of Jesus Christ to receive his apostolic blessing and then depart as if sent by the Divine Saviour himself."

"In this way we are beginning a great work, not because we have pretences or believe we can convert the whole universe in a few days, no, but who knows. Could it be that this departure and this little group is like a seed from which a huge tree grows? Who knows if it is not a grain of millet or a mustard seed which grows little by little and may do great good?"

"To give you a good idea of the great need for priests in the Argentine Republic, let me quote just a few bits from a letter recently received from a friend in that country. 'If ever in these parts,' he writes 'we could have something like you have, I don't say the church of Mary Help of Christians, but even in the most forgotten parts of Italy or France, oh how fortunate these

peoples would consider themselves, and how grateful and bending they would be to the voice of the ones who were labouring on their behalf! But here often, not even at the moment of death, can they have any of the comforts of our religion. Not a few areas are absolutely deprived of Holy Mass.' He told me of a relative of his, who wanting to go to Mass on Sunday left on Thursday and to arrive on time he had to travel fast using a horse, a carriage and whatever other means possible, and he just arrived in time in that town on the Sunday morning for Mass."

"The few priests there are, are not enough to administer the sacraments to the dying either because of the size of the population they have to look after, or because of the distance to the various towns they live in."

"I recommend to you then with special insistence the sad situation of many Italian families, many of whom live in those cities and towns and out in the countryside. Parents and their children have little instruction in the language and customs of where they live, far from schools and churches, and they don't go to religious practices or if they do, understand nothing. Therefore they write to me that you will find a huge number of children and also adults who live in deplorable ignorance unable to read, write or without any religious principles. Go then, seek out these brothers of ours who through poverty or misfortune have gone to a strange land, and help them know how great is God's mercy, that he has sent you to them for the good of their souls, to help them know and follow the path, the secure path that will lead them to eternal salvation."

"And then in the regions surrounding the civilised part there are hordes of natives [savages] where the religion of Jesus Christ, civilisation, business has not yet penetrated, and where there is not yet a single trace of a European foot."

"These areas are the Pampas, Patagonia and some islands around them, making up a continent perhaps larger than all of Europe."

"Now all those vast regions are ignorant of Christianity, and ignorant in fact of any principle of civilisation, business, religion. Oh so let us pray then,

let us pray to the owner of the vineyard that he may send workers into his harvest, that he may send many, but that he may send them after his own heart so they may spread the kingdom of Jesus Christ on this earth.”

“At this point I should address words of thanks to all the benefactors who in so many ways have worked for the success of this mission. What can I say? We turn to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, exposed now for Benediction and pray that he may recompense all that has been done on behalf of this house, the Salesian Congregation and this mission.”

“I should speak of a well-known person who began, followed up and brought this pious undertaking to conclusion, but I must remain silent because he is here present; I will speak about him on another occasion.”

“And now I address a few words to you, my believed sons who are about to depart.”

“Before anything else I recommend that in your private and common prayer you never forget our benefactors in Europe, and the first souls that you succeed in winning over for Jesus Christ offer them to the heavenly Father in homage and as a pledge of gratitude to the worthy donors of this mission. I have already spoken to each of you individually as my heart inspired me to or what I thought useful; for all of you then I am leaving some special written reminders as my testament for those going to foreign countries and whom perhaps I will not have the consolation of seeing again on this earth.”

“But my voice is failing, my tears are drowning my words. I only want to tell you that if my soul at this moment is moved to emotion by your departure, my heart finds great consolation in seeing how our Congregation has grown; in seeing how in our small way we too in this moment can place our little rock in the great building of the Church. You leave with courage, but remember there is only one Church that extends across Europe and America and throughout the world, and holds within it the inhabitants of all nations who wish to take refuge in its motherly bosom.”

“Christ is the Saviour of souls here and also there. The Gospel is such that what is preached in one place is also preached in another, and although

we might be separated in body there is unity in spirit everywhere, everyone working for the greater glory of the same God and Saviour Our Lord Jesus Christ.”

“But wherever you go and live, oh beloved sons, you must always maintain that you are Catholic priests and you are Salesians. As Catholics you went to Rome to receive the blessing, indeed your mission from the supreme pontiff.”

“And by this fact you pronounce a formula, a profession of faith and make it publicly known that you are sent by the Vicar of Jesus Christ to carry out the same mission as the Apostles, sent by Jesus Christ himself.”

“Therefore these same sacraments, this same Gospel preached by the Saviour, by his apostles, by the successors of St Peter up until our time, that same religion, those same sacraments must be jealously loved, professed and exclusively preached, whether you go amongst savages, or amongst uncivilised peoples. May God free you from saying any word or doing the least action that may be or could also be interpreted to be contrary to the infallible teachings of Peter’s supreme See, the See of Jesus Christ, to which everything must refer, and upon which everything must depend.”

“As Salesians in whatever remote part of the globe you find yourselves, do not forget that here in Italy you have a father who loves you in the Lord, a Congregation that thinks of you in any event, provides for you as will always welcome you as brothers. Go then, you will have to face up to all kinds of difficulties, hardships, dangers, but do not be afraid, God is with you, he will give you such grace that you will say with St Paul: ‘Alone I can do nothing, but with divine help I am all powerful. *Omnia possum in eo qui me confortat.*’ Go, but do not go alone; everyone is accompanying you. Not a few of your companions will follow your example and will go and reach you there in your field of glory and tribulations. Those who do not leave with you to accompany you in the evangelical field that Divine Providence has established for you, will accompany you in thought and with prayer, and they will share your consolations, afflictions, the flowers and thorns, so that with divine help you can be fruitful in all that you must put up with for the salvation of souls by Jesus the redeemer. Go then, the Vicar of Jesus Christ, and our venerable

Archbishop have blessed you, I also with all the affection of my heart invoke copious divine blessings on you, on your voyage, on your every undertaking, your every effort.”

“Goodbye! Perhaps we will never see each other again on this earth, but I have the firm hope that through the infinite mercy of the Lord we will see each other together in that homeland where earth’s labours, the brief sufferings of our life will be fittingly rewarded with the eternal joys of Heaven.”