

## II. A MISSIONARY PROJECT IN RAPID DEVELOPMENT

*What were Don Bosco's missionary plans for Argentina once he had set foot in that land? With the information in his possession thanks to research by Fr Giulio Barberis, and to correspondence with local authorities and Salesian missionaries, six months after the first expedition Don Bosco was able to send the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide, Cardinal Alessandro Franchi, a first report on the immediate results of the work of Salesian missionaries in Argentina (no. 98). He asked for financial aid and the setting up of an Apostolic Prefecture for the territories of Pampa and Patagonia to refer those who belonged to no institution either ecclesiastical or civil.*

*He also asked for financial support from the Italian Minister for External Affairs for Salesian assistance to Italian immigrants in Argentina (no. 99), and from benefactors in general for houses already opened in Argentina, those requested in Chile, for the costs of voyages and the necessary personal effects for new missionaries (no. 100).*

*At the end of 1877 he once again sent the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda Fide a new broad-ranging memo on the importance of the Salesian missions, on the results achieved over two years, on the personnel involved and his limited financial resources. He finished with a request to erect an Apostolic Vicariate in central north Patagonia and an Apostolic Prefecture further south (no. 101).*

*As soon as the new Prefect of Propaganda Fide, Cardinal Giovanni Simeoni was appointed, Don Bosco briefly repeated the same request, which amongst other things he had also forwarded to the new Pope Leo XIII, who shared Don Bosco's plans for America and India, but left all decision in that regard to the appropriate Congregation (no. 102).*

*He sent a memo on the state of the Salesian Society in the Patagonian missions to the same pontiff in April 1879, and again asked for formal recognition by the Holy see for those parts, so he could obtain financial assistance from the Pious Work of the Propagation of the Faith in Lyon and the Holy Childhood (no. 103).*

*Broad-ranging information with attached documentation on the progress of the Salesian missions are contained in two other memos: above all in a broad*

*report to the Pope on the missions in Patagonia in 1880 again with a view to obtaining an Apostolic Vicariate in Patagonia, and then in an even briefer but detailed history of the individual Salesian foundations in Patagonia sent to the Work of Propagation of the Faith in Lyon in March 1882, so he could have some financial support to improve apostolic results (no. 105).*

*The repeated requests for new juridical circumscriptions were accepted the following year. On November 16, 1883 the Vicariate and Apostolic prefecture, so long desired, were erected (no. 106)<sup>10</sup>.*

*Our brief collection concludes with a circular to missionary Cooperators in 1886 (no. 107), translated into 4 languages and sent all round the world, in which Don Bosco referred to the imminent development of Salesian works in Chile, down in the Magellan territories in the south, in Brazil, while he renewed his request for prayers and for financial help.*

*Nine expeditions had already left with more than 100 Salesian missionaries and 40 Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. While Don Bosco was still alive, a further three expeditions followed (April and December 1886, December 1887) with around thirty other missionaries, men and women who by now had arrived in the extreme south of Chile (Punta Arenas, 1887).*

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

Critical Ed. in E(m) V, pp. 143-149.

Rome, 10 May 1876

Your Eminence,

As an affectionate and obedient son of the Holy See, I am explaining to Your Eminence a project that over these times seems to me can be of great benefit to a vast region, perhaps the only one in which up until now the Gospel has not reached to offer the merciful effects of faith in Jesus Christ.

<sup>10</sup> Maria Andrea NICOLETTI, *Le complicate missioni della Patagonia da don Bosco a don Rua: situazione iniziale, sviluppi, bilancio*, in Francesco MOTTO (Ed.), *Don Michele Rua nella storia*. Roma, LAS 2010, pp. 339-362.

This region is known as the Pampas and Patagonia or the Magellanic area of South America. It is between the Sea of the Indies and the Pacific and extends from the 42nd parallel to the 60th. Joined to this are nearby islands, and the area forms a continent larger than Europe. Thirty years after Christopher Columbus, the famous explorers Caboto and Magellan made their existence known, but were unable to penetrate the region. After them various courageous Gospel workers made an attempt at various times and some are still working there, but their efforts and progress has been temporary.

The name of Jesus resounded as far as the 45th parallel, but again they had to pull back and limit themselves to the current borders of the Argentine Republic and Chile.

So in Patagonia, with its vast area and scarce population, and because of the fierce nature and gigantic stature of its people, and again because of the terrible climate, (from 6 to 8 degrees centigrade) saw few gains and its geography is listed amongst those huge regions where neither Christianity nor civilisation has been able to penetrate until now, nor has any civil or ecclesiastical authority been able to extend influence or empire.

In recent times there has been some dawning of hope and divine mercy since various cities, a few towns in the Argentine Republic founded close to the savages have established some vague contacts with them to the point where it has been possible to approach them, speak with them and even do a little mixed trading.

Those behind these social events thought it might be possible to try something that would have possible spiritual fruit.

Some years ago we dealt with Cardinal Barnabò<sup>11</sup>, of glorious memory, regarding some projects that were also explained to the Holy Father. One or other of these was given preference, and His Holiness blessed and encouraged the attempt.

The project most preferred was to establish shelters, colleges, hostels, and educational centres on the borders where the natives [*selvaggi*] lived.

<sup>11</sup> Alessandro Barnabò (1801-1874), Prefect of the Congregation of *Propaganda Fide* from 1856 until his death.

By relating with the children it was easier to communicate with the parents so little by little to make progress amongst the savage tribes. With the blessing of the Holy Father I got in contact with Mr Giovanni Battista Gazzolo, the Argentine Consul in Savona, and with his help dealt with the archbishop of Buenos Ayres, the President of the Argentine Republic<sup>12</sup> and with the city council at San Nicolás de Los Arroyos; two years of negotiations concluded with ten Salesians going there to dedicate themselves to a new kind of mission, opening a hospice in Buenos Ayres as a base, and a college at San Nicolás.

Since this city is no more than 60 leagues from the natives it could be a place for the Salesians to study the language, history, customs of the people, and maybe even prepare some indigenous missionaries from amongst the pupils who could be a guide amongst the natives.

#### *Hospice in Buenos Aires*

Once the departure of the Salesians was set they quickly began studying the language, history and customs of the countries.

When they had prepared the necessary materials for religious worship, and furniture for rooms and classrooms, they went to Rome to receive the blessing, their Mission and appropriate advice from the Vicar of Jesus Christ. Furnished then by Your Eminence with faculties as apostolic missionaries, on November 14, 1875 they left for America and on December 14 they arrived in the capital of the Argentine Republic.

They had with them a *Brief* from the Holy Father and a recommendation from the Cardinal Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs and were welcomed with much kindness by the civil and ecclesiastical authorities.

Of these Salesians three remained in the aforementioned hospice and church of Mater *Misericordiae* and then set to work directly with the many

<sup>12</sup> The President was Nicolás Avellaneda (1837-1885). The former Minister for Justice and Minister for Education, went about an economic policy aimed at agricultural and industrial development of the Country, thanks also to colonisation of the Pampa begun by his predecessors and the strong European immigration which provided cheap labour.

Italians living there. They occupied themselves in the city hearing confessions, preaching and were already able to open three festive oratories in three main parts of the city.

### *College at San Nicolás*

The other seven religious went to San Nicolás, where the city council offered them a small hall, but sufficient to be able to begin the college.

Works were completed with the help of some charitable citizens, the hall was extended, furnished and now has around a hundred boys living in and fifty who are there during the day only, because the lack of space means they need to spend the night with their families or in private arrangements.

The college is called San Nicolás in order not to offend certain national sensitivities, but it is a true seminary or college for the missions amongst the natives.

There have already been some consoling results from the college. The classes are set up properly and fully religious discipline is observed. Amongst the indigenous pupils, seven of the older ones have asked if they can embrace the ecclesiastical state to go, as they say, and convert their relatives who are still savages. Some pupils are sons of parents who a short time ago used to live in the Pampas, others come from there to see their children and talk a little with the teachers or the directors, or so I can glean from letters I received a few days ago from San Nicolás.

Now we want to open other education centres in areas closer to the native tribes but for these works to be supported, progress and obtain the desired results we need men, and we need material means. And since evangelisation amongst the natives belongs to the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide I am turning humbly to Your Eminence, its worthy Prefect, asking you to help me with the work and advice.

### *Things most needed*

The harvest is abundant everywhere, and pupils abound, but of course building and personnel are absolutely essential. So to prevent our current

missionaries not being weighed down by work we need to send them as soon as possible no fewer than ten religious to support the works begun and to take new steps towards Patagonia.

Up until now the expenses entailed (ca. 100000 fr.) have been—with effort—borne by the Salesian Congregation helped locally by some pious Argnetinians, but private aid cannot manage such an undertaking so I am asking Your Eminence:

1. To take this mission into kind consideration, give us all the rules and advice that in your enlightened wisdom that you feel can help and be of moral benefit for the natives .

2. Give us material aid for the classes we have set up in Turin for missionaries destined for Patagonia and for the missionaries to whom Your Eminence wanted to entrust a mission in the Indies [understand this as South American Indians!] as you were kind enough to indicate to me; to support the expenses of voyages and what we need for the college opened in San Nicolás, and for the houses and hospices that are to be opened according to the project indicated earlier.

3. To establish an Apostolic Prefecture with a view to exercising ecclesiastical authority over the people of the Pampas and Patagonia who currently belong to no diocesan Ordinary, nor to any civil government authority.

Having thus explained this humble project I submit everything to Your Eminence's prudence and am ready to accept and follow whatever modification or variation you consider fit.

I desire only to spend the last days of my life for this mission that seems to me to be for the greater glory of God and the benefit of souls. May Your Eminence help me in whatever you can, especially by the charity of your holy prayers. I have the distinct honour of bowing before you and declaring myself to be,

Your Eminence's most humble and indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

### 99. To the Minister for External Affairs, Amedeo Melegari

Critical Ed. in E(m) V, pp. 192-193.

[Turin, 12 August 1876]

Your Excellency<sup>13</sup>,

Last April I had the honour of explaining to Your Excellency the miserable situation of Italians who have gone to the Argentine Republic and other countries and cities in South America, for want of scholastic and moral education.

I also noted some ways by which it seemed to me we could provide for their needs and how as an experiment I had already sent ten Salesians or in other words members of the charitable association under the name of San Francis de Sales, whose purpose is to work for poorest and most abandoned children in society.

Your Excellency showed he was sensitive to this explanation, praised the project and, promising government support directed me to Marquis Spinola<sup>14</sup> who was about to depart as the Italian Minister in Buenos Ayres.

This intelligent gentleman understood the serious situation and promised to get involved as soon as he took office, while meanwhile he advised me to continue working in Italy with Your Excellency.

Now I have the honour of letting you know that we have successfully set up schools and religious services in the Church de los *Italianos* in Buenos Aires.

A college was opened at San Nicolás de los Arroyos with boarders, and poor pupils who cannot be taken in as boarders but come to school as day students.

<sup>13</sup> Luigi Amedeo Melegari (1805-1881), senator from 1862. In 1876-1877 he was Foreign Minister.

<sup>14</sup> Federico Costanzo Spinola (1830-1909), extraordinary envoy and plenipotentiary Minister for the Italian Government in Argentina.

Also as soon as possible we will open a hospice for poor boys living in the capital, and a college in Montevideo with the same purpose as the one in San Nicolás.

For provision we need to support these schools, the hospice and colleges, if Your Excellency is happy I could talk about this when we have received a report from Marquis Spinola.

As things stand at the moment I would simply like Your Excellency to grant a subsidy<sup>15</sup> for items and expenses for the voyage for twenty Salesians who need to leave as soon as possible to help the other members who find it difficult because they are too few for the growing and considerable needs.

I have every hope that Your Excellency will lend his effective support that besides its national interest is especially aimed at improving the lot of the most needy group in society, the children of Italian families at risk.

I am honoured to declare that with all respect I am,  
Your Excellency's [humble servant],

[Fr John Bosco]

### 100. Circular to Benefactors

Critical Ed. in E(m) V, pp. 204-208.

Turin, 25 August 1876

Worthy Sir,

God who is so rich in mercy deigned to bless the idea of a mission *in the Argentine Republic* and over a few months Salesian missionaries were able to found a college in Montevideo, set up a shelter for neglected children, repair the *Mother of Mercy* Church, open schools and festive oratories in Buenos-Ayres for the many Italians living there.

<sup>15</sup> We were given a thousand lire.

We have completed and opened a college in *San Nicolás de los Arroyos*, where there are more than a hundred and twenty boys, a few of whom belong to families from native tribal areas.

Connected with the college they have also opened a public church where adults can listen to God's Word, hear Mass, approach the sacraments of confession and communion.

By opening these houses the way has been set up for making progress with the natives. The Holy Father has blessed and commended this pious undertaking. Now we are attempting to open a new institute in *Dolores*, another in *Carmen* which is the last city in the Argentine republic between the Atlantic and Patagonia.

From letters received at the moment from missionaries we have the great consolation that in three areas the natives are asking for missionaries to come amongst them and proclaim the kingdom of God. Other houses, other shelters of the same kind are planned for the Republic of *Chile*.

There we have been offered the chance to open in *Santiago*, the capital, a shelter for many neglected and abandoned children who have no education, no way of knowing about God their Creator; a college in *Valparaiso*, the second city in the Republic; a junior seminary in *Concepcion* the last diocese in the south of the republic and one in *Valdivia*, a city bordering on the native area of Patagonia.

When these houses have been opened, shelters set up, we can ensure morality and religion amongst the natives, and we can provide academic and Christian education for children of every class. Meanwhile we are looking after vocations to the Church which are fortunately manifesting themselves amongst our pupils.

This way we hope to prepare missionaries for the people in the Pampa and Patagonia, so the natives can become evangelisers amongst the natives with out the danger of new massacres as in past ages. The plan to form indigenous missionaries seems to be blessed by the Lord since there are already ten older native boys who have made the request and been admitted amongst the missionaries.

They are very keen to join the clergy and go and preach the Gospel amongst the natives.

But the Salesians who have been sent and are already working in the evangelical field assigned to them are not enough for the serious work they have in hand and the extended work still ahead of them.

So they do not succumb to the weight of their labours it is essential that they are immediately sent no fewer than *twenty new helpers* to help them. That is the number they are asking for there and that we are preparing, all content to face whatever risks so they can join their confreres and work with them to win over souls for God. But just like last year when I had to rely on the charity of the faithful for the first expedition, now I have to do the same.

We need to provide books, personal effects, sacred vessels, items for school, the house, and fares for those about to depart. We also need to provide many things those already in the missions have asked for.

In those remote places everything is lacking. The cost of a new mission is no less than *sixty six thousand francs*. I have no other way to collect this amount than to rely on the charity of good Catholics and especially your worthy self.

While the Salesians willingly offer their lives to save souls, in their mission place they are relying on Your Lordships' charity, begging you to come to their aid through your kindness.

Do what you can, and we also need you to recommend other charitable individuals we can have special contact with. Every offering no matter how small can be sent to me in whatever way is easiest for the good donor.

May our loving and divine Saviour, who died on the Cross to save us all, bless and abundantly reward all our benefactors.

Our missionaries for their part, those already in America, those preparing to leave, assure you of their daily prayers for their benefactors, and in the name of them all I express my deep gratitude. I have the distinct honour being,

Your worthy Sir's most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

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

Critical Ed. in E(m) V, pp. 533-541.

Turin, 31 December 1877

To His Eminence Cardinal Franchi Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide.

In the calamitous times in which we are living, good Catholics and especially religious congregations have to close ranks even more around the great teacher of truth, the Holy See. It is from there that we have guidance and advice to act with certain success both in civilised countries and in the foreign missions. For this purpose some years ago I had the distinct honour of explaining to Your Eminence the desire many Salesians had to dedicate their efforts to the foreign missions where we feel the lack of Gospel workers more and more every day.

With paternal and wise advice Your Eminence told me: let us prepare missionaries. Comforted by the Holy Father's blessings I set about this task and supported only by Divine Providence I opened a college and seminary in Turin for the foreign missions, almost immediately afterwards, another in Genoa and then elsewhere.

God blessed these feeble efforts and in a short time I was able to prepare a notable number of trade teachers and religious keen to dedicate themselves to the missions.

So I am presenting myself once more to Your Eminence to advise me where best to make the first attempt, that is, in the Indies or in Australia or in South America towards the Pampas and Patagonia.

The last mentioned seems the most appropriate because more proportionate to a new congregation. The successes we have obtained encourage me to ask Your Eminence to intervene with your authority to consolidate the work begun two years ago under your auspices.

I am asking you therefore to first let me explain three things: the need for this mission; its situation regarding personnel and how we have sustained them thus far; and then Your Eminence can judge what needs to be done for the greater glory of God.

*The need for this mission*

We first need to say that between the natives in the Pampas and Patagonia right down to Tierra del Fuego or Cape Horn there is an area about the size of Europe where the Gospel has not been able to penetrate until now.

Over various times some courageous clergy have penetrated into some parts of the native population but it has always cost their lives without any real success for their sacrifice.

It is true that down there near the natives [savages] there were always some missionaries, especially the French, some Vincentians, but their few numbers and the extraordinary distances along with other serious problems meant the results of their zeal were few and far between.

In this general need that we have learned from history and also from what others have said or done, and considering the present situation in those countries, we believed it was time for a new experiment. That of no longer sending missionaries amongst the savages, but going to nearby civilised areas and founding churches, schools and hospices there with two aims in mind:

1. Cooperating with and preserving the faith of those who have already received it;
2. Instructing and giving shelter to those natives for whom religion or need has moved them to seek refuge amongst Christians. The aim was to establish relationships with the parents through the children, so that the natives [savages] could be evangelised by the natives themselves.

To carry out this plan, the help of the Argentine Consul resident in Savona was very helpful. He asked the archbishop of the Argentine Republic and a missionary from Modena, Fr Ceccarelli, to make a formal request to this

humble writer to come to the religious assistance of towns that were already set up, and the natives.

As he put it these miserable people were advancing in huge numbers against regular troops but just becoming prey because they were being decimated by Government machine guns and muskets.

We completed our arrangements by November 14, 1875 and the first ten Salesians left; the second expedition, 24 in number, left the year after; we finally sent the last group of 27 just last November. A further fifteen will reach their companions next spring.

### *Results*

1. Blessed by the Vicar of Jesus Christ and therefore really blessed by God, the Salesian missionaries found an abundant harvest.

Archbishop Aneyros of Buenos Aires has a huge diocese surrounded on several sides by the natives of Patagonia and the Pampas. Many towns and cities hadn't seen a Catholic priest in years. So the archbishop accepted the newly sent missionaries with great kindness and soon gave them the administration of the Church of Our Lady or Mercy or *de los Italianos*, in the centre of the city. It had fallen into disuse.

2. They then opened festive oratories, evening classes, then a hospice for poor and abandoned children especially those coming from native families. The hospice holds eighty orphans with a public church next to it.

3. This became too small for the needs, so with government help another school for arts and trades was opened in the city, where there are three hundred orphans with a public church.

4. Next to the orphanage in Buenos Ayres there is a suburb called La Bocca with 25 thousand inhabitants of various languages and nationality. There was no church, school or priest there. So in agreement with the archbishop they established a parish, opened day and evening classes and festive oratories. Now they are already building (and have almost finished) a wooden church with a residence for the parish priest and his helpers.

5. A college boarding house and day school at San Nicolás de los Arroyos, the last city in the Argentine Republic towards the natives in the Pampas. They have around 200 pupils.

6. They have opened a publicly functioning church in the city.

7. Pio College in Villa Colón not far from Montevideo the capital of Uruguay.

8. There is no bishop in this large Republic, just a Vicar Apostolic, Monsignor Vera, who had no seminary or Catholic college. Now in Pio college they have about 150 pupils, the only 'nursery' from which we can hope to have vocations for the Church for this Republic and for the missions.

9. Next to the college they have opened the public church of Saint Rose frequented by people living in the district and nearby towns.

10. Not far from Villa Colón a girls' boarding and day school has been opened for poor and abandoned girls, run by the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians who also belong to the Salesian Congregation.

11. At the end of November last, Monsignor Vera<sup>16</sup> offered a parish to the Salesians - and it was accepted - in Las Piedras, a city of around 6,000 without priests and without school teachers. It is 20 kilometres from Villa Colón and puts us in contact with the western side of the Republic which is still inhabited by natives [savages].

These are the houses and churches already opened in the Argentine Republic and Uruguay on behalf of youth and adults.

However while the Salesians were working to promote and preserve the spirit of faith in them, they never lost sight of studying what could ease the way to working amongst the natives, which is the constant goal they have dreamed of.

<sup>16</sup> Giacinto Vera, the Vicar Apostolic in Montevideo and first bishop of the new diocese from 1878 until his death (1881).

### *Personnel*

Many people have been needed to sustain festive oratories, day and evening schools, hostels for working boys, colleges and churches. 60 Salesians have already left from Europe for this purpose, and are now busy running the above-mentioned works.

It is true that this year one of our most zealous missionaries died, a victim, they wrote, of his tireless work<sup>17</sup>. But far from discouraging them it encouraged real enthusiasm in every Salesian to leave for the foreign missions.

Already thirty young men have come from the colleges and schools we have opened who wanted to join the clergy and become missionaries. They want to live amongst and bring the Gospel to their parents and friends still all immersed in idolatry. More than a hundred pupils have already shown a clear desire to embrace the ecclesiastical state and are giving clear signs of a vocation.

A regular Novitiate and Studentate were also opened in the Argentine capital having obtained authorisation from Your Eminence.

In Europe then we have many houses where we take in young men in all kinds of situations, educate them in learning and piety, and most of them want to be missionaries. More than two hundred of these alone are in our house in Sampierdarena and it is known as the *Work of Mary Help of Christians*.

All these things lead us to the well-founded hope that with God's help we can send fifty missionaries abroad each year, including trade teachers, catechists and priests.

### *Material means*

If we want to draw up a budget then we have no secure income—not a penny, but always and very especially supported by Divine Providence we have been able to found, set up, provide materials for so many houses and

<sup>17</sup> Fr John Baccino (1843-1877), member of the first missionary expedition (1875); the first Salesian to die in America.

churches, prepare hundreds of trade teachers and priests and send them off with everything they need. All this has been done while giving bread and Christian education to twenty thousand children.

For the glory of God and the American peoples we can state that the Salesians who came to these foreign lands were welcomed with unheard of charity to the point where they lacked nothing they needed to exercise their sacred ministry, set up hospices, churches and schools.

Strictly speaking the Salesians owned nothing in Europe or in America, but they have never lacked anything for the works they have undertaken.

The only steady and stable benefactor is the Holy Father, who has so often come to our aid so generously with inexhaustible charity. Now we can add the hopeful response of Your Eminence and the Pious Work of Propagation of the Faith, which from letters written by its president indicates that they will help us with these missions once Your Eminence makes the recommendation<sup>18</sup>.

### *Projected events*

While the Salesians have been at work running the Institutes entrusted to them by Divine Providence, other people have often gone to set up missions in the countryside amongst the more advanced colonies of natives.

While they were catechising, people of every nation rushed there but for material interests. However for many years now there has been no priest there and a priest's voice has not been heard.

Thanks to these excursions on behalf of the Gospel, writes Father Cagliero, the head of the Salesian missionaries, we have been able to learn much about the character, nature, languages and customs of the natives and at least commence some contacts which are very useful for getting to know the best places for the missions and which are less dangerous for the missionaries.

Amongst the many places where it seems they can set up a stable mission are Carruhué and Santa Cruz.

<sup>18</sup> See no. 102.

Carruhué is a place with a garrison of soldiers and a fort built in 1875 on the newly erected frontier with the Republic of Buenos Aires. The government had extended its frontier more than eight thousand kilometres towards the Pampas where they keep the natives [savages] at bay at gunpoint. Under the pretence of trade the natives have often raided and killed the Argentinians.

On the western side of the Argentine Republic, Carruhué is the most advanced location amongst the natives, located as it is at the 37th parallel of latitude, and 5th of longitude west of the meridian of Buenos Aires.

It is true, as the newspapers indicate, that this year (1877) there were serious hostilities and massacres amongst the Pampas and the Argentinians but the missionaries were not part of those events and they were kindly welcomed, indeed both sides were happy to have them there: meaning the natives and the Argentinians. At Carruhué they built or better improvised a large square and market where savages and civilised could meet.

The Salesians are being awaited there, and the archbishop of Buenos Aires can't wait for them to come and look after the native adults and children. The adults have a barbarous custom of often abandoning their children in the fields when they have too many of them or they cause some problem. Here they are building a church and next to it a hospice to entrust to the Salesians.

Santa Cruz is a small colony in the extreme east of Patagonia near the Magellan Straits on the 50th parallel (latitude). It is a trade site for Patagonians that usually came there to exchange products with the foreigners, who brought them the food and drink the natives preferred. This colony has now become one of major importance because as the Argentine newspapers have announced, two hundred Russian families are settling there for trade and agriculture. And at the moment there is no provision for religious worship.

If the Catholics go there they are going to find the others already well-established and in a certain way their superiors. But if the Russians become dominant, it will be very difficult for Catholic missionaries to organise themselves and establish themselves.

A hospice, a mission house at Santa Cruz and Carruhué seem appropriate both to preserve the faith amongst those who have already received it, and to

begin contact with the natives, give shelter and education to their children always with the religious purpose of making further advances into the lands they inhabit.

*Petition*

So having given you some pointers on the Salesian missions I now feel bold enough to ask Your Eminence to help with your authority and wise advice.

It seems to me that it would be timely and effective to consolidate and stabilise things there for bringing and spreading the Gospel:

1. By erecting the mission at Carruhué as an Apostolic Prefecture;
2. By erecting Santa Cruz as an Apostolic Vicariate as it is so far away and one could say almost impossible to have a bishop for the sacraments they are asking for.

Now it only remains for me to fulfil my duty on behalf of the Salesian Congregation, thanking Your Eminence for all the charity you have shown to the Salesians and asking you to continue with this precious kindness and advice. Meanwhile, I have the distinct honour of being,

Your Eminence's most indebted son of the Holy See,

Fr John Bosco

**102. To the new Prefect of the Sacred Congregation  
of Propaganda Fide, Cardinal Giovanni Simeoni**

ASC A1740613; ed. in E III, pp. 320-321.

[Rome, after 15 March 1878]

Your Eminence<sup>19</sup>,

After the discussions that I had the distinct honour of having with Your Eminence concerning the missions in South America and amongst the

<sup>19</sup> Giovanni Simeoni (1816-1892), former auditor at the Nunciature in Spain then secretary of the Congregation of *Propaganda Fide*; in 1875 he was sent as Nuncio to Spain and made a cardinal. Secretary of State from 1876 until March 5, 1878, he was then Prefect of the Apostolic Palace and the Congregation of *Propaganda Fide*.

natives, I immediately went to the Holy Father to explain what it seems to me we could undertake for the smooth running of the missions we have begun<sup>20</sup>.

*I noted in brief:*

1. The success we have had in the houses, or better at the seminary in San Nicolás de Los Arroyos, the last city in the Argentine Republic bordering on the natives [savages]. It seems that the time of mercy has arrived for those people and therefore it could be fruitful to try an experiment in Patagonia itself where the missionaries would be invited by two well-known chiefs to stay in their locality where they would assist and protect them.

2. So it seems timely to set up a Vicariate or Apostolic Prefecture in Carmen, also called Concepcion or Patagónes, a small colony on the north banks of the Rio Negro where the natives [savages] are trading with the foreigners. Once we have a college for students and a hospice for working boys it will be easy to establish contact with the natives and through their children begin to talk religion with their parents. The college at San Nicolás offers us an example supporting this argument.

3. I also explained in a few words how within a year I could prepare ten priests for the Apostolic Vicariate of Mangalor in India, or for some other mission that His Holiness judges to be preferable.

His Holiness, with his usual kindness, listened to this brief explanation, praised and blessed both projects then directed me to Your Eminence so that in your enlightened wisdom you could inform His Holiness concerning the convenience, the material and moral means that can be depended on in this eventuality. The same request was put some months ago to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, and now I humbly renew this request for this grace without which we cannot provide for the urgent needs of the

<sup>20</sup> Don Bosco stayed in Rome from 23 December 1877 until March 26, 1878. He was received in audience by the new Pope Leo XIII on March 16.

foreign missions and the Salesian houses in Europe which are collecting essential provisions for the greater glory of God and the good of souls.

Fr John Bosco

### 103. To Pope Leo XIII

Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Segreteria di Stato a. 1879 r. 248, ms aut. by Gioachino Berto with authentic signature of Don Bosco; ed. in E III, pp. 468-470.

Turin, 20 April 1879

#### *Memo*

#### *Approval of Salesian missions by the Holy See*

[Most Holy Father,]

The first negotiations for the Salesian missions abroad took place with His Eminence Card. Barnabò in 1872, who gave us encouragement.

Then His Holiness Pius IX gave us the location for the missions in 1874, and encouraged us to go to the Argentine Republic to take care of the Italians there and to try out some new forays amongst the Pampas and Patagonian natives. The same charitable Pius IX provided material means for the first expedition which took place on November 14, 1875.

The first 10 Salesian missionaries presented themselves to the Holy Father on November 1 that year to receive his blessing and their apostolic mission.

The Holy Father encouraged them with warm words, provided them with a letter from the Cardinal Secretary of State to the Archbishop of Buenos Ayres dated the same day (see attachment A<sup>21</sup>).

They were also granted the necessary faculties by the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide with a decree on November 14, 1875 (see attachment B).

<sup>21</sup> The attachments are not published here.

The supreme pontiff expressed his consolation, praising and approving the new mission in a *Brief* dated the 17th of the same month and year (see attachment C).

There were four Salesian missionary departures in the years that followed. Now there are more than 100 of them in South America, that is, in Uruguay, the Argentine Republic and in Paraguay, where they are preparing to accommodate the pious desires of Your Holiness Leo XIII.

To give still greater stability to the Salesian missions the Congregation of Propaganda, informed of the increase in the evangelical harvest and the vocations God has raised up in those countries, authorised the opening of a novitiate by decree on July 6, 1876 (see attachment D).

The reigning supreme pontiff Leo XIII, may God keep him healthy and whole for many years, on September 18, 1878 deigned to address another *Brief* full of fatherly affection, with which he approved and encouraged the Salesian missions in America (see attachment E).

The same charitable supreme pontiff Leo XIII although in serious financial straits, nevertheless, informed of the difficulties we were meeting with the fourth expedition, for lack of finance, helped us with a generous offering<sup>22</sup> and encouraged us to continue the work begun with a letter dated November 23, 1878.

One of the great difficulties was uncertainty as to whether the missions in South America belonged to the Congregation of Propaganda Fide or the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs.

Everything therefore was recommended to the charity and zeal of His Eminence Cardinal Nina, Secretary of State, that as Protector of the Salesian Congregation he would:

1. Establish which of the two Sacred Congregations mentioned we should turn to when Salesian missionaries have recourse to the authority of the Holy See. These missionaries are now in Uruguay and the Argentine Republic.

<sup>22</sup> The sum of 2,000 lire.

2. Approve these missions in accordance with the request made by the General Council of the Pious Work the Propagation of the Faith, resident in Lyon<sup>23</sup>, so we can obtain the promised subsidies which are essential in our current situation (see attachment F).

3. In reply to the letter of the General Council of the Propagation of the Faith we note that for each matter of a subsidy or matters to do with it reference be made to Fr John Bosco, Rector Major of the Congregation in Turin. Here he has set up the main seminary from which the missionaries leave, and where the countries entrusted to them for exercising the sacred ministry also maintain correspondence and are dependent on.

4. It would be of great advantage also to have a recommendation for the Work of the Holy Childhood.

We could also note how many young people saved from certain death were brought from Arabia (Cabil) to our house in Turin. Here they were instructed in the Faith, baptised, educated, given a trade and others were prepared for an ecclesiastical career and are now missionaries in their own country. Another 10 coming from Damascus are now doing their studies before being sent back to their country. And once again there is a considerable number of native boys who have been baptised by the Salesians amongst the natives; others have been taken into hospices in Buenos Aires.

On this same day, April 20, 1879 three Salesian missionaries have departed with the Minister for War in Buenos Aires, to go down to the natives in the Pampas and save the huge number of children from the extermination they appear to have been condemned to by the Argentine Government. Unfortunately these boys wander in their thousands looking for someone to save them in body and soul, but we don't have the material or moral means to save them all. Nevertheless the number of native [savage] children given to the Gospel and civil society will be great.

Fr John Bosco

<sup>23</sup> See no. 105.

#### 104. To Pope Leo XIII

ASC A1720724 Orig letter., Leone XIII; ed. in E III, pp. 568-575.

Rome, 13 April 1880

##### *Salesian missions and relationships with the Holy See*

The foreign missions have always been the Salesian Congregation's dream.

The need to sustain the faith for those who have been baptised, to propagate it in native lands and thus help and free those still living in the darkness of error has always been a topic of study, reading and admiration amongst us.

For a long time our pupils used to go to the missions by associating themselves with other Institutes or requests from bishops, in America, Australia, India, China and Japan.

The first negotiations for an expedition of missionaries were carried out in 1872 with His Eminence Cardinal Barnabò Prefect of Propaganda Fide; then the Supreme Pontiff Pius IX advised us to bring together the Salesian religious aspiring to go to the missions and send them to found houses and hospices in places of greatest need.

Amongst other regions the supreme pontiff was pleased to indicate South America and nominated the Argentine Republic. Since he had been in those parts he knew the great need for missionaries to go and look after Italians who had gone there and also to make some efforts amongst the natives in the Pampa and Patagonia.

The charitable Pius IX effectively helped us with material means to complete the first expedition, and on November 1, 1875 ten Salesians went to present themselves to the supreme head of the Church, the Holy Father, to ask for his holy blessing and thus receive their apostolic mission from the Vicar of Jesus Christ.

The Holy Father welcomed them with great kindness, encouraged them with warm words, and provided them with a letter from the Cardinal Secretary of State to the Archbishop of Buenos Aires dated the same day. See *Attachment A*<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> The attachments are not published here.

They were also granted the necessary faculties by the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide with a decree on November 14, 1875. See *Attachment B*.

A little after the Supreme Pontiff expressed his consolation, praising and approving the new expedition with a Brief dated the 17th of the same month and year. See *Attachment C*.

To give still greater stability to the Salesian missions the Congregation of Propaganda, informed of the increase in the evangelical harvest and the vocations God has raised up in those countries, authorised the foundation of a novitiate by decree on July 6, 1876. See *Attachment D*.

The reigning Supreme Pontiff Leo XIII, may God keep him healthy and whole for many years, on September 18, 1878 deigned to address another Brief full of fatherly affection, with which he approved and encouraged the Salesian missions in America. See *Attachment E*.

The same reigning Leo XIII although in serious financial straits, nevertheless, informed of the difficulties we were meeting with the fourth expedition, for lack of finance, helped us with a generous offering and encouraged us to continue the work begun with a letter dated November 23, 1878.

#### *Purpose of the Salesian missions in America*

The Supreme Pontiff Pius IX proposed three aims to the Salesian missionaries:

1. To go and look after Italian adults and especially the young who had gone in great numbers to South America.
2. Open houses near the natives [savages] to serve as a junior seminary and provide shelter for the poorest and most abandoned.
3. This way make progress in propagating the Gospel amongst the natives in the Pampas and Patagonia. The first departure of Salesians, as we said, was on November 14, 1875, and they arrived on the 14th of the following month in Buenos Aires, capital of the Argentine Republic.

*Present situation of the Salesian missions in America*

Currently there are around 120 Salesian in America working as follows:

In the diocese and city of Buenos Aires, the provincial house, the administration centre. The provincial lives in the parish soon erected, and known as San Carlos in Almagro, with around six thousand souls.

The Pius IX hospice where some 150 boys are learning arts and trades.

Public schools, oratory and a recreation centre with amusements for day students on weekends.

Novitiate and studentate for members of the Congregation.

The parish at La Boca dedicated to St John the Evangelist with around 27 thousand inhabitants almost all of whom, are Italian.

Public schools for poor children.

The *Mater Misericordiae* church, or *de los Italianos*, whose main purpose is to help Italian adults and children in religion. They come from all over the city and nearby countryside.

In the city of San Nicolás de los Arroyos not far from the natives [savages] there is a college or junior seminary for the missions where a number of vocations are coming from.

Here too there is a public church for the benefit of the adults.

We also run the Ramallo parish which is a village of some 4000 souls. This parish is made up of various homesteads that are some distance from one another, but the inhabitants come together on Sundays to take part in religious practices, approach the sacraments and have their children baptised.

In the Republic of Uruguay with the Lord's help we have also been able to found other houses.

The Pio College at Villa Colón is considered to be a diocesan seminary for the missions, and it is also linked to the State university.

A public church has been opened for the people around Villa Colón.

In Montevideo, the capital of the Republic, an oratory has been founded and schools for poor and at risk children.

In Las Piedras we have a parish of six thousand souls with public schools and a festive oratory.

### *Sisters of Mary Help of Christians*

Three years ago the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians have come to the aid of Salesian religious in America, looking after the very many poor girls who are in serious danger regarding morality and religion.

In the diocese of Montevideo in the earlier mentioned parish at Las Piedras the Sisters help the missionaries with school, catechism, assisting and instructing the native girls, preparing them for confession, communion, and the sacrament of confirmation.

At Villa Colón they have a school, workshops on weekdays, and they bring the older girls together at weekends.

In Montevideo they have founded schools and a hospice for girls at risk of falling into the hands of the Protestants.

In Buenos Aires they founded many schools, workshops and weekend congregations of abandoned girls.

### *The colonies on the Rio Negro*

Having given a rapid explanation of the Salesian missions in America, it would be good now to explain what we think needs to be done to improve the lot of the natives from the Pampa and Patagonia along the Rio Negro.

The Rio Negro is a river that arises in the heights of the Cordilleras de Los Andes and after a long and torturous journey of 1000 km it empties into the Atlantic at the 40th latitude South. The north bank of this river marks the boundary with the vast Pampas deserts. The vast regions of eastern Patagonia begin with the south bank.

For four centuries Catholic missionaries have found it very difficult to penetrate these native lands; they made unheard of sacrifices, but without results as far as we know since none of those who got as far as inner Patagonia ever returned.

In 1878 [the Salesians] also sought to try out something there and left on a Government boat for the Rio Negro, but a terrible storm put their lives in danger, pushed them back several times and finally they were forced to take refuge in Buenos Aires.

In 1879 they were more successful going another way. They crossed the Pampas, spoke with some chiefs or native heads and found good acceptance. They were able to baptise more than 400 native children. Arriving at the Rio Negro they saw the colonies which the archbishop of Buenos Aires in a letter of August 15, 1879, offered to the Salesian missionaries, with the description as follows: See Attachment I.

The moment has finally come where we can offer the mission of Patagonia that has been so much at heart, as also the parish of Patagones that can serve as a centre for the mission. As you will have already seen from the letters of Fr Costamagna, the parish of Patagones consists of:

1. Carmen de Patagones with around 3,500 souls, and the parish priest looking after them lives here;
2. La Guardia-Mitre around 17 leagues from Patagones with a population of around 1000;
3. The Conesa Colony 34 leagues from Patagones, where there are around 800 natives from the Catriel tribe;
4. A new settlement at Choele-Choel 70 leagues from Patagones with around 2000 souls between Christians and natives. All these villages are situated on the north bank of the Rio Negro, which is easily navigable; at its widest it is no wider than two 'quadras' (270 metres). Opposite Carmen de Patagones, on the south bank of the Rio Negro, and already in Patagonia, is Mercedes de la Patagonia, where the governor of the territories lives. Here there is now a church for a population of some 1,500 souls.

Around eight leagues from Mercedes is the colony of St Francis Xavier, also on the south bank of the Rio Negro, therefore part of Patagonia. This colony is made up of around 400 Linares natives.

For all these natives there is but one priest. On Sundays he celebrates Mass at his residence, then crosses the river and celebrates a second one at Mercedes de la Patagonia. As you can see it is almost impossible for one priest alone to provide a regular service for all these parishes, even if he had a helper. I regret very much that up until now I have not been able to remedy this need for an absolute lack of priests.

Some years ago the Vincentian Fathers took over this mission, but it all came down to preparations for a house for the missionaries and after that for want of men, they had to abandon it.

To all these problems we can add the sad effects of Protestant propaganda at work in these areas. To help put a stop to these growing evils and give some stability to the Patagonian missions, and to stop the people from falling victim to the insidious activities of enemies of the Faith, we accepted the proposal of the zealous Archbishop Aneyros, who also made some good offers in the name of the Argentine Government to send the Salesians to Patagonia. So an expedition was formed of twelve Salesians, and on 15 December last, with a much more peaceful voyage this time, they arrived in Carmen on January 2 this year. Others then left to help their confreres and if Divine Providence continues its support, we hope to send another expedition soon.

To help set up the civil and religious arrangements in the colonies in this area, the Argentine Government is helping the missions and is currently offering to help the Salesians in evangelising both banks of the Rio Negro, meaning promoting the Gospel amongst the Pampas and Patagonian natives.

They have promised material and moral support to this end. Recently the President of the Republic formally asked us to present a document explaining what would be the appropriate conditions for relationships between the missionaries, the government and the natives.

The Salesians who went to Patagonia, in accordance with the view of the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, chose Carmen as their centre for correspondence

and administration. Their first concerns were to build a church, a place to live in, schools for the boys and the girls. Some then set about teaching arts, trades and agriculture to the colonies, others continued to make progress amongst the natives to catechise them and if possible found colonies in areas further into the desert.

The Sisters of Mary Help of Christians have already begun to work on behalf of these colonies, organising schools and hospices for the most neglected of the girls.

*Things that need to be done*

So that religion can be stabilised in Patagonia and cooperate effectively in the development and growth of the missions, it seems that three things are most important:

1. An Apostolic Prefecture or Vicariate as a centre for the already established colonies and those which, with the Lord's help, we still hope to set up.
2. Founding a seminary for pupils to study the nature, language, customs and history and geography of the area.
3. Formulating a proposal which, if the Argentine Government is well-disposed enough to accept, would ensure the religious and civil status of natives who come to the Faith.

Since negotiations with the Argentine Government take time and need clarification, this can be put off till later.

However we can take up the other two points, that is to found an Apostolic Vicariate and a seminary for the missions in Patagonia.

*Apostolic Vicariate in Patagonia*

Given that the Argentine has recently set up the above-described colonies as the Province of Patagonia, the Apostolic Vicariate or Prefecture could carry the same title. It would embrace the colonies on both the north and south banks of the Rio Negro, including all territories to the eastern side of Patagonia until a new Vicariate is set up in Santa Cruz, a small colony already

founded towards the Magellan Straits, where the River by that name empties into the Atlantic. The new Vicariate then would extend from the 36th until the 50th parallel of latitude South.

It would be good to note that the Cordillera de los Andes divide Patagonia from the 40th to the 50th parallel of latitude South as far as the Magellan Straits, thus forming the eastern side towards the Atlantic and the western side towards the Pacific.

Since this latter aside belongs to Chile it would have to be excluded from the proposed Vicariate.

After the Magellan Straits, the Tierra del Fuego area begins and adjacent islands as far as Cape Horn, that is, from the 50th to 63rd parallel. These areas are the subject of dispute between the Argentine and Chilean Governments, so it would also be good not to involve them in our plan.

Once the Holy See has set up an Apostolic Vicariate at Carmen, as well as having a stable centre for the missions, we will also have the necessary titles for obtaining aid from the Work of Propagation of the Faith and the Holy Childhood.

We could likewise have help from some charitable organisation in Buenos Aires, which could help in spreading the Gospel in the Pampas and Patagonia.

We also have a well-founded hope that the Argentine Government will agree to an annual donation for a Vicariate which we would say is essential for the political and religious situation in the two territories.

#### *Seminary for the missions in Patagonia*

Three colleges or junior seminaries, as we can say, were founded in South America in order to cultivate vocations to the ecclesiastical state. One in Villa Colón, another in Buenos Aires, the third in San Nicolás de los Arroyos the last city in the Argentine Republic bordering on the Pampas.

We already have some vocations, but these vocations for now are somewhat rare and are not enough for the serious needs of the dioceses which have a great lack of clergy. So it is essential to have a seminary in Europe with a view to preparing Gospel workers for Patagonia.

As reflection has matured on the convenience of opening this seminary in Italy, or France or Spain, it seems that for the hope of the best material and moral support Marseilles is the best city for this seminary, and in time open a studentate in Spain to facilitate study and practice in Spanish, which is the language of Government and popular schools, and the first one to be learned by the natives.

Once we have an Apostolic Vicariate, this seminary and studentate once founded can also hope for some help from the Propagation of the Faith and the Holy Childhood and we would also have an easy way to organise fundraising for this purpose, if that would please the Holy Father.

We note that in order not to touch on the sensitivities of dioceses which in general are all lacking vocations, it seems better that our students should all be taught as far as philosophy and then be free to return to their dioceses, or enter a religious order, or dedicate themselves to the missions in Patagonia. Only this latter group should be accepted and prepared for studies proper to those who wish to dedicate themselves to the missions amongst the natives of the Pampas, Patagonia, and God willing also in the lands of Tierra del Fuego.

All the matters above were dealt with and discussed with the Very Reverend Monsignor Domenico Jacobini, secretary of the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs<sup>25</sup>, and with His Eminence Cardinal Gaetano Alimonda<sup>26</sup>, member of the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide, both given this role by His Holiness the Supreme Pontiff Leo XIII, to whom everything has been communicated, and that he may bless and approve whatever he judges to be for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Fr John Bosco

<sup>25</sup> Domenico Jacobini (1837-1900), was secretary of the Congregation of *Briefs*, and from 1879 to 1880 was secretary of Extraordinary Affairs. Nuncio in Lisbon from 1891 to 1896, he was made cardinal in 1896.

<sup>26</sup> Gaetano Alimonda (1818-1891), bishop of Albenga in 1877, cardinal from 1879, in 1883 became archbishop of Turin; he was friendly with and admired Don Bosco.

### 105. To the Work of the Propagation of the Faith in Lyon

ASC A2210117 Originals (not letters), written by Gioachino Berto with corrections by the author. di don Bosco; ed. in E IV, pp. 123-127<sup>27</sup>.

[Turin, March 1882]

#### *The evangelisation of Patagonia*

The vast extent of the Pampas deserts and Patagonia, of Tierra del Fuego and the Malvinas Islands are regions that up until now have obstinately resisted civilisation and the voice of Catholic missionaries. These lands cover a surface area more or less the size of Europe. Since Columbus discovered America courageous Gospel workers have tried to penetrate them many times, but with little result and indeed one could say they were all massacred without anyone bringing back positive news of the territories and their inhabitants.

Father John Bosco, meditating on the unhappy state of the multitude of savages still buried in the shadows of death, felt bitter disappointment.

Moved by the desire to try again, he went to Rome and spoke with the Prefect of *Propaganda Fide*, and then with the Supreme Pontiff, Pius IX. This wonderful pontiff, while knowing the difficulty of the task, nevertheless encouraged it, blessed it and effectively cooperated in preparing the first efforts.

Once the first dealings with civil and ecclesiastical authorities were complete, a chosen group of Salesians went to Rome and presented themselves to the Vicar of Jesus Christ on November 1, 1875.

The loving pontiff welcomed them with fatherly kindness, spoke with them in public and private and then told them: Go now to South America. Earlier efforts convinced them not to go immediately amongst the natives, but to set themselves up near them in order to preserve in faith those who had already received it, and meanwhile through the children of the natives find a way to approach their parents.

<sup>27</sup> The text was translated and published in France (*Les Missions catholiques*, 24 July) then re-translated in Italy (*Bollettino delle Missioni Cattoliche*, Milano, 3 novembre 1882).

Having received their mission from the Vicar of Jesus Christ, the 10 sons of St Francis de Sales, led by Fr John Cagliero, left on the 14th of the same month for the Argentine Republic and on the 14th of the following December, landed in Buenos Aires, the capital of that Republic.

The first efforts of the new missionaries were directed to founding institutes in Uruguay and the Argentine Republic bordering on and on behalf of the natives. They founded hospices to take in poor and abandoned children; some seminaries were set up to take in young men and educate them, possibly preparing them for an ecclesiastical vocation.

The number of houses increased and they needed other and many more personnel. There was one and sometimes more expeditions to South America each year. They began with various places for the missions not far from the natives, and these missions were of advantage. Hundreds of children were instructed and received into the Faith.

#### *First attempts to enter Patagonia*

With a view to finally entering Patagonia it was decided to take advantage of a Government ship that was supposed to go to the Rio Negro in the northern part of Patagonia. The boat departed in May 1879. The journey seemed as it would go well but it was not to be.

On the high seas a terrible storm swept the Atlantic and after 13 days of useless and very dangerous navigation they had to abandon themselves to the winds which pushed the boat and its crew back to where they had departed from. That the missionaries and others were saved is attributed to special protection from Heaven.

But far from losing courage the missionaries decided to enter by land. Therefore the following year Fr James Costamagna with Dr Anthony Espinosa and a catechist set out through the Pampas where many consolations awaited them. They were able to speak with a number of tribal chiefs, make known the name of Jesus to the inhabitants of those immense deserts, who up till then had never heard of him, and baptise around 500 of the natives [savages] including adults and children.

Finally after 45 days of journeying through this land without name, no roads and no habitation, not without difficulty they crossed the Rio Colorado, the Rio Negro and arrived in Patagonia properly so called and which had always been the missionaries' dream.

The Argentine Government protected this perilous expedition, a journey of more than two thousand kilometres.

*The borders of Patagonia and the situation of the Salesian missions there*

The name Patagonia is given to that part of South America beginning at the 37th parallel South and extending to the Magellan Straits. A high chain of mountains called the Cordilleras divides Patagonia into two. The western side runs out to the Pacific and belongs to the Republic of Chile; the other is the great eastern slopes that belong to the Argentine Government when they are able to civilise them.

The eastern side has the following borders: to the north the Rio Colorado which rises in the Cordilleras and empties its waters into the Atlantic. To the east it borders on the Atlantic; to the south with the Magellan Straits, to the west with the Cordilleras separating it from the western side.

The new missionaries stopped on the banks of the Rio Negro on the 40th parallel south. Here they came across various venues where foreigners usually go to sell or better exchange wines, liquor, bread or some *objets d'art* with products from those territories, work done by the natives and which because of their novelty are then brought to other parts of America and even to Europe.

The missionaries therefore stayed in Carmen which is a large square where the natives and other foreigners usually gather.

The Patagonians and also the Europeans living there welcomed the missionaries with inexpressible joy. So they were able to deal with their chiefs, examine the condition of the inhabitants and find out the possibilities for setting up colonies there.

They took the necessary precautions, found good understanding with the natives, and promising to return as soon as possible they boarded a waiting

ship on the Rio Negro and returned to Buenos Ayres to prepare essential items for life, especially the victuals they would need for eating.

When they got to Buenos Ayres they explained the results of their journey to the Government and their Salesian confreres who all thanked the good Lord who had finally opened the treasures of his graces for people who up until then had lain amidst the shadows of death.

They then prepared the most necessary items, and with the help of other missionaries and the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians who had arrived from Europe, Father Joseph Fagnano, at the end of December 1879 went directly to Patagonia to give the mission a regular form.

They founded houses, churches, hospices and established schools for the boys and girls. At the moment the regularly established colonies in Patagonia along the northern bank of the Rio Negro towards the Rio Colorado are:

1. *Carmen de Patagones* with around 1,500 souls between Europeans and natives who have come to the Faith;
2. *La Guardia Mitre* 85 km from Patagones, and with 1,500 souls;
3. The *Conesa Colony* 155 km from Patagones, where there are more than a thousand natives belonging to the Catriel tribe;
4. A new settlement called *Choele-Choel* 350 kilometres from Patagones. Between baptised Christians and natives preparing for the Faith there are 2,500 souls.

Opposite Carmen on the southern banks of the Rio Negro and in Patagonia proper is Mercedes which is currently the residence for the governor sent by the Argentine Government. The population is around 2,000 souls.

50 kilometres from Mercedes is the *San Xavier* colony also on the southern banks of the Rio Negro, but further into Patagonia. There are 600 Linares natives there some of whom are baptised and some being instructed in the Faith. At the moment new settlements are being founded inside Patagonia and they are already preparing what is needed for a regular settlement on the banks of Lake Nahuel-Huapi, where there are many natives living around.

Fr Joseph Fagnano<sup>28</sup> with a catechist made an excursion down to this place which is about a thousand kilometres from Carmen and is not far from the Cordilleras of America. Details of this and other excursions are described separately.

Near this lake we have already been able to receive hundreds of natives into the Faith and thus has begun a Christianity which is the first fruits of central Patagonia offered by the garden of the Catholic Church.

### *Difficulties to be overcome*

The first difficulty is the scarce number of missionaries in those endless regions. In agreement with the Holy father in Europe colleges and seminaries were founded with the purpose of preparing workers for the Gospel.

In Uruguay and the Argentine Republic there are two colleges or seminaries with the same purpose of preparing missionaries for the Evangelisation of the Pampas and Patagonia.

This way we hope to surmount this first problem.

The second difficulty is the scarcity of funds. We have to build houses, churches, schools, a building for the Sisters and classrooms for girls and boys.

We have also built shelters for the native boys and girls, but needs demands that we build many more. We need sacred vessels, supplies for classrooms, our houses and also clothing for the poorest amongst the natives.

Another serious obstacle is presented by the Protestants. As soon as they saw that the danger of being massacred had gone, and encouraged by huge salaries, they went to set up their tents in the settlements. Here they became teachers and under the appearance of practising medicine, surgery, or setting up pharmacies, they lavished much money, risking serious embarrassment for the Catholic missionaries.

<sup>28</sup> Joseph Fagnano (1844-1916), left with the first missionary expedition (1875), and in 1883 was appointed Prefect Apostolic of southern Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego (no. 106).

But all these and other difficulties the missionaries themselves hope to overcome little by little as they advance into the lands still to be evangelised.

Heaven's protection of the Christians is obvious. There was one settlement where there was so much need and because of their promises the Protestants were blindly given all the power, but as soon as the missionaries came there and were able to found Catholic schools the so-called evangelical schools were left empty and without students. What is absolutely essential at the moment is the support of the worthy and pious Work of the Propagation of the Faith.

Fr John Bosco

### **106. Decree erecting the Apostolic Vicariate and Prefecture in South America (16 November 1883)**

ASC A8430106 *Patagonia Nord: aperturalerezione canonica*, copia ms; ed. in MB XVI, 582.

#### **Vicariate Apostolic**

*LEO XIII*

*Ad futuram rei memoriam. Ad fovendam vel magis et provehendam sacram missionem Patagoniae, cuius curam laboresque iam pridem Sodales Congregationis Salesianae susceperunt, postulatum est a dilecto filio Joanne Bosco memoratae Congregationis Auctore et Antistite Summo, ut in Septentrionali Patagoniae regione Vicariatus Apostolicus erigatur. De sacrarum missionum bono et incremento ex officio Supremi Apostolatus, quo in Ecclesia Dei fungimur, Nos vehementer solliciti Venerabilibus Fratribus Nostris S. R. E. Cardinalibus Catholicae propagandae Fidei praepositis huiusce rei examen commisimus. Itaque pensatis hac de re omnibus accurateque consi-deratis de eorundem Venerabilium Fratrum Nostrorum consilio huiusmodi postulato annuendum existimavimus.*

*Nos igitur Apostolica auctoritate Nostra harum litterarum vi in Septentrionali supradictae regionis parte Vicariatium Apostolicum erigimus atque erectum declaramus, ea lege ut in ipso comprehendatur etiam pars centralis Patagoniae, quae nondum explorata est. Huiusce autem Vicariatus Apostolici Patagoniae Septentrionalis limites esse volumus ad Orientem mare Atlanticum, ad Occidentem Montes, qui vulgari nomine "Les Cordiglieres" appellantur, ad Austrum [?] populos,*

*qui dicuntur Pampas, ad meridiem Patagoniam centralem. Haec volumus atque decernimus in contrarium facientibus quamvis speciali atque individua mentione ac derogatione dignis non obstantibus quibuscumque.*

*Datum Romae apud S. Petrum suo Annulo Piscatoris die XVI Novembris MDCCCLXXXIII. Pontificatus Nostri Anno sexto<sup>29</sup>.*

Pro D.mo Card. Mertel  
A. Trinchieri Subst.

*(Translation)*

For perpetual remembrance. To better foster and promote the sacred mission in Patagonia, already for some time entrusted to the care and activities of the members of the Salesian Congregation, our beloved son John Bosco, founder and supreme moderator of the aforesaid Congregation, has requested that an apostolic vicariate be erected in the northern region of Patagonia. Greatly encouraged by the good done and the growth of the sacred missions, by virtue of the role of supreme apostolate entrusted to us in the Church of God, we have passed the examination of this request on to our venerable brothers the cardinals of the holy Roman Church responsible for the activities of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. Therefore, having carefully pondered everything regarding this matter, and as it is the opinion of our venerable brothers, we have judged it appropriate to accept the request.

We then, by virtue of our apostolic authority and by means of this document, create and declare erected the apostolic vicariate in the northern part of the aforesaid region, adding that also the central and as yet unexplored part of Patagonia be included in it. The borders of this apostolic vicariate of northern Patagonia will be: to the east the Atlantic ocean, to the west the mountains known in the vulgar tongue as “Les Cordiglieres”, in the north the Pampas peoples, to the south, central Patagonia. We wish and decree this, notwithstanding anything to the contrary... (the rest as is standard for such decrees!)

<sup>29</sup> The *brief* appointing Fr Cagliari as Vicar Apostolic was given on November 20 (MB XVI, 583).

From Rome, St Peter's, under the seal of the Fisherman, November 16, 1883, the sixth of our Pontificate.

For His Eminence Cardinal Mertel  
Trinchieri, *Substitute*

### **Apostolic Prefecture**

ASC A8420101 *Patagonia Merid.: aperturalerezione canonica*, copia ms, ed. in MB XVI 584.

#### *Decretum*

*Cum ad catholicae fidei propagationem in Patagoniae regionibus expedire visum fuerit Sacro Consilio Christiano nomini propagando ut Apostolica Praefectura ibidem erigeretur, E.mi ac R.mi Patres eiusdem Sacri consilii in Generali Conventu habito die 27 Augusti 1883 censuerunt statuer que, ut praedicta Praefectura in parte Meridionali Patagoniae erigeretur, quae insulas Malvinianas ac insulas circa sinus Magellanum existentes comprehendat. Huius tamen Praefecturae limites determinari in praesens non possunt cum regio illa adhuc explorata non sit in omnibus partibus.*

*Quam quidem in rem E.mi ac R.mi Patres praesens edi Decretum mandarunt.*

*Datum Romae ex Aed. S. Congregationis de Propaganda Fide die 16 Novembris 1883<sup>30</sup>.*

† Ioannes Card. Simeoni *Praefectus*  
Trinchieri, *Substitutus*

*(Translation)*

Since for the Propagation of the Catholic Faith in the regions of Patagonia, it has seemed appropriate to the sacred council responsible for the spreading of the name of Christ, that there be established there an Apostolic Prefecture, the eminent and reverend fathers of the same sacred council at their general

<sup>30</sup> Fr Fagnano was appointed Prefect Apostolic on December 2, 1883.

meeting held on August 27, 1883, considered it opportune and established that the aforesaid prefecture be erected in the southern part of Patagonia and would include the Malvinas Islands and the islands around the Magellan Straits. Nevertheless, the boundaries of this prefecture at the current moment cannot be defined since not all parts of the region have yet been explored.

For this decision, the eminent and reverend fathers have ordered publication of his decree.

Given in Rome, from the palace of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, on November 16, 1883.

† Giovanni Card. Simeoni, *prefect*  
D. Archbishop of Tiro, *secretary*

### 107. Circular to Cooperators

ASC A1770201 *Circolari, Inviti ad altri*, ms by another hand in 4 languages,  
with DB's signature.; ed. in E IV, pp. 360-363.

Turin, 15 October 1886

My worthy Cooperators,

My heart rejoices in being able to tell you, my dear Cooperators of the interesting news that comes from Patagonia and the many other missions already opened in South America, and at the same time tell you of plans for new enterprises, which because of the urgent needs of those far off populations, we need to begin as soon as possible.

After having travelled back and forth through Patagonia, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Cordilleras de los Andes, and crossed those famous mountains a good two times to arrive in Chile, and after having catechised and baptised various native tribes at the price of incredible dangers and efforts on the part of our missionaries, the time has arrived to think seriously of consolidating and perpetuating the good done up till now.

Since these tribes have been pacified and converted to the Faith, and having begun to enjoy the first fruits of a Christian and civilised life, they

cannot resign themselves to seeing the missionary only from time to time, calling them to a social life and the light of the Gospel.

Rightly they want them always in their midst to be directed, instructed and consoled by them and more especially to be assisted by them when they are sick and in danger of death.

We should not marvel then that Bishop Cagliero, vicar apostolic of Patagonia, does not have the courage to refuse these poor natives who are also his dear children in Jesus Christ, these missionaries and these just comforts. But he has neither personnel nor sufficient means to satisfy their ardent desires. Having to set up fixed residences for the missionaries in the Patagonian desert, where the natives have come together in colonies or villages, he needs, as you can well understand, a greater number of priests, catechists and Sisters, and many material means which are essential for social existence and divine worship.

These poor neophytes, despite their good will, cannot offer our missionaries anything else other than their lamentable poverty. They too need everything, right down to being clothed and maintained, especially at the beginning of their conversion. So the fate of the missionaries depends on the Pious Salesian Society and the charity of our Cooperators. Should we be disheartened? Oh no! Indeed let's redouble our efforts, so as not to allow those works to diminish which have already meant so much sweat and sacrifice.

Other than this it is good for you to know that, to ensure the result of the total conversion of Patagonia, we have already decided to open a way through from the western part of Chile, and already a small group of Salesians has gone there to found a house on the other side of the Cordilleras, in the city of Concepción, belonging to the Chilean Republic.

It is from there that groups of missionaries must leave to evangelise Araucania and western Patagonia, spreading then little by little into the Chiloe archipelago and Magellan, and into the territory of Tierra del Fuego, all populated by countless native tribes completely without any idea of religion and civilisation.

Fr Fagnano at the moment would have already gone to the Malvinas, and from there he will go to explore all the islands as far as Cape Horn, and there he will look at the most strategic points best suited for setting up the tents of the new soldiers of the Cross who will soon go down there to reach him.

You could never imagine, dear Cooperators, how many requests come to me from down there from our tireless missionaries and the people themselves, to send new and considerable reinforcements of men and money.

And to make better known the needs and satisfying condition, thanks be to God, in our missions in America our missionary Fr Louis Lasagna has come expressly from those parts, and he will leave no stone unturned to convince me to prepare another large expedition of Salesian missionaries and Sisters of Mary Help of Christians. He also needs a good number for the missions entrusted to him in the vast empire of Brazil, bigger in itself than the whole of Europe, with boundless regions populated solely by natives roaming through vast forests and hoping for centuries for a helping hand to take them out of their shameful barbarous ways in which they have lain buried and will remain so, for who knows how many more generations, unless the zeal of the missionaries, supported by the charity of the faithful, soon brings them help.

Urged on by these powerful motives we have decided to prepare for next November an expedition with a new group of missionaries, at least thirty of them, and even more if abundant help arrives from benefactors in time.

That said, it will not be difficult to understand, dear Cooperators, that to prepare the new band of conquerors of souls and propagators of God's kingdom on earth we need considerable expense for sacred items, clothing and linen, items for the church, school and dwelling and urgent expense for journeys by sea and land. So I just have to put all my hope in God and in your generosity, dear Cooperators, so that just as you have helped me with previous expeditions so you will not delay in helping me with this current one, despite the financial straits afflicting us.

So I am appealing once more to your charity. Listen to me and also to the voice of our dear missionaries and the cry coming from so many poor destitute people in those distant parts.

Therefore I beg our Cooperators to make this new expedition possible helping us with your fervent prayers and offerings of cloth or linen, rags or clothing, church items, sacred vessels, and even more so with money for tackling the expenses of journeys by sea and land, and finally with any alms your piety suggests and your situation permits.

At the Oratory in Turin where the new missionaries will leave from, we can gratefully receive by hand, or by rail, or by post, whatever your industrious charity will sent for this noble cause.

On the day chosen for the departure of the missionaries, before the farewell function, there will be a conference for Cooperators in the sanctuary of Mary Help of Christians. You will be notified in good time so those who want to can come. And while you are invited from this moment, I would not want to omit asking you to kindly seek out people you know and friends who also might want to come with their offering for this work of humanity and faith.

We will write their and your names in the register in our pious institute so we will remember them every day in our prayers, and to implore copious blessings on you and all those who help us, on their families and their work, certain that God will write them into the book of life, the book of the predestined, since it is the opinion of the great St Augustine that whoever effectively procures the salvation of souls ensures that of his own soul: *Animam salvasti, animam tuam praecelestinasti.*

May Mary Help of Christians, who is the mother and protectress of our missionaries and those poor natives, obtain from God every choicest spiritual and temporal blessing,

Yours most affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr J. Bosco

N.B. The charitable benefactors of our missions are asked to send their offerings directly to Don Bosco in Turin, via Cottolengo, N. 32.