

The Founding and Early Expansion of the Salesian Work in the San Francisco Area from Archival Documents

Part I. The Founding Era

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Foreword

Recently the Central Salesian Archives released the files of the Rua rectorate on some 1,750 microfiches.¹ This boon has made archival research in that rectorate possible even for students residing away from the Central Archives. As the Salesian Province of St. Andrew (U.S. West) prepares to celebrate the centenary of the Salesian work in San Francisco, I took the opportunity to peruse the newly released documents pertaining to that founding. I immediately realized their interest and their value, and decided to bring this material to my confreres' attention.

Since a critical edition of the documents (mostly correspondence) was not possible from microfiche reproduction (for example, one cannot provide physical descriptions of the papers), I decided merely to transcribe and translate the papers *carefully*, providing such historical and biographical comments as seemed appropriate.

During his recent stay in Rome, Brother John Rasor had the opportunity of working with some of this material directly from the files of the Central Archive. He produced at the time a critical edition of the Riordan-Rua letters, which he has kindly placed at my disposal.²

At about the same time there appeared in the pages of this journal an article by Father Michael Ribotta telling the story of the founding and of the early pioneers. He provides biographical sketches and other interesting details.³

¹ Archivio Salesiano Centrale, *Fondo Don Rua con annessi: Don Bosco (Complementi), Maria Domenica Mazzarello*. Microschede-Descrizione (Roma: [SDB], 1996. [FDR])

² John Rasor, *A Critical Edition of the Riordan-Rua Letters Leading to the Founding of the San Francisco Province*. Typescript (Rome: Salesian Pontifical University, Theology Department, Institute of Spirituality, 1994). [Rasor]

³ Michael Ribotta, "Discovering America: Father Raphael Piperni and the First

The archivist of the Salesian San Francisco province, Father Mario Mich, has kindly placed at my disposal the relevant papers held in that archive, some of which are authenticated copies of letters held in the archive of the Archdiocese of San Francisco.

As stated above, I propose to transcribe and translate all documentation relative to the beginnings of the Salesian work in San Francisco which is available to me; it is not my purpose to tell the story of the founding. Obviously, such documents when read in chronological sequence do tell part of the story; but it is not a continuous narrative story. Nor is it a complete story, for there are lacunae. For example, one would expect that the minutes of the meetings of the superior chapter held during the Rua period (1888-1910) would provide a detailed account of the founding. Disappointingly, nothing is recorded there on the subject.⁴ San Francisco comes up for discussion only occasionally after the founding.⁵ Perhaps this is explainable from the fact that the minutes themselves show notable gaps, during which, no doubt, requests were considered but went unrecorded.⁶

As a consequence we shall chiefly have to rely on the correspondence pertaining to the beginning of the work. But there are lacunae also in this area. In other words, a number of letters that would, if available, establish continuity in the correspondence, are not given in *FDR*. For example, although there are numerous letters by Father Rua to Father Valentine Cassini, none are found by the latter to Father Rua in the period of the founding. Perhaps the Cassini letters are located in a separate box in the Central Archive, and have not been reproduced in *FDR*.

The abundance of archival material necessitates presentation in two installments. The present installment, after an introduction dealing with

Salesian Missionaries in North America," *Journal of Salesian Studies* 5:1 (1994) 1-34. [*Ribotta*]

⁴ *FDR* 4,240 D8 - 4,251 A5. The minutes in Book I are by secretary John Baptist Lemoyne; Those in Book II show different hands, but are signed by pro-secretary Calogero Gusmano. [*Minutes I and II*]

⁵ Cf. *Minutes I*, p. 161, December 9 1897, *FDR* 4,242 C1-2, where the discussion deals with the permission required for building a church in a mission; *Minutes II*, p. 74, April 15, 1906, *FDR* 4,245 E11, where Father Rua suggests sending Bishop James Costamagna, who "can no longer ride a horse," to San Francisco "as superior;" *Minutes II*, 133, May 21, 1907, *FDR* 4,246 E10, where it is announced that Father Piperni has rebuilt the parish church [after earthquake and fire] and urges the building of a parish school.

⁶ For example there is a gap in the minutes from August 29, 1894 to November 9, 1895. Lemoyne explains: "The meetings held during this interval were not recorded in this book, but a record is to be found in various [departmental] offices, for reasons noted with the decisions taken at the time." [*FDR* 4,242 A1] The meaning of the last clause is not clear ("*per le conseguenze notate sulle deliberazioni prese*"). Other gaps occurring when negotiations for the founding would have been in progress remain unexplained.

“negotiations that failed,” will present the documents of the founding and early organization of the Salesian work in San Francisco. The period in question spans the years 1895-1897. A future installment will present documents referring to the expansion of the Salesian work to Corpus Christi church and to St. Joseph church in Oakland, and spanning the years 1898-1908.

Introduction

During the second half of the nineteenth, and in the early years of the twentieth century, the migratory movement between Europe and other parts of the world took on colossal proportions. It took place chiefly in three directions: (1) an estimated 50 million Europeans migrated to North America (the Catholics being mostly from France, Italy, Spain, Germany and Poland); (2) an estimated 20 million Europeans migrated to South and Central America (chiefly Spaniards, Portuguese and Italians); (3) a third large movement involving some 17 million people (chiefly Anglo-Saxon and Dutch) was directed toward South Africa and Australasia.⁷

Both the sending and the receiving countries were obviously concerned about the phenomenon; and so was the Church. Popes and Bishops called for protection and care of immigrant people. It is in this context that new religious congregations were founded for this specific purpose, and that existing religious congregations (especially those oriented toward the missions) were called upon to make a contribution. Don Bosco and his successors, Fr. Michael Rua in particular, readily responded to the call and undertook the care of immigrants in many cities of the Americas.

San Francisco had been a target of immigration for many years. In the 1890s, at the height of the migratory movement, San Francisco had the largest concentration of Italian immigrants on the West Coast. The Italian “colony,” established in North Beach and environs had a population of over 15,000. The Bay Area and immediate vicinity was home to some 50,000.

Wherever they settled, the immigrants formed communities held together by strong inner cultural bonds. The San Francisco community, like its even larger Buenos Aires counterpart, was composed mostly of people from the north of Italy, the Genoese being the largest minority. The leaders of the community were an elite of disillusioned revolutionaries, republicans of the Mazzini-Garibaldi stamp, or anarchists of the Bakunin variety. These people had begun to emigrate after the fall of the Roman republic (1849), and the flow continued during and after the unification of Italy under the Savoy monarchy (1861 and 1870). Mazzini died in 1872, Garibaldi in 1882, and Bakunin in 1876, but their spirit lived on. Opposition to traditional religion and to the Church, and bitter anticlericalism united all these people in a common cause. They naturally dominated

⁷ T. Stark, “Migration, International,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Ed. By an Editorial Staff at the Catholic University of America (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966) IX, pp. 830-833. [*New Catholic Encyclopedia*]

the mass of the population which was largely uneducated. This situation prevailed in most communities of Italian immigrants in cities of the Americas, such as Buenos Aires or New York.⁸

The care of the immigrant population had been a major pastoral concern of Archbishop William Patrick Riordan since his appointment in 1883.⁹ It was in this context that the archbishop addressed his request to Father Rua in Turin.

It was neither the first nor the last such request to come from the United States. During Don Bosco's last years a number of proposals were received for the establishment of Salesian foundations in American cities, for the care of immigrants and for other ministries.¹⁰

During the Rua rectorate such requests intensified, and brief discussions of the proposals appear in the minutes of the superior chapter. Likewise, the files in *FDR* under the heading, *Requests for Foundations*, record numerous instances, together with correspondence relating to the negotiations. The initiative stemmed mostly from local bishops, but sometimes also from priests and even from lay people. And it should be noted that not all these requests were for the care of Italian immigrants. Among other needs expressed we find vocational schools, juvenile homes, work among Amerindians, etc. These little known requests may be of interest to our readers.

⁸ Cf. Gianfausto Rosoli, "Impegno missionario e assistenza religiosa agli emigranti nella visione e nell'opera di Don Bosco e dei Salesiani," in *Don Bosco nella storia della cultura popolare*, ed. Francesco Traniello (Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1987) pp. 289-329, esp. 301ff. and 317ff.

⁹ William Patrick Riordan (1841-1914) attended Notre Dame University, the North American College in Rome, and the University of Louvain, where he earned a Master of Theology degree and was ordained in 1865. After serving as professor of theology at the seminary of St. Mary of the Lake, Chicago, and as pastor at Woodstock, Joliet and Chicago, Illinois, in 1883 he was named coadjutor bishop of San Francisco with right of succession. He succeeded Archbishop Joseph Sadoc Alemany in 1885. Archbishop Riordan's achievements as leader of the Catholic Church in northern California are too numerous to mention. Among them, the founding of St. Patrick's Seminary in Menlo Park and of Newman Clubs on California's university campuses testify to his pastoral concern, as does his abiding commitment to the care of immigrants. [Cf. J. T. Foudy, "San Francisco," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, XII, pp. 1022-1028].

¹⁰ For instance, from Boston, MA, Los Angeles, CA, Savannah, GA [cf. *FDB* 135 A11 - 136 A5; 159 A2-6; 180 C2 - D10; respectively]. A request to staff St. Vincent's Orphanage near San Francisco was made to Don Bosco by Archbishop Joseph Sadoc Alemany in 1869 or 1870, but nothing came of it [Cf. Michael Ribotta, "The Road Not Taken [...]," *Journal of Salesian Studies* 1:2 (1990, 47-67). A sheet containing points 8-13 of the Agreement has survived in *ASC*. It found its archival place with the San Francisco negotiations of 27 years later [*FDR* 3,346 E4-5]. It is not Don Bosco's holograph, and point No. 9 does not match Ribotta's text [*Ibid.*, pp. 58-59].

1. New York.— Requests were made for Salesians during Don Bosco's last years (1884-1888),¹¹ in 1894,¹² and between 1897 and 1909 for a larger field of Salesian activity than that already established at St. Brigid and Transfiguration parishes.¹³

2. Philadelphia, PA.— In 1896 and 1897 some thirty letters from Archbishop John Ryan, his chancellor, and other persons, request the Salesians for the care of Italian immigrants.¹⁴

3. Cleveland, OH.— Five letters from Bishop Ignatius Horstmann dated between 1902 and 1904 request Salesians to take charge of a juvenile home.¹⁵

4. Santa Fe, NM.— Three letters requesting Salesians for parish work are dated 1892 and 1893.¹⁶

5. Pittsburgh, PA.— Three letters request the Salesians for Italian and other immigrants.¹⁷

6. Chicago, IL.— Salesians are requested for the care of a Polish community.¹⁸

7. Natchez, MS.— Salesians are offered a mission among native Americans.¹⁹

8. Other requests came to Father Rua from Baltimore, MD (1896), Holyoke, MA (1896), Canada (1900), Galveston, TX (1903), Peoria, IL (1904).²⁰

¹¹ *FDR* 3,318 D7 - E5.

¹² *FDR* 3,318 E6 - 3,319 A1.

¹³ *FDR* 3,319 A2 - 3,320 D7. Repeatedly Archbishop Augustine Corrigan requests more Salesian priests for an expanded ministry. For example we read: "Archbishop Corrigan of New York, in [North] America, [...] has high praises for the Salesians who are working in that city [...] but he asks for three additional Salesians for full-time ministries. One would be assigned to meeting the Italian immigrants coming off the ships, to provide them with needed direction and advice. A second priest would be given the ministry at large to the more than 100,000 Italians in that city. A third priest is needed for Italian missions in country towns. Father Rua has [someone] reply that we have recently sent an additional priest to New York, but that we will do our utmost to meet the need." [*Minutes I*, p. 180, June 27, 1900, *FDR* 4,243 A4]. Another request is that Father Ernest Coppo, director and pastor at Transfiguration be released "to work at large for the preservation of the faith in New York" [*Minutes I*, pp. 485 and 498, January 30 and February 19, 1906, *FDR* 4,245 E 2 and 4].

¹⁴ *FDR* 3,062 D5 - 3,064 E4; *Minutes I*, pp. 150 and 151, June 22, and August 4, 1896, *FDR* 4,242 A 3 and 5.

¹⁵ *FDR* 3,052 E12 - 3,053 A9; *Minutes I*, pp. 199, 208 and 210, March 28, 1902, May 11 and October 7, 1903, *FDR* 4,243 D6 and E11, 4,244 A4.

¹⁶ *FDR* 3.137 B12 - C8.

¹⁷ *FDR* 3,111 C3-8.

¹⁸ *Minutes I*, p. 184, October 11, 1900, *FDR* 4,243 A12.

¹⁹ *Minutes I*, p. 154, January 4, 1897, *FDR* 4,242 A11.

²⁰ *FDR* 3,029 D2-3; 3,074 A7-11; 3,069 E8-9; 3,107 B4. The Canada request is

9. Portland, OR.— Portland's case is as unique as it is instructive, for it reveals the dynamics of protracted negotiations which ultimately failed. The Portland file in the "Request for Foundations" box of the *FDR* contains 18 items dated between 1903 and 1911;²¹ and the matter is taken up in 5 meetings of the superior chapter spaced over the years 1904-1911.

A letter of Archbishop Alexander Christie of Oregon City to Father Michael Borghino, newly appointed provincial residing in San Francisco, gives the "definite terms" of the proposal (implying an earlier request):

1°. I will deed to your order 300 acres of good land near Beaverton for an industrial school for boys. 2°. I will give your order 12 additional acres of land in the city of Portland, which the order can dispose of in any way it pleases for the best interest of the aforesaid school. On this property are three small houses. 3°. There is also some other valuable property recently left to the diocese by will, and when that is disposed of I will give a good portion to your order for the school in accordance with the will.—A state-law provides that any institution which gives a home to orphans shall receive \$50.00 a year for each child. [...]²²

An undated memorandum and proposal for acceptance by Salesian provincial Father Borghino (intended for Father Rua), speaks of additional possibilities for Salesian work in Portland, including the care of Italian immigrants in the area, and addresses the problem of personnel by offering himself for the task of the founding.²³ This is followed by a letter from Father Andrew Bergeretti, pastor of St. Joseph's in Oakland.²⁴ It is written to Father Rua in support of the founding

discussed in a meeting of the superior chapter: "We have a request from five missionary bishops in north-west Canada. The government has just given them thousands of acres of land, and they are begging us to establish an agricultural school for American natives. The superior chapter replies that we cannot accept the offer, because we are already over-committed. We might consider it a few years from now, perhaps in 1904." [*Minutes I*, p. 178, May 18, 1900, *FDR* 4,242 E11]

²¹ *FDR* 3,117 A8 - D9.

²² Archbishop Alexander Christie to Father Michael Borghino, Portland, Oregon, October 27, 1903, *FDR* 3,117 A8-9.

Michael Borghino (1855-1829), born near Turin, was ordained in 1889 in Montevideo, Uruguay. He later held the posts of vice-provincial and then provincial in the United States (1802-1809), and thereafter of provincial in Venezuela and of director at Bahia Blanca, Argentina, where he also served as visitor for the superior general. [*Bollettino Salesiano*, in E. Valentini et al., *Dizionario Biografico dei Salesiani* (Torino: Ufficio Stampa Salesiano, 1969), p. 49.] [*Dizionario Biografico*]

²³ *FDR* 3,117 B3-6.

²⁴ Father Andrew Bergeretti to Father Michael Rua, Oakland, June 6, 1904, *FDR* 4,117 C8.

Felix Andrew Bergeretti (1856-1909), after ordination in 1871 was assigned by the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith first to the diocese of Sydney, Aus-

and to accompany a detailed and persuasive presentation by a Father Alexander Cestelli, pastor of St. Michael's in Portland, urging acceptance of the archbishop's offer.²⁵

It was a most advantageous offer, and Father Rua was persuaded. We read in the minutes: "Father Rua moves that we open a house in Portland on the Pacific coast. The council members are against it, but defer when Father Rua insists."²⁶

Some months later, the archbishop personally and through a representative in San Francisco, renewed the offer and even added some new incentives. Lack of personnel is a problem, but Father Rua sees a solution. The minutes read:

The bishop of Portland urges acceptance, and the terms of the proposal are favorable enough. Perhaps it would do Father Borghino a lot of good if he were to switch to a more congenial job. Father Rua himself undertakes to write to Father Borghino. He will make it clear that there is no personnel available in Turin, but that the council is in favor of accepting the offer. Would he be willing to move to Portland and get the Salesian work started?²⁷

Apparently Father Borghino could not follow up on what he had himself suggested. In 1905 we find him residing as provincial in Troy, NY. In 1909 Father Michael Foglino replaced Father Borghino as provincial with residence in Hawthorne, NY. During this lull of some four years, the proposal was not shelved. Father Bergeretti, as we may gather, was to submit a draft of agreement and plans for the building of the school. In 1909 a new sally is recorded in the form of insistent letters to Father Rua from Archbishop Christie and Father Bergeretti. Father Rua and his council took the matter under advisement. We read in the minutes:

Father Bergeretti is asking for two priests for the Portland foundation [the school], and he wishes to know whether we have any intention of accepting the Italian parish which is being offered [apart from the school]. The reply is that

tralia, and subsequently to Sri Lanka, where he worked for eleven years and established many missionary stations. An architect of great ability, he built several churches, including the great cathedral in the capital city of Colombo. When the Sri Lanka missions were assigned to religious congregations, Father Bergeretti joined the work of the Holy Family of Bethlehem, and thereafter, with Father Anthony Belloni and Father Raphael Piperni, became a Salesian in 1894. After working for seven years in Venezuela, where he founded the first Salesian house, he was sent by Father Rua to San Francisco, as part of a group led by Father Michael Borghino, and assigned to St. Joseph's Portuguese Church in Oakland (1902), where he died on September 11, 1909. [Amedeo Rodinò, "Bergeretti, Andrea," in *Dizionario Biografico*, p. 36.]

²⁵ Father Alexander Cestelli to Very Rev. Father General, Oakland, CA, June 9, 1904, *FDR* 4,117 C9 - D1.

²⁶ *Minutes I*, p. 220, October 4, 1904, *FDR* 4,244 B11.

²⁷ *Minutes II*, p. 26, July 24-26, 1905, *FDR* 4,245 A11.

the superiors on the whole accept the proposal for a foundation. Father Bergeretti has already been instructed to supervise the building of the school. He was also asked to sketch out a draft agreement and to submit drawings for the building. Neither one nor the other has thus far been received at this office. We need an explanation. We need also to acquaint the new provincial [Father Foglino] of the whole affair. He should reach an understanding with Father Bergeretti, and then go to Portland as soon as possible. As for the Italian parish, we cannot accept it for lack of personnel.²⁸

The negotiations came to a halt when the archdiocesan council forbade the transfer of the property "to any religious order," and the archbishop notified Father Bergeretti and Father Rua of the new conditions. Father Rua must have replied that such a change was not acceptable, for the archbishop wrote with an air of finality:

Our council will not change the conditions which I wrote to you. [...] As you cannot accept the conditions of our council, I am directed by the council to obtain Brothers from some other order.²⁹

Father Bergeretti died on September 11, 1909, and Father Rua on April 6, 1910. In 1911 another request was made to Father Paul Albera, by the Archbishop through Father Raphael Piperni, to obtain Salesians for an Italian church in Portland, but nothing came of it.

The Portland affair is a well attested, typical example of negotiations that failed. The great promises at the offset seemed to evaporate at the end. By contrast the San Francisco negotiations are a typical example, also well attested, of a transaction that came to fruition. The offer was more modest and limited in scope. But the parties maintained faith throughout, and it had success.

It will now be our task to set out the documentation.

San Francisco (1895-1897)

As mentioned above, one of Archbishop Riordan's pastoral concerns since his appointment in 1883 was the care of immigrants, for San Francisco had been a target city in the great migration of Europeans toward North America. In the early 1890s the Italian colony numbered some 15,000.

First to care for Italians (in 1870) was a certain Father Valentini, a diocesan priest at St. Francis of Assisi church on Columbus. He had help from Jesuit priests from St. Ignatius' College (now the University of San Francisco). Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish on Broadway served Italian as well as the Spanish-speaking immigrants from its opening in 1875 until early in 1884. In that year, SS. Peter and Paul church was built at 1600 Dupont Street, corner of Filbert. It

²⁸ *Minutes II*, pp. 215-216, February 16, 1909. *FDR* 4,248 B8-9.

²⁹ Archbishop Alexander Christie to Father Michael Rua, Portland, Oregon, April 5, 1909, *FDR* 3,117 D2.

was the first church for Italians in the city.³⁰ Fr. Carlo Franchi was its first pastor. Then two Italian priests, Fr. Raphael De Carolis (Decaroli) and Fr. Cherubino De Romanis, administered it until the arrival of the Salesians.³¹

I. First Steps

From the correspondence to be quoted below it emerges that Father De Carolis, wanting to return to Italy, had asked to be relieved. Consequently, the archbishop, so it appears, was seeking to put the care of the Italian community on a permanent basis by entrusting it to some religious congregation. This was the situation in 1893, when Father Joseph Sasia, S.J., after completing terms of service in San Francisco was returning to Turin.³² The archbishop asked him to explore the possibility of obtaining the services of some such congregation. As may be learned from a letter to be quoted below, Father Sasia had contacted Father Rua, the Salesian rector major, on the matter and had Father Rua's word that the Salesians would undertake the mission by 1896.

1. Father Joseph Sasia, S.J., to Archbishop Patrick W. Riordan, Turin, October 22, 1895.

Recalling an earlier request, he notifies the archbishop that Father Rua is willing to send Salesians to San Francisco; he introduces Father Angelo Piccono who would call on the archbishop in San Francisco.³³

³⁰ See Deanna Paoli Gumina, "Sts. Peter and Paul's: The Church of the Fishermen", in *U. S. Catholic Historian* 6:4 (Fall, 1987), p. 374, in *Rasor*, p. 7.

³¹ *New Italian Church of Sts. Peter and Paul*, commemorative booklet of 1924, p. 41. A copy is kept in ASC Box F548, folder CA 9620, in *Rasor*, p. 7. Cf. also Eugene Ceria, *Annali della Società Salesiana* vol. 2 (Turin: SEI 1943), p. 589.

³² Joseph Sasia, S.J., was one of a group that came to California after the Jesuits were expelled from Piedmont in the wake of the liberal revolution. These Jesuits went on to found colleges (later, universities). Father Sasia served two terms as president of St. Ignatius College (later, University of San Francisco), and was at the time vice-provincial of the Jesuit Oregon and California province. [*Ribotta*, pp. 5-6, note 5]

³³ Archive of the San Francisco Province, copy from the Archive of the Archdiocese of San Francisco. All in Father Sasia's hand.

Angelo Piccono (1848-1913), born near Turin, served in the police force in Turin up until 1878, when he decided to join the Salesians. He was ordained a priest that same year, and in 1881 he was sent to the missions in Argentina. In 1892, with four other Salesians (among whom Father Raphael Piperni) he founded the Salesian work in Mexico, and in 1896 he founded the Salesian work in San Salvador. He returned to Italy in 1901, where he died in 1913. [Adone Cicuta, "Piccono, Angelo," in *Dizionario Biografico*, p. 222.]

Torino, Via Stampatori, N. 4.
October 22.d, 1895

May it please your Grace[.]

Most Rev.d Archbishop[.]

When I left California more than two years ago, your Grace requested me to try to secure the services of some Religious Order or Congregation of Italian Priests for the administration of the Italian Parish dei Santi Pietro e Paolo [*sic*]. Some time after my arrival, I informed you that V. Rev. Fr. Rua, the successor of Don Bosco, would likely be ready to accept that charge, and send two or three of his Salesian Missionaries in 1896. In case your Grace should yet entertain the same idea, there is now offered a fine opportunity of realizing your project by transacting this business with the bearer of the present, Rev. Angel J. Piccono, who is a Salesian Priest, duly authorized by his Superior, Rev. D. Rua, to begin negotiation with your Grace. Rev. Piccono is on his way to Mexico, and having requested me to introduce him to your Grace, I took the liberty to do so.

I avail myself of this opportunity to renew my sincere thanks to your Grace for all the kindness you invariably showed to me, and for which I shall ever feel most grateful. Next January I begin the third and, may be, last year of my term: hence it may be that two or three years hence I shall again become your diocesan.

Joseph Sasia, S.J.

2. Fr. Angelo G. Piccono to Archbishop Patrick W. Riordan, Turin, October 22, 1895.

He notifies the archbishop that his trip to Mexico has been delayed. He encloses Sasia's letter of introduction and asks the archbishop for an interview.³⁴

My Lord Archbishop,

As I shall not be able to reach Mexico before December next, I take the liberty of sending you per post the hereunto united introductory letter, begging your Grace to let me know at my address in Mexico — Apartado del Correo, N° 927 — if I may have the honour of being received by You in February or March next in connection with the matter alluded to in Father Sasia's letter.

With best thanks in anticipation of the desired favour, I beg to kiss your sacred hand and implore your Pastoral Benediction.

I am, My Lord Archbishop,

Your Grace's humble and most ob[e]d[ient] servant,

Angelo G. Piccono

Turin, Salesian Oratory

22nd October, 1895

³⁴ Archive of the San Francisco Province, copy from the Archive of the Archdiocese of San Francisco. Father Piccono's meeting with Archbishop Riordan is confirmed by the latter's letter of July 2, 1896 to Father Rua, and by chronicles of Salesian houses in Mexico, cited in *Rasor*, p. 13.

Father Piccono met with Archbishop Riordan in late June 1896, and apparently there was a meeting of the minds, for the archbishop responded without delay.

3. Archbishop Patrick W. Riordan to Father Michael Rua, San Francisco, July 2, 1896.

Having met with Father Piccono, he presents the official request, with the proviso that the Italian Fathers will confine their ministry to the Italian immigrants.³⁵

[Printed letterhead:] St. Mary's Cathedral, / 1100 Franklin Street.
San Francisco, Cal. July 2nd 1896.

Very Rev. D. Michael Rua, Sup^r,

Very Rev. and dear Father,

Rev[.] Father Piconio [Piccono] of your Society called this week, and stated that he would write urging the foundation of your Fathers in this city. I now write asking the foundation to be made. This understood however that the work of the Fathers will be among the Italians of this City and diocese, and that they will confine themselves exclusively to the italians [*sic*] and not to other nationalities in this City. It would produce endless confusion if they were anxious to attend to other people besides Italians who are numerous enough to occupy all their time and zeal. I believe that there is a great field for the Fathers in this City and state, and great prospects for the future. The Fathers who come here should be Italians, not English or Irish who speak Italian. In case of the acceptance of the foundation, I will send you the amount sufficient to defray the travelling expenses.

I wish you would answer this as soon as possible, and I hope favor[a]bly to my petition[.]

Sincerely Yours[.]

+P[.] W[.] Riordan

Archbishop of San Francisco

[Notation in Father Rua's hand:] [Father Charles] Buss.³⁶ [Use] the better stationery. We received Father Piccono's letter and also yours of the 2nd[?]³⁷.

³⁵ ASC, Works Established, FDR 3,346 E6-7. All in the archbishop's large, florid hand. He often uses the period where we would expect a comma. I take the liberty of correcting this procedure in transcribing the archbishop's letters.

³⁶ Charles Louis Buss (1873-1938) was born in London, made his novitiate and his profession as a Salesian at Foglizzo (Turin) in 1891. He spent the next few years at the office of the *Salesian Bulletin* in Turin, and on the English-language staff of the superior chapter. In that capacity, during the period of the San Francisco negotiations, he acted as Father Rua's secretary for the latter's correspondence with Archbishop Riordan. He was ordained in 1897, and in 1901 he was assigned to San Francisco. He served as associate at Corpus Christi and SS. Peter and Paul, and in 1907 again at Corpus Christi as pastor. Having taken ill, he returned to England in 1912, and subsequently served as military chaplain during the First World War. From 1919 to 1923 he was director in Battersea, London, and then returned to the United

Thank [the archbishop]. We will gladly accede to his request. By the end of the current [year] or by the beginning of 1897 we will send 6 Salesians, namely, 3 priests, 1 seminarian, and 2 brothers. We will instruct them to work only with the Italian [immigrants].

[Notation by Father Buss:] Replied as above, July 23, 1896.

[Notation in Father Rua's hand:] Buss. Carta di rispetto — Ricevemmo lett[era] di D. Piccono[,] pur la V[ostra] del 2 [?] - Ringr[azia] Ci dispon[iamo] vol[entieri] ai suoi ordini - Pel fine del corr[ente] o primi del 97 mander[emo] 6 Sal[esiani] cioè 3 Sac[erdoti] 1 cher[ico] 2 laici - Raccoman[der]emo vivam[ente] di occup[arsi] solo degli Ital[iani]

[Notation by Father Buss:] Risp[osto] quanto sopra — 23 - 7 - '96[.]

4. Archbishop Patrick W. Riordan to Father Michael Rua, San Francisco, CA, August 10, 1896.

Grateful for the response, the archbishop speaks of the needs of the mission and of travel arrangements.³⁸

[Printed letterhead:] St. Mary's Cathedral, / 1100 Franklin Street.
San Francisco, Cal. Aug 10th 1896.

Very Rev. Father Michael Rua.

Very Rev[.] dear Father[.]

I thank God that you are able to send your Missionaries to this distant Coast. I am confident that they will do an immense amount of good among the Italian people of the State. One of them at least should be a very good preacher, as people are attracted by the eloquent exposition of the Christian doctrine. It will be necessary to send you the amount for the transportation of the band of Missionaries. I shall make enquiries [sic] within a few days, and ascertain which route is preferable, and inform you.

Sincerely Yours[.]

+ P[.] W[.] Riordan[.] Archbishop, S. F.

5. Archbishop Patrick W. Riordan to Father Michael Rua, San Francisco, CA, August 11, 1896.

He asks Father Rua to draft an agreement, emphasizes that the Salesians in San Francisco must confine their ministry to Italian immigrants, and speaks of possible routes for the missionaries' trip.³⁹

States where he served as pastor in various parishes on the east and west coasts. He died in Paterson, N.J. at the age of 65. [Mortuary Letter by Father Modesto Valenti; John Dixon, *The Dynamics of Growth [...]* (Roma: LAS, 1991), *passim*]

³⁷ The "2" may refer to the date of a letter from the archbishop, or to the date of letters from both the archbishop and Father Piccono, as Ceria construes it in *Annali* 2, p. 588.

³⁸ ASC, Works Established, FDR 3,346 E8. All in the archbishop's hand.

³⁹ ASC, Works Established, FDR 3,346 E9-10. All in the archbishop's hand.

[Printed letterhead:] St. Mary's Cathedral, / 1100 Franklin Street.
San Francisco, Cal. Aug 11th 1896.

Very Rev[.] dear Father Rua, Sup^r.

It would be advisable before taking charge of the Italian parish in the City that we should have a perfect understanding of what the Fathers have to do, and what they must refrain from doing. If you will draw up a form of agreement and send it to me for my approval I will return it to you with my signature. I can not permit any interference with the English parishes of the City. There is plenty of work to be done among the Italians, and splendid results will follow the work of the Fathers if they confine themselves to that portion of the vineyard which will be committed to their Care. Should they interfere with the parishes of others, trouble and confusion will ensue. I have made some enquiries [*sic*] as to the best way to reach here. One way is from Genoa to New York, and then across the country to San Francisco. Another way is from Genoa to Panama by the La Veloce steamship Co. and then from Panama here by steamer.⁴⁰ Find out the best way to come and tell me in your letter, and state what it will cost per Capita. I can probably obtain cheaper rates when I know the route.

Sincerely Yours[.]
+P. W. Riordan

Father Rua must have acted without delay to have the agreement drafted. Fathers Celestine Durando and Father Julius Barberis would be the persons charged with that task.⁴¹ Meanwhile a letter from Archbishop Riordan arrived with a request regarding the date of the missionaries' departure.

6. Archbishop Patrick W. Riordan to Father Michael Rua, San Francisco, CA, September 15, 1896.

⁴⁰ Before the Panama canal was built, an overland route across the isthmus, from Colón to Panama City, was used.

⁴¹ Celestine Durando (1840-1907), a companion of Dominic Savio, was one of the co-founders of the Salesian Society in 1859, and was ordained in 1864. He authored textbooks and a Latin dictionary, and was general editor of the series, *Library of Italian Classics*. He served as provincial and as a member of the superior chapter from 1865 until his death. Processing requests for new foundations was his special responsibility. [Eugenio Ceria, "Durando, Celestino," in *Dizionario Biografico*, pp. 113-114]

Julius Barberis (1847-1927), born near Turin, became a Salesian in 1865 and was ordained in 1870. He was appointed first novice master in 1879, and in 1892 novice master general (that is, director of formation) for the whole Society. He was active as a teacher, chronicler, writer, and secretary. [Alessio Barberis, *Don Giulio Barberis [...]* (San Benigno:Scuola Tipografica Don Bosco, 1932); Also E. Ceria, *Profili dei Capitolari salesiani [...]* (Colle Don Bosco: Libreria Dottrina Cristiana, 1951), pp. 305-324]

The archbishop asks the missionaries to delay their departure, for he will be out of town for an extended period of time.⁴²

[Printed letterhead:] St. Mary's Cathedral, / 1100 Franklin Street.
San Francisco, Cal. Sept 15 1896.

Very Rev dear Father Rua Sup^f,

I received a letter last evening from Very Rev[.] Father Lasia [Sasia] of your city, in which he states that the Fathers would leave Turin in October for this City. I write to say that it would be advisable for the Fathers not to start from Turin until toward the end of the year or even in the beginning of January. I intend to be absent from the City until about December and it is necessary that I should be here when the Fathers arrive. Besides I must make provision for the present Rector which I can easily do by the time indicated.⁴³ I arranged this with Father Piconio [Piccono] when he was here.

Sincerely Yours[.]

+ P. W. Riordan

II. Form of Agreement

7. We have a preliminary draft of agreement in the hand of Father Barberis, with correction by Father Rua.⁴⁴

Preliminary Draft of Agreement

With the aim of providing assistance to the Italian immigrants living in San Francisco, California, the following convention is established between His Excellency, the Most Rev. Bishop....., and the Rev. Father Rua, superior general of the Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales.

1. His Excellency Bishop.....entrusts to the Salesians the Italian parish presently existing in the city of San Francisco.

2. [His Excellency] shall defray travel expenses, and expenses for basic needed items, for the Salesians who will leave in December 1896.

3. The Rev. Father Rua will send for the present two priests, one seminarian and one brother to take charge of said parish, and as circumstances permit he will open an oratory for Sundays and holy days, day and evening school, and later also a vocational boarding school [Rua adds:] *especially* for homeless children.

4. [Father Rua] restricts the Salesian's sacred ministry to the care of Italian immigrants.

⁴² ASC, Works Established, FDR 3,346 E11.

⁴³ The Rector referred to is the pastor of SS. Peter and Paul, Father Raphael De Carolis.

⁴⁴ ASC, Works Established, FDR 3,347 A8-9.

Abbozzo di Convenzione

Nel desiderio di provvedere al bene degli Italiani dimoranti in S[an] Francisco di California, tra S[ua] E[ccellenza] Rev[erend]is[ima] M[onsignor].....e il Sig[nor] D[on] Rua[,] superiore generale della pia [Pia] Società di S. Francesco di Sales interviene la seguente convenzione[.]

1° Sua Eccellenza M[onsignor]r.....offre ai Salesiani la parrocchia degli Italiani esistente nella città di S[an] Francisco[.]

2° Provvede alle spese del viaggio e delle prime indispensabili provviste ai Salesiani che verranno nel Dicembre prossimo 1896[.]

3° Il Sig[nor] D[on] Rua manderebbe per ora due preti, un chierico ed un laico a prender cura di detta parrocchia ed a misura che si potrà ~~si~~ aprirà Oratorio festivo - scuole diurne e serali e poi anche ospizio e scuole di Arti e mestieri [Rua adds:] specialmente pei giovanetti abbandonati[.]

4° Limita ai salesiani ~~che manda ad~~ [Rua corrects:] di esercitare il Sacro ministero in favore degli Italiani[.] —

5° Questa convenzione sarà duratura in perpetuo se non avvengano motivi gravi che richiedano revisione di comune accordof[.]

[Provision No. 5 is crossed out.]

Father Rua then wrote a note to Seminarian Buss.

8. Father Michael Rua to Seminarian Charles Buss, Foglizzo, October 2, 1896.

He asks Seminarian Buss to translate into English the draft of agreement to be sent to the archbishop.⁴⁵

Foglizzo, October 2, 1896

Dear Father Buss,

Please translate the agreement as set down on the back of this sheet and send it to the bishop of San Francisco. If I should be away, have it signed [with my signature] by Father Lago.⁴⁶ In your letter please specify that although I have signed the Agreement we are ready to add to it and modify it as His Excellency might suggest.

May the Lord bless you.

Affectionately yours in Jesus and Mary,
Father Michael Rua

Foglizzo 2 - 10 - 96

Caro D[on] Buss.[,]

Puoi mandare al Vescovo di S[an] Francisco la traduzione della retro-descritta convenzione, che farai firmare da D[on] Lago, se io non sarò a casa. Nella lettera dirai che la mando firmata, ma che però siam disposti ad

⁴⁵ ASC, Works Established, FDR 3,347 A10.

⁴⁶ Angelo Lago (1834-1914), a pharmacist by profession, joined the Salesians in 1873 and was ordained in 1877. He worked in Father Rua's office, and later as private secretary to Father Paul Albera. [*Bollettino Salesiano*, in *Dizionario Biografico*, p. 163] He "had Father Rua's signature."

ammettere quelle aggiunte e modificazioni che S[ua] E[ccellenz] crederà opportune.

*Il Signore ti benedica col
Tuo aff[ezionatissimo] in G[esù] e M[aria],
Sac[erdote] Michele Rua*

9. Father Rua also set down points for Seminarian Buss' letter to the archbishop, with which the agreement was to be enclosed.⁴⁷

[Secretary's note to Buss:] Reply in accordance with the following points. To be signed: Father Rua. [date:] October 5, 1896. Enclosure: Draft of Agreement.

1. Thank the archbishop for the information.
2. We hope to be able to send for the moment two priests, one seminarian, and one brother.
3. Purpose [of the mission:] the care of Italian immigrants, with church, oratory on Sundays and holy days, evening classes, and when feasible a school for apprentices and poor boys who wish to study.
4. The trip [is to be by boat] from Genoa to New York, and from there on by railway. ~~We can obtain discounted tickets for the boat trip. See if you can get the same for the railway trip.~~ [Rua strikes through and corrects:] Let [the archbishop] try to get us the highest possible discounts both for the ocean voyage and for the overland journey.
5. The government of Colombia granted 2,000 francs per person to cover traveling expenses, and expenses for the wardrobe: clothes, linen, books, etc. It adds up to a lot of money.

[Marginal note by Buss in Italian:] We already discussed the matter of discounts in an earlier letter. How are we to reply to the second letter? Rev. Father Durando wishes Father Rua to be consulted before a reply is made. Charles Buss.

[Secretary's note:] Rispondere quanto segue — firm[are] D[on] Rua — 5 - 10 - '96 — Aggiuntovi l'abozzo di Convenzione.

[Points for a reply:]

- 1° Ringraziamo delle notizie[.]
- 2° Speriamo poter mandare per ora due sacerdoti, un chierico ed un coadiutore.
- 3° Scopo: la cura degli italiani, chiesa, oratorio festivo, scuole serali e quando si potrà un ospizio per artigiani e studenti poveri.
- 4° Viaggio Genova New York[,] e poi Ferrovia; ~~per Mare possiamo già ottenere riduzione; si ottenga ribasso per ferrovia.~~ [Rua strikes through the preceding and corrects:] Veda di ottenerci le maggiori riduzioni che potrà per mare e per terra.

⁴⁷ ASC, Works Established, FDR 3,347 A5.

5° Il Governo della Colombia assegnò per spese di viaggio Fr[anchi] 2000 ciascuno; dovendo[si] provvedere corredo intiero; abiti, libri, biancheria ecc. la spesa è piuttosto grave.

[Marginal note by Fr. Charles Buss:] Si è già parlato in una lettera antecedente intorno al % sconto. Come si risponde poi alla 2ª lettera? Il Sig[nor] D[on] Durando desidera che veda il Sig[nor] D[on] Rua prima di rispondere — Buss Carlo.

With the above instructions in mind, Seminarian Buss styled the following letter to the archbishop.

10. Father Michael Rua to Archbishop Patrick W. Riordan, Turin, October 5, 1896.

He formally accepts the mission among Italian immigrants in San Francisco, and submits the "Form of Agreement" for the archbishop's approval.⁴⁸

[Printed letterhead:] Oeuvres de Don Bosco / Oratoire Saint-François de Sales /
32, Rue Cottolengo/ Turin,

Ce. October 5th 1896

To the Most Rev. Dr. Riordan / Archbishop of San Francisco / United States of America

My Lord Archbishop,

Owing to my absence from Turin when Your Grace's esteemed favours arrived, I was unable to reply immediately as I should have desired. I now undertake to fulfill this duty.

My grateful thanks are due to Your Grace for the kind welcome my letter received at your hands. For the present[,] two priests, a cleric, and a lay brother have been destined for the Mission Your Grace deigns to confide to our humble Society. Their labours will be confined to the Italian population of San Francisco, in whose behalf they will exercise their sacred ministry. They will, moreover, attend to their moral and religious education by means of the Festive Oratory and Night Schools; and build an Institute, as soon as they are in a position to do so, for artisans and students from among the poorer classes. In compliance with Your Grace's desire I have drawn up a form of Agreement which I enclose with the present letter and submit for Your Grace's inspection. Although it bears my signature, it will be my care and duty to see that those additional items or modifications Your Grace deems it convenient to make, be attended to.

With regard to the journey I think the best way will be from Genova to New York by sea, thence to San Francisco by rail. The sum expended by the Government of Columbia [*sic*], a few years ago, in behalf of our Missionaries, was 2,000 francs per head, for the journey alone, without taking into consideration

⁴⁸ Archive of the San Francisco Province, copy from the Archive of the Archdiocese of San Francisco. In Seminarian Buss' hand.

the expenses involved in providing outfits, linen, books, etc. for the Missionaries. As Your Grace will doubtless be able to obtain a greater reduction on the fares, etc., I leave the whole affair in Your Grace's hands.

Begging to be excused for my delay in replying, and humbly imploring the pastoral blessing, I have the honour to be,

My Lord Archbishop,

Your Grace's devoted servant in Xto [in Christ][,]

[in Rua's hand:] Michael Rua

Superior-General

P.S. I have just received Your Grace's letter of the 15th of September, and I beg to assure Your Grace that our Confrères shall not set out until the end of December or the beginning of the coming year.

[Enclosure:] Form of Agreement⁴⁹

The following Form has been drawn up between the Most Rev. Patrick W. Riordan, D.D., Archbishop of San Francisco and the Very Rev. Michael Rua, Superior General of the Society of St. Francis de Sales[,] in order to contribute to the religious welfare of the Italian population in the Diocese of San Francisco;[:]

1. His Grace Dr. Riordan: (a) will consign to the Salesians the Italian Parish Church of San Francisco; (b) will provide for the four Salesians who leave Turin for San Francisco in December 1896, the expenses of the journey and their indispensable outfit.

2. The V. Rev. Michael Rua: (a) will send, for the present, two priests, a cleric, and a lay-brother to take charge of the aforesaid Parish Church, and, when circumstances permit, to open a "Festive Oratory", Day and Night Schools, to be followed by an Institute of Arts and Trades especially for poor and abandoned boys; (b) obliges the Salesians to confine their labours to the Italian portion of the population of San Francisco.

Signed[:]

Signed [in Rua's hand:] Michael *Rua*, S.S. [not legible in copy]

Archbishop Riordan's response was not long delayed.

11. Archbishop Patrick W. Riordan to Father Michael Rua, San Francisco, November 23, 1896.

He accepts the terms of agreement in accordance with Canon Law, and comments on travel arrangements.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Archive of the San Francisco Province, copy from the Archive of the Archdiocese of San Francisco.

⁵⁰ ASC, Works Established, FDR 3,346 E12 - 3,347 A1. All in Archbishop Riordan's hand.

[Printed letterhead:] St. Mary's Cathedral, / 1100 Franklin Street.
San Francisco, Cal. Nov[.] 23, 1896.

Very Rev. and dear Father Rua,

I have just returned home after an absence of nearly two months. Hence the delay in receiving and answering your letter. The formula of Agreement is sufficiently satisfactory provided you add, that the relation of the parish to the Archbishop and his relation to it are to be governed by the Constitution of Leo XIII "Romanos Pontifices." This Constitution has been applied by the present Pontiff to the Churches of this Country and adopted by all religious Communities holding parish Churches. You have selected the best route to this City namely from Genoa to New York, and then across to this City. I will make arrangements here that the Fathers may obtain tickets in New York at 1/2 rates and will write you next week, giving the name and address in New York of the Rail Road office. The Fathers will not need much of an outfit. Every[thing] they will need, can gradually be obtained here. The parish is large, and if properly administered will amply provide all things necessary to the priests in charge of it. So that less than the Columbean [*sic*] Government gave will be sufficient to come here. The Fathers need not leave until after Jan[.] 1st. I send money x c [by check?] next week.

Sincerely Yours[.]
+ P[.] W[.] Riordan

III. Gathering the Team for the Mission Under Father Raphael Piperni's Leadership

In his *Autobiographical Memoir*, Father Piperni relates how he was summoned and given charge of the mission, and quotes Father Rua's letter *verbatim*.⁵¹

12. Father Michael Rua to Father Raphael Piperni, September 8, 1896.

⁵¹ Raphael Piperni (1842-1920), was ordained in 1867. After some priestly and teaching activity in his diocese (Campobasso, Molise, Italy), he attended the Missionary Institute of the Congregation for the Propagation of the faith, and in 1876 as an apostolic missionary he joined Father Anthony Belloni at the orphanage the latter had founded in Bethlehem, which became known as the Work of the Holy Family. Between 1877 and 1890 he traveled throughout Europe and the Americas to raise funds for Father Belloni's charitable undertaking. When the Work of the Holy Family was taken over by the Salesian Society in 1891, Father Piperni, with Father Belloni and Father Bergeretti, joined the Salesian Society. As a Salesian Father Piperni (with Father Piccono and others) started the Salesian work in Mexico in 1892. It is from the orphanage of Puebla which he founded and directed, that Father Rua called him in 1896. His distinguished service at the Church of SS. Peter and Paul in San Francisco is in the public record. In 1927 Father Piperni retired to Richmond, CA, where he passed away in 1930. [*Autobiographical Memoir* (see below); Ruffillo Uguccioni, *Un missionario di tre continenti: don Raffaele Piperni salesiano* (Lecture Cattoliche, No. 1160. Torino: SEI 1949); *Ribotta*, pp. 12-17]

He calls Father Piperni from Puebla, Mexico, to Turin, to muster his team and undertake the mission in San Francisco.⁵²

Dear Father Piperni,

I wish hereby to notify you without delay of the decision taken by myself and the superior chapter of our Congregation to entrust to you the foundation of a Salesian house in the city of San Francisco, California. The Archbishop of that city, Mgr. P. Riordan, has for quite some time been asking for the Salesians. Your mission is to be the spiritual care of the many Italian immigrants in that city.

I am enclosing your successor's letter of appointment. Hand over to him the government of your house, and then come to Turin as soon as possible to muster the confreres who are to be your companions on this mission.

Turin, September 8, 1896

Father Michael Rua

Carissimo P. Piperni,

Mi affretto a comunicarle che piacque a me e a questo Capitolo Superiore della nostra Congregazione di affidare a Lei la fondazione di una Casa Salesiana nella città di San Francisco, Cal., da tanto tempo sollecitata da quell'Arcivescovo Mgr. P. Riordan, per l'assistenza spirituale dei molti Italiani emigrati in quella città. Rimetta la direzione nelle mani del suo successore, del quale va qui annessa la nomina, e venga a Torino per prendere seco i suoi compagni di Missione, al più presto possibile.

Torino, Settembre 8 del 1896.

Sac[erdote] M[ichele] Rua.

Father Piperni continues his narrative (in the third person):

He [Piperni] arrived in Turin on the last day of January, 1897. Preparations for the new mission to San Francisco began immediately. The confreres assigned to go with him were Father Valentine Cassini (now in Buenos Aires), the seminarian Joseph Oreni, and the brother Nicholas Imieliński.

On February 17, 1897, the group left Turin. In addition to his fatherly blessing, the Very Rev. Father Rua, Superior General, deigned to give the group a personally written message. It sets forth the purpose of the Salesian mission to San Francisco. The document is herewith attached.⁵³

⁵² *Autobiographical Memoir*, p. 9. The Archive of the San Francisco Province holds three typewritten memoirs authored by Father Piperni. The first memoir (12 pages) describes his career by stages up to 1906. [*Autobiographical Memoir*] The second memoir (7 pages) describes the beginning of the Salesian work in San Francisco, the earthquake and the reconstruction. [*Mission Memoir*] He authored a third and longer memoir, also biographical in character, in which he describes his activities (chiefly fund raising), as a priest of the Work of the Holy Family of Nazareth.

⁵³ *Autobiographical Memoir*, p. 10. In his second memoir, Father Piperni specifies that Father Cassini, who had been prefect in a Salesian school in Buenos Aires, Argentina, was at the time in Turin for a period of convalescence. He adds that

13. Father Michael Rua to the four Salesians departing for San Francisco, Turin, February 16, 1897⁵⁴

My dearest Sons in Christ,

As I am sending you out to undertake a great task in San Francisco, California, I extend to you my paternal blessing:

May God deign to bless you and your works; may he cause you to grow and multiply like the stars of heaven and the sands of the seashore, that you may save the greatest possible number of souls and that the kingdom of Jesus Christ may be extended to all the regions of the earth.

Do not forget your brethren in your holy prayers and sacrifices, and above all remember me to God.

Turin[,]
16 February, 1897
Yours in Jesus and Mary[,]
Rev. Mich. Rua

[Printed letterhead:] Oratorio / di / S. Francesco di Sales / Torino,
Via Cottolengo, n. 32

both Seminararian Oreni and Brother Imieliński were stationed at Valsalice. [*Mission Memoir*, p. 1]

Valentine Cassini (1851-1922) enrolled at the Oratory as an apprentice and later as a student, and became a Salesian in 1871. Ordained a priest in 1875, he went to South America with the first Salesian missionary expedition. He later served as director in Salesian schools. He revisited Italy in 1887 as Don Bosco lay dying, and again in 1896 to see his aged mother and for a period of convalescence. In San Francisco, after one year at SS. Peter and Paul, he became curate and then pastor of Corpus Christi. Never well in health, in 1903 he returned to Argentina, where he worked in a Salesian School in Bahia Blanca and later as associate parish priest in Buenos Aires, where he died. [*Bollettino Salesiano*, in *Dizionario Biografico*, pp. 74-75]

Joseph Oreni (1874-?), born at Treviglio (Bergamo, Italy), professed as a Salesian in the early 1890s and was a seminarian at Valsalice (Turin) in 1897, when he joined the group leaving for San Francisco. He was ordained a priest at SS. Peter and Paul in 1900. Shortly thereafter, in 1901, he was assigned to an Italian parish in Venezuela. He left the Congregation in 1915. [*Rasor*, p. 14; *Ribotta*, p. 11].

Nicholas Imieliński (1873-1948), born in Poland, professed as a Salesian in September 1896, and some six months later joined the San Francisco group. At SS. Peter and Paul he served for a time as cook, and as sacristan until his death, May 26, 1948. [*Rasor*, p. 14; *Ribotta*, p. 11] Shortly after the group's arrival, Father Piperni writes: "Our good confreres, Seminararian Oreni and the Polish brother are doing very well. The latter turned out to be a good cook." [Piperni to Rua, San Francisco, March 21, 1897, cf. below.]

⁵⁴ Archive of the San Francisco Province. All in Father Rua's hand. I give the official translation released by the provincial office, but I emend the last sentence, where the Latin text was misconstrued to read, "remember *them* to God."

Filli mei in Christo dilectissimi,

*Cum vos missurus sim ad magnum opus suscipiendum apud S[anctum] Franciscum in California vos paterna mea benedictione prose-
quor:*

*Dignetur Dominus vos benedicere et opera vestra; vos crescere
faciat et multiplicet sicut stellas Coeli et arenas quae sunt in litore maris, ut
animas quum plurimas salvare possitis et Jesu Christi regnum in omnes ter-
rae plagas extendatur.*

*Confratrum vestrorum ne obliviscamini in sanctis orationibus et
sacrificiis et praesertim apud Deum mementote*

Dat[um] Aug[ustae] Taurinor[um]

die 16 Febr[uarii], a[nn]o] 1897

Vobis addit[issimu]m in J[esu] et M[aria]

Sac[erdos] Mich[ael] Rua

IV. Father Piperni's Account of the Trip from Turin to San Francisco

In a series of letters to Father Rua, suitable for publication in the *Salesian Bulletin*, Father Piperni describes the sea voyage and the overland journey, in colorful detail. The group boarded ship at Genoa, on the steamship *Werra*, bound for Gibraltar and New York.⁵⁵

14. Father Raphael Piperni to Father Michael Rua, On board the *Werra*, February 14 [?], 1897.

He speaks of boarding the ship, of a last minute visit by Salesian confreres, and of life on board.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ At this point there arises a problem relating to the dating of the group's departure from Turin (for Sampierdarena) and from Genoa. Piperni gives the following dates: (1) February 16: Father Rua's parting letter [autograph extant]. (2) February 17: departure from Turin [Piperni's *Autobiographical Memoir* and *Mission Memoir*, both written in 1914 or later]. (3) February 12: Piperni's meeting Father Marengo at Sampierdarena [as he states in his letter written on board the *Werra* bound for Gibraltar]. (4) February 14: date of the letter written on board. (5) In the *Werra* letter, dated Feb. 14, Piperni states that the following day would be Sunday. But in 1897 Feb. 15 was a Monday and therefore Piperni was writing the letter on a Sunday. — Clearly we have conflicting data here, and I refrain from speculation. One would like to credit the *Werra* letter, written as it was during the event. But Father Rua's parting message is dated February 16! And note that (according to Piperni) the message was *handed* to the departing group, not sent later. And then how could Piperni be confused about the day of week?

⁵⁶ ASC, Letters to Father Rua, FDR 3,790 D2-6. All in Father Piperni's neat hand. The more elaborate Italian forms of address are rendered with the simpler, "Dear Father Rua," throughout.

[Notation in Rua's hand:] To Father Dones for the Salesian Bulletin.⁵⁷

On board the [steamship] *Werra*, February 14 [?], 1897

Dear Father Rua,

Within five or six hours, *Deo favente* [with God's help], we shall be at Gibraltar. The steamship will berth there for a few hours. I take this opportunity, while still in European waters, yet again to send you our greeting. We boarded ship in Genoa at exactly 10 o'clock A.M. The weather has been magnificent, the sea tranquil and smooth. We have every reason to thank God for his goodness to us.

I need not mention the extraordinary goodness and charity shown us by our confreres at Sampierdarena, except to say that we thank them from the bottom of our hearts. Father Marengo arrived at the house from the Holy Land the evening of the 12th. We reminisced and spoke at length of our houses in Palestine where I worked for 14 years before becoming a Salesian. We spoke especially of the progress that has been made in that mission, now Salesian. *Deo gratias* [Thanks be to God].

We were just about to sail, when the Rev. Father Marengo himself and Father Bellagamba came on board to bid us a last good-bye, a wonderful, if unexpected, surprise. Father Marengo insisted on seeing our staterooms in order to ascertain if we were well lodged or lacked anything. To be truthful, two of the staterooms were not in a good location; but by the effort of our confrere, Brother Garbellone, and of our errand man, Ghigliani, we obtained better ones.⁵⁸

As the signal for departure sounded, they wished us success in our mission to California, under the patronage of Mary Help of Christians and with your blessing. Then we said our warm and repeated good-byes.

We have formed a small community on board. We have with us a German religious priest of the Congregation of the Precious Blood and a French [diocesan] priest, both wonderful persons. There are few of us at table, and this makes it possible for us to faithfully offer grace before and after meals. Early in

⁵⁷ Father Antonio Dones (1867-1939), after his ordination in 1891, worked as secretary and in the office of the Salesian Bulletin. From 1900 until his death he served as director in a number of Salesian schools. [Guido Favini, "Dones, Antonio," in *Dizionario Biografico*, pp. 112-113.]

⁵⁸ John Marengo (1853-1921) joined Don Bosco as a theological student and was ordained in 1875. He served successfully as rector of the newly dedicated church of St. John the Evangelist in Turin (1882), director and provincial in Liguria-Tuscany (1888), Father Rua's vicar to the Salesian Sisters (1892), and procurator general of the Society (1899). Consecrated bishop of Massa-Carrara (1909), he was later appointed papal nuncio in Central America (1917).

John Garbellone (1850-1928), became a Salesian brother in 1877, and worked for 32 years at the Oratory in the procurement office. The material and logistic arrangements for Missionary "expeditions" were his special responsibility. He was a proficient band master, and the catechetical instruction of first-Communion children was for many years his special apostolate. In 1925 he was part of the team that set up the Salesian section of the Vatican International Missionary Exposition. [Amedeo Rodinò, "Garbellone, Giovanni," in *Dizionario Biografico*, pp. 1134-135.]

No data are available on Father Bellagamba and on Ghigliani.

the morning the four of us priests offer Holy Mass in a little room which the captain, even though a Protestant, has placed at our disposal. We've turned a Protestant ship into a Catholic cathedral, God be praised.

Over one hundred Italian emigrants are traveling in the ship's third class. I visited them several times and urged them to pray to Our Lady. A good number of Venetians are found among them; they seem to be the only good, religious people in the group. It is regrettable that we cannot celebrate holy Mass for them, tomorrow being Sunday. We have been engaging the two good priests [traveling with us] in conversation on how we may help Italian immigrants in the United States. Our minds and hearts are constantly occupied with the mission that lies ahead of us. The evil which we deplore among Italians is widespread also among immigrants from other nations. It is a general condition.

The confreres are in good health and happy; they have already paid their tribute to the sea, and are now doing well.

In my free time, when things quiet down on the ship, I keep busy with translating into Spanish the short biography of Father [Camillus] Ortuzar, which Father Francesia published in Italian. I began this work before leaving Puebla, but could not finish it. I hope to have done with it by the time we get to California. For me this is a way of paying my tribute of respect and love to this beautiful soul, my sorely missed dear friend and confrere. We knew each other at Valsalice in 1894, and the two of us often hiked alone through those lovely hills on Autumn evenings. How edifying was his conversation! May he rest in peace, such a chosen ornament of the Society and such glory for Chile.

I bring the first letter of this new ocean voyage, the thirty-sixth of my missionary career, to a conclusion. My second letter will be from New York. Hopefully we shall get there safe and sound, and *ad maiorem Dei gloriam* [to God's greater glory].

Bless us all, dearest Father, while we kiss your hand with filial love.

In Corde Iesu [in the Heart of Jesus], the last of your sons,
Father Raphael Mary Piperni

[Notation in Rua's hand:] A D[on] Dones pel Boll[ettino]

A bordo del "Werra" Feb[braio] 14. [17] 97

Amatissimo Padre D[on] Rua.

Da qui a 5 o 6 ore arriveremo, Deo favente, a Gibilterra, e si ferma poche ore il vapore: L'approfitto per salutarla ancora una volta dalle acque di Europa. C'imbarcammo precisamente alle 10 di mattina in Genova, con un tempo magnifico e magnifico ha continuato fino a quest'ora: mare tranquillo e placido che ci fa benedire Dio per la tanta bontà che ci usa. - È inutile dirle che i nostri di S[an] Pier d'Arena sono stati grandemente buoni, caritatevoli assai verso di noi. Ne li ringraziamo dal fondo dell'anima. La sera del 12[?] arrivò là il caro Don Marengo reduce da Terra Santa e facemmo lunghissimi ricordi delle nostre case di Palestina, per le quali / ho lavorato 14 anni prima di essere salesiano specialmente: mi parlò del progresso di quella Missione oggi salesiana: Deo gratias.

Stando già sul vapore tutti e quasi sulle mosse di salpare, ecco lo stesso S[igno]r Don Marengo che in compagnia del Prefetto Don Bellagamba veniva a darci l'ultimo addio: fu una sorpresa graditissima e inaspet-

tata: volle riconoscere le nostre cabine per vedere se eravamo ben collocati, e se niente ci mancasse: veramente due di esse non erano in un luogo assai piacevole, e coll'aiuto del confratello il S[igno]r Garbellone e del missionista Ghiglioni, ottenemmo che ce le cambiassero.

Dato il segno di partenza, i nostri saluti furono caldissimi e ripetuti augurandoci il buon esito della nostra nuova spedizione a Cali- / fornia, sotto la protezione di Maria Ausiliatrice e sotto la benedizione di Lei, amatissimo Padre. Formiamo a bordo una piccola comunità: abbiamo la assai buona compagnia di un Padre, tedesco di origine, religioso del titolo del Preziosissimo Sangue, e di un assai buon prete francese. Siamo pochi a tavola, e così al cominciare e finire di essa, pratichiamo esattamente le nostre preghiere: La mattina ci alziamo un po' per tempo e diciamo in una saletta che ci fu concessa dal capitano, quantunque protestante, tutti e quattro la santa messa. Ecco qua un vapore protestante ridotto a una piccola cattedrale cattolica. Benedetto Dio.

Vengono in 3^a classe un cento e più italiani: li ho visitato varie volte e suggerito loro si raccomandassero a Maria Santissima: va [v'ha?] fra essi un bel numero di Veneti, i quali mi parvero gli unici buoni. Peccato che / non c'è modo di dir loro la santa messa almeno domani, domenica. Con questi buoni preti andiamo parlando spesso del modo di far il bene agli Italiani emigrati negli Stati Uniti: così la nostra mente e il nostro cuore va sempre assorto nella nostra missione. Ma ciò che si deplora negli Italiani, è da deplorarsi anche negli emigrati di altre nazioni: il male è generale.

I confratelli vengono tutti bene e contenti: han pagato il loro tributo al mare, ed è passato il male.

Nei momenti liberi che non c'è tanto movimento del vapore, mi occupo di terminare la traduzione in ispannuolo della piccola vita di Don Ortuzar, scritta dal nostro caro Don Francesca in italiano: l'avevo cominciato in Puebla prima di partire e non potetti terminarla: spero potervi cavar le mani prima di arrivare a / California. È un tributo di rispetto e di amore che intendo pagare a quell'alma così bella del mio compianto amico e caro confratello: ci conoschemmo in Valsalice nel 1894 e facevamo le nostre passeggiate di autunno su quelle colline quasi ogni sera, soli: quanto edificanti erano i suoi discorsi! Dorma nella pace del Signore quel fiore prediletto della nostra Società, e gloria del Chilì.

Chiudo qui la mia prima lettera di qu° [questo] nuovo viaggio per mare, 36° di mia vita di missionario! Riceverà la 2^a mia da N[ew] York, donde speriamo arrivare sani e salvi, e ad m[aiorem] D[ei] g[loriam].

Ci benedica, amatissimo Padre, e le baciamo tutti con filial affetto le mani.

L'ultimo dei suoi figlio in Corde Jesu[.]
Sac[er]dot[us] Raffaele Maria Piperni

15. Father Raphael Piperni to Father Michael Rua, New York, March 2, 1897

He tells of being met, upon debarking, by "a person," who escorted them to their hotel.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ ASC, Letters to Father Rua, FDR 3,790 D7-8.

[Printed letterhead:] Sinclair House, / Broadway, cor. Eighth Street, / New York.
/ EUROPEAN PLAN. / A. L. Ashman.

[Notation in Rua's hand:] For Father Dones

New York, March 2, 1897

Dear Father Rua,

We've gotten off the boat just a couple of hours ago. Our trip after Gibraltar was a happy, uneventful one, thanks be to God. We had a few days of rough seas, but it was all inconsequential.

No sooner arrived than we were met by a person who asked us if we were the Italian priests bound for San Francisco. The archbishop of that city had asked him by letter to meet us and to take us to the hotel where he had made reservations for us. This was mighty courteous of him.⁶⁰ Here we are then at the hotel, which is run by a very good Catholic gentleman and his wife. They have been to Rome and visited the rest of Italy. The lady asked for our blessing, plied us with questions about Rome, and spoke very highly of Archbishop Riordan. We will shortly be leaving for Chicago. But tomorrow the people here keep an important civic holiday, for the inaugural of the new president of the Republic.⁶¹

We will write again from Chicago. Dear Father, please give us your blessing, extend our best regard to all our dear superiors, and [in your prayers] commend us to Mary Help of Christians and to Don Bosco.

We kiss your hand with filial love and with heartfelt good wishes.

Your most useless son,

Raphael Piperni

[P.S.] Please ask the editor of the English *Salesian Bulletin* to send us at least a dozen copies to start with.

⁶⁰ This unnamed person can be none other than Anselmo Petazzi. Father Piperni's reference to him as "a person" in writing to Father Rua tends to show that Father Piperni had not known him or of him up to this point. Also, according to the Father Piperni, this "person" met the Salesians at Archbishop Riordan's request. All this would place the story, and especially the dialogue, reported by Uguccioni and quoted by Ribotta in some doubt. [Ruffillo Uguccioni, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-67; Ribotta, pp. 1-2] How the archbishop came to know this young man must remain a mystery. Later Father Piperni writes: "The young man from New York whom Father Rua recommended came with us and is working as an assistant to Brother [Imieliński]." [Father Raphael Piperni to Father Joseph Lazzero, San Francisco, March 21, 1897, cf. below.]

Anselmo Petazzi (1877-1841) came to know the Salesians through the *Salesian Bulletin* after migrating to the United States (Boston) from his home town in Italy. Father Rua came to know of him, and recommended him to Father Piperni. He met Father Piperni and company in New York and accompanied them to San Francisco. He became a Salesian brother in 1900 and worked in San Francisco until transferred to Troy, NY. He then became director of the Salesian boys club in Port Chester, NY, where he worked until his death. [Ribotta, p. 2, note 1 and p. 18]

⁶¹ William McKinley (1843-1901), 25th president of the U.S. (1897-1901).

[Notation in Rua's hand:] per D. Dones

New York, Marzo 2 1897

Amatissimo Padre Don Rua[,]

Sono appena due ore che siamo scesi a terra. Il nostro viaggio dopo Gibilterra è stato felicissimo, grazie a Dio. Abbiamo avuto qualche giorno di brutto mare, ma non fu cosa di considerazione.

All'arrivare qua, una persona ci si fece innanzi domandandoci se eravamo i preti italiani diretti a S[an] Francisco, perchè l'Arcivescovo di là aveva scritto qui che venisse a incontrarci e condurci al hotel [sic] da lui designato. È stata dunque una bella prova di cortesia questa. Siamo qui a questo hotel, il cui patrone [sic] colla sua signora è eminentemente cattolico, e hanno visitato Roma e resto d'Italia. La signora volle ricevere, chiestala, la nostra / benedizione e ci fece tante domande circa Roma e ci disse tante belle cose del arcivescovo [sic] Riordan.

Adesso ci prepariamo per la nuova partenza per Chicago. Dopo dimani è qui gran festa civile, perchè prende possesso il nuovo Presidente della Repubblica.

Da Chicago le torneremo a scrivere. Ci benedica Padre e ci saluti tutti gli altri carissimi superiori, e ci raccomandi a Maria Ausiliatrice e a Don Bosco. Tutti le baciamo amorosamente la mano e riceva i più cordiali saluti dal suo inutilissimo figlio[,]

Raffael [sic] Piperni

[P.S.] Faccia piacere indicare al Dir[ettore] del Bollettino inglese che ce ne rimetta a principio almeno una dozzina.

16. Father Raphael Piperni to Father Michael Rua, San Francisco, March 15, 1897

He gives an account of the processing of immigrants on Ellis Island, of the trip from New York to Chicago and San Francisco, of the Salesians' first days in San Francisco, of their taking possession of the parish, and of the situation of the Italian community.⁶²

[A notation in an unknown hand reads:] If this letter is to be published in the Salesian Bulletin, it should be edited for correct style.⁶³

San Francisco, California, March 15, 1897

Dear Father Rua,

This is the fifth day since our arrival in this our new mission. I am at last able to write and bring you up to date. I could not do it sooner because we were

⁶² ASC, Letters to Father Rua, FDR 3,790 D9 - E4. All in Father Piperni's hand.

⁶³ The editor worked on the first 3 pages, heavily crossing out words, phrases, paragraphs. The 5 remaining pages were spared. I have attempted to restore the original text, but some words were practically obliterated and remain uncertain.

so tired from the trip, and my head is still in a whirl. What with meeting people, inquiries, and countless other matters, I needed a few days of rest before writing.

During those two days in New York, we were the guests of the good Scalabrini Fathers, who run a parish for Italian nationals.⁶⁴ They were most kind and hospitable to us. The church is rather pretty, but they would like to improve it. However, it isn't their property; they are only leasing it. It used to be a Protestant church before being sold to a Jewish capitalist for 50,000 dollars. That is the sum of money needed in order to buy it.

What we found most remarkable in New York is the manner in which Italian immigrants are processed upon arrival. They are conveyed to a small artificial island, on which a huge brick building has been constructed. It is quite handsome, and it contains great halls and compartments, with dormitories, kitchen, and every imaginable facility. That's where the immigrants are interviewed. One by one they appear before a committee of four persons, one of whom conducts the interrogation in Italian. Each immigrant is asked to state first and last name, place of origin, occupation, money paid, money carried, destination, whether s/he has any relatives or friends in this country, etc. All information is recorded in books. Those that are able to work are set at liberty; those that are not able to work are sent back to Italy. During the half hour in which I witnessed this operation, seven were rejected and sent back. All immigrants are treated alike, but since nine tenths of them are Italian, the officers' work is mostly with Italians. It's a daily operation because, incredible as it may seem, Italian immigrants arrive by the hundreds every day. The expense for immigrants' food and drink for the time they remain on the island, and for the salaried employees, is enormous, but the government foots the bill. A representative of the Italian government is also present at the interrogation, but he receives his salary from Italy. We were not put through this process, because it is only for immigrants.

Two days later, we left for Chicago. During our two-day stopover in that city we stayed with the dear Servite Fathers.⁶⁵ We shall never forget their kindness.

⁶⁴ The Pious Society of the Missionaries of St. Charles (popularly, Scalabrinians or Scalabrini Fathers) was founded in 1887 by Bishop John Baptist Scalabrini (1837-1905) expressly for ministry to Italian immigrants in the Americas. He also founded the Missionary Sisters of St. Charles, with the same aim, and bestowed the missionary cross on Mother Frances Cabrini and her companions when they were leaving to begin their work among Italian immigrants in the United States. [L. Sabatini, "Scalabrini, Giovanni Battista," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* XII, pp. 1110-1111; G. Tassarolo, "Scalabrinians," *Ibid.*, p. 1111]

⁶⁵ The Order of Friar Servants of St. Mary (popularly, Servites) were founded in 1233 by St. Bonifilius and companions. In 1874 Bishop Thomas Foley of Chicago invited Servite Father Austin Morini to take a parish in that city. Father Morini founded the great church of Our Lady of Sorrows and the monastery which became the mother house of the order in the United States. Their ministry included the care of Italian immigrants. [J.M. Ryska, "Servites," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* XIII, pp. 131-135.]

In his *Mission Memoir*, Father Piperni adds: "The archbishop had advanced to us the money for the trip, which later was debited to the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul. In Chicago we were provided with additional money by the archbishop's brother, who

Their charity was so attentive as to be embarrassing. I had met their superior, Father Moreschini, 20 years ago when I first visited this country in behalf of our houses in the Holy Land. He was now particularly gracious toward us, and we want to acknowledge his kindness.

At 10 in the evening we left for San Francisco [by train]. Once out of Chicago, for a good three fourths of the long journey, for hundreds and hundreds of miles through desert country, we saw nothing but snow right and left, over mountains and valleys. We could see nothing that claimed our attention. It was a monotonous journey in many ways, but we were in no way uncomfortable. The railway cars are long and roomy and well heated by steam.

On the twelfth of this month [of March], in the morning we finally set foot in San Francisco, exactly two months since I boarded ship in Veracruz [Mexico].⁶⁶ The pastor, Father De Carolis, kindly met us at the station and drove us by coach to the Italian church. We have been here five days and are now settled.

On March 13 we paid a visit to the archbishop escorted by Father De Carolis. He received us most cordially, as was to be expected, and he offered his best wishes for good work and progress in our mission. He gave us at once all the faculties needed for the running of the parish. He wasted no time, for here "time is money," though for us "time means saving souls." Then *recto tramite* [directly] we returned to our house, and Father De Carolis handed the administration over to us, including the debt of 12,000 dollars still weighing on the church, and connected papers.

Father De Carolis is a good priest and has done much for this church and for this Italian community. He will be missed and gratefully remembered. He is leaving tomorrow for Italy, directly for his home town of Aquino (Naples).

Once settled, we began our ministry without delay. Yesterday we preached and announced a mission which is to begin this coming Sunday. The archbishop was very happy with this proposal, namely, that we should begin with a mission, and he extended to us all necessary faculties.

The church is large and beautiful. With a coat of paint it will be even more beautiful. The parish house is very comfortable. When, as we hope, you pay us a visit, you will find a beautiful room ready for you. It already has a name, "Father Rua's room."

I have some good news which I must share with you. This past Sunday, that is, yesterday, as on every Sunday, we had some 500 girls and boys at the 9 o'clock Mass. After Mass, they broke up into groups around the church and were taught their catechism for half an hour. Religious instruction is given by the Holy Family Sisters and by a number of zealous ladies. The teaching of Christian doctrine to boys and girls in parish churches is a special apostolate of this congregation of nuns. They also teach catechism from 2 to 3 on Saturday after-

was a local pastor." [*Mission Memoir*, p. 1]

⁶⁶ When Father Piperni was called to Turin from Puebla, Mexico, to take charge of the San Francisco mission, he took a ship out of Veracruz.

The day of arrival in San Francisco in this letter, written 5 days later, is given as March 12. In Father Piperni's *Mission Memoir*, written at least 17 years later, it is given as Friday, March 11. But in 1897, March 11, was a Thursday, not a Friday. March 12 is clearly to be preferred.

noons. But boys are less numerous at that hour. I was deeply moved at such a spectacle, and gave thanks to God for the good that is being done. If we could only open an oratory for Sundays and holy days. Along one side of the church there is a strip of ground 50 by 10 meters, which might be leveled and used for that purpose.

A great harvest lies before us. There are Italians living much farther away, and the bishop wants us to visit them also very often. At the moment we don't know just how numerous the Italian colony is in these parts, but it must be several, in fact many thousands strong.

Sad to say, Italians are held in very low esteem everywhere here, so much so that the good ones are ashamed of being so identified. Italian is a term of revilement. The charge against them is that they are uncivilized, irreligious, impious, blasphemers. There are a lot of good people among them, glory be to God, but they have much to suffer.

You can understand then, dear Father, how much in need we are of your prayers, that we might do something for the honor of God and the good of neighbor.

We kiss your hand and ask for your blessing *in Corde Iesu* [in the Heart of Jesus].

Your useless son,
Raphael M. Piperni

San Francisco di California, 15 Marzo 1897
Amatissimo Padre Don Rua,

Nel quinto giorno (che è oggi) dopo del nostro arrivo in questa nostra nuova missione, prendo la penna per scriverle e darle notizia di noi. Nol feci prima perchè stanchissimi del viaggio, con una testa che ancora gira sempre, e poi le visite, le domande, la gente e tante e tante cose... bisognava aspettare qualche giorno di riposo per scrivere.

C'intrattenemmo due giorni in N[uova] York presso i buoni Padri di Mgr. Scalabrini, i quali hanno là una parrocchia italiana. Ci hanno usato molta carità e sono stati cortesissimi con noi. La loro chiesa è piuttosto bellina e la farebbero più bella, se fosse di loro proprietà: l'hanno in affitto: era una chiesa protestante venduta a un capitalista giudeo per 50 mila scudi: tanti ce ne abbisognerebbero per comperarla. / Ciò che chiamò la nostra attenzione in Nuova York, si è il modo come trattano gli Italiani immigranti allo sbarcare che fannoli portare tutti in una isoletta, fatta proprio artificialmente, e sulla quale hanno innalzato una casa immensa di tegole, assai ben fatta architettonicamente, con sale immense, e departamente [sic] grandissimi, dormitori, e cucina e tutte le comodità possibili. Lì sono ricevuti gli immigranti, e uno per uno sono presentati innanzi a un tribunale composto di 4 individui; uno di essi che parla italiano interroga [?] uno per uno tutti, il nome e cognome, la provenienza, il mestiere, il denaro che ha pagato, il denaro che porta seco; a che punto si dirige [sic], se ha qui parenti, amici, etc. e tutto si registra nei libri. Se lo credono buono e idoneo al lavoro, lo lasciano libero; se no, lo rimandano indietro in Italia. Il giorno che io assistetti a questo atto / per una mezzora, ne rimandarono sette a Italia. Fanno lo stesso per gli immigranti di altre nazioni. ma [sic] siccome gli italiani formano i nove decimi, così l'occupazione di quelli è sempre per essi. Questa è cosa giornaliera; perchè, incredibile a dirsi, ogni giorno arrivano delle centinaia d'italiani. Le spese orribili che porta questa operazione

è a carico del governo, il mangiare e bereve [?] degli italiani in quell'isola, tutti i giorni che vi restano, e lo stipendio degl'impiegati. Vi è anche un impiegato del governo d'Italia, però questo è a carico dell'Italia. Questa operazione è unicamente per gli immigranti. [Here ends the editing.] Noi dunque non ci comprendemmo fra di loro.

Ai due giorni ripartimmo per Chicago, dove facemmo scalo per altri due giorni e li passammo coi carissimi Padri Serviti, i quali ci trattarono / con tanta squisita carità, che ne rimanemmo proprio confusi. Non ce ne dimenticheremo giammai. Il loro Superiore, il P[adre] Moreschini, che io conobbi venti anni fa nella mia prima escursione che feci in questa Repubblica, per le Case di Terra Santa, è stato cortesissimo con noi tutti e gli mandiamo di qua un vero cordialissimo saluto.

Alle 10 di sera ripartimmo per San Francisco. Alla uscita di Chicago sino ai tre quarti del cammino, a diritta e sinistra del lunghissimo e monotono cammino dalle molte centinaia di miglia per deserti, non vedemmo che neve, per monti e pianure. Cosicchè dopo Chicago il viaggio fu in un certo modo fastidioso, senza avere nè vedere nulla che chiamasse la nostra attenzione. Però, non per questo venimmo in disagio [sic], perchè i lunghissimi e ampî vagoni / sono riscaldati a vapore.

Finalmente la mattina del giorno dodici di questo mese, ai due mesi precisamente che m'imbarcai in Veracruz ponemmo piede in S. Francisco. Nella stazione ci aspettava qu° [questo] parroco il S[igno]r De Carolis, che gentilmente ci prese in carrozza e difilato alla Chiesa italiana, dove ci troviamo da cinque giorni installati.

Visitammo il giorno 13 il Signor Arcivescovo, accompagnati dallo stesso S[igno]r De Carolis e l'accoglienza fu cordialissima, come era da aspettarsi: gli auguri furono caldissimi pel bene e prosperità della nostra missione. Immediatamente ci munì di tutte le facoltà parrocchiali, senza perder tempo, perchè di qua "il tempo è denaro" e per noi è salvare anime, e recto tramite ritornammo / alla nostra abitazione. Il Sig[no]r De Carolis ci fece la consegna dello esistente, senza lasciare i documenti del debito di dodici mila scudi che gravitano sulla chiesa. Il detto rispettabile sacerdote ha fatto un gran bene a questa chiesa e colonia italiana: la sua memoria sarà benedetta. Egli parte domani per l'Italia, direttamente per Napoli-Aquino, sua patria.

Una volta installati, cominciammo il nostro ministero, predicando ieri e annunciando una santa spirituale missione che comincerà la prossima domenica. L'Arcivescovo fu contento del nostro santo progetto dal [sic] cominciar con una missione e ci comunicò tutte le facoltà necessarie.

La Chiesa è grande e bella: una volta pittata [sic], sarà bellissima. La canonica / [è] assai comoda: e quando Vossignoria ci visiterà, come ~~ei ha~~ promesso speriamo, troverà una bella camera, che già chiamiamo "camera Don Rua."

Non posso però lasciare di darle la bella notizia, che domenica passata, cioè ieri, come in tutte le altre domeniche dell'anno, circa 500 tra giovanette e giovanetti assisterono alla messa delle 9 di mattina, e dopo la messa vi rimasero mezzora pel catechismo; ripartiti a piccoli gruppi in chiesa, ricevevano la istruzione dalle Suore chiamate della Santa Famiglia e da altre zelose zelanti signore. Queste Suore hanno per un ramo di loro istituto

proprio questo di insegnare nelle chiese il catechismo ai ragazzi e ragazze. Fanno lo stesso il sabato innanzi dalle 2 alle 3 pomeridiane, però in qu[est]a ora sono meno in numero i ragazzi. Questo spettacolo mi commosse grandemente e ringraziai Dio pel bene che si fa. Oh! se potessimo aprire un / oratorio festivo: abbiamo un terreno a lato della chiesa di 50 metri di lungo e 10 di largo: vedremo come appianarlo e aggiustarlo all'uopo.

La messe ci si apre immensa: vi sono italiani assai assai lontani da noi, e il Vescovo vuole che li visitiamo spesso spesso.

Non sappiamo dire fin oggi quanta sia la colonia italiana sparsa di qua: ma è di varie o molte migliaia.

Ma, devo dirlo? Gl'italiani sono così in bassa stima presso tutti, che i buoni arrossiscono chiamarsi italiani. Il nome italiano è nome di spregio: le accuse fatte contra di loro, sono di essere incivili e senza nessuna religione, bestemmiatori e irrispettuosi. I buoni ne soffrono assai; per gloria di Dio sono non pochi.

Vede dunque, caro Padre, quanto abbiamo bisogno delle sue preghiere, affinché qualche cosa potessimo fare a onore di Dio e dei prosim[us].

Tutti le bacciamo le mani e ci benedica in Corde Jesu.

Suo inutile figlio, Raffaele M[ari]a Piperni.

V. First Experiences in San Francisco

Father Piperni reports also to Father Joseph Lazzero, who was in charge of missionary correspondence, though already debilitated by illness.

17. Father Raphael Piperni to Father Joseph Lazzero, San Francisco, March 21, 1897.

He gives an account of the situation in the Italian community and of the mission which he is preaching.⁶⁷

March 21, 1897.

Dear Father Lazzero,

A few days ago, I wrote to our dear Father Rua and conveyed my regards.⁶⁸ Now, in a moment when my parish duties, so new to me, afford me some leisure time, I am writing to you for the same purpose.

The mission services began today. I had two sermons this morning at 9 and 11, I will have a third one this evening at 7:30. The mission will continue over

⁶⁷ ASC, Works Established, FDR 3,347 B10 - C6. All in Father Piperni's hand.

⁶⁸ See previous letter, Piperni to Rua, March 15, 1897.

Joseph Lazzero (1837-1910), born near Turin, was one of the co-founding members of the Salesian Society in 1859, and one of the first professed in 1862. After his ordination in 1865, he served as [vice-] director of the Oratory, and as counselor on the superior chapter from 1874 to 1898. He was the first to hold the office of vocational counselor, and in 1885 he was put in charge of missionary correspondence. In 1897 serious illness forced him into permanent retirement. [Eugene Ceria, "Lazzero, Giuseppe," in *Dizionario Biografico*, p. 165]

the next 15 days, but with only two sermons a day. Dear Father Cassini is no help in this department [preaching].

Our dear Italian people here are truly the object of resentment and contempt, and it's their fault. They are embroiled in countless secret societies. They are without education and without manners; that's why they are despised. But we are not discouraged. As for their religious practice, they left the Church by reason of the bad example received from the priests that were in charge of them [back home]. We hope gradually to bring them back, *suaviter* [with kindness].

In this mission the use of the English language is also a must. The second generation, children and young adults born and married here, speaks nothing but English: English at school, English in catechism classes, English in the confessional. Only those who came from Italy as adults speak Italian. This morning, after the 9 o'clock Mass, we had some 500 boys and girls for catechism. Catechism classes are conducted by the Holy Family Sisters with the help of other devoted persons. Classes last one hour and are held in the church, just as at the [Turin] Oratory on Sunday evenings. The Sisters tell me that by the month of May we shall have more than 100 boys and girls ready for first Communion. If you could see the numbers of young Italian ruffians roaming the streets here. If we could only set up a school with workshops in the near future! This would be a new idea here; it would gain us the good will of people in and out of the city. Have a word with our dear Father Rua. Perhaps he can send us some good men in 1898, people who would be able to learn English. I say, "able," because not everyone can learn the language. We need young seminarians to come and have their education here up to theology, while they learn the language at the same time as a requirement.

We are beginning to have some vocations, but we have no place to put them. The house is very small.

The hardest thing here is to obtain a piece of land for a school. The rest is easy: we would put up a wooden structure. The whole city is made of wood: beautiful buildings, built with wooden panels or boards.

I will do my best to start a cycle of "conferences" in Italian after Easter, and get some other priest or lay person to do the same in English. For such conferences, which are called "lectures" here, we would use public halls, which are very numerous here and everywhere.

The climate of San Francisco is a far cry from the description given by Father Piccono in a moment of elation. It's cold here and we suffer. The weather changes four or five times a day. This is the kind of climate we have, as anybody will tell you.

Father Cassini hasn't come to terms yet with his lot in this new assignment. He continues to be in a high-strung temper and in a blue funk. Please write some encouraging letters to him. I too am finding this new kind of life pretty hard, in a new environment, a new language, a new kind of work. But I think I am coping better than Father Cassini.

Our good confreres, seminarian Oreni and the Polish brother, are doing very well. The latter turned out to be a good cook.

The young man from New York whom Father Rua recommended came with us and is working as an assistant to Brother [Imieliński].

March 25. The mission is very well attended, especially in the evening. If I am to believe reports, we have already found favor with the Italians. *Deo gratias*

[Thanks be to God]. I have been thinking of a Salesian [vocational] school, and have discussed the project with several people; they liked the idea very much. We have found some Salesian alumni here in San Francisco; they are very happy that we have come. The school would serve two purposes: first, that of helping so many young people who are morally adrift; secondly, that of boosting the Italian name [among the local population]. (Believe me, Father Lazzero, one is ashamed of being Italian.) A school would also facilitate the establishment of the Association of [Salesian] Cooperators. Italians are openly branded as "bandits" in the newspapers. Italian-language newspapers, riddled with atheism and controlled by Freemasonry as they are, have added to such bad reputation. There are no less than four Italian-language dailies in the city. If Father Rua were to guarantee the personnel, I could already begin planning for such a vocational school.

Four fifths of all Italians here are from Genoa, not from southern Italy. Let me repeat, the climate in the city is as bad as can be; it is as I remember it from my last visit here 20 years ago. If I could only put pressure on the superiors, as Father Piccono knows how to do so well, and extract a promise of personnel for next year. But I haven't got such power. Father Rua could send the young men to be assigned to this mission to London for their novitiate. They would learn English, which is an essential tool for the education of Italian children. Every one knows that the new generation speaks no Italian. My sermons are understood by their parents, who came from Italy; but not by the young people. Nor do they attend other churches [where English is spoken], with the result that they are deprived of the word of God proclaimed from the altar. Their only religious instruction is what they get from English-language catechism classes. You see then what our position is. The archbishop is aware of the situation and agrees with regard to the need.

Here buildings, even the beautiful ones, are wooden structures. As such, they can be raised with the aid of enormous levers resting on solid ground and operated by machine. Such an operation, like many others requiring mechanical expertise, is an easy one for American know-how, and it is often performed. We are planning to raise our church 3 or 4 meters up from its present level, to make room for a hall below it. On Sundays we could hold catechism classes for the young people there and celebrate Mass with sermons especially for them. This is regularly done in other parishes. The job might be done at a cost of about 2,000 dollars.

This is all for today. Please pray for us, and for me, your most useless confrere.

Love in *Corde Iesu* [in the Heart of Jesus],

R. M. Piperni

P.S. Please place an order with the office of the *Salesian Bulletin* for the following: 50 copies in Italian; 100 copies in English. Have them sent to me. Later I will send in the names [for enrollment as Cooperators].

Marzo 21. 97

Amatissimo S[ignor] Don Lazzero.

Dopo aver salutato il nostro caro P[adre] Don Rua nei giorni scorsi, vengo a salutare anche Lei oggi, nel momento che le occupazioni

parrocchiali, tanto nuove per me, me lo permettono. Oggi è cominciata la santa missione: ho predicato due prediche la mattina alle 9 e alle 11: ripredicherò alle 7 1/2: e poi continuerà la missione per 15 giorni, predicando solo due volte al giorno: il caro D[on] Cassini non può aiutarmi in qu[est]a parte.- Questi cari italiani sono proprio mal visti, disprezzati, e ne hanno la colpa: gente di cento sette segrete, senza educazione neppur civile: sono proprio gente disprezzata. Eppure non ci scoraggiamo. In quanto a religione, hanno ricevuto mali esempi dai preti che li governarono, e perciò si ritirarono dalla chiesa. Speriamo ricondurli bel bello, suaviter, et / in ~~Corde Iesu~~ - La nostra missione ci obbliga a parlare l'inglese: perchè i figli piccoli e grandi, nati e maritati qui, non parlano che l'inglese: scuola inglese, catechismo inglese, confessioni in inglese: l'italiano è solo per gli adulti che così vengono dall'Italia - Qu[est]a mattina vennero al catechismo, dopo la messa delle 9, 500 tra ragazzi e ragazze: le suore della S[acra] Famiglia, aiutate altre pie anime fanno il catechismo, per un'ora, nella stessa chiesa, come nell'Oratorio la sera delle domeniche[.] - Pel mese di Maggio mi dicono le Suore, avremo più di 100 di prima comunione, ben preparati[.] - Se vedesse lei quanta ragazzaglia italiana vaga per le strade della colonia! Oh! se potessimo metter su / un collegio con laboratori per l'anno futuro! Qui non ne hanno idea, e guadagneremmo tanta simpatia in città e fuori. Ne parli con D. Rua, nostro carissimo Padre, e veda se mi promette pel 1898 un buon personale, capace di apprendere l'inglese, dico capace perchè non tutti ci riescono[.] - Giovani chierici, che si educassero qui alla Teologia, farebbero bene imparando qui simultaneamente la lingua.

Si presenta già qualche vocazione, ma non sappiamo dove metterli: la casa è piccolissima.

Qui tutto il difficile è comprare il terreno del Collegio: il resto si fa di tavole: tutta la città è di tavole: bellissimi edifizii in tavole ossia assi.

/ Farò di tutto per dare conferenze in italiano dopo Pasqua, e in inglese per mezzo di qualche prete inglese or secolare ancora in pubbliche sale, che qui e dapper-tutto [sic] ce ne sono per qu[est]o uso, di conferenze, chiamate qui "Lecture".

Il clima della città non è quello che descrisse in momenti di trasporti D[on] Piccono. Soffriamo il freddo, e l'incostanza atmosferica 4 o 5 volte al giorno: così è qu[est]o clima; tutti lo sanno.

Don Cassini ancora non è rassegnato a qu[est]a nuova sua sorte: dura ancora nervoso e fastidioso. Gli scriva lettere incoraggianti. Io pure duro a piegarmi a qu[est]a nuova vita, nuovo cielo, nuova lingua, e nuove occupazioni: ma paro [sic] più rassegnato di Don Cassini.

/ Il buon Chierico Oreni si porta assai bene. Il buon Polacco, assai bene ancora: riusci un buon cuoco[.]

Venne con noi il giovine di N[uova] York, raccomandatoci dal P[adre] Don Rua: stà da assistente al coadiutore polacco.

Giorno 25. La missione è frequentata assai specie la sera: da quanto ci riferiscono, abbiamo trovato già grazia presso gl'Italiani; Deo gratias[.] - Ho presentato a vari il progetto di un collegio di Don Bosco, e piacque grandemente. Abbiamo trovato alunni di Don Bosco qui a S[an] Franc[isco]: e sono contentissimi del nostro arrivo. Il collegio avrebbe due fini, di fare il bene a

tanta gioventù scostumata, e rialzare il prestigio degli italiani: (mi creda, D. Lazzerò, ci fa vergogna chiamarci italiani), e servirebbe pure per organizzare la società dei cooperatori. Il nome che qui / si dà agli italiani, è di "briganti", pubblicamente nei giornali. A qu[est]o contribuiscono i giornali italiani atei e frammassonici [sic], che solo qui sono in numero di 4 giornalieri. Se Don Rua mi promettesse pel 1898 il personale, io già penserei veramente al necessario pel collegio di arti e mestieri.

I 4/5 degli italiani sono genovesi, e non della bassa Italia. Ripeto, il clima della città è pessimo, come io lo conosceva 20 anni fa, che ci feci qui[.] — Ah! se potessi influire sull'animo dei cari Superiori, come lo può così imperiosamente Don Piccono, per farmi promettere il personale per l'anno prossimo! Ma non ne ho la forza[.] - Se potesse Don Rua decidersi mandare al noviziato di Londra i giovani destinati per qu[est]a missione, affinché apprendano l'inglese, necessarissimo [sic] come il pane per educare i fanciulli / italiani, i quali proprio non capiscono italiano: è cosa risaputa e pubblica. Ecco: predico solo ai loro genitori oriundi, o venuti d'Italia: i giovani non capiscono: e ad altre chiese non vanno, e dunque restano senza la parola di Dio, predicata dall'altare: sanno solo in quanto a religione il catechismo in inglese. Si veda dunque qual è la posizione della casa. L'Arciv[escov]o conviene con me su qu[est]o punto.

Qui come gli edifizii sono di tavole, assai belli, c'è modo d'innalzarli in peso con enormi viti piantate sul solido e mosse con macchine. È operazione qu[est]a facile come qualunque altra per la meccanica americana: se ne fanno spessissimo di qu[est]e operazioni. Studiamo dunque il modo di alzare la nostra chiesa 3 o 4 metri sul livello che ha, e formare / così una sala sotto la chiesa, grande per riunire i giovanetti pel catechismo la domenica, e per dire loro la messa a parte e predicar loro a parte. È cosa che si fa così in altre parrocchie. Forse costerà circa 2 mila dollari l'operazione.

Per oggi, niente più. Preghi per noi e specie per questo inutile confratello che l'ama in Corde Iesu[.]

R[.] M[.] Piperni

/ P.S. Faccia il piacere di ordinare all'ufficio del Bollettino Salesiano che mandino

50 copie in italiano[.] 100 in inglese[.] tutte a me[.] e poi io manderò i nomi.

Father Cassini, while still at SS. Peter and Paul, also kept in touch with Father Rua. The *FDR* files, however, only contain letters which Father Rua wrote to him in reply. Apparently in his letters Father Cassini is not as expansive as Father Piperni in recording situations and experiences.

18. Father Michael Rua to Father Valentine Cassini, Turin July 3, 1897.

He thanks Father Cassini for an offering and expresses his satisfaction about the community.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ ASC, Rua's Authentic Letters, *FDR* 3,881 D7-8. Stereotyped, printed Thank

Turin, July 3, 1897

Dear *Father Cassini (San Francisco)*,

I thank you for your welcome letter, and I think you will be pleased with this reply of mine. I am sending you a keepsake from our most beloved Don Bosco, written in his own hand.

[printed imitation of Don Bosco's script:] "How great shall our reward be for the good we shall have done in our lifetime. John Bosco, Priest."

Accept my heartfelt greetings, and please pray to the Lord for me.

Most affectionately yours in Jesus and Mary,

Father Michael Rua.

P.S. I received in due time your very welcome letter, with your good wishes for the feast of St. John.⁷⁰ I thank you, the Rev. Father Piperni, and everyone in your little [Salesian] family. Thanks also for your thoughtful gift of money. This gesture of yours touched me deeply. I am aware of your straitened circumstances, so that I was truly pleased and edified by your very generous gift. May the Lord reward you abundantly, and may Mary Help of Christians, our treasurer, return the hundredfold in spiritual and temporal favors. I hope you have been keeping in good health. I hope in fact that your health has improved; and that at the same time you are enjoying that happy, balanced peace of mind which helps win souls for the Lord. On my part, I wish you every spiritual and temporal blessing, and for this I pray daily to the Lord for you.

Torino il 3-VII-97

Carissimo D[on] Cassini (S[an] Francisco)

Ti ringrazio della gradita tua lettera e penso farti una risposta di tuo gusto col mandarti un bel pensiero del nostro amatissimo D. Bosco scritto di sua mano:

[Printed imitation of Don Bosco's script:] Che grande ricom- / pensa avremo di tutto / il bene che facciamo / in vita - ! Sac. Gio Bosco Gradisci i miei cordiali saluti e prega il Signore per tuo affezionatissimo in G[esù] e M[aria,]

Sac[er]dote] Michele Rua

P.S. ho ricevuto a suo tempo la graditissima tua di augurio per la festa di S. Giovanni. Io ringrazio te, il Sig[nor] D[on] Piperni e tutta codesta piccola famiglia, tanto più pel buon pensiero che avete avuto di unirvi un'offerta. Questo mi commosse. Conosco le vostre strettezze e vedervi così generosi mi fu veramente di gaudio ed edificazione. Il Signore vi rimeriti largamente e Maria Ausiliatrice nostra Tesoriera vi procuri il 100 per uno in grazie spirituali ed anche temporali. Io spero che tua salute si sarà conservata buona ed anche rinvigorita e che colla salute ci sarà quell'allegria uguaglianza d'umore

You note with personalized parts and signature filled in by Father Rua, followed an extended message in Father Rua's hand.

⁷⁰ Don Bosco's name day was observed on June 24, Feast of the Birth of St. John the Baptist, even though he was named after St. John the Evangelist. This custom was continued under Father Rua, in spite of the fact that his name was Michael.

che tanto serve a tirar le anime al Signore. Dal canto mio ti auguro di cuore quanto può ridondar a tuo maggior vantaggio spirituale e temporale ed a tal fine prego ogni giorno il Signore per te.

19. Father Raphael Piperni to Father Michael Rua, San Francisco, August 15, 1897.

He describes the deteriorated religious situation in the Italian community, points out probable causes, and proposes some remedies.⁷¹

[Notation in Rua's hand:] Let Father Dones edit it for the [*Salesian*] *Bulletin* and perhaps also for the *Corriere Nazionale*.

San Francisco, California, August 15, 1897

Reverend and dear Father Rua,

The [paper] *Italia Reale* of some weeks ago carried a statistical report, which, even though not complete, should be the source of joy for every Christian heart, and of praise to God, the author of all good. It spoke of the great number of conversions which take place every year in these United States of America from Protestantism to the our holy Catholic Church.

On reading the news I decided to write this little article for Catholics in Italy,⁷² in order to urge them not to rejoice over the gains, but to cry for the huge, lamentable losses by the Catholic Church in these areas of the United States. The losses are far superior to the gains, and they take place in the communities of Italian immigrants. But there is a difference: the Protestants who are converted are people of outstanding honesty and moral rectitude, while those [Italians] who leave the Catholic Church are the exact opposite.

Dear Father, be not frightened by the numbers, but a good half of all Italian immigrants in America have lost their faith. Half is a conservative estimate; to speak more exactly, I should raise the quota. A good four fifths of all Italians born in America these past 30 years no longer believe in anything. And one fourth, perhaps even one third, of their children, whether infants, adolescents or adults, have not been baptized, and there is no way to get the parents to have them baptized. I have this information from various sources, in particular from priests in both city and country parishes.

An entirely dependable Italian missionary with whom I have had occasion to discuss the matter told me of his bitter disappointment. He was assigned by his superiors these past three years to visit Italian immigrants scattered far and wide; he worked hard at it but had no success. With tears in his eyes, he said that he found them averse to sermons and to Mass; he had met with nothing but scorn from them and with total indifference on their part to their own souls' salvation. This has also been our experience in this mission which obedience has assigned to us.

⁷¹ ASC, Letters to Father Rua, FDR 3,790 E5-10. The editing is moderate. I restore Father Piperni's text.

⁷² Father Piperni says, "article," because such reports from missionaries were often published in the *Salesian Bulletin*.

Out of more than 15,000 Italians residing in San Francisco and environs, barely 2,000 (I would guess) have kept their Catholic faith alive and attend church. The rest have fallen away, and it is frightening to hear them spew out heresies and blasphemies against the faith, the Church, the pope, the priests. They display their godless behavior on the street, in taverns, and within their own family, even in the presence of their children.

The causes of such an unfortunate situation are many, but in my view the following are the most important.⁷³

1. Ignorance of the truths of faith.— This is a pervasive and deep-seated sickness. It's a situation which brings shame on Italy, for all her being the center of Catholicism and the teacher of nations. It is a situation for which the parish priests of the towns where these people come from must take the blame.

2. Local Italian-language newspapers.— They are very numerous, and they are worthy American offspring of revolutionary newspapers in Italy, of socialist, anarchist inspiration and the like. Not only do these papers publish the most revolting crimes perpetrated here, but they also reprint from Italian newspapers those committed in the hundred cities of Italy, no matter how scandalous, abhorrent, or gory the crime might be. These deeds of blood are published under banner headlines, so as to entice the reader. One might say that such newspapers are nothing more than repositories of all the shameful deeds of Italy chronicled for Italian emigrants. Their editors even claim to love Italy passionately, and yet they publicize her most revolting filth. Almost never do edifying stories apt to promote virtue or charity appear in these newspapers. Add to this their policy of vilifying and ridiculing God, religion and the Church. When readers, both men and women, both young and old, draw day after day from such a polluted and filthy source, what can one expect?

3. Living with a Protestant, heretical majority and with unbelievers without numbers.— Being ignorant of their own religion, and having to live with heretics, Italian immigrants have come to believe that the other people's religious tradition is better and more reasonable than their own. Hence the craze to follow their example in everything. They have stopped going to Mass with the pretext that God (if they believe in God at all) is everywhere. They don't have their children baptized, because they hear Anabaptists say that only as an adult can one make a commitment to a religious faith, and hence receive baptism. Like the Protestants, they no longer pray for the dead; they bury their dead with incredible external pomp and at great expense; they may keep the body in the house for a whole week, for holding a burial within 24 hours would show lack of respect or of love for the dead person. For this purpose the body is either em-

⁷³ For the situation obtaining in the Italian community, cf. the Introduction above. It should be noted, however, as Father Piperni clearly states in his reports, that the church was well attended and that, when the Salesians first arrived, between 500 and 600 children attended religious instruction classes on any given Sunday. The religious education program even experienced an increase with the arrival of the dynamic Father Charles Redahan. This conveys the impression that the general population was not averse to religion. Father Piperni appears to have been somewhat emotional and heavy-handed in his assessments and descriptions. Father Cassini, as may be gathered from the one letter that addresses the problem, seems to have been less negative. [Cf. Rua to Cassini, Turin, September 18, 1897, Number 20, below.]

balmed (a relatively inexpensive procedure here) or wrapped in dry ice to prevent corruption. Then they hold the wake, which is nothing but a party with a lot of drinking and honors paid to Bacchus.

I won't say anything of the high incidence of civil and mixed marriages.

4. The great number of Masonic lodges.— No sooner is an Italian immigrant off the ship than agents of Freemasonry take charge of him and tell him that unless he belongs to some secret society he won't have protection and will not get a job. What can the poor man do, finding himself in a foreign land, without friends and without any knowledge of the language? No sooner said than done, he becomes a member.

5. Public schools.— Because children from many religious affiliations attend school together, no religious instruction is given in public schools. Nor is religious education provided by the family, when, as is often the case, parents either are ignorant of their religion or have fallen away from it. As a consequence the children grow up without religion and without moral guidance. They soon become a trial for their guilty parents and turn into a terrible menace for society. They will eventually join the ranks of the socialists and anarchists.

6. Protestant propaganda.— The Protestants carry on their proselytizing in Italian as well as in English by means of leaflets and pamphlets which are replete with vicious defamation of priests, the pope, and the Sacraments. Every trick is resorted to in order to win over the Italian immigrants, including, most unfortunately, the action of apostate priests. Generally speaking, our Italian brothers and sisters will have nothing to do with religion of any kind, and therefore they will not join Protestant sects. But the reading of Protestant propaganda literature confirms them in their repudiation of religion.

7. Religious isolation.— Finally, the fact that many Italians live scattered through the countryside, far from any Catholic church, but in the vicinity of Protestant churches, constitutes a temptation. Friendship and social relationships with Protestant families induce them to join their church.

For these and other reasons the Italian colony stands out for its unbelief and atheism, for its hatred against the Catholic religious tradition of its birth. I say "stands out" because, even though there are countless unbelievers of other nationalities, the unbelief of the Italians is the fruit of their apostasy. This is the reason why they are singled out as despicable apostates by everyone, even by Protestants and Mormons. Italians are the object of constant ridicule: "Do you take me for an Italian, because I eat meat on Fridays?" "I'm no Italian, so why should I curse and hate my Creator?" "Do you take me for an Italian, because I do not go to Mass on Sundays?" "I am no assassin of kings, presidents, and ministers: I am not Italian." An Irish Catholic wondered how the pope could be Italian.

The Italian-language newspapers in the area deplore such ignominious insults. But they don't seem to realize that they themselves are one of the chief causes why Italians despise their religion, the pope and the priests. They don't seem to be aware of the general belief of people here, that a human being without religion, be it only that of the Mormons or of Mohammed, is a disgusting and dishonorable person.

Dear Father, generally speaking and judging from a human standpoint, there is not much we can do to reverse this very bad situation. But we would like to save as many as possible of those young people who might still be saved from the flood of atheism. Noah's ark, in this case, is the Salesian oratory. We are

even now at work preparing the land and the hall, etc. Our worthy archbishop has expressed his support and has pledged his help. He promised it and he will follow through, because he is a strong man of action. But we lack the personnel for this task; we need a Salesian who can speak English, since the Italian young people who were born in this country don't speak any other language.

I realize that at this time of year you are swamped by requests for personnel from Salesian houses everywhere. I trust nonetheless that your fatherly heart will take up the good cause of the Italian immigrants of San Francisco, and will act in favor of our oratory, the only hope left to us for our young people's salvation. Let everything be for the greater glory of God. Please bless us all in *Corde Iesu* [in the Heart of Jesus].

The last of your sons,
Raphael M. Piperni

[Notation in Rua's hand:] D[on] Dones l'aggiusti pel Boll[ettino] e magari anche pel corr[iere] nazione[sic].

S. Francisco - California / Agosto 15. 1897
Amatissimo Padre S[igno]r Don Rua.

Lessi nell'Italia Reale di alcune settimane fa, pubblicata una statistica, quantunque non completa, o meglio una notizia sul numero delle conversioni che anno per anno si verificano in questi Stati Uniti di America, dal protestantismo alla nostra santa Chiesa Cattolica: sono cose da rallegrare ogni cuore cristiano e da benedire Dio, autore di ogni bene.

La lettura di questa notizia mi fece venire il pensiero di scrivere questo mio articoletto per invitare i cuori dei cattolici d'Italia non a rallegrarsi, ma a veramente piangere sopra la disgrazia delle immense perdite che la Chiesa Cattolica fa in questi luoghi degli Stati Uniti, perdite molto superiori ai guadagni, nelle colonie degli immigrati italiani: colla differenza però che i convertiti protestanti sono fiori di galantuomini e di condotta rispettabile, e ciò non può dirsi di quelli che abbandonano il cattolicesimo.

Carissimo Padre, non si spaventi della cifra, se Le dico che la metà degl'Italiani in questa America hanno perduto la fede cristiana: dico la metà per [non] parlare con più esattezza.... La generazione italiana, nata in America, da 30 anni a questa parte, i quattro quinti sono increduli, perfettamente increduli: ed una quarta parte, quanto meno, o una terza parte dei loro figliuoli ~~non sono battezzati~~, tra piccoli, adulti ed altri assai adulti, non sono battezzati: nè vi ha modo d'indurre i genitori a che li lascino battezzare. Questi dati li ho preso da varie parti, specie da Sacerdoti di varie parrocchie di città e campagne.

Un missionario italiano assai rispettabile, col quale ebbi / conferenza sul proposito, mi diceva quasi ~~laerimando~~, che, destinato in questi tre ultimi anni dai suoi Superiori a visitare gl'italiani dispersi in tanti luoghi, lavorò assai[,] e quasi piangendo mi diceva di non aver guadagnato niente avendoli ~~trovati~~ incontrati renitenti a prediche, a messa, e non aveva trovato che sprezzo e indifferentismo per la salute delle loro anime. Lo proviamo anche noi nel posto assegnatoci dall'ubbidienza.

Dei 15 mila e più italiani che risiedono in S[an] Francisco e dintorni, appena 2 mila potremmo dire che hanno ancora viva la fede cattolica

in cuore e che vanno in chiesa: il resto fa paura udirli vomitare eresie e bestemmie contra la fede, contra la Chiesa, contra il Papa e Sacerdoti, nelle strade, nelle cantine, nelle stesse loro famiglie in presenza dei figli: è cosa da raccapricciare.

Le cause che si potrebbero citare, di tanta disgrazia, sono varie; le principali sono le seguenti, a mio parere:

1° La ignoranza: la quale, in materia di religione già s'intende, è tale e tanta che fa vergogna all'Italia, centro del cattolicesimo e maestra delle nazioni, e da far coprire la faccia di rossore ai Parrochi dalle cui parrocchie, dalle quali arrivano a questi luoghi [sic].

2° I giornali italiani locali, di America. Ce n'è un numero grande, che sono l'eco dei giornali settari di Italia, socialisti, anarchici, etc.; e come se non bastassero i fatti vergognosi che si commettono in questi luoghi, copiano e riproducono nelle loro colonne anche quelli che si commettono nelle cento città d'Italia, sieno i più scandalosi, i più ripugnanti alla natura umana, fatti sanguinari e criminali, annunziati poi con titoloni a tanto di lettere per eccitare la curiosità di chi riceve nelle sue mani il giornale. Si potrebbe dire che questi giornali sieno niente più che una collezione / o una completa cronaca degli opprob[r]i d'Italia, pubblicata in terra straniera... E dicono di amare svisceratamente la Patria, sciorinandone per tutti i venti le luridezze... e quasi mai un fatto edificante che promuova la virtù o la carità. Non dico niente delle ingiurie e satire contra Dio, religione, chiesa, etc... Abbeverati i lettori a queste schifose fonti, giorno per giorno, uomini e donne, grandi e piccoli, chi può misurarne il male le conseguenze?

3° La mescolanza cogli eretici protestanti, che formano la gran maggioranza, e coll'immenso numero degli increduli. Ignoranti come sono, e obbligati a vivere in mezzo a loro, gl'italiani credono che ciò che gli eretici fanno, sia meglio e più ragionevole di ciò che fanno essi. Di qua la smania di imitarli in tutto: non vanno a messa, scusandosi col dire che Dio (se qualche idea ne hanno ancora) è dovunque: non battezzano i figli, perchè sentono dalle Sette Anabattiste che bisogna essere adulto per scegliere la religione e poi battezzarsi; vanno a seppellire i loro morti con uno sfarzo e costo incredibile di pompa civile, perchè, dicono, i Protestanti non pregano pei morti. Su questo ultimo punto dico che arrivano a tenere in casa una settimana un cadavere, imbalsamato (qui il balsamo costa poca cosa) o circondato di ghiaccio artificiale per impedire la corruzione. perchè, dicono, sarebbe segno di poco affetto al morto, mandarlo al cimitero alle 24 ore: gli fanno quindi la veglia, e in essa, vini... liquori... onori a Bacco.

Che direi dei matrimonî civili e misti, assai numerosi?

4° La molteplicità delle logge massoniche. non appena sbarca un italiano, che gli emissari della setta lo circondano e dannogli ad intendere che se non appartengono a qualche società segreta, non troverà lavoro nè protezione: e se il povero uomo, in terra / straniera, senza amici, senza sapere la lingua nuova.... che farà?... l'affiliazione è bella e conchiusa.

5. Le Scuole pubbliche. Qui non s'insegna religione, per la mescolanza dei giovanetti di tante sette: nè insegnandosi nelle famiglie, perchè i genitori non ne sanno, o perchè l'avranno rinnegata, ne avviene che i loro figli crescono senza idee religiose e senza morale, e formano la disperazione dei loro colpevoli genitori e una minaccia terribile per la so-

cietà, perchè più tardi dovranno aumentare le file dei socialisti e degli anarchici.

6. La propaganda protestante. Questa è fatta in lingua inglese e italiana, in modo particolare per gl'Italiani: foglietti, libretti, pieni di infamie e calunnie contra i Sacerdoti e il Papa, i Sacramenti, tutto è messo in azione per conquistare gl'Italiani: non mancano anche preti apostati per colmo di disgrazia. I nostri connazionali non vanno, per certo, al protestantesimo, perchè non vogliono saperne di religione, sia qualunque il colore, ma, sì, per la cattiva lettura s'immergono più e più nella irreligione.

7. Finalmente il vivere nelle campagne, lontanissimi dalle chiese cattoliche, e vicini a chiese protestanti, fa sì che al fine per le amicizie e relazioni sociali con famiglie protestanti, finiscono coll'affiliarsi alla setta.

Queste ed altre ragioni sono la causa che la colonia italiana, in questa America, si distingue per l'incredulità e ateismo, pel suo odio contra la religione cattolica in cui erano nati; dico si distinguono, perchè sibbene sì bene [sic] vi sieno infiniti altri increduli di altre nazioni, la loro incredulità è apostasia, ed è questo precisamente, che li fa segnare a dito, e sono ancora l'oggetto del disprezzo universale, sin anco degli stessi Protestanti e Mormoni. Sono continuamente / canzonati: "Mi hai preso per un italiano, perchè io mangi carne il venerdì?.." dice uno. "Mi hai preso per un italiano, perchè bestemmî e odii il mio Creatore" dice un'altro. "Credi tu che io sia un italiano, chè io lasci di andare a messa:" Credi tu che sia io assassino italiano, assassini di Re, Presidenti, Ministri..?" "Come è possibile che sia di nazione italiana il Papa...?" diceva un giorno un cattolico irlandese.

Queste ignominie le confessano gli stessi giornali italiani locali, senza accorgersi che essi sono precisamente la una delle cause principali del disprezzo alla religione, al Papa, ai Sacerdoti, senza capire che in questi luoghi si ha la idea assai comune che uomo senza religione, fosse pure quella dei Mormoni o di Maometto, è uomo ributtato e discreditato.

Caro Padre, questo gran male, nella sua grandissima parte non ha rimedio, umanamente parlando: vorremmo salvare qualche nucleo di giovinetti che sono ancora in grado e in tempo di essere salvati dal diluvio dell'ateismo, nell'Arca di Noè, che sono gli oratori festivi. Stiamo prendendo delle providenze [sic] per preparare il terreno, la sala, etc.; il degnissimo Arcivescovo è animato anche lui e vuole aiutarci: lo ha promesso, e lo farà, perchè è uomo di azione ed energia. Ci manca il personale / vigilante, e che sappia bene la lingua inglese, perchè i giovanetti italiani nati qui, non parlano altra lingua.

So bene che in questa epoca dell'anno dalle altre case salesiane e da altri luoghi, arrivano a V[ostr]a Signoria dirette dimande di personale: ma confido nel suo paterno cuore che non abbandonerà la buona causa degli Italiani emigrati di San Francisco, e ci porgerà un ausilio pel nostro oratorio festivo, unica speranza che rimane qui di salvazione. Sia tutto alla maggior gloria di Dio. Non lasci di benedirvi tutti in Corde Iesu.

Suo ultimo figlio[.]

Raffaele M.a Piperni

20. Father Michael Rua to Father Valentine Cassini, Turin, September 18, 1897.

He thanks Father Cassini, and makes hopeful comments on the moral climate in the Italian community in accordance with what Father Cassini had written.⁷⁴

Turin, September 18, 1897

Dear Father *Cassini* (*San Francisco*),

I thank you for your welcome letter, and I think you will be pleased with this reply of mine. I am sending you a keepsake from our most beloved Don Bosco written in his own hand.

[Printed script imitating Don Bosco's hand:] "In heaven we shall be in possession of all good for ever." John Bosco, Priest.

Accept my heartfelt greetings, and please pray to the Lord for me.

Yours most affectionately in Jesus and Mary,

Father Michael Rua

P.S. Your letter of August 22 was a source of considerable satisfaction for me. Your words confirm what I had hoped would be the case. Italian immigrants may be the object of scorn abroad, but as far as the delinquency rate is concerned, are in a better position than other nationalities. Religious education is what's needed if they are to be safeguarded from heresy and corruption. You state that girls have looser morals than boys. The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians would be happy to come, with the Archbishop's permission, if their help is needed. They would collaborate with the Sisters and with the Catholic women already working for the girls. They would especially take care of the more wayward ones through the oratory on Sundays and holy days and through workshop and school, as they do with such success in Buenos Aires and elsewhere. I gather from the general tone of your letter that the work which lies ahead is enormous, and that therefore there is an urgent need for many good evangelical workers. [marginal addition:] You need to get busy right away to recruit vocations.

The Father Carlini who drowned is unfortunately our Father Carlini. His doctors prescribed a cure of baths at the seashore, and that's how we lost him. Pray for him. I like your suggestion to deal with bathing as we are dealing with smoking. We shall have to see if such a thing is possible. May the Lord bless you and your labors.

Torino il 18-IX-97

Carissimo D[on] Cassini (S[an] Francisco)

Ti ringrazio della gradita tua lettera e penso farti una risposta di tuo gusto col mandarti un bel pensiero del nostro amatissimo D. Bosco scritto di sua mano:

[Printed imitation of Don Bosco's script:] In paradiso si godono tutti i beni / in eterno - Sac. Gio Bosco

⁷⁴ ASC, Father Rua's Authentic Letters, FDR 3,881 D9-10. Stereotyped, printed Thank You note with personalized parts and signature filled in by Rua, followed by an extended message in Father Rua's hand.

*Gradisci i miei cordiali saluti e prega il Signore pel tuo affezionatissimo in G[esù] e M[aria,]
Sac[erdote] Michele Rua*

P. S. La gradita tua del 22 Agosto mi recò non lieve soddisfazione. Mi viene confermato da te ciò che speravo. Gl'Italiani sono molto disprezzati all'estero, avranno certo i loro torti, ma in fatto di delinquenza sono in miglior condizione che le altre nazioni. hanno bisogno di educazione religiosa e con essa potranno preservarsi dall'eresia e dalla corruzione. - Mi dici che le ragazze son più libertine che i ragazzi: se mai occorresse l'opera delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice in ajuto delle altre religiose e pie persone che già lavorano pel femineo sesso, volontieri esse verrebbero col permesso dell'Arcivesc[ovo] a collaborare a favore delle più disperatelle, specie coll'Oratorio festivo e coi laboratori e scuole come fanno con tanto frutto in B[uenos] Ayres ed altrove. Rilevo dal complesso di tua lettera che vi è costì gran bisogno di lavorare e però di molti e buoni operai evangelici]. [marginal addition:] Converterà che vi adoperiate subito a coltivar vocazioni. Il D[on] Carlini annegato è proprio pur troppo il nostro. Era andato per consiglio dei medici a far la cura dei bagni e vi restò. Pregate per lui. Mi piace il tuo suggerimento di far pei bagni come per la fuma. Vedremo se si potrà eseguire. Il Signore benedica voi e le vostre fatiche.

No letters by Brother Imieliński appear in *FDR*. Seminarian Oreni, on the contrary, is represented by a 10-page letter. Originally written in neat calligraphy, it is unfortunately no longer legible. At Father Rua's request each section is summarized in brief captions.

21. Seminarian Joseph Oreni to Father Michael Rua, San Francisco, December 5, 1897.

He chronicles various events and activities, including a trip to the Jesuit College of Santa Clara.⁷⁵

[Notation in Father Rua's hand:] Father P[?];⁷⁶ [Reply with] Thanks, etc. I entertain fond hopes, etc. Let Father Berto summarize [the letter] on separate sheets.⁷⁷

[Short topical summaries (by Berto?) appear at the beginning of sections of the letter as follows:]

⁷⁵ *ASC*, Letters to Father Rua, *FDR* 3,347 A12 - B9.

⁷⁶ Identity not ascertained.

⁷⁷ Joachim Berto (1847-1914), born at Villar Almese (Turin), entered the Oratory in 1862 and made his profession in 1865. Before his ordination in 1871, he was chosen by Don Bosco to be his secretary, a post he retained until ill health forced him to retire in 1884. But even in his retirement he served as the Society's archivist, and carefully collected and preserved every scrap of information available on the founder. Even in his illness and retirement he was available to Father Rua for secretarial work. [Amedeo Rodinò, "Berto, Gioachino," in *Dizionario Biografico*, pp. 38-39]

1. Seminarian Oreni joins his confreres of the house of San Francisco in offering good wishes and congratulations⁷⁸ to Father Rua.

2. [Oreni] says that Father Rua's letter was very beneficial to him. He is now confident that he will live to the age of 100 years. He describes a trip he took to the city of Santa Clara to visit the beautiful campus of the Jesuit college.

3. He describes and gives information about the first railway [locomotive?] in America and encloses a sketch.

4. He describes the solemn celebration of the Forty Hours held on November 28, 29 and 30 in our Italian church of San Francisco, California.

5. [The Blessed Sacrament was carried in procession] under the baldachin borne by Mr. G. Oliva, Mr. Garbini, Mr. Cupertini, and Mr. Giuseppe Morgana.

6. Finally he asks for a blessing on that parish and on all the Salesians working in it.

[Notation in Father Rua's hand:] D[on] P[?]. Ringr[aziare] ecc. Spero bene, ecc.— D[on] Berto sunteggi in fogli a parte.

[Short topical summaries (by Berto?) appear at the beginning of sections of the letter, as follows:]

[1. At the top of p. 1:] Il ch.[ierico] Oreni co' suoi Confratelli della casa di S[an] Francisco - aug[uri] e felicit[azioni] a D. Rua.

[2. At the top of p. 2:] Dice che la lettera di D. Rua gli fece molto bene ed è sicuro di vivere fino a 100 anni — Descrive un suo viaggio alla città di S.[anta] Chiara al Collegio dei Gesuiti assai pittoresco.

[3. Low on p. 5:] Descrive e dà notizia della prima ferrovia dell'America e vi unisce un disegno.

[4. Low on p. 6 and at the top of p. 7:] Descrive le solenni feste celebrate il 28, 29 e 30 Novembre in occasione dell' Quarantore nella nostra Chiesa Sale / ~~siana~~ italiana di S[an] Francisco di California.

[5. at the top of p. 9:] // Sotto il Baldacchino portato dal sig[or] Oliva G., dal sig[nor] Garbini, dal sig[nor] Cupertini e dal sig[nor] Giuseppe Morgana.

[6. Toward the end of p. 10:] Chiede infine benediz[ione] su quella parrocchia e sopra tutti i Salesiani che ivi lavorano[.]

22. Father Raphael Piperni to Father Julius Barberis, San Francisco, December 18, 1897.

He anticipates with joy Father Barberis' impending visit, and (with some misgivings) Father Charles Redahan's arrival.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Perhaps these congratulations were meant for Father Rua's 60th birthday. Father Rua was born on June 9, 1837.

⁷⁹ ASC, Works Established, FDR 3,347 C7-9. In Father Piperni's hand.

Charles Bernard Redahan (1862-1920), was recruited in Ireland with other Irish young men for the missions by Archbishop Lynch of Toronto, Canada, in 1882. The group was placed at the Oratory with Don Bosco for their preparation. Four of them, among whom Redahan, became Salesians instead. He was ordained in 1888, and

1600 Dupont Street
S. Francisco. Cal.
December 18, 1897

Dear Father Barberis,

Here is a greeting from the Pacific shores, and from Father Piperni. Happy New Year! May it bring renewed blessings from the Lord on your work as a Salesian.

We learnt through the mails that you are about to set out for these shores and pay us a visit in Father Rua's name. We were overjoyed at hearing this, and we are eagerly awaiting your arrival. Come without delay.⁸⁰ We are enjoying the good life here. What Father Piccono, our advanced scout, reported two years ago is unfortunately true. We do have gorgeous potatoes, choice wines, luscious grapes, all kinds of delectable fruit. What he failed to tell you is that we live among unholy people. North America is the haven of all such people. The evil that could not take root in Italy, thrives here.

We received word from Father Rua's office that Father [Charles] Redahan will be added to our staff. His mission will be the oratory on Sundays and holy days and everything that has to do with our young people who, having been born here, speak no Italian.

My fear is that this confrere, unless he is imbued with a true spirit of charity, will not find the mission among young people of Italian extraction to his liking. He may even be the victim of Irish priests here, for he will find himself

served as financial administrator of the motherhouse until 1898, when Father Rua sent him to San Francisco where an English-speaking priest was needed for youth work. He worked indefatigably and with distinction at SS. Peter and Paul from 1898 to 1914. He immediately began "Americanization" and English classes for Italian immigrants, preparing many for citizenship. Under his direction, the religious instruction program flourished, with as many as 2,000 children enrolled. After the earthquake and the fire, as financial administrator of SS. Peter and Paul, Father Redahan raised the funds and was the chief mover of the reconstruction. In 1914 he was named pastor of Corpus Christi. After a stint at Holy Rosary in Port Chester, NY, he returned to Corpus Christi, where he died after a series of heart attacks. [Archive of the Salesian province of San Francisco, Redahan file] When a rumor spread in the city that Father Redahan was going to be removed, Archbishop Riordan lodged a protest with Father Rua. We have the latter's reply, assuring the archbishop that no such move was contemplated. [Father Rua to Archbishop Riordan, Turin, May 29, 1907, in Archive of San Francisco Province, from Archive of the Archdiocese of San Francisco]

⁸⁰ Father Barberis never did visit San Francisco. His biographer writes: "The Rev. Father Rua had planned to send him in 1901 as visitor to the Salesian houses in the Americas. Father Julius was very tired and took ill at the time. Father Rua then, regarding the visit as urgent, sent the Rev. Father Albera instead. Father Barberis took Father Albera's place as spiritual director general of the Society until the latter's return [in 1903]." [Alessio Barberis, *Don Giulio Barberis*, p. 162; Also E. Ceria, *Profili dei Capitolari salesiani [...]*, p. 316] Father Albera visited San Francisco and the other Salesian houses in the United States in 1903.

among numerous compatriots, both priests and lay people, who have a deep-rooted dislike for Italians. He may succumb under the lash of their sarcasm.

Please share these fears of mine with Father Rua, and ask him to give Father Redahan precise instructions for this mission. It seems inappropriate that I should be the one to tell him what he has to do.

Please give me some information about his character, etc.

To conclude, dear Father Barberis, *ora pro nobis* [pray for us], as we pray for you.

Yours in *Corde Iesu* [in the Heart of Jesus],

R. M. Piperni

D[icem]bre 18. [18]97

Mio carissimo D. Barberis[,]

Dalle spiagge del Pacifico le manda un saluto D[on] Piperni per dirle: "Buon Anno Nuovo e mille nuove benedizioni sulle sue salesiane fati- che."

Ci hanno scritto che Lei è in procinto di partire per questi luoghi per visitarci: abbiám fatto gran festa a qu[est]a notizia e sospiriamo il momento di vederla venire in nome di D[on] Rua. Su dunque, faccia presto. Qui si gode magnificamente: è pur troppo vero quello che scrisse D[on] Piccono due anni fa, come esploratore: patate magnifiche: vini squisiti: uve saporite: frutta soavi al palato. Una cosa non la disse, ed era la gente non santa fra / cui viviamo. L'America del Nord è il ricettacolo di tutta essa: il male che non può prosperare in Italia, qui fa fortuna.

Ci si scrisse dal S[igno]r Don Rua che verrà Don Radahan [sic] a darci una mano: la sua missione sarà l'Oratorio festivo e tutto ciò che riguarda la gioventù nata qui, la quale non parla italiano.

Temo non poco che qu[est]o confratello che verrà, trovandosi tra innumerevoli suoi connazionali, preti e popolo, non ami la missione della gioventù italiana, a meno che sia animato da vero spirito di carità. Temo / che possa essere vittima dei preti irlandesi, i quali una col popolo, hanno grave antipatia agli Italiani: temo che possa essere vittima dei loro sarcasmi.

Dica un poco al S[igno]r Don Rua questi miei timori: e la preghi che per qu[est]a missione di Don Redahan, gli scriva terminatamente ciò che deve fare: non conviene che sia io quegli che gli assegni il suo da fare.

Mi dica un poco che indole ha, etc.

In fine, ora pro nobis[,] caro D. Barberis, come noi oriamo per Lei.

Suo in Corde Iesu[,]

R[.] M[.] Piperni

Conclusion

Thus far the documentation pertaining to the founding and the earliest organization of the Salesian work in San Francisco. The material available to me from various archives, although not complete, has allowed us to reconstruct the story of the founding. By reading this material in chronological order, we hear of the initial overtures, the early negotiations, the terms of agreement, the mustering of

the mission team, the journey and the settling, the first assessment of the situation, the first ministerial activity and early organization of parish work—at the church of SS. Peter and Paul, 1600 Dupont Street.

Documents to be presented in a future installment will describe the first expansion of the Salesian work to neighboring communities of immigrants in need of spiritual care—Corpus Christi Church at the “Mission Street Gardens” and St. Joseph Church in Oakland.

(to be continued)

Appendix

Father Raphael Piperni's *Mission Memoir*—Part I⁸¹

**Memoir of the Coming of the Rev. Salesian Fathers
to San Francisco, California
Description of Personnel and Parish Structures
By the Rev. Father Raphael M. Piperni,
Superior of the First Salesian Mission Team**

Negotiations between the Most Reverend Mgr. Patrick Riordan, Archbishop of San Francisco, and the superior chapter of the Salesian Congregation in Turin were conducted over a period of about two years. Then finally the first Salesian mission team left Turin on February 17, 1897, for San Francisco, California.⁸² The aim of the mission was to staff the parish of SS. Peter and Paul established for the care of Italian immigrants.

The following four Salesians made up the team assigned to the mission:

Father Raphael M. Piperni, from the Salesian School in Puebla, Mexico.— He was at the time serving as director of the school which he himself had founded. The Very Reverend Father [Michael] Rua called him to Turin under obedience to serve as director and pastor of the new mission in San Francisco.

The second priest was Father Valentine Cassini.— He was at the time prefect in a Salesian school in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and happened to be in Turin for a period of convalescence.

Seminarian Joseph Oreni, a student from the college of Valsalice.

Brother Nicholas Imieliński, a Polish Salesian, also from Valsalice.

The archbishop had advanced the money for the trip, which was later debited to the church. In Chicago we were provided with additional funds by Archbishop Riordan's brother, a local pastor. For the length of our stay in that city we were the guests of the Servite Fathers of the Assumption.

We arrived in San Francisco on Friday, March 11, 1897.⁸³ We were made welcome by the then pastor [of SS. Peter and Paul], Father Raphael De Carolis. He was a native of Aquino, province of Naples. We spent the first day in getting familiar with house and church. The following day, the pastor handed everything

⁸¹ As already indicated [cf. note 52 above], Father Piperni's *Mission Memoir* is a less than professional typescript of 7 pages, double-spaced. It may be divided into three sections: Part I (2 plus pages) roughly covers the period of the founding, that is, the year 1897. Part II (3 plus pages) describes the earthquake and fire, and the early reconstruction phase, in 1906 and early 1907. Part III (1 plus page) is a brief chronicle of events dating from January 1909 to March 1914. Only Part I is relevant to the period covered in this article.

⁸² For a discussion of the departure date, cf. Note 55, above.

⁸³ For a discussion of the date of arrival, cf. note 66 above.

over to us and then took us to see the archbishop. He took his leave the same day, and that's the last we saw of him.

The archbishop received us graciously, and with encouraging words urged us to begin with a will our work with the Italian community.

That Sunday, March 13, I delivered my first sermon to the people. I explained to them who we were, who had called us to San Francisco, and why we had come. Nobody presented us to the people, neither Father De Carolis, nor any priest from the chancery office. This is how we began our ministry.

The following Sunday, with the archbishop's permission, I began a preaching mission, which by God's grace bore good fruit.

The children attended Sunday school in large numbers, up to 600 on any given Sunday. We needed a priest only for them, an English-speaking priest,⁸⁴ because the children spoke no other language, and the catechism text was in English. Consequently I pleaded with the Rector Major to send us such a priest. He sent us the Reverend Father Charles Redahan, an Irish Salesian, who arrived in February 1898 and took charge of Sunday school. After a few months I asked the Superiors to appoint him prefect, and they did.

At the so-called "Farmers' Gardens" of Mission Street, out of the city, on the way to San Mateo, lived a numerous Italian community almost totally deprived of any pastoral care. Toward the end of 1897, with the archbishop's consent and on land donated by him, work began on a church for them.⁸⁵ It was located on Croke Street, as it was then called, and the archbishop named it Corpus Christi. The building was completed in March 1898 and blessed by the vicar general, Father Prendergast. Father Cassini took charge and celebrated Mass there. For a few months, Corpus Christi functioned as a mission of SS. Peter and Paul. But I pleaded with Father Rua, and as a consequence Father Cassini was named pastor of that independent parish.

With Father Redahan in charge, the Sunday school experienced a considerable increase in numbers. The Holy Family Sisters had been in charge of the school before the Salesians took over; now they not only continued their involvement, but they did so in greater numbers.

Just a word about material improvements. We painted the church, the walls of which had thus far remained in their natural state. We added more pews to the few that lined the center of the nave. We acquired a beautiful, large bell, and the bell tower was reinforced so that it could bear its weight. We built a large hall beside the church and put it to good use for religious instruction, meetings, bazaars, and presentations.

⁸⁴ Father Piperni writes: "a priest of English nationality."

⁸⁵ Father Piperni inadvertently writes: "We began a street for them which in those days was called Croke Street."

**MEMORIA DELL'ARRIVO DEI R.R. [Reverendi] PADRI
SALESIANI in S[AN] FRANCISCO CALIFORNIA
PERSONALE — LORO OPERE PARROCCHIALI**
*Scritta dal Rev[eren]do P[adre] D[on] RAFFAELE MARIA
PIPERNI, Superiore della 1a [prima] spedizione dei Salesiani.*

Dopo circa due anni di trattative passate tra il Rev[erendissi]mo Arciv[escovo] M[g]r. Patrizio Riordan, di S[an] Francisco, e il Capitolo Superiore della Congregazione Salesiana di Torino, finalmente partì da Torino la 1a [prima] spedizione di Salesiani per gli Stati Uniti, diretti a S[an] Francisco[,] California, coll'oggetto di amministrare la Parrocchia di S[s]. Pietro e Paolo per gli Italiani. La partenza da Torino fu il 17 febbraio 1897.

PERSONALE— Il Sac.[erdote] D. Raffaele Ma Piperni, il quale si trovava nella città di Puebla, Repubblica del Messico quale direttore di quel Collegio Salesiano da lui stesso fondato, fu chiamato a Torino dal R[everendissi]mo Sig[nor] D[on] Rua coll'ubbidienza di fungere da Direttore e Parroco nella nuova fondazione in S[an] Francisco.

L'altro sacerdote fu D[on] Valentino Cassini, che era prefetto in una casa salesiana di Buenos Aires (Argentina). Egli si trovava a Torino per ristabilirsi in salute.

Il Ch[ierico] Giuseppe Oreni, preso dal collegio di Valsalice.

Il Coad[iutore] Nicola Imieliński, polacco, preso da Valsalice.

L'arciv[escovo] aveva anticipato il denaro pel viaggio, che più tardi fu caricato alla chiesa. A Chicago ci rifornimmo di altro denaro presso il Parroco Riordan, fratello dell'Arcivescovo. Ivi alloggiammo presso i PP. [Padri] Serviti dell'Assunzione. /

Arrivammo a S[an] Francisco il giorno 11 Marzo 1897, Venerdì. Fummo ricevuti dal parroco di allora, D[on] Raffaele De Carolis, nativo di Aquino, prov[incia di] Napoli. Passammo il primo giorno in conoscere la casa e chiesa, che il giorno seguente ci furono consegnate da quel Parroco, che ci accompagnò presso l'Arcivescovo, e lo stesso giorno si licenziò da noi, nè più lo vedemmo.

L'Arciv[escovo] ci ricevette bene e ci animò al lavoro attorno agli Italiani.

La domenica seguente, 13 marzo, feci la prima predica al popolo, spiegando chi eravamo, chi ci aveva chiamati, e il perchè del nostro arrivo. Nessuno ci presentò al popolo, nè il D[on De] Carolis, nè alcun prete che venisse dalla Curia. Così cominciammo il nostro ministero.

La domenica seguente, col permesso dell'Arcivescovo, cominciai una missione la quale diede frutto, grazie a Dio.

Nel corso dell'anno, in vista del gran numero (da 500 a 600) dei ragazzi del Sunday School, e della necessità che si occupasse di loro un sacerdote speciale e di nazionalità inglese perchè i ragazzi non sanno altra lingua che l'inglese, ed essendo inglese il catechismo, supplicai il Rettor Maggiore, ed egli inviò il Rev[erendo] D[on] Carlo Redahan, irlandese di nazione, che giunse nel febbraio

1898 e prese a dirigere il Sunday School. Dopo pochi mesi pregai e ottenni che egli fosse nominato prefetto.

Essendovi molti Italiani mezzo abbandonati nei così [sic] detti Giardini di Mission Street (camino a S[an] Matteo) fuori di S[an] Francisco, verso la fine del 1897, col consenso dell'Arcivescovo (che diede gratis il terreno) cominciammo per loro [una chiesa in] una strada che allora si chiamava Croke Street. L'Arciv[escovo] le diede il nome di Corpus Christi. — Finita la chiesa nel Marzo 1898, e benedetta dal P[adre] Prendergast, Vicario Generale, rimase incaricato il P[adre] Cassini a dirvi messa. Per alcuni mesi la chiesa era considerata come succursale di SS. Pietro e Paolo; ma insistendo presso il Sig[nor] D[on] Rua, ottenni che D[on] Cassini ne fosse nominato parroco indipendente.

Coll'arrivo del P[adre] Redahan aumentò il numero dei ragazzi alle [sic] Sunday School e le Suore of the Holy Family [sic], che le accudevano prima dei Salesiani, vi continuarono il loro servizio aumentando esse pure di numero. /

Tra le opere materiali notiamo l'imbiancatura dei muri tuttora rozzi, e la provvista di altri banchi essendovene appena al centro. Si provvide una bella campana grande e si rinforzò la torre per sostenerla. Si edificò una gran sala a fianco la chiesa per catechismi, adunanze, fiere, rappresentanze.