

ANDRÉ SAMPERS

ARCHBISHOP BLANCHET'S REQUEST FOR
REDEMPTORIST MISSIONARIES IN OREGON, 1846

SUMMARIUM

Viginti abhinc annos in his foliis vulgavimus quaedam documenta, in archivo generali Congregationis SS.mi Redemptoris, Romae, conservata, circa petitionem Exc.mi Francisci Norberti Blanchet, archiepiscopi de Oregon City (24 VII 1846), aestate an. 1846 Vindobonae prolatam, ut Redemptoristae missionem inter « gentes feras incultasque » regionem Oregon inhabitantes assumerent; quae tamen petitio exitum optatum non habuit. *Spic. hist.* 6 (1958) 486-490.

Nuper in archivo S. Congregationis de Propaganda Fide epistolam Exc.mi Blanchet invenimus, qua patet eum Em.mum Iacobum Fransoni, Congregationis de P. F. praefectum, adiisse ut ipsum adiuveret ad finem intentum assequendum (Doc. 1); qua epistula motus, cardinalis Exc.mum Michaellem Viale Prelà, nuntium apostolicum Vindobonae, rogavit ut operam sollicite interponeret ad rem componendam (Doc. 2).

INTRODUCTION

Several years ago this review published a few letters exchanged in the summer of 1846 by Archbishop Francis Norbert Blanchet, the Superior General of the Redemptorists, Fr. Giancamillo Ripoli, and his Vicar General for the transalpine branch of this Congregation, Fr. Joseph Passerat¹. It was the correspondence preserved in the General Archives of the Redemptorists at Rome (hereinafter: AGR) concerning Blanchet's request to the sons of St. Alphonsus to assist him

¹ *Spic. hist.* 6 (1958) 486-490.

and his fellow bishops² in their missionary work in Oregon³. Recently we came across some other documents about this matter in the Propaganda Fide Archives (hereinafter: APF), and they seem worth publishing as a supplement to the above mentioned article.

After he had successfully handled the Oregon mission's affairs with Propaganda in the first half of 1846, Blanchet left Rome for Munich and then went to Vienna where he arrived on July 17, taking up residence with the Redemptorist Fathers at Maria Stiegen⁴.

Searching constantly for funds and even more for personnel, it was only natural for Blanchet to contact the Redemptorist Vicar General Fr. Passerat, who resided in the same monastery, about the possibility of getting missionaries for Oregon. In fact, the Redemptorists had been working strenuously in the Western United States since 1832, when Passerat had yielded to Vicar General Frederick Resé's repeated requests⁵.

Passerat was by no means unwilling to comply with Blanchet's proposal but after some recent clashes with the Superior General about how to proceed with the American mission⁶, he pointed out to the

² On July 24, 1846 the metropolitan see of Oregon City (F. N. Blanchet) was erected with two suffragan sees at Vancouver Island (M. Demers) and Walla Walla (Aug. Blanchet). See J. B. CODE, *Dictionary of the American Hierarchy, 1789-1964*, New York [1964], 17 and 65. On August 8, 1846 Propaganda informed Blanchet about the newly erected sees and the nomination of their titulars; APF, LDB, vol. 334 (1846, parte II), f° 819v. See also R. RITZLER — P. SEFRIN, *Hierarchia catholica medii et recentioris aevi VIII* (1846-1903), Padova 1979, 427 (Oregonopolitan), 581 (Vancouverien.), 596 (Walla-Wallen).

³ Blanchet's request is mentioned in M. J. CURLEY, *The Provincial Story. A History of the Baltimore Province of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer*, New York 1963, 90-91. Cf. *Spic. hist.* 13 (1965) 409.

⁴ In a letter to Propaganda, dated « Vienne, chez les RR. PP. Liguoriens, le 18 juillet 1846 », Blanchet complains of getting no news to that date about the papal approval of his proposal to revise the Oregon ecclesiastical territory. At the end of the letter: « P.S. Arrivé hier à Vienne, j'en partirai le 27 » [in fact he left about ten days later]. APF, SRC AC, vol. 14 (1845-1848), f° 309rv.

⁵ See *Spic. hist.* 4 (1956) 124-131 and 17 (1969) 155; CURLEY, *op. cit.* 4-9.

⁶ His 1845-1846 disagreements with Fr. Ripoli had been rather heated. They had clashed about the mission in Texas, proposed by Bishop John M. Odin and accepted by Passerat; cf. *Spic. hist.* 6 (1958) 487, note 12 and CURLEY, *op. cit.* 89-90. In his letter to Passerat of April 18, 1846 Ripoli stated that he was very much displeased that the mission had been accepted without his knowledge and consent, and vehemently reproached his Vicar General with his high-handed way of acting: « Compatior tibi, Frater, ex corde, quia omnia sustines, multum pateris, infirma valetudine opprimeris et majores in dies adhuc tibi paras cruces. Ad quid? Habes Provinciales, eosque spernis. Habes Consultores, et nihil tibi prosunt. Me non audis. Solus vis omnia facere, nonne ut citius succumbas? Quia vae soli ». AGR XII B 21. This reprimand was certainly excessive, as Passerat was indeed generally inclined to depend too much on others. In his answer of May 18 he informed the General that the Texas mission was called off in token of obedience, if not wisdom: « obedientia enim non ratiocinatur, et contentus sum corde cum prohibitione mihi facta ».

Archbishop the absolute necessity of first getting the consent of the highest authority in the Congregation.

Hence Blanchet wrote on August 4 a letter to the Rector Major of the Redemptorists, Fr. Ripoli⁷, then residing in Nocera de' Pagani, a small town in the Kingdom of Naples, about halfway between Pompei and Salerno. Passerat forwarded this letter with his own of August 7, in which he expressed his willingness to help out as requested but only in case the General ordered it: « res enim a me nullo modo pendet, nisi quoad oboedientiam! »⁸.

On August 4, the day he wrote to Ripoli, Blanchet also sent a letter to the Prefect of Propaganda, Cardinal Giacomo Fransoni, asking him to back his request and thus persuade the Redemptorists to send missionaries to Oregon⁹.

We found no trace in AGR nor in APF of such contact between this Congregation and Ripoli or Passerat, either directly or through the acting Procurator General¹⁰. However, on August 31 the Prefect of Propaganda wrote to the Apostolic Nuncio in Vienna, Archbishop Michele Viale Prelà, requesting his good offices in pushing Blanchet's proposal through¹¹. We do not know whether the Nuncio recommended Blanchet's request to Passerat. If he really did, his interlocutor would certainly have told him that it was not up to him to make the final decision but to the Superior General.

On September 1 Fr. Ripoli had given an answer to both Blanchet and Passerat¹² which — although affirmative in principle — was in fact rather negative: he gladly consented to taking up mission

⁷ This letter is published in *Spic. hist.* 6 (1958) 486-487.

⁸ This letter is published *ibid.* 487-489.

⁹ This letter is published *infra*, Doc. 1.

¹⁰ After the death of Fr. Biagio Panzuti (May 8, 1846) Fr. Domenico Centore handled the Congregation's procura. He was elected Procurator General on February 19, 1847.

The day of Centore's election is repeatedly given incorrectly as February 29 (impossible date as 1847 was not a leap-year); *Spic. hist.* 2 (1954) 42, 82, 241 and 26 (1978) 214, also in Fr. MINERVINO, *Catalogo dei Redentoristi d'Italia 1732-1841, e dei Redentoristi delle Provincie meridionali d'Italia, 1841-1869* (*Bibliotheca Historica CSSR VIII*), Roma 1978, 36. The numeral as written in the only source available (*Libro delle Consulte generali, 1783-1859*, fo 36r) could be read as 29, but careful comparison with other numerals of the same hand in the preceding entries of the register makes it clear that it reads 19.

¹¹ This letter is published *infra*, Doc. 2.

¹² Ripoli's letter to Blanchet is published in *Spic. hist.* 6 (1958) 489. The first part of the letter to Passerat *ibid.* 489-490.

work among the « savages »¹³ but he restricted his Vicar General's choice of missionaries exclusively to the members of the Austrian Province without « touching even one » of the Belgian and Helvetic Provinces. For the rest he left the matter completely up to Passerat who found himself in a somewhat awkward position: how could he find five or six French speaking priests — as Blanchet had expressly requested — among the members of the Austrian Province?

Nonetheless, the problem was solved but in a quite unexpected way.

After his departure from Vienna on about the 6th of August¹⁴, Blanchet did not insist on obtaining Redemptorists for Oregon, as Passerat mentioned — evidently not without relief — in his letter to Ripoli of September 16 and in the following one of October 29¹⁵. Probably Blanchet did not press the matter any further because his endeavours to recruit personnel for the Oregon mission had been more successful elsewhere. When he returned finally from Brest to the States on February 22, 1847¹⁶ he was accompanied by 21 missionaries, including eight priests and seven sisters¹⁷.

¹³ This letter reads verbatim: « inter vulgo silvestres (sauvages) ». The expression is taken from Blanchet's letter of August 4, in which he says that he wants the Redemptorists particularly « pour les missions sauvages » and that in some parts of the region « les sauvages » had begun to learn French.

¹⁴ At the beginning of his letter of August 7 Passerat notes that Blanchet had stayed « with us » for three weeks. As mentioned before, he arrived in Vienna on July 17. In a later letter of September 16 Passerat says that the Archbishop had left by mid August. In the chronicles of the Redemptorist house in Vienna (AGR, Pr.A XVII, an. 1846) Blanchet's sojourn is not mentioned.

¹⁵ The pertinent passages from these letters are published in *Spic. hist.* 6 (1958) 490.

¹⁶ *The Catholic Encyclopedia* II [1907] 593.

¹⁷ *New Catholic Encyclopedia* II [1967] 603.

DOCUMENTS

1. - Francis Norbert Blanchet, Archbishop of Oregon City, to Cardinal Giacomo Frasoni, Prefect of Propaganda; Vienna, August 4, 1846. — Original in APF, SRC AC, vol. 14 (1845-1848), f° 345rv.

†

J.M.J.

Eminence Révérendissime!

Après avoir heureusement obtenu la division de l'Orégon en évêchés et la nomination de deux nouveaux évêques pour m'aider à en faire la conquête spirituelle, il me reste encore un grand devoir à remplir envers le pays. C'est de lui trouver de bons missionnaires pour nous assister.

Vous voudrez bien, Eminence, en votre qualité de Préfet de la S.C., et de concert avec elle, me prêter votre secours pour ce choix important. Les preuves de bonté et de bienveillance dont Votre Eminence m'a comblé, l'intérêt dont la mission de l'Orégon a été l'objet, m'engagent à cette dernière démarche.

J'ai jeté les yeux sur les RR. PP. Liguoristes. Ceux de Vienne ayant accepté, l'hiver dernier, la mission du Texas, et le T. R. P. Général ayant refusé sur les représentations du Provincial de Belgique¹⁸, il faut maintenant un désir ou un ordre de la part de la Propagande pour les mettre à l'abri de tout reproche. Cet ordre serait la voix du Ciel. J'en aurais besoin de *six* pour *le départ au mois d'octobre*. Leur mission, sans faire exclusion de tout autre congrégation que les évêques désireraient avoir par la suite, suivant le besoin.

Ils auraient à évangéliser particulièrement du 49° au 70° degré les possessions anglaises et russes, environ 500 lieues de long sur 3 à 400 lieues de large vers la grande pointe des possessions russes. Ils s'avanceraient vers le nord à l'ouest des Montagnes Rocheuses, en même temps que les RR. PP. Oblats de Marseille le feraient à l'est

¹⁸ Fr. Friedrich von (Frédéric de) Held, superior (1833) and then first Provincial (1841-1847) of the Congregation in Belgium. From 1844 till 1850 the Redemptorists in the United States were under the jurisdiction of the Belgian Provincial.

sur le territoire de la Baie d'Hudson. Quand le gouvernement serait mieux disposé, ils pourraient y entrer avec la langue slave ou russe.

Veillez bien, Eminence, mettre le comble aux faveurs que vous avez accordées à l'Orégon, de concert avec la S. C., en décidant les RR. PP. à accepter la mission de l'Orégon avec les RR. PP. Jésuites, sous la direction des évêques.

La quête n'avance pas; les circonstances ne sont point favorables; toutes les grandes familles sont absentes. J'espère pourtant obtenir un secours annuel de la Société Léopoldine. Son Excellence Monseigneur le Nonce apostolique à Vienne a eu pour moi des bontés extraordinaires.

Veillez agréer, je vous prie, Révérendissime Seigneur, l'assurance des hommages de mon respect et de la vénération profonde avec lesquels j'ai l'honneur d'être,

De Votre Eminence Révérendissime

le très humble
et très obéissant serviteur
† Fr. N. Blanchet
Evêque de Drasa
Vicaire apostolique de l'Orégon

Chez les RR. PP. Liguoristes
à Vienne, le 4 août 1846

A Son Eminence Rev.me
Monseigneur le Cardinal Fransoni
Préfet de la Propagande etc. etc., à Rome

Notes by officials of Propaganda (f° 346v):

1846, America, Stati Uniti, Oregon.
Vienna, 4 Agosto.

Mr Planchit [!], V° A° dell'Orégon, ottenuta la divisione di quel vescovato e la nomina di due vescovi suoi collaboratori. Chiede sei missionarii Liguorini di Vienna. Ha avuto un annuo soccorso dalla Leopoldina¹⁹.

Si è scritto a Mr Nunzio di Vienna 31 ag° 1846.
1228. 22 agosto 1846.

¹⁹ To be exact: Blanchet does not say in his letter that the Leopoldine Society (Leopoldinen-Stiftung) had granted him an annual subsidy but that he hoped (« j'espère.

2. - Cardinal Giacomo Fransoni, Prefect of Propaganda, to Archbishop Michele Viale Prelà, Nuncio in Vienna; Rome, August 31, 1846. — Copy in APF, LDB, vol. 334 (1846, parte II), f° 886r.

Mgr. Blanchet, recentemente nominato dalla Santità di N. S. Arcivescovo d'Oregon City, con sua lettera scritta alla S. C. il 4 ag° da Vienna, ha fatto istanza alla medesima onde raccomandandi al R.mo Padre Generale²⁰ dei Redentoristi d'accordare per quella vastissima missione n. 6 religiosi di quella Congregazione.

Aderendo a tale istanza dell'arcivescovo suddetto, mi rivolgo a V. S. e La prego a compiacersi di adoprarsi premurosamente per l'intento.

re) to get it. Cf. F. KENNEALLY (ed.), *United States Documents in the Propaganda Fide Archives*, First Series, vol. II, Washington 1968, 19, n. 125. In his previously cited letter of July 18 to the Secretary of Propaganda, Archbishop Giovanni Brunelli, Blanchet mentions that he got 500 florins in Munich, probably from the Ludwig Mission Society (Ludwig-Missionsverein).

²⁰ Was first written: « Padre Vicario Generale ». Then the word « Vicario » was cancelled.