

SAMUEL J. BOLAND

AN EARLY OFFER OF AN  
AUSTRALIAN REDEMPTORIST FOUNDATION

SUMMARY

1. Earlier approaches. 2. The Brighton foundation. 3. Reception of the offer. 4. The end of the negotiations. Documents.

During the year 1866 Redemptorist superiors in Rome and England gave serious thought to invitations to establish the Congregation in Australia<sup>1</sup>. Coming from the newly established diocese of Brisbane and one of its most flamboyant early priests, the letters hold some interest for the student of Australian Catholic history. They add a little life and colour to the story of the Church establishing itself in a vast new world. It is possible for one to share, with a better understanding indeed, the regret expressed by the Superior General that negotiations so full of promise should have collapsed.

The story of the correspondence is brief enough, to be sure, After all, in those pioneering days it took at times many months for letters to be exchanged. While letters, penned in hope, made their laborious way from Brisbane to London, much was happening in Rome; and it was there that the decisions were being made. The small incident of the proposed foundation and its fate reveal the condition of the Redemptorists. They were still centralised in their government to an extent a modern must find surprising. Father Nicho-

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<sup>1</sup> Redemptorist archives quoted in this article will be designated by the following abbreviations:

AGR: General archives, Rome,

APC: Archives of the Canberra (Australasian) province,

APD: Archives of the Dublin (Irish) province,

APL: Archives of the London (English) province.

las Mauron, the Superior General, made decisions of this kind very much his own personal responsibility. Very soon he found himself faced with the choice between Brisbane and another place; and in the end he chose neither.

### 1. *Earlier approaches*

By 1866 the possibility of a foundation in Australia had already been more than once proposed to the Redemptorists<sup>2</sup>. There was an intriguing mention of the country as early as 1848. In March of that year Father Rudolf von Smetana wrote on behalf of the Vicar General of the Redemptorists outside Italy, Father Joseph Passerat, to inform the superior in England that it was most unlikely that it would even be considered sending a community to Australia<sup>3</sup>. At that time the Redemptorists had been in England only five years and were under the leadership of the energetic Father Frederick von Held, who had been a disciple of St. Clement Hofbauer. It is not possible to be quite certain as to who had approached Father von Held. Two of the new Australian bishops had come to England in 1847, Willson of Hobart and Polding of Sydney<sup>4</sup>. The bishop from Van Diemen's Land had come to plead for more humane treatment for the convicts, and it was hardly likely that he was thinking of bringing religious to his depressing prison island. It seems more probable that it had been the zealous and saintly Johan Bede Polding of Sydney who had made this attempt to induce the Redemptorists to join the sadly thin ranks of his clergy.

The matter came up again in the beginning of 1860. The minutes of a consultation on 2nd January record that the Superior General had decided not to accept a foundation in Brisbane<sup>5</sup>. In this case the origin of the suggestion is easy to identify. James Quinn, newly appointed bishop, was making his way from Ireland to his distant see and had paused in Rome, hoping to entice some few recruits to the huge colony of Queensland. There was probably some

<sup>2</sup> In an earlier article in *Spic. hist.*, 25(1977) 250-271, I had occasion to mention these offers. At that time I mistakenly identified the alternative that Father Mauron chose in place of Brisbane as Surinam. Further searching has shown that the venture of the Dutch province in no way affected the plans for Australia.

<sup>3</sup> Smetana to Held, 11th March 1848. The letter is in the archives of the Redemptorists of the Cologne province.

<sup>4</sup> P.F. MORAN, *History of the Catholic Church in Australasia*, Sydney, 1895, 273, 445.

<sup>5</sup> AGR, *Liber consultationum*, I, 76.

excited speculation in Sant'Alfonso when it was known that a bishop had come asking for missionaries for such an exotic land as Australia. Later in the same year one of the Fathers who were unhappily trying to establish themselves in Chile suggested to Father Mauron that Australia was a much better choice to have made and offering himself to go to Sydney and explore the prospects<sup>6</sup>.

In 1862 Archbishop Polding made a further attempt. Addressing himself to Father R.A. Coffin, he mentioned relatives of his, the Sharples family of Liverpool, close neighbours of the community in Bishop Eton<sup>7</sup>. Hoping perhaps to exploit this meagre bond, he proposed a plan to settle a small community in Gosford, or Brisbane Water as it was then called, with charge of that picturesque district north of Sydney. The ship carrying the mail foundered when it was a couple of days out from Ceylon. The archbishop's letter was among the mail recovered from the disaster, and it still bears the stains of its hazardous passage as it reposes in the files of the Australian Redemptorists<sup>8</sup>. It is a pity to have to record that nothing came of the adventure. At that time the Redemptorists were firmly opposed to parish ministry, which was the main reason why the request was unsuccessful.

Five years later Father Coffin, then superior of the newly created English province, met Archbishop Polding in the home of the Sharples. The now aged pioneer missionary renewed his request, even going on his knees and pleading with tears in his eyes. The English provincial, however, did not allow himself to be moved. Not only did he share the general opposition to parishes, but he was in those early years very much aware that the personnel at his disposal was limited. That was the reason why his first reaction had been unfavourable to the offer made in the previous year from Brisbane, which is our present concern.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Spic. hist.*, 30(1982) 378.

<sup>7</sup> The English and Irish houses then belonged to the province of Holland and England. Father Coffin, an Oxford convert and associate of Newman in establishing the English Oratory, was vice-provincial and resident in Clapham. It seems that Mr. & Mrs. Sharples were acquaintances of Father Coffin. Archbishop Polding's letter is in APC, Episcopal.

<sup>8</sup> The story of the shipwreck and the recovery of the letter is in T. SHEARMAN, *The Redemptorists in Australasia*, Mayfield, I, 1907, 2. Father Shearman's work in MS is in APC.

## 2. The Brighton foundation

Towards the end of 1865 Father Coffin received a letter from Brisbane with the signature of Father Patrick Dunne<sup>9</sup>. The writer introduced himself as having « some seven or eight years ago had the happiness of making a retreat in the house of your order in Rome, and ever since I have been looking for some opportunity of doing something in return for all the kindness I then received ». This information identifies the writer quite definitely as that Patrick Dunne who had left Melbourne in 1857 after he and two of his clerical cronies, forming what their long-suffering bishop called « the clique », had engaged Church authorities in a noisy, protracted and embarrassing public quarrel<sup>10</sup>.

A writer who loved to reminisce about the priests who laboured *in diebus illis* has described Father Dunne as « one of the most picturesque of the early priests, who touched Australian life at almost as many points as Father Therry, whom in many ways he resembled. He was of the same build, much of the same temperament, loved a fight and feared no man »<sup>11</sup>.

A few months after reaching Melbourne late in 1850 he was appointed to the new parish of Pentridge, a name now reserved for the prison, the district going by the presumably more respectable name of Coburg. He had not been there long when the colony was thrilled by reports of gold discovered in Ballarat. The diggings were some hundred or so kilometres from Coburg, but as far as the parish priest could see, they were his responsibility. In any case, so many of his parishioners were rushing off to try their luck that he thought it best to follow them. His tent, pitched on what is now called Brown Hill, has a claim, scarcely to be disputed, to have been the first church of any denomination on the Victorian goldfields. When a priest was appointed to Ballarat a few months later, Father Dunne was sent to Geelong and later to the Western District. His outspoken criticism of his bishop, joined to the complaints of his two bosom friends,

<sup>9</sup> APD, Dunne to Coffin, 18th October 1865.

<sup>10</sup> An account of Father Dunne's spectacular career has been given in JOHN O'BRIEN, « In diebus illis » in *The Australasian Catholic Record*, second series, Sydney, 22(1945) 32-34. John O'Brien was the *nom-de-plume* of P.J.HARTIGAN, whose highly entertaining and generally trustworthy reminiscences of the early Australian clergy have been republished as *The Men of '38 and Other Pioneer Priests*, Kilmore, Vic., 1975.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.* The Father Therry mentioned was one of the first two Catholic priests authorised by the British government to exercise their ministry in Australia. He is naturally a figure of legend. The many tales of his zeal are matched by amusing (at this distance in time) stories of his controversies with authorities, both civil and ecclesiastical, in Sydney and Hobart.

reached a climax in 1856 with the members of the « clique » being released from the diocese. Patrick Dunne in this way found himself in Rome in 1857. Besides the happiness of making that retreat in Sant'Alfonso there is reason to know that he did not fail to use the opportunity of letting authorities in Propaganda know about the hopeless incompetence of the poor Bishop of Melbourne. He was in Ireland by 1858, because in that year we find him President of St. Brigid's Seminary, Tullamore. But Patrick Dunne was no academic.

In 1861 he was touched by the plight of the numerous Irish who sought to escape the poverty of their homeland by emigration. No longer able to find refuge in America, where civil war was raging, they were becoming quite desperate. The resourceful President of Tullamore Seminary was sure he had found the answer in the assisted migration being promoted by the newly proclaimed colony of Queensland. Irish clergy were dismayed when the learned Father Dunne appeared in pulpits all over the country preaching both the Gospel and the Queensland Land Act. The formidable opponent of Bishop Goold of Melbourne brushed aside the chorus of condemnation and launched the Queensland Immigration Society with the warm support of the new Bishop of Brisbane<sup>12</sup>.

The first migrant ship, sailing in 1862 daringly loaded with four hundred hopefuls, was named with a touch of Irish pride the *Erin-go-Bragh*. Before the leaky, hardly seaworthy old wreck ended its seemingly interminable voyage its passengers had renamed it the *Erin-go-Slow*. It has been described as « the worst ship that ever sailed the seas ». That title might well be contested by the *Fiery Cross*, which brought the next group of Irish settlers to Queensland. On its return voyage, true to its name, it caught fire at sea, and Father Dunne, who had been unable to find a place in the life boats, was one of the few survivors. His migration scheme continued until bigoted opposition prevailed on the Queensland government to withdraw its support. By the time Father Dunne had settled down in Sandgate he had brought some 6000 or so Irish colonists to the new country, which Protestants were beginning to call in some alarm Quinnsland after the Catholic Bishop of Brisbane. By 1865 the indefatigable pioneer was thinking of the Redemptorists, who had been his hosts in 1857. And what he proposed to Father Coffin in October looked very promising indeed.

<sup>12</sup> There is an informative study of the society in T.P. BOLAND, « The Queensland Immigration Society » in *The Australasian Catholic Record*, second series, Sydney, 39(1962) 205-212; 298-304; 40(1963) 23-30.

He offered to make available at very reasonable terms five hundred acres « in this beautiful seaport of Sandgate » to the Redemptorist Fathers, adding as a possible further inducement, « I would hope to join the Order myself and do all in my power to promote its interests »<sup>13</sup>.

The letter went on to describe the property. It was part of a larger estate on which the writer had established what he called the « small township » of Brighton. The five hundred acres he described as lying along the shore of Moreton Bay and bordered on two other sides by a river and a broad creek. He urged Father Coffin to « lose no time in seeing about this important matter », because the bishop was already thinking about « the Passionists or some other Order »<sup>14</sup>. Dunne ended his plea with a description, not really exaggerated, of the property as not only beautifully situated but quite valuable. It was certainly a very generous gift he was proposing, as became clearer when later correspondence enabled him to refer to a map in his description of the Brighton property.

It was after receiving an encouraging reply from the provincial<sup>15</sup> that Dunne sent along his neatly drawn map of Sandgate and the adjoining Brighton « township » with the extensive property awaiting the coming of the Redemptorists<sup>16</sup>. He did not fail to sound a warning about dealings with the bishop, a note that would have sounded ominous to his former bishop of Melbourne. Bishop Quinn liked to keep control of finances in his own hands, to the great resentment of the lay people, said Dunne; but he had already shown his incompetence. « The bishop is unable to pay the debts which are immediately pressing on him. We cannot expect any assistance from his Lordship. His blessing and good will are all we can expect ». From himself, on the other hand there was much to be expected. « As soon as I can wind up my affairs I purpose with God's assistance to join the Fathers and bring anything I can spare with me and end my days in peace ».

<sup>13</sup> APD. Dunne to Coffin, 18th October 1865.

<sup>14</sup> It has been pointed out that religious clergy were only tardily admitted to dioceses like Brisbane which had Irish bishops. Cf. K.T. LIVINGSTONE, *The Emergence of an Australian Catholic Priesthood, 1835-1915*, Sydney, 1977, 99-100. It was not for want of trying, as is clear from Dunne's letter. There is also evidence that Bishop Quinn tried to interest the Vincentians in 1866, even while he was still hoping to secure the Redemptorists. Cf. D.F. BOURKE, *The History of the Vincentian Fathers in Australasia*, Melbourne, 1980, 18.

<sup>15</sup> APD, Coffin to Dunne, 31st January 1866.

<sup>16</sup> APD, Dunne to Coffin, 17th May 1866.

A few days later he was writing again with cautions, now liberally underlined, about depending on the bishop<sup>17</sup>.

« Believe me, if the securing of the land be left to the bishop it will *never be done*. Should you wish to send money to secure the land, I would *privately* suggest to you not to let the money get into his Lordship's hands. If you do, it might be devoted, *for the present* to meet some more pressing call ». He once more ended by expressing his desire for the religious life in words that came strangely perhaps from the pen of one who « loved a fight and feared no man ».

« I trust that when I have sold off all the property in my hands and paid off all my liabilities I shall be able to bring in with me about 1000 pounds at least and will, I trust, find a home and more peace and happiness than I have ever had in the world, when observing under our superior the Rules and observances of our holy Founder. I cannot sell my property at present with any advantage. I must wait till times become a little better and the colony more prosperous. If I were able to hold over the property for five or ten years I would not part with it for 50,000 or 60,000 pounds. I am sick and tired of the world. I am most anxious to retire from it and save my soul, as I find it difficult to do now, situated as I am with so much worldly business to attend to. I hope you and the Fathers under you will pray that God may spare me till I get out of the bustle of the world and a few years of holy peace to prepare for a better one ».

Almost at this very time the bishop himself was writing about the Brighton foundation<sup>18</sup>. « I write to assure your reverence that the project of securing for the purpose of the foundation a quantity of land near Brisbane has my approval and most cordial cooperation ». Some little problem had arisen, he warned, about the purchase of the land; but the legal documents would be in his hands within a few days. With himself, presumably, the pioneers would have to deal on their arrival. This, one gathers, was the very thing that had occasioned Dunne's heavily underlined warnings.

The bishop, who no doubt had learned of the Redemptorists' views on the occasion of his earlier dealings, hastened to declare his own intentions. « My wishes are identical with those of your Superior General, namely that the object of the foundation here should be to labour for the salvation of souls in the spirit and according to the Rules of your holy Founder, St. Alphonsus ». There would be ample opportunity to achieve this object, he went on, « in this vast

<sup>17</sup> APD, Dunne to Coffin, 20th May 1866.

<sup>18</sup> APD, Quinn to Coffin, 21st May 1866.

diocese about three times the size of France ». There was not a single religious house where his clergy could make a retreat, even after long years of unremitting pastoral work in isolated places. The Redemptorists were bound to find a welcome in the colony, « where religion is perfectly free, and all religious denominations have a great respect for the Catholic Faith ».

The account given by Patrick Dunne and the assurances offered by his bishop made the prospective foundation appear most attractive. They wrote of a distant and unknown land. The colony of Queensland had been in existence barely half a dozen years, but in the mind of one man at least there was little doubt of its future. And the bishop's apparent good will augured well for the foundation.

### 3. *Reception of the offer*

Father Coffin seems to have reacted to Father Dunne's offer rather as he had to the earlier request of Archbishop Polding. Sending the letter on to his Superior General early in January 1866, he added that he had warned the writer that the English province was not yet in a position to think about overseas foundations, but that the final decision rested with the Roman authorities<sup>19</sup>.

The Superior General replied promptly, at some length and with an enthusiasm which surely surprised the English provincial<sup>20</sup>. He had been thinking, he declared, for some years about Australia, a reference, no doubt, to the visit of Bishop Quinn in 1860. It would be a pity, he thought, to be so preoccupied with the familiar world of Europe as to overlook the new world, where in countries like Australia the Church of the future might well be developing. He saw it as providential that the call should have come just at that moment. « I wish to know only the Will of God and the good pleasure of St. Alphonsus ». His consultors, he added, warmly and enthusiastically agreed that the time had come to think seriously about Australia.

Continuing in the same vein of optimism, Father Mauron weighed the possibilities. At the most he considered that there would be need for no more than three Fathers and two Brothers to set up a house and church. He undertook to find two men who could be taught English, and that would leave England a share that should not prove too taxing. Father Coffin in replying declared himself will-

<sup>19</sup> AGR, Prov. Anglica, Provincialia, I, Coffin to Mauron, 5th January 1866.

ing to cooperate<sup>21</sup>. He should have no trouble in providing one Father and two Brothers. Just the same, he had misgivings, which he voiced. « I can't help fearing that Mgr. Quinn will put us in charge of some district, at least of the little town of Sandgate ».

Under the same date he wrote to Father Dunne in far-off Brighton<sup>22</sup>. He faithfully reported the Superior General's eagerness to accept the offer. Owing to the lack of English-speakers who could be spared, however, it was necessary to be patient for some time, while the members of the community were chosen and prepared. Father Coffin took occasion to spell out clearly and firmly his wish that it be understood that Redemptorists were preachers, who should not be hampered by parish duties, because otherwise

« we should fail in the special work proposed to us and disappoint those who kindly desire to see the Redemptorists settled in Australia... Our sole desire in this matter is to know and do God's Will to promote His greater glory and to save souls redeemed by His Blood in the spirit and according to the rules of our holy Founder St. Alphonsus which we have bound ourselves to follow ».

Not long after all that talk about the opening in Australia another matter intruded to divide Father Mauron's attention, as may be gathered from his next mention of Brighton. In March he sent on to Father Coffin a package of letters to be forwarded to Father Louis de Buggenoms in the West Indies<sup>23</sup>. He spoke of the mission to the Dominican Republic entrusted by the Holy See to Father de Buggenoms and the proposal that there should be a foundation on the island<sup>24</sup>. This business, he has to confess, has prevented his reaching a final decision about Australia. It would be helpful, he suggests, if he had a map. There the matter had to rest until almost the end of the years. Patrick Dunne duly provided his map on 17th May, of which a copy was sent off to Rome bearing the date of 31st May<sup>25</sup>. By then Father Mauron had become very much involved in dealings with the Holy See and the varying fortunes of the project for Santo

<sup>20</sup> AGR, Prov. Anglica, Provincialia, I, Mauron to Coffin, 13th January 1866.

<sup>21</sup> AGR, Prov. Anglica, Provincialia, I, Coffin to Mauron, 31st January 1866.

<sup>22</sup> APD, Coffin to Dunne, 31st January 1866.

<sup>23</sup> AGR, Prov. Anglica, Provincialia, I, Mauron to Coffin, 23rd March 1866.

<sup>24</sup> Father Louis de Buggenoms, a Belgian, had been a member of the first community in England. There is information about his extraordinarily varied career, especially in the West Indies, in A. BONI, *In den Westindischen Archipel*, Bruges, 1944, 188-238.

<sup>25</sup> AGR, Prov. Anglica, Provincialia, I, Coffin to Mauron, s.d.

Domingo. Brighton, meanwhile, receded further and further into the background.

#### 4. *The end of the negotiations*

Finally, in September Father Mauron wrote to ask the English provincial to let Father Dunne know that his offer had to be regretfully refused<sup>26</sup>. That outcome had been altogether foreseeable over the past few months. Just the same, the Superior General tried to cling to the hopes with which he had greeted the possible foundation in January. « If your province could undertake it », he told Father Coffin, « I should desire it with all my heart ». But there was no hope in that quarter, so that nothing remained but for Father Coffin to wind up the negotiations.

« Your reverence can write to his Lordship the Bishop of Brisbane and to Mr. Dunne that against my will I am obliged to renounce the foundation; and the chief reason you can give is that by order of the Holy Father we have had to take charge of a large mission in the Indies, and that has strained our resources, especially those I had intended for Australia ».

The provincial, who from the beginning had been less than enthusiastic about the venture, was able to write to Father Dunne about « the formal order from the Holy Father to undertake a large and most important mission in the West Indies »<sup>27</sup>. It was this sacred charge, he went on, which had deprived the Father General « of those subjects whom he had intended to associate with us of this province in Australia ». On the same day he wrote in the same terms to Bishop Quinn<sup>28</sup>.

Perhaps it will not be without interest to speculate as to whom the Superior General had in mind as founders in Australia. In his communications with Father Coffin he mentioned no names at any time. The clearest indication he gave was at the end, when he had the provincial inform the Bishop and Father Dunne that the two men intended for Brighton had to be diverted to Santo Domingo. He had, in fact, designated three Fathers for the West Indies about the middle of 1866<sup>29</sup>. They were Fathers F.X. Masson, who was to be the supe-

<sup>26</sup> AGR, Prov. Anglica, Provincialia, I, 11th September 1866.

<sup>27</sup> APD, Coffin to Dunne, 1st October 1866.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Anales Provinciae Hispanicae C.SS.R.*, I, Madrid, 1925, 38-39; D. DE FELIPE, *Fundación de los Redentoristas en España*, Madrid, 1965, 58-59.

rior, Célestin Etienne and Felix Grisar. Of the three the most suitable would seem to have been the first named. Father Masson had been a member of the community in Fribourg when it was suppressed in 1847 after the war of the Sonderbund. He was sent to the United States, where he worked mainly in New Orleans until he was recalled in 1856 to become superior of the province of France and Switzerland<sup>30</sup>. He was the only one of the three with any experience of English. He could well have been one of the two mentioned by Father Mauron in January as knowing German and likely to learn English with little trouble<sup>31</sup>. The other was almost certainly Father Grisar, who had been born in Germany of Belgian parents and had volunteered for the recently established foundations in Spain. He was to be one of the pioneers of the South American missions a few years later<sup>32</sup>. Father Etienne was a Belgian who had been working in Spain for two or three years; and there is no reason to think that he was a German speaker<sup>33</sup>. He was possibly a restless character, as Father de Buggenoms protested when he heard that Father Etienne was likely to join him in Santo Domingo.

The final decision had rested with Father Mauron, the Superior General. Indeed he had personally directed the negotiations with distant Australia. And these dealings offer some information about the man who governed the Redemptorists for nearly forty years.

On more than one occasion Father Mauron had showed his interest in transplanting the Congregation outside Europe. At the same time he had his misgivings. For one thing, he showed an unwillingness to accept foreign missions, and for that reason showed considerable reluctance when the Dutch province was considering a foundation in Curaçao. The provincial on that occasion concluded that Father Mauron was positively opposed to foreign missions, even when the Holy See seemed to insist<sup>34</sup>. When a foundation was attempted in Chile some six years earlier he had expressed his ideal as being the establishment in the New World of what had functioned so well in Europe<sup>35</sup>. That was very likely the thinking expressed in his cor-

<sup>30</sup> Information concerning Father Masson can be found in [J.-B. LORTHOIT], *Mémorial Alphonsien*, Tourcoing, 1929, 161.

<sup>31</sup> AGR, Prov. Anglica, Provincialia, I, Mauron to Coffin, 13th January 1866.

<sup>32</sup> On the career of Father Grisar see LORTHOIT, 473; *Annales Provinciae Hispanicae*, I, 125.

<sup>33</sup> See LORTHOIT, 94; *Annales Provinciae Hispanicae*, I, 124.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. A. SAMPERS, « The Transfer of the Catholic Mission of Surinam to the Dutch Redemptorists, 1864-1865 » in *Studia Dondersiana (Bibliotheca Historica C.S.S.R., XI)*, Rome, 1982, 113-114.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *Spic. hist.*, 30(1982) 370.

respondence about Brighton. There is emphatic mention of the missions and the importance of avoiding the charge of a parish. On the other hand, there is no indication of how that tiny community of three Fathers and two Brothers in a very distant land should be reinforced and even replaced. This foundation, for which the Superior General assumed what amounted to sole responsibility, does not really seem to have been well organised.

It is true that Father Mauron kept the business very much in his own hands. In his reply to Father Coffin when the Australian offer was brought to his notice he mentioned how warmly his consultants supported his views; but that was the only word about them during the whole course of the affair. The Superior General had a strong, one might even justly say an overwhelming, consciousness of his personal responsibilities. It was the sort of centralism that was encouraged by the Holy See in the time of Pius IX<sup>36</sup>. For Father Mauron the acceptance or refusal of the Brighton offer was a grave matter, as he put it to the English provincial, « I wish only to know the Will of God and the good pleasure of St. Alphonsus ». Sentiments like this reveal much, not only of himself, but of his times. It was in the same lonely search for the Will of God (and of St. Alphonsus) that he found himself burdened with the cares of Santo Domingo. « The good God knows », he wrote to Father Coffin, « how hard I have been working to find a certain number of Fathers for Santo Domingo »<sup>37</sup>. In the end neither project succeeded.

And what of Patrick Dunne, whose attempt to help the new diocese of Brisbane had occasioned so much trial for the Superior General? His subsequent career was quite in keeping with his varied past. Brisbane's financial troubles were the occasion for his leaving for Goulburn in 1867. Bishop Lanigan had already accepted the other two members of the notorious « clique » of ten years or so earlier. Now he warmly welcomed their equally turbulent companion and at once made him administrator of his cathedral. A few years later he became the first president of St. Patrick's College, a post he held for one year. He went on to establish the vast parish of Gundagai and Cootamundra, passing to Albury where he was vicar general of the diocese as well as parish priest. He ended his days as chaplain to the Catholic orphanage in Albury, completely deaf and unable to discharge the pastoral duties he had so loved, the result of a night in bitter cold

<sup>36</sup> Cf. R. AUBERT, *The Church in a Secularised Society (The Christian Centuries, V)*, London 1978, 114-115.

<sup>37</sup> AGR, Prov. Anglica, Provincialia, I, Mauron to Coffin, 11th September 1866.

when he had lost his way on a sick call.

This was the man who had hoped to find among the Redemptorists « a home and more peace and happiness than I have ever had ». One has to admit, however, that Patrick Dunne was not of the kind to make for peace in a religious community. The years of his priestly life had been filled with conflict, the best remembered of which were with his bishops. « John O'Brien » ends his reminiscences of the colorful if stormy character by recalling what had been said by his panegyrist of « the grand old man of the diocese. With a sharp tongue and an able pen he fought the Church's battles to the end ».

## DOCUMENTS

### 1. Dunne to Coffin, 18th October 1865, APD.

Very Rev. & Dear Sir,

Some seven or eight years ago I had the happiness of making a retreat in the house of your Order at Rome, and ever since I have been looking for some opportunity of doing something in return for all the kindness I then received. I have just been speaking with the Bishop of this diocese on the subject of inviting the Redemptorist Fathers into his diocese, and his Lordship is quite willing to do so and has promised to write home to his brother, the Very Rev., now perhaps the Right Rev. Dr. Quinn, of Gayfield House, Donnybrook near Dublin, on the subject<sup>38</sup>.

I have offered to give five hundred acres of land here in this beautiful seaport of Sandgate for ever in *fee* and in *trust* for the Redemptorist Fathers, should you be able to make arrangements to establish a house here. I would hope to be able to join the Order myself and to do all in my power to promote their interests.

The land is beautifully situated between a small river or creek on one side and by the Bay on the other. It is surrounded on all sides by water except one, so that you could be quite secluded here, and in five minutes' walk you could reach the site of the projected railway and pier connecting Sandgate with Brisbane. The land, though in its natural state is now worth 10 pounds an acre, in the course of a few years it may well be worth 50 pounds an acre, as there is a great

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<sup>38</sup> Matthew Quinn, in fact, had been consecrated Bishop of Bathurst on 23rd June 1865 and arrived in his diocese in November of the following year.

possibility of this place becoming the shipping port of Brisbane, as no large ships can go nearer the City than the Bay, a distance of twenty-two miles by water, while a railway and pier would make the distance only twelve miles.

I have formed a small township here and called it Brighton. The land I propose giving to the Redemptorists is a portion of the Brighton estate. By next mail I may be able to send you a local sketch of the place.

You have no idea of all the good you could do here. Unfortunately, the devil is working hard against our holy religion in this new country and many of our Catholics are becoming tepid and negligent of their religious duties. There is no place in the diocese at present where a man, lay or clerical, can go to spend a few days in retreat, and if a man comes from the bush into Brisbane the chances are that he goes away a much worse man than he came. Do, then, take compassion on us out here and your reward will be very great. I beg you will lose no time in seeing about this important matter, as the bishop will invite the Passionists or some other Order if you do not come. I will take care that the land will be conveyed in the names of trustees for the Redemptorists first; and if they cannot come, for some other Order to be approved of by the Bishop of this diocese. If you decide on coming, as I hope you will, then the land can be conveyed in trust to yourselves.

This is the most beautiful and healthy place in the world and the land is capable of producing almost anything. At present, as I stated, it is in its natural state; but a little labour and perseverance would make it all you could desire. There is an unlimited supply of fish in the river adjoining, and the vine, pineapple, sugarcane, banana, besides potatoes and all kinds of vegetables can be cultivated with the greatest success. The land is also particularly adapted for a dairy farm, being well supplied with fresh water lagoons.

I would be anxious to hear from you by the next mail as to the chances of getting a branch of your Order out here. In the meantime, I beg you will pray for me, and I remain, Very Rev. & Dear Sir,

Yours very faithfully,  
P. Dunne C.C.

2. Coffin to Mauron, 5th January 1866, AGR, Prov. Anglica, Provincialia I. (extract)

Voici la copie d'une lettre que je viens de recevoir d'un prêtre du diocèse de Brisbane, Australie.

Je lui ai répondu en lui remerciant seulement de sa bonne volonté envers la Congrégation en lui disant que je ferais parvenir sa lettre à V. Paternité de laquelle seulement dépendait la décision. J'ai crû bien d'ajouter que pour nous autres de cette province nous avons besoin du temps avant de pouvoir aux fondations d'outre mer, et que je ferais savoir la réponse de Votre Paternité.

3. Mauron to Coffin, 13th January 1866, AGR, Prov. Anglica, Provincialia I.

Très révérend & mon cher Père,

Je viens répondre à votre lettre du 5 Janvier relative à la proposition faite par Mr. Dunne pour l'Australie.

Déjà depuis plusieurs années l'Australie a eu mes sympathies, puisque c'est une contrée à laquelle l'Eglise a voué toute son attention maternelle. C'est tout un nouveau monde où le Catholicisme se développe d'une manière bien remarquable, et si un jour il y a le prépondérance cette contrée deviendra une partie importante de l'Eglise Catholique. Si en ce moment on peut espérer de faire relativement plus de bien dans l'ancien monde, néanmoins les conséquences pour l'avenir sont bien plus importantes en Australie que partout ailleurs. Il y a plusieurs années que déjà l'Evêque de Brisbane avait insisté auprès de moi pour y avoir une mission, mais je ne croyais pas le moment venu de lui donner un espoir fondé; et même *en ce moment* j'eusse préféré ne pas recevoir une invitation telle que nous a faite Mr. Dunne. Si je savais que la chose ne fut pas dans les desseins de Dieu et suivant Sa sainte Volonté, je répondrais avec beaucoup de plaisir et même de satisfaction par un refus absolu. Je désire par conséquent bien connaître là et faire la volonté de Dieu et le bon plaisir de St. Alphonse.

L'offre que nous fait Mr. Dunne est vraiment importante; l'invitation est pressante; et l'occasion de songer à l'Australie vraiment si belle que je craindrais de mal faire et même de déplaire à Dieu en donnant un refus pur et simple. Ce que je viens de dire, je le sens beaucoup plus que je ne saurais l'exprimer: c'est pour cela que j'ai beaucoup prié afin que le Seigneur veuille m'éclaircir sur ce qu'il

y a à faire. J'ai pris l'avis de mes consultants, et ils m'ont *unanimentement* prié de vouloir faire tout mon possible pour ne pas laisser échapper une si belle occasion de transplanter la Congrégation dans cette partie importante du monde. Mr Dunne dans une retraite faite dans notre maison à Rome il y a huit ans a pris la résolution de ne pas désister qu'il n'ait obtenu le but de ses désirs. En outre, le lieu offert est dans le diocèse de l'Evêque de Brisbane, qui le premier et le seul ait fait des tentatives auprès de moi; et se trouve dans la plus belle partie de l'Australie où il n'y a pas encore de religieux. De plus on nous fait une offre vraiment considérable qui nous permettra de pouvoir amplement aux besoins de ceux que nous aurons à y envoyer. La proposition est faite sans ombre de conditions. On y exprime même le but special très propre à notre Congrégation, à savoir celui de donner les exercices spirituelles dans la maison même, soit au clergé soit aux séculiers. Il est à renseigner en outre que dès le principe il n'y a aucune obligation de nous charger d'un district particulier, et qu'il n'y a point de charge d'âmes, de moins qu'il ne s'agit que de ministère à exercer par charité pure et simple, le tout sans contrat et les charges et obligations de justice qui en découlent, ce qui est d'une très grande importance. Combien il eut été avantageux pour le bien de la Congrégation et ses sujets si on eut pu conter de la même manière aux Etats Unis!

Votre révérence ne manquera pas de convenir que tout cela est bien beau, mais répondra que les sujets propres pour cette mission nous manquent et que la province Anglaise ne peut par les pouvoir. Que reste-t-il donc à faire! Je comprends fort bien cette énorme difficulté. Mais voyons si nous ne pouvons pas la résoudre à une manière ou l'autre. Pour commencer, il faudrait tout d'abord seulement deux Pères et un Frère, ou tout au plus trois Pères et deux Frères, car il s'agit avant tout de bâtir une maison et une église pour recevoir la petite communauté; et entretemps préparer d'autres sujets. Mais où prendre ces deux ou trois Pères et Frères? Si votre révérence peut en attendant donner *un* Père avec un ou deux Frères, je pourrais sans difficulté trouver deux autres Pères, qui malheureusement ne connaissent pas encore l'anglais, mais que je ferais partir aussitôt que possible pour l'Angleterre pour y apprendre la langue. Ces deux Pères savent l'allemand et le français et ils pourraient en peu de temps apprendre suffisamment d'anglais pour pouvoir partir pour l'Australie. Tous les deux m'ont écrit plus d'une fois pour me faire connaître leur grand désir d'être employés aux missions étrangères. Et pour autant qu'il est à ma connaissance ce sont des sujets sains pour la

moralité et déjà depuis bien des années dans le ministère. De cette manière nous pourrions *d'ici en ce cas* pouvoir la petite colonie de cette mission nouvelle qui viendrait tout naturellement agrandir votre chère petite province anglaise. L'essentiel est que vous puissiez donare un Père et un Frère mûr, sûr, bon religieux, et qui ait des capacités d'être Supérieur des autres. Comme la langue anglaise s'apprend plus facilement que toute autre, surtout par les allemands, je n'ai aucune crainte pour l'avenir pour vous aider et trouver les confrères nécessaires et du reste, comme vous le savez, on étudie beaucoup l'anglais au studendat français et plusieurs sont bien avancés. J'aurai soin de penser aux premiers frais à faire.

Réfléchissez donc bien sur tout ce qui précède et priez comme je le fais moi-même et veuillez ensuite me dire votre opinion. Entretenez si vous n'êtes pas d'un avis contraire et faudra donner une réponse à Mr. Dunne, lui écrivant que je désire beaucoup accepter l'offre qu'il nous fait, et que j'ai l'espoir de réussir à tout arranger d'une manière favorable, mais que pour cela il n'y a pas de Pères anglais disponibles et qu'il faut quelques mois pour préparer les sujets. Il sera opportun que votre révérence dans sa lettre revienne sur la manière dont j'entends la proposition faite, comme je l'ai expliqué plus haut. Tout fois si avant de lui écrire vous avez des observations à me soumettre, vous pouvez le faire en toute liberté, car je désire par dessus tout être parfaitement éclairé avant d'entreprendre cette affaire. Je le répète, je ne veux de l'Australie que pour autant ce soit la volonté de Dieu pour Sa plus grande gloire et pour le bien de la Congrégation. Du reste, je ne doute nullement que Dieu n'intervienne dans cette affaire comme Il l'a fait dans tant d'autres.

Je suis toujours dans les SS. Coeurs de Jésus et Marie  
 Votre très affectionné confrère,  
 Nic. Mauron C.SS.R., R.M.

P.S. Votre révérence connaît mieux que moi le P. Theunis, en ce moment à Lille, et je sais qu'il est bon missionnaire et qu'il regrette toujours les Irlandais<sup>39</sup>. D'après la connaissance que vous avez de lui pensez-vous qu'il puisse convenir pour l'Australie pour le cas où nous

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<sup>39</sup> Father Francis Theunis, then forty-five years of age, had been a member of the province of Holland and England when it was established in 1855 and had worked for some years in England and Ireland. He passed to the Belgian province, and in 1866 was a member of the province of France and Switzerland. When he died in 1882 he belonged to a Belgian community.

acceptons? Et lui croyez-vous la vertu et le courage nécessaires pour changer le vieux monde contre le nouveau etc. etc.?

N.M.

4. Quinn to Coffin, 21st May 1866, APD.

Dear Rev. Father,

The Rev. Patrick Dunne has shown me two letters which your reverence addressed to him respecting a foundation of your Holy Congregation in this diocese, for which he asked, and which you, with the sanction of your enlightened and saintly Superior General are disposed to grant.

I write to assure your reverence that the project of securing for the purpose of the foundation a quantity of land situated near Brisbane, as explained to you, I presume, by Father Dunne, has my approval and most cordial cooperation. The legal documents having reference to the land and rendering it available for the purpose of the foundation would be now completed and in my possession, were it not for the ill health of one of the lawyers concerned. They will be ready and handed over to me, Father Dunne assures me, within a few days.

I wish also to inform your reverence that I most earnestly desire the presence of the Redemptorist Fathers in my diocese. My wishes are identical with those of your Superior General as expressed by you in your letter to Rev. P. Dunne dated 31st January 1866, viz. that the object of the foundation here should be to labour for the salvation of souls in the spirit and according to the rules of your Holy Founder, St. Alphonsus.

I wish also to state to your reverence my belief that there are few places where the special objects of your Congregation can be better carried out than in this colony. You can judge for yourself when I tell you that in this vast diocese, about three times the size of France, there is not a single religious house into which the clergy or members of the laity so disposed could retire to make a spiritual retreat; that the clergy are, for the most part, young men who only entered college seven, eight or nine years since; that the towns of the colony are separated long distances from each other and have nearly all considerable Catholic populations, while some of them have no resident priest; that there is a large number of German Catholics and no Ger-

man or German-speaking priest; that religion is perfectly free and that all religious denominations have a great respect for the Catholic faith.

I am, very reverend Father,

Your very faithful servant in Christ,  
+ James Quinn,  
Bishop of Brisbane.

5. Coffin to Dunne, 1st October 1866, APD.

Reverend and Dear Sir,

I have duly received your reverence's two last letters and I have explained the whole question, as it now stands, to our Superior General. His Paternity has written to me in reply and desires me to communicate to your reverence and to his Lordship the decision to which after much and careful reflection he has come; and it is this:

That in spite of himself and much against his will he finds himself obliged to give up for the moment the proposed foundation in Australia. The principal cause of this decision is that he has lately received a formal order from the Holy Father to undertake at once a large and most important mission in the West Indies. This has exhausted our strength, and especially has deprived him of those subjects whom he had intended to employ and associate with us of this province in Australia.

His Paternity desires me to thank your reverence for the good will and interest you have so kindly shown in this affair, and to express his regret that he has been obliged to come to this decision.

In these sentiments I also beg to join and to offer to your reverence my sincere thanks and best wishes, while I remain always,

Your faithful servant in Christ,  
R.A. Coffin C.S.S.R.,  
Sup. prov.