

Province of The Most Holy Name

Franciscan Fathers

135 WEST 31ST STREET

NEW YORK CITY 1

OFFICE OF THE PROVINCIAL

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My dear confrere:

I left New York by plane for South America at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, November 14, and arrived in Lima at 7:20 a.m., November 15. Left Lima on a DC3 for Santa Cruz, arriving at 6:25 p.m. En route between Arica and La Paz, the Andes are crossed, and we used oxygen masks for about an hour, as we traveled from sea level to 17,500 feet. At Cochabamba Prosper Lubert, O.F.M., formerly a missionary in China, was at the airport to say hello and to practice his English. He asked to be remembered to Fr. Lawrence Bultmann. I was met at Santa Cruz by Fr. Magnobon Koller, O.F.M., of the Bavarian Province. He is the procurator for the Vicariate of Nuflo de Chavez. Once a South African missionary, he speaks English fluently.

Santa Cruz is a city of about 45,000 in southern Bolivia 1400 feet above sea level. It has a lighting system that operates from 6 p.m. to 5 a.m., but no paved streets or municipal water system. The Friars have a religious house with church attached--an 80-year-old installation taken over from the Spanish by the Tyrolese Friars and now serving as a Procuration for the Vicariates of Chiquitos and Nuflo de Chavez.

At 2 p.m., Thursday, November 18, I flew out of Santa Cruz, arriving in Ascension at 2:50 p.m.--a trip that takes a week by horse. Bishop Kilian Pflaum, O.F.M., Vicar Apostolic of Nuflo de Chavez, met me at the airport with Sebastian Rabin and Anselm Reckamp of the St. Louis Province. Friday we took a two-hour horseback ride to Sebastian's mission at San Pablo.

The pioneers of the Church in this area were sixteenth-century Jesuits, but their work did not survive. Two secular priests later laid a substantial foundation in the Guarayos region, and their work was continued by Friars from the Apostolic College at Tarata, Bolivia, in the early nineteenth century. The Friars, besides imparting the rudiments of doctrine, went into the woods, persuaded the Indians to clear land for villages, encouraged them to clothe themselves. The typical mission was a cleared rectangle of 10 to 20 acres around a sort of village square. One side of the square was the church and the missionary's compound. The other three sides were made up of the homes of the Indians. As more and more came to live at the mission, the village pushed out further and further at the sides. The Indians worked three days for the mission and three for themselves. The produce and handicraft were stored at the compound. The missionary--spiritual leader, civil chief and merchant of the mission--sold the Indians' goods for them and provided for their needs. The mission was rich and the Indians well cared for. I was told many times over that although the missionary had access to all these foodstuffs and other materials, he continued to live as the Indians did. Life was simple, life was good. Time was set aside for religious instruction and for satisfying religious obligations. Then, in 1938, the Bolivian government decided to secularize the missions. This took from the pastor all but spiritual authority; it took from the Indians the honest administration of their worldly affairs. In ten years their stores were squandered. The government then attempted to transfer civil authority and responsibility to the missionaries again; but they, fearing another build-up for plunder, refused.

In 1948, the Indians were given their freedom. They are now guaranteed a minimum wage. It sounds good--but is not nearly so good as the old mission set-up. The civil authorities have a tendency in many places to exploit the Indian. In Sebastian's village of San Pablo, after the revolution

of 1952, the civil rulers Jose Vaca and his son attempted to mobilize the Indians for work on the Vaca lands. They intended, apparently, to build a large plantation manned by Indian slaves. The bells were rung one morning and the Indians ordered to work. Sebastian told the Vacas and the Indians that the latter were free men and did not have to work on command. The situation grew more and more difficult. As the Vacas pressed their demands, Sebastian threw more and more blocks at them. He kept informing the Indians of their rights, their minimum wage, etc. Easter, 1952, the Vacas threatened Sebastian's life and denounced him to the government in La Paz. Those were tough and dangerous days, but our boy held on, and in July, 1954, saw a reformation of the party in power which had the effect of reading the two Vacas out of the party. Now all is about normal again.

When Sebastian and two other American Friars went to Bolivia, it was for the purpose of helping the Tyrolese Friars in the Vicariate of Chiquitos. Sebastian worked briefly at a couple of missions learning the languages and then went to San Pablo. In 1951, the Bavarian Fathers moved down from Peru, the Vicariate of Chiquitos was split into the Vicariates of Chiquitos and Nuflo de Chavez. The Tyrolese still have Chiquitos and the Bavarians man the Vicariate of Nuflo de Chavez. San Pablo is in the latter.

I was privileged to give First Communion to 13 children at San Pablo on Sunday, November 21. The previous afternoon, Sebastian heard their confessions and then brought them to the house for presents. He gave to each a 3-yard piece of plaid cloth from a bolt in his store. This was about 4:30 on Saturday afternoon. The next morning at the 7-o'clock Mass, each girl had on a dress and each boy a shirt made from the cloth. On the morning of First Communion, each received a rosary.

The American Fathers conduct for the Indians a sort of co-operative, buying necessities in quantity and selling them at about cost. They also purchase Indian produce and items of handicraft for resale or use.

Bishop Pflaum covers the Vicariate on horseback about three times a year. Each circuit takes three months and involves riding some 1200 miles. He rides for four or five hours and then takes an hour's rest in a hammock hung between two trees. The saddle is taken from the horse so that it too gets a rest. Ordinarily the Bishop's party consists of a priest and a boy, with four horses. There are plenty of airstrips in Bolivia, and the Bishop is considering the idea of getting a light plane to facilitate his travel problems. The Vicariate has 12 parishes manned by Fathers and about 80 settlements which they also attend. Sebastian has been doing some work in the lower end of the Vicariate of Beni, which borders on Nuflo de Chavez, since no one has been covering the area. This means, among other things, that if we can get a man down there, he will be company for Sebastian and will have sufficient work to do. Sebastian moves around his territory on horseback or in a boat with an outboard motor.

Friar statistics in Bolivia are: Eight bishops--two dioceses, four Vicars Apostolic with Vicariates, two retired. There are approximately 120 Friars: 108 of these are missionaries from foreign lands working in the four Vicariates; 12 belong to the Bolivian Province.

The utilities are primitive: toilet by Chic Sales; wash in a basin supplied by an earthen jar on the floor; clean teeth from a glass of water; shave as you wash, from a basin; light from a lamp fed with kerosene; sleep in a hammock or a bed made of animal skin stretched taut over a frame; toilet tissue and flashlight are standard equipment. Shower consists of large drum on stilts with a piece of pipe and sprinkler-head attached. Fill the drum, open the valve, and you have it.

Transportation is mostly by horse, but you can at least get close to the various missions by plane from Santa Cruz. The Fathers ship materials in to Ascension, 10 miles from Sebastian's mission and 25 from Anselm's, at about \$50 an hour, flying time. From Ascension Sebastian's stuff is carried by ox cart. Anselm has a road so he can use a jeep and trailer.

The go-between for Indians and priest and/or civil authority is the Indian chief. He and his counselors are appointed with at least the approval of the priest, since the official appointment consists of blessing a staff and presenting it to the chief. If this is not done, Indians pay no attention to the chief.

There is another official whose job is to inform the priest when anyone is seriously sick. His sign of office is a cross. The Indian wants the priest at death, like the rest of us: he has a saying that he does not want to die like a dog. Generally, the Indian knows pretty well when his time is up; he climbs into a hammock, has the official notify the priest, gets the Last Sacraments and does not leave the hammock again. He is buried in it, within 24 hours after his death. Graves are about five feet deep, and are prepared with bamboo and palm leaves above and below the hammock.

From May to September of the current year the statue of the Pilgrim Virgin of Fatima was carried through the Vicariate of Nuflo de Chavez. Two Redemptorist Fathers went along with the group and gave a mission from a day to a week long, depending on the length of stay at any individual spot. Great faith and great success was reported in every mission.

On November 24, Sebastian and I flew from Ascension to Santa Cruz. I left him there and flew on to Puerto Suarez, the last Bolivia town, on the Brazilian border. It took about three and a half hours to get through Bolivian customs and into Corumba, Brazil (the hottest place I have ever been in), for more formalities. On Friday morning, November 26, I left Corumba for Sao Paulo. Arriving in the afternoon, I was met by Fr. Paul, stayed with the Friars overnight, and left for Anapolis the next morning.

The beginning of negotiations between the Brazilian Federal Government and the State of Goiaz to turn over administration of the entire rural school system of the recently colonized Colonia Agricola to the Franciscan Fathers, is the latest proof that the Brazilian Government and the ecclesiastical authorities are recognizing the ability of American Friars to get things done. The negotiations, slated to begin early in 1955, will aim at putting the 22 schools of the system under Franciscan administration at state expense. The schools will double as chapels.

The local Administrator at Ceres, to whom the Federal Government is turning over jurisdiction of the Colonia Agricola, offered management of the school system to the Friars. They would assume responsibility for appointing the director of the system (a layman) and remunerating the teachers. Funds would be provided by produce collected from a population 98 percent Catholic and vitally interested in the move. The first attempt to effect the turnover was blocked when the Mayor of Ceres (a Protestant minister) led a group of local Protestants in demanding that 15 of the 22 schools be placed under Protestant auspices. Fr. Berard McInerney consulted with the Administrator and Deputies at Rio, who did him the courtesy of coming to him at Rio's Franciscan Monastery. Two concrete steps resulted. First, the Federal Government will manage and subsidize the schools for one more year under the same lay director whom the Friars would have appointed; and second, completion of the negotiations which will give the Friars control of the schools was promised during 1955.

The Fathers in Anapolis have a central agency for the promotion of Family Communion. A new social group is in formation whose general purpose will be that of the St. Vincent De Paul Society. It is hoped that this will develop into a Third Order group. The first project is food packages for the poor at Christmas. Fr. Dominic Foley is contributing a popular and instructive weekly piece on apologetics to the local paper. Next year, St. Ann's in Anapolis will have a First Year High School for girls. The boys now go to the Ginasio. Projects to increase the size of existing schools are under way in Anapolis (St. Anthony's) Ceres and Pires do Rio. We have been invited to establish a parish in Goiania, the capital of Goiaz. This

can be done by pulling out of a couple of places for which we have no beneplacita. Fr. Ronan Giehl has been teaching in Goiania for some time, and has established there an enthusiastic Third Order group. The Legion of Mary is now set up in Catalao under Fr. Dunstan Carroll and in Anapolis with five praesidia under Frs. Dominic Foley, Edmund Fox, John B. Vogel and Benedito (Dominic) Coscia. The legionaries, doing work ordinarily done by parish visiting Sisters, have compiled some amazing statistics; e.g., in one parish the legionaries turned in names and addresses of 250 families who consider themselves Catholics but who have not made their Easter Duty.

They are hoping here that we may be able to get Sisters from the Midwest to staff the new Santa Casa being constructed in Anapolis, to be finished at the end of 1955. The hospital will contain about 60 beds in wards and about 15 private rooms. Private rooms here have two beds; one hospital and one regular for the relative who stays to attend the patient.

The present hospital in Anapolis, part of a Protestant mission set-up, has a nurses' training school which doubles in training nurses to proselytize. With some restrictions, the Fathers are allowed to attend patients, but the hospital administration will not call a priest for the dying, etc. The family may call, but the whole atmosphere is unfriendly.

They tell a story here concerning Benedito (Dominic) Coscia, who decided to do a little missionary work at the Protestant hospital. He went from room to room and bed to bed (I presume Catholic patients were concerned), picking up Protestant literature and depositing it in his capuche. Before long he ran into the Doctor Minister, who objected strenuously to Benedito's moving about his hospital with such freedom. Benedito bent over to pick something from the floor and the contents of the capuche were spread at the minister's feet. Benedito left, but not quietly.

When we feel prepared, our next move in Brazil may be toward Northern Goiaz in the diocese of Porto Nacional. Fr. John will inspect the territory and report. Air transport is the only link between the four parishes offered us. The diocese has one Bishop and 12 priests.

In a pastoral letter re the advance of Communism and Protestantism in their country, the Bishops of Brazil pointed to the Friars of Holy Name Province as leaders in successfully fighting both. Others were advised to go to Goiaz to investigate.

The Brothers in Brazil are an invaluable asset to the missionary work. Celsus Gansen supervises the cooking and is general caretaker at Pirenopolis. Agapitus Rothmann and Maurice Swartout run the carpenter shop at the Colegio Sao Francisco, Anapolis. They make altars, vestment cases, cabinets, pews, desks, and other items for use throughout the whole Commissariat. Gabriel Hughes and Theophane Musser raise chickens, supervise cooking, and do the housework at the Seminary. Gerard Quigley supervises the cooking and is general caretaker at St. Ann's, Anapolis; Tarsicius Stumpf does the same double job at Ceres, Anselm Donohue at Pires do Rio, and Denis Clark at Catalao and also, for a day and a half each week, at Goiandira. Solanus Rocheleau keeps the Commissariat Accounts and doubles as general caretaker at St. Ann's, Anapolis.

My next letter will describe the work at Jamaica and Puerto Rico.

Sincerely and fraternally,

Celsus Wheeler, of.m.

Minister Provincial