

On the Mission to Caledonia

28th September 1873

My dear Daughters,

I am anxious to talk to you, now that we are all together again, about the great step we have taken in reference to New Caledonia. Ever since he was named bishop of this mission, Mgr. Vitte has been asking insistently for some Religious of the Assumption to help him in the good that there is to be done there.

The greatest preoccupation, you understand, when one is sent to these distant countries, is the absence of spiritual helps on the side of the missionaries and the bishops, and as it is not probable that anyone will ever go to visit these houses, we must find a priest upon whom we can count to maintain the Rule and the religious observances. There, we will be under the protection of a bishop, devoted, sure, wise, virtuous and with religious spirit. With these guarantees we believe we could grant the desires of Mgr. Vitte.

Sister M. Amelie, after her long stay at Malaga, is well disposed to leave. She will be accompanied by two Coadjutrix Sisters, who can be just as useful and perhaps even more useful than the choir Sisters.

At Noumea, where our Sisters are going, there are already about a hundred little girls, brought together by a devoted person. Certainly, we must be teach them

Catechism, reading, - French even, up to a certain degree, and maintain the order that is proper to the house of God. But the most important work is to teach these little Caledonians gardening, laundering, cooking, not just the fancy kind of cooking that is done in the restaurants of Paris, but just so that they can prepare a meal different from what the savages prepare. These children are divided into little groups and will take turns in these diverse tasks that is why the Coadjutrix Sisters will be of great help. The establishment is situated near the little city of Noumea, in a nice place. It was the missionaries who gathered together all the abandoned little girls when they made a visit around the island, and brought them to this place to be educated as Christians. When they grow up, they are sent to the Christian tribes where they take charge of the chapels, the sacred chants teach these to the others, and are a great help to the priests. It is thus that they hope to christianize the country. And perhaps after two or three generations, we may find souls who will want to consecrate themselves to God. We can thus form the Oblates of the Assumption in Caledonia, just as the Sisters of Charity have founded a house of their Order in China.

But we must not have illusions. Children of primitive races can not immediately become similar to our children of civilized races who have already been Christianized for several centuries. The pagan children need to be controlled more, supervised more; their passions are very strong. Perhaps it will only be after several generations that the horrible vices that these poor people give in to disappear.

There is another work to add to this: France has designated New Caledonia as a place of deportation. Families of absolute impiety, all the criminals of the Commune, the men who wanted to tear Paris apart by war; revolutionaries, those sworn enemies of society, will be brought there.

The experience that England has had with its convicts, makes us hope that, after two or three years passed in cultivating the land, restrained by severe discipline, far from the newspapers and cabarets of Paris which demoralize them, these men will change and become different from what they were. Perhaps also, not having any means of educating their children, they will think of sending them to the Central establishment of Noumea, where they will stay for three years or four years, without returning to their families. When they do go back, after having been well educated in strong and solid Christian principles, they will spread these to those around them and can thus bring this population back to religion and the practice of good.

These two hopes mean that we cannot refuse Mgr. Vitte the souls of good will who are willing to devote themselves to this work. I ask you to pray much for them. Such an undertaking demands more virtue than any other. Those who leave for this mission must already have perfect detachment from themselves, an absolute generosity, a tried patience and a great spirit of sacrifice, to know how to remain without help, without support, without sustenance, in

the midst of labours, desolations, pain, the most complete isolation, in the face of the greatest miseries.

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