

# Irish Migration Studies in Latin America

Society for Irish Latin American Studies

## Review of Susana Taurozzi's *Los Pasionistas en Argentina y Uruguay: Cien años de historia*

By Edward Walsh



Buenos Aires: Misioneros Pasionistas, 2006.  
432 pages, photographs, notes, bibliography.  
ISBN 9789509070028

Susana Taurozzi is a well-known Argentine historian and a respected scholar, having spent many years teaching. She has written widely, with books and many articles to her name, specifically in relation to the history of the Catholic Church in Argentina. Taurozzi's primary and secondary education was at the Passionist Fathers' Colegio San Gabriel in Vicente López, Buenos Aires province, and her involvement with the Congregation continues as she teaches at that institution. During the 1980s she was involved with the Passionists' pastoral youth work. She commenced work on this book in 2001 using letters, documents, house chronicles, mission books, chapter acts and confraternity acts - all from the Holy Cross archive. She also conducted sixteen interviews between 2001 and 2005 with members of the Province and seven with parishioners from the parishes of Holy Cross and Santa Gema. The book, published in Spanish, is divided into four parts: 1874-1901 (53 pages), 1901-1934 (93 pages), 1934-1970 (199 pages), and 1970-2002 (164 pages).

The scene is set with the arrival in Argentina of Fr Pius Devine in 1874, the first Passionist to visit the country. Devine was on what became a worldwide begging jaunt to raise funds for the building of Mount Argus Church in Dublin. Devine was in the country for seventy-four days and his *Adventures and Misadventures of a Jolly Beggar* provides a graphic account of his stay. Devine was followed five years later by Fr Martin Byrne. His efforts to establish the Passionist Congregation in Argentina would bring him into conflict with Bernardo Silvestrelli, his Rome-based Superior General. The Byrne-Silvestrelli and Kent-Silvestrelli correspondence highlights the tension between those who would maintain a close relationship with the Irish community and those in Rome who were not in agreement. In no uncertain terms, Silvestrelli reminded Byrne that what was proposed (the founding of a mission to the 'Irish Colony', implicitly assuming the care of parishes, churches, hospitals, orphanages and so on) "would be a radical exception to the rule of our Institution which I cannot permit" (Silvestrelli to Byrne, 1880). These were strong words. Byrne was suspended *a divinis* by his Superior General. He took his case to Rome and in due course the suspension was lifted. A somewhat tetchy relationship with the Irish community would continue. With the death of the Irish chaplain Fr John B. Leahy in 1882, the Archbishop of Buenos Aires Monsignor Federico Aneiros requested that the Passionists take over the Irish chaplaincies, taking in the locations of Carmen de Areco, Salto, Rojas and other newly-founded towns towards the province of Santa Fe.

Taurozzi highlights the missionary work that the Passionists undertook - missions preached in towns, at gatherings in the *camp*, at *estancias* and twice on the Falkland Islands - in 1910 and 1916. The Province of the Immaculate Conception was canonically erected in 1901. She notes the thirty-two Provincial Chapters held between 1902 and 2002 and how the Congregation set down its organisational framework and evangelisation strategy. Confrontation with the Peronist government was almost unavoidable, and some events are related with not a little humour. There then occurred a challenge of a different nature; the implementation, commencing in 1962, of the reforms of the

Second Vatican Council (Vatican II). It was inevitable that there would be further confrontation following the military coup in March 1976. Families of the 'disappeared' started to meet at Holy Cross from 1977. The religious community was targeted when the church walls were daubed with slogans such as *Curas montoneros*, *Cueva de comunistas*, *Santa Cruz*, and *arsenal del E.R.P.* Fr Federico Richards was the editor and director of *The Southern Cross* in 1969-1988, with one year of absence in 1978. His editorials were hard-hitting and caused disquiet among certain sections of the hierarchy. Richards criticised the passivity of the bishops. This was treading on dangerous ground. Cardinal Raúl Primatesta was not amused and made known his displeasure. Richards was unforgiving and by letter of 31 May 1977 penned a memorable reply.

The annexes (pp. 413-423) contain a series of boxes detailing the chronology of principal events in the life of the Province and the houses in Capitán Sarmiento, Santa Cruz, Salto, La Calera, Colonia Caroya, San Gabriel, Montevideo, Vicente Casares, San Miguel, La Teja, and the continuing mission in Formosa that was started in 1971, yet curiously there is no single unified list of the Provincials. There are a few minor spelling and/or typographical errors, such as non-adherence to the convention of denoting membership of a religious order or congregation in the upper case - for example, 'Federico J. Soneira c.p.' instead of 'Federico J. Soneira C.P.' (page 8); *The Standard* newspaper is *The Standart* (427); the title of E. Gellner's book *Nations and Nationalism* is noted as *Nations and Natinalism*, while José María Ghio's work *The Argentine Catholic Church from 1880 to 1945* is referred to as *The Argentin Catholic Church* (430). These are minor *peccadilloes*, but it is unfortunate that the quality of the forty-one photos is poor. There is a plethora of fascinating footnotes, 703 in total, but strangely no person and/or place index.

A book of this kind is often written by somebody as an insider looking out, as per the case of works by Vincent Laffan C.P. and the celebrated Victor Carolan C.P. Susana Taurozzi writes as an outsider looking in and her expose and scrutiny are excellent. This is a genre of work which, although unlikely to top the list of best-sellers and not an easy read, is nonetheless an interesting book. Taurozzi has made a valuable and scholarly contribution with this up-to-date history of the Passionist Congregation in Argentina.

Edward Walsh

### **References**

- Devine, Pius. 'Adventures & Misadventures of a Jolly Beggar' in *Passionist Historical Archives* 3:3 (Summer 1995). Available online (<http://cpprovince.org/archives/heritage/summer95/summer95-2-1.php>), accessed 1 August 2007.
- Silvestrelli, Bernardo to Martin Byrne (Rome), 14 May 1880, letter. Manuscript in the Holy Cross archive, Buenos Aires.

### **Author's Reply**

I consider Edward Walsh's evaluation very positive and I appreciate his comments. Perhaps it is difficult with such an extensive work to summarise the central points in a few lines. Edward Walsh focuses on aspects linked to the origins of the order and the relationship of the Congregation with the political development of the country. The book presents other possible readings in relation to the construction of a model of the Church and to the connection that developed between the religious and the lay people, which should not be under-estimated. I am immensely grateful for the consideration and kindness which he had towards my book and towards my research work.

Susana Taurozzi

Translated by Claire Healy