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**Missionaries Extraordinaire:  
The Vincentians  
From Saint Mary's of the Barrens Seminary**

BY

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**A Bedrock Foundation**

Between the years 1787 and 1818, a small settlement was established, situated some eighty miles south of Saint Louis and a few miles inland from the west bank of the Mississippi River, that came to be known as the Barrens Colony and began to mature as an agricultural community. In its process of development, early on the locale became the site of a Roman Catholic seminary originally called the Barrens Seminary, but later known as Saint Mary's of the Barrens. From its origin in 1818, this institution of formation and study was operated under the direction of the Congregation of the Mission, the Vincentiãns.

In order to fully appreciate the significance of the seminary it must be understood that it was there that numerous "Sons of Saint Vincent," who ventured forth throughout the American Southwest and West to evangelize, were molded into frontier churchmen inspired with the spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul. Those Vincentians — especially in the nineteenth century — labored not only in Missouri, but traveled southward into Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, and even northern Mexico (a distinction used after Texas independence in 1836) as well. Eventually they were assigned westward through New Mexico and Arizona to California. At Saint Mary's of the Barrens Seminary these servants of God absorbed their Vincentian spirituality, and they regularly reinforced their faith as they returned to the seminary from their far-flung stations for retreats, conferences, and other gatherings with their confreres.

In 1787 the first permanent settlers to the locale that eventually became the Barrens Colony were two Catholic Frenchmen, Jean-Baptiste Barsaloux and his father. That they were Catholics can be presumed since they acquired their plot of land from the royal government of Catholic Spain, their being Catholic a requirement of the Spanish for a

land grant. The Barsalouxes planned to settle into a life of farming.

As the Barrens Colony began to develop, ultimately growing as Perryville in Perry County, Missouri (named after the War of 1812 naval hero Oliver Hazard Perry), other people emerged prominent in the building of the seminary. Among those personages could be counted Joseph Fenwick, at the vanguard of a group of Marylander Catholics who had moved west to the colony; Isidore Moore and his family; Joseph Tucker and his sons; Aquila Hagan; Sarah Haydon; and Wilfrid, Joseph, and Ignatius Layton and the latter's wife. Important too in their contributions were the French Trappist pastor of the Catholic parish at Florissant, Missouri, Reverend Joseph Dunand; Vincentian Reverend (later first Bishop of Saint Louis) Joseph Rosati; and Bishop of Louisiana and the Floridas, Frenchman Louis William DuBourg — all of whom the Italian Vincentian Reverend Felix De Andreis inspired. It was under the influence of each of these individuals — and a few more — that in the fall of 1818 construction on the seminary started.<sup>1</sup>

On 1 October 1818 Reverend Rosati and his missionaries appeared at the Barrens Colony. Bishop DuBourg had purchased the land upon which the seminary was being erected and was personally overseeing the early stages of its construction when Rosati and his Vincentians arrived. DuBourg welcomed them joyfully. Reverend Rosati assumed responsibility for finishing the seminary, with his Vincentians and settlers in the surrounding vicinity providing most of the labor. As time passed, into the early 1820s, the buildings for the seminary were completed. A lay college was added — causing some tension within the Congregation of the Mission community over the issue of what the central mission of the Vincentians was in reference to education. Soon enrollments at both institutions began to stabilize.<sup>2</sup>

As attention is turned to some of the better known members of the Congregation of the Mission from Saint Mary's of the Barrens Seminary who dedicated themselves to missioning, and whose lives are closely associated with the Perryville seminary, some historical observations seem in order. First, while the narrative of Catholic history in America has consistently emphasized the contributions of the Jesuits and Franciscans — and rightfully so, for those clerics have served he-

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Foley, *A Missionary Always: Jean-Marie Odin, C.M., Builder of the Catholic Faith in Texas and Civil War Archbishop of New Orleans* (Manuscript under consideration by Texas A&M University Press), 42-43.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

roically — other groups, including the Vincentians, have received much less mention. Yet, in the trans-Mississippi West and Southwest few have enjoyed greater success in implanting a Catholic presence than the Vincentians. And, as already has been detailed, the roots of that effort came from the foundation laid at Saint Mary's of the Barrens Seminary. The legacy of the Congregation of the Mission, and the central part that the seminary played in that evangelizing heritage, must be preserved historically. It should never be forgotten.

Beyond any doubt, the Congregation of the Mission scholar, the late Reverend Ralph Bayard, made a profound contribution to the annals of Vincentian labors on the American frontier, especially in Texas during the early mid-Nineteenth century, with his outstanding tome, *The Catholic Re-Occupation of Texas, 1838-1848*. Published first in 1945, Bayard's book remains the classic reference work on the Vincentians of the Southwest during those years in that land beyond the Red and Sabine rivers. But, more than a half century has passed since the Bayard volume first appeared. A more recent publication (1988), which Reverend John Rybolt, C.M., and other Vincentian historians produced, *The American Vincentians: A Popular History of the Congregation in the United States, 1815-1987*, is an also outstanding scholarly work. It is a thorough endeavor that chronicles the historical experience of the Congregation of the Mission throughout America.

My book manuscript on the life of the noted Vincentian frontier missionary and prelate, Jean-Marie Odin, entitled *A Missionary Always: Jean-Marie Odin, C.M., Builder of the Catholic Faith in Texas and Civil War Archbishop of New Orleans*, is currently under publication consideration at Texas A&M University Press. Significantly, each of these works devotes part of its coverage to the influence of Saint Mary's of the Barrens Seminary in forming the priests and brothers who brought the "Good News" not only to southeastern Missouri and vicinity, but — as previously mentioned — to Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, northern Mexico, and west all the way to California.

Other studies have given some attention to the Vincentian story. For example, volumes six and seven of Carlos Eduardo Castaneda's classic seven-volume series, *Our Catholic Heritage in Texas, 1519-1936*, delves into aspects of the Vincentian story in Texas. So also does Reverend James Talmadge Moore's fine volume, *Through Fire and Flood: The Catholic Church in Frontier Texas, 1836-1900*. Moore's book mentions Saint Mary's of the Barrens Seminary in reference to Vincentian Reverend Joseph Paquin, while a professor on leave from the college

attached to the seminary, volunteering for labors in Texas.<sup>3</sup> More locally-known Vincentian publications center their attention on the seminary and the parish of Saint Mary's of the Barrens. Foremost of these would perhaps be Reverend John J. Hagan's *St. Mary's of the Barrens Parish: The Early Days* (1987), and the Congregation of the Mission's 1993 booklet *Saint Mary's of the Barrens, Perryville, Missouri*.

### Missioning From the Perryville Seminary

Most people do not realize that Saint Mary's of the Barrens Seminary was only the second such Catholic institution of formation for priests and brothers in the United States when it was founded, the first being the Sulpician-run Saint Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, Maryland, opened almost two decades earlier. And the Barrens seminary survived for some time as the only Roman Catholic seminary west of the Mississippi River. At the heart of Vincentian formation lay the desire for each member of the Congregation of the Mission to immerse himself in the growth of mental prayer.

From his founding of the Congregation of the Mission in 1625, Saint Vincent de Paul taught that mental prayer would make up a major aspect of the spiritual base which each Vincentian would engage in to strengthen his mission work. And such a vocation — along with the conducting of retreats — existed prominently in the calling of the Vincentians. "We know that our works are worthless if they are not living and animated by God's will," Saint Vincent wrote on 7 March 1659.<sup>4</sup> The Vincentian priest or brother thus would prayerfully struggle at every moment to come to an adherence to God's will. The interior life — strengthened through mental prayer — existed as fundamental to this struggle and would serve to mold the essence of the Vincentian being.

This depth in interior life would sustain the Vincentian as he labored in his calling to mission work in the dedicated manner which Saint Vincent de Paul had proscribed back in the seventeenth century to groups of evangelists departing Europe for distant lands:

Go gentlemen, in the name of Our Lord. It is He who

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<sup>3</sup> James Talmadge Moore, *Through Fire and Flood: The Catholic Church in Frontier Texas, 1836- 1900* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 1992), 26.

<sup>4</sup> Conference #199, "Conference on Conformity With the Will of God," 7 March 1659, in Pierre Coste, C.M., ed., *Saint Vincent de Paul Correspondance, Entretiens, Documents*, 14 vols. (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre J. Gabalda, 1920-1926), 12:150-165.

is sending you; it is for His service and His glory that you are undertaking this voyage and this mission. It will also be He who will lead you and who will assist and protect you. We hope for this from His infinite Goodness. Always hold fast with faithful guidance. We have recourse to Him in all places and on all occasions. Throw yourselves into His arms, as the one whom you should recognize as your very good Father, with firm confidence that He will assist you and bless all of your works.<sup>5</sup>

### **Jean-Marie Odin — The Consummate Vincentian Missionary**

Nineteenth-century Vincentians who at some point in their lives were associated with Saint Mary's of the Barrens Seminary — several receiving their training at Perryville and others assigned to the American Vincentians from Europe — embodied this spirit of Vincent de Paul as they struck out into the mission field. Naming just a few from among the better known priests or brothers, there were John Bollier, Michael Calvo, John Peter Chandy, Eudald Estany, Richard Hennesy, John Francis Llebaria, Bartholomew Rollando, and Raimondo Lastortas Salas. None stood out more distinctly, however, than the Frenchman Jean-Marie Odin and the Irish-American John Timon. Odin and Timon, whose legacy remains vivid today in the historical memory of the Congregation of the Mission, enthusiastically embraced the Vincentian spirituality that flourished at Saint Mary's of the Barrens Seminary. As a result, they became two of America's most renowned Catholic frontier missionaries, in their later years being named bishops (and in Odin's case, archbishop).

Odin, on whom this paper will focus, was born on 25 February 1800, in the tiny French hamlet of Hauteville, attached to the ancient priory Church of Saint Martin d'Ambierle, situated in the far western reaches of the Archdiocese of Lyon. He was the seventh of ten children born to Jean and Claudine-Marie (Serol) Odin. The devout Catholic family environment which he enjoyed in that locale, which could brag of being one of the most Catholic regions of a France, torn by the French Revolution and suffering under the recently-established rule of Napoleon Bonaparte, unquestionably encouraged Odin's calling to the priest-

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<sup>5</sup> Saint Vincent de Paul, *Advice Given on the Departure of Missionaries for Distant Countries*, in Louis Abelly, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God: Vincent de Paul*, John E. Rybolt, C.M., ed., 3 vols. (New York: New City Press, 1993), 3:12.

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hood.

Following a brief period of time, during which he received some education in his neighborhood at the hands of a cousin who was a former seminarian and an older uncle (one of his mother's brothers) who was a priest in a nearby village, Jean-Marie entered the archdiocesan seminary system of Lyon. He studied at two *petit séminaires* (small, though not necessarily minor, seminaries) prior to, in 1818, being admitted to the seminary college of *Alix dans la Rhône* near Villefranche, situated between the cities of Roanne and Lyon. Then, in 1820, young Odin was accepted at the Sulpician *grand séminaire* of Saint Irenaeus located in Lyon, one of Europe's historic major institutions of Catholic formation.

Less than two years later the twenty-two year old Jean-Marie Odin, by then a subdeacon, responded to the invitation from Bishop DuBourg for seminarians to come serve in his American Diocese of Louisiana and the Floridas. Departing the French port of Le Havre in May 1822, the subdeacon endured a difficult voyage across the Atlantic Ocean to New Orleans. Then Odin followed a trip up the Mississippi River to Perryville and Saint Mary's of the Barrens Seminary, where he arrived at the end of August. Almost six weeks later, on 12 October, at the seminary, he received ordination as a deacon in the Church from the hands of Bishop DuBourg.<sup>6</sup> Several weeks later, on 22 November, the new deacon entered the Congregation of the Mission, eventually making his final vows in 1825.

The following spring (1823) the highpoint in the French missionary's vocation occurred when Bishop DuBourg again traveled south from Saint Louis to Perryville and, on 4 May of that year, at the seminary, ordained Jean-Marie to the Catholic priesthood. The new priest recorded this in a letter to his parents in which he wrote (giving the date of his ordination), "... what favors the Lord has bestowed upon me. Here I am a priest. . . . Oh what dignity, what honor!"<sup>7</sup>

Over the course of the next seventeen years Reverend Jean-Marie Odin, C.M., served as a priest at Saint Mary's of the Barrens Seminary, as well as the college, in a variety of capacities. He was a professor at the seminary and, for a time, president of the college. But, perhaps he

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<sup>6</sup> Odin, Joannes Maria, C.M., Rev., 1800 Febr. 25, Archives of the Archdiocese of Saint Louis. The author wishes to thank Dr. Martin Towey, archivist of the Archives of the Archdiocese of Saint Louis, for this source.

<sup>7</sup> M. Bony, *Vie de Mgr. Jean-Marie Odin, Missionnaire Lazariste, Archeveque de Las Nouvelle- Orleans* (Paris: Imprimerie de D.D. Dumoulin et C., 1896), chapter 6, 3.



Jean-Marie Odin, C.M. Portrait.

*Collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute, Chicago, Illinois*

was best known as secretary to Reverend Rosati in the latter's role as rector of the seminary. Indeed, Odin would himself succeed Rosati as rector. Along with those assignments, the Vincentian from France became confessor to the Sisters of Lorreto, who had established a convent near the seminary in the mid-1820s.

Later, in 1833, Odin joined Rosati, who had been named coadjutor Bishop of Louisiana in 1824, but since 1827 was Bishop of Saint Louis, at the Baltimore Provincial Council. In Baltimore he acted as Rosati's theologian. Upon the completion of the provincial council, Odin then carried out a mandate from his Vincentian confreres and traveled to Europe to tend to some business for the Vincentians in America at their *maison mère* (motherhouse) in Paris. Moreover, since Jean-Marie's father had recently died, and inasmuch as he had failed to return to his native land since his departure for the United States more than eleven years earlier, the Vincentians at Perryville felt that a visit would be good for him and his family. Furthermore, Odin could carry with him the Baltimore council's resolutions for presentation to the Holy See.

Despite all of these responsibilities consuming a considerable amount of his attention and time, Odin also worked a rigid schedule of missioning in and around Perryville. John Timon — three years older than Odin, but ordained a priest more than three years after the



Frenchman, on 23 September 1826 — often accompanied Odin on these trips. Years later, as first Bishop of Buffalo, New York, Timon authored a monograph entitled *Diary of Our Starting the Barrens*. Of Timon's many comments made about Jean-Marie Odin, C.M., in that booklet, the following one is most telling regarding his labors as a priest during those years:

For a considerable time Mr. Odin was left as the sole priest in the seminary. He had to attend to the duties of Provisional Superior, parish priest, confessor to the brothers, students, collegians and Lorretine nuns, and at the same time direct the general course of teaching. Often on Saturdays he would be out [until] ten at night on sick calls, and when he came home [he would] find students and brothers waiting to go to confession, occupying him for a great part of what remained of the night.<sup>8</sup>

John Timon proved to be a great help to Reverend Odin on his evangelization jaunts around the seminary. Those treks were usually kept to within a circle of about twenty miles in any direction from Perryville. However, on some occasions the two Vincentians ventured many miles from their headquarters. The evangelists' expedition into the southern reaches of the Arkansas region in 1824 developed into one of their most adventuresome journeys. Fortunately, on this excursion Odin avoided suffering the serious migraine headaches that plagued him throughout his adult life. But, another obstacle — his having never learned to swim — almost did create a serious setback. While plodding through the wooded trails of the northern Arkansas area, Odin and Timon were forced to cross a rapidly flowing river with strong currents. Odin in particular struggled with the fast-moving waters just to survive, eventually crawling out onto the opposite riverbank dangerously fatigued. Years later he was to suffer a similar almost fatal incident trying to negotiate a river in central Texas.

With all of those challenges, Reverend Jean-Marie Odin had to follow the missionary tradition of learning the language — or languages — of his mission field. When he first arrived at Saint Mary's of the

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<sup>8</sup> John Timon, C.M., *Barrens Memoir*, De Andreis Rosati Memorial Archives, DePaul University, Chicago, IL.

Barrens Seminary the Frenchman knew the language of his native country and the Latin of his priestly calling. It took him several years to learn English, but before the decade of the 1820s had run its course he spoke English well enough to hear confessions, give sermons, and carry out other duties as a priest.<sup>9</sup> Later, after he was sent to Texas he not only studied Spanish, but taught that language to several incoming churchmen and sisters who came to serve with him in that vast land.

Reverend Odin remained at Saint Mary's of the Barrens Seminary and the lay college at Perryville through the early spring of 1836, when he was named pastor of the newly-established parish of Saint Vincent de Paul (which at the time did not even have a church) situated some thirty miles south at Cape Girardeau. Of that appointment a noted nineteenth-century Catholic historian wrote:

He remained on duty as before at the Barrens until 1836, when a permanent mission was established at Cape Girardeau, for which he was selected as pastor. On March 24 of that year the mission was opened by a celebration of Mass by Father Timon, the Visitor, who after Mass introduced Father Odin to the congregation as their pastor, and in so doing paid an exalted tribute to the service he [Odin] had already rendered to religion and [that] augured the most favorable results from his mission to the Cape.<sup>10</sup>

Following his return to Perryville, Odin served for approximately three more years at Saint Mary's of the Barrens Seminary, when — as the Vincentians were given ecclesiastical responsibility for Texas in 1839 — Reverend Timon dispatched him to the Lone Star Republic as Vice Prefect Apostolic. In that huge territory Odin faced the challenging task of rebuilding the Catholic religious presence. Vice Prefect Apostolic Odin stepped ashore on Texas soil for the first time on 14 July 1840.

Drawing heavily upon the Vincentian formation and training that had been fostered in his many years at Saint Mary's of the Barrens Seminary, Odin — over a time-span of two decades — worked evan-

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<sup>9</sup> Foley, *A Missionary Always*, 78, 79.

<sup>10</sup> Richard H. Clarke, *Lives of the Deceased Bishops of the Catholic Church in the United States*, 3 vols. (New York: Richard H. Clarke, 1888), 2:6.

gelistic wonders in frontier Texas. When he made his first appearance in the then Lone Star Republic there were only two priests serving the entire area, diocesan clergy from the Diocese of Linares, Mexico, living lives that many people considered to be scandalous. Exhibiting the missionary spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul, Odin went to work in what was to become his beloved Texas. In 1842 he was consecrated a bishop and named Vicar Apostolic of Texas. Five years later, in 1847, the Frenchman was elevated to the position of first Bishop of Galveston.

When he departed what was by then the Lone Star State in the late spring of 1861 (Texas became a state on 29 December 1845) to take up his newly acquired responsibilities as the second Archbishop of New Orleans, Texas could count forty-two priests, a number of brothers, two orders of nuns, and forty-five churches or missions. The latter group of religious edifices included Saint Mary's Cathedral in Galveston, over which Odin personally supervised the construction. The Vincentian had served as the inspiration for founding Texas' first Catholic college, present-day Saint Mary's University in San Antonio de Bexar. Under his leadership other schools, hospitals, and much more were built. In 1858, as Bishop of Galveston, Jean-Marie Odin convened the Diocese of Galveston's first synod.

The Vincentian missionary from France essentially erected the base for the future of the Catholic Church in Texas for decades to come. He served as the Archbishop of New Orleans during the traumatic and devastating era of the American Civil War, constantly promoting peace. Immediately following that struggle Odin took the lead in building up educational opportunities for African-American Catholics, most of whom were former slaves.

Jean-Marie Odin, C.M., died in the very house in Hauteville, France, wherein he was born more than seventy years earlier, on 25 May 1870, having become ill while attending the First Vatican Council.

Today Jean-Marie Odin's legacy is profound, especially in Texas. The Vincentian spirit of Saint Mary's of the Barrens Seminary at Perryville always accompanied him wherever he ventured as a missionary. Odin's confreres at Perryville consistently supported him, and today the perception of him remains high among the members of the Congregation of the Mission. Thus it can well be argued that as priests such as Jean-Marie Odin, C.M., clearly mirror, they were missionaries *extraordinaire*, those Vincentians of Saint Mary's of the Barrens Seminary.