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John E. Rybolt C.M., Ph.D.

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Vincentian Missions Among Native Americans

By John E. Rybolt, C.M.

"I feel strongly impelled to devote myself, in a particular manner, to the conversion of the Indian tribes who live beyond the Mississippi."¹ "I came to America to work especially for the salvation of the poor Indians."² These clear statements came from the pens of the two founders of the American Vincentian mission, Felix De Andreis and Joseph Rosati. They are surprising, since they seem to contradict the original stated purposes of the mission itself: founding a seminary and preaching missions.

This study sets out to present and analyze the scanty information concerning the missionary efforts undertaken by De Andreis, Rosati, and other early American Vincentians among Native Americans. What results is a picture of exaggerated hopes, but few efforts with virtually no continuation. The work of these missionaries, however, cannot be judged either a success or a failure, because conditions changed rapidly, and resources in men and money remained poor. These pioneers were striving to adapt to the needs of the times, the common missionary experience.

Ministers of the Great Spirit

Felix De Andreis and his band of Vincentian missionaries in Bordeaux were thunderstruck when they read Bishop Louis William

¹Felix De Andreis to Domenico Sicardi, 5 January 1817, from Bardstown, De Andreis-Rosati Memorial Archives, Saint Mary's Seminary, Perryville, Missouri (hereafter cited as DRMA), Souvay collection. Quoted also in Joseph Rosati, Life of the Very Reverend Felix De Andreis (Baltimore, 1861), 157. All translations are the author's unless otherwise indicated.
DuBourg’s letter from Lyons informing them of the change of location for their mission. The bishop was facing too many problems from his clergy in New Orleans to allow him to place the missionaries there, so he chose the northern part of his diocese instead, headquartered at Saint Louis. His recruits feared the English language so much that some abandoned the mission at that point. De Andreis, however, feared the Indians. In a letter written from Bordeaux, he said that they “are even worse than wild beasts.” By the time he reached the shores of America on 26 July 1816, his perspective had changed, and he prayed that his heart would expand such that he would live and die in forgetfulness of all creatures, his mind set on God alone and no longer fearful of Indians. A further letter written from Baltimore shows even greater familiarity and sympathy with the first Americans, “reduced to almost nothing from the wars which have wiped out entire nations.... Other nations have been reduced to a few hundred persons, either in the measure that the civilized population grows, or they become civilized and unite together, or get themselves killed in their crazy raids. Hence the primary object of the Congregation is the foundation of these missions.”

Once the missionaries arrived in the West, that is, over the Allegheny Mountains and in the Ohio Valley, their encounters with the Indians began. Vincentians shared the views of Indians popular among missionaries, inasmuch as they, too, while still in Europe, had read and heard reports of the various Indian nations. For example, they had heard that the Indians lived austere lives and were favorable to missionaries, particularly since they had had visits from Jesuits a century and more before.

De Andreis reported the same and added that a missionary familiar with their language and culture and able to put up with privations, could do much good.

The experiences of Joseph Rosati and his Sulpician companion, Guy Ignatius Chabrat, during a missionary trip to Vincennes, an Indian-white meeting place, confirmed this. Chabrat himself probably wrote the following account, of which he was an eyewitness.

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1De Andreis to Sicardi, 28 May 1816, from Bordeaux, Archives of the Postulator General of the Congregation of the Mission, Rome, Italy (hereinafter cited at APGCM).
2De Andreis to Sicardi, 28 July 1816, from Baltimore, APGCM.
3De Andreis to Bartolomeo Colucci, 26 August 1816, from Baltimore, DRMA, Souvay collection.
4De Andreis to Peter Dahmen, 29 November 1816, from Baltimore, DRMA, Souvay collection.
The superior of the seminary of the Barrens, near Saint Louis, found himself one day with another missionary in Kentucky. He saw an Indian coming toward him, accompanied by his son and an interpreter. He was the brother of the king of the Miami, a very considerable nation. He had been traveling for eight days.

After warmly shaking hands as a sign of friendship he said: "I know that you are the minister of the Great Spirit. You have in your hands the papers which contain his will, and you are responsible for showing others, by your words and examples, the road that they must follow if they want to see the Great Spirit one day. In my case, I know only that he exists, and when I go to bed, I raise my hands to him and say: 'Great Spirit, I thank you for having preserved me today. I beg you to preserve me during this night,' and then I go to sleep. As soon as I wake up, I raise my hands to him and say: 'Great Spirit, I thank you for giving me the light to enjoy. I beg you to keep me during this day, as you have kept me during this night.' Then I get up and go to my work. That's all I know how to do."

Three days later the Indian fell sick, and as his last hour approached, he sent for one of the Blackrobes.

"What do you desire?" Mr. Rosati asked.

"I have sent for you to do for me something without which I will be unable to see the Great Spirit."

"What is it then?" the missionary asked.

At that point, the sick man, who could not find in his own language any word to express his wish, raised his hand above his head, and made him understand by that gesture that he wanted to be baptized.

"Do you believe in the Great Spirit?" Mr. Rosati asked him.

"I have believed in him my whole life."

"Do you believe that there are three persons in him, but that nevertheless there is only one Great Spirit?"

"Oh, I never realized that, but I believe it because you say so. I know that you are his minister."

Rosati instructed him and then baptized him. When Chabrat came to give him a brief exhortation, the sick man said he would die before morning, and in fact he died during the night.7

A letter of De Andreis recounts the same incident, which he heard from Rosati and Chabrat, but adds some details. He concludes: "These are the first fruits of the abundant harvest which we have reason to hope for in Saint Louis, in the immense regions which extend from the Mississippi to the Pacific Ocean. They are all inhabited by Indians, and

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the light of faith has not penetrated there. It would be a dainty morsel for a priest who had some zeal."

So far, De Andreis had only heard of read of Indians. "When I reached Kaskaskias [sic], Illinois, two days before reaching Saint Louis, I saw my first Indian. He was carrying his kill, a buck, which is a kind of small stag." Once arrived in Saint Louis, De Andreis continued to develop his interest in the Indians, who at that period visited the city regularly. In his newly learned English he reported, "The Indian nation of the Sacks [Sauks or Sacs] came in whole its fashion, and deep with their chief [sic] to make a formal visit to their Bishop: they were in the number of about twenty persons giving signs of great reverence and respect."9

Only a few days later, De Andreis wrote again to Rosati with the news that he had offered himself as a missionary to go with a businessman trading with the Indians. The trader would pay the expenses of such a journey. Bishop DuBourg approved the arrangement, but the visit never took place, apparently on account of war conditions among various tribes.10 De Andreis's readiness may seem precipitate, but he had already gone to some significant trouble to prepare himself for such a ministry.

With the assistance of an interpreter, I have made some attempts to arrange their principal language according to grammatical rules. This is a difficult undertaking, as my interpreter, knowing nothing of such laws, cannot translate word for word, nor supply me with equivalent expressions for every idea; however, I have begun a small dictionary, and made some translations ... As some curious person may be glad to meet with a specimen of their language, I will here insert the Pater Noster as I translated it by means of periphrasis, for they have no word to express

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9De Andreis to Philippine Duchesne (probably), 20 July 1817, from Bardstown, APCGM, Duchesne collection, 36-37. De Andreis added that the old man had died like a "beatus," repeating over and over "mon Dieu," French words he had learned as a child.
10"First Indians" in "Itinerario Italo-Gallo-Americano" (1819), p. 25 of Souvay transcription, DRMA; "Sack Visit," De Andreis to Rosati, 26 February 1818, from Saint Louis, DRMA, Souvay collection. Another contemporary view is offered by the recollections of Father Dunand, a Trappist and missionary in the period 1805-1823, and is found as the second part of Relation de ce qui est arrive à deux religieux de la Trappe pendant leur séjour auprès des sauvages (Paris, 1824). The following translation is available: "Epistle or Diary of the Reverend Father Marie Joseph Durand [sic, Dunand]," trans. Ella M.E. Flick, Records of the American Catholic Historical Society 26 (1915):328-46; 27 (1916):45-64.
either sanctificetur [hallowed], regnum [kingdom], dimitte [forgive] or tentatione [temptation].""11

In his work in Saint Louis, De Andreis baptized two Indian boys and admitted to "the fantasy that made me wonder whether there would be place at the College of Propaganda [in Rome] for such Indian students to bind these remote regions to the center of Christianity."12 Nothing apparently came of his enthusiastic hopes. By the fall of 1818, he had decided that the most realistic location for the Indian mission would be among the Shawnees living near the seminary of the Barrens in what became Perry County, Missouri.13 The mission had not been undertaken by the next February, as the following shows: "Less than a day's distance from here is an Indian nation called the SavaHannons [Shawnees]. They will be the first on whom the ministry will be extended. Various Indians have already been baptized, but they cannot be counted on, except at the point of death. Greater measures will have to be taken to make their nomadic life susceptible to Christian conduct."14

It is interesting to see here the first expression of doubt about the ease of the missionary task being faced. By summer, De Andreis was writing lengthy reports of the entire mission to his confreres in Rome. He knew by then that language study as well as inculturation were needed in the task of evangelization. His opinion of the Indians had likewise degenerated; he considered them, in his own words, like a third species between man and beast, unable to deal with abstract notions.

One day having run across several [Indians] in a place in company with some whites who understood their language, and with the help of an interpreter, I began to talk to them of God, of religion, of the soul and salvation. They asked me if I was one of those fur sellers who travel on

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11Same to Sicardi, 24 February 1818, from Saint Louis, APCGM. A sample of a contemporary sermon given to the Indians by Antoine Blanc (future archbishop of New Orleans) is found in Annales PF 2 (1826):343-46. De Andreis mentions his interpreter, who had fallen sick and had come back to the practice of his faith, in a letter to Francesco Antonio Baccari, 7 December 1818, from Saint Louis, APGCM. De Andreis's translations, intended for a catechism, mentioned in the same letter (and in same to Colucci, 9 February 1819, from Saint Louis, DRMA, Souvay collection) never entered into use, as Rosati admitted years later (Rosati to Samuel Eccleston, 22 October 1838, from Saint Louis, Archives of the Archdiocese of Baltimore [hereinafter cited as AAB]).

12De Andreis to Colucci, 27 April 1818, from Saint Louis, DRMA, Souvay collection.

13De Andreis to Baccari, 3 September 1818, from Saint Louis, DRMA, Souvay collection. This is also Rosati's view (Rosati to Nervi, 26 December 1817, from Bardstown, ACBS).

14De Andreis to Colucci, 9 February 1819, from Saint Louis, DRMA, Souvay collection. The year before, Rosati in Bardstown held out the same hopes for the Shawnees, living only eight miles from the Barrens (Rosati to Sicardi, 29 December 1817, from Bardstown, APGCM).
the Missouri to buy up those skins. I answered them that I have a much more noble profession, that is, that I was the agent of the master of life to save souls (one has to speak in that fashion to be understood). I added other things concerning the soul and salvation. At the end the result of my discourse was such that I was the agent of the master of life, and I should at least give them the money to go and buy whisky, a liquor which they crave greatly, and with which they get drunk, and thereby are killed like dogs.

On this occasion De Andreis baptized only a few. In addition he recounted that he had a few Indian penitents (women), very simple, innocent, and fervent. He also added information about mixed-bloods, who in his opinion seemed less than human at times. "The hardest part of our ministry is knowing how to instruct such people."15

Nevertheless, his wish to participate in the mission nearly came to fruition. "Alleluia. Deo Gratias! At length we are to commence a mission among the savages. I am to have the happiness of accompanying the bishop to visit these unfortunate people."16 But De Andreis died unexpectedly on 15 October 1820. Only a few weeks before, on 4 September, he wrote that Bishop DuBourg had decided to delay the endeavor. The bishop considered a mission in the spring of 1821 premature. His reason was the same one quoted many times subsequently: too few priests to care for the Catholics already under their jurisdiction to justify the evangelization of the Indians. Still, DuBourg was able to send a diocesan priest, Charles De la Croix, to the Osages some months later.17

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16 Quoted in Rosati, Life, 205. The letter is undated, but it was placed by Rosati toward the end of his subject’s life. "Savages" was not intended pejoratively, since it was the common expression in both French and Italian. De Andreis used the term "Indians" when writing in English. The site for the visit may have been Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, where DuBourg hoped to open a school for Indian boys to be run by Vincentians. "Oh how happy I would be if I could spend the rest of miserable life there" (De Andreis, "Itinerario," 14, DRMA).

17 De Andreis to Baccari, 4 September 1820, Saint Louis, APGCM. On De la Croix, see O[adin] to Mr. [Cholleton?], 21 October 1822, from Saint Louis, Anales PF, 1 (1825):449. Rosati to Nervi, 19 December 1821, from Saint Louis, ACBS, reports on continuing interest in and hope for evangelizing the Indians and tells of a request to do so in Michigan. Without missionaries from Europe nothing could be done. See also Rosati to Nervi, Barrens, 18 August 1822, ACBS. The same justification was quoted at length in the official documents submitted for the cause of the beatification of De Andreis (Beatificationis et Canonizationis Servi Dei Felicis De Andreis ... Summarium [Rome, 1908], 106-09).
The shock of De Andreis’ death, coupled with needed adjustments in the apostolate to whites, put at least a temporary end to the Vincentian evangelization of the Indians.

"The Blackrobes from France," 1824

By 1823 a new opportunity for missionary work presented itself. The federal government in Washington had expressed an interest in bringing the arts of American civilization to the Indians through the help of missionaries. In Saint Louis the explorer William Clark became superintendent of Indian affairs. Both the time and the place were right for Bishop DuBourg to act on his plans. Consequently, he traveled to Washington to negotiate directly with government representatives and succeeded eventually in receiving promises of $200 yearly for the support of three (later four) missionaries living among remote tribes, "i.e. westward beyond the Osages." The areas for development included Council Bluffs, Iowa; River (or Bayou) Saint Pierre, Louisiana; and Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. In doing so, DuBourg was carrying out a plan he had outlined as early as 1815. It called for religious communities destined for work among the Indians and government support for missionaries and teachers. The financial aid was supposed to amount to two-thirds of the expenses of a missionary and a helper—understood as including religious brothers, a necessary stipulation for Vincentians.

The bishop was forced to ignore the Perry County Shawnees, who were not living in remote areas. As mentioned above, he first planned to send the Vincentians to the Menominees at Prairie du Chien, then decided instead on the Potawatamis at Council Bluffs, where a school was to be opened. He changed his mind once more, giving that mission to the Jesuits and planning that the Vincentians would go to Mississippi. No reasons for these changes have appeared in the sources, although DuBourg often changed his mind. None of the three locations ever received Vincentian missionaries.

18 Melville, Dubourg, chapter 27, 2:623ff; DuBourg to John Carroll, 5 October 1815, from Rome, AAB, Carroll papers. It should be noted that Vincentian missionaries in Illinois never mentioned Native Americans, probably because they had emigrated by the time the Vincentians arrived in the mid-1830s.

19 Rosati to Baccari, 11 April 1823, (from Barrens?), APGCM. This material is repeated in same to same, 6 May 1823, from Sainte Genevieve, ibid.

Offers of help came from another source as well: a French merchant (probably Auguste Pierre Chouteau) engaged in trade with the Indians. He asked for two priests to travel with him to his trading post and even offered to build them a house for their headquarters. Rosati, ordained a bishop only a few weeks before on 25 March, had to decline. There were too few available Jesuits and Vincentians to inaugurate such an undertaking just then.

A further offer came from Arkansas. John Mulletti, a settler there, offered 160 acres for a church to take care of the nearly 1,000 Catholics living in the area at the time without a church or clergy. His invitation arrived just in time, inasmuch as the bishop had planned to send his only available men, the priest-novice John Mary Odin and the seminarian John Timon, on an extended missionary journey. Their objective would now also include negotiations with Mulletti in Arkansas.

Odin and Timon set out on 8 September 1824 with letters of introduction from Rosati and headed first toward New Madrid, Missouri, where Odin wrote back with news of their first days. Of far greater interest is the lengthy report which he composed for the editor of the *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi*. This letter is quoted extensively below because of its interest as a firsthand report.

Monsieur:

Knowing the interest which you have in everything which deals with the glory of God and our missions in America, I hasten to give you a brief report on a trip which I just finished with Mr. Timon, the young theologian I mentioned to you in several of my letters.

On September 8, after offering the holy sacrifice of the mass to put ourselves under the protection of her whose feast we celebrated, we left to visit the Catholics dispersed in the Territory of Arkansas. He describes the route through Apple Creek, Jackson, New Madrid, and Grande-Prairie. Travel is difficult because of lack of roads and the presence of wild animals, such as bears. They arrive in Arkansas and visit.

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21 Rosati to Baccari, 14 June 1824, from Barrens, APGCM.
23 Rosati, Diary, 28 September 1824, SLCHR 3 (1921):355. This letter appears now to be lost. Copy of the introductions, dated 8 September 1824, in Archives of the Archdiocese of Saint Louis (hereinafter cited as AASL).
24 *Annales PF*, 3 (1828-1829):56-75. The letter was also quoted in part in *Annales CM* 60 (1895):574-78. The letter is not dated, but the missionaries returned by 31 October, as noted in Rosati, Diary, SLCHR 3 (1921):361.
25 They celebrated the feast of the Birth of Mary. Arkansas, correctly called a Territory here, became a state 16 June 1836.
1824 Mission Journey

Missouri, Arkansas
Little Rock, Arkansas Post, and elsewhere. They preach to lapsed Catholics, who were abandoned for many years, and baptize. Baptisms had been performed by lay persons, but without proper knowledge of the ceremonies. They have contact with Protestants, who show openness to hear the Catholic faith.]

I am going to shorten my report on the Americans to speak to you about the good savages. During our trip, we often saw the tents where the poor Indians took rest during their hunts. We passed through several villages, from which the ambition of the Americans had chased them away, and several areas where they had been dispossessed. The new owners of their fields told us some very interesting stories, especially at the Castor River, where they told us the Shawnees and the Delawares, who had lived there up to two years ago, never buried their dead without placing a cross over their graves. In spring and fall they pray for a good hunt and an abundant harvest of corn. Whenever the elder who speaks to the great spirit exhorts them, he always carries a cross in his hand. It is easy to see that this custom came to them from Catholic missionaries. A doctor, who lives some fifteen leagues from there, told us the same thing.

During our trip, we saw Shawnees, Delawares, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and others, but bad roads and the brief time assigned to us kept us from going to the places where these different tribes lived. We were only able to visit the Kappawson-Arkansas, who live on the bank of the river of the same name, near a French village. There is nothing more touching than the friendship they showed us. One of the chiefs, a very respectable elder named Sarrasin, when he was told about our arrival in the village, immediately came to visit us in company with his whole family. "Ah," he said as we shook hands, "now I will die happy, since I have seen my Father, the blackrobe from France."

We enjoyed eating supper with him. He told us, by means of an interpreter, the history of their religion and their nation. The next day, a Sunday, great numbers of them attended the holy sacrifice of the mass. The great chief of the nation told me as we began: "My father, the French blackrobe, my heart is completely happy as I see you." I promised then that I would go to celebrate the holy mysteries in their village.

On Monday, when the appointed time came, the good chief Sarrasin sent his sons to help us cross the river. He then appeared in his best clothes, and received us at a little distance from his cabin, and asked us to sit on his mat. Some runners left to announce our arrival to the great chief and to those of the nation who were nearby. He had already taken the trouble of preparing for the celebration of the holy sacrifice. We set up a small rustic altar, which seemed to please them. The chiefs sat around it, and we gave them a brief explanation of this great mystery. In particular, I promised that I would recommend them to the Great Spirit.

Oh, what sweet, but also sad and heart-rending sentiments moved me at various times during the celebration of the holy sacrifice! I could not look without tenderness on these good savages seated around me, giving their whole attention, but ignorant at the same time of the precious victim

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26 The Castor is a small stream in southeast Missouri.
27 Kappawson-Arkansas is a misprint for Kappas-on-Arkansas, today's Quapaw tribe. Their village was north of the Arkansas River, probably in Phillips County. The French village is probably Arkansas Post, some ten to twelve miles south of the Quapaw settlement.
who was then being offered and immolated for their salvation on Mount Calvary. When I later reflected that they would probably never have the happiness of knowing the true religion, oh how that thought rent my heart!

Whenever the server knelt down, they knelt as well, undoubtedly for the first time. Their knees, uncovered and delicate, could not stand the ground for a long time, and so they shifted from one knee to the other, or really they were squatting down. After the celebration of the holy sacrifice, I offered them some images which they received with thanks, and evident pleasure.

We were brought into their cabins, and even into the sacred abode of the dead, a place where no one may enter. They even showed us several scalps taken from their enemies. They have a group of ancient traditions which constitute their religion. Three or four of the most respected elders are in charge of these traditions. They believe that there was a time when the whole earth was flooded. A god, dressed in white and carrying a small sack of tobacco on his shoulders, brought them out of the abyss, and put it into their minds to look for land. At that time, everything was still covered with darkness. A beaver plunged in and led them to a bit of ground to show them that soon they would find a resting place.

Some time after there appeared a white eagle with a green branch in its beak. The white god them left them after giving them various instructions. The country which they discovered was extremely cold and located in the north. They kept moving south, they recounted, and had to battle several nations before being able to stay on the Arkansas River. In addition to the Master of Life, that is, the Great Spirit, whom they adore as the first and greatest of the gods, there are also lesser deities. Their veneration for the white eagle is so great that if, on the point of leaving for battle or for a hunt they see one flying about them, all their plans are overturned, and they stop immediately. They seem to have the idea of a time when man began to speak different languages.

When the corn and melons are ripe, they offer the first ones to the Master of Life. Their children would die of hunger rather than touch the first fruits before this offering. This takes place amid striking circumstances, and these prove that they have some communication with demons. They cut the corn, the melons, etc., into small pieces on a mat, in the presence of the elders of the nation, who alone may assist at this ceremony. A dog is then brought and cut into small pieces. They do not remove either its skin or bones, but mix everything together. The elders perform some ceremonies, and then begin dancing. At that point, some girls moved by the spirit of madness, or rather a diabolical spirit, throw themselves into their midst, fall on the offering, and make it disappear in

\[28\] The server appears here for the first time. Possibly he was a young person (an interpreter?) who accompanied them from Arkansas Post.

\[29\] This account makes their religion appear somewhat more monotheistic than it was in reality. The white god was one of four, although regarded as the supreme deity. Veneration for the eagle was well known among Siouan tribes (The Encyclopedia of Religion, s.v. "North American Indians. Indians of the Plains").
an instant. Then the elders seize them and plunge them in the Arkansas River, where they suddenly recover their former tranquillity.30

They admit the existence of another life. According to them, the flesh dies but the spirit never perishes. The soul of a good savage passes to a country where stags and bears are abundant, fat and easy to kill. The soul of an evil savage is sent to a land where game is scarce, thin and hard to find. They think that the soul always follows the sun, and for this reason they bury their dead with the head turned to face the sun. They bring to their dead food for an entire year, and for four nights after their death they light a fire near their head.

It would be too long to tell you everything that we learned about these good Indians. They seriously want to have a Blackrobe, to teach them prayer, agriculture, and to bring them civilization. They asked me to say this to the father of the Blackrobes. They will take care of a missionary, and he would not die of famine in his cabin.

Good chief Sarrasin, who understands and speaks a few words of French, came to tell me some of his problems. "Although you are quite young, he said, you are my father. My brother, the French, he added, came here, and we Arkansas gave him land. The Frenchman is good for the Arkansas. He has taught us, he has fed us, and he has never mistreated us. The Frenchman and the Arkansas always walk side by side.31 My brother the Spaniard came here, the Arkansas received him. The Spaniard was good for the Arkansas, he helped us, and we walked together on the right road.32 The American came, the Arkansas received him, and we gave him everything he could desire. But the American keeps on pushing the Arkansas and chasing us away. In fact, he came to force us to enter into some agreement with the United States, which will deprive us of all our lands. At the beginning, the American agreed to let us stay on the Arkansas River, [on lands] fifteen miles long, and sixty miles wide, but the Congress never accepted the first treaty. The governor of the Arkansas Territory, whom we visited, told us that the president did not want to adopt the treaty, and that he demanded that we abandon our possessions and be sent to the Red River among the Caddo. We have not yet learned the outcome of this.33

The Indians will submit to this only with some difficulty. They have often declared that because the whites, whom they have always treated well, have treated them so, the whites might slaughter them, but could never place them among enemy nations, where a certain death would await them. Our departure saddened them, since the love the French deeply, and are mild and patient. They do not practice polygamy.

30The same custom was reported by Thomas Nuttall, "who visited the tribe in 1819 [and who] wrote that women, before the spring corn planting, devoured a live dog as an offering to the Indian Ceres" (John Anthony Caruso, The Mississippi Valley Frontier [Indianapolis 1966] 90).
31The Quapaws' encounter with Europeans is reputed to go back to the earliest days, perhaps to the De Soto expedition, 1539-1843 (Frederick W. Hodge, ed., Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico, 2 vols. [Totowa, New Jersey, 1975], 2:333).
32French domination gave way to the Spanish during the period 1762-1800. In the latter year the American government made two treaties, the first dated 24 August 1818 and the second 15 August 1824, the latter just prior to the Vincentian missionary visit (Hodge, Handbook of American Indians 2:336). James Miller, the first territorial governor (1819-1825), dealt with President James Madison (1817-1825). The Caddo tribe lived in northwest Louisiana.
Without doubt, they could be easily converted.

We then planned to visit a great number of Catholics along the Red River, near the Ouachita, at Bayou Saint-Pierre, and in different places, and moving toward the Attakapas. We were then to visit the savage Cherokees, and from there to go among the Osages, and finally return along the Missouri River toward Saint Louis. The poor state of our horses, however, as well as the lack of money and a violent fever that I suffered, upset all our plans. My illness was so serious that my companion, who had once studied medicine, feared that I would die without the assistance of a priest. It took at least twelve days to reach the closest missionary from the place where we were, but Providence came to my aid. After a few days, I felt well enough to return to the seminary, but the fever hung on somewhat. Monsieur, how careful have been the ways of Providence toward us!

During our absence, Bishop Rosati baptized two savages in the Jesuit mission. It seems that we will not have the happiness of seeing our mission open among the poor Indians. The Jesuits lost a priest last summer. The house is composed of a superior and five novices who are just now beginning to study their theology. The bearer of this letter is Mr. Niel, who takes care of the city of Saint Louis. His health obliges him to return to France. Bishop Rosati has asked Mr. Janvier to replace him. I do not know whether Bishop DuBourg will want to let him go up to Saint Louis, where there is only one young French priest at present. I am alone at the seminary with the bishop. Three other priests are attached to three parishes. This is all the clergy we have in Upper Louisiana.

[He sends best wishes to people he names, and asks prayers for the American mission.]

Odin did not report anything about the offer of property by Mulletti, perhaps because no decisions were made about it. Fortunately, Timon too left an account, although briefer and written many years later. His details, however, are helpful in many ways since they supplement Odin's letter.

At the post of Arkansas, several visits were paid to the Quapaw Indians, then inhabiting the South bank of the Arkansas River. The Missionaries erected a rustic altar before the wigwam of Sarasin the Chief. The Indians assisted at Mass. The Missionaries through W. Neismere, explained the Catholic faith. The Indian Priest and medicine man

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3The term "savage" applied to Cherokees is particularly inept, since they were among the most "civilized" of all Native Americans. Odin may have used the term here as a synonym for Indian without any specific judgment intended.

35Peter J. Timmermans, S.J., died 31 May 1824, after only one year in the new Missouri mission (Garraghan, Jesuits, 1:115).

36Francis Niel, pastor of Saint Louis, returned to France for his health and also to act as Rosati’s agent in raising funds and recruiting personnel. August Janvier, an early recruit of DuBourg’s, came with him on his first trip to America as bishop.

37The parishes were Saint Louis, Sainte Genevieve, and Old Mines, all in Missouri. It is difficult to determine which priests were attached to the parishes at that time.
at night was persuaded to tell the dogma of his faith. In general, it is hard to get from an Indian a precise detail, even of the little they profess to know. They are afraid of being laughed at. In general like other Indians, they believe in God, in subordinate Gods, good and bad, perhaps vague parodies of our good and bad Angels; of future rewards and punishments, in which our views of a threefold store [heaven, purgatory, hell] are distinguishable.

Their ancient tradition is that they came from the cold north, that the first remembrance their fathers had was their being floundering on the surface of a vast lake; that a God in white from the south, one in red from the north, one in black from the east, one in motley colors from the west, approached. The God in white was the superior. A bird was sent to discover land, but with no result; different animals then follow; one returned with his feet and legs besmeared with mud. The God in white led them towards the point from whence the animal returned. Land was found; they knelt to thank and adore the God in white. "No, children," said he, "I am sent by the Great Spirit. Him you must adore." He then predicted their victories over all the nations they should encounter till they reached the sunny south, and in the lapse of ages, they would see white men, children of the God in white, whom they should never injure for sake of their guide, etc. Strange gestures and wild episodes accompanied the account of which the above is an abridgement. From their traditions, it seems that beside some vague recollections of the earlier revelations, they retained some remembrances of the deluge and of Noah's trials to know if the deluge had ceased.38

Despite the exotic nature of the encounters with abandoned Catholics and with Native Americans, Vincentians did little to follow up those initiatives. Rosati first had to pay off the debt incurred in sending the missionaries in the first place.39 Although two students, Peter Vergani and Joseph Paquin, as well as an unnamed brother, expressed interest in the mission, the students probably would have had to wait until priestly ordination on 23 September 1826, and in any case there were too few priests and brothers to go around.40

In an official report to Archbishop Pietro Caprano, secretary of Propaganda Fide in Rome, Rosati commented on the journey of Odin and Timon. He regarded it as a mission both to French Catholics and to well-disposed Indians in Arkansas. Warning of eventual Protestant
incursions, Rosati nevertheless had to conclude “For the moment I cannot do anything, lacking both priests and money.”

“They camped near the Seminary,” 1824-1837

In the period between the two major missionary journeys, 1824 and 1837, contacts with Indians developed and increased in frequency. For example, Father Odin continued his interests in the Indians. A year before the Arkansas mission, while still a novice, he had written, “I experience a great desire of evangelizing the Indians, but so many holy missionaries have the same wish that I dare not count on such a favor.” He repeated these same wishes in several other letters, even asking at one point for Indian souvenirs to be sent to his family.

On a fund raising and recruiting trip to Europe, Odin delighted his audiences with an account of the holy death of one of the “poor children of the forests.” His address was eventually printed in French and Italian for distribution. He began by describing the great diocese of Saint Louis, eight times larger than the whole of France. The Indians were dispersed all over, but now the United States Congress has given them reservations west of the Mississippi. “These poor children of the forests are continually asking for Blackrobes to learn about the God who created them, and to be instructed in the arts of civilization.”

To give a brief idea of the favorable dispositions of the Indians toward Christianity, I will report here the conversion of a 70-year-old chief of the Schawanons [Shawnees] whom I had the happiness of baptizing a little while ago. On my way back from a brief trip, I encountered several Indians at the bank of a river. They ran up to me eagerly and grabbed my hand and cried out: Hail, Blackrobe, we are happy to meet you. Come, our chief is very ill, he will be delighted to see you. I went immediately to the old man, whom I found lying on a bed of bark and in the grip of great pain. He had been poisoned by an Indian enemy. I greeted him: “Are you very ill, brother?”

“Yes, Blackrobe,” he replied.

“Are you thinking about your death?”

“I certainly am.”

“Will you be happy to go to the beautiful home of the Great Spirit, where you will live forever?”

“Oh certainly, because I love the Great Spirit deeply.”

“But you won’t be able to go unless I pour water on your head.”

“Please, Blackrobe, pour the water on my head.”

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41Rosati to Pietro Caprano, 1 November 1825, from New Orleans, quoted in Easterly. Life, 78-79.
42Odin to Duplay, 30 March 1823, from Barrens, Annales CM 60 (1895):559.
43Odin to Timon, 20 November 1826, from Barrens, Archives of the University of Notre Dame (hereinafter cited as AUND), microfilm of the Vincentian Collection, roll 1, no. 9.
I then instructed him in the principal mysteries of the faith, and asked him if he believed the great truths which I had explained to him. "I believe them, because you are the Blackrobe," he answered.

These poor Indians have such a great horror of lying that they could not believe that someone whom they esteem would ever be able to deceive them, and so it is easy to implant in them the reasons for belief, on which our holy religion is based. The day after this first meeting I asked the sick man if he still remembered the instructions which he had received. He replied: "I have kept thinking about the Great Spirit. Hasten to pour the water on my head, because I want to become his child at once." Since he had been poisoned, I was very afraid that he would be unable to pardon his enemy. Indians never forget a good received, and it is very difficult for them to forgive an injury. So I took the crucifix and showed him how much the Great Spirit had suffered, and I showed him that the Great Spirit's own children had made him endure all those evils, but that he had pardoned them, and even demanded that we should pardon the other as soon as we have received an injury. Otherwise he will never admit us into his beautiful home. He told me: "I pardon him indeed, since the Great Spirit demands it," and he instructed his children never to revenge the evil that had been done to him.

Odin concluded this possibly romanticized account by speaking of the chief's baptism and then of his pious death four days later.44

During this time various Native Americans continued to live in Perry County, Missouri. Peorias lived in the Bois Brule bottoms on the banks of the Mississippi, while Delawares made their home on the north side of Apple Creek. Shawnees, as noted above, settled around Apple Creek, and the name of Shawneetown is one of the few lasting memorials to their presence. Federal agents made Perryville a center for dealing with the tribes of the area.45

Among the members of the Vincentian community interest in the Indians ran high and must have been encouraged by contact with those tribes living close by. The following account records what might have been a typical occurrence, although it dates from 1824.

Two Indian chiefs of the Delaware tribe, along with several families of the same nation, came here [the Barrens] three weeks ago. They camped near the seminary "to visit their good friends in the big house, the Blackrobes." They all came dressed in their finery on Sunday. We served them dinner, and then they wanted to attend Vespers. The singing and the brief sermon pleased them. To avoid any disturbance, they had their children remain by the door.

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44"Missione del Missouri. Missiion du Missouri," printed page, undated, APGCM. The text was also given, without attribution, in Bony, "Odin," 91-93.

45Timothy J. O'Rourke, Maryland Catholics on the Frontier (Parsons, Kansas, 1973), 2; Annales PF 3 (1828-1829):493ff.
The first chief, who spoke good English, told us that they gathered this way twice each year, in fall to ask for a good hunt, and in spring to pray for good corn. We presented them with some small images, and the next day the first chief, who had killed a deer, brought us a large quarter as a token of their thanks. The explanation that we gave them of the passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ touched them deeply. Something very curious also happened on that occasion. One of our Sisters [of Loretto] gave a crucifix to an Indian woman. An American happened to go through the camp, and the Indians crowded around him and reproached him for the deicide of which his compatriots were guilty. Even though he wanted to excuse his nation, he couldn't dissuade the Indians.

One of our seminarians came to the camp as this was taking place. They asked him, "Are the Americans truly responsible for the death of the Great Spirit?" "No," he said. "Then it must have been the French!" He spoke to then of the Jewish nation, and they let the American go free.

The first chief had a twelve-year old son, of excellent character, and handsomely built. He wanted to remain here. We did not keep him since the bishop [Rosati] was away, but he will return. His father, a powerful person in the tribe, promised to take care of the Blackrobe whom we will send him. Bishop Rosati strongly wishes to do something for these poor people. But, alas! Without missionaries, everything restricts our desires.

"How will they preach unless they be sent? [Romans 10:15] but "How will they be sent unless there is someone to send?" The Jesuits in Florissant are thinking seriously about these missions, and they already have five young Indians [in their school]. Their novices are beginning to speak a little of their barbarous language. The government is still disposed to help Catholic priests in the great work of civilized the poor Indians. General Clark [the Indian agent] besought Bishop Rosati a few days ago to begin soon the establishment of our Community at Prairie du Chien.46

Besides these occasional visits, the seminary community had a continuing reminder of the Shawnees in the person of Cato, "the last of the Shawnees." His romantic story was part of the common folklore of Perry County. He had killed his wife "in a fit of passion." As a result, the tribe ostracized him. When it left Perry County after 1825, Cato was forced to remain and turned from hunting to farming. After some time, he became a devout Catholic and faithfully attended Sunday mass even on the bitterest winter mornings. At his death, he was buried in the town cemetery, Mount Hope.47

Letters of the period continued to refer to plans for the long-delayed Indian mission, but the usual problem, lack of men and money, pre-

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46Odin to Cholleton, undated [1824], [from Barrens], in Annales PF 3 (1828-1829):47-49.
47Centennial History of Perry County, Missouri (Perryville, 1921), unpaginated, chapter 5, by Stephen Paul Hueber. Neither baptismal nor burial records corroborate this romantic story. It may have its roots in the baptism of a Shawnee-Delaware Indian, named John Louis, on 30 August 1826. He was believed to be about 60 at the time and was the only person designated as an Indian in the parish records. These do not record his death and burial.
Ostensibly beginning.48 Odin himself applied a little pressure, citing the
wishes of the pope and European benefactors.49 Even the superiors
general took some notice of the Indian mission, but more as a cause for
boasting and self-congratulation than for any decision taken at the
highest levels of Vincentian Community.50

"We began our mission," 1837

The establishment of the American houses as an independent
province in 1835 and the appointment of John Timon as the first visitor
(provincial superior), marked a turning point in Vincentian history in
the United States. As a veteran of the 1824 mission, Timon might be
expected to have maintained an interest in this specialized ministry to
the Indians. In fact, he planned to go himself to open a mission among
them in 1837.51 For reasons unknown, he did not do so.

Instead, he chose two other missionaries, John Brands and Francis
Simonin. Brands, the first native of the Netherlands to join the Vincen-
tians, was born in 1797. He came to America in 1828 with Leo DeNeck-
ere, the future bishop of New Orleans, and was ordained to the
priesthood in 1830. Simonin was born in France in 1810, came to
America in 1835, and was ordained the following year. Still a novice at
the time of this new mission, he took vows the following 22 December,
scarcely nine months before his death, on 15 September 1838.52

As with the case of Odin and Timon thirteen years previously,
Rosati prepared documents giving the two men missionary faculties for
Missouri and for the entire state of Arkansas, still a part of his diocese.53

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48For example, Tornatore to Simone Ugo, 8 June 1831 and 12 July 1832, from Barrens, APGCM.
49Odin to Timon, 24 December 1834, from Genoa, AUND, microfilm, roll one no. 172.
50Dominique Sallogne, 1 January 1830 ("the happiest successes, whether among Catholics or
among the Indians"), Recueil des principales circulaires des Superieurs Generaux de la Congregation de la
51Timon to Ugo, 3 February 1837, from Barrens, APGCM. Timon's correspondence does not
contain any explicit reference to such a continuing interest on his part.
52For Brands, see Cornelie Verwoerd, "Jean Brands: Premier lazariste hollandais," Annales CM
102 (1937):645-61; the author did not mention the Indian mission. An account of Simonin's life was
prepared for publication, but exists only in manuscript in "Notices VI, 1801-1847," Archives of the
Congregation of the Mission, Paris (hereinafter cited as ACM), 1207-1220. The same account quotes a
letter written by Simonin, 21 July 1837, prior to the visit, which outlines precisely the goals of the trip:
to visit several tribes and to visit dispersed Catholics (1238-40.) Odin's report of Simonin's death to
Jean-Baptiste Etienne, superior general, is in Annales CM 5 (1839):45-51. He notes that Simonin had
begun planning a second mission.
53Copies dated 23 July 1837, in AASL. The introductory letter, however, does not mention a visit
to the Indians, but only asks Catholics to afford themselves of the spiritual helps offered by the
missionaries. The letter of faculties reads: "Both among the native tribes and among the faithful." Since
the Indian Territory was attached to Arkansas, it fell under Rosati's jurisdiction. Charles van
Quickenborne, S.J., had visited the Indians of the area in 1827, 1828, 1830, and 1834; no permanent
mission began until 1844 (Garraghan, Jesuits, 1:182-94; 2:493-593).
Indian Settlements in Northeastern Indian Territory (Oklahoma)
The following letter, in Brands' handwriting, reported to Timon on the mission as it was nearing its end.

Territory of the Senecas
Exaltation of the Holy Cross [14 September] 1837

Dear Sir:

We have put off writing you for some time, in hopes of being able to write you something positive about the outcome of our mission, but unexpected delays have prevented us from doing so until now, and they will keep us in suspense. As far as we are concerned personally, our trip up to now has been very satisfactory, thanks be to God. The roads are well laid out, and the dwellings are fairly close together. Only the first few days were hot—boiling hot.

[They recount their journey, the preaching to Protestants in Springfield, Missouri, and the reconciliation of Catholics.]

On 14 August we arrived at the plantation of Mr. Auguste Chouteau. Everything was ready for us to celebrate the glorious Assumption of Mary [15 August]. We offered the holy mysteries and agreed to place our mission under the august protection of the Mother of God.

Major Chouteau, retired agent of the Osage nation, was there with his brother. We intended to remain there only long enough to secure the information we needed. The Chouteau brothers had to go on the 25th of the month to the fort, about 45 miles away. The purpose of their trip was to take the payment due the Osage nation as a result of arrangements with the American government for the cession of their lands. The majority of the nation came to the rendezvous at the plantation. It seemed to us that the occasion was right to see the nation which people had tried too hard to interest us in. These several days, when we had determined to wait, were more fruitful for us for these reasons than for any others.

At the end of the month, horseflies made the prairies more impractical than ever. Fever broke out in the family where Father Brands was staying, and he himself was attacked by an illness which gave him some sharp pains, but happily they didn't last long. All that we could do during that period was to instruct a little and to baptize the children of

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54 Archives of the General Curia of the Congregation of the Mission, microfilm of correspondence with the provinces of the United States of America (hereinafter cited as AGCUSA), microfilm, series A, roll 2, no. 321. The Senecas, some 500 individuals including their Shawnee cousins, had been relocated by treaties of 1831 and 1832 to the northeast corner of Indian Territory, now in Oklahoma, but then attached to Arkansas, and thus under Rosati's ecclesiastical jurisdiction. It is impossible to locate precisely where the letter was written.

55 Auguste Pierre Chouteau (1786-1838) had founded a trading post in Indian Territory in 1823 and relocated it, the "Osage Agency," near Salina on the Neosho (also known as the Grand) River above Fort Gibson, the principal military base in the territory. He was Indian agent for the federal government in early 1837. His brother, Pierre Chouteau (1789-1865), worked with him at various times, while carrying on his own business as a fur trader and later as a financier in Saint Louis (Dictionary of American Biography, s.v. "Chouteau, August Pierre" and "Chouteau Pierre." As Indian agent, Auguste Chouteau handled the federal funds ($7,000 annually for twenty years) due the Osages from the treaty of 2-3 June 1825. For treaties, see Wilcomb E. Washburn, The American Indian and the United States: A Documentary History, 4 vols. (New York, 1973), 4:2396. Washington Irving left a description of Osage Agency and Fort Gibson in 1832, in A Tour on the Prairies in his Complete Works (New York, n.d.), chapter 3.
Mr. Chouteau.

Meanwhile a hundred or so Osages arrived and we saw with our own eyes what we had heard about them. We speak about the Osages more in particular since we have been sent especially for them. This nation was more warlike than all the others. They are tall and well-built. They shave their heads, leaving a kind of tuft which falls down their back. Their look is haughty, proud and quite open. Their bearing is confident, even noble, having nothing in common with the submissiveness of other nations which we have had occasion to see. They tell us that their strongly articulated language is simple to learn.

For clothing they use the "mitassé", a kind of long leggings, and the "bragay" or belt around their hips from which hands a woolen loincloth. The woman are more modest.

Up to six years ago they knew nothing of intoxicating liquors, but now they drink and get drunk just like all the neighboring nations.

They have several wives, but without seeming to lose their morals. It has been truly said that the education of the Osages consists in thievery and in eating, or better: in feasting. We know through experience that they have no cooks. Concerning theft, they have lost their reputation among the [other] tribes, who according to appearances are less delicate on this point. For each one, it seems that they make theft a point of honor.

They have a religion. They adore Wacanda, the master of life, and they pay special veneration to the virgin Assega. They prepare for war or the hunt by severe fasts. I have seen one of their chiefs remain six days without taking even a drop of water. There are about 10,000 of them in all. Oh, Monsieur, if only they could do this for a better-known Master of life!

We have kept begging Mr. Chouteau to help us get an interview with the four chiefs of the nation. Right from the beginning we realized one thing that we should pay attention to. The dispositions of the nations under the influence of their religious education have changed in recent years. The different population of the West received the majority of missionaries from the government, and we do not think we exaggerate in assuring them that they have for the most part been deceived. Beyond their indisposition and coldness, some other people have resolved never to open their lands to [missionaries]. Don’t you think that their very unwillingness should turn to the triumph of the [Catholic] faith which has promises from on high, and whose pure flame alone burns brightly?

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56Mitassé, also spelled mataché, was a painted, decorated animal skin.

57The tone of this and the preceding paragraph is probably ironic. The official government view of the Osages, "the same wild and predatory beings as ever," contrasts with that of the Quapaws, "a more honest, quiet, peaceable people are not to be found in any nation of the Indian country." Executive Documents [House of Representatives], 25th Congress, 2nd Session, Document 3, 5 December 1837, 582, 586.

58Wacanda, or in Lakota [Sioux] Wakantanka, is translated ‘Great Spirit’. No evidence exists of monotheism among them as such, despite the efforts of Catholic missionaries to find traces of primitive revelation. Assega is perhaps Aŋgaya Gigaŋeŋi, translated either as ‘Red Man’ or ‘Red Woman’, associated with thunder. Mention of Assega here was intended to recall the revelation of the Blessed Mother (Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, s.v. “Cherokee”).
In any case, the Osage have not shown themselves too difficult in agreeing to our request. They have promised to send their children to our school, whether we establish it among them or give preference to some of their neighbors. According to the advice of all those who know this nation and with whom we have conversed, it would be too hazardous to try an establishment among them, as wild and turbulent as they are. This would result in injuries and worries, and might involve exorbitant expenses in a new establishment.

An easy solution presents itself, however. Near Osage Territory lies the country of the Quapaws of Arkansas, who make up a population of five or six hundred individuals. They are peaceful, they love quiet, and live in good relations with other nations, with the Osages in particular who often hunt on their lands. Surrounding them in a circumference of about ten or perhaps fifteen miles are the Senecas, several Shawnee families and part of the Cherokee nation. They make a total of twelve or fifteen thousand persons.

Among the reasons which move us to choose Arkansas to profit from these other nations, the main ones are as follows: we would be near the Osages, only a short distance away, and so we could help them without having anything to fear from them. Besides, the language of the other tribes is close enough that they understand one another perfectly, and don’t need an interpreter. Thus they will have a high veneration for Catholic priests and protestants. The Shawnees have happy memories of the Barrens and of Sainte Genevieve. Might we not start with them and then take further steps? You could make that decision.

We would be more than 200 miles from the Jesuit fathers, and only a few miles from the United States border.

We have now been three days with an American trader, and we await from one moment to the next the old chief of the nation, who is looking for a horse. We would certainly want to talk with him, to be assured of his consent. This is one of the nations which has complained the most. Five or six years ago they were asked to send some of their children to an institution in Kentucky. The [chiefs] did not recommend it and the insistent demands of the parents to send their children have been fruitless up to now. We have been quite fearful of their present unwillingness. God will arrange matters according to his good purpose. The nation of the Osages of the Arkansas have no money at present.

We have to tell you, Monsieur, for the glory of our holy religion, that our being Catholic priests has drawn from the principal officers of the post at Fort Gibson a welcome which might even be called liberality. Colonel Dillerd, who provides food for the officers, has absolutely refused to let us pay him, although we have been his guests for four days. Colonel Whistler, commandant in the general’s absence, has invited us

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59 By this time the Quapaw, visited by Odin and Timon in 1824, had been largely resettled in the northwest corner of the Indian Territory. Officially they numbered 476 individuals (Executive Documents, 641).

60 That is, the border of the Indian Territory and the State of Arkansas.

61 The school was the Choctaw Academy, Scott County, Kentucky, founded by Baptists as a boys school and eventually attended by Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Creek students. It ran from 1825 to 1841 (Grant Foreman, The Five Civilized Tribes, [Norman, Oklahoma, 1934], 33, 35, 36).
several times. His wife is French and a Catholic, along with all her family. As to the colonel, he is simply the colonel. The few days we have spent in the garrison have been employed in confirming in their faith the poor Irish who are in the army. There are no less than 200 Catholics, according to what we are told. They broke into great cries when we celebrated the holy mysteries in one of their cabins, with the agreement of their superior officers.  

We have not reported anything about the Cherokees, Creeks, Seminoles, and others, because it does not seem that much is to be expected of them for the moment. The Cherokees are the most advanced in the arts of civilization, since their ways are close to those of the Americans, whose language many of them speak. According to the reports which we have received, they are some 500 whites living among them. There might be some advantage for the Indians to have the whites teach them farming, and to give them examples of good habits. They do have some missionaries, but it does not seem that they enjoy much favor. The principal chiefs prefer keeping their children at home, rather than sending them to school. At all events, it is not very likely that they are disposed to grant land for a new missionary establishment. Nevertheless, missions might be given.

As to the Creeks and Seminoles, many divisions exist among them. Those recently arrived are very unhappy. It takes a lot to presume that they will remain on the lands allocated to them by the government. They are going to want to take them out of Texas, too. Besides, their agent, a hasty man, is completely set against letting any missionary set foot on their territory. He has even made public his stand to the government. We have consequently not believed that it would be right to sound out his intentions in our regard. It might nevertheless happen that something might be in our favor, since the agent of the Cherokee nation, a soldier in the old army, who was successively a member of the Senate and governor of North Carolina, agreed that missions among the Indians belonged by right to the Catholics, and that only Catholics would give promise of long-lasting success. He is an Episcopalian.

After we have seen the chief of the Arkansas, we will then move on toward the country of the Choctaws, who live about 140 miles from here. They number about 6000. We have very little information on them, only that we are told that some among them understand and speak French. They are probably interspersed among the others. Perhaps we will find there, lastly, superintendent Armstrong, who it has proven impossible to find up to now. He is the agent for this nation, and we have been told at the garrison where he was expected that he remained at home because of a fever. It appears that this is the way things run in the country. Beyond

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62 In 1837, Fort Gibson was commanded by Brigadier General Matthew Arbuckle and comprised some 700 officers and enlisted men (Executive Documents, 240-41).

63 The Creeks, about 15,000-20,000 in number, were removed during the years 1836-1840. The majority of the Seminoles, related to the Creeks, were removed to the Indian Territory, although some remained in Florida. Colonel James Logan was the Creek agent. The Cherokee agent referred to here could be either John Branch, governor (1817-1820) and senator (1822-1829), or James Iredell, governor (1827-1828) and senator (1828-1831). No one served first as senator then as governor, as the writer reported. The “old army” was that of the War of 1812, in which both men served.
that, if God wills we will resume our way to the State of Arkansas to reach again the blessed retreat of St. Marie.64

Pray for us, Monsieur, that God might accompany us on the way we have taken through obedience, and for His holy glory. In the spirit of humility, we ask your blessing.

Your very humble and devoted sons in Christ,
John Brands, unworthy priest of the Congregation of the Mission

Only a few letters exist which mention their return and the outcome of the mission. Brands wrote to Timon urging quick action on the government subsidy: “As we promised to return this Spring, I fear that [the Indians] will fall out with us, or at least lose their confidence if we do not stick to our promises. Moreover I fear the opposition party [Protestants] will intrude themselves in our place.” The most important letter is Simonin’s own report to his uncle. Most of the details agree with Brands’. The intent of the Indians in having missionaries was clear to Simonin: “Come, we will give you lands and you will teach our children.” The missionaries responded “We promised them to return after the leaves fall.” The old chief repeated, “Come back quickly, you will learn our language and we will talk together.” As usual, Protestant missionaries were ridiculed: they “only want to enrich themselves at [the Indians’] expense.” Simonin acknowledged the sad state of the Indians, ruined in part by imports from “civilization,” but more especially by the reservation system. He noted that the Indians had exchanged the arrow (to hunt for buffalo) for the pick (to till the ground). Since Indians were kept on the reservations against their will, they might be forced to go to war again in their desperation. He concluded that it was too difficult to undertake missions among them just now. “We will work by preference among Catholics for whom the seed of salvation has not been fruitful.”65

Rosati wrote an official report on this mission to the Association for the Propagation of the Faith in France, but gave no indication of the apparent decision by the Vincentians to pull back from the mission.66

64It is impossible to verify their exact journey, since documents are missing. Sainte Marie was a small French settlement at a place called Plum Bayou in Jefferson County, along the Arkansas River between Pine Bluff and Little Rock. It has now disappeared.

65Brands to Timon, 15 April 1838, from Cape Girardeau, DRMA; Simonin to his uncle, 1 June 1838, from Barrens, Annales CM 5 (1839):35-44. As a mark of special honor, Simonin was buried in the Assumption Church in Perryville.

66Rosati to Association, 10 August 1838, from Saint Louis, Annales PF 12 (1840):267-712; also, same to Nicola Rosati, 19 December 1837, from Saint Louis, APGCM. Rosati had intended to go back to Arkansas with Simonin on a confirmation tour, but the latter’s illness and subsequent death frustrated his plans (Rosati to Timon, 23 April 1838, from Saint Louis, AUND, microfilm, roll 2, no. 152).
Final official word on limiting plans for further Indian missions came from Vincentian headquarters in Paris at the end of 1842. The works undertaken by the province in 1841 and 1842 multiplied rapidly. Along with the problems of staffing and financing—the usual concerns—some criticized the administration of John Timon, the provincial superior. After the general council reviewed the complaints and reports, Pier Paolo Sturchi, assistant superior general, counseled, but did not order, Timon to concentrate on the evangelization of Catholics, then Protestants, and finally Indians, in that order. From that date on, Vincentian records contain virtually nothing about assuming the Indian mission as a provincial apostolate. In some ways, that decision came too late. By 1842 the Indians of Missouri had already moved west, leaving only memories of their presence and depriving the Vincentians of the stimulus of regular contact with them.

"I killed one of them": Texas and Louisiana

When one opportunity disappears, another often takes its place. In this case, the vast mission field of Texas held opportunities for its spiritual leader, John Mary Odin. In the late 1830s the Holy See began to receive requests from English-speaking settlers in the new Republic of Texas for missionaries. To help remedy the situation, John Timon was deputed to review the situation there. His first trip lasted several months in 1838 and 1839. Odin went to Texas as Timon's nominal assistant in 1840. The following year, Odin was named vicar apostolic and ordained a bishop. He became a diocesan bishop in 1847 and made Galveston his see city.

His experiences with the Indian nations in Texas differed widely from those with the compliant Shawnees and Quapaws twenty years before. "The majority of these Indians," remarked Odin, "are cannibals; they love to eat human flesh; hands and feet are their favorite parts. I have just taken some steps with the Karakanays [Karankawa] to bring them together at the mission. Mr. Estany also went to visit them and they greatly desire to have a priest. The house at Refugio was originally founded for them." 68

Odin found the conversion of the Comanches very difficult. They were constantly at war, trying to regain their lands and push out the

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67 Sturchi to Timon, 27 December 1842, from Paris, AUND, microfilm, roll 3, no. 211.
68 Annales CM 61 (1896):235. The Karankawa tribes lived near Galveston. Their cannibalism had aspects of magic or revenge, rather than nourishment (see W.W. Newcome, Jr., The Indians of Texas [Austin, 1961], 78).
settlers. One example of their ferocity was an attack by 500 Indians and Mexicans at Linnville and Victoria. They stormed the house where his Vincentian confere Father Estany was living. Odin reported later: "He had the good fortune to escape their weapons but they stole all of his linens, his ornaments [vestments] and even his books. These savages were led by Mexicans. They led away a lot of the horses and mules. We live here in constant fear." Four months later, the bishop shared a bitter experience with the superior general, John Baptist Etienne. "The savages have already stolen two horses," wrote Odin. "I killed one of them during my journeys. Most of the time I spend my nights in the open air; it often happens that we travel several consecutive days without encountering any houses. I have already traveled 500 miles across the country. Many unfortunate travelers succumb under the arrows of those barbarians."

To Odin’s credit he worked to establish missions and schools for the Indians in Texas and regularly begged for funds from European sources, such as the Leopoldinen Stiftung in Vienna. Yet Vincentian contacts as such ceased when the community pulled out of Texas to concentrate its forces in already established houses.

Although Vincentians worked in Louisiana during the same period, their contact with the Indians was negligible. Few Native Americans inhabited the state, and those who did lived far from sites of Vincentian activity, like the parishes in Natchitoches and Alexandria and the seminary at Bayou Lafourche. The name of one colorful character, however, deserves recall: Adrien Emmanuel Rouquette, a graduate of the Vincentian seminary.

In 1842 Rouquette, a native-born Louisianan, entered the seminary, where he spent two and a half years studying theology and indulging a growing taste for writing and publishing sentimental poetry. Upon his ordination in 1845, he began mastering the Choctaw language, but could not begin a true mission among them until 1859. His motivation

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69 Odin to Blanc, 24 August 1840, from San Antonio, Catholic Archives of Texas, Austin. He makes the same report in Odin to Rosati, San Antonio, 27 August 1840, ibid., and adds: "Travel here is very dangerous; we always need escorts to be protected from the Comanches." Nearly the same text to Etienne, San Antonio, 28 August 1840, ibid. Odin reports problems with the Comanches with great regularity. Copies in CAT.

70 Odin to Etienne, 13 December 1840, from Austin, AGCISA, Series C, reel 2, no. 180. Odin did not mention this in his Daily Journal.

71 Ralph Bayard, C.M., Lone-Star Vanguard: The Catholic Re-Occupation of Texas (1838-1848) (Saint Louis, 1945), 365.

72 C.W. Widman, S.J., "Outlines of History - St. Charles' Church, Grand Coteau, La.," Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia 9 (1898):343-51. In the time of Vincentian pastors, 1822-1825, adult Indians were occasionally baptized on their deathbeds.
seems to have been mixed: one part of him was the idle, romantic dreamer, living among the noble Choctaw, speaking their language, and coming to be known by them as Chacta-Ima 'Choctaw-like'; the other part of him was the devoted missionary. As his people moved west to the Indian Territory, he begged permission to follow them, but Bishop Andrew Byrne of Little Rock had hesitations. Instead, Rouquette remained in his Louisiana woods, where he ministered to the few Choctaw still there. The bishops of the New Orleans province recognized his devotion in 1873 when they submitted his name to the Holy See as their only choice to be bishop of the Indian Territory. For reasons unknown, he was not elevated to the episcopate.

**Later Endeavors**

This study has dealt only with missions to Native Americans in the earliest period of the American Vincentian history. Other later instances should be mentioned. The first was Bishop Thaddeus Amat's concern for the California Indians in his diocese of Monterey-Los Angeles. His biographer sounds the familiar refrain: lack of personnel and money together with apathy about the Indians "combined to make this aspect of Amat's episcopate something less than a total success."

In 1911 Vincentian faculty and students of the Seminary of Our Lady of Angels, Niagara, New York, began a ministry among the Tuscarora, whose reservation was only a few miles from the seminary. The name of Father Robert Arway is especially connected with the later development of this ministry, which continued until the transfer of the seminary to Albany, New York, in 1962.

Father John Quentin O'Connell has for several years undertaken a special ministry to Native Americans living in the Denver area. To a much lesser extent, the Vincentians of Cortez, Colorado, have charge of the mountain Ute village of Towaoc. Other instances, past and present, could doubtless be mentioned.

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74 Finbar Kenneally, ed., *United States Documents in the Propaganda Fide Archives: A Calendar* (Washington D.C., 1966-), 10:215, no. 1646. Contrary to the normal practice of submitting three names, the petition contained Rouquette's alone. Instead of making the territory a vicariate apostolic, the Holy See established it as a prefecture apostolic in 1876 and appointed Isidore Robot, O.S.B., the first prefect. Fifteen years later (1891) the territory became a vicariate with Theophile Meerschaert as bishop. Rouquette did not live to see the vicariate; he died in 1887.
Conclusion

As is generally the case in historical matters, no one reason stands out to account for the end of the Vincentian mission to the Native Americans. Lack of personnel and finances, as has been seen, furnished the most common excuse. In addition other needs took priority: at first, abandoned Catholics in need of evangelization, and later, the needs of established seminaries and parishes for available priests. Above all else, the community at large had never taken a decision to make the apostolate to the Indians one of its main works, even under the rubric of popular missions. It is interesting to speculate on what might have happened to the province had the Vincentian community done so.
Appendix
The Our Father

The text of Our Father in an Indian language, given below, was reported by De Andreis himself in a footnote to his letter of 24 February 1818. The transcription of the letters and the accents is difficult because the terms are completely unfamiliar.


Early and slightly variant transcriptions of this text are found in Rosati, Life, 179-80; Ricciardelli, Vita, 390; and perhaps also in Annales PF 1 (1825): 433, n. 1.76 The text of this prayer is in a form of an Algonquian language spoken in Illinois, but which became extinct in the nineteenth century. De Andreis seems to have been ignorant of the long tradition in translating this particular prayer, such that his version is longer than most and does not include certain standard renderings of particular points.77

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76 See Jay P. Dolan, The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present. (Garden City, N.Y., 1985), 57-58, for a general description of the linguistic difficulties facing early missionaries. The text in Annales de la Propagation de la Foi differs in some orthographic respects from De Andreis’s version, although the two are generally identical. On the basis of this comparison, it may be suggested that the two versions came from a common oral source.

77 See J. Hammond Trumbull, “Notes on Forty Versions of the Lord’s Prayer in Algonkin Languages,” Transactions of the American Philological Association, 1872, (Hartford, Conn., 1873), 113ff. Communicated to the author by Dr. Allan R. Taylor, Professor, University of Colorado at Boulder.
In prayer God helps us to realize his goodness in giving himself to us.

(*Saint Louise de Marillac, conference to Daughters of Charity, 31 May 1648*)

There is no action in life that makes us know ourselves better or shows us more clearly what is God's will than prayer.

(*Saint Vincent de Paul, conference to the Daughters of Charity, 31 May 1648*)