

Frontier Missionary. Felix De Andreis, C.M.

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3.

Frontier Missionary. Felix De Andreis, C.M.
1778 - 1820
Correspondence and Historical Writings

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PREFACE

Cardinal Newman wrote somewhere that we are all links in the great chain of providence. He wrote, further, that we may never know exactly what providence expects of us but we can be sure that we will accomplish it if we are only faithful. Each of us is the beneficiary of the fidelity of those who have gone before us; our hope is that we will be as great a benefit to those who follow us.

In these pages you will gain insight into the life of a man who was faithful, whom many in his own time called a “saint.” The life of Reverend Felix De Andreis, C.M., is particularly pertinent to citizens of the Midwest, to Catholics in the many Midwestern dioceses, and to the Vincentian Fathers and Brothers, because for all of these individuals he was a part of their beginnings. He, along with many others, certainly helped to create who and what we are today. The Archdiocese of St. Louis, in particular, owes him a great debt of gratitude.

In reading the letters of De Andreis you will encounter a human being — not unlike ourselves — meeting the challenges to be holy and to be strong in the face of some extraordinarily difficult circumstances, not unlike our own. You will meet a man who was a friend to others, Bishop Joseph Rosati and Saint Rose Philippine Duchesne being among them. You will read of his longing for a home that he left for the sake of bringing the gospel to an alien land. You will read of his own deep commitment to holiness and of his commitment to the ideals of Saint Vincent de Paul, the founder of his religious community.

My hope is that, in the pages of this book, you will find a teacher — a man who can help each of us see what we can be for others, what fidelity to Jesus Christ looks like, and the ways in which our lives can be gifts to the people of tomorrow.

27 May 2002

Justin Rigali
Archbishop of Philadelphia
(Former Archbishop of Saint Louis)

INTRODUCTION

Rose Philippine Duchesne, herself a canonized saint, called him a saint;¹ and Benedict Joseph Flaget, bishop of Bardstown, wondered whether he should pray for his soul or pray to him as a saint.² Even the Roman Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith offered its sympathy at his death and invited Bishop Dubourg to open a formal process for beatification if there are "*certa quaedam illius sanctitatis indicia*" ["some specific indications of his holiness"].³ The object of their veneration was Andrew James Felix Bartholomew De Andreis, born and baptized on 12 December 1778, in Demonte, a small town of Savoy, now a part of Italy. He was the founding superior of the Congregation of the Mission, the Vincentians, in the United States.

Honored during his life for his piety and knowledge, De Andreis continued to receive recognition after his death in Saint Louis, Missouri, 15 October 1820. He remains largely unknown outside American Vincentian circles, yet his cause for beatification, and ultimately canonization, was introduced in Rome. The decree from the Holy See announcing this decision spells out the details of his life, and this collection of his correspondence and historical writings attempts to remedy ignorance about his work. It sheds light as well on his remarkable character and holy life, and presents a view of the Church in the nascent Midwestern United States.⁴

After moving to America, De Andreis spent three years in Saint Louis supervising and guiding the first American Vincentians until his death. In his time Saint Louis was a city built along the banks of the Mississippi River. A town of some 3000 persons, Saint Louis had four north-south streets, and about 18 east-west streets. The people lived mostly in rough wooden dwellings, although their wealthier

¹ For example, in her letters to Mother Barat, L. 70, 1 December 1819, and to Mother Deshayes, L. 82, 29 August 1820, in Chantal Paisant, ed., *Les années pionnières* Paris: Cerf, 2001, 289, 321.

² Flaget mentioned his "simplicity, piety, fervor" in a letter of condolence to Rosati, from Bardstown, 6 November 1820; in SLAA, Flaget papers.

³ Finbar Keneally, ed., *United States Documents in the Propaganda Fide Archives* (Washington: 1966), vol. 3, #15474, dated 1821.

⁴ Apart from one posthumous portrait in Rome, reproduced in this volume, we know little or nothing about his appearance. Engravings of him were, however, distributed as early as 1825, and these form the basis of many other common illustrations (See Rosati to Philip Borgna, 5 November 1825; original in SLAA, Rosati papers; copy by Souvay, in DRMA, Rosati papers).

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neighbors had brick or even stone houses.⁵ At that time, this frontier town had some 40 stores, a post office, three banks, a land office, a brewery, two distilleries, and a steam flour mill.⁶

De Andreis' correspondence and historical writings, primarily the American ones, should be read against this frontier background. On a daily basis he saw trappers, traders, Indians, the descendants of African slaves, immigrants from the original English colonies as well as new arrivals from Europe. Although most did not have religion on their minds, his patient commitment to the Vincentian vision of the care of the poor and love of the clergy marked him as a saint in their midst.

Who were his correspondents? What importance did they have? Despite the precarious nature of mail delivery in the early nineteenth century, we have a great many of his letters to Joseph Rosati, his American confrere, and later first bishop of Saint Louis. There are also several reports to his superiors in Rome (Fathers Sicardi and Baccari). A special collection is his family correspondence with his father (one letter) and his brother. De Andreis wrote other letters to friends and colleagues in Europe and the United States. The few surviving letters written to him have been included here for the sake of completeness.

Rosati, the author of the first life of Felix De Andreis, remarked that "a collection of his letters would take up several volumes which would be fruitfully read."⁷ Although many, if not most, of his letters have been lost, a great number remain from his American period. All his extant letters have been collected from many sources for the first time, their texts established, translated from Italian, French and Latin into a readable modern American English, and annotated to increase understanding and appreciation of their contents. Copies were collated

⁵ James Neal Primm, *Lion of the Valley*. St. Louis, Missouri, 2nd ed. (Boulder, Colo.: Pruett, 1990), 108.

⁶ Saint Louis Planning Commission, *History of the Physical Growth of the City of Saint Louis* (Saint Louis, n.d., [about 1969]), 10.

⁷ "Summarium super dubio," in Sacra Rituum Congregatione. *Sancti Ludovici, Beatificationis et Canonizationis Servi Dei Felicis de Andreis . . . Positio super introductione causae* (Rome: Guerra et Mirri, 1918), 103. Printed in the original language, this volume contains the "Life of De Andreis" considered to be the best and surest version of what Joseph Rosati wanted, since the Roman text was transcribed directly from his manuscript.

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against originals or printed documents, where available. In some cases, early copies provided a better or clearer reading than the surviving originals, which had suffered damage over time. To render the originals readable, it was necessary to standardize. For example, biblical quotations are given in English translation; currency is cited in its original forms; and formal salutations and conclusions of the letters have been regularized.

One notable problem is that the writer was neither always consistent or coherent. He sometimes wrote at one sitting, but more usually completed a letter over a period of time. He was often sick, even confined to bed, and this led him to dictate his letters. His young secretary, Andrew Ferrari, occasionally had trouble keeping up with his superior and lost the train of his thought, with confusing results. These letters, however, have been kept as they are in their original form. Particularly in his later letters, his reflections on his condition and the American mission are frequently repeated. Other problems in transcription arose from the form of proper names. These have been kept in their original forms, except for those who lived in America. In that case, these names have been regularly put into English (Felix instead of Felice, for example). Archaic weights and measures, such as arpents and Roman miles, and obsolete currency (louis d'or, scudo, bajocco, paolo, piastre, etc.) have been left in their original forms. His use of titles of address have been smoothed out to correspond to modern usage, such as "Very reverend and dear Father" to translate the florid "*Molto Reverendo Signor, Patrone osservatissimo ed onoratissimo Padre.*" All Vincentians have been identified with first names and dates where possible.

Besides the letters, both from and to him, this volume prints associated documents. These are items which he referred to or joined to his correspondence, the principal one being his "Itinerary." This work, in turn, was based on his "Important Notices," also presented here. These letters and historical writings have been supplemented by accounts of his missions given while he was stationed in Rome. These accounts give a feel for his Vincentian missionary work, before he embarked on the Atlantic to reach the New World. The majority of these documents have never been translated into English or previously published.

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Some of De Andreis' writings have not been included, particularly his spiritual writings and sermons. These are lengthy and less interesting and valuable for understanding his life in its historical context.

Sources for documenting De Andreis' life are given in the bibliography, the primary one being the life begun by Joseph Rosati.⁸ While in Italy, some months before his death, Rosati entrusted the completion of his work to Giovanni Battista Semeria, one of a family with several Vincentian members.⁹ Rosati's French work was completed and translated into Italian, and the bishop intended to have it published in June 1843, but his illness and subsequent death, 25 September 1843, delayed the project.¹⁰ An expanded version—with chapters nine through twelve—was published in English by Francis Burlando, C.M., eighteen years later, in 1861. The author of the four additional chapters is unknown.

Contemporary with Rosati's work was the incomplete sketch written by Carlo Casoni, C.M., a Vincentian historian living in Rome. The basis for Casoni's work was letters and other reminiscences of De Andreis. A brief work, undated, is a series of notes on his life, sent to the Vincentian mother house in Paris, called the "Paris manuscript" here. Its author is unknown, but the work appears to incorporate many an eye-witness detail.¹¹ The most complete life is by Giuseppe Ricciardelli, C.M., the promoter of his cause for canonization. Further significant information is presented in the volume prepared for his canonization process, no longer actively pursued.

⁸ Rosati had already written at least two other historical accounts: a life of Andrew Ferrari, C.M., and his "Recollections of the founding of the Congregation of the Mission in the United States of America." Rosati's own diary shows that he wrote his life of Felix De Andreis between 1 and 10 July 1839 at the Barrens. Virtually the complete text has been published in the canonization volume.

⁹ This man is said to have been an Oratorian, but a Giovanni Battista Semeria entered the Congregation of the Mission in 1834, and made his vows in 1836. He left the Congregation in 1853. Perhaps he joined the Oratorians afterwards.

¹⁰ Rosati to Étienne, from Rome, 20 October 1842; in archives of the General Curia, American province papers, Rosati file. Rosati's original biography is in the same archives.

¹¹ To this can be added *Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission en Italie. Quatrième Époque De 1815 à 1874*, Archives de la Mission. This large register, arranged chronologically, presents information mainly in French about De Andreis, citing some of his letters. A few items of information are found nowhere else. The work was copied about 1880, perhaps from Casoni's manuscript life.

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The main source for the De Andreis letters are: (1) the General Curia of the Congregation of the Mission, Rome; (2) the archives of the Roman province of the Congregation of the Mission, Rome; (3) the archives of the Turin province, Turin, Italy; (4) the archives of the archdiocese of St. Louis, Saint Louis, Missouri; (5) the archives of the Collegio Brignole-Sale Negroni, Genoa, Italy; (6) the De Andreis-Rosati Memorial Archives, DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois. In addition, individual letters were found in the archives of the archdiocese of Baltimore; the Sulpician archives, Baltimore; the archives of Propaganda Fide, Rome; the archives of the Congregation of the Mission, Paris; and the archives of the Eastern Province, Germantown, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Unfortunately, De Andreis's own letter book, which he kept as a record of his correspondence, has disappeared. Also, some of the original letters known only a few decades ago have disappeared and exist now only in copies. Much of the work of copying was done by the indefatigable Charles Leon Souvay, C.M., vice-postulator of De Andreis's cause and subsequently superior general.

Background information has come from several sources, as noted in the footnotes. The most important of these sources, however, have been the correspondence and historical writings of Joseph Rosati.

The editor wishes to acknowledge with gratitude the many persons who have assisted in the gathering and production of this work, an undertaking lasting nearly twenty years. Besides the archival sources mentioned above, information was received from the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, Vatican City; the American Catholic Archives, University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana; the archives of Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.; the archives of the Sisters of Charity, Cincinnati; the Sisters of Loretto, Nerinx, Kentucky; the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, Kentucky; the Daughters of Charity in Paris and Emmitsburg, Maryland; the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, Rome and Saint Louis, Missouri; the Sisters of La Réunion, Bordeaux and Guadalajara, Spain; the Sisters of Charity of Nevers, France; the archives of the archdioceses and dioceses of Albenga-Imperia, Baltimore, Belleville, Bordeaux, Boston, Charleston, Louisville, New Orleans, New York; the cathedral archives of Porto Maurizio, Italy; Saint Paul's Cathedral, Pittsburgh; the Jesuit archives in Rome and

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Saint Louis, Missouri, the Sulpician archives in Paris;¹² the Vincentian provincial archives in Naples; the Missouri Historical Society, Saint Louis, and the State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia; the State Library of Indiana, Indianapolis; the Historical Society of West Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; the New York Historical Society, New York City; the Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore, Maryland; and the Archives Départementales, Bordeaux.

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¹² The principal manuscript collection is E.M. Faillon, "Mémoires particulières pour servir à l'histoire religieuse de l'Amérique du Nord," 5 vols.

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*Bibliography***ABBREVIATIONS EMPLOYED**

AAB: Archives of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Baltimore, Maryland.

AMP: Archives of the Mission, Paris.

AUND: Archives of the University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana.

BMHS: *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society.*

DRMA: De Andreis-Rosati Memorial Archives, formerly Saint Mary of the Barrens, Perryville, Missouri. Currently housed at the Richardson Library of DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois.

RACHSP: *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia.*

SLCHR: *Saint Louis Catholic Historical Review.*

SLAA: Saint Louis Archdiocesan Archives, Saint Louis, Missouri.

VH: *Vincentian Heritage.*

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DECREE OF THE SACRED CONGREGATION OF RITES, 1918

INTRODUCTION

The following decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites authorized the opening of the process leading to the eventual beatification and canonization of Felix De Andreis. Its importance lies in that it presents a succinct summary of his life and virtues, one arrived at after initial canonical investigations. In addition, it evaluates the importance of his life for the Church. Thus the decree can serve as a somewhat official version of his life and introduction to his writings.

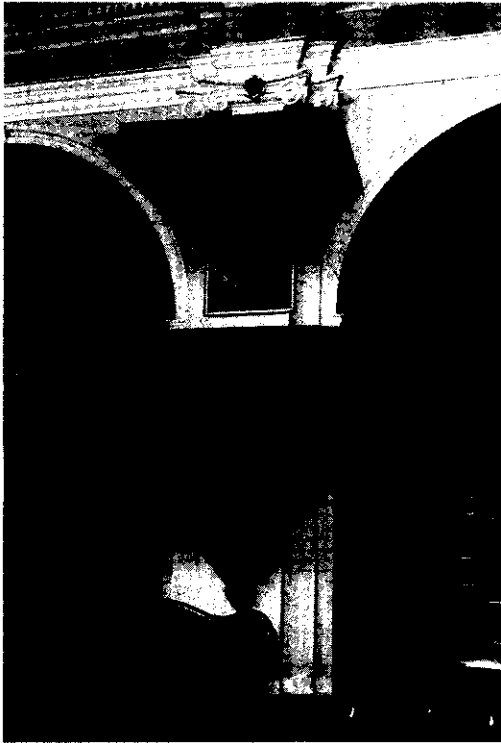
The decree contains two sections. The first and longer section lays out the details of his life. The second reviews the canonical process up to the time of publication.

DECREE ON BEHALF OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF SAINT LOUIS CONCERNING THE BEATIFICATION AND CANONIZATION OF THE SERVANT OF GOD FELIX DE ANDREIS PRIEST AND FIRST SUPERIOR OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION IN AMERICA

Felix De Andreis was born in the town of Demonte, in the diocese of Cuneo, formerly the diocese of Turin, on 12 December 1778 of pious parents, and was baptized on the same day. At the age of eight he received the sacrament of confirmation. While still a boy, he once fell into a deep river, but with God's help he was miraculously saved unharmed. At age fifteen, he went to a college where he devoted himself to the study of liberal arts, especially poetry. At that time, he felt inclined to join the Congregation of the Mission, but when he expressed his intention and desire to the visitor of that community, he was prevented from following his desired purpose because of his diversified interests and his various courses of study. However, he was not discouraged nor did he stop trying to prepare for everything, and finally his desire came true. Dropping his inclination to the arts, he was first accepted for a year of probation, and then, in 1797, was admitted to the

Decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites

novitiate of the Congregation of the Mission at Mondovi. Having successfully completed the novitiate, he pursued his studies first in Turin and then in the college at Piacenza, where he completed them well. When he had fulfilled all the requirements, he received the sacred orders of subdiaconate, diaconate and priesthood, striving only for the glory of God, his own eternal salvation and the salvation of his neighbor.



The parish pulpit at Demonte.
Courtesy of the author

After ordination, he laudably and fruitfully performed various functions, as ordered by his superiors, such as director, teacher and preacher. He was well versed in the languages and literature of Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French and Spanish; in addition, he diligently pursued the natural sciences of mathematics, geography, chemistry, pharmacy, medicine and music. But with particular diligence and piety he culti-

Decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites

vated and taught the theological sciences, together with canon law and sacred scripture with the commentaries of the Church Fathers and Doctors, using these subjects both in preaching and ministry, especially in seminaries, monasteries and other religious institutions. In his desire to preach Christ's word and to spread his faith among the pagans, he asked and with great joy obtained permission [for this], although the carrying out of such permission was deferred to a more suitable time. In the meantime, some other work was assigned him both in Piacenza and Rome.

In March 1806 the visitor of the Roman Province called Felix De Andreis to Rome and entrusted to him, besides the chair of dogmatic theology in the house of the Congregation next to the curia of Pope Innocent,¹ various other ministries of preaching and hearing confessions inside and outside the house for the benefit of the clergy and the laity, especially in colleges, religious institutions and families, and in the priestly Sodality of Saint Paul, into which he was received and made a member of its Council of Moderators.² Thus he gained the high esteem of Cardinal [Giulio Maria] di Somaglia, then vicar general of Rome, as well as that of the Holy Father, who judged him worthy of the episcopal dignity.

The most prominent members of both clergy and laity have testified privately and publicly how much this servant of God, professor of theology, teacher of the clerics of the Congregation of the Mission and of the students of the College of the Propagation of the Faith, and excellent preacher and missionary, had contributed to the renewal and preservation of the integrity of faith and morals in Rome during the hostile government when Pope Pius VII of holy memory lived in exile, as well as when freedom and peace were restored to the Church and to the sovereign pontiff.

¹ Decree, 1918. Printed sheet, 28" x 17 1/2", Latin. Copy in the archives of the General Curia, Rome, De Andreis papers.

The "curia of Pope Innocent" refers to its location at Monte Citorio, where about 1697 Innocent XII had placed his administrative curia in an effort to centralize all pontifical tribunals.

² Little is known of De Andreis's participation in this organization. It differs from the "Adunanza della Porta" which met in the Monte Citorio house, and to which he wrote the long letter, number 66, published in this work.

Decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites

During the year 1815 Father Dubourg, named bishop of New Orleans in North America, came to Rome to pay due homage and obedience to the Apostolic See and to the Roman pontiff, and also to look for capable and worthy workers for his diocese. Received as a guest in the aforementioned house of the Mission he could easily see that the Congregation of the Mission should be fittingly and usefully established in his diocese, especially in the city of Saint Louis. Once certain difficulties that had arisen were overcome with God's help, and he had obtained the generous permission of the superiors, the Holy Father with his august presence expressed his best wishes and bestowed his blessing. Felix De Andreis and his chosen companions then departed for distant regions, while Bishop Dubourg rejoiced over the treasure he had acquired for himself and his diocese.

On the way, he [De Andreis] stopped for six months in Bordeaux, where he willingly and diligently performed the functions entrusted him by the diocesan archbishop in prisons and hospitals and with the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent. Bishop Dubourg acknowledged him as the visitor of his Congregation³ and conferred on him the title and office of vicar general of the diocese. He and his companions then traveled laboriously on sacred expeditions through the various regions of North America, sowing the good seed and gathering the fruits accordingly. The servant of God himself acknowledged in his writings that he and his companions, while staying at Saint Thomas near Bardstown with remarkable men like Bishop Flaget and Father David, a missionary, made their apprenticeship in learning languages, becoming acquainted with the country, experiencing the ministry and the functions that offered themselves to a missionary priest in public and private life. While he was engaged there in teaching theology and in the ministry, Felix was suddenly sent with his companions to the city of Saint Louis, where he was placed in charge of the parish of Sainte Genevieve.⁴

³ This title was only informal, but De Andreis exercised the functions of a visitor since he was so far removed from Rome. The first formal visitor was John Timon, who assumed that office in 1835.

⁴ The decree confused the parish of Sainte Genevieve in the town of Sainte Genevieve, where De Andreis worked temporarily, with the cathedral in Saint Louis, where he lived regularly.

Decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites

After the example of the Divine Shepherd, who willingly became an example to the flock, he used to describe the purpose of his mission with the words: "He sent me to preach the gospel to the poor," and fulfilled this purpose with the proper intention, intense study and hard work. But that the Congregation of the Mission might acquire a permanent home according to the norms of law and spread through America, a novitiate was established on 3 December 1817 in Saint Louis by the consent and approval of Bishop Dubourg and under the name and patronage of Saint Francis Xavier. Felix De Andreis was appointed to this college and a neighboring school as administrator, rector and teacher.⁵ Under his authority the novices and students always responded to the wise and paternal care of their teacher. The servant of God planned to extend the benefits of the mission also to peoples wild and barbarous in their language, nature and character. For that purpose he learned their native language and was always ready to receive them and help them in everything.

Physically weakened after so many labors, the man of God felt that the hour of his departure from this world was approaching, and quietly and peacefully awaited the blessed reward promised by the Lord God to a good and faithful servant. As one devoted to our Lord's incarnation and passion, as a loving son of the Virgin Mother of God, and as a faithful disciple and imitator of Saint Francis Xavier, Saint Francis de Sales and his father and lawgiver, Vincent de Paul, while his health was declining and his incurable disease was worsening daily, he most devoutly received the sacraments of the Church. After giving to the grief stricken who were present the testimony and proof of his faith and charity as well as his paternal blessing, he peacefully passed from this life on 15 October 1820. After solemn obsequies had been celebrated by the clergy and devoutly attended by a large crowd of laity and civil representatives, the body of the servant of God was borne to the seminary of the Barrens, and solemnly laid to rest near the altar of Saint Vincent, confessor, and founder of the Congregation of the Mission.⁶

⁵ The language of the decree confuses his being novice master ("administrator, rector"), and a professor of theology, for the clerics who taught in the Saint Louis academy.

⁶ His burial near the altar of Saint Vincent took place some years later, once the Barrens church had been completed.

Decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites

In the meantime, the fame of the holiness which Felix De Andreis acquired during his lifetime and which shone forth even more after his death provided the reason for an inquiry about it by ordinary authority both in Rome and in the ecclesiastical Curia of Saint Louis. When the informative procedures had been completed and submitted to the Congregation of Sacred Rites, and the writings of the servant of God had been diligently examined as prescribed by law, nothing stood in the way to impede the further procedure. At the instance of Father Raffaele Ricciardelli, postulator general of the Congregation of the Mission, together with the whole Vincentian family, and considering the written requests of the eminent cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, several bishops and archbishops, as well as the superiors general of orders and congregations, and other prominent churchmen and civil dignitaries, the undersigned Cardinal Antonio Vico, bishop of Porto and Santa Rufina, substituting for His Eminence Cardinal Raphael Merry del Val, the Ponent of this cause, in an ordinary meeting of the Congregation of Sacred Rites, on the date mentioned below, proposed for discussion the following question: Whether a commission for the introduction of this cause should be appointed for the purpose under consideration. Their Eminences, the Fathers in charge of the protection of sacred rites, after the report of the same cardinal Proponent, heard and read the opinion of Father Doctor Angelo Mariani, Promoter General of the Faith. After diligently considering everything, they decided on the following answer: the commission for the introduction of the cause ought to be appointed, if His Holiness gives his approval. 24 July 1918.

After the undersigned cardinal prefect of the Congregation of Sacred Rites reported all these things to His Holiness Pope Benedict XV, His Holiness approved the rescript of the same Congregation and deigned to sign in his own hand the commission for the introduction of the cause of beatification and canonization of the servant of God Felix De Andreis, priest, and first superior of the Congregation of the Mission in America, on the twenty-fifth day of the same month and year.

+ A. Cardinal Vico, bishop of Porto and Santa Rufina, prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Rites.

Alexander Verde, secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Rites.

[Seal]

