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History and Baroux's Ministry

When Louis Baroux first arrived at Silver Creek in 1847, he found few tokens of the Western civilization familiar to him in his native France and the eastern United States. En route to Notre Dame, he marveled at the "metropolis" of New York City and the "flourishing cities and villages" along the Hudson River, but his mission offered him the sight of "very miserable log huts" tucked away among the wooded expanses of southern Michigan. It is likely that he celebrated Mass in some of the great cathedrals of France, but Silver Creek presented him with a small, broken-roofed log building which would serve him the double purpose of home and church. On his journey to Indiana, he was surrounded by habits: accompanying him were three confrères, including Edward Sorin, and thirteen Holy Cross religious; at Silver Creek he encountered "half naked" Potawatomi wearing only pants, blankets, feathers, and moccasins who greeted him with "dark," "swarthy," "savage and severe" faces.[1] Among the Pokagon, Baroux faced circumstances similar to those experienced by other white settlers of and missionaries on the American frontier: geographic distance from the culture they knew and immersion in one they did not. Unlike other settlers and missionaries, however, he maintained an institutional identity that linked him to the Church's broader evangelical efforts in the United States. Using the plot progression of his autobiography as evidence, this section will demonstrate that Louis Baroux understood his time at Silver Creek within the context of a sustained ministry to the Potawatomi that transcended his own person, time, and place. It will then suggest that this understanding contrasted with that of other frontier missionaries.

Louis Baroux was born in Saint-Michel de Chavaignes, Sarthe, France, on March 25th, 1817. He was ordained a diocesan priest in Mans in 1842; three years later, he entered the Holy

[1] Baroux, *Seventeen Years*. The description of his journey comes from Chapter I (2-9); his first impressions of Silver Creek are recorded in Chapter III (28-9).

Cross novitiate.[2] It was here that he prepared for missionary work in America—though not necessarily for ministry to Native Americans—and likely where he met Frs. Alexis Granger and François Gouesse.[3] His descriptions of the places he travelled through suggest he was an enthusiastic student of history, geography, and geology.[4] Considering the fact that he reached Notre Dame on August 22nd, 1846, but did not arrive at Silver Creek until February of the following year, it is possible that he spent a semester teaching at the college. These personal details are absent from his autobiography. The first chapter skips his early life entirely and begins with the "burning desire" he felt as a seminarian for the vocation of a missionary. Baroux mentions his formation in Holy Cross only in passing before chronicling the journey from Le Mans to Notre Dame, and finally his arrival at Silver Creek.[5] He creates the impression that his life *began* with a calling toward the Pokagon.

The beginning of the third chapter chronicles the Catholic mission to the Potawatomi antedating Baroux's arrival; central to the narrative are Frs. Louis DeSeille and Benjamin-Marie Petit. Baroux lauds DeSeille's success in converting more than a thousand natives in fewer than two years, and reverently records his final self-administration of the Eucharist and death beside the altar of the mission church; Petit is praised for the devotion and self-sacrifice he displayed in accompanying the Potawatomi on the Trail of Death in 1838. Baroux asserts that both are saints.[6] He uses seven pages of his autobiography to record and admire the ministries that preceded his own, while his record is silent concerning his life before becoming a missionary himself. His

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[2] Jean Proust, C.S.C., *Sainte Croix en France: Les Peres* (Paris: 1980), 6.
[3] Brother Augustine to Father Sorin, August 4th, 1845. In *Adapted to the Lake: Letters by the Brother Founders of Notre Dame, 1841-1849*, edited and translated by George Klawitter (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 92.
[4] See, for example, Baroux's description of the Azores (6-7) and of Rouen (51-3) in *Seventeen Years*.
[5] Baroux, *Seventeen Years*, 1-9.
[6] Ibid., 21-7.

identity extended beyond his own life and work and lay in the Church's broader evangelical mission in the United States. His mission would be a continuation of work already begun.

Louis Baroux was not the only Holy Cross priest in Michiana to have been inspired by the ministries of DeSielle and Peitit. Edward Sorin spent three weeks with the Pokagon shortly after having arrived at Notre Dame; this experience, combined with the inspiring witness of DeSielle and Petit, lead Sorin to ask Basil Moreau to be reassigned from the college to Silver Creek as a missionary.[7] The influence of the earlier missionaries on Sorin, however, was balanced by that of South Bend resident and fur-trapper Alexis Coquillard, whom historian Marvin R. O'Connell asserts was a "useful model" for taking advantage of the "seemingly boundless" opportunities that the as-yet sparsely populated frontier presented to the settler.[8] Sorin should not be equivocated with American settlers and missionaries; in fact, O'Connell states that the "the differences between the two amounted almost to a clash of cultures," albeit not one as stark as that which existed between Baroux and the Pokagon. The common French background shared by the two missionary priests included "immutable tradition," "communal enterprise," and "familial continuity" that contrasted sharply with American frontier individualism.[9] Despite this, it seems that Sorin underwent a degree of Americanization that Baroux did not. Baroux's ministry to the Pokagon had precedent in the area, while Sorin was more dependent on examples of entrepreneurial initiative in the building of a school. In any case, Baroux's ministry to the Pokagon stands out as one closely connected to Church history, a connection that was not possible for Sorin to make.

Louis Baroux's self-conception was antithetical to that of some antebellum Protestant missionaries. The Second Great Awakening created a strain of Millennialism which "convinced

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[7] Marvin R. O'Connell, *Edward Sorin* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 114-5.
[8] Ibid., 125-6.
[9] Ibid., 129.

many that they should erase the memory of the past and learn all they could about the gospel of equality",[10] a gospel which would be written in the settlement of the frontier. In the years after Andrew Jackson's 1830 State of the Union address—in which he described westward migration as a "source of joy" in which "our young population may range unconstrained in body or in mind"[11]—a group belonging to the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) arrived among the Métis community of the western Great Lakes. Historian Rebecca Kugel has argued that the sense of individualism they cultivated enabled them to "reinterpret [regional] history to fit their paradigm of westward expansion across a virgin wilderness." These commissioners cast themselves as settlers in an uninhabited desert, which precluded considerations of aboriginal history as well as of prior evangelical missions to the Métis by Catholics. In doing so, they created an identity crisis among the natives they ministered to.[12] These missionaries arrived as pioneers, while Baroux sought to sustain a tradition through his ministry. His autobiography reveals an embrace of history and a rootedness in a religious institution that the ABCFM personnel who attempted to evangelize the western Great Lakes actively resisted.

Baroux's writing indicates that he was susceptible to a similar kind of individualism. In the letter to De Neve, he describes his mindset in the months after arriving at Silver Creek: "In the long winter evenings alone, poking the fire, I built castles. I formed a thousand different projects; I cut down the woods, I cultivated the virgin land, I obtained magnificent harvests, I built a Church. My Indians, influenced by the progress around them exchanged their feathers and skins

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[10] Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 186.
[11] Andrew Jackson, "State of the Union Address, December 6, 1830" in *Manifest Destiny and American Territorial Expansion: A Brief History with Documents*, edited by Amy S. Greenberg (New York: Bedford, St. Martin's, 2012), 62.
[12] Rebecca Kugel, "Rewriting Ethnicity: Gender, Work Roles, and Contending Redefinitions of the Great Lakes, 1820-42" in *Enduring Nations: Native Americans in the Midwest*, edited by R. David Edmonds (Chicago: University of Illinois

of wild animals for hats and boots and shoes."[13] The imagery of cutting, cultivating, harvesting, building, and exchanging on a "virgin land" hardly constitutes a commitment to honoring the past—especially the preservation of indigenous culture. Such daydreams should serve as a reminder that, though he was committed to the Church's collective evangelical efforts, he saw those evangelical efforts as progressing toward a goal. He valued history but was selective about the history he sought to honor; the history of the Catholic Church in America would continue with his mission, but that continuation would occur at the cost of Pokagon folkways. As the story of himself, *Seventeen Years in the Life of a Missionary Priest* reveals that Louis Baroux's identity as a missionary priest was relational rather than individual.

"We wish only to convert them": The Sacraments in Baroux's Ministry

Historian Henry Warner Bowden has characterized the Anglo-American missions to Native American communities during the Antebellum Period as "acculturating". Through English language lessons, the introduction of agriculture, mandates in European dress, and other means, American missionaries—some of them federally funded—sought to instill Republican virtue in aboriginals through Christian evangelization.[14] Louis Baroux was critical of these efforts; yet, after gaining his bearings at Silver Creek, he began to fulfill his daydreams of "building castles" among the Pokagon in many of the same ways that Protestant missionaries attempted to acculturate other native groups. This section will explore Baroux's criticism of U.S. missions, which mainly concerned their ties to Manifest Destiny and the hypocritical behavior of their missionaries. It will contrast Baroux's interpretation of the causes of the U.S. Civil War with those held by other Catholics to further this point. It will then seek to show how Baroux's

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[13] Louis Baroux, *Early Indian Mission*, 70.
[14] Henry Warner Bowden, *American Indians and Christian Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 165-9.

ministry was one punctuated by Sacraments rather than milestones in the Americanization of those he ministered to.

Baroux's criticism of American missions was complicated and can be split into three parts. The first is relatively straightforward: U.S. missions were the "the work of Satan" because they were largely Protestant and therefore guilty of spreading theological error.[15] Such sectarianism was common even among Protestant missionaries, and he is not notable for holding this prejudice, especially in the aftermath of the Second Great Awakening.[16] The next two, however, are more unique. The second concerns U.S. missions as a means to an end: Baroux writes that "American agents during their visits take the liberty of preaching to them, wishing to make them appreciate our civilization, and in all their preaching there is one moral only on their lips": the possession of the land that the natives inhabited.[17] According to Baroux, the Christianity that American Protestant missionaries brought to Native Americans was merely a front for more materialistic ends.[18] Finally, he cites a disdain for the hypocrisy that he observed among U.S. missionaries: "We have taught him the vices of our civilization and instructed him by our actions to despise us [...] When I think of the conduct of the Europeans [and Americans of European descent] in regard to these people, I blush at our haughty pretensions [of superiority]."[19] He was unconvinced that American missionaries had the good of the native in mind when they ministered to them.

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[15] Baroux, *An Early Indian Mission*, 17.
[16] Ángel Cortés, *Sectarianism and Orestes Brownson in the American Religious Marketplace* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), 18. Michael Pasquier describes a degree of paranoia among French missionary priests over a sectarian conspiracy to eradicate Catholicism in America; see *Fathers on the Frontier*, 128.
[17] Baroux, *An Early Indian Mission*, 21.
[18] This assertion is supported by the historical record: Henry Warner Bowden writes that "Evangelical programs amalgamated spiritual teachings with white living standards, deliberately urging their superiority in order to eradicate native American cultures." See *Christian Missions*, 168-9.
[19] Baroux, *An Early Indian Mission*, 21.

Baroux would interpret the American Civil War in the context of these missions. While the war is outside of the periodization of this paper, Baroux's insights serve to show how rigorous his opposition to the American missionary effort was. In his 1862 letter to De Neve, he noted the frequency with which an "insolent and cruel soldiery" were often found behind American missionaries, men who "accompany these unfortunate victims into their place of exile and [...] treat them with indignity". He did not differentiate between the soldiers tasked with removing native peoples and those engaged in the War Between the States: in light of the United States' criminal behavior toward the aborigine, he wrote, the Civil War seemed to be a "fitting chastisement for these injustices!"[20] The loss of life and treasure caused by Southern secession and Northern aggression was, according to Baroux, a providential punishment for the Indian Removal policy and its masquerade as a philanthropic effort.

Baroux was an outlier in his interpretation of the war. Sorin wrote that the war brought out "the most charming side of the Society of Holy Cross" in the number of opportunities it provided for priests and religious to undertake heroic ministries.[21] As a chaplain of the U.S. 69th New York Infantry Brigade, Fr. William Corby, C.S.C. enumerated among his duties "everywhere [to] elevate [...] true patriotism"—to promote love of country, in addition to love of God.[22] Baroux identified a criminal state in the Republic that Sorin and Corby

Baroux stated the rationale of his mission in the letter to De Neve: "We believe ourselves called to convert them".[23] The Pokagon needed "bread of life" and the "refreshing waters of salvation"[24]—that which every other Christian required. Though days were spent under a work

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[20] Baroux, *An Early Indian Mission*, 20.
[21] Sorin,
[22] William Corby, *Memoirs of Chaplain Life*, 28.
[23] Baroux, *An Early Indian Mission*, 21.
[24] Baroux, *An Early Indian Mission*, 18.

regimen, Baroux ended each one with a communal prayer and catechesis in the Church.[25] He records having used twenty-five dollars raised by his Pokagon congregation through hunting and weaving—indigenous occupations undertaken in indigenous gender roles—to buy linen for the altar.[26] "something akin to sublimity"[27]

"A Sunday was appointed on which I proposed to admit to the Church only those who were dressed as Europeans."[28] Historian Thomas J. Campion has argued that white settlement in northern Indiana created a "society based on private property and the pursuit of monetary gain".[29]

Louis Baroux's ministry to the Pokagon

Since 1819, the federal government had been annually funding Protestant missionary societies for the purpose of "instructing Indians in agriculture, literacy, and other beneficial pursuits."[30] Such funds were premised on the belief that they were "steadily degenerating"[31] Fr. Sorin wrote that "Everybody knows that the Indians remain all their lives like children who must be led by the hand or they will fall [...] It is just as hard to keep them from drinking as it is to make them work."[32] Baroux addressed such pessimism the letter to De Neve. "sterility" of evangelization in Europe. "They have beautiful churches, which are deserted while we in our missions have pious and fervent catholics but no churches."[33] "We have Catholic Indians whom we do not see decaying and race-suiciding any more than the European colonies transplanted on these far off shores." While he does not deny the vulnerability of Native Americans, he does

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[25] Baroux, *Early Indian Mission*, 73.
[26] Baroux, *Seventeen Years*, 31.
[27] Baroux, *Seventeen Years*, 41.
[28] Baroux, *An Early Indian Mission*, 73.
[29] Campion, "Transformation of Northern Indiana", 62.
[30] Bowden, *American Indians and Christian Missions*, 167.
[31] Campion, "Indian Removal and the Transformation of Northern Indiana", 45.
[32] Sorin, *Chronicles of Notre Dame du Lac*, 102.
[33] Baroux, *An Early Indian Mission*, 18.

dispute the idea that Europeans and Anglo-Americans are superior to them. "The savage has in his conscience an idea of justice and rights, of falsehood and truth."[34]

Upon returning from a trip to France, Baroux writes that "They led me to the Graveyard, and the children showed me the graves of parents, and parents showed me the graves of their children, and others showed me the graves of a husband or a wife, and they all told me their feelings of sorrow, when their loved ones had died, and I so far away, they could not see me to communicate their sorrow, nor receive my consolations."[35]

> We are apt to forget too soon the death of those who are dear to us, but it is not so with the Indians, for many years after the death of their friends they visit the sacred spot where the dear one lie [sic] buried and shed many tears and offer many prayers for the rest of the departed souls. Very often I saw a father coming to the grave of her who had been dearest to them, and removing the snow from the grave, kneeling with his children around the sacred spot, and in weeping and praying spend many hours.[36]

He identified them as "my Indians".[37] Despite this remarkable praise, Baroux himself was prone to simplifying the intellectual and religious capabilities of the Pokagon.

"The Catholic Church alone is able to preserve them from an otherwise inevitable ruin," wrote Sorin, but "most frequently there is a lack of the personnel as well as of the funds to take care of them as their weakness requires."[38] In contrast to many American Protestant and even European Catholic missionaries, Baroux appreciated—to an extent—indigenous Christianity as it was practiced by the Pokagon. He describes them as "exemplary christians [sic]".[39] "I have always seen them so pious and so devout that I have never been under the necessity of rebuking them by word in church for even the least irreverence. There is no need [...] to tell you that of their faith when they prepare for themselves for the reception of the sacraments. Some among

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[34] Baroux, An Early Indian Mission, 21.
[35] Baroux, *Seventeen Years*, 71.
[36] Baroux. *Seventeen Years*, 72.
[37] Baroux, *Seventeen Years*, 30.
[38] Sorin, *Chronicles*, 102.
[39] Baroux, *Seventeen Years*, 41.

them have so great a love of God and so great a fear of offending him that they watch with the most scrupulous attention over all their thoughts, words, and actions."[40]

Conclusion

Louis Baroux's ministry to the Pokagon ran counter to broader currents in missionary activity on the American frontier during the Age of Jackson. In an isolated environment largely devoid of established institutions, he maintained a sense of history that guided his mission and connected him to the broader evangelization of America. In a political atmosphere charged with patriotism, he celebrated the Sacraments of a universal church. In a people marginalized for their race and culture, he found grace. To a large degree, he resisted the individualism, utilitarianism, and prejudice so prevalent in other efforts toward the evangelization of Native Americans. Ironically, his own religious community posed the greatest threat to his ministry at Silver Creek.

However the Church would minister to the Pokagon after 1853, the Congregation of Holy Cross would not be the community to do so. It is unlikely that Baroux was intended to minister to the Pokagon in the first place: it was the Bishop of Detroit, Pierre-Paul LeFèvre—not Sorin or Moreau—who appointed Baroux to Silver Creek, perhaps as a means of compensating the diocese for the title to land in Bertrand given to Holy Cross in 1844.[41] Not only did Baroux have the Pokagon missions at Silver Creek and Rush Lake to minister to: Irish railroad workers settled Michiana after the completion of the line in 1848 and increased the pastoral demands placed upon him,[42] while LeFèvre charged him with an additional mission at St. Joseph.[43] He was considered as a candidate for novice-master for the Brothers in New Orleans by Br. Vincent as

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[40] Baroux, *An Early Indian Mission*, 80.
[41] O'Connell, *Sorin*, 148-9.
[42] Baroux, *Seventeen Years*, 34.
[43] Ibid., 41.

early as 1849;[44] Sorin chose Baroux to raise funds in France to rebuild the apprentice shops and dormitory at Notre Dame after they burned down in the same year.[45] The additional responsibilities given to him made a sustained ministry to the Pokagon almost impossible, and suggest that Baroux is responsible for the image of himself as an "Indian Priest".

The Pokagon Band of the Potawatomi were a marginal priority for Holy Cross. In 1851, Fr. Basil Moreau accepted a commission to begin ministries in Bengal—a decision in part motivated by the possibility of gaining papal approbation for the Congregation.[46] Moreau reassigned Sorin to this mission, but when Sorin refused to go[47] the assignment fell to Baroux.[48] Fr. Almire Fouremont, C.S.C., was chosen to replace Baroux at Silver Creek. Soon after he withdrew from the community and committed his services, as well as the care of the Pokagon, to the diocese—an act that Sorin described as a "great relief to Notre Dame du Lac", as Silver Creek, Rush Lake, and St. Joseph "were becoming every year a greater burden."[49] Of those qualified to begin the mission in Bengal, Baroux was chosen as one whose ministry the Congregation could most afford to shed. With his relocation to south Asia and the end of the Holy Cross presence at Silver Creek, he would have to set aside, at least temporarily, his wish to die like the Pokagon he loved. He recorded the desolation he felt in his memoir:

> The unwelcome moment at length arrived when I must start. [The Silver Creek Pokagon] all accompanied me to my carriage which was waiting near the graveyard, and it seemed as though they were determined to go with me still farther, and the sight of their grief was breaking my heart, so I blessed them again and tore myself from them, and as I went I could distinguish between the sobs of one of my Indians "We would rather bury you here, for then we could have the sad consolation of coming to your grave to pray." These were the last words of my Indians.[50]

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[44] Br. Vincent to Fr. Sorin, June 22nd, 1849. In Klawiiter, *Adapted to the Lake*, 315.
[45] Sorin, *Chronicles*, 88.
[46] Canon Etienne and Tony Catta, *Basil Anthony Moreau, Volume I* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1955), 886-7.
[47] O'Connell, *Sorin*, 289-97.
[48] Baroux, *Seventeen Years*, 76.
[49] Sorin, *Chronicles*, 108.
[50] Baroux, *Seventeen Years*, 77.