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"Fixing the Italian Problem": Archbishop of New Orleans John W. Shaw and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, 1918-1933

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“Fixing the Italian Problem”: Archbishop of New Orleans John W. Shaw and the Oblates of
Mary Immaculate, 1918-1933

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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in
History

by

Emily Nuttli

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Dedication

To my grandmothers, LaVerne and Marylynn.

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Abstract

In 1918, Archbishop Shaw invited the Texas Catholic religious order, Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, to New Orleans to manage the St. Louis Cathedral and its filial parish for Southern Italians, St. Mary's Church. This thesis will look at the personalities and preferentialism that affected this early 20th century transfer of religious power from secular priests to a religious order. Comparing the language used by Archbishop Shaw in correspondence with Oblate Fathers with the language he used with his secular priests will determine that Shaw displayed favoritism in his decision to invite the Oblates. This decision was affected by four primary factors: Shaw's prior relationship with the Oblates as Bishop of San Antonio, his concerns with archdiocesan finances, his perceived threat of encroaching Protestantism, and politics of discontent amongst his secular clergy. Shaw's distinct idealistic pragmatism shows the dynamic nature of the institution of the Catholic Church in Louisiana.

Key Words: Archbishop John W. Shaw, Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Sicilian immigration, St. Mary's Church, New Orleans

“I do not let personalities influence me in any of my appointments. *Salus animarum, suprema lex* has always been my rule.”¹

- John William Shaw, 1933

On the morning of May 11, 1919, Archbishop John William Shaw of New Orleans sat at his writing desk in the Archbishop’s House, located on Esplanade Avenue on the edge of the French Quarter, and opened a letter from the superior general of a missionary order of Catholic priests, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI).² Augustin Dontenwill, former Archbishop of Vancouver and then seated in Rome, wrote to inform Archbishop Shaw that he would be unable to send the Archdiocese of New Orleans an Italian priest to minister to the Sicilian immigrants in the city. Shaw had appealed to the Oblates for an Italian-speaking priest since the time he was first appointed to New Orleans in January of 1918, fearing that the poor Southern Italian immigrants living in the French Quarter would soon abandon their Catholic faith without an Italian-speaking priest from this particular religious order. In the letter, Superior General Dontenwill had written, “that possibility is out of the question.”³ As the superior general explained, World War I had rendered Europe unable to send foreign missionaries to minister in America, as had long been the custom, especially in

¹ Letter from John W. Shaw to Joseph Cozad, January 10, 1933, “Provincial Correspondence, Diocese New Orleans, LA Antoine 1909-38,” Box 3, Oblate School of Theology Archives, San Antonio, Texas. Taken from *The Code of Canon Law*, translated “salvation of souls is the highest law.”

² The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, OMI, is a missionary congregation of Catholic priests and brothers who take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Founded in 1816 by Saint Eugene de Mazenod in the south of France, their ministry is focused on poverty, peace, and social justice. In 1857, Pope Pius XI, impressed with the Oblates’ ministry toward impoverished communities in the Church, prompted the Oblates to more specifically define their duties as “service to the poor and marginalized through contemporary spirituality.” In 1849, The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate established a headquarters in Brownsville, Texas, at the request of Bishop Jean Marie Odin. By 1884 Oblate missionaries expanded and settled in San Antonio. In 1904 the order’s headquarters moved to San Antonio, due in part to the newly established Oblate School of Theology, which allowed the Oblates to provide their own priestly religious education and expand their missionary efforts. See James Talmadge Moore, *Through Fire and Flood: The Catholic Church in Frontier Texas, 1836-1900* (College Station: Texas A&M, 2000). See also James Talmadge Moore, *Acts of Faith: The Catholic Church in Texas, 1900-1950* (College Station: Texas A&M, 2002).

³ Letter from Augustin Dontenwill to John W. Shaw, May 11, 1919, Oblate Fathers Correspondence Prior To 1935, Archdiocese of New Orleans Office of Archives and Records, New Orleans, Louisiana.

New Orleans. Despite this setback, Shaw continued to press the Oblates for this favor through correspondence with the Oblate Fathers located in San Antonio, Texas. By June 4, 1919, Father Albert Antoine, then Provincial of the Second American Province in Texas, promised to abate the archbishop's fears and wrote that he would "be able to present a workable plan to take care of St. Mary's Chapel," the Italian church in the French Quarter.⁴ This promise of Oblate assistance, however, was not an impetuous decision by Father Antoine, but rather the result of many years of cultivated relationship between the Texan prelate, Archbishop Shaw and the San Antonio Oblates.

Although the Diocese of Louisiana and the Two Floridas was erected in 1793 under Spanish rule, New Orleans Catholicism had long been closely associated with France, both in language usage and clerical hierarchy.⁵ Five of the archdiocese's seven archbishops, prior to Shaw, had been French and all of the seven had been of European origin. John W. Shaw, a native of Mobile, Alabama, and later Bishop of San Antonio, nominally severed this European tie and was the first American-born Archbishop of New Orleans. Although the Catholic communities in Mobile, San Antonio, and New Orleans were often in communication with one another, Archbishop Shaw's arrival in New Orleans in 1918 positioned him as an American outsider. The Texas clergyman, known for his pastoral work with Spanish-speaking immigrants in San Antonio, brought with him elements of American pragmatism regarding institutional decision-making.⁶ Shaw's outsider positioning intersected with the United States entering World War I and European Catholic seminaries

⁴ Letter from Albert Antoine to John W. Shaw, June 4, 1919, Oblate Fathers Correspondence Prior to 1935, ANOOR, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁵ Cécyile Trépanier. "The Catholic Church in French Louisiana: An Ethnic Institution?" *Journal of Cultural Geography* July (1986): 59-75.

⁶ Mark Raphael. "John William Shaw, First American-born Archbishop of New Orleans (1918-1934)" (PhD diss., Catholic University of America Press, 2009).

becoming less capable of providing new priests to American parishes. The result was an increasingly volatile environment for the city's once stable French Catholicism.

Archbishop Shaw's physical positioning within New Orleans, his residence on Esplanade Avenue and primary ministry at St. Louis Cathedral, also may have prompted his pleas for assistance for what Shaw described as "the difficulties we have with the Italians- I mean the Sicilians."⁷ Seated in the heart of Italian poverty and illiteracy in the French Quarter neighborhood, nicknamed "Little Palermo" in reference to the new Sicilian immigrants' city of origin, Archbishop Shaw often described the need for proper ministry to Italian Catholics as imperative. The Sicilians, poor and without Italian-speaking priests, presented Shaw with a problem.

This concern for the Italian immigrants' faith was a departure from the general hostility toward Southern Italian immigrants in New Orleans that had culminated in the 1891 lynching of eleven Sicilian prisoners- the largest lynching in American history. The Archiepiscopal Council Minutes book shows that at the November 5, 1918, meeting of consulters, Archbishop Shaw proposed that the two French Quarter parishes, St. Louis Cathedral and St. Mary's Church (a Sicilian parish) were in need of proper management, lest the detriment of "religion and souls."⁸ The archbishop insisted that some outside religious community, such as the Oblate Fathers of San Antonio, be brought in to manage the immigrant parishioners in his cathedral parishes.⁹

The years of correspondence between Archbishop Shaw and the Oblates that precede and

⁷ Letter from John W. Shaw to Theo Labouré, July 10, 1923, Oblate Fathers Correspondence Prior to 1935, ANOOAR, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁸ The Archiepiscopal Council Minutes Book, 1858-1921, November 5, 1918, Archdiocese of New Orleans Archiepiscopal Council Minutes, ANOOAR, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁹ The term *cathedral parishes* was used in reference to St. Louis Cathedral, St. Mary's Church, and Our Lady of Guadalupe Church.

follow Archbishop Shaw's formal proposal in 1918 suggest that the archbishop's recommendation of the Oblate Fathers was a result of a long-standing relationship with the Texas order. The casual, friendly tone Archbishop Shaw used in many of his letters with the Oblate Fathers contrasts with the more formal language he typically employed in correspondence with religious authorities and, when viewed in isolation, indicates a personal relationship between Shaw and the Oblates. When the letters are placed in historical context, however, their familiar language signifies a pattern of preferentialism of the early 20th century Catholic Church in New Orleans, headed by Archbishop Shaw, toward the Texas Oblate Fathers and over his local secular priests.¹⁰ This favoritism can be clearly seen through an examination of Archbishop Shaw's tone and language used in correspondence between 1918 and 1933.

Examining this initial transfer of religious responsibility from local diocesan rule to an outside religious order and the strategies Archbishop Shaw employed during this transition of power can reveal how personalities and decisions based on personal favoritism can dramatically influence an institution, such as New Orleans Catholicism, that may present an outward appearance of hierarchical harmony. This work will argue that looking at the language used in Archbishop Shaw's correspondence with secular priests and Oblate Fathers reveals a pattern of preferentialism toward the latter. This invitation that grew into favoritism stemmed from four primary factors: Archbishop Shaw's prior relationship with the Oblates in San Antonio, his concern for archdiocesan finances, his perceived threat of encroaching Protestantism, and dissension between himself and his secular priests. Shaw's American pragmatism, and his position as the first American-born Archbishop of New Orleans, merged with his inflated optimism of the Oblates' missionary abilities, to produce a paradoxical idealistic pragmatism.

¹⁰ The term *secular* is used to describe priests who are not members of a religious order or institute. They are also referred to as diocesan, archdiocesan, or lay clergymen.

Examining the correspondence surrounding this partial decision to transition toward religious outsourcing gives New Orleans Catholicism dynamic facets, influenced by discordant personalities.

Historiography

Much of the historical work that focuses on late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Catholicism in New Orleans is done through a biographical approach. These biographies are limited to the lives of prominent male clergymen, often focusing on the lives of New Orleans archbishops, such as Archbishops Jean-Marie Odin, Francis Janssens, James Hubert Blenk, John William Shaw, and Joseph F. Rummel.¹¹ These works provide valuable information on the individual personalities of each archbishop, and on rules and instructions given to the Archdiocese of New Orleans from the Vatican and by the Archdiocese of New Orleans to its priests and lay peoples. However, the biographies do not place the archbishops in conversation with one another, showing administrative shifts, nor do they give much voice to the Catholic or non-Catholic people who come in contact with the archbishops.

One of these biographies, Raphael's *John William Shaw: First American-born Archbishop of New Orleans, 1918-1934*, gives a comprehensive description of Shaw's religious life in Mobile, San Antonio, and New Orleans. Raphael argues that Shaw's New Orleans reign marks a shift in archdiocesan politics due to Shaw's rare ability to blend what Raphael calls Southern idealism with "ecclesiastical Americanization," both of which were departures for the old-rule Catholic Francophiles.¹² The work offers valuable discussion of Shaw's unsatisfactory

¹¹Patrick Foley. *Missionary Bishop: Jean-Marie Odin in Galveston and New Orleans* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2013); Annmarie Kasteel. *Francis Janssens 1843-1897 A Dutch American Prelate*. (Lafayette: The Center for Louisiana Studies, 1992); John Smestad Jr. "The Rome of Archbishop Joseph F. Rummel in the Desegregation of Catholic Schools in New Orleans" (New Orleans: Loyola University New Orleans, 1994); Raphael "John William Shaw, First American-born Archbishop of New Orleans (1918-1934)," 2009.

¹² Raphael "John William Shaw," 59.

dealings with German immigrants and African Americans, but gives little mention of Italian immigration and no mention of the Oblates. Raphael strongly supports an earlier observation by Robert Baudier in *The Catholic Church in Louisiana* about Shaw's nativist tendency to rely on local clergymen and resources to solve archdiocesan problems.¹³ Archbishop Shaw's religious outsourcing to the Oblate Fathers either disproves this claim or reveals an inconsistency in Shaw's traditional preference. Although historians Baudier and Raphael have extensively covered the details of Shaw's religious life, this apparent absence in the literature and opposition to the nativist claim emphasizes the importance of the Oblate narrative in order to ensure a more complete picture of the first American-born Archbishop of New Orleans.

Other work on the Catholic Church in New Orleans or on Catholicism in Louisiana and Texas more generally, focuses primarily on the institutional function of the church. Phyllis E. Leblanc's "Weight of Tradition or Power Struggle? Conflict and Tradition within the Nineteenth-Century Catholic Church of Louisiana" presents a static description of what she terms the "cultural elite" within the societal institution of the Catholic Church.¹⁴ Leblanc provides valuable insight on what she describes as a political strategy of maintaining French as the language of Catholicism in New Orleans throughout the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century. Leblanc determines that this strategy allowed the upper echelons of the hierarchy to exclude other ethnic groups from gaining seats of power within the church. Thus, she paints New Orleans Catholic hierarchy as a harmonious hegemony. Although different in subject matter, James Talmadge Moore's discussion of the Oblates in Texas mirrors this static institutional treatment. Moore's writings on turn-of-the-century Catholicism in frontier Texas

¹³ Roger Baudier, *The Catholic Church in Louisiana* (New Orleans: Louisiana Library Association Public Library Section, 1939), 524.

¹⁴ Phyllis E. Leblanc. "Weight of Tradition or Power Struggle? Conflict and Tradition Within the Nineteenth-Century Catholic Church of Louisiana" *Louisiana History*, Vol. 56 no. 2 (Apr. 2015):157.

describe a dynamic secular clergy who interacted with New Orleans to form the Diocese of San Antonio, yet he is more reluctant to acknowledge differing personalities within religious orders, like the OMIs.¹⁵ While both Leblanc's and Moore's institutional focus is useful for survey information on the structural workings of the church and highlights the political strategies or administrative organization of the Catholic Church, this approach often fails to take into account the effects of individual personalities within church hierarchy.

Certain works on Louisiana Catholicism present dynamic personalities who attempted to navigate their space within institutional frameworks, thereby combining elements of both the biographical and institutional approaches. Emilie Leumas's *Mais I Sin in French, I Gotta Go to Confession in French: A Study of the Language Shift from French to English Within the Louisiana Catholic Church* determines that the "linguistic tip" for language change from French to English within the church occurred in 1907, during Archbishop Blenk's administration. Leumas's work argues that Archbishop Blenk's term saw a more multiethnic clergy and an increasing body of priests who were local, or not from Europe. While Leumas frames her narrative institutionally, according to archbishop administrations, her methodology that relies on sacramental registers, Archiepiscopal Council Book minutes, and pastoral letters to clergy and parishioners, gives complexity and personality to the upper echelons within the archdiocesan institution.¹⁶ Bamba Pitman, in "Culture, Caste, and Conflict in New Orleans Catholicism: Archbishop Francis Janssens and the Color Line," argues that the perpetuation of Jim Crow in the Catholic Church, often attributed to Archbishop Janssens, is a complex subject that requires consideration of Janssens's own "lack of emotional connectedness," due to secular concerns

¹⁵ Moore, *Through Fire and Flood*, 59.

¹⁶ Emilie Leumas, "Mais I Sin in French, I Gotta Go to Confession in French: A Study of the Language Shift from French to English within the Louisiana Catholic Church" (PhD diss., Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, 2009).

affecting the archdiocese.¹⁷ Pitman effectively attributes institutionalized Jim Crow perpetuation within the Church to an individual's own personality and contextualized distractions. While these works act as models for the discussion of individual personalities making decisions within the Catholic Church in Louisiana, neither of the works discuss early twentieth century Catholicism or Italian immigration in detail. This exclusion makes the story of Archbishop Shaw's preference toward the Oblates for assistance with immigrant Catholics a vital part of the larger narrative of dynamic decision-making within the Catholic Church in Louisiana.

The Archiepiscopal Council Minutes book, 1858-1921, is an excellent source for uncovering when the hierarchy of the Archdiocese of New Orleans began to discuss the need for churches that better catered to the city's growing immigrant populations. The minutes suggest that although Archbishop Shaw's 1918 invitation to the Oblate Fathers refers to Spanish, Italian, and French Catholics, council members were at first only concerned with Italian immigrants. The Archiepiscopal Council Minutes examined in this paper are those minutes recorded in English from November 26, 1913, until the ledger book's last entry on May 13, 1921. Emilie Leumas notes how the use of either French or English to record the minutes of the archiepiscopal council corresponds with the native language of the archbishop's recording secretary, and changes with administrations. In 1913, the council minutes' final switch from French to English occurs with Archbishop Blenk's Louisiana-born secretary, Father W. J. Vincent.¹⁸

This paper will look at Archbishop Shaw's language while corresponding with the Oblate Fathers, the secular clergy, and the apostolic delegate.¹⁹ It will particularly examine the way that

¹⁷ Bamba Pitman, "Culture, Caste, and Conflict in New Orleans Catholicism: Archbishop Francis Janssens and the Color Line" *Louisiana History* Vol. 49 no 4 (Fall 2008): 424.

¹⁸ Leumas, *Mais I Sin in French*, 54.

¹⁹ Similar to an *apostolic nuncio* or *papal nuncio*, the apostolic delegate is an ecclesiastical position, usually an archbishop, who acts as a liaison between a nation's government and the Holy See in Rome. Unlike a

the archbishop emphasized different factors of the 1918 transition from secular control of the cathedral parishes to Oblate control, according to his audience. This paper will also look at the language found in the New Orleans Archiepiscopal Council Minutes book, 1910 until 1921, and the Provincial Council Minute Book for the Southern U.S. Province to compare how Archbishop Shaw's advisory council in New Orleans, the Archiepiscopal Council, and the Oblates' advisory council in San Antonio, the Provincial Council, addressed this invitation and implementation of the Oblate Fathers.²⁰ The aim is to uncover the reasons and strategies employed by Archbishop Shaw in his decision to invite the Oblates to New Orleans to manage the cathedral parishes. This work will argue that Archbishop Shaw invited the Oblates to New Orleans for four reasons: due to his prior relationship with Oblate Fathers, in response to financial pressures faced by the archdiocese, in response to the threat or perceived threat of Protestantism on immigrant Catholics, and as a reaction to the diocesan political pressures Shaw faced. This research will highlight how opposing personalities may simultaneously exist within a single public institution. This methodology, which combines an analysis of correspondence and council minute books, will trace the way that a particular decision within an institution evolves over time and can be influenced by a variety of individual personalities, including those whose influence may not correlate with their authority level.

Shaw's Motives

In an effort to understand why Archbishop Shaw chose the Oblates to manage the cathedral and its filial parishes, it is necessary to consider Archbishop Shaw's experience as

nuncio, however, the apostolic delegate exists in a country without formal diplomatic ties to the Vatican. Formal nunciature relations, or a papal nuncio, did not exist in the United States until 1984.

²⁰ Leumas in *Mais I Sin in French* describes the function of the Archiepiscopal Council to be "to advise the bishop in pastoral governance, including the appointment of priests/pastors to parishes, the establishment of parish boundaries, the creation of new parishes and property management." This consultative body consists of four to six members, half of whom are appointed by the archbishop and half of whom are nominated by the clergy. The minute book of the Archiepiscopal Council from 1858 to 1921 is located at the Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans. In the minute book, the Archiepiscopal Council is also referred to as the Diocesan Consulters.

Bishop of San Antonio, his relationship with certain Oblate Fathers while in San Antonio, and the Archdiocese of New Orleans's relationship with the Southwestern OMIs prior to 1918.²¹ On February 7, 1910, Pope Pius X appointed John Shaw, a native of Mobile, Alabama, to serve as coadjutor bishop of the Diocese of San Antonio, Texas.²² Shaw was appointed to assist the diocese's existing bishop, John Anthony Forest, who was ailing in health.²³ Catholics in San Antonio greeted Shaw's arrival with enthusiasm. *The Daily Enterprise* reported that 10,000 people and every Catholic society in the city participated in a parade to welcome Shaw and celebrate his new post at the San Fernando Cathedral.²⁴ On March 11, 1911, following Bishop Forest's death, Shaw became the fourth Bishop of San Antonio. With this title, Shaw immediately prioritized traveling throughout the Western Texas diocese to visit all Catholic communities under his jurisdiction. These visits encompassed a range of activities such as meeting with local church dignitaries, leading dedication ceremonies for churches and hospitals, and conferring the sacrament of confirmation on classes of students throughout the diocese.²⁵

The new bishop of San Antonio also stayed in constant communion with his past post, the Diocese of Mobile, and his future home, the Archdiocese of New Orleans. Upon his transition from Mobile to San Antonio, Shaw stopped in New Orleans for a one-day visit with Archbishop James Hubert Blenk, before continuing to Texas accompanied by a New Orleans priest, Father Raymond Carra, and a Mobile priest, Father Hackett, who was to act as his secretary once in San

²¹ The term *filial parish* or *filial church* is used to denote a Roman Catholic Church that operates dependently under another, often older, parish.

²² The term *coadjutor* refers to a bishop appointed to assist a diocesan bishop, similar to an auxiliary bishop. According to canon 403.3, however, in the case of the coadjutor bishop, the assisting bishop has immediate right to succession upon the diocesan bishop's death.

²³ Talmadge, *Acts of Faith* 32.

²⁴ "Bishop Shaw Welcomed. 10,000 Turned Out to Greet Him in San Antonio." *The Daily Enterprise*, May 12, 1910.

²⁵ "Dallas Churchman Delivers Address: Bishop Shaw Dedicates St. John Sanitarium." *Dallas Morning News*, November 29, 1910; "Bishop Shaw Visiting Diocese." *Dallas Morning News*, March 31, 1911.

Antonio.²⁶ San Antonio, Dallas, and New Orleans newspapers often cited Bishop Shaw as present at various clerical gatherings with Archbishop Blenk of New Orleans. The most notable of these was a mass held to honor Mobile's bicentennial, whereby Bishop Shaw was present to sing the solemn verses of thanksgiving.²⁷ Highlighting the frequency of these inter-diocesan interactions may help soften the exaggerated exceptionalism that the Archdiocese of New Orleans had incurred by the 1920s, due to its French association, and could moderate Archbishop Shaw's outsider position.

Bishop Shaw of San Antonio also came into contact with the Archdiocese of New Orleans to observe good institutional practices that could be applied in West Texas. On July 28, 1911, Bishop Shaw met in New Orleans with the prelate of St. Joseph's Seminary to observe the Bohemian and Spanish instruction occurring at the seminary, with the hope that he might send his own San Antonio diocesan priests to study at the New Orleans seminary. The *Times Picayune* reported that Bishop Shaw was "desirous of having priests who can speak those languages to minister to the spiritual wants of those parishioners."²⁸ This concern with seminarian education would become manifest during his time in San Antonio, when, in 1915, Shaw established St. John's Seminary. Additionally, his concern for proper priestly ministry for non-English speaking parishioners would follow Shaw to New Orleans and characterize one of his greatest concerns, and later accomplishments, as Archbishop of New Orleans.²⁹ While Bishop Shaw's overall

²⁶ "Bishop Shaw Spends Day Here on His Way to San Antonio." *Times Picayune*, May 11, 1910.

²⁷ "News from Mobile: Catholic Clergy Meet to Discuss the Celebration in Honor of Mobile's Bicentennial. Cardinal Gibbons to Preside at Pontifical Mass." *Times Picayune*. January 30, 1911.

²⁸ "Bishop Shaw's Visit May Result in More Students for St. Joseph Seminary," *Times Picayune*, July 28, 1911.

²⁹ Bishop Shaw's ministry to San Antonio's immigrant church acted as a precursor to his management of New Orleans' immigrant church. Shaw recognized the challenge of ministering to 20,000 Mexicans in San Antonio with only eight Catholic priests in the diocese. Between 1911 and 1915 Bishop Shaw oversaw the building of several immigrant churches and schools for Mexican immigrants and instructed pastors to publically speak on behalf of the valuable economic contributions Mexicans made to the diocese, to counteract racial prejudices against the immigrants. David A. Badillo notes that Bishop Shaw pivotally described the Mexicans as "humble, docile, and

pastoral responsibilities as Bishop of San Antonio influenced later priorities as Archbishop of New Orleans, his interaction with certain Oblate Fathers in San Antonio also functioned as a precursor to Archbishop Shaw's Oblate invitation.

Archbishop Shaw had personal ties to the San Antonio Oblate Fathers prior to his invitation to the order to reside in New Orleans. Bishop Shaw interacted with the Oblates in his missionary work and seminary oversight. In 1915 Bishop Shaw was honored by the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in San Antonio for his "efforts to provide relief to Mexican refugees in Texas." He also presided over the Archdiocese of San Antonio's seminary, Assumption Seminary, run by the Oblate Fathers.³⁰ Archbishop Shaw's relationship with San-Antonio-based Oblate Fathers Henri Ambrose Constantineau, Marie-Pierre Albert Antoine, Theo Labouré, Emile Lecourtois, and Carmelo Gagliardoni began in San Antonio at Assumption Seminary, but would continue after Bishop Shaw of San Antonio became Archbishop Shaw of New Orleans in 1918. Three of these Oblate Fathers would eventually hold the office of Provincial of the Second American Province of OMI, the highest position of the Southwestern province.

In December 1918, five Oblate Fathers: Lecourtois, Gagliardoni, Labouré, Cartier, and Herman were brought to St. Louis Cathedral to take pastoral authority of St. Louis Cathedral and St. Mary's Church. Fr. Gagliardoni would serve as pastor of St. Mary's Church for the Italians, and Fr. Lecourtois would serve as the first Oblate pastor at St. Louis Cathedral. Several more Oblate Fathers would be brought to the city as Oblate influence increased to include Our Lady of

worth of charity," in contrast to contradictory rumors run by German newspaper propaganda. In 1911, the prelate also invited the Redemptorist Fathers to San Antonio to establish and run immigrant parishes and missions. Bishop Shaw viewed Catholic education as a means to successfully assimilate Mexican Americans, who were culturally at odds with Anglo society. Shaw's perception of immigrant Catholics, his invitation to an outside religious order, and his solution of space-building through proper infrastructure for cultural diversity within the diocese directly mirrors his invitation to Oblate fathers and Italian immigrant management while serving as Archbishop of New Orleans. See: David A. Badillo, *Latinos and the New Immigrant Church* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 32-38. See also: Mary Diane Langford, *God Has Been God for Us: The History of the Missionary Servants of St. Anthony A Congregation of Diocesan Right in San Antonio, Texas* (AuthorHouse, 2012).

³⁰Moore, *Acts of Faith*, 59.

Guadalupe Church and the French Mission fields in Livingston Parish (See Appendix C).

Initially, all Oblate Fathers would take residence at St. Louis Cathedral, dubbed the St. Louis House. Despite Archbishop Shaw's emphasis on the Oblate Fathers' distinct ability to minister to the Italian immigrants, Labouré and Gagliardoni were the only Oblate Fathers fluent in Italian, and Labouré would spend his first six months assigned to the cathedral rather than St. Mary's Church, the Sicilian parish.



Seated left to right: Henri Ambrose Constantineau, Bishop John W Shaw, and Provincial Marie-Pierre Albert Antoine. Photo courtesy Oblate School of Theology Archives.

Exposing Bishop Shaw's San Antonio based friendship with one Oblate Father in particular, Father Theo Labouré, reveals developing favoritism toward Oblate Fathers over secular priests,

while in New Orleans. The language that Shaw used when writing Labouré and the continuous decisions to elevate Labouré to favorable positions in New Orleans can act as an example of the lasting influence these initial Texas friendships wrought. The Provincial Council Minutes for the Southern U.S. Province, the San Antonio OMIs, record that at a November 20, 1918, meeting, the council agreed that Theo Labouré would be moved from his position on the Local Council and Director of the Sacred Heart Residence at the San Antonio seminary to New Orleans, where he would manage finances and household responsibilities at the cathedral as the Local Econome.³¹ Father Labouré's movement from the seminary to New Orleans suggests a close tie between Labouré and Shaw that probably existed due to Shaw's previous work with the San Antonio seminary as Bishop of San Antonio.

Archbishop Shaw wrote that his primary concerns as Bishop of San Antonio and as Archbishop of New Orleans were the establishment of a local seminary and bringing the Catholic faith to the poor and marginalized. Both of these priorities were extensions of his predecessor, Archbishop Blenk's work. In 1906, James Hubert Blenk had been named the seventh Archbishop of New Orleans. Blenk's administration saw the invitation of several new religious communities to the city, an unfulfilled desire to establish a local seminary, inherited financial problems, and the systemization of the local Catholic school system. The outbreak of World War I under Archbishop Blenk spurred the need for a local seminary, since as historian Charles E. Nolan notes, "conscription of European clergy and seminarians into military service and travel restrictions dramatically reduced the recruitment of foreign clergy."³² Archbishop Blenk's reign also saw the establishment of the Catholic Church Extension Society in Louisiana. In 1905, Pope

³¹ 55th Meeting of the Provincial Council, November 20, 1918, Provincial Council Minutes for the Southern U.S. Province, OST Archives, San Antonio, Texas.

³² Charles E. Nolan, *A History of the Archdiocese of New Orleans* (Eckbolsheim: Editions du Signe, 2000), 60.

Pius X had founded this national organization to assist American dioceses in giving financial, capital, and ministerial support to poor, rural mission communities. Archbishop Blenk's focus on poor mission communities and his desire to establish a local seminary was in line with Shaw's own pastoral concerns. Once in New Orleans, as Blenk's replacement, Shaw used different strategies to achieve these two goals. While Archbishop Shaw's goal of establishing a seminary emphasized the use of local resources, he chose to achieve the latter goal of immigrant ministry through outside resources: the OMIs.

Although the frequency of correspondence between the Archdiocese of New Orleans and the OMI American headquarters in San Antonio significantly increased with the reign of Archbishop Shaw, evidence suggests that an institutional relationship had begun prior to 1918. Correspondence between the Oblates and the Archdiocese of New Orleans is found as early as April 15, 1909, as Archbishop Blenk wrote to Oblate Provincial Reverend H. A. Constantineau to thank the Oblate Fathers and Sisters of Divine Providence for a donation of \$260 for relief of damage caused to the diocese by the 1909 Grand Isle Hurricane.³³

On November 24, 1909, Provincial Constantineau wrote to Archbishop Blenk about the San Antonio Oblate Fathers' delightful hosting of Archbishop Augustin Dontenwill, the Superior General whom Shaw would later appeal for Oblate assistance. Archbishop Constantineau wrote that Archbishop Dontenwill desired to make a one-day visit to New Orleans to meet with Blenk.³⁴ Archbishop Blenk responded that he would be honored to receive the Superior General

³³ Letter from James Blenk to H. A. Constantineau, October 26, 1909, Oblate Father Correspondence Print 1935, ANOOAR, New Orleans, Louisiana. Very Rev. H. A. Constantineau, O.M.I., D.D., served as first provincial of the Southern Province of the Oblates, established October, 1904. See: Catholic Encyclopedia's Diocese of San Antonio page. The Sisters of Divine Providence, also called Congregation of Divine Providence, are a Catholic religious order of women, founded in 1852. Their motherhouse was located in Saint-Jean-de-Bassel, Moselle, France, but moved to San Antonio, Texas in 1896.

³⁴ Letter from H. A. Constantineau to James Blenk, November 24, 1909, Oblate Father Correspondence Print 1935, ANOOAR, New Orleans, Louisiana.

at his home in New Orleans and provided a date for the upcoming visit.³⁵ This December 3, 1909, meeting between the Archbishop of New Orleans and the Superior General of the OMIs, a decade before Shaw's appointment, marks the formal beginning of the relationship between the Oblates and the Archdiocese of New Orleans.³⁶

Shaw's pastoral responsibilities as Bishop of San Antonio ignited his concern for immigrant communities and local seminaries. The Archdiocese of New Orleans' prior relationship with the Diocese of San Antonio and with the OMIs foretold an easier transition, on an institutional level. Bishop Shaw's close friendship with certain Oblate Fathers, on a personal level, further indicates why he asked this particular religious order to assist in New Orleans. Thus, Shaw's motives for inviting the Oblates functioned on an experiential, institutional, and personal level. Once installed as Archbishop of New Orleans, however, these motives grew to also include the particular needs of Catholicism in the Crescent City.

Establishing an Italian Parish

Beginning in the late 1800s, many Italian immigrants began to arrive in America from Sicily to escape extreme poverty and a corrupt government. By 1920, four million Southern Italian immigrants had come to the United States, and represented ten percent of the nation's immigrant population. Many of these Sicilian immigrants came to New Orleans and took residence in the French Quarter, nicknamed "Little Palermo." These Southern Italians differed from the city's already established Northern Italians, in both their jobs and religious practices.

³⁵Letter from James Blenk to H. A. Constantineau, November 26, 1909, "Provincial Correspondance, Diocese New Orleans, LA Antoine 1909-38 Box 3," OST Archives, San Antonio, Texas.

³⁶ The relationship between older Oblates and the Archdiocese of New Orleans dates back to 1849 when missionary Oblates in Montreal, Canada, were invited by Bishop Odin, later Archbishop of New Orleans, to serve in Brownsville, Texas. Before arriving at the new Texas assignment, Oblate Fathers Pierre Telmon and Alexander Soulerin, and lay brother, Joseph Mensche, accompanied Odin down the Mississippi River and on to a brief stay in New Orleans. However, lack of communication between Oblate Fathers and Odin with Superior General Mazenod resulted in an initial strained reception of the Oblates in Brownsville.

Many of the Sicilian immigrants in the French Quarter worked as laborers, selling food goods in the French Market or working on New Orleans docks. Harold Abramson in “Ethnic Diversity within Catholicism: A Contemporary and Historical Religion,” explains the contempt many Southern Italians felt for the Northern, establishment Catholicism of Rome, and how this attitude was carried over with immigration to the United States. Abramson explains that the Sicilian style of Catholicism contained anti-clericalism and folk-ceremonies, and that the immigrants were “profoundly religious. However, their beliefs and practices did not conform to the doctrines and liturgy of the Church.”³⁷ Thus, the Catholic hierarchy in New Orleans expressed prejudice toward the Sicilian Catholics, due to what was perceived to be faithlessness. This misinterpretation due to differing Catholic cultures affected both Archbishops Blenk and Shaw’s urgency in their desire to provide the Southern Italian immigrants with property ministry.

Examining the language in the Archiepiscopal Council Book minutes, the Provincial Council minute book, and correspondence amongst Archbishop Shaw and clergymen reveals the personalities at play in this prioritization of Italian immigrants and subsequent decision for Oblate invitation. The language in these records also reveals how the reception of Archbishop Shaw’s proposal was not unanimously supported. Finally, the correspondence suggests that Archbishop Shaw consciously emphasized different characteristics according to his audience. These shifting emphases would eventually transform into noticeable preferentialism in the archbishop’s language toward Oblate Fathers, and at the expense of his secular priests.

Archbishop Blenk’s appeals to his Archiepiscopal Council in New Orleans to establish a parish for Italian immigrants act as the precursor to Archbishop Shaw’s later appeals to the Oblates. On April 28, 1914, the Archiepiscopal Council had unanimously agreed that the

³⁷ Harold Abramson. “Ethnic Diversity within Catholicism: A Contemporary and Historical Religion” (*Journal of Social History*: Oxford University Press, 1971), 375.

Archdiocese should establish a new church parish for the Italian population, consisting of 900 communicants and located on the lower side of Canal Street. Archbishop Blenk had recommended using St. Mary's Church, the Old Ursuline Convent, located on Chartres Street, for the betterment of this Italian population's spirituality. Archbishop Blenk next discussed the sale of St. Anthony's Church, the Old Mortuary Chapel located on Rampart Street, then designated for the city's Italian population, and under the direction of the Dominicans.³⁸ The archbishop mentioned the high likelihood of the Archdiocese to get a "good price" of thirty thousand dollars from this sale.³⁹

Archbishop Blenk's determination to sell St. Mary's Church was largely influenced by concern over the church's proximity to the New Orleans legal red light district, Storyville. Although the Dominican Fathers left the historic Old Mortuary Chapel in 1915, Archbishop Blenk's plans to sell St. Anthony's Church did not come to fruition. Approximately five years later, in 1921, Oblate Fathers renamed the North Rampart Street parish Our Lady of Guadalupe Church and established the church as a parish for Spanish immigrants. Archbishop Blenk's discussion of the relocation of the Italian parish to St. Mary's Church, his discussion of the future of St. Anthony's Church, later renamed Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, and his concern over financial benefits of these parishes sets the framework for Archbishop Shaw's later discussion of immigrant parishes.

Comparing the language used in the Archiepiscopal Council minutes, marking the meetings of Shaw and his advisory council, with the Provincial Council minutes, marking the meetings of the Oblate Fathers in San Antonio, reveals both groups as primarily concerned with

³⁸ The Dominican Order of Preachers is a Catholic religious order founded in France in the 13th century under the Spanish priest Saint Dominic de Guzman.

³⁹ The Archiepiscopal Council Minutes Book, 1858-1921, April 28, 1914, Archdiocese of New Orleans Archiepiscopal Council Minutes, ANOAR, New Orleans, Louisiana.

power retention. The November 5, 1918, meeting of the Diocesan Consulters was Archbishop Shaw's first Archiepiscopal Council meeting after being instated as Archbishop Blenk's successor. The Archiepiscopal Council Minute Book shows that Archbishop Shaw's first order of business was to discuss the status of St. Louis Cathedral and its "filial" parish, St. Mary's Church.⁴⁰ Father R. Canon Racine, pastor of St. Joseph's in Baton Rouge, and Archbishop Shaw persuaded the council that these two churches were in critical need of proper management, else the loss of the authority of the church in New Orleans and the spirituality of many souls. The two men suggested that a religious order from San Antonio, either the Oblate Fathers or the Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, should manage St. Louis Cathedral and St. Mary's Church "under one regime or pastorate."⁴¹ Although Archbishop Shaw had ultimate authority over the Archdiocese and could formally invite a religious order to the city without consulting the counsel, he assured the Archiepiscopal council of the security of the secular priests' position and emphasized the Oblate Fathers' ability to speak several languages. As noted, however, only two of the Oblate Fathers that initially came to New Orleans were fluent in Italian. The minutes read:

The Archbishop explained at length how this would be affected without detriment to the rights or dignity of the Cathedral and Archbishop. The Archbishop also mentioned that he had consulted the Apostolic Delegate who approved the change as outlined. The Consulters then concurred in the views and resolution of the Archbishop to introduce the Reverend Oblate Fathers of San Antonio who could furnish Fathers speaking the different languages considered as necessary by Father Racine in the Communication.⁴²

As noted, Archbishop Shaw's tone changed according to his audience, during his discussion of shifting authority due to the Oblate Fathers' presence. When addressing his

⁴⁰ The Archiepiscopal Council Minutes Book, 1858-1921, November 5, 1918, Archdiocese of New Orleans Archiepiscopal Council Minutes, ANOOAR, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

Archiepiscopal Council, the minutes show that Archbishop Shaw continually stressed that the Oblate Fathers would assist through their bilingual abilities, but the traditional authority of the secular clergy over the Cathedral Parishes would remain constant.

By November 11, 1918, at an Armistice Day Celebration in San Antonio, Archbishop Shaw began to make appeals to the Oblates to send priests to New Orleans to manage the Cathedral Parishes. Although only a few of them could speak the Italian language, according to a parishioner's letter written to Pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, Peter Roger, Archbishop Shaw reportedly "earnestly requested, in fact he [has] begged the Oblate Fathers," to assist with the management of the poor, immigrant parishioners in these parishes.⁴³ Uninterested in the offer, however, San Antonio Provincial Father Antoine "turned it down flat."⁴⁴ The Archiepiscopal and Provincial Council book minutes, however, mask this initial unwillingness. Archbishop Shaw's requests soon turned increasingly persuasive and eventually resulted in appeals to the Apostolic Delegate, the diplomatic church liaison between the United States and the Vatican, and outright demands upon the Oblates to accept.

The November 20, 1918, meeting of the Provincial Council Minutes for the Southern U.S. Province of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate was held in San Antonio to discuss Archbishop Shaw's proposition. The Oblates Fathers considered several points that would make the transition an advantageous one. First, the cathedral parishes were almost exclusively comprised of the poor, and so "in entire conformity with [the Oblates'] religious vocation."⁴⁵ The minutes show that the Oblate Fathers also discussed the canonical authority they would hold. While Archbishop Shaw used the term *canonical* to console nervous secular priests in New

⁴³ 55th Meeting of Provincial Council, April 30, 1919, Provincial Council Minutes for the Southern US Province, OST Archives, San Antonio, Texas.

⁴⁴ Letter from "Lou" to Peter Rogers, August 10 n.d., "Official Files, Parishes, New Orleans, St. Louis Cathedral Folder 1, Box 12" OST Archives, San Antonio, Texas.

⁴⁵ November 20, 1918 Provincial Council Meeting, SA

Orleans, the Oblates emphasized that despite technical power limits, they would still establish a “real community” with a “permanent” presence.⁴⁶ The Provincial Council minutes and Archiepiscopal Council minutes show that while each council discussed the same proposition and even emphasized the same terminology, both Oblate Fathers and New Orleans secular priests expected themselves to be the superior entity.

Correspondence between Oblate Fathers also reveals the religious order’s shifting attitude toward their proposed assignment in New Orleans. On November 23, 1918, Father Albert Antoine, then Provincial O.M.I., wrote to Father Isidore Belle, General O.M.I., concerning what he termed an “exciting opportunity” for the Oblates of Mary Immaculate to take pastoral responsibility of New Orleans’ most prominent Catholic parishes, the cathedral parishes. Father Antoine wrote that he had recently met with Archbishop Shaw of New Orleans who expressed the anxiety and strain that had been placed on the secular priests of the diocese due to the French, Spanish, and Italian “multiglot” population in these parishes.⁴⁷ In his letter, Father Antoine described this “attractive offer” as a good way for the Oblates Fathers to spread their mission and influence outside of their American headquarters.⁴⁸ Father Antoine explained to Father Belle that ministering to these ethnically organized religious groups would allow the Oblates lasting influence over the New Orleans Catholic population. He wrote, “Once we are established there, no one can disturb us, precisely because we are the only ones capable of this ministry.”⁴⁹ Father Antoine stressed that Archbishop Shaw had assured him that even though the Oblate Fathers cannot be given permanent, “canonical” possession of the

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Letter from Albert Antoine to Isidore Belle, November 23, 1918, Oblate Father Correspondence Print 1935, ANOOAR, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

parishes, the Oblates “will never be disturbed.”⁵⁰ Two days after the Oblates revealed excitement about their prospects in New Orleans, Father Antoine wrote Archbishop Shaw that the Oblate Provincial Council had unanimously accepted.

While later pastoral letters would reveal local diocesan discontent surrounding the Oblates’ arrival at the cathedral parishes, initial correspondence between secular priests and Oblate Fathers was welcoming. On December 22, 1918, the pastor of the St. Louis Cathedral, Father Racine, who would soon forfeit his pastorate to Father Antoine, wrote to Antoine, “I have grown very much attached to this old place, but I cheerfully make the sacrifice to leave it.”⁵¹ Racine continued, in correspondence with Antoine, to invite the incoming Oblate Fathers to Racine’s final mass, as pastor of the cathedral. Racine wrote, “You do not need to be afraid at all to be in the way,” and insisted that he would like to publically introduce the Oblate Fathers to the cathedral’s parishioners. This initial cheerful reception by the secular clergy contrasts with later letters of complaint.

Although much of Archbishop Shaw’s correspondence contained praise of the success of the Oblate Fathers upon their 1918 arrival in New Orleans, close attention must be given to those letters that contend this view of success. Additionally, the goals of Archbishop Shaw when he invited the Oblates of Mary to New Orleans must be revisited to determine the effectiveness of the Oblate Fathers in managing the Cathedral Parishes.

The Archiepiscopal Council Minutes from November 5, 1918, list the enactment of better ministry to Italian-speaking Catholics as one of the primary reasons the Archdiocese of New Orleans needed the Oblate Fathers’ help. It is questionable, then, when on May 11, 1919,

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Letter from Racine to Albert Antoine, December 22, 1918, Provincial Correspondence, Diocese New Orleans, LA Antoine 1909-38, OST Archives, San Antonio, Texas.

approximately one year after the Oblates of Mary Immaculate's arrival, Archbishop Shaw discussed the great success of the Oblate Fathers, yet at the same time revealed that St. Mary's Church was still in need of an Italian-speaking priest. Correspondence with Monseigneur Dontenwill and Father Antoine reveal that the search for an Italian priest was an on-going problem. On May 11, 1919, Monseigneur Dontenwill wrote to Archbishop Shaw saying, "The sending of an Italian Father is not possible, owing to an unforeseen circumstance."⁵² On June 12, 1919, the Monseigneur again wrote about his disappointment over the lack of a Sicilian priest for the Italian parish.⁵³

On June 4, 1919, Father Antoine wrote to Archbishop Shaw expressing his disappointment in the Superior General Monseigneur Dontenwill's inability to send over a Sicilian Father. Father Antoine wrote that he hoped that the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, under his direction, could find a solution to this problem, so that the services of the secular pastor of St. Mary's Church, Father Gaudino could be "dispersed."⁵⁴ As one of the secular clergy members whose pastoral responsibilities got demoted with the arrival of the Oblate Fathers at his parish, Father Gaudino had written several complaints to Archbishop Shaw from 1918 until 1925. In 1923, these complaints escalated to such a point that they were brought to the attention of the Pope. On July 10, 1923, Father Theo Labouré wrote to Archbishop Shaw, stating that he suspected Father Gaudino sent in the anonymous complaint to the Holy Father, and that he hoped Archbishop Shaw could impress upon the Holy See the "difficulties we have with the Italians- I

⁵² Letter from Augustin Dontenwill to John Shaw, May 11, 1919, Oblate Fathers Correspondence Print 1935, ANOOAR, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁵³ Letter from Augustin Dontenwill to John Shaw, June 12, 1919, Oblate Fathers Correspondence Print 1935, ANOOAR, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁵⁴ Letter from Anthony Antoine to John Shaw, June 4, 1919, Oblate Fathers Correspondence Print 1935, ANOOAR, New Orleans, Louisiana.

mean the Sicilians.”⁵⁵ These letters suggest that Archbishop Shaw’s reasoning for bringing in the Oblates of Mary Immaculate to manage the Italian Catholics may be linked to his favoritism toward several of the Oblate Fathers and his dislike of Father Guadino, pastor of St. Mary’s Church.

The lack of an Italian-speaking priest to minister to Italian Catholics continued to go unresolved. On March 23, 1920, Monseigneur Dontenwill responded to Archbishop Shaw’s letter, dated February 8, 1919, asking for both forgiveness and additional Oblate Fathers to serve in New Orleans.⁵⁶ Monseigneur Dontenwill stated that he was happy to hear of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate’s success, but regrettably could not send over any Sicilian Fathers to manage the Italian parishioners in New Orleans. The Monseigneur explained that the Italian Oblates had just opened a new community in Rome, and had to focus all of their priests toward this Province. Monseigneur Dontenwill concluded the letter with cutting prejudice against the Italian parishioners in New Orleans. He stated, “May I be permitted to say that those Italians who clamor for a Sicilian priest would find another excuse for not going to church, should a Sicilian priest be given to them?”⁵⁷

Several points may be drawn by dissecting this letter and by looking at the persistent problem of a lack of Sicilian Oblate Fathers. First, there is a significant amount of time, approximately six months, that passes after the Oblates of Mary Immaculate establish themselves in New Orleans for the main purpose of better serving Italian immigrants and before they uncover that the solution to their lack of an Italian-speaking Oblate Father lay with Father Theo

⁵⁵ Letter from Theo Labouré to John Shaw, July 10, 1923, Oblate Fathers Correspondence Print 1935, ANOOAR, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁵⁶ Letter from John Shaw to Augustin Dontenwill, February 8, 1919, Oblate Fathers Correspondence Print 1935, ANOOAR, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁵⁷ Letter from Augustin Dontenwill to John Shaw, March 23, 1920, Oblate Fathers Correspondence Print 1935, ANOOAR, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Labouré, an Oblate Father who was fluent in Italian and served right next door, at St. Louis Cathedral. Additionally, although Archbishop Shaw expresses concern over a lack of a Sicilian Father, much of his correspondence ecclesiastical hierarchy in Rome praises the success of the Oblate Fathers in New Orleans. It would seem that if a primary objective for the Oblate Fathers was really ministering to Italian immigrants,⁵⁸ then this lack of a Sicilian priest for so long might be viewed as a failure. Second, it seems peculiar that Archbishop Shaw would select the Oblates of Mary Immaculate as the religious order to better serve the Italian parishioners, when it is clear that for many years the Superior General of the Oblate Fathers is unable to send over the requested Sicilian Father. Finally, Monseigneur Dontenwill's comment about the Sicilian's faithlessness, and the troubles with Father Gaudino suggest that, contrary to Archbishop Shaw's statements that the laity and clergy had received the Oblate Fathers with warmth, instead favoritism and clashing personalities plagued this religious transitional period in New Orleans.

Favoritism and Discontent

Archbishop Shaw's preference toward the Oblates over other local religious orders and secular priests continued as the Oblate Fathers gained more pastoral responsibilities over archdiocesan properties. This partiality especially can be seen in the case of the transfer of management of the French Mission field in Livingston Parish under the archbishop's control to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. On March 23, 1919, Archbishop Shaw wrote to Father Antoine in San Antonio explaining that the archbishop would allow the Oblate Fathers to serve in the large mission field in Livingston Parish.⁵⁹ Archbishop Shaw first emphasized how comfortable the living arrangements would be for the Oblate Fathers, in

⁵⁸ The Archiepiscopal Council Minutes Book, 1858-1921, November 5, 1918, ANOOAR Archiepiscopal Council Minutes, ANOOAR, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁵⁹ A missionary order is a Catholic religious order devoted to the active promotion of Catholicism.

contrast to the poor Texas missions. He next discussed the need for the priests to speak French, since many of the Catholics in Livingston Parish go to confession in their native language. How that would happen was not mentioned, showing Shaw's opinion that the Oblates could adapt to any situation, a belief that proved impractical. Archbishop Shaw also stressed the need to act quickly due to pressing Protestantism, stating a great many of the souls "have been sadly scandalized in the past."⁶⁰ This quote shows Shaw's belief that language should be respected and his fear of Protestantism, regardless of the actual threat of Protestant conversions. The April 30, 1919, meeting of the Provincial Council in San Antonio echoes the Archbishop's zeal, stating "...[Shaw] has earnestly requested, in fact, he has begged the Oblate Fathers, to take charge of a large mission-field which is only some sixty miles from New Orleans." The council ruled unanimously in favor of this decision due to the fact that the Cathedral Parish had "proven to be such a great blessing, both spiritually and financially," and out of repaid kindness for the "numerous favors" Archbishop Shaw had already bestowed on the Oblates.⁶¹

On May 3, 1919, Father Antoine wrote a positive response to Archbishop Shaw's efforts to establish OMI missionary work in Livingston Parish. Father Antoine mentioned that he had visited the Livingston Parish mission field, gained approval from Provincial Council of the Province of the Oblates of the Southwest, and had written to Rome to receive the final authorization.⁶² Although Archbishop Shaw mentioned the need for evangelization to the French in Livingston Parish, this mention was made in conjunction with the need to fight off Protestantism. This coupling suggests that as an institution, the Archdiocese of New Orleans was primarily concerned with geographically expanding the influence of Catholicism. Similarly, the

⁶⁰ Letter from John Shaw to Albert Antoine, March 23, 1919, Oblate Father Correspondence Print 1935, ANOOAR, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Letter from Albert Antoine to John Shaw, May 3, 1919, Oblate Father Correspondence Print 1935, ANOOAR, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Minutes of the Provincial Council gave no mention of the need to provide more appropriate ministry to the French-speaking peoples of Livingston Parish. Rather, the council described good opportunities to continue Oblate success in New Orleans. Shaw's repeated description of Oblate "success" ought to be problematized, however, since a closer examination of the correspondence reveals local discontent amongst parishioners and secular clergy as well as hierarchical contested authority- issues not often associated with success.

The majority of Archbishop Shaw's correspondence and documents found at the Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans acknowledge the archbishop's regional authority in the management of the Oblate Fathers in New Orleans. However, a February 8, 1919, letter from Archbishop Shaw to Monseigneur Dontenwill, seated in Rome, reveals that sometimes, Catholic hierarchical authority is merely nominal, and Archbishop Shaw's invitation to the Oblate Fathers to New Orleans may have been technically beyond his own breadth of power. Archbishop Shaw apologized to Monseigneur Dontenwill for failing to ask for "official approval" in his invitation to the Oblate Fathers to come manage the St. Louis Cathedral.⁶³ The archbishop promptly defended himself, however, stating that he did not find Monseigneur Dontenwill's approval necessary since Father Antoine and the Provincial Council were already in favor of the movement. Archbishop Shaw continued to describe the work the priests have done, stating "I need not assure Your Grace how pleased I was to have them come here and help me in a large and extensive field which was suffering because there were not workers sufficient to cultivate it."⁶⁴

The distinction of Archbishop Shaw's letter to Monseigneur Dontenwill lies less in what is written and more in what is left unwritten. First, Archbishop Shaw described only the

⁶³ Letter from John Shaw to Augustin Dontenwill, February 8, 1919, Oblate Fathers Correspondence Print 1935, ANOOR, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Cathedral Church and failed to list the filial Cathedral Parishes, St. Mary's Church and Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, or the French Missions that were all also under the direction of the Oblate Fathers. Second, Archbishop Shaw's explanation of the necessity of the Oblate Fathers' management was vague, and did not mention the crucial ministering to the French, Italian, and Spanish-speaking parishioners. This description is in contrast to the one found in the November 5, 1918, meeting of the Archiepiscopal Council, whereby Archbishop Shaw originally described the need for religious outsourcing of a multilingual order. Thus, Archbishop Shaw again changed the language and emphasis that he used in his discussion of the Oblate Fathers, according to his audience. It is possible that in this instance, Archbishop Shaw was writing with consciousness of the traditional view that the Catholic Church hierarchy, since the creation of the Diocese of New Orleans in 1793 until a twentieth century transitional period, was committed to equating Catholicism in New Orleans with French heritage. As the first American-born archbishop, Shaw may have also been writing with an acute sense of Rome's unease with Archbishop Shaw's catering to immigrant Sicilians.

Finally, Archbishop Shaw also mentioned that the Oblate Fathers had been "welcomed by our clergy and laity most cordially."⁶⁵ The archbishop stated that his only complaint was that the diocese did not have a few more of the Fathers ministering in New Orleans. Although Archbishop Shaw often wrote about the success and good reception of the Oblate Fathers, several letters written to Archbishop Shaw by the secular laity at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church and the St. Louis Cathedral show the tension and controversy that actually did exist.

A September 14, 1919, letter written from Father Antoine to Archbishop Shaw discussed the San Antonio Provincial Sisters of the Sacred Heart's impending plans to move to New

⁶⁵Ibid.

Orleans to provide what was termed “domestic” assistance to the St. Louis Cathedral.⁶⁶ The sisters’ arrival implied that the Oblate Fathers, who were specifically brought to New Orleans to “manage” the Cathedral Parishes, especially Father Labouré whose position was to manage the cathedral’s domestic affairs, were somehow lacking in this effort. The letter also described the arrival of the Mother Provincial and three sisters who hoped to establish a school at the French Missions settlement in Livingston Parish, and hoped to receive a welcome “warmer than the one given to the Fathers.”⁶⁷ Although subtle, this mention of discontent and the arrival of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart suggest Archbishop Shaw overstated the welcome that the Oblate Fathers actually received.

Contested authority amongst Shaw and Dontenwill and subtle suggestions of Oblate-induced displeasure, seen in the Sisters of the Sacred Heart correspondence, both reveal that Shaw’s description of Oblate “success” may contain underlying complexity. Letters of complaint over Oblate management written to Shaw from his secular priests further contest any simple description of “success.” In 1919, Italian-speaking Father Labouré finally moved from the St. Louis Cathedral to assist Oblate Father Gagliardini in ministry the Sicilians at St. Mary’s Church. Father Labouré would replace secular priests Father Scramuzza and Father Gaudino, placing Oblate Fathers in charge of St. Mary’s Church, and resulting in conflict between secular priests and Oblate Fathers. Looking at the correspondence surrounding this conflict helps display the unrestrained language used by secular priests in their complaints and where lay the loyalties of Archbishop Shaw.

On June 28, 1919, Father V. M. Scramuzza, secular priest at the Cathedral Parishes, wrote a twelve-page handwritten complaint against the Oblate Fathers to Archbishop Shaw. Father

⁶⁶ Letter from Albert Antoine to John Shaw, September 14, 1919, “Oblate Fathers Correspondence Print 1935,” ANOAR, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Scramuzza complained against the Oblates' financial bookkeeping, and claimed that he and Father Gaudino were owed a deficit of \$1,055. Father Scramuzza stated that this unacknowledged debt was incurred through the transition of St. Mary's Church to Oblate Fathers, especially Father Theo Labouré. He responded to Father Labouré's claims that Father Scramuzza was a poor bookkeeper, and confronted Archbishop Shaw on his role in the matter. Father Scramuzza stated, "It is evident that the whole statement and the ensuring understanding and approval of Your Grace is immoral, because built on an intellectual falsehood."⁶⁸ Father Scramuzza concluded his complaint with a suggestion to the Archbishop that directly addressed Archbishop Shaw's absence in the transition of the parish to the Oblate Fathers. He stated, "P.S. I humbly suggest that in the future Your Grace either personally or through a delegate supervise the transfer of a Parish. Had this been the case in our instance, all this would not have happened."⁶⁹ Father Scramuzza did not simply complain that his pastoral responsibilities were being taken away from him, but found Archbishop Shaw's lack of guidance to be the root of the secular clergy's difficulties. On June 12, 1919, Oblate Father Theo Labouré responded that Father Scramuzza must have "mixed up his own money with that of the church."⁷⁰ Father Labouré claimed that Father Scramuzza was the one at fault for his own debt, and told Archbishop Shaw that he would leave the matter in His Grace's hands.⁷¹ Archbishop Shaw responded to these complaints with clear favoritism toward Father Labouré and dismissal of Father Scramuzza's complaints.

Archbishop Shaw's personal affection for Father Labouré is also evident when

⁶⁸ Letter from V. M. Scramuzza to John Shaw, June 28, 1919, Oblate Fathers Correspondence Print 1935, ANOOAR New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Letter from Theo Labouré to John Shaw, June 12, 1919, Oblate Fathers Correspondence Print 1935, ANOOAR, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁷¹ Ibid.

contrasting these letters of complaint with the more jovial letters exchanged between the two clerical friends. For example, on January 14, 1927, Archbishop Shaw wrote a letter to Father Labouré, then stationed in San Antonio, asking if Labouré would accept a shipment of a crate of homemade syrup from a mutual friend, Miss Louise Lewis, to Father Labouré's religious residence. Archbishop Shaw briefly referenced the nature of the missionary work Father Labouré's Oblate Fathers were undertaking before shifting into more playful language. Shaw praised the ability of the delicious syrup to especially alleviate the "...religious engaged in the strenuous work of evangelizing the Mexicans."⁷² Archbishop Shaw's reference to immigrant missionary efforts gets only a passing mention, as Shaw continued to teasingly persuade Labouré that "...this luscious tidbit will sweeten-- if it were possible-- your already sweet disposition."⁷³ Shaw's letter is filled with jokingly flowery language about the deliciousness of the sugary treat and the inflated importance of his correspondence. Shaw concluded, "Sincerely hoping that you will not lose any sleep from the perusal of this official document."⁷⁴ Father Labouré responded with equally friendly language, assuring Shaw that he would be honored to accept the crate and would attend to the treat immediately upon its arrival.⁷⁵

The archbishop's experiences in San Antonio established a predisposition to the Oblate Fathers, prior to their arrival in New Orleans. Once stationed at the Cathedral Parishes, however, this favoritism developed into a documented pattern of support toward Father Labouré and other Oblate Fathers, and in opposition to the local secular clergy. For instance, in Shaw's establishment of a parish for the Spanish-speaking in the city, he again turned to the Oblates with

⁷² Letter from John W Shaw to Theo Labouré, January 14, 1927, "Provincial Correspondence, Diocese New Orleans, LA, Antoine 1909-38, Box 3" Oblate School of Theology Archives, San Antonio, Texas.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Letter from Theo Labouré to John W Shaw, January 18, 1927, "Provincial Correspondence, Diocese of New Orleans, LA, Antoine 1909-38, Box 3" Oblate School of Theology Archives, San Antonio, Texas.

optimism that the missionary priests could solve his immigrant “problem.” During the January 27, 1921. Archiepiscopal Council meeting, Archbishop Shaw announced his plans to establish Old St. Anthony’s Church, on North Rampart Street, as a “Chapel for the convenience or service of the Spaniards of the city, in order to counter-act the activities of the Protestants in regard to the Spaniards.”⁷⁶ Old St. Anthony’s Church, or the Old Mortuary Chapel, would be renamed Our Lady of Guadalupe, to better appeal to Spanish-speaking immigrants. Prior to the invitation for the Oblates of Mary Immaculate to come to New Orleans, Archbishop Shaw had mentioned serving the Spanish-speaking population, but the main focus of his early tenure had been the establishment of an Italian parish. The minute book of the Diocesan Council meeting shows that Archbishop Shaw provided his secular clergy council the same assurance of Archdiocesan control that he offered on the November 5, 1918, meeting. The minutes read:

It would be understood that no parish rights would be given to the Spaniards outside of the Cathedral Parish, that two masses would be said on Sundays, and the chapel would be in charge of the Oblate Fathers, who would put it in care of their own Spanish Priests, who would be brought to the city for that purpose.⁷⁷

Archbishop Shaw addressed his council in 1921 with the same tone and awareness of his audience that he had in his 1918 address. Unlike in his correspondence with the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, in which he described the freedom the Oblates would have in their ministry, here Archbishop Shaw emphasized the ultimate authority of the Archdiocese of New Orleans over parish rights. More research on the correspondence between Shaw and the secular and religious priests involved in ministry to Spanish-speaking immigrants could reveal the reception of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, similar to that of the Italian-speaking Oblate Fathers at St. Mary’s Church.

⁷⁶ The Archiepiscopal Council Minutes Book, 1858-1921, January 27, 1921, Archdiocese of New Orleans Archiepiscopal Council Minutes, ANOOAR, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

Regardless of the local reception of the Oblate Fathers at Our Lady of Guadalupe, Shaw's correspondence reveals that his reputation for successful ministry to immigrant parishes had spread beyond New Orleans. On March 13, 1922, John Joseph Cantwell, Bishop of Monterey and Los Angeles, wrote to Archbishop Shaw to discuss his diocese's "great difficulty with the Mexican situation."⁷⁸ Bishop Cantwell explained that Los Angeles was growing faster than any other city in the world, and asked Archbishop Shaw if he might be able to request to send over some New Orleans Oblate Fathers to minister to Los Angeles' Spanish-speaking communities. Although Archbishop Shaw was unable to send over Spanish-speaking Oblate Fathers, Bishop Cantwell's plea shows that word of the OMI ministry to Spanish immigrants had spread and had been perceived to be successful.

The Oblate ministry at Our Lady of Guadalupe would prove to be the most lasting endeavor, with OMI's still, in 2016, in control of the parish, now named the National Shrine of St. Jude. Although the focus on Spanish immigration is no longer dominant, the Oblates at Our Lady of Guadalupe continue the Oblate mission of contemporary spirituality to the poor through its new mission of service to the homeless. In 1976, St. Mary's Italian Church temporarily changed its name to Our Lady of Victory to emphasize the Ursulines' role in the Battle of New Orleans. Although the church is now again called St. Mary's Church, the focus on Sicilian Italians and the Oblate Fathers' presence at the parish ended in 1976. In 1993, the final Oblate pastor of St. Louis Cathedral moved back to Oblate headquarters, now in Washington D. C., and pastoral responsibility of the parish was returned to the archdiocese.

⁷⁸ Letter from John Joseph Cantwell to John Shaw, March 13, 1922, Oblate Fathers Correspondence Print 1935, Archdiocese of New Orleans Office of Archives and Records, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Conclusion

Archbishop Shaw's invitation to the religious order the Oblates of Mary Immaculate to minister to the Italian immigrants and manage the Cathedral Parishes was influenced by four factors: his experience in San Antonio, inherited financial pressures of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, the threat or perceived threat of encroaching Protestantism, and diocesan unrest amongst the secular clergy. Studying these four factors reveals that Archbishop Shaw's invitation to the Oblates reflected his idealistic pragmatism and preferentialism toward the San Antonio order, at the expense of his secular priests in New Orleans.

Shaw's decision to invite the missionary order was preceded by years of relationship with the Oblate Fathers while in San Antonio. Shaw's experience as Bishop of San Antonio and his friendship with the Oblates is evident through the familial language he used in letters to Oblate Fathers and in contrast to his letters to his secular priests. This personal preference developed into a pattern of institutional preferentialism toward the Oblate Fathers, once Shaw came to New Orleans. Shaw's arrival in New Orleans not only resulted in personal preferentialism toward pragmatic religious outsourcing to solve the local immigrant problem, but also brought institutional upheaval. His position as the first American-born Archbishop of New Orleans pivotally intersected with Europe's receding role in American Catholicism, and France's lessening influence on New Orleans Catholicism. This resulted in a volatile environment for the Oblate Fathers' arrival at the St. Louis Cathedral.

Archbishop Blenk's concerns with a "good price" in his establishment of an Italian church foreshadowed Archbishop Shaw's concern for the financial benefits of this new immigrant parish. Finances are placed at the forefront of Shaw's institutional decision-making when he appointed his good friend Father Labouré as Local Econome and dealt with Father

Scramuzza's letters of complaint against the Oblate Fathers' financial bookkeeping. Archbishop Shaw's concerns over finances emphasize his view that the archdiocese had to make pragmatic decisions and suggest the weight of power that the clergymen consciously associated with money, even amidst their religious environment.

This consciousness of hierarchical power levels extends beyond local financial concerns and can be seen in correspondence that discussed the extent of Oblate influence on the Cathedral Parishes and the French Mission fields. Although Shaw's writings to his local secular priests and to the Oblates offered conflicting narratives of which group would have greater authority, the emphasis on canonical responsibility precludes the diocesan discontent that would soon follow, upon the Oblates arrival in the parishes. The Oblates were especially at odds with the secular priests at St. Mary's Italian Church. The language used by the archbishop in letters to Oblate Father Labouré and secular Father Scamuzza especially highlight Shaw's preference for the Oblates over his own diocesan priests. Shaw also listed a concern for encroaching Protestantism as another reason that immigrant Catholics needed proper ministry, in their native language. This concern is especially seen in the invitation of Oblates to the French Mission fields. Shaw, like other New Orleans archbishops, felt that Protestant churches were more of a threat in rural Louisiana parishes than in New Orleans. Nonetheless, Shaw also listed the threat of Protestantism as a reason for bringing in the Oblates to establish an Italian church.

Archbishop Shaw chose the Oblates of Mary Immaculate to minister to the Italian immigrants due to a perceived threat of Protestantism, as a means of evading interdiocesan discontent, out of financial concern, and due to his prior relationship with the Oblate Fathers while in San Antonio. Examining Archbishop Shaw's correspondence with the unhappy secular clergy, his unmasked criticism of the "Italians- I mean the Sicilians," and the linguistic

shortcomings of the Oblate Fathers, considering only two were fluent in Italian, it becomes clear that Shaw's decision to invite the Oblates was made out of more than just pragmatism. Shaw acted under an idealistic pragmatism, continually optimistic about the Oblates' ability to solve local problems, and his preference toward the Oblates developed into institutional favoritism. The case Archbishop Shaw's invitation to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate proves that the Catholic Church in New Orleans did not operate as a static, two-dimensional institution, but rather had powerful, sometimes clashing personalities within its organization who lay behind the church's formal decision-making.

Appendix A

Archbishops of New Orleans and Country of Origin, 1850-1964

Antoine Blanc (1850-1860), France

Jean-Marie Odin (1861-1870), France

Napoléon-Joseph Perché (1870-1883), France

Francis Xavier Leray (1883-1887), France

Francis Janssesn (1888-1897), Netherlands

Placide-Louis Chapelle (1897-1905), France

James Hubert Blenk (1906-1917), Germany

John William Shaw (1918-1934), United States

Joseph Francis Rummel (1935-1964), Germany

Appendix B

Provincials of the Second American Province, 1904-1935 (Southern US Province)

Henri Ambrose Constantineau (1904-1913)

Marie-Pierre Albert Antoine (1913-1920)

Paul Emile Lecourtois (1920-1926)

Theodore Labouré (1926-1932)

Joseph Wayne Cozad (1932-1933)

Joseph Francois Xavier Lefebvre (1933-1935)

Appendix C

Oblate Fathers Assignments in New Orleans, 1918- 1922⁷⁹

Name	Place	Year	Position
Fr. E Lecourtois	St. Louis Cathedral	1918	Pastor
Fr. Gagliardoni	St. Mary's Church	1918	
Fr. Labouré	St. Louis Cathedral, St. Mary's Church	1918, 1919	Local Economé, then Assistant to Fr. Gagliardoni
Fr. Cartier	St. Louis Cathedral	1918	
Fr. Herman	St. Louis Cathedral	1918	
Fr. Sirois	Albany and French Settlement	1919	Director
Fr. Gagnon	Albany and French Settlement	1919	Assistant
Fr. Thomas	St. Louis Cathedral	1919	Local Economé
Fr. A. Taillon	St. Louis Cathedral	1919	Recently ordained
Rev. A. Antoine	St. Louis Cathedral	1920	Pastor
Fr. F.X. Gagnon	Our Lady of Guadalupe	1921	
Fr. J. Prieto	Our Lady of Guadalupe	1921	"to take charge"
Fr. Bornes	Our Lady of Guadalupe	1921	Replaces Fr. Prieto
Fr. Massaro	St. Mary's Church	1922	Replaces Fr. Gagliardoni
Fr. F.A. Lefebvre	St. Louis Cathedral		Pastor and Superior

⁷⁹ Data for this chart is drawn from Oblate *Codus Historicus* and Leumas *Mais I Sin in French*

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Vita

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Apart from studying history at the University of New Orleans, Nuttli enjoys cheering on the New Orleans Saints, reading in her hammock, breaking a sweat in spin class, and dining on Popeye's fried chicken.