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THE PERMISSION TO BURY SAINT JOHN NEUMANN  
IN ST. PETER'S, PHILADELPHIA

SUMMARIUM

Quando subito mortuus est Episcopus Neumann (N.), die 5 I 1860, Episcopus Wood (W.) ordinavit ut sepeliretur in ecclesia S. Ioannis, pro-cathedrali. Quia in vita N. saepe dixit se velle penes confratres suos sepeliri, Redemptoristae petierunt a W. permissionem sepeliendi eum in eorum ecclesia, S. Petri. W. respondit negative. Inde contentio inter W. et Redemptoristas. Vespere diei 8 I 1860 Archiepiscopus Kenrick (K.) advenit Philadelphiam Baltimora. Pater Provincialis, I. de Dycker CSSR, se contulit ad stationem viae ferratae ut K. exciperet. Ibi statim petiit permissionem sepeliendi N. in ecclesia S. Petri. K. illud benignissime concessit. Haec series factorum invenitur in N. biographiis. Valde improbabile videtur quod Provincialis, inconsulto Ordinario, adiret archiepiscopum. Similiter, quod K., inconsulto Ordinario, daret hanc permissionem, quae pertinet ad res dioecesananas. Documenta inventa sunt quae indicant quod W. ultimo paratus fuit — licet non libenter — sese conformare decisioni archiepiscopi. Ergo aliquo modo episcopus Philadelphiae ratam habuit sepulturam N. in ecclesia S. Petri anno 1860.

It is possible that we will never get the full story or reach rock-bottom truth regarding the permission to bury St. John Neumann, C.S.S.R., the Fourth Bishop of Philadelphia, in St. Peter's, the church conducted by the Redemptorists. This is not to question the honesty of anyone involved in the episode. Rather, it is a case where we have the final decision and are not told all the steps leading to it. This is like knowing the final answer to a problem in mathematics without knowing the stages leading to it. At present we have the story as that has found its way into the standard Neumann biographies. While doing Neumann research, the writer came across unused or little-used archival material. The purpose of these pages is to study the printed and manuscript material in the hope of shedding more light on this problem.

By way of introduction it will be helpful to furnish 1) a list and identification of the persons involved and 2) a summary of the story as already known. The three bishops involved are Francis Patrick Kenrick,

archbishop of Baltimore and Neumann's predecessor in Philadelphia<sup>1</sup>, Bishop Neumann<sup>2</sup>, and James Frederick Wood who succeeded Neumann and became Philadelphia's first archbishop in 1875<sup>3</sup>. The Redemptorist priests involved are John De Dycker, the Provincial<sup>4</sup>, Lawrence Holzer, the Rector of St. Peter's, an anonymous priest at St. Peter's who wrote to Neumann's nephew, John Berger, then a student for the priesthood at the Redemptorist seminary in Cumberland, Maryland, and the writer of the *Domestic Chronicles* at St. Peter's. The Redemptorist brother involved is Brother Christopher who was in charge of the office<sup>5</sup>.

Briefly, the story is this: When Neumann died so suddenly on January 5th, 1860, Wood made the arrangements for him to be buried at St. John's, the procathedral. Because Neumann was a Redemptorist and because he often said that he wanted to be buried with his confreres, the Redemptorists hoped to have him buried at their church. Holzer sent Giesen to see Wood on January 6th to ask about the burial at St. Peter's. Wood refused the request on the grounds that the burial place for the bishop was St. John's, the procathedral. In one account Wood is portrayed as saying that the decision was to be left to the archbishop. The funeral Mass and burial were to take place at St. John's on Monday, January 9th. When the archbishop arrived on Sunday evening, De Dycker went to meet him at the railroad station and requested to have Neumann buried at St. Peter's. Kenrick granted the request<sup>6</sup>.

Even in the earliest published material, Berger's biography of his uncle, we sense that there is more to this story than meets the eye. The English translation reads: « But when Archbishop Kenrick arrived, other arrangements were made ». This is a clever translation in the sense that a very neutral phrase is used to by-pass an issue. The feeling that there is much more here than meets the eye is even stronger when one reads Berger's German. Literally, the German says that « with the arrival of Archbishop Kenrick in Philadelphia, things took a different turn »<sup>7</sup>. Language like this is a perfect illustration of the English phrase « to

<sup>1</sup> Hugh Nolan, *The Most Reverend Francis Patrick Kenrick, Third Bishop of Philadelphia: 1830-1851*, Philadelphia 1948; John Marshall CSV, *Francis Patrick Kenrick, 1851-1863: The Baltimore Years*. This is a typed Ph.D. Dissertation, The Catholic University of America, Washington 1965.

<sup>2</sup> Michael J. Curley CSSR, *Venerable John Neumann CSSR, Fourth Bishop of Philadelphia*, Washington 1952; Andreas Sampers CSSR, *Bibliographia Neumanniana, 1860-1962*, in *Spic. hist.* 11 (1963) 261-272.

<sup>3</sup> Curley, *Neumann*, pp. 307-336.

<sup>4</sup> Michael J. Curley CSSR, *The Provincial Story. A History of the Baltimore Province of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer*, New York 1963, pp. 137-151.

<sup>5</sup> For Holzer, Giesen and Christopher, see Joseph Wuest CSSR, *Annales Congregationis SS. Redemptoris Provinciae Americanae*, 5 vols. in 9 pts., Ilchester, Md., and Boston, 1888-1924, Vol. IV/2, pp. 447, 448, 464.

<sup>6</sup> John Berger CSSR, *Leben und Wirken des hochseligen Johannes Nep. Neumann CSSR*, New York 1883, p. 395; *Life of Rt. Rev. John N. Neumann CSSR*, tr. by Eugene Grimm CSSR, New York 1884, p. 445; Wuest, *Annales*, vol. IV/1, p. 128; Curley, *Neumann*, p. 395.

<sup>7</sup> Berger, *Leben*, p. 395; *Life*, p. 445.

speak with tongue in cheek ». It gets a person out from under the obligation of saying a great deal more. At the same time it suggests that there is much more that could be said, but that the person prefers to keep silent about certain things. Furthermore, language like this is delicate in the sense that it spares the feelings of anyone involved in the episode and whose plans were changed. The archival material sheds more light on « the things that took a different turn with the arrival of the archbishop ».

With Neumann's death, James Frederick Wood, Neumann's coadjutor with the right of succession, automatically became bishop of Philadelphia. Neumann's unexpected death on January 5, 1860 left Wood with the gigantic task of arranging the funeral. In making these arrangements Wood did not first consult with Neumann's confreres; there was no obligation on his part to do so. The news was telegraphed to Archbishop Kenrick, to the bishops of the metropolitan province, to other bishops and to the Redemptorist Provincial in Baltimore<sup>8</sup>. Curiously, the official notification from Wood was late in reaching the Redemptorists in Philadelphia itself. They did not receive the news until late that night when they were gathered together in their chapel for night prayers. This we know from the letter of Brother Christopher and from the *Domestic Chronicles of St. Peter's*<sup>9</sup>.

Wood's notification occasioned the letter of Holzer to De Dycker, a letter written immediately after receiving the news because he expressly says that he wrote it at nine-thirty in the evening. Here he tells the Provincial about Neumann's death and about the funeral that is to take place « next Monday morning at nine o'clock in St. John's »<sup>10</sup>. Here we see Wood's arrangements. In a letter written at « the cathedral, Jan. 6, 1860 » Wood informs Archbishop John Baptist Purcell of Cincinnati about the death and then says: « We are preparing to lay him out in state and will have the Solemn Obsequies on Monday next »<sup>11</sup>. The newspapers carried this informa-

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<sup>8</sup> Alfred C. Rush CSSR, *The Death and Burial of St. John Neumann CSSR, Fourth Bishop of Philadelphia*; the preceding article.

<sup>9</sup> Redemptorist Archives of the Baltimore Province, housed in Brooklyn (RABB), Neumann Section(N), Leopoldine Transcripts, Brother Christopher [Froehlich] to Father [Coudenhove], Jan. 15, 1860, Philadelphia; *Domestic Chronicles of St. Peter's* (1860), p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> RABB, N, Data 1860, L. Holzer to Father Provincial [J. De Dycker], Jan. 5, 1860, nine-thirty P.M., Philadelphia.

<sup>11</sup> RABB, N, Data 1860, Wood to Purcell, Jan. 6, 1860, Philadelphia. This is a transcribed copy of the letter. The Wood letters are in the Archives of the University of Notre Dame. In RABB, N, there is a section, Wood Letters 1857-1860. These are copies of the letters covering Wood's years as Neumann's coadjutor.

tion with the added detail that the body would lie in state all day long after the funeral Mass in the morning and that it would be buried at nine o'clock in the evening in one of the vaults along the north side of the outside of the church<sup>12</sup>. Meanwhile, preparations were under way at St. John's for the Mass and burial; this included the decoration of the church and the readying of the vault<sup>13</sup>.

On January 6th, as we read in the Domestic Chronicles of St. Peter's, Holzer sent Giesen to the bishop to request that Neumann be buried there<sup>14</sup>. Two other contemporary documents confirm Giesen's errand to Wood. The first not only confirms the fact of the errand, but shows why Giesen was sent. In his letter of the previous evening to the Provincial, Holzer writes: « Father Giesen says that the deceased has very important writings and letters dealing with the Congregation which he once showed him. I will send him to the bishop tomorrow in the possibility of getting them »<sup>15</sup>. Giesen's presence with Wood is also seen in the letter written by the anonymous priest at St. Peter's to Berger and the Cumberland confreres the same day. Five priests were stationed at St. Peter's at that time: Lawrence Holzer, the Rector, Henry Giesen, Charles Kuenzer, Joseph Jacobs and Joachim Heymann<sup>16</sup>. The writer of the letter is a very thoughtful, considerate person. He says that he was so upset and sad the whole morning long that he did not know what to do and so he sat down and put a few lines together. Berger rightly describes these few lines as a detailed account. This letter is preserved in a transcribed copy in a letter that Berger wrote on January 8th to his aunt, Sister Caroline, Neumann's sister Joan who joined the Sisters of Mercy of St. Charles Borromeo in Prague<sup>17</sup>. Regarding Giesen's visit the letter states: « The Most Reverend Bishop Wood assured Father Giesen

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<sup>12</sup> See *The Morning Pennsylvanian* and also *The Press*, Jan. 7, 1860. The vault prepared for Neumann was used on Jan. 14th for the burial of Father James Ryder, a Jesuit who died at St. John's on the 12th. Formerly he had been Jesuit Provincial and President of Georgetown College and also of Holy Cross College, Worcester, Mass. See *The Press*, Jan. 13, 14, 1860; *Funeral Obsequies of Rt. Rev. John Nepomucene Neumann*, Philadelphia 1860, p. 39.

<sup>13</sup> Berger, *Leben*, p. 395. For the decorations, see *Funeral Obsequies*, pp. 13-14; *The Morning Pennsylvanian*, *The Press*, Jan. 10, 1860.

<sup>14</sup> RABB, Domestic Chronicles of St. Peter's (1860), p. 17.

<sup>15</sup> RABB, Holzer to De Dycker.

<sup>16</sup> Wuest, *Annales*, Vol. IV/1, p. 126.

<sup>17</sup> RABB, N, Berger Letters on Neumann's Death, Berger to Dear Aunt [Sr. Caroline], Jan. 8, 1860, Cumberland, Md. In the archives there are transliterated typed copies of these letters. A mark on this letter says it was written on Jan. 8-9. In the body of the letter we read that it was written on Sunday (Jan. 8).

that our holy bishop was prepared for death, that he always regarded him [Neumann] as a saint, that he never heard him complain about anything and showed himself in all eventualities calm and even-tempered<sup>18</sup>.

Originally Giesen's errand was to get Neumann's writings and letters<sup>19</sup>. Later he was told to ask about the permission to bury him at St. Peter's. Obviously, when the first shock occasioned by the news of the death subsided among his Redemptorist confreres, the topic of the burial must have been brought up. They must have talked about Neumann's desire to be buried with his confreres and about the possibility of burying him in their church. Certainly, that was Giesen's request to Wood on January 6th. The Domestic Chronicler of St. Peter's tells us that Wood refused to grant the request on the grounds that the proper burial place for the bishop was St. John's, the procathedral<sup>20</sup>. Brother Christopher's account contains another reason. He tells Father Coudenhove: « It is now a question of the body of the deceased. When he was living, the Most Reverend Bishop often said that he wanted to be buried with his confreres when he died. Since he is a member of the Congregation and since it was also his will to be [buried] with us, we have to a certain degree a claim on him. The Most Reverend Bishop Wood said that he would be guided completely by the decision of the Most Reverend Archbishop »<sup>21</sup>.

Taken in their literal meaning and at their face value, these two statements do not harmonize. They create a problem. They also — as will be seen later — form the basis for the answer to the problem. It is evident that the remark about leaving the matter up to the archbishop is not to be understood as the only answer Wood gave. This statement cannot be divorced from the arrangement of Wood to bury Neumann at St. John's. This is clear from two things, namely, a fact and a controversy. The fact is that Wood's decision had been that the obsequies and burial were to take place at St. John's. These arrangements had already been announced in the papers. Furthermore, all the later write-ups, including those in the morning papers of January 9th, keep telling the people about the morning Mass

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<sup>18</sup> RABB, N, Berger Letters, [Anonymous at St. Peter's] to Berger, Jan. 6, 1860, as contained in Berger's letter to Sr. Caroline (n. 17).

<sup>19</sup> Nothing further is heard about these writings and letters.

<sup>20</sup> RABB, Domestic Chronicles of St. Peter's (1860), p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> RABB, Christopher to Coudenhove.

and evening burial at St. John's. Even when it was known that the body would be brought to St. Peter's for a wake and Mass, some newspaper write-ups were still thinking in terms of the actual burial at St. John's.

To interpret Wood's two statements, one must also take into account the dispute about the body. Even in Christopher's letter, after the remark about Wood's being completely willing to abide by the decision of the archbishop, we read: « There was, accordingly, a dispute about the body of the deceased »<sup>22</sup>. The obvious question is: How can one speak about a dispute if the final answer to a request is not yet given? The fact is there was a dispute and it became public knowledge through the efforts of an alert reporter with an instinct for a story. The reporter for *The Evening Bulletin* writes:

There is some difference of opinion as to the proper disposition of the remains of the late bishop. The body is claimed by the Redemptorists, of which class Bishop Neumann was a member. It is uncertain whether they will succeed in enforcing their claims. Should they do so, the remains will be conveyed to St. Peter's church, corner of Fifth Street and Girard Avenue, and there laid in state awaiting burial<sup>23</sup>.

Once this story broke in the evening paper of the 9th, the morning papers of the 10th carried the story and also the decision to have the burial at St. Peter's.

The dispute over the body plays a large part in the account written by the reporter from *The Philadelphia Daily News*. Of all the reporters, he is the only one who manifests the bias associated with nineteenth-century American Nativism. The occasion for him to manifest this prejudice was the presence of the Pennsylvania Rifle Company. This was a group composed of German residents from the various parishes. They marched alongside the funeral cortege, formed lines at the door of the church to keep the crowds back and allow the procession to enter in orderly peace; after that they took their stand in the middle aisle of the church all during the long services<sup>24</sup>. Without making any open and explicit charges, the reporter makes dark hints about why the Catholic Church in Philadelphia has paid « some attention to the formation of military companies ». With regard to the dispute over the body, these things must be kept in

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> *The Evening Bulletin*, Jan. 9, 1860.

<sup>24</sup> *The Public Ledger*, Jan. 10, 1860.

mind: 1) he did not know of Neumann's desire to be buried with his confreres; 2) he did not understand the desire of the Redemptorists to have their confrere buried with them; 3) he portrays the request to the bishop for the body as a dispute between warring antagonists. Against this background he speaks of the contention of the Redemptorist Fathers and the party having the body (Wood). The contending parties — to quote Scripture (Jude: 9) — are like Michael the archangel and the devil disputing about the body of Moses. In his bias he associates the dispute about the body with the Rifle Company and says: « Whether it was expected that an outbreak would occur, of course, is not known publicly, but such may be inferred from the presence of the soldiers »<sup>25</sup>. This is a good illustration of the exaggeration and distortion that can spring from prejudice and from not knowing all the facts of a case. At the same time it is in its own way a witness to the fact that, despite the statement that Wood would abide by the decision of the archbishop, there was a dispute going on about the place of burial.

In the Domestic Chronicles of St. Peter's we learn that De Dycker went to the railroad station on Sunday evening, January 8th, to greet the archbishop and to ask his permission to bury Neumann in St. Peter's<sup>26</sup>. We also learn that « His Grace granted this » and that « the order was given for the body to be brought to our church to be buried here »<sup>27</sup>. Christopher says that « the Most Reverend Archbishop decided in our favor »<sup>28</sup>. In Berger's biography, the reputed answer of the archbishop is given in quotation marks. This undoubtedly represents the answer that had been handed down by word of mouth among the Redemptorists for slightly more than twenty years. To understand the reported answer, it must be recalled that Neumann had to give up the Redemptorist community life when he became a bishop, this being one of the principal reasons inducing him to join the Congregation. This background makes intelligible the answer that Kenrick is reported to have given De Dycker: « I gladly agree to have Bishop Neumann find a resting place, in death, in the place where he truly desired it in life but did not find it »<sup>29</sup>.

Here we are faced with these facts: 1) De Dycker went to

<sup>25</sup> *The Philadelphia Daily News*, Jan. 10, 1860.

<sup>26</sup> RABB, Domestic Chronicles of St. Peter's (1860), p. 18.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> RABB, Christopher to Coudenhove.

<sup>29</sup> Berger, *Leben*, p. 395; *Life*, p. 445; Curley, *Neumann*, p. 395.

meet Kenrick; 2) he requested permission to bury Neumann at St. Peter's; 3) Kenrick granted the request. The facts call for some intelligibility and plausible explanation. It hardly seems possible that these things took place out of the blue. It does not seem credible that De Dycker simply went over Wood's head or that Kenrick on his own settled a diocesan matter, completely ignoring the bishop of the diocese. In other words, Wood must have been involved in some way. It is here that we get help from Christopher's account when he tells us that Wood expressed a willingness to abide by the decision of the archbishop<sup>30</sup>. It is an arrangement like this that gives meaning to a phrase in the letter of the anonymous priest at St. Peter's to Berger. After giving the information about the Mass and burial at St. John's, he goes on to say: « It could be that we perhaps will get his body for our vault »<sup>31</sup>. In other words, despite Wood's decision to have the burial at St. John's, there was still the possibility and the hope of having it at St. Peter's.

It is now possible, with the help of facts and conjectures, to reconstruct the story of the permission to bury Neumann in St. Peter's.

1) When Bishop Neumann died, Bishop Wood did not first consult Neumann's Redemptorist confreres in Philadelphia. There was no obligation for him to do so.

2) Wood made the normal decision to have Neumann buried at St. John's, the Philadelphia procathedral.

3) Because Neumann was a Redemptorist and because he often said that he wanted to be buried with his confreres, the Redemptorists were anxious to bury him in their church.

4) On January 6th, the day after Neumann's death, Father Lawrence Holzer, the Rector at St. Peter's, sent Father Henry Giesen to Bishop Wood to get his permission to bury Neumann at St. Peter's.

5) Wood refused to grant the permission. His reason was that the proper burial place for the bishop was St. John's, the procathedral of the diocese.

6) At this stage the Redemptorists must have continued to press their claims for St. Peter's. Just as strongly Wood insisted on his plan for St. John's. This is the origin of the controversy between them.

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<sup>30</sup> RABB, Christopher to Coudenhove.

<sup>31</sup> RABB, N, [Anonymous] to Berger.



7) In the meantime, while Wood's arrangements for the burial at St. John's were being carried out, an arrangement must have been reached of submitting the problem to the archbishop when he arrived and of abiding by the decision.

8) The archbishop decided for St. Peter's. His word was the deciding factor and it brought about an end to the ongoing dispute. As Holzer tells Father Nicholas Mauron, the Redemptorist Superior General in Rome: « After a long opposition, through the final word coming from the Most Reverend Archbishop Kenrick of Baltimore, we obtained the grace of being allowed to bury him in our church »<sup>32</sup>.

9) Even though the parties had to await Kenrick's decision, Wood had to be involved in it and make it his own. *The Public Ledger* announced that the bishop of the diocese decided that the body would be buried with the Redemptorists<sup>33</sup>. Berger also speaks of Wood's involvement in the burial of Neumann at St. Peter's<sup>34</sup>.

10) When Neumann died in 1860, only the exterior of the cathedral was completed; the dedication did not take place until 1864<sup>35</sup>. The burial of Neumann in St. Peter's in 1860 in some way had the backing of Bishop Wood, even if it was not an enthusiastic approval<sup>36</sup>. In a letter to his grandfather, mother and aunt Louise (Neumann's father and sisters) Berger consoles them with the fact that he is buried in St. Peter's with his confreres. He also speaks of the joy of looking forward to the day when he can visit the grave<sup>37</sup>.

Visiting the grave at St. Peter's was a regular practice since the day of burial, January 10th. From the day of burial the tomb was filled with votive offerings, left there by the people who came to seek his intercession with the Lord. As early as February 1st, Holzer tells Mauron: « Our church has truly become a pilgrimage church »<sup>38</sup>. The Neumann tomb at St. Peter's has remained so for over a century. People visit it from all over the United States. The mail received there comes from all over the world. His desire was to be buried with his own; his own have given him their best care.

<sup>32</sup> RABB, N, Data 1860, Holzer to Mauron, Feb. 1, 1860, Philadelphia. Copy.

<sup>33</sup> *The Public Ledger*, Jan. 10, 1860.

<sup>34</sup> RABB, N, Berger Letters, Berger to his grandfather, mother and aunt Louise, Jan. 12, 1860, Cumberland, Md.

<sup>35</sup> Curley, *Neumann*, pp. 392-393; *Historical Sketches of the Catholic Churches and Institutions of Philadelphia*, Philadelphia 1895, p. 28.

<sup>36</sup> See above, nn. 21, 33, 34.

<sup>37</sup> See above, n. 34.

<sup>38</sup> RABB, Holzer to Mauron .