

CARL HOEGERL, CSSR

HISTORY OF THE CAUSE FOR CANONIZATION OF
BLESSED FRANCIS XAVIER SEELOS, CSSR

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I. PREHISTORY OF THE CAUSE

1. - *The Efforts of Brother Louis Kenning, CSSR*

When Brother Louis Kenning, CSSR, who as infirmarian of the community of Saint Mary in New Orleans had cared for Father Seelos in his fatal illness, began to give an account of the four Redemptorists who died in the yellow fever epidemic of 1867, he introduced it with these words:

No one will take it amiss if I begin with the death of the deceased Father Francis Xavier Seelos, because everyone of us, and actually everyone who has ever known him, considers him a saint and rightly so, for he is one.¹

At the end of his lengthy and detailed account of the last days, death, and funeral of Father Seelos, he made this statement:

I would not have written everything with so much detail and so extensively, but I am firmly convinced that at some time he will be honored by the whole world as a saint.²

Although those who knew Father Seelos considered him a most holy man and called him a saint, still it was Brother Louis Kenning who, looking to the future, was one of those who from the first considered it important that a full description be given of the last days of this holy man. In a true sense, the long process of the Cause for Canonization of Father Seelos can be said to have its starting point in the words and the practical activity of Brother Louis Kenning.

In his observations the Brother was merely reflecting what the people of the three Redemptorist parishes in New Orleans, Saint Alphonsus, Saint Mary, and Notre Dame de Bon Secours, thought of Father Seelos. Some ten days after the burial, on October 15, Father Benedict Neithart, a member of the community, wrote a lengthy letter to the confreres in Annapolis, giving a

¹ Brother Louis Kenning, CSSR, (1807-1875), professed in 1843, was one of the first brothers to join the Redemptorists in the United States. During his novitiate at Saint James, Baltimore, he spent several months with Father Seelos, who was at the time making his own novitiate. For almost a year he was with Father Seelos at Saint Philomena's Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and he was at Saint Mary's, New Orleans, during the year that Father Seelos was stationed there. He kept a journal or diary in German in which he wrote about the events of the community, personages, and items of interest to himself. When he died in 1875 (April 6, in New Orleans), he had completed three volumes of his *Chronik* and one volume of *Memorandum*. The death account of Father Seelos is found in *Chronik* II, 236-248; an English translation is found in the *Positio super Vita, Virtutibus et Fama Sanctitatis* (Rome, 1998) (hereafter cited simply as *Positio*), II/ 2: 1271-1294. The quoted text is found on p. 1272. The originals of the journals are preserved in the archives of the Denver Province. The three other Redemptorists who succumbed in the epidemic were: Brother Peter (Lawrence) Fischewenger (September 27), Brother Gerard Fleddermann (September 28), and Father Charles Stiessberger (October 6).

² *Positio*, II/2: 1284.

full account of the tragedy that had visited them during the yellow fever epidemic of that year. In describing the funeral of Father Seelos on Saturday, October 5, he wrote:

After the *Libera* the whole immense Congregation pushed towards the corpse in hopes of obtaining a last glance at their beloved father, before the coffin was closed. Whilst the officers of the societies preserved order, all of us, fathers and brothers and Mass boys, were engaged for about half an hour in touching hundreds of rosaries, books and so forth to the body.

As the remains of Father Seelos were lowered into the vault "before the altar of Saint Alphonsus at the side of the large mission crucifix," the people could no longer contain themselves. Father Neithart observed: "The lamentations of the good people, which had commenced at the beginning of the *Requiem* Mass and had increased during the sermon, now reached their climax."

The continued reaction of the parishioners to the death of Father Seelos and their esteem for the holiness of his life did not escape the observant eye of Father Neithart. About this, too, he informed the confreres in Annapolis, most of whom had known Father Seelos in life.

Their love and devotion has not yet abated. One solemn *Requiem* Mass after the other is sung at the request of the devoted people. The holy Communion is almost countless. The most rare bouquets are laid upon the tomb, bundles of wax candles placed on the side, two lamps and a number of candles constantly burning below the crucifix; and from morning till night no one leaves the church without kneeling at least a quarter of an hour at the tomb of dear Father Seelos.³

That his life and death were beyond that of an ordinary good and faithful priest and religious can be gathered from remarks that Father Joseph Helmprecht, provincial superior of the American Redemptorists, made in his letter to the sister of Father Seelos in Germany, Sister Romualda. On October 17, just a few weeks after the final moments of Father Seelos, while informing her of his death, the Provincial solaced her with words of high praise for the holiness of life of her brother. "It will be a consolation for you, as for me, that the good Father died the death of a saint. Already during

³ The letter in its original form has not survived. However, it was printed in the form of a small brochure for wider dissemination with the title, *Short Account of the Edifying Life and Precious Death of Our Dear Confreres Who Died at New Orleans during the Epidemic of 1867: Taken from a Letter Written by a Father of New Orleans* (Annapolis: Typis CSSR, n.d.). Several copies are found in the Redemptorist Archives of the Baltimore Province (hereafter cited as RABP), Francis Xavier Seelos, Data 1867, Neithart Accounts. The whole letter is found in *Positio*, II/2, 1284-1294, with the cited text on pp. 1293-1294. Benedict Neithart: born March 21, 1840, in Flieten, Hessen; professed April 3, 1857; ordained March 12, 1864; died March 9, 1915, Saint Michael, Chicago.

his lifetime he was considered one, and now that he is gone, even so much more so." Further in the letter he observed:

The people loved and revered him as a holy priest and now after his death they want relics of him, decorate his grave with candles and flowers, and even are talking about miracles that have occurred.

The amount of work he did was astonishing; he suffered, during his ten-day sickness, terribly; his patience was wonderful

For us his confreres, he serves as a model especially in regard to four things: through his love of poverty, and of mortification; through his love of neighbor, and his zeal for souls.

In concluding his letter, Father Helmprecht wrote these telling words: "I am still praying for him but, because he was so good, cannot believe that he is still in Purgatory."⁴

A week later, on October 22, in a more formal way, Helmprecht informed Father Nicholas Mauron, Redemptorist superior general in Rome, of the four tragic victims of the epidemic. Among the deceased, he called Father Seelos "the best and the most observant." He told the General that he had sent him to New Orleans "with the idea that he might keep alive and promote the spirit of the Institute in the community of that house," which was most unique; and that "he fulfilled my expectations, but for too short a time." He then added this significant paragraph:

He died an edifying death; his death struggle lasted three days and three nights during which he was always cheerful and contented and prayed much for us; he prayed especially for a stronger faith for us. I have been written that the people - Germans, English-speaking, and French - are revering him as a saint.⁵

Two years later, Brother Louis took more direct and practical steps toward the Cause of his beloved friend. On the second anniversary of the death of Father Seelos, October 4, 1869, Brother Louis wrote to Father Nicholas Mauron, asking him to urge the American provincial to begin preserving material about Father Seelos. As a preamble to his suggestion to the General, he notes that although saints are rare in modern times and their actions "subject to so many proofs and processes until canonization is reached, still from time to time there are some who successfully undergo every test and carry off the victory." He then develops his point more sharply:

Among these I consider the departed Father Francis Xavier Seelos. Right away, before I go any further, I would like to declare him blessed, be-

⁴ The entire letter is found in *Positio*, II/2: 1308-1309, with the above citation on p. 1309. Joseph Helmprecht: born January 14, 1826, Niederwinkling, Bavaria; to the United States June, 1843; professed December 6, 1844; ordained December 21, 1845; provincial 1865-1877; died December 15, Most Holy Redeemer, New York.

⁵ Excerpts of the letter are found in *Positio*, II/2: 1309-1310.

cause from the depths of my heart I state: If he is not a saint then all of us here in America have to give up all hope of every becoming holy, indeed, he was already a saint when he was a novice.

For this reason I would like to encourage Your Paternity to take care that some things be written up and preserved through our Reverend Father Provincial; and this, as much as possible by those who knew Father Seelos more closely. One can still obtain much without much effort now which after a few years one cannot obtain with the greatest effort.

He then informed the General that he himself had begun to write up his recollections of Father Seelos; in fact, had already filled eight or ten pages. To encourage the General to follow up on his suggestion of requesting the Provincial to see that someone began to collect data on Father Seelos, he sent the General some mementos of him, along with an account of two unusual cures attributed to his prayers.⁶

2. - Other Efforts to Collect Material on the Life and Holiness of Father Seelos

It is not known whether the words of Brother Kenning to Father Mauron had any effect; there is no documentary evidence that would suggest that Father Helmprecht officially appointed someone to collect and preserve material from and about Father Seelos. We do know, though, that a few years later, Father Bernard Beck, while stationed in Pittsburgh (1871-1877), began gathering letters of Father Seelos and transcribing them into five large copybooks. He entitled his collection, "*Gesammelte Schriften und Briefe von R. R. Seelos für sein Leben*," ("Collected Writings and Letters of Reverend Father Seelos for His Life"). His purpose, obviously, was to gather material that would serve as a basis for a biography. In his introduction to the collection, Beck gives us the reason for this collection. He notes that three years previously, that is, while he was stationed at Saint Mary's, Detroit, Michigan, the idea occurred to him that it would be "beautiful and helpful" if material were gathered for a life of Father Seelos. His life, being "merely a chain of virtues," would be most welcome to those who had known him personally and would be helpful to others. He saw it as a duty "of gratitude and filial love to do everything in order to snatch from oblivion the so exalted examples of virtue and teaching of our esteemed and blessed Father." He hoped that others who were closer to Father Seelos would undertake to write his life. His lament was:

Still, when after a long silence and waiting, as it seemed to me, one left the work to the other, and each alleged a lack of time, I then presented my

⁶ Pertinent parts of the letter are founds in *Positio*, II/2: 1310-1313, with the above citations on p. 1311.

complaint about the over long delay to the proper authorities. I received the advice, but not the command, that I should collect and write down what I knew and was capable of. "Others, then, at the proper time, will do their part".

The inspiration for this project came from the people themselves. While stationed at Saint Mary's, Detroit, where Father Seelos had ministered in 1866, Father Beck translated into German for the people Father Neithart's English *Short Account*. He was pleasantly surprised at the reaction of the people who had known Father Seelos for less than a year: "I was not a little astounded how the zealous devotees of Father Seelos wanted to see published not only an account of his death but of his whole life."⁷

Beginning, therefore in the early 1870s in Pittsburgh and continuing later in other places, Father Beck managed to collect fifty of the letters of Father Seelos and transcribe them into his copy books. Unfortunately, in many cases, he did not preserve the originals, or if he himself did, they were lost in subsequent years. The material, mostly letters, but also some other anecdotal material about Seelos, takes up 250 of the large-sized pages (28 cm by 21 cm).

Using the data of Father Neithart's *Short Account*, supplemented with the material that he had gathered, Beck put together what merits the distinction of being the first continuous biography of Father Seelos, even though it is quite brief. He presented this material to the parishioners of Saint Philomena, Pittsburgh, in the form of a lecture in German. Many of the people still remembered the nine years that Seelos had been stationed there, 1845-1854. The printed cover of a handwritten, fair copy of this lecture reads: *Leben und Tugenden des Hochw. F. X. Seelos, CSSR. Vorlesung gehalten von Rev. B. Beck, CSSR, St. Philomena Kirche, Pittsburg, Pa., am Montag, den 27 Dezember, 1875*. To promote interest in the life and holiness of Father Seelos, Beck sent a copy of his lecture to Father Nicholas Mauron in Rome.⁸ It is not known what effect this had upon the authorities in Rome; but there was significant activity in the United States.

Either through the suggestion of Father Beck, or encouraged by his example, or independently of him, others who had known Father Seelos and were convinced of the extraordinary holiness of his life began to gather material and commit to writing what they knew or heard. Among these, two individuals stand out for their contribution. Father Joseph Wuest in a letter to a confrere, Father Maximus Leimgruber, wrote on October 29, 1876:

⁷ BECK, Transcripts and Notes, I, 1-2, as Beck's collection is cited hereafter. Bernard Beck: born October 17, 1835, Minderlachen, Bavaria; professed March 25, 1859; ordained March 21, 1863; died December 22, 1891, Saint Peter, Philadelphia.

⁸ Archivium Generale Historicum Redemptoristarum, Provincia Americana (hereafter AGHR, PAM), V, Defuncti 1848-1875, Seelos File.

Right now I am putting together a sketch in German of the life of our good Father Seelos, which I plan to publish - insofar as the critics allow this. Possibly I may also see to an English translation.

For the purposes of the sketch, Wuest asked Leimgruber to help him by contributing some data: "In part you can recall some beautiful incidents from his life; and in part, there are some in your family who can still remember edifying details." He asked for anything that "can contribute to embellishing the portrait of his life." In closing his request, he manifests a sense of hurry: "I urgently ask you for an answer as quickly as possible." There is no hint as to why there should be a question of urgency in obtain this material.⁹

The other father who stands out for his contribution is Father Joseph Wissel, who, as we shall see further on in this article, became the vice-postulator of the Cause for Canonization of Father Seelos. The exact date is not securely ascertained but sometime in the later 1870s and early 1880s, he began writing short paragraphs about Father Seelos, whose friend and mission companion he had been. Many of these found their way verbatim into the biography that was eventually written.¹⁰

3. - The First Published Biography

Finally, in 1883, Father Elias Schauer, the provincial superior (1877-1890), commissioned Father John Berger, who had recently published the life of his uncle, Bishop John Neumann, to write a biography destined for publication. On March 28, 1883, Schauer wrote Berger that his biography of Bishop Neumann was being very favorably reviewed and that one reviewer made the "suggestion that the life of departed Father Seelos be published." He then comes to the purpose of his letter.

On my part, I have been thinking for a long time now that no life would stand more fittingly beside that of Bishop Neumann than that of Father Seelos. But the difficulty always was, Who should do it? Now, since the life of your uncle finds such universal acceptance from all sides; and you have already worked yourself into biographical writing, the thought sponta-

⁹ RABP, Francis Seelos, Berger/Beck Correspondence, 12 B: Joseph Wuest, CSSR, to Maximus Leimgruber, CSSR, October 29, 1876. This is a collection of material of various kinds - letters, account, comments - that pertain to Father Seelos. Joseph Wuest: born February 22, 1834, Coblenz, Germany; to the United States August 21, 1854; professed December 8, 1854; ordained September 26, 1859; died November 13, 1924, Saint Mary, Ilchester. Maximus Leimgruber: born April 9, 1820, Ochsenhausen, Württemberg; professed November 16, 1840; ordained August 24, 1844; to the United States March 10, 1847; died April 18, 1892, Saint Michael, Chicago.

¹⁰ There are 42 fragments, but no doubt there were more that have not been found. They are preserved in RABP, Francis Seelos, Wissel Fragments.

neously hits one in the face that no one is more capable for this than you.

Not to leave him too frightened by the work ahead, Schauer assured him that "Father Wuest has already written very much of it, and besides there is still very much unused material on hand." He asked Berger if he wanted "all the material for this edifying and saintly life of Father Seelos, our dear and treasured prefect" to be sent to him from Baltimore to Saint Joseph, Rochester, New York, where he was then stationed. He then added some words that were bound to spur Berger to undertake the project gracefully and happily: "So, I have placed my full confidence in you. You will not let me be disappointed."¹¹

Father Berger immediately began the biography. This can be gathered from the fact that Father Bernard Beck got wind of the project as early as April 3, because on that day he wrote to Berger: "If you are going to write the life of Fr. Seelos, I will share with you all the important things that I know and have not yet written down."¹² In order to obtain as much first-hand material as possible, Berger wrote to those confreres who had known Father Seelos, asking them to send him their recollections and accounts of what they knew, had heard, or had seen. Benedict Neithart answered him from St. Louis, Missouri, already on April 12: "Just received your kind postal of 8th instant. [...] I am sorry to state that, during the next two months, I will have no leisure to pen any Recollections about dear Fr. Seelos."¹³

With the material that the Provincial, as promised, had sent him and the accounts and recollections that he was receiving from those whom he had requested to write him, Berger set to work vigorously, working against time, we can surmise, because of his failing health. He could report to the Provincial at the early date of May 20: "So far, I have completed the first five chapters [...]" He also gave an outline of the biography as he was planning it.

I have read through all the collected material and came to the conclusion that Father Seelos should be described: 1. Great in the strength of his own soul: 2. Effective in saving and sanctifying the souls of many.

He then set down the headings of the sixteen chapters of the book as he foresaw its development, noting that the "last seven chapters would have to be divided into two or three chapters because of the abundance of mate-

¹¹ Berger/Beck Correspondence, 13: Elias Schauer, CSSR, to John Berger, CSSR, March 28, 1883. Elias Schauer: born October 13, 1832, Millhausen, Bavaria; professed December 8, 1856; ordained March 21, 1863; provincial 1877-1890; died April 15, 1920, Most Holy Redeemer, New York City. John Berger: born May 12, 1839, Prachatiz, Bohemia; professed October 15, 1859; ordained April 1, 1865; died January 13, 1884, Saint Alphonsus, Baltimore.

¹² Berger/Beck Correspondence, 17: Bernard Beck, CSSR, to John Berger, CSSR, April 3, 1883.

¹³ Berger/Beck Correspondence, 18: Benedict Neithart, CSSR, to John Berger, CSSR, April 12, 1883.

rial. He envisioned the entire book would “cover approximately 300 pages.”¹⁴ Two months later, on July 16, he informed the Provincial that if nothing developed to interfere, he would “be finished with the arrangement in four weeks.” At the same time, anticipating difficulty in attracting a publisher for a German edition, due to an insufficient market, he suggested that “it would be better that the biography of Father Seelos is immediately translated into English and consigned to a printer.”¹⁵

Despite serious problems with his health, Berger continued his work on the book. Toward the end of the year, he went to Saint Alphonsus, Baltimore, “to gather some things for the biography of Father Seelos and to recuperate for a time, if possible,” as the house chronicler put it.¹⁶ These hopes were destined not to be fulfilled, for Father Berger died in Baltimore on January 13, 1884. Again the house chronicler has this comment to make on the future of the life of Father Seelos.

Has he now died too soon to complete his work, still he gathered together so much material, arranged everything so well, worked so flawlessly on the early chapters of the life of Father Seelos that it will not present such great difficulty for someone who takes up the work to complete it.¹⁷

The biography was then entrusted to Father Peter Zimmer, novice master at Saint Mary’s, Annapolis, who had known Father Seelos in life. He set to work immediately and was thought to have completed it by October. Father Beck in a letter to Zimmer said that at the beginning of October, 1884, he had written to Antonia, the sister of Father Seelos, and “told her that, as far as I knew, you had written and completed the biography.” But he could not give her an exact date because he did not know “how long it will take the censors to emend the text before publication.”¹⁸ Beck’s remark that the biography was completed was quite premature. The following year he was still making suggestion to Zimmer about material that should be included, especially some of the poems that Father Seelos wrote “if and where they fit into the biography.” Those that did not fit “should be added to the life as an appendix or supplement.” To make sure this was not neglected, he added

¹⁴ Berger/Beck Correspondence, 22 B: John Berger, CSSR, to Elias Schauer, CSSR, May 20, 1883.

¹⁵ Berger/Beck Correspondence, 27 B: John Berger, CSSR, to Elias Schauer, CSSR, July 16, 1883. An English translation was made but was never published.

¹⁶ Domestic Chronicles, Saint Alphonsus, Baltimore, December 18, 1883: I: 304.

¹⁷ Domestic Chronicles, Saint Alphonsus, Baltimore, January 13, 1884: I: 309.

¹⁸ Berger/Beck Correspondence, 39: Bernard Beck, CSSR, to Peter Zimmer, CSSR, December 15, 1884. Peter Zimmer: born June 20, 1830, Echternach, Luxemburg; to the United States August 21, 1854; professed December 8, 1854; ordained June 6, 1857; died October 26, 1901, Annapolis.

this admonition: "*Sic dixit et ordinavit R. P. Provincial.*"¹⁹ But another year was to elapse before the biography was completed and ready for publication. "The biography of your departed brother, Xavier Seelos, is in the hands of the printer, Benziger Brothers," Father Beck informed Antonia Seelos, May 3, 1886, adding that the work would be done in Maria Einsiedeln, Switzerland.²⁰

Finally, the biography saw its publication in 1887 with the title: *Leben und Wirken des Hochwürdigen P. Franz Xaver Seelos, aus der Congregation des allerheil. Erlösers*. The rather small format, measuring 17.5 cm by 11.5 cm, consists of 376 pages, of which the last 57 (from p. 319) are an appendix of poems. In the Introduction to this life, written by Zimmer, we read:

What does it matter if it is still being said that the saints do not have a place in the modern, sophisticated world! The life of Father Seelos convinces us that precisely at such times does the grace of God find its most effective tools, which, even if only in small numbers, are able to change the world.

Let us, therefore, thank the kindly and fatherly Providence of God for the gift to our times of this zealous religious priest. May he be to young and old, men and women, religious and clergy a trustworthy light that leads to eternal life.²¹

An article in a prominent German Catholic newspaper of the times, recalling the death of Father Zimmer in 1901 and enumerating some of his achievements, singles out the biography of Father Seelos as a small memorial that he left behind to the Christian world. Further, that it was "the principle reason and cause that the mandate came from Rome to initiate the preparatory work for the beatification and canonization of the Servant of God, F.X. Seelos, that is, the diocesan investigation of his life and virtues."²²

II. FOUR PROCESSUS INFORMATIVI

Introduction

On September 8, 1898, Father Claudio Benedetti (1841-1926), the Redemptorist postulator general in Rome, appointed Joseph Wissel, CSSR, of the Baltimore Province, as the vice-postulator for the Cause of Father Fran-

¹⁹ Berger/Beck Correspondence, 40: Bernard Beck, CSSR, to Peter Zimmer, CSSR, March 23, 1885.

²⁰ Berger/Beck Correspondence 43, Bernard Beck, CSSR to Antonia Seelos, May 3, 1886.

²¹ ZIMMER, *Leben*, 8.

²² *Katholische Volks-Zeitung*, Baltimore, October 31, 1901.

cis Seelos in the United States.²³ In his letter of appointment, after a short introduction about the reputation for holiness of Father Seelos, he wrote:

Since, however, this reputation for holiness has been growing greater day by day and, as it is being said, has been confirmed by God through many extraordinary signs, our more prudent fathers have come to the conclusion that, if his Cause for beatification and canonization is inaugurated, there is very great hope of success.

Benedetti then continued that, not wanting to be remiss in his duties, he decided to seek, from the proper ecclesiastical authorities, the inauguration of the Ordinary Processes. The first Process would be to ascertain the veracity of the reputation for holiness, the virtues, and miracles accredited to Seelos; the second Process would be to verify that no forbidden religious cult had been shown to Father Seelos. Since he himself could not be present in New Orleans and elsewhere, Benedetti appointed, as his vice-postulator, Joseph Wissel, "in whose doctrine, prudence, virtue, and skill and ability in handling affairs, I have, in the Lord, great trust." He assured Wissel that he shared in all the faculties that were inherent in this office, even to the point of appointing assistants in his work. He ended with a prayer: "May God be with you, his Virgin Mother interceding, that your work may come to a happy conclusion for the greater glory of God, for the exaltation of Holy Mother Church, and for the honor and growth of our Congregation." On September 12, Father Matthias Raus, superior general, added his blessing and encouraged him "to fulfill the office given to you ... with that sagacity and diligence with which you are gifted."²⁴

Father Wissel was chosen because he was conducting, with evident satisfaction, the Cause for canonization of Bishop John Nepomucene Neumann, CSSR, fourth bishop of Philadelphia. Some years prior to this, in 1896, Father Joseph Schwarz, general consultor in Rome, representing the United States, wrote to the Baltimore provincial, Ferdinand Litz, that the "cause of Bishop Neumann is making progress." Further, he noted that it was "necessary to have a good 'Postulator causae' in America" because "the late process in America has been carelessly conducted and much important testimony has to be put aside." Realistically, he insisted: "The Postulator must be [an]

²³ Claudio Benedetti: born August 30, 1841, Falvaterra, diocese of Veroli; ordained April 2, 1865; professed July 27, 1878; postulator general CSSR, 1890-1922; died February 29, 1926; for more details and a short bibliography, cfr S. J. BOLAND, CSSR, *A Dictionary of the Redemptorists*, Rome, 1987, 33-34. Joseph Wissel [the elder]: born February 4, 1830, Rabach, Bavaria; to the United States December 16, 1848; ordained and professed March 26, 1853; died September 7, 1912, Saint Peter, Philadelphia.

²⁴ A transcription of Wissel's letter of appointment and the superior general's blessing is found in the *Copia Publica* of the process in Pittsburgh, fols. 14v-15v.

active, pushing man, something like F. Benedetti," as he put aside possible candidates as too old and gentle, or too busy and involved in affairs.²⁵

Some months later, Schwarz coming back to the appointment of a vice-postulator for the Neumann Cause, suggested as possibilities "in order of excellence or preference," the following: Paul Huber, William Licking, Augustine MacInerney, John Friederick, and James Keitz. He asked the Provincial to consider these names and "perhaps you could manage to select a good one from among them."²⁶

It comes as something of a surprise, therefore, that a month later, Schwarz, in informing Litz of the results of the General Consultation, wrote: "The selection of F. Wissel as 'postulator causae' of Bishop Neumann has also been approved."²⁷ The appointment is all the more surprising, since Wissel was 66-years-old and in those days not to be considered a young man, one of the qualifications desired by Joseph Schwarz.

Details of the steps that led to the appointment of Wissel as vice-postulator of the Seelos Cause have so far not come to light; nor even how it came about that the Cause itself was initiated. Absence of such information leaves room for some speculative, but nonetheless, educated conjecture. One would not seem to be far from the mark in saying that it was Wissel himself who had taken the initiative. He had been a personal friend of Father Seelos and had come to admire his holiness of life. He was one of those who, prior to this period, had started to gather material for a biography of Father Seelos. This, together with his experience in this area from his involvement with the Cause of Bishop Neumann, would suggest that he had been the prime mover toward the beginning of the Seelos Cause. As a matter of fact, his appointment came while he was in Rome consulting about the Cause of Bishop Neumann with the postulator general. It may not, therefore, be mere coincidence that Wissel was appointed to handle the Seelos Cause precisely during this visit. In his diary, he noted under date of September 5, 1898, upon his first arriving at the Generalate: "Benedetti took a hold of me at once." As narrated above, his official appointment was dated September 8.²⁸

²⁵ RABP, Ferdinand Litz Papers: Joseph Schwarz, CSSR, to Ferdinand Litz, CSSR, July 12, 1896. Joseph Schwarz: born August 1, 1849, New Orleans; professed October 15, 1868; ordained June 6, 1872; general consultor 1894-1901, procurator general 1909-1927; died January 31, 1927. Ferdinand Litz: born September 20, 1847; professed November 1, 1864; ordained March 30, 1872; provincial 1890-1898, 1909-1912; died May 6, 1913, Saint Alphonsus, Baltimore.

²⁶ RABP, Ferdinand Litz Papers: Joseph Schwarz, CSSR, to Ferdinand Litz, CSSR, October 22, 1896.

²⁷ RABP, Ferdinand Litz Papers: Joseph Schwarz, CSSR, to Ferdinand Litz, CSSR, November 24, 1896.

²⁸ RABP, Joseph Wissel: Diary, September 5, 1898. He was in Rome September 5-16.

Almost a year was to pass before the first concrete steps were taken. Father Wissel made a notation in his special journal on the day that he began to work in all seriousness on the Cause of Father Seelos. An entry for August 21, 1899, reads: "went to Baltimore - saw F. Neithart about F. Seelos' life in N[ew] O[rleans] - first step in Proc. of Beatif. of F. Seelos."²⁹ Many entries in his regular Diary for the year 1900, show that Wissel spent much time in making preparations for the first of the four *Processus* that was to take place in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

1. - *The Processus in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*

Since Father Seelos had spent nine years of his priestly ministry at Saint Philomena, it was to be expected that a *Processus* would be held there. And also that it would be the first one, since he exercised his ministry in Pittsburgh during the early years of his priestly life (1845-1854). Delay was to be avoided at all costs because the most valuable witnesses were already well advanced in years.

The first session of the Process was held on September 17, 1900, and the closing session, on June 19, 1902, in the sacristy of old Saint Paul's Cathedral. The other sessions were held in the sacristy of old Saint Philomena's Redemptorist Church. There was a total of 41 sessions, in which 24 witnesses gave their testimony. Of these 24 witnesses, 21 were eye-witnesses of the life and work of Father Seelos. Three others had obtained favors through his intercession. Twelve of the witnesses were men and twelve were women. Of the women, 2 were Sisters of Mercy, Sister Mary de Pazzi Russell and Sister Mary Magdalen Phelan; of the men, 3 were Redemptorists, Father Peter Zimmer, who had completed the biography, and Father Joseph Firle, and Brother Peter Recktenwalk. The bishop of Pittsburgh, under whose authority the entire investigation took place, was Richard Phelan (1828-1905, ordinary from 1889).³⁰

2. - *The Processus in Baltimore, Maryland*

The second Process was conducted in Baltimore, Maryland, where Father Seelos had been stationed at Saint Alphonsus Church (1854-1857) and two Redemptorist foundations located in the archdiocese: Saints Peter and Paul, Cumberland, Maryland (1857-1862) and Saint Mary's, Annapolis, Maryland (1862-1865).

²⁹ RABP, Joseph Wissel. This entry is not in Wissel's regular Diary but in a special one which he entitled Active Life of a Redemptorist on the American Missions. Entries run from 1878 until April 16, 1912. He died in that year, September 7.

³⁰ For more details on the witnesses in the four *Processus*, cfr *Summarium*, pp. [3] - 25. For the full title of this, cfr Section VI below in the text.

The first session of this Process was held on April 9, 1901, and the closing session on June 12, 1902, in the sacristy of the cathedral, while the remaining sessions took place in the chapel of Saint Alphonsus Redemptorist Church. Twenty-two witnesses were heard in 35 sessions. Five of the sessions (12-16) took place in St. Louis, Missouri (October 19-28, 1901), because the distance to Baltimore would have entailed too much difficulty for the 6 witnesses called. Its sessions took place in the chapel of the Archbishop and in the sacristy of Saint Alphonsus Redemptorist Church (the Rock Church). Of the total of 22 witnesses who testified, 21 were eye-witnesses and had known Father Seelos personally. Of these witnesses, 8 were women, and 14 were men. Of the women, 3 were nuns at the St. Louis sessions: Sister Theresa Eckstein, Sister of Charity; Sister Mary Bernard of Saint Theresa (Elizabeth Dorsey) and Sister Mary Catherine of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Mary Carney) both Carmelites. Of the men, 8 were Redemptorists: Fathers Henry Meurer, Joseph Wuest, Benedict Neithart, Hubert Bove, Elias Schauer, and Joseph Loewekamp in the Baltimore sessions; Fathers Ferreol Girardey and Timothy Enright in the St. Louis sessions. The sessions in Baltimore were under the jurisdiction of James Cardinal Gibbons (1834-1921, ordinary from 1877), while those in St. Louis were under Archbishop John Joseph Kain (1841-1903, ordinary from 1895).

3. - *The Processus in New Orleans, Louisiana*

The third Process was conducted in New Orleans, Louisiana, where Father Seelos had been stationed (1866-1867), as acting pastor of Saint Mary of the Assumption Church and where he died and is buried.

The 15 sessions took place from September 4 to October 29, 1902, in the chapel of the Archbishop's house. Of the 16 witnesses who gave their testimony 12 were eye-witnesses. Twelve of the witnesses were women; four were men. Of the women, one was a nun, Sister Mary Largusa, School Sister of Notre Dame; of the men two were Redemptorists, Father Bernard Klaphake and Brother Hermann Graute. The archbishop of New Orleans was Placide Louis Chapell (1842-1905, ordinary from 1897).

4. - *The Processus in Augsburg, Germany*

The fourth and final Process was held in Augsburg, Germany, in which diocese Seelos was born and spent the greater part of his childhood and youth (1819-1843).

The 11 sessions took place from January 5 to February 24, 1903 in the chapel of the Archbishop's house and in the sacristy chapel of the cathedral. Of the 5 witnesses called to give their testimony three were eye-witnesses. One was Adam Seelos, a brother of Father Seelos and the other his sister,

Sister Mary Romualda (Mary Ann), School Sister of Notre Dame. Four of the witnesses were men, the fifth, a nun. One of the men was Father Constantine Hergenroether, a parish priest in Germany, who had been a Redemptorist in the United States and a student under Father Seelos but left the Congregation and returned to Germany. The bishop was Maximilian Lingg (1842-1930, ordinary from July, 1902).

In summary, then, of the 67 witnesses summoned to give their testimony in the four Processes, 57 were eye-witnesses of some period of the life of Father Seelos. Of the 67 witnesses 33 were women, and 34 were men. Among the witnesses 7 were nuns and 13 were Redemptorists, 11 priests and 2 brothers; and one former Redemptorist priest. Father Wissel completed the informative phase of the Cause of Father Seelos in the remarkably short time of two years and five months. The amount of work that went into this can hardly be calculated. He had to draw up the questions to be asked, to contact the witnesses, to arrange with the ecclesiastical authorities for the officials and sessions of the *Processus*, and all the other details and formalities that were required lest some aspect or element of the process be declared invalid at some future date; or that the whole effort be judged inconclusive or inadequate. He himself took upon himself to translate the original English or German of the testimony of the witnesses into Latin. All this becomes more remarkable when one considers that during a portion of this period, he was still organizing sessions of the Cause of Bishop John Neumann. And at the same time, he was often engaged in preaching missions, retreats, and occasional celebratory sermons.

III. THE PROCESSUS DE NON-CULTU

While the ordinary *Processus Informativus* of New Orleans was being conducted, the *Processus de non-cultu* was also initiated, with its regular meetings in the oratory of the Archbishop's house. There were 13 sessions of this Process between September 30 and October 29, 1902. Eight men were called as witnesses, of whom two were Redemptorist priests: Father Augustine Guendling, superior of the New Orleans community, and Father John Baptist Muehlsiepen, prefect of Saint Mary of the Assumption Church. These gave testimony about the following points: that there was never any public cult given to Father Seelos; that pictures or images of him did not give any signs of cult, for example by having haloes, rays, etc.; pictures were not set up for public veneration; relics of him were not exposed for public veneration; votive offerings were never given in his honor; images of him did

not call him a saint or a blessed; nothing was ever said, done, written, or printed that indicated a public cult.³¹

Of particular interest in this Process was Session VIII, which took place in the morning of October 23, beginning at 10:00 o'clock in Saint Mary of the Assumption Church. As part of the inspection of the sacred precincts and the Redemptorist monastery for any signs of public cult given to Father Seelos, his tomb was opened and the remains were examined, the first time since his burial in 1867. He was buried outside the Communion railing under the pavement against the south wall of the church, near the altar of the Sacred Heart, and in front of the Shrine of Our Lady of Perpetual Help.³² Over the grave was a stone slab with the simple inscription "Rev. Fr. X. Seelos." On this occasion, the original metal coffin was opened and found to be half filled with water; of the body there remained only bones. These were placed in a wooden coffin measuring 37.5 inches long, 15 inches wide, and 13 inches high, which was sealed with the seal of the archbishop of New Orleans. This was then placed in a shallow crypt under the pavement of the sanctuary on the right side a few feet from the steps of the high altar. The inscription placed on the marble slab covering the crypt reads: "*Hic in pace requiescit Servus Dei, Franciscus Xaverius Seelos, natus die 11 Jan. 1819, professus die 16 Maji 1844, ordinatus die 22 Dec. 1844, mortuus die 4 Oct. 1867, cujus Causa Beatificationis agi coepit mense Aprili 1900.*"³³

On the same day, October 23, in Session X in the community chapel, the delegated judge of Auxiliary Bishop Gustave A. Rouxel pronounced his conclusion that no public and forbidden cult had been given to Father Seelos:

[...] dicimus, pronuntiamus, decernimus, declaramus, ac definitive sententiamus nec circa sepulchrum seu tumulum, nec alibi circa reliquias, imagines, aliasque memorias dicti Servi Dei Francisci Xaverii Seelos, CSSR, quidquid reperiri quo publicum vetitumque cultum quoquo modo praeferat, aut quomodocumque sit obnoxium formae dictorum Decretorum; sed iidem [sic] fuisse et esse sufficienter satisfactum et omimodam obedientiam praestitam.³⁴

³¹ Archdiocesan Archives of New Orleans (hereafter AANO), Acta Originalia Processus super Culto nunquam praestito Servo Dei Fr. Xav. Seelos, C. Ss.R. Novae Aureliae constructi, 30 Sept - 29 Oct. 1902. The seven areas of investigation are found on fols. 9r-v. Cfr RABP, Joseph Wissel, Diary, September and October 1902, for his annotations about this *Processus*.

³² AANO, Acta Originalia, fol. 31v, testimony of John B. Muehlsiepen.

³³ AANO, Acta Originalia, fols. 38r-40r for more details about the opening of the grave.

³⁴ AANO, Acta originalia, fols. 43r-v. CODE, *Dictionary of the American Hierarchy* (New York: Joseph F. Wagner, Inc., 1964) (cited hereafter as CODE, *American Hierarchy*), p. 255: Gustave Augustin Rouxel (1840-1908), appointed auxiliary bishop of New Orleans in 1899.

Some few days later, on October 28, this *Process* was concluded as well as the *Processus Informativus*.³⁵

IV. THE *COPIAE PUBLICAE* OF THE FOUR PROCESSES, 1906

Father Joseph Wissel, designated by the officials of the Processes to bring the transcripts of the investigations to the Sacred Congregation of Rites in Rome, left for Europe on November 29, 1902. He had with him the official hand-written copy, called "*exemplum seu transumptum publicum et authenticum*," of the testimonies in Pittsburgh, Baltimore, and New Orleans, and the transcript of the *Processus de non-cultu*.³⁶ He did not go directly to Rome but immediately began arranging for the fourth and final Process to be instituted in Augsburg, the native diocese of Father Seelos. This took place January 5 to February 24, 1903. He then went to Rome with the transcripts of the five investigations. His Diary for February 28, 1903, has this entry: "Delivered the 5 Processes of the Beatification of Father Seelos to the S.R.C. - got a receipt."

The Postulator, Father Claudio Benedetti, in company with Father Wissel, committed the material into the hands of the Chancellor of the Congregation of Rites who was to make a copy of it. After authenticating the copy, he was to give it to the Postulator, while the original transcript was to be placed in the archives of the Congregation.³⁷ For the Cause of Seelos, this work required three years; in 1906, the four *Copiae Publicae* of the Processes on the reputation for holiness and the virtues of Father Seelos were completed. The title page of the one dated December 15, 1906, is:

Copia Publica Transumpti Processus Ordinaria auctoritate constructi in Curia Ecclesiastica Novae Aureliae super fama sanctitatis vitae, virtutum et miraculorum Servi Dei Francisci Xaverii Seelos Sacerdotis Professi e Congregatione Ssmi. Redemptoris. Vol. unic. Gustavus Adv. Savignoni S. R. C. Cancellarius et Archivista. Anno 1906.

³⁵ RABP, Joseph Wissel: Dairy, October 29: "Session XIII de non- cultu 9o'cl. tally 2 - close. Session XV inform. 10 o'cl. close. All finished."

³⁶ Damian Joseph BLAHER, O.F.M., *The Ordinary Processes in Causes of Beatification and Canonization: A Historical Synopsis and a Commentary*, The Catholic University of America Canon Law Series, no. 268 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of American Press, 1949), p. 215: "The chief purpose of the regulation which orders the copy of acts be made by hand is to minimize the possibility of a multiplication of copies."

³⁷ Antonius M. SANTARELL, O.F.M., *Codex pro Postulatoribus Causarum Beatificationis et Canonizationis*, 4th ed. (Roma: Libreria del Collegio S. Antonio, 1929), p. 156.

The title page of the other three are the same except for the insertion of the place of the interrogations: "*in Curia Ecclesiastica Pittsburgensi*," "*in Curia Ecclesiastica Baltimorensi*," in *Curia Ecclesiastica Augustana Vindellicorum*." These latter three were signed on December 22, 1906 by "*Gustavus Adv. Savignoni S.R.C. Notarius, Cancellarius et Archivista*."

The number of pages of each is as follows:

Pittsburgh, 206 fols. - 412 pages

Baltimore, 261 fols. - 522 pages

New Orleans, 143 fols. - 286 pages

Augsburg, 125 fols - 250 pages

In total, 1470 pages.³⁸

V. PROCESSUS PERQUISITIONIS SCRIPTORUM, 1908

On January 29, 1908, Alexander Verde, the Promotor of the Faith, issued an Instruction for the archbishop of Baltimore about the requisition of the writings of Father Seelos, noting that until this was done, there could not be an official Introduction of the Cause by the Sacred Congregation of Rites. He noted that although this pertained to the ordinaries of the dioceses, still Claudio Benedetti, the Postulator, had humbly requested His Holiness, Pope Pius X, that he be granted the faculty to carry this out.³⁹ The Sacred Congregation of Rites, using the special faculties given to it, graciously acceded to the request of Father Benedetti in its decree of December 20, 1907, providing that everything was done according to the Instruction given. To be collected was everything printed and non-printed that was authored by Father Seelos: books, letters, diaries, treatises, sermons, pamphlets, notes, meditations, memoranda, examinations of consciences, and also anything of his copied by others.

The Instruction, although dated January 29, was sent to Baltimore on March 11, 1908. It was addressed to Cardinal James Gibbons with a cover letter of the Prefect of the Congregation of Rites, Cardinal Cretoni. The brief words of the Roman cardinal noted that the Postulator of the Cause had ob-

³⁸ The four volumes are found in the Archives of the Postulator General (hereafter noted as APG). A xeroxed copy of these is found in RABP, Francis Seelos, *Copiae Publicae*.

³⁹ Baltimore Archdiocesan Archives: Acta Processus Perquisitionis Scriptorum quae Servo Dei Francisco Xaverio Seelos, Presytero Congr. SS. Redemptoris, tribuuntur: [...]. "P. Claudius Benedetti, Congregationis Ssmi Redemptoris Sacerdos Professus et Postulator Generalis, Ssmum Nostrum Pium PP. X [...] humiliter adprecatus est, ut facultatem concedere dignaretur Apostolica auctoritate peragendi in locis a me designandis perquisitionem scriptorum omnium, quae praedicto Dei Servo tribuuntur". For some data on the ecclesiastical career of Alexander Verde, cfr Josephus Löw, CSSR, *De Causis "historicis" Beatificationis nostrorum Servorum Dei brevis commentatio*, in *SHCSR* 7 (1959) 361, n. 6.

tained the faculty for this Process from the Pope and that the conditions of the Instruction were to be carried out to the letter.⁴⁰

Father Wissel noted in his special journal under date of May 4, 1908: "Went to Baltimore - consultation with Card. Gibbons in reference to an order of the Holy See that all the writings of F. Seelos must be sent to Rome." In his regular Diary, under the same date, we find: "Saw Cardinal in reference to scripta P. Seelos - First meeting held at once. Edict sent at once to all the parish priests."⁴¹ This edict was decided upon at Session I of the Process, May 4.

On May 7, 1908, Cardinal Gibbons sent out a letter addressed "To the Clergy and Faithful of the Archdiocese of Baltimore," in which he ordered:

[...] all the faithful of this City and Archdiocese, who have in their possession writings of this Servant of God, whether in his own hand-writing, or dictated by him, or written by his order; whether in manuscript or printed form, to deliver the same to the Chancery office of this Archdiocese, before and not later than May 30th, 1908 [...].⁴²

Session II was held on May 30 and Session III, the concluding one, on June 29. The collected writings of Father Seelos were examined, sealed, and ordered to be sent to the Congregation of Rites in Rome.⁴³

A Process for the requisition of the writings of Father Seelos was conducted in New Orleans. Session I was held on May 30, 1908, at which a letter was drafted to be sent out to the clergy and people of the Archdiocese. Session II took place on July 8 and Session III, the concluding one, on July 10.⁴⁴ It is not known if similar requisitions were conducted in Pittsburgh and Augsburg; the Acta of the investigations of Pittsburgh have not been found, and those of Augsburg were destroyed in the Second World War.

The Sacred Congregation of Rites issued its decree on the writings of Father Seelos May 8, 1912.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Baltimore Archdiocesan Archives: Acta Processus Perquisitionis Scriptorum, fol. 9. For some data on James Cardinal Gibbons, cfr CODE, *American Hierarchy*, 108-109.

⁴¹ Cfr RABP, Joseph Wissel, *Active Life of a Redemptorist on the American Missions*; Diary.

⁴² RABP, Francis Seelos, *History of the Cause*, where a copy of the letter is found.

⁴³ Baltimore Archdiocesan Archives, Acta Processus Perquisitionis Scriptorum, fol. 12r lists the writings collected: "1. Viginti Epistolae; 2. Librum manu Servi Dei partim lingua germana partim anglica scriptum cum titulo: *Asceticae conferentiae* continens 180 folia; 3. Librum *Exercitiorum Lumina* continens 8 folia; 4. Ordinem diei datam Bernardinae Bokel ex originali transcriptum; 5. Triginta quatuor (34) poemata - 64 folia."

⁴⁴ New Orleans Archdiocesan Archives, Processus Perquisitionis Scriptorum [...].

⁴⁵ Index ac status Causarum Beatificationis Servorum Dei et Canonizationis Beatorum (1975), p. 172.

VI. THE *SUMMARIUM* OF 1908

In the meantime, other elements of the Cause were in progress or had been completed. After the *Copiae Publicae* were available at the end of 1906, the Postulator confided them to an “*avvocato*,” an advocate in English, causes for canonization being considered more or less as cases in court. This official of the Sacred Congregation of Rites had the responsibility of preparing for printing a *Summarium* of the pertinent data of the four diocesan investigations. For Father Seelos, this work took more than a year and a half to complete. On August 29, 1908, there appeared in printed form the compilation of the testimonies of the witnesses contained in the four *Copiae Publicae*. The title page reads:

NEO-AURELIANEN. SEU BALTIMOREN.
BEATIFICATIONIS ET CANONIZATIONIS
SERVI DEI
FRANCISCI XAVERII SEELOS
SACERDOTIS PROFESSI
E CONGREGATIONE SSMI REDEMPTORIS
SUMMARIUM
SUPER DUBIO
 An sit signanda Commissio Introductionis Causae
 in casu et ad effectum de quo agitur?

There are 240 printed pages of text to this *Summarium*. It is signed by Achilles Martini, advocate of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, and Arturo Benedetti, procurator. It was reviewed by Advocate Angelus Mariani, Assessor and Sub-promotor of the Faith of the Congregation.⁴⁶

VII. THE *INFORMATIO* OF 1910

After the *Summarium* appeared in print in 1908, again an advocate was designated to elaborate an *Informatio*. This was to contain a short biography of Father Seelos, the testimony of the witnesses to the heroicity of his practice of the Christian virtues, an account of his supernatural gifts, and descriptions of reputed cures attributed to his intercession. More than two years later, on November 10, 1910, there appeared the synthesis of the compiled testimonies as found in the *Summarium*. The title page is as follows:

NEO-AURELIANEN. SEU BALTIMOREN.

⁴⁶ A xeroxed copy of the APG *Summarium* is found in RABP, Francis Seelos.

BEATIFICATIONIS ET CANONIZATIONIS
SERVI DEI
FRANCISCI XAVERII SEELOS
SACERDOTIS PROFESSI
E CONGREGATIONE SSMI REDEMPTORIS
INFORMATIO
SUPER DUBIO

An sit signanda Commissio Introductionis Causae
in casu et ad effectum de quo agitur?

There are 96 pages of text with testimony attesting to the following in regard to Father Seelos: his practice of virtue to an heroic degree in general; then specifically, about the theological virtues of faith, hope, love of God and love of neighbor; about the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance; about the observance of the vows of poverty, obedience and perseverance, and chastity; about humility; about his supernatural gifts; about miracles during life and after death; about his reputation for holiness during life and after death. It is signed by Arturo Benedetti, Advocate, and Adulfus Guidi. It was reviewed by Advocate Angelus Mariani, Assessor and Sub-promotor of the Faith of the Congregation.⁴⁷

VIII. THE LONG SILENCE

Nothing is heard about the progress of the Cause or lack of it for almost a year and a half. Then, in a Circular Letter of 1912 to the members of the Congregation, giving them some information on the status of the twelve Causes of Redemptorist confreres that were in progress at the time, Father Patrick Murray, the Redemptorist superior general, wrote:

IX. In regard to the Servant of God Francis Xavier Seelos, the *Informatio* has already been printed for the Introduction of the Cause in the Roman Curia. When the Promotor of the Faith has composed his *Animadversiones*, the Patron of the Cause will respond.

In closing the letter, Father Murray made two recommendations to all the members: that "each one of you strive to acquire the virtues" evidenced in these confreres by their reputation for holiness; and that "you strive to propagate and promote devotion to these Servants of God, so that, God will

⁴⁷ A xeroxed copy of the APG *Informatio* is found in RABP, Francis Seelos. AGHR, Patrick Murray, CSSR, Circular Letter 13: To the Members of the Congregation, Rome, May 24, 1910: "Illud [*Summarium*] nunc pervolvit Causae Advocatus, ut suam inde *Informationem* conscribat."

deign to work miracles through their intercession," because without these the Cause can make no progress.⁴⁸

However, a year later, in 1913, again in a letter to the members of the Congregation, he wrote that it would be welcome to them for him "to say something briefly about the Servants of God, our confreres, whose Cause for Beatification is being pursued and is, more or less, moving toward a conclusion." In mentioning Father Seelos, he noted: "We are also awaiting the *Animadversiones* of the Promotor of the Faith about introducing the Cause with the Holy See."⁴⁹

Despite the note of expectancy evident in this short notice, the *Animadversiones* were not forthcoming. The reason for this is the fact that the Postulator General, Claudio Benedetti, did not pursue the Cause at this time. This is evident from a letter, written from Sant'Alfonso, Rome, in 1928, almost twenty years later, by the Redemptorist Father Engelbert Zettl. The recipient, a member of the Redemptorist community in Gars-am-Inn, Germany, has not been identified. In reconstructing the situation, it is clear that the Redemptorist in Germany asked Father Zettl about the status of the Cause of Father Seelos. Zettl asked Father Benedetto D'Orazio, the then postulator general, about this. Zettl's letter to Gars, dated June 26, 1928, included the autograph account of D'Orazio, whose tenor is as follows:

The ordinary processes of Father Seelos have been conducted, in which the juridical formalities were fulfilled. But the oral testimonies, which alone in this process have probative value, are, unfortunately, so poor as to render rather doubtful the very introduction of the Cause. For this reason, my predecessor, R. P. Benedetti, thought it prudent to postpone it, suspending the procedure. Providence will give counsel in the future as to what is to be done.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ AGHR, Patrick Murray, CSSR, Circular Letter 26: To the Members of the Congregation, Rome, March 25, 1912: "Quod spectat ad Dei Servum Franciscum Xav. Seelos, typis iam mandata est Informatio de Causa apud Romanam Curiam introducenda. Ubi Promotor Fidei suas conscripserit *Animadversiones*, respondebit Causae Patronus."

⁴⁹ AGHR, Patrick Murray, CSSR, Circular Letter 30: To the Members of the Congregation, Rome, March 25, 1913: "Etiamnum expectamus *Animadversiones* Promotoris Fidei de introducenda Causa apud S. Sedem."

⁵⁰ The original Italian reads: Del P. Seelos sono stati costruiti i processi ordinari, nei quali le formalità giuridiche furono adempiute. Ma le testimonianze orali, che sole in questo processo hanno valore probativo, sono purtroppo assai deficienti da rendere assai dubbia la stessa introduzione della causa. Perciò, il mio predecessore R. P. Benedetti stimò prudente soprassedere sospendendo la procedura. La Provvidenza darà consiglio in futuro sul da farsi. A photostatic copy of Father Zettl's letter and Father D'Orazio's note is found in RABP, Francis Seelos, History of the Cause. A notation on the copy indicates that the original is found in the Redemptorist Archives of the Munich Province, Gars-am-Inn, Germany. Father Benedetti ceased to be Redemptorist postulator general in 1922, at which time Benedetto D'Orazio assumed that position. D'Orazio: born January 27, 1881; professed September 29,

The question to be asked is why there were no efforts made to supply for what was considered lacking in the testimony of the witnesses of the four Processes. There is general silence in the documentation about a response to that question. Some background information, however, may hold an answer, or at least shed some light upon it.

On September 7, 1912, Father Joseph Wissel died at the age of 82. He had been the vice-postulator of the Cause of Bishop John Neumann and then that of Father Seelos. From documentation available, it appears that he did not engage the help of any close assistant or assistants in his work for the Causes. Therefore, once he passed from the scene, there was no one who could easily assume the office that he had discharged for so many productive years.

It is obvious that this work was not the kind for which a replacement could easily be found, even in the best of circumstances. Qualifications for it were very special and exacting. One had to be familiar with the extensive regulations found in Canon Law and with the stringent requirements of the Holy See. One had to be familiar with the formalities of the various processes necessary for their validity. One was required to deal with local ordinaries and their chanceries to institute the canonical tribunals. Witnesses had to be found who were qualified to give testimony and they had to be scheduled to appear at the often numerous sessions of the processes. In short, there were many necessary competencies that were requisite in an area in which Rome was so exacting and demanding.

The American Church, in general, at this period of its history was not especially well prepared for work of this kind; and the Redemptorist community, in particular, even less so. We must remember that there was probably a great deal of awe and mystery about the whole process of canonization on the part of those in the United States. At this time, there was not a single canonized saint who had lived and ministered in the United States, and the Causes that were being conducted were few in number.

This fact is verified by a listing of the Causes for beatification that had been introduced during these years as given by the then Apostolic Delegate to the United States, Archbishop Amleto Giovanni Cicognani. In his book *Sanctity in America*, published in 1939, he presents a short biographical sketch of seventeen outstanding figures of the American Church and of their status in regard to canonization. In the period of time that we are considering, the Causes of eight of these were under consideration, either on the diocesan or the apostolic level, and two of these were Bishop Neumann and

1900; ordained June 9, 1906; postulator general 1922-1958; died March 4, 1975. Father Zettl was a student of the Redemptorist Collegium Maius in Rome; cfr *Catalogus Congregationis SS. Redemptoris*, 1927, 9.

Father Seelos.⁵¹ This paucity of Causes is to be expected in a Church that was still young when compared to the Church in many other parts of the world.

The fact that among American Redemptorists there was no one who could easily step into the shoes of Father Wissel goes a long way in explaining why a successor to him as vice-postulator was not immediately appointed. This fact, combined with the unfamiliarity of the Church in American with the whole process of canonization - rather one could say with something like a fear and awe of this entire area of ecclesiastical procedure - brings us a long way toward grasping the extended interruption in the progression of the Cause of Father Seelos.

There is, in addition, another circumstance to be considered as contributing to the delay at this particular time. In years that can well be called the "golden years" of the parish ministry of the Redemptorists in the United States, the demands of this apostolate were very great. Also, preached missions were a regular feature of most parishes, and Redemptorists in this period were the most renowned preachers of such missions in the States. Consequently, requests for them from bishops and pastors were very numerous. The provincial superior was always at a loss to find sufficient laborers for these two areas of pastoral commitments to which the members of the Province were chiefly dedicated. Because of limited personnel during these years, many offers for foundations, tendered by American bishops to the provincial superior, had to be refused. Few able-bodied Redemptorists were not fully involved in apostolic ministry in one or the other of these fields. In this regard, it is well to recall that Father Wissel, even during all the years that he was involved with the Processes of Bishop Neumann and Father Seelos, was fully active in the ministry, engaged in giving retreats and preaching missions. He conducted the work for the Causes in between pastoral engagements. He was, as can be conjectured, a most exceptionally energetic individual with an unusual capacity for work. Granted the constant pressure on the provincial superior to find priests for the apostolic responsibilities of the Province, together with the highly specialized nature entailed in the office of vice-postulator, the delay in pursuing the Cause becomes more understandable and less of an enigma.

Two years after the death of Father Wissel, there was some activity in regard to the Cause of Bishop Neumann. The minutes of the provincial con-

⁵¹ Amleto Giovanni Cicognani, *Sanctity in America* (Patterson, N.J.: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1939). The Causes begun before 1912 are: the North American Martyrs, begun in 1652 but neglected for two centuries until 1904; Magin Catala, O.F.M., begun in 1884; Bishop John N. Neumann, CSSR, begun in 1886; Rose Philippine Duchesne, begun in 1895; Father Francis Seelos, begun in 1900; Elizabeth Seton, begun in 1907; Felix de Andreis, C.M., begun in 1908; Mother Theodore Guérin, begun in 1909. Elizabeth Seton was canonized in 1975, John Neumann in 1977, and Rose Philippine Duchesne in 1988.

sultation of the Baltimore Province for April 29, 1914, contain this notation: "At the suggestion of V. Rev. F. Speidel, V. Rev. F. Provincial brought up in this meeting the necessity of appointing some Father to look after the cause of Ven. Bp. Neumann's canonization. F. Adalbert Frank was chosen unanimously."⁵² It is not clear whether the name of Father Frank was suggested for being appointed to the position of vice-postulator of the Cause, or merely someone to be responsible if something should come up regarding the Cause. Significantly for our purpose, there is, however, no mention of the Cause of Father Seelos. And this is true for subsequent years also. Though from time to time the Cause of Bishop Neumann is averted to in the records of the provincial consultations, there is total silence about Father Seelos.

In reviewing the reason or reasons that might explain the long pause in the pursuit of the Cause of Father Seelos, due attention must also be given to a peculiar circumstance that worked to its disadvantage. In his lifetime, he was a member of the American Province, there being then only one Redemptorist jurisdictional entity in the United States. In 1875, eight years after his death, the American Province was divided into the Baltimore and Saint Louis Provinces. Until the death of Father Joseph Wissel, the Cause was conducted under the encouragement and auspices of the Baltimore Province, of whom Wissel was a member. Father Seelos, however, died and was buried in New Orleans, a Redemptorist foundation within the confines of the Saint Louis Province. This fact has great bearing, it would seem, upon the twilight in which the Cause of Father Seelos found itself.

The Cause was, it can securely be said, inaugurated in the Baltimore Province for a number of reasons. Father Seelos spent all of his priestly life in what became the territory of the Baltimore Province, with the exception of one year in Detroit and one year in New Orleans. Therefore, the memory of him was keenest in the parishes and among the confreres of that geographical area. The majority of those who still had vivid recollections of him and of his ministry in Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Cumberland, and Annapolis were within the Baltimore Province. Father Seelos was considered, experientially and humanly speaking, a member, even if deceased, of the Baltimore Province. Then too, Father Wissel had himself known, lived, and worked with Father Seelos, and was deeply attached to him personally. This gave him strong motivation to pursue his Cause for canonization.

⁵² RABP, Consultationes Provincialis, 1909-1921, p. 93. The provincial was Joseph Schneider, CSSR: born November 15, 1867; professed August 27, 1887; ordained December 7, 1892; provincial 1912-1920; died February 2, 1920. Fidelis Speidel, CSSR, (1854-1928), consultant to the superior general (1912-1928), was at this particular time in the United States. Adalbert Frank (1853-1915) was a member of the community of Saint Peter's Church, Philadelphia, where Bishop Neumann is buried.

Once he passed from the scene in 1912, the situation changed entirely. There were not many confreres living who had the sharp recollections of Father Seelos that several previous generations had. This was true of the Redemptorists in the Baltimore Province, as well as of those in the Saint Louis Province, where, in addition, there was no one who had the qualifications of Father Wissel for overseeing the Cause. There is, also, the likelihood, and this is most significant, that the provincial of the Saint Louis Province did not think it prudent to do anything that might have the appearance of interfering or encroaching upon the affairs of the Baltimore Province. Relationships were, for various reasons, rather delicate between the two Provinces. Since the Cause was from the beginning in the hands of Baltimore Province, it was taken for granted that any further move should come from there. No move was forthcoming in Baltimore, at this time, for reasons explained above.

There is, moreover, a verbal tradition in the Baltimore Province to explain why the Cause of Father Seelos was not pursued during these years. It was said that the Province did not want to exert its energies for the canonization of two of its members at the same time: Bishop Neumann and Father Seelos. Since the Cause of Bishop Neumann had been begun some few years before that of Father Seelos, a decision was made to give full attention to it. When that had come to a successful conclusion, the Cause of Father Seelos would be taken up in full earnest. The Cause of Bishop Neumann itself was at a standstill, which did not augur well for any activity in the Seelos Cause.

This was the situation when interest in the Cause from an unexpected source came in 1933. On March 17, of that year, Amleto Giovanni Cicognani, Secretary of the Commission for the Codification of Oriental Canon Law, was appointed Apostolic Delegate to the United States. Shortly after his arrival in Washington, he addressed a letter, dated June 2, to Father Andrew Kuhn, the provincial of the Baltimore Province. The essential part of the letter merits citation in full.

Before leaving Rome I was informed in the Sacred Congregation of Rites of the causes of two members of your Congregation: Ven. John Nepomucene Neumann and Father Francis Xavier Seelos.

As Apostolic Delegate in this country, I naturally consider it my duty to do my best to cooperate in promoting these causes. Hence I approach you with the request to forward to me whatever information you can as to how affairs are progressing.

I would appreciate it very much if you would give me definite data on the present status of the two causes, especially with reference to the names of the postulators, and the name or names of any in Rome who may be commissioned to look after affairs there, and also any who may be acting as aides to the postulators here.

May I add that if in these matters I can render any assistance, I shall be

most happy to be informed to that effect.⁵³

Thereupon, the Provincial asked the province archivist, Father John Byrne, to respond with the practical information requested by the Delegate. Father Byrne wrote a four-page report on the Cause of Bishop Neumann and a five-page report on the status of the Cause of Father Seelos. He clearly indicated the various steps the Cause had passed through up to that point. After quoting the Circular Letters of the Redemptorist Superior General of May 24, 1910, March 25, 1912 and March 25, 1913, which we have cited above, he closed with this sentence: "Since that time, more than twenty years ago, we have no official information as to the progress of the Cause of Father Seelos." He was not able to inform the Delegate about the vice-postulator nor whether anyone was working directly for the Cause, because, it is quite certain, no one had been appointed to that position; and it would be some time before someone would be. Father Byrne's report is dated September 26, 1933.⁵⁴

The first part of Father Byrne's report contained a two-and-a-half biographical sketch of Father Seelos, taken, as he noted, "partly from the *Annales Provinciae Americanae* [...] and partly from the *Positiones et Articuli* - passim," that Father Wissel had prepared for the various Processes.⁵⁵ This sketch brought forth fruit several years later that drew attention to the Cause of Father Seelos. In 1939, Archbishop Cicognani published his *Sanctity in America* (which has been mentioned above), chapter ten of which is devoted to Father Seelos. It is entitled "Francis Xavier Seelos, CSSR: Redemptorist Preacher and Missionary," pp. 92-96. The Delegate based this chapter on the sketch Father Byrne had sent him in 1933; so much so, indeed, that Father Byrne can really be called its author, although he is not given any credit for his authorship.

Finally then, this has to be added to explain the long pause in the progression of the Cause of Father Seelos. The Redemptorist postulator general

⁵³ RABP, Francis Seelos, History of the Cause, where a copy of the letter is preserved. The original has not been found. For some details of the ecclesiastical career of Cicognani, cfr *The Official Catholic Directory*, 1934, p. 12. He served as Apostolic Delegate to the United States from 1933 to 1958. Andrew Kuhn, CSSR: born January 9, 1880; professed August 2, 1901; ordained June 13, 1906; provincial of the Baltimore Province 1930-1939; died January 14, 1940.

⁵⁴ RABP, Francis Seelos, History of the Cause, where a copy of the Report is found. Byrne: born May 23, 1879; professed August 2, 1900; ordained June 22, 1905; archivist 1919-1945; died June 2, 1919.

⁵⁵ Joseph Wuest's Latin text of an obituary of Father Seelos which Father Byrne used for his sketch is found in *Annales Congregationis SS. Redemptoris Provinciae Americanae* (Boston: Angel Guardian Press, 1918) (cited hereafter as Wuest, *Annales*), V/1: 228-254. RABP, Francis Seelos, *Processus Informativus*, English and German versions of the *Positiones et Articuli*.

from 1922 to 1958, thirty-six years, was Father Benedetto D'Orazio. During those years, a number of Redemptorist Causes that had made some progress prior to his tenure came to a standstill. We offer no explanation of this fact, but merely want to make mention of it here as being part of the full picture of the quiescence of the Cause of Father Seelos. When Father D'Orazio entered upon his office, there were eleven Causes (not including that of Father Seelos) that were in progress. During his thirty-six years, there was movement in only three of them.⁵⁶

An interesting fact emerges from a closer consideration of other Redemptorist Causes. A time lapse in the various steps of their progression is evident in a number of them, possibly not unrelated to what was mentioned in the previous paragraph. The Cause of Saint John Neumann was dormant for 41 years, 1920-1961. That of Venerable Joseph Passerat, 46 years, 1913-1959. Alfred Pampalon's Cause rested for 39 years, 1922-1961. The longest time lapse occurred with the Cause of recently beatified Gennaro Sarnelli, 88 years, 1907-1995.

IX. THE REPUTATION OF FATHER SEELOS FOR HOLINESS CONTINUED DURING THE YEARS OF OFFICIAL INACTIVITY

Despite the fact that during many years, there was no official action taken in the Cause of Father Seelos, his reputation for holiness among the people continued. Understandably this was not as widespread nor as strong as it had been for many years immediately after his death. Demographic changes in the neighborhood of the parish brought a majority of non-Catholics into the vicinity. The older parishioners either died off or moved into other sections of the city. However, the memory of the holy man who had lived and worked at Saint Mary of the Assumption, though somewhat dimmed, did not die out. It is understandable, too, that documentation in this area of investigation is not as rich as one would wish. However, there is clear and definite evidence that, throughout the official years of silence, his *fama sanctitatis* remained alive among the people of the area and, in general, of the city of New Orleans.

We begin with a very negative appraisal of the situation. In response to the request of the Apostolic Delegate, Amleto Cicognani, in 1933 for information about the status of the Cause of Father Seelos, Father Andrew Kuhn, Baltimore provincial superior, turned the matter over to the archivist,

⁵⁶ See the interesting article by Andreas SAMPERS, CSSR, *Positiones in causis beatificationis et canonizationis Servorum Dei CSSR*, in: *SHCSR* 10 (1962) 278-299. The Causes that were dormant were: Gennaro Sarnelli, Bishop John N. Neumann, Cesare Sportelli, Joseph Passerat, Dominic Blasucci, Emmanuel Ribera, John Baptist Stoeger, Alfred Pampalon. Those in which some movement was made were: Paul Cafaro (1927), Vito Michael Di Netta (1927, 1931, 1934, 1935), and Peter Donders (1928, 1937, 1938, 1941, 1942, 1943).

John Byrne who contacted Father Thomas Palmer, provincial of the Saint Louis Province, apparently asking for information about the reputation for holiness of Father Seelos in New Orleans. Palmer, in turn, asked the Redemptorist superior of New Orleans, as being on the scene, to send him his observations: "I have written to Father Fitzgerald, the Rector in New Orleans," he wrote to Byrne, "and have asked him to send me the information you request."⁵⁷ Father Byrne, however, did not wait until he received an answer to his request for information, but sent his report to the Delegate on September 26, as we have seen above. The news from New Orleans, however, was not of the nature to make him happy. Father Fitzgerald, the superior there, answered his provincial's request on October 7, 1933. The somber two paragraphs of his response are quoted here in full.

As to his "fama sanctitatis," nothing endures here. No one seems to remember him except, perhaps, a few old people. During the years I was here formerly, I think I heard his name mentioned once. The other Fathers who have been stationed here say his name has been very rarely mentioned. The present generation do not know of him.

His remains lie in the vault under the Sanctuary of St. Mary's Assumption Church. There is no evidence that any one visits his tomb or prays through his intercession.⁵⁸

The situation would be dire indeed if the report of Father Fitzgerald, so categorically negative, is the only evidence we have to depend upon to ascertain the actual condition of the Cause of Father Seelos and to assure us that the memory of him lingered among the people and that he continued to be cherished by them. But there are other witnesses, equally familiar with the scene and equally trustworthy, who provide us with an entirely different picture. Their testimony enables us to state with certitude that, though in a diminished form, the reputation for holiness of Father Seelos was handed down from generation to generation, in an unbroken chain, among the people of the parish especially and among the people of the city of New Orleans in general. Actually, in view of the testimonies that follow here, it is difficult to understand how Father Fitzgerald could come to such conclusions.

1. The house chronicle for the Redemptorist community in New Orleans, under date of October 13, 1919, noted this about the death of one of the

⁵⁷ RABP, Archivist Papers, John Byrne: Thomas Palmer, CSSR, to John Byrne, CSSR, St. Louis, September 19, 1933.

⁵⁸ Redemptorist Archives Denver Province (hereafter RADP): Thomas Palmer Papers, Francis A. Fitzgerald, CSSR, to Thomas A. Palmer, CSSR, New Orleans, October 7, 1933. Thomas Palmer: born August 5, 1882; professed August 15, 1901; ordained July 4, 1906; provincial superior of the then Saint Louis Province, 1933-1942; died November 21, 1957. Francis Fitzgerald: born November 28, 1878; professed August 2, 1915; ordained July 4, 1920; died July 16, 1951; superior in New Orleans, 1933-1939.

parishioners: "She is in her 85th year, a staunch member of St. Mary's Assumption Church, and one of the few who never misses the Holy Hour on Thursday, spent before the Blessed Sacrament, a practice introduced by good Father Seelos, CSSR, many, many years ago."⁵⁹ The custom introduced by Father Seelos still continued in the parish; and the fact that he had introduced it was also not forgotten, and this 52 years after his death.

2. In 1946, that is, 79 years after the death of Father Seelos, an aged parishioner of Saint Mary's, New Orleans, in a note to Father William Grangell, the Redemptorist superior, wrote: "I promised to give you the Picture and reading of our saintly Rev. Fr. F. X. Seelos."⁶⁰ She had among her possessions a picture of Father Seelos and some written material, either about him or by him, and she called him "our Saintly" Father Seelos.

3. In 1959, Father John Vaughn was appointed by Paul Baudry, CSSR, the superior of the New Orleans Vice-province, "to be the promoter of interest in Father Seelos' life." In a letter to the American general consultor in Rome, Father Raymond Miller, asking about the status of the Cause, Vaughn made this observation about the reverence for the memory of Father Seelos that continued among the people.

There is absolutely no doubt that he is still venerated in New Orleans. There are many people who quite consistently come to ask for a Mass to be said in Thanksgiving to our Mother of Perpetual Help and Father Seelos and there are still many of the old-timers who pray to him.⁶¹

4. Father William Reintjes, former superior of the Redemptorist community in New Orleans and later vice-provincial, writing to Father Vaughn in 1960, advised him to call upon an elderly lady of the parish, noting: "She has a great devotion to Father Seelos. She is an old member of St. Mary Assumption Church."⁶²

⁵⁹ Vol 2 (1890-1928) 286.

⁶⁰ Redemptorist Archives Vice-Province of New Orleans (hereafter as RAVPNO), Seelos Correspondence I: Mary Molitor to William Grangell, CSSR, New Orleans, April 22, 1946. William Grangell: born December 10, 1893; professed August 2, 1914; ordained July 2, 1919; died December 14, 1986; was superior in New Orleans, 1945-1947.

⁶¹ RAVPNO, Seelos Correspondence I: John Vaughn, CSSR, to Raymond Miller, CSSR, New Orleans, December 6, 1959, carbon copy. Paul Baudry: born December 1, 1896; professed August 2, 1919; ordained May 7, 1924; died October 17, 1982; was vice-provincial 1959-1967. Raymond Miller: born December 8, 1901; professed August 2, 1922; ordained June 12, 1927; died October 4, 1988; as a member of the Saint Louis Province was general consultor in Rome 1958-1963. More will be said of Father John Vaughn in a subsequent section of this article.

⁶² RAVPNO, Seelos Correspondence I: William Reintjes, CSSR, to Vaughn, New Orleans, February 27, 1960. William Reintjes: born December 9, 1893; professed August 2, 1915; ordained July 4, 1920; died August 30, 1978; was superior in New Orleans 1939-1945, and vice-provincial 1955-1959.

5. In the first letter, dated July 13, 1960, that has been found of Father Vaughn to Father Nicola Ferrante, the Redemptorist postulator general in Rome, we find his observations about the awareness of the people of Father Seelos. "Devotion to Father Seelos is not completely dead, although it is not very widespread either." This means that devotion to Father Seelos was not much diffused outside the city of New Orleans. He then stated that "I think it would be possible to prove that there is definitely a continuing devotion to him ever since the time of his death." He stated that he was in the process of developing some means "to promote further interest in his cause and to pray for his canonization." He noted also: "There are still a lot of the old people who do pray to him, but the younger generation by and large has forgotten about him. There are still people living whose relatives were cured by Father Seelos." Vaughn saw his work as passing on to the newer generation, the devotion that an earlier one had toward Father Seelos.⁶³

6. Shortly after the above letter, Mary Molitor, a parishioner, wrote to Father Vaughn, August 6, 1960, about a Mrs. Caroline Schlosser: "She has a great devotion to the Saintly Rev. Father F. X. Seelos, CSSR Her mother knew Rev. Father Seelos personally and had received a favor from Rev. Father Seelos." She adds that Mrs. Schlosser "has a picture I gave to her now framed in her home. She calls on and prays asking Rev. Fr. F. X. Seelos to help her often." To confirm her statements she tells Father Vaughn to ask one of the parish priests who "knows the lady and of her devotion to Father Seelos."⁶⁴

7. In 1961, Father Paul Baudry, vice-provincial of New Orleans, recalled his years as "minister" (community procurator) of the Redemptorists in New Orleans, 1942-1944; and the five years that he was superior of the community, 1953-1958. He wrote to Father Vaughn, the recently appointed Vice-postulator of the Cause, in words that merit extensive citation.

During my years in St. Alphonsus' Parish, New Orleans, there has always been a cult of Father Seelos. From 1942 to 1944, I was Minister of the Community and frequently heard mention of Father Seelos among the people. At that time, following the special devotions of the Holy Family Sodality, an Our Father and Hail Mary were offered "that if it pleased God, Father Seelos would soon be raised to the altars of the Church." Periodically articles would appear in the papers of New Orleans, with a story of Father Seelos and a picture of his grave. Mr. Roger Baudier, K.S.G., outstanding writer of New Orleans history, especially ecclesiastical, closely associated with the Archdiocesan paper, periodically made reference to the cause of Father Seelos [...].

During my five years as Pastor of St. Alphonsus Parish, 1953 to 1958, there was a knowledge and an understanding very prevalent of the sacred-

⁶³ APG), Seelos Correspondence: Vaughn to Nicola Ferrante, CSSR, New Orleans, July 13, 1960. More will be said of Father Ferrante in the following section.

⁶⁴ RAVPNO, Seelos Correspondence II: Mary Molitor to Vaughn, New Orleans, August 6, 1960.

ness of the holy remains of Father Seelos within the sanctuary of St. Mary's Assumption Church. And because of this "attachment" to Father Seelos that seemed to persist I was moved, in the naming of our various parochial buildings, to call one Seelos Hall. Another effective telling of this dependence on the help of Father Seelos was the having of Low Masses periodically in "thanks to Father Seelos." Regrettably with lay help in our office and not publishing Low Masses intentions, no record was kept of those offering thanks. But I am definitely able to bear witness to the fact that such Masses were requested and said.

In a postscript, Father Baudry wrote:

While pastor of St. Alphonsus and St. Mary's Church, I wished to initiate renewal of Cause of Father Seelos but was prevented from doing so because of certain obstacles which I was unable to surmount.⁶⁵

We have no way of knowing what the obstacles were that stood in the way of furthering the Cause of Father Seelos at that time, 1953-1958.

According to Father Baudry, then, the name of Father Seelos was often mentioned among the people; prayers were offered regularly for the progress of his Cause for canonization; articles appeared periodically in the secular and religious newspapers of the city; the tomb of Father Seelos in Saint Mary's Church was considered a most sacred place. Because of the awareness of his singularity as a saintly person and of the attachment to him among the people, one of the parish buildings was given the name Seelos Hall. Masses of thanksgiving to God were requested in recognition of favors received through his intercession.

In a previous letter, Baudry had mentioned, in abbreviated form, the substance of what he wrote in the letter above: "There has always been a 'cult' built around Father Seelos. Many pray to him." "His memory is very fresh in N[ew] O[rleans]." "I had letters requesting relics of Father Seelos from lay people in the Oakland Province."⁶⁶

8. In February, 1961, Father Vaughn wrote to the consultor general in Rome, Raymond Miller, asking him about the manner of proving a continuous devotion.

Will it be of value if I interview people who have had a devotion to Father Seelos for many years? As I understand it from my reading, it is important to show that devotion to him has continued over the years from the time of his death until the present time. I certainly will be able to get information which would be of great value in proving this point [...].

The more I read about the life of Father Seelos, the more convinced I

⁶⁵ RAVPNO, Seelos Correspondence II: Paul Baudry, CSSR, to Vaughn, New Orleans, January 8, 1961. Father Baudry, when using the word "cult" in reference to Father Seelos, of course, means only the private devotion and prayer of the people.

⁶⁶ AGR, Consultor General Raymond Miller: Paul Baudry, CSSR, to Raymond Miller, CSSR, New Orleans, July 6, 1960.

am that he is truly worthy of canonization. I also seem to see the working of God's grace in this case as I progress. Every day makes me more and more convinced of the worthiness of the cause we have before us.⁶⁷

9. On May 22, 1961, Father Vaughn wrote to Father Ferrante in Rome: "Practically every day now I receive a letter from someone who feels that their prayers to Father Seelos have been answered."⁶⁸

10. Shortly thereafter, Father Vaughn wrote to an unidentified friend: "I have been told of Mrs. Enget's long-standing devotion to Father Seelos [...]" And further on in the letter: "It is really amazing how so many people are establishing a definite devotion in their lives to him, and the great amount of prayers that are being said to Father Seelos, as well as the many favors that have been answered."⁶⁹

11. In other places in the United States, there was an interest in the Cause of Father Seelos. In October Father Vaughn received a letter from the superior of the Redemptorist parish of Saint Mary's in Buffalo, New York. Father Henry Missig wrote:

Last week I ran across the enclosed picture of Father Seelos. This week's issue of the N.Y. Catholic Weekly gives a little account of our holy confrere's life.⁷⁰

12. Toward the end of the year Father Vaughn made this report to Father Ferrante in Rome.

I have received over 300 letters from people who feel that their prayers to Father Seelos have been answered. Last month I put a guest book by the tomb, asking the people to sign their name and address. Within a month over 800 signatures were put in the book, indicating that at least that many people had visited the tomb.⁷¹

13. And also in his hometown of Füssen, Germany, Father Seelos and the Cause for his canonization had not fallen into oblivion. Sister Hildegard in New Orleans had volunteered to translate his letters and other writings from German into English. While engaged in this work she wrote to the pastor of Saint Mang Parish in Füssen, informing him of the progress of the Cause. The pastor, Christoph Waiser, then thanked her and made the following remarks, among other things.

⁶⁷ RAVPNO, Seelos Correspondence I: Vaughn to Miller, New Orleans, February 2, 1961, carbon copy.

⁶⁸ RAVPNO, Ferrante Correspondence: Vaughn to Ferrante, New Orleans, May 22, 1961, carbon copy.

⁶⁹ RAVPNO, Seelos Correspondence I: Vaughn to Elmer [?], New Orleans, June 15, 1961, carbon copy.

⁷⁰ RAVPNO, Seelos Correspondence II: Henry Missig, CSSR, to Vaughn, Buffalo, New York, October 17, 1961.

⁷¹ RAVPNO, Seelos Correspondence I: Vaughn to Ferrante, New Orleans, November 18, 1961, carbon copy.

Your letter of April 30 brought great joy into the rectory and into the entire parish of St. Mang. Of course, we in Füssen to this day know about Father Xavier Seelos. On the 90 anniversary of his death in 1957, our diocesan paper carried a commemorative article of him.

In writing about Mrs. Linsmayer, a direct descendant of Ambrose Seelos, brother of Father Seelos, he noted: "She is very religious and a great venerator of Father Seelos."⁷²

14. Father Vaughn had sent a copy of Father Waiser's letter to Archbishop John Cody of New Orleans in order to inform him of "the influence of the devotion of Father Seelos in Germany." Father Stanley J. Iverson, vice-chancellor of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, in his letter of gratitude to Father Vaughn added this paragraph:

It is indeed remarkable that devotion to Father Seelos has been preserved through the years without benefit of organized "promotion."⁷³

From the above citations, it is certain that Father Seelos and his saintly life were not forgotten by the people in New Orleans and in his hometown in Germany. The remarkable aspect of this is that even when there was no official activity toward the promotion of the Cause, there still continued, among the ordinary people, a devotion and reverence for him. From his death until the renewal of movement, all during those many years of silence, his intercession was sought, his tomb visited. People were convinced that they received favors through his prayers.

X. PROGRESS TOWARD THE REACTIVATION OF THE CAUSE

On July 20, 1958, the Redemptorist superior general, William Gaudreau, CSSR, accepted the resignation of Benedetto D'Orazio as postulator general for Redemptorist Causes "because of his advanced age." D'Orazio was in his seventy-eighth year and had functioned in the office of postulator general since his appointment in 1922, thirty-six years. On the same date, which happened to be the solemnity of the Most Holy Redeemer, Father Gaudreau appointed Father Nicola Ferrante, a member of the Roman Province of Redemptorists, to succeed him as postulator general for Redemptorist Causes. On July 30, the superior general informed the Congre-

⁷² RADP, Seelos Papers: Pastor Christoph Waiser to Sister M. Hildegard, Füssen, Germany, May 22, 1963, English translation.

⁷³ RAVPNO, Seelos Correspondence II: Father Stanley J. Iverson to Vaughn, New Orleans, September 20, 1963. Charles N. BRANSOM, Jr, *Ordinations of U.S. Catholic Bishops: 1790-1989: A Chronological List* (Washington, D.C., 1990) (hereafter Bransom, *Ordinations*), pp. 109-110: John Patrick Cody: coadjutor archbishop of New Orleans, August 10, 1961; apostolic administrator, June 1, 1962; ordinary of New Orleans, November 8, 1964; archbishop of Chicago, June 14, 1965; cardinal, June 26, 1967; died, April 25, 1982.

gation of Rites of this appointment, noting that Father Ferrante had been given all the faculties required to deal with the Sacred Congregation of Rites. Finally, the chancellor of the Congregation of Rites placed a record of the appointment in the archives of the Congregation.⁷⁴

In the following year, 1959, as we have seen, Father Paul Baudry, vice-provincial in New Orleans, appointed Father John Vaughn “to be the promotor of interest in Father Seelos’ life here in the Vice-Province.” This was the practical result of renewed concern in Rome about the Cause of Father Seelos. Father Vaughn, writing to Father Raymond Miller, the American general consultor in Rome, noted: “Father Grangell tells me that there is renewed interest in promoting the cause of Father Seelos in Rome.” Father Grangell had just returned to New Orleans from his four-year stint as general consultor and so was familiar with happenings in Rome.⁷⁵

Father Vaughn immediately started to work on the Cause. He conducted a frequent correspondence with Father Ferrante in Rome (and with others who might be able to give help) in order to ascertain the status of the Cause, to obtain documents pertinent to the life and work of Father Seelos, and in general, to become acquainted with anything that had reference to the process. Since he had shown such keen interest in this work, even though, at the time, he was committed to regular parish duties in New Orleans, and to give him an official status, he was appointed by Father Ferrante as Vice-postulator on March 5, 1961.⁷⁶ He was the first vice-postulator to work on the Cause of Father Seelos since the death of Father Joseph Wissel in 1912. He expended himself tirelessly and devotedly in promoting various aspects of the Cause. He inaugurated a program to make the life and holiness of Father Seelos better known among the people; he began the four-page, monthly newsletter *Father Seelos and Sanctity*, which is still being published; he undertook a diligent search for new documents by Father Seelos and material about him; he made copies of known documents to be sent to Father Ferrante for his work in Rome and for Father Curley, who was writing the biography of Father Seelos, entitled *Cheerful Ascetic*. After a number

⁷⁴ *Analecta* 30 (1958) 346-348, where the pertinent documents can be found. Nicola Ferrante of the Roman Province: born May 13, 1910; professed September 28, 1927; ordained October 28, 1934; died August 20, 1986; postulator general for 28 years, 1958-1986.

⁷⁵ RAVPNO, Seelos Correspondence I: Vaughn to Miller, New Orleans, December 6, 1959, carbon copy. For Paul Baudry and Raymond Miller, cfr n. 61 above; William Grangell was consultor general 1954-1958.

⁷⁶ RAVPNO, Seelos Correspondence I: Ferrante to Vaughn, Rome, March 5, 1961: “Acclusa alla lettera troverá il Mandato di Vice-Postulatore della causa di Beatificazione del Padre Seelos per la quale stiamo insieme lavorando”; Vaughn to Vince [?], New Orleans, April 20, 1961, carbon copy: “After some misunderstanding in Rome I finally got the document of my appointment as Vice-Postulator. It is dated March 5, 1961.”

of very energetic and productive years, for which the Cause of Father Seelos owes him a great debt of gratitude, Father Vaughn resigned from the office of vice-postulator in 1968.⁷⁷

Shortly after his appointment as postulator general, Father Nicola Ferrante began his work on the Cause of Father Seelos. He engaged the services of Avvocato Carlo Snider who had labored on many Causes for the Congregation of Rites. Father Ferrante requested him to examine the available data on Father Seelos and make a report on the possibility of petitioning the Congregation of Rites for the official introduction of the Cause. In a letter, dated July 14, 1960, to Father Raymond Miller, who was on Visitation in Canada, Father Ferrante informed him of Snider's evaluation:

Yesterday evening, finally, the lawyer gave me his response in regard to the Cause of the Servant of God, Father Seelos: the answer is positive. There are difficulties to overcome, it is true, but the Cause presents a truly beautiful figure of a confessor of the faith, heroic in virtue. There is nothing for us to do but to move ahead with great courage in the desire to arrive quickly at a definite result.⁷⁸

The salient points of Avvocato Snider's Report, a copy of which he sent to Vaughn on August 1, are these. After examining the four *Processus Informativi*, the *Summarium* of 1908, and the *Informatio* of 1910, he gave his impressions in nine points.

1) Sometimes the testimony of the witness is rather brief, "though all the necessary and sufficient elements to prove the fame of sanctity and virtue" are in them. The brevity is due, Snider noted, not always to the lack of knowledge on the part of the witnesses but "how the judges collected the deposition."

2) The documentation is very useful to complete the information supplied by the witnesses, but this documentation has not been presented and utilized according to the demands of historical criticism.

3) In the *Informatio* the lawyer has proven the fame and virtues of Father Seelos using the oral testimony of the witnesses; however, these testimonies have not been carefully studied. A more careful examination would

⁷⁷ RAVPNO, Seelos Correspondence I: Vaughn to Ferrante, New Orleans, November 16, 1961, carbon copy: "I am also sending out a newsletter (the first edition goes out this month [...])." John Vaughn: born June 14, 1926; professed August 2, 1946; ordained July 2, 1951; some time after his resignation, Father Vaughn left the priesthood and Redemptorist religious life.

⁷⁸ APG, Ferrante Correspondence: Ferrante to Miller, Rome, July 14, 1960, typed copy: "Ieri sera, finalmente, l'Avvocato mi ha data la risposta in merito alla causa del Servo di Dio Padre Seelos: la risposta è positiva. Vi sono sì difficoltà da sormontare, ma la causa presenta una figura veramente bella di confessore della fede, eroico nelle virtù. Non ci resta che andare avanti con grande coraggio col desiderio di arrivare presto a un risultato decisivo."

have revealed the figure of Father Seelos as “richer and more complete, especially if it is considered in the time and in the places” in which he lived.

4) Despite these deficiencies, Avvocato Snider thinks “*the cause can be presented with confidence to the Congregation of Rites.*” [emphasis in the original]

5) In resuming the Cause, a number of things must be considered

a) because there are witnesses *de visu* “the introduction of the cause [can] be dealt [with] in the ordinary section.”

b) because witnesses *de visu* can no longer be called, the heroicity of virtue must be proven with the witnesses of the Ordinary Process and “with documentation already known and with the documentation that can be presented in future.”

c) research is to be made for all extant documentation written by Father Seelos, about him, and to him. This documentation must be kept in mind in the preparation of the new *Positio super introductione causae*. Thus, after the Cause has been introduced, the documentary research will not be made by the historical section and the “acts for the examination of the heroic virtues will not be made ‘ex officio’ by that section.”

d) the *Summarium* will be prepared according to rules followed “in the treatment of the causes of the ordinary section” of the Congregation of Rites.

e) The *Summarium* and the *Informatio* must not only give arguments for the introduction of the cause but also must give evidence and proof of the heroicity of the virtues of Father Seelos.

6) The Vice-postulator is to collect all the documents concerning Father Seelos and send authenticated copies to the Postulator. After presenting them to the Congregation of Rites, the Postulator and the lawyer will determine which are to be included in the *Summarium*.

7) Every document is to be accompanied by critical apparatus, giving its provenance, author, authenticity, reliability, and probative value.

8) Information is to be provided about the personality and the authority of the witnesses of the four *Processus Informativi*.

9) The Vice-postulator is to provide evidence that there is an “oral tradition about the life and virtues” of Father Seelos.⁷⁹

At the beginning of December, Father Ferrante could report to Father Vaughn that Mr. Snider was planning to undertake “a very ample and complete work,” in which he intended to make “use of not only the depositions of the witnesses, but also of the writing of Father Seelos and all the historical documents about his life.” This, Father Ferrante wrote, was necessary be-

⁷⁹ RAVPNO, Seelos Correspondence I: Ferrante to Vaughn, Rome, August 1, 1960. The copy of the Report as found here is written in very poor English; there is no evidence to indicate whether Mr. Snider himself made the translation or whether Father Ferrante had it done for the benefit of Father Vaughn, whose knowledge of Italian was limited.

cause of the “somewhat poor and uncertain” responses of the witnesses.⁸⁰ Early in the following year, Father Raymond Miller, the general consultor, wrote to Vaughn about a meeting he and Ferrante had with Snider. Mr. Snider was so enthusiastic about Father Seelos that he repeatedly called him “*una figura gigantesca!*” and wondered, because of this, why the Redemptorists had “delayed so long in getting to work on the cause?” and “why on earth did they abandon it for fifty years?”⁸¹ Shortly after, in another letter, Father Miller again remarked about Snider’s enthusiasm for Father Seelos: “He is more and more impressed with the personality of Fr. Seelos, his being a poet, etc., ‘A Saint with the soul of an artist!’”⁸²

A month before this, however, evidence of enthusiasm for the Cause come from another quarter, but one that, in view of past events, could be expected and appreciated. We cite a telling paragraph from Father Miller’s letter to Vaughn, February 13, 1961.

Here is some special news, Arky! [Vaughn’s nickname]. The other day Fr. Ferrante got a telephone call, & who should it be but Cardinal Hamlet Cicognani, former Apostolic Delegate in the US. He asked Fr. F. to come to his office at 4 p.m. And the reason for calling him was to tell him of his very warm & personal interest in three things: 1) the cause of Bp Neumann; 2) the naming of St. Gerard as Patron of Mothers; and 3) *the cause of Fr. Seelos!* He spoke with such energy & determination that he almost took Fr. Ferrante off his feet, “These things *must get going!*” he kept saying.⁸³

The correspondence that has been found of these years shows that the work was begun in an aura of great warmth and enthusiasm. Father Vaughn sent a steady stream of documents pertinent to the Cause to Rome. The plan, at the time, was briefly expressed by Father Ferrante in a letter to Father Vaughn, June 1, 1964: “When I feel certain that there are no more important documents to be found I will get a lawyer to draw up the *Summarium* and the *Informatio* that will be presented to the Congregation of Rites.”⁸⁴ Some months later, in September, Father Vaughn, writing to Father Ferrante, made mention of a new development in the progress of the work: “When Father Curley and I visited Mr. Snider in Rome, he told us that he did not plan on working on the “*summarium*” and the “*informatio*” until Father Curley had finished his research and wrote his book.”⁸⁵

⁸⁰ RAVPNO, Ferrante Correspondence: Ferrante to Vaughn, Rome, December 8, 1960.

⁸¹ RAVPNO, Seelos Correspondence I: Miller to Vaughn, Rome, January 27, 1961.

⁸² RAVPNO, Seelos Correspondence I: Miller to Vaughn, Rome, March 7, 1961.

⁸³ RAVPNO, Seelos Correspondence I: Miller to Vaughn, Rome, February 13, 1961.

⁸⁴ RAVPNO, Ferrante Correspondence: Ferrante to Vaughn, Rome, June 1, 1964, English translation.

⁸⁵ RAVPNO, Ferrante Correspondence: Vaughn to Ferrante, New Orleans, September 12, 1964, carbon copy.

XI. *CHEERFUL ASCETIC*: SCIENTIFIC BIOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL J. CURLEY, CSSR

A short digression is called for here to mention the biography of Father Michael Curley, since the reactivation of the Cause and the writing of this book are concomitant and are closely related. As early as 1954, Father Curley was giving some thought to a modern biography of Father Seelos. A Redemptorist of the New Orleans Vice-province, Father Thomas McDonough, after a visit to Brooklyn, New York, wrote to Archbishop Joseph Rummel of New Orleans about a conversation he had with Father Curley. McDonough wrote that Curley thought “that it would be a good thing to bring out an up-to-date life” of Father Seelos; and that if there were a “sufficient amount of documentation on the life and virtues of Father Seelos” in the archdiocesan archives, he would come to New Orleans to study the material and to begin to make some notations. Father Curley said that even though the Cause had been abandoned for some time, Father Seelos’s “life, labors, and virtues did merit publication and dissemination.”⁸⁶ Father Curley had just published his biography of Bishop John Neumann, CSSR, friend and contemporary of Father Seelos, and was casting about for another project in American Redemptorist history.⁸⁷

Nothing came of the Seelos biography in 1954 or even shortly thereafter. It was not until 1961 that Father Curley considered in earnest beginning the life of Father Seelos. Toward the end of that year, in November, Father Vaughn, communicating with Father Ferrante, wrote that Curley “seems interested in writing a definitive life of Father Seelos.” Vaughn himself, at that time, was sending to Father Curley copies of all the documents and translations that he was then sending to Ferrante in Rome, because “he has indicated that he might be interested in using them” in the biography he was considering.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ RAVPNO, Seelos Correspondence I: Thomas McDonough, CSSR, to Archbishop Joseph F. Rummel, New Orleans, March 2, 1954, carbon copy. McDonough: born October 9, 1903; professed August 2, 1925; ordained July 2, 1930; died November 19, 1973. *Encyclopedia of American Catholic History*, s.v. “Rummel, Joseph Francis (1876-1964)”, by Charles E. Nolan: archbishop of New Orleans 1935-1964.

⁸⁷ Michael J. Curley: born April 28, 1900; professed August 2, 1921; ordained June 13, 1926; died December 3, 1972; archivist of the Baltimore Province 1945-1949. Father Curley has to his credit three books that shed much light on the history of the Baltimore Province; *Venerable John Neumann, CSSR: Fourth Bishop of Philadelphia* (New York: Crusade Press, 1952); *The Provincial Story: A History of the Baltimore Province of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer* (New York: Redemptorist Fathers, 1963); and the biography of Father Seelos that we are discussing in this section.

⁸⁸ RAVPNO, Ferrante Correspondence: Vaughn to Ferrante, New Orleans, November

At the beginning of the following year, 1962, Father Curley made an assessment of what was required for a historically sound biography and his qualifications to do it. Communicating with Father Vaughn he was convinced that anyone who embarked upon a life of Father Seelos would “have to do it in the east” because Father Seelos spent most of his life in that part of the United States and because “there is need of checking and rechecking so much,” something that would be difficult for someone coming from the south or west. Father Curley then made these observations about his own passion for historical accuracy.

My trouble is the bent of my mind will not allow me to take hearsay slipshod reports as history. Maybe I’m too careful. But I firmly believe that the pietistic tripe often given out for history is harmful rather than helpful. These men of God are solid and need no glamorizing.

He did not think there were any large or significant documents that had not yet been uncovered. To write the biography, therefore, would mean “to get small bits of information and put them into a mosaic.”⁸⁹

To conduct a thorough search for material for the biography, Fathers Curley and Vaughn spend over three months in Rome and in Germany, especially in Füssen, the hometown of Father Seelos, in the latter part of the summer of 1963.⁹⁰ The next year, Vaughn informed Ferrante about the progress of the biography, saying that Father Curley, hoped “to finish it within two years.”⁹¹ However, it was not until the following year, 1965, that the actual writing began, as Vaughn reported: “Father Curley is in the final phases of research into the life of Father Seelos and should begin writing the book shortly.”⁹² Toward the end of the year Vaughn could report to Ferrante that Father Curley was working at a rapid pace: “He is expecting to have the manuscript completed by December of 1966.”⁹³

This estimate of Father Curley was a bit premature as on January 4, 1967, he still had to report: “I am hard at work trying to finish the manuscript.” He was especially concerned about the footnotes which, as he remarked, “have to be exact if we wish to relate the life story of Father Seelos correctly.”⁹⁴ He was anxious to have a finalized manuscript to send to Rome

29, 1961, carbon copy

⁸⁹ RAVPNO, Seelos Correspondence I: Michael Curley, CSSR, to Vaughn, Brooklyn, New York, January 23, 1962.

⁹⁰ RAVPNO, Ferrante Correspondence: Vaughn to Ferrante, New Orleans, August 16, 1963, carbon copy.

⁹¹ RAVPNO, Ferrante Correspondence: Vaughn to Ferrante, New Orleans, April 8, 1964, carbon copy.

⁹² APG, Vaughn to Ferrante, New Orleans, February 8, 1965.

⁹³ RAVPNO, Ferrante Correspondence: Vaughn to Ferrante, New Orleans, November 30, 1965, carbon copy.

⁹⁴ APG, Curley to Ferrante, Brooklyn, January 4, 1967.

as soon as possible. "This manuscript text is prepared mainly so that you may be able to move ahead on the Cause in Rome."⁹⁵ Finally, on June 22, 1967, he was able to send to Father Ferrante "the manuscript copies of the biography of Father Seelos, together with the notes and bibliography." Father Curley, hoping for a speedy continuation of the Cause in Rome, added an optimistic comment: "With these copies in your hand you and Mr. Snider can see what may be needed to complete the documentation necessary for the Apostolic process."⁹⁶ Further details about the biography need not detain us here except to say that the book with the title *Cheerful Ascetic: The Life of Francis Xavier Seelos, CSSR*, had to wait some few years yet before publication. This took place in October 1969.⁹⁷

XII. FURTHER STEPS TOWARD THE REACTIVATION OF THE CAUSE

As was mentioned before the short digression on the work of Father Curley, Father Ferrante and Avvocato Snider were studying all the documents that they had on hand and those they were receiving either from Father Vaughn or Father Curley. Their plan, in 1965, was "to prepare, with much care, the *Summarium* and the *Informatio* for the Cause, and then to ask for the dispensation from the apostolic process because of the death of all direct witnesses." (It must be remembered that up to this point the Cause, despite many years of work on it, had not yet been officially introduced in the Congregation of Rites; hence, the usually required apostolic process had not been conducted). Because of this plan, it was important for Mr. Snider to see and study all the documentation that was extant; after which he could proceed with confidence to printing the *Summarium* and the *Informatio*. Father Ferrante had high hopes that if "the work is exhaustive, then it will be easier for us to obtain the dispensation from the apostolic process."⁹⁸ In August of the following year, 1966, Father Ferrante was hoping that the *Summarium* would be completed for the hundredth anniversary of the death of Father Seelos, October 4, 1867.⁹⁹ Father Ferrante and Mr. Snider in Rome were awaiting the completion of Curley's biography to assure that all pertinent documentation had been taken into consideration.

⁹⁵ APG, Curley to Ferrante, Brooklyn, March 3, 1967.

⁹⁶ APG, Curley to Ferrante, Brooklyn, June 22, 1967.

⁹⁷ APG, Curley to Ferrante, Brooklyn, October 17, 1969: "At long last the book on Seelos came out!"

⁹⁸ APG, Ferrante to Vaughn, Rome, August 5, 1965, carbon copy.

⁹⁹ APG, Ferrante to Curley, Rome, August 3, 1966, carbon copy of an English translation.

Finally, on July 5, 1967, the manuscript copy of Father Curley's biography arrived in Rome. Ferrante quickly took it to Mr. Snider who was "very busy at this moment with a case given to him directly by the Pope." But Snider promised to read the text as soon as possible to ascertain the documents that he still required for preparing the *Summarium*. At this point, for the first time Ferrante touched upon the possibility, though very indirectly, of confiding the work to someone else, while demonstrating, at the same time, some of his native astuteness.

Stay calm, I will try and quicken the matters with the lawyer but I have to do it delicately because he is very nervous. On the other hand, he is the only lawyer from the Rites that handles these ancient studies and everyone goes to him for the difficult cases. If we leave him for another we gain time but we lose the deepness and the fullness of the study. Why don't you write to him from time to time using a bit of tactic? Mr. Snider is a sentimental and we can win him with our good ways.¹⁰⁰

A few months later, in September, Father Ferrante wrote to Father Curley about Mr. Snider: "Unfortunately, I have the impression that until now he has not begun his work despite my continuous insistence."¹⁰¹ On November 14, Ferrante could report that "Mr. Snider, finally, began his work."¹⁰² And toward the end of the year, Father Ferrante told Vaughn that he himself would function as assistant to Mr. Snider and that "at the moment I have good grounds for hoping that we may be able to have the Apostolic Process dispensed with entirely."¹⁰³ In the same vein, he wrote to Curley in February of the following year: "We will ask for a dispensation from the apostolic processes, and after the Cause is introduced we will pass to an examination of the heroicity of the virtues."¹⁰⁴

In 1968, Father Ferrante appointed Father James Hennessy as Vice-postulator in New Orleans because of the resignation of Father Vaughn.

I am very glad to appoint you as Vice-postulator of the Cause of Father Seelos. I knew very well your enthusiasm for the opening of the tomb of Father Seelos; therefore, I am sure that you will continue assistance to me as Father Vaughn has done. As for me, I shall work with new fervor for our

¹⁰⁰ RAVPNO, Ferrante Correspondence: Ferrante to Vaughn, Rome, July 5, 1967. English translation.

¹⁰¹ APG, Ferrante to Curley, Rome, November 28, 1967, carbon copy.

¹⁰² RAVPNO, Ferrante Correspondence: Ferrante to Vaughn, Rome, November 14, 1967. English translation.

¹⁰³ RAVPNO, Ferrante Correspondence: Ferrante to Vaughn, Rome, December 24, 1967, English translation.

¹⁰⁴ APG, Ferrante to Curley, Rome, February 21, 1968, carbon copy: "Chiederemo la dispensa dai processi apostolici e introdotta la causa passeremo all'esame dell'eroicità delle virtù."

Cause. This is a solemn engagement for me, Father.”¹⁰⁵

Some months later, in explaining to Father Hennessy the nature of their work, he noted that he and Mr. Snider “proposed to integrate the testimony of the witnesses with the several photostat history documents of your predecessor, which form a series of sixteen volumes.” To these were added the documents cited by Father Curley in his biography and the letters and writings of Father Seelos. They envisioned “a volume of about 1500 pages, where every document would be studied critically and reproduced integrally.”¹⁰⁶

Despite the optimism Father Ferrante had shown up to this point, a change becomes noticeable in 1969. In a February letter to Father Curley, he complained that he was continuing his study of the documents “because up until now Avvocato Snider has done nothing. Consequently, I am working all alone.”¹⁰⁷ More bad news for Ferrante came when Father Hennessy resigned as Vice-postulator and his designated successor, Father Enos Babin, died before his official appointment could be made.¹⁰⁸ During the summer, Father William Grangell was named the new Vice-postulator of the Cause.¹⁰⁹

XIII. INTRODUCTION OF THE CAUSE IN THE HISTORICAL SECTION OF THE CONGREGATION FOR THE CAUSES OF SAINTS, APRIL 11, 1970

When Father Curley’s biography, *Cheerful Ascetic*, was published in October, 1969, he immediately sent a number of copies to Rome. In an accompanying letter, he assured Ferrante: “I wrote the book with an eye to your work. There is not a statement in it that cannot be backed up with documentary proof!”¹¹⁰ It was not, however, until December 3 that the copies arrived in Rome and Ferrante was overjoyed to receive “your magnificent book,” as he expressed himself. He was anxious to receive a dozen copies from New Orleans because “they are necessary for the Congregation of the

¹⁰⁵ APG, Ferrante to James G. Hennessy, CSSR, Rome, July 16, 1968, carbon copy of an English translation. Hennessy: born April 22, 1932; professed August 2, 1953; ordained June 24, 1958; left the Congregation and the priesthood.

¹⁰⁶ APG, Ferrante to Hennessy, Rome, January 11, 1969, carbon copy of an English translation.

¹⁰⁷ APG, Ferrante to Curley, Rome, February 24, 1969, carbon copy.

¹⁰⁸ APG, Hennessy to Ferrante, New Orleans, March 19, 1969, for the resignation of Hennessy; RABP, Michael Curley: Raymond Gaydos, CSSR, to Michael Curley, CSSR, New Orleans, May 23, 1969, for the death of Father Enos Babin. Father Gaydos was appointed to take charge of the Seelos Center during the interim.

¹⁰⁹ APG, Ferrante to William Grangell, CSSR, Rome, August 2, 1969.

¹¹⁰ APG, Curley to Ferrante, Brooklyn, October 17, 1969.

Causes of Saints.” In this same letter he told Father Curley: “I am confident that both Father Melchiorre, director general of the historical causes, and Mons. Pietro Frutaz, under-secretary of the Congregation, will be satisfied with it.” He then praised Father Curley for “finding and arranging in chronological order historical material,” and for preferring “objective exposition of the documents” to subjective reflection over them, something that “is precisely desired in the Congregation for the Causes of Saint.” For this reason, Ferrante could say that “your work will have a decisive importance for our cause.”¹¹¹

As for himself, Ferrante wrote, in the same letter of December 3, 1969, that it was his plan “to come to an arrangement with the Congregation for the Causes of Saints and to present everything directly to them, dispensing with Mr. Snider.”

Extant documentary sources are silent about the immediate steps that led to and preceded the next stage in the history of the Cause. It seems reasonable, however, to say that the excellently documented biography of Father Curley had much to do with it. His work gave the officials of the Congregation assurance that there was reliable documentation in sufficient quantity with which to reconstruct the life of Father Seelos and upon which a reasonable hope could be placed to prove, incontrovertibly, his practice of virtue in a heroic degree. On April 11, 1970, the Cause of Father Seelos was recognized as a Cause in the historical section of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.¹¹² After the event, Ferrante, in writing to Father Curley, noted: “I believe that I have already mentioned that the Cause of Seelos has passed to the historical section of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.” With cautious enthusiasm, he “had placed himself in a position of dependence upon the Congregation” for his historical study, “leaving aside Mr. Snider.”¹¹³

From this point on, very little correspondence between Father Ferrante and those working on the Cause in the United States has been

¹¹¹ APG, Ferrante to Curley, Rome, December 3, 1969, carbon copy: “Sono sicuro che sia il padre Melchiorre, relatore generale delle cause storiche, sia Mons. Pietro Frutaz, sottosegretario della stessa Congregazione, ne saranno soddisfatti.” The use of “Congregation of the Causes of Saint,” instead of the Congregation of Rites in this letter, reflects the Apostolic Constitution of Pope Paul VI, *Sacra Rituum Congregatio*, of May 8, 1969; cfr Fabijan VERAJA, *Commento alla nuova legislazione per le cause dei santi*, Roma 1983, 9. *Annuario Pontificio* 1970, 992: Mons. Amato Pietro Frutaz is listed as the under-secretary of the Congregation and Father Melchiorre da Pobladora, O.F.M.Cap., as the *relatore generale*.

¹¹² *Index ac status Causarum Beatificationis Servorum Dei et Canonizationis Beatorum* (1975), p. 172.

¹¹³ RAPB, Michael Curley: Ferrante to Curley, Rome, August 14, 1970: “Credo di averle già detto che la causa Seelos è passata alla sezione storica della congregazione per le cause dei santi.”

found, if ever there was any. Here and there, however, there is a glimmer. In June 1971, Father Ferrante, writing to congratulate Father Joseph Elworthy on his appointment as director of the Seelos Center in New Orleans, gave a short resume of the status of the Cause. He observed that the delay in the pursuit of the Cause "has not been too damaging" because such Causes as that of Father Seelos "must pass through the Historical Section" of the Congregation. In view of this, he had offered to carry on the work himself, when he "heard that the Historical Section could not dispose, for a time, of a suited person for such a task." In this letter Father Ferrante also made some inquiries about a number of unusual cures that were being attributed to the intercession of Father Seelos, notably that of Mrs. Angela Boudreaux of New Orleans, which cure, as it turned out, was the one that was eventually accepted by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints for the beatification of Seelos.

The Melvin Boudreaux Case. I will submit it to careful examination, but it will require the necessary long elapse of time which will be the decisive factor for judging the durability of the recovery, the case being *cancer*; [an] illness that may reproduce itself even after six or seven years.¹¹⁴

For the next more than ten years, Father Ferrante continued the work on the Cause as best he could, granted that he was occupied during this time with other Causes with which he was entrusted, both of Redemptorist confreres and of others. There is, unfortunately, no documentation that can shed any special light on those years. In 1983, a notice in *Southern Accent*, a publication for Redemptorists of the Vice-province of New Orleans, lets us understand that those years of silence were not idle ones. The issue for November, 1983, gives a short account of the work of the Vice-postulator, Father Joseph Buhler. He was being kept busy with "basic historical spadework." To meet the demands of the Cause, he was "kept busy tracking down, reproducing, transcribing, and indexing all of the sources" that were cited by Father Curley. His efforts, there can be no doubt, were in service of the work that Father Ferrante had taken upon himself in 1969.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ RAVPNO, Ferrante Correspondence: Ferrante to Joseph Elworthy, CSSR, Rome, June 21, 1971, English translation. Elworthy: born June 7, 1915; professed August 2, 1934; ordained June 29, 1939; vice-postulator of the Cause 1972-1978.

¹¹⁵ RABP, Francis Seelos, *History of the Cause*, 1983, a xeroxed copy of p. 4 of *Southern Accent*. Joseph Buhler: born July 20, 1913; professed August 2, 1934; ordained June 29, 1939; died April 8, 1996; vice-postulator of the Cause 1978-1995.

XIV. THE POSITIO SUPER VIRTUTIBUS HEROICIS

1. - *Carl Hoegerl, CSSR, is Appointed External Collaborator*

In October, 1983, Bishop Stanley Ott, recently appointed ordinary of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, had a meeting with Father Ferrante in Rome in which he inquired about the status of the Cause. Bishop Ott, while auxiliary in New Orleans (1976-1983) had always manifested an intense interest in the progress of the Cause of Father Seelos. In this meeting Bishop Ott and Father Ferrante were in agreement that, since Father Ferrante was at a standstill in his work for Father Seelos, they should seek the help of Father Carl Hoegerl, CSSR, because "he speaks and reads German, has an academic background in history and is presently in Rome." Consequently, in December, 1983, Father Matthew Kerschen, CSSR, the superior of the Vice-province of New Orleans, sent a formal request to Father Joseph Pfab, Redemptorist superior general, that Father Hoegerl, be assigned "to undertake and discharge this historical segment on the life of Father Seelos."¹¹⁶

Father Pfab, at a meeting with Father Hoegerl, January 17, 1984, requested him to undertake this work for the Cause of Father Seelos when he had completed the project that he was then working on.¹¹⁷ At the time Father Hoegerl was a member of the Redemptorist Historical Institute and Director of the Permanent Commission for Redemptorist Spirituality, with their offices in Rome. Because of unfinished projects, he could not devote his complete attention to the Cause until the spring of 1986.

2. - *Ambrogio Eszer, O.P., Is Appointed Director (Relatore), His Instruction*

Some months later, Father Ambrogio Eszer, O.P., was appointed as the Director (*relatore*) of the Cause to guide its progress and the work of Father Hoegerl when he should become fully involved with it.¹¹⁸ In May of the following year, 1985, Father Eszer had ready his "Instruction for the Further Course of the Cause of the Servant of God, Francis Xavier Seelos, CSSR, (1819-1867)." In his cover letter to Father Ferrante he noted that on the one

¹¹⁶ RABP, Francis Seelos, Hoegerl Correspondence, Matthew J. Kerschen, CSSR, to Josef G. Pfab, CSSR, New Orleans, December 14, 1983 - xeroxed copy. Bransom, *Ordinations*, 172: Stanley Joseph Ott: auxiliary of New Orleans, 1976-1983; ordinary of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, January 13, 1983; died November 28, 1992. Joseph Pfab: born August 7, 1922; professed September 2, 1948; ordained May 14, 1951; superior general 1973-1985; died November 24, 2000. Matthew Kerschen: born November 10, 1921; professed August 2, 1942; ordained January 6, 1948; died February 27, 1998; vice-provincial 1981-1990.

¹¹⁷ RABP, Francis Seelos, Log of the Cause of Francis Xavier Seelos, CSSR Henceforth cited simply as Log.

¹¹⁸ RABP, Log, under date of June 28, 1984.

hand “it will not be easy to make the future *Positio*,” but on the other, “practically all the material is at hand and no further research will have to be made.” He said this in view of the extensive work that had been done for the Cause in the early part of the century, as well as because of the two biographers, Fathers Peter Zimmer and Michael Curley. He made the further remark that the “external collaborator can write in his native language, English.”¹¹⁹

Under point 1.1. of the Instruction, Father Eszer noted that the Seelos Cause “belongs to that type of procedure that is spoken of in article 34 of the *Regolamento della Sacra Congregazione per le Cause dei Santi*, March 21, 1983. The *Positio super Virtutibus* is to be prepared under the guidance of a Director (*relatore*). Under point 1.2, Father Eszer cited article 16 of the *Regolamento*, according to which the *Positio* must contain “the documented presentation, in chronological order, of the life and activities of the Servant of God and also the testimonies to his holiness.” This critical study is to be prefaced with an *Informatio*.

Under point 2.1, Father Eszer said that, since the previous work on the Cause “was not composed according to modern scientific criteria, the “whole *Positio* must be redone according to the criteria of the above-mentioned article 16 of the *Regolamento*.” Under point 2.2, Father Eszer observed that, despite the inadequacies of previous work, the “depositions of the witnesses of the four *Processus Informativi*,” are not without value. “Rather they take on an importance of the first order,” since most of the witnesses are *de visu*. The *Summarium* of 1908, however, will have to be redone in a more orderly fashion and with the elimination of egregious typographical errors. In point 2.3 it was noted that the *Summarium* is to have the usual Index of Witnesses.

Point 2.4 concerns the documentation that is to be presented in the *Positio*; that is, documents cited in the *Copia Publica* and documents cited by Father Curley in his biography *Cheerful Ascetic*. These documents are to “follow the course of his life, beginning with those concerning his birth and baptism.” The biography of Father Peter Zimmer, even though it is without critical apparatus, “has a value of the first order,” because “the author knew well the Servant of God and then scrupulously preserved the recollections of contemporaries.” Father Eszer then gives some specific directives for the presentation of the documents, with particular attention to the demands of the historical apparatus.

Point 3. refers to the new *Informatio*. Being based on the depositions of the witnesses of the four Processes and on the documentation presented it “will bring to light the fact that the Servant of God practiced all the theo-

¹¹⁹ RABP, Francis Seelos, History of the Cause, 1985: Ambrogio Eszer, O.P., to Ferrante, May 28, 1985. English translation of the Italian original.

logical and cardinal virtues and those virtues annexed to them in an extraordinary and heroic degree." It will also serve to exculpate him against certain accusations made against him during several periods of his life.¹²⁰

3. - *Death of the Redemptorist Postulator General; His Successor*

On August 20, 1986, Father Nicola Ferrante died after several years of ill health. He had been in charge of Redemptorist Causes for canonization since 1958. Shortly thereafter, Father Antonio Marrazzo, CSSR, was appointed as his successor.¹²¹

4. - *Report of the Historical Commission Appointed by the Archbishop of New Orleans*

On February 17, 1994, the Most Reverend Francis B. Schulte, Archbishop of New Orleans, appointed an Historical Commission to prepare a Report about the thoroughness of the research for documentation that might shed light on the life and virtues of Father Seelos.¹²² The three members of this Commission were: Father Carl Hoegerl as chairman, assisted by two highly competent scholars: Mrs. Sally Reeves, M.A., and Dr. Alfred E. Lemmon. Mrs. Sally Reeves is the Archivist of the New Orleans Notarial Archives; Dr. Alfred E. Lemmon is Curator of Manuscripts of the Historic New Orleans Collection.

The Commission sent its notarized Report to Archbishop Schulte on July 18, 1994. The operative conclusions contained in the Report are these.

All repositories that were considered possible sources of documents written by the Servant of God [...] have been thoroughly researched. Further, all sources that were considered to probably contain documents that shed light on the life of the Servant of God and of his practice of the virtues have been diligently searched. Consequently, it is the considered opinion of this Historical Commission that no probable source of documents, either by the Servant of God or about him, that would be helpful to the Cause, has been overlooked.

There are no writings of the Servant of God that have been published. The vast majority of his unpublished writings are preserved in the Redemptorist Archives of the Baltimore Province, in Brooklyn, New York.

¹²⁰ The original Italian text of the Instruction is found in APG, among the official documents of the Cause; a xeroxed copy is found in RABP, Francis Seelos, History of the Cause, 1985. It is printed in the *Positio*, I: 1-4.

¹²¹ Antonio Marrazzo: born October 26, 1952; professed September 29, 1972; ordained June 25, 1978.

¹²² BRANSOM, *Ordinations*, p. 184, no. 946. Francis Bible Schulte: born February 21, 1922; ordained May 10, 1952; archbishop of New Orleans since 1988.

Competent historians have authenticated these documents and notarized copies have been made [...].

The information contained in these documents contributes much to the knowledge of the life and virtues of the Servant of God, especially in those areas that are not touched upon by the witnesses of the four *Processus Informativi* [...].

From a study of the documents, there emerges the portrait of a Redemptorist priest who was remarkable for his desire for holiness and for his perseverance in striving to attain it.

The Report also contained a partial list of the archives in which documents were found and a brief bibliography. On the day the Report was sent to the Archbishop, the three members swore under oath, in the presence of a notary, that they had “used all diligence” as members of the Commission and that nothing had been removed, added, or falsified during the work and in the Report.

Archbishop Schulte sent the Report to His eminence Angelo Cardinal Felici, Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saint, August 4, 1994. In his cover letter, the Archbishop wrote:

The members of the commission have completed their efforts in a praiseworthy and diligent fashion. I am hopeful this cause will proceed with the able assistance and guidance of Reverend Ambrogio Eszer, O.P., who serves as *Relatore* of the Seelos Cause.

The archbishop then added some words about the Cause itself: “This matter is of considerable interest to many people in the Archdiocese of New Orleans. Father Seelos continues to this day to be honored and respected for his many acts of charity and his example of holiness.”

On September 5, 1994, Cardinal Felici sent an acknowledgement of the reception of the Report to Archbishop Schulte through Most Rev. Agostino Cacciavillan, the Pro-Nuntius of the Holy See to the United States. The Cardinal stated that the Report would be “made part of the Acts of the Cause.”¹²³

5. - *The Decree of the Validity of the Four Processes*

In the Ordinary Congress of September 23, 1994, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints deliberated about the validity of the *Processus Informativi* of Augsburg, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, and New Orleans. The answer was: “*Affirmative, seu constare de validitate eorundem Processuum in casu et ad effectum de quo agitur.*” The Decree was signed by Angelo Cardi-

¹²³ RABP, Francis Seelos, Documents Pertaining to the Historical Commission. Most of these texts are xeroxed copies of the originals.

nal Felici, the prefect of the Congregation, and by the secretary, Eduard Nowak.¹²⁴

6. - *The New Summarium, 1996*

Father Eszer in his Instruction of May 28, 1985, under point 2.2, noted: "The *Summarium* is to be redone, in the sense that depositions of the individual witnesses are to follow one after the other, that is, in the order of the *Copia Publica*." Also that "the egregious mistakes in the present *Positio* are also to be eliminated." Under point 2.3, he instructed: "The *Summarium* is also to have the usual Index of Witnesses. These instructions, having been taken into consideration, a new *Summarium* was prepared to supplant the deficient one of 1908 and was ready for the printer in 1996. It is dated Rome, September 20, 1997.

7. - *The Documented Biography*

Father Eszer, in his Instruction for the Further Course of the Cause, under section 2.3, gave clear directives on the methodology of the documented biography that would have to be written.

All the documents are to be put into the third part of the *Positio*, that is, all the documents already presented or cited in the present *Copia Publica*, and all the other documents cited in the biography of the Servant of God of Michael J. Curley, CSSR [...], according as they can help toward the desired goal; namely proof of the heroic virtues of the Servant of God. The documentation must follow the course of his life, beginning with those concerning his birth and baptism. Excerpts already published can serve the purpose of the Cause; for example, sources whose original has been lost or testimony of the reputation for holiness of the Servant of God, especially the biography of Peter Zimmer, CSSR [...]. This book is without critical apparatus, but in view of the fact that the author knew well the Servant of God and then scrupulously preserved the recollections of contemporaries, the book has a value of the first order. All the documents are to be prefaced with appropriate critical comments which bring to light their historical ambient and probative value.

Father Eszer, in this section of his Instruction, noted that citations from the German letters of Father Seelos "must be given in the original language," but at a subsequent meeting with Father Hoegerl decided that, since the readership of these would be English-speaking for the most part, they could be presented in an English translation.¹²⁵ Also, he instructed that parts taken from the *Copia Publica* "must naturally remain in Latin, both because

¹²⁴ The Decree is found at the beginning of the new *Summarium*.

¹²⁵ RABP, Log: notes of a meeting with Father Eszer, March 20, 1986: "3) Letters can be in English."

this is a more economical procedure, and Latin always remains a language of this sacred forum." His concluding sentence of this section refers to Curley's biography which, as he wrote, "will serve above all as an arsenal of sources which were not known to Zimmer and the author of the *Positio* of 1910."

In the early part of 1984, Father Hoegerl began working part-time on the Cause; and then in March of 1986, he was able to give his full attention to writing the *Documented Biography*. Eleven years were to elapse before a *finis* could be declared. It was not until May, 1997, that he could write to Father Eszer: "I am sending you the last two chapters" of the biography; with these "I have completed work on the documentary biography of Father Seelos."¹²⁶

A summary description of the *Biography* is in order here to give some idea of its articulation and contents. Volume II of the *Positio*, consisting of 2 books, is devoted to the life of Father Seelos and the critical apparatus pertinent to this kind of work. The volume is divided into three parts. Part I (1-140) is devoted to introductory material: Acknowledgments, Outline and Contents, Abbreviations, Chronology, History of the Cause, and Sources. Part II (141-1532): Life, Apostolic Ministry, Holy Death, Spiritual Charism, and Reputation for Holiness, Four Addendices. Part III (1533-1636): Documents Presented, Archives Researched, Bibliography Cited, Index of Names and Places.

Chapters 1-16 (1-1324) are devoted to the life of Father Seelos proper and carry his story from birth in 1819 in Füssen, Germany, to his death in 1867, in New Orleans, Louisiana. Chapter 17 (1325-1410) is entitled: "The Spirituality of the Servant of God: Three Summary Appraisals." These appraisals are by those individuals who, because of their engagement with the life and work of Father Seelos, are presumed to know the most about him: one from Father Zimmer's biography, the second from Father Curley's *Cheerful Ascetic*, and the third by Father Hoegerl. To complete the account of the spiritual personality of Father Seelos and the influence of his holiness upon others, it was thought helpful and even necessary to add chapter 18 (1411-1448): "Reputation for Holiness of the Servant of God, Special Gifts with Which He Was Blessed, Favors Received through His Intercession."

Each of the sixteen chapters has two distinct sections. The first is designated as "narration," which contains a running account of the events in the life of Father Seelos that occurred in the time-frame focused upon in that chapter. The second section is called "documentation," which presents the documents that pertain to the period under consideration in that chapter. Not to lose valuable material gathered by the two former biographers, copious data from them was incorporated into each chapter. Chapters 5-14 of

¹²⁶ RABP, Log: Hoegerl to Eszer, Brooklyn, May 29, 1997 - copy.

Curley's *Cheerful Ascetic* formed the narrative section of chapters 8 to 16; and 76 excerpts from Zimmer's *Leben* were used. The two tomes of volume II, all 1636 pages, came off the press in 1998.

8. - *The New Informatio*

The text called the *Informatio* of a Cause is a succinct summary of the life and virtues of the person under consideration. In the case of Father Seelos, an *Informatio* had been made and printed in 1910, but was judged too faulty and much too inadequate to be presented to the Congregation of Rites for its consideration. Consequently, a new *Informatio* was needed for the Cause. Father Eszer in point 3 of his 1985 Instruction indicated the procedure for the future in this regard:

The *Informatio* must be based either on the dispositions of the witnesses given in the four *Processus Ordinarii Informativi*, or on the documentary part. This will bring to light the fact that the Servant of God practiced all the theological and cardinal virtues, and those virtues annexed to them, in an extraordinary and heroic degree [...].

After some discussion about who should author the *Informatio*, whether an *avvocato* or Father Eszer himself, it was finally concluded that Father Hoegerl, as being most familiar with the Cause, was the logical choice for this.¹²⁷ He began his work in April, 1998, and was able to send his text to Rome for printing in September. The articulation of the *Informatio* is as follows: in addition to the Introduction and the Conclusion, there are nine chapters whose headings are: Appraisal of the Spirituality and Charism of the Servant of God; Significance for Today; *Curriculum Vitae*; Nature of the Probative Data, A) the Witnesses, B) the Documents; Heroicity of Virtues in General; Heroicity of the Virtues in Detail; Extraordinary Spiritual Gifts; Reputation for Holiness and Miracles; History of the Cause.

The heart of the *Informatio* is found in chapter VI, Heroicity of the Virtues in Detail. Here data from witnesses of the four Processes and from the documentation is presented to prove conclusively that Father Seelos practiced the traditional Christian virtues in an extraordinary degree. The virtues which find a place in the presentation are: Faith, Hope, Love of God, Love of Neighbor, Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance, Poverty, Chastity, Obedience, and Humility.

Father Eszer's Presentation of the printed text is dated December 10, 1998. The title, after the usual formalities of identification, reads: *INFORMATIO super dubio: An constet de virtutibus theologalibus Fide, Spe, Caritate tum in Deum tum in proximum, necnon de cardinalibus Prudentia,*

¹²⁷ RABP, Log: notes of a meeting with Father Eszer, April 22, 1998: "2) I'm to do the *Informatio*. In the past he [Eszer] thought he might do it or an *avvocato*."

Iustitia, Fortitudine, Temperantia, eisque adnexis in gradu heroico, in casu et ad effectum de quo agitur. As is customary, the *Informatio*, which consists of 199 pages, is bound with the *Summarium* and these two form the major texts of volume I of the *Positio*.

XV. DECREE OF HEROICITY OF VIRTUE

1. - *Vota of the Historical Consultors*

Copies of the entire *Positio* were given to six historical consultors of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints for their judgment. The six were: Prof. Hans-Joachim Kracht, Prof. Christoph Ludwig, Prof. Bernard Przewoźny, O.F.M., Prof. Tomáš Špidlík, S.J., Prof. Michele Ravuzzi, O.P., and Prof. Alfred Wilder, O.P. Their task was to answer, in writing, three questions: 1) Whether the research for documents to shed light on the life and work of Father Seelos was thoroughly and properly carried out? 2) Whether the documents that were gathered and inserted into the *Positio* merit historical credence? 3) Whether there are found in the documents those elements that provide a solid historical foundation to make a judgment about the reputation for holiness of Father Seelos and his practice of the virtues? Under the chairmanship of Father Eszer, five of these (Prof. Wilder could not attend) met on April 27, 1999, in the chambers of the Congregation to discuss: *Novae Aureliae, Beatificationis et Canonizationis Servi Dei Francisci Xaverii Seelos, C.S.S.R., (1819-1867), Positio super vita, virtutibus et fama sanctitatis*, voll. I-II, Rom(e) 1998, P.N. 1091. All six of the historical consultors cast a positive vote to each of the three questions they was asked to respond to. Their Reports, 47 pages in printed form, are found in the concluding pages of the *Positio*, I: *Relatio et vota sulla seduta dei consultori storici tenuta il 27 aprile 1999*.

2. - *Vota of the Theological Consultors*

Then eight theological consultors were selected to give a report and cast a vote about whether the Servant of God had practiced the Christian virtues to an heroic degree. The Special Session of the Congregation of Saints took place on December 14, 1999, with Mons. Sandro Corradini, Promotor General of the Faith, presiding. He announced that all eight theological consultors had cast a positive vote as to the heroicity of the virtues of Father Seelos and opened the floor for comments. Six of the consultors had some various observations to make. One said that "we find ourselves before an extraordinary confessor who lived humility in a remarkable way." Another,

that “the entire life of the Servant of God reflected goodness.” Another, that “his affable manner appears as the fruit of an intense interior life.”

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Promotor of the Faith expressed his agreement with the eight positive votes and wished the Cause speedy progress in view of the approaching year of jubilee. The proceedings of the sitting, containing as an essential part the Reports of the theologians, were printed in a separate fascicle of 105 pages, entitled *Relatio et vota congressus peculiaris super virtutibus die 14 decembris an. 1999 habiti* (Roma, 1999).

3. - *Vota of the Cardinals and Bishops*

In the Ordinary Session of the Congregation of Saints, convened on January 11, 2000, the cardinals and bishops, members of the Congregation, added their approval to the conclusions of the historical and theological experts about the life and virtues of Father Seelos. The *ponens* of the Cause was Cardinal Simone Lourdusamy. A report of this was given to the Pope John Paul II, who ordered that a decree to that effect be prepared.¹²⁸

XVI. DECREE ON THE MIRACLE

1. - *The Positio super Miraculo*

On July 27, 1966, 37-year-old Mrs. Angela Boudreaux (nee Governale) was admitted into the Southern Baptism hospital in New Orleans. A laparotomy on August 8 disclosed a massive inoperable malignant tumor that had invaded 90 per cent of her liver. The prognosis was extremely unfavorable. However, after leaving the hospital on August 18, she recovered rapidly, and within a month all symptoms of her previous ailment had disappeared. Some years later, in 1971, on the occasion of a surgical procedure, unrelated to the cancer, the liver was found to be normal. She attributed her cure to Father Seelos to whom she had prayed during her illness.

As we have mentioned in section XIII above, Father Ferrante, the Redemptorist postulator general, mentioned the Boudreaux cure in a letter of June 21, 1971 to Father Joseph Elworthy of the Seelos Center in New Orleans, who, no doubt, informed him of it.¹²⁹ Shortly thereafter, July 19, Ferrante wrote to Elworthy: “First of all, I wish to assure you of having al-

¹²⁸ *Decretum super Virtutibus*, Rome, January 27, 2000, where these details are found.

¹²⁹ RAVPNO, Ferrante Correspondence: Ferrante to Elworthy, Rome, June 21, 1971. English translation.

ready handed over to an expert physician of the Congregation of Causes the case of Mrs. Melvin Boudreaux.”¹³⁰ In an answer Elworthy noted:

As soon as possible, I shall take the necessary steps to get further information on the case of Mrs. Melvin Boudreaux. She is naturally delighted to hear the news about her “miracle.” She said she would get all the cooperation necessary from the doctors and nurses who took care of her five years ago.¹³¹

Toward the end of the year, December 10, Ferrante, acknowledging receipt of documents on the cure and informing Elworthy that he would consign them “without delay to the expert physician of the Congregation,” added: “If all goes well, I will ask for the Articles on the said recovery, and airmail them to you together with the instructions for the opening of a process on this case in New Orleans.”¹³²

Ferrante was able to persuade the archbishop of New Orleans, Philip Hannan, to authorize the constitution of a tribunal for the *Processus Cognitionalis*, whose competence it was to investigate the cure of Angela Boudreaux, observing all the canonical requirements.¹³³ The Tribunal had twelve sessions between March 7, 1973 and March 31, 1979, in which eleven witnesses gave their deposition. These were: Angela herself, her husband, her brother, four physicians, a nurse, two priests, and a parishioner who was acquainted with the case.¹³⁴ In time, the Acta of this process were duly sent to Rome where a *Copia Publica* was made. Then, as far as the cure was concerned matters were at a standstill until Father Hoegerl’s work on the *Positio super Virtutibus* was nearly completed in 1998.

Events then followed each other with unprecedented rapidity. On November 13, 1998, the Congregation issued its Decree on the validity of the investigative process in New Orleans.¹³⁵ After this assurance that all had been done with canonical correctness, the door was now open to further steps. A *Summarium ex Processu Cognitionali in Curia Archiepiscopali No-vae Aureliae annis 1973-1976 constructo*, consisting of 253 pages, prepared under the direction of Father Marrazzo, was ready from the printer on Janu-

¹³⁰ RAVPNO, Ferrante Correspondence: Ferrante to Elworthy, Rome, July 19, 1971.

¹³¹ RAVPNO, Ferrante Correspondence: Elworthy to Ferrante, New Orleans, August 27, 1971 - copy.

¹³² RAVPNO, Ferrante Correspondence: Ferrante to Elworthy, Rome, December 10, 1971

¹³³ *Positio super Miraculo*, 4, where Marrazzo stated: “Il Processo è stato portato avanti dal mio predecessore, il P. Nicola Ferrante, CSSR, il quale nel 1973 fece istanza all’Arcivescovo di New Orleans, S. E. Rev. Philip M. Hannan perché costituisse il Tribunale [...]”. Philip Matthew Hannan: born May 20, 1913; ordained December 8, 1939; archbishop of New Orleans 1965-1988.

¹³⁴ *Positio super Miraculo*, 4-5.

¹³⁵ *Positio super Miraculo: Decretum super validitate Processus Cognitionalis*.

ary 8, 1999. The *Informatio super dubio: An constet de miraculo in casu et ad effectum de quo agitur* was published on November 28, of the same year.

2. - Vota of the Medical Board

In the meantime, however, an event took place that was of capital importance to the Cause. The documents pertinent to the cure of Angela Boudreaux had been given to two *ex officio* medical experts for their study and opinion: Prof. Franco Introna and Prof. Lorenzo Bonomo. Both of these coming to the conclusion that there was question of a medically inexplicable cure, the case was discussed on October 20, 1999, by the Medical Board of the Congregation. There was a unanimous opinion that the cure went beyond what could be explained by scientific means. "The case," as Father Marrazzo remarked "can now be submitted to the examination of the reverend theological consultors and the most eminent cardinals with the hope that they will confirm the judgment of the medical experts."¹³⁶

3. - Vota of the Theological Consultors and the Cardinals and Bishops

On January 5, 2000, the Special Session of the theological consultors, under the direction of Sandro Corradini, Promotor of the Faith in the Congregation, convened to "discuss the alleged miracle attributed to the intercession of the Venerable Servant of God Francis Xavier Seelos."¹³⁷ In the exchange all the consultors agreed unanimously "that the cure was undoubtedly extremely rapid, has lasted for a good 33 years, and cannot be explained scientifically." After the remarks of the consultors, the Promotor of the Faith expressed his agreement with the unanimous opinion of the consultors, "judging the examined cure to be preternatural and attributable to the intercession of the Servant of God."¹³⁸

Then, the cardinals and bishops of the Congregation, meeting in Ordinary Session on January 18, confirmed the decisions of the medical and theological experts that the cure of Angela Boudreaux was beyond the powers of nature. This conclusion was reported to the Holy Father who ordered that a decree to that effect be prepared.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ *Informatio*, [3]: [...] "il caso può essere ora sottoposto all'esame dei Rev.mi. Consultori Teologi e degli Em.mi Padri Cardinali, con la speranza che confermino il giudizio dei Consulenti Medici."

¹³⁷ *Relatio et vota Congressus Peculiaris super miro die 5 Ianuarii an. 2000 habiti*, 4.

¹³⁸ *Relatio et vota*, 31.

¹³⁹ *Decretum super Miraculum*, Rome, January 27, 2000, where these details can be found.

XVII. PROMULGATION OF THE TWO DECREES

In a manner almost without precedent, Pope John Paul, on January 27, 2000, promulgated on the same occasion, the Decree on the Heroicity of Virtues and also the Decree on the Miracle. A letter of Father Joseph Tobin, superior general, dated January 27 informed the members of the Redemptorist community worldwide: "This morning, in the presence of the Holy Father, a Decree was promulgated concerning the verification of a miracle through the intercession of the Venerable Servant of God, Fr. Francis Xavier Seelos, a professed priest of our Congregation." Father Tobin announced that the beatification would take place on Sunday, April 9, in Saint Peter's Square. He also noted that Venerable Father Seelos would be beatified together with four others: Marian di Gesù Euse Hoyos, a diocesan priest from Colombia; Mary Elizabeth Hesselblad, foundress of the Order of the Sisters of the Most Holy Savior of Saint Brigid; from Sweden; Mary Teresa Mankidiyan, foundress of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family, from India; and Anna Rosa Gattorno, widow and foundress of the Institute of the Daughters of Saint Anne, from Italy.¹⁴⁰

XVIII. - THE BEATIFICATION OF BLESSED FRANCIS XAVIER SEELOS, APRIL 9, 2000

Thus the efforts to see Father Seelos, humble priest of the Congregation, raised to the honors of the altar, came to fruition on a cloudy and rain-threatening Sunday in April, 2000, in Saint Peter's Square. Pope John Paul II, at the instance of Archbishop Francis Bible Schulte, declared that henceforth Venerable Father Seelos had the title of Blessed Father Seelos and that his feast would be celebrated on October 5. The process was begun on September 17, 1900, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and ended just a few months short of 100 years in Rome. The persevering conviction of so many was proven correct that Father Seelos was, indeed, a remarkably good man, a holiness-seeking religious, and a zealous and self-effacing apostolic priest.

And thus also, the words of Brother Louis Kenning, written shortly after the death of Father Seelos, have been truly verified.

Everyone of us, and actually everyone who has ever known him, considers him a saint and rightly so, for he is one.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Joseph Tobin, CSSR, to "Dear Confreres", Rome, January 27, 2000.

¹⁴¹ Cfr n. 1 above.

RÉSUMÉ

La cause du Bienheureux Francis Seelos prit exactement cent ans. Durant les premières années, de 1867 à 1900, on s'occupa surtout de rassembler les témoignages des contemporains et Peter Zimmer CSSR publia la première biographie, en allemand. Entre 1900 et 1903, quatre *Processus Informativi* furent instruits à Pittsburgh, Baltimore, la Nouvelle-Orléans et Augsburg en Allemagne. Les *Copiae Publicae* furent prêtes en 1906, le *Summarium* en 1908 et l'*Informatio* en 1910. Certaines déficiences dans ces actes empêchèrent l'introduction de la Cause auprès de la Congrégation des Rites. S'en suivit un long silence mais la réputation de sainteté de Seelos restait vivante parmi le peuple, surtout à la Nouvelle-Orléans où il est enterré. En 1970 la Cause fut acceptée par la section historique de la Congrégation pour la Cause des Saints. En 1984, Carl Hoegerl CSSR fut nommé collaborateur externe. On imprima un nouveau *Summarium* en 1996; la *Documented Biography* et la nouvelle *Informatio* parurent en 1998. Après l'approbation du travail de Hoegerl par les experts historiques et théologiques attachés à la *Congregatio*, le décret du Pape Jean-Paul II déclarant l'héroïcité des vertus fut promulgué le 27 janvier 2000. Le même jour fut reconnu le caractère miraculeux d'une guérison attribuée à Seelos. Enfin le 9 avril 2000 le Saint Père déclara François-Xavier Seelos Bienheureux.