

# STUDIA

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ST. JOHN NEPOMOUCENE NEUMANN (1811-1860) –  
A BRIEF MEMORIAL BIOGRAPHY OF  
THE REDEMPTORIST MISSIONARY PRIEST AND BISHOP  
Commemorating the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of His Birth  
and the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of His Death

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## 1. – *Early Life*

Philip and Agnes Neumann of Prachatitz, Bohemia, already had two young daughters when they welcomed their first son on March 28, 1811. On that same day, their son was carried to the town's Church of St. James to be baptized. His complete given name was John Nepomucene in honor of the Saint by that name, the patron of Bohemia.

Besides his older sisters, Catherine and Veronica, John would eventually have three younger siblings; these were two more sisters, Joan and Louise, and, as the last-born, a brother for John named Wenceslaus.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A complete genealogical record of St. John Neumann can be found in Raimond PALECZEK, *Der Heilige Nicht nur aus dem Böhmerwald – zu den Vorfahren des hl. Johann Nempomuk Neumann*, in SHCSR 44 (1999) 181-204.

Although the family lived in Bohemia and had a mother of Czech ancestry, German was the family's basic language and culture. Philip Neumann had emigrated from Bavaria to Bohemia in 1802 to avoid the political strife in his native country.<sup>2</sup>

By John Neumann's own description both of his parents were «deeply Christian».<sup>3</sup> His mother attended daily Mass whenever she could. However, such faithful attendance was not possible for his father, as on weekdays he went early to open his place of business, a small shop for weaving stockings. A special influence which John's father passed on to him was a passion for reading, something that marked this elder son all his life.

In 1818, when he was seven, John began his schooling at the village school in Prachatitz. In that same year he was instructed for and received his first Sacrament of Reconciliation. Confirmation came when he was eight, conferred by the Bishop Constantin Ernest Rudžicka of Budweis. According to the practice of the day, his First Communion was delayed until he was ten.

As a very young child he thought of priesthood as a role too exalted for him. Yet in his last two years of elementary school in Prachatitz, 1822-1823, when other young men his age signed up to take some basic Latin from the local catechist, he went along with them. Then the thought of being a priest began to take root.

By November of 1823 it was time to begin the next stage of schooling called the *Gymnasium* (somewhat equal to a secondary, or high school, in many of today's cultures). This meant he

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<sup>2</sup> Agnes Neumann's maiden name was Lebis (or Lebish). She was Philip's Neumann's second wife; his first wife, Antonia Strakotinskou, died in 1804 during childbirth (along with their child). See Michael J. CURLEY, *Venerable John Neumann, C.S.S.R.*, Washington 1952, 2-3, and Note 7, 403. Hereinafter cited: CURLEY, *Venerable John Neumann*.

<sup>3</sup> Alfred C. RUSH, trans. and ed., *Autobiography of St. John Neumann, C.S.S.R.*, Boston 1977, 17. This scholarly translation of Neumann's *Autobiography* into English, is accompanied by an Introduction, Commentary, and Epilogue. The reader will find that this is an incomplete autobiography, insofar as it does not tell of the last eight years of Neumann's life. It was written at the command of his Redemptorist superior just before John Neumann was ordained a bishop. Father Alfred Rush served as Professor of History at the Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., and later as the Baltimore Province Archivist. Hereinafter cited: RUSH, *Autobiography*.

was a boarding student thirty miles away in Budweis and somewhat on his own although he was only twelve years old. The *Gymnasium* also brought a very sad taste of reality. His main instructor for two and half years, although a learned man, was alcohol addicted, eventually dismissed from his job, and soon after that, a suicide. Moreover, his religion teacher was at best, boring. John Neumann credited the faith and piety learned in his family for keeping him from «the pitfalls in which most of [his] companions were trapped».<sup>4</sup> By 1827 he considered giving up his studies; it was his mother and his older sister Veronica who talked him into continuing.<sup>5</sup> He was then glad they did, for he found the next stage of his studies, the Humanities, much more to his liking.

Still a boarding student in Budweis in his so-called «philosophy years», 1829-1831, Neumann blossomed into a very serious student. True, his courses included some study of philosophy as such, but the courses also embraced botany, biology, physics, geology, astronomy, and geography. There were two factors which greatly enhanced this stage of his student life: one was the faculty of Cistercian priests-professors, and the other was his fellow students. About his companions he wrote, «We spent all our free hours and entire recreation days sharing with one another what each one had found out in his own specialty».<sup>6</sup> It was in this period that Neumann developed his special interest in botany, something that would remain throughout his life. Interestingly, although he had an earlier aversion to mathematics, the Cistercians made this field appealing.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. – Seminary Studies, and Looking Toward America

In 1831 it was decision time: was his future to be law, medicine, or theology? His father seems to have urged medicine, costly as these studies were. Although not insistent in her opin-

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<sup>4</sup> RUSH, *Autobiography*, 19-20.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>7</sup> In fact, when Neumann was an isolated missionary in upper New York State, mathematics was a hobby with him.

ion, his mother thought he should give theology a try. He ended up applying for, and was accepted into Budweis Theological Seminary. In his own words, «I never gave another thought to medicine and I also practically gave up completely the study of physics and astronomy on which I preferred to spend time».<sup>8</sup>

The required theology curriculum for Neumann was to take up the next four years. He began these studies at the Budweis seminary in November of 1831, soon discovering his special attraction for Sacred Scripture (notably the letters of St. Paul) as well as Hebrew and Church History.<sup>9</sup> In his second year at the Budweis seminary he began looking toward the missions in America. This inspiration came from reports of a mission society in Austria, the Leopoldine Foundation, which at times featured the on-site accounts of Father (later Bishop) Frederick Baraga of Michigan.<sup>10</sup>

As the call and dream to serve in America grew, Neumann chose to transfer from the local Budweis seminary to the archdiocesan seminary program in Prague for his last two years of theology. This decision was made partially because he thought that Prague offered a better opportunity to develop his knowledge of English and French.

The seminary at Prague was one part of the large University of Prague and was generally a disappointment to Neumann. In his opinion, the theology courses were far too «free-thinking» and decidedly short on loyalty to the pope. On his own he turned to the Fathers of the Church and to established theologians like Thomas Aquinas, Peter Canisius, and Robert Bellarmine.<sup>11</sup>

More disappointment followed when Neumann found that the university offered no courses in English, and that he was not

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 22. Indirectly Baraga was a «slight thread» connecting Neumann with the Redemptorists. As a student in Vienna, Bishop Baraga had known the Redemptorist St. Clement Hofbauer and, in fact, attended the prayer/discussion groups led by Hofbauer. To these groups, later termed *Hofbauerkreise*, came prominent Viennese men and women, «persons who were reckoned among the great minds...». See John HOFER, *St. Clement Maria Hofbauer*, New York 1926, 346.

<sup>11</sup> CURLEY, *Venerable John Neumann*, 24-25, and RUSH, *Autobiography*, 78, FN 55.

allowed to attend the French classes—when the truth was he had favored coming to Prague particularly to study these languages.<sup>12</sup> In view of this letdown, he continued to study French and English privately, and even found some English workmen in a nearby factory with whom he could cultivate his English-speaking skill.<sup>13</sup> In spite of his difficulties in Prague, he passed all of his final examinations there and returned to his home diocese of Budweis in 1835.<sup>14</sup>

But once he returned to Budweis, he faced still more disappointments, the greatest of which was that there was no hope of his being ordained a priest at this time. Bishop Rudžicka was now old and ill, there were too many priests in Budweis, and not enough places in which they might serve. The result was that many young men were still awaiting ordination, and the government was refusing to give «a title of support» to these prospective priests.

All these factors, of course, turned Neumann's mind all the more toward America, but here, too, he was encountered difficulty. It was known that several American bishops were eager to have European priests (or seminarians close to ordination), and these American prelates at times even had delegated priest-agents in Europe to be on the lookout for good prospects. But there were also several hurdles that first had to be cleared. For instance, one's local European bishop had to give his official release. Then there was the matter of procuring travel expenses and a legal passport.

Finally, in February 1836 Neumann left Budweis, choosing not to bid a formal farewell to his family in Prachatitz so as to avoid «mutual sorrow of separation».<sup>15</sup> His tentative destination

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<sup>12</sup> CURLEY, *Venerable John Neumann*, 28. Also Richard Andrew BOEVER, *The Spirituality of St. John Neumann, C.Ss.R., Fourth Bishop of Philadelphia*, unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, St. Louis University, St. Louis Missouri 1983, 20. Boever believes that some of Neumann's negative judgments about the Prague seminary years were colored by Neumann's loneliness as he was separated from family and friends.

<sup>13</sup> RUSH, *Autobiography*, 77-78, FN52, and CURLEY, *Venerable John Neumann*, 28

<sup>14</sup> We note that in his second year at Prague (1834-1835) Neumann began a spiritual journal, continuing entries until 1839 when he was a priest in America. Richard Andrew Boever's Dissertation (see FN 12 above) provides an analysis and commentary on this journal.

<sup>15</sup> RUSH, *Autobiography*, 81, FN 68.

was Philadelphia because he had heard that the bishop there was seeking European priests. But when he arrived in Munich he was stunned with the news that the Philadelphia possibility had evaporated. However, he soon heard that the American Bishop Simon Bruté was in Europe seeking priests for his newly created diocese of Vincennes, Indiana. A friend promised to contact Bruté, and, on this basis, Neumann pressed onward to Augsburg, Germany, and then to Strasbourg in Alsace. Wherever he could, he stayed with friends or acquaintances, and along the way he gathered letters of recommendation from clerics he knew.

In Strasbourg a certain Father (later Bishop) Andreas Räss, who had been the priest-agent in Europe authorized to seek clerics or promising seminarians for Philadelphia, confirmed that that city was out of the question.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand Räss said that he would write to Bishop John Dubois of New York on Neumann's behalf. But meanwhile Neumann trudged onward to Paris, arriving on March 13 with the slimmest hope that a favorable answer from Bishop Bruté would be waiting there. (It is now known that the request from Munich never reached Bishop Bruté in Indiana).<sup>17</sup> Neumann's meager funds had dwindled, and two months of travel had worn him down. However, his valuable assets of love for his family, trust in the Lord, and his resolve to be a missionary in America were not depleted.<sup>18</sup>

After a month in Paris, with no reply from Bishop Bruté in hand, and not being able to find «a rich merchant» (who was supposed to be a benefactor to help him),<sup>19</sup> he traveled 120 miles westward to Le Havre and found an affordable passenger ship that would take him to New York. For the six-week voyage his «accommodations» were to be in the «middle deck», meaning that he first had to purchase and take on board his own food, a cooking pot, and

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<sup>16</sup> In 1836 it was Bishop Francis P. Kenrick who, as Apostolic Administrator of Philadelphia, had cancelled his work-agreement with Father Räss of Strasbourg. Ironic is the fact that it was the same Bishop Kenrick, who later as Archbishop of Baltimore, urged the Vatican to appoint John Neumann as bishop of Philadelphia in 1852!

<sup>17</sup> CURLEY, *Venerable John Neumann*, 49.

<sup>18</sup> RUSH, *Autobiography*, 86, FN 94.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 26. Father Andreas Räss had promised that this benefactor in Paris was a «friend of the missions» and would help Neumann.

a coarse straw mattress. This three-master ship, «The Europe», was captained by a man named Drummond who, apparently hoping to have more passengers, delayed sailing until Wednesday, April 20.<sup>20</sup>

### 3. – *New York and Brighter Days*

It was on Thursday, June 2, 1836, that he set foot in the city of New York, and the very next day his prospects as a missionary priest grew vastly more promising. After being directed to the home of New York's Bishop John Dubois, he discovered that Dubois had gladly received the letter of recommendation of Father Räss of Strasbourg. Bishop Dubois had eagerly been awaiting the arrival of John Neumann, especially since he was German-speaking. Moreover, Dubois was highly impressed by the testimonial letters which Neumann carried with him. The bishop not only housed him in his own residence; he arranged to ordain him in short order.

John Neumann was ordained to the priesthood only three weeks after setting foot on American soil. The ceremony took place on Saturday, June 25, 1836, in the Old St. Patrick's Cathedral, which stretched between Mulberry and Mott Streets, a few miles south of today's famous St. Patrick's Cathedral. The next day, Neumann celebrated his First Mass in the small Church of St. Nicholas on East Second Street. The congregation that day was a crowd of delighted German Catholics. There was the added joy for Neumann of administering First Holy Communion to some children whom he had instructed during his brief days in New York.

Then he was en route to his assigned station among the German-speaking people of rural Erie County. His trip to this far-western part of New York State took him up the Hudson River to Albany by boat, then by railroad to Schenectady, and from there via the Erie Canal to Buffalo. The last leg of his journey was on a horse-drawn canal boat which traveled four miles per hour. He was now a diocesan priest of the Diocese of New York. Bishop Dubois had paid his travel expenses.

On the way to his assigned location, there was a stopover in the town of Rochester, where he had the opportunity to exer-

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<sup>20</sup> During the delay, Neumann lived aboard the ship part of the time.

cise «his priestly faculties» for the first time. In his own words, «I preached there twice on Sunday, heard confessions, and baptized, all this for the first time in America».<sup>21</sup> It was also in Rochester that he met the first Redemptorist with whom he had ever spoken. This was the irrepensible Father Joseph Prost, at that time the superior of all Redemptorists in America, who was to play such a significant role in Neumann's future life.<sup>22</sup>

#### 4. – Neumann's First Parish Ministry

By July 13, 1836, Father John Neumann was ten miles north of Buffalo, New York, at the site of his first parish in Williamsville. Or, we can better say, his several parishes. For besides Williamsville where he was to make his home, he had charge of the churches at North Bush and Lancaster, with several scattered German communities to care for besides.<sup>23</sup>

In Williamsville, besides being priest, he also had to serve as the stand-in school teacher. The man who had been the teacher had a problem with drink. Neumann dismissed him, but, as one might imagine on the frontier, no substitute other than himself could be found for some six months. There was also the problem of having to go into debt simply to pay for his housing. This led to his decision to move to North Bush where a kind farmer gave him *free* housing in one room of his log cabin. The disadvantage, however, of his new lodging was that he had to walk over a mile through mud and forest to his nearest church. (Eventually the people of North Bush built Neumann his own small house near the church).

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<sup>21</sup> RUSH, *Autobiography*, 28.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* Prost had ministered to the Rochester Germans several times before 1836, and the people there wanted him to be their permanent pastor. By July 10, 1836, he had just returned to Rochester when Neumann met him on July 13. He intended to stay, but trustee problems intervened. Only in 1839 did the Redemptorists make a permanent foundation in Rochester. See John F. BYRNE, *The Redemptorist Centenaries*, Philadelphia 1932, 55, 126ff.

<sup>23</sup> A description of Neumann's ministry in seven locations in northwest New York State can be found in John F. BYRNE, *The Redemptorist Centenaries* (see our FN 22 above), 293-295. One of these places for which he was responsible was the community at the world-famous Niagara Falls.

The following summer Bishop John Dubois came to visit Neumann, and with the New York prelate came Father Joseph Prost. This Redemptorist began urging the young missionary to join the sons of St. Alphonsus, but Neumann refused. He later mentioned that in those days time he did not «have a spark of a vocation» in the direction of life in a missionary order. However, in subsequent meetings with Prost and other Redemptorists, Neumann grew to like them, impressed especially by how effective Father Prost was as a missionary.<sup>24</sup>

The next major happening in Neumann's life was the arrival from Bohemia of his brother, Wenceslaus, who came to wilds of New York State in September of 1839 to take «upon himself the household duties».<sup>25</sup> Previously these duties were done by Father Neumann himself in addition to his ministry. The arrival of his brother provided some relief from household chores, but it also meant more time in which the young priest could be out and about among his people. In turn, though, the constant pastoral activity began to take its toll on his health. By the spring of 1840, after almost four years in which he «had spared [him]self no pain» among his widespread commitments, he fell ill with what he termed «a very persistent and recurring fever» which stayed with him three months.<sup>26</sup>

##### 5. – *And Then the Redemptorists*

This experience was the occasion when a desire grew within him «to live in a community of priests».<sup>27</sup> On September 4, 1840,

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<sup>24</sup> RUSH, *Autobiography*, 29-30. The other Redemptorists were Fathers Francis Hätscher and Simon Sänderl.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 30. Also, see FN 135, p. 98 of the RUSH, *Autobiography* for the correct day of Wencelaus' arrival in New York. St. John Neumann gives a mistaken date, which is corrected in FN 135 of Rush.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>27</sup> John N. BERGER, *Life of Right Rev. John N. Neumann, D.D. of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, fourth Bishop of Philadelphia*, New York – Cincinnati 1884, 216. Hereinafter cited: BERGER, *Life of Right Rev. John N. Neumann*. This biography was first published in German: *Leben und Wirken des hochseligen Johannes Nep. Neumann, aus der Congregation des allerh. Erlösers, Bischofs von Philadelphia*, New York-Cincinnati 1883.

he wrote to Father Joseph Prost for admission into the Redemptorists. Given the distance from Baltimore, where the Redemptorist superior had taken up residence, it is amazing that in twelve days, by September 16, he had word of his acceptance. He then wrote to Bishop John Hughes, who had been given administrative charge of the New York diocese since Bishop Dubois had grown feeble. No reply came because Hughes was away on visitation in the diocese.

We are told that his diocesan-priest confessor, Father Alexander Pax, and Father Prost promised to handle negotiations with Bishop Hughes,<sup>28</sup> so that Neumann could begin the first phase of his Redemptorist novitiate. In early October 1840 he set out for Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, two-hundred miles south and slightly west. He went via Lake Erie steamboat, and overland by stage-coach. Wenceslaus Neumann stayed behind to gather his brother's few belongings – and by now was determined to follow John into the Redemptorists as a professed brother.

One needs to remember that the Redemptorists were only eight years in America at this time, and things were still in process, even in disarray. Since Pittsburgh was the first place they were able to claim as a «stable community foundation», this may have been why John Neumann was sent there. But as it turned out, the next months constituted the strangest novitiate one might imagine.

With the Pittsburgh Redemptorists being called in all directions to care for German communities surrounding Pittsburgh, Father Neumann found himself celebrating Mass, instructing children, and, in general, serving the «home parish». Finally about six weeks later, on November 29, 1840, Father Prost arrived from Baltimore to invest Neumann in the Redemptorist habit. Not having the proper ritual book, Prost made up a ceremony in his head.<sup>29</sup>

Once invested in the habit, Neumann would experience no less than seven more changes of residence during the thirteen and one-half months of what was called his novitiate year. These

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<sup>28</sup> CURLEY, *Venerable John Neumann*, 80.

<sup>29</sup> RUSH, *Autobiography*, 32.

moves (from Pittsburgh) were to Baltimore (a few days), New York City (fourteen days); Rochester, New York (two months); Buffalo, New York (five weeks); Norwalk, Ohio (two months); Rochester again (a week), Norwalk again (six weeks); and finally Baltimore, Maryland, (six weeks).<sup>30</sup> In addition, there were days and weeks taken up with long travel, and even the preaching of missions to German immigrants.<sup>31</sup>

Only for those final six weeks in Baltimore was John Neumann free from active priestly activity imposed by superiors. He and another novice, Benedict Bayer, then «made the daily exercises as far as [they] knew them».<sup>32</sup> Summing up his «novitiate» later, he was later to recall, «I myself was never a real novice, for when I entered the Congregation, it had neither a novice master nor a novitiate in America».<sup>33</sup>

On January 16, 1842, at the hands of the new general vicegerent for America, Alexander Czvitkovicz, he professed his vows as a Redemptorist at Old St. James Church in Baltimore. Playing on the literal meaning of Neumann's name, the house chronicler at St. James wrote that a «*new man*» had entered the congregation.<sup>34</sup> After his profession of vows Neumann wrote in a letter to his parents back in Prachatitz:

«I now belong body and soul to the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer. The corporal and spiritual aid, mutually given and received, the edification and good example which, in a society of this kind, one has around him until death, wonderfully facilitate the life I am now leading, the vocation to which I have been

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-34. After Norwalk, and en route to Baltimore, Neumann met Bishop John B. Purcell of Cincinnati and his Vicar General (the future bishop of Milwaukee, Martin Henni). These two told Neumann of a rumor that the Redemptorists in America were on the verge of giving up any idea of staying in America. *Ibid.*, 34; also Joseph WUEST, *Annales Provinciae Americanae*, Vol. 4, Pars I, Boston 1914, 141. They also urged him to join the diocese of Cincinnati, but Neumann states that he «declined».

<sup>31</sup> CURLEY, *Venerable John Neumann*, 91-92; RUSH, *Autobiography*, 34.

<sup>32</sup> RUSH, *Autobiography*, 34.

<sup>33</sup> Redemptorist Archives, Baltimore Province, Neumann Letters 1858, Neumann to his nephew John Berger, Sept. 13, 1858. These archives hereinafter cited: RABP.

<sup>34</sup> CURLEY, *Venerable John Neumann*, 92

called. I have every reason to hope that death will be more welcome to me in this holy Congregation than it usually is to seculars».<sup>35</sup>

When he had arrived to complete his novitiate year at St. James, the parish there was somewhat well staffed. But that staff was soon diminished, giving up three of its priests to the needs of the expanding American mission under the vicegerent Alexander Czvitkovicz. Only Fathers Neumann and Joseph Fey were left to care for the home parish and its multiple «mission stations». These latter consisted of German-speaking immigrant communities scattered in rural locations in the states of Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.<sup>36</sup> Neumann attested in his letters to his family and others in Europe, that, generally speaking, the spiritual plight of these German people was pitiful.<sup>37</sup>

6. – *Return to Pittsburgh, Now as Pastor and Religious Superior*

After a brief two-year assignment to St. James in Baltimore, John Neumann in 1842 was called back to western Pennsylvania. He was to serve as pastor and community superior of St. Philomena's in Pittsburgh, where he had begun as a novice. He walked into a situation which was in turmoil. It was so bad that the two most recent pastors had asked to be relieved of their position. A new church was going up, but in haphazard fits and starts, and now stood only half built. Money was in short supply among the working class people. Moreover, the new thirty-three year-old Irish bishop, Michael O'Connor, harbored doubts about the clannish Germans. O'Connor, however, did take a liking to Neumann, appreciating the newcomer's pastoral spirit and his ability to converse in six languages.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> As found in BOEVER, *The Spirituality of St. John Neumann*, (see FN 12 above), 117.

<sup>36</sup> Neumann to Archbishop Vincent E. Milde of Vienna, as found in Joseph WUEST, *Annales Provinciae Americanae*, I, Ilchester, MD 1888, 306. (Hereinafter *this* Volume cited as WUEST, *Annales* I). In this letter Neumann says that the spiritual care of *all Germans in the state of Virginia* was entrusted to the Baltimore Redemptorists by Bishop Richard V. Whelan of Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>37</sup> CURLEY, *Venerable John Neumann*, 95.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-99.

Moreover, Neumann soon devised ways of collecting small but regular donations from his poor flock so that their new church could be completed. He did so despite very hard economic conditions and a disastrous fire that destroyed one-third of Pittsburgh's homes. Bishop O'Connor, with exaggeration, was later to claim delightedly that Neumann had «built a church without money». On October 4, 1846, O'Connor dedicated the completed Gothic church, a huge marvel to all who came to see it.<sup>39</sup>

For a brief while, when Father Neumann was pastor of St. Philomena's, he had with him in the same Redemptorist community another very holy and hardworking priest. This was none other than Blessed Francis X. Seelos. As of this writing, there are lively hopes that Seelos will be the next canonized Redemptorist Saint.<sup>40</sup>

Just as in the case of St. James in Baltimore, the St. Philomena Redemptorists in Pittsburgh reached out to surrounding districts where German-speaking people were found. It is clear that Neumann regularly assigned himself to these outlying mission stations. Today there are more than a dozen established parishes which can produce their sacramental registers – and point with pride to the signature of *Joan. N. Neumann, C.Ss.R.*<sup>41</sup>

So much hard work, however, took its toll, and in 1847 he developed a «constant cough, accompanied by spitting of blood... sure indications of pulmonary difficulties».<sup>42</sup> As soon as Father Peter Czackert (the Redemptorist vicegerent who had replaced Father Czvitkovicz in 1845) heard of this, he summoned Neumann to Baltimore. Czackert was of the opinion that Neumann

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 99-100. St. Philomena's Church was one-hundred and sixty feet by sixty-five feet. It is fully described in John BYRNE, *The Redemptorist Centenaries*, 84. Also, a pen-drawing of this church can be seen in Francis-Xaver MURPHY, *John Nepomucene Neumann, Saint*, South Hackensack, NJ 1977, 49.

<sup>40</sup> Carl HOEGERL, trans. and ed., *Sincerely Seelos*, New Orleans 2008, 53. Seelos' name was proposed in 1860 to be the bishop of the See of Pittsburgh. After pleas by Seelos, and others, that he be spared this burden, another man was chosen. See Michael CURLEY, *The Nomination of Francis X. Seelos for the See of Pittsburgh*, in *SHCSR* 11 (1963) 166-181.

<sup>41</sup> CURLEY, *Venerable John Neumann*, 101. *Joan.* is the Latin abbreviation for *Joannis* (John).

<sup>42</sup> BERGER, *Life of Right Rev. John N. Neumann*, 281.

had ruined his health through his indiscreet zeal, and saw the move as necessary, hoping Neumann would not take it as an insult.<sup>43</sup> Within a week Neumann had returned to Baltimore and his new assignment. This port city was to be again his home until 1852.

Neumann's return to Baltimore was in late January of 1847, and his place of residence was at St. James Church at Aisquith and Eager Streets. But that was just for a few months, after which time all the Baltimore Redemptorists were consolidated into the house at St. Alphonsus parish, a mile away.<sup>44</sup>

Things were very different in Baltimore from what Neumann had known in the past. St. Alphonsus was now the focus of Redemptorist activity, and St. James had been reduced to an out-mission. There was the new church of St. Alphonsus, whose construction had been supervised by Alexander Czvitkovicz, and which had a two-hundred and twenty feet high steeple, easily seen from Baltimore's Inner Harbor a mile away.<sup>45</sup>

#### 8. – *The Superior of All the Redemptorists in America*

Neumann began his recuperation period. Then within seven weeks very startling news reached him. Only thirty-six years old, and barely five years professed as a Redemptorist, he was chosen to be the new general vicegerent in America. This was by order of his provincial in Belgium, Frederick De Held, who had jurisdiction over the American mission.<sup>46</sup> On March 15, 1847, Neu-

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<sup>43</sup> RABP, Neumann papers, Letter Peter Chakert [sic] to Joseph Müller, Jan. 19, 1847. The vicegerent's family name has been alternately spelled *Czackert*.

<sup>44</sup> WUEST, *Annales* I, 183. St. James now became a «mission» of St. Alphonsus.

<sup>45</sup> BERGER, *Life of Right Rev. John N. Neumann*, 296. There has been some claim that magnificent Catholic churches of this era were seen as «making a statement» about Catholic presence within a Protestant atmosphere; see John T. MCGREEVY, *Catholicism and American Freedom, a History*, New York 2003, 32.

<sup>46</sup> In 1846 De Held grew displeased with, and then removed the American superior, Peter Czackert, stating that Czackert «harmonized so little with my views and showed himself so ready to take things in his own hands». Just sixteen months prior, De Held had already discharged Czackert's predecessor, Alexander Czvitkovicz. These dismissals from office point to the friction that at

mann now officially and simultaneously began holding three major posts: vicegerent of all the Redemptorists in America, pastor of St. Alphonsus parish, and local superior of the Redemptorist community of Baltimore.<sup>47</sup>

His most fulfilling moments came with his pastoral role at St. Alphonsus. Here he was able to provide a new school for the parish children. He often catechized children and adults (a skill in which he had excelled for years), and instructed converts as well.<sup>48</sup> He also had the joy of welcoming from Germany Blessed Theresa Gerhardinger<sup>49</sup> and her School Sisters of Notre Dame. In fact, when the first American destination of these women religious proved untenable, it was John Neumann who arranged for them to establish a foothold in Baltimore. Thereafter, all through America these outstanding educators often taught in the schools of Redemptorist parishes.<sup>50</sup>

We note also that in Baltimore, Neumann as the Redemptorist vicegerent took special interest in the Oblate Sisters of Providence, the first permanent African-American Roman Catholic sisterhood in the United States.<sup>51</sup> According to Neumann's nephew, Father John Berger, C.Ss.R., Neumann «in all things connected with them, manifested a lively interest».<sup>52</sup> As Redemptorist vicegerent Neumann then delegated Father Thaddeus Anwander, C.Ss.R., who, with the reluctant permission of the

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times existed between on-site superiors in America and the desired firm control from Europe. See Michael CURLEY, *The Provincial Story*, New York 1963, 80-81, 92-93.

<sup>47</sup> MURPHY, *John Nepomucene Neumann, Saint*, 46. See FN 39 above.

<sup>48</sup> WUEST, *Annales* I, 180; also, BERGER, *Life of Right Rev. John N. Neumann*, 296.

<sup>49</sup> Mother Theresa (née Karolina) Gerhardinger (1797-1879) beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1985. She was inducted into the Valhalla Hall of Fame for «laudable and distinguished Germans» at Regensburg in 1998.

<sup>50</sup> BYRNE, *The Redemptorist Centenaries*, (see our FN 22), 99, 100. In Baltimore Neumann sold the former Redemptorist novitiate building to Mother Theresa Gerhardinger and her pioneer sisters for «not more than half its cash value». *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Diane Batts MORROW, *Persons of Color and Religious at the Same Time, the Oblate Sisters of Providence, 1823-1860*, Chapel Hill, North Carolina 2002, 203, 247.

<sup>52</sup> BERGER, *Life of Right Rev. John N. Neumann*, 299.

archbishop of Baltimore, became their very attentive priest director.<sup>53</sup>

But in his role as superior of the American Redemptorists John Neumann suffered greatly. He had unquestioned authority during only six months of his twenty-two month tenure.<sup>54</sup> The reasons for this distressing and insecure position were complicated. They can be described here only in summary form. He had to answer to various European superiors who did not always agree, but still they wanted to «micromanage» the American mission from a distance. Major political upheavals in Europe caused a rapid succession of changes of these European superiors. Moreover Neumann's American Redemptorists, fifty in number, were polyglot and poly-cultural. They included Austrians, Czechs, Dutch, Bavarians, Belgians and Swiss. These men formed camps which often disliked and mistrusted one another.<sup>55</sup>

One of the saddest factors was that after the second Visitation within two years by European superiors, the Visitor, Father Martin Stark, abruptly appointed a Consultor-assistant for Neumann named Father Ignatius Stelzig. This brash individual, only twenty-four years old, had just arrived from Europe. Stelzig proceeded to send scathing reports about Neumann back to Stark in Vienna, unjustly complaining of Neumann's incompetence.<sup>56</sup>

In the last five months of Neumann's tenure as leader of the American Redemptorists, a new crisis arose regarding his au-

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<sup>53</sup> Archbishop Eccleston was of the opinion that these Sisters had no future. To this day the Oblate Sisters look upon the memory of Thaddeus Anwander with high regard. Other Redemptorists (especially Father Czvitkovicz, Czackert, Smulders and Gillet) attended and supported these Oblate Sisters. See Diane Batts MORROW, *passim*, especially 202-203; also WUEST, *Annales* I, 181; ID., *Supplementum* ad I, II, II, Pars 2<sup>da</sup>, Ilchester, MD 1903, 105ff.

<sup>54</sup> CURLEY, *The Provincial Story*, (see our FN 46 above), 102.

<sup>55</sup> ID., *Venerable John Neumann*, 107, 119, 143-150; also Curley's *The Provincial Story*, (see our FN 46 above), 98.

<sup>56</sup> Three of these letters can be found, in German, in Johannes NORDMANN, *Die Liguorianer, Ihre Constitutionen und Korrespondenz*, Vienna 1849, 120-139, 140-153, 154-159. See also, CURLEY, *Venerable John Neumann*, 147-148. Stelzig was gone from the Redemptorists less than two years after causing St. John Neumann so much distress. The chronicle book of the St. Peter's, Philadelphia, community (RABP) in August 1850, refers to Stelzig as «an ambitious man, of vainglorious and unstable character».

thority. The American mission was raised to the level of Vice-province, with Neumann now being named Vice-provincial. But immediately it was noticed that valid legal procedures had not been followed. Still, he was asked to remain in office (not knowing what authority he had) until the difficulty could be rectified. Much to Neumann's relief, his successor, Father Bernard Hafkenschaid, was legally named and appointed Vice-provincial on December 8, 1848, and arrived in America on January 9, 1849.<sup>57</sup>

It is no wonder that the difficulties of leadership under such conditions had caused Neumann to think several times of resigning as the American Superior.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, he stayed at his post and actually accomplished much lasting good. He put new emphasis on «regular observance» of the Redemptorist Rule. Wherever possible, he curtailed additional expenditures. He also saw to it that the novitiate training of newcomers was put on a solid basis at the house in Pittsburgh, with the saintly Francis X. Seelos as Director of Novices.

It was something of an affirmation of the accomplishments of Neumann that the new Vice-provincial Bernard Hafkenschaid immediately chose him as one of his consultors. He also relieved Neumann of his responsibilities as pastor of St. Alphonsus Church. So, for the most part, Neumann's ministry was once again to be that an assistant pastor among the people of St. Alphonsus parish, with occasional trips to the outlying missions outside of Baltimore. He also served as confessor to many women religious in the area. As the historian Father Michael Curley noted, Neumann «was [now] active at a much more leisurely pace than during his first years as a Redemptorist».<sup>59</sup>

During this period, he also authored and issued a third edition of a very basic catechism which he had previously published when sta-

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<sup>57</sup> CURLEY, *The Provincial Story*, (see our FN 46 above), 104. Also Bernard HAFKENSCHID, *Actes authentiques*, in WUEST, *Annales Provinciae Americanae, Supplementum* ad I, II, III, Pars 2<sup>da</sup>, 184.

<sup>58</sup> CURLEY, *The Provincial Story*, (see our FN 46 above), 99, 101-102. Neumann's letters offering his resignation were probably destroyed when revolutionaries destroyed the Redemptorist Transalpine headquarters in Vienna, March 1848. But correspondence in answer to these lost letters of Neumann show that more than once he wanted to resign. *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> CURLEY, *Venerable John Neumann*, 157.

tioned in Pittsburgh. Although having a longer title, it was generally called the *Kleiner Katechismus*, a highly condensed work of only sixteen pages.<sup>60</sup>

During this period a keen sadness darkened John Neumann's life. His mother died on July 16, 1849, and it was long after the fact that he learned of her death. It seems that a series of family letters from Europe never reached him with the heart-breaking news. Only months afterwards, by way of a letter from a cousin, did he learn indirectly that Agnes Neumann had died. Then a year later, and again only well after the fact, came word of the death of his sister Veronica. When he heard of each of these deaths, he had to write asking for the exact dates of their passing, so that he and his brother Wenceslaus could observe the anniversaries of these loved ones.<sup>61</sup>

#### 9. – *A Bishop's Ring and Pectoral Cross*

Archbishop Samuel Eccleston of Baltimore died in April of 1851. The following August Pope Pius IX chose to have Philadelphia's Francis P. Kenrick move south to the See of Baltimore. Philadelphia was now *sede vacante*. Rumors began, and letters went back and forth among United States bishops who were declaring to the Vatican their top suggestions for who might serve well as the new bishop for Philadelphia.

Toward the end of 1851, after having chosen Neumann as his personal confessor, Archbishop Kenrick began hinting to him that he might have «to get himself a mitre». <sup>62</sup> In fact, the archbishop had already submitted his *terna*, his official recommendation ballot to the Vatican. He had listed Neumann as his number-two choice for the See of Philadelphia. When Neumann heard

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<sup>60</sup> Neumann's larger version of 147 pages, the *Katholischer Katechismus*, had been published in Pittsburgh. Both were standard works used in German parishes and schools. It is interesting that Neumann's name appeared on the cover of his catechisms only later, when he was a bishop. See Alfred C. RUSH, *Saint John Neumann, C.S.S.R., Catechist and Writer of Catechisms*, in *SHCSR* 32 (1984) 185-232.

<sup>61</sup> BERGER, *Life of Right Rev. John Neumann*, 310. Berger gives no date for this letter.

<sup>62</sup> CURLEY, *Venerable John Neumann*, 164.

this, and then from other sources learned that it was more than a possibility, he made appeals by way of Redemptorist channels, trying his utmost to head off any such choice.<sup>63</sup>

Then in late January 1852 somehow the advance news leaked out-from what source we do not know. But the Philadelphia Catholic papers boldly announced that the Redemptorist John Neumann was to be the next bishop of Philadelphia! This turned out to be true – but, when announced, the pope had not yet signed the documents in Rome!<sup>64</sup> Official confirmation of the appointment did not come to Archbishop Kenrick until March 1, 1852.

The often-repeated story of how Neumann received word of his appointment is worth the re-telling. The following is the description of what happened on March 19, 1852, as described by his nephew, Father John Berger.

«Father Neumann after a short absence entered his little cell about dusk. As he stepped toward the small table at which he was accustomed to read and write, his glance discovered something on it sparkling and glistening in the dim evening light. He drew near and found lying there an episcopal ring and pectoral cross. Perplexed, and not daring to collect his thoughts, he hurried to the Brother-Porter to know who had entered his room during his absence. «Reverend Father» said the Brother, «the Archbishop was here, and went up to your room as usual to make his confession». This was enough for poor Father Neumann. The truth dawned upon his mind; he understood only too well the meaning of the episcopal insignia laid upon his table... [He] locked the door and threw himself on his knees. Morning came and found him still kneeling in the same spot... he had wrestled with God through the long hours of night».<sup>65</sup>

Among the bishops and other clergy, some were elated, and some were dismayed. As for the laity of Philadelphia, they would have to wait until he was in their midst to form their opinions.

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, and 172.

<sup>64</sup> *The Catholic Herald*, Jan. 29, 1852. It may have been the hints of Abp. Francis Kenrick himself that led to the premature announcements. See CURLEY, *Venerable John Neumann*, 173.

<sup>65</sup> BERGER, *Life of Right Rev. John N. Neumann*, 314.

10. – *The Fourth Bishop of Philadelphia*

John Nepomucene Neumann was ordained bishop two weeks before Easter, 1852.<sup>66</sup> The ceremony was on March 28, Neumann's forty-first birthday, and was held in St. Alphonsus Church in Baltimore. He was quoted as saying on the evening before, «If the Lord gave me the choice either to die, or to accept this dignity, I should prefer to lay down my life tomorrow rather than be consecrated a bishop...». He went on to explain that he thought his salvation more secure if he were to appear before God not having been burdened with the responsibility of bishop.<sup>67</sup>

Two days later after his episcopal ordination, he took the train to Philadelphia. A large delegation of priests of the diocese met him at the station and welcomed him warmly. But there was no pomp or parade or formal reception, and this pleased him.<sup>68</sup> There was, however, a large crowd present for his installation that afternoon at St. John's Pro-cathedral. (The new cathedral was still under construction).

Philadelphia itself had a total population of 400,000, but the diocesan boundaries reached beyond Pennsylvania into the neighboring states of Delaware and New Jersey, as well as half way into central Pennsylvania. In other words, it was vast, with about 170,000 Catholics. It included many German-speaking people, but the majority of the Catholics were Irish and native-born Americans, with immigrants of many other ethnic backgrounds. Priests in the diocese numbered 100, serving 113 parishes.<sup>69</sup>

The very next day, led by his diocesan vicar general, Neumann went out among the people, wanting to become acquainted. In the first week he preached six times and conferred the Sacrament of Confirmation. He even visited the county jail. Within ten days he issued his first pastoral letter, thanking people and asking for their prayerful support.<sup>70</sup> In the following weeks he went to

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<sup>66</sup> In those days the terminology in use was «the consecration of a bishop».

<sup>67</sup> BERGER, *Life of Right Rev. John N. Neumann*, 319.

<sup>68</sup> At the urging of «a priest» the people made an alternate decision: as an expression of their joy at his arrival a new school would be built. See *ibid.*, 326. The priest is not named.

<sup>69</sup> These figures are from CURLEY, *Venerable John Neumann*, 182.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

all the religious communities, the orphanages and the hospitals.<sup>71</sup>

In May of 1852, Neumann had to return to Baltimore to attend the first Plenary Council of Baltimore, the gathering of the nation's thirty-one bishops. This Council gave a special impetus to Catholic schools and recommended the formation of eleven new dioceses. One of these was Newark, New Jersey, and by this decision Neumann no longer had the responsibility for the southern half of New Jersey. Resulting from a resolution of this Council was yet another and larger (180-page) catechism produced in 1863 by Neumann in German.<sup>72</sup> Among those he impressed with both his knowledge of theology and his humility was the famous Benedictine Abbot Boniface Wimmer who was also at the Council.

The decision of the Council to promote Catholic schools must have pleased the new bishop. For this was in line with his own thinking. In fact, just prior to the Council, in a meeting held in his own residence, he had established the first Central Board of Education for a diocese in the United States. Under his presidency, pastors and two lay representatives from each parish made up this board. The board's purpose was to recommend a plan of instruction in the schools and to aid in a general appeal for the construction of parochial schools. He would continue this emphasis on Catholic education in both city and rural areas throughout his episcopate. Even by November 1853 he could write to his father in Bohemia, «The number of children [in the schools of the diocese] has increased from five hundred to five thousand; and before another year has passed, I hope to have ten thousand...».<sup>73</sup>

He was also eager to support Catholic higher institutions of study. There were four colleges exclusively for male students. Two of these were located in Philadelphia itself, the Augustinians' Villanova and the Jesuits' St. Joseph. A third, St. Joseph College, was in Susquehanna, Pennsylvania. All three of these

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<sup>71</sup> BERGER, *Life of Right Rev. John N. Neumann*, 334.

<sup>72</sup> RUSH, *Saint John Neumann, CSSR, Catechist and Writer of Catechisms*, 218.

<sup>73</sup> CURLEY, *Venerable John Neumann*. The quotation from his letter is on p. 211. Other data on schools, p. 207-209.

were in their early stages of development. St. Mary College in Wilmington, Delaware, with the backing of the DuPont family, was a bit more advanced and could count 160 students. – For women’s higher education there was Eden Hall, conducted by the Religious of the Sacred Heart which was doing well, but another institution, conducted by the Visitation Sisters soon had to close, and another by the Sisters of St. Joseph was struggling. Generally Neumann did what he could to bolster higher education; he attended commencements, and celebrated various liturgies for these college.<sup>74</sup>

A shortage of priests in the diocese was a never-ending concern for Bishop Neumann. This was especially true regarding German-speaking priests. He appealed to Europe, but this yielded only one additional priest and one seminarian. The priest shortage became even more acute when the Vincentians informed him that they had to withdraw from St. Charles Borromeo, the diocesan seminary. This meant that the bishop had to call on some of his own diocesan parish priests to serve as professors. Still he continued to move forward with building and opening new churches, fifty in the first five years.<sup>75</sup> His biographer, Father Michael Curley, well sums up Neumann’s belief: «Because it was God’s work, it must succeed».<sup>76</sup>

Besides the priest shortage, the Philadelphia diocese held other challenges for him. One time some angry Germans, sensing discrimination against them, tried unsuccessfully to wreck a train on which he was traveling. At other times he had to resort to excommunication to quiet a disturbance.<sup>77</sup> Trustee problems plagued him always. This was the situation in which certain lay people claimed rights in a parish such as control of finances, and they sometimes had even attempted to control which priest was to serve

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 212-213. At Eden Hall Neumann once quickly identified a certain flower which the young women, even after consulting their textbooks, could not identify. His love and knowledge of botany was still with him.

<sup>75</sup> BERGER, *Life of Right Rev. John N. Neumann*, 335. BERGER, 351, 356, notes that from the beginning Bishop Neumann wanted his own preparatory seminary for younger aspirants. But he did not see this happen until 1859.

<sup>76</sup> CURLEY, *Venerable John Neumann*, 216.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

the parish.<sup>78</sup> Redemptorists had become famous for resisting such trustee control, and, in fact, in 1854 Neumann won a landmark civil court case against the trustees of Philadelphia's Holy Trinity parish.<sup>79</sup>

A burden which stayed with Neumann throughout his years as bishop was the unfinished Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul which his predecessor Kenrick had passed on to him. He did not want to go deep into debt, preferring to build slowly as money was available. Various collection campaigns for the cathedral never produced large sums, although September of 1859 was to see the roof completed with a golden cross adorning its dome. It seems that Bishop Neumann was willing to endure the years of slow construction – as was true of many great cathedrals built in Europe.

Meanwhile he continued his rounds of parish visitations, to the larger places every year and the smaller ones at least every two years.<sup>80</sup> Some times he had the company of another priest, but often he was alone on these visits. In rural areas he paid visits to communities or clusters of Catholics even when there was no church at hand. For the homebound sick he was known to use a «temporary altar» for celebrating Mass in a private home. Frequently he administered Confirmation in a school, private home, public hall, or, on occasion, in a courthouse.<sup>81</sup>

Bishop John Neumann's solicitude for the women and men religious of his diocese was noteworthy. Above all, he wanted to remain close to his Redemptorist roots and did not want to stop considering himself fully a Redemptorist. Every week he visited his confessor at the Redemptorist church of St. Peter's (which still stands at today's Fifth and Girard Streets). He also made his monthly and yearly retreats there. This community was very considerate in placing his name among their own – in fact, at the head of the list of community members.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> This trustee situation often was present when the people themselves had originally built, and then maintained, a church building *before* any priest was available to serve in a given place.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 225-227.

<sup>80</sup> BERGER, *Life of the Right Rev. John N. Neumann*, 335.

<sup>81</sup> CURLEY, *Venerable John Neumann*, 218.

<sup>82</sup> BERGER, *Life of Right Rev. John N. Neumann*, 362. The bishop also,

But this attachment to the Redemptorists did not keep him for being deeply devoted to the other religious orders and congregations which, as he said, «...drew down upon his diocese the richest blessings of Heaven».<sup>83</sup> Besides the groups already mentioned, there were the Sisters of the Holy Cross from Le Mans, France; the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Belgium; the School Sisters of Notre Dame, whose origins were in Germany; and the Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters of Monroe, Michigan, a community begun by a Redemptorist, Father Louis F. Gillet and Sister Theresa Maxis Duchemin in 1845.<sup>84</sup> As we will see shortly, Neumann himself was instrumental in the founding of the women religious known today as the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia.

#### 11. – *An Interlude in Europe, 1854*

In late 1854 and early 1855 Bishop John Neumann returned to Europe. He had accepted an invitation sent by Pope Pius IX to attend the Solemn Proclamation of Mary's Immaculate Conception in Rome on December 8, 1854. However, he also saw that while in Rome he would be able to make the official report on his diocese to Pope Pius IX (something periodically required of the head of a diocese). In addition he could collect alms for the church of Philadelphia and be on the alert for any additional clergy willing to serve in his diocese. Not least on his agenda was to pay a visit to his aged father and other family members.

His father was overjoyed at the prospect of this visit. Still the elderly Philip Neumann was puzzled at the main reason for his son's coming to Europe, «Why must the bishops be called from America to Rome to tell us that the Most Blessed Virgin was conceived without sin? We've always fervently believed that anyway!»<sup>85</sup>

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when possible, went out of Philadelphia to various Redemptorist events, especially to confer ordinations or perform other episcopal functions, always getting due permission from local ordinaries in those places. *Ibid.*, 363.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 364.

<sup>84</sup> Later he was to welcome the Holy Cross Brothers and the Christian Brothers.

<sup>85</sup> BERGER, *Life of the Right Rev. John Neumann*, 393.

Leaving New York on October 17, 1854, aboard the Steamship *Union* Bishop Neumann landed at Le Havre, France, on November 2. There followed an overland journey south to Lyon and then on to the port of Marseille. From there he sailed to Civitavecchia, the port of Rome. His lodging was to be in the center of Rome at the Redemptorist house of Santa Maria in Monterone where he would spend two months.<sup>86</sup>

As expected, he joined fifty-three cardinals, 140 bishops and the more than 50,000 priests, religious, and laity who were in St. Peter's Basilica on December 8 for the Pontifical Mass and other ceremonies attending the formal declaration of Mary's Immaculate Conception. Later he wrote a letter to the people of Philadelphia describing his joy at the occasion, «To have been present is an honor and happiness... for which I return and forever will return humble thanks to our Lord Jesus Christ».<sup>87</sup>

Two days later he was at St. Paul Outside the Walls, the famous basilica and burial place of St. Paul. It was the day of solemn consecration, or better, the re-consecration. For this St. Paul's Basilica had been destroyed by fire three decades earlier and had now been rebuilt. Today Neumann's name remains engraved on one of the large sanctuary plaques commemorating the day and the prelates who attended the re-consecration.

His personal meeting with Pius IX and the submission of his diocesan status report followed on December 16. The pope greeted him cordially with the words, «Bishop Neumann of Philadelphia, isn't obedience better than sacrifice?»<sup>88</sup> This papal remark was in reference to the bishop's reluctance in having been chosen as a bishop.

By year's end Neumann was on his way to his native place in Bohemia, where he was to spend seven days. He traveled by way of Venice, Vienna, and Prague (in Prague he received a large donation from the former Austro-Hungarian Emperor Ferdinand). On February 2, after an absence of eighteen years, he arrived home in Prachatitz and was embraced by his father. Later he reported that the eighty-one year-old Philip Neumann at once car-

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<sup>86</sup> To this day the Redemptorists at Santa Maria in Monterone proudly point out the room used by Neumann.

<sup>87</sup> Quoted in CURLEY, *Venerable John Neumann*, 239.

<sup>88</sup> BERGER, *Life of the Right Rev. John Neumann*, 394.

ried him, literally, up the stairs, with his feet not being able to touch the floor.<sup>89</sup>

Although he tried, John Neumann was not successful in keeping his home visit a modest affair. A number of public and private receptions were held for him as the honored guest. Finally, however, he did succeed in quietly taking leave of Prachatitz before dawn on February 9. He made his way to Munich, and then to Paris, by way of Augsburg, Stuttgart and Speyer. He was frustrated, however, in learning that he could not book passage from Le Havre for some days. So he went to Liverpool, England, and sailed from there to New York, arriving on March 28.

#### 12. – *Again at Home in His Diocese of Philadelphia*

The bishop came home to the challenges of his large and growing diocese. Some of these challenges he had faced before, and some were new. It was the era of «Nativism» with its shortsighted slogan of «America for Americans», meaning that resistance to new immigrants was rampant. Native-born bigots conveniently ignored that *they themselves* were descended from immigrants. Nor did they admit that immigrant labor was occupied in the expansion of America in its wilderness areas. Hard-working «foreigners» were digging canals, building railways and carriage roads, and mining iron, coal and other minerals. In addition they were harvesting the huge agricultural potential of the Midwest. Posturing as super-patriots, the Nativists especially feared Catholic immigrants, seeing them as enemies of freedom who were «dominated by the Romish pope».

The antagonism in Pennsylvania never again reached the point of wholesale violence as it had done in Philadelphia before Neumann's arrival as bishop. But he was kept constantly on the alert to safeguard such matters as property rights of the Catholic Church, and the continuance of his program of Catholic education. Yet, generally speaking, Neumann was also careful not to get caught up in the religious polemics that sometimes filled the public press.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 402.

<sup>90</sup> CURLEY, *Venerable John Neumann*, 251.

The economic downturn of 1854 and 1855, with many Catholics finding themselves unemployed, added to Neumann's financial concerns. For one thing, it slowed down the progress on the building of Philadelphia's Cathedral. Yet, in the summer of 1855 he was able to proceed with the establishment of St. Vincent's orphan asylum, ten miles from Philadelphia, in Tacony, Pennsylvania.

To this same era also belongs the founding of a new group of Women Religious. When he was in Rome in 1854, Neumann had received formal permission to begin a community of religious which was to grow into the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia. Informally, three devoted women, led by Anna Maria Boll Bachmann, had already been living in community in a private home, under the guidance of Father Peter Hespelien, C.Ss.R. In April 1855 these women were invested in the Franciscan habit at St. Peter's Redemptorist Church in Philadelphia. Bishop Neumann wrote their initial rule of life, and received their first religious vows in the year 1856 in his private chapel. They first served the immigrant poor, eventually expanding their ministry into hospitals and teaching. By the early 1900s this Franciscan community was to have almost 800 members.<sup>91</sup>

Meanwhile, just as the city of Philadelphia was continually growing, so was the total of Catholics in Neumann's diocese. In 1855 no other diocese in the United States could match its numbers: an estimated 250,000 Catholics, who were served by 145 churches. It was simply too much for one bishop, and Neumann began petitioning for the See of Philadelphia to be split into two or three dioceses. He said he would gladly take a smaller, less important diocese.<sup>92</sup>

However, with all of his concerns, financial and otherwise, Bishop Neumann remained at heart a pastoral-minded prelate. He could report to Rome that at least five months of every year

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<sup>91</sup> Website, 2010, «Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia», <http://www.osfphila.org>. Maria Anna Boll Bachmann was the widow of Anthony Bachmann who had died after being wounded in the anti-Catholic Nativist riots in Philadelphia in 1851. *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> CURLEY, *Venerable John Neumann*, 267, 271. Also letter, James F. Wood to Cardinal Barnabò, Prefect of Propaganda Fide, Sept. 15, 1858, as quoted *ibid.*, 327.

he was involved in what he called «holy visitations» of both urban and rural parishes.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, aware of the large numbers of Irish in the city of Philadelphia, it was about this time that he set about learning Gaelic, mainly so he could minister to these people in the confessional.<sup>94</sup>

A special, personal joy came into John Neumann's when his nephew, John Berger, who was the son of his sister Catherine, came to America in 1857 with a view to being a diocesan priest in Philadelphia. Eventually, however, Berger met and joined the Redemptorists.<sup>95</sup>

### 13. – *The Arrival of a Coadjutor Bishop in Philadelphia*

Although Bishop Neumann had wanted and petitioned for the leadership of a smaller diocese, it was not until February of 1857 that his plea was heard, and, in a fashion, granted. The answer came by the appointment of a coadjutor bishop named James Frederick Wood, the son of a Cincinnati, Ohio, banker, and formerly a banker himself. Wood was praised «for his suavity of manners, his learning, and his piety».<sup>96</sup> Following his conversion to the Catholic faith, and his subsequent desire to serve as a priest in Cincinnati, Wood had been sent to Rome where he lived at the Irish College (not far from the Redemptorist Generalate) and studied at the College of Propaganda Fide. He was just thirteen years ordained when he was chosen to be both Neumann's helper and successor.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Letter, Neumann to Cardinal Franzoni, Prefect of Propaganda Fide in Rome, May 28, 1855, as quoted *ibid.*, 274-275.

<sup>94</sup> Neumann *already* spoke German, French, Italian, Bohemian, Spanish and English. See Curley as in FN 92, 263, 273.

<sup>95</sup> John Berger was born in Prachatitz, Bohemia, May 12, 1839. He was professed as a Redemptorist in Annapolis, Maryland, Oct. 15, 1859; ordained in Cumberland, Maryland, April 1, 1865. As we have seen, (see FN 27 above), he authored the first biography of St. John Neumann, *Leben und Wirken des Hochseligen Johannes Nep. Neumann*. Berger died a Redemptorist in Baltimore on Jan. 13, 1884.

<sup>96</sup> The *Catholic Herald and Visitor of Philadelphia*, April [11?] 1857, as quoted in CURLEY, *Venerable John Neumann*, 310.

<sup>97</sup> Technically, Wood was Neumann's coadjutor *cum jure successionis*. This Latin phrase meant that he held the right to follow Neumann as the next

But the whole question of «succession» to the diocese seems to have involved the misunderstanding by Wood that John Neumann *wanted to resign* from the See of Philadelphia and would do so as soon as possible. This was not the case at all; Neumann never expressed any intention of resigning, although he did state that he was willing to accept a smaller diocese. This misunderstanding led to the «sometimes strained relations» with the coadjutor Bishop Wood.<sup>98</sup>

Neumann was only too happy to turn over to Wood many administrative affairs, especially the financial management of the diocese. However, the coadjutor found this arrangement hard to bear «without [his having] full governing authority».<sup>99</sup> He also tended to assume an attitude of «patronizing superiority» towards John Neumann when it came to money matters, saying that Neumann had «so little skill in such matters».<sup>100</sup> The Redemptorist Michael Curley, Neumann's biographer, says, «That Bishop Wood was uncomfortable in his position is amply evident in his correspondence». This correspondence repeatedly shows that Wood desired either to be head of the Philadelphia diocese, or the head of another diocese. His present status left him com-

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bishop of Philadelphia.

<sup>98</sup> CURLEY, *Venerable John Neumann*, 310, 326. In justice to Archbishop Wood, it must be pointed out the Roman Document of appointment contained ambiguous language – an interpretation of which could have been read to mean that Neumann's resignation was imminent. The text of this document is in *Studia Neumanniana. Sancto Joanni Nepomuceno Neumann in solemnibus canonizatione obsequii fratrum munus* (Bibliotheca Historica Congregationis Sanctissimi Redemptoris, 6), Roma 1977, 198-199. A background and brief commentary on the document can be found in the article by Giuseppe ORLANDI, *G. N. Neumann e i Vescovi degli U.S.A. nelle Lettere dell'Archivio di Propaganda Fide 1852-1860*, *ibid.*, 149-151.

<sup>99</sup> Letter, Francis Patrick Kenrick, Archbishop of Baltimore, to his brother Peter Richard Kenrick, Archbishop of St. Louis, May 9, 1858, as quoted in CURLEY, *Venerable John Neumann*, 324. See also *ibid.*, 321.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 315-316. This claim of «little skill» was hardly true of Neumann who had already overseen the building of some fifty churches, and numerous Catholic schools besides, in only four years in Philadelphia (not to mention his excellent financial management as a pastor in Baltimore and Pittsburgh). The truth was that Neumann preferred the pointedly pastoral role of his episcopacy.

plaining that he was the «the victim of anxiety which I can scarcely explain».<sup>101</sup> Little did Bishop Wood know that in less than seven months (after writing this letter) his anxiety would be resolved in a most unexpected way.

#### 14. – *Death Comes to the Sainly Bishop*

The last months of John Neumann's life found him making his accustomed rounds of visits to the outlying districts of his diocese. These visits were made a little easier with the advent of new railway lines. He also continued to preside at the opening of new churches and Catholic schools, sometimes buying previously used buildings in this effort. Included among these openings was also that of a preparatory seminary for his diocese at Glen Riddle, Pennsylvania.<sup>102</sup>

Although he never lived to see the final completion of Philadelphia's Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul, Neumann did have the joy of seeing significant progress on the building. Once the roof was on and the Corinthian façade finished, there was a noteworthy celebration on September 14, 1859, to raise and place a large golden-colored cross on the Cathedral dome. A large number of the faithful, estimated at six- to ten thousand, crowded into Logan Square in front of the Cathedral for the event.

On Christmas Eve of 1859 the bishop was in the confessional of his own chapel offering the Sacrament of Reconciliation until 11:00 P.M. Then he went to the Redemptorist Church of St. Peter to preside at Midnight Mass. It was on January 4 that he mentioned in a letter that he was not feeling well, something he repeated the next day when a Redemptorist priest came for a brief visit. That afternoon, January 5, he had just left the office of an attorney where they had discussed some business about property deeds when... suddenly he collapsed on the street. Two men rushed to help him. They carried him inside a nearby house.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 331-332. The quotation about his anxiety is from his letter of May 30, 1859 to his friend and patron, Archbishop John B. Purcell of Cincinnati, as quoted by Curley.

<sup>102</sup> The list of these newly opened facilities is rather lengthy; see CURLEY, *Venerable John Neumann*, 378-379.

<sup>103</sup> The many details, some of them contradictory and problematic, sur-

But John Neumann was dead, and the news spread quickly around Philadelphia. His funeral liturgy followed on Monday, January 9, 1860, and was celebrated in St. John's Pro-Cathedral. Bishop Wood presided, Archbishop Kenrick of Baltimore preached the funeral homily. Neumann had often expressed a wish to be buried among his Redemptorist confreres,<sup>104</sup> and so it was that he was buried in the Lower Church of St. Peter's in Philadelphia, where his body lies to this day. This location has grown into a pilgrimage Shrine in his honor, complete with a St. John Neumann Memorial Museum.

15. – *Declaration of Heroic Virtue, Beatification, and Canonization*

An archdiocesan canonical investigation of his virtues was begun in 1886 in Philadelphia. This was followed by the Roman investigation in 1897, and in 1921 Pope Benedict XV declared that Neumann's virtues had been practiced «to a heroic degree». It can be fairly said that the political disturbances of the early to mid-twentieth century (especially World War II) slowed down the movement of his cause for sainthood. But the interest and tenacity of the Apostolic Delegate to the United States, Archbishop Amleto Cicognani, played a significant role in continuing the promotion of the cause of Neumann. Likewise, two Redemptorist postulators for the cause, Father Nicola Ferrante in Rome, and Father Francis Litz in Philadelphia, fulfilled important roles in keeping alive a strong devotion among the people and furthering the process within the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

When Pope John XXIII was elected in 1958, he showed a special interest in the life and virtue of John Neumann. In fact, Neumann's Beatification was inscribed on Pope John's calendar when the pope's death occurred on June 3, 1963. Consequently

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rounding St. John Neumann's death are treated at length in Alfred C. RUSH, *The Death and Burial of St. John Neumann Redemptorist and Fourth Bishop of Philadelphia*. This excellent article that can be found in two locations: a) *SHCSR* 24 (1976) 438-475; b) *Studia Neumanniana*, 301-338.

<sup>104</sup> RUSH, *The Death and Burial of St John Neumann*, 465; *Studia Neumanniana*, 328.

the Beatification took place a few months later on October 13, 1963, in the pontificate of Pope Paul VI during the time of the Second Vatican Council.

A brief fourteen years later, on June 19, 1977, the same Paul VI proclaimed our quiet, unassuming Redemptorist confrere as Saint John Neumann.

#### SUMMARY

January 5, 2010, marked the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the death of St. John Neumann, C.Ss.R., whereas March 28, 2011, will recall the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth. Throughout both of these years various events will take place around the world to pay tribute this quiet-mannered Redemptorist saint who from humble beginnings in Bohemia, became the fourth bishop of Philadelphia in North America. As our own anniversary tribute to St. John Neumann, C.Ss.R., we provide here an account of the major events of his life. Many of these events in his life have been previously recorded by many authors, especially at the time of his canonization in June 1977. However, there are certain details in this account which have been drawn from more recent research.

#### RÉSUMÉ

La date du 5 janvier 2010 nous a rappelé le 150<sup>ème</sup> anniversaire de la mort de St Jean Neumann CSsR, alors que le 28 mars 2011 rappellera le 200<sup>ème</sup> anniversaire de sa naissance. Au cours de ces deux années, diverses commémorations auront lieu de par le monde pour honorer ce saint Rédemptoriste, un homme calme qui parti de ses humbles origines en Bohême, deviendra le quatrième évêque de Philadelphie. Voulant contribuer à ces commémorations, nous esquissons ici les grandes lignes de sa vie. Beaucoup de faits ont déjà été décrits par de nombreux auteurs, notamment durant l'année de sa canonisation en 1977. Cependant on trouvera encore certains détails dans cet article qui proviennent de recherches plus récentes.