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ST. JOHN NEUMANN'S SPIRITUALITY

1. – *We Were Brought up in the Old-fashioned School*; 2. – *Poverty of Spirit*; 3. – *Neumann's Transition to North America*; 4. – *Zeal for your house consumes me (Ps 69:9)*; 5. – *Neumann's Pastoral Presence: «I shall make you known and loved»*; 6. – *The Light I need to follow the Way of Your law*; 7. – *Behold my Resolution to be Devout in Your Service*; 8. – *The Religious Life; Conclusion*

On the day of St. John Neumann's funeral in early January, 1860, Father William O'Hara, then rector of St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in Philadelphia, reported to Rome concerning Neumann's death: «The Church in America has suffered a great loss».¹ The funeral outpouring in Philadelphia demonstrated that he was not alone in that evaluation. Moreover, the end of Neumann's life on earth was clearly not the end of his influence on the American Church; from the first days after the funeral obsequies until today, the faithful have been inspired by his life and seek his ongoing assistance in their needs.

Pope Paul VI canonized John Nepomucene Neumann on June 19, 1977. In his homily on the occasion, he pointed out that we need to «... ask ourselves ... what is the meaning of this extraordinary event, the meaning of his canonization? It is the celebration of holiness. And what is holiness? It is human perfection, human love raised up to its highest level in Christ, in God».²

Neumann's story usually consists of a series of accomplishments. There is much to admire – the organization of the Catholic School system in Philadelphia, the institutionalization of the Forty Hours Devotion for the Diocese, the founding of a congregation of women religious, the Sisters of the Third Order

¹ Archives of the Sacred Congregation de Propaganda Fide, Rome, Italy, Vol. XVIII, January 7, 1860.

² PAUL VI, in «Acta Apostolicae Sedis» 1977.

of St. Francis of Glen Riddle, and the help he provided to other religious communities in their struggles to find a foothold in America. He published catechisms and established institutions of charity to care for the needs of the poor, especially the immigrants who were flooding the shores of North America. His presence to the faithful wherever they might be found was untiring; his founding of a minor seminary to provide future priests to serve the People of God was notable; the construction of many churches and schools was impressive. The list of activities is lauded and is the usual focus of attention when considering the glory of St. John Neumann. Yet, there is more. «For true activity», Pope Benedict XV declared in 1922 at the decree proclaiming the heroic virtue of the saint, «does not consist in mere noise, it is not the creature of a day, but it unfolds itself in the present, it is the fruit of the past and should be the good seed of the future».³

Neumann's past, the unfolding of the ministry, and the good seed produced are all indications of something deeper, his spirituality. From his response to the experiences of his life and of God's presence in life events, he developed firm convictions and a basic framework for all of his activity that followed. To understand his spirituality, it is indeed necessary to be familiar with his *curriculum vitae*, but study is needed to understand Neumann's spirituality.

«Christian spirituality studies the reactions which Christian belief produces in the religious consciousness».⁴ The way an individual interprets his or her experience and places it within a context of a philosophy for living, as well as the success or failure of the individual to live according to his or her foundational belief are the context of spirituality. «The experience, reflection and articulation of the assumptions and consequences of religious faith as it is lived in concrete situations» is the definition given by Carolyn Osiek for spirituality, and is also the understanding of this study.⁵

³ BENEDICT XV, in «Acta Apostolicae Sedis» 1922.

⁴ Louis BOUYER, *A History of Christian Spirituality*, Vol. I, New York 1963, VII.

⁵ JON ALEXANDER, *What Do Recent Writers Mean by Spirituality?*, in «Spirituality Today», September, 1980, 250. Hereafter cited as ALEXANDER.

Neumann's spirituality is rooted in his European background and is expressed in his missionary career in North America. By the end of his seminary experience, Neumann had embraced a poverty of spirit, often ascribed to him as the virtue of humility, a virtue that, in his theological notes, he ascribed as essential in the Christian life. «Without humility, he declared, other virtues could be neither genuine nor permanent».⁶ This foundational virtue made his apostolic zeal, expressed in the ministry, all the more authentic.

Neumann's years can be divided between the time of formation in Europe and of ministry in America. His first twenty-five years of experience were completely European, Bohemian to be more precise; the last years, almost of equal number, were those spent in ministry in the United States. The blending of these experiences in the life of Neumann produced the first American male ever canonized by the Church. This took place in 1977.⁷

1. – *We Were Brought up in the Old-fashioned School*

Neumann writes of his early life in Europe:

We were brought up in the old-fashioned school. Our parents were both deeply Christian. While our father from morning to night supervised the apprentices and workers, of which there were at times five or six in the house, our mother never missed a day hearing Mass. She always took with her one or the other of the children who was not yet in school. She went to Holy Communion often and fasted not only on the fast days of the Church but at other times as well; my father, however, did not approve of this. In my case there was needed at times the promise of a penny or something similar to bring me to Mass, Rosary and Stations of the Cross.⁸

⁶ Michael J. CURLEY, *Venerable John Neumann, C.S.S.R.*, Washington 1952, 373. Hereafter cited as CURLEY.

⁷ A photocopy of Neumann's passport showing his American citizenship can be found in the Archives of the Redemptorists of the Baltimore Province, Neumanniana.

⁸ Alfred C. RUSH, trans. and ed., *The Autobiography of St. John Neumann, C.S.S.R.*, Boston 1977, 17. Hereafter cited as RUSH.

Philip Neumann, John's father, emigrated from Obernburg, Bavaria to the village of Prachatitz (modern-day *Prachatice* in the Czech Republic) in Bohemia in 1802 to ply his trade as a stocking maker; Agnes Lebis, a native of the village, became his wife in 1805. There would be six children from the union, John being the third child, born March 28, 1811. The village Church was as central to daily life as was the town square. John's birth year had been just a bit more than twenty years after the French Revolution and the spirit of nationalism, even in ecclesiastical circles, was a reality; this, however, was less in the villages than in the larger metropolitan areas. John grew up in the old-fashioned school!

We can further categorize Neumann's family life as being not only of the old-fashioned school but of the Roman Catholic school. Philip Neumann was known for his justice in his shop and for his charity as the distributor of alms when he was the town's Prefect of the Poor. In his office as prefect, Philip cared for the indigent and sought to care for their needs from taxes levied for this purpose. This was a lesson John learned and emulated later in his ministry to immigrants.

Of the children of the family, John would be ordained a priest and eventually profess religious vows as a Redemptorist; his brother Wenzel would profess vows as a Redemptorist Brother and be known as Brother Wencelaus. Of the girls, the two eldest, Catherine and Veronica married; the fourth eldest child in the family, Joan, entered the Sisters of St. Charles and became known as Sister Caroline. Louise, the youngest girl, took care of Philip Neumann until his death and then lived out the remainder of her life with the Sisters of St. Charles. The only grandchild born to John's parents was Catherine's son, John Berger, who would later go to America and become a Redemptorist priest. Berger was also to be the first biographer of John Neumann.

Though John grew up in a traditional Catholic family, he confided that he did not feel an inclination toward becoming a priest, even in the midst of his family's piety; he was more intrigued with science. He did study Latin with the town catechist, but that was a custom for all students who were interested in pursuing advanced studies. After his time in the village school, in 1823, John with approximately twenty others students from

Prachatitz moved on to Budweis (modern day *České Budějovice* in the Czech Republic) for the *gymnasium*. During these years, he continued the routine of a sincere religious practice.

We went to confession every three months. As far as I can recall, it was always a truly serious matter with me to receive the holy sacraments properly, for the first instruction that I received in my home kept me from the pitfalls in which most of my school companions were trapped.⁹

At the end of the *gymnasium*, John entered his two years of philosophy. He confided that «During the two years of philosophy, many changes took place in me».¹⁰ He continued in the revelation of the evolution of his vocation:

In those two years I avidly followed my bent for the natural sciences: botany and biology, geography, physics, geology, astronomy. And I applied myself with the greatest enthusiasm to algebra, geometry, and trigonometry, subjects that formerly were not to my liking. When the time came, at the end of the philosophy course, for me to decide either for theology or law or medicine, I felt more of an attraction for the latter.¹¹

John's father was not disappointed with the inclination toward the study of medicine; his mother, however, persuaded John to apply also for the seminary in Budweis. He protested that he did not feel worthy of the high calling, nor did he have testimonials from influential people to help him get accepted. Furthermore, only twenty of the eighty applicants would be accepted and he did not feel that he would be one of them. Nonetheless, he did apply and was accepted. He confessed that he was not disappointed and gave up the thought of medicine. «From that moment on I never gave another thought to medicine, and I also practically gave up completely the study of physics and astronomy on which I had preferred to spend time, and this without any great difficulty».¹² Neumann began his theological studies on the feast of All Saints, November 1, 1831.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 21.

The seminary for the Diocese of Budweis was established in 1804 and numbered 140 students in Neumann's day. Neumann was content in the seminary.

I studied *con amore* Old Testament, Hebrew, Church History and so on to my own satisfaction and that of the professors who were diocesan priests and who, with the exception of the professor of Church History and Canon Law, who was more of a Josephinist, had a good spirit and with great ease taught us in a short time a great deal of useful material. At the end of the first year of theology I was one of the few who were to receive Tonsure and the four Minor Orders. This actually took place on July 21, 1832.¹³

The second year of theology continued as smoothly as the first. It was during this year that Neumann made his decision to be a missionary in America.

In the second year of theology we had New Testament in Latin and Greek together with Exegesis and Canon Law. What appealed to me most were the Letters of the Apostle, St. Paul, which the professor knew how to explain very well. About this time I began to read the reports of the Leopoldine Society, especially the letters of Father Baraga and other missionaries among the Germans in North America. This is how there arose in one of my fellow students, Adalbert Schmidt, and in myself on the occasion of a walk along the Moldau River, the determination to devote ourselves to North America as soon as we acquired some experience after ordination.¹⁴

The decision to become a missionary affected Neumann's choices from that time onward. It was the determining factor in his decision to transfer from the diocesan seminary in Budweis to the archdiocesan seminary in Prague. He reasoned that learning English and French would be essential elements for his future ministry in America and that the study of these languages could better be done in the larger city of Prague. He applied for one of the two positions made available each year to seminarians from Budweis and was accepted, along with a classmate, Anton Laad.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

Unfortunately, Neumann's plans to study new languages never materialized.

I had hardly gone to the French classes at the *Clementinum* for a few [days or weeks] when an order came from the archbishop that no seminarian was to attend these classes. As for English, I could learn even less because that language was not taught at the University then.¹⁵

In spite of the restrictions on the study of French and the absence of classes in English, Neumann was able to learn enough to begin recording his thoughts and feelings in his *Journal* which he began while he was a student at Prague and which he continued almost until he entered the Redemptorists in 1840. The *Journal* was not a diary but a means of reflecting upon his own experiences. Neumann was lonely during the years at Prague and he would continue to live a life that was often isolated while serving as a diocesan priest on the frontiers of western New York State. The jottings in the *Journal* provided him a means to externalize some of the deepest streams of his heart. It was found among his personal things at the time of his death; though he had not made an entry in the *Journal* for twenty years, he kept the writing for his own reasons.

The seminary of Prague was radically different from that of Budweis, if for no other reason than that it was part of a large city and large university. As part of the university, it boasted a history of over 450 years, located in the former Jesuit College of the *Clementinum* which housed the Royal Imperial Library. It is not surprising that many of the theological currents that Neumann would find offensive could be experienced in this setting.

At Prague I was likewise displeased with the professors of Dogmatic and Moral Theology as well as Pastoral Theology. The first was more against the Pope than for him, ... The second was far too philosophical for a single one of us to understand him. The third was an out-and-out Josephinist.¹⁶

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

During the Prague years, the seminarian reacted and responded to his environment and many of his principles of life took root in those days, especially his ecclesiology. Some of the divergent streams of Prague were not much to Neumann's liking.

Neumann did not consider his Prague period profitable, neither in 1835 nor, even less so, later. ...He concludes his criticism in these words: «It took a lot of effort and self-control to bury myself in the study of subjects and ideas whose foolishness I had already come to realize».¹⁷

He kept a copy of Peter Canisius' *Summa Doctrinae Christianae* next to his text books and would be chided for his «hyper-orthodoxy». His personal study of spiritual writers verifies that this criticism of him, though he found it offensive, was not inaccurate.

Neumann's diaries spread out before us his interior, spiritual development during his Prague sojourn. They deserve special study with regard to the psychology and piety of the Catholic Restoration. The essential point is that Neumann's piety stands within the renewed classical-baroque tradition of Ignatius of Loyola, Francis Xavier, Peter Canisius, Louis of Granada, Theresa of Avila, Vincent de Paul, Francis de Sales, Joseph of Calasanz, Scupoli, Fenelon, Alphonse of Liguori, Jean Crasset (1618-1692), Jean Croiset (1656-1738), Bourdaloue and the Roman Catechism.¹⁸

In 1814, three years after Neumann's birth year, Pope Pius VI returned from exile to Rome and within the context of this historical moment a new spirit pervaded the institutional body of the Roman Church aimed at bringing back into the fold many of those affected by the Enlightenment. This direction continued in the time of his successor, Pope Pius VII.

Under Pius VII and his successors the Church undertook a general redefinition of Catholic life. Inspired by the sixteenth-century Catholic Counter-Reformation and the Council of Trent,

¹⁷ August Kurt HUBER, *John N. Neumann's Student Years in Prague, 1833-1835*, in «Records of the American Historical Society of Philadelphia», 89 (Numbers 1-4, 1978).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

restoration churchmen expanded the institutional structures and devotional activities that gave form and substance to Catholic communities throughout the West.¹⁹

By the end of his seminary years, Neumann was well rooted in what came to be known as the Catholic Restoration.

On one level restoration Catholicism can be seen as a reaction against the Enlightenment (counterpoising universalism to nationalism, supernaturalism to secular rationalism, and authoritarianism to liberalism), but it also attempted to reform Catholicity in all its aspects and to recapture the aggressive vitality of the Tridentine Church of the sixteenth century. Once more the Church became a militant and transforming force in Western culture.²⁰

In the years of formation, Neumann's convictions concerning the value of the institutional church took deep root in him, and went with him from Europe to the New World. While a student in Prague, in 1834, Neumann wrote a letter to a friend, John Holba, back in the seminary in Budweis concerning his belief that it made sense to follow the pope when there was doubt. Of course, this was before the declaration of papal infallibility and Neumann did not base his conviction on the doctrine but on a propensity to believe that the universal church needed to be in union with the pope. When there was doubt, the position of the pope could be safely followed. His pro-Roman bias was demonstrated while he was still a seminarian in Prague; he was impatient with Josephism and Febronianism and referred often to the Roman catechisms to verify all opinions offered in his theological studies.

In ministry, Neumann's ecclesiology would prove a determining factor in setting the parameters of his ministry. An even more important determinant, however, was a spirituality rooted in humility.

¹⁹ Dale B. LIGHT, *Rome and the New Republic*, Notre Dame 1996, 247. Hereafter cited as LIGHT.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

2. – *Poverty of Spirit*

To become human means to become «poor», to have nothing that one might brag about before God. To become human means to have no support and no power, save the enthusiasm and commitment to one's own heart. Becoming human involves proclaiming the poverty of the human spirit in the face of the total claims of a transcendent God.²¹

From Neumann's *Journal* it is possible to identify the evolution of the basic value that directed so many of his actions – a genuine Poverty of Spirit. Coming to such a profound spirituality did not come easily; at one point his inner sufferings were so profound that he gave passing thought to suicide as a possible escape from the torment. «My God, do not let this despair of mine continue... it could lead me to suicide. This faintheartedness and lack of faith is frightening.»²² On the other hand, reflecting the experience of St. Paul, another avenue opened for Neumann. It was in his weakness that he found his strength.²³

The Prague years were profoundly lonely years for Neumann; he was removed from the more familiar rural setting, separated from friends and confidants, foiled in his very reasons for venturing into the capital. The study of French was forbidden and English was not available in the academic setting. In addition, Neumann had a tender conscience and was, at times, rather ruthless in confronting his sins and imperfections. He often longed for the opportunity to confess his sins and imposed rather severe punishments on himself as restitution for his offences. He was introspective and had a tender conscience and often complained of despondency. In this setting, Neumann was led to spiritual poverty...

Thinking about [my friends] today made me feel so disconsolate, especially after supper, that I started to cry! Here I am, with

²¹ Johannes Baptist METZ, *Poverty of Spirit*, New York 1998, 10. Hereafter cited as METZ.

²² John N. NEUMANN, *Spiritual Journal*, in *SHCSR* 26 (1978) 295, s.d. March 4, 1834. Hereafter cited as *Journal*, with Vol. of *SHCSR*, page, and date indicated.

²³ See 2 *Cor.* 12:10.

all my carelessness and indifference while my friends in Budweis are surrounded by remarkable people and enjoy wise and holy spiritual direction! They don't even think of me anymore. In my loneliness and grief they have forgotten all about me.²⁴

He was not gregarious and he missed the few, deep friendships he had enjoyed over the years. After reading St. Theresa, he knew how important a spiritual director could be to his spiritual development, but this relationship was also absent to him. He was obviously a very capable and talented man, but was troubled by his inadequacy. It is not surprising that the exposure that is part of preaching was challenging to him and an incident in homiletic class crystallized all of these realities.

Neumann would never become known as an orator in his ministry; it was not finesse but rather the depth of content which sprouted through his dryness and which made his words sought by the faithful. In the experience of preaching, Neumann felt all his weakness and even wondered if prayer could help him.

You are aware of my weakness, my inclination to discouragement; my lack of skill in preaching worries me so much. I would readily turn to you in prayer, Lord, but so many of my prayers, marred by my sins, go unheard, that I no longer have the confidence to approach the throne of your mercy.²⁵

His anxiety was justified. He forgot his sermon and had to step down from the pulpit in homiletics class. He chided himself because he not only failed in the delivery but also because he lied by saying he knew the text in Latin but not German.

Enduring the inner feelings that assailed him in these years was most difficult. Time after time, he accused himself of personal weakness. His honesty made him wonder if he had the ability to live the Christian life in the manner he thought proper.

I was worse than lax most of the day, for I often actually took delight in the impure thoughts that occurred to me. I was glad that I had them and maybe even coddled them! I no longer value humility or make an effort to acquire it because of my tepidity, lack of love, wavering faith and my despair of recovering

²⁴ *Journal*, in *SHCSR* 26 (1978) 348, s.d. May 1, 1835.

²⁵ *Journal*, in *SHCSR* 25 (1977) 408, s.d. December 22, 1834.

God's grace. Indeed, the condition of my soul is simply astonishing... Right now I would gladly quit this particular path of salvation I have trod for so long!²⁶

Emptiness went far beyond a guilty conscience for his faults, as he was entering into an experience of spiritual poverty, the lack of power or control except in God, the negation of all illusion of self sufficiency. «We really hope when we no longer have anything of our own. Any possession or personal strength tempts us to a vain self reliance...».²⁷ The intensity of poverty was all the more difficult because it was coupled with a sense of absence from God.

Jesus, my delight, has fled; alas, I seek for him in vain! I have lost my Beloved. He hearkens not to my sighs, he heeds not my voice. My eyes are blinded by tears, my voice has grown weak from lamenting; but he is not moved. He does not show himself to my poor soul. Jesus, Jesus, where art Thou?²⁸

Neumann continues his lament: «That Love, O my God, which once united me to Thee has completely disappeared. O my Jesus, I am lost to heaven, I am dead to Thee!»²⁹ Nonetheless, in the depths of the *via negativa*, Neumann continued his routine of faith.

I am assaulted by the demon of discouragement and despair; but, my soul, hold fast to Jesus. He will have mercy on you!... All my comfort, all my joy must come from him. Worldlings may call me unhappy, but I will rejoice in you alone... O my Jesus, if it be your will that these terrible temptations against faith should again assail me, I beseech you suffer me not to fall! Let me taste their full bitterness, but let me not fall! O my Lord, my God, I cast myself entirely into your hands! Worn out by the struggle, I will rest beneath your cross; I will embrace it; I will kiss it as the symbol of my victory!³⁰

²⁶ *Journal*, in *SHCSR* 27 (1979) 118, s.d. June 10, 1835.

²⁷ METZ, 38.

²⁸ John A. BERGER, *Life of Right Rev. John N. Neumann*, New York 1884, 212. Hereafter cited as BERGER.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 211.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 75-76.

Neumann's growth into humility was as it should have been:

We dimly begin to realize that we are poor, that our power and strength are derived from the wellsprings of invisible mystery ... Worshipping in 'spirit and truth' (Jn. 4:23), we no longer bear ourselves with the swagger of the executive who knows what is up and has all under control ... In worship we hand over even our poverty and pledge it to this mystery of God's all-encompassing presence ... Surrendering everything, even our poverty, we become truly rich: 'For when I am weak, then I am strong' (2 Cor. 12:10).³¹

The genius of Neumann's spirituality emerges from experienced nothingness and even more because he was able to allow the absence of God to unfold into an even deeper faith. His poverty of spirit progressed to a surrender into the God who pervaded his life and it continued to deepen in the ministry. There was not a specific moment that can be identified as his «conversion moment»; his ongoing jottings in the *Journal* show that he continued to refine the virtue as his life progressed. He did not record having experienced any kind of ecstatic union, only the ongoing faithfulness to the transcendent God.

When I beg your grace in order to practice virtue, you grant it to me and it does help me accomplish something worthwhile. But then I become conceited and proud. When I ask you to send me misfortune so that I may learn the path of salvation, I then bear it with little resignation. I even ask you to deliver me from it. If you remove it, I get depressed and desolate and I feel miserable. Behold me, dear God, at the foot of your throne. Give me whatever you will. Spare me from whatever you will. Let me know your will, without a doubt, for that must be my law.³²

The richness of a self-awareness that led Neumann into God made it possible for him to give himself completely to the ministry. His zeal flowed not from a perceived personal strength or ability, but from an abiding awareness that it was no longer he that lived, but Christ lived in him.³³

³¹ METZ, 50-52.

³² *Journal*, in *SHCSR* 25 (1977) 397, s.d. December 12, 1834.

³³ *Gal.* 2:20.

At the end of his seminary studies in Prague, Neumann was saddened by the fact that ordinations that year were to be postponed for the Diocese of Budweis. There was a sufficient number of clergy and the bishop was old and sickly. The seminarians, therefore, had to return home and await the announcement of when, or if, ordinations would take place in the future. Neumann had hoped to be ordained in Bohemia, surrounded by his family, and to celebrate his First Mass before journeying to America as a missionary. It actually took him three weeks time before he had the courage to inform his family of his intention to emigrate to the New World. When he did so, there was some opposition but, in the end, he received the blessings of his family.

3. – *Neumann's Transition to North America*

Between 1836 and 1860, the years which Neumann spent in America, 4,300,000 immigrants arrived in the United States and, of these, 1,493,155 were German-speaking. Like Neumann, most arrived impoverished, had no one to meet them at the docks and didn't really know what they were going to do when they had arrived in the New World. The Catholic Church served as an anchor for many of the immigrants.

One landmark that Catholics recognized on either the urban or rural front was the church. Transplanted from the old country, it was a nostalgic reminder of what had been. In New York, Irish and German parishioners were located within walking distance of one another, but they were as distinct as German beer and Irish whiskey. They reinforced the ethnic differences of the people and enabled a neighborhood to build cultural barriers among themselves. As the center of their religious life, the neighborhood parish exhibited the piety of the people, and the differences in piety proved to be more striking than the similarities of the urban environment.³⁴

April 12, 1836 marked the day Neumann sailed from Le Havre for America. The crossing took forty days, which he considered akin to Jesus' time in the desert before he began his pub-

³⁴ Jay P. DOLAN, *The Immigrant Church*, Baltimore 1975, 44. Hereafter cited as DOLAN.

lic ministry. He would return to Europe only one time, nineteen years later in 1854, for the solemn declaration of the Immaculate Conception. When he arrived in the United States, he had no indication that he would be accepted for ordination in any diocese. He was a stranger in a strange land. He had completed the seminary curriculum and had many talents; his zeal motivated the journey but he was unable to get the assurance of ordination that he wanted due to a very slow and unreliable postal service.

Neumann set foot in New York City June 2, 1836. After a day of search, he was able to find the bishop:

Father Raffener brought me at once to the Most Rev. Bishop Dubois – a born Frenchman – who in his glad surprise did not know whether he should address me in Latin, French or English. As soon as he had seen my testimonials, he told me at once that he was determined to receive me into the diocese.³⁵

The immigrant found his ministry in the New World; he was ordained a priest in Old St. Patrick's on June 25, 1836.

O my Jesus, how I glory in belonging to you! O Jesus, Searcher of hearts, you know how mine longs to be holy, to be united with you! Your death, O Jesus, made all people my brothers and sisters! Come, then, O Holy Spirit, come upon me that I may show forth to your world the way of eternal salvation! Come upon me, Strength of the weak, that my life and my works may exhibit faith made fruitful by your grace! O Holy Spirit, direct me in all my ways! With the Blessed Virgin, your mother, and with St. Joseph, I kneel at your crib and weep over my sins but ask again your grace. You are my all, My Lord, my God!³⁶

4. – *Zeal for your house consumes me* (Ps 69:9)

One dictionary defines zeal as «Enthusiastic devotion to a cause, ideal, or goal and tireless diligence in its furtherance».³⁷ Neumann was clear in his basic motivation, his cause: «This will

³⁵ Letter Neumann to «Reverend Sir Dean [Endres]», June 27, 1836. Original in Archives of Diocese of Budweis, Rodler Papers.

³⁶ Edited from Neumann's prayers as recorded in Berger upon his ordination as sub-deacon, deacon, and priest, 151ff.

³⁷ *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th Ed., Boston 2000.

be my thanksgiving: I shall make you known and loved, while for myself I ask of you and the whole court of heaven, the light I need to follow the way of your law».³⁸ The «house» for which Neumann had zeal was the Catholic community: «I want to dedicate my every effort to your glory, to spread your Kingdom over the face of this earth which you have loved enough to become the God-Man».³⁹

That Neumann was zealous there is little doubt considering his accomplishments; his «...religious faith as it is lived in concrete situations».⁴⁰ All the effort which he exerted was directed toward the people he loved and served as Church. His ecclesiology encased his spirituality and was in harmony with most of the hierarchy of America. The Church was the *societas perfecta*. There was a set of doctrines to be believed, a sharing in a life of prayer and sacrament in the institutional cult, and obedience to legitimate authority. The distinction between the teacher and the taught, the sanctifying and the sanctified, the governing and the governed was rather clearly understood and accepted by those who wished to be part of the institution. This strong corporate identity served the American Church well, the Ultramontane spirit of the day was embraced and, as the immigration of peoples from many lands with language and custom that were often peculiar to the homeland was encountered, the institutional model served to offer an anchor to the faithful of diverse cultures.

Restoration churchmen expanded the institutional structures and devotional activities that gave form and substance to Catholic communities ...and reforming bishops everywhere undertook elaborate and expensive building programs with the intent of making the parish church a physical presence in every community in which Catholics lived ... Reformers assiduously promoted the formation of a variety of religious societies, confraternities, sodalities, and devotional associations all of which had as their purpose the involvement of Catholic laymen and women in a comprehensive social network centered on the parish church.⁴¹

³⁸ *Journal*, in *SHCSR* 25 (1977) 324, s.d. October 1, 1834.

³⁹ *Journal*, in *SHCSR* 27 (1979) 87, s.d. May 11, 1835.

⁴⁰ ALEXANDER, 250.

⁴¹ LIGHT, 254.

5. – *Neumann's Pastoral Presence: «I shall make you known and loved»*

True, I feel but little devotion; my soul is dry and sluggish; but yet, O Lord Jesus, I believe in you, I hope in you, I love you, and I grieve of having ever offended you! Behold my resolution to live entirely for you, to be patient in sufferings, diligent in the fulfillment of my duties, humble before you and my neighbor, and devout in your service. O my God, accept the sacrifice of my lowliness!⁴²

Neumann accepted the call to leadership within the Catholic community. In following the opinion and advice of St. Vincent de Paul in this regard, he was never known to be authoritarian, yet he did govern with conviction.

Since the superior takes the place of God, he should after the example of the Redeemer strive to bring to God the souls entrusted to his care. He is not to appear as a superior and master, for nothing is more false than to allege that in order to govern well and to maintain authority those in authority should make it felt that they are superiors, since Jesus Christ taught the contrary by work and example.⁴³

As a young priest, he confronted a saloon keeper who was going to have a festival which was not to Neumann's liking. The pastor threatened to leave the parish if the event was held. On the day of the festival, the parishioners, thinking their benign pastor would not carry out his threat, were shocked to see he had packed his wagon to move on. When the innkeeper implored Neumann to allow just this last celebration, Neumann refused, saying they knew he had spoken the ultimatum. The festival was cancelled.

While vice-gerent for the Redemptorists in North America, Neumann believed his primary responsibility was to carry out the directives of the Belgian provincial. Father Frederick von Held, the provincial, had ordered the Redemptorists of North America to retrench, meaning no further communities could be established until more men were recruited from Europe and the astronomi-

⁴² BERGER, 70.

⁴³ Neumann's Theological Notes, *De Statu Religioso*, Redemptorist Archives of the Baltimore Province, Neumanniana.

cal debt was paid down. Many Redemptorists, for very zealous reasons, argued that it was not according to God's will that the American Redemptorists should not continue to expand to serve the needs of the ever growing population of German-speaking Catholics. In spite of their reasonable objections, Neumann held strong to the directives of the provincial. He believed in authority as being intimately tied to his relationship with God. In a letter to his friend, Blessed Francis Seelos about the religious obedience owed superiors, he explained his rationale:

Our greatest mistake is that we allow ourselves to be deceived by a spirit of worldly shrewdness, the desire for fame and the love of comfort. We ought to fight the temptation to make spiritual things a means of temporal advancement. Thus the things we should and could do, become for many an occasion of sin and unfaithfulness to God. The principles of faith fade out of our hearts in proportion as we allow the principles of the world to come in. We place our confidence not in God but in our own intelligence, experience, and so on. We seek not what is least or most difficult or most despised but what is easiest and what redounds most to our own glory. If we love only God alone and from our whole heart, how easy it would be for our superiors to lead us according to the prescriptions of the rule. God would then urge us on and we would not resist. This, my dear Father, in my opinion, is the cause of all the unhappiness that seems to reign here. I believe that what is most necessary is that we should pray for one another daily with great confidence: *Spiritus rectum innova in visceribus meis. Adveniat regnum tuum.*⁴⁴

While Bishop in Philadelphia, he urged all parishes to establish a school for the children. One of the prominent pastors said it was just impossible for the parish to do so at that time. Neumann, with understanding replied that if it was impossible for the pastor to do as he directed, perhaps another priest could be found to serve as pastor in the parish. The local pastor started a school.

⁴⁴ Letter Neumann to Blessed Francis Seelos, January 30, 1850. Original in Archives Redemptorist Province of Baltimore, *Neumanniana*. See also *SHCSR* 25 (1977) 3-10, wherein Andreas Sampers gives this letter in German, with commentary. Vulgate version of Psalm 50 (51), v. 12b: Its modern translation: «Renew in me a steadfast spirit»; part b) is from the Lord's Prayer, «Thy kingdom come».

Bishop Neumann called three synods in Philadelphia with his clergy. At them, they deliberated immediate concerns and Neumann listened attentively to the group's wisdom. He commented that he knew «...of no better means than these synods to settle things at once.»⁴⁵ He executed the decisions of the synods, and the laws promulgated were direct and to the point. They implemented regulations from the higher authority of both Rome and the Councils of Baltimore (Plenary and Regional). The directives dealt both with regulations for liturgical services and prayers, as well as with regulations that governed the clergy themselves and the establishment of consultative boards.

Neumann is better known for his pastoral presence than as an authority figure. His ministry always encompassed large areas. He began his ministry in western New York State. There he was given charge of the region north of Buffalo, up to the Niagara Falls, roughly 900 square miles of parish. The nearest mission was two hours from his rectory; the most distant was twelve hours by horseback. «Like an old German emperor followed everywhere by his court, do I carry with me all needful church articles while visiting my three parishes».⁴⁶ Neumann made it a point to be available to his parishioners and traveled constantly from region to region. As vice-gerent of the Redemptorists in America, his frequent visitations to the local communities brought him across vast areas. As bishop, he assumed a diocese that encompassed 35,000 square miles – two-thirds of Pennsylvania, all of Delaware and half of New Jersey. In spite of the areas, Neumann's visitation records show that he was concerned for each member of his flock. He set a goal for himself that he would visit each parish in the city of Philadelphia once each year and every parish in the country districts every two years. While on visitation he not only reviewed the sacramental and financial records of parishes, gave the spiritual exercises to the faithful, and conferred the sacraments. When complaints about his absence were expressed, he answered that the diocese was too large for one bishop. He even proposed that the diocese be split, and that he

⁴⁵ BERGER, 372.

⁴⁶ Letter Neumann to «Dear Parents», September 5, 1837. Original in Archives of Diocese of Budweis, Rodler Papers.

be assigned the more rural areas rather than those with sizeable cities. That did not happen.

Neumann's pastoral presence was especially noted in his ministry to the immigrant. While he neither avoided nor refused to serve those who were more established, his experience was that the poor were in greater need. This also flowed from his own spiritual bent which sought only God as the foundation of his life and was careful not to allow lesser vanities take control. He was criticized for this in his role as Bishop of Philadelphia. The sophisticated Catholic society of the city would have boasted of the presence of the bishop at their functions, but Neumann did not attend if he could avoid doing so. Rather he sent the Coadjutor bishop. At the time of his death, the Catholic Herald described the bishop as «...not solicitous for the shadow of a great name, neither did he seek to be familiarly acquainted with many nor to be particularly loved by men...».⁴⁷

An anecdote is related by one of Neumann's parish priests about an incident on one of the bishop's visitations: One day we were obliged to dine at the house of a very rich Catholic. The guests were numerous and the appointments brilliant... The very next day brought us quite a change of circumstances, for we dined in a log-cabin, off simple fare, our only beverage pure water... When out of the house, he remarked: «What a difference between yesterday and to-day! Yesterday we were treated to a well-filled table, to empty forms of politeness and useless conversation; but today we were surrounded by the charming simplicity of a pious Catholic home».⁴⁸

Neumann didn't theorize about his inclination to serve the poor, but his actions demonstrated his preference. The poor who most received Neumann's attention were the immigrants. Like many missionaries who joined the American Mission, Neumann had intended to work with the Native people. It did not take long, however, for him to learn that there was a more pressing need. He was inclined to the adage that «language saved faith»,⁴⁹ and

⁴⁷ «Catholic Herald» (Philadelphia), January 7, 1860.

⁴⁸ BERGER, 424.

⁴⁹ See Michael V. GANNON, *Before and After Modernism: The Intellectual Isolation of the American Priest*, in John Tracy ELLIS, ed., *The Catholic Priest in*

he became passionate in trying to care for those who were in such great need. Like his confrere, Father Alexander Czvitkovicz, C.S.S.R., he became convinced that «for every one hundred Indians who were baptized, a thousand German Catholics fell away from the faith.»⁵⁰ He tried to recruit classmates from the seminary in Europe, urging them to join him in the work of the missions.

The need of Catholic priests and the spiritual desolation of the faithful is increasing day by day. Judging from a human standpoint, the disproportion would have lamentable results – only God alone is the support of His Church. When I arrived here in America three years ago, it seemed as if the Germans in America would soon have sufficient priests. But the results taught otherwise. The Most Reverend Bishop Hughes, the co-adjutor of this diocese, declared not long ago, that he would receive 7 – 8 if they were to be had.⁵¹

Neumann was so convinced of the need that he joined his voice to the possibility of establishing a seminary to train ministers for the American Missions. The purpose of the new seminary was: «to provide for those who feel themselves called to the exalted and divine work of devoting their energies to the salvation of souls in distant parts of the world, an opportunity to prepare themselves in every way for this important field of labor».⁵² The project came very near to being implemented but the funds that would have supported the seminary were more urgently needed in the United States and the idea never reached fruition.⁵³

Neumann was talented in language and was himself available throughout the years of ministry to serve those who struggled with language. At one point, he studied enough Gaelic to be able to hear the confessions of the Irish immigrants. On one

the United States, Historical Investigations, Collegeville 1971.

⁵⁰ J.M. LENHART, *Projected Missionary Seminary for America*, in «Social Justice Review», May 1941, 50.

⁵¹ Neumann Letter, May 31, 1839. Letter to Rev. Hermann Dichtl. Original in Rodler Papers, Archives of Diocese of Budweis.

⁵² Willibald MATTHAESER, *The Proposed Mission Seminary at Altötting, 1845*, in «Social Justice Review», November 1935, 250.

⁵³ See Richard A. BOEVER, *A Pressing Need of the German Immigrants: the Proposed German Seminary to Train Men for Ministry in America*, in «Redemptorist North American Historical Bulletin», n. 37, Spring, 2010.

occasion, the penitent, after leaving the confessional, confided to a friend that Philadelphia at last had an Irish Bishop. Neumann would give the Italian immigrants the use of his chapel for services in their language and, a couple of months later, purchased a Protestant chapel to establish the first Italian Catholic parish in Philadelphia, St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi.

In the midst of poverty, social needs pressed upon the Catholic community. Works of charity were necessary to care for the immediate needs of the immigrant. Neumann elicited the care of religious orders in the tasks of teaching and caring of all the faithful but, again, especially for those most in need, the sick and orphans. The thrust of social ministry was not systemic so much as a response to pressing problems – houses where the sick could find care, schools to instruct the children and orphanages to protect those who lost their parents or whose parents simply could not be sustained children in the early days with the wages of their labor. Parishes were established to nourish the faith life of the immigrant in language and cultural familiarity. Neumann, who was sometimes reputed to be lacking in organizational skills, managed very well to develop all of these. «Like adolescence, with its spurts, the task was to stay alive and to develop correctly».⁵⁴

5. – *The Light I need to follow the Way of Your Law*

Neumann prayed for the light he needed to follow the way of God's law; he also worked tirelessly to spread that light to those he served. Religious experiments were common enough in the New World and most had a philosophy that endorsed, at least in part, the perfectibility of humanity. The many experiments were as individual as were their leaders. «They were, nonetheless, bound together by what they called 'the spiritual principle' – a principle which was articulated in three major agreements: an insistence upon divine immanence, a dependence upon intuitive perceptions of truth, and a rejection of all external authority».⁵⁵ It is not surprising that Neumann did not embrace this

⁵⁴ DOLAN, 8.

⁵⁵ Winthrop S. HUDSON, *Religion in America*, New York 1965, 175.

perspective. In an address to the Philopatrian Institute of Philadelphia, a prominent Catholic literary society, Neumann clearly stated to the audience that all learning should enhance our love of God. If one cannot say an Our Father with devotion after the study of some material, he counseled, it was not appropriate for a Catholic scholar. The local paper reported his thoughts:

He recommended the members of the Institute to study those works of truth on which sound, useful knowledge could be founded. He cautioned them against the admission of the false Philosophies of Germany and France. The writings of the Transcendentalists, and so-called Socialists should find no place in a Catholic library. Such works could mislead, unsettle, and corrupt the mind. The general tendency of novels, too, was injurious; they filled the mind of the reader with frivolous imaginings and too frequently displaced the love of God for an unhallowed love of creatures... All their labors in the pursuit of knowledge should be made subservient to the service of God.⁵⁶

These words did not come from someone who was anti-intellectual, for Neumann was a man of learning.⁵⁷ Moreover, Neumann's zeal was not insular, but neither was he in favor of unguarded assimilation at the expense of faith. Nor did he freely embrace the concept of the perfectibility of humanity; for him, the reality was a humanity redeemed. Neumann's concern was for truth, which for him was synonymous with the teachings of the Catholic Church. This caused him to beg for good literature and spiritual books from Europe, and relentlessly to seek for ways to educate his parishioners, both adults and children.

I began yesterday to instruct the children. They are in a sad state. The poor little creatures have had few advantages. They speak both German and English badly, and have little idea of religion. From lack of care and instruction, many weeds have sprung up among them; and yet a school cannot even be thought of. O God, how melancholy is the spectacle in this part of your Kingdom! ... Enlighten me, strengthen me with your powerful grace,

⁵⁶ «The Catholic Instructor» (Philadelphia), April 17, 1852

⁵⁷ CURLEY, Chap. 1. His classical, linguistic, and scientific interests and depth are amply established. His mother once «playfully called him 'my little bibliomaniac'». *Ibid.*, 6.

that I may snatch from Satan his unfortunate prey, and lead them back to you.⁵⁸

Any of his efforts at instructing the children drew the approval of his parishioners. «As may be imagined, with such a teacher and such rewards, Father Neumann's instruction was well attended».⁵⁹ Every Sunday afternoon he and his students could be found studying catechism.

The catechism was the anchor which prevented the various cultural communities from dividing into separate denominations as so often happened in Protestant sects. It held communities together as a systematic approach to learning the basic tenants of the Catholic faith universally held by all regions. While pastor in Pittsburgh, he published two catechisms, one smaller, the *Kleiner Katechismus*, and one larger, the *Katholischer Katechismus*, both in the traditional question and answer format. Years later, his Larger Catechism would be chosen to be used in by all German-speaking Catholics in the United States and go through thirty-eight editions before it was no longer needed.

He was an accomplished catechist and a great lover of children. His gentleness, meekness, and perseverance in communicating religious instruction to the children often awoke my astonishment, and the salutary impression he made upon even the most faulty and troublesome of our little people was quite remarkable... They often said to me, «Sister, Father Neumann looked right into my heart».⁶⁰

Neumann's most famous contribution to education was the establishment of the first Catholic school system in America. He wasted no time in this effort after arriving in Philadelphia as bishop. In his mind, Catholic schools were desperately needed both because students were sometimes ridiculed for their faith in the public school, and also because he was convinced that all subjects should be imbued with Catholic principles when they are taught.

⁵⁸ «Journal», July 6, 1836. To be noted is that is from a section of the *Journal* which Neumann composed in *German*. The original can be found in Redemptorist Archives of the Baltimore Province, Neumanniana.

⁵⁹ BERGER, 167.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 298.

The school system of the United States is very liberal in theory; but in reality it is most intolerant toward Catholics. Everyone has to contribute to the erection and maintenance of the public schools, in which instruction is restricted to reading, writing and ciphering.⁶¹ As respects religious instruction which is excluded from those schools, parents are free to have their children reared in whatever religion they please. Notwithstanding these liberal concessions, it cannot be doubted that the young mind is influenced by the irreligious dispositions of teachers... Due to the prejudice against the faith that was infused in the public school system as we knew it, the determination that religious instruction needed to be part of the daily curriculum and the conviction that Catholic values need to permeate even secular subjects, we will spare no effort in the establishment of a solid, Catholic school in every parish to guarantee, as best we can, that the gift of the faith continues into future generations.⁶²

6. – *Behold my Resolution to be Devout in Your Service*

The worship within the liturgies of the Church was central to Neumann's ministry. After Neumann's death, in the eulogy delivered by Father Edward Sourin, S.J., who had served as Neumann's vicar-general at the beginning of his time in Philadelphia, Neumann was described as a man «who spared himself in nothing». This was most certainly true in the administration of the sacraments and as leader of prayer. Twice he suffered from exhaustion-at the end of his time as a diocesan priest in New York⁶³, and again at the end of his first term as pastor at St. Philomena's in Pittsburgh.⁶⁴ He died at age forty-eight years and nine months.

⁶¹ The term "ciphering", no longer in common English usage, here means elementary mathematic skills.

⁶² BERGER, 268.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 216. «When Easter of 1840 rolled round, it found Father Neumann completely broken down. He was seized with intermittent fever in its most violent and obstinate form, and for three months he was prey to its weakening attacks, being often obliged to keep to his bed».

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 281. «At last his brethren believed themselves in duty bound to procure from the Provincial for Father Neumann to submit to medical treatment. A physician was consulted, and, after a thorough examination of the sick man, declared his lungs involved: the worst results were to be feared if remedies were not promptly administered».

Neumann was insistent that the liturgical norms of the Church be honored in all services. At the first Plenary Council of Baltimore, he served on the committee which consolidated the rituals for the celebration of divine worship. Considering the many customs that were brought to the New World by immigrants from many parts of the world, such consolidation was all the more necessary. At a synod within his own diocese, he sought to implement the direction of the Plenary Council in Philadelphia.

Last month I assembled all the priests of the diocese, and gave them the spiritual exercises; then followed a synod: and I have reason to rejoice over the success of both. These synods are especially needed in the United States, in order to secure uniformity in the performance of clerical functions. As missionaries come here from all parts of Christendom, each bringing with him the peculiarities of his own nation, discord may thereby be engendered. I know of no better means than these synods to settle things at once, as is done in the Eternal City.⁶⁵

At the same synod, Neumann introduced his idea for instituting an ongoing Forty Hours Devotion in the diocese. The reaction of the clergy was not positive. Anti-Catholic prejudice was strong in the diocese and a church had recently been burned, all of which led to a fear of sacrilege in such a public display of devotion on the part of those who heard the proposal. Neumann was disappointed and continued to think about the proposal. One evening, working late, he fell asleep at his desk. He had steadied the candle that provided his light on the desk since it had almost been spent and could no longer keep burning on the candlestick. He awoke with alarm and found that the candle had scorched his papers. The writing was still legible. He knelt for a prayer of thanks that he had not burned down the house and he heard a voice: «As the flames are here burning without consuming or even injuring the writing, so shall I pour out my grace in the Blessed Sacrament without prejudice to my honor. Fear not profanation, therefore; hesitate no longer to carry out your designs for my glory».⁶⁶

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 372.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 374

Neumann instituted a schedule in the Diocese of Philadelphia for the Forty Hours Devotion so that exposition continued unbroken for adoration of the Sacrament and for the reception of a plenary indulgence for those who participated. This practice touched the piety of the age and many bishops followed Neumann's example in their own dioceses. Neumann himself prescribed a ritual to be followed and prayers to be said. No sacrilege from anti-Catholic sympathizers ensued.

Various confraternities of prayer were also established and special events urged upon his pastors for Lent or for parish missions.

He that has not given missions or heard confessions during missions cannot know how useful these exercises are. Owing to the manner in which the Bread of the Divine Word is broken, when eternal truths are methodically exposed to the hearers who have assembled in great numbers, it is nearly impossible for them not to be converted.⁶⁷

From his youth, Neumann exhibited a great love and devotion to the Mother of God. This became even more public when the Church announced that there was to be a solemn declaration concerning Mary's Immaculate Conception. In the month of October 1854, Neumann received an invitation from Pope Pius IX to attend the ceremonies in Rome and to have, at the same time, his *ad limina* visit in order to report on his diocese. This gave Neumann great joy and provided him his only opportunity to return to Europe and his homeland during his missionary career. The honor given to the Mother of God inspired Neumann, his visit to his homeland was tender. To his people in Philadelphia, he wrote a pastoral letter both before the trip and a second pastoral letter on his return, praising Mary and attesting to his deep devotion to her.

Never, Christian brethren, never can we admit that she was for one moment the slave of the devil; the Virgin who was destined to be the Mother of God, the Spouse of the Holy Spirit, the Ark of the New Covenant, the Mediatrix of Mankind, the Terror of the Powers of Darkness, the Queen of all the Heavenly Hosts.

⁶⁷ CURLEY, 353

Purer than heaven's purest angel, brighter than its brightest seraph, Mary, after her Creator, God – who made and gave her all– is the most perfect of beings, the masterpiece of Infinite Wisdom, Almighty Power, and Eternal Love.⁶⁸

His pastoral letter of 1855 continued his unbridled praise of Mary in her Immaculate Conception.

To whom, with more reason, propriety, confidence and veneration can we turn than to a being whom, from all eternity God has so loved and honored? ... At the same time, no more powerful friend have we with God! The humbler of our chief enemy, Satan, she is in a noble sense, the strength of the weak, the Help of Christians ... No day should be allowed to pass without some actual proof of your confidence in her protection, of your perpetual joy and gratitude for her Immaculate Conception and for all the other graces, glory and the power which God has bestowed upon her.⁶⁹

7. – *The Religious Life*

Neumann's decision to enter religious life as a Redemptorist is worthy of special consideration. This was a very deliberate choice of St. John Neumann, and being a Redemptorist was a vital part of his spirituality. Previously as a diocesan priest he had indeed lived a life of poverty and simplicity and was likewise chaste and obedient to the laws of God and the Church. It was not a need of reform that inspired him to seek entrance the Redemptorists. Rather Neumann sought community life as religious. This was a means of experiencing and profiting from the good example of the confreres around him. It was also an expression of a shared, interpersonal spirituality in a brotherhood which would be mutually beneficial to all for eternal salvation.

Neumann had first mentioned passing thoughts of joining either the Redemptorists or the Jesuits when he was a student in Prague; these, however, seem to have been ruminations connected with his calling to be a missionary in North America. Both

⁶⁸ Neumann Pastoral Letter, «Catholic Herald» (Philadelphia), Nov. 4, 1854. Reprinted in «Social Justice Review», 76 (1985) March-April, 59-64.

⁶⁹ Neumann Pastoral Letter, «Catholic Herald» (Philadelphia), May 1, 1855. Reprinted in «Social Justice Review», 76 (1985) May-June, 86-90.

communities had men serving in this mission, and being a member of a community offered an opportunity to execute his decision to go to America.

After ordination, while a parish priest in New York, Bishop DuBois, accompanied by the Redemptorist Father Joseph Prost, made a visitation to Neumann's parish. While there, Father Prost spoke to Neumann about joining the Redemptorists. Prost's primary motivation in doing so was because he would have liked the bishop to turn over Neumann's parishes and Buffalo to the care of the Redemptorists. Prost did not persuade Neumann. «His reasons were all very good and true, but they did not impress me because at that time I did not have a spark of a vocation».⁷⁰

In 1840, Neumann was exhausted, he confided to Father Pax, his friend and neighboring pastor in Buffalo, that his health was gone. During his convalescence, Neumann spent some time with the Redemptorists in Rochester.

For four years, I had spared myself no pain to bring the parishes under my care to a fervor similar to that which I had observed at St. Joseph's Parish in Rochester. This, as well as a natural, or rather supernatural, desire to live in a community of priests where I would not have to be exposed alone to the thousand dangers of the world, made me suddenly resolve to request from Father Prost ...admittance into the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer ...and received from him acceptance in a letter of the 16th of September from Baltimore⁷¹.

After a year of novitiate, on January 16, 1842, John Neumann professed his religious vows. He was thus the first to be professed as a Redemptorist in North America.

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 till death, wonderfully facilitate the life I am now leading, the vocation to which I have been called. I have every reason to hope that death will be more welcome to me in the holy Congregation than it usually is to seculars.⁷²

⁷⁰ Rush, 29.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 39

⁷² Letter Neumann to his parents, October 12, 1842. Original in Ar-

Neumann continued to live his life as a sincere religious. Even after his ordination to the episcopacy, he continued in the fraternity of the confreres. He had a Redemptorist as his confessor, and also made both his monthly day of retreat and his yearly extended retreat inside the Redemptorist residence. He often wore his habit when in their midst, not the more distinguished garb of bishop. It was written into his will and testament that he be buried among his confreres in death. This is why his body rests within the shrine which honors him at Philadelphia's Redemptorist Church of St. Peter the Apostle.

For him, the religious life became a safe place to live his profound spirituality. He directed other religious to live the life he himself embraced. «Your chief study is your rule. If you observe it faithfully and conscientiously, God will bless your work. Our labors are crowned not so much by our own efforts as by God's blessing».⁷³

Conclusion

From all indications, Neumann was a holy man; but proving it to a Roman tribunal investigating the heroicity of virtue in the saint was not easy. The judge protested:

The testimony shows the Venerable Servant of God to have been indeed a good and pious man and bishop, remarkably zealous for God's glory and the salvation of souls, but it does not show that he surpassed the bounds of ordinary virtue of the sort that any upright priest, missionary, religious or especially bishop would have.⁷⁴

The postulator countered that the judges had conceded to John Neumann a high place in heaven but how could they have come to that conclusion if not on the basis of the testimony presented? It was finally Pope Benedict XV who settled the debate.

chives of Diocese of Budweis.

⁷³ BERGER, 329.

⁷⁴ Cardinal Domenico Ferrata, Relatore, *Positio Super Virtutibus Ven. Servi Dei Joannis N. Neumann*, Romae 1907, *Animadversiones*, 30. Copies of this large volume called the *Positio* are not numerous; one can be found in Library of the Redemptorist General Archives in Rome, Via Merulana 31.

The merits of an active man are measured not so much in the number of deeds performed, as in their thoroughness and stability. For true activity does not consist in mere noise; it is not the creature of a day, but it unfolds itself in the present, it is the fruit of the past and should be the good seed of the future. Are not these very characteristics that mark of the activity of Venerable Neumann. Bearing all this in mind, no one will any longer doubt that the simplicity of the work performed by our Venerable Servant of God did not hinder him from becoming a marvelous example of activity. The very simplicity has forced us ...to impress on our children ...the proclamation of the heroic virtues of Neumann, since all find in the new hero an example not difficult to imitate.⁷⁵

This decree receives a corroborating footnote in the Vatican Council's document *Lumen Gentium*⁷⁶ and notes that Benedict XV «Unraveled the question and taught openly that the one norm for heroic virtue is the faithful, perpetual and constant carrying out of the duties and obligations of one's proper state in life».⁷⁷

In 1860, Father William O'Hara, then President of Philadelphia's St. Charles Seminary, and later Bishop of Scranton (1868-1899), sent word to Rome that the American Church had lost a hero.⁷⁸ He had died and was gone from the earth. In 1977, Pope Paul VI canonized the same man which, in effect, gave him back not as a man living on earth but as a saint and companion who, by the simplicity and the thoroughness of his deeds, gives all an example to imitate. In that regard, he is still with us.

⁷⁵ *Decretum approbationis virtutum in causa beatificationis et canonizationis Servi Dei Joannis Nepomuceni Neumann*, in «Acta Apostolicae Sedis» 1922.

⁷⁶ This footnote can be found in Walter ABBOT, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II*, New York 1966, 82, FN 236. This footnote references pgh. 50 of the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*. John Neumann is mentioned by name.

⁷⁷ Alfred RUSH, *The Second Vatican Council, 1962-1965, and Bishop Neumann*, «Records of the American Catholic Historical Society», 85, September – December 1974, 125.

⁷⁷ CURLEY, 396.

SUMMARY

Beyond the facts of St. John's Neumann's achievements – there was his spirituality. After giving a working definition of spirituality, the author illustrates how the convictions of Neumann's faith were revealed in concrete situations. Thus his spiritual life, rooted in his European background, was developed and expressed first in his youth and student days in his native Bohemia. Then his missionary career in North America (a total of twenty-four years) is shown, with its evidence of Neumann's continued spiritual growth which produced much fruit. Amid fatigue, loneliness and illness as a diocesan priest among poor immigrants in northwestern New York State, his zeal was blended with humility. After six years in New York, he entered religious life as a Redemptorist in 1842, sensing his deep need for a community, to learn «from the good example of confreres», in a «brotherhood which would be beneficial to all for eternal salvation». Finally, one sees him as bishop of the huge Philadelphia diocese. His simple, prayerful missionary spirituality flourished even more, as he devoted himself to children and elders, the poor and the rich, the laity, clergy and religious, in distant rural areas and in his See City-a diverse flock from multiple linguistic and ethnic backgrounds.

RÉSUMÉ

Au-delà des faits connus de la vie de John Neumann, il y a sa spiritualité. Après avoir défini la notion de spiritualité, l'auteur nous montre comment les convictions de foi de Neumann se manifestèrent dans des situations concrètes. Sa vie spirituelle, enracinée dans sa culture européenne, se développa et s'exprima en tant que jeune étudiant dans sa Bohême natale. Vint ensuite sa carrière missionnaire en Amérique du Nord durant vingt-quatre ans où nous avons la preuve de sa continue croissance spirituelle qui produira tant de fruits. Parmi les fatigues, la solitude, la maladie nous admirons le zèle emprunt d'humilité de ce prêtre diocésain envers les immigrants pauvres du Nord Ouest de l'État de New York. En 1842, après six années passées à New York, il entra dans la Congrégation des Rédemptoristes, ayant un profond besoin d'une vie communautaire et pour s'instruire «grâce aux bons exemples des confrères», dans une «vie de fraternité bénéfique pour tous en vue du salut éternel». Pour finir nous le rencontrons comme évêque de l'immense diocèse de Philadelphie. Sa spiritualité missionnaire simple, pétrie de prières put s'épanouir encore davantage, alors qu'il se dépensait pour les enfants, les personnes âgées, pauvres et riches, pour le clergé et les religieux et religieuses jusque dans les campagnes les plus reculées, mais aussi dans sa ville épiscopale composée de diverses communautés ethniques et linguistiques.