

Saintly Priest N.Y. Missioner

BY REV. JAMES J. GALVIN, C.S.S.R.

This is the fourth of five articles on Venerable John Nepomucene Neumann, saintly pioneer priest of the 1800's, who preached his first sermon, heard Confessions and baptized for the first time in Rochester. His suggestion that German speaking Catholics needed a parish of their own led to the founding of St. Joseph's Church, this year marking its 125th anniversary.

When the Venerable John Neumann was 47 years to the day, the Pope gave him 30,000 square miles for birthday gift, the largest see in the United States: the Diocese of Philadelphia.

In 1852 that diocese comprised part of the present Archdiocese of Trenton, a bit of Altoona and Camden, all of Harrisburg, Scranton and Wilkes-Barre, plus the present Archdiocese of Philadelphia itself.

It was on Passover Sunday, March 28, 1852, in the Redemptorist Church of St. Alphonsus in Baltimore. Archbishop Francis Patrick Kenrick, the consecrating prelate, asked in his soft Dublin Latin: "Wilt thou teach the people?"

It was part of the formality of the ceremony. But when John Neumann answered "I will," it became a synopsis of the remainder of his life. For the next eight years he would do his utmost to instruct his diocese in the rudiments of the Catholic Faith.

Continuing Priesthood

For Neumann this was but a continuation of all his priestly effort in America, building schools, personally teaching youngsters, inviting others to help in the great apostolate of Catholic education.

As a diocesan priest in the 1830's, he had built log cabin schoolhouses over Western New York — and taught the classes himself. Through the 1840's as

Redemptorist superior he had seen school bells hung and swung in Baltimore, New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Buffalo, in separate buildings next door to the parish church.

Nuns for the Schools

When the first small group of nuns from Munich arrived in Baltimore in 1847 — the School Sisters of Notre Dame, Father Neumann was quick to befriend them, entrusting the pupils of St. James and St. Alphonsus parish to their care. He did more. He took their Superiors on a tour of inspection to all the Redemptorist parishes under his care, and soon had them teaching in every parish school under his jurisdiction.

This flourishing congregation of teaching nuns today remembers Bishop Neumann with gratitude. The School Sisters of Notre Dame affectionately style him "our second founder, our first father in the New World."

Father Neumann had long been engaged in the problems of Catholic education before that March morning in Baltimore when he answered "I will."

Arrival in Philadelphia

The kind of reception tendered the new Bishop by the clergy upon his arrival in Philadelphia was a significant gesture. They had been briefed on his dislike of loud display. There were no bells, no brass bands, or flags or parading. Simply two carriages moving up Broad St. towards the center of town, and inside one of the carriages the Vicar General, quietly presented Bishop Neumann with a piece of white paper. It was the deed of a new school.

It charmed him, and he said so. Nothing was dearer to his heart than the education of little ones in their Faith. Five years before, he had written a Bible History and a catechism, books that were then being used in many Catholic schools. He knew only too well the inroads made into the Faith of little ones in schools that were not Catholic.

His first sermon as bishop, delivered at the pro-cathedral of St. John the Evangelist, on 13th St. above Chestnut, was a ringing plea to place Catholic children in Catholic schools. There were but 500 children attending Catholic schools in Philadelphia, in the year 1852. The same topic cropped up again in his first pastoral letter, read on Easter Sunday. He meant business.

He was in the diocese less than six weeks when on April 28 he assembled a group of influential gentlemen at his residence on Logan Square, to discuss plans for the systematic establishment of parish schools throughout the city and the diocese.

First Diocesan System

A week later the group convened a second time: the pastor plus two lay delegates from each parish in Philadelphia. It was a historic evening. They unanimously adopted a plan for the establishment of a central board of education in the diocese. A week later when the Hierarchy met in Baltimore for the first Plenary Council it was urged that Catholic schools be established in every Catholic parish in the land.

Bishop Neumann, however, was by no means the first to establish a parochial school in America. Sixty years before he was born, in 1743, Jesuit Father Theodore Schneider rang the first Catholic school bell in Pennsylvania, at Goshenhoppen (now known as Balley). And in the city of Philadelphia, St. Mary's free school was graduating Catholic classes, a half century before John Neumann stepped off the SS. Europa and landed in America.

As a matter of record there were at least 200 parochial schools in operation in the United States before 1840 — in the year Neumann knocked on the door of the Redemptorists in Pittsburgh.

The signal contribution of Venerable John Neumann was not a parochial school but a system. He organized parochial schools on a diocesan basis under a central board of education — a system canonized by the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore three decades after Bishop Neumann's death.

School Enrollments

The Know-Nothings were something to reckon with in the early years of the 50's. In Pennsylvania they held the chief political positions. Despite that, school after Catholic school went up throughout the diocese. The public schools found great gaps in their enrollment. Catholic children moving by the thousands into their own schools. The fact did not escape comment in the newspapers of the time.

Once the schools were built, teachers were needed to staff them. Bishop Neumann introduced to the diocese the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and Sisters of the Holy Cross for this purpose.

In April, 1855, on the advice of Pope Pius IX he founded an American Congregation of the Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis, now with their motherhouse in Glen Riddle, Pa. He wrote their Constitutions. When not engaged in other activity their members were to teach in parish schools.

Established 80 Churches

In 1858 he gave his blessing to a school for Negro children. That same year he wrote in a



Father Ray Minder's Address Book

If you have moved to a new address, or plan to move, since making a pledge to the Catholic High Schools Campaign, you can simplify the book-keeping at the fund drive's main office if you would notify your former pastor and your new pastor of the change in your address — or just send a note with old and new address to the campaign office, 35 Scio Street, Rochester 4, N.Y.

letter "God had so graciously blessed the work of primary schools, that nearly every church in the diocese now has its own school."

The years of his episcopate saw fleets of sailing ships crowded with European immigrants tie up at the wharves of the Delaware. To accommodate this growing influx, Pennsylvania needed more and more Catholic churches, or lose these faithful and their posterity. Neumann clearly saw this. For each of the 80 months that he was Bishop, a newly shingled church lifted its steeple in the diocese.

But of what use is a new church and an altar without a priest to consecrate, to preach, and bless, and care for people's souls? The Bishop was vividly aware of the need of priests among his ever-growing diocese.

Back in 1837, when but a year ordained, he wrote letters to his fellow priests in Prague and Budweis, begging them to come over to America where their hands were so badly needed. He had even dreamed of

annexing to his log cabin on the Niagara Frontier — where German-speaking seminarians from Europe could be trained on the scene for the work in America. Bishop Dubois gave the project his blessing, but the training school for pioneer missionaries never materialized in the woods of North Bush where young John Neumann lived.

In Philadelphia of the 50's the Seminary of St. Charles Borromeo on Race St., next to the Cathedral, had 40 young men in training when Neumann arrived. They were the apple of his eye. Whenever he was home he went over to give them classes in practical Pastoral Theology. In his brief career as Bishop he raised 61 young men to the priesthood.

Fewer and fewer priests were coming from Europe. Though Neumann sent letters of invitation to various seminaries, not many replied. A time would soon come, he foresaw, when America would have to raise its own priesthood. With this in

mind he purchased an estate outside the city as a training school for teenage boys with signs of a priestly vocation.

Unique Program

The idea must have been unique for the Boston Pilot commented on Philadelphia's diocesan preparatory seminary: "Bishop Neumann is likely to soon be followed by other bishops... a glance at his plan for forming a native clergy will convince all of its wisdom."

Schools, teachers, churches, priests... and now a minor seminary. That was his answer to Kenrick's ritual question: "Wilt thou teach the people?" The new minor seminary was opened at Glen Riddle with four professors and 26 students just three months before Bishop Neumann died.

(Continued Next Week)
(Courtesy Philadelphia Standard and Times)

No Work For Priest

Seckau, Austria — (NC) — The management of a glass factory has refused to give a young priest of the Seckau diocese a temporary summer job as an unskilled laborer on the grounds that it would arouse hostility among the plant's predominantly socialist workers.

Father Friedrich Zeck explained to the management when he applied for the job that he wanted it as a means of establishing contact with industrial workers and of becoming acquainted with their social and labor problems. Most Austrian workers, although baptized Catholics, have drifted away from the Church and won over by socialism.

The management said it turned down the priest's application after consulting with shop stewards, who advised that the presence of a priest among the socialist workers was likely to lead to "unpleasant controversies" and "unrest."

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By MOST REV. FULTON J. SHEEN

Statues of the Sacred Heart have always been a favorite target for Communist bullets. It was so during the Spanish Civil War when to shoot at one was proof that an individual was no longer loyal to the Church. The Communists have continued this infamous practice in the Congo. First they destroyed a statue of Bishop Grissom, founder of the mission in Stanleyville, which was standing in front of the Cathedral. Then their rage turned on the statue of the Sacred Heart. Before being dispersed they succeeded in breaking off the right arm, which had been raised in blessing. (The arm was soon restored by the faithful, who came by the thousands to offer reparation to Our Lord for this indignity.)

Calvary was thus re-enacted, as when His right Hand was nailed to the Cross — the same Hand that was laid on the son of the widow of Naim, the same Hand that cured the paralytic in Capernaum. Our Lord told His followers: "If thy right hand scandalize thee, cut it off." Apparently it was His own right Hand that scandalized the Communists in the Congo — so they cut it off. The Reds would never do that to a statue of Napoleon or Caesar. Why do it to Christ? Because He is Love. And how can their hate reign in a world of love?

The prophet Isaiah asked: "Doubt you that the Lord's Hand is shortened that He cannot deliver you?" The Communists may never have read Isaiah, but they did shorten His Arm. Some day how they will wish that He would reach it out to them, even at the very throat of hell!

The right hand of the Lord Incarnate is shot at in so many places in China, North Korea, in North Vietnam, in Laos. What happened in the Congo is only a symbol of what is happening through the mission world. You, dear readers, have a right hand — unwounded by a nail, unmarked by a hammer. You may use it to turn this page, saying: "Oh, how interesting!" Or you may help the Holy Father heal the wounds of Christ in the Missions by your sacrifice, saying: "If I forget Thee, perish the skill of my right hand" (Psalm 136). Send your offerings to The Society for the Propagation of the Faith now. If you write checks with your left hand, God will still count them as rightly done!

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