

Blessed John Neumann ... Reluctant Bishop

Philadelphia in the 1850s prided itself on its sophistication.

To many Catholics there, the choice of a plain-faced little religious missionary to head the ultra-Yankee see — John Neumann — came as an unpleasant affront.

The Bishop of Philadelphia ought to be a native-born American, not one whose English was couched in the accent of Central Europe, they said. Particularly at this time with the bigotries of the Nativists and Know-Nothings so flagrant, he ought to be a person who could saunter down Broad Street, as much a part of the picture as was Benjamin Franklin, as native as the Liberty Bell.

But Philadelphia then was more than a cradle of liberty. It also was one of the busiest ports of entry from Europe. Sailing packets by the hundreds

poked their prows over Delaware Avenue, disgorging immigrants from all over Europe. They needed a bishop who could talk their language. They needed an immigrant like themselves. Plain little John Neumann from Bohemia was the man.

He went his rounds preaching in English and German; and when the need arose, he preached in Italian. In fact, in 1853, he bought a Methodist Church and dedicated it to St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi — the first national parish for Italians in the United States.

This is recorded of an old Irish lady in Trevorton in the year 1856:

She bobbed into the box and commenced her confession, "Beannaigh me, a Athair, de brri gur Pheacaiois..." — the Irish formula for confession. Bishop Neumann heard her out, gave her a penance and

a little word of encouragement in his halting Irish.

The old woman walked out of the church with a smile like a field of Conemara primrose. "Moladh go deo le Dia," she said to the neighbors. "Espog Eireannach's ata 'gairn ar deire." (Praise be to the good God, it's an Irish bishop we have at last!)

If native-born Catholic Philadelphians had reservations about Neumann's episcopal appointment, they shared sentiments with Neumann himself.

He had a particular distaste for the regal pomp and accoutrements the role was encumbered with in those days.

He often said that he wished he could have postponed his episcopal ordination by a day so that Philadelphia could have a more symbolic occasion to

remember him. April Fool's Day.

On the occasion of his ordination the vicar general quietly presented John 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 the Faith. Five years before he had written a Bible History and a catechism.

He was in the diocese less than six weeks when he assembled a group of influential gentlemen at his residence to discuss plans for the systematic establishment of parish schools throughout his diocese.

That meeting marked the birth of systematic parochial education in the U.S.

Next week: A life in a coat pocket.

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Farm Work Week

Pictured above is the official Farm Work Week poster. Money raised during the week will buy medicine for five rural health centers.

Chile Bishops In Plea for Human Rights

See related story, Page 16

Santiago (RNS) — Chile's Roman Catholic bishops told the ruling military government of President Augusto Pinochet in a strongly-worded pastoral that human rights in Chile will not exist until the nation has a constitution, by a popular vote.

In raising the question of the legitimacy of the junta's power, the bishops declared: We believe that full guarantees of respect of human rights will not exist as long as the country does not have a constitution, old or new, ratified by popular suffrage; as long as the laws are not dictated by legitimate representatives of the citizenry; and as long as organisms of the state... are not submitted to the constitution and the law."

The nine-page document was signed by six members of the Bishops' Permanent

Committee, including Cardinal Raul Silva Henriquez of Santiago.

Last year, the regime began to promulgate a series of "constitutional acts" aimed at replacing Chile's 50-year-old constitution. Five major changes have been introduced since January with no special procedure other than signatures of the four members of the junta. The decrees bypassed the newly-created Council of State and the commission set up to write a new constitution.

The pastoral also challenged a recent decree requiring all Chileans to submit new books and pamphlets to military authorities for approval. The bishops said the restrictions on freedom of information could lead to "grave consequences" and noted that the Church "could not in conscience admit restrictions limiting

its legitimate right to receive information and teach its doctrine."

The document, entitled "Living Together as a Nation" and representing Chile's 31 bishops, also requested President Pinochet to "clear up the fate" of missing political prisoners, and said that economic decisions con-

cerning the financially strapped country be subjected to "open debate."

Observing that President Pinochet stated recently that government action was grounded on "Christian humanist thought," the bishops said it was the Church's role to point out the "essential elements of that humanism." The

bishops cited the Vatican II principle that the Church can "pass moral judgments, even on matters touching the political order whenever basic personal rights make such judgments necessary."

The Vicariate of Solidarity, a Catholic agency for human rights, has 10 times petitioned the Chilean high court to in-

vestigate the cases of 415 persons who are missing and who, according to "overwhelming evidence" were detained by the secret police, DINA.

The government has repeatedly claimed that there is little or no evidence to support claims of torture and the disappearance of prisoners.

Pastoral Office Announces Changes

Father Lewis Brown of Hornell, the voice of radio's Sunday School, has been appointed director of the Diocesan Division of Religious Education to succeed Father Donald Schwab, who is returning to pastoral work. Father Thomas Streb of Elmira has been named chaplain at Ithaca College.

Father Brown's radio program is aired throughout the diocese on the Christian Broadcasting Network. Initially for children, the Sunday School has developed into a family religious education program in the four years since it began. It originates in

Hornell, where Father Brown is associate pastor of St. Ann's. He has said that each 15-minute segment takes six hours to prepare, and that he thinks his following includes a good many people who don't regularly go to church.

Father Brown, from St. Mary Our Mother parish in Horseheads, was ordained June 4, 1967. He has served at the Church of the Assumption in Fairport and at St. Alphonsus, Auburn.

Father Schwab and Father Streb were graduated from St. Bernard's Seminary, in 1973. Both hold BA degrees from St. John Fisher College. Father Schwab has also a Master of Divinity degree from the seminary. He spent the first three years of his priesthood at St. Ambrose, where he was involved in adult education, teacher training and youth programs. Father Streb is associate pastor of St. Charles Borromeo in Elmira Heights. Both men are Rochesterians.

Friends of Thomas O'Connor, former associate editor of the Courier-Journal, have been asked to send their get-well messages directly to Tom at Highland Hospital where he is this week recuperating from surgery.

COURIER JOURNAL

PILGRIMAGE TO ROME

WITH

BISHOP HOGAN



BISHOP JOSEPH L. HOGAN

Plan now to join Bishop Hogan, Msgr. Richard K. Burns, Father Bernard Power and Father Michael Conboy and a congenial group of Courier readers visiting Rome FOR THE CANONIZATION OF BLESSED JOHN NEUMANN ON JUNE 19th. Four days in Rome, visiting the Four Major Basilicas, the Catacombs, the Colosseum, etc., then a coach tour to . . .

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