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Rt. Rev. John Martin Henni: Energetic Priest on the Ohio Frontier

From our Lord's interaction with Martha and Mary we know that contemplation and being take precedence over action, but on the Ohio frontier of the 1830s an energetic man of action was needed to help build up the Church and minister to the German Catholic immigrants. Father John M. Henni, later Archbishop of Milwaukee, filled that role to perfection.

Education

Henni was born on June 15, 1805 at Misanenga in the parish of Oberstantzen, Canton Graubünden (that is, Grisons), Switzerland. He received his early education in the gymnasium in St. Gall and in the lyceum and gymnasium of Lucerne. He went to Rome and in 1824 began his study of philosophy and theology at Urban College of the Propaganda. In St. Gall and in Rome he was a fellow-student of Martin Kündig. In 1827 they met Bishop Fenwick there and both volunteered to go to America to assist in his vast diocese.

They and a third seminarian accompanied Rev. Vincent deRaymaecker across the ocean and in June, 1828 they entered St. Thomas Seminary at Bardstown, Ky. Years later Henni remarked years later that at this time he saw the primitive log houses that were Bishop Flaget's first house and seminary there.

Henni and Kündig were ordained subdeacons at Bardstown by Bishop Flaget on November 23, and deacons on December 14, 1828. They were ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Fenwick in Cincinnati on February 2, 1829.

Missionary in Ohio

Bishop Fenwick had two kinds of missionary, those who were stationary and those who traveled. Henni and Kündig were assigned the latter role. Henni would prove quite useful in an immigrant Church, for he spoke German and French as well as Latin and his native Romansh. For the first few months after ordination, he studied the English language and taught lessons in the Athenaeum. As Easter of 1829 approached, however, the bishop asked him to come to him and said, "I cannot assign a pastorate to you, because nobody gives what he does not have, but nevertheless you will find work enough. Wander through the state of Ohio, seek out everywhere the scattered German Catholics, spend yourself in giving them the consolations of holy religion, and if you find anywhere a sufficient number of Catholics together, who as yet have no pastor, then settle down and make your home there." Henni pronounced himself ready to undertake this commission, asked the episcopal blessing, and, firmly trusting in God, took up his pilgrim's staff.

The German Catholics of Cincinnati knew of German settlers in the backwoods, and, one directing him to the next, he found larger or smaller communities. He visited most of the localities where strong Catholic congregations existed or later formed, such as Fayetteville, Chillicothe, Circleville, Columbus, Somerset (May 17-20), Zanesville, and Delaware. At each place he stayed as long as was necessary, baptized the children, blessed marriages, promoted the Christian instruction of the youths, and gave all the opportunity to receive the sacraments. However, in none of these places was the number of Catholics great enough to justify a permanent pastorate.

Pastor at Canton

At Canton there were a large number of settlers from Baden, Alsace, and Rheinbaiern, which was large and strong enough to support a pastor. They had a church, St. John the Baptist, and had supported a pastor, Rev. John Hill, O.P., until his untimely death in 1828. According to some accounts Henni found them and settled among them, while others say that the bishop specifically sent him to them. He signed the baptismal register there from Jan. 1, 1830 to Aug. 18, 1834.

For a time he had the help of Dominican Father Vincent deRaymaecker, the same priest who had accompanied him and Father Kündig on their journey from Italy to America. Henni attended to the Germans, Swiss, and French and deRaymaecker, with better English, the Irish and Americans. They alternated languages for preaching and instructing on Sundays, with catechism, marriages, funerals, and vespers in the afternoon. Marriages were performed in the language preferred by the couple. Often there were discussions after vespers, to which the Protestant neighbors were invited.

In the fall of 1831 Bishop Fenwick found the congregation at Canton much increased under

Henni's care. Three new churches had been started within 20 miles of that place. The list of mission churches and stations attended by Henni is very impressive: In addition to Canton, in Stark County there were Canal Fulton, Navarre, then known as Bethlehem (where Catholics arrived in 1832 and his visits started at once); Harrisburg, where French settlers arrived in 1833; and Louisville (Beechland or Nimishillen). In Portage Co. he was the first priest to visit Randolph, in 1831. (St. Martin Church there was named for him after he had departed for Cincinnati in 1835.) In Columbiana Co. he at times attended the parish at St. Paul's, Dungannon. In Tuscarawas Co. he attended St. Peter's in Lawrence Twp. and probably visited Dover. In Carroll Co., there was the church at Moregg named for St. Fidelis of Sigmarigen, the martyr of the Grisons, Henni's natal area. In Wayne County there were Chippewa (near Doylestown), Wooster, Marshallville or Bristol, and Dalton (called Sugar Creek). Some think he was the first priest to visit Calmoutier, the French settlement in Holmes County. Cleveland, Mansfield, Norwalk and Peru in Huron County, Tiffin, and Lower Sandusky benefited by his visits, and it was said that he went as far as Detroit to allow the Germans to carry out their Easter duty. It was expected that Canton would become the most important Catholic center in the northeastern portion of the state, as Cincinnati was in the southwestern, but in time it was overshadowed by Cleveland.

The summer of 1832 brought enormous work to Kündig in the south of Ohio and Henni in the north. The cholera struck first in Canada and New York and then spread across the lakes to Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Michigan. Day and night the priests were in the saddle, to take help and the consolation of religion to the sick and dying in all directions.

That summer Bishop Fenwick made a long and arduous missionary journey to the American

Indians in the northern reaches of his diocese. In August he reached Canton on the return leg of his journey. He was so feeble and exhausted that his life was feared for. Henni accompanied him from Canton to Steubenville, on to Pittsburgh, and back to Dungannon. On their return to Canton, the bishop administered Confirmation on Sunday, September 23. While the bishop was still there, a letter arrived announcing the death of Bishop Gabriel Richard in Detroit. The bishop left Canton for Wooster, weak and dizzy with cholera, on Tuesday, Sept. 25. On the morning of Thursday the 27th, word came to Henni from Wooster that his bishop was dying and he set out to comfort him, as he had comforted so many, but upon his arrival in Wooster that afternoon he found only the little mound that covered the bishop's remains.

In June, 1834 Bishop Purcell made his first Episcopal Visitation of the diocese. Henni, energetic as always, on the 13th went to St. Paul's, Dungannon to prepare the people for reception of the sacraments on the bishop's visit. Henni also visited Lancaster and stayed eight days in Columbus that summer.

Cincinnati Pastor and Vicar General

On July 27, 1834 Bishop Purcell wrote to Henni, "A great epidemic is raging here, especially among the Germans. Come to our aid as soon as possible. Let go all other work and make haste to save the victims of the epidemic."

That same year Bishop Purcell gave Henni charge of Holy Trinity, the newly organized German parish in Cincinnati. He resided in Cincinnati for the next 10 years, where he was a faithful and energetic worker in the cause of religion and also advanced the religious and material welfare of the German-speaking immigrants who flocked to that city part of the country. Holy Trinity's was the second Catholic church in Cincinnati and was the first German

Catholic church west of the Allegheny Mountains. It had over five thousand members from the start.

Despite this huge responsibility, Father Henni found other work that needed his attention. On March 6, 1835, the *Catholic Telegraph* announced the publication of his German Catholic Catechism. He had first approached Bishop Purcell about this project early in 1834 for two reasons. First, the usual catechism was too complex for children and "too abstract for those tender minds." Secondly, the catechism then available from booksellers was too expensive. Henni's catechism was well received and for many years was a standard introduction manual in German parishes throughout the country.

During Lent, 1835 he visited the Catholics of Portsmouth, Piketon, Frankfort, Chillicothe, Columbus, Springfield, and Dayton. On Passion Sunday, April 3, he offered Mass in the house of George Studer on Canal St. in Columbus. He then left the diocese for a hurried visit to Europe to carry out some business for Purcell. While in Munich he issued his pamphlet, *A Glimpse of the Ohio Valley* (published in translation in these pages over the last three years) in which he gathered together letters he had written that described the conditions and poverty of the Church west of the Allegheny Mountains, with an eye toward finding financial assistance in Germany.

In 1837 in Cincinnati Father Henni founded *Der Wahrheits-Freund*, "a weekly paper for Catholic life, action, and knowledge," of which he continued as editor until 1843. Like the *Catholic Telegraph*, it carried little "news" but much Catholic thought. It continued to be published until 1907.

In May of 1838 Bishop Purcell, while at Marietta on the start of a trip to Europe, appointed Henni

and Father Edward E. Collins vicars general of the diocese. As Vicar General Henni accompanied the bishop on his episcopal visitations throughout the state and also made visits of his own to the German communities.

In November of 1840 they visited Chillicothe. A few days later the bishop dedicated the new St. Mary Church in Lancaster. Henni preached in German at the end of the Mass, "in his usual graceful, impressive and eloquent manner." He then accompanied Purcell to Danville, where the new St. Luke Church was dedicated and Henni preached in German "with his wonted energy and zeal" and sang the High Mass on the next day. He continued on with Purcell to visit Findlay and Ottawa, then the German settlements in Putnam, Mercer, and Shelby counties, then on to Dayton.

In the summer of 1841 Henni officiated in Columbus, then went to Norwalk and met the bishop on his visitation there. That October they visited parishes and missions in Muskingum, Morgan, Perry, Monroe, and Washington counties, then went north to Henni's former communities in the northeast and finished with a



Bishop John Martin Henni

stop in Columbus. In Zanesville Henni preached at the request of both the Lutheran and the Catholic Germans.

Bishop of Milwaukee

In 1843 V. Rev. John Henni attended the Fifth Provincial Council at Baltimore as theologian to Bishop Purcell. That council petitioned the Holy Father to erect a new see at Milwaukee for the Territory of Wisconsin and recommended Father Henni for the episcopate. The request was granted on November 28, 1843 and on March 19, 1844 Henni was consecrated in the Cathedral in Cincinnati by Purcell, assisted by bishops O'Connor of Pittsburgh and Miles of Nashville.

As Bishop, Henni displayed the same energy as he had on the Ohio missions. From that moment onward, his entire life was devoted to a grand effort to build up the Church in Wisconsin, strengthen it, enlarge it, and expand its influence, in all of which he was highly successful. At his arrival Wisconsin had but 6 priests and 5,000 Catholics. The new bishop obtained priests and sisters, built churches and the cathedral (blessed in 1853 with Archbishop Purcell in attendance and as evening preacher), toured Mexico and Cuba to obtain funds, and opened a seminary. In 1868 new sees were erected at Green Bay and LaCrosse and in 1875 Henni became Archbishop in 1875. By 1881 Wisconsin had three dioceses, 185 priests, 258 churches, 125 schools, 25 religious and charitable institutions, and 200,000 Catholics.

The Bishop died on September 7, 1881. By his own acts of marked devotion and unswerving confidence in the cause, he had built up a corresponding faith in the hearts of others, both as a missionary and pastor in Ohio and as Bishop and Archbishop in Wisconsin. ... "few indeed are the instances where men are so warmly and generally appreciated as was he" ... He was laid to rest in a vault under his cathedral.

It is comforting to note that in almost all of his work in Wisconsin, Henni had the company and assistance of his old friend, Father Martin Kündig. After the death of Bishop Fenwick, Father Frederick Rese was appointed administrator of the Diocese of Cincinnati. He called Father Kündig from the missions to help him in Cincinnati and, when he was appointed Bishop of Detroit, Rese again called for and received the assistance of Father Kündig. In 1841 Father Kündig went to Wisconsin and his old friend Bishop Henni found him when he made his first journey to Milwaukee. Henni appointed him Vicar General and pastor of the cathedral. He died on March 16, 1879, just thirty months before Henni.

SOURCES

Bishop Henni is mentioned over two dozen times in the pages of our *Bulletin*. In addition, his work at Canton with Father deRaymaecker is

mentioned by Sister Loretta Petit in Vol. 23, page 159.

Summaries of his missionary work in Ohio can be found in the 1952 *History of Old Saint Peter's* by V. Rev. John M. Lenhart, O.F.M. Cap. (pp 13-15) and *A History of the Diocese of Cleveland* by Father W. A. Juergens (pp 110-112 and 231-234).

His work in Wisconsin is covered in the *History of the Catholic Church in Wisconsin* (Catholic Historical Publishing Co., Milwaukee, 1899, pp. 297-299).

For those who read German, the Josephinum library owns a copy of his biography, *Dr. Johann Martin Henni, Erster Bischof und Erzbischof von Milwaukee, Ein Eebensbild aus der Pionier-Zeit von Ohio und Wisconsin* by Martin Marty, O.S.B. (Benziger Brothers, 1888).

Cardington St. Joseph Deaths and Burials from the Register of St. Mary Parish, Delaware 1882-1910

These records were copied from the original record book of deaths and burials at St. Mary Parish, which runs up to 1897, and were compared against a transcription made into the newer book. Father Philip Steyle, who knew the people of the mission, added a few notes as he made the transcription and these are noted as such below.

1882, Jan. 25, Michael Pepper (urea), age 32, buried on Jan. 27. The 1897 transcript adds "Cardington".

1885, Feb. 10, Helen Lynch, age 26, "killed on railroad near Cardington" Ph. Steyle

1885, March 2, James Donavin, age 26, buried on March 4 (consumption). Ph. Steyle. The

1897 transcript adds "Cardington".

1885, Sept. 22, Helen Donavin (Cardington), age 22, buried on Sept. 25. Ph. Steyle

1887, Nov. 20, Susan Nolk, age 15 years, buried on Nov. 22 in Cardington. Ph. Steyle

1887, Dec. 4, infant of Maurice O'Connor, buried in St. Joseph Cemetery, Cardington, Dec. 6. Ph. Steyle

1887, Dec. 4, Darby Lynch, in Cardington, age 80, buried in St. Joseph Cemetery, Cardington on Dec. 6. Ph. Steyle

1887, Dec. 31, Michael Pepper, Cardington, age 70, buried Jan. 2, 1888. Ph. Steyle

1888, April 7, infant daughter of Michael Broderick in the town of Edison, buried in Cardington April 8. Ph. Steyle

1889, Oct. 1, Patrick Hunt, 46 years old, buried in Cardington Oct. 3. Ph. Steyle

1891, March 22, Susanna Conrad, about 20 years, buried in Cardington March 24 (La Grippe). Ph. Steyle

1891, Oct. 15, John Carney (Cardington), 57 years old, buried Oct. 17 (Bright's Disease).

1891, Nov. 6, Patrick Donovan, age 36, buried Nov. 9 (consumption). Ph. Steyle

1892, March 23, Bridget Donovan, 40 years old, at the town of Cardington, was buried on March 25 (consumption). Ph. Steyle

1893, Oct. 26, Mary Ann McNamara, age 82, was buried in Cardington on the 28th. Charles Meyer

1893, Nov. 28, Christina Florentina Conrad[Flora Conrad in the transcript], in Cardington, age 28, buried Dec. 1. Ch. Meyer

1894, Oct. 8, Michael Sullivan, in Cardington, age 29, buried Oct. 10 (consumption). Ph. Steyle

1897, Jan. 3, Michael Donovan [transcript doesn't say Cardington], "a very worthy young man", age 27, buried Jan. 5 (heart failure). Ph. Steyle

[The last entry in the original record book is dated April 18, 1897.]

1899, Aug. 5, Joseph Donovan (Cardington), age 23, buried Aug. 8 (consumption). "a very worthy young man, the 8th in the family...of consumption" Ph. Steyle

1900, Nov. 8, Thomas Pepper (Cardington), age 90, buried Nov. 10 (old age). Ph. Steyle

1901, Feb. 17, J. F. Doty (Cardington), age 60, buried Feb. 20 (apoplexy). Ph. Steyle

1902, Nov. 9, John McNamara (Cardington), age 80, was buried on the 11th (old age). "a very good old man the ---- of Cardington church and mission" Ph. Steyle

1902, Dec. 13, James Dugan (Cardington), age 84, buried on the 15th (old age). Ph. Steyle

1903, John Moore (Cardington), died Jan. 16, age 31, was buried on the 19th (typhoid pneumonia). Ph. Steyle

1907, Aug. 29, Jeremiah Dean (Cardington), age 92, buried on Aug. 31 (old age). Ph. Steyle

1907, Nov. 20, James Lacey (Cardington), age 90, buried on Nov. 22 (dementia, old age). Ph. Steyle Died in the state asylum.

1907, Nov. 24, Mary, wife of John Hunt (Cardington), age 61, buried Nov. 26 (cancer). Ph. Steyle

1908, March 31, James Pepper (Cardington), age 48, buried Apr. 2 (paralysis). Ph. Steyle

1909, Aug. 27, William Callahan (Cardington), age 93, buried Aug. 29 (old age). Ph. Steyle

1910, Aug. 10, John [possibly Joanna] Deehan from Cardington, age 80, buried Aug. 12 (old age). Ph. Steyle

1910, Sept. 21, Emma Sulter (nee Conrad) (Cardington), age 48 (dementia). Died in the sanitarium at Columbus. Ph. Steyle



Abstracts from *The Catholic Telegraph*

(Continued, from Vol. XXVIII, No. 3)

July 3, 1852

ST. JOSEPH'S, June 26th, 1852

Very Rev. Sir.---This vicinity was lately honored with a visit from the Rt. Rev. Bishop Miles, of Nashville, on his return from the National Council. The Rt. Rev. Prelate was highly delighted with the improvements which this scene of his own former zealous labors had undergone since his last visit, some eleven years ago. On the festival of Corpus Christi, at the request of the Most Rev. Archbishop of Cincinnati, he administered the holy Sacrament of Confirmation, in St. Joseph's Church, to thirty-six children who had been previously instructed and prepared for the occasion. In a beautiful and eloquent charge to the candidates, he explained the nature and effects of the Sacrament, enlarged upon the many and dangerous temptations to which a Christian is exposed in this world and especially in a mixed community; and concluded with a moving exhortation to the practice of virtue and constancy in maintaining the principles of our holy faith. In the afternoon the bishop proceeded to Somerset and at the close of Vespers, preached and administered Confirmation to forty-three persons, four of whom were converts to the Catholic faith. On the following day, he left for Zanesville on his way homewards, expressing himself highly pleased with the flourishing condition of Religion in this portion of the Archdiocese. The Rt. Rev. Prelate though declining in years and somewhat worn by arduous labors, is still in the possession of much vigor, and during his short stay with us, was in the enjoyment of excellent health.

On Sunday within the Octave of Corpus Christi, the usual procession of the Blessed Sacrament took place. The faithful of St. Joseph's and the surrounding congregations had assembled in very large numbers, at an early hour in the afternoon; and after Vespers, the Rev.

Nicholas R. Young ascended the pulpit and delivered an eloquent sermon on the mystery of the Eucharist.... After the sermon, the procession was formed in this manner: first preceded the cross-bearer accompanied by two Acolytes with lighted tapers, then the students of the College, the choir and band, the Religious community and little girls strewing the way with flowers. After these the Most Holy Sacrament was borne by the Rev. C. P. Montgomery, accompanied by a Deacon and Sub-Deacon, under a beautiful canopy of silk, and was followed by the rest of the faithful. ...

Subscriptions: Peter Timony, Hulls, Athens, O.; Morand Bushue, Somerset, O.; James Galin [sic], Somerset, O.

July 17, 1852

PORTSMOUTH

There were sixty-three persons Confirmed on last Sunday by Archbishop Purcell, in Portsmouth. The candidates were prepared by Rev. Mr. Hengehold. Six were converts, three of whom had made their abjuration, on their knees, before the altar, holding lighted candles in their hands, and shedding abundant tears. Rev. Mr. Hengehold will remain here some time to confirm the good that has been done and increase it. An English Priest is much wanted here and at the Furnaces.

The churches in Washington, Monroe, Noble, and Guernsey counties will be visited in September and October.

July 24, 1852

CHILLICOTHE

The Church lately purchased from the Methodists, in this town, was crowded with Catholics, and many of the Protestant citizens, on last Sunday. The High Mass was sung by Rev.

Mr. Boulger, Rev. Messrs. George A. Carrell, S.J., Rector of St. Xavier's, Cincinnati, and Rev. Mr. Forde of Circleville officiating as Deacon and Subdeacon. The Archbishop preached in the forenoon and Rev. Mr. Carrell in the afternoon. There were fifty-two persons confirmed, of whom a few converts, one quite an elderly lady.

In the evening, forty persons were confirmed in St. Peter's Church (German), and a fine large bell was blessed by the Archbishop.

The readers of the "Catholic Telegraph" are aware that a College has been recently opened near Somerset, Perry county, Ohio, under the direction of the Dominican Fathers. The first annual commencement was held on the 8th last. The present building not being sufficiently spacious to accommodate a large assembly, a stage was erected for the purpose in a beautiful grove adjacent to the College....

Many are the obstacles that surround our newly founded College... The guardians of St. Joseph's College aim not at distinction.-- They are not desirous of pre-eminence. They ask only that place in the esteem and gratitude of their friends and countrymen, to which their disinterested exertions may entitle them. --Should their efforts be crowned with success, they will consider their reward simple, in the blessings of learning and religion that may have flowed through their hands upon the rising youth of our country.... It

has numbered within its walls fifty boarders--sons of honorable and respectable citizens of Perry and the surrounding counties, and several from distant States....

July 31, 1852

Mention is made of Miss Lucy Pyne of Chillicothe, as the most distinguished among her competitors at the school of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur in Chillicothe.

Rev. Sylvester Rosecrans, of this diocese, was ordained priest in Rome, on the 5th of June; on the same day, Rev. John c. Albrinc was ordained sub-deacon. Mr. Frederick Bender, like the two former destined for this diocese, was too young to be promoted to sub-deaconship. The number of ordinands was two hundred and eighteen. Of these there were 36 priests, twenty-five deacons and sixty-four sub-deacons.

August 14, 1852

At the distribution of premiums at the Ursuline Academy at St. Martin's, Brown County, Miss Helen Hunter and Miss Teresa Ewing, both of Lancaster, received awards.

Subscriptions: Peter McLean, Circleville, O.; Daniel Coakley and Philip Haffy, Zanesville, O.; William J. Clark, Somerset, O.

(To be continued)