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Notable Vincentians (1): Francis Xavier Dahmen, C.M.

[The first in an ongoing series of articles about members of the Congregation of the Mission, of whatever province or country, whose lives merit remembering. The series will avoid bishops, superiors general, or other high officials in favor of more ordinary Vincentians whose stories should be told. The following sketch of Francis Xavier Dahmen, C.M., was written by Monsignor Frederick G. Holweck and appeared in the (Saint Louis) Pastoral Blatt, 52:9 (September 1918) 129-37. It was translated from the original German by the Reverend Francis Germovnik, C.M., and lightly edited.]

In his account of the Major Seminary of Saint Louis of the year 1844, Canon John O'Hanlon (*Life and Scenery in Missouri*, [Dublin: J. Duffy, 1890] page 17) writes as follows:

A prime favourite with our seminarists was the good German Lazarist, Father Dahmen, a native of Saxony, and one who during his early youth had been engaged as a cavalry soldier in some of the bloody campaigns waged by the Emperor Napoleon Buonaparte on the Continent of Europe. Father Dahmen had fought in several great engagements; he had a vivid recollection of the dreadful scenes he witnessed on the battlefield; his anecdotes of the Emperor Napoleon were original and most interesting; he was ready at all times to relate his own personal adventures, and freely to pronounce a very sound opinion on the maneuvers and policy of his renowned leader, having had an enthusiastic regard for his genius and resources as a general. Father Dahmen's undoubted courage, sense of honour, uprightness and integrity of character won our admiration; his brusque and military air was independent of forms while his courtesy and kindness rendered him lovable to a degree. His piety

and learning were well recognized, when he was obliged to quit his Saxon seminary and serve as a young conscript, and he returned to resume his religious vocation and studies when the great army was disbanded. He had a correct knowledge of the world and of its ordinary pursuits, with a practical manner for appreciating and utilizing them. He preached with eloquence and earnestness to the Germans of Saint Louis, who were accustomed largely to frequent our temporary and small seminary chapel, which had been opened to the public. Hearing confessions in German, he also exercised missionary duties among his people, while speaking French or English with great fluency and correctness. When Father Dahmen chose to join our walks and outing parties, the students were ever delighted with his cheerful company and conversation.

The Vincentian of whom O'Hanlon speaks in these lines is the German priest Francis Xavier Dahmen, who had in Missouri the opportunity to work for the care of souls among the Germans. He entered the sacred ministry seven years before the arrival of the Reverend Anthony J. Lutz. It is true that before him two German priests had been working in the territory of the present State of Missouri, the Capuchin Bernard de Limpach in Saint Louis, and the Carmelite Father Paul de Saint Pierre in Sainte Genevieve, but these two worked here only among the French and Creoles, because at that time there were almost no Germans in Upper Louisiana.

The notice in O'Hanlon's book contains some inexact statements, just as usually O'Hanlon is extremely unreliable regarding the historical dates and events which he himself did not witness.

First of all, Dahmen was not a Saxon but a native of the Rhineland, for he was born March 23, 1789 in Duerren, the province of Rhine. Also the seminary where he studied was hardly a Saxon seminary, but some educational institution in

the Rhineland, perhaps in Cologne. Since the whole territory west of the Rhine in the beginning of the nineteenth century belonged to France he was, like so many of his contemporaries dragged into the great war, apparently as early as 1809, not on the side of the German freedom fighters but on the side of Napoleon, the oppressor of freedom. Where the *furor Martis* [the fury of Mars, god of war] led him we were not able to find out in our sources. As O'Hanlon says, Dahmen liked to talk about that, but he did not write down anything.

When peace finally came, the cavalryman took off his French uniform and, in 1815, already twenty six years old, went to Rome. In the Holy City he wanted to take up his studies again, because Germany was at that time in the process of reconstruction. In the midst of the turmoil of war, dangers, and temptations of a soldier's life, he kept the idea of his vocation to the priesthood. Did he intend to put himself at the disposal of the Holy See as an apostolic missionary? At that time Louis William Dubourg, the apostolic administrator and, since September 1815, bishop of the diocese of Louisiana, stayed in Eternal City in order to get fellow workers for his immense and unorganized diocese. Dahmen was referred to him. After the young man from the Rhineland had seen the lands of so many rulers, after he had seen so much blood and misery and death in every form, missionary work in the wild west of the Mississippi Valley no longer frightened him. Therefore he joined Dubourg, apparently in November 1815, because he was not in the group which on October 14, 1815, received the blessing of Pius VII.¹

Dubourg had succeeded in winning the Vincentian congregation for his mission field. After the expulsion of the Jesuits

¹These were the Vincentians, De Andreis, Rosati, Acquaroni, the secular priest Pereira, the student Deys and the brother A. Boboni.

from Louisiana (1764) members of the various Orders had been working in Upper Louisiana: Trappists, Franciscans, Carmelites, Capuchins, Benedictines, but these were individuals in the Diaspora. Now the Congregation of the Mission of Saint Vincent was to take over a leading and organizing role in Louisiana, especially by founding seminaries. Heading the enterprise was the venerable servant of God, Felix de Andreis, who was to inspire and toughen all others through the holiness of his life, purity of his intentions and a strong Christian spirit of sacrifice.

With this servant of God, upon whom Dubourg set great hopes, Dahmen left Rome on December 15, 1815. In their company was the priest Spezioli² and the Spanish student Casto Gonzalez.³ They traveled over the mountains toward Bologna and stopped in Piacenza from December 27 to 30. There brother Martin Blanka, joined the company.⁴ North of Susa they crossed, amid many dangers -- it was January -- Mount Genis Pass and arrived on January 24 in Toulouse. There they met Joseph Rosati and his traveling companions, to the great joy of both parties, because De Andreis with his men had heard that Rosati suffered shipwreck in the winter storms on the coast of Provence, and Rosati had thought that De Andreis and the men with him had been buried by avalanches. On January 30 all of them arrived at Bordeaux where they had to wait for further instructions. The archbi-

²He returned again from Bordeaux back to Italy.

³Casto Gonzalez ran away from the Seminary of the Barrens as early as January 1819 and lingered around Father Pratte in Sainte Genevieve. The latter intervened for his readmission. On October 12, 1822, he left the diocese. Even though a subdeacon he lived later on in Lousville as watchmaker. He caused Rosati, the rector of the Seminary, serious worries. Some compared him with the impostor Inglesi; of course, he was not an international swindler as Inglesi was.

⁴Later on he rendered excellent services to the Congregation in Missouri.

shop of Bordeaux (Charles d'Aviau du Bois de Sanzai) received the missionaries enthusiastically, because they also brought him more news of the final victory of the Church and the glorious return to Rome of the suffering Pope Pius VII. The archbishop appointed De Andreis for the time of his residence in Bordeaux (four and half months) chaplain of the prisoners of Chateau du Ha, for whom he worked in the true spirit of Saint Vincent. On Good Friday De Andreis preached for the first time in one of the monastic churches of the city the Tre Ore in honor of Christ's agony on the cross, a devotion entirely unknown in France at that time. The archbishop himself attended the Three Hours devotion.

De Andreis and Rosati set up a provisional seminary in Bordeaux, and with that, as Rosati himself stated more than once, the major seminary of Saint Louis began in Bordeaux in February 1816. Here, according to an account written on Rosati's own hand, Dahmen began his higher studies with logic and metaphysics, proving that Dahmen had stayed in Rome for such a short time that he could hardly have taken up his studies there.

On March 22, 1816, Dubourg came to Bordeaux⁵ On May 21, Dahmen received tonsure, along with Italian Joseph Tichitoli⁶ and the already mentioned Spaniard Gonzalez. On June 1, Dubourg gave him and clerics Tichitoli, Gonzalez and Leo Deys (a Fleming) the four minor orders.

Since in the meantime because of the intrigues of the

⁵Here he conducted the Corpus Christi procession and won a high respect for himself because of his stately and truly priestly appearance (Letter of Saulnier, an eyewitness). ε

⁶whom Dubourg in the meantime won and brought with himself.

*inimicus homo*⁷ Dubourg decided not to go to New Orleans but to Upper Louisiana, namely to Sainte Genevieve or to Saint Louis, where knowledge of English was more necessary than in Lower Louisiana, all of them zealously began to study English, so far as this was possible. With the exception of Dubourg there was no one in the whole company who could master English.

On June 12, all except Dubourg embarked on the brig *Ranger* for America. For Dahmen the farewell from Europe was to last thirty-four years. As a true missionary who leaves father and mother and all things, he did not even yield to his desire to revisit his native Rhineland before his departure. Since they were almost the only passengers on the *Ranger*, they converted the ship into a monastery and observed a strict order of the day as far as storms and sea sickness would permit. They even attended choir. The captain and his crew were particularly impressed by the high mass on Sundays and the singing of the Litany of Loretto and other hymns, because it just so happened that all of them had good voices and some of them had studied music (e.g., Deys). On July 23, land appeared and on July 26, they landed in Baltimore after they had sung a high mass of thanksgiving on the octave of Saint Vincent. At their departure from Bordeaux they "put away their Italian clerical dress and put on the customary dress of the American clergy." Because the winds had been calm for a long time and the provisions were running low they all made a vow on July 19, the feast of Saint Vincent, that on September 27 (1816), the anniversary of his death, they would celebrate it as a feastday, preparing for it with a novena and fasting on the eve of that day.

⁷The pastor of the cathedral²parish Antonio Sedella of New Orleans. [*inimicus homo*, an enemy, quoted from Matt 13:28.]

Father Simon Brute⁸ received the newcomers with open arms and joyful heart at Saint Mary's Seminary, belonging to the Sulpicians, and lodged them in various parish houses. After they had rested from the sea voyage, they left Baltimore in two groups on September 3 and 10, and after many struggles with pouring rains and floods and financial straits they arrived in Pittsburgh on September 19. There they fulfilled their vow in honor of Saint Vincent (September 27), and on October 23, they began their journey down the Ohio River on a flatboat. They were fascinated by the beauties of nature on the river-sides. On November 19, 1816, they arrived in Louisville. The rest of the group remained there, while De Andreis went up to Bardstown in order to ask Bishop Flaget what they should do. Contrary to the decision of Dubourg to travel directly to Saint Louis, Flaget and De Andreis decided to remain in Bardstown and there wait for the arrival of Dubourg, because, said Bishop Flaget, the people of Saint Louis were not prepared for the arrival of so many, and there were no living quarters where they could be lodged nor the money to support them. Also, they had to apply themselves to the study of French and English in order to be able to accomplish anything. Therefore they all remained in Bardstown and continued their studies under the direction of bishop John B. David, Flaget's coadjutor. At that time the seminary had ten students, four of whom belonged to Louisiana (that is, including both Saint Louis and New Orleans). De Andreis himself wrote (January 5, 1817), "Our seminary here is like a Trappist or Carthusian monastery," as regards its spirit and its location in the midst of the woods. "Here we drink nothing but water, except for some coffee in the morning and some tea in the evening."

⁸Later on bishop of Vincennés, consecrated in Saint Louis, October 28, 1831.

Here, in Saint Thomas Seminary, Dahmen and Tichitoli received the subdiaconate from Bishop Flaget on March 10, 1817. Casto Gonzalez was not ordained. De Andreis and Flaget apparently did not trust him. After he had observed the virtues of the servant of God De Andreis for two years, Dahmen decided to join the Congregation to which De Andreis belonged. At the end of 1817, he presented himself as a postulant and was received by Rosati, because at that time De Andreis was the substitute pastor of Sainte Genevieve. When on January 5, 1816, Dubourg was installed in Saint Louis, De Andreis established his residence in Saint Louis as vicar general.

The seminary set up in the Barrens, Perry County, was turned over by Bishop Dubourg to the Vincentian Joseph Rosati, later the bishop of Saint Louis. In the course of the year 1818, the students, brothers and postulants were gradually brought from Kentucky to the Barrens. The group was increased considerably by the candidates Dubourg himself brought.

On November 1, 1818, ordinations took place for the first time in the old log church in Sainte Genevieve (Dubourg had ordained several times before in Saint Louis) where Mr. Barreau received the tonsure, Mr. Constatine Maenhaut the minor orders, Gonzalez and Deys the subdiaconate, Dahmen and Tichitoli the diaconate, Desmoulins and Brassac the priesthood.

The following day Father Ferrari (a canon from Porto Maurizio), Dahmen, Tichitoli, de Neckere (later bishop of New Orleans), Vallezano and Perrodin left for Saint Louis. Ferrari, Dahmen and Tichitoli were to enter the novitiate which De Andreis opened on December 3, 1818, in the dining room of the bishop's house. The rest of them were to function as professors in Saint Louis Academy. However, Vallezano returned as early as November 23, back to the Barrens and disappeared there in 1819 (although he was already a priest).

After a short novitiate Ferrari was sent to Vincennes (Indiana), but he did not stay long and went to New Orleans. There he died November 23, 1822.

On September 5, 1819, Francis Xavier Dahmen was ordained a priest by Bishop Dubourg. If his life was full of changes in the previous ten years, so was the course of his ordination. He received tonsure and minor orders in Bordeaux, subdiaconate in Bardstown, diaconate in Sainte Genevieve, and priesthood in Saint Louis. He was a little over thirty years old when he was promoted to the priesthood.

Since Father Ferrari did not want to remain in Vincennes, Father Dahmen was appointed as his successor. He arrived there on February 18, 1820. The French settlement on the bank of Wabash was old, much older than Saint Louis, but the settlers were poor, because the Creoles never really knew how to exploit the riches of the land on which they lived. And so it happened that none of the priests who in the beginning of the nineteenth century had the care of souls in Vincennes lasted very long. Nor did Dahmen fare any better in spite of his good will and energetic character. He put up with it for a year, then he was taken away by his superiors since the local parish could not adequately support a priest.

On May 28, 1821, we find him at the Barrens. On that day he took his vows. (On October 15, 1820, when De Andreis died a holy death in Saint Louis, the novitiate was transferred to the Barrens.)

The Catholics of Vincennes found it hard to be without a priest, so on September 4, 1821, they sent a petition to Dubourg asking that, if at all possible, Father Dahmen should be sent back to them and promised to do their best to provide for his support. The bishop gave in, but when Dahmen came back no one would take any interest in him, so on the feast of All Saints the priest left Vincennes for the second time, this time for good. During the winter he remained at the Barrens and helped out in the care of souls and in the seminary where

he was needed.

Since the pastor of Saint Ferdinand (Florissant), Father De la Croix, went west to the Osage Indians for some time, Dahmen was sent as his substitute to Florissant, where he arrived on July 22, 1822.

On September 1, 1822, the young and zealous pastor Henry Pratte died in Sainte Genevieve. Since the Vincentian John Baptist Acquaroni, who came over with Rosati (and De Andreis), was not happy in Portage des Sioux, he was sent for the interim to Sainte Genevieve⁹, but already in the same month, Dahmen was appointed pastor of Sainte Genevieve; he arrived there on September 29, 1822. The choice did not fall on Dahmen because he was the only confrere who spoke German, since the German language was hardly spoken in Sainte Genevieve in 1822. In the beginning of the nineteenth century there was in Sainte Genevieve only one German, Francois Coleman (Franz Kohlmann) from the diocese of Wurzburg. In 1774 he married a French woman, Terese Robinet. Since 1809, Dahmen had also been under strong French influence, so that hardly anyone thought that he was German. He was chosen because he spoke both French and English correctly and fluently, and because he was a very imposing man, strapping like a soldier, hospitable, and devoted to duty.

In the year 1824, the famous missionary Charles Nerinckx, the founder of the Sisters of Loretto, died in his house. As early as 1809, it had been Nerinckx's heart's desire to go

⁹He left the Vincentian Congregation, became vicar at the New Orleans Cathedral under the "inimicus homo" and traveled back to Europe, June 27, 1824. There he was canon in Porto Maurizio. But later on he returned to America (Louisiana). [The author erred here: He never returned to America, despite a strong desire and several attempts to do so.]

Missouri. At that time he wanted to leave Kentucky and take over the churches of Saint Louis and Saint Charles, because in the whole territory of Upper Louisiana there were only two priests: Father Maxwell in Sainte Genevieve and Father Donatien Olivier in Prairie du Rocher. But he could not get the necessary faculties. In 1824, all kinds of difficulties caused him to move at least temporarily to Missouri. He left Loretto on June 16, 1824, and came to Bethlehem (near the Barrens) on July 2. By the end of the month he traveled to Saint Louis and visited Florissant, the place where his friends, the Trappists, had lived before, as also the Jesuits, and the Sisters of the Sacred Heart. On August 4, he arrived at Sainte Genevieve very ill; he could no longer continue on his way, so he remained in the little log parish house of the ever hospitable Father Dahmen. There he passed away in the Lord on August 12, 1824. He was buried on August 16, near his spiritual daughters, the Sisters of Loretto, in Bethlehem [a quarter-mile from the Barrens]. In December 1833, his remains were transferred from Bethlehem, to Loretto, Kentucky. Father Nerinckx was born October 2, 1761, in Herfhelingen in Brabant. He was one of the most outstanding missionaries who worked in the wild west in the early nineteenth century, since 1804. Father Dahmen certainly considered it a great honor to give this apostolic man the consolations of the Catholic faith and to close his eyes.

On August 25, 1827, twenty eight citizens of Sainte Genevieve sent a petition to Bishop Rosati asking him to help them to establish a literary club. Father Dahmen also signed the petition. The moderator of this new association was M. Amoureux. This is a proof that Father Dahmen was active not only in the care of souls but that he also tried to raise the intellectual level of his parishioners. A real go-getter!

Besides the church of Sainte Genevieve, Dahmen also took care of the church of Saint Joachim in Old Mines until, in 1828, John Boullier was appointed pastor at this old settle-

ment (founded in 1810).

Toward the end of the twenties the German immigration into Perry and Sainte Genevieve Counties, Missouri, began to take on considerable proportions. The first newcomers were from Alsace, but the later ones almost exclusively from Ortenau, that is, from the districts of Offenburg in Baden. The tradition in Sainte Genevieve maintains that the first German who came to Sainte Genevieve was the Alsatian Matthew Ziegler with his young wife Barbara Heffner. The first German baptism in the parish register is that of their son Louis Ziegler¹⁰, born February 10, 1828. The godparents were French: Louis and Odille Vallee. The second German baptism is that of Henry Keil, baptized by Anthony Blanc (later archbishop of New Orleans); the godfather was Matthew Ziegler. Also at the next baptism (July 28, 1829) of Alexander Nerwein, Matthew Ziegler was the godfather. At the baptism of Charles Frederick (later pastor of Saint Malachi's, Saint Louis) September 9, 1832, Sebastian Ziegler¹¹ and Lucy Schlegel functioned as godparents. Further older German baptisms are:

August 1, 1833 Frances Schwendt, daughter of Joseph Schwendt and Magdalen Joggerst

September 3, 1833 Teresa Heine.

September 22, 1833 Josephine Ziegler, daughter of F.X. Ziegler and Teresa Ebner (godparents: Sebastian Ziegler and Barbara Ziegler).

September 29, 1833 Clara Siebert, daughter of Henry

¹⁰Later the well known river captain Louis Zieglar.

¹¹This one seems to have had a good French education. He was one of the most respected citizens of the town and his name appears on several documents.

Siebert and Maria A. Sucher.

December 15, 1833, Martin Huber, son of Benedict Huber and Frances Weiler.

The church of Sainte Genevieve was a large log building, built in 1794. A part of the construction material had been used previously in the church of Old Sainte Genevieve in Big Fields; the church there had been dedicated to Sainte Genevieve. Now, after thirty seven years the church had become dilapidated.¹² The community decided to build a new church of stone. The old log building was pulled down and the cornerstone of the new house of God was laid on July 27, 1831. It was soon finished, but was consecrated only in 1837.

In the meantime many things were changed even in the Seminary of the Barrens, on account of increasing immigration. German students began to arrive. As early as 1833, the seminary counted four students of German descent: J.H. Fortmann of the diocese of Munster and three Lorrainers, from the diocese of Nancy: Ambrose Heim, Charles Rolle, and Nicholas Stehle. To these were soon added G. Kaspar Ostlangenberg and J. Fischer. When therefore Father Timon became superior, he remembered that Father Dahmen was a German and decided to draw him back to the seminary. After all, he was only on loan to the diocese. He reminded Bishop Rosati of this, and so he sent a letter to this effect to Dahmen with the instruction to read it on Sunday. The Frenchman J. Bergeron was appointed by the bishop as pastor of Sainte Genevieve. On May 18, 1836, Father Dahmen left his parish and went to the Barrens. But this unleashed a storm in the community. On

¹²The life of Reverend Charles Nerinckx published in 1915 by William J. Howlett contains between pages 240 and 241 a drawing of the old church and the parish house of Sainte Genevieve in 1824 by Loretta Bindewald.

Pentecost Sunday, May 22, a meeting of the community took place and the following petition was drafted:

Your Excellency:

The people of the parish of Sainte Genevieve submit to your Excellency their humble petition confident that you will consider their request and answer their appeal. The pain caused to them by the reading of your letter by their pastor Father Dahmen, which announced his early transfer was all the more distressing to them because in the fourteen years of his outstanding and zealous ministry he knew how to win their trust, respect and esteem.

Therefore, your Excellency, they gathered together on the feast of Pentecost in the parish house for deliberation and submit only to your approval the following measures they think to be necessary in order to prevent and avert what all of them consider as a misfortune.

Since they have known for a number of years the zeal and the talents of the priests of the Congregation of the Mission and know how to appreciate their merits, they have unanimously decided to make a last attempt with these priests, and have proposed for this purpose to offer Father Timon, their present superior, a formal sale of the church and its accessories, which all of them have signed unanimously. But since they realize that it would be improper on such occasion to conclude anything without notifying you, they have nominated a committee of twelve persons to submit this petition to you in the hope that you will approve this proposal, all the more because they see from your letter that you transfer their pastor Father Dahmen only with regret. They hope, moreover, that you will not refuse them the same favor as you have granted to the people of Old Mines. They expect from your kindness that you will gladly concede them something so useful for the good of religion and especially so likely to make their village flourish again.

In this hope we, the members of the committee, ask you to accept the respectful feelings with which we dare to append our signature in the name of all the people of the parish of Sainte Genevieve.

Devoted and obedient servants
of your Excellency

Paul LaBruyere	J. Bte. Vallee
Francois Durant	Joseph Bogy
Francois B. Bequette	Auguste Ste. Gemme
Eloy LeCompte	Sebastian Ziegler
Antoine (his mark) Tomure	Ferdinand Rozier
Clement Detchmendy	J.B. Lalumandiere

On May 31, Rosati himself came to Sainte Genevieve and told the people that the matter did not depend on him alone, that the superior had the right to withdraw a priest of his Congregation, etc. But in the course of June Rosati yielded, contrary to all expectation, at least so far as Father Bergeron was concerned. He held a conference with the Superior John Timon (who was at the same time vicar general of diocese) and the laymen Joseph Bogy and Felix Vallee of Sainte Genevieve at the Barrens where the final transfer of the church property to the Vincentians was decided. Because Rosati showed himself favorable to the people of Sainte Genevieve, Father Bergeron wrote him on July 2:

I have thought that, for the sake of peace and in order to preserve your honor it is better for me to offer myself like Jonah and, in order to calm the storm, go away immediately, that is, to disappear from the parish and return to the more hospitable land, New Orleans. I must tell you that I am extremely pleased with the gentlemen of Sainte Genevieve. They took care of my departure and very generously contributed to my traveling expenses without any previous agreement. I would be happy with these Catholic people.

Bogy and Vallee were very happy that Bergeron did not cause any difficulty. They wrote to Rosati in a letter of June 27: "We are very sorry that we put you to so much trouble but we ask you to believe us that we did not act on our own or for ourselves but according to the wish and will of the whole parish."

So Father Bergeron went away after a three month's administration, and Dahmen was again appointed, with Father Mignard as assistant; the latter does not seem to have stayed very long. His successor as assistant was the Italian Father Angelo Gandolfo. After Father Brands provisionally administered the parish for a certain time, Father Dahmen took up his functions again on November 13, 1836. The Catholic Directory for 1836 states under Sainte Genevieve: "Sermon in French and German and sometimes in English." Now also the new stone church was consecrated on November 12, 1837. We print the document written by Dahmen himself but apparently composed by Rosati, as it is found in the diocesan archives:

CONSECRATION OF THE CHURCH OF SAINTE GENEVIEVE

On the 12th day of November 1836, the twenty sixth Sunday after Pentecost, the Most Illustrious and Most Reverend Joseph Rosati of the Congregation of the Mission, bishop of Saint Louis, observing all the precepts of the Roman Pontifical consecrated and dedicated the church whose cornerstone he had blessed on the twenty seventh day of July 1831 and placed it as is customary in the foundation; the church having been built by the faithful of this parish from contributions in work and money and successfully completed after six years; it was dedicated to Almighty and Merciful God under the invocation of Sainte Genevieve, Virgin, the glorious patroness of the parish and of the city, after a fast had been announced and observed the day before;

after the vigil had been celebrated as is customary, he consecrated with the most solemn rite the church together with the main altar in which he placed with due reverence the relics of the Princes of the Apostles Peter and Paul, of Saint Lawrence the Martyr, and of Saint Lucy Virgin and Martyr; assisted by Reverend Father Francis Cellini as archdeacon, Reverend Fathers Benedict Roux and J. Moraschini as assistant deacons, Reverend Father Aloysius Parodi C.M. as deacon, Reverend Father Joseph Giustiniani C.M. as subdeacon, Reverend Fathers Bartholomew Rolando C.M., and Hector Figari C.M. as masters of ceremonies, Reverend Fathers John Baptist Tornatore C.M., John Bouiller C.M., Francis M.X. Simonin C.M., Ambrose Heim, Francis Xavier Dahmen, the parish rector, and Messrs. John Cotter and Nicholas Stehle C.M. as chanters; the inferior clerical ministries were performed by Messrs. Collins, Burk, Tiernin, Escoffier, Chandy, Broyderick, Robert C.M., and O'Donnell, McCabe and Cusak.

The bier with the relics was carried by the Reverend Fathers John Brands C.M., Timothy Conway, Benedict Roux and Moraschini. The altar was incensed by Reverend Father Hippolyte Gandolfo. While the bishop with the clergy was performing all the sacred ceremonies within the church with the doors closed, the Reverend Father Francis M.X. Simonin explained to the large crowd of people gathered outside the church in the French language very clearly all the venerable rites used from ancient times for the consecration of churches.

In order that the memory of this happy event may be preserved for many future generations a document of consecration was drawn up for the archives of this parish of Sainte Genevieve and signed in the rectory of Sainte Genevieve on November 13, 1837 by the Most Illustrious and Most Reverend Bishop, the priests, deacons, subdea-

cons, clerics and a large number of laymen who were present.

Francis Xavier Dahmen C.M., Rector of the Parish

Five months before the consecration of the church the Sisters of Loretto opened in Sainte Genevieve a religious school for girls, June 25, 1837. And because at that time German immigration increased considerably, Sainte Genevieve became a flourishing and well organized community. The Sisters of Loretto had their school for girls in the old Detchmندی mansion. After a few years the school was transferred to the Sisters of Saint Joseph. For boys a teacher was hired whenever it was possible to get one.

The priests of Sainte Genevieve served at that time once a month the community of Saint Anne in Petit Canada, Saint Francis County, now called French Village. Soon after 1833, they built there on the land of Joseph Leverard a temporary chapel, but in 1838 under Dahmen's guidance a new little church on the farm of Toussaint Lahaie. At that time Dahmen planned to build on the Big River a church in honor of Saint Gregory, which would later on be served from Old Mines. Besides this, the priests of Sainte Genevieve visited the community of Saint Philomena in Riviere aux Vases and the Saint Matthias community on Establishment Creek. When later on chapels were built in these places, the one in Riviere aux Vases was dedicated to Saint Anthony, and the other on the Establishment to Saint Philomena.

In 1839, a little episode took place between Father Dahmen and Bishop Rosati. Rosati sold Dahmen an old organ from Saint Louis Cathedral for \$400.00. On May 30, 1839, Dahmen then wrote to the bishop as follows:

Last night I received your letter and I hasten to thank you but here is the thing: right now I have only seven dollars in my house. As I had recently the whole church

painted, the painter took 225 dollars, everything I had in my safe.

On December 26, 1839, he wrote:

If I did not answer you right away, it was because I was really upset not knowing how I could come up with the first 100 dollars. It seems to me that money is very scarce. If we had somebody who could play the organ, it seems to me, it would be easy to collect the signatures, but it is almost always silent. It has been used only five or six times by the little ladies and that quite badly. I do not know how I could cope with it. . . . So, Monsignor, I ask you, give us a little time. I am so glad that we have an organ, but the pity is that it is not used.

When in the spring of 1840, Rosati went to Rome he instructed his lawyer Leduc that Father Dahmen, or rather his community, owed him four hundred dollars for the organ and that he had promised to pay him an installment of one hundred dollars a year. Was the organ ever paid for after Dahmen's transfer, Rosati's departure, and Leduc's death? Anyway, Dahmen did not swim in money at Sainte Genevieve, otherwise the payment of the community debt of only four hundred dollars would not cause him such a headache.

The church property of Sainte Genevieve, which came into the hands of the Vincentians during the squabble over Father Dahmen's transfer (1836), had its own peculiar history. It was at that time transferred personally to Father Timon, the visitor [provincial superior] of the Congregation. The latter kept it in his name even after he had become bishop of Buffalo. After Timon's death it came into the hands of the oldest bishop of the province of New York, Bishop John Loughlin of Brooklyn. When Archbishop Kain in the nineties ordered the investigation of the property titles of individual churches, it appeared that the church property of Sainte Genevieve was entered in the name of the deceased Bishop Loughlin of

Brooklyn. That was amazing. No one in Saint Louis had the slightest idea about that. Also the Vincentians seemed to have completely forgotten that they were the legitimate owners, all the more since, because of the shortage of workers, they had long ago returned the parish to the diocese. Only by employing a lawyer and at considerable cost was it possible to acquire a firm title of ownership for the diocese. Besides, it is very doubtful whether the church property that had been donated by the Spanish government to the people as such could be legally sold or transferred to the religious community of the Barrens. In order to sell a few lots on the church block of Saint Louis because of debts, a special permission by the State Legislature of Missouri had to be obtained. It may be that with the exception of Timon, with whom the incident of 1836 was transacted, hardly anyone in the Vincentian congregation knew anything certain about the church property of Sainte Genevieve.

What they wanted to do in 1836, had to be done anyway in 1840. They had to have at the Barrens a teacher for German theologians. As soon, therefore, as Rosati departed for Europe in April 1840, the superiors took Father Dahmen from Sainte Genevieve and transferred him to the major seminary. His last baptism took place October 20, 1840. His place as pastor was taken up by his assistant Father Gandolfo, and since he understood no German, an assistant was assigned to him, first the Fleming Brands, then Nicholas Stehle from Lorraine.

With regard to the German immigration what Father Gandolfo wrote six years later to Father Pier-Paolo Sturchi, an assistant of the superior general in Paris was true even then in Sainte Genevieve County:

100,000 Germans are expected and are already on their way to the United States. It is almost impossible to imagine the crowd which arrives every day. Also the German language is becoming just as necessary as English and French and we need right away somebody

who knows that language. The few people we have are overburdened with work. Father Huland teaches German to all minor seminarians at the Barrens. I myself sometimes take German lessons with Father Stehle, but *durus est hic sermo*. . . .

The Father Huland mentioned here is Father John C. Uhland, C.M., later pastor of Saint Vincent's parish in Saint Louis, who became the confessor of the German clergy of the city. His name remains even today in blessed memory. Since the diocesan seminary of Saint Louis in Perry County was so far away from the episcopal city and moreover a good distance from the traffic artery, the river, it was considered as inconvenient and often as harmful. Therefore, as soon as the new coadjutor, Bishop Peter Richard Kenrick, came to Saint Louis, he conceived, in agreement with the Vincentians, the plan to transfer the diocesan seminary to Saint Louis. In 1839, Bishop Rosati himself had the foundation laid for a church (Holy Trinity) in the Soulard Addition. It would serve the care of souls among the Catholics of the south side. In March 1839 the Catholics of that district had to this effect circulated a petition which is still preserved in the diocesan archives. The foundation was abandoned after Rosati had departed, and Holy Trinity church was never built. Next to those foundations the Vincentians set up in some houses belonging to the bishop a provisional seminary with a chapel dedicated to the Holy Trinity (October 1842). And Father Dahmen as one of the professors accompanied the seminary from the Barrens to Saint Louis. That he was very popular here is evident from O'Hanlon's words which we have placed at the beginning of this sketch. Dahmen preached in German in the seminary chapel every Sunday, even before the Chapel of Saint Mary's had been opened (September 15, 1844).

O'Hanlon reports about the further fortunes of the seminary as follows:

Our Seminary had been situated within the Soulard Addition to Saint Louis - the estate of a Creole Catholic gentleman whose fine brick mansion was near us - and through it were marked off new streets, the whole of that fine property. . . .

At one of the evening recreations, Father Timon came in to meet the assembled students, and he informed us, that soon we might be in preparation for a flitting to Monsieur Soulard's fine house, that a large plot had been secured on which foundations and walls had been already placed, that these should be torn down and transferred to another site, where the present church of Saint Vincent de Paul stands. About this time, also, the slight rafters supporting the plank flooring of our temporary church had given way on Sunday, while a numerous congregation was present. A panic ensued. Several persons having been seriously injured in their eagerness to escape through the doors and windows, High Mass had been interrupted until something like order was effected; and it was found that only in one particular section the floor had sunk down but a few feet. To save expense the Seminarians unanimously proposed to Fathers Timon and Paquin that they should have a holiday, that picks, crowbars and shovels might be borrowed, while they engaged to level the walls, and to root up the foundation stones, so that they could be carried away for the new site. Permission was obtained and the very next day all went cheerfully to work. A perfect demolition was effected before the day was far advanced, and not one stone was left over another except in a loose state and separated from mortar or cement.

The new house and its garden were soon ready for our reception, and with all expedition we removed our furni-

ture and effects to a much better site. . . .

In the year 1839, the foundation for a new and a large church had been laid beside our former Seminary, and in the humble chapel of Saint Mary's attached, English speaking and German congregations met at stated hours. Now we had uprooted all those the foundations, and the stones had been carted away to the better site selected. A new design was formed, and an edifice cruciform in shape was planned. . . . Great preparations were made to have all things in readiness to lay the foundation stone - on the 17th March 1844 - under the invocation and title of Saint Vincent de Paul. . . .

Meanwhile our new church was progressing, while our Sundays and Holydays were still spent in the old chapel, during the hours of High Mass and Vespers. In the summer of 1845, the latter was abandoned and the former was opened for Divine service.

This statement of O'Hanlon also contains an error. The seminary chapel was not dedicated to the Mother of God; it was called Holy Trinity Chapel.

As soon as Saint Vincent's Church was completed, Father Dahmen was appointed as its first pastor. The superior of the house was Blaise Raho, Dahmen's assistants were Francis Burlando and John Serreta. Father Dahmen kept his place in the seminary as professor, as long as it was in the hands of the Vincentians. In 1845, there were four German pastors in Saint Louis: Father J. Fischer (from Lorraine) at Saint Mary's Church; the Jesuit Father Cotting (from Switzerland) at Saint Aloysius Church; Father Joseph Anthony Lutz (from Baden) at the Irish Saint Patrick's Church and Father Francis X. Dahmen (from the Rhineland) at Saint Vincent's Church.

Of Father Dahmen's activity, which extended to the French, the Irish, and the German's, there is nothing extraordinary to report. The seminary did not long remain at Saint Vincent's. In 1848, the Vincentians declared that they did not

have enough men to serve two seminaries, their own community seminary and the diocesan. Therefore Bishop Kenrick turned the seminary over to the diocesan priests, with Father Duggan as Rector, and transferred it to Carondelet. The minor (preparatory) seminary remained at the Barrens.

As long as the seminary remained in the hands of the Vincentians, Father Dahmen functioned as professor, besides his work in the care of souls at Saint Vincent's. The superior of the house of Saint Vincent's was, since 1845, Father Blaise Raho. In 1847 Raho was transferred to Saint Vincent Seminary in New Orleans (in 1855, he went with Bishop Amat to Monterey, California, and died in Los Angeles, December 11, 1862). His successor in Saint Louis was Father Francis Burlando. During 1850 and 1851, Father Dahmen was alone at Saint Vincent's Church. In September 1852, he was sent by his superiors on community business to Paris. In the directory of January 1853 there appear at Saint Vincent's Church: Reverend Anthony Penco, Francis Burlando, Aloysius Parodi, and John G. Uhland. The good Father Uhland was also Dahmen's successor as pastor of the Germans at Saint Vincent's. At Sainte Genevieve there functioned at that time the diocesan priest Ireneus M.J. Saint Cyr and Father Anselm (from Lorraine). Father Dahmen apparently was the representative of the American branch of the Vincentians in Paris. He lived there almost fourteen years. As Father Frederick Maune, the local Superior of Saint Vincent's Seminary in Germantown kindly informed us, Father Dahmen died at the Motherhouse in Paris, March 26, 1866, at the blessed age of 77.

Father Dahmen used an excellent French in his letters. Though he was involved with the French throughout his life, he did not forget his German countrymen. He began to preach in German at Sainte Genevieve as soon as the immigration began and also in Saint Louis he preached the word of God to the Germans in their mother tongue from his arrival (1840) until his departure (1852). We have researched his course of

life with special love and it was a real joy that we were able to put together a somewhat complete picture of his life.

The *Pastoral Blatt* considers it as a special honor to have been able to revive the memory of the four German pioneer priests: Father de Saint Pierre, Father Bernard de Limpach, Father Francis X. Dahmen, and Joseph Anthony Lutz. They were almost forgotten and even people well informed in local history knew little more than their names. Many data were extremely hard to get. All the greater is the joy over the completed work.

Appendix

An eyewitness account confirms and supplements Holweck's remarks about Dahmen: ". . . Rev. Francis Xavier Dahmen, a German by birth, and the companion of Bp. Rosati in his long journey was then only deacon, but soon after his arrival in U.S. was promoted to the order of priesthood, and placed to exercise his holy ministry at St. Genevieve, Mo where he had constant occasion to use the French and German languages both of which he spoke perfectly. He still lives in the community of the Maison Mere, Paris, having reached the venerable age of 76 years, and in the enjoyment of all of [his] excellent health and almost all the buoyant spirits of his youth.

"I may as well observe here en passant that Father Dahmen had belonged to a regiment of dragoons in the Napoleon wars in Spain, when Wellington commanded the English army and aided the Spaniards against Napoleon. He had distinguished himself as a dragoon in many a brilliant charge on the English, when he was finally made prisoner of war and carried to England until the time arrived for the exchange of prisoners. When finally released and set at liberty he abandoned the military for the ecclesiastical profession and repaired to Rome to pursue his ecclesiastical studies. Before leaving England he had acquired considerable knowledge of the English language.

He entered the Society of the Congregation of the Mission at Rome and at the time of Fathers DeAndreis and Rosati's departure for the American mission expressed a wish to join and was accepted, being considered as a promising and useful missionary in possession of four languages so useful on the American Missions - the English, French, German and Italian. Fr. Dahmen's name is found for the first time in the Baptismal Register of the Church of the Holy Cross, La Salle, on the 23rd April 1841. He continued to labor and attend the French and German Catholics in and about La Salle until the month of March of the year following, when he was recalled to Missouri, and his place supplied by another French-German missionary, Rev. Nicholas Stehle who labored on the missions for about one year and a half and was recalled to the Barrens."

Account taken from "A brief memoire of the establishment of the house of the Lazarists at La Salle, state of Illinois, U.S.Am. written in the year of our Lord 1861-2 by the Rev. J. O'Reilly while superior of the seminary of Our Lady of Angels, Niagara, at the request of his provincial or visitor, the Very Rev. S.V. Ryan." Manuscript in the archives of the Eastern Province, Saint John's University, Jamaica, New York, pp. 11-13.



To enjoy, we must love; and to love, we must sacrifice.
Mother Seton