

Our Catholic History  
Rev. P. Eugene Hagedorn, O.F.M.  
serialized in The Teutopolis Press  
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as the friars celebrated fifty years since their coming to the U.S.  
(edited by Fr. Lawrence Jagdfeld, O.F.M.)

Fr. Damian in this same letter (May, 1859) also asks the Provincial for teachers, but only for such as were willing to become Tertiaries regular in order that they might be employed at the discretion (without the appearance of seeking filthy lucre) for the salvation of youthful souls and even of adults.<sup>i</sup>

“We can use two of such teachers here. But in the first place they must be tried in your Novitiate, even if during a few months only. It would be desirable that they show a liking for the English language and be able to play the organ tolerably well. One of them might also be our Syndic<sup>ii</sup> because August appointed for us is of no use to use, living ninety hours distance from here.” Fr. Damian moreover requests the Provincial to spread in this monasteries devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and testifies that since it’s introduction at Teutopolis he has found great relief in his spiritual functions. “Yes,” he continues, “by and by, all will turn out well, and without doubt God has sent us, weak as we are, in order to encourage the strong and to cause us to exclaim: ‘Das hat Gott gethan!’<sup>iii</sup>; and in order that also the critical wiseacres may understand: “Non in curribus, non in equis, sed in Domino.”<sup>iv</sup> Poor and humble was our beginning and our journey, but we never lost courage; and though we had perished in the waves of the seas, or even if, which God forbid! our sphere of activity here be closed against us, yet should we never regret on that account to have made this difficult and dangerous journey. For what we do for God’s sake, is ever good, provided we, with a pure intention, dedicate our strength to His holy Will.

“I hope that your Reverence will greet us about the middle of August when coming for the canonical visitation and bring over a few teachers and a skillful cabinet maker (perhaps Brother Conrad) and an apostolic Father<sup>v</sup> who speaks French well is called long ago by Almighty God. I say at least one; for just think, how painful it must be to me, when on Sundays or during Easter time, or at the time of distant missions, I am alone for eight days to three weeks, always in danger of being summoned on remote sick calls and obliged to leave the parish alone, or of myself dying without the sacraments, etc.” The Superior also requests the Provincial to bring along faculties from Rome, to erect the Confraternity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and of the Precious Blood (as the Bishop gives faculties for erecting the Confraternity of the Sacred Heart of Mary,) also to bring the “Choral-Book” or Antiphony with the Latin Masses, hymns, Litanies in large octavo,<sup>vi</sup> formulas for scapulars and leaflets (explaining the scapular), and a few copies of pamphlets, containing the prayers for the first communion of children.”

### **Labors and Joys of Missionary Work**

What Fr. Damian did at Teutopolis, the other two Fathers did on a smaller scale in their stations.

The Fathers however were not satisfied in trying to win new recruits for the American missions, “where so many lose their virtue and their faith, because there is a dearth of good and zealous priests,” but they strained every nerve in their field of labors. And this was by no means limited to Teutopolis, Effingham, and Green Creek. Besides their ordinary parish work, they conducted six missions before January 1, 1859,

at St. Libory's, Breese, Hanover, Teutopolis, Green Creek and Effingham. What made this arduous task still more arduous was the fact that the missionaries not only preached the many and long sermons, but also heard nearly all the confessions. When after spending hours in the confessional, they were almost spent with fatigue and thought it impossible to go on with the work, there came in the woods, as Fr. Servace writes, another stray sheep that had kept aloof from the fold of the true shepherd for many years, in order to make a clean sweep, sometimes the first confession on the American continent, and turn over a new leaf, having made peace with his God and his conscience. This filled the hearts of the Fathers with new courage and new joy and enabled them to go on with their laborious task and caused them to render thanks to God a thousand times. They were greatly consoled and spurred on, when they saw the zeal of the good people, thirsting for eternal salvation, surrounding the confessionals as early as three o'clock in the morning and persevering until late at night. "Formerly," writes Fr. Servace, "I should have believed that for me at least it would be impossible to hear so many confessions for so many hours. But now we find confirmed what the apostles says: 'Omnia possum in eo, qui me confortat.'<sup>vii</sup> Besides, you may imagine, that the administration of the Sacrament of Penance (as that of the Holy Sacraments in general) is connected with difficulties, of which you hardly think; at times there are cases apt to drive the perspiration to the pores."

While on their missionary trip to the south, from November 4<sup>th</sup> to the 26<sup>th</sup>, 1858, a letter was received from the Bishop, asking one of the Fathers to meet him at another place. Since they were not possessed of the gift of bilocation, this was impossible. On Christmas Day, Fr. Capistran sang two high Masses at Effingham (after giving two missions of eight days each immediately before) and preached three sermons and by a mistake did not get to eat so much, as he was wont to get at the monastery on Holy Friday. Such and even more severe fasts occur frequently and must be observed though they are not noted in our Directories and are mentioned neither in our Rule nor our Statutes. "We are moreover obliged to spend many a night in wretched log houses, which with you (in Europe) would not be deemed good enough for (certain unclean animals). They are built of logs, placed one above the other, and the holes are filled with mud, at times in such a way that the wind enters at one end and makes its exit at the other. Also the fructifying rain pours through the ceiling. Some time ago I had to spend three nights in such a stable. During the night a severe thunderstorm came on and the shower burst just at my side, forcing me next day to resume work in my drenched habit. Add to this, now that summer is approaching, the war one must carry on against bedbugs. And the mosquitoes bite until your skin is blistered. But all this matters not, people are used to it here, and in spite of this we are all well and of good cheer." Thus Fr. Servace writes to the Provincial.

### **A Sickcall to Watson**

But the activity of the Fathers extended still farther. "My chief task," writes Fr. Servace,<sup>viii</sup> "extends To Effingham and environs as far as – I do not know the limits." Our mission district extends, as Rev. Bartels, the former pastor of Teutopolis expressed it, 'to the end of the world,' or as Rev. Menge, the chaplain of the Bishop added, 'a solis ortu usque at occasum.'<sup>ix</sup> At Effingham I know only that Teutopolis is to the east and that Fr. Capistran is 'ploughing'<sup>x</sup> in the north: towards the west and south, however, I do not know the limits." Soon they became better acquainted with their district. Towards the end of November, 1858, when Fr. Servace one afternoon returned from church after baptizing a child, Rev. Fr. Praeses<sup>xi</sup> and one of our trustees came to me and informed me, that a messenger had just arrived in all haste to call a priest to a Frenchman (who spoke English too), who in falling from a bridge had been seriously wounded in the head and perhaps was dead by this time. Fr. Servace was to get ready immediately in order to render

assistance if possible. "I ran," he writes, "donned my riding breeches, took the sacred vessel with the holy oils and got the Blessed Sacrament from the church. When I returned, a saddled horse was ready; the two Frenchmen who had come to get me also mounted in a thrice and away we galloped. We hurriedly left town in a southerly direction, whither I did not know. Soon we disappeared in the woods where the roads were poor. Amid such conditions we are absolutely forced to ride since the roads are often such that a wagon cannot pass them in daytime, much less at night, since frequently even a saddle horse with difficulty wends its way. Here where, by the by, almost every woman can and must ride on horseback, riding is nothing extraordinary or scandalous and can easily be accomplished. We simply don dark-colored riding breeches, tuck up our habit and, when dismounting, let it down and the monk is ready again. In the woods we frequently passed puddles of water and swamps; often we went up hill so that the horses had to climb like chamois, then downhill, which was still more dangerous. Finally we emerged from the woods and came to an extensive plain (prairie) where the roads were in better condition. Here we urged our horses to gallop as much as possible, for every moment was precious, perhaps decisive for eternity. At last, towards evening, we arrived at our destination. Thanks be to God! I found my Frenchman still alive and conscious so that I could administer all the sacraments. As I was later on informed by a brother of the patient, the sick man was conscious just as long as I stayed, when he fell into a stupor and died soon after. When I had done all I could for the patient, I had to baptize a baby, five weeks old, and not until now had I an opportunity to inquire where I was. I found myself in a French settlement, all French Canadians who had lived in this country (America) for several generations. They there live without all spiritual assistance, 140 miles from the next French priest, and are thus in life and death in a miserable condition.

To be continued.

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<sup>i</sup> This paragraph ended the column from the preceding week's column and is provided here for context.

<sup>ii</sup> Treasurer

<sup>iii</sup> "This is God's work!"

<sup>iv</sup> "Not in chariots, not in horses, but upon the Lord."

<sup>v</sup> Father Mathias Hiltermann seems to be meant by this comment.

<sup>vi</sup> Oversized volumes that would be placed on an easel or bookstand so that all could read from the same volume.

<sup>vii</sup> "I can do all in Him who strengthens me."

<sup>viii</sup> In a letter dated May 11, 1859.

<sup>ix</sup> "From the rising of the sun to its setting."

<sup>x</sup> Sic.

<sup>xi</sup> Superior