

Chapter 6: New Horizons [1]

Back in his native Spain, Alemany, "cum permissu superiorum," took up residence in Valencia in the upstairs of a house diagonally across from the old Dominican church, Nuestra Senora Del Pilar. Adjacent to the church was a former Dominican convent now occupied by soldiers and which Alemany hoped might be restored to its former religious use. Here his dream of a Dominican school specifically for missionaries might begin to be realized: young men receiving a Dominican formation in mind and heart but as oriented to the life of a missionary. A French Dominican, Fr. Albert Gebhart, shared the apartment and acted as Alemany's companion and secretary.

The former archbishop, now simply Frater Alemany or Frater Sadoc, O.P., as he signed himself, did daily parochial ministry in the church across the street and worked at trying to get his school --both novitiate and studium -- underway. But on the feast of the Epiphany, January 6, 1888, while hearing confessions before Mass he suffered a stroke. He soon recovered from it sufficiently to continue to work at his project and parochial ministry. After suffering a second stroke, however, he died on April 14, 1888, "at the hour of the evening Angelus." He had wished to be buried in his native city of Vich, and so his body was transported there. With due ceremony and with Canon Narvisso Vilarrasa, nephew of his long time companion, preaching the funeral oration, he was buried in the church of Santo Domingo, where many years before, Brother Sadoc Joseph Alemany had vowed his life to God.

The remarkable parallel between the lives of Alemany and Vilarrasa continued even to their deaths. Born but three weeks apart and within only a few miles of each other; both exceptionally small of stature but big in intellect and spirit; professed and ordained within the same week, in the same country, city, church; coming to the eastern United States as co-workers in the Order's newest missionary field; traveling to the "wilds" of California together, and together establishing and nourishing the Order there; and finally dying within only three weeks of each other. The differences between them, though major, served mainly to highlight their profounder commonality, their mutual rootedness and brotherhood in Lord, Church, Order.

After Alemany left California, Vilarrasa continued to lead the Dominicans. The matter of parish property and use was settled with Alemany's successor, Archbishop Riordan, who recognized and abided by the rights of religious. The Dominicans could breathe more freely, live their full communal religious life and continue -- less frenetically now that the former prelate's pressure was removed -- to do the preaching and other ministry their specific vocation required of them. The ministry, they realized, was important, and in a missionary country, heavy with materialistic secularism and American Protestant individualism, it was urgent. But

equally important and pressing, and precisely for the same reasons, was the contemplative life in which the ministry was to be rooted and toward which it was to point as a witness of the realizability of God's Kingdom here and now. The preaching and ministry, yes, but the prayer, liturgical and private, the quiet joyful study of God's Word, the living together in a brotherly love grounded in the love of God -- here was the beginning and the end of the preaching and its fundamental message.

Here would appear to be the explanation of Vilarrasa's tenaciousness in holding to the monastic, communal side of the Dominican charism for so long a time -- from his novitiate years till his death -- and for the backing he received in it from his California brothers with few if any exceptions. It was a life difficult to maintain, not simply because of the demands of the time and place and of an exacting, active, missionary bishop such as Alemany, but by reason of its very nature. The contemplative, interior, "at home" life is undramatic, unnoticed, and its worth graspable only by a vital faith. Thus the temptation, not only for the western Dominicans, but perennially for the Order at large, to give up on it and become merely active. Vilarrasa, along with other devoted Dominicans of the time like Jandel and Cormier, would see to it that the contemplative soul of Dominican life would not be lost whatever the temptations and pressures to the contrary. Even the energetically apostolic Lacordaire, often (wrongly) contrasted with the more monastic Jandel, was severe in his religious observance -- the totality of his Dominican communal life. "The Rule above all!" was his remonstrance one day to the only other religious left at home when others were occupied elsewhere. One of his biographers tells of this particular incident which he claims encapsulates this aspect of the great preacher's life:

When at Chalais, or indeed in any house of the Order, Lacordaire was foremost in the strict observance of every rule. His punctuality was always absolute. His brethren tell how once he and one other were the only occupants of the newly-opened Dominican house at Toulouse through Lent, all the other members being out preaching. The two kept all Community rules most precisely, but one day the other Religious overslept himself, and instead of calling Lacordaire at three A.M. for Matins, did not appear till four o'Clock. Lacordaire remonstrated, "Avant tout la regle!" but when the same thing happened again the next morning, he exclaimed, "My dear fellow, the Community can never work at this rate! I must bewakesman myself in future!"[2]

This Dominican, at any rate, one of the greats whose active ministry accomplished so much in a relatively few years for his Church, Order and country, would not have been altogether sympathetic with any of his brothers, western or otherwise, who neglected any aspect of the Rule simply because he happened to be alone!

It is often said that Alemany and Vilarrasa, as Lacordaire and Jandel, represented the tension inherent in the Dominican vocation: the one driven by ministry, the other retiring into study and contemplation and monastic discipline. This is not quite true. Bishop Alemany and commissary general Vilarrasa are not to be contrasted as Dominicans, for the simple reason that Alemany in California was not formally a Dominican. He was the devoted prelate of his large archdiocese and all his heart was for the fulfillment of this heavy responsibility. By nature and desire he was, apparently, more active than contemplative -- although in his student days and early priesthood he seems to have relished as well as lived the monastic life; while Vilarrasa, though profoundly appreciative of Dominican ministry, by temperament seems to have been much more the monk than the active preacher. But Alemany, whether as simple Dominican or exalted prelate, could not help agreeing with Vilarrasa on the fundamental value of the contemplative and monastic in the life of a Dominican. For that message was written large in the Constitutions and Acts of the Order and the Acts of each biennial congregation of the California community as well as its later provincial chapters, and it was engraved in the lives of the Saints and Blesseds of the Order. Thus the early brethren in California revered Vilarrasa far above their archbishop, and cherished him as their leader through some thirty five years. In him they found the realization and promoter of the full Dominican charism with its proper emphasis. His ideal, and his way of working it out, was what they wanted for themselves, even though they might find that in their given time and circumstances it might not easily be fulfilled.[3]

There are few direct testimonies about Vilarrasa's virtues, and nothing about whatever vices he may have had. Upon his death there was no eulogy preached. As mentioned in the *Monitor's* obituary describing the requiem Mass: "There was no sermon preached, as it is a rule of the Dominicans to have no panegyrics preached at the obsequies of members of the Order." Something of a eulogy did appear, however, but quietly and hidden away in the Acts of the 1888 biennial congregation. A brief summary of his life and work is followed by a more intimate note on his person and his final moments:

... for the purpose of enlarging the Order he was adorned with many virtues among which especially were piety toward God, charity toward neighbor, prudence in counseling, lovable conversation, regular observance in discipline, simplicity in conduct. Indeed, for a long time it was granted to us to possess him as a most gentle and dear parent to all and to enjoy his paternal love. But... overcome by pneumonia and fortified by the Mysteries of our holy Religion at the extreme hour, still in his right mind, with devout and tranquil spirit, his brethren about him, praying and weeping, he calmly breathed his last at two o'clock in the morning...

There is a more extended and grandiloquent testimony to Vilarrasa, one delivered not at his death but eight years preceding it when he celebrated his fiftieth jubilee of religious

profession on September 30, 1880. At that jubilee many of the secular clergy and religious priests and brothers, "besides the whole Dominican family," were present for the morning solemn high Mass at St. Dominic's, Benicia, and the afternoon banquet in the monastery garden. "All told there were about seventy priests and religious" present for the celebration, as reported in the San Francisco *Monitor*. It was at the banquet that Father Antoninus Rooney, O.P., spoke the panegyric that would be lacking eight years later at the great man's funeral. At such an occasion one would expect to hear of nothing but the virtues of the honoree, and so it was at this particular celebration. In the regrettably florid language common to much of the oratory of that time, Fr. Rooney had nothing but praise for his superior. But precisely because of the nature of the celebration, the person celebrated, and those present -- especially the many Dominicans who would be quick to sense the false and the exaggerated about one they knew so well -- we can expect that Fr. Rooney spoke the truth as he and his brother Dominicans, together with the whole of that audience, perceived and welcomed it.

Rev. Fathers and Brothers: -- We are assembled here today to do honor to one who is justly entitled to all the respect and reverence we can give him, and I say this not only to his spiritual children, but also to the clergy and religious of the whole Archdiocese, yes, of this whole Coast, for the Very Rev. Sadoc Vilarrasa, S.T.L., O.P., by reason of his spotless purity of life, his nobility of character, gentleness of disposition, and his prudent zeal in the vineyard of God's Church, has been a model to all clergymen and religious, and will ever be regarded as a true type of priestly and religious life, not only by his own subjects, but by all ecclesiastics who know him, or will hear of his unostentatious yet most useful career...

Twenty-nine years ago he commenced his work alone, and today, by his energy, by his zeal, by his untiring efforts, he has around him a band of men, who, he knows, approximate, at least, in some degree, to the great models of the Order...Yes, he commenced alone, and today he has under his jurisdiction twenty priests, five students of philosophy, six postulants, and five lay brothers. He is truly the Spiritual Father of all these, and to him, in a great measure, is due the credit of all the good works performed by his priests and other subjects from the foundation of this Vicariate...

In order that every opportunity for learning and solid religion might be given to his spiritual children, he had some to pass their time of studies in England and others in Louvain, or in St. Maximin's. The chief duty of every Provincial and Commissary General is to watch over and protect the seminary; it is, peculiarly, his business, from the dignity and responsibility of his office, to see that the novices, the "spes gregis," are solidly instructed in spirituality, in doctrine, in the ceremonies of the Church, in the Rule and Constitutions of the Order, by which their lives must be governed, and in the sciences for which the Order itself has ever been renowned. Well has our present Chief

Superior on this Coast attended to that most particular branch of his Office, hence the Order here has bright prospects for the future... To this end too he has formed one of the best and most select of libraries for ecclesiastics and religious that I have ever seen. In twenty-nine years he has thus amassed for his children a fortune which will never be squandered and yet which will ever be enjoyable. Rev. Fathers, examine the library collected by our Superior before you leave these hallowed grounds, and you will learn more of his history, tastes, turn of mind, ability, piety and zeal than I could ever describe to you...

Rome was not mistaken... in appointing him to the exalted position or dignity he has been so long enjoying, and which we, his children, pray God, may, for as many more years, enjoy. Rome has ever shown him the respect which innocence of life, integrity of character and solid learning have always received at her hands. Wherever Father Vilarrasa is known (and where is he not?) he is respected and loved. Archbishops, bishops and superiors of religious Orders throughout the United States, reverence and respect the priest whom we today honor, and you, Rev. Brethren of the clergy of this Archdiocese, all show your esteem and appreciation of his worth by your presence at this celebration...

But Very Rev. Father Vilarrasa, Commissary General of the Dominican Order in California, we, your children in God and St. Dominic... have some words to address to your reverence. Each and every member of the Dominican Family in this Vicariate, on this memorable day, testifies through my unworthy self, that he is glad, rejoices in his heart to be the spiritual child of so noble, so pious, so gentle, so discreet and learned a Father, and that he will ever cherish in fond and dear remembrance the examples of every virtue that your reverence has given him, and the mild and tender, yet firm and most sacred government under which he has lived...

Finally, Very Reverend Father, we all, individually and collectively, take this auspicious occasion to renew to your Reverence our obedience, respect and devotion, and we promise you that as in the past, so also in the future, we will be in all things guided by your wisdom, prudence and goodness, and that we will even be more careful hereafter to show still greater reverence and obedience to you in your declining years, knowing well, from past experience, that nothing will please you better than to see us most exact, fervent and zealous laborers in the vineyard of the Church through the fulfillment of the Rules of our holy Order...

Allowing for exaggeration due to time and circumstance, one cannot escape the simple underlying truth in Rooney's eulogy that for him and his audience Vilarrasa was a great and holy man, loved and esteemed by his California brethren universally and by the diocesan

clergy generally. And perhaps Rooney saved for his conclusion that last long sentence quoted above because it was most telling of Vilarrasa, and what his Dominican brothers most appreciated him for, and wanted him to continue to be for themselves and for the good of the whole Order and Church. He was a background man, quietly inspiring and training his men to live the fullness of their Dominican commitment: "from the fulfillment of the Rules of our holy Order," i.e. by living their common religious life, they were to become "fervent and zealous laborers" in the Church, i.e. preachers after the heart of St. Dominic. Again, Vilarrasa and the thirty Dominicans in his charge at the time were in complete accord as to the ideal of their Order and the need to be faithful to it, whatever the difficulties inherent in the actual living out of it.

Upon his death one of Vilarrasa's earliest novices succeeded him as major superior, Fr. Vincent Vinyes. It will be recalled that Fr. Vinyes was one of six novices coming to Monterey from Vich, Spain, in 1852. Because of his intelligence and learning -- before entering the Order he could speak several languages, was well versed in music, mathematics and science as well as logic, Latin, and Greek, and already had some grounding in philosophy and theology -- he was immediately put to work teaching, along with Vilarrasa, the young ladies of Santa Catalina, and when the friars and sisters moved to Benicia, he continued as convent professor and was warmly appreciated for his learning and pedagogy. Once ordained he remained at the Benicia priory as lector of the novices and students and in various administrative capacities, but we also find him now and again in one or other of the parishes entrusted to the Dominicans and giving retreats or parish missions. While still a young priest Vinyes was already known and respected not just by his Dominican brothers but by the California secular clergy at large, so much so that he was several times nominated for bishop. In 1873 Bishop Amat of Monterey proposed several candidates as his successor: Vinyes was second on his list. In the same year Bishop O'Connell of Grass Valley proposed Vinyes as his successor, and in the following year when the California bishops met for their first Provincial Council, Vinyes was their first nominee for Grass Valley. Rome, however, chose Fr. John Prendergast, Vicar General of San Francisco. When Prendergast refused, Vinyes was again proposed. In response to this second strong recommendation, Propaganda Fide consulted Fr. Joseph Sanvito, the Vicar General of the Order, who replied that "Father Vincent Vinyes is deserving of commendation under every respect... I also judge him fit for the distinguished office for which Bishop O'Connell of Grass Valley is singling him out. However, on the occasion of a similar request for Father Vinyes, I pointed out the fact that his departure from his young Province would cause considerable hardship. Father Villarosa [sic] wrote to me on February 4, 1874, 'I thank you especially for your help in preventing that Father Vinyes should be named Bishop. In the present circumstances his loss would appear to constitute a great calamity for the Order in California.'..." In spite of Vilarrasa's objection and the Vicar General's implied agreement with it, the Sacred Congregation in January, 1877, designated Fr. Vinyes as bishop-elect of Grass Valley, which appointment he declined. He presented his reasons to the Sacred Congregation, and then summarized them for Fr. Sanvito:

I have always shied away from every type of responsibility where others are concerned, so that it was mainly to avoid the responsibility involved in the care of

souls that I decided to join a religious order... When I stop to consider how many and great are the qualifications necessary for a Bishop, I cannot honestly find a single one in me. Unfit as I am to rule even a tiny community, how on earth could I undertake the administration of a Diocese? I am led to say this by truth rather than by humility.

One may, then, imagine Vinyes' consternation when in March, 1888, he was appointed by the Master General to succeed Vilarrasa as vicar general of the California congregation -- not as bad as the episcopacy, perhaps, but still an office heavy with responsibility for others. And how even begin to measure up to his predecessor? But Vinyes need not have worried over his inability to be and do as Vilarrasa, for now that the founding father was no longer there to guide and decide, the time was ripe for the leadership of the California congregation to become more diffuse. With some lapses, more and more it would be the local entities, whether of institution or person, that carried the congregation forward into the new century.

As detailed above, toward the turn of the century, some of the small outlying missions began to grow into quasi-independent entities. Initially, in the late '50s and in the '60s those who had the care of the small churches of Martinez, Vallejo, Antioch, Concord, Pittsburg, etc., lived at St. Dominic's in Benicia and, on weekends, would travel to their respective assignments. Then small rectories, whether houses donated or built, would house a resident Dominican or two, who, however, would have as immediate superior the prior of St. Dominic's. Finally, the church would become a parish in its own right and the rectory a formal house with its own superior. Thus in catalogi prior to 1914, Vallejo, Martinez, Antioch, etc. are simply listed as under the care of Benicia. Whereas in those of 1914 forward each of these locations has a listing of its own with the names of the friars assigned and their designated superior (*praeses, vicarius, superior*) -- though they had been long since independent *in practice* of the motherhouse.

St. Vincent Ferrer's in Vallejo is a fine example of such evolution and expansion. It was in 1855, the year following the transfer of their novitiate and studium to Benicia, that the Dominicans began to minister on a regular basis in Vallejo. Like other small northern California settlements in the forties, Vallejo, named after its founder, General Mariano Vallejo, grew in population and size with the gold rush and the establishment in 1852 of the naval base on Mare Island. By the time the Dominicans arrived in Benicia it had become a fair-sized town requiring the Church's attention. Accordingly, each weekend one or other of the friars would either walk or ride horse from St. Dominic's to Vallejo some eight miles distant. An old time resident of Benicia, James Bolton, recalled seeing Fr. Vilarrasa making the trek from Benicia to Vallejo and back again on foot "until the neighbors bought and presented to him a donkey. He rode the donkey all about on his ministerial work." Bolton might also have seen along the same route, and on donkey, horse, or on foot, Frs. Langlois, Aerden, Vinyes. Each in his turn would be heading for the small white church built in 1855 on land donated by General Vallejo. This, the first St. Vincent church, was located on Marin Street, between Capitol and Virginia Streets. It was reportedly a handsome structure: a low, white frame hall with five tall windows on each of its long side walls and surmounted by an open belfry holding the bell from the old Sonoma mission, a gift from General John B. Frisbie, son-in-law of General Vallejo. The seating capacity was about 200. It was on August 19, 1855, that Archbishop Alemany came from San Francisco to formally dedicate the church and celebrate the event with the

local citizenry. On this same day Alemany performed the first Catholic marriage ceremony in Vallejo, uniting Simon Marion of Austria and Anna McCormick of Maryland, U.S.A. Within a year of the dedication, General Vallejo and General Frisbie, with their wives, Francisca Benicia Vallejo and Epiphania Vallejo Frisbie, stood proudly near the baptismal font while Fr. Vilarrasa baptized their infant daughters -- Maria Aloysia Vallejo and Epiphania Anatalia Frisbie.

It was not until ten years later that St. Dominic's in Benicia was able to supply St. Vincent's with its first resident pastor, John Louis Daniel, O.P. Previously, he, together with other of the fathers who came to Vallejo on weekends, was given over-night hospitality by Patrick Haggerty, who lived just a few doors away from the church. But now a small house was added to the church and in 1865 Fr. Daniel took up his residence in it.

In the meantime Vallejo's population had grown considerably. A much larger church was needed, and also a school. On August 21, 1864, Fr. Louis called a general meeting of the parish to discuss expansion plans. Various properties were considered, especially two areas offered gratis by General John Frisbie, now, by appointment of Governor Leland Stanford, commander in chief of the state militia. On September 4, 1864, the matter was voted upon by the whole parish, and the "hill site" at Florida and Sacramento Streets was chosen. Since Archbishop Alemany was adamant against parishes incurring debts, it was agreed to postpone construction of the church until the money was in hand. Several benefactors, besides General Frisbie, immediately stepped forward: Patrick Dillon, who offered to provide stone from his quarry, Thomas Toomey, and a most generous Peter Fagan who told Fr. Louis to "begin your church, Father, and if you run short of money, come to me and I will give you what you need." In little over a year, Daniel had the necessary funds in hand, and, on August 18, 1867, the corner stone was laid. In 1868, shortly after the new church was begun, the first St. Vincent's Church was moved to the top of the hill where, in 1870, when the new church was completed, it was converted into a school for girls staffed by the Dominican Sisters from St. Catherine's in Benicia.

As the church was being constructed so also was the rectory -- both buildings of stone quarried locally, and brick made of the adobe soil plentiful in the area. The new rectory was built with a view to the future growth of the parish, but also of the Dominican presence. Fr. Louis Daniel, of like mind with Vilarrasa, was apparently looking to the time when St. Vincent's would be a priory, requiring at least six solemnly professed friars, as well as a parish. The rectory's ground floor contained two parlors, two rooms for housekeepers, a dining room, and a bedroom. On the second floor were five bedrooms, a recreation room, and a chapel. Both church and rectory were built well for they survived the two major earthquakes of 1898 and 1906 and the rectory continued to house the parish priests until 1934 when it was replaced by the one presently in use.

Though eventually six, and even eight, fathers were assigned to the house, St. Vincent's never reached priorial status. When Fr. Louis took up residence, with him, as assistant, was Fr. J.P. Callaghan, O.P. These two increased to three in 1904, to four in 1912-13, and from then on the number fluctuates, from three again in 1914, 1922-24, 1932, 1935, to four in 1915-17, to five in 1918, 1926, 1937, 1939, 1941, to six in 1936, 1938, 1940, 1943-46, and even to eight in

1947. In 1914, however, the house was raised from simply a parochial religious house to a *domus formata* or vicariate, even though at the time there were only three priests in residence. This meant that the friars had to be complete and exact in their religious observance. And in times of visitation they would be reminded of their communal as well as personal obligations. There might be extenuating circumstances diminishing the requirements of a given formal house, but the circumstances rather than the requirements were to be changed. Thus on the occasion of his visitation of St. Vincent's, January 29, 1916, the then provincial, Fr. Arthur L. McMahon, noting "the ill health of some of the Fathers" and "the many ministerial duties of all," granted that "the recitation of the divine office in common does not seem to be possible." Accordingly, "For the present this will not be required of them." The brethren were to continue their two periods of communal meditation each day, were to have specified communal grace before and after meals, and were to wear the habit when in the house, especially "at meals and when called to the parlor." But they were dispensed from communal Mass and Office. In the following year, however, in a letter dated June 15, 1917, the whole battery of religious observances is not only recommended but demanded of the community. After quoting from his 1916 visitation letter, requiring communal meditation and dispensing from choral office, Fr. McMahon continues:

The fidelity with which the Fathers have observed the ordination regarding common meditation has undoubtedly brought upon the community and the parish many blessings. Greater blessings may be expected through the community Mass and the recitation of the Divine Office in common. At last the time has come when it is possible for the Fathers to discharge these community obligations. It is needless to say that of the religious exercises of a community the most important are the Conventual Mass and the choral recitation of the Divine Office.

McMahon goes on to remind the fathers how important and serious this obligation is, noting in scrupulous detail what is expected of them by both Church and Order.

To what extent the fathers fulfilled their communal obligations, or in what spirit, it is impossible to judge. But that they knew the seriousness of them and their provincial's seriousness about them, is evident. The ministry of St. Vincent's that was meant to grow out of such communal living under its first pastors -- Frs. Louis Daniel, Mannes Doogan, T. Ceslaus Clancy, C.V. Lamb, J.D. O'Brien -- stretching from 1865 to 1921, we can only observe in general and surmise the rest. These years saw dramatic growth in Vallejo's general and in its specifically Catholic population. The fathers ministered to the people in and from St. Vincent's as also its mission church, St. Louis Bertrand, in southern Vallejo. They also had the care of the naval station of Mare Island. The parish school under the management and care of the Dominican sisters, now centered in San Rafael, experienced tremendous growth in these years. A "free school," meaning no or very little tuition, it began with five sisters from St. Catherine's in Benicia and fifty young women. In 1883 it became necessary to add two classrooms and two more teachers. By 1893 the student population had outgrown the present building and so a new, much larger edifice -- two stories with basement -- was erected on the corner next to the sisters' convent. With the opening of the new school male students were welcomed along with the young ladies, resulting in an overall population of some 700 students. In 1903 a classroom was set aside for the smaller children in preparation for

advancement into "St. Vincent's High." Thus began St. Vincent's grade school. The 1912 *History of Solano and Napa Counties*, after praising the school generally, adds that at St. Vincent's "The music department has been made very attractive and is presided over by very efficient vocal and instrumental teachers, all of which with the finely appointed library, tends to make this one of the most thoroughly equipped educational institutions of Solano and Napa counties. At present writing (1911) there are four hundred and thirty pupils in the school, under the direction of a corps of fourteen teachers. The teachers of the instruction have always been women of unusual qualifications and decided ability..."[4] The school served other purposes, too. In 1915, under the pastorship of Fr. J.D. O'Brien, the newly constructed high school was given over to the care of the many victims of influenza. The sisters and priests together with many of the laity of the parish cared for the sick and dying both military and civilian -- shades of the next World War, 1939-46, when the school and parish, under the leadership of Fr. Joachim Walsh, once again served the government by housing the headquarters of the 211 Coast Artillery Anti-Aircraft Division, with its guns set high atop the school roof, and by tending the sick and wounded at the Mare Island naval hospital.

The ministerial power of St. Vincent's early friars and sisters was amply evidenced at the funeral of its first pastor in June of 1896. Fr. Daniel was an energetic and prudent pastor with financial know-how, but even more he was a loving and loveable priest for his people, a devoted and pious religious, who served as confessor and spiritual director for priests and religious as well as laity. One of those whom he long directed was Sister Mary Louis O'Donnell, O.P., who during his tenure as pastor was teacher and principal of St. Vincent's school. She had had Frs. Vilarrasa and Vinyes as her spiritual advisors, and now she turned to Fr. Daniel. He was of special help to her when in 1887 she was elected Mother Provincial with the task of relocating the center of her congregation from Benicia to San Rafael. In this and in other tasks, almost impossible because of the financial indebtedness of her congregation, she relied upon Fr. Daniel for advice and help. His letters to her reveal his practicality but also his deep faith and simple piety. The material demands upon Mother Louis were real and had to be faced prudently and realistically, Fr. Daniel acknowledged, but the spiritual dimension was most critical and must never be neglected. So he wrote in February of 1894, after the sisters had moved to the new convent and school in San Rafael:

You must not impose upon yourself all the responsibility of the debt of Saint Catherine's. Some religious, I should say many, have no idea where money is to come from to meet their many needs. They have no sympathy with those charged with the temporal affairs of the community... I would suggest, also, that you commence a novena to Saint Joseph in March, and he will come to your relief. Have seven candles burning steadily during the novena. Purchase the candles and send me the bill. To this I will add one hundred dollars as an earnest of my concern."

And in April of the same year, when things began to look better for the sisters, he wrote:

I am glad to find, by your letter just received, that you are in a more hopeful frame of mind... You have a great load to carry, but it will help to lighten it by seeking the assistance of our dear Lord, His Holy Mother, and Saint Joseph. Frequently you must remind them of your own weakness and inability, openly declare to them, that when

you unhesitatingly obeyed their divine call to enter their holy service, in the religious state and in a mendicant Order, it was entirely unknown to you that after long years of faithful service, you should be held almost exclusively responsible for so enormous a debt. You must humbly but earnestly remind them that your present indebtedness is not personal, reminding them gently how little it would cost them to help you in your present difficulty, to pay off a portion of your obligations.

It was such childlike faith and trust coupled with a realistic sense of the worth and demands of the temporal that endeared Fr. Daniel to all who were blessed to know him while he was alive and to honor him in his death. The reporting of his funeral is lavish. The whole of the city -- Catholic, Protestant, Jew, atheist, civic leaders, rich, poor, and plain ordinary folk -- joined in paying tribute to the man who loved and served all of whatever race, color, or creed. The bell tolled at the City Hall, flags were at half mast, ministers of other churches attended the services, over 500 representatives of different societies were present, and over 200 carriages with other mourners on foot formed the funeral cortege all the way to the cemetery in Benicia. This was a personal tribute to Fr. Louis Daniel, of course, but also to the other Dominicans, male and female, who labored with him with the same mind and heart.

A similar evolution appears in other of the early churches missioned out of Benicia directly or indirectly through one or other of its original missions. Some began small and remained so: St. Catherine's in Martinez, Queen of All Saints in Concord, and the churches of Pacheco, Sommersville, Nortonville, Brentwood, Port Costa, Crockett, Bay Point (Port Chicago), Oakley - - and by the early 1920s were no longer in the care of the Dominicans. But Holy Rosary in Antioch and St. Peter Martyr in Pittsburg experienced growth, though slow and modest.

Holy Rosary, as we have seen, began when in 1864 Fr. Vinyes was called from Benicia to attend an injured miner at the Empire Mine just south of the small town of Antioch. Every other weekend initially, but soon every weekend, one or other of the fathers from Benicia would serve the incipient parish. It was Fr. Thomas O'Neill, Irish-born but with the California Dominicans from the novitiate forward, who supervised the building of the church. It was begun in early April of 1864 and completed in the following September, as witnessed by Alemany's Journal of Correspondence for September 18, 1864 : "Blessed the church at Antioch under the title of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary. Confirmed about six."

For the next ten years Holy Rosary continued to be served from Benicia as a kind of extension of St. Catherine's in Martinez. Its records for baptisms, marriages, funerals show a variety of names of officiating priests, all assigned to St. Dominic's in Benicia at the time: Frs. Vincent Vinyes, Patrick Callaghan, Louis Daniel, Henry Aerden, Jordan Caldwell, Hyacinth Derham, Mannes Doogan, and, most prominently in those earliest years, Thomas O'Neill. It seems one father would work the missions of Martinez, Holy Rosary, and Sommersville for three months steady and then be relieved by another, who in turn would have his three month term. But it is O'Neill who is most featured as pastor of the several missions. So we read in the *Monitor* of May 10, 1873: "Fr. O'Neill, pastor of Antioch, Nortonville and Somersville, seeing the increase of population and the need of a cemetery, worked for six months to procure one... Blessing of the new cemetery took place on May 1... At 11:00 o'clock one thousand people from the area

assembled for the occasion, a procession headed by Fr. Vincent and McGovern of Vallejo, Fr. Horgan of San Francisco together with our own pastor, Fr. O'Neill... Fr. Vincent spoke..."

The upgrading of Holy Rosary from mission church to an independent parish occurred sometime in 1875. Fr. Patrick Callaghan, like O'Neill a native of Ireland but an affiliate of the western Dominicans, was named its first resident pastor. When he took up actual residence in Antioch is unknown. At the time of his appointment he was finishing out his term as prior of St. Dominic's in Benicia. Where he first resided in Antioch is also not known. There was no rectory at Holy Rosary until 1880, and even this date is doubtful. The first known mention of a rectory at Holy Rosary is in the minutes of a council meeting of St. Dominic's, April 9, 1886, when approval was given "to build a house in the town of Antioch for the Father who has the care of the church of that town." Up until this time Fr. Callaghan may still have resided at Benicia; or he may have been a boarder in one of the parish's private homes. This last surmise may be born out by the fact that in St. Dominic's council book an entry dated December 22, 1876, agreed to pay to "Mr. Griffin of Antioch one hundred dollars and to Mr. Swartz of Martinez fifty dollars for offices rendered to the fathers who have the care of the churches of Antioch and Martinez." Such payment may well have been for the fathers' room and board, including that of Antioch's first resident pastor, before a rectory was erected.

In the October 15, 1870 issue of the Antioch Ledger the Catholic population of Antioch was numbered at about one hundred, seventy-five more, it is noted, than when Fr. O'Neill officiated at the first church in 1864. Parishioners were mainly Irish, who had formerly worked the neighboring coal mines but, with local production steadily diminishing, joined -- some of them -- the incoming Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese ranchers in farming the rich soil of the area. The Southern Pacific Railroad also helped the population to grow. On September 9, 1878 for the first time a train puffed through Antioch and soon a station was established to accommodate the farmers. The Catholics were still mainly of Irish stock, but in the late '80s and early '90s we begin to find more and more Italian, German and Portuguese names recorded in Holy Rosary's baptismal registry. Some of these new-comers, however, were probably in residence in the neighboring fishing and coal-mining towns of Pittsburg, Somersville, and Nortonville, now missions of Antioch.

By the turn of the century the Catholic population of Antioch had grown sufficiently to warrant a larger church. For some years pastor and people dreamed and made plans, both for a church and school, but it was not until March of 1905 that ground for the church was finally broken on 8th St. between G and H Sts. Dedication of the new church was scheduled for April 22, 1906, but the earthquake forced a delay of about six weeks. It was on Pentecost Sunday, June 3, 1906, that the dedication took place with the new pastor, Fr. Peter A. Riley, and his assistant, Frederick B. Clyne, as resident priests. The parish school was to remain a dream until some sixty-five years later when in September of 1955 Holy Rosary School opened its doors to its initial first-to-third graders. Yet all along, from the beginning of the mission to the building of the school under Fr. William Lewis, both the young and old of Antioch had their religious instruction from the fathers, from the Holy Family Sisters, and from the Dominican Sisters both of Mission San Jose and San Rafael, the San Rafael Dominicans becoming resident faculty and staff once the school got under way.

The parish, however, never reached a size sufficient to warrant more than two or at most three resident priests. This, together with the frequency of the change in personnel, suggests that the common religious life could scarcely be lived by the fathers stationed at Antioch. From 1874 to 1903 only one priest was in residence. Then from 1904 forward there is rapid fluctuation between two and three priests, with only one priest again from 1925 to 1928 and once again in 1935. The longest terms as pastor were held by Fr. Patrick Callaghan: from 1874 to 1888, and again from 1893 to 1902. The shortest term, scarcely six months, was that of the missionary to the Indians, Fr. William Dempflin, from June 26, 1892, to Feb, 11, 1893. It would seem he took over the pastorate simply to mind the house until the proper guardian could be found and he would be allowed to return to the work he loved.

St. Peter Martyr in Pittsburg is yet another example of growth from simple mission to independent house and parish. It began as a mission out of Antioch. In the baptismal register of Holy Rosary Church, Antioch, there is indecision as to the name of the small settlement on the bank of the San Juaquin River, eventually known as Pittsburg. Some entries call it Black Diamond Landing, after the coal that was mined in the vicinity in those early days and shipped out on the river, and some refer to it as New York Landing, so named from the hopes of some of the early settlers that it would one day grow into a harbor that would rival those of New York. The first family in permanent residence there was that of the O'Haras. They had a ranch on the west side of the present city which they homesteaded in 1859. Some ten years later other Catholics were in residence, for we find listed in the baptismal register of Holy Rosary for December, 1875, an Anna McCue whose parents lived at Black Diamond Landing, and other Black Diamond residents, mainly Irish, from then on. As with Antioch, when the mines began to fail many of the old families moved out and a new type of immigrant took up residence in the Landing. Many of these newcomers were from a single fishing village in the Province of Palermo in Sicily known as "Isola Delle Femmine." By the 1880s the Italians were in the majority, at first dwelling along the water front but then, as their population grew, spreading to other parts of the village now become a thriving, bustling little town.

The Dominicans served the people of Pittsburg as best they could in the difficult traveling conditions at that time. They would come sometimes from Benicia, sometimes from Martinez, but mainly from Holy Rosary in Antioch. A chapel was built on Second Street, but it is not known when or by whom. It burnt down in July of 1906 and from then until 1910 Mass was offered in the basement of the Elks Hall. A new church, named after the Dominican St. Peter Martyr, was raised near the site of the present church and blessed in 1910. It had a prominent belfry that was used not just by the priest to summon the people to Mass but also by the fire department whenever it had need of it.

By 1911 Pittsburg was well on its way to becoming a fair sized city. Fishing, though still a major concern of Pittsburg, was no longer its principal industry, having been surpassed by the Redwood Manufacturing Company and matched by yet other industries. Italians, however, were still dominant, and they together with Catholics of other nationalities began to demand that their little church become independent of Antioch and a parish in its own right. Fr. McMahon, provincial at the time, acceded to their wishes and in November of 1914 appointed Fr. Reginald Fei, O.P., a native of Florence, Italy, the first resident pastor. The choice was inspired, for Fr. Fei, while a fine scholar and teacher, was also warmly social and consistently

devoted not only to his parishioners but to all he would meet along the streets in his daily walks through the city. And being a native of Italy was no small additional asset in that "little Italy" known as Pittsburg, California. At the time of his installation there were in the parish some 3,000 Catholics, far too many for the miniature church that was meant to serve them, but Fr. Fei managed. He himself lived simply, in a rented house. He wanted something better for the people and for the parish priest, but times were hard and he was not one for pressuring the poor to give what they did not have. As early as 1916 Fr. McMahon was negotiating for property for both church and rectory and even a parish hall, but the execution of plans was slow in developing. Plans were still being laid as late as September, 1919, but still there were delays. About this time Fr. Fei wrote to the provincial explaining the delay in the projected building program: "It will be necessary to wait until the spring of 1920 because the fishermen from Alaska returned with little profit." He also informed the provincial of the parishioners' advice on the matter: "I was talking to the parish about the drive for the parsonage. I have received the answer: now it is too late, rain is near, to build now is crazy, the best thing to do is to wait until next April. No drive, no parsonage, no cemetery, no troubles, that is the solution. Stop all!"

The provincial in turn wrote to Hooper and Co., Lumber Merchants, asking for the delay that Fr. Fei recommended:

May I ask you to permit the offer to stand until next March or April? It has been brought to my attention that, owing to the poor fishing season in Alaskan waters, the seven hundred Sicilians of Pittsburg who are about to return from there, will bring little or no money. And from Mr. Moran I have learned that he has so much work on hand that he could do but little on our house before the rains set in, when the work would necessarily be unsatisfactory and expensive.

An earlier indication of the value of Fr. Fei in the eyes of his provincial as well as those of his people is given in a letter of Fr. McMahon to Fr. Francis Driscoll, the current pastor of Blessed Sacrament in Seattle. The letter, dated Jan. 14, 1917, also reveals something of the kindness, prudence, foresight, and over-all concern that was characteristic of Fr. McMahon throughout his many years as vicar general/provincial. It tells us, too, some interesting details of Pittsburg at this time:

I have given a great deal of attention to Pittsburg (formerly Black Diamond), which promises to be a large city. There is a population there now of about 6000 and there are good reasons for believing that in fifteen or twenty years it will be about 50000. Recently the first unit of a great chemical plant was put into operation. It employs about 170. The steel plant employs 259. There are more employed in the lumber yard and mill. Then there is the rubber concern. The fish packing business has increased. Great developments are being made in building and in extending the streets. One man, or rather a corporation, put up thirty dwellings last year. Many laborers live in Antioch because they cannot find dwelling places in Pittsburg. Mr. Creed, whose father-in-law was Mr. Hooper, has an immense amount of money at his disposal for the development of the city in every way, and he is able to attract manufacturers. He controls some of the industries that are there now, and is looking forward to great increases in their

capacities. At the steel mill they have been using scrap metal, but after awhile they will have pig-iron from China and ore from the mountains of California. And when further advances are made in the use of oil in blast furnaces, there will be nothing to keep the concern from becoming a vast one.

A few days ago I went over the city with Mr. Creed and selected a piece of ground that I got him to give for a church and house... where the center of the city will be for ten years or more. Close by is the great big public school. It is almost across the street from the lots I selected. And directly opposite will be the town hall.

Father Fei has done great work there. It is his work that encouraged Mr. Creed to give the land. We will set about getting subscriptions for new buildings, for which funds will be furnished immediately by the Archbishop.

Just as Father Fei gets into a new house he will have to have an assistant. The Archbishop recognizes this. And he sees as well as I do how the city is going to grow by leaps and bounds, and that the Italian population will be outnumbered by what we will call an American. There is, of course, a possibility of Father Fei's going away. But I think the probability of his going back to Italy is remote. Confidentially I will say that I am hoping an opening may appear at the seminary. The Archbishop esteems him highly as a theologian and professor and I have a suspicion that he would be glad to have him at St. Patrick's. But I do not wish to propose him, partly because I have no one to put in his place, and partly because I wish the Archbishop to ask for him. For years, now about eight years, I have been looking forward to the time when we could have professors in the provincial seminary at Menlo, and in other seminaries. And in educating our men this is one of the things I have had in mind. But much as I desire to have chairs of theology, particularly at Menlo, I wish the Province to be in the position of one giving a favor or granting an accommodation rather than in the position of one asking for a favor.

You see what I have in mind. We must hold Pittsburg through Father Fei and an assistant or through Father Fei's successor and assistant; and we must be prepared to let him teach at Menlo if conditions there grow as they seem to be growing. Among our students there is a fine fellow, Naselli, born in this country of Sicilian parents. He is really very extraordinary, full of zeal and piety and brightness. Unlike so many Italians or Sicilians he is never idle; when he is not studying he is working with his hands. And he will not be above his people or unwilling to labor among them. He will be just the man for Pittsburg or such a place. But we can't have his services under seven years. In the meantime we must have someone else ready. I am wondering if you cannot stimulate Father Sturla to study Italian so that he will be able to use it fluently, and to take an interest in such work as Pittsburg offers. He impressed me very much while he was here. He seemed to show ambition that was lacking formerly. I do not wish to hold out to him any kind of a promise or hope that he may have any kind of a charge in Pittsburg; but you could make use of some of the contents of this letter (of nearly everything but the seminary idea) to get his thoughts turned that way. Later on, if his efforts to fit himself and his zeal and prudence in doing what he has before him to be

done warrant it, I will talk with him. At Pittsburg he will have to be faithful to all, to Italians and to others... just as Father Fei is. By his self-sacrifice and constant attention to his duty Father Fei has won the hearts of all classes. Formerly the Italians were wont to insult priests, now the men raise their hats to them.

Please begin to work upon Father Sturla before I go to Seattle. You may expect me for the visitation within a month, perhaps within three weeks.

Fr. Fei did in fact leave Pittsburg some two years after the above letter was written, but not for a teaching post at the seminary. Rather, he returned to his homeland which for sometime he had been aching for, and it was there that eventually he was able to resume his teaching. The war had weighed heavy upon him and it seems he was biding his time till it ended. So in a letter to McMahon, October 31, 1917, in which he spoke of the difficulty he would have in absenting himself from the parish in order to make his annual retreat in Benicia, he notes: "No news from Rome. Now Germans are in Italy, and I hope the war will be finished before Christmas." Apparently it made little difference to him who won the war just so long as it ended. Finally when the war did end, he made his move, and in another letter to McMahon, June 14, 1919, he announced his intention, adding a remark that may suggest that his five year assignment at St. Peter's was not altogether pleasant, though more humor than seriousness may have been intended: "I think it is my duty to announce to you that on the second day of June, I have written to the Very Rev. Father General, asking the permission to go back to my old country. During five years I have done enough penance in Pittsburg." His departure from the province and provincial was gracious and friendly, but his arrival in Italy was not at all happy, as, in his still broken English, he complained to McMahon shortly thereafter (October 28, 1920):

I am Pastor of the Basilica of St. Maria Novella in Florence. I thank you for everything, and I will never forget what you have done for me. In Italy we have many troubles, and our poverty is misery.

Father General has been very sick. Now I write to you asking your help. Monday, the robbers have stolen to me everythings, my clothings, writings books. I am obliged to buy all again. Our monastery is very poor. Kan you send me some intentiones missarum to help me? It is very sad, but it is happened. In Italy we can not find the stuff for our habit. I am very sad, my writings are lost, my sermons are lost. Fiat voluntas tua! I have seen the Pope, and I was talking with him during half an hour. He is very intelligent, and he knows what he will. Father General will be in Rome, perhaps in January. The religious conditions in Italy are terrible..

As it eventuated, Fr. George Sturla was not appointed to take Fr. Fei's place, but rather Fr. Fred Clyne, fresh from his chaplaincy with the Marines in WW I, and with him, as assistant, Fr. Edward Warren. It was at this time (1922) that Mr. W.E. Creed of the Hooper Estate donated land on Eighth and Black Diamond Streets for a rectory. The rectory was completed by the end of 1922 and the old church was lifted from its foundations and transported to the lot directly behind it. It was Fr. Augustine Naselli, spoken of so highly by McMahon in his letter to Fr. Driscoll, who, as pastor finally in 1927, began and completed a drive for a new church to be

erected on the empty lot adjacent to the rectory. But it was not until the one-year pastorate of Fr. H.H. Kelly in 1932 that the church was finished. Fr. Naselli returned as pastor in 1945 and again began a drive for funds, now for a parish school and convent for the sisters who were to staff it. This time he was able to stay on and complete the project.

As Fr. McMahon had predicted, Pittsburg had grown into a large and energetic city with a Catholic population keeping pace with its growth. Thus the need for a parish school, but also for yet another church to provide for Catholics some distance from St. Peter's. In 1940, under the pastorate of Fr. Joseph Valine, a mission chapel, dedicated to St. Philomena, was built in Bella Vista to accommodate the western sprawl of Pittsburg. Some of the older fathers still living remember offering Mass there. But they remember especially the crowded Sunday liturgies in St. Peter's itself in the late '40s and the '50s, ten to eleven of them, half of them in the church itself and the other half in the hall downstairs. The Masses would be so staggered that the preacher for the day having finished his upstairs sermon might get downstairs in time to deliver it again! But however large the parish in population, the priests in residence remained few in number, averaging between two to four fathers -- sometimes one, rarely five -- till in 1966 the parish was given over to the diocesan clergy. St. Philomena's had already been surrendered in 1962, becoming the present populous Our Lady Queen of Heaven parish.

Such small communities of Dominicans continued to cause misgivings and qualms of conscience in the Western Congregation at large. But it was also appreciated that the territory was missionary, which meant that whatever the Dominican ideal, the practical situation demanded that the fathers be on the road, often without the visible support, the tangible life of the community. For some of the friars, in fact, community living was a rarity. Lone pastors like Fr. Henry Shaw in Antioch and Fr. Fei in Pittsburg, with daily ministry always pressing upon them, could scarcely make the annual community retreat let alone fulfill the daily, hourly requirements of the Rule and Constitutions. They would have to be content with their communal spiritual bond, with their personal prayer for their brothers and the liturgy they prayed with the community in distantia, and with whatever thin physical links they might manage through the writing of financial reports and letters, discussions with the major superior in times of visitation, welcoming others of the brethren or being welcomed by them whenever paths would happen to cross.

In this category of early lone Dominican Fr. William Dempflin especially fits. He differed from other Dominicans who were isolated from community life in two respects: 1) he was a wandering or itinerant preacher, not a resident pastor; and 2) he ministered not to those of European stock who were flooding California, but to the native Indians who were being drowned in the flood, isolated from all community, including, often, their own, being robbed of land home, and dignity. These people Alemany, as universal shepherd, was worried over and demanded that Vilarrasa have the Dominicans minister to them, to which demand, as we have seen, Vilarrasa sharply answered that Fr. Dempflin was fulfilling this work and no more Dominicans could be spared for it. Vilarrasa would certainly have liked to have more of his men working among the Indians, but in and through Dempflin he could rightly feel justified that the California Dominicans were not being remiss in so urgent a ministry.

Fr. William -- seldom did he use his surname or did others refer to him by it -- was born in Weiblingen, Germany, November 18th, 1838. His parents were poor but they saw to it that he had a proper elementary education. At 18 he left Germany for Guatemala and there worked in the silver and gold mines for some ten years. He must have been a prized laborer for he was a big, strong man physically. He was described as over six feet tall, some said six three or four. He had broad shoulders, large head and hands and feet. It was said he found it difficult to pass through doors, having to bow and pass through sideways. In 1866 he applied to and was accepted by the Dominican community of Guatemala City. There he made his novitiate, did his philosophical studies, and began his studies in theology. The latter were interrupted when the new government of 1872 confiscated the properties of religious and banished them from the country. Fr. William might have continued on in Guatemala and become a secular priest but apparently his heart was set on remaining Dominican. He stayed in Guatemala living *extra conventum* for a time, hoping for another change in government, but finally gave up on the expectation. He, together with seven other Dominicans, left Guatemala and after some four thousand miles of hard travel ended up in Benicia. By order of the Master General, he was assigned to the California congregation. He made his solemn profession in the hands of Fr. Vilarrasa in 1875 and, in the same year, was ordained priest by Archbishop Alemany. As he himself notes in a single page summary of his life, his first assignment was the giving of "missions to the English, Germans, Spanish, and Portuguese," of northern California. But he soon found his prime love: ministry among the many tribes of the western Indians, having as "the major part" of his work "to preach the Gospel to ten gentile Indian nations, the Apaches, Cocopahs, Papacohs, Maricopas, and Gilas in Mexico, and the Pumas, Apaches, Pintes, Monos, Monaches, and Diggers in the United States."

That he might better serve the Indians Dempflin set for himself a routine from which he seldom deviated. In the fall and winter months he would visit the various native rancherias in southern and in Baja California and in Arizona. He would then return to Benicia for some rest and religious community life. Spring and summer he would spend with the Indians of northern California, and then briefly return again to St. Dominic's. In this way he could reach all his people once each year, securing a deepening of their faith with every visit, and giving them a chance to know and trust him better. Each of his individual visits was likewise exact and undeviating in its routine, even down to his dress. When traveling he would wear civilian clothes with his clerical collar, but as he reached an Indian settlement he would don his white Dominican habit -- hence his affectionate title among the Indians as "Padre Blanco." He arrived at each settlement at the same time each year, and after each arrival he did exactly the same things in the same way. Midway in any particular rancheria he would send a messenger on to the next settlement. On the following Monday he would set out in his buck-board or on a horse, accompanied by an Indian as guide and companion. Half way to the next stop they would be met by another Indian, who would take the other's place, and the Padre and the new man would proceed to the settlement. Here all had been made ready, with the temporary brush chapel prepared just for this visit, and large enough to accommodate all in the vicinity. The tall wooden cross kept and venerated through the years would be placed before the doorway and, within, the altar properly arranged to hold the mass equipment Dempflin would have with him. Upon his arrival all would be there to greet him. His guide would unhitch or unsaddle the horse and turn him into the corral. Some would try to feed the horse but, mysteriously, it would never eat, though it was always fat. A miracle horse! -- one of several

legends that grew up around Padre Blanco. His horse may not have eaten, but he himself did. He partook of the same fare as the Indians themselves, which may at times include worms and grasshoppers and other like native delicacies. And he slept as they did, fully clothed and on some grass strewn over the bare earth.

Almost immediately upon his arrival Fr. William would begin his instructions, which would continue throughout the week. He would lecture and then question, beginning at about eight in the morning and continuing till evening, with, of course, appropriate breaks in between. Come Saturday, each Indian who had reached the use of reason was expected to make his or her yearly confession. Another legend surrounding Padre Blanco had to do with this particularly difficult requirement:

One day... a strange thing happened on the site of El Tejon ranch. It was a sultry Saturday. The converts had built their tule chapel in a gully. Father William had persuaded all but four to go to Confession. There were two men and two women. Suddenly dark, heavy clouds appeared coming from the direction of the hills and before they were aware of it the chapel was drenched in a cloudburst and the water began to rush in torrents down the ravine. The Indians started to rush for higher ground but Father William forbade them to leave. All but the recalcitrant four obeyed. Father William stood at the chapel door, the onrushing waters divided, leaving the shack unharmed, but catching the fugitives off their feet, drowning two of them while the other two succeeded in making their way back to the hut.

Whatever its truth, the story travelled far and wide among the natives and gleaned for the Padre added prestige and reverence.

Also on Saturday the neophytes and babies were baptized and marriages blessed. Come Sunday, Mass with sermon -- a long one, presumably, since it would be another year before this particular congregation would hear their Padre Blanco again -- would be celebrated, and finishing-up tasks and socialization would end the visit.

Though William adhered to his routine as much as he could, circumstances would often demand flexibility and spontaneity and radical changes in plan. In May of 1881 the San Francisco *Monitor* ran a series of interviews with Fr. William, pretty much allowing him to tell his own story in his own words. In the following extracts it may be seen how often unpredictable the life of this particular missionary often was.

For five years Father William has labored among the Indians, living as they did, their food often consisting of horse or dog meat when such luxuries could be had, but the ordinary bill of fare was fried grasshoppers or fat worms from Mono Lake. The first place Father William visited was Calaveras county, in the vicinity of West Point, where he found a small tribe of Indians whom he instructed and converted to Christianity. He next went into Mariposa county, where he instructed and baptized a tribe of 150 Indians. After he concluded his mission here, a delegation of the Fresno Indians waited on him and asked his services in converting them to Christianity. Accordingly the

Father proceeded to Fresno Flat, where he succeeded in baptizing the whole tribe of 300 Indians....

It was while with this last tribe that the startlingly unexpected occurred, as Fr. William himself narrated:

While I was there some of the settlers who were living with squaws exhibited considerable animosity towards me, partly for the reason that my teachings were designed to break up concubinage, and partly because they were prejudiced against the Catholic religion. I got the tribe together and built a church out of logs and brush. After the church was completed, and while I was celebrating mass, two white settlers, named John Basso and Jonathan Lewis, attempted to ride into the building on horseback, but the door was too low, so they dismounted and interrupted the services. After my congregation dispersed they grossly insulted me and ordered me to leave the place. I refused to do so until I had concluded my labors... The next day they ordered me to leave the place before noon, and threatened that if I refused to go they would take me away by force... I had concluded my work that afternoon and started for Batchee Hootch, the San Joaquin district in Fresno county.

While on the way I saw a young Indian not more than 22 years of age lying under a tree and evidently dying of fever. I got off my horse, and after having given him the necessary instructions, and having obtained his consent, I baptized him. From there I went to a rancheria where about 400 Indians were waiting for me. When I arrived I explained the principles of the Christian religion to them, and remained up around the camp fire until late at night, answering the questions of the chiefs about God, and the future life, and so on.

It was pretty late that night when I went to sleep, and I reposed in the open air on a pile of dry grass close by a blazing fire. I was very much fatigued, and I never had such a refreshing sleep before. In the morning they brought me a bowl of acorn mush. I was very hungry, and enjoyed the novel dish immensely. I arose at sunrise, and proceeded to measure off the ground for a church. It was to be one hundred feet long by 50 feet wide, and was to be constructed of logs and brush. While I was so engaged with a couple of the chiefs, five men drove up with their faces blackened... Two of them were armed with rifles and three with revolvers. They drove right up to where I was working, and one of them said, addressing me, "Are you here yet?" This man had a rifle. The other, who was similarly armed, made a remark to the same purport, and I recognized them as Jonathan Lewis and John Basso. They ordered me to leave immediately... I asked them whether they owned the land upon which I proposed erecting the church, and they said they did. So, not knowing whether their statement was true or false, and not wishing to have any trouble and possibly bloodshed, for the Indians were very much incensed, I consented to leave...

They made William mount a mustang and ride ahead of them, taunting him all the time, mocking the articles of his faith. One of them, with his pistol continually pointed at him sang a song with the refrain, "Captain, where shall I send the bullet through?", which must

have worried him some. They rode for about ten miles into Green Valley, stopped by a large tree and dismounted. Lewis warned William once more: "If ever you come back again you will be hanged on that tree." But as soon as William was free of his captors he returned to his Indian friends,

... the Indians manifested great joy on seeing me, because they had heard of my being spirited away. They were very angry at my treatment, and I advised them to keep quiet and to refrain from violence. I put on an Indian's hat and coat, partly covered my face with a handkerchief and otherwise disguised myself.

Thus equipped, I started in the night time with an Indian guide on horseback to the place from which I had been spirited away, arriving there about midnight. As I approached I heard a great cry of lamentation among the Indians, and was informed that they were bewailing the death of the young Indian, whom I had baptized on the road side. They were rejoiced to see me, and built a large fire on the north bank of the San Joachin river. I instructed and baptized 400 that night. They talked about killing the white men who had taken me away, and I had considerable difficulty in making them consent to remain quiet. At daylight, I arrived at the tree on which my captors had promised I should be hanged if I returned, and I had quite a little laugh there to myself.

Fr. William related other personal experiences, perhaps not so dramatic as the above but equally revelatory of his love and care for the natives. Once again in Fresno county,

I found a very wild and uncultivated tribe, without property, and living upon whatever they could lay their hands upon. I worked among these with good success and induced them to build little houses for themselves and lay up provisions for the Winter. They seem to be very good Christians now. They suffered some persecutions from white men who laid poison for their dogs there and the Indians were afraid that their children would eat of the poison food. They speak no other language but their own. They are a branch of the Piutes and are called Monos.

William explained how he came to know of them and how he was able to communicate with them

A delegation of them came to Botchee Hootch for me. They said they had heard of the white prophet and wished him to visit them. They number about 200, among whom were a few Mission Indians who acted as interpreters for me. They all embraced the faith willingly and were baptized.

Though William was much impressed with the religious zeal of the Monos -- they would travel some thirty to forty miles for Mass -- he also found things that needed correction and he was quick to provide it:

Before I came among them they had a law by which any doctor of their tribe under whose care two or three persons died, was put to death. There would be very few

doctors left if that were the rule observed among whites. I stopped that practice altogether, and showed them the folly of their law.

Another instance of William's opposition to some of the medical attitudes of the Indians was the practice of the "temescal" or sweat-house. Indians who had some serious ailment were placed in a narrow hut, resembling a baking oven, and seated there. After being thoroughly sweated they would emerge and jump into the cold waters of creek or river. Says William, "This last proceeding sometimes kills the patient very quickly. I explained to them the folly of this kind of water cure, and they omitted it afterwards with very good results."

But sometimes the Indian doctor's medicine worked, and William was objective enough to report it and let it pass:

For all kinds of sores and cancers their doctors use suction as a cure. I saw one case where the doctor cut open a cancer on a man's jaw with a piece of broken bottle and sucked the blood out of it. The patient got better, and seemed to suffer no inconvenience from it.

William reports other interesting bits of Indian medicine -- often, however, without recounting the results: "I knew an Indian doctor once who had an idiotic child, and cut open its forehead and the back of its neck with a piece of broken glass. He then sucked the wounds, hoping to draw out the disease in that way." Period. Such silence as to consequence instances how Padre Blanco was slow to judge, much less condemn, the practices of the Indians. Unless the practice was patently harmful he let it be. He was, however, quick to note the virtues of those he encountered. Speaking again of the Piutes, and of a particularly poor group of them, he says: "Towards their sick they are very kind, and they never say a harsh word to or beat their children. The latter are docile and obedient and it rarely becomes necessary to punish them." The very young he admires, as here, but also the old and/or infirm. "The blind Indians," he says, "have some peculiar kind of instinct which enables them to travel without a guide for forty or fifty miles over a rough country without losing their way. I saw an old blind Indian once who told me he would like to go in under a roof because he believed it was going to rain. He said he could feel it, and he was right, because it did rain in a few hours afterwards.

What he also admired about the Indians was their eagerness to learn about Christianity, their natural capacity for it and talents to express it with beauty and delight. And he seems to have respected their way of learning, expressing, and living their new-found faith.

I had Sunday School every day from daylight until dark, with intermission only for meals. The major portion of this time was occupied in teaching them their prayers. They would keep on repeating, "Padre nostro; padre nostro," until they knew it by heart, and then they would recite a little more until they knew that, and so on. I also taught them to sing the simple hymns. They have the finest voices in the world -- strong, clear and mellow on account of their healthy and well developed lungs. After getting through with the day's instructions, they would very often sit up until midnight practicing the hymns they had learned during the day.

Even their superstitions Dempflin respected. He simply recounts them with not the slightest hint of disapprobation or condescension.

Some of the Diggers and Piutes burn their dead, and the relations of the deceased paint their faces with the ashes of the corpse. They have but very few superstitions. They regard the eagle with something like veneration, and when they gather together for a grand banquet, they call it an eagle feast. They do not like to have an eagle fly over their camp, because they believe it to be an omen of death. The Monos believe that there is something human about bears and will not kill them. They believe that the man who kills a bear will be killed himself by one of those animals. They do not like to kill a rattlesnake for the same reason.

What is striking and warming about Fr. William, and what endeared him to the Indians he served, was the love and respect that suffused his service. Other "white men" of his day looked down upon the Indians, saw them as curiosities. They might even have regarded them with fear and hostility, or, if they were proper people, might have proffered their services out of a sense of justice -- to diminish the wrong done to a violated people. But Fr. William regarded the Indians as truly his brothers and sisters and of a dignity to match, at least, that of their white supplanters; and he worked among them because he felt at home with them. "They are good people and worthy of the best care," was his simple, natural statement to Archbishop Alemany about the Indians around Merced, California, in preface to a request on their behalf. Out of this basic attitude grew his happy ministry of love and justice. He seems to have been absolutely single-minded: everything for the Indians.

Everything he could lay his hands on was carried off to the Indians. When in his travels the priest came near a religious house he would always stop. This stay was generally for the night unless the Indians in the vicinity were numerous. In such an event he would stay as long as his labors required. On the morning of his departure he would make a tour of inspection of the house, stables and grounds. Anything which he considered of less use to the Parish priest than to his Indians he would store away in his buck-board and without saying a word, off he would trot to the next Indian mission and there distribute his loot. The different priests throughout California knew our missionary well. They soon learned to lock what they did not want to lose when he put in an appearance. But Father William was loved by all and no priest has yet been found who resented his rapacious habits.[5]

Padre Blanco did more for the temporal welfare of his people than simply bring them second-hand articles. He also tried for larger benefits and for what we call today "social justice" on their behalf. In his letter to Alemany, November 24, 1879, William, with his accustomed lapses in spelling, grammar and clarity, wrote:

They [the Indians in the Merced area] must have a little proper spot of own land where the priest can give them a Mission without being interrupted by anyone, where we can hear confessions, where they can be gathered from Sualnonne [?], Mariposa and part of Fresno Co. and where the Archbishop can easily approach to confirm them. This place would be the Rancho of James Buttlar 10 miles from Mariposa for it is an old home of

the Indians Mr. Buttler is giving to Washinton Territory. Offers have been made to him for his land and cattle, he only has possession no title but he told me that he would not make any bargains with anyone untill he hears from me again.

If the Archbishop could help us and send me an order of 500 dollars I will get the place, fences, house, improvements and some cattle or cows and pigs and have wheat put in the ground, government title which will be given to your Grace.

The Ranch of James Buttler is a very nice location for the Indians and they will be able to support themselves. Mr. Buttler has been living and in possession of this land for the past 15 or so years, his possessory claim is good and a full title can be obtained from the government which I will take up. I will stop here with Rev. Father McNamara a few days awaiting a reply from your Grace.

In another letter of May 12, 1880 -- this one to Bishop Mora of Los Angeles -- he again speaks of the hardships of the Indians and the injustice done to them and asks that something be done about it:

The conditions of the Indians in regard to their temporal life is bad. In San Jacinto Mr. Burns of San Bernardino is about to drive them from their homes. At [?] Farly [?] Tomas and others are about doing the same. At Temecula they are on a sandy creek at agnanea driven away. At San Isidro, Jack Alem [?] also took the land from the Indians here at Agua Caliente. Governor Downy claims the Ranch and where the Indians live. I think that if your Lordship comes to the conclusion to form a permanent settlement for the Indians who have no homes at Pauma Ranch that Pauma could be settled thickly with Indian families. Besides stealing the land from the Indians the agent had put Protestant teachers who also not only preach their protestant dirt to them but also allow the children practice bad morals such is the state of the government of the present Agent. If Mr. Stanford will be elected and must exchange the teacher and also some of the Captains I have some good able Indians to be interpreters for the new Agent and myself can give him important information.

In September of '83 (?) he again wrote to Bishop Mora, Leland Stanford being now governor of California.

After having talked with Mr. Burns about the Indians he tells me that there is a most practical gentleman here able to be Agent for the Indians. his name is M.J. Riley a good Catholic recommended by the Fathers. has a certificate for teaching schools, living here for 12 years, [??], well acquainted with the Indians and would be obedient to the Bishop. Mr. Burns tells me that would not another man be found within three counties that would suit so well as this man. If your Grace has not yet seen Mr. Stanford it would be to our advantage to recommend Mr. Riley. At any rate I told Mr. Burns to tell Mr. Riley to gather as many names to recommend him and send them to the Bishop in order to forward them to Washington...

What overall results Fr. William's efforts had in securing some justice for the native American is impossible to determine. But his beneficial effect upon many individual American Indians was deep and lasting. In a sketch of the Yuma Indian School, dated March 14, 1891, we read that

The sisters have been greatly aided in their good work by the zealous and self-sacrificing Father William of the Dominican Order at Benicia, who has endeared himself to the children and to all the Indians in the neighborhood by his kindness, generosity and piety. No man has done more in the United States for the "red man" than Father William. His life written would make an interesting volume; he has devoted his years in the holy ministry almost entirely to the wants of the Indian; he has shared their camps, their food and their life. Thousands have bowed before him under the words of absolution; thousands have received from his hands the Bread of Life...[6]

And after nearly a century he is still remembered with devotion by Indians in the various locales of his ministry. In the Fresno diocesan newspaper, *Register*, for September 12, 1976, Charles McCarthy reported that "Many families still have holy pictures given them by 'Padre Blanco.' A few of the elderly recall the white-robed Dominican with the dark red beard who baptized them when they were children. They still sing the hymns he taught them in the Spanish language. They talk of the priest's little bay horse which was always healthy and fat, though they never once saw the animal eat." Recently, in Lemoore, California, within the parish of St. Peter's, a chapel was built by the Indians who first received the Gospel from Fr. William. The chapel is on the same reservation where Fr. William helped the Indians build their first chapel which served them for over eighty years until it burned down twenty five years ago. Monsignor John O'Friel, the present pastor of St. Peter's, reports that after one hundred years the tribe is still one hundred percent Catholic. They will have nothing to do with the Protestants, and, he adds, not much more with the local parish! They cherish the Faith received from Fr. William but also the independence within it, also encouraged by their Padre Blanco.

In 1894 Fr. William left California, visited the Master General in Rome, and then returned to Guatemala where he attempted to work among the natives there as was his original desire. But, as he noted in his single-page sketch of his religious life, "I was not able to because of the hate and opposition of the government and all those having died who were of this Province, I occupied myself for one year giving missions on the border of Chiapas and Guatemala and now the 30th of May, 1895 I made the trip, I made a trip to Europe in order to regain strength and especially to put myself personally under the orders of our Very Rev. Fr. General Andrew Fruhwirth, O.P. who gave me permission to stay some months here in Germany." What happened between then and 1912 is at present unknown. In the Fall of 1912 we find William in New York where he took sick and was brought to St. Vincent's hospital. A priest who visited him there described the once tall, strong missionary as now a "thin and weather-beaten" old man. He was transferred to St. Francis Hospital and died there in early December, 1912. His body was waked at the St. Vincent Ferrer's priory and was buried in St. Rose Cemetery, Springfield, Kentucky.

While dying he was happily visited by a young western Dominican student who had been completing his theology in Washington D.C., Fr. William Lewis. It was good, for Padre Blanco and for the California brethren with whom he served so well for so long, that someone from their (and his) congregation was present for the last farewell.

Endnotes

[1]. For Alemany and Vilarrasa, same as above. For Vinyes, WDA XII:1. For other Dominicans mentioned in this chapter cf. their respective files in WDA XII, if affiliated to the Western Congregation, or WDA XIII if outside the congregation. For Vallejo, WDA XI:114, and for other locales, their respective files under Roman numeral XI. For the San Rafael Sisters, cf. *The Dominicans of San Rafael... a Tribute...*

[2]. H.L. Sidney Lear, *Henri Dominique Lacordaire: A Biographical Sketch*, London, 1887, p. 211. Lacordaire's other biographers -- his disciple, Pere Bernard Chocarne, his lay friends M. Foisset and M. de Montalembert, the latter entitling his biographical sketch "A Nineteenth-Century Monk" -- all agree on the intensity of Lacordaire's interior, "monastic" life as both the source and end of the great man's ministry. And at the heart of all was daily Eucharist. "Those who assisted frequently at his Mass say they could not help being struck with the exceeding reverence and thoughtfulness with which it was always said; routine and daily custom seemed quite unable to deaden the solemnity of the act to him. He might always have been celebrating his first Mass, it was said by one of his brethren... He always gave some time after saying Mass to the study of Holy Scripture, which with the Summa were the only books that might always be found on his table." (ibid., p. 213).

[3]. R. Coffey (*The American Dominicans...*) argues the contrast (and conflict) between Vilarrasa and Alemany as also between Jandel and Lacordaire as that of the monastic (contemplative) versus active life. Yet he offers no hard evidence that Alemany did not value the monastic as fundamental to the Order. He speaks of Vilarrasa as having been formed at "the militant Convent of La Quercia [in Viterbo], the bellwether of the nineteenth-century Dominican reform movement" (p. 247), and therefore of the strict monastic persuasion. But Alemany received his initial formation at Santa Maria dei Gradi also in Viterbo and equally strict with La Quercia. And as Bishop of Monterey in one of his letters to the Generalate in Rome, Dec. 15, 1850, he asked that novices for California receive their initial formation in the convent of La Quercia -- hardly the request of one who lacked an appreciation of good monastic formation. With regard to the supposed clash between Lacordaire and Jandel, again Coffey offers no convincing evidence. On the contrary, he speaks of the life-long cordial, mutually respectful relations between the two; and he concedes that there is not the slightest suggestion of any disagreement over matters of observance in letters between Jandel and Lacordaire's devoted "liberal" disciple, successor, and biographer, Fr. Bernard Chocarne: "No hint of any division of opinion, however, is to be found in any of the correspondence which Chocarne carried on with Jandel from America. Chocarne returned to his native France in 1869, and later served for three terms as provincial" (pp. 384-85). Temperaments and emphases certainly differed and there were divisions in France as elsewhere in the Order due to disagreement in matters of observance and ministry. But few if any of the best of the Order denied that authentic Dominican life demanded both the monastic/contemplative and the

active/ ministerial, with the former as ground and ultimate goal of specifically Dominican ministry.

[4]. Tom Gregory, etc., History of Solano and Napa Counties, Calif.... pp. 827-28.

[5]. Msgr. James H. Culleton, The Register, Annual Review, 1931, reprinted in *Academy Scrapbook*, Academy of California, Church History; Fresno, Feb. 1951, p. 246 -- as in WDA XII:50.

[6]. Cf. Dempflin's file XII:50

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