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**MEDITERRANEAN MISSIONARIES AND THEIR  
CONTRIBUTION TO THE EARLY PROVINCE OF ST. JOSEPH,  
1830-1870**

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When one thinks of the American Dominican Province of St. Joseph, one thinks of the Irish and Irish-Americans. With its provincials named Kelly, O'Carroll, Meagher, McDermott, Quinn, and Mulcahy, it is not difficult to imagine that the province was founded and populated by the Irish Dominicans and the Irish immigrants who came to the Eastern shores of the USA. One Irish-American Dominican told me, when I was first interested in joining the Province, "There are the Irish, and then there are the "others." A smattering of Italian-Americans and those of French extraction seem to have found their way into the Province, but not often. St. Patrick's Day was celebrated with great gusto in most of our priories, as the parish priests went off to march in the local Irish parade dressed in morning coats and top hats. But such was not always the case. The Province of St. Joseph was, in fact, founded by members of the English Province. And it was quickly populated by Dominicans from Spain and Italy.

Edward Dominic Fenwick's vision in founding a Dominican province in the United States involved founding a college as the centerpiece. This is why he said he needed the presence of Thomas Wilson (an English Dominican) as one of his first companions. Wilson was the rector of the English Dominican College in Bornhem, Belgium, recently closed down by the invading army of Napoleon. The college, owing to the political instability of the region and the financial depression of the English Province, could not be revived despite several efforts and was finally closed in 1823. Wilson's talents, Fenwick reasoned, might best be used in a new Dominican college in the United States. But instead of founding a

college in Maryland, his home state, which was what he had envisioned, Fenwick was instead asked to go to the Kentucky frontier by the bishop of the United States, John Carroll. Thus the college was founded in St. Rose, Kentucky, and a second one founded in Somerset, Ohio, soon after.

Fenwick devoted a lot of effort to staffing these two colleges, even though he never committed to the teaching ministry himself, preferring to be on the road as a missionary. All three members of the English Province who accompanied Fenwick at first -- Thomas Wilson, Raymond Tuite, and Robert Angiers -- were friars who had taught at Bornhem. One of Fr. Fenwick's first goals was to recruit members of the Dominican order in Europe to add to this tiny group.<sup>1</sup> Even as his idea for a new province was germinating, he suggested to Fr. Concanen, the vicar for English-speaking Dominicans, that the first group going to the United States should include Fr. Tosi, who was the novice-master in Rome. Tosi never came, but Fenwick clearly was looking for Dominicans experienced in teaching or in leadership. Once he had established the new province, he would continue these efforts at every opportunity.

However, it was not only academics whom he attracted to his fledgling province, but a mixed bag of Dominicans interested in various ministries, which could be divided into three groups: academics, missionaries, and pastoral workers within the province. And the very first person he attracted, Raphael Muñoz, was none of these.

Fenwick, having been appointed the first bishop of Cincinnati in 1822, soon embarked on a trip to Rome in 1823, thinking his province was in good hands with Thomas Wilson at the helm as provincial and rector of the college in Kentucky. But Fenwick needed a sure hand to help with his new diocese, so he recruited Raphael Muñoz. Here, clearly, was someone with experience and connections. Muñoz was born in Granada around 1775 and made profession at that city's Holy Cross convent (date unknown). He served as chaplain for at least a year with Irish soldiers serving in the British army during the Peninsular War waged against Napoleon. After 1815 he held the position of confessor to the Spanish Embassy in London and possibly confessor to the Spanish royal family. The latter may explain why he was given a chalice by King Ferdinand VII when he was departing for the United States.

Fenwick wasted no time in putting him to work and giving him considerable responsibility. Muñoz arrived in Ohio before the early summer of 1825, whereupon Fenwick (still in Europe) appointed him Vicar-General of the Diocese of Cincinnati, which encompassed all of Ohio and Michigan at the time. (Vicar-Generals acted as bishop in the absence of the duly-appointed bishop.) In 1828, on Fenwick's return to the diocese, Muñoz had been replaced as vicar by John Augustine Hill, an Englishman, and was residing at the college in Somerset, Ohio. He

was sent by Fenwick to St. Rose to restore order to what had become a contentious house.

The province was not in such good hands, after all. Wilson, the first provincial and mainstay of the college at St. Rose, had died in 1824, while Fenwick was away in Europe. Raymond Tuite quickly claimed the role of provincial on the spurious grounds that he was the “senior member” of the original founding group, and the obvious heir to the throne.<sup>2</sup> Complaints about Tuite abounded – namely that he was not dividing the property in half and sending the proceeds to Ohio, as had been previously agreed on, and that he had a drinking problem. Of the eight Dominicans living at St. Rose, six of them petitioned Fenwick’s vicar at the time (the above-mentioned John Augustine Hill) to have Tuite removed. Only Tuite and his friend S.L. Montgomery (who was also accused of problem drinking) did not sign the petition.

Two matters had been cleared up: Fenwick was now not only the Bishop of Cincinnati but had been appointed to be the Commissary General (or acting provincial) of the province. This province, which had allegedly broken into two provinces – Kentucky and Ohio -- had been “reunited” by Rome. So now there was no question of two provinces, and Raymond Tuite was *de facto* deposed as “provincial”, if he had ever been recognized as such. Fenwick still needed to clean house in Kentucky and Muñoz seemed to be the most able administrator to do it.<sup>3</sup>

Muñoz not only needed to enforce discipline and observance in a house that obviously had become divided, but also seems to have been charged with the task of closing St. Thomas College in St. Rose for good. In closing down the college, he allowed the convent of sisters to remain and their school to continue.<sup>4</sup> His attempt to establish discipline may have met with some resistance. Samuel Mazzuchelli, who lived under Muñoz for a brief time, described him as *poco fanatico*. Later on Stephen Byrne, in his short history of the Province, wrote cryptically, “Father Muñoz introduced many reforms that his successors as Prior have respectfully and steadfastly retained. He was Prior for only one year” (Byrne, *Relatio*, Vidmar, p. 23). His short term as prior ended on January 1, 1830. His premature departure as prior may not have been due to protests over his heavy hand, but was perhaps owing to ill health. He died the following July in Cincinnati and is buried in Somerset, Ohio.<sup>5</sup> Tuite died in 1833.

While Muñoz was being appointed prior of St. Rose in 1828, a boyish young Italian Dominican arrived in Cincinnati in the same year. He was not yet ordained a priest, but would study for the priesthood and improve his English at St. Joseph’s in Ohio before being ordained by Fenwick and sent to the “Northwest Territory” of upstate Michigan, its northern peninsula (given to Michigan in 1836), and neighboring Wisconsin. Fenwick had a particular affection for upper Michigan and

had previously ministered to its white and Indian populations and knew the great need for priests in the area. Mazzuchelli would prove to be a tireless worker – ministering to several Indian tribes (the Ottawas, Chippewas, Menominees, and Winnebagos). While he preached in French and English and communicated with the Indians through an interpreter, he also produced a prayer book in the Winnebago language. Soon his ministry spread to Wisconsin, Illinois, and Iowa.

Mazzuchelli often worked alone. When the Diocese of Dubuque, Iowa, was founded in 1837, Mazzuchelli was its only priest. This isolation seemed to suit Mazzuchelli well, though his independence stirred some controversy within the province. Complaints about Mazzuchelli surrounded his lack of use of the Dominican habit, his dressing the Dominican sisters in black (a far more practical color on the frontier) and his relationship with a Miss B. Provincials found him to be a helpful eccentric and generally left him to his missionary work. In 1835, the provincial, Nicholas Dominic Young, having heard of the complaints, summoned Mazzuchelli to Somerset in 1835, but soon allowed him to return to his mission field.<sup>6</sup>

In 1844 he traveled to Rome, without the knowledge of the provincial (George Wilson), in order to seek permission to begin a new Dominican province, which he called the Province of St. Charles Borromeo, with himself as the provincial. When he returned to the United States he purchased 500 acres of land at Sinsinawa Mound in Wisconsin and opened a college for men there in 1846. He attracted young Italian Dominicans, including his own family members, but they did not endure and he complained of their laziness. By 1849 he had renounced the idea of a new province and returned the property to the province.

A later provincial, Joseph Augustine Kelly, travelled to Sinsinawa and met with Mazzuchelli in 1859. In commending the location and grounds of the property (now 700 acres), Kelly describes the cemetery: “F. Samuel has a portion of his intended grave already scooped out [and] some wag placed a slab over it with the inscription: ‘Hic non jacet’ [‘Here does *not* lie ...’].”<sup>7</sup> Kelly was impressed with the achievement of Mazzuchelli and the sisters, praising the “prosperity” of the female students at the academy, the growth of the sisters’ community, and the lack of debt. He even singled out Mazzuchelli for praise, citing the fact that he “has been the Pioneer of religion in Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin; he built the first church in Dubuque, Galena, most of the river cities, and in most of the country towns around here. ... He is active, zealous, and I believe a good man.”<sup>8</sup>

However, Mazzuchelli, with his “idiosyncrasies,” could be vexing to the provincial. “He (Mazzuchelli) has unhappily an Italian way of his own of doing things. Though a professed Dominican he seems to

entertain as holy a hatred of the white habit of the order... The sisters by his advice have separated from the order, wear a black habit and are guided by rules which he has drawn up for them, and which he claims to take from our Constitutions. He is about to publish a little book containing these rules with commentaries of his own."<sup>9</sup>

Mazzuchelli died in 1864. The Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa revere him to this day and have tirelessly pursued the cause for his canonization. Despite a few mistakes along the way – he admitted that he was not a good administrator – including a premature and ill-conceived foundation of a new province (it would come in 1939) and a rather bizarre attempt to buy back the Sinsinawa property and re-start the college -- his achievement was prodigious. Fenwick chose wisely when he sent such an independent and energetic missionary into the wilderness of Michigan Territory. Not many priests would have gone where Mazzuchelli went, let alone accomplish what he accomplished. He built twenty-five churches, many of which he designed himself, in what would become four different states (Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Iowa). He founded Sinsinawa College and the congregation of Dominican sisters who have continued the college to the present day. He was tireless in ministering to the English, French, and Indians peoples. He advocated for Indian rights when he protested to President Andrew Jackson that educational funds due to the Indians had gone entirely to the Episcopalian mission.<sup>10</sup> He complained loudly when treaties were violated and the Indian Removal Act was passed. His realism in adapting Dominican life to the frontier made him enemies but also earned him the eventual respect of Thomas Grace, the Dominican Bishop of St. Paul, Minnesota, who complimented Mazzuchelli on his “enlightened views and correct judgments of matters and things connected with the Order.”<sup>11</sup>

In the early 1840s more Dominican reinforcements arrived in the United States as another Italian, Hyacinth Pozzo, and two more Spaniards, Joseph Sadoc Alemany and Francis Cubero. Pozzo seemed promising as he had been a Professor of Theology at the University of Turin, but proved to be a disappointment. Either his restlessness or his obsession with homeopathy (which was invented in 1798 and was considered to be no more scientific than faith-healing) found him moving from the United States to the English Province in 1854, where he was made Regent of Studies, but then quickly (after a year-and-a-half in England) back to his native Piedmont. The Sardinian government dismissed him from a teaching position there (again, on account of his obsession with homeopathy) and he spent most of the rest of his life in Constantinople.<sup>12</sup> He died in his native Piedmont in 1862.<sup>13</sup>

Francis Cubero stayed in the United States until the end of his life, but his career as a Dominican was also less than ordinary. He served



as novice master in both St. Rose (1845-7) and St. Joseph after 1847. His other assignments included parish work in Memphis and Zanesville during the 1850s. He could be *un poco fanatico* himself. In 1859 the provincial, the same Fr. Kelly as above, drove to the parish of St. Thomas in Zanesville, where he commented on the interesting confessions he was hearing: "Encountered some strange cases, illustrating the feelings of the Rvd guides of souls here (Frs. Cubero and Montgomery), who are more strict than the law itself. A woman told me she had never been a drunkard, but still was forced to take the total abstinence pledge before she was allowed to go to communion. Said she was forced to it, and did not intend to keep it at the time, and wanted to know if she sinned, in breaking such a pledge." Kelly commented, "Thus great rigor often begets sin, instead of destroying it. Some of the people are kept on the stool of repentance for months at a time. Though the intention may be good, we cannot applaud the act. Our law is one of mercy, of gentleness, and of love."<sup>14</sup>

And typical of the rigor preached to the women of St. Thomas was the ban on "wide sleeves and hoop skirts" then fashionable. While Kelly said the Sunday Mass, Fr. Montgomery "preached for an hour on wide sleeves and hooped dresses -- that wide sleeves (sic) on ladies arms, unless they wore an under sleeve, made them sin mortally; that it was a mortal sin to wear hoops, all who (had) done so would be excluded from the sacraments here and would go direct to hell hereafter." Kelly, a strict disciplinarian himself, was appalled and commented sarcastically, "He made no distinction between narrow hoops or wide ones." He also noted that "Fr. Cubero stood at the church door to see if any lady entered with the odious hoops; he found one, and told her she had better go home, or some where else as it was no use for her to come to church." On the preceding Sunday Cubero had denounced not only women's hoops but also men's chewing tobacco, declaring "they were an abomination to the Lord, and would be turned out of church by physical force, if they came there." The provincial noted sadly in his diary, "Comment is unnecessary."<sup>15</sup> Beginning around 1861 Cubero was secularized (served as a diocesan priest) for a period of about ten years, working at parishes in Cincinnati and Dayton, but returned to the Order in 1871 and was assigned to the sisters at St. Catherine's as their chaplain. Kelly ran across Fr. Cubero again in 1872, when Kelly was subprior in Louisville and noticed that Fr. Cubero had just taken up residence at the motherhouse at St. Catherine's where "he is to be chaplain for life." Apparently doubting that this would work, Kelly commented, "We shall see."<sup>16</sup>

It is possible that Kelly's hesitations about the ministry of Fr. Cubero were not universally held. In 1847, the provincial chapter failed to elect a successor to Fr. George Wilson. He wrote to the Master General in

Rome and suggested three names: Fr. Bowling, the highest vote-getter but one whom Fr. Wilson urged the Master not to accept, and Fr. Cubero and Fr. Alemany, “who are both men animated with great zeal for the good of the Order and will be tempted by nothing that is not in its best interest”.<sup>17</sup> Cubero died in 1883 and is buried at St. Catherine’s having been, so it seems, its “chaplain for life” after all.

The man who was eventually chosen to lead the St. Joseph Province was Joseph Sadoc Alemany, the third of the three missionaries coming to the Province of St. Joseph in the early 1840s. His credentials, even as a young man, were impressive. After entering the Order in Aragon and completing his studies in Italy (again, due to the anti-clerical laws of Spain in 1835), he was ordained in Viterbo in 1837. Soon after he was appointed to be assistant novice master and was sent to Rome to complete his theological studies and his preparation for the mission in the United States. On his arrival in the United States, purportedly to assist Bishop Miles in Tennessee, he was initially sent to Cuba, which was quickly overrun with the same anticlericalism that was affecting the mother country of Spain. Alemany returned to Tennessee and was appointed to the cathedral in Nashville and then to the parish of St. Peter’s in Memphis.

Within six months of becoming provincial, Alemany was approached by Fr. Peter Augustine Anderson, O.P., a native of New Jersey, who asked permission to travel to California to serve as a missionary to the thousands of Americans flooding the territory in search of gold. This was granted and Fr. Anderson headed west to spearhead the Dominican presence in California. He would soon be followed by Alemany himself, who was appointed in 1850 to be the first bishop of Monterey, California. He was accompanied by fellow Dominican and Spaniard, Francis Sadoc Vilarrasa, whose job was to establish the Order (and a new Province) in California.

Alemany was soon appointed archbishop of the new archdiocese of San Francisco in 1853 and served as its archbishop and oversaw its phenomenal growth until 1884, when he resigned and returned to his native Spain, where he died in 1888. His body was exhumed and returned to San Francisco in 1965 where it is buried in the Archbishops’ Crypt in Holy Cross Cemetery in Colma, California.

Three last “Mediterranean Missionaries” arrived together in the United States in 1844: Januarius D’Arco, Francis Sadoc Vilarrasa, and James “Luigi” Orengo. Fr. D’Arco, born in Naples, Italy, was originally recruited as an academic, but saw nearly twenty years of parish service in the Province in Ohio, Tennessee, Indiana, and Wisconsin before becoming a missionary apostolic in 1864 or 1865. Late in life he was secularized and died in Indianapolis, Indiana in 1899.

Luigi Orengo was a native of Liguria in Italy, and served in Kentucky



from 1845-50, but made his mark in Tennessee, where he was a missionary from 1850-75. Like Mazzuchelli in the American "Northwest", Orengo seemed to have been both tireless in his ministry and also somewhat on the "edge" of the Province. He did not get high praise from one pastor in Memphis, the indomitable Joseph Augustine Kelly, who remarked in a diary that Orengo "is here to build an Italian church, a great humbug that will die still born."<sup>18</sup> But Kelly had underestimated his man; the Italian church of St. Joseph would be founded in Memphis in 1875 and a Fr. Luisielli, a secular priest, would be its first pastor. 1875 was the same year that Orengo returned to Italy for good. His achievement was truly remarkable. He had founded at least twelve parishes in Tennessee and his name can be seen on several historical markers throughout the state. So effective was the Dominican presence in Tennessee that Bishop John Morris of Little Rock, while speaking at the centennial of the Nashville Diocese in 1937, said, "One cannot speak of the Diocese of Nashville without speaking of the Dominicans, because they were for a long time almost the only missionaries in the state, and the diocese is more indebted to the fathers of St. Dominic for its Catholic life than to any other source whatsoever."<sup>19</sup> The tireless work of Luigi Orengo contributed in no small part to this accomplishment.

Finally, someone who will be forever linked with Joseph Alemany is Francis Sadoc Vilarrasa. Born in the same region of Spain as Alemany and educated in Viterbo, Italy, where they both served as assistant novice masters, Vilarrasa spent only a few short years in the Province of St. Joseph. In 1850 Vilarrasa accompanied Alemany to California on the condition that he be left to found the new Dominican Province of the Most Holy Name of Jesus, while Alemany tended to his flock. This was agreed upon, though both would mutually support each other and still manage to have a few battles, sometimes over how the province was to be run. Unfortunately, the man they were both counting on for information and guidance about their new postings, the above-mentioned Fr. Anderson, had died fifteen days before in Sacramento at the age of thirty-two. Undaunted, both Alemany and Vilarrasa set about their respective tasks – one of establishing his diocese and reclaiming mission lands lost during the "secularization" of Spanish territory, the other of founding a new province. The sudden and seeming miraculous appearance in 1851 of six young Dominicans from Catalonia solidified the new province and allowed it to move forward. It also effectively ended the migration of the "Mediterranean Missionaries" to the Province of St. Joseph. From now on, Spanish and Italian-born Dominicans would be finding their way to California to assist in the growth of the new province. Fr. Vilarrasa died in California in 1888.

1850 was a watershed year for the Province of St. Joseph as it began to

move back to the East Coast and see the foundations of several parishes in Washington, DC, New York City, and New Haven, Connecticut. By then, the Irish immigration had put its stamp on the province. Those Mediterranean Missionaries still in the province would continue to labor in the Midwest, but were no longer as sorely needed as they had been in the past, or would be in the new province in California. In their various ways, these men were indispensable to the growth of Fr. Fenwick's "Little American Province" and will forever remain with its gratitude.

#### NOTES

1 Angier, because he and Thomas Wilson did not get along with each other, never engaged in the academic life of the province and was used as a parish priest (and kept far away from Wilson) until he returned to the English Province. He is buried in Belgium.

2 Angier was back in Maryland engaged in parochial work and Fenwick was in Europe.

3 Adding to the awkwardness of Fenwick's dual role as bishop and "provincial" was the fact that half of the men under his charge resided in Kentucky, under the control of another bishop.

4 Two different dates are given for his installation as prior of St. Rose: August 21, 1828 (*Council Book of St. Rose*), and September 1, 1828 (*Book of Receptions and Professions at St. Rose*).

5 Muñoz was replaced by Stephen Hyacinth Montgomery, which Dominican historian Fr. Coffey maintains was "one of the worst appointments Fenwick ever made (Coffey, *American Dominicans*, p. 172).

6 Coffey questions whether Mazzuchelli was a) a member of the Province and b) a Dominican at all. The fact that Mazzuchelli actually returned to meet with the provincial shows a level of obedience which would only be practiced by a member of the province and not by a free-lance missionary-apostolic working under a bishop.

7 Kelly Diary III, May 17, 1859.

8 Kelly Diary III, May 27, 1859. Kelly notes that Mazzuchelli "Some years ago he published a work in Italian of 300 pages, detailing his labors &c" (*Ibid.*).

9 *Ibid.*

10 Mazzuchelli to President Jackson, 10 May 1835, Sinsinawa Dominican Archives II, 23.

11 Cf. Mary Cabrini Durkin and Mary Nona McGreal, *Always on Call: Samuel Mazzuchelli of the Order of Preachers* (Strasbourg, France: Editions du Signe, 2000), p. 39. For more details on Mazzuchelli's relationship with the Province of St. Joseph, see John Vidmar, *Fr. Fenwick's "Little American Province"*, pp. 26-28.

12 Pozzo's obsession with homeopathy may be the reason he departed the US and England so precipitously.

13 One humorous note from O'Daniel points out that Mr. and Mrs. Martin Scott wrote a letter claiming that Pozzo was also well-known for his enormous eye-glasses (December 17, 1891).

14 Kelly Diary III, April 24, 1859.

15 Kelly Diary III, April 25, 1859.

16 Kelly Diary IV, Feb 18, 1872.

17 Fabian Stan Parmisano, *Mission West: the Western Dominican Province, 1850-1966 (Oakland: Most Holy Name of Jesus Province), 1995*, p. 36.

18 Kelly Diary IV, March 8, 1868.

19 Bishop John Morris, *A Sermon Delivered on the Occasion of the Celebration of the Centenary of the Diocese of Nashville, October 5, 1937. Archives of the Province of St. Joseph.*