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Bishop James Whelan (1823-1878)

## **Bishop James Whelan, O.P.:**

**College President in Somerset and Second Bishop of Nashville,  
While Passing Through and Returning to Zanesville**

by Anthony J. Lisska  
Denison University

Nineteenth century narratives of famous Dominican Friar-Preachers from the Somerset area are many. The story of how the Dominican frontier missionary and later first Bishop of Cincinnati, Edward Dominic Fenwick, rode through the forests of Ohio has been told often. The history of the Dominican Fathers in

Somerset and environs during the early part of the Nineteenth Century has been well written and documented, often in the pages of this historical publication. Yet Fenwick was not the only Bishop to be culled from the small band of energetic Dominicans undertaking committed missionary work in central Ohio and Kentucky.

Three Dominicans became bishops of important see cities in the rapidly developing United States. Before the middle of the century, Dominicans who spent some time in Somerset named to American bishoprics include Langdon Thomas Grace (second Bishop of St. Paul), Richard Pius Miles (first Bishop of Nashville), and Joseph Sadoc Alemany (first Bishop of Monterey, California, and later first Bishop and then Archbishop of San Francisco). Dominicans with ecclesiastical roots in Somerset from the middle part of the century, however, have been less documented and discussed. Among the illustrious band of Dominican followers of Edward Fenwick must be mentioned James Whelan, who succeeded Richard Miles as the second Bishop of Nashville and became a somewhat tragic figure in the history of Civil War American Catholicism.

From Ireland to Somerset  
by way of New York City

James Whelan was born on February 28, 1823 near Kilkenny, Ireland, in the little village of Danesport. His parents were William and Judy (De Loughry) Whelan. His parents appear to have moved to Dublin when young James was but an infant. James, at an early age, journeyed with his parents across the Atlantic Ocean to the then teeming Irish neighborhoods of New York City. His education appears to have been undertaken in both Dublin and New York City. The historian of the American Dominicans, Victor F. O'Daniel, writes that from early on, "...he attracted attention by his rare mind, remarkable memory, and love of study."<sup>1</sup> Whelan's superb intellectual powers are noted often in accounts of his life and work.

The Irish-born pastor of St. James's Church in New York City, Father Andrew Byrne, appears to have detected the possibility of a religious vocation in this young Irish lad. A bright and precocious child, James early on showed signs of

a vocation to the clerical state. Father Byrne, who later became the first Bishop of Little Rock, Arkansas, also appears to have directed the young Irishman towards the American Dominicans. The pastor of his New York parish suggested that James might consider entering the Order of St. Dominic with its novitiate then at the Priory of St. Rose of Lima in Springfield, Kentucky. Byrne introduced James to that grand peripatetic American Dominican, Nicholas Dominic Young, during one of Young's many trips to the East Coast. James returned with Young to the Priory of St. Rose in Springfield and began his year of novitiate training.

One year later, after spending the novitiate year according to the canonical requirements of the time, on June 29, 1840, James was professed as a member of the Dominican Province of St. Joseph. He appears to have kept his baptismal name, James, as his name in the religious life, a practice then not common among American Dominicans. Following the completion of his novitiate year, Whelan traveled to the Priory of St. Joseph in Somerset, Ohio, in order to begin his study of philosophy and theology in preparation for ordination as a Dominican priest. At that time, St. Joseph's Priory had the academic standing of a full *studium generalis*, or "formal House of Studies," in the academic structure of the Dominican Order. This academic designation was received from Rome in 1841. Nonetheless, it is unclear if the academic quality was strong enough to merit this designation of *studium generalis*.

Many of the documents providing information about the life of James Whelan repeat stories about the gifted nature of his mind and his robust mental endowment. Yet there is some disagreement on how well he applied his natural gifts in the study of philosophy and theology. O'Daniel notes that "industriously plying his fine mind to his matter, his advancement was thorough and rapid."<sup>2</sup> O'Daniel notes that at the

Dominican Chapter for the Province of St. Joseph held in 1845 at St. Joseph's, the then sub-deacon, Brother James Whelan, defended publicly several theological theses in the standard scholastic mode then common in Dominican Houses of Study in Europe. Yet in his history of the American followers of Edward Fenwick, *The American Dominicans*, Reginald Coffey writes about a certain lackadaisicalness, and perhaps even laziness, attributed to Whelan as a student. Referring to a letter sent by the Head of the Seminary Studies Program at Somerset, Fr. Eugenio Giacinto Pozzo, to the Master General in Rome, Coffey writes the following:

There is [so Pozzo writes to the Master General] only one student in theology, James Whelan, and he is a third-year student. Whelan is quite talented, has an extraordinary memory, but is so cold by nature that, lacking competition from other students, it is difficult to make him take an interest in his studies. Since it is not possible to have circles and debates [the then pedagogical practices of Dominican seminaries], to give Whelan some incentive and stimulation, Pozzo has attempted to substitute for them, by having him deliver discourses on theological subjects to the community at St. Joseph's<sup>3</sup>

This uninvolved attitude characterized by a lack of commitment and zeal may have been a harbinger of a fate that befell Whelan later in his life. Nonetheless, no document available doubts that he was a gifted student with a mental endowment far beyond many mid-nineteenth century American ecclesiastical students. What is a bit surprising in Whelan's case, however, is the fact that he was not sent to Rome to complete his philosophical and theological studies. In the previous ten years, several talented American Dominican students had been sent to Rome for such a purpose. This is both an unclear and a vexing issue, especially at this time when several Dominican Master Generals were beseeching their American confreres to send their best students to Rome for serious and reflective study

in the grand traditions of the Order of Preachers.

#### Ordination and Administrative Duties

Whatever these study problems may have been, nonetheless James Whelan was ordained to the priesthood on August 2, 1846, by the Archbishop of Cincinnati, John Baptist Purcell. Purcell traveled to St. Joseph's for the ordination ceremony. A year later, James Whelan received the Lectorate in Sacred Theology, an advanced academic degree awarded to only a few Dominican students. Whelan was the first American Dominican to receive this degree while studying only in an American Dominican seminary or House of Studies. Certainly the reception of this advanced theological degree was due to the significant work that Pozzo undertook with the young Dominican priest. Furthermore, after ordination, Whelan and Pozzo worked together in the field of parochial missions. In the spring of 1849, these two Dominicans conducted a series of spiritual retreats and revivals in all of the Ohio churches under the auspices of the American Dominicans.

Whelan's career on the academic/administrative side of the Dominican ledger advanced rapidly. On November 29, 1849, he was named to the position of Regent of Studies at St. Joseph's. The Regent is the person in charge of all studies and academic training for clerical novices studying for the priesthood in any Dominican province. The former Regent, Father Pozzo, resigned from this position and journeyed to New York to continue his apostolic work in the big city. There is some textual evidence suggesting that Pozzo was becoming disenchanted with the lack of a serious program of study for the American Dominicans. About this time, Whelan was also appointed the second President of St. Joseph's College in Somerset, a fledgling college that Father Matthew Anthony O'Brien had begun in 1849. In addition to the demanding tasks of Regent of Studies and College President, Whelan

also taught continuously in both the Dominican *studium* and the secular college. About this time, the separate college building was completed at St. Joseph's, which provided much needed space for the college students. O'Daniel writes that Whelan taught "...with conspicuous success."<sup>4</sup>

#### Prior-Provincial at Thirty-one

Whelan must have shown significant signs of success as an administrator, because his ascent in ecclesiastical administration was meteoric. In 1854 he was elected the Prior-Provincial of St. Joseph's Province. At the age of thirty-one, he was the youngest person up to that time elected to the important position of Prior-Provincial. He served his four-year term and then late in 1858, his term completed, he returned to the position of President of St. Joseph's College. These must have been strenuous times for the college, for it was to close less than two years later never to re-open, a causality of the War of Between the States. In early 1859, Whelan was appointed the coadjutor Bishop to his Dominican confrere, the rapidly aging and seriously ill Bishop Richard Miles in Nashville.

Writing about Whelan's election as Prior-Provincial in 1854, O'Daniel suggests that this event "...was a change from the emphatically apostolical to the decidedly intellectual for provincial."<sup>5</sup> At this time, the small American province of the Dominicans sponsored three secular colleges: St. Joseph's in Somerset, St. Thomas Aquinas at Sinsinawa Mound in southwest Wisconsin, and a small operation at St. Rose Priory in Kentucky. Much of this beginning activity is due to the phenomenal energy of Whelan's predecessor as provincial, Father Matthew A. O'Brien. Whelan, nonetheless, had the task of maintaining these educational institutions. His duties as provincial necessitated that he relinquish the college presidency, which he gave to Father Philip Dominic Noon. Father Joseph Augustine Kelly became the new Regent

of Studies for the province. Kelly and Whelan were associated for many years. We will see later that Kelly joined Whelan in Nashville during the troubled times near the end of the Civil War. During his years as provincial, Whelan continued to live at St. Joseph's in Somerset.

Whelan appears to have been an active Provincial. Dominicans entering and making profession during Whelan's four-year term of office include several men illustrious in the annals of the American Dominicans. Michael Dominic Lilly, John Antoninus Rochford and Stephen Byrne all became future Prior-Provincials. Philip Dominic Noon, whom some records indicate as the brightest intellect in the annals of nineteenth century Dominican history, became a young President of St. Joseph's College and a theologian at a Baltimore Provincial Council. During his time as provincial, Whelan became known as a marvelous preacher in the grand tradition of his religious Order of Preachers. O'Daniel writes that "he was one of the best pulpit orators in the country, and his sermons were gems of thought, order and exquisite English."<sup>6</sup> O'Daniel also notes that the newspapers of the day indicate that Whelan was invited frequently to preach at various notable occasions. In his lucidly written narrative, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, Thomas Stritch writes about Whelan in the following way:

He seems to have been the ideal Dominican, keenly interested in philosophy and theology, a successful teacher, but above all a splendid performer in the pulpit, a real "Preacher." In addition, Whelan seems to have had an engaging and companionable personality.<sup>7</sup>

Near the end of his term as provincial, Whelan undertook the task of supervising the construction of Holy Trinity Church in the village of Somerset. Whelan served as the second pastor of Holy Trinity Parish. He had the new church built over the older one, and when the construction of the new edifice was completed,

the original structure was disassembled and the pieces removed from the new church.

#### Assisting the Dominican Sisters of St. Mary's in Somerset

In 1830, at the invitation of Bishop Fenwick, several Dominican Sisters from the convent of St. Catherine in Springfield, Kentucky came to Somerset in order to establish a school for young women. At this time, the Dominican sisters were under the direct office and supervision of the Prior-Provincial of the American Dominican Friars. The establishment of convents of religious women whose primary purpose was the education of young people was somewhat foreign to the usual constitutions of Religious Orders as founded in Europe. Most sisters in Europe were cloistered. The early constitutions of the Kentucky Dominicans, and their ecclesiastical descendants in Somerset, contained written propositions, which were reinforced in their formula of religious profession, stating that when possible and feasible, a thoroughly cloistered life was the goal and desirable end. In addition, the singing of Matins and Lauds of the Divine Office at midnight was mandatory. As the active teaching lives of these sisters progressed, the obligations put upon them by the early constitutions were seen not only as excessive but as hindering their unique apostolic contributions through the realm of education. Several provincials prior to Whelan had attempted to modify and rescind these obligations but to no avail. Finally, under the direction of Whelan, this modification in religious practice was accomplished. Writing directly to the Dominican Master General in Rome, Whelan secured the deletion from their profession formula the proposition that the sisters would at some future time observe fully the rules of ecclesiastical enclosure in a cloister. This ruling officially paved the way for full membership in the Dominican family of what later became known as the Third Order of

Dominican Religious Women. In effect, Whelan's insistence with Rome demonstrated the importance of the Third Order Religious for the apostolic work necessary for Catholicism in the New World. Whelan was concerned that the religious rule of the sisters was a complicated mixture of Second Order Cloistered nuns and Third Order teaching Sisters. He sought to clear up these confusions. Furthermore, because of these structural confusions, Whelan noted that, in his judgment, many of the sisters, because of unclear recommendations by several of his predecessors as Prior-Provincial, were confused about their religious obligations. This was the cause of excessive worry and concern.

Writing from Rome, the Dominican Master General responded to Whelan's request in the following way:

I do not think that in the times we live and under the present circumstances our Sisters of the Third Order are called to Cloister life, but on the contrary that they are designed to do much good in dedicating themselves to an active life and particularly to the education of children. I believe it is proper to suppress the clause at the reception so that our sisters may enter plainly and with all their power into the true sense of their vocation and of the important work which is placed before them.<sup>4</sup>

Whelan, however, in his role as direct superior of the teaching sisters, was somewhat critical of their training and preparation for educational purposes. A later Dominican sister archivist, in discovering this letter, tried to defend her community's educational preparation. One must take Whelan's observation in context. It probably was the case that postulants were permitted entry into the convent without elaborate and formal educational requirements. Soon these sisters were teaching. Whelan the educator was concerned about this issue and brought it up in the proper channels.

Whelan's four-year term of office as Prior-

Provincial ended in 1858. At that time, he appears to have resumed the presidency of St. Joseph's College. This position did not last long, however, because early in 1859 Whelan was called by Rome to join the ranks of the American Catholic episcopate.

(To be continued)

#### NOTES

1) Victor F. O'Daniel, *The Dominican Province of St. Joseph: Historico-Biographical Studies* (New York, 1942), p. 202.

2) *Ibid.*, p. 203.

3) Reginald M. Coffey, *The American Dominicans: A History of Saint Joseph's Province* (New York: Saint Martin de Porres Guild, 1970), p. 224.

4) *Ibid.*

5) *Ibid.*, p. 189.

6) *Ibid.*

7) Thomas Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee: The Sesquicentennial Story* (Nashville, 1987), pp. 142-43.

8) Katherine Burton, *Make the Way Known* (New York, 1959), p. 64.

### Death of Nicholas D. Gallagher

Nicholas D. Gallagher, for a long lifetime a resident of Noble county, died at his late residence, 863 Dennison Avenue, Columbus, Ohio, Feb. 22, of pneumonia, at the advanced age of 78. Early in life he engaged in merchandising at Temperanceville, Belmont county, and after a few years of successful activity in that line he engaged in farming and live-stock raising near Batesville, and where, until a few months ago he made his home.

Mr. Gallagher was a gentleman of the old school, a philosopher and a scholar. His moral character, industry and integrity were characteristics of the highest type of development. Throughout life he was a devout christian and his charities were many. His friendship was always highly prized and his most aggrieved mourners are his lifelong friends. He was known as a public spirited citizen and was one of the builders of St. Mary's Catholic church, which for more than thirty years was the place of worship attended by one of the most populous and prosperous congregations in the state.

The late Mr. Gallagher was in every sense a modest man. He never sought place or power, but instead preferred the quiet of rural life. About six months ago the infirmities that accompany old age induced him to retire from the farm and spend the winter at Columbus, which is the home of his sons, Eugene and Frank D., also of his daughter, Mrs. J. F. McNulty. He is survived by his wife, Charlotte V. Gallagher, Ignatius N. Gallagher, who resides on his farm which adjoins the old homestead near Batesville, Augustine Gallagher, president of the "Modern Miller" Co., St. Louis, Mo., Eugene and Frank D. Gallagher, of the cigar manufacturing firm of Eugene Gallagher & Bro., Mrs. J. F. McNulty and Miss Anna Gallagher. At the time of his death he was surrounded by every member of his family besides other relatives and friends. His illness was of about ten days duration, previous to which he had for months enjoyed excellent health for a man of his years. Interment took place Thursday, from Sacred Heart church, in Mt. Calvary cemetery, Columbus.

-- The Barnesville *Enterprise*, March 3, 1898,  
courtesy of Pearl Gallagher Reischman

**Mt. Calvary Cemetery, Columbus  
Cathedral Section C, Lot Records, 1867-1926**

(Continued, from Vol. XXVIII, No. 5)

100-C east

p. 256, Mrs. Callahan, 1884 Nov. 8, lot 100  
east half. Graves: 1884 Nov. 8; 1891 May 11.

**CALLAHAN: Mary Roach 1797-1871**

**John Scott 1837-1871**

**Mary, his wife 1849-1872**

**Thomas Callahan 1821-1900**

**Margaret his wife 1821-1884**

**James their son 1854-1894**

101-C

p. 145, Peter Kelly, 1872 Sept. 23, lot 101.  
Graves: 1889 Dec. 17; 1902 Nov. 7; 1912 May  
30. Four graves in above lot transferred to  
Mrs. Delia Gleason, southwest corner - 1/3 lot.  
[no stones]

101-C southwest

p. 439, Mrs. Delia Gleason, 1905 Nov. 22,  
four graves in 101 southwest transferred to her  
by Peter Kelly heirs. Grave: 1924 Feb. 29.

**(Father) William Augustine Gleason**

**(Mother) Delia Blake Gleason "My Mom"**

**(Daughter) Katherine Gleason Mar. 8, 1968**

102-C east

p. 44, Michael Farrell Jr., 1873 May 30, lot  
102 east half. Graves: 1886 April 5; 1890  
Nov. 23.

**Sacred to the memory of Michael Farrell, born in  
Co. Tipperary, Ireland, died Nov. 23, 1890 aged 74  
y's**

**Sacred to the memory of Margaret, wife of Michael  
Farrell, born in Co. Tipperary, Ireland, died Apr. 5,  
1886 aged 69 y.**

**John F. Farrell died Dec. 17, 1894 aged 42 years  
[another large base with no inscription stone atop]**

102-C west

p. 176, Patrick Colaton, near Worthington, lot  
102 west, by cash to Fr. Murray. 1891 Feb.

12, To dig grave & transfer from Oc----.

**Patrick Colligan, born in Co. Kildare Ireland Jan. 6,  
1817 [no death date]**

**Winifred O'Rourke wife of Patrick Colligan, born in  
Co. Kildare Ireland 1807 Died July 31, 1880**

**David Colligan born 1852 died June 25, 1873**

**Catharine Collican born July 1843 died Oct. 31,  
1879**

**Patrick Collican jr. born Oct. 1840 died Oct. 1887**

**Catherine Colliton Nov. 11, 1873-Feb. 9, 1914**

103-C north

p. 72, Mrs. James Fagan, 1873 May 12, lot 103  
north half. Graves: 1881 Jan. 3; 1892 Jan. 13  
child of Thos. Fagan; 1893 Nov. 15 child of  
Ann Fagan; 1899 Apr. 7; 1901 Aug. 26; 1906  
March 16; 1901 Apr. 21; 1911 May 30.

**(Father) James Fagan Aug. 15, 1832 - May 29,  
1911**

**James, son of J. & E. Fagan, born Jan. 23, 1870,  
died Apr. 7, 1899 Rest in Peace**

**Our Mother Elizabeth Fagan a native of the parish  
of Rath\_abill [short name, perhaps Down] Co.**

**Ireland. Died Jan. 2, 1881: aged 47 years**

**Mary J. daughter of J. & E. Fagan, born Jan. 23,  
1862: died Sept. 19, 1872**

103-C south

p. 73, P. J. Conway, 1874 May 12, lot 103  
south half. Graves: 1883 Sept. 6; 1884 Jan. 8;  
1890 Dec. 3. [only the bottom of an old  
marker, "May her soul rest in peace."]

104-C north

p. 274, Michael Foley, lot 104 north half. [no  
payments listed] [no stones]

104-C south

p. 52, Dennis Crimmins, 420 W. Goodale,  
1874 June 4, lot 104 south half. Graves: 1880  
Jan. [blank]; 1888 Apr. 24; 1898[?] July 14.

Written at the bottom of this ledger section:  
"Nora A. Curts[?] 418 W. Goodale St. Mary  
C. Nicely 420 W. Goodale St."

**Margaret Cremmons 1845-1899**

Dennis Cremmons died Apr. 23, 1888, aged 50 yrs  
{Anna Josephine  
{Thomas Patrick  
{Joseph  
{Children of Dennis & Margaret Cremmons

105-C north

~~p. 170, Mrs. Timothy Fields, 1874-Aug-17, lot  
105-north-half.~~

p. 421, Julius Oagnier[?], 56 Seidmore St.  
Anthonys Hospital, one grave in this lot not to  
be removed, 1901 May 1, part of lot 105, north  
half. Graves: 1901 May 1; 1912 Nov. 14;  
1914 June 28; 1916 Oct. 11.

Edward O'Rourke, born in Co. Kildare, Ireland  
1809: died May 1, 1888

105-C south

p. 122, Mrs. Richard Sheridan, 647 Congress  
St. [addresses crossed out: Worthington; 1291  
Atchison St.; 423 N. 20th St.], 1880 Apr. 4, lot  
105 south half. Graves: 1880 Apr 4; 1888  
May 28; 1919 June 4.

105-C [southwest?]

p. 463, Michael Cannon, 383 Cleveland Ave.,  
1906 Apr. 30, two graves in lot 105. Graves:  
1906 Apr. 13; 1917 May 17. 1927 March 10,  
charge for raising remains.

**PALMA: Leonardo May 14, 1858 - Oct. 4, 1928**  
**Filomena M., Mar. 10, 1860-Mar. 30, 1941**

106-C north

p. 280, James Gallagher, 1876 Apr. 1, lot 106  
north half. Graves: 1876 Apr. 1; 1877 Nov. 20  
[or 30?]. 1922 Dec. 16, 2 unused graves in  
southwest corner sold to Calvary Cemetery. 4  
graves are occupied.

106-C south and northwest

p. 319 Nora Slevin Staley, 592 E. Main St.,  
1876 March 31, lot 106 south half.  
Transferred by her to Mrs. Honor Staley  
Gabel, 122 Sherman Ave., July 21, 1925.  
"Mrs. Honora Staley Gabel To 2 graves in 1/2  
lot 106 n.s. Sec C, formerly owned by Jas.  
Gallagher." [stones in northwest:]  
(Mamma) Honoria Staley, Oct. 22, 1940  
Cornelius D. Staley Ohio Pvt 158 Depot Brigade  
World War I Dec. 2, 1893-Aug. 20, 1953

107-C east

p. 151, John Madigan, 1876 May 14, lot 107.  
Graves: [1877?] March 23 grave for K. Long  
[child]; [1877] May 14 child; [1878 or '79]  
March 19; [year?]Apr. 18; 1888 Aug. 16; 1891  
May 23; 1900 July 9 child; 1901 Aug. 19 child;  
1909 July 26; 1910 Jan. 9; 1922 Feb. 13; 1925  
Apr. 2.

**John Madigan and Family**

(To be continued)