The Leopoldine Society, William Unterthiner, and the Tyrolean Friars in the United States

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Abstract | *At the invitation of Bishop John Baptist Purcell, Wilhelm Unterthiner, a Tyrolean Franciscan priest, came to Cincinnati in 1844 to minister to German-speaking Catholics. For eighteen months he worked with Francis Louis Huber, a Bavarian Franciscan priest, at Holy Trinity Parish in Cincinnati, aided financially by the recently established Leopoldine Society. Significant international tensions arose; they both had to deal with major opposition from the growing Nativist movement, fueled in part by émigrés from the failed revolutions of 1848. This article is based on letters exchanged between Unterthiner and Franciscan superiors in Tyrol. After Unterthiner successfully recruited more friars from Tyrol, a new form of Franciscan life emerged under changed circumstances. The issues of inculturation and becoming a world church will be addressed in this article.*

Keywords: | *Leopoldine Society, William Unterthiner, Austrian missionaries, Tyrol*

Geography and historical context influence every human endeavor. For example, a simple goal such as recruiting more Roman Catholic clergy in Tyrol to serve German speakers emigrating in large numbers to Cincinnati in the 1840s involved many more variables than religious superiors on either side of the Atlantic realized. In the case of the Tyrolean Friars Minor (Franciscan men whose first member arrived in 1844), financing such an endeavor, even with the help of Austria's Leopoldine Society, presented unique obstacles and

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opportunities. This study will focus on that group and the assistance given by its members.[1]

The Tyrolean friars who had grown up in a predominantly Catholic world under a monarchy were hardly prepared for the diverse and boisterous situation they found in the United States, a country with no officially established religion and a constitution only 57 years old. The friars' Catholic faith provided the strongest and clearest link between everything once familiar to them and the radically different life they encountered in the United States.

This article will demonstrate how these challenges influenced the life and ministry of the Tyrolean friars in the United States.[2] No one has yet thoroughly analyzed their first ministries, the financial assistance they received from the Leopoldine Society, and US parish ministry 180 years ago. The entire United States was then regarded as "mission territory" under the jurisdiction of Rome's Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, a designation that ended only in 1908.[3]

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1. See Theodore Roemer, OFM Cap., *Ten Decades of Alms* (St. Louis: Herder, 1942) for general information about the French, Austrian, and Bavarian mission aid societies. See also Gertrude Kummer, *Die Leopoldinen-Stiftung* (1829–1914): *Der älteste österrreichische Missionsverein* (Vienna: Wiener Dom-Verlag, 1966), 54–58, for better monetary equivalences than the Roemer volume provides.

2. This article will draw heavily on six volumes of primary sources: Pat McCloskey, OFM, *The Letters of Father William Unterthiner, OSF (1844–46): Founder of St. John the Baptist Province* (self-pub., 1979), hereafter cited as *Thesis*; McCloskey, OFM, *The 1846–54 Letters of Father William Unterthiner, OSF: Founder of St. John the Baptist* Province (self-pub., 1982), hereafter McCloskey, *U.II*; McCloskey, OFM, ed., trans. Aldric Heidlage, OFM, *The 1846–74 Letters of Five Tyrolese Friars* (self-pub., 1984), hereafter McCloskey and Heidlage, *Five*; McCloskey, OFM, ed., trans. Heidlage, OFM, *The 1850–74 Letters of Twelve Tyrolese Friars* (self-pub., 1984), hereafter McCloskey and Heidlage, *Twelve*; McCloskey, OFM, ed., trans. Heidlage, OFM, *The 1840–67 Letters from Tyrol to Cincinnati, Tyrol to Rome, Rome to Tyrol, Episcopal Letters and Grant Requests* (self-pub., 1983), hereafter McCloskey and Heidlage, *Tyrol*; McCloskey, OFM, ed., trans. Cyprian Berens, OFM, and McCloskey, OFM, *The 1840–65 Letters in the General Archives of the Order of Friars Minor* (self-pub., 1983), hereafter McCloskey and Berens, *Rome*.

3. James Hennesey, SJ, *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 206; Gerald P. Fogarty, SJ, *The Vatican and the American Hierarchy from 1870 to 1965* (Wilmington, DE: Glazier, 1985), 204.

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Assistance from Mission Aid Societies in Europe

The Tyrolean friars were greatly assisted by Austria's Leopoldine Society, set up in 1829 to assist its missionaries serving the Catholic Church in foreign lands. Bishop Fenwick was one of the first US bishops to request its help. Bavaria's Ludwig-Missionsverein (established in 1838) aided that country's foreign missionaries. Bishop John Baptist Purcell was one of its first petitioners.[4]

In a sense, the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, founded in Lyon, France, in 1822, anticipated both organizations by enabling ordinary lay Catholics to support the Catholic Church's international sharing of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Father Frederic Rese, a diocesan priest in Cincinnati, was instrumental in setting up both the Leopoldine Society and the Ludwig-Missionsverein. The financial contributions of the former group will be noted, while appeals to and assistance from the latter group will be acknowledged more briefly.

These mission societies played a major role for the Catholic Church after the Congress of Vienna's attempt to restore Europe to its political, social, and religious status quo before the French Revolution. After 1815, membership in pre-Revolution religious orders and congregations grew as numerous new ones were founded, many of them calling on assistance from mission societies.

Growth of the Diocese of Cincinnati

In 1821, Father Edward Fenwick became the first bishop of the Diocese of Cincinnati covering Ohio and Michigan. The next year he sought funds from the newly established Society for the Propagation of the Faith (Propaganda Fide) in Lyon. He and others described his diocese as "the poorest one in Christendom."[5] In 1823 Fenwick wrote again, emphasizing his dire need for German-speaking priests. In 1827 he sent Father Frederic Rese, vicar general of the Diocese of Cincinnati, to Europe to seek missionaries and financial aid. Rese was instrumental in establishing the Leopoldine Society, whose statutes were approved on April 15, 1829.[6]

4. John Lamott, *A History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, 1821–1921* (New York: Pustet, 1921), 188.

5. "Exhortation to the Piety of the Faithful," October 12, 1823, Edward Dominic Fenwick Papers, p. 146, Archive of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, Rome, Italy. This author is indebted to Michelle Smith, archivist of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, for this reference. For the general background, see Lamott, *History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati*, 40–97.

6. Roemer, *Ten Decades of Alms*, 39. Another resource is Benjamin Blied, *Austrian Aid to American Catholics, 1830–60* (Milwaukee, WI: self-pub., 1944). For general background on Catholic immigration to the United States in the mid-nineteenth century, see Emmet

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Rese, by now the first bishop of Detroit, Michigan, helped establish in 1838 Bavaria's Ludwig-Missionsverein.[7] The Diocese of Cincinnati drew support from both the Leopoldine Society and the Ludwig-Missionsverein for its German-speaking communities.

Between 1823 and 1869, the Leopoldine Society sent 118,569 florins (ca. $50,000) to the Diocese (Archdiocese after 1850) of Cincinnati.[8] This figure does not include grants made for the travels of missionaries on their way to work in that diocese.[9]

In 1832 when John Baptist Purcell was appointed bishop of Cincinnati (now covering only the state of Ohio), he estimated that approximately half of his Catholics had German as their mother tongue. In 1834, Bishop Purcell had laid the cornerstone for Holy Trinity Church in Cincinnati, the first parish west of the Alleghenies for German Catholics. It played a short but significant role in the development of the Tyrolean friars' ministry in the United States.

On an 1838–1839 trip to Europe, Purcell had recruited seven priests, only one of whom spoke German: Franciscan Father Francis Louis Huber (1804–1851) from Saint Anthony Province in Munich. Huber would greatly influence the first 18 months of the Tyrolean mission in Cincinnati. He arrived in Cincinnati in 1839 and was immediately assigned by Bishop Purcell to Holy Trinity Parish in that city. In 1840, German speakers numbered approximately 19,000 of Cincinnati's 46,382 inhabitants.

That same year Huber wrote to Society for the Propagation of Faith of Paris-Lyon and to his minister general, asking that Bavarian friars be sent to Cincinnati.[10] When that did not happen, Huber and Bishop Purcell turned to the Tyrolean Province of Saint Leopold, which eventually responded in 1844 by sending Father William Unterthiner to work under Bishop Purcell.

Herman Rothan, OFM, *The German Catholic Immigrant in the United States* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1946), 67.

7. Roemer, *Ten Decades of Alms*, 54.

8. Ibid., 234. Roemer gives cumulative totals for religious congregations of men. According to Kummer, the Leopoldine Society gave the diocese/archdiocese of Cincinnati 120,020 florins between 1830 and 1883, with 1,350 florins earmarked for Franciscan causes. Unterthiner personally received 100 florins in 1845, 50 florins in 1847, and 40 florins in 1849, see Kummer, *Die Leopoldinen-Stiftung*, 54–57 and 89. One florin then equaled approximately $0.42.

9. Ibid., 47–48.

10. This letter is found in the series *United States Documents in the Propaganda Archives*, edited by Finbar Kenneally (Washington, DC: American Academy of Franciscan History, 1966). This series presents a calendar of the Propaganda Fide material on microfilm at Notre Dame University. Each volume is indexed according to who wrote a letter or is mentioned in it.

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Were German-Speaking Catholics Being Neglected?

Die katholisch-irisch-bischöfliche Administration in Nord-Amerika: Eine Stimme der Deutschen and Franzosen daselbst, an 1840 pamphlet by Severus Brandanus [Father Wilhelm Piesbach] harshly criticized US bishops for not doing enough to help German-speaking Catholics in the United States remain Catholic. Canon Josef Salzbacher of Vienna visited the United States to report on the condition of German Catholic immigrants there.[11]

After four days in Cincinnati, in April and October of 1842, he estimated that it had the largest number of German Catholic immigrants of any US diocese.[12] He reported his findings in *Meine Reise nach Nord-Amerika im Jahre 1842*.[13]

In fact, Society for the Propagation of Faith of Paris-Lyon soon received conflicting reports about the zeal or neglect with which the US bishops (increasingly of Irish origins) treated the German-speaking immigrants entrusted to their care.

First Tyrolean Franciscan Arrives in 1844

William Unterthiner, the first Tyrolean friar to come to the United States, is the key person in this article. His thirteen-year ministry in the United States helped to define the Franciscan presence in the American Midwest as well as contribute to the growing influence of European missionaries in American dioceses.

Born in Feldthurns (Klausen) on October 2, 1809, Nicholas Joseph Unterthiner entered Saint Leopold Province (Innsbruck) in 1827, receiving the religious name Wilhelm. Philosophy and theology studies preceded his priestly ordination in 1833. After two more years of theology studies, he passed the *cura animarum* (care of souls) exam authorizing him to preach and hear confessions. He was appointed to teach New Testament exegesis at the friars' gymnasium in Hall in Tirol. Two years later he was appointed *Pfarrprediger* in that city.[14]

Although he had volunteered to work in the Custody of the Holy Land, the Tyrolean provincial council considered Bishop Purcell's request to be more urgent. Besides, the Tyrolean province's chronicler noted that William would still be a missionary but in a different mission. Provincial Arbogast Schoepf

11. See the essay "The Brandanus Affair, the Leopoldine Society, and Austrian-American Relations," by Jonathan Singerton and Katharina Ziegler in this volume.

12. Ibid.

13. Josef Salzbacher, *Meine Reise nach Nord-Amerika im Jahre 1842* (Vienna: Schmidt & Leo, 1845). This pamphlet and its reception are described in Jonathan Singerton and Katharina Ziegler's article "The Brandanus Affair, the Leopoldine Society, and Austrian-American Relations" in this special *JAAH* volume.

14. *Thesis*, 12.

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wrote that on April 15, Father William Unterthiner left for America as a missionary because of the great need for priests. He left Catholic Tyrol to save "so many other souls about to perish because of the lack of priests."[15]

The same provincial wrote in the chronicle of Saint Leopold Province that Father Francis Louis Huber, who was alone and overwhelmed with work, had suggested that, if the Bavarian province could not send a priest, perhaps the Tyrolean province could. Schoepf continued: "I discussed with the definitorial council whether someone from our province could be sent, and we thought Father William Unterthiner should be sent if he was agreeable to it—he was already prepared for the mission in the Holy Land—inasmuch as he is of sound body, healthy, zealous for souls, sound in character, learned as far as theological matters, and skillful in public speaking and other gifts."[16] Once the proper Church permissions were obtained, Unterthiner left on April 15 with Johann Raffeiner, a diocesan priest and vicar general for Germans in the Diocese of New York. They were joined by two other priests. The Leopoldine Society soon joined in making generous contributions for the Tyrolean friars' work in Cincinnati.

On May 23, 1844, Unterthiner wrote from Le Havre to Father Gregory Eder, a former teaching colleague in Hall. "We have not had any misfortunes; on the contrary I must say that until now God's Providence has always gone before us. Now I hope that he will not abandon me. . . . God strengthens us to do all good things and makes us happy to comply with the vocation to which he has called us. Here below I have never become sad or depressed as long as I am on the way." William asked Gregory to thank the provincial minister for his support. "To all who ask about me and who wish me well, my greetings and thanks. Now I end with a request of my confreres: that they remember me in love and especially at prayer."[17]

Unterthiner's passage was partly paid by the Ludwig-Missionsverein, probably because of Bavarian Franciscan Brothers Leander Streber and Arsacius Wieser, whom Bishop Purcell had convinced the Bavarian province to send with Unterthiner for service in Cincinnati. Unterthiner and four others previously mentioned, plus Johann Raffeiner, a diocesan priest and vicar general for Germans in the Diocese of New York, went together as far as New York City. The Leopoldine Society supported Raffeiner with 2,000 florins and gave a small sum (100 florins) to Unterthiner to help with his expenses.[18]

In Le Havre on June 2, 1844, they boarded the three-masted *Tuskina* for a 43-day voyage to New York, followed by a steamship trip to Albany and one

15. McCloskey and Heidlage, *Tyrol*, 181–82, citing *Protocollum Provinciae*, III, 96–97.
16. *Thesis*, 40.
17. Ibid., 40.
18. Kummer, *Die Leopoldinen-Stiftung*, 56–57.

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by train to Buffalo. There the three friars took a boat to Cleveland and then made an eight-day flatboat journey to Portsmouth (Ohio) to board a boat to Cincinnati.

William, Leander, and Arsacius joined Father Francis Louis Huber, Holy Trinity's new pastor after John Martin Henni's appointment as the first bishop of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Unterthiner immediately wrote to his provincial that Huber was "well loved" at Holy Trinity Church.[19] Unfortunately, this harmony with Huber dissolved within three months.

Unterthiner knew that some members of the Leopoldine Society sought general news about life in the United States. Immediately after arriving in Cincinnati, he wrote: "How do I like America? I have never disliked anything. The location of our church and house is excellent. It is warm. I believe that in Bozen [Tyrol, where he was a student] it could hardly be less warm. America is completely wooded and certainly cannot be compared with Germany in other ways. Indeed, the cities are built of bricks. But in the country one finds nicely built wooden houses that have recently been constructed. There is an extraordinary amount of building. The climate is very changeable. It can be very warm; then it suddenly becomes quite cold. Good wine and fruit of all kinds are found in Cincinnati; tropical fruits grow only in greenhouses. The open spaces here are terribly expensive."[20] Unterthiner's first impressions of the United States as a land of plenty were soon tempered after he realized the scarcity of German-speaking Roman Catholic priests in Cincinnati.

Recruiting More Tyrolean Friars

On November 29, 1844, Unterthiner wrote to his provincial that relations with Father Huber had deteriorated considerably. Unterthiner took some consolation that few Tyroleans had come or are coming. "Thank God, only a few have come from Austria; they were fugitives."[21]

Anticipating a new assignment from Bishop Purcell, Unterthiner wrote home again on December 14, 1844, asking that two more priests be sent: one to work with Unterthiner and the other to travel to nearby German-speaking Catholics.

Bishop Purcell then attached a letter in Latin to the Tyrolean provincial "Humbly and zealously," Purcell wrote, "I beg the Austrian Leopoldine Society and the Bavarian Ludwig-Missionsverein to supply the money and passage

19. *Thesis*, 20, 47.

20. Ibid., 46. Unterthiner wrote a second and longer article describing America, see *Thesis*, 106–20.

21. Ibid., 72–73.

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for missionaries for the Diocese of Cincinnati, missionaries of the Order of Saint Francis, which sum of money is necessary because of our need. For these and other kindnesses shown me, for the most reverend and illustrious leaders and imperial patrons and other subscribers of these societies, I cherish the most grateful spiritual feeling, and I will cherish them forever."[22] The Catholic Church in Cincinnati initially depended heavily on outside resources to carry out its mission, due to the burgeoning German-speaking Catholic population and the small number of parish priests to meet their spiritual needs.

On May 2, 1845, Unterthiner, Huber, Fathers Joseph Ferneding and Edward Purcell (the bishop's brother) met with Bishop Purcell, who upheld Unterthiner's position that Holy Trinity was not a canonically established religious house and that Purcell would remain his superior.[23]

Between January 9 and 13, 1846, Unterthiner wrote to his new provincial, Father Luke Rauth, that Father Alexander Martin had arrived from Tyrol just before Christmas; he lived at Holy Trinity and worked at Saint Mary, a large German parish twelve blocks away.[24]

On February 23, 1846, Unterthiner wrote to announce that Bishop Purcell had appointed him pastor at Saint John the Baptist Parish; Brothers Leander and Arsacius later joined him. By this time, Father Alexander had already gone to Boston before later settling in New York City, where he founded Saint Francis Church on 31st Street. [25]

Unterthiner served as superior of the US mission until 1854 when David Widmann took over; Otto Jair succeeded him as commissary in 1856 and three years later became custos (head) of the new Saint John the Baptist Custody. Unterthiner had already advised that whoever led the friars' mission should not be pastor of a large parish.

Because replacement friars were urgently needed, between July 1844 and April 1854 another six Tyrolean friars arrived in Cincinnati, working there first and gradually expanding into neighboring dioceses, primarily in parish ministry. The warm climate that Unterthiner described, however, did not suit all the new recruits. Three friars died before April 1854.[26]

Eventually, the Leopoldine Society helped bring to the United States many of the 34 Tyrolean friars who came between 1844 and 1875 at the invitation of Bishop Purcell and other bishops to serve German-speaking Catholic immigrants. To

22. Ibid., 72–73.
23. Ibid., 69.
24. Ibid., 90.
25. Ibid., 90–91.
26. McCloskey and Heidlage, *Five*, 243–45. Accursius Gärtner, Georg Flir, and Bernard Kellner died between 1850 and 1854.

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whom else could the bishops turn for needed financial assistance? Nearby US dioceses such as Louisville, Vincennes (Indiana), and Alton (now Springfield, Illinois) soon made similar requests for friars in order to serve their growing Catholic communities. With significant help from the Leopoldine Society, the Tyrolean friars in Cincinnati set out to prove that the seraphic Order could indeed prosper in the United States in a culture very different from what they had known in Tyrol, where the friars had arrived over 600 years earlier.

Support from the Leopoldine Society alongside the Ludwig-Missionsverein enabled the Franciscans to establish a foothold within the United States. In total, the Leopoldine Society gave over 120,000 florins to the Diocese/Archdiocese of Cincinnati between 1830 and 1883—of which 2,450 florins went specifically toward Franciscan causes within the diocese.[27] The Ludwig-Missionsverein gave 3,500 florins to the diocese on the personal behest of King Ludwig I with 2,000 florins going to Franciscan projects, including the Poor Clare nuns who received 1,000 florins in March 1858.[28] Numerous letters from the Tyrolean Franciscans acknowledge the importance of this financial assistance. Provincial leaders in Innsbruck similarly corresponded with Vienna's Leopoldine Society directors on behalf of their friars in Cincinnati.

By 1850, Cincinnati's population of 115,000 included 51,000 German-born residents or those of German parentage. An estimated one-third of priests spoke German.[29] Growth was so rapid that by 1861, Cincinnati had ten parishes where German was the first language of its members; only four parishes were considered English-speaking parishes.

Nativist Opposition Already Strong

Resistance to immigrants, especially Catholics, could be very fierce. In August 1834 the convent and boarding school of the Ursuline Sisters in Charlestown, Massachusetts was burned to the ground by Nativists. In May 1844 a Nativist mob burned two Catholic churches in Philadelphia.[30]

In his July 23–26, 1844, letter to his provincial, Unterthiner wrote that on his way to see Father Edward Purcell (the bishop's brother), "people threw sticks at us."

The following November, he wrote that people are terribly angry with the Catholics because the Whig Party's Henry Clay lost to the Democrat James

27. Kummer, *Die Leopoldinen-Stiftung*, 89.

28. Willibald Mäthaser, *Der Ludwig Missionsverein in der Zeit König Ludwigs I von Bayern* (Munich: Druck der Salesianischen Offizin, 1938), 357–58.

29. *Thesis*, 63.

30. Hennesey, *American Catholics*, 122.

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Polk for president. "People say this happened because of the influence of the Catholics, and people curse them for this. 'There are dangers outside and perils within' [2 Corinthians 11:26]. This is a restless time, especially for Catholics."[31]

In the 1850s, the Nativist movement gave rise to the Know-Nothing Party, which fielded and saw elected candidates for local and state offices. Anti-immigrant election riots broke out in Cincinnati and Louisville. After the failed 1848 revolutions in what is now Germany, many people on the losing side came to America, bringing with them resentment for everyone who previously lived under a monarchy, including Tyrolean friars. In fact, Unterthiner became a United States citizen in 1854 at his earliest opportunity, reflecting perhaps the intense pressures placed on immigrants.

Similar Yet Very Different Missionaries

People often assume that those who share a mother tongue have a more common identity than the facts may justify. This is especially true for Francis Louis Huber, a Bavarian Franciscan, and William Unterthiner, a Tyrolean Franciscan. Although they arrived in Cincinnati within five years of each other (1839 and 1844 respectively), they brought with them very different political, cultural, Church, and Franciscan worlds that impacted the short time they worked together.

For Unterthiner, Huber was a constant and irritating reminder that Bavaria had cooperated with Napoleon Bonaparte, whom the Austrians had fiercely resisted. In turn, Bonaparte gave Bavarians much more freedom than the Austrians had. For example, for several years he prevented the Austrian Franciscans and other religious communities from accepting new members. "Bavarian" appears negatively in most of Unterthiner's references, including the dumplings served at Holy Trinity.

Although Huber's parishioners came from many German-speaking areas, he apparently considered Bavarians the gold standard of Catholicism while regarding his many parishioners, especially from northern Germany, as very poorly catechized. They felt patronized by him.

Huber and Unterthiner came from different groups within the Franciscan family: Huber from the Recollect branch and Unterthiner from the Riformati branch. When William Unterthiner was assigned by Bishop Purcell to Holy Trinity Parish in July 1844 with Brothers Leander and Arsacius, Louis Huber considered himself not only the pastor of Holy Trinity Parish (which he certainly was) but also the religious superior of the other three friars in a

31. *Thesis*, 63.

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Franciscan house belonging to Munich's Saint Anthony Province. Unterthiner, however, immediately and vehemently denied this, asserting instead that he was a missionary apostolic sent by Rome's Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, with Bishop Purcell—not Huber—as his religious superior during his stay in Cincinnati. In fact, all four Franciscans would live at Holy Trinity Parish only from July 1844 through February 1846.

As writers in *Der Wahrheitsfreund*, a German Catholic newspaper for which both of them wrote, Huber (writing from 1840 to 1843) was more of a rigorist in Catholic teaching whereas Unterthiner, who began in 1844, tried to reach out positively to non-Catholics as much as he could. Editor Max Ortel soon replaced Huber's contributions with Unterthiner's.

The pages of *Der Wahrheitsfreund* often contained articles answering criticisms of the Catholic Church, made by Germans who emigrated after the failed 1848 revolutions in many parts of modern-day Germany. Catholics were often characterized in print and conversation as inveterate monarchists.

Similarly, during Italy's *Risorgimento* movement of the 1860s, Catholic clerics were frequently regarded as a major obstacle to an independent and united Italy. Indeed, official Catholic teaching until 1965 held that wherever they constituted a majority of citizens, that political entity should make Catholicism its official religion.

Huber eventually had a very adversarial relationship with Bishop Baptist Purcell, who removed him as pastor in 1849. After Huber sought and failed to find vindication in civil and canon law, he returned to Europe and died in Trieste in 1851.

Friars Recalled to Tyrol in 1854

Unterthiner's continuous requests that more priests and brothers be sent to the United States met with increasingly fraught debates back in Tyrol where some friars became uneasy about their own diminished domestic capacity due to the drain on personnel. Doubts soon arose about whether or not Franciscan friars could ever be firmly established within the United States, even with the support of the Leopoldine Society and the Ludwig-Missionsverein.

On July 24, 1854, the proceedings of the chapter of Saint Leopold Province of the Order of Friars Minor reflect these debates. "There were brought under discussion the needs and the state of the confreres stationed in America who earnestly asked us to help them by sending priests and brothers. After a thorough exchange of opinions, it was decided that the request should be denied even if the province were able to give help because there was no hope of introducing the seraphic [Franciscan] Order into North America and of continuing it with

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their own members, i.e., native sons, and this was the province's original and only intention."[32] The Tyrolean friars in chapter concluded that it would be best for their Tyrolean confreres in the United States to conclude their ministries and slowly return to their homeland.[33]

The tension between origin and mission for other transplanted Franciscans echoed the wider difficulties for immigrant priests in the United States throughout the mid-nineteenth century. Similar cultural tussles existed for Italian friars who in 1855 founded the Immaculate Conception Custody in Allegany, New York. The same, too, for Westphalian friars who emigrated en masse from Germany to the United States after Otto von Bismarck's May Laws. In 1879 they founded the Sacred Heart of Jesus Province (first headquartered in Teutopolis, Illinois). Both groups faced similar challenges in adapting to life in the United States.

In all these cases, migrating priests depleted the capacities of the original provinces and led to similar arguments over how much support should be given in terms of personnel. At the same time, these transitions from living and working in a predominately Catholic culture to a religiously pluralistic one required all the zeal, resources, and missionary commitment that the Tyrolean and later other European friars could muster.[34]

New living and working situations in the United States presented many new possibilities for the lay brothers, who had exercised a much more restricted ministry in Tyrol, usually serving as porter, cook, sacristan, or tailor. Yet the changed circumstances of pastoral work also reflected suspicions among home friars about the new roles undertaken by friars in the United States. The 1854 recall order came from Tyrolean friars who had no firsthand experience in staffing parishes; they feared that the friars in the United States lived too far from one another to permit the conventual (quasi-monastic) life then seen as proper for Franciscan friars. Friaries attached to the Tyrolean Gymnasium schools in Bozen and Hall could easily schedule times for common prayer, meals, days of recollection, retreats, and other community activities. Their friars also served as chaplains, confessors, or preachers. A majority of lay friars preferred their new roles that brought slightly more autonomy than they had known in Tyrolean friaries. In fact, 62 percent of Tyrolean lay

32. McCloskey and Berens, *Rome*, 254–55.

33. Ibid.

34. This very challenging transition is explained in great detail in Pat McCloskey, OFM, "Reimagining Franciscan Life: Tyrol Meets Cincinnati (1844–61)," in *Francis in the Americas: Essays on the Franciscan Family in North and South America*, ed. John Schwaller (Berkeley: Academy of American Franciscan History, 2005) 343–64: see also Jack Clark Robinson, OFM, *Franciscan Friars Coast to Coast* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2019), 22–46.

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friars persevered in the United States; the comparable percentage for clerical friars was 48.[35]

There was also a theological element within the 1854 recall. As "missionaries apostolic" authorized by the Holy See's Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, Tyrolean friars in the United States were sometimes dismissed by their European confreres as simply diocesan priests who wore Franciscan habits. In fact, the Tyrolean friars had special permission to handle money and did not wear their Franciscan habit outside their friaries before 1851 because of the Nativist movement. Compounding matters further were the limitations on the Order's resources in the United States. A local bishop could easily reclaim a parish once served by priests of a religious order.

Provincial Luke Rauth wrote to the Leopoldine Society in January 1850 to recommend continued funding of this mission. In responding to the request for additional funds for a small church and convent, Canon Kohlgruber in Vienna told the Innsbruck provincial how he had already brought up the matter "with emphatic recommendation" to the prince-bishop as president for the support of the Franciscan mission in North America. He confided that the archbishop had told him, "Even if the proposed building does not pertain exactly to the purpose of the Leopoldine Society, they would gladly contribute something considerable to the building because of the zealous efforts of the Tyrolean Franciscans with the mission in America."[36] Though the donors were Bavarians and Austrians, their aid helped German-speaking Catholics, most of whom would never revisit the country of their birth. The support of the Leopoldine Society and the Ludwig-Missionsverein helped German-speaking Catholics in the United States face new and urgent challenges to their faith.

Tyrolean friars in the United States did not own the property on which they lived until 1850 when Saint Clement Parish in Saint Bernard, Ohio, was established and its land was deeded to the friars. It would eventually be canonically recognized as a religious house, enabling the friars to begin a formation program for men wanting to join the Order's new custody. Several friars in Tyrol also worried that their confreres in the United States might contract parish debts for which Saint Leopold Province would be liable.

The tensions between Cincinnati and Tyrolean friars resulted in the 1854 recall that became further contested in an unusual rebuke to the powers of the provincial within the Franciscan Order. On receiving news of the 1854 chapter decision, Unterthiner performed a crucial role by immediately informing Bishop Purcell, who he knew would be concerned about losing so many valuable members of his fledgling diocese. Following the existing chain of

35. McCloskey and Berens, *Rome*, 274–75.
36. McCloskey and Berens, *Rome*, 275.

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command, Purcell wrote to the Minister General of the Franciscan Order, Venantius of Celano, bitterly complaining that ten years of immeasurable work by the friars would be erased if this decision should be upheld. Venantius contacted Provincial Joseph Cupertino Friedl in Innsbruck and eventually counseled that, whatever problems existed in America, the recall from Cincinnati to Innsbruck was not the proper solution.

Unterthiner wrote a two-page letter in Latin to Rome's Congregation Propaganda Fide on December 1, 1854, asking them to overturn the Tyrolean chapter's recall order.[37] On February 13, 1855, Minister General Venantius wrote to the Tyrolean Provincial Joseph Friedl: "I certainly know that our mission in North America, which belongs to this [your] province, is in need of laborers since those who are now there are not sufficient friars to do the work of the ministry. Hence I ask your paternity with all the strength of soul I possess that you send workers into that vineyard [Matthew 20:1] because the fruits that it produces for life eternal are so many flowers to form a crown of glory not only for our whole Order, but especially for your province, which is certainly covered with shame if the head of the household, by neglect of those present, does not send workers to guard and cultivate the vineyard. Confident that your paternity will promptly meet this need, I impart to you the seraphic [Franciscan] blessing."[38] Friedl later rescinded the chapter's previous order, as he reported to the minister general on March 9, 1855.

Unterthiner's Death Ends an Era

On January 17, 1857, Father William died at Saint John the Baptist Friary. Superior Father Otto Jair wrote to his provincial, Joseph of Cupertino Friedl, four days later that William "asked all the confreres to forgive him and pray for him."[39] Archbishop Purcell visited him the day Unterthiner died. At the funeral Mass, twenty-eight priests attended, a sizable number under the circumstances.

After Father Clement Hammer's sermon in German (for the benefit of Unterthiner's parishioners), Archbishop Purcell spoke. "At first he was unable to speak properly; his voice was all broken up," wrote Father Otto. "Three times he said, "I have lost a good friend, my best support, one of my best priests."[40]

"Father Provincial," wrote Jair, "we have lost much in Father William, very much indeed, more than you think. His reputation and influence with the

37. Propaganda Archives, IV, item 1857, cited in McCloskey, "Reimagining Franciscan Life," 351.

38. McCloskey and Heidlage, *Five*, 89.

39. Ibid., 90.

40. *Thesis*, 90.

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archbishop and all the bishops who knew him was great. All the priests and the entire assembly were weeping. . . . There were inside and outside the church at least 5,000 people, not including the children who were in the schoolhouse praying during the services."[41] Unterthiner's ministry was greatly appreciated.

An obituary from the January 24, 1857, issue of the *Catholic Telegraph* noted: "Providence conducted him [Unterthiner] to Cincinnati, where he has been steadily engaged, with occasional missionary excursions into Tennessee, Kentucky, and Indiana, for the last thirteen years. During this time he was pastor at St. John's church, [head] of his Order, a member of the Archbishop's Council and examiner of the students of the Theological Seminary. In all these various capacities he won the esteem and affection of the clergy and his flock, and merited by his learning, eloquence, and courtesy the respect even of the enemies of our holy faith, whom he solidly confuted by arguments from the pulpit and the press, or disabused of their prejudices by his calm and charitable, but invincible reasoning."[42] The obituary then pointed out, "The archbishop added, in English, a further tribute to the memory of the deceased, at which all in church and sanctuary were, like himself, dissolved in tears."[43]

Recalled Again in 1857

The issues behind the chapter's 1854 recall decision did not automatically evaporate. The Saint Leopold Province's 1855 intermediate meeting stated that each friar in the United States should have a closer connection with his superior, especially regarding money. The friars there must accept no new assignments because the Saint Leopold Province will send no more missionaries.[44] Allegations about some US friars by other friars and spirited responses were part of the August 11, 1856, intermediate congregation.[45] The July 1857 provincial chapter determined that no more missionaries be sent to America because "there appeared no hope that our Order would be properly introduced with things as they are." The friars were either to return to the province or attach themselves and Saint Clement Friary to the newly established Custody of the Immaculate Conception (headquartered in Allegany, New York).[46]

This startling and bitter news came at an unfortunate moment for the Tyrolean friars in the United States because Unterthiner had died in January

41. Ibid.
42. McCloskey, *U. II*, 189.
43. Ibid., 190.
44. McCloskey and Heidlage, *Tyrol*, 253.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid., 253–54.

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1857. His forceful nature and strong voice within the diocese as Purcell's trusted co-worker strengthened the friars' earlier resolve to defy the provincial recall of 1854, but now the renewed petition to cease activities in the United States posed a serious threat. The chapter decision prompted the thirteen remaining Tyrolean friars then living dispersed across Ohio, Kentucky, and New York to make plans to prove wrong those friars assembled in their provincial chapter.

On October 17, 1857, Commissary Otto Jair wrote to the Innsbruck Provincial John Capistran Sojer:

> "I received your letter of August 8 in which you make known to us the disagreeable chapter decision, and I made known its contents first to my confreres and then to the most reverend archbishop. All of us feel severely affected, still more the congregations entrusted to our care for their souls, and most all, the archbishop. On September 29, St. Michael's Day, we had a consultation about our future condition and to learn the intention of every single friar.
>
> There can be no talk of going home at the present time without incurring heavy responsibility before God; all confreres were in agreement about that. We have already given up two mission posts, Lawrenceburg and Aurora in the Diocese of Vincennes, the state of Indiana, which were visited once a month from [Cincinnati's] St. John Church through Father Anselm, and they are now without clerical help.
>
> Presently we are taking care of St. John Church and from there St. Bernard, where Brother Adolph is by himself as watchman for convent and church to protect it for better times. At [Louisville's] St. Boniface Church is Father [Edmund] Etschmann, still all by himself. He soon will hurt himself with work. At St. Stephen Church in Hamilton [Ohio] is Father Pirmin, now occupied with building a new school. No one can leave his post without its being abandoned, and each one of these large congregations could perhaps be without a priest for a year. I believe the bishop and the congregation would curse us, and indeed rightly so, for presently the scarcity of priests is greater than it has been for years. We have decided, if God gives us health and strength, that we will keep the above-mentioned churches at least until we can be replaced by other priests. When the most reverend archbishop learned of the chapter decision, he broke into tears and into the words: "Many thousand times I've thanked God to have you in my diocese, and I should lose the best help. I beg you: Don't leave me and the congregations."[47]

47. McCloskey and Heidlage, *Five*, 97.

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The Tyrolean friars in the United States immediately sprang into action, proposing to Bishop Purcell that they establish a gymnasium for the education of young men, some of whom might become friars. The bishop gave them the property and cemetery of the former Christ Church, the city's first Catholic Church at what is now Liberty and Vine Streets.[48] The Sankt Franziskus Gymnasium opened on October 4, 1858.[49] Six of its first graduates were invested in 1860.[50] Father Anthony Becker was ordained in 1861.[51] The Custody of Saint John the Baptist was established in Rome on February 19, 1859; the Province of Saint John the Baptist followed on September 11, 1885.[52] Franciscan life has indeed taken root in America, adapting itself there as it has done for centuries everywhere else in the world.

Conclusions

Without the help of the Leopoldine Society, the mission of Father William Unterthiner and his confreres on behalf of German-speaking Catholics in Cincinnati and nearby areas could not have prospered. The Saint Leopold Province took a risk in making friars available for a ministry that their own friars did not yet exercise but would soon undertake in Tyrol. Bishop John Baptist Purcell of Cincinnati very persuasively made his case for financial assistance.

Using letters by those most involved in the mission that began in Cincinnati and quickly spread to neighboring cities and states, this article fully justifies the following assertions:

1. William Unterthiner was a zealous missionary, ready to endure hardships from a frequently hostile US culture and misunderstandings from continental members of the Saint Leopold Province. Even so, he encouraged his superiors to send more priests and brothers to minister in the United States.
2. Bishop/Archbishop John Baptist Purcell and Catholic priests near Cincinnati highly valued Unterthiner's pastoral ministry and that of his Tyrolean confreres. The account of his funeral vividly illustrates that.
3. Significant cultural and political differences existed among German-speaking Catholics in Cincinnati, as well as with German-speaking

48. Pat McCloskey, OFM, *God Gives His Grace* (self-pub., 2001), 8.
49. Ibid., 49.
50. Ibid.
51. Byron Witzeman, OFM, *History of the Province of St. John the Baptist* (self-pub., 1960). Anthony Becker is not listed among the deceased members of that province.
52. McCloskey, *God Gives His Grace*, 15.

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Protestants there. Unterthiner and his confreres continued to show and mature the missionary zeal that initially brought them to the United States.

4. The Tyrolean friars vigorously protested the 1854 and 1857 chapter mandates that they either return to Austria or join the new Immaculate Conception Custody's friars in Allegany, New York. The Tyrolean friars' commitment to the German Catholic immigrants in the Midwest of the United States never wavered and would bear considerable fruit.

The Leopoldine Society provided significant help to Unterthiner and his Tyrolean confreres, especially in the construction of their first house, Saint Clement Friary in Saint Bernard. This enabled the friars to accept young men into the Order, leading to the eventual creation of Saint John the Baptist Province (headquartered in Cincinnati). The support of the Leopoldine Society members and similarly motivated Catholics later enabled these friars and their successors to evangelize throughout the United States as well as in China, the Philippines, and Jamaica.

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