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FRANCIS X. WENINGER PAPERS
1805-2010

CHI.4.001

JESUIT ARCHIVES & RESEARCH CENTER
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Collection Summary

Collection number: CHI.4.001

Repository: Jesuit Archives & Research Center

Title: Francis X. Weninger papers

Dates [Inclusive]: 1805-2010

Extent: 8 linear feet (10 boxes)

Creator: Weninger, F. X. (Francis Xavier), 1805-1888

Language of material: German and Latin with some English

Abstract: Francis Xavier Weninger (1805-1888) was an Austrian Jesuit missionary who preached extensively in the United States and Canada in the latter half of the 19th century. Weninger's writings during his life time were extensive and varied across a wide spectrum of topics, including, but not limited to, scripture commentaries, works on canon law, sermons, mission techniques, and musical compositions. The Francis X. Weninger Collection was compiled from records in the Chicago Province Collection and the Missouri Province Collection of the Midwest Jesuit Archives.

Processing history: Susan X. Blakely (d. 1910/1911) worked on the material in the early twentieth century and translated and transcribed several of Weninger's works including his Memoirs. Jesuit Murtha J. Boylan (d.1954) traveled from Rome to Germany and across the United States collecting notes for a Weninger biography that remained unfinished upon his death. Jesuit Henry H. Regnet (d. 1979) worked with the Blakely and Boylan contributions to create a biography that also was not published. Processed by Alicia M. Detelich, Michael A. Gregory, and David P. Miros, March 2010.

Conditions governing access: This collection is open for research.

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Preferred citation: [Identification of item], [Box number], [Folder number]. Francis X. Weninger series. Jesuit Archives & Research Center, St. Louis, Missouri. [Date accessed].

Additional finding aids: An [item level box list](#) is available online.

Biographical note

Francis Xavier Weninger (1805-1888) was born in Marburg, Styria, a province in southern Austria, to a prominent Catholic family. He had connections to the old aristocracy of Austria through his mother, Barbara von Mendelstein, and lived for a time on a large estate with his family. Weninger spent much of his youth in Vienna, where he attended the local high school and dreamed of enlisting in the military. However, his father disapproved of this goal, and instead sent the young Weninger to work as an apprentice at a pharmacy in Laybach.

With the permission of his guardian and the director of his high school, Weninger continued his studies independently, and his progress in the academic world soon caught the attention of the Habsburg Court. In 1821, on the recommendation of the director, Empress Carolina Augusta of Austria agreed to sponsor Weninger's education, and he entered the Klinkowstöm Institute and the University of Vienna to continue his academic work. At the age of seventeen, having spent two years studying philosophy and the classics, Weninger became convinced that he should become a priest. He began studying dogmatic and moral theology and was ordained a priest in 1827. In 1829 he earned a doctorate of divinity at the Episcopal Seminary at Gratz, and began teaching dogmatic theology at the University of Gratz. For the first few years after his ordination, Weninger associated with the Benedictines, Camaldolese, and the Franciscans. He eventually entered the Society of Jesus in 1832.

Weninger worked for several years in Austria and Germany, teaching and preaching throughout the region, at one point even serving as confessor to the Duchess de Berri, the exiled queen of France. However, the 1848 expulsion of the Jesuits due to the revolution in Germany brought Weninger to the United States. He landed in New York, preaching his first American sermon at the Church of the Most Holy Trinity in Williamsburg, and then traveled to Saint Louis to confer with the Superior of the Missouri Mission about his usefulness in the western territories.

Weninger traveled extensively throughout the country; an entry in Weninger's obituary notes that "nearly every part of the country was to feel the effects of his grace-laden mission-tours." Between 1850 and 1860, Weninger preached in Ohio, Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, New York, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Louisiana, Texas, Alabama, Virginia, Washington D.C., and various locations across Canada. During this period, worshippers at a mission in the town of Guttenberg, Iowa, experienced, during a visit from Weninger, a vision of a white cross in the sky, which became a well-known event in the Society of Jesus. The primary goal of these missions was conversion, but Weninger also spoke out forcefully against German radicals and the Know-Nothing political party, groups which were gaining popularity during the 1850s.

Weninger was residing in the Midwestern portion of the United States when the Civil War broke out in 1861. He spoke out against the politics of the situation, both the Republican bullying of the United States government and the permission of slave-holding in the Confederate states, which was a unique political position to hold at the time. He continued his missionary work in the Union states of Kentucky, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, New York, Iowa, and Minnesota, where he conducted retreats and gave sermons.

Following the conclusion of the Civil War, Weninger conducted over ninety-five missions and retreats, traveling to California, Oregon, Nevada, Washington Territory, Vancouver, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Ohio, Florida, New York, New Jersey, Louisiana, Michigan, Illinois, Kansas, Minnesota, and Arkansas. He also conducted an examination of the relics of Peter Claver. After returning to the Midwest in 1871, Weninger continued his routine of missionary work across the country, preaching in many states until, around 1880, his health forced him to limit the amount of traveling in which he could participate. However, he did not stop his work completely. During the late 1870s and early 1880s, he began working toward the improvement of the religious practices of African Americans and began pushing for the canonization of Saint Peter Claver. He retired to Cincinnati around 1882, where he died in 1888 at the age of 82.

Weninger's writings during his life time were extensive and varied across a wide spectrum of topics, including, but not limited to, scripture commentaries, works on canon law, sermons, mission techniques, and musical compositions. These works had a great impact their readers, as shown in a letter that was sent in memoriam by a Jewish man from New Orleans. In the letter, he writes: "To my sincere sorrow, I read in to-day's paper of the demise of Fr. Weninger of Cincinnati. Not having had the pleasure of knowing him personally, I have learned to love him from studying some of his works, and it was for some time a favorite idea of mine, when passing through Cincinnati, to call on him and that him for the great spiritual benefit I derived by perusing his books. His picture is hanging over my desk, and if the prayers of a poor sinful Hebrew convert, whom by his writings he has helped by to find again the true and only way that leads to salvation, are acceptable toward the repose of his soul, I will thus try and show him my gratitude."

"Father Weninger," Woodstock Letters 18, no. 1 (1889): 123.

Scope and Content note

The Francis X. Weninger papers describes the intellectual and spiritual life of missionary priest Francis X. Weninger, S.J., who traveled in the western regions of the United States during the latter half of the 19th century.

The collection includes Weninger's memoirs, correspondence, and writings on house rules for Jesuits, the catechism, and church history; lecture notes on logic, canon law, scriptures, and missionary work in the United States; sermons on a variety of topics including particular feast days, the apostles, and founders of religious orders; scripture commentaries on many books in the both the Old and the New Testament; publications that were written by Weninger and printed during his lifetime; and published and unpublished musical compositions written by Weninger, as well as commentaries concerning the use of music during the liturgy.

Also included in the Weninger papers is a collection of research on Weninger compiled by Jesuits Murtha J. Boylan and Henry H. Regnet.

Arrangement note

The Francis X. Weninger Collection has been divided into ten boxes, each with its own concentration on specific Weninger topics.

Collection contents

Series 1. Biographical Information

Box 7.0060

Scope and content:

Includes the translation and transcription of Weninger's Memoirs done by Susan X. Blakely.

Series 2. Writings and research

Box 7.0061

Box 7.0062

Scope and content:

Includes Weninger's writings on house rules for Jesuits in the nineteenth century, the catechism, and church history. Writings and Research also includes Weninger's writings on various topics, letters to and about Weninger, and a collection of research on Weninger compiled by Jesuits Murtha J. Boylan and Henry H. Regnet.

Series 3. Lecture notes

Box 7.0065

Scope and content:

Includes lecture notes on logic, canon law, scriptures, as well as an account of his work in the United States.

Series 4. Scripture commentaries

Box 7.0063

Scope and content:

Includes Weninger's commentaries on many books in the both the Old and the New Testament.

Series 5. Sermons

Box 7.0064

Box 7.0069

Scope and content:

Includes Weninger's sermons over a variety of topics including particular feast days, the apostles, and founders of religious orders. Sermons written on oversized paper that were translated by Susan X. Blakely in the early twentieth century.

Series 6. Publications

Box 7.0066

Scope and content:

Includes publications that were written by Weninger and printed during his lifetime.

Series 7. Musical compositions

Box 7.0067

Box 7.0068

Scope and content:

Includes published and unpublished musical compositions that were written by Weninger as well as commentaries concerning the use of music during the liturgy.