Fr. Paul Gerard Hinnebusch, OP Interview

0:00:01 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

What was it like at the beginning of the province?

What are the things that stand out in your mind?

0:00:09 - Fr. Paul Hinnebusch, OP

What was the spirit like? Well, the first person I think of, of course, is Peter O'Brien, the first provincial. He was our professor of theology at the time, and he was so busy getting a province set up that we had only about half... our number of classes. And so we did a lot of studying on our own.

0:00:49 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

One thing the fellow told me in Chicago, he said, don't be afraid of gigantic gaps of silence.

He said, they'll all be edited out.

0:00:59 - Fr. Paul Hinnebusch, OP

Yeah, the next thing that comes to me is the, well, I don't know if you'd call it the turmoil of choosing which province you would belong to. For some men, it was a turmoil. For others, for me, immediately I knew where I was going to be and had never the slightest doubt or hesitation. I made up my mind and never thought of it again. But many others, right up until the deadline, were moving back and forth.

And the... Another early thing that made an impression on me was the fact that four, I believe, of our men were sent to Washington to go to school. Sad lot, and the only one I can think of right off. Oh, and I think one who went stayed there. I don't even know who the others were. was a big thing.

0:02:08 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

What was it like living at River Forest in those days?

0:02:12 - Fr. Paul Hinnebusch, OP

Well, it was great for me. And 15, 20 years later, when the men were saying, that place is a hell on earth, I could never understand it, because it was not.

It must have been a wholly, a completely different type of person who came in 10 or 15 years later. Because, well, as far as I was concerned, I was always perfectly at home, perfectly relaxed.

I don't think I was aware of, if there were tensions, I was in ignorant bliss of them. I think that's always been one of my blessings, that I can live in the midst of turmoil and not even notice it.

So maybe there was more turmoil there than I was aware of. In those days, I still had not conquered my natural timidity.

I remember at deacon's night, did you have a deacon's night in your day? The great thing they ribbed me on was my failure to make any real contribution to recreation. I just sit there and listen, and I was perfectly content.

So, I mean, that sort of thing, maybe lack of a deep involvement in that way. Maybe I was unaware of complaints and gripes and the like.

0:03:53 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

Of the early apostolates in the province, what are those which stand out in your mind?

As you were a student, what were the things that really were offered in terms of ministry in those days?

0:04:09 - Fr. Paul Hinnebusch, OP

Well, the first thing is, I think everybody was in dread of being assigned to Fenwick. And in my class of 14, I think 10 of the 14 were assigned to Fenwick. And I was one of the, as I thought, one of the fortunate ones who wasn't sent there.

There was not adequate preparation for preaching. We never had any real homiletic training.

And so the preaching wasn't really encouraged in that sense at all. The only thing that carried me through the pulpit through the years was the sense of, I have a vocation to the Dominican order. I have the sacrament of holy orders, so I better get up there and do something. I tried to say something, but no one really told us how to do it or what approach to take.

That was one of the woeful deficiencies.

All I'm thinking of now is deficiencies. deficiency in scriptures, no real bringing of the scriptures to bear on Christian life and on preaching, not at all.

And some of the things I discovered on my own 20 years later, I said to one of my professors later on, well, didn't you know this stuff? You studied in Jerusalem. Why didn't you teach it?

0:05:58 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

Who's going to edit all this stuff?

0:06:01 - Fr. Paul Hinnebusch, OP

But what did he say? He really didn't give an answer. He just kind of shrugged. And because he was a little embarrassed, I didn't push him. I guess he was not yet sure enough of, even though Pere Lagrange was his professor and taught him all this stuff, he wasn't sure enough of it to, to bring out the new stuff, I guess. I suppose maybe he would have been resisted by his peers, the rest of the faculty.

One attempt that was made in our time was to make us mission conscious. We had regular, maybe once a month, we'd have an evening spent just on, study of missions and their needs, what's going on, the various kinds of preparation needed for it.

And I suppose that served its purpose, because when we did begin to take foreign missions, there was already interest in the missions.

0:07:12 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

Who were some of the people that stand out in your mind? Not necessarily the superiors in the province or the provincials, but others that might really have contributed to the growth of the province from its beginnings?

0:07:28 - Fr. Paul Hinnebusch, OP

Well, the only people I was really aware of were the professors, and my professors were, I had Peter O'Brien, only one year, maybe it was two, Sparks, at least six out of seven years, all through philosophy and all through theology, and

People like McDonald, J.J. McDonald, Clancy, or Canon Law.

Men like that, I was content enough with them. I was always unhappy with the Scripture professors. I never had one I was happy with.

And the only reason I knew any Scripture is because...

I studied it on my own.

It's strange that this hasn't come to my mind sooner, but the one man who seemed to be most revered and loved by the students in our time was George Kinsella. Everybody had him on a pedestal and I think he deserved it.

So that's why we were amazed when he was out of that job and in other jobs he seemed to be rejected as prior in other places.

He was always very, very much behind the students and went to bat for them and defended them and protected them and conscientiously worked with them. And I remember, well, here's a little indication. I guess people did have problems in those times. One day I went to see him and said, you know, I have a problem.

And he says, well, what is it? He says, my problem is everybody seems to have problems, but I have no problem. So he just laughed. I mean, I was always so, I guess, perfectly content. And if there were problems, I didn't see them. And so he just laughed and says, well, thank the Lord or something like that.

0:10:13 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

What was your first assignment?

0:10:18 - Fr. Paul Hinnebusch, OP

After ordination, Canton, South Dakota.

0:10:22 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

And we just opened it?

0:10:25 - Fr. Paul Hinnebusch, OP

Yes, and of course, I was unneeded in the parish.

It was a one-man parish of only 50 families, and the pastor just didn't want anyone there. And the Diocese of Sioux Falls was so short of clergy, that they put me to work. I was practically loaned to the diocese. So in three years, I worked in 30 different places in the diocese. I used to say, well, each year there I spent nine months of each year waiting for buses and three months riding on them. I was always riding on buses and wasting endless hours waiting for them, and never stole some trains until I'd ride trains.

But the man who pushed our taking over of that place was Walter Conway, a native of that diocese and of that state. And he thought, well, this is great mission territory. There's a great future for us. And he wanted me to join him in preaching missions.

But the provincial vetoed it. See, I was only ordained a year. That's where I'd have learned preaching, with a preacher. If I could have accompanied a man on preaching, I would have learned something about it. But the provincial, I guess, said I was too young for mission work.

So I would travel around preaching at 40 hours and so on, but I would come to a parish. I came to one parish, for example, to preach the 40 hours, and the priest had a sore jaw and couldn't speak above a whisper, so he asked me to stay as long as I could.

So I stayed nine months because the preaching jobs that were coming to me were so few and far between.

And then the following year I was loaned to the diocese and assigned by the bishop to a parish for six months in Aberdeen.

So I spent three years there.

And then I had ambitions to do some writing. So I asked if I could be given freedom to write a book that I had in mind. And Pete O'Brien was just going out of office, so he didn't make the decision. He said he'd refer it to the provincial chapter at which his successor was elected. So the provincial chapter assigned me to Madison so I could do some writing. But the next provincial... didn't like that assignment, so at his earliest opportunity, he took me out of it.

What did you do then? Well, first of all, after six weeks, one of our priests was sick, and he asked me to substitute for him. So I spent the whole year as chaplain at Racine, substituting for a sick chaplain.

And then I was sent to Trinity High School to be chaplain, and I taught in the high school for five years. And so Ed Hughes was the one who, I wanted to write a book on the mother of Jesus. And Ed Hughes, the provincial, says, oh, that book doesn't need to be written. It has been written.

And looking back at it later on, I knew that he really got me off the hook because I wasn't ready at that time to write that kind of a book. So it was a blessing in that sense. I've since written one, and I can't find a publisher for it, even now.

0:14:24 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

Where do you think the province has gone in its growth and in its ministries?

0:14:40 - Fr. Paul Hinnebusch, OP

That I don't know.

0:14:45 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

Where would you like to see it go?

0:14:48 - Fr. Paul Hinnebusch, OP

I would like to see some real preaching of the gospel, some real evangelism. And I think the next generation is at last going to see it.

I think only now after, let's see, 34 years, I think that grace is at last hitting me. What impeded it for 35 years?

Well, for one thing, a deep-down natural timidity on my part. Well, I shouldn't be talking about why. Well, of course, another thing, that very timidity that prevented me from preaching spontaneously made me write. And so the more I developed as a writer, the more that hampered preaching And so I had to make a real effort to break out of that bind or whatever you call it, thinking as a writer instead of as a preacher.

And I'd say it's only in the last two or three or four years that I've really broken out of that. And that breaking out of it actually comes from the charismatic renewal. That's where I learned how to... how to preach, learning it from lay people how to preach.