

DAMIAN VINCENT SCHMELZ: DISTINGUISHED EDUCATOR, SCIENTIST, AND THEOLOGIAN

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It is indeed an honor to be asked to write in behalf of Dr. Damian V. Schmelz, OSB, for the Indiana Academy of Science's Biography Series. It is doubtful that any present member of the Academy enjoys greater respect, admiration, and affection than does Dr. Schmelz, or is more deserving of this recognition.

Damian and I first became acquainted in 1962 when he came to Purdue University's Department of Biological Sciences to pursue a Master of Science Degree in Plant Ecology under the direction of Dr. Alton A. Lindsey. At that time, six of us were working toward advanced degrees in Ecology with Dr. Lindsey. Later, Damian completed his Ph.D. in Plant Ecology (also with Lindsey) in 1969. Being about the same age, both having grown up on southern Indiana farms, and interested in the same area of graduate study, we soon became very good friends, as well as later becoming colleagues, relationships that have continued for more than 40 years.

ORIGINS, EARLY HISTORY, AND EDUCATION

The 50-acre farm where Damian grew up is located in Harrison County, Indiana, a few miles northeast from Corydon. In Damian's words, "in between Georgetown (post office), Crandall (telephone), and Lanesville (church and school)." He was born on May 7, 1932, the youngest of four brothers, all of whom still survive; the older three served in World War II or Korea. As Damian's stated, "We were of modest means, but we did not realize how much others had. We raised most of our own food – cows, hogs, chickens, garden, and fruit trees. Only I went to boarding high school (St. Meinrad) as a freshman; home two weeks at Christmas and summers. Mid-college, at age 20, I entered St. Meinrad Monastery".

His education included broad plus in-depth studies in Theology, Liberal Arts, Philosophy,

Science, and Education, plus advanced degrees in Ecology and Natural Resources Management (sort of a Modern-day Renaissance Person). Dr. Schmelz graduated from St. Meinrad Seminary High School, St Meinrad, Indiana in May 1950, and from St. Meinrad College with a B.A. in Philosophy in May 1958. He also received the Theology S.T.B. from St. Meinrad School of Theology, and Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. in June 1959.

During the early 1960s, he completed three NSF Summer Institutes at Purdue University. In the early 1970s, he completed an NSF Summer Institute in Systems Ecology at the University of Oklahoma, plus six NSF-AAAS Chautauqua Short Courses in various areas of Life Sciences at Miami University (Ohio). From 1962 thru 1969, he completed the M.S.

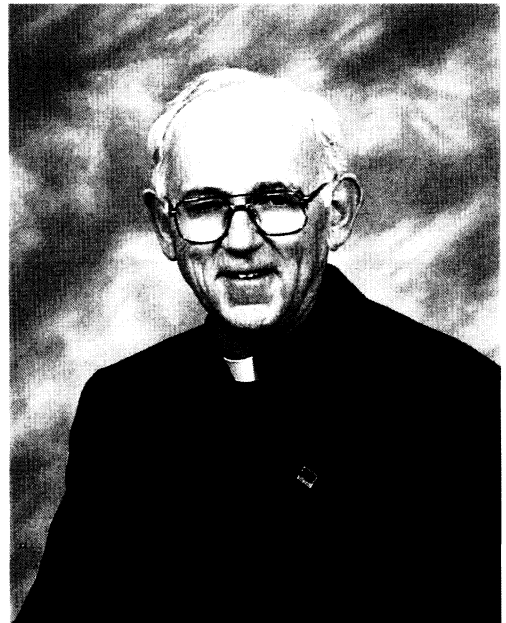


Figure 1.—Father Damian Schmelz in 2002.



Figure 2.—The Schmelz Family in 1952. Shown are his parents and three brothers. Damian, on far left, is the youngest.

and Ph.D. in Plant Ecology (mentioned previously) at Purdue University. Damian held an NDEA Title IV Graduate Fellowship to support his Ph.D. Study at Purdue.

TEACHING AND ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE

For a number of years (1959–1967), Damian was an effective and highly-regarded Biology Teacher at St. Meinrad Seminary High School. He also had a faculty position in Biology at St. Meinrad College, rising from Instructor in 1965 to Full Professor in 1975, thence continuing as Professor until 1998, for a total of 43 years at St. Meinrad College. Students found him to be unusually well-informed, and supremely conscientious in helping them learn. He became a self-taught photographer and used his several thousand 35 mm slides of nature and science illustrations to complement his interesting lectures.

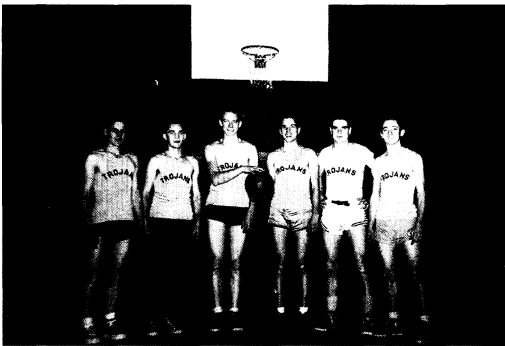


Figure 3.—St. Meinrad Seminary intramural team in 1952. Damian is at far right.



Figure 4.—Dr. Schmelz in his Biology office at St. Meinrad College in 1970.

His career in College Administration was equally varied, lengthy, and distinguished. Administrative duties included: Chairman, Division of Mathematics and Natural Sciences (1969–1976); Assistant Dean of Students (1971–1975); Trustee of the College (1974–1998); Academic Dean (1975–1993); and Provost and Vice Rector (1993–1998). (A careful read will reveal that many of these demanding responsibilities were over-lapping or simultaneous appointments).

In his “spare time”, he also was the manager of the Campus *Un-Stable* (the student pizza parlor in the basement of the gym), in his words “a two-year appointment that lasted for about 27 years. This facility had the walls lined with barn lumber, constructed in the days of 7-UP “*Un-cola*”, and serving beer and wine!” Damian summarized his career at St. Meinrad, which lasted from 1959 to 1998, with a quote from G.K. Chesterton, “Anything worth doing, is worth doing poorly,” but knowing his zeal for perfection, I am sure that he served with distinction in almost every case.

On top of other duties, he chaired space, renovation, and landscaping committees, as well as the committee to memorialize St. Meinrad College after its closure. He became curator of the natural science collections, and saw to their disposition along with equipment from the labs when the college closed. In his words, “Rightly or wrongly, early on I came to accept that when no one stepped forward for something which simply had to be done, I would do it with my limitation of time and abilities.” How much more smoothly our world and human society would function, if only more of us followed Damian’s willingness to serve.

TO PURDUE AND FIELD RESEARCH
WITH DR. LINDSEY
by Damian V. Schmelz

“I had a lot of prerequisite science credits to accumulate before applying for a M.S. program. After three summer sessions at Catholic University in Washington, D.C., where I had one of the best professors ever, I was accepted at Purdue where I became part of a National Science Foundation M.S. Program. Dr. Al Lindsey became my Major Professor and Director of Research. I had not heard of him before, and he had never mentored a student who was a Catholic priest! It became a good fit.

He allowed me to develop a course of studies that would prepare me to teach a wide variety of undergraduate courses at St. Meinrad. He found me an apt, hardworking student who wanted to soak up his knowledge and experience of the natural world and especially of old-growth forests, the topic for both M.S. and Ph.D. dissertations.

As we visited all parts of Indiana to complete the Natural Areas Inventory, I had all the camping I ever needed during the one three-month summer data-gathering around the State! Sometimes there were just the two of us; other times as many as five working an area, at times including another ‘giant’ in my life, Dr. Tom Bushnell, the ‘Father of Indiana Soil Science.’

Lindsey’s needs for food and sleep were quite simple. Out on Monday, back on Saturday to clean up and re-charge. Our field work included the usual array of unplanned events. Once we were awakened by a raccoon dragging off a metal container with cookies through the underbrush at midnight when he couldn’t get the lid off. Another time we set up the tent at the wrong place at Hovey Lake, went into town to treat ourselves to supper at a restaurant for a change, and came back to find every piece of clothing soaked by a deluge.

I was hardly competent to challenge— or to help— him, but Dr. Lindsey never saw a plant of interest that he could not identify at least to *genus*. I learned innumerable pieces of information about species simply impossible to describe in writing—a texture, an odor.

Dr. Lindsey, finally, was the one who moved me into my first position with the Indiana

Academy of Science, succeeding Dr. Frank Guthrie as Treasurer and Newsletter Editor. Talk about being in the right place at the right time!”

SERVICE TO THE INDIANA
ACADEMY OF SCIENCE

Beginning while he was still in Graduate School, Damian embarked on his long tenure of excellent service to the Indiana Academy of Science. Appropriately, since his Graduate Research involved analysis of old-growth forests in Indiana, he was appointed to the Preservation of Scientific Areas Committee in 1966 and served a three-year term. In 1967 he was Chairman of the Plant Taxonomy Section at the Fall Meetings, a position that he filled again in 1991.

A series of elected appointments began in 1969 when he was chosen for a three-year term as Treasurer. On becoming President, Dr. Schmelz was given a half-dozen file folders of information on what the role entailed. During his tenure he developed an Operations Manual consisting of three large binders dealing with all aspects of IAS. These were of basis of the comment by his successor, Dr. John Patton, that we should enlist Damian to fill all Academy Offices in order to enhance the efficiency of all Academy operations!

Other positions of responsibility included Newsletter Editor in 1972, and Academy Foundation Committee member in 1972–73. In 1974, at the young age of 42, he became President of the Indiana Academy of Science. His Presidential Address was a slide lecture entitled *Roots in the Soil, and Water, and Sky*. Other responsible positions included Speaker-of-the-Year for 1979–80. His slide lecture was: *Stewardship of Indiana’s Natural Resources*, a very appropriate title since he served as the Academy Representative on the Indiana Natural Resources Commission for more than 25 years following 1975. In addition, Damian served as Chair of the IAS Fellows Committee from 1992–97.

Honors conferred upon Dr. Schmelz by the Academy include Fellow, 1973; President, 1974; Speaker-of-the-Year, 1979–80; and the Academy’s Outstanding Service Award, 2003. In addition, The Indiana Wildlife Federation granted him the Lifetime Conservation Achievement Award in 2007.



Figure 5.—On site of Anderson River erosion repair in Perry County in 1998.

ECOLOGICAL RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION

Dr. Schmelz' ecological research has centered primarily on three basic approaches to analysis of the structure of old-growth forests. The approach employed in his M.S. thesis research examined the size class – density patterns present in several of the highest quality remaining forest stands of Indiana. Such evaluation provides information regarding the timing and nature of past disturbance within the old-growth stands (*Forest Science* 11:259–264).

His Ph.D. dissertation research involved analysis of the tree species composition present within old-growth forests that occupy different topographic positions throughout the State. To graphically portray differences in forest structure as related to drainage-aeration patterns, he developed a set of triangular graphs similar to the texture triangle widely used by soil scientists. (*Proceedings of the Indiana Academy of Science* 79:192–203, and *Ecology* 51:620–629). (Data for this study were obtained primarily from full censuses of (or by intensively sampling) old-growth stands from throughout the State during the Indiana Natural Areas Inventory (*Natural Areas of Indiana and Their Preservation*, 594 p.)

Another research interest of Damian's has been Long-term Ecological Research (LTER), as based on chronological comparisons of decade-interval changes in selected old-growth stands, (especially Donaldson's Woods in Lawrence County and Kramer Woods in Spencer County). Such study is based on detailed large-scale maps of the exact locations of all individual trees in 8-hectare sections of

the forests. These studies involve re-measuring all trees at successive time periods to note growth rates, mortality, and accessions of individual trees. (*Proc. Indiana Acad. Sci.* 96:209–214). Data from these LTER Studies (and for several other such mapped stands around the State), are of immense significance to study long-term natural change. Those of us involved in such research have serious concern whether future scientists will preserve these data files and continue re-studies.

Also of interest to readers of this Biography is that Dr. Schmelz along with Dr. Lindsey did the first census of trees in Kramer Woods (owned and protected in recent times by Helen and Kathryn Hougland), and assisted Bill Barnes, first DNR Director of the Division of Nature Preserves, in its protection as Indiana's 200th Nature Preserve. It is one of the finest remaining old-growth forest remnants in Indiana.

WORK ON INDIANA'S NATURAL RE- SOURCES COMMISSION (NRC) 1975–2008

by Damian Schmelz

"I was asked by Dr. John Patton, my successor as IAS President, to assume the position of IAS delegate to NRC vacated by the current member leaving on sabbatical. It was a cast of 'giants' such as the Chair, John Hillenbrand, Bill Lieber, grandson of Colonel Lieber, founder of the Indiana State Park System, Ruben Dooley, Charlie Werner from one of the Indianapolis newspapers, and others.

The monthly agendas were lengthy and detailed. We handled nearly all requests for permits regarding the use of natural resources, and also fielded violations and complaints. Represented on the Committee were key members of the DNR staff, as well as delegates from the other State agencies such as IDEM and INDOT, along with 5–6 appointees of the Governor.

As a Catholic priest, with a Ph.D. in hand from Purdue and delegated by the IAS President, I was easy to spot at NRC meetings, always attending in clerical garb. Members of the audience had to wonder the how and why of my appointment. It did not take long to sense that DNR staff and those of other agencies at times felt pressured regarding analyses and decisions. I learned from my non-political/scientific position that I could

say some things some others could not. On occasion, a head rolled as a result of a vote by NRC.

My routine was to leave St. Meinrad at 5:30 a.m., drive three hours to Indianapolis, sit through the 3–5 hour meeting—working through lunch—then make the return trip. Later on, much of the detailed analysis leading to decisions was delegated to competent DNR staff. For several years NRC has met every other month for 2–3 hours, focusing on policy, certain staff appointments, conservancy district matters and hearing officers' reports.

Members of NRC have lost the opportunity to get to know the DNR staff who previously needed to attend the meetings to speak to agenda items. I brought to NRC a broad environmental perspective and background with special interests in forests, deer, parks and natural areas, and coal mining reclamation. I argued regularly for making State Parks and Inns family friendly for ordinary Indiana citizens, especially that fees should be somewhat lower than at commercial enterprises."

**BROWN COUNTY STATE PARK
DEER STUDY COMMITTEE
CHAIR (1992–1993)**

One of the highest profile assignments that Dr. Schmelz became involved with, as a result of his work with the NRC, was Chairing the State Park Deer Study Committee. His appointment was by the Director of DNR to represent the NRC. The Committee was broad-based with a membership of 14, representing a wide spectrum of viewpoints and expertise, the point being that opinions from all quarters would be heard and respected within the study group, rather than from the sidelines. Dr. John O. Whitaker, Jr. and I represented ISU, joining the dozen other members from other academic institutions, DNR staff, and several others concerned with the question of controlling deer population size in State Parks.

This highly controversial topic was thoroughly researched in the literature and in the field. Meetings were open to the public, of course, and some of them got rather heated—once Damian was questioned about how he, a member of the clergy, could sleep at night, recommending the killing of Bambi. Most likely, anyone other than Damian would have elicited even stronger objections.

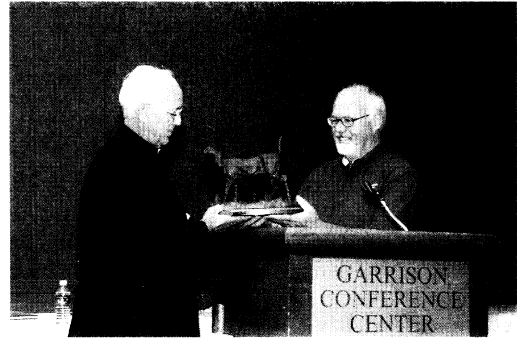


Figure 6.—John Goss presenting the Indiana Wildlife Conservation Achievement award to Dr. Schmelz in 2007.

The Committee considered eight possible alternatives to address the problems of excessive deer numbers within Indiana State Parks as follows, and rejected all but one: 1). Do nothing—ecological damage and malnourished deer problems would continue; 2). Trap and transfer—expensive, stresses deer, and no place for excess deer; 3). Fertility control—expensive, no effective delivery system; 4). Supplemental feeding—expensive, not effective, greater long-term damage; 5). Fencing—expensive, long-term ecological damage; 6). Large predator reintroduction—habitat unsuitable, socially unacceptable; 7). Landscape management—expensive, will not solve problem; 8). Hunting—least expensive, most effective but controversial. After long and careful deliberation and weighing of all alternatives, No. 8 was selected as being overall the least objectionable choice.

A consensus report was presented to the NRC, but it disappeared into an 'inaction file' (too sensitive politically?) for about two years. There was one court challenge. Then it led to the initial effort toward deer population control in Indiana State Parks; the first controlled 'hunt' at Brown County State Park presented tense moments with threats of demonstrations in the woods, but these failed to materialize.

Special commendations are due to Jerry Pagac (then Director of State Parks), who handled the logistics of meeting agenda and sites, Jim Eagleman (Naturalist at Brown County State Park), Dr. John Mitchell (DNR Deer Biologist), and Dr. George Parker (Purdue Forestry Researcher), who provided solid scientific evidence for the need to control the deer population, leading to legislative authori-



Figure 7.—Father Damian Schmelz at the St. Henry rectory in 2007.

zation for the ongoing policy for the entire State Park System.

INVOCATIONS ¹

by Damian V. Schmelz

“Over the years, I was asked to offer a blessing at banquets and various meetings. When Bill Walters was Director of State Parks, he asked me to give an invocation when a new nature center (formerly the old lake bathhouse) was dedicated at Spring Mill State Park. He exhibited the text with photos on a slab of wood on the lower level. Dr. Jackson included a couple in his monumental rewrite of *Natural Features of Indiana* (i.e., *The Natural Heritage of Indiana*). Over the years, I composed several dozen such poem-prayers. Examples: Portland

Arch, Lincoln State Park Amphitheater, William Lieber Nature Preserve, Rededication of Pine Hills Nature Preserve, Clifty Inn Rededication, and (amusing to some of my friends) Twin Swamps Nature Preserve.

I was specially honored when James Ride-nour, having served as DNR Director, asked me to write an invocation for the ceremony of his appointment as Director of the National Park Service. I always did my homework regarding people who had been connected with the place, its natural history, the significance of what DNR was doing and making available to citizens of Indiana. Always brief, never too long that the audience was bored, or the meal got cold.”

PRIESTLY MINISTRY

Beginning with his Ordination in 1958, Father Damian has done most of his ministry in the context of St. Meinrad Seminary, whose main educational mission has always been preparing students for the ministry. Apart from the campus, he assisted at local parishes frequently on week-ends and during some summers.

He spent two summers at parishes in Wyoming, with lots of time to savor the beauty

¹ *Note by MTJ.*—It is my failing that a concluding chapter authored by Dr. Schmelz and entitled *Ecotheology* was not added to *The Natural Heritage of Indiana*. No one from Indiana whom I have ever read is better able to capture the Spirit of the land, and what Human stewardship of the Earth should be, than does Damian in his Invocations. He is uniquely gifted by his education, by his experience, by his understanding of how nature works, and by his emotions, to capture that special ecological understanding often attributed to Native Americans.

and life of the landscape. Finally, at age 69—when most of his classmates were retiring from active ministry—he became the priest of a small country parish located at Ferdinand, Indiana, 12 miles from St. Meinrad.

A LIFE OF SERVICE

Of all the people that I have come to know during my 75 years, Damian stands near the top in terms of what he gives to institutions, to causes, to others. Throughout his adult life, he has given spiritually to so many parishioners, and St. Meinrad students; he has given educationally to his many students in both high school and college; he has given ecologically to make Indiana and Planet Earth a better place for all; and he has given of his time, energy, and knowledge to make the Indiana Academy of Science a more vital and effective scientific organization. He has given his colleagues inspiration, an unqualified personal example, and a yardstick for measuring their contributions. Thanks, Damian, for all you share.

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

(*Note:* An asterisk indicates publication presented at the Fall meeting of the Indiana Academy of Science.)

*Lindsey, A.A. & D.V. Schmelz. 1965. Comparison of Donaldson's Woods in 1964 with its 1954 map of 20 acres. *Proceedings of the Indiana Academy of Science* 74:169–177.

Schmelz, D.V. & A.A. Lindsey. 1965. Size-class structure of old-growth forests in Indiana. *Forest Science* 11:259–264.

Lindsey, A.A., D.V. Schmelz & S.A. Nichols. 1969. *Natural areas in Indiana and their preservation*. Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana. 594 pp.

*Lindsey, A.A. & D.V. Schmelz. 1970. The forest types of Indiana and a new method of classifying Midwestern hardwood forests. *Proceedings of the Indiana Academy of Science* 79:192–203.

Schmelz, D.V. & A. Lindsey. 1970. Relationships among the forest types of Indiana. *Ecology* 51:620–629.

*Schmelz, D.V. & D.L. Hodde. 1971. *The James Bird Woods: An old-growth oak-hickory*

remnant in Harrison County, Indiana. *Proceedings of the Indiana Academy of Science* 80:215–219.

*Coe, Michael W. & D.V. Schmelz. 1973. A preliminary description of the physio-chemical characteristics and biota of three strip mine lakes, Spencer County, Indiana. *Proceedings of the Indiana Academy of Science* 82:184–188.

*Schmelz, D.V., J.D. Barton & A.A. Lindsey. 1975. Donaldson's Woods: Two decades of change. *Proceedings of the Indiana Academy of Science* 84:234–243.

*Barton, J.D. & D.V. Schmelz. 1987. Thirty years of growth records in Donaldson's Woods. *Proceedings of the Indiana Academy of Science* 96:209–214.

*Schmelz, D.V., J.M. Haynes, D.S. Wright, M.T. Jackson & D.B. Abrell. Census and mapping of 8 ha. of Kramer Woods. (in preparation).

*Schmelz, D.V. Donaldson's Woods 1954–2004. (in preparation).

PAPERS PRESENTED AND LECTURES GIVEN

Testing the quarter-method against full tallies in old-growth forests. *Indiana Academy of Science, Fall Meeting, 1969.*

Indiana's natural areas: the critical need to "waste" some good land by preserving it. Illustrated public lecture, St. Thomas Aquinas Center, West Lafayette, Indiana, April 1970.

Abortion—toward an ethic. NSF-AAAS Chautauqua Short Course, Miami University (Ohio), February 1972.

Roots in the soil and water and sky. Presidential address to Indiana Academy of Science membership, November 1974.

Abortion—just when does human life really begin. Illustrated public lecture, Northwood Institute, West Baden, Indiana, April 1975.

Stewardship of Indiana's Natural Resources. Illustrated lecture, Indiana Academy of Science Speaker-of-the-Year, 1979.

The warmth of the land, the freshness of the air, the sparkle of the water—How can you buy them? 45th Annual Great Lakes Park Training Institute, 1991.