COLLOQUE

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Contents

Editorial

For most confrères the first real acquaintance with St. Vincent began in the seminaire with their being introduced to the sequence of events which make up his life-story. Development of this acquaintance usually took the form of reading about what Vincent had to say on certain topics such as missions, prayer or community life. It would seem that there should have been an intermediary stage between these two, a stage where confreres would have become acquainted with him as a person and not just retained a knowledge about him as an historical personage. The articles in this issue are like a complete portrait of Vincent projected through the filters of different Irish confrères.

This issue was already with the printer when Fr Tom O'Flynn died. The Autumn issue will carry an obituary.

The Beatification of Vincent De Paul

John White's Evidence

THE CAUSE

The Sixth General Assembly, 1697, decided unanimously that steps should be taken to secure the beatification of Vincent, and Nicolas Pierron, newly-elected fourth Superior General, in a circular letter of 26 October 1697 asked superiors to begin gathering material which could be useful.

The Ordinary (i.e. diocesan) Informative (i.e. fact-finding) Process began in Paris in early 1705. The Presiding Judge was François Vivant, Parish Priest of St Leu-St Gilles in the city and Vicar General. Most of the Paris witnesses gave evidence at sessions of the Tribunal held in St Teresa's chapel in this church.

The Promotor Fiscal was Mgr Achille Thomassin, rector of St Nicolas-du-Louvre . He was the diocesan equivalent of the Promotor of the Faith at the Apostolic (i. e. Roman) Process, usually called the Devil's Advocate. He was appointed by the Archbishop of Paris.

The Procurator of the Cause was Pierre-Casimir de Cès CM, aged forty-three, who had been Superior of the Seminary in Tout before being appointed to this full-time office by the fifth Superior General François Wattel. The Procurator drew up a series of' Articles"; these were factual statements about the life and work of Vincent. He submitted these to the Promotor Fiscal who then drew up an "Interrogatory", which was a set of questions based on the Articles. JW was asked all the questions in the Interrogatory but was questioned on only those points in the Articles on which he was expected to have personal knowledge; this explains the gaps in the numbering in his evidence.

THE WITNESS

John White was from Limerick. When he entered the Congregation in Paris on 4 May 1658 it was noted in the Register of Entries that he was about twenty-eight; that would put his birth about 1630. In his evidence he said he was eighty, in 1705, which would put it five years earlier. He took his vows on 7 May 1660 and was ordained in 1661, which indicates that he had completed most of

his studies before entry. It is not possible to be certain about what appointments he held because of the notorious difficulty of knowing whether a reference to Monsieur Le Blanc, without first name, means George, Francis or John White, or the Frenchman Charles Le Blanc. At the time of his evidence he was stationed in Les Invalides, Paris; the chaplaincy duties in this hospital were undertaken by the Congregation only as a result of direct pressure from Louis XIV in 1686. At the start there were fifteen priests and some students there. JW died there on 27 November 1705, eight months after giving his evidence.

THE EVIDENCE

JW gave his evidence in French; this was then translated into Italian for the Apostolic Process. It has a Latin preamble, down as far as the first question; there is a short Latin paragraph between the Interrogatory and the questions on the Articles, and there is a Latin conclusion. It is this Latin and Italian manuscript which is in the CM archives in Paris. It is bound with all the other manuscript evidence into an unwieldy volume about eight inches thick which is very difficult to put on a photocopying machine; for this reason I made a transcript for our archives.

The Notary-Actuary did not record the wording of the questions. As the session progressed he altered his method of recording reported speech by inserting, not always felicitously, the words "this Witness". He also had to use the same third person singular pronouns for both White and Vincent, but the context usually makes it clear to whom the pronoun refers. For clarity I have inserted brackets in one place, and have also used more punctuation than is found in the original.

JW's evidence does not, by itself, contribute much to proving the heroicity of Vincent's virtues. There were, however, 330 other witnesses and 33 of these were examined twice. What his evidence does give us is some fascinating glimpses of Vincent recalled after nearly fifty years by someone who had lived in the same house with him for a period of two and a half years.

TD

In the same year, indiction and pontificate as above,[1] but on the ninth of March, a feria, at eight o'clock in the morning, in the oratory for sick priests in the Royal Home for Sick Soldiers in Paris.

Before us, Francois Vivant, Doctor of Theology, delegated as Judge in this Cause, together with the aforementioned Fathers Lagrené and De Buna, in the presence of Mgr Achille Thomassin, delegated Promotor Fiscal, who participated in the proceedings, and also of Father Pierre de Combes, delegated Notary-Actuary.

There appeared Father John White, a priest of the Congregation of the Mission, who lives in the aforementioned royal foundation.

The witness was introduced and sworn by Father Pierre-Casimir de Cès, Procurator of the Cause, and he showed the summons, served on him the previous day by the *cursor* Mongin, in which he was cited by order of the said Procurator, Father Pierre-Casimir de Cès. And now thus introduced the Witness, with his two hands on the most holy gospels of God in front of him, again took the oath saying exactly the following words

I the undersigned, touching the holy gospels of God here in front of me, swear that I will tell the truth as regards both the Interrogatory and the Articles on which I will be examined, and also that I will observe secrecy and not reveal to anybody whomsoever, under pain of perjury, the content of either questions and answers or of the depositions made by myself in the Cause for the beatification and canonisation of the Venerable Servant of God Vincent de Paul, and thus I promise and may God, and these his holy gospels, help me.

And being examined and questioned first according to the Interrogatory prepared on behalf of and by order of the said Promotor Fiscal, which was produced at the session still closed and under seal and now opened by him; and subsequently on the other Articles introduced to the session in the name of the said Pierre-Casimir de Ces, Procurator of this Cause, he stated and deposed as herunder, namely

On the first point in the said Interrogatory

He answered that he was fully aware of the importance of the oath he had taken.

On the second

He answered that his name was John White, son of Stephen White and Felicia Fox;[2] that he was eighty years old, born in Limerick; that he was a priest of the Congregation, at present living in the house of the said Congregation in the Royal Palace of *Les Invalides*.

Questioned on the third

He answered that he usually went to confession once a week and said mass every day. He had done so not more than four days previously; after saying mass in the oratory of the said Palace he had gone to confession to Fr. Hardis, a priest of the said Congregation.

Questioned on the fourth and fifth

He answered that he had never been accused of, nor sentenced for, any misdeed; nor had he ever incurred any censure, by the grace of God.

On the sixth

He answered that no one had suggested to him what he should say, and that he would speak according to his lights and his conscience.

On the seventh

He answered that he entered the said Congregation two years and five months before the death of the Venerable Servant of God, Vincent de Paul, who received him and who often spoken to him in public and private.

On the eighth

He answered that he honoured and respected the memory of the said Servant of God, Vincent de Paul, and that he wanted very much to see him beatified and canonised.

On the ninth

He answered that he knew the said Servant of God lived in Paris over a long period in the said St Lazare and that he had a great reputation for holiness.

On the tenth

He answered that this Witness was in Paris in St Lazare when the said Servant of God died there, and that he departed this world in that completely spiritual and religious frame of mind which makes the death of the just precious in the sight of God; that he died more from natural weakness than sickness, and that everyone in the house, as well as others, considered his death a happy and a holy one, and this Witness considered himself fortunate to have been one of those present at the recommendation of his soul, and also to have been one of those who carried his body to burial.

On the eleventh

He answered that after his death there was a continuous, widespread and well-founded opinion that the said Servant of God had lived and died the way saints live and die; and this Witness does not know of this reputation ever being stained, but rather on the contrary he is witness that many people, including bishops and other wise, holy and disinterested persons, as well as persons of great authority, have always spoken of him in this way.

On the twelfth

He answered that he knew, and that it was common knowledge, that credit should be given to the said Servant of God for the results which have been, and continue to be, achieved by the said Congregation of the Mission of which he was the originator, founder and first superior, as well as of the Confraternities and Companies of the Ladies of Charity in the various parishes in Paris and outside of Paris, the foundation and good running of which he had established.

On the thirteenth

He answered that he knew and that it was generally known that the said Servant of God had worked so hard at missions, retreats for ordinands and other retreats that they are still being carried on at present by the priests of the said Congregation.

That the Witness knows that in the final years of his life the Servant of God was no longer able to go on missions both because of his advanced age and his huge work-load, but that he had very frequently noticed the great desire which he had to go, and that being unable to do so himself he did so by means of the priests of the Congregation, sending them to give missions, to establish houses and to direct seminaries, to conduct ordination and other retreats, to organise conferences for priests and similar functions; this was the sort of work he himself had done as long as he had the strength and the time to do so.

On the fourteenth

He answered that he never noticed in the said Servant of God anything other than evidence of a most perfect holiness, and that he was graced with both the theological and cardinal virtues, and moreover that he was ready to talk about this when we question him on each of them in particular.

On the fifteenth

He answered, and he convinced us that he knew, that miracles happen, and he told us that he did not doubt that God has worked some by means of his said Servant, and that he is ready to tell us what he knows.

The Interrogatory of the said Promoter Fiscal being completed the session continued with the Articles produced on behalf of and by order of the said Father Pierre-Casimir de Cès, specially appointed as Procurator in this Cause.

Questioned on the first and subsequent Articles he answered both this and the subsequent ones (which deal with the various activities and circumstances of the life of the said Servant of God up to the time when the said Witness entered the said Congregation) by saying that he had no first-hand knowledge, but only what he had been told, and what was common knowledge, and what he had read in his *Life,* but that he was ready to tell us all that he personally knew of the life of the said Servant of God from the time that this Witness entered the said Congregation.

On the fortieth Article, concerning faith

This Witness answered that he had been present when the said Servant of God showed evidence of his devotion to the passion of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and to the Most Blessed Sacrament.

That one Good Friday in the refectory while saying grace out loud the said Servant of God, during the prayer *Respice,* wept very emotionally and caused many others present to do the same, when pronouncing the words *Pro quibus Dominus noster Jesus Christus non dubitavit manibus tradi nocentium et crucis subire tormentum.*

That on another day, in the church, the said Servant of God during a conference on prayer which he was giving to the whole community gave an admonition never to pass in front of the Blessed Sacrament without genuflecting; he himself was greatly hindered by trouble which he had in his knees and legs, and he said in a devotional and emotional voice "Fathers and Brothers, I urge you to have the greatest respect for Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar; as for myself, with all the problems which you see I have, when I pass in front of the divine Sacrament, being unable to genuflect easily I will put my hands on the floor and bend my knees to the best of my ability rather than fail in my duty and in the respect which I owe to Jesus Christ who is present"

Then the said Servant of God asked for forgiveness for all the bad

example which he might have given in this matter, making as it were public restitution of honour to the Blessed Sacrament for all the lack of respect of which everyone else might have been guilty; and he kissed the floor, though only with great effort. These two indications of the faith of the said Servant of God the said Witness vouches for, having been an eyewitness of them.

Questioned on the forty-second, concerning love for God

He answered that this was apparent especially in how warmly, tenderly and with great feeling the said Servant of God used to speak about matters relating to salvation; this Witness was present the day the said Servant of God distributed the Common Rules and Constitutions and he listened to the conference which he gave on this subject to the said community, a conference which seemed to him more divine than human and which touched and deeply affected the hearts of all present.

That he was present at the last sermon preached by the said Servant of God to the members of his community. This took place in accordance with a custom in the Congregation; when priests return from missions one of the missioners preaches a short sermon in the refectory during the evening meal. When one of the missioners, one of the most senior, was experiencing great difficulty in fulfilling this one Friday, the said Servant of God, in order to set him an example, preached the sermon himself, taking as his theme the words of Jesus Christ *Nescitis cujus spiritus estis.* And old and all as he was he spoke with a vigour and spirit which amazed everyone and many wept.

This Witness believes that the real devotion with which the Servant of God celebrated mass must be attributed to the love which he had for God; that this Witness served his mass every day for three months in the oratory of the Infirmary, since he could no longer go to the church, and he noticed that the said Servant of God had such devotion and concentration while saying mass that his face reflected the warmth of his heart and this evoked a response in those present.

On the forty-fifth, concerning love for others

He answered that he would give three examples, of which he himself was a witness.

First, that this Witness was in St Lazare when the said Servant of God gave a conference every Friday for eight weeks on the sin of malicious gossip, saying that he was determined to root out this

in all forms from St Lazare and the whole Company, if possible, because of the great horror which he had of this wretched and widespread vice.[3]

Second, that in sixteen fifty-nine when there was a great shortage in Paris, with the neglected poor dying of starvation, three thousand were kept fed by the said Servant of God over a period of three months; he had bread baked for them and soup distributed to them in the house of the Daughters of Charity opposite St Lazare, and the said Witness was one of those who used to teach catechism to the said poor children before the bread and soup were given out.

Third, that having lost St. Lazare and all its contents in a law-suit, in which he had thought his side of the case absolutely just and with Counsel convinced his side was right and advising that the Servant of God should appeal, and offering to conduct the appeal at his own expense, the said Servant of God replied: "There's no need to think any more about it; God preserve us from that. The judges have already decided once; we should let things go their way and not give an impression of disagreement, or of ill-will towards those judges who gave the decision".[4]

And the said Witness heard the said Servant of God say to the said community on the occasion of the loss of this law-suit: "Let us thank God for the loss we have suffered. God has conferred this benefit on us; he has taken it from us; blessed *be* his holy name; let us accept this sentence as pronounced by the mouth of God and let us not blame either the judges or our opponents".

On the fifty-second, concerning humility

He answered that he was present when the said Servant of God spoke in this way about the said Congregation when he was announcing the death of Father de Chandenier, abbé de Tournon, who died in a house of the Congregation and in its habit: "Father de Chandenier, abbe de Tournon, died in our house in Chambéry where he was taken ill on his way back from Rome; for a long time he had been asking to be received into our poor Company but I always postponed granting his request, believing that the poor Company was not worthy to have someone of his rank. However, when he saw that he was in danger of death he persuaded Father Berthe, who had been with him all during his journey, to accept him as a missioner; this was granted to him, and so he died a missioner, wanting to appear before God in our rags".[5]

Questioned on the fifty-fourth, concerning chastity

He answered that he had always considered a great example, and a lesson in the precautions which a priest should take to preserve chastity, the care which the said Servant of God took never to be alone with any lady or unmarried woman, and always to be within view of some member of his Congregation; the said Witness fulfilled this role many times when he used to go to speak to the Ladies of Charity of Paris, being placed by the said Servant of God close to the door and being told: "Brother, don't move from here; keep your eyes on me the whole time; never let me out of your sight".[6]

On this matter the said Witness noticed that the said Servant of God never looked at these women in the face but always kept his eyes somewhat lowered, and the said Witness said that he had noticed the same thing about the said Servant of God when he used to speak to the Daughters of Charity.

On the second-last Article, concerning miracles

He answered

First, that he has always regarded as a miracle and as a special favour granted to him by God through the said Servant of God something which happened to him shortly after the death of the said Servant of God, although he had judged it prudent never to have spoken about it to anyone up to the present. His superiors were urging him to accept Holy Orders and he himself was equally reluctant to present himself for them after passing his examination. The said Servant of God, who had died six months previously, appeared to him in a dream, saying: "Brother, don't be in bad form or depressed because they want you to receive Orders".[6] And the said Witness woke up, suddenly free from the reluctance and gloom with which he had gone to sleep and ready to do all that they wanted.

Second, that Father Le Goust, at that time still a student in the Congregtion of St Lazare and who later left and became a Parish Priest in the diocese of Poitiers, told our Witness that having a most violent headache for three months went into the room of the said Servant of God, who had heard from him about this complaint; he made the sign of the cross on his forehead and then placed his hand on his head. He immediately felt himself free from the said pain in the head and left the room cured. This was told to the Witness several times after the death of the said Servant of God by the said Father Le Goust, who is now dead.

On the last Article

He answered as in the answers which he gave to the above Interrogatory.

And the examination being ended all his evidence was read back to him and he confirmed and ratified it to us together with the Assessors, the Promotor Fiscal and Notary-Actuary as undersigned.

Notes

1. In the preamble to the evidence of the first witness the year 1705 is referred to as the thirteenth of the indiction (i.e. a fifteen year administrative period) and the fifth of the pontificate of Clement XI.
2. The manuscript has retained the French translation of the surname White but used the Italian form of the first names.
3. Here JW's memory is not quite correct; there were five such conferences, not eight, on 11, 18,25 October and 8 and 15 November 1658 (XII 481).
4. The lawsuit was about the St Lazare farm at Orsigny, not about the main property. It happened about twelve years before JW entered the Congregation but he could have read about it in Abelly as well as hearing about it from others. Some years after Vincent's death the farm came back into St Lazare ownership.
5. Again JW is inaccurate in a detail: de Chandenier died in Chambéry but there was no CM house there. For references to nine members of this family and Vincent's relations with them see pp 99-100 of Vol XIV.
6. In French usage seminarists and students were referred to and addressed as "Brother".

In turning over in my mind the words of this Servant of God I was so taken by them that I had to admit that he was the man who best exemplified the earthly life of the Son of God. And what astonished me even more was, above all, that a man such as he, great and all as he was, with matters of great importance calling for his attention, gave his time, no matter what the inconvenience, to any person, even from the lower end of the social scale, until that person was completely satisfied.

Vincent De Paul in his evidence at the beatification process of Francis de Sales (XIII72-3).

Saint Vincent De Paul 1600-1614

A Psycho-spiritual Study

Patrick Collins

Introduction

In this study we will look at Vincent's life from his ordination in 1600 to the time he vowed to serve the poor in 1614. For the sake of clarity we will divide these 14 years into three separate stages:

1600-1605 early-adult transition, during which Vincent was ordained;

1605-1608 a time of crisis when Vincent went missing;

1608-1614 years of purification and transformation.

We will use three complementary kinds of resource material. Firstly, there are the known historical facts: events, dates and some biographical material in letters and conferences. That said, we know precious little about the events of his early days and even less about his inner life. For example, Coste devotes only 50 pages of his 1500-page biography to the first third of Vincent's life. Secondly, we will attempt to interpret the available facts in the light of developmental psychology. We will use Levinson's[1] study of the male life-cycle and the Whiteheads'[2] theological presentation of Erickson's developmental stages and tasks. Thirdly, we will use the Ignatian description of two main stages in spiritual growth.[3] Each has its own specific dynamic. In the first, the experimental emphasis is on the Lord's relationship with the believer. In the second, the focus shifts to the believer's desire to be united with Jesus poor and humble. The movement from one dynamic to the other becomes evident in a renunciation of pride and a worldly desire to possess, or to be noticed. This kind of conversion opens the heart to the possibility of great holiness of life.

By using these historic, psychological and spiritual resources we will hope to gain some insight into the possible dynamics of Vincent's interior life. They tend to be neglected in the biographies I have read. It is disappointing because these are significant years in Vincent's formation. Not only was his future sanctity rooted in this period, it

marked the time when his experience of God was most like our own. It is my hope, therefore, that as we become aware of the dynamics of his early growth in holiness we will also throw light on our own potential for union with God. My approach will be tentative. That said, I hope it will stimulate fruitful reflection on this fascinating period of Vincent's life.

Early-adult transition 1600-1605

In his *Seasons of a Man's Life* Levinson says that men enter an early-adult transition between the ages of 17 and 22. This is a bridging period between adolescence and early adulthood. The main pre-occupations of this time are a desire to get established in the world and to begin working out an adult sense of identity. These issues tend to be highlighted in what he calls "marker events". Vincent reached his at the age of 19 when he was ordained a priest.

Ordination was a significant event in Vincent's life. It was illegal. Local custom tended to reflect the teaching of the recent Council of Trent 1545. A man was not eligible for ordination until he was 24. Nevertheless Vincent became a deacon at the tender age of 17! He then applied to the Bishop of Dax for permission to be ordained a priest. He must have lied about his age to get his dimissorial letters. Then he showed cunning, if not simplicity, by being ordained by a bishop who wasn't scrupulous about the Tridentine directive. This prelate was neither the bishop of Toulouse, Vincent's place of residence, nor of Dax his place of birth. The future reformer of the clergy got off to a rather irregular start himself. No wonder his confrères were never to know anything about the date, place, or circumstances of his ordination. Prudence rather than modesty seems to have been the motive. Vincent found it hard to get established in a priestly job or identity. The bishop of Dax offered him a parish but there were legal problems, so he continued to live as he had before. He ran his small school and continued to study at the university. It was a time when he seemed to rely on his own considerable talents for success. His earnings increased, his debts grew less and he got his bachelor's degree in theology in 1604. We don't know what the priesthood meant to him; had he a formal commitment to the role, or an interior sense of union with Jesus the highpriest? Two incidents in 1605 point towards an answer. Early in that year Vincent headed off to Bordeaux on a secret mission. He said it would be rash to mention what it was about. It is remotely possible that he had been offered a bishopric. "What we do know for certain — on Vincent's own admission — is that the business promised to be of GREAT ADVANTAGE TO HIM,

that it would involve considerable expenditure."[4]

When he returned from the South, Vincent found that he had been left some money in a woman's will. There was a complication. The only way he could get the 400 crowns was to collect the sum from a man in Marseilles who owed that amount to the deceased. To finance his trip Vincent had to borrow heavily himself. He hired a horse and set off. The future apostle of charity showed little compassion when he caught the man he called "a scamp". He had him thrown into jail until he would agree to pay the debt. This was a far cry from the text "be mindful of prisoners as if you were sharing their imprisonment" (Heb. 13.3). Meantime Vincent sold the hired horse. It was a bit like selling a rented car to raise money. It would be an immoral act in any age, and an illegal one in ours.

In 1605 Vincent was a talented and well qualified priest of 25. He had his faults. He could act in an unscrupulous and callous way if it served his desire for ecclesiastical and financial advancement. In fact he was the kind of young priest that a present-day provincial would probably ask to see for "a wee chat"! He certainly wasn't a saint.

The missing years, 1605-1608

Levinson says that early-adulthood begins about 22 and ends when a man is 45 or so. During that time he can expect to experience one or more marker events, periods of transition that will challenge his values and sense of self. For Vincent one of these crises took place between the ages of 24 and 27, when he went missing. We are not sure where he was. In letters to M. De Comet he said that he had been a captive in Tunisia, having been captured by pirates during a sea voyage. While its certain that Vincent wrote the letters, doubt has been cast on their contents. Stafford Poole says that there are three possibilities.[5] Firstly, the letters are completely true. Grandchamps has shown that this is not viable from the historical point of view. Secondly, the letters could be dismissed as completely false. Thirdly, parts of the letters could be accepted as true, other parts rejected as false. After weighing all the evidence Poole concludes that the letters are probably false. This would explain why Vincent never once mentioned his captivity. Both Br Ducournau and Abelly testify to his life-long silence about it. It would also explain why Vincent made such frantic efforts to have the letters destroyed when they were discovered 50 years after their composition. At the age of 79 he wrote these words to Canon De St Martin; "I entreat you by all the favours that God has been pleased to give you, to do me the favour of sending me THAT WRETCHED LETTER that makes mention of Turkey. I speak of the one that was

discovered among the papers of the late M De Comet. I beg you again by the heart of Jesus Christ Our Lord to do me this favour that I ask you, as quickly as possible".[6] Was Vincent's silence about his captivity, his desire to have the letters destroyed, motivated by the same embarassment he felt about his ordination?

If Vincent wasn't in North Africa where was he? There are a number of possibilities. Perhaps he was in debtors' prison on account of the large sums he owed. Or he may have taken refuge from his creditors in the papal enclave of Avignon. Wherever he was, I believe it was a time of passage and crisis for Vincent.

Having looked at it from an historical point of view we will switch now to a psychological perspective.

The Whiteheads say that there are three phases in the experience of passage:[1]

1. **Separation:** A time when our usual accommodation with life is disrupted. Old securities are challenged. There is a feeling of having been hi-jacked, of being a helpless victim in a sort of no-man's-land. This would be the symbolic meaning of Vincent's disappearance from society.

2. **Transition:** A time of increased vulnerability, questioning and doubt. As illusions are challenged, the person begins to ask basic questions about his identity and values. As defence mechanisms break down, *chronos* becomes *kairos* as God begins to reveal Himself in a way that invites the person to change his values and sense of self. The experience of this kind of conversion would be the symbolic meaning of Vincent's absence from society.

3. **Incorporation:** As a person lets go of old ways of perception, he enters into a new stage of maturity and stability. This would be the symbolic implication of Vincent's re-emergence into society.

Some time ago it occurred to me that Vincent's captivity letters had a dreamlike quality. Could they be interpreted in a Jungian way as symbols of un-conscious conflicts? I think they can, so I'd like to propose a tentative interpretation. The journey by sea, followed by years in a strange land, represents a movement from the person constituted by its various roles to the real, but largely un-conscious, self. This movement from the phenomenal to the real self is implicit in the

accounts of Vincent's slave owners. Each one seems to symbolise some aspect of his conflict about priestly identity. Firstly, there is the fisherman. A priest is called to be a fisher of men, but Vincent writes: "I was sold to a fisherman, but I have always been A VERY BAD SAILOR; he was obliged to get rid of me".[8] In other words, he had no stomach for the demands of priestly mission. Secondly, he was sold to an alchemist. This is fascinating from a symbolic point of view; indeed Jung wrote no less than three books on the psychological implications of alchemy.[9] I'd like to draw attention to points mentioned by Vincent. He refers to the practice of trying to turn base metal into gold by human efforts. Surely this is symbolic of a Faustian desire to be like God. It is implicit in the reference to the philosopher's stone as well. As one author had written, "If the Alchemist could impregnate the Stone with his own life, then he had discovered the secret of the Creator".[10] Was Vincent becoming aware of his spiritual pride? Then he refers to the alchemist's talking skull. By means of ventriloquism he made it appear that he was receiving oracles from God. Symbolically, this means to suggest that Vincent saw himself as a false prophet, a priest who failed to speak God's word. Thirdly, he was sold to a renegade priest. Is this a symbol of Vincent's alter-ego, the priest who is no longer faithful to his vocation? The women in the story are very interesting. There are three wives, one Greek Orthodox and two Moslems. From a Jungian point of view they would seem to be projections of different aspects of the Anima, i.e. the feminine aspects of the un-conscious mind. They are reminiscent of the three graces, wisdom, joy and festivity in classical mythology." The Greek woman would be Sophia, or wisdom. She liked Vincent and treated him with kindness. But it was one of the pagan women who was to be his source of joy. It was she who persuaded her husband to return to the excercise of his priesthood. In other words, through the benevolent power of the Anima, Vincent was led to a new sense of God, self and vocation. The soul is feminine in relation to a Father God. So Vincent personifies his spiritual deliverance in feminine terms by attributing it to Our Lady. As he let go of his old persona, with its false sense of self and values, Vincent was able to make his exodus journey back to a new sense of priestly identity. This coincided with his re-appearance in society as a changed man. As I have said, the Jungian interpretation is tentative. We are on firmer ground when we suspect that Vincent went through a spiritual trial in which his pride as the root of sin was revealed. I suspect that during the missing year he saw through his worldliness, his desire for money, status and advancement. Perhaps he began to see that it is by these desires that pride insinuates itself into the heart. It would seem that during this period he began to

be attracted to Jesus in his poverty and humble dependence on God. He wanted to be united to him in this way, content to labour with Him for the salvation of souls even if it meant insult and injury. We can infer that this dynamic was at work in Vincent's life from the way he lived when he returned to Paris in 1608. As the Lord says, "by your fruits you shall be known" (Mt. 7:16).

Purification and transformation 1608-1614

Vincent was 27 when he surfaced in the capital. As we look at three significant events we will see how much he had changed. The first concerns the way he handled a threat to his good name. He was sharing an appartment with a judge at the time. One day while he was sick in bed, a thief made off with the judge's money. Vincent describes what happened next: "A member of the community was once accused of having robbed his companion, and that before the house where he was staying. The charge was not true. Finding himself falsely accused, although he never meant to justify himself, the thought nevertheless did occur to him: 'See here; you are going to justify yourself, are you not? You are being falsely accused you know!' 'Oh no' he said, as he lifted his mind to God, 'it is necessary that I suffer this patiently' ".[12] What a change. At 24 years of age Vincent demanded his rights, now he was willing to renounce them even if it meant the loss of his good name.

His attitude to money had also changed. In 1611 he received a gift of 15,000 *livres* from John Latanne, master of the Paris mint. He immediately gave it to the Charity Hospital "to tend and nurse the sick poor". Gone was his earlier preoccupation with cash. In its place is evidence of a growing sensitivity to the poor. However there is evidence too that Vincent was tempted to resist his growing attraction to a life lived in total commitment to the poor. For example in 1610 he wrote to his mother "I put great hope in God's grace, that he will bless my efforts, and soon give me the means of an honourable retirement so that I may spend the rest of my days near you".[13] Retirement at the age of 29! Vincent still had mixed desires, his purification was not yet complete.

The year 1610 inaugurated another marker event. Vincent knew a priest who was experiencing terrible temptations against faith. He prayed that God would allow him to accept this man's burden in return for his peace of mind. As a result the theologian's trial ended while Vincent entered the period of interior struggle. Later he was to say "God often wishes to establish, upon the patience of those who undertake them, the good works that are to endure, and for that reason he allows such people to suffer many trials".[14] Well, Vincent battled with doubt for about three years. During this time he learned

to die to the last vestiges of his pride. Finally, as Bill Purcell wrote, "he made up his mind to devote himself wholly and irrevocably to the service of the poor out of love for his Divine Master and in order to imitate him more perfectly".[15] When his doubts disappeared at this time, Vincent's faith was as strong as his commitment to the poor was complete. Faith and commitment found a united focus in the person of Jesus poor and humble.

Conclusion

Over thirteen years or so Vincent had gone through a remarkable interior change. Instead of making him bitter his many trials had made him better. During his times of passage he had discovered "the potency of disorder". Bit by bit he had become disillusioned with his youthful sense of identity and value. He had tried to escape from the implications of material and spiritual poverty, as from an enemy. But between the ages of 20 and 33 he learned to love his enemy. When he finally embraced and kissed him in 1614, he found it was Jesus he was loving. He discovered the truth of the words "As often as you did it for one of these the least of my brothers, you did it for Me" (Mt 25:44). Vincent was about to become the apostle of charity. Surely the dynamics of his gradual conversion are also our God-given route to sanctity.

Notes

1. Levinson: *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (Ballantine).
2. Whitehead & Whitehead: *Christian Life Patterns* (Doubleday)
3. Fleming (ed): *The Spiritual Exercises* (Institute of Jesuit Resources); Rahner: *Meditations on Priestly Life,* ch 16 "The Two Standards" (Sheed & Ward).
4. Coste: *The Life and Labours of St Vincent de Paul,* vol. 1 p 26 (Burns & Oates)
5. Poole: *Tunisian Captivity: A survey of the controversy* p 71 (St John's Seminary, California).
6. Coste, op. cit p 40.
7. op. cit. pp 62-64.
8. Calvet: *St Vincent de Paul,* p 24 (Burns & Oates)
9. Volumes 12, 13 and 14 of the collected works: *Psychology and Alchemy, Alchemical Studies* and *Mysterium Coniunctionis.*
10. Chetwynd: *A Dictionary of Symbols,* p 7 (Paladin).
11. Chetwynd, op. cit p 23.
12. *All Hallows Annual 1959-1961* p 55, Purcell: "St Vincent de Paul: Spiritual Life".
13. Coste: op. cit. p44.
14. Purcell: op. cit. p 74
15. Purcell: op, cit. p 55.

"To Listen like a Disciple" (Is. 50:4)

James Dyar

The question "Where did this man get this wisdom?" (Mt 15:34) was asked about our Lord and it is understandable that we should ask it about his faithful servant St Vincent. Our saint used to express his admiration for St Francis de Sales as a spiritual guide, so we can look towards him for similarity of outlook. We can also look towards St Francis of Assisi for traces of influence since Vincent spent two or more years at a Fransiscan secondary school at Dax. The Common Rules are taken as containing St Vincent's definitive expression of Christian wisdom as far as it concerned himself and his confrères. They will be referred to a number of times.

By the end of the year 1618 St Vincent had been a priest for eighteen years, and an excellent one. But it could be said that one thing was lacking in him. In his own words he had "a dry and brusque temperament". It was at this time that the met Francis de Sales, who came to Paris on business that lasted about ten months. His acquaintance with Francis was a revelation to Vincent on the rôle of meekness in the priestly life.

Shortly after his ordination in 1593 Francis was sent by his bishop to the Calvinist Chablais district in Switzerland. After about a year he had one convert. After two more years there were thousands of them. In 1602 he had spent six months in Paris and preached very frequently. In 1609 he published the *Introduction to the Devout Life,* and in 1616 the *Treatise on The Love of God*. In 1618 he was back again in Paris. Speaking more particularly about this period St Jane Frances de Chantal testified:

"Every Sunday and feastday crowds of people used to come to him — men and women of high rank, ordinary citizens, soldiers, servant girls, peasants, beggars, people who were ill, full of sores, stinking of squalid diseases — he welcomed them all without making any difference between them… I am speaking of what I myself saw in Paris, where he often used to hear confessions in our church… People thought there was no one like him for kindness, for love of God, and skilful direction. When it got around that he was passing through some town or going to stay in the country with friends he always had to hear general confessions…"

St Vincent must have heard about these things. But it is remarkable that he does not seem to have spoken about the great labours and the conversions. What St Vincent used to refer to, and repeatedly, was the kindness and gentleness of the bishop of Geneva. St Vincent had an illness in 1622, and afterwards he told some people close to him that during the illness he used to say again and again "My God, how good you must be, seeing that your creature (Francis) is so good". Almost forty years later, when petitioning the Pope for the beatification of his friend, he recalled this illness and his frequent reflections on the goodness and gentleness of Francis. What exactly it was that his contemporaries saw in Francis is, perhaps, best illustrated by something that happened before his death. He travelled several miles through his diocese to hear the confession of a dying man who refused to confess to anyone else. Vincent called Francis "a living gospel" and said that he came to see in him "the one who was the best likeness of the Son of God on earth. . . Finally, I resolved to allow myself to be formed the way I thought our blessed father would do it".

To find out what that might mean we can turn to the sworn testimony of St Chantal concerning the virtues of St Francis. She said that the virtues he liked best were small, unseen, virtues. She named humility, meekness, simplicity "and other little virtues that mortify the heart". Here we note four of the five virtues which St Vincent eventually came to reckon as the faculties of the soul of the Congregation of the Mission (CRII 14); and St Francis called them small. He had this idea about littleness, and urged it not only at the individual level but also, and with emphasis, at the collective level. Speaking about his own Visitation nuns he wrote to a superioress:

> The evil spirit exerts his efforts, because he sees that this little institute is useful to the glory and service of God, and he specially hates it because it is little, and the least of all; for he is an arrogant spirit and hates littleness because it serves towards humility — he who always loved pride, haughtiness and arrogance, and who, because he would not stay in his littleness, lost his greatness.

St Vincent himself noted:

> There are many communities which think only of the interests of their own communities, because these are so important that they engulf God's interests.

He had also observed the phenomenon by which certain Religious

banished vanity at the individual level only to retrieve it at the collective level:

Is it not a strange thing for someone to imagine that the individuals of a company, like Peter, John and James, ought to flee from honour and love contempt, but the company and community ought to acquire and preserve esteem and honour in the world…; and so all the missionaries ought to be content not only when they find themselves in some occasion of individual contempt but also when the company is despised.

Hence, he scattered frequent reminders of this aspect of humility throughout eight of the chapters of the Common Rules: "little congregation (minima)"; "everyone to the best of his poor ability"; "according to our poor measure".

With regard to the virtue of humility we may note one difference between the two saints: St Francis refrained from making disparaging remarks about himself; St Vincent did not. But the two were in agreement about the much more important matter of the effort needed to develop a virtue. St Francis said that he concentrated for three whole years on trying to have a more humble opinion about himself. St Vincent said: "A true missionary ought to labour incessantly to acquire this virtue". That they happened to be speaking about one particular virtue is only incidental here. They would apply the same idea (effort) to the acquisition and growth of any virtue required by one's state in life. In fact, St Francis had little regard except for that virtue which was won, as he said, "at the point of the sword". This attitude of the two saints was in contrast to the Quietists who troubled the Church at the end of the century.

This brings us to a subject in which St Vincent differs from St Francis more than in any other matter: fear. Vincent tells us that all his life he had a fear that he might slip into heresy and be enveloped in its errors. Sins of the intellect he regarded as the most dangerous because only rarely did one retract. In one of his conferences he said he knew two saintly people who had allowed themselves to be won over to the new opinions and refused to submit to the judgement of the Pope. The saint remarked that nothing he had ever observed gave him such a vivid idea of Hell as the state of mind of these two people.

One can recall other fears expressed by St Vincent, and they seem to revolve around faith and knowledge. He recalls how in the early days of the missions, when returning to Paris, he used to fear that the gates would fall on, and crush him. In the mission just given he had met so many people who badly needed a mission, and he would say to

himself that there must be many others like them in the neighbouring parishes (and here was he, going for a rest!). What the need of those people was, in St Vincent's eyes, can be seen from his appeal to Fr Du Coudray. The latter wanted to make a new translation of the Old Testament. The saint represented the poor people imploring him to come and help them. They did not need an improved translation of Scripture, just a priest to give them an elementary knowledge of their faith, etc.

He had a fear that God might remove his Church from the countries of Europe (because of the disorders of the clergy). For, he said, that even though our Lord had promised that his Church would last till the end of the world he had not promised that it would continue to exist in individual countries.

He had a fear of knowledge (and a still greater fear of ignorance):

> We must have knowledge, my brothers, and alas for those who don't spend their time well! But let us fear — let us tremble a thousand times more often than I can say; for those who have intelligence have much to fear; *scientia inflat;* and it is even worse for those without it, if they do not humble themselves.

St Vincent would pilot us with much trepidation between the Scylla of conceited knowledge and the Charybdis of reprehensible ignorance (cf CR XII8).

Fear, in St Vincent, was not the phantasy of a timid pesonality, for good sense and confidence in God are among his most prominent characteristics. His fear was worship of the holy and unsearchable judgements of God, "the beginning of wisdom". It does not appear that St Francis voiced his fear like St Vincent.

He has, of course, three or four chapters on this topic in the *Treatise,* and he shows its place in the spiritual life with his usual clarity. But these passages are exposition of doctrine.

As for knowledge, St Francis expresses his regrets:

> I am in continual turmoil which the variety of the affairs of this diocese continually produces, without a single day in which I can look at my poor books, which I so loved once, and which I no longer dare to love now, for fear that the divorce from them, into which I have fallen, might become more cruel and afflicting.

He had even greater regrets that in the matter of learning the Church had been caught napping in the previous century. He was con-

vinced that the Reformation did so much harm to the Church because the clergy had fallen behind in learning:

> We confined ourselves to saying our breviaries and did not think of acquiring scientific knowledge… Knowledge is the priest's eighth sacrament.

The two saints realised the necessity and importance of learning in the clergy. It might be said that Francis was the more enthusiastic and Vincent more cautious (cf CR XII8).

As the founder of a Congregation devoted to the giving of missions St Vincent was especially interested in preaching. In this connection he spoke of the virtue of simplicity, a virtue by which one speaks and acts with God alone in view. He said that while we should practise this virtue at all times we should do so more particularly when we preach. He branded as sacrilege the preaching that was done by anyone who used the pulpit to build up for himself a reputation for learning, eloquence, etc. In order to escape from such a danger, and at the same time offer the people instruction that was within every listener's grasp, the saint most urgently insisted on simple preaching. Moreover, when the subject permitted it (i.e. a sermon on a virtue) he proposed the use of what he called "the little method" — three points: in what the virtue consists; the motives for practising it; the means of acquiring it (cf CR XII5).

There was a well-known example of the simple style. The bishop of Geneva was asked to preach at the Oratory in Paris, 11 November 1618. The King and Queen were present, and the church was so packed that the preacher had to use a ladder and enter by a window. In the pulpit he proceeded to give a very plain narrative account of the saint of the day (St Martin). Some of the congregation felt cheated and were very annoyed. Words like "bumpkin" and "mountaineer" were heard afterwards.

As to "the little method", St Francis was making use of it (at least in substance) long before the foundation of our Congregation. In a letter to another bishop (1604) he writes:

> You can reduce your sermon to method, considering in what the virtue consists, its true marks, it effects, and the means of acquiring or practising it. This has always been my method… There is another method, showing how the virtue is worthy of honour, useful and pleasing, which are the three goods which can be desired.

Since St Francis was a very well-known preacher in Paris it is quite likely that zealous priests studied and analysed his sermons.

St Vincent wished all of us to cultivate the virtue of zeal for souls. This is not a "little" virtue. The distinction between which virtue a person likes best and which one dominates his soul may be little. In any case, St Chantal said that St Francis liked simplicity, meekness etc, best; but in one of her letters she gave it as her judgement that zeal for souls was the dominant thing in him.

St Vincent, too, was all for zeal but against impetuosity. We know how complaints were made about him on account of his slowness in answering letters. On his side, our saint was sceptical about people who were in a hurry with their projects, and he said that he saw nothing more common than the failure of such. He held that God is glorified by the amount of time that we take to think over matters that concern his service. Of course there is a limit. "Life is too short as it is". In 1657 preparations were in hand for the printing of the Common Rules. Suggestions and tiresome amendments kept pouring in to the saint's room in St Lazare. Eventually they sparked off a flash of childhood memory: how chickens can go over the same little patch of ground a hundred times and always find something to peck at.

St Vincent was slow to start, but once any work was accepted he was most tenacious. This quality of perseverance in tasks once started made his other quality of cautious slowness imperative, otherwise his time would have been taken up with unworkable schemes. His friend, St Francis, had the same qualities. It took him four months to make up his mind if he himself was the right person to direct St Chantal. And when problems arose he was just as dogged as St Vincent. In fact, St Chantal uses about him a verb that suggests the "mentalilty" of a terrier: *il n'en démordait jamais.* He would never "unbite".

Slowness is not opposed to zeal, but insensibility is. St Vincent made earnest appeal to the confrères about a nonchalant, mechanical way of doing the works of the Congregation. He urged us to cultivate sensitivity about the way we perform the liturgical ceremonies and preach the word of God, because when the faithful see that we esteem our function they respond. Zeal, in fact,

> …consists in a pure desire to make ourselves pleasing to God and useful to the neighbour ... If the love of God is a fire, zeal is its flame; if love is a sun, zeal is its ray. Zeal is what is purest in the love of God.

When expressing the hope that the Congregation would learn to

love God with unselfish love St Vincent drew on the example used by St Francis about an expert musician who had been adopted and reared by a prince. When the prince asked him to play he did so willingly, even though he could not hear a single note he played, being deaf. And he continued to obey the order even after the prince had left the room *(Treatise,* Bk 9, ch 9). It was thus, in fact, that the foundress of the Visitation practised divine love for forty years, and this may explain the terms of profound reverence St Vincent used in writing to her, beyond all other recipients of his letters. Both St Francis and St Vincent draw attention to a subtle failure in this matter, a trap that catches many spiritual people: in their good works and excercises of piety it is not God's contentment but their own that they seek. This shackles ardent zeal (cf CR XII2, 11).

That the love of God was uppermost in St Vincent's care of the poor is sufficiently indicated in his words to the Daughters of Charity:

> It was never our Lord's intention, in founding your Company, for you to take care only of the body, because there never will be wanting persons to do that… God has chosen you principally in order to teach the truths necessary for their salvation;

the patron of the Poor telling us what is the particular poverty of the poor.

Our founder accepted a maxim much used by St Francis, who left it as a kind of legacy to the Visitation nuns at Lyons, a few days before he died: "Ask for nothing and refuse nothing". It is obvious that St Vincent consulted his friend's conference on this topic when preparing his own one for the sisters (1657). He quoted from it also for the benefit of some of his own seminarists who were injuring their health by trying to advance in perfection without realising their own limitations, (and while counselling the seminarists he was telling the whole community which spiritual writer knew best):

> I recall on this subject a saying of the bishop of Geneva, divine words and worthy of so great a man: " I would not wish to go to God if God did not come to me". Admirable words! He would not wish to go to God if God did not first come to him. Oh!, how these words come from a heart perfectly enlightened in that science of love! That being so, a heart wounded by charity, which understands what it means to love God, would not wish to go to God if God did not forestall it and draw it by his grace.

In loving God, just as in everything else, one must not "encroach

upon Divine Providence, but follow it step by step".

St Vincent did not incorporate this maxim ("ask nothing, etc") in the paragraph on indifference, but in the chapter on obedience (CR V 4). Its presence here might make one think that St Vincent felt there was no need for much communication between a superior and his confrères in community. On the contrary, St Vincent believed very strongly in the circulation of information and opinion in community. He was asked about this by St Louise at a council of the Daughters and he replied that nothing was more necessary. He said that there was a certain Sister Servant who caused unbelievable pain by holding herself aloof from her community. Then he added;

> I find that over there, where we have the poor wretches of the Mission, if there is a superior who is open, who communicates, everything goes well. On the contrary, if there is someone who stands on his dignity and keeps his mind to himself, that locks hearts and no one would dare to approach him... It is necessary to have this reciprocity.

We know that our saint used to read the *Treatise* as one of his favourite books. The reply given above seems to be reminiscent (even in its vocabulary) of a sentence of St Francis in which he says that charity is a friendship, and that friendship cannot be unless it is reciprocal, and its groundwork is communication (Bk X, ch 10, and cf CR VIII2: "fraternal charity.. . living together after the manner of dear friends").

We may take a glance at the two saints' ideas on ecclesiastical authority. In his use of authority St Francis had a clear idea of the weakness of human nature and the poverty of contemporary faith and discipline. He thought that censures might check some cases of disorder, but were no use for giving vigour to the life of the Church. But if Francis thought little of them Vincent thought far less:

> Regulations can be made and censures imposed, (priests) can be forbidden to hear confession, to preach, to beg for alms, but in spite of all that there will be no amendment, and never will the empire of Jesus Christ in souls be extended or preserved by such means. Formerly, God armed heaven and earth against man. Alas! What good did it do? In the end did he not have to lower himself before man in order to get him to accept the sweet yoke of his empire and his guidance? And what God could not do with his omnipotence, how can a prelate do with his power?

St Vincent applies to mental prayer what Sacred Scipture says about Wisdom: "It is through it that all good things come to us" (cf Wisd. 7:11). He was most anxious that his confrères should learn how to pray well. It is one more mark of the great regard he had for St Francis that the method of making mental prayer handed down in our Congregation is that found in the *Introduction to the Devout Life* (part II, chs 2-7). The two saints, of course, would look upon method as a good servant but a bad master:

> Some are continually, as it were, examining and prying into their prayer to see how they make it, or how it could be improved upon, and they think that they must neither cough nor move during it, for fear the Spirit of God should withdraw. Truly, this is a great folly, as if the Spirit of God were so fastidious as to depend on the method and posture of those who pray. I do not say that we ought not to make use of the methods recommended to us, but we must not cling to them, as do those who think that they have never prayed unless they make their considerations before the affections which our Lord gives them, whereas these affections are really the end for which we make the considerations. Such persons resemble people who, finding themselves at the very place to which they intended to go, yet turn back because they have not reached it by the road which was pointed out to them".

So St Francis. We can easily recall how St Vincent dealt with that last point by the example of a person who wants to light a fire, and so strikes a flint to obtain a flame. He would make himself ridiculous if he kept on striking the flint after he had obtained flame.

The writing of St Francis has been criticised for being too sweet, too florid. Whatever about that, should one neglect great works on account of their style? The dream of St Jerome comes to mind. As a young priest he used to read the Scriptures dutifully, but was often appalled by the style. He would find relief by turning to the classics. In his dream he saw himself brought before the tribunal of our Lord. He was asked about his religion, and answered that he was a Christian. "You lie" said the Judge, "You are a Ciceronian, not a Christian".

In defence of St Francis' writing it has been justly observed that one gets no spiritual gimmickry, no ranting, no obscurity, and (saint though he is) the writer has the most helpful quality of making the reader feel that he is only one step ahead of him. But for us, what is most important is the judgement of St Vincent. None of us can imagine our Holy

Founder being taken in by "seraphic twaddle" (sic Sainte-Beuve), and recommmending it in all directions. The *Treatise* was one of the books he read most, and he wrote: "I have carefully arranged that it shall be read throughout our Company". During his lifetime it was the custom for the sisters to read a chapter of the *Introduction* every day. When Fr Nacquart was setting out for Madagascar St Vincent asked him to take some copies of it with him.

This special promotion by St Vincent of an author who was himself the co-founder of a religious institute is all the more remarkable because St Vincent showed himself keenly aware that attitudes and practices suitable for one religious family were not so for another. Indeed, St Francis held this opinion just as strongly. It might seem, therefore, that in order to be faithfully Salesian in outlook St Vincent should have been rather silent about the writings of St Francis while speaking to his own communities. The fact that he so openly showed his approval is an indication that, in the judgement of St Vincent, these writings breathed a spirit suitable to his own foundations. How very particular St Vincent was on this point is seen in a conference to the Daughters on the spirit of their Company. He told them to take advice from those people only "to whom God has communicated your spirit". On one occasion when some sisters were being sent to a town where there was a number of religious communities he advised them that when going to confession there they should go to a secular priest rather than to a confessor of one of the religious houses. It was simply his concern that they should not acquire a spirit other than the one God had given them.

There was another Francis who may have had an influence on Vincent's development, Francis of Assisi. St Vincent spent a few years at a Franciscan secondary school at Dax. I can only point out a few coincidences, which may well be nothing more. They could, however, indicate ideas implanted in his mind at this period, which gradually matured over the years, (cf Mk 4:26 "The Kingdom of God is as if a man should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow and grow, he knows not how".)

We all know how frequently St Vincent turned to the example of Jesus in the Common Rules:

> We have, as far as in our power, endeavoured to draw them all, as may easily be seen, from the Spirit of Jesus Christ and the actions of his life".

Franciscan scholars point out that their founder was the first to do

this. It is not that previous founders failed to look towards our Lord. If, however, one compares (for example) the Rule of St Benedict with the first written Rule of St Francis it is obvious that the latter refers to Jesus much more frequently. More than one tenth of the text is direct quotation from the words of Jesus.

In his devotion to our Lord St Vincent dwelt especially on his endurance of humiliations *(Jesus aneanti.* referring to Philippians 2:7ff). As in so many other things, different sources can be suggested. It is a fact, however, that St Francis was particularly affected by the humility of the Word Incarnate. There is a story among *The Little Flowers of St Francis* which conveys the message. The saint asks Br Leo where true joy is to be found. He himself suggests that it is to be found in possible brilliant success for his Order, friends in high places, etc, etc, only to reject all such things. The conclusion he comes to is that true joy is to be found in willingly bearing humiliations for Christ. St Vincent in his time made the same choice. He rejected the efforts of his agent in Rome to make an impression on the Papal Court. His bent was "to honour the trials, contradictions, weariness and labours that Jesus endured", and he held that the best condition for anyone of us to be in was that one which most resembled the life of Jesus, "tempted, praying, labouring, suffering".

Had St Vincent heard much about St Francis at Dax? When Bremond was doing research for his great work on the history of spirituality in France he was unable to find material to answer some of his own questions about St Vincent. He complained that some communities had a bizarre way of honouring their founder. Was such a complaint ever made about the Friars?

When the first Franciscans started preaching, their theme was penance, "and they were active in the confessional with the same zeal as in the pulpit". One is reminded about what St Vincent said regarding his own first missions: "I had only one sermon, but I turned it a thousand ways" ("Do penance"). Our Congregation started from a sermon on penance and the general confessions that followed.

The great exponent of Franciscan spirituality is St Bonaventure. In his guidance of souls he insists particularly on humility, examination of conscience, frequent confession, (all interconnected). St Vincent was rather exceptional even among canonised saints, for the frequency with which he approached the sacrament of penance. Had this practice its origin in something he heard in the Franciscan college-chapel at Dax?

St Vincent De Paul — A Guide for Priests Today

Jerome Twomey

(A talk given to the students of All Hallows College, 27 September 1976. What is given here is a transcript of JT's manuscript; in delivering the talk he probably did not adhere rigidly to his text. I have added a few notes. TD)

Some 45 years ago now, (English translation in 1932), a French diocesan priest the Abbe A'rnaud d'Agnel wrote a book entitled *St Vincent de Paul a Guide for Priests,* from which I have borrowed most of my title, adding only the word "today".[1] I take most of what I have to say tonight, however, from the spoken and written words of Vincent himself, more than three thousand still extant letters of his and many hundreds of conferences, sermons, addresses and other documents of various kinds given by him to all sorts of gatherings and people, carefully preserved by the recipients and still available to us today in printed form.

One of the things that I think you can *not* complain of in this college is that there has never been the slightest attempt on the part either the Vincentian or the diocesan priest-members of its faculty or administration to force Vincentianism down your throats. In fact, in my ten years on its staff I cannot ever remember having heard even one sermon or homily or conference being given, or heard *of one* being given, to the student body in the house by any member of the staff on this topic. And this *is* rather a pity, because any history of priestly training and formation in the Catholic Church will single out the seventeenth century in France as one of its greatest and most influential periods, and Vincent de Paul, with M Olier the founder of the Sulpicians, the body to which Adolphe Tanquerey before the Council and Ray Brown today belong, as one of the greatest and most influential names in that history. And of that, you know as much about Vincent de Paul as you do about the Nabob of Rawalpindi, *so* making a short sketch of his life and times necessary before going on to the main point of my paper, his uncanny anticipation of the documents of Vatican II, and so his relevance for us today.

Vincent de Paul was born to a small-farmer family in a rather desolate region of the Landes in the south of France, in a village named Pouy. His father spotted that the young boy was above average in intelligence and decided that he should become a priest — no great compliment to either of them, in the way in which we think of of the priesthood today, but not so uncomplimentary to the priesthood in the Church generally at that time, and perhaps it was worst of all in France in the second half of the sixteenth century, into which Vincent was born in 1581. Vincent himself, when he was far from his beginnings and well on the way to sanctity, had some very scathing things to say of the clergy of the timeout perhaps there was some excuse for them in the system. The decree of the Council of Trent ordering the setting up of seminaries for the formation — by which it really meant re-formation — of the clergy, passed on 15 July 1563, was still a dead-letter in France. Apart from any other consideration, one of the difficulties was finding people fit to run them. A French writer, Jacques Duquesne, in a book *Les Pretres,* "The Clergy", published in 1965, sums up the scene well, even if not nearly as strongly as it was described in the seventeenth century itself by Vincent de Paul, Jean-Jacques Olier, Bourdoise, Francis de Sales and many others: "Up to the time of Trent" he writes "the formation of future priests was somewhat chaotic and haphazard . . . The intellectual elite of the clergy came from the universities, of which there were 25 in France, the main one being the Sorbonne... The morals of the young man destined for the priesthood, who attended these universities, left much to be desired. Those who came from the presbyteral schools, conducted by a local priest to provide successors for himself and his neighbours, didn't *know* much at the end of their time there. Their ignorance was at times so crass that some of them did not even know the formula of absolution and instead recited over their penitents an *Ave Maria* . . . The Bishop of Comminges, for instance, quite a pious man himself, demanded of candidates presenting themselves to him for ordination that they should turn up at his residence the night before ordination and listen to a sermon, and that they should avoid gambling and all forms of debauchery for that one night in their lodgings". It was no wonder that Vincent's friend Bourdoise even many years later wrote that "If tailors and shoemakers were no better at *their* jobs than the vast majority of clergy at *theirs* we should be exceedingly badly shod and clothed". No wonder that Vincent himself, long after those early days when he was no great shakes himself, exclaimed that "priests

who live as the vast majority do today are the greatest enemies of the church of God". A few half-hearted attempts to start seminaries were, indeed, made, but were short-lived. The seminary at Rouen produced six priests in twenty years, that of Limoges in the same time not even one. Francis de Sales wrote: "After having striven seventeen years to train merely three priests to assist me in the reformation of the clergy of my diocese, I was able to/produce only one and a half". And no wonder! Whether they learned much *theology* at the university or not is a moot point, as you may infer from Vincent's own BD later on, but there is nothing moot about the fact that most of the rest of what they learned there was anything but suitable preparation for the priesthood, and there was no question whatever of their learning anything other than speculative theology, *la scholastique,* not even most elementary ideas of pastoral practice or liturgical performance. Vincent himself mentions once being present in a church where several priests were saying mass simultaneously, no two of them in the same way, and one of them commencing with the *Pater Noster;* and the picture is amply confirmed from contemporary sources. Arnaud d'Agnel sums it all up succinctly in connection with Vincent's father's decision to make his son a priest: "They became priests because it was the easiest of all professions, one that offered a peasant who had picked up a little Latin a better living than he could obtain on his father's farm, and to those with a university diploma, or powerful friends to push their fortunes, fat somnolent benefices".

So, Vincent after a scratch secondary education, if you could call it that, in a Franciscan school in a nearby town, Dax, armed with the money his father got from selling two oxen, betook himself after two years schooling, aged about fourteen, to the university of Toulouse where he graduated BD about four years later.[2] He supported himself while at the university by giving private tuition on the side. When he was about eighteen and a half years of age he was given permission by the bishop of Dax on 13 September 1599, to be ordained priest. With commendable piety, however, he decided he was too young for ordination, so he put it off for a year, and was ordained priest in 1600, aged 19-plus. The Council of Trent had put the minimum age at 24, but the Council of Trent didn't cut much ice in France in those days and, in fact, if I remember aright, its decrees were not promulgated until 1613 anyway. Partly, possibly, from a desire for further learning, partly because of a shrewd calculation that a bit more education would not hurt in getting "a fat somnolent benefice" he spent four more years in the university, supporting himself by

conducting a small private school at Buzetabout fifteen miles from Toulouse, later transferred to Toulouse itself. These were the inauspicious beginnings of the man who, with one or two others, notably Olier of St Sulpice, was to initiate a generation of priests who for three hundred years served the church, whatever else their faults, as it had never before been so universally well served by its priests, and inaugurated with this a period of missionary expansion of the church unparalleled in her history.

How did he do this? I would try to summarise in one phrase: By anticipating in the seventeenth century, even if the heavy hand of institutionalism in time choked the original spontaneity somewhat, the mind of *Presbyterorum ordinis* and *Optatam totius* of Vatican II, the decrees on priestly life and ministry and on the training of priests, respectively. A big claim? Yes, indeed, but I think I can substantiate it item by item, and there are many other modern ideas, especially in the line of pastoral practice and training which, even if the heavy hand of a more rigid formalism came to overlay them for a while, were nevertheless started by Vincent three hundred years ago and more — he died in 1660. Perhaps I might just list them briefly first, not in any particular order:

1. The need for theoretical training and practical experience in priestly courses apart from purely speculative theology.
2. The separation of what later came to be known as Minor from Major Seminaries, and the express stipulation that the Minor Seminaries, or Colleges as he called his, were not, contrary to later custom, to be confined to boys intending to be priests but were also to educate what would become good Christian laymen.
3. The idea of what we call "In-service Training" in his famous Tuesday Conferences.
4. The idea of "Team Ministry" as we call it today, which was why he founded his community of secular priests living in common and working in groups. He used the Tuesday Conference members in the same way.
5. The notion of "Secular Institutes" which is what he Daughters of Charity were and are, despite the overlay of subsequent centuries; women who are not religious but bind themselves together by yearly vows to work for God in the neighbour, "leaving God for God" as he phrased it

when someone suggested they should be continually at their prayers.[3]

6. The notion of "Adaptability". While each of his two communities had paramount aims, missions to the abandoned country people and work for the clergy for his priests, service of the materially poor for his sisters, he would have neither absolutely tied to any one line of work but always open to the needs of the times as indicated by "the signs of the times" and the call of the church.

7. The need for organised backing if charitable work was to be really effective, and the involvement of the laity, especially women, in this. Hence his detailed rules for the Ladies of Charity, who were the fore-runners in many ways of our "Meals on Wheels" notion, and for the Confraternities of Charity which after the French Revolution became the model of the St Vincent de Paul Conferences established by Ozanam. Also his support for the Company of the Blessed Sacrament for men in the same work.

8. The large-scale involvement of women in active apostolic work. As Boudignon remarks of him: "He *created* in Catholic society a new kind of apostolate well adapted to modern needs, the apostolate of women".

9. The awareness of the close connection between social evils on the material and spiritual planes, the idea that there was little use in trying to convert a starving stomach or to expect anything but large-scale crime where there was great disparity in the distribution of wealth.

10. His realisation that the mission of the Christian was to the whole man and to the whole world, whence his diverse interests: abandoned children; unmarried mothers; the poor in general and specifically the criminal poor as we would tend to call them today; displaced persons, refugees from the wars of the Fronde in France or the religious persecution in the British Isles; the need of men everywhere to hear the word of Christ preached to them, or continued to be preached to them, whence his foreign missions in Madagascar and North Africa as well as behind "the Iron Curtain" drawn around the British Isles by the Penal Laws and especially their Cromwellian implementation.

11. His realisation that social justice demanded socially conscious people in charge of government, hence his list of friends and acquaintances ranging from the Queen Mother and the King down, and reading like a *Who's Who* of everybody who was anybody in the France of his day.

12. His instituting the practice of enclosed retreats for laymen and laywomen, as well as clerics, in the houses of his two communities.

13. His instruction to his sisters that while working for the immediate relief of the abandoned poor in country areas they should also set up schools and there teach the children skills that would enable them to help themselves better thereafter, the three R's and Home Economics as we call it today.

One could go on endlessly about this really remarkable man, but to conclude this talk perhaps you will allow me to expand a little on those aspects of *priestly* life and formation in which he most obviously anticipated much that we tend to think — even perhaps *want* to think — only came into Christian and priestly consciousness in our own day.

1. The need for theoretical training and practical experience in priestly formation courses.

Opatam totius, the Decree on Training of Priests, opens with the principle that priestly training must always answer the pastoral requirements of the particular area in which the ministry is to be exercised", and we are inclined to take it for granted that because this is so obviously true it was in fact always done, or at least attempted. But the brute fact is that for a long time in the Western Church it was neither done nor attempted. What we have seen to have happened in Vincent's own case was true throughout Europe in his day and for centuries before his day so that, as the great French Academician Daniel-Rops put it "There was a saying current in Provence: 'If you want to go to Hell make yourself a priest'", and while there may have been a certain exaggeration in this the *vox populi* was, as it usually is, not *too* wide of the mark. Vincent himself is on record: "Priests living in the way most of them do today are the greatest enemies of the church of God; the depravity of the ecclesiastical state is the principal cause of the ruin of the Church". Many men, of course,

had seen this. Trent had seen it, but when Vincent was ordained at the age of 19, forty years after Trent, Trent was still a dead letter. Many had attempted to do something about it but with no success except for two, Vincent de Paul and Jean-Jacques Olier, founder of the Sulpicians. Vincent saw clearly that a few years in one's youth studying speculative theology in a university was no preparation for the priesthood. A knowledge of theology was, of course, necessary but it was far from enough. It might produce good scholars, which he conceded freely, but it had no chance whatever of producing a good pastoral clergy, dedicated, zealous, competent in pastoral practice. For this one needed also both the theory and practice of *moral* theology, *pastoral* theology and practice, *some* idea of how and what to preach in the pulpit, a *practical* knowledge of the liturgy of the church, as a bare minimum. He began, as he had to begin, in a very small way. In July 1628 the bishop of Beauvais invited him to prepare a "crash course" in these subjects for men who, after their university studies, presented themselves for ordination. They would come to the bishop's residence in groups, spend about three weeks there on this course, and then be ordained. It was a small beginning but one had to begin somewhere and with what one had got. It produced such extraordinary results, so bad were things at the time, that it soon spread to other dioceses. Paris made it compulsory in Vincent's own *College des Bans Enfants* for all ordinands in 1631. Alexander VII made it compulsory in the Vincentian house of Montecitorio for all priests being ordained in the diocese of Rome. It wasn't much; it was a mustard seed, and side by side with it went the setting up of seminaries where *priests* rather than students at first came to be formed in pastoral theory and practice, at first for some months and then gradually lengthened to a few years. Both on the retreats and in the somewhat longer training in the seminaries the ideas were roughly the same and, making some allowance for changed times, have a curiously modern ring about them. Each morning there was a lecture on moral principles, each afternoon a lecture on priestly practice, especially liturgical and pastoral. After each lecture the group broke up into smaller groups of twelve to fifteen and the priests of the house conducted seminars on the topic with these. As well, in Vincent's own words, "they visit hospitals and prisons where they catechise, preach, hear confessions, as they also do in the colleges". This make-shift arrangement lasted about fifteen years until about 1643 when the more wide-spread establishment of seminaries as we know them and as Trent envisaged them,

with modifications introduced in the light of experience, began to make them unnecessary.

2. In-service Training

Out of these modest beginnings developed a form of "in-service training" as we should call it today that was soon also to become a wide-spread form of continuing pastoral formation, in France especially. The young men who went through these short Retreats for Ordinands as they were called were among the first to realise how much there was to be learned and how little one could learn in three weeks, so they approached Vincent, in Paris at first but this idea also gradually spread all over France and beyond it, and asked him to bring them together regularly "to hold discussions regarding the virtues and functions proper to the life and ministry of priests". Vincent agreed, and so on 16 July 1633 began the famous Tuesday Conferences. One enrolled and one attended regularly or was expelled. A topic was set a week in advance. Each man present spoke for a quarter of an hour on the set topic; then there was a general discussion; the whole session lasted two hours. In time, one could say, every good priest in Paris, and especially those engaged in priestly formation, came to the Conferences and their influence became very considerable, mainly in two ways:

(a) The Conferences themselves were attended by such outstanding men as professors of theology at the Sorbonne like Duval, founders of congregations like Olier, renowned preachers and future bishops like Bossuet, reformers like de Ranee (founder of the Trappist reform of the Cistercians), and through their influence had an effect on the French clergy far beyond the confines of membership of the Conferences itself.

(b) In time the members became a kind of loosely-associated society and started "team ministries" as we would call them in areas where they were needed. While Vincent's own priests largely confined their parish mission work to the neglected areas of the country where there were no, or few, or very ill-educated priests, the members of the Tuesday Conferences made themselves up into small teams and, as occasion offered or seemed to demand, did similar work in the cities or bigger towns.

All these in time became the norm of priestly formation and are things still commended to us today. Sometimes they appear as new discoveries, and in a sense they are because over the centuries they

tended to become formalised and lose their freshness, but it is as well to appreciate that they are re-discoveries and not *new* discoveries. If only because it is the plain truth we may forgive the patriotic fervour of two modern French biographers of Vincent: Jean Calvet when he writes of these works of Vincent that "it was indeed from France that we got the dawn of a new age, the great reform of the Church wished for by the Council of Trent"; and Daniel-Rops when he writes that "from these Vincentian seminaries — as also from the seminaries of the Sulpicians and the Eudists — there issued an elite of priests such as France had not known for three centuries and who were long unrivalled by the priests of any other country". We Vincentians were very choosy in those days; we sacked from one of our seminaries, as not having brains to be a priest, a young man named Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

3. Pastoral Practice as well as Theory

I mentioned his insistence on pastoral *practice* as well as theory. Today, especially since the Council, we have revived it in a big way. But it is worth noting that it *is* a revival. It was not only for *the priests* in his early Retreats for Ordinands and Tuesday Conferences that he insisted on this. When his seminaries proper got under way, institutions more in line with what we understand by the word today, he used his students as well as his faculty- members and other priests to go out on parish missions which, in those days, often lasted several months in the one parish. He used them for catechesis of both the young and the adult in an age when ignorance of religion, especially in country areas, was almost total. He used them for showing young and old again what Christian worship was all about and how they should take part in it. He even sent them on the foreign missions and the missions "behind the Iron Curtain" of the day. With one batch of eight missioners he sent to Cromwellian Ireland he included two students, one French and one Irish; the latter, Thady Lee, was martyred before his mother's eyes by Cromwell's troops when they caught him after the siege of Limerick.[4] He sent them to teach the catechism and the chant. He was very strong on the need for teaching the chant, though what opportunities he saw for putting it into practice in Cromwellian Ireland is not quite clear! But our "apostolic works" as an integral part of priestly formation were not invented, even if they were restored, by Vatican II; they were an essential part of priestly training in theory and practice for Vincent de Paul three hundred years ago.

4. Theory also important

For Vincent the theory, on spiritual, theological, pastoral and practical levels was as important as the practice, and so we find him constantly inculcating the need for the future priest *to know in principle,* in order to carry out in practice, what he was doing, why he was doing it and how could do it in the given set of circumstances. He was anything but the kindly, slightly foolish-looking old man with an abandoned child in his arms and two more hanging on to his soutane, with which traditional statuary and *bon-dieuserie* art have made us familiar. We have "Communication Courses" today in our seminaries, calling on the help of actors. Vincent *started* them when they were even more badly needed than they are now, warning his men repeatedly and almost *ad nauseam* against lengthy sermons florid in style, couched in language no ordinary person ever used and which ordinary people wouldn't understand, illustrated, if illustrated at all, with far-fetched imagery from classical literature instead of — like the Lord's own sermons — with imagery from their own everyday lives, set out in the simplest and most strikingly clear language^and concentrating on three principal aspects of one main point; *"Why* we should want to practise the virtue or understand the truth being put before us; precisely outlining the *nature* of that virtue or truth; dealing practically and briefly with the *means* best adapted to the capacity of the particular audience for putting that virtue, or the consequences of that truth, into practice in their daily lives. Motives, nature, means — the essential constituents of "the little method" on which he harped so constantly in teaching "Communication", and the microphone and the TV camera have only accentuated these basic factors, as well as accentuating abstention from elaborate and meaningless gestures and posturings, against which he inveighed equally strongly. His whole teaching on priestly activity in all its aspects was best summed up for me in a little book published in 1921 by the American Bishop Kelly, founder of the missionary Extension Society, when he wrote that "Zeal is no excuse for opening your mouth before you know what is going to come out of it".

5. Solid organisation needed behind charitable effort.

Vincent learned this lesson early. While still a young priest he was actually in the pulpit in a small country village one Sunday when a man approached him and whispered that there was a family on the outskirts of the village literally dying of starvation. Vincent preached

on the topic and appealed for help so successfully that the whole village streamed out to the house with gifts of food and clothing sufficient to feed and clothe the entire village. Vincent learned the lesson; solid organisation was needed behind charitable effort. This was the beginning of his parochial Confraternities of Charity, for which he laid down the most minutely detailed procedures covering all foreseeable possibilities. These were the predecessors, as I already mentioned, of Ozanam's Conferences of St Vincent de Paul after the Revolution. And even there the similarity doesn't end because, oddly enough, Vincent's Confraternities of Charity were composed of women which was a new and brave venture in his day, lately copied by the St Vincent de Paul Society. His main male support was the Company of the Blessed Sacrament, the membership of which was mainly middle to upper class interested in their fellowmen, just as Ozanam's first helpers were University students like himself.

6. Three brief items.

Vincent was no bookworm, as might be suspected, yet his words to the young philosophers of his own community in 1658 concerning their studies are worth reading today.

Among his still extant letters is one to the superior of the first band of his missionaries departing for Madagascar giving a list of books he was to take with him as a library on which the missionaries among the pagan people could fall back for spiritual and intellectual nourishment, without which their priestly lives would become insupportable and evangelisation impossible.

We have *talks* on the priest and the mentally ill in our modern seminaries, but Vincent housed a collection of them in the garden of his HQ at Saint-Lazare, and his sermons to his community on how to treat them, while not exactly a model of 20th century psychiatry, show a humanity and an insight rare in that day.

Summing-up

I shall finish by saying that rarely has the church of God seen a priest who was so much to so many as Vincent de Paul, and by suggesting (and as a priest like Vincent himself and not as a Vincentian, which he would be the first to proclaim gives me no additional qualification greater than that greatest of all gifts which I received at my ordination) that you will learn more about what being a priest means in the 20th century than you will from all your courses and apostolic activities, necessary though these are, by reading and

studying prayerfully a good life of that great priest, *le grand saint du grand siècle,* the great priest of that great century of French history, Vincent de Paul, Monsieur Vincent. In no man I know is the presentation of the vertical and the horizontal dimension of Christianity, and especially Christian priesthood, so clearly portrayed and so easily recognisable as applicable to our times as in Vincent de Paul, Man of God, Patron of all Charitable Works in God's Church.

May I finish with a quotation from one of his conferences which might even be regarded as slightly left-wing, Latin American, Liberation Theology today if we did not know that it came from a conference to his priests on 6 December 1658:

> If any one of us should think that he has joined us in order to preach the gospel to the poor but not to help them, to bring them spiritual remedies but not temporal, I would reply to such a man by saying that we are bound to bring them every help we can and to try to see to it that similar help is brought to them by others, if we want to hear the consoling words of the Supreme Judge of the living and the dead: "Come you blessed of my Father…, for I was hungry and you gave me to eat, naked and you clothed me". To do this is to preach the gospel by word and deed; it is to carry on the most perfect work there is; it is to carry on the work the Lord himself did on earth, which they are bound to carry on who on earth bear his character and his function as their own, that is, priests.

Notes

1. It is worth noting, for the record, that on the title-page and cover of the English translation the author's name appears incorrectly as d'Angel.
2. JT is not correct here. Vincent received his degree in 1604 at the age of 23 after seven years of study for it.
3. This expression, so much associated with Vincent, seems to have originated with Benet of Canfield. Cf Optat de Veghel: *Benoît de Canfield,* Rome 1949, p 128.
4. On whether there were eight or nine in this group see the article in COLLOQUE 3.

The Eloquence of Vincent De Paul

Eamon Devlin

(In the present climate of renewal the "eloquence" of Vincent de Paul may at best appear quaint; at worst it might seem heady and superfluous! I have adapted this article from a French thesis which I did as part of my university examination, hence the academic thrust of the subject.

The aim of the article is to discredit further the traditional view of Vincent as an ignorant man who was even hostile to learning and knowledge. Vincent himself is the greatest offender here and the error has long since been put right. Yet while I found that Vincent can and does attain to an eloquence which in his sermons, conferences and letters pleases by the use of all the techniques of rhetoric, I found too that all his learning and all his eloquence were at the service of his main aim, his haunting obsession with saving the poor. This is the relevance of the article for us).

Introduction

> "In the letters of St Vincent de Paul all danger of rhetoric has disappeared. His deeds are eloquent, not his words…"
>
> "…St Vincent de Paul has the gift of enlightening souls and not that of writing..."

The name of Vincent de Paul is synonymous with charity. He is the Apostle of Charity whose works have outlived him, and that is doubtless how Vincent would have wanted it. Nearly all literary critics of the seventeenth century have tended to play off his charitable works against his achievement as a preacher and man of letters. While the letters themselves do allow for some such opposition there is, I feel, the risk of a very limited appreciation of the man Vincent de Paul and, by extension, of the scope of his work.

In speaking of Vincent's eloquence as a preacher and writer I will use the word in its original and purest sense of speaking out to persuade and to touch, *e-loquor.* Eloquence with its modern connotations of pleasing through rhetorical technique is implied only in a secondary

way. Vincent's eloquence, then, has to do with his overriding desire to evangelise the poor and will be seen to consist chiefly in its facility to adapt itself according to circumstances and to the needs of his hearers or readers.

The background: seventeenth century rhetoric

The seventeenth century in France is called the great century because it witnessed the full flowering of literature and the arts. Humanism is the dominant philosophy and finds its way into society through the famous salons of the period. All the famous people of the period frequented these literary and religious salons and it is through their influence that the dechristianisation of the cultivated elite of Paris took place. Preaching was considered a literary *genre* and the upper classes thronged the churches of Paris to study the rhetoric and oratorical style of the sermons rather than listen to their message. As more and more priests conformed themselves to the demands of such an influential audience the medium became more important than the message and the great masses of the poor of Paris became more alienated.

The Council of Trent had delcared that all preaching should make use of the Scriptures and the Church Fathers only, but by the seventeenth century the protagonists of the counter-reformation found themselves in a different position. The Jesuits opted for an integration of Christian truth and pagan literature and rhetoric in the hope of holding the attention of the cultured elite. Francis de Sales, the bishop of Geneva, felt that the Parisian elite with its humanist philosophy was at least fideist and he visualised a new Christian literature which would replace the pagan classics. His *Introduction to the Devout Life* (1609) and his *Treatise on the Love of God* (1616) are among the most successful of these Christian works. In a letter dating from about 1620 Francis de Sales justifies his humanist approach:

> …we are fishers, fishers of men. In our fishing therefore not only must we be very careful, work very hard and give much time to it, but we must also set traps, lay down bait, yes even, if I may say so, we should use "holy tricks". The world has become so tricky that henceforth we won't be able to touch it except with fine gloves or dress its wounds except with delicate plasters; but what does it matter as long as men are cured and in the end saved? Charity, our Queen, does all things for her children.

It is with the successors of Francis de Sales, men like Camus the bishop of Belley, that the integration of Christian faith with classical

humanism begins to give undue weight to the latter. Camus' sermons consist of little more than exaggerated rhetoric. In one sermon alone he quotes fifty lines of Virgil and Lucretius. In another he begins by speaking of "quenching the thirst of the ears of his listeners by offering them the intoxicating cup of his words". He proceeds to call on "the zephyrs of the Holy Spirit to carry the sails of his thoughts into the sea of his audience".

Vincent de Paul: desirable Ignorance.

Vincent de Paul refuses any compromising with the securalising influences of classical literature. In preaching he is scornful of any attempt to please or delight the listeners. One must preach simply and familiarly. Vincent is always seen to adopt the more practical line of approach and in so doing he seems to despise learning and knowledge:

> …the most learned do not usually produce the most fruit (IV 126)

Vincent counsels another scrupulous confrère to forget his study if only he can fulfil his other duties (VII 518). Vincent himself of course wanted to be considered ignorant. Abelly notes this as one of the two of the saint's outstanding faults but it is important to consider the background against which Vincent's anti-intellectualism arises. It is the period of the Catholic counter-reformation which is marked by a strong emphasis on Church authority. Vincent's letters suggest that he in particular had a deep distrust of what he calls *des opinions nouvelles;* he is for example chief among those who lobbied the French bishops to ask the Pope to condemn the Jansenists. Among his own confrères Vincent dreads the inordinate thirst for knowledge and he impresses time and again on confrères, and especially on the seminarists, that they are studying in "the school of our Lord" (IV125). This implies that confrères should study "soberly . . ., humbly . . ., and with love". But if he is suspicious of knowledge Vincent can think of something which is worse still:

> …We need knowledge . . . but let us fear, let us fear, confrères, for those who are wise have much to fear: *scientia inflat;* but as for those who have no knowledge it is worse still unless they humble themselves (XI128).

St Vincent and preaching

The perversity of the world has forced preachers, in an effort to

> combine the useful with the agreeable, to make use of fine words and subtle conceits, and all rhetorical devices to appease by any means and to stem as best they can the wickedness of the world (XI258).

Vincent felt that the medium had become the message and in his slightly sarcastic allusion to the Preface to the *Introduction to the Devout Life* we can sense the depth of his distrust. But we will have to consider Vincent's eloquence in the light of the audience to which he speaks. Francis de Sales and most of the famous preachers of the time addressed themselves to the dechristianised elite of Paris; others devoted themselves to stemming the tide of Calvinism; Vincent was obsessed with the great majority of the poor people in town and country. He is always mindful not only of the vanity of rhetoric and the temptation to preach oneself, but also, and most important of all, of the needs of his people. Therefore he recommends simplicity and humility. To a priest who wrote to him in search of "a good preacher" Vincent replies:

> You tell me that either I send a good preacher or else we should not get involved in preaching in the light of so many other missioners who are excellent preachers. We have no such preachers. M Boussordec however speaks very usefully. And anyway if we aim to teach the poor in order to save them and not to win praise and commendation for ourselves, then we have all the skill we need for that (VIII208).

Vincent invented his *petite méthode* to guide the confrères in their preaching. His little method with its emphasis on motives, nature and means reflects a desire not only to explain but also to persuade so that Calvet can speak of it as "a popular, realistic and direct eloquence which served as a model to his missioners". We must therefore assess Vincent's rejection of what pleases in preaching in the context of his desire to touch and persuade:

> How many people do we see converted by those other methods? We however have the evidence of our own; but of these new methods you have the very opposite experience; they are all up in the air, they only skim the surface — sound and fury signifying nothing! (XI280).

In a very real sense Vincent de Paul is in a tradition of sacred eloquence which has its roots in the Council of Trent. He partakes of an ideal which sacrifices rhetoric to the word of God. Again, Vincent's

letters reveal that he considered himself part of a preaching tradition with stretches from Augustine *(De doctrina Christiana)* to Charles Borromeo and Francis de Sales. Towards the end of the famous conference of August 20 1655 "On the method to use in preaching" Vincent speaks of the scope of influence of his *petite méthode:*

> Don't believe, Gentlemen, that this method is only for the country, the poor people. It is indeed excellent for the people, but also for more learned people, for the towns, … for Paris, … for the Court itself.

This is his telling conclusion:

> Gentlemen, there is no better or more efficacious method, for the best method is always that which uses everything necessary to win over the listeners (XI 281ff).

Here we see that Vincent is in fact ready to adapt his method of preaching to the needs of his audience provided that the aim be to move and persuade. Vincent's own great innovation is his ability to modify the tradition of Christian eloquence to the needs of his poorly educated people.

Although Jeanmaire published *The Sermons of St Vincent de Paul, his Contemporaries and Immediate Successors* in 1859 most historians are agreed that the manuscript he was following dates from only 1712 and contains none of Vincent's sermons. We have, therefore, only two authentic sermons which date from early in Vincent's ministry, probably 1616 and 1617. The first of these, on the importance of the catechism, was preached to the poor of Saint-Leorard-de-Chaume. Though he has not yet invented his *petite methode* Vincent uses it as a natural structure for his sermon. There are, he says, three kinds of sermon, one which teaches, one which exhorts and a third kind which does both. This sermon is basically doctrinal but it is also very persuasive through the faith of the preacher himself rather than as the result of a studied eloquence. The second sermon, on Holy Communion, is important in that we have an early draft of it as well as the finished product. There are interesting developments from the early version to the later which, according to one commentator, prove that "Vincent's anti-rhetorical stance does not exlcude the use of rhetorical devices". The sermon is essentially inspirational and Vincent consciously adorns his phrases in order to emphasise the importance of his message. While in the early version Vincent dwells on the punishment incurred by those who partake of the Body of Christ unworthily, in the later sermon

he adds to the reality of punishment a comparison which brings out a sense of the great gift being offered:

> Anyone who is to receive a greater than himself takes many pains to receive him worthily. He tidies and cleans and fixes up his house, he rolls out the red carpet and makes sure everything is in order… To receive our Lord, however, none of this is necessary (XIII 37).

The periphrase by which, in the first sermon, he speaks of our Lady as "a place filled with everything that is perfect" is adorned even further in the second:

> Since his only Son was to take flesh of a woman the Eternal Father ordained that this should be a woman worthy to receive him, a woman full of grace and holiness, free from all sin,… the most pure and immaculate virgin Mary… Therefore God planned from all eternity to prepare this dwelling for him, to adorn it with the rarest and worthiest gifts… so that it might be a temple worthy of God, a place worthy of his Son (XIII 35).

The Conferences of St Vincent

None of the three hundred or so conferences of Vincent which have come down to us were written in his hand but André Dodin claims that they do faithfully express his thoughts and "as far as possible, his turn of phrase". Vincent's ideas on the conference have played an important role in the development of what one commentator has called this *"genre* of religious literature". While the sermons of Vincent were for the poor, his conferences were for an audience already imbued with religious ideas, his confrères and the Daughters of Charity. Vincent himself much preferred the conference form to that of the sermon; he tells the Daughters that while it is good to hear a sermon they must prefer the conference, which he frequently calls *une assemblée* or gathering together (IX 73). The reason for Vincent's preference is a simple one which reflects the primary aim of his evangelical preaching, to teach and to persuade:

> …everything said in our gatherings is pertinent for us as a group and as individuals, which is not the case with sermons (IX 73).

The great strength of the conference lies not only in the fact of its treating a topic which is relevant for all those assembled, but also in the sense of community and solidarity it can create by bringing together

the members from their diverse works. Vincent realised this too and he said of the conference that what prayer is to the soul of the individual the conference is to the soul of the community (IX 401-2).

In one of his conferences Vincent digresses to speak of the evolution of the *genre*. He notes that it existed before the sermon, having its origins in the beginnings of the Church:

> It is certain that Jesus Christ himself instituted conferences and after his death all the teaching of the apostles and priests took the form of conferences. There was no sermon (IX 395).

As the number of the faithful grew the conference had to give way to the sermon but Vincent sees it as a salutary sign that the conference is becoming important again in his own time. There is in this clear distinction between the conference and the sermon an important condemnation of the rhetoric which characterises the public sermon; the development of the conference also shows an increasingly anti-intellectual tendency. Vincent used his little way in the conference but as this often proved too laborious and complicated for the early Daughters he decided to suppress that part which describes the nature of a virtue. Yet the conferences are full of spontaneous eloquence issuing from the burning faith of Vincent himself, and of rhetorical techniques which spring forth naturally to meet the needs of his hearers. Thus for example the rhetorical figures which Vincent calls upon most often are the simple ones of repetition and exclamation.

Vincent's use of exclamation, for example, makes for some of the most eloquent of his conferences. In the course of a conference with the confrères Vincent speaks of two priests who have suffered greatly in their apostolates, one in Algiers the other in Madagascar:

> O Saviour! O my Saviour! What will become of these poor men? What are they to do? … what will our poor brother do, this man who has left his country, his homeland, his relatives, his place of birth when he might have had a peaceful life?…
>
> Confrères, let us pray for M Bourdaise who is so far away and all alone, M Bourdaise who, as you know, has with great pain and care brought to Jesus Christ a multitude of the poor people of the country he is in. M Bourdaise, are you still alive, or not? If you are, may God preserve you! If you are in heaven, pray for us! (XII 69).

This passage made a great impression on commentators such as Bremond, Calvet, Chalumeau and Coste. Bremond has this to say about it:

> We ought to know a passage like this very well, we ought to know it by heart from our schooldays! It is worthy of a place with the three great examples of the *genre:* David weeping for Jonathan, *Monies Gelboe;* Virgil, *heu si qua fata;* and St Bernard in the funeral oration for his brother.

Ever attentive to the needs of his audience Vincent was not slow to modify the *genre* of the conference. His great innovation was the introduction of a dialogue structure into the conference form. Where others had fallen back on all the embellishments of rhetoric to delight their audience while instructing, and so hold their attention, Vincent's choice of a dialogue approach in which he asked questions and the Sisters gave answers seems to make up for the lack of rhetoric in his conferences. In this too however we see that Vincent does speak eloquently and that his eloquence is one which always seeks to teach and to persuade. One of the greatest preachers of the seventeenth century, Bossuet, was a disciple of Vincent and wrote this of Vincent's eloquence in a letter to Pope Clement XI:

> When we used to listen attentively to him giving a conference we felt that the words of the Apostle were being fulfilled in him: "If anyone is a preacher let his words be as the words of God".

The Letters of St Vincent

As regards the letters of Vincent I think that they too illustrate by their simplicity and direct style this natural eloquence of Vincent which springs from the fire of his conviction. The other striking feature of this huge correspondence (fifty years after his death, 30,000 letters of his were still extant) is the variety of subject, style and correspondent. Though he writes to confrères, Daughters, the Pope, bishops and politicians about matters ranging from the provision of sufficient food for the confrères to the question of the Fronde war in Paris Vincent is always, directly or indirectly, taken up with the salvation of the poor. His letters speak of a kind of obsession and it is this which makes them eloquent. Calvet, too, senses this:

> With a mind so obsessed and a heart so enflamed, how could Vincent de Paul not have been so eloquent?

Likewise Emile Trolliet, a literary critic:

> Vincent is not concerned with making up striking comparisons but with helping the poor and saving sinners... He inspires in his

> double army of co-workers a passion for charity and a distrust of style... He writes to them letters which are plain as prosody but which are profoundly persuasive…

Vincent's eloquence in all his letters is a product of an economy of words and a directness which is frequently firm but often humourous. There is, for example, a series of letters between Vincent and Louise de Marillac which pre-date the foundation of the Daughters of Charity and which trace the development of a close friendship between the two saints. Vincent is acting as Louise's spiritual director but his efforts are dogged by her scrupulosity in even the smallest matters. Louise often brings out the most human in Vincent. In this undated letter we see Vinvent getting impatient with her but the tone of the letter is a combination of firmness and charity:

> Mademoiselle,
>
> Good evening to you; I wish you wouldn't get worked up about your son Michael's future ... In God's name, woman, Divine Providence is full of all riches and they honour our Lord most who abide by Providence and do not try to direct it themselves! "Yes", you will tell me, "but I'm getting worked up on God's behalf". You are no longer serving God if to serve him you are getting yourself into a nervous state (I 68).

Sometimes Vincent's resoluteness takes the form of a long involved letter in which he doggedly argues his stance allowing no point to escape his attention. In one such letter to Jean Dehorgny in Rome Vincent uses a style which is both to the point and yet full of detailed logical argument. It is 1648, the Jansenist question is to the fore in France and while a pronouncement from the Pope was awaited in France many leading figures took sides in an open and often bitter debate. Vincent opposed the Jansenists (their elitist tendencies would have been anathema to his desire to save especially the most deprived spiritually and materially) and took it on himself to persuade the bishops of France to write to the Pope asking him to condemn these *nouvelles opinions.* Not everyone in the Congregation agreed with his stance and Dehorgny wrote from Rome and told Vincent that he was making a great mistake. In his lengthy reply Vincent shows an intimate knowledge of the personalities involved and the opinions put forward. His reasons for condemning the Jansenists vary from the plain fact that Church authorities have already come out against them to the fact that he himself knows Saint-Cryan personally and can see the real aim of the opinions he holds, "…to destroy the present state of the Church

and to gain power over it". In the letter Vincent shows himself to be very conversant with Arnauld's literary defence of Jansenism *De la fréquente communion* and he refutes the arguments of the book by quoting successive Popes and Fathers of the Church.

Letters such as I have already mentioned show us the truth of at least one commentator's belief that Vincent's eloquence springs from his lively mind and his impassioned heart. The literary critic Emile Trolliet adds to this that "often too the sublime passes from the content to the form itself". When it is a matter of administration and he has to influence secular or religious authorities Vincent is capable of a style which has the diction and delicacy of diplomacy. In all his letters to the Vatican, whether it be to oppose the move to cloister his Daughters or to win approval for a new missionary adventure, Vincent combines an almost excessive deference with a practical tone which pleads its case. Thus, writing to the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda to get permission to send two Irish confrères to the Hebrides, Vincent concludes a very deferential opening with a very practical reason for his request. These priests, he says, are needed *"non solum propter scientiam, probitatem et animarum zelum, quibus multum commendantur, sed etiam quia harum insularum incolae lingua ut plurimum utuntur hibernica, et ibi nulli alii sunt sacerdotes"* (IV 92).

Hitherto it is evident that the stylistic aspects of Vincent's letters have always played a secondary role to his practical aims. Yet I would like to conclude by suggesting that there was perhaps a time in Vincent's life when the *delectare* element may have been more important than the *persuadere*. Unfortunately most of the surviving letters of Vincent date from 1640 until his death. There are only seven letters dating from the first twenty years of his priesthood (1600-1620) when it was a more secular Vincent who was writing. Among these are the two famous letters to M de Comet in which Vincent speaks of his time as a slave in North Africa. The style of the longer of these two letters is very different indeed from that of all the letters of his later life. The letter reads like an adventure story and Bremond compares it to the best chapter of the *Thousand and One Nights*. The fine literary style of this letter finds echoes throughout the other letters of Vincent, though in later years I think Vincent consciously suppressed it.

Here is one last example of a letter to Jane de Chantal in which Vincent seems to forget himself for a moment and to imitate the style of their common friend Francis de Sales:

> I have received your letter…, and you can imagine with what reverence and devotion, my most honourable Mother, since it is

> a letter from my only mother and is full of sweet perfume of her spirit. O Lord, my dear Mother, how this letter has brought balm to my heart! Oh, indeed blessed be he for the love of whom your kindness has offered to receive us, to house us and to furnish us! (I 574).

Although he can produce an ornate style the letters of Vincent show that his eloquence is in fact the result of his desire to persuade his reader:

> …to express his thought he has found a simple and direct form, a terse and racy style which does not win the distinction of a Bérulle or of an Olier but which is always close to reality; as a result of which he is a great writer precisely because he takes pains not to be a writer.

Conclusion

Vincent de Paul is eloquent in the true sense of the word. In his sermons, conferences and letters Vincent desires to touch and to persuade. I noted at the beginning of this article that Vincent's personal gifts have been eclipsed by his numerous works of charity. That is how he would have wanted it and yet perhaps the present-day scope of his works is itself the most efficacious witness to the eloquence of the man who fired his priests and sisters with a passion for charity. Calvet's phrase echoes in my mind:

> With a mind so obsessed and a heart so enflamed how could Vincent de Paul not have been eloquent?

It is doubtless true that Vincent's letters and conferences have an eloquence which is stylistically pleasing, but ultimately his eloquence wells up from the depth of his faith and his haunting obsession with the salvation of the poor. Calvet concludes:

> He is not a thinker, a speculator like Bérulle or Condren; though he wrote much, Vincent wanted to situate himself outside the bounds of literature. But his spirit is so alive and his heart so warm that the gift of style is given him as a bonus so that there is not, in the fourteen volumes he has left us, one page which is dull and uninteresting.

Saint Vincent as Spiritual Adviser

Thomas Davitt

Paper read to meeting of Spiritual Directors in Celbridge, 2 September 1982.

It is unfortunate that no one who had Vincent as his spiritual adviser has left a journal or detailed notes of the advice which he received. Our knowledge of the sort of advice Vincent gave comes to us from his letters and conferences, from what he said after Repetition of Prayer, and from what others have said about it.

Abelly says that Vincent was very approachable, especially for those who had any sort of spiritual problem, and that he had been known to receive the same person as many as four times within an hour. One confrère gave Abelly a written account of his own experience with Vincent:

> Fr Vincent always gave me great support and treated me very kindly when I was going through a bad time. I used constantly go and intrude on him when he was getting ready to celebrate mass or say his breviary. And when I had received an answer I would leave, and then turn round and go back in again, repeating this several times. This went on over a long period and I never heard him say a harsh word, rather quite the opposite. He always answered me with great kindness, never putting me off as he could justifiably have done since I was continually imposing on him. Even when he had told me what to do, seeing I was still in doubt he took the trouble to write out for me in his own hand what he had said so that I would remember it better; for this reason he would get me to read it back to him out loud. Finally, no matter at what hour I went to him, and it was often very late, well on into the night, he always received me with the same goodness, listened to me and answered with a kindness and charity which I cannot explain (3.12.1).

In 1650 Vincent wrote to Sister Jeanne Lepeintre:

> Spiritual direction is very useful; it is a source of advice when

> in difficulties, of help when discouraged, of safety when tempted and of strength when overwhelmed… (Ill 614).

In the Common Rules he goes further than saying that spiritual direction is "very useful"; he says "one can hardly make progress in virtue without the help of a spiritual director". But if direction is so important it is equally important that the director be someone who is capable of giving the help required, someone who will not "turn off" those looking for help. In the letter to Sister Jeanne Lepeintre Vincent added at the end of the passage quoted "…when the director is really charitable, prudent and experienced". In 1657 he wrote to Louis Dupont who was dealing with someone who had an unspecified problem:

> You mustn't put him off; instead, welcome him and treat him kindly and in that way give him confidence to come and see you and consult you. Show him that you want to help him, and this as your own idea; don't mention that I wrote to you about it (VII 29).

Some years earlier Mark Cogley had asked Vincent how to deal with difficult confrères and was told:

> …prudence must decide this; it is useful in some cases to see things from their point of view in order to be all things to all men as the Apostle says; in others it is good to take issue with them quietly and in a moderate way; and with others to oppose firmly their way of behaving (IV 90).

To Pierre Escart in 1643 (II 265) and to Guillaume Delattre in 1646 (II 584) he quoted Francis de Sales' maxim that if a thing had a hundred ways of being viewed one should always choose the best. He also used this in a conference to the confrères in 1642 (XI 122). But if kindness doesn't have its effect then firmness must be used, as he told Pierre de Beaumont, superior in Richelieu, in 1658 (VII 163). In the previous year there had been much dissatisfaction with the behaviour of the Director of the intern seminaire there, Honore Belart. The complaints were about the manner in which he treated the seminarists and the insulting language he used to them, even in the presence of others. Seminarists were leaving because of this, and other young men who had been thinking of entering the community changed their minds when they heard about Belart's conduct. He also showed signs of jealousy if he thought other confrères were trespassing on what he considered to be his territory (VI385-388).

Around the same time Denis Laudin, superior in Le Mans, was given similar advice: kindness does not mean letting the confrère in question do and say what he likes (VII 226). And so, a few months later again, he told Etienne Bienvenu:

> You'd like to have the advantages of our community life but not its problems and difficulties. That's impossible. Every type of life in the world has its sweetnesses and bitternesses; both must be swallowed (VII 317).

The problem with many of these confrères was that they thought that they had the answers themselves, that they knew it all. In 1647 Vincent had warned Claude Dufour about the danger of thinking that his opinion was an inspiration (II 174). In 1652 he told Achille Le Vazeux:

> The worst is, your make-up is such … that you think you yourself have sufficient light to see everything without seeking that of others (IV 437).

In a conference to the confrères in 1659 he spoke about God giving inspirations to certain people, but added that such people should discuss the matter with experienced men and seek advice (XII 150).

What he was warning against was really the danger of a person's not having a real knowledge of himself. Honoré Bélart, the problem Director in Richelieu in 1657, was told:

> If you say you've never noticed these faults in yourself, Father, it's a sign that you don't know yourself (VI 388).

In 1649 a Visitation nun, Jeanne-Marguerite Chahu, was told to

> Look into the depths of your soul in the sight of God…
>
> (Ill 461)

so that she could recognise what exactly her motivation was. The knowledge of our defects is necessary so that we can do something about remedying them, as he pointed out in a conference to the confrères in 1659 (XII 231). In 1638 in a letter to Bernard Codoing he says he prays that Codoing may be helped by God towards self-mastery (1501). In an undated conference referred to by Abelly he spelt out one aspect of self-mastery in the area of anger: it means trying to forsee the events and persons which could generate anger and to practise in advance overcoming one's initial angry response

to them (XI 66). There is no point in knowing our faults if we do not do anything about them, as he wrote to an unnamed confrère in 1647:

> …we see many who, no matter how good their intention and how fine their resolutions, are nevertheless slow when it comes to putting these into practice, or when it comes to overcoming problems… (Ill 163).

In 1659 he wrote to a student confrère Jean de Fricourt:

> …if you ask me therefore how it is that men are so different, some fervent and others lax, I answer that the former overcome their natural dislikes and that the latter don't make sufficient effort to do so; the former are at peace because their heart is not divided, since they have given everything to God. The others are uneasy because wanting to love God they still won't give up loving things other than God, and these things are the bodily comforts which make the soul reluctant to practise virtues. This gives birth to, and nourishes, laziness, the clerical vice (VIII 111).

Nearly twenty years earlier he had told Etienne Blatiron that there must be perseverance in the practice of virtues

> …and the means for that, Father, is the constant recognition of the mercy and goodness of God towards us, together with the continual, or frequent, fear of rendering ourselves unworthy of them and of becoming slack about our little exercises, especially prayer, the presence of God, examens, spiritual reading and the performance each day of some acts of charity, mortification, humility and simplicity (II 129).

Virtues are acquired slowly, by repeated acts. In 1655 he wrote to Pierre de Beaumont, who had been Director of the seminaire in Richelieu before becoming superior there:

> About your idea of working hard to mortify the self-centred judgement and will of your seminarists I have this to say . . .; this cannot be done all at once but only by repeated acts. You must therefore be content with leading your seminarists towards it step by step, aiming at eventually reaching the goal after a long time because there is a long road to travel, except when it pleases God to dispense with the ordinary ways (V 436).

That progress is slow and gradual, in practical as well as in spiritual matters, is something to which Vincent refers very frequently, and he often links it with the fact that the Spirit of God works quietly while the activity of natural inclinations and the evil spirit lacks these qualities (IV 122, IV 576, VII 417).

In the list which he sent to Etienne Blatiron of things about which a person might become lax he put prayer first. On 13 August 1660, which was only six weeks before his death, Vincent wrote to Jacques Pesnelle, superior in Genoa:

> Our rule which obliges us to make an hour's prayer every day does not make an exception of days when we have a sleep. So, Father, on those days there must be a full hour just as if we had not taken a sleep; it is not right to take the extra sleep at the expense of the most important activity of the day. However, we have to adapt to circumstances. Sometimes we have things to do which cannot be put off and which cannot be reconciled with the hour's prayer. Very well, we attend to them after having considered them in the sight of God and found them reasonable, because God does not ask of us anything contrary to reason. But since this does not happen every day, nor to everyone, it is better, generally speaking, to keep to the rule… The Prince de Conti… is admirable in his fidelity to prayer, doing two hours every day, one in the morning and one in the evening, and no matter what important business he has, and no matter who may be present, he never misses them. It's true that he is not so attached to a precise time that he won't start earlier or later according to circumstances (VIII368-9).

In a Circular Letter to all superiors dated 15 January 1650 Vincent links the falling-off in some community houses to the fact that some confrères were not getting up for prayer, and continues:

> So much so, that not being at prayer with the others they were deprived of the advantages which come from praying together, and often enough they prayed only rarely, or not at all, on their own (III 353).

Further on in this letter he wrote:

> …the grace of vocation is dependent on prayer (III 359).

Vincent generally recommended Francis de Sales' method of prayer but he made it clear that no one was bound to follow that or

any other particular method (IV 390, IX 50). For those who follow such a method he warns against the danger of thinking that the early part of the method, the "thoughts and considerations", is actually prayer (IX 30). In 1656 Antoine Durand, a twenty-seven year old confrère, was appointed superior in the seminary in Agde and he kept some notes of what Vincent said to him when he was given the appointment, including this about prayer:

> There is one important thing to which you must attend conscientiously; you must give plenty of time to being open with our Lord in prayer (XI 344).

In his article on Vincent in *The All Hallows Annual* for 1959-61 William Purcell refers to the difficulty of finding a neat phrase to express accurately the French *avoir grande communication*. A dictionary of 17th century usage shows that the verb from which the noun derives meant to reveal one's thoughts, very much in the sense in which the English word "communication" is, or at least used to be, used in spiritual direction. The context makes it clear that Vincent envisaged this communication with our Lord as being two-way. This would be in line with a remark in a conference to the Daughters in May 1648 that in prayer we get to know ourselves (IX 417).

He also warned the Daughters that prayer was not just a matter of thoughts nor was it a time for preparing for the day's work (IX 30) and he warned the confrères that it was not to be a time for preparing something to say in case they were called for reptition (XI 253). On 17 June 1657, after Repetition of Prayer, he repeated four or five times "God be praised!" because Mark Cogley had said that at prayer he spent very little time on thoughts and most of the time on affections. Vincent praised him very much for this and said that that is the way to pray (XI 401). Almost exactly two years earlier, after he had called a student for repetition, he had remarked that the students generally gave too much time to thoughts and too little to affections, and added:

> Reasoning is all very well but it is by no means enough; something more is needed; the will must come into play and not just the intellect, since all our thinking is profitless if we do not move on to the affections (XI 183).

Later on he gave as an example of what he meant: acts of faith, hope, charity, humility, thanksgiving, adoration, dependence, and finally asking pardon. "Excite" and "inflame" are two verbs which

he often used in the context of affective prayer.

But for Vincent prayer does not stop even there. There must be a further step, as he said after Repetition on one occasion:

Some people have lovely thoughts and fine feelings but they don't relate them to themselves and don't make sufficient reflection about their interior state (XI90).

The corrective to this mistake is to make a practical link between one's prayer and one's daily life. Unless this practical link is made Vincent would not regard it as genuine prayer, and that is why he can say that the resolutions formed at prayer are its most important element:

> The main effect of prayer is a genuine determination, a strong determination, a firmly-based self-convincing determination to get oneself to carry out what one has resolved, foreseeing difficulties in order to overcome them (XI 87; cf also XI 406-7, XI90, XI301, IX 30).

But here again he adds a warning about the danger of over-relying on our own strength to carry out the resolutions, since only with the help of God can this be done. Most failures stem from this mistake (XI88). To prepare ourselves to receive the necessary help in the future we should constantly remember and thank God for what he has given in the past (XI256,407).

In a conference to the Daughters on 31 May 1648 Vincent explained about mental prayer, and then continued:

> The other sort of prayer is called contemplation. It is when the soul, in the presence of God, does not do anything except receive what he gives it. It is without any activity and God himself inspires it, without any effort on its part, with whatever it could want to obtain, and much more.

And he went on to say that no doubt some of them had experienced this at retreats (IX 420).

In a letter to Antoine Portail in April 1638 he wrote:

> May it please God's goodness … to give us a share in the eternal idea which he has of himself… (1 475).

All quotations so far have been taken from different letters, conferences and repetitions, mainly directed to confrères; they were all extracts taken from larger overall contexts. Not many of Vincent's letters were "letters of direction", but the following one is entirely

on one point on which the addressee had consulted him. The letter is in volume II pp 15-17 but Coste has censored it and omitted five passages from it. In a footnote he says he felt obliged to do this. This is all the more remarkable since towards the end of the previous volume he had complained that someone else had thoroughly obliterated forty lines in a letter which Vincent had written to Jeanne de Chantal: "It is profoundly regrettable, let us say it again, that someone went to so much trouble to prevent our knowing what one saint wrote to another" (1574, n. 1). The orginal letter is in Turin and when I was there during the summer I took the opportunity of obtaining a photocopy. It is addressed to Jacques Tholard, a confrère in the seminary in Annecy. He was ordained, at the age of 24½, on 17 December 1639 and the letter from Vincent is dated 1 February 1640, seven weeks later. This means that he had only just started his priestly ministry when he wrote to Vincent. His problem was that he had experienced seminal emissions when hearing confessions. As far as I know this is the first time that this letter has appeared in print in its entirety in any language. In it Vincent, as in some other letters, used a sort of dialogue style; he framed objections which the addressee might make and then answered them. For clarity in reading, these objections have been printed between inverted commas:

> I received your letter with a pleasure so deeply felt that I cannot put it in words, and the sole reason for this is that it was a letter from Fr Tholard whom my heart loves more than I can say. But I must admit that there was equal sorrow in reading what you say about your cross to which Providence has nailed you, not in order to ruin you as you fear, but so that, as in St Paul, *virtus tua in infirmitate perficiatur.* Since the grace God gave him at the height of his temptations was sufficient for him you also have reason to hope for the same sufficiency in the grace he gives you, and which is apparent in the purity of intention which you have when you begin hearing confessions, in the fear you have of offending God while hearing them, in the remorse you feel when the violence of the temptation having removed your freedom causes nature to give in, *vacando rei licitae,* and finally in the constant determination you have of preferring to die rather than voluntarily do wrong; all this makes it clear that these happenings are not voluntary, and therefore not culpable. As you know, sin is such a

voluntary thing that if the will has not been involved there is no sin at all in actions in which materially there may seem to be, and that's why the masters of the spiritual life judge to be non-sinful these happenings which occur during confessions, and nowadays they do not wish people to confess them, and in this connection I know a holy priest who never, or rarely, confesses that he falls into these weaknesses; and although that is the case he confesses them only in his annual confession, and in that he accuses himself not of the substance of the matter but of not sufficiently detesting the pleasure which his miserable carcase takes in it, and of the fear that perhaps his will in some way contributed to the action. And if you believe me, Father, you'll never confess them except at the same time and in the same way that he does, and he's one of the best and most fervent priests I know on earth; what's more, he's known to be such by everyone.

"Yes, but it's not the same thing; perhaps he has some indication by which he knows that he had no freedom when he was carried away by the violence of nature; but as for me, I'm not in that position, for it seems to me that I could prevent it". No, Father, don't believe it, because neither this movement nor its effect depend in any way on your will; in the agitation of nature it could not prevent them; as a result, the thing is no more voluntary in your case than in his, or in anybody else's.

"Yes, but I could get up and leave, until this agitation has passed, or at least not ask the questions which bring it on". I answer that if it happened to you in other places or other activities to which you are not obliged or to which are indifferent then you would have to leave the place and the activity at the first stirrings of this feeling. But since it happens to you in a holy and godly activity to which nowadays every priest is obliged, you are not allowed to give up the action or to omit the questions which are necessary for salvation just because of this feeling or because of the emission which usually follows it; because these are actions and questions which concern the salvation of the neighbour and your own vocation.

"Yes, but wouldn't it be better if I completely gave up hearing confessions?" Jesus, no way! God has called you to the vocation in which you are; he has given you blessings in it; he has preserved you; in this way you have greatly extended the empire of God and saved many souls, and you will continue to

do all this in the future, I hope, with more grace and success.

And Jesus, Father, how could you repair the displeasure and the damage you'd do to God's glory and the souls he has ransomed with his precious blood if you give up what you are doing? Remember, Father, you can pick roses only among thorns, and heroic acts of virtue can be performed only in weakness. St Paul didn't give up God's work just because he was tempted, and one does not abandon Christianity because in it one experiences great and horrible temptations; and we are not allowed to take our own lives just because they are lived out in the concupiscence of the flesh and that of the eyes, and the pride of life.

"Yes, but I could stifle this feeling or its effect". In view of the violence of the feelings you would not be able to prevent its effect without danger to your life; one of our brothers died of this and we have another at the moment running the same risk. That's why the masters of the spiritual life forbid doing oneself violence in such cases and they advocate allowing this weakness to take its course as a natural discharge and continue hearing confessions without worrying about it.

It would be a good idea for you to pass over these matters as lightly as possible. That's the first bit of advice usually given, and that one shouldn't worry when one feels too much attracted.

The second is to try not to look at the faces, and the other parts of the body, of the other sex which lead to the temptation. And when the opposite happens, rest assured, Father that this is because you haven't freedom and because the will is weakend by the violence of the temptation, and don't worry about it if it seems to you that this is not the case.

That, Father, is what I have to say to you in God's sight and in the light of doctrine and the teaching of the saints.

Don't worry about what you tell me your confessors say to you about this matter; they haven't enough insight and are not sufficiently experienced in this matter. Confess only in the way I have told you. I offer to answer to God for you, and I am, in the love of our Lord.

Your very humble servant,
Vincent de Paul

Saint Vincent de Paul and Popular Devotion

Thomas O'Flynn

(The first part of this contribution was published in EVANGELIZARE in 1953. The author has added his reflections on it after thirty years).

Glancing through the small-advertisement page of a daily newspaper recently, my eye rested on the heading 'Thanksgivings' and reading down through it I found the usual half-dozen or so acknowledgements to various Devotions and Saints for favours received. And it crossed my mind — not for the first time — that in cursory perusals of such notices in pious periodicals, as well as in the newspapers, over a number of years. I never once came across the name of St Vincent de Paul. Does this mean that devotion to the saint in the popular sense of the word is not very common in Ireland? Why are some saints popular, like St Jude or St Therese, while others like St Gregory the Great or St Augustine, giants in achievement and sanctity, do not appear to catch the popular favour?

To take the second query first. Most people, I suppose, are devoted to a saint simply because they find his or her intercession useful in obtaining spiritual or temporal favours. No doubt this is not the highest form of devotion; still, it is not unmixed with better motives and must in most cases ultimately reach out to something higher. Besides, devotion is a form of charity and the benefits of charity are, necessarily, reciprocal.

But to get back to our main query. St Vincent, of course, is one of the great figures in ecclesiastical history, and in secular history too. Nor is the esteem in which he is undoubtedly held merely static. The Society of St Vincent de Paul, for instance, flourishes in every diocese in Ireland and its 503 Conferences, embracing 7790 members, can be no strangers to the spirit of St Vincent.

Within a radius of five miles from where I am writing I can count a dozen institutions under his patronage — two, at least, outstanding in the life of the nation.

But achievement, and even admiration for that achievement, does not make a saint popular in the sense we are discussing. If this were the case St Augustine and St Ignatius Loyola should be amongst the most popular saints. But I have a feeling that St Monica is more popular than her more distinguished son; and who will deny that St Francis Xavier has stolen a great deal of St Ingatius' thunder? Not every saint has a No vena of Grace!

It is a truism to say that devotions arise in the Church to meet a particular need, sometimes the need of a particular time or place: "The Spirit breathes where He will". I can recall nothing in the life of St Anthony of Padua that would, humanly speaking, make him the the Patron of things lost. Yet I think that there are few, if any, of us who are not indebted to him under this title. How did he achieve this niche in the scheme of our devotional life? Memory vainly grasps at the gosssamer thread of a pretty story circling round a lost ring and a pious lady's dream. But more than that. . .? Anyhow does it matter? It is the Vox Populi, guided by the Holy Spirit and regulated by Ecclesiastical Authority that is the final word in these matters.

Up to 150 years ago who knew anything of St Philomena? Nor is anything (beyond the fact that she was martyred by the Emperor Diocletian) known of her to this day — from history. Yet at the present time she rivals in popular affection the greatest favourites among the saints, mainly because devotion to her has been everywhere accompanied by great favours ever since her translation after the discovery of her relics in the Priscillian Catacomb in the year 1802.

So much for the human element in devotion to the saints. Of course there is a sense in which the human element does play an important, if subsidiary, part in the rise of popular devotion. Some of the saints grip the popular mind by the astonishing miracles that they work during life or after death. Many of our Irish saints belong to the former category, as St Philomena and St Therese belong to the latter. But when all is said, I think that what most draws people to any particular saint and makes him a "friend in need" is that all-embracing charity and breadth of vision that can best be described by some word like "humanity" or "approachability".

Now St Vincent possessed these characteristics in an eminent degree. During his life there was scarcely any species of human misery that he did not alleviate. St Lazare, that was much too grand for the little company, suddenly became attractive when it was discovered that it housed a few poor creatures who were mentally ill

and whom nobody would care for. Nobody could say that a man who used a carriage, so reluctantly accepted, to give lifts to tired-looking beggars on the streets of Paris, was unapproachable. Does it not seem strange if one so approachable in life should not be approached in suppliant prayer when he is in glory? And remember, the Church raised him to her altars not only that we might honour him but that we might seek his intercession. Indeed there is a special liturgical blessing for water in honour of St Vincent to be given to the sick. In 1888 the then Holy Father, Leo XIII, declared him Patron of all Charitable Works.

Is there room for an increase in popular devotion to St Vincent in Ireland? And if there is (and mind you, I do not say there is) is it ancillary to some want in the devotion of his confrères? These are merely questions, springing from a random train of thought, the product of an idle hour, but perhaps they might provoke a not unfruitful heart-searching.

Reflections by the author after thirty years

When the Editor told me he was about to reprint in COLLOQUE a piece of writing by me on St Vincent de Paul and Popular Devotion that appeared in EVANGELIZARE many years ago I felt like a man who has just heard that his Recording Angel has decided to rush into print. A lot of water has flowed under O'Connell Bridge since that little article saw the light of day. After all, as the song says "I was a pale young curate then". The Council with all its soul-searching has given a new look to so many things that I thought my little effusion of 1953 might well be theologically tatty if not downright heretical.

However, on glancing through the script I saw little that I would change. Indeed with Pilate I might almost say *Quod scripsi, scripsi.* I see a brief reference to St Philomena. That would have to be modified. She has gone by the board by order of one of the Congregations of the Holy See. I remember, when the order was made, asking Abbot Cashman of Mount Melleray what he did about her shrine in the chapel there. He simply replied "Of course we dismantled it". I would have done the same, though the thought might have crossed my mind "However would the Curé of Ars explain all the miracles now?"

But to return to St Vincent. Devotion comes at different levels. In the article I was writing about popular devotion; popular devotion generally consists of prayer for favours. There is another level of devotion that looks to a saint as guide and model and takes on his or

her spirit; I was not writing about devotion to St Vincent at that level. Indeed such an important subject would need a deeper and wider treatment than could be given in a short and skimpy article.

At the time I was inclined to regret the failure of the people as a whole to look to St Vincent for help; I see no reason to think that the situation has changed. And the lack of devotion is not due to what might be called contemporary "enlightenment". Indeed, as I write I notice in a daily newspaper as many as seven acknowledgements or thanksgivings to St. Jude. And this, mind you not in *The Irish Press* or *Independent,* not even in *The Irish Catholic,* but in the blameless Low Church pages of the *Daily Telegraph*. Perhaps we his confrères could benefit by a more intimate and simple approach in prayer to St Vincent. Perhaps a new interest on the part of the people might in turn spring from that.

I must make a resolution to ask more through his intercession. But I shall take care to serve notice on him that I want results!

The history of the relations of Vincent De Paul with Ireland deserves a place in the history of the church in Ireland. It shows, moreover, that the ideas of saints, even when they seem to have perished, often possess a vitality which makes them spring up, as it were, from the dust and produce much fruit.

Patrick Boyle CM, Hibernia Vincentiana, in IER, October 1903.

Forum

PARISH MISSIONS

Recent contributions to this journal on the topic of parish missions have stimulated me to reflect on my experience of giving missions in Ireland. By June 1984 the mission team at All Hallows will have completed 45 parish missions, 4 Youth missions, 6 Novenas and 5 Tridua. Team members have also been active in the giving of School Retreats and work with individual groups, both in the Renewal Centre and at other locations. The numbers mentioned above refer to those activities undertaken in a parish situation.

The model of mission the team has operated with is the traditional two-week stay in a parish. This was given new emphasis in terms of preparation, content and style. How does one evaluate the efforts of the team to date? I think it is difficult for a team member to do so objectively, though it is a question which must be addressed. What I offer here is not such evaluation but my limited and personal reflections on the last few years.

Some time after my return to Ireland from the CMS, as the team were searching for ideas and strategies for mission, it began to dawn on me that my year of missions in England might not be as useful as I had first thought. For myself it was one of the happiest years of my life. I really enjoyed the fellowship of very good priests, I learned much about people, priesthood and preaching. However as I settled back in Ireland I became very aware of the complexities and paradoxes of the Church here. It was certainly different from the Church I had served my apprenticeship in.

In England it seemed as if the battle lines were much more closely drawn. One could move beyond the rather narrow criterion of mass attendance and assume that some of the 30% who came to church every week, did so with a sense of identity. They had an awareness of being part of some Christian community. They knew themselves to be a minority in the larger and often post-christian community in which they lived. At times that sense of identity was not expressed as strongly as one might like it to be. Visitation of the other 70% was often frustrating and frequently depressing, but at least in terms of a strategy for evangelisation — if one wished to have one in a parish — the task was clearly identified.

By contrast those who wished to seek a new dimension to parish evangelisation in Ireland were faced with a more complex situation,

and the difficulty of trying to discover where exactly to start. We found ourselves steering a course between those who didn't see any need for change and those who felt we were wasting our time since missions had nothing to offer in the eighties. There is little doubt that the Irish Church is very different from what it was twenty years ago. It is no longer the monolithic structure it once was. I am beginning to believe that what we have now is three different Churches, the northern, the rural and the urban Church. All of them have been affected by change in different ways, each demanding different responses. A particular weakness common to all is that they have been over-sacramentalised and under-evangelised. When people seem to talk more about the institution than the gospel message, then something has gone wrong. Many Irish people seem to be more pre-occupied by the politics and externals of religion than with its deeper realities.

A weakness of the team in our response to the Irish situation lies somewhere in the fact that we too readily focused on what the Vincentians might have to offer and too little on what the real needs of the local churches might be. This was understandable, if not inevitable, given the limited resources of the team. At the same time as we were trying to get a three-man team into action, there were over fifty Redemptorists active on the mission scene in Ireland. They were engaged in the only innovation that seemed to be taking place around then; it involved anything up to fifteen of their men visiting a parish for four weeks prior to a week or two of preaching. They claimed that if they had another fifty there would be plenty of work for them to do. In the belief that it was better to start somewhere we began with what was essentially the traditional mission structure, with more remote preparation, an updated theology and a different liturgical style.

Was what we offered of any use? I think I would answer in a positive way and say that it met very definite needs in people in certain situations. Perhaps the more important question to ask is whether it was enough? I think my answer to that would be a negative one.

It is interesting to note that most of our requests for missions came from two areas, the northern and rural dioceses. Some confrères have asked if we ever intend to give a mission in a Dublin parish. The team has given six missions in Dublin, three of these being to the Parish of the Travelling People. Given the fact that the majority of confrères in Ireland work in the Dublin area it might not be a bad thing to extend our activities outside the narrow confines of the Pale. However that was not the real reason. Working out of the resources we had, what we were offering met a need in the northern and rural Chruch. That same

need was not felt in the urban parishes of Dublin and anyone with a real knowledge of that area should not find that too surprising

What we offered and what those who employed us appreciated was a new approach in the context of the traditional mission. The parish mission has a deep-rooted and long tradition in the northern diocese (perhaps too long for its own good). To many of the clergy, since they and their bishops were going to insist on its continuation (a point made to us by Bishop Daly at a meeting in Derry), then it were best if it were done well. The original invitation to go north came as a result of the high regard which some of the Derry priests had for Kevin Scallon. Their invitation enabled us to get started in some way. Once the initial missions were judged to have gone well the invitations continued to come. With the exception of interesting clerical gossip. Now news travels faster among clergy than the success or failure of a mission.

Given the sad and tragic happenings in the North over the last number of years it always struck me that areas such as Moyard or Twinbrook in Belfast or the Bogside or Creggan in Derry, or Magilligan Prison, were places greatly in need of some message of hope, some call to reconciliation. While there, I always felt they were most appropriate locations for followers of St Vincent to minister.

If I were asked to identify a quality which others considered to be among our strengths I would suggest that it has something to do with the word *popular.* By that I mean an ability to communicate the gospel by preaching which is rooted in the experience and language of ordinary people. Where we failed to do that the mission did not go well. Where we achieved that many people found it of value for their lives in a very real way. Whatever model of mission is adopted for the future if it loses the sense *of popular* it is most likely to fail.

I have little doubt that despite the limitations of our approach and the feebleness of our efforts many people have experienced the power of God's love through the preaching they have heard. They have also experienced his great forgiveness in the sacrament of reconciliation. These facts alone do not legitimise a simple continuation of what we have been doing, but had we waited for the perfect model we might never have started.

The danger facing the present team is having developed a style of mission that meets particular demands we might be content to pursue that and ignore the need to adapt and innovate. The key to innovation and change does not rest simply with missioners. Local clergy and parish leaders must identify the real needs of a parish and suggest ways by which lay and clerical groups who come from the outside

might assist them in their programmes of evangelisation.

Part of the problem of any discussion of missions is found in a lack of clarity of terminology and expectations. Missioners need to be clear on what they are offering and parishes on what they are expecting. It is one thing to be invited to a parish for a week of direct proclamation of the gospel which is to be part of an ongoing process of evangelisation which has many varied elements. It is another to be invited to a place where the same week of proclamation is the principal or often the only instrument of evangelisation. Hidden in the midst of the expectations for such a week one finds adult education, return of the lapsed and some liturgical renewal of the parish. I suspect even Jesus would have found that difficult in one or two weeks! Much is made of the need for the missioners to visit the homes of the parish prior to preaching. There is no doubting the value of such contact; however if all one does is to invite people back to the same unimaginative and boring celebration of Sunday ritual which may have contributed to their falling away in the first place it makes little sense. It might make sense if one were inviting people back to a warm welcoming and living community. It often strikes me as ironic that some are happy to use a mission as an instrument of maintenance.

What does the future hold for parish missions? Fr Cronin's interesting account of the Australian confrères' enterprising innovation points a definite way forward, perhaps the only real way. However I suspect such a development was possible only because of certain circumstances and situations which have yet to happen in Ireland. The Australian model can have developed only because of the support of those who tend to hold power in the local church, i.e. the local clergy. It also reflects an understanding and model of Church which many of those who who have power and control in Ireland have not yet grasped. The challenge of the present and the future for the Irish mission team is to discover what its contribution to the ever-expanding parishes in the urban areas is to be. I must honestly say I am not sure what we have to offer to Dublin parishes which are equal in size to the smallest diocese, often including vast impersonal housing estates where the traditional Irish thermometer of faith, mass attendance, registers at thirty or forty per cent. Perhaps we need to remind ourselves that the Vincentians do not hold all the answers to the problems of today. Our contribution can only be in proportion to our resources.

I suppose that one of our greatest assets and resources lies in our association with the Renewal Centre at All Hallows, something which would be furthered by actual residence there and development of a

separate or distinct community. It might become the base from which we establish links with parishes on the north side of the city and, over a period of time, jointly develop some diverse programmes of renewal. Such programmes might include periods of church-based preaching at certain times in the year. Some argue that the day is long passed when people come out five or six nights in a row to hear someone preach. This runs contrary to my own experience. It is true, however, that people will not return a second or third night if the preacher is unable to communicate with them and no one can blame them for such action. I would envisage groups from those parishes coming to the centre for courses in adult education (of a 'popular' kind), for training in ministry and for short periods of prayer and reflection. Such groups might bring their own speakers or on occasions draw on the expertise of the seminary staff or team members. It might be from such groups that one would recruit part-time or full-time lay members for the mission team. If one is to reflect a true understanding of church and ministry then lay members are vital and necessary. And contemporary mission effort must address itself to the alienated people, an increasing phenomenon in the urban church. The promotion and development of small basic communities seems to be one effective way of facilitating dialogue with such people. It would be good if some team members were to acquire some of the skills necessary for such a task.

I feel some small move in the direction of the vision outlined above is essential if one is to make an attempt to operate in the urban areas of Dublin. If such a vision were to become a reality I believe it would have interesting implications for the life of the Province. The first effect would be to change the traditional criteria for the appointment of missioners. It would allow for greater expression of individual charisms and talents. In such a team those who feel called to be preachers, teachers, youth ministers and even those retired from active ministry could unite under the common banner of evangelisation and operate from the same community. Yet such a development protects the twin elements of direct preaching and mobility which historically seem to have been at the heart of Vincentian missions.

The day when such a vision might become a reality may well be far away but unless we take some tentative steps in such a direction now we may never achieve such a vision. The problem for those in authority in a time of limited availability of confrères is that visions are not very sound bases for planning. The problem for the team is that such a move is difficult without at least one or two more men. How does one solve this dilemma? Perhaps the only way is with an act of faith in the

future on all our parts. Faith can make for bad management but in the work of the Lord lack of faith can make things a lot worse.

Aidan Galvin

A QUESTION OF FOCUS !

"There is nothing more prejudicial to community life than to mask tensions and pretend they do not exist, or to hide behind a polite facade and flee from reality and dialogue. A tension or difficulty can be the sign of the approach of a new grace of God. It can announce God's passage through the community" (Vanier).

We would be foolish to deny that at this moment of time there are tensions and difficulties in our Province. But there is no need for us to be discouraged. Perhaps, as Vanier says, our difficulties may be the sign of the approach of a new grace of God. Moreover difficulties don't matter. They are normal in all relationships. How we deal with them does matter.

"Community is an art. Good communities don't just happen, they must be built. There must be full and loving sharing of thoughts, feelings and difficulties. You have problems? That's quite normal; all communities do. As a matter of fact it is a good thing. Those who make a success of their community are those who tackle their problems together and who overcome them. Those who lack the courage to do this are the ones whose community is a failure." (Paul Tournier: except for the word 'marriage' I have put 'community').

Such as it is, here is my attempt to contribute to the dialogue. You don't have to agree with me but please accept that I say what I say because I sincerely believe it is for the good of our Province. St John said that "Anyone who says he is not a sinner is a liar." We are all sinners. We all fail to live up to principles. I am not talking here about failure to live up to principles. I am concerned that some of our local communities have been working according to wrong principles. I am concerned with establishing right principles. I am concerned with vision.

Well! Let's begin! When I am dead there is not much use of the Provincial giving me an appointment. I won't be able to do anything. Because I am dead. If I am half dead, if I am in one way or another a devitalised person, I will be capable of little more. But if I am fully alive — spiritually, emotionally, and physically — then I will be

capable of giving a great service to the people of God. And if all the members of my particular community are fully alive, then an even greater service will be given to the people of God.

If then we love God and his people we will want our confrères to be fully alive. But if we want our confrères to be fully alive, then we must focus on the community and create the conditions that encourage the growth of the confrères. It is a question of focus. If a gardener wants his flowers to give joy to people, he will not focus on the people but on his flowers and he will try and establish the best conditions for their growth. Of course no conditions can prevent the essential growth of a human being, that is, growth in love. A priest that is captured and tortured by the Communists may become a saint. But we would be acting contrary to God's will if we tortured confrères, and if in fact we did, you might find that while some might become saints, others would be destroyed and many would leave.

It is God's will that we treat beings according to their nature and that is how we can best provide for their growth and vitality. It is surely wrong for us to do otherwise and then wave flags of obedience.

"The goal of the leader of a community is the growth of individuals in love and truth" (Vanier). "The first quality needed by those who carry responsibility is a love for all the members of the community and a common concern for their growth" (Vanier).

If we want to get the parish or the school or whatever right we must first get the community right.

If we want to attract vocations we must first get the community right. If we want to stem the flow of some of our best priests from the community we must first get the community right. We must first focus on the community. Which does not mean that the community exists for its own sake. On the contrary the community exists for others. It exists and was founded to serve the poor. It is apt here to quote Bruno Bettleheim: "I am convinced communal life can flourish only if it exists for an aim outside itself. Community is viable if it is the outgrowth of a deep involvement in a purpose which is other than, or above that of being a community."

THE INGREDIENTS OF GOOD COMMUNITY

1. God must be at the centre of community life

If we leave God out then the whole thing is a farce and our lives are "a tale of woe, full of sound and fury signifying nothing." No need to say any more on this point.

2. There must be prayer

If we leave prayer out we are in fact leaving God out. "Silent prayer is the most important nourishment of all for people who live in community" (Vanier). "How many souls we could save if only we prayed" (Curé of Ars). That's enough about that.

3. There must be communication

Our Superior General once said: "If there is no communication there is no community." It is true. Here is the way I see it.

It is fundamental to human living and to doing God's will that we treat beings according to their nature. I have a canary. A canary is an eating being. If I do not feed him I destroy him. A confrère is a human being. And that is the most important thing to remember about any confrère. It follows that a confrère eats, sleeps, needs clothes, medical attention etc. But these are needs we share with animals. Arkle, the horse, got medical attention costing thousands. A human being is not a mere animal. He is made in God's image. Like God he has an intellect and a will. He is a thinking being and a decision-making being. If he is to develop he must be encouraged to think and make decisions. A confrère is a thinking being. Let's dwell on that. He has ideas. He can express them in speech. In so far as you don't invite him to express his ideas you tend to destroy him. You are in effect saying to him: "My dear confrère, I am not interested in your thoughts, ideas, and feelings. I am not interested in you. I run this place. You don't count."

"You don't count." There is no worse message you can convey to any confrère or to anyone. To a certain extent also you are denying he is a person. And to a great extent it can be said that a community without communication is a community without love.

The whole question of communication (and consultation, which is part of it) has many aspects:

> a) If a leader does not set up the machinery for communication in his community, you will probably find that he will not do it for the people of the parish either. The people will be treated as "Payers and Prayers". They will not grow. Fatal for the church at this moment of time.
>
> b) In his book *The Violence Inside,* Paul Tournier, speaking of the innumerable tiny evangelistic communities that one finds now in many places, comments: "It is one of the most striking features of modern youth, this intense need to rediscover the community spirit which is too often lacking, even in churches."

If young people come to us, can we offer them real community?

c) The real planning for a Parish or a School or whatever, will be done much better if it is done by many rather than by one.

d) Through the lack of communication a confrère may feel lonely and unwanted. He may then leave. An apt quotation from Paul Tournier: "It is impossible to overemphasise the immense need men have to be really listened to, to be taken seriously, to be understood ... No one can develop freely in this world and find a full life without feeling understood by at least one person. Misunderstood, he loses his self-confidence, he loses his faith in life or even in God. He is blocked and he regresses".

e) Are we not living a lie when we sit down with a young engaged couple and say to them: "Now marriage is a relationship; Now in all relationships communication is of the utmost importance" … and then go back into a community of our own which has little or no communication?

A few apt quotes from Vanier: "Community is the place where all of us feel free to be ourselves and have confidence to say everything we live and think."

"One of the roles of community is to help all its members express what they are thinking and feeling. It is serious when people feel they have to brood over their frustrations indefinitely instead of talking about them openly. The expression of feelings brings freedom."

4. Every confrère must have suitable work: with the conditions for fruitful and satisfying work.

"A community which allows unemployed members to exist within it will perish because of them" (Vanier).

Our work is of vital importance to us. This is especially so since we are not married. Through our work we fulfil our priesthood. Through our work we carry out God's great command to love. Through our work we develop and grow as human beings. Our work greatly helps to give meaning and purpose to our lives.

Every confrère must have suitable work with the conditions that make such work fruitful and satisfying, in so far of course as that is possible. There must be true delegation and consultation. No confrère should be allowed, or appointed, to take over the work of another

on a regular basis on the plea that such a confrère can do the work better. Even if the Superior is the best preacher in the world, he is not justified in preaching at all the masses. The saintly and wise Jean Vanier says something which helps to make this point: "People with responsibility must always share their work, even if others do it less well than they do or in a different manner." We must once and for all stop offending against these principles and then appealing to obedience or the example of the suffering of Christ or calling on slogans like: "It matters not who preaches the gospel as long as it is preached." Here are some interesting facts and quotes that point to the truth and importance of what I am talking about. We must treat men according to their nature. That is God's will. I give these in order to help us to understand men:

"Very few of the industrialists that I number among my friends have any idea of how to get action from their people, while at the same time they themselves play the part of the ship's rudder, unseen beneath the water, yet guiding the vessel to its destination. *Very few treat their workers as men*. They do not seem to understand that when it is a matter of restoring responsibility on top one must also restore it below, with the object of causing authority to circulate throughout the whole social body… Life is sustained in our own bodies by the blood which flows from the heart through a marvellous network of blood vessels to the extremities. And when it has completed its work the blood returns to the heart. It is the same with 'secondary authority', which sub-divides as it moves downwards, always from the same origin, penetrating gently right to the fringe of things and then returning to its source. It develops initiative and gets things done in orderly freedom throughout its course, as it goes on its kindly mission. *Centralisation on the contrary is inherently a disorderly thing: it suffocates initiative, destroys freedom and ruins authority. When the feeling of being a responsible person begins to disappear human dignity is lost. Nothing remains but cringing servility or the urge to revolt, and these are one and the same thing…* The employer should delegate his authority, as God delegates His, without losing interest in it and without giving it up… Industrialists who are opposed to this idea treat authority as if it were a cake which becomes smaller as it is cut up, whereas authority grows and becomes stronger the more it is shared, so long as the sharing takes place in an orderly manner."

That brilliant quotation comes from the works of Leon Harmel and dates from about 1885. It is not Vatican II made these things wrong. They were always wrong.

Here are some more telling facts: "A team of investigators under Rensis Likert made a study of supervision in an insurance company. First they measured productivity and morale in the supervised groups and divided them into those that were high and low on these measures. They found significant differences in the behaviour, methods, and personalities of supervisors of the high-productivity, high-morale groups and the qualities of the supervisors of the low groups".

"In working units with high records, supervisors and group leaders *were interested primarily in the workers as people, and interest in production was secondary.* Supervisors encouraged group participation and discussion, and decision-making about work problems and policies was a shared process. Interestingly, supervisors in these "high" units did not supervise closely the work being done, but trusted the worker to carry the responsibility for doing the work".

"The supervisors of units where productivity and morale were low showed the opposite behaviours. They *were concerned primarily with production,* they made the decisions without consultation, and they supervised the work very closely. One could hardly find clearer evidence of the results of a person-centred approach." (Carl Rogers on Personal Power). Just imagine! An industry concentrates on the growth and welfare of its workers. And what happens? They make more money than those who concentrated on making money. A question of focus!

There is nothing here about any kind of selfish fulfilment. Everything here is about doing God's will and about love; about service of the poor, vocations, and priests leaving. Because everything here is about good community.

There is no solution here to all our difficulties. But there is a key to a solution. And there is nothing here about doing away with all suffering or creating a perfect community. "Life holds one certain quality for everyone — suffering." (Dr. Marion Hilliard). Yes! everyone must carry his cross.

Liam O'Rafferty.

HOME-THOUGHTS FROM ABROAD

I had thoughts of calling this piece *Home-Thoughts from a Fraud* because of the nagging doubts one constantly has about the accuracy of impressions, and the narrow range of one's experience. Everything

that follows is quite untrue, in some sense. Indeed, anyone who has the temerity to write about the United States should preface everything *with perhaps* or *maybe*. The visitor has a fatal tendency to generalise from his own severely limited experience, and given another day or two he could just as well find equally strong evidence for a totally different series of impressions. There is a prejudice in all Europeans to believe that television reflects the complexity of American life; it doesn't. All American life is not encapsulated within a social milieu ranging from the decadence of *Dallas* to the frantic violence of *Hill Street Blues*. It takes some time to come to grips with the sheer vastness of the country and realise that one is attempting the impossible in making any generalisation about a continent. Living in Boston doesn't help. New England has an air of autonomy and conscious superiority rather like the south of England. If civilised life ends north of Watford the same is true, for most Bostonians, once you cross the state line. The brownstone houses and enormous *cachet* attached to everything European makes you wonder at times if the American Revolution really began here. Known to the citizens as "The Hub" Boston, for all its Irish pubs and third-rate ballad-singers, is really like a strangely English *raj,* and even if the name is O'Flaherty or Seducci once they have percolated up to professional status their tastes and behaviour are remarkably English. It is significant that the opening challenge of the Revolution should have gone down in history as the Boston *Tea Party!*

Still, the very mobility of Americans means that university life provides a useful contact with students from all over the country. So, one begins to gather a few impressions which, one must file under "Tentative".

It doesn't take long to appreciate that for most Americans religion is a serious business. Unlike their peers in Ireland and Britain, American students are extremely open when it comes to discussing religious convictions, or lack of them. Coming from a more reticent tradition I found their ease and readiness to reveal the most intimate details of belief and practice quite unnerving. Even those who have rejected Catholicism will still insist on telling you in excessive detail why they "couldn't take any more of that crap" (sic). You can't help feeling that many are in the throes of disengaging themselves from a series of unfortunate encounters with less-than-admirable exponents of the Gospel. Even those whose lives are technically alienated from the institutional Church will still grapple with it as if the mark of God is on them and, try as they will, they simply can't get "Him" off their

backs. I have failed to find any of that cynical paganism masquerading as "selective Christianity" which bedevils so much of Irish middle-class life. Even in the American equivalent of Maeve Binchy's Dublin 4 there is a refreshing honesty which at least regrets its inability to live up to the demands of the Gospel rather than the phoney "enlightenment" which gnaws away at the vitals of Irish "faith".

There is, however, a real problem when it comes to finding a language adequate to religious conviction. Sadly, the diction of Psychology has had an enormous impact on high school and undergraduate vocabulary. Everything must be reduced to the currently fashionable *models* — Maslow, Fowler and Kohlberg — rather than the simple language of experience. Words like "kinda", "sorta", "like" nearly always preface an attempt to see the realities of life in terms of the prevailing jargon. Once a verbal label has been found you are meant to reply in similar fashion. At times I am convinced that the attempts to see religious developments *solely* in terms of psychological theory have tended to impose models and stereotypes between the parties to a conversation. When a student tells you that her father is having a "role conflict", or that his father wasn't "nurturing", you simply are not playing the game if you ask "What exactly do you mean?" A recent book by William Kirk Kilpatrick, a psychologist at Boston College, called *Psychological Deductions* has caused a flurry in the psychological dovecotes, and even merited a review in the London *Times,* by simply questioning the whole attempt to construct a religion of psychology in place of the cult of the Living God.

Certainly the whole cult of Counselling leaves you wondering if this is yet another instance of the contemporary fascination with the professional. Everything must have a label with appropriate academic accreditation. Where before a woman went next door and wept on her neighbour's shoulder, she now makes an appointment with her Counsellor and pays through the nose for the privilege. Some priest acquaintances have told me that they simply had to have a Counselling qualification if their parishioners were to have any confidence in them. God has become an understanding therapist who wants us only to come to love and accept ourselves for what we are. As Kilpatrick remarks: "We would do well to remember that Christ… performs radical surgery on us because what we need is not a pat on the back but an operation, very possibly a heart transplant". The whole present vogue for spiritual direction is largely a growth industry of the Counselling boom. Even Fr Bill Connolly, a shrewd and experienced practitioner of spiritual direction, warns: "If the present interest in

spiritual direction follows the course of other recent movements in American spirituality the enthusiasm itself will not last more than ten years or so". While Connolly's measured prediction is worth bearing in mind for anyone who imagines that a course in spiritual direction is the "cure-all" for the difficulties of mediating the Living God to a reluctant generation, I have found that the best practitioners of direction are extremely circumspect in their reliance on psychological "maxims" and much more likely to press the less palatable "maxims" of the New Testament.

There is no doubt that the "feel good" philosophy has done untold damage to any attempt to foster a genuine spirituality. At the heart of the whole miasma is the basic refusal to face the problem of Truth. There is a real tendency to forget that Christ came to reveal a transcendent reality, not a set of inspirational themes. The main question to be asked of any religion, be it faith in Christ or faith in Psychology, is *not* "Does it answer needs?" but "Does it answer questions?" The Truth, not elaborate ego-massage, is what ultimately makes us free. I have spent a considerable amount of time wading through recommended "spiritual writing" much of which is crudely sentimental or blatantly false. One of the curious things about secularised society is that the less it believes in God the more it believes in miracles. Much of this rubbish might carry the subtitle "How to achieve sanctity without even trying". Even the definition of sanctity is seen in strictly monetary and social terms. And much of this is not the preserve of the Evangelical "lunatic fringe" but of what I can only call the Catholic "God in the trees and weak in the knees" school of spiritual confectionery. While I hope I have sufficient respect for the mysterious ways of Providence and the Lord's care for the falling sparrow I baulk at the confusion of aesthetic elation and a "God" who is on call, night or day, to arrange social mobility or instantly dispense from all the suffering which is part of the human condition. There is basically a tendency to by-pass the inconveniently human and opt for some transcendental Utopia that requires just a change of attitude and a coy disregard of sin.

Much of this kind of "spiritual" writing comes in response to a pervasive lonliness at the heart of American life. While the kindness and hospitality of most Americans would put our grudging formalism to shame there is a deep lonliness that longs for some form of "community". Sadly, the very word "community" has become a buzz word in the vocabulary of Religious. I have been amused at the irony entailed in hearing "liberated" Religious on the lecture circuit speaking with passionate conviction on the lack of "meaningful" community in reli-

gious houses, while they check their schedules for their next speaking engagement. Many community houses have become the retirement homes of the elderly, and the postal addresses of the itinerant young. "Self-actualisation"and "self-fulfilment" often mask a blatant selfishness which is the religious equivalent of the "Me Generation".

America's commendable dis-satisfaction with the inadequacies of the present can often be used as an excuse for evading its crosses. Nowhere is this more evident than in the current debate on the future of Ministry and the place of women in the Church. When one hears of some of the treatment meted out to religious women in the past the back-lash was inevitable. One hears of convents located on the top storey of Dickensian school buildings where the devoted Sisters lived out a lonely existence in frugal penury while the clergy dwelt in baronial splendour in the rectory. The injustices were legion, and bishops were quite content to fulfil canonical obligation with a ritual annual visit that left nothing changed. Vatican II simply lifted the lid on an already festering situation and the climate of acceptance allowed many to leave. It is against this background of real grievances at hierarchical neglect, and the coincidence of the Women's Movement, that much of the current turmoil among women religious must be viewed. Sadly, the bitterness is still very real, and the insensitivity of some Roman *diktats on* trivial matters of habit and canonical niceties has added to the frustration. It might be added that in many cases the sisters are considerably better qualified in matters theological, scriptural and canonical than some priests. Few can deny that religious women have been far more willing to undergo the hard task of renewal and re-thinking than priests.

All of this has tended to focus attention on the limitations of the present structure of the Church and concentrate energies on a Church of the future. Often the present is dismissed as an aberration, as if a "new" Church will emerge miraculously from the sheer intensity of theorists. There are times when the possibility of schism seems very real. The enthusiasm of many devotees of ecumenism has convinced them that Unity has been achieved "in spirit", and it is no secret that many of the most accomplished women theological graduates have gravitated to the Episcopal Church where they feel their voice will be heard; or else they have joined *soi-disant* ecclesial communities on the Congregational model. Predictably, the thorny question of Ministry has become the issue which focuses the dis-satisfactions of many women, religious and otherwise. While many are happy to raise the question and leave the solution to the unfolding of the Spirit, a recent

injunction from Rome ordering bishops to withdraw all support from organisations studying the question has left many wondering if Roman congregations really know what is going on. If Church authorities simply won't listen, then, it is argued, they must act on their own.

One of the disturbing aspects of all this is the growth of "parallel" churches which, for all their commendable zeal, are doomed to go the way of all splinter groups. Perhaps at the heart of the problem is an overweening seriousness that lacks the blessed gift of laughter to realise that God ultimately disposes. It has been said that "the serious tone of the therapist's office has crept into all the areas of our lives"; and at times I have heard the humourless tones of the self-righteous 17th century reformer in some of the more strident denunciations of the institutional church. Hence, I am often saddened to see a genuine love of the Church gradually transmuted into a nebulous quest for the "ideal" church of the future.

The most alarming aspect of the current debate on Ministry is a tendency to undermine confidence in the institution of Priesthood. What begins as a radical critique of the arrogance and posturing of priests, soon becomes an insidious devaluation of the very sacrament of Orders. There are the seeds of a neo-Congregation-alism in the air, and many younger priests have found the confusion of expectancies too much to handle. If Priesthood is only one Ministry among many, and if, as some would argue, presiding at the Eucharist is the result of deputation to that office by a congregation, then what is the uniquely priestly character? It isn't surprising to discover that recent research has shown that those priests who combine two roles, priest-teacher, priest-counselor, etc., are least likely to succumb to "burn-out". The poor pastor coping with a parish and the diverse interpretations of his role must either batten down the hatches and lapse into a totally conservative posture or else work through the confusion with nothing more than the fraternity of his fellow-priests and a profound confidence in God to see him through. The latter course has led to a most impressive growth in "spiritual development" programmes and practical strategies to assist priests to foster a sense of fraternity.

Amid the welter of mis-directed energies the concentration on spirituality in seminaries is one of the many signs of hope. I never cease to be amazed at Americans' unwillingness to acquiesce in the *status quo.* The European's tendency to live with contradiction is simply not acceptable. If something is wrong, then you take action to remedy the situation. While universities have a fatal urge to theorise in terms of the ideal, I have found seminaries more shrewdly aware of their

responsibilities to the wider community of the diocese. University teachers have at best to deal with their peers; seminary personnel have a more immediate constituency in the rank and file of the diocese. When your salary is being paid by the men and women in the pews your speculations have a very pragmatic dimension! The tragedy is that the universities rather than the seminaries are the training ground for most of the newest forms of Ministry and tend to be divorced from the real needs of the Church *now.* There is also a singular lack of any training in the dynamics of personal spirituality. It is assumed that Ministry requires theological and pastoral skills only. In some cases the need to keep numbers in a department up to a viable norm has led to the acceptance of some candidates for Ministry who will simply be unemployable. Members of religious communities who have proved too difficult to involve in a community's traditional apostolate are shunted into Ministry training in the hope of keeping them usefully occupied for a few years.

Ironically, seminaries which are now geared to foster vocations to priesthood and permanent diaconate have become increasingly selective, and candidates must undergo an often harrowing series of evaluations each year. My own experience with the programme for permanent deacons in the Boston diocese has been a most invigorating experience. The sheer range, in terms of social and ethnic background, is quite staggering. To find the head of a merchant bank and a black Haitian school janitor seated side by side reminds me of some of the anomalies of the early Church: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor freeman". Of the four years spent in training the first is spent entirely in spiritual formation and each candidate spends at least one hour every two weeks with his individual director. The contrast with the university programme is quite pronounced. And the tragedy is that ordained and non-ordained candidates for Ministry will emerge from totally different institutions with often contradictory expectations. The problem will now be compounded by the refusal of the authorities in Rome to permit seminaries to change their focus from ordained Ministry alone. However, there is a flexing of hierarchical muscles clearly visible, and I suspect this will be side-stepped by some ingenious canonical sleight-of-hand. The American hierarchy has achieved a strong sense of cohesion over the last few years and will not be cowed quite so easily. There is no doubt that they are providing remarkable collective leadership, and on the issue of nuclear weapons have adopted the role of loyal opposition to the prevailing political establishment.

Living away from the community and forced to cope on my own I have been surprised at how readily I have tended to gravitate towards the diocesan clergy, and flattered by the kindness and welcome with which I have been received. Whatever our peculiar identity may be I am convinced it has much in common with that of the diocesan clergy. Much of my time outside university is spent at St John's Seminary, a Liberal Arts and theological centre for the New England dioceses. By a series of fortunate accidents I have found myself being drawn more and more into life at St John's. My over-riding impression is the prevailing commitment among *all* members of staff to the primary task of fostering vocation. Formation is not something hived off to a corps of spiritual directors but a goal to which all contribute. Certainly there are tensions between academic and pastoral demands, and at times I wonder if the students aren't simply exhausted trying to cope with competing expectations; still, the primary role of the seminary, never disolves in a series of short-term peripheral goals. Nor is it assumed that the ideal formula has been discovered; there is a constant re-evaluation and a willingness to change. At the heart of the seminary programme is the whole detailed process of formation; conferences, liturgy and retreats are not mere appendages to the daily routine of lectures and study. But most significant of all is the almost total absense of what I can only term "clerical careerism"; there is no jockeying for preferment nor salivation at the prospect of vacant sees!

That I have managed to survive over here (and let no one imagine that being sent to study abroad is a holiday in disguise) is due in large meausure to the fraternity I have experienced in the diocese of Boston and, I might add, the high esteem in which confrères like Fathers Donal Cregan and Sam Clyne are held at Boston College! But also the inestimable value of community life during my years at Castleknock and the profoundly educative influence of the boys! Any exposure to young people is useful in studying the dynamics of religious development; to have lived with them in the close proximity of a boarding school is one of the surest antidotes to arrested development in a middle-aged cleric. The eagerness with which candidates for Ministry seek access to educational institutions over here makes me wonder if we appreciate just how valuable our own commitments really are?

Martin Rafferty

Miscellanea

INTERNEXUS

In 1632 Vincent de Paul transferred his headquarters from the Collège des Bons Enfants to St Lazare. St Lazare had been in existence as early as the 12th century as a leper hospital. From early in the 16th century it had been a priory of the Augustinian Canons of St Victor.

The Augustinian Canons of St Victor established St Wolstan's, Celbridge, about 1205 and their land eventually embraced the site of De Paul House. In 1536 St Wolstan's was granted to John Alen.

Later the Alen family engaged an architect and master-builder named Alien to alter and enlarge the house. He was a member of a family which in the 17th century bought land in Stillorgan which stretched down to Blackrock and included the site of St. Joseph's, Temple Road.

In the 18th century the Aliens bought land in Arklow which included the site of St. Kevin's, Glenart. An Alien daughter eventually married a Proby of Elton Hall, Huntingdonshire. Later the Probys became Earls of Carysfort.

Seeing one thread running through such diverse material and linking the Collège des Bons Enfants with the Rock, Glenart and De Paul House one is inevitably reminded of some lines in *The Bower of Melissa* by the first Earl of Carysfort:

> Before him now a mighty forest lay,
> So thick with briars, and tangled thorns o'er spread,
> It seemed as never marked by human tread.
> One track alone appeared…

TD

Vincentian Spiritual Directors in Holy Cross College, Clonliffe.

1938-1945	Donal Costelloe
1945-1949	Joseph Cullen
1949-1954	Maurice Carbery
1954-1955	Michael Mannix
1955-1959	Patrick O'Leary
1959-1963	William O'Keefe
1963-1967	Donal Costelloe
1967-1984	Thomas O'Flynn

The list of Vincentian Spiritual Directors in St Patrick's College Maynooth was printed in COLLOQUE No. 5.

34 USHER'S QUAY

The following advertisement appeared in *The Freeman's Journal* on 4, 6, 13, 17 July and 6 and 8 August 1833:

A DAY SCHOOL

under the patronage of

THE MOST REV. DOCTOR MURRAY

and to be conducted by a number of Clergymen approved of by his Grace for that purpose

WILL OPEN ON THE 16th OF AUGUST

The Course of Studies will comprise the Greek and Roman Classics; History, Ancient and Modern; Geography, and the various branches of Mathematics. The Hebrew, German, French and Italian Languages will also be taught.

While every exertion will be made by the Rev. Gentlemen of this establishment to perfect their pupils in classical literature, particular attention will be paid to the study of the English language, and the principles of practical Arithmetic will be exemplified in a useful and extensive course.

Terms per quarter to be paid in advance:

English course, including Mathematics	£1:11:6
Classical course, with the above	£2: 2:0
Hebrew, German, French and Italian, each	£0:10:6

Further particulars may be known at the School-house, 34 Usher's Quay.

The opening day was, in fact, postponed until August 28.

In *The Freeman's Journal of 28* December 1833 an advertisement gave results of the Christmas examinations, using the name St Vincent's Seminary.