COLLOQUE

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An early photograph of St. Peter's, Phibsboro, from the Royal Archives, Windsor Castle. See page 398.

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Editorial

From the nature of things it is not usually possible to plan a whole issue of COLLOQUE around a single theme. It sometimes happens, though, that the material available for a particular issue blends into a nicely balanced mixture. This issue has material on St Vincent in his own time, on the link between his time and ours, and on the continuing way forward in his spirit. Geographically, the spread of the material involves the three sectors of the Province, Ireland, Britain and Nigeria, with a bit of Ethiopia as well.

For the first time since the Journal began there is an obituary on a student, the first student to die in the Province in half a century. Those who are fascinated by such curiosities might like to ponder the fact that Austin Ibekwem is the third student in the history of the Province who has died at the age of 37. Michael Purcell died in 1899 and Alexander Jackson in 1921, both aged 37.

The obituaries on Fathers Patrick Travers and Martin Rafferty have not arrived at the time of going to press; they will be included in the Autumn issue.

Why should we of the 1980s bother with St Vincent?

Thomas Davitt

(Expanded from a talk to the Lanark community, 29 September 1987)

At the start an important distinction has to be made. Vincent can be looked at from either the point of view of the Congregation or Province as a whole, or from the point of view of the individual confrère. The former is necessary when decisions of policy have to be made at the level of Assemblies, of the Superior General and his council, and of the Provincial and his council. This article tries to approach the matter from the point of view of the individual confrère. Its aim would be to help us to get to know how Vincent reacted to circumstances so that this knowledge may influence our own everyday lives.

Our starting point in attempting to answer the question posed in the title has to be the present moment. In 1988 we exist as a group of people distinct from other groups. Our distinguishing features are, at least to a certain extent, recognisable. Each one of us chose the Vincentians as the community we wanted to join, indicating that we were able to differentiate it from other superficially similar communities. But the Vincentians of this Province in 1988 are the successors of the men who grouped themselves together in 34 Usher's Quay in 1833, and who later bought the Castleknock property and affiliated themselves to the already existing Congregation of the Mission. This congregation, in turn, was made up of the successors of the men who had grouped themselves together in the Collège des Bons Enfants in 1625. This shows a continuous chain of inter-personal reaction from 1625 to 1988, from Vincent de Paul down to today's individual confrère.

We are the present end of that chain, and if we are to understand properly what we are, and what we are supposed to be, we need to have a knowledge and appreciation of the start of the chain, Vincent himself, and also some acquaintance with those events, persons and influences which filtered his ideas and spirit and transmitted them down to us.

Gaudium et spes says in article 5 that the human race has changed from having a static concept of reality to having an evolutionary one. Simplifying this rather drastically it means, among other things, that no group of people stands still over a period, but is changing in some way all the time, either for better or for worse.

From within any group there arise in all generations individuals who stand out from their contemporaries by reason of the decisive influence which they have on their fellows. John Gill used to quote, at his retreats, some lines from Arthur O'Shaughnessy's *Ode:*

> One man with a dream, at pleasure,
> Shall go forth and conquer a crown;
> And three with a new song's measure
> Can trample an empire down.

At the origin of our community we have one such man, Vincent de Paul. To understand our origin we must understand this man, but before we can understand him we have to get to know him. But we must not stop at merely acquiring factual knowledge about him. What we learn about him must in some way actually change our lives.

Vatican II re-affirmed the traditional teaching about saints, and made it clear that there was no playing-down of this teaching. Article 104 of the Liturgy Constitution, *Sacrosanctum concilium,* and articles 50 and 51 of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium,* are the places where this is set out. The Council says that it accepts the tradition of veneration of the saints and endorses what had been said by previous Councils, especially Nicea II, Florence and Trent.

Two of the Council's points can be dealt with very briefly: 1) The saints can pray for us because of their union with God in heaven, and therefore we should make use of their intercession. 2) This invocation of the saints does not in any way replace or lessen Christ's unique mediatorship. Neither of these points raises any problem or calls for any elaboration in our present context.

The next point, though, does call for comment. In article 104 of *Sacrosanctum concilium* it is stated that the Church proposes saints to us "as examples". This is what puzzles some people. Just how can a person from another century, another country and often from a totally different cultural background, be an "example" or "model" for us in any realistic way? We can approach an answer to this very real difficulty by starting in a general way. All the saints were members of the human race. The holiness of their lives shows what God can accomplish with

human beings who fully co-operate with him. Pope Paul VI, speaking from his balcony at the Angelus after the canonisation of Justin De Jacobis in October 1975, said:

> Just as natural things invite our admiration by revealing God's activity, his omnipotence, greatness and beauty, we can, and should, to an even greater extent, appreciate his image, restored to its perfection and reflecting his work and love, in the mirror of these heroic brothers of ours… We need human examples if we are to achieve a closer likeness to God. *(Osservatore Romano* 27-28 October 1975)

That passage contained the word "heroic". For canonisation it is necessary to establish that the person concerned lived the Christian life to a heroic degree. As heroism is rare in any sphere of life it is hardly to be wondered at that the number of canonised saints is very small indeed in comparison with the number of human beings who have lived since the time of Jesus. In this matter we have to be careful to avoid getting on to a wrong track. The saints are not put before us as models to help us towards canonisation, but to help us towards holiness. The puzzlement of many people stems from not appreciating this distinction, between holiness and heroic holiness. Everyone is called to holiness, as chapter 5 of *Lumen gentium* explains; the canonised saints are people who followed this call to an exceptional degree.

In the opening article of *Lumen gentium* the Second Vatican Council says that because of her relationship with Christ the Church is a sign of two things, and also the instrument for bringing about the reality of the two things signified. The two things are union with God and unity among people.

What the Council says here about the Church as a whole is also applicable to each individual member of the Church. Each one of us should be a sign of union with God and of unity among people, and each one must also be an instrument for bringing about such union and unity. This is, basically, only a more technical way of stating Jesus' twofold commandment.

The pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes* provides practical guidelines for doing what the dogmatic constitution says. At the end of article 3 it says that the Church has only one aim, to continue Christ's work of bearing witness to the truth, of rescuing and of serving.

Once again the goal for the whole Church is also the goal for the individual member of the Church, for each one of us. We, as individual

Christians, have to witness to the truth, to rescue and to serve. These are three practical headings for carrying out Jesus' twofold commandment. In article 4 two necessary preliminaries for this threefold task are laid down: the Church, and therefore the individual Christian as well, has to scrutinise the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the gospel.

In chapter 5 of *Lumen gentium* it is stated that the individual Christian is called to holiness in the ordinary circumstances of his everyday life. These circumstances are the signs of the times which first have to be scrutinised, and then interpreted in the light of the gospel, so that the individual can witness to the truth, rescue and serve, in the terminology of *Gaudium et spes,* or can be both a sign and instrument of union with God and unity among people, in the terminology of *Lumen gentium.*

It is precisely in this area of scrutinising the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the gospel that Vincent can be a model and example, for the Congregation as a whole, for the Province as a whole, for a local community and for the individual confrère.

We do not, of course, take him as a model or example in the simplistic sense of trying to do precisely what he did. Instead of that sort of mechanical copying, which would be counter-productive, we have to look at how he reacted to his own personal circumstances, how he understood himself, and how he understood his contemporaries. While historical, geographical and cultural situations vary enormously persons and inter-personal relationships are always basically the same. We can see the scale of values and sense of priorities which influenced Vincent in making decisions, and we can learn from them.

He lived in France and in the 17th century; we live outside of France and in the 20th century. This means, straight off, that anything peculiarly French, or anything peculiarly 17th century, must simply be jettisoned. And under the heading of things peculiarly 17th century we have to include 17th century theological, scriptural, psychological and sociological pre-suppositions which would have influenced Vincent but which would not be acceptable today. For example, in theology he believed that simple ignorance of certain basic truths meant eternal damnation (XII 80); that was the driving force behind his idea of rural missions. His scriptural approach, in some cases, is equally unacceptable today. For example, he deduced from the following scriptural passages that only a small number would be saved: only seven or eight were saved in Noah's ark, only five of the ten virgins in the parable were allowed to enter, and only one of the ten healed lepers returned to Jesus (XII 126). The theological and scriptural ideas of his day were some of

the signs of the times that he had to scrutinise; we take him as a model in the sense of being equally able to use the theological and scriptural insights of the 1980s and put them at the service of our ministry.

But the most obvious of the signs of the times to be scrutinised and interpreted in the light of the gospel is oneself. It is necessary to have a realistic appreciation of oneself, based on facts. These facts would include one's personality, skills and talents, one's training and expertise, and also one's limitations and shortcomings. These are all facts and to ignore facts is always dangerous. As facts they have to be scrutinised in order to have a realistic assessment of them, for without a realistic appreciation of them there cannot be a secure foundation on which to build, and Jesus warned of the stupidity of trying to build without a secure foundation, or tackling a problem without realistic planning. Likes and dislikes have also to be taken into consideration, since once again they are facts, but they will not be the determining factor in arriving at a solution and will normally have to give way before more important elements in a situation.

What applies to oneself obviously also applies to other people. They also are signs of the times and they must be scrutinised, and interpreted in the light of the gospel. After all, bearing witness, rescuing and serving, in the terminology of *Gaudium etspes,* are all activities directed towards other people, as are, in the terminology of *Lumen gentium,* being a sign and instrument of union with God and unity among people.

The circumstances in which we find ourselves are the scaffolding which enables us to work at our task of bearing witness, rescuing and serving; of being a sign and instrument of union with God and unity among people. For the most part these signs of the times will not be within our control; they will simply be there. But what is, to a very large extent, within our control is our reaction to them. Here again we can realistically take Vincent as a model and example. Thomas Kinsella in one of his poems, *Remembering old wars,* refers to waking up in the morning:

> Once more to face the hells of circumstance.

If we regard our circumstances as hells we are reacting wrongly; we have not scrutinised them properly nor interpreted them in the light of the gospel.

During the period from 1608, when he arrived in Paris, until 1625 when the Congregation of the Mission was officially established, Vincent de Paul experienced a gradually developing conversion of life.

Within that period certain situations can be seen as successive steps in that conversion. These steps can be seen as involving the key ideas from Vatican II already mentioned, sign and instrument, union with God, unity among people, bearing witness to the truth, rescuing, serving, scrutinising the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the gospel.

When he arrived in Paris in 1608 he came into contact with the intertwined spirituality of four people: Benet of Canfield OFM Cap. (born 1562), Andre Duval (born 1564), Barbe Acarie (nee Avrillot, 1566) and her precocious.younger cousin Pierre de Bérulle (born 1575), all of them older than himself. Vincent was certainly in personal contact with Duval and Bérulle and so at least indirectly with the spiritual ideas of the other two. Mme Acarie, Duval and Bérulle were also probable sources of some of the Carmelite element in Vincent's developed spirituality.

Francis de Sales' *Introduction to the Devout Life* appeared in 1609, and Vincent frequently paid tribute to the book and the author, though he did not meet Francis until 1618.

1609 was also the year of the incident about the missing money of his fellow-lodger, the judge from Sore. Vincent assessed the situation of being unjustly accused and applied the gospel value of not defending himself. Abelly, contrary to his usual practice, gives the year, the location and his source. In a conference to the community in St Lazare in 1656, when he was seventy-seven, Vincent refers to this event but in an anonymous way, saying it happened to a member of the Congregation (XI 337).

Though he could accept an unjust accusation without defending himself he still had other gospel values to learn. On 17 February 1610 he wrote to his mother about his need to stay on in Paris in order to better his position, and about the possibility of getting a well-paid post which would enable him to retire *soon,* with a good income, to his native place; he was still under thirty (I 18-20). In May of that year he thought he had found what he sought when he managed to secure for himself the abbacy of the Cistercian abbey of Saint Léonard de Chaumes, near La Rochelle; he was under the impression that a good income went with it but in fact he acquired mainly debts and wrangles.

Around this time occurred his meeting with the doctor of theology who was tempted against the faith. Vincent was able to relieve the doctor's worries, but at the cost of experiencing them himself. Abelly says that this trial lasted three or four years; he does not pin it down more precisely, nor does Coste. In an undated conference Vincent mentions that it happened when the theologian was a chaplain to Queen

Margot (XI 32). Coste therefore concludes that it was probably during the period when Vincent also was one of her chaplains. Vincent was relieved of the burden when he took the decision to dedicate himself to the service of the poor. In August 1611 Queen Margot gave a building to the St John of God Brothers as a hospital, and that is when and where Vincent started visiting the sick poor.

Before Bérulle formally established his Oratory Vincent apparently spent some time living with him, while still retaining his chaplaincy duties. Although he had high regard for Bérulle's ideas he came to the conclusion after a short stay that what Bérulle had in mind would not provide him with that elusive "something" for which he was searching. It would appear that Bérulle agreed with him because they separated without a rupture of their relationship. It was actually Bérulle who pointed him in the correct direction towards the next milestone on his route. François Bourgoing, the Parish Priest of Clichy, wanted to join Berulle in starting the Oratory and Vincent wanted to leave; Bérulle suggested they switch places. The deed by which Bourgoing transferred the parish to Vincent is dated 13 October 1611; the formal opening of the Oratory took place on 11 November 1611.

The deed of transfer of Clichy is dated 13 October 1611. On the 20th Vincent donated a sum of 15,000 *livres* to the hospital he had been visiting (XIII 14-16). If the money was totally his then he had passed another milestone by not holding on to the money for himself. If he was not the actual owner of the money, but merely a middleman through whom it passed from donor to recipient, it still says something about him that he was chosen for that role.

On 2 May 1612 he took formal possession of the parish of Clichy. The pastoral effectiveness of the new Parish Priest is well known. Calvet attributes this to the influence of an "accessible, unassuming sanctity, at the service of all".

Abelly, with his usual imprecision, says that "about 1613" Vincent, on the advice of Bérulle, took up residence in the de Gondi household as a tutor (livre I, ch VII). His work gradually expanded to include ministry to the house servants and, unofficially, to the tenantry on the estates. Another important milestone was passed when, after about a year in the house, Vincent was asked by Mme de Gondi to become her confessor and director. As far as is known she was the first person to become Vincent's directee.

By this time Vincent was holding three positions, abbot of St Leonard de Chaumes, Parish Priest of Clichy and tutor in the de Gondi household. He resigned the abbacy on 29 October 1616 (XIII 37ff), but

retained Clichy until 1626. When he resigned the parish in that year he retained the right to an annual pension from it; even by 1626 he still had his eye on his personal finances. In 1630, though, he returned to his successor in Clichy the four years' income he had already received (XIII 85).

In January 1617 occurred the episode of the sick tenant in Cannes, on the de Gondi estate near Amiens, who told Mme de Gondi of the help Vincent had given him in making his peace with God. Mme de Gondi persuaded Vincent to preach about general confession in Folleville on the 25th, with the well-known results.

Vincent began to wonder whether his work as tutor to young Pierre de Gondi was compatible with the ideas of a more pastoral ministry which had long been germinating in his mind. He consulted Bérulle and explained to him how his thinking was developing. Bérulle accepted his line of reasoning and was able to direct him towards another parish which needed a new Parish Priest. In Lent Vincent headed south to Châtillon-les-Dombes, leaving the de Gondi house without saying a word to anyone; he still had to learn that such insensitivity to others was incompatible with holiness.

M. and Mme de Gondi were not the sort of people to let matters rest like that. They were important people with plenty of "pull" and they had contacts for having pressure put on Vincent to return. Bérulle was among these, but he did not pressurise Vincent; he merely put before him all that was involved in the situation and asked him to make up his own mind. In October Vincent came to his decision; he would go back to the de Gondis. He arrived back in Paris on 23 December and the first person to whom he went was Bérulle. On Christmas Eve he went back to the de Gondi household, but on a new footing. With the de Gondis' consent he was no longer just a children's tutor, but was officially assigned to pastoral ministry among the tenants on the family estates. Antoine Portail, whom Vincent had first met in Clichy when he was a student, took over the tutoring.

Vincent brought to his new ministry what he had learned from the experience of his January sermon in Folleville and his August one in Chatillon: the ordinary people needed to be instructed and the poor, especially the sick, needed organised help.

In 1618-19 his field of work was extended to include a new group who were in need of his ministry, the galley-slaves. Because of Phillipe Emmanuel de Gondi's position as General of the Galleys Vincent was able to minister to the galley-slaves with official backing.

Another key event for him in 1618 was his meeting with Francis de

Sales in person for the first time. He had been an admirer of Francis since his first book in 1609, and was equally enthusiastic about his second, the *Treatise on the Love of God,* which had come out in 1616. The two met on a number of occasions during the ten months Francis stayed in Paris. Ten years later, in April 1628, Vincent gave evidence for the beatification of Francis and said that Francis was the person who best exemplified the earthly life of the Son of God (XIII 72).

All the time since his return to her house in December 1617 Mme de Gondi kept bringing up the need for regular missions on an organised basis given by a group of priests specifically dedicated to such work. Vincent had to face up to the question of whether this might be what God was calling him to. In 1621 he made a retreat in the Carthusian monastery of Valprofonde, in the diocese of Soissons, with the specific aim of trying to answer this question (II 107, II 246-7 and *Vincentiana* 4-5-6 1984, p 547).

He was in need of still further purification. In 1622-23 he was on a mission in Bordeaux, which is not all that far from his native place. He wondered whether he should pay a visit, and asked advice; the advice was affirmative, and he went. The disturbing result was that he had to cope with the temptation to use his talents for the material improvement of his relatives; he says it took him three months to get things into proper focus (XII 219).

He eventually accepted Mme de Gondi's idea that he himself should head a new group of priests specifically dedicated to preaching missions, and he signed a legal deed to that effect on 17 April 1625. From then on we see him, in his letters and conferences, continuing to assess situations in the light of the gospel in order to locate the next milestone and learn the direction God wanted him to take.

The Carmelite Dimension in St Vincent and its Implications today

Eamonn Flanagan

(Revision of paper read to Vincentian Study Group 2 April 1987)

At the beginning of this decade we celebrated the fourth centenary of St Vincent's birth, and just afterwards, in 1982, the fourth centenary of St Teresa's death. Their earthly lives coincided for not much more than a year. As the practical woman of mystic heights departed this world there entered in the mystic of action, a man who distrusted all forms of false piety and pseudo-religion. The life of the other great Carmelite of the Reform, St John of the Cross (1542-91), had a slightly longer overlap with St Vincent's.

The two Carmelite founders, then, their saintly stories and their rich nourishing spiritual writings were widely known and well established by the time of Vincent's maturity. The gigantic Castillian figures of faith and love were in some fashion prolonged in the intrepid Gascon. Vincent assumes the task where Teresa left off. She says in the *Interior Castle* (V.3.8.) that true love for our neighbour is an authentic sign of our love for God. Vincent would agree wholeheartedly. Similarities abound in both saints. They were both deeply moved by the condition of the Church as they initiated their reforms. St Teresa was inspired by the call of Philip II to avert in Spain the divisions of the Church rampant in northern Europe, and St Vincent was awestruck by the condition of the physically and religiously poor. Both had a striking humility and saw themselves as sinners, but also open to total trust in God, their source of boundless strength. No doubt, also, they were hugely gifted people. Leibnitz said of Teresa that she was capable of governing empires. And it has been asserted of Vincent that he was a superior statesman to Richelieu.

Vincent against his own background

Vincent de Paul would hardly like the term "spirituality". We imagine he would be happier with the word "spirit", indicating a lived, day-to-day active ministry, reflected on and tested with the gospel as criterion.

We could say that his two terms of reference were his ministry of evangelisation in its many forms on the one hand, and, on the other, the living tradition of Jesus Christ in the Church. For Vincent, the Christ of the past and of the present is one. So his spirituality has a central focus, and revolves around Christ, who reveals the Father in an active ministerial and, also, a contemplative, expression. This is a general statement of the Founder's spirituality. We obviously must look closer at details, special colouring in outlook, stresses in experience, particular direction of intention, and the resulting fruitfulness in mission.

Vincent took part in the currents of spirituality moving about him. The Spanish torrent burst upon the scene. It is an accepted fact that the Spanish mystics became the favoured authors of the major seventeenth century French masters.[1] I will not attempt here to discuss the French school of spirituality; (recent papers in our Study Group have dealt with the contributions of Benet of Canfield and Bérulle). It is sufficient to say that great emphasis was placed on Christ and the incorporation of the Christian by baptism into the Incarnate Word. This is the basis for rejection of sin and for the life of the virtues. This concentration has been traced back, partially at least, to the doctrine on grace found in St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas. In a sense it was a reaction against a Renaissance tendency to extol the humanistic element and the natural goodness of humankind.[2] St Vincent, at a formative time (his early thirties), had close contact with Bérulle and other exponents of this way. But the French school itself, from the first publication of the Teresian writings in French in 1601, was drawing from this new Spanish source. Until about 1617 Vincent relied on Bérulle's spiritual direction, and so it can be inferred that the cardinal's sublime doctrine on the virtue of religion and the Incarnation was liberally shared with his disciple. The latter, however, imbibed the teaching only according to his own personal charism.

In the second half of Vincent's thirties the momentous experiences of his pastoral ministry, clarified and deepened by interior prayer, were steering him away from a merely individual and detached worship of the Incarnation. The penitent in Gannes and the poor of Châtillon needed direct help and more immediate application of Christ's love.

Enter the Carmelites

This movement in Depaul, so much in harmony with his own personality, received a new dimension and a more insistently gentle thrust from the Carmelite tradition. He could get in touch with this through direct reading of the mystical works, but also through his great friends

Francis de Sales, Jane Frances de Chantal and André Duval. Besides, from the 1620s the interaction and mutual fruitful influence of Vincent and Louise de Marillac implied a definite Carmelite content and background. Francis de Sales, at the present time, is not seriously considered a member of the French school. His early formation and writings are Ignatian-inspired, but the *Treatise on the Love of God* (1616) is deeply indebted to the insights, theology and even, in places, to the terminology of St Teresa of Avila. The Carmelite foundress and her associate in the Reform, St John of the Cross, were a fascinating experience for Francis, who discovered them through the Dijon foundation in the early years of the century. Both Carmelite mystics, taken together, have given to the world the most systematic and penetrating presentation of discursive and mystical prayer, and a life lived accordingly. The reformers of Carmel, read by Francis, were also available to Vincent. St Teresa's writings received early general prominence, but after her canonisation in 1622 not only hers but also those of John were very widely distributed and esteemed.[3] Francis de Sales' *Love of God* was corroborated by its author's presence, direction and friendship accorded to Vincent. This total precious gift to our Founder left an indelible mark, confirming the processes taking shape within him, and drawing him to a more effective, truly human and realistically ministerial vision of Jesus Christ, God in human flesh, the one who "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). The conversations of the two saints in Paris, 1618-19, are celebrated. The noble bishop during his lifetime and, indeed after his death (1622) through his heritage, brought the wholesome substance of the Carmelite spiritual teaching, and its expression in his own holy life, to the attention of Vincent de Paul, who was able to accept the gift graciously and exploit its talent generously.

The authentically human and solidly doctrinal character of the Carmelite founders is faithfully absorbed, though not plagiarised, by Francis de Sales, and transmitted in his *Love of God.* Thus it seems clear that St Vincent found in the bishop of Geneva a more complete exponent of Teresian-Sanjuanist doctrine than in Bérulle. The latter, apparently, was not as profoundly influenced by the true Carmelite tradition, and his unhappy episode with the first nuns of the Reform in France reveals discrepancy in understanding. It may be noted that the Oratorian in reality owed more to Benet of Canfield and the Rheno-Flemish mystics than to the Carmelites. That northern mysticism was not welcomed by the Carmelites. "In this respect Vincent, identified as he was with Francis by his resistance to the mystics of the north, was closer to Teresian teaching".[4]

The encounters with Francis de Sales were supplemented by St Vincent's growing familiarity with André Duval, who became ecclesiastical superior of the Carmelites in France. Duval, a diocesan priest with a doctorate from the Sorbonne, was a member of the Paris group devoted to the renewal of the Church. Bérulle, his cousin Mme Acarie and Benet of Canfield also belonged to this group. It was here that Vincent discovered Duval, one of those instrumental in bringing the Carmelites to France. Duval's humility and prudence, no doubt spiced by Teresian common sense, made due impression on the alert, discerning Vincent. Effectively, the shrewd Gascon's option for the guidance of Duval edged out Bérulle's predominance. Clearly, by 1617 or so, Vincent de Paul, now a man nearing his fortieth birthday, having tasted diverse sources, was imbibing a decisive depth and inspiration from the Carmelite fountain. Thereafter for over two decades Duval's long-standing support, direction and friendship maintain a Teresian-Sanjuanist continuity in the shaping of our Founder's own charism. Contact, on-going for about the same duration with Jane Frances de Chantal, was a prolongation of Teresian affectiv-ity, so evocative of St Teresa. Jane Frances was a great devotee of the Carmelite mystics,[5] and perhaps we can see reflected in her in varying degrees the charm of Teresa and the purification of John.

The Carmelite element, filtering through the heart of Vincent, would be further nourished by his close co-operation with St Louise for over thirty-five years of their lives. The Marillacs were strong supporters of Carmel. Michel was one of the people most influential in introducing the Spanish Carmelites to French soil, and a relative entered the Discalced convent in Amiens. Louise enjoyed the *Treatise on the Love of God,* and may even have met its author. Yet her spirituality had a touch of severity and rigidity until Bishop Camus' consolation and Vincent's moderation and personal affection set her free to love Christ in the poor.

The vitality of Teresian teaching

In life generally Vincent de Paul was a man who saw, evaluated and chose what he deemed apposite. This he did with regard to several spiritualities. He learned from what had gone before. His guiding criteria were his own experience in ministry and relationships, and his silent prayer with God. But, if we can imagine his charism as a great river with its own unique quality, we can think of various streams feeding into it, being adapted to its flow and direction. The new inclusions are discernible, but are given an entirely fresh and original complexion. Here we become more aware of the richness, diversity and ever-newness of the

Spirit's life in the Church.

Explicit references to St Teresa are found in the writings of St Vincent. He acknowledges her as a the reformer of Carmel and a great teacher of the spiritual life. The latter point is made in a letter of direction to a Carthusian, where the saint writes: "I am consoled by the expression of love you have for this great mistress of the spiritual life, St Teresa" (IV 576-7). In encouraging a Daughter of Charity when things were tough he recalled St Teresa's reluctance on entering the Carmel of Avila. In relation to prayer Vincent, with his customary realism, counsels perseverance and effort, and quotes the long haul endured by the Carmelite Foundress on her way to contemplation. Her special commitment to intercession for priests is noted by Vincent in an exhortation to the confrères. St Teresa in her day, he says, saw the Church's need for good priests. Perhaps the change for the better, which was becoming apparent in his own time, is due in part to the devotion of this great saint because, he continues, God always uses weak instruments for his great designs (XII 18). In extolling the ideal of always seeking God's kingdom the confrères are once more offered the example of St Teresa, who made a vow to choose at all times the greater glory of God (cf XII 14-16).

The Sanjuanist touch

Obviously the renown of Teresa de Ahumada, especially strong after her canonisation, is reflected in Vincent's direct admiration and testimony. It is not quite the same in the case of Juan de Yepes, not at least as far as direct quotations go. Yet, it seems certain that the leading friar of the Carmel Reform leaves his imprint on our Founder. Before 1652 there were eight French editions of the Sanjuanist writings published in Paris. From 1622 both Carmelite doctors were read widely.[6] It is surprising that St Vincent does not quote John, just as he refers to so many contemporary reliable works. Nonetheless, the evidence seems to be there. I would like to point to a few outstanding areas.

(a) Christocentrism is remarkable in John of the Cross, perhaps more so than in Teresa herself. Sanjuanist spiritual Christology is far-famed. John sees Christ as the great teacher, the Word of the Father, but is also emphatic on the humanness of Jesus. We see in the Castillian saint a more truly incarnate, intimate, Jesus than the Christ of Berulle. No doubt, the Sanjuanist image of the Son of Mary would exert a stronger magnetism on the apostle of the poor, and would harmonise well with his vision of Christ in them.

(b) The theme of purification has a clear appeal in both saints. The

despoiling abnegation and purgations of the man who sang the *Dark Night* and wrote the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* are discovered in Vincent in the milder, though no less exigent, form of indifference, so widespread in the writings of the latter.

(c) John of the Cross has produced a sizeable and coherent doctrine on discernment, which has great potential for today's directors, and indeed for all time. St Vincent's guidelines on discernment, found in various places in his works, echo San Juan's *Cautions,* and his distinction of true and false lights could well be based on themes of John.[7]

(d) One scholar has argued persuasively that Vincent's outline of contemplation may be found faithfully parallelled in the doctor of Carmel. He indicates a coincidence both in content and expression between the two.[8] Certainly, Vincent was conversant with contemplative prayer. Here he offers us a personal statement on the subject:

I am sure that you often experience contemplation in your retreats and spiritual exercises, when you become astounded at how, without doing anything on your part, God himself fills your spirit and imprints on it knowledge which you never could have had (IX 420-421).

Deductions

As the scholars proceed with their research the arrow seems to point more and more to a strong Carmelite ingredient in Vincent's spirituality, while we allow for his own originality and uniqueness. After all, Homer and Shakespeare are original, yet do also show a dependence on what had gone before. So, also, we can say something similar happens in the realm of the spirit. Now, it seems that from the preceding reflections the following conclusions can be drawn on this theme and its application to ourselves, the family of St Vincent.[9]

1) It appears evident that by about 1620 the power of grace and the reality of Christ, together with the spiritual experience of the poor, were powerfully active in Vincent. The other greatest influence about that date was the Carmelite spirituality received in purest form via Francis de Sales, André Duval, and others who had contact with its vivid attraction.

Subsequent co-operation in ministry with the two women, Jane Frances de Chantal and Louise de Marillac, gave an intuitive and tender complementarity to the strong, determined, though chastened, organiser. The gentle, incarnately Christian, mysticism of the Carmelite founders, I would suggest, had a deep bearing on Vincent, the "new man". It had a lot to do with tempering his severity, restraining his haste, and giving a more human face and wider range to his undoubted zeal and talent.

In other words, the very human, very divine love of the Carmelites was invisibly moving within, but was also reaching outwards into marvellous viable effects. At least, the Carmelite spirit was an outstanding force in all this.

2) The reciprocal movement of prayer-life, life-prayer, is an imperative of St Vincent de Paul. He constantly speaks of the virtues or, as we might say today, the practising of love or keeping the commandments. The Carmelite saints could at times be very active in real physical ministry, as we witness, for example, St Teresa serving the sick, and there are numerous instances of Fray Juan's personal service of others. Contemplation was not an escape, or a pretext for idleness in these saints. The following text could have been written by St Vincent:

> To truly find God it is not enough to pray…, but also along with that one must work. Many would like God to ask them for no more than words.

The quotation is from St John of the Cross *(Canticle* 3.2.). Such a stress on prayer and life going together is truly valid, sensible, and a proof of authenticity. St Vincent is a distinguished master and exemplar of a similar doctrine.

3) The harmony and wholesome Christian sweetness found in the lives of Teresa and John would have been extensively known in France in Vincent's lifetime. These qualities reflect a synthesis and assimilation of the Good News as attractively healthy and devoid of an exaggerated behaviour or abstruse speculation sometimes noted in supposed mystical circles. The clarity and luminous evangelical glow of the Carmelite mystics are based on the true Jesus who shone with God's spirit but "lived among us" toiling, travelling, celebrating, tiring, feeling our pathos and poignancy, but also our joys. The Carmelite Christ is the Christ of the New Testament, and of now. So is Vincent's, and ours.

Notes

1. Crisógono de Jesús: *Compendia de ascética y mística.* Madrid 1933, p 343.
2. See A R Marín: *Grandes Maestros de la vida espiritual,* Madrid 1973, pp 400ff.
3. Ismael Bengoecha: *Santa Teresa y San Juan de la Cruz y la espiritualidad de San Vicente de Paúl* in "Teología espiritual" 26, 1982, p 278.
4. Ibid p 275, note 9.
5. Ibid p 273.
6. Ibid p 275. (See also, among others, the works of Dodin, Delarue).
7. See *Ascent,* prologue 2 and *II Ascent,* 21.4 and St Vincent on "true lights and illusions" in *Collection of Conferences and Letters,* Dublin 1881, pp 203-215.
8. Ramfrez Muneta: *La espiritualidad de San Vicente* Madrid 1956, p 33.
9. To underline further St Vincent's personal relationship with Carmel we may indicate his correspondence with Mère de la Trinité, prioress of the Carmel in Troyes, who gave such powerful support to a foundation of the Congregation in the locality. The Founder, in his letters addressed to her, expressed himself with great affection, humility and veneration towards the Daughters of St Teresa (I 408, 424).
   See also André Dodin CM: *Les deux amis,* Paris 1984, pp 72-76, on the Teresian background to the *Love of God* concerning the theme of contemplative prayer, with the particular modifications of St Vincent.
   Perhaps Vincent's earliest Carmelite experience was during his period of study in Zaragoza (1597-8), according to José Maria Roman CM: *San Vicente de Paúl I: Biografía,* first edition, Madrid 1981, p 48.

1617 — A Crucial Year for St Vincent

Aidan McGing

From the beginning Vincentians regarded 25 January 1617, the day of the Folleville sermon, as the founding day of the Congregation. Recent writers see this event, and the whole of 1617, as the turning-point of Vincent's life.[1] His conversion had begun earlier, probably when he was accused of theft in 1609, and continued with the long temptation against faith, perhaps from 1612.

To put 1617 in perspective, let us look at the preceding years:

1607. July, age 27,[2] he writes to M. de Comet, little worried by his debts, and enjoying the Vice-Legate's favour.

1608. age 28, while in Rome looking for a benefice, he maintains his influence over the Vice-Legate with "the mirror of Archimedes and an artificial spring that makes a death's head talk…, (and) a thousand other wonderful geometrical things" (I 15; ET I 12-13).

1609. age 29, chaplain to the ex-queen, Marguerite de Valois, former wife of Henri IV, he is accused of theft; meets Bérulle.

1610. age 30, he writes in February to his mother, hoping that God will soon give him the means of an honourable retirement (at the age of thirty!) (I 19; ET I 15). In May he receives the benefice of the abbey of St Leonard de Chaumes (XIII 8-13).

1611. age 31, he moves in with Bérulle, starts visiting the hospital of St John of God; donates 15,000 *livres* to it (XIII 14-16).

1612. age 32, on the invitation of Bérulle, he becomes Parish Priest of Clichy (XIII 17-18).

1613. age 33, he becomes tutor to the de Gondi children, moving in to their town house in Paris.

1617, age 37, 25 January, sermon in Folleville; a few weeks later he leaves the de Gondis without leave-taking or explanation.

Clearly Vincent grew steadily during those nine years. The brash young man, so casual about the property of others, who plays on the

Vice-Legate's gullibility, gradually comes to face the truth with Berulle, and moves into the Catholic *haul monde* of Paris, only to give it all up and bury himself in the country parish of Clichy. Abelly saw it as a humiliation that a former chaplain to the queen should move to this obscure place.

After Vincent had spent about a year in Clichy where, in his own words, he had been "happier than the Pope" (IX 646), Bérulle asked him to become tutor to the three sons of the Count de Gondi. The eldest at that time was eleven, the second was three and the third was born around the time of Vincent's arrival. With so many aristocratic priests in Paris it was remarkable that Bérulle sent this Gascon of obscure origin to one of the most powerful families in France.

In the ethos of the Counter Reformation he was to bring up these children as good Catholics, so that later in life, being in positions of influence, they would support the faith. And so Vincent exchanged rural Clichy for the opulent town-house of the de Gondis. This was in 1613, Vincent being about 33. He later described vividly how it was:

> In this situation one must be prudent and not get too involved with others, not speak at table unless spoken to. With the servants one should speak privately, instructing them quietly in the faith. You dine at second table with the major-domo and take second place to him, since this abuse has become custom (XI 25-28).

The more I read of Vincent the more I see that he was born to command; sitting below the major-domo seems to have rankled. Typically, however, and in spite of his warning about getting involved, he became a very close friend of the General's secretary, M. Dufresne.[3] To a correspondent he wrote in 1636:

> I used to hold it as a maxim to consider the General in God and God in him, and to obey him as God and his late wife as the Virgin, and not to push myself forward unless for some urgent and important matter. In the name of God, Monsieur, act in like manner. As for the servants, you must pay them great honour and treat them kindly, cordially and most respectfully. Above all, you should say something to them about God now and then, and take great care not to ask for information about the household or about the state (I 354; ET I 344).

Gradually his position in the household began to change as the de

Gondis fell under his spell. His success in talking the Count out of a duel is well known, and his disinterestedness and genius for friendship finally conquered his employers. Unfortunately, Mme de Gondi became dependent on him; when she went to visit her enormous estates around Paris she took him with her, as she did not wish to confess to the village cures.

Vincent used this ambiguous situation well by preaching to, and catechising, the country people on the estates. We have an early letter from him to the Vicar General of Sens, where the de Gondis had lands, asking for permission to absolve from reserved cases when hearing general confessions (I 20; ET I 17). Hardly any letters survive from this period, but no doubt he made other similar requests. We also have three early sermons of his from this time, earnest but rather abstract and conventional. He had not yet developed that sparkling eloquence we find in the later conferences.

January 1617: the sermon in Folleville

It was the sermon in Folleville, in Picardy, on 25 January which crowned all this activity. The results were startling, and Vincent had found his vocation. In four of his extant conferences he recalled Folleville, and in three of them he described it as the birthday of the Congregation. And, indeed, from the beginning the Congregation regarded Folleville as its birthday. In modern terminology *the founding myth of the Congregation is a sermon asking a group of poor people to repent.*

Vincent had now found his way forward; he could no longer stay with the de Gondis. About two months later:

> …as he had only entered this house on the persuasion of M. de Bérulle he went to find him and asked him to agree that he should leave it, without giving any other reason except that he felt God calling him to go to some distant province, and to work in the service and instruction of the poor country people; all of which Fr de Bérulle accepted, judging that he could not advise him to do any better than he himself proposed.[4]

Vincent had already shaken off Bérulle's tutelage and seized the initiative from him. He left the General's house quietly on the pretext of taking a short journey, but really to travel to Châtillon-les-Dombes, a small town near Lyons, where Bérulle had offered him a benefice.

In the seven or eight working months he was to spend in Châtillon

Vincent, who in Paris with the de Gondis had locked himself away in his room and, on his own avowal, had been "melancholy", suddenly blossomed. In a short time he put iron in the six easy-going priests he found there, began a reformation of the town, started the first Charity and drew up its rules and, as ever, made a lot of friends (XIII 45-54).

Why did Vincent leave the de Gondis?

Taking such a step was, humanly speaking, foolish. Vincent had been a social climber, an ecclesiastical careerist, who had won the confidence of one of the most powerful families in France, a family moreover with many rich benefices at its disposal. The flight to Châtillon could have cut him off from the whole aristocratic and religious establishment which he had entered. At a loftier level he could reassure himself that he had under his care a future General of the Galleys and a future archbishop of Paris.[5] What could he not promise to the French Church by moulding these two important men into good Catholics?

All this said, why, then, did he leave? Abelly, who knew him well, puts it like this:

> Although he certainly saw that he would be criticised for leaving in this manner, and even be accused of ingratitude after the honours and benefits received in this house, something he was well aware of since he always felt the demands of gratitude; nevertheless, he passed beyond these considerations and, renouncing his self-interest, exposed himself to all these disadvantages, to be faithful to God.[6]

Abelly, who, as well as having known Vincent personally had documents and memoirs at his disposal, goes on to give three reasons for Vincent's departure. The first was that he felt it better in his own interest and that of Mme de Gondi to get away and "go to some distant province". If Abelly is being vague, at least he tells us that his hero wanted to get away from the Countess, for whatever reason. The second reason for his leaving was that Vincent feared:

> …that the ascendency he had achieved over this illustrious family would become a snare which might hold him back and prevent him from advancing in the perfection of his state; this was why, closing his eyes to natural inclination and all his worldly interests, he resolved to move away and give himself more perfectly to God.

The third reason emerges from Vincent's statement to Bérulle mentioned above: "He felt God was calling him to go to some distant province, and *to work in the service and instruction of the poor country people.*

Why did he return to the de Gondis?

When Vincent reached Châtillon he wrote to the General of the Galleys and asked him to break the news to Mme de Gondi. The General did this, suggesting to his wife that if their tutor could not manage the children "he can have a man under him, but in any case I desire passionately that he returns to my house, where he can live as he wants".[7] Madame wrote to Vincent:

> My anguish over this matter would be unbearable without a very special grace from God, which I do not deserve... If it were only for a time, I would not be so upset; but when I think of all the occasions on which I shall need to be assisted by direction and counsel, either in death or in life, my grief begins anew… M. Bérulle has promised me that he will write to you, and I am calling on God and the Blessed Virgin to bring you back to our home (I 21-22; ET I 19-20).

Bérulle did write, but merely to say that Madame was in pain; he left the decision to Vincent. Madame, in turn, began to tour Paris recommending the affair "to the prayers of the principal religious communities". She recognised that her ill-used confessor "…is not a man to have taken half-measures; he has foreseen all that I could do or say and he made up his mind before leaving". She wrote to him several times; he replied that he was not changing his mind.

She returned to the attack. "There are letters in existence", writes Abelly, "from her children, from her brother-in-law Cardinal de Retz, at that time bishop of Paris, from other close relatives, from the principal officers of her house, from several doctors and religious, and from a great number of persons of piety and consequence" pressing Vincent to return. Abelly must have been very sure of his facts to make such statements about a member of such a powerful family, benefactors too of St Lazare where he was writing and to which, after giving up, through ill health, his work as bishop of Rodez, he would later retire to spend the remainder of his life.

Finally they sent the General's secretary, M. Dufresne, one of Vincent's closest friends, down to Châtillon. He prevailed on Vincent

at least to consult some wise men on the matter. The affair dragged on until finally Vincent arrived back to the de Gondis in Paris on Christmas Eve. But this time he entered the house on his own terms, with Antoine Portail from now on to look after the children.[8] He compromised with the de Gondis to the extent of promising to stay with them as long as Mme de Gondi lived, but otherwise he could do as he liked.

I recount this episode at some length in order to show how reluctantly Vincent returned to the great house, and how totally his mind had moved away from satisfying his own ambition and towards evangelising the abandoned people. He had yielded to Bérulle and left Clichy to enter a situation where, as the Countess saw, he was not really happy, and now he returned on condition that he need no longer look after the children but was free to preach the gospel.

Not that he was unable to manage these children — that was a face-saver on the General's part. The assured tone in Vincent's earlier letters to M. de Comet shows that he must have been a success with *his* children. If he no longer acts as tutor to the de Gondis it is because his mind is elsewhere.

When a person clarifies a judgement in his mind many connected ideas begin to fall into place, qualifying and deepening the original intuition. Doubts and inner conflicts lessen, and one concentrates on action. By 1616 Vincent's long temptation against faith, his dark night, was over, when he had resolved to devote himself to the poor.[9] He had reached the resolution; how was he to fulfill it? Imperceptibly, as he turned to the de Gondi tenants, he found the way.

Folleville was the culmination, and it is no accident that he fled from the de Gondis less than two months later. Everything was falling into place; it was his conversion, his *metanoia,* his change of outlook. It released him, both spiritually and emotionally, as his subsequent creativity showed: "…by the mercy of God the Church has enough hermits" (III 202). He would never again be a hermit.

Bérulle and Duval: the choice

Both spiritually and materially Vincent owed Bérulle a great debt. Bérulle had helped him spiritually, had introduced him into the Catholic establishment in Paris, had procured the benefice of Clichy for him and brought him to the de Gondis. Bérulle was a formidable man among the higher clergy and the nobility. He was a good man, but could be difficult and vindictive; certainly not one to quarrel with.

Yet around 1617 Vincent did leave Bérulle and turned to Duval, who was having a violent quarrel with Bérulle, a quarrel which came to a

head in January 1618 just after Vincent's return to Paris. Without going into details, Bérulle appears to have been completely in the wrong. What interests us here, however, is that he did not sympathise with Vincent's resolve to evangelise the neglected, even though he did get him the benefice in Châtillon. He later tried to turn Philippe-Emmanuel de Gondi against Vincent, and intrigued against him in Rome in 1628.

Duval did sympathise with Vincent's project and gave him continual support. For Vincent to turn from Bérulle, a man to whom he owed so much and who was so powerful, to his arch-rival proves further what a divide he crossed in 1617.

Renewed activity

Vincent was now back in the de Gondi household, where he was to live from 1618 to 1625, making it a house for giving missions and establishing "charities" on their lands. (Perhaps we underestimate the value of these associations in a pre-welfare society). A year after his return the General appointed him chaplain to the galleys, which led to more work.

A year after his return also, probably in December 1618, he met Francis de Sales who, some three years later, made him superior of the first Visitation monastery in Paris. This led him to study more profoundly the mystical writings of this doctor of the Church, and apply them, as it were in a laboratory, to Jeanne de Chantal. The experience deepened and clarified his own spiritual experience, though for himself and his followers he gave de Sales' teaching a more masculine, active and Christocentric turn.[10]

In 1623 he obtained a licentiate in Canon Law. In 1624 he became rector of the College des Bons Enfants. In this same year he made a retreat in Soissons:

> …being at the beginning of this plan for the Mission, in this continual preoccupation which made me suspect that the project might be from nature or from the evil spirit, I made a retreat in Soissons so that God might take from me the spirit of delight and haste that I had in this affair; and it pleased God to grant my request... I wish to follow this practice of undertaking and finishing nothing while I am agitated by the hope of great accomplishments (II 246-7).

In 1625 Mme de Gondi died, and Vincent was released. He moved out, with a few helpers, to the Bons Enfants. He always remained loyal

to the de Gondis. God, as we know, writes straight with crooked lines. If Vincent had not returned to the de Gondis, and resumed his missionary work for those crucial years, he might simply have become an excellent Parish Priest in a remote town. As it was, the remaining years in their household allowed him to grow into the missions and into the charities and led to the contacts which were to further his myriad works later on.

Further reflections

When Abelly proposes the sermon in Folleville as a triumph for his hero we instantly hesitate. We might even see Vincent as a well-intentioned priest terrifying a group of peasants in a cold damp church on a January day, to the benefit of the ecclesiastical and civil authorities and the local landlord, who could expect to impose eight or nine different sorts of payments on his peasants in a given year. This was on top of Church tithes and state taxes.[11] (Significantly, he later remarked that in those days he had only one sermon everywhere, which he turned in a thousand ways, on the fear of God).

A sermon of Vincent from this time, in his own handwriting, gives the flavour of the period:

> I do not enter the pulpit to deliver a sermon to you as you are accustomed to, but to say something to you about the catechism, since his Lordship the Count has desired it, with the permission of the Cure… knowing that God has established the nobility not only to receive rents and tolls from their subjects but also to administer justice, maintain religion and cause the tenants to love, serve and honour God, and learn his holy will (XIII 25ff).

One might also ask how Vincent, in common with his contemporaries could assume in such a matter of fact way that all those who concealed sins in confession — a large number, granted that they confessed to a curé who knew them, and granted the religious ignorance of the time — would be damned for ever. And how could he regard God as good if he thought that those who did not explicitly believe in the mystery of the Blessed Trinity would also be damned?[13]

Christians in every century are limited by the perspectives of their time. Our descendants will surely be baffled by the mixture of psychology and community spirit which is the vehicle for so much evangelisation today. The researches of Delumeau[14] can leave us in no doubt about the extraordinary pessimism of seventeenth century Christianity, which Vincent had clearly internalised. And perhaps he picked up even more

pessimism from the Jansenists whom he opposed.

Though he lived in a cruel and corrupt society, which may have further heightened his pessimism, he did more to alleviate its harshness than any of his contemporaries. He allowed himself to be moved by the sufferings of individuals in a way which successful administrators seldom can afford. Above all, he found God utterly captivating and communicated that love to others. Yet he could do so only within the constraints of his society and its assumptions.

And, finally, we may remark that Vincent's most productive years coincided with a general desire for reform in French society:

> The desire now (in France after 1630) was for discipline, for order, for refinement, for the establishment of rules and law, for the reign of authority. The purification of language went hand in hand with the purification of morals…[15]

Conclusion

For Vincent, to speak about God was a matter of life and death; people had to be taught the way to God or they would be damned. Nowadays, how great the change! We are very aware that God means all people to be saved (1 Tim 2:4), we pride ourselves on our religious tolerance, and we are acutely aware how religion has kept old hatreds alive. Would it not be more humane to let the matter drop?

Well, even in our tolerant society I do not see secularists or sexual libertines or ideologues from the right or the left suffering from such scruples. They propose their ideologies in season and out of season, they try to influence appointments in their favour, they work on public opinion, set out to infiltrate the civil service, the unions, and public associations, fight for control of the media, exercise censorship when they can.

I do not suggest that all these ideological positions are incompatible with Christianity, or that we ought to imitate these methods. But he who looks will see that still today those who believe strongly propose their beliefs strongly. Should we be bashful about proposing ours, when we have sworn to do so? This, to me, is the ultimate conclusion to be drawn from Vincent's *annus mirabilis,* 1617.

In his own time John the Baptist made sense. Religious washing, the sacred river, the prophet, the holy man from the desert, messianic hopes, were all cultural forms which made him intelligible; so the ideology of the king and the desire for stability underpinned Vincent's preaching; so also in an industrial society where we seem to have gained the material

world and lost our own souls (Mt 10:26) the search to re-discover ourselves and our neighbours can deepen the faith of many. We are led to God in different ways because we see things differently as history changes. But the end is still to bring people closer to God, to each other, and to themselves (Mk 12:30-31), after we ourselves have trodden the same path.

The scene at the Jordan where John the Baptist asked for conversion and dipped his hearers in the water, may appear as bizarre to the unbeliever as the sermon in Folleville, yet Jesus was there, had himself dipped, and approved. He himself continued to ask for conversion. Vincent assumed that we who had the spirit of Christ would continue to do as Christ did (CR 1:3), in ways appropriate to our century.

Notes

1. André Dodin CM, in the article on Duval in *Dictionnaire de Spirintalité:* Luigi Mezzadri CM. *Saint Vincent de Paul.* Paris 1984. José Maria Román CM, *San Vicente de Paul,* Madrid 1981 (Italian translation. Milan 1986. pp 81-115). While agreeing that 1617 was the crucial year Dodin also holds that the conversion process continued until about 1630: see his *Lectures de saint Vincent de Paul* in "Annales de la CM" 112-113 (1947-48) pp 480-483.
2. Vincent spoke and wrote surprisingly often about his age. When these references are collated it becomes clear that he was born in 1580 or 1581 (Román, op. cit. 21-23). For convenience sake I take 1580 as the conventional year of his birth.
3. Abelly. Bk I. Ch IX.
4. ibid.
5. ibid.
6. It is true that the second Cardinal de Retz did not. in fact, become archbishop of Paris, but he seems to have been passed over because he plotted publicly against Mazarin.
7. Abelly, loc. cit.
8. Abelly. loc. cit. The detail about Antoine Portail is from the "Annales". 1933, pp 72-80, quoted in Román, op. cit. p 121. Mme de Gondi left Portail a bequest for what he had done for her children.
9. Abelly, Bk III, Ch II, sect. I.
10. Dodin, in *Lectures…* in "Annales" 106-107 pp 239-248. 110-111 pp 447-464. 112-113 pp 479-497.
11. John Lough, *An Introduction to Seventeenth Century France.* London 1969, pp 4-6.
12. XIII 35ff. Significantly, in one passage (I have lost the reference) Vincent refers to the tenants as vassals.

13. I 121; X 336; XI 181, 382: XII 80-81; XIII 158. This was obviously one of his great preoccupations. It is true that he spoke of this explicit belief in the Blessed Trinity being necessary "according to the great doctors", but he does accept it as a reality. Writing to François du Coudray in Rome he says, referring to the Curia: "You ought to let them understand that the poor people are being damned for lack of knowing what is necessary for salvation and for lack of going to confession" (I 115).
14. Jean Delumeau, *Le péché et la peur: la culpabilité en Occident,* Paris 1983, and other works.
15. H R Roach in his edition of Racine's *Phédre,* London 1981, p vii.

The Future of Irish Vincentians in Britain

Patrick McCrohan

(This is a synopsis of a thesis for a Maîtrise en Théologie submitted to the Institut Catholique in Paris in June 1986, entitled: "The Future of the Irish Vincentians in England; an Historical and Theological Perspective on their 1986 Mission Statement")

Introduction

The Provincial Assembly of 1985 produced our "Mission Statement". Its purpose was to give us, as a Province, a renewed sense of who we are and where we are going. We are not the first or only group in the Church to think we need to do this sort of re-focussing. It is normal for any group of people, religious or secular, to need to re-appraise their situation. It happens to any group which sets out on a journey that, after some time, they get separated. Some people like to get from A to B in the shortest possible time; others like to enjoy the scenic route. In the perspective of history, religious groups — even Churches — tend to move through four phases:

1. The Phase of the Founder, when the vision and charisma of a particular individual draw together and sustain a group of followers.

2. The Phase of Expansion, as new possibilities open up, new members join, and new works are started.

3. The Phase of Consolidation, when the "scriptures" are written and steps are taken to institutionalise or ensure the continuation of the original vision and charism.

4. The Phase of Disintegration.[1]

These four phases can happen within the lifetime of the founder, or over the space of hundreds of years. Depending on circumstances, and particularly on how Phase 4 is handled, groups can be born, grow and decline, only to be re-born, or re-founded, with new life and vision, again and again and again. For example, the Congregation of the Mission was well into Phase 4 in France at the time of the Revolution of 1789, only to undergo a great new beginning at the time of the Restoration and from the 1840s under Jean-Baptiste Etienne.

It is my belief that the Irish Province is well-advanced in Phase 4, and that our Mission Statement is a recognition of this, and an attempt

to re-focus, re-group and be re-born.

The purpose of my study was to look at our Founding Phase in order to see what light it casts on our current situation, and what possible insights it gives us into how we should proceed if we wish to be re-born, especially in Britain.

In real terms, the Founding Phase of the Irish Province cannot be traced back to St Vincent, but must be situated, spiritually as well as historically, in a time of internal conflict as between Etienne, Philip Dowley and Thomas McNamara, the latter two being the first and second Provincials.

What may be learnt from our Founding Phase?

Most of us are familiar with our story: six Maynooth priests sensed a need to group together and do something as a community for the Church in Ireland, and especially for the poor. They started a school on Usher's Quay, Dublin, in 1833, then moved north of the Phoenix Park to Castleknock, and to Phibsboro. Then in 1839 they joined the Vincentians, and in 1842 the Phibsboro priests started preaching missions, with the Castleknock confrères filling in for them in Phibsboro during their absences. The names of Dowley and McNamara are familiar.

What we may be less familiar with is the friction that existed between Dowley (erstwhile Dean of the Maynooth priests and father-figure) and Thomas McNamara, his more colourful and volatile assistant. This friction, and a near-split in the Province that developed because of it in 1861, has had, I believe, a lasting effect on the Province, on the relationship between the educational and missionary aspects of the Province, and on the relationship between the Irish and British sides of the Province.

Another thing that struck me in my research was the almost total lack of reference to St Vincent. Our Province was born at a very *practical* time in the history of both France and Ireland. There was a huge job to be done: in post-Revolution France a work of "Restoration", and in post-Emancipation Ireland a work of bringing the Church, especially in rural areas, up to Tridentine standards. The Vincentians were clear in their own minds about what had to be *done;* the problem was that different minds were clear about different things, and so there was a great lack of clarity and of working together. The rural parish missions, which got off to a great start in Ireland, suffered from a lack of concerted thinking, and already by the 1870s were in a state of decline.[2] From the very beginning, as I shall describe, the missionary outreach to England suffered from confusion and fudging and conflicting goals.

My belief is, that by seeing what the original Irish confrères were *trying* to do in England, what they actually *did* do, and what caused the divergences, we will have a better awareness of our own identity and of our inconsistencies, and a greater freedom to take ownership of our heritage, choose new goals, and take new responsibility for our future in Britain. In other words, by having a better grasp of our own story we will have a better idea of who we are and what we are for, and thus be in a better position to choose — in accordance with the strengths and weaknesses of our heritage — who we *want* to be, and what (or *whom)* we *want* to be for.

The story of Irish Vincentian origins in Britain

When Jean-Baptiste Etienne took over as Superior General from Jean-Baptiste Nozo in 1843 he inherited a recently-grafted wild-olive shoot which, in 1849, would become the Irish Province.

From early on in his period of office (1843-1874) Etienne was urging Philip Dowley to start a mission in England. Dowley was opposed to the idea, and in a letter of 22 February 1849[3] he detailed his reasons for his opposition to a specific offer of a chaplaincy/mission on the estate of the Middleton family in Yorkshire; he saw the needs in Ireland as too pressing, the numbers too small to be able to spare confrères; he also feared the dangers of being under the control of a rich English family.

After much haggling the Middleton project was definitively dropped in July 1850, as noted in the minutes of the Provincial Council.

Two months later Dowley turned down another offer, this time from the Earl of Shrewsbury. The reasons given were the same as in the rejection of the Middleton offer (Minutes of Council 10-09-1850).

It was at this stage that Thomas McNamara's impatience with Dowley on the question of an English Mission became apparent. McNamara wrote — from Beirut! — to a confrère in Paris that Dowley ought to have accepted Lord Shrewsbury's offer as a sign of God's Providence. Like Etienne — and like Pius IX and a great many Continental bishops of the "Second Spring" era[4], McNamara saw England ripe for conversion to Rome:

> The remarkable conversions which every day witnesses, and the wonderful progress which the true religion continues to make in that country seem to indicate… that the Almighty has special designs of mercy in its regard, for the speedy enlightenment and conversion of its people.

As regards Dowley's contention that they haven't enough men to spare McNamara argues that they could easily withdraw three or four priests from Castleknock and replace them with laymen.

This was the kind of talk Etienne wanted to hear. In spite of many protests from Dowley (cf letter of 02-12-1851) arguing the impossibility and the pointlessness of a Vincentian Mission in England — especially as there was a war to be waged against English-financed proselytisers in Ireland — Etienne continued to insist. Finally, in the minutes of the Provincial Council for April 1852 we read that, at the request of Monsignor Briggs, a foundation is to be made in Sheffield.

Dowley's resentment of Etienne's interference and forcing of the issue is cracklingly evident in the following, from a letter of 9 December 1853:

> I feel I should tell you frankly that your zealous confidence and fatherly wisdom have been entirely responsible for the establishment of the house and mission in Sheffield, England. The small number of labourers, insufficient to gather in the fruits of a harvest — in Ireland very much exposed to the danger of being lost — lack of means to begin the work, the frightful difficulties of the apostolate itself… were all against it. But our dear and Very Honoured Father indicated so often his wish to see his sons established in England that difficulties are forgotten, and with filial submission all cried out: "Our Most Honoured Father, the successor of St Vincent, wills it. We go there".[5]

Beginnings, expectations and realities

The English outreach of the Irish Province began on the First Sunday of Advent 1853. Its stated objective, for Etienne, in a letter to Dowley of 6 October 1853, was to play "its little part in the great work of the Catholic regeneration of this kingdom". McNamara shared this same vision.

For Philip Dowley England was a country of bigoted Protestants, whose main belief was in money (Cf letter of 2 December 1854).

When Michael Burke and his companions moved in to the Solly Street area of Sheffield on 27 November 1853 it was to be, effectively, as Irish chaplains. The situation they inherited was very unhealthy. St Marie's parish church was neither accepting of, nor acceptable to, the Irish immigrants and so Fr Scully and Mgr Briggs, the future bishop of the area, asked the Vincentians to head off a quasi-schism by looking

after the largely Irish section of the parish.

What happened was this. Burke and his confrères found that they had more than enough to do to cater for the Irish. That became their "mission", and since the entire Catholic Church in England at the time was regarded as mission territory, and each parish was described as a "mission", Burke had little difficulty in seeing the Sheffield work as missionary in the Vincentian sense. However, eight years later, Burke admits to being unhappy with the way things have evolved:

> I grieve to record it, but the truth must be told, St Vincent's became the church of the Irish… The English, even those who lived in our mission, went to St Marie's church… and only the relations of decent civility were kept up with this, our mission.[5]

So, St Vincent's had become part of a process of "ghettoisation", and contact with, or influence upon, the old English population, Catholic or Protestant, was minimal.

The original hope of Etienne, McNamara and Burke, that Sheffield should be a base for a missionary apostolate in the traditional sense, was thwarted. As far as can be discerned from the records of McNamara, Burke and Provincial Council minutes, the Vincentians gave only *seven* parish missions in the twenty-four years between 1853 and 1877. What is also striking is that in nearly all cases the missions were seen as strengthening the faith of the Irish. Thus, a mission in York in Advent 1855 was given by three Vincentians from Ireland, Frs Gowan, Kavanagh and O'Grady, and Fr Duff from Sheffield. Burke describes how these men brought great joy to: "a large, fixed population of the natives of the Green Isle, and the old Celtic tongue was to be heard once more in the streets of the ancient metropolis of Northumbria".[6]

Writing in 1861 Burke re-asserts his personal hopes and vision for Sheffield as a base for parish missions:

> The Missions, therefore, should be, and are, our first and most important end and aim. But to have a missionary body always ready to take the field there must first of all be a centre and a home for them…, a standing and continual mission; we hope we are preparing at the same time a centre and a *locum standi* for the Congregation of the Mission in England, from which home and centre they may go forth conquering and to conquer, all round this land to the sea-board.[7]

The reality of the situation was that a group of Irish Vincentians, coming from the background of St Peter's, Phibsboro and the Irish missions of the 1840-1860 period, was in a very, very different world in England. Given the dividedness of the Province, which I will discuss in a moment, the bitter disagreements between Dowley on the one hand and McNamara and Burke on the other, the problems of a minority Church trying to adapt to Industrial Revolution urban living, the friction between English and Irish Catholics, the delicate situation as between Old Catholics, Ultra-montanes and High Church Anglicans, it is not at all surprising that the Sheffield confrères made an "option for the Irish", and left the preaching of missions of conversion to other bodies like the Redemptorists, the Passionists, the Rosminians and others.

Sheffield, an outpost of a divided Province

The wonder is that Sheffield survived at all as a Vincentian foundation. In 1861 the friction in the Province, between Dowley and McNamara, between the "educational wing" and the "mission wing", and between those for and against a British foundation, reached crisis-point.[8]

There was no consensus among the confrères in favour of a British outreach. Resentment against Etienne, and against McNamara's support of Etienne, and his independent attitude vis-a-vis Dowley, and an underlying feud between "college men" and "mission men" all came to a head. McNamara in an 1861 document entitled *Some observations on the agitation which has troubled the Province of Ireland for some time* says:

> Some are opposed to the house in Sheffield and demand its total suppression, in spite of the well-known interest the Superior General has in that house… Some protested strongly against the foundation of Lanark, even though it was directly authorised by the Superior General, and complained that he was more concerned with the expansion of the Congregation than the conservation of its spirit. And some of these gentlemen demonstrated a remarkable antipathy towards the Sisters of Charity on the grounds that they were introduced into this country by the direct authority of the Superior General, who thus undermined the immediate authority of the Visitor of the Province.

Another aspect of the division is alluded to by the anonymous writer (McNamara ?) of *Observations on the Provincial Assembly of Ireland, 1861.* Agreeing with all that McNamara says, he adds, concerning

the "minority" who opposed Sheffield: "What is very remarkable is that practically all the 'minority' have always held extreme views in politics".[9]

Beginnings and new beginnings?

Given the story of our origins, especially on the island of Great Britain, it is not surprising that we have recognised in recent years something of a" crisis of identity". To describe the British side of our Province as an "unwanted baby", or at least a baby that met with a very mixed reception, may cast light on our situation today.

It has to be something of a unique achievement that, after 134 years in this country, our personnel is still so Irish, so dependent on Ireland for vocations, so bereft of English vocations, and so diffident about seeking the sort of autonomy or regional responsibility that one might anticipate after more than a century in existence. As a body we have shown, I believe, unmistakable marks of self-doubt, a blurred sense of identity and a lack of confidence about a future among "strangers" — the kind of symptoms one sees in the unwanted child. The irony is that, while remaining very Irish in personnel and outlook, we seem to have lost a sense of "preferential option" for the Irish. If one thinks of chaplaincy to the Irish in Britain today one thinks immediately of the Oblates (OMI), or of the Columbans, or of the clergy from several Irish dioceses who have been sent to Britain for that specific purpose — but not of the Vincentians.

So, who are we, whom are we for, and what are we for? In our Mission Statement we told ourselves that we wish to be followers of Christ, the Evangeliser of the Poor, and to draw from what has been best in our Province's tradition in education and mission, in order to be missionary in the most effective way we can today, especially in relation to the marginalised, the disaffected, and the oppressed members of our world today.

If one accepts, and I would argue it very strongly, that the Irish immigrants of the 1840-1870 period fitted very much into these categories (marginalised, disaffected, oppressed), and that they were, in fact, very well served by the Vincentians, one may then ask the question: how are we, the Irish Vincentians in Britain in the 1980s, to re-discover a sufficiently strong sense of identity and purpose as to be born again, with a deep conviction of being needed, and wanting to live and grow, giving ourselves to this country and its poor today?

This was the fundamental question we put to ourselves in Upholland.

Upholland

The meeting in Upholland, Lancashire, in Easter Week 1986, was historic. It was the first time in 133 years that the Vincentians met together as the Vincentians-in-Britain. That, in itself, was of enormous significance.

And what did we say to ourselves? We said we wanted to *live,* and to re-discover our missionary identity. To give concrete and symbolic expression to that wish we asked for the setting-up of a mission team based in London, whose task would be, in a British context, to be missionary "in the way best fitted today for the renewal of parishes and other Christian communities".[10]

I would agree that our great need is to re-discover a *missionary vision.* I contend that the missionary vision of our Province faded in the late 1870s, both in Ireland and Britain, and that in Ireland we developed a new vision of forming an articulate Catholic middle-class, both lay and clerical, to be the leaders of a new, Ultramontane, Catholic Ireland, both in "metropolitan Ireland" and overseas. In Britain there was little vision, apart from being Irish priests in Britain who happened to be Vincentians.

This loss of vision was due, I believe, to several factors, to most of which I have already alluded. Above all it was due, in Britain, to a fundamental uncertainty about the authority, nature and goal of the mission. This led to a turning inward, and to a rejection of what was British, Protestant and "alien". This xenophobia is evident throughout Michael Burke's *History of St Vincent's, Sheffield,* and also in the *Memoir of the Congregation of the Mission in Ireland, England and Scotland* written by Thomas McNamara in 1867. So, while Luigi Gentili, Moses Furlong (both Rosminians) and several Redemptorists and Passionists (notably Dominic Barberi) preached missions to both Catholics and Protestants with considerable success in terms of conversions[11], Burke and McNamara were locked into a view of Protestants (a term that included Anglicans) that was sour, suspicious, defensive and aggressive by turns.[12] This anti-Protestant antipathy was rooted in the Irish missionary experience of proselytism, but Burke's preoccupation with unmasking what he universally presumed to be Protestant insincerity and trickery hardly bespeaks a missionary spirit in a country where 97% of the people were "Protestants".

Mission today in the inner city?

I think that a specifically Vincentian vision of mission in Britain today would have to take certain factors into account.

I do not believe that the Catholic-oriented missions of the past — they were vital in the context of the pre-Tridentine state of 19th century rural Irish Catholicism — could today be seen other than as parish retreats. Parish retreats have, and always will have, their place, but if we wish to be missionary to the marginalised and the alienated, then we are talking about a very different "constituency".

The poor of Britain today live in a somewhat loosely called "inner city", or what *Faith in the City*[13] calls "urban priority areas". The poor of the inner cities are not primarily Irish, but black, and they are not largely Catholic, but of all religions and none.

I propose that inner city mission should be a priority for Vincentians working in this country, and that the realities of racism and the task of working for reconciliation and justice in a multi-cultural Britain must be of the foremost importance in our thinking.

Black people have, I believe, replaced the Irish of the 1850s as the alienated and rejected of British society — and also of the Church.[14]. However, the problems of following Christ the Evangeliser of the Poor in their regard are far more complex than were those of the 1850s. In view of all that is being seen and said in contemporary theology and missiology I believe that our task is not primarily to convert non-Catholics or non-Christians to our faith but, in the spirit of Peter in Acts 10 and 15, to discern where the Spirit is at work, even outside all the structures, preconceptions and presuppositions of our own beliefs. The task of the missionary is not so much conversion as dialogue, not so much to lead people to religious observance and church services, as to make Christ present as the one who serves, and who sows the seeds of the Kingdom of God, a kingdom of justice, truth and peace.

A vision of missionary community

All of this involves changes in attitude, practice and expectations so fundamental and wide-ranging as to turn mission, in its traditional Vincentian sense, on its head if it is to remain true to the charism of St Vincent. As I see it, the task of the mission team is to find a missionary approach that will affect the missionary outlook of all our confrères, whatever their particular apostolate.

First and foremost, the team must steep itself in the realities of inner-city poverty, live closely with the poor, and especially be open to black people who, because of endemic white racism, are increasingly alienated from, and resentful towards, British society at large, and towards the mainstream Churches in particular. (The prodigious growth of black-led Christian churches bears witness to the disillusionment

of Afro-Caribbean blacks with the Anglican, Catholic and Methodist Churches).

The spirituality of the team will need to be moulded by the shared experience of those who work for Justice and Peace and for the liberation of people who are "the victims of injustice and poverty".

The theatre of operations will be, not the Catholic Church buildings, but rather the high-rise estates of the inner city. The goal will be to communicate to people that they matter, that God loves them, and that we are witnesses to that love through our concern for them, and our solidarity with them in their struggle for justice, dignity and acceptance. The sign of that solidarity will be the building up of small communities to be sources of hope and agents of change. These communities will be formed by people who live on the estates and who are willing to meet and work and pray together so as to be at the service of the community at large, whatever its needs and concerns. Thus Christ the Evangeliser of the Poor is seen to be the one who "eats with tax-collectors and sinners", whether or not they ever come to church (cf Mk 1:16).

Some final remarks

One practical question is: "How does the team support itself?" Normally mission teams are paid a stipend by the parish in which they minister. But in the style of mission I am describing I would envisage that the team would work for anything from two months to a year in any one parish-area, and it seems unlikely that an inner city parish could make any real contribution to the support of the team and its work. I believe that either the team should be self-financing through part-time salaried work by some of its members or else it should be supported from diocesan funds. The benefit to the diocese is that a team of priests is committed to building up a missionary laity, and to training them in ministry, so that, little by little, they may bring the Good News to the unchurched and the forgotten "outsiders", help the Church at large to be more aware of the poor, and work for a more just, pluralist, society.

Our task is not so much to talk about Christ and the Church as to make Christ present in our love, our respect, our compassion, our openness and our proclaiming of the Kingdom of God. To call people to repentance because the Kingdom of God is at hand does not necessarily mean that one expects Muslims and Hindus and Sikhs to become Christians, but it *does* demand a change of heart on the part of *all* people — not least Catholics — and a recognition that God's Kingdom is *God's* work, and not the perquisite of this or that group or race or sect, and that God's Spirit is at work in people's hearts even if they never go

to church.

Karl Rahner has suggested that the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:5-35) was the transition-point from an exclusively Jewish Church to a Jewish-Greek-Roman (or "western") Church, and that Vatican II will one day be seen to have been the transition-point to a truly Catholic or World Church.[15] Our minds cannot easily foresee the implications of that transition, but I believe it is the privileged and exciting task of Vincentian Mission in Britain today to be part of that transition.

Notes

1. Cf Cada: *Shaping the Coming Age of Religious Life,* New York 1979.
2. Cf J H Murphy: *A Hundred Years Ago* in COLLOQUE No 1, Summer 1979, p 31. He quotes from a report by Fr Mariano Mailer on the state of the Irish Province.
3. All letters referred to are to be found, in original or copy, in the Provincial Archives, 4 Cabra Road.
4. Cf Norman: *The English Catholic Church in the 19th Century,* Oxford, pp 210-216.
5. Burke: *History of the Beginning of St Vincent's Mission, Sheffield,* 1861, p 100.
6. ibid, p 53.
7. ibid, p 55.
8. Cf Fr J H Murphy's excellent piece of research entitled *The Provincial Assembly of 1861* in COLLOQUE No 4, Spring 1981, pp 22-32.
9. ibid, p 29.
10. Cf Mission Statement, 1986.
11. Cf Norman, op cit, pp 204, 219, 228-229.
12. Cf Burke, op cit, pp 63-66, 101-103; and also McNamara: *Memoir of the Congregation of the Mission in Ireland, England and Scotland,* 1867, pp 233, 238.
13. The Report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on the mission of the Church in the cities today; Church House Publishing, 1985.
14. Cf *Faith in the City* and also *With You in Spirit;* the latter is the report of Cardinal Hume's Commission to investigate the situation of black people in the Catholic Church. The Report was very critical of the inherent racism to be found in the Church, as everywhere in British society.
15. Cf Rahner: *Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II,* in "Theological Studies" No 40, pp 716-727.

A View from Lagos

Roderic Crowley

It was while waiting in Lagos airport for some five hours for a delayed flight to Dublin that I got the opportunity to ponder Kevin Rafferty's reflections on the General Assembly in COLLOQUE No. 15. Perhaps this Lagos viewpoint could compare with Palermo and the steps of St Peter's. Lagos is a teeming city of the largest country in Africa. The African continent was one of the first to receive missionaries in the time of St Vincent. Nigeria is a country which is in many ways "white for the harvest". If Vincent were here today he would find many outlets for his apostolic zeal there. It is also a place where the fulfilment of his prophecy about the transfer of the Church from Europe could well be discovered. In terms of vocations it is where the Irish Province has most reason for hope for the future. So, it offered quite an appropriate background for the perusal of Kevin's reflections.

A reading of our Constitutions and Statutes leaves one with the strong impression that they provide an excellent source of renewal and revitalisation, if only they could become a living reality. Kevin's "gleanings" from the Assembly give one the same impression about it. That is why I have taken the liberty of trying to underline those that strike me with particular force and relevance.

Vocations

The Lord seems to be speaking to us in a very loud voice these days in, or through, our declining numbers. Even our best efforts to deal with the situation over the years seem to be of little avail. The spectre of falling numbers still continues to haunt us. Perhaps we have not yet reflected suffciently on what it is saying to us. Maybe even more serious heart-searching is called for. The "Vincentian vocation" seems to be still flourishing in groups like that of San Egidio in Rome, of which Kevin speaks. We must ask ourselves if the Vincentian vocation is sufficiently expressed in our lives so as to attract the same enthusiastic response that they get. I would like to suggest the idea of a survey addressed to each member of the Irish Province on this topic of vocations. It could include such questions as the following:

Why, in your opinion, are we not attracting a greater number of vocations today?

What "vision" of the Vincentian Community would you propose to offer to likely candidates?

What is the likely source of vocations in your area?

What are you personally doing about vocations, or what do you feel you should, or could, do?

Why, in your opinion, are young men not joining the Vincentians today, as formerly they did?

Do you see your local community as being ready to welcome young men to share their life with them for some length of time so as to come to an understanding of the Vincentian way of life?

Such questions as these, answered prayerfully and reflectively, might help to clarify the situation and point to the source of the blockage, or rather the "call" that is being made to us.

Highlights

Some phrases seem to stand out with particular clarity and resonance in Kevin's presentation. Among these would be, for example, the danger of "living on the capital of the past", the fact that "the next ten years are crucial for the future of the Congregation" in these parts, the need to respond to "the real needs of today's Church in a Vincentian way". The need for "radical pruning" (as in the case of the vines of Frascatti), and for a "process of discernment" are further signposts in his article. Any tendency to complacency is disturbed by his reference to "Vincentian fundamentalism" in reference to Vincentian studies, and also as regards our acceptance of "popular missions" as our "foundation charism" without seeing how "the creative genius of St Vincent de Paul in the area of parish renewal should be lived out in our time". His emphasis on "walking with priests" rather than any more patronising description of our role also strikes home. Likewise when he speaks of the need for reflection about our activities so that the poor can be "the Sacrament of God for us". Another key phrase would seem to be the need to move from the "Theology of Charity" to the "Theology of Justice". The wider view of the Vincentian Community, seen as embracing similar lay

groups, would seem to be also worthy of serious attention. In the rest of this article I would like to touch in a little more detail on some of these points.

Need for discernment

As a Province we have a rich capital from the past to live on. But the trouble with all capital is that it tends to run out unless it is replenished. In the business world, especially today in a time of rapid change, the need to diversify and keep up with changing times is universally accepted. It seems equally true that we too, as a Province, must look for new "investments" (of personnel) so as to respond to the "signs of the times". Otherwise our "capital" will steadily grow depleted. The discovery of where to make these "investments" (of personnel) is not an easy one. It should be an investment aimed at renewing and revitalising our Vincentian charism. It should be a living out of the "creative genius" of St Vincent, of which Kevin speaks, and avoiding the danger of "Vincentian fundamentalism". As Vincent found solutions for the problems of his times we do not necessarily have to continue his solutions but rather imitate his search. This is required in order to respond to "real needs in today's Church in a Vincentian way". This calls for a very heart-searching process. Kevin speaks of the need for a "process of discernment", and I believe that we should consider this seriously. This implies a very special sort of reflection as the basis for decision-making. We already have had a taste of it, but only a small taste, in relation to the Vincentian charism. It is a process to which St Vincent himself was no stranger. (An article on this topic by Padraig Regan appeared in COLLOQUE No. 11. Victoriano Torres, of the Province of the Philippines, recently wrote a dissertation on it in Rome, while a small article on it is also among my own unpublished works). It is a means of discovering where the Holy Spirit is leading us. It involves guided prayer and reflection after all the relevant facts have been discovered and seen in a clear light. It is not a majority decision based on a weighing up of the pros and cons.

Perhaps, as regards some aspects of our future, we could set up a group to collect the relevant facts on behalf of the Provincial Council, and also set about preparing ourselves for the discernment process (as it calls for some special preparation). The resultant decision would then be given a sound basis enabling us to face the sacrifices and faith-action inevitably involved. Kevin's request for more reflection at various levels may seem excessive to some. But there is always a danger of mistaking discussion for reflection. In fact, the need for reflection never really ends. This is brought out in a booklet by Fr Brian Grogan entitled

Reflective Living where he speaks of its need to discover where God is drawing us.

Analysis of the causes of poverty

The distinction between a "Theology of Charity" and a "Theology of Justice" may not appeal to everybody. In fact, it is not claimed that they are mutually exclusive. But the emphasis in our Constitutions is on a "Theology of Justice". This is made abundantly clear in *Lines of Action.* In it there are three very specific references to the need for "serious analysis of the causes of poverty" (arts. 6, 8 & 11), and also in the Pope's address to the Assembly which was very strong and specific. Hopefully, this is an area where the *Lines of Action* will be realised in our own case, so as to give us a greater awareness and conscientisation in this regard. Otherwise, how can we hope to be motivated to serious involvement in trying to remedy such situations?

If any change of direction is to come about, such "homework" would seem to be a basic necessity. We need the "cry of the poor" to be relayed to us by this means if we are to hear it clearly. Surely there is an urgent need to equip some confrère for such an undertaking and set him aside for it, so that the rest of the Province can benefit from his findings. The Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice would seem to offer us a certain headline in this respect. We live in a much more complex world today than St Vincent did, and so we need more elaborate means to meet the situation. Perhaps this undertaking could be done in conjunction with the Society of St Vincent de Paul. Hopefully it will lead to greater personal involvement as a result.

Priestly formation

I believe that it is not open to question that work for priests is a very important part of our Vincentian charism. In the short time that I have been involved in the work of spiritual direction in Maynooth I have been amazed at the tributes which I have heard being paid to the contribution of my predecessors here. Even on a recent Late Late Show, which dealt with the collection for Maynooth, one of them received honourable mention. But all this should not lead us to a feeling of complacency.

This area of priestly formation is also a changing area. Vatican II with its two important documents on the training and ministry of priests opened the way to fresh thinking on the subject. This has continued since then, both at official and unofficial levels. The Irish bishops have already produced a Charter for Priestly Formation and that of the bishops of England and Wales is due to appear in its final form in 1988.

Should all this leave us untouched in our understanding of our role?

Delarue, in his book *The Faith of St Vincent de Paul,* speaks of the special slant that he gave to priestly formation, which marked him off from other reformers in the Oratory and Saint-Sulpice. Have we still an "original" contribution to offer? Could we benefit from a group of those among us who are involved in different aspects of this task setting out to draw up a Vincentian "charter" for our days and place? This might help to produce a more unified thrust, which could still express itself in different forms. In line with the preparatory document of the English bishops should we not accept the need to put more emphasis on on-going formation now that the seminary is no longer to be the "last word" on the subject? We see movements like the Ministry to Priests and the Jesus Caritas Union of Priests springing up. What have they to say to us? I believe that we should ask ourselves these questions in an organised way, as well as keeping ourselves well informed and abreast of developments in this field. Are we ready to "walk with priests" in the spirit of the "Emmaus walk" of the Intercession for Priests?

The question of training priests and laity together, which is focussed on in the document of the English bishops, also raises important questions. Perhaps they are already being answered, at least in part, by recent developments in All Hallows. While not decrying in any way our present contribution it is possible that it could be substantially enriched.

Involvement with the laity

This reference to the laity brings me to the last point that I wanted to make in regard to Kevin's article. There is a sentence in it which seems worth quoting in full, as it somehow sums it all up. He says: "The presence of lay Christians as full-time members of our Congregation in works arising directly out of the inspiration of St Vincent might paradoxically help us to rediscover what our true Vincentian identity is and what our role might be in the Church today".

In a sense, this brings us back to where we started. No matter what happens, our vocations are not likely to reach former levels. We still need to see ourselves more as a leaven of St Vincent's spirit rather than as a custodian, just as the Holy Spirit's activity is no longer considered to be confined to the Catholic Church. I believe that we need to reach out more to groups animated by the Vincentian spirit, wherever our involvement is considered acceptable. It could be seen as something on the lines of a third order, or its equivalent. This would enrich us, as well as, hopefully, enriching them. The new realisation of the union between priests and laity should be reflected in our community also. Vincent

himself was very involved with them. Closer association with the St Vincent de Paul Society, and with the undertakings of the Daughters of Charity would seem to be very desirable where it is feasible.

A new approach to the idea of Brothers could help to revitalise that group. The example of young people who gather round Jean Vanier in his work for the handicapped could possibly be a guide in this. Involvement with groups like that of San Egidio (a group of lay students and workers who meet daily for prayer and discussion, and devote a substantial period of time to work for the deprived, the handicapped and the oppressed) could lead to worthwhile developments. I believe that this *apertura all' esterno* is one of the signs of the times which we should read and follow up. Perhaps each local community could aim at gathering a lay group around it and integrating them to some degree in the community. The Friends of the Vincentians might well be developed along these lines. This sort of "honorary membership" has already been approved of for individuals. Perhaps it could be extended further.

These few reflections of mine are not intended as critical, but as constructive. If I show ignorance of recent developments in the Province please attribute it to my long stay abroad. But I believe that we must take seriously the statement that the next ten years will be vital for the Vincentian Community in Ireland, Britain and Nigeria. After that, it is likely that we will be past the "fail safe" point. "Business as usual" is not likely to be the answer. We cannot afford to bury our head in the sand and hope that the problem will go away (in case we are inclined to do so). Belief in ourselves, and in St Vincent, should lead us to make every effort and sacrifice to ensure that his work continues. Nor should we yield to the temptation to take refuge in the idea that others are experiencing the same difficulties. It is true that it is, and must remain, God's work ("neither myself nor Monsieur Portail..."). But it must also be our work or, perhaps better, our readiness to let God work through us. This calls for a very listening attitude which is not always easy to acquire but which will enable us to hear the "gentle breeze" (of the Spirit). With Samuel we must be ready to say "Speak, Lord (even if you say unexpected and hard things), your servant is listening", and is ready to respond.

Forum

"…and the ears of the deaf be unstopped"

The music of Handel's *Messiah* welled up spontaneously inside me as I drove away from Clonmel. I had just spent about an hour visiting, not the celebrated Tommy O'Brien of RTE fame, but a young deaf man who is a patient in Clonmel's psychiatric hospital. My deaf friend has never in his life heard an opera or a concert, yet I found myself humming and singing:

> "Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened
> And the ears of the deaf be unstopped."

Handel gives a very strong positive tone to Isaiah's announcement of this piece of good news. And I had found it fulfilled in a way that neither Handel nor Isaiah might have expected.

Normally I had come to think of Jesus as the one who fulfilled the prophecy by opening the eyes of the blind and giving hearing to the deaf. He did this out of compassion for them and also as a sign to those of us who can see and hear that we might be in need of *spiritual* healing. Might we not be blind to the light of Christ and deaf to his Word spoken to us?

Words in signs

Returning to my young friend in Clonmel, how was the prophecy of Isaiah fulfilled in his case? How were his ears unstopped? Not by any miraculous healing but by speaking with the hands, or sign-language. The deaf man was able to let off steam by telling me all the things that were pent up inside him. I was able to understand, and to reply in the same manner. Finally we prayed together, signing the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory be.

Using signs is to the deaf what reading Braille is to the blind, only more so. Whereas the blind baby will pick up language by hearing it spoken to him and all around him, the deaf baby has no language at all and will never learn any language until someone teaches him or her.

Natural body-language and miming come quickly to the deaf, a broad smile, a deep frown, a gasp of surprise, a grimace of pain with a sharp

intake of breath, a finger pointing into the chest meaning "I", a bowing of the head for adoration… We all do a lot of these things anyway, but this is a fairly minimal form of communication and it would not take anyone very far in our educational system.

So the problem remains: how to teach language to a deaf child, to show that each thing has a name and can be written down in another sign-language, that of the written word on the page? One way of starting is by using the signs made with the hands and as much oral speech as the child (with hearing-aids) is capable of. With the fingers of the hand all the letters of the alphabet are formed so that any word which does not have a special sign of its own can be spelt instead. Something of the anger and the frustration, as well as the joy, of this kind of teaching can be seen in the film *Children of a lesser God*

Seeing the word

I've mentioned Isaiah and Handel; now it is time to bring in St Paul. Sad to say, something he wrote to the Romans was quoted for centuries, not to liberate the deaf from their silence but to bind them down within their handicap of isolation. He wrote: "Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ" (10:17). From this it was concluded that deaf people could have no faith because they had no language and could neither hear nor read the word of God. So they were baptised because of the faith of their parents and because the handicap is not usually discovered for a few months, or even longer, after birth. But being deaf the child was then prevented from celebrating the sacraments of reconciliation and Holy Communion. Deaf people were treated as babies all their lives by both Church and State, being allowed neither to marry nor to own property.

The first break-through came in the 16th century when a Spanish monk, Pedro Ponce de Leon, found a method of teaching deaf children to use their tongues and articulate language, as well as writing it down. He thus taught a small group of them to read, speak, write, calculate, pray and celebrate the sacraments. For his achievements he was considered a miracle-worker, but unfortunately no wide-spread system for educating the deaf was implemented. Most deaf people languished in a corner until the great break-through in the 18th century by the French priest Abbé Charles-Michel de L'Epée. He set up a school in which deaf children were fully educated by having signs for most words, and spelling those which did not have signs of their own, e.g. names of people and places. In this way a full course of religion was taught, and

so the deaf children came to *see* the Word of God in the manual signs and in the written word of books.

Thus faith came to the deaf by *seeing*. I experience this myself when I celebrate mass with the deaf. I speak the words and sign them, and the deaf people watch very carefully. (They are patient with my mistakes !). Some can speak the responses and others will sign back to me. Using my hands to give the homily I feel and handle the Word of life. In the very literal sense I hand it on to others. So our celebration of the mass breaks through the isolation and the ignorance from which the deaf suffered for centuries. The Kingdom of God is among us.

Sharing the faith

One of the fruits of all the joyful and painful efforts of the past is the fact that the deaf have taken the Word of God to themselves and are handing it on to each other. Last year in Cork, for example, our annual retreat was given by three young deaf adults with their priest, Fr John Cleary CM. We sat around in a circle as they each gave witness to their faith. Then we broke into smaller groups where the participants could share their difficulties, their questions, and their faith with the retreat-team and with each other. Most of this was done through sign-language. Later we prayed and celebrated the mass in the same way.

I believe it is no exaggeration to see in this the prophecy of Isaiah fulfilled and the gospel healings of Jesus continued in our own time. In reply to those who ask us "Where is Jesus?" can we not give his answer to the messengers of John the Baptist?: "Go back and tell John what you hear and see; the blind see again, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is proclaimed to the poor" (Mt 11:2-5).

We may well devote ourselves to many worthy projects, but if we neglected the poor, the leper or the handicapped we could no longer call ourselves followers of Jesus in any real sense. We build today on the faith, hope, love and hard work of the generations before us who discovered a way through the communications barrier so that deaf people are no longer left without language, but as brothers and sisters in the image and likeness of God we can walk the same road and share the same life together.

Bill Clarke

UNUM CORPUS, UNUS SPIRITUS, IN CHRISTO

I

My first feeling on reading *Lines of Action 1986-1992* was one of gratitude, gratitude to all who had participated in the General Assembly of 1986 and whose common vision has given us all a new hope. Such statements as "the Congregation of the Mission is experiencing a time of grace" and "in recent years the Congregation of the Mission has travelled a promising journey in the area of the evangelisation of the poor" quite definitely speak of the new vision and hope that many of us are experiencing within the Congregation since Vatican II.

The vision and hope have to be made real. This is what the *Lines* are all about. Already time is slipping by, for it is now just a year and a half since we received the document from Rome. To me this spells out a certain urgency. An urgency in myself first and in our Province after that.

I ask myself: "Have I discovered a new sense of the Mission?" To answer that I would like to share a story with you. I remember when I was appointed to the Parish Mission Team in 1980 I took a long walk along Dun Laoghaire pier and I was reflecting on how I would describe myself now. At that time I could be described as a travelling preacher, the tools of my trade being words. I had very little else except my personality and my experience of life. Those words, however, were life-giving and I went around the towns of Ireland with my companions, convinced that I had something to offer to people. I had the vision of life as portrayed in the gospel. Over the years I suspect that that vision has become dulled and tarnished. My present work with the Travelling People has forced me once again to examine my commitment to that fundamental gospel vision, "Evangelizare pauperibus misit me". Prayer and reflection on the *Lines of Action* will strengthen me in my resolve.

The vision is mighty, the commitment demanding. Will it be possible for any of us to fulfill the following?:

> Participation in the life of the poor and commitment to the cause of their liberation and salvation are an integral part of the conversion to which the missionaries and the local communities are called (par. 10).

Hence the urgency at community and Provincial level. The *Lines* call

us to be prophetic in our individual lives. Prophetic also in our community life. Our communities are to be places where we:

> sincerely and diligently seek ways and means to listen to each other and to share our successes and failures (par. 19:1).

We speak a lot about community life and we emphasise that our work grows out of community, and community strengthens our work. The *Lines of Action* are calling us to live a simple, prophetic, evangelical life-style. Linked with this is the third element of the vision: "What will attract young people to join us to continue the mission of the Church in the spirit of St Vincent?" The continuance of the Vincentian vocation is for the good of the poor. The poor will always be with us. Our life and our work by its very nature will always contain the germ of the evangelical calling. The challenge is again to make that attractive in the world in which we live.

I end with another story. I was visiting a campsite recently and a woman in a trailer remarked to me that the lot of the Travellers won't change very significantly in the years ahead. "In twenty years time we will still be on the side of the road" she said.

The symbol of the journey is used at the beginning of the *Lines of Action.* How further along that road we travel depends on each one of us.

Sean Johnston

II

In *A Reason to Live, a Reason to Die* John Powell makes the point that in Chinese there are two characters for the word *crisis;* they are "danger" and "opportunity".

The *Lines of Action* are a summary of the dangers and opportunities which surround us owing to our changing apostolates and our decrease in vocations.

I have heard much about how the young priest can influence vocations, yet in my years as a boy in Castleknock one of the men who influenced me most in my vocation was the late Maurice O'Neill, one of. the older priests. The appeal that Maurice held for me was the fact that he blended an earthy humanity with a deep holiness, and came across as "a man you could talk to, a man who understood you in the

difficult years of adolescence". In short, Maurice will always be for me a truly great priest.

But what is "a truly great priest?" In the remainder of this contribution I would like to show how *Lines of Action* offer four statements which can answer this question.

"Today's youth… do not always appreciate the meaning of priestly ministry or of the vocation of a brother" (par. 25). Surely such a statement begs the question "Why?" I feel there are two reasons. One is beyond our control, and that is the fact that the ideal of the priesthood is becoming less and less "a philosophy of our age" (1 Cor 2:6). The demands of our life go against the grain of a life centred on social and economic achievement. The second reason is within our control to a certain extent: Do we, as priests and students, always appreciate, (or even try to), the meaning of the priestly ministry and the vocation of a brother? If the answer is" no" then can we fault today's youth for responding in the same way?

"A simple life-style, joy in our work with the poor, and a sense of welcome in our houses are the things that most attract young candidates" (par. 22). In view of our decreasing numbers perhaps this is something we need to reflect on individually. Is my "joy of life" a joy that others would want to search for? Am I, through my life-style, at the door of the tomb or am I on the hill of Calvary?

Interlinked with this is the third statement: St Vincent's "example and healthy realism, which led him to avoid both useless confrontations and exaggerated idealization of the poor person, will be our inspiration in planning our ministries" (par. 9). I have often wondered, after a day-retreat with schools, "Have I that exemplary life and healthy realism that would draw another human to look at life through my window?"

These three statements are knitted together in the fourth and the most penetrative reflection of all: "Each confrère… shall hear the urgent call to continued conversion and make efforts to respond to that call, in order to live out... the spiritual experience of St Vincent" (par. 10). Putting it in another way: "What is the nature of my spiritual experience?", or "Do I have any experience of God in an emotional way?"

At the time of writing this (Christmas 1987) I have been ordained almost seven months. In those seven months I have often thought that if I were married and had talked to my wife as often and as personally as I have talked to God my wife would have gone home to her mother by now. Again and again, from my mission and retreat work, I have placed greater emphasis on the work of the Lord rather than on the Lord of the

work. I have often been deaf to the will of the Lord, so absorbed was I in my own will and achievement in little things.

If the life of St Vincent teaches us anything it is that he was consumed with a zeal for the Father, a zeal that consumed all his energies. Through his deep spiritual experience Vincent's life was rooted in a healthy realism which, in turn, characterised his ministry. From his spiritual experience stemmed his understanding of his ministry, a ministry realised in his simplicity, hospitality, deep sense of fraternity, and joy in his work. After all, how many of us would devote our lives to the morbid and morose?

For me, Maurice O'Neill had that spiritual experience of God. It was like electricity; you couldn't see it yet you knew it was there, because the bulbs were alight — with a light that drew others.

Since joining the community I have experienced that same light in the confrères, both young and old.

Perhaps the tragedy and the problem of our community is that the light is only best seen when within the community, a light which radiates a kindness and caring approach, a warmth, support and affection. It is through others around me that I have experienced something of the spiritual experience of God. If I have one goal in life it is to communicate that "Vincentian" love to others, that warmth, support and fraternity on which I believe our future is pinned. It is a sense of being cared for, which "many of the masters of this age have never known, … things that no eye has seen and no ear has heard, things beyond the mind of man, … (things) that God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor 6:9), things of the heart wherein lies our opportunity for spiritual experience, an experience which forms the truly great priest.

Jay Shanahan

VINCENTIANS TOGETHER, NOVEMBER 16-20, 1987

Our constitutions call for "a brotherly spirit of co-operation" with the Daughters of Charity. They ask us to give our attention to the lay associations founded by St Vincent or based on his spirit. In this age of collaborative ministry, and in these days when "communion" is a popular religious word, this ideal presents no problem. But it is not easy to put the ideal into practice. The main difficulty comes from the difference in our styles of apostolate. The majority of confrères live and work at least one remove from the poor. A large number of Daughters

of Charity belong to communities involved in specialised works for the poor. The members of the St Vincent de Paul Society are rooted in a parish community; their dealings with poor families are immediate and concrete.

As part of a search for ways of collaborating we have recently been inviting a cross-section of Vincentian men and women to events in Damascus House in London. In January the invitation is for the weekend nearest to our feastday on the 25th. In November the invitation is for a Monday-Friday seminar on a Vincentian topic. In November 1987 the topic was "one in mission". It was designed as a search for a common vision to help us make the good news real in Great Britain today. The topics were good news for the poor, catechesis and the changing understanding of ministry.

To provide the threads which would link all these topics together the special speaker was Fr Bob Maloney CM. Fr Bob was for many years involved in formation work in his home Province (Eastern, USA) before he went as a missioner to Panama. In the General Assembly of 1986 he was elected Assistant General.

In presenting his message Fr Bob used an approach which appealed to head, heart and the un-named areas in between. This approach he had already used at the Vincentian Month in Paris in July 1987. He began by providing an image that would appeal to our collective imagination. He made good use, for example, of his own reactions to Claude Monet's three different paintings of the same location on the Seine. After the appeal to our imagination he put the spotlight on one aspect of St Vincent's teaching. In each instance the teaching was set in a scriptural or theological context. Thus, on the topic of good news to the poor the setting was an eight-point reflection on the Christ of St Luke's gospel. Catechesis was related to the virtue of simplicity; simplicity was presented as a love for the truth; the truth, in turn, is Christ, and being in the truth is what makes us real.

After a period of input came a case study which we brought with us to our groups. In each instance the case study was geared towards pastoral action. The protagonists in the case were people of different cultures and backgrounds. We soon discovered that Fathers Giuseppe, Manuel, Jack, Jean and Stanislaw had local equivalents. When we had come to terms with the case study we returned to the plenary session. The variety of our responses and impressions were found to have had more unity than we had expected.

Fr Bob had a strong supporting cast. There was a healthy realism

about Fr Paddy McCrohan's reflections on his search for a new kind of mission, and in Sr Pauline Lawlor's application of Maslow's ladder of human needs to human poverty. Both speakers helped us to look with both sympathy and criticism to all man-made structures.

Fr Kevin Cronin and Fr Michael Prior helped us to put an English face on St Vincent's dictum that "everyone agrees that the fruit realised on the mission is due to catechesis". Sr Matthew Clancy's team of parishioners from Easterhouse opened us to many pastoral possibilities as they treated us to a feast of catechesis without tears and with smiles.

Fr Jim McCormack introduced the topic of the changing face of ministry. He involved us all in the composition of a group story which would reflect our various pre-suppositions and prejudices. In presenting friendship as a requirement for any effective collaboration in ministry Sr Clare Gilbraith examined some of the bonds of friendship that gave energy to the work of St Vincent, St Francis de Sales, St Louise and Marguerite Naseau. Sr Cecilia Brennan drew on the experience of other Provinces and on a description of some happenings nearer home to tell us that the time seems ripe for new forms of affiliation within our Vincentian communities.

Did the seminar promote collaboration and union? Hopefully, yes. But the real value of the week was that the great outlines of the Vincentian story were told with a new vigour. If it is true that a movement is alive as long as it has a living story, the week gave us many reasons for hope. Like faith, charism seems to come from hearing. As the Vincentian story was told by speaker after speaker, gems ancient and modern abounded. Each of our notebooks carried away a different collection. Mine included the observation that Jesus seems to have had the gift of being at the right well at the right time; that tradition is not to be confused with the collection of mistakes we have made in the past; that today justice is the name for effective love; that spirituality is a vision that generates energy and gives it a direction; that everything that diminishes the quality of life now is poverty; that some people are so hungry that God can come to them only in the form of bread (Gandhi). And did you know that St Vincent was a behavioural modificationist?

A common mission statement would be a pretentious name for what we attempted on Friday. Once again Fr Bob came to help us with a case study. The statement that ensued tried to capture the attitudes and convictions that had surfaced from the confrères (about 20), the Daughters (about 60) and a small number of the St Vincent de Paul Society and other Vincentian groups who had participated at various stages during

the week.

A Daughter of Charity has written that as the week came to a close we were all left with the same two questions: "When are we going to have the next one?" and "How can we ensure that it is more representative of the whole Vincentian family?" By the time you are reading this the "next one" will already have taken place, from January 29 to 31, 1988, with Fr Peter Verrity leading us in wondering "Are we still a Christian country?" The answer to the second question is still in the making.

Tom Lane

THE STATEMENT

At the conclusion of four days of listening, talking and reflecting together those present, Vincentians and Daughters of Charity, expressed the following needs:

1. To encourage and sustain a growing-together of the four-fold Vincentian family (the Daughters of Charity, the Congregation of the Mission, the St Vincent de Paul Society, the Ladies of Charity) and our many other Friends and Associates among the laity, at national level and local level.

2. To build up communities of prayer and discernment among the members of this total Vincentian family to discern together, in partnership with poor people, what are the real needs of the poor, and to make this discernment the basis of our apostolic priorities.

3. To study and reflect on the root causes of individual and social poverty, and to work for the changing of unjust structures. In this regard again we must listen to the poor, and seek ways of building up relationships with Justice and Peace groups.

4. To promote vocations to serve Christ in the poor, jointly, and to listen particularly to young people.

Miscellanea

NOT QUITE IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ST JUSTIN DE JACOBIS

We set off by plane from Addis Ababa on 24 April 1987 for Mekalle, a distance of 700 km. It took us three hours. It took Justin fourteen days to travel from Massawa to Adwa, a distance of 250 km. Our party consisted of three Daughters of Charity, Sisters Zoe, Teresa and Assefatch, four Vincentians (known as Lazarists here) Fathers Leo, Peter, Girmay Abraha and myself. Abba Kidane Gebray from the Catholic Secretariate and a security man completed the list of passengers. I must not forget to mention the pilot, Captain Paul, who was excellent. The plane was a Pilatus Porter, about a ten-seater, so it was low flying and we had a wonderful view of the country, Nothern Shewa, Wollo and then Tigray. We passed over Lalibela and saw the famous monolithic church. It was interesting to note the change of landscape from the lush green pastures of the south to the barren mountainous wastes of the north.

Since the famine of 1984-85 Mekalle has doubled in size to a population of about 20,000 now, and the influence of the Catholic Church has soared also, mainly owing to the work of the Daughters of Charity and their associates during that awful time two years ago. The Daughters have two houses in Mekalle, St Vincent's and St Louise's seminary. After lunch we flew on to Adigrat, about forty minutes by air. We stayed at the major seminary for the diocese of Adigrat and were given a very warm welcome by Bishop Kidane-Mariam and the staff of the seminary, which is a mixture of Ethiopian priests and White Fathers. Fr Kevin O'Mahony WF is teaching theology there. We were present at the ordination of four young men to the priesthood for the diocese of Adigrat on Sunday 26 April. On Saturday we had gone to Idga Hamus, about 25 km from Adigrat, where four Irish Sisters of the Assumption are making the first foundation of the Little Sisters in Ethiopia. They have chosen a beautiful site for their house and clinic. One of them comes from Bantry Bay so she knows all about beauty spots.

On Monday we began in earnest to follow in the footsteps of Justin. We visited Guala where, in 1844, he bought land and built a house and the College of Mary Immaculate and where, in the following year

when twenty seminarians were brought from Adwa, the first Catholic seminary was established. Not many of the original buildings remain, but the chapel and Justin's room are still intact. We sat under the tree where he used to conduct retreats. It was all very moving and inspiring. The whole site is now in the hands of the Salesians.

We left Adigrat on Tuesday for Salem Bessa where the White Sisters, who work in the local hospital, entertained us. We had a great lunch in preparation for the tough part of our pilgrimage, a three hour walk to the Daughters' house in Monexoito. Captain Paul told us that it takes a plane ten minutes to cover the same distance, so that gives some idea of the terrain over which we struggled in the heat of the afternoon. Sr Marie Tesfaye and her community (Sisters Tsige and Ababa) gave us a great welcome and we rejoiced the next day at the installation of Sr Marie as the Superior of the first Ethiopian community of the Daughters.

On Friday, refreshed and invigorated, we set off on the four hour journey to Alitiena, this time with the assistance of mules if so desired. I preferred to walk most of the way. There was much time for thought and reflection. Justin was told that Alitiena would be a safe refuge if needed in time of persecution. I understand that a Land Rover got through in the past, but it certainly could not now. It is only a track for most of the way, very rugged and quite treacherous in places. The altitude on the route varies from 5,400 ft to 7,500. How do the people live in this desolate region? There were small fields to be seen from time to time but no sign of vegetation. There had been no rain for over six months. Then we began to see the Bellis or Prickly Pear which, according to tradition, Justin introduced into Ethiopia. It forms the staple diet of the people from June to October. Then there is honey from which is made a delicious nourishing drink called tej. At the half-way mark the local Parish Priest turned out with most of his flock to greet us and entertain us with singing and dancing and, of course, tej to sustain us for the rest of the journey. At Kin-Kin-Ty, the highest point, we began to meet the people of Alitiena who had come out to meet us, even though we were still about 10 km from our destination. Among them was Sr Christine Casey DC, from Manchester. They were dancing and singing "The Lazarists have come back". We had, of course, our newly ordained Lazarist Fr Girmay Abraha with us; he was coming to say his first mass in his home parish of Alitiena. What a welcome! Looking back, it now seems like a dream. Everybody had palm branches and they waved them and sang and danced all the rest of the way to Alitiena.

Then we turned a corner and there, nestling in a valley surrounded

by huge mountains, was Alitiena. It was a fortress. It was indeed a safe refuge for Justin in time of persecution. We were met by the Parish Priest, Abba Fessu, and all the priests, with the whole of the parish in attendance, in the centre of the village. We venerated the Holy Cross and proceeded to the church to hear the first of many speeches of welcome. We noted the plaques on the wall in memory of the seven Lazarists, six French and one Dutch, who died serving the people of Alitiena and are buried there.

The Daughters of Charity have a strong presence. In their own compound they have a hostel for young girls who are attending the secondary school in the village. They also have a kindergarten and an excellent clinic, with a dental unit, and even a laboratory, attached. Sisters Dashe, Margaret Brady and Tsige-Mariam gave us a great welcome. Sr Margaret Coyne, who works in Mekalle was also there for the occasion. There is a fine elementary school and a minor seminary in the village.

Later we visited the priests' house where Justin used to live. In the little oratory there was much evidence of a past Vincentian presence, including a list on a notice-board of all the Vincentians who had died in 1937, including Edward Gaynor who died in Cork and Frank Slevin who died in Blackrock while still a student. Also in the little chapel were relics of St Vincent, Blessed Francis Clet and Blessed John Gabriel Perboyre. So the Vincentian spirit lives on in Alitiena.

All that remains of that "dilapidated church", formerly Orthodox, is a wooden post. That was where Justin ordained Ghebre-Michael to the priesthood on 1 January 1851.

Sunday was a great day when Girmay Abraha CM, with another newly ordained priest of the diocese of Adigrat, concelebrated their first mass in their home parish.

After lavish hospitality and having been duly fortified we began the trek back on Monday. The question asked by so many remained unanswered: "When are the Lazarists coming back to stay in Alitiena?"

Abba Fessu and Abba Beyenne, both of whom were kindness itself, walked with us for some distance. Abba Beyenne came as far as Kin-Kin-Ty, about 10 km, and as we went along we felt drops of welcome rain on our faces.

Denis J Corkery

CHARLES WATSON

In COLLOQUE No. 13 Charles Watson was listed among the Englishmen who became Vincentians. He was a convert who was ordained for the diocese of Westminster, then became a Vincentian in France and went to China where he took his vows, and after that became a Dominican. At the end of the entry I said that I had heard that he later became a Carthusian. Confirmation of this has now come to light. In June 1896 the Irish Provincial, Thomas Morrissey, replied to a letter which he had received from Watson; Watson's letter has not survived, but Morrissey kept a copy of his own letter. Watson at that stage was in the Carthusians but wanted to re-join the Vincentians, this time in the Irish Province. Morrissey referred the matter to the Superior General. He did not join the Irish Province nor, apparently, any other Province of the Congregation. It would be interesting to know what did become of him.

TD

PATRICK BOYLE

In COLLOQUE No 11 a provisional listing of Boyle's writings was given, with some further titles added in No. 12. Four further titles have since come to light. One is a booklet of 38 pages: *The Irish Catholic Foundations in France,* Dublin, Browne & Nolan, 1909. The other three are articles: "The Society of St Vincent de Paul" in *New Ireland Review,* No. VI, 1902; ; "The Irish College in Paris" in *Catholic University Bulletin,* December 1909, and "The University of Douai" in *American Educational Review,* 1914.

The information about the three articles comes from a small notebook. A name has been cut from the fly-leaf, pieces have been cut from some pages and in several places lines of writing have been obliterated. The handwriting and contents show that it belonged to Patrick Boyle. Most of the notebook is a diary with very brief entries covering the period from 23 September 1892 to April 1907. At the end of the notebook he listed most of the articles which he had written, even ones from after 1907 when the diary entries ceased. For many of the articles he also noted the payment he had received. For those in the IER on Sedulius, O'Donovan and O'Molony he received £2 each, and for that on Marshal MacMahon £3; he does not mention any sums for the other IER articles.

For the articles in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* he received £13 for the one on the Irish colleges on the continent and £6 for that on Apostolic Schools. He received £8 for the article in *New Ireland Review,* £8 for that in *American Educational Review* and £10 for that in *Catholic University Bulletin,* the three articles mentioned above,

TD

AN EARLY PHOTOGRAPH OF ST PETER'S, PHIBSBORO

Mr Domhnall O Luanaigh, Keeper of Printed Books in the National Library, Dublin, drew our attention to the existence of the photograph which is reproduced as the frontispiece in this issue. It is part of a collection of photographs of Dublin and Killarney which is in the Royal Archives in Windsor Castle.

The Archivist in Windsor told me that the collection was assembled by Prince Albert in 1861 but that there is no evidence to identify the photographer. She supplied me with a print from the original negative and authorised the use of it in this issue. (A condition for its reproduction was the printing of the precise wording of the copyright notice).

The date can be moved back a few years before 1861. The white wall near the centre of the photograph is the end wall of two small houses. They were on the site of the present sacristy and transept. They were purchased and demolished to make room for the new building. This started in the Autumn of 1857, according to Thomas McNamara's *Memoirs.*

The photograph, then, was taken before the Autumn of 1857. Can we say how much earlier? The Celtic cross visible at the left gives some help in answering this. It is the work of James Cahill who began providing such works in 1852, from 23 Marlboro Street. At the Royal Hibernian Academy exhibition of 1856 Cahill exhibited two pieces, one of them being "The figure of the Virgin" for the cross for Phibsboro Church. (This figure is on the side of the cross facing the church door). As the figure is carved from the stone of the cross it is probable that what he exhibited was a plaster cast. This might mean that the cross was erected in 1856 thus dating the photograph to 1856-57. It could not be earlier than 1852.

TD

Austin Ibekwem CM

In 1981 seven young men were received into our seminaire in Ogobia by Fr Stan Brindley, the Director. Austin Ibekwem was one of these seven. As each one unpacked his luggage in the course of the year one could glean something of their characters from the contents of their loads. All were striving to become like Christ, according to the teaching of St Vincent. Austin showed great zeal and enthusiasm in this pursuit. He was particularly zealous in the performance of all his assignments both inside and outside the community. His dedication to what the students called his "mini parish" station was indicative of his ability and capacities.

In 1982 he went to our house of studies. Blessed Ghebre-Michael House, in Ikot Ekpene with his seminaire companions. It was here that I came to know and understand this young man. He was a great community man in every way, especially in his life-style. He had the rare ability to hold one spellbound in conversation, no matter how long drawn out the conversation might be. He punctuated all his conversation with proverbs which he was always careful to explain as far as possible. He did this in the original language of the proverb. Austin was an original kind of character. One could not become bored when he was around, because he had the capacity to inject humour into every situation.

Austin was a man of prayer and was very convinced of St Vincent's dictum: "Give me a man of prayer and he can do all things". His regularity at Legion of Mary meetings and his great interest in the village apostolate endeared him to all, but especially to the old folk. Austin seemed to find in them both the image of the Lord and of his own parents. He was totally dedicated to the people of the village and helped them in every way possible. Naturally they were very appreciative of his kindness and, of course, his ability to converse with them in their own language was a great help.

We will miss Austin very much indeed at Ghebre Michael's, as will the people of the village for whom he lived and worked so zealously. In spite of his ill health he carried on cheerfully and patiently, being prepared like St Paul "to be spent for others". He died in the service of the Lord and of the people of God. As St Vincent would say, in all things let us give thanks to God for we do not know what is in the mind of the Lord. Austin was very prepared to meet the Lord, but perhaps not so

soon. However, he would often say jokingly: "Let us be prepared at all times. I am prepared at all times to return to my Maker and to rest with him eternally".

By nature Austin was of a genial and kindly disposition. In his whole way of life he followed St Vincent's plans. His religious life and his sociability were indeed very edifying. He always spoke out his mind clearly, but in a friendly and light-hearted way.

As I have already said, we will miss Austin at Ghebre Michael's very much and we will miss him in the Bigard Seminary in Enugu, where he was studying at the time of his death. May he rest in peace.

Cyril Mbata CM

AUSTIN NWANKWOR IBEKWEM CM
Born: 1950, in Agba Umana, Ezeagu Local Government Area, Anambra State, Nigeria.
Entered the Congregation: 17 November 1981.
Vows: 3 August 1987.

Died: 6 August 1987.

Fr Leo O'Mahoney CM

When Fr Christy O'Leary was made Provincial in 1955 the first appointment he had to make was to fill the vacancy of superior in Sunday's Well, Cork. The community in Cork pressed Fr Christy to tell them whom he had in mind for this post. Fr O'Leary said: "I cannot announce his name yet, but one thing I say about your next superior is that he is a perfect gentleman". He was referring to Fr Leo O'Mahoney, who died on 9 September 1987. I had the privilege of having him as my superior from 1956 to 1962. I can concur with Fr O'Leary's statement that he was a gentleman, and much more besides.

Leo O'Mahoney was born in Cork in 1903. He went to Maynooth to study for the priesthood for the diocese of Cork. While at Maynooth he was strongly influenced by the Vincentian spiritual directors there and expressed his desire to join the Vincentians. Due to the reluctance of the spiritual directors to be seen as "poaching", and the anxiety of the

bishop of Cork and the staff in Maynooth to keep Leo for the diocese, he was not able to follow his desire to enter the Vincentian community until after his ordination, which took place on 19 June 1927. He was appointed to All Hallows College, where he served in the formation of students for the priesthood first as dean for seventeen years and then as spiritual director for twelve.

Fr Leo was by nature a methodical man. His long years of seminary life moulded him into a very methodical and predictable kind of person. As time passed even his stories became more and more predictable. He took note of all the spiritual books he read and the retreat conferences he heard and made a heroic effort to put all their suggestions into practice. He was as regular as clockwork at all his spiritual exercises and the other events in his order of day. If one did not know his warm smiling personality one might have found his approach to life rather rigid. His life seemed based on the principle that if you keep the rules they will keep you and bring you to God. While he imposed this way of life on himself he did not expect it from everyone else. Fr Leo was open to the views and experiences of those who differed from him. Noteworthy in this regard was the unlikely friendship which he had with Fr John Shanahan while he was in All Hallows. Fr Leo's numerous stories about Fr Shanahan showed how much he admired, and learned from, this man, who was so different from Leo in his attitude to life and spirituality. Fr Leo's willingness to listen and appreciate the point of view of others helped to form his warm friendly character, which hid a steel-like determination to do God's will in every aspect of his life.

Fr Leo O'Mahoney became, even in his lifetime, part of the rich tradition and legend of All Hallows College. The many priests from All Hallows who came to visit him in Cork testified to the high regard in which he was held by All Hallows students, especially as spiritual director. Fr Leo was always the same reassuring self, ready to listen to and support whoever came to him. His high valuation of the dignity of the priesthood characterised his whole life as a priest. A real highlight of his life was to see his nephew Dermot O'Mahoney raised to the priesthood and subsequently ordained bishop.

On his arrival in Cork Fr Leo quickly became part of the Cork Vincentian legend. He organised the splendid centenary celebrations in 1956, ably helped by Fr Sinnott. He helped organise the very successful General Mission in Cork city in 1960. He often joked about leaving information in the archives for his successor in Cork in the year 2056. He will be remembered in Cork for his care for the Vincentian church and heritage. Among his achievements in Cork must be mentioned

his cajolling Fr John Oakey into writing the booklet on the life of Fr Michael O'Sullivan, the first superior of Sunday's Well, who had been Vicar General of the diocese.

Fr Leo remained in Cork when his term as superior ended. Not so long afterwards his health began to deteriorate. His illness gradually limited the amount of pastoral work he could do. Yes, a gentleman; but much more besides; a priest in the mould of St Vincent de Paul. May he rest in peace.

Diarmuid O'Farrell CM

LEO O'MAHONEY CM
Born: Cork 10 April 1903.
Ordained a priest for the diocese of Cork in Maynooth by Dr Edward Byrne, archbishop of Dublin, 19 June 1927.
Entered CM: 7 September 1927.
Final vows: 8 September 1929.

Appointments
1928-1955 All Hallows.
1955-1987 St Vincent's, Cork.

Died 9 September 1987.