COLLOQUE

Journal of the Irish Province of the
Congregation of the Mission

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Contents

Editorial

This is the last issue of *Colloque* under my editorship. The next issue, No. 36, Autumn 1997, will be produced by a new Editor.

During his last year as Provincial I asked Mark Noonan to give some thought to the question of a successor to me as Editor, and to raise it with his successor-designate as soon as his name was known. I had two reasons for making this request. The first was that I felt I was getting stale in the position and that it was time for a fresh mind to tackle the job. The second reason was that I felt that a younger confrere should be in charge of producing our Provincial Journal.

Perhaps this is as good a place as any to put on record the origins of *Colloque.* I took up a new appointment in St Mary's College, Strawberry Hill, in the autumn of 1974. I began to read fairly systematically on Vincentian topics and gradually came to the conclusion that it would be a good idea to have, in the Irish Province, a Journal which would provide a means for confreres of the Province to publish their contributions on such topics. A decade or so previously two periodicals had ceased publication. In the Congregation *Les Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission* and in Ireland *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record* had both stopped appearing. Both had carried historical and biographical articles of great interest to their respective readerships, and no other periodicals ever really filled the gaps left when these ceased publication. To my mind, that was a significant loss. I thought that within the Irish Province there was a need for a publication somewhat resembling those two which had vanished.

Shortly after he had become Provincial I discussed my idea with Richard McCullen one day in 293 Waldegrave Road. He was in favour, and it was he who subsequently chose the name *Colloque,* reflecting back to the exercise in sharing which we used to have in the seminaire on Saturday evenings. He asked Philip Walshe, who had experience in producing the St Paul's *Record* to be Editor, and myself to be his assistant. Philip, in conjunction with Patrick Funge of Elo Press, decided on the cover and the overall format. I took over the Editorship with No. 6.

For a decade or so all contributions were written by confreres of the Irish Province. Then a number of confreres, individually, suggested to me that it would be a good idea if, from time to time, confreres of other Provinces were invited to contribute, and also if significant articles which had appeared in foreign-language Vincentian publications could be re-published in translation in *Colloque.* Both of these suggestions were acted upon.

In spite of that last point, most contributions have continued to be written by confreres of the Irish Province, revealing a wealth of talent which had previously remained largely untapped. I would, therefore, like to record my gratitude to all the contributors who have made *Colloque* such a success.

Thomas Davitt CM

God's Will

Vincent de Paul

(Talk to the community in St Lazare, 7 March 1659.
Translation by TD)

My dear confreres, we're explaining chapter II of our Rules, dealing with gospel teaching. We spoke the last time about "Seek first the kingdom of God and its justice", from paragraph 2 of this chapter, so here we are now at paragraph 3, which says:

> A sure way for a Christian to grow rapidly in holiness is a conscientious effort to carry out God's will in all circumstances and at all times. Each one of us, then, should try to integrate into his life, as far as possible, these four principles: (1) we should conscientiously carry out what is ordered and avoid what is forbidden, when these orders or prohibitions come from God, from the Church, from our superiors, or from the Rules or Constitutions of our Congregation; (2) when there is choice open to us in matters neither ordered nor forbidden we should choose the less palatable rather than the more pleasing. This does not apply, of course, if the more pleasing things, being in some sense necessary, have to be chosen. Still, though, in such cases our motivation ought not to be that we like them, but simply that they are more pleasing to God. Finally, if when faced with a choice between things neither ordered nor forbidden they are either equally attractive or equally unattractive, then any one of them may be chosen at random as coming from God's Providence; (3) when something unexpected happens to us in body or mind, good or bad, we are to accept it without fuss as from God's loving hand; (4) our motive for putting the above three principles into practice is that they are God's will. It is in this way that we can imitate Christ, the Lord. Christ always lived by these principles, and for that very motive. He tells us this himself: *I always do what pleases* the Father.

Now when I was reading that I saw that a printer's error had slipped in, which we hadn't noticed (1). It's where it says: *When faced with*

a choice between things neither ordered nor forbidden, and they are equally attractive or equally unattractive; this should be replaced by: *When faced with a choice between things neither ordered nor forbidden there is no real element of personal preference between the options available.* In that case it doesn't matter which of them we go for.

So, the rule says that carrying out God's will is what helps us to develop our relationship with God as Christians and missioners. We should bear in mind that authorities on the spiritual life have suggested various methods of doing this, and which they have each carried out in their own way. Some have suggested complete indifference, the aim being neither to want nor to reject any of the things which God sends. In every eventuality they turn to God, with no preference one way or the other. Indifference is certainly a holy attitude. Oh, what a holy attitude to have, wanting what God wants, both in a general way and in actual fact!

Others have suggested acting with a pure intention, seeing God in anything that happens, and doing things or putting up with things from this perspective. That's very neat. But not to waste time, always doing God's will is far better than all that, because it covers both indifference and purity of intention as well as all other methods which are used or suggested. And if there is any other method which develops our relationship with God it is covered by this one in an even better way. Who is more indifferent than someone who does God's will in everything, never his own in anything, and who doesn't want even legitimate things except in so far as God wants them? Can anyone be freer or more available for carrying out God's good pleasure than that? And as for purity of intention, how could there possibly be a better form of it than carrying out God's will? Is there anyone with a more perfect purity of intention than wanting and doing everything God wants and in the way he wants it? If we compare all these methods we'll see that God is more honoured by the carrying out of his will than by all the others, and no one honours him more than the person who deliberately commits himself to this holy way of acting. That's a reason for really giving ourselves to God so as to obey this rule.

Here's another reason: It's obvious that doing work in a merely human and perfunctory way, without any higher motivation such as carrying out God's will, kills such work. Being present at the divine office, mental prayer, preaching, work, if done aimlessly, what does it all amount to except soulless activity? It's counterfeit money lacking the prince's stamp, since God takes note of actions only in so far as he sees himself in them and they are dedicated to him.

In the garden of the earthly paradise our father Adam was a fine tree which, in the normal way, bore fruit which pleased his Lord. But the devil got him to sin, his will was confused and, separated from God's will, was unable of its own accord to produce anything which could please God. We are sprung from that contaminated trunk and, humanly speaking, are equally incapable, since everything coming from that direction, from the old Adam, is totally unacceptable to God. Yes, totally, because they are natural acts in no way related to God because they are not guided by him.

If there are teachers who hold that anything not done for God is sinful, why don't we hold that, even if it's not sinful, it should at least be regarded as not having been done at all? Now the rule tells us how to make what we do, or don't do, good, how to ensure that what we do or avoid doing meets the requirements for pleasing God, when it tells us to do God's will in everything and at all times. It tells us also that each one of us should try, as far as possible, to get into the habit of this. If we have enough of God's grace, and really believe that in his goodness he never fails to give enough, shouldn't we give ourselves to him right now, to please him, and from now on to act in him and for him? *Deus virtutum:* he's the God of virtues, so we should put these virtues into practice and do everything for God! (2). O my Saviour, what a blessing it would be if there were a few in the Congregation who were faithful to that, if there were many, if all of us were in that blessed group! My God, wouldn't the Mission please you! O Divine Goodness, you know it would! And we, Fathers, we know that our work is useless if it's not given life and soul by God's will. It's the gospel teaching that prompts us to do everything to please him. We should give lots of praise to his infinite Majesty because of the grace he has given the Congregation to adopt this completely holy attitude, an attitude which always helps us to become holy. Yes, right from the start we've always wanted to set out on the road of those close to God, by honouring him in all our works. And if that hasn't been done as fully as it should, then you don't have to search for the reason: it's this wretch who hasn't led by example.

Our third reason is our Lord's. His habit was to do his Father's will in everything all the time; that's why he came on earth, not to do what he wanted but what his Father wanted. O Saviour, O Goodness, how clearly, how obviously, you put virtues into practice! You're the King of Glory, yet you came into the world just to do the will of him who sent you. You know, my dear confreres, how much this dedica-

tion meant to our Lord. *Cibus meus est,* he used to say, *ut faciam voluntatem ejus qui misit me* (Jn 4:34); doing my Father's will is what sustains me, what strengthens me.

Since that's the case, Fathers, oughtn't we think ourselves blessed in having joined a Congregation which makes a particular point of doing what the Son of God did? Oughtn't we turn to him frequently to learn the height, depth and breadth of this, something which goes straight to God, embraces all that is good and makes us avoid all that is bad? *Cibus meus est ut faciam voluntatem ejus qui misit me.* O my Saviour, that's what you did! St John's way was repentance; he was filled with the desire to repent and to get others to repent; that's why he came into the world. But you, Lamb of God, who take away the sins of the world, you came here filled with the desire to do your Father's will and to teach us to do it. Elijah had this drive and this marvellous zeal for the glory of his God; he set everything on fire and ablaze in order to impress respect and fear on men's hearts; and you, my Saviour, you were driven by this great incomparable desire, that God's will be done by all creatures; that's why you inserted into the Lord's Prayer *Fiat voluntas tua.* That's the prayer you taught your disciples, that's what you wanted everybody to ask and do. What? The eternal Father's will. Where? On earth, as in heaven. And how? As the angels and saints do it, promptly, totally, constantly, and lovingly. I'm quite sure there are no priests here who have said mass, nobody who has performed other acts which are holy in themselves, for any reason except to honour God's majesty; yet it could be that God would reject our offerings because on those days we did our own will. Isn't that what the prophet meant when he said, speaking for God: "I want no more of your fasting; you think you're honouring me, but you're doing the opposite, because when you fast you're doing your own will, and so you spoil your fast". The same could be said about any action: to do your own will means to spoil your devotions, your work, your penances, etc. For the last twenty years I've never read that reading, from chapter 58 of Isaia, without being greatly upset; yet in spite of that I'm no better.

So, what's to be done if we're not to waste time and effort? The answer is never to act from personal interest or inclination, but to get into the habit of doing God's will in everything; in everything, mind you, not just in some. It's sanctifying grace that makes both the person and what he does acceptable to God. What a relief it is to think that when I keep my rules, when I do my work, when I obey my superiors, and when I turn to God to offer him all these things, that's how I make

myself always acceptable to God. So we must ask for sanctifying grace, take possession of it and put it to use; otherwise, all is lost.

"Many will say to me", Jesus Christ said, and I was talking to you about this recently, "Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy, drive out demons, and put many virtues into practice in your name?". "I've never known you", he'll reply, "Be off with you, you evil people".

"But, Lord, are you calling the prophecies we've made and miracles we've done, in your name, evil?"

"Get away from me, you scoundrels, I don't know you".

"Well who, then, are going to get into the kingdom of heaven?"

"It'll be those who do my heavenly Father's will".

So you see our Lord will never say to anyone who has tried to follow God's good pleasure always: "I don't know you". Quite the contrary, that's the one he'll bring into his glory. O Saviour, give us the grace to fill ourselves with this attitude, never to produce wild fruit, but that all we do may be for you and through you, always acceptable in your Father's sight; please make us take on this commitment and carry out all our work according to your will.

Let's give ourselves to God, to pay attention to this and stick to it, because, by doing this, won't we have great reason for praising God? Won't he look favourably on the Congregation in general, and on each individual? Anyway, *in nomine Domini!* [In God's name!]. That's enough on the motives which urge us to get into the habit of doing God's will in everything and making a resolution to follow our Lord's teaching: *Cibus meus est ut faciam voluntatem ejus qui misit me.* Let's go on now and see what it involves.

I'm convinced I should do it – but how? We must realise that everything we do, everything we avoid doing, is commanded, or forbidden, or indifferent, the latter being things neither commanded nor forbidden. That's how we know God's will. I'll say it again, everything a person does is commanded, forbidden, or neither. As regards things ordered or forbidden, God wants us to the former and avoid doing the latter: Here's something commanded, so I must do it; here's something forbidden, I must avoid doing it. We must always do them, as long as they are commanded by God, either directly by himself or indirectly by the Church. Everything he commands must be done; everything which the Church orders must be done; she's his spouse, and he's that father of the family who wants his children to obey their mother as they would himself. And we'll do God's will in this if, directing what we do to him, each one says or resolves: "I want to do this in order to be acceptable

to God", or "I want to avoid doing a forbidden thing in order to please his goodness". If we behave in that way we'll infallibly do God's will. How does a child do its father's will, or a subject the king's? By doing what they command and avoiding what they forbid; the child does it out of respect for his father, the subject to obey his king; by following their words and commands each does what the father or king wants. You, then, you'll do God's will when you intend to give glory to this loving Father and to obey lovingly this King of love, doing what he commands and avoiding what he forbids. But to make this habit really effective we must say: "I'm doing this, or avoiding that, because that's your good pleasure". That's the soul of the matter.

I said that the Church commands, and that we have to obey it as the spouse of Jesus Christ, because under that title it has the right to make laws and bind the faithful to keep them. Yes, it binds them to keep what is commanded by the councils, by the Popes and by the bishops. There doesn't seem to be anything meritorious in doing that; such things can, however, be made good by offering them to God, even natural things like eating, sleeping and so on, when they're done in the name of the Lord, as the Apostle says (1 Cor. 10:31).

In all these ways, then, we do God's will: Firstly, doing what is commanded and avoiding what is forbidden, not just by God, by his Church, by our Rules and spiritual and Church superiors, but also by the king, governors, magistrates, police officers and judges, who are put there by God for temporal affairs. Obeying them is doing God's will, because God wants it that way. Secondly, in the case of things which are indifferent, choosing those which are more helpful in subduing the old man (3). Thirdly, doing in God's sight things which neither please nor displease, physically or mentally, even natural things, even desired by the lower appetite, when necessity obliges us to do them.

There's a fourth way of knowing God's will, inspirations; for he often lets us know his will by enlightening our intelligence, or giving a fillip to our affectivity. But, if we are not to be deceived, we need the grain of salt. Out of the many thoughts and feelings we get there will be some which look good, yet they are not from God and not to his liking; so we've got to examine them, turn to God and ask what's to be done; we've got to check out the motives, the purpose, the means, to see if everything smacks of his good pleasure; we've got to go over them with experienced people, get the opinion of those in charge, since they're entrusted with the treasures of God's wisdom; in following their advice we're doing God's will.

There's a fifth way of knowing and doing it, and that is by doing what is rational. Something crops up, neither commanded nor forbidden; but it is according to reason, so it's God's will, which is never contrary to reason, and we can even do it as the Church's intention, because it makes us pray for this grace in this prayer: *Praesta, quaesumus, omnipotens Deus, ut, semper rationabilia meditantes, quae tibi sunt placita et dictis exsequamur et factis;* We ask you, almighty God, that, thinking always of what is reasonable, we do what you want by our words and actions (4). You see, then, that according to this prayer to do an act which seems reasonable is to do God's will. That's always to be understood with the grain of salt of Christian prudence and with the advice of those who direct us, because it could happen that what is involved may be reasonable itself, but may not be so in its present context of time, place or method; in such a case it must not be done.

It should be noted that all we've been saying about doing God's will in these ways concerns doing God's will actively. It can also be done passively, by submitting to God when his will touches us; for example, in the unexpected things that happen to our surprise. Something pleasant surprises us; news arrives – what examples have I? – about the important conversion of a prominent person, or of a whole country, or that God is well served by people we like, or that peace has been made between two families or two provinces at odds with each other in a way that scandalises the Church; all such things are to be accepted from God's hand, we are to be glad about them as our Lord was when he thanked his Father for having revealed his secrets to simple people. Then, on the other hand, something unpleasant happens, sickness, some loss, a calumny, etc; these also must be accepted as coming from God; he wants to test us in this way, since it's he who sends all these afflictions: *non est malum in civitate quod non fecerit Dominus* [There is no misfortune in the city which is not from God] (Am 3:6). In the Garden of Olives our Lord was thinking of the torments he was going to suffer; he saw them as willed by his Father; we, then, have to say, as he did: "May my will not be done, Lord, but yours". That's how we put passive acceptance of God's will into practice, when his will is shown to us in such haphazard events, pleasant or unpleasant. We accept them as coming from God, in whose hands are our life and our death. God's will, then, is both active and passive: active, when we do it by obeying his commands and doing things which please him; passive, when we accept his doing it himself in us without us. That's not clear, but I haven't enough time to explain

it better. We'll have some conferences on this and then you'll see better what God's will is and how it can be done in all its various aspects. I would like, though, if we could get into the habit of offering to God all we do and all we suffer, saying to him: "My God, it's your will that I go and prepare a sermon, say mass, do such and such a thing; that I'm tempted, not feeling well, worried; that I'm upset or at ease, sad or happy; I go along with this, Lord, and I do so because it's what you want". Let's now look at some ways for making this easier.

The first way for getting in on this is taught us in the Our Father: *Fiat voluntas tua, sicut in caelo et in terra* [Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven]. Now since our Lord put these words into the daily prayer he wants us to ask him every day for the grace to do his will on earth as it is done in heaven, ceaselessly, totally, in simple and unalterable agreement with our Lord. We should often pray, then, that he would be pleased to make us accept what he wants from us and what he commands us to do, and that will be a great way for us to obtain the grace to get into this good habit.

The second way is to get into the habit of not just saying this prayer, but of actually doing what it says, starting tomorrow, or right now. For example, you can offer God your patience in listening to this poor fellow speaking to you, and saying: "Lord, I want to listen, and to do, for your glory, everything made known to me in your name". It's important, you see, to make his will real like that, and to get into the habit of renewing our intention often, especially on getting up in the morning: "My God, I'm getting up to serve you; I'm off down to prayer to please you, to hear or say mass to honour you, to work because you want me to". Finally, we must work at turning to him in our more important activities to offer them totally to him and to do them in accordance with his will.

"But, Father, I keep forgetting; I go for hours, half a day, entire days, without thinking about God, or without alerting myself to offer whatever I'm doing to him".

If there are some among us like that we should greatly regret it, worry about the lost merit of such things or at least about the pleasure God would have got from them had they been offered to him. To make up for this lack, all of us should make a general offering to God of all the day's actions, as soon as we get up. As well as this it's a good idea to repeat this offering once or twice in the course of the morning, and again after dinner, saying: "My God, please accept all the inclinations of my heart and body; draw them to you; I offer you them, along with my rules, my

work and my sufferings". And, my dear confreres, the more we do that the easier it becomes, and the more meritorious. This should be done at least four times a day. In this way our love will deepen, and this love will make us persevere and grow in this good habit. But, Fathers, this has got to be actually done, what I've just said has got to be done, if we are really to get into the habit of doing God's will.

Self-denial is also necessary, since we must go against natural inclinations if we are to exclude self-gratification from what we offer to God; this virtue is the way to overcome self. It lets us by-pass what suits and pleases us; it's what gives us the strength to do what our personal inclination would avoid, to do what God asks; and, Fathers, it's what we've got to tackle head-on, getting used to disciplining ourselves in everything, mentally or physically gratifying. It's the third method we have for getting used to doing God's will always. We'll gradually get in on the idea; it'll become a habit or, better still, it will become a grace from God, so that from constant repetition we get used to it and, like some, will end up by being completely taken over and motivated by it. Unfortunately, how few there are who never lose sight of God! We see some among us who always walk and act in his presence. How many lay people are in the habit of this! I recently met someone who was worried because they had been diverted from God's presence three times in one day. People like that will be our judges, and one day will denounce us before the divine Majesty because we forgot him, having something else to do than loving him and showing our love by our work and by turning towards him.

Let us pray, Fathers, to our Lord, so that he will give us the grace to say as he did: *Cibus meus est ut faciam voluntatem ejus qui misit me.* Fathers, Brothers, let's give ourselves to God, as best we may, right from this moment, tomorrow at prayer, in everything, everywhere, always, hungering and thirsting for this justice. Let's think about it; let's tease out especially what I said to you so irritably and in such-a mixed-up way; let's stoke up our will to repeat and to live up to those divine words of Jesus Christ: "My food is to do his will and accomplish his work". Saviour of the world, that was your pleasure, your ambrosia, your nectar, to do your Father's will. We are your children, who run to your arms to imitate what you did; grant us this grace. Since we can't do it of our own accord, we ask you for it, we hope for it from you, but trustingly and with a real desire to follow you. O Lord, if it pleases you to give this spirit to the Congregation that it should work at always making itself more acceptable in your sight, you will fill it with a

burning desire to become like you; and this desire already makes it live with your life, so that each one can say with St Paul: *"Vivo ego, jam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus"* (Gal 2:20) [I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me]. O blessed Congregation! Blessed are all of us! If we aim for that we'll inevitably reach it. What happiness to have these words apply to ourselves: *"Vivo ego, jam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus"*. For we no longer live a human life, we live a divine one, and we will live that if our hearts are filled with this intention of doing God's will, and our actions bear it out. Now if there are some who can say that they are already doing this, which is true, there are others like myself who can say: "Am I not unfortunate in seeing my confreres live the life of Jesus Christ, acceptable in the sight of his eternal Father, while I live a sensual animal life, deserving to be banished from their company as something displeasing to God?". May it please his goodness that this attitude becomes so rooted in our soul that, becoming ashamed of our cowardice, we double our speed so as to catch up with the leaders on the road to perfection. May God give us this grace.

Notes

1. It is very interesting that as late in his life as eighteen months before his death Vincent should be unwilling to admit a mistake of his own and, instead, put the blame on the printer. I think it is impossible to accept his statement that the error was made by the printer. It is highly unlikely that a printer with the words *"quae nee sunt grata nee ingrata"* in the copy before him would have set up in print the words *"aequaliter vel grata vet non grata"*. It seems far more likely that the wording as printed was as Vincent had given it to the printer, but that when he read it later he realised it did not express the nuance he had intended. So he blamed the printer! It is worth noting that the first edition of the Common Rules, with the earlier wording in this paragraph, did not have the date 1658 on the title-page. When the Rules were re-printed with the correction, the date 1658 was inserted on the title-page. The three copies of the Common Rules, with 1658 on the title-page, which are in the archives of the Irish Province have the corrected version of this paragraph, so they are not first editions. Similarly, the illustration of a title-page with 1658, captioned "First edition", on page 97 of the 1984 Latin edition (page 99 of the 1989 English translation) of the Common Rules, is incorrect.
2. The expression *Dominus virtutum* appears in many psalms in the Vulgate: 45, 56, 79, 83,88, etc. Vincent takes "virtus" to mean "virtue", for his own purpose, here and elsewhere. The JB has "Yahweh Sabaoth" while in the breviary the Grail translation has "Lord of hosts" in Ps 45.
3. For the Pauline concept of the "old man" see Rm 6:6, Eph 4:22, Col 3:9.
4. In Vincent's day this prayer was in the liturgy of the 6th Sunday after Epiphany; at present it is in that of the 7th Sunday in Ordinary Time.

Vincent de Paul's Health Record

Thomas Davitt

(An expanded version of a talk given to the participants of the CIF session in Paris, 8 April 1996)

Most confreres know quite a lot about Vincent and his achievements. In what sense, though, can the ordinary confrere take him as a model? Vincent was always the superior general, and the oldest confrere in the Congregation. Both of these facts make him somewhat different from ourselves. In this article I want to present him in a way that shows him just like each of us, a man who could get sick and tired, and who grew old and experienced most of the problems associated with the aging process.

Sources of information about his health

Vincent died on 27 September 1660. On 10 September 1664 the first biography of him appeared, the three volume *La vie du vénérable serviteur de Dieu Vincent de Paul* by Louis Abelly. The author was born in Paris in 1604, and first came into contact with Vincent around 1625-6, and was ordained in 1628 or 1629. He was involved in the Tuesday Conferences from their start, and gave missions and retreats with other members of this group as well as with Vincent's priests. In 1639 François Fouquet was ordained bishop for the diocese of Bayonne and Abelly became his Vicar General. Four years later, when the bishop was transferred to Agde, Abelly returned to Paris and became curé of the parish of Saint Josse, the smallest in the city. He was already somewhat of an author and continued in that field. In 1650 Vincent asked him to take on the direction of the Daughters of the Cross and in 1657 he asked him to take over, from his own priests, the pastoral ministry at the General Hospital established for beggars in April 1656. Abelly kept up his writing and in 1659 Vincent sent three copies of one of Abelly's books, plus a letter from the author, to Edme Jolly, superior in Rome; one copy was for the Pope (VII 481).

The General Assembly which began on 15 January 1661 elected René Alméras as Superior General. It was not surprising that the new General thought of Abelly, an established writer and lifelong associate of Vincent, as the person best fitted to write a biography of him. He

was given access to written material, and guaranteed the co-operation of Vincent's two secretaries Brothers Bertrand Ducournau and Louis Robineau. Just when he had finished his book Abelly was named bishop of Rodez in June 1664. He went to his diocese in October 1664 but suffered a stroke in the summer of the following year and retired to Paris, where he took up residence in Saint Lazare. He died there in 1691 and was buried in a side chapel of the church (1).

Chapters 50-53 of Book I deal with Vincent's health, and all quotations which follow are translated from chapter 50 unless otherwise noted.

The other great source of contemporary information about Vincent's health is his own correspondence, as he often refers to it when writing to members of his Congregation, especially those outside France. We also learn something about his health from letters written to him by Louise de Marillac.

His physical appearance
Abelly tells us:

> As far as physical appearance goes Fr Vincent was well-built, of medium height. His head was a bit fleshy, rather heavy looking but well formed and quite proportionate to the rest of his body. His brow was broad and imposing, his face neither too fat nor too lean. His glance was mild, but he could give a piercing look. His hearing was keen (2).

The medium height can be more accurately determined. At the official recognition of his remains in 1830, at the time of the translation of the relics, his height was calculated from the skeleton as having been 1m 62cm, or roughly 5' 6" (3).

Age 34
About 1615 he had

> a serious illness which left his legs and feet swollen in such a way that this trouble lasted until his death. As well as this… he was very susceptible to weather changes and, as a result, liable to slight fever which became habitual and lasted sometimes three or four days, and sometimes up to a fortnight or more. . . he used to call this his 'little fever'. The only way he could get rid of it was by sweating, which he used to induce for several successive days, especially during the summer. To do this, during the very hot weather when you could hardly bear one sheet at night, he had

> to have three blankets and at each side of his body a large tin hot water bottle, and he spent the night that way. As a result, he used to get out of bed in the morning as though he were getting out of a bath, the mattress and blankets all soaked with sweat… As well as this 'little fever' he was subject for a long time to a quartan fever which hit him once or twice a year…
>
> He suffered over a period of forty-five years from the troublesome swelling of his legs and feet already mentioned, and sometimes it was so bad that he could hardly stand or walk. At other times the inflammation and pain were so severe that he had to stay in bed. Because of this, from 1632 when he came to Saint Lazare he had to have a horse, both because of the amount of business which began to accumulate then, and continuously ever since, and because the house is so far out of town.

Age 50

In May 1631 he wrote to Louise de Marillac:

> My little indisposition is not at all my usual little fever, but a bit of trouble with my leg as a result of a slight injury from the kick of a horse, and a little tumour which had appeared a week or two previously (I 110).

Age 52

In April 1633 he reported that he had been bled for his little fever, and on May 1 that he was to take a laxative the following day, and

> The fall of the horse under me, and then down on top of me, was extremely dangerous… The only effect remaining is a slight strain in the tendons (I 198).

In an undated later from around the same time he thanks Louise for the good bread, jams and apples which she had sent him (I 222). She also sent other things:

> Your medicine, Mademoiselle, has caused me nine bowel movements. The waters never did anything for me, neither when I had my fever in Forges nor here… My little fever is, as you remark, double-tertian but you know that at this time of year I normally have double-quartan and I've already had it this autumn (I 581).

Forges-les-Eaux is a spa about 120 km north-east of Paris where Vincent and other confreres went for the waters.

Age 58
On 9 or 10 October 1639 he wrote to Louise:

> My little fever is tertian; I'm having the third bout. It hit me the evening I had the happiness of seeing you, because I went down to the refectory immediately after vomiting up the little dose I took. The first bout deprived me totally of sleep. The next day, and since, I brought on a sweat which caused the bouts to lessen. Also, I have been bled twice, so that the one I am going through at the moment is very mild. Our doctor is of the opinion I should take a laxative next Wednesday. I would like you to get the medicine made up for me. The sort you sent recently was useless but what Fr Blatiron took wasn't; it did him a lot of good and he has gone off with the bishop of Alet (I 587).

It also worked for Vincent, as he reported to her on the 13th:

> I thank you very humbly for your good medicine. I took it yesterday and had three bowel movements. Our doctor thinks I should take some more tomorrow with some syrup of rosepale (I 597).

Coste informs us that that syrup was to control diarrhoea.

Age 59
In the autumn of the following year he had the fever again, as he told Louise on 28 October 1640:

> Don't be worried about my health. The fever I had yesterday is much less and I'm going to take medicine at once which will bring on my little sweats (II 130).

Age 63
Apart from references to things like being bled there are no further specific references to his health in his letters until 14 October 1644 when he tells Antoine Portail that he has some trouble with his teeth, the only time he ever refers to this.

Age 64
A brief extract from Abelly fits in here:

> He had a serious and dangerous illness during 1645… The severity of this illness affected his brain and he was delirious for several hours.

Age 68

Abelly says that at this time Vincent used his horse

> till 1649 when his leg trouble got much worse after the long trip he made in Brittany and Poitou. This brought him to the stage where he could no longer mount or dismount. He would have been forced to stay in the house only that the late archbishop of Paris ordered him to make use of a small carriage.

Age 71

In March 1651 he wrote to Lambert aux Couteaux in Warsaw that he had not been out of the house for eight or ten days because of his fever (IV 342). In November of the same year he was at Orsigny, one of the Saint Lazare farms, on orders from the doctor to get "some fresh air because of my little fever" (IV 530).

Age 74

On 28 July 1655 he told the Saint Lazare community during a conference that he could no longer genuflect because of the pain in his legs (XI 207). On 9 November he wrote to Jean Martin in Turin that he has had three or four days of fever, ending two days previously (V 462), and on the 14th Louise wrote to him:

> Allow me to tell you that it's absolutely essential that your leg shouldn't be let dangle for a quarter of an hour, nor should it be exposed to the full heat of the fire. If it is cold you should warm it with heated linen on top of your breeches. And if you consider it useful, my most honoured Father, to try this mild ointment, it should be rubbed on lightly with a twice-folded cloth soaked in warm water. When the cloth gets cold you should re-soak it, but the water must not be hot nor completely cold. The bleedings, as well as the leg trouble, have weakened your body and when you put your poor leg on the floor the heat and humours go to it as to the weakest part. I wish you wouldn't take so many glasses of cold water, but allow your insides to calm down and cool off in order not to send the heat so violently to your poor leg. With the doctor's agreement perhaps the weight of half an *écu* of mineral crystal in the first glass of water would help the rest to pass more easily.

She adds a postscript:

> I take half a dram of tea every day and feel very well as a result; it gives strength and appetite (V 464).

On the 20th he wrote to Mark Cogley, an Irish confrere from Carrick-on-Suir, who was superior in Sedan, and told him that he was still in bed and being treated for erysipelas which had appeared on his leg after the fever had abated (V 468). On the 23rd he is still in bed (V 469), and on the 26th is still trying to get better (V 473). On the 29th his principal secretary, Brother Bertrand Ducournau, wrote to Louise:

> Fr Vincent's health is good and his leg is getting steadily better. However, he has a cold since yesterday and was bled today (V 647, sic).

The following day his other secretary, Brother Louis Robineau, mentions in a note that Vincent uses a carriage only because his infirmities no longer allow him to mount a horse (V 474). Three days later, on 3 December, Vincent wrote to Jean Martin in Turin that although his leg was improving it was not yet fully better (V 476). Shortly after this Louise passes on to him her latest suggestion; it was

> …to suggest the sweating of both legs, but not the body, by means of Monsieur I'Obligeois' sweating chamber, but not without the opinion of one or two doctors. You could take some tea between early morning broth and dinner, as experience has shown me that although it can't be regarded as food it is excellent for settling the stomach (V 478).

On the 15th he is still prevented from going out (V 481) and on the 17th he wrote to Etienne Blatiron in Genoa:

> I'm still in bed or on a chair, or rather two chairs, because of the pain I have in my legs which forces me to keep them supported all day long at roughly the level of my head. Apart from that I'm well (V 486).

Six weeks later, on 28 January 1656, he told Jean Martin in Turin that he had started going out of the house a week previously, something he had not been able to do for three months (V 532).

Age 75

Abelly has some information on this period:

> [The] swelling of the legs was getting worse all the time and reached the knees by 1656. He could bend them only with difficulty and needed a stick to walk…
> In 1656 he had another illness which began with a fever which lasted several days, and which ended with a great inflamma-

> tion on one leg which kept him in bed for some time and then confined him to his room for almost two months. It affected him to such an extent that he could not support himself, and he had to be carried from his bed to the fireside and back… From that year until the end of his life he had frequent attacks of fever and of other illnesses. During all of one Lent he had a great aversion to food, being able to eat hardly anything.

In late November of that year, 1656, he wrote to Louise:

> My little cold is getting better, thank God, and I do everything I can to help this. I don't leave my room, I take a sleep every morning, I eat everything I'm given, and each evening I've taken a sort of julep which Brother Alexandre gives me (VI 136).

Brother Alexandre Veronne was the infirmarian in Saint Lazare; he had learnt a certain amount of medicine from his step-father who was a doctor. He was the one person who could, and did, give orders to Vincent, which were obeyed.

Age 77

In the letters which have survived there is no reference at all to his health during 1657. Early in 1658

> as he was returning from town with another priest in the small carriage the main braces snapped and the overturning carriage suddenly pitched Fr Vincent out, and he gave his head a nasty bang on the pavement. He suffered from the effects of this for quite a long time, so much so, in fact, that he thought he was in danger of death from his injury, as fever set in a few days after his fall.

Abelly says the accident was at the end of 1658, but there is plenty of evidence in Vincent's own letters that it was at the beginning of the year. In a letter to Firmin Get in Marseille, 25 January 1658, he said he has been a fortnight in bed as a result of the accident (VII 58), and to Jean Martin in Turin, on the same day, he reported that he was still laid up but is improving (VII60). On 8 February he told Charles Ozenne, in Warsaw, that he was on the mend

> …after falling head first from a carriage; I'm recovering from this, thank God, though I'm still confined to my room because of the extreme cold. I hope to get out at the first thaw (VII 74-75).

The minutes of a Council meeting of the Daughters of Charity, dated

29 February 1658, record that Vincent was preserved from serious injury in this accident (XIII 737). (But 1658 was not a leap year!).

There is nothing further about his health till December of that year when he wrote that he could not go to a Tuesday conference because of his leg trouble, which was getting worse (VII 390). The meetings had been changed from Saint Lazare to the Collège des Bons Enfants, and he could not travel that distance. On 15 December he was still unable to go out (VII 403), and on the 22nd his leg is giving more trouble than usual and he cannot go downstairs and has to remain seated all day (VII 408).

Abelly has something to say about this period 1658-59:

> In 1658 there was further trouble, with his right ankle ulcerating. The pains in his knees were getting continuously worse, and from the beginning of 1659 he could not leave the house. He continued for some time, though, to come downstairs to prayer in the church with the community, to celebrate mass there, and to be present at priests' meetings in the hall set apart for them. As regards mass, a short while later he was unable to go up or down the sacristy stairs and had to vest and unvest at the altar…
> In 1658 he had trouble in one eye and, after trying several remedies without result, the doctor prescribed the application to the eye of the blood of a freshly-killed pigeon…
> Finally, not to bore the reader with an account of all the other illnesses which God sent Fr Vincent from time to time to test his virtue, it will be enough to say that there are few sicknesses or bodily infirmities which he did not experience.

Abelly then quotes Vincent as often saying to others, especially young confreres, that he had suffered from shortness of breath, hernia, headaches, chest and stomach troubles.

Age 78

In 1659 the first reference to his health in his letters occurs in a letter written in February to Sister Nicole Haran in Nantes, mentioning that he had been rather ill and confined to his room with leg trouble (VII 457). In March he wrote to Louise:

> I've had an attack of fever, brought on by a sudden cold spell, which caused heat and then shivering, as usual. It's a type of fever to which I'm very subject. One of my legs, which has been giving trouble for about a year, is better and I no longer bandage it; the other one is improving (VII 462).

In May, however, he reported to Jean Martin in Turin:

> I'm fairly well at the moment, apart from my legs, which can hardly support me any more (VII 567).

In June he admitted to Edme Menestrier, superior in Agen, that it had been five or six months since he had been out of the house (VII 589). At the beginning of July he wrote to François Fournier in Cahors that he had some sort of inflammation of the eyes which forced him to keep one of them covered (VIII 1), and on the 13th of the same month he told Louis Rivet, superior in Saintes:

> It is seven or eight months since I have gone out of the house, because of the state of my legs, which has got worse; and as well as that I have an inflammation of one eye for the past five or six weeks which is not getting any better, although I'm making use of several remedies (VIII 23).

By 8 August he has increased the period since he left the house to eight or ten months (VIII 68). Then there is nothing further till December.

On 17 December he admitted to Louis Dupont, superior in Treguier, that it was true that his legs would no longer support him (VIII 194), and two days later Guillaume Desdames, superior in Warsaw, was told:

> My legs are getting worse every day, and they no longer want to carry me (VIII 202).

Age 79

A short extract from Abelly fits in here:

> By the end of 1659 he had to celebrate mass in the infirmary chapel. In 1660, the year of his death, his legs finally gave out and he could no longer celebrate mass. He continued to be present at mass, though, up to the eve of his death, although he suffered incredible pain in going from his room to the chapel, and he had to use crutches to walk.

In a letter of 11 January 1660 he told Jean Dehorgny in Richelieu:

> As regards myself, I can no longer go downstairs because of my legs which are worse than they have been before (VIII 222).

On the 30th of the same month he admitted to Guillaume Desdames in Warsaw:

> There's no news from here. Everyone is reasonably well, apart from our usual invalids of whom I'm one. My legs have deserted me and I can no longer go downstairs or say mass (VIII 231).

On 5 March he told the same confrere that he had now to remain seated all day (VIII 259). On 28 May he told Jean Martin in Turin that his legs

> …no longer allow me to move from place to place except with great difficulty (VIII 301).

On 16 July he told the same confrere that the legs

> …no longer let me rest at night, nor walk during the day, nor even stand up. Apart from that I'm quite well (VIII 322).

Although there are more than forty further surviving letters between that date and 25 September, two days before his death, he makes no further reference to his health. Some passages from Abelly remedy this defect:

> He got weaker every day and ate hardly anything… He was then reduced to being unable to walk without crutches, and even then with unspeakable difficulty and in constant danger of falling, since he could hardly move his legs any more…
>
> Certainly if this venerable old man had no problem other than having to remain every day for two years, from morning till evening, without being able to move or help himself, particularly in the last year, this alone would have been a sufficient trial. But when you remember the fierce pain which his swollen knees and ulcerated feet caused all the time, especially at night when he could find no position which gave relief, you have to admit that his life was an unending martyrdom. But on top of all this God allowed another source of suffering. . . This added trial was that he had great difficulty in urinating during the last year of his life. This caused him much pain and trouble, as he could neither raise himself up nor help himself with his legs, and the least movement which he forced himself to make, by grabbing with his hands at a thick rope which had been tied to a rafter of his room, caused him very severe pain…
>
> The painful discharge of fluid from the ulcers on his legs during the day was sometimes so abundant that it flowed across the room

in a little stream. During the night it lodged in the joints of his knees and caused redoubled pain, drying him up and consuming him little by little.

You could see him weakening and going down day by day, yet he never for a moment let up in dealing with the needs of the Congregation and of the outside associations which he directed, and the other matters he had to attend to. On 25 September he fell asleep in his chair around mid-day, something which had been happening more frequently than usual for a few days. This happened on the one hand because he could get no sleep at night and on the other because of the great weakness which was increasing all the time and which kept him as though in a faint for most of the time.

Jean Gicquel's diary

Jean Gicquel was a Breton, born in 1617. He entered the Congregation in 1647, five years after his ordination. He was used frequently by Vincent for sorting out legal problems connected with various houses. In the later 1650s he was sub-assistant superior in Saint Lazare, though in very many practical matters he would have acted as actual superior. Vincent was superior but was largely incapacitated with regard to day to day affairs in the house. René Alméras was assistant superior, but also first assistant to the Superior General; with Vincent's incapacity Alméras often had to supply for him and so was frequently absent from the house.

From 5 June 1660 till Vincent's death Gicquel kept a diary about Vincent (VIII 175-193). Apart from the statement "Today I went on retreat" Gicquel always refers to himself in the third person. Unfortunately the pages covering 8 June to 14 September have not survived. On 19 September Gicquel was on retreat and resumed his diary entries on the 26th. It is from his diary that we have the well-known description of Vincent's last hours.

16 September

There had been no discharge from Fr Vincent's legs for eight or ten days and they had not been giving him any extra pain. These last three days they have begun to discharge again, with lumps of pus as big as your finger.

26 September

Fr Vincent, having been got up and dressed, although already rather listless, had himself brought to mass, where his drowsiness got worse;

so much so that, while he was being brought back, the doctor judged that he was in danger. He was given a mild purge and in the afternoon his illness took a turn for the worse so that at 6.30 Fr Dehorgny administered Extreme Unction… Although he made a terrific effort to force himself to reply, getting a grip on himself, he was able to answer only two or three words intelligibly; we couldn't make out the rest… Pulling himself together he said the entire *Confiteor.* Afterwards they begin the anointings and he answers *Amen.* At the end of the anointings he rallies a little and, lifting up his eyes, looks around at all those present with a happy expression on his face… The drowsiness overcomes him and he remains that way, sitting down with his head resting all night on a napkin held by one of the Brothers, Prévost, Survire or Ducournau, because his head used to fall forward when the drowsiness overtook him… At around eleven o'clock he is drenched in perspiration; immediately afterwards his pulse weakens and the sweat alters and becomes cold… This coldness passes and his pulse picks up a bit. He is offered some orange juice and he grits his teeth; some jam is put in his mouth but after a while he spits it out. Brother Alexandre blows some cephalic powder up his nose to revive him; this makes him sneeze and go for the basin. Then drowsiness overcomes him again… At two o'clock comes a second perspiring; he seems flushed and shiny, then becomes as white as snow. Fr Gicquel says *Deus in adjutorium* too frequently and, pulling himself together he says "That's enough!", in other words letting him know he was talking too much and being a distraction to him, for he seemed always to have his mind on what was going on, although half drowsy… A little before four o'clock there is a third flush, rosy and pleasant looking, which covers his face and he seems all on fire; and then he becomes white as snow… This final attack intensifies and towards half past four he enters the gasping and suffering of the final agony which lasted till a quarter to five, without any convulsions, symptoms or strain… He died in his chair, fully clothed, beside the fire.

A last word from Abelly

Abelly refers to the post-mortem examination:

> He was opened and they found the main organs (4) very sound. In his spleen a bone had been formed, the size of a silver *écu,* longer than it was wide, which the doctors found extraordinary.

These are the only two sentences he has on the post-mortem.

Diagnosis

I asked a doctor in Dublin to read an early draft of this article and to suggest a diagnosis of Vincent's main medical problems. He thought that the frequent bouts of fever were malaria, and that the leg trouble was lymph oedema. He also said that it was most unusual to have such detailed contemporary evidence about the medical problems of someone who lived more than three hundred years ago.

Notes

1. The information about Louis Abelly is taken from the first chapter of *La légende et I'histoire: De Monsieur Depaul à saint Vincent de Paul,* by André Dodin, Paris 1985.
2. Abelly, livre I, ch. xix, p75.
3. *Le corps de saint Vincent de Paul,* Abbeville 1913, page 99. This book was written by Alphonse Vandamme CM but published anonymously. Coste in *Monsieur Vincent: Le grand saint du grand siècle,* Paris 1931, vol. Ill page 499, gives the height as 1m 82cm. In the *Annales de la CM,* vol. 114-5 (1949-50), page 286, this figure of Coste is shown to be erroneous and the correct height is re-stated to be that as given by Vandamme, 1m 62cm.
4. The expression used by Abelly is *les parties nobles.* This expression was used in anatomy for the viscera, the parts necessary for life, such as heart, liver, lungs and brain. Cf Bouillet: *Dictionnaire universe! des sciences, des lettres et des arts,* 17th ed., Paris 1864.

A Few Reflections on our Vincentian Charism – from an African Perspective

Matthew Barry

Preamble

Open any worthwhile book or periodical on the Religious Life today and you are almost certain to find a reference to "charism". It is an "in" topic and libraries have been written about it. It is one of the key terms in a new language that has replaced the old more legalistic one where words like "uniformity" and "the rule" dominated. Yet, the strange thing is, in my experience at least, that very few seem to understand the word. They don't know the charism of their own congregation, or at least have a very confused idea about it. I have found this on many occasions and with a variety of religious, both male and female.

I was travelling with a sister recently and I asked her what was the charism of her order. She immediately answered "women for justice"! I can recall a Daughter of Charity being quite certain that the charism of her community was to visit the poor in their own homes. I also remember very vividly an eminent Irish Vincentian, on the crest of an emotional wave during a Provincial Assembly, insisting that the Vincentian charism was to preach parish missions. Some years ago Fr Futrell SJ conducted a seminar with us on this topic. He implied that we could not define the charism. Rather it is something that we experience and live with; I wonder. We can attempt to define the charisms of the Church, so why not that of the Vincentians? How can we know what is distinctive about "the little company" if we can't express its particular giftedness in some kind of words? How can we inculturate our charism – as everyone is insisting that we must – if we don't know what it is?

Charism

I think all agree that a charism – our charism – is a *gift,* given by God to our founder and through him to us. I am avoiding here the further distinctions that some make, e.g. between founder's and founding charism. I find them more confusing than helpful. But that mysteri-

ous gift, like the eternal Word, had to grow and be shaped and honed through Vincent's life experiences. Most of those experiences involved him with other people, for example Madame de Gondi, Bérulle, Duval, Portail, Alméras, and many others. One particularly important experience was his shared relationship with Louise de Marillac. It seems reasonable to suppose that the Vincentian charism was shared by them, something that took shape through the mutual exchange of their lives.

Our charism is a *missionary gift,* given for the mission. So it has to do with the world, our mission field, and not just with ourselves. The gift is given for the benefit of poor people, and not specifically for the Vincentians themselves. It is also a *universally applicable gift,* capable of being adapted to every age and culture. In addition, it is a *community gift,* given through Vincent to the Vincentian community. It is meant to be nourished and shared through the common life and mission of the members.

There are a few distinctions to be made in order to clarify a bit more what this charism is, to avoid fundamentalism and the type of confusion I mentioned above. Much of this confusion comes from a failure to distinguish three elements: charism, mission, ministry.

Charism is the basic gift from God given to every religious order, and others besides. It is this charism which gives us our identity.

Mission is the call from God to go out and exercise that gift, and use it for the building up of the Kingdom.

Ministry is the precise apostolates we undertake to fulfil that mission and express our charism.

Vincentian Charism

So, we could say that our Vincentian charism (a universal, missionary gift, for the benefit of the world) is a gifted vision, a gospel vision, a way of looking out at the world and seeing it differently, seeing it with specific gospel eyes, seeing the poor as the VIPs in that world. Sometime ago I asked a distinguished Jesuit if he would accept that the Jesuit charism was to look out at the world and see God in all things. He agreed. Other apostolic religious could describe theirs with similar variations. It is, I think, possible then to describe our Vincentian charism as *a graced way of looking out at the world where the poor are the VIPs.*

A policeman looks out on the world and focusses on likely criminals. A nurse or doctor will direct their attention to sick people. A trader will

gaze on potential buyers. These are important people in their lives. To a large extent, the behaviour and needs of these people shape and define the lives of those people who look out on them. In a similar way, our charism and its vision will shape and form us, but only if we own it and live it in our missions and ministries. Vincent, the newly ordained priest, looked out and focussed on rich and influential people who could help him achieve his ambitions of that time. The older Vincent later viewed the world with a very different eye. God had by then gifted him with a new vision, our charism. He saw very different people now wearing the purple robes.

The Vincentian charism empowers us to look out at today's world and see the poor as special people. This obviously is not something we see as if we were wearing trick spectacles. The poor are there for all to see, but our charism gives us an instinctive "feeling" for them – for the lesser more that the achiever, for the weak student before the genius, for the "messer" rather than the handy-man, for the one on the margins rather than the one who can get me what I want from the centre of power. It is not just a feeling of pity, but rather a deeper sense that these poor people are actually our brothers and sisters, our friends.

There is a further aspect. As we allow our charism to grow and deepen, we are able in faith to see more clearly, not only brothers and sisters, but Christ himself, especially in his suffering members. And we see Christ and relate to him, in particular, through the relationships we build with these poor people. The charism was given to Vincent mysteriously by way of many other people. We maintain it and nourish it through our relationships with the poor.

Vincentian Mission and Ministries

The Vincentian mission, the call from God to make use of this gift, is simply as we traditionally describe it: "Evangelizare pauperibus misit me", the call to go out and bring the material and spiritual gospel to poor people, especially those who are neglected. This aspect of neglect is perhaps of particular importance. It surely points to the significance of Vincent's insistence that parish missions in his day should be preached only in country places, the areas of neglect at that time. Perhaps this question of poor who are neglected should be more central to our thinking and planning when we are choosing new ministries.

Our ministry or ministries are, then, of course, the various apostolates we undertake in order to be faithful to our call to the poor and our graced vision of their importance.

Some Observations

Our charism is unchanging and applicable to all times and situations. Wherever we are, as Vincentians, we have a gift for seeing the poor in a special way. They should stick out a mile for us, attract our attention. Obviously, the strength of that gifted vision will depend on our openness to the gift and the way we have nourished it. In contrast to this, our mission and ministry are adaptable and their choice and development will depend on actual needs and circumstances. For example, one might feel a call to the homeless people in Dublin or London where they are abandoned on the streets, whereas here in Nigeria the homeless are almost always able to find a vacant corner in a friend's house. The neglected poor in Nigeria are very real, but different.

It is, of course, true that everything from God is a gift, a charism. So, our mission and ministries are also gifts in the broad sense, but not precisely in the same way as the basic charism. To visit the poor in their homes and to preach parish missions are both ministries through which we exercise and express the Vincentian charism. They are not the charism itself. It is possible that they would be the wrong service in some situations – for example where a hospital is the crying need, or people are too hungry to hear the preached word. However, we know that both visiting in the home and parish missions hold a special place in our tradition.

This triple distinction of charism, mission, and ministry may appear self-evident, but my experience, as I have already mentioned, indicates the opposite. I think it also has some very practical implications. If we confuse these three we may see an apostolate as unchangeable and immovable. We could finish up like the American factory which produced whips when people travelled by horse or horse-drawn carriages. Everyone said they were the best whips in the world and they all wanted to have one. But then the motor car entered on the scene and the horses disappeared. What happened to the factory? It continued to produce whips because they were the best, and the owners couldn't understand why people no longer wanted to buy them. Stupid, but it happened!

This type of fundamentalism – saying that a particular work of Vincent's time or our own is of universal application – is a real temptation for those of us in the "overseas mission". We become attached to, and perhaps skilled in, the apostolates of our home Province, and are then tempted to plant them in our mission territory where they may not meet the immediate needs. We treat a ministry as if it was the charism. Maybe our proper role is to form an indigenous community and let these

members decide how to inculturate the charism in their own country, let them select the particular apostolates to be undertaken. Then the poor can take their rightful place as the VIPs – not the missionaries with special skills – and there is a better chance that they may be listened to and have a say in what the Vincentians are going to do for them.

The Five Virtues and the Vows

I recall, on yet another occasion, asking a confrere what he thought our charism was. Without hesitation he replied: "The five virtues". Maybe he had a point. They certainly "cling" to the charism. But perhaps their real role is different and twofold: Firstly, to protect the charism against the invasions of human nature and our culture. Vincent chose these five virtues to offset the negative pull of the culture of his day. They touch on the basic temptations of our nature, and to a large extent are cross-cultural. For example: our temptations in Nigeria today are remarkably similar to those faced by Vincent and his contemporaries, especially the urge to become big. We want big cars, big buildings, big numbers and big academic degrees. The concept of "the little company" does not come naturally or easily, and consequently that graced vision of the poor as the "big" people struggles for survival. We need the power and practice of these virtues to free our charism and enable us to operate as Vincentians.

There is, perhaps, a second way of looking at the five virtues. They are like a coat worn by the charism. Other congregations are gifted with a vision of the poor. The five virtues provide a specifically Vincentian style and climate within which the charism is possessed, nourished and lived by us.

The four vows play a somewhat similar role in our life. Historically they were introduced to ensure our faithful commitment to the mission. That is still the basic task of our basic vow of stability, to keep our eyes firmly focussed on the poor. The other three vows, like the virtues, set the tone and style of our fidelity. The vow of poverty reminds us that Christ became poor to enrich us from his poverty. In the present age of generous funding from overseas agencies, this vow reminds us that while aid may be of benefit to the poor, our basic call is to serve as poor Vincentians, and not as rich, endowed, people. Our celibacy, among other aspects, cuts at the very root of tribalism and narrow tribal instincts, and urges us to work tirelessly against this evil – to make a real option for the poor of all ethnic groups in our ministries, especially the more marginalised. Obedience, an awkward word in some cultures

today, simply expresses our commitment to conduct the mission his way: "I always do what is pleasing to my Father". It is a commitment to listen rather than to dictate, listen to God as he speaks to us through the poor, the wisdom of our confreres, the prayerful reading of the scriptures, and a variety of other ways.

We should also, perhaps, ask the question: what are the particular dangers or obstacles threatening the charism today in our own situation? What special protection does it need in our own context? The answer might suggest some addition to the five virtues, but it is hard to imagine us not needing any of them. They are surely still for all of us those five stones of David as Vincent saw them.

Inculturatlon

Finally, I wonder about inculturating our charism. What does this really mean in practice? What is the difference between looking out on the world in Ireland and seeing the poor there, and doing the same in Nigeria? I suppose there is a cultural way of looking out and seeing "our lords and masters"; or, as Fr. Denis O'Donovan often insisted, our "lords and teachers" as the correct translation of the French. Some cultures find it easier than others to see the poor as important. Some are afraid of the poor, at least certain classes of poor people, whom they see as witches or possessed by evil spirits. It is a long hard battle in many parts of the world to convince people, even Vincentians, that the really important people are not necessarily the rich and powerful. This is no more difficult here in Africa than it is in the western world.

Inculturation perhaps becomes a bit more meaningful when we apply it to the mission and the ministries. Then, the local way, the local style, the local needs, must be decisive. We have to discern who the poor are in a particular place and their real needs before we can decide whom we are called to. And the culture will surely play a major role in deciding what work we do with them, and how we will carry it out.

Conclusion

If our charism in its origins has been shaped and refined through the interaction of Vincent and Louise, through their sharing of that gift, could it be that we Vincentians and Daughters need to share it today in a similar way in order to keep it alive and strong? For cultural reasons, in the 17th century, Louise depended to a large extent on the guidance and influence of Vincent. Perhaps the opposite is true today,

and it is we Vincentians who need the faithfulness and single-minded devotion to the poor of the Daughters, in order to maintain the life of our charism.

At the end of the day we are left with a gift from God which must remain largely a mystery, a mysterious gift which defies precise definition. And yet, for the sake of clarity and other practical reasons mentioned above, we need to make some effort to describe it. Perhaps this will help us to do what really matters, namely to value, respect and love that gift, and do everything in our power to allow it to shape our lives.

Living Waters
Welling up to Eternal Life:
A Reflection on Parish Missions

Paul Roche

In days gone by in Tullamore the first Friday of each month belonged to the Church and the Sacred Heart. The mass at 6.30 a.m. was crowded. Several priests were needed as long lines formed for Holy Communion. Religion went on all day and into the evening with the Men's Sodality after supper. Powerful singing, rosary, a long sermon and sincere pledges made in each guild of the crowded church. God was with his people.

The third Fridays were very different. That was Fair Day in Tullamore. It too began very early. Before 5.00 a.m. cattle and sheep began to arrive into the town, some in lorries or tractors and trailers, but mostly driven with a lot of shouting and cursing in steaming herds and droves. Buying and selling on the streets and in the pubs filled the day. By evening the buyers had won and the cattle were at the railway station being loaded on the trains to Dublin so as to catch the night sailing from the North Wall to England.

But the town remained crowded and excited after the animals were gone. Attention moved from the Market Square to the stalls in O'Connor Square. Here everything was for sale: clothes, old and new, delph and crockery, potatoes and cabbage-plants. But best of all were the "Bargain Stalls". Each month brought new items and fresh surprises. There were bargains for men, women and children. Yo-yos, penknives and marbles were mixed with hammers, box-wrenches, yard brushes, buckets, clothes-pegs, biros and writing paper. You want safety pins? They are there by the card, but only if you take two dish-cloths as well. The men who operated these stalls on rickety tables at the back of their vans were strangers, foreigners, maybe from Dublin or England – somewhere like that. High humour, flattery and reckless bargaining ensured that the shrewd farmers parted with their money and went home to their

wives with the bargain of the month. A frying pan, and a small hand mirror serving as a peace offering in place of the money spent drinking. Afterwards the Bargain Stalls men left town and went on to Ballinasloe, Clones, Tralee, and so many other places, to return again on the next third Friday.

The first Friday and the third Friday were both central parts of the culture of the town at the time, Different players, each had their day and their role. All were caught up in something bigger than themselves, something older than anyone could remember, and something that was never questioned or doubted. This was the only ways things could ever be.

Half a lifetime later both have gone. No more Fair Days. The weekly marts with white-coated auctioneers have found a less personal way of buying and selling. The Sacred Heart and the first Friday has become a minority interest, tolerated but no longer the fashion, except for the older people.

What do you want with me, Jesus?

One evening Jesus got aboard the boat and suggested to the Twelve "Let us cross over to the other side". No purpose was given, but they set out without questioning the wisdom of sailing at such a late hour. After a vicious storm which was miraculously stilled "they came to the land of the Gaderenes". Their worst fears of the strange place and its people were realised. Their way to the town was blocked by a naked madman who lived wolf-like among the graves. A struggle took place. Jesus won. The legion of evil spirits were driven from the man, who was transformed and wanted to stay always with Jesus. The cost? More than 2,000 swine, all drowned in the sea. Jesus had allowed the spirits possess the animals in return for freeing the man – the price of salvation. Word spread to the town, more quickly than by mobile phone. All the people came to see Jesus. They met their townsman as healthy as themselves. Fear gripped them: "they begged him to leave their neighbourhood". Thus the outsider got into the boat and left (Mt 5:1 ff).

Today salvation has come to your house

"The purpose of the Congregation of the Mission is to follow Christ evangelising the poor" (Const. 1). We are going to Tullamore. The parish mission begins Saturday 4th February, in partnership with the parish team, and in the footsteps of the Bargain Stalls men, we come in the name of Jesus to proclaim salvation.

"But what is in it for us?", people ask. "Is there salvation from arthritis or cancer? Can they save us from unemployment and depression? Have they the answer to crime and marriage breakdown? Will they save us from road accidents, strokes and young adult suicide and financial ruin? That is what we want, that is what we seek".

But we have come to tell you of the God you do not know any more, to speak to you of "the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting". The reply – not always spoken, but clearly communicated – is not unlike that which greeted Paul the outsider in the Areopagus: "Not today, thank you, maybe another day" (Acts 17:33).

> Before a man needs redemption, and the faith that redeems, before his old faith departs from him and he stakes all the has on the gamble of belief in the miracle of salvation, things must go ill for him, very ill indeed. He must have experienced sorrow and disappointment, bitterness and despair. The waters must rise up to his neck…

So says Herman Hesse in his novel *The Glassbead Game.* Is it so? Is salvation only sought by those whose lives have known brokenness? Is it that in our comfortable consumer society of material plenty we are discovering for real what we have always half suspected to be true, that "it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter Heaven" (Mt 19:24)?

The missionary an outsider

As suggested above, in times past the Church and all it stood for, May altars, Corpus Christi processions, Friday abstinence, Lenten fasting, Saturday confessions, and so much besides, was part of the culture of the people. Parish missions, though less regular than Fair Day, were every bit as much a part of the life of the town, with the women's and men's weeks. The missioners, who were always strangers, were never outsiders. As surely as the Bargain Stalls men they had a special role in the order of things, they fitted into people's lives.

This has ceased to be the case for a full generation now. It can be said that it is not just the visiting missionary, or the first Friday, that has slipped out of the plan of things, but the entire project. Church, God, salvation, once all so central, now sit in increasingly uneasy relationship to mainstream life. This is something new, and is the most basic consideration for any who continue to follow Christ evangelising the poor.

Third world, second world, first world

Over the years I've worked in differing situations, in very different churches. A couple of memories, the first from Nigeria.

Sister Justina puffed up the pillows behind Austin, who smiled weakly at the group gathered around his hospital bed. Mass was about to begin. Crowded into the small room were three members of his family, Benedict the catechist, several seminarians, and sisters from the hospital all in clean white dress. The altar had been neatly arranged on the bed-table over the foot of the bed. I stood at the makeshift altar, a concelebrant on either side. "May the grace and peace of Christ Jesus be ever with you". Austin Ibekwem was to take his vows at Communion time of the mass.

The previous ten days had been a losing struggle with the inevitable. Each day groups were gathered and brought the sixty miles to St Vincent's Hospital to give their blood, eleven pints in all. Sometimes we dared to hope, but generally we realised the stern reality that was among us.

"I Austin Ibekwem, in the presence of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, vow to God that I will faithfully dedicate myself, in the Congregation of the Mission, for all the days of my life, to the evangelization of the poor…" There were just three days remaining in his life. Austin left us early on the morning of the Transfiguration, August 6th 1987.

Seven years later, the feast of the Transfiguration 1994, once again I was starting mass. The setting was very different. We were in what the government postcard described as The Organ Hall, Krasnoyarsk, Central Siberia. Indeed the church did still serve as an Organ Hall, as it had done since worship had been forbidden by Stalin in 1947. The occasion was the parish feast, and also the public commemoration of Fr Bob Bradshaw from Tipperary who had died there the previous September. State TV was there. It was a real celebration of faith, one that spanned an interruption of almost fifty years of Soviet persecution.

The two stories, while very different, have in common the fact that they were totally "real" for everyone present. Like the first and third Fridays the events belonged, were culturally authentic and part of the life of the very different communities in which they took place.

In Ireland today we are going through a deepening separation between Church and people's lived experience. Religious ceremonial is less and less frequently an authentic part of the lives of the people. Even such Church ceremonies as marriage are often sat out in the pub, and the "real" celebration follows afterwards. People attend Sunday mass on a

much less regular basis, more or less as it feels good to do so, without considering that this is any less than required. Others who may be in a second relationship and not "married in Church" will feel free to receive Communion any time they attend mass. Life with its demands and needs is drifting away from the Church which is experienced as not meeting people's needs. The missionary, along with the parish clergy and all the rest is becoming not just a stranger but an outsider. As has happened many times before in history the Church is presently being overtaken by history, by developments in society.

Why are we going to Navan, or Clonmel, or anywhere?

Today's missionary, like Paul and Barbnabas of old, is a "Son of Encouragement", who travels from place to place encouraging the followers of the Way. Like them he should not take for granted the existence of local communities into which he will be welcomed. Often such communities exist only in name. Do we have parishes in any real sense? Certainly we have parish churches, parish schools, parish priests, and headed notepaper, but what is the reality on the ground? Our practice of the faith has become very individualistic, and often our Sunday eucharist is a rather haphazard collection of individuals whose weekly assembling does not constitute any real community.

Paul had a very clear grasp of the Good News, and he used it as a criterion against which he measured everything – even the Church. Using this method of judging everything by the mind of Christ and the gospel one would have to be very cautious in saying that particular offices, forms of ministry, types of leadership, places of worship, special days or rituals were of divine ordinance and could never be changed.

Kahlil Gibran in his collection of aphorisms *Sand and Foam* writes:

> Once every hundred years Jesus of Nazareth meets Jesus of the Christian in a garden among the hills of Lebanon, and they talk long. And each time Jesus of Nazareth goes away saying to Jesus of the Christian "My friend, I fear we shall never agree".

It becomes clear now that the task of the missionary is to help and encourage people, create communities that have a centre, a heart, around which people will be drawn, and where they will find rest and solace. This will often mean moving outside so much that has been accepted unquestioningly as being Church. Jesus of Nazareth said:

> Whoever drinks this water
> will get thirsty again;
> but anyone who drinks the water that I shall give
> will never be thirsty again;
> the water that I shall give
> will turn into a spring,
> welling up to eternal life (Jn 4:14).

There is a tremendous thirst for spirituality today, a persistent quest for a real meaning in life. Many are unable to satisfy this thirst by attendance at church. Like people at a deep well but without a bucket they have gone off in all directions searching and unsatisfied. That the basic longing and needs of people remain unsatisfied today is very apparent from so much loneliness and disaffection in society. So much change, and so many instant solutions, yet everywhere desperation and disappointment.

The missionary, like the water diviner, helps people discover the source of life among them. He does not bring life to the people; it is there already. He helps them dig where the living water is to be found.

Vincentian Mission 2000 – Background 1996

Kevin Rafferty

(Talk to the Irish Regional Meeting, All Hallows College, 27 September 1996)

I would like to welcome all of you to this Annual General Meeting and to wish you a very happy feast day on this, the 27th day of September, the feast of St Vincent de Paul. I thank you for breaking away from the work of your houses to devote these two days to the concerns of our communities in this Region, and our efforts to Proclaim the Good News to the Poor.

It was in Nigeria that the custom of having an Annual General Meeting developed in our Province and, as you know, we have Regional Meetings now in Ireland, Britain and Nigeria.

The expression "Annual General Meeting" has got a secular ring to it. We see reports in the newspapers every day about meetings of the shareholders of AIB, of the Bank of Ireland, of Smurfit's, etc., etc. And perhaps what is true in the comparison is that we are – all of us – shareholders in the future of the Province, and especially in the future of the Province in each of the Regions we belong to at present. However, what is not true in the comparison is that for us a meeting like this is something more than an AGM. It is a time of discernment in which we seek to find out what is God's will for us.

And so, we begin with prayer – the Morning Prayer of the Church – on this feast of St Vincent. In this Prayer this morning we will be remembering in a special way our confrere Fr Paddy O'Leary who died two days ago in his 95th year.

You will see from the documentation I have circulated that the Provincial Council met ten times last year to try and take forward the Marino Mission Statement and to give shape to what I have been calling Vincentian Mission 2000 in my various letters to communities and confreres. This has broken down into looking at the mission of our communities and region under four headings:

Emergent Poverties
Parish Missions
Formation for Mission
Evangelization of Young People

Those of us on the Provincial Council have tried to discern in our various sessions:

* What work can be *developed* or *strengthened!*

* In what works should we *change our presence* and consider handing over the administration of the work to others?

* What works should we *withdraw from* or reduce our presence in?

You will be aware that what we have put in front of you is only the beginning of a plan. But it is a *beginning.* Those of us on the Provincial Council will certainly welcome your comments and suggestions, and if there are any questions we can respond to during the course of the day we will certainly do our best to clarify points you may want to raise.

On behalf of the Provincial Council I would like to thank you for your feedback to the various questions we put to each community in the four areas I referred to above. In the sessions we are having today we, and the members of the Research & Development Committee, hope to mirror back to you comments and suggestions you have made in your communities.

For a few minutes this morning I want to step back from the details of the plan as such as it is developing and being formulated, and talk to you about some aspects of the background in this current year, 1996, as I perceive it.

A. *Darkness and Light in Our Region*

On leaving the Marino Assembly in July last year someone said to me "We have moved too quickly from the darkness to the light", and later in the year and indeed especially over the last three or four months, as we on the Provincial Council struggled to make appointments, these words came back to haunt me.

Yes, we have made brave efforts to face up to the reality of our declining and aging numbers; of our median age which, in the Irish Region, is over 60; of the absence of young men joining us; of the increasing burdens on a number of confreres, and still, for myself at any rate, there is always a tendency to want to carry on as before and to keep the reality of our present situation at a distance. I feel that, despite all the reality therapy breaking in on us these days, there is still a tendency to keep the darkness and the dying in our own region at a distance, as well as the darkness in our Church in Ireland and among the religious orders.

I sometimes feel the changes taking place are so far-reaching that despite our best efforts we are like corks being tossed about in a turbulent sea, with all kinds of forces operating beyond our control and, inevitably, leading us and many other religious orders and congregations in Ireland into a totally new situation – a situation that challenges our very existence.

You will have noticed many articles in *The Furrow* throughout the course of the past year, analysing the present situation as a *winter period* in the Irish Church and, indeed, in many places in Continental Europe too – France, Belgium, Germany and other countries too. At the main mass in the cathedral of the city of Toulouse on the second Sunday of August this year – a city of over half a million people – only seventy people were present and they all fitted into the choir area. I believe that there is plenty of evidence that Christianity as we have known it is dying in many places in Continental Europe, and in Ireland too.

At the Annual General Meeting of CORI (Conference of Religious of Ireland) this summer it became evident that this organisation is going through a crisis at present. Since the death of Fr Damian Byrne last March CORI has not been able to find a Secretary, President or Vice-President, and the Provincials of the orders and congregations attending this meeting in Rosslare last summer were encouraged to stay with the darkness and what this represented for the Irish Church. Some suggested that it was symptomatic of a crisis within the Irish Church at present, and also symptomatic of a crisis with many religious orders who do not feel they can release the personnel to take up these positions.

And when we think of ourselves, our own situation, we have to face up to the dying that is taking place in many of our works at present, at least in regard to our involvement in these works. The presence of ten young confreres from other Provinces in our Dublin houses to learn English over the summer reminded me (and, I think, many other confreres) of the harsh reality that no young man has joined us in the Irish Region over a ten year period.

I am not mentioning all this because I want you to wallow in a world of darkness or a world of dying. But I am saying it to myself and to you because I know it is important to feel the pain of all this change and all this dying if there is to be new life into the future.

From my visits to the nine communities in the Region I have no doubt that new life is beginning in many of our works, and it is important for us to be able to discern where Kingdom values are taking root. One example struck me in the last few days, which is that the media were very quick to pick up on the further decline in intake into seminaries

in Ireland again this year, but it says nothing of the number of young lay men and lay women who have enrolled for courses and degrees in theology and spirituality in various centres around the country. Does this mean that many people today – inside and outside the media – can only see "vocations" in a narrow and restricted sense, out of tune with one of the key insights of Vatican II – the Church as the People of God?

There was a very interesting article in the September *Furrow* about a renewal process that has begun in many parishes of the Diocese of Clogher over the past year. And we all know lay men and lay women in our parishes and schools and colleges who are prepared to take up the new challenges that face us in proclaiming the Gospel to the poor today. And much of the feedback from our houses bears this out too.

The work our two confreres are doing in Ballymena over the last three months, facing what Eamonn Cowan called "the vortex of darkness", the darkness of prejudice and hatred, made me feel very proud of the way Frank and Eamonn are a beacon of light to the Christian Community there, and a support to the priests of the Diocese of Down & Connor.

So, the challenge to us is how to see the light and the Kingdom values taking root in the darkness and the dying all around us at present.

B. *Three Perspectives – New Ways of Looking at Our Situation*

Over the last few months, as I have been struggling myself to face up to the darkness and dying in the Irish Region of the Congregation of the Mission and in our Irish Church, I have been trying to find perspectives that would give hope to confreres in our Region.

Is it possible to see the situation we are in at present in a new way, which does not deny the pain and the suffering and the darkness and the dying, but puts it into some kind of Gospel perspective and, indeed, some kind of Vincentian perspective?

The following three perspectives occurred to me:

1) *Gríosach – Keeping the Coals Alight*

The first time I heard this Celtic custom mentioned was at the Salamanca meeting of Visitors in early June of this year, when Fr Joe Levesque, the Provincial of the Eastern US Province, referred to it. He acknowledged his source as the writings of Joan Chittester and, in particular, her recent book *The Fire in the Ashes.* She compared the task of those in religious life today to the process of Gríosach, the burying of warm coals in the ashes at night in order to preserve the fire for the next day. The warm coals are covered over with ash and the next morning, with a bit of

raking, they burst into flame and become the beginnings of new fire.

So, to paraphrase her words, we are the carriers of Vincentian Fire in the Irish Region of our Province into the future and, although we cannot see that clearly what forms of Vincentian Fire will burst forth, we can be sure that, unless it is already dead in us, it will spring forth in new kinds of life into the future.

And it is those words "unless it is already dead in us" that lingered in my mind.

She is not putting forward this kind of imagery to encourage us to be fatalistic about the future, but to encourage us to live religious life (and, in our case, Vincentian life) to the full and, eventually, others will catch something of the Vincentian Fire for the future.

2) *A Pauline Mission Perspective*

Sometimes I feel that all the discussion that is going on at present about priestly ministry and lay ministry, about celibate priests and married priests, about ordaining women to the priesthood, is consuming so much of our energies and diverting us from the task in hand of proclaiming the Good News of the Gospel to people of our day.

So, recently when I picked up a new book by Fr Jerome Murphy-O'Connor on the life of St Paul I felt I was being lifted out of all these contemporary discussions about ministry and new structures in the Church and being brought to the heart of the gospel – the heart of what mission is all about.

Paul – A Critical Life is, in fact, very hard going and I would recommend that you think carefully before parting with your £35. I would not claim to have understood all that he writes about Paul, but what struck home to me was that Paul had no blueprint for mission when he went to Thessalonica, to Ephesus, to Philippi, to Colossae. He made the most of all the contacts he made through his craft of tentmaking and gradually the Gospel took root in small groups in the places he visited. He also commissioned others to take up and engage in this work of evangelization, and left it to them to fan the little flames he had started from one place to another.

And the reason I find this so comforting is that we, in all our houses and works, have a multiplicity of contacts and resources and if only we could see the immense possibilities for evangelization in all this. And for all this to happen involves a change of perspective on my part. I begin to see the immense possibilities of listening and dialoguing and travelling in simple ways with people who come into my life from day to day.

Pope Paul VIs *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) and Pope John Paul IIs *Redemptoris Missio* (1991) have opened up many rich seams of mission theology for all of us. If there is one area of theology we should take seriously over the next few years, we who belong to the Congregation of the Mission, it is, I think, the rich theology of mission that is becoming available in the Church today.

3) *Parallels between the Founding of the Congregation in the Irish Region and the Situation Today*

One of the advantages of having the Archives beside me in the Provincial Office in 4 Cabra Road is that I have been able to delve into them from time to time, as well as the back numbers of the thirty-four editions of *Colloque* which Tom Davitt has edited so faithfully over the years. In reading various accounts of the beginnings of the Province, including the first chapter of James Murphy's book on the history of St Vincent's, Castleknock, I have been struck by the parallels between the situation in the 1830s and the situation today:

* Dowley, McNamara and their companions were conscious of *a great need for reform* in the Irish Church – a reform at the level of parish communities – and I don't think it is too fanciful to say that the same desire for a *deepening and a development of parish community life* is being expressed by many people today.

* One reading of what was going on in the Ireland of the mid-19th century was that the Catholic Church was beginning to implement the *Decrees of the Council of Trent* under the leadership of Cardinal Cullen. We are faced with taking seriously the implementation of the *Second Vatican Council,* especially its understanding of the Church as the *People of God,* with all kinds of new possibilities now for mission and ministry for lay men and lay women.

* It would appear that there was *very low morale* among the clergy in Ireland in the 1830s. It would be an understatement that there is the same today.

* There were new hopes for Irish people in post-Emancipation Ireland and it would probably be true to say that for many Catholics

to be Irish was to be Catholic; to be Catholic was to be Irish. It seems to me that we are in a completely *new situation today,* a new political climate, a new pluralist climate, with a whole set of *new challenges on how Church and State relate* and how we perceive our Christian identity into the future.

* A great new *missionary era* opened up for the Irish Church from 1830 onwards, reaching its zenith in the 1950s, (cf Ed Hogan's *The Irish Missionary Church from 1830 to 1980).* It has come to an end now and a whole new kind of mission is opening which no longer divides up the world into mission-sending and mission-receiving countries. *Mission is on our doorstep.*

* Vincentians played a *pioneering role in the renewal of parish life* in Ireland from 1830 onwards in initiating the Parish Mission Movement. Some people would say that the Parish Mission Movement lost its fire around the early 1870s when these parish missions became domesticated and became parish retreats. A new Parish Mission Movement is needed today that is inserted into parish and diocesan renewal programmes and which brings new energies to the deepening of parish life on this island.

* One of the greatest needs in the Irish Church in the 19th century was *education.* At the end of the 20th century the State has taken over much of this and we are challenged as a Community to think of a new role in education in the years ahead. The overall level of education when our Province was founded was very low indeed. Today we proclaim the Gospel to an *educated people* who can take apart any facile and fundamentalist interpretation of the Gospel. It would seem to me that *Adult Religious Education* is the area of education we should concentrate on in the years ahead.

Faced with this kind of contrast between the situation in the mid-19th century and the situation at the end of the 20th some would say that we are faced with re-founding the community. I have never really bought into that perspective of re-founding. It is my own belief that we have a very rich heritage of works in the Irish Region of the Province and for me it is a question of using the considerable resources at our disposal to take a number of works in our Province in new directions, re-directing our energies and the energies of our collaborators to tasks that meet the deepest needs of our contemporaries.

Conclusion

I have dwelt on two themes this morning:

Darkness and Light in our lives /in our Church/in our Region, owning the darkness and being able to perceive the Light of Gospel values taking root all around us.

Three perspectives which can give us hope:

– Keeping the coals alight.

– Going on Mission in simple ways.

– Responding to the deepest needs of Parish Communities in the Ireland of our day.

Maynooth and the Missions: The Background

Myles Rearden

(This article was prepared for a proposed Maynooth publication and is used here with permission)

The missionary impulse

The background to Maynooth's missionary commitment goes back long before the College was founded in 1795. It owes much to conversions from a sinful or ambiguous life, like those of Ignatius of Loyola, Francis Xavier, and the secular priest from Dax in southern France, Vincent Depaul. Even more important is the certainty as old as Christianity that salvation, in this world and the next, comes from knowing and living the faith the apostles preached. Maynooth's missionary background also includes the conviction, characteristic of the Counter-reformation, that priests are God's privileged instruments in spreading the faith.

Pope Clement VIII (d. 1605) shared with many others the strangely modern-sounding view that Christianity in Europe had run its course, and God was going to transplant his Church to other countries. This seems to have influenced the early Counter-reformation missions. But the nineteenth and twentieth century missions drew their inspiration from quite a different source. The great vitality of Catholic life in France and elsewhere in the nineteenth century produced a powerful missionary movement. Catholic life in Ireland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was if anything even more vigorous and self-confident and produced foreign missionaries of warm and dynamic humanity. Joseph Lee acknowledged their significance in his *Ireland: 1912-1985,* and their stories are told in a series of other books, like Kevin Condon's *The Missionary College of All Hallows,* Thomas Kiggins' *The Maynooth Mission to Africa,* and Desmond Forristal's *The Second Burial of Bishop Shanahan.* Perhaps it is Luke O'Reilly in his *The Laughter and the Weeping* who captures best the spirit of the Irish missions. His description of the Chinese Church facing into its dark night of Communist persecution is hauntingly powerful.

People and events: Readiness to go

Vincent Depaul summed up the spirit of the missionaries he sent to Madagascar by saying: "What they have is freedom of heart". This is even more true of one of the people he most admired, the Jesuit founder-figure of the Catholic missions, Francis Xavier. His missionary life began unexpectedly. He held an important position as secretary to the Jesuit general, Ignatius, in Rome, when a vacancy occurred in a missionary party setting out for India. It had to be filled immediately. As a result, Francis Xavier left Rome at one day's notice on a journey from which he would never return. It brought his eager, interested and compassionate eye to India, Japan and finally the island off the coast of China where he died.

Xavier's ready response found many imitators down the years. A century later Vincent Depaul was informed that a ship was ready to leave Nantes for Madagascar with places for two priests. He sent messages to four of his missionaries working in different parts of France to make post haste for Nantes. The first two who arrived were to set out for Madagascar, the others to resume their work at home. Such availability is almost incredible. But much later again, Edward Galvin, three years out of Maynooth as a priest, and expecting to return to Ireland from a temporary posting in New York, turned east instead to go to China when a missionary opportunity offered.

Freedom of heart characterises the whole missionary movement in which Maynooth came to play an important role. In fact, it was central to all Catholic spirituality during the Counter-reformation and before. Detachment from merely human desires so as to respond to the desires God gives is seen as essential to the goodness of every Christian. Missionary freedom is an aspect of attachment to God, similar to what led St Anthony and the Egyptian monks into the desert, St Patrick to Ireland, and the Irish monks into exile from Ireland.

The twilight years of the Chinese mission

In the wake of Francis Xavier's attempt to reach China important Jesuit missions pioneered by Matteo Ricci entered the Celestial Empire, as the Chinese called their country. They adapted themselves to Chinese ways as much as possible, and even aimed at nothing less than the conversion of the Emperor to Catholicism as the key to missionary success. Ricci did not convert the Emperor, which was just as well as the Ming dynasty was soon to fall, but he did bring some influential Chinese into the Church. With their help small but vigourous Chinese Catholic communi-

ties were established. A number of Chinese priests were also ordained, as was a Chinese bishop.

The policy of adopting Chinese ways aroused intense opposition from other missionaries who thought that the authentic Christian message was being diluted. The authorities at Propaganda Fide took a hand in this dispute, known as the Chinese Rites Controversy, and began sending their own missionaries to China. In 1697 a Vincentian, Ludovico Appiani, who was spiritual director of the College of Propaganda Fide in Rome, was appointed to lead a contingent of these missionaries. He was given the special task of founding a seminary for native clergy at either Beijing or Guangzhou (Canton). In the event, his entire mission to China was taken up with the fallout from the controversy over rites. He and his fellow Propaganda Fide missionaries bore the brunt of the strong resistance to the Church's condemnation of the Chinese Rites which was mounted by the Imperial Court at Beijing and by other European missionaries. Appiani needed all the freedom of heart he could muster because, of the thirty-three years he spent in China he was in prison for almost twenty. No seminary was established, though the German Vincentian Johann Muellner, who became a bishop in Szechwan province, trained and ordained Chinese priests to help him in his mission. The last of these, Paul Sou, died in Macao in 1756 or 1757.

The Irish connection

Some thirty years later the person who is probably the first Irish missionary to China arrived in Macao. He was another Vincentian, Robert Hanna from Newry in Co. Down (1). Hanna was one of the group of Vincentian missionaries requested by the Holy See to take over the mission at Beijing from the Jesuits after their Society was suppressed in 1773. He was a mathematician and joined the Imperial Academy of Sciences at Beijing, but he died there suddenly in 1797.

At around the same time another Irish Vincentian, Edward Ferris of Kerry, rose to the position of Assistant General of his Congregation. In the aftermath of the French Revolution he returned to his native country to become dean in the newly established college of Maynooth. Some twenty-five years after Ferris's death in 1809 Philip Dowley of Waterford, one of his successors, the one in fact who did most to establish the role of dean in the college, resigned in order to take up leadership of a group of newly ordained priests who had decided to become Vincentians. The group had at that stage no foreign missionary aims, but they formed an important link in the missionary future of Maynooth.

The Chinese Missions: a new dawn

As the nineteenth century progressed Catholic (and Protestant) missionaries became increasingly active in China. The French Vincentians, usually called Lazarists, were among the groups who committed themselves heavily to the people of the Celestial Empire. Two of their priests were martyred there, Francis Clet in 1820 and John Gabriel Perboyre in 1840. Training Chinese priests was a major part of their missionary strategy. They, like other French missionaries, went about their task with great thoroughness.

Anthony Boyle

The stage was now set for the entry of an interesting person. Anthony Boyle, of Lavey in Co. Derry, was born in 1845. He and his cousin, Patrick Boyle from the same place, decided to offer themselves to the bishop of Derry for the priesthood. He accepted them and sent them to study, not at Maynooth, but at the Grand Seminaire of Cambrai in France, where there were already several Derry students preparing for ordination. Cambrai seminary was under the direction of the Lazarists, as were many French seminaries at that time. The two completed their studies, and impressed the authorities as very good candidates for the priesthood. In 1870 Anthony returned to Ireland for ordination, and was appointed as a curate to Moville, Co. Donegal.

Three years later Anthony decided to ask his bishop for permission to join the Irish Vincentians. He was the first person to be admitted to their newly opened formation centre at Blackrock in Dublin. After a year there, and another at Sheffield in England, he was appointed to teach classics at St Patrick's College, Armagh.

In 1877 Anthony Boyle volunteered to go to China as a missionary. His provincial, Peter Duff, forwarded his name to the Superior General in Paris. The offer was a somewhat unusual one, as the Irish Vincentians did not have any mission at the time. During the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early part of this there was, however, a trickle of priests, some of whom were ordained at Maynooth, who joined continental provinces of the Vincentians in order to work in China.

The first was Michael Dowling of Elphin diocese who was born at Caltra, Co. Roscommon, and ordained in 1844. He arrived in China in 1850 just as a persecution of the Church there was beginning. He ministered to a community of refugee Christians in the hills of Ho-Nan but, because of poor health caused by the inadequate diet, was changed to the coastal region of Tché-Kiang, where he died in 1858. He was

followed by Thomas Fitzpatrick, of Dublin, who joined the Vincentians as a student and taught in the Irish College in Paris before being sent to Shanghai in 1862.

He worked as spiritual director to the Daughters of Charity and their Chinese novices but tragically died, as the result of plunging into icy water on horseback, after only three years.

Patrick Maloney, of Doon, Co. Limerick, arrived in China in 1870. He acquired the reputation of being the best speaker of Chinese among the missionaries in his province, Kiang-si, and worked unceasingly among the villagers, travelling from place to place on foot or in a small boat, with only banana leaves as protection against the weather. "The good Father Maloney", as he was called, died in 1882.

It was not for an easy mission that Anthony Boyle volunteered. Vincent Depaul would have penned as many urgent pleas to his missionaries in China to take care of their health as he did to those in Madagascar.

Fr Boyle's offer to go to China was not taken up by the authorities. Instead he was changed from the work of school-teaching to that of giving parish missions. He was based at Sunday's Well in Cork and worked successfully as a missioner for eight years.

Anthony Boyle's foreign missionary call came through in 1885. He was not sent to China but to Australia. This is not surprising as the main missionary drive of the Irish Church in the last century was to new world countries such as Australia, New Zealand and the United States. He and his companion, Malachy O'Callaghan, were to found the Vincentians in Australia. In the accounts they sent back of their missions, one of the groups about whom they expressed most concern, was immigrant Chinese traders in the cities; they raised the possibility of getting native Chinese priests to look after them pastorally, as Irish priests were doing for the Irish immigrants.

The Australian experience proved a very difficult one for Anthony, or Tony as he was usually called. This was particularly the case when he was appointed superior of a large house in Sydney. The correspondence with his superiors in Ireland shows how much about human nature he learned there.

After twenty years in Australia he was recalled to Ireland and assigned, at the age of sixty, to a completely new kind of work, that of Spiritual Director at Maynooth. His cousin Patrick, with whom he had studied at Cambrai, had been one of the first two Vincentians to take up this post at the college in 1886, and went on to become one of the outstanding rectors of the Irish College in Paris. Tony's thirty-five years of experi-

ence in the priesthood had fitted him for his new task. He came to be very well liked by the students. It may very well be he whom Neil Kevin has in mind when he writes about the Spiritual Fathers in *I Remember Maynooth.* The garden near the Junior Infirmary where he used to walk became known as "Tony's Garden". And then the call of China came again, in a new and unexpected way.

John Fraser and Edward Calvin

John Fraser was a Canadian who studied for the priesthood at the foreign missionary seminary directed by the Vincentians at Genoa in Italy. After his ordination in 1904 he went to work in China as a diocesan priest alongside the French Vincentians. In 1911 he came to Ireland in search of volunteers and funds, and addressed the staff and students in the Aula Maxima at Maynooth. He made a powerful impression, on Tony Boyle as much as on anyone.

On the way to visit his family in Ontario Fr Fraser made a visit to a parish in New York and provided one of the assistant priests with the missionary opportunity mentioned earlier. Edward Galvin had been ordained for the diocese of Cork at Maynooth in 1909. He was working, like many others at the time and for long afterwards, in a diocese outside Ireland until a vacancy should arise at home. John Fraser was a somewhat difficult character and he had managed to antagonise most of the other priests at the rectory by remarking on such things as how many Chinese villagers could be fed on what was being served for dinner in the priests' dining room. When Edward Galvin asked if he could have a discussion with him about the missions, Fraser continued in his antagonistic mood: "I suppose you are more interested in your own comfort than in missionary work". This was a suspicion often harboured, and sometimes voiced, by French missionaries about their Irish counterparts though, as we have seen, it was far from being true of the Irish priests who had already gone to China. Galvin was not so easily deterred. The outcome of the conversation was that he arranged to offer his services for work with the French Vincentians in China. He wrote to Bishop O'Callaghan in Cork and set out with Fr Fraser on the long journey to China, where he arrived in April 1912.

Burses

Letters soon began reaching Maynooth from China. It is not easy to establish the sequence, but one was from Edward Galvin to the then President of the College, Monsignor Hogan, and one was from the newly appointed Vincentian Vicar Apostolic of Hang Chow to Anthony Boyle.

The bishop's letter asked specifically for funds to educate Chinese students for the priesthood. He stated that a capital sum of £80 would yield enough interest to educate a Chinese seminarian for a year, a point Fr Fraser had already made when he visited Maynooth. Tony Boyle was roused to action, and it appears he was also delegated by the President to tell the students about Fr Galvin's missionary work in China. This would not have been difficult, as Galvin had a very sympathetic and warm eye for human situations and could write most graphically. The outcome of Fr Boyle's efforts (and he was no mean preacher himself) was that the college staff quickly contributed enough for one burse and the students enough for another. With that practical commitment, interest in the Chinese Mission became very strong in the college. It does not take much imagination to see a good deal of freedom of heart in the priests and students of Maynooth, in Edward Galvin and John Fraser, and in Tony Boyle, in the way they responded to the missionary needs presented to them. As Denis Meehan remarks in his article on Maynooth and the Missions in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* for the 150th anniversary of Maynooth's foundation in 1945, "This was a preparation of the soil".

Fr Boyle continued his fund-raising activities throughout Ireland, making a real apostolate of it which he continued after leaving Maynooth at the age of seventy in 1915. He used *The Irish Catholic* to publicise the amounts people contributed, and also sent the paper letters from China to publish. Here is an account of his own activities as a fund-raiser for the Chinese seminaries:

> Father Boyle's method of collecting when he travelled through the country, as he did on his vacations, was quite unique. He rarely preached a charity sermon, and there was nothing spectacular about his *modus agendi.* Having secured the permission of the parish priest, he went to the nearest National School at the hour for religious instruction. With the consent of the principal teacher he got the children to assemble in some large room and, having explained to them how great a thing it is to help to educate a priest, he got the children to pray with him for the success of the foreign missions. He then proceeded to people who, he learned, could afford to contribute something, and very often returned with the amount of a full burse (3).

Tony Boyle's photograph shows a strong and attentive face. Youngsters hearing him speak about the missions that meant so much to

him must have been deeply impressed. He spent his last eleven years of life at Blackrock, where he had gone for his missionary formation forty years before. There he organised a team to help him answer the letters he received from benefactors. The archbishop of Dublin wanted his contribution to the missions to receive public acknowledgement, and wrote to his superiors to ask if it would be appropriate to have an ecclesiastical honour bestowed on him; they declined, and it is not known whether Fr Boyle ever learned about the offer. He died in 1926.

The Maynooth Missions to China and Africa

It became steadily clearer to Edward Galvin in China and his friends in Ireland that there was not a great deal to be said for capable and enthusiastic Maynooth priests simply working alongside the French Vincentians. Missionary vitality would be stifled unless there was an Irish missionary society with its own territory. The idea of the Maynooth Mission to China began to detach itself from the movements that preceded it.

A similar development took place in West Africa in the 1930s, when the volunteers from Irish dioceses working in Nigeria crystallised under Fr P J Whitney's inspiration into St Patrick's Missionary Society.

The charism of femininity

The architecture of Irish towns shows the importance of women in the religious renaissance of Ireland in the nineteenth century. Huge convent-school complexes, and often also hospitals, dominate the narrow streets and complement the Neo-Gothic parish churches. What Pope John Paul II has called "the charism of femininity" contributed as much, or even more, to the missionary renaissance of the last and present centuries. The missionary societies of priests all had their corresponding congregations of missionary sisters: The Sisters of Our Lady of the Apostles who worked with the Society of African Missions, The Holy Rosary Sisters, founded by Bishop Shanahan, The Columban Sisters who paralleled the Maynooth Mission to China, The Medical Missionaries of Mary founded by Mary Martin alongside the Kiltegan Fathers in Nigeria, and many other communities besides. The Daughters of Charity, an important part of the Maynooth scene since taking over the infirmary in 1905, had long worked with the Vincentians in China.

The practical aim of the women's missionary congregations was to attend to the needs of women in young churches, especially preparing them for marriage, educating girls, and, increasingly, providing medical

and particularly maternity services. At the deeper level they showed the feminine side of the Church and opened up to girls in the new churches the possibility of the consecrated life.

Among the first Irish missionary sisters to go to China were Daughters of Charity belonging to the British Province who worked with the French Lazarists. The names of some of them were to become famous. Sister Alice O'Sullivan, of Clonmel, Co. Tipperary, went to China in 1863, and was working at a hospital in Tientsin when she and nine companions met their deaths at the hands of rioting mobs in 1870.

Another Sister O'Sullivan, Sister Eamonn, was to become famous later. She was a Franciscan Missionary of Mary from Cork, a much-loved school teacher and one of the few Europeans permitted to remain in Beijing under the communists. Sister Eamonn died from ill-treatment she received at the hands of the Red Guards during the Cultural revolution in 1966.

Perhaps the most outstanding of the early women missionaries in China from this part of the world was Sister Xavier Berkeley, who arrived in China at the age of twenty-two in 1890. She was English and a member of the Kerry Catholic land-owning family of the Kenmares. She was a person of extraordinary energy, kindness, holiness and common sense, who amazed the more prosaic French sisters with whom she worked. "La grande soeur anglaise" dominated the Church, and indeed the civic, life of the Chusan Islands where she looked after orphaned and abandoned children. From the Maynooth perspective she resembles no one so much as St Brigid of Kildare, though in fact the missionary story of modern Ireland from Mama Kevina in East Africa to Mother Teresa of Calcutta contains many women like her.

Xavier Berkeley had as mentor and spiritual guide in China an Irish priest from Kinsale in Co. Cork, a product of the Jesuit-run philosophy seminary at Mungret in Limerick, by name Denis Nugent. He joined the Vincentians in Holland for the purpose of going to China, and travelled there along the Trans-Siberian Railway in 1913. For many years Denis Nugent was rector of the seminary at Ningpo, on the Chinese mainland opposite the Chusan Islands. The missionary reformer Vincent Lebbe considered him one of the few foreigners of the time who were alive to the needs of the Chinese church.

Another Maynooth Mission – in a minor key

The Irish Vincentians themselves began a mission to China around the same time as Maynooth did. The first two missionaries went out in

1919, and its first superior was a former Cloyne student of Maynooth, Patrick O'Gorman. O'Gorman always remained a Maynooth man at heart. It was he who was commissioned to write the article on "The Spirit of Maynooth" for *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record* in Maynooth's sesquicentennial year of 1945. In May 1920 he wrote a letter to the Vincentian procurator in Shanghai asking him to offer hospitality to a group of Maynooth missionaries on their way through from Ireland to Hanyang. The letter glows with national pride and O'Gorman's characteristic enthusiasm. National pride was within a few decades to be tempered with humiliation when Fr O'Gorman's successor and many of the Maynooth missionaries were rounded up and put in prison.

Eight years after the last of the Irish Vincentians in China, Maurice Kavanagh from Enniscorthy, left there in 1952, they undertook a new mission in Nigeria, this time in co-operation with "The Maynooth Mission to Africa". Once again the founding superior of the mission was a former Maynooth student, Fr Frank Mullan from Tony Boyle's own diocese of Derry. He too was to spend the last months of his ten years in Africa in prison, at the end of the Nigerian civil war.

The beginnings of missionary renewal

At the time when the Maynooth Mission to China and the Irish Vincentians were beginning their missionary work in China important changes were taking place in the Church's understanding of her missionary work. The encyclical *Maximum illud* was published by Pope Benedict XV in 1919, and was followed by the ordination of six Chinese bishops in 1926. The origin of this renewal can be traced to the controversial book of a French diocesan priest who had never been near the missions, *Christianity in the Far East* by Leon Joly, which came out in 1907. The book caused fury among traditional missionaries, but it inspired innovative individuals like the Belgian Vincentian Vincent Lebbe (4). Lebbe was, in fact, only moderately innovative, advocating such obvious measures as the end of the French protectorate of Catholic missions in China, the handing over of leadership of the Chinese Catholic Church to Chinese bishops, and the building up of an active Catholic laity with its own newspapers. He advocated, in effect, returning to the missionary plan of the original Jesuits in China, substituting, in the democratic spirit of the time, appeal to the general public for influence at the imperial Court.

By the time the Maynooth missionaries arrived in China the Celestial Empire was in the throes of the greatest revolution in its thousand of years of history. The last Emperor had already been dethroned. When,

some thirty years later, the missionaries had already been withdrawn or imprisoned, Mao Tse Tung was in control. One of the most extraordinary series of mass political convulsions in the world's history was about to begin. Luke O'Reilly turned to the Book of the Apocalypse as his scriptural guide book to the times that were coming.

The future?

Yet changes were to occur in the old Catholic mission-sending countries of the West which were scarcely less apocalyptic. They affected Ireland as much as anywhere. Patrick Corish in his *Maynooth College 1795-1995* sums up these changes in crisp sentences:

> The road from "structuralism" through "deconstruction" to "post modernism" has been a trail of destruction, and sometimes it is possible to sense a kind of mourning for the house that has been destroyed… It is possible that the wave of "deconstruction" is passing, but it may be leaving a wasteland behind (p 359).

In other words, the changes are on the level of ideas and beliefs. Catholics, who have lived their missionary commission by challenging the ideas and beliefs of the nations, now feel themselves challenged in their own convictions. It is not difficult to see that the future for the Church's mission at home and abroad must come from her discovery of new certitude on the levels of feeling, imagination, intellect and will. When that inner "reconstruction" is shared by many people, and extends to every aspect of human life, a new dawn for the missions may be expected.

Notes

1. On Hanna cf *Colloque* No 40 (Editor's note).
2. On Ferris cf *Colloque* Nos 7, 18, 21 (Editor's note).
3. Cullen, E. (Ed): *The Origin and Development of the Irish Vincentian Foundations 1833-1933,* Dublin, n.d. [1933], p. 150. (This is the title as on the title-page. On the cover the title is *A Century of Irish Vincentian Foundations, 1833-1933).*
4. Cf Cheza, M, in *Revue Théologique de Louvain,* 1983, pp 302-327.

Miscellanea

VISITATION OF THE IRISH PROVINCE BY THE SUPERIOR GENERAL, ANTOINE FIAT, 1883

The Superior General's Letter

On his return to Paris Fiat wrote to Peter Duff, the Irish Provincial, on 28 September. What is extraordinary about the letter is that except for item 7 it deals with matters of no great importance, and has no reference whatever to the works or ministries of the Province. He wrote in French. With the conventional opening and ending omitted it reads as follows in translation:

Here I am back after my journey to the British Isles. I have seen, and examined to the best of my ability, the state of the houses and persons but without taking any decisions; I wanted to put before my Council the result of my observations, and even to get from each superior of the Province his explanations of certain practices which caught my attention.

This is why I am sending you this letter, asking you to reply in writing to the various points I mention.

1. The order of day is such that it necessitates what amounts to three periods of recreation per day, at 11.00, 3.30 and 8.30 or 9.00. Would it be possible to arrange an order of day which would have only two?

2. In all the houses of the Province it appears that there is talk at the evening meal. This is obviously against P. 4 chap. VIII of the Common Rules. Do you know the origin of this abuse? I would like it to stop.

3. The Rule (chap. VII, v) requires each one to make his bed on rising in the morning; In Ireland, the seminarists, students, etc. don't make their beds until after breakfast. Why is this? The smallest details of the Rule are to be respected, and these exceptions, with several others, destroy uniformity and weaken the links which ought to unite every Province to the body of the Company.

4. The Rule (ch. 8, P 3) presumes that the biretta is worn in the refectory. This is done by the entire Company and Fr Etienne, in a circular of 27

September 1859, makes an express recommendation of it. What is the origin of the fact that in Ireland nobody wears the biretta?

5. In Ireland the privilege of not saying the breviary on missions is availed of, replacing this by some prayers. Fr Etienne, I know, did not want this privilege availed of. Do you know what is the origin, in Ireland, of this custom?

6. Lay brothers never have their meals in the refectory with the priests; it seemed to me that they are looked down on, and not dealt with according to St Vincent's spirit; what is your view on this?

7. Would it not be useful to insist that all confreres who are legally trustees of Congregation property should make several copies of their will, v.g. for the Sup. Gen., for the Provincial, etc.?

8. Would it be opportune to forbid the renting of holiday houses at the seaside, since holidays can be taken in other houses of the Province?

9. I was shocked to see confreres shaking hands with nuns and young ladies; do the customs of the country include this? St Vincent would not put up with it, in my opinion.*

These are the various points which I wanted to put before you before laying down anything; I await your answer.

* *[addendum]* and it is above all according to his rules and his spirit that we must behave, on pain of not having the uniformity so necessary for the general good of the Congregation.

The Response of the Irish Province

It is not clear how the responses to this letter were organized, whether each house sent its answer to Duff or to Fiat. What has survived is a summary, in French, of the responses of each house to each question. This summary was obviously made in Paris, as the spelling "Phibsborog" is used throughout. Below is an abbreviation of this summary.

1. *[Order of day]:* This does not apply to Sheffield or Cork, and it would be impossible to change the order of day in the other houses.

2. *[Talking at evening meal]:* The ICP and Cork thought this could be altered. All the other houses regarded it as part of recreation. Castleknock and Phibsborough regarded it as a means of maintaining charity; they

both had done this since the start, and Phibsborough said it was authorized by Etienne.

3. *[Not making beds on rising]:* Every house in the Province said this was done for reasons of hygiene. Sheffield and Lanark said any confrere is free to make his bed as soon as he gets up, if he wants to. Castleknock said the Irish climate called for this.

4. *[Birettas in refectory]:* Every house said the biretta could be worn. Armagh said it was through mere inadvertence. Castleknock said "the biretta could be worn everywhere as no one wore it anywhere". Blackrock said this stemmed from normal clerical usage, but they have now begun to wear the biretta.

5. *[Privilege of not saying office on missions]:* The general answer was that because of the work on missions, especially confessions, saying the office would be impossible. The ICP was the only house that thought there was no further need for using the privilege. Lanark said this practice went back sixteen years, Cork said twenty, and Lanark said to a Provincial Council decision in 1866. Armagh and Castleknock said the Redemptorists also use this privilege, and the ICP said it was authorized by theologians. Sheffield said the office could be said for the first ten days of a mission.

6. *[Lay brothers eating apart]:* Every house was in agreement that this practice could not be changed. The ICP and Sheffield mentioned the different social background of the brothers. Lanark said the brothers would not want this changed. Castleknock and Phibsborough said the brothers were happy with the present practice. Blackrock said the "esprit du pays" called for this.

7. *[Trustees' wills]:* There was general agreement on this, apart from Cork where the confreres thought it was not necessary and should be left to the Provincial.

8. *[Seaside houses]:* The ICP thought this an abuse which should be suppressed. Sheffield said they didn't do it but that the colleges could consider it to be necessary. Lanark thought it necessary for the colleges, but not for other houses. They advised prohibiting the renting of fine houses in popular resorts. Armagh suggested it would be enough to prescribe certain limits, plus a recommendation to go for holidays to other CM houses. Cork said they didn't do it. Castleknock said it was necessary, and far better than going to other CM houses; they had been doing it for fifty years. Blackrock also said it was necessary, but suggested certain limits, for example not going to the more popular resorts.

9. *[Shaking hands with women]:* All houses were unanimous that this cannot be altered. The ICP said to avoid this would cause scandal. Sheffield said it was the custom, and to change would be harmful. Lanark said it was the universal custom. Armagh, Cork and Castleknock said it would be annoying to forbid it. Phibsborough said it was the custom, and Blackrock said that not to do it would be a very obvious singularity.

Of the nine points raised by Fiat the Province gave negative answers to seven, agreeing only with the one about trustees' wills, and saying the matter of the biretta could be attended to.

In saying that they had been renting seaside houses for fifty years Castleknock was saying that this had been done since 1833 when Usher's Quay opened, six years before the community decided to join the Congregation of the Mission.

The Superior General's Second Letter

On 28 October Fiat replied to the Provincial:

I have received from the houses of your Province the answers to the questions which I believed I should ask in order to be well informed on certain points of discipline which had attracted my attention during my travels in your dear fatherland.

We find that uniformity with other Provinces leaves something to be desired, and is even non-existent between several houses of your Province.

As we must have a sexennial assembly during the next holidays, and as at the provincial assembly which must precede it there should be discussion as to whether there is any problem to be referred to the Superior General for solution, would you please go into the matter of your recreation, of your holiday houses about which I have received repeated complaints, and of wills. The Constitutions forbid discussion of whether or not a point of the rules is to be observed, so the question of silence in the refectory cannot be raised, nor the duty of making one's bed on rising.

Here is what we decided in our Council on these points and on the others:

1. While awaiting fuller information Father Provincial is to advise superiors of houses which have the custom of renting holiday houses to choose less popular resorts and to rent houses where the rent is not too high. In such rented houses there is to be reading at meals and also the carrying out of all community exercises.

2. All confreres are asked to make use of the biretta in the refectory, at conferences and repetitions of prayer, as is the general practice in the Congregation, based on 3 of chap. 8 of the Common Rules, on the decree of the 1668 assembly, sess 7, and on Fr Etienne's circular of 27 September 1859.

3. The rule (chap. 8, 4) explicitly lays down silence at table and since this rule is kept everywhere in the Company it seemed to us that I must ask our dear Irish confreres to sacrifice this little satisfaction, beginning with the central house which should be an example to all the others and which will easily bring them into the way of regularity because of the good spirit which animates them.

I therefore count on the piety and docility of the priests in Blackrock to keep silence at the evening meal; the young people will have no trouble in imitating them. There is no obligation to have reading during this meal, any more than we in France have reading during breakfast, which we take in silence.

4. I also want those in the central house to get the seminarists and students into the habit of making their beds on rising, in conformity with the rule (chap. VII 3), unless someone, because of profuse sweating, needs to dry out his bed. Our doctors in France agree with those in Ireland on this, but no attention is paid to this. Our Sisters in Ireland make their beds in the morning because that is their rule. I think that obedience to the rule will be more useful for health than exaggerated precautions would be. I like to think that this custom will pass from the central house to all the houses, and that, with uniformity being more complete, union of minds and hearts will also be, though I can do nothing but praise God for the good spirit of our dear Irish confreres.

I ask Fr Provincial to see to it that parish retreats don't interfere with the principal work of missions; for this the following would be needed: 1. to give a retreat only where a mission had been given; 2. to go in pairs on these retreats also; 3. to give them without charge, like the missions; 4. not to forget to get persons to make a general confession who did not make one at the mission.

Would it not be possible for the Castleknock confreres to do some preaching in Phibsborough church? This was formerly the custom; it would be good for them. See if it is possible.

My attention was drawn to the fact that uniformity for breakfast, and for tea on Fridays, was tending to disappear. In certain houses meat is taken at breakfast, but not in others. On Friday evenings in one place they are content with tea, and bread and butter; in others they add eggs to this. This difference is regrettable.

I ask you also to avail of the provincial assembly to discuss these matters.

I am leaving for the Orient in a few hours; no chance of copying this letter, so please share it with your houses for the points which concern them.

The Irish Provincial Assembly of 1884

The provincial assembly was held in Castleknock, beginning on 8 July 1884. The acta were drawn up in Latin. The first and second sessions dealt with organizational matters, electing a secretary, and electing the delegate to go with the Provincial to the sexennial assembly in Paris. The third session took up the matter of holiday houses:

> The Assembly decided: Houses are to be rented as heretofore for confreres who work in seminaries and colleges, as is laid down by the 4th General Assembly, session IV, but observing the advice given by the V. R. Fr Sup. Gen. to the V. R. Provincial as regards location and expense.

At the fourth session someone raised the question as to whether confreres who did not work in seminaries or colleges could "by dispensation or otherwise" avail of the "privilege" of these holiday houses. "The reply is that the Assembly sees no reason for departing from the custom hitherto observed in this province".

This session also accepted the points about parish retreats, and said that they should not be given very often.

The fifth session decided that uniformity of menu for breakfast was impossible, because of the health or work of some confreres, and the difficulty in getting eggs at certain times of the year. As regards the evening meal on Fridays the Assembly clearly had strong feelings:

> The Assembly decided: Since in our Province the very light evening meal (collatiuncula vespertina) uniformly and universally consists only of bread and butter with the drink commonly known as "Tea" (cum potu vulgo dicto *Tea),* nothing can be reduced on Fridays, but the custom can be continued of taking one egg at breakfast instead of the two taken on other days, which has been observed in this Province now for many years.

As regards the privilege of not saying – the divine office on missions, the Assembly asked the Superior General to sanction its continuance, because of the workload of missioners, especially confessions.

The Assembly held that the confreres in Castleknock had plenty of work to do without imposing on them the extra work of preaching in Phibsborough.

As regards the three periods of recreation and talking at the evening meal, the Assembly seemed to deal with these as being the same thing, which was more or less the point made in the Province's replies to Fiat's first letter. This custom went right back to the foundation of the Province, and as regards the late evening meal it is the custom in these regions. The Assembly decided nothing was to be changed.

The wills of trustees. The Assembly decided that what was asked was of no value whatever, and the same end can be achieved in accordance with the law of the country by other means, as is in fact being done.

As regards observing rules in holiday houses "the Assembly humbly asks the V. R. Fr Superior General to approve the existing custom of the Irish Province of talking at meals in holiday houses, after the reading of Sacred Scripture and the Roman Martyrology, and of saying the divine office in private, especially as the priests, students and seminarists of the Paris house, as well as priests of other Provinces, enjoy similar permission in their holiday houses.

Conclusion

What was really at issue was this: A French Superior General, with his council of three Frenchmen and one Italian, held that what was done in Paris had to be done also in the Irish Province. The Irish Province, though, held that because of climate, local customs, and the nature of the confreres' work, such slavish imitation could not be achieved, and anyway was neither necessary nor desirable.

Looking back now after one hundred and thirteen years one can only marvel at the fact that a Superior General could make a visitation of a province and then write back to it a letter that contained no reference to its works, that mentioned he was "shocked" by such a normal matter as shaking hands with women, and that seemed to regard minutiae such as making one's bed sooner rather than later, and wearing the biretta at meals, as important.

TD

Father Patrick O'Leary CM

(Homily at funeral mass, St Peter's, Phibsborough, 28 September 1996. Readings for Saturday of Week 25: Eccl 11:9-12:8, Lk 9:43-45))

On an April spring day, when Patrick O'Leary was attending the little primary school in Ardfield, outside Clonakilty, the teacher invited the pupils to come out into the school yard for a few minutes so that they could see the world's largest ship passing their coast on its way out into the great Atlantic. The ship, of course, was the newly launched *Titanic,* and the year was 1912.

It was one of the memories that Fr Paddy O'Leary could recall of his boyhood days – and recounting it seemed to bring home to Fr Paddy himself and anyone listening to him the long span of years that the Lord had given to him. Fr Paddy's voyage across the sea of time was longer than is the lot of most others. In the last three or four years he often wondered why he was being left so long in life and was eager to reach port, which he did early last Thursday morning on the eve of St Vincent's feast. In his last years Fr Paddy could easily identify with the sentiments of the author of Ecclesiastes who saw old age as the time when "the days of trouble come, and the years draw near when you will say T have no pleasure in them'" (Eccl 12:1).

The metaphor of a ship was a favourite one of St Vincent's when he reflected on his own community. He was particularly fond of using it when he felt that one of his priests or brothers might be wavering in their vocation. He liked to remind them that the particular community to which they had been called was the ship which God placed had us in, and which will carry us to the port of heaven. There are other ships larger and more grandiose than ours on God's ocean, he would remind his correspondent, but the one we are in is that which will most securely bring us to port and the wished for happiness of heaven.

Fr Paddy would not think of himself as a craft that was built for trans-atlantic voyages. He was built for calmer waters; he was not equipped to withstand the Force 11 gale winds of the mid-ocean storms. Even the choppy waters of ordinary discomfort and the thousand irritations that are the lot of any human on life's sea seemed to bear down on Fr Paddy more than on most.

But for all that he never lost the ability – and it was one of his gifts – of seeing the humour in community situations, and particularly those in which he found himself in at an earlier stage in the course of his long life. "Rejoice, young man, while you are young" counsels the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes in today's reading "and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth… Remember your creator in the days of your youth…". Fr Paddy did rejoice in the days of his youth, and after his education in Castleknock he did remember his Creator and responded to his invitation to the priesthood in St Vincent's community.

After his ordination to the priesthood in 1926 he taught for some years in Castleknock. Later on, in our house in Sunday's Well, Cork, he took a particular interest in the apostolate of the deaf. Two days ago Sister Nicholas Griffey OP recalled with appreciation how carefully he had tried to learn some of the sign language so that he could establish greater contact with the deaf and bring them the consolations of our Christian faith.

"Banish anxiety from your mind…" is the advice of Ecclesiastes to us today. It is very much part of a priest's apostolate to banish anxiety from people's minds by mediating to them the mercy of God and the peace of our Risen Christ that accompanies it. In so many and various ways the ministry of a priest is to banish anxiety from the minds of God's children, particularly through the sacrament of reconciliation. That was one of Fr Paddy's charisms. Many people came to know him here in this church as a very sympathetic and understanding confessor, as did a number of Daughters of Charity. It was a gift that made him friends among the laity here in Phibsboro and in other places, friends who remained fast and loyal to him to the end. It was that same quality of mediating the peace of Christ that must have led his superiors to appoint him, some decades ago now, as spiritual director to the seminarians in Clonliffe College. Even when Fr Paddy was in his eighties a few of his former seminarians, now priests in the Dublin diocese, used to return to him from time to

time to experience the mercy of God mediated to them in the sacrament of reconciliation.

As with the disciples in today's gospel, and indeed for any follower of Christ, the meaning of so much that happened during our lives is hidden from us. "But they did not understand this saying", remarks St Luke, "its meaning was concealed from them…". What must have been clear to Fr Paddy at the end of his life and certainly to his confreres in the Vincentian Community as well as to his relatives and friends, was that the care that he received in Rickard House from Sister Carmel and her devoted staff was a clear manifestation of the mercy of God. In his heart of hearts he must have felt in his better moments during his final years of suffering that, like the people in today's gospel, "all were astounded at the greatness of God".

At the end of his long life St Vincent, speaking to his community one morning, said:

> Let us then be merciful and let us exercise mercy towards all in a way that we will never encounter a poor person without consoling him, if we can, nor when ignorant of the faith without teaching him in a few words the things which it is necessary to believe and which he must do for his salvation. O Saviour, do not permit that we abuse our vocation and do not take away from this Company the spirit of mercy, for what would become of us if You should withdraw from it Your mercy. Grant it to us, then, along with the spirit of gentleness and humility (XI 342).

May the Lord grant the fullness of His mercy to Fr Paddy, and to us who remain the gift of mediating the tender mercy of our God to each other, particularly

> in the day when the guards of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the women who grind cease working because they are few, and those who look through the windows see dimly…, when one is afraid of heights, and terrors are in the road…, because all must go to their eternal home, and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the breath returns to the God who gave it (Eccl 12:3-7).

Richard McCullen CM

FR PATRICK O'LEARY CM
Born: Ardfield, Clonakilty, Co. Cork, 6 April 1902.
Entered CM: 7 September 1919.
Final vows: 8 September 1921.
Ordained a priest in Holy Cross College, Clonliffe, by Dr Edward Byrne, Archbishop of Dublin, 27 February 1926.

APPOINTMENTS
1926-1940 St Vincent's, Castleknock.
1940-1951 St Vincent's, Cork.
1951-1955 St Patrick's, Drumcondra.
1955-1959 St Joseph's, Blackrock (Clonliffe).
1959-1996 St Peter's, Phibsborough.
Died 26 September 1996.
Buried: Glasnevin.

Father Fintan Briscoe CM

In the following notes I am deeply indebted to the reminiscences of Dermot O'Dowd, who was ordained with Fintan and who was very close to him, especially in his last years.

One of Fintan's most endearing characteristics was the way he always spoke of his parents with pride and affection. They had a profound influence on him. His father worked for the former Great Southern & Western Railway, and after the railway amalgamation for the Great Southern Railways, and travelled frequently to London on Union business. His mother, who was from Newcastle, Co. Durham, worked for the former London North Eastern Railway, and also came regularly to London on Union business, where she met Fintan's father. Fintan was proud that both his father and his mother had broken the mould, he by advancing in a Company where Catholics at the time were apparently discriminated against, and she by becoming one of the first women to be involved in Union affairs.

His parents settled down in Phibsborough, where Fintan was born on April 23, 1923. From Fintan's recollections it was a happy and faith-filled household, where he found affection and security. He went to school in St Vincent's, Glasnevin, transferring later to O'Connell Schools for his last two years of secondary education.

During this time Fintan served an early Mass every morning in St Peter's, and here he came under the influence of (among others) Fr

James Bennett CM, then superior of St Peter's and a former Provincial. He impressed Fintan with his sincerity and holiness and attracted him to the Vincentians. Fintan asked to join the community.

The Vins liked Fintan and accepted him. He entered St Joseph's on September 3,1940, along with seven others. All of the eight were subsequently ordained, although, sad to say, only three now remain with us.

Fintan's father died suddenly in August 1942, when Fintan was preparing to take his vows. He felt it as a great loss. With his usual sense of responsibility he offered to leave St Joseph's in order to get a job and help to support his mother, but she would not hear of it.

Fintan was ordained in the Pro-Cathedral on May 22, 1948, by Archbishop John Charles McQuaid. Twenty-five years later all the eight were able to come together for a concelebrated Mass in St Joseph's, Blackrock, followed by a meal in the Glen of the Downs Hotel. These were two happy events that Fintan looked back on with great satisfaction.

After an initial year as bursar in St Joseph's Fintan was to spend the next seventeen years in education, from 1949 to 1954 in Castleknock, and from 1954 to 1966 in St Paul's, where he became head of the junior school. In both of these appointments he showed himself to be hard working and very dependable. If Fintan undertook to do anything, everybody knew it would be done.

In 1966 he broke new ground by being sent to St Mary's, Lanark, where he exchanged the routine of a college for the comings and goings of a parish. Lanark at that time was also a considerable mission house. As usual, Fintan fitted in well, showed himself utterly reliable, was very attentive to the parishioners and their needs, and made many friends. He became parish priest in 1969 and stayed in Lanark till 1975. In that year he was transferred to Sunday's Well, Cork, where he stayed until 1990.

From Fintan's later conversation it was clear that out of all the houses he had ever been in Cork was the favourite. It is sometimes said that a Dubliner can never be totally accepted in Cork. In fact the Cork people have taken many Dubliners to their hearts, and among those who were accepted in the southern capital was certainly Fintan. He loved them and they loved him.

In Cork Fintan was tireless, both as bursar and, increasingly as the years wore on, as the man who knew everybody and everything connected with the parish. Confreres came and confreres went, but

Fintan remained on for fifteen years. Sometimes one finds in a house a confrere who can be trusted to do the difficult jobs and whose worth is realised only after he has left. Such was Fintan in Cork.

Unfortunately this continual hard work and responsibility took their toll of him and by 1990 his health was seriously undermined. In the autumn of that year he was asked to proceed to Mill Hill, perhaps because it was considered a pleasant house where he could recover his strength. Fintan always regarded the wishes of a superior, and especially of the Provincial, as a sign to him of God's will, and he agreed immediately to the change, but in doing so, whether he realised it or not at the time, he condemned himself to a lonely exile for his final years.

He found London too big and brash and impersonal after the intimacy of Cork. He was too old and too unwell to adjust to his new home and suffered deeply from the culture shock caused by his new surroundings. In one way this was surprising, for he had always kept in touch with his English relatives and visited them regularly, and he had come with his family summer after summer on holidays to England up to the outbreak of the war. During his college years he had done many summer supplies in English parishes. He often said to me that he had liked Lanark, had no problem with it, because he was young enough to adjust to it and, after all, it was rather like an Irish country town, but Mill Hill was, as they say, something else. He never really settled there.

He knew perfectly well that if he put his case seriously to the Provincial he would be changed. I often discussed the matter with him, but he was adamant. He never said it, but I sensed the spirit of faith behind his decision. Mill Hill was the will of God for him, and there he would stay. Successive Provincials might have wished that we were all as obedient, self-effacing, and dependable as Fintan!

I could not help comparing him to St John of the Cross who, in spite of all he had said about detachment and mortification, looked forward eagerly in his later years to returning from the south of Spain to his native Castille. Similarly Fintan was longing to retire to a quiet room in St Peter's, Phibsborough, among his own people.

So his years in Mill Hill in one sense were sad, although in another sense he was sharing a common lot, for I would guess that most of us have been in houses which we found difficult. Mill Hill may well have been the first such house for Fintan. But he never grew bitter, and I suspect that in Mill Hill he found a purifying experience which drew

him closer to God. He accepted as a matter of course the usual parish duties. Perhaps on account of his own fragile health he was very attentive to the sick, and very good to people in need who came to the door. As the years wore on he made many friends, and came to be highly regarded by the parishioners, even though his lack of energy prevented him from taking many initiatives.

He prayed regularly and was faithful to his spiritual exercises. In spite of his dreadful insomnia he was always even-tempered and he was a remarkably easy person to work with. Although we were as different as the proverbial chalk and cheese I could not imagine a more pleasant and a more tolerant companion in the house. His was an uncomplicated personality, although he could make shrewd but kindly remarks about people and events. I cannot remember his ever criticising anybody.

He was a great lover of every kind of sport (in Lanark he had been an excellent golfer) and also an avid reader, and these interests gave him much support. He listened continually to the Irish radio and read all the Irish papers he could lay his hands on. At the same time he had a surprising grasp of British politics, and an equally surprising knowledge of British personalities. This was probably a reflection of his great interest in people generally.

A fact which became clear after his death was his extraordinary personal poverty. He gave away freely what little money he had, and he left practically nothing behind in the way of books or "curious and unnecessary articles" or clothes. Whatever clothes or shoes he had were practically all ancient.

Last May we went together on a retreat to a retreat house outside Brecon, in the beautiful Welsh countryside. Fintan was in excellent form especially, I think, because by then it had finally been agreed that he would return to St Peter's, Phibsborough, early in the New year of 1997. But later, during the summer, he became seriously ill and on September 18 I flew with him to Dublin, and we went to St Paul's. At this stage he was confined to a wheelchair, and as there were long delays at both Luton and Dublin Airports it was a nightmare journey for him. He looked and felt dreadful, but he bore the ordeal with great dignity, and never once complained.

Unfortunately I had to return on that afternoon, but the confreres in St Paul's attended to all Fintan's needs admirably. St Vincent would have been proud of them. They got him into Beaumont Hospital immediately, and kept in continual touch with him. The hospital staff

were admirable, but all was in vain and after an attack of pneumonia, followed by a heart attack, he died on October 1st. Before being brought to the operating theatre for a final attempt to prolong his life he had been supported spiritually by the Provincial and a group of confreres from St Paul's.

Fintan had a premonition that he was going to die, for he had told some of his intimate friends that he did not expect to celebrate the golden jubilee of his ordination to the priesthood. Although he was rather a timid person he did not appear to be afraid of death. In a conversation earlier in the year we had both agreed that to believe we are meeting a welcoming God after death makes the prospect of dying much less terrifying, and Fintan was a man of deep faith. It was easy to like Fintan. You could not be angry with him because he was so gentle and good natured. As I reflect on the years I spent with him I realise that writing his obituary, however imperfect it may be, had become a labour of love. Requiescat in pace! He was a good man, and he lives now with God.

Aidan McGing CM

FINTAN BRISCOE CM
Born: Dublin 23 April 1923.
Entered CM: 7 September 1940.
Final vows: 8 September 1942.
Ordained a priest in the Pro-Cathedral, Dublin, by Dr John Charles McQuaid, Archbishop of Dublin, 22 May 1948.

APPOINTMENTS
1948-1949 St Joseph's, Blackrock.
1949-1954 St Vincent's, Castleknock.
1954-1966 St Paul's, Raheny.
1966-1975 St Mary's, Lanark.
1975-1990 St Vincent's, Cork.
1990-1996 Sacred Heart, Mill Hill.
Died 1 October 1996.
Buried: Glasnevin.