COLLOQUE

Journal of the Irish Province of the
Congregation of the Mission

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Contents

Editorial

For those of our readers outside the Irish Province, this edition of *Colloque* may well be the last that you receive through the post. As of this year, *Colloque* is now available on the world wide web at www.vincentians.ie. This website of the Irish Province will give you free access to all editions of the journal from its inception in Autumn 1979 and will be updated with each new edition.

For this reason, no further editions of *Colloque* will be posted abroad unless they are specifically requested and, in this case, we would ask that those requesting postage undertake to cover the cost. It is our hope that having *Colloque* on the web will make it more accessible to many.

I would particularly like to thank Frs Kevin O'Shea and Brian Moore who, as Visitors of the Province, gave support to this initiative and made the funds available to undertake it. I would also thank the members of the Provincial Council for their support and encouragement. Most particularly, I would thank: Níall Funge who undertook the work of preparing and formatting all the past editions for the web; Helen Ryan-Lawless, and others, who had the laborious task of scanning those past editions which were no longer available in disc form; Jean Martin, our former web-master, for liaising with Níall and resolving issues about which the editor, a techno-twit, had no understanding and which he blithely believed posed no difficulty at all; and, as ever, Una Groarke, the Provincial Secretary, who has, for so many years, undertaken to dispatch *Colloque* to its various destinations. It is to be hoped that this new venture will reduce her workload! The sight of *Colloque* on the web belies the long hours of work that went into preparing it for presentation in such a form and I am hugely grateful to all.

The larger part of this current edition is made up of the work of Charles van Leeuven, in which he commemorates the life and works of the Dutch congregation of the Sisters of Charity of Our Lady Mother of Mercy; a very different and inspiring way of recording a history and a journey of faith. Tom McKenna, of the Eastern Province USA, has kindly updated a talk on Frederic Ozanam which he gave in Trinity College, Dublin, last year just as Fr Robin Colpman, himself a former Vincentian Volunteer, gave kind permission to publish the talk that he gave earlier this year. Tom Davitt's contributions reflect on Vincent and travel in, as ever, Tom's inimitable style.

The province lost three much-loved confreres in these past months; Frs Eamonn Cowan and Myles Rearden had just entered their seventies while Fr Eugene Sweeney was, as he so often insisted, in his ninety-ninth year (once a birthday had passed, he had little use for it and looked

forward to equalling his mother's great age of one hundred and seven, though that was not to be). Their obituaries, and reflections offered at Masses in the colleges in which they worked, are published here. There are still two obituaries due; those of Frs Kevin O'Rafferty and Diarmuid O'Hegarty; this latter is long overdue and redress is being made at the kind promptings of Tom Davitt. With regard to Kevin, readers are reminded that, in some ways, Kevin wrote his own obituary in his book, published after his death, called *Fragments of a Life*. It is a reflection on many of the significant moments of his own life and faith journey and his experiences as a priest, confrere and one intimately connected with education and formation in the past decades of seismic change in ecclesial life. Copies of this book are available from All Hallows College or by contacting the Provinical Office in Dublin. Lastly, we publish a brief review of *Seeds of Hope* which Myles Rearden delivered to the editor only a few days before his untimely death.

In preparing this edition, I reread the very first editorial (then Foreword) by Philip Walshe. It seemed pertinent to our situation today. He wrote;

> A small group of people, like the members of the Irish Province of the Congregation of the Mission, is constantly in danger of losing its identity under the bombardment of mass communications… *Colloque* is an attempt to assert ourselves. To use the name "Vincentian" implies a wish to share the ideal, the thought patterns, of Saint Vincent… In this first issue and in succeeding ones members of the Province will have a twice yearly renewal of their awareness of Saint Vincent. It is to be hoped that this will aid them both in personal piety and in preaching… This journal is intended to be a means of communication within the Province

It is to be hoped that, in changing times, even in times of diminishment, this new venture will prove to be a way to 'assert ourselves' and to use mass communications to that end and to say with Ulysses, in Tennyson's poem of that name;

> Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
> We are not now that strength which in old days
> Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are;
> One equal temper of heroic hearts,
> Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
> To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

Charity in your name

Charles van Leeuwen

Original title: *Liefde in je naam* (2007) Translated from the Dutch by Ulrike Smulders and Sr Anne Marie Newsham scmm. Reworked and edited by Alison Edwards and Charles van Leeuwen

Charles van Leeuwen is a lecturer in literature and art at Maastricht University and secretary of studies of the Brothers of Our Lady Mother of Mercy in Tilburg. He has published widely on spirituality and religious history. Recent books include Hemelse voorbeelden [Examples from Heaven] *(2001*), Vuur dat blijft branden [The fire that keeps burning] *(2005),* Barmhartigheid en broederschap [Mercy and Brotherhood] *(2006) and* Herinneringen aan frater Andreas [Remembering Brother Andreas] *(2007). He is a Benedictine oblate attached to Saint André de Clerlande in Belgium*

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Charity in your name was published in 2007 on the occasion of the 175th anniversary of the Sisters of Charity of Our Lady Mother of Mercy.

These short and reflective texts reveal what it means to live and work as a sister today. They deal with inspiration from the gospel and the interpretation of a life in community, including all the challenges and difficulties this brings. They touch upon everyday activities characterized by dedication to justice, mercy and compassion for the destitute. It asks questions about a contemporary religious lifestyle involving simplicity, silence, attention, friendship and hospitality, as well as inspiration from the Scriptures and tradition. In addition, it considers how the Sisters of Charity deal with the heritage of their past and reflect on the future – a future that is insecure but not untenable.

Charity In Your Name is not only a retrospective of past and present religious life, but also a passionate plea for its continuation, modernization and 'ressourcement' (return to the spiritual sources). It is not only *about* the exchange of ideas with younger generations inspired by religion, but actually strikes up the conversation. It not only reflects on new forms of commitment, but with its direct tone and open, personal considerations, takes the first step towards this commitment. *Charity*

In Your Name aims to reveal the sister within, and appeal to the sister in you.

Charity In Your Name is a portrait of one of the largest Dutch congregations of women, the Sisters of Charity of Our Lady Mother of Mercy. Founded in Tilburg in 1832 by Bishop Joannes Zwijsen, the congregation has been active in many countries since, for instance in education, healthcare, social support and other Church activities…

Sisters of Charity

Have you ever wondered
why the Sisters of Charity were there?
The question might raise a smile
evoke pity, disbelief, annoyance
or curiosity: why were they there?

Who else would have cared for
the sick, the poor, the infirm who
needed warmth and human contact
the child who did not have
equal opportunity but also wanted
to learn and read and play?

Who else would have recalled
the solitary elderly, the prisoner
the orphan, destitute and lonely
the vulnerable and small
who sought nothing but care?

Who else would have believed in
rights for the weakest
chances for the littlest
futures for the poorest:
who would have awakened their
own sleeping talents for charity?

When all these things
were not yet taken for granted
were not yet in practice
we were needed to do good
where others passed it by.
But that was in times past, you say:
What use are sisters now?
Perhaps the world is better now,
more compassionate and kind,
and we can start again: maybe
care for the deprived today?

What Inspires Us?

Why do we do all this?
It's a question we can't answer
well. Do *you* always know why
you do what you do? The fact
is that we surrender to it, and
devote ourselves heart and soul.

We believe in a better world
and in a dignified existence
within reach of all humankind
given out of love for everyone
in justice, in peace, in the name
of a good and merciful God.

We believe in these lofty ideals
but also that we ourselves can
and must act to tackle misery
and help wherever possible.
We know that it begins with
small, ordinary things.

We believe in setting about
with like-minded women along
the path to lasting solutions.
We build schools and hospitals
and houses to care for people.

We believe in our own strength,
but still more in each other for
we do not face the work alone:
united we form a community with
the chance to support, encourage
and share our joy with each other.

We believe it all has meaning
and our work will be blessed.
We trust that all we do shall
be guided and supported by
the God of mercy and love
in whose name we strive.

Now you know what inspires us
as Sisters of Charity: how we
see the world and how we
want it to be. Can you believe
this drive for greater humanity
this faith has never grown less?

How It Began

It began with a misunderstanding.
A priest found three beguines
to help him set up a school. They
thought: is this what we want?
Years they had lived in peace,
now they wanted to take a new
course in their lives of prayer.

Would they stay in their beguinage
or start that school with the priest?
They were not timid, and in
divine providence had faith.
And so they set out, Sister Michael
and two nieces with whom she lived.

At last they arrived and
called on the priest, only to find
other sisters already arrived
and no work left for them.
A spell of confusion followed:
must they return to their beguinage?

Another priest heard the news
and thought: Why not have them
start a school in our district? It's
what we need, and sure enough
if they will care for others
we must care for them first.

And thus the three came to Tilburg
where the people knew how to work and
swiftly built a house, a chapel, a school.
Before they knew it, upon them were
three tasks: in the classroom,
with the sick, and at the altar.

Seek nothing, refuse nothing,
they said, and with it they meant:
fuss not, and simply do what
must be done. In poor times
in a poor town mercy had no end.

How long did this misunderstanding last?
The priest who soon became Monsignor
had planned only one convent,
but soon the sisters numbered thirty
and at his life's end there were
one thousand four hundred and ninety.

Our Sisters

Can you imagine that more than
ten thousand women have
embraced our religious family
and opted for our paths of mercy?
All ordinary and special sisters who
just wore their wimples a little differently.

We each made the same choice,
bore the same charity in our names.
Yet we differed vastly: there were
as many kinds of sisters
as kinds of love, or almost so.

Six groups we were: doing-sisters
and thinking-sisters, the first in the
majority, the latter on the council,
school sisters and care sisters,
the first strict, others mild,
and stable sisters and transfer sisters.

We differed, too, in class and origin:
working-class sisters and well-to-do sisters,
urban sisters and rural sisters.
But these worldly differences held
less weight within the convent:
were we not all sisters and equal?

We slept in cubicles if we slept at all,
among coughing sisters and snoring sisters,
we prayed in the chapel, if we prayed,
among murmuring sisters and mute sisters,
and in the refectory sat stuck between
sweet-tooth sisters and slurping sisters.

We each had our own domain.
Sister sacristan watched over the chapel
sister receptionist over hallway and door
a school sister held sway in the classroom
and a working sister in her workshop:
thus we exercised love and authority.

After Vatican II, things rapidly changed:
curly-hair sisters and ponytail sisters appeared,
progressive sisters and tradition sisters,
trouser sisters, miniskirt sisters, bikini sisters.
Only then did we realize how different
we were despite our shared sisterhood!

Are all those species now endangered
on the brink of becoming extinct? Some
are, it's true, but the new flock forth:
brown and black and yellow sisters,
study sisters, action sisters, lay sisters,
part-time sisters and internet sisters.

Today, we spin our vivid, exotic web
with ocean sisters and volcano sisters,
archipelago sisters and Amazon sisters:
we do the clog dance and the samba
we sing the kundiman and the psalms
we eat cabbage and saffron rice.

So we form a multicoloured sisterhood
just like smurf sisters who kick up a
great fuss and cheerful spectacle
of their small, funny differences.

Enduring And Daring

All this might sound too beautiful and
too romantic to you. Did we actually
live up to those high expectations?
Did we not have a terribly hard time?
Were we not sometimes exploited
under the guise of devotion?

Perhaps so, indeed. We dared
much but also endured much:
had lofty ideals but battled
tough and untamed realities.

Daring it was to take earnestly
our desire to become sisters,
to consider all that would follow.
Daring it was, too, to share our
questions about our vocation
and make that existential choice.

Daring to tell our parents, to
set out with but a suitcase to
begin a new life with other women.
Daring to see it as the way of the
gospel, and to stay seeing it so.

Daring our lives were at times
but enduring was ever the rule.

Enduring the schoolchildren
who brought trouble and rebellion,
enduring the sick in the homes
who called for attention time and again,
enduring the poor wretches in the
clinics who never understood our care.

Enduring our own circle, too,the
sisters who lived not for each other
but rather on top of each other.
Our motto was *love without self-love*:
too often it became self-love without love.

Self-sanctification was our desire
but self-denial was how it felt.

We often ignored ourselves
and when love became loveless
we had to endure, when life became
hopeless we had to bear, and when
nothing was left but merciful and
merciless giving: we had to do that.

We worked so pitilessly hard that
once the sister's day was through
no school book could we face again
no prayer book bear to open
no duster sweep across the shelves
only say a brief Hail Mary.

A Florid Cross

In times past, our sisters wore
a heavy silver cross dangling
on their chests, always in their way.
With every move it made itself felt,
that angular and twinkling thing.

Though they learnt to handle it
they always had to take care
as they stood or sat or walked,
to avoid making sudden moves.
They would grab it if they had to dash
and take it off for scrubbing.

At school, the big cross proved
quite handy and impressive:
it served to draw lines, open letters
and tap on desks. The cross was
a swinging, walking classroom hub.

Yet not so useful was it for
handicrafts and play. In nursing
too, its bulk could not be borne:
it would wake up the sick
wound the injured and set fly
to the odd glass of water.

After Vatican II, we got smaller
more graceful crosses to wear
with little leaves and flowers
lightweight and easily tucked
beneath our tops if we wanted
to hide our identity for a time.

It tinkles cheerfully as we cycle
pricks our skin now and then
and vibrates softly as we write.

With its light weight and delicate form
we sometimes forget that it's there –
clutch anxiously at our necks and
wonder: is it still there?

Likewise, many sides of our
religious lives have grown lighter
subtler, harder to interpret too.
But our devotion remains the same
and the cross we wear in bloom.

Yesterday, Today And Tomorrow

Do you think we talk too much of
the past and too little of the now?
What we did, not what we do
who we were, not who we are?
Why don't we talk of what may be
what we want and could make be?

What matters most is today:
the attention we can give
the courage we can summon.

But today is in a state of flux,
cannot easily be put in words.
The unexpected guest arrives
an unforeseen question arises
or the appeal we can't turn down.
Today is unknown and undefined.

The past has moulded us: we
live through old stories, pray with
old words, possess an old faith.

We owe almost all to the past,
to the sisters who came before
us and who we see clearly yet:
simple, energetic, inspiring women.
Do we live up to their expectations?

From them we inherited this ancient
religious life to which we must give
new expression. Do we truly dare?
Do we see the chances and needs
of the now, and accept them in full?

Is our inspiration still their inspiration?
Do we still share what they shared?
Is the old drive ever young and strong
enough to strive for new horizons
and set new days on fire?

Let us continue asking these questions:
only then may we hope that our lives
will go on, that other women will dare
dare to opt for life as Sisters of Charity.

For of course we must think of the
morrow: to whom we can entrust
our house, confide our concerns
and commit our works. Though
it may be different, it must still be.

Yesterday, today and tomorrow:
in three times at once we live
our faith our hope and desire.

Friendship

How much the world has changed
in the last fifty years can be seen
in how we approach friendship.

Friendship, then, was not allowed:
it was suspect and interfered
with vocation. Sisters too friendly
with each other were separated,
transferred to other convents.

Friendship, now, is a cornerstone
of our existence, giving expression
and meaning to our desire to
live as sisters. And though some
live in communities and others
on their own, friendship unites us.

To embrace our vocation in earnest
we bow out of family life and intimacy.
Yet we feel surrounded by friendship
and accepted in warm sisterhood.

Our lifestyle is strengthened through
friendship: we share simplicity, attention
devotion and hospitality with each other.

We're often surprised by how far
friendship bridges the differences
between us in culture and age.
It starts with a flash of recognition
and can grow into fulfilment.

Can we opt for religious life if
it does not ripen in friendship?
We need to share with others our
questions and answers, learn to
discern questions that clarify from
those that distract and mislead.

Can we deepen and promote
religious life without support
and stimulation from friends
and companions; quiet, close
and trusted persons from
whom we hide no secrets?

We experience friendship
as a gift from God, a piece
of eternity here on earth
but also as a task in imitation
of Jesus. For did he not say:
I call you friends?

Living in the World

For some, vocation stems from
a desire to abandon the world and
with others or in quiet solitude
start a life devoted to God in peaceful
and perfect seclusion somewhere
on the barren heights or in the desert.

A hermit needs but few things:
an enclosed garden, some books
and a place to pray. She lives in
silence, simplicity and austerity
a life reduced to its essence.

Behind the convent walls, a nun
in an enclosed order gives meaning
to her community, hymns and prayers
and derives pleasure from her life
of manual work, study and liturgy
through peace and quiet.

For us, things are different:
our vocation is among people and
our houses at the heart of society.
We seek no solitude, no extremes
nor to wander in the wilderness.

We just devote our lives to mercy:
step out into the street each day
and meet those in need to lend
our support and encouragement.

We do not turn our backs to the
world, but aim to spread God's love
and mercy throughout that world.

We are always ready to move
though this makes us vulnerable
because the purity and credibility
of our commitment are at stake:
how do we stay sharp and alert?

We need not hide behind walls
as long as we carry silence
and prayer in our hearts
and firmly entwine ourselves
in a sisterly veil of faith
and mutual support.

Against Injustice And Poverty

Our rule says that we must take a
stand against existing injustice and
poverty, against the tyranny of greed,
possession and the selfish belief in
our own rights. Pretentious it may
sound, but it's what we try to do.

It begins with a frugal lifestyle.
We seek to show solidarity with
those who have little or nothing
and share as much as possible.
We make no claims to more
than we honestly, truly need.

Then there is our work, in which
we try to fight poverty every day.
This is a small struggle but a fierce
one, as small but concrete acts
take on greater dimensions.

If you open your eyes you'll see
poverty all around: people with
no food no parents no home
no care no education no hope
no faith no souls no love:
where must charity begin?

Look closer and you will also see
much injustice. But this is harder to
find: sometimes it's so obvious that
we miss it, sometimes it is tucked
away, or cloaked as a form of right.
Yet merciful eyes can see it.

Sometimes just one person needs to
be heard in the silence, call poverty
by its rightful name, put injustice into
words, sing the first song of change.

Sometimes just one person needs to
take the lead, show that there are
other ways to work and share, other
forms of attention and inspiration to
give the vulnerable and forgotten.

We are not a large community
and cannot do great things.
Yet we are rich in people with
eyes hands ears hearts voices
people who can bring hope
and let others share in it.

Hospitality

You might have got the impression
that we lead terribly active lives.
It all seems to hinge on giving and
doing our part for a world in need.
But is it always our sworn desire
to set about like missionaries?

Neither always nor at all. For
before we can give, we must learn
to receive and be received. How
can we speak without first
opening ourselves up to listen?

Hospitality has always been important
in our homes. From the start we learnt
to open our circle and ask guests to
share our bread. Yet, the question
remains:do we go far enough?

Being hospitable is much more
than a good habit or good deed:
it is an exercise in opening ourselves,
meeting and understanding others,
experiencing life's fullness and joy.

Hospitality helps us get to know
the sister in ourselves and others.

Who is the guest and who the host?
Who receives and is being received?
These roles can be clearly divided
or swiftly change, for those who give
attention receive attention in return
and the respectful receive respect.

God loves the joyful giver,
so the old saying declares. God's
love becomes tangible when it is
with joy that we give and receive.
God will then be in our midst as
both a merciful guest and a host.

Hospitality is a sacred principle
that brings the Sacred close.

What Matters Most To You?

If you want to know if you'd feel at home
in a convent or a community, what would
you consider? Would you head first
for the buildings and the gardens
the chapel and the workshops
the kitchen and the library?

Would you check whether the beds are
hard enough, the chapel benches snug?
Perhaps you would try on our clothes
sample our meals, taste our bread?

Would you take note of the horizon
and the space round the houses
how the light shines through and
the echo of the world comes in
whether the silence is truly pure
whether here you'd feel secure?

Or would you look to the sisters who
receive you, and want to share their
convent with you: are we friendly
and trustworthy, hospitable and inspiring
and have we something to offer you?

And what do you think *we* would
consider if you came to our convent
or community: whether you are friendly
and reliable, cheerful and grounded,
and have something to share with us?

And what would those buildings consider
the workshops and gardens too: whether
you're enthusiastic, attentive, can fill them
with life and work and a loving community?

And what would all else want to ask you:
the chapel benches whether you pray
the beds whether you keep vigil well
the clothes whether you are relaxed
and the bread whether you can share?

And then comes the question,
of course, what God would consider.
We'll never know but don't you think
God would be grateful if you simply
and sincerely share your life?

Simplicity

Are we not too tied up to
truly realize what it means
to dedicate our lives to God?
Is it truly a matter of what we
do and have done, or rather
of what and who we are?

Our lives are not inspired
by work but by simplicity.

Sometimes our days are just
too full for us to see this.
We live from one thing to the next,
all of utmost importance:
until simplicity calls us back
to order, back to our cores.

Our simplicity is merciful.
We share what is abundant
release what is superfluous
give up what is not required
and cherish what remains.
Our simplicity is light and mild.

Our simplicity is tender rather
than stark. With fresh flowers a small painting
and a candle it colours and warms our homes.
Our simplicity is not frugal but
generous and open to others.

Our simplicity is cordial rather
than strict. A smile, a silent
gesture and heartfelt words
will do to bring us together.
Our simplicity is not lonely
but open and inviting.

Our simplicity liberates us and
helps us see God's blessing.

In a simple way we share the bread
received through God's goodwill.
In simple words we give thanks:
merciful God, your grace is infinite.
In simple faith we pray for help:
merciful God, stay close by.

Nothing But The Rule?

Though we live by the rule
we do so flexibly and simply.
In all that we do, and all that
we don't, we recall that rule
yet without anxiety and fear
without tyranny and threat.

A rule supports our religious life.
It is a personal behest handed
down from those who came before.
It is thus not a straitjacket
but an invitation to live
and an example to follow.

A rule asks the questions that matter:
why we choose this life, what our
innermost motives are, which
attitude we hold, how we can
persevere and deepen this life.
And how to share it with others!

Reading the rule keeps us alert
yet modest, stirs and questions
us, tempers or incites us. It is
a candid conversation we share
with someone in authority.

A rule is never isolated but
leads us to other reflective
and inspiring texts. It widens
our horizons and brings us
into contact with sisters
brothers fathers mothers.

You briefly read a rule each day
bit by bit, and allow it to sink in –
a gentle, purifying word.

Is there a rule for us other
than that of the gospel itself?
'Nothing but the rule' means
nothing more than living the gospel.
A rule is a short explanation
for everyday use.

How many rules did Jesus teach?
Only a few, in fact –
for he aimed to release us from
too many rules and open our eyes
to what truly matters: the love of
God and our neighbour.

A Fresh Source

The Bible was once almost sealed
to us. We heard stories but rarely
had time to read. What's more,
no one would read with us, teach us,
there was no time or attention for it.

The Bible's message was hidden
in language, habits and mysterious rites.
Our liturgy was strict because
as Sisters of Charity we had
other things to do than reflect.

But one day we began to read
together and alone, careful and
curious, uncomfortable and clumsy.
We know no longer who started it
or continued it along: but for us,
it was a revolution in our lives.

We learnt to pray with new words,
describe the depth of our faith.
We learnt to see our Church and
community in a different light.
We came to know a different Jesus:
speaking, recognizable and nearby.

We began to celebrate once more
rekindle simple, calm festive prayer,
community and singing to share
uplifting words and echo the gospel.

Tap water tastes different from that
served in a carafe, from a creek or
hauled from a well in the mountain:
so too do the words not drawn up
for us, but drawn by us alone.

As Sisters of Charity we work amongst
people and live our faith on real terms.
For this, we need not be theologians
nor possess great minds. No –
what we seek is to radiate deep
proven, religious and fresh belief.

The Chain Of Mercy

What do we know about the good
Samaritan? He was a stranger who
happened by, saw a man in need,
stopped and helped. Then he went
on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho.

What kind of man was he
to have time enough to stop
money enough to give and
freedom enough to dare do
what that poor battered soul
by the road so sorely needed?

What kind of man was he to
see what no one else had seen,
do what no one else had done?
Do you think he thought long
about what he must do, knew
what it would bring about?

Who he was remained unknown
but what he did was widely told:
the destitute traveller passed it on
the innkeeper treated his guests to it
and the Samaritan himself shared it
with his friends, grateful and amazed.

How did Jesus hear of the tale:
from the traveller, the innkeeper
the Samaritan or someone
else unnamed? He passed
it on, so deeply touched was he.

And so the story of mercy goes on
time and time again. Who told us first
we can't recall, but we know that we
were moved: for mercy raises us
above ourselves and gives us wings.

The Spirit That Moves Us

You will understand that religious life
is not as controlled and defined
as it seems. Not only do we face
frequent surprises in our work
but new and unexpected things
happen regularly in our community.

Little works out to how we'd expect:
we might see in this the glorious
workings of the Spirit, Spirit of God
who time and again visits and pursues
us, surprises and tests us with the
strangest and most beautiful things.

Little in church do we speak
of the Spirit: many dare not see her
workings, can neither grasp it with
their hearts nor put it into words.
Some fear, too, that this Spirit
will bring chaos, confusion to all.

They have cast her out: they
no longer see that the Spirit will
renew the face of the earth. They live
without soul, passion and hope
without strength and fire.

Dare we be people of the Spirit,
moved by her wondrous power,
Spirit of love that fills our hearts
of warmth that sets us aflame
of light that illuminates us?

Dare we be children of the Spirit,
join her magnificent plan, Spirit
that counsels and brings relief
that knows our depths and foresees
that brings joy and fulfilment?

Dare we be sisters of the Spirit,
let others share her marvellous gifts,
Spirit that is benevolent, makes
barrenness thrive and hardness light
relieves poverty and comforts grief?

Or do we live by another spirit,
unwilling, unable, afraid to give in
to this Holy One who cares for us so
generously, dwells within us mercifully,
and brings us peace and relief?

A Different Sort of Sister

People sometimes ask if they
may join our community, be
associated with us. They long to
share our lives: but full members
they can't or don't want to be.

Can you be a sister only in part?
Or a sister of a different sort?

For years, there was but one form:
you either took the vows or didn't,
you were a sister or you weren't.
Yet, in practice we each rendered
religious life in our own way:
neither more nor less, just different.

Today we see sisterhood in broader
light, with others who share and accept
our ideals and live them on their own:
not individually but together
neither more nor less, just different.

Together we form a community,
in which we can grow and change.
Together we want to pray, work
believe, share, celebrate
and give shape to charity.

We are still on the search for just the
right forms, the right words for all this.
Our Church speaks in proper terms of
commitment of the laity, the *third order*
and *associate members*, words that
sound cold and formal to our ears.

We prefer to speak of our partners
and travelling companions, but still
these terms are unclear. Why not
just call each other sisters,
for that's what we want to be.
Do you want to live by the gospel?
Could our home be your home?
Could our tradition be part of your life?
We take your desires in earnest,
invite you to come and speak with us
about a commitment in your life.
You need not take the vows.
You need not live in a convent
and share all parts of our lives.
But we ask you to live by God's word
and be faithful in your commitment.
Don't think it will be easy,
being a different sort of sister.
At times it will be difficult,
always a challenge. You must
seek out your own style, balance
how far you can and will go.
Is such commitment credible?
No guarantee: but maybe.
Is it the way of the future?
We don't know, but it need
not be, as long as it answers
your and our sincere desire.

Charity In Your Name

Are you aware of all that you bear
in your name? The memory of
loved ones, longing, fulfillment
admiration, dedication? A name
provides a circle of unknown friends
and a chain of unexpected questions.

Once when we entered religious life
we received a name to suit, perhaps
to shed a former name with unmeant
undertones, or start and confirm our
new life with that new and sacred name.

Some were better off: Lea became
Laetitia and Mia became Michael. Others
were lumped with a cross to bear: Exempla,
Addolorata, Paduana. Who on earth had
invented all these odd, religious names?

And we got, of course, an added name:
no longer miss or mistress, but sisters
we were, like the very first Christians
who saw themselves as brothers and
sisters – one large family, if you will.

And we got, too, a Latin name:
Sorores Caritatis Matris Misericordiae,
this called, of course, for lengthy study
before we could write and repeat it.
Mostly we used SCMM: the brief
yet powerful code of our identity.

But rarely did we realize what hid
behind those letters. We bore not just
Mary in our names but also mercy,
motherhood, sisterhood. A name with
a mission, it was, with untold depth.

But the most beautiful name we acquired
was charity: Sisters of Charity, we're called.
This name we each cherish as desire,
fulfilment, vocation and mission at once:
we bear God's love in our name.

The young Church says: Jesus loves you,
open your mind to him. The old:
ubi caritas et amor Deus ibi est,
in love and care, God is present.
Like the imprint of a seal, we
bear this love in all our names.

The Cost of Charity

Our pupils called us *unmerciful*
Sisters of Charity. That was no joke:
they saw how we had wronged them,
wronged ourselves, through the
essential void in our lives. But
had we deserved the name?

They saw us often standing exhausted
in front of the classroom, lapsing
into strictness neither natural nor
justified. They saw, too, how we
snapped and snarled at other sisters.

They saw it: denounced us for it.
They felt our lives were neither
balanced nor mature, thought our
education sprang from building walls
around ourselves and our shortfalls.

They realized better than we that
workers of mercy deal mercilessly
with themselves and one another.
They recognized then what we
understood only later and
took great pains to fight.

There is a bright side to religious life
but also a side in the shadow.

We had not learnt to deal with what we
thought was sin and denial. We learnt
how to confess and suppress conflict
and survive; neglected other sides
of life like how to recognize and
express our anger, grief and fear.

For anger, there was officially no room
in our lives. In reality, though, every day
it snuck in through the cracks. Often
were we impatient irritated intolerant
of matters that attacked the exact
and ordered discipline in which we lived.

And then there was fear that
overshadowed all else, made us
hesitant in our work, insecure in our
relations and afraid of our superiors.
It was the fear of failure, angst about
undermining our lives of vocation.

The sorrow would come in bursts:
pain of being humiliated and misread
doubts about the sacrifices we made
longing for the lives we never lived.
The grief was intangible, benumbed
our days and muffled our senses.

Even charity has its price: can you
look back with charitable eyes?

Peaceful Silence

A strange silence fills our houses
of empty rooms and dear guests
who call round no more: a silence
not of subdued joy or tempered
energy, but of failed promises.

You almost can't imagine the quiet
that reigned in past hours of silence.
Nothing would break it, no one dared
say a word. The only sound to hear
was a banging door or creaky floor.

Was it a peaceful or threatening quiet?
At times those long imposed silences
during the day and at night felt lonely.
This silence was enforced not by love
but authority, upheld through penance.

Yet the silence could be enjoyable
if you filled it with pleasant pursuits
like craftwork, reading or writing.
As we lifted the strict, unfriendly
silence, we lost the welcome quiet.

Silence so real, it gently surrounds you
leads you not to offend or mislead.
Silence that protects against harsh
superfluous words and purifies you.

Silence that creates simplicity
brings you down to earth, close
to others in quietness and mercy.

Silence that heals and repairs what
tumult and division have caused,
silence that refreshes, brings space
to renew, helps digest and deepen,
lays a gentle foundation for prayer.

Silence that can take everything from
you then give it all back, that carries,
uplifts, rejects and overwhelms as you
set foot on holy ground. In silence alone
do we come nearer the Merciful One.

Silence: only later you realize what
it has done in you and what you could
do with it. Perhaps we should allow
it to enter our lives once again: that
gentle, peaceful, yet awesome silence.

To See and To Do

You might have noticed now and then
that some within the Church look down
on us and our lifestyle: as if we were
the drudges of the sacristy, helpful but
depthless, second rate of vocation.

They see us as handmaidens,
servants of the heavenly household,
Marthas who miss the best part.
Or perhaps they just see us work
but not what moves us in our work.

They misunderstand, in any event,
our mission and manner of life:
they also misread the gospel.

Why should active religious life be
worth less than contemplative life?
Why has the Church an order of rank?
And why distinguish between those who
treasure their faith in their hearts, deepen
it in their minds and testify to it in deed?

As if we weren't all doers and seers
at once in our imitations of Jesus:
both reflective and involved?

Jesus had not only the power to see
but also the courage to do. He saw
people's problems, was determined
of answer, lingered upon visions but
could quickly come to the point.

He was a doer, as his father the
carpenter was. From Joseph he
learnt to build and break, learnt
what he could do and what not.
From him he learnt to handle
clients, find and manage staff.

But Jesus, too, was a seer, as his
mother was. Mary saw what no one
else could: angels and visions. She
saw the things that were not yet and
were yet to come: mercy and justice.
She saw the needs and the solutions.

And Jesus saw that his father, too
was a seer who followed his dreams,
that his mother, too, was a doer
not afraid to act. Thus hand in hand
he saw they went: to see and to do,
to do and to see, and to see do.

How To Go On?

How to go on? This we are asked
by almost all, directly or indirectly,
and we all have different answers.
Must we pass our mission on,
or simply pass away? Or both?

But how to pass it on, and what
to do before passing away?

Some advertise, others create paid
jobs while still more leave Europe.
We do little to pass things on,
yet are reluctant to pass away.

We consider the needs of the world
more important than our own.

Many of our houses have not seen
the footfalls of youth for long years.
We neither sought them out nor
knew how to receive them, for what
could we offer, or ask of them?

We hesitated to take their future in
our hands, and so we waited.

Why didn't we make better use of
our work to bring in the youth?
Why did we shy away from discussion
and dodge their questions and answers?

Have we been too cautious or just
too concerned with ourselves?
We experience their absence
as rejection of our existence.

Is our life so unrecognizable
today? For whom, then, did
we bring modernization,
our open forms of living,
our work in different worlds
new words for our belief?

For whom did we open the
convents and ourselves?

Not to die but live, and give life.
So let us live and give it all:
attention, space, challenge, hope
guidance, foundation and love.
For God lives and gives life.

How to go on? What to foresee?
God knows what is in store.

Two or Three

Now you know why the Sisters of Charity
are there: what we believe, what we do.
Few know all this, and we knowingly
make it this way: for we want to spend
our time on charity and not on our name.

We need not win the world over and
build a reputation. Why seek renown
for work that prospers better in silence?
It is not our aim to please people:
God's blessing is enough for us.

Yet despite our will to work in modesty
and quiet, now and then we must emerge
from the dark and make ourselves known:
the work we do, the community we form
and the love within us require that.

But how far ought we go to make
our work more widely known,
how much publicity can we allow?
Will it bring encounter or distance,
inspiration or disbelief?

How do we invoke, when making
a film or writing a booklet, that spark
of desire for you to know us not only
by sight, but share our lives perhaps
for a while and feel involved?

How do we make our name heard,
let its embedded love shine,
reveal the sister within us
and appeal to the sister in you
without becoming insincere?

How can we do all this without doing
injustice to what we are and stand for?
Without saying or promising too much
without betraying, disguising the word
without pushing our desire too far?

Let not our name be one of great
expectations, but of small things
we do each day; not of a great past
but the courage to start again,
no matter how small, even today.

Let not our name be one of
bygone days but a new beginning:
love that is rekindled today
hope that is awakened today
faith that still has power to thrive
and bring about something new.

Let charity be our name
the charity of two or three sisters
who gather in God's name
charity that dares invite a guest
to every empty seat, and a friend
or stranger to every empty room.

Vincentian AGM 28th February 2009

Rev Robin Colpman

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There's every chance that you'll already be familiar with some of the things included here if you know something of the Vincentian story, but it may be that I relate them in a different way or use them to draw attention to something new. Hopefully I can throw a few ideas out there and you can grasp hold of whatever parts you feel to be helpful, but I thought you might be interested to know from the outset that my parents offered to help me write something for today. It was my mother's birthday last Friday, so I went to visit to celebrate with a family meal. I happened to mention that I was coming here today to talk about St Vincent and she said 'well, that will be alright, just tell them that your father works for St Vincent's Housing Association.' I nodded politely whilst thinking to myself, 'I'm going to have to say a bit more than that.' A short while later my dad appeared and my mother told him that I was going to be talking to you about St Vincent. He said 'Oh, tell them that I work for St Vincent's Housing Association. A similar thought to my previous one floated back into my mind. But then he continued on to tell an interesting little tale.

St Vincent in the 'naughty corner'

Just to put you in the picture, my dad's a maintenance officer and surveyor and you know by know that he works for St Vincent's Housing Association, which was set up in 1971 by members of the SVP to provide quality and affordable housing and at present they have about three thousand properties throughout the North West which they let out to families and individuals as well as offering supported and sheltered housing and being involved in a few other social projects. The point of the story is to mention that the offices in Bolton, Rochdale and Stretford all moved to one central office in Manchester a couple of months ago and since then the statue of St Vincent which used to have pride of place for all to see in the entrance of one of the office buildings has 'been sent to the naughty corner' as my father put it. Seemingly having been relegated to obscurity, he stands facing the wall in the back store room among the old boxes and files.

What we're about here is bringing St Vincent back into view, taking him out of the store cupboard and casting a light on him. I'm sure the statue's current location is only a temporary measure and they'll be bringing him back into full view soon, but our doing this here will let us see what kind of example he provides for us so that we can 'see life through Vincentian eyes' – in other words, we want to ask ourselves 'how does being a Vincentian colour our vision of life?' as Sr Barbara wrote to me in her e-mail. So we're going to look a bit about St Vincent's view of the world; what he saw and the lens he used to filter those images, which will mean going between his life and the story of faith in scripture as a continual dialogue and then bringing that response into our own time and place to see how comfortably it fits with our own experience of the world.

The World of M Vincent

We might start this by asking ourselves what life was like in St Vincent's time; Seventeenth century France? In religious terms, it's post reformation and socially there's been a history of civil war for about 35 years taking us up until the end of the sixteenth century. If you're familiar with Dumas' novel, 'The Three Musketeers,' this is the backdrop he used for his writing, but whether you've read the book or seen the film, that doesn't really express the severity of some of the problems.

Some historical accounts of the situation paint quite a bleak picture. For example, at the Benedictine Abbey of Porte Royal, just outside Paris, in 1649, the abbess wrote;

> This poor country is a horrible sight; it is stripped of everything. The soldiers take possession of the farms and have the corn threshed, but will not give a single grain to the owners who beg it as an alms. It is impossible to plough. There are no more horses all have been carried off. The peasants are reduced to sleeping in the woods and are thankful to have them as a refuge from murderers. And if they only had enough bread to half satisfy their hunger, they would indeed count themselves happy.

Two years after this, in 1651 the Estates of Normandy reported that,

> Of the 450 sick persons whom the inhabitants were unable to relieve, 200 were turned out, and these we saw die one by one as they lay on the roadside. A large number still remain, and to each of them it is only possible to dole out the least scrap of bread. We only give bread to those who would otherwise die. The staple dish here consists of mice, which the inhabitants hunt, so desperate are they from hunger. They devour roots which the animals cannot

> eat; one can, in fact, not put into words the things one sees… This narrative, far from exaggerating, rather understates the horror of the case, for it does not record the hundredth part of the misery in this district. Those who have not witnessed it with their own eyes cannot imagine how great it is.

I think you'll agree that things were in a pretty poor state and while these accounts are from the latter years of Vincent's life and there were a lot of ups and downs in such a temperamental time, Vincent had been a priest for nearly seventeen years before his eyes were properly opened to the hardships people were enduring. Some accounts of his early life are not entirely favourable, but soon what he saw with his eyes he'd experience in his heart as he began to look anew with the eyes of faith.

It was 1617 when he was made parish priest of a village called Chatillon-les-Dombes and a month after joining the community there, a lady from the parish drew his attention to a family on the outskirts of the village that were seriously ill and in desperate need of assistance. After speaking about the family in his homily he went to visit them, and on his way there he met a number of women from the parish who had been themselves to visit, taking provisions with them. It was probably through this experience that he began a programme of organising the regular distribution of relief to the poor from which grew the confraternity of charity, (later named the Ladies of Charity) which in turn paved the way for the Daughters of Charity, founded by St Vincent with Louise De Marillac in 1633 to take care of the physical and spiritual needs of the poor that the ladies were unable to do.

Our World Today

There are some vivid images involved in the story so far and the world St Vincent saw probably did look a bit different to what we're used to and while he did much to improve the lives of many, some of the difficulties and struggles that St Vincent was a witness to <u>are</u> still with us today. There's a chilling similarity between the letter from the Abbess and the situation in certain parts of the developing world in recent times, and while we might not see many people physically dying of hunger on our own, apparently civilised, streets, last year's statistics suggested that there were about 400,000 hidden homeless people here in the UK, and in the current economic climate with mass redundancies and soaring repossessions, it seems likely that the numbers will be going up rather than down. There are lots of projects which work to try and improve the situation and many of these, in one way or another, work in the same spirit of St Vincent, whether they are conscious of this or not, so I want to look a bit about what this spirit is.

We already know something of the life of St Vincent which saw him named as the Patron of Works of Charity, and of others who followed him, for example Louise de Marillac and later Frederic Ozanam, which extended the Vincentian family. So from St Vincent's time onwards people have admired what he did and saw value in it, not simply as a problem to be solved, but in the individuals they responded to.

That doesn't mean there isn't a problem to be solved. The "Make Poverty History" campaign which I'm sure you're all familiar with is a good and worthwhile campaign but its limitations and the measure of its success will be whether, and how, it meets its prime target which is about the cancelling of debt. If it *was* just about money, which we know it's not, we also know from the recent news about the financial crisis that things like this change continually throughout countries and regions and change for individuals in different walks of life even more frequently than the changing of the wind or the tides, so money's always going to be a sticking point for more reasons than we have time to mention. It might help us to feed the hungry, cloth the naked and offer shelter to the homeless but more important than the means to do this is the desire to do it.

We could have the best intentions and want to banish all forms of poverty forever, thinking that if all people, in all places and at all times, had the same goal then it would be achievable, but here and now I think that's a pretty big ask, even if we do think it's a matter of justice, but I don't think justice will get us as far as we want to be. As Frederic Ozanam said, 'Charity is the Samaritan who pours oil on the wounds of the traveller who has been attacked. It is justice's role to prevent the attack.' We'll know that justice is important, even necessary, and on one level we might want to be pushing things in that direction, but injustice in varying forms has been with us throughout the history of mankind, and it doesn't seem to be going away any time soon, so we need something else.

We can think about it in another way, shown in the gospel where Jesus gets drawn into a trap set by the Scribes and Pharisees, who bring him a woman who's sinned, saying that according to the law, given in the book of Deuteronomy, the sentence is death. On the one hand, it seems as though he can't say that the woman should be set free or else he contradicts the justice of the law. On the other hand, the people have heard Christ's teaching on compassion and forgiveness, so he can't say that she should be condemned to death or else he contradicts himself and appears as nothing more than a fraud. It's not the woman who's on trial now, the tables have turned and it's Jesus standing in the dock.

The accusers have sidestepped one problem to leave Jesus in an even bigger one. It seems as though, on the one hand or the other, without

the need to even pick up a stone, Jesus has been caught out, but his own hands aren't tied by either possibility. He turns the tables again and puts the Scribes and Pharisees on trial saying 'If there is one of you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.' He doesn't say the law is wrong and he doesn't say that he is wrong. By throwing it back at the Pharisees they have to ask themselves whether they really want justice to prevail. If they did, and if they condemned the woman, they would also have condemned themselves. Basically Jesus shows that there's a difference between justice and mercy, and it's mercy that we all need more than anything else, and I think St Vincent would have recognised this in his own life too.

Motives for Justice

Justice, as in social justice, works on one level to a certain point when we try to make sure that everyone's rights are upheld and that they have all their basic needs, but on the next level, and particularly on the receiving end I think we'd prefer mercy rather than justice. Justice might seem beneficial but there are a lot of costs involved. Mercy goes further than justice by saying that it's not about what people might deserve, but what they need. Mercy wouldn't be mercy if it was what someone deserved. That's its defining point. Like with the woman in the gospel, mercy doesn't declare the guilty to be innocent, it recognises their guilt but doesn't ask them to pay the price. It takes on board the needs and provides for them without the question of whether they've been earned, and it doesn't place demands on the things that have passed but turns only to the future with hope in the knowledge of God's mercy. This, as Christians, we bring into the present by being agents of that mercy and love as St Vincent was, by not asking whether someone deserved help, but whether they needed it. 'Justice has its limits whereas charity knows none.'

In thinking about the spirit of St Vincent we're distracted by his title of Patron of works of Charity if we think of charity in secular terms which has evolved from its original meaning. These days we tend to think of charity as an organisation or a fund set up to help the needy, but the word charity comes to us from the Latin 'caritas' which is a translation of the Greek 'agape' and is the purest of all forms of love, which seeks nothing other than the good of another, so the word 'charity' should be synonymous with the word 'love.' If St Vincent's the patron of works of love then it's not only about what we do, but about why we do it; what motivates us. So we're coming at it from a different angle for reasons that we've already mentioned and because otherwise we'd be getting pretty close to saying that the continued effects of poverty mean that St Vincent had failed. I don't think any of us want to say this

because we know that the Vincentian family has grown and spread in a remarkable way and that's why our focus is on the fact that St Vincent and his companions did find a solution. The solution they found was to respond to each individual and to see in them the presence of God.

This, St Vincent found in Matthew Chapter 25 and he used it as his motive.

> When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, in so far as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these, you neglected to do it for me.

If this moved St Vincent, as members of the Vincentian family today, does it still move us? St Vincent said 'What a wonderful title and what a beautiful description… "Servants of the poor!" It is the same as saying Servants of Jesus Christ, for He regards as done to Himself what is done to them. What did he do on earth but serve the poor?'

Ozanam

One person it did move permanently was Frederic Ozanam who, in 1833 was a student in Paris. It was the aftermath of the French revolution, which took place some 30-40 years earlier, so period wise, we can think of Victor Hugo's Novel, *Les Miserables*, which deals with the Paris uprising of 1832. If you're not familiar with Les Mis there's plenty of opportunity to become familiar with it as its been adapted worldwide for stage and screen fifty times, including the musical that most people know of. Interestingly, to set the scene of the time, Hugo counted 740 criticisms of Les Mis by the catholic press despite the fact that the Bishop comes off quite favourably, being seen as a kindly man who gave food and shelter to Jean Valjean, and covered for him, sparing him from prison by claiming that the silver he stole from the Bishop was a gift. This might be due to the fact that Hugo was a Catholic, albeit a complicated one, but his portrayal of the Church was not typical of the time as the Church was still out of favour with a lot of people for a number of different reasons. There was still rioting in the streets. Unemployment was high and disease was rife and some people wondered where the Church was in all of this. One Summary of where the Church went with it tells of how:

> One day in a heated argument Frederic was challenged by a fellow student who did not share Frederic's Catholic beliefs: "Your faith exists in books, not in deeds, Monsieur Ozanam. What are you Catholics doing to help the poor and the underprivileged?" Fredric was quick to the defence of the Catholic religion. "The Church has always been a friend of the poor", he replied. "Christ came to save all mankind…" But his adversary interrupted him. "You speak of the past, Monsieur Ozanam. I am asking you what are the Catholics of today doing, you and your companions?" Frederic was deeply disturbed by the question and the argument proved a turning point in his life. The following Sunday evening, Frederic and his companions wondered what practical response they could make. Soon, having searched in a small cupboard where they kept spare firewood, Frederic and a friend went to visit an elderly neighbour who lived alone. Soon it became obvious that the neighbour did not really need the firewood. What he craved much more was somebody to speak to. His spiritual needs were more important than his material needs – a point that was not lost on Frederic. Frederic and his companions now realised that Christianity was about actions and not words.

We see this too, in Jesus, whose presence was the action of a loving God.

Their friendly evening chats became meetings to coordinate themselves in what they were going to call the Conference of Charity, to visit local people in various kinds of need to offer companionship as well as food and clothing. It was 173 years after the death of St Vincent but they took him as their patron and their profile was raised two years later when he was named Patron Saint of Charitable Works by Pope Leo 13th. Twenty years after it began, when Frederic himself became a victim to tuberculosis, the SVP had more than five hundred groups throughout France and England. The spirit of St Vincent was alive and flourishing and it does so still and it will always have plenty to do.

Responding today

As we know poverty has many forms and even Christ said that 'the poor will be with you always.' That doesn't mean he wants people to be poor, despite the beatitudes which tell us ' Blessed are the hungry, those who mourn, the poor,' As Archbishop Helder Camera said 'Saints may be found in slums, but we cannot retain slums in order to make them the breeding ground for saints.' So we remember that 'they shall have their fill, they shall be comforted, the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs' and we work in the spirit of St Vincent, which is the Spirit of the Gospel, to make it so, by the way we respond to individuals in the time and place that we find ourselves. This is what Frederic and his companions did, taking on board St Vincent's own words, "Let us love God, but let it be with the sweat of our brows and the strength of our arms." Indeed Vincent's motto was 'action is our entire task' but he wanted it to be clear that action held a much deeper meaning when it was the fruit of prayer and meditation. That was always its starting point and he wrote in one of his letters that "You must have an inner life, everything must tend in that direction. If you lack this, you lack everything." So it was about a dialogue where prayer informs work and work is nourished by prayer. It might not always be easy but he said 'Give me persons of prayer and they will be capable of anything.'

That can sound a bit scary because sometimes we might think that there's little that we can do, but we know that little things can make a big difference, directly to those we encounter and indirectly to those who follow the same example. It's still a challenge because often the way we serve others might be proactive, where we see what's happening around us, judge what we need to do and make a plan so that we can go out and act. Those tend to be circumstances where we're prepared, but how do we deal with the reactive, where something just happens and it may be at a time when we're tired, or busy with other important matters or don't have the time to call a meeting to work out what to do, but we still have to do something. It's interesting that there are models for both

of these things in the journey that Christ took to the cross, which we'll be thinking about a bit more now that we're beginning Lent. Those two models are firstly the one who chooses to serve and then the chosen servant.

If we think about the Stations of the Cross, we see a picture of Veronica. She sees Jesus who had sweat and blood trickling down his face, and notices the need that he's in. She wonders what she can do and then recognises that she is in a position to help, so she breaks through the crowd filled with the courage to come to his aid despite the risk of being attacked by the soldiers who stood by jeering at him. She steps up to him, takes off her veil and uses it to wipe Jesus' face. Is it a simple matter of kindness, or a more heartfelt and deeply rooted compassion? Sometimes we might be like Veronica, standing up against the crowd and willing to do what our heart tells us to be right. We might choose to serve and as such an imprint of goodness is left behind.

The other type of service is perhaps more like that of Simon of Cyrene. Jesus seemed to be struggling and so a passer by, who was just coming in from the country, was enlisted to help Jesus carry his cross. I doubt if he'd ever met Jesus. He'd probably never heard of him before, but all that was going to change. He didn't have a choice about whether or not to help Jesus, the soldiers made him, and so whether Simon loved or hated Jesus, he was now sharing the burden of the cross. How must he have felt to have been pulled out of the crowd and forced to help this man? What seems like a chance encounter, must have led him to find out more about Jesus because he and his children (Rufus and Alexander) seem to be known by other members of the early Christian community later on. Sometimes we're more like Simon of Cyrene, where something just happens, the circumstances seem to be beyond our control and we find ourselves in a situation when, even if we're not consciously prepared, we have no choice but to respond, sharing the burden, and that response in turn prompts us to go deeper, to ask questions and make discoveries which lead us closer to the truth of God and of how we serve Him even or, should I say, especially in other people.

We're not all going to find ourselves in that kind of situation in such a concrete way, but figuratively speaking of the presence of Christ in the eyes of the poor, we may at some point end up wiping his brow or carrying his burden. St Vincent did it by organising countless local charities in the villages throughout France, some of which became the pattern for how institutions and governmental departments of social services were to operate. This included work organising hospitals for the sick poor, founding institutions for abandoned children, opening soup kitchens, creating job training programmes, teaching young women to read, improving prison conditions, assisting refugees

and other victims of tragedy and caring for the housebound. All of these were social necessities and at the same time, founded on his faith and in the spirit of the gospel, it was missionary activity.

As I mentioned, it may seem easier to go out with a plan as we know where we're channelling our energy, but what happens when someone or something lands on our doorstep? In the parish where I'm based there are people coming begging at the presbytery door on a regular basis, sometimes as often as several times a day. I could be in the middle of meeting a family to arrange a funeral, getting ready for a service (or even writing a talk about St Vincent) not to mention trying to get lunch before it's too late to bother because I've been called out to a patient dying in hospital. Sometimes it's difficult to avoid thinking of them as a nuisance, and I do have to remind myself of what we're about and that begins by the way we present ourselves. St Vincent's own experience showed him that:

> Whenever I happened to speak abruptly to the convicts, I spoiled everything. But whenever I praised them for their acceptance and showed them compassion, whenever I sympathized with them in their sorrows, when I kissed their chains, and showed them how upset I was when they were punished, then they always listened to me and even turned to God.

Sometimes it is difficult, particularly when you know you're being told a made up story to try and get extra money because they've run out of cider. When I first moved to St Cuthbert's they'd be asking for money for a cup of tea or something to eat. Instead of giving them money I'd offer to make them a sandwich. Then I'd be told that sandwiches were being found in the hedge down the road or else sold rather than eaten. Then they wanted hot food because it was cold and I wasn't able to provide hot food so I'd need to give them money for chips.

Sometimes I'd point them to *Cornerstone*, which is a drop in centre where they can get hot food, but they'd need the bus fare to get there, or they'd come for bus fare to see their visit sick relatives, or to other places they needed to get to urgently so they didn't break their bail conditions. Then they'd come for food at a time when Cornerstone was closed. There always seemed to be a reason why they wanted money rather than anything else and sometimes the smell of alcohol on their breath was down to a can their friend had given them rather than that they'd already spent up, including the money they'd begged for. Occasionally I gave in and have given them money telling them to make sure they did get something to eat, only to set off down the road a few minutes later and see them coming out of the off licence with another bottle.

There would be others who took sandwiches to begin with, then they needed food for the rest of the week till the next giro came through, so I'd give a them bread and milk and a few tins or other things out of the cupboard, which was usually pretty bare to start with. Then they needed money putting on the electric card to cook it with. Then they came with a shopping list which included nappies (even though they had no children) and other things we obviously didn't have. Was this also just a ruse or had they come to rely on what we'd give and so spent their shopping money on other things? St Vincent tells us that;

> A missionary needs patience and restraint in his works with those to whom he is sent. The poor can be so unrefined, so ignorant… If an individual hasn't the gentleness to put up with their crudeness, what can he hope to accomplish? Nothing at all. On the contrary, he will dishearten those poor ones. When they feel his sharpness, they will be put off and will not return to learn those things which are needed (for them to be saved.) Gentle patience, then, is demanded of us.

This doesn't always mean that we give them what they want, but in a sensitive way and without being patronising, try to give them what they need, as he also taught that;

> true charity does not consist only of distributing alms, but of helping the abject to regain their dignity and independence.

This follows the saying which I'm sure you'll have heard that goes, 'give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach a man to fish and you feed him for life.' Not many people go fishing in Manchester but the principle is the same. It's about moving people forward and assisting them, where possible, to use wisely the resources available so that they don't have to keep coming and asking for things. There's much more dignity in assisting someone to get to that stage where they're able to support themselves than there is in simply throwing food at them on a daily basis.

Acknowledging the poverty in each of us

As individuals we've all had to rely on others at certain points and have benefited from the goodness that they've show to us, and as Christians we believe that we're the subject of that same love from God himself. It was in our own poverty that God sent his Son to us, 'to bring the good news to the poor.' That reference that Jesus quotes from the prophet Isaiah is a way of showing us that Christ came to be with us in our own

need and in turn empowers us to be with others in their need. St Vincent used these words to guide him, not because he was a priest, but because he was a baptised member of the Church. It was the same for all the people Vincent helped to empower, and all those who followed in his footsteps.

These words are for us as well:

> The spirit of the Lord has been given to me,
> for he has anointed me.
> He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor,
> to soothe the broken hearted,
> to proclaim liberty to captives
> and to the blind new sight,
> to set the downtrodden free,
> to proclaim the Lord's year of favour.

This applies to each of us, because we've all been anointed for the same purpose. At baptism and confirmation we were anointed with the oil of Chrism to signify our new role in life and in the Church, and that new role carries rights and responsibilities.

Today, as Christians, and especially as members of the Vincentian family, we strive to extend Vincent's dream to our own time and place. As a community we have wonderful gifts and talents which can make a difference in the lives of others, so whatever we're able to do and however we may think it's just a small thing to us, it can make a big difference to others as well as help us to meet God in our everyday experiences, in the events, the persons and the circumstances of our life.

As Vincentians, according to our mission statement we've accepted the challenge to live in the spirit and vision of St Vincent de Paul by recognising Christ in the lives of those on the edge of society, by serving others in a respectful, loving and non-judgemental way and by creating a supportive and prayerful environment for one another. We've seen some of the ways St Vincent and those he inspired did this. It's present in the legacy they left us and was expressed at his funeral with the words "He just about transformed the face of the Church." We're asked to use all the means at our disposal to do this ourselves, not as individuals but as members of a community which receives as well as offers support.

That encouragement can come from many different places and last year on the 175th anniversary of the SVP, the Vatican's Secretary of State wrote that;

> The Holy Father wishes to spiritually join the action of thanksgiving of this happy commemoration and at the same time to set

> forward an invitation to passionately renew the commitment of service to the Church in the unselfish love to the most needed brothers and sisters.

Hopefully a renewal of commitment to the vision of St Vincent, which many people have shown faithfully, will help each of us to live out our own calling and will call others alongside us to live out the gospel by serving all our brothers and sisters, especially those in any kind of need.

Let's ask the Lord also to help us and support us as we finish by turning to him in prayer;

> Lord Jesus, you who willed to become poor,
> give us eyes and a heart directed toward the poor;
> help us to recognize you in them-
> in their thirst, their hunger, their loneliness, and their misfortune.
> Enkindle within our Vincentian Family
> unity, simplicity, humility,
> and the fire of love
> that burned in St Vincent de Paul.
> Strengthen us, so that, faithful to the practice of these virtues,
> we may contemplate you and serve you in the person of the poor,
> and may one day be united with you and them in your Kingdom.
> Amen.

Vincent de Paul, Travel Agent

Tom Davitt CM

While working through Vincent's letters, first when I was reading them in sequence and later when involved in their translation, I was often struck by the detailed information he gives about travel arrangements, either for his own travel or that of others.

To Louise De Marillac;
In 1629 he tells Louise de Marillac that he has been told by M de Gondi to come by stagecoach(1) to meet him in Montmirail. He asks Louise if she would like to meet him there, and if so she should take the coach for Châlons-sur-Marne the following Wednesday. The departure point from Paris is The Cardinal, presumably an inn, opposite Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs church, a church well known to Louise (38).

In June 1632 he tells Louise that she won't be too uncomfortable in the Joigny boat as it is a covered vessel; it departs on Saturday at 07.00. Joigny is on a tributary of the Seine (109).

Four years later he advises Louise that Sister Geneviève, given the state of her health, should travel by the Senlis coach which was departing the following day. From there she could go on to Verneuil and then to Liancourt. This would entail three leagues on foot. Another possibility would be to take the Clermont wagon and she could ask to be let off right in Liancourt. He enclosed one *écu* for her expenses (252).

In December 1637 he tells Louise that if she feels up to it the following Spring she could take the coach as far as Orléans and then the boat to Saumur, which is eight leagues from [Richelieu] (286).

Early in 1638 he tells Robert de Sergis, who is in either Aiguillon or Toulouse after a mission, that he has overworked and needs to take a break and have his eyes and throat seen to. Then after Easter de Sergis is to give missions in some small villages, and Vincent explains how he is to get there. He will have to go by boat down the Garonne to Bordeaux, and then on to Bourg. He explains that Bourg is on the estuary of the Garonne, but not as far down as Blaye. He will then have to proceed overland to Barbizieux, which he estimates as a two-day journey. From there he will have another two or three leagues to La Marguerie, where a mission is to be given (438).

On 01 October in the same year he explains to Louise how Sisters Barbe and Louise are to get to Richelieu, and encloses fifty *livres* for

their expenses. They are to take the stagecoach as far as Tours. When they get there they should contact a man who usually takes people onwards to Richelieu. They should rent either a donkey or a cart from him. He says Richelieu is about ten leagues further on (351).

On the same day he writes to Lambert aux Couteaux, superior in Richelieu, sending the letter with the two Sisters mentioned in the previous letter. Bernard Codoing, in Richelieu, had told Vincent that he suspected he had the quartan fever. Vincent tells Lambert to send him to Paris. He can be sent to Tours by cart, and from there on to Paris by stagecoach, unless his attacks are too severe (352).

The following day he writes to Louise that he has booked two seats on the Tours coach for Sisters Barbe and Louise, and has paid the deposit. He will know by the evening where the coach will leave from, and at what time (353).

About a year later he writes to Louise that if she opts to take the Châteaudun coach it will pass through Chartres, and she can attend to her devotion to that place while passing. Orléans is about eleven leagues, or perhaps even less, from Châteaudun. From Orléans she can go by river to Notre Dame de Cléry; as far as he can recall, the river goes through there, or is very close to it. In this way she will avoid travel by road, except for a few leagues in the Orléans area. She can hire a cart in Orléans. She will not have to pay the coach fare, as it is "on the house". In other words, it is one of the coaches the profits of which were transferred to Saint-Lazare by Cardinal Richelieu(410). (2)

On 28 January the following year, 1640, in a letter to Louise in Angers, there is a further mention of these coaches. He says he forgot to tell her that he would have sent a coach for her return, were it not for three leagues of poor roads between Chartres and Le Mans, which are impassable in winter. As well as this, he cannot divert coaches from their normal routes without public outcry(421). (3)

For the confreres and sisters;

For his own travels he sometimes borrowed a carriage from a friend. In 1640 he writes to Louise that he will borrow one from Monsieur de Vincy. This was Antoine Hennequin, a priest, a brother of Mlle du Fay. He died in 1645, having just (?) joined the congregation (483).

On 31 January 1642 he writes to Bernard Codoing, superior in Annecy, about arrangements for his travel to Rome. Codoing is to collect forty *livres* which Vincent has sent to André Lumague, a banker in Lyon. This will suffice to get him to Marseille. There he is to contact Monsieur de Forbin, lieutenant general of the galleys, who will tell him where the group going to Rome will be staying. The others going to Rome should be in Marseille by around 16 February. The secretary of

the ambassador to Rome should be there about the same time. Vincent hopes that Codoing will get there in time to travel with him, "which will be no small advantage" (560).

Vincent drafted a letter to Codoing in Rome, on 17 March 1642. He gives him some financial advice "to avoid confusion". He also gives health advice: Coding is to find lodgings in a healthy location, and to follow to some extent "Roman superstition" and imitate what the locals do about getting out of the city at certain times. Louis Lebreton had died five months earlier because he did not follow that local custom. He re-wrote this long letter on the following day, but made no substantial change to that piece of advice, even retaining the word "superstition" (575).

On 04 August 1646 he wrote to Louise, telling her that no one has heard anything about her since she left Paris. He hopes that the fierce heat and the discomfort of travelling by coach have not affected her too much; he's "waiting impatiently for news" (830). In a long footnote Coste reconstructs the details of her journey from her own letters. He does not include the interesting detail that the part of the journey by river boat was longer than usual because of the exceptionally low level of the water, as she herself says in a letter of 11 August.

In the last days of September 1646 he wrote to René Alméras, senior; this is eleven years before this man entered the community. Vincent has to apologise about sending his son off on a journey to Rome: "I committed this fault without thinking; and it's true that I gave absolutely no thought whatsoever about it before his leaving". Alméras junior was not in the best of health, and Vincent and his consultors were worried about what places they could send him to. The original idea was to send him to visit some houses, but not make visitations, to see if this would improve his health. He was to go to Sedan, and from there to Toul, Troyes and Annecy, and then on to Marseille and ultimately Rome. The doctors were in agreement about sending him down the country, but against his going to Rome unless he had recovered fully by the time he got to Marseille. They were worried about how he should go to Sedan, because a covered coach would not be possible until after Troyes, and the weather was extremely hot. They changed their minds from day to day until an opportunity came up of getting him to Angers. From there he could travel in a covered coach to Orléans, and go on by river boat. With this decision having been taken one evening, young Alméras left the following day "without my adverting in the slightest to his filial duty to visit you to learn your wishes". Vincent then says that Alméras junior did not give this matter any thought either! He ends the paragraph "You see from this, Sir, that my fault was not voluntary, but a lack of attention to my duty". Antoine Portail reported from La Rose on 08

September that Alméras junior and himself "never felt better, and these are his exact words". They were to leave there for Marseille a week later, one for Genoa and Rome, and one for Annecy. "At the moment I don't know which will go to Rome, or even if both may go there". "I assure you, Sir, that your son will not go to Rome if Monsieur Merlet and our own doctor Monsieur Vacherot judge this to be in the slightest contra-indicated" (864).

About two years later, November 1648, he wrote to Louise to tell her that someone should go to visit Sister Barbe Angiboust, who was reported to have had a fever for quite some time. His first draft gave some travel details. But in his final draft he expands them. The Sister who will be going should take the coach, if there is one, otherwise take the river boat as far as Melun. He says there is some sort of transport available to there from Port Saint-Paul (St Paul's Quay) in Paris on Mondays and Tuesdays. The coach leaves from rue de la Cassonerie (1073).

In November 1651 he tells Jean-Baptiste Gilles, superior in Crécy, not to purchase a horse, but to hire one as required (1427).

Words of wisdom from a seasoned traveller

In May 1652 he tells Lambert aux Couteaux in Warsaw about the problems faced by Donat Crowley, from Cork, in his travels: he had to ford rivers, go barefoot, because of the risk of meeting soldiers. One day he heard that soldiers had stolen cattle from some poor people. He traced the robbers to a wood and recovered the beasts, which he then drove back to their owners (1497).

In November 1653 he wrote to Lambert aux Couteaux in Dover, delayed on the first leg of his journey to Warsaw. As well as being delayed he apparently also had a problem with his luggage; access to it was not allowed until it had been inspected. (4) In a PS Vincent gives a weather warning and tells Lambert that if travel in the current weather would be dangerous, "in God's name wait until Spring" (1680).

In April 1655 he wrote to Charles Ozenne in Warsaw about eating in a foreign country. He is not to accept invitations to meals; he is not to "eat out" in town. Then "Finally, Father, I beg you to adjust all local customs to what is done in the community, including the sort of food, and its quantity, as used here [in Paris], not changing the quality nor increasing the quantity". Earlier he had said they could, because of the weather, use warmer clothing, even with fur, as the Jesuits do (1857).

In October 1655 he tells Charles Ozenne in Krakow that he has consulted his map and worked out that Krakow is only about 150 leagues from Vienna, and if there are problems with the postal services from Krakow he could send his letters via Vienna (1939).

In March 1657 he writes to Jean Martin, superior in Turin, referring to a problem which travellers may encounter when abroad. He says he has heard that there is bad feeling between Turin and Genoa, and therefore postulants from Turin should not be sent to Genoa. Richelieu or Paris would be better places for them. They could travel first to Lyon, and then by river boat from Roanne to Orléans, and from there by either coach or the scheduled Paris wagon. Or they could go to Tours, followed by one day on horseback to Richelieu (2221).

Speaking with the locals

The following month he writes to him again, touching on another problem which travellers abroad encounter: foreign languages. Before that he approves of the fact that Martin had given himself a break, but suggests that he should have taken an even longer one. He is greatly annoyed that the French confreres in Turin "have little interest" in the Italian language. He will send a confrere to make a visitation "who will turn them around"! (2255).

In June the same year, 1657, in a letter to Martin, he writes: "I am very pleased that our student Demortier(5) has made such progress in the language that he is able to say «Signor, si!»" (2290).

This is not the only time that Vincent deals with the language problem for confreres who travel. Perhaps the most unexpected reference to this is when he stresses the need to learn foreign languages, because the Iroquois cannot understand the Hurons, nor the Hurons the Iroquois. This occurs in a conference he gave in Saint-Lazare in June the following year, 1658, on the need to learn foreign languages. He asks how can confreres go to the whole world to preach the gospel, if they do not know the local languages? In Poland Guillaume Desdames and Victor Duperroy speak Polish well, and Charles Ozenne speaks a little (Conf. 183).

In the previous year he had written to Cardinal Nicola Bagni, who had been nuncio in Paris, about the language problem involved in sending French missioners to Ireland, Scotland and the Hebrides. He says he knows of only one French priest who speaks English; the overall context would seem to suggest he is speaking of a confrere. It would be interesting to know to whom he was referring (2387).

In a letter in August 1657 to Edmonde Jolly, superior in Rome, he again refers to the reluctance of French confreres in Italy to learn the language (2357). In the following month he writes to Jean Martin, superior in Turin, and in a postscript he says that Fathers Portail, Dehorgny and Alméras speak Italian, but the first two are now too old to preach in that language, and the third is worn out (2386). Portail was sixty-seven, Dehorgny, was sixty(6), and Alméras was forty-four.

Taking the air

The latest letter with travel information, or at least the latest on which I have a note, is dated 20 September 1658, to Firmin Get, superior in Marseille, who had some sort of eye trouble. Vincent advises him, and then upgrades that to urges him, to get a change of air. The obvious place to go would be to the nearest community house, Agde. But Agde is on the coast, as is Marseille, so the air in those places would be even worse. Annecy would be preferable, or Notre-Dame-de-Lorm "where the air is good, the countryside is lovely, and the Garonne, which is a beautiful river, flows by" (2664).

In 1650 he writes to Etienne Blatiron, superior in Genoa, and expresses sadness at the sickness of an un-named confrere, but is surprised that the man wants to go to consult doctors in Milan, instead of those in Genoa. Blatiron is to let Vincent know details of the man's symptoms and he will check them out with Paris doctors. There would seem to be an implied judgement here that Paris doctors are better than Italian ones (1273). A month earlier he had told Blatiron that perhaps Italian women were less competent than Italians (1254). About a decade or so earlier Julien Guerin in Tunis tells Vincent that French slaves are better than those of other nationalities for putting up with their difficulties! (909).

In January 1658 he gives Louis Rivet, superior in Saintes, a bit of advice about confreres who arrive at his house for a stop-over during their journey to an onward destination. Such travellers are to be allowed to stay only one or two days, unless there are valid reasons for a longer stay, and Rivet is to make sure then that they move on to where they should be going (2516).

Money

Money is sometimes mentioned in the letters, but during Vincent's lifetime it did not maintain an un-changed standard value. A good reference point is in Letter 1972, written to Jean Martin in Turin in December 1655. Vincent says that at that time 1,000 *livres* would maintain two priests and a brother for a year, whether they are out on missions or at home. A *livre* and a *franc* are the same, and one *écu* equals three of either. A rather unusual indication of the value of one *écu* is that during the siege of Limerick a horse's head cost one *écu* (1476). See above for one *écu* being sent for Sister Geneviève's travelling expenses for a journey described in some detail.

There were twenty *sols* in a *livre*. Postage on a book from Rennes to Paris was 32 *sols*, which Vincent thinks excessive (Letter 2497). Sometimes another unit of money is mentioned, a *louis*. This coin varied in value between 10 and 12 *livres*, depending on when it had been minted.

When Vincent is acknowledging receipt of a letter he very often mentions the date which was on the letter he had received. To take a random example: on 26 June 1654 he writes to Firmin Get in Marseille that he has received his letter of the 15th (1756). This gives a good indication of how efficient the postal system in France was. In October 1652 he wrote to Thomas Berthe in Laon that he has not yet received the expected letter from him, and has sent down four times to check if the post had arrived (1653).

International mail is also mentioned in many letters. On 2 March 1657 he tells Jean Martin in Turin that he has received three of his letters, the earliest being dated 5 January (2221). In 1659 a letter from Jacques Pesnellle in Genoa, dated 19 August, arrived in Paris before 5 September (2963). On 9 April he tells Charles Ozenne in Warsaw that he has received his letter of 11 March (1861).

In very many ways the travel needs and problems of 17th century travellers are not, *mutatis mutandis*, very different from those of today.

Notes

1 The French expression is *en diligence*; this can have two meanings, either "by stagecoach" or "immediately"; the English edition of the letters opted for the stagecoach. In this article letters will be identified by the numbers which they have in the Coste edition. The English edition retains these numbers.

2 Cf. Letter 293.

3 In a footnote to this letter Coste explains that Vincent had the right to divert coaches from their normal routes (II, pp. 9-10, note 3). There is enough matter about these coaches in the letters to provide a full-length article. Because of that I will make no further reference to them in this one.

4 In Letter 1860 Louis Serre writes from Saint-Méen that Pierre Laisné could not give the morning talks because his luggage was lost on the journey from Paris.

5 Raymond Demortier was one of the confreres who gave evidence at the process for the beatification of Vincent de Paul.

6 Dehorgny's date of birth is not given in the usual obvious sources. In the *Notices sur les Prêtres, Clercs et Frères de la Congrégation de la Mission*, Tome I, Paris 1881, on page 220 it says he died aged 70, and on page 153 it says he died in 1667.

Vincent Getting Away For Short Breaks

Tom Davitt CM

Quite a number of years ago a confrere, in conversation, pointed out something which has stuck in my mind ever since. He remarked that Vincent was always the senior confrere in the community, apart from the short period when René Alméras, *père,* (1575-1658), was a seminarist, 02 March 1657 to 04 January 1658. He was *always* superior, or later superior general. The point being made by the confrere was that the only way Vincent related to other confreres was as their superior.

In the Common Rules, ch.VI, §3, he wrote that sick confreres "should be completely obedient to doctors and chaplains, as well as to the nurse and anyone else involved in their care".

Vincent himself obeyed this idea, even before the Rules were written. Vincent and other confreres used to go to Forges-les-Eaux, a famous thermal spa in Normandy, still popular today. In the late 1620s Vincent tells Louise that it had been suggested to him, and he was urged to act on the suggestion, that he go to the spa the following day; the doctor advises him to go (29). The indication would seem to be that he was stricken with one of his periodic bouts of malaria. Coste dates this letter as between 1626 and 1629. In a later letter, dated by Coste as between 1636 and 1648, he tells Louise that spa waters have never done his fever any good, either in Forges or at home (394).

In 1630 an important figure, Brother Alexandre Véronne, (1610-1686), comes on the scene. He was born in Avignon. His father died when Alexandre was quite young, and his mother married again. Her new husband was a doctor, and he taught his stepson the rudiments of medicine and pharmacology. At the age of about fifteen he went up to Paris and worked in the Collège des Bons Enfants for five years before joining the new community in 1630.(1) For the rest of his life he was the community infirmarian. When Alexandre told Vincent to do something with regard to health matters, Vincent obeyed. One of the things he was often told to do was to take a break down on the Saint-Lazare farm in Fréneville.

Fréneville

Fréneville is in the modern *département* of Seine-et-Oise, roughly seventy kilometers from Paris.(2) It was one of two farms given to Vincent by *Madame la Présidente* de Herse in 1635. She was a prominent Lady of Charity, and her name gets nearly half a page in the Index volume (XIV) of Vincent's works. Vincent first mentions these two

farms, though not by name, in a letter to Louise shortly after accepting the gift; he tells her he is going to take a look at them.(3) The first mention of Fréneville by name in his correspondence is in a letter dated 02 November 1636, which he writes to Louise from there on his way back from Orléans. He has no comment about the farm itself (248). As he received her letter there he must have been some time there already when he wrote. He mentions that he will be leaving in two or three days' time. He writes to her again from Fréneville on 30 December 1636. He does not mention why he is there or whether he has been there all through November and December; it would seem more likely that he was on another visit there (258). At the end of April 1638 Antoine Portail is at the farm; Vincent wrote to him there from Paris. Only the end of the letter is extant, so we do not know why Portail was there (322).

On 8 May 1638 he wrote from Paris to François du Festel CM, and mentions at the end of the letter: "I have to leave this morning for Brie-Comte-Robert, and from there I'll be able to go and have a break in Fréneville, getting home on the vigil of the Ascension"(322a). (4)

The first letter from Fréneville in which he says he is there for his health is dated "The octave of Corpus Christi", without giving the year. (In a footnote Coste says that the date was 10 June 1638). The letter is to Nicolas Marceille CM in Saint-Lazare, and Vincent draws on his own farming background to say: "You must not have the hay cut during the rainy weather, no matter what the workmen say". He says he is going to take a laxative, unless something absolutely urgent necessitates his return to Paris (328).

On the same day he wrote to Jean Bécu CM, who was staying at the Gondi château in Montmirail, and gives the year as 1638. Bécu was giving a mission there and Vincent tells him that exposition of the Blessed Sacrament is not a universal custom, and Bécu is to fall in with the local usage. Towards the end of the letter Vincent says he is in Fréneville "with my little fever, by order of Alexandre" (329).

Fréneville Revisited

In the extant letters there is no further mention of Fréneville until 05 October 1644, when Vincent writes from Richelieu, where he was conducting a visitation, to Antoine Portail in Paris. Portail is to send 400 *livres* to Fréneville to pay the farmer for harvesting the corn. He says he found things in a mess in Richelieu, and will not be able to get away for three or four days. If there is any urgent need to contact him he will be in Fréneville on the 15th (725).

On the 14th he writes to Portail again, this time from Fréneville; he arrived the previous evening, in good form except for some problem

with his teeth, which is clearing up. He is not sure whether he should go on to Fontainebleau, where the court is (727).

On the next day he is still in Fréneville, and writes another letter to Portail. He refers to two students in Paris, whose health was giving cause for anxiety, but he was confident that Brother Alexandre was taking good care of them. One was Firmin Get, whose ordination was postponed. He later became a very prominent confrere and died in 1682; the other one died some months after Vincent's letter. He says he himself is unwell, but hopes to leave for Fontainebleau in a few days time if his state of health allows him. He sends back a letter he had received from François Grimal, and asks Brother Alexandre to do what Grimal is asking about the bedclothes.(5)

On the 14th, before the two letters to Portail, he wrote to Jean Dehorgny in Rome (726). He thanks him for forwarding two letters; one of them was for the late Antoine Dufour, who had died earlier in the year. Coste has a very interesting footnote about Antoine Dufour (1613-1644). In 1643-44 he was superior in the Collège des Bons Enfants, and fell ill with some minor ailment, which was certainly not life-threatening. But he offered his own life in exchange for Vincent's, whose state of health at the time was causing great worry. Abelly says that Vincent "had a serious and dangerous illness during 164[4]… The severity of this illness affected his brain and he was delirious for several hours". Dufour's health deteriorated unexpectedly, while Vincent's improved. According to Abelly, one night those who were keeping vigil at Vincent's bedside in Saint-Lazare heard three raps at the door, but when the door was opened there was not anybody there. Vincent interpreted this as a sign and sent for a student and asked him to pray part of the Office of the Dead; Dufour had just died elsewhere in the house.(6)

On the 21st Vincent was still in Fréneville, and wrote again to Portail. It is very much a business letter, asking Portail to see to certain payments and other arrangements. Vincent says he hopes to leave for Chartres the following day, a Saturday, or on the Monday, and on the way he will inspect another farm which has been offered to the community. He hopes to arrive back in Paris on Thursday, or Friday at the latest. His final remark before his signature is that his health is quite good (728).

The next letter from Fréneville is dated almost three years later, 26 June 1647; it is to Louise de Marillac. There is no indication in it why he is there, but he says he left Paris at such short notice that he had not had time to say good-bye to her. Perhaps Alexandre Véronne had ordered him away immediately. He expects to be back in Paris on Monday, or early on Tuesday, so obviously his stay was less than a week (965).

The next letter in which there is mention of Fréneville is un-dated, but Coste says it was written in October 1648; the reply to the letter

shows this. It was written from Paris to Louise. He thanks her for some medicine which she had sent, and says he will use it. He had recently been in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, and the air there had done him good, and he felt better. He says he might go to Fréneville to visit the Daughters there; they had opened a house there the previous year. He says that the air there had always been good for his health. The several references to his health in this letter might indicate that Alexandre once again had intervened (1066).

Next we move on to February 1649; on the 4th he wrote to Louise from there. He tells her that he had been caught unawares by the sudden cold snap, and was unable to leave. He took the opportunity to give an impromptu mission sermon in neighbouring Valpuiseaux. It would probably have been around the start of Lent. He reports that the two Sisters have settled in. Once the weather improves he hopes to leave directly for Angers to visit the Sisters there (1088).

The following day, still in Fréneville, he wrote to Jacques Norais in Orsigny, an honorary royal secretary. He sympathises with him on the fact that Norais' property in Orsigny had been looted, and mentions that what the Congregation's farm there had suffered was nothing compared with what Norais' property has suffered (1089).

Nearly a week later he is still in Fréneville, from where he wrote to the Ladies of Charity on the 11th. He says that providence has separated him from them, but towards the end of the letter he explains that it is the cold weather that has kept him in Fréneville, not Alexandre. The letter deals with the problems caused to the Ladies by the internal political situation in France. More than six weeks earlier he had paid a visit to the court in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, and after three or four days there he judged it prudent to absent himself from the capital, and make a round of all the houses of the Congregation, conducting visitations in each one. The spell of cold weather prolonged his stay at the farm (1090). He refers to the pillage of the Congregation's farm in Orsigny.

He got away from there some days later and wrote from Orléans on the 25th to Denis Gautier, superior in Richelieu. He says the bad weather caused him to stay a month in Fréneville, but that he got away three days earlier. He again refers to the looting of the Orsigny farm, and that he had left Fréneville with a flock of two hundred and forty sheep saved from the Orsigny farm. He is heading for Le Mans to begin the visitation, and then intends going on to Angers in the hope of collecting some money which is due. From there he plans to go up to Brittany to the houses in Saint-Méen and Tréguier, returning via either Richelieu or Luçon. In Saint-Lazare the confreres are feeding two thousand poor people each day. Similar help is being given by the houses in Crécy, Troyes and Montmirail (1091).

He reached Le Mans and from there wrote to Antoine Portail, in Marseille, on 04 March. He explains that Portail has not received any letters from him for the previous one or two months, because the postal system has broken down. He explains about his enforced stay of a month in Fréneville, saying that he had planned to spend only two or three days, bringing the flock of sheep and two horses saved from the pillage of Orsigny. Soldiers stole horses from a farm not too far away, so he decided, in spite of the weather, to bring the sheep to a safe refuge four or five leagues distant. He continued with the two horses to Le Mans, arriving on the 2nd. On the evening of the third he opened the visitation. In the middle of the month he hopes to go to Brittany and then Richelieu. If God safeguards his health he intends then going south to Marseille, where he will meet Portail. A map of France will show the extent of his travels; from Brittany to Marseille is roughly the entire length of France from north to south. He mentions the loss of crops in Orsigny and Saint-Lazare, and the cessation of rents. This necessitates drastic reductions in the numbers of confreres in the Paris houses, sending them to Richelieu, Le Mans and elsewhere. He refers to between two and three thousand being fed each day in Saint-Lazare (1093).

Fréneville No More

Volume XIV of the Coste set, which is the index volume, shows no further references to Fréneville in the letters after Letter 1093, dated 04 March 1649. This is quite extraordinary, as the Congregation continued in possession of the farm until it was confiscated by the revolutionary government on 19 November, 1792.(7)

However, in November 1652 Vincent wrote from the farm in Orsigny to Brother Nicholas Sené, who was in Lagny, and towards the end of the letter mentions that "The doctor has sent me to Orsigny to take the air for a while, because of my little fever which troubles me at night" (1577).

In November 1655 he tells the Duchess of Aiguillon that he has been advised to take the air for a while, though he says he seldom gets any relief. He hopes to go to Rougemont or Orsigny, getting back on Friday (1862).

There are many later references to Alexandre Véronne in the correspondence. Sometimes Louise wanted to borrow him, and she sometimes referred to him in connection with Vincent's various health problems. Vincent often reports back to her on the state of his health, and in some cases Alexandre is mentioned in this context. On 25 November 1656 he tells her: "My little cold is getting better, thank God, and I am doing all I can about it: I don't leave my room; I take a sleep every morning; I

eat everything I'm given. And each evening I take a sort of julep which Brother Alexandre gives me" (2173). While Alexandre is mentioned specifically in connection with the julep, I would think that he probably also ordered the other matters.

There is a later letter to Louise, headed "Tuesday evening", which Coste places in January 1659, which has the sentence "Brother Alexandre wanted me to take some little thing which he will give me tomorrow". One can picture Alexandre telling him: "I want you to take this tomorrow", and Vincent being, perhaps, somewhat reluctant. The context is that he is thanking Louise for the remedies which she has suggested, but he says that Monsieur Dalancé(8) has told him a few days previously that frequent laxatives are not the correct solution to the particular ailment which he has (2773). Perhaps Vincent was wondering whether he should say to Alexandre "But the doctor says…"

Notes

1 In *Miroir du Frère Coadjuteur de la Congrégation de la Mission*, Paris 1875, pages 145-358 consist of some introductory matter to over 200 pages of a very hagiographical life of Alexandre Véronne, written by Brother Pierre Chollier CM in 1688, two years after the death of Alexandre. This biography was circulated to all houses of the Congregation. Together with some other senior brothers he was given permission to read the New Testament in the vernacular (Letter 2623).

2 *Colloque* 40, pp. 255 & 259-60.

3 Letter 203. For the rest of the article letters will be identified by their number in the Coste edition, in brackets after their mention in the text. The English translation retains Coste's numbering.

4 This letter is in the Supplément, Vol. XV, published as *Mission et Charité*, 19-20, 1970. It is incorporated in the English translation of the complete works in its correct chronological position, as number 322a.

5 This letter is not in the Coste set. It was published in the Supplément, Vol. XV, pp. 52-3. It is incorporated in the English translation in Vol. II, as number 322a.

6 Abelly: *Vie de Vincent de Paul*, Paris 1664, livre I, ch. 50, pp. 244-5. Coste (II, 481, n. 2) corrects Abelly's 1645 to 1644. That Dufour died in Saint-Lazare, and not in the Bons Enfants, is in *Catalogue du Personnel de la Congrégation de la Mission (Lazaristes), depuis l'origine (1625), jusqu'à la fin du XVIIIe siècle*, Paris 1911, p. 204.

7 Rybolt, J E: In the Footsteps of Vincent de Paul, Chicago 2007, p. 148.

8 In a footnote to this letter Coste mentions that Dalancé was a famous surgeon.

Frederic Ozanam's Tactical Wisdom for Today's Consumer Society

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One of the ways a "classic" gets identified is by its aptitude to speak to ages beyond its own. The product of one era, it has an ability to bring its insight to the concerns of many others. On that score, Frederic Ozanam and his founding work are surely classics in that they contain practical wisdom that can travel well to our times. This article explores one of those intersection points between his vision of a century and a half ago and certain challenges that press on us today. Specifically, his Gospel-based approach to social conditions of his time can address the phenomenon of consumerism, a pervasive and often toxic influence in contemporary culture that threatens to blunt the power of not only the Christian message, but indeed of any religious or humanitarian outlook.

The element in Frederic's thought I will examine is his conception of how a religious tradition should engage its surrounding society. His insights were both extensively theoretical and concretely practical, or better, they fused the two into an amalgam that brought about both effective action in the short term and salutary shifts in basic attitudes for the longer run.

There are two relevant sub-headings to this topic, both of which from the beginning interested Frederic. The first is a background one, the constructive influence that traditions, for him the Christian tradition, can have on society. He spent the bulk of his scholarly life defending the truth of Christianity in a hostile ethos, but did so through original research into the up-building influence the Church had been on Western civilization in past ages. More immediately relevant to our purposes is his second interest. Frederic also laid out concrete proposals and programs whereby the generous, other-directed charitable energies in such a tradition could continue to be that leaven in his day.

I propose to draw this component in Ozanam's writings into conversation with a force in modern western society that commentators claim is severely weakening the generous spirit and altruistic outreach of most all world-views. And that, again, is consumerism. More precisely, it is the commodification process a consumerist mentality sets in motion and continues to accelerate. From the writings of a number of historians, social scientists and theologians, I will lay out a picture of how

the consumer mentality is negatively affecting the attitudes of a whole generation toward the traditions into which they were born.(1)

All this suggests an outline. First, will be a brief overview of Frederic Ozanam, his life, works, and then some relevant factors in his views and approaches. Secondly will come a description of some of the smothering effects consumerism is having on the other-directed, civic minded impulses not only of Christianity but of all traditions, particularly on how such impulses get translated into practice. Finally, I will suggest some elements in Frederic's approach that might serve as counterbalances to that pressure.

I. About Frederic

A) His Life

Frederic was born in Milan in 1813 to a professional middle class family. When he was still young they moved back to their home to Lyons, France because of worsening political conditions in Italy. Frederic was one of 14 children, only three of whom survived. As a boy he was sickly and for the remainder of his relatively short life struggled with poor health. His parents were what we might term today strong and practicing Catholics.

From early on, young Frederic showed a bent for the religious dimension in life. In adolescence, while attending a Lyons school where he encountered some strident opposition to his Catholicism, he underwent a hurtful period of doubt. With the help of a mentor, Fr Joseph Noirot, professor of philosophy, he emerged out the other side with firmer faith convictions, a resolve to defend the truth of his religion, and a project to make the underlying vitality of his Church more influential on French society. From the pain of his own bewilderment during this faith crisis, he gained a life long sympathy for others who struggled with their faith, and indeed for those people who just struggled, the poor.

Though his interests ran to literature and history, he followed his father's wishes and took up the law. However, while pursuing his legal studies at the Sorbonne, he kept up his interest in the first areas, particularly in the role Christianity had played in the advance of European society. In this early period, he even managed to publish some articles and gained a bit of a reputation as boy genius.(2)

In the university world, Frederic found an atmosphere still more hostile to religion. Searching for support, he sought the company of like minded students. Encouraged by Emmanuel Bailly, a former professor with a life-long love for St Vincent de Paul, Frederic took the lead in setting up a discussion group. In a short while, he and his compatriots

were debating the social doctrines of the Church and particularly what they thought was needed to bring these teachings into a more vital contact with modern conditions.(3) In a heated discussion one night, one participant pressed the Catholics in the group to address a gap he saw between their beliefs and their actions. Their words about the self-forgetfulness and practicality of the Gospel came across very thinly, he charged, when they weren't backed up with deeds. "What is the Church doing for the poor of Paris?" he said. "Show us your work and I will believe you." The taunt got to Frederic, and so along with some others he responded. "Yes," he said, "let us go to the poor."(4)

In 1833 he and six friends began a "Conference of Charity" which, most likely at the suggestion of a certain Daughter of Charity, soon became the "Conference of St Vincent de Paul."(5) This saint was a national hero of social service, admired even by the anti-Church factions of Frederic's day. The young companions resolved to take up what they termed "practical works of charity," and searched for ways to carry out their resolve. It was M Bailly who led them to the above mentioned Daughter of Charity, Sr Rosalie Rendu. Over the years she had gained a city-wide reputation for working innovatively in the worst slum neighborhoods of Paris. Sr Rosalie promptly sent the students, two by two, to the apartments of poor families. For follow-up, she gave them clothes, fuel and food vouchers to distribute.

In addition to sending them out to visit, we have reason to believe that Rosalie brought the volunteers back to her convent to reflect on what they had just done. How to speak with these families? How to help, without stepping on their dignity? What connections were there between what they were doing and the message of the Gospel? What echoes and dissonances did they find between what they were doing and the life of Vincent de Paul? (She provided them with biographies!) What were their underlying reasons for getting involved in this work in the first place? Today, we would call such sessions theological reflection, a purposeful attempt not only to get more competent in one's charity work, but also to make the bigger connections; i.e., the ones between service and beliefs, between what these young men were doing and the religious tradition in which they stood. Mentoring of this sort, in both practice and faith, seems likely to have been part of these early gatherings.

In these same years, Frederic's career took a number of turns. He returned to Lyons and opened a law practice, but in a few years grew weary of that profession. After his parents died, he was able to go back to his first loves, literature and history, and again took up studies in Paris, this time for a doctorate in that field. On the strength of a first place award in a national competition, he was offered a teaching position

in foreign literature at the Sorbonne. In a short time, his lectures were drawing crowds, and Frederic's reputation as both a literary historian and religious thinker spread nationally and internationally, especially through his professional publications.

In 1844 he married, and four years later became the delighted father of a little girl. In his letters, he often gushed over the joys of his new life, grateful to his wife, Amelie, and their daughter, Marie, for being the lights of his life.

In his middle and later thirties, Frederic ran into stormy professional waters stirred up by his stance on how religious traditions should relate to their surrounding society. Even under the pressure of the conservative ecclesial-political backlash to the revolution of 1848, he never gave up hope for a rapprochement between the Christianity identified with the wealthy and the bourgeoisie, and a newer one that sided with the working classes.(6) Closer to home, he envisioned a key role for his own Vincent de Paul Society as a bridge over the troubled and sometimes violent waters roiling between rich and poor.

Because of his chronic medical problems and perhaps equally so because of his always increasing workload (editor, writer, lecturer, chronicler of the Society's activities, father and husband), his health broke down while still in his thirties. On a doctor-advised sabbatical to Italy in 1853, his strength finally ran out. Surrounded by his family and a number of brothers in the Society, he died in Marseilles, only 40 years old.

With this brief account of his life, we turn to his attitude toward the culture of his day. Frederic had many thoughts on how his faith should relate to society, and we limit ourselves to a select few which concern our topic.

B) Ozanam's Tactics

Frederic's context for viewing civic issues was the manner in which members of his Church should relate to their socio-economic surroundings. His heritage was Catholicism, but his approach can be extended to how any tradition is to connect to the civic arena. There are a number of possibilities for their correlation, ranging from complete separation to total overlap. In Frederic's day stances fell all along the spectrum, and because of the clash between hierarchically popular restorationism on the one hand and anti-Church secularism on the other, the issue had polarized dramatically. Anyone proposing a mediating position could expect to take heat from both left and right.

On the far liberal side, there was a call to eliminate all Church influence, the Catholic establishment being seen as a mouthpiece for the old

regime, friend of the rich, and enemy of the lower class. The conservative wing tended to view efforts to reduce the socio-economic gap as outcroppings of Godless philosophies bent on excluding religion.

Frederic took the harder-to-articulate middle view. He defended Christianity against the stereotype that it was class-identified and out to cement in place the economically imbalanced status quo. But he went the additional mile of speaking up for the bottom-of-the-ladder working people, especially those in the rapidly industrializing cities. He proposed that the Church also cast its lot with just these individuals.(7) It should stand with them in their misery, he wrote, throw its energies into redressing the social inequities that not only burdened these unfortunates, but also were ripping apart the entire society.

In a hard-hitting statement of this conviction, he wrote to a friend in 1836.

> "For if the question which disturbs the world around us today is not a question of political approaches but a social question, if it is the struggle between those who have nothing and those who have too much, if it is the violent clash of opulence and poverty which shakes the earth under us, then our duty to ourselves as Christians is to throw ourselves between these two irreconcilable enemies. We are to make the one side divest itself … and the other to accept what is given. We are to make the one stop demanding and the other stop refusing. We are to make equality as operative as possible among peoples, to make free cooperation take the place of coercion and brute force, to make charity accomplish what justice alone cannot do."(8)

Frederic advocated engagement. Rather than retreat inside a fortress, Christians are to remain in the field. Operating from their core convictions, they should wrestle with society's issues. The precise wrong move, he would say, is to disengage from the class struggle, or to stand with only one side of it and cut off dialogue with the other. It is only from within, he contended, that the political, economic and cultural solutions will emerge. Some of Frederic's most memorable appeals to the members of his Association plead with them to stand in the breech, translating the poor to the rich and vice versa.

> "Between these two classes a confrontation is coming and this looming clash will be terrible. On the one side, there is the power of gold, and on the other the power of despair. We must cast ourselves between these two enemy armies, if not to prevent, at least to deaden the shock… It is good to have mediators who can

> prevent a collision whose terrible disasters cannot be imagined, who can make the two camps listen. [These are mediators…] who can bring to the one side words of acceptance and to the other counsels of mercy, and can give to everybody involved the reconciling wisdom that would bring about a better order."(9)

Onto this field of struggle, Frederic brought two genuine talents: rigorous analysis and practical action, each infusing the other. He was an intellectual and an internationally recognized one at that. A full-time professor at the Sorbonne, a controversialist and op-ed contributor to the Parisian newspapers, a peer-acknowledged author of scholarly volumes, editor of the Vatican's *Chronicles of the Propagation of the Faith*, a university star under consideration for the Academie Francaise, Ozanam was a bona fide academic. Someone who searched for both the big picture and the internal patterns, Frederic was a far seeing thinker who sought out the more encompassing background against which the shifting foreground came to make sense.

But he was also sensitive to an occupational hazard of academics – thinking while looking out the window of an ivory tower. From early on, he realized that one cannot know the issues unless in some way he is down on the mat wrestling with them. Though his first contact with the slum dwellers of Paris came from a challenge to practice what he preached, over time he came to appreciate how much this face-to-face contact with poor families was putting flesh on this thinking and how profoundly it was reshaping his perceptions. Frederic came to value both speculative and practical knowledge. Perhaps more accurately, he increasingly prized that fuller, more concrete and textured kind of knowing that comes only from interpersonal contact.

Perhaps because it is so omnipresent in his writings, another of Frederic's building blocks can be overlooked. He put prime importance on connecting the activity of the members with the wider traditions within which this service was embedded, in his case the Christian Gospel. When writing about the tone of their assistance, the pitfalls members can stumble into, the politics within and between the local associations, outside publicity, improved organizational structures, fund raising – most everything – Frederic explicitly referenced its Christian framework. The meetings, the internal leadership style, and the visits with the poor are all to be nourished from their underlying matrix, the wellsprings of their faith. In turn, Christianity's beliefs, creeds, and symbols (including the example and teachings of Vincent de Paul) are fleshed out through the Society's practices.

This theory-action relationship opens onto another aspect of Frederic's approach, the gift of reciprocal benefit, or better, reciprocal

salvation. During the transaction between member and client, changes for the good happen not only in the poor person being helped, but also inside the helper. The generosity of the member, if rightly motivated and channelled, breaks back on him or her, deepening convictions and filling out faith. More specifically, for Frederic the personal visit to the poor person was prized, in Gerard Cholvy's felicitous phrase, "as the point of mutual exchange," where both participants are the beneficiaries.(10)

One final element can also be passed over for its obviousness. Frederic believed and worked *with others*. The very beginning of his association grew out of a need for support and collaboration in a religiously cool world. Even with his solid Catholic upbringing, he realized he could not live out the Gospel injunctions on his own, especially the calls to honor the dignity of the least of the brothers and sisters. Often, he highlighted the strength each member instilled into the rest. In particular, he noted the unique benefit that support across the generations supplied, the younger ones mentored by the older and the old encouraged by energy of the young.

It was the interaction of all these elements, so firmly rooted in a tradition, steadily put into practice, and done with like-minded compatriots that lay beneath the long term resilience in serving the poor which came to mark Ozanam's Vincent de Paul Society.

In this second section, I touched briefly on four components in Frederic's approach that presently will come back into the conversation. These were that the individual should 1) address and engage the inequalities in society, especially its political-economic imbalances, 2) do that by historically solid analysis *and* practical on-the-ground action, 3) firm up those beliefs and actions by embedding them inside a long tested tradition, and 4) sustain them over time by common commitment and activity. Behind each of these is Ozanam's desire that Christians are to be leavens in the social arena. He was convinced that by this interweaving of belief and action, citizens should put their oars in the water on the side of what today we would call distributive justice.

With such convictions in his heart, Frederic looked out at his world and took the measure of those societal forces which ran against this vision. And here lies the junction point for our conversation: what, in a given time, thwarts the ripening of convictions such as these? In his assessment of 19th century European culture, Frederic singled out certain impeding factors, and then lined up his strategies against them. In like manner we ask ourselves, what are obstructions in our era, and what contributions can Frederic's approach make to moving past them?

II. A Pervasive Filter on Culture: Commodification

I want to reflect briefly on a cultural factor that, while only one of others operating today, is especially powerful because of both its pervasiveness and its subtlety. It is what commentators have called commodification. (11) By that they mean the process whereby the range of meanings that any cultural object (physical or verbal) can carry gets narrowed down to only those which can gain the attention of the consumer.

While commodification does not fully overlap with two other frequently noted features in today's ethos, individualism and the culture of the therapeutic, it is indeed their close cousin inasmuch as it both feeds off their energies and multiplies their effects.

Critics point out the mostly unnoticed ways the commodification genie weakens the hold which traditions have on people. They describe various back-stage mechanisms by which this mentality drains the deeper meanings out of a person's world view, especially from his or her religious world view. And because this process, by tamping down the ardour of attachment to beliefs, symbols and practices, trains the populace to admit only certain dimensions of reality onto their field of vision, it thereby lessens ethical demand. Shallower perceptions evoke correspondingly superficial moral responses; narrowed intake makes for weaker obligation.

It works this way.

In thousands of messages everyday, advertising tells us that fulfillment can be gained by owning some product or other, by buying some commodity. Not only will this purchase satisfy a utilitarian need ("This car will get me to work comfortably and reliably."), but it will also bestow a much wider array of social benefits, such as personal attractiveness and class mobility ("This car will not only make me attractive to women, and also will also tell the neighbours that "I'm moving up.").

Looking through this grid day in and day out, I get increasingly conditioned to believe that the main and foundational value of things is to be calculated by their salability and aptitude for being put on the market; i.e., by their capacity to be turned into commodities. Placing prime importance on marketability, I develop a disposition to assess the worth of everything, material and otherwise, by how well it can present itself as an exchangeable good.

When I regard the world primarily through the commodity lens, its dimensions shrink. The range of meanings that any given reality can carry is narrowed down. The "what counts" of anything gets constricted to its consumerable aspects, to those features that can be commercialized. Conversely, the many rich qualities in that object, no matter of what order, that are not likely to move well on the shelves get pushed to the side.

Among the meanings that step forward to displace the less commodifiable ones are:

A) Appearance.
Selling spotlights whatever it is that strikes my senses first, what catches my attention and breaks through the clutter. Primacy is put on the sizzle and glitter in the product, how sexy it is. A well known example is the Andre Agasiss billboard touting the message, "Image is everything!" The most important quality of any reality is the allure of its packaging. Over and over, image trumps substance.

As a result I get progressively conditioned to focus on the outside of things, on their surfaces. After a while, my interest shifts from whether there is truth in some object to whether it's interesting. The deeper, more foundational instinct to look for the solidity in back of appearances gets blunted.

Over time, I develop a kind of psychic hide, what might be termed a "pre-emptive scepticism." This defense mechanism builds up as a reaction to being fooled so many times in my presumption that the symbol presenting itself to me in the ad (e.g., the sexually hot car) actually contains what it is symbolizing. In time, the skepticism can thicken to the point where I stop even caring whether there *is* any truth in the packaging, so long as the product is attention-getting.

The moral cost is high. I become less and less troubled by the disconnects between what a thing claims to be and what it actually is. I grow more tolerant of artificiality and not overly bothered by tidy surfaces that hide cluttered cabinets. When sensing the hollowness in objects put before me, I'm conditioned to tell myself that this is simply the way of the world. My insincerity threshold grows and grows.

B) Ability to Entertain.
The significance of things is measured by how intensely they can stir up my sensibilities and engage my emotions. How vivid and kinetic an effect does it have on my psyche? Commentators speak of "The Cult of Celebrity," evidenced in the run-away popularity of *People Magazine* and its spin-offs. As one wag said to an interviewer, "How well do you think a show called *The Lifestyles of the Poor and Unknown*" would do against *The Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*?" Does this product give me a good feeling, or better, does it deliver an intense feeling, whether good or bad? What is the "rush factor" or "impact quotient" in the object?

One of the casualties of this narrowed perception is the potency of my motivation to take effective action against moral evil. Shallow perception evokes superficial response. For instance, I can come to delude

myself into thinking that I'm taking a brave and principled stance on the genocide in Rwanda just because I've allowed myself to be stirred by the media's graphic presentation of the slaughter there. When I've been conditioned to take in everything, including evil, as entertainment, my response to it (my response-ability) gets weakened

C) The Thirst for Novelty.

Because the actual possession of any commodity always falls short of the expectation its presentation created in me, I eventually turn to something new. It has always been the case that my deep desires will eventually outstrip whatever I have in hand. But the commodity atmosphere, dripping hourly on my psyche, sets me up to believe that the next product up the line will, in fact, satisfy – or at least come closer to doing so. Some have called this "the cult of the next new thing." I recall being with a well-off family on summer vacation and listening to the steady whining of their children wandering through the luxurious seaside house asking, "What are we going to do next? I'm bored!"

A victim of this perpetual dissatisfaction is long-term commitment, the ability to persevere in the pursuit of a goal particularly a hard-to-define social one. When I tire of the present activity, I move onto the next new thing. I'm less able stay *with* something. I'm not as disposed to sustain a project, to hang in for the long haul.

One commentator, Vincent Miller, argues that this chronic sense of disappointment points to the source and substrate of all the other dynamics in a consumer world. And that is, "the misdirection of desire."(12) By constantly presenting me with so many meaning-promising possibilities, the marketer keeps stirring up the very energy of my desiring and will not allow it ever to settle. But then, he redirects this longing for the infinite to a finite commodity. If you buy this fragrance called "Ecstasy," soul-filling ecstasy will in fact be delivered to you. Miller contends that such constant whipping up of desire with nothing proportionate to fulfill it is the fundamental cause of the emptiness and meaninglessness so many feel today.

D) Customization.

Not satisfied with things everybody else can own, I can tailor the commodity to my personality, to my unique style. This is the relatively recent "Niche Marketing" sales strategy whereby I customize my purchase so as not just to satisfy my likes but get the additional pay-off of carving out a distinctive social identity. It's the lure of "Have it Your Way." Living in this uniform world of generics, it suggests, I'm still able to retain my individuality. By walking up to the counter at Starbucks and ordering a triple shot, mocha, 2% milk, no foam, espresso grande, I not

only get a pleasing taste, but make a statement about my signature style.

One of the casualties here is my willingness to engage in common projects, my capacity to cooperate with others in a group endeavour. Why put up with the compromises and negotiations needed for effective collaboration when I can mark my contribution with my personal stamp, can tailor the work to my own likes and talents? Why put my shoulder to the bigger wheel when I can design a "boutiquy" one that is a better fit to my particular shoulder? Combined with the individualism caught in Robert Putnam's metaphor "Bowling Alone,"(13) (documenting the demise of bowling leagues) or described as "Sheilaism" by Robert Bellah(14) (Sheila's moral obligation is only to herself and her immediate circle), it further tamps down impulses to come together for a wider cause.

E) Abstraction

A general category for understanding all these processes is the notion of abstraction**.** This entails pulling a particular reality away from its fuller context for use in some other setting. To abstract is to lift something out of its wider, more deeply rooted and concrete surroundings, oftentimes with the purpose of giving it a more universal use. A math formula is a good example, extracting the quantifiable aspects of some reality from out of their fuller qualitative context.

To market an object successfully, it is desirable and even necessary to simplify it, to knock the unique irregularities off its rougher edges so it can function more easily as a standardized part. Smoothed down this way, it is better able to interlock with other parts (i.e., commodities). In addition, commodification removes objects, particularly cultural objects, from their original contexts. It severs contact not only with the ground that nurtured them but with the surrounding elements that interacted with them and so located and stabilized them still further.

Vincent Miller(15) suggests the produce section of a supermarket as an example. I buy bananas not only by price, but also by how close they approximate an image of what I've come to identify as a good banana – bright yellow, no marks, a certain size and firmness. I pass up the "irregulars," the ones with bumps, spots, of smaller size, differently shaped, and off-yellow. Additionally, I have no idea where they were grown, what life is like on that foreign farm, nor what families worked under what conditions to tend and ship them. Each of the fruits in the bins presents in the same way – a competing item, attractively displayed, almost identical, but cut off from the conditions of its production. It is food that comes from nowhere that is produced by nobody, in Miller's acid phrase.

The idea of abstraction sheds light on what the consumer process does to world-views, particularly traditions and especially religious traditions. It places them, like stones being polished in a steel tumbler, inside the chamber of the commodification grinder. Out the bottom come versions of the tradition which are flattened, less connected, and more free-floating. Like machine parts, they are now interchangeable, precisely because they have been smoothed down and excised from the more complex and richer web of their original meanings. They carry neither the same significance nor, especially, the same depth, and so can be used for other purposes, even ones antithetical to their first meaning.

In addition, these abstracted objects now have a greater capacity to take on the market qualities named above. I can mix and match world views (traditions, normative stories) so that the new combination shines out more brightly than its competitors, entertains me more thrillingly, feeds my craving for the next new thing and does a better job of setting my voice off from the others in the room. But by the same process, these more attractive collages don't ask as much from me. They don't prod me half as insistently as the unique original to do such things as take care of the "undeserving" neighbor, inconvenience myself for the interests of another, step off my mapped-out path in life to change some socio-economic arrangement, or cooperate with others responding to like moral challenges.

Let me try to synthesize these processes by way of an example from the Christian tradition. My recall of it might not be totally accurate, but the story carries the point.

Someone once told me about an ad for "St Francis Sandals." They were advertised in a high-end fashion magazine, were placed next to some visuals about New Age religion and the ecological movement, and indeed were a limited edition. The graphic was St Francis walking in them through the very "green" Umbrian countryside. The copy claimed that the sandals were identical in appearance and manufacture to St Francis' own footwear. Made in Asissi of course, from cows whose breeding goes back to the 14th century, handcrafted by a specialist in medieval leather-making, and available in different shades of brown, they could be yours in selected stores for somewhere in the two thousand dollar range.

What a distance from the original matrix! The commodification process had disconnected them from most every meaning they gave off when Francis wore them – renunciation of possessions, downward mobility so as to identify with the outcasts, long-term commitment to rebuilding the Church and establishing the Kingdom of Justice on earth, solidarity with the poor and especially solidarity with the poor Jesus as he hung on the cross.

And see what new appeal these sandals have taken on. They're elegant, with lines and patterns finer than those Birkenstocks everybody wears. They're noble; they pull up feelings of compassion in me for the down and out – and I like to feel that way. They're interesting, certainly more so than the drab pair I've got in my closet now that I have to keep polishing and taking for repairs. And that middle shade, the Umbrian tan, is so me! With a little more accessorizing, these sandals will set my feet off from anyone else's who has a mind (and a bank account) to buy them.

The most useful point of the story (its underlying critique) is to bring out the very powerful, hidden, and pervasive workings of the consumerist mentality. It unveils a kind of atmospheric training programme that shapes the ways I take in reality, disposing me to look out at the whole world as commodity. Commodification creates a filter on existence that slips over all the other frameworks and displaces them. It locks in a "default setting" of narrowed perceptions through which I ingest reality and interpret what counts and what doesn't. Finally, it not only separates foundational convictions from their defining contexts, but, as a subset of that, also constricts the feedback loop between belief and practice.

III. Frederic and the Commodity Culture

With these concerns in mind, we rejoin Frederic, now with the question of how his approach might serve as a buffer against the pressures of commodification. What help can he be in the face of this mostly unnoticed "formation program" in the habits of consumer interpretation?

While the ideas I suggest are directed to Ozanam's own Society of St Vincent de Paul, the lessons are transferable to any group dedicated to the poor. Also, given the massive influence of commodification, I do not regard my suggestions as grand strategies so much as tactics for making some neighborhood inroads into the problem. You might think of them as counter-insurgency training tools for use within local cells.

A) The Home Visits

Something never to forget is Frederic's insistence on regular face-to-face contact with the people he would serve. He engaged 19th Century society and its flaws very concretely, most especially in his up-close interaction with the ones who benefited the least from it. The knowledge he used as his baseline for writing and organizing was not the pure-and-chaste-from-afar kind, but rather the fleshy brand of knowing born of practical action and personal engagement. His was that fuller, denser wisdom that comes only from interpersonal contact.

In terms of the categories in the previous section, his approach was anything but abstract. Interacting with people on a regular basis in their home setting does not allow a lot of disconnected theorizing about how to help them. Operating so close up, I can't bend or romanticize the conditions of their world. I can't easily lop off disturbing aspects of face-to-face interaction such that my response can be transmuted into mere ethical good-feeling.

In other words, if commodification builds habits of the heart that encourage me to narrow the meanings of things to only what sits on the surface, its insistence on concrete encounter pushes in the opposite direction toward depth and substance. To the extent that the market-induced disposition puts me up in a control tower as the "sovereign consumer" who can mix and match pieces of culture to my taste, rubbing the elbows of actual people lowers me down and makes me deal with things as they intractably are.

Once again, when you concretize an abstraction (especially a social one), you also intensify the felt obligation to respond. Eye-to-eye interaction puts a sharper edge on the moral demand to "do something about it."

Frederic's predilection for the fuller granular knowledge that comes by interaction is a key counter-cultural training principle. It stirs up more powerful motivation to act, and it puts flesh on what could too easily be very thin wishes for justice.

B) Theological Reflection

Another of Frederic's practices was the inclusion of reflection, both at the Conference meetings and outside of them. In face of the forces of disconnection that the commodity culture deploys, this too is a move in the opposite direction.

He consistently strove to make and then strengthen the links between the activities of his Association and the seed bed in which they were rooted – which for him was the Gospel of Jesus Christ lived out over many generations. In the company of his fellows, he conversed with that Gospel, so to speak. For one thing, he made prayer part of his meetings. For another, in his letters and reports, Frederic characteristically tied in what the members were doing to the symbols, practices and beliefs of the Christian tradition. And for still one more, he regularly incorporated the good works of the Society into the central rituals of his faith, notably the Eucharist.(16)

Even though he likely would have welcomed the help of those not of his religion, the backdrop for his own exhortations to the Association was not generic (as indeed any tradition never is). His stated purpose was to serve the truth of his heritage, Christianity, and, even more to our point, to enhance the faith by word and deed. Practice and theory

wove tightly together for him, but precisely as expression and fruit of the overarching Christian story.

Earlier, I mentioned the informal discussions that took place during those first visits to the poor under the tutelage of Sr Rosalie Rendu. More refined and structured today under the formal name of Theological Reflection, the purpose of this practice is to make the bigger connections. It is designed to forge links between the religious riches of the Christian inheritance and life's experience, particularly service experience.

Theological reflection aims to thicken these bonds and habituate me to keep on strengthening them. It is a tactic that runs directly against the current that transmutes beliefs and symbols into what one writer terms free floating signifiers; i.e. symbols isolated from their original associations which can then carry any meaning the marketer assigns. (17) This reflection process, done regularly and intentionally, is meant to cover the bones of my beliefs with the sinew of concrete experience, and sometimes even reset those bones. Conversely, it helps steer the charitable work I do and also gives it additional staying power.

Theological reflection is a nourishing exercise, practiced in the early days of the Society which works against the flattening effects of commodification. Might not its re-introduction into Conference activities in its more modern form respond to today's special challenges?

C) A Communal Effort

In a climate that showcases individualism, the value of working together cannot be taken for granted. Recall that Frederic sought out compatriots to stand with him against the cultural winds that were blowing in his day. His first attempt to add action to his words was a communal one. Again and again, he thanked God for the building-up each member gave to the others.

If he were living in this era, his instincts for this might well have been even more explicit. "Having it your way," is just one of the cultural factors which feed my expectation that I'm sovereign in the world, that in the memorable image of Tom Wolf's book, I'm "The Master of the Universe." The array of choices and niches that consumerism offers downplays the value of collaboration.

It would be an easy task, using Frederic's letters, to show how much he valued the quality and depth of relationships within his Association. He often enthused about the influence the older members could have on the younger, about the value of keeping up lively contacts within and between the conferences, and about the joy of working closely together. For him, the brotherhood made the crucial difference in the ability to sustain an effort.(18)

In this age of "bowling alone" where there is such reluctance to invest in common projects, perseverance suffers. When conjoined with the restless search for the next new thing, this preference for working alone tilts the table toward dabbling rather than long haul commitment. Frederic's wisdom about the communal counters this. He both needed and knew the support of his Society members for following through on his convictions. And in this day of systematically entrenched injustices, is not this need for sustenance from the brotherhood even greater?

D) Marrying Practice and Theory

One criticism of consumerism is that it can delude a person into thinking that letting himself feel the pain of another is the same as giving real help to the other. Valuing the "rush" above all else, it is enough to be stimulated (entertained?) by the drama in the wrong that was done. We noted how this attitude separates perception from follow-through; I can mouth humanitarian concerns while not acting on them concretely.

Frederic's learning was that practice is not only required to legitimate theoretical claims, but that the practices begin to feed back into the theory. The evolution of his ideas about charity and Church-State collaboration happened in the main because of his experience of serving the poor of Paris. A large part of his admiration for St Vincent de Paul stemmed from an appreciation of St Vincent's practicality, or in Vincent's own words, the way in which "affective and effective action" run together.

The on-the-ground flavour that stamped Frederic's spirituality is another counterweight to the forces of commodification. Given Frederic's scholarly training and love for things academic, this quality in him is not only striking in itself but can serve as call to today's Society to consider again the blessings that come from intertwining intelligent theory and effective operation.

E) Eyes on the Unmarketable

This last suggestion is the most general and requires a step back from tactics to catch the longer view.(19) The underlying danger of thoroughgoing consumerism is that it tries to commodify everything. Left alone in the field, it would shrink reality to what can be marketed, bought and sold. In at least three fundamental areas, Frederic resists this process.

In the first place, he esteemed tradition and regarded it as a living and encompassing thing. He recognized that the breadth of this intergenerational wisdom took in far more than he could ever hope to assimilate. He looked to it as a table from which to nourish his mind and heart, and so take him past the conventional wisdoms. Frederic enjoined his companions to drink deeply from this font, to keep making

the connections between the service they were giving and the much more fertile ground in which their activities were rooted. Rather than being at his disposal as some commodity, the living tradition embraced him and led him forward.

Secondly, along with E Bailly, Sr Rosalie Rendu, St Vincent de Paul and Jesus Himself, Frederic regarded the poor as priceless, far beyond any buying and selling. It was his regular interaction with these men and woman that would not let him reduce them to categories, statistics or noble-feeling causes.

Finally, Frederic's Lord was anything but commodifiable. The Mystery to whom he gave himself was not only the living God but the encircling and all pervading source of living period. This God he confessed was infinitely beyond his ability to manipulate, or pass off as some appealing product a consumer could take, leave, or suit to her tastes.

There indeed are things that money can't buy,(20) but in these times of being so conditioned to not quite believe that, the reverential spirit of an Ozanam is especially needed. Putting oneself under Frederic's tutelage forestalls the shrinking-down tendencies of the consumer society.

IV. Conclusion

Undoubtedly, there are other aspects of his approach that could work to counteract the pressures of the commodity mentality. Among them might be the greater sense of religious agency (someone owning his religion as opposed to "handing it off to a specialist; i.e., the clergy") that involvement in a Catholic lay association such as the Society can give its members. Another might be the check against the impulse to run after the "next new thing" that sustained contact with the poor can be. Still another might be the simplification of daily life that Frederic's Association implied when it solicited its own members for contributions for the poor.

But the overall point is this. A 21st Century person who imbibes Frederic's approach, especially by taking up his style of integrating religiously rooted theory and practice in communal and concrete service of the poor, can be re-tooled to resist the shallowing dynamics of the commodity culture.

Frederic's Society, one that lives from the action-proven spirituality of a St Vincent de Paul, provides a training ground for such a task. Still more widely, any committed, long term, reflected upon, tradition-grounded, and practical participation in communal endeavors for social improvement is counter cultural in its most saving sense.

Notes

1 A lucid overview of this literature can be found in "Moral Notes: Consumerism and Christian Ethics," Kenneth R Himes, OFM, *Theological Studies*, Vol. 68, March 2007, pp. 132-153.

2 Gerard Cholvy underlines Frederic's abiding curiosity, observing how "The young Ozanam proposed to his school friends… that they seek out signs of early religion, and therefore of Catholicism, in the traditions of every nation. He himself… restricted his own research to the medieval period." "Frederic Ozanam and the Challenge of The Times," *Society of St Vincent de Paul Bulletin of News*, Feb. 13, 2009.

3 "What About the Poor? 19th Century Paris and the Revival of Vincentian Charity." Edward R Udovic, CM *Vincentian Heritage Journal*, Vol. 14, 1, 1993.

4 "Frederic Ozanam: Lay Evangelizer." Shaun McCarty, ST *Vincentian Heritage Journal,* Vol. 17, 1, 1996, p. 8.

5 The work spread rapidly. Less than 20 years later, the Society numbered 2000 local units (Conferences) with 500 of them outside of France. Today there are over 600,000 members, divided into 47,000 Conferences and active in 132 countries. ("The Virtuous Personality of Blessed Frederic Ozanam." John Rybolt, CM *Vincentian Heritage Journal*, Vol 17, 1, 1996, p. 42.)

6 *Frederic Ozanam and His World.* Thomas Auge. Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1966.

7 Auge, p. 106.

8 To Francis Lallier, November 5, 1836. *Frederic Ozanam: A Life in Letters.* Joseph I Dirvin. St Louis: Society of St Vincent de Paul, 1986, p. 91.

9 To Louis Janmot, November 13, 1836. Dirvin, p. 96.

10 Cholvy, p. 2.

11 *Following Christ in a Consumer Society: The Spirituality of Cultural Resistance.* John Kavanaugh. Maryknoll, New York, Orbis, 1991. *Radical Gratitude.* Mary Jo Leddy. Maryknoll New York, Orbis, 2002. *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture.* Vincent J. Miller, New York: Continuum, 2004.)

12 Miller, chapter 4, ("Desire and the Kingdom of God").

13 *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Survival of American Community.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000.

14 *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985

15 Miller, p. 38.

16 To Mademioselle Soulacroix, May 1, 1841. Dirvin, p. 242.

17 Miller, ch. 5.

18 In an early letter, Frederic writes, "It is important then to form an association of mutual encouragement…where one finds friendship, support and example." (To Leonce Curnier, November 4, 1834. Dirvin, p. 55)

19 Cf. "Reconsidering Greed," *Having: Property and Possession in Religious and Social Life.* William Schweiker (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 249-71.

20 "Asceticism and the Ethics of Consumption." Maria Antonaccio. *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics,* 26 (2006) p. 79-96.

A review of Seeds of Hope; Stories of Systemic Change (2008)

Myles Rearden CM

This work, of just under 200 pages in its English-language edition, is, it seems, without precedent in Vincentian history. It has been produced by a body called The Vincentian Family's Commission for Promoting Systemic Change. That body was set up by a group of nine organizations collectively known as 'the Vincentian Family', which came together from the hundred and sixty or more associations that can be called 'Vincentian' in one way or another: that is to say, the Commission was set up by the heads of the nine associations and societies that have grouped themselves under that name: The International Association of Charity (AI C), the Congregation of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity, the Society of St Vincent de Paul, the Religious of St Vincent de Paul, Marian Vincentian Youth, Association of the Miraculous Medal, the Missionary Cenacle Family *(Trinitarians)* and the Sisters of Charity Federation (USA). [In the Vincentian Family Website (24 January 2009) it is stated that these groups 'among others' are members of the Family: I have not been able to find an official list of members as at that date.] The Commission set up by the Vincentian Family to promote Systemic Change was established in 2006. It consists of seven members:

Robert Maloney CM (USA);
former Superior General of the CM (Coordinator)
Norberto Carchelar CM (Phillipines)
Ellen Flynn DC (Britain)
Joseph Foley CM (USA);
NGO representative of the CM at the United Nations
Patricia Nava (Mexico); former President of AIC and now representative of the AIC for relations with the International Vincentian Family
Pedro Opeka CM (Madagascar/Argentina)
Rev Mr Gene Smith (USA);
former US national President of SSVP

The goal of the Commission is 'to help bring about systemic change through the works of the members of the Vincentian Family, especially through projects among the oppressed poor' *(Seeds of Hope,* p l91). The

Vincentian Family asked the Commission to study available material concerning systemic change, to discuss their own involvement in it, to formulate as list of effective strategies for helping the poor emerge from poverty, and to share that list with the members of the Vincentian Family. The present book, along with related workshops and seminars world-wide, represents one of these strategies.

All the members of the Commission have contributed to the fifteen chapters of *Seeds of Hope,* including a Prologue and an Epilogue. Five of them, those dealing mainly with the notion of 'systemic change', are by Patricia Nava,· three, including the Prologue and the Epilogue, are by Robert Maloney; two by Ellen Flynn, and one by each of the others, plus a specially invited author, Sister Malou Baaco DC of the Philippines. Patricia Nava's chapters are mostly of world-wide application, while the others deal largely with particular projects in the Philippines, Madagascar, Mozambique and other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, The Dominican Republic, Britain and the Republic of Ireland. Editorial assistance was provided by Rev James Keane SJ of the Jesuit magazine *America*. As can be seen, a large proportion of the text (over a quarter) is by Patricia Nava, and it is to her that we owe what the work contributes to our understanding of what is meant by 'systemic change', which is the most original and perhaps controversial aspect of the work.

Nonetheless, the descriptions of the various projects that have been undertaken and carried forward in the name of 'systemic change' are both inspiring and challenging. They provide concrete evidence of what can be done, often in the face of great difficulty, and are well worthy to take their place among the many such projects that have been achieved under Vincentian auspices in the nearly 400 years since the first Vincentian Charity, The Ladies of Charity, was founded in 1617. As the Vincentian Family faces its future, an effort to distil its ideas and inspiration in an enduring way may be exactly what is needed. It is with this in mind that I offer the present study of the ideas of Patricia Nava and their relation to currently emerging aspects of catholic social teaching.

Robert Maloney also offers some general theoretical observations regarding systemic change in his Prologue. Thus he considers that a 'systemic change project' involves a 'long-term social impact', that it is 'sustainable', that it is 'replicable' in various circumstances, that it has actually expanded from its original setting, and that it has brought about significant change by transforming traditional practice. Not everything new is necessarily a 'systemic change' It is, he believes, characteristic of the stories, the accounts of projects given in *Seeds of Hope,* that they are durable and significant in these five ways. What this appears to mean that it is only with the passage of time that a change can be recognized

as really 'systemic'. What we shall be looking for in Patricia Nava's ideas is whether there are any short-term indicators that might help us to recognize a change as systemic.

Patricia Nava insists that her theoretical work is not abstract, but based on the projects described in the other sections of the work. As an initial comment on the projects the Commission was considering, she quotes a remark of Pope John Paul II in 1979, in which he stated that "social thinking and social practice inspired by the Gospel must always be marked by a special sensitivity towards those who are in distress…", and to 'the structural reasons that cause poverty' (p 43) Such sensitivity to people and intelligent awareness of the cause of their distress were seen by the Commission as indicators of change that promised to be genuinely systemic. Systemic change thus grows out of a certain quality of mind and heart. Yet it also involves certain 'strategies':

- Mission-oriented strategies (focusing on direction and motivation);
- People-oriented strategies (focusing on the poor as the persons who are most capable of changing their own situations)
- Task oriented strategies (focusing on organization);
- strategies directed towards co-responsibility, net-working and political action (focusing on participation and solidarity. (pp 162-169)

Patricia Nava then takes up each of these types of strategy in chapters 3 (pp 44-48), 6 (pp 76-85), 9 (pp 1l8-126) and 12 (pp 162-169). The significance of her dealing them in different chapters is to emphasize that 'systemic change' involves a number of different things and operates at various levels. At each stage in 'systemic change'planning, it is important to remember at what stage you are. Initially, for instance, a great deal will involve focusing on how the individual 'servant of the poor' experiences his or her own motivation (does it contain a lot of anger or desire to exercise power?), and then it is necessary to move on to liking and respecting the poor (strategy 2). But there are also other issues, connected with running an organization designed to help the poor, or help the poor help themselves better, e.g. a conference of the SSVP or a night-shelter, which cannot remain simply at the personal level, and finally there is the level at which planning deals with whole and perhaps massive organizations like the SSVP nationally or regionally, or the Vincentian Partnership. Serving the poor is quite a sophisticated undertaking – a fact that entails its own risks. The systemic change projects described in the remaining chapters of the book illustrate all this very well.

Mission-oriented strategies

As a basic principle for the mission-oriented strategy, Nava lays down that poverty is not to be regarded as just the inevitable result of circumstances: the poor remain poor largely because of changeable circumstances. She quotes Nelson Mandela, "like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural" and, before him, Ozanam:

> Charity is not sufficient. It treats the wounds but not the blows that cause them… Charity is the Samaritan who pours oil on the wounds of the traveler who has been attacked. It is Justice's role to prevent the attacks. (p 46)

A second principle for the mission-oriented strategy is to 'design projects, creative strategies, policies and guidelines that flow from our Christian and Vincentian values and mission'. That is what determined the whole course of Vincent's life from when in his early thirties he 'committed himself to following Christ as the Evangelizer and servant of the poor' (p 47) Vincentian motivation combines prayer and action, and is essentially spiritual.

A third and final principle at the level of mission orientation is 'to evangelize, while maintaining a profound respect for the local culture, thus inculturating our Christian and Vincentian charism within that culture', which, we may observe, relates not alone to various foreign cultures, but to the new cultures that succeeding generations develop for themselves. At this point it is clear that the mission-oriented strategies are moving towards those that are people-oriented.

Person-oriented strategies

Under this heading, Nava directs our attention to the poor as the persons who are most capable of changing their own situation. "As members of the Vincentian family, inspired by Christ the evangelizer and servant of the poor, we seek to be attentive to their needs and their hopes so that we may not only evangelize and serve them, but also be changed by our contact with them". Nava quotes St Louise de Marillac on this point: "As for your conduct towards the poor, may you never take the attitude of merely getting the task done. You must show them affection; serving them from the heart – inquiring of them what they need; speaking to them gently and compassionately; procuring necessary help for them without being too bothersome or too eager". (p 77)

Treating people with respect helps them to grow in respect. She quotes St Vincent: "Whenever I happened to speak abruptly to these convicts, I spoiled everything, but whenever I praised them for their acceptance and showed them compassion… they always listened to me

and even turned to God." (p 78) And later she remarks, 'Members of the Vincentian Family attempt to live and work in solidarity with the poor rather than merely encourage others to share their superfluous wealth with them'. A vital way of showing solidarity with the poor is having a deep concern for the education of the young, which is deeply rooted in the Vincentian tradition. Equally vital is the development of servant-leaders, inspired by the example of St Vincent de Paul. She quotes Eduardo Marques: "How to acquire the skills of a servant leader? The initial answer is that these skills cannot be acquired only through training, but must be accompanied by the leader's true desire to serve." (p 81)

Empowering others for leadership was not only something St Vincent himself excelled in, but which has shown itself clearly in the AIC systemic-change type projects in Madagascar: 'Soon the first volunteers became multiplying agents, training others to be active in working towards social change even in the poorest communities of this budding network'. Fr Norberto Concelar from the Phillipines notes that 'Searching for the means to emerge from poverty is a risky experience. Servant leadership encourages the community to take such risks'(p 83)… which leads on to the more task-oriented strategy and ultimately to the political.

Task-oriented strategies

Nava begins her examination of this level of strategy with the very first organization established by St Vincent, that of the Charity at Chatillon-les-Dombes in 1617, and the Rule he composed for it. She sees this as illustrating the strategic principle of 'starting with a serious analysis of the local reality, flowing from concrete data, and tailoring all projects to that reality.' At Chatillon Vincent discovered a rich vein of generosity among the local people, and a plentiful supply of volunteers to deliver that generosity to those in need, along with a willingness of those volunteers to be organized in such a way as to allow of the most efficient distribution of assistance. No doubt it was fortuitous that he found all these qualities together among the poor of Chatillon and what his success there shows is the importance of identifying the personnel and other resources for relieving local needs. Nava amplifies this principle of Vincent's with one drawn from Blessed Rosalie Rendu: There are different kinds of charity, and the small help we give is only a palliative, for it is necessary to set up a more efficient and lasting charity;

To study the attitudes and the level of instruction of the poor, obtaining work for them, with the result that they can escape their own condition of misery. (p 120)

People only escape from poverty when they have stable means for satisfying their basic human needs. Nava illustrates this from the examples of Pedro Opeka's projects in Madagascar, and the level of 'quality service' provided in the Passage in London. Finally, she illustrates the basic Vincentian principle of durability by ensuring a solid financial basis for projects, such as Fr Maloney's DREAM project for HIV sufferers, concluding with the advice to 'be transparent, inviting participation in preparing budgets and in commenting on financial reports: maintain careful controls over money management.' (p 125)

Co-responsibility, networking and political action strategies

Nava points out that Vincent frequently intervened in political issues in order to help the poor: that is, he involved royalty, the nobility, the legal profession and high church authorities in projects for the sake of the poor, at a time when the poor themselves were virtually powerless. The empowerment of the masses in many contemporary societies is something he could only have dreamed of, but even today "it is necessary to construct a shared vision with diverse stake-holders: poor communities, interested individuals, donors, churches, governments, unions, the media, international organizations and networks, etc". In other words the sectionalizing or cornering of the power to control welfare needs to be avoided in our democratic societies. As Nava states 'The fundamental model for the Vincentian mission is collaborative, involving teamwork, networking and shared goals'. (p 166) In which connection, it is perhaps appropriate to state that Vincentian exclusivism is no more acceptable than any other kind when it comes to the service of the poor! The words of Pedro Opeka with which she concludes lie at the heart of the Vincentian attitude:

> When we explore the mystery of the covenant between God and humanity… we live in joy and peace because we love deeply. To that end, we attempt to return continually to the source of the Good News and open our hearts to it. If we do that faithfully, then, in the footsteps of Christ, we ourselves will be Good News. (p 169)

The soul of systemic change

If there is a single idea that gives meaning to 'systemic change' at all its four levels, it must certainly be that which determined the course of Vincent's own life from his early thirties on: that of consecrating his entire self and all he possessed to God for the service of the poor. This idea determined the generosity with which he made particular donations,

and it was what he used to motivate the Ladies of Charity to donate their jewelry for the work of the foundlings. But it also determined the spirit of fraternity with which he spoke to the galley-slaves, or regretted not doing so at times, and it equally controlled the spirit of servant-leadership in which he established the Charity at Chatillon-les-Dombes, and saw to the creation of networks of charity throughout war-torn France, involving everyone he could influence.

Importantly, it is precisely this fundamental attitude of mind, heart and will that is most amenable to prayer and the sacramental life: it is why Vincent is not just an organizational genius but a saint. In a certain sense, this still centre of systemic change does not change at all, rather it is the living heart of a human being alive with the love of God. It feels very much like the core of Vincentian existence, or really, of all Christian and human existence. Systemic change means reaching the point of never having to change again.

Obituaries

Father Eamonn Cowan CM

Some weeks ago I visited Fr Eamonn in St Pauls, Raheny – the Vincentian Community House where Eamonn lived. He was on a mobile oxygen unit and wasn't at all well. In the course of our conversation he mentioned that he was making his funeral arrangements now while he was able. He was hoping for the best – there was still hope for his situation – but he wanted to prepare just in case. We talked about death and dying for a while. Then he asked if I would preach at his funeral Mass. I said I would be very honoured to do so but then I suggested another possible arrangement. His reaction was: "no Mark, you do the preaching". I said: "ok I'll do the preaching". Then I said: "What would you like me to say about you". He said with a twinkle in his eye and a broad smile: "you can say anything you like but I'll be listening". So here I am to honour Eamonn's request and to say goodbye to a Vincentian confrere and a good friend of many years.

My first reaction to that conversation was to marvel at Eamonn's courage. It was a side to him I had never seen. Eamonn showed extraordinary courage in the past year and a half. His brother Leo's illness and dying was never far away from Eamonn's thoughts over the last year as he observed the progression of his own illness. We talked about it quite a lot. I used to reply to his concerns: "Just because it happened to Leo like that doesn't mean its going to happen to you". But he kept going on as cheerfully as ever with his job as chaplain here in St Pats. Even when walking became impossible and he needed a little buggy to get around he kept going. The fact that he was so open and honest about his condition made the journey somewhat easier for those who were with him on his last journey. Thanks Eamonn for your courage and your honesty.

When I reflect on Eamonn's living out of the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ over the past year and a half I am left with the sheer mystery of it all. The mystery of life and death; the mystery of suffering. When you ask yourself the question: Why do bad things happen to good people you are left with an empty silence by way of answer. The only attempt at an answer lies at the foot of the Cross of Jesus. The suffering and death of Jesus was the road to resurrection and new life for him. As it was for Jesus so it is with Eamonn and so it is for all of us. *When the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death we gain an everlasting dwelling place in Heaven. In him who rose from the dead our hope of resurrection dawned. The sadness of death gives way to the bright*

promise of immortality. Lord for your faithful people life is changed not ended.

Eamonn was very close to his Armagh roots all his life. He stayed closely and passionately in touch with the ups and downs of Armagh football. Somebody remarked that when Armagh won the All Ireland a few years ago there was no sign of Eamonn for at least a week. Nobody knew where he was. But nobody had to ask where he was either. Everyone knew the score – as he would say himself. He was so proud of his family and remained close to them all his life. It comes as no surprise that he expressed a wish to be buried later today in Armagh – almost in the shadow of St Patrick's Cathedral and the shadow of St Patrick's College where he was at school and where he met members of the Vincentian community for the first time.

Eamonn had a great sense of humour. There would be a twinkle in the eye and then you would get a description of something that was going on in vivid imagery. Some of his descriptions of the events of life used to be in football images. When he came to discuss his own future, in his present post as chaplain of St Patrick's College, he used often say: "It is much better to leave the field before Joe Kernan takes you off". Little did he know that the Joe Kernan who would take him off the field would be his final illness. One time when he was asked to say Mass in a difficult situation he told me that he felt like an RUC man delivering a summons on the Falls Road.

The commitment and closeness which Eamonn had with his family and with Armagh, he also had as a Vincentian priest. He was very pastoral and caring in the many ministries in which he served. People always came first with Eamonn and he was remembered by them with great affection.

There is a promise in the second reading of today's Mass: *Happy are those who die in the Lord; now they can rest for ever after their work since their good deeds go with them*. It would be impossible to cover all of Eamonn's good deeds or to name all the people touched by Eamonn's gentleness and goodness since his ordination in 1963. I do want to name where those people were; Eamonn served on the Vincentian Mission teams in Sheffield and Phibsboro, he was chaplain to the deaf community in Leeds, he was director of a hostel for young people out of prison in Glengowan in Glasgow, he was on the Vincentian retreat team in Damascus House in London and in All Hallows College in Drumcondra, he was on the parish team in the Sacred Heart Parish in Mill Hill, Director of the Daughters of Charity in Ireland based in St Joseph's in Blackrock, he was in the parish of Ballymena at the out church in Harryville when the church was regularly under siege. Finally for the past 11 years he served as chaplain here in St Patrick's College

of Education where he was very happy. I think Eamonn would want me on this occasion to thank Dr Pauric Travers, President of the College and the staff and students for their support for Eamonn and his work as chaplain. I know from my chats with him that he appreciated their support very much indeed.

As well as all those ministries he served on the Vincentian Provincial Council, was assistant provincial for a number of years and Director of Vocations. What an interesting and full life Eamonn lived: so many very differing ministries, so many different places, so many people. His appointment as chaplain in St Patrick's College was his longest appointment. I have little doubt that the promise of the second reading is fulfilled in abundance in Eamonn's case. *Happy are those who die in the Lord; now they can rest for ever after their work since their good deeds go with them.*

Eamonn was a very pleasant travelling companion. We had many holidays together. Eamonn's condition for travelling to Spain after Christmas was that he had to be back for Mass here in St Patrick's College for January 6th – the Feast of the Epiphany. I used to suggest getting someone else to celebrate the Mass or even to cancel the Mass altogether. I reasoned that people will have no problem in attending a Mass in some other church. But no! Eamonn had to be back to say Mass. That conscientiousness and caring was a characteristic of all his work as a priest in our province for almost 50 years.

There is another promise in the first reading – the promise of a future life with God. "*The Lord of Hosts will prepare a banquet of rich food… he will destroy death for ever… the Lord will wipe away the tears from every cheek*". So as we gather to day to say farewell to Eamonn, our hearts are full of sadness and grief. Yet this mass gives us some hope; hope that Eamonn is with God, hope that the sadness of death gives way to the bright promise of immortality, hope that the Lord of host will prepare for all peoples a banquet of rich food.

Our sincere sympathies to Anne, Mary, Emmet and Joe, Eamonn's nephews and all the family. May Eamonn rest in peace.

Mark Noonan CM

Reflection given by Dr Pauric Travers, President of St Patrick's College, Drumcondra at a Memorial Mass for Fr Eamonn Cowan CM, in the College Chapel on 18 February 2009

Go silent friend, your life has found its ending.
Eamonn Cowan, brother, uncle, priest, chaplain, colleague and friend passed away on 2nd January. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam uasal.

I would like to welcome you all here today to this memorial mass, in particular, Fr Eamonn's sisters, Mary and Ann, members of the extended Cowan family, and Eamonn's Vincentian confreres. I welcome also colleagues and former colleagues of Eamonn, students, staff and friends. In the midst of death, there is life: in remembering Eamonn, we note with joy the birth of his grand-nephew, Oscar, a son to Mark and Miah – I have no doubt that as he grows up he will have an additional guardian angel watching over him.

It was characteristic of the man that he would go gentle into that dark night and slip away quietly during the Christmas holidays – no fuss, no pomp, no ceremony. Fr Mark Noonan mentioned at the funeral mass that Eamonn would be watching with a critical eye the proceedings that day. I am sure he is still watching.

Go silent friend, Forgive us if we grieved you.
Fr Eamonn was appointed Chaplain here by the Archbishop of Dublin in 1997. His eleven year ministry coincided with a significant transition in the history of the College, following the withdrawal of the Vincentian Community and the appointment of a lay-President in 1999. The successful negotiation of that transition owes much to the sensitive and reassuring presence of Eamonn Cowan.

He and I talked often about our respective roles. We reached an informal *modus vivendi*: I would look after the teaching and he would look after the preaching – not that preaching was his forté in the traditional sense – he led by example not by words, and by living his values. Our working relationship was a variation on the gospel advice: render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. Of course this apparently tidy demarcation is in practice nothing of the sort . It is precisely the messy inter-faces between temporal and spiritual, reason and faith, body and soul that are the most critical and sensitive, not least for those involved in education, teacher education and an institution such as this.

Go silent friend, Your life in Christ is buried

Eamonn knew a thing or two about inter-face areas although he was reticent to speak of it. He brought a wealth of experience to his chaplaincy. Even for those of us who thought we knew him well, the list of settings in which he ministered comes as a surprise: ordained in 1963, he served in Phibsboro: in Sheffield on Missions and Retreats; as Chaplain to the Deaf Community in Leeds; as Director of a Hostel for young offenders on leaving prison in Glasgow: on the parish team in Mill Hill London and later as Assistant Director of Damascus House; as Assistant Director of the Retreat House in All Hallows; as Director of Daughters of Charity in Ireland; and as Curate in Harryville – Ballymena. He also served as Assistant Provincial and Vocations Director for the Irish Province of the Vincentians for many years.

Eamonn and Frank Mullan were curates and school chaplains in the Harryville district of Ballymena at a very difficult and turbulent time. After the funeral, I received a letter from Martin Kearney, retired principal of St Mary's PS, Ballymena – I quote from the letter:

> our school suffered four arson attacks and the church and adjoining parochial house were subject to endless vandalism, paint-bomb, pipe-bomb and incendiary attacks. This was the home of these two exemplary clerics. Each Saturday night the vigil mass at the chapel was at the centre of a loyalist protest, which was often violent and threatening. Their sense of duty, integrity, loyalty and good humour was *a beacon* to pupils, staff, parents, school governors and parishioners alike. Sadly they had to leave their homes, or to put it more accurately, flee – leaving a void which was never filled.

Eamonn was an exemplar of the best traditions of the followers of St Vincent. He combined humility and a deep commitment to the poor. His humility was striking: at the funeral someone remarked that he had no ego – his own personality or needs never got in the way and that that allowed him to commit himself without reservation and to serve. I think that is true – although sometimes I felt he could do with a little more ego and a little less humility.

He often expressed concern about whether he was the right person for the job of chaplain in a third level College. He was conscious of filling the shoes of Fr Brian Magee, his predecessor, who had a national and, I think it is fair to say, international reputation as a liturgist. Again, I don't think Eamonn's forté was as a liturgist. His strengths lay is his openness, his presence and his ability to touch the lives of students and staff. These qualities made him an outstanding chaplain.

Each year we do an annual report, reporting on activities and events across the College, including the Chaplaincy. It was well nigh impossible to get Eamonn to give us text – he said it was too much like blowing his own trumpet. He wrote in one report that the three crucial areas in third level chaplaincy were community, prayer and involvement with those on the margins. He nourished all three through his work with students in the St Vincent de Paul society, the development of the Quiet Room, daily mass, the family mass on Sundays and, not least, his open door. The task of chaplaincy, he wrote in 2001, 'is that of helping create a community which integrates personal, spiritual and social development with academic effort and achievement. The aim is to nourish a climate of care within the College and promote a sense of belonging among students and staff.'

Eamonn was universally popular with students and staff alike. He always had a sympathetic ear and a kind word for those with troubles, great or small. Many students and staff here today could testify to his kindness and gentle support at times of bereavement and loss. He was always the first name on the guest list of student functions – and rarely missed an event. The esteem and affection in which he was held by students was manifest on many occasions, including the 40th Anniversary of his ordination when the student body made him a presentation.

As well as being College Chaplain, Fr Eamonn acted as Chaplain to the schools on campus. He gave his time generously to the pastoral care of the school pupils and to their preparation for the sacraments of Communion and Confirmation. The weekly Family Mass at the College Chapel was legendary and consistently attracted large congregations over many years. The attendance at his removal and funeral Mass included many current and former pupils of the school and their parents. Last Friday, the school organised their own memorial mass here in the Church – it was a moving and memorable occasion. The pupils have two scrap books recording their own impressions and memories – the entries were funny, perceptive and revealing: one boy said he would never forget Fr Eamonn – he spelled the name A-M-E-N – Eamonn; another referred to how Eamonn always spoke gently – he only ever shouted once – and that was when Armagh won the All Ireland.

Go silent friend, we do not grudge your glory

My own favourite moment from last Friday's mass was when Fr Sean asked where Eamonn was from; Armagh they answered in unison; Fr Sean then proceeded to ask in his rich Dublin accent where they thought he was from; after a short pause, they answered – Armagh. I am not sure what our manager, Archbishop Martin, would make of their conviction

that all priests are from Armagh – however, I take it as a ultimate testimony to Fr Eamonn's impact on their young lives.

You will understand if I pass quickly over Eamonn's passion for Armagh football. We had an unwritten rule that we could talk football in the days before a match but never afterwards. Some of you will know the intense local and county rivalry which is such a feature of the GAA. As a Donegal man, I am only too conscious of the generations of my countymen whose lives have been blighted by the boys from the County Armagh. A succession of broken Donegal full backs still have nightmares, years later: in the dying moments of another titanic struggle; two points up – and then, a long diagonal ball to Mc Conville or Clarke or whoever – it doesn't matter and the ball is in the back of the Donegal net. Dreams shattered for another year.

Apart from Armagh football, the only thing I have ever heard Eamonn get roused about was this beautiful chapel. The heating system had to be replaced last year but Eamonn ensured that nothing would be done to diminish its perfect symmetry and beauty. ***Si monumentum requires: circumspice* – if you seek a memorial, look around.** When he died, it was entirely fitting that his removal should be from this church where he had ministered so well.

Last Summer, we brought Eamonn to dinner in Howth to mark his 70th birthday. We were worried that he might refuse to come if we said it was for his birthday – so we told him it was to mark completion of the restoration work on the Church. It was a beautiful sunny evening. As usual we talked about the College and about football. At one stage Art McCooey's name cropped up. Art McCooey as all the students will know was an eighteenth century bardic poet from South Armagh who fell foul of the church authorities and spent some time in exile in Howth. In his most famous poem, Úrchill an Chreagain, he returns to the Creggan graveyard which housed the O'Neill family vault; a maiden appears to him and urges him to come west-away to the fair land of promise. He asks for only one pledge before he agrees – should he die in some far-off place, his weary heart should rest where he began his journey. It was appropriate that Eamonn's remains should repose here in Drumcondra but doubly so that they should then be brought back to Armagh and the bosom of his family.

May he rest in Peace.

Compassionate Lord, Jesus Christ,
grant him rest, peace, pardon, glory.

EAMONN COWAN CM

Born;	Armagh, 23 June 1938
Entered the CM:	7 September 1956
Vows:	8 September 1961
Ordained Priest:	30 March 1963 at Holy Cross College, Clonliffe by Dr John Charles McQuaid, Archbishop of Dublin

APPOINTMENTS:

1963 – '66:	St Peter's, Phibsborough
1966 – '69:	St Vincent's, Sheffield (Deaf Apostolate, Leeds Diocese)
1969 – '71:	Glenowan Boys Hostel, Glasgow
1971 – '73:	Sacred Heart, Mill Hill
1973 – '78:	Damascus House, Mill Hill
1978 – '79:	Liturgical Centre, Carlow
1979 – '80:	All Hallows College – Retreat Centre
1980 – '92:	St Joseph's, Blackrock – Director to Daughters of Charity
1992 – '97:	Diocese of Down & Connor (Falls Road & Harryville)
1997 – 2009:	Iona Drive (Chaplain in St Patrick's, Drumcondra)

Died:	2 January 2009
Buried:	Armagh (in his family's plot)

Father Myles Rearden CM

As Myles and I had different schedules in our non-archival work we seldom were in the Archives on the same day, unless by prior arrangement. We used to leave memos on each other's desk. On 11 January 2003 I left him a memo outlining a long-term schema for division of work. I began with the words "As you are ten years younger than I am we can act on the presumption that you will outlive me…" *Præsumptio cedat veritati.*

I first met Myles when I was given Fourth Year French in Castleknock in September 1954, and I had him again in Fifth and Sixth Years. While at day school in Cork he had been an enthusiastic Scout, and he continued his involvement during holidays from Castleknock. He asked me to give him a simple test in oral French, to earn him another badge on his uniform; at that time there was no oral French in the Leaving Certificate course. His request was a hint that he was not content to do just what was expected, but that he tended to push out the edges a bit. He kept up contact with his former Scoutmaster until the latter died at an advanced age. This man was a journalist and I first met him during my years in Cork, and on odd occasions after that till his death, but in a totally different context. A word he used about Myles as a Scout was "dedicated"; I think that can be applied to all matters to which Myles gave his attention.

During his time in Nigeria we exchanged the odd letter, mine usually in reply to some request from him. Later when he was in Tanzania and I was in Rome we were both members of the Phibsboro community, *domui adscripti*. That was when I really got to know him again. We communicated more frequently, and sent each other cards from varied places on our travels. I kept him supplied with paperbacks, mainly detective fiction; plenty of these were available in the Oxfam shop in Rome. In one batch I included a book by Freeman Wills Crofts. My father had introduced me to this author's books when I was about fifteen. He was a Belfastman, and wrote during the 1920s and 1930. He did not write very many books, as he was a railway engineer by profession and writing was a sideline. Myles was very taken by him, and asked me to find more of his books. His detective always stressed the importance of trying to re-construct a precise timetable of the crime as a means towards solving it. I think that is what appealed to Myles's mind, the meticulous attention to detail necessary for understanding a problem and only then dealing with it. I always liked his letters to newspapers. The last book by Crofts which I gave him was a tattered copy which I picked up somewhere quite recently and left on his desk. He removed it, so I presume he read it.

He found his time in Tanzania difficult. The religious community of Sisters with whom he worked were German, a language which he did not have. It was necessary to learn Swahili, and all his ministry had to be through that medium. It is no wonder that he sought relief in reading fiction. He wrote a 56-page life of St Vincent in that language, *Matakatifu Vinsent Wa Paulo*, and also some sort of a brief introduction to the spiritual life. He left a copy of each in the Archives. He told me once, with great glee, that during a holiday in Ireland, at the end of some coach journey, he was jostling for position to retrieve his bag from the luggage compartment when a big African man said to his girlfriend the Swahili equivalent of "That little so-and-so is not getting in front of me". He was flabbergasted, and his girl even more so, when Myles retorted with the Swahili equivalent of "Get lost!" In July 1997 our paths crossed when both of us were at a meeting in Addis Ababa, he from Tanzania and I from the Curia. We took the opportunity to visit, and photograph, Denis Corkery's grave. When leaving Tanzania he brought me back a beautiful 12" Christus figure, carved in some very dark native wood, for which I had a suitable cross made; it now hangs above my bed.

When I learnt that he was returning permanently from Tanzania I immediately headhunted him to be my "co-adjutor with the right of succession". I was successful, and what an excellent choice it proved to be, though his handwriting is going to cause problems to future researchers.

I got the impression that he really relished being given this appointment, and he set about learning the trade immediately. He took a short course in archival management, and we decided that he would embark on what is known as "listing our holdings". He worked out a cataloguing system and got to work with his computer. In 2005 archivists received a circular outlining the possibility of applying to The Heritage Council of Ireland for a financial grant. We decided that this was worth investigating, and he set about doing so. He made out a case and presented it. He made out such a good case that we received €5,000. This enabled us to employ a professional archivist for a number of weeks, which was of great assistance.

He was a great conversationalist. When we arranged a meeting in the Archives to work out some matter our professional discussion usually developed into more general affairs and time flew. He kept in contact with a few of his classmates from Castleknock, and they used to meet from time to time. One of them told me at his funeral that they had met only the previous week.

The last communication which I received from him was by post, on 20 February 2009. In his almost indecipherable calligraphy he wished me Happy Birthday for my 80th, and said he had celebrated Mass for me on the 18th. He enclosed a €50 Book Token. I will give the matter

much thought before selecting a book to be a fitting memento of him. My visual memory of him will always be with his head crowned with his trademark knitted woollen skullcap.

He was a great friend, whom I miss.

Tom Davitt CM

Father Myles Rearden CM

Homily given by Msgr Hugh Connolly,
President of St Patrick's College, Maynooth
at the Commemoration Mass for Myles
held in the College Chapel on 27 February 2009

On behalf of the entire community of St Patrick's College and indeed the broader campus community here in Maynooth, I would like to welcome you all here this afternoon especially Fr Myles' brother, Ted, and his sister, Susie, and their families, Fr Brian Moore provincial of the Vincentian Congregation and other confreres from his religious family, as well as family, colleagues, friends of Myles, and the priests of the college and elsewhere and seminarians and students who have joined us for this celebration.

We have gathered here today to offer the Holy Eucharist, the center of our lives, and to include our beloved Father Myles in the gifts we bring to this altar. The man who gave us so much over his life time, we now return as a gift to the God who called him. Where his coffin lies today on the floor of this College Chapel evokes another occasion and another Chapel where he lay prostrate during his solemn profession and again later his ordination more than 4 decades ago. It was in these ceremonies that Father Myles confirmed his own baptism through solemn vows and embraced the message and the mission of Christ so that he and others might go forth and bear much fruit. Today that mission is achieved and we give thanks for the life and witness of Myles Rearden. In so doing we also remind ourselves of our own calling and mission and we take a moment now to call to mind our failure to live out that calling to the full.

In our first reading today the prophet Isaiah declares that God, the Lord of hosts, has in store for all people a feast, a rich and sumptuous feast, at which the veil that is cast over every nation shall be destroyed, death swallowed up forever, and tears wiped away from all faces.

As a priest, Fr Myles presided often at the Eucharistic celebration of this great and promised feast to come. At this very altar Myles on many occasions invited us to lift up our hearts in anticipation of that rich and wonderful feast that God holds in store for all his people. And from the offering of bread and wine placed upon this altar, Myles offered to us the body and blood of our Saviour who has prepared for us the great banquet where all our sorrow is turned to eternal joy.

Myles was someone who was unwavering in his conviction of that truth. He was as I said the other evening, a stalwart of faith, integrity, goodness, kindness an extraordinary example of priesthood today.

He was someone who understood service and what it means to truly serve God and to serve others.

During the seven decades of his life, Father Myles became *both* the *seed* that gave life and the *good ground* in which the Word of God grew: he preached the Word; he welcomed thousands of people with kindness; he listened compassionately for countless hours to the hopes and dreams as well as the personal suffering of others, always offering a calm and faith-filled wisdom and of course a healthy dose of common sense. I dare say that most of us gathered here today could recount a litany of the stories we have about Myles from one time or another. And the truth is that because of his extraordinary involvement in priestly formation right throughout his ministry Myles had an enormous impact of the lives of thousands of priests and seminarians, and in virtue of this, no doubt upon the lives of tens of thousands of the people of God.

The picture given to us of our God in the gospel we have just heard is the picture reflected in the very life of Christ himself, for Jesus is the perfect image of the God who loves us with a love beyond all telling. In today's excerpt, taken from chapter 12 of Saint John, we find those powerful words of Jesus telling his disciples that his Hour had come; that he was about to suffer, to die and then to rise again so that we all might be gathered up with him in glory. In the Gospel Jesus goes on to explain that he is the seed which *must* die in order to bear much fruit, the fruit of salvation and eternal life. At the same time he reveals that this must be our path as well. Out of love Jesus died for us and out of love he shows us the only way to the Father which is at least in some measure the way of the cross. Jesus was the archetypal suffering servant.

Historically, servants did their work for money or out of fear of punishment. But our servant-God serves out of love and compassion for those *served* so that they might truly know their worth, namely that *they* are – *that we are* – the very image of God and are thus valued so highly that we are invited into the banquet of love.

Jesus himself is revealed as the Servant of God and the one who through his service is raised up by God, victorious over sin and death. The servant follower of Jesus Christ in turn receives Christ as the model of servant hood. The true servant of the Lord is one chosen by God and with whom God is pleased.

When this kind servant sees people of good will he does not crush them in their weakness but, like Christ, gently draws them too into the justice love and mercy and joy of discipleship. The *servant* of God is seen by those who seek God as that one who teaches with the authority of God. The *servant* is effective because he knows that in truth it all comes from God. Myles Rearden was, as we all know, one such servant.

Myles Rearden was born in Cork in 1939 and grew up in a loving

family. He entered religious life with the Congregation of the Mission in September 1957 and there he continued to build on the firm foundations of faith that he had already experienced in his own family home. He took final vows in 1962 and was ordained in 1965. His early years of ministry were spent on the formation team in All Hallows as well as in teaching philosophy. From 1976 until 1989 he continued this work in a very different setting in Nigeria. His years in Nigeria were very important to Myles and he spoke of them often and fondly. He then came here to St Patrick's College Maynooth in '89 on the first of two terms as spiritual director: the first for 6 years until '95 and the second for 8 and a half years from 2000 until today. In the intervening 5 years he worked in Tanzania developing the mission of the Vincentian family.

And so throughout the seven decades of his life Myles assimilated what he received by example and spent his life attempting to become the icon of *Christ the servant***.** Those were seven vibrant decades of extraordinary service and witness, decades no doubt rich in joyful, sorrowful glorious and indeed illuminating mysteries. But it was the service of others above all that typified his ministry, and it was for the sake of the mission and the Church that he accepted an office of service to others.

Father Myles set high standards for himself and for others. He could hold his own in discussions on most issues whether Church or secular. Politics, sport, the economy, philosophy and, of course, theology were also issues which he keenly and critically reviewed. He was, of course, widely published and was a gifted author, reviewer, commentator and translator. I believe he even has an article due for publication in next month's edition of *The Furrow*. I suppose that must really set new standards of dedication to duty for our scholarly community. Myles had a keen intellect and a sharp wit. He spoke well and learnedly and was always very attentive to detail. Whenever he was sure of the position he took, *which was almost always* he would strongly defend it. Myles was also a very committed ecumenist and I know it pleased him greatly to have been able to host the Greehills Conference committee here last Monday.

The way Myles faced his illness and ultimately his death was clear testimony to his profound understanding and acceptance of the Paschal Mystery. As Jesus accepted the Father's will, Myles accepted the Father's will. No complaints no upset. When you asked about his health he tended to brush it aside. When you suggested it might be time to take things easier he informed you *kindly* but *firmly* the way that he had decided these things were going to be. He accepted illness, as he had accepted every other change in his life and ministry… with a sincerity and humility that was Myles. But he was not going to modify his life

until he was ready to modify it.

The manner of his death was extraordinary; in the middle of spiritual direction on Ash Wednesday morning seated in his usual armchair he shuddered briefly leaned back and then fell asleep. He had his missal on his knee and his right hand holding open the pages of the Easter Triduum. Already at the very beginning of Lent Myles had his mind firmly fixed on the outcome.

And this of course is the great truth that we all celebrate here today – the truth of the dying and rising of Christ to new life. Just as death could not keep our Lord shackled, and he burst through to new life – resurrected life – on Easter morning so too we believe in the power of Christ to raise Fr Myles to new life today. We pray that the Lord in his goodness will overlook any failings that were apart of his human condition, and welcome him into the kingdom prepared for him by the Father in Heaven.

Central to Fr Myles' priesthood was, of course, the Eucharist. The Gospel of John reminds us of Jesus' words "I am the Bread of Life… whoever eats this bread will live forever." And so we offer this celebration of the Eucharist for Myles today that the Christ he fed us with will now feed him with the gift of eternal life.

In these days therefore, when we will confide the noble soul of Father Myles to the Lord, whom he loved and served, and his mortal remains to the earth from which he came, our thoughts and prayers are especially with his Vincentian confreres, his family, and his friends and colleagues here today. To his sister, Susie, and brother, Ted, and his nephews and nieces, go our sincerest sympathies and the assurance of our prayers. Sympathies also to our seminarians and students who had him as their personal spiritual director and to our college nurse, Pauline Carbury, and others among our staff who helped Myles through his time of illness. To all his colleagues and friends and confreres and all of you here this afternoon I say 'thank you' for the love and support you showed to him. We all journey with you in your loss of a spiritual father a colleague and friend.

Myles, you believed the message about Christ, and you obeyed it by sharing generously with God's people and with everyone else. Thank you Myles for having listened to the Word, made flesh; thank you for the quality and example of your faith; thank you for your priestly witness and example.

Today all of us here thank God for Myles Rearden, a great priest who has touched our lives and our hearts

There are words in the Gospel that are often used to express the Lord's welcome and reward to one who has lived in love and faithfulness, and I am sure that Myles understood those words well on his death on Ash

Wednesday morning when in the very midst of his morning work he heard Jesus gently whisper in his ear:

Euge, serve bone et fidelis –
"Well done, good and faithful servant."

MYLES REARDEN CM

Born:	Passage East, Cork, 07 August 1939
Entered the CM:	7 September 1957
Vows:	8 September 1962
Ordained Priest:	3 April 1965 at Holy Cross College, Clonliffe by Dr John Charles McQuaid, Archbishop of Dublin

APPOINTMENTS:

1965 – '66:	St Joseph's, Blackrock
1966 – '71:	All Hallows College
1971 – '72:	Oxford – studies
1972 – '76:	All Hallows College
1976 – '89:	Nigeria: St Vincent's & Bl Ghebre Michael House, Ikot Ekpene
1989 – '95:	St Peter's, Phibsborough (Spiritual Director, Maynooth)
1995 – '00:	Tanzania (Superior General's Appointment)
2000 – '09:	St Vincent's, Castleknock (Spiritual Director, Maynooth & Assistant Provincial Archivist)

Died:	25 February 2009
Buried:	Castleknock College

Father Eugene Sweeney CM

Homily given by Tom Lane CM

Reception, All Hallows, 29 April 2009

Nearly four hundred years ago, St Vincent de Paul gathered round him a group of priests and laymen and he sent them out to bring good news to poor people and to provide the Church with good shepherds. Years later, he gave them a rule of life. When I took my vows as a Vincentian, I got my personal copy of that rule. My favourite line in the whole rule continues to be the invitation to "live together as dear friends".

We are all here this evening as dear friends of a dear friend. And I am sure that Fr Eugene is welcoming each of us as a dear friend. It is eighty years since he joined the Vincentians in the house of studies at Blackrock. The community included men of unusual academic excellence like Jerome Twomey and Donal Cregan. Beside them, Eugene saw himself as a very "poor scholar". They, in turn, would tell you of his many creative gifts, especially the gift of his very inventive hands. All that generation of Vincentians have gone to their reward, as have Eugene's colleagues as a priest at Castleknock and St Patrick's College, most of his colleagues at Strawberry Hill, and many of his colleagues at All Hallows.

Eugene's dear friends were not all Vincentians. His *Mo Scéal Féin* is a lovely introduction to many people who helped make him to be who he was. One could say he was humbly proud of them. The book could have been called *Scéal Mo Cháirde Dhílse.* His special *cara dílis* was his mother who outran him in life's race. In his years in Rickard House, he made many dear friends among his spiritual cousins, the Daughters of Charity. This evening, on behalf of all his countless dear friends, we are thanking God for Eugene's life and we are praying that God's therapy will remove any remaining scales from his eyes on his way to seeing *God* face to face.

The word "dear" has two quite different meanings. The first suggests warmth, affection, intimacy. The second suggests the costly and the expensive. To be a friend of Eugene Sweeney could be quite costly. He could scold you. He *could* fix his eye on you and say, "You're wrong; *you're* wrong again!" But somehow, after a few initial shocks, you felt you had found a place in his friendship; you felt *you* belonged. He certainly had no time for empty words, for mere blarney. He *could* direct sharp shafts against the county from which blarney gets its name. All round, he was more at home in the second meaning of "dear". To adapt the words of St Vincent, I think he would say that dear friendship can call on the strength of your arm and the sweat of your brow.

Eugene liked to tell us that most of his students didn't even know his name. As a dean, he was Dixie. As bursar, he was Dollar Bill. And still his past students and past staff members remembered him all their lives with a very personal and warm esteem. He had his own distinctive way of being a dean. He was known to have challenged dissident students to contests in the gymnasium. As bursar, he encouraged you in the use of your talents, and he quietly helped all staff members to work in harmony.

Since Eugene came as bursar in 1966, countless changes have taken place in All Hallows. But there were a few constants. One was what I call Eugene's morning star. The first light on in the College, day after day, for many years, was the dim light at his *prie-dieu,* long before the community assembled for morning prayer. His personal prayer and his Mass were very dear to him in a costly sense. He had a great respect for and love of the word of God, but he found preaching a very trying ordeal. If he was marked for the public Mass, he spent the whole week preparing. Commentaries were read. People were asked for suggestions. By Sunday morning, a word-perfect script was ready. Eugene's joy after Mass was beyond words. We joked him that, whereas the words of the rest of us were soon forgotten, he continued to be quoted for weeks. A few cautionary texts of scripture kept recurring in his homilies. One was from the Song of Songs (2: 15): "Catch the little foxes that ruin the vineyard".

Eugene's call to dear friendship was continually nurtured by the response he made to God on the morning of his ordination. Having been called by name, he replied *Adsum:* "here I am". In the ordination rite, this response was later changed to "I am ready and willing". Today it is simply "present". All three versions could be used as a summary of Eugene's life. The dearest of friends is the one who is a friend in need. If you got a pain during the night, if you were summoned on an unexpected journey, if you needed urgent copies of a text, Eugene was the one you thought of calling. The cheery response was always the same. This remained true in his retirement years in All Hallows when many staff members became his sisters and brothers.

The Gospel this evening invites us to place all our friendships in the loving care of four special people who were dear friends. Jesus loved Martha, Mary and Lazarus. He was not afraid to cry in their company. Martha wasn't afraid to give him a gentle scolding. It is in this dear company of Gospel friends that, in the words of the First Reading (l Thess. 5:4), we continue to encourage each other and build each other up.

Eugene, dear friend, may we all meet again, when every tear will be wiped away, and all our friendships will have come to full flowering in our Dearest Friend who is the Resurrection and the Life.

Father Eugene Sweeney CM

"*I could have better spared a better man*" [William Shakespeare]

"It depends what you mean by better" [Eugene Sweeney]
– Eugene liked to have the last word.

It would not be possible to satisfactorily give a comprehensive treatment of Eugene's life, personality and character within the short confines of a funeral Homily. Nor is such a comprehensive account necessary. You all have your various memories of the man, and know the affection in which he was held. Your emphases may well be different from mine –" that's the way it goes" – to cite one of his favourite comments.

For me, first and foremost,

Eugene, was a realist – a flat-eyed realist "*A Primrose by the river's brim, a yellow primrose was to him, And it was nothing more*" – Similarly a loose screw was a loose screw. Because he was a realist he hated everything that was false or phoney or affected. He asked me to give the homily at his funeral Mass in the expectation that this would be respected. He wanted warts and all. Indeed, especially warts. You might not like it – but it's what he asked for, and his remains aren't here to make us feel good. He particularly disliked ornate baroque ruminations posturing as the higher, would-be – more – insightful spirituality. He would really have disliked a syruppy whitewash job – or anything emotional.

His flat-eyed, pragmatic realism extended to his vocation to priesthood. He was free enough to assert that he should never have been ordained to priesthood – some may feel uncomfortable with that, though I must say I admired his freedom in saying so. How many of us are comparably free? He felt no calling whatsoever to pastoral work such as preaching or hearing confessions as he would have called it. I'm sure he was right about this – he should never have been let near a pulpit, nor, I imagine, a Confessional. The talents the Lord gave him lay elsewhere.

His talents were practical. While very happy in belonging to the Vincentian community, he reckoned he should have been a Brother. I believe he could have had a wonderfully rich ministry as a Brother, say, in rural CHINA when he was in his prime – say the 1930s '40s and 50s – a true liberator making the water flow and bringing electricity, improving sanitation, fixing machinery and so on, and in such matters passing on skills to local people – and probably speaking the language like a native "raising up the people" as the Chinese like to say. Better

doing that than moralising in a Church to them. He was the elemental "will-do" "hands-on" "mucker-in". In fact, I believe he would have made a very successful field-surgeon on the missions.He had a great interest in medicine and knowledge of anatomy – he liked the versicle in the Psalm "we are fearfully and wonderfully constructed" [though that was usually invoked to account for any of his colleagues who weren't the full shilling.] He had the temperament for dealing effectively with human ailments - being devoid of sentimentality or false sympathy. If you appeared in his presence with one of your limbs or head bandaged, his robust greeting was always –"have it off."

Unfortunately, he had learned and appropriated pre-Vatican II theology and spirituality so thoroughly that he found it almost impossible to act outside of these, though he wasn't without insight into their limitations.

Eugene had all the traditional qualities of discipline, hard work, common sense, fidelity and piety, and much more.

There was extraordinary discipline and regularity in his life – matter-of- factly never counting the cost. Down in the oratory in the morning for his meditation and prayer – long before the rest of us. A great man to have in community.

Absolutely faithful to his Vincentian vocation. And being a man of faith there would have been no doubt in his mind that he'd be meeting us all again.

He had a great fear of the Final Particular Judgement – the Dies Irae [the Day of Wrath] was a daily living reality for him – an oft-quoted text being *"Liber Scriptus Proferetur"* – with the Recording Angel producing the Accounts book in which all his sins and transgressions had been recorded.

Though he feared the Recording Angel there was something about the image of the book being produced, that appealed to him. Maybe he was looking forward to arguing the toss about a few entries.

A RARE MAN no matter how you slice him. No doubt he could be a contrary little git – that's why we are here to pray for him. I often told him he was irritating– he agreed of course. To quote himself: "I'd brain you if I knew where to hit you". He gave me so many laughs – and I cherish his memory for that. When he was ninety years of age I heard him admonishing a nun-then in her seventies, for not wearing make-up – thus somehow making life a little bit harder for him.

I could have conversations with Eugene that I could not have with anyone else. I'll miss that. The few happy hours I spent during my 30 years or so in All Hallows, were spent in Eugene's company – especially when we enjoyed a leisurely late breakfast together, and I got him reminiscing about his young days and about Vincentians he had known

long ago, with their idiosyncracies – we loitered so long that eventually Michael Daly – another rare man – would bring us in a fresh pot of tea and maybe a few horse-racing tips for myself. I do believe that on such occasions I was briefly happy in this attritional place.

Eugene is one of only two confreres I have grieved for – the other being Brian Doyle, though that was for other reasons.

I cannot think of Eugene without a smile coming to my heart – and I feel grateful for that. *"Take him all in all, I will never look upon his like again*". We were all enriched by him. May the Lord reward him and May he rest in peace.

Jim McCormack CM

EUGENE SWEENEY CM

Born:	Burtonport, Co Donegal, 26 December 1910
Entered the CM:	7 September 1930
Vows:	8 September 1932
Ordained priest:	27 September 1936 at Holy Cross College, Clonliffe by Dr Wall, auxillary bishop of Dublin

APPOINTMENTS:

1937 – '38:	St Vincent's, Castleknock
1938 – '44:	St Patrick's College, Drumcondra
1944 – '66:	St Mary's College, Strawberry Hill
1966 - 2009:	All Hallows College

Died:	27 April, 2009
Buried:	All Hallows College