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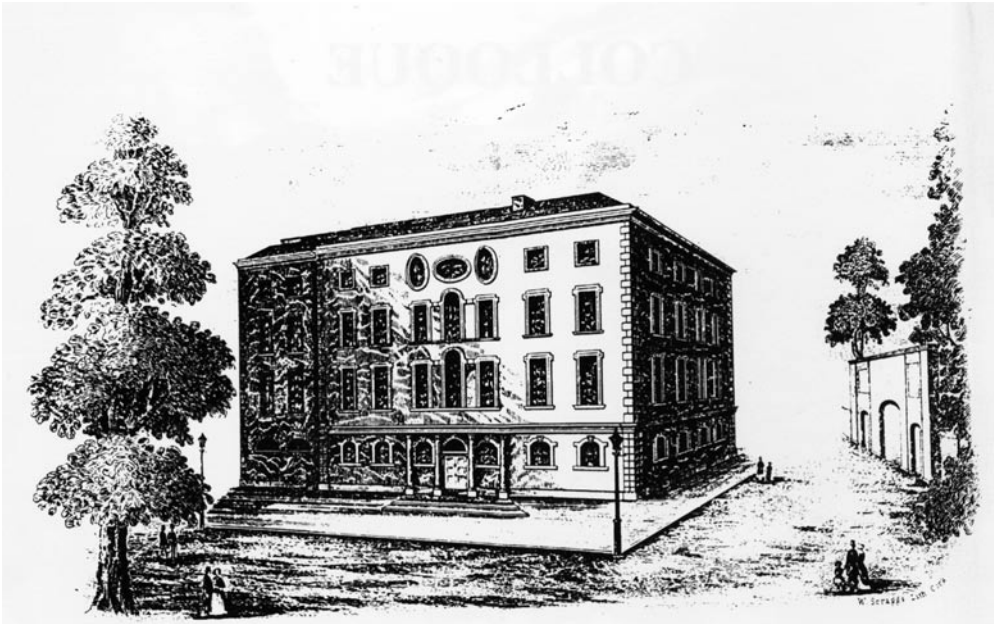

ST VINCENT'S SEMINARY,

(LATE MANSION HOUSE)

CORK.

Contents

Editorial

This issue will be going out as we approach the start of the twenty-fifth year of our Nigerian mission. Five of the seven articles have a Nigerian connection. Three are written by Nigerian confrères, one from each "generation"; one is by one of the first pair of Nigerian confrères to be ordained a decade ago, one is by one of the second pair ordained a year ago, and one is by one of our theology students. Two other articles and one contribution to Forum are by Irish confrères who are, or were, working in Nigeria. A Nigerian theologian wrote in the first number of Shalom: "No one doubts the dynamism or vitality of our Nigerian Church. The signs of a growing Church are evident…".

St Vincent and Mental Prayer

Aidan McGing

Unfortunately, although Vincent had read widely in the classics of prayer, and has been called "a master whose prudence and sagacity really amount to genius"[1] he has left us no treatise on prayer. We do not possess even the conferences which he gave to the priests on this subject. We have to fill out the picture from four principal sources: some conferences to the Daughters, repetitions of prayer in St Lazare, fragments preserved by Abelly, and his correspondence. Let us note in passing that many of his remarks à propos were directed to students, seminarists and sisters still in formation. His rather humdrum discourses in these situations cannot represent the heights to which he personally soared.

To begin with, he is certain that mental prayer is for all, whether priests, lay people or religious.[2] It is so important that the Congregation will last only as long as it continues in mental prayer.[3] He repeats continually that there are two things necessary for mental prayer, the first being mortification (perhaps we would say "self-discipline", "simple life-style" etc., today). The era which had seen the heroism of the Conquistadores and took public torture for granted was bound to indulge in violent mortifications. Vincent was moderate for a man of his time, and his kindness to the sick in both communities was extraordinary. But he insists that self-denial is necessary for prayer, while prayer makes self-denial easy. His second pre-requisite is simplicity, or a total humility before God; it is God who gives the gift of prayer. We must work at it, but no learning, no extraordinary efforts on our part will force his hand (MP 52).

"Prayer" he says "is an elevation of the mind to God by which the soul detaches itself, as it were, from itself, so as to seek God in himself. It is a conversation of the soul with God, an intercourse of the spirit in which God teaches it in an interior way what it should know and do, in which *the soul says to God what he himself teaches it to ask for.*[4] In the concrete, we begin prayer by deliberately coming into God's presence.[5]

He describes at length how the beginner should set about prayer. He must reflect with his understanding on what has been read, or on some mystery, and then seek to stir up his will to make "affections" to avoid evil and turn to God, etc.[6] Vincent is influenced here by the

scholastic distinction between intellect and will; the modern beginner in prayer turns more easily to the pre-scholastic *lectio divina,* where he reads, ponders and raises his mind to God. Vincent is also eager to take different virtues for the subject of each prayer session; the modern beginner is instinctively personalist; he starts from the experience of the psalmist, from somebody else's personal prayers, or from the figure of Christ in the gospels.

In his own cultural setting Vincent's aim is to get the praying person to rise to "affections" towards God: in a word, to get the praying person beyond thinking *about* God (Christ) and to pray *to* him as a person who loves us. Modern experience shows that this is still the first great step forward in prayer, when the beginner, after reflecting, reading and hearing about the Lord actually speaks to him as a friend and not just as a giver of gifts and a saviour from tight corners. Vincent continually returns to this point — long experience had taught him how much encouragement beginners need to take the step.[7]

At the same time one should pray for one's needs, especially specific virtues.[8] One may look forward and ask oneself how God wants one to spend the day.[9] His instructions to beginners are very specific, and follow the method of St Francis de Sales, but for those more experienced he recommends the gospels and the psalms, in the manner of the *lectio divina* described above.[10]

Once the praying person is over the preliminary stages Vincent is very liberal. He accepts, for instance, that some will simply say the rosary quietly while others will read a book, raising their minds to God from time to time (MP 48). Even the advanced should be happy to waste time in God's presence when nothing seems to be happening.[11]

In passing, let me quote a concrete instance of Vincent's own way of praying, from his repetition of prayer on October 18, the Feast of St Luke, 1656. In this repetition he is deliberately teaching his hearers to pray, but the personal accent is unmistakable: "And yet above everything else there should be little reasoning but much prayer; much, very much, prayer. And after what I have just said (i.e. in reference to the day's feast) we should raise our hearts to God and say to him 'O Lord, send good workers to your Church, but may they be good. Send good missionaries to work hard in your vineyard, men, O my God, such as they ought to be, utterly detached from their own comfort and worldly goods. Let them even be few in number, provided they are good. O Lord, grant this favour to your Church. Give me all the dispositions you wish to see in your disciples, such as having no attachment to earthly goods'. And so on" (MP 202).

Provided that we do the will of God outside of prayer ("Let us love God, yes, but let us love him in the sweat of our brow"), Vincent taught that prayer "should grow more and more affective and such affective acts should tend to grow more and more simple… Such a state of simple, loving attention, in which all the powers of the soul are concentrated, would seem to be the ideal towards which he urges his hearers. Not indeed that the soul, according to him, is merely at rest there, but this state of simple, loving attention, is the source or fountainhead from which action will follow" (MP 46).

This prayer of simple attention, interspersed naturally with distractions, is already moving towards wordless infused contemplation. But contemplation is a free gift of God which nobody can force from him. To try too hard at prayer, and to try to achieve success prematurely by sheer willpower makes no sense, and can even be dangerous.[12] It is worth remembering this at present when many authors are proposing new ways into prayer, incorporating insights from psychology and Eastern mysticism. Those writers would be the first to say that the exercises they offer can at most dispose us to let God act in us.

Nevertheless, Vincent is extraordinarily optimistic about the number of those who will receive this gift. Listen to him speaking to the Daughters on May 31, 1648: "In (contemplation) the soul in the presence of God does nothing else but receive from him what he bestows. She is without actions, and God himself inspires her, without any effort on the soul's part, with all she can desire, and with far more. Have you ever, my dear sisters, experienced this sort of prayer? I am sure you have, and in your retreats you have often been astonished that without doing anything on your part, God himself has filled your soul and granted you knowledge you never had before" (MP 146-147). In a word, he assumes that the Daughters will normally be given infused contemplation. When later in the same conference he asserts that learning is a barrier to this contemplation I feel he is indulging in some rhetorical exaggeration in order to reassure his audience, some of whom had not yet learned to read. He does not see "learning" as a barrier against the priests reaching the same sort of prayer. Speaking to them in a repetition of prayer on August 4, 1655, he said: "God, when he wishes to communicate himself, does so without effort, in an affective way, altogether suave, gentle and loving.[13] Let us therefore frequently ask him for the gift of prayer, and let us do so with great confidence, and let us be certain that in the end he will grant it to us out of boundless mercy, for he never refuses to give ear to a humble and confident prayer. If he does not grant it immediately, he will do so later on…; when God in his goodness

bestows his grace on a soul, what seemed to be so hard becomes so easy, that just precisely where it experienced the greatest difficulty it now experiences delight. The soul is rightly and completely astonished at this unexpected change in itself… But there must be no forcing, *no attempt to form distinct words in one's interior"*.[14]

Here we see a new side of Vincent, a saint who presumes that his followers will go beyond discursive prayer and be given infused and wordless prayer. This wordless ("apophatic") prayer has a long history, beginning with St Paul: "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words" (Rm 8:26). The tradition proceeds right down to the present day through, for instance, St Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, St Bonaventure (see the second reading on his feast, July 15), *The Cloud of Unknowing,* St Teresa of Avila, etc., etc. William Johnston has written a lot to make it known in our own day. Although it is strictly a gift, perhaps every generation has to rediscover it all over again.

I cannot say what human authors and traditions have influenced Vincent most, but his *obiter dicta* lead me to believe that he was particularly influenced by St Francis de Sales and, perhaps surprisingly, by St Teresa of Avila, whom he echoes (I believe) repeatedly. It is hardly an accident that he tells the Daughters: "…since the Apostles, no one has ever reached the height of St Teresa (in prayer). How do you know, my daughters, but that God wishes to make St Teresas of you?"[15]

Still, nobody can get far in prayer without persevering daily in it, following the advice of Christ.[16] But he warned of the difficulties in prayer, the deserts to be crossed which, if we are trying to do God's will, are proofs rather of progress than of failure. They are stepping stones to contemplation. So he approved of the priest who spends a lot of time praying and yet can only say "My God, I am here in your presence to do your will. It is enough that you see me".[17]

And so, if one can do no more, one can stay quietly in the presence of God, showing him one's needs, as a beggar in those days showed his sores to the passers-by as a better way of getting alms than by importuning them.[18] Vincent assumes that this felt absence of God, provided we are trying to do his will, is always for our good, as it helps us to pray for God's glory (see the first half of the Our Father!) rather than for our own satisfaction;[19] and in the end it leads to an even greater knowledge and love of God, with the peace and joy of the Holy Spirit.[20]

Wordsworth once described how his early enthusiasms faded as he grew older:

The things which I have seen, I now can see no more…
But yet I know, where'er I go,
That there hath past away a glory from the earth…
Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?
(Ode on Intimations of Immortality)

With Vincent it was different. He had seen the misery which 17th century France had to offer: civil wars, agrarian unrest, street fighting in Paris, invasion, disease and famine. And yet, right to the end of his life, the glory had not departed. Why? Because he prayed. Listen to him speaking on Whit Sunday 1648: "The holy Fathers when they speak of prayer do so triumphantly: they say it is a fountain of youth in which the soul grows young. Philosophers say that amongst the secrets of nature there is a fountain, which they call the fountain of youth, from which if old men drink, they will grow young. However that may be, we know that there are mineral springs beneficial to the health. But prayer rejuvenates the soul far more truly than the fountain of youth the philosophers speak of rejuvenates the body. In prayer, your soul, weakened by bad habits, grows quite vigorous; in prayer it recovers the vision it lost when it went blind; ears formerly deaf to the voice of God are open to holy inspirations, and the heart receives new strength, is animated with a courage it never felt before".[21]

We sometimes speak of first fervour as if in later life we must turn away from God. It need not be so. The Constitutions of 1980 ask us to pursue the end of the Congregation more and more all through life "in continual conversion to Christ" (§116). This is the sort of spiritual youth which Vincent promised to those who pray, and which he retained both fresh and mature in his own life to the end.

To end on a personal note: as the person who first suggested at a provincial assembly that we should reduce our time of prayer from an hour to half an hour I owe it to the Province to make amends and ask for the hour again. There are strange and pervasive influences in every social group, through which the grace of God either works or is blocked. In our case, the more we try to pray the easier it is for all to pray.

Vincent became involved in the crises of many religious communities.[22] He saw repeatedly what had gone wrong and what should be put right, so he spoke neither as a visionary nor a theorist when he said "The Congregation of the Mission will last as long as the exercise of prayer is faithfully practised in it" (XII 83, quoting Abelly).

Notes

1. Tanquerey: *The Spiritual Life,* Tournai and New York, 1950, p xliii.
2. Most of the texts of St Vincent quoted in this article are from those collected by Fr Joseph Leonard CM in his book *St Vincent de Paul and Mental Prayer,* London 1925. Details of the quotations will be given in these notes, as well as page references to Leonard. References to this book for other than direct quotations from St Vincent will be indicated in the body of the text by the letters MP plus the page number. This first reference is MP 37.
3. Abelly: *Vie du Vénérable Serviteur de Dieu, Vincent de Paul,* livre III, ch. VII.
4. Conference to DCs, 31 May 1648; MP 35.
5. Conference to DCs, 31 July 1634; MP 71-73.
6. Conference to DCs, 31 May 1648; MP 36.
7. Repetition of Prayer, 27 May 1655; MP 185ff.
8. Conference to CM, 29 August 1659; MP 36-37. (It should be noted that Leonard gives the incorrect date, and translates the imperfect text, from the old Pemartin edition of the Conference).
9. Conference to DCs, 2 August 1640; MP 100.
10. Conference to CM, 14 February 1659; MP 43-44.
11. Conference to DCs, 15 October 1641; MP 113.
12. Repetition of Prayer, 4 August 1655; MP 189-192.
13. "…d'une manière sensible, toute suave, douce, amoureuse"; the phrase is untranslatable, and reflects the depth of Vincent's own experience. *Sensible* in French refers to a perception through the emotions; in biblical language Vincent is saying that God touches the heart, man in his inmost citadel. The saint has left far behind him the methods of prayer based on scholastic psychology which he had proposed to beginners.
14. MP 193-194; Vincent was more optimistic about the gift of contemplation than St John of the Cross. The latter wrote: "At this time, God… begins to communicate himself through pure spirit by an act of simple contemplation in which there is no succession of thought… (he) does not bring to contemplation all those who purposely exercise themselves in the way of the spirit, *or even half.* Why? He best knows". *(The Dark Night of the Soul,* Bk 1, ch 9, nn 8-9; Kavanagh- Rodriguez translation). Vincent must have observed the gifts of the Spirit being freely given in the first years of both communities.
15. Conference to the DCs, 31 May 1648; MP 149.
16. Ibid.
17. Conference to DCs, 22 January 1645; MP 120.
18. Letter 1504, 21 May 1652, to a CM priest; MP 175.
19. Conference to DCs, 3 June 1653; MP 179. See also letter of 16 June 1656 (No. 2082) to a CM student in Genoa, MP 201.
20. Letter 1759,10 July 1654, to a CM priest in Agde, MP 182. See also Repetition of Prayer 11 April 1655, MP 183.
21. Conference to DCs, 31 May 1648; MP 144-145.
22. Cf Coste: *The Life and Works of St Vincent de Paul,* Leonard translation, vol. 2 pp 237-254.

Blessed Ghèbre-Michael
"The truth will make you free"

James Cahalan

"Truth! What is that?" We are all very familiar with the context in which that question was asked in the New Testament. We are also aware of the fact that the questioner did not wait for an answer. Wars, international and civil, have been fought all down the centuries to defend one or other interpretation of TRUTH. Today the world is alive with controversies, and indeed wars too, about this word TRUTH. People have been burned at the stake because of their obstinate defence of their version of the truth. I suppose in one way or another all this search for the truth originates in rival claimants to be the followers of the Lord himself who stated "I came into this world to give witness to the truth" (Jn 18:37). In the Church's liturgical calendar we come face to face frequently during the year with men and women who died, some very violently, in defence of the truth of the Catholic faith.

On August 30 those of us who follow the Vincentian version of the Roman Calendar meet one of these heroes of the truth, Blessed Ghèbre-Michael. He was not, in fact, a Vincentian in the strict letter-of-the-law sense because, in the words of St Justin De Jacobis, "At the time he was to enter the Vincentian seminaire he was in prison". He had made the formal request to become a Vincentian and so, again in the words of St Justin, "He belonged in his heart and in his spirit to the Congregation". But whom have we here anyhow, where did he come from and what is his significance for us today?

Ghèbre-Michael was an Ethiopian, born there in the Godjam region in either 1788 or 1791. Incidentally, already in the uncertainty of the date of his birth we have an external resemblance to St Vincent whose date of birth was disputed for many years. Ghèbre-Michael was a very bright young man who from the very early years of his life engaged in a most anxious and persistent search for the truth. Indeed in the Ethiopia into which he was born it was difficult to find the truth. Though the country was evangelised as far back as the fourth century by a famous man, St Frumentius, who became the first Catholic bishop in Ethiopia, the country has had a long history of struggle in the whole field of

religion. Incidentally, it was St Athanasius who elevated St Frumentius to the dignity of the episcopacy. The Jews were very prominent in Ethiopia and Frumentius ran into many of the difficulties in which St Paul was involved in the early church in Corinth, and indeed elsewhere. In addition the Moslems constituted a big obstacle to the spread of the faith. But in 362 or 363 a very severe blow fell on the new faith when it was decided that the Ethiopian Metropolitan should be appointed by the Patriarch of Alexandria. To add to the confusion Monophysitism appeared in the 13th century. The Council of Florence tried in 1441 to bring about a union between the different sects and Catholicism, especially with the Jacobite church and the Coptic church. The union was short-lived. Attempts were made subsequently to heal the divisions in the Ethiopian religious field but again without permanent success.

Brief though this sketch is it gives some idea about the situation into which Ghèbre-Michael found himself plunged. In fact there were three religious sects in Ethiopia when he was growing up and he himself belonged to a sect called the Kevats. A common denominator of all the sects was Monophysitism. His early education took place in the parish church school at Dibio. At the age of twelve he entered on his secondary education in one of the monastic schools which were very much in evidence at the time. He distinguished himself at his studies and came to be known as a young Ethiopian who was shrewd, singleminded, dynamic and exemplary in every way. And so when it came to the time for him to make a choice of career at the end of his secondary studies he opted for a career in the Church. In fact he was only nineteen years of age when he became a monk in one of the Coptic monasteries and was finally professed as a fully-fledged monophysite monk in 1813. But this was in no way a signal for total contentment with the religious beliefs which he professed in the monastery. He was restless and uneasy and felt very deeply that he had not yet found the truth. And to make matters worse he did not find the same kind of enthusiasm for the truth in his confrères in the monastery. So he continued his stated objective which was "to seek only the Church which seemed to him to be in possession of the truth".

The search uprooted him from his native Ethiopia and sent him on a very long pilgrimage, a pilgrimage to Cairo, Rome and Jerusalem. The object of his pilgrimage to Cairo was with others to petition the Patriarch at Cairo for a bishop for Ethiopia. The Patriarch was of course a Copt. It was on this pilgrimage that Ghèbre-Michael met Justin De Jacobis for the first time. The to the Patriarch failed in the sense that the bishop appointed 5y him'did not meet with the approval of Ghèbre-

Michael or Justin. In fact the beginnings of Ghèbre-Michael's sufferings in the cause of the truth really began here. The newly-appointed bishop abused him, calling him "You wicked old one-eye…"; he had lost one eye as a youth.

The delegation now proceeded to Rome, Ghèbre-Michael still very much in search of the truth. Rome astonished the delegation for many reasons. For one thing they were astonished at the numbers attending services in the magnificent churches of Rome. And perhaps what was more remarkable the delegation was wholly overcome with the grandeur of the ceremonial. They themselves rightly of course are very proud of their ceremonial. The reception given them by the reigning Pope, Gregory XVI, was most cordial and the Ethiopian delegation was greatly impressed by his cordiality. Ghèbre-Michael was brought into discussions with the Pope and in this way his heart and soul which were aching for the truth were very much filled with excitement and enthusiasm. Justin said of this visit: "The journey to Rome will change the ideas of my poor Abyssinians and it will be better than a course in theology for them".

The next stop was Jerusalem. The reception here was somewhat of a contrast to that at Rome. News reached Jerusalem before their arrival that they were coming from Rome and of course there was a very real suspicion that they had all become Catholics. Having visited the Holy Places they began their return journey through Cairo. Here they visited the Patriarch again and received a letter from him for the newly-appointed bishop in Ethiopia. Ghèbre-Michael still avidly in search of the truth found that the Patriarch had come very near to conversion. In the letter he had imposed a new doctrinal decree on all the faithful in Ethiopia, enjoining that every doctrine rejecting the eternal and human generation of Christ must be rejected and regarded as heretical.

When eventually the delegation arrived back in Ethiopia the bishop accepted the letter from Ghèbre-Michael, but instead of opening it and declaring its contents to the priests put it back in his pocket. When the news got around that the delegation was back the Orthodox planned to kill Ghèbre-Michael. He was actually put in chains, but because he was a friend of the Emperor he was soon released. Escaping many times from traps that were laid for him he ultimately arrived at Adoua where he rejoined Justin De Jacobis. Naturally Justin received him with open arms. At this stage Justin writes of him: "He still reflected for a long time but once he embraced the truth he never rejected it again. Everything became clear to his mind and no objection of the heretics had any further influence on him". At last he was formally admitted

into the Catholic Church in February 1844. It was said of him after this that he was totally transformed and had no other desire than to spread the Catholic faith wherever he could. He soon found himself in the school which Justin opened at Adoua, where he rendered wonderful service to Justin, especially by the instructions which he gave every day to the clergy at Adoua and in the neighbourhood. He produced several books. In particular he wrote a kind of source-book aout the Catholic faith which was simple and clear. He also got together a dictionary of the Gheez language used in the Liturgy which was a very important step, because up to that time there was no such work in existence and Gheez was always taught orally. But none of this interfered with his main objective and that was to form the group of seminarians which were entrusted to him by Justin. It was natural that the kind of formation which Justin inculcated was that of St Vincent. Unfortunately, owing to an incident which had nothing really to do with him, he became unhappy in the seminary and decided to go to Gondar to set about converting some of his old enemies. Justin was very opposed to the move but Ghèbre-Michael insisted. He was recognised while passing through Adoua and was arrested and put in jail for over two months. Soon after his release he met Justin again. Justin ordained him a priest in 1851 in the little church in Alitiena; this was Justin's first priestly ordination. Ghèbre-Michael was now sixty years of age.

Once ordained a priest his zeal knew no bounds. While he continued teaching in the seminary he co-operated in producing a textbook of Dogmatic Theology and had his mind set on making the Catholic faith the faith of his own country. The Coptic authorities, in the person of Abouna Salama, were greatly disturbed by the activities of the Catholics and especially of Justin and Ghèbre-Michael. A veritable persecution was set afoot during which lay Catholics and priests were put in prison. This time neither Justin nor Ghèbre-Michael was caught; they escaped. In fact because of representations made by Justin to the king the Catholics were released from prison and they and their priests were given carte blanche to preach the Catholic faith. This did not last long either. It is difficult for us to imagine the intense hatred for the Catholic Church which prevailed in Ethiopia at the time we are discussing, though perhaps our own history in Ireland furnishes us with situations which were not all that different from what prevailed in Ethiopia at the time of Justin and Ghèbre-Michael. A typical declaration from the schismatic authorities is this: "If this formula (a heretical one) is not accepted I will break the necks of the offenders and cut off their feet". Obviously people like Justin and Ghèbre-Michael would not

subscribe to a heretical formula no matter what the threat. In fact both of them were imprisoned because of their rejection of this formula. An interesting fact about the imprisonment was that Justin was, generally speaking, treated better than Ghèbre-Michael, probably because of his connection with people in authority. There was a very special hatred of Ghèbre-Michael. He was constantly submitted to the most horrible torture in the hope, of course, that he would renounce the Catholic faith. The schismatics felt that if they could get a renunciation of the faith from him they would score a great victory. He was a very able man, very respected because of his ability and his singlemindedness, and hence the appalling tortures to which he was submitted. Occasionally the authorities varied their tactics and offered him all kinds of benefits if he would change his mind. "Father", he said to a young priest undergoing similar punishment to himself, "we cannot be far from the great day when we will see Jesus face to face and when we will be ravished in his blessed presence". Messages were constantly passing from Justin to his fellow-prisoners and they were messages of encouragement and exhortation to continue in their fidelity to God and to Rome, no matter what the suffering. One such message brings out the quality both of Justin and the recipient of the letter, Ghèbre-Michael: "As we sit night and day on the floor of the cell we preach without saying anything; our mouths are closed but our dying limbs cry out unmistakably 'Believe in the Catholic Church'". The prisoners were arraigned before the judges from time to time. One such occasion was on August 23, 1854. This was in fact the fourth time that they were summoned to the judges and of course once again they were called on to renounce the Catholic faith. The fiendish hatred for Ghèbre-Michael asserted itself again on this occasion when Abouna Salama called him "this detestable old deceiver". Again, on Christmas Eve 1854 Salama again presented him to the public saying "Here is the great disturber of the Empire and he is the one who is causing the others to be obstinate". In fact he was accused of holding out because of the money he was getting from Rome. Salama told him he would give him money and property if he renounced the faith: "If you abandon your own belief and accept mine I will give you all the money you want". Ghèbre-Michael's response was: "I want neither your faith nor your property". All this resistance of his meant more and more punishment.

When a new Emperor was appointed in Ethiopia he too tried his hand with Ghèbre-Michael. All he got was "O king, I will never believe or proclaim any other truth than that Christ has a human and a divine nature". To make a statement like this before the king would most cer-

tainly bring the prisoner execution. This was a capital crime at the time in Ethiopia. In fact they did not condemn him to death. They were very much hoping that if they were to continue the tortures he would ultimately give in. If he did, they of course would have gained an enormous victory, and as well as that they would not have to face the very real criticism that would have been levelled against them had they executed the great man. But he did not give in; he continued to submit himself to the daily increasing tortures without the slightest sign of succumbing to them. In fact it was said that on one occasion, after being beaten very severely, to such an extent in fact that people thought he was dead, he stood up and moved away without the slightest trace of torture on his body. The people proclaimed him a second St George; this was the saint who was said to have had seven lives.

Once again Ghèbre-Michael had to fall in behind the marching soldiers of the Emperor Theodorus and stumble along as best he could. And again with almost monotonous regularity he was presented to the public. This time it was a special occasion and there were many dignitaries present, including a very important English Anglican. Theodorus proclaimed publicly again that this old man was the only one of all his subjects who continued to resist him and refuse to renounce the despicable Catholic faith. Ghèbre-Michael stood firm. Theodorus asked the assembled crowd what did they think should be done with this man — How similar to Pilate's question! The people shouted that he should be put to death. However, the British consul William Plowden with his entourage asked for mercy for him and it was granted in a qualified sort of way. The king agreed not to execute him but decreed that he should carry his chains to the end of his life. And so once again he must line up behind the marching soldiers. This time he was of course extremely exhausted. He was unable to walk; in fact he was unable to stay on the back of the mule which they gave him either. Ultimately, as we would put it, he died on the side of the road, totally exhausted and worn out, but not before he warned the soldiers and those standing by, that he was about to die. He died on 28 August 1855 only four years after his ordination. The actual date of his death, like the date of his birth, has been disputed. Some say he died on 29 August, and the liturgical calendar gives his feast on 30 August. Many confrères have tried to locate his grave but without success. But does it matter? It is not his grave that really matters, but his amazing faith, courage and love. His last agony lasted for a period of over thirteen months, which was almost half of his priestly life. He was beatified on 31 October 1926 by the late Pope Pius XI.

Justin De Jacobis had a great love and admiration for Ghèbre-Michael, whom he called so often "the generous athlete of Christ". I am sure that St Justin would completely agree with a sentiment which is often expressed in Ethiopia today, namely that if Justin is canonised so too should Ghèbre-Michael. Naturally the Ethiopian Catholics earnestly desire his canonisation. We must of course wait for Holy Mother the Church to bring this about, but surely we must pray for the acceleration of this event which would bring so much joy to this ancient Christian nation of Ethiopia.

> Since I last wrote to your Grace, a deputation of Abyssinians arrived in Rome for the purpose of making their submission, and that of their prince, to the Holy See. The deputation consists of twenty-three persons, all blacks, and it is accompanied by a Lazarist missionary Sig. de Jacobis, who was prefect of the missions in Abyssinia. Here in Rome they do not seem to attach much importance to the deputation, as the Abyssinians have the character of being fickle and perfidious. However, the Pope received them with his usual kindness, and four or five young men who are in the party are to remain in Rome to study at the Propaganda. The others, after receiving some presents from his Holiness are to return to their own country.
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> *Paul Cullen, Rector of the Irish College, Rome, to Daniel Murray, Archbishop of Dublin, 19 August 1841.*

Repetition of Prayer

Anthony Njoku

In the chapel of the old St Lazare, twice or more a week, towards the end of morning prayer, St Vincent would gather his confrères around himself. He would then call upon them to share with the community the good thoughts and resolutions that God had given them during meditation.[1]

At each sharing he would invite three or four to speak. In spite of his heavy and crowded schedule he gave this exercise a priority, listening to their accounts with much interest and evident joy, rushing and interrupting none. This practice, which he did not limit to his community alone, came to be known as repetition of prayer. This exercise, an innovation of St Vincent, still in use in the not too distant past among priests of the Mission, Daughters of Charity and in some diocesan seminaries, consisted in the free but brief sharing of one's thoughts and resolutions, had during meditation, for mutual edification (XII 9). At the end of prayer the superior would invite one or more or all present to share successively what thoughts came home to them during the prayer. Concluding, the superior would, summarising the thoughts of those who shared, share his own prayer.

When held at St Lazare, besides the confrères St Vincent would also sometimes invite to this prayer-experience the domestics, who spoke in their turn to the edification and joy of St Vincent who, at hearing what they had to say, always gave thanks to God who loves to communicate himself to the simple, as in the case of the domestic who shared the following:

> Having considered that our Lord has recommended assistance to the poor I thought I ought to do something for them; but I, being poor myself and not able to give anything, I took the resolution of at least rendering them some little honour, to speak kindly to them when they speak to me and even to take off my hat in saluting them.

Even on his journeys, travelling with others, he would encourage his companions to share the inspirations which the Holy Spirit had

given them. Following his encouragement some pious ladies shared their prayer with even their maidservants, to their spiritual advantage. "Blessed Sister Mary of the Incarnation" he noted "made use of this means to advance very far in perfection. She gave a careful account of her prayer to her maidservant" (IX 4).

To encourage the Daughters to do the same he would often tell them the experience of repetition of prayer among the priests and brothers and would cite the example of some pious women who had profited immensely from this exercise. Insisting on this, he said:

> Take care to give an account of your prayer to one another as soon as possible after making it. You cannot imagine how useful this will be. Tell one another quite simply the thoughts which God has given you and, above all, carefully remember the resolutions you made at prayer… Oh yes, my daughters, you cannot imagine how greatly this practice will profit you, and the pleasure you will aive to God by acting in this way (IX 4).

With even greater urgency in the conference of 2 August 1640 he repeated his exhortation:

> I beg you to be about this holy exercise to tell one another how you have spent the time at prayer and especially the resolutions you have taken, and you should do so quite simply (IX 38).

As if to make sure there was no doubt in their minds as to what he desired for them he returned to the need in charity to share as he gave them a conference on the good use of instruction:

> And what should a Daughter of Charity do to whom God has given, during the prayer she made on the subject of a conference, some light to guide her in the practice of a virtue or to abandon some imperfections? Should she not reveal it to others? Is she to keep it concealed and for herself alone? Oh no, she should mention it humbly and ingenuously, knowing and feeling that it does not come from herself but from God, who gave it to her and who wishes her to share it with others as you all do with whatever you possess (IX 389-390).

This practice, as a community exercise, has its origin in the genius of St Vincent though we must acknowledge the possible influence

of Madame Acarie and the Oratorians of St Philip Neri.[2] Vincent claimed:

> The repetition of prayer was formerly a thing unheard of in the Church of God… We have reason to thank God for having given this grace to the Company and we can say that this practice had never been in use in any other community, if not in ours (XII9).

This repetition of prayer is different from the repetition of prayer as contained in the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius. Ignatian repetition consists in paying "attention to and dwelling especially on the points in which I experienced greater comfort or distress or some more marked spiritual effect".[3] This is clearly individual while the Vincentian repetition is communitarian.

The climate and condition for this sharing is utter simplicity on the part of all who take part in it. This renders hearts open to each other. In the words of St Vincent: "Tell one another quite simply the thoughts which God has given you…" (IX 4). Anyone who takes the opportunity to make a display of his learning or to be other than his true self gets an immediate rebuke from him. It is a prayer-session to which each gives his full attention and interest. It is a fraternal sharing at the deepest level. Here no one is judged, but unconditionally accepted as a bearer of God's word for the group. Sharing such as this creates a field of common experience and makes possible a convergent or complementary interpretation of experience which fosters a common goal rooted in shared understanding and meaning. Sharing fosters and presupposes fraternal love and an unconditional acceptance of each other and an awareness that God's design is being worked out through all, even through their folly.

Many reasons have been advanced as regards the intention of St Vincent in promoting this "holy exercise", as he used to refer to it. This is the case despite his clear statement on the matter. André Dodin asserted, based on his study of a number of texts of repetition of prayer, that St Vincent used the repetition of prayer as a means of governing his community and as a method of spiritual direction.[4] For some others it has been a way of dictating, and correcting errors, theological or otherwise, in a period of so many controversies.

However plausible these speculations may seem the truth must be sought in the testimony of the saint himself. It is hard to understand how these reasons explain his encouragement of devout ladies to use the method nor his invitation to domestics to attend these sessions. Usually

domestics run no danger of theological heresy.

In the conference of 31 July 1634, the earliest of the extant conferences to the Daughters of Charity, during which he exhorted the sisters to tell one another their thoughts, he stated his intention in encouraging them to do so. It was a "means to advance very far in perfection" (IX 4).

In a conference to the priests of the Mission he said that it was one of the greatest ways of encouraging one another on the way to holiness. "The repetition of prayer" he said "is one of the most necessary means of mutually spurring each other to holiness" (XII 288).

Not only did their own sanctification call for such mutual sharing, they were obliged to do so in charity and in the knowledge that whatever they had to share was given them by God for the purpose of sharing with others. St Vincent's intention is simple and clear. Spiritual sharing is for the growth of the individual, the group and for mutual encouragement. It is part of that total sharing with the companion which constitutes common life. Charity among them demands that they share these spiritual riches, humbly and ingenuously, knowing and feeling that they have come from God who wishes them to be so shared and to whom pleasure is given by so doing (IX 389-390).

St Vincent knew from his own experience the immense help to holiness which such sharing would bring to those who did so, as he said at a meeting of the Daughters' Council:

> I assure you I cannot express adequately the fruit that comes from it. When I am dry at prayer my hope is that I could receive some light from some good brother that had otherwise received some, and from that I drew profit. I expect this from the bounty of God and I am never disappointed. What great consolation I find in listening to these good brothers and to our sisters. When I hear any of these sharing anything I am so deeply touched that I do no know how to express it. I do not know whether others are like me, but so I am and this happens to me all the time they share something edifying in their repetition of prayer (XIII 666).

In a conference to the Daughters he said: "Oh, yes, my daughters, you cannot imagine how greatly this practice will profit you" (IX 4).

Experience seeks expression and grows through it. The sharing of an experience deepens and clarifies it. By sharing an experience we manifest openly our conviction and by so doing feel more committed to it. When resolutions are shared there is a feeling of greater commit-

ment and urgency to be faithful to them. Therefore the sharing of one's resolutions is a sure way of growing in virtue. St Vincent knew this. He knew that his Daughters, ignorant and poor, needed the support of one another. Repetition of prayer was an effective means of providing that support. This explains why from the very beginning he insisted on this sharing (IX 4).

Spiritual sharing deepens the awareness of the power of the Spirit operating in our life and a recognition that all our good thoughts and feelings have come from him. By so sharing one learns to turn one's gaze away from the self to the power operating within. There grows in the individual the sense of the liberty of the children of God from which flows the courage to become true to one's personal vocation.

Sharing at this depth demands courage. It is a risk taken in obedience to the gentle but compelling power of the Spirit in us. It fosters openness of spirit and the growth in acceptance of the other, not as a rival but as a brother with whom one can share all the gifts of life without losing by so doing.

Repetition is a means of interiorising values and events. The chosen people of God so often in Sacred Scripture gave several accounts of the same event. Their greatest prayer, the psalms, is full of repetition of the same sentiments and thoughts. The same is the case with the liturgy. In personal prayer, in the simple but powerful prayer of the rosary or the Jesus prayer, repetition serves the purpose of allowing time to let these sentiments descend, so to say, from the head to the heart.

When the word of God is shared it brings about common understanding which constitutes Christian community. Perfect listening to God's word is not an individual but a community affair. The word of God will not penetrate the whole community unless there are ways of sharing insights on it. It is one of the curious features of religious communities that one notable area of sharing in which members fall short is communication about the very reason for their being together. They find it difficult to talk about the Father, about Jesus and about the Holy Spirit.

In sharing, the individual confesses and acknowledges the greatness of God. It affords mutual edification. It is the school from which new-comers and the inexperienced learn to form themselves in the art of praying. It is one thing to be told how to pray and another to enter into the prayer-experience of somebody more experienced. In sharing of prayer the teacher becomes not a signpost that points out the way without going with the traveller but a guide who takes the traveller by the hand and goes with him.

Jesus, asked by the disciples to teach them how to pray, did so by sharing his own prayer with them and so introduced them into his own experience of God as Father (Lk 11:1). Let those who genuinely seek to help others in the great art of prayer borrow a leaf from this. Methods will hold their place but nothing will ever substitute for your sharing of your own spiritual experience with those you long to help.

It leads to union of hearts for in the prayer of the other we recognise ourselves, our doubts, our struggles and our joys. At the centre from which the prayer proceeds we are all one, marked by the same weakness and strength. In shared prayer people are led to accept one another at an ever deeper level of conviction and compassion.

Spiritual sharing must be part of that sharing which is expressed in the vow of poverty for the building of a fraternal community. If common ownership of property applies only to material goods it would indeed be limited. It must lead to a community of spiritual goods, both joys and sorrows. One way of achieving this is through the repetition of prayer. "Oh no" said St Vincent "she should mention it humbly and ingenuously, knowing and feeling that it does not come from herself but from God, who gave it to her and who wishes her to share it with others, as all do with whatever you possess" (IX 390).

Friendship is sharing. What is shared determines the nature of the friendship. Religious community is above all else a spiritual association. If this ideal is ever going to be realised there must be a greater spiritual sharing. This may be one of the reasons why the attempts and experiments to create true religious communities in our time have constantly met with failure. There is little spiritual sharing. Community cannot be built on ideals; it is built on a shared vision of the heart.

Through the sharing of prayer the personal prayer acquires a community dimension. There is a common awareness of a common weakness and strength. This leads to greater understanding, sympathy and love for one another. A community that shares prayer shares one heart.

Aiming at this St Vincent in one of the earliest conferences to the Daughters of Charity, just gathered to form an apostolic community, insisted very much on the sharing of prayer (IX 4). Community can be built only on a common-shared-experience of God. It was at Sinai that the People of God became a people. It was their common experience of God that formed them into a people. When that experience was forgotten disintegration set in. To keep their unity and preserve their very existence as a people that experience continued to be re-lived and re-told.

Prayer-sharing is not the discovery of the 1960s. St Vincent was

promoting it in the seventeenth century in his communities and among his associates. He knew, though he did not use our terminology, that a religious community was charismatic, a community living in the Spirit, called and given a particular gift and mission for the Body of Christ, the Church. This was the way he conceived the Daughters of Charity and his priests. To be and to do that they needed a community prayer that had a prayer-sharing dimension. Would that we accept this insight of St Vincent bequeathed to his double family for their personal and community growth in holiness, for fraternal charity and for a more perfect realisation of their charismatic mission in the Church. What is now widely practised as shared prayer "was formerly a thing unheard of in the Church of God… We have reason to thank God for having given the grace to the Company and we can say that this practice had never been in use in any other community, if not in ours" (XII 9). Repetition of prayer belongs to our heritage.

Notes

1. Maynard: *Virtues and Spiritual Doctrine of St Vincent de Paul,* translated by a Priest of the Mission, Alagara 1877, p 54.
2. Ponnelle & Bordet: *Saint Philippe Neri et la société romaine de son temps,* Paris 1930,p124.
3. St Ignatius of Loyola: *The Spiritual Exercises,* translated by Thomas Corbishley SJ, Wheathampstead, 1974.
4. Dodin: *En prière avec Monsieur Vincent,* Paris 1950, p 72.

The Vincentians vis-à-vis Materialism in Nigeria

Ezennia Simeon Eneh

"One of the obvious influences of the Nigerian Society on the Church … is its tendency to over-celebrate and over-feast… Practically every event in Nigeria is an occasion for collective noise, which in practice means eating, drinking, wealth display, etc., many a time to a great excess. Consequently consumerism, squandermania, wealth exhibitionism, excessive cult of material values are easily recognisable practices among our people. This same tendency… is reflected in the Church, among our priests, bishops and religious". (B. Okolo, "Season's Greetings: Christmas, '83", p 2).

In this write-up I intend to examine the need for our evangelical poverty, and the role it could play, vis-a-vis the scourge of materialism in our country. What can our life of poverty achieve for our young ailing Church; for the daily increasing materially poor? How can we work and walk against this materialism and how secure from this materialistic way of life are we? These are some of the questions this article would like to consider.

It should be stated right away that poverty in reference to ourselves, the Vincentians, is understood in terms of evangelical poverty. And this article's understanding of evangelical poverty is a voluntary one embraced for the evangelisation of the people; in our own case, the poor.

The above citation is a thorough analysis of the materialistic trend of life in Nigeria by one of our priest lecturers in one of our universities. The situation is clear; the Nigerian Church, including her hierarchy and the religious who profess evangelical poverty, is in great danger of drowning in materialism. There is that propensity to wealth display and over-attachment of importance to it not only among the priests, bishops, religious but among the seminarians. That means that materialism is not only eroding today's Church but even tomorrow's. If such is the case within the circle of the clergy, think of the laity! This calls for urgent remedial action.

For the Church to drown with our society in materialism is the

most unfortunate evil that could befall us. Who fishes out the other becomes a crucial question. The situation is such that mere mention of poverty and streamlining our expenditure, even among priests and seminarians sounds monkish and archaic. To accept poverty is, for most, baffling. And to be poor even in the religious sense is to be an object of pity, a laughing stock. Every man wants to prove his "successfulness" and "importance" to his neighbour by out-displaying him in material wealth. And so we languish in competitive materialism. And since, naturally, no one wants to be unimportant or relegated to the background, no one wants to feign poverty much less to live poor, not even the "Church of the poor"; poverty is dreaded. (We are not giving poverty a positive value anyway, but that doesn't mean there is no positive value in poverty). Consequent to this competition more and more people fall prey to misery and poverty.

With the problems and number of the poor increasing daily in direct proportion to the escalating competitive materialism, the Vincentians are both threatened and challenged. The Vincentians exist because of the poor; because they exist. Therefore we live for them. No wonder St Vincent calls them our Lords. The Vincentians are therefore threatened because the poor, for whom they exist, are threatened out of existence by our present situation. We are therefore confronted with that Shakespearian question: "to be or not be be?" To be, we have to be Vincentians and to be Vincentians we have to be poor and preserve the poor. Otherwise we have to abandon the poor and join the rat race. It is either/or. We cannot be rich and exist as Vincentians: "We know for certain that… *poverty will be an impregnable bulwark* by which the Congegation… will be *preserved"* (emphasis, mine). (CR. 3, 1)

The Vincentians are therefore called upon to stand out in Nigeria today as a living sign of contradiction. If we have anything to offer our local Church, it is neither priests nor sisters; not education or what have you. It must be a discovery (not a re-discovery, because it has never been discovered before) of the value of evangelical poverty. That spirit of poverty capable of rinsing her clean of materialism. If we have to be true to our mission of preaching to the poor, we must live this life of poverty. The materialism-riddled life of our people calls for nothing short of this. We must swim against the current.

I have already mentioned that materialism today offers us a challenge. It is the barometer of our sensitivity to, and preparedness to relieve, the misery of the poor. All others are secondary. Every effort then should be directed towards an effective ministration to the poor. I do not subscribe to that interpretation of *evangelizare pauperibus*

misit me which emphasises the spiritual aspect of our mission to the detriment of the material. It is an evasive interpretation of "to preach the *gospel* to the poor". It is one dimensional and blind to the material needs of the poor. The two aspects are complementary, interwoven and cannot be sundered: "Concern for the poor in their physical affliction, and compassion for the moral plight of their souls, cannot be separated. They blend into one love for ailing humanity" (Raymond Tartre, *The Priesthood is a Challenge,* New York, 1974, p 74). If any aspect should be emphasised or given priority it should be relieving their material needs. This is so for by so doing we relieve their needs and demonstrate to them God's care and love for them and so present our faith to them for acceptance. (Cf. Jas. 2:18ff).

But why must we live in poverty when there is wealth all about us? Is there anything bad with wealth? — one might ask. Wealth as such is not bad. We must live proverty if we are to be committed to the poor. We can't commit ourselves to them and be rich. It must be emphasised that it is only in relation to material poverty that the evangelical poverty becomes meaningful. Congar testifies that "except by relating it to the real poverty, … poverty as a religious attitude would have no value…" (Y. Congar, "Poverty in Christian Life amidst an Affluent Society", in *Concilium* Vol. 15, p 64). This is why I see as effective or barren any poverty that relieves or fails to relieve the misery of the poor. Commitment to our life or poverty, therefore, entails commitment to the situation of the poor, a negative solution to materialism. By this commitment every Vincentian stands as a living contradiction to the materialistic trend of life in Nigeria today and offers a challenge to both the citizens and the Church.

The Vincentians must realise that we are in an either/or situation. A situation where that Shakespearian question, "to be or not to be?" — is very vital. To be, it must be with the poor. And to be with the poor entails meeting them on a common ground; foregoing some of our conveniences to meet their needs; moving out from the security that comes from wealth; walking into the insecurity and inconveniences of poverty. It is, in other words, when we have walked into their oversized shoe of poverty and stumbled in it as they often, do that we will be in the best position to appraise their problems.

This boils down to saying that the situation of the poor should condition and shape our practice of poverty. The Constitutions state this in a clear and unmistakable term: *"Mindful of the conditions of the poor, our style of life should radiate simplicity and sobriety…* The Congregation, at the same time avoiding *any accumulation of goods,*

will work to *share its resources with the poor"*. This is the only way we can "witness" against the Nigerian "world infested by materialism" (Cf. Cc. 49). The Common Rule is even more emphatic on this such that even "in necessary things, each one shall… *accommodate himself to what is suitable fora poor person*. In these, as in all things, he shall be ready *to feel* some effects of poverty…" (CR. 3, 7).

If we do not just profess poverty but live and EXPERIENCE it, we shall convince the rich that the poor are no nuisance; that bigness does not consist in competitive display of one's luxurious and air-conditioned cars. "For man's no bigger than the way he treats his fellow man", in this case the poor. We shall convince our Church who thinks that her work consists in erecting imposing Church edifices; ensuring large Sunday collections; raising and acquiring staggering sums of money for herself, that her essence lies not in these but in catering for her flock especially the weak and poor ones; that she must be converted to poverty in order to be herself since "only a Church converted to the poor, and therefore to poverty, can… become truly the Church of the poor" (Yves Congar, *Loc. Cit.).*

Working Among the Poor in Nigeria

Michael Imediedu Edem

Nigeria as a developing nation has myriads of problems and these include unemployment, high mortality rate, crime, inability to control natural disasters, poverty of various kinds, abortion, insecurity, overpopulation, to mention but a few. These problems are so glaring that one cannot but acknowledge them. It may not be possible to pretend for a very long time about the people's problems and conditions. The insecurity and poverty may stem from the fact that few have enough to live on and those who are rich are really very rich while the poor are really very poor even to the point of lacking one full meal per day let alone other basic necessities of life. This happens even though there are many others swimming in luxury.

In the towns and cities, the rich have decent homes while the poor live in slums, and some others may even be looking for the slums without finding any; as such they sleep under bridges. In the villages a greater percentage of the people use thatch houses which become very unsafe during the rainy season. Some do not have any land to cultivate in preparation for the next season. This makes the prospects of feeding themselves during the following season a problem. In the case of men, their lack of plots for farming could be accounted for by lack of money to redeem the plots that were lent out in times of difficulties; for widows lack of male issue can be the cause. It can be very distressing for a widow who has no male issue and no right of inheritance, since this is passed on patrilineally and not matrilineally. Many of these problems stem from inequality, social injustice and oppression. Natural disasters like epidemic, war, drought, flood and the like can cause physical deformity which may create a situation of insecurity and unavoidable total dependence on any person who offers to help. This situation may make one a beggar even against his or her will. This may become very difficult to stop even after the person had been offered opportunity to be independent. In this case the person may even think that he or she is even asked to depend more instead of being independent. How have the Vincentians responded to this situation?

The Vincentian Apostolate in Nigeria

The Vincentians are not involved in or tied to any particular apostolate, they are involved in as many apostolates as possible. The Vincentian apostolate is greatly diversified. It embraces Retreat and Mission work, training of priests, chaplains to schools and colleges, prisons and care of the sick in the villages. The Retreat and Mission work is a very outstanding work which embraces not only the poorest of the poor but also the spiritually poor. During the Retreat periods, Vincentians do encourage the people to try and contribute towards the upkeep of the poor. One such occasion was the Retreat given at Fege-Onitsha in which a sum of about one thousand Naira (N1000) was collected for the specific purpose of helping the poor. This is similar to what St Vincent did near Lyons when the case of a poor family was reported to him before Mass; when he went into the church he spoke so passionately that almost everyone brought something to the family after Mass. Following this an excess was had and this eventually led to the founding of The Confraternity of Charity which later developed to the status of the Daughters of Charity.

This charitable work of the Vincentians does not terminate in a very small and circumscribed area but extends even to places that may seem to be neglected by others. The Vincentians work in the prisons as well. Here an enormous work has been accomplished both spiritually and materially. One of the interesting things achieved here was the roofing of the house for the lunatics. This was achieved through the help of the voluntary organisations that provided the funds. On the social level, many people who were detained unjustly have either been released or given a fair trial. This has been due to the efforts of the former and present chaplains. The house for the lunatics goes a very long way to protect the dignity of the human person. Spiritual services are not left out at all. Masses are being provided every Sunday. Apart from these, Vincentian students go there for Catechism classes as well. Other secular subjects are also taught by the students to prepare the candidates for the various examinations.

It was mentioned above that the Vincentians' apostolate also embraces some schools and colleges and some of these schools are run by the Vincentians while some are established by the Vincentians for the purpose of helping the poor children who cannot afford to attend other schools that are very expensive. One of the schools run by the Vincentians is Emmanuel Secondary School in Ugbokolo-Otukpo in Benue State. This school is in a Mission land and provides a big forum for evangelisation and apostolic activity. many students who came from

non-Christian families into the school have had opportunities of being baptised, confirmed and sharing in the Eucharistic banquet of the Lord. This is a rare opportunity which they might have missed elsewhere.

The Mater Dei situation in Oraifite is very similar to the one described above. The school in Ugbokolo is for boys only, while that of Oraifite is for girls only. The difference between the two is that the Mater Dei School was established by the Vincentians with the approval of the Church Committee and Women Organisation in particular. The school is established and run for the purpose of providing equal opportunity for good education to these youngsters who are endowed with the brain but not the means. This is a mission land of a sort. In other Schools the Vincentians are involved as part-time teachers and chaplains.

Four Vincentians are involved presently in the work of training future priests. Two are working in the Philosophy Campus of Bigard Memorial Seminary in Ikot Ekpene and the other two are in the Theology Campus of the same seminary in Enugu as spiritual directors. (It is interesting to note that these eminaries are owned by the bishops of Onitsha ecclesiastical province. Following this it is not only the Vincentian students that are found there but Diocesan students as well. The Diocesan students form the bulk of those who school here.) The Vincentians teach not only the things that the students are supposed to know and learn from the seminary but also concern for the poor as one of the essential works of the poor.

Care of the Poor and the Sick in the Villages

This work is self-explanatory and obvious. This involves real pastoral care of the poor and the sick. There are many poor and sick people that might have been forgotten about by now who are still alive; these were helped to live on by the Vincentians. For instance there is a woman around who has no child, no husband, no immediate relations, nothing to eat, and only a tattered house to live in. This poor, lonely and miserable woman was discovered by one of the Vincentian students who works in the village. After investigating her condition he made a recommendation to the house. She was discovered to be not only poor but sick as well. The first help that was rendered was to contribute some money and buy her a small plot of land to cultivate crops that would be used for the following season before the arrangement of taking her to the hospital for treatment was made. Thanks to the healing power of God, she is restored to health through the competent hands of St Mary's Hospital in Urua Akpan who considered her as a pauper. Today she is a very cheerful and grateful woman. There are several of these cases.

Some of these are alive while some were attended to till the moment of death.

Apart from the physical level there is the spiritual aspect as well. These men and women do look up to the Vincentians as their relations and friends. Thus they do not hesitate to send for the priest when they are sick or ask him to bring Holy Communion to the sick. An interesting story was told of one of the sick women who stayed with her daughter away from the village. When she became very sick she requested that she be brought back to the village to see a priest before she died. The moment she confided in the priest she became very happy and calm and the following day after coming back from the hospital she died. Looking at this, it would immediately be seen that there is team work involved here.

The Vincentian Students' Involvement

It has been mentioned earlier that the rate of the Vincentian students' involvement is not minimal at all; it is rather great. They are involved not only in the villages but also in other places of apostolate that they are sent to. One thing that stands out very clearly wherever they are sent to work is the ability to work with equal zeal and enthusiasm. In other words, they are totally identified with the people that they work with. One would have expected the students to complain about working in a place like Okpodim in Owerri where they worked with the blind on the farms, cooked their meals, practised the crafts with them and helped them in a thousand other ways without any remuneration, especially in an age of materialist self-esteem like ours. Instead of being concerned about what they could get, they were rather worried about the poor conditions of these wretched people. This accounts for their total involvement in the work and their realisation of the dignity of the human person. They saw the conditions of these handicapped people as a privation and lack; hence they needed help that is deeply rooted in God.

The same experience of those at Okpodim could be said to have prevailed at Ossiomo as well. There lepers are taken care of by the Daughters of Charity who accepted that the Vincentian students should come and work with the poor for some time during the long vacation. Here too they exhibited a real sense of friendliness and concern for the poor and anxiety to improve their lot. The sense of oneness and identification, love and sympathy are the things that characterise the Vincentians here. The Vincentian students were not lacking in zeal at all when they were asked to do their apostolate at Uturu with the

Marist Brothers who care for the physically handicapped and disabled. They so fraternised here that they worked what one of them called 'the Vincentian miracle'. A man who never used a wheelchair in his life was able to be rolled in one; and not only that, he was able to use one himself when the students had left.

Future Orientation

Reflecting on what has been said so far, the work seems very exciting and interesting, with a very bright future. This is very promising in as much as the poor are always here and one does not need to go and search for them. In the face of such problems as the ones enumerated above, there is need to have enough and well-trained personnel to train the manpower needed for this work. There is a great challenge then facing the Vincentian apostolate — the training of priests. This is the power-house that will supply the needed manpower to cater for all these diversified works that are facing the country at the moment. When men who are trained in various disciplines are there as the backbone in the seminaries for training future priests, the Retreat and Mission work will not suffer at all. Through this means the poor will be reached wherever they are, in as much as the Vincentians cannot be at, or establish their houses in, every place that they are needed. It does not mean that the Retreat and Mission work is second-rate; by no means; it is as important as ever but at this stage when the Nigerian situation is still growing, there is need to have trained personnel who in turn will train others.

Presently, we have almost enough personnel involved in the seminaries in Nigeria but how long will this last and what will happen in the future when these confrères are no more there? The problem of working among the poor in Nigeria at the moment is not that the work has to be sought for, since it is found in every corner, but the problem is that of tools. When once the good tools are there the work will almost do itself.

The work with the poor demands peculiar characteristics like courage, zeal, patience, charity, concern, respect, identification with and involvement with the poor; otherwise the person that is worked for may feel insulted. There is a very great need to discover and respect the dignity of the person, created in the image and likeness of God, despite serious infections, diseases, ill-health and the like. Unless one is identified with the poor, the service that is rendered would be vague, puerile and lacking in depth but rich in hypocrisy and pomposity. There is a great lesson to be learnt from Christ who is called the friend of tax collectors and sinners, the poor, the lowly, the unloved and the rejected. As

he cared for their physical needs as well as their spiritual needs, without neglecting the rich, so must the Vincentians who want to follow his footsteps. Those preparing others for the great Vincentian work ahead must not be lacking in any of these qualities. The harvest is rich but the labourers are few; pray the Lord of the harvest to send labourers into his vineyard.

The second reading in the Office of Readings for 27 September is headed, in both Latin and English editions, "Ep. 2546". A quick look at Letter 2546 shows that this reference is wrong. The French CM supplement to the breviary identifies the passage as an amalgam of seven extracts: three from different conferences to the Daughters, three from different conferences to the confrères and one from a report to the Ladies of Charity. The references to the Coste set for the extracts are as follows: XI 32, XIII 811, XI 392, IX 215, IX 319, X 595, XI 393.

Nigerian Seminaries: A Vincentian Perspective

Myles Rearden

1. *The Nigerian seminaries*

Although the first beginnings of minor seminaries in Nigeria can be traced back to 1908 in Ibadan the Nigerian system of major seminaries, like that of missionary countries in general, dates from the pontificate of Benedict XV.[1] In his encyclical *Maximum Illud* (1919) he identified the formation of an indigenous clergy as a major aim of missionary activity:

> Wherever a sufficiently numerous indigenous clergy is found, well formed and worthy of their holy vocation, it can be said that the missionaries there have brought their work to a successful conclusion and that the Church has been effectively founded there.[2]

The next pope, Pius XI ordained six bishops from mission countries in 1926 and in the same year issued an encyclical in which he repeated his predecessor's assertion concerning the necessity of indigenous clergy, while correcting its exclusively clerical emphasis.[3]

The first Nigerian priest, Fr Paul Emechete, had been ordained in 1921, but he had received private training. The first Nigerian major seminary opened its doors to nine students in 1924. This was the seminary for what was then the Vicariate of Southern Nigeria, centred at Onitsha and with Bishop Joseph Shanahan as Vicar Apostolic. It was known as St Paul's Seminary and was situated at Igbariam in the present Anambra State. It moved successively to Onitsha, Eke (near Enugu), Enugu and Okpuala (near Owerri) before being finally established at Uwani, Enugu, in 1950. Enugu was the capital of the then Eastern Region of Nigeria. Though it continued to be dedicated to St Paul it came to bear the name Bigard Memorial Seminary in memory of two Frenchwomen, Stephanie and Jeanne Bigard, mother and daughter, who founded the Opus Sancti Petri Apostoli for the education of indig-

enous clergy, which sponsored and continues to sponsor the seminary.

A second major seminary, this time for Western Nigeria, had similar small beginnings at Asaba on the Niger in 1927. It too was called St Paul's Seminary and moved first to Benin City before finally settling in Ibadan, the capital of the Western Region, in 1957. A third seminary, for the north, began at Keffi and settled at its present site in Jos in 1966. It is under the patronage of St Augustine. These three seminaries form the backbone of the Nigerian seminary system.

In addition there are scholasticates belonging to certain religious congregations, which for the most part split off from the other seminaries; both the Claretians and Spiritans operate their own philosophates at the time of writing. In 1976, under pressure of an enormous increase in the numbers presenting themselves for the priesthood, the philosophy section of the Enugu seminary was moved some 200km to the south, to Ikot Ekpene in Cross River State. It was at Ikot Ekpene that the Vincentians first began in Nigeria in 1960, though the house there has not been regularly occupied since 1968. In 1977 the National Missionary Seminary of St Paul opened at Iperu in Ogun State; it is shortly expected to move to its permanent site at Abuja, the new federal capital. At the time of writing there are some 800 seminarians in the two branches of Bigard, some 300 in Jos and some 200 in Ibadan. These figures, taken together with smaller numbers in the other institutions mentioned, give a total of more than 1400 senior seminarians in Nigeria at present.

A major reason for this great number is the existence of minor seminaries in almost every diocese, whose educational standards are very high compared with those of most other schools which, since 1973, have been under state control. The major seminaries are all associated with universities, whether in Nigeria or in Rome, and thus the students attending them can, if suitably qualified, receive university degrees, whether in Religious Studies, Theology or Philosophy.

In the beginning all three major seminaries were conducted by the missionary societies, congregations or orders which had responsibility for the region in which they were situated: the Society of African Missions for Ibadan, the Holy Ghost Fathers (Spiritans) for Enugu and the Augustinians for Jos. With the departure of almost all the expatriate Holy Ghost Fathers from the former Eastern Region of Nigeria in 1970 the direction of the Enugu seminary was assumed by the diocesan clergy from the various dioceses of the Onitsha Province. The seminary at Ibadan has also been under Nigerian direction for some time. In 1969 Mgr Patrick Ugboko became Rector and while there are still African

Missioners, White Fathers and Dominicans on the staff it is chiefly the responsibility of the diocesan clergy of the Lagos Province. At the time of writing the rector of the Jos seminary is still an Irish Augustinian and there are several Augustinians and African Missioners on the staff, as well as a number of sisters, but the direction of the seminary itself is increasingly the responsibility of diocesan priests of the Kaduna Province. However, the origins of these seminaries in religious congregations or orders and missionary societies means that the basic pattern of priestly training in Nigeria, if it is to be carefully studied, should be sought in the systems operated by the Holy Ghost Fathers at Kimmage, Dublin, the African Missioners at Wilton, Cork and Dromantine, Co. Down, and the Augustinians at Ballyboden, Dublin, and at St Patrick's, Rome.

Vincentian involvement in the Nigerian seminaries, in spite of approaches from both Ibadan and Jos, has been confined to the Eastern seminary at Enugu and at its philosophy campus at Ikot Ekpene. Vincentian seminarians attend these institutions. The involvement of Vincentian priests has been chiefly in the field of spiritual direction, though this is not so much a matter of episcopal policy as of the availability of confrères qualified in the other aspects of the seminary apostolate. Numerically, out of a total faculty strength of over thirty in the Bigard, there are at present four Vincentians. The Claretian Fathers and the Holy Ghost Fathers also provide faculty members, at the moment one and four respectively. The degree of Vincentian involvement in the Nigerian seminary system as a whole, even in the East, has therefore been modest enough, however much it has stretched our capacity to provide personnel.

From what has already been said it is evident that no specifically Vincentian orientation is to be expected in the Nigerian priesthood or seminaries. In what follows, I offer some necessarily rather impressionistic reflections on where Vincentian principles of priesthood and seminary training converge with or diverge from those operative in Nigeria. I am not suggesting that Vincentian principles are to be considered at all better than others, nor that the tendencies noted in Nigeria are peculiar to this country. Basically what I would like to offer is some material towards defining the specifically Vincentian approach to priesthood. To begin with, let us consider some of the elements of this approach.

2. Vincentian principles

In an article on St Vincent and the reform of the clergy Franco Molinari speaks of two theologies of the priesthood, Dionisian and Augustinian.[4] According to the former the priest is isolated from the people in his sanctuary and in his presbytery. The typical representative of this kind of thinking in St Vincent's time was Bérulle, while St Charles Borromeo's theory of the priesthood, if not his practice, took the same direction. By contrast, according to the Augustinian idea of the priesthood the priest is immersed in the community and is the servant of his brothers. The Augustinian priest is essentially devoted to the mission of building up the ecclesial community, of serving the Church.

The Council of Trent in its dogmatic decrees, according to Molinari, tended towards the Dionisian theology while in its reforming decrees "it shows a more mature and more Augustinian conception". The good pastor ought to know the people, to nourish them with his word, with the sacraments, with good example, and to love them in the weakest members. St Vincent is an outstanding example of this ideal of the priesthood. If he, like Bérulle, sometimes compares priests to angels it is in as much as they are sent on missions of salvation to people on earth.[5] At the same time, he insists as much as anyone on the need for the priest to be intimately united with God in prayer. And why? In order that he may be capable of accomplishing everything.

This peculiarly Vincentian blend of the classical conceptions of priesthood, inclining strongly as it does towards the Augustinian, shows how far removed St Vincent is from the "spiritualisation" of which Fr Brian Nolan has written in his article *The Many Faces of the Priest down the Centuries*.[6] The Vincentian ideal belongs squarely in the preceding phase of developing priestly self-consciousness as described in that article, namely "evangelisation". To say this, however, does not exclude the possibility that in subsequent thought and practice Vincentians may have inclined too much to self-spiritualisation. It is perhaps to be identified with the "religiousification", if the word may be permitted, of which Fr Perez Rores writes,[7] He cites Fr Chalumeau for the view that this process went on continuously and reached its high point in the nineteenth century.

To come a bit closer to our own tradition in the Irish province, the book on which Fr James Dyar based his formation programme in the seminaire in the late fifties sets out St Vincent's idea of the priesthood very forcibly: Jacques Delarue's *The Missionary Ideal of the Priesthood*[8] According to Delarue St Vincent thought of the priesthood

as essentially instrumental:

> The priest's office is "so exalted that it is supremely the office of the Son of God". So much so that we cannot imagine the priesthood of Christ except in the absolute dependence on Christ. "We are called to be companions and sharers in the plans of the Son of God". To be a priest is not so much following him in the ministry of which He gave us the example, as "giving ourselves to Him so that He may continue to operate it in us and through us". We are applied to it as instruments through which the Son of God continues to do from heaven throughout the ages what he did on earth during his lifetime. That is the basic notion with St Vincent de Paul; his whole pastoral teaching rests on this idea that the priest is the instrument of the eternal priesthood of Christ.[9]

Clearly what this means is that there is nothing like self-sufficiency, whether individual or corporate, in the priesthood. Consequently, the practical demands of the priesthood are. for St Vincent, renunciation of one's own will in order to be led by Jesus Christ, and of one's own spirit in order to enter into the spirit of Jesus Christ. These can. perhaps, be summed up in the single word "humility". Thus humility emerges as the core of St Vincent's doctrine of the priesthood. If this does not sound particularly attractive, and even seems to smack of excessive "spiritualisation" or the "religiousification" mentioned earlier, a further quotation from Delarue may help to put the matter into better perspective, at least theoretically:

> So far from his (the priest's) humility degenerating into pusillanimity, it will authorise all the undertakings to which the Lord may wish to apply him. "You have great reason to distrust yourself, the Saint reminds one of his missionaries, "but you have greater reason to trust in him".[10]

This point is developed further by a confrère of the Roman Province who is widely regarded as an outstanding scholar, Fr Luigi Mezzadri, in an article which appeard in *Vincentiana* in 1978 entitled *Humility in the apostolic dynamism of St Vincent.*[11] In this deeply moving study Fr Mezzadri shows that "humility is invariably the reason for devoting oneself to the poor":

> The man closed in upon himself is incapable of seeing the mystery

> of the poor… The poor person is not attached to the goods of the earth, but is absolutely available, is close to God… Seeing man in this way led (Vincent) to set his ideal not in wealth or power but in humility…[12]

For St Vincent humility is the leading virtue of the truly zealous priest. He even describes it as "the foundation of all evangelical perfection, the bond of the whole spiritual life".[13]

Fr Mezzadri insists on the practical and experimental character of St Vincent's whole thinking, and in particular of his ideas on humility. Whatever he may have learned from Bérulle, it was chiefly from the unevangelised poor of Folleville and the hungry poor of Chatillon that he learned the importance of humility. Experience taught Vincent to place his ideals not in wealth or power but in poverty and humility. If a Marx sees the working class (but not the poor, whom he despises as a *lumpenproletariai)* as the power base for a revolutionary strategy, St Vincent sees the poor in the strict sense as the point of contact between God and man in the strategy of redemption, and reverses the usual order by enrolling the well-to-do in their service. When he speaks of humility it is chiefly poor persons that St Vincent has in mind.

It is precisely because of the neediness of the poor that humility has a dynamic effect. Humility identifies the missionary so much with the poor, and at the same time forces him into a position of absolute reliance on God, that he has no choice but to ransack the treasuries of his faith and his ministry. If humility is differently conceived, for example as principally snowing itself in obedience to authority, it will lack an inner dynamism. Obedience does not necessarily produce zeal. The same could be said of humility which consisted chiefly in identification with unpretentious folk. Zeal is not at all unpretentious — that is a luxury it cannot afford. While humility must certainly place the missionary in a positive relationship both to those in authority and to the comfortably off (whose treasuries he may also need to ransack), genuinely Vincentian humility must, it seems, be defined by identification with the poor in their need and in their lack of any recourse except God.[14]

As we should expect, the quality St Vincent sees as central to the priesthood he also sees as an essential goal of priestly training. This emerges from the Rule of the Seminary of the Bons Enfants in which we find humility and zeal, whose interconnections we have already considered, vying with each other for the position of main objective of the formation given in the seminary. Fr Maurice Roche has shown that this was the fundamental model for the subsequent Vincentian

seminary rules.[15] In it the goal of the seminary is defined as follows:

> … the objective striven for is to have the reverend gentlemen learn from actual practice the science of the saints, that is to say, the Christian virtues, especially humility, mortification, modesty, zeal for souls and true devotion.[16]

The various details of the seminary rule, such as the obedience to be shown to the superior, frequent confession, simplicity and uniformity in dress, punctuality, serving in the refectory, caring for one's room, etc., even in the cases where they are not expressly prescribed as means for acquiring humility, can best be seen as directed precisely towards this aim. The relation of the details of the seminary rule to zeal for souls is perhaps less evident, showing itself most clearly in the order of day prescribed with its emphasis on hard work and the good use of time, and in the general seriousness expected in the spiritual life. However, it seems that at the end of their year in the seminary they were expected to be capable of accompanying the missionaries of the house on their missions.

It must be admitted that humility as described in the Bons Enfants rule does not self-evidently mean the identification with the poor spoken of earlier. It could be interpreted chiefly in terms of submission to authority, and has perhaps not infrequently been so interpreted. It is the growth of Vincent's own vocation that reveals humility as essentially dynamic, and that gives the lie to excessively spiritual interpretations of the virtue.

The Vatican II decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis,* on the ministry and life of priests, in its §15 emphasises humility almost as much as St Vincent does. However, it links it with obedience and hence with "the more mature freedom of the sons of God, (which) by its nature demands that priests in the exercise of their duties should be moved by charity prudently to seek new methods of advancing the good of the Church". This is a rather mild version of the humility-zeal combination. The orientation towards the poor required by *Optatam Totius,* on the training of priests, opens the way to a more full-blooded idea of humility:

> (The seminarians) should be taught to seek Christ… in the Bishop by whom they are sent and in the people to whom they are sent, especially the poor, little children, the weak, sinners and unbelievers (§8).

There is, moreover, a passage in the dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium* which expresses the character of the Church, and by implication, of the priest, in a way that would have appealed especially to St Vincent:

> … the Church, although she needs human resources to carry out her mission, is not set up to seek earthly glory, but to proclaim, and this by her own example, humility and self-denial. Christ was sent by the Father "to bring good news to the poor…" …Similarly, the Church encompasses with her love all those who are afflicted by human misery and she recognises in those who are poor and who suffer, the image of her poor and suffering founder (§8).

In spite of these points of conciliar doctrine it may be wondered whether the inculcation of humility is really a major aim of modern seminary training, in Africa or elsewhere. It seems rather that the heavy emphasis on academics in the seminary of today, and the relaxation of seminary discipline, may have catapulted the seminarian into the privileged classes — perhaps the most privileged class of all, the grant-maintained third-level students. Theory and practice have not always come to the same thing in the period since the council.

There are two other points concerning the Vincentian perspective on the priesthood that I feel should be mentioned: the attitude towards the intellectual life, and the attitude towards the liturgy.

St Vincent did not consider great learning an advantage in the priestly ministry. Of that we can be sure, even if we accept Coste's statement that "the legend that depicts him to us as attaching little value to knowledge is of Jansenist origin" (II 322, n 9). Fr Maurice Roche even shows that his attitude towards studies seems if anything to have hardened in the course of his life:

> It is natural to think that in the beginning of his work for the formation of the clergy he would insist upon holiness and a minimum of knowledge, and that as the years went on and the more immediate needs of the clergy were filled, he would begin to demand a more profound intellectual training. Such a progression in thought is not evident… In July 1659 he told another priest that he had enough knowledge for his present duties and that everything above a middling knowledge was to be feared rather than desired by the workers of the Gospel. Just before his death in 1660 he was thinking of removing scholastic theology from the

curriculum of the Bons Enfants.[17]

His tendency in theology was distinctively conservative. He was strongly averse to disputes in matters of doctrine, and "when new explanations or new theories arose St Vincent would hold a view that was older and more accepted in preference to one that was newer and perhaps more correct".[18] The nourishment for his spiritual life was the common doctrine of the Church and the common interpretation of the Scriptures. While it is surely true to say that he was influenced by the intellectual movements of his day, for instance the stoic revival and voluntarism, he was very far from playing an active part in any of these movements.[19] When he needed sound theological advice he would go to people like "the good M Duval" rather than embark on any personal research. Though it is pointless to speculate where he would have fixed the bounds of moderation in studies had he lived three centuries later, there is no mistaking his conviction that simple faith, prayer and high quality preaching were far more central to the priest's ministry than personal theological or other learning. Certainly, the new situations racing his followers in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries demanded a far more serious commitment to intellectual work; on the one hand there was the need for men well versed in secular learning to assume the mantle of the Jesuits in Peking, and on the other was the need to support the developing Catholic laities in countries like Ireland and the United States.[20] Nevertheless the underlying Vincentian insistence on simple faith and theological conservatism seems to have remained.

Concern for the proper celebration of the liturgy characterised St Vincent from the beginning. At the end of his life we find him still able to express his horror at the disorderly way Mass had been celebrated forty years before (XII 258ff). Yet, only seven years after the foundation of the Congregation at Paris the Bull *Salvatoris Nostri* can list among its achievements an improvement in the observance of the rites of the Church (XIII 263). The rule of the seminary of the Bons Enfants, mentioned already, makes reference to careful and worthy liturgical celebration,[21] while in a repetition of prayer St Vincent insisted that the chant be well taught at St Lazare (XI 262ff).

This tradition continued. In the library in the house at Perugia, for example, although dogmatic theology was poorly represented the liturgical section was good.[22] Moreover, the type of public devotion associated with the missions was for the most part austerely liturgical. At the General Assembly of 1711 the Superior General, Jean Bonnet,

ruled as follows on the use of hymns:

> It is necessary, as far as possible, to keep to our old tradition, which does not allow us to sing anything on the missions except the commandments of God and the litanies of Our Lady. Experience makes evident and almost palpable the fact that these hymns dissipate the spirit of compunction, which constitutes the basis of all Christian penitence; whence it is clear that they should not be introduced either before or after the sermon; perhaps some could be tolerated before or after the catechism…[23]

It would be interesting to know more about the kind of hymns so strongly disapproved of by the early Vincentians, but it is clear that they were determined to maintain a very pure form of public worship.

The tradition of liturgical exactitude, and even of liturgical scholarship as represented by the journal *Ephemerides Liturgicae,* has borne remarkable fruit in the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council. These were due in no small measure to the courage and prudence of the Roman Vincentian Fr Annibale Bugnini. Vincentians may feel a certain family interest in and responsibility for the new liturgy. This is a point of special interest in the African context, not least in connection with the Nigerian seminaries, to which we shall now once more turn our attention.

3. The Nigerian pastoral scene

The two most evident facts about the Nigerian pastoral scene are that from having too few priests not so long ago the Church in Nigeria will have very many indeed, perhaps more in some localities than can easily be absorbed, and that the prevailing idea of the priesthood is unreservedly Augustinian. A thoroughly pastoral clergy with a strong *esprit de corps* can easily develop clericalist tendencies, and Nigeria is no more immune to this danger than is anywhere else. Clericalism ia a vague word but it brings together elements of corporate pride, ambition and complacency; in this sense it was by no means absent in St Vincent's France, and indeed the whole Vincentian movement among the clergy can be seen as an attempt to combat it. The essentially Vincentian vision of the priest as an instrumental, not a primary, cause, and of his mission as defined by poverty/humility/zeal in the way explained above, is profoundly anti-clericalist. This Vincentian vision awakens a favourable response among many Nigerian priests and seminarians; indeed, it accords well with African tradition. Whether this will issue

in a movement of Vincentian inspiration in the Nigerian clergy of the future remains to be seen. Much will depend upon the capacity of the clergy here to permit the laity to play their accustomed role in Church affairs. In the past this has been a very prominent role, as can be seen from the following points.

In many parts of Nigeria the administration of the Church at local level is to a considerable extent in lay hands. A parish may easily contain anything up to forty villages, and each of these stations as they are called will have its own Church organisation, but of course no resident priest. The Church building itself, and related buildings like halls, quarters for those preparing for marriage, etc., are generally maintained and to a large extent administered by lay Church members. Such places may receive a visit from a priest only a few times a year, and may even be cut off from the parish centre during the rainy months, and the life of the Church there depends largely on the lay leadership. But even where there is a resident priest, or several, the lay Church President and Church Committee are of very great importance.

Of even more importance, from one point of view, are the cate-chists. There are two grades of catechist: those who are attached full-time to a parish, and those who are maintained by local village churches in a part-time capacity. The catechists are usually married laymen, though there are also some religious brothers who serve as catechists, and there is a move towards having women catechists in some places. For all their importance, however, catechists usually enjoy much less standing than the lay Church leaders, mainly because their education is often not good. When catechists can overcome these difficulties, however, they are figures of powerful influence in their parishes and stations. Station or village catechists are often trained teachers and so can actually be educationally and socially superior to their full-time colleagues.

Arguably of greatest importance are the Christian Mothers and the Catholic Women's Organisation who, when they turn out in their official uniform on a special occasion, can really look like an army in battle array. They certainly include a high proportion of the committed Catholics in the country, even though they have practically no voice in Church affairs.

Finally, Nigerian Church life has always depended to a very great extent on lay associations like the Legion of Mary, the St Jude Apostolate, and the Society of St Vincent de Paul. Latterly, charismatic prayer groups have begun to appear, and a current development is the growth of associations of knights, not only the pontifical orders but, increasingly, diocesan associations. A great deal of the vitality of the

Nigerian Church stems from these lay organisations, as also do some of the problems.

If anywhere, it is Nigeria that is ready for the priest as "the director of ministries":

> a true spiritual leader of active Christians rather than the only person in the parish or the given apostolate expected to manifest spiritual initiative.[24]

It remains to be seen whether the fast-growing clergy can, as a body, adapt themselves to this rather self-effacing role. It involves forging a new concept of priesthood, quite different from that of the priest as omni-competent, taking over from the missionary clergy who founded the Church here.

Another inherited difficulty facing the Nigerian Church in general and the clergy in particular concerns relations with other Christian bodies. Traditionally, the various Churches developed in marked hostility to each other, and the old battle-lines are to a great extent maintained. Some of the most viruently anti-Catholic sects flourish in Nigeria. However, the most disquieting feature of the ecumenical scene is the tendency of the Scripture-based and pentecostal-type churches to proliferate. They are known locally as "mushroom churches". To a large extent these become family churches, as a minor chief decides to have a separate church for his own clan; we have two such churches (or is it "ecclesial bodies"?) in our own village. It should be added that there exists a corresponding tendency on the Catholic side of the ecumenical divide, with villages, parishes and even dioceses growing apart from each other as Church organisation develops. It is not altogether easy to secure co-ordinated action on a nationwide basis for Catholics, and virtually imposible to get it from non-Catholics.

To these negative aspects of the ecumenical problem should be added two positive ones. One is the universal love of Scripture on the part of all Nigerian Christians; the potential which this contains for ecumenical *rapprochement is* immense. Equally important is the African capacity for pragmatic solutions; if the balance of advantage is in favour of co-operation between the Churches then the Churches in Africa will co-operate. A feature of the Nigerian situation helping to create such a balance of advantage is the existence of a Moslem majority or near-majority in the country. This has produed an influential organisation known as the Christian Association of Nigeria (C.A.N.). If the Catholic tendency to think only in local terms can be overcome, and the clergy

in particular can be got to think in nationwide terms, a very fruitful ecumenical dialogue could ensue.

While the problem of clerical-lay relations within the Church, and the problem of the relation between the various Christian groupings, can be considered the major issues facing the Nigerian Catholic priest at present, there exist several other issues of a more immediately practical nature. These are: excessive sacramentalism among Catholics, the poor quality of catechesis at present, and the charismatic renewal.

A form of sacramentalism has been inherited from missionary times which places participation in liturgical and sacramental activities far above a thorough grasp of the faith in the order of pastoral priorities. The loss of the schools with the state take-over in 1973, coupled with the fewness of the clergy up to very recently, has aggravated the effects of this sacramental priority. The young people are now very poorly formed in the faith, except for those who have attended junior seminaries and the girls who attend juniorates, and the devout core who attend retreats and belong to religious organisations.

More serious, what catechesis there is often remains at a low level. Typically, the intensive catechesis for First Holy Communion or Confirmation is carried on during the long vacation, with the teaching being done by junior seminarians whose grasp of the faith, while it may be adequate for their personal needs, is quite inadequate for the purpose of teaching others, even assuming that such young persons could command the respect and inspire the confidence necessary in a teacher of religion. The texts used for this catechesis are often catechisms of questionable worth, of overseas and pre-conciliar origin. It should be added by way of corrective that in certain areas there are valuable catechetical programmes being operated; Fr Tom Woods is involved in such a programme in the diocese of Makurdi. Moreover there are some signs of a nationwide movement to deal with the problem, notably the recent publication of a new Catholic Syllabus. Much will depend now on whether the Church can secure an entry to schools once more.

As the celebrated case of Archbishop Milingo of Lusaka will have made everyone realise, the relation of Catholic Christianity to Christianity in the charismatic mood is exceedingly difficult to define, and yet it is of crucial importance, in Nigeria as much as anywhere. Many Catholics, especially among the clergy, define this relationship in a reactionary way, but it is being increasingly realised that reaction is not enough. At a recent Charismatic conference in Owerri no fewer than six members of the hierarchy participated.

The core of the problem lies in the healing ministry. This sums up all

that is good and bad in African Charismatic Christianity. It contains the desire for bodily relief from sickness and the heart-melting confidence in God that inspire African prayer for healing. It confronts the Catholic insistence on rationality and patience with a quest for quick results and ready conviviality. It raises the question of the relation between sickness, which everyone wants rid of, and sin, which many are unwilling to abandon. In a word, the charismatic movement confronts African Catholicism with the questions of the nature and possibility of salvation. What would Jean Bonnet have said?

4. Conclusion

To be associated with a young Church finding its vocation in an emergent Africa is both a privilege and a challenge. It is a challenge not only to face the objective requirements of the situation which I have tried to outline, but also to provide the specifically Vincentian component for the solution of the Church's problems here. I have suggested that this Vincentian component includes a conception of priesthood as essentially instrumental and missionary, a conception of spirituality as built upon the foundation of humility conceived in a dynamic way, and a conception of learning which favours the personal appropriation and practical application of what is learned, while being satisfied with the common teaching of the Church, and a certain *sentire cum ecclesia* in liturgical celebration. Much has been left out; for instance, nothing was said of a Vincentian contribution to the relief of poverty. Important though this is it can scarcely be regarded as the primacy or particular concern of seminaries.

I have expressed certain misgivings about the situation here, notably the danger of clericalism. It is for this more than for anything that an authentically Vincentian approach to the priesthood provides a remedy. But to a great extent a remedy for it is also to be found in other aspects of the indigenous situation: the serious cult of excellence in the seminaries, and an underlying African mentality which is very congenial to humility. The basic orientation of African life, especially in Eastern Nigeria, is towards brotherhood with all, regardless of social standing. A pauper can sit down with a chief. Plain speaking and simple language are highly valued, so that one of our bishops could criticise the thorny prose of a philosopher-seminarian as "unAfrican". The excessive cult of the "big man", and the artificial divisions created in society by new-found wealth, are alien to the Nigerian tradition, at least in the East. This means that not only may Nigerian seminaries be asked to produce humility in the students for the sake of both Christian and

traditional African values, but that of course there are traditional forces at work within the seminaries doing exactly that. The possibilities are immense.

Notes

1. O'Neill: *The Catholic Faith in Ibadan Diocese,* Ibadan 1981, p 20.
2. Seumois: *Théologie Missionaire,* Rome 1981, Vol. I, p 30.
3. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis,* 1926 p 77.
4. "San Vincenzo e la riforma del clero", in *San Vincenzo de Paoli tra storia e profezia,* 6° Convengo di Animazione Vincenziana. Roma 15-20 settembre 1981. Edizioni Vincenziane, Rome, n.d.
5. Ibid, p 60.
6. *All Hallows Studies,* 1983, p 20.
7. *Vincentiana* 1983,4-5 p 344.
8. English translation privately produced at St Joseph's, Blackrock.
9. Ibid., pp 16-17.
10. Ibid., p 37.
11. *Vincentiana* 1978,3. Would it not be a good idea if we could be saved the trouble of battling through articles like this in foreign languages by a selection of the more outstanding ones being translated into English? They could be published in COLLOQUE or else simply duplicated for the houses.
12. Ibid., p 140.
13. Common Rules, II 7.
14. Might we not begin to call ourselves Vincentian Missionaries instead of Vincentian Fathers, and Vincentian Missionary Community instead of Vincentian Community?
15. Roche: *St Vincent de Paul and the Formation of Clerics,* Fribourg, 1964, p 184.
16. Ibid., p 188. cf also p 192.
17. Roche, op. cit. p 84.
18. Ibid., p 79.
19. Ibanez: "Le voluntarisme chez Saint Vincent de Paul" in *Vincent de Paul, Colloque de Paris 1981,* Rome, n.d., p 159.
20. Coste: *La Congrégation de la Mission,* Paris 1927, pp 203ff.
21. Roche: op. cit., p 189.
22. Mezzadri: "Le Missioni Popolari dei Lazzaristi nell'Umbria" in *Vincent de Paul, Colloque de Paris 1981,* Rome, n.d., p 321.
23. Mezzadri: "San Vincenzo de'Paolie la religiosità popolare", in op. cit. in note 4, p 96n.
24. Larkin & Broccolo, eds., *Spiritual Renewal of the American Priesthood,* Washington 1973, p 16.

Saint Vincent's Seminary, Cork (Part I)

Thomas Davitt

The genesis of the Vincentian foundation in Cork is very similar in its main elements to that of the earlier Dublin foundation. For each the starting point was an awareness of the need for parish missions, and the consequent desire to establish a community to meet this need. In each case a school was decided on as giving the best fixed base for such a community, and in each case the achievement of St Vincent de Paul was the inspiration. There were, however, two principal differences. The foundation of St Vincent's, Usher's Quay, was the result of the pooling of ideas by a group of like-minded men, and from the start of their discussions until the launching of the project there was a space of only a few years. In Cork, on the other hand, the birth of a Vincentian community was the brain-child of one man and it was about twenty years gestating.

Michael O'Sullivan was born in Bantry on 29 September 1800, the only son of Timothy O'Sullivan, a tobacco manufacturer and spirit dealer, and his wife Margaret, née Murphy.[1] After an elementary education in Bantry he went to Cork for further schooling, probably in St Mary's Seminary which had been started in 1813 near the North Chapel.[2] When he returned to Bantry he founded a circulating library and began writing articles for periodicals "and his fame reached the capital and his contributions were sought for by the metropolitan press, and went so far that by the conductor of the principal popular paper then in Ireland he was induced to become not only its principal contributor but also its editor for a period". The payment he received for such work went to various charitable causes such as "forwarding the education of some youth of merit".[3]

At school he was one of a group of three who intended becoming priests but for family reasons he was unable to follow his inclination.[4] In his late twenties during an illness he gave the matter further thought, and decided to enter a seminary. One of his sisters, Julia, wanted to become a nun and in 1828 he told her that if she entered that year he would postpone until the following year his entry into a seminary, in order to minimise the disruption of domestic affairs in Bantry; at this

stage his other sister was married. Julia entered the North Presentation Convent, Cork, on 28 April 1828, taking the name of Sister Charles (ANPC).

It was probably, therefore, in 1829, at the age of 29, that he began his seminary course at St Patrick's College, Carlow.[5] During his course he taught a class in Law in order to pay the fees of a fellow-student. He had already decided, before coming to Carlow, that when ordained he would "create or introduce a society of missionary priests who would give their apostolic services gratuitously and live in community on their own patrimony" (ANPC). "His object at an early period, I have heard Fr Russell say, was to become a Father of St Vincent".[6] He had discussed all this with Bishop John Murphy of Cork, and in correspondence and personal interviews with Archbishop Daniel Murray of Dublin. He had also been in contact with Fr Andrew Fitzgerald OP, President of St Patrick's College, Carlow, who had been trying to bring the Congregation of the Mission to Ireland; this apparently is why he chose Carlow for his studies.[7]

He was ordained in June 1833 and celebrated his first Mass, on the feast of the Sacred Heart, in the North Presentation Convent, and his second in the chapel of the Sisters of Charity, at that time on Eason's Hill.[8] He returned to live in Bantry. "He then organised a Temperance Sodality there and effected the conversion of many who were addicted to the vice of drunkeness, superintended the National Schools, instructed the children for First Communion, and formed a religious circulating library for the benefit of the middling and poorer classes" (ANPC).

On 21 December 1834 he was back in Carlow to preach at the episcopal ordination of William Clancy, who had been appointed coadjutor bishop of Charleston, North Carolina. Clancy was a professor in Carlow and had been a pupil in St Mary's Seminary, Cork, when the bishop of Charleston, John England, had been president there.[9]

"In 1835 he offered his services to the then venerable Bishop of the diocese" (ANPC); he was appointed lecturer at the cathedral and chaplain to the city goal; he introduced reservation of the Blessed Sacrament to both the goal and the asylum, and also introduced to Cork devotion to the Sacred Heart and the May Devotions.[10]

Battersby's *Complete Catholic Directory, Almanack and Registry* began publication in 1836. O'Sullivan first appears in the 1837 issue, as "Scripture lecturer and chaplain to Gaol'. In the issues for 1838 and 1839 he is in the "Bishop's Parish, Chaplain to City Gaol and Lecturer" and he lives in Sunday's Well. In the issue for 1840 and 1841 the wording is as for 1839 but it appears opposite the name of William O'Sullivan, below Michael; it is not clear whether this is a slip on the

part of the printer or not. In the 1840 issue in the section on the diocese of Cork there is a paragraph headed *The State of Religion* in which it says "The establishment of a Diocesan College or Seminary would be of the greatest advantage". At that time O'Sullivan's thoughts were certainly along the lines of linking his proposed missionary community with a school or minor seminary. Before 1841 he had visited either St Vincent's, Usher's Quay, or Castleknock; his contact may well have been John McCann who was ordained in Carlow the same year as himself. In 1841 he paid a second visit to Dublin:

> After the expiration of some time a branch of this Order was established in Dublin; thither he went to be informed of the Rules and Regulations of this Institute, but not finding them altogether conformable to the Primitive Rule, he for that time deferred the execution of his Project, but never lost sight of it. Meanwhile he served the Lord as a secular Priest in this Diocese in the department already mentioned. Having this year 1841 revisited the House of St Vincent in Dublin, and finding that the Rules had undergone many improvements, he again consulted God and "the Mother of Good Counsel" by long and earnest prayer after which, feeling a powerful attraction to join that Establishment, he resigned his charges in this Diocese to obey the call of God (ANPC).

By the start of July 1841 he had made up his mind to leave Cork. Mary Aikenhead wrote to Mother de Chantal Coleman, superioress of St Vincent's Convent, Cork, on 2 July:

> …believe me, I do not think of you without praying for you, as I have cordially entered into your trial in the departure of so valuable and so active and attached friend. I had some conversation with Revd. Mr Leahy from whom I learned Mr O'S's destination. I hope he will be induced to visit Rome in the first place, and being in gratitude bound, I shall try to unite in your prayers for his final settlement. Yet in the opinion of many really wise and pious persons the undertaking of these revd. gentlemen is considered not calculated to succeed in this country.[11]

On 28 August O'Sullivan gave the nuns of the North Presentation Convent the three volumes of Bossuet's *Discours sur 1'histoire universelle* as a farewell present and left for Rome. In *Mary Aikenhead,* by S.A., the authoress says he was "ordered to proceed to Rome, with little

chance, as he thought, of ever returning".[12] In a memoir written at the time of his death a nun in St Vincent's Convent, Cork, wrote:

> He went to Rome in '41 intending not to return, being disappointed not to have been able to join the Vincentian order; however, he told the writer he cd not rest for he felt continually as if someone called him to return to assist the poor, or at times at if a dying individual called upon him to the Bedside.[13]

These quotations leave two questions unanswered. Where was the destination referred to in Mary Aikenhead's letter? She hoped he would go to Rome before going to this destination; her letter would seem to indicate that it was Castleknock, but that would not square with what the Sister of Charity wrote at the time of his death. Both this Sister of Charity and Mrs Atkinson are in agreement that he expected, or intended, never to return to Cork, and the latter says that this was because he could not join the Vincentians. Then, who could have "ordered" him to go to Rome, as stated by Mrs Atkinson? She was writing nearly forty years after the event and twenty-five after his death, so it is possible that she mis-interpreted something which she heard or read.

In Rome he stayed in the Irish College; the North Presentation nuns noted that they received a letter from him in Rome in March 1842. By September he was back in his house in Sunday's Well, from where he wrote to John Hand in All Hallows College on the 9th. He mentioned that the rules of the Brothers of Charity were printed in the July issue of *L'Ami de la Religion;* at that time each of them would have been interested in examining such rules. He continues:

> As yet nothing *certain* has turned up about my own project; the Bishop has told me that he approves the plan and object I have in view, but looks upon it as quite impracticable from the want of pecuniary resources on my own part to found such an institute, or clergymen with a patrimony to join. Could you inform me whether (by discreet inquiry on the subject) it would be possible to make out in the diocese of Dublin any clergymen with a partimony, who would join in this undertaking…
>
> How do they get on at Castleknock? Are they likely to commence the missions soon?[14]

"Make out" as used in this letter occurs in several other letters of the writer. The bishop of Cork at the time was John Murphy; he was in his seventieth year and in the twenty-seventh of his episcopate.

On 15 October 1842 Paul Cullen, rector of the Irish College, Rome, wrote from Cork to his vice-rector Tobias Kirby that O'Sullivan "is about founding a house of the Brothers of Charity" (ICR). This seems to have been a passing phase and by January 1843 he was in contact with a French Oblate, Casimir Aubert, who was in Ireland with the express purpose of trying to found a house of his community, a "society which in all the leading objects is similar to that which I contemplate", as O'Sullivan wrote to Kirby on 12 January 1843. Further on in this letter he wrote:

> Not to tire you with details about my own project it is sufficient to state that the most probable means of succeeding at present appears to be by a combination or junction with Monsieur Aubert, and that the parent Society to grant such a modification of it as to allow the Bishops to be the local superiors, or at least to concede the same exemption to the branches of it that may be established in Ireland which the gentlemen of Castleknock enjoy relating to the parent Society of St Vincent, namely that no member should be bound to leave Ireland and that embracing any of the foreign missions should be a voluntary act. When the Bishop spoke of this to me at first in conjunction with a school, I must confess I felt a repugnance both to subject myself to a Foreign Superior and to assume the office of teacher, and it is only on the condition that the first point at least should be conceded that either the Bishop or I would consent at present (ICR).

The following month he wrote again to Cullen and in a PS which is almost as long as the letter itself gave some further information about his project:

> I have scarcely time to allude to my own project in which you have taken so kind an interest. I have a good prospect but as yet nothing tangible. The Bishop appears well disposed to encourage the Congregation of the Immaculate Conception and I have come to an understanding with the Abbé Aubert on the subject. Should we succeed in establishing the Congregation I stipulate that no Irish subject should be required to leave the country only by his own free will and that we should have a novitiate in Ireland for those who may not wish to go to France. The Abbé Aubert

> tells me that there will no no difficulty in obtaining these terms. He leaves for France in May and expects to return with another Frenchman (should the bishop agree to it). In the meantime I am to endeavour to procure some other friends to join me, for at present I bear some resemblance to the Donegal Cavalry which was comprised in the person of one surviving horseman… It is not improbable that the Bishop will require of us to fit up a school in order to create funds and although I have no taste for handling the *ferula* I am resolved with the Divine assistance to conform to anything which would effect so great a blessing as the introduction of a Missionary Society into this country under the patronage of the Blessed Virgin (ICR).

That letter was dated 17 February. Two days later Eugène de Mazenod, the founder of the Oblates, wrote to Aubert in a very different vein:

> To establish ourselves there requires people and money. To come back to the pretensions of the Bishop of Cork, you were remiss in not making them clear to me. Hence my embarrassment as to the sharp rejoinders which I shall enclose in this letter and which I will have to show to him, as well as to Fr O'Sullivan. We must not lose sight of the Sulpicians' example in Canada. Nothing is more dangerous than weakening family ties. The stage will thereby be set for ominous divisions between nationalities which will end in total separation. We must take precautions against this danger all the more because our communities in Ireland and England will soon be composed entirely of English and Irish. A bishop with bad intentions could dismiss the Frenchman who would be at their head and that would be the end of it. So do not do anything that can give us trouble later.[15]

A year later he was still of the same opinion, as he wrote to Aubert on 1 February 1844:

> I say no more about Cork or Ireland. The Bishop of that city has behaved like a bad pastor and the zeal of Monsieur O'Sullivan carries little weight. May God bless him and take into account the good that he wished to do for them and that they have rejected.

Eight days later he expressed himself even more strongly to another member of his community:

> The obstinacy of the Bishop of Cork is truly a blindness which it will be difficult for him to excuse before God.

O'Sullivan had by this time made two decisions; he would start on his own and leave to the future any link with an already existing community, and he would make this start by opening a school. It was probably late in 1843 when he came to an arrangement with Cork Corporation to adapt the then disused Mayoralty House, or Mansion House, for this purpose. It had been in use since 1773 as the official residence of the Lord Mayor. It was designed by the French-Italian architect Daviso de Arcort (anglicised as Davis Duckart).[16] For reasons of economy the Corporation had ceased to use the building in 1842. O'Sullivan adapted the Banquet Room as a Study Hall and for a chapel he converted the Civic Ballroom where in former days "in mockery of popish practices a person clothed as a priest on festive occasions sat to hear the confessions of the guests. The old housekeeper of Fr MO'S actually lived as servant years before in the Mansion House when these things were going on".[17] By late 1844 he was able to announce an opening date. In successive issues of *The Cork Examiner* (then an evening paper appearing thrice weekly) from 2 November until mid-December he ran a 750-word advertisement setting out the aims and curriculum of the school.[18]

The school opened in January 1845. On 13 June Daniel O'Connell paid it a visit and "was received at the grand entrance by the Principal the Rev. Mr O'Sullivan"; the report in the *Examiner* gives much space to what O'Connell said but has nothing about the school itself.[19] However, on 30 July, the third day of the new term, O'Sullivan wrote to Paul Cullen who was again in Ireland:

> You will be glad to learn that the school is going on prosperously — as many day-scholars as a good staff of Teachers can attend to, and a prospect of more boarders than I can accommodate. As yet I have taken none though frequently solicited. I am patiently waiting to realise the object for which I undertook the school and trust before long to achieve it. It would be a fearful calamity to see the Government of the Country possess the monopoly of Education. And yet it is to be deplored that our Ecclesiastical Superiors do not appear to have read the lesson which is presented to them in the state of other countries in which heretical and infidel governments have monopolised the education of the People.

That the idea of living in the Mansion House amused him appears later on in the letter:

> I must tell you, though, as Chief Magistrate of the City, that it would be high treason to sleep out of the Mansion House, and that the Mayor's bed-chamber shall be forthwith put in readiness for you. You will also have the pleasure of saluting the Madonna whose statue occupies the place of the glorious & pious William who was very ingloriously turned out of doors on our taking the possession (ICR).

After Cullen had returned to Rome he received another letter from O'Sullivan dated 7 October in which he was invited, when next in Ireland, to:

> …witness the former domicile of the Orange party transformed into a Catholic Seminary… I am very anxious to form a junction with the Society in Marseilles called the Oblates of the Immaculate Conception. I have tried Castle-knock but got no encouragement; on the contrary, they have been on the stand-off. I have tried what I could amongst our own friends for nearly three years and failed. The only resource is the Society at Marseilles, and it appears well adapted for Ireland, particularly in the present crisis, as *Education* is one of their leading objects.
>
> Doctor Murphy in the commencement actually gave permission for the society to settle here. He afterwards wavered in his purpose, but latterly he gave me leave to carry on a correspondence with them, though I am still afraid that when it comes to a point he may refuse… The School is, I thank God, very prosperous, and likely to be much more so if I can succeed in getting an organised Society of Religious to work it. But if it depend on individual efforts it will, I am afraid, prove a mere contingency (ICR).

The Cork Examiner in its issues of 3 and 6 July 1846 gave a lengthy two-part account of the end of year function at the school, and on the 20th carried a notice about the opening of the new term on 3 August; in all cases the name Mansion House School is used. A printed Prospectus, however, which appeared about this time is headed "St Vincent's Seminary (late Mansion House)". This may indicate that he already believed that there would be a change of mind in Castleknock about coming to Cork. This Prospectus shows that the seminary had

eight professors in addition to the Principal, and that some new subjects had been added to the curriculum since the original advertisement in the *Examiner* eighteen months earlier. Architecture and Navigation were now offered, as well as two more languages, Hebrew and Irish. Certain subjects were now "extras" at an additional two guineas per year: Civil Engineering, Architectural Drawing, Stenography, French, German and Hebrew (CMAR). There must have been a market for the latter language as a Mr Goodman, "a native of Bavaria", also taught it at his home.[20] The fees were still the same as when the school opened: Classics course 8 guineas *per annum,* the full English Course 6 guineas *per annum.*

From December 1846 news items and advertisements in the *Examiner* used the new name but there was never any mention of why the name was changed. In January 1847 it published the names of those pupils of the seminary who had won scholarships to Maynooth, as well as those who had gone on to Castleknock and other establishments. On 12 July the report on the end of year function mentioned Master George Roche's essay on Hebrew Poetry.

1847 was, however, notable for matters more important for the school than Master Roche's essay. On 17 September Fr Philip Dowley, President of Castleknock, had a meeting with his council; the minutes of their meeting record:

> An application on the part of the Very Rev. Michl O'Sullivan, President of St Vincent's Seminary and Vicar General of that diocess, sanctioned and approved by the Bishop, R. R. Dr Delany, to solicit and obtain with as little delay as may be, a Branch house of "The Mission" for that Diocess, to take charge of the said St Vincent's Seminary, and conduct missions as usual in that quarter. Having been duly considered, it was unanimously ruled that this proposal should be accepted, provided upon enquiry it were found that proceeds of that school together with the other resources upon which the Right Rev. Prelate and Mr O'Sullivan had counted would be deemed at all adequate to the maintenance of a few Missioners required to carry on this twofold object. In this ready adoption of the proposal made, Mr O'Sullivan's confessed determination to enter "the Congregation" himself had considerable weight, a resolution cherished for years and frequently submitted and pressed upon us.
>
> It was also ruled that the Superiors do make due enquiries into the premises (CMAD).

On the 22nd Dowley wrote to O'Sullivan to this effect. Perhaps the change of bishop in Cork had something to do with this. Dr Murphy had died in April and was succeeded by Dr William Delany. Until he could acquire a house of his own the new bishop was lodging in O'Sullivan's house in Sunday's Well.[21] On 11 October Dowley wrote to the Superior General, Jean-Baptiste Etienne; the latter had already given permission for a third Vincentian house in Ireland and plans were being drawn up for its establishment in the diocese of Meath. Bishop Delany and O'Sullivan were to visit Castleknock later in October and Dowley wanted to have by then Etienne's approval for the third house to be opened in Cork instead of Meath; the two existing houses were Castleknock and Phibsboro:

> Cork is, in the matter of importance, the second city of Ireland. It already has a St Vincent's Seminary, run by a Fr O'Sullivan, a priest rather noteworthy for his talents and holiness. This worthy priest has been begging us for a long time to link himself and his seminary to the family and work of St Vincent. Some time ago he accepted from his bishop the office of Vicar General of the diosese, but only on condition that he would be allowed to place himself totally at the disposition of the superiors of our Congregation, and to do his *seminaire* at the time and in the manner they would judge suitable. His seminary is for *day-pupils* only, so "the Mission" can easily make a foundation in Cork by sending down two or three of our confrères at Christmas to take charge of the school. A few months later we can send some others to give missions in the diocese, where there is a very special need for the little works of our missions.

In a PS he added:

> The means of support proposed for our work in Cork: the Bishop will give chaplaincy work to the confrères working in the school and, if it should prove necessary, a small church like St Peter's near Dublin. The profits from the school, and other donations on which we are counting, will be enough for the missioners' needs (CMAR; all letters from Dowley to Etienne are in French).

Etienne gave his consent. Delany and O'Sullivan went to Castleknock as planned and everything was satisfactorily arranged. On 29 October Roger Kickham was appointed superior of the Cork foundation, with Laurence Gillooly and Philip Burton as his staff; the latter were to be

ordained on 7 December (CMAD). Dowley reported all this to Etienne on 11 November and also requested permission to receive O'Sullivan into the Congregation and to send him to Paris later on if considered desirable (CMAR). At that time the houses in Ireland were part of the Vincentian province of the Ile-de-France, and the Provincial, Louis-Michel Redon, lived in Tours. On 4 December Dowley told him of the Superior General's approval of the Cork project, mentioning that the school had one hundred pupils from respectable families (CMAR). This is the earliest reference to the number of pupils.

On 3 January 1848 the *Examiner* carried the usual notice about the date of re-opening but made no mention of the new Vincentian presence. On the 21st Mother de Chantal Coleman wrote to Mary Aikenhead that O'Sullivan "was well pleased with the Clergymen from Castleknock and will begin his novitiate very shortly, still, however, continuing as Vicar General as the Bishop wishes in everything to have his advice".[22] He was received into the Congregation in Cork on 2 February, the first to be admitted into the new Irish Province which had been established on 24 January, with Philip Dowley as Provincial.[23] On 21 March Mother de Chantal wrote to Mary Aikenhead: "I have no doubt that the Fathers of the Mission will be what you say, like a flourishing Oak yet in our city"; Mother Aikenhead had obviously changed her opinion since 1841. Mother de Chantal also noted that Roger Kickham was "rather advanced in life":[24] he was forty.

On 4 April one of the lay teachers in the school was received into the Congregation. He was Patrick Kelsh, aged twenty-seven; he had been an ecclesiastical student but had discontinued his studies.[25]

Bishop Delany presided at the end of year function, as reported in the *Examiner* on 17 July:

> In conclusion his Lordship congratulated not only the assembly he then addressed, but the inhabitants of the city and county of Cork, on having established amongst them in the Congregation of St Vincent de Paul a body of Teachers so eminently qualified to instruct in the highest departments of Literature and Science, to give to the faculties of the youthful mind the greatest development of which they are susceptible, whilst purifying and directing them to the service of the Being who had bestowed them with a zeal for the interests of their pupils which charity alone could inspire, and an influence on their conduct which Religion alone could supply.

In September Fr Dowley made the first canonical visitation of the

house and was very satisfied. He reported to the Superior General that the bishop and clergy were "singularly touched" at the blessings produced by the mission given in the diocese by confrères from the Cork and Dublin houses, a mission which had to contend with the effects of the Famine, especially souperism (CMAR).

Early in 1849 Dowley asked the Superior General if he might appoint O'Sullivan Assistant Superior in Cork even though he had not yet taken his vows; on receiving an affirmative reply he made the appointment on 23 April. On 6 July the *Examiner* reported the end of year celebrations and had this to say about the staff of St Vincent's:

> Religion is with them no insignificant corollary, but the grand and all-animating principle. Classical study is, under their care, no barren trifling — or if fruitful, fruitful only in paltry pedantry— but the introduction to the purest models of taste and the subtlest masters of expression.

During 1849 O'Sullivan spent some time at the mother-house in Paris and on the way back stayed a few days in Castleknock.[26] In January 1850 the Provincial Council decided that as soon as O'Sullivan took his vows Roger Kickham would be brought back to Phibsboro as Director of Missions and temporary superior; this was to replace Thomas McNamara who was being granted a year's leave of absence because of eye trouble. He took his vows on 2 April. In July he was, according to the minutes of the Provincial Council, to be "encouraged to look out for a site for a church and community house in the environs of Cork, with a view to establish a permanent body of confrères there for the general missions of that diocess, and that no time shld be lost in availing himself of the kind offer made to him by the Bishop Dr Delany to that effect" (CMAD).

After 1849 the *Examiner* ceased to report the end of year function in St Vincent's, but on 6 July O'Sullivan wrote to Paul Cullen, who had been archbishop of Armagh since the previous 27 December, that:

> …our Lord Bishop was present at our Exhibition and pronounced a Panegyric on the Establishment and St Vincent's children which the warmest friend of the Congregation could not exceed (DDA).

Later in the year Dr Delany suggested that O'Sullivan should take over the Capuchin church in Cork, but O'Sullivan advised Dowley against accepting this as the church was too small, in bad repair and without an attached residence or a possible site for one; if it were

accepted there would be difficulty later in leaving it, and finally the Capuchins were unlikely to leave it within a year. All this is noted in the minutes of the Provincial Council (CM AD). On 12 December Dowley wrote to the Superior General:

> Our confrères, with the help of some lay-teachers, have given a stamp to this school which is second to none. Protestant or Catholic, for the skill and success of its teaching (CMAR).

In January 1851 O'Sullivan, as acting Superior, made a report to the Superior General on the Cork house, in the course of which he wrote:

> Although at the start the seminary was intended only as a means of getting the Congregation established in Cork, it now seems that it had been part of the plan of Providence to have it founded as a bastion of religion in the field of education, against the damaging and dangerous influence of the Queen's College founded in this city last year (CMAR).

Later in the same month the Provincial Council decided that O'Sullivan was to "further by all means in his power" the project for a church and community residence, and later in the year he succeeded in his quest. From at least 1838 he had lived in a small detached house situated right on the roadside of Sunday's Well Road, in the present car-park of St Vincent's church. At that time this house was number 25. Number 24, "Ardfallen", the next house towards the top of Wise's Hill, was occupied by a Miss Mary McSweeney (also spelt McSwiney). On 5 August she gave "the garden and premises" to O'Sullivan as a site for a church and she moved to number 26 on the far side of O'Sullivan's house, and some distance from it.[27] Even after acquiring the Mansion House O'Sullivan retained his house in Sunday's Well, and perhaps some of the community lived there.[28]

The time and effort spent on looking for a church site had interfered with O'Sullivan's work in the school and in January 1851 he had asked for an extra priest to be appointed to St Vincent's; Dowley replied that he should engage a lay teacher as it was not expedient to tie up too many priests in teaching. By May however, the problem had become more acute and his request was partly granted; James I. Taylor was sent to Cork on a temporary basis until the end of the school year. Taylor had been President of St Patrick's College, Carlow, and was thinking of joining the Vincentian community.[29]

On 14 July Gillooly wrote to the Superior General about the situa-

tion in Cork. Dowley had given the community reason to believe that Kickham, their superior, would return from his temporary assignment in Phibsboro before the end of the year. His presence was more than ever needed because of the plan to build a church; this would be the first church in Ireland dedicated to St Vincent; O'Sullivan had been very successful in fund-raising for it. The numbers in the school had dropped to about eighty because of the well-known opposition of its staff to the Queen's College.[30]

The building of the church made rapid progress and the foundations and lower walls were ready for the formal laying of the foundation-stone on 24 October. (By coincidence or design, the day chosen for the ceremony was the anniversary of the purchase of the Castleknock property). In its report on 29 October the *Examiner* said:

> We are gratified to learn that an establishment of missionary priests will be connected with this church. Numerous and important as have been the institutions of St Vincent for the benefit of the poor, that of the "missions" is pre-eminently the first for the nature and extent of the advantages it confers.

Mary Aikenhead thanked Mother de Chantal "for the real pleasure you gave me by your report of having enjoyed the heart-stirring solemnity which by the Divine Mercy and Power took place at Ardfallen".[31]

In 1852 Taylor was back in Cork to conduct the end of year examinations, but only on the strict understanding that he was to finish in Cork in time for him to start the clergy retreat in Waterford (CMAD). For the start of the new academic year Daniel O'Sullivan, ordained the previous year, was appointed to the school in place of Patrick Kelsh who went to Castleknock to resume his studies and prepare for ordination.[32]

On 6 June one of the confrères in Cork wrote to Dowley:

> Everything Vincentian in Cork is going on well, thank God, school, confrères, church-collection, *all*.
>
> It is only a few days since they resumed operations at the church and Fr Michael has proposed to go on gradually & steadily in order not to get ahead of the subscriptions… The basement or crypt facing the Dyke looks very well and is right well built.[33]

The collection for the church was not going perhaps quite as well as that letter suggested; the cost of the building is frequently mentioned in the minutes of the Provincial Council during 1853. The first mention is on 23 January and perhaps O'Sullivan himself was at the meeting.[34] Mr

Gillooly (probably not Laurence, but his brother) offered to lend £350 at 4½% and this was accepted in March. O'Sullivan was authorised to borrow £200 from Fr J. Murphy, a Cork priest. Both of these measures were taken because the £1,200 "now impending" was thought to be too much.

The long-standing friendship between O'Sullivan and Bishop Delany had been ruptured by their taking different attitudes towards the Queen's College. In a letter dated 4 November to Paul Cullen, who was now archbishop of Dublin, O'Sullivan said he had forfeited Dr Delany's confidence and the bishop now confided in his other Vicar General (DDA).

He soon suffered an even worse blow. Between 9 and 10 on the night of 14 November a violent strom lifted the partly-finished roof of the new church and demolished the upper parts of the walls.

On 30 November Dowley asked the Superior General to appoint O'Sullivan superior in Cork because Kickham, as Director of Missions, was so frequently absent; this appears to have been granted.[35]

Sometime after the destruction of the incomplete church a meeting of Cork citizens took place in St Vincent's Seminary and a scheme was worked out to raise money for the re-building. District Collectors were appointed and about £700 was collected in the city in the course of a few weeks. Collections continued all over the diocese of Cork, and in parts of the dioceses of Cloyne, Kerry and Waterford. O'Sullivan collected in the towns while Burton covered the rural parish. O'Sullivan also went to Dublin where he collected £300. A spin-off from all this was a much more widespread knowledge of, and interest in, Vincentian missions (ASW).

In the following year, 1854, on 21 February, O'Sullivan was returning by train from Waterford. A fellow-traveller was John Henry Newman who was heading for Cork to stay at St Vincent's Seminary; neither traveller knew the other and they arrived at St Vincent's within minutes of each other. In fact Newman's letter had never arrived, apparently because he had not realised that "O'Sullivan" without a first name was not sufficiently specific for Cork. Possibly the postman was the one referred to by O'Sullivan in a letter to Cullen a little over a year previously: "Our letter carrier, who is not a genius of the first order…" (DDA).

In April James Parle, aged 42, who had been a curate in the diocese of Ferns and had recently joined the Congregation (but later left) was appointed to St Vincent's as the Provincial Council thought the staff there were over-worked; his appointment was a temporary one, only until July (CMAD). In September O'Sullivan mentioned in a letter to Cullen that Gillooly was at that time in charge of the school (DDA).

This was probably because the building of the church was taking up so much of O'Sullivan's time. In January 1855 Gillooly wrote to the Superior General that the confrères in Cork could be glad that the storm had demolished the partly-built church because the re-construction was very much better. He also reported that Bishop Delany was not as interested in the project as the community would have liked; he had begun to get jealous of religious communities (CMAR). While Gillooly reported on the church O'Sullivan reported at the same time on the school:

> Thanks be to God our seminary is going very well. We normally have more than a hundred pupils, of whom about one third are preparing for the priesthood (CMAR).

On 29 June O'Sullivan was taken ill while celebrating Mass in St Vincent's Convent, which had transferred some.years earlier from Eason's Hill to Peacock Lane. He had contracted a fever and he died on 6 July; he was almost 55. His coffin was placed in the seminary chapel, the former Civic Ballroom, and from there was brought to the cathedral for the office and Mass; Bishop Delany was the celebrant. He was buried in the Sisters' cemetery in Peacock Lane, with the intention of his remains being transferred to a vault under St Vincent's Church in Sunday's Well when it would be completed.[37] On the evening of his death the *Examiner* carried a tribute to him, including:

> To a lofty and philosophical mind, and a pure and noble eloquence, he united the deepest learning and the most exalted piety… Devoted to the cause of education and the care of the institution for that purpose, the Saint Vincent Seminary which he established and of which he was President, he did not often appear in public, yet every charity in the city and every work tending to the advancement of religion, felt the influence of his zeal… Outside the mere local sphere of his exertions it is believed that he possessed, in a peculiar degree, the confidence of the highest authorities of the Church in Ireland, and that in consequence of his great judgement, his apostolic piety and his profound acquaintance with ecclesiastical policy he exercised a considerable influence on the direction of religious affairs. To the poor and helpless he appeared always as a personal friend.

The clinical cause of death may have been fever, but one confrère who came to Cork shortly afterwards reported:

> You must know that it is the oral tradition of our Congregation that the Cork Queen's College broke the heart & caused the death of Fr Ml O'Sullivan. It was the cause of his crossing swords more than once with his Lordship, and on one occasion with rather deadly effect.[38]

(To be concluded in next issue)

Notes

To avoid having too many notes at the end the following abbreviations have been used in the body of the articles; the context will usually give sufficient identifying detail:

ANPC: *The Annals of the North Presentation Convent,* Cork: This is a manuscript diary of events connected with the convent, written at the time; there are many entries about MO'S, and when he died a 17 page biography was written in.

ASW: The archives of St Vincent's, Sunday's Well, Cork: There are two main items, (a) *The Annals of the Congregation of the Mision in the Diocese of Cork,* which is a manuscript diary of events; the earlier sections appear to have been written retrospectively, (b) The Minute Books of the former Domestic Council. Both of these items are now in CMAD. There is still in St Vincent's some less important manuscript material.

CMAD: CM archives, Dublin.

CMAR: CM archives, Rome. All material used was originally in CM archives, Paris, and was transferred to Rome when the Superior General moved from Paris to Rome.

DDA: Dublin diocesan archives.

ICR: Archives of the Irish College, Rome.

Acknowledgement of, and thanks for, facilities extended for research in the above sources and in others mentioned in the text is hereby recorded.

1. CMAD: Register of entrants. The occupation of the father of MO'S is given in *Fr Michael O'Sullivan CM,* by A Vincentian Father, Cork 1962, p 9. The author was John Oakey CM; in his Introduction he thanks a Mr P. O'Keeffe of Bantry for "valuable biographical details".
2. *The Gentleman's & Citizen's Corrected Cork Almanack for the Year of Our Lord 1817* has on p 35: "College of St Mary's for the Education of Candidates for Holy Orders in the Roman Catholic Church, opened on the 12th of September 1813. . . Near the North Chapel. Accommodation for 24. Actual No. 14".
3. *The Cork Examiner,* 23 July 1856; report of sermon by Fr Bartholomew Russell OP at the re-interment of remains of MO'S. I have been unable to identify the papers referred to by BR.
4. *Ibid.* The other two were William O'Sullivan OSF and Bartholomew Russell himself; this is indicated in a marginal note on the cutting from the *Examiner* in the Dominican archives in Tallaght.
5. There is no complete register of students for this period in the archives in St Patrick's College, Carlow.

6. This statement is in a manuscript note in the archives of St Vincent's, Sunday's Well, apparently written at the time of the death of MO'S; It lacks the final page(s). ANPC for 1841, the year of his departure for Rome, mentions this as having been his intention "from the first period of his unreserved consecration to God".
7. *Examiner,* as in note 3.
8. ANPC, and also *The Annals of St Vincent's Convent, Cork;* the latter is a similar manuscript account of events kept by the Irish Sisters of Charity.
9. Guilday: *The Life and Times of John England 1786-1842,* two volumes, New York, 1927, II p 314 and p 324. The sermon MO'S preached was printed and published by Richard Coyne, Dublin, in 1835; it runs to 33 pages. There is a copy in the library in St Vincent's, Sunday's Well.
10. *The Annals ofSt Vincent's Convent.*
11. *Letters of Mary Aikenhead,* Dublin, 1914, p 115. The editor indicates in a note that the final sentence refers to Castleknock.
12. S.A.: *Mary Aikenhead,* Dublin, 1879, p 512. The writer was Mrs Sarah Atkinson.
13. From an unsigned manuscript in the archives of St Vincent's, Sunday's Well. In spite of the handwriting being of a very singular character the archivist of the Sisters of Charity in Mount St Anne's, Milltown, Co. Dublin, was unable to identify the writer.
14. Archives of All Hallows College, Drumcondra.
15. This and the two following quotations are from: *Oblate Writings III: Letters and Documents concerning England and Ireland, 1842-1860,* translated by John Witherspoon Mole OMI, Rome 1979, pp 5-8.
16. On the Mansion House itself see "The Architecture of DavisDuckart", by The Knight of Glin, in *Country Life,* 28 September and 5 October 1967.
17. As in note 13, for chapel; *The Cork Examiner* 11 December 1846 for Study Hall.
18. The advertisement mentions that further particulars may be had from MO'S or Fr Edmund Scully. ES had taught in Castleknock from 1836 to 1842, though he did not join the CM; he later also gave some missions with CM priests. He was of Cashel diocese but later went to diocese of Beverley in England and was instrumental in bringing the CM to Sheffield where he gave them part of his parish of St Marie's, which became St Vincent's. After a short period in Australia he again lived with the confrères in Phibsboro, Lanark and Cork. He is buried in Castleknock.
19. *Examiner,* 13 June 1845.
20. *Post Office Directory, 1842-43.*
21. Mother de Chantal Coleman to Mary Aikenhead, 11 December 1847, in archives of Mount St Anne's, Milltown. Though it is not strictly relevant to St Vincent's Seminary it should be noted that there is much reference in contemporary sources to the pastoral ministry of MO'S during the Famine.
22. *The Life and Work of Mary Aikenhead* by a Member of the Congregation, London 1925, p363.
23. Dowley to Etienne, 21 February 1848 (CMAR) for admission of MO'S. Gazafy: *Dictionnaire des Visiteurs et Vice-visiteurs Provinciaux 1653-1975,* typescript, Rome, 1975 for date of establishment of Irish Province.
24. Archives of Mount St Anne's, Milltown.
25. His surname is sometimes found spelt Kelch, but he signed himself Kelsh. One early document in ASW gives his name as Michael and this error has been repeated when use has been made of this document.
26. Matthew Kavanagh. Caslleknock, to Médard Salvayre. Secretary General, 12 December 1849 (CMAR).

27. Griffith's Primary Valuation, 1852, printed text and manuscript map in Valuation Office, 6 Ely Place. Dublin. The street numbers of the houses have been changed al least once since then, but house reference numbers linking these, and later, maps and lists have remained unchanged.
28. Griffith shows that in 1825 MO'S was still the lessor of 25 hut that it was occupied by a Denis Forde. The account in the Examiner i>f the re-interment of the remains of MO'S in July 1856 in the new vault of St Vincent's Church. Sunday's Well, says thai henceforth the former residence of MO'S nuukl be the Vinccntian presbytery; it js possible, however, that the writer confused the former residence of MO'S with one »f the two houses given in January 1856 by Miss McSwecney lo the community.
29. Taylor was received into the Congregation on 12 August IN51 but left before vows; he is not lo be confused with James B Taylor who died in Castleknock in 1917.
30. CMAR. I have also gone through about fifty letters from MO'S to Cullen in DDA and very many of them mention opposition to ihe Queen's College, usually referred to as the Godless College.
31. Letters of Mary Aikcnhcad. p 240.
32. Minutes of the Provincial Council: he was ordained on HI June 1854.
33. For some reason not uadily apparent this letter is in DDA; it lacks Ihe final pagc(s); the handwriting is not that of Gillooly and the general tone of the letter would suggest Kickhamas the writer rather than one of the younger confrères.
34. MO'S was in Dublin at the lime; he visited Mary Aikenhead on the 24th (*letters of Mary Aikenhead*, p249).
35. The request is noted in the Minutes of the Provincial Council. Fr James H. Murphy was unable to trace in CMAR any note of his appointment. A manuscript note in ASW says he was appointed on 22 January 1854. After the death of MO'S Dowley requested the Superior General to appoint Gillooly superior "in place of MO'S.
36. *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*. Volume XVI. pp 49ff. In February 1854 the railway had not yet reached Waterford city and operated to and from a temporary terminus at Dunkitt, two miles distant. At Cork, pending the completion of the tunnel, Blackpool was the temporary terminus.
37. The cruciform tombstone, with its Latin inscription very weathered, is still (1984) *in situ*.
38. Nicholas Barlow to Fr (later Cardinal) Patrick Moran, 20 January 1858 (CMAR); other references to NB tend to suggest that he may have inclined towards lack of objectivity.

Forum

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

For five weeks during January and February up to twenty Vincentians and Daughters of Charity attended workshops in All Hallows College which I conducted on basic aspects of the process of spiritual direction. They were intended to assist would-be general practitioners in helping directees in a formal or informal way to grow in conscious relationship with God. Each session lasted about an hour and a half, consisting of a presentation and role-play, followed by a coffee-break and sharing in small groups. The purpose of this kind of format and dynamic was to put each participant in touch with different experiences rather than just thinking about them. The subjects of the different workshops were as follows:

1. "Religious experience as the focus of spiritual direction; how to recognise and stay with it". We saw how a person becomes aware of God's self-revelation as a result of what is called the contemplative attitude, i.e. an ability to go beyond self-absorption, to look at, to view things, with continued attention. We noted five characteristics of such experiences: self-forgetfulness, other-directedness, surrender of control, in an emotionally evocative way, that invites a willed response.
2. "The importance of affectivity, the directee's in relation to God, the director's in relation to the directee". The importance of feelings was stressed, the directee's in relation to God, himself and the events of daily life. The director focuses on them and encourages the directee to express them directly to the Lord, without editing or censorship.
3. "Learning to listen with empathy: paying attention to the experience of the directee". In this workshop a distinction was drawn between apathetic, sympathetic and empathetic forms of listening. In direction the latter kind is the most helpful form. Ten dos and don'ts of listening were outlined, because to pay attention to the directee's experience is to begin to pay attention to the God of his/her experience.
4. "Helping the directee to pay attention to his or her experience of God". Three phases in spiritual growth were outlined, each

with its own dynamic. The director can help the directee to move towards greater attention to God, what he is like as he reveals himself in response to the directee's contemplative attitude.

5. "Coping with desolation and/or resistance; the directee's movement away from relationship". In this the last workshop we looked at the ways in which a director can help a person who feels God is remote and whose feelings are depressed and negative. Three types of desolation were examined. Finally, the causes and characteristics of resistance were outlined, i.e. the directee's movement away from relationship.

The workshop ended with a reminder of the references to spiritual direction in the Constitutions (4:66 and 1:19) and in the norms of the recent provincial assembly, "As a means to growth in faith each confrère should have a spiritual director" (Spiritual Life §3).

Pat Collins

VINCENTIAN STUDY GROUP

This Group had its origin in two meetings of some interested confrères in the spring of 1983. Five meetings were held during the following winter at each of which a confrère read a paper on some aspect of St Vincent; after the paper there was a period of open discussion. Those attending the meeting had previously been given some related readings as background. The minimum number attending a meeting was ten, the maximum fourteen.

The first meeting, in October in Celbridge, had a paper from myself: *St Vincent, The Common Rules and the Individual Confrère.* Vincent's way of drawing up our Common Rules was very different from that used for the rules of the Confraternities of Charity and the Daughters of Charity; this was because our rules were for a different purpose. An examination, in chronological order, of what he said and wrote about our rules shows that he regarded them not as laws but as means for the developing and deepening of the individual confrère's relationship with God. For this developing and deepening not all the rules are of equal importance; the ones which Vincent emphasised over the years were: reading the New Testament, taking Jesus as model, spiritual reading, examination of conscience, and certain key virtues.

The second meeting, in November in All Hallows, had a paper from Eamonn Flanagan: *The Ministry of Priesthood for St Vincent and Us.* St Vincent made a major breakthrough in releasing the priesthood from

the encrustment of centuries. The Vincentian charism of priesthood (also truly Catholic) is seen to be rooted in the New Testament. It is born of humble discipleship, and expressed in joyful service towards many kinds of people. Prayer is our light and strength at every stage of the priestly journey.

The third meeting, in January in Drumcondra, had a paper from John Cleary: *St Vincent, Model Strategist of Renewal.* One experiences the spirit of St Vincent in knowing priests who live and work as Vincentians. As a strategist for renewal St Vincent was (a) in touch with people, lay and clerical, who were close associates of his in his many enterprises; (b) his own man, free of attachment, who did not seek publicity; (c) a past master at getting to the key people, talking to them openly to involve them in enabling the necessary changes; (d) a non-stop worker, who still had time for people, but who did not suffer fools gladly; (e) he never settled for things as they were but used his insights and energy to effect change for the better.

The fourth meeting, in March in Celbridge, had a paper from Aidan McGing: *St Vincent and Mental Prayer;* this, in revised form, is printed elsewhere in this issue.

The fifth meeting, in April in St Paul's, had a paper from Padraig Regan: *St Vincent and Discernment.* St Vincent counsels us to hold to the principle of always using "divine means for divine ends" (CR II 5). He practised this principle in his own life, coping with his temptation against the faith, reaching his decision to found the Congregation, and directing Claude Dufour to remain in the Congregation when he was tempted to leave. His discernment conformed to three rules: (a) that the matter was evidently right; (b) that decision was accompanied by inner peace; (c) that the decision was in conformity with the mind of the Church. Our Irish Province, now planning its future in response to Church and community demands *(Evangelii Nuntiandi* and the statement from the Bogota meeting) must consider itself bound to follow Vincent's practice and principle of discernment to employ divine means for divine ends.

A further series of five meetings is already arranged for the coming winter.

Tom Davitt

VINCENTIAN MONTH

The "Vincentian Month", a new event in the history of our Congregation was held in Paris in July 1984. I felt very privileged to

be able to join Fr Richard Diala of Nigeria and 52 other confrères from all over the world for this great exercise of our Vincentian family. In the months prior to July we had been given some very helpful advance information about the course. It was organised by SIEV (International Secretariate for Vincentian Studies) which sprang from the General Assembly of 1980. So the whole purpose of the Month was to promote Vincentian studies and animate a renewal of our charism.

The Month began with a Mass at the rue du Bac at which our Superior General was the chief celebrant. In his homily Fr McCullen emphasised a balanced view (a poverty) with regard to created things in the light of God's goodness, beauty and truth. In his subsequent introductory talk he invited us to seek historical clarity concerning St Vincent and the Congregation, and also spiritual enrichment and strengthening of bonds in the entire Community. And so, all was in order for our common journey of study, reflection, and "living together as dear friends".

All of us lodged at the Maison-Mère in the rue de Sevres, where we were warmly received and cared for by the Provincial of Paris, Fr Lautissier, and our French confrères. Each day we had Morning Prayer and concelebrated Mass, with a strong Latin flavour in each. This linguistic common ground was quite a satisfactory arrangement, and I was amazed at the knowledge of Latin shown by the confrères, even the younger ones. Twice daily we had a short walk to the Mother House of the Daughters of Charity for the conferences, group discussions, and general gatherings. The conference hall of the Sisters and the translation service were put at our disposal. Both sisters and confrères did the laborious work of translation for us. About five hours a day were spent on the activity of the course; there were less formal intervals for coffee and assorted soft drinks, of which the Daughters seemed to provide a veritable unfailing fountain.

Themes at the various sessions ranged from the strictly factual, economic, social and cultural elements of St Vincent's time and later, to mission, community life, prayer, and spirituality of the Congregation. It is impossible in this short space to do full justice to the vast amount of material covered in the conferences (they would probably fill three volumes of text). I can only hope to refer to some of the most striking and interesting aspects. The members of SIEV intend to publish the contents in successive issues of 'Vincentiana'.

I: *Sources and background*

During the first week we were given a great wealth of information on the documents and source material available for a study of St Vincent.

Visits to the archives of the rue du Bac and St Lazare supplemented the lectures. Abelly's biography was evaluated, and its importance and edifying character were noted. It was interesting to learn that the early editions were not severe on Jansenism, as opposition to that movement would not be welcome at that time among the nobility. At this stage and all through the Month the value of the original documents and the actual writings of St Vincent was stressed. Fr Ibanez and Professor Jacquart (the only non-Vincentian speaker) provided an excellent and comprehensive survey of the economic and social conditions of 17th century France. Three quarters of the whole population were in serious poverty and eighty per cent of the total lived in rural areas. The country people were the poorest, but accidents of nature or of man could also plunge artisans of the towns into dangerous straits. War levies on the poor caused borrowing; this in turn led to crippling debt. The way was then open to the sad succession of expropriation, begging, vagrancy and delinquency. Wars, plague and disease further added to the turbulent sea of human misery.

In medieval times, compassion for the poor found expression in community absorption of them and a solidarity of caring. This mentality was yielding in the 17th century to another view, that the poor were a menace, a nuisance, and responsible for their own condition. Vincent de Paul was grief-stricken at all this, and set to work with the means available, and indeed with a new heretofore unwitnessed resourcefulness. Here our Founder emerged as a man who re-discovered a New Testament priesthood with particular accent on a spirit of mission and leadership based on personal integrity rather than on power.

II: *Stages in Vincent's Life*

First, Fr Morin offered a historical analysis of Vincent. He recalled his own maturing knowledge of the Saint from "a certain devotion to a real devotion", from a programmatic approach to an integration of the whole man. Fr Morin highlighted the affective side of Monsieur Vincent in the close family ties which required so much purification, his later friendships, the togetherness of his community influenced by home life at Ranquines, and his experience of the tough and thrifty life of the poor. At this point of the Month, Frs Stafford Poole and J. M. Roman made major contributions. Fr Poole looked closely at the early years, and applied a rigorous and critical assessment of available evidence. He is not able to accept the story of Vincent's captivity in Tunis, and is doubtful of Abelly's account of the long temptation against faith. Fr Roman (who incidentally favours the transmarine sojourn)

traced the spiritual evolution of St Vincent through the fourth decade of his life. 1617 was a crucial year, a key, and a turning-point, a year in which he discovered the true priesthood of pastoral service. Fr Roman also portrayed the practical sense of Vincent. He was prepared to found small communities, but with considerable acumen regarding financial stability and terms of apostolic reference.

The foundations and growth of the Congregation during the Founder's lifetime and afterwards were also dealt with in this week. Fr Van Winsen of Holland covered much of this development.

III: *Spirituality*

Fr Dodin began with some shrewd observations on the sources of Vincent's spirituality, and the so-called French school. Early biographers do not acknowledge his sources, but he had his influences, like Berulle, St Francis de Salles, and earlier saints and the Fathers of the Church, such as St Augustine and St Bernard. The Carmelites of the Reform and St Ignatius should also be considered. But after all, St Vincent is spiritually original. The inspiration comes to us from the Inspirer himself (inspired by God); his conversion marked a change of direction, and it blossomed forth into a continually evolving reality. It is the Founder's spirit that is the essence; the works and forms of expression of that spirit may be diversified, but the spirit is the force that animates all. The true son of St Vincent richly and faithfully depicts the spirit which is a mirror of the humility and courageous mission of Jesus Christ.

Fr Renouard told us that the Christ of St Vincent is not an idea, but a living person who appears as the loving and missionary man of the Gospels. Christ is religion towards the Father, but emerges most prominently as charity towards the neighbour. Vincent's zeal comes from his contemplation of Christ, but it is always toned by tenderness. Jesus is the Sower whom we follow. We are called by Vincent to see Jesus Christ in the other, as "All in all", the fulfilment of our being. The oft-debated question of the poor then and now was tackled by Fr Corera. It seems clear, he argues, that Vincent wanted to serve people in some kind of social dereliction, who were also spiritually neglected. So the Congregation's primary task is to evangelise such poor. Aid in material terms, while not excluded, is always subordinate to that.

To enable us to be missionaries the Congregation has been formed into communities from the outset. Fr Gaziello sees local communities and provinces not as isolated units, but as localisations of the whole Congregation. Total unity of our Congregation is vital to us. Fr Morin

returned to speak once more to us, this time about St Vincent's way with conferences. With humorous touch and clear thought he shed much light on this theme. The Gascon, a born communicator, began to be more human and attractive. It must have been interesting, even exciting to sit before Monsieur Vincent who was capable of being carried away by his subject, waving his arms and raising his tone of voice! His pedagogy was direct, personal, and concrete, especially with the Daughters; more abstract with the confrères who were well-versed in theology. But he never forgot the coadjutor brothers.

IV: *From Monsieur Vincent to Today*

An ambitious title headed the final week. I would be happy to touch even the high spot here. Fr Stafford Poole followed the growth of the Congregation, and the trends noticeable in its diffusion during its first two centuries. National allegiances entered into our story, just as they did in the wider Church. The great advance in centralisation in the 19th century had strengths and weaknesses, one of the latter being an accelerated drift towards a mentality of religious in our Congregation. Only now perhaps are we shaking ourselves free from this. Fr Perez Flores did a few presentations on the evolution of the early group from Mission to Congregation of the Mission, and the most recent (juridical) self-understanding of the Community. From the 1980 Constitutions we have firmly established our secularity. Our vows are there characterised as "non-religious", indicating for us a no less spiritual commitment than for religious, but freeing us for the mobility and availability of men in a condition of generous evangelisation. Directly confronting our mission to the poor of today, Fr Antonello (who works among drug-addicts in Milan) delivered one of the most challenging papers of the Month. He quoted a recent article in *Civiltá Cattolica,* which stated that the young are the poorest in modern society. An interior destruction of values is the source of frightening poverty today. So activity against poverty is needed, but especially we need to strike at the sources of this contemporary poverty of values. Fr Antonello suggested a new evangelisation to sow Christian values in order to halt the ravages of this rampant poverty.

Fr Sens spoke on prayer from a Vincentian standpoint. Prayer is the source of all action, and penetrates it. Prayer and action are in a healthy tension, not in opposition. Finally, prayer must be accompanied by our own fully-assumed responsibility. St Vincent, great man of prayer that he was, yet was not a quietist.

Other Faces of the Month

Small group discussions took place most days. These were aimed at arousing personal reflection on key matters of charism and mission. For example, we came to realise a sense of evolution, that our charism is in the process of growth as history unfolds and new situations arise, but always there should be continuity with the original inspiration of St Vincent. There were two major extended general sessions: (1) the genesis and growth of our provinces; and (2) the present position regarding Vincentian animation in each province. On the latter, we ourselves could report our recently-formed "Friends of the Vincentians", COLLOQUE (a widely-respected journal), the Vincentian Study Group, and the meetings of confrères engaged in specific works.

Among the highlights of the Month were the excursions to Vincentian places. The first was a tour round the streets of Paris by way of old St Lazare and many other sites, not least the church of Clichy, where the young Vincent was "happier than the Pope", as parish priest. We spent a whole day on the tour to Folleville and Amiens. The celebration of Sunday Mass at Folleville had a special thrill for every Vincentian heart. The beginning of the mission where "God blessed my words" and whose effects are still with us is a perennial motive for thanksgiving. The final weekend was passed in a long trek to the south across the rich heartland of France. En route we concelebrated Mass at Chateau-PEveque on the spot where Vincent de Paul was ordained priest. This was a true occasion for emotion, tears, prayer, hope. Then the birthplace and the baptismal font of Pouy offered a space for quietness, pause and deepening. Here, one could say, was the goal of our pilgrimage. The Bishop of Dax led us at Mass in this cradle of St Vincent. The Daughters of Charity, as at Chateau-l'Eveque, so also at Berceau supplied delicious nourishment for their weary brothers.

A final word

Along with all the talks, the cerebral and spiritual activity, there went an atmosphere of encounter and sharing among confrères from countries as widely dispersed as Poland, Indonesia, and the Americas. This common brotherhood amid cultural diversity was one of the great graces of the Month. The charism of our Father Vincent is a golden thread binding us all together. Confrères from war-torn regions or other difficult situations had a special place in our thoughts and prayers. The relics of our Founder and of the Vincentian Blessed and the striking Marian mementoes of the rue du Bac were a continual call to us to stay

and pray. A ring of new hope and love seemed to encircle us. We began to see more clearly the validity of the words of one speaker: "St Vincent de Paul is alive". The Evangeliser of the poor leads us on to noble and humble service, not only on familiar ground, but also in the new fields opening out before us.

I think we all feel strong sentiments of gratitude to the Lord and to all the people who made this Month possible. We thank our Provincial Fr Mullan for facilitating our attendance, and in a special way Fr McCullen and the animators of the Course, the confrères of the Maison-Mere, and the Daughters of Charity.

One of the most beautiful expressions of fraternity lingers indelibly in my memory. It was the "ministry of feeding" in the manner of the Lord's Supper, led by Frs Gaziello and Mezzadri and taken up by others, on the occasions of our stops at the watering holes at Amiens and along the motorways for the "restaurations, petites et grandes".

I cherish the hope, along with SIEV and the participants of the Month, that the fruits of this unique experience can be shared more and more with all our confrères, and that the present Vincentian animation will grow into a great tree of life in all the provinces.

Eamon Flanagan

A CONGREGATION DIVIDED: A CHALLENGE TO OUR MISSION

St Vincent left the Congregation clearly divided by a rule of separation which marked off the clerics from the brothers as if they were two different races of people, a superior and an inferior one. I think it is very necessary for us now to assess the principles on which this was done if we are to move forward into a new relationship with the rest of the people of God who have not received the sacrament of Holy Orders.

These brothers and sisters of ours were described in the Common Rules as "externs" (ch 9). Thus we were left with two artificial separations, that of cleric from brother and that of Vincentian from non-Vincentian. In our Province now we are drifting towards fully clerical communities with no brothers, or very few. Only in Nigeria do we see signs of a fresh development of the lay element in the community. So, in these islands should we settle for *The Vincentian Fathers'?* Or in doing so, would we not actually narrow the vision of St Vincent who saw the Congregation as composed of clerics and laymen? Or is there not in fact

a new partnership with lay-people developing in some of our apostolates? And do these people not form part of the evangelising community for the period of time in which we are together (no human community being eternal)?

Sifting the foundations

Throughout the Common Rules St Vincent invokes the Scriptures and the example of Jesus to support his vision of the Congregation. When it comes to the brothers, however, what Scripture could be invoked to prevent them learning to read and write unless with the express permission of the Superior General? (5:16). Scripture itself is evidently a product of reading and writing. And where are we to find prayers, tears and mortifications without also finding hope, joy and celebration of the paschal victory of the Lord? (1:2). Thus, for the brothers St Vincent proposed a spirituality with the characteristics of the passion without those of the resurrection, oral best with a resurrection absolutely postponed until after death, while he ruled that their intellectual life be kept as closely as possible to zero.

Unfortunately St Vincent, in my opinion, accepted the maxims of the world in relation to the brothers where he strongly combatted them in so many other areas. He not only accepted the class-divisions of French society but he also accepted the sharp division of the Church into clerics and laity, *duae sunt genera Chnstianorum*. The clerics were the elite, privileged group, the First Estate in France who could not be tried for civil offences in a civil court because they had the *privllegium fori*. Clerical income was guaranteed by the civil power through the collection of tithes, by coercion if necessary. Political influence was exerted by bishops and such powerful cardinals as Richelieu, Mazarin and de Retz. So how could the members of this elite class (always addressed as *Monsieur* by St Vincent as against the more Christian *Frère* for the brothers), to sit at the same table, to recreate in the same room? And perhaps uppermost in St Vincent's mind, because he actually expresses it in the Rules, wasn't there a danger that some of the brothers might aspire to the ecclesiastical state? (5:16).

St Vincent therefore inserted into the foundations of our community some material which didn't come from the gospel at all but from the culture of his time. Interesting that St John Baptist de la Salle only a few years after St Vincent's death established a community of brothers who not only could read and write themselves, but were charged with the mission of teaching others to read and write also. Perhaps he succeeded

because the brothers were not confronted with a clerical membership in their community? But surely there is something very fundamentally wrong with a Christian community which creates an artificial division between the celebrant of the Eucharist and the participants? Does it not say that what is celebrated in the Eucharist cannot be celebrated in life itself, so that we can have a ritual and sacramental friendship but not a warm, lived friendship, a communion visibly expressed, which is arguably the only genuine basis on which the sacramental celebration can rest — given the sacrament of baptism, of course?

Today we could, of course, just change a few rules here and there, make a few pragmatic adjustments according to personality, culture and work-situation. I think that would be to betray St Vincent who always looked to the gospels for inspiration. I believe we too can search the Scriptures for those fresh foundations we need.

Jesus and the Apostles

I see no evidence in the gospels that Jesus tried to check out the educational level of the apostles so that he might have people of similar intellectual development to talk to as he wandered from one town to another. Mark certainly doesn't flatter those early followers of the Lord. And were they true clerics? What kind of community life did they live?

Well, Peter at least was a married man so he had already experienced the most intimate kind of community there is, that of man and wife, the basic community of Genesis. Straight away this puts him outside the clerical state in the Latin Church. But the lifestyle of this wandering community of preachers and disciples is marked by a very non-clerical fact: no separation. Neither by clothing, nor by housing, nor by privileges of the state, nor by privileges of the official religion, nor by titles such as reverend, monsignor, eminence, by none of these things were they distinguished from their neighbours in the market-place, and yet from these men was to emerge the first college of bishops in the infant Church with the married Peter at their centre and with the words of Jesus echoing in their ears: "All authority in heaven and on earth is given to me. Going therefore …" (Mt 28:18-19). With the authority of Jesus behind them they didn't seem to feel the need of a privileged place in society.

In the Church of the Acts of the Apostles then we see a people with many different charisms, gifts and offices, a people searching for unity in prayer, life and the breaking of bread. First Corinthians gives the same picture (by no means idealised; their faults crop up on every page).

Chapter 12 is particularly strong on the unity of the body of Christ; the thought that a Christian community should make a rule that some of its members were forbidden to talk to others, who could imagine such a thing? Yet the different gifts and ministries are strongly affirmed; one basic spirituality as followers of Jesus and then the particular callings of each one. Fortunately the Church in our own times has rediscovered the original focus on the sacrament of Baptism which offers us a fresh foundation on which to build.

Baptism, the missing sacrament

The scholars I have consulted attribute the development of a clerical state to the age of Constantine when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. This short essay is no place to go into the history of that development, but an essential point to note is that the spirituality of the early Fathers was not based on a clerical versus lay concept of the Church. It was based solidly on the sacrament of Baptism. Clement of Alexandria and Origen led the way and their teaching gained momentum in the succeeding centuries as the liturgy of Lent and Eastertide received fuller and fuller development. The elite group of those early centuries were not clerics but martyrs who achieved a total identification with Jesus in his baptism of blood.

Sad to relate, by the time of St Vincent the sacrament of Baptism had slipped away into the background. Rodriguez's *Christian Perfection,* for example, concentrated on acquiring virtues rather than on contemplating the mysteries of what God had done for each one of his people and being filled with wonder, joy, thanksgiving and generosity at the marvellous works God accomplishes through the simple sacramental signs. Vincent was much more in the mould of Rodriguez than of the Fathers of the Church as he failed to give the brothers any foundation in their dignity as a baptised, priestly, people. Had he looked at the *Summa* of St Thomas, la, Ilae, Q89, Art. 6, he would also have found material for reflection on the basic dignity of every human being which might have formed an opening preamble to the Rules. But it was his lack of baptismal spirituality that led him into the trap of giving the brothers a spirituality characterised by the passion without resurrection, because the sacrament is all about dying to sin and rising to a new life — now! Again Aquinas could have helped here because he saw the religious vows as a particular development of the sacrament of Baptism. But then, what was Vincent's view of the vows?

The Fathers of Vatican II rescued the sacrament of Baptism by

a stroke of the Holy Spirit, surely, when they decided to reverse the order of chapters presented to them in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium.* When they placed the chapter on The People of God before that on The Church is Hierarchical they said loud and clear "the primary reality is the people of God. The sacrament of Holy Orders exists for the sake of and at the service of that people". The foundations for this change can be seen as far back as Pope Leo XIIFs encyclical *Divinum illud munus* of 1897 where he treats as of primary importance the gift of the Holy Spirit received by each Christian in the sacrament of Baptism and draws very heavily on the teaching of the Fathers of the Church in order to restore *(instaurare)* the full Christian life to all members of the Church.

This fresh approach makes it possible for a Vincentian Community to see itself first as a Christian Community of baptised people, followers of Jesus, and then to see within that community different charisms, gifts, sacraments — all at the service of Church and world. It also enables us to relate to our fellow-members of the Church as brothers and sisters rather than as externs or second-class citizens of the non-clerical variety. This is in fact to use the very charism of the priesthood itself which is to gather the people of God for the celebration of their communion in a sacramental manner. The priesthood is a sign of communion; the clerical caste is a sign of division.

The life and teaching of St Vincent afford us many principles on which to build. (It seems to me very important to think out the pastoral principles of St Vincent and to apply them now in our very changed conditions rather than to pretend that everything that he said and did must be said and done in our time in exactly the same way). If we could therefore extend the principle of "living together as dear friends" (CR 7:2) to the laypeople with whom we work so as to enter in some way into a real friendship with them, we would be following such admirable examples as Justin De Jacobis and Fernand Portal, or indeed Castleknock College as I experienced it myself as a boy. St Vincent also gave us the foundation for a very strong communion of friendship with one individual person whom he called a spiritual director (CR 10:11) but whom we might prefer to call a friend with whom we share our deepest life *(anam-chara* in the Irish tradition). Thus the openness to our brothers and sisters in the Church is accompanied by a deepening of relationships within the family to which we belong in primary relationships: the Congregation of the Mission.

Let us heal the divisions of the past and think of how we are to ally ourselves with the lay element in the Church so that we can witness

together and get into the middle of the market-place with the message of love and communion in Christ Jesus. *"Muna bhfuil agat ach poc gabhar, bi i Mr an aonaigh leis!"* (If you have only a puck-goat, be in the middle of the fair with it!). We have a lot more than a puck-goat to offer!

BillClarke

Miscellanea

The first, seventh and eighth issues of COLLOQUE carried various items about the origins of Usher's Quay and Castleknock and the contacts made with the Congregation in Rome and Paris. Since then the original letter from the Superior General to Philip Dowley has come to light. This is the letter resulting from John O'Toole's contact with the Superior General which he mentions in his letter to Archdeacon Hamilton of 18 December 1838 (cf COLLOQUE 7, pages47-48). The original is in French:

> Father,
>
> There have been several reasons for the rather long delay in my writing the letter I have been intending to send you. Perhaps divine providence arranged this so that we would not do anything too hurriedly in so important a matter as what you have in mind. In this, as in many other matters, St Vincent has given us examples which certainly ought to influence us.
>
> So, Father, now that you have had time to reflect on the step you wish to take, if you want to go ahead with your plan to join the congregation founded by St Vincent you can come over here with one or two of your colleagues to discern more clearly and more certainly whether this is the Lord's will.
>
> If it pleased God^s goodness to make your wish come true we would have reason to thank him a thousand times; the consequences could be very important for religion, for your own community and for ours. That is what we are praying for, as no doubt you yourselves also are.
>
> Have no doubt, Father, about the joy we would have in receiving you and showing you in every possible way the esteem and friendly respect in which I am
>
> Your very humble and obedient servant
> J. B. Nozo, upCM.
> Sup. Gen.

Paris, 25 January 1839, anniversary of the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission.

The best-laid plans…

A very extensive pile of building is about to be erected at Castleknock College, of which Mr George Goldie is the architect. It will be connected with the existing building by a corridor only, and is intended more especially for the reception of clerical students and the accommodation of the community. The frontage of the building will be 165ft, with a pavilion four stories in height in the centre, surmounted by a cupola, with wings on either side three stories high. On the ground floor the entrance hall occupies the centre of the building, on each side of which are study halls 30ft by 20ft. In each wing are two study halls 41ft by 24ft each. The first floor contains the community rooms, and this and the third floor contain in all thirty-three airy and spacious bedrooms. The upper story and lofty roof of the central pavilion is devoted to a library and museum 45ft by 35ft, with additional accommodation in a gallery. The exterior of the building will be of the most severely plain character, approaching almost to ugliness. Mr James Freeman has been declared contractor. Cost, about £6,000.

The Dublin Builder, 15 March 1866

("Third floor" in the above obviously should read "second floor")

Thomas McNamara became Provincial, and President of Castle-knock, in 1864. He had been left a large legacy, mainly in mining shares, and intended to use this to build a Central House for the Province. After the building had been partly erected the value of the shares dropped and the plan had to be altered, and the idea of a Central House was abandoned; what had been already built was made available to the college. The building in the westward direction stopped at the present Bursar's Office, and the projected fourth story of this Central Pavilion was never completed. Above the present Community Room the walls had reached only the first floor and that was roofed.

An architect's drawing of the front elevation of the proposed building is in the Provincial Archives.

Fr Thomas O'Flynn CM

Even as I write, more than six months after his unexpected taking from among us, it is difficult to think of Fr Tom O'Flynn as of someone who is dead. Though his appointments during the latter half of his priestly life required him to live outside the community, he was always punctilious about keeping in touch, regularly visiting the house to which he was formally attached whether it was the old St Joseph's on Temple Road, Blackrock or the new one at Stillorgan Park. Then, of course, he "breezed in" to the other houses making some provocative statement and galvanising a sometimes jaded community into life. Perhaps this is the same as saying that he was life-enhancing.

Tom O, as he was affectionately known among his confrères, was born in Millstreet, Co. Cork and, though he spent most of his life in the Dublin area, there was a sense in which he never left it. This was largely due to his devotion to his family. But those of us who lived close to him in his earlier years heard a good deal about the Presentation Convent in Millstreet and the nuns in Drishane, and also about the local citizenry. And there was the famous occasion — I think it was at the end of the war — when Tom O, bewailing the rise in the cost of living, informed us that some Millstreet notability had to leave the neighbourhood because he couldn't afford to stay. Tom Cashin, who with Michael Walsh and myself shared the end of the Castleknock table with him, asked sympathetically "What did he do, did he emigrate to America?" "Oh no!" replied Tom O, unconscious (or was he?) of the bizarre nature of the remark, "He came up to Dublin and bought a house in Ailesbury Road". In a way it was his spontaneous tribute to the supremacy of Millstreet over the metropolis.

Not indeed that he did not like Dublin. He once told the writer that he intended to be a witness of every important event that occurred in Dublin during his lifetime. I am afraid this drew the obvious question "What leads you to suppose that you will spend your life in Dublin?" I have forgotten his reply but I have no doubt that he dealt more than adequately with the remark. In the event, apart from two years as spiritual director in Maynooth, he did spend his life in Dublin, where an evening paper was available — a necessary amenity for Tom O. He was also fortunate in being close to the sea at St Paul's and Clonliffe and he was able to take a daily walk on the Bull Wall or on the pier at Howth or

at Dun Laoghaire, sometimes indeed during the holidays on two of the three. How he managed to combine this with all his spiritual activities remains a mystery.

He was much addicted to the drinking of tea (weak), something that his family also noted, and I remember he once announced (perhaps by way of excuse) that Dr Johnson had made the observation that the stimulation of tea-drinking was a necessary concomitant to good conversation. He would never refuse a cup of tea and, whether as a result or not, it must be conceded that his conversation, like the tea, was always stimulating. Dr Johnson was a much-quoted author and he possessed in full measure the good doctor's robust common sense and also some of his minor eccentricities. He loved having his leg pulled and enjoyed telling stories against himself. Tom Woods once told us that during the Christmas holidays at the end of his first term on the staff of St Paul's when Tom O was president, the two of them met on O'Connell Street and Tom O enquired politely how Tom and the other students were faring in Glenart. Characteristically, Tom O greatly relished the story when he heard it. In early life he had been very absent-minded but was always down to earth and with the passage of time it was amazing how organised his life became. This achievement must have been a gift of God to enable him to widen and deepen his spiritual influence.

During his schooldays in Castleknock Tom O gave early evidence of his literary bent, his enthusiasm for Irish, his keenness for English and Irish debate, and his love of dramatics. He took an honours degree at UCD and subsequently gained a first class honours MA in English. These interests and accomplishments were invaluable during his teaching career but his greatest asset, then and later as a spiritual director, was his lovable personality. He was immensely popular and his unusual qualities of mind and heart, his sympathy for and understanding of the problems of those with whom he came in contact, whether boys or students for the priesthood or others he encountered during life, were greatly appreciated. He always had a deep devotion to Our Lady and this found an outlet in his work for the Legion of Mary of which he became spiritual director to the Concilium and a close friend of Frank Duff. The members of the Legion showed their appreciation of his tireless work on their behalf by their massive attendance at his funeral Mass and afterwards by their touching recitation of the rosary at his graveside.

He was, I suppose, a conservative in matters of religion and, though very open, would not take all new insights on board. But he would defend his views with disarming wit and was tolerant of the views of

those who differed from him, saying cheerfully that he would "meet them on the way back". This good humour and his great kindness in personal contact enabled him to surmount the difficulties of the late '60s and early '70s in his work as spiritual director. One felt that he was humanly and spiritually fulfilled as never before during the long years in Clonliffe. He often spoke of the kindness of staff and students and he seemed to have become a kind of father figure to one and all. They gave him a great "send-off" in the ceremonies and singing at Phibsborough and at Glasnevin, and afterwards Fr Brendan Houlihan, the president of Clonliffe, was the perfect host. Tom must have been pleased with his obsequies.

These are only a few of one man's reminiscences on the life of Tom; others I know, would have more valuable things to say. Was he the last of our "characters"? At any rate, his amusing, edifying and enquiring presence will continue to be missed in our province. But my last words must be to his family to which he was so devoted, and to give our assurance to his sister Maurleen and his brothers Niall and Paddy and their families that we shall keep a remembrance of him in our Masses and prayers. May he rest in peace.

D.F.C.

THOMAS O'FLYNN, C.M.
Born: Millstreet, Co. Cork, 18 September 1915.
Entered the Congregation: 7 September 1935.
Final vows: 8 September 1937.
Ordained a priest in the Pro-Cathedral, Dublin, by Dr McQuaid, Archbishop of Dublin, 30 May 1942.

APPOINTMENTS

1942-1959	St Vincent's, Castleknock.
1959-1965	St Paul's, Raheny.
1965-1967	St Patrick's, Maynooth.
1967-1984	Holy Cross, Clonliffe.

Died 20 February 1984.

Fr Francis J. Sweeney, CM

I find it strangely difficult to write about Frank. And it certainly is not for the want of memories. His jaunty gait, his golf swing — slow, deliberate and unique — his beaming smile, lighting up a bronzed and ruddy face, his infectious chuckle whenever he scored a hit in a battle of wits — all flash upon the mind's eye. And yet, somehow the uniqueness of the man himself is not easy to convey. At a gathering of the brethren a few years ago, when memories were being poured forth concerning some famous personalities of the past, I remember Frank proclaiming authoritatively, "We don't have characters like that any more!" But he was wrong. As a character Frank himself belonged with the immortals!

He was over eighty when he died, but who would have believed it! Age did not seem to have touched Frank Sweeney. His bronzed, youthful face gave the lie to his years. And his zest for life stood by him almost to the end. No pressure of work ever subdued Frank Sweeney. No mission was ever so heavy, no hours in the confessional were ever so long or dreary as to leave him unfit for a walk, or a drive, or a game of golf. And not just eighteen holes! Where others would be prostrated to the point of falling down exhausted, Frank would already have gone off for another eighteen holes. For this reason it was sad to visit him in the hospital during his final illness; he was taciturn, restless and almost apologetic to the visitor for being weak, helpless and unable to respond.

Frank was of the old school; he never took too kindly to the "new wave" in the Church's theory and practice. His style was the trenchant style of the past, strong and forthright, but also uniquely coloured with the unmistakable Sweeney flavour. Father Ned O'Hanlon accused him once of being too fond of synonyms. "Synonyms?" said Frank, "What synonyms? Give me an example." Whereupon Ned quoted a sentence which left Frank in a paroxysm of chuckles: "The house was small, little, minute, almost imperceptible."

He had a resonant singing voice and loved to exercise it, being well practised in the choral and operatic hits of fifty years ago. He asked me one day to suggest to him a few exercises for the improvement of his "tonal quality". After a few days of loud and not very musical reverberations around the house, no wonder that the Superior considered Father Sweeney to have reached the required tonal quality and directed that he be informed accordingly.

Frank had been driving a Crossley truck for the business in Achill in the days when private cars were still a luxury of the rich. He loved

to sit behind a wheel and never seemed to tire of it. Nor did he have to be urged! A funeral in Clonmel, *The Dream ofGerontius* in Limerick, a visit to Achill, or Dublin, or both; mention any reasonable cause and Frank was ready for the road.

He was born in 1903 into the large family in Achill, towards whom he always had a deep loyalty. Often I heard him speak of his brothers and sisters. After his schooling in Clongowes Wood College he went into the family business for several years. He was twenty-nine when he joined the Congregation in March 1932; and he was ordained in 1938. His first appointment was to Phibsborough, after which he spent some time in Lanark, and for the last thirty years he was based at Sunday's Well, Cork. His chief work was in parish missions and retreats, which he gave in various parts of Scotland, Ireland and England, and — for about a year—in Australia. He was particularly attentive to the visitation of the sick and the celebration of the sacraments, in the exercise of which functions he showed most of all the deep religious faith which had first inspired his vocation.

Charles Sinnott, CM

FRANCIS J. SWEENEY, CM
Born: Achill, Co. Mayo, 27 April 1903.
Entered the Congregation: 4 March 1932.
Final vows: 11 March 1932.
Ordained a priest in the Pro-Cathedral, Dublin, by Dr Wall, Auxiliary Bishop of Dublin, 11 June 1938.

APPOINTMENTS
1938-1945 St Peter's, Phibsborough.
1945-1952 St Mary's, Lanark.
1952-1984 St Vincent's, Cork.

Died 8 May 1984.

Fr Vincent O'Dea, C.M.

Recently, on the.death of my mother, I received a letter of sympathy from Fr Larry O'Dea with a postscript at the end of the page. The P.S. reads: "Vincent sends his prayers". There was an added poignancy in that brief message because Vincent died the day after the letter was posted and before it had reached me.

Ten years ago when Vincent and I were members of the community at St Joseph's, Blackrock, he had more than once said to me: "Diarmuid, why don't you take the day off and go and see your mother — you won't always have her, you know". And when I took his advice he would be waiting for my return to ask "And how did you find her?" So I know that there was a depth of solicitude and compassion and sincerity that is not immediately obvious in those four words: "Vincent sends his prayers". And those prayers came from his hospital bed in Scotland but by the time they reached me they were coming from heavenly places.

Perhaps Vincent always had one foot inside the pearly gates. His regularity in attending community prayer and the quality of his concentration in prayer would have gladdened the heart of his namesake and patron Vincent de Paul. Confrères who lived with him in Blackrock will remember his slight figure pacing up and down the Lake Walk reading his breviary or praying the rosary, totally oblivious of the cows staring at him over the fence or of the Brookfield children searching at the lake's edge for tadpoles and safe in the knowledge that he at least would not chase them away. I hope the Recording Angel has kept an accurate account of all the rosaries said over a period of some forty years.

In our last few years together Vincent and I, along with Fr Johnny O'Connell and Fr James O'Doherty, used to concelebrate Mass in the Community Room each morning. Those were precious peaceful moments for me, and, I believe, for my three sick confrères too. Their example was a daily reminder of the words in the Ordination ceremony: Know what you are doing; imitate what you celebrate; model your life on the mystery of the Lord's cross. *Age quodagis…* When St Joseph's, Temple Road, was closed Vincent went to join his brother Larry in the community at Lanark.

For most of his priestly life Vincent was dogged by poor health, yet I never heard a word of complaint. Rather, he practised a patience and a resignation to God's will that reminded one of the prophet Job: "If we take happiness from God's hand, must we not take sorrows too? And in all this misfortune Job uttered no sinful word".

When his health allowed there was nothing he revelled in more than to be given the opportunity to supply for the local clergy, hearing confessions, saying a public Mass in the parish church, or giving benediction in one or other of the several convents in the neighbourhood.

During my student days Vincent was appointed to teach us Church History. He prepared meticulously for class, often staying up late into the night reading widely, and coming in to class full of enthusiasm for his subject. In dealing with the Reformation he used the phrase "your bishops and your princes" but for the life of me I cannot recall what these eminent gentlemen did or said. It was in those far-off days too that

an elderly and sometimes crabbed lay brother went to Vincent and with not a little drama disclosed that he was fed up with life and was going to jump into the lake and end it all. "Good for you, Brother" said Vincent "come on and I'll watch you", and he led the way; the good brother did not follow him!

By human reckoning Vincent's life would not be described as one of great achievements. Even his own confrères sometimes referred to him as "poor Vincent" — though that was said with compassion and affection. For those of us who lived with him and were privileged to know him more intimately than most Vincent was a very lovable confrère. His courtesy and graciousness came straight from the pages of the *Introduction to the Devout Life;* he would go out of his way to ensure that visiting confrères were made to feel welcome; he enjoyed the camaraderie and banter of the Community Room, even when that was at his own expense. And he could give as good as he got, yet good naturedly and without any trace of malice.

I think there were times when he felt he was a burden on the community, unable through human frailty to contribute much to the mission of the Congregation. He envied the confrères on active service, especially the missioners. But he never doubted that he was a member of the Little Company and "one of the family". That was his consolation and his strength.

The Family has been blessed by Vincent's presence, his prayers and his sufferings. How blessed will not be fully revealed until the Day of Judgement.

Diarmuid O Hegarty CM

VINCENT O'DEA, CM
Born: Sheffield, 13 May 1913.
Entered the Congregation: 7 September 1931.
Final vows: 8 September 1933.
Ordained a priest in Clonliffe College by Dr Wall, Auxiliary Bishop of Dublin 2 October 1938.

APPOINTMENTS

1938-1939	St Joseph's Blackrock.
1939-1943	St Patrick's, Armagh.
1943-1945	St Vincent's, Castleknock.
1946-1978	St Joseph's, Blackrock.
1978-1984	St Mary's, Lanark.

Died 21 July 1984.

Note: For reasons of health VO'D had periods of residence in Sheffield and Mill Hill which do not appear to have been official appointments.