

COLLOQUE

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Editorial

The first article in this issue is particularly interesting. It illustrates how something can be stated, and constantly repeated over centuries, without anyone investigating in depth the point in question.

The second article, held over from the last issue because of its length, follows on Michael Prior's study of the Congregation's motto in the two previous issues.

The third article brings together for the first time all the material which seems to be available about an eighteenth century Irish confrere.

The two items in the Forum section are more contemporary, reviewing a book and reporting on a seminar.

The coming together in this issue of the article on Fr Robert Hanna and the obituary of Fr Andy Kavanagh makes a link between the first Irish Vincentian (and probably the first Irish priest) to minister in China and the last surviving Irish Vincentian to have ministered there.

A New Look at an Old Temptation

Stafford Poole & Douglas Slawson

(Reprinted from *Vincentian Heritage*, Vol. 11 No. 2,1990. Spellings and, in places, punctuation have been altered to conform to usage this side of the Atlantic. References in footnotes to quotations have been recast in the form normally used in this journal).

One of the crucial events in the life of St Vincent de Paul is the history of how, when a doctor of theology suffered a prolonged temptation against faith, St Vincent prayed to have the temptation pass to himself, endured it for three or four years, and was finally freed from it only when he made a resolution (not a vow, as is often said) to spend his life in the service of the poor. For more than three centuries this chapter in the saint's life has been viewed as a major stage in his growth in holiness, one which opened to him his life's work and that of the Congregation he founded. In view of the importance that has been attached to the incident, it is surprising that it has never been given the historical study it deserves.

The Twofold Account

The full story was first related in two parts by Louis Abelly, author of the earliest biography of St Vincent. He began it with a long quotation from a conference on faith that the saint gave at some unknown time to the priests of the Mission:

I knew a famous doctor, who for a long time had defended the Catholic faith against heretics in his capacity as canon theologian which he had held in a diocese (1). When the late Queen Marguerite called him to her service because of his learning and piety, he was obliged to leave his employment. Since he no longer preached or catechized, he was assaulted in his leisure by a

violent temptation against faith. This, by the way, teaches us how dangerous it is to be idle, either in body or in spirit. For just as a field, no matter how good it may be, still, if it lies fallow quickly produces thistles and thorns, so our souls cannot remain for long in leisure and idleness without experiencing some passions or temptations that draw it toward evil. This doctor, then, seeing himself in this unhappy situation, came to me to tell me that he was disturbed by quite violent temptations against faith and that he had horrible thoughts of blasphemy against Jesus Christ, and even of despair, to such an extent that he felt impelled to throw himself out of a window. And he was reduced to such an extremity that it was finally necessary to dispense him from reciting his breviary and celebrating Holy Mass, and even of saying any prayer whatever, to such an extent that as soon as he merely began to recite the Our Father, it seemed to him that he saw a thousand spectres that greatly troubled him. His imagination was so distracted and his spirit so exhausted by reason of making acts of resistance to his temptations that he could no longer make them. In this pitiful state, someone suggested this practice, which was that whenever he turned his hand or one of his fingers toward the city of Rome, or even toward some church, he signified by this movement and by this action that he believed everything that the Roman Church believed. What happened after that? When he fell ill, God finally had pity on this poor doctor. He was instantly freed from all his temptation [and] the blindfold was suddenly removed from the eyes of his spirit. He began to see all the truths of faith, but with such clarity that he thought he felt and touched them with his finger. And at length he died, giving loving thanks to God for having allowed him to fall into these temptations in order to deliver him from them with so much benefit and he exhibited the greatest and most admirable feelings for the mysteries of religion (2).

Abelly goes on to say that St Vincent made no mention of the means that he used to free the doctor from these temptations. It was only after Vincent's death that the other part of the story became known. According to Abelly, the testimony was given by a person worthy of belief (*une personne tres digne de foy*) who submitted it in writing and who had no knowledge of Saint Vincent's conference quoted above (3).

When Monsieur Vincent was given the duty of consoling this man

who had revealed his spiritual pains to him, he advised him to resist them and to do some good works in order to obtain the grace of being freed from them. Later it happened that this man fell ill and that in his illness the evil spirit redoubled its efforts to cause him to be lost. So Monsieur Vincent, seeing him reduced to this pitiful condition and fearing with good reason that he would eventually succumb to these temptations to infidelity and blasphemy and that he would die poisoned by that implacable hatred that the devil has toward the Son of God, turned in prayer to ask his divine goodness to be pleased to deliver the sick man from this danger and he offered himself to God in a spirit of penance to bring upon himself, if not the same pain, at least such effects of his justice as he would be pleased to have him suffer, imitating in this regard the charity of Jesus Christ, who was burdened with our infirmities in order to cure us of them and who satisfied the penalties that we had merited. God willed by his secret providence to take the charitable Monsieur Vincent at his word and hearing his prayer, he freed the sick man completely from his temptation, returned calm to his spirit, clarified his troubled and darkened faith, and gave him sentiments of religion and gratitude toward Our Lord Jesus Christ, so filled with a tenderness and devotion that he had never had. But at the same time, O admirable way of the divine wisdom!, God permitted that this same temptation should pass into the soul of Monsieur Vincent, who was then strongly assailed by it. He used prayers and mortifications to be rid of it, but the only result was to cause him to suffer those fumes of hell with patience and resignation, yet without losing hope that eventually God would take pity on him. Nevertheless, since he realized that God wanted to test him by permitting the devil to attack him with so much violence, he did two things. The first was that he wrote his profession of faith on a piece of paper, which he placed over his heart, as a specific remedy for the evil that he was experiencing, and making a general repudiation of all thoughts contrary to faith, he made a pact with Our Lord that whenever he put his hand on this piece of paper, as he frequently did, he intended by this action and by this movement of his hand to renounce the temptation, even though he did not say a word by his mouth, and at the same time he lifted his heart to God and gently turned his spirit from his pain, thus confounding the devil, without speaking to him or paying him any heed.

The second remedy that he employed was that of doing the

opposite of what the temptation suggested to him, trying to act by faith and to render honour and service to Jesus Christ. This is what he did particularly by visiting the sick poor of the Hôpital de la Charité in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, where he was living at that time. This charitable work being one of the most meritorious of Christendom, it was thus the most appropriate to testify to Our Lord with what faith he believed in his words and his examples and with what love he wanted to serve him, since he said that he considered as done to himself the service that is rendered to the least of his brothers. By this means God gave to Monsieur Vincent the grace to draw such great profit from this temptation that he not only never had any occasion to confess any fault that he might have committed in this matter, but even those remedies which he used were to him like the source of innumerable goods that they afterwards made to flow into his soul.

Finally, after three or four years having passed in this violent condition, and Monsieur Vincent always groaning before God under the very fatiguing weight of these temptations, and nonetheless to strengthen himself more and more against the devil and to confound him, one day he decided to take a firm and inviolable resolution to honour Jesus Christ further and in order to imitate him more perfectly than he had yet done, which was that of giving his entire life out of love for him to the service of the poor. He had no more formed this resolution in his spirit than by a marvelous effect of grace, all those suggestions of the evil spirit dissipated and vanished; his heart, which had for so long been in oppression, was returned to a sweet freedom, and his soul was filled with such an abundant light that he admitted on different occasions that he thought he saw the truths of faith with a totally special light (4).

Abelly interprets this resolution as the source from which the great accomplishments of Saint Vincent's later life would flow: "It can be said that from it God, by his grace, later drew all the great works that were done by his servant for the help and salvation of an infinite number of poor" (5). He goes on to say that in addition to the person who gave this testimony, there were very many other persons of merit and virtue, still living, who had related the same story. They claimed to have heard it from Monsieur Vincent himself who told them about it in confidence in order "to have them make use of the same remedies in order to obtain relief and healing of similar pains of spirit" (6).

Biographers after Abelly

This account has been accepted and repeated by subsequent biographers of Saint Vincent de Paul. After Abelly the first of these was the eighteenth-century French theologian Pierre Collet who admitted that “the event has so much of the extraordinary about it that I would have suppressed it, if it were not based on evidence that admits no exception or contradiction” (7). Collet described the account in more vivid language than the quotations given by Abelly (8). He also said that it was Saint Vincent who advised the doctor to turn toward a church or Rome, an assertion that Saint Vincent did not make. Collet went on to show that Saint Vincent helped many persons who were tempted against faith, including a virtuous priest whose difficulty about an article of faith was resolved by the saint’s words (9).

Biographers after Collet have repeated this account, added details, and interpreted it as a decisive step on the road to sanctity and Vincent’s future works. Among the more important of these authors were the Abbé Maynard (10), Emmanuel de Broglie (11), Emile Bougaud (who rather gratuitously states that the doctor was “a victim probably of his own pride”)(12), Arthur Loth (who speaks of it as “this marvelous grace from on high that confirmed him in his vocation”) (13), Paul Renaudin (who apparently was the first to call the theologian a doctor of the Sorbonne) (14), Henri Lavedan (15), M V Woodgate (16), Pierre Coste (17), Jean Calvet (who embellishes the story by saying that the doctor was also tempted “to commit sins of the flesh”) (18), Jean Mauduit (who also calls the theologian a doctor of the Sorbonne and identifies him with the Dominican preacher Nicholas de Coeffêteau) (19), Iginio Giordani (20), André Dodin (21), and Luigi Mezzadri (22). In addition to his biographers other students of Saint Vincent’s life have found in the incident a key element in this spiritual development. Pierre Deffrennes saw it as one of the steps in Vincent’s discovery of his vocation, although he was dubious that Vincent’s temptation against faith was connected with that of the theologian (23). The preparatory commission for the Vincentian general assembly of 1980 included the episode in a description of Saint Vincent’s spiritual journey. The committee’s interpretation of the event reflects its importance to the hagiography of Saint Vincent and his community: “Vincent’s faith was thus marked by this acute human crisis. The solution to it he found in the service of the poor, in the mystique of the poor. The price was three or four years of disarray and of interior darkness. Afterward Vincent became a model of faith. This was forged in the crucible of suffering. At the very moment of experiencing doubts and the attack of the evil spirit, he strengthened himself with decisive

personal convictions” (24).

A number of writers in *Colloque*, the excellent publication of the Vincentian Province of Ireland, have testified to the impact that the account has had on present-day interpreters of Saint Vincent de Paul. Patrick McCrohan writes, “All his efforts to distract himself from temptations against his faith failed until he recognized that what God was doing was purifying him prior to calling him to find Jesus Christ in the Poor” (25). Pdraig Regan describes how Vincent “slowly, painfully and persistently propels himself toward the light, senses rather than sees God’s light in the ambient darkness, and ends by finding his life’s vocation in this apparently endless night of evil” (26). Similarly Roderic Crowley calls the temptation “the real turning point” in the saint’s life (27). Biographers and commentators have been almost unanimous in viewing this episode as pivotal in Saint Vincent’s discernment of his vocation and hence that of the Congregation of the Mission (28).

The first person to express publicly a doubt about the historicity of the account was the French author Antoine Redier in 1927 (29). His biography, the so-called “true life” of Saint Vincent, was the first one to be based on Pierre Coste’s publication of documents on the saint’s life and works. It was criticised for its sceptical approach to some incidents in Vincent’s life, such as the Tunisian captivity, and was banned from the houses of the Daughters of Charity. With regard to the account of Vincent’s temptation given by the unknown witness, Redier wrote, “A story like this needs refined and solid proofs in order to be believed, especially when there is question of such a person [the unnamed witness]”. He added that it would be a pleasure to believe such a thing of Saint Vincent but that it was necessary to forego the pleasure (30).

A stronger position was taken in 1950 by Pierre Debongnie, professor of Church history at Louvain University. After evaluating and rejecting an account of a retreat made by Pierre de Berulle, Adrien Bourdoise, and Saint Vincent, during which the three supposedly formulated their plans for the reform of the French Church (31), Debongnie turns to the story of Vincent’s temptation.

This “moving tradition” is no more reliable than the preceding one. Abelly’s testimony is not enough ... it is not supported by any declaration by the saint. Vincent never made any allusion to a vow [*sic*] of this kind nor to this heroic substitution. If he never spoke of it, who knew of it? Furthermore, where should these three or four years be placed? And here again one comes up against what

is most certain in Vincent's spiritual psychology, the established principle of waiting for the indications of providence (32).

Having challenged the story, Debonnie did not elaborate on or respond to the challenges. The traditional account held the field.

The author of the most recent major biography, José María Román, accepts and conflates the two accounts given by Abelly but adds a confusing observation: "The assertion that Vincent had asked God for the transference of the temptation comes from Abelly, who tells us that he received it from a person worthy of all credence and one who did not know of Vincent's account. On the basis of only this testimony it is of doubtful credibility. On the other hand, the historicity of the temptation itself ... is incontestable" (33). He does not try to reconcile the "incontestable" historicity of the account with the fact that the only evidence for it is of "doubtful ... credibility". In a paper given at the Vincentian Month in Paris in 1984 Stafford Poole expressed doubts about Abelly's addition to Saint Vincent's account (34). Jaime Corera, like Deffrennes, accepted the idea that Vincent underwent a crisis of faith but rejected the transfer from the troubled theologian as the source of it, despite the fact that the two rest on the same foundation (35). The late Jean Morin, in a paper prepared for the Vincentian Month in Paris in 1987, showed some hesitation about accepting Abelly's account uncritically (36). The historicity of the account was rejected by Douglas Slawson in an article in *Vincentian Heritage* in 1989 (37).

What Abelly presents in his biography is two different accounts which in his judgement belong together. The first is that of Saint Vincent himself, but it is in Saint Vincent's words as given by Abelly. The latter was not above altering the saint's words in order to make them sound more pious or genteel (38). The second is the testimony of an unknown witness, submitted between the saint's death in 1660 and the publication of Abelly's book in 1664, which relates events of almost fifty years before. Both accounts deal with temptations against faith but in their present form the only connection between the two is made by Abelly himself.

Who was this unnamed witness? In dealing with testimony that is essentially hearsay, this is an important question. Both Loth and Lavedan state explicitly that it was St Vincent's friend, the Canon de Saint-Martin, who was the source of much of Abelly's information about Vincent's early life (39). In view of Abelly's known reliance on Saint-Martin, this is quite possible. The canon was the brother of Louis de Saint-Martin, son-in-law of Monsieur de Comet the younger,

Vincent's patron after the death of Monsieur de Comet the elder, and the person to whom the letters on the Tunisian captivity were addressed. It is not clear how long the canon had known St Vincent, but the latter's relations with the Saint-Martin family went back at least to 1610 (40). Coste, however, gives a negative verdict on this source:

Canon de Saint-Martin who was entrusted with the task of collecting information on the Saint's native district was not the man needed for such a work, for he had neither the taste for research, nor the knowledge of local history, nor the critical flair which every historian needs if he is to distinguish between truth and error in the evidence placed before him. The good old Canon's word is not authoritative; facts which he alleges and which have no other foundation rest on a very shaky basis, and it would therefore be wrong to regard them as indubitable (41).

José María Román rejects this assessment, which he considers exaggerated, adding that it "has been repeated without critical judgement" (42). It should be noted, however, that there were major gaps in the canon's knowledge of Vincent's early years. For example, prior to the discovery of St Vincent's two letters on the Tunisian captivity of 1605-1607, Saint-Martin had been entirely ignorant of that episode in his friend's life (43). Abelly's description of the witness as being totally worthy of credence is part of the standard formula he employed when referring to any of his sources. As Dodin has pointed out, this was common to hagiographic history in which religion and virtue in a witness were as important as veracity or knowledge (44).

Even a casual reading shows that the two accounts cannot be fully harmonised. St Vincent clearly attributes the deliverance of the troubled theologian to the divine mercy and the practices that had been recommended to him. The testimony of the anonymous witness does not mention these. St Vincent says that the doctor was delivered as soon as he fell ill, whereas the second account states that the temptations threatened to follow him even to the point of death. St Vincent himself, in all his surviving writings and conferences, never alludes to his having suffered such temptations or made a resolution to dedicate his life to the service of the poor. The differences between the two accounts are not in themselves insurmountable, but they are sufficient to raise questions about the relationship of the second account to St Vincent's.

Also significant is the fact that Abelly does not relate the anonymous account to St Vincent's early years in Paris. In narrating those years in

the first part of his biography he never mentions the temptation (45). Rather, he puts it in the last third of his work with only the vaguest chronological reference and very little biographical context. In his description of Vincent's first stay in Paris Abelly's only reference to the saint's working at the Hôpital de la Charité is a passing one in a quotation from Queen Marguerite's secretary – and then it is mentioned as an example of his virtue, not in reference to any personal crisis (46). The story of the temptation is presented as a somewhat isolated example of Vincent's virtue and seems appended almost as an afterthought.

The study that follows will address the two questions posed by Debongnie, that is, evaluating the episode from the point of view of St Vincent's spiritual psychology and its place in the chronology of his life.

St Vincent's Spiritual Psychology

The first difficulty that arises in the account given by the unnamed witness is that it is not in accord with what is known about St Vincent's manner of acting, both during this period (1610-1617) and later.

Vincent de Paul was extremely reticent in talking about himself or his accomplishments. Some things were kept completely hidden during his lifetime: the date and place of his ordination to the priesthood, his supposed captivity in Tunisia, and the date and circumstances of his arrival in Paris. When in 1658 the Canon de Saint-Martin forwarded to St Lazare the recently discovered letters of 1607-1608 that narrated St Vincent's Tunisian adventure, Brother Bertrand Ducournau, Vincent's secretary, wrote to Saint-Martin on behalf of some of the saint's closest associates:

They would like very much to know how he departed from the legate to Avignon who brought him to Rome, what he did at that court, where he went on leaving Italy, when and why he came to Paris, in what year and in what place he was made a priest. And if you know, Monsieur, any other particulars of his youth, you will do us a favour in telling us about them. He never speaks of himself except to his shame and never to make known the graces that God has given him (47).

This letter makes clear the fact that persons who had known St Vincent for decades, in some cases for almost half a century, had only a scant knowledge of his early life. When he spoke of his childhood and

youth, it was in stereotyped phrases that often put him in a bad light, for example, having been a swineherd or having been ashamed of his father (48). Ducournau noted that “he has quite often told us that he was the son of a farm worker, that he tended his father’s pigs, and other humiliating things but he kept from us all those that would redound to his honour” (49). Throughout his life, whenever he told his confres anything that could have reflected credit on him, he recounted it in the third person. In light of this persistent reserve it is antecedently improbable that he could have told anyone, even in spiritual direction, of an incident that would have shown him in such an heroic light (50).

In view of Vincent’s well established principle of not running ahead of providence, it is also improbable that Vincent would have taken such a serious step without seeking advice or spiritual direction. Private vows of various kinds were not unusual in the French religious milieu of the time, but they were usually taken only after a period of prayer and reflection. When Jean-Jacques Olier desired to make a vow of servitude to Christ in 1641, his confessor made him wait a full year before doing so (51). Although in St Vincent’s case there is question of a resolution rather than a vow, it still was a serious step. During the time period under consideration his spiritual director was Pierre de BÉrulle, the future cardinal and dominant figure of the French Catholic Reformation. Vincent did little or nothing without BÉrulle’s advice, at least prior to 1617. BÉrulle directed him toward his service in the Gondi household and arranged his pastorates at Clichy and Châtillon-les-Dombes. The saint consulted him before leaving the Gondis for Chatillon in mid-1617 and after returning later in the year. Though Vincent and Berulle later parted company, with perhaps some ill feeling on Berulle’s part, during the years 1610-1617 Vincent would not have made any major decision without consulting him. In his later life the saint continued the practice of seeking advice as a means of discerning God’s will, as when he consulted Andre Duval both about securing papal approval of the Congregation of the Mission and the acceptance of the priory of St Lazare (52). Yet in Abelly’s account there is no indication of any recourse to another person. St Vincent is pictured as acting on his own.

It is highly unlikely that a prudent director like BÉrulle would have allowed his directee to undertake something as irresponsible as the transfer of a temptation. It is even more unlikely that Vincent, as the unnamed witness claims, would have advised his own directees to take similar steps. It is contrary to what is known of the saint’s prudence and aversion to the extravagant and singular in the spiritual life. This same

aversion makes it improbable that Vincent would even have contemplated such an action for himself. For him the summit of virtue was to be found in responsiveness to the divine will and an unflagging devotion to the duties and works that this will imposed on an individual. His spirituality was based very much on the *via media*.

Viewed in themselves these objections are not sufficient to overthrow the Abelly account. A greater difficulty is that of situating the episode in the chronology of St Vincent's life.

The Problem of Chronology

Some elements of this chronology are quite clear, others less so. The exact date of Vincent de Paul's arrival in Paris is uncertain, but in all probability it was in 1609 (53). His first residence was in a small apartment near Saint-Germain-des-Prés which he shared with a judge from Sore, in the Landes, who later accused him of theft (54). He wrote to his mother on 17 February 1610, indicating that he had not yet been able to find a suitable benefice or employment (55). Later he found a position since on 17 May 1610 he was mentioned for the first time as an almoner to Queen Marguerite de Valois, the repudiated wife of Henry IV, though the appointment was probably made earlier in the year (56). From 17 May 1610 until 7 December 1612 Vincent was living near the queen's palace (57). This was adjacent to the Hôpital de la Charité, where Abelly's witness says that Vincent worked. On 20 October 1611 the saint, probably acting as intermediary for the master of the Paris mint, presented a gift of 15,000 *livres* to the hospital (58). On 13 October 1611 François Bourgoing resigned his parish at Clichy in favour of Vincent de Paul, who took possession on 12 May 1612 (59). In the following year, at Bérulle's urging, he entered the service of Monsieur and Madame de Gondi as tutor to their children, while administering the parish at Clichy through a vicar. One result of this was that Vincent was named pastor of the parish of Gamaches in the archdiocese of Rouen (28 February 1614), over which Monsieur de Gondi had the right of presentation (60). It is not known how long he held the position, though he clearly must have been an absentee pastor. On 25 January 1617 he gave the famous sermon on general confession in the church of Folleville, a village situated on the Gondi estates. Though in hindsight he came to view it as the first sermon of the mission, it did not immediately lead to any organised work of evangelization. Some time between April and July Vincent was making secret arrangements

to leave the Gondis and he soon fled their household to become pastor at Châtillon-les-Dombes (61). In December 1617 he was compelled to return by the entreaties of Madame de Gondi and those she had enlisted to help her. He resigned his post in Châtillon on 31 January 1618. During his second stay with the Gondis he acted as their chaplain and began the process of rural evangelization that would lead to the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission. The purpose of this chronology is to establish the framework within which the three or four years of the temptation should be placed. Since the doctor of theology in Vincent's account underwent his temptation as a result of entering the service of Queen Marguerite, this temptation should logically be placed between St Vincent's entrance into the same service (between February and May 1610) and his possession of the parish of Clichy (12 May 1612). Abelly's anonymous witness states that Vincent's temptation occurred when he was living in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, something that on the basis of known dates would bracket it between May 1610 and December 1611. The only known date for any contact between Vincent and the *Fate ben fratelli* or Brothers of St John of God at the Hopital de la Charité is October 1611. If, as Abelly says, this was to counteract his temptation against faith, then it would be necessary to situate the beginning of the temptation at least in mid-1611. If it lasted three or four years, then it would have begun no earlier than 1610 or later than 1611, and would have ended no earlier than 1613 or later than 1615. This would mean that the temptation was raging during his year at Clichy (1612-1613), something that contradicts Vincent's own testimony that this was one of the happiest periods of his life (62):

This gave me so much consolation and made me so happy that I used to say to myself: "My God! How happy you are to have such good people!". And I would add: "I think that the pope himself is not so happy as a parish priest in the midst of such goodhearted people". One day His Eminence, Cardinal de Retz, asked me: "Well, sir, how are you?" I told him: "My Lord, I am so happy that I cannot express it". "Why?" "Because I have such good people, so obedient to everything I tell them that I think to myself that neither the Holy Father, nor you, My Lord, is as happy as I" (63).

Those are not the words of a man "always groaning before God under the very fatiguing weight of these temptations" or with a heart "in oppression", as Abelly's witness claims.

If Vincent's temptation ended between 1613 and 1615 and did so

because of a resolution to devote his life to the poor, then it would be logical to expect a major change at this time, a radical conversion in favour of the poor. All known evidence shows that this was not the case (64). The decisions that he took at this time, all of them with Bérulle's approval or encouragement, cannot be reconciled with Abelly's assertion of a newly-found orientation toward the poor. Vincent's lifestyle was not substantially altered. He did not, for example, suddenly divest himself of the various benefices and employments that he had secured in order to obtain a comfortable living. On the contrary, it was a matter of years before those were phased out. Saint-Léonard de Chaume, which he received in 1610, was renounced in 1616, not as a gesture of self-sacrifice, but because of lawsuits and lack of revenue. About Gamaches, which he received in 1614, nothing is known except his appointment. Ecouis, accepted in 1615, was given up at an unknown date. He remained the absentee pastor of Clichy until 1626, the year after the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission, and apparently continued to receive a regular income from it (65). The most mysterious of all, Saint-Nicolas de Grosse-Chauve, was obtained in 1624, but nothing more is known about it. He also made an oblique reference to being prior of a chapter when he was pastor of Châtillon-les-Dombes in 1617 (66).

Neither was there any clear line of demarcation in his works. If Bérulle had counselled or approved this resolution (which, as Vincent's spiritual director, he surely would have known about), he did little or nothing to see that it was implemented (67). In 1613, at Bérulle's urging, St Vincent became a tutor in an aristocratic family. When he left the Gondis in 1617, two to four years after the resolution would supposedly have been taken, it was not to go to the poor but to the parish of Châtillon-les-Dombes, where Bérulle had arranged for him to be pastor (68). This was not a village of paupers but a small walled town and market centre. It was, wrote Coste, "beautifully situated in a smiling, fertile valley, diversified by woods, meadows and vine-clad hill-sides... In those days it contained a working population of about two thousand souls, who left much to be desired both from the point of view of morals and religion" (69). While at Châtillon, Vincent continued to be the absentee pastor of Clichy and probably of Gamaches as well. His ministry in Châtillon was to the religiously abandoned, not the materially destitute, and consisted largely of reforming the local clergy, uplifting public morals, and converting heretics. Châtillon is remembered in his biographies as the locale where the first Confraternity of Charity was established. It should be noted, however, that the first

Charity was a service to the helpless sick, not the poor. It is significant that those parishioners of Châtillon who later gave testimony for the process of Vincent's canonisation emphasised his conversions of heretics, reconciliation of lapsed Catholics, and reform of the local clergy (70).

When Vincent left Châtillon in 1617, it was not to dedicate his life to the poor but to return to the aristocratic Gondis, where he devoted his time to being their chaplain and to founding confraternities of charity, ministering to the galley slaves, and giving missions on the Gondi estates (71). One of the conditions of this return was a promise to Madame de Gondi that he would remain with her until her death (72). Six years later (17 April 1625) this condition was written into the contract with the Gondis which formed the basis for the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission: "The said lord and lady understand that the said Sieur Paul will make his present and continual residence in their home in order to continue for them and their family the spiritual assistance that he has rendered to them for many years" (73). It was only after Madame de Gondi's death on 25 June 1625 that he went to live with the community that he had founded. There was no linear movement from the supposed self-dedication to the poor to an actual service to them.

The reality of Vincent de Paul's life is that his accomplishments did not grow out of a dramatic conversion that revealed his destiny to him but out of a response to happenings and needs in which he saw the call of providence. His works resulted from events that he did not anticipate and took directions that he did not foresee. The first sermon of the mission, delivered at Folleville on 25 January 1625, came about unexpectedly. So did the initial evangelization of the rural districts that followed his return to the Gondi household eleven months later. With considerable exaggeration Coste writes that "the mission at Folleville clearly revealed to Vincent de Paul what God expected of him... After a long and terrible struggle, God had set him free from temptations against the Faith after he had made a resolution to devote the rest of his days to the service of the poor" (74). That, however, is not what happened. St Vincent did not follow up this event at Folleville nor do his biographers speak of any missions that he gave in its immediate aftermath, except for some scattered ones in the vicinity of Folleville (75). It was only in hindsight that he came to view it as the first sermon of the mission. Within six months Vincent fled from the Gondis to return to the life in which he had previously found the greatest satisfaction, that of being a pastor in a small country town. After his return he resumed his association with the Gondi family and made a lifetime commitment to

living with them as their chaplain, while at the same time inaugurating a programme of rural missions. It was only with the passage of time and in response to the needs he encountered that Vincent de Paul eventually found his true vocation. And even then it was accepted slowly and with a certain reluctance, only after he had become convinced that no one else would meet the religious needs of the people in the rural districts of France. This process of personal and apostolic discovery can be documented both from his life and his testimony, without any need to appeal to dramatic conversions. It is consistent with the Vincent of history and his lifelong process of discernment (76). Although the account given by Abelly on the word of an anonymous witness has gained force through centuries of repetition, it is no stronger than the credibility of its source and its intrinsic reliability. A close and detailed analysis shows that it is historically doubtful at best and that there are substantial reasons for rejecting it. There is no reliable evidence of any prolonged temptation against the faith at any point in St Vincent's life.

Notes

1. *Theologal*. A member of a cathedral chapter who was charged with teaching theology to candidates for clerical orders.
2. Louis Abelly: *La vie du venerable serviteur de Dieu Vincent de Paul Instituteur et premier superieur de la Congregation de la Mission* (Paris, 1664), book 3, chapter 11, pp. 116-117; Pierre Coste, CM: *Saint Vincent de Paul: Conferences, entretiens, documents*, 14 vols. (Paris, 1920-1926), (XI 32-34), hereinafter cited simply by volume and page number(s) in this form.
3. Abelly: *ibid.*, p. 117.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 117-119. 5. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Pierre Collet: *La Vie de Saint Vincent de Paul, Instituteur de la Congregation de la Mission, & des Filles de la Charite*, 2 vols. (Nancy, 1748), I, p. 31.
8. *Ibid.*, I, pp. 31-34.
9. *Ibid.*, I, 34; Abelly, *Vie*, book 3, chapter 2, p. 6.
10. L'Abbé [Michel Ulysse] Maynard: *Saint Vincent de Paul: sa vie, son temps, ses oeuvres, son influence*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1860), I, pp. 69-71.
11. Emmanuel de Broglie: *Saint Vincent de Paul*, trans. Mildred Partridge, (London, 1906), pp. 30-32.
12. Emile Bougaud: *History of St Vincent de Paul Founder of the Congregation of the Mission (Vincentians) and the Sisters of Charity*, trans. from the 2nd French edition by the Rev. Joseph Brady, CM, 2 vols. (London, New York and Bombay, 1899), pp 34-35.
13. Arthur Loth: *Saint Vincent de Paul et sa mission sociale*, (Paris, 1906), pp. 50-53.

14. Paul Renaudin: *Saint Vincent de Paul*, (Marseille, 1927), p. 41.
15. Henri Lavedan: *The Heroic Life of Sain! Vincent de Paul*, trans. Fr. Leonard CM, (London, 1929). pp. 76-80.
16. M V Woodgate: *Saint Vincent de Paul*, (Westminster, Maryland, n.d.), p. 9. She has an unverified citation regarding the resolution to serve the poor: "he never had any devotion to the poor, nay, rather the opposite".
17. Pierre Coste: *The Life and Works of Saint Vincent de Paul*, trans. Joseph Leonard, CM, 3 vols. (Westminster, Maryland, 1952), I, pp. 48-49.
18. Jean Calvet: *Saint Vincent de Paul*, trans. Lancelot C Sheppard, (New York, 1948), pp. 47-48.
19. Jean Mauduit: *Saint Vincent de Paul*, (Paris, 1960), p. 109. Coeffêteau (1574-1623) was court preacher to Henry IV, administrator of the diocese of Metz, and bishop of Marseille. Mauduit's identification of the theologian with Coëffeteau appears to be erroneous. Aside from the fact that it is highly improbable that a Dominican would have been a member of a cathedral chapter, the date of his death is too long after the events to tally with Vincent's account.
20. Igino Giordani: *Saint Vincent de Paul: Servant of the Poor*, trans. Thomas J Tobin, (Milwaukee, 1961), pp. 15-16.
21. André Dodin: "Saint Vincent de Paul, mystique de l'action religieuse". *Mission et Charité*, No. 29/30 (January-June 1968), p. 33; "La misère vue par M. Vincent", *Mission et Charité*, No. 4, p 412.
22. Luigi Mezzadri: *Saint Vincent de Paul (1581-1660)*. (Paris, 1985), p. 25.
23. Pierre Deffrennes: "La vocation de Saint Vincent de Paul", *Revue d'Ascétique et Mystique*, 13 (1932), pp. 398-399. Deffrennes accepts the reality of a prolonged temptation against faith, which he dates from 1613 to 1616, but is sceptical of the story of the transference. Despite this, however, he uses the time frame given by Abelly's unknown witness.
24. English Translation: *Saint Vincent's Spiritual Experience and Our Own*, (Perryville, Missouri, n.d.), p. 7. The document was originally published in French in 1977. No single author was given. The members of the commission were Luigi Beta, René Dulucq, José M. Sanchez Mallo, Carey Leonard, Jean-Pierre Renouard, Ventura Sarasola and Italo Zedde.
25. Patrick McCrohan: "Vincent de Paul: Minister of Restlessness", *Colloque 4* (Spring 1981), p. 6.
26. Padraig Regan: "St Vincent and Discernment", *Colloque 11* (Spring 1985), p. 348.
27. Roderic Crowley: "The Mystery of the Poor", *Colloque 18* (Autumn 1988), p. 408.
28. No mention is made here of Henri Bremond, whose treatment of St Vincent is not biographical. He mentions the temptation against faith only in passing, when dealing with a similar episode in the life of Jean-Jacques Olier: *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France depuis la fin des guerres de religion jusqu'à nos jours*, 11 vols. (Paris, 1921-23), Vol. 3: *La conquête mystique: l'école française*, pp 430-431.
29. In the late nineteenth century a German author, Ernst Schafer, a Protestant who wrote a somewhat critical biographical notice on St Vincent, hinted at some scepticism about the transference of the temptation. He wrote that "whatever one is to believe of such a substitution theory, I think that not a word of this is to be lost". ("Vinzenz von Paul", in *Monatschrift für Innere Mission* [December 1893]: p. 95, n. 3). Apparently he meant that he was including the story for

- the sake of completeness. Schafer gives two citations in this note. The first is to the article “Vincentius de Paulo”, by Hollenberg and Zockler in the *Real-Encyclopadie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche* (Leipzig, 1885), 16, pp. 513-516. This article, however, expresses no scepticism about the story. The other citation is of Gerard Uhlhorn: *Die christliche Liebesthatigkeit*, 3 vols. (Stuttgart, 1882-1884), 3, p 212, which says nothing about the temptation.
30. Antoine Redier: *La vraie vie de Saint Vincent de Paul* (Paris 1927), pp. 52-54. As mentioned above Deffrennes was doubtful that St Vincent’s account and that of the unknown witness belonged together (“La vocation de Saint Vincent de Paul”, p. 398, n.2).
 31. A story also rejected by Coste.
 32. Pierre Debongnie: “Saint Vincent de Paul et Abelly”, *Revue d’Histoire Ecclesiastique* 45 (1950), pp. 693-694.
 33. José María Román: *San Vicente de Paúl, I. Biografía* (Madrid, 1981), p. 104, n. 29.
 34. Stafford Poole: “Saint Vincent de Paul, 1595-1617”, *Vincentiana* 4-5-6 (1984), pp. 439-440.
 35. Jaime Corera: *Diez estudios vicencianos* (Salamanca, Editorial CEME, 1983), pp. 30-38. In this study Corera makes several references to a vow to serve the poor rather than a resolution.
 36. Jean Morin: “Les années obscures (1610-1617): la conversion”, *Vincentiana* (1987), pp. 553-554. 37 Douglas Slawson: “Saint Vincent de Paul’s Discernment of his own Vocation and That of the Congregation of the Mission”, *Vincentian Heritage* vol. 10, no. 1(1989), p. 11, n. 39.
 38. For examples see Coste: *Life and Works*, vol. 3, pp. 485-486.
 39. Loth: *Saint Vincent de Paul*, p. 52; Lavedan: *The Heroic Life*, p. 78. Deffrennes: “La vocation de Saint Vincent de Paul”, p. 398, n. 2, speculates that it might have been St Louise de Marillac but the only reason he gives is that she also suffered temptations against faith.
 40. Román: *San Vicente de Paúl*, pp. 33-34. See Vincent’s letter to his mother, from Paris, 17 February 1608 (I, 18).
 41. Coste: *Life and Works*, vol. 3, p. 483.
 42. Román: *San Vicente de Paul*, p. 33, n. 9.
 43. It is not clear just which parts of Abelly’s account of Vincent’s youth came from Saint-Martin, but several are demonstrably erroneous. These include the reference to a chapel at Buglose during the saint’s youth, the chronology of his schooling at Dax, the date of his ordination (all of which are in error but could have been easily verified), the reference to the vacant see of Dax in 1600, and the statement that Cardinal d’Ossat entrusted Vincent with a secret mission to King Henry IV at a time when the cardinal had been dead for six years.
 44. André Dodin: *Le legende et l’histoire: de Monsieur Depaul à Saint Vincent de Paul* (Paris, 1985), pp. 107-115.
 45. Abelly: *Vie*, book 1, chapter 5.
 46. “It is he [Monsieur Defresne, Queen Marguerite’s secretary] who has given this testimony: ‘from that time on, Monsieur Vincent seemed very humble, charitable, and prudent, doing good to everyone, and not being a bother to anyone, circumspect in his words, calmly listening to others, without ever interrupting them, and from that time on he was assiduous in going to visit. serve and exhort the poor sick of the Charité’” (Abelly: *Vie*, book 1, chapter 5, p. 21).
 47. Ducournau to Canon de Saint-Martin, from Paris, August 1658 (VIII 514).

48. Coste: *Life and Works*, vol. 1, pp. 13-14.
49. Ducournau to Saint-Martin (VIII 513-514).
50. Abelly himself commented on this aspect of Vincent's character: "It is true that it will not be easy to narrate what this great servant of God always tried to hide, as much as he could, under the veil of a very profound humility. That is why we can say only what charity or obedience compelled him to make known exteriorly, of which the principal part, which is totally interior and spiritual, is unknown to us" (*Vie*, book 1, chapter 18, p. 75).
51. Christopher J Kauffmann: *Tradition and Transformation in Catholic Culture: The Priests of Saint Sulpice in the United States from 1791 to the Present* (New York, 1988), p. 14.
52. Coste: *Life and Works*, vol. 1, pp. 158, 166, 168, 171.
53. *Ibid.*, vol. I,p43.
54. *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.
55. I 18-20.
56. Coste: *Life and Works*, vol. 1, p. 45, n. 5. In the English translation the note incorrectly cites I 8, as the source and says that the document mentioning St Vincent is a list. It is actually the conferral on Vincent of the abbey of Saint-Leonard de Chaume and is to be found in XIII 8.
57. He was living on the rue de Seine, according to three documents dated 17 May 1610, 20 October 1611, and 7 December 1612, (Coste: *Life and Works*, vol. 1, p. 50, n. 13). The last document presents a problem since St Vincent was pastor of Clichy at that time. Did he continue to maintain a legal domicile in Paris or was he still an almoner to Queen Marguerite, that is, a multiple office holder? Abelly, *Vie*, book 1, chapter 6, p. 24, says that Vincent lived with the Oratory for two years. The Oratory, however, had not yet been founded in France. Louis Batterel, *Memoires pour servir à l'histoire de l'Oratoire*, cited by Coste, *ibid.*, says that Vincent, Bérulle, and some other ecclesiastics led a semi-communitarian life near the Carmelite convent in Paris.
58. Coste, *Life and Works*, vol. 1, p. 50, says that the money was given as a personal gift to St Vincent and he immediately turned it over to the hospital. The original document, however, is ambiguous on the point. See XIII 14-16.
59. Coste: *Life and Works*, vol. 1, p. 54; XIII 17-18.
60. Raymond Chalumeau-André Dodin: "Monsieur Vincent: Curé de Gamaches", *Mission et Charité* 8 (October 1962), p. 495.
61. The sequence of events between the sermon at Folleville and Vincent's departure for Châtillon-les-Dombes is not at all clear. The rector of Châtillon-les-Dombes resigned his position in favour of St Vincent (though he did not know his successor's name at the time) on 19 April 1617. The saint was named pastor on 29 July 1617 and took possession on 1 August (XIII 40-45). On the basis of this document, Coste dates his departure in July (*Life and Works*, vol. 1, p. 74, n. 4). One of the witnesses in the inquiry made of the inhabitants of Châtillon in 1665 stated that he arrived in Lent of 1617 (XIII 47). Roman: *San Vicente de Paúl*, p. 122, n. 6, accepts this date and estimates the arrival at March or April 1617. The inquiry also states that the pastor of Chatillon had died and the post was vacant when Vincent accepted it. This document also credits Berulle and the Oratorians with taking the initiative in offering it to St Vincent, whereas Abelly seems to place the initiative on Vincent's part.
62. Roman: *San Vicente de Paúl*, p. 683, specifically says that the time at Clichy was also part of the time of the temptation.

63. Coste: *Life and Works*, vol. 1, p. 57. This is quoted from a conference to the Daughters of Charity, 27 July 1653 (IX 646).
64. Corera explains Abelly's use of the temptation narratives in the following way: "Abelly uses it evidently in order to provide us with the exact key to the momentous change of direction that Vincent's life underwent after thirty years. Even Abelly, who seems committed to canonizing Vincent from his infancy, had to take into account the fact that the mature Vincent whom he knew had little resemblance, in questions of the vital perspective of faith, to the youthful Vincent of the first letters. He had to explain this change in some way and thought that he had found the explanation in the famous temptation against faith" (*Diez estudios*, p. 30). The difficulty with this explanation is that Abelly did not relate the temptation to Vincent's early life nor did he speak of any sort of conversion. Abelly obviously had a difficulty in attempting to reconcile the picture of Vincent as a saint from childhood with the reality of the youthful and somewhat turbulent priest. His solution was not to attempt any full reconciliation.
65. It was not until 1630 that he received the final payment of income due to him from Clichy. See XIII 85-86.
66. Conference to the Daughters of Charity, 13 February 1646 (IX 243). None of the documents of appointment and resignation make any reference to a chapter.
67. A similar point is made by Corera: *Diez estudios*, p. 33.
68. The authors do not accept Corera's thesis (*Diez estudios*, pp. 38-39) that Châtillon marked Vincent's attempt to reclaim his vocation to the evangelization of the rural poor, but "like Abraham (Heb 11:8) he set forth without really knowing where he was going". The authors believe that Châtillon was an effort to recapture Clichy, not Folleville. It should also be noted that Vincent then held two pastorates, Clichy and Châtillon.
69. Coste: *Life and Works*, vol. 1, p. 72.
70. XIII 45-54. Somewhat anachronistically the witnesses said that he established the Daughters of Charity in Châtillon to take care of the sick poor. This may have been a confused memory of the founding of the Confraternity.
71. It is impossible to tell how much time Vincent actually devoted to these missions. Collet, *Vie*, vol. 1, pp. 87-88, says that he gave missions throughout the dioceses of Beauvais, Soissons, and Sens, and that "he seemed tireless". Collet, however, gives no sources for this. Abelly says that after his return to the Gondis, Vincent gave missions in all the villages on the Gondi estates (*Vie*, book 1, chapter 13, p. 53). On the other hand, there is documentary evidence for only one mission given by Vincent himself between 1617 and 1621. See Jules Melot: "Saint Vincent de Paul missionnaire", *Mission et Charité* 11 (July 1963), p. 249.
72. Coste: *Life and Works*, vol. 1, p. 93.
73. XIII 199; Coste: *Life and Works*, vol. 1, p. 149.
74. Coste: *Life and Works*, vol. 1, p. 70.
75. "During his first stay in the house of the Gondis up to 1617, what absorbed M, Vincent was not in any way the evangelization of the rural poor, but the education of the Gondi children, the spiritual direction of the lady, and the catechizing of their servants" (Corera: *Diez estudios*, pp. 33-34).
76. See Slawson: "Saint Vincent de Paul's Discernment", throughout.

St Vincent and the Bible

Myles Rearden

Introduction

Those who, in my time, joined the Vincentians from Castleknock brought with them a number of scriptural maxims, in the Latin of the Vulgate bible St Vincent knew: the “Boys, praise the Lord!” from over the high altar in the college chapel, and the “We, however, trust in the Lord’s name” of the college emblem. After their arrival at the house of formation in Blackrock they might see the Vincentians’ own scriptural maxim “He sent me to evangelize the poor”, though it was more usually met in the one word *Evangelizare* as title of the student magazine, and even more usually just as “Evange”. Not that any of these were much talked about, or even preached about, as scriptural maxims, but they were part of the heritage acquired. And, strikingly, the order in which they were acquired mirrors their order of priority in the Vincentian mind. At least, that is one of the things I will suggest in this article.

The article examines the motto of the Congregation of the Mission in the light of St Vincent’s use of scripture and what the gospel and preaching it to the poor meant to him. I am writing in the context of Michael Prior’s two recent articles in *Colloque* on the biblical meaning of the motto (1), and James Murphy’s note on the “Dooleyites” (2). And, a little further back, of Aidan McGing’s “1617, a Crucial year for St Vincent” (3). For the most part I do not take issue with what they say; my aim is rather to add to the on-going discussion.

1. A Motto for the Vincentians

The Congregation of the Mission uses the words of Isaiah which Jesus applied to himself in Lk 4:18 as its motto, and, according to Coste, has done so since the time of Vincent himself. In a letter to the superior of the house in Marseilles in 1655 Vincent writes: “I most willingly approve of your putting on the door of your new building the heraldic arms of which you have sent me the design” (V 379). Coste comments in a footnote: “These were the arms of the Congregation of the Mission”, which he then describes in heraldic language; what he says may be translated like this:

The arms represent Christ in blue and red clothing, with his arms extended and his head surrounded with rays, and the motto: *Evangelizare pauperibus misit me* (4).

There does not seem to be any example of the heraldic shield of the Congregation from St Vincent's time still in existence, either in colour or in black and white, either painted or in print. Its general use may not in fact go back beyond the nineteenth century. What do exist are seals or emblems of officials of the Congregation (the superior general, local superiors) showing the figure of Christ as described above, only with an inscription such as *Superioris Generalis Congreg. Missionis* surrounding it (5). That suggests that for most of two centuries a heraldic shield was not felt to be an important unifying factor in the Congregation, but that when the Congregation was being restored after its near-destruction at the time of the French Revolution, the need for such a unifying factor began to be felt; though even then it was not given great prominence. To a large extent, therefore, we must take Coste's word for the antiquity of our heraldic arms as we know them. The putting together of the figure of Christ and the words of Lk 4:18 as a single visual unit is not something we can necessarily push back to St Vincent's time. Visually, what we have is the figure of Christ.

Until the present Constitutions the words of Jesus in Lk 4:18 do not, so far as I am aware, appear in any juridical text of the Congregation, not even in the Common Rules (6). Where they do appear is, with ringing emphasis, in St Vincent's conference on the "end" of the Congregation, on 6 December 1658 (7), and in the heraldic arms of the Congregation. It must, I feel, be significant that it is in the inspirational contexts of a spiritual conference and a set of heraldic arms that the Congregation applies to itself the words of Jesus in Lk 4:18: "He sent me to evangelize the poor". It means that they are used for inspiration, for expressing what Vincentians feel themselves to be, rather than as a set programme or a line of action. In addition, their use on the heraldic shield means that they get their meaning in conjunction with the figure of Christ, present to the visual imagination. It is the one who says the words as much as the words themselves that provides the inspiration: the person of Jesus, saying those words. What I wish to suggest is that the primary meaning of the Vincentian heraldic arms, shield plus motto, is that only Jesus possesses the depth of interiority needed to say the words "He sent me to evangelize the poor". And that, in turn, is why I think it is of considerable pedagogical significance that the would-be Vincentian missionary arriving at Blackrock from Castleknock came with two

maxims expressing his relationship with the Lord, and met a further one expressing how his life was to be spent. “He sent me to evangelize the poor” was laid on the foundation of “Boys, praise the Lord!” and “We, however, trust in the Lord’s name”.

What the Vincentian motto does, then, in its heraldic setting, is to call the missionaries back to the source of their gospel as much as it sends them out with it. And it operates at a deeper level than mere rules, at a level of shared personal conviction, like a banner stretched by the wind.

Michael Prior has made excitingly clear what was said by Jesus in the words of the Vincentian motto, and by Deutero-Isaiah and Luke. He does, however, come unnecessarily close to making a law of it when he writes: “A Lucan Christian ought not to possess more than what is absolutely necessary for survival, as long as others are in need” (8). I would suggest that the words of Jesus in Luke, at least as they occur in the heraldic setting, are an invitation to enter the inner world of Jesus before they are an invitation, still less an imperative, actually to do anything. It is the spirit that comes from entering the inner world of Jesus that saddens believers at the poverty they see and impels them to go into that impoverished situation with good news. Not that they could not get agitated by poverty and aroused to put things right by other spirits too; but the point of the motto is to emphasise the Christian way. So the Vincentian emblem is a call to intimacy with Christ and a promise of the spirit. And, as emanating from Vincent, it expresses his own conversion experience in which, as we shall now see, he discovered Jesus simultaneously in the poor and in scripture.

2. *St Vincent and the Bible*

André Dodin CM, of the Paris Province, a scholar of great distinction, has recently published a little study of St Vincent and the bible, which makes interesting reading (9). Dodin writes vigorously:

When Coste’s 13 volumes were published everyone could see the extraordinary suppleness of the mind that could cite the bible more than 3,500 times, and frequently adapt it to the minds of his listeners.

However

up to 1617, when he was 36, Vincent rarely used the bible and makes us think that he did not know it well.

In the few early sermons we have from his hand

he speaks of God, of Providence, of the Virgin, but the name and face of Jesus only appear for the first time in the Rule of the Châtillon Charité, 1617 (10).

In other words, Vincent's own studies which he pursued energetically at the progressive university of Toulouse (and even in Salamanca, it seems) were as much centred on theological works rather than the bible itself, as those of any of our confreres who studied before, say, 1960. The poor and the bible arrived together into Vincent's life in 1617, the year of the old man of Cannes and the starving family of Châtillon, and they brought with them the living spirit of Jesus. Or, as Dodin puts it,

Christ living in the poor had not yet caught up with [Vincent], had not yet rendered him capable of deciphering the letter of scripture (11).

It was the spiritual progress, almost the ordeal, of the years 1610-1617, that broke Vincent down so that he could hear the call of the Christ of the poor, and then appreciate the articulation of that cry in the scripture.

Vincent's love of scripture as the ultimate "norm of Christian holiness" (12) had its roots in his love of Christian perfection and of the poor where he found Christ, says Dodin. Such an origin explains what Dodin calls "the disconcerting agility of Vincentian exegesis". Usually, Vincent's use of scripture is closer to midrash or eisegesis than to exegesis. "By nature and vocation a catechist", writes Dodin, "Vincent is preoccupied to the point of obsession with getting to the poor a knowledge of the good news of the Son of God". Hence the teaching method he used, that practised by Jesus himself, which is based on everyday illustrations and examples. Such vivid and apt illustrations have a powerful effect on the mind, as we shall see later when we look at one of Vincent's conferences.

Vincent's way of using the bible shows that he regarded it as being for the sake of the poor, not the poor for the bible. So he could say to the Daughters of Charity:

Our Saviour, when he went visiting the poor, passed drinking houses where they shouted jokes at him, made rude noises at him, and was distressed by the low songs and rude talk to be heard in those places (X 185).

Vincent has no difficulty asserting that St Peter wept continually (IX 279). And he argues that there is no need for Marguerite Chetif to change her head-dress to the local one when she is transferred, because our Lord did not change his style of dress when he went to Egypt (VI 114). Vincent even attributes to our Lord a line of the Latin poet Juvenal, and Dodin implies that, had the error been pointed out to him, it would not have concerned him in the least. (The line is *malum pecus inficit omne pecus* – a bad sheep infect the whole flock; perhaps something Vincent as a former shepherd was so familiar with that he assumes the Lord had said it).

Dodin's point is clear: it was experience, experience of needy and suffering people, that taught Vincent. Scripture was a means of expressing that experience, and for speaking into it, with the experience having a certain priority over literal scriptural accuracy. Like canon law, in which Vincent had his professional qualification, scripture was for him something to be utilised in the service of the poor, not to hamper the efforts of those serving them. And most of all, as Dodin concludes, for Vincent "scripture constantly reveals a truer, more solid and more certain world" than this one, and "that invisible world is the abode of Jesus Christ, the eternal sweetness of men and angels", sweetness being the means "by which we reach there, by which we save others and ourselves" (13).

3. *St Vincent's Gospel*

For Vincent, the bible meant above all the New Testament. Reading a chapter of that every day was one of his most important personal and community spiritual exercises. He encourages others to it very warmly in 1642:

We should be very eager to make ourselves faithful to the reading of the chapter of the New Testament, and to producing, as we start, the acts: first, of adoration, adoring the word of God and its truth; second, to enter into the feelings of our Lord as he was expressing these truths; third, to resolve to put them into practice. For example, if I read "Blessed are the meek" I will give myself to God to practise gentleness. Above all, it is important to avoid reading as a kind of research, saying, for instance: "this passage will be useful for such and such a sermon", but to read only for our advancement. And one should not be discouraged either if after reading the chapter several times for a month, two months,

six months, you get nothing out of it. It will come about that at one time we will get a little light, another time a bigger one, and a bigger one still when we need it. A single word is enough to convert us, it only needs one, just as one was enough for St Anthony (14).

That passage may seem to resemble one in the Common Rules too much to be quoted at such length. But it has a vivacity and near-playfulness compared with CR X 8. Eagerness will become respect for the norm of Christian holiness in the rule, and the persistence that yields first a little light, and then more and more, gives way to a ritual of reading with head uncovered and on bended knees. What remains constant is the “ferocious and unconditional fidelity in realising every aspect of his supernatural vocation” with which Vincent faced, and expected others to face, the daily reading of the New Testament (15). His approach shows itself as a powerful *method* for reading the New Testament, which closely parallels his methods of prayer and of preaching, and which looks to me significantly different from the methods of either Ignatius or Cardijn.

The conviction that underlay Vincent’s personal practice of reading the New Testament daily was that it contained *verités*, truths. He gives his fullest expression to that conviction in the chapter on the evangelical maxims in the Common Rules, and in his thirteen conferences explaining it. The remainder of this section of the article will deal with the first of those conferences: “On the maxims of the gospel”.

The conference begins by recapitulating what had been said on an earlier occasion about the aim or purpose of the Congregation. Vincent repeated several times “in a grave and measured tone” that the aim of the Company is to work firstly and above all things for one’s own perfection, and to do that by imitating the example and following the teaching of our Lord. “It is therefore necessary for us to have this divine picture before our eyes” (16) — the multi-coloured heraldic shield comes to mind. After listing the works, and making special mention of the brothers’ contribution, he states that what both they and the priests do is only possible in the spirit of Jesus Christ. By this Vincent does not mean any set or sequence of teaching found in the gospels as a unit, like the beatitudes or the sermon on the mount. Amazingly, he means an original and specifically Vincentian construction out of gospel material, put together by himself and his companions on the basis of their lived ministry to the poor.

Following his “little method” Vincent then explains the nature of “the teaching of Jesus Christ”. It consists in eternal truths infallibly followed

by their effects, an unshakable rock, such that heaven would pass away before that teaching could fail. There are, Vincent says, three sections in that teaching, what we would today call doctrinal, liturgical and moral parts. It is only with the last that the members of the Congregation are concerned in trying to put on the spirit of Christ.

It is surprising to us how readily Vincent uses the word “truth” to mean practical principles, rather than dogmatic assertions like the divinity of Christ. But this is of a piece with his calling the New Testament “the rule of Christian perfection” (17). According to Vincent the New Testament is principally to be used for personal practical purposes, “advancement” rather than the professional practical purpose of preaching. And perfection means something definite, so that the principles that lead to it have a Tightness that definitely excludes other things as wrong or false. There is a tingling urgency about this way of seeing the New Testament, reminiscent of how daily concerns are often a matter of life and death for poor people.

Vincent locates these truths in a general way in Mt 5, 6 & 7, and goes on to quote just one by way of example: “Go, treat your neighbour as you would like him to treat you”. What was explained above about how Vincent understands gospel truth is illustrated by the fact that when he gives this principle in the Common Rules themselves it is not in its strictly scriptural form but “in the way we might reasonably expect to be treated by them” (18). Not “would like to be” but “would reasonably expect to be”. Evidently there is a powerful extra-scriptural life-principle at work in the “agile exegesis” of Vincent, and it is this that gives to the gospel its vivid truth. He will not allow the Golden Rule to become a weapon in the conspiracy of the tough-minded, but revises it so that it becomes a principle of fair play. Concern for the poor and concern for personal perfection overcome Vincent’s concern for the very words of scripture.

As he talks on, it becomes clear that for Vincent there is one kind of extra-scriptural principle that he will never permit to mould his exegesis, and that is what he calls “the maxims of the world”. As he puts it:

In the first place, the maxims of our Lord say: “Blessed are the poor”, and those of the world: “Blessed are the rich”. The former tell us to be meek and gentle, the latter that we must stand fast and make ourselves feared. Our Lord tells us that afflictions are good: “Blessed are they that mourn”; and worldlings, on the contrary: “Blessed are they who rejoice while enjoying themselves”... Not indeed that there are not good worldly maxims, but they are not

opposed to Christian ones, for instance: “Who does good, finds good”. That is true; pagans and Turks proclaim it, and there is no one who does not agree with it (19).

But, Vincent continues, the difference between maxims of the world that are good and the maxims of our Lord is that the former are the fruit of experience, whereas the latter are known to be infallible by his Spirit, “which gives us a knowledge and acute discernment of them, and lets us see to what these divine consequences tend”. If it is the Spirit who enables Vincent to hear the call to holiness and the cry of the poor, it is also the Spirit who enables him to see the point of scripture and to stake his life on it. And, if the sound maxims of the world are known by experience, the bad ones are contradicted by all experience. Vincent, while leaving that unsaid here, states it clearly in CR II 1, where he calls the doctrine of the world *semper fallax*, “worldly wisdom will always let us down”.

Vincent was a vastly skilful orator, as Joseph M Connors, SVD, has shown in a lengthy article in *Vincentian Heritage* (20). This is significant in connection with his and the Congregation’s limited use of visual symbols; speech and personal presence were perhaps the symbolic forms preferred by Vincent and his confreres. The conference of his which we are considering now is a particularly good example of his artistry at work. He illustrates the trustworthiness of the gospel maxims with three telling appeals to experience. First, he compares the maxims of the gospel to the ability of astronomers to forecast eclipses, and concluded: “if men have this knowledge, how much more has not this Eternal Truth, which penetrates things down to the smallest details, seen the truth of these maxims”. Second, he recalls how often experience shows the importance of the gospel maxim: “If someone strikes you on one cheek give him the other”. If a nobleman is struck, the world calls on him to avenge his honour, despite the fact that in so doing he risks losing everything. “Would he not have done better to hold by our Lord’s maxim, which would have preserved his person and the well-being of his house and drawn down on him great graces from God?” – Vincent must have spoken with some feeling, enough to give conviction to his point, remembering how he had once confronted Philippe-Emmanuel de Gondi in his own house and persuaded him not to fight a duel. Finally, he refers to the recent experience of the community listening to him as evidence for the maxim: “If someone would take your coat, let him have your cloak too”. It would have been better, he says, for the Company to have let the Orsigny farm go in the first instance, rather than take

the matter to court and lose it by judicial decision. “God permitted this to teach us how deceptive human prudence is, and how worthy of love and belief his word is”. Such skilful use of well-known and personally significant facts must have made an unforgettable impression on his hearers. Even more than the Congregation’s heraldic shield, they show how Vincent’s gospel was less written word than living reality.

4. The Gospel and the Poor

If the reading of the New Testament aimed not at professional preparation but at spiritual advancement, that is, personal growth, it is nonetheless true that the uniquely Vincentian summary of the gospel maxims aimed at producing missionaries whom the poor would find acceptable: simple, humble, gentle, mortified and zealous. The dynamic of involvement with the poor informed the Vincentian reading of the gospels. To take a somewhat Joycean liberty with language, the motto of the Priests of the Mission could be read: “He has sent me to preach the gospel to the poor”. By contrast, the actual tasks the missionaries set themselves appear to have been drawn from a variety of sources, one of which was their missionary experiences, another the gospel picture of Jesus and his followers as itinerant preachers, but a good part of which was current theological and pastoral thinking; for example, thinking about the value of the sacrament of penance as a means to assuage the deeply felt guilt of the people, about the necessity of knowing the mysteries of the Trinity and Incarnation in order to be saved, and, indeed, the whole massive catechetical drive which lay at the heart of the Tridentine reform. Vincent’s own sermon, launching, it would seem, the catechetical reform at Joigny, is a tour-de-force of vigorous argumentation (XIII 25-30). His convictions on that point must have stemmed from his pastoral experience and his recent prolonged immersion in the spirituality of the Catholic Reform rather than from private meditation on the gospels. His conviction regarding the necessity for salvation of knowledge of the Trinity and Incarnation was drawn, as he explicitly tells us, from theology (21); and although he recognised that not all theologians held that those ignorant of the doctrines would be damned, nevertheless for safety’s sake the people were to be taught them. As well as which, if the 1653 record of the catechism lesson he taught to the poor of the Nom-de-Jesus hostel is anything to go by, he must have thoroughly enjoyed teaching those doctrines to the people (XIII 156-162). Vincent’s conviction concerning the value of helping people to make good confessions, while it surely has roots in counter-reformation theology about

the integrity of confession, must have also stemmed from the deep and evident relief expressed by those who at long last were enabled to make good confessions. And so, indirectly, that aspect of the missionary task sprang from the way in which Christian faith and a deep feeling of shame were bound together for the people of that time. The Last Judgement scenes carved on the entrances to many medieval French churches had taught their lesson well. What gospel the poor needed preaching to them was no more in doubt for Vincent and his companions than what kind of evangelized evangelists were needed to do the preaching. It is, I suggest, very important that this gospel was derived essentially from the Tridentine movement combined with personal missionary experience. It seems that the deepest roots of the Vincentian missionary impetus lay not just in the gospels themselves, but also in a combination of the Church's prevailing pastoral orientation and a clear view of how things were with the masses of the people. Would I be right in thinking that ultimately that is what "he sent me to preach the gospel to the poor" means?

The ideal I am trying to suggest is that the heraldic arms of the Congregation of the Mission sum up the zest with which a group of enthusiastic and capable priests and brothers set about responding to a desperate pastoral situation. For them, the point of reference of "to the poor" was not to chapter and verse of their nicely-bound New Testaments so much as to the teeming millions they could see in villages and hamlets the length and breadth of France. With Vincentian exegetical agility they knew that Jesus saw the same, and that Deutero-Isaiah prophesied it. And so they organised themselves in their many houses and an impressive range of works, only partially listed by Vincent in his conference on the "end" of the Congregation, to do their part in remedying the situation they could see.

5. Battle-cry, not Legal Formula?

In what I have said so far I may seem to have gone along so far with Vincentian eisegesis as to part company with Michael Prior's careful and exhilarating exegesis. Certainly I do not think that Vincent's vocation was based on exegesis of the Lucan "he sent me to evangelize the poor", but rather that he used it as his battle-cry, so to speak, in setting out to defeat the Goliath from hell. But this does not mean that I fail to accept Michael's promise on behalf of both of us "to offer a study which... respects the faith perspective that the Word of God is alive and active, and calls for a response from every generation". I do, except that

I think that the Word of God came to Vincent through the poor, through the Church, through his own inner sense of power to teach, and be accepted by, people, as well as through the tranquil and inspiring pages of scripture. The *ptochoi* of Luke, the *pauperes rusticani* of Vincent and the poor of today's Ireland or Britain or Nigeria may have much or little in common, but they are the most nakedly human and vulnerable section of society, even if not always, as in Vincent's France, the most neglected by the Church. In this section of the article I will try to follow Vincent in the conference where he savours the words of the Congregation's motto: "He sent me to evangelize the poor" (22).

The rhetoric of the second part of the conference is extremely powerful, and displays Vincentian eisegesis to best advantage:

Our Lord asks us to preach the gospel to the poor; that is what he did, and it is what he wants to continue doing through us. We have great reason to humble ourselves about this, seeing the Eternal Father setting us the goals of his Son, who came to evangelize the poor and who gave it as a sign that he was the Son of God and that the expected Messiah had come. What a great obligation we are under to his infinite goodness for associating us with him in this divine employment, and for selecting us from among so many others, more worthy of the honour and better able to do it than we are (23).

The available English translations of that passage have blunted it considerably, even that of Fr Joe Leonard. Both his and the Irish Province translation (by Malachy O'Callaghan and John Burke, but published anonymously) of 1881 fail to bring out the immediacy of the union between Christ and the missionary expressed in St Vincent's own words (24). While the 1881 version, like the flawed French text (of Pémartin) on which it was based, passes over the suggestion from the Founder that plenty other people would be better for the task than we are – at the very time when John Bosco and his companions in Turin were providing living evidence of the point. Vincent goes on:

There is no other company which has the poor as its own share and which gives itself entirely to the poor to the extent of not preaching in the great towns. That is what the missionaries make profession of. It is particular to them to be, like Jesus Christ, designated for the poor.

And then, with a rhetorical crescendo:

Oh! how great that is! How far being consorts and sharers in the goal of the Son of God surpasses our understanding! What! to make us ... I dare not say it ... it is so much, it is such a high office to evangelize the poor, to the point of being *par excellence* the office of the Son of God; and we are designated for it as instruments by which the Son of God continues to do from heaven what he did on earth. A great reason for praising God, my brothers, and for constantly thanking him for his grace.

The intensity of this rhetoric is scarcely conceivable unless evangelizing the poor is a specific and clearly defined function, something a person could do or be tempted not to do. Why so much emphasis if it is what a priest is almost bound to be doing in any case?

Finally, by means of the device of challenging others to say him nay, Vincent rounds on some real or imaginary critics:

Who is it that will turn us away from the good works we have begun? They will be libertine, libertine, libertine spirits, who only ask to enjoy themselves and, so long as there is something for dinner, don't trouble themselves about anything else.

Fr Leonard translates the word *libertins* as "free-thinkers", but inserts a footnote explaining that the word as Vincent uses it here has some of the later connotation of loose morals. I think that he may be mistaken here, and that the word as Vincent used it refers chiefly to one who has lost the faith (25). The *libertins* were actually a definite set among the educated classes of the day. A few years after the date of this conference (December 1658) the satirist Boileau described them like this:

The libertine, who has no soul and no faith, Makes a supreme law out of what pleases him (26).

If Vincent really wanted to sting missionaries, who were in the forefront of the catechetical and religious renewal of France, the jibe to hurl at them was "libertines". The significant point here is that he does this in relation to abandoning the poor. That indicates that there is a very intimate bond between love of the poor and faith in Jesus Christ, in the Vincentian vocation.

For Vincent to describe as libertines confreres who would think of

eliminating the community's direct work for the poor is therefore something significant. It must also be somehow significant that in the 1844 edition of the conferences (in French), and so in the Irish Province's 1881 translation of that edition, the stinging offensive word "*libertins*" is quite simply left out; possibly in the incorrect belief that the word had only become offensive since Vincent's time, during the anti-religious eighteenth century. On the contrary, Vincent must have been well aware how shocking the word was. Responsible figures in the Church of his day were much preoccupied by libertinism among Catholics in the 1650s and 1660s, sometimes attacking them outright, sometimes in a more ecumenical vein seeking to rescue what was good in the *libertin* position. There is an interesting example of this in a sermon given by the celebrated preacher Bossuet, a member of the Tuesday Conferences, the year before the conference we are considering. He gives what has the ring of an authentically Vincentian account of the relation between liberty and constraint in the Christian spirit, and one which I think throws a great deal of light on how the Vincentian motto is to be understood. Bossuet states the principle:

Never so much liberty that we do not set limits to bind ourselves; and never so much constraint that we cannot keep a holy liberty of spirit, so as to join together freedom and servitude (27).

The principle is, I think, a helpful corrective to what could appear to be too absolute or constricting in Lucan theology as Michael Prior presented it. And yet, the following passage from further on in the same sermon shows that Bossuet's principle is not in the least permissive or self-indulgent:

O numbed hands of the miser, why not tear off the bands of avarice that stop you opening yourselves to the miseries of the poor! Why not break the bonds that do not allow you to assist either the innocent person who is oppressed, whom a word from you could uphold; or the languishing prisoner, whom your interest could release; or this poor family which is in despair and which could live well on the smallest reduction in your luxury! Employ your liberty, Gentlemen, in these Christian practices; dedicate it to the service of the poor members of Jesus Christ (28).

And Vincent himself, for all his stinging rhetoric in the conference we have been considering, lets it be seen at its conclusion that he no

more favours fanaticism than libertinism:

Let us stay within the bounds of our vocation, let us make ourselves interior people, who have great and holy desires for God's service; let us do the good which arises to be done in the way we have said. I don't say that we have to proceed to infinity and undertake everything equally, but just what God makes it known that he asks of us (29).

In a contribution to a recent issue of *Colloque* James Murphy suggests that what he calls a "tolerant inclusiveness" could have "something akin to the authority of a founding charism" in the Irish Province (30). There is in existence, however, only one account of how things were for the confreres at the beginning of what became the Irish Province of the Vincentians, and "tolerant inclusiveness" is a phrase that accords very ill with that account. This is how Thomas McNamara describes the occupations of the founding members before they made contact with the Congregation of the Mission in 1838:

These were indeed years of labour. With its slender force the community had on hands the seminary at home and the college in town. They had besides the three chaplaincies of the convent in Cabra and the two penitent asylums already spoken of, together with the confessional duty and instructions required in connection with each. They also, as it has been noticed, took part in the ministry of the parish of Blanchardstown, celebrating Masses, preaching and catechizing on Sundays, and making a sort of mission in one of the churches of the parish in Lent each year. They also conducted clerical retreats in several dioceses (31).

"Years of labour" seems closer to the mark than "tolerant inclusiveness". But there is nonetheless something like a "founding charism" to be discerned in McNamara's account. Paddy O'Donoghue, in his reflections on the early years of the Province in *Colloque* No. 11 has, I think, caught this when he writes:

The impression given by the early Vincentians in their correspondence, by their actions and work, and to contemporaries is one of a zealous, independent-minded and pragmatic body of men who responded quickly to the needs of the Church (32).

And not only the needs, but also the pastoral options both of the local church and of the universal Church, still to a large extent those of the Tridentine Reform in which the Vincentians were born.

McNamara's well-rounded prose does not however compete with the eloquence of either a Bossuet or of a Vincent at the original founding moment of the Vincentian charism. Vincent was doing just that, and doing so while respecting a balance of liberty and constraint in a manner that would brook no competition.

Conclusion

There is a great deal more work to be done on the founding motto of the Congregation of the Mission and I for one would regret if more time were taken from direct communication with the poor in order to do it. But what has been done here already shows that the Vincentian charism is nourished from three sources: communication with Christ in the gospels, communication with poor people in a pastoral setting, and openness to the pastoral options of the Church. It is with the Church that we may leave the concluding word:

Christ was sent by the Father "to bring good news to the poor, to heal the contrite of heart" (Lk 4:18), "to seek out and save what was lost" (Lk 19:10). Similarly the Church encompasses with love all those who are affected with human weakness. Indeed she recognizes in the poor and the suffering the likeness of her poor and suffering Founder. She does all she can to relieve their need and in them she strives to serve Christ (33).

NOTES

1. Prior, M: "Evangelizare pauperibus misit me: Jesus in the Synagogue at Nazareth", in *Colloque* No. 22, pp. 250-63, and "The Poor in Luke's Gospel" in *Colloque* No. 23, pp. 349-369.
2. Murphy, J H: "Planctus for the Dooleyites", in *Colloque* No. 23, pp. 372-75.
3. McGing, A: "1617 - A Crucial year for St Vincent", in *Colloque* No. 17, pp. 356-66.
4. I am grateful to Fr Georges Baldacchino, CM, archivist of the Maison-mere, for an explanation of the heraldic terms.
5. Cf. Dodin, A: *Saint Vincent de Paul et la charité*, Paris 1960, illustration on p. 98.
6. Constitutions, #5.
7. XII 73-94; English trans. J Leonard, CM: *Conferences of St Vincent de*

Paul, Philadelphia 1963, pp. 596-615.

8. *Colloque* No. 23, p. 367.
9. Dodin, A: "M. Vincent de Paul et la Bible" in *Le Grand Siècle et la Bible*, Paris 1989, pp. 627-42.
10. *Op. cit.*, p. 629. The Rule referred to is found as a long footnote in the Index volume, XIV 125-6, n. 1.
11. *Ibid.*
12. CR X 8.
13. Dodin: *op. cit.*, p. 642. Cf Abelly (1664 edition), Book 3, p. 182.
14. Dodin, A: *Entretiens Spirituels aux Missionnaires*, Paris 1960, pp. 50ff. (Chapter advice of 19 January 1642).
15. *Ibid.*, p. 33 (Introduction).
16. *Ibid.*, p. 531.
17. Cf CR X 8 (in Latin original).
18. CR II12.
19. Leonard, J: *Op. cit.*, p. 644.
20. Connors, J M: "The Vincentian Homiletic Tradition" in *Vincentian Heritage* Vol. 4 No. 2 (1983), pp. 3-39.
21. XII 80ff; Cf Leonard: *Op. cit.* pp. 602ff.
22. XII 73-94; Leonard: *Op. cit.* pp. 596-615.
23. XII 79; my translation.
24. *A Collection of the Conferences of St Vincent, with many of his letters; and some of Mr Almeras, his immediate successor*, Dublin 1881, p. 16.
25. I am grateful to Professor Breandáin O Doibhlín of St Patrick's College, Maynooth, for advice on this point.
26. Boileau, N: *Satire IV*, 11.23f.
27. Bossuet, 3-B: *Panegyrique de Saint Victor*, 2nd point.
28. *Ibid.*
29. XII 93; cf Leonard: *Op. cit.* p. 612.
30. *Colloque* No. 23, p. 375.
31. McNamara, T: "The Origins of the Congregation in Ireland" in *Colloque* . No. 7, p. 43.
32. *Colloque* No. 11, p. 411.
33. *Lumen Gentium*, #8.

Robert Hanna

Thomas Davitt

Personal background

On 6 August 1783 Robert Hanna entered the Congregation of the Mission as a seminarist in St Lazare, Paris. His date and place of birth were recorded as August 1762, in Newry, diocese of Dromore. He took his vows on 7 August 1785. He died in Peking (Beijing) on 10 January 1797(1).

O'Hart's *Irish Pedigrees* gives details of the Hanna family in Newry. Robert, the third son of William Hanna (c 1731-1807) and his wife Jane (née Wallace), is recorded as dying unmarried in China. This would certainly seem to be the same man (2). His family had some Church of Ireland clergymen in it so it would seem likely that Robert was a convert (3). As he was twenty-one years old when he joined the community he may have been studying in Paris.

His date of ordination is not on record. We know from a later reference that he, together with a French confrere Raymond Aubin (1759-95), attended the course on astronomy given by Joseph-Jerome Le François de Lalande. They lived in St Firmin's, the former College des Bons Enfants, as it was nearer to the university than St Lazare. They were both being sent to China, and scientific qualifications were essential for being accepted in Peking (4).

To Macao, en route to China

The next mention of him is in the circular letter of Alexis Pertuisot, the Vicar General, of 1 January 1788. After giving some news about the confreres in China he adds:

We are going to give some help to these deserving workers by sending them Frs Aubin and Hanna; they will leave on the first boat for China (5).

The following year the new Superior General, Jean-Félix Cayla de la

Garde, also mentions them in his New Year's Day circular letter:

We have also sent two new missionaries to China, Frs Aubin and Hanna; but what is that for the huge needs of this deserving mission? (6)

The letter also mentions that the mission in Peking has suffered a great loss in the death of Fr Ventavon, a former Jesuit. A Vincentian laybrother, Joseph Paris, has replaced him as watchmaker in the imperial palace. The Vincentians can stay on in Peking only because of "arts and sciences", so Cayla asks that if any house has a laybrother who shows any aptitude in those fields, and who would not have any objection to going to China, he should be given the opportunity of being trained (7).

Aubin and Hanna arrived in Macao on 21 September 1788. Hanna gives this date in a long letter which he sent on 29 December 1788 to "Monsieur Philippe" in Paris. This was probably Laurent Philippe, Director of the Daughters of Charity. He says that before he left Paris he promised to send back details of the state of Christianity in the East. He reports, after three months in Macao, with varying degree of detail and not from personal experience, on China, Tonkin, Cochinchina, Pondicherry, Cambodia, Siam, Siampa (?) and Japan. (He has an interesting little detail: "The English, whether for political reasons or through a special providence, do all they can in favour of the missionaries in Siam"). The journey was long, five months less one day, but uneventful. They were met on arrival by two confreres, one Portuguese and one Italian, Manoel Correa and Giovanni Agostino Villa. Correa gave them a letter written by Nicolas-Joseph Raux, Vincentian superior in Peking. At the beginning of this letter Raux wrote: "I wish I had a balloon to go to see you, to embrace the brothers whom Providence has at last sent me"(8). (The Montgolfier brothers had made their first balloon ascent in Paris in June 1783, nine months before Raux left for China).

The 1791 New Year's circular letter of the Superior General reports that they had to spend a long time in Macao but that by the time the letter was being written they should have left for their final destinations. Aubin was to go to the province of Hou-Kouan, and Hanna to Peking (9).

The 1792 New Year's letter, however, has to report that they are both still in Macao, though Aubin has made three unsuccessful attempts to get into the interior of China (10).

The next recorded reference to Hanna in the circulars of the Superior General is in one dated 1 January 1795, written by Cayla from Rome:

The letters which came from China are still in England. All I know at present about that country is that our two confreres, Frs Hanna and [Louis-Francis] Lamiot, delayed in Macao already for two years, have arrived safe and sound in Peking, thanks to the English ambassadors who went there via the Korea Strait; the others are in good health in their own house (11).

Cayla was correct as regards the arrival of Hanna in Peking; he got there on 30 June 1794 (12). This was not, however, thanks to the English ambassadors, as explained below.

Background to the situation in Macao

The quotation above from the New Year's circular of 1789 refers to the death of an ex-Jesuit. The Jesuits had been suppressed by Clement XIV in 1773. Ten years later, on 7 December 1783, the Congregation *de Propaganda Fide* issued a decree by which the former Jesuit missions in China were given to the Vincentians (13). On 13 December *Propaganda* approved Nicolas-Joseph Raux as "Apostolic Superior of the above-mentioned French mission in China" (14). Raux arrived in Canton on 1 September 1784 and was officially installed in Peking on 8 May 1785 (15). On 25 January 1784 Louis XIV issued letters patent giving effect to the decree of *Propaganda* (16). The French consul and other officials in Canton, ships' captains and any other Frenchmen are to render all possible help to Raux (17). In a decree of 31 January 1784 Louis XIV set out the conditions under which the Vincentians would live in China; included were:

Article 1. They are to have all the rights, privileges, etc., formerly enjoyed by the Jesuits;

Article 2. They are to occupy the house, church and dependencies of the French mission in the palace compound of the Emperor in Peking;

Article 7. A procurator for the missions is to be appointed as soon as possible in Canton (18).

At the same time the queen of Portugal was endeavouring to have the Vincentians replace the Jesuits in Goa and Macao. Macao is a Portuguese colony on the Chinese mainland, about 60 km across the estuary of the Pearl River from Hong Kong; it is only 15.5 square kilometers in area. She undertook the expense of repairing and refurbishing

bishing the former Jesuit seminary, Sao Jose, and having it staffed by Portuguese Vincentians. The five Vincentians on the staff, and the Chinese students, were maintained at her expense. The seminary reopened in this form on 1 October 1784, with Manoel Correa as superior. French Vincentians were not allowed to land in Macao because the only missionaries the Portuguese authorities there would allow in were those who came under the Portuguese flag. (The Italian confrere, Villa, already mentioned, had arrived via Brazil and Goa). In 1785 the Paris Foreign Missions Society (Société des Missions Etrangères de Paris, henceforward MEP) asked the French government to intervene with that of Portugal to have this restriction lifted, but the letter was either lost or suppressed. In the following year the matter was raised again and the Portuguese replied favourably. In the following year the French Ministry of the Marine reported that it was essential for the French missions in China, Cochinchina, Tonkin and Siam that there should be a French Procurator in Macao, as that was the only gateway through which men and supplies could reach the missions. This matter was raised again and again between the two governments, and agreement was reached, but there always seemed to be some breakdown in communications between Lisbon and the administrators in Macao itself. In 1787 permission was given to the MEP for a French procurator to reside in Macao, build a house there and receive French missionaries in it. That is why Aubin and Hanna were allowed to land in Macao on 21 September 1788, and stay on (19).

Enforced stay in Macao

They applied for permission to enter China. The only permitted route for foreigners to enter China was through Canton (Guangzhou), about 120 km up-river from Macao. The viceroy in Canton caused delay by notifying a minister in Peking instead of the emperor. The Vincentian superior in Peking, Nicolas-Joseph Raux, had the backing of the French government and was also a member of a scientific society there so he had a quite a lot of influence. He used all the influence at his disposal with the minister in question, whom he knew, but the latter insisted that all formalities must be complied with. It would be three years before Aubin could get to the Hou-Kouang mission, and five before Hanna would reach Peking (20).

Hanna and Aubin stayed in the MEP house, but had at first to maintain a low profile because of the still ambivalent attitude of the Portuguese authorities (21). Because the MEP procurator, Claude-

Fran9ois Letondal, had happy memories of relations with Vincentians in France he kept Aubin and Hanna free of charge (22). He also realised the importance of the Peking mission and was so interested in its affairs that he dealt with them as if they were MEP affairs (23).

Over a year after Hanna's arrival in Macao Raux wrote from Peking, on 11 November 1789, to Simon-Bruno Fontaine in Paris, presuming that he was the confrere in charge of finances for the Chinese missions. He explained the current situation in China and stressed the need for two more Europeans immediately, as well as the need for a Vincentian procurator in Macao, who would also take care of correspondence by sending someone once a year to Canton to forward letters to Peking. The Portuguese Vincentian superior in Macao and the bishop of Peking were both in agreement with this. He goes on to say that the reason why Hanna and Aubin are still in Macao is because there is no Vincentian procurator in Macao and there is not sufficient money to pay the considerable expenses involved in getting them to Peking; he hopes they will get there early in 1790. He thinks that the Congregation *de Propaganda Fide* should have the money but their procurator in Macao says he has not got it. "If the Senate of Macao has it, then, I am assured, it will never release it" (24).

Raux's hope that they would be able to leave Macao early in 1790 was only partially realised. Hanna wrote to him on 24 January 1791 and told him that Aubin had been able to leave Macao for the mission in Hou-Kouan (25).

Hanna himself had to stay on in Macao and was teaching philosophy in the Portuguese Vincentian seminary, Sao Jose. He was appointed procurator for the French missions in China.

He was loved and esteemed by everyone because of his excellent qualities; his devotion and regularity were exemplary, and his manners were gentle and pleasant. (26).

Perhaps he was too gentle. Letondal, the MEP procurator, thought he was too much under the thumb of the Portuguese procurator and he asked Raux in Peking to give Hanna greater authority so that delays could be obviated (27).

During Hanna's time in Macao Francis Clet arrived there, on 15 October, 1791, on his way into China. With him was a deacon, Louis Lamiot, who was appointed to go to Peking with Hanna; he was ordained priest secretly in the residence of the procurator of the Congregation *de Propaganda Fide* in Macao (28).

The Macartney Embassy

The East India Company established traders in Canton, but the conditions under which they were allowed to operate were restricted, including the markets to which they had access. The British government wished to improve the situation and to establish, for the first time, full diplomatic relations with China, including the permanent residence of an ambassador in Peking. On 26 September 1792 Earl Macartney was appointed to lead an “embassy” to Peking “to counter acts of injustice by Chinese on British subjects”.

George Macartney was born in Lissanoure, Co. Antrim. He became MP for Antrim and Chief Secretary for Ireland. Later he served in Russia, the West Indies and India. He became a peer in 1788 and received an earldom in 1792 (29). The Home Secretary, Henry Dundas, instructed Macartney to demonstrate England’s scientific knowledge and technical achievements (30). What the British did not realise, and which ultimately led to the failure of the Macartney Embassy, was that China never accepted diplomatic relations with any country which did not acknowledge China as the superior nation; China regarded all nations as inferior to itself. A symbol of this was the obligation on foreigners to *ko-tow*, something which Macartney refused to do.

Hanna and the Macartney Embassy

When the embassy left Portsmouth on 26 September 1792 it had a Chinese priest as interpreter, and two other Chinese priests as passengers; all three disembarked at Macao when the embassy called there in the early summer of 1793. The embassy had letters “from the cardinal prefect of the congregation for propagating the faith at Rome, to the procurator of the mission residing at Macao” (31). Because the French had executed their king the Chinese viewed all foreigners with even more suspicion than formerly

and tho the missionaries were received in China and even, as astronomers and artists, encouraged in the capital, their correspondence, from whatever part of Europe, was henceforward intercepted, in order to be examined (32).

The embassy sailed from Macao on 22 June 1793 and Macartney noted in his diary under that date:

... we, at the earnest request of the Italian missionaries of the

Propaganda at Macao, to whom we owe some obligations, have consented to give a passage to two others [i.e. other missionaries] who have been waiting for an opportunity of proceeding to Peking and of entering into the Emperor's service there as mathematicians and astronomers (33).

The two missionaries were Hanna and Lamiot, though Sergeant Major Samuel Holmes described them as

two French Jesuits who had been long resident in the country and wanted a passage to Peking (34).

One might speculate whether the fact that Hanna and Macartney were both Ulstermen had anything to do with the latter's agreeing to take the two missionaries.

The destination of the ships was Taku, at the mouth of the Peiho river, about 120 km from Tientsin. Under the heading "Taku, 9 August 1793", Macartney wrote in his diary:

This morning I dispatched Mr Proctor in the *Endeavour* from the river. He was obliged to take back with him the two Macao missionaries Hanna and Lamiot without their ever coming ashore. We found, indeed, that if they accompanied us to Peking they would be considered as belonging to the Embassy and obliged to depart with it, whereas their intention is to enter into the Emperor's service and to remain the rest of their lives in China, like the other missionaries (35).

Macartney, however, did not abandon his attempt to help them. Having arrived at his destination and made contact with the Chinese officials he brought up the matter of their entry into China. He noted in his diary, under the date of 18 September 1793:

I have also recommended [to the first Minister] to send a European missionary with Captain Mackintosh [of the East Indiaman *Hindustan*] who may, (if thought proper), conduct the two mathematicians who had come to Taku in order to enter into the Emperor's service, but were still on board the *Hindustan* (36).

The minister's answer, however, showed that this was regarded as undue interference, as Macartney noted in his diary the following day:

That the two European mathematicians should be allowed to come to Peking, and enter into the Emperor's service, and that the Minister would give proper directions for the purpose without our interference (37).

The two missionaries had, therefore, to return on the *Hindostan*.

The next recorded reference to them is in a letter from Francis Clet in the province of Kiang-si, to Claude-François Letondal, the MEP procurator in Macao, dated 2 October 1793:

You know for some months now the new appointment of Fr Hanna to the provinces and that of Fr [Jean-Remi] Hurel [CM] to K[iang] S[i]; it is very important for the arrangement of our affairs that they travel together or at the same time, either in the same boat or two different ones; we hope that you will do your best to help us in this matter; but if it is absolutely impossible to persuade the extortioners to agree to sending two bales of contraband at the same time then I urge you to see to it that Fr Hurel gets priority, as this would give me more time to familiarise him with the missions to be entrusted to him ... (38).

In fact Fr Hurel never got to China. This is the only reference to Hanna's appointment being changed from Peking to the provinces; it would appear that Clet was mis-informed.

On 7 October 1793 the embassy left Peking without having achieved its purpose and on 15 January 1794 called again at Macao. Hanna, still in Canton since his return on the *Hindostan*, wrote two letters to Sir George Staunton, secretary to the embassy, before the ships finally sailed for home on 17 March. The first was dated 1 March. He starts by saying that at last they have received permission from the Emperor, through an official in Canton, to start their journey to Peking. Most of the letter is taken up by a very long quotation from a letter which he has seen examining why the embassy failed. He is very thankful for all the help the embassy gave

and I am quite embarrassed to ask for new favours, but your noble and generous character, coupled with the circumstance of shortage of workers on our missions emboldens me and makes me take the liberty of asking you to crown your benefits by interesting yourself in trying to obtain passage for any of our confreres who might be in London waiting to come here but unable to obtain

that favour. Such a service would be of immense importance to Fr Raux and he would not fail to be much obliged to you for it (39).

The second letter is dated four days later. Once again it quotes a long extract about why the embassy failed. At the end Hanna mentions that he has been told that they may start their journey to Peking in a fortnight's time (40).

In both of these letters Hanna refers to the interception of letters by the Chinese authorities.

Two days later, 7 March, Giovanni Agostino Villa, the Italian confrere in Macao, wrote to Benedetto Fenaja, Provincial in Rome, reporting that Hanna and Lamiot had been unable to land from the English ships and had to return to Canton:

... the Chinese mandarins told them that it was not the custom for mathematicians to enter by any route other than through Canton... Our confreres, on arrival in Canton, were introduced to the Zumtou, or Visitor, of the two provinces, who welcomed them favourably, although he later on made them undergo a rigorous interrogation, probably because of some unfortunate suspicion. He asked them: 1. If they were persons of dissolute life; 2. If they had the intention of serving the Emperor; if, after arriving in Peking, they were going to change their clothing again; 3. What country they came from. In what ship they came. What was the captain's name. Why they stayed so long in Macao. What they did there. Why did they associate with the English. Was it true the French had killed their king. How could a nation survive without a leader, etc. It seems that they answered to the viceroy's satisfaction and, in bidding them farewell, this latter told them to await the answer of the Emperor to whom he would immediately communicate their resolution to serve him. Everyone sees this audience as a good omen, but up to the present moment the Emperor's reply has not arrived (41).

To Peking at Last

The Emperor's permission did, however, arrive, though the date does not seem to be on record. In a letter which Hanna wrote on 26 March, he speaks as if the permission had already arrived by that date. The letter is addressed to "The missionaries of St Lazare" and was left in Canton for confreres arriving there in the future. It was now ten years since Louis XIV's decree that a Vincentian procurator be appointed in Canton yet

there still was no such official there. Hanna's letter deals with this and in places is, in fact, really addressed to a future holder of that office. (He uses the French noun *procure* which refers to the office; in the translation I have used the noun "procurator", referring to the holder of the office, as there is no convenient English word in common use for *procure*, and I omit the conventional beginning and end of the letter):

Although I am not in a position to give you any advice on the question of having a procurator in Canton, whether it be about how confreres intended either for the interior or for the capital might spend their time and, for which defect, anyway, the insights and experience of Fr L'Etondal can make up, I thought, however, I should leave this letter before departing for the capital, thinking that on your arrival it will give you some pleasure and that it will be of great help to me also, as it will serve to ask you to be kind enough to represent to our common Father my great needs so that he will be pleased to do something about them.

I begin with the important office of procurator. Fr Raux refers to this office as being *important*, and rightly so since if there had been a procurator in Canton five years ago I would now, with the help of God, be in the capital and Fr Lamiot would have been there two years ago, and probably the difficulties and obstacles which I have encountered have somewhat slowed up the zeal of the Superior General and hindered him from making as strenuous efforts as otherwise he would have made to send confreres here if I had arrived promptly at my destination.

At first sight this office might not seem attractive, but we do not come here to do our own will. Besides, *omnia loca sunt paria ubi par Dei voluntas*, and we merit more when we make greater effort in carrying out an assignment which we do not like. Besides, what is more meritorious? Isn't this law of David *pars aequa descendentis ad praedam [proelium] et remanentis ad fascinas* verified with respect to the procurator? Moreover, just as Saul contributed more to the death of St Stephen by looking after the garments of those who stoned him so the procurator, by looking after the clothing and dealing with the requests of the missionaries, will contribute more than others to the spreading of the gospel.

I should warn you that there is a Christian called Simon who was our servant in Canton; he seems to me to be attentive and quite loyal, except that he always wants to make something for himself on any purchases he makes. I gave him 5 piastres per

month. I preferred to give him these 5 than 4 to a pagan. If I had to stay on longer I would, perhaps, have reduced this by one piastre by giving our laundry to be washed by his wife. But I did not want to argue with him because of the short time we have to stay in Canton. When I leave I intend leaving a letter of recommendation with him. As your stay in Canton (where you will be like the just Lot, distressed to see crime reigning everywhere) would be more agreeable if you have some seminarist to stay with you for formation I will speak about this to Fr Raux. Besides, this seminarist would prevent your being cheated about prices when buying things; that would mean double advantage. You have no idea how hard Fr Raux has worked to have a procurator in Canton. There is no need to tell you to lay in a great store of patience, not to lend money easily to the Chinese Christians unless you know them well, not to accept anything from them, v.g. delivery of wax for mass, &c, as otherwise you will have on your heels people who pester you and be a problem later on. It's up to Frs L'Etondal and Marchini to pass on the necessary information for carrying out your assignment well.

I am now going to address our priests, whether they are for the capital or for the provinces. I see nothing better than to recommend them to read seriously the decrees of the Holy See on the missions, the letter of Mgr Agathopolis for the Fokien missionary, the two from Mgr de Caradie and Fr Aubin, the same prelate's catechism for funerals, a pastoral letter sent to Peking and finally the instructions, whether printed or handwritten, which the directors of the [Paris] Foreign Missions are accustomed to give to their priests when they are leaving Paris. As for the rest, Fr l'Etondal should know better than myself how you can usefully spend your time; Fr Raux's intention is that you follow in the footsteps of the [Paris] Foreign Missions priests, on whose works the Lord bestows such an obvious *blessing*.

In order to bring you up to date on our affairs I have left several letters from Fr Raux to different persons, one from Fr Ghislain, two from Fr Aubin and one from Fr Ko, a Chinese priest, and finally an extract which I have made from a letter of Fr Aubin to Fr Daudet. I have no doubt that you will appreciate my sincere wish to provide for you in this way some little satisfaction immediately you arrive here.

As well as these I have left a letter from Fr Clet to Fr Hurell and another letter from Fr Raux for yourselves, Fathers (42).

Raux reported the arrival of Hanna and Lamiot in Peking in a letter to Benedetto Fenaja in Rome, dated 20 October 1794:

On 30 June of this present year, 1794, our two kind confreres Fr Hanna and Fr Lamiot arrived safe and sound in Peking. We live here in peace, happiness and regularity and carry out all the works of our Congregation. This house of St Saviour's (Pe-Tang) is large and attractive (43).

The situation of the Vincentians in Peking at the time is described by André Everard van Braam Houckgeest, second in command of the Dutch East India Company's embassy to the Emperor of China, 1794-95:

The missionaries are answerable to only one mandarin who is in charge of their affairs; they are reasonably free; they have a house in the city and one in the country; they can leave and return to Peking whenever they wish; they maintain a large household; for, including the Chinese, there are as many as one hundred and sixty, and even more; they have mules and carriages; they make extremely good bread; but they have difficulty in producing wine (44).

On 3 October 1795 Hanna wrote to Villa in Macao:

I have received with great pleasure the two letters which you did me the honour of sending me, the first dated 24 September and the other 22 February; both the one and the other were well filled with interesting facts. I am sorry that I cannot do the same for you, and I even think I should keep quiet about the success of God's work in this country, in order to respect the wishes of my Superior.

Francisco Callado is very close to eternity. Thanks to the Lord he had time to dispose himself for this. He is completely resigned and gives great edification. I have often been to *Nantang* to see him & will probably see him tomorrow.

Please accept my sincere thanks for the help of your prayers which you keep up for me. I admit that, through want of practice, I have lost the habit of letter writing. Fr Ghislain, who hardly writes at all any more, told me that it will be worse next year. If that is the case then I will be very embarrassed about answering letters which I will receive.

Thanks be to the Lord that the latest letters which Fr L'Etondal

sent us about the present state of France are much better than their predecessors. We hope that God, in his infinite mercy, will at last have pity on that kingdom which was formerly so flourishing & bring about a revival there of the true religion in all its splendour.

I have spoken to Fr Raux about the martyrology which you have; he told me to tell you that he had heard that a very recent edition had come out in Italy which contains recently canonised saints, and if yours is that edition it would give him great pleasure if you passed it on to him at the same price which it cost you. As regards the masses, Fr Raux requested them last year from Fr Fenailla [Fenaja]. However, if a favourable opportunity were to arise for getting some from Lisbon he would be very pleased at your availing of it.

I am not writing to Fr Correa because I have nothing special to tell him and because Fr Raux does not want us to write unnecessarily so as not to make the packets too large. For the same reason I am not writing to Frs Ferreira, Ribeiro, Minguet and Marchini. I venture to ask you to make up for this defect by assuring them, each one individually, of my kindest regards and recommending me to their prayers and masses (45).

After that letter there does not seem to be any further surviving item about Hanna until his death fifteen months later:

The Peking mission, which was developing very well owing to the peace it enjoyed, suffered at that time, however, the blow of losing Fr Hanna who died on 10 January 1797. He was stricken with a chest ailment which carried him off two years after his arrival in Peking. The cause of this premature death was that he was studying too hard. It was a great loss to this mission, for Fr Raux was thinking of preparing him to replace himself in the work at the Court (46).

He was only thirty-five years old. He is buried in Tcheng-fou-se (47).

NOTES

1. Details of his birth and entry into the CM were recorded in the Register of Entries of the old St Lazare, which is now in the French National Archives in Paris (MM 519 B). The spellings in this Register are “Hannat” and

“Newwry”. Date and place of death are in Joseph van den Brandt CM: *Les Lazaristes en Chine (1697-1935)*, Peking 1936, p 7.

2. John O’Hart: *Irish Pedigrees*, vol. II, New York 1923. There is a copy of this in the library in St Vincent’s, Sunday’s Well, where Fr T Devine CM drew my attention to this entry some years ago.
3. The Church of Ireland authorities in Newry told me that Newry baptismal registers for this period have not survived there. Publications of the National Library, Dublin, indicate that they are not to be found anywhere.
4. *Mémoires de la Congrégation de la Mission*, vol. VII, Paris 1866, p 752.

This nine volume set was edited by Gabriel Perboyre, a cousin of the martyr (*Annales de la CM*, 127, 1963, p 3). The Superior General, Jean-Baptiste Etienne, in a letter of 12 April 1872 which he circulated to all superiors, said that the Congregation *de Propaganda Fide* had told him that the Jesuit Superior General had objected to the way the Jesuit missions in China were dealt with in volumes IV to VIII and had threatened to take the matter to either the Holy Office or the Congregation for the Index. Etienne said he would submit to the judgement of the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation and would be prepared to withdraw the volumes. At the urging of the SJ Superior General the cardinal ordered Etienne to circularise every CM house and order all copies of the five volumes in question to be withdrawn from circulation. In practice, however, this was not fully complied with. Carlo Bernardi, the Provincial of the Roman Province, wrote on 2 August 1884:

The Superior General has given to the Provincial the faculty of retaining the five volumes on China in the Archives, under lock and key, and because he does not think that the Holy See requires anything in connection with this work over and above what is required for forbidden books.

Our Archives in Dublin have photocopies of both Etienne’s letter and that of Bernardi. Volumes IV and VIII survived in the Irish Province and I have been able to obtain copies of volumes V, VI and VII in an exchange of material with fellow archivists, so that we now have the complete nine volume set.

5. *Recueil des Principales Circulantes des Supérieurs Généraux de la CM*, II, Paris 1879, p 188.
6. *ibid* p 219.
7. *ibid* p 220.
8. This very long letter has survived in a re-translation from Spanish into French headed: “Traduction de livre espagnol (?)”. The CM archivist in Paris kindly provided a photocopy.
9. *Recueil* II, p 232.
10. *ibid* p 237.
11. *ibid* p 252.
12. van den Brandt, *op. cit.*, p 7.
13. *Recueil* II p 559.
14. *Actes du Gouvernement Français concernant la Congrégation de la Mission*, 3rd ed., Paris 1902, p 65.

15. van den Brandt: op. cit., p 7.
16. *Actes du Gouvernement François* p 66.
17. ibid.
18. ibid p 67.
19. *Mémoires* VII pp 745 ff.
20. ibid p 752.
21. ibid.
22. ibid p 752.
23. ibid p 753.
24. ibid pp 711-13.
25. ibid pp 754-5.
26. ibid p 763.
27. ibid p 763.
28. van den Brandt, op. cit. p 26.
29. The wording inside quotation marks is from the *Dictionary of National Biography*, the remainder from: J L Cranmer-Byng: *An Embassy to China (Lord Macartney's Journal)*, London, 1962.
30. Cranmer-Byng: op. cit. p 30.
31. Sir George Staunton: *An Authentic Account of an Embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China*, two volumes, London, 1797,1 p 390.
32. ibid Ip 397.
33. Cranmer-Byng: op. cit., p 64.
34. *The Journal of Mr Samuel Holmes, serjeant-major of the XIth Light Dragoons, during his attendance, as one of the guard, on Lord Macartney's Embassy to China and Tartary 1792-93*, London, 1798, p 94.
35. Cranmer-Byng: op. cit. pp 77-78.
36. ibid p 141.
37. ibid p 142.
38. Joseph van den Brandt (ed.): *Lettres du Bienheureux François-Régis Clet*, Peking, 1944, pp 15-16.
39. E H Pritchard: *Letters from Missionaries at Peking Relating to the Macartney Embassy (1793-1803)* in "T'oung Pao", XXXI, 1935, pp 31-36. (In a note on page 30 Hanna is referred to as "an Irish Lazarine").
40. ibid pp 36-39.
41. *Mémoires* VII pp 781-2.
42. CM archives, Paris.
43. *Mémoires* VII p 792.
44. *Mémoires* VII p 821.
45. CM archives, Paris.
46. *Mémoires* VII p 822.
47. van den Brandt: *Les Lazaristes en Chine* p 7.

Forum

NO EXIT? REFLECTIONS ON A BOOK

In a thought-provoking book published in 1989 entitled *The Prophetic Horizons of Religious Life* Diarmuid O Murchú MSC reflects on the future of religious communities, using a very wide canvas embracing non-Christian religious life and world movements today. I had the occasion to review the book for *The Furrow*. Now, post-Convocation, post-Assembly and also post-Vincentian Seminar Week, I would like to reflect on it again, with our own Irish Province in view. The recent ordination of the last two of our present candidates in Ireland helps to sharpen the focus of this reflection.

A lot of ideas in the book are not new, but this perhaps gives added weight to them. One that could serve as a summary of the conclusions is the need to refound religious communities, at a particular stage of their development. We need to ask ourselves if this is the stage we are at. There are a number of criteria in the book which would lead us to say that it is, including the “vitality curve” which indicates the average life-span of religious communities from their original foundation. This is suggested to be in the region of 250 years, unless they are refounded. Acting on the assumption that it is the Lord’s will for us to survive we should set ourselves to the task of refounding, so that St Vincent’s charism may survive in these parts into the next millennium. Otherwise we may be engaged in patching an old garment, which may cause an even greater tear, or tinkering with the parts when a new engine is needed. It is not an undertaking one enters on lightly, but have we any choice? We are like a patient facing a serious operation in order to save his life.

If it is a matter of refounding, the next question is how do you go about it? O Murchú’s response to this is found in his expression of the need to call out “refounding members” from the group, people who will lead us in new directions. He sees this as coming from the grass roots, initially, rather than from the top, though with their approval. This can be seen as being in line with Vatican II’s emphasis on charism in addition to hierarchy. It is a case of supporting the “prophets” among us and giving them their head. In this way a new approach should gradu-

ally emerge. This calls for a great degree of openness and trust so that we can be ready to listen to what these “prophets” might have to say. It is not easy to do, in view of the pressing demands of “maintenance”.

In recent times we have devoted a lot of effort to charism and mission statements. There is no question of neglecting or abandoning these. In regard to a community’s charism O Murchú speaks of the need to “revitalise” it and not just reproduce it in the form it found expression in at the time of the founder.

Perhaps I could quote here:

A return to the spirit of the founder means a reappropriation of those attitudes, perceptions and values which determined and influenced the founder’s options in his/her own time. The outcome of that process in the 20th/21st century however may be totally different from that of former times. What the group now chooses to do may have little or no resemblance to what the founding person actually did.

He goes on to say that “reappropriating a charism in our time has as much to do with ‘reading the signs of the times’ as with understanding the vision of the founding person” (pp 111-3, *passim*). He later speaks of the danger of “enthroning the founding person as a false god”. We have devoted a great deal of time and effort in recent times to the study of St Vincent. This is a very good development. But is it enough? Have we devoted sufficient effort to reading the signs of the times, both experientially and theoretically? The recently established Justice and Peace Commission should be seen as a step in this direction. Are there other steps we should be taking, and even with some urgency? Do we need to assign a group to do this work for us?

As part of the “global” or basic underlying concept of religious life O Murchú proposes the concepts of “Liminal Identity, Archtypal Values and Prophetic Possibilities”. These Jungian concepts are strange at first sight, but in fact seem to underline the idea that religious founders were prophetic visionaries who opened new paths. Being “liminal” just means being on the threshold rather than being at the centre. It emphasises the notion of reaching out rather than operating existing structures. It involves a path-finding activity, walking in untrodden paths, taking risks. “Activating change especially at a structural level” is how he describes it. It needs to be done afresh in each age and implies moving on, as part of a pilgrim Church.

“Archtypal values” implies embracing some fundamental human

values, which are perhaps being neglected or overlooked. These would include such things as the value of the human person, the value of community, of human work and creativity, of simplicity of life. We can see how a group like the Benedictines has been especially involved in this. But we all have our part to play.

The “prophetic” element is one which receives a lot of attention today. It implies a speaking out, having a message to give the world, whether by our lives or our actions, speaking out against injustice and oppression, having a vision to offer. St Vincent was a truly prophetic person in his time. Are we prophetic people today? Our involvement with the Travellers and the Deaf would definitely seem to be in the prophetic line. But should not this quality somehow run through all our works and activities, in some way or other?

People like Jean Vanier and Mother Teresa stood out as prophetic figures in our day. But are we not all called to share in the light in our own particular way? Vincent’s prophetic stance in regard to the galley-slaves and foundlings should be examples to inspire us to look around in our day to areas such as homelessness, drug addiction, AIDS, etc.

I mentioned the “vitality curve” earlier. In its terminal stage there are three possible choices:

1. To die, as a Community, to cease to be;
2. To continue in a very diminished way;
3. To revive to new life.

The will of God and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit must be taken into account in regard to them. But death or extinction cannot easily be proved to be part of God’s plan for us. Since refounding seems to be the only way to avoid this I believe that we must commit ourselves to that task as the only way of offering an exit from the present situation. Nothing less is likely to serve. We owe it to St Vincent, apart from anyone else!

Refounding in the present understanding implies calling forth refounding members from the community, and giving them their head. We need to do this with some sense of urgency, lest the sands of time run out on us. Presumably the Provincial and his Council should be the ones to exercise discernment in this matter. But in trust and openness we need to cast out into the deep. Christianity does not teach us fatalism.

Roderic Crowley

SPIRITUALITY AND JUSTICE,
16-20 September 1991: a brief report.

A radical critique of Catholic spirituality and theology was provided for fifteen of us in this Damascus House workshop. A pity there weren't more participants! With a great deal of charm, humour and intelligence Fr Tissa Balasuriya OMI led us through a process of See, Judge, Act. It was so refreshing to hear an Asian viewpoint on how Westerners have been abusing the world which God has given into the hands of all.

Seeing

Brainstorming enabled us to come up with lists of social, political, economic and religious matters which offended our sense of justice, e.g. money for war but not for the National Health Service; stockpiling of food, consumerism, violence towards women, child abuse, discrimination against Travellers and refugees, environmental abuses, male domination in the Church, imperialism of the multi-nationals.

In twos and threes we then studied and reported on concrete documentation which Fr Tissa provided for some of these topics, reminding ourselves how badly the world's wealth is distributed: American billionaires can get \$135,000 a day by investing at 5%, while millions are starving. The poverty level in Britain (less than £52.00 a week) has risen from 12% in 1979 to 19% in 1987. Petty theft is severely punished in the poor while de-forestation by the rich goes without chastisement.

Next it was Fr Tissa's turn. He reminded us that: the UN mandate allows no change in the world order that was set up by the victors of World War II; a few hundred multi-nationals exercise a commercial colonialism, replacing military domination; vast wealth is accumulated without responsibility (except to share-holders, who are often billionaires); so much of commerce is based on oil that the USA is prepared to fight for it while consuming 32% of world resources; and poorer nations are kept in an appalling debt-trap.

Judging

Why were the spiritualities of the last 1500 years not addressing matters of social justice? This was the next brainstorming question. Our ideas were synthesised on the board. Then Fr Tissa expounded a far more radical view. On the one hand a traditional descending theology was expending great intellectual energy elaborating something like the fol-

lowing outline: Humanity in original sin / saved through Jesus the Redeemer / the Church holds the merits of Christ / dispenses them through the sacraments / bishops and priests are in control (which they don't want to give up) / saving souls is their main aim / structures of parishes, schools, social works etc. are all aimed at conversion to the one true faith. This theology preached love of God and neighbour without stressing that the latter requires social justice. Whereas in the big bad world genocide and slavery were flourishing for centuries, males dominated, women were down-graded, the Church jealously held power and colluded with European expansionist domination.

Acting

What are we to do about this divorce of spirituality and theology from the world where injustice abounds? Fr Tissa helped us towards several answers:

1. With new eyes, seeing Jesus as he faced up to the injustices of his time.
2. Being converted to Christ the Liberator and not just to the Church.
3. Taking the risk of really following Jesus, dispossessing ourselves, ready to be persecuted for justice's sake.
4. Realising the option for the poor is taken more by the laity than by religious.
5. Querying our mode of presence to the rich, remembering that Jesus challenged them in an effort to lead them into that liberation which they find so difficult.
6. Bringing social analysis into our parish, becoming prophetic.
7. Remaining so faithful to Lk 4, the beatitudes, Mt 25, that the Spirit will call us further.

Stan Brindley
*(on behalf of the Justice and Peace
Commission in Britain)*

Miscellanea

Phibsborough Spire

An interesting story was told some years ago by His Grace the Archbishop of Dublin with regard to the latest visit of Cardinal Moran to Dublin. On that occasion he was the guest of the Archbishop. When the two great ecclesiastics were enjoying “a bird’s eye view” of Dublin from the highest point of the Archiepiscopal Palace the Cardinal remarked that it was very strange that all the big church spires were on the south side of the Liffey. The Archbishop confessed that this fact had never struck him before, but upon examination he found that the Cardinal was perfectly right. It was not long after this that the Archbishop was requested to preside at a meeting in support of the proposed extension by the Vincentian Fathers of the magnificent church at Phibsborough. His Grace took advantage of this occasion to tell the story of Cardinal Moran’s comment, and appealed humourously to Father Geoghegan to remove this reproach to the north side of Dublin. He promised that he would contribute more than he had originally intended, and asked the Vincentians to undertake to have a splendid spire erected by the time of Cardinal Moran’s next visit to Dublin, which he trusted would be soon. Then, he said, he would be able to show that the north side of Dublin had a church spire to be proud of. This suggestion was certainly taken up very earnestly by the Vincentian Fathers. The splendid steeple which now adorns their church is indeed one to be proud of. It towers over all the other spires in Dublin, and evokes the admiration of all who see it. Cardinal Moran, had he been spared to see it, would have been delighted with this great monument of Catholicity in Dublin.

The Catholic Herald 26 August 1911

OBITUARIES

Brother William Smyth CM

Enconomia galore from the Sheffield press:

A devoted Sheffield churchman.

A legend in his time.

A friend to everybody.

The best-loved Catholic church figure in the city.

The popular RC figure who survived the Luftwaffe hit.

Brother Willie Smyth had broken all records: he had died 64 years to the day after taking his vows, after 62 years in the one appointment, and at the age of 85, well-known and well-loved.

A native of Enniscorthy, he was born of a Protestant father, who kept accounts in the local mill, and a devout Catholic mother. The Smyth children numbered four, two boys and two girls. The two girls were later to emigrate to France, one to marry a Frenchman and the other to join a French order of nuns; the former is still alive. Of the two boys Willie was to join the Vins and Teddy was to work with them as cook in the old St Joseph's until he died in the late 1930s. Mrs Smyth died while her children were still young, so the two girls were sent to the Holy Faith school in Glasnevin while the two boys went to St Vincent's, Glasnevin.

Willie's first job was in St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, as an assistant in the science laboratory. In St Patrick's he was to experience "the gentle compassionate love of Christ" in a Vincentian lay brother (probably Charlie Boyle). At 19 he decided to join some order of Brothers in England. He bought the outfit and, *jam omnia parata*, Willie was ready to travel. Suddenly the memory of this truly good Vincentian was powerful enough to make him change his mind (the Damascus Road magnetic field!) and seek acceptance in the Vins. He entered St Joseph's, Blackrock, on 15 September 1925 and took his vows on 16 September 1927.

After his vows he apparently stayed on in St Joseph's for two years. (He used to recall a short spell in Strawberry Hill for health reasons during this period). He was appointed sacristan in Sheffield in 1929, to succeed Brother Michael Murphy who had completed nearly half a

century in the post.

Brother Willie's memory of his early days remained ever fresh. Little five year old Ted Cummings (now a well-known senior citizen) sang very well for him on Brother's first visit to St Vincent's School beside the church. Dostoyevsky claimed that "there is nothing nobler, stronger, healthier and more beneficial than a good memory". Brother Willie was very blessed with a keen memory for people, names, places and things.

As sacristan he was to see St Vincent's Church in its greatest glory for the consecration on 18 June 1931 and for the centenary celebrations in 1956. But there was also the devastation of the Luftwaffe hit in 1940 when the snow fell into the church and covered the pulpit area.

Brother Willie prepared the church for high masses, when long processions of altar boys led magnificently vested sub-deacon, deacon and celebrant through a spotless church to a riot of flowers and a blaze of candle-light in the sanctuary. In the organ loft well-rehearsed choirs and their star organist John Denham adorned the liturgy with splendid melodies and the lovely plainchant. To this day a Christmas carol composed by John Denham is sung at the beginning of midnight mass. The church was full for Sunday masses, and for the big occasion there was standing room only.

In its day St Vincent's was the mother of churches in Sheffield and Brother Willie reigned serene and supreme in his oak panelled sacristy, so well furnished with wardrobes and vesting benches. The vestments, according to colour, lay in covers in drawers, and there was an endless supply of linen — corporals, purificators and finger-towels. Underneath St Justin's Day Chapel (in St Vincent's church) there was a large work room with a dozen wardrobes and presses crammed with flower vases, candles and stands, altar covers and all that was needed for processions, Holy Week ceremonies, etc. Brother Willie washed and ironed a lot of the smaller altar linen here.

While most of us adopt "the manner of a policeman accosted by an amiable drunk, prepared to humour him a moment in order to hurry him the more quietly on his way" (McGahern) Brother Willie had found the secret of Helder Camara: "Do people weigh you down? Don't carry them on your shoulders; take them into your heart". Brother's "handouts" were well-known and groups like the Union of Catholic Mothers gave him contributions.

He lived the poor life himself. While his room was always spotless his little "possessions" consisted of a small transistor radio, a suitcase and a few books. A year ago he gave his remaining money to the community and left the rest to help cover his funeral expenses.

Did the fact that his father was a Protestant endow him with special ecumenical sympathy? He certainly was quite at home with all, irrespective of their shade of belief. His saying: "friendly with all" was a living reality.

The schools once had about a thousand pupils and the boys and girls glided and chirped around Brother Willie like birds. Solly Street and the surrounding area was packed with the descendants of Irish immigrants. Alas, after the war the houses were pulled down as people moved to new parishes, and industry robbed Willie of the company of hundreds of his friends. He would see the great congregations gradually dwindle down to a mere hundred for just one Sunday mass by 1990.

He had a great gift for dealing with church helpers and cleaners, electricians and heating engineers. Everyone experienced his kindness, appreciation and respect. To the sacristy would come past parishioners, past students of the school and, of course, members of the travelling community.

Brother Willie had a photo of his brother, Teddy, and of his sisters in his office. He used to say that they all loved the poor. Is it true that all those we love deeply become part of us? Beggars seemed to think so and sought out Brother Willie in the sacristy and presbytery up to the end of his life, as if to prove the truth of Michel Quoist's saying: "Dying is not ceasing to live but ceasing to love". Brother Willie put up a little challenge in the beginning but the skilled eye of the expert traveller knew that he was an easy hook and could be hauled aboard in no time; food and money were on the way!

Brother Willie didn't know what it meant to be lonely. He was always busy in a quiet methodical way, counting the Sunday and church box collections and banking them every week, and keeping his account books up to date. Of course the sacristy and church work took several hours every morning. Then he typed his letters, and many people came to talk to him about old times and about their life problems. He was a good listener and took a patient balanced and pragmatic view of things. He was a gentleman who wouldn't cause pain. Earlier in life he walked a lot with his dog, and kept a lovely rose and flower garden which had a Lourdes grotto which he had built himself. He liked to read biographies and spiritual books. He had a working knowledge of French, which improved with his trips to France to visit his two sisters. He liked to visit his friends and to spend a few hours in the club occasionally.

The Sheffield smog in the grey days of belching steel mills caused bronchial ailments to many people. Brother Willie suffered from a "bad chest" for many years. In later years he needed about two hours to "come

around” as he prepared for morning prayer. After a cup of tea he made his way to the chapel a good half hour before everybody else. The “old chest” slowed him down and prevented him from travelling very far. For many years Dr Derek Cullen, Sheffield’s chief Catholic consultant, insisted on seeing him every few months for a check-up. He regarded it as a great honour to give his services free of charge. Claremont Nursing Home, run by the Sisters of Mercy, looked after “dear Brother Smyth” in his last illnesses.

In conversation Brother Willie held your interest as he reminisced about the past. As a speaker in the club for special occasions he was a “great take”.

As we motored to Solly Street for morning mass he would recall that at such a spot there once stood a great store where you could buy everything “from an anchor to a needle”. He could say of someone: “I knew his father and mother. I have seen them come and go. We learn from experience — some people never learn”. He could say of Frank Finnegan (now in his eighties): “I knew his grandparents”.

His most famous phrase was that he was “friendly with all and familiar with none”. Shortly after I heard him make this claim on one occasion I saw an admiring female sweep into the sacristy before mass and give him a big kiss. I challenged him: “Looks as if you’re familiar with all!”. He was quite amused.

As a man of prayer he found the old Formulary and the meditations on the vows and spirits of perennial value. As well as a full hour’s prayer every morning he spent half an hour every evening before the Blessed Sacrament, and was always present for the Prayer of the Church at mid-day and in the evening. During his work in the sacristy and church there were periods for devotions and rosary. He had a tender devotion to the Mother of God and her altar in St Vincent’s church was lavishly decorated with flowers. He adapted wonderfully to change in some things as if “to love is to change” had been coined by himself.

A faithful, thankful Vincentian brother he said with truth: “I have covered the ground”. He would resonate with Helder Camara:

I love to look at a hundred year old tree with shoots as though it were a stripling. It teaches me the secret of growing old, open to life, to youth, to dreams, and makes me aware that youth and age are steps towards eternity.

Michael Dunne CM

WILLIAM SMYTH CM

Born: Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford, 20 April 1906.

Entered the CM: 15 September 1925.

Final vows: 16 September 1927.

APPOINTMENTS

1927-29 St Joseph's, Blackrock. (See below).

1929-91 St Vincent's, Sheffield.

Died 16 September 1991.

There is no documentary evidence in the archives as to where he spent the two years between his vows and his appointment to Sheffield. Senior confreres cannot recall where he was in those years, and investigations in suggested houses did not turn up any evidence. The balance of probabilities is that he stayed on in Blackrock.

Father Michael Walsh CM

(Homily at funeral mass)

My Lord Bishop, Father Provincial, Reverend Fathers and Sisters, relatives and friends of Father Walsh, parishioners of St Vincent's.

Let me begin by thanking your Parish Priest, Fr McMahon, for inviting me to speak at Fr Walsh's funeral obsequies here today. I can think of one reason at least why he did so. Ever since my school days at Castleknock and his early years as a newly-ordained priest Fr Walsh and myself have never been apart for long. Over the years we have seen a great deal of each other.

Fr Gardiner told me that when he was preparing the readings for today's mass he found a well-thumbed leaflet in Fr Walsh's old missal. It was a mass for the dead. It contained a passage from St Paul's letter to the Romans, 14:7-12, one, we believe, he read often. We judged we would please him by choosing it for today's mass. It goes like this:

None of us lives to himself; none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die we die to the Lord.

These words of Paul contain a very profound truth; one, indeed, that we can very easily overlook. To grow in belief of my own self-suffi-

ciency is something that can easily happen. If I live as though I control the events of my own life; if I live as if my destiny is in my own hands, then I am living an erroneous mis-conception. Following his conversion on the road to Damascus Paul became increasingly overwhelmed by the mystery of God's love made manifest in Jesus Christ. This conviction became the driving force that motivated his whole life. In effect he was saying: "Everyone and everything is in God's hands".

Today is the feast of St John of the Cross. In one of his writings called his Spiritual Canticle he develops this same idea. Let me read it for you:

There are depths to be fathomed in Christ. He is like a rich mine with many recesses containing treasures. No matter how we try to fathom them, the end is never reached. Rather in each recess we go on finding new veins of new riches.

And he goes on to pray that each of us may be strengthened and rooted in love; that we be given the power to understand the love of Christ which surpasses all knowledge, and thereby to be filled with the fullness of God.

I believe that what I have just said reflects the lived-out convictions of Fr Michael Walsh. In his own private, unassuming, way he was a devout man.

I first came into contact with him in 1938. Having been ordained in the autumn of the previous year he was appointed to the staff of Castleknock College in Dublin. I was then a student at the college. He was to spend the next twenty-five years on the college staff. He filled in succession the offices of teacher, Dean of Discipline, Prefect of Studies and for his last six years he was the college President. During these final years he was my religious superior. I remember him as a man, very dutiful, always well-informed, perhaps over-conscientious, showing fairness to everyone and favour to none. I thought that at times he paid excessive attention to trivial matters; at other times, that he sought to find the complete answer to problems that arose; all of which must have increased the burdens of responsibility. He wanted to get to the root of what was happening. However, that was his nature; he would be satisfied with nothing less. In 1963 his term of office expired. His college career was ended and he was appointed to this parish.

I can only surmise the pain this change caused him. It was a real uprooting. He was called upon to sacrifice the happiness and security of the preceding quarter-century, and head out into the great unknown.

But there was no complaint, still less any self-pity. He simply packed his bags and was on his way. With the exception of a few years spent as a bursar in Dublin the remainder of his life was spent here in Sheffield, a total of twenty-six years.

When he arrived at Solly Street he was appointed chaplain to the old Royal Infirmary. That was for him a most fortuitous blessing. It gave him a focus for his ministry. From then on, until it finally closed, he gave it his meticulous attention. I doubt if there were many days when he didn't visit the Infirmary. If anyone was looking for him and he wasn't to be found it was a fair guess that he was over there. Subsequently he became chaplain to the King Edward VII Hospital, an office he retained until his death. He became chaplain to the Catholic Nurses' Guild. He was spiritual director to the Legion of Mary. That he died on the feast of our Lady's Immaculate Conception would indeed please him.

With you, people of St Vincent's, he carved out, over the years, his own niche of respect and esteem. There were many things you admired about him. For example, his sincerity, his honesty, his commitment to his priesthood. Above all I think you admired his integrity — Ah, yes!, his uncompromising integrity. He simply couldn't be untrue to himself. If that is a characteristic that sometimes irritates, equally it earns admiration and respect. If there were times when someone found him too honest, even too out-spoken — and there were — I'm sure he was forgiven; he was speaking his deepest convictions.

He was, of course, a conservative at heart, conservative in the ecclesial sense of the word. He simply disliked change. He was well into middle age when Vatican II occurred, so he found the subsequent change hard to accept. Deeply rooted in him was a profound love for the Church, which he understood as the flawless "bride of Christ". Hence he was suspicious of anything that cast doubt on his perception of it. He was always concerned that something precious might be lost which could not be regained. In the same mould was his regard for both the Canon Law of the Church and our own community rules and constitutions. I recall one day he said to me: "Why is it always taken for granted that something is better because it is new?" It was part of his nature to be loyal to what had stood the test of time and experience. But even if he couldn't understand, even if much of what was happening went against the grain, his loyalty to his Church and to his community was unwavering.

I know he loved living in community; it was his home. He wasn't a great conversationalist; in fact he was rather reticent. But he listened carefully to others, and woe betide anyone who made a sweeping state-

ment with which he disagreed! Those of us who lived with him have memories of that!

I will remember him as a humble, unpretentious man, with simple tastes. He loved the countryside. In his young days rugby football was his great interest and, of course, cricket throughout his life. Bird-watching, or a day with gun and dog on the Derbyshire moors was his greatest pleasure. Maybe it was a happy coincidence that his birthday fell on “the glorious twelfth”.

Speaking of “the glorious twelfth”, let me tell you about something that happened on what was to be his last in this world. He was celebrating his 80th birthday. He came in the evening to celebrate mass in Our Lady’s church. He expected to find the usual handful of people present. When he went in he was amazed to find the church crowded, with everything prepared for a major celebration. When the time came for the homily he paused, as he usually did. Then he said:

I’ll be very brief. I have only one thing to say. I would like to ask forgiveness from you all for the many times I have failed you in the past. Please pray for me.

Those present said one could hear the proverbial pin drop. All were deeply moved. One parishioner said afterwards: “That was Fr Michael’s finest hour”.

In the end death came suddenly and somewhat unexpectedly. Those who knew him best felt he had a premonition that time was short. He would never want to be an invalid or a burden on anyone. For that reason I believe the timing and circumstances of his death would please him.

Let me conclude by telling you something that happened the day that Brother Willie was buried. A group was gathered at the graveside reading the names of Vincentians buried in the plot there. Someone asked Fr Michael where he would like to be buried: “Would you like to be taken home to be buried on the hill in Castleknock?” His answer was: “Why should I? Sheffield is my home. I hope to die here. I want to be buried here”. He pointed to a place beside Brother Willie: “That spot will do me nicely”. So today his wish will be fulfilled. We will lay his mortal remains to rest beside his good friend Brother Willie, two of the finest side by side.

May God grant to them both and to the souls of all the faithful departed eternal rest and peace. Amen.

Francis MacMorrow CM

FATHER MICHAEL WALSH CM

Born: Longford 12 August 1911.

Entered the CM: 7 September 1930.

Final vows: 8 September 1932.

Ordained a priest in Clonliffe College by Dr Francis Wall, auxiliary bishop of Dublin, 3 October 1937.

APPOINTMENTS

1938-63 St Vincent's, Castleknock.

1963-66 St Vincent's, Sheffield.

1966-67 St Paul's, Raheny.

1967-70 St Peter's, Phibsboro.

1970-91 St Vincent's, Sheffield.

Died 8 December 1991.

Father James Cahalan CM

Three days after his death the following appeared in the Office of Readings, on 18 December:

In your old age I shall still be the same,
When your hair is grey I shall still support you.
I have already done so. I have carried you (Is 46:4).

Like the Lord, James ever remained the same, *sibi semper constans*. He never did change, a restless soul to the last.

At a Justice Seminar last July (could there be one without him?) he told us of a dream he had had, which was quite a revelation on his part. This turned out to be the famous death scene of St Vincent — but in reverse. Instead of well-intentioned confreres tugging at Vincent asking him for his blessing on their works, here was Vincent in the dream doing the tugging, rousing and urging on James, and, by implication, the rest of us, to a more active ministry. *Davantage!*

The late John Charles McQuaid, archbishop of Dublin, once rang James in St Joseph's. Naturally James was nowhere to be found, so I was called to the phone. I said James was certainly at home — I had seen him at breakfast. "You saw him at breakfast, Father", said John Charles, "But don't you know, Father, that now, even as we speak, Father James could be in the Outer Hebrides!" The AB certainly knew his man. There was a close affinity between the pair of them during James' time as Provincial and Director of the Daughters.

One of today's buzz words is "energy". Everyone talks about being "energised" and the Myers-Briggs test, as every modern religious knows, is all about where you get your energy from. Whatever its quality or provenance James was its ultimate practitioner. Cliches spring to mind - you can't avoid them. Yes, he was a man of boundless energy and insatiable activity. Kaleidoscopic memories abound: James playing at centre in a rugby match in the Rock and then, half an hour later, seated in the Immaculate Conception Oratory engaging our attention in more weighty matters; that unmistakable hurried light-footed tread up and down the stairs, or approaching the altar for mass; that marked propensity of his for going to Cork via Armagh just in case there might be a wasted hour or two. Psychologists would probably have something to say about it all but, in his case, it must all come under the rubric of zeal. "If love of God is a fire", said Vincent, "zeal is its flame". James was a zealous man, a man in a hurry, ever intent on the urgency of his life and work as a Vincentian priest.

A biographer would have difficulty in categorizing that life and work. About the only things you can nail down are the dates of his appointments. His early years were spent in Dublin, in St Joseph's, Blackrock; in Paris, in the Irish College and the Institut Catholique; in St Mary's College, Strawberry Hill; and then a succession of appointments spanning almost half a century, and all concerned with direction and formation with priests, students and Sisters. This was his "rightful garden"; he had found his niche. 1944-56, Director in St Joseph's; 1956-61, superior in Glenart; 1961-67, Director of the Daughters of Charity in Great Britain and Ireland; 1966-75, Provincial of the Irish Province. Then that astonishing move to Nigeria at the youthful age of 65 to take up again, and in a vastly more concentrated form, that work of spiritual direction in the 500 student Bigard major seminary in Enugu.

Though James was later a devotee of courses, seminars and small groups it's worth remembering that he had done a large part of his spiritual direction before these were invented!

Those of us who were his students must now marvel at his understanding, perception and discernment in those days when these very terms were scarcely used. Part of this may be explained by his voracious appetite for reading and absorbing what he read. It's a truism to say he was light years ahead of most of us in discovering and devouring the very latest in scripture, theology and spirituality. Even in Nigeria he had ways and means of overcoming the problem of limited access to new books and publications. He once contacted me and asked if I could look after the bill for "a bit of an oul' book" that he had ordered in Paris

for shipment to Nigeria. Eventually the bill turned up – for £175.50 (sterling!). Next time he was home on leave I made it my business to ask him, with studied casualness of course, how he had enjoyed his book. He then admitted the “book” was really a six volume edition of the *Dictionnaire Théologique* and, yes, he was enjoying it immensely and had already reached volume 5.

In the presence of such activity and zeal the rest of us were often moved to a self-righteous questioning of the prudence of it all. Many were the gloomy predictions thirty years ago that James couldn't possibly keep up his outrageous workload, but in the event, of course, practically all his questioners predeceased him.

There can't be much doubt, I believe, but that the source of it all lay in prayer. What “grande communication” there was between himself and the Lord no one ever found out; he just never told anyone. About this, as about so many other aspects of his life, he was reticent, self-deprecatory, even dismissive. Like his master St Vincent he never drew up a coherent system of spirituality or prayer, but it was his life-long fidelity to the practice of prayer that served as the best teaching and example for others. One of my very earliest memories of James is seeing him hunched at his prie-dieu in St Joseph's, Blackrock, at 5.30 a.m., and one of my very last is seeing him on his knees in the oratory of St Vincent's, Enugu; the only difference after fifty years was that this time it was 5.00 a.m.! All of which is an eloquent expression of Vincent's dictum that the grace of early morning rising and prayer is intimately connected with the grace of one's very vocation.

It's quite fascinating to find, as you leaf through the conferences and letters of Vincent, how the best loved lines and passages came alive in James. Himself and Vincent became interchangeable. What was vintage Vincent is vintage James, and no wonder. He was so steeped in the study of Vincent that he grew into his very likeness. Said Vincent once: “I have been thinking these past few days about the common ordinary life our Lord was pleased to lead on earth”. This is exactly what James inculcated by his attitude and whole approach to life – the simple, the frugal, the ordinary. “Nothing is quite enough”! In an age, too, when frequent, if not excessive, self-reference tends to occur in and out of homilies James was a constant abstentionist from the practice. Humility and self-emptying were his trade.

Vincent again: “We must not”, said he, “pay too much attention to doctors, who are only too willing to oblige”. James spent most of his life, but especially his latter years, affirming that particular thesis. His life in Nigeria was a saga of defiance, defiance of all the accepted rules

and practices for health preservation. Seven or eight years ago I was misguided enough to imagine that it was at last the time for him to return home. I wrote in that vein to the rector of the Bigard Seminary, Enugu, who replied thus: "If you think you can take Father Cahalan from us for silly things like health reasons you'll have a fight on your hands".

A wiser man, I bethought me of Vincent's: "As for me, old and infirm as I am, I'd like to go to the Indies to win souls for Christ, even if I should die on the way".

Nigeria was the apogee of his existence, the fulfilment of long-cherished ambition. I hope it doesn't sound patronising but it is probably true that only those of us who have worked in Nigeria can realise what he meant to people, priests and sisters there. He may never have made a deep study of the process of inculturation but he saw them as part of his life and they in turn grew to love him dearly as part of theirs.

Because of his own perpetual youthfulness he had a particular way with him in meeting and talking with the young, particularly the young sisters in Nigeria and Ethiopia. Ethiopia, in his latter years, had become the only real threat to Nigeria in his affections.

All of this is but an inadequate series of reminiscences. At another time and in another place his life and the worth of it must be properly chronicled. He was a man like the prophets raised up and blessed by God and given to our Province. In the words of one of the Advent prayers: He was "the daystar powerfully dispelling our darkness, awakening our faith from sleep". May we prove worthy of him.

James died on 15 December in the Regional House of the Daughters of Charity, Eleme, Port Harcourt, Nigeria. So fitting that he should die in the loving care of the Daughters whom he had loved and served. *Finis coronal opus*. Said Vincent: "If we are to die like Christ we must live like Christ". James Cahalan did both.

May the angels receive him into Paradise;
 May the martyrs welcome him at his coming,
 And with Lazarus, once poor, may he enjoy eternal rest.

Francis Mullan CM

JAMES CAHALAN CM

Born: Borrisokane, Co. Tipperary, 14 September 1910.

Entered the CM: 4 October 1931.

Final vows: 11 October 1933.

Ordained a priest in Clonliffe College, Dublin, by Dr Francis Wall, auxiliary bishop of Dublin, 21 December 1935.

APPOINTMENTS

1936-37 Irish College, Paris.

1937-38 St Joseph's, Blackrock.

1938-39 Irish College, Paris.

Sept. 1939 – early 1940 St Joseph's, Blackrock.

1940-44 St Mary's, Strawberry Hill.

1944-56 St Joseph's, Blackrock.

1956-61 St Kevin's, Glenart.

1961-67 Director of the Daughters of Charity, Britain and Ireland.

1966-75 Provincial, Irish Province.

1975-88 Bigard Seminary, Enugu. (*Adscriptus* Ikot Ekpene and Ogbia).

1988-1991 St Vincent's, Enugu. (Director, Bigard seminary).

Died 15 December 1991.

Father Andrew Kavanagh CM

Andy Kavanagh was born in 1904 in the townland of Tomgarrow, near Newtownbarry, Co. Wexford, where he grew up on the family farm. He was one of thirteen children, of whom two became Vincentian foreign missionaries and two Poor Clare sisters.

As a young man Andy emigrated to western Canada where, as he told us, he ploughed the prairie with a team of four horses, and drove around on a sleigh in the winter. But he soon returned to Ireland, entering the community in 1927 after the example of his brother Maurice. He had done his two years of philosophy in Gateacre.

After an STL in Rome he went to China in 1932 with the intention of spending his whole life in that country. He went, he told me, because he thought it was the best way to save his soul. After his arrival in Peking (now Beijing) he contracted a severe illness as a result of which it was felt he was too delicate to live in the country areas so he was confined to working in the city. I am sure his parishioners found him a congenial and attentive pastor.

During his first visit home in 1947 the communists took over in China so Andy could not return there. After a year in Sheffield he was made bursar in Glenart. By this time Andy had become a city man at heart but he accepted his banishment to the country in a spirit of faith.

Those of us who were students in Glenart at the time still remember

vividly how, when he wanted a job done, he would approach the students with his right hand raised, calling out: "Two men, two men".

He assisted me at my first mass and when I failed to uncover the ciborium at the offertory the whole congregation held its breath while Andy walked gravely up to the altar to remove the offending lid. It was typical of him; he didn't miss anything.

After Glenart there followed five years in Cork and three in Lanark, where the Scottish winters proved too much for him as he drove around the rural area of the parish on his motor cycle during the harshest weather. In 1959 he was finally placed in the balmy climate of Mill Hill, where he was to remain till his death.

Between Andy's return to Ireland in 1947 and his appointment to Mill Hill in 1959, a period of twelve years, he was in four different houses, which might give the impression that this was an unstable period in his life, contrasting with the fifteen years he spent in Beijing and the thirty-two in Mill Hill. I suspect that the truth is more complex. After fifteen years in a remote and alien culture Andy, and the other China missionaries, arrived back in a Province which, as I saw with my own eyes, did not quite know what to do with them or how to treat them. The missionaries themselves found it hard to readjust to life in Europe. It was a difficult human situation, but Andy did not complain.

When I went to Mill Hill in 1985 I again came into contact with Andy. In every sense of the word he was an edifying man. Right up to the end he was the first down in the oratory for morning prayer. He attended all community exercises, never missed his weekly holy hour, and would be seen continually walking about the house saying his rosary.

He had his own pastoral style, based on personal contact and great sympathy for people in their troubles and temptations. His notebooks, full of the names and addresses of parishioners whom he visited, testify to his zeal. In later years when heart disease struck and he became less involved in the parish he continued to meet the people at the door of the church before all the weekend masses. He continued this practice literally until the day of his death, a custom which made him much loved.

Like St Vincent, Andy disclaimed any pretension to scholarship, yet he was always well informed, extremely shrewd, and judged people and events correctly. I often asked his advice and took his views very seriously indeed. Towards the end his speech became more and more abrupt, but I never ceased to marvel at his ability to get to the nub of a question in a short sentence or two.

He was plagued with deafness from his youth and, of course, this condition grew worse until, in the end, he had to give up hearing confes-

sions. But a good example of his adaptability was the way, while he was still hearing, he took to the new rite, to the great profit of his penitents. (Another example of his openness was his desire, in his eighty-seventh year, to master the word processor).

Andy used his senior citizen's pass to rove all around London by train and bus right up to the end. Indeed he had an extraordinary knowledge of the intricacies of the London transport system. He took it for granted that he would get painful attacks of angina on these expeditions, so as far as possible he would walk where there were shop windows into which he could look until the attack passed.

Once, when on retreat in Blackrock, he went for a walk in the afternoon and felt the pain coming on. He turned in to inspect a house and was challenged by a garda who accused him of planning to burgle the place.

Andy followed Vincent's maxim of accepting everything, good and bad, from the hand of God, and so he never complained about his deafness or his increasing isolation or his continuous angina pains. But, equally, he accepted the celebrations for his diamond jubilee with unaffected happiness. The enormous crowd of people at his jubilee mass, and afterwards at the reception in the hall, testified to the affection in which he was held.

But these celebrations in October 1991 were to be a sort of anticipation of his funeral, when the church was again packed, with people standing one third of the way from the back of the building.

Early in December Andy received a bad report from his doctor. From that time he began to read Sheila Cassidy's *Good Friday People*, surely in preparation for his own death, but otherwise he carried on with his usual lack of self-pity, although failing visibly.

Shortly before five o'clock on Christmas morning he woke up Fr Briscoe to say that he was unwell. His breathing was bad but he had no pain. Fintan anointed him while I rang for an ambulance. When he was brought into Casualty, by an unbelievable coincidence, one of his grandnieces was on duty as staff nurse. She recognised him and spoke to him before he went into a coma. He died an hour later at 6.30.

As I mentioned above, there was a large congregation for his funeral mass, including many who had moved away from Mill Hill but returned briefly to mourn a friend. One sensed from the singing that this was both the mourning and celebration in faith of a good man. Perhaps it was the ultimate vindication of his pastoral style of friendship and close personal contact. While it is more important that his name is written in heaven, Andy will be long remembered in Mill Hill.

ANDREW KAVANAGH CM

Born: Tomgarrow, Co. Wexford, 29 March 1904.

Entered the CM: 7 September 1927.

Final vows: 8 September 1929.

Ordained a priest by Dr Francis Wall, auxiliary bishop of Dublin, in Clonliffe College, 4 October 1931.

APPOINTMENTS

1931-32 Casa Internazionale, Rome.

1932-48 St Joseph's, Peking.

1948-49 St Vincent's, Sheffield.

1949-51 St Kevin's, Glenart.

1951-56 St Vincent's, Cork.

1956-59 St Mary's, Lanark.

1959-91 Sacred Heart, Mill Hill.

Died 25 December 1991.