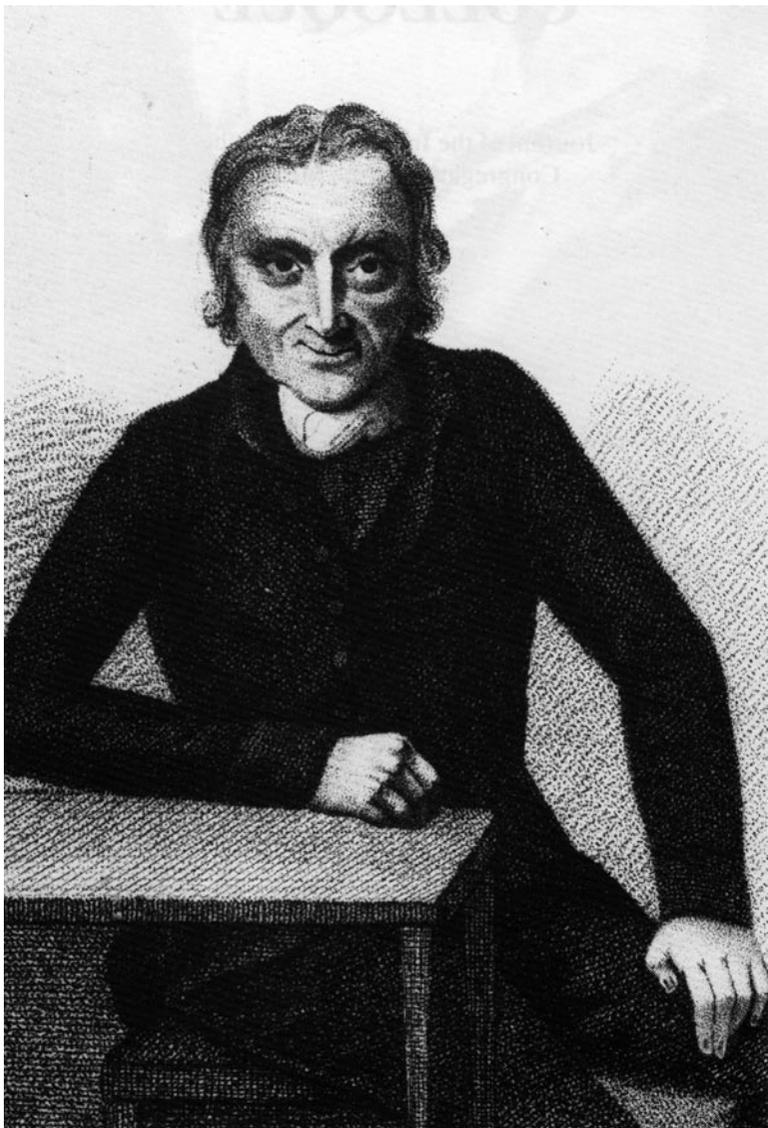


COLLOQUE

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Edward Ferris, 1738-1809
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Editorial

1833 – 1983

One hundred and fifty years ago a new day-school opened its doors at 34 Usher's Quay, Dublin, and thus was taken the first step towards the establishment of the Congregation of the Mission in Ireland. In the 17th century the Irish were the second most numerous nationality in the Congregation and during that century a number of Irish and French confreres worked in Ireland at different times. At the very end of the 18th century there was once again a Vincentian presence in Ireland in the person of Edward Ferris. In the early 19th century, after his death, there were several abortive attempts to revive such a presence. It was to the Usher's Quay community that eventual success in this came, and their Superior saw them as the heirs, through Edward Ferris's influence in Maynooth, of the original inspiration and spirit of St Vincent.

1983 has two other notable anniversaries. It was in 1633 that Louise de Marillac gathered around herself the first group of Daughters of Charity and began living with them in community. In 1833 Frédéric Ozanam founded the Conferences of St Vincent de Paul.

The Editorials in the first six issues of COLLOQUE were written by Philip Walshe. He also determined with the Elo Press the general format of the journal and successfully launched it. He merits the thanks of the Province.

Edward Ferris

Thomas Davitt

Caragh Lake in Co. Kerry fills the northern end of Glencar valley. When Edward Ferris arrived at St Lazare in Paris on 29 January 1758 he said he had been born in Glencar just over twenty years previously, on 1 January 1738.¹ He had served as a gentleman-cadet in the Irish Brigade of the French army.² From 1638 when John Skyddie from Cork had joined the Congregation there had been an unbroken Irish presence in it. At the time of Ferris's entry there were at least three Irish confrères: Thomas Barry from Dublin, who had joined in Rome and was working in Italy. Christopher Vaughan from Navan, and Thady O'Rourke from Tralee. There were three others who could easily have still been alive in 1758 but the dates of whose deaths are not recorded: Eugene Sullivan who was possibly another Kerryman, William Giffard who for some reason was known as Fitzharris, a Dubliner, and Brother Michael O'Daniel from Waterford. When Ferris entered there were almost thirty seminarists in St Lazare and seventy students.³ Ferris took his vows on 30 January 1760 in the presence of Arnould Bossu who had become Director of the seminaire just about the time he entered. Four months later another Irishman entered, Matthew O'Hea from the diocese of Ross.⁴ On 27 March the following year Ferris received the four minor orders from the archbishop of Paris, Christopher de Beaumont, in the archbishop's residence.⁵

There is no record of the date of his ordination to the priesthood nor of what appointments he held before September 1771. He was in St Lazare on 15 August 1770 at the vows of Jean Hugot.⁶ In September 1771, some months short of his thirty-fourth birthday, he was appointed superior of the seminary in Toul.⁷ The original records of the seminary for this period do not appear to have survived but a history of the diocese contains some reference to Ferris.⁸ His appointment as superior came at the height of a disagreement between his predecessor, Honoré-Nicolas Brocquevielle, and the bishop. Brocquevielle had been already on the seminary staff when the bishop chose him as his own spiritual director, appointed him Vicar General and asked the Congregation to appoint him Superior. From May 1765 he had been Visitor of the Province of Champagne. Martin

says he was lax about standards for admission to orders and did not keep a check on what was being taught, on the behaviour of the students or on the spirit of the community. He is also supposed to have intrigued against the bishop. Unsuitable books were found in students' rooms, there were rumours of nocturnal escapades and *une académie de joyeux viveurs* "*Epicuri de grege porcos*" organised by some of the students. Some parish priests notified the bishop about all this and as a result of enquiries made he reprimanded Brocquevielle, who then turned against him. The bishop asked the Congregation to remove him, and some other confrères, from the seminary. Ferris was his replacement as Superior, but in the opinion of Martin he was of too weak and indecisive character to initiate the necessary reforms. Felix Contassot CM criticises Martin for his lack of objectivity in portraying both Brocquevielle and Ferris and suggests that he would have seen them both in a different light had he taken the trouble to consult Vincentian records.⁹

During Ferris's period as rector of the seminary in Toul there was a nun in the diocese who claimed to have had visions of Our Lord during which he complained that while there were feasts of Corpus Christi and the Sacred Heart there was no feast of his Holy Soul. She convinced her Jesuit director that the visions were genuine and the bishop appointed Ferris and two others to investigate the matter. Their opinion was that what she claimed was contrary to the dogma of the incarnation and dangerous for devotion to the Blessed Eucharist, and that writings which had appeared about it contained many errors already condemned. This put an end to the matter without any scandal.¹⁰

In July 1774 Pagel de Ventoux, dean of Toul cathedral, asked Ferris on behalf of the Vicars General not to forbid the young men in the seminary to curl and powder their hair "as there was no need to back up their director Fr Fourcy in all the ridiculous demands he makes on the seminarians".¹¹

Toul is about 25km from Nancy. In his evidence at the enquiry into the sacking of Saint Lazare, Ferris said he had a doctorate in theology from the university of Nancy. There are two problems about this. First, confrères at that time were not supposed to go for degrees, and secondly the university did not have a faculty of theology. With regard to the first, the Congregation in the latter half of the eighteenth century was governed loosely enough and confrères did in fact take degrees. The doctorate in theology could be very easily obtained and in a disconcertingly short time; the licentiate, not the doctorate, was the significant degree.

Ferris's statement that his doctorate was from Nancy seems to be contradicted by the fact that Nancy did not confer theology degrees.

There was a theology faculty in the small town of Pont-a-Mousson; this town, Toul and Nancy are each about 25km from each other. As Pont-à-Mousson was such a small place it is possible that after Nancy became part of France in 1766 its degrees were loosely referred to as being from Nancy.¹²

He may also have been Vicar General of Toul, as the *Maynooth College Calendar* for 1884-1885 says; Brocquevielle who predated him as rector of the seminary and, under a new bishop, also succeeded him, was Vicar General on each occasion.¹³

The new bishop of Toul arrived in September 1774 and Brocquevielle resumed his rectorate of the seminary; Ferris left for the seminary in Amiens. His patent as superior there is dated 4 November of that year; at some stage he also became Vicar General of the diocese.¹⁴ The archives of the seminary for the period of his rectorate have not survived but a certain amount of factual information is available. The building had been erected in 1740 and had 120 rooms. The library contained 6481 books divided into twelve sections, the first being banned books.¹⁵ In March 1779 work began on the construction of a new kitchen building, as an inscription in the stonework commemorates. On 22 July the following year, at 2.15 in the afternoon, lightning destroyed the bell-tower; a student scratched the details into the stonework of the window in his room. Ferris had the tower rebuilt and in 1783 two confrères on the staff, Jean-Baptiste Bagnolle and Paul Brochois, donated a new chime of four bells inscribed with their names and that of the rector. Unlike others in the city these bells survived the Revolution as the buildings were then being used as a military hospital. Ferris also commissioned several paintings for the reception rooms, some, or all, of which are supposed to have been painted by refugee Irish artists to whom he gave asylum in the seminary.

During his period in Amiens he also came into contact with another Irish priest, John Kavanagh from Gorey, who had been ordained in 1774 at the age of 24. He had gone to Nantes the following year for study and then became chaplain to a marquis. After that he saw active service as chaplain on board a French warship for a year and then became chaplain to a childless old couple near Angers. During Advent 1783 four confrères from Angers gave a mission in the village where he was. The superior, Claude Burel, who was on the mission, had entered the seminaire in St Lazare about ten weeks before Ferris, and when he met Kavanagh he told him of the Irish rector in Amiens and suggested he should write to him. Kavanagh was hoping for a better position and he thought that the Vicar General and seminary rector might have some influence. He wrote

a long autobiographical letter in English and received in reply a rather short one in French, dated 9 January 1784:

Sir,

Allow me to make use of the language to which I have become accustomed in replying to the letter which you did me the honour of writing to me. Fr Burel is very kind to have spoken to you so favourably of me. For my part I am really embarrassed, so little do I deserve it. Why, Sir, do you not take your talents and zeal to our own country where the harvest is so great and the gospel workers so few in number? I would suggest this course rather than a position in the diocese of Amiens where the benefices are very poorly paid and there are a great many priests. At the start of this new year I wish you everything which could make you happy, and I beg you to believe that I am, with the greatest respect,

Your very humble

and very obedient servant

Ferris, Vic. Gen; Sup. of the seminary.¹⁶

While he was in Amiens Ferris was elected delegate of the Picardy province to attend three General Assemblies of the Congregation held in Paris in 1780, 1786 and 1788.¹⁷ The 1788 Assembly was summoned after the death of the ninth Superior General Antoine Jacquier. Jean-Félix Cayla de la Garde was elected as his successor. The election of his First Assistant, Alexis Pertuisot, took little time but then two further ballots failed to produce the required majority of votes for the Second Assistant. Francois Brunei and Ferris topped the poll so a third ballot just between these two was held and again neither reached the necessary quota; a fourth similarly failed so Brunet was declared elected Second Assistant on a simple majority of votes and Ferris became Third Assistant.¹⁸ The Assembly ended on 18 June and Ferris changed his residence from Amiens to St Lazare.

The following year on 13 July, the day before the fall of the Bastille, St. Lazare was attacked by a mob. Cayla described what happened in a letter dated 24 July:

At three o'clock in the morning a raging mob armed with guns, sabres and torches came to St Lazare; the doors were broken down in less than a quarter of an hour. The pillage began with unheard-of fury and went on until five in the afternoon, carried on by waves of frenzied maniacs who followed each other in their thousands

and whom nothing could frighten, since Paris was without troops and defenceless. Everything was wrecked. In the house there is not a door left, not a window, table or bed. Every stick of furniture of any sort was stolen. Money from the Bursar's office was taken, as well as private money. We have lost most of our documents and legal deeds. The library suffered particularly badly. The refectory is just a heap of rubbish. All our supplies have disappeared. Wine was flowing all over the floor of the cellars and nearly a hundred of these wretches were drowned in it after getting drunk. Some others poisoned themselves in the dispensary, which has been reduced to just its bare walls. At about three in the afternoon fire broke out in the hayloft and all the buildings would have been destroyed only for the prompt help of the Fire Brigade.¹⁹

This letter makes no mention of Ferris either by name or title. Another memoir of the pillage, compiled from the accounts of eyewitnesses, contains this passage:

The Superior General and two of his Assistants escaped over the perimeter wall; a third who took the risk of going through the mob to summon help was brutally beaten up by them and seriously injured.²⁰

Gabriel Perboyre in an article published posthumously in the *Annales* in 1907 gives excerpts from documents on the pillage which are in the French National Archives. He identifies one of the two Assistants who escaped with Cayla as Brunet, and the one who was beaten up by the mob as Ferris:

Fr Ferris, who went out to look for help, was followed; beaten up and covered with blood he succeeded in escaping from this fierce brutality by moving in succession from one house to another, in each of which he found refuge.²¹

The pillage took place on Monday the 13th; on Thursday the 16th an enquiry into it opened and the evidence of witnesses who were heard is preserved in the National Archives in Paris. Ferris brought the members of the enquiry up to his room, No. 58 on the first floor:

Having arrived at it we noticed that the door was all broken and when we went into the said room we found it completely wrecked

with not a single stick of furniture undamaged; the frames as well as the panes of the windows were smashed, all the books removed, the room a shambles of papers and broken furniture, with about a dozen books scattered here and there on the floor and the remainder either pitched out the windows or taken off the shelves and torn up. And the said Monsieur Deferris then told us that all his money had been stolen, to the amount of 20 *louis* belonging to himself and about 50 *louis* which he had been minding for some of the young men in the house, as well as his silver watch. His personal papers had also been stolen, in particular his baptism certificate, a loss which is all the more serious for him since he is a native of Ireland where the parish priests do not keep baptismal registers because of the troubled times they live in; on top of this, the certificate of his doctorate in theology from the university of Nancy, the papers showing he was Vicar General of the diocese of Amiens, and especially those attesting his service in the Irish Brigade, Clare's Regiment, Conway's Company, signed by Conway, captain of the said company and by Colonel Major Moore, and counter-signed by the Chevallier de Mezieres, Lieutenant General of the King's armies...²²

Francis Clet also gave evidence and like Ferris reported the loss of his silver watch, personal money and students' money.

The house had sustained about one million *livres* worth of material damage and Cayla in his circular of 24 July mentions that it could no longer support the former number of confrères and that other houses would have to come to its help financially and by taking some of the confrères.²³ Cayla and others had resumed residence in the wrecked house a few days after the outrage.

Five months later Cayla in his New Year's letter of 1790 says that though the numbers are down the spirituality of the house is much better than before. A year later he writes:

No matter what our fears, no matter what probability there is of our being suppressed, our obligations do not change. We will be missioners until the last moment. . .

He was still in St Lazare when he wrote his circular for the New Year of 1792. None of these three circulars makes any mention of his Assistants by either name or title, though they do mention another Irish confrère, Robert Hanna of Newry, who was in Macao on his way to the

mathematical academy in Peking.

1792 was a year in which very practical problems arose for the confrères in St Lazare. On 28 April the wearing of clerical dress outside of religious ceremonies was prohibited, and on 18 August the Congregation of the Mission was suppressed. In the National Archives in Paris there is an interesting collection of documents from St Lazare from July and August of that year, all dealing with money.²⁴ They are mainly notes signed by students, laybrothers or priests acknowledging receipt of money from Ferris for clothing; in some of them he is described as Superior of the house. From the time of St Vincent the Superior General was always technically the Superior of St *Lazare* but the actual day-to-day running of the house was in the hands of one of his Assistants. From these documents, and from a House of Commons report on Maynooth in 1808, it would appear that Ferris was regarded as the Superior of the house. Some of the community were not present in St Lazare and others collected their money for them. A letter from Jean-Baptiste Varrain to Ignace Delorme in St Lazare asks the latter to send on his laundry by the milkman, and continues:

If money is being handed out send it along as well if you can as I don't want to go back yet unless one is free to leave Paris again. You can tell Ferris that if a signature is necessary he has only to hold on to this letter until I get back. He'll see from this that I'm agreeable to that, for I'm afraid all the time that some trouble will break out and all will be lost. Send me what I ask as soon as you can, and come yourself if possible for I'd very much like to see you.

As well as these notes and this letter there are two formal documents dated 17 and 27 August 1792 "Year 4 of Liberty and 1 of Equality". The earlier one was drawn up the day before the Congregation was suppressed and its purpose was to record that the one hundred and one members of the community of St Lazare met in the house to authorise the Bursar to give one hundred francs to each confrère to purchase civilian clothing, and to sign the document as evidence that "each individually makes himself responsible for what concerns him with regard to the Municipality, promising and binding for and against everything". Neither Cayla nor Brunei signed this document, but Ferris, Pertuisot and the Fourth Assistant, the Italian Carlo Domenici Sicardi, did. Ferris also signed as proxy for four others, including Brunet. Ten days later, on the 27th, they met again for what was probably their last meeting as a community. The

purpose of this meeting was also to distribute money in view of their decreed expulsion from the house. Once again the signature of Cayla is absent from the minutes and Ferris is the only one of the Assistants whose signature appears; once again he signed as proxy for Brunei. The absence of the signatures of the General and the other Assistants probably indicates that they were keeping away from the house. Five days later, on 1 September, another document was drawn up attesting the fact that the ornate casket in which the body of St Vincent had been kept in St Lazare had been requisitioned by the municipal authorities; once again the document was signed by Ferris but not by the General or any other Assistant.²⁵

On Sunday 2 September Cayla and Brunet left Paris.²⁶ They and the other Assistants escaped the September Massacres of that day and the following. On the 6th Cayla and Brunet were in Le Forez near Lyon but were back in Paris later, and before the end of the month they were in hiding, with Ferris, in the Chateau d'Heilly in Picardy.²⁷ Cayla was from the south of France and before being elected General had worked only in that region. Brunet and Ferris had each been superior of the seminary in Amiens for quite long terms and it was probably their contacts which facilitated their going into hiding in the area. By 24 July 1793 they were Ypres, from where Cayla wrote on that date.²⁸ On 13 September he wrote from Tournai²⁹ and by 9 December they were in Manheim in the Palatinate.³⁰ In November 1791, in view of the situation in France, he had erected the houses in the Palatine into a separate province; the confrères were in charge of the observatory in Manheim.³¹ In his circular of 1 January 1794 Cayla, writing from Manheim, mentions that Brunet and Ferris are with him, that he has not heard of Pertuisot for nearly a year and that Sicardi is superior of a house in Turin. He mentions that Pius VI had appointed an Italian confrère Benedetto Fenaja as Vicar General for as long as he was impeded in his functions, and he now officially notifies the Congregation that he has taken the reins of administration back into his own hands.³²

In May 1794 Cayla, Brunet and Ferris left Manheim for Rome, arriving there on 9 November; they were joined by Sicardi and Jacques-Antoine Lesueur the Secretary General. Rome was not an undisturbed city and they had in turn to leave two different houses of the Congregation. Cayla's circulars of January and December 1795, January 1797 and January 1798 make no mention of any of the Assistants by either name or title, but during 1798 on an unrecorded date Pertuisot died; Brunet therefore became First Assistant and Ferris Second.

However, something much more significant for Ferris also happened that year. On 17 January he was appointed Dean in Maynooth, the first holder of the office.³³ On 10 May Luke Concannon OP in Rome wrote to John Thomas Troy OP, archbishop of Dublin, about the new Dean:

We are old friends. He is an excellent good priest now turned of 60 yrs of age. The good man forgot his native language almost. I believe they'll make him General of his Congregation . . . Ferris was surprised the place was not offered to me.³⁴

In spite of the date of the appointment it would seem that Ferris did not fully resign himself to accepting it until later in the year. On 21 September Concannon wrote to Troy:

I informed you that Rd Mr Edward Ferris now cheerfully accepts the Post offered him at Maynooth. The change that lately happened in his Congregation made him determine. Almost all the houses of his Order are lost. Nobody can be fitter for the office given him in the College. Such has been his employment almost all his life. He's Vicr Genl of a B in France & was greatly esteemed there. He's now studying the English and hopes to get from the trustees the sum offered to help him through the journey. He'll set out from Italy next Spring. Perhaps we'll travel together.

On 12 January of the following year Concannon told the archbishop that "Abbé Ferris calls often to see me" and that he is waiting only for the means to start his journey, and Concannon suggests some financial arrangements. "Ferris is impatient to hear his fate & prays a speedy answer". Arrangements were soon made and Concannon could write on 10 March: "Abbé Edward Ferris is to depart from hence at the same time with me". But by 28 April neither of them had started:

Poor Abbé Ferris is without any lodging here... All my friends unanimously dissuade me from attempting to go home, the roads being covered with hosts of warriors of different nations & the sea spread with Privateers; tis next an impossibility to penetrate into the Emperor's dominions, & notwithstanding all these difficulties Abbé Ferris has the courage to set off and deprives me of the pleasure of travelling with him. I will consign Dr Dillon's pallium to the Abbé, according to his Grace's instructions to F Connolly tho' I greatly fear he'll be robbed of it & everything else on the

way, in the present dangerous moment.³⁵

This time he did depart and arrived safely in Maynooth where he was installed as Dean on 17 June 1799.³⁶

By January 1800 the new Dean was making his presence felt. Eugene Conwell, one of the students, wrote to his uncle:

The discipline is much more severer than heretofore. There are many new regulations adopted by Mr Ferris.³⁷

On 1 February Concannon mentioned in a letter to Troy that the “overplus” of the money which had been made available to Ferris for his travel was to be paid, on the instructions of the latter, to Cayla. Cayla, however, died eleven days later in Rome. No document naming a Vicar General was found among his papers so Brunet, who had become First Assistant on the death of Pertuisot, now became Vicar General according to the Constitutions. Some confrères claimed that in view of the then unsettled state of Congregation affairs such provisions of the Constitutions were no longer applicable. To settle this Pius VII officially confirmed Brunet in office and appointed a commission to look into the matter. This commission issued its report on 17 May 1800 and said that the Constitutions still stood. Brunet explained all this in a letter from Rome dated 25 May. He added in a postscript that on 21 June there had been found among Cayla’s papers the *schedula* signed and sealed and dated 30 October 1799 naming himself as Vicar General.³⁸

Ferris was now First Assistant and this brought problems for Brunet. Of the original four Assistants Pertuisot was dead, he himself had become Vicar General and Ferris was in Maynooth; this meant that only Sicardi was available, and for many decisions of the Council the presence of at least two Assistants was required. On 23 May Brunet had written to a confrère about Cayla’s death and added:

I will have to get another Assistant in place of Mr Ferris, who has an excellent job where he can put 60 pounds sterling a year in his pocket.³⁹

He did not mean “in place of Mr Ferris” to signify that Ferris would cease to be an Assistant, but that because of his non-availability another Assistant would be needed in Rome to make a quorum for the Council. He petitioned Pius VII on 25 July 1800 to name a new Assistant since one was dead and another *in remotissimis Hiberniae partibus existente*,

and that he as Vicar General could not appoint a new Assistant without consulting at least two Assistants. He asked the Pope to appoint Benedetto Fenaja, Visitor of the Roman province; his request was granted. On 22 August he further requested, and was granted, that the summoning of a General Assembly to elect a new Superior General be postponed beyond the interval laid down in the Constitutions.⁴⁰

The £60 that Ferris was earning apparently made a deep impression on Brunei, as he mentioned it in a number of letters. He wrote to Jean-Claude Vicherat CM in Algiers:

It is worth 60 pounds a year, together with lodging, food, heating, lighting, etc.⁴¹

In October 1800 he wrote to Giovanni Crisostomo Isolabella CM and after mentioning Fenaja's appointment said that Ferris had left Rome in the June of the previous year for his new post in Ireland which was "very advantageous for his purse".⁴² His interest in Ferris's earnings had a practical side to it. Cayla and his Assistants had decided that they were not going to live in Rome at the expense of the Italian confrères, nor were they going to give the impression that the General and his Council were taking up permanent residence there. He wanted to make it quite clear that it was a temporary arrangement and that while there they would live on whatever money confrères in other places could send them. This was why Ferris arranged for the balance of his travel money to be paid to Cayla, and was almost certainly why he was allowed to take the post in Maynooth.⁴³

At a Meeting of the Maynooth Trustees on 4 November 1800 Ferris was promoted from the office of Dean, which he had held for almost eighteen months, to that of Professor of Moral Theology, though he was to continue to act as Dean until the following meeting of the Trustees.⁴⁴ Like his predecessor in his new post, Louis Delahogue, Ferris is described in the Dublin Directories of the period as also Professor of Scripture and Hebrew.⁴⁵ In 1808 he told the House of Commons enquiry on Maynooth that his salary was £106, with the same "perks" as when Dean.⁴⁶

In April 1801 Brunei again told Vicherat about the post Ferris held in "The magnificent rich college founded near Dublin" and said that perhaps he will be appointed a bishop in Ireland.⁴⁷ Vicherat apparently thought that he could profit from Ferris's large salary but in June Brunei had to disabuse him:

You say that Mr Ferris could come to your aid. It is not long since

he wrote to London that he was very sorry that he could not help the confrères who are in London in rather large numbers because he was overwhelmed by a crowd of ruined relations.⁴⁸

Ferris may have been involved in one such exiled confrère getting a post in Maynooth. Gilbert-Olivier Le Grand had been superior of Bayeux seminary and in September 1792 he escaped to London. His whereabouts can be traced until 1796 but after that there does not seem to be any reference to him until May 1802 when an exiled priest of the Paris Foreign Missions wrote from London to Rome that “Frs Ferris and Le Grand are getting on well”. On 25 September Le Grand was appointed Professor of Humanity in Maynooth. He taught Greek and Latin there until 25 December of the same year. He was fifty-one years old. Dominique-François Hanon CM, rector of Amiens seminary, was trying to locate as many pre-Revolution confrères as possible. He made an undated note that Le Grand was in Dublin with Ferris.⁴⁹

Priests who had fled France at the time of the Revolution seem to have kept in some sort of touch with each other and passed on news. Many of the early professors in Maynooth were French and some of their correspondence has survived. Cardinal Jean-Siffrein Maury, who was in Italy, used to write to Delahogue in Maynooth and in a letter of 2 April 1802 said that Delahogue and Ferris would have to put up with the poor wine and that many are very much worse off, and that they should be very glad they are somewhere where they are able to teach theology without hindrance to students who are “numerous, docile, hard-working, many of whom have talents which must be of great hope to their teachers”.⁵⁰

Maynooth affairs may have seemed that way to an exiled French cardinal in Italy; they appeared in another light on the spot. Ferris’s successor as Dean was Thomas Coen and an anonymous author writing in 1808 contrasted the two of them; it would seem to be not free of bias:

Maynooth has rapidly declined both in discipline and learning notwithstanding the persevering efforts to the contrary of one of the most virtuous and learned ecclesiastics that the Catholic Church can boast in any age or in any country. The person to whom we allude is the Rev. Dr Ferris... He was ordained a priest among a society of clergymen, known by the name of the Brothers of the Mission, whose revenues were then considerable, and who spread all over the world, great numbers of them being even in China. Dr Ferris by his extraordinary merit, his transcendent piety and his universal learning, raised himself to the highest consideration

in the society, and his knowledge of human nature and human life soon pointed him out as the most proper person to assist in regulating its affairs. He was therefore appointed Vice-General of the order, which office he held until the period of the revolution...

After an absence of forty-five years he at length returned to his native country, and from being a director of the greatest society in the world, next to the Jesuits, he became Dean of Maynooth college. The conduct of this great man in so humble a situation soon endeared him to the students. His humanity, his exemplary piety, and his rigid self-denials operated as the most eloquent lesson of morality. The amiability of his disposition, his tenderness of heart frequently displayed, and his elegant manners made him an object of love. The students worshipped his very name, they adored his virtues. To such a pitch of discipline did he raise the college that for sanctity of manners, Maynooth in 1800 and 1801 might be styled the Bangor of modern times. Alas, the scene is terribly changed, but Dr Ferris is no longer Dean. Will it be believed that he was succeeded in his office by an illiterate, vulgar student who was despised by his fellow scholars, for the meanness of his manners and the littleness of his talents, who was brought from the most uncivilised part of Connaught. . .⁵¹

In subsequent issues of the magazine many points from this article were taken up in the letters columns but none of them concerned Ferris.

In January 1803 simmering discontent among the students erupted into some sort of demonstration. One evening at the height of the tension

...Mr Ferris came down to the Hall (no other man could venture to do it) to explain Dr Flood's sentiments. He received a great deal of respect, but at last said that if they would not return to order that he would begin to separate them and left them thus. They told him that they only wanted their grievances redressed, and that his authority and that of the other Professors was suspended, as they had applied to a higher tribunal for that redress which their Professors refused them.⁵²

Some of the students were disciplined as a result of this affair and in March, Ferris interceded with Bishop John Young of Limerick on behalf of three students of that diocese, writing a separate letter for each of them.⁵³ For Thomas Hogan, a subdeacon, and Edward Byrne, an acolyte, he wrote in Latin. Byrne was an *eximius adolescens, indole comptus, consuetudine mansuetus, moribus innoxius, ingenio capax, et inter*

capadores ex suis condiscipulis annumerandus. Hogan had sese semper exhibuisse indole candidum, moribus et vita irreprehensibilem, studio assiduam, profectu nemini ex primis inter suos condiscipulis impari. After that the two letters are almost identical. There was a lot of *materia combustibilis* around which needed only a spark to ignite, and once the student had got involved in the rebellion *falsus honor, agnoscendi suam errorem pudor, regrediendi crescens semper difficultas, et mutuae defensionis intemo* all came into play, but there was never *pravum ullum praeconceptum consilium*. After that he committed each student to the bishop's pastoral care, admitting that while the offence was grave it was a first offence. He signed each letter as "Ex-Dean, Professor of Theology".

For some reason which is not apparent he wrote his letter about the third student, Philip Sheehan, in English; it is dated 5 April, about a month after the other two, and has rather idiosyncratic punctuation and a few irregular spellings:

My Lord,

Young Mr Shean one of your subjects who fears above all things the incurring your displeasure; comes and prays me to give your Lordship the whole account of his conduct in this College, and especially concerning the late unfortunate Buisness: which I do with sincerity and candor. He was not present at the first act of disobedience to Mr Coen's command, but signed the list of calition, without well knowing its object, which was subscribed by the whole number of students then in the College, except two. This was the only active part he took in their proceedings; he was among the first to retract and make reparation. In the whole of his conduct he is applyed and regular; does well in class and will be I hope a good subject. His feelings and gratitude for your Lordship's bounty and favours are the proof of his good heart, and a prognostic of what he will be.

In regard to his ordination and that of his compagnons, without your Lordship's demissory, which is in itself a grievous violation of one of the most important laws of canonical discipline; the fault seems to be entirely attributed to the President, who was considered as cautious, and generally regarded as having full power from the Bishops concerning the ordination of their subjects. Yours relied on this common opinion; he placed them on the liste without taking from them any information; if living he should be the person brought to account. Nevertheless they are sincerely sorry

of their mistake and want of caution; and as they have incurred the suspension from the functions of their orders, they will abstain, and do beg for the power of being absolved by their confessors under whatever penalty your Lordship will be pleased to impose. I profit of this occasion to manifest the profound respect and veneration with which I am your Lordship's

Most Humble and obed.^t serv.^t

Edward Ferris

Ferris's intervention was effective, as Sheehan mentions in a letter to Bishop Young on 19 May:

...as Dr Ferris has written to you on this subject and that you have been graciously pleased to revoke the sentence pronounced against us.

As well as these three letters of a rather formal nature a more ordinary letter written by Ferris survived.⁵⁴ It is dated 16 August 1805 and was written from Maynooth to Timothy McCarthy, curate in Kilmallock, whom Ferris had known as a student; in this one he is more sparing of his punctuation:

Dear Revd Sir,

I cannot forget this occasion of calling to the memory of my beloved Tim his good old friend who did not forget him since he left the College and never will. He will be always happy to hear him happy that he is faithful to God and to his duty, edifying in all his conduct employing his time in study prayer and all kinds of good works instructing the ignorant visiting the sick comforting the afflicted assisting the poor for whom he will receive contributions according as his charity for them will impress this virtue in the hearts of others.

The only comfort of a priest is in the internal peace of a pure irreproachable conscience and the practical feeling of a diffusive goodness, these two qualities are natural to my beloved Tim, what will be and do in him when assisted by divine Grace, he will strongly resist all contrary examples.

I had some thought of going to Kerry this vacation and a great desire of seeing you on the way. But reflection made, I am too old to project for the future of any other travel but that to my grave. When there and until there you will pray for me. We will meet I

hope in eternal happiness.

Give my love and good wishes to M. O'Connor. Our dear Philip will acquaint you with all the doings and concernings this College.

I am

Your old tenderly affectionate friend and servant
Edw^d Ferris

In 1875 John Kenny, Dean of Killaloe, wrote to Charles W. Russell, President of Maynooth. some reminiscences of his time in Mavnooth; Russell passed these on to Malachy O'Callaghan, President of Castleknock. He had this to say about Ferris:

...The class book when he was Professor of Moral Theology was Antoine but in his lectures Dr Ferris was much more rigid than Antoine; Collet was his favourite author. In many of his opinions which were strictly followed by many of the students of Maynooth he prescribed a course of moral action scarcely pursued I believe by anybody at the present day. Dr Ferris when at Maynooth pursued Conventual habits; he uniformly arose at 4 in the morning, celebrated Mass at 5, after which he sometimes remained in the chapel for more than an hour at prayer; then he retired to his room where he remained until the Community Mass from which he was never absent; during his time he was the only superior in the house who never even by chance incurred the displeasure of a single student. He naturally made himself a general favourite and indeed the adoption by many of the principles inculcated by him (sic). Dr Ferris was a native of Kerry. After his lamented death a small box came into my possession from which it appeared that the Dr was a graduate in many Universities, was Vicar General to many Bishops, and Professor in several Colleges in France. This passed into the hands of the Rev. Eugene McCarthy who was afterwards P.P. of Newtownsands Co. Kerry and is long since dead. From these documents a summary of the Dr's life was prepared and intended for the monument erected to his memory ... I had the rare happiness of serving Mass for Dr Ferris from the Quatuor Tense of Advent 1808 until his death.⁵⁵

Walter Meyler, Dean of Dublin, used to say that the French priests who were on the staff in Maynooth in Ferris's time complained about the noise he made getting up at four each morning, saying that he was not

content with being a saint himself but wanted to make his next door neighbours saints as well.⁵⁶

On 11 June 1853 the *Catholic Telegraph and Advocate* of Cincinnati, Ohio, published a short piece headed “Maynooth College” which is solely about Ferris. It is signed “Milesius”. clearly a former student of Maynooth, and is rather effusive in praise of its subject; it is also factually inaccurate in places. The name of Ferris “is spoken of with veneration even at this day . . . Many (who are still living) and who were under his superintendance will recollect with feelings of grateful love the counsel with which he directed and the wisdom with which he enlightened their minds... At his tomb the pious student often drops a tear of gratitude”.⁵⁷

One student who would not seem to fit Milesius’s picture was John Cousins. His evidence to the enquiry on Maynooth conducted by the Commissioners of Irish Education in 1824 contained a passage on Ferris; he was the only witness who mentioned him. In the early part of his evidence Cousins said he was in Maynooth from 1799 till 1805, the year of his ordination. In 1811 he left the priesthood and became a minister of the Church of Ireland:

There was a professor Dr Ferris, very much esteemed & respected by the students as a pious man, and some circumstances connected with his lectures would lead me to conclude that he had a leaning to Jansenism. The Jesuits & the Jansenists are two opposite parties; the Jesuits opposed the Jansenists in France & crushed them there. Maynooth was probably suspected for a leaning to Jansenism in my time, and upon that ground I would conclude that the Roman Catholic bishops might have patronised the Jesuits and got up the establishment at Clongowes for the purpose of checking that disposition. I was going to mention a circumstance with respect to Mr Ferris: a question was put to him in class on the merits of saints, and his observation was that the merits of saints was (sic) no more than a drop of water compared with the ocean; he could not have gone further, consistent with the Roman Catholic doctrine, in crying down the merits of saints; and I understand that this is one of the doctrines of the Jansenists.⁵⁸

The only work published by Ferris appears to have been a 16 page booklet *De Ideis Innatis*, published in 1809, the year of his death.⁵⁹ He was five weeks short of his 72nd birthday when he died. The official account of his death, compiled by Dr Francis Power, Vice-President,

reads as follows:

On Sunday 26th November 1809, departed this life, the Reverend Edward Ferris, Priest of the Diocese of Kerry, D.D., first assistant to the Superior-General of the Lazarists in France; Vicar-General of the Dioceses of Toul and Amiens; Dean and Professor of Moral Theology in the Roman Catholic College of St Patrick, Maynooth. On Tuesday, 28th, following, his mortal remains, pursuant to his directions, were, with due solemnity, conveyed to and deposited in the old Church of Lara Brien. R.I.P.⁶⁰

James Bernard Clinch composed the following sonnet:

Ferris, rest here, O name most sad, most sweet;
 Thus ancient relics of the priesthood lie.
 Henceforth be chilled for ever, heart that beat
 For God, for friendship and for misery.
 Here eyes of cherub on the mercy seat
 Soliciting the penitential sigh
 Be dim; and thus be stretched ye comely feet,
 Evangelists of pardon from on high.

Yet still thy kind and awful spirit hears
 Each stifled groan of this my last Adieu.
 And smilingly thou numberest the tears
 That fain would hide thee from my parting view.
 I kissed this marble forehead and withdrew.
 Friend of my heart, we'll meet when Christ appears.

Thomas McNamara made the following note about this poem: "A venerable clergyman, who preserved the foregoing lines, in giving them to a member of the Congregation of the Mission more than fifty years afterwards said 'I saw Mr Clinch, the author of them, kiss the forehead of dear Ferris immediately after the office, before the coffin was closed'".⁶¹

McNamara has also noted that shortly before his death Ferris was persuaded by the Maynooth students to allow his portrait to be taken, and that copies of this were brought away from the college by each student on his ordination. He says that at the date he was writing, 1867, almost sixty years after Ferris's death, copies were still to be seen in

many presbyteries in Ireland. An oil-painting of him still hangs in one of the refectories in Maynooth.⁶²

When the Congregation was eventually established in Ireland the early confrères were not unaware of their predecessor. John Gowan gave a mission in Castletownbere in 1852 or 1853 and while there he met a young grand-niece of Ferris, and many years later wrote a note recording the fact.⁶³ In 1875 Malachy O'Callaghan, who was then President of Castleknock, had Ferris's remains exhumed from Laragh Brien and re-interred in the community cemetery in Castleknock. The original tombstone was also transferred and an extra sentence added to the Latin inscription. The epitaph has been translated as follows:

Long lines of students in procession, bewailing him as a father, and bearing him in turn on their shoulders, laid in this grave the Rev. Edward Ferris, adorned with every priestly virtue, a Priest of the Diocese of Kerry, first Assistant of the Congregation of the Mission in France, Vicar-General of the Diocese of Amiens, Doctor of Theology, and Professor in the Roman Catholic College of Maynooth, in the hope of a happy resurrection. This eminent man died on the 26th November 1809, aged 72.

Whose bones having been previously buried near Maynooth were thence on the 19th October 1875 transferred and piously laid here amongst his brethren.⁶⁴

A fragment of the original tombstone, unfortunately without indication of its provenance, is enshrined in the wall of the entrance hall of De Paul House, Celbridge, with a plaque commemorating the blessing of the foundation stone by Fr James Richardson, Superior General, on 1 March 1977.

Notes

1. The record of his entry has "Glancair", one of several variant spellings. Although the entire valley is named Glencar there is also a townland of this name in it. Mary Purcell has discovered that EF's brother Richard used to say that he was born in Tought, Co. Kerry. This would seem to be Toogh, or Knockane, a parish of which Glencar forms a part. The surname is almost totally confined to the region around Killorglin, and the family's original stronghold was Ballymalis, about 4½ miles east of the town. There were still substantial landholders of this name in the area at the start of the 19th century. (Mary Purcell made available a report which she had obtained from the Genealogical Office, Dublin, and Fr Michael Manning of the diocese of Kerry clarified the topographical details).

2. EFs evidence at the enquiry into the sack of St Lazare, Archives Nationales, Paris, Z2 4684:1 made a photocopy of this for our archives.
3. Louis de Bras, Superior General, in his circular of 1 January 1759, in *Recueil des Principals Circulantes des Sup. Gen. CM*, I 605. (Henceforward *Recueil*).
4. Barry died in Macerata in 1789 aged 70. O'Rourke died in Beauvais in 1762 aged 65. Vaughan died in Les Invalides, Paris in 1763 aged 85. Giffard was at one time stationed in Angers and O'Hea was in Lyon. No details of appointments held by the others are available.
5. Ms *Dictionnaire du personnel: Première serie 1625-1800*, vol. DUD-F, in CM archives, Paris. (Henceforth CMAP, and similarly for Rome and Dublin CMAR, CMAD).
6. *Registre des vœux*, CMAP.
7. *Catalogue des patentes des supérieurs*, CMAP.
8. Martin: *Histoire des diocèses de foug, de Nancy et de Saint-Die*, three volumes, 1900-1903. Material on EF is scattered between pages 547 and 621 of volume 3. In the archives of the Department of Meurthe-et-Moselle I did not find anything of EF not already known.
9. In a typescript history of Toul seminary in CMAP.
10. Martin, p 554.
11. Martin, p 619.
12. Both R Chalumeau CM and the Conservateur of the municipal library in Nancy each independently suggested the Pont-a-Mousson hypothesis.
13. *Maynooth College Calendar 1884-1885*, p 159, prints a note made at the time of EFs death by Dr Francis Power, Vice-President of Maynooth, which says EF was VG of Toul.
14. Cf note 2 above.
15. In CMAP there are two ms volumes, undated, *Histoire du Grand Séminaire d'Amiens*, by Alphonse Vandamme CM, in which EFs superiorship is dealt with in pp 214-219. The information about the library is on p 229 of *Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de Picardie*, tome XIII, 1892. Malachy O'Callaghan CM in *Annales de la CM*, 45 (1880) p 189 says that documentary evidence about the period of EFs superiorship in Amiens is not available. MO'C, who had been a pupil at 34 Usher's Quay, clearly did a fair amount of research on EF, including contacting survivors who had known him in Maynooth. The article was published anonymously but P Boyle in *Annales* 68 (1903) p 13 says it was by MO'C.
16. The Kavanagh diary is in the Passionist archives, Mount Argus, Dublin. A microfilm version is in the National Library, Dublin. The EF material is on Positive 7660.
17. In *Recueil* II 203 EFs name is omitted from the list of delegates at the 1788 Assembly. The original *acta* of the Assembly show that he was present. I made photocopies for CMAD of relevant sections of these *acta*, including the final page with signatures of EF, FR Clet and L J Francois.
18. *Acta*, CMAR.
19. *Recueil*, II 222. There are about half a dozen books from the old St Lazare library in the library of the Irish College, Paris.
20. *Recueil*, II570.
21. *Annales*, 72, pp 302-304. On GP see COLLOQUE 6, p 47, note 23.
22. Cf note 2 above.
23. *Recueil*, II 195, 222.

24. Archives Nationales, Paris, S 6698.
25. *Le Corps de Saint Vincent*, Paris 1913 p 71. This was written by Alphonse Vandamme CM though published anonymously.
26. *Recueil*, II 269.
27. *Annales*, 73, p 335, note 1, and *Diet. Pers.* as above in note 5.
28. *Recueil*, II 197.
29. *Recueil*, II 243.
30. *Recueil*, II 197.
31. *Recueil*, II 220, 234.
32. *Recueil*, II 245.
33. Journal of the Meetings of the Trustees, St Patrick's College, Maynooth, 17 January 1798. EF was at first called "Prefect"; later the title was changed to "Dean".
34. The letters from Concannon to Troy are in the Dublin Diocesan Archives. LC was later appointed to the see of New York but died before he left Italy.
35. The Dr Dillon referred to was Edward Dillon, bishop of Kilmacduagh; he was transferred to the metropolitan see of Tuam, hence reference to the pallium.
36. *Annales*, 45, p 194.
37. Eugene Conwell: *Letters from Maynooth*, Ed. Brother Luke, Dundalk 1942, 2nd ed., p28.
38. *Recueil* II 270-1.
39. From a manuscript in CMAP headed "Copie de la lettre de M. Brunei", 23 May 1800, from Montecitorio, Rome. It starts simply "Monsieur", so the addressee is not known.
40. *Acta Apostolica, Bullae, Brevia et Rescripta in Gratiam CM*, Paris 1876, pp 227-8. See *Répertoire Historique*, Paris 1900, pp 80-83, for a complete list of all the papal documents about the governing of the Congregation up to 16 January 1827 when Leo XII appointed Pierre de Wailly as Superior General. He died the following year and in 1829 there was a General Assembly, the first since 1788; it elected Dominique Salhorgne as twelfth Superior General.
41. Ms copy in CMAP; no indication is given as to where the original was or is.
42. O'Callaghan, *Annales*, 45, p 192. I have been unable to find the original in either CMAP or CMAR.
43. O'Callaghan, *Annales*, 45, pp 192-3.
44. Journal of the Maynooth Trustees, 4 November 1800.
45. *Maynooth College Calendar 1884-85*, p 166.
46. *Papers presented to the House of Commons relating to the Royal College of St Patrick*, 1800, p 30.
47. O'Callaghan, *Annales*, 45, p 193.
48. O'Callaghan, *Annales*, 45, p 195.
49. In *Dictionnaire du Personnel de la CM 1625-1800*, a large ms work in CMAP, there is a note attributed to Chanoine Le Male of Bayeux on Le Grand's movements from 1791 in Bayeux to June 1796 in London. Also in CMAP are the Hanon note and a copy of the extract from the archives of the Paris Foreign Missions. Le Grand does not figure in any of the articles which J Twomey wrote on emigre French confrères in England, nor in FCombaluzier's supplementary notes to JT's article on them in *Annales* 123 (1958). In Healy: *Maynooth College: Its Centenary History*, 1895, p 718, there is a note saying that there is nothing in the college records to indicate whether Le Grand was a priest or layman.
50. This letter is in the archives of the diocese of Clogher together with other

- Delahogue papers; I did not find any other reference to EF.
51. *The Irish Magazine and Monthly Asylum for Neglected Biography*, March 1808, pp 100 ff. The same magazine in May 1808 carried as frontispiece the engraving of EF reproduced in this issue. In its number of December 1809 it reported EF's death and repeated most of the March 1808 article without adding anything new. In its number for January 1810 it carried an obituary on Fr Paul O'Brien, professor of Irish in Maynooth, which contained the following: "Maynooth, at that period, may be said to be in its meridian splendour; the celebrated Flood was its president, Clinch graced the chair of rhetoric, and the great, the learned, Ferris was its dean".
 52. Conwell, op. cit., p51.
 53. These letters are in the archives of the diocese of Limerick.
 54. John Begley, PP of Kilmallock, sent a copy of this letter to Patrick Boyle in 1929. He said he had got the original about 1925 from a grand-nephew of a Fr McCormack who had been a curate of Fr Tim McCarthy at the time of the latter's death. Enquiries have failed to discover what became of Begley's papers after his death. His letter to Boyle is in CMAD.
 55. The Kenny original is in CMAD. The Collet referred to is Pierre Collet CM, who published a very important life of St Vincent in 1748. He wrote over fifty books, mainly theological. On the death of Tournely he completed his course of moral theology and of the 33 volumes in the work 17 are by Collet. He was a professor in St Lazare when EF was a student there.
 56. O'Callaghan, *Annales* 45, p 197. Meyler entered Maynooth in 1799 at the age of 17. He was ordained there in 1807 for Ferns, his native diocese. In 1808 he transferred to Dublin and ministered in the old Liffey St chapel and then in the new Pro-Cathedral. In 1833 he was moved to Westland Row and remained there till his death in 1864; he became Dean in 1839. He was in Maynooth for eight of the ten years which EF spent there.
 57. I have obtained a photostat of the article for CMAD. In Healy *Maynooth College: Its Centenary History*, 1895, p 205, it is suggested that Milesius was Miles Gaffney, Dean in Maynooth from 1834 to 1855 when he left to join the Jesuits.
 58. Eighth Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Enquiry, London 1827, page 357.
 59. Up to the time of going to press I have been unable to find a copy of this work.
 60. Quoted in *Maynooth College Calendar 1884-85*, p 159.
 61. JBC, a layman, was Professor of Belles Lettres in Maynooth from October 1795. In 1798 he became Professor of Rhetoric, and later also of Humanity. He resigned in 1802. This sonnet, and the accompanying note, have been inserted into TMcN's manuscript history of the origins of the Irish Province.
 62. O'Callaghan, *Annales* 45 p 197. Details of clothing in this portrait are different from those in the engraving done for *The Irish Magazine*. It is not clear whether both were done from life, or whether the engraving, with some alteration of detail, was made from the portrait, or even whether the portrait was done posthumously from the engraving. It would seem more likely that it was copies of the engraving that the students took with them.
 63. Original in CMAD.
 64. *Castleknock Centenary Record*, p 39. The original Latin version is also printed there. The lettering on the stone is now very difficult to decipher.

The Origins of the Congregation in Ireland

Thomas McNamara

(Accounts of the origins of the community in Ireland have been printed in Boyle: *St Vincent de Paul and the Vincentians in Ireland, Scotland and England*, 1909; *A Century of Irish Vincentian Foundations 1833-1933*, 1933; *Castleknock College Centenary Record*, 1935; *The Story of the Vincentians*, by Mary Purcell, 1973. They all draw on a manuscript of Thomas McNamara written in 1867. This is here given in an abridged, but not otherwise altered, version. Explanatory matter has been inserted in brackets. The original is in the archives in 4 Cabra Road. Typewritten copies of the earlier portion of it, 93 pages of 4to size, are to be found in some houses. These copies have an *enormous* number of mis-readings and omissions. TD)

Having had some time lately at my disposal I gladly availed myself of it to write the following narrative of the "Congregation of the Mission" in Ireland, England and Scotland from the commencement to the present time. I cannot help regretting, nevertheless, that the task was not undertaken by someone more competent, and that it was so postponed as to become a matter of personal obligation to me. This obligation arose from the fact that all the first members had passed to their reward, except the Right Reverend Dr Lynch and myself, and though his Lordship remains still a member of the Congregation, yet on account of his being so absorbed in the cares and labours of his exalted position, the responsibility devolved upon me, in the order of Providence, of transmitting to posterity the history of our origin and the earlier years of our existence in these countries...

I flattered myself, moreover, that I was undertaking a work which could be advantageous to the present and future members of the Institute. Of course they will take an interest in reviewing the history of a work, to which the Almighty has called them in His special mercy.

But they will not fail to see, moreover, the inspiration, direction and powerful Hand of the Most High in the origin and development of the Institute, and they will be urged thereby to render themselves more and more worthy of a vocation on which the Almighty has in so special a manner impressed the seal of His divine approval...

It would indeed be very shortsighted to view the aid and cooperation we received from friends in many of our works, as merely the result of their zeal and generosity in our regard. In them and in their good deeds we must always recognise the action of God's holy providence to assist us in the assistance they afforded us. To see things in this light we have only to recollect how little did we see of our way in most of our works. We commenced scarcely able to do more than make a commencement. And as the work advanced, means and resources which we could not have calculated upon came into our hands. Legacies we could never have dreamt of were bequeathed to us as if proceeding from the ever bountiful hands of the Most High, and thus by the manifest agency of divine providence God's work went forward...

In reading the following pages the present and future members of the Congregation in the Irish province will be afforded a view to look into "the rock whence they are hewn and the hole of the pit from whence they are dug out" (Is 51:1). And as having been identified with the work from the beginning I feel it a particular happiness to make them acquainted with their elder brethren that they may seek in them the examples God has set before their eyes so that guided by them as to how they should walk and please God they will, with the divine blessing and under the patronage of our common father St Vincent, so walk and abound the more and thus being of the same mind and following the same rule we shall all press forward with a holy emulation towards the mark, to the prize of the supernal vocation of God in Christ Jesus (Phil 3:14)...

In the commencement and for a considerable time the professors and superiors (in Maynooth) were Irishmen educated on the continent, together with some Frenchmen. Amongst the former was found a distinguished son of St Vincent de Paul, in the good and holy Edward Ferris... The Trustees of the college of Maynooth knowing his great merit (had) invited him to take the post of Dean or Master of Discipline in that establishment in 1798. Thus after an absence of over forty years he returned to his native land. . . Such a representative of the Congregation of the Mission before the eyes of the bishops and priests of Ireland had the effect of renewing their appreciation of the Institute and of renewing at the same time the desire of establishing it in the country. The President of Maynooth at the time, the Very Rev Dr Everard, who afterwards became archbishop of Cashel, was ready to consecrate his entire property, consisting of over £10,000 sterling, to the purpose. However, the time of God's appointment had not yet arrived. Nevertheless, so much had the venerable archbishop the project at heart that in bequeathing his property to the founding of a

diocesan seminary he appended to the bequest a stipulation respecting the Institute of the Mission...

Some time later the Right Rev Dr Doyle, bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, made an attempt to establish the Congregation, or at least some missionary institute, in his Lordship's diocese. This illustrious member of the Irish hierarchy whose name, on account of his distinguished writings and works, shed a bright lustre on many a page of Irish ecclesiastical history, made his studies in Portugal in the celebrated university of Coimbra. He had an opportunity whilst there of appreciating the Congregation of the Mission and its functions. Several ecclesiastics of the diocese, and amongst them Parish Priests of the highest standing, shared his Lordship's design and gave their names for the good work. However, when the time came for taking some decided steps difficulties came in the way and the project came to naught.

There was at the same time a distinguished member of the venerable Order of Preachers, president of the diocesan seminary of Carlow, named Dr Andrew Fitzgerald, popularly called Fr Andrew of Carlow. Observing the failure of the bishop's plan Fr Andrew ascribed it to the fact that the gentlemen who had proposed joining it were advanced in years and must therefore have contracted habits which they could not well relinquish in order to submit to the restraints of community life. Approving himself of the Institute, and desirous if possible to establish it, he resolved upon the opposite plan which was to engage a number of students in the seminary whom he might find disposed to embark in such an undertaking and form them for the proposed work. He accordingly made known his views to several select students in the establishment and found a certain number were disposed. But, as happened in the bishop's attempt, some difficulties arose and rendered Fr Andrew's project abortive also.

Another essay was made by the good and patriarchal Parish Priest of Blanchardstown, the Very Rev Joseph Joy Dean. He had been educated in Portugal and occupied the post of professor in the Irish seminary of St Patrick in Lisbon. He observed the Congregation of the Mission and its works in that metropolis and was full of the idea that a similar congregation would be most useful in Ireland. Being an ardent man he conceived that all that was necessary was to erect a community house, speculating as a matter of course that when erected postulants would immediately knock at the door seeking admission. However, when the building was completed he found that he had calculated without his host and he was obliged to devote the house to other purposes. God Almighty, notwithstanding, allowed him the consolation before he died

of seeing the Congregation definitively established within his parish, Castleknock, the cradle of the Congregation in Ireland, being situated in the parish of Blanchardstown.

The good work was also attempted by a Rev William Meagher in Dublin. This most pious ecclesiastic, who afterwards became Vicar General of the diocese and had got several voices in his favour at an election of an archbishop to succeed the Most Rev Dr Murray in the metropolitan see of Dublin, made his studies in Rome and resided during the time in the Mission House of Montecitorio. From his acquaintance with the missionaries and his observation of the several works in which he saw them engaged he conceived the idea of introducing the Congregation into Ireland. On returning he laid his project before the archbishop, the Most Rev Dr Murray, who approved of it most highly, and gave him the most earnest encouragement. He opened a college in the city in the hope that some of the ecclesiastical students of the college might join him in his zealous enterprise. He also hoped that he might find some priests who, appreciating his good intentions, might associate themselves with him. He laboured for eight or nine years in the direction of his college, which as a college was successful enough, but at the same time utterly sterile of vocations for the Institute he had in view. He had two or three priests to join him during the time but they soon fell away and in the end he himself, despairing of success, gave up the project and joined the ordinary ministry...

The time of God's appointment had at length arrived and like the other works of St Vincent the introduction of his Congregation into Ireland was to be marked with the character of his humility. The project was undertaken by a few pious students in the National College or great seminary of Maynooth in the year 1832. These young men were Messrs James Lynch, Peter Kenrick, Anthony Reynolds and Michael Burke, all of the diocese of Dublin. Kindred dispositions had united these young men in bonds of sincere attachment. They therefore spoke to each other without reserve of their vocation to the ecclesiastical state, the functions, responsibilities and dangers of the sacred ministry. In these conversations they discovered in each other two prevailing sentiments, one a dread of the dangers of the ordinary ministry, and the other an ardent zeal for the saving of souls. These two sentiments obviously disposed them to embrace an Institute which would afford them the twofold advantage of security for themselves and a field of labour for saving souls. With these ideas in their minds some of them, and essentially Mr Lynch, thought of the Jesuits. He had received his early education in one of their colleges, the college

of Clongowes, after which he embraced the profession of surgeon. However, before entering on the practice of that profession he felt he was destined by God not for curing the bodies but the souls of men in the ecclesiastical state. Accordingly he relinquished the profession of surgeon and entered the college of Maynooth in 1826. Coming towards the close of his studies in this establishment he thought anxiously of his future career. Inclined, as already mentioned, to join the Jesuits, he frequently consulted his friend and confessor the Rev Patrick J Carew, one of the professors, on the subject. He also had recourse to the Rev P Dowley, senior Dean of the seminary, for advice. These two gentlemen considered that the Jesuits, according to the works they then had in the country, would not afford sufficient scope for his active zeal and that of his young companions, and recollecting that the Rev Mr Meagher, whom they knew very intimately, and who, as already stated, had undertaken the project of introducing the Congregation of the Mission into Ireland, they proposed to him to join this gentleman in his project. They explained at the same time the nature of the Institute and pointed out how it combined the twofold object he and his friends had in view, namely security as regarded themselves and unbounded scope for their zeal for the salvation of souls. They represented that though Mr Meagher had relinquished the project in despair of his being able to realise it, still he would very likely resume courage on finding so many young men of such excellent promise ready to join him. Mr Lynch was quite captivated with the proposal of his respected advisers, and communicating it to his friends he found them equally zealous to embrace it. It was accordingly resolved that he and Mr Kenrick should wait on Mr Meagher on the subject. As already mentioned, this gentleman after conducting a college for several years entered into the ordinary ministry. He was appointed administrator of the church of St Peter's, Phibsboro which, as we shall see later on, was destined to belong one day to the Congregation of the Mission. Here Messrs Lynch and Kenrick found him. They stated the object of their visit but they were greatly disappointed on finding that he had completely turned his mind from the project. He assured them however that he remained unchanged in his high appreciation of it, but having exhausted every hope and thereby convinced himself that he was not destined in the designs of Providence to carry it out he abandoned it, and in doing so his resolution was fixed and final. At the same time he exhorted them most earnestly to proceed with their good intentions, observing that there appeared to him all the signs of God's holy will in their aspirations, and he concluded his observations with the encouraging words, which he

pronounced with solemn emphasis, *Digitus Dei est hic*.

As Messrs Lynch and Kenrick report the result of their visit the little band is disconcerted for the moment and have recourse to their trusty advisers for further counsel. Foremost among these was Mr Carew, already mentioned, who afterwards became bishop of Madras from which see he was promoted to the archbishoprick of Calcutta... They also consulted Mr Dowley, who as already mentioned was Dean of the college and who was esteemed for the rare combination of prudence and piety which distinguished his character. The Very Rev Dr Crotty, the venerable president of the college, was also among their advisers. They also had recourse to the Very Rev Dr Anglade for consultation. This venerable ecclesiastic was a native Frenchman who had been compelled to leave France on account of the Revolution and seek asylum in England. He was a graduate of the Sorbonne and after the college of Maynooth was opened he was invited to accept a professorship in that establishment. At this time he had been over thirty years in Maynooth. He was thoroughly acquainted with the Congregation of the Mission in France and augured the most blessed results from its introduction into Ireland. He took a most lively interest in the prospect which now presented itself and when dying he bequeathed one hundred pounds to aid its advancement.

They had another very particular adviser in the Very Rev Dr Meyler, (later) Vicar General of the archbishop and Dean of the venerable chapter of Dublin. He had been Mr Lynch's confessor and particular friend before his coming to Maynooth and it was under his direction he relinquished the profession of surgery to embrace the ecclesiastical state.

The young aspirants placed themselves in the hands of these wise and holy men for direction and conceived themselves secure in the course they should pursue according to their good advice. But an obvious difficulty occurred to all. The young men had the precise defect of being young, and however zealous they wanted experience. A head was essential who mature in years would guide their timid steps in the unexplored path they had to venture upon, and save them at the same time from imputation of rashness or eccentricity in an undertaking so novel and extraordinary. This was consequently the subject of their anxious thoughts and fervent prayers and for the moment they held themselves in suspense awaiting the will of God.

In the meantime it became known that Mr Dowley, the Dean of the college, had himself some notion of joining Mr Meagher had that gentleman succeeded in his project. The idea at once occurred to the

little flock of addressing themselves to him and inviting him to place himself at their head. His inclination to join Mr Meagher had to a certain extent disposed his mind for such a proposition. He thought, he prayed and to the great joy of all he declared that in God's name he would associate himself with the holy enterprise.

The accession of such a man was hailed as an unequivocal manifestation of God's approval. In consequence of his prominent position as Dean of Maynooth for many years he was known to the entire episcopate and clergy of Ireland, and the universal esteem in which he was held for his many and distinguished virtues was sure to secure credit and confidence at once for the new Institute.

Time advanced and Messrs Kenrick, Reynolds and Burke had come to the end of the ordinary course of studies in Maynooth. It was agreed that the two former would take priest's orders and go into the ministry until matters would be more mature to make a formal beginning. It was considered that the experience they would acquire would be useful for the end in view. Mr Burke was not yet of age for the priesthood, on which account, as he had besides the required qualifications, he was promoted to the Dunboyne establishment, a department in the college of Maynooth reserved for students of distinguished merit who after finishing the ordinary course desire to pursue a higher and more extended course of studies. . . As for Mr Lynch, he had one more year to finish his studies. He was, however, appointed to the very responsible post of monitor, or prefect of discipline, in the junior portion of the college in which he had charge of about 120 of the junior students.

In these various appointments the little flock was somewhat scattered for the moment. They were however all pledged to each other as fellow members and to Mr. Dowley as their head.

In the meantime Mr Lynch secures another providential recruit. Before coming to Maynooth he and a Mr McCann were most intimate friends. They both resided under the same roof with a Mr Scurlog, uncle of Mr Lynch, in Dublin. Mr McCann was pursuing the profession of solicitor as Mr Lynch was that of surgeon, and as the latter had been educated by the Jesuits in Clongowes the former received his education in the Jesuit college of Stoneyhurst in England. Faithful to the virtuous training they had received in those nurseries of piety they persevered in the strict observance of their Christian duties, frequenting the sacraments of Penance and the Blessed Eucharist and leading lives of great edification in the midst of the world. Both had the same confessor, the Very Rev Dr Meyler already spoken of, and thereby contracted for each other that profound esteem and affection which are sure to result

from companionship in partaking of the holy mysteries of religion. When Mr Lynch had embraced the ecclesiastical state the example made a deep impression on his friend and in a year later he followed him. Instead however of going to Maynooth Mr McCann went to Rome and entered upon his ecclesiastical studies in the Propaganda College. His health failing in this establishment he was obliged to come home and he completed his studies in the diocesan seminary of Carlow. Mr Lynch recollected his friend, and knowing his disposition so thoroughly opens his mind to him and to his great delight he finds him quite well disposed. He had however fallen into a chronic state of delicate health. On this account he could not venture to offer himself as an ordinary member. But he was ready to give his best services and to devote his property to the advancement of the good work. He even thought there was a particular providence in reference to his property. While in Rome he had for a while the idea of divesting himself of it and consecrating it to some purpose of religion or charity. He consulted a Fr Kenny, a celebrated and holy Irish Jesuit, who happened to be then in Rome. He advised him to wait until he should return to Ireland where he would be sure to find purposes in abundance to serve and promote. Now he thought and felt as if God had dictated the advice of the holy Jesuit with a view to the proposed new Institute in Ireland and he ever afterwards looked back on the incident as specially providential. All the associates and their friends took the same view, and therefore regarded the accession of Mr McCann as an additional indication of God's approval on their designs.

In the office of monitor or prefect of discipline in the junior department of the college of Maynooth Mr Lynch had as colleague a Mr McNamara who was likewise a classfellow of his and who, therefore, like himself was coming to the term of his ecclesiastical studies. By companionship in office Mr Lynch acquired a complete knowledge of his colleague and considered he would be a suitable companion also for the good work in contemplation. Accordingly, with the approval of Mr Dowley, he proposed the matter to him, explaining of course at the same time the nature of the Institute. He had not concluded his explanation when the other felt urged by an irresistible impulse to say on the spot "Yes, that is according to my mind. Set me down as one of the number". Mr McNamara regarded through life this impulse as a special grace of the moment and was ever grateful to the Almighty for it. It was as lasting as it was instantaneous. He had many difficulties to surmount, the importunities and remonstrances of friends, the monotonous drudgery of a teaching life debarring him from the exercise of his ministry, to

which he was most devotedly attached, the gloom that hung for years over the future of the Institute, and above all the paternal regard of a bishop under whom he had the dazzling prospect of the highest promotion in a diocese, the richest in Ireland, in those attractions which captivate the young and aspiring minds. He, however, never wavered for a moment. On the contrary, he ever afterwards thanked God for the efficacious grace his divine bounty vouchsafed to him at a moment which he constantly looked back upon as a supreme crisis involving his destiny for time and eternity. Mr McNamara was a subject of the diocese of Meath and received his preparatory education for Maynooth in the seminary of Navan. It was necessary therefore to obtain his bishop's consent. Happily, there was not much difficulty in the way. The Right Rev Dr Cantwell, the then bishop of Meath, was a man of enlarged views and generous heart and ever ready to assist and encourage a good work. Besides, he had a particular respect for the principle of vocation. Moreover he and Mr Dowley had been colleagues in the office of Dean in the college of Maynooth, which circumstances gave the latter the influence to obtain any favours from his Lordship. The Congregation had reason to treasure the name of this venerable bishop not only on account of Mr McNamara but on account likewise of several meritorious subjects whom in after years he permitted in the same way to join the Congregation and who in due time rendered the most valuable services and filled the highest posts in the Irish Province. And so far from regretting the loss to his own diocese he used in the generosity of his heart take a pleasure in speaking of the good he had conferred on the Congregation through the good subjects he gave it. Towards the end of his life he was planning arrangements for a branch of the Institute in his diocese. Death however took him to his reward before he could give effect to his good wishes which he may yet succeed in accomplishing through his prayers and intercession before the throne of God in heaven.

In a few months Mr Lynch and Mr McNamara reached the end of their seminary course in Maynooth. All the others were in advance of them and it appeared that the time had arrived for making some formal and practical commencement of the good work. But in what way was this commencement to be made? This question engaged the serious attention of all. It was not known what was the situation of the Congregation in France at the time, and certain prepossessions which it was necessary to take account of suggested that it would not be expedient to subject themselves to an authority out of the country. The Institutes of the Christian Brothers in Ireland and of the Irish Sisters of Charity

were pointed out as examples to follow. It was also considered that to engage prematurely in the work of the missions might comprise that work in as much as the youth and inexperience of all except Mr Dowley would be sure to add to the prejudices and objections which a ministry so novel would have in any case to encounter; and even the greater the zeal of the young missionaries the greater likewise would be the danger of betraying themselves into indiscretions in the difficult and delicate circumstances that would necessarily come in their way. Moreover, they felt it due to themselves to live together for some time under community discipline in order to test their perseverance and acquire confidence in each other, as also and more particularly to practice the virtues required for the career and manner of life they proposed to themselves. These considerations led to the conclusion that the best course to adopt was to undertake some work provisionally which would be useful to the public and at the same time improving to themselves and thereby serve a means to the end they had in view. The work they resolved upon as best combining these advantages was an extern college in the city of Dublin which would afford the advantages of a religious and literary education to the pupils generally but more especially to youths destined for the ecclesiastical state, there being at that time no ecclesiastical seminary in the diocese. The project appeared simple and inexpensive, and with the advantage of community life it would afford the young associates opportunities for study and literary culture at the same time that the education of youth in piety and science would afford a desirable exercise for zeal.

A practical commencement having being agreed upon the time had come to submit the project of the new Institute to the Most Rev Dr Murray, archbishop of the diocese, for his Grace's sanction and approval. Accordingly Mr Dowley waited upon him for this purpose. Dr Murray was a man of enlarged views and a zealous encourager of all good works. It was therefore confidently expected that he should "cheer on" the little band in their undertaking. But what was their delight to find that this most exalted prelate had himself long and earnestly cherished the wish to see the Congregation of the Mission established in the country and that he had shared in the views and designs to that effect which the venerable archbishop of Cashel the Most Rev Dr Everard had so much at heart and to carry out which, as we have already observed, his Grace was ready to devote his entire property. No sooner therefore had Mr Dowley mentioned the project to Dr Murray than his Grace hailed it as a blessing especially designed for Ireland by heaven and assured him in the most gracious manner that he would give it all the aid in his power.

He further promised that he would defray the expenses of two missions annually out of his own means. Also approving the plan of an extern college as a provisional occupation he offered Mr Dowley the little church, as it then was, of St Peter's, Phibsboro, for his young confrères to exercise their ministry conjointly with the work of the college. Finally, recollecting at the moment that he had in his possession a copy of the constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission he presented it to Mr Dowley with renewed assurance of his most cordial approval and best support. Such a sanction and approval of the "Angel of the Church" in which it was proposed to make a beginning was more than encouraging. It was hailed as another distinct indication of God's holy will in favour of the good work.

It now only remained to prepare for undertaking the proposed college in Dublin and the church of Phibsboro. Messrs Lynch, Burke and McNamara were accordingly ordained priests on 18th June 1833, Mr Lynch being designed for the administratorship of the church and the others, together with Messrs McCann, Kenrick and Reynolds, being reserved for the college. As to Mr Dowley, it was arranged that he would yet retain for some time his post as Dean of Maynooth and that Mr Kenrick would be *ad interim* the provisional superior. A house was sought for, and the house No 34 Usher's Quay was taken to serve the twofold purpose of a college and a residence for the community. Mr McCann was the responsible representative of his companions in this transaction. He also undertook the expense and trouble of preparing and fitting up the house to have it in readiness for the month of August when it was proposed, after the usual time of vacation, to open the new college.

As to the church, a disappointment occurred which somewhat discouraged the little community for the moment. It was an auxiliary church, dependent on the parochial church of St Paul's in the city, and therefore subject to the Parish Priest who at that time was the Very Rev Dr Yore. This most excellent ecclesiastic, who in the course of time became a most signal benefactor of the Congregation, first agreed to the archbishop's proposal respecting the church at Phibsboro. However, he saw reasons for changing his mind and the archbishop, who was another Moses in meekness, did not press the matter. Thus the "little flock" was left to commence with the college at its only work. They had reason, however, in a short time to be grateful for the disappointment as they found the work of the college quite enough for their strength, and they should have been overburdened had they the work of the church to attend to besides.

All the associates except Mr Dowley and Mr Reynolds were together early in the month of August 1833. Mr Reynolds could not, for some weeks later, disengage himself from his post in the ministry... The 16th of August was fixed for the opening of the college, and the little community in order to draw down the divine blessing, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, on their undertaking sought to prepare themselves for it by a retreat of a few days terminating on the feast of her glorious Assumption.

In the order of divine providence good works have generally trials to meet in the commencement. The work of St Vincent in Ireland was not exempt from this dispensation. The young community had only closed their retreat when one of the members declared himself as no longer of their number, and this member was no other than their provisional superior Mr Kenrick. The blow was a stunning one. Discouragement and dismay were pictured in every countenance. For a moment they seemed as if afraid to speak to each other upon the occurrence lest they should hear of others yielding to the example of their chief. The best friends were discouraged and expected the immediate dissolution of the "little flock". One was heard to say "Oh, the young society will soon disperse; Mr Kenrick is already gone". Another, "They are going assunder already. They have no 'glue' amongst them to bind them together". Even the archbishop himself seemed to give way. he was quite disposed to retain Mr Kenrick at least for a time if the community desired it. But they saw no advantage in keeping him against his will. Some time later His Grace visited the college. Discouragement was in his looks. He said little. He referred to Mr Kenrick's defection and said "A bad business, a bad business". It was indeed a severe trial, especially at such a time. However, after a little they took courage to speak to each other, and taking a supernatural view of the matter they observed that it was a trial in the order of God's providence to test their stability and prove them worthy of his holy designs in their regard; that no man was necessary for God's work and that he had permitted the defection of the member upon whom they relied most in order that they might place their confidence more in the strong arm of the Almighty. By mutual encouragement they soon rose superior to the trial which had, on that account, which is usually the case, the effect of knitting them together in closer union and of increasing their confidence in each other.

As for Mr Kenrick himself, he had long been thinking of going to America to join his brother the distinguished bishop of Philadelphia and afterwards archbishop of Baltimore. He therefore gave his adhesion to the new Institute with considerable hesitation. During the retreat he

considered that the moment had come for a final resolve one way or the other, and he accordingly decided on going to his brother. That the Almighty had guided him in this decision appeared clearly afterwards, for after labouring with much fruit for some years under his venerable brother he was himself raised to the dignity of archbishop of St Louis, in which see he rendered great and extensive services to the church of God and became a distinguished friend and patron of the Congregation of the Mission which he found already established in the diocese of St Louis...

Young minds are generally sanguine in their undertakings and the young community expected that their college should realise immediate success. They advertised it in the newspapers of the city and circulated the Prospectus far and wide. They moreover placed a large brass plate on the door, prominently setting forth the archbishop's sanction and patronage. The opening day arrived: all were in earnest readiness to pay attention to the parents and to reach the hand of welcome to the pupils. How dispiriting therefore was their disappointment when, as the appointed hour had come, there was but one single little boy, about ten years of age, to present himself... At length Mr McCann went out into the city to fetch in three or four others who had engaged to come on the opening day. The community consoled themselves as well as they could, observing the wide difference between hopes and realities but still clinging to their prospects as indubitably certain. Next morning brought in some more pupils, and day after day there were new accessions till the number in the course of a few months had reached nigh a hundred...

(For the end of the first term they decided) that a public examination would be the best sort of advertisement to make the college known and appreciated... All appeared to the greatest advantage...

But the day did not close with the examinations. There was a large dinner-party to come off in the evening, consisting of the archbishop and the higher members of the clergy... After dinner the archbishop proposed the new Institute as a toast to the company. He was pleased to preface the toast with words to the following effect: "Gentlemen, the mustard seed which was sown only the other day has already grown up and put forth its branches. The children of the city are receiving beneath its fostering shadow the blessings of a religious and literary education. We were all delighted with the specimens we witnessed in the examination at which we had the pleasure of assisting today. The display was creditable in the highest degree both to the teachers and pupils, and presents a happy augury of what we are to expect of the new

Institute. You will therefore join me, Gentlemen, I am sure, with flowing hearts as well as flowing glasses in wishing success and happiness to the young community of the Congregation of the Mission...”

Besides the work of teaching during the day all were obliged to study with intense diligence during the evening to prepare for their respective classes next day. This, together with a strict habit of life which they had adopted, was found to prey very sensibly on their health by the middle of this their first year together. Mr Reynolds especially fell into a confirmed state of delicacy that led to consumption, of which he died the following year. Mr Lynch became so weak that he was scarcely able to go upstairs after his classes. Mr Burke was little better. Mr McCann continued in his chronic state of delicate health and could only attend to the temporal affairs of the house. Mr McNamara was the only one who retained somewhat of health and vigour. Such a state of health suggested the expedience of taking a house of residence in the suburbs from which they could come in to attend their college duties in town. Accordingly they rented a house called “Rose Villa” on the North Circular Road at Phibsboro, near to where the Midland Great Western Railway passes under the road. They took possession of this house on the 19th March, the feast of St Joseph, 1834.

In the afternoon of Sunday the community usually took a drive into the country for recreation before dinner. For this purpose, during their residence in the city, they hired a vehicle off the street. Afterwards, when they had gone to reside on the Circular Road, they procured a horse and car for themselves which they made more free use of to enjoy the country air and make excursions into the country.

The community were now come to the close of their first year together. So far there was not much in their actual position to encourage or cheer them on. They were all of one mind to hope against hope and to persevere to the end, whether that end should be success or utter extinction. They even took courage to make a step in advance and come to the resolution of taking some residence which would give a more imposing aspect to their position and in which, with the patronage of the archbishop, they might establish an ecclesiastical seminary for the diocese. Such an institution, the conceived, would be of the highest value. For want of a suitable education the ecclesiastics of the diocese went to Maynooth and to other such establishments without a sufficient knowledge of the holy state to which they aspired or the dispositions necessary for it. The consequence was that the greater part of them... returned to embrace a secular life... It was also considered that in such a work the community would become more identified with the clergy of

the diocese and should have, besides, the prospect of obtaining recruits for themselves out of the ranks of their pupils.

(The archbishop approved of the project and gave a donation of £200; a Mr Burke of Rathmines bequeathed £700 and Dr Anglade, one of the original French priests in Maynooth, bequeathed £100).

They accordingly looked around the city in every direction and found that the house and demesne of Castleknock were in the market. It cost £3000, subject to a rent of nearly £150 a year and an annuity charge payable to an old lady during her life. Mr McCann generously devoted his property to this purchase, and in so far, as also for his outlay in fitting up the college in the city, he has a right to be regarded as the founder of the Congregation of the Mission in Ireland.

The time had now arrived when, according to arrangement, the little community expected Mr Dowley to come and place himself at their head. But important changes had taken place in Maynooth and the bishops and other trustees of the college were determined if possible to retain so valuable an officer. They even promoted him to the office of vice-president with a considerable increase of salary. But his faith was pledged elsewhere, and a higher position with the inducement of a higher salary so far from retaining him served only the more to signalise his love of poverty and humility, the counter-attractions of the state of life he had resolved upon embracing. He accordingly came away, taking with him the esteem and respect of all; and the trustees to mark their high sense of his distinguished merit voted him a gratuity tribute of £100. In coming to take charge of his little flock Mr Dowley brought with him an additional subject in the person of Mr Kickham of the diocese of Cashel, who had been a fellow-student with the others in Maynooth...

Although the purchase of Castleknock was effected early in the summer of 1834 there was a considerable delay in clearing up the title for a proper conveyance of the property and it was only late in the autumn following that the community were free to occupy it... They at once called it St Vincent's to designate the ultimate purpose for which they had come together, and took for themselves the title of Vincentians, in imitation of Dominicans, Franciscans and others who were popularly called after their founders...

Immediately after having taken possession of Castleknock the little community commenced to fit up the establishment for the purpose of a diocesan seminary with a view to having it in readiness for the autumn following (1835). In their endeavours to do so they were greatly embarrassed from want of means to meet the expenses. Mr McCann's

property had been quite absorbed by the purchase of the place, and the income from the college in Dublin did little more than bear its own expenses, including of course the support of the teaching staff. They consequently turned their thoughts in every direction to catch a prospect if possible of finding means... It should always be a subject of thanksgiving with the Congregation in Ireland to consider the straitened circumstances the first members had to contend with and how God, in his infinite bounty, sustained their courage and enabled them to prosecute the undertaking in which they had embarked in his name.

After taking possession of Castleknock the community still continued to carry on their college in Dublin. Messrs Lynch, Burke, Kickham and McNamara went in every morning and returned in the afternoon, having the use of a horse and car for the purpose. Mr McCann was absorbed in temporal matters which had become greatly increased on account of the new establishment and all that had to be done to fit it up for the contemplated seminary. As Providence would have it, he had full exercise for the experience he had previously acquired while engaged in the world. He moreover took charge of the Penitent Asylum of Drumcondra, on the north side of the city, so far as to say Mass there on Sundays and holy days and instruct the penitents. Mr Dowley took his own place at the head of the community and all things proceeded in his name and by his authority. Poor Mr Reynolds was no longer of the number. Early in January he passed to the reward of a holy life...

Besides the work of the college in the city and the chaplaincies of the two Penitent Asylums already mentioned (the Mendicity Institution on Usher's Island, and Drumcondra) the community found exercise for the ministry in the parish of their new abode, namely Blanchardstown. Generally speaking, on Sundays and holy days some of them said Mass and preached in one or other of the three churches of the parish (Blanchardstown, Porterstown and Chapelizod). The teaching of catechism on Sundays engaged their zeal in a special degree. This work was confided principally to Mr Burke who devoted to it the zeal of an apostle. In each of the three churches he formed a Christian Doctrine Confraternity, both male and female, for teaching the catechism. With these Institutes he united a select number of the students of the seminary whom he used to lead forth to the good work as so many disciples...

Lent came, the first Lent of the community at St Vincent's. The zeal of all, Parish Priest, curates and missionaries, suggested something like a mission. It could not be a mission. Owing to the small number of members and their many laborious employments they could not pretend to more than a missionary essay. Chapelizod, a village in the

parish about a mile from St Vincent's, was chosen for this little effort of zeal. Mr McNamara opened the exercises. The attendances were very large throughout and the pressure on the confessionals was so great as to occupy the missionaries the whole night, if they could stay. But having their other works to carry on at the same time, all they could do was to come down to the church after dinner and spend the evening preaching and hearing confessions up to nine or ten o'clock. Mr Dowley, however, was able to find time to attend during the day, on Fridays, to hear confessions...

Nothing deserving particular notice occurred during the remaining months until the opening of the diocesan seminary in September (1835). By this time the old buildings had been put in order and all was in readiness, except the necessary force to conduct the establishment...

It may be well to observe that the seminary was undertaken to be exclusively an ecclesiastical establishment for the diocese. It was recognised and approved as such by the archbishop who, besides requiring all the candidates for Maynooth and other great seminaries to pass through it, reserved two burses or free places in Maynooth for the most deserving of its pupils every year...

From this period the works of the community continued on without change or additional variety through the succeeding years till 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 of 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 Mass, preaching and catechising 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. This function was performed by Mr Dowley, the others being too young at the time.

Besides being a period of labour these years were also a period of anxious suspense as to the prospect of ever realising the ultimate object the associates had in view. They often asked each other if it were likely the Institute would succeed, and according to all human appearance the prospect seemed the reverse of cheering. Through these years, and still longer, there was no increase in numbers, with the single exception of the good and holy Mr Thomas Kelly of Waterford who was truly a man of God in work and word as long as he lived. Various applications were indeed made from time to time, and some of the applicants actually came. But having made trial of the manner of life they found

in observance in the community, and having experienced somewhat of its labours, and seeing very likely the little prospect it seemed to have of succeeding, they retired after some time...

Notwithstanding their gloomy prospects the "little flock" consoled themselves in thinking that the cause in which they had embarked was more the cause of God than their own, and that they should await in patience in dispositions of his providence. They felt moreover that living together according to the rule of life they had adopted they were afforded abundant means and helps for practising virtue and sanctifying themselves. They looked back to the indications of the divine will, which they considered so manifest, in the circumstances under which they had come together. They encouraged each other to hope against hope to the last. They further reflected that perhaps they had too much human feeling in the enterprise in which they had embarked and that it might be the designs of God to purify their motives and sentiments by giving them to see how little they could do of themselves, and that in vouchsafing them success in the end he would do so in such a way as to teach them that it was the result of his own bounty and goodness, and consequently that the work should bear all the more the stamp of heaven. Finally, they lived together in great peace and charity and the time passed on happily and agreeably in the society and companionship they afforded each other...

In the autumn of that year (1838) the community at St Vincent's had a casual visit, as it seemed at the time, from a Revd Mr O'Toole, Econome of the Irish College, Paris. He spent the evening at St Vincent's and learned the ultimate purpose the community had in view. Returning to Paris, and without any instructions from the community, he waited on the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and spoke to him of the little Institute in Ireland. The Superior General felt greatly interested with what the good Mr O'Toole told him, and mentioned at once his readiness to adopt the members if they themselves felt inclined to join the parent Institute. Mr O'Toole wrote without delay to Mr Dowley to tell him of his interview with the Superior General, and that he himself (the Superior General) would write to him in a few days. He did so, in effect, and formally invited Mr Dowley, and any of his companions he would take with him, to come to Paris and pass some time at the central or mother house of the Congregation. The proposal, more especially when viewed in connection with the circumstances which gave occasion to it, appeared strikingly providential to all, and the little community felt as if the gloom which had hung over them so long had given way to the prospect of a brilliant future.

Mr Dowley was not slow in replying to say that he gratefully accepted the invitation, and that he and one of his companions would soon present themselves in Paris. Some few weeks passed on and the Spring of 1839 arrived when Mr Dowley and, in a short time after him, Mr Kickham, entered the mother house, thus taking the first step towards engrafting the Irish branch on to the parent stock of St Vincent...

Birmingham.
15th November,
1882

Very Rev. Father,

If any words of mine can aid in furthering the success of such excellent objects as I learn from your letter you have in view, gladly do I, according to your request, send you these.

I recollect well, how, when I became a Catholic, the first religious body which attracted my reverent notice was yours; and afterwards, when I was resident in Dublin, with what kindness, on presenting myself at your House at Castleknock. I was received by your Superior and Community.

I am pleased, then, at the opportunity, which after so many years you give me, of expressing my sympathy and interest in the Congregation of St Vincent, and my sincere hope that your good work in England, as well as Ireland, may extend and prosper.

Very truly yours,
+JohnH. Card. Newman.

The Very Rev. Fr. O'Callaghan.

(This letter, which is in the archives in Castleknock, was written to Malachy O'Callaghan and used on a printed leaflet issued in connection with an appeal for funds for the building of St Joseph's, Blackrock).

Miscellaneous Items

About the Early Years

1. What eventually became of Fr Ferris's copy of the Common Rules? Here's what we can say, on the authority of a confrère, the present archbishop of Toronto in Canada, who was the first pupil admitted to Castleknock College, which opened in 1835. He was also the first person from the Irish Province who was not already a priest to enter the intern seminaire in Paris, in 1839. The copy of the Rules discovered in Maynooth after Fr Ferris's death fell into the hands of Fr Dowley, and as had formerly happened in the case of the prophet's mantle the spirit and virtues of Fr Ferris passed on to Fr Dowley with the book, and he became his blessed heir. He admired the Rule of St Vincent and soon very much wished to see a group of priests in Ireland who would live according to its full demands.

(Malachy O'Callaghan in *Annales* 45,1880, pp 199-200)

2. In the archives in Cabra Road there is a copy of the Common Rules, in Latin, which has a 78 page *Prologus* which gives an outline of St Vincent's life and the works of the Congregation. In spite of Vincent's well-known opinion on the question it states explicitly that its purpose is to make the Congregation and its works known. It was printed in Lisbon in 1743. Jerome Twomey made a note about it in which he says that there is a *possibility* that this *may* be the copy given by Archbishop Murray to Philip Dowley. Murray had studied in Spain, and if the interest which McNamara says he had in the Congregation started there this is, perhaps, the sort of book he would have picked up. This copy was always kept among the Visitor's books until the establishment of the archives on a more formal basis. It is a pity that some early confrère did not indicate for posterity what became of the Ferris and Murray copies of the Rules.

TD

3. A fourth venerable refugee from France had also been received into Maynooth, but had died some time before Mr Dowley entered. This was Fr Ferris of the Congregation of the Mission, an Irishman by birth, who at the breaking out of the Revolution held the position of Assistant in the house of St Lazare in Paris. Although Mr Dowley had not the happiness of being personally acquainted with this holy ecclesiastic the account he heard of his virtues and edifying life made the deepest impression on

his mind. The students and professors who know him often spoke of his regular habits and saintly demeanour. Their veneration of him went so far as to cause them to engage an artist to execute an engraving of him which was eagerly procured by all. Mr Dowley succeeded in obtaining one of these pictures and preserved it with great respect to the day of his death.

(From an anonymous manuscript *Life of Fr Dowley and Life of Fr Lydon* in the archives, Cabra Rd.)

Note: Ferris died in November 1809; Dowley entered Maynooth in 1812, aged 24.

4. But why, it will be asked, these years of hesitation? With so much enthusiasm for St Vincent's congregation, and having given his venerated name to the Castleknock seminary right from the start, why not immediately graft on to the life-giving trunk of the Congregation of the Mission? The answer to these questions is that before the days of well-established railways and steamships communications were long and costly, and we did not know what degree of confidence that Congregation could inspire. Above all, certain national prejudices and the idea of subjection to a foreign authority posed great difficulties. It was suggested we should follow the example of some other religious communities which were being founded on, and were drawing their members from, the native soil. Anyway, things were like that until in the autumn of 1838 we had the visit from Mr O'Toole, at that time a professor in the Irish College, Paris, where I am writing these lines.

(Thomas McNamara in *Annales* 41, 1876, p 56, in an account of the visit of Eugene Boré, Superior General, to Ireland. This account was later published separately as a pamphlet).

5. *John O'Toole, Paris, to Archdeacon John Hamilton, Dublin, 18 December 1838:*

I wrote to Mr O'Connell, the worthy and zealous secretary of the Association. I hope he received the letter. You will of course see it. I mentioned in it a project which I have entertained for the last three months and which, I am sure you will think with me, would, if realised, be productive of considerable good both to Ireland and the missions of foreign countries. I mean the establishment of a branch of the French Lazarists in Dublin. I have seen the *Procureur Général* and the *Supérieur Général* of the order. They are most anxious about its success, and have given every assurance that nothing will be wanting on their part to

contribute to facilitate such an undertaking. I did not mention in my letter to Mr O'C what my plan is, because I thought it would not be prudent to have it generally known before I had ascertained the dispositions of those persons in Ireland whose co-operation is necessary for the immediate realisation of it. To you, however, I need not hesitate to communicate it, as you may perhaps be able to assist me by your influence and advice. You will of course be guided by your usual prudence in making use of what I am about to mention. The plan I have at present in view is to endeavour to have Mr Dooley's establishment aggregated (I use the expression in the sense of the French word *agrégé*) to that of the Lazarists here. I have written to him on the subject and was authorised to say on the part of the authorities here that every facility would be afforded by them to bring about such a measure, that in fact all they would require would be to have two of the clergymen of Castleknock come to Paris and spend five or six months in the novitiate; that they might then return, one as *Supérieur* of the Irish branch of the order, and send over others until there should be a sufficient number to form a novitiate in Ireland. I don't know what Mr Dooley may think of this suggestion. I trust in God he will look upon it favourably, for the French Lazarists are just the sort of people wanted in Ireland, and the mere fact of having Ireland connected with an order whose reputation deservedly stands so high would contribute more than anything I know of to give instantaneous development of Mr Dooley's views. I expect his answer in the course of this week. I have not time to dwell on the subject longer, but I hope you think with me that it would be very desirable Mr Dooley would accede to the proposals made him.

(Extract from a letter in the Dublin diocesan archives.

The Association referred to at the start is the
Association for the Propagation of the Faith)

6. *Jean-Baptiste Nozo, Superior General, in his circular of 1 January 1840:*

The directors and founders of a minor seminary in Dublin have asked to join us and to unite their work with our little congregation. After mature deliberation we have agreed to their repeated requests. Already Messrs Dowlay and Kitkem, who are in charge of this seminary, have come here as novices and spent about six months in our intern seminaire where they have given both sufficient indication of vocation to our holy state and the most edifying example. On their return home, where the demands of their work recalled them for a time, they have sent us another seminarist, most suitable in every way, who is fitting in very well into our students' way of life.

If this amalgamation succeeds, and there is every hope that it will, it will be to the advantage both of Ireland which will get the benefit of missions and of many of our own houses where there is a need for missioners who know English.

7. I have gone through the minutes of the Superior General's Council in the archives in the Curia in Rome from the mid-1830's until the end of 1839 looking for some reference to the mature deliberation mentioned in Nozo's letter. There is no explicit reference to Ireland at all. Under the date of 18 October 1838 there is the following, which may refer to Ireland; the date would be about right for what O'Toole says in his letter of December 1838:

"The Council then discussed several persons who are seeking to join the Congregation, and other matters of little importance". The implications of the word "other" in the context are rather intriguing.

The first explicit reference to Irish affairs in the Minutes is under the date 8 November 1841: "Fr Lynch asks permission to take his vows. Granted". This was James, who was a priest, and not John Joseph who was not. James had applied from Castleknock; he never went to Paris.

I also went through the letters of Nozo from 1836 till 1844 without finding any reference to Ireland, but it is clearly not a complete collection.

From the records in Paris the first six Irishmen to go there were Philip Dowley who arrived on 18 March 1839 and left on 20 July 1839; Roger Kickham who arrived on 10 April 1839 and left on 17 August 1839; John Joseph Lynch, the seminarist referred to in Nozo's letter, who arrived on 20 November 1839 and left on 30 May 1842. Then came Richard Collier, a priest, who stayed about two months and then left the Congregation; Matthew Kavanagh arrived in April 1841 but the date of his return to Ireland is not recorded; William Henegan arrived on the same day as Kavanagh and returned to Ireland for reasons of health in July 1842 and died in January 1843. Four others came in 1841, five in 1842, three in 1843 and four in 1844, and this pattern continued for many years afterwards. TD

8. *John O'Toole, Paris, to Archdeacon John Hamilton, Dublin, 30 April 1839:*

Our friend Mr Dooley is in excellent health and spirits. I saw him lately, and the other gentleman who has come over to join him. He is, in his words, in Paradise since he arrived. Everything is to his entire satisfaction, & (?) the arrangement he is to make with the Lazarists such

as to facilitate the speedy establishment of the order in Ireland. The Lazarists are precisely the persons fitted for that country at the moment. They are humble in the extreme; can excite no jealousies by privileges or exemptions as they always derive their jurisdiction from the Ordinary and are animated with the best possible spirit.

If Mr Dooley be established in Ireland before any arrangement be definitely made, the Lazarists are the persons to put at the head of the Seminary for the Colonies.

(Extract from a letter in the Dublin diocesan archives)

9. *From T McNamara's manuscript:*

In the following year (1840) at their own request the Superior General sent them a French confrère, Mr Girard from the mission of Tours, to aid them in acquiring the spirit of their holy state and adopting the usages and observances of the Congregation. He remained (in Castleknock) to receive the holy vows of Mr Dowley (19 March 1841), who in a short time after received those of Mr Kickham.

Joseph Girard was born in 1791 and was ordained for the diocese of Clermont. He later transferred to Paris. The solemn translation of the relics of St Vincent in 1830 decided him to join the Congregation. He entered in November 1834, when John Gabriel Perboyre was Director. He died as Visitor of Algeria in 1879. Thomas McNamara wrote his obituary in the *Annales*.

TD

10. On this whole period see also COLLOQUE No 1 pages 25 to 29.

11. *Freudian tail-piece:*

In the *Annales* Vol. 72 (1907) page 513 the priest who suggested that the Castleknock community join the Congregation of the Mission is called Monsieur O' Fool.

St Vincent and the Priesthood

James Cahalan

Introduction

Daniel-Rops in his history of the church in the 17th century entitles his second chapter “An age of spiritual grandeur”. Yet in that same chapter he has some frightening references to the scandalous conduct of priests who, in his own words, “were interested in everything but their priesthood and their apostolate. They lived with their families after ordination, unoccupied; they frequented the Court and the town, hoping for a good benefice — apart from all those in minor orders, subdeacons and other wandering monks who were to be found everywhere”. There would seem to be somewhat of a paradox here. In fact some of the biographies of St Vincent concentrate so much on the evils of the clergy of the 17th century that many would find it difficult to accept the title of Daniel-Rops’ second chapter. But in fact parallel to the sordid state of the clergy, or at least of some of them, there was a tremendous revivalist movement going on.

The famous French school of spirituality, headed by Bérulle, was exercising a powerful counter-witness to that of the undesirable clergy to which Daniel-Rops and indeed Vincent himself refer so often. Interestingly, historians of the period seem generally speaking to omit the name of Vincent de Paul from this French school of spirituality. In addition to Bérulle his successor as superior of the Oratory, Charles de Condren, Jean-Jacques Olier and John Eudes are the names that are usually given as forming the nucleus of this original French school of spirituality. Vincent’s name is not linked with the school. This might be puzzling at first sight because in fact Vincent was a disciple of Bérulle in the sense that Bérulle was his confessor and director. He probably spent a whole year doing something like an extended retreat with Bérulle. But while Vincent learned much of his Christo-centrism from Bérulle he manifested a complete independence of him in the manner in which he applied his Incarnational theology to life. Vincent had another tutor besides Bérulle, the poor. As we shall see, Vincent was thoroughly evangelised by the poor and this gave a very practical and down-to-earth slant to his Incarnationalism. Vincent of course was not alone in this interpretation of Bérullianism. John Eudes was of similar frame of mind. Vincent however would be the first to admit to the tremendous influence of Bérulle on this great revivalist movement of the 17th century in which

he himself played a very significant role. It was because the days were dark that the work of these great reformers shone so brightly and merited for the 17th century the designation “An age of spiritual grandeur”.

Vincent becomes a priest

Vincent was ordained to the priesthood when he was not quite twenty years of age. In other words, he violated the prescriptions of the Council of Trent which stipulated that the minimum age for ordination to the priesthood was twenty-four. I suppose there is some excuse for this extraordinary violation of the Church’s ruling in the fact that the decrees of the Council of Trent were not even accepted in France at that time. So, while it does not justify the situation, the fact is that it was nothing unusual to have priests ordained even before the age of twenty in France at that time.

Notwithstanding his youth at the time of his ordination Vincent differed from many of his priest contemporaries intellectually. He was in fact an educated man at the time of his ordination. The same could not be said of many of his contemporaries. He had done three years in the school in Dax where he was both student and tutor — tutor to Monsieur de Comet’s children. He then entered the university of Toulouse where he spent up to seven years in all and obtained a Bachelor’s degree in Theology. While therefore as I have said he differed from his contemporaries intellectually the question is, did he differ from them in ambition? Could what Daniel-Rops says of the general run of the clergy at the time be said of Vincent too? Well, we have his own words to the effect that his early ambition was to secure a good benefice and settle down near his mother so that he could look after her. There was however something about his choice of Buzet as the venue for his first Mass which seems to indicate that there was a depth to his spirituality even at this time which augured well for the future. There was a shrine to our Lady at Buzet which he visited frequently during his student days. The late Mgr Calvet’s comment on this in his biography of Vincent is interesting: “At twenty, head and heart were in a healthy state morally; and it was as a priest, indeed a good priest, that he went on with his studies at the university of Toulouse and continued to preside over his small school”. Nearly sixty years later, however, Vincent testifies himself that his understanding of of the sublimity of the priesthood when he was ordained was quite meagre: “As far as I am concerned myself, if I had known the real nature of the priesthood then, when I had the temerity to become a priest, as I know it now, I would have chosen to work as a labourer on the land rather than involve myself in such a sublime calling” (V 568).

So, while one must recognise with Calvet that even at the beginning Vincent had a deep reverence for the priesthood it must be admitted too that there was quite a strong mixture of worldliness and ambition in the young priest Vincent.

The mission experience

As already stated, however, Vincent had another tutor besides Berulle, the poor. When he began to give the much-needed missions to the poor country people he made a discovery which greatly shocked him and which revealed to him that there was urgent need for a new type of priest. This new type of priest must not be content simply to contemplate Christ the Eternal Priest offering himself to the Father, but rather one who carries the living Christ into the market place of the neglected people, especially the poor and destitute. The state of the country people to whom Vincent gave his first missions constituted a real school of sacerdotal theology for him. From his knowledge of the history of the church in the world at large and the way in which priests neglected their duties to their people, he saw this very thing happening in his own native France. Often during his subsequent years he spoke feelingly of the way in which the church down the centuries was brought to disaster in many places by bad priests. In fact he almost became obsessed by the shocking neglect of the poor by the priests. As we know, he was one of the team of deeply concerned ecclesiastics who saw the solution to the situation in the establishment of seminaries as recommended by the Council of Trent.

Man of God for others

In modern times we are very accustomed to the statement that a priest is a man of God for others. Incidentally, this is one of Helder Camara's description of the priest: "Do you know what it means to be a priest? It means to belong to yourself no more. The priest belongs to God and to others" (*The Impossible Dream*, pp 23-24). The whole theology of Vincent on the priesthood is really saturated with the idea that the priest is for others. His starting point in his approach to the priesthood as indeed in his approach to everything is Jesus Christ. For Vincent the Gospels are the story of Christ the Eternal High Priest. He was not interested in what modern theologians call Christ's consciousness of his priesthood. Vincent saw the priesthood of Christ unfolded on every page of the Gospels. He was thoroughly convinced that the "human" priest participates in this Gospel priesthood of Christ. It is a priesthood which bypasses as it were speculative theology and is totally immersed in concrete reality.

We know anyhow that speculative theology was not Vincent's interest, certainly after his own conversion. We might with good reason call him a biblical theologian precisely because of his practical and concrete approach to matters theological. He has a very strong statement on this question of relationship between the priesthood of Christ and ours in a conference given on 19 July 1655: "The distinguishing mark of priests is that their priesthood is a participation in the priesthood of the Son of God who has given them the power to offer his own Body in sacrifice and to give it as meat so that those who eat it will live eternally" (XI 7). It is of course true that this same idea about the nature of our priesthood is also the common teaching of many of Vincent's contemporaries, and of course of modern theologians as well. But once again he differs from them all in his manner of applying the doctrine of participation to the priesthood of the ministerial priests. Vincent seemed to see the priest as the very Christ going about in the concrete circumstances of everyday life, doing good to real people in the flesh. In fact he said so much on one occasion: "To be a priest is not so much to accomplish or fulfil the ministry of which he has given us an example, as to give oneself to him so that he will continue to exercise the ministry in us and by us" (XI 74). This seems to me to be the very heart of Vincent's teaching on the priesthood. He saw the "human" priest as the identity of Christ the Priest. We know how often Vincent himself paused in the exercise of his own priesthood to try to be sure that at this particular moment in his life he was in fact the identity of Christ. What would Christ do in these circumstances was a constant question he put to himself.

Instrument of Christ

Another simile used by Vincent very often about the priest is *Instrument*. Here of course he is thinking of instrument as a living reality. In the mind of Vincent the priest is the instrument of Christ because in a very real way the priest is alive with the very aliveness of Christ himself. Again in modern theology the term used for this would probably be *sacrament*: the priest is the sacrament of Christ. It is because of this that Vincent insisted so much on the need for a very high quality of spiritual or interior life in the priest. For him, though the priest is certainly one who is sent as the instrument of Christ, he is sent not just as a messenger or on an errand. He is sent as a person who is destined to live out the personality of Christ. He is sent too to share the total destiny of Christ the Priest. Some theologians today when discussing this "ontology" of the priest tend to teach that the priest can be effective in his cultic mission without being identified necessarily with the "ontology" of the Priest

Christ. On the other hand these same theologians are convinced that in his prophetic role the priest must himself be part of the living word. In other words he cannot divorce the quality of his life from the word that he preaches because he himself is the word. Vincent would have no such hair-splitting. All his teaching on the priesthood emphasised the total take-over of the priest's personality by the personality of Christ. For example, Vincent says that when the priest says Mass he must be conscious of the fact that Christ himself is the chief celebrant: "When a priest says Mass he must believe and realise that it is Jesus Christ himself, our Saviour, who is the principal and the sovereign priest who offers the sacrifice; the priest is only the minister of the Lord..." (XI 375). And again, in similar vein: "Our vocation is to embrace the hearts of men, do what the Son of God did, he who came into the world to set it on fire. It is true therefore that I am sent not only to love God but to make him loved. It is not enough to love God if my neighbour does not love him" (XII 262). From all this it is obvious that Vincent is asking for a very high degree of Christ-consciousness in the priest. Vincent's words about the priest and Mass quoted above make it quite clear that at Mass the priest must be deeply conscious of his identity with Christ the Eternal High Priest.

The priest the voice of God

Vincent is no less convinced that the priest is the voice of God, especially when he is preaching the word: "We must preach as apostles, that is to say to preach well with fruit; we must approach it with simplicity and use simple language, the kind of language that everyone will understand and from which they will derive fruit. This is how Jesus Christ preached and it is a great privilege that God has granted to this miserable Company the happiness of imitating him in this" (XI258). The voice of the priest is the voice of the love of God in the priest's heart: "Now if it is true that we are called to preach the love of God far and near, if we must inflame the nations with this love, if we are called to cast the divine fire on earth, if all this is so, my brothers, what a great fire of divine love should be burning in my soul" (XII 263). It was because there was so little of this "divine enthusiasm" in the preachers of his own day that Vincent was so insistent on the virtue of simplicity in the priest. For Vincent simplicity was not just a virtue, it was a vision leading to a deep personal experience of God. And it is precisely this experience that he preaches.

Relationship between the poor and Vincent's concept of the priest

I remember many years ago having a conversation with one of the Congregation's historians about St Vincent and the priesthood. This historian was quite certain that Vincent's interest in the priesthood was very definitely related to his mission to the poor. In other words, according to this historian had Vincent not embarked first on his mission to the neglected country people he probably would not have become so involved in the reform of the clergy. In the introduction to this article I have already referred to the fact that the poor evangelised Vincent. Here I want to draw attention to the other side of the coin, namely that Vincent saw the priest very much as the Messiah for the poor.

In a conference in December 1658 he has this to say on Christ, the priest and the poor: "Yes, our Saviour asks us to evangelise the poor; this is what he himself did and this is what he wants to be continued by us. We have much reason to be humiliated on this matter, seeing the Eternal Father calls us to fulfil the designs of his Son who came to evangelise the poor and who has actually given this as a sign that he was the Son of God and that he was the Messiah for whom the world was waiting" (XII 79). Vincent seems to have reached a very deep consciousness of the meaning of the priesthood when he found himself among the shepherdless poor. He would therefore be very much at home with the current emphasis on the church as the church of the poor. It would be impossible to think of Vincent enjoying the very deep and satisfying contemplation of the French spiritual salons while the poor were languishing for the word and sacrament. I am sure that with Vincent's own dedication to Divine Providence he would have seen his entry into the world of the poor when he was a young ambitious priest as one of the very important ways in which God was deepening his consciousness of the meaning of the priesthood. Reading his letters especially one gets the very definite impression that he saw the ministry to the poor as a very effective instrument in the creation of his own "priestly mind".

The influence of the priest in society

We are all familiar with Vincent's thesis about the influence of bad priests. In a conference specifically on priests in September 1655 he is quite dramatic about this fact. He says: "Recently I was at a meeting where there were seven prelates who were reflecting on the disorders in the church. They were saying quite definitely that it was the ecclesiastics who were the principal cause of these disorders in the church". He then added his own contribution on the subject: "It is the priests therefore, yes, we are the cause of the desolation which is ruining the church,

this deplorable falling-away from the church which is happening in so many parts of the world. It is almost entirely destroyed in Asia, Africa and even in a great part of Europe". It was in this context that he made the statement about the possible transfer of the church from Europe altogether: "Doesn't it seem, Fathers, that God wishes to transport his church to other countries?" (XI 309).

Pope St Pius X was a very strong supporter of the thesis of Vincent about the harm done by bad priests. This fear which seems to have been constantly on the mind of Vincent dictated the kind of directions which he gave to his priests in seminaries concerning the removal of doubtful candidates for the priesthood.

On the other side of the coin, however, Vincent had most encouraging words about the influence of the good priest: "Oh, Fathers, what a wonderful thing is a good priest. What cannot a good ecclesiastic do! What conversions will he not bring about! Take for example Monsieur Bourdaise, this excellent priest. What does he not do, and what cannot he do! The happiness of the Christian way of life depends on priests because the good parishioners look up to a good ecclesiastic, they respect a charitable pastor and they follow his lead; in fact they try to imitate him. Oh, let us strive to make them all good since this is our work and because the priesthood is such a sublime calling. Oh my Saviour, how totally should the poor missionaries give themselves to you for the formation of good ecclesiastics, since this is the most difficult and the most sublime work, and of course the most important for the salvation of men and the progress of Christianity" (XI 7-8).

Conclusion

The priest, then, for Vincent is a real presence of the mind and the spirit of Christ. In fact he is in a very real sense a real presence of the person of Christ himself. No other theology of the priesthood would fit in with Vincent's conviction of the transforming power of the good priest in any society. Again, one is reminded of the saintly Pope Pius X who stated: "No priest can be good or bad alone".

We can readily hear Vincent saying Amen to the present Holy Father's assessment of the kind of priest that the world is looking for today: "In practical terms, the only priest who will always prove necessary to people is the priest who is conscious of the full meaning of his priesthood; the priest who believes profoundly, who professes his faith with courage, who prays fervently, who teaches with deep conviction, who serves, who puts into practice the programme of the Beatitudes, who knows how to love disinterestedly, who is close to everyone and especially to those who

are most in need” (*Letter to Priests*, Passion Sunday 1979). This is in fact the new type of priest which Vincent saw the need for when he entered the mission field of the poor country people in 1617 and for which he laboured for over half of his eighty years.

After a Repetition of Prayer in 1658 Vincent said:

St Teresa, who in her own day saw the Church’s need for good workers, used to ask God to provide good priests, and she wanted the nuns of her Order to pray frequently for this; perhaps the present change for the better in the priesthood is due in part to the devotion of this great saint, because God always made use of weak instruments for important projects.
(XII 18)

Forum

Mission to the Travelling People, September - October 1982

This year's mission to the Travellers of Dublin lasted six weeks, three weeks of September and three of October. It was given by a mission team of three, Sean Johnston, Aidan Galvin and Reggie Deaton, and helped by the parish team when we could. Kevin Scallan later joined in.

This was the second Travellers' mission so it was planned and programmed in the light of the previous year's experience.

Planning for this year's mission took place almost as soon as the previous one finished, in September 1981. In the light of what was truly pioneering work it was decided to extend the mission from four to six weeks and so give more time to each of the areas in which it would take place.

The Travellers live in a number of communities scattered in almost a circle north, west and south of Dublin city. The plan for the missions was simply to spend one, two or three days in each area, following a similar plan of campaign for all areas. This plan included outreach to children and youth through schools and Training Centres, family visiting, and gathering of adults to a convenient church.

Reports and reviews of the first mission were taken in October, followed by planning with the missionaries in March and a pre-mission day held in All Hallows in September. This gathered our ground-workers and local travellers to go through the details of the plan for each area and to pray for the success of the effort. Other advance preparation involved the production of a mission poster for display in caravans, and a mission card. Schools had previously run a mission poster competition.

So, with the experience of the first mission having answered for Travellers the question "What is a mission?" the plan for the second mission was to consolidate and develop the first year's experience and success. Last year we had a few central gatherings, beginning together Travellers from all over the city to our "own" church, Sts Michael and John's. This year we would repeat this, but with the addition of the idea of pilgrimage, a pilgrimage to Knock.

The first week of the mission began in the Finglas area. We visited primary schools first for children's confessions, and next day for Mass. This was followed by family visitation, and Mass in Corduff church, in Avila Park community centre, and family Masses on Dunsink site. Finally the people from the three separate areas were brought together

to Finglas West church for a Mass of Healing. The first week saw us also visit and preach in the three major prisons to the Travellers there, Mountjoy, St Patrick's and Arbour Hill. We finished off the first week with a one-day mission to the Travellers of Athy.

This was the pattern for the six weeks, two or three areas covered each week. Bigger ones like Tallaght were given three days, the smaller, like Labre Park, two days. Outreach to the young through schools and centres in the mornings, to families in the afternoons, and gathering of adults in the evenings. Where we could gather the people for two or three nights the first night would be devoted to a preaching directed to penance, with prayer before the Blessed Sacrament; the second to Mass with renewal of baptismal promises, and the third to a Mass of Healing.

Priorswood parish was typical of a big centre. Jack Harris was there to record and share a bit of the atmosphere for Radio 2 listeners. We had Reggie's reverent Stations of the Cross, Aidan's jokes and Sean leading the enthusiastic renunciation of the devil. We had old and young, healthy and handicapped, engaged, single and married, men and women (with slightly more women), sober and not so sober. The mission being really a series of mini-missions there were many highlights, and when one area was left warm the next had to be warmed up from cold.

The pilgrimage to Knock was one of the most memorable of the highlights. Each area sent its coach or minibus. When we met in Knock we found that we were the largest group there, and it was fitting that it was in the Basilica of Our Lady, under whose patronage the whole mission had been placed, that the Travellers were united and that the biggest single gathering to date of the people of our parish of the Travelling People took place. Michael McCullagh was justifiably proud and moved when unexpectedly asked to preside. Providence seemed to be directing events and giving us a great pride and joy in unity.

There were many minor highlights in the various areas. The singing and Baptism on the third night in Ballymun; the Children's Mission in Sunshine House, Balbriggan, at the same time; the third night in Tallaght with the homely tea afterwards in St Basil's Centre; the queues for confession, blessings, anointing, communion, the pledges given and kept, the listening, the deep faith of these people, the promise and challenge of the young. Small turnout or large, there was a sense of what faith is — invitation and response. And for the course of the mission it was the missionaries who were, in the literal sense, itinerant.

The mission was above all an experience of cheerfulness, encouragement and welcome to us and undoubtedly to the Travellers too. The ground work was done by our loyal local contacts and monitored by

our able Parish Office staff in Exchange House. Finally, I should mention two gatherings for significant groups which took place in Sts Michael and John's. One was a night for young people which gathered teenage Travellers from all over the city and from Bray, and the second was the closing of the mission to which we invited young married couples. These young marrieds gave us great hope. Many of them know us well since their marriage preparation. They are happy to belong to the church. They are taking to heart the message of the mission, the challenge of loving each other as Christ loves us, and the conviction that you can't make it on your own, that you need the support of faith. The last night of the mission saw us also reverence the cross of Taize, brought to us by a group of young Christians committed to spreading the message of reconciliation — (in the Irish context this too is another significant seed of hope) — breaking down the barrier of Gentile and Jew, Traveller and Settled Folk. All who took part in the mission found themselves strengthened in faith and looking forward to next year, to the next mission.

Adrian Eastwood.

SHALOM, Spiritual/Pastoral Quarterly for Priests

The idea of producing a quarterly spiritual/pastoral magazine for priests in Nigeria first came to light some two or three years ago in the course of an annual meeting of the Spiritual Directors of the Major Seminaries of Nigeria. (In spite of its high-sounding title this meeting often consisted of three or four priests, the majority of whom were confrères). We were anxious to offer something to priests after they left the seminary so that they would have an on-going stimulus and encouragement to study. In particular, at least in the initial stages, we focussed on the aspect of encouraging them in keeping up to date in their reading, and some form of extended book-review was really what was in question. This topic became a recurring item at these meetings until eventually it was decided that it was time to do something about it. So, a special meeting was held to discuss it, and to this meeting some additional *periti* were invited, including Fr Jim Sheerin, a Kiltegan Father, who was qualified in journalism and was a former editor of *Africa*. This developed into an editorial board of some 16 members, about half of whom were Nigerians, with the idea of setting the magazine up on as broad a base as possible. The scope of the magazine broadened at the same time so that it came to include the present sections.

We were very anxious that it should be a magazine for which the Nigerian priests felt some sense of proprietorship. For that reason it is

hoped to have a Nigerian editor as soon as possible. We were fortunate to discover a good printer who was both efficient and interested in the project, being a former seminarian himself. We were anxious that as many Nigerian priests as possible should contribute to it and were fortunate to discover such good talent as we had for the first issue. We saw it as providing a forum for the Nigerian priests where they would be free to express themselves and share their experience and ideas. We hoped that it would provide a bond of unity among them, and hence the title.

There was an impressive launching of the magazine at the Eucharistic Congress at Jos. The first issue was generally well received. The problem of distribution remains a very difficult one. Also, the need to have an interested representative in each diocese who will “push” it. We have seen where this has made all the difference. With the help of your prayers we would hope to keep it going. It seems a bit like the “Intercession for Priests”, to fit in as an extension, geared to the needs of our day, of our call to participate in work for priests.

Roderic Crowley.

RELIGION ON RADIO TWO

During my six years in Strawberry Hill from 1973 to 1979, I became interested in local hospital radio and presented a ninety-minute blend of music, news, prayers and reflections in the West Middlesex Hospital on Sunday evenings. When I moved to St. Joseph’s, Stillorgan Park in 1979, I found that a new radio station for younger people — RTE Radio Two was just a few months old and growing in popularity. Its aim was to counteract the ‘pirate’ radio stations which had appeared in most large towns and cities; it was to be a music station with very little talk and the music would range from the gentlest country and western to the heaviest rock. There would be none of the formality of RTE Radio One with its continuity announcers and separate departments producing their own individual programmes. Music stations operated on the ‘strip principle’ where information about traffic, weather and sport was blended in with music, comment, a bit of humour and items of news to form a continuous background of sound into which people periodically dipped the conscious part of their being. This audible wallpaper was served up in two-hour portions punctuated with commercials and news-headlines; the publicity machine gave the whole thing a forceful ‘coming-at-you’ image. A fifteen minute concession was made to the Lord early on Sunday mornings but there was no mention of Him on week-days.

I suggested a ‘Thought-for-the-day’ spot during the ‘Breakfast Show’ and was asked to give a set of Reflections in Holy Week 1980 as an experiment. It worked and I have been giving a daily live “Reflection” ever since on a month-on, month-off basis, and my file now has over four hundred talks. I opted for the live presentation so that each talk could be linked to some item of news if necessary and I think it’s better to be in the same frame of mind as the listener who might be struggling out of bed, swearing at the cornflakes, or stuck in a traffic jam.

In 1981 the Sunday morning programme was extended to half-an-hour and in Spring 1982 it was given a new name. It became “Sunday” and I was asked to become its presenter. I think it was the first time ever in the history of Radio Eireann that a priest hosted his own radio show. Then in the Autumn 1982 Schedules, “Sunday” moved to seven-thirty in the evening and introduced some more current-affairs reporting and moved away from being a holy half-hour. So far I have interviewed a lot of confrères about their work and I have drawn on the expertise of many others for help and guidance. I find it a challenge trying to bring some of the gospel to a non-captive audience and I like the discipline of broadcasting. It’s something I could strongly recommend in a lot of non-broadcast areas of proclaiming the gospel.

Jack Harris.

WHAT THINK YOU?

In reply to Jim McCormack’s appeal (COLLOQUE No 6) for “... openness, simplicity and a free flow of information and brotherly love” I would like to propose some reflections of my own.

At a recent Vincentian funeral, as I looked around at the assembled confrères I was struck forcibly by that *magna reverentia* which Vincent demands that we have for each other. I was struck too to see that we had all grown that much older, and I wondered how far my generation, and I am one of them, can really change any longer. Abelly, who knew Vincent personally, remarks that Vincent did not ask older priests to change. But even if we are not asked to change that much ourselves I believe that we ought to start thinking to prepare for the generation after us.

When I read again recently about the origins of our Province I realised that in that heady decade after Emancipation the founders had many options before them. Fr McCann’s brothers “...asked him why he did not join some well established Order instead of an embryo community” (Mary Purcell: *The Vincentians* p 91). Philip Dowley could easily have joined the Jesuits as other members of the Maynooth staff did at the

time. Then why did the little band go out on a limb and start a Vincentian province?

The answer must be that they wanted to do in the 1830s in Ireland pretty much what Vincent had done in 17th century France, evangelise a poor and nominally Christian people. Philip Dowley had Fr Ferris's copy of the Common Rules and later spent four months in the mother house in Paris; he must have had a clear idea of what Vincent intended. And indeed the actions of the early Irish Vincentians show how thoroughly they had accepted Vincent's aims, or how much his aims coincided with theirs. They opened what was in effect a minor seminary, they pioneered parish missions in Ireland and they set up two centres (Sheffield and Lanark) to cater for the religious needs of impoverished emigrants. Their work in the Mendicity Institute and in the then neglected area of Phibsborough points in the same direction.

The origin of the Spanish provinces offers an uncanny parallel. For nearly twenty years a Fr Senjust of Barcelona had devoted himself to country missions and to retreats for ordinands. He had unsuccessfully tried to found a community for these purposes but finally during a stay in Rome (October 1699 to May 1700) he came into contact with the Vincentians: "His contact with the Vincentians convinced him that this was the community he had been seeking for two decades. He determined that come what may he would introduce the Congregation of the Mission into his native country" (Poole: *A History of the CM*, pp 205-213).

The Carthusians are said to be the only religious community in existence which has never slipped from its early ideals, and since 150 years is a long time in our history we may be excused for not seeing things quite as our first founders, not to mention Vincent himself, saw them. The forces that brought this change about have been enormous, since to judge by the anxieties expressed at Bogota other provinces are in a similar position.

This problem of our change in direction was all the acuter for me since I had been dealing with our students for twelve years, and students ask awkward questions. They are preoccupied with their vows and compare them with what they observe in the Province. When they ask such questions are they being naughty children or are they saying that the emperor has no clothes? The fact that these same students after ordination often accepted the *status quo* does not invalidate their original questions. As detached observers they may well have seen more clearly. At any rate, they helped to concentrate my mind on a reality which I might otherwise have dodged, because the achievements of this little province have been so remarkable that it might have been easier not to

look below the surface. I reflected, however, that a business firm which does not face its problems, where everybody is too nice to tell the truth, goes bankrupt; I wondered if the same could happen to us, so I propose to look at what I take to be some of our truth. If the topic interests you I hope you will contribute to a future discussion in these pages.

The Congregation draws its strength from the whole church

The history of the Catholic Church is a long story of ever recurring renewal and decay. It is never the case that in one century everything is right and in another century everything is wrong, but we can distinguish broad patterns of expansion and decline. Thus, from one point of view the Counter Reformation petered out in the 18th century while a new upsurge began in the 19th century.

We believe that this process goes on through the Spirit of Christ who lives in the Church prompting her to react to each crisis as she meets it. She is like a living organism which under the influence of the Spirit reacts to an often hostile environment, drawing new strength, and understanding herself better, as the Spirit guides her into all truth, taking what Jesus says and telling it to her (Jn 16: 13-14).

Pentecost is continually renewed, but nowadays through a network of communications within the Church. Ecumenical councils especially pick up the stirrings of the Spirit from all over the world, clarify them and lead to new growth. Every council is limited, but to its contemporaries it offers the impulse of the Spirit. And indeed we might reflect that nowhere except in the Catholic Church are there world-wide religious communities like ours. We draw our strength from the Church in the Spirit and ignore its councils at our peril.

Specifically, Vatican II (*Perfectae Caritatis*, § 2b) is clear that “institutes have their own proper characters and functions. Therefore the spirit and aims of the founder should be faithfully accepted and retained”. How far are we willing to face this truth and act on it? Are we really afraid of finding Vincent’s charism, of finding out who we are or who we should be? I hope not.

The mind of Vincent and Philip Dowley in 2000 AD

We can find Vincent in good biographies, in the Common Rules, in his correspondence and conferences, but in the twentieth century he is found immediately in his successors: in the Superior General in conference with the Provincials in Bogota, and in the Constitutions elaborated by General Assemblies and committees working in liaison with the General. As an ecumenical council draws on the wisdom of the whole Church

guided by the Spirit, so the Superior General and the Constitutions have drawn on the whole Congregation, and again we ignore them at our peril. This is all the truer since the Vincentian curia became internationalised and representative and settled in Rome.

Philip Dowley and the others saw instinctively that the Irish group had to be grafted on to a larger body and derive support from it. Otherwise they might become a body of diocesan missionaries, good men but confined to a narrow sphere and doomed to extinction. And as they drew their strength from the whole Congregation, and indeed contributed to it, so must we; on condition that we take seriously these Constitutions which along with the Common Rules are the voice of Vincent for us now.

After struggling for years to propose in modern personalist terms the end and purpose of the Congregation, originally formulated by Vincent more abstractly (CR 1:1), the Assembly of 1980 came up with a remarkable formula, faithful to Vincent yet acceptable to the modern mentality (cf Jesús Ma. Cavanna CM: *St Vincent's signature in our revised CM Constitutions 1980*, VINCENTIANA 1982, 3-4). This reads: "The end of the CM is to follow Christ the Evangeliser of the poor. This end is realised when the confrères and the communities, faithful to St Vincent: (1) make every effort to put on the spirit of Christ himself (CR 1:3) in order that they may acquire a perfection appropriate to their vocation (CR 12:13); (2) work at evangelising the poor, especially the more abandoned; (3) help in the formation of clergy and laity and lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelisation of the poor" (Constitutions 1980, part 1, § 1). Can anyone doubt that this is the voice of Vincent, and for us, of Philip Dowley and his little band? If we find it daunting to turn to the poor, make no mistake about it, Vincent found it terrifying. He struggled against it for years. It was a true conversion when he turned to the poor; that is how he became a saint. Are we being asked for a similar conversion?

The vow we have all taken: to evangelise the poor

If Vincent speaks to me today through the constitutions, he speaks far more intimately through the vow I have made to spend my life evangelising the poor. Let us have the courage to look at it. The old form ran: "I vow also that I spend myself in the aforesaid Congregation for the whole time of my life for the salvation of the poor country people". The modern version allows for urbanisation but its thrust is the same: "I vow that I will dedicate myself in the CM for the whole time of my life, to the evangelisation of the poor after the example of Christ the evangeliser...".

We have all taken this vow, but has it been overshadowed by subsequent ordination and priesthood? Have we repressed it from our memory, like the emperor in the story who could not see that he had no cloak because he did not want to know? I sometimes wonder whether the Daughters see it all the more clearly because the vow is brought to their attention year after year as they renew it on 25 March. I suspect that we have made of our priesthood and our years of study a defence against the reality, which is that we have promised something.

No one will want to interpret this vow in a simplistic sense. To begin with, the twentieth century is not the seventeenth century. But when all is said and done, the tenor of what we have undertaken is clear: to spend our lives evangelising, announcing the good news about Christ, and especially to the poor. The meaning of that word, as Vincent, as Philip Dowley and indeed as common sense understands it, can only be the economically poor. It does not mean the destitute only and has never meant that; but can we look each other in the face and explain it away by saying that everybody in any need is a poor person? "If everybody is poor then nobody is poor".

It may be objected that it is altogether too naive to govern one's life by such a vow, when truth is so opaque and paradoxical. Life is not so simple. Well, life is untidy but it does not have to be that untidy. Marriage is mysterious and cannot be totally encapsulated within a code of laws; but the general principle, the guiding light, that it is a bond of fidelity between two people, is clear enough. If that is rejected the marriage falls. There is a truth here that can be rejected for a hundred reasons, a truth on the other hand that can be plumbed ever more deeply as life goes on, a truth known only by living it, but always on the premise that one has made the first commitment.

Let us be honest, pause and reflect what a vow to God means. "I am bound by the vows I have made" (Ps 56:12). I believe I am dealing with a personal God, awesome yet kind, a Person who has chosen me and wants my friendship. This is the language of the Bible, of the whole Christian tradition and, needless to say, of Vincent himself. Now, could I feel myself a man of integrity if I went back on a public promise made to another person after reflection and consultation, and to which I actually appended my signature? If called to account could I really say I had not meant it? If the promise had been extorted or made in a weak moment I might reconsider it, but otherwise?

If we cannot change ourselves overnight (though things can change very fast in the present world), we can begin by admitting publicly among ourselves that we have vowed to evangelise the poor, and see where that

takes us. It is for the whole Province to decide where we go from there, and the decision may take years to work itself out. There is no shortage of options.

What then?

We can bear only so much reality. The truth of our vow may be painful, “For too much truth at first sight ne’er attracts” (Byron, *Don Juan* Canto 14, line 102); but if accepted, we would experience a Copernican revolution where everything outwardly remained the same but all has changed, for we have seen differently. It might mean dying a little but in the end ... “he who loses his life for my sake will find it” (Mt 10:39), for truth is life-giving: “The truth will set you free” (Jn 8:32). To accept it can be like jumping the dreadful chasm on the far side of which is security. “Fear not little flock, it has pleased your father to give you the kingdom” (Lk 12:32). Over the last few years I have repeatedly seen people smile, relax and fill with joy after recognising and accepting a difficult truth. Corny? I can report only what I have seen.

And, after all that, I cannot myself claim to be evangelising poor people. I can only wait to see what the future brings, and hope if I am asked to do so that I will be ready. Part of me lives in the rest of the province and part of it lives in me. What few of us can do singly we can do with the support of each other, especially in the company of a religious community which has rediscovered itself. If we cannot force the Spirit to come, we can at least prepare the way.

Objections

Confrères sometimes say that raising the sort of issue that I raise here will tear the Province apart. On the contrary, I believe that if we are honest we will have to admit that for years the Province has already been divided into interest groups competing for the human resources available; I wish to re-unite it. Of course people are more interested in what they themselves are doing, but we have lacked any sense of a common over-riding apostolate to which all could contribute according to their talents, and where the work done in one sector supported and was supported by the work done in others. We lacked that clear goal, the sense of a corporate venture, which the most rudimentary organisation must have in order to prosper.

When two confrères last year asked an outside lay consultant how they should present the Province to prospective candidates he asked some merciless questions: What vision have we? What product have we got? What is unique about ourselves? Do we believe in it? Did we realise that

other communities know what they want and believe in it, and we who don't seem to know where we are going are competing with them? After a conversation lasting four hours he confessed himself beaten and fell back on the agreed Futrell statements. Here at least, even if cautiously, we had put ourselves on the line. The incident does not reflect on the confrères involved, but demonstrates rather the confusion prevailing about our aims and goals.

Another objection occurs to me. In saying all this am I not condemning confrères in the Province who don't seem worried about this vow and indeed about our end, but whom we all admire? With respect, things have gone wrong in other areas as well and good men have lost little sleep over it. Out of all those whom we have qualified to third degree level since the war we have not qualified one single confrère for parish missions and put him on the mission team. Yet this is the activity which gave its name to our congregation, the activity we pioneered in Ireland, our foundation charism, which we should never neglect on the pretext of taking up any work otherwise more useful (CR 11:10). It emerged at Bogotá that other provinces too are losing interest in the missions, at a time when in this part of the world at least they are more *and* more in demand. My point is: apart from those immediately involved, who protested? It was the trend, and we acquiesced.

And incidentally, we have in my opinion gravely underestimated the work done by the missionaries in the past and in the present. Only those who have moved around giving missions can realise the stress and toil involved.

The Spirit breathes where he wills. Before the apparitions at the rue du Bac the Congregation, according to Fr Fiat, consisted of a few old men waiting to die; after the apparitions we expanded again, and new and undreamt-of provinces arose, one of which was our own. The Spirit may surprise us, but ordinarily we have to prepare the way (Acts 1:14), and in the end it comes down to faith. Could Christ mean so much to us that we would really like to make him known. . . , to the poor? Other provinces are making the turn around, they are facing conversion. The wind is blowing; what about us?

To conclude: a clear sense of purpose emerging from what we have already promised would leave us more at ease with ourselves, with each other and with God; it would be more attractive to young men thinking of joining us, and finally it would make us more credible in the eyes of our own students and thereby affirm their vocation. If my generation does not enter the promised land I hope we can help the next generation to get there.

If you would like to follow up the ideas I outlined above by all means read a remarkable article in *VINCENTIANA* 1981, pp 366-383: *Reflections on the Renewal of Vincentian Spirituality*, by John Prager CM. Prager's documentation is simply extraordinary. Do my readers realise how much dynamite the formerly bland pages of *VINCENTIANA* now contain?

Aidan McGing

OBITUARY

Father Patrick J. Gilgunn, C.M.

On 22 October 1982 came the news that Fr Paddy Gilgunn had died. As usual it came as a shock because it was difficult to think of him as dead. He was such an alive character, full of fun, eager to tell a joke he had heard, or perhaps an old one and fairly corny. But the real test that it was a joke told by PJ, as he was affectionately known among us, was that there was no barb to it, for he was essentially charitable towards everyone and it was his outstanding quality which, to quote Scripture, covered a multitude.

Paddy was born in Dromahaire, Co. Leitrim, and entered the congregation in 1926. He was sent to Liverpool with a small group of young men to study philosophy in the Vincentian house called Gateacre, long since closed, and with the same group he returned in 1928 to St Joseph's, Blackrock, to do the year's seminaire and complete his philosophy and theology. This was my first meeting with him and it was a pleasant one. He was quite talented at games, especially soccer at which he was quite proficient and keen. At that time in one of Liverpool's teams there was a character called Dixie Dean, an English international and the greatest. Needless to say, we heard a lot about him and his glorious deeds. PJ found the study of theology difficult but he was always cheerful about it. In 1933 he was ordained to the priesthood and was appointed to the Missions, beginning with Sheffield. In the middle of the Second World War, in 1943, he went to Mill Hill where he served for three years. Then he was three years in Sunday's Well before coming to Phibsboro in 1949. Four years later he was appointed to Lanark, where he served for four years. After a year in Hereford he returned to Phibsboro in 1959 where he served until his death.

It could be said that he suffered his purgatory in the last ten years of his life because he was struck down with chronic arthritis, and from leading an active extrovert type of life full of activity he was confined to his house and eventually to his room. He showed great courage during this period and the parishioners of Phibsboro were edified by his cheerfulness and patience. His fundamental virtue of charity saw him through in the end, and we hope and pray that he is now enjoying the full reward of his priestly life.

Maurice Carbery CM

PATRICK J. GILGUNN, C.M.

Born: Dromahaire, Co. Leitrim, 17 March 1907.

Entered the Congregation: 7 September 1928.

Final vows: 8 September 1930.

Ordained a priest in Clonliffe College by Dr Wall, Auxiliary Bishop of Dublin 23 December 1933.

APPOINTMENTS

1933-1943 St Vincent's, Sheffield.

1943-1946 Sacred Heart, Mill Hill.

1946-1949 St Vincent's, Cork.

1949-1953 St Peter's, Phibsboro.

1953-1957 St Mary's, Lanark.

1957-1958 Our Lady's, Hereford.

1958-1982 St Peter's, Phibsboro.

Died 22 October 1982.