

COLLOQUE

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Congregation of the Mission

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Editorial

The word “Convocation” occurs many times in this issue. As roughly 40% of the copies of each issue now go to readers outside the Irish Province this word needs some explanation. From the 6th to the 12th of August this year there will be, for the first time since the very early days, a meeting of virtually all the confrères of the Province, elderly and infirm confrères being excused, as well as a small number who will have to remain in Nigeria. The Provincial explains the purpose of it in this issue.

For the same readers perhaps a word of explanation is also needed as to why there is another contribution about deaf people, the third in recent issues. Fr Thomas McNamara CM, back in the 1840s, had been a pioneer in the field of religious formation of the deaf in Ireland, and it has continued to be a very important specialised Vincentian ministry in the Province ever since.

Two confrères from other Provinces have contributions in this issue, one Australian and the other American, both of whom worked for some time in houses of the Irish Province, the former in Armagh and the latter in Peking.

The Two Conversions

Aidan McGing

Law in the Church

When the risen Christ appeared to the first Christians, when they realised that the Crucified was both Messiah and Son of God, it was more than they could take. Their minds were blown, and they appeared like drunken men. Such a community had little time for laws, as the New Testament polemic against rabbinical legislation testifies. But gradually, as the first ferment died down, they felt a need for order, and this order was nurtured by the principle of authority, a principle deeply rooted in the Christian tradition. The word for “authority” (*exousia*) occurs over ninety times in the New Testament, from the early strata right up to the Apocalypse, connecting the authority of Jesus with that exercised by office holders in the post-resurrection community.

If there is authority there must be law. The repeated warnings of the New Testament writers against the abuse of power within the Church (e.g. Mt 23:1-2, 24:45-51, Lk 22:25, Jn 13:14, 1 Pet 5:2-3) suggest a growing disenchantment with irresponsible charismatic leaders. People wanted objective norms, and already we find an embryo legislation (e.g. 1 Cor 6:4-6, Mt 18:15-17, 1 Tim 5:19).

In time ecclesial legislation became more professional, as property was acquired and conflicts of jurisdiction arose, indeed as lawyers like Tertullian and Ambrose gained authority.

During the Dark Ages the Church, as a landowner and part of society, became enmeshed in feudal law, while the rediscovery of Roman law in the early Middle Ages led to further legislation.

Later on the centralising tendencies of the Catholic Monarchs, first in Spain and then in France, were copied by the Church, especially as the edicts of Trent began to come into force. With the Code of Canon Law in 1918, based on the Napoleonic Code, there was a renewed enthusiasm for law. This all-pervasive influence of law came home to me poignantly in a hospital ward one day when a dying man told me that he had received the last sacraments with the words “I have done my duties”.

My compression of 1900 years of history into a few paragraphs may read like a caricature, but it does tell us that Latin Catholicism, to a degree which scandalises the Orthodox, had become permeated with laws and obligations. A glance back over the consultations in the old *Clergy Review* or, indeed, *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, will remind us how intensely priests wished to know whether they were keeping the law. And as the priests, so the people. A Legionary of Mary whom I once knew solved difficulties at meetings by appealing to “Legion law”; there were no lacunae in Legion law.

Law will be necessary in every society both to maintain order and to secure justice. (It was a great merit of the French Revolution to have replaced on official documents the heading “By favour of the King” with the heading “According to the rule of law”). As a visible society the Church needs good laws, but problems begin when our relations with God are spelled out too much in terms of law and not enough from love. This was the great complaint of our Lord, and indeed of the New Testament writers, against the Pharisees. But, in general, it is always difficult to cope with existence, and people will use whatever means come to hand. In a society that relies on law, so will the Church and inner-ecclesiastical societies rely on law.

Law is not enough

The reader may object at this stage that the real problem is the neglect of law: people have lost the sense of right and wrong, and the crime rate is rising. This is perfectly true, but the issues are complex and I still believe we must supplement laws with other forms of motivation. Let me explain myself.

As society grows more complicated, laws multiply; but we have begun to understand that human motivation is so tortuous that law alone is not enough. One cannot legislate poets or entrepreneurs into existence, and no family, no nation, could survive if run according to the letter of the law. When employees “work to rule”, that is to say work by the letter of the law, they bring the whole enterprise to a halt.

Many reasons have led us to believe that other procedures must supplement law in the running of society. In the immediate past, two world wars and the publicity attending Vietnam have made people mistrust the very notion of authority, since it was legal authority which brought on these miseries. More positively, the trend towards interiority has been going on now for at least three thousand years. Law is from without, from the legislator, but we attend more and more to what happens within

ourselves, and indeed understand it better than in the past. I would like to reflect on this phenomenon at some length.

The earlier Old Testament memorialists understood so little of the human mind that they could not really distinguish between an intentional and a non-intentional act (1 Sam, 14:24-30). But already by about 600 BC Jeremiah could declare: "The heart is more devious than any other thing, perverse too: who can pierce its secrets?" (17:9). The Iliad and the Odyssey were composed in their final forms by a stupendous poet (or poets – the argument is not affected if each was composed by a separate poet) about 750 BC. He (or they) incorporated a lot of older material, some of it going back to 1300 BC and earlier. But the sections which employ psychological vocabulary, or elaborate the characters of the heroes, or portray actions arising from clearly described inner states, are all late, and probably from the last great poet or poets.

Christianity also played its part. Christ relentlessly turned his followers' attention inwards, away from external actions: "What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart" (Mt 15:18); "You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also?" (Lk 11:40). Down the years the procession moves from the *Confessions of St Augustine* to medieval ruminations about the nature of love, to the *Imitation of Christ*, to the Rhineland and Spanish mystics, and on to the French School.

On the secular side Shakespeare showed more insight than the Greek tragedians, while the great nineteenth century novelists unveiled the workings of the human mind with a clarity not reached even by Shakespeare. Indeed, like the classic mystical writers, they anticipated the discovery of the subconscious.

Since the first world war human sciences such as sociology and depth psychology have increasingly systematised these insights. Sciences dealing with the human person must remain inexact, but at least they have shown us more clearly than in the past how and why we act, less rationally than we would like to believe. In matters that affect us deeply we learn rather through dialogue, through childhood experiences, through social intercourse, and so on. Perceptive people had always known this, but now maps began to be drawn of these obscure areas which never come totally under the control of law and clear ideas.

A practical and utilitarian world will want to put all this knowledge to use; truth is what works. Karen Homey in her autobiography relates how she and a group of fellow Freudians fled from Germany in the early 1930s and found their way to Chicago, where the local business community funded teaching posts for them in the university. But after a while

these benefactors came back to ask what was in it for them; how could the psychologists help them to run their businesses? A cynic might say that the psychologists then helped the management to manipulate the workers, but let us remember that this happened during the Depression, when employees worked hard anyway to hold on to whatever jobs there were. Without being too starry-eyed I prefer to believe, whatever the motives of the employers, that the intervention of the psychologists helped to reduce conflict and to release the energies and enthusiasm of the workers.

What appears to have happened is this. Human societies have always organised themselves and motivated their members not only by law and regulation but also by appealing to the emotions. Both armies and religions have used music, ritual and various sorts of uniforms, habits and vestments, while the more successful entrepreneurs have generally worked through company rituals, news sheets, golden handshakes and so on, to give their employees a sense of pride in belonging to the company. But over the last half century societies have begun to motivate their members and organise them not just through emotion, law and self-interest, but through the new art of management, which is based on research, on the findings of the human sciences, and on the acquiring of management skills.

Some people, like St Vincent, are natural managers, but the rest of us can now learn something about it systematically, depending on our talents, opportunities, degree of commitment, etc. To some extent, management is a tempering of the law to our emotions, or a rational approach to the real motives which drive us on. If we allow, as we must, that law and regulations can influence religious life, then why not management? If we have a saint who is a canonist (St Raymond de Pennafort) why may we not expect one who will be a manager?

Management supplements law

As well, then, as showing us that we do not act as rationally as we might think, modern research offers us ways of being more rational. At first sight, what could be more rational than making decisions by majority vote? In some cases it may be necessary for legal reasons; but in many cases this adversarial procedure arouses hostile emotions which can stop both co-operation and clear thinking. Why not, instead, change to non-adversarial procedures based on a better understanding of the human psyche? We are then supplementing legal procedures with

procedures drawn from a better understanding of why people act as they do.

Social conditions have changed too; people are becoming better educated. An American tycoon who saw what was happening in the 1950s put it like this:

We're in this mess because for the last 200 years we've been using the Catholic Church and Caesar's legions as our pattern for creating organizations. And until the last forty or fifty years it made sense. The average churchgoer, soldier and factory worker was uneducated and depended on orders from above. And authority carried considerable weight because disobedience brought the death penalty or its equivalent. (Robert Townsend: *Up the Organisation*, London 1971, p. 125).

And I cannot resist quoting Shirley Williams:

The post-industrial society is one of teamwork, not of hierarchy. It is decentralised... Its lifeblood is the free flow of information, its most important resource, highly educated people challenged by creative thinking and wide-ranging ideas. (*The Tablet*, 17 October 1987).

In industry and commerce it is the law of the jungle which prevails; the weak go under. But it is precisely in order to survive that the wiser practitioners use other methods beyond self-interest and ordinance. Let me quote a simple, perhaps naive, example.

An acquaintance of mine at one stage had to arrange every year four separate weeks of planning for the firm which employed him, one week in each quarter of the year. During each of these weeks all the decision-making staff members down to the most junior salesman spent five days together in a hotel at the company's expense. The first two days were spent in playing games together so as to increase mutual trust and frankness. During the last three days they could then, according to the theory, plan for the next quarter, everybody saying it as it was, without fear or favour. On the following Monday they were all back in the company pecking order.

This firm, like other firms, had its own rule book, a sort of internal Canon Law. I do not know how successful my friend's four weeks were, but clearly the management felt that rules were not enough to keep them

ahead of their competitors. They supplemented them with procedures drawn from empirical psychology.

And, incidentally, these quarterly meetings place our Convocation, even though it is a religious event, firmly in the contemporary scene. In no way do I wish to suggest that up to now we have got it all wrong; but if we look at history we find that Catholics, *and especially the most innovative saints*, accept and use the movements of their time. St Augustine took it as axiomatic that we should borrow from contemporary culture; he called it “plundering the Egyptians” (cf Ex 12:36). Whether it is the Jesuits using Renaissance education, or nineteenth century missionaries using colonialism, the principle is the same. And so is the application of the human sciences to religious purposes – let me give an example.

An application of the human sciences to religion

The Code of Canon Law states (Can 868):

For an infant to be baptised lawfully, it is required that there be a well-founded hope that the child will be brought up in the Catholic religion. If such a hope is truly lacking, the baptism is, in accordance with the provisions of particular law, to be deferred, and the parents advised of the reason for this.

The canon is crystal clear and very necessary, but the pastor who takes it seriously steps on to a minefield where legal enactments give little protection. To meet the situation, Mickey Quinn, whom many of us will remember from the Rock, and his wife Terri, have devised a course in four sessions to explain the matter to parents who wish to have their children baptised. The course employs religious symbols and ritual, it has a faith input, it uses group dynamics and scripture, involves dialogue, it helps the participants to explore their childhood memories, it gets them talking to other parents who have had their children baptised. At the end, parents are left to make a decision whether to have their children baptised or not.

This is not brainwashing. Rather, the true motives which lead parents to have their children baptised are acknowledged, discussed and, hopefully, purified; and these are areas where law has little to say.

By the same token I recently had the privilege of conducting a course over ten weeks for a number of parents in the parish. The course had

been put together by the same Quinns, who had certainly plundered the Egyptians (the behavioural scientists) to help Christian parents bring up their children.

The parents' reaction to the course was instructive. They all agreed that the course fascinated them, that it explained the dynamics of the family in a way they had never seen it before, but which had only to be stated to be accepted. The real problem was to change their own way of thinking (to be converted) and to have the courage to take their children into their confidence.

These parents still demanded obedience – the first evening of the course was spent in learning how not to be manipulated by their children – but it was now, ideally at least, an obedience based on “teamwork and the free flow of information”. I could not help reflecting that many of the principles these parents found so novel and helpful were equally applicable to community life, work and meetings.

We are, then, in a post-legal age, not in the sense that there are no more laws, but in the sense that organisations in the western world have increasingly supplemented their regulations with procedures to win the willing participation of their members. Even the military, who have the most draconian laws of all and demand obedience to death, regularly send their cadres, down to the most junior warrant officers, away on management courses.

The first conversion: accepting a new world

In a word, if we are to remain part of the real world both the behavioural sciences and new management techniques must change the way we organise ourselves. This is what our Convocation is doing, and what Fr John Cleary is doing when he works so enthusiastically with AVEC. But already, as I remarked in a previous article (COLLOQUE No. 12, p 431) the Constitutions and Statutes of 1980 (definitive edition 1984) reflect this new way of thinking in paragraph after paragraph. Let the reader ponder, for instance, the implications of paragraphs 2, 15, 18, 19, 20, 22, 29, 34, 35, 36 (1980 numbering). In the definitive 1984 edition these paragraphs are now numbered: Constitutions 2, 13, 14, 15, 16, 22, 23, 24 and Statutes 6, 11. Let him compare them with the clear prescriptions of chapters 8 and 9 of the Common Rules. Somehow we have moved from the Cartesian world of the Clear Ideas (the *Discourse on Method* was published in Paris in 1629) to the murkier world of Marx and Freud, with their interest in more hidden motives.

So, in principle, the work of adapting ourselves to the new age has begun. All societies in our world are being asked to change. In the commercial world it can be a matter of survival; and in our own case it will be increasingly difficult to secure the cooperation of lay people if we are not on their wavelength. To absorb these paragraphs of 1980 (1984), and I suppose they will ultimately filter through, will be our first conversion.

The second conversion: re-accepting an old world

But a second, and far profounder, conversion is required of us, namely a return to the Common Rules. The extraordinary thing about the Constitutions and Statutes of 1980 (1984) is that while they brought us up to date they continued to demand as much as the Common Rules ever did, and this must be a sign that the finger of God is here. They implicitly refer us back to the Common Rules.

It is most extraordinary that a man of Vincent's humility should ask us to regard the Common Rules "as coming not from the human but from the Divine Spirit" (CR, introductory letter). And, certainly, when we remove from them those passages which reflect a certain time and place, we are left with a transcription of the Sermon on the Mount. Recently, and in a roundabout way, I came to see, I hope correctly, how crucial the Common Rules are for our renewal.

St John of the Cross

Twelve years ago I was given a present of the collected works of St John of the Cross, which are quite short. Slowly I began to read this daunting master. Some of his demands seemed inhuman, but he did describe unerringly, or so it seemed to me as far as I could follow him, how the believer is drawn to God. Reflecting on him was like looking up to the snow-capped mountains in winter; you know you will never make it to those heights, but they are exhilarating to contemplate.

Later I attended a summer course on St John, given in All Hallows by Fr Ron Rolheiser OMI, which made the saint more intelligible. I was further reassured on reading his life to discover that this preacher of detachment thought that the day would never come when he could leave Andalusia and return to his native Castille. Stranger still, he could hardly bear to live in a monastery without the presence of his brother, who was a layman.

Furthermore, because the saint disconcerted me by his strained biblical allusions and his exaggerations I was relieved to find a com-

mentator begging me not to be put off by “his sixteenth century pedantry and hyperbole”. It was a comfort to know that these traits irritated other readers also, and were rather a defect of the time than of the man. I began increasingly to warm to him. After all, he was the greatest.

Reflecting on all this one day I suddenly realised that his outrageous demands were simply the Sermon on the Mount transposed to sixteenth century Spain. His suffering and rejection, his ruthless demands combined paradoxically with his great sympathy for human weakness, reflected the mind and the experience of Christ.

Vincent and St John of the Cross

Many people who have read both Vincent and St John of the Cross have been struck by the way Vincent continually echoes the Spanish mystic. He seems to have read him, to have absorbed him totally, and applied his teaching to the more active life he envisaged for himself. What could be more natural? After all, Vincent had begun as a disciple of Berulle, and it was Berulle who had introduced the reformed Carmelite nuns to France. Why could he not have introduced Vincent to John? However, there is no solid proof that Vincent depended on him as he depended, for instance, on Benet of Canfield. (But see Eamonn Flanagan’s article in COLLOQUE No. 17).

That said, there *are* extraordinary parallels between the teachings of these two saints, and continuing this train of thought I was struck one day by a sort of thunderbolt: as St John had transposed the Sermon on the Mount to sixteenth century Spain, in the heroic manner of the conquistadores, so St Vincent had transposed it far more moderately to seventeenth century France. To me at least, Vincent’s version as it appears in the Common Rules is far gentler and far closer to us. When the seventeenth century excrescences have been cut away it emerges timeless, like the rules of St Augustine or St Benedict.

For the Common Rules do rewrite the Sermon on the Mount. Vincent himself states in his introductory letter:

For this reason we have endeavoured to the best of our ability, as may easily be seen, to draw them all from the spirit of Jesus Christ and the actions of his life. We judge that those men who have been called to carry on the mission of Christ Himself, the chief purpose of which is the preaching of the gospel to the poor, should be filled with the same outlook and desires, even the selfsame spirit as He, and should tread in His footsteps.

In the end, no matter how deeply Catholicism embeds itself in various cultures, it is concerned with another world to be reached through this one. After all, the first proclamations of Christianity were about the Resurrection. In the desert, Jesus treated the ordinary human goals of self-satisfaction, reputation and power as temptations, and his life culminated in his passion and resurrection; in his passion he deliberately and violently detached himself from all human goods, in his resurrection he is outside history, transcendent. There will always be in this religion a strange intersection of the human and the divine, as there was and is in Christ. So, the sacraments appear outwardly to be rites which chart the course of a person's life, or strengthen the kinship group, but within they place the recipient in immediate contact with a transcendent God.

Renewal is an unmerited grace

Similarly, a religious community appears to come into existence *or to renew itself* through a charismatic leader at a suitable historical juncture. Agreed, both the charismatic person and the historical circumstances are required, but nothing will happen without divine intervention or, if you will, the coming of the Spirit. "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come down upon you" (Acts 1:7-8). "The time has drawn near and the Kingdom of God is at hand" (Mk 1:15). We may prepare, but we cannot make it happen.

Like the disciples in the upper room, we *should* prepare for the coming of the Spirit. Perhaps the process has already begun as we are being stripped gradually of those things in the Province that are capable of pleasing or of drawing the applause of men (CR XII 10).

The first conversion has begun in small ways and, no doubt, it will proceed steadily as the thinking of the 1980 (1984) Constitutions begins to percolate through. The real problem, as I see it, is the deeper conversion of again accepting the Common Rules, and practising them. Many factors are outside our control: the historical situation, the emergence of charismatic persons, even of visionaries, as in 1830, but above all the grace of God, for, humanly speaking, the Common Rules, like the gospel itself, are a folly and a scandal. "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (Jn 6:44). But if we are given this grace, three things, I believe, will be humanly observable.

How we might experience renewal

First, we would probably attract excellent men to the community.

Secondly, our values would change, so that what had been unattractive would now draw us on: “The labour we delight in physics pain” (*Macbeth* II 3), or, one must lose one’s life to save it. As the person who absolutely wants money or reputation or whatever, finds the labour involved in reaching his goal as easy, so the person who absolutely wants the Kingdom of God. “Give me a lover”, says St Augustine, “he knows what I am talking about.”

Thirdly, the goal, humanly speaking, can hardly be attained until a sufficient number wish to attain it. What a single person cannot do alone he can do in a group, as soldiers on parade can move with a precision they could not attain if they moved alone.

As we wait, we live through a sort of dialectic, in which we want the Province to continue, perhaps from a small nucleus, and yet are ready to see it diminish, if that is what the Lord needs as a way of renewing us.

Rather shall he cast his care on the Lord, convinced that, as long as he is rooted in this charity and grounded in this love, he will always remain under the protection of the God of heaven. Thus no evil will befall him, nor will he be wanting in any good, even though he may think that everything he possessed is about to be ruined (CR II 2).

Key Ideas in St Vincent's Spirituality

Thomas Davitt

(Talk given in Damascus House, 22 November 1988)

Where we find Vincent's ideas on spirituality

Vincent himself did not use the word "spirituality"; that word did not come into use until later. Neither did he speak of "the spiritual life", though that expression was in use in his day. When he spoke or wrote about what we understand by these expressions "perfection" was the word he most frequently used. He also sometimes used the expression "the interior life". I am taking these four terms as being synonymous, and I will be looking at what Vincent wrote and at what he said on this topic.

We look first at what he wrote because this is the only material where his exact words have been preserved. This material is found in two sources, in the Common Rules for the Congregation of the Mission and in his letters.

The Common Rules

This is the only material written by Vincent which he himself intended for printing. Because of this he took a lot of time in arriving at the final version of what he wanted to say. In 1655, at the age of seventy-five, thirty years after the foundation of the Congregation, he had the rules printed for the first time but there were so many printer's errors that he did not distribute any copies.

He waited three more years, until 1658, before having them printed again, and he availed of the interval for further revision of them. Even this 1658 edition, which was distributed to the confrères, did not fully satisfy him and for the next printing he made one further slight change in one sentence.

Because of the purpose of these Rules, and the time and care which he took in arriving at their definitive form, the Common Rules are the primary source for understanding Vincent's teaching on the spiritual life. They contain the basics of the spiritual life and also the application of these to the circumstances of members of the Congregation of the Mission.

There is, though, one unfortunate drawback about this book. In it Vincent combined guidelines for the spiritual life of the individual confrère and guidelines for the practical administration of the local community. In reading the Rules this distinction has to be kept in mind because many of the administrative guidelines were linked to the background of Vincent's own time and country and are no longer relevant, while the spiritual guidelines still are.

His letters

Many of the letters are in Vincent's own handwriting, so we have the exact words he wrote. Others are in the handwriting of one of his lay-brother secretaries, sometimes with corrections or additions in his own hand. Still others are versions which are quoted in Abelly's biography and therefore probably altered somewhat from the original version.

The letters sometimes deal with basic spiritual themes and sometimes with the practical application of such basics to the actual situation of the person to whom he was writing the letter. This often affected what Vincent wrote. This means that we must remember that at least sometimes what we find in a letter cannot be taken as Vincent's "teaching" on some point of spirituality but may only be a piece of practical advice for that particular person in a certain situation.

Next we come to what he said, in the literal sense of what he actually spoke. This is found, with varying degrees of accuracy, in the versions which have come down to us of his conferences to the St Lazare community, of what he said at the sessions in St Lazare known as Repetitions of Prayer, and of his conferences to the Daughters of Charity. A short comment is needed about each of these sources.

Conferences to the St Lazare community

In many of these conferences he dealt with basic themes of spirituality. But we also have to remember that he was speaking to a specific group of men at a specific moment, so that what he said was sometimes influenced by either or both of these facts and therefore might not be of general application.

The group was made up of priests, students and laybrothers. Students and laybrothers were both addressed as "Brother" so he usually began the conference with the greeting "Fathers and my dear Brothers". (The older translations had the expression "Gentlemen and my dear brothers"; I don't think it was always realised that this referred to the two groups in the community).

In actual fact, though, a lot of what he said would have been above the heads of the laybrothers, though sometimes he directed certain remarks specifically to them. The special needs of the brothers were catered for, of course, by a priest of the community who was appointed to look after them. Sometimes he also directed remarks specifically to the students. Again, though, their special needs were looked after by their director. In other words, the vast majority of what Vincent said in these conferences was addressed to his priests, and that coloured all he said; they were priests, and they were members of the Congregation of the Mission. A lot of what he said was about basic spirituality, but this was then often applied to the particular needs of priests of the Congregation of the Mission.

The other factor which has to be borne in mind is that what he said in these conferences was often influenced by the time at which they were given, such as the liturgical season or the proximity of a particular feast, or by what he saw as a specific need at a particular time. An example of the latter would be the five conferences which he gave on slander in October and November 1658. We don't have the text of these conferences so we don't know why he thought the subject needed to be dealt with in five conferences. We know he gave these conferences because they are in the list kept by Fr Jean Gicquel of the conferences Vincent gave from 1650 to 1660.

The final point to be noted about his conferences to the St Lazare community is that we do not have verbatim transcripts of what he said, and that the versions which we now have differ in the degree of authenticity, depending on how they have been recorded. There are thirty-one conferences from 1655 onwards which have been more faithfully recorded than the others.

Repetitions of prayer in St Lazare

All that needs to be said here is that while Vincent prepared his conferences to the community he spoke more "off the cuff" at these sessions, often taking as his starting point what someone else had just said. Again, the accuracy of what we now have depends on how faithfully what he said was remembered.

Conferences to the Daughters of Charity

Like the conferences to the St Lazare community these conferences dealt with the basic themes of spirituality, but again were addressed

to a specific group at a specific time. With regard to the first factor, a specific group, it is extremely important to remember that what he said was aimed at a group of uneducated, mostly illiterate, country girls. Because he aimed specifically at such people we have to bear in mind that a lot of what he said cannot be taken as normative spirituality for Daughters of Charity today. What was adequate for the audience to which he spoke is not always adequate for Daughters of Charity today in our two Provinces.

Those are the three sources where we find out what Vincent said, in the sense of what he actually spoke, about the spiritual life. In using them we have always to keep in mind that they are not 100% accurate transcripts of what he said, and that the degree of authenticity depends on how the present version of what he said has been preserved. We also have to keep in mind the two other factors mentioned, those to whom he spoke and the occasion on which he spoke.

What is spirituality?

Having explained where we find Vincent's teaching on spirituality the next thing to look at is what does this word, and its synonyms, mean?

In this whole area Vincent was very much influenced by the English Capuchin Benet of Canfield, especially by his book *The Rule of Perfection*. On the title-page of that book, in both the English and French editions, Benet says that *The Rule of Perfection* is an abridgement of "the wholle spirituall life", so, as I have already said, we can take "perfection" and "the spiritual life" as meaning the same thing. He goes on to say, still on the title-page, that the spiritual life can be reduced to "the will of God". In an earlier manuscript version he added, still on the title-page, a quotation from 1 Thess. 4:3: "This is the will of God, your sanctification". So, Vincent learnt from Benet that perfection, the spiritual life, the will of God and our sanctification all mean the same thing. Our sanctification means that each of us, as an individual, is offered the possibility of a personal relationship with God because of the life death and resurrection of Jesus. An awareness of God, then, can be taken as the first key idea in Vincent's spirituality.

An awareness of God

Because of the time and care which he took in refining them, and because they are the only material which he intended for printing, the

Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission are the most important source for learning Vincent's ideas on spirituality. As I said already, they contain both basic themes of spirituality and the application of these to members of the Congregation. In paragraph 1 of chapter 1 he summarises the whole purpose of the Congregation under three headings. The first of these headings is basic and common to everyone, the second and third are special to the Congregation. The first heading is:

Each member should have a genuine commitment to the deepening of his relationship with God, patterning himself, as far as possible, on the virtues which the great Master himself was kind enough to show us in what he said and did.

A word of explanation is needed here. Vincent wrote the rules in Latin. The English translation which we have used for years translated the Latin verb "studere" as "to study" and so missed the whole point of what Vincent wrote. Vincent himself, in the conference on 6 December 1658 (XII 73ff), translated this for the laybrothers as "to work at our perfection"; I have translated it as "to have a genuine commitment to a deepening of our relationship with God".

Vincent then teased out what the rule says, explaining that grace is needed for this deepening of our relationship with God so that we can eliminate anything that would hinder growth and develop whatever would help it. He says this is a continuous on-going task. He then asked the question "What, then, in one word is perfection"? His answer shows that relationship with God has to be lived out in relationship with other persons, and that this relationship with other persons is on three levels because we are human beings, we are Christians and we are members of the Congregation of the Mission:

First, as reasonable beings we get on well with others and respect their rights;

Second, as Christians we put into practice the virtues of which our Saviour gave us examples;

Finally, as members of the Congregation we faithfully continue his ministry, in the same spirit, as far as our limitations, which God knows well, allow.

All that is what we must aim at (XII 77-78).

He did not let the St Lazare community lose sight of the fact that this threefold explanation is of how we develop our relationship with God:

It is important therefore, Fathers, that we accept this on-going commitment to deepening our relationship with God and to doing well what we have to do so that it may be pleasing to God and in this way make us the sort of people who can help others ... So, that is a decision we have to make, to give ourselves to God and to make it our main aim to do our everyday work well so that God is pleased with it; that is our perfection (XII 78-79).

God was very real for Vincent. Words like greatness, glory, majesty, beauty and goodness occur frequently in what he said and wrote about God. Abelly gives a quotation from a conference, undated and not elsewhere recorded:

Now this certainty we have that God is infinitely above all types of knowledge and all created understanding should be enough for us to see that he is infinitely appreciated, to reduce ourselves to nothing in his presence, and to make us speak of his supreme majesty with a great feeling of reverence and submission. And in proportion to our appreciation of him we will also love him, and this love will produce in us an insatiable desire to acknowledge his gifts and to lead people to be his true adorers (XI 48).

Jesus

For Vincent Jesus is the key to our individual relationship with God. In the introductory letter to the Common Rules he writes:

And, as you can see, I have tried to base all the Rules, where possible, on the spirit and actions of Jesus Christ. My idea was that men who are called to continue Christ's mission, which is mainly preaching the good news to the poor, should see things from his point of view and want what he wanted. They should have the same spirit that he had, and follow in his footsteps.

In paragraph 3 of chapter 1 he refers to the need to put on the spirit of Christ if we are to achieve our purpose, with the help of God's grace, and continues:

How to do this is learnt mainly from what is taught in the gospels.

At the start of the next chapter he says that we are to take as “our most fundamental principle that Christ’s teaching will never let us down while worldly wisdom always will”.

All through the rest of the Rules he tries to base each important point on these principles. In his letters and in his conferences to both communities this theme is recurrent.

Reading the New Testament

To find out about Jesus and his teaching we have to go to the New Testament. In paragraph 8 of chapter 10 of the Rules Vincent calls this “the norm of Christian perfection”. Priests and students are to read a chapter of it every day and should end their reading by a prayer which embraces three points: reverence for what we have read; a desire to enter into the spirit which Christ, or the writer, had; a determination to put into practice the teaching or example given.

There are two passages of the New Testament which Vincent treated in this way himself: first, chapter 25 of Matthew about the last judgement and Jesus’ words about doing to him what is done for the hungry, sick and other afflicted people. And second, the incident in chapter 4 of Luke where Jesus quoted Is 61:1 in the synagogue in Nazareth saying that the words of the prophet about bringing the good news to the poor were being fulfilled in his person.

Two points in what Vincent says about reading the New Testament reflect his own time, and we can ignore them. He does not include the laybrothers among the confrères who should read the New Testament, and he says it should be read on the basis of one chapter a day. Our reading should, of course, be divided according to the sense, and not according to chapters. The division into chapters was not made by the authors but was introduced in the 13th century as a reference help.

Prayer

In paragraph 7 of chapter 10 of the Common Rules Vincent writes:

Christ, the Lord, in addition to his daily meditation sometimes used to spend the whole night in prayer to God. We cannot fully follow his example in this, though we should try to do so while making allowance for our weakness. Each and every one, therefore, should conscientiously spend one hour a day in mental prayer...

On 13 August 1660 Vincent wrote to Jacques Pesnelle, superior in Genoa, referring to that paragraph:

Our rule which binds us to make a hour's mental prayer every day makes no exception of days on which we take a sleep. So, Father, on those days we must make a full hour just as if we had not taken a sleep. It is not right that taking a sleep should be at the expense of the most important activity of the day (VIII 368).

So, just six weeks before his death, Vincent calls the hour of mental prayer the most important activity of the day. Its importance is something he stressed all through his life. In a circular letter to all superiors, dated 15 January 1650, he said that he had been aware, from visitations, of a falling-off in some of the houses without being able to pinpoint the cause. He finally realised that it was because there were confrères not getting up in the morning and never, or only rarely, making their hour's prayer. He then says: "... the grace of vocation is dependent on prayer" (III 539). He said exactly the same thing to the Daughters in a conference on 31 May 1648 (IX 416). In an undated conference to the St Lazare community, quoted by Abelly, Vincent said that the Congregation would survive as long as the practice of prayer was kept up. In that same conference he made the famous remark: "Give me a man of prayer and he will be able to tackle anything" (XI 83-84).

Simplicity

In a conference to the St Lazare community on 14 March 1659 he dealt with paragraph 4 of chapter 2 of the Common Rules, where simplicity is mentioned. He said:

God is a simple being, not incorporating any other being, a sovereign and infinite essence not admitting of anything being amalgamated with him; he is pure being, never undergoing any change. Now this virtue of the Creator is found in some creatures by communication and is rooted in them in the way envisaged by the Rule (XII 172).

Simplicity is also mentioned in paragraph 14 of the same chapter and he dealt with that on 22 August 1659. He said that our motivation for practising our five characteristic virtues should stem from the nature of holiness. Holiness, he said, is

the withdrawal and distancing of ourselves from worldly matters and at the same time being intent on God and uniting ourselves with the divine will. That, in my opinion, is what holiness means (XII 300).

Wanting to be intent on God and to unite ourselves with his will, therefore, is the motivation for practising simplicity; simplicity is a characteristic of God which we can share in some way by communication. Further on in that August conference he said:

Simplicity, which consists in doing all things for the love of God and in having no other end in view in all our actions except his glory, that's really what simplicity is (XII 302).

A little bit further on he came back to this idea:

Simplicity, then, is to do everything for the love of God, rejecting all contamination because simplicity implies the absence of any complexity. It's because there is no complexity in God that we say he is pure and simple act. So, we have to stop being mixed up and set our sights on God alone (XII 302).

Vincent saw one main difficulty to be overcome in setting our sights on God alone, namely setting our sights, at least partly, on ourselves. In a conference to the St Lazare community in September 1655 he said:

Believe me, it is an infallible maxim of Jesus Christ, which I have often passed on to you in his name, that as soon as a heart is emptied of self God fills it (XI 312).

In the conference of 22 August 1659, from which I have already quoted, he said:

We are a total offering to God, to whom we owe all honour and in whose presence we must annihilate self and allow God to take possession of us (XII 306).

Deepening our Vincentian Vocation

Mark Noonan

*(A talk to Presidents of the St Vincent de Paul Society,
St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, 11 September 1988)*

I have been asked to speak about “Deepening our Vincentian Vocation”. Before doing so I wish to say very briefly what I see our Vincentian vocation to be. Our vocation as Vincentians is rooted in the description by Jesus of the last judgement:

Then the King will say to those on his right hand: “Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take for your heritage the Kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome, naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me” (Mt 25:34-36).

We will be judged not on the masses we attend nor on the prayers we say but on how well we have loved others. What is done to others is done to God: “In so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40). St Vincent de Paul took these words of Jesus and gave them a new meaning. Frederic Ozanam did the same in his own time. In some mysterious way, and it is a mystery, what we do to and for the poor we do to and for God. The breath of life in each human being is the breath of God. This reality remains true even when we sin, even when people’s lives are degraded by poverty in all its forms. There is a part of every human being which reflects who God is. This is particularly true of the poor who, in their brokenness, are more open to the Spirit of God.

Vincent de Paul’s Jesus was the Jesus of St Luke’s gospel. St Luke portrays in a special way the mercy and love of God. Two parables which are not in the other gospels are particularly apt, namely the parable of the Prodigal Son and the parable of the Good Samaritan. When the prodigal son returned home after wasting his father’s money there was no word of condemnation, no recrimination, no punishment. The father welcomed the son with open arms, received him back into

the family and treated him as if he had never been away. He was loved for what he was rather than condemned for what he did. The Vincentian vocation has within it the attitude of the father in the parable.

The parable of the Good Samaritan portrays also some elements of the Vincentian vocation. The good Samaritan notices the need and responds generously. St Luke tells us:

He was moved with compassion. He went up and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. He then lifted him on to his own mount, carried him to the inn and looked after him. Next day he took out two denarii and handed them to the innkeeper. "Look after him" he said "and on my way back I will make good any extra expense you have (Lk 10:33-35).

Notice that the good Samaritan didn't remain behind to supervise the innkeeper. He went on his way having ensured that the man who fell among robbers was comfortable. Vincent de Paul's great charism was to notice the need, to respond immediately and generously with his time and his money and then to withdraw into the background. He didn't wait around but trusted other people to continue with the work which he had initiated. Vincent de Paul carried the poor in his heart but he didn't, so to speak, carry them on his back. He allowed other people to do that.

But there is more to the Vincentian vocation. In the mind of St Vincent it was not enough to give the poor bread. At a recent meeting of the area presidents and the Council of Ireland at Kerdiffstown one of the sisters at the meeting shared an experience she had of cooking a shepherd's pie for a family in the locality, where the father and mother were both in jail. When the mother returned home the Vincent de Paul member stopped sending the shepherd's pies to the family, presuming that the mother was looking after the family food. In a short time the mother asked the sister to make some pies. After a while the mother asked to be taught how to cook shepherd's pie. Soon the mother was able to cook for the family in a way she was never able to do before. The Vincent de Paul member talked about the thrill she got at seeing the change which came about in the home in such a short time. The home was cleaned up. The mother became more concerned about her appearance and clothes. She enrolled in a Vincent de Paul home management course. What was a dreadful situation was changed. As a result of all this the mother came to a new awareness of her self-worth. This communicated itself to the family. That mother had received not only bread from the Vincent de Paul Society but she also received a new awareness of her self-worth.

She received the good news of God's love in a concrete way.

This must be the essence of the Vincentian vocation - to nurture new life and new hope in those who have no life and no hope. It doesn't mean that the material lot of the poor will be alleviated all that much, but it does mean that the poor are raised up to a new level. Two men looked through prison bars - one saw mud, the other saw stars. It is the essence of the Vincentian vocation to attempt to raise the downcast eyes of the poor and direct them towards the stars. It is the essence of the Vincentian vocation to communicate to the poor something of God's love, through our love for them. Only then can they begin to believe that God loves them even in their poverty.

I would like to come now to the notion of deepening our Vincentian vocation. I believe we have to begin at the human level. Much depends on our ability to relate to the poor at a human level. To build up a relationship with a poor person it is necessary to spend time with that person. St Vincent said: "The poor will only forgive us the bread we give them when we really love them". It is easy to give a poor person bread or material things. It demands an extra effort to give the poor, whom we visit, some time – time to allow ourselves to be evangelised by them, time for us to see God in them and time for them to see God in us. In any relationship it takes time to build up trust and open lines of communication. It is more difficult to do this with someone who has been broken by life. Generosity with time is of the essence, if a real loving relationship is to be built with a poor person.

There are many instances in the gospels where Jesus wasn't satisfied with curing people. He entered into a relationship with them as well. Notice the way he built up a relationship with the Samaritan woman at the well, the man born blind, the woman taken in adultery and the woman with the haemorrhage of blood. In each case he built up a relationship with the people he cured. In the case of the woman with the haemorrhage of blood, she was cured by touching the hem of his garment. But he asked who touched him and kept looking around until the woman came forward. Then, in the words of the gospel, she told him "the whole truth about herself. We can tell the whole truth about ourselves only to someone with whom we have formed a deep relationship. Our Vincentian vocation is deepened when we give a little more time to the people we serve.

Secondly, if we are to bring good news to the poor we have in some way to have experienced the good news ourselves. The good news is that God loves me, that I am precious in his eyes and that life is good. We have already experienced something of God's love by our member-

ship of the Society. If I am to deepen my Vincentian vocation I have to become more aware of God's love for me as a person. This entails a willingness to spend some time each day in personal prayer, not just saying prayers over and over again, but to enter into a deeper relationship with God who is our Father. Over a period of time we begin to experience God's love, and then it becomes possible to communicate the same love to others, not by talking about it but by the quality of our presence with people. Who we are is much more important in our relationship with poor people than what we do or what we say. To have experienced God in our lives affects who we are.

Thirdly, if we are to deepen our Vincentian vocation we have to make better use of the scriptures at our meetings and in our lives. It is through the scriptures that we begin to learn the attitudes of Christ. If we are to bring good news to the poor we have to be other Christs for them. We can be other Christs only when we have spent some time with the person of Christ through the scriptures and discovered for ourselves what kind of a man he was. It is only then that it becomes possible to put on the mind of Christ, to see the world through the eyes of Christ and to love the poor as Christ loved them. It is not enough to read the scriptures privately. When the scriptures are read publicly at a meeting and the members share their insights they begin to see dimensions in the scriptures which a private reading does not give. Perhaps this is already going on, but occasionally at a meeting it is good to have a piece of scripture read aloud and, after a period of prayer, to allow the members to share their insights on the reading.

Fourthly, God is in our experience of meeting the poor. But he is a God who lies hidden. I'm sure all the members of the Society have experienced God in this way but so often we miss the finger of God in our own lives and in the lives of others. T S Eliot said: "I have had the experience but missed the meaning". In the poor we discover in a deeper way the God we already knew. This becomes possible only when we begin to reflect on our experience. I wonder if it would be possible for the Society to call on the expertise which is available to enable the members to reflect occasionally at a deeper level on their experience of their work with the poor. The apostles reflected on their experience of the mission by reporting back to Jesus what they had done:

On their return the apostles gave an account of all they had done. Then he took them with him and withdrew to a town called Bethsaida where they could be by themselves (Lk 9:10).

The Society caters for some reflection by the method of reporting back to the weekly meeting. From time to time I believe this reporting can be done at a deeper level with the help of someone who is an expert in this area. This type of deeper reflection which I have in mind could lead to a real deepening of the vocation of the members.

Fifthly, having reflected on our experience of God in the poor it becomes possible for us to take on the attitudes of poor people. John Steinbeck said in one of his novels: "To be poor is to have no alternative". It is difficult for us with the benefit of education and other gifts of grace and nature to know what it is like to have no alternative. For that reason we have to work at the beatitude "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven" if we are to learn to be dependent on God, to live with our brokenness and to be content with what we have. When we go to the poor we have to be poor in spirit ourselves. To be poor in spirit is a call to conversion, to a change of heart, at a time when consumer values in our country are taking priority over the gospel values of love, justice, honesty, simplicity and truth. The archbishop of Dublin, in the recently published report by the Catholic Social Service Conference, said: "The poor and those who live in the margins cry out to each of us and to our country for a change of heart". The poor are continuously calling us to conversion, to a change of heart.

The work of the Vincent de Paul Society is a work of faith. At a meeting of students of the University of Paris in the spring of 1833 twenty year old Frederic Ozanam referred to the benefits which Christianity had given to the human race. An unbelieving student replied:

You are right, Ozanam, when you speak of the past. In past centuries Christianity did marvellous things. But what is it doing now? And you, proud of being a Catholic, what are you doing for the poor? Where are the visible results which would show the practical value of your faith? We await them.

That was the remark which stung Frederic Ozanam into action. The work of the Vincent de Paul Society is the work of God. It is a sign to people of what God's compassion is like. It is, in the words of Zachary, "The loving kindness of the heart of our God who visits us like the dawn from on high". We are doing what Jesus Christ did when he healed the sick, fed the hungry and brought the good news of God's love to the poor and the outcasts of the society of his time. Any desire to deepen our Vincentian vocation comes from the grace of God working in our lives. The Society can provide the structures for deepening the spirituality of

the members but ultimately each member has to take responsibility for his or her own formation in the vocation to which God is calling.

The poor of St Vincent's time and the poor of Frederic Ozanam's time are now replaced by our generation of poor. St Vincent, writing to Franfois du Coudray, said: "Picture to yourself millions of people with outstretched arms". Our faith motivates us to notice the outstretched arms, to relieve the immediate poverty in a practical way, and to communicate something of God's love by the quality of our presence. The great temptation for the Vincentian family may be to be active and busy about many things and in the process to lose sight of the reason for the activity. Our love for God is our motive in loving the poor. The real challenge for us is to love the poor as God loves them. To be compassionate as God is compassionate.

In the longer term our faith and our Vincentian vocation motivate us to highlight unjust structures and to create an awareness in our society of the need to change unjust structures. The awareness of the Society to this aspect of our vocation is very obvious in the policy statements, budget submissions and other work of the Society. But on this occasion I would like to remind you of a resolution which the Council of Ireland passed in 1970 and which is in the handbook for members. It says all I would want to say on the subject of injustice in our country:

The Society of St Vincent de Paul, always in a strictly impartial and non-political way, actively, constantly and where necessary publicly, plays its part in striving for justice for the less privileged members of the community. It will do this particularly by advocating, encouraging and working for:

- the provision of more employment
- an allocation of funds for public welfare benefits and services which will be distributed and administered in the fairest and best possible way
- the creation of public and private attitudes which will ensure that less privileged people are never treated as second-class citizens.

The aim of this Resolution, according to the Handbook, was to "formulate a policy of Christian commitment which would be in the best traditions of the Society, reflect the times we live in, and satisfy the aspirations of members".

The whole area of justice and tackling the roots of injustice is very difficult. Any wish to change structures has to emerge from much

prayer and discernment. Otherwise there is a danger that such a desire could have our own personal anger as its origin rather than God. The Vincentian voice has to be heard in these areas and on these topics. The Vincent de Paul Society is ideally placed to speak authoritatively on the present injustices in our country. I feel the poor are calling us to speak for them and to challenge any policy of governments which results in the poor becoming poorer. Who will speak for the poor if the Society is silent? Our call for justice, though, has to be one of gentleness which has grown from a deep spirituality of what it means to be a Vincentian.

The World of the Dis-Empowered as a Milieu of Evangelization

Michael McCullagh

“It is not the poor who gave him to God, but God who, on the contrary, gave him to the poor” (1). Thus wrote Henri Bremond of St Vincent. It is indisputable that if one gives oneself to God, God will, in turn, give one to the poor. On the other hand, if one gives oneself totally to the poor there is no guarantee that one will be given to God.

However, there is a process whereby the poor may give us to God and this is a process which may have also operated in the lives of Jesus and Vincent. I present the process in the hope that we, as individuals and as a Congregation, may take another look at our method of evangelization.

Definition of terms

Already I face language difficulties. For example, the word “poor” smacks of helplessness, suggesting a people culpable for their own conditions, a group considered objects, rather than subjects possessing potential for change. Hence I introduce the term “dis-empowered”, suggesting a people denied rights or facilities in their own empowerment. Of themselves they do not evangelize us. Rather their world becomes a milieu of evangelization, a place where the process of our evangelization may be realised.

The process

The following are the four stages in the process of evangelization which has as its starting point the world of the dis-empowered:

1. Recognition;
2. Entry;
3. Residence;
4. Theological reflection.

Recognition

Here we recognise that there is a group of people who, because of fate or circumstances, see life from a different perspective. In most instances they are considered materially poor, deprived, and labelled “underprivileged” from the perspective of the powerful. From personal observations it seems that they share a similar outlook on life, ask the same questions, challenge the assumptions which underpin religious and political attitudes of a privileged status quo society, and have an understanding of each other which binds them in a solidarity in a world of definite boundaries. This sense of solidarity exists on two levels, the horizontal where the dis-empowered of the contemporary world are one, and secondly on the vertical, where the dis-empowered of today may experience an immediate bond with their predecessors similarly dis-empowered. This could include those of the gospels and those of the time of St Vincent.

Entry

Entry into the world of the dis-empowered can never be presumed. Naturally, they control entry to their world and it is we who must negotiate on their terms. We come with the disposition of a disciple to listen and learn. In this milieu, where death is often a daily reality, we hear in the voices of the people echoes of Job who calls for silence: “Hold your voice and let me speak” (13:13). Thus the dis-empowered speak the first words. The challenge for us is to have a theology which resonates with theirs. Our mode of entry is a slow and often painful process. In our entry we try to live by the maxim of the letter to the Hebrews: “Remember those in prison as if you were in prison with them. Remember those who suffer as if you suffer with them” (13:3).

Residence

Residence in the world of the dis-empowered is a necessary step towards discipleship. Gustavo Gutierrez describes what this implies:

Commitment to them does not mean entering that world but rather emerging from it to proclaim the good news to every human being (2).

When we dare to take up residence the people find courage to challenge us. The following are a sample of their questions and statements:

Is there one God for us and another God for the rich people?

Why did your God take my baby?

You will have no choice as to where you will die. I had no choice as to where I was born.

I think that when I meet God it is God who will have a lot to answer for.

There is no escape once one has taken up residence. The dis-empowered look into our eyes searching for truth; they wish us to articulate what they feel at heart level. Like Job they, too, can say: "From my flesh I shall see God" (19:26). The challenge is up to us to see as they see.

We come in silence, making a quiet residence while reflecting on our own mortality, vulnerability and relationship with God. We refrain from presenting a God conditioned by our limited experiences of life, so that we can better hear from a people who have nothing only God. Sometimes it is difficult to listen to the anger and absorb the pain. We find ourselves wanting. We are thrown back to the author of all love and forgiveness. Hence we are brought to the final stage in the process of the dis-empowered evangelizing us.

Theological reflection

The dis-empowered challenge us to dig deep and find new answers. Like Job we are overwhelmed and are forced to exclaim:

I have dealt with great things that I do not understand, things too wonderful for me that I cannot know (42:3).

The answers do not come immediately. We are first compelled to wrestle with God because we have heard with our hearts the scream deep within the people. They look to us as they try to re-image a Being who seems to deal unjustly with them. Thus we are challenged to wrestle with God from their position. How often, when we bring the bewilderment, anger and rejection of the dis-empowered to God in silent prayer, what begins as an initial stranglehold occasionally resolves itself in a gentle embrace with a new Being whom we now re-image as the God of the dis-empowered. In this sense we could say that the dis-empowered are now the instruments of our evangelization.

The dis-empowered can also help us to discover that our love is oftentimes mere charity. St Paul tells us that "when the perfect comes the

partial will pass away” (1 Cor 13:10). Hence our charity is chastened and purified in the presence of the author of all love. Indeed our love can be full of self-seeking. Tempted to become saviours, with always one more phonecall to make, another prison to visit, the constant need to console the bereaved, we are gently reminded by Pope John Paul II that we have come to serve “the Lord of the work”, and not “the work of the Lord” (3).

From the street to the upper room

Dermot A Lane says that every religious experience is an in-depth experience but it does not necessarily follow that every in-depth experience is religious (4). Therefore it does not follow that if we have in-depth experience we will automatically come closer to God. Prayer is essential if we wish to bring the in-depth experiences of the street to the upper room. In this way Pentecost is reversed. In the first happening the apostles moved from the upper room and brought unity to the diverse languages of the street. Now we bring the language of the dis-empowered, often contorted by the harsh realities of life, from the streets to the upper room where it will find meaning and cohesion in the presence of the Lord. In this prayer-pattern the dis-empowered play a significant role in our evangelization.

Jesus in the milieu of the dis-empowered

In the process just outlined it is possible to see how the dis-empowered may evangelize us. If we employ this same process in looking at the life of Jesus in his relations with the dis-empowered it may be possible to establish that he also was evangelized by them.

In our Constitutions we read of our Congregation that “Jesus Christ ... shall be considered as the centre of its life and activity” (5). Therefore, if we are to know our mission we must know Jesus in the context of his mission among his people.

There are obvious problems when we try to discover the pre-paschal, pre-ecclesial Jesus, problems of christology and problems of hermeneutics. I shall look briefly in a practical way at problems of christology.

Moving from a descending to an ascending christology

In today’s climate where the poor find themselves dependent is it not better that they can look to a God in Jesus who was one of them-

selves, one whose starting point was among them, who was open to them and perhaps influenced by them? This is the Jesus of the poor, one-in-relation with them and together with them awaited with a similar eagerness the coming of the reign of God.

Consequently what matters is who theologises, the dis-empowered or the powerful? We, the powerful, think in orthodox terms, presenting Jesus as the Logos-Word, the one who embodied a Godly condescension towards the poor, whereas the poor look to the Jesus of orthopraxis. This is to understand Jesus as a person whose identity is discovered and established as a person in relation to others and ultimately to their God. In this latter instance Jesus is not given to humanity from without; rather he emerges from within.

I have not favoured orthopraxis at the expense of orthodoxy, nor have I opted exclusively for one kind of christology. The central point of redemption for the dis-empowered is that humanity, at its most vulnerable, encounters God in Jesus, and in this latter event total liberation is achieved. However, it is important to accept that the dis-empowered can use their own situation as a starting point as they discover in the Jesus of history one of themselves who also related to God from a position of dis-empowerment. Now they can deduce that if the Jesus of history felt at home among a dis-empowered people perhaps the Christ of faith, the one they encounter, is equally among them in their contemporary situation.

The hermeneutical privilege of the dis-empowered

There are advantages in the dis-empowered becoming the primary interpreters of the gospels in their own lives. Firstly, the void in their own lives is similar to the void in their dis-empowered ancestors who first provided a locus for God in Jesus to come among them. Secondly, because they are the pure of heart, those with hearts and eyes chastened with life's experiences, they have the gift of seeing how the Jesus of the gospels related to their theological ancestors.

If the poor today can see Jesus as one who emerged from among a people similarly dis-empowered, and if they acknowledge themselves as their descendants, they may find a confidence and a reassurance that the Jesus who spoke to their predecessors also speaks to them as the primary recipients of the good news. Since it is they who best understand, and can interpret, the influences of their ancestors on Jesus, then we can say that they are indeed a people of hermeneutical privilege (6).

Jesus – evangelizer or evangelized?

It should be possible to allow the world and its people a greater role in the evangelization process. So often we talk of a God who came *into* the world, of our Church *in* the world and, indeed, of Vincentians *in* the world. Since Vatican II we have spoken of the Church *in* the world. Now, the Church needs to be inhabited and evangelized by the world. If this is so, then the dis-empowered need to know that they in their lives can also influence religious thought. I should now like to see how their ancestors may have influenced Jesus as he came to discover himself in his relations with God.

Jesus among the dis-empowered of the gospels

The dis-empowered of today, through new emphases in christology and hermeneutics, are able to re-image Jesus, not as a remote authority figure but as one among them who enables them to heal, to reconcile, to prophesy and experience redemption in what for them is often a milieu of quiet despair. If they can re-image Jesus in a changing world, perhaps it was they who first gave him an identity in their world of dis-empowerment. I shall now examine whether it is possible that they may have evangelized him in a process similar to that outlined at the beginning. Once more I shall follow the four steps already outlined, recognition, entry, residence and theological reflection.

Jesus recognises the dis-empowered

The Jesus we meet in the gospels experienced a fate similar to that of the dis-empowered today. He can be recognised as one of them. He, in turn, recognised them and justified his presence among them as, for example, with the publicans and sinners in Mt 9:10, and with the public sinner in Lk 7:36-50. Sometimes we can overlook the human and minister to others as if we ministered to Christ. For Jesus, however, he simply saw another human being, one like himself. He knew what was in people. As John says of him: “He needed no one to give him testimony about human nature” (Jn2:25).

The mode of entry

The mode of entry into the world of the dis-empowered is an indicator of whether one is prepared to have a residence in their world. We observe the sensitivity of Jesus with the blind man in Mk 8:22-26:

“... and taking him by the hand he led him forth outside the village”. There, away from the gaze of the crowd, the man is allowed to savour in privacy the restoration of his sight. In Jn 8:1-11 we see Jesus enter the world of a woman condemned by men as a public sinner. He crouches to her level and only after she has regained her full stature does he rise to his feet to celebrate her liberated status.

The poor can accept ridicule with equanimity only from those who love them. Hence Jesus can dare to call the Canaanite woman a “house-dog” (Mt 15:21-28). Jesus entered her life, giving expression to her own sense of unworthiness. Now she is free and has the confidence to put her request for healing. There are many other instances where Jesus commends discipleship rather than lordship, notably in Mt 20:26 where he commends the role of servant, and in Mt 23:8 where he cautions against such a title as “rabbi”. Having entered the world of the disempowered Jesus may now find residence among them.

Jesus in residence among his people

If Jesus finds residence in the world of the poor then this must imply that he is open to their questions, confrontations, rejection and ultimately to their wisdom and teaching. For example, when he had entered the world of the Samaritan woman she felt free to confront and challenge him as he crossed cultural barriers in relating to her (Jn 4:30). Likewise Martha and Mary found freedom to confront him with the same statement when he delayed in coming to their aid: “Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died” (Jn 11: 21, 32). Finally, he exhorts his followers to be open-hearted among those who were most abandoned. Only then may they proclaim the good news (Mk 16:15).

The prayer of Jesus

In the gospels there is an obvious emphasis on the movement from God to the people as, for example, in the proclamation of Lk 4:18: “He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor”. It is not so easy to prove that the movement could have been the other way, that is from the people to God. However, if it is possible that Paul’s vision of Christ crucified is tied in with his reflections on the forgiving Stephen (Acts 7:60, 9:4-5) then it is also probable that Jesus also reflected theologically on those people who touched him. An example of such a Godward movement followed by a humanward movement is found in Mt 14:23-24. Following the miracle of loaves and fishes he retires to pray but in

this prayer God sends him back to the disciples now caught in the storm. It is therefore possible to make the case that the poor challenged him to re-image God so that he would become their God also. In this prayer of re-imagining he found authority to challenge the scribes and the pharisees who would condemn him for fraternising with sinners.

An example for others

Jesus is always active among his people, working for their liberation. From time to time people come who are inspired to see and follow Jesus in a new way. One such person was St Vincent. It is my understanding that he too started with the people and ended on his knees before God. In this sense they too may have been his evangelizers.

Recognition of, and identification with, the most abandoned

Having known dis-empowerment himself Vincent could identify with others. His time of captivity, whatever it involved, was his first experience of being poor. Asked to pray aloud he chose the psalm of captivity: "By the rivers of Babylon" whereby he acknowledges not only his own condition but identifies with others who have experienced a similar fate. Having known a captivity experience he is able later to identify with the doctor of theology assailed by doubts of faith. This may not have been enough and so he went one step further, offering himself victim, taking on the doubts of the man. This act of solidarity was so binding that Vincent suffered three to four years of mental anguish. Could this have been a parable for Vincent? Did it cause him to re-image God? Were his doubts dispelled when he re-imagined a God of the broken and the poor, a God who has made in Christ a preferential option for them? We do not have documentary evidence, except the words of Vincent saying that he found relief from his doubts when he made his option to dedicate his life to the poor: "The taking of this resolution immediately banished the temptation and banished it for life" (7).

From this point in Vincent's life there is a clear sense of identification in his options towards the dis-empowered. He recognizes their vulnerability and their dignity as his own. Hence, in reference to the deaths of galley slaves, he says:

"The funerals of galley slaves ... were carried out with a certain amount of solemnity and, according to custom, six ecclesiastics assisted at the funeral service" (8).

An example to follow

Vincent imitated a Christ who identified with the poor and became one of them. He wishes those who would follow him to see and follow Christ in a similar fashion. He tells us in the Common Rules we should do this:

In honour of the common life which Christ our Lord chose to lead in order to be like others and so gain them more easily for God (1:11).

In imitation of this Christ-model he asked that his followers would “weep with those who weep” and “rejoice with those who rejoice” and, finally, “to become all things to all people that we (they) may gain all for Christ” (11:12).

Vincent prescribes a mode of entry

Vincent was familiar with the entry process whereby the poor challenge, purify and refine our motives as we venture into their world. He cites the behaviour of a Daughter of Charity in her relations with a galley slave, when she refused to return “evil for evil ..., insult for insult”(9). In a conference to the St Lazare community he said:

When we go to visit the poor we should enter into their sentiments so as to suffer with them and adopt the dispositions of that great apostle who said: “I became all things to all men” ... Hence we should soften our hearts and make them susceptible to the sufferings and miseries of our neighbour (XI 340-341).

If we conscientiously go through a process of entry to the world of the poor we will become aware of them purifying our motives. Through their scrutinies charity will be elevated to the level of love. This will be a slow process as we find that much of our thrust towards others is often fraught with some form of self-seeking. So, Vincent asks that our love be pure:

So your intention in coming to the company must be to come purely for love of God and for his pleasure, and, as long as you remain in it, your every action must tend to this same love ... What good will it do you to take soup or medicines to the poor if you do not do it for this same love? (IX 20).

Vincent also left us, in the Common Rules, three virtues which will guide our entry into the world of the poor: simplicity, whereby we refuse to become saviours; meekness, as a means of disposing fearful people to the Lord; and humility, whereby we give credit to God and others for the works wrought through us (2:4, 6).

Residence in the world of the dis-empowered, Vincentian style

To have residence in this world means to feel at home, and being at home implies that one is in a familiar relationship with the people. It is a milieu of equal relations. If one dares to speak then one must dare also to listen. Every word purporting to come from God must be tested, challenged and, if necessary, re-formulated in the light of the faith experiences of the community. It was in this milieu that Vincent made his residence. In the milieu of death among the galley slaves his followers were not just ministers of the good news but rather sisters and brothers. Shortly after befriending the galley slaves he asked his followers to reach out to their families as friends.

Among those of his followers who died in quick succession among the galley slaves was *Chevalier* Gaspard Simiane de la Coste, a layman, who was administrator of the hospital for galley slaves in Marseilles; Vincent would say that he was known among them as their “father and protector”. So, Vincent envisaged us as becoming part of the family of the dis-empowered. He fears that we could become remote from them:

We come from poor folk, you and I. I am the son of a farm worker. I was fed simply and now that I find myself superior of the Mission should I want to delude myself and be treated like a gentleman? (X 342).

Vincent would wish that the poor could feel as much at home in our world as we do in theirs. His own home in St Lazare was also the home for the most abandoned, including persons sent there for detention and the street homeless. These he often referred to as his “boarders”(10). Feeling at home with Vincent they found a confidence to speak their minds when, threatened with mass hospitalization and believing Vincent to have some say in the matter, they could speak as follows:

May I tell you what people are saying about you? Everyone in Paris is abusing you because they think you are the cause of the poor people being shut up in the big hospital (11).

Vincent acknowledged these, his friends, as sacraments of Christ. It was not a matter of his “bringing Jesus to the poor, but of finding him there” (12).

However, while the streets of the city and its inhabitants become a residence Vincent also stipulated that within these streets there would be a place for prayer and reflection. We will now see how he did this in his own life.

Theological reflection: From the street to the upper room

The first stage in theological reflection consists in bringing one’s experiences before God, and this Vincent did. Coste says of Vincent that he allowed his experiences to touch him:

Experience was, in this case, a source of knowledge, for he knew how to observe, and perhaps there never was a better pupil in the school of experience (13).

The second stage is to try to induce from this experience the message which God is revealing through it. This would seem to have been Vincent’s method of knowing the mind of God in all matters relating to his own decisions, and in formulating maxims for his followers. Coste says of him: “He loved the method of induction” (14).

In this context we can take another look at what Vincent calls divine providence. Coste says: “What he calls providence is, in fact, indistinguishable from experience” (15). Therefore, when Vincent says that true wisdom consists in following providence step by step he is saying that the mind of God is understood through an inductive method of theological reflection on one’s experiences (16). For Vincent many of these experiences came from the world of the dis-empowered. So the manifestations of God among the people were brought before God in prayer:

I will examine the matter for a month, thereby to honour the silence which our Lord so often observed when he was on earth (17).

It is possible in this silence that Vincent could acknowledge the dis-empowered as instruments in his evangelization.

Towards a Vincentian theology of evangelization

The words of Henri Bremond have already been quoted, saying that it was not the poor who gave Vincent to God but rather God who gave

him to the poor. While the thrust cannot be disputed it is still an authority-centred approach to evangelization written in hindsight and thereby causing us to lose sight of Vincent as one struggling with his daily experiences among the dis-empowered. In our Constitutions (1984) there is an acknowledgement of the poor, as members of the Congregation are asked to have

some sharing in the lives of the poor so that not only will we attend their evangelization but that we ourselves will be evangelized by them (12, §3).

However, the words of the Superior General's statement at the close of the 1986 General Assembly approximate most closely to what I have been attempting to put forward here as a model of evangelization, namely that in giving ourselves in a particular manner to the poor they, in this faith process, will give us to God:

Our lines of action must bring us beyond the poor. They must bring us, along with the poor, back to Jesus Christ (18).

However, it would be challenging if the statement applied to student formation could be applied to the entire community:

Students need to have direct contact with the poor and consequently to know their life situation, reflect on the causes of poverty and allow themselves to be evangelized by the poor (19).

Re-appraising our statements

In the past we have tried to transpose a seventeenth century theology to the present age. Perhaps the time has come to look anew at such a process. Kevin Rafferty in COLLOQUE No. 15, Spring 1987, clarifies the issue by his use of the terms "resourcement" and "praxis". By resourcement he means those elements which have come down to us in history, namely charism, heritage and tradition, while praxis is the critical analysis of society and the needs of today. He, too, would agree that both are necessary, but makes the case that perhaps for too long we have emphasised resourcement in transposing a seventeenth century theology to the needs of today. It would, it seems to me, be preferable first of all to analyse present needs and then look to our resources to meet them.

How are we to relate our following of Vincent to the presence of Jesus among us? “A founder”, says Jon Sobrino, “is a Christian who at a particular time in history tries to follow Jesus” (20). This Vincent did. However, we are primarily followers of Jesus who is alive in the community, emerging from, and working in, it, and our allegiance to Vincent is therefore subservient to our following of Jesus.

The relationship between the charism of the founder and the Jesus of history can be presented as follows:

The charism of the founder can and should continue to be a norm as long as it is subordinate to Christ or to the history to which Christ continually gives rise. If for some historical reason a charism can no longer give rise to a history that is in accordance with Jesus, then its *kairos* has passed (21).

In many instances the charism is adopted as a norm and then means are found for its expression, rather than starting with what the needs are. Kevin Rafferty refers to this as “Vincentian fundamentalism” or “proof texting” (22). So the challenge for us now is to look to a new history to which Christ is giving rise in our present apostolates and hopefully we will find this history in accordance with the charism of our founder.

Conclusion

I have attempted to establish that the world of the dis-empowered is a unique world wherein the residents have an immediate solidarity with, and understanding of, each other. It is a world which Jesus and, later, St Vincent in imitation of him, entered. In our Constitutions we have opted to call this world that of the “most abandoned”. It is difficult to have the courage and strength to enter it. John Prager puts it in simpler but more challenging terms;

Are we going out to the most abandoned or are we making them come to us? (23).

When we enter the world of the dis-empowered as people of faith a number of things happen. Firstly, we encounter Christ still struggling in the footsteps of the homeless, or in the measured breaths of those condemned to die of AIDS, in prison or elsewhere. Secondly, we experience life being redeemed and assuming meaning and hope among a people with little cause for optimism. Finally, our own faith is strengthened as

we bring our experiences before God.

The dialectic continues but with a different starting point, namely the world of the dis-empowered. We move from their world to the world of contemplation and back again to them. Prayer now assumes a new dynamic:

We bring the world with us into prayer. And prayer propels us out into the world (24).

This is the new movement starting with the poor to whom we are sent and ending up in prayer, so as to bring afresh the love of God, which brings hope and liberation to the dis-empowered. Hence the world assumes a new status as it becomes the milieu of evangelization.

NOTES

1. Henri Bremond: *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France*, 12 volumes. Paris 1929-1936, vol. III, p. 246. Quoted by Gustavo Gutierrez in *We Drink from our own Wells: the Spiritual Journey of a People*, New York 1984, p. 125.
2. Arthur I Waskow: *God Wrestling*, New York 1978, pp. 1-12.
3. *The Pope in Ireland*, Dublin 1979, p. 70.
4. Dermot A Lane: *The Experience of God*, Dublin 1981, p. 13.
5. Quoted in *Lines of Action 1986-1992*, p. 3.
6. Monika Hellwig: *Whose Experience Counts?*, Marquette University 1982, p. 28.
7. Coste, trans. Leonard: *The Life and Labours of St Vincent de Paul*, three volumes, London 1934-35, vol. I, pp. 48-49.
8. *Ibid*, vol. II, p. 318.
9. *Ibid*, vol. II, p. 323.
10. *Ibid*, vol. II, p. 311.
11. *Ibid*, vol. II, p. 301.
12. Gutierrez: *op. cit.* p. 125.
- 13-17. Coste, *op. cit.* vol. III, pp. 330-333.
18. *Lines of Action 1986-1992* p. 25.
19. *Ibid*, p. 44.
20. Jon Sobrino: *The True Church and the Poor*, New York 1984, p.313.
21. *Ibid*, *loc. cit.*
22. K Rafferty, *art. cit.* p. 223.
23. John Prager: *Reflections on the renewal of Vincentian spirituality in "Vincentiana"* 1981, p. 379.
24. *Ibid*, p. 380.

Deaf People as Ministers

Thomas Woods

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On a visit to a small town in County Kerry two members of the Pastoral Team in Dublin heard a story from the hearing mother of a twelve year old deaf boy. Like many such mothers she, and her husband, had suffered much, travelled much from doctor to doctor, wept and prayed much for a son whose deafness was not diagnosed until the boy was four years of age. For some time she was sorely tempted to turn away from God and the practice of her faith but that time passed when her son went to school and long since he had not only become a favourite in family but, in her own words, “a very great blessing”, and an instrument of God informing and forming faith in herself and her husband. Her story is about Easter Day.

Sunday dawned as one of those beautiful balmy spring mornings that lift people’s spirits with an assurance that winter is past and “Mary” was humming to herself as she went to call her son for mass. For him she had kept the largest Easter egg and it was to this she pointed as soon as he awoke. “Look at the lovely Easter egg I got for you”, she said, pointing to the dressing table where it lay. But the boy paid little attention to the gaily wrapped gift; instead he went directly to the window, drew back the curtains and looked out at the beautiful morning. He continued to gaze for some seconds and when he turned to his mother he was smiling and clearly very happy. “It is a very beautiful day”, he said, “and Jesus is alive again”.

The story is a moving one in itself but it is told here not because of the boy’s words but because of his mother’s reaction to them. This happy and proud mother repeated the story not only to the two visitors from Dublin but also to her husband, to relatives and neighbours and to her parish priest, to whom she added: “Here am I, a grown woman, and I had never really thought about the true meaning of Easter before”. All of

these people, no doubt, shared her reaction to some extent and thereafter would be less likely to forget the true meaning of Easter.

Was this deaf boy a minister of the word? Was his mother? Had anyone addressed either of them as such they would have been amused or perplexed, but their story illustrates three points about “Deaf People as Ministers” that need to be stressed at the beginning of this paper, the more so because the word “minister” has acquired a frequency of use and a familiarity not experienced by our parents. These three points are:

1. Ministers and ministries, even when the words are used with conscious reference to the Church or religion, are not to be limited to the cultic or overtly religious. One has only to recall the help given to the deaf blind people at retreats or liturgy to be sure of this.
2. More important is the truth that the work of ministry is not new among deaf people any more than it is among hearing; whatever about the title “minister”, deaf people have been ministers to one another for as long as they have had faith.
3. Nor should the work of ministry be limited to the kinds of events and efforts described below; the essential work of ministry, serving the coming of the Kingdom, is being carried out in a great variety of ways and situations. Indeed it will be the function of those ministers who are conscious of their calling to unveil for others the faith-dimension, and hence the ministerial-dimension, of lives and actions that are truly eucharistic.

This is not a theoretical paper; it attempts no theology of ministry nor does it try to prescribe any programme for the training of ministers among deaf people. Rather it simply sets out to describe how a situation has come about in which there are among the deaf people in Dublin a group of exemplary ministers of the eucharist and a pastoral team of between fifteen and twenty members who share closely in the work of the Chaplaincy and are anxious for further participation in the ministry of the Church. It will then seek to identify and list the thinking, practices and programmes that have contributed to the creation of the situation. Finally, it will look to the future in an effort to see how growth might be maintained in a process already rich with potential. The writer is well aware that other people have more accurate information about many of the events that have led to the present situation and hopes that some of these people will share in criticism and reflection on the story. Indeed, because he has only recently become acquainted with the deaf

community in Ireland, almost all the content of this paper comes from conversations or interviews with those who have been the *dramatis personae* in the different acts of what developed like a historical drama. There are others who should have been consulted.

Groundwork and on-going demand: education

In the conversations and interviews with members of the eucharistic ministers and members of the Pastoral Team two formative influences were mentioned again and again. Firstly, in answer to the question “Why do you think you became interested in, and involved with, the work of the Church?” almost without exception they named “home”. One typical reply was expressed with vigour and gratitude: “It didn’t come down from the sky, you know; it was already in my home”. Secondly, these same people had no doubt that what attracted them in the initial stages, and what they still wanted, was education. By “education” they did not mean just information or academic qualifications, though these were not despised, but what might be called on-going formation. This desire for growth has been evinced recently in the numbers of young men and women who wanted to join a Scripture Study Group in the Centre for the Deaf, and in the decision of the Pastoral Team to participate in a course on “Assertiveness Training” in the coming autumn. Though the phrase “further education” was the one that most frequently cropped up in the conversations it is here translated as a desire for growth because it was expressed almost as a hunger and often unfocussed, in the sense that there seemed to be no clearly identified content in the education they wanted. It was certainly not limited to theological or scriptural studies, though these were sometimes mentioned, but seemed to be linked to experiences of growth in the past and to an awareness of a richness already possessed, and a yearning to know better how to share it. On reflection, it came across as a facet of zeal.

This conscious gratitude for what they had received, and the repeated emphasis on “education”, did not themselves “come down from the sky”. Most deaf people in Ireland have been fortunate in their schooling, and appreciation of the importance of education for both deaf children and adults is integral to a long tradition and frequently acknowledged by both teachers and the Church. In 1981 a working party comprised of five members of the Catholic Institute for the Deaf (CID), under the chairmanship of Bishop Brendan Comiskey, produced a report reviewing the work of the Institute and proposing a new body to be known as the Association for the Pastoral Care of the Deaf (APCD). This report

is noteworthy here, not only because it reflects episcopal awareness of, and support for, a new participation on the part of deaf people in the life of the Church, but also for the emphasis it lays on education. The provision of religious education and the training of Catholic teachers are the first-named of the “overall purposes” of the proposed new body, and “life-long religious education” for deaf people is given as its first aim. The report also stressed the need for “special care” of deaf people because they do not easily “pick up faith from their environment”, and for the insertion of deaf people into the everyday life of the Church. As will be seen in the next section, the mentality expressed in that last sentence is central to the development of conscious participation by deaf people in the ministry of the Church in the 1970s and 1980s.

In the schools themselves three factors seem to have contributed in a special way to the zeal that now animates many of those overtly involved in the mission and ministries of the Church. Firstly, the close relationship between schools and homes, and the encouragement given to parents to become involved in the religious, especially sacramental, education of their children is such that it would be almost impossible to separate the influences of school and home in the formation of many of our ministers. Secondly, the presence of teachers who are themselves deaf on the staffs was not missed by the pupils. Both these teachers and their former pupils acknowledge that their very deafness was a bond enabling greater openness and approachability that was sometimes vital to development, and at the same time these teachers were an embodiment of hope and encouragement to their pupils. One of these teachers reflected that “deaf pupils who are sometimes shy in the presence of a hearing teacher can be more open with a deaf person and, at times, I know their language even when they do not have it themselves”. Because of the need to use a person’s name I hesitate to include the third formative factor in the schools but, for at least some time in his ministry, Father Cuffe must have been especially imbued with the spirit, for he ignited a spark in many who are now fired with some of his own zeal for the Kingdom.

So the ground was already well prepared and the seeds already rooted by the 1970s when Vatican II’s description of the Church as the People of God began to shift the emphasis from mere attendance to active participation in the Church’s life and mission. As Amos, tending his sycamores and herding his flocks, considered himself “no prophet” but was equal to the task when the call came, so, too, many of those who are now active in the Church’s mission needed only the opportunity and, in the current jargon, empowerment. The teacher was right when

she said “commitment will grow if we begin in school by involving the pupils in our own faith and giving them work to do”.

Nurturing and maturation – small groups and weekends

Traditionally the commitment sown in home and school found expression and nourishment through such apostolates as the Legion of Mary and the Society of St Vincent de Paul, and both these continue to survive in the Centre for the Deaf in Dublin, despite very meagre support. Recently a visiting officer of the V de P expressed his astonishment and admiration at the depth of commitment and generous service he found among the deaf members. It remains a pity that more scope and direction is not given to this energy. However, during the seventies a different understanding and expression of service in the Church was growing rapidly, associated with encounter-type groups, and these quickly attracted the deaf community here. The spirit of Vatican IPs “People of God” theology, in conjunction with the non-directive psychology of Carl Rogers and the praxis methodology of Paolo Freire, began to find expression through a great variety of groups in which members sought both their own spiritual growth and outlets for their zeal. The initiative that brought the deaf community into this movement came first from the chaplain and his involvement with AVEC.

The AVEC agency emphasised non-directive methods of achieving Church and community development and through its training programme sought a more creative balance between “working with people and working for them, and allowing people to work with and for themselves”. Animated by his experience with AVEC the chaplain set about the formation of groups of hearing and deaf people. Not surprisingly at the beginning the aims and objectives of the members were not uniform and for some people their own aims became clear slowly through the encounters. Integration between deaf and hearing people in the Church was a cardinal point for one group and of peripheral interest to another. Self-development rated highly with some while others had more explicitly missionary hopes. But this multiformity was not contradictory and was not allowed to interfere too much with the deeper unity of the groups; there remained shared search and mutual support and from these new growth sprouted quickly.

The period of rapid growth in conscious Church involvement was characterised by “sharing”: shared “Search” and “Discovery” weekends, shared travel to Kilkenny, Corrymeela and Taize”, and eventually shared prayer cemented the unity and sharpened the focus on service in the

Church. Though the word “minister” is not part of the memory of those events, participation in the Mission of Christ and the Church became more conscious, the driving energy more deeply spiritual. With hindsight it is not surprising that some members of these groups became full-time workers in the Chaplaincy and a number went on to priesthood and sisterhood.

“The Search weekend was a conversion for me”. This is one of many comments that identify a weekend in Kilkenny as one of the most graced events in this story. “For me it all began with the Search weekends for it was because of them that I went to Taize and then joined the Prayer Group. I became a member of the Core Group and sometimes I was asked to lead the Prayer Meeting”. This speaker summarises neatly the crucial events in the growth of conscious participation in the work of the Church: “The Taize visit was important because the message of Taize was to go back home and look at your own situation to see what you can do there”. And it was on the way back from Corrymeela that the deaf members decided to organise an important weekend in Raheny, Dublin. “It was the deaf who organised that meeting; the chaplaincy just came along. It was a very educational meeting and a lot of people came. We learnt that other people, hearing people, have problems and this was important”. In this period confidence grew through the shared weekends, enthusiasm was fired by the visits to Taize and Corrymeela, and the Prayer Group gave depth and scope for the expression of faith.

The memory of these events is still vivid in almost all of the participants and they can all identify the formative elements: the learning about others, the growth of self-confidence and the new awareness of the importance of God in their lives.

Cross-fertilisation: Eucharistic ministers and English conferences

Such a flow of energy could not be maintained indefinitely. For some years it seemed that what had been planted and watered was left to put down stronger roots. What husbandry there was came through attendance at Charismatic Prayer Rallies and at the annual Conferences in Britain, and especially through the visual aids of the Deaf Choir and the Drama Group’s participation in the liturgy. The attendance at the Catholic Conferences in Britain kept alive or fostered the longing for something at home, and then two different events renewed the enthusiasm and produced new and nourishing fruit.

Firstly, a member of the Chaplaincy invited six deaf people to become eucharistic ministers. The six attended the preparatory course with the

help of an interpreter and were commissioned at a ceremony in the Centre. "Never before had I seen the deaf people give such a standing ovation to deaf people" was one comment I heard after the ceremony. But the commissioning had a more lasting effect than applause; in an almost sacramental way the eucharistic ministers are revelatory for many deaf people. It is not just that they are proud of them; rather they reveal themselves to themselves. Some who had long ministered to the "Old Folk" and the deaf blind saw that ministry in a new light. It was as though the commissioning had conferred a new identity on the whole congregation. And the presence of the eucharistic ministers at liturgies in the Centre or in churches throughout the country remains an abiding visual sign that was efficaciously calling forth that potential.

The second revitalising event was the annual Conference held in Cardiff in 1987. A larger than usual number of deaf people attended from Ireland and the success of the participation in group discussions, along with the challenge from the late Mary Braidwood to bring the message of the Conference home, stirred the old desire to "do more", and moved some of the participants to articulate that longing. This led directly to the formation of the "Pastoral Group".

The theme of the Cardiff Conference was "Called to Serve", and the chaplain had recommended both preparation for, and a follow-up meeting on, the theme. That meeting produced a wealth of suggestions on how the deaf community could be served, and an even greater wealth of good will and enthusiasm for the work; indeed, such was the wealth of ideas that another meeting was deemed necessary to identify priorities and to effectually move from reflection to decision and action. Since September 1987 the Group has met for one and a half to two hours every month; there are eighteen members, of whom twelve are deaf. The most overt form of their ministry has probably been their participation in giving retreats throughout the country; whether leading in prayer or sharing their own experience of faith, their words/signs have an impact that is edifying in the best sense of that word, building up people and the Kingdom of God. But their more important ministry may be less overt; the very existence of the Group, and the mutual support they give, changes the thinking about ministry and the experience of Church. And though the chaplain worked very hard for a meeting of part-time chaplains and priests interested in working with deaf people the success of that meeting was due in large measure to the work of the Pastoral Group.

Ministry and service have naturally figured prominently in the discussions of the Pastoral Group. So it is hardly surprising that the

members quickly recognised the service of many deaf people who are neither ministers of the eucharist nor members of the Pastoral Group. Many deaf people were seen to work with a dedication far beyond any duty, and with no commensurate reward or kudos. The reflection that followed this recognition led to a decision to organise a public acknowledgement in a liturgical context. Within the Advent Penitential Service the Group prepared a moving ceremony of “Recognition of those who serve us”. As in the previous year this ceremony revealed to many a faith or religious dimension to their lives that they had been unaware of, and this surely is one of the first aims of any minister in the Church: to enable people to celebrate their everyday lives in the eucharist.

The annual faith-sharing weekend in Coolure House, Co. Westmeath, produced another example of deaf people ministering in the Church, perhaps the most heartening. “Faith Exploring” was the theme chosen and the weekend was organised and prepared by the Pastoral Group, with a lot of help from the Catholic Youth Council (CYC), but the significant fact was that all six “talks” were given by deaf people.

Saving the harvest

The reader might be forgiven a complaint that this story is too much of a fairy tale, that life is, at least sometimes, “a battlefield, not a bed of roses”. Of course there have been losses, painful tensions and frustrations, but these did not seem apposite; the intention has been to look at how deaf people minister to others within the Church and try to identify the steps by which they achieved this function. It remains now to separate the grain from the ear, to identify those elements of the story that reveal structures or methods of permanent worth. Though these might be useful as guidelines for future action it is important to stress now that pre-conceived notions or blueprints seem inimical to the spirit of our age. Prototypes are for machines or material construction. They are of less help with people.

“When I look at what a minister does I find several behaviour patterns...”. So writes George Tvard in *A Theology for Ministry*. It is more than remarkable how the same behaviour patterns, or structures as he chooses to call them, are evident in the story recounted above. Tvard identifies four such structures which he calls mediation, proclamation, service and education. The titles are less important here than the functions.

1. Mediation requires that ministers be first “practitioners of prayer” and, above all, those who lead people in prayer. The Prayer Group has

been a paramount formative influence in the conscious ministry of deaf people in Dublin. In the conversations and interviews with these people it has become more and more evident that the importance of the Prayer Group has been under-rated in recent years; it has been allowed to function alongside other structures rather than as integral. Both the Prayer Group and other agents (Pastoral Group, Chaplaincy, V de P, etc.) become detached from their central mission unless these other agents can find effective conduits between their concerns and the energy of the practitioners of prayer, especially those in the Prayer Group.

2. The structures of proclamation demand that ministers preach the Good News. The growth of awareness that this function is not reserved to ordained ministers has been central to the developments described above, and yet acknowledgement of the potential it offers has been as yet too mutely expressed. Chaplains who have been accompanied by deaf people on country retreats have learned that the contribution of those deaf people should not be optional. Only deaf people can fruitfully communicate with some deaf people, and with all of them a few sentences of genuinely shared faith from a deaf person can do more than a lengthy sermon. This truth poses problems, especially in relation to content and emphasis, problems that have been experienced, but to sacrifice the structures of proclamation because of the problems would be like throwing the baby out with the bath water. Opportunities for scriptural and theological education may need to be provided, but proclamation of the Word does not exclude freedom to speak prophetically, and prophets like Amos are often impatient with “official preachers”.

3. Ministry should have a structure of service. The functions of this structure are less clear both in Tavard and in our story because they change with changing needs. But it is clear that needs in the deaf community are manifold and beyond the capacity of any one agency, or even a few, to meet them. Perhaps the biggest challenge facing us is the creation of multiple agents who will not only develop the work traditionally done by the Legion of Mary and the Society of St Vincent de Paul but also involve deaf people more fully in parish teams, in sacramental preparation, especially for baptism and marriage, and perhaps in catechesis.

4. Structures of education are needed for two reasons: education is a pre-condition for mediation, proclamation and service, and any minister needs an education commensurate with her or his function. That Irish deaf people, especially those interested in the Church’s mission, are well aware of this has already been shown. What has also been shown, but perhaps not so clearly stated, is the importance of the methods

used. The aim in this education must be formation, not information, and since personal growth is individual a lot of time must be allowed for the exploration of experience. Adults don't learn in the same way as children, and the use of adult educational methods contributed in no small way to the formation of people now committed to mission. The temptation to give answers has to be resisted, not only because answers should follow questions, but even more for the reason accurately and succinctly expressed by an old man who hitched a lift from a priest; he was sympathising with a young man from his village because "the poor fellow has gone up to the seminary where they are stuffing answers into his head for what we do have no questions".

Finally, in the light of the events described, we should add one more structure to those of Tavard – liturgy. This is not just because "liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed" (CSL 10), though that is reason enough, but because the celebration of people's real lives and endeavours in liturgy is the best way to reveal the relationship between those lives and the Kingdom of God. It is therefore the central function of a minister. The liturgical celebrations in which the eucharistic ministers were commissioned, and other ministers acknowledged, were not just memorable; they are remembered and their memory continues to catechise, for good liturgy is the best of teachers. New life is a gift ultimately from God, and this is true of new life in groups as well as in individuals. Christians should "baptise" all such new life as they have traditionally "baptised" old wells and feasts, that is, they should seek words and signs, especially signs, that reveal to themselves and others the eternal dimension of moments of growth and so praise God who alone "gives the increase".

The courage to cultivate

"And they will never have a preacher unless one is sent" (Rm 10:15). An Irishwoman, who knows deaf people better than most, often remarks: "I think deaf people are marvellous". And the deaf people who organised and carried out the Dublin Millenium celebrations demonstrated brilliantly that there are no structures or functions shared by hearing people that are beyond them. If that is true in the secular sphere it is just as true in the sacred for people in whom the seed has been planted in good homes and watered in good schools. All that is required for deaf people as ministers is to let them know they are called and sent. There is but one mission, that of Christ from the Trinity, but many ministers share his mission.

You did not choose me,
no, I chose you;
and I commissioned you
to go out and bear fruit,
fruit that will last (Jn 15:16).

He has already demonstrated his choice of deaf people.

Forum

CONVOCATION

*(Talk at meeting of confrères based in Ireland,
All Hallows, 1 June 1988)*

Why a Convocation?

The main reason for the Convocation is that as a Province we are at a crossroads or a crisis point. The crisis is caused by a shortage of vocations and by a shortage of personnel, especially in the under 40 age group. The reasons for the shortage do not concern us at the moment. It is sufficient to say that in Ireland and Britain we have had only 14 newly ordained priests in almost 20 years. Also, we have four students at present and not too many prospects for next year. There is another statistic which I mentioned in a letter to the Province (23 September 1987): by the year 2007, which is a short twenty years away, if nobody joins us and no confrères die under the age of 65, we will have only 25 confrères under the age of 65. These facts are incontrovertible.

We are living in a disturbing time in the history of the community and indeed in the history of the Church. Many confrères feel confused and there can be great frustration, anger and bewilderment at the rate of change. These feelings have to be acknowledged and talked about in a spirit of openness and honesty. A crisis can be very frightening but it can also be very life-giving. We have to see our present difficulties as a growth point for the Province and for each individual member. Our difficulty can be grace-filled if we use the opportunity wisely. We have to see this desert time as a time of transition when we are moving from an old model of community to a new model, when we have to move from the long-established works, where we have possibly finished our work, into new forms of ministry, when we have to experiment and be open to new ways and new ideas, when we have to be flexible and offer lay people a share in our mission.

What must we do?

We are an apostolic community. So we have to face our difficulty together. This means that we have to be together to plan for the future.

The future belongs to all of us. So all must have a say in the planning process. The way of governance in a post-Vatican II community is to accept all the members of the community as adult volunteers and give each one an opportunity to have his voice heard. Then, when a policy is formulated, the thinking behind the policy will be known by each confrère, and he will be more willing to follow policy guidelines, even if he doesn't agree with it.

In the introduction to the *Lines of Action 1986-1992* we are told:

Our Constitutions and Statutes invite us to live in a state of continual renewal by evaluating and planning our ministries. In response to this invitation the Assembly proposes that the *Lines of Action* ... should serve as the basis for formulating local and provincial plans which shall be evaluated periodically. In this way we hope that all the members of the Congregation will feel committed to putting the plans into practice and accomplishing their objectives (Par. 2).

So that is the main purpose of the Convocation – to plan realistically for the future – to develop an action programme for our apostolates, community life and on-going formation as we have been asked to do in the *Lines of Action*. This is something we have to do together as a Province.

As a Province we have to decide where we are going with what has been given to us. Our task is to translate St Vincent's vision, in practical terms, into today's Church in Ireland, Britain and Nigeria. The vision of St Vincent de Paul remains the same but the adaptation has to be different from age to age and from country to country. The challenge for us, as a community, is to adapt to changing situations and ideas and to constantly renew our mission to the people in accordance with the vision of St Vincent and in the spirit of Vatican II. The Daughters of Charity and the Vincent de Paul Society share St Vincent's vision with us. We have to be in close contact with them if we are to come to a deeper awareness of our identity as Vincentians.

How is this planning to be achieved?

We have to plan with our heads and hearts. We have little difficulty in planning with our heads except for the choice of many possibilities. Planning with our hearts means we have to get in touch with our experience of mission as Vincentian priests. God is in our experience of

the mission, but so often he is the God who lies hidden. T S Eliot said somewhere: “We have had the experience but missed the meaning”. We need each other if we are to discover the real meaning of our experience of the mission. This is not something we can do locked in the isolation of our own lives, or even of our own houses. This has to be a collective experience of what it means to be a Vincentian in today’s Church. We need each other if we are to go on discovering our giftedness as Vincentians. We need each other if we are to renew for ourselves St Vincent’s vision and to apply it to our own time. Through reflecting on our experience of mission we discover God who lies hidden in our experience. Under the inspiration of the spirit of God planning for the future becomes possible.

If we plan with our heads only we are in trouble because nobody will join us. If we plan with our hearts only we will be unrealistic. I pray that between the preparation for the Convocation and the Convocation itself a Spirit-filled balance between the head and the heart will be achieved.

The planning is not all going to happen on the six days of the Convocation. The planning process begins in the preparation for the Convocation, is enriched during the Convocation itself and continues after the Convocation. In our preparation for the Convocation we will reflect on our experience of mission, we will share our experience with one another and we will learn from our experience for future planning.

In our planning up to date theology of mission is of crucial importance. After all, we are the Congregation of the Mission. My hope is that over the next few years the whole Province could be put on a more active mission footing. The result of this would be:

1. A greater awareness of what it means to be Vincentian.
2. A renewal of the priesthood for each member of the Province.
3. A greater solidarity with the poor and marginalised.
4. A greater mobility in our works.

Mark Noonan

Convocation: Hopes and expectations

When I first heard that we were going to have a “Convocation” of the Irish Province I must admit to being more puzzled than anything else. It was something new in my experience and I hadn’t heard of a similar exercise elsewhere. It had some overtones of an emergency general meeting, I suppose, initially. Perhaps that is something of the reality

of it, as it seems to be “not unconnected with” our present vocations “crisis”, while that is not the whole story. The only previous associations of the word for me were connected with University life when, if I am not mistaken, it was the occasion of conferring of degrees. But I suspected that this was not the Provincial’s intention on this occasion! My “classical upbringing” then came to my help to understand it as a calling together of the community for some purpose or other, perhaps for the very sake of calling us to togetherness! However, some real vagueness as to what it was all about still remained.

The meeting of the confrères working in Ireland, in All Hallows on 1 June 1988, was well set up and attended. A fair degree of clarification was offered. The Provincial’s address (printed elsewhere in this issue) was both enlightening and inspiring. The stark reality of our present situation was clearly set out. The need to respond by readiness to move to new forms of ministry, to experiment, and to be flexible in approach offered a way forward. The necessity for togetherness in translating Vincent’s vision to our days came through as a plan for survival. All this was presented as a matter of both head and heart, and calling for a new theology of mission which would require a greater mobility in our works. It seemed to offer a very good ground-plan for the future. I was disappointed that it was not presented for detailed discussion in our groups. Instead, we seemed to move, in our subsequent Task Force meetings, into a fairly amorphous area of discussion, which had a certain air of unreality about it. However, I must admit that there is some validity in the argument that it is the process which is important. The very fact of coming together on eight separate occasions to discuss our community situations must increase our level of awareness and produce a certain sense of togetherness which should help to ready us for coming together in August. I still can’t help wondering if a clearer basis for discussion would not have brought us further along the way.

The experience of the Task Force meetings to date must inevitably influence my hopes and expectations for the end result. I can’t help wondering if the results of five Task Forces working in relative isolation will be easily brought together into unity during the week of Convocation. I feel the danger of each group going its own way, as it were, and focussing on a particular aspect without any account being taken of the overall picture. Would we not first have needed to decide on the basic outlines for our future development before focussing on the details? Do we not first need to settle on our basic vision before speaking of specifics? Would it not have been better to have started from our Charism Statements or our Mission Statement and see where we go

from there?

One or two previous experiences did, however, give a basis for assessing the prospects for a Convocation. In Nigeria, for many years now, we have had an annual gathering of the whole community there to consider any present problems and to make plans for the future. This has only gradually developed over the years into a fairly important aspect of the formulation and execution of a Community Plan, at the regional level. It wasn't planned in any great detail at the start. But it did help to create a community, or regional, consciousness. It did help to create and develop the feeling of all being in this together, and in all being involved in the growth and development of the Region. It developed a sense of "collegiality", one might say. This was a real gain in itself, no matter what decisions were or were not taken. Somewhat similar to the Synod of Bishops, we were never quite sure what sort of power it had!

The Vincentian charism reflections was another event which would serve to give me hope. That proved to be a good exercise even in itself. I experienced this in Nigeria. The openness and sharing on that occasion was a very valuable thing. The end result was, in the words of a recently departing President, "not bad at all". The degree of unanimity achieved at three separate and distant venues was remarkable. It really succeeded in coming up with quite a sharp focus. The only question remaining is to what degree this has succeeded in influencing our lives and undertakings since then.

The other positive "sign of the times" has been the *Lines of Action 1986-1992* and discussion of them and reflection on them at community level. This has come across as a real effort to search for a way forward together. The document itself is very realistic, drawn from real-life experience and related to it. At the end of it all, however, one is reminded of "that great chasm which no man seems able to cross", separating ideas and suggestions from real life. That is the gap which it seems most necessary to bridge, and so the key question for the Convocation would seem to be whether it can succeed in bridging this gap.

In answer to the question posed to me by the Editor I would say that my hopes are certainly that the Convocation can succeed in this task of making real in our individual and community lives some of the ideas for our future which have already been proposed to us on paper. I would hope for a moment of "realism" and "truth". I think that the Daughters of Charity have set themselves the goal of "re-founding the community". I believe that we should attempt the same task. It would seem to be a moment for "naming" the confrères, and "calling them out", who can serve to be the "pathfinders" for the future. I hope it may be an

occasion for reviving the prophetic role and function of the community which St Vincent exercised himself in his own day. Perhaps at the heart of it all would be my hope that we will succeed in achieving a new, or rather renewed, Vincentian vision which will be accepted by all and will serve as a source of inspiration and animation for our future. I would then hope that this vision will be translated into a limited number of specifics in regard to our life and undertakings. The result of this would be, I hope, a new focus to our community, and a new (or renewed) sense of purpose and direction. What is very important is that we buy into this, one and all, not only with our heads but with our hearts also. What we need the Lord to grant us on this occasion is a heart renewed. This would, hopefully, result in a new and increased sense of unity in the Province as a whole.

I wouldn't like to propose Ezechiel's dry bones as a description of our present situation. But, nonetheless, it is likely to represent it to some limited extent. And so his "solution" is worth considering. Ultimately we depend on the Spirit to breathe new life into these "dead bones". He must be the source of our hope. There is no particular limit to what we can hope for from him if we make ourselves open to his activity in our lives and in our community.

My expectations are not much different from my hopes, even if they do not coincide exactly. There is a certain feeling of something stirring, and this should increase as time goes on. What has been close to the surface up to now should begin to show up above ground. I only wonder if the time factor is adequate, to produce the necessary changes. But then the first step is what is important in any journey.

Roderic Crowley

Benagalbón: A Marian-Vincentian manifestation

The haunting murmur of the guitar, the swish of Flamenco dresses, the plaintive notes of the *conte jondo* clinging to the balmy summer air might well be the stuff of dreams in an Andalusian night. But these and similar things combined to create the setting at Benagalbón (Near Málaga) in the last week of July 1988 during the 9th Assembly of the Marian-Vincentian Youth (JMV). Play, merriment, waves of song, the warmth of laughter intermingle with interior seriousness and reflection in the Spanish temperament (so like the Irish), and this gathering was no exception.

A Vincentian concourse, so far unequalled in my experience, found its way here. Clear skies and warm sunshine poured a beneficent atmosphere upon us all, some 1,600 young men and women, about 50 Vincentians, over 200 Daughters of Charity, and other priests, sisters and lay people. Most were Spanish, but some came from Portugal and other countries. A feast of light this was, as the ever-new Vincentian spirit irradiated its unfailing glow and power upon a new world. Sometimes one needs to go outside one's own usual haunts and find a measure of disorientation in order to discover the better self. The Vincentian sap can then rise up and can be released afresh in the bone's marrow. I felt affectively and spiritually something of this. The spiritual mood which is always present in us, and always associated with inner attitudes, was good and positive for me at Benagalbón, and has remained so. Thanks be to God, these new Vincentian ways and endeavours seem to be no flash in the pan.

The formation process of the JMV across the country is related to the RCIA programme, with a special emphasis on service, Church, and its patrons, Mary and Vincent. Benagalbón is a culmination and concentration of all this. The absorption of the discourses delivered by various Vincentians, Daughters and other speakers was ensured by group reflection and sharing. There were about a dozen young people in each small group, with a Daughter, Vincentian or a member of the FMV (married Marian-Vincentians) as guides to the groups. The sharing and frank exchanges of these groups were impressive in their depth and inspiration. A real personal assimilation was taking place.

Major issues and decisions were put to the groups for consultation. There was no forcing of the youth, but excellent guidance and challenge balanced adolescent enthusiasm. Many stories were told. These youth reminded me of their predecessors in the Vincentian drama, the lay people of the first Charities, the Daughters, and the confrères of the earliest times, whether they moved among the poor drug addicts of Cartagena, the gypsies of Grenada, prisoners in Barcelona, or children suffering the ill-effects of parental neglect. An attitude of presence, nearness, and solidarity stamps these 20th century young Vincentians. Here for me is a cause for wonder and a sense of promise, that would transcend narrow judgement or put-down from myself or others. Merely secular standards are repulsed by the inner power of the gospel. This is service of high quality, ministry with a Christian seal; the gleam of hope is offered to weary faces and worn bodies.

From the hard-working, sharing, groups the youth would pass easily to a meal, or a song, or a pre-lunch swim in the refreshing nearby waters

of the Mediterranean. A truly remarkable organization managed to transform the scene of reflection into an open-air dining area for meals. Some time for digestion would ensue. Eucharist picked up and united the diverse threads of persons and regions. Offertory revealed a variety of gifts. Exquisite provincial attire and costumes were worn by the gift-bearers, adding colour and beauty to the liturgical action. Song and music were woven into the worship. The Body of Christ gave interior food to the soul's hunger. Instruments and voices tapered into the silence of faith-reception and the spirit's pondering at post-communion. Confessions *al aire libre* provided one of my deepest experiences. Such a sight would thrill any old – or young – missionary's heart. Religious mime and drama were presented in the late evenings as the air cooled pleasantly towards midnight. These were very moving, as, for example, a "TV live interview" with Mary, the mother of Jesus, lamenting and loving her marginalized sons and daughters by the Guadalquivir (so evocative of Lorca's *Gitano Ballads*). The stories of Mary's Annunciation, Visitation and Nativity were given a modern dressing, and had an imaginative stirring effect on the inner self. Scripture thus walks alongside the experience of today, and both are in dialogue. That approach had far-reaching consequences for Vincent de Paul, and could be a risky matter for us now, as it was for him!

Good humour and joy were prevalently pervasive. Sometimes the exuberance broke into music as if to release deep-rising energies. I never witnessed there the slightest animosity or bad temper. Respect, simplicity and openness to companions were the keynote in relationships. Young men and women mingled easily and shared in a Christian way, with complete propriety. Laughter and song issued forth at various suitable times. These expanded into instrumental folklore pieces and dances, and lots of amusing acts, in which sisters and priests were sometimes invited to participate. *Thejaleo* (we might say "crack" in Ireland) was a definite feature, though it did not take over. Now I understand well why St Teresa and her nuns played music, sang and danced. The joy of the psalms and of Christ overflows from within through the whole person -though of course cultures vary in their forms of expression.

Great moments endure in my memory and regale me on winter evenings. Simple things are often profound. A young lad from Galicia told me more about the great Irish musician Turlough O'Carolan than I knew myself: a Celtic motif in a Latin symphony? Or better, a specific beauty in the allness of things. The boys and girls from Cantabrica wanted me to teach them some of our Irish language. Now, perhaps, they are saying *oiche mhaith* instead of *buenas noches*. The Canarian

youth want a large crowd of Irish Marian-Vincentians to join them in Spain in Summer 1989. They want to widen the good influence of Vincent, the disciple of Christ. One of my most treasured memories is a picture of five young Daughters of Charity who have grown up through the ranks of the JMV. And in 1988 the first young man of the JMV was ordained a Vincentian priest.

I sometimes notice a hint of Vincentian character in myself, or more frequently savour it among my confrères. There at Benagalbón you could feel this reality as a great embrace of charity. The true spirit of St Vincent lives on, and we know this by the many good fruits, one of which is the mission of several young Spanish JMV members to Latin America. In one of the groups we were discussing the Marian dimension: they asked me what I thought. I said it is something very real and effective, an influence, almost a presence, of Mary in a person. Sr Pilar, who had come from Morocco with a batch of African university students, looked round her at the young people and said one could see in their faces, as it were, the countenance of Mary. I agree. These beautiful, serene, faces reflect the Mary we all know in some degree. Mary, pilgrim of faith and servant of the poor, was a special emphasis all through.

A remarkable aspect of the JMV is the effort to blend its own charism with ecclesial authority. Fr Lauro Palú, one of the Assistants General, was present and addressed the assembly. The bishop of Murcia, Mgr Azagra, represented the hierarchy; he stayed a few days and mingled freely. All the priests together had a meeting with him. It was an opportunity to see an example of dialogue between the prophetic and the hierarchic in our Church. The tendency of Church authority may sometimes be to draw things close to its heart, and perhaps over-protect; the prophets see visions, are sometimes a little untidy, surprising, point in new directions, need to be tested, require guidance, though not a “skelp of the crozier” as pejoratively understood. (“You are there..., you guide me..., you give me comfort”). If the prophets were to go unheard, or go silent, then a cloud of mediocrity and depression would hang over this world of ours. The leaders for their part discern and encourage, and must expect the support of the followers. Leaders can be prophets and vice versa, but the gifts are distinct. Some tension is probable, but it can be positive. The Church is big enough for all, whether prophets, leaders, administrators, people of prayer, of wisdom, followers, and so on. The bishop of Málaga, Mgr Buxarras, led the final concelebrated mass, and performed a very inspiring missioning ceremony for the young people going into specific ministries. Towards the end of this eucharist all

heaven broke loose in an ecstasy of melody and celebration. After the liturgy the bishop remarked to me: “Spain is different”. Yes, indeed. But I can learn from it, as from all good sources.

Jésus María Lusarreta CM, the modern founder of an association dating back to St Catherine Laboure and Fr Aladel, is the present leader of the Movement in Spain. He is a very gifted man, with a charism for youth and a realistic pragmatism, which he combines with a true prophetic quality. Sr Dominica Pena DC, a woman of wisdom, is the National Secretary for the JMV. Self-effacing, strong, gentle, she has by her a feminine complementarity, which goes to foster in a particular way the affective nature of the charism. To them both, to Sr Victorina DC, of Bilbao, who was such a good angel to me, to Sr Josefa DC, and to all the Daughters and Vincentians there, especially my brothers of the Miramar Community, my sincerest thanks and prayers. The *globos*, balloons of Benagalbón, launched by each young person into the sky on the final evening, have been known to travel as far as Burgos in Old Castile where, it is said, a pastor found one with its words attached. May the message of this place and these great people be a source of good news and joy to all.

I returned to Málaga with the Pamplona contingent as they began the long trail northwards. On the coach I expressed appreciation, and said the whole event was like a heaven. One of the confrères present replied: “If that is heaven then I’ll be very happy”. There, heaven and earth touched, and for a while became a realized eschatology.

I came away from Benagalbón bearing a strong impression of a Movement with clear objectives, excellent leadership, sound and prudent discipline, prayer, simplicity, a healthy joy, and compassionate service.

Eamon Flanagan

Miscellanea

A letter from the archbishop of Armagh to the Provincial

Drogheda, 11 January 1854

My dear Mr Dowley,

Your truly esteemed note has found me here. I am delighted with the news about Crossmaglen; and I agree in thinking that the summer days after Easter will answer the people of that Quarter best. I am delighted also to learn that there is no further objection to your taking possession of the Seminary except that which arises from the want of subjects at present. As to this objection, of course it is hard to reply to it; but, of one thing I am certain that of all the projects connected with this diocese, this one of getting the seminary put under your care, is by far the most important. The building of the Cathedral is a mere trifle compared with it. It would be too long to go into all the reasons in a letter. For the present it is enough to say, that if this were effected, a neutral body of clergy would be established in the very heart of the diocese, belonging neither to the Northern nor the Southern part of the diocese, but having the confidence of both parts: and the good which this would effect for religion is incalculable, no one could describe it to you, and no one consequently could describe the joy, which it would give to all good men, to see the seminary in your hands. As to the means of support, I think that with an honest man to manage the fine farm of 50 acres, and the £50 per year, which a clergyman will contribute, and the pensions of the ecclesiastical students, these will be enough even if they were not to admit any lay pupils. I trust that providence will soon get us over the only remaining difficulty now, that is, the want of subjects on your part.

I hope to write soon to Father Kickham about the financial question.

I am,
my dear Mr Dowley,
with sincerest regard and esteem,
yours affectionately,
+ Joseph Dixon

Armagh recalled after nearly half a century

The withdrawal of the Vincentians from St Patrick's, Armagh, has prompted the Editor to seek a personal reminiscence of Sandy Hill from across nearly half a century.

With my university studies and exams completed at UCD in September 1942 Fr O'Doherty, then Visitor, told me that I had been given an appointment to Armagh, since return to Australia just then was quite precarious. After four years at UCD a change to Armagh was quite an adventure, even though it meant breaking, to some degree, ties established with the confrères at Blackrock.

If my memory serves me correctly I arrived by train from Dublin at about 5.00 in the afternoon of 29 September. I was met by Fr John Kenny, who escorted me to St Patrick's. Of course, I had never been to Armagh before.

I was received very cordially by Fr Tom Rafferty, who was president, and by Fr Con Murphy, who had been in the College a long time. Fr Gus Sheridan, Fr Dermot Moran, Fr Arthur McRory, Fr John Kenny, Fr Johnny O'Hare were on the staff. Fr Pat Murphy was the newly appointed dean. He had taken the place of Fr Leo McDonald who had died suddenly just when the school year was about to begin. I recall that his Month's Mind was celebrated soon after my arrival and that Fr James O'Doherty came for the mass.

September 30 was the date of my facing my first class. It was in a room at the foot of a set of stairs quite close to my room. (I think Fr Jack Conran had been the previous occupant). I recall that I saved myself from sliding from the last few steps unceremoniously into the room.

I was assigned Religion, Latin and French as the subjects I was to teach. I remember the names of some of the students I was privileged to teach - some bishops: Frank Lenny and James Lennon; our present Superior General; Jim Feenan, Matt White and Larry Haughey who were ordained, two for Australia the other for New Zealand; Harry Devlin, now a Parish Priest in Armagh archdiocese; Iggy Jones from Dungannon, a brilliant footballer; Kevin Arthurs from Keady, George Jackson from Derry; Tony Mackle, Jim Devlin, Pat Gallagher, Turlough Quinn. There were, of course, others.

There would have been about one hundred and fifty boys, all told, including a handful of day-boys only, because the Christian Brothers had their own High School in the town. Among the day-boys were the two Ferris boys François and Bernard, from a French family farming not far out of town. They were a contrast in temperament and disposition to

the Irish boys.

With the number of priests on the staff and that number of boys, we knew one another very well. The priests lived in a kind of “fishbowl”, so that there was little about us that the boys didn’t know.

Fr Rafferty had a reputation, that I had heard in Blackrock, of being a man who “chewed nails and spat out the rust”. That was meant to express his general toughness on himself and others. He was from Crossmaglen, by no means an oil painting, hard working and deeply devoted to everything the College stood for. He was straightforward and direct, seeing little need for much finesse in his dealings even with Cardinal McRory, the archbishop, primate and patron of the College. I found him very considerate and I did admire all he did in those rather restricted days of the Second World War, when supplies were short in the North, when the College depended on its own potato crops and its herd of cows. He had, also, to deal with the Northern Ireland Board of Education and its officials; this he did with considerable efficiency and success.

Fr Con Murphy was considered an old man by the rest of us, who were so much younger. He had been with Fr Rafferty for a long time and was an enthusiast of the first order. He was effervescent, you could say. He had ceased teaching when I arrived in Armagh but he was still active as spiritual director and confessor. He used a stick because he had a slight limp. He was ever-ready to accompany junior teams to places like Dundalk and Monaghan. I recall his famous consoling words to a team that was beaten by St Mary’s, Dundalk: “Boys, you lost the score but you won the match!”

Fr Gus Sheridan was much loved and respected by the boys as a teacher and a man. He specialised in English. He was originally a priest from Tuam archdiocese and he used to tease the local clergy by the inscription he had on his breviary cover: “Quomodo cantabimus Domino in terra aliena?” He was already well settled in Armagh when I arrived and was to become president in succession to Fr Rafferty. He was to die in Armagh. He was a great community man, a real gentleman; he made you feel that you were his special friend. He was one with good, sound, judgement, not easily perturbed and well respected by all the diocesan clergy, by people like Austin Quinn who became bishop of Kilmore, by Eugene O’Callaghan, made bishop of Clogher, by John Quinn, later Dean in Dungannon. He had a flair for dramatics and produced successfully, among other plays, the one on St Patrick scripted by Aodh de Blacam (“Roddy the Rover” of the *Irish Press*) for the fifteenth centenary of the establishment of the Primatial See. Gerry

Hicks, one of the lay masters, starred as St Patrick.

What can I say of Dermot Moran, a dear friend and a tremendous community man? He wasn't much senior to me in age or vocation. He was a man who enjoyed a drubbing by people like Gus Sheridan, Arthur McRory or John Kenny. He had a great sense of fun and was prepared to laugh at himself without much encouragement. He moved on from Armagh to St Paul's, and then to Coventry and was there, I think, till Ullathorne closed as a Vincentian school. His death a few years ago, after he had been superior in Celbridge and had been stricken seriously by a stroke, was a real sorrow to me.

I suppose it would not be far from the mark to say that Arthur McRory lived for St Patrick's. He was to die there, as he would probably have wished. He did not spare himself as bursar and even as dean, doing both jobs together at times. Football coach he was as well, when the McRory Cup was won and a victory parade of the whole College welcomed back the winners and escorted them from the railway station that Saturday evening in 1944.

Fr John Kenny was an ex-student, like Arthur. He was from Markethill. A gentle lovable unassuming man with great ideals. Like many such people he was sensitive and rather shy, but he possessed a genuine sense of humour and enjoyed the vibrant community spirit, the memory of which has not faded. I regret I did not see him in 1977 when I was in Strawberry Hill on a short visit. I did have a conversation with him by phone on that occasion, but his untimely and sudden death left me with a sense of shock.

Fr John O'Hare taught Irish, History and Latin. He was just newly ordained. He was a keen Gaelic student and visits to the Gaelteacht were highlights for him in that wartime period. He enjoyed "having his leg pulled" by people like Dermot Moran and Gus Sheridan. He made his own special contribution to the community, for he had a wry sense of humour and was able to enjoy both his uncle Fr Rafferty and Fr Con Murphy.

Fr Pat Murphy did not stay beyond one year as dean, if I remember correctly. He wasn't all that well and found the contrast between Strawberry Hill and Sandy Hill somewhat stark. I don't know that he was all that successful as dean, although he did his best. Maybe, there was no complete understanding of those North of Ireland boys, something that made me more aware of the differences between people of the one race and religion but the products of different environments. His early death after leaving Armagh was sudden and unexpected. He was still a young man.

Brother Terence McDonald and Brother Pat Normoyle were with us doing the work of Martha. Even Fr Rafferty dealt with Brother Terence sensitively, for Brother wasn't one you could treat otherwise. His tolerance level was, I recall, low enough, but it was maintained. My respect for these two brothers, so different the one from the other, has always been high. Their memory and their example I still hold in benediction.

The relationship between the Vincentians and the diocesan clergy was very close. On clergy conference days the priests had lunch with us in the boys' dining room. There was a practice I found truly wholesome and delightful: on Christmas Day we were invited to have dinner with the cardinal at Ara Coeli, together with the parish clergy. (When, at Christmas of 1943, the cardinal found out that my cousin Pat Feenan, serving with the RAAF, was staying with us he insisted that he should join the gathering. That was a human touch we both appreciated). On New Year's Day the parish clergy were the hosts, while the Vins hosted the dinner for the Epiphany. These occasions brought us all together, so that priests like John Mackle, Peter McDonnell and Eugene Rice, with the other clergy from Abbey Street, were always welcome.

The cardinal came to Fr Con for absolution, and I was reminded that this was a long-standing practice, going back to the days of Cardinal Logue at least. There was the story that in the narrow corridor outside my room and near the bursar's one dark evening in winter Fr Paddy Meenagh, dean at the time, with cane upraised was about to wallop, as he thought, a fugitive student bent over almost double, when he fortunately recognised the voice of Cardinal Logue enquiring where his confessor might be found.

I don't know that I've ever been as happy as I was during those two years in Armagh. The confrères and the boys made it very special for me, and I've recalled more than once that the spartan nature of our lives and the care we took of one another created an atmosphere that was joyful and vibrant. We lived the full Vincentian life of prayer; we had our weekly conferences, our repetitions of prayer, our weekly chapter of faults. We worked hard. God was with us, I feel. He had to be, as we lived in the shadow of St Patrick's cathedral with the memory of Malachy, whose apple was on the College crest, and of Oliver Plunkett, always fresh. There we were, somehow mindful of that great tradition of Catholicity that stretched back to St Patrick, to the stag that fled to Sandy Hill, back even to the Red Branch Knights whose fort was built not far away, out along the road that leads out of Armagh past the cathedral.

John Wilkinson

Recollections of Tung Tang, March 1947 thru August 1948

These recollections have dimmed much over the past forty years so I beg your indulgence should something of the fanciful interject itself in place of fact.

When we arrived at the Tung Tang we were five young American CMs from the Eastern Province of the USA. Joseph Hill (ordained 1943), myself (1944), John Henry (1945), Arthur Colby and Thomas Browne (both 1946). Maurice Kavanagh was the pastor, and superior of the community which was comprised of James Feely, Michael Crowley, Thomas Rice and Kevin Murnaghan. Andy Kavanagh had just left Peiping for his home visit and Mick Howard was not there either. So, all together we were ten confrères in the house. We registered as students of the Chinese language in the language school sponsored by Yale University, conducted by Dr Henry Fenn, made up of students from the Protestant denominations, the US Army Advisory Group and the men from the Oil Companies. The school was only a short bike ride from the church and, so, very handy. In a few months time Frs Hill and Henry and myself moved from the Tung Tang to a mission church and compound where Michael Crowley was the pastor, and the four of us lived there in the compound, going frequently to the Tung Tang for community exercises and meals.

My impressions of each of the Irish confrères at the Tung Tang: *Maurice Kavanagh*: Father was a good superior and a good pastor and missionary. He was very kind and patient with us and encouraged us in our language studies. He was very regular in living the community life and trying to keep a happy and contented community. Yet, all the time I was very impressed at the amount of work he did with the parishioners. He seemed to be involved in all the parish activities, visiting the sick and shut-ins, and seemed to be well known and respected thruout the city. He seemed to be a very humble man, no airs about him, rather retiring and not one to display his talents, which seemed to be many. He always had some business (*commercium*) going, to help the mission and pay the expenses of the parish and the house, etc. I think in the end this caused his arrest and torture by the communists, and, from all I heard, he suffered greatly from their hands because he would not reveal the names of the people who helped him. We looked up to Fr Maurice and he played a good role model for us.

James Feely: Father was sort of semi-retired in our eyes when we reached Peiping and, while he helped out in the parish and acted as confessor to nuns, and, I'm sure, did many parochial duties we were not

even aware of, he seemed very quiet and retiring and almost uncommunicative. However, when you questioned him about China or the history of the parish or the missions he had much to offer in the way of interest. Once again, a pleasant and kind confrère.

Michael Crowley: Father was a hard-working and worrisome priest who must have had an unfavorable opinion of his own abilities, as he sort of put himself down and was never satisfied with what he did and depended much on Maurice Kavanagh for approval and support. Again, a very pleasant man but rather on the serious and worrisome side. He ran the mission church of the parish well, but I know he considered it a big responsibility and burden. He was a very prayerful man.

Thomas Rice: Father Rice was a native born Scotsman and a really shy person who gave the appearance, unfortunately, of being rather critical and cynical, though I think this appearance was a cover-up for his shyness. Father was a scholar and studied the Chinese language but did not converse well in it. He also helped out a good deal in the parish.

Kevin Murnaghan: I guess if we were to choose one of the confrères to be a “character” it would be Kevin. He seemed to have boundless energy, boundless abilities, boundless strength. His grasp of the Chinese language, both written and spoken, was the best of the group. He taught in the local diocesan seminary as well as helped with parish work, and I think Maurice Kavanagh relied on him for lots of help with the language and the handling of affairs with the native politicians and civil lawyers, etc.

He could walk all over the city or ride a bike for hours at a time. He was very jovial and loved conversation. He spent a lot of time with us helping us with the language, taking us around the city, etc. Kevin was a fine confrère and a most generous man. His limitless energy was at times overwhelming.

My recollections of my days spent with the Irish confrères in Peiping were very happy days, good community life, good spiritual life and example by all the confrères and an acceptance and affirmation which was deeply appreciated. I think what caused us to have to move out was the arrival, at the Fall of 1947, of three more American confrères, Frs Crawford, Menig and Thomas, who had been ordained the previous Spring. In August, as the communists started their move out of Shansi province to Peiping our bishop regretfully called for us to come down to Kanchow, to come down to the diocese and be in place before the Reds arrived. That was Bishop John O’Shea CM. Other than hearing about Maurice I don’t know how the other Irish confrères fared in Peiping and

how they got out of China. I know both Maurice and Kevin stopped in Germantown, Philadelphia, on their way home, for several weeks visit.

I hope this is of some interest. Time erases much that was, I'm sure, recorded in earlier memories.

John Lawlor

Missionary Exhibition, Dublin, 1934

A copy of the Souvenir Programme of this Exhibition, which was held in the Mansion House from 25 August to 16 September, has recently been donated to the Provincial Archives. The programme has 64 pages and contains contributions from the twenty missionary communities which had stalls at the Exhibition, as well as a contribution from the Pontifical Work of the Propagation of the Faith, which also had a stall. The African Section, containing twelve stalls, was in the Round Room; the Asiatic Section, of nine stalls, was in the Supper Room; a special Medical Mission section was in the Oak Room. The Vincentians had a corner stall in the Supper Room.

The main interest of the programme now is what it has about the work of the Irish Province in China. The programme has three pages on the Vincentians, the first on the Congregation in general and on the Irish Province; the second page has half its length on the Congregation in China and the other half on the Irish confrères in China, starting with Robert Hanna in the 18th century, then Michael Dowling, Thomas Fitzpatrick and Patrick Moloney in the 19th; all that is only half a dozen lines. Then comes the interesting part describing how the Irish Province came to be involved in China and a summary of what the Irish confrères were doing there in 1934. Here is a full transcription of that section:

In 1918 at the earnest request of the late Rt Rev. Stanislaus Jarlin CM (1850-1933) another group of Irish Vincentians were sent to China. They were given charge of a large district in Peking and neighbourhood, with a congregation of about 500 Chinese Catholics scattered amongst more than 80,000 pagans. Besides attending to the evangelisation and the spiritual needs of their large district the Fathers, from the first, set themselves to improve the condition of the schools and to open new ones. The boys' schools are taught by Chinese lay teachers. The girls' schools are taught by the Sisters of St Vincent de Paul, mostly native Chinese, with about 400 pupils. There is also a flourishing academy or high school, taught by the Franciscan Sisters of Mary, with an enrolment of about 350 girls.

Besides some missions in the country with an aggregate of about 8,000 Christians, well equipped with chapels, schools and dispensaries, the Irish Vincentians have the fine church of St Joseph, Tung Tang, Peking, with a congregation of more than 2,000 practical Chinese Catholics, mostly recent converts. Their schools are well attended. They have homes for the old and infirm, a well-equipped orphanage and dispensary, also workrooms where girls can gain a decent livelihood while completing their education in a practical way.

From this short summary of the work of the Irish Vincentians both in the remote and in the recent past, it will be seen that their labours have been blessed by God in his own divine way. The progress made in past years gives good ground for the hope that, with God's help, the advance will be still more rapid in the coming time.

There then follows a list of nine exhibits on the Irish Vincentian stall, mainly items of Chinese interest. The first item, though, is a "Large scale model of the Irish Vincentian church, St Joseph's, Tung Tang, Peking". It would be interesting to know where this came from and what became of it.

TD

OBITUARY

Father Vincent R Allen CM

It is with regret and a sense of loss that we think of Fr Alien, who died on November 29th. Still, we like to think that those who are called in that month of the Holy Souls are favoured by God, as there is around them such an outpouring of prayer from the Church and from the faithful. But the passing of someone like Fr Bob, even after a long illness, does come as a shock and leaves a void in those who knew him so well. In all, in different houses of the Congregation, I lived with him for 42 years. Our days in the Rock come back vividly now.

He, with his older brothers, was an altar server in Clarendon Street. An older brother, Philip, entered the Carmelite order but, with indifferent health, he died as a student.

Bob, like so many Dublin boys of that time, did his secondary studies in Roscrea. Even though he always kept in touch with the Carmelites in Clarendon Street and with the Cistercians in Roscrea it was God's design that he would spend his life as a Vincentian. In 1921 he applied to the then Provincial to enter the Congregation. Whatever impression he made on Fr Bennet on that occasion there remained a mutual feeling of appreciation through later years.

Even in his student days in St Joseph's his health was not robust, but it did not prevent him then, or in all the years of his priestly life, from giving of his best.

Ordained in 1928 his first appointment was to Sheffield, and there his priestly zeal blossomed, that zeal that grew in him through all the years.

From Sheffield he came to Sunday's Well in 1930. Here, as bursar, his talents became apparent. Always a spiritual man, a genuine facet of that spirituality shone out in unflinching desire to help others. There were a number of elderly confrères in the community at that time and he had the exceptional gift of knowing their needs, and really there was no limit to the services he rendered to them -services that few would be prepared to give. Indeed, looking back at that full life, what shines out all through is his readiness to help his fellow men, surely a characteristic that is registered in heaven.

Outside the community, especially in the neighbouring district of Gurrabraher which was then part of the cathedral parish, he was known and loved. The people from there came to our church. It was not the wealthiest district of the city and youngsters leaving school looking

for work came to Fr Alien. He would ring his friend Arthur Barry, who had a fine business in Patrick Street. Arthur got going at once. He knew at any time the shops or stores that needed young helpers, and many a boy and girl got their first job through Fr Bob and Arthur. Yes, many of these young people climbed the ladder to higher things. Is it a coincidence that Arthur Barry's home is now a house of the Daughters of Charity?

When Fr Gaynor, because of his years, could no longer work with his famous choir in Sunday's Well, it was handed on to Fr Bob who kept up the standard that was given to him. The choir members, young and not so young, were as enthusiastic as he was, turning up, some from quite a distance, for practice. On feast days as on Sundays, and particularly in Holy Week, the people of Cork showed their appreciation with a packed church at every service.

He also availed of that fine hall downstairs in St Vincent's for concerts, plays and whist drives. All these gatherings helped to preserve a grand community spirit in the people of St Vincent's.

Later, when he was changed from Cork in 1943, that send-off dinner given by the choir was a proof of their loyalty to him; yes, it was an emotional gathering. The songs by some of the senior members were suited to the occasion and brought a few tears.

The Sunday's Well Rugby Club, founded by Fr John Kelly CM and later taken over by Fr Bob Wilson CM and later in the hands of Fr Alien as chairman, still shines among the best known clubs in the country. Fr Bob was also president of the "Well" swimming club, with their headquarters in Crosshaven. How he managed to keep up with his many groups I do not know, and yet these activities never interfered with his duties in St Vincent's. In fact his true Vincentian way of life helped many by his example.

In those days in Cork St Vincent's was not yet a parish. We were at the far end of the cathedral parish, quite a distance from its presbytery. This meant that many sick calls came to our door, urgent calls and especially night calls. Fr Bob fixed an extension beside his bed from the telephone and hall door and very frequently he had to dress and go to the sick or dying, up the hills of Gurrabraher in all kinds of weather. What a joyful meeting when they greet him now above!

He had a special kind thought for the Daughters of Charity. Those in the North Infirmary had several experiences of his goodness. On one occasion he had to make quite a journey to do some good act for them. When he returned I asked if he was tired and he said: "I would walk across Cork any day or night to help the sisters".

Now for that extraordinary business mind of his. As bursar he made several useful changes inside the house. Before the second world war he seemed to see difficulties ahead and coped with them. In a spare room he had a large supply of household things that were not attainable during the difficult days that followed -linen, stationery, soap and so many other things that were not to be had during the war and for long after. It was his confrères who benefitted from his foresight because it was just then, 1943, that he was changed from Cork to Mill Hill right into the centre of world conflict. I remember standing with him outside St Vincent's on a calm peaceful starry night. He had many friends in England, including his sister Molly and her family. He said: "It is hard to realise that bombs are falling on those people over there. Let us say a prayer for them".

From Mill Hill he was changed to Strawberry Hill in 1945 and here too he was untiring in his work.

His last appointment was to his own loved city. He came to St Peter's, Phibsboro, in 1950. Here he had charge of the choir after Fr Hastings who, like Fr Gaynor in Cork, was a gifted director of music. He laboured here for 38 years, ready, as always, to help others in the community and outside.

For several years he suffered illness but bore it bravely to the end. He is sorely missed by many whom he helped, as was obvious at his removal and funeral mass.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dflis.

Patrick O'Leary CM

VINCENT ROBERT ALLEN CM

Born: Dublin 19 May 1903.

Entered CM: 31 October 1921.

Final vows: 7 November 1923.

Ordained a priest in Clonliffe College by Dr Edward Byrne, archbishop of Dublin, 3 March 1928.

Appointments

1928-1930 St Vincent's, Sheffield.

1930-1943 St Vincent's, Cork.

1943-1945 Sacred Heart, Mill Hill.

1945-1950 St Mary's, Strawberry Hill.

1950-1988 St Peter's, Phibsboro.

Died 29 November 1988.