

# COLLOQUE

Journal of the Irish Province of the  
Congregation of the Mission



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## Editorial

The longest article in this issue was written a quarter of a century ago but has not previously been published. It shows that commonly-held beliefs about St Vincent are not necessarily true, and also that he did not always act according to the principles which he enunciated.

Two items in the Forum section deal with students' pastoral assignments during the summer vacation. The first deals with the first occasion on which students were sent out on pastoral work, twenty-three years ago, and the second deals with one student's work during the summer of this year.

This is the first issue to carry six obituaries. There should, in fact, be seven, but that on Denis Corkery is held over until the Spring issue.

# St Vincent and Discernment

Roderic Crowley

One of the statements emanating from Vatican II was the need to “discern the signs of the times”. In many ways this was an approach underlying the whole of the Council. But since the Council it has served to give new life to the whole process of discernment, both individual and community. It is now an accepted and valued practice at every level of the Church’s life. Sometimes it is used without a full appreciation of what is involved in it. Often it is not realised that it is not something which came into being with the Council, but is an age-old practice in the Church. It has a very sound biblical foundation. Its practice is to be found in the earliest days of the Church’s history, including such great figures as Anthony of the desert and Augustine. The fact that, to some extent, it has fallen into disuse in recent times can be explained by historical reasons. We lived in relatively stable times in a relatively stable Church. The theological emphasis was on the immutability of God and the permanence of the natural law. It was the time of “eternal verities”. From the time of the Council of Trent the main work of the Church was considered to be to propound and explain the Church’s teaching, which should offer a clear and sure way for the faithful to follow. But now we live in times of rapid and explosive change, when the way ahead is not clear. We also live in a time when there is great emphasis on the right of the individual, and on personal freedom. So, it is a time when there is great need for discernment.

In scripture the first letter of John speaks in many places of the need to discern false prophets, and how to do so. In the letter to the Philippians Paul prays that their “love for each other may increase more and more” and that they may “never stop improving their knowledge and deepening their perception, so that they can always recognise what is best” (1:9). In his letter to the Romans he urges them to change their behaviour, as “this is the only way to discover the will of God and know what is good, what it is that God wants, what is the perfect thing to do” (12:2). From these passages we can see that discernment is concerned with discovering the will of God, increasing in love, and seeking to do the best thing in God’s sight.

Discernment has been defined by John Futtrell SJ as “the art of being able to see and do the best act of the love of God and others in any given

situation". It is a question of discovering the will of God for us in the here and now. The will of God is our sanctification, as Paul reminds us (1 Thess 4:3). It involves a certain sifting out, both exterior and interior. Externally, we must discover the voice of God speaking to us in the events we experience. Like Samuel, we must be ready to say: "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening" (1 Sam 3:9) to God's voice among the many voices which come to us. Or, like the prophet Elijah, we must try to find God not in the thunder but in the silent breeze, which we must struggle to hear (1 Kgs 19:9). It involves making a choice for our life, which is in accord with God's will for us, in the here and now which we have helped to construct, and not just in some ideal situation.

Vincent de Paul acknowledges the influence of Ignatius of Loyola as regards many details of the rules which he left to his two communities. No doubt he was also influenced by the central place which Ignatius gave to discernment in his spirituality. But a particular influence in this respect was Benet of Canfield, for whom Providence was the cornerstone of his spiritual teaching. In all he did Vincent made it expressly clear that he only wished to follow the ways of Providence. His often quoted maxim "to follow Providence and not tread on its heels" was first written to Louise de Marillac about 1629 (I 68), and he told a confrère in 1641 that he had "a special devotion to following the adorable Providence of God step by step" (II 208). He attributes the establishment of the two communities totally to God's Providence. As regards the Congregation of the Mission he says that neither Monsieur Portail nor himself ever dreamt of it (XI 38, XII 7, 9). In the case of the Daughters of Charity he says in a conference in 1646:

I have told you many times, my daughters, that you should be quite assured that it is God who is your founder, because I can tell you in his presence that in my whole life I never thought of it, and I believe the same is true for Mile Le Gras (IX 242-243).

This approach was in keeping with his general teaching and attitude. On one occasion he said that "the good things that God wills happen of themselves, without people having to think about them" (IV 122). He saw divine Providence as being something incarnated in history, and in time and place. He expressed this when he advised a confrère that "God's works have their own moment; his Providence arranges them for just then, and not for any earlier or any later" (V 396). For a man who responded to so many needs in so many different ways he appears almost passive in his approach to undertakings:

We should try to be content with making the most of the few

talents he has put into our hands ... We do not wish to choose our ways, but to walk along those which it will please God to lay down for us (VII 515).

Apart from his letters and the record of his conferences Vincent has left us in writing only the Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission. Here we can find a clear expression of his attitude towards discernment. In the introductory letter to these rules he says:

Think of them, not as the product of human ingenuity, but as a gift from the Holy Spirit. Everything good comes from him, and we are not qualified of ourselves to claim anything as our own achievement.

This concerns their origin. As regards their orientation he goes on to say:

After all, can you find one single thing in them which will not be a help to you in avoiding evil, in growing in virtue, and in putting into practice the teachings of the gospels? ... men who are called to continue Christ's mission ... 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.

So he offers the rules as the fruit of discernment, and makes special mention of the fact that they are given only some thirty-three years after the foundation of the Congregation, and so are the fruit of experience.

One of the principal chapters of the Common Rules deals with gospel teaching suitable for the members. At the end of this chapter he warns us against the wiles of Satan which might turn us away from them. Here he speaks very explicitly about the need for discernment of spirits. He says:

The evil spirit often disguises himself as an angel of light, and now and then tricks us by his illusions. All of us must be ever alert for these tricks and should pay particular attention to learning how to recognize and overcome them (CR II, 16).

The remedy he proposes is to reveal them to a director "so that the matter can be competently dealt with" (*ibid*). He urges the following of the director's advice in the matter.

In the teaching of the gospel which Vincent proposes to us we find the doing of God's will in all things. He quotes Jn 8:29 where Jesus

says, in reference to the Father: “I do always what pleases him”. Vincent proposes four rules for achieving this in practice which, to some degree, reflect the spiritual outlook of his times, especially as regards the emphasis on the corruption of human nature:

1. We should conscientiously carry out what is ordered and avoid what is forbidden, when these orders or prohibitions come from God, from the Church, from our superiors, or from the Rules or Constitutions of our Congregation.
2. When there is choice open to us in matters neither ordered nor forbidden we should choose the less palatable rather than the more pleasing ... Finally, if when faced with a choice between things neither ordered nor forbidden there is no real element of personal preference between the options available, then any one of them may be chosen at random as coming from God’s providence.
3. When something unexpected happens to us in body or mind, good or bad, we are to accept it without fuss as from God’s loving hand. (CR II, 3).

The fourth point speaks of purity of intention. These were guidelines which Vincent himself used in reaching decisions for action. External authority was always very important for him. And this at a time when there was a great deal of corruption to be found in the Church, at all levels. When he felt strongly drawn towards any line of action he was always very reluctant to pursue it until his ardour for it had calmed down and he could judge it more calmly. This was the case even when there was some fairly obvious spiritual good in question. In such adverse circumstances as the death of confrères, the loss of valuable property or such, he was always ready to see the paternal hand of God. On one occasion, in 1657, there was a project to group the poor of Paris into shelters where they would be cared for. This was a scheme very dear to the heart of Vincent and was offered to him by the *Parlement*. Even though he was fully convinced as to its utility he hesitated to undertake it. When asked to explain why, he said: “In order to know sufficiently if the good God wishes it” (Arnaud d’Agnel: *St Vincent de Paul, directeur de conscience*, Paris 1925, p 15).

In Vincent’s discernment process some elements stood out more strongly than others. In particular he discovered the voice of God in external events. This was the “evidence” he used in many cases, especially, as we shall see, in discovering the direction he should take in his own life. He was always afraid that his own self, with its human attitudes, would intrude on his decision-making. He believed, and prac-

tised himself, what he urged on his community; “Christ’s teaching will never let us down, while worldly wisdom always will” (CR II, 1), and so he always sought “... to follow the teaching of Christ himself and never that of the worldly-wise” (*ibid*). As a result, he tried to cultivate the practice of “holy indifference”. He put into practice the maxim of Francis de Sales of “asking for nothing and refusing nothing”. He cultivated the virtue of humility so as to avoid self-seeking in his life, to which he must have been very prone with his various “successes” and achievements.

Another help to this process of purification was the quality of simplicity, which he also recommended to his followers. As was mentioned earlier, he always feared undue haste. He referred to these in writing to Bernard Codoing:

I am too slow in answering and in doing everything, but I have yet to see anything spoiled by my slowness. Everything has been done in its own time and with proper precautions ... I have a special devotion to following the adorable Providence of God step by step (II 207-208).

This slowness of Vincent was not a natural failing, but rather a spiritual quality by means of which he gave time for a fuller discernment. On another occasion he repeats to the same Bernard Codoing:

In God’s name, Father, think of this and of what I have told you on other occasions, and do not let yourself be carried away by impetuosity. What commonly deceives us is the appearance of the good according to human reason which never, or rarely ever, reaches the divine (II 473).

Vincent saw the need for time in order to go beneath the surface of things so as to reach the divine reality underneath. Vincent saw prayer as a necessary part of his discernment also. On one occasion, in the course of a conference to the Daughters, he said:

There is no action in life which makes us know ourselves better, nor which demonstrates more evidently to us, the wishes of God than prayer (IX 417).

On another occasion he referred to St Thomas gaining most of his knowledge at the foot of the crucifix (IX 32). Vincent described prayer as “a conversation with God ... in which God says interiorly to the soul what he wants it to know and to do” (IX 419). So, prayer was very

integral to Vincent's search for the will of God. He was also aware of the need to look for confirmation in the interior movements. D'Agnel, in the book already referred to, gives us the advice which Vincent offered to a Carthusian who wished to leave his monastery in order to reach greater spiritual heights. He says that Vincent:

accustomed to distinguish, with himself and others, the impulses of nature from the movements of grace, ... opposes the first to the second with a surety of doctrine fit to inform the Carthusian about his case: "It is a maxim that the Spirit of our Lord acts gently and sweetly, and that of nature and the evil spirit acts, on the contrary, bitterly and sharply" (op. cit. p 47).

He concludes that it is bitter and sharp sentiments which are influencing the Carthusian's decision, and so advises him against it. In the case of many of his own decisions Vincent would normally await external confirmation from somebody in a position of authority to give it.

It might be useful now to give a case-history from Vincent's own experience, and also one from his experience as spiritual director of others. The first case concerns the founding of the Congregation of the Mission. There were three events which prepared the way for this. The first was a very strong temptation against the faith which Vincent underwent, and which lasted for some three years. He got freed from it only through a promise he made to devote the rest of his life to the service of the poor. Up till then he had been somewhat of a "career officer" in the priesthood. Some years later, in Folleville on the estates of Mme de Gondi, he gave a retreat for the people. From that he came to realise the desperate spiritual plight of these neglected country people and sought a way of getting somebody to provide a remedy for it. Shortly after that, in the parish of Châtillon-les-Dombes, a case of a family living in destitution made him aware of the material needs of the people. But he still had to discover what all these events were saying to him in the concrete, and what specific response was called for from him. He went through three stages in the discovery of the answer.

The first two were during a retreat he made in a Carthusian priory in Valprofonde, in the diocese of Soissons. There his Carthusian director first dispelled his misgivings about the Tightness or wrongness of the project of setting up a community to meet these needs. The director told him the story of a monk who was offered three crowns of varying sizes by God. He would receive the largest one only if he succeeded in dispelling some temptation he had been wrestling with, about the acceptability of women for baptism. This anecdote succeeded in dispelling Vincent's temptation about his vocation (II 107).

The second stage during this retreat was when Vincent sought to distinguish the real from the apparent will of God. He tells us that what he wanted was:

that God might desire to take away from me the spirit of pleasure and haste which I was feeling about this matter, and God deigned to hear me to such an extent that in his mercy he removed from me this pleasure and haste, and allowed me to move into the opposite dispositions (II 246-247).

Vincent was now becoming attuned to the Spirit of God rather than to any other spirit. He was reaching a state of indifference over the matter. He fulfilled his wish of not

undertaking anything while there remains in me these ardours of hope in the prospect of great benefits (II 247).

The third stage was that of confirmation by God through the authority of the Church, expressed by his spiritual director André Duval, as José Maria Román tells us:

In his efforts to submit himself totally to the will of God Vincent ... had learned that that will, even though well manifested by the interior movements of grace, becomes clearer still by way of the commands of one's superiors. In Soissons he had reached perfect indifference of spirit (freedom) . He saw there a sign of the supernatural character of the proposed foundation. He wanted something more: an indication that it was positively willed by God (confirmation). So he brought the matter to his spiritual director, Fr Duval (*San Vicente de Paul*, I, Madrid 1981, p 167).

The response was: "The servant who knows his master's will and does not do it will be given many blows". This was sufficient for Vincent. He felt in his heart "a powerful explosion of grace". He took it as the divine command he was seeking. So, now, after this careful and thorough process of discernment, Vincent felt free to undertake the project. We can now see more clearly why he attributed the foundation to God.

Vincent showed the same gift of discernment in his dealings with those entrusted to his care. There was the case of Claude Dufour, rector of the seminary in Saintes, who was a conscientious but austere man but who now wanted to leave the Congregation and join the Carthusians in order to live a life more in conformity with his inclinations. He submit-

ted his plan to Vincent's direction; here is what Vincent told him:

It is part of (the devil's) cleverness to tempt most good people to greater perfection, so that he may make them abandon the post where God wishes them to be (III 166).

Here we see the devil appearing as "an angel of light". It is also a question of a choice between two good things, to see which is the better act of the love of God.

A month later, in April 1647, Vincent writes to him again. He repeats his warnings about the illusions of the devil. He says that the devil's design

is to withdraw you from where God has placed you, under the pretext of the greater security of your salvation, in order that the saving of your soul may be put in greater danger. I've been told that there are a hundred Jesuits in Paris who left the bosom of their holy mother, under the pretext of doing wonders elsewhere, and most of them are a scandal and in great danger of damnation. In the name of God, Father, stand fast in the state in which God has placed you (III 173).

For Vincent discernment did not change from day to day and move in the opposite direction. For him God was not changeable, as he often used to like to repeat. On other occasions he would warn people of the dangers of excessive zeal, which he saw as a ruse of the devil to lead to eventual disgust with what one was doing.

In 1648 he again has occasion to write to Claude Dufour who, this time, is complaining about the number of unnecessary rules in the Community. But Vincent sees the same evil spirit at work. So he advises him:

This makes me think that the little repugnance you felt is the work of the evil spirit who wishes to annoy you in the beautiful road along which you are travelling. I beseech you, Father, not to listen to him (III 346).

Vincent first considers the question of right or wrong in leaving the community. Then he speaks of the various feelings involved and of their likely origin. Finally, he turns to the question of rules which have been approved by the Church, for confirmation of his earlier discernment. Vincent was truly a master of the art of discernment, both for himself and for others.

In 1981 the Vincentian Community in Ireland, Britain and Nigeria undertook what I believe was the first act of communal discernment in its history. The aim of this was to reach an understanding and expression of our Vincentian charism, which we had to live and to offer to the world today. It was a very interesting and helpful exercise. Three brief statements were produced at three separate venues. The first two, in Ireland and Britain, were facilitated by the same people. The third, in Nigeria, was facilitated by a totally different person and without any reference to, or awareness of, the other two. The extraordinary thing was how closely they paralleled each other. It could easily be claimed that the same Spirit was clearly at work in each case. The key word in each case was “compassion”, which can be seen at the heart of our Vincentian heritage. But the spirit and the way in which this compassion was to be lived and exercised reached a very close degree of convergence. This Vincentian discernment offers us a great unifying principle and a source of inspiration and vision for the future, which we had failed to provide ourselves with up till then. So, Vincent’s gift of discernment can be seen to have a true and lasting value for the Community he established as a result of a long and patient discernment on his part.

## Would St Vincent Favour Advertising?

Kevin Murnaghan

(KM died in 1966. This article was written a few years earlier, probably for the student magazine EVANGELIZARE, but it was not published. It has been slightly edited here. Italicisation of words in quotations from St Vincent was done by KM)

### *Videtur quod non*

From some of his letters it would appear that Vincent was absolutely opposed to anything resembling advertisement for his Congregation. In a letter of 1657 he is very annoyed at a publication on the spirit and functions of the Congregation:

It is something totally against humility to publish who we are and what we do ... Let God manifest us if he wishes... We, ignorant sinners, must hide, as useless for any good and not worthy to be thought of. For this reason God has always given me the grace to refuse to allow anything to be published that would make us known and esteemed (VI 176-7).

We mustn't get outsiders to boost us either (IV 496). We never seek an establishment (VIII 59). He refuses for six years to receive into the Congregation the two Abbés de Chandenier because they are too highborn and virtuous for us. He doesn't know what they could see in our rags to want to be buried in them, as they did (VIII 303).

He is angry because Achille Le Vazeux, assistant superior in Rome, petitioned Propaganda to prohibit Christophe d'Authier from taking the name Priests of the Mission for his community. He told the superior in Rome that he had ordered Le Vazeux

to leave this matter to Providence ..., as if God, who made us what we are, would not himself take care to preserve us (IV 346).

And he told Le Vazeux himself that we should have no objection to God sending all he wishes into his vineyard, with their reputation increasing and ours diminishing (IV 348-9).

Again, as regards new religious orders in France:

I beg our Lord that he not only bless the intentions and works of these new missionaries and of all others, but even more, if he sees they'll do better than we, that he destroy us and raise them up (VI 400).

And to the Nuncio in France, in 1652:

When there are other workers who want to go to places to which we have been called we will retire (IV 331).

Satchel-bearers of the Jesuits is what we are (Coste: *Monsieur Vincent*, vol. III p. 361; English trans.: vol. III p. 315). His pet name for the Congregation is *gueuserie* (VI34); the dictionary gives us the choice of “beggary, trash, knavery, pack of scoundrels, rascals or ragamuffins”!

Poor Antoine Portail and all the CMs are “gueux”. He, Vincent, is a gross beast, the Sisters are “poor, mean, puny (*chetives*), unpolished country girls”. He says that Toussaint Bourdaise’s account of the Madagascar mission doesn’t deserve to be read:

It shows too much the simplicity of a poor missionary who knows better how to act than to express himself (VI 34).

He opposes Jean Dehorgny’s attempts to get established in episcopal cities (IV 373) and in 1659 he refuses to send more men to Poland until Providence decides they are needed (VII 515).

He agrees with Louise de Marillac and Etienne Blatiron that the Sisters and priests have lost their primitive fervour. He himself believes, in 1646, that all Europe will have reverted to paganism within a hundred years (III 36). He tries to resign from directing the Visitandines. He does resign from being Superior General, at the 1642 Assembly, but his resignation is not accepted (XIII 296), and he ends up by regretting he ever let himself be ordained (V 568, VII 463). Why should *such* a man be interested in advertising *such* a Congregation?

### *Sed contra*

And yet when we see the tremendous efforts he made to put the Congregation on its feet, and then to make it survive, we will find his every action tends *to perpetuate* his work. So that it is very legitimate to conclude that in the twentieth century, after three hundred years of establishment showing the approval of Providence, and with the immense army of the Daughters of Charity to direct, Vincent *would* rise to the occasion and advertise, even by radio like the Holy Father, in the

interests of the Church, to keep such a great work from languishing.

His genius consisted in adapting himself to ever changing conditions. As René Almérás said in the Assembly of 1651:

Why shouldn't we change if it's for the better? Fr Vincent has changed in the matter of ceremonies and says that all, even up to God, is subject to change (XIII 339).

I find Vincent as unchanging in the one great principle of survival, which he outlined in secret to Jane Frances de Chantal, as he was forever changing to fit the circumstances. I find he even advertised secretly, and openly when forced to. And though he often left things to Providence, as he said, you'd be surprised when you find out how broad was his comprehension of the idea, and that his praise for Edme Jolly's way of "furthering Providence" would fit the radio and advertising reviews of today. In 1640 he told his "secret" in a letter to Jane Frances de Chantal:

Jesus! I'm just remembering I'm leaving out an answer to what your charity says about our trying to combine religious and ecclesiastical perfection. Oh no, my dear Mother, we are too insignificant for that. But it is true *we are in trouble trying to survive* in our vocation. I will tell my dear Mother the reasons some other time ...

P.S. In the name of God, my worthy Mother, let the final point of my letter be only for the dear heart of my Mother and for nobody else.

She and he well knew how Francis de Sales had tried to start the Visitation Order as a visiting order, but when the cardinal in Lyons imposed enclosure Francis was commissioned by Rome to write the new constitutions to fit *this* situation and not what he had intended, which made him say he really wasn't their founder at all. Vincent could be as supple.

No matter how one interprets his recommendation to leave things to Providence we see him, from 1628 until his death in 1660, doing his share of *resisting* the manoeuvres of the Abbey of St Genevieve, the canons of St Victor and the Parish Priests of Paris, climaxing it all by going on his knees to Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld and the Superior General of St Genevieve to leave him his St Lazare. And in Rome he kept a representative to fight his hidden adversaries, Oratorians and others. Richelieu told him to "wait for the next pontificate" and then he, the cardinal, would write for him (II 137). Vincent's instructions to his

man in Rome in 1631, Francois du Coudray, about getting approval for the Congregation, were:

*Baste* for the wording; but as regards the substance, it must remain intact (I 116).

And to René Alméras in Rome in 1648:

Get our ambassador to intervene and, if he is *persona non grata*, let him speak once and then use your private endeavours, not so much by reasons as by recommendations to their lordships, as much as you can with respect to our French prelates (III 383).

Earlier in that letter he had written, with regard to letting the Pope know about the Congregation:

It will be good to show him that it will be difficult *to make the company survive* having regard to its diverse, important, difficult and far-flung works ... How hard, in the midst of such difficult and important works, to hold on to men who are free to leave! ... Note, Father, that it is very difficult to have the means *to enable it to survive* in such difficult works ... It is up to him to give us *the means to survive* ... As regards our rules I think, Father, that you have to start getting them approved, or at least those about the vows and the perpetuity of the generalship, having in mind those who will come to us in the future (III 379-381).

The climax comes in the famous letter of 1658 to Edme Jolly in Rome, about retaining possession of St Lazare, when he tells him:

... to get the bulls at any cost whatsoever and in the best possible form.

This is because

A religious of St Genevieve told a member of the company, a relation of his, that their Congregation ... is only waiting for my death before beginning, hoping that then they would have a better chance than now when I am around to stand up for our right (VII 247-248).

He *fought*, literally, for the establishment in St Méen, with the involvement of military operations and the jailing of the superior's rep-

representative, in chains (VII 147-148, 204-206). Edme Jolly spent twelve years fighting this issue in Rome against hidden foes. Vincent even used two monks from Cahors, disguised, to help, but they were discovered and threatened with excommunication and jail.

The one unchanging point was: *We mean to survive*. It was his secret, to be shared only with Jane Frances de Chantal. He fought for this in Paris and Rome, and if he often changed his mind as to the means he never did as to the principle.

At first he didn't want vows because of the extraordinary aversion everyone had to the religious state (II 28, 138), "from the Pope downwards" (III 379). In 1640 he had told Jane Frances de Chantal that we were too insignificant to be religious but in January 1651 he writes to Almérás in Rome about the need for getting the vows approved, and if the first attempt with one intermediary fails he will make another with someone else. This letter stresses that the Congregation is losing too many men and that there must be some means for retaining them (IV 133). He has thought of simple vows, oaths, and even fulminations of excommunication made in chapter. He has consulted all around him, was open to suggestions on all points except the principle: "We mean to survive".

By the Assembly of 1651 he has made up his mind. It is to be simple vows. He has most of the superiors against him, Fathers Almérás, Blatiron, Dehorgny. They discuss it all and try to demolish his reasons. As we read through the account of this Assembly in Coste's biography we see, every time, in his contributions, Vincent simply *ignores* what they have been saying, and sticks to his thesis: We must have vows. Our Lord wants us to make them. *He* took vows, Fr de Condren says. They say the Pope is against them. The doctors of theology say they could be invalid. But one can obtain anything in Rome if one waits long enough, I have been told; we will put a man there ...

He got his vows alright. Would such a man shirk from advertising, to live?

*Notice how he takes even his losses!*

In 1648: "We must regard this departure of priests as something good for the Congregation" (III 379). In 1658, about the loss of the Orsigny farm: "We must believe this loss will be to our advantage" (VII 252). But at the same time, on this same matter, he will even oppose evangelical maxims if expedient:

I have great pain, for reasons you can imagine, in going against the advice of our Lord, who did not want his followers to take

legal action. And if we have already done so it is because I could not in conscience give up something so legitimately acquired, community property of which I have charge, without doing my best to hold on to it. But now God has relieved me of this responsibility ... (VII 406-407).

We can hope God will give us back what the world takes (VII 406). Send away Brother Doutrelet; God will have taken this means “to *make the Congregation survive*” (III 379). With regard to getting proper accommodation in Rome in 1658 he wrote:

... we should also love to be unknown and abandoned, as long as it will please God to leave us in that condition; and perhaps God will make use of this love of rejection, if we have it, to get us accommodation to our advantage (VII 312).

He will resist even the views of Propaganda Fide about Irish priests because he feels the Congregation should have the right to their ministry after having educated them (VII 331).

*Never take back those who leave?*

He will beg worthy priests to come back, but willingly let worthless ones go. He wrote to Chrétien Daisne in 1658:

I very willingly agree that you should leave, as your past conduct shows you were tending that way (VII 354).

In 1642 five left and two were expelled, and he wrote that God had consoled him with the thought that they would have done harm in the Congregation (II 287).

On the other hand he usually refuses to grant remission of vows to good priests. In October 1646 he wrote to Thomas Berthe:

Come back, Father, I conjure you by the promise you made to God ... (III 88).

The following month he wrote to Antoine Portail about Berthe:

Fr Berthe has left us ... He had let it be thought in the town that he was going as superior; having been disabused of this by us and ordered back here he pretended to be sick ... and returned ... to his parents (III 105).

A fortnight later he wrote to Berthe again:

I will have more confidence in you than ever, because I will no longer be afraid of losing you, having seen you saved from such a dangerous reef. Choose any house you please; you will be received everywhere with open arms ... (III 118).

He will have them lock a student into a room and punish him by depriving him of something at table rather than dispense him from his vows. He wrote that the student must be reformed, not expelled, but if the student were to break Vincent would be sorry "because of the good he could do in the company" (VII 210). Vows hold good even if they were made only through fear of losing board and lodging, and penance should be done rather than a promise be broken (VII 316-317). Both of those incidents were in 1658 and later in the same year he wrote to Etienne Bienvenu:

What have we done to you for you to leave? What dissatisfaction have you received from the company to make such a break? The only reason you give is that you are sick; for my part I tell you to reflect that there is no one who is not ill sometimes, and that no matter where one is one carries one's body which is liable to that. To this I add that it will be hard for you to find the same treatment for your illness which the company gives to its members ... I cannot and will not, either by word or in writing, allow you to leave the company ...(VII 373-374).

Note in all these extracts the purpose never varies: survival of the Congregation. He willingly lets some go, but professes he *cannot* lose others.

He would even *invite* useful people into the Congregation. In 1628 he wrote from Beauvais to François du Coudray in the Bons Enfants:

I think you would do well to sound out the tailor who works in the house if he has any thought of giving himself to the house. He once had, but his short-sightedness and the difficulty he sometimes had in cooking held him back, and me also (I 67).

In 1657 he wrote to Edme Jolly in Rome:

Generally speaking, those who have left some religious order are unlikely to succeed in our Congregation ... It would be necessary to know why the Spanish gentleman who is asking to join us left

the Jesuits ... *We need suitable men* for that kingdom (VI 284).

In another letter to Jolly later that year he wrote:

I'd be very glad if you received the rector of Collegio Salviati and the good Portuguese young man ... and also the Spanish priest who was a Jesuit ... Their example might attract others to you ... *we have great need of men* (VI 508).

In the previous year he had admonished the director because the seminary was losing men owing to his harshness (VI 385-388). Inscribe that against the accepted thesis: "Send them away from us to anyone else".

Why is he so "downhearted and crushed", as he tells Firmin Get in 1657, at the glorious sacrifice of the confrères in Genoa, if not for the "survival" idea? In the previous year he had told Jolly in Rome that the Congregation was *not* to imitate the Oratorians who risked their lives in ministering to the plague victims:

Our company is still too small and too weak to imitate other bodies in the Church who are like giants and can, without inconvenience, furnish several workers, where we could not do the same without *extinguishing* ourselves (VI 116-117).

René Alméras said at the 1651 Assembly that a man had the right to change his mind, and that Fr Vincent *did* in certain cases (XIII 339). And Vincent admits changing his mind on the very question of survival; he had been *too* rigid, as he told Etienne Blatiron in 1655:

I thank God for the special devotions you have proposed, to ask God, through blessed St Joseph, for the *propagation* of the company. I beg his divine goodness to accept them. For twenty years I never dared ask for this, thinking that, as the Congregation was his work, care for its conservation and growth should be left only to him; but from thinking about the recommendation given in the gospel to ask him to send workers into his harvest I have become convinced of the importance and usefulness of this devotion (V 462-463).

As the gospels which say: "Let not your right hand know ..." also say: "Do your works so that men may glorify God in you", and as we must not insinuate that our Lord ever contradicted himself, why should we persist in quoting Vincent *only* on the "Leave all to Providence" and

forget all the texts quoted, and still to be quoted, in this article?

Though he determined not to preach in episcopal cities, and refused the Queen on this issue, he also said he didn't intend to deprive the poor; and Richelieu changed his mind for him about parishes (II251), and the Pope over-rode his objections to working in Rome (VII 214). Couldn't the need of the twentieth century make him over-ride his humility and advertise?

He was always refusing a change of air to confrères. He said no one, not even kings, left their capitals because the air was bad. *Yet* when Edme Jolly was being Providence for the survival of the Congregation of the Mission he changed his tune. His message was: I see you are still in Rome and haven't gone away as I told you to. You are sacrificing yourself. We need you. Go away. Use a carriage. Don't tire yourself out (cf VI 430-432, VII 490-492).

In 1649 René Alméras was complimented for refusing to give a bribe to help on the matter of approval of the vows. Vincent wrote to him:

I wrote this *crooked* proposition to you only because it was suggested to me by Cardinal Grimaldi, and once more I assure you I am very edified that you refused it (III 486).

But nine years later, in 1658, he would write, about another matter: "Get the bulls at any cost" (VII 247). As early as 1631 he wrote to François du Coudray in Rome:

As to the memoranda you desire to be sent in by others, who would seem less interested in the matter than ourselves, I agree well enough. I find this a little bit ingenuous, but what can one do? (I 144).

Later, in 1657, when Edme Jolly wanted to refuse offered accommodation in the Lateran Palace (which *would* seem the spirit we are to follow: "Who are we? Send others *there*") Vincent writes:

Nevertheless, if God's Providence, by order of the Pope, lodges you there it seems good would come of it, as much because this would be a way of *making the company known* (VII 27, n5).

How is that from the advertisement angle? However, before sending the letter he toned down the last part to: "It would make the Congregation serve in the first see of Christendom".

In Paris Vincent advertised his wants to the richest ladies of France, to anyone who had money and goodwill towards the poor. I guess he

hated bragging, but he would cheerfully find a way of letting the decent people of our century know about our method of trying to serve God and the poor.

*Solvuntur difficultates*

We saw Vincent change his mind about *not* praying for vocations for the Congregation. This discounts several of the difficulties. He said the things quoted in the first pages of this article, but he said a lot more on the following pages; read them all.

In 1657 he may “have been angry” (VI 176) that anything was said for us, but in 1658 he “was *glad*” when Cardinal Durazzo boosted us to the Holy See! “His testimony in our favour should excite us to be as he says” (VII 215). If we “never *seek* an establishment” (VIII 59), right now it is a different problem altogether, namely continuing a three hundred year old congregation blessed by God. If in 1660 he marvelled that the two Abbes de Chandenier could admire St Lazare (VIII 302-303) and its rags, that was his humility. But *we* are allowed to admire him and his rags, for they are canonised by Rome and the gospel.

If Achille Le Vazeux was blamed for not leaving Fr Authier to Providence (IV 346), Vincent didn’t leave him to Providence either. He knew better than Le Vazeux that the whole matter depended not on Fr Authier but on the Duke de Ventadour, head of the secret Company of the Blessed Sacrament, to which Vincent also belonged. He took the matter up with the duke and settled it through him. Biographies usually tell only about Vincent scolding Le Vazeux; they say nothing about his going to the duke.

Though he said he would retire from a work if any other order came in (IV 331), that was just general policy and it did not prevent him from fighting in Rome, Paris and St Méen for what he possessed, fighting even evangelical maxims when they ran counter to our spirit. As he said in a 1659 conference to the St Lazare community:

We are therefore, through his mercy, fully ready and absolutely bound to practice his maxims, if they are not contrary to our Institute (XII 129).

He told the Sisters in a 1655 conference that each order has its own way of following gospel maxims (X 143-145). In St Méen, as we have seen, the Vincentians availed of military force against the Benedictines.

If we are to imitate the Jesuits without even understanding, if he called us “ragamuffins” etc. (VI 34), he also wrote:

I admit that the superiorships in our houses are not well filled, but be assured it is usually so with companies at the start, and that the Jesuits, except for the first nine fathers and some small number of others, were in the same state at the start ...and who would have thought that our own poor company, which is only an abortion of others in the Church, would do what it pleases God to do through it, not only in France but also in foreign countries? ... we have reason to hope that his divine goodness will also give it suitable members for governing it (III 187-188).

In 1659 the “ragamuffins” in Rome have the ordinands! The Holy Father resists all attempts to take them from us. It seems the company is working as our Lord desires, and with success. We are in demand everywhere. Our functions have appeared so beautiful as to raise emulation. Even in Rome a company wanted to take the ordinands from us, which they might have done with success if the Holy Father had deemed it expedient. We must praise God for the zeal some have (cf VIII 222, 310). Is he proud of the Congregation or not? The previous year he had written to Edme Jolly in Rome:

There is reason for praising God that the Pope has wanted to be informed about our Institute and the results of our work ... and has given orders ... for us to carry on our ministry in Rome, as we do in Genoa and elsewhere (VII 214).

If he says that Fr Bourdaise doesn't deserve to be read (VI 34) that is because Bourdaise was someone whom Vincent originally had wanted to send away because he did not have enough learning “even for us” (XI 445), but Fathers Berthe, Alméras, Codoing and the scripture scholar du Coudray were also Vincentians. If he thought Europe would be pagan again in three hundred years, popes have agreed with him, and the general idea seems to be working out after four hundred. If he regretted having been ordained, so did lots of saints, and every time we find this it is an argument *ad hominem* proving that anyone who is ordained without vocation is in peril. And Vincent never denied his own biliousness and melancholia; way back in 1621 he was asking God to cure him of this “dry and harsh humour”.

As to his famous precept “to leave all to Providence”: when you know the different meanings he attached to that word there is no difficulty at all. We saw that the Pope was Providence when he wanted Edme Jolly at the Lateran, but there is also the case where the Pope and cardinals were inflexible against vows and this was not treated as the Lateran Palace issue but:

This is a cloud that will pass; the day will come when the company will be more acceptable and have more support, and those who will be able to do it good will have more charity for it than they have now. The Jesuits were thwarted quite a bit at the start under Paul IV who made them wear a cowl; they wore it, as a matter of fact, during his lifetime; but after his death they left it off, the new Pope being more favourable to them. Let us submit it to Providence; it will settle our affairs in its own time and in its own way (III 453-454).

Obviously Providence did not mean following the then Pope's idea! His attitude to negotiating with Rome was always that if the matter could not be settled one way then another petition could be presented in another way at some other time. And the climax is reached in his praise of Edme Jolly in 1658:

You are one of the few men who honour the Providence of God more *by the preparation of remedies against foreseen evils*. I thank you very humbly for this and pray our Lord that he continue to enlighten you more and more so that such enlightenment may spread through the company (VII 310).

Earlier that year he told him that success in the matter of getting a suitable house in Rome would be attributable, "after God", to him (VII 247). How far we are from the "Leave the whole thing to God" of his 1652 letter about Achille Le Vazeux (IV 346). And we are the sons of St Vincent, and he wants us to understand Providence like Edme Jolly and ward off foreseen evils, and honour Providence *that way!*

*A last word: would it be against "the primitive spirit"?*

Not if you distinguish between literal and spiritual primitive spirit. The literal idea of "the same kind of soutane, collar, beard, and rosary at the belt" has long since gone. The Duke of Orleans and Louis XIV met the CM Parish Priest of Fontainebleau in his queer soutane, and the Duke said: "Look at that beard" (They were called *barbichets*). The King said: "His tailor wasn't very successful that day". The Duke enlightened him: "It's not the tailor's fault; they insist on its being still so". But now no one has the rosary at his belt, and only the Italians have, they say, his collar, and if the French have his body the Spaniards insist that they have his spirit. But what remains to all? The spiritual interpretation of being *an un-noticed member of the clergy*. And anyone can write, or talk over the radio, so why can't the Vincentian priests advertise good works

and encourage youth to follow suit? The world badly needs everything that's good, and three hundred years have shown the value of Vincent's Congregation.

### *Conclusion*

We need not, and must not, try to be more Catholic than the Pope. Now, our Lord said once: "If they strike you on one cheek, turn the other", and yet when he was struck on the cheek what he did was to say: "If I have done wrong, show it; otherwise why strike me?". And his apostle, Paul, when struck said: "God will certainly strike you for this". Again, our Lord once said: "On mission, take nothing at all ...", as Vincent told Antoine Durand in 1656:

The Son of God when he sent out his apostles at the start recommended them not to bring any money; but later on ... he appointed a bursar (XI 350).

And so if they tell you that Vincent said: "leave it all to God" agree with them, and beg leave to add that he also:

Told a confrère to sound out a tailor and see if he wouldn't like to join us;

Had refused to pray for the Congregation for twenty years, but the gospel convinced him that he was wrong;

Told Fr Jolly that he had the right idea of honouring Providence by preparing against foreseen evils;

Prayed to our Lord that Fr Jolly's enlightenment might spread through the company.

# The Holiness of St Vincent de Paul

Patrick Collins

*(A sermon preached in St Peter's, Phibsboro, on 28 September 1987, as part of the celebrations for the 250th anniversary of St Vincent's canonisation)*

## *The universal call to holiness*

Two years ago I brought Cardinal McCann of Cape Town to Armagh. On the return journey I discovered that he had attended the whole of the Second Vatican Council. "What impressed you most during the Council?" I asked. After a pause His Eminence replied: "The fact that holiness is for everyone, not just for priests and nuns". I don't quite know why, but that reply left a deep impression on me. Since then I have often asked myself the question: "What is holiness, anyway?" I think I have found the makings of an answer in the letters of St Paul. A holy person is one who is "filled with the Spirit" (Eph 5:18) and who "walks by the Spirit" (Gal 5:25). Vincent de Paul was such a person. On the 250th anniversary of his canonisation we celebrate the triumph of God's grace in his life.

## *Vincent was filled with the Spirit*

Over the years Vincent was filled with the Spirit. It didn't happen overnight. He was ordained at the early age of nineteen. He had to cheat a little to make that possible. In many ways he was a typical young man. He immersed himself in the outer world, at the expense of his inner life. There is convincing evidence that he was insensitive to the deeper murmurings of his own heart and the cry of the poor around him. While he fulfilled his basic religious duties he was mainly preoccupied with getting a good well-paid job.

Then, over a period of about fourteen years, he suffered a number of painful setbacks. They began in his mid-twenties when he was a captive in North Africa, and ended with his three year battle with temptations against faith. These crises had a numbing effect. Vincent became disillusioned with his worldly ambitions. As he became increasingly aware of his own inner brokenness and the cry of the poor about him, he began

to have a deep desire for a revelation of God in his life.

The great thing about God is the fact that he always satisfies our wholehearted desire to experience him. Bit by bit Vincent had the power, in the words of St Paul, “to grasp the length and breadth, the height and depth, of the love of Jesus, which surpasses understanding” (Eph 3:18). But most of all Vincent became aware of the compassion of the Lord, whose mercy and love led him to share in the worst of our sufferings. As a result, he began to feel that compassion was the key to the motivation and ministry of Jesus. Speaking to his priests he was to say, in characteristic fashion:

Ah!, but the Son of God was tender of heart. I cannot help constantly turning my eyes to this model of love. He is called to visit Lazarus. He goes. Magdalene rises to meet him, weeping. The Jews follow and weep as well. What does the Lord do? He weeps with them, so loving and compassionate is he. This tender love was the cause of his coming down from heaven (XII 270-271).

So, Vincent considered that the Incarnation, the coming of Jesus, was motivated above all by compassion. I think he would have wholeheartedly agreed with a modern author who has written:

When Jesus was moved to compassion, the source of all life trembled, the ground of all love burst open, the abyss of God’s immense, inexhaustible and unfathomable tenderness revealed itself (H Nouwen: *Compassion*, p 17).

### *Vincent walked by the Spirit*

Whenever the Lord is revealed to a person’s heart as he really is that person has an inner desire to become for others what God has become for him. God was revealed to Vincent as compassion, so he had a growing desire to become compassionate, as the Father is compassionate (Lk 6:36). He wanted to imitate the Saviour by *proclaiming* and *demonstrating* the love of God, especially to the poor. This he began to do. But the dreams of his heart far exceeded his ability to fulfill them unaided.

He founded the Congregation of the Mission, since known as the Vincentians, to preach the good news to the poor of neglected parishes in rural areas. He told his priests that effective preaching would need a number of qualities. Firstly, the missionaries should preach only what God had first revealed to them in prayer. He said on one occasion:

We must receive from the Lord what should be communicated to our neighbour. Thus we follow the example of Jesus who learned from his Father what he spoke to the apostles and to the people who followed him (cf VII 156).

If we priests were to listen to this advice perhaps there would be a great silence in our pulpits! Could it be that the ineffectiveness of a good deal of our preaching is due to the fact that it is not inspired by God?

Secondly, Vincent said that missionaries should avoid high-faluting sermons. Instead, their approach should be clear, simple and practical. Finally, he said that missionaries should avoid all judgement, harshness or condemnation in their preaching. He wrote to one of his priests:

St Vincent Ferrer maintains that there is no way of profiting from preaching if one does not preach from the depths of compassion (I 536, English trans. I 526).

Together with his close friend St Louise de Marillac Vincent founded the Ladies of Charity, a part-time lay group, and the Daughters of Charity. These women were to demonstrate the compassion of God in works of mercy for the poor. Speaking to the Daughters on one occasion Vincent said:

You are destined to represent God's goodness towards these poor sick people. Now, since this goodness deals gently and lovingly with the afflicted, you too must behave towards the poor invalids just as his goodness teaches you, that is with gentleness, compassion and love; for they are your masters, and mine too (X 332).

St Augustine says that in a sacrament a word and a deed come together to make Christ present. This was Vincent's aim. His missionaries would proclaim the good news of God's love and compassion, the Daughters and the Ladies of Charity would demonstrate that love in works of mercy. Together they would reveal God's salvation to the poor.

### *The cry of the poor*

What might Vincent de Paul say, if he were alive today? I suspect that he would show how the poverty of twentieth century Ireland is very different from the poverty of seventeenth century France. I'm sure he would agree with Mother Teresa of Calcutta when she says that there are two famines in the world today. In the under-developed nations there is a famine of the belly, due to lack of food. In developed nations like

ours there is a famine of the heart, due to lack of love. Mother Teresa calls this the famine of lovelessness. Its victims are the “new poor” of our day.

As I travel around Ireland conducting missions I meet the new poor everywhere I go. From the middle class suburbs of Cork to the campsites of the travellers in Dublin the story is the same. Besides anxiety about the economic recession and unemployment many people suffer from lack of self-esteem and unresolved feelings of unworthiness and inadequacy. These painful feelings, the inner tooth-ache of the heart, can lead to anger and aggression. In my opinion this situation leads to Ireland’s three greatest problems: family breakdown, alcoholism and depression — the blue plague, as it is called, which quenches the flame of feeling in the heart. Tragically, as love is eclipsed so is the face of God. As a result, many of our people are in a state of spiritual desolation.

How will we help the poor of our day? It won’t be easy. As Mother Teresa has said, it’s relatively easy to end the famine of the belly. All its victims need is a bowl of rice, bandages for their wounds and a good cuddle. The problems of the victims of lovelessness go much deeper. In most cases they are psychological rather than material. As such they are harder to cope with.

To become witnesses of the God of compassion we will have to encounter that God, as St Vincent de Paul did, in our prayer. It begins by facing our own poverty and listening not only to the still sad music of our own hearts, but also to that of the people around us. As we express our feelings and desires to the Lord he will come to our aid. St Paul was so right when he wrote: “God comforts us in all our sorrows, so that we can offer others in their sorrows the consolation we have received from God ourselves” (2 Cor 1:4). Not only will the God of compassion be revealed to us in this kind of prayer, but like Vincent we will have both the desire and the power to show his compassion to the new poor of our day.

The victims of the famine of lovelessness need us to spend time with them, to offer them a listening ear and an understanding heart. It won’t be easy. Hurt people are often demanding, self-absorbed and unpredictable. But if we listen, if we stay with their sufferings while allowing ourselves to respond in a spirit of unconditional acceptance and love, great things can happen. Famine victims begin to accept and love themselves in a healing way. A few months ago I saw this happen.

I had given a talk entitled “Jesus our liberator” at a large conference. When I went backstage a middle-aged woman brought a teenage girl to see me. She was sixteen, pregnant, and had picked up AIDS from her boyfriend who was a drug addict. This famine victim had the saddest, most forlorn face I had ever seen. After speaking to her for a few

moments I placed my hands on her head and began to pray for her. As I sensed her brokenness and desperation I was flooded inwardly with a strong sense of compassion for this unfortunate girl. I had a conviction that Jesus was present, and that my love was but a pale reflection of his. As soon as this thought occurred to me I felt what seemed like a surge of energy passing through me to the girl. She got weak at the knees and sagged back into a seat. The Holy Spirit had fallen on her in power. After a few minutes I concluded the prayer. Then the girl looked up at me and asked: "Did God give you any message for me, Father?" "No". I replied, "but he gave me a strong sense of his love for you." The girl hesitated for a moment, then with incredulity and longing she said: "Do you mean that God really loves me?" With a lump in my throat and tears in my eyes I replied: "Yes, dear, of that I am absolutely sure". That was my outstanding moment of 1987. I had proclaimed the word of love, and tried to demonstrate it by means of compassionate listening. God did the rest by pouring out his grace. It enabled this young victim of the famine of lovelessness to hear the gospel for the first time.

### *Conclusion*

Somewhere author Brian Moore writes: "In the beginning was the word, and the word was no!" That is the experience of many of the new poor. But if we proclaim and demonstrate the love of God in a spirit of compassion they will be able to say: "In the beginning was the word, and the word was yes!", a giant yes of love from almighty God in the depths of their hearts, one that will evoke from them an answering yes of love. Compassion may not be enough. Many of the poor may need action for justice, and practical help. Compassion without action is sentimentality, while action without compassion is condescension. But compassion expressed in appropriate action is Emmanuel, God-with-us. It is the Vincentian way, a way of holiness.

# St Vincent's Ideas on Spiritual Direction

Thomas Davitt

*(Talk given in Damascus House, 24 November 1988)*

The first place we look for Vincent's considered opinion on anything in the area of spirituality is the Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission, as this is the only expression of his thinking which he specifically intended for printing. Paragraph 11 of chapter 10 reads as follows:

It is hardly possible to make progress in the spiritual life without the help of a spiritual director. So, unless a directee sometimes talks about the state of his interior life to his personal director, as he should, it is extremely difficult for him to reach a level of holiness appropriate for him. Each one of us, therefore, should with complete openness and due reverence give an account of his conscience to the superior, or someone assigned by him, in the manner customary in the Congregation. We should do this every three months, especially when on retreat, and as often as the superior thinks necessary.

Two comments are needed about that paragraph. First, it is not about sacramental confession. Next, the essential core of the paragraph has to be isolated, and distinguished from merely regulatory details. The essentials of the paragraph are:

- 1 It is hardly possible to make progress in the spiritual life without the help of a spiritual director;
- 2 A person must, therefore, go to his director at certain times, and be open and frank in talking to him;
- 3 One particularly suitable time would be during a retreat.

The regulatory details, which reflect the period at which this was written and which need not be followed today, are:

- 1 That a confrère goes for spiritual direction to the superior or to someone appointed by him;
- 2 That a standardised framework be used by everyone at sessions with a spiritual director;
- 3 That such sessions be held at mathematically regular intervals of three months.

This paragraph is in chapter 10. After the distribution of the printed rules on 17 May 1658 Vincent embarked on a series of conferences on each paragraph, starting at the beginning. However, on some Fridays he gave conferences on other topics. Because of this he did not reach chapter 10 before his death, so we do not have his own exposition of the paragraph on spiritual direction.

In pages 451 to 485 of Volume XII of the Coste set we have a list of the subjects dealt with by Vincent at the St Lazare conferences from 23 September 1650 until his death, and in most cases the three main points are also given. For most of these conferences we do not have the full text. Coste compiled these pages from two lists, one kept by Jean Gicquel and a much shorter one kept by René Alméras, though the two together do not make up a complete list of conferences for the ten years. From this list we learn that Vincent gave three conferences on spiritual direction during that period, in February 1653 (XII 462), on 10 April 1654 (XII 466) and on 27 November 1654 (XII 467). He spoke of the reasons why confrères should go for spiritual direction every month; by the time he got the rules printed five years later he had changed that to every three months. He spoke of how one can commit faults against this, and how to make proper use of such sessions. It is a great pity that we do not have the text of these conferences.

There is, however, one other conference which gives us something of Vincent's thinking on spiritual direction. In chapter 2 of the Common Rules paragraph 16 speaks of the danger of being misled by deceptions of the devil and of the need to be able to recognise and deal with such deceptions. It then says:

Experience has shown that the most effective and surest remedy in such cases is to discuss them as soon as possible with those appointed by God for this.

Since this paragraph occurs in chapter 2 Vincent did reach it in the series of conferences on the rules before his death. The conference on 17 October 1659 dealt with paragraph 16 of chapter 2.

Unfortunately he did not deal with the matter of seeking advice from a director, though he referred to it in passing three times. Pope Clement VIII was worried about how to deal with Henri IV, king of France and whether his subjects should be released from their obligation to serve him since he was a relapsed heretic. The pope's confessor told him that since he had approached the matter with all the prudence called for, and having taken advice and prayed a lot, he could be satisfied that he had reached the correct conclusion. Note in the middle of that the phrase "and having taken advice" (XII 348). (This, incidentally, is one of the references Vincent made to having seen Clement VIII. He died in 1605, so this causes a slight problem in the chronology of Vincent's early years). Later on he mentions the importance of going to either the superior or spiritual director, but not to anyone else, for advice either after committing some fault or if worried about whether some idea might be from the devil (XII 354).

The following Friday, 24 October, Vincent began the conference by saying that on the 17th he had not dealt sufficiently with paragraph 16 as he had not got around to talking about the "opening of the heart" in order to make one's illusions, faults and worries known to the superior. He said, though, that he would also take in paragraph 17, on letting the superior know about the faults of others. This point, in fact, was the one to which he gave most of the time, though he touched on the matter of direction once or twice. He said that a person who did not avail of direction was preventing himself from learning how to correct his faults. Not only that, he would, in fact, get worse. Later on he said that failings in the spiritual life were like pus, and the only cure was to lance the spot and let the pus out (XII 355-364).

Nowhere else in the conferences to the St Lazare community does he touch on the matter of spiritual direction, or communication. In a letter to Etienne Blatiron, superior in Genoa, dated 28 February 1653, Vincent refers to it as "so useful and necessary a practice" (IV 552). Ten years earlier, on 12 January 1643, he had said in a letter to Jean Guérin, superior in Annecy, that the community should be keen on this practice (II 355). Eighteen months before that, on 9 June 1641, he wrote to Jane Frances de Chantal, who was superioress in Annecy, and in the course of the letter thanked God that the confrères in Annecy went to her for spiritual direction (XV 27). This is interesting as it shows that Vincent was not rigid on the matter of going only to the local superior or another designated confrère for direction. It is also interesting in that he saw nothing wrong with a woman giving such direction. It would appear from a 1641 letter from Vincent to Louise that she also gave direction (II 190).

Finally, in an undated outline of a conference to ordinands, one of the

points Vincent made was that after the reception of orders they should have a spiritual director (XIII 142).

So far we have seen the importance Vincent attached to spiritual direction. Next we need to look at what he thought should be discussed between director and directee. In dealing with the importance of direction, in the references and quotations already used, we have seen some general ideas on this topic:

1. The directee should speak about his interior state. Vincent also uses the word "conscience" with the same meaning, but the context makes it clear that he is not speaking of sacramental confession;
2. The directee should learn from his director how to recognise and overcome deceptions suggested by the devil. Vincent also refers to these as "illusions";
3. The directee should talk with his director about temptations;
4. The directee should discuss "serious troubles"; I think "worries" might perhaps be the current word for this.

We can learn a bit more of what Vincent thought about direction from a few other sources. After a Repetition of Prayer in St Lazare on 1 August 1655 Vincent said that a recently deceased theologian used to make his annual retreat in St Lazare, and Vincent himself always dealt with him. During a session of direction Vincent asked him what his predominant passion was. So there we have a question which Vincent asked of a directee. The theologian's answer, as a matter of interest, was that he was from the north and people from the north did not have any serious passions. (XI 211-212).

Just three days later, on 4 August, after another Repetition of Prayer, Vincent again indicated some matters which should come up in spiritual direction. He said he was addressing his remarks specifically to the seminarists. They were overdoing their efforts at the spiritual life, trying too hard to feel the presence of God, adding special devotions, trying too hard to produce too frequent acts of different virtues. He said that we can never love God sufficiently but that although we are obliged to love God with all our heart and all our strength we must not make such extraordinary efforts at this that our health is affected. Beginners tend to make this mistake. Vincent then addressed the director of the seminaire, Fr Gabriel Delespiney, and told him to be on the lookout, during sessions of direction with the seminarists, for any tendencies towards

excess. He also told him to be on the lookout for the opposite, laxity in this area. Excess, he said, usually comes from pride or ignorance, and from trying to “feel” spiritual realities. Such people want to reach the heights of virtue all at once, and do not recognise human weakness. We must accommodate ourselves to the realities of human nature, since God has made us subject to it. We should trust God, be open with him and not worry so much (XI 215-223).

So far I have been dealing with what Vincent wrote and said about direction to the Congregation of the Mission. When we turn to the Daughters of Charity we come up against a problem. A set of rules was drawn up for them in 1645, but it is not clear how much of it is to be attributed to Vincent and how much to Louise. On 20 November of the following year, 1646, Jean François Paul de Gondi, coadjutor archbishop of Paris, approved the statutes of the Daughters. Again we cannot identify the precise input of Vincent or Louise. In neither document, though, is there reference to spiritual direction. Each document says that a sister is to go to the mother-house of the community and give an account of her work to the superior (XIII 555, 564).

In actual practice, though, it would seem clear from several things that Vincent wrote or said that some form of spiritual direction was practised, at least for some sisters. On 23 February 1650 Vincent wrote to Sr Jeanne Lepeintre in Nantes:

Spiritual direction is very useful; it is a source of advice when in difficulties, of help when discouraged, of safety when tempted and of strength when overwhelmed; finally, it is a source of benefit and consolation when the director is really charitable, prudent and experienced (III 614).

Perhaps the external communication to the superior about a sister's work did, in fact, merge into spiritual direction. In a conference to the Daughters on 2 February 1655 Vincent spoke of discussing temptations and worries with the superior, in addition to mentioning them in confession (X 73).

That the superior in question is not necessarily the local one comes out in something Vincent said in a conference on 6 January 1658. He told them to go to their superior and say:

Father, or Mademoiselle, I am bothered by this temptation; certain persons annoy me so much that I can't bear meeting them. What do you advise me to do? (X 444).

Later in the conference he said that Francis de Sales put into the

Visitation rules that if a superior was unable to deal with the direction of one of the nuns she was free to go to someone outside the order. Experience showed, however, that this brought more problems than it solved and Vincent himself advised Jane Frances de Chantal to change this, which she did (X 451).

Jacques de la Fosse, a thirty-nine year old confrère in Troyes, famous as a poet, orator and literary man, asked Vincent why the Congregation, which had a rule against ministry to nuns, was so involved with the Daughters of Charity. Vincent's answer is in a letter dated 7 February 1660. In the course of it Vincent mentions that the Daughters of Charity come to St Lazare once a month for spiritual direction and confession (VIII 239). It would seem that spiritual direction was given in confession and not separately. This also comes out in a conference to the Daughters on 17 November 1658 when Vincent said that when they go for direction to their confessor the main thing they should mention was what was causing them the most trouble, so that they could be given advice on how to deal with it (X 605-606).

Apart from the references to direction in confession and a few about direction by someone outside either community it is quite clear that for both communities Vincent regarded direction by the superior as the norm, and this is a point on which we have to part company with him. He is quite explicit at times that by being the director of members of his or her community the superior is helped in running the community, whether the Congregation as a whole or a local community. In the conference to the St Lazare community on 24 October 1659, from which I have earlier quoted, he said that a confrère who is worried by what might be illusions should discuss them with the superior. The reason he gives for this is that otherwise the confrère cannot have his situation corrected and will, in fact get worse. He then says that there is still another reason:

It is that this is the only way the superior has for properly running a community and for remedying the damage and mistakes caused by an individual member (XII 359).

He was equally explicit to the Daughters. In the conference on 2 February 1655, already referred to, he said:

You may say to me: "Oh, Father, but I've already told my confessor; why should I have to say it again to Mademoiselle?" That, of course, is all very well, but it is not enough. You must discuss it with your superiors because, as has been mentioned, otherwise they cannot exercise leadership (X 73).

We will now jump forward to the 19th century. Jean-Baptiste Etienne, the Superior General, dealt with “interior communication” in a circular letter of 21 April 1844. From what he says it is quite clear that he is thinking of straightforward spiritual direction. He refers to the paragraph of the Common Rules in which it is said that interior communication be made every three months to the superior or to another appointed for this. Etienne then goes on to say that superiors would be taking on “a frightening responsibility” if they insisted that this communication be made to themselves personally, because that could lead to the whole purpose of the rule being negated. Trust and openness are essential elements in direction, and, he asks, what superior can presume that each member of his community will have that trust and openness towards him? For this reason a superior must designate another confrère for this, as is envisaged in the rule; in larger communities several confrères are to be designated for this.

In 1897 Antoine Fiat, the then Superior General, circulated a printed collection of extracts from circular letters of earlier Superiors General, as well as from some of his own. Etienne’s circular of 21 April 1844 was included. The following year the Irish Provincial, Thomas Morrissey, decided to have this volume translated into English, the actual translation being done by the seminarists in Blackrock. Morrissey did not agree with part of Etienne’s April 1844 letter, and wrote to the Superior General on 9 November 1898 about it:

In a paragraph of the circular of Fr Etienne about interior communication he says that the local superior should appoint a director and that he should *encourage* members of the community to make their communication to that director. I beg your permission, Father, to omit this paragraph from the English translation. It seems to me, and to my consultors, that this paragraph will lead several confrères to omit making their communication. The superior will not know whether they make it or not. Besides, it is very useful that the confrères come at least four times a year to chat with the superior about their problems and to have their faults pointed out by him. It is a very good opportunity for the superior to correct his confrères.

If a confrère is not satisfied with the spiritual advice from his superior he can consult his confessor about what affects his soul.

The Superior General wrote “oui” across the top of Morrissey’s letter, and the paragraph was omitted from the printed English translation.

This, however, does not seem to have put an end to the matter in

Ireland. In 1906 Fr Fiat wrote two letters, dated 15 August, one to all the confrères of the Irish Province and one to the superiors of the Province. In the first mentioned letter he is countering an opinion that a recent Roman decree had put an end to the rule about interior communication. He points out that the relevant Roman Congregation had itself made it clear that the Decree in question applied only to congregations composed entirely of non-clerics. He then states: "The rule about communication therefore retains all its force, as well as the other rules, and must be observed faithfully". In his letter to the superiors Fiat stressed the importance of their role in receiving communication. He conceded that a superior could delegate another confrère but that he should not do so "without reason". Fiat would appear to be trying to maintain a balance between what the Common Rules, and Etienne, say about such delegation and Morrissey's decision to omit the relevant passage from Etienne's circular.

Things have changed since the days of Thomas Morrissey, and in the new Code of Canon Law can. 630, par. 1, says:

Superiors are to acknowledge the freedom due to the members concerning the sacrament of penance and the direction of conscience.

# Why Directed Retreats?

Francis Murphy

*(Revised version of talk given in Damascus House  
23 November 1988)*

Why do a directed retreat? My own answer to that came through hearing Daughters of Charity in Nigeria talking about how valuable they found directed retreats. Their enthusiasm provoked my curiosity. When they said they had spent eight days without any talks, and prayed for three to four hours a day on passages of scripture, I felt very frightened and wondered if I would be able to manage one. I decided that if they could do it then I could. I did one a few weeks before I finally left Nigeria in 1977. (A directed retreat at a time of transition can be a very helpful experience). I found the retreat very personal, and it helped me in exactly the way I needed guidance at that moment in my life. I was being given a year to study after leaving Nigeria but was undecided what to do. During the retreat I decided that this was what I would like to do. It was then I discovered the term “spirituality”, and that new centres were starting all over the United States and Europe to cope with the demands of a changing world and a changing Church.

At the same time, in Damascus House, Brian Doyle had decided to put on a directed retreat for Daughters of Charity the following summer and asked me to join the team.

When the retreat took place in the summer of 1978 I was amazed at the effect it had in the lives of the sisters who participated. Sisters who wanted God and who were prepared to pray each day on scripture and meet their director to make what was known, in our Vincentian tradition, as repetition of prayer, found it a marvellous experience of the God of surprises! Since then, almost all the retreats I have directed have been in this style. It was only when faced with preparing a paper for this seminar on “Our Spirituality Now” that I reflected on the question: Why directed retreats?

Throughout history it is clear that there is one Christ who is the fount and source of all our relationship with God. But there are many ways of coming to know Christ, many spiritualities. A directed retreat is one

way which many have found helpful, but it is not for everybody. In a changing world and in a changing Church a directed retreat has given many people an experience of prayer and of relationship with Christ which has transformed their lives and given them an anchor to enable them to move out of the certainty of familiar ways towards uncertain ways. It has led them to grow in trust and hope in a God who cannot be contained in our limited human thinking.

A directed retreat doesn't mean having to change gear into another spirituality which is alien and different. You come to a directed retreat with your own spirituality as it has developed. It enriches and deepens your natural spirituality. If you have not already discovered what is your unique way of relating to God then this kind of retreat will help you do just that. The focus of a directed retreat is your relationship with the person of Jesus Christ, and where Jesus is leading you by his Spirit, and what blocks you may be putting in the way of answering his call.

The following are some of what I would consider the great values of the directed retreat:

1. Some form of spiritual direction is a necessity for most people at some time in their lives, e.g. when in formation; at a time of crisis; when facing a difficult decision; when involved in directing others. Spiritual direction, as someone said, is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. A directed retreat gives a person a very intense experience of spiritual direction. He has the privilege of being able to talk of his experience of God over a period of eight days. It is a rare opportunity for anyone in community or lay life to have such a gift. In doing this he can come to see more clearly what God is saying to him, where He is leading him, and what blocks he is putting in the way of that. By going deeper into himself he comes closer to God.

2. In talking out the experience I begin to own and accept the experience as mine. Until I verbalise, write, paint, etc., an experience I may miss the point of it and gain nothing from it. T S Eliot said: "We had the experience but missed the meaning".

3. Most people have little difficulty in seeing God in the nice and pleasant moments of their experience. Equally so, most people find great difficulty in finding God in the dark and painful areas of life. With the help of God's grace and a good director they are helped to enter into these areas and find him there. They come to see that what they are avoiding is, in fact, their unique spirituality and their way of relating to

God. A directed retreat has the effect of taking the spotlight off me and my pain and focussing on the person of Jesus. Having focused on the person of Jesus and got to know his attitudes I am enabled to return to the pain and see it in a new way.

4. A directed retreat gives me the confidence to trust my own experience. It helps me to take responsibility for my own life and to become inner directed. Our understanding of obedience has developed a lot. In the past we felt that it was only in doing what the rule said, or what our superior indicated, that we found God's will. God's will is also to be found in our own experience of life. In today's world and Church we have to take much more responsibility for listening to God in our own lives. Obedience is more collaborative and consultative, and less authoritarian and imposed. Many priests and sisters are lost in today's Church because they still want everything clear cut. They say: "Tell me what to do, and I will do it; but don't ask me to discuss it or talk about it any more". When told, they can be free to bitch about it because it was not their decision! We are now being asked to be adults and to take much more responsibility before God for our own lives. This is a difficult and threatening thing for many, and a directed retreat can be a very gentle introduction to learning to do this.

5. A directed retreat can be a marvellous way of helping us "let go control" and come back to a trust in the living God at work in our experience. For God to work, to get a chink in our armour of defence, the best place is to be out of control! It may not *feel* right. But now we are in a place where we can no longer trust in our nice prayer life, our faithful observance of our spiritual exercises, our good and spiritual feelings and thoughts, our success as a priest, sister, teacher, preacher. It is a dangerous thing to fall into the hands of the living God, and we all resist it.

6. This form of retreat is a good way of growing in self-knowledge and helps me to make better decisions, ones that are more in keeping with what God wants rather than coming from my own best wisdom. In growing in self-knowledge I come to know the deep defences and resistances that I have built up. All this happens slowly and gradually, and God deals with each of us very personally during a directed retreat, and never asks us to go further than we are able to go at this moment. St Augustine asked the question: "How do we hear God after we cry out to him for guidance?" His answer was that although God answers clearly

all do not hear clearly. All ask what they wish, but do not always hear the answer that they wish. That man is your best servant who is not so much concerned to hear from you what he wills, as to will what he hears from you.

7. Finally, a directed retreat is a school of prayer. In it we may learn to pray from scripture for the first time. This can be a very enriching experience. Whom do you pray to? What does he look like? Image is very important in prayer, otherwise prayer may become an exercise in self-absorption. At times it is right to cease to use scripture or images and to let God do the work, to stop the hard work of rowing a boat and let the wind in the sails move it along effortlessly, as St Vincent explained to us. A perceptive director can be an invaluable help to enable us to recognise when it is right to respond to God in a more imageless prayer.

Someone said that a preached retreat is “a lazy man’s retreat”. This may be a bit harsh, but it is very easy to sit back, be passive, and let the preacher do all the work. I can remain untouched and passive, and live from talk to talk, feel good after it, and do nothing about it. In a directed retreat there is no escape! I have to meet my director each day, and he will sense if I am talking from the top of my head and that no real meeting with God is happening. Praying is hard work, and wrestling with God can be a very tiring experience. Prayer is what God does in me, and He can do a lot if I am willing to trust Him.

One of the essential differences between a preached retreat and a directed retreat is to be found in the theology of revelation. The preached retreat can be said to be based on a theology of revelation coming from the First Vatican Council. God has spoken in past events and through messengers. His revelation culminated in Jesus Christ and with the apostles. The aim of the preached retreat, then, is to give knowledge and help people to accept God’s outer word, and the timeless truths that have been revealed. The method used is that of talks, conferences, discussions and meditation.

The model of the personalised directed retreat is based on a theology of revelation developed at the Second Vatican Council. It sees God’s revelation from a personal viewpoint, from his inner spoken word in my heart. Revelation is seen *not only* as a past event but as experienced in myself, in my inner depths and in the community I am part of. It is not simply doctrinal, but inspirational and capable of transforming our hearts. The method used in this kind of retreat is that one prays for three or four periods a day, usually on scripture, and then talks each day to the

director about what is happening or not happening. It is characterised by a great sensitivity and reverential restraint on the part of the director to the inner dialogue that is going on between the person doing the retreat and God. God is *the* director, and the initiative lies with God! Fr Torn O'Flynn said to me, when I asked him for advice on my becoming a spiritual director for the first time, in All Hallows, that a good director "always keeps half a step behind the Holy Spirit".

This kind of retreat is based on the theological presupposition that God is alive and present in our experience and everyday living. This was the experience of the Jewish people as they saw Him at work in their history, in the social and political events that made up their experience. It was only later that a static image of God took over and we began to concentrate on revealed truths. This had the effect of making us feel very secure and certain. We were then called to be "perfect", and the way of Christian perfection was presented to us as the ideal. This led to a lot of guilt, scrupulosity and discouragement. Thank God for Thérèse of Lisieux who had the courage and simplicity to say she was unable to go this complex road of all that was required to be perfect. She saw herself as a little child, able only to trust in the love of her Father in heaven for her. "What pleases Him", she said, "is to see me love my littleness and poverty, the blind hope I have in His mercy". It is no wonder that millions have found in her the freedom and liberation to find the true God.

A second theological presupposition is that God is present in and through our human nature, that the Incarnation is continuing in you and me today. Christ continues to be born, to live, to suffer and to die in me each day. I can help that continue, or I can block it. This is a call to take seriously the experiences we have, particularly the negative ones. Can you find God in your feelings of anger, envy, resentment, failure, pain, hurt, rejection, loneliness, unimportance, fear, or in your sexual longings for intimacy with another man or woman, or any ambivalence and ambiguity in your desire? "God could never love and accept me with these feelings", we say. Yet we are in relationship with Christ who "has been tempted in every way that we are ... He too lives in the limitations of weakness" and who cried out "with loud groans and tears" to be saved from the pain he faced. The way forward for all of us is in and through whatever it is that I am experiencing. This is *my way* to God. It is my unique spirituality. Paul had his own thorn in the flesh and he did not like it and cried out three times to the Lord for Him to save him, but he experienced God saying to him: "My grace is enough for you; my power is at its best in weakness". But so often we say, think and hope

that when things get better, when we are “perfect”, then we can relate to God and he will accept me. How blind we have become to the way God works and to the simplicity of relating to Him as a child, with a blind hope in His mercy.

In ten years of directing people the single biggest difficulty that I have come across is lack of self-acceptance, a failure to be able to love oneself, and consequently not being able to believe that God loves me as I am. I think that I will be loved only when I am perfect — which will never happen in this life! Jesus said that we have “to love our neighbour as ourselves”. Unless I believe that I am lovable, and accept that God loves me unconditionally, then I will be unable to love others and die to self in a truly free way. So often we love others so that we will feel good ourselves and paper over the bad feelings that we experience. We give in order to get.

To be a director in a personally directed retreat is a demanding relationship. The director has to be prepared to stand with and journey with a person who may have to work through unhealed memories, bereavement, anger, bitterness, ambivalence in their sexuality, etc. There is no easy solution usually, but in listening to someone over the time of a retreat the director can give a directee the greatest gift he can give — the conviction and faith that *God will act* in him if he wants him to. If he comes wanting God and prays, then God will reveal himself to him, and very often in ways never even dreamt of. To give this faith and trust a director must first have come to it himself.

A directed retreat can be very helpful to enable me to come to know myself and my own resistances. Priests in particular can be very fearful of coming to know themselves and learning to live with ambiguity and uncertainty in themselves. We have been trained with our mind, to use our head, and the head likes certainty and clarity. It is no wonder that one of the cries that went up from the Task Forces in preparation for the forthcoming Convocation of the Irish Province was in this area: What are we to do? Where are we going? How do we do it? We were asked to “be”, and to feel and to talk about our experiences, and let God reveal Himself in our unsureness and confusion and lack of clarity. I think those who trusted that process found Him. God waits for us to be out of control to be able to enter and meet us in the depths of our being. The tragedy is that whenever a chink opens we do our best to shore it up and get back in control and successfully keep God out. A directed retreat can be a great help in learning to trust the living God at work in our experiences.

Pope John Paul II listed St Vincent de Paul as one of the great directors

of souls, and said that “he was up to date” in regard to the spiritualities of his time. Vincent looked around, and used what he experienced as helpful. It is curious that the strongest critics of directed retreats are people who have not made one themselves. Fear and unfreedom are an awful scourge in the Church. I would recommend everyone at least to try a directed retreat. It may not be for you. But at least then you can talk from your own experience and might gain the inner freedom to be able to allow others to do something that might be helpful for them. A directed retreat is one of the many ways which some people find helpful as a means to enable them to grow in relationship with Christ.

# Forum

## **Provincials' Meeting, Rio de Janeiro, June-July 1989.**

I had never been to South America. My visit for the meeting of Provincials was a short one – three weeks. Here are a few random impressions.

The meeting was very good. We were reviewing the *Lines of Action* of the last General Assembly, and spent much time sharing what was being done in the different provinces under the headings of Evangelization of the Poor, Formation for Mission and Community for Mission. The *Lines of Action* were designed to focus the attention of the Community world-wide on these three crucial areas for animating the life of the provinces. There was general consensus, especially among the old-timers, that the *Lines of Action* had brought about a tremendous unity among the different provinces.

Talks were given by various confrères on certain aspects of Evangelization, Formation and Community for Mission. We had two days with Brother Panini, a Marist from Brazil, on drawing up a Provincial Plan, a Community Plan, and a personal project. The personal project was new for me. We also had talks on the function of Provincial Councils, preparing for Provincial Assemblies, the role of the Provincial according to the mind of St Vincent, and we looked ahead to the General Assembly of 1992. Inputs were usually followed by sharing in the different language groups, and then a general sharing in the whole group, with a translation facility in operation. Overall, it was a very good experience of on-going formation.

On a lighter note, the Provincial in Rio organised a number of trips which were most enjoyable. These included a Brazilian night of music and dance, an afternoon's cruise on Rio harbour (courtesy of the Brazilian navy), a school pageant on the history of slavery in Brazil, and a visit to the shrine of Our Lady.

One of the highlights of the visit was the eucharist concelebrated with Bishop Helder Camara. He is a frail man now, with a powerful message and a powerful voice. He talked about 2,000 years of Christianity, which will have been completed in eleven years' time, and wondered what that had achieved, or had not achieved. He talked about the arms race and the scandal of amassing a huge number of weapons when half of

the money could solve overnight the problems of poverty in the world. He refused to talk about poverty anymore. He said the situation now in many countries was one of misery rather than poverty. He assured us that there was no place in the Church for pessimists, that the death and resurrection of Jesus filled us with hope, in spite of the difficulties. He displayed, very obviously, a great love for St Vincent and his charism, and also a great love for St Vincent's sons and daughters. He is now retired and was made an affiliate member of the Congregation a few years ago. He lives with the Daughters of Charity in Recife.

Rio itself is a beautiful city. A visit to the Corcovado on a lovely sunny afternoon, where the statue of Christ the Redeemer looks out over the city, left me in no doubt that it was one of the most beautiful cities I had ever seen. A visit to the Sugar Loaf, another high mountain overlooking Rio, confirmed my initial reaction. There are skyscrapers, there are green mountains, and, in between, there is the sea, with five beautiful beaches.

As we travelled down the mountain in the chair-lift I reflected on the way the beauty of the city from a distance masked the appalling poverty which is ever present and is always obvious.. No matter where one went in Rio one was conscious of the shanty town perched precariously on the side of the hills. Walking along the streets one became aware of great riches and great poverty, side by side, in close proximity. The open sewers at the foot of luxury flats and high-rise buildings were a constant reminder of the contradictions and inconsistencies in society. The ever-present and glaring graffiti, many of them of a political nature, gave one food for thought about the volatility and violence in the political scene. I travelled on the underground and in the buses. The underground is very efficiently run, and spotlessly clean. But it runs in a straight line, from one rich area to another, and touches not at all the *favellas* on the mountain slopes.

I was struck, too, by the huge cathedral in Rio, capable of seating twenty thousand people. There were fifty people at mass, with the bishop presiding, on the Sunday when we visited. Yet the people in the high-rise flats round about were practically all Catholics. This gave me a further insight into the problems of the Church in South America, and I understood the reason for the basic Christian communities a bit better.

What was achieved? There was a unity and a togetherness which were very supportive. It was consoling to know that most of the provinces share the same problems, shortage of vocations, shortage of personnel, the need for collaborative ministries, and adapting to a changing Church. The meeting gave me a world perspective which was

most encouraging. It's always good to have the mind focussed on new horizons. Fr McCullen and the curia in Rome have promised a reflection on the meeting which will be sent to the provinces in due course. A Meeting of European Provincials in Paris on April 19, 20 and 21, 1990, and a meeting of formation personnel in Zaire on April 23, 24 and 25 to look at Vincentian formation in Africa, are some of the fruits of our get-together.

My thanks are due to the Daughters of Charity (our meeting was held in their motherhouse) and to the confrères, especially Fr José Pires de Almeida, for their warm hospitality and kindness. It was a truly memorable experience.

Mark Noonan

### **Taking the plunge: Hull 1966**

Within a few days of entering the seminary I began to see a real purpose in my life, a meaning that had been absent before. The studies, the manual work, the prayers, the community life: all led to the goal of the priesthood. Only in my final year, however, when we had been ordained deacons, were we actually sent out on a real mission. It was the first time that students of the Irish Province were sent out on any sort of pastoral work. It was Easter Week of 1966 when we four Vincentians, Joe McCann, Jim McCormack, Paddy Walsh and myself, took a plane from Dublin to Leeds-Bradford to join with a Legion of Mary group for a week's missionary work in a parish in Hull. This kind of mission was called *Peregrinatio pro Christo*, Adventuring for Christ or, perhaps, On Pilgrimage for Christ, a term used by the Celtic monks like St Brendan, who sailed out in their currachs to find new people for Christ.

We had sailed through the sky in an aeroplane and then we found ourselves travelling in a bus through a smoky industrial landscape to the centre of Leeds. It was my first time ever outside Ireland and I immediately felt alienated by the drabness and unfamiliarity of our surroundings, not improved by a steady drizzle of fine, wet mist and a heavy, overcast sky.

We had some hours to spend in Leeds before getting our train for Hull so we wandered up to the cathedral where a young priest immedi-

ately recognised us as students for the priesthood. We were surprised at this because we were dressed in our best shirts and ties, but why should four young Irishmen suddenly appear at Leeds cathedral on a Sunday afternoon and take such a keen interest in what was happening there? As we chatted with the priest a man came up and said: “Excuse me, please, is there a toilet here?” I thought: “This is it! The secular world! Imagine looking for a toilet in the church! This is the only use he sees in the church. This is what we will be up against in our mission”. I kept these thoughts to myself, however, being unwilling to admit my own nervousness at that early stage.

When we arrived in Hull the curate of the parish met us at the railway station and drove us to the presbytery, where we met the other members of the team. All belonged to the Legion of Mary. All were Irish except one Frenchman called Jean-Max. The English Legionaries from the parish took part in the mission when they were free to do so. A Dublin girl in her early twenties led the team for the week. The young Irish curate who had met us at the station made us very welcome in the presbytery, but it wasn't he who had invited the team. The priest who had invited us was flying back to Dublin as we flew out. He wanted to attend the 50th anniversary celebrations of the Easter Rising of 1916. We all felt disappointed at this news, but it did little to dampen our nervous enthusiasm to get going with the mission.

And so the pattern of the days was set: mass in the parish church each morning, visiting house to house, and a meeting each day which consisted of prayer, spiritual reading and reports and discussions about the work.

What we see here is the mobilisation of lay-people for the work of the gospel. Frank Duff, the Legion's founder, aimed very deliberately at this objective from the moment he started. He didn't want lay-people to be confined only to charitable works, prayer, family life and church practices. He wanted them to speak about their faith. He believed in a new vision of the Church, the vision of an active, apostolic laity — and this in the difficult conditions of the city of Dublin in the year 1921. The Vatican Council of 1962-65 has deepened and broadened this new vision of the Church (which is really a very old vision, to be found all over the New Testament) (1).

The Legion of Mary's leadership incorporates laity, priests and religious together, asking of the priests and religious a leadership in teaching and speaking the Word of God. What the world will see from this, therefore, is not just a priest giving witness on his own as if he were in himself the complete representative of Christ (*alter Christus*), but the

Church community giving witness together and showing themselves to be the body of Christ in this world. In this view of the Church all the gifts of our people can flourish:

There are varieties of gifts,  
but the same Spirit;  
and there are varieties of service,  
but the same Lord;  
and there are varieties of working,  
but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one.  
To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit  
for the common good.

I Corinthians 12:4-7.

When the priest actually believes all this he finds the business of “attending meetings” becomes praying, witnessing, learning and growing in friendship together. So it was for our group in Hull. We became a “little Church” for that week. When there are no prayerful, reflective meetings the pattern of the factory takes over: “You do this and I’ll do that; you say your prayers and I’ll say mine; what matters is to get the job done”. Production, results, money, buildings, schools, numbers in church — getting the job done! And forgetting that the real job is to become the body of Christ in this world.

With courage and fear, and relying on the grace of God and our mutual support, our little group went out onto the streets of Hull, a mixed bag of various kinds of fish, young and not so young, widowed and single, clerical and lay. Two by two we sallied forth armed with some cards for the Catholic Enquiry Centre in London in case we met anybody who wanted a correspondence course of instruction in the Catholic faith. A vicious east wind cut at us from the North Sea. Sometimes it was accompanied by hail and sleet. As I had never experienced such cold before I was learning something about leaving one’s native land and coming into the land that the Lord would show me.

I learned a lot more than that. Although more than twenty years have passed since that first mission, and I have taken part in all kinds of other works since then, I still carry some of those vivid first impressions as if they had happened only yesterday: having a religious discussion with my first live Moslem; climbing up to an attic room and meeting a convinced Anglican Christian from Lagos, Nigeria; my first time negotiating a tower block of flats; the lady who welcomed us by saying: “Yes, I believe in God and the Queen and nice things like that!”, while

her gentleman friend said: “I’m a hedonist, myself”; a man who felt so guilty about his marriage outside the Catholic Church that he always stayed at the very back of the church during mass — after our discussion he began to see his way to reconciling with the Church again, and his wife was agreeable also.

Door to door we went, offering to speak of our beliefs to anybody who wanted to listen. We sometimes discovered Catholics who were not known to the priests in the parish. Most people were quite happy to see us and though we met some indifference we didn’t experience much real hostility, just an occasional door closed in our faces. Nine out of ten people in Hull were not Catholics, but we found that many of the Anglican and Methodist believers expressed great happiness to see us going around giving witness to our faith. None of us were expertly trained, but we adopted a friendly, open approach and we prayed a lot even as we rang the doorbells hoping for a friendly response.

Of course when you stand on an unknown doorstep you can feel very defenceless. You possess no rights on the person who opens that door. You are poor and can be spurned from the door in mid-sentence. Your head may tell you that the carpenter from Nazareth got a lot worse treatment than that, but your bruised feelings tell you to give up, retire to the safety of your home, or of an office, meet people in the security of the Catholic institutions where “the work can be better organised” and where, in fact, Church-people possess all the power. The same temptation applies on the foreign mission field where some missionaries can spend years in a country without ever mixing with the people in their villages and homes. How easily we retreat into our houses, schools, churches, hospitals, offices, clubs, convents, our territory, our pad. And do we always travel in the security of “our car” so that we never have to rub shoulders with the masses? Meanwhile, Jesus walked the roads and streets quite unprotected, uncushioned from the beggars, the blind, the contentious jostling of the scribes and Pharisees. He possessed no buildings or institutions at all. Yet he seemed to do a fairly good job — of loving people, that is.

It seems that the communists can also suffer from this same temptation to hide behind their party structures and privileges. Solzhenitsyn describes the successful communist party-man, Pavel, gradually rising from being a factory worker to being an important person (a party official) and the effect that had on his behaviour:

Gradually with the years he and his wife developed an aversion to teeming human beings, to jostling crowds. They found trams,

buses and trolley-buses quite disgusting. People were always pushing, especially when they were trying to get aboard. Insults were always flying around... So they gradually changed over to motor-cars – first office-cars and taxis, and then their own. They found it quite unbearable, of course, to travel in ordinary railway carriages or even in reserved seats where people crammed in, wearing sheepskin coats and carrying buckets and sacks... They loved the People, their great People. They served the People and were ready to give their lives for the People. But as the years went by they found themselves less and less able to tolerate actual human beings, those obstinate creatures who were always resistant, refusing to do what they were told and, besides, demanding something for themselves ... So they became wary of people who were badly dressed, impudent, or even a bit drunk ... A badly dressed man was always dangerous because it meant he lacked a proper sense of responsibility... (2).

From what I have described of our mission some important elements appear:

1. We became a team of prayer, work, sharing meals and conversation together, a team of men and women, lay and clerical, in short, a little church.
2. We approached everybody, regardless of their beliefs or lack of them, and we offered to tell them about the Catholic Church.
3. We allowed ourselves to be poor and defenceless on the doorsteps of people's houses, allowing them the freedom to decide whether they would listen to us or not.

These elements seem very important to me. They contrast with an attitude of domination and indoctrination, of manipulation and power-play into which it is too easy to fall. But when we allow ourselves to experience the mission on the streets as Jesus did, then we can bring back into our institutions the fresh flavour of his life-giving truth.

*Notes*

1. Thus St Paul to the Christians of Corinth: "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the Church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues" (1 Cor 12:27-28). Or 1 Pet 2:9: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light".
2. *Cancer Ward*, Penguin Books 1971, p. 212.

Bill Clarke

### **Wormwood Scrubs, Summer 1989.**

"He sent me to bring the good news to the poor,  
Tell prisoners that they are prisoners no more".

I have been asked to write about my work in Wormwood Scrubs prison, to write about what my work entailed and what I gained from the experience.

On going to the Scrubs I was going as the fourth consecutive Vincentian student to spend a summer there. I spent about six weeks in total, a four week stint before Convocation and two weeks after. I worked there from 8.30 to 5.00, Monday to Friday, and came in on Sundays to share their liturgy with them.

Wormwood Scrubs is one of the best known prisons in the English Prison Service, and also one of the oldest. It is a Category A prison, which means that it is of maximum security. It has housed some of the most wanted and notorious criminals over the last century. It has a capacity of well over 1,200 prisoners but at present houses around 1,000. Over the last few years they have begun to transfer the more "dangerous" prisoners to other prisons. The RC Chaplaincy in the prison is one of the best in the Prison Service. It consists of Fr Hugh Sinclair, a priest from the diocese of Birmingham, and Sr Agnes Hunt, who is the assist-

ant chaplain. Hugh has been in the job now over three years, whereas Agnes has been “inside” nearly twelve. Between them they have seen many come and go, but I think that all who have left their care have left being touched by their love and kindness. The Chaplaincy is also helped by another priest, two sisters and a couple of lay people.

In preparing to go inside I read Mgr Dick Atherton’s book *Summons to Serve*, a book that touched me in a very special way and one that gives a good insight into Prison Ministry.

Upon entering the grounds of the prison you can only be struck by the security, the cameras, the high walls, the fences, the huge doors, and the officers. Once you enter through the gates you are in another world. A whole blanket of security permeates the place; but it is amazing how you get used to it.

My day began at 7.40, leaving Mill Hill in order to be at East Acton Underground station by 8.30. I started work by going through any unfinished business from the previous day and checking the list of new receptions to find Catholics. We were not allowed on the Wings until 9.30, after the prisoners had had breakfast and had “slopped out”. I had until 11.30 to see the new receptions, either those convicted or those remanded. With each I introduced them to the RC Chaplaincy and told them of our services. Usually they would want me to telephone someone to let them know that they had been “nicked” and to ask them to visit. Usually by 11.30 I would have seen them all. As well as seeing the receptions I would make any “call-backs” from the previous day. Usually walking along the Wings brought me extra custom. I could be asked for anything from a bible to a phone call. At times I felt like a telephonist.

At 11.30 the men were given their dinner, and allowed to “slop out” at 1.00. I spent from 11.30 to 1.30 on the phone or doing any other needed administration, and having lunch. We were allowed back on the Wings from 1.30 to 4.30. In this afternoon period I tried to get to see all those who put in applications to see me, and to visit my usuals. I spent this time going from cell to cell and person to person, taking them in whatever mood I found them. By 4.30 supper was beginning to be served so it was time to return to the office, usually to the phone.

I preferred my work with the convicted men because they were usually permanent and didn’t want me just to make telephone calls for them. Not that all the remanded were interested only in the phone, but a large majority were. So, with the convicted men there was an opportunity for deep sharing and friendship. It was with these men, especially the lifers who were facing a minimum of 12 to 15 years in prison, that I

really learned about prison. I learned about their pasts, their crimes and about how they were coping with their sentences. I found myself with many broken men, men who felt that they were the rubbish of society. On one occasion a lifer said that he had noticed that the size of the “run” for each guard dog was three times the size of his cell. This led him to the question: “Which one of us is the animal, the dog or me?” This comment struck me very forcibly. It made me wonder which is the bigger crime, the crime the prisoner committed or the crime of locking him away for a sizeable portion of his life.

Spending this time with the men was very fruitful. I became friends with a few and was touched by their brokenness. I felt the power of the Lord was very present in the prison, especially with these men. I found very strong faith with many of them, and hope there too. After spending time sharing their highs and lows I always left the prison very thankful, thankful for having been there but more thankful for being free to go home. With every lifer I talked to I was touched by the knowledge that they were facing nearly a quarter of their lives in prison, in a cell six feet by three, and some of them would die in prison.

A prisoner has to share a cell with another prisoner, (in some prisons there are up to four in a cell), unless he is either a lifer or in a job. They could spend up to 23 hours a day in their cells, only being allowed to “slop out” three times a day, since there is no running water in any of the cells. Those who are convicted can have more freedom if they have some sort of a job within the prison. Once convicted they are allowed to write two letters a week and receive two visits a month. All letters, whether incoming or outgoing, are censored. The visit can last between 30 minutes and two hours, depending on staff and the number of visits taking place.

I am conscious that I have been painting a very dark picture of prison, and it is very dark, but there is one place in the prison that I see great light. They call it The Annexe. It houses about thirty men, each addicted to either drink or drugs, but each striving to overcome his addiction. It is a place of great hope, where officers call men by their Christian names rather than by their surname and number, and where the men call the officers by their Christian names too. The men go under therapy, at group and individual level. Each man supports the others to fight their addiction. Every time I entered The Annexe I could sense this hope and concern for each other, and every time I left it I left with hope for the Prison Service.

In my time in the Scrubs I have met a wide variety of people, people who have committed many different crimes from murder to petty theft.

I have met people who will spend most of their lives inside, and others who should never have been sent to prison in the first place. But after my time there three things struck me: the high proportion of Irish and black men in prison; the very high proportion of drink-related offences; and the wide use of the legal term “conspiracy” in the British justice system.

I could write for pages about my experience in the Scrubs but I’m trying to give only a glimpse of what it was like. To put the goal of the Prison Ministry in words I would think it would be like this: “It is to try to set prisoners free, free of their pasts, of their hurts, free of their crimes, in order for them to go forward with hope and return no more”. I would like to encourage all confrères to get involved with prisoners if the opportunity arises. I know I gained much more from the experience than I ever imagined I would.

John Murray

## Miscellanea

### **The Strange Case of Bernard Regan**

The first necrology of the Irish Province was printed by Jerome Twomey in his *Book Notes* 11:2, the summer issue of 1978. Under the date of 4 April he had: Bernard Regan, student, Blackrock, 1908. In November 1984 I brought out an up-dated second edition. One reaction to the second edition was that a number of confrères asked me to include in any subsequent editions the age of confrères at the time of their death.

For consistency I decided I would give the age reached by each man on the birthday preceding his death. This meant going through the Register of Entries and checking the day and month of his birth; earlier editions of the Catalogues gave only the year. When I looked for the date of Regan's birth I found that he did not appear at all in the Register. I thought that this might be a mere oversight, as any register is only as good as the assiduity of those who compile it, and leaving a name out of a list is a very easy thing to do, as any archivist, necrologist or editor knows only too well. There are, however, other documents, drawn up by persons different from each other and from those who filled in the Register of Entries, in which all confrères should appear: the Minutes of the Provincial Council, recording acceptance for the Congregation; the Soin of Seminaire's list of new seminarists; and, finally, as the necrology described Regan as a student, the Minutes of the Domestic Council in Blackrock and the Minutes of the Provincial Council recording acceptance for vows. Regan does not appear in any of these documents.

This made it quite clear that Regan was not a member of the Irish Province. On the tombstone in Dean's Grange he is listed, with the others exhumed in September 1977 from the cemetery in the old St Joseph's, as Bernard Regan CM, aged 21. I wrote to John Hurley, who entered St Joseph's only eight years after Regan's death, to ask whether he had any recollection of hearing anything about Regan, but he did not recall anything about him. Some other senior confrères also had no recollection of ever hearing anything about him.

If he was not a student of the Irish Province what was the most likely place to look for evidence about him? The first place that occurred to me was Panningen, in Holland. I knew that around that time three Irishmen had joined the Congregation there with a view to going to China: Denis Nugent in October 1907, Michael McKiernan in February 1908 and James Feely in August 1909. I thought that perhaps he had gone there and then had returned to Ireland through illness and been buried in St Joseph's when he died. I wrote to Panningen and once again received a negative reply; no news of Regan there.

I next thought I might get some background information if I could get his death certificate. I went in to the General Register Office in East Lombard Street, Dublin. Here I met with a new difficulty, as I was asked for "place of death". I suggested Blackrock, but a search through the years 1907 to 1909 did not show any Bernard Regan dying in Blackrock. However, I was also told that if he had not died in a hospital it was quite possible, at that time, that his death simply had not been registered.

My next search was in the National Library, in the back numbers of the *Irish Independent* and the *Freeman's Journal*. Once again I did not find him, either in the deaths columns or in the month's mind columns.

At this stage I thought it might be a good idea to check, if possible, on the precise wording of Regan's original tombstone in St Joseph's. I found that Diarmuid O Hegarty had kept a transcript of the wording on each stone. I discovered that Regan was the only name that did *not* have CM after it. As was the case with other students and seminarists the particulars on his tombstone were in Latin, and he had "D." in front of his name, for "Dominus", as the Latin for "Mister"; the priests had "Rev.". This made it clear that he was a clerical student, as the tombstones of laybrothers had inscriptions in English. As even deceased seminarists, without vows, had CM after their names his lack of CM made it even more clear that he was not a Vincentian.

How, then, did Jerome Twomey come to include him in the necrology? The necrology was published in the summer of 1978. The exhumation and re-interment had taken place in September 1977. In the November 1977 issue of his *Bulletin* Brother Sean O'Dell had printed a list of those exhumed and re-interred, and at the head of that list he put: "Members of the Congregation of the Mission (Irish Province) ..."; Regan was included in the list, under the sub-heading

“Students”, with no qualification to differentiate him from the others; obviously Jerome Twomey used this list. It would appear that Brother Scan took it for granted that every name on the list was a Vincentian, and perhaps this was the reason for the CM appearing also on the new stone in Dean’s Grange.

The state of the question at this stage was that Regan was a clerical student, not a Vincentian, who for some reason not yet apparent was buried in the cemetery in St Joseph’s. I searched for any reference to his death or burial in the Minutes of the Provincial Council and the Domestic Council, but without success.

The next question to try to answer was: at what seminary was he a student? The obvious short list was those which had some Vincentian link, All Hallows, Maynooth, Clonliffe and the Irish College in Paris. In March 1988 I made enquiries in the first three. I got a negative reply from All Hallows and no reply from either of the others.

In February 1989 I decided to try Maynooth and Clonliffe again. I got a negative reply from each. But shortly after that I got a reversal of the Clonliffe negative: the college records *did* have a Bernard Regan: Student entry number 1069, born 26 March 1888 in 45 Keith Street, Bootle, Liverpool. Educated at the Christian Brothers, Liverpool. Date of admission to Clonliffe 4 September 1907, into 2nd Arts class. Off college books 4 April 1908. Died 4 April 1908. This was obviously the man I had been looking for, as date of death and age were correct.

I still had no indication as to why he was buried in St Joseph’s. My first idea was that he might have had a relative in the Congregation who arranged for his burial there rather than have his body brought back to Liverpool. At that time there was no confrère in the Province called Regan, though there was an O’Regan. However, perhaps the supposed relative was on his mother’s side. I wrote to the Christian Brothers in Liverpool and to St Alexander’s parish in Bootle (which seemed to be the only one there in the 1880s) requesting any information available, giving all the particulars which I had.

I learned that the records of St Alexander’s had been destroyed in the war. The Brother Superior of St Anne’s, Liverpool, told me that records for that period did not exist, but he forwarded my request to St Edward’s College and the Brother Superior there told me that they had “most” of the Christian Brothers’ records of that period but that he could not find any Bernard Regan. However, the Brother in St Anne’s also made enquiries in St James’ parish and found the elusive

Regan: Born 26 March 1888, baptised 29 March 1888. Father's name: John; mother's maiden name: Mary McDermott; also the names of sponsors and baptising priest (Parish records ref.: 103/455). The date of birth was the same as in the Clonliffe records so it was clearly the same man. The mother's maiden name, McDermott, gave no help as to a possible reason for burial in St Joseph's, as there was no confrère of that name in the Province in 1908. There had been a seminarist lay-brother, William McDermott, who entered St Joseph's in 1889. He left in 1891 so he was an unlikely reason for Regan's burial in St Joseph's in 1908.

Now that I knew that he had been in Clonliffe I thought that a second visit to the General Register Office might be helpful; a death certificate would give the place of death and the cause of death, and perhaps indicate some further line of enquiry. On this second visit I gave the place of death as probably Clonliffe, or possibly the Mater Hospital. In one sense I fared better this time as I learned that no Bernard Regan was registered as having died anywhere in Ireland between 1907 and 1909. I asked for a check on Reagan and O'Regan, but without result. It seemed clear that his death simply had not been registered.

The fact that he was in Clonliffe raised a new possibility. Prospective Vincentians were sometimes sent to Clonliffe for their Arts course. The Clonliffe records showed that Regan joined the 2nd Arts class. I again consulted the Minutes of the Provincial Council, this time for 1907. An entry dated 12 August 1907 reads: "That the Visitor write to the Superior of Clonliffe to enquire if there be places for our postulants who are to read for 2nd Arts". A week later the Council decided to ask the Superior in Castleknock for reports on postulants to be sent to Clonliffe. Bernard Regan, however, was definitely not a Castleknock past pupil. No names are given, nor is it clear whether *all* the postulants were from Castleknock. What is clear, though, is that the Provincial was enquiring about places for students reading 2nd Arts, the class Regan entered. Up to May 1908, the month after Regan's death, there is no further reference in the Minutes to these postulants, nor to whether they were, in fact, accepted in Clonliffe. James H Murphy compiled an Index to the Minutes of the Provincial Council and the name of Regan does not appear anywhere. However, all the above material would seem to make it quite likely that Regan was a postulant for the community, thus explaining his burial in St Joseph's.

There is one further possibility; did he take Vincentian vows on

his deathbed? If he did, that would be a further possible reason for his burial in St Joseph's. Back in 1983 I was looking for some information, in a different context, on deathbed vows. I searched various official CM publications for information on this matter, but all I could find was that a seminarist who took his vows on his deathbed was *not* entitled to the usual suffrages unless he had completed his two years of probation (*Collectio privilegiorum et indulgentiarum CM*, 3rd ed., Paris 1900, par. 79). I wrote to the General Curia in Rome seeking something more relevant than this. I discovered that the Superior General's permission is not necessary; a local superior, or even the director of the seminary, can give permission for such vows. (If, however, the seminarist recovers the vows have no juridical effect). Regan was not, of course, a seminarist but there have been non-seminarists who took Vincentian vows on their deathbeds.

If Regan took CM vows on his deathbed would it be registered anywhere, and would it not have entitled him to CM on his tombstone? The only parallel case I know of in the Irish Province is that of John Aloysius Fitzgerald, a Kerry student in the Irish College in Paris, who took CM vows on his deathbed in 1863. These vows are not registered and there is no CM after his name on his tombstone in the ICP plot in Cachan (Arcueil) cemetery. The fact of his having taken vows is noted in a list of ICP students who joined the Vincentians, drawn up in 1919 by Patrick Boyle (COLLOQUE No. 6, pp 58-59).

So, what facts are we left with about Bernard Regan? He was from Liverpool; he was in the 2nd Arts class in Clonliffe; he died nine days after his 20th birthday; he was buried in the cemetery in St Joseph's, Temple Road, Blackrock, the only person buried there who did not have CM after his name on his tombstone; he was exhumed, with all the others, and re-interred in Dean's Grange in 1977 and acquired CM after his name on the new stone. Then there is a probability: that he was a Vincentian postulant, sent to Clonliffe. And a final possibility: that he took CM vows on his deathbed. Either, or both, of those last points could explain his burial in St Joseph's.

When I was arranging for Diarmuid Moran's name to be added to the stone in Dean's Grange I asked the stonecutter about the possibility of removing the CM from after Regan's name. He explained that the only way to do this satisfactorily would be to grind down the surface of the whole stone to the depth of the incised letters, about a quarter of an inch, and then re-cut all the names again. This is one of two stones

listing the names and dates of all those re-interred from the old St Joseph's cemetery. Cutting Diarmuid Moran's name on the main stone cost £74. At that rate the re-cutting of all the names would cost approximately £2,000, not to mention the cost of the previous grinding down of the surface. As that would seem to be a prohibitive price to pay for the excision of two letters it looks as though Bernard Regan will remain as the only man who joined the Irish Province posthumously.

TD

## Father John Hurley CM

It is not too difficult to write about John. He was an original, a natural, the sort of person that legends grow about.

But it is not easy to do anything like “justice” to this really remarkable man. There have not been many confrères like him.

He impressed most people who knew him as a truly “simple” man, in St Vincent’s sense of the word. And that he was! But he also liked to encourage people to think of him as a simple country boy not long out of his native Skibbereen, (a “simple Corkman”! Help!), who had somehow strayed into the company of academics and intellectuals. And he told stories against himself to make people think of him like that.

I have often heard him telling perfect strangers how, when he came to Strawberry Hill as a young man and, on his first free day had gone in to London to see the sights of the big city, he found when he arrived at Waterloo Station that he had lost his railway ticket. “Where have you come from, sir?” the ticket collector had asked him. “From Skibbereen” John had replied, and immediately got into trouble.

Most of his priestly life was spent at Strawberry Hill, and I am pretty sure that when the other confrères who lived and worked there are long forgotten they will still be telling stories about a fabulous “Father John” who had flourished there generations ago.

When he retired from Strawberry Hill he served for a few years in Cork and Sheffield, then for six years at the Daughters of Charity Home for Sick Children at St Leonard’s-on-Sea, then five years in St Cedd’s, Goodmayes, returning to Strawberry Hill to spend the last decade of his life there in happy retirement.

On the college staff he was officially Lecturer in History and English; he was an extremely good lecturer. As all his life he was an avid reader his lectures were full of ideas, quotes, theories, illustrations, that he had gleaned from the many authors he had consulted. It was typical of him, however, that he never advertised his scholarship to his students. One of his ruses was, when quoting from some authority or other, to say: “I don’t know how I came across this; I got it in a book somewhere”. The students were highly amused and this regular

disclaimer “I got it in a book” became part of the legend they built up about John.

One thing endeared John to his students — his single-minded commitment to seeing that they passed their final examination. He was not a strict disciplinarian but he let it be known that he would not tolerate a man in any of his classes who was not prepared to do at least a minimum of work. He was known, on occasion, to interrupt a morning lecture when he realised that a particular student had failed to turn up, had gone upstairs to the offender’s room and had yanked him out of bed and brought him in his pyjamas to the lecture room, more, I suspect, to *encourager les autres* than for any other reason.

He was especially kind to the less gifted. He stood over them, gave them a lot of private tuition, more or less forcibly fed them, and saw them through.

Among the many who have called at the college in recent years asking for “Father John” I have recognised some who are now respected headmasters in their home towns but who — I know and they know — owe the success of their first painful step up the professional ladder to John’s energetic pushing them from behind.

For him his teaching was never just a profession; it was genuinely a vocation. “We are here,” he often said “to turn out good Catholics first, good teachers as best we can”.

His love of the Catholic Church was patent for all to see. In his teaching of History he was what someone once described as a “Roman wicket-keeper”. He was forever defending the Church, refusing to admit that popes and bishops had ever acted except from the best of motives. Students being what they are, this led to some heated debates in his lectures.

The second great love of his life was the Vincentian community. It genuinely pained him to see how completely unable we were, apparently, to attract English vocations to the Province, and he often spoke about it. In our monthly prayer sessions for vocations I am sure his prayers were especially fervent.

It was as a Vincentian that he impressed those who admired him and who saw through his pretence of being “a scholar of the fourth form”; (where have we heard that term before?).

Each of the confrères on the staff of St Mary’s College took a particular interest in one or more of the many student clubs and societies. John opted for the Vincent de Paul Society, and was soon involved with the students of the Society in doing something for the disabled,

the homeless and the dropouts of the neighbourhood. And when I say “involved” I really mean *involved*.

I recall one disreputable old character who came frequently to visit John. His clothes were filthy, his beard an outrage. He had ceased to mind whom he offended by his appearance and his lifestyle. He was bad-tempered and foul-mouthed. John managed to convince him that he would be better off if he were to be admitted to a hostel for old men where he would be looked after properly. John got two of the V de P students to waylay him the next time he came to the College. They brought him up to John’s room, gave him, to his shocked surprise and rather feeble resistance, the first bath he had had for years, dressed him in clean clothes (some of John’s cast-offs) and delivered him, still protesting, to the local home for the aged where a room had been reserved for him. When they arrived at the hostel they found that the room was not yet ready so they returned him to John. That night he slept in John’s bed while John occupied the armchair. Next day he was admitted to the hostel.

To the end of his days John’s “involvement” with those down-and-outs continued; if anything, increased. They regarded him, I’m afraid, as a “soft touch” and whatever money he had was sure to find its way in their direction.

He was a “good community man”. I can recall many confrères about whom that was said but none, I think, to equal John. What he did for the Strawberry Hill community is not easy to describe, but after his death the void it had created was almost palpable.

Nothing pleased him better than to be present at after-dinner community gatherings, when everyone was relaxed and nobody was in a hurry to leave. Some wonderful discussions took place at those meetings.

John, everyone knew, had read all the recent theological or theology-related books that had arrived in our library, and was dying to discuss them. In matters theological he was an unashamed traditionalist, and he found it hard to come to terms with the scholarly pronouncements of writers such as Küng and Schillebeeckx. Some of the younger confrères were not above provoking him by defending their speculations, and he never failed to rise to the bait.

The discussions that followed were often lively, never acrimonious, always interesting. If John began to feel the argument was not going his way he had a way of leaving the field of battle with flag still flying. He would stop in his tracks, look around with disarming smile, and

say: “Well, anyway, what the hell ...!”

He died in the way he himself might have planned. One day he was there. The next day he was gone. No fuss! No trouble to anyone!

We are not likely to forget him.

Kevin Cronin CM

### JOHN HURLEY CM

Born: Skibbereen, Co. Cork, 18 April 1898.

Entered the CM: 30 August 1916.

Final vows: 8 September 1918.

Ordained a priest in Clonliffe College by Dr Byrne, archbishop of Dublin, 14 March 1924.

#### Appointments

1924-1926 St Patrick’s, Drumcondra.

1926-1930 St Vincent’s, Castleknock.

1930-1965 St Mary’s, Strawberry Hill.

1956-1967 St Vincent’s, Cork.

1967-1968 St Vincent’s, Sheffield.

1968-1974 St Leonard’s-on-Sea (*adscriptus* St Vincent’s, Mill Hill)

1974-1979 St Cedd’s, Goodmayes.

1979-1989 St Mary’s, Strawberry Hill.

Died 18 January 1989.

## Father Charles A Sinnott CM

Just four days before his death Charlie came to me with an old photograph he had discovered in his souvenirs. It was of two seventeen year old youths in their Sunday best, Child of Mary medals pinned beneath the breast pockets of their jackets, sitting on a bench in the grounds of Castleknock College. Were the seeds of vocations sown at those weekly Sodality meetings when the members gathered together to recite the Office of Our Lady? Charlie and I remained friends all through the forty years since that photo was taken.

My schoolday memories of Charlie are of rugby pitches and tennis courts, of sneaking a forbidden smoke behind the handball alley or in some other hidden nook, of “free days, feed and pictures” (movies, to my

US confrères!). Perhaps the most lasting memory is of Charlie standing on the stage in a production of *The Gondoliers* singing “Take a Pair of Sparkling Eyes”. As we stood in the churchyard last January awaiting the arrival of Charlie’s mortal remains from Cork, it was a memory shared and recalled by several of his schoolday contemporaries.

Charlie served in the family business for a few years before deciding to become a Vin. He often told me how he went to consult Fr Bill Meagher in Phibsboro about his intentions, but got cold feet at the last minute and retired instead to the pub on Doyle’s corner. It was at his third attempt that he succeeded in reaching St Peter’s and Fr Bill.

The spiritual and devotional aspects of life in the seminary Charlie found most appealing and satisfying. Not so the study of philosophy and theology from Latin textbooks. The groves of academe were not his *metier*. I think that may explain his empathy with young students who came to him on retreat in later years. One of the great joys of his seminary days was the scope for his vocal cords in church music and plainchant. There were, too, Fr Michael O’Callaghan’s drama productions. The casting of *Arsenic and Old Lace* was inspired – Charlie and Denis Corkery playing the parts of two innocent and scheming old dears whose antics baffled their debonair nephew.

Charlie’s priestly ministry began in Sunday’s Well, Cork, in the days before it became a parish. At first he had to struggle with the local idiom and accent. He wasn’t sure what to make of the young children who confessed that they had been “waxin’ the gaza”. An older and wiser confrère explained that it meant swinging on a rope tied around a street lampstandard. The friction of the rope polished the lamp-post, hence “waxing”, and the word “gaza” came from the days before electricity when the lamps were lit by gas.

Fr Bob Alien had left Cork by the time Charlie arrived and the mantle and choir of Fr Gaynor which he had inherited passed to Charlie. St Vincent’s was most fortunate in the succession of choir-masters who came to Cork. I hope Charlie has left on record the result of his research into the life and work of Fr Gaynor. The choir, the drama society, the altar boys, the Boys’ Club, all kept Charlie on his toes, but his horizon was wider than Sunday’s Well and he became involved in the rehabilitation of young people in the city who had been in trouble with the law and the courts.

When it was decided to appoint the first Director of Vocations in the Irish Province Charlie was an obvious choice, and so he returned to his native city. He combined the role of Vocations Director with his work

in the Retreat Centre, first in Blackrock and later in All Hallows.

Of the first hundred possible vocations contacted Charlie saw only two who persevered unto ordination in the Little Company. He hid his disappointment behind "I've done my best, and anyway it's God who gives the increase". It was at this time that he paid a visit to the US, to observe the *modus operandi* of his opposite numbers, Frank Quinn and Jim Dore of the Eastern Province and Barry Moriarty of the Mid-West. More recently, it was he who led the banter when a former protege of his ran foul of the law for allegedly selling Irish passports to illegal aliens in London.

Charlie had an extraordinary tolerance of the weaknesses of human nature and his success in the retreat work must have stemmed from the fact that he took people where they were and not from where perhaps they should have been at. He just never expected them to be anywhere else than where they were at.

When he moved from Blackrock to set up the new Retreat Centre in All Hallows he took with him his loyal and trusted friend, Mai Larkin. Together they did trojan work, but I suspect that the effort took its toll on Charlie's health eventually.

His appointment as Parish Priest in St Peter's was greeted warmly by his old mentor, Fr Bill Meagher. Charlie saw it as an opportunity to repay a long-standing debt, and he did all he could to ease the burden of Bill's declining years. He was exemplary in his care and attention to Michael O'Callaghan, Pat Travers, Bob Alien and Michael Murphy as their lives drew to a close. His ready smile, his warm charm, his genial good humour and his availability soon won him many friends in Phibsboro. His responsibilities as Manager of St Peter's School were a heavy cross and he was happy to let Brendan Steen take over this difficult scene.

Charlie's heart attack in 1986 was a stark reminder that his brothers Denis and Tom had both died suddenly, as had his father. He was frightened and I think he lived out the next three years under a sword of Damocles. Not that it stopped him from visiting the flat-land in the parish, or from leading the congregation in song at each of the Sunday masses from 9 am to 1 pm.

I have never heard Charlie speak a word in anger. He was a man of peace who wanted only to be let get on with the task in hand. He was looking forward to the end of his term of office this summer but the Lord he had served so well anticipated the appointments list and called him to rest from his labours last January.

Twice a year Charlie downed tools to make two very different but complementary journeys. One was to the Cistercian monastery in Roscrea for a private retreat, where he enjoyed the peace and solitude and also the choral singing of the monks. Then, later in the year, the second journey was to one of the cities of Europe, sightseeing and savouring the atmosphere of Paris, Salzburg, Amsterdam etc. Now that his life's journey has come to an end may he enjoy the fullness of life in the rarified atmosphere of the holy city, the new and eternal Jerusalem.

Diarmuid O Hegarty CM

#### CHARLES A SINNOTT CM

Born: Dublin 10 April 1924.

Entered the CM: 28 October 1945.

Final vows: 1 November 1947.

Ordained a priest in Clonliffe College by Dr McQuaid, archbishop of Dublin, 25 May 1952.

#### Appointments

1952-1966 St Vincent's, Cork.

1966-1978 St Joseph's, Blackrock.

1978-1983 All Hallows.

1983-1989 St Peter's, Phibsboro.

Died 28 January 1989.

## Father William J Meagher CM

When a man's life spans ninety years, as did Fr William Meagher's, there will be very few, if any, who can recall his early years. There are some of us, however, who, as boys, can remember him as a young priest. But it is difficult to erase more recent memories of him as he advanced into old age and to conjure up the young man whom once we knew and to whom we owed so much.

In later life he liked to recall that he had been ordained priest in Kilkenny by a Vincentian bishop, James Downey, co-adjutor bishop of Ossory, in company with three other confrères, Frs Dan O'Connell, Jack Walsh and James Rodgers. With the last named he spent the next year in Rome where he took the STL degree, and the companionship of James during that Roman year laid the foundation of a life-long friendship. The following year, in September 1925, he was appointed

to Castleknock where he spent nearly twenty years, and it was there as a schoolboy that I first got to know him.

How does one account for the success of his various ministries during a long life and his profound influence on all those whose lives he touched? Humanly speaking (there were more spiritual reasons) it was perhaps due to the fact that he was an unusual combination of mildness and strength. The mildness of his character was reflected in his countenance and expression. He was kind and considerate as Dean in Castleknock, but on the other hand firm when he thought firmness was needed. Later, as Prefect of Studies, he was sympathetic to the academically weak and encouraging to the brighter boy. All through life he was courteous in his dealings with others, whether the parents of the boys in Castleknock, or the parishioners in Phibsboro, Sheffield and Mill Hill, or the students in All Hallows and Maynooth where he was Spiritual Director. It was part of his courtesy, and also part of his success as President of Castleknock and, later, as superior of Phibsboro, where he was also Director of Missions, that he was prompt and punctilious in the answering of letters. He was a sensitive man himself, but was also sensitive of the feelings of others. He treated people with rare tact and delicacy and was sympathetic to all in trouble. Yet though basically a reserved and modest man, his personality was strong. I recall his quoting James Rodgers to me many years ago: "If a man is lucky he will be said to have a strong personality, but if unlucky he will be described as obstinate". I don't know whether he realized he was one of the lucky ones.

A native of Tuam he was intensely devoted to his family, especially to his mother, a most remarkable woman (his father died when he was a young boy) but also to his two sisters and his brother, Frank, and he retained an interest in his nieces and nephews until the end. In many ways he was ahead of his times: even before the second world war he felt that our Vincentian students should be allowed to visit their families during the vacation period.

He was diffident about public speaking and words did not come easily to him. It might almost be said that, in conversation, he cultivated a mumble. "Remember", he advised me once, "that a boy's best friend is his mutter". Later in life I began to realize the uses of obscurity in speech! Yet in the religious context he was an effective speaker and the reason was simple: the medium was the message. His audience knew that they were listening to a man of God.

All during his parish ministry he was devoted to the confessional and it was this which brought him back to Phibsboro at the age of eighty. He was sympathetic to the frailties of human nature and he applied the touchstone of charity to what might be called the hierarchy of sins. With the passage of time he became increasingly deaf and I once asked him how he managed to hear confessions in spite of his disability. His reply was disarming: "If people come to confession their dispositions must be good, and, if I don't hear everything I manage to hear everything of importance". In this his views were very much in accordance with Vatican II which he took in his stride. The Lord was good to him and enabled him to hear confessions almost to the day of his death. He helped people in the confessional but the faith and devotion of his penitents also helped to nourish his remarkable life of prayer: from early morning in the oratory to the prayers he said last thing at night in the privacy of his room he was continuously in the presence of God.

I always thought his gifts and virtues were Salesian and their application to the service of the Community and the Church must have been a source of great joy to St Vincent, the friend of Francis de Sales.

Donal F Cregan CM

#### WILLIAM J MEAGHER CM

Born: Tuam, Co. Galway, 13 January 1899.

Entered CM: 10 September 1917.

Final vows: 12 September 1919.

Ordained a priest in Loreto Convent, Kilkenny, by Dr James Downey CM, co-adjutor bishop of Ossory, 8 September 1924.

#### Appointments

1924-1925 Casa Internazionale, Rome.

1925-1944 St Vincent's, Castleknock.

1944-1950 St Peter's, Phibsboro.

1950-1954 St Vincent's, Sheffield.

1954-1965 Maynooth (*adscriptus* Blackrock).

1965-1970 All Hallows.

1970-1973 Sacred Heart, Mill Hill.

1973-1979 All Hallows.

1979-1989 St Peter's, Phibsboro.

Died 27 March 1989.

## Father Bernard Buckley CM

It was in 1947 that I first met Bernard. Those were the days when visiting confrères sometimes held an “audience” in the Students’ Hall in the Rock. The word had gone around that the visitor was a priest of the Madrid Province who had been in India for some years. He actually looked the part. He was dark and swarthy with, we thought, a foreign look about him. Then he began to talk to us about life in India – in a polished English accent!

We soon discovered that Bernard was, in fact, a native of Bristol who, through contact with the Spanish Vincentians in Potters Bar, Hertfordshire, had joined the Madrid Province. He had done all his seminary studies in Spain, where he was ordained to the priesthood in 1935. After a short spell in Potters Bar he was assigned to the Vincentian mission in Cuttack, India, and worked there until the outbreak of the Second World War. He joined the RAF as a chaplain in 1943 and served in India and Burma throughout the remainder of the war, ministering zealously to young air force personnel. When the war ended he decided to seek admission to the Irish Province and that change of Provinces was being negotiated when we met him in the Rock.

After my ordination I lived in community with Bernard in three different houses, Strawberry Hill, Coventry and Hereford. I came to know him well and to appreciate him as a very agreeable and highly talented confrère. A sociable man, he enjoyed company and loved festive occasions and celebrations, which he spiced with his good humoured, rumbling, laughter. He was essentially a simple, gentle, person without guile. He told you exactly what he thought in any situation and shared his hopes and ambitions (sometimes frustrated ones) in an appealingly straightforward way.

Bernard’s gifts were many. He was an accomplished linguist. His Spanish, of course, was perfect and he could get around very well in French and German. He was a very good preacher, with a nice command of language. He was a gifted musician who played piano and organ beautifully, and he had a pleasing tenor voice. A great confrère to have with you in a parish, who would happily play the organ at liturgical celebrations, at weddings and funerals, and could produce a well-rounded homily or sermon for any occasion.

Bernard was a prayerful and studious man whose taste in reading was theology and the serious periodicals. One of his daily relaxations

was the London *Times* crossword puzzle, which he completed most days. I felt flattered when occasionally he needed my inexpert help! They were enjoyable times.

Though Bernard's health had not been good for a few years the news of his death in Spain came as a shock to us all. Our sympathy goes to his two priest brothers in their native Clifton diocese, and to all the family. Bernard was proud of his family and his country. He was proud also to be a Vincentian and was always a faithful and loyal confrère and a zealous priest of the mission.

“May we all merrily meet in heaven”.

Dermot O’Dowd CM

The second of five children of Jeremiah and May Buckley, Bernard was born in Bristol on 6 November 1911. At a very early age he evinced considerable musical talent and a gift for languages. Competing in several local musical festivals he won the title of “Bristol’s boy night-ingale”. Eventually he became quite an accomplished pianist and organist.

Not yet sixteen years of age he went to Spain, where he was to spend the years in preparation for his ordination as a Vincentian priest of the Madrid Province; he took his vows the day after his eighteenth birthday. He was ordained priest in Cuenca on 15 September 1935 by Bishop Cruz la Plana y Laguna (who was later to be killed by the revolutionaries).

After ordination he served in Potters Bar until his appointment as assistant director of novices in Burgos (1937-38) and then to the staff of the former Spanish Vincentian parish in Saffron Walden, Essex. In 1939 the newly established diocese of Cuttack, south of Calcutta, was confided to a Spanish Vincentian bishop who invited Bernard to accompany him to India to work on missions in the area. From 1943 to 1946 he served as a war-time chaplain to the RAF in India and Burma, and then returned to Potters Bar for a short spell in parish work. It was then decided that he should join the Irish Province of the Congregation and was appointed to the staff of St Peter’s, Phibsboro, in order to conduct missions and retreats throughout Ireland.

After five years in Ireland he lectured in Divinity in St Mary’s College, Strawberry Hill until, in 1956, he was given the post (with direct qualifications from the DES) of teacher of religion in the Ullathorne secondary school in Coventry. He remained there for eight

years until becoming chaplain to students in Strawberry Hill and then a conductor of missions and retreats and parish work in Lanark, Sheffield and Hereford.

At the request of the bishop of Gibraltar, who knew of his fluency in Spanish, Bernard took up the task of priest-in-charge of St Joseph's. He remained in Gibraltar for five years and, after a short spell as chaplain to New Hall School, Chelmsford (1978-79) his final assignment in Britain was to the Vincentian parish in Hereford where he remained until age and failing health (as well, it has to be admitted, his love for Spain) induced him to request permission to spend many months every year in Almuñecar in the diocese of Granada, where he spent his time preaching, teaching and hearing confessions (all in Spanish). For months at a time he would preach daily in the parish church in that town, and his services were highly appreciated by the local clergy as well as by the parishioners, who came to know him well and admired his Castillian Spanish. He was able to gather a kind of "ecumenical parish" in that area for the English-speaking foreign nationals who had hitherto been without priest or minister. During all this time, and until his death, he had the unremitting care of his niece Cecilia, especially when he was ill.

He was suffering from leukemia and it was to Bristol that he had recourse for medical treatment in 1985, followed eventually by what he called "semi-retirement" in Nazareth House, Cheltenham, in March 1988. As late as the summer of that year he was helping out in parishes in the diocese of Plymouth, and this spring he was arranging to do a supply in Birmingham.

On Sunday, 16 April, 1989, Bernard arrived, with his sister Mrs Evelyn Brain, in Almuñecar, where they intended to take a short holiday. He concelebrated with the Parish Priest at 7 pm. The latter mentioned that he had an urgent appointment in Granada the following day and asked Bernard to keep an eye on the parish during his absence. He accepted to do this and, after mass, went to his niece Cecilia Me Weeny de Chacon, for supper. Although complaining of tiredness he appeared not too unwell until the next morning when a medical friend, a retired Irish doctor, saw him and immediately advised that emergency measures be taken. An ambulance arrived with a Spanish doctor, who found him *in extremis*. Before more could be done Bernard died as Cecilia made the sign of the cross on his forehead; there was no priest available to minister to him.

His funeral mass took place the following day, concelebrated by the Vicar General of Granada, the Parish Priest of Almuñecar, and a dozen or so Vincentians from different parts of Spain, as well as by his brother, the present writer, who flew over to join his sister Evelyn for the obsequies.

After his remains had been borne on the shoulders of men from the town to the parish church of the Annunciation, Almuñecar, which was full to the doors with parishioners and many English-speaking (as well as other) residents, the requiem mass took place and the youngest great-niece there made her first holy communion. The British Legion was represented. There were English hymns (“Abide with me ...”, etc.) and beautifully rendered anthems (Bernard had helped to form a choir there) including Handel’s “I know that my redeemer liveth”, as well as the ordinary of the mass sung in Spanish by the congregation. He was buried in the local cemetery *more Hispanorum*. The following Sunday, 23 April, his brother presided at a mass in Los Marineros, near China Sol, the seat of the “ecumenical parish”, and where persons of any or no denomination gathered to pay tribute to a priest they had loved and who had served them as best he could for some years.

Throughout his life as a priest he loved to write poetry, whether in English or Spanish, none of which he ever published, usually of a religious nature. Sleepless nights were an occasion for him to do so, and he filled many hundreds of pages with what was probably his own form and style of prayer.

He is survived by two brothers, both priests and canons of Clifton diocese, Canon Vincent and myself, and two sisters, Mrs Mary McWeeny and Mrs Evelyn Brain.

Joseph C Buckley, VG

#### BERNARD BUCKLEY CM

Born: Bristol, 6 November 1911.

Entered the CM, Madrid Province: 3 October 1927.

Final vows: 7 November 1929.

Ordained a priest in Cuenca by Mgr Cruz la Plana y Laguna, bishop of Cuenca, 15 September 1935

#### Appointments

1936-1937 St Vincent’s, Potters Bar.

1937-1938 Burgos, Spain.

1938-1939 Saffron Walden, Essex.  
1939-1943 India: Cuttack and Surada.  
1943-1946 India and Burma: RAF chaplain.  
1946-1948 St Vincent's, Potters Bar.  
1948-1953 St Peter's, Phibsboro.  
1953-1956 St Mary's, Strawberry Hill.  
1956-1964 St Vincent's, Coventry.  
1964-1965 St Mary's, Strawberry Hill.  
1965-1966 St Mary's, Lanark.  
1966-1967 St Vincent's, Sheffield.  
1969-1973 Our Lady's, Hereford.  
1973-1978 Gibraltar (*adscript*s 293, Waldegrave Road).  
1978-1979 Chelmsford (*adscriptus* St Cedd's, Goodmayes).  
1979-1980 St Cedd's, Goodmayes.  
1980-1985 Our Lady's, Hereford.  
1985-1989 St Mary's, Strawberry Hill.

Died in Spain 17 April 1989.

## Father Francis Lyne CM

(*Homily at funeral mass*)

“Unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies it remains only a single grain; but if it dies it yields a rich harvest” (Jn 12:24).

When the news of Fr Frank's death reached us we were shattered. He had been looking forward for weeks to the end of the school year and his annual trip to Norway. To his fellow Vincentians, his teaching colleagues, to parents, past pupils and the present students, and to all who knew him, he was the personification of St Paul's. His life was devoted and dedicated to St Paul's. If ever there was a person who wholeheartedly dedicated himself to the work he was appointed to, it was Fr Frank. Whether as a young teacher, or bursar, or Principal he did not spare himself, and he gave to all who came in contact with him the example of “a good and faithful servant” (Mt 25:21). And his interest and concern didn't cease when pupils passed out of the school. He rejoiced with those who succeeded in later life, but he did not

ignore or forget those who were the ordinary students either.

But in addition to all those who knew him as a dedicated and conscientious worker in the school, whether in the classroom, or in his office, or in the gym, we, his fellow Vincentians, knew him also as a zealous and deeply spiritual priest.

Only a month before his death he had presided as celebrant and preacher at the end of the year mass for the Sixth Year students who had come to the end of their time in St Paul's. He had this to say in the course of his homily:

Almost ten years ago the Pope visited Ireland. He spoke to the youth of Ireland in Galway. At one stage in his sermon he said: "When I look at you I see the Ireland of the future. Tomorrow you will be the living force of your country; you will decide what Ireland will be. Tomorrow, Ireland will depend on you". In some small way the same thing can be said of you, the young men and women who leave St Paul's this year. My prayer is that the society you build will be founded on faith in Jesus Christ, and therefore reflect the love of Jesus Christ through peace, justice and concern for other people ... May God strengthen you so that this dream may become a reality through your faith in, and commitment to, the person of Jesus Christ who loves us all.

The faith and sincerity that shine out in this extract from his last sermon was no flash in the pan. They had been nourished and developed by a life of prayer and devotion to the mass. And it was renewed and invigorated every year by his going to places where he could enjoy the beauties of God's creation. Every year he and I would go on retreat to Donegal. There, amid the beauty of hill and sea-shore he could come close to God through the beauty and quietness of the place. The same could be said of his beloved Beara peninsula. There he would be out, in his hiking boots and with his walking stick, striding over the hills or along the shore. But I think it was among the majestic mountains and fjords of Norway that he made the closest contact with the Creator of such beauty.

It is fitting that he again had the happiness of seeing his "promised land" before his sudden and unexpected death. And in the mass we will pray, and how appropriate it is, that the Lord will grant him a "locus refrigerii, lucis et pacis". The English translation does not do justice to

the original Latin which means “a place of coolness and peace”, which he found year after year in Norway, and which we pray that the Lord will give him as a reward for his labours, and that he will welcome him with the words: “Well done, good and faithful servant, ... enter into the joy of the Lord” (Mt 25:21).

Thomas Dougan CM

#### FRANCIS LYNE CM

Born: Castletownbere, Co. Cork, 4 September 1937.

Entered CM: 7 September 1956.

Final vows: 8 September 1961.

Ordained a priest in Clonliffe College by Dr McQuaid, archbishop of Dublin, 14 March 1964.

#### Appointment

1964-1989 St Paul's, Raheny.

Died in Germany 18 June 1989.

## James C Shell CM

*(Homily at funeral mass)*

The Church's central message in every funeral service is the proclamation of Christ's victory over death. The good news is that God desires life, not death, but the model of conquest over death is Christ's life; the good news is the glorification of the human race in Christ Jesus. Ours is a resurrection faith. Before we can triumph we must suffer and die. Victory is not easy nor is grace cheap. Both are bought in the daily struggle of ordinary lives, but with extraordinary consequences. The divine – temporal and eternal – is found in the ordinary. Neither victory nor grace exist through any denial of the hard reality of life and of the grave. The resurrection is a prize to be won, not a gift from a magician – a phrase I remember from a retreat by Fr Sheil when I was in the seminaire. Life is achieved through death, but a death vanquished by the power of the cross and the glory of the resurrection.

The life and death of Christ reveal an enormously rich tapestry of human endeavour and effort to do God's will. It was not a constant

state of pain and punishment. The New Testament tells us he went about doing good — attending weddings, banquets and funerals. He talked and prayed with friends, strangers and alone. He observed the land, the sky, the trees, plants, crops and birds. He rested and walked, was tired and angry, he attacked the Pharisees and took authority to task. Christ was at pains to show that the life which led to the death on the cross and the resurrection was one lived in human endeavours to do his Father's will in the good times and bad; but always in conformity with the Father's will.

We come today to honour, and reflect on, the life of one who tried to model his life on Christ and St Vincent. Affectionately known to each of us by different titles: Father Sheil, Uncle Jimmy, James, Jimmy and J Sheil. Each title bespoke a different relationship but each relationship was enriched by a special sharing in his life and prayers. In St Patrick's we were always aware and grateful that he was the powerhouse of prayer behind all our work in the college.

In his priestly life of fifty-six years he lived in eight communities. He enlivened and enriched each with his many gifts and unique contributions. He was always quiet but ever determined not to be sidelined. Community life did not deny him opportunities for singularly wry comments or gentle denunciations. In this give-and-take one had to be exceptionally adept to bowl J Sheil a googly; he was a superb deflector of pointed remarks. His convictions were significant but his victories were usually skilfully disguised.

His courage was remarkable, both moral and physical. Intimidation or denial of rights was abhorrent to him, but his slight build did not prevent him once from tackling a runaway horse. He was possessed of many talents, and a sense of taste and propriety which he so gladly shared with everyone. The talents he possessed were impressive in the fields of music: in 'Knock he founded a society for classical music; art: when in the Irish College, Paris, he opened up the treasures of Paris to the students; literature; travel: He loved to hop on and off trains all over Europe, but in his latter days he often spoke with great feeling of his bicycle tours in Ireland with the confrères; nature study and, above all, a devotion to the history of the Church and of the two communities, the Vins and the Daughters.

He was a connoisseur of fine wines. One particular Christmas he had decided that the choice of the year should be procured for the Christmas dinner. A diligent search by the superior and bursar failed to

secure it, but a different vintage was offered. Fr Sheil, with great devilment and aplomb, pronounced it to be “a pretentious little wine”.

Fr Sheil was the quintessential Vin; the virtues of simplicity, humility, meekness, mortification and zeal for souls were visible for all to see, but not to comment on. As with every other aspect of his life — even in his last illness he did not invite discussion about himself — he was always eager to hear other people’s stories.

Perhaps one of his greatest loves was to search among the letters of St Vincent and translate those which he thought addressed community problems. Often these referred to superiors whom St Vincent had to reprimand, or to confrères whose conduct was eccentric and needed to be reformed. During our retreats in St Patrick’s a choice selection was read by him at dinner; the spice in the advice was often a gentle hint to some of us.

Those of us who had him for class, retreats, nature walks, football teams, cycling holidays, or just ordinary talks, together with his inimitable humming and whistling accompaniment, will cherish memories of a kind, gentle and courteous Christian gentleman.

In Glenart I remember his classes on Church History and the Old Testament. In the former the Church, though not without wrinkle, was not to be subjected to its dirty linen being washed in public. In the era of great advances in scriptural studies he exercised a gentle censorship over the books made available, lest some “zealous critics” would be led astray.

Fr Sheil always trained the under thirteens and under fourteens in ‘Knock. He aspired to train a cup team and commented that he “ought not to be deprived of the chance of losing a cup”.

In the more serious areas of his life he was totally absorbed in the Eucharist. His preparation for and celebration of mass were the highlights of his day. I know of nobody who remembered people so personally and continuously in his mass. In his later years he regarded his single contribution to the Church and the world to be his ability to pray for them, and especially for vocations to the twin Vincentian families.

In latter years he became somewhat withdrawn; his failing eyesight and hearing forced him into a certain loneliness, but one could never depend that he didn’t see and hear what he chose to see and hear.

In the order of his priorities one was never in doubt about the love he bore for his family. Their lives, joys and tribulations were in the forefront of his mind. Family was private to him and only rarely did

he share with others his deep pride and real happiness in their achievements. The death of his brother Willie at a young age sorrowed him, but Michael's took the heart out of him, to some extent.

His love of the community was most striking in his fidelity to community life, and in his personal and sincere enquiries about confrères' work and families. The constant yearly reminders of birthdays and anniversaries were his most single proof of his continuing interest. Fr Sheil could always tell you where each confrère was, and what he was doing. He personified Vincent's hope that the community would live together after the manner of dear friends.

There are many things which must be left unsaid, but one thing must be said: so many of us owe so much to him; perhaps he now will pray for us and forgive us whatever we left undone. He has left us a legacy of a quiet and gentle man and priest, self-effacing but remarkable as a man of prayer and piety, and a custodian of all that was civilised and beautiful in the world of human communication, spirituality, art and nature. He was a true son of St Vincent and is now at home with his friends in heaven, and his Eternal Father and Blessed Mother.

Simon Clyne CM

#### JAMES C SHEIL CM

Born: Dublin 4 May 1908.

Entered the CM: 7 September 1928.

Final vows: 8 September 1930.

Ordained a priest in the Pro-Cathedral, Dublin, by Dr Wall, auxiliary bishop of Dublin, 10 June 1933.

#### Appointments

1933-1934 Sacred Heart, Mill Hill.

1934-1935 St Vincent's, Gateacre.

1935-1939 Irish College, Paris.

1939-1942 St Joseph's, Blackrock.

1942-1953 St Vincent's, Castleknock.

1953-1968 St Kevin's, Glenart.

1968-1971 St Joseph's, Blackrock.

1971-1989 St Patrick's, Drumcondra.

Died 29 June 1989.