

COLLOQUE

Journal of the Irish Province of the
Congregation of the Mission

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Editorial

The articles in this edition of *Colloque* once again remind us that this is a journal, in which we record our thoughts, our memories, our hopes and our concerns.

Sr Judith Greville has been of great assistance to the editor over the past six years and her memories of her time in Australia might encourage some of the rest of us to record our experiences. Community history comprises the lives of all of us but, if we do not record them, the record will be lost. There is a trove of community lore from the Irish Province that has yet to be recorded. Perhaps, like Edward Ferris' copy of the *Common Rules*, such reflections might be a spur to people in a time after us to take up the 'baton' of Vincentianism.

Seamus O'Neill has submitted just such a piece, which he translated, about Henry Gray who went out from Ireland to Argentina and Con Curtin shares something of his experience of Centring Prayer.

In different ways and from very different perspectives Kevin Rafferty and Aidan McGing look to the future. In the light of the focus of the forthcoming Provincial and General Assemblies, Kevin's thoughts on the *Constitutions* may prove most valuable to the reader. Aidan looks to *Humanae Vitae* not as a document from the past but as an integral part of the future.

Finally, I am most grateful to Des O'Connell for permission to publish his brief reflection on The Smile; I heard it many years ago as a homily on 25th January, in which Des reflected further on the smile of St Vincent, and it struck me forcefully.

Perhaps you will not agree with some of the suggestions put forward in particular articles; I encourage you then to set down your own thoughts and reflections and submit them to me. If you are thinking of submitting an article (and are techno-literate) please send it, if possible, either on a floppy disk or, by e-mail, to ecurran@allhallows.ie. If you are not a cybergeek, typed is better than hand-written but I will deal with whatever comes!

Why not try Centring Prayer

Con Curtin C.M.

A priest returned from a Retreat. A colleague, a bit of a wag, said to him, “What did the retreat-master speak about?”

“Meditation”.

“I know what that is. It is sitting on a bench in the Church with your mouth open, thinking about nothing.”

Intended as a jocose remark, it actually contained a profound truth. There are many different forms of prayer; Discursive Prayer, Lectio Divina, Contemplative Meditation or, as it is called, Centring Prayer. The Rosary is very important, and of course, “Pray the way you can, not way you can’t”. If you are satisfied with your present way of prayer, stick to it. I’m just throwing out this suggestion, if you find it helpful, as I did.

My Story – My Prayer Life

As novices and students for the priesthood in the old days, we were introduced only to discursive prayer i.e. you reflected on some scene from the gospel or reflected on some truth or on the feast day. Then you made acts of the will, acts of the love of God or trust in God or sorrow for sin etc.

It roughly boiled down to Considerations, Affections, Resolutions and Petitions. As an aid to memory, Fr Carpenter, who was Vincentian Spiritual Director in Maynooth College, used to tell the students, “Remember ‘Old Carp’” (his nickname) as a help to recall the different stages of meditation. There is nothing wrong with discursive prayer, but as time went on, somehow or other I could not follow this type of prayer. One day I was at our retreat centre, Damascus House, and I asked one of the priests “What course is going on at present?” “Fr Matthew McGettrick, a Carmelite priest, is giving a course on Centring Prayer”. I went in to hear him and got hooked on it, and ever since, I have followed it and found it most helpful.

It is a common experience of many who started with discursive prayer gradually to tend to contemplative prayer. “All prayer converges on contemplation” (Fr Johnston SJ).

Centring Prayer is nothing new in the Church. In fact it is just a new name for contemplative meditation which goes back to the early desert fathers and beyond. It is also dealt with in *The Cloud of Unknowing* – a treatise on prayer, by an English monk in the 14th Century. In recent times it began to be called Centring Prayer. It is based on the great truth

of faith; *THE DIVINE INDWELLING* (i.e. God dwells in the centre of our being, in an indwelling of friendship and love). Our task in this life is to remain in a constant consciousness of God. We do this especially through prayer.

Now, Centring Prayer is simply ‘old goods in a new package’. We cannot comprehend God with our intellect as He is infinite being but we can contact God with our wills, when we stretch out in love to God in prayer. Centring prayer has become popular throughout the church through the spread of prayer groups. It has spread throughout the English speaking world through the work of Fr John Main OSB, Abbot Keating OCR, Fr Matthew McGettrick OCD, Fr Basil Pennington OCR and several others.

What do I do to practise contemplative meditation? This is just a short account of the mechanics of it.

The use of the Mantra – use a favourite aspiration or ‘holy word’ and repeat it.

Here are a few examples which people use but each person must pick their own, e.g. ‘Maranatha’, ‘Jesus be merciful to me a sinner’, ‘Jesus I love you’, ‘Come Holy Spirit’ etc. *The idea of the Mantra* – it is a means of bringing the wandering mind back to focus on God. It is like a chain on a rowing boat, anchored in the harbour. When the tide seems to bring the boat out to sea, the chain attached to the anchor brings it back again. You are bound to have many distractions, as the human mind cannot focus for long on any one topic. The use of the Mantra brings the mind back again.

The Mechanics of practising Centring Prayer

1. Relax and sit upright on a chair.
2. Try to remain still in body, because the stillness of the body helps the stillness of the soul.
3. Place yourself in God’s presence and reach out to Him in love. Try to remain attentive to God’s presence. There is no need for thoughts or images, just stay quietly in God’s presence. St John of the Cross called it “a loving attention to God”. The result is often a feeling of profound peace.

Thomas Merton says, “Contemplation is the highest occupation of the human mind”. Everything is happening underneath the senses. You may be inclined to think what is the use of all this? Only wool-gathering? Only moping? The Holy Spirit is converting us, cleansing us, filling us with his graces, transforming us.

What about petitions? I may think I should be praying for my aunt who is sick, or for my son that he may pass his exams etc. When you

meditate, you are praying for all these intentions as well.

As we progress in meditation, there are two common difficulties.

1. Distractions, we repeat the Mantra as a help to focus on God.
2. Dryness, for some reason or other, meditation does not seem to work.

There are many reasons for this, viz. I may not be feeling well, I may have some serious worry or God may be purifying us and deepening our faith. We are no longer seeking the ‘consolations of God’ but the ‘God of consolation’. We are no longer looking for ‘spiritual kicks’. God will keep us in a state of loving attention for as long as He wills. When He withdraws it, we realise how much we depend on Him. It deepens our faith. It is like a little bush growing on the mountainside. The stronger the wind blows, the deeper it sends its roots into the mountainside.

What am I to do in times of dryness? One can vary one’s tactics: say the Rosary meditatively; use *Lectio Divina*, i.e. read a favourite passage from the Bible, dwell on it slowly, making acts of love; or read a spiritual book. The period of dryness will pass away. The important thing is to give your time and attention to God. As Cardinal Hume says, “The very will to pray is to pray”. Don’t expect to be flooded with delightful consolations. Prayer is like life itself; it is mainly quiet and grey, it is often hard work but it is well worth the effort to persevere.

A Prayer Group is a great help. There are two well-known groups in Britain and Ireland – the John Main group called the ‘Christian Meditation Group’ and Abbot Keating’s ‘Contemplative Outreach’. In a few parishes where I was stationed, I started contemplative prayer groups. I felt that there were a number of very holy people who had not been stretched. The idea prevalent at that time tacitly assumed that Sunday Mass, Morning and Night Prayers and occasional confession was sufficient for the Laity.

What happens at the meetings?

1. Tea, coffee and biscuits.
2. An opening prayer to the Holy Spirit.
3. The playing of a tape by some of the authorities on contemplative prayer e.g. John Main, Lawrence Freeman, Matthew McGettrick or several others, lasting about 20 minutes.
4. Silent prayer in darkness except for a lighted candle in front of a crucifix. We play music softly before and after meditation. The important part is that the people continue meditation at home, whilst attendance at the meeting once a week is a great help to perseverance.

It is also a great help to belong to a John Main Christian Meditation

group. The numbers at these meetings are usually small, as it demands a good deal from the members.

How often do we have to pray? The ideal is twice a day, morning and evening for a minimum of 20 minutes or a maximum of 30 minutes.

St Vincent and Contemplative Prayer

I digress slightly here to touch briefly on this topic. While we all readily recognise that St Vincent was a great man of action, we may not realise so easily that he was a great man of contemplative prayer as well. Fr Bob Maloney, our Superior General, has written a very interesting article dealing with this and other aspects of St Vincent. The article is entitled “On uniting action and contemplation, a key to understanding Vincent de Paul”. St Vincent spoke on contemplation in his conference to the Daughters of Charity, on May 31st 1648, “On Prayer”. He tells the Sisters that while contemplation is a gift from God, it is the normal issue of the spiritual life. He regarded some of the Sisters as contemplatives. He encouraged them to become other St Teresas.

Perseverance

This is a true story about a middle-aged couple. The wife started attending a prayer group. Her husband ridiculed her at first – “There goes pious Maria to her devotions”. After a year her husband said to her – “Since you started attending your prayer group, I have noticed a great change in you for the better. You are much more patient and considerate. I would like to go with you to the meetings” – and he did.

I suppose our final tip on prayer is that of perseverance. Our Lord himself in His two parables on prayer, stresses this; in the parable the importunate neighbour who continues knocking on his neighbour’s door looking for food in the middle of the night and in the parable of the widow who nagged at the unjust judge till he answered her request. If you persevere in prayer, whatever form it takes, gradually and imperceptibly it will transform you into the likeness of Christ.

“Be instant in prayer”

The Australian Connection:

A Daughter of Charity remembers 1954-1976

Judith Greville DC

It has been said that until the story of Women's Religious Orders has been written the Story of the Church itself is incomplete. It was through their apostolates that the Church ministered to the people. In the last few years some very fine papers have been given on this subject at American University Summer Schools.

Not only are the lives of the Founders, the pioneers and leaders being researched but sociologists and historians are urging us to tell our individual stories. The changes in society, the Church and Religious Life have been considerable in the last half century and it is from the memories, diaries and oral histories that the landscape of daily life emerges. "Life has to be lived forwards, but it can only be understood backwards." It is rather like filling in the background of a large tapestry. This is the contemporary way of doing history.

The following story, or half story, (for it spans only twenty-two of nearly fifty years of a vocation), is offered rather tentatively. It is a very ordinary story, yet different because of the circumstances.

It was originally written for newsletters and I have kept it light, factual and funny, rather than analytical or profound, it is easier to be objective. It was, of course, a period in Community when we had our hardships and frustrations. It was pre- and post-Vatican II. We all struggled with it. In many ways it was cataclysmic. We were brought up to believe that Superiors were natural leaders and always knew what they were doing. Part of the great confusion in Religious Life of those days was that we only slowly became aware that they were struggling with new concepts as we were. The wonder of it is that we all survived and grew in the process – or not all, for many left. "Life has to be lived forwards, but it can only be understood backwards." In offering this I hope that others may be encouraged to reflect on their stories and out of this meditation help us to appreciate and evaluate our shared Community History.

The Beginnings

Divine Providence led me to Australia where I landed at the end of November 1952, quite unaware of the significance of the 27th, 28th and 29th or that I would be entering the Community two years later. All four of the original band of pioneer sisters were alive then, Sr Catherine McGuire, Sr Vincent Valentine, Sr Mary Fagan, and Sr Joseph Leonard. Sr Hurley, the Vice Visitatrice had returned to England, and her

successor, Sr Louise O'Sullivan, was on her way out and due to land in Melbourne en route for Sydney and the Provincial House just one week after I rang the door bell at St Anne's Hall in Melbourne, in March 1954. The Sister Servant of this hostel was Sr Catherine McGuire. By now she was very frail and in the weeks that followed she had to take to her bed, handing me over to the care of Sr Kevin Cleary, "a good sensible girl". In August she died, just one month before I went to the Seminary, her last postulant, and Sr O'Sullivan's first in Australia. Sr McGuire was so simple and warm-hearted she could put anyone at their ease. Her last words to me were, "and if you don't go to look after the handicapped when you get the cornette, what then?" By that time I'd got the message. "Oh," I said, "I'll probably do what I'm told". She patted my shoulder and said happily, "you'll be alright, Miss."

Sr Magdalen Roche was Sister Servant at St Joseph's Home, Sandgate, New South Wales. Most of the postulants were sent to her, though this time she had only one "on her hands". Another, Sr Ellen Sheridan, was over at Murray Dwyer Orphanage, five miles down the road on a bleak estuary of the Hunter River where mining went on day and night. It was here that the Mill Hill Orphanage boys had arrived when they were evacuated during the war, a disturbed and frightened group of youngsters. Sr Magdalen loved postulants and young sisters and complained laughingly that they were whisked off to the Seminary as soon as they learned to be useful, after four months or so. Many of us were sent back to her after receiving the habit, to get a sound education in the service of the poor. She was a big bony Irish woman, strict but loving and possessed of a marvellous sense of humour that turned many a tear and tragedy to mirth. Neither did she stand on ceremony with anyone, and often told jokes at her own expense. She had a serious heart complaint and often had to retire to bed for a day or two. On several occasions she had a heart attack in the night and was anointed, only to turn up on duty next day. She liked to recall a young postulant's reassuring remark on one such occasion, "Don't worry about anything, sister, it's just as well you haven't got a proper job!"

The Postulatum

In '54 St Joseph's Home for the old people had just undergone the first phase of its redevelopment, a one-storey building of fine red brick on the ladies' side, but still a collection of wooden huts with open verandas on the men's, much like their own 'humpies' in the outback. They housed a quaint assortment of furniture, all 'sent in', including a child's rocking horse, and a dentist's chair. In many ways it was fairly primitive, and the sisters worked very hard to combat the heat and dust, yet when the new buildings went up the men were loath to move. They

just didn't find them so homely. St Joseph's was perched on top of windy Ironbark Hill, flat paddocks on three sides where horses waited for the 'knacker's yard' and hides dried on the slip rails in the sun. On the fourth side a steep slope of grass and gum trees fell down to the swamp. There the mosquitoes and fleas bred prolifically in the summer months and plagued us at night. Then we took refuge under mosquito nets and learned the technique of wet soap and blanket fluff treatment for the fleas.

Sr Magdalen was a great champion in the cause of freedom for her old men and women and rejoiced in their eccentricities. John, for instance, would sit on the roosting pole in the hen house for hours, the sun burning down on the corrugated iron roof, saying the rosary whilst waiting for the eggs to be laid. Around five o'clock each day he returned, buckets full, announcing, "we've laid thirty-one today" or whatever the count might be.

Another of the residents was a man so ingrained with coal dust from years of working on the barges that he was named Clinker by the other men. After a few months he was ready to make his peace with God. Confession was his bother, and he shook at the thought of it. Another old man undertook to help him out. That night, as sister passed his bed she saw the two of them hard at it, the catechist saying solemnly, "Don't worry at all Clinker, just say "everything but murder, Father"." It went off very happily in the end; Clinker and the Priest emerged arm in arm as if from the pub, beaming with satisfaction. On his second First Communion day all his mates donated part of his trousseau, a tie, shirt, socks, etc. not all well-fitting, but given, and worn, with pride.

One of the old ladies was exceedingly fat and the sister who cared for her very much wanted to 'make a lady of her', and help her self-respect. After much cajoling she took her to town for a day's shopping and a perm. Clearly, the new outfit would have to include a firm corset. Mrs P was impressed by her new appearance in the mirror and came back a changed woman. However, by dinner time next day things had got a little out of hand. As the sisters sat in silence listening to the reading in the refectory an almighty din could be heard at the outer door. One by one those at the end of the table were sent out to see what the matter was. One by one they came back doubled up with laughter and unable to account for it. Finally, as no one else could be relied upon, Sr Magdalen strode to the door herself. When she returned the place erupted in gales of laughter. Mrs P was standing at the back door, overflowing in all directions, her teeth in one hand and corset in the other, shouting, "it's very kind of you sisters, but I likes my freedom". That was it, exactly!

One thing Sr Magdalen used to say to young sisters was "your Parish Priests will always expect sisters to know two things; how to set up for

Mass and how to lay out the dead". She made sure we had plenty of experience in both.

Sr Vincent Valentine was Sr Magdalen's assistant, and the last of the four pioneers to die. She had a sharp tongue and a heart of gold. She was devoted to Sr Magdalen, to the poor, to the tea trolleys, the trays, the sewing and starching, the ironing and rounding up the staff. She was also devoted to "walking the postulant" (in hat and coat and a 95°-100° temperature.) In the kindness of her heart she was sure one needed to get out, and that meant someone had to do the taking. She was over seventy and her feet always hurt her but 'take' she did, often in the direction of an island where greyhounds were bred. They were very lean and fierce; it was a terrifying experience. For a special treat she would take the bus into town and shop for little gifts for the sisters, especially sticky buns which she regarded as particularly English. As she talked of Mill Hill and 'home', I thought she was a little bit home-sick too. On the grand starching days the young sisters were instructed and scolded and sent running up and down to the line in the paddock with plaqued cornettes until the perspiration dripped off their flushed faces, but at the end of the day she would climb on a chair to fetch down the hidden treat from the top of some wardrobe, home-made peppermint creams. There was a lot of fun and laughter. It was a happy house, the old folk and the sisters were one. Yes, Sr Vincent was like a grandmother. She could be very demanding, and reduce you to tears, and then sit down on your bed with a glass of hot milk and show you all her holy pictures! Somehow or other all those sisters remind me of the words on one of those cards from the Mother House;

Holy Mary, Mother of God
 give to me the heart of a child,
 pure and transparent as a stream.
 Obtain for me a simple heart
 which never holds on to sadness,
 a heart large in giving self,
 tender and compassionate,
 a heart faithful and generous,
 which never fails to see the goodness in others
 and refuses to see evil in anyone.
 Give to me a heart sweet and humble,
 loving without demanding any return,
 joyful in its self-effacement before the heart of another,
 your Divine Son,
 a heart great and indomitable,
 which is not closed by the ingratitude of others,

nor tired by indifference,
a heart tormented by the glory of Jesus Christ,
Blessed by His love,
and the peace which is only to be found in Heaven.

There is a Tree-map of the Australian Province so well done that it gives a splendid summary of its history. A full account has also been written. It is interesting to see many familiar place names that travelled out with successive groups of settlers from the old country, names like Maitland, Croagh Patrick, Carlton, Preston, Orange, Kew, Balwyn, Highgate and Guildford, a bit of nostalgia that works in reverse for someone who meets them over here for the first time.

Seminary

Of the sisters' names most would be familiar to the older generation as they went out from Ireland and England between 1926 and 1954. Most of them I knew too, though some had died and three or four had returned home. Sr Clare Scott and Sr Veronica Polley were already a legend. When I came to the Seminary we made seven. It was September 1954. Fr Nicholas Rossiter had replaced Fr Macken as Vice-Provincial Director. Fr Macken was supposed to look very like St Vincent. As a student he had been a very good organist and was permitted the honour of playing at St Lazare where he entertained the Irish students with jigs in slow motion as they processed in to Solemn High Mass. Fr Rossiter was very good to us. He liked to stroll over from St Joseph's Seminary across the road to chat with the Seminary sisters working in the garden. He would tuck up his soutane and take to the spade like a true farmer's son. He made the seminary a little easier for us, often coming over in the evening to sit on the seminary bench and break up the formality to get us laughing and swapping stories. His book on the Vincentian saints and martyrs was probably the lightest literature we had in those days. The Directress was Sr Brigid Harley and Sr Maeve O'Brien, (then Aloysius) soon returned from training in Mill Hill and Paris to be Sister of Office. Later they were to be Australia's first sisters on the Ethiopian Mission. Sr Louise O'Sullivan settled in as the new Vice-Visitatrice and in the years that followed there was a rapid expansion of the Vice-Province. She was often away on visitation or setting up new houses, the distances and changes of climate across that wide continent must have made travelling a gruelling affair. For the sisters who came over from Perth in Western Australia for the annual retreat in Sydney it meant a five-day train journey across the sweltering Nullabore Plain to Adelaide, then on to Melbourne, and finally to Sydney. Each change involved another train as the gauges varied from state to state.

The Australian Seminary was modelled closely on the one in Mill Hill. Because of the great distance between us the ‘t’s were crossed and the ‘i’s dotted, earnestly. We even had fried bread or porridge for breakfast on alternate mornings and cocoa for supper. The emphasis was very much on ‘loving God by the strength of your arm and the sweat of your brow’ – the latter being comparatively easy in a sub-tropical climate. Perspiration arose like dew-drops on the back of your hands in the chapel, and Sunday shoes and habits could go green with mildew in the cupboard during the hot-wet season. We wore the same Seminary robes as in Europe, and all that went with them – above and below. Apart from this our tales of the Seminary would be much the same as elsewhere – for those days. The part that was absolutely different was the Australian flora and fauna. Before the new buildings went up the grounds included scrub which grew dense in the summer months. It shaded possums and blue-tongued lizards 18” long, the occasional goanna and bandicoot, and sometimes a snake or two. The sandy gravel in front of the house was alive with trap door spiders, and the large hairy hunter spiders were everywhere. I recall one Christmas day, when the Seminary were writing their letters home, our peace was shattered by a cry of horror as we spied two blue-tongued lizards cooling off against the wall in the Seminary classroom. Some sisters ran for the old straw brooms, whilst others leapt on the benches. It neatly divided the country girls from the city slickers! Christmas bush and Shasta daisies were our decorations at this season. Bougainvillea cascaded down the sides of the grotto and wild freesias grew on the waste ground where the villas are now. Livingstone daisies in phosphorescent colours ringed the shrubs, Rose of Sharon and camellias, on the brown lawns, and over the road at St Joseph’s College the scarlet flowers of the flame tree contrasted with the violet bells of the jacarandas.

The chapel stood on its own in the garden in those days. In the wet season we ran back and forth with our ‘gents’ umbrellas. One night the seminary sister on bell duty crossed the path to open the chapel doors for night prayers only to run into a visiting priest. He had been unable to make himself heard at the front door and came round to the lighted windows. There was a scream as she fell into his arms and then a hurried apology as she saw the white collar. “Oh, I’m so sorry Father, I thought you were a man!”

Sr Joseph Leonard was one of the first group of four to come out to Australia. I knew her by reputation as a very gifted teacher. Her habit, however, I knew well. It was given to me as a second after the *Pris d’habit*, and became known as Joseph’s coat – rather aptly, as it boasted 27 patches in various shades of blue.

Not a lot changed for me in the next six or seven years as I emerged from the Seminary chrysalis with drooping cornette and first placement

– as Sister of Office. Sr Mary Fagan, an aunt of Fr Kieran Magovern, also one of the first four, took care of the door and the ‘phone. She also taught part time at St Anthony’s, the Parish school across the road. She taught handcrafts to the slow learners by day and unpicked and reworked it by night – “so that it’s right for them in the morning!” She regularly mended the Vincentians’ clothing and occasionally gave it away to men-of-the-road by mistake. Even in her seventies she was pretty, with a pink and white complexion and a sweet expression.

Provincial House was built on three sides of a square then and one of her duties was to mop the lower veranda each day. When caught red-handed shaking her mop over the edge onto the violets she was heard to exclaim – “Oh Sister Visitatrice, I do believe you are omnipresent!” She went out Parish Visiting right up to the time of her last illness. One woman she visited regularly outlived her, though both had cancer. Once she told me that she used to sing pop songs to Our Lord as she did her *ménage*.

Breaks from the routine

There were three breaks in the Seminary routine that I really enjoyed. These were the Wednesday afternoons spent visiting with the Parish Sister in Woolloomooloo, East Sydney; the annual fortnight back at Sandgate, relieving a sister on retreat; and the regular turn at the weekend washing for the Meecham family in Haberfield. Woolloomooloo was a very old part of Sydney, rather like our Soho in London, a mixture of vice and poverty, with many old houses where I was warned not to do the brushing too vigorously for fear that the ceiling would collapse. Fleas and bed bugs arose in clouds when beds were remade. Many a sister had to get under the shower (clothes and all) when she came home. There were some fascinating characters there too, including a self-styled witch who lived on the ground floor and was wooed with baked custards.

St Joseph’s Home in Sandgate expanded rapidly during those years. Today, it is a very large complex including a nurses’ home. The huge chapel became the parish church for miles around. The sisters lived over the administration block with the ladies’ wing to the left and the men’s to the right. In addition to elderly people there were a few chronically ill. One young man had fallen off scaffolding and broken his back and lay on his stomach for years. He was a great reader and had many friends to visit him. A more harrowing case was a young woman who suffered from an acute form of arthritis since she was sixteen. By the time she reached twenty she also had a terrible skin complaint that gave off a stench of death. She was completely covered in creams and bandages and was very distressed almost all of the time. Everything had to be done for her. She was in her forties by the time she died. Her suffering

was the most extreme I have ever seen. Everyone was so kind to her but very little could be done to relieve her. Those who nursed her just suffered with her.

Back in Sydney extensions were being made to Provincial House with a Retreat Wing to the right and a Seminary block to the left of the original building. In 1956, Fr Frank Meacham, a secular priest and professor at Manly Seminary, approached the Community for help to nurse his family. His three sisters had creeping paralysis and his mother had just suffered a severe stroke after nursing them since childhood. No suitable nursing home could be found, and Father had tried to feed, wash and care for them himself in addition to teaching at the Seminary. He was nearly at breaking point. Two sisters were sent to live at the house in Haberfield, a Sydney suburb, as full time staff. A third sister was loaned from Provincial House each weekend to do the weekly wash and clean up. We managed for a while with much good will, and eventually St Catherine's Villa was built on Provincial House grounds. The family moved in together with about twenty-five other patients. Mrs Meecham died just before the transfer. The girls survived for a number of years. Nancy, the youngest, with her electric typewriter, was the secretary and translator for the others as their speech deteriorated. The 'Villa' cared for elderly women, two or three mentally retarded girls and some spastic patients. Over the years other villas have been built alongside St Catherine's to provide for mentally handicapped teenage girls and another house for our aged sisters. All are connected to Provincial House with covered walkways, and share our chapel. In later years the swimming pool and walled garden were built for the girls and the sisters could make use of it too. We had some marvellous recreations around the pool. In the early days though, things were pretty spartan and the staff minimal. Habit sisters, including the Assistant of the Province and the Directress, spent their recreations over there washing up. We still had some fun over it though.

Back at the Seminary

Sr Pauline Delaney took Sr Brigid's place as Directress and was renowned for her witty *avis* and her stories of the house at North Lismore with the Aborigines. One day, I was to know it at first hand. After teacher-training in 1962, my first school was at Orange, over the Blue Mountains north of Sydney. Sr Aileen Maguire, then Sr Michael, was a young Sister Servant at Croagh Patrick Orphanage where we cared for about 36 boys aged from three to twelve. After that they went down to the brothers in Sydney. Their sisters were at the Mercy nuns' orphanage at Bathurst, some twenty miles away. Such was the system in those days. The Sister-Servant and the kitchen sister minded

the toddlers at home and the other five sisters walked the boys down to the school in the town. There were no lay teachers or any other staff. We had a tubular stove in each classroom that required cleaning out and re-setting with paper and wood chips first thing every morning. The toilets were across the yard and the cloakrooms non-existent. The coats simply dripped from their hooks around the walls. Sixty pairs of shoes and socks dried around the chip heater. It snowed heavily in winter, and for two weeks each year (when it closed until the thaw) our boys had a whale of a time at home building snowmen and having snow fights. A neighbouring Protestant orphanage called Buena Vista (or 'The Blisters', to our boys), was often the other guest at bonfire nights and other outings arranged by charitable groups. To them our lads were 'The Crows'. There was inevitably a fight when the two groups came together. Once they really got excited and ran amok. Sr Aileen waded into the scuffle and a squib landed in her cornette blowing the side out of it. That did it! Both orphanage staffs stopped the proceedings and the sorry boys were marched off to bed. Sister, forgetting herself in the fray, held forth on the stupidity and dangers of such behaviour, and the hearers, suitably stunned, forgot to laugh. Only afterwards did we all appreciate the funny side. Fortunately she was not hurt.

After school the sisters visited in the Parish and took converts for instruction, when they weren't on duty with the boys. We had a home-farm and local growers were very good to us. If there was a glut on the market, the trucks would trundle up the hill on their way to the tip and ashamed lorry drivers unloaded peaches, pears and apples on us until they reached from the ground to the first floor, box upon box. Unfortunately, the possums appreciated them too and often climbed the boxes at night until, satiated; they climbed through an open window and slept on a spare bed in the dormitory. Nature was never far away. A colony of fruit bats circled around the stair well on the top landing, and were sometimes seen hanging upside-down on the brass rails around the sisters' beds. In summer, the air was like wine but in winter it was bitterly cold. Some sisters had terrible chilblains from hanging out the washing before Mass. At six in the morning it could freeze solid in half an hour. I shared a dormitory with Sr Patricia Lyons, the headmistress. On one such night we couldn't sleep for shivering and all the curtain rods shivered with us. Suddenly a forlorn cry broke the great silence – "Lord save us, we perish". Laughter even warms you up!

Next Placement; North Lismore

From Seminary days, Orange and North Lismore were part of the folklore of the Australian Community. I was fortunate indeed to experience both of them. North Lismore was to be my next assignment.

Geographically it was a far cry from the Blue Mountains, a country town in Northern New South Wales, nearer the equator and a geologist's happy hunting ground. It was the site of long since extinct volcanoes and the meeting place of five rivers that overflowed sometimes twice a year, in June and January. It was mined for its blue metal, quarried down the end of our road. This was used for surfacing roads. The surrounding countryside was rich in fossils and minerals, especially semi-precious stones. Wealthier people lived on the hilltops and slopes and were mostly farmers. Migrant Italians farmed further afield and sent their children to our school down in the valley which was very humid and subject to flooding.

I arrived there several days before the letter announcing my arrival. Luckily an elderly couple offered me a lift from the station as I stepped off the over-night train from Sydney, and drove the 20 miles from Casino to Lismore. Sr Brendan Crist, the Sister Servant, was amazed to see me. After breakfast and a sleep, we went over to school to prepare for the new term starting the following day. Then came a visit to the Parish Priest and his curate, Scallabrinian Fathers, founded to care for Italian migrants. I first saw Fr John literally 'up a gum tree', trying to rescue a neighbour's cockatoo. In the years that followed, one got used to seeing him on the roof or up trees; he had done a bit of mountaineering and was very agile when it came to climbing about in the course of mending his property. Both priests were musical, one played the organ, impromptu, while the other said Mass. It sounded like the forerunner of the 'moog synthesiser'.

Houses in our street were built on stilts, as much for coolness as a precaution against floods. In the space beneath, people parked cars or hung their boats, kept the laundry facilities, tool-shed etc. Nearly all the houses were a mixture of brick and weatherboard slats, with a stair of planks leading up to the front door. In spring, the street was lined with the purple bells of the jacaranda trees and occasional splashes of brilliant red Coral and Flame trees. Bougainvillea, Hoya and Passion fruit vines draped the fences and climbed the walls and Colas plants grew to a height of several feet. In winter, there were Hydrangeas and Roses. The summers were long, hot, wet and humid, a perfect climate for lizards, goannas, turtles, sometimes snakes, and, most of all, frogs of every size. The children brought turtles to school with a hole drilled in the shell, threaded with string so they could tie them up. If left over-night they grew mischievous and would rummage in forgotten wastepaper baskets and upend anything in sight. Frogs were extremely vocal night and day and visible too, especially in the cisterns where they held family parties, or sat in pairs on the toilet seat waiting for other guests. During the grand clean up on Saturday mornings, they would

start a veritable *Eisteddfod*, a cacophony of croaking as chain after chain was pulled. They hopped out of children's pockets, crawled up the outside of the church windows, exposing bright pink tummies and had been known to come in, leaping over benches when chased. Once, one fell into the sanctuary lamp during Benediction. Tiny ones, the size of a fingernail, dropped off the trees onto your hand in very humid weather, and to go to the 'bathroom' in the night was a hazard.

Three of us taught in the local Primary School while another was at home doing the cooking and visiting. We had two classes each, except the Headmistress who had three and enjoyed it. She was a brilliant teacher with years of experience at Chullora Migrant Camp, helping new Australians of many nationalities come to terms with a new country and language. Sr Brendan was also the heart and soul of their social life, encouraging them to share their rich cultural heritage with Australian neighbours. Love of Concerts was the medium she used to integrate the families as well as to educate them. It was the same with our Australian, Italian and Aboriginal children in North Lismore. Rehearsals went on for weeks as we emptied out onto the verandas for class and the classrooms became the concert-hall. The performance itself was attended by families and Parish priests from miles around. Fr John was in his element as host. He bore a marked resemblance to Pope Paul VI and was often told so. When giving the Vote of Thanks at the end of the Christmas Concert one year, he became rather carried away by the general excitement and his English failed him. Bowing to the congratulations and applause he said: "My dear friends, you say many kind things – but it is only the behind of me that is like the Holy Father".

The Cycle of the Year at North Lismore

Each year we had a Harvest Festival. Banana trees appeared in the sanctuary and stalls of beautifully arranged fruit and vegetables. Out in the street, the farm machinery stood in rows waiting to be blessed. God bless the Scallabrinians, they were very enthusiastic and energetic. They turned their Italian migrants into good parishioners in spite of the distances and the constant farm work. The local hotel/club became an aid too. Mass was changed to one hour before opening time on Sundays and the families stayed on for a picnic lunch around it, a day to meet relations and friends and allow the women to gossip and the children to play together. On their remote farms, the company was very limited all week and the work constant and hard.

Once a year my class went to Spinaze's Farm for an outing. This family was third generation Australian and had six girls in school. The farm was something of a showpiece and students came to study it from

all around the Pacific. Like almost all of the surrounding farms, they had pigs, bananas and beans, in that order, down the hillside. The pigs at the top end were wonderfully clean little animals housed in age-groups like a sort of pigs' boarding school. The banana trees grew in neat rows down the slopes, and appeared to move up or down a couple of feet every two years when old trees were cut down and new shoots grew up alongside. In the fertile valley grew the beans. The swill from the pigs was carefully channelled down to fertilise first the trees and then the market garden. All up and down the hillsides the brilliant blue plastic bags hung like gigantic flowers over the branches of ripening fruit to keep off predators. Lorries that sped around our corner on market days, while we were doing bus duty, would sometimes drop bundles of these bags on the road. They were very useful in the tropical downpours, with holes cut out for arms and heads, and popped over the smaller children to keep them dry.

Our neighbours were very good to us and often left gifts of eggs and vegetables on our doorstep. Local publicans and their customers regularly shared out trays of meat or fish that were raffled at the hotel bar on Saturday nights. I'm not sure whether the floods came in the holidays, or the education department structured the terms around them, but when they arrived our house and school provided sanctuary as they were up on a little rise. The aboriginal families who lived under the viaduct camped in the school and horses and dogs tore around the playground for a week or two. The Aborigines didn't really like living in houses and used them to store their belongings, tearing up the floorboards to make a fire in the garden around which they camped. A number of the men were metho-drinkers and came to us for tea and sandwiches plus a handful of chillies from the bush at the front door. Women and children were sure of clothes from the cupboards under the house. This was a mercifully cool spot in summer and the children brought their desks over from school and sat the Primary Finals there. A couple of times we found freshly shed snake skins in the rafters overhead when all was over. Occasionally, a neighbour was called on to shoot a snake that was twined round the poor clothes or crib figures. They really do wriggle around minus their heads until sunset!

The old people's houses were largely unpainted on the outside and had wide shady verandas, bead curtains to keep the mosquitoes at bay and bamboo furniture. They might have been in Malaysia. Our climate, flowers and fruits were so similar that the Social Studies and Natural Science books were often illustrated and printed there, relatively cheaply. Books for children in Australia were extremely good and well graded. In later years generous Government grants meant that we had excellent school and classroom libraries.

We had a rare visit from the Apostolic Delegate on one occasion, an event of considerable importance. Rehearsals were interminable, protocol all-important. Infant school children have a way of reducing all that to manageable proportions. On the morning of his visit Sr Brendan came to check that all was in order; "Well, children, and who is our important visitor?" "The Depostolic Alligator, Sister", came the reply.

Changes

In 1963, Australia became an autonomous Province, and Sr Xavier Pigott (one of the first Australians to enter), the first Visitatrice. In 1964, we changed the Habit, and in 1966, Sr Julia Denton succeeded Sr Pigott as Provincial. The times they were a-changing, fast!

Vocations fell off during the 1960's in all the religious orders. We too were obliged to retrench and re-group. For the last few months at North Lismore, Sr Brigid Coakley and I were on our own though we had the assistance of a lay teacher. Mostly we forgot the cooking and returned to find yet another 'ember day'. We learned to rely on salads, Irish stew and baked custards. The Mercy nuns took over the school when we left, and that same year the Carmelites came to Lismore. Our cupboards were turned out and their contents taken over to help the new foundation.

So we left the dear little school with its map of Australia on the playground, its sunburnt children and generous people. Many mothers left their own floors half finished to come and scrub out the school with us at the end of term. There were other helpers too: Frank O'Sullivan, the SVP man, poorer than some he visited; Bernard Muldoon, the printer who gave us paper and card for the school so generously (he was a wonderful Catholic layman, brother of the Bishop, and some would say an even better speaker) and many, many more. We left years of legendary sisters. Sr Angela Brohan visited there for many years. She brought many converts into the Church. For her, people would do the impossible. Sr Francis Ryan too, who once sat up in the rafters during a flood, the Blessed Sacrament in one black bag and the cat in the other, watching the fruit and vegetables floating out of the door while the chickens shared the rafters with her. All this was in the 'olden days' before our house was lifted up on stilts like the others, and boats rowed down the street at flood time. Many of our pioneer Daughters served God and the Poor there with great joy and hard work.

Woolloomooloo

Woolloomooloo in East Sydney was my next house. The old and new buildings stood side by side. The old house was a perfect rabbit warren, the sisters living quarters and the Infant school crowded on top of one another. When I first saw it on a teaching practice week back in 1961,

the whole of the lower end of the Primary School was there too. The Maltese mamas in the kitchen carried the trays back and forth through the classroom preparing the school dinners, and the children of course, waived and shouted their greetings to relatives. On two days a week, the pulley with the sisters' clothes line (suitably camouflaged) was draped across the yard over the children's heads.

The new building meant great expansion. Soon, all but the Infant School moved out, the rest of the Primary School went down the street to the Cathedral School where the sisters and Christian Brothers taught together. The new building, the Marillac Centre, was a little like Carlisle Place, with multiple works. The sisters lived here too. The roof playground held swings, a roundabout and an old car for the Nursery children. Two floors housed the Nursery 2-4 year olds. They had their own entrance and ramp up to each floor – beloved of older brothers and sisters with roller skates. Pensioners used the ground floor for a Day Centre, with clothes rooms, showers and facilities for hairdressing, chiropody etc, manned by volunteers. In the basement, about 120 hot meals were cooked and served to regular and roving pensioners alike for 20c a time. Another part served as a hostel for fifteen girls on probation or attending psychiatric clinics. Sisters passing through Sydney often came for a day or two.

This district was at the same time cosmopolitan in character and at the back of the bright lights, in more senses than one. It had all the attendant problems of vice and poverty. Our doctor was a very clever young Chinese, the school children Turks, Greeks, Maltese, Italian and Yugoslav. Notes from parents often read: "Dear Sr Goodit..." for they couldn't pronounce J or Th. During my first year, it was very noisy. Roads were being dug up and re-surfaced on three sides of us and the interior entirely renovated. The sound of constant pneumatic drills, lorries and carpenters drove us to look elsewhere for educational projects that took us off the premises for at least part of the day. We were right in the inner city, quite near the Australian Museum of Natural Science, one of the finest in the world. Thence we trooped to look at Aboriginal Life, Marine Biology, Butterflies of the World, Shells, Maps, Rocks and Planetary Systems. There were excellent films on certain days, on deep sea diving and volcanoes. Another of our venues was the free Education and Leisure Centre. We used it for sports and crafts. All the equipment and staff were at our disposal. Collages and puppets were popular. They even made us a puppet theatre for our plays. The children were as wild as hares and knew the alleys and short cuts better than I. We set off together and everyone arrived safely, eventually. The problems of the area showed up mainly by night, drugs and prostitution, brawling and burglary. My classroom had been the sisters' dormitory at

the top of about 60 stone steps. One tall landing window had a gaping hole through which a football had bounced. When the children careered down the stairs you held your breath and prayed.

From our windows we had a great view over the rooftops. One morning police frisked the tenants in the terraces below where their back yard faced ours. Out came mattresses, bedding, clothing and all, as they searched for drugs. Several people were arrested and the house was watched for weeks to come. After school visiting could be unusual too. On one occasion, I visited the father of one of our families. Neighbours reported that he had locked his wife and children out and they were wandering the streets. He opened the door just a chink, gun in hand. However, he meant no harm, he was only sorting out loot with his mates, and would let the family back in when 'business' was settled.

Francis Street, as the house was usually called, was famous for its Christmas Party Outing. Each year, in the midst of the hot and humid Christmas Season, all the Sydney houses emptied out and converged on Francis Street. A great army of helpers prepared for weeks in advance. Some of the old-timers had done so for years. They gathered together laden with boxes, bags, flasks and crates. For several years, they went to one of the islands in Sydney harbour by ferry, the blind, lame, mentally handicapped, the old and the unmarried mothers, school children and poor men. It was a marvellous cross-section of the poor of Sydney, and it was THEIR DAY. Some of the volunteers were great names in Sydney, Ladies of Charity, society and stage people who did fund-raising, donated goods and generally supported the sisters' works all year round. It was a very colourful crowd and a day for everyone. As evening fell they returned hot, exhausted and grubby but ecstatic.

Moving on to Marsfield

Two Spanish sisters came out to work with Spanish migrants and I was moved again to make place for one at our house. This time it was back to Provincial House to teach in the Parish Primary School at St Anthony's, Marsfield. This part of Eastwood was originally a soldier settlement in convict time, hence 'Field of Mars'. By the late 60's, it was a suburb of Sydney surrounded by market gardens. Many of our children were Italians who worked hard in the fruit season. They were often kept home or arrived tired out after banging tins all night to keep off the fruit bats. They also spent hours after school picking the Iceland poppies and tying them in dozens for sale. By the 70's they had prospered and school attendance was more regular. The Vincentian Seminary was just across the road. The students came over to observe the RE lessons.

Under the leadership of Sr Denton, sisters from all over Australia came for one of the three annual carne retreats at Provincial House.

In these years of change after Vatican II, seminars were introduced, two days before or after them. This ensured that all the sisters of the Province were in touch with the new thinking in spirituality and psychology. It helped the Community to move forward and cope with change and development, not piecemeal but together. Some sisters were sent to university in the 60's; the first three subsequently left. The world had gone on ahead of us and we were in a time warp, unknowingly. The whole ethos of the Community was anti-intellectual. We were working on the principles of 1633, innocent but ignorant. To hit the twentieth century was, for some, traumatic. It took a while to adjust. More sisters were sent to do external studies, educational and counselling courses, some did diplomas in theology. We were still 'sent'. The word 'consultation' was not yet in our vocabulary. We joined our secular colleagues at the Teachers' Summer Schools; both those run by the State and the Catholic Education Department. A Jesuit brother began a new initiative for religious brothers and sisters who worked in kitchens and catering, The Food Service Directors. Was it an American gimmick? He did much to raise their morale and brought out a whole spirituality for this service, in addition to providing information, training and an opportunity for sharing at the Annual Day to which they could bring a companion. Our kitchen sister took me a couple of times and it was really enjoyable. The lectures, leaflets and buffet were a feast, spiritual and culinary. What a face-lift for the profession! God bless him, he really brought imagination and joy into an area that many religious had found to be drudgery. What a little appreciation can do!

The school was developing too. We now had a 'Parents and Friends' Association. It was a very happy partnership between the Vincentians in the Parish, the Sisters in the school and the parishioners. Almost the whole social life of the parish revolved around the church and school. Mothers did fund raising and dads took care of maintenance and sports training. Saturdays and Sundays were particularly busy. A new church was built, in the post-Vatican style. A circular interior and sloping floors down to the central altar encouraged participation in the liturgy and people actually met and talked to each other after Mass on the shady verandas. The word got around and soon we had congregations from other parishes 'on the move'.

School outings were more sophisticated here. At Assembly one day, a child told us that her daddy 'drove a submarine'. It proved to be true, he was Lt Commander of HMS Ottway, one of two nuclear submarines presently in Sydney Harbour on manoeuvres from Scotland (the child, Fiona, returned years later with her mother to tell us that they had become converts). He arranged for our class to see over the ship. What a day it was. During these years our five-year-olds had a new game

in the playground. They arranged for 'heart transplants'! They nearly needed them too when they started banging stones into each other's breast pockets! Christian Barnard was a household name. It was also the age of space exploration. We were fortunate to have an American space exhibition in Sydney's Hyde Park, where astronauts guided us around the large marquee that housed the 3D pictures of all the expeditions. The prize exhibit was Gemini 8, on a platform in the centre. We were amazed to see how small it was, and how many wires and strings were left hanging around like untidy shoelaces. Women would have finished it off better, given a chance!

Practical Changes

At Provincial House large dormitories were divided up into spacious cubicles and afforded a modicum of privacy. The scrub around the garden had all but vanished. Several villas were flourishing, caring for the old, the mentally handicapped teenagers and our senior sisters. The single large table disappeared from the Community room and was replaced by several small ones and a few easy chairs. Communal recreation periods, at which we had made or mended our clothes, now included games and crafts. Sr Julia sorted her stamp collection or prepared slides to illustrate her talks on Ethiopia and the countries she had visited on her trips to and from the General Assembly. We had a fine new kitchen and the refectory with dividing doors opened out to provide more accommodation at retreat times. The Seminary block had spacious rooms and corridors with vinyl floor tiles.

In the chapel a beautiful blue carpet ran the length of the aisle and sanctuary. Two fine stained glass doors made in Germany depicting our founders, Vincent and Louise, welcomed us into the chapel. Light and colour were everywhere. We no longer scrubbed floors of wood or linoleum on our knees. The electric polisher had arrived!

We seldom saw lizards out in the garden now, let alone in the house. Gone were the fruit bats, but the rosella parrots, brilliant red, yellow and blue/green still converged on the fruit trees in season, and the kookaburra could still be seen on the clothes line. All around us, the market gardens were disappearing and housing estates were going up. Macquarie University was being built at the end of our road. Many religious orders had their student houses in the neighbourhood. We visited each other's houses on feast days, bringing musical instruments to celebrate the liturgy together. Still, our own feasts were the most important events. On Boxing Day each year, the sisters came out from the other Sydney houses for a Community day; Mass, followed by a barbecue in the garden and a progressive tennis tournament for all was the pattern. After all those years, we even discovered a few stars. Sr.

Aileen Maguire was usually the winner. The Provincial volunteered to mix the fruit punch! When evening came we had recreation around the Seton Villa swimming pool.

By 1965 we had bought a holiday cottage at Avalon, down the Peninsula. At first it contained the bare essentials, all we needed. Holidays were a new concept in Community and so was swimming. We soon got used to both. Sisters who were tired or in the process of being changed went down for a few days quiet and fresh air, sun, sand and surf. Bookings for the annual two weeks holiday were in great demand.

Brisbane

Following a course on the Education of Perceptually Impaired Children, I was sent to start a pilot scheme in Brisbane. This was to be my last house in Australia

It is the distances out there that Europeans find so hard to appreciate. When Fr Richardson came out, he looked at the map when planning his itinerary and was surprised to find five or six hundred miles between one state and another, a distance you couldn't cover in an afternoon, except by air. It took thirteen and a half hours overnight, by train from Sydney to Brisbane, then out to Carina, our suburb. It was our only house in Queensland and we numbered seven sisters teaching in three schools. The Primary School was next to our house at Carina, the Infants' and Secondary schools two miles down the road at Mt Gravatt. Seton College was a Secondary School with a difference. All 120 or so children had problems of one sort or another requiring very special education. Gradually the school, under Sr Margaret Hope-Johnson, became another pilot project in the area and gained an excellent reputation.

The Infant school was alongside it. By the judicious use of time our 'breaks' kept us from clashing with each other. We had a fine hill on the far side of the building where children chased after old car tyres begged from the local garage.

On the edge of the playground stood the Presbytery, a wooden hut on stilts with a tin roof. It might have been Australia's monument to St Francis of Assisi. Truly the parishioners had never seen another like it. Fr Paddy Dowd was a farmer's son and gave his time and energy to the school and parish unstintingly. He was very much a part of our family. Sr Margaret used to say, "at least he gets a good meal and some company when he comes to us." When asked who the priest was, our little children would say, "he drives the bus"; he did, for all three schools. This meant a carefully worked out schedule with staggered times for starting and ending the school day so that all the children could avail of the transport. Father loved wheels, which was just as well.

When not on the bus, car, motor-bike or bulldozer, with which he kept down the undergrowth, he was under one or other doing his own repairs. The previous parish priest had taught woodwork to the older boys. When the sisters first came he made all their beds himself – no springs of course, but good for the back.

The paddocks across the road at Carina were lovely stretches of green. Even in that hot climate parts of them were always waterlogged. There were trees and wild arum lilies in abundance and horses that had come to the end of their days and were in retirement. The wall of the church which overlooked this was entirely glassed. Before Mass in the morning, it was a beautiful sight, horses galloped around in pure pleasure. It wasn't hard to thank God for such beauty. We were nearer the equator than ever here.

The Vincentians had parishes further north still and called on their way to or from Sydney. We occasionally went up to them at Southport for an evening's celebration, usually at Christmas time.

Great poinsettia trees grew around the church and school. In Australia they are called the Pentecost flower, both because of their colour and shape and because they flower around that time. We also had frangipani trees with their heavy scent and gold and white blossoms. From the huge mulberry trees we gathered fruit for puddings and leaves for the silk worms in school. The children could weave ribbons of pure gold from the cocoons after they had hatched and flown away. The Infant school children loved the days we went out to collect living things; plants, seeds and insects – 'to find God at work making things'. Once we went to a hatchery and brought back day-old chicks. One family had a small home farm. Each year we went to see the animals and learn about bee-keeping. One parent was a house-painter by trade but had started bee-keeping as a hobby with his friend. The hobby eventually took over and one of them retired to carry it on full time. They had a caravan to take the hives to various parts of the country where special plants grew that gave the honey its specific flavours. Agricultural Society charts around the shed gave a professional start to his lessons. As ever, we had no cleaning staff but did everything ourselves. The little children joined in very often when they saw us washing down the verandas before or after school. Litter was picked up on the spot before leaving a room or the playground – very good training, I think.

Catholic Education

In Australia, at least until 1976, Catholic Education was not free. Parents paid on a sliding scale according to their means and in consultation with the Head Teacher. Catholics were very proud of their school system and always worked hard and made many sacrifices to preserve the freedom

to teach the Faith and to choose their own teachers. Schools in the Catholic sector were largely staffed by Religious. They had initiated the Catholic Schools and lived on whatever the Parish Priest could afford to give them after providing the buildings. Later, when vocations fell off in the 60's, more lay people joined our staffs and we worked towards parity of pay with the State Sector. All fees went into the Diocesan Catholic Education Office who paid the teachers' salaries directly. Religious were paid a fraction of this as it was presumed they could live on less. It was, therefore, a frugal life but a healthy one. We could eat out under the trees in summer, mosquitoes permitting, and swim after school. The weather could grow oppressively hot. Cyclones came regularly in January and once we experienced a hurricane, some miles away, that left a trail of devastation in a few minutes.

State school Inspectors visited us every other year in Sydney and the Catholic Inspectors every alternate year. They were usually very helpful. In Brisbane inspections were not so frequent, but visiting school psychologists gave their help freely. A lot of very good material was available from England, Holland and the USA; especially books and games for teaching perceptually impaired children. We also made some of our own equipment (as in the past). Brisbane was a good place for a variety of courses. Overseas lecturers came from Europe and America. Banyo, the Diocesan Seminary, opened its doors to Religious and Laity for courses of all kinds. Once again, it was a great opportunity to meet a wide variety of other Religious Orders and let our appreciation of each other grow.

We came into the Charismatic Movement through one of our lay teachers. The National Charismatic Centre was in Brisbane and we were frequent visitors, bringing with us many other religious, priests and lay-people. Among these were the young Columban missionaries on leave from the Philippines. Once, the Charismatic weekend was held at the University, in the main hall. People came from all over Australia and the Pacific. It was a tremendous time of prayer and renewal, a time of great healing of relationships between Bishops and priests, pastors and parishioners, and within Communities. Soon we were going to the Friday night prayer meetings at the Catholic centre, and the Ecumenical meetings in town on Sunday evenings. All this was in addition to the Thursday evening prayer group in our own parish church, which rapidly grew to include sixty or so people each week. It brought new life and joy and opened up a whole field of religious interaction.

Some of the mothers in the Parish were anxious to take catechetics into the State Primary School. This was permitted on Wednesdays. We gave them our lesson notes and loaned them the teaching aids. On Saturday afternoons we met to plan their lessons and talk over the 'post-

mortems' of the previous week. Those who persevered went on to do a full catechetics course with the Catholic Education Office and gain their diploma.

Getting to know the people

The roads were long, hot and dusty for parish visiting, but that was certainly the way to get to know your children's families and understand their problems. A Yugoslav couple with a son at our school had had to crawl out from under barbed wire to escape to freedom. Another family with several young children and a wonderful mother had a father away in gaol. Yet another was a psychiatric case. His older sons stole cars and swapped the parts around before spray painting the new model for resale. Dad used to offer me a lift to the next house. One small boy was exhibiting some very deviant behaviour. The father was very violent and had once beaten him with the Christmas tree his mother had bought him. Some of the families were quite large. A six-year-old said that the best thing about dad coming home on leave from the army was that they always had "ten tucky tied ticken" for supper. It became a catch-phrase for us when we went for Kentucky Fried Chicken on feast days.

Goulbourne and Moree

School sisters were sent to other houses to help out during the holidays. In this way, I got to Goulbourne near Canberra. We had a home for old ladies, fifteen of them, way out in sheep country, with three sisters to look after them. It was a cosy farmhouse with an old-fashioned kitchen range. In cold weather the oven doors would be opened and the heat permeated the house. There were great log fires too. Sheep country is also 'blow fly country'. Our milk jugs here and elsewhere had old-fashioned net covers with beads around the edges. Food was never left out. Another visit took me to Moree in Northern New South Wales, an Aboriginal Mission where four sisters worked in the clinic, mostly pre- and post-natal care, and a pre-school for children from two to four years of age. This mission had been tried and given up by several groups but the sisters stayed and the people prospered. The Aboriginal people were thought to be naturally dull and backward, incapable of being assimilated into the white society or of contributing anything to it. They had been exploited and degraded since colonisation began. In the sixties and seventies, a new movement began and accelerated. Aboriginal Rights is now an issue that is receiving much attention from articulate individuals and latterly from the Government. Land rights of these ancient tribes have been ignored by the big multi-national mining companies. There was a new consciousness of the human and cultural rights of these peoples. They were encouraged to bring their folklore

into liturgical dance and mime. Local artists painted their own church furnishings and decorations and carved in their own tradition. There was tremendous interest and enthusiasm. This was all backed by the two-year experimentation obtained from Rome. Sadly the experiments were not continued after that. The Aboriginal people were saddened and disappointed after all. The priests too felt let down by the proscriptions of the Sacred Congregation. The culture had received a terrible insult with this ban. "It is not good enough for the white men!" was the conclusion they drew from the sad affair.

By concentrating on the clinic for mothers and babies and the pre-school the sisters achieved much. The elements of hygiene and language were taught and the little children were soon built up with vitamins and a healthy diet. They learned to socialise and communicate as the other children did, and were then able to integrate in the ordinary schools around when they started school at five years of age. The ear-, nose- and throat problems cleared up and they had overcome the handicaps of their previous neglect and poverty well enough to prove that they were not naturally retarded but could compete with other young people for jobs after school. It was also a question of breaking down deep-seated prejudices in the local community. Local Government sent plumbers and carpenters with foremen to direct the Aborigines in building their own homes, good timber houses with modern amenities.

I recall a day when I accompanied two sisters on their fortnightly visit to Toomelah, a Government station in the bush, some sixty miles north. In the small school, staffed by lay teachers with great insight and dedication, the sisters held the clinic for that day and gathered the names of families who wanted the priest for baptisms, weddings etc. – parish visiting of a sort. While they worked, I was invited to an Aboriginal picnic with the native Field Officer, his family and friends. One old lady had brought her paints and taught me how to paint in acrylics, out there in the bush. All the time she played charismatic Pentecostal music at full blast on her tape recorder. We ate around the campfire with the traditional 'billy-can' of water for the tea, hanging over the fire and great pieces of steak cooking on a tin dish in the ashes. It was a beautiful day. I came back in Eric's truck and called in on various relations on the return journey. They are a beautifully welcoming and generous people who would share anything with you. They are also very poor, living in sub-standard housing on the edge of the towns, but with great warmth and dignity.

Returning Home

The year before leaving Brisbane and Australia to come home, we had a first ever visit from a Mother General of the Company. Mother Rogé came out to Australia and even took a light plane up to Brisbane for the day, an unscheduled trip. I was able to ask her directly, "Mother, what is your opinion in the matter; what would you think if I asked to change Provinces and go back to my own country? When I entered in 1954, we were still part of the English Province." She said very simply and without hesitation, "My dear sister, I can't see anything wrong in that at all. Pray about it, and ask the two Provincials, then wait and see what happens. No, I can't see any problem, but leave it to the good Lord and to them!"

The Australian Experience has given me so much, another dimension to Community Life, a recognisably Australian Accent, many enjoyable memories of places and people, and some tremendous friends among my sisters and lay people alike. For all of this, I do thank the good God frequently, almost daily, and for the experience of growing up in many different environments. Sometimes it was a tough experience, but I'm mighty glad I stayed with it. Probably one of the hardest things in Community Life anywhere is the loss of friends and companions, the ones who leave. Other losses have their compensations, though all of them are small deaths. Any bereavement is, you might say, a preparation for death and a healthy reminder of it.

Thank you to the Australian Province that brought me up and to the British Province that brought me home!

Vocations and Humanae Vitae

Aidan McGing CM

Away back in 1995, Archbishop Curtiss of Omaha, Nebraska, wrote a seminal article on vocations in his diocesan newspaper. He didn't theorize. He just set out to analyse objectively (his own words) what was happening in the dioceses and religious orders which were attracting candidates.

He wrote:

Young people do not want to commit themselves to dioceses or religious communities which permit or simply ignore dissent from Church doctrine. They do not want to be associated with people who are angry at the Church's leadership or reject magisterial teaching. They do not want to be battered by agendas which are not the Church's, and radical movements which are not the Church's...

Dissent in this context is shorthand for dissenting from *Humane Vitae* (HV) in the matter of contraception. Archbishop Curtiss is saying that it is a fact empirically verifiable that dioceses and communities in the United States which dissent from *Humanae Vitae* do not attract vocations. *A condition for attracting vocations is to accept Humanae Vitae.* Undoubtedly, Ireland is not America, but since, when America sneezes, Europe catches cold, we should be warned.

My experience of Humanae Vitae

At this stage I ask the reader to bear with me while I explain my own reactions to HV. The only time in my life when I thought of giving up the priesthood was on the appearance of this encyclical. It seemed absurd. Child mortality in the West had almost ceased, people were living longer, and they were living in cities where it was difficult to bring up children, parents now had pensions and no longer needed large numbers of children to keep them in old age. At the same time, the world population was expanding rapidly (*it has quadrupled in the last century.*) So clearly, we needed less children, and were we now condemning married people to a life of celibacy? Can you ask the whole human race casually for heroism?

But gradually, as I watched society disintegrate around me, I started to wonder, and I began to take an interest in Natural Family Planning (NFP). Somebody at the time told me that there was a good booklet

on the subject available in the bookshop of a local pro-abortion and pro-contraception association. With some trepidation I entered the shop, when I suddenly became aware that I was surrounded from floor to ceiling with pornography. It was a defining moment. So all the talk about overworked mums and third world poverty (and both exist) ended up in pornography! I grabbed my pamphlet and ran.

When I subsequently attended a seminar on NFP in Liverpool, I was highly impressed by the calibre of the speakers, but to my shame, I made no effort to spread the word about NFP to the couples who were coming to me to get married.

In the autumn of 2001, now that I had more time, I got down seriously to the study of this topic. The last eighteen months have been a revelation to me, as I began to see more and more clearly that Paul VI had been right after all. In HV he foretold how the fallout from contraception would affect society, and it has happened exactly as he foretold.

A new look at Humanae Vitae

It is estimated that about 60% of Catholic priests in the United States dissent from *Humanae Vitae*. I don't know the figure for Ireland, but it may be similar. I only know that priests whom I like and respect dissent from HV, and if you are one of them, I ask you to suspend your judgment, and listen to the arguments against contraception and for NFP. I believe they are overwhelming. I also believe that we have all been brainwashed.

Let's start with some facts. In 1960, the divorce rate in the United States was approximately 5%. In 1961, the hormone pill swept through that country, and at present (2003) the American divorce rate is roughly 45% after five years of marriage. It has increased nine times in just over forty years. In Ireland, separations began to soar around the mid-eighties, about the time that people had finally decided to use the pill. So there has to be a connection between contraception and divorce/separation. That means that *contraception makes married people unhappy*, for why otherwise would they separate so readily?

Anybody who has been close to a divorce/separation knows it is a catastrophe. Every case is different, but divorce/separation usually means the partners' whole world torn apart, their children terrified, a wife abandoned, enormous financial costs, humiliation, anger and resentment and loss of self-esteem. Divorce/separation have frightful psychosomatic effects, such as weight loss, depression, sleeplessness, and even the inability to hold down one's job.

Some effects of contraception

The causes of modern divorce and separation are complex, but contraception is certainly one of the main causes, probably *the* cause, for the present explosion. Why is this?

If a non-married couple feel that intercourse would result in pregnancy, they are cautious, no matter how strongly they feel drawn to each other. But if they are fairly sure that there will be no pregnancy, then one of nature's safeguards is gone. Men can find out quickly if a woman is on the pill and then she is fair game, and her marriage will break up. If a man gets himself sterilized, he is tempted to go on the prowl, and then there is more trouble.

Contraception also disturbs the psychological equilibrium between the sexes; if they rely on sex to draw them to each other, they are inclined to see each other as sex-objects, and not as persons to be loved; lust overcomes love, and of course in time, limitless sex palls. The wife feels she is being used, and the husband feels humiliated in his constant demands.

Contraception is also largely responsible for cohabitation before marriage. Once people feel that they love each other and that there will be no children, why not move in straight away? But the statistics show clearly that couples who cohabit before marriage are more likely to divorce/separate later. No matter how you look at it, their marriage will be less happy than if they had waited.

Cohabitation before marriage leads to divorce/separation for many reasons: first because while the woman may agree to it for fear of losing her man, she will often resent it deeply and feel used. She needs the assurance of a public ceremony which will leave her an "honest woman". Then cohabitators think separately; for instance they seldom have a joint bank account. They do not behave as man and wife, so that it is a delusion to claim that this is a trial run. Further, since they know deep down that they are in the wrong, they feel that sex is a furtive and illicit activity, which leaves them ill at ease with each other in a crucial area. These and other factors are so many seeds of future conflicts.

There are many other reasons why cohabitation can lead to disaster; the main point being that cohabitation is triggered by contraception, which is here again destructive.

Let's see another effect of contraception. In Ireland today nearly one third of all births are to unmarried mothers. The causes for this state of affairs are again complex, but contraception has certainly a lot to do with it, in so far as it encourages men to separate sex from children, so that they feel little responsibility either for their child or their partner. (Despite all the rhetoric about choice, this is the driving force behind abortion.) It is a simple fact that men and women need each other, but in

present circumstances, many single parents, usually women, are left to bring up the child(ren) alone.

These mothers may be in some sort of touch with the child's father, but usually in an uneasy and stressful relationship. It is not surprising that their unfortunate children tend to have a higher rate of alcoholism, poorer physical and mental health, poorer education, and less well paid jobs, than the rest of the community. They are also more likely to be involved in crime and drugs. Let me repeat, we are talking of *nearly one third of the population being affected*, and most of this is down to contraception.

Children deserve better than to be born into these non-families. While liberalism in all its forms can correct over-regulation, it is still a philosophy of the powerful who repress the weak. This is true of economic liberalism, and it is particularly true of sexual liberalism which is unjust to women, children and unborn children.

So contraception is not wrong because the Catholic Church arbitrarily says so; the Catholic Church says it is wrong because contraception is already wrong in its own consequences and therefore in itself. To quote Arthur Miller, a deed and its consequences cannot be separated.

The three results of artificial contraception which I have just mentioned are in a sense utilitarian or consequential, showing that contraception must be wrong from the bad consequences that flow from it: "By their fruits shall you know them."

Can we go further and say that contraception is wrong per se, intrinsically wrong?

Abortion shows that artificial contraception is intrinsically wrong

It is often hard to prove that anything is absolutely wrong. That does not mean to say that there is no difference between right and wrong. We know, for instance, that we must in normal circumstances honour the remains of the dead who were close to us, and we would feel very guilty if we did not do so. How can we prove that this is an absolute demand of morality? Yet there are such demands. John O'Donoghue, of *Anamcara* fame, speaks somewhere of the tragic hero being redeemed when he stumbles on an absolute interdiction and surrenders to it.

If ever there was a consequence that could not be separated from the deed, it is abortion arising out of contraception. While we sympathize with women on account of the frightful pressures that some men put on them, abortion still means killing. The chemical killing of earlier unborn children is already a crime, but late abortions are particularly gruesome, where the operator physically attacks the child. This is the silent scream that appears on the face of the unborn as he tries desperately to escape the instruments that are tearing him apart in agony. Anybody who killed

a cat or a dog in this manner would be put in prison, and rightly so; do I really have to spell it out that abortion is intrinsically wrong?

A pro-abortion lawyer stated in 1989:

For better for worse, there no longer exists any bright line between the fundamental right that was established in *Griswold* [legal right to contraception] and the fundamental right that was established in *Roe* [legal right to abortion]. These two rights, because of advances in medicine and science, now overlap. They coalesce and merge and they are not distinct. The most common forms of contraception today – IUDs, low dose birth prevention pills, which are the safest type of birth prevention pills available – act as abortifacients.

Can contraception, which *always* leads to abortion, be anything but intrinsically wrong?

Two objections

Surely it is right to use condoms to prevent the spread of AIDS? I reply that the only place where AIDS is receding in sub-Saharan Africa is in Uganda, where Christians and Muslims have combined in a remarkable initiative to promote chastity (do you remember the word?) among young men and women. Such an initiative is politically very incorrect, but even the most hardened ideologues are beginning to wonder whether perhaps the Ugandans have got it right.

Then there is the objection that we should encourage contraception in order to control the population explosion. In a famous sentence, Malthus stated that the human race was multiplying in a geometrical ratio (e.g. 2 multiplied by 2 multiplied by 2 etc.), while food production increased only in an arithmetical ratio (e.g. 2+2+2 etc.), so that the human race faced starvation unless it limited its growth.

Like everything else that touches on contraception, this is a matter of extraordinary complexity so that I am forced to simplify. The fact is that in the more developed countries we simply do not know what to do with the food – it is in total surplus. And while more food is certainly needed in Africa, here also there is a general increase in the food available per capita.

Food production in third world countries will not improve through contraceptives which only bring more disease and immobilize the young food producers. On the contrary, the most effective of all forms of family planning is prosperity, since it causes people to marry later and feel less dependent on having a large family. Prosperity and adequate food production will only take off in third world countries

when there are improved education and health services, less corrupt administrations, more facilities for food storage, and more access to the protected first world markets.

Population implosion

Even well informed people believe that we are faced with a crisis of over-population, when the exact opposite is the truth. The human race is at present faced with extinction. One noted demographer has estimated that if we continue as we are going, the human race will be extinct by the year 2,400. Yet culturally, a horror of large families (more than three!) has bitten deeply into our collective psyche.

The population maintenance rate is reckoned at 2.1 children per family; in Ireland we are now at approximately 1.9, and making up through immigration. In a remarkable list of countries ranked by their 2001 population growth rates, *only 61 out of 194 are above the crucial 2.1 children per family*. The two population giants India and China rate at 1.58 and 0.89 respectively. They don't say much about it, but governments all over the world are wondering who is going to pay all the pensions of the greying populations.

The choice of Natural Family Planning

So if there are reasons for having smaller families, and yet contraception has caused such havoc, where do we go from here? The issues involved are again complex, but part of the answer must be Natural Family Planning (NFP).

NFP is a method of family planning based on the fact that during a cycle of approximately twenty-eight days, the average woman can only conceive during nine to ten consecutive days of her cycle. If the couple abstain during this time there will be no conception.

Couples thinking of NFP generally have two problems with it. First of all, how effective is it? And secondly, is the abstinence involved too demanding?

To begin with, *modern NFP is far more reliable than the old Rhythm method. We are no longer talking about Rhythm*. Modern NFP methods enable a woman to tell at any given moment independently of her cycles, whether or not she is fertile.

Still, we have all heard horror stories about the ineffectiveness of NFP. How true are they? To answer the question we have to remember that all methods of family planning, short of sterilization and castration, can be difficult to follow and none are 100% effective. People grow lazy, they take chances, they forget their pills, they cannot be bothered, and then they become pregnant. The (artificial) method has failed. Similarly if people take chances with NFP it fails too. The problem is generally

not the method, but the people who use it.

Modern NFP methods can however be very effective. In an article in the *British Medical Journal* of September 18, 1993, it was reported that NFP as taught by Mother Teresa's sisters to the poorest in Calcutta, mostly illiterate women, had a higher effectiveness rate than *all* artificial methods.

But granted that the method is effective, does it demand too much of couples, asking them to abstain for a block of nine to ten days out of an average twenty eight? As a preliminary let us remember that all methods of family planning are inconvenient, and all make demands on the users; barrier methods are often felt to be revolting, while the various pills destroy women's health. It is also becoming clearer and clearer that artificial methods can have grave psychological consequences, especially making women feel that they are being used.

While abstinence is of course difficult, the evidence is that couples who have not been living together before marriage, and who therefore find it easier to know each other as persons, and not merely as sex objects, who are accustomed to self-mastery, take the abstinent periods in their stride. Indeed the evidence is that abstinence can prompt simple gestures of affection between the spouses which greatly strengthen their marriage. And after all, in every marriage there are times of stress, sickness and other reasons for refraining.

Natural Family Planning is not just another form of birth control. It is a whole way of life. People who move from NFP to contraception and vice versa feel they are making a momentous change. It has been well said: "Disputes about sexuality are disputes about the meaning of life."

Benefits of Natural Family Planning

One result of the restraint needed for NFP is a growing mutual trust that the other spouse will be faithful. If they have both shown restraint and respect for each other before and during marriage, then each takes the other's fidelity for granted. The woman feels she is respected as her husband does not wish to damage her with pills, while in turn he has a greater sense of earned self-respect.

With NFP there is better communication, as they have to talk through their fertility, a powerful bond which keeps them in touch with each other. It is one sexual person connecting with another, rather than one sexual object connecting with another. And since the parents are accustomed to discussing their sexuality together in a relaxed way, they can give assured but relaxed guidance to their teenage children. The subject is no longer like Thurber's elephant in the living room, screaming for attention while all the guests pretend it's not there.

It is often objected that there is no difference between contraception

and NFP, since they both have the same goal. Of course they both have the same goal, but they both employ totally different means. Spouses who use NFP do nothing wrong either by abstaining while fertile, or by having intercourse while infertile. They accept and channel their fertility, instead of regarding it as curse to be frustrated. Contraceptors on the other hand actively block their own fertility.

One of Paul VI's profoundest insights was precisely that the unitive and procreative aspects must not be separated. If the baby is actively excluded, so is the bonding between husband and wife; artificial contraception is essentially a singular affair – another reason for contraception leading to divorce.

Incidentally, for couples who do not cohabit before marriage, this mutual trust and intimacy begins early as they investigate NFP together during their courtship. Engaged couples tend to live in a fantasy world in which the other person is automatically going to make them happy. But when in NFP classes they are suddenly faced with the awesome truth of their own fertility, everything changes. They are immediately grounded in reality with each other, and they find that their relationship reaches a new depth and a new intimacy.

Nona Aguilar states that in preparing for her book she interviewed about 400 married men and women. Of those who had used artificial contraception, only 10.6% found it satisfactory, while 74.5 found NFP *highly* satisfactory. 26% regarded contraception as highly unsatisfactory, while only 1.8% gave this low rating to NFP. Asked whether family planning in general was a dead loss, 59% of those using artificial contraception said it was, while only 4.5 of those using NFP would agree with them.

Dear reader, may I suggest that you go back and meditate on these figures again. When I first read them they surprised me because I still did not understand that “God always forgives, man sometimes forgives, but nature never forgives.”

Aguilar also quotes a study she did on the effects of NFP on divorce:

One hundred and sixty-four men and women returned my questionnaire. These individuals were a diverse group geographically and had widely different educational, social, and religious backgrounds. (Many respondents specifically pointed out that they were not Catholics, lest I suspect a religious basis for their positive response to NFP.) The couples had only one thing in common: they had learned to use natural family planning methods during or, in the case of a handful of newly married couples, prior to marriage.

The divorce rate for this sampling of married couples was 0.6 per cent. In other words, *less than 1 per cent of the respondents had been previously married and divorced!* Specifically, only one individual out of 164 who responded had been divorced.

Remember, the divorce rate in America is over 45% after five years, and Aguilar goes on to make the point that Catholics divorce there at about the same rate as the rest of the population, so that even if there were more Catholics than average on this survey, it was NFP and not Catholicism which kept them together. I am sure their Catholicism helped those who had it, but the survey still shows the benevolent power of NFP.

I could quote many other figures, but the above figures alone suggest that spouses live more happily with NFP than with contraception. If we have any compassion for people, we should offer them NFP as a sure and humane way to live. Ultimately I am not making debating points or talking about statistics. I am talking about the happiness of real men and women and their children.

In the past we presented God as a cruel master who just kept saying ‘thou shalt not’. We have to re-discover the loving Father, who, like all fathers, must say no but in order to increase his child’s happiness:

*I, Yahweh, your God, teach you what is good for you,
I lead you in the way that you must go.
If only you had been alert to my commandments,
Your happiness would have been like a river. (Isaiah, 48, 17)*

Now let’s hear from a woman who found NFP to be the perfect solution:

Yes, I was alive and fertile in 1968. I was 19 and *knew* the pill was a gift from God and *Humanae Vitae* was a real crock. The pill was going to eliminate teenage pregnancy, marital disharmony and world population problems, bring a new era etc.

By my five-year reunion (high school), those of us who had been so confident about contraception had gone from euphoria to anger. Nothing seemed to work. I’d been on the pill less than two years before I’d quit. The pill depressed us. Or scared us (especially those of us who were smokers) because of the “stroke” factor. I didn’t want to keep taking it year after year, or on-again, off-again after I broke up with my college lover. So I decided to live a minimally healthy life-style and quit both smoking and oral contraceptives.

The “safer” IUD (copper-T) gave me cramps and heavy periods. I was lucky. A friend of mine got such a ghastly infection

from her IUD she lost her uterus, tubes, ovaries – the works. The woman was devastated. She felt like a gutted shell. Now they've taken them off the market.

I tried the diaphragm. Hard to keep motivated on that one... I felt wadded up with junk, inwardly disgusted. I wanted to be delectable, like a Haagen Dazs ice cream cone; instead, I was a spermicidal sump...

By the 10th high school reunion, my friends were still fiddling with this method and that, they'd had abortions, and/or their marriages were falling apart. Mine almost did.

Then my husband and I settled on the condom plus periodic abstinence. But we depended on the condom in a way that made it easy to rationalize some "fudging" on abstinence. (I'm probably fertile, but hey, we've got the ol' rubber so what harm can I do?) You know what "fudging" can lead to. Thank God I didn't have an abortion, but I did have one hell of an untimely pregnancy.

Are you getting my point, fantasy-land theologians?

Finally, my husband and I reached a turning point. At a very low point in our marriage, we met some great people who urged us to really give our lives to the Lord and to be chaste in our marriage.

That blew our minds. We thought it meant "give up sex." That's not what it means. It means respecting bodily union as a sacred act. It meant acting like a couple in love, a couple in *awe*, not a couple of cats in heat. For my husband and me, it meant NFP with no rubber, no "fudging." And I won't kid you, it was a difficult discipline.

NFP and a chaste attitude towards sex in marriage opened up a new world for us. It bonded my husband and me in a way that is so deep, so strong, that it's hard to describe. Sometimes it's difficult, but that makes us even closer. We revere each other. And when we come together we're like honeymooners.

Sad to say, I was past 35 when I finally realized that the Church was right after all. Not the grab-your-sincerity-and-slide church of Charlie Curran, but the real church, the church we encountered through lay-people in the Couple to Couple League, the *Catholic* church. The Church is right about contraception (it stinks), right about marriage (it's a sacrament), right about human happiness (it flows – no, it *floods* when you embrace the will of God.) It gave us depth. It opened our hearts to love.

Put *that* in your graduate seminar and smoke it.

Dissent from Humanae Vitae

The early dissenting theologians first attacked *Humanae Vitae*, but soon they began to attack the notion of magisterium itself. The dissent shows itself in snide attacks on the present Pope, sometimes cautious but always persistent. Then there are continuing attacks on the very notion of hierarchy. Dissent also means in practice rejecting the first and second Vatican Councils. Dissenters are also very keen to confuse the distinction between lay and ordained ministers and devote great energy to finding lay ministers while ignoring the recruitment of priests and religious.

In practice they reject auricular confession, continually asking for Rite 3. They undermine marriage by asking that divorced Catholics should be able to remarry, and they undermine the Eucharistic Sacrifice by insisting that those living in adultery should also be permitted to receive Holy Communion. All these deviations hang together; they don't want any ordained ministry or confession or councils because they find them inconvenient. Anyone who reads the trendier Catholic periodicals will know that I am not exaggerating.

And since logically, once you accept contraception, it is hard to say why *any* form of genital sexual activity is wrong, we find Catholic dissenters also pleading for homosexual unions.

Fr Shadbolt, writing in the *Tablet* of January 18 last, from Australia, raises another intriguing angle. He points out that the convictions for clerical sexual crimes in Australia and in the US occurred chiefly "between the late Sixties and the early Eighties." (*Humane Vitae* was published in 1968.) He asks the question: "Can George Weigel's thesis, that doctrinal dissent was the key contributing factor to this explosion of priestly crime, be so easily dismissed?" Wow!

Some objections to Humanae Vitae

It is commonly objected that HV is just one of the many mistakes that popes have made. If they made such a mess of Galileo and the *Syllabus*, if Pius XI denounced mixed education, why couldn't Paul VI have been mistaken in HV?

Popes certainly made errors of judgment in the past, but these errors were tied to particular historical circumstances. So, in his masterly survey of liberal Catholicism, Cardinal George points out that Pius IX's discourse in the *Syllabus* arose out of "The memory of thousands of priests and nuns exiled, imprisoned, tortured, and executed; state control of religion and the suppression of the church; of a dictator who was a Lenin before his time..."

Rejection of contraception is different; since it touches the very essence of the person, it is almost entirely outside changing historical

circumstances. It has been in possession among Christians since the beginning, in spite of the Lambeth conference of 1930 and the subsequent rout of non-Catholic churches. From Pius XI to John Paul II, five popes have repeated the prohibition, and no future pope will ever change it. That's for sure. No wonder John Paul has said that to reject *Humanae Vitae* is to reject revelation itself.

It is also objected that the People of God still have not accepted *Humanae Vitae*, so that successive popes must have got it wrong. We could equally say that for centuries the People of God did not accept the Church's prohibition of duelling. Was the Church therefore wrong to persist?

The Popes in this matter are prophets. Members of other churches have spoken to me about the awful effects of family breakdown, but I notice that they never speak about contraception as one of the prime causes, which it is. Only the Catholic Church has the strength to face the truth. Jesus Himself must have spoken many unwelcome truths before they put him to death.

But if NFP has so many advantages, why is it so little accepted? Out of many reasons let me mention: the attitude of the medical establishment, very influential with its women patients, and accustomed to drugs and operations – they instinctively have little sympathy with time-consuming NFP; the anti-family heritage of Marx and Freud, the traditional anti-family attitude of many psychologists, writers and journalists (the NUJ is officially pro-abortion); the anti-life ideologies rampant in international organizations like UNFPA and IPPF; the vast sums of money to be made out of contraception and abortion; the superficial convenience of artificial contraception; the fact that NFP is seen as a Catholic idiosyncrasy; the fact that we live in a society totally over-sexed through print and other media; – these and other factors exert a great cumulative pressure against NFP.

The Province and Humanae Vitae

Casti Connubii gives no reasons why contraception is wrong, so that it might appear to be issuing an arbitrary and hard-hearted *ukase*. In *Humanae Vitae*, Paul VI gave three destructive effects on society which contraception would bring, and he has been proved absolutely right. Finally, John Paul II has devoted half a lifetime, from the first appearance of *Love and Responsibility* in 1960, down to the present day, in offering arguments in support of HV, and he wants us to do the same.

Allow me to quote from his *Familiaris Consortio*:

...I feel it is my duty to extend a pressing invitation to theologians, asking them to unite their efforts in order to collaborate with the

hierarchical Magisterium and to commit themselves to the task of illustrating ever more clearly the biblical foundations, the ethical grounds and the personalistic reasons behind this doctrine...

A united effort by theologians in this regard, inspired by a convinced adherence to the magisterium, which is the one authentic guide for the People of God, is particularly urgent for reasons that include the close link between Catholic Teaching on this matter and the view of the human person that the Church proposes: doubt or error in the field of marriage or the family involves obscuring to a serious extent the integral truth about the human person, in a cultural situation that is already so often confused and contradictory...theologians are called upon to provide enlightenment and a deeper understanding, and their contribution is of incomparable value and represents a unique and highly meritorious service to the family and humanity.

To go back to the beginning: Archbishop Curtiss states categorically that young men and women are only attracted to dioceses and communities, which accept *Humanae Vitae*. I have tried to show that to accept HV, apart altogether from religious obedience, is a rational and humane decision, in the best interests of society. But above all, it fits in with the designs of our Creator, revealed to us through the Church, the Body of Christ.

Looking at the Province, I see that with the happy exception of All Hallows, our colleges have gone from our direct care, our parishes are going, we have little room for manoeuvre, and we are looking for a “doctrine”, an objective, to sustain us during the coming century. Historically, the Congregation began as part of the movement in 17th century France to evangelize the population after the destructive civil and religious wars; it re-emerged in the 1830s in a fresh effort to evangelize after the turmoil of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars.

We are now facing another crisis of civilization reflected in the collapse of the family. As people search desperately for some sort of family stability, into which NFP must come, could this apostolate be our new focus? If we accepted (among other things) *Humanae Vitae* and the promotion of NFP, we would have a clear evangelizing programme, in tune with the signs of the times. We would have something very concrete and attractive to offer prospective candidates to the Province.

The proposal is more than a passing fad of mine. At the instigation of John Paul II, a whole series of institutes for the study of family matters is springing up. And if you are wondering how to set about the spread of Natural Family Planning, a whole praxis and literature already exists on the subject in the United States. This is where the Spirit appears to

be blowing.

I began these reflections by saying that if we really want vocations, then as a precondition we should accept *Humanae Vitae*, and I explained that you do not have to be a flat-earther to do so. I then suggested that if we are looking for a focus of activity, it could well be in the area of family and NFP, as John Paul is asking for.

The whole argument seems to me to hang together. What do you think?

The Smile; A Reflection

Desmond O'Connell CM

Over the course of many years, I find myself returning to this single reflection, this query; did Jesus laugh or smile even? I find it haunting my mind and heart, aching for an answer.

Where in the holy Gospel does an evangelist write of Jesus' smile? I have failed to find a single instance or any real hint of it. Why not a laugh, a chuckle or a smile?

The evangelists describe Jesus expressing longing and joy unbounded at the fulfilment of his great desire in the Upper Room; he was patient, infinitely so, with the slowness and awkward clumsiness of the Apostles; he weeps; he is angry.

Surely the perfection of his humanity must imply the exercise of perhaps the most 'human' trait of all, the capacity to burst into expressions of joy and surprise with a hearty laugh, a smile of indescribable warmth? *Indescribable*, perhaps there is a clue; I shall return to it later.

When those around him were stirred to wonder at a cure, an exorcism and whooped and hollered with uncontrollable joy and delight, are we to believe that He remained deadpan and did not reciprocate and join in the fun? Surely His heart must have danced at the sight of the once-lame man now leaping and dancing his merry way into the temple. But not even a smile?

Was it that to attempt a description somehow defied all words? Or was it rather that these uncouth trainees possessed a certain sensitivity which inhibited them from presenting Jesus as capable of levity of any kind, in view of the gravity of His message and the *gravitas* of aspects of His demeanour?

Certainly, not everything Jesus said or did is recorded; "the world could not contain the books..." Yet, what an omission; not to find space to record even one instance of this most human trait, even as He witnessed all around him the fullest expression of joy in others, never bending to the temptation to join them.

This omission is all the more mysterious when we have a number of beautiful invocations in the Divine Office; e.g. 'Let His face smile on us and we shall be saved' (Evening Prayer daily in Advent) which is also rendered as 'Let His face shed its light...' (Grail) and 'Let His face shine...' (NEB) which is the Church's spin on Psalm 66. Could we invoke 'Lex orandi, lex credendi' to make the case?

It has occurred to me that one could easily describe Jesus' visage and body-language as 'indescribable' throughout the 'forty days' for, as we

know, His appearance had changed, not now the former image nor yet the fullness of glory; but dare we suggest almost a peeping through of that blinding glory yet to blossom?

Remember the Lord calling from the shore to the fishermen; "Friends, have you caught anything?" (not a chuckle?) Later on, with time to reflect, when Jesus had been taken up out of their sight, surely they might have visualised Him having smiled at their discomfort as He had called from the lakeside to His weary apostles.

He was not recognisable even to His closest friends nor is there the slightest attempt to describe His appearance.

Then there is Emmaus. They listened and their hearts burned with love and the transports of joy, dazzled and transfixed, truly an 'out-of-this-world' experience. Only when He had withdrawn did they emerge from the transport with a thud! If the evangelist does not describe Jesus as smiling as he broke bread at table and observed the disciples' growing recognition, surely we cannot read this episode, one of the most moving in all scripture, and not visualise Jesus' incomparable smile, allowing that our image of His visage must be pre-Resurrection.

Perhaps the nearest one gets to visualising Jesus smiling might be the very evocative episode of the young man whom Jesus recognised as having striven to keep the commandments.

Even John the Divine, who rested his head on Jesus' shoulder at the Supper, writing in exile with plenty of time in old age to spin wonderfully colourful images of the Master in action, gives not a hint of Jesus' beatific smile before or after the Resurrection. Surely John must have smiled at Jesus frequently. Did Jesus not reciprocate? Surely the Psalmist is not yearning for a surly face when singing; "Hide not your face from me" (Ps. 27) or again, "Why do you hide your face, forgetting our woe and oppression?" (Ps. 44)

Whether or not totally logical or theologically sound, I am drawn to comment that if the Psalmist (and now the Church) would believe that Jesus is capable of a laugh and a smile, then the case is virtually made that He smiled often and I am ready to row in with that! I suppose that, somewhere in the world, there exists in art a painting or statue of the smiling Jesus. I dearly hope so.

Fr Henry Gray CM (1850-1928)

A Vincentian Missionary in Argentina 1879-1928

Horacio Palacias CM

Translation by Seamus O'Neill CM

His parents were Henry Gray and Brigid O'Hanlon, who lived in Lisnadill, Armagh. Henry junior was born on 24th May 1850 and baptised the same day in Ballymacnab Church.

He attended the Christian Brothers School, Armagh. In 1862, he moved to St. Patrick's College for his secondary education and philosophy course. He then entered the Internal Seminary of the Vincentians at Castleknock and took his vows there on 27th September 1871. There he studied theology, receiving minor orders, including sub-diaconate and diaconate. He was ordained to the priesthood in Dundalk on 21st September 1873.

His first appointment was to St. Patrick's College, Armagh, where he was on the teaching staff during the years 1873-1879.

Apparently, the Argentinean Provincial requested the Irish Provincial to send an Irish Vincentian priest to care for the pastoral needs of the Irish immigrants who were centred in Lujan(1) (a small Marian Shrine) and its neighbourhood. Fr Henry Gray was appointed for this mission.

He landed in Argentina, via France, on the 30th August 1879 and was directed to Lujan. There he worked in the parish and in the Vincentian College Seminary. The Superior and Parish Priest was Fr Emilio George CM and his assistant was Fr Jorge Maria Salvaire CM. Fr Gray, as 2nd assistant, joined them.

In Lujan, Fr Gray built up a strong Irish Community at the Shrine of Our Lady and in the parish of Lujan. He became a well-known figure to the pilgrims who came here and to the individual people among the Irish.

After seven years he was appointed to the central house of the Vincentians in Buenos Aires in 1886. He carried out his pastoral ministry here and in Montevideo for 12 years (1886-1898). He was then appointed as Professor and Bursar to the seminary of San Juan de Cuyo, which had been directed by the Vincentians since 1885.

After a further seven years in the seminary, he was appointed to Lujan, where he lived the rest of his life (1905-1928) in the sanctuary of Our Lady of Lujan. Here, he found a huge building project going ahead under the urgent direction of Fr Vincente Maria Davani CM.

Actually it was the building of a huge basilica and presbytery and Pilgrim Plaza.

The unmistakable figure of Fr Gray became well known to the pilgrims and to the members of the Irish Colony. His countenance reflected his deep interior life. His ministry as a priest manifested itself particularly in Divine Worship, in hearing confessions and in his attention to the sick. He was humble, mortified and an exemplary son of St. Vincent.

When Fr Gray CM died on the Monday of Holy Week, 2nd April 1928, after a short illness, everyone lamented his death and spoke eloquently of his virtues. He was 78 years old and had lived 59 years as a Vincentian confrere.

It is not surprising then that his funeral rites gave expression to the love and esteem in which he was held. Sufficient proof of this was the amazing numbers present at the celebration of his funeral – Fr Julio Bauden CM, Provincial of the Vincentian Congregation in Argentina, celebrated the Solemn Requiem Mass assisted, as deacon, by Fr Humberto Mariani CM and, as sub-deacon, by Fr Juan Mariani CM. These two Vincentians were his fellow workers and companions at the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lujan. Fr Gray was Director and Parish Priest during the last years of his life.

Amongst the clergy present were: Mgr Claudio Burdet, Vicar General of the Diocese, and Rev Enrique Gamboa, special delegate; the honorary Canon Santiago Husher, treasurer of the Archbishop of Buenos Aires; the parish curate of Quilmes, Rev F Brazzone, and the parish priest of Mercedes (a future episcopal See) Rev Fr Asaldo; The Provincial of the Pallotine Fathers; the Provincial of the White Fathers (who was in charge of the works of the Pontifical Missionaries of the Propagation of the Faith in Argentina); Rev Fr Marladot; the Provincial of the Marist Brothers and a group of 33 priests. The choir from the *schola* of the town of San Jose sang the Mass. Also present were numbers of other religious communities and Catholic Colleges. The Congregation was saturated by the coming together of the large Irish Colony to whom Fr Gray had dedicated his spiritual and pastoral care. The civil authority was represented by the Deputies Kaiser and Perez.

Fr Gray's mortal remains were buried, on 3rd April, in the Crypt of the Sanctuary, in front of the altar of St Patrick, Patron of Ireland. This side chapel of St Patrick is beautifully decorated in Connemara Marble. On the floor of the chapel there is a circular plaque with the following inscription in mosaic :

*Here lies Fr Henry Gray CM.
Born in Lisnadil, Armagh, Ireland
Died 2nd April 1928, aged 78 years, in Lujan
Arrived in Argentina (Buenos Aires) 30th August 1879*

On the stone covering his coffin:

*To the Holy Priest
Counsellor to all
This stone was dedicated
By his grateful compatriots*

From the files of the Provincial archives of Argentina:

Born: 24th May 1850
Vocation: 12th September 1869
Vows: 27th September 1871
Priesthood: 21st September 1873

Appointments:

St. Patrick's, Armagh: 1873-1879
Lujan: 1879-1836
Buenos Aires: 1886 1898
San Juan: 1898-1905
Lujan: 1905-1928
Died in Lujan 2nd April 1928

NOTES

1. Lujan is a small village where some Spanish immigrants stopped on their way further west. In a wagon, they had two statues of Our Lady. One of these was placed on the ground during their brief stay. When they tried to move it back to the wagon they were unable to lift it, so they built a small shrine around it as they left. The statue became known to the people as miraculous. The Basilica mentioned above was built for the statue of "Our Lady of Lujan" and became the national shrine of Our Lady. Huge pilgrimages and miraculous cures took place there. It was built by the Vincentians, among whom was Fr Henry Gray CM, and the Irish Colony and given the title of Basilica by Pope John Paul II.

Folleville Revisited;

Reflections on Vincentian Apostolic Works

Kevin Rafferty, CM

On the 28th September, 2002, I was invited by Fr John Rybolt and Fr Juan Julian Diaz Catalan, the two directors of the CIF course, to join fourteen CIF students from India, the Philippines, Eritrea, Ethiopia, the Lebanon, Italy and Madagascar on a pilgrimage to Folleville. For me it was a journey into the past. I had paid a fleeting visit there with a few confreres some twenty-five years previously. But now, under the expert guidance of John Rybolt, I was able to see St Vincent's famous mission there, in January 1617 to the people of the de Gondi estates, in a new light. Two other events that week sharpened my focus. I had spent three days earlier in the week talking to this group of student priests and brothers about the importance of the Folleville event in the life of the Congregation of the Mission. The previous day, September 27th, Cardinal Lustiger had visited the Maison-Mère to preside at Mass honouring St Vincent de Paul. In the course of his homily he spoke about the springtime of the Church in France in the 17th century. He suggested that we had much to learn from St Vincent de Paul about how to energise our efforts to re-evangelise today but he had no blueprint about what forms or methods should be used in engaging in this work.

After a brief stop in Gannes, where Vincent had heard the general confession of the dying man, we arrived in Folleville as the morning fog was lifting. John Rybolt brought us for a tour of the area beside the church, including the ruined chateau of the de Gondis, a short distance from the church. It had been dismantled by the de Gondis themselves in the 19th century being superfluous at that stage to their needs. The well-preserved ruin was a symbol of glories past. A young confrere from Madagascar presided at our Eucharist around the altar in the little church, a church that could seat about a hundred people. The church itself cannot have been very much different to what it was like both interiorly and exteriorly in St Vincent's time. The only concession to modernity is that we were gathered around a rickety wooden table for the Eucharist itself. We took it in turns to stand in the ancient pulpit where Vincent had preached his famous sermon. I came away with the same thoughts and feelings I had twenty-five years previously: it is from these small beginnings that Vincent's apostolates began to people in spiritual and material need and to their priests who needed affirmation, encouragement and support in their mission.

My lectures to this group of CIF students earlier in the week on the

topic of Vincentian apostolates today took the form of:

- I Looking back to the past: St Vincent's lifetime, three hundred years of history, post-Vatican II developments
- II Constitutions 10-18: Traditional and Contemporary Tensions
- III Developments today, 1980-2000: Political. Social, Church and Congregation contexts.

Looking Back

a. St Vincent's Lifetime, 1617-1659

One can see in embryo in the civil contract of the foundation of the Congregation, a contract between Philip Emmanuel de Gondi and Marguerite de Silly on the one hand and Vincent de Paul on the other, what were to become the foundational apostolates of the Congregation of the Mission. Under the guidance of St Vincent a group of clerics would engage in the work that had begun on the de Gondi estates in Folleville in 1617, some eight years previously. They would commit themselves to the evangelisation of poor country people on the de Gondi estates. In this evangelisation they would go from village to village "to instruct, to exhort and to catechise these poor country people", without taking any payment so that they might give freely what they had received from the hands of God. They were to give missions in the landholdings of the de Gondis every five years and they were to use their free time in the "works of assistance and help to pastors".

The two foundational works of the Congregation: Parish Missions and the Education of Priests – it is true that the latter is less clearly defined – are both in place by the year 1625. In the approvals that were obtained from the Archbishop of Paris, from the King and from the Parliament and also from Rome between 1625 and 1633, one can see that one of the main discussion points was whether or not these parish missions would be of a temporary or permanent nature. Certainly many church people at the time thought along temporary lines. There was also the thorny question of getting permission from bishops to give missions in their dioceses. One could sense that some bishops and priests had misgivings about this fledgling group. In his efforts to obtain Roman approval of his new congregation, Vincent of course wanted his congregation to be set up on a permanent basis and to have a degree of independence from bishops. He certainly saw that the spiritual and temporal needs of people in the countryside were ongoing and that a congregation set up on a permanent basis was needed to address these needs.

With the setting up of the Tuesday Conferences in 1633, his work for priests moved a step forward. Already he had encouraged his brethren to have meetings of priests in the parishes where they had given missions,

encouraging them in their spiritual development and also instructing them in the basics in regard to celebration of the sacraments and pastoral practice.

I have the impression that the General Assemblies of 1642 and 1655 were concerned mainly with approval of the Rule and the setting up of elementary structures of government in the congregation itself. Insofar as there was further development of works after 1633, it was in the development of parish missions in various dioceses in France, some involvement in seminary formation – dioceses in France moved slowly to implementing the decrees of the Council of Trent in the 17th century – and reluctant involvement in parishes where, because of invitations from the royal court or bishops, he felt he had no option but to acquiesce. A further development of course was involvement in setting up communities of the Congregation in Italy, Poland and Madagascar.

b. Three Hundred Years of Tradition in regard to Apostolates 1660-1960

As I prepared these lectures, I would have loved to have been able to research any turning points in regard to our apostolates over the three hundred years from 1660 to 1960. I did not have the materials at my disposal to know if there were records of any such turning points at General Assemblies during these three hundred years. Were there crisis points or any major new initiatives in the development of our apostolates? I suspect that our commitment to parish missions and the formation of priests – our two foundational works – have remained fairly constant through this three hundred year period. No doubt major historical turning points such as the Counter-Reformation, the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, Colonial Expansion (accompanied as it was by new missionary developments in the mid-19th century) must all have had an impact on our foundational works.

At the same time, I also have the impression that the founding events in each province have left their mark on the apostolates we have inherited from one province to another. The province I belong to, the Irish Province, began in post-Emancipation Ireland when the Penal Laws were relaxed and when a group of priests and seminarians from the national seminary, Maynooth, decided that there was a need for parish missions to evangelise a people weighed down by poverty – spiritual and material. In time this group realised that there was a congregation called the Congregation of the Mission engaged in this work and eventually the group of diocesan priests affiliated with the community in Paris. At the time when there was no secondary school education provided by the State it seemed to be a very natural move to set up a college to provide both the personnel and the money needed to sustain the parish mission movement.

Other provinces will have their own story to tell and no doubt works of the parent provinces influenced the choice of apostolates in provinces set up in the 19th and 20th centuries.

c. Post-Conciliar Developments: 1968-1980

What happened during the twelve years from 1968 to 1980 is important in trying to understand the content of the Constitutions, especially Constitutions 10-18 on the apostolates. It took twelve years and three General Assemblies for the delegates from our various provinces to reach a consensus about new Constitutions. The delegates at the 1968/69 General Assembly opened up the issues and there appears to have been quite a divergence of viewpoint about what works we should be engaged in today as Vincentians. The confreres who attended the 1974 General Assembly also ran into heavy weather and came up with “declarations” about the life and works of the Congregation. It was only in the 1980 General Assembly that a consensus was reached and the Constitutions, as we know them today, were formulated and approved by the Holy See. Over these twelve years I would list the following five points/major influences on the development of our Constitutions, especially in relation to our apostolic works:

1. VATICAN II (1962-1965)

Coming to terms with the teachings of Vatican II, especially our understanding of ourselves as Church (*Lumen Gentium*) and on the role of the Church in the modern world (*Gaudium et Spes*) had a major impact on the way we saw our works. So much had to be absorbed about the understanding of the Church, the role of the Church in the world and the celebration of the Eucharist. As we look back on it now it is not surprising that we needed twelve years to absorb what Vatican II had initiated and then to be able to reach a consensus about our apostolates in the General Assembly of 1980.

2. Populorum Progressio (1967)

During the Vatican Council a number of council fathers, led by Bishop Helder Camera, were advocating that bishops of the Church should come out much more strongly about the gap between rich and poor in our world. Pope Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* was an effort to meet this need and as we look at this document now we can see that there was an optimistic spirit abroad that the gap between rich and poor could be narrowed. Pope Paul VI's emphasis on making an option for the poor became a rallying cry for many Catholics around the world. *Populorum Progressio* was very well received in the Catholic world and people like Helder Camera must have felt vindicated.

3. *Liberation Theology (1970-1980)*

The publication of Gustavo Gutierrez's *Liberation Theology* in the early 1970s highlighted the gap between rich and poor in a new way. Taking the gap between rich and poor as the very starting point of theology was certainly a new departure. With a number of confreres working in frontline situations in our South American provinces it was not surprising that they would make a significant contribution to the debates at our General Assemblies in 1968/69 and 1974.

4. *Pope Paul VI's Evangelii Nuntiandi (1975)*

There are a number of very significant quotations from Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* in our Constitutions 10-18 that call for a new evangelisation to meet the needs of our contemporaries. The encyclical was published on the 10th anniversary of Vatican II, December 8th 1975. The emphasis on the proclamation of the Gospel and witness to the Gospel being inseparable, as well as the statement that work for justice was an integral part of evangelisation, were picked out by many commentators on this encyclical.

5. *General Assembly Debates (1968/69 and 1974)*

Among the debates that took place at these assemblies were debates about the relationship between the works founded by St Vincent in the 17th century and their relevance to our apostolates today. There were heated exchanges about the role of education in our apostolates and in this context provinces in the United States, with their commitment to university education, and other provinces, including Ireland and Australia, with their commitment to secondary school education, were challenged about whether or not these works were in line with the commitment to the poor.

As we read carefully Constitutions 10-18 on Apostolic Works we will see how the above five influences bear on these Constitutions, directly or indirectly, and influenced the consensus that was established during the course of the 1980 General Assembly.

II *EVALUATING CONSTITUTIONS 10-18 ON APOSTOLIC WORKS*

As one reflects on the contents of Constitutions 10-18 one becomes more aware of the internal coherence and the balance that runs through these nine constitutions. There is a balancing act inside and between these constitutions, keeping in tension different points of view. In evaluating these constitutions I will draw attention to eight points of tension, which struck me forcefully over the last few months. I became more aware how great efforts were made to maintain a balance between different points of view and to do justice to the views of the delegates

from a variety of provinces. (The reader will note that I am using the word 'tension' in a positive sense of doing justice to different points of view as we live through a period of great change in the world itself and in the Church and in our Congregation.)

Before outlining these eight points of tension, here is a very brief summary of C10-18 on our apostolic works:

Constitution 10	Vincentian Heritage
Constitution 11	Christological Motivation
Constitution 12	Characteristics of Vincentians engaging in Apostolic Works
Constitution 13	Decisions about Apostolates made at Provincial Level in Popular Missions in accordance with variations of time and place
Constitution 14	Popular Missions
Constitution 15	Formation of Clerics and Lay Men and Women
Constitution 16	Foreign Missions
Constitution 17	Partnership with the Daughters of Charity
Constitution 18	Crisis Situations; Evangelising Charity and Social Justice

Balancing the Vertical and the Horizontal

In many of his conferences and letters to confreres and Daughters of Charity, St Vincent de Paul is continually playing variations on the Great Commandment. Love of God and love of neighbour are bound up together. In Constitution 10 it is stated that we are called by God to engage in the work of evangelisation. In Constitution 11 the motivation of love of Christ is put clearly in front of us for promoting his kingdom. We are moved by his compassion for the poor. Confreres who met at the 1980 General Assembly to put these Constitutions together must have been particularly conscious of the great debate going on about Liberation Theology. A Marxist analysis of the inequalities in society would have had very little time for the transcendent or for the love of Christ as a motivating force for action in narrowing the gap between rich and poor. Vincent de Paul wanted confreres to be concerned about both the spiritual and material wellbeing of poor people but he is constantly returning to the theme of love of God and love of neighbour being bound up together. It is not surprising that this emphasis comes

through very strongly in Constitutions 10 and 11, of the section on Apostolic Works.

Vincentian Tradition and Contemporary Realities

The second tension running through these constitutions is balancing faithfulness to Vincentian traditions in our apostolates and at the same time facing up to the demands of contemporary realities. Two very good examples of this are found in Constitutions 14 and 15. Constitution 14 recalls Vincent's love of the Popular Missions and of course we know that he himself was keen to participate in these missions right up to the end of his life. He encouraged and exhorted confreres to do so too. At the same time in C14, there is a recognition that this form of evangelisation needs to be renewed today if it is to be pastorally effective. The same point is made in Constitution 15 in regard to Seminary Formation. In the light of all that was taking place in the Church at large through the 1970s, it is not surprising that C15 picks up on the renewal of seminary formation at all levels – theologically, pastorally, human development, etc.

Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* was indeed a great challenge to confreres involved in the ministry of popular missions, as were the various documents coming from the Congregation for Catholic Education in regard to the reform and renewal of seminary formation. In the post-Vatican II Church of the 1970s a constant theme was '*aggiornamento*', facing up to contemporary realities and contemporary needs, and recognising that enormous change was taking place in the world around about us. At the same time, another theme coming from Vatican II discussions was '*resourcement*' – delving deep into our Christian traditions and Christian resources to discover what was the essence of evangelisation and Christian formation. Our constitutions are challenging us to engage in this exercise in regard to the two foundational works of the Congregation, Popular Missions and Education of Priests – both initial and continuing education of priests.

In any authentic evaluation of our works then it should be possible to discern how any new work we initiate is in continuity with our Vincentian traditions and at the same time courageously gives a new expression to our foundational works of evangelisation and of formation of both clerics and lay men and women today.

Evangelisation and Formation

In St Vincent's lifetime we can see how his involvement in parish missions led him gradually into the work of formation of priests, beginning with continuing formation of priests in a fairly elementary way, moving on to setting up the Tuesday Conferences and eventually to involvement in seminary formation. It seems to me that an important

aspect of our apostolic works is that we get involved, insofar as we can, in both direct evangelisation and in the formation of evangelizers. In fact it would seem to me that the cutting edge for us Vincentians today is how to maintain both in tension and in balance. From my own experience in the Irish Province, I observed over a period of twenty years how the confreres who were engaged in parish missions gradually got involved in the formation of men and women for various ministries in parish communities where they had given missions. A good deal of the work they got involved in after the parish missions was in setting up courses for the formation of men and women to engage in various parish ministries. I also became aware that one of the besetting sins of seminary formation is that it becomes so ‘academic’ that it is too remote from parish ministry and the pastoral engagement seminarians are preparing for. We take it for granted now that all our seminarians will be on pastoral placements all through their six or seven years in seminaries and will engage in pastoral reflection in a systematic way on these experiences. An orientation towards evangelisation and towards praxis has been a Vincentian characteristic in seminary formation.

The cutting edge of direct evangelization and formation for ministry today is in keeping both in tension, interacting as much as possible one with the other. This, I think, is implied in all kinds of ways in Constitutions 10 to 18, with the emphasis on the building up of Christian communities which will acquire both direct evangelisation and formation of ministers. It is also implied in Statutes 11 and 12, which bear on our involvement in parishes and in educational works.

Word and Action

Constitution 11 states that the members of the Congregation engaging in works of evangelisation should do so in both word and in action. There is a reference to *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, para.23, in which the process of evangelization is expressed as the “inauguration of the kingdom...”, “of a new reality, a new way of being, a new way of living in community, etc.” “Evangelising by word and action” is, of course, a very Vincentian theme and Vincent would have returned to this repeatedly throughout his life. He had very little time for armchair theologians. It looks to me as if he wanted everybody out in the frontline engaged in proclaiming the Word and in building up – in all kinds of ways – parish communities. In other sections of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI has stated in a very memorable phrase that the only credible witness we can give to the Gospel today is in our deeds and in our actions. We proclaim the Gospel as much in what we do as in what we say or indeed the credibility of what we say can only be manifest in what we do. Our words have to be in tune with what we say.

Priests and Lay People

In Constitution 15, on the Formation of Clerics, we find that the main thrust of this particular constitution concerns the formation of priests – initial formation and continuing education of priests. And, at the same time, in the third paragraph of this constitution we read “the members of the Congregation should also devote themselves to motivating and suitably preparing lay people for the pastoral ministry necessary in a Christian community”. Already a number of provinces were involved in this work by 1980. I suspect that a number of provinces with universities saw their work as preparing lay people, particularly in their theology departments, for lay ministry in dioceses where this work was developing. One sees how the first three paragraphs of Constitution 15 keep the two kinds of formation in balance: Formation of Clerics and Formation of Lay People. The suggestions about the formation of lay people are tentative – “motivating” lay people and “suitably preparing” lay people for involvement in pastoral ministry. One might get the impression that it is a second level kind of formation.

The final paragraph in Constitution 15 is also very interesting because it begins to talk about genuine collaboration between priests and lay people. The final paragraph reads as follows: “Members should teach clerics and laity to work together and to support one another in the process of forming a Christian community”. Later on in the 1980s the expression ‘collaboration in ministry’ became more common. One can see in the 1980 Constitutions a recognition of the importance of getting priests and lay people to work together. Was there an awareness then that one of the besetting sins of the Catholic tradition is clericalism where clerics take over and do everything themselves, where lay people are given very little scope to participate in the ministry of the Church. There is no doubt that in the last twenty years this whole question has become much more acute in the European context, not only because of the shortage of priests but because of the growing consciousness of lay people’s rightful place and active role in the mission of the Church today. One could see this as a development of Vatican II ecclesiology in which the starting point is not the division between clerics and lay people, structured hierarchically, but the starting point is the local Christian community and the role of all the baptised in that community. We are touching here on one of the great developments in the last thirty years of the 20th century in the Catholic tradition.

Charity and Justice

I think it would be true to say that up to Vatican II, Vincentians, and indeed most other orders and congregations, operated out of a theology of charity. It was certainly the world that Vincent operated out of in

the 17th century, accepting, as he did, the hierarchical structure of society. The social teaching of the Catholic Church from the late 19th and right through the 20th century did of course touch on issues of justice but, in the wake of Pope Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* and the powerful challenges of Liberation Theologians, Christians involved with marginalised groups began to see the justice issue with a new kind of urgency. It is not surprising then that Constitution 12 talks about doing what we can to combat the inequalities in the distribution of this world's goods, and Constitution 18, holds in tension a theology of charity and a theology of justice in responding to crisis situations in regard to marginalised groups. In the light of the challenging words of Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* that work for justice is an integral part of evangelisation, Vincentians are now encouraged to get involved in practical ways in justice issues. One of the most far-reaching developments in our constitutions about apostolic works in the 1980 Constitutions is the inclusion of a theology of justice perspective, standing side by side with a theology of charity.

Placing the two side by side, a theology of charity and a theology of justice, as is done in Constitution 18, is perhaps what is distinctive about a Vincentian approach to justice issues. I think it has been our tradition to be bridge-builders between rich and poor. Vincent in his own lifetime certainly moved easily from one group to the other. Of course, if he did not have the support of many rich people in his day he would not have been able to engage in the many works of practical charity he was involved in to relieve distress of all kinds. There is an important mediating role to be done building bridges between rich and poor and this does not exclude the prophetic role that we may have to play from time to time when we do get involved in marginalised groups.

These constitutions challenge us to move beyond any sticking plaster solutions to people in distress. We are encouraged to look for the causes of poverty and this means, inevitably, confrontation with some of the "powers that be" in our societies. The great challenge is to hold a theology of justice and a theology of charity in tension. With the experience many provinces have of working with marginalised groups, the experience and credible witness built up over the years, we are in a strong position to go down the advocacy route as a number of confreres are now doing from one province to another. Getting involved in justice issues at the United Nations, as a number of confreres in the US are doing, or acquiring legal expertise, as a number of our confreres working with prisoners in Nigeria are doing, or setting up credit banks in poor parishes, as some of our Philippino confreres are doing, are ways of taking our 1980 Constitutions seriously

Men and Women

Constitution 17 is concerned with the interaction between Vincentians and Daughters of Charity. It picks up on the traditional theme of Vincentians having a common heritage with the Daughters of Charity and being ready to offer them spiritual support in the form of retreats and spiritual direction. However, it moves on from this to open up the question of co-operation in our works. This constitution does anticipate a lot of what is being written about collaboration between men and women over the last twenty years in our contemporary Church. The suggestion that we can cooperate in many practical ways in work for the poor transcends some of the acrimonious elements in what I would call the gender debate in Catholic circles, at least in the western world. There are many different ways in which Vincentians and Daughters of Charity collaborate in promoting the kingdom of God in various works and projects from one province to another. We know now that much trust and patience is required in taking these steps.

Evangelise and Be Evangelised

In Constitution 12, paragraph 3, there is a very interesting phrase which I think is worth commenting on. In the context of Vincentians being prepared to share in some way in the life of the poor, the text goes on to say “so that not only will we attend to their evangelization but that we ourselves may be evangelised by them”.

This kind of statement has all kinds of Vincentian overtones: of discovering God in the poor, the poor mirroring God to us, and it is interesting to see how this theme has been taken up in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and is now taken for granted in most discussions about working ‘with and for the poor’.

Paulo Freire, who was so popular in Church circles in the 1970s, had so much to teach us about moving from the poor being ‘objects’ of our charity to the poor becoming ‘subjects’ who would engage in their own liberation if they were empowered to do so. And so we have this phrase of working not only ‘for’ but ‘with’ the poor. We have moved a long way from a condescending attitude towards people in distress, realising that we all share in certain kinds of poverty. A number of the confreres attending the General Assemblies of the late 1960s and 70s, as well as the General Assembly of 1980, were familiar with the writings of Paulo Freire and the writings of Gustavo Gutierrez, Sobrino and other Liberation Theologians. When eventually the authority of the Church spoke about Liberation Theology, it acknowledged some of the genuine achievements of this movement in the Church and the way it has challenged ‘the establishment’ right across the world. This movement has, like most movements, had its excesses in parts of the world where

the gap between rich and poor is great. One can understand why this gap was made the very starting point of theology.

III DEVELOPMENTS IN OUR CONTEMPORARY WORLD 1980-2000

At the General Assembly of 1980, the delegates who drew up these constitutions tried to read the 'signs of the times'. Twenty years later how would we read the 'signs of the times' that bear on our apostolic works today? We have been trying to live out these constitutions now for nearly twenty years. What have we learned from that experience? Are there events that have taken place that would lead us to reshape one or other of these constitutions 10-18 or add new ones?

In his article on the 1980 Constitutions, Fr Carlo Braga remarked that we need time to evaluate Constitutions, how they are being lived out, or what difficulties confreres are experiencing in their implementation. From this point of view, twenty years is a short period of time. However, we do, I think, take it for granted today that the rate of change has increased so much that twenty years is indeed a fairly lengthy period in the world in which we are living. The exercise of trying to engage in what has happened over the last twenty years that has a bearing on our constitutions, particularly these Constitutions 10-18, is, I think, a worthwhile exercise. It is an exercise that our Superior General, Fr Robert Maloney, is encouraging us to do during the course of the coming year in preparation for the 2004 General Assembly.

When I was in Paris in September 2002, reflecting with fourteen students from a variety of provinces, I engaged in this exercise with them. Over a few days we reflected on the events that have occurred over the last twenty years that bear on our Constitutions 10-18 today. To keep some order in the discussion, I asked these confreres to note down four developments that had taken place in each of four areas:

- The Congregation of the Mission
- the Catholic Church
- the World of Politics
- the Social Sphere.

The following are the results of that exercise. I note in a second column my own reflections which I had prepared in advance and which betray a Western European point of view.

A	<i>Developments in the Congregation of the Mission</i>	
	CIF Students	Kevin Rafferty
1	Canonisation of Vincentian Saints	International Missions
2	International Missions	Vincentian Family
3	The Ratio Formationis	Parish Mission Conference (Paris 1997)
4	Globalisation of Charity in the Congregation	Provincial Leadership Directory (Salamanca 1996) and Local Superior Directory (Dublin 2001)

B	<i>Developments in the Church 1980-2000</i>	
1	Dialogue with interfaith and ecumenical groups	Leadership of Pope John Paul II
2	Inculturation of Liturgy	Vocations to the Priesthood (increase in Africa, Asia, decrease in Europe, US etc.)
3	Empowerment of Lay Men and Women in the Church (<i>Christifideles Laici</i>)	NewAge – Spirituality/ Fundamentalism
4	New Movements in the Church (Charismatic groups, Focolare, Neo-catechumenate, Basic Christian communities etc.)	New Movements in the Church
5	The Pontificate of Pope John Paul II	

B	<i>Political Developments 1980-2000</i>	
1	The Fall of Communism	The Fall of the Wall
2	The Rise of People Power (Phillipines and elsewhere)	Globalisation
3	Fundamentalist Groups in Islam etc.	The Rise of Islam
4	Terrorism	The EU in a European Context
5	Ethnicity and Tribalism	

B	<i>Social Developments 1980-2000</i>	
1	The War against Hunger	Computer/Internet
2	Involvement of NGO groups in the UN etc.	The Role of Women in Society
3	Increasing influence of the Media	Universalisation of Education
4	Consumerism	The Power of the Media

The CIF group would have needed more time to specify in more detail the influence of the above factors/events on our various apostolates. Also more time would have been needed to develop our own Vincentian response to some of these developments. Nevertheless, the exercise brought home to all of us that the world in which we are living is constantly changing, and changing at a phenomenal rate, and that there are all kinds of opportunities now in our various provinces to develop our Vincentian traditions in regard to our apostolic works. We also became aware of the great variety of social and political situations from one continent to another and from one province to another – resources, provincial traditions, etc. backing up the statement in Constitution 13 that the decision about what works we engage in be taken at provincial level – “according to the circumstances of time and place”.

CONCLUSIONS

1. In promulgating the Constitutions in January 1983, the Superior General, Fr Richard McCullen, encouraged all of us to read them carefully, to reflect on them, and to meditate on them. It was only after I had to study Constitutions 10-18 carefully, in preparation for the CIF course last autumn, that I became aware of the richness of the content of these constitutions. In dialoguing with a number of the confreres involved in the 1968/’69, 1974 and 1980 General Assemblies, from the Irish Province, I became more aware of the debates at these General Assemblies and the balancing of what appeared to be opposing forces represented by confreres from various provinces during these assemblies.
2. Through dialogue with the confreres attending the CIF session in the autumn of 2002, I became more aware of the variety of works from one province to another and also that there is a cycle in the development of our works which means that what is appropriate in one province may not be suitable in another. The parish mission movement, or what we call Popular Missions, has run through various phases in a number of our European provinces. In a number

of African provinces it seems to me that now parish missions, as we have known them, may be coming into their own, backed up by catechetical centres and centres of formation.

3. In Europe I believe we are at a turning point in regard to the most appropriate forms of evangelisation that will renew and energise parish communities today. In fact it may be more appropriate to talk about re-evangelization. I believe that we are also at a turning point in our other foundational apostolate – Formation of Clerics – in how we call people to priestly and lay ministry in the Church today.

Recommended Reading:

- Carlo Braga, C.M., 'The Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission – Historical Note', *Vincentiana*, 4/5, July/October, 2000
Papers on Popular Missions given at a four week conference in Paris, July 1997, *Vincentiana*, 4/5, June/October, 1997
Kevin Rafferty CM, 'Vincentians in Europe 2000: a time of crisis', pp 23-39, *Vincentiana*, January/February 2000