

COLLOQUE

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Congregation of the Mission

Contents

Editorial	402
A Heart Which Sees <i>G Gregory Gay</i>	403
Homily given at the Shrine of Our Lady of Knock <i>M Ginete</i>	412
“My Gospel... Let Then Simplicity Live...” <i>R McCullen</i>	415
A few thoughts on the Rosary <i>C Curtin</i>	430
Conference 214, 17 October 1659 <i>Translated by T Davitt</i>	433
Attempting to Bridge a Gap <i>T Davitt</i>	443
Seventeenth Century Vincentian Sites in Ireland <i>T Davitt</i>	446
In the Maison-Mère and Villebon <i>T Davitt</i>	457
Talks given at the Launch of Duncan McPherson’s Book, <i>Living Stones</i> , published in memory of Michael Prior CM <i>M Noonan and P Gildea</i>	470
Obituary <i>Fr Diarmuid O’Farrell CM</i>	475

Editorial

This past summer saw a visit by the Superior General, Fr Gregory Gay, to Ireland. Having originally agreed to come to present a day on Vincentian Spirituality in All Hallows, Fr Greg then availed of the opportunity to visit many of the vincentian works in Ireland; North, South, East and West – represented by his sojourns in Belfast, Cork, Dublin and Knock. In his visit, he was accompanied by Fr Manny Ginete, delegate to the Vincentian Family. We were delighted to have both of them amongst us.

Each venue gave an opportunity for Fr Gay to meet members of the Vincentian Family and, indeed, gave many of us a chance to meet each other. His keynote address from the Spirituality Day is included here, as is Fr Manny's homily from Knock, Ireland's most significant Marian Shrine.

As always in a journal, one looks back and remembers, one looks ahead and dreams. One touches on the eternal truths and recalls fondly the seemingly ephemeral details of ordinary life.

In this edition, Tom Davitt, besides his translation of St Vincent's conference, looks at two aspects of our common history; the men who are part of it (Irish men in the CM before the establishment of the Irish Province) and the places in which it has been lived out (Vincentian Sites). He also reflects a little on some of his own personal history in the CM and, in his inevitable way, offers some memorable vignettes.

Richard McCullen and Con Curtin, in very different ways and styles, look at some of the qualities which hold us together and mark our lives; simplicity and prayer.

As ever, there are memories of those who have been part of our immediate history and who have lived the life with us; Diarmuid O'Farrell and Michael Prior. Yet, as we recall both men, it is important to note that, though their earthly lives have ended, each, in unique and very different ways, has left something for the future, something that will benefit others; Diarmuid in his work for the Deaf and Michael in the Living Stones Trust.

“A Heart Which Sees”

G Gregory Gay CM

This is the text of the address that the Superior General gave at the Vincentian Spirituality Day in All Hallows on 24 June 2006.

I have read Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, three times. Upon reading through it the second time, I did so with this gathering of the members of the Vincentian Family in Ireland in mind. What I would like to share with you this morning is how this encyclical can help us deepen our own Vincentian spirituality. There are two major points with regard to our spirituality through which the encyclical can provide us with opportunities for growth.

Firstly, our Vincentian spirituality is an action-oriented spirituality. We are, as St Vincent would tell us, contemplatives in action; “True missionaries ought to be like Carthusians in their houses and like apostles outside them.” (Abelly, Book 1, 100)

Secondly, at the heart of our spirituality is charity. What motivates us to love the poor is the very love of God that we experience in our service of them.

Let's begin with the contemplative part of our spirituality. That obviously involves prayer. The Pope, in his encyclical, speaks explicitly of prayer in numbers 36 and 37. He says in number 36:

Prayer, as a means of drawing ever new strength from Christ, is concretely and urgently needed. People who pray are not wasting their time... time devoted to God in prayer not only does not detract from effective and loving service to our neighbour but is in fact the inexhaustible source of that service.

As you can see, the Pope here connects the relationship between prayer and the practice of charity. In number 37, he says: *It is time to reaffirm the importance of prayer in the face of the activism and the growing secularism of many Christians engaged in charitable work.* It is important that we begin with this gift that God has given us; that is, the capacity to pray, to enter into an intimate relationship with God and experience God's love for us.

In number 7 of the encyclical, the Pope makes reference to the *Pastoral Rule* of Pope Gregory the Great when he says:... *the good pastor must be rooted in contemplation. Only in this way will he be able*

to take upon himself the needs of others and make them his own.

Gregory the Great also speaks of the figure of Moses, as Pope Benedict cites in the same number 7:

Moses, who entered the tabernacle time and again, remaining in dialogue with God, so that when he emerged he could be at the service of his people. “Within [the tent] he is borne aloft through contemplation, while without he is completely engaged in helping those who suffer.”

Apostolic Reflection;

The other side of our Vincentian spirituality is the action-oriented part, what takes place in what we traditionally call the apostolate or our service of the poor. To help us maintain this integral relationship between prayer that is contemplation and our action in service of the poor, there is a practice which we know as *apostolic reflection*. If well done, I think it is at the very heart of helping us to keep our Vincentian spirituality alive and dynamic.

Apostolic reflection is the telling of our story. It is not an intellectual or an academic exercise. It is where we share moments, experiences, relationships with the poor, which have touched our hearts, which have moved us to convictions, to actions on their behalf and with them. Apostolic reflection also speaks of those experiences that question us, in which I may have said to myself, or asked myself, what is God telling me in this moment, in this situation, in this relationship with this poor person. In apostolic reflection, that is what we share with others, and always in the context of prayer.

Apostolic reflection is the opportunity to share with one another the experience that we have of God through our service of the poor and with the poor. Apostolic reflection is done in the context of communal prayer. The experience of the poor is the content which nourishes the prayer. It is the poor themselves who serve as the link between our prayer and service. In other words, the poor are at the heart of our prayer, as well as at the heart of our mission.

Unity between prayer and mission makes our own spirituality authentic. On the one hand, prayer, without action, disconnected from service of the poor, can become spiritualism, where our hearts and minds are somewhere in the clouds. On the other hand, action, without the source of life that comes from prayer, is what we know as activism. In order to avoid these “isms”: spiritualism or activism, it is crucial that we continually reflect on our experience in our apostolates with those whom we are called to serve and love.

Charity;

The other aspect of our spirituality on which I am most interested in focusing at this time is charity. In the first place, how do we understand charity? What is it? Simply stated, we understand charity as concrete love, that love which is incarnated. The foundation of charity is the love God; it is the love that God has for all of us. It is a constant theme which is woven throughout Benedict’s encyclical, especially in the second part.

Charity is mentioned at great length in article nine of the encyclical, as well as in numbers 17, 18, 19, and 38.

In number nine, it tells us that the human person: *comes to experience himself [herself] as loved by God, and discovers joy in truth and in righteousness.* In number 17, the Pope says: *[God] has loved us first and [God] continues to do so; we too, then, can respond with love.* We convert this experience of the love of God into the practice of charity.

The Pope says that charity is the work of all the Church. We, as members of the Vincentian Family, form a part of this same Church. The Pope shares a wonderful story in the encyclical in number 23, when he speaks about St Lawrence, the deacon, who, when the authorities were claiming the Church’s treasures, distributed all the Church’s money to the poor. Afterwards Lawrence presented the poor to the authorities, claiming that they were the treasure of the Church.

The poor are the true treasure of the Church, the principal beneficiaries of the Church’s charity. This understanding should not surprise us as members of the Vincentian Family. St Vincent refers to the poor as “our Lords and Masters.” They are, in this sense, our principal treasure and our reason to be as a Family.

In number 24, the Pope speaks about charity as a “decisive feature of the Christian community.” It is impossible to consider oneself a member of the Christian community if the practice of charity is not a part of our life experience. We see in number 25 one of the key phrases of this encyclical: *For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being.*

I would like to present some of my reflections on charity in greater depth, showing how charity is lived by Mary, as well as by St Vincent de Paul. I am going to speak of charity, as I have in a number of places, in its three essential dimensions.

The three dimensions of Charity

The first dimension, Pope Benedict calls personal charity; I call it direct contact, closeness, with the poor. It is not enough just to give alms or even participate in the promotion of the poor, or even to write letters to

governments so that they change the structures that oppress the poor. In order to live charity, as members of the Vincentian Family, we have to express this charity, first of all, by way of our closeness with the poor. We have to know them, know them by name, share with them in their life situations, their histories, their sufferings. The poor should not be strangers to us, people who are somewhere “out there.” They should be those with whom we are relating on a regular basis, with whom we have personal contact and closeness.

I would like to speak about the three dimensions of charity in the life of Mary and do so through her experience in the scene we know as the Visitation. In that scene, Mary shows her incarnated love in her relationship with her cousin, Elizabeth. There is contact, there is closeness. She joyfully enters into the home of her cousin and shares with her.

The second dimension of charity, of equal importance, is what we call human promotion. It can be understood as the organization of charity. Mary, in the Visitation scene, worries about the well-being of her cousin. It is not only her first contact that suffices, but over a period of three months she stays with her, as the Scriptures tell us. She promotes her well-being in a systematic manner: an expression of charity which promotes the dignity of her cousin in need.

The third expression of charity, I like to call political charity. It is that dimension which gives us the ability to struggle, to fight with the poor. It is that desire to change the structures that oppress the poor. Charity itself gives us the energy to struggle and to fight. There is no prayer more radically in favor of the poor and against those who oppress them, than the prayer that is proclaimed from the mouth and heart of Mary in this visit to her cousin. We all know this prayer as the Magnificat. We have to read it, reflect on it. Perhaps many times we simply spiritualize it. The Magnificat is rather concrete in its challenge to put ourselves on the side of the poor and oppressed, with a deep faith that structures will change radically, so that the poor might have life and life in abundance.

St Vincent and the three dimensions of Charity;

St Vincent also manifests in his own life these three dimensions of charity. I will mention rapidly some examples, because I think they are quite well known to all of us.

Of the images we have of St Vincent de Paul, which can be found in almost all the houses of the Daughters of Charity and a good number of houses of the Congregation of the Mission, are those of him as the Patron of Charity, with a little child in his arms and another child at his side or before a poor man. You cannot really show any greater closeness. These are images which reflect what was the entire life of St Vincent de Paul. He did not live as a theorist, distant from the reality of the poor of

his time. He was very involved in the situation of the suffering and the misery of the people.

The second dimension of charity, that of promoting the dignity of the poor, is evident in the capacity St Vincent de Paul had to organize the Charities. Right from the very beginning of his ministry, it is the way in which God led him to show love in a concrete, organized manner, inviting the participation of many other baptized women and men.

With regard to the third dimension, political charity, St Vincent had the capacity to confront the political powers of his time, both government leaders and Church leaders as well. Even though it was not a popular stand, he would always be at the side of the poor, speaking in their favor.

As a Vincentian Family we take Mary and Vincent, along with many others, as models of this three-fold dimension of charity.

The Pope and the three dimensions of Charity;

The dimension that is the strongest and well-presented by the Pope is what he calls personal charity, and what I call the importance of being close to the poor. In number 28 of his encyclical, he speaks of this in a very straightforward way:

The State which would provide everything, absorbing everything into itself, would ultimately become a mere bureaucracy incapable of guaranteeing the very thing which the suffering person - every person - needs: namely, loving personal concern.

In number 31, we read:... *human beings always need something more than technically proper care. They need humanity. They need heartfelt concern...*In order to have this attention that comes from the heart, personal charity is necessary. This is the closeness to the poor of which we have spoken. A little bit further along in number 31, the Pope says: *We contribute to a better world only by personally doing good now, with full commitment and wherever we have the opportunity ... The Christian's programme...is "a heart which sees."*

To highlight the dimension of human promotion and the organization of charity, I would like to read from the letter from some of the heads of the Vincentian Family at the international level. This is the letter that comes out every year with the theme for celebrating, as a Family, the feast of St Vincent de Paul. If you have not already received it, you will do so shortly. In the accompanying document to that letter this year, we mention the following, which is taken from the encyclical of Pope Benedict: *Love thus needs to be organized if it is to be an ordered service to the community.* We find this phrase in number 20 of

the encyclical. As we say, “his invitation also extends itself to collaboration with other organisms, which today we call ‘networking.’” The Pope mentions this in number 30:

Church agencies, with their transparent operation and their faithfulness to the duty of witnessing to love, are able to give a Christian quality to the civil agencies too, favouring a mutual coordination that can only redound to the effectiveness of charitable service.

For us, as sons and daughters of St Vincent de Paul, networking is nothing new. It was precisely St Vincent de Paul who pioneered the organization of charity. There are many situations in his own life and in the lives of others, which give faith to this expression. We need not look any farther than, for example, at the life of Frederick Ozanam or Sr Rosalie Rendu. And even today, here in Ireland, we see this experience of organized charity in the Vincentian Millennium Partnership, the Vincentian Housing Partnership, and the DePaul Trust, as well as various activities of other members of the Vincentian Family.

Some considerations and limitations;

I must admit I find the third dimension, political charity, a little weak in the Pope’s encyclical. There is even a part of the encyclical that made me feel uncomfortable when I read it. It is where the Pope criticizes a word that is often used to describe the situation of the poor, in which the structures of our society are the cause of their poverty. The word is: “impoverishment.” The Pope criticizes this word because for him it is a term that comes from the Marxist theory. It is certain that it is a word that is found in Marxism, but “impoverishment” is also a reality which indicates that it is the structures of society which oppress the poor and make the poor yet poorer.

It is not a question, as unfortunately some people seem to think, that the poor are poor because they “do not want to work.” From professional analysis of the various situations in different countries throughout the world, we know well that that is not the case. There are economic structures that favor those who have. At the same time, they are impoverishing those who do not have. It is the ever-widening abyss about which John Paul II often spoke in his social encyclicals. This political dimension of charity is not completely absent from the Pope’s encyclical, but as I said, it is weak. He speaks of the importance of the relationship that should exist between charity and justice, but then he does not go beyond that and say how that relationship evolves.

In my opinion, it is impossible to have authentic charity, as the Lord

asks us, incarnating his love, if one of these three dimensions is absent from our expression of love.

For example, if we have only personal contact, that is, we live personal charity with regard to the poor, there could be a tendency to fall into what we understand as “paternalism” or “maternalism.” This type of attitude is not something that benefits the poor. At times it can even keep the poor poor, while satisfying the consciences of some people. If we think that the only way we can live charity is through this personal contact, we may fall into this “ism,” which does nothing for the poor.

If human promotion were the only dimension of charity, then we could have the tendency to fall into what I call “socialism,” in the negative sense of the word. Here I am not criticizing any particular style of government or political ideology. Rather, it is in the sense that we fall in the trap that Pope Benedict himself calls “social assistance” - without heart. If we live this dimension of charity alone, we risk the possibility that our charity not be an authentic expression of our love.

Even political charity, without the other two dimensions, both personal contact and human promotion, can become pure rhetoric and what we sometimes call politicking. We can say a lot of things about the poor, and even in favor of the poor, but then if there is no concretization of the talk, it can become pure blah, blah, blah.

There has to be an integration of the three dimensions, in order that love might be authentic and that our charity might be real.

Beyond local borders;

I'd also like to look into a couple of other articles of the encyclical that are related to our Vincentian spirituality and can even serve as a launching point for reflection among us, as members of the Vincentian Family.

In number 30, the Pope says: *Our times call for a new readiness to assist our neighbours in need.* I truly believe that the Vincentian Family, in different parts of the world as well as here in Ireland, has heard this need and is available to respond in new ways to the needs of the poor.

In the same number 30, the Pope says: *Concern for our neighbour transcends the confines of national communities and has increasingly broadened its horizon to the whole world.* I think a real concrete example of such an attitude is present, at least from my experience, in a number of the groups of the Vincentian Family here in Ireland. One group, recently begun, has given itself the name, MISEVI, and rightly so. With Fr Michael McCullagh, the volunteers have gone beyond the frontiers of Ireland to accompany the poor in Ethiopia. DePaul Trust has also gone beyond its borders. It was founded first in Great Britain as an outgrowth of the St Vincent de Paul Society. It has now moved into

Ireland, Slovakia and Ukraine. It has also been brought to my attention, in my visit here to Ireland, that the Society of St Vincent de Paul has gone beyond its borders here in Ireland, having twinning experiences in many countries, especially 13 countries in Africa alone. I must also mention the Congregation of the Mission here in Ireland, as well as the Daughters of Charity, and their different missionary activities, which extend beyond their borders to Nigeria, Kenya, etc. These are certainly a way of showing solidarity. I want to encourage all of you, members of the Vincentian Family, to go beyond your own borders to show solidarity with the most vulnerable. The globalization of love is manifested through the promotion of the dignity of the poor.

In number 30b, the Pope speaks of volunteerism, which is responsible in one way or another for many services in the Church. Certainly the different branches of our own Vincentian Family would fall into this grouping. There are 90 volunteers in the Vincentian Housing Partnership alone. The Pope states: *For young people, this widespread involvement [volunteerism] constitutes a school of life which offers them a formation in solidarity and in readiness to offer others not simply material aid but their very selves.*

We can attract young people today through volunteerism, as is evident here. I think that the experience that all of us have in our service of the poor is much more than simply giving something. When we are truly involved in the life of the poor, supporting their needs in a very concrete way, we begin to experience a “giving of ourselves.” It is then that we realize what charity really is. We move from giving something to giving of ourselves. Charity is that motivating force.

When I read this quote from the Pope about volunteerism being a school for young people as a way of educating them in solidarity and helping them to give truly of themselves, I consider it to be one of the greatest challenges that we face as the Vincentian Family today. In many parts of the western world, especially in the First World, we find ourselves ageing as a Family. I feel that, if we unite ourselves as a Family, giving of ourselves together with the poor, this is something that will attract youth. Our witness, of a capacity to live the Gospel radically in a united way, as love in action, has to attract.

Conclusion;

In his encyclical, the Pope makes a great effort to give us this message, not from the heights of theological thought, but rather from the reality of the People of God. The greatest need that our world today has is the need for expressions of true love, concretized through expressions of charity. Charity is nothing strange to us. As I stated earlier, it is our reason for being.

I would like to conclude with a prayer to Mary that the Pope uses in the encyclical. As the Daughters state in their Constitutions, “she is our only Mother.” Number 42, the last number of the encyclical, says:

*Holy Mary, Mother of God,
you have given the world its true light,
Jesus, your Son – the Son of God.
You abandoned yourself completely
to God’s call
and thus became a wellspring
of the goodness which flows forth from him.
Show us Jesus. Lead us to him.
Teach us to know and love him,
so that we too can become
capable of true love
and be fountains of living water
in the midst of a thirsting world.*

And so to her we confide the Vincentian Family here in Ireland and its mission to serve God’s people “with hearts that see.”

Homily given at the Shrine of Our Lady of Knock, County Mayo, Ireland

Manuel Ginete CM

Delegate for the Vincentian Family
28 June 2006

Readings: Galatians 4:4-7
Luke 1:39-47

Today we find ourselves in this beautiful shrine of Our Lady of Knock, the Queen of Ireland. It is a testament to the enduring care and concern of Our Lady for those who follow her Son. I stand here in awe of the great things that the mercy of the Lord has brought upon this blessed land and its people, even as I pay homage to the many Irish missionaries who have worked and still do in my own land.

Mary Byrne and her companions, we are told, all 15 of them who saw with their eyes the apparition of 21 August 1879 had affirmed that, unlike at her previous apparitions, here at Knock the Blessed Mother had given no explicit verbal message. But to people with faith, the message is plain enough to see. As the figure of St John the Evangelist seems to point out, we need only to go back to the Gospel and God's Word in order to unearth the profound meaning of the apparition for us, believers and pilgrims of today.

Today's Gospel recalls for us the wonderful moment when, shortly after the angel appeared to her, Mary came down the hill country of Judea to visit her cousin Elizabeth who, like her, was with child. As we all know it is a scene that starts out simply and ordinarily enough – a young lady traveling some distance and going out of her way to be by her relation's side at a time of the latter's need. Yet this simple narration ends up in the full trumpet blare of the "Magnificat" – the finest hymn of thanksgiving in the New Testament, a canticle of praise for all the good things that the Lord has done for his people, especially the poor and the downtrodden.

Indeed, one may ask: what has taken place in this Gospel story? I venture to say that at its core it is no less than the meeting of God's goodness and man's faith, a moment when human beings saw the events in their lives from the light of faith. Elizabeth saw in Mary not only her cousin – she also beheld the Mother of God. Likewise, the baby in Elizabeth's womb recognized the special One whom Mary was carrying in hers. For her part, Mary did not regard this simply as an ordinary

family encounter – for her, it was the moment when she recognized how much the Lord God has blessed her. In this instance, Mary seemed to have understood the role she was to play not only for her Son, but for all humanity.

Yet if one goes deeper still, the scene reminds us of what happens when we allow God to take hold of our lives. We are not only transformed, we also become agents of God's transforming love for others. Mary was transformed by the one she bore in her womb for nine months, and consequently she had become the most fitting human instrument of God's message of salvation, the bearer of the Good News of the Father's love. The lowly maiden has become the instrument of God's exultation.

I believe that in essence this is what is behind all Marian apparitions. In different times and seasons, in places far and near, Mary, on the one hand, wishes to assure us of her enduring maternal care, her intercession before the throne of God, her desire that all of us follow in the footsteps of her Son, the Lamb once slain, who brought meaning, salvation, and peace to a troubled and sinful humanity. But on the other hand, she also reminds us of what happens when we live for God and allow God to mould us in his image. She gives witness to the wisdom of God's love overturning human calculation and folly.

In a significant way especially for us, members of the Vincentian Family, Mary wishes to convey this message to the poor. It is no happenstance, no accident that the apparition here took place at the time of famine and was witnessed by ordinary lay people, that in Fatima she appeared to peasants, in Lourdes to a simple village girl, and in Paris to a young novice of the Daughters of Charity. Indeed, if there is one common message in all this it would be none other than that the Lord hears the cry of the poor.

In the images before us here at Knock, one does not easily perceive a representation of the poor. However, I dare say that in this connection the figure of St Joseph is relevant. He himself may not appear as poor in this image, but his pose reminds one of the peasants in Francois Millet's painting "The Angelus". As many of you may know, it is a picture of farmers pausing to pray to God in the midst of their work. It is a portrait of people who toil with their hands and with the sweat of their brow, farmers respectful of the land that the Lord has given and grateful for the fruits that it brings. St Joseph stands for a person of faith. But he also represents the attitude of trust so common among the poor and of homage before the marvels of God, the very same attitude for which Jesus calls them "blessed." St Joseph's bowed head points in the direction of Mary, but also beyond - to the cross and the lamb on the altar of sacrifice. It is as if he is directing us to the central message of the apparition: beyond the suffering of the Cross is the glory of the Lamb

who not only takes away the sin of the world but who brings all peoples into the table of the Lord, from where all may eat and be nourished. This message was particularly not lost to the poor ravaged by famine.

But more than God's predilection for the poor, Mary also draws our attention to the role that they play in God's plans for humanity. The ones who are deemed unimportant by the world have become God's apostles of love and peace. The ones to whom the Gospel is brought are now the same ones who bring the Gospel to others.

St Vincent de Paul too had reminded us of this. God not only loves the poor, he also makes them the instruments by which we are able to know God and his will for us. That is why unabashedly Vincent called them "my lords and masters."

I find a contemporary application from all this. Throughout these past days of visit, the one refrain that I kept hearing, upon being introduced as a Filipino, is this: "Oh, we have Filipino nurses working with us, and they are wonderful – so tender, so ready to serve." It is a tribute that I am proud to accept in the name of all other Filipinos. But at this point, it is something from which I instead wish to draw a reflection. Surely, the nurses came to Ireland in search of gainful employment, even if often this meant leaving behind the security of home and family. But unknown perhaps to their designs, God is making them as instruments of his love and care for the handicapped, the elderly, the sick, the poor and all those who experience the famine of insensitivity and neglect. At a time of globalization, when the "economic" seems to rule the world, God sends these men and women from a poor country to remind us all that there are other things that are of greater value: compassion, care for the weak, love for the poor. The poor have become bearers of God's Good News.

Mary visited Elizabeth to extend to her God's care and concern. More than a hundred years ago, she appeared here at Knock to bring hope to a suffering people. Today, in the midst of still so much poverty in spirit and body, she reiterates that message to us. Do we allow that message to fall on deaf ears, or do we allow God to so transform us as to become the instruments of the Good News?

“My Gospel... Let then Simplicity live...”(1)

Richard McCullen CM

Introduction

Some two years ago there was published a book entitled *The Times Book of Saints*. A selection was made of more than 300 saints and the editor gave a brief résumé of the life and works of each saint. A distinguishing feature of the volume is the inclusion of a short extract from the writings of each saint, if such writings exist. St Vincent finds his place in the volume and it was with a certain eagerness that I searched out the two pages devoted to our Founder, curious to know what passage the editor would have selected from the writings of M Vincent. It would surely be an extract from one of his impassioned addresses to the community of St Lazare or to his beloved Daughters of Charity on the urgency of evangelisation and the importance of service of the Poor. To my surprise this is what I read:

Jesus, the Lord, expects us to have the simplicity of a dove (Mt.10:16). This means giving a straightforward opinion about things in the way we honestly see them, without needless reservations. It also means doing things without double-dealing or manipulation, our intentions being focused solely on God. Each of us, then, should take care to behave always in the spirit of simplicity, remembering that God likes to deal with the simple, and that he conceals the secrets of heaven from the wise and prudent of this world and reveals them to little ones.

However, while Christ recommends a dove's simplicity, he also tells us to have a serpent's prudence. He means that we should speak and behave with discretion. We ought, therefore, to keep quiet about matters which should not be made known, especially if they are unsuitable or unlawful. When we are discussing things which it is good and proper to talk about, we should hold back any details which would not be for God's glory, or which could harm some other person, or which would make us foolishly smug.

In actual practice this virtue is about choosing the right way to do things. We should make it a sacred principle, admitting of no exceptions, that since we are working for God we will always choose God-related ways for carrying out our work, and see and judge things from Christ's point of view and not from a worldly-wise one; and not according to the feeble reasoning of our own mind. (2)

The choice of this piece as illustrative of the life and mission of St Vincent is interesting. It is, of course, taken from the Common Rules (3) of the Congregation of the Mission which St Vincent had printed in 1658, two years before his death. The choice made by this editor – Bert Ghezzi, a layman – is particularly significant. It would seem that he perceived that M Vincent’s grasp and appreciation of the virtue of evangelical simplicity and prudence was the secret of the flowering and growth of that great and dense forest of works which – as Daniel Rops remarked – hides the man Vincent de Paul as in a fog. Bert Ghezzi’s perception of the secret of the fecundity of the life of Vincent de Paul is rooted in that virtue which the Saint himself describes as *my gospel*. *God has given me such an appreciation of simplicity that I call it my gospel.*(4)

One of the first references M Vincent makes to the virtue of simplicity occurs in the Rules drawn up for the Confraternity of Charity in November-December 1617. We read that the members are *to take care in practising humility, simplicity and charity, each deferring to her companions and to others, performing all their actions for the charitable intention of persons who are poor and with no human respect.* (5)

That passing reference to the three virtues of humility simplicity and charity is like the first trickling of a river over ground, a river that with the passing of the years would become wide and broad and deep in the mind and heart of M Vincent. The trinity of virtues – simplicity, humility, and charity – are those to which the saint most often refers in his conferences to the Daughters of Charity, while to simplicity he assigns the primacy of place in the rule for both the Daughters of Charity and the members of the Congregation of the Mission.

The rock from which you were hewn...

The young Vincent did not imbibe simplicity with his mother’s milk. Indeed being a Gascon - he would have soon learned that a goodly measure of astuteness along with a cultivated shrewdness was necessary if one was to advance one’s interests in society. A later letter of M Vincent point to this indigenous Gascon trait. When a member of his community, Firmin Get, had withheld from M Vincent some rather important details about a financial matter, the saint administered the following rebuke:

I must confess, Monsieur, that this has surprised me more than anything that has happened to me for a long time. If you were a Gascon or a Norman, I would not find it strange. To think, however, that a straightforward man from Picardy, whom I consider one of the most sincere men in the Company, would have hidden that

from me -how can I not be surprised at that, and just as surprised at the means used to meet those demands? (6)

A flash of the Gascon trait surfaces again when within two weeks of the Saint's death. M Gicquel who kept a close eye on the Saint during the final days, of his life. He records in his diary that M Vincent, when issuing instructions to M Dehorgny on how he should communicate the news of the appointment of the Sister chosen to succeed Mademoiselle le Gras, remarked;

M Dehorgny, have them (the Sisters) assemble and, after the conference announce to them the choice God has made of Sister (Marguerite Chétif) as Superioress. Tell them beforehand that they will all kiss her hands as a sign of acknowledgement, and she will embrace them; take a look around at the faces and expression of the members of the Community, especially the two or three who were officers and who had it in mind...(7)

M Vincent was not one – to quote Isaiah – *who would forget the rock from which you were hewn, and the quarry from which you were dug.* (8) The Daughters of Charity were the beneficiaries of his reflection on the virtues that he saw in

good village girls, because I know them from experience and indeed by nature, for I am the son of a poor tiller of the soil and I lived in the country until I was fifteen... So I can tell you, dear Sisters, that the spirit of true village girls is extremely simple – no slyness, nor words of double meaning, they're not opinionated nor obstinate because in their simplicity they believe quite simply what they're told. Daughters of Charity should be like that, Sisters, and you'll know that you're really so, if you're truly simple, not attached to your own ideas but accepting those of others: if you're candid in your speech and if you aren't thinking one thing while your lips say another. I can well believe that of you, dear Sisters...(9)

The City and the Court:

Through labyrinthine ways Vincent, the newly ordained priest, after leaving the languid lands of the *Landes*, would eventually settle down in the sophisticated world of Paris. Those first ten years of his priesthood, intent as he was on carving out a comfortable niche in the ecclesiastical world by securing a lucrative benefice or even an Episcopal appoint-

ment, had ended in failure. (10) Disillusioned, he was slowly making the discovery that would be reflected in phrases of the rule he would write some 50 years later. Purely human wisdom avails little in the domain of spiritual principles. Indeed human prudence can prove counterproductive in harvesting that genuine fruit which the Lord of the Vineyard guaranteed would remain. (11) The young priest Vincent would seem to have only made that discovery after many of those human agents upon whom he had pinned his hopes had failed to procure the ecclesiastical advancement he had dreamed about. There is a ring of deep conviction in a phrase such as this written two years before his death:

Let each of us accept the truth of the following statement and try to make our most fundamental principle: Christ's teaching will never let us down, while worldly wisdom always will...And that is why the Congregation should always try to follow the teaching of Christ himself and never that of the worldly. (12)

The principles of worldly wisdom had failed Vincent, and it would be in Paris through his contacts with a constellation of theological and spiritual luminaries that he would come slowly to the realization that *Christ's teaching will never let us down*.

The eight years that intervened between M Vincent's first arrival in Paris and the year of the Folleville Mission had brought him into a world in which he saw '*worldly wisdom*' displayed in the court of Queen Marguerite. Contemporaneously he was beginning to breathe the purer air of the mountain of the Lord to which he had been led by De Berulle and Duval. A refining and purifying of motive for action was taking place. It is the pure of heart who will see God. (13) With a growing purity of heart the vision of M Vincent was being sharpened to see the presence of the crucified and risen Christ *in ten thousand places, lovely in eyes, lovely in limbs not his*. (14) To see Christ particularly where one would least expect to find him -in human minds and bodies that poverty and suffering had broken and distorted.

...*And the Church...*

It was while ascending the mountain of the Lord in the second decade of the 17th century that M Vincent met a bishop whom he would recognise and acknowledge as having a profound and lasting influence on his life. One will find more than 150 references to St Francis de Sales scattered like seed throughout M Vincent's correspondence and conferences. To judge from the approving warmth of his references to the *dicta* of the gentle bishop of Geneva, M Vincent looked to him as a spiritual role model. In later years the when the memory of St Francis de Sales

crossed his mind he liked to designate him as *Our Blessed Father*. The two celebrated works of St Francis de Sales, *A Treatise on the Love of God* and *The Introduction to the Devout Life*, would have been familiar to St Vincent, the latter work being frequently commended by him as spiritual reading.

The importance of the virtue of Simplicity was accepted by authorities on the spiritual life in 17th century France. St Francis de Sales in his correspondence makes reference to an anonymous Flemish work entitled ‘*La Perle Evangelique*’ which markedly influenced Benet of Canfield and Francis de Sales. (15) Although not found in the Annecy edition of the works of Francis de Sales (and hence not accessible to St Vincent) St Francis de Sales wrote:

To understand what simplicity is, it is necessary to know that there are three virtues which are so like one another that it seems there is no difference between them, namely truth, purity and simplicity. Truth makes us seem exteriorly what we are interiorly... purity cannot endure any sin however slight, or any impure intention which does not tend to God’s glory but simplicity surpasses these in as much as it has only a simple regard for God. (16)

Even though four decades had elapsed, clear echoes of these observations of the *Our Blessed Father* are to be heard when in 1659 St Vincent was addressing his community:

I know well that simplicity in general is taken as truth, or purity of intention: truth in so far as it make our words and other expressions conform to our thoughts; purity of intention, because it makes all our acts tend straight to God. But when one takes simplicity as a particular virtue and in the proper sense, it includes not just purity and truth but also the property it has of excluding from our words and actions all deceitfulness, ruses and duplicity. (17)

As M Vincent continued to scale ever higher the mountain of the Lord, and to breathe its pure air, his vision of *the God of gods in Sion* became more focused and penetrating. St Thomas Aquinas predicated of the virtue of humility its power to give unhindered *access to spiritual and divine goods*. (18) M Vincent was enlightened by grace to see that through the practice of simplicity the Lord gave *unhindered access* to the hearts of little ones, while at the same time unveiling some of the deep mysteries of God. The short prayer of praise which Jesus offered to the Lord of Heaven and earth for revealing *hidden things* to little ones was often quoted by M Vincent in his conferences and directions to individual correspondents. (19)

The virtue I love most...

The virtue of simplicity was to become, what later M Vincent would call, '*my gospel*.' (20)

It is the virtue I love most, the one to which in all my actions I pay most heed, so it seems to me; and if it were lawful to say so, the one I may say in which I have by God's mercy made some progress. (21)

This confession from the lips of M Vincent, who was invariably reticent about his personal spiritual experiences, must carry special weight and be valued as a special key to the interpretation of his monumental life. From later observations made by the Saint about the high place simplicity occupies in the hierarchy of virtues which he proposed to his two communities (and the references are multiple (22)) a question could be proposed. Was his strong conviction on evangelical simplicity born solely from his experience of the efficacy of the virtue in attaining practical and successful results in the ministry of evangelising and serving the Poor?

It must be said that M Vincent's starting point for presenting simplicity as one of *the faculties of the soul* of the Congregation of the Mission was based not on sheer pragmatism but on theological foundations. (23) Repeatedly the Saint refers to the truth that God likes to communicate with those who are simple. (24) In the conference which he gave to his own community on the virtues of Simplicity and Prudence, after citing some relevant Scriptural passages, he recalls the theological truth that God is simple.

God is a simple Being who receives nothing from another. He is a sovereign and infinite essence, excluding all admixture. He is a pure Being never undergoing change. Now this quality of the Creator is to be found in some of his creatures. It is communicated to them and exists after the manner indicated in our Rules. (25)

Authentic simplicity makes for direct communication with God. It facilitates a growth in faith which is a created participation in the knowledge God has of himself. Faith gives limited vision, until the perfect is come with the direct vision of God. (26) Was it the practice of simplicity that enabled M. Vincent to grow stronger in faith, to see with the eyes of Christ, to judge of persons and events with the mind of Christ? (27) To M Vincent was given the charism of seeing the features and the person of Jesus Christ beneath the broken bodies and the agitated minds of the Poor. Purity of heart and purity of intention are constitutive parts of

the virtue of simplicity. The French writer George Bernanos is credited with the observation: *Ask for the only thing you need - a star and a pure heart.* The star for M Vincent was the living person of Jesus Christ. The gaining of an ever-purer heart was sought through prayer, daily examen of consciousness (as distinct from conscience) and the blood transfusions from the risen Christ in the sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation.

Each one in every single thing he does, especially in preaching or other ministries of the Congregation, should make an effort to have, to the best of his ability, as pure an intention as possible of pleasing God alone. (28)

As the eyes of servants... so too our eyes...

Simplicity presupposes an awareness of the presence of God. To be simple is to focus one's intentions *solely on God.* (29) A practice which M Vincent encouraged very frequently, particularly when addressing the Daughters of Charity, was that of recalling the presence of God. In teaching the Sisters how to pray he indicates that at the beginning of prayer it is important to recall the presence of God and that for some Sisters that may be difficult, and may even cause headaches. (30) So he proposes four other means of facilitating the centring of the mind and heart on the presence of the living God. It is clear that development of an awareness of the presence of God even outside the times of formal prayer would make the service of the Poor more easy and more single-minded. Hence the numerous references to this practice in the Conferences given to the Daughters of Charity:

Our Sister has given us an almost infallible means of loving God; it is, she says, ever to walking His presence; and that is most true; the more one sees a perfectly good person, the more one loves him. Now, if we have God frequently before our eyes, as God is beauty and perfection itself there is not doubt that the longer we look upon Him the more we shall love Him. (31)

What image of God?

It is interesting that M Vincent here evokes the God of beauty, adding that *the more we look upon Him the more we shall love him.* If one is to live in the presence of God and refer one's activities of thought, word and action to God, what image of God is to be cultivated? A God of beauty, a loving God is the suggestion to M Vincent at that particular conference.

The image of a God as a severe taskmaster, intent on inculcating servile fear, will not favour growth in simplicity. The renowned German-born scriptural expert, Joachim Jeremias, published in the 1960s a small work entitled *The Central Message of the New Testament* in which he highlighted the Fatherhood of God as central in the revelation of Christ. Becoming a true child of our loving Father is an indispensable condition for entering the Kingdom of Heaven. (32) Philip the apostle - at once curious and fascinated by the frequent references our Lord made to his Father - asked that Jesus would show them the Father. (33) The reply: *Philip... whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?* Only a short time before Philip would have looked at our Lord on his knees before him as he began to wash his feet. So our God is a God who puts on an apron, goes on his knees and washes feet. The God of Jesus Christ is a self-emptying God, a serving God. He is supremely the God of Vincent de Paul. Goodness for M Vincent was not merely something to do but Someone to love. His God was a serving, loving God. And this God had emphasised that greatness comes from within, that the value of actions lies in the intention. (34) Hence *the really acceptable offering of purification of the spirit is that which is rendered not in a man-made temple but in the temple of the heart, where Christ the Lord is pleased to enter.* (35)

Why are you fearful?

Fear must be considered as one of the obstacles to the growth of the virtue of simplicity. A present-day English contemplative nun has noted that *most men and women spend their lives running away from fear or, to express it dramatically but none the less really, from feeling unimportant?* (36) Fear that is born of human respect or from an excessive spirit of competitiveness can propel us into inauthentic ways of acting and of speaking. M Vincent would have seen much of it in the Court circles and in the aristocratic stratum of society that he entered after his arrival in Paris:

We hardly meet anyone at the present day who speaks as he thinks... The world overflows with duplicity... It is essential that we be on our guard against appearing crafty, clever, wily and, above all using double-meaning language. (37)

When, in August 1659, M Vincent spoke those words, one wonders if he was recalling his experience of working with Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin who were not only familiar with Machiavellian theory but practitioners of it, and would projected themselves to M Vincent as *crafty, clever and, wily.* (38)

The kingdom of the arrière pensée is where all human debates occur, observed Paul Valery, (39) and few must have been as aware as M Vincent of that truth. Not only in Court circles and among the politicians of his day but in the world of ecclesiastics he would have noticed the hollowness and the veneer that often masked the unspoken thought. Nor was the pulpit an artificiality-free zone. The parading of an array of classical learning was frequently substituted for the word of God and basic simple catechesis. *The hungry sheep look up and are not fed.* (40) M Vincent was well aware of the artificiality of much preaching in his time. The antidote which he vigorously proposed to his missionaries was simplicity in thought and expression.

Stripping one's vines...

Rather like the river Nile which, flowing between its banks, succeeds in irrigating hundreds of hectares of land, making them fertile, so the virtue of simplicity will flower in a variety of forms. (42) More than an attitude, simplicity is a spirit that presupposes an ensemble of virtues. In authentic simplicity one will find humility, sincerity, truth, modesty. A constellation of such virtues will generate a certain spontaneity and ease of approach to others that can facilitate greater openness in them. One thinks of Blessed Pope John XIII and his disarming simplicity that put people so much at their ease in his presence. In his *Journal of a Soul* he wrote:

The more mature I grow in years and experience the more I recognise that the surest way to make myself holy ... lies in the constant effort to reduce everything, principles, aims position, business, to the utmost simplicity and tranquillity; I must always take care to strip my vines of all useless foliage and spreading tendrils, and concentrate on what is truth, justice and charity, above all charity. (43)

In an age of consumerism a simplicity of life-style, motivated by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, can be compelling and prophetic. The modern world, for all its complexity and technology, seems to experience a thirst for simplicity in word, in life-style, in action. Such simplicity of life-style is silently eloquent of the all- sufficiency of trust in the God who clothes with beauty the lilies of the fields, providing food for the birds of the air and counselling humans not to be anxious for the morrow. (44) Such simplicity when lived authentically can radiate a serenity that is a healing therapy for the Poor.

The mother and mould of all moral virtues.

The virtue of evangelical simplicity is indissolubly united in St Vincent's thought with the virtue of prudence. He sees the marriage of simplicity and prudence as blessed by Jesus Christ who would have his disciples *wise as serpents and simple as doves*. (45) Were he living in today's world he would note the popularity of the present-day cult of transparency that flourishes (or often does not!) in the world of business, politics, administration, and accountability. The cult may have arisen as a reaction to the widespread adoption of the tactics of dissemblance and cover-up in our present-day culture. M Vincent's endorsement of such transparency would not be a full approval of what is known today in some countries as "political correctness". He would note, too, that in the Western culture there prevails at the present time a certain mercilessness in arriving at the truth through exposure that is not always consonant with the supreme rule of *speaking the truth in love*. (46) Hence the need of the virtue of prudence which, according to Aquinas, is *the mold and mother of all the moral virtues, while charity molds even prudence itself*. (47)

That St Vincent was familiar with the teaching of Aquinas on the virtue of prudence is evidenced by a little phrase which he cites in the paragraph devoted to prudence in the Common Rules for his missionaries: *In actual practice this virtue is about choosing the right way to do things*.

This is a clear echo of the *recta ratio agibilium* (the right reason of doing) which St Thomas links to the virtue of prudence. (48) Immediately St Vincent raises the question to the supernatural plane as he continues:

We should make it a sacred principle, then, that since we are working for God we will always choose God-related ways for carrying out our work, and see and judge things from Christ's point of view and not from worldly-wise one; and not according to the feeble reasoning of our own mind either. (49)

It is clear that St Vincent is here writing of supernatural prudence, and in this context Josef Pieper makes a profound assertion.

The highest and most fruitful achievement of Christian life depends on the felicitous collaboration of prudence and charity... Charity being participation by grace in the life of the Trinitarian God, is in essence a gift ultimately beyond the power of man's will or reason to bestow... The divine love conferred by grace shapes from the ground up and throughout the innermost core of the most

commonplace moral action of a Christian, even though that action may be ‘outwardly’ without special distinguishing characteristics...In proportion to the growth of the theological virtue love there unfolds in the man who has received grace the sevenfold gift of the spirit; in the same proportion human prudence receives, more tangibly and more audibly, the aid of ‘the gift of counsel, ‘donum consilii’. The gift of counsel corresponds to prudence, helping and perfecting it (50)

Two good and inseparable sisters:

In the conference on Simplicity and Prudence given on 14th March 1659, M Vincent treats at some length the virtue of simplicity before taking up that of prudence. When in the second half of the conference he turns to the virtue of prudence, there are clear resonances of St Thomas Aquinas’ treatment of that virtue, but they are coloured by M Vincent’s own convictions as well as by his sensitivity to the group of priests and brothers to whom he was speaking. (51) At one point he states that there is no difference between the two virtues:

Prudence and simplicity tend to the same end, which is to speak well and act well, and one cannot exist without the other. I know, however, that a difference will be found to exist between them by a distinction of the reason but in reality they have only the one and the same substance and object... They are two good and inseparable sisters. (52)

Throughout the conference one finds a pendulum-like swing between what natural prudence suggests and the prudence that is shot through with the *agapé* of God. Our invariable rule must be *to judge all things as our Lord has judged them; and I say always and in all things, and to ask ourselves on occasions; ‘How did our Lord judge of this? How did he act in the like case?’* (53) Examples are taken from the gospel to illustrate the virtue of prudence: the reply of our Lord on the question of tribute to Caesar and that given to the accusers of the woman caught in the act of adultery.

While M Vincent considers that simplicity and prudence cannot be separated, (54) he treats simplicity more expansively in his conferences and correspondence. This is particularly so when he is addressing the Daughters of Charity. When talking to the Daughters of Charity about simplicity – he invariably states that the virtue of humility is its inseparable partner, while with the missionaries he tends to emphasise that the virtue of prudence is complement of simplicity. In the final chapter of

the Common Rules, which one could regard as a sort of Founder's spiritual testament in which the features of the Congregation of the Mission receive their definitive lines, M Vincent returns once again to the virtue of simplicity, as if to underline once more its importance. He set down the principle:

As simplicity is the principal and most characteristic virtue of missionaries, we should show it at all times and in all circumstances. We should be more careful to practise it during missions, especially when we proclaim the word of God country people, to whom because they are simply God speaks through us. (55)

What he enunciates in the remainder of this paragraph about clarity of exposition would be fully endorsed by any school of modern media communications or a professional in the art of public relations. Perhaps the only difference would be M Vincent's presenting of Christ, the Lord, as the supreme model of all good communication.

Two centuries later..

Almost two centuries after the death of St Vincent, the Danish Christian philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, published a work entitled *Purity of heart is to will one thing*. (56) *The* work has become a classic. Its title would have seized the imagination of M Vincent who gave so much thought to purity of heart and of intention in all that one does and thinks and says. Furthermore the work would have greatly interested him for the reason that that a consequence to willing one thing by a heart that is pure leads infallibly to the accomplishment of the will of God. And is not the accomplishment of the will of God through Christ Jesus a cardinal feature of St Vincent's spirituality and the summit of all holiness?

In his Introduction to the English translation of Kierkegaard's work, Douglas Steere alluded to another brief work of Kierkegaard's entitled *The Difference between a Genius and an Apostle*. Summarising Kierkegaard's thought, Steere writes:

The apostle may be a commoner, a fisherman, a one-talent man by nature, or he may have ten talents – yet all that he has is dedicated to the service of the Eternal and as such is lifted up. The genius speaks with brilliance and charm. The apostle speaks with authority. The way of the genius is a way closed to all but a few. The way of the apostle is a way open to all as individuals – even to the genius himself if he can forsake the absorbing satisfactions of a brilliant self-sufficiency and be ready to will one thing.

It has been the glorious distinction of M Vincent that he proved himself to be both a genius and an apostle. To this genius and apostle, *Le grand saint du Grand Siècle*, let us leave the final word.

Now if there is any Community that ought to make profession of simplicity it is ours, for note this well, my Brothers, duplicity is the bane of a Missionary; duplicity deprives him of his spirit; not to be sincere and simple in the eyes of God and men, is the venom and the poison of the Congregation of the Mission. The Virtue of simplicity, then, my Brothers, simplicity, ah, how beautiful it is...(57)

NOTES

1. We should be careful to practise it (simplicity) during missions, especially when we proclaim the word of God to country people, to whom because they are simple, God speaks through us. For this reason our style of preaching and catechising should be simple... We should take care not to preach any far-fetched or too subtly contrived ideas or pointless distinctions from the pulpit of truth. (41)
2. SV 11:286
3. Common Rules or Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission: chapter 2, n.5.
4. SV 9: 606
5. SV 13:435 or Eng 13a:196-197
6. SV 5:199
7. SV 13: 180-181 or Eng 13a : 196-197. Also T Davitt in *Colloque 5: 16*
8. Isaiah 51:1
9. SV 9:81 or Eng 9:68
10. St Vincent de Paul: A biography: JM Roman, pp.55-89
11. John 15:16
12. RC 2:1.
13. Matt 5:8
14. G M Hopkins in *As kingfishers catch fire*
15. Michel Dupuy PSS in *Dictionnaire de Spiriiualité* Vol.12 part 2, coll. 1159-1169
16. Ib. Vol.14 col.914 ‘*Sermon pour la fête de Saint Jean porte latine*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris 1821, t.2,p.181.
17. SV 12:172
18. II-IIae 161, 5 ad 4
19. Matthew 11:25
20. SV 9:606
21. SV 1:284 Eng. 1:265
22. See for example Robert Maloney CM in *The Way of Vincent de Paul* p.39

23. I am indebted to Fr Bernard Koch CM for drawing my attention to this point, and indeed for other precisions which he kindly brought to my notice. I am also indebted to my confrere Fr Myles Rearden , who read the proofs of this piece and made a number of helpful suggestions.
24. SV 2:341, 12:170 , 12:302
25. SV12:172, 12:299. See Also Dodin *Entretiens* pp.915 citing Abelly. *God is very simple. Rather God is simplicity itself...Where there is simplicity, there also God is to be met.*
26. 1 Cor 13:12
27. Cf. R.C. 2:5
28. R.C. 12:2
29. R.C. 2:4
30. SV 10 :457
31. SV 9:471
32. Matthew 18:3
33. John 14: 8-9
34. Mathew 6: 4,6,18
35. St Laurence Justinian, quoted in Office of Readings of the Memorial of the Immaculate Heart of Mary
36. Ruth Burrows ODC in “*Guidelines for Mystical Prayer*”, p.84.
37. SV12: 302-303
38. In a lecture delivered in Rome in November 2004, Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP spoke of a “*crisis of truthfulness*” in Western society. A few weeks previously, Radcliffe said, a British study found that 67 percent of the public did not expect to be told the truth by members of parliament, and 70 percent expect to be lied to by government ministers. The only professional groups that fared worse were real estate agents and journalists. Fr Radcliffe wryly commented “*Thank God, they did not ask about the clergy....*”
39. Quoted by F Varillon, *L’Humilité de Dieu*, p96.
40. John Milton in *Lycidas*
41. RC 12:5
42. TS Eliot in his Poem *Four Quartets - Little Gidding* writes of “*a condition of complete simplicity, (costing not less than everything.)*”
43. *Journal of a Soul*, Retreat 1948 (53)
44. Cf Matthew 6: 25-27, 34
45. ib. 10:16
46. Ephesians 4: 15
47. *Quaest. Disput.* 14:5 ad 11
48. Pieper Josef in *The Four Cardinal Virtues* p.29, Notre Dame Press 1966
49. RC 2:5
50. ib. pp 37-38 Also *Summa Theologica. II-II 52,2*
51. Simplicity as expounded by St Vincent would relate to truth in St Thomas treatment of the moral virtues. Simplicity is a facet of truth which in turn is related to justice. Simplicity completes truth in so far as that it connects with rightness of intention, which will exclude all duplicity.
52. SV 12: 176.
53. Ib. p.178

54. SV 12:184

55. R.C. 12:5

56. English translation by Douglas V Steere, published by Harper, 1938.

57. SV 12:303

A Few Thoughts on the Rosary

Con Curtin CM

Holy Mary Mother of God pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Away back in the 17th century St Vincent sent some Vincentian priests to Scotland. Among them was a Fr Duggan who went to the Hebrides. One day he came across a young man in tears and asked him what was the matter. 'My poor father is dying and I cannot persuade him that he is. He said that he will not die until he has seen a priest, and that he has said the Rosary every day for this intention all his life, i.e. he has asked Our Lady fifty times a day *'pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death.'* 'I told him it was impossible to see a priest, that there were no priests in Scotland because of the persecution.' Fr Duggan, who was disguised as a layman, revealed who he was and gave the old man the last sacraments. Our Lady had answered the old man's prayers in spite of the impossibility of the situation.

There is a great desire for prayer today. There are prayer groups everywhere in spite of the distractions of modern life. There is the danger of neglecting one of the greatest prayers of the church, which has borne the test of the ages, namely the Rosary. This was the staple spiritual diet of the ordinary people together with Holy Mass, which kept faith alive. There is the danger of not regarding its true value for a number of reasons. Some people are inclined to regard it as a prayer only suitable for simple uneducated people in times past.

With the recent emphasis on the liturgy, they feel the Rosary takes a back place in the church's devotional life. The popes have emphasised that private devotions as well as the liturgy, have a place in the spiritual life of a catholic. They help to enhance one another. It is not a question of 'either/or' but 'both/and'. Our private devotions nourish our faith, so that we are able to celebrate the liturgy with greater devotion. The liturgy may be compared to a picture, which needs a proper frame. This is provided by our private devotions, such as the Rosary. They both enhance each other, and one's spiritual life.

One of the great advantages of the Rosary is its easy accessibility. It can be said, any place, any time. Though it looks a very simple prayer, it is a very sublime and profound prayer because it combines the most profound vocal prayers, the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and the Gloria with the deepest contemplative prayer as we meditate on the great mysteries of the life of Our Lord and His Blessed Mother.

For people who find contemplative prayer difficult, and need something for the imagination to cling to, the scenes from the gospel are a great help. This applies to many people. It is a reason why the Rosary appeals to so many people. I notice that after mass in the parish church where I work, many people of their own account go into the Lady Chapel to pray the Rosary. It is still the most important and popular devotion to Our Lady in the church.

At Lourdes and Fatima Our Lady showed how she wants us to pray the Rosary. She said to the children at Fatima ‘I want you to say the Rosary, but I want you to say it *well*’. A great help to pray the Rosary well, is to use a little booklet or pamphlet, which gives a short summary of each mystery. We recall the mystery in question and a particularly good booklet is the ‘Bible Rosary’ by Fr Harty OP. When we use Fr Harty’s booklet, the reflections are taken from the bible itself. There are many other similar booklets available.

The Pope suggests that we pause before reciting each mystery, while we recall the mystery in question. We then reflect on it for a short while, before we actually say the mystery. It helps us to be more recollected when we say the Rosary. A concern experienced when we say the Rosary, is that we start off well and after a mystery or two, our minds wander, and when we come to the end of the Rosary, we feel disgusted with ourselves and feel it was a failure and a waste of time. It is a consolation to know that God looks at our intention as Cardinal Hulme has said ‘*the very will to pray, is to pray.*’ To reflect on the mysteries prevents the Rosary from becoming boring and being meaningless.

Here are three ways of saying the Rosary

- 1) We can reflect on the mysteries using our imagination to recall the scene, and raising our hearts and minds to God. This is the commonest way.
- 2) We can recite it in a contemplative way, by staying in the presence of Our Lord or His Blessed Mother, while using the Hail Mary as a mantra.
- 3) We can reflect on the actual meaning of the words of the vocal prayers.

It is often a combination of all three ways. It is for each one to say it in the way one finds best.

I am writing these few reflections to encourage the reader to read the splendid apostolic letter on the Rosary by Pope John Paul II called ‘*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*’. It is a splendid summary of the church’s teaching on the Rosary and is quite easy to read.

* *The 15 Promises given by Our Lady to those who pray the Rosary*

- 1) Whoever shall faithfully serve me by the recitation of the Rosary, shall receive signal graces.
- 2) I promise my special protection and the greatest graces to all those who shall recite the Rosary.
- 3) The Rosary shall be a powerful armour against hell, it will destroy vice, decrease sin, and defeat heresies.
- 4) It will cause virtue and good works to flourish; it will obtain for souls the abundant mercy of God; it will withdraw the hearts of men from the love of the world and its vanities, and will lift them to the desire of eternal things. Oh! that souls would sanctify themselves by this means.
- 5) The soul which recommends itself to me by the recitation of the Rosary, shall not perish.
- 6) Whoever shall recite the Rosary devoutly, and apply himself to the consideration of its sacred mysteries shall never be conquered by misfortune. God will not chastise him in His justice, he shall not perish by an unprovided death; if he be just, he shall remain in the grace of God, and become worthy of eternal life.
- 7) Whoever shall have true devotion for the Rosary, shall not die without the sacraments of the church.
- 8) Those who are faithful to recite the Rosary shall have during their life, and at their death, the light of God and the plenitude of His graces; at the moment of death, they shall participate in the merits of the saints in paradise.
- 9) I shall deliver from purgatory those who have been devoted to the Rosary.
- 10) The faithful children of the Rosary shall merit a high degree of glory in Heaven.
- 11) You shall obtain all you ask of me by the recitation of the Rosary.
- 12) All those who propagate the Holy Rosary shall be aided by me in their necessities.
- 13) I have obtained from my Divine Son that all the advocates of the Rosary shall have for intercessors the entire celestial court during their life and at the hour of death.
- 14) All who recite the Rosary are my sons, and brothers of my only son, Jesus Christ.
- 15) Devotion to my Rosary is a great sign of predestination.

These promises were made to St Dominic and Blessed Alan.

Conference 214,

17 October 1659

Authentic Inspirations and Deceptive Illusions

(Common Rules Ch.II, §16)

Vincent de Paul CM

Translated by Tom Davitt CM

Well, my dear confreres, we've got as far as the sixteenth article of [the chapter on] *Gospel Teaching*, which we've to talk about; here's how it goes:

The evil spirit often disguises himself as an angel of light, and now and then tricks us by his illusions. All of us must be ever alert for these tricks and should pay particular attention to learning how to recognise and overcome them. Experience has shown that the most effective and surest remedy in such cases is to discuss them as soon as possible with those appointed by God for this. So, if anyone feels himself troubled by ideas which seem to be in some way misleading, or upset by acute anxiety or temptation, he should tell his superior, or a director appointed for this, as soon as possible, so that the matter can be competently dealt with. And he should accept with approval, as coming from God's hand, whatever solution is suggested, and put it into practice with confidence and respect. Above all, he should take care not to discuss it in any way with anyone else, whether a member of the Congregation or not. Experience has shown that this worsens the problem, causes similar trouble for others, and can, in the long run, even do serious damage in the whole Congregation.

So, my dear confreres, that's the topic we have to deal with. We'll try to tease out this article in the way we did in previous conferences. First of all we'll have a look at the reasons we have for giving ourselves to God, so that we can clearly spot the difference between the spirit of light and the spirit of darkness, distinguishing the good angel from the evil one, authentic inspirations from deceptive illusions. That's the first point.

For the second, we'll move on to the topic of illusions, saying something about their nature and causes, and the main ones likely to be met with in the Company.

Finally, we'll indicate the clues which help us to see the difference

between authentic insights and deceptive ones. Then, if we've got the time, we'll say something about how we go about fighting the illusions which come from the evil spirit.

So, the first reason, my dear confreres, is that everything depends on this; what I mean is our eternal happiness, or wretchedness; our salvation, or damnation; to aim at distinguishing authentic insights from deceptive ones, taking on board the true ones and rejecting the false. Or, to put it all in one word, our most basic task is to appreciate how important is the ability to tell the difference between the maxims of Jesus Christ and those of the demon. All the evil which has come into the world through our first father, stripped of holiness and fallen from the state of innocence in which he had been created, with human nature today subject to all the justice of God, and to the evils which it has to put up with, all this stems from deceptive insights; yes, my dear confreres, from warped inspirations.

So that you can appreciate this truth, I want you to listen to the words which the spirit of darkness addressed to our first parents:

“Why are you not eating the fruit of life?”

“We were told not to”.

“Oh no, it's not that at all, you've got it wrong! Here's the real reason; it is that if you eat it *eritis sicut dii* (1), you will become gods, and you will have better knowledge of good and evil”.

Everything evil with which we have to put up stems from these deceptive insights, which means we need to understand all the inspirations which may occur. And don't imagine, my dear confreres, that this is as small a matter as might be thought. After all, it's not just a minor crime to have reduced the whole of humanity to having to the necessity of suffering such violent on-going evils, the mere thought of which is horrifying and makes one prefer death to such a wretched life. Fathers, Brothers, who will give us the grace to be able rightly to distinguish good from evil, the traps and tricks of the evil spirit and, ultimately, the wretched state into which poor human nature has fallen through deceptive insights?

The second motive is that persons who are withdrawn from the world are more likely than others to be misled by deceptive insights. The devil makes little effort to attract to himself the average lay person; all he has to do is to make a suggestion, and it is acted on at once; he gets himself adored by them, because he gives them the expectation that they will enjoy all the pleasures they long for; he holds on to them, he manipulates them, he lets them run where they want to, allowing them to do so with a joyful heart, knowing for certain that they will always be his and will obey what he orders.

But as regards people withdrawn from the world in order to live with

Jesus Christ, they are more liable to be affected by illusions. In fact we must keep in mind that though our Lord mixed with people, maintaining at the same time awareness of his Father, he was never tempted. But as soon as he headed out into the desert to do more penance than previously, the evil spirit tempted him and had the effrontery to test him on three different occasions. We learn from this that, although God has given us the grace to withdraw us from the bustle of the world, we must realise that we are more liable to be affected by deceptive insights than ordinary people. So, my dear confreres, that's the second motive.

The third is, strictly speaking, that it is the devout persons, with spiritual lives, who live in a spiritual manner, who ought to know how to distinguish between deceptive insights and authentic ones, both for their own good and for helping their neighbour. They have received the insights which the Holy Spirit gives to those who ask for them. They are then aware that they have the clarity of vision, and even the experience, to help souls who are attracted to doing things which are leading them to ruin. How many, unfortunately, do we see, and how many have been seen in former days, who have guided a huge number of souls, even though they had not been called to priesthood; the special role of a priest is to be the light of the world! If that is the case, Fathers, and there is no reason at all to doubt it, how much more are we priests not obliged to inform ourselves about such matters, and to learn which are the authentic insights, so that we can undeceive those who are walking in darkness, and console those who are beset by deceptive illusions. And if we don't do this we are guilty before God for all the souls who perish because of us, because our ordination obliges us to this. If God's laws have been lost sight of, we have to bring them back. People have the right to ask this of us, because we are their legislators and masters. That's why we must know how to recognise true inspirations. I've given three reasons. Against the background of all that, let's see what an illusion is.

Strictly speaking, an illusion can be understood in various ways. Lawyers are accustomed to use this word in their pleadings; because of this their pleadings are said to be illusory, deceiving. Now that is not the meaning intended in our rule. In the rule the word is to be taken in the sense of a false dawn, a misleading light which the evil spirit slips into the imagination, the glint of which enters the understanding, and its influences and reflections go to the will. That's the way in which we are to take our rule, the meaning we are to give it.

"But, Father, what on earth are you saying? You say: 'A false dawn'. You mean to say that they make things appear to be what they are not! You say that what is as white as a swan is as black as a crow, and what is black as a crow is as white as a swan!"

Yes! What the evil spirit insinuates into the imagination, I call a false

dawn. The images he suggests do not correspond to the reality of the things they should clarify. As a result, these appearances enter into the imagination, climb up into the intelligence and finally affect the will; in that way this angel of darkness makes what is black appear white, and makes what is only a falsehood appear true.

“But, Father, what are you saying? That’s very odd! Does this sort of thing happen in other circumstances?”

Yes, of course! In nature itself illusions occur. Persons who have been to Montmirail have seen a tree trunk change into stone. But how does that happen? I don’t know what power is involved when wood comes into contact with stone and one becomes the other; what used to be wood seems to be stone. This wood is still there, it is wood, so what is happening? Your eyes say it’s wood; the moss that’s around it, the outline and the veins of the wood tell you it is wood, but feel it and you’ll say it’s stone. That, my dear confreres, is an example of an illusion.

What is nature up to? You make an incision in a tree, you graft in a slip and, when it takes, a change happens and a bit of alien stock becomes a part of the tree. What was previously an apple tree is today a pear tree. What are we to make of this? It’s an illusion. I knew a fellow once who had a sort of a sharp awl, the blade of which retracted when he pressed it against something. He used to stick it down his throat, and when people saw him putting into his mouth they used to scream “Take it out, take it out!” Although the blade seemed to go down his gullet, it did not in fact do so. In that way this fellow deceived people.

Strictly speaking, what do we mean by “eloquence”? It is an illusion, which makes good seem evil and evil good, which makes someone take as true something which is false, and falsehood for truth. It manipulates words, arranging them in a certain way and, while it is flattering and charming the listener, it is deceiving him at the same time.

So, my dear confreres, if there are so many illusions in the world, make up your mind that the author of lies, the devil, who, according to St Paul can transform himself into an angel of light (2), can also cause his own illusions. If men, whose total knowledge is very small and limited, can easily deceive one another, what can the evil spirit, I ask you, not do? He knows everything and has the skill to make things appear in whatever different fashions he wants.

Would you like to know what, as regards ourselves, is the evil spirit? He is nothing more than illusion and deceit; he is very ingenious, and persuades us that we’ll be happy if we get this or that. He even makes us believe that to be praised for successful preaching is a matter of God’s glory, and that one should make a name for oneself in some place. Oh Lord, what snares, what deceits, what tricks our enemy uses to ruin the

creatures whom you have redeemed by your precious blood!

You'll say to me: "But, Father, the evil spirit well knows this, but have men not been able to identify the appearances and the individual tricks used by him?" Well, who could? But remember, anyway, that, when we fall into sin, illusions are involved, because by sinning we abandon the supreme good and go for an imaginary one.

Oh Lord, what traps there are for men! How much light we need to avoid devilish trickery! If the first man, whom God had established in holiness, fell into the trap with the first step he took, if the angels who were created as it were as so many lights, were overshadowed and fell into the trap and, when they had been defeated by St Michael because they were unwilling to obey God's commands, were thrown into hell. Oh, my dear confreres, after falls like those, who should not be afraid? And who will be exempted from such?

"But, Father, how does he do it?"

He knows what brings this or that passion into operation, he knows what excites it, so that by the false dawns which he puts into our imagination he brings about a fall. He knows all our moods, he knows our own personal actions. He knows how to combine all these together to give an impression of daylight, which passes from the imagination into the intellect and from there on into the will to induce it to give consent. But how does he do that? Or is that all he does?

He also tempts us from another angle, making use of creatures as so many snares to cause us to trip. You know the story of St Anthony and how he was tempted by representations of unchaste women which the demon introduced into his imagination, pictures of certain really beautiful women, completely nude. The demon also has the power to make certain bodies out of air so that when a person sees them he very often allows himself to be captivated. Let's add to that the bad dreams, which are very often the work of the devil.

On this matter I'll remind you of a story which I've told you before. It's about Pope Clement VIII, whom I had the honour of seeing. You know the problems which arose in France about Henry IV. This king had been a heretic, and had relapsed. Because of this, his subjects were bound to withdraw their allegiance which they would have given him, had he not once again declared himself the enemy of the Catholic religion. This king, under pressure from his conscience to abandon his errors, and seeing that people were refusing to submit to his laws, immediately contacted Rome about reconciliation. The Pope said he had relapsed into heresy and that therefore there was no likelihood that he would change, and that the desire to reign, rather than the desire to convert, was urging him towards reconciliation. On hearing this, the king sent his ambassadors back. Once again, the Pope refused.

But fearing that the king would send his ambassadors back a third time he began a fast, he prayed to God, in order to know whether he should dispense the people whom he had forbidden to give allegiance to the king as long as he remained stubborn. In the end, having done a lot of penance and mortification, having had people pray to God for his intention, he decided to receive the king in penitence and oblige his subjects to obey him. One night, a few days later, this holy man dreamt he was summoned before God's tribunal where he was charged with having exposed God's flock to a billy goat, and having ordered Catholics to submit to a monster. His mind was greatly worried by this vision, and it was said he experienced the same pain which St Jerome is supposed to have felt, the pain of being whipped. This holy Pope, finding himself in this state of mind, and afraid that he had given in too easily to the king, sent for some spiritual advisers to get their opinions. But none of them satisfied him, until his confessor, Cardinal Tolet, told him that what he was experiencing was an illusion. He had used all the prudence which the situation called for, and had done everything with advice and after much praying, so he should be at peace and believe that everything which had happened was God's will. This relieved him of his anxiety.

So, what actually had happened? The Pope had experienced a deceptive insight, by which the evil spirit wished to upset him, and not just in the daytime but even during sleep, by a montage of appearances, which he made look real. The illusion, then, was not just of the first or second type, but in fact of the third, namely during sleep. That's why we're going to have a look at that sort of illusion, the one which comes during sleep.

There is another illusion, of things out of the ordinary, a false dawn. A man will come to see you, saying that he has an experience, hearing as it were an interior voice screaming at him that he must leave his wife. What would you call that? It's a sheer absurdity. It's when we encounter absurd ideas like that that we need enlightenment from heaven, so that we can give helpful advice to that sort of person when they come to us. We also need such help when we have to advise persons who have lofty ideas about leading a life very much out of the ordinary, and would like to change their status and rank. As this is so, it is necessary for us to be well informed, theoretically and practically, about the nature of illusions and their different forms. We need this so as not to fail those who consult us, and to avoid the reefs and snares of the evil spirit, with God's help.

But what clues will we get to recognise these false insights? In order to save time I'll give you just three or four. The first way to decide whether this insight is true or deceptive is to look at the nub of the matter, and

all the circumstances involved. For example, say a man wants to leave his wife. If it's for some good reason, and with her consent, well and good! The Church allows that in certain circumstances. A person wants to join a religious community, so we have to check whether that might be against God's commandments or those of the Church, or possibly in violation of the law of the country.

Another clue to help us detect an illusion is when there is any element of superstition involved. And you'll recognise underlying superstition when something must be done a certain number of times, or at a certain time, that certain words must be said, certain herbs must be mixed with certain others, something must be done in the presence of certain other persons of a certain status or age. Our decision, then, will be "the whole thing is an illusion".

The third clue is when illusions of this sort pester us, worry us and cause anxiety. The reason is that God's spirit never upsets us; *Non in commotione Dominus* (3). This means that someone comes to us with a problem. He will let us know about his trouble, his worry and his insights. If we see that he is reacting to all this with anxiety, with bitterness and impatience, we form the opinion that some form of illusion is involved. You see, God's spirit is one of peace, it is a gentle light which slips smoothly into us. *Non in commotione Dominus*. Everything done by God's spirit is followed by calm, and freedom from anxiety. And, since he is the God of peace and union, he cannot tolerate any upset or discord. For example, if God at times lets us know something through the ministry of angels, it will be easy to recognise that this comes from him if it glides calmly into our soul and prompts us to check out what would be for the greater glory of God. That, my dear confreres, is standard practice, but it is a guaranteed way for distinguishing authentic insights from deceptive ones.

Finally, if one of us experiences this sort of thing himself, or if our superior or confessor notices it, it would be an illusion, a false dawn, for us to be unwilling to lay this insight before them, or not to accept their view, because the spirit of God leads into submission those whom he inspires. The spirit of the gospel is a spirit of obedience, and refusal to obey is resistance to God's will. Now take, for example, some important matter which crops up, and which involves us. What's to be done? We must seek advice. If the person receiving such advice accepts it calmly in a relaxed way, adopting it, that reaction shows that there's no question of an illusion in what he does and puts into practice.

These four indicators are the usual ones. But when I thought about the possibility of other ones, I decided that these would be enough, or that any others come down to these. In the past I've heard other people talk about this matter.

“So, Father, what you’re saying is that the evil spirit sets snares to make mischief, that he tries to block us from keeping our rules, and that he is always lying in ambush; how do you react to that?”

My dear confreres, these things are his misleading insights. What causes someone to be absent from the community praying of the office? What’s the origin of that extraordinary individualism which is seen in certain confreres, which causes them to undervalue our customs and the warnings they have been given? Whose work is that? Who is its author? Isn’t it the evil spirit, who suggests to our minds misleading insights and imaginary reasons? And we are flattered, and dispense ourselves from our obligations. Oh, Lord, Lord! Oh Lord! What traps the demon sets for us, and who’s going to give us the grace to sidestep them?

Yes, how can we be on our guard against illusions and how can we help those who are trapped by them? You’ll appreciate that the first means is recognition that a supernatural light from God is needed to distinguish authentic insights from deceptive ones. We need to ask God for this. Some examples, now: “I’m only a laybrother, I don’t understand what an illusion is”. “You’ve made me a priest, and I don’t understand the dignity of this office; I have no experience of genuine insights; I don’t know how to help my neighbour, who is afflicted by illusions unless, you, my God, give me clear insight to identify false ones in others”. That’s the grace we ask of you, Lord.

The second thing is, never to be too inquisitive to find false dawns. Curiosity makes us wonder about our actions, makes us examine them from various angles. The evil spirit notices this intricate probing to find out, and he jumps at the opportunity to upset the poor soul and squeeze until he falls into the trap.

God usually punishes with illusions persons who want to know miracles, seeking to probe into matters which are none of their business. My dear confreres, Ah, my dear confreres, let’s flee from all inquisitiveness, and learn how to be humble, not over estimating ourselves, believing ourselves unworthy of seeing the light. Let’s convince ourselves that we deserve to be shunned by everyone, seeing in ourselves nothing but persons liable to divine justice. A person in that frame of mind will not experience illusions. For that reason we must be humble in the sight of God, seeing nothing in ourselves but poverty and wretchedness. We must reject any idea contrary to that, eradicating any singularity, any wish to be successful in everything we do. Having done all that we’ll be in a position to identify false dawns. But if we do the opposite, what happens? My dear confreres, pride is what happens. If we work towards self-knowledge, if we think of ourselves as children of Adam, inheritors of anger and a curse, then how happy we would be! Humility, then, and not only with regard to ourselves, but we are also

to suggest it to persons with whom we come into contact. Humility, wanting to know *ad sobrietatem* (4), wanting to do what God wants us to do, and being amazed that in His goodness He puts up with us, after so many sins committed by us. I regret to say, my dear confreres, that if we do not have self-knowledge it is because we don't search for it.

Do you really understand that we are worse than the demons? Yes, worse than the demons! For, if God had given them one tenth of the graces He has given us, my God, what use would they not have made of them?

What wretched people you are, redeemed by the precious blood of an incarnate God. You have the actual graces for living the life of Jesus Christ, yet you have scorned them! What punishment do you deserve for that?

Listen, now. Let's make a real effort, and when we have done all that's required, let's face it: we are useless servants, yes, useless servants. We should not forget that when all we've done is examined rigorously, taking into account both its core and its details, as well as the circumstances, we will arrive at the conclusion that in our whole lifetime we have not achieved anything worthwhile. And if we want to examine this in depth, all we need to do is to have a look at how we fared at prayer this morning, how did we pray the small hours of the breviary, how did we put in our time during the morning, and so on for the rest of the day. Let's go back, if you like, to other days, and examine in the sight of God everything we have done, and how we have done it.

I don't know about others, but as regards myself I know I deserve justice; I know that you are good, that you love God, that you go along in good faith, that you walk straight ahead in the sight of His divine majesty. Unfortunately, I find nothing in myself that does not deserve punishment. Everything I have done is tainted by sin, and that's what makes me scared of God's judgement. I should, I suppose, go into this in more depth, but I'd get too involved. Whatever about that, let's say after we have put our rules into practice, point by point, we are useless servants. Let us have no doubt about that, because it is the Son of God himself who said so (5).

So, what are we to do about all this? The only thing is to give ourselves to God, so that He will be pleased to put into our hands the weapons necessary to fight the evil spirit. If we have fallen, if we have followed some illusion, let us turn to God, and not worry. But we must not speak to anyone at all except to those who have the grace for it, namely the superior or the spiritual director of the house. Our rules say that if we realised the harm done by sharing such matters with a third party, or even a fourth, we would never unburden ourselves to anyone except to those appointed by God for that (6).

Believe me, Fathers, this sort of wrong reaction affects the entire Congregation. Just as our good work brings credit to the entire community, because of the union between members and head, so all the harm done by talking imprudently about such matters taints the whole Company. What a pity it is to see in a community some persons who complain and grumble about everything: “What’s all this? What’s that? What good is that? Will anyone ever have done that?” They go in for this sort of gossip with others. One person tells it to someone else; that makes two; this someone else rushes off to pass it on to a third person. In this way an entire community is infected by this poison. Someone says: “I know a lay brother who does such and such a thing”; or “I know a priest...”; or “I know someone who holds such and such an office...”, and so on and so on. What can come of all this, my dear confreres, except the total ruin of a Company?

If God wants to heal this disorder, and if we here and now make a resolution to give ourselves to His divine goodness and never reveal our problems to anyone except those set over us by Him, Oh my dear Brothers, Oh my dear Fathers, how happy we would be! That is not to say that there are no virtuous senior confreres here, but it is a matter of indisputable fact that a person who confides in his superior is doing God’s will. God says: “It’s not you who have arranged this, but I who have commanded this through your superior”. And I assure you that you’ll never go wrong if you turn to him. So let’s go on like that, asking God to teach the Company what we have just been talking about, and he will give us suitable weapons to fight illusions. That’s the grace we’re going to ask Him to give us.

NOTES

1. GN 3:5
2. CR II §16; 2COR 11:14
3. 1K 19:11
4. CR XII, §8; RM 12:3
5. CFLK 17:10
6. CR II, §16

Attempting to Bridge a Gap

Tom Davitt CM

On October 9th 1638, two Corkmen presented themselves at St Lazare to join the Congregation. They were the first Irishmen to do so. John Skyddie was twenty-nine and James Water was twenty-two, and both of them had almost completed their studies. On 26th November 1809 Edward Ferris from Kerry died in Maynooth. Between those two dates there was an unbroken Irish presence in the Congregation of the Mission.

On 12th March 1839 Philip Dowley, from Waterford, went to 95, rue de Sèvres, to join the Congregation. Did any Irishman join between the death of Edward Ferris and the arrival in Paris of Philip Dowley? The late Jerome Twomey CM had always hoped to find somewhere some evidence that would bridge that thirty-year gap. He never found any, and before his death in 1979 he bequeathed to me the task of continuing the search.

Ring, Burke and Harrington:

I began my work later that year in the obvious place, the CM archives in Paris. I discovered that Patrick Ring of Cork and Thomas Burke of Cashel had joined the CM on 1st May 1834. This knocked five years off the gap, reducing it to twenty-five years. I discovered later that they had joined in Rome, and spent their community lives in the US. I was interested to know whether any records in the CM archives in the US listed the place of birth of all the confreres who worked in the US in the early years. I had come across a Brother Daniel Harrington who had died in Cape Girardeau in 1852 in the thirty-second year of his vocation; that would mean he entered the community in 1820.

On 13th September 1979 I wrote to the late John Young CM, provincial archivist at that time in St John's University, New York, where the early community archives were then located. I asked if Harrington's place of birth was on record, and also asked for information on the place of birth and date of entry for five others whose names I had come across: Richard and Edmund Hennessy, John Hayden, John O'Reilly and John Quigley.

In his reply, dated 24th September, John Young said that Daniel Harrington was born in Ballistaea, in the diocese of Cloyne & Ross. With Brother Harrington being an Irishman who entered the community in 1820, the gap was reduced from twenty-five years to eleven; he had entered eleven years after the death of Edward Ferris.

When John Young received my letter he checked his records for all Irishmen who joined in the US at the relevant time. He found nine men of Irish birth, including Harrington, Ring and Burke, but none of them had entered earlier than Harrington. He also said that he might not have transcribed the names of places in Ireland accurately.

I had checked the records in Paris, and John Young had checked those in the US. I did not make any further searches till 1984.

Dorrigan;

In the period after the French Revolution there were Italian Vicars General. From 1818 to 1827 Francesco Antonio Baccari held the office. While on the tracks of Edward Ferris, I had occasion to read Baccari's circular letter of 11th March 1822. Towards the end of it he gives news of confreres who had been sent to missions abroad. Among the confreres, sent from Rome to America, he listed a Brother Darighan. As that seemed to be an Irish name, probably mis-spelt by an Italian, I thought it would be worth my while to follow it up. Edward MacLysaght, in his *The Surnames of Ireland*, lists "(O) Dorrigan. An occasional variant of Dorgan in Co. Cork". That seemed to me to be enough reason to write to the archivist of the Roman Province for further information.

Luigi Vaggagini was the archivist at that time, and I wrote to him on 15th April 1984 asking if he had any information on Brother Darighan, or on any Irishmen who had joined in Rome between 1808 and 1820. I thought that there was quite a possibility that some students, or priests, of the Irish College might have joined the Congregation. Burke and Ring, mentioned earlier, had joined in Rome aged 26 and 24 respectively.

He replied on the 23rd, saying he had found no trace of Brother Darighan. He listed nine Irishmen who had joined in Rome, including Burke and Ring, but none of them had joined between 1808 and 1820. In his final paragraph he suggested that I should come to Rome in the summer of 1984 and give him a hand in sorting out things in his archives, with the consent of our superiors. I took him up on that final suggestion and spent most of July in the curia, with frequent visits to the archives of the Roman Province in Via Pompeo Magno. These visits were well worth while, though of no help in trying to bridge the gap.

'Mind the Gap':

With Paris, Rome and the US giving me no help in bridging the gap, the next obvious place to turn to was Spain, as there were Irish Colleges in that country, most notably that in Salamanca. In December 1984, by means of translation by Eamon Flanagan, I wrote to the Provincial Archivist in Madrid. The answer was that no Irishmen had joined the

Congregation within the period specified.

The *status quæstionis*, therefore, is that there was an unbroken presence of Irishmen in the Congregation from 1838 until 1809, and from 1820 to the present. My research has been unsuccessful in finding any record of an Irishman joining the Congregation anywhere between the death of Edward Ferris in 1809 and the entry of Daniel Harrington in 1820. However, in other areas of my research over the years, unexpected pieces of information have turned up.

Seventeenth Century Vincentian Sites in Ireland

Tom Davitt CM

Between the years 1638 and 1660 twenty-four Irishmen joined the Congregation of the Mission, though not all of them persevered. By 1660 about one tenth of the Congregation was Irish, the largest nationality after the French. At the end of 1646 Vincent sent a group of missionaries to Ireland (1). The birthplaces of the confreres born in Ireland, and the places associated with the missionary group of 1646, provide a number of locations in Ireland for anyone who would like to experience a link between ourselves as 21st century Irish Vincentians and our compatriot confreres of the 17th century.

Limerick;

The 17th century missionaries gave missions in the dioceses of Limerick and Cashel & Emly. One of the missions was in the city of Limerick, where Edmund [O'] Dwyer was bishop. He had been ordained bishop in Paris, and had known Vincent there. Archdeacon John Lynch of Tuam wrote in 1672, in Latin, "Edmundus Dwyer, Hibernice O Dubhir" was the first to send the "missionary fathers" to Ireland. "They instructed young persons in the rudiments of the faith and educated adults and the elderly by teaching a sound way of life" (2). Abelly quotes a letter to Vincent, which has to be from 1649 or 1650, written by Edmund Dwyer in which he says that the mission was in the cathedral (3). This cathedral dates from 1168 and had passed into Anglican possession after the Reformation. "On the surrender of Limerick to the Confederate forces the Catholics re-took possession of the churches and Dr Arthur once again consecrated them for Catholic worship" (4). The cathedral reverted to Anglican possession in 1651 (5).

We can, therefore, stand in a building in which those early confreres celebrated Mass, preached, heard confessions, and catechised children. The table of the altar in the Lady Chapel, at the rear of the sanctuary, is from the original pre-Reformation High Altar. It is a single slab of limestone about thirteen feet long and weighing over three tons. It had been removed from the cathedral by Cromwellian soldiers, being dragged outside by horses, getting chipped in the process but not broken. The leaflet given to visitors says it was re-instated in the cathedral in the 1960s. A printed notice on the altar says that it was found in 1962 and replaced in its original position in 1997. So, one can stand at, and place one's hands on, the altar at which the seventeenth century confreres

celebrated Mass. A postcard photograph of the altar is on sale, but its main purpose is to illustrate a frontal, woven by Anglican nuns in Dublin.

The Catholic cathedral, St John's, dates from 1856-61, and there is a stained glass window of St Vincent over the altar of a chapel at the right of the sanctuary. There is no indication of any link between him and Limerick. On 4 January 2003, while the cathedral was being renovated, I wrote to Bishop Donal Murray, mentioning the mission, the correspondence between Vincent and Bishops Richard Arthur and Edmund Dwyer, and the fact that in Vincent's lifetime nine Limerickmen joined the Congregation. I suggested that a plaque should be placed near the stained glass window giving these facts. I received a reply from the Diocesan Secretary on 15 January, saying that the bishop had asked him to respond, and that he had passed on my suggestion to the administrator of the cathedral. No plaque was put up.

Abelly says that they also gave a mission in Rathkeale, Co. Limerick (6). He says that during the mission a wealthy man, on horseback, shouted out a blasphemous expression, and sneered when his friend suggested that he kiss the ground in repentance. On his way home he fell off his horse and injured himself as he hit the ground. He went off and made a general confession. On a visit to Rathkeale in May 2005 I did not see any building which looked like being from the 17th century. There does not seem to be any information as to other places in the diocese of Limerick where missions might have been given.

When the Cromwellians besieged Limerick in 1651 the confres who were in the city made their escapes in different ways. On 22 March 1652 Vincent wrote to Lambert aux Couteaux, superior in Warsaw, that Gerard Brin had escaped from Limerick in disguise and, mixing with the soldiers of the garrison who were leaving, "went towards his native place, with the Vicar General of Cashel". His native place is given in the register as "near Cashel". Edmund Barry headed for "some mountains which he named" (7). What a pity that Vincent did not give this name. If Barry gave the Irish form of the name it probably was unpronounceable to Vincent.

Clare;

In south County Clare the tradition is that some Vincentian priests, after the fall of Limerick, arrived in the parish of O'Callaghan's Mills. There are three churches in the parish, and the Vincentians are associated in local folk memory with that in Oatfield.

In *The Clare Champion* of 21 May 1966 there is a report of the administration of Confirmation in the church in Oatfield (8). This was the first occasion on which Confirmation was administered in that

church. Bishop Joseph Rodgers of Killaloe used the opportunity to dedicate the church to St Vincent de Paul. In his homily he recalled the tradition that the Vincentian priests had come from Limerick to Oatfield, and he said:

According to the tradition, which has been carefully preserved here, these Vincentian Fathers made their way over the hills to this secluded valley and at Derrynaveigh they got a small house. There they celebrated Mass for the people while the guards were on outposts on the hills... Tradition has it that they laboured here for at least four or five years, perhaps even longer... We have dedicated this church to St Vincent de Paul, linking it again with him and his great missionaries, and we pray that the great charity which always animated him may also animate you.

Derrynaveigh is an area just south of Oatfield; it is marked on map 58 of the Discovery Series. In a letter to me, dated 20 September 1985, the late Bishop Michael Harty of Killaloe wrote:

Unfortunately there is no documentation here, but the oral tradition in Oatfield is very strong on the ministry of the Vincentian priests in this area. I heard the story myself from the late Michael Kelly who lived beside the church and had a lively interest in the history of the area.

In the letter of 22 March 1652, referred to above, Vincent says that Edmund Barry was already back in France, in Nantes, at that date. We do not know the dates for the movements of the other missionaries.

The newspaper account of the Confirmation ceremony and the dedication of the church to St Vincent reported Bishop Rodgers as saying that “part of the church they were assembled in had an unbroken history which scanned back well over three hundred years”. I revisited Oatfield in June 2005, and although it was a Sunday afternoon the church was locked. However, while walking around the outside I noticed that the shape and size of the stonework of the windows and doors, and some outdoor holy water fonts, seemed to be very like those of ruined pre-Reformation Irish churches. This would seem to support what Bishop Rodgers said. The stonework of the walls is rendered and painted, so I could not estimate its age.

In a letter to me from Paris, dated 13 & 22 May 1995, Denis O’Donovan CM wrote:

It seems that there is a tradition in the neighbourhood that the

Missioners, escaping from Limerick, established themselves for a time in what was then a wooded and inaccessible area and said Mass for the people. We know that the disarmed army evacuated the city on the Clare side. They already had a camp in Sixmilebridge. It would seem likely that some of them would have sought refuge in the forests to the east of the village, especially if they felt that they could be hunted, as priests dressed as soldiers undoubtedly would. Oatfield would then have been deep in the forests. St Vincent describes Barry going to the mountains and being received by a woman who sheltered him before he was able to get a ship back to France (Letter 1473).

Although Oatfield is in the parish of O'Callaghan's Mills it is quite a distance from that village. It is on the R471 between Cloonlara and Sixmilebridge.

Fr Ignatius Murphy, the diocesan historian for the diocese of Killaloe, wrote to me on 30 September 1985, and said that he could not add anything to what Bishop Harty had told me. He had done research on the 18th and 19th centuries in the diocese, but not on the 17th, and added that "no serious work on this period (in Killaloe diocese) has been done for many years".

Birthplaces (John McEnery);

When Irishmen joined the Congregation in Paris in the 17th century their particulars were entered in a register. The register of admissions to the CM between its foundation and the French Revolution is now in the French National Archives (9). I spent many hours going through it. It gives the name, date and place of birth, and so on, of the Irish confreres. In the column for place of birth there is great variety of detail. Sometimes just the name of the diocese is given, sometimes the name of the larger towns such as Cork or Limerick. In one case the actual parish in Dublin is mentioned. In some cases the name of a small village is given, or even a townland, but in only one case is the name of the residence given. This is the man who appears in 17th century Vincentian sources as Jean Ennery. He gave his place of birth as *Chateau de MaKennery au diocèse de Limerick en Hibernie*. I asked Donal Cregan CM for help with this and he said it probably referred to the village of Castletown, about twenty kilometers west of his own birthplace Newcastle West. This crossroads hamlet is on an un-numbered minor road about three kilometres off R518 to the south. The junction is about eight kilometres west of Bruree. On a map at the back of MacLysaght's *The Surnames of Ireland* the family name McEniry is located in that area (10). Canon John Begley gives the name as Castletown MacEnery, and says that our

confrere was a member of an old Irish family who had held long sway in that locality (11). In June 2005 I did not see any 17th century building, but I found it interesting to reflect that a man from there had ended up as a Vincentian priest dying of the plague in Genoa in 1657.

Surnames (Thady Lee);

The surnames of the Irish confreres in the seventeenth century cause a bit of a problem. If readily pronounceable by Frenchmen they were left unaltered, e.g. Arthur, Barry, Butler, Skyddie, and some others. Sometimes vowels were changed in order to help a Frenchman keep the pronunciation as nearly as possible to what it should be, e.g. Crowley to Cruoly, Cogley to Coglée. Sometimes the meaning of a name was translated, e.g. White to Le Blanc. (An Italian confrere named Giudice became Lejuge). Sometimes the name was gallicised, e.g. Walsh to Valois.

But it also has to be remembered that in Ireland there was not always a “correct” spelling for a surname. Edward MacLysaght in his *Irish Life in the Seventeenth Century* says: “Orthography in the Irish language has always been fairly exact, but prior to the eighteenth century people were notoriously indifferent to the spelling of English, not only of ordinary words but even of their own names” (12). He adds that he had come across thirty-seven variants of his own surname. (The third edition, 1969, of his book has MacLysaght on the title page but McLysaght on the spine!). He also mentions that “O” and “Mc” were often dropped (13). Even in the 19th century Irish confreres were not consistent in the use of O and Mc in their own surnames, as is evident from material in our archives.

Thady Lee joined the Vincentians in Paris on 21 October 1643, aged twenty. His surname was registered as Leë; the final vowel has an acute accent as well as the diaeresis; (I cannot reproduce the two together on the computer). Presumably whoever was writing the name into the register was trying to reproduce as accurately as possible the sounds which he heard; perhaps Thady was giving the Irish form of his name.

Thady Lee joined as a cleric and not as a laybrother. There was a separate register for brothers, and he is not in it. He is in the register for those preparing for ordination. The title *Frère* was used for seminarists and students as well as for brothers, and since Lee died before ordination he was always referred to as *Frère*, which in the past led to some writers in English referring to him as a laybrother. In the original register his place of birth is given as *Toia en Hibernie*. There has been a difference of opinion among writers as to the identity of this place. In *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record* of October 1903 Patrick Boyle CM has an article entitled “Hibernia Vincentiana” in which he states that it referred to

Tuam. In the October 1904 number he has another article entitled “An Irish Vincentian Martyr in the Seventeenth Century” in which he gives the birthplace as “Tuam (?)”. This provoked a response in the following issue from William H Grattan Flood:

Fr Boyle gives the name of the Irish Vincentian martyr as “Lye” and equates “Touä” with “Tuam”, adding that his martyrdom took place in the latter town (Co. Galway).

It will doubtless interest Father Boyle and many other readers to know that the name of the martyr was Rev Thady Lee, whose forbears were from Kilmeeedy, Co. Limerick. He himself was born in Tuogh, Co Limerick (the French form “Touä” being a fairly good phonetic rendering of the townland known as Tuogh), not far from Clonshire, near Adare.

One would like to know Grattan Flood’s source for the family details.

During my sabbatical year in Paris, Donal Cregan CM wrote to me on 30 November 1981:

I am most interested in the result of your visit to the Archives Nationales... It is even possible that the double dot in Toüa was misplaced by the printer. I do note, however, that there is also a double dot over the ‘e’ of Lië and am wondering what its significance is. I am glad that you are transcribing all proper names (including place names) exactly as they are in the original.

The double dot in the register is over the *u*, but in Boyle’s two articles in the IER and in his book it is over the *a* (14). The moving of the double dot would hardly have been done by three different printers. It was obviously deliberate on the part of Boyle, but it is not clear why he did it. In a handwritten letter of his in the CM archives in Paris he wrote TOUGH in capitals.

Donal Cregan told me that he was completely satisfied that the place was Tuogh, about four kilometers west of Adare; it is marked on Map 65 of the Discovery Series. He told me that he had identified the actual holding of the Lees in that area. Unfortunately he did not give me the precise information. In Begley’s book, referred to above, a 1659 list (a census or poll tax) shows that the townland of Twough had a population of fifty, “all Irish” (15). In June 2005 I visited the area, and tried to let my imagination work.

Up to 1660, eight men from Limerick joined the Congregation. William Cart, Thady Molony, Patrick Walsh, Francis and John White, are recorded in the register as being from the city, while the following

are recorded as being from the diocese: Thady Lee, John McEnnery and George White.

Gerard Brin and Thurles;

One of the missionaries was Gerard Brin. As with most of the Irish confreres of the time, different spellings of his name appear. In the register his birthplace is given as *proche de la ville de Cassel*. His appointments, including four superiorships, from 1644 to 1662 are well documented. He was back in Ireland in 1664 working as a curate in Thurles. He died at the end of 1683 or the start of 1684, and in his will asked to be buried *Within the churchyard gate in Thurles* (16). The churchyard in question is that which surrounds the present St Mary's (Church of Ireland), though the present church is later than the 17th century. On the reasonable presumption that his wishes with regard to his place of burial were carried out, one can visit the graveyard in which he is buried, a plot of land forming another link with the confreres of the 17th century and so with Vincent de Paul. If "within the churchyard gate" means "just inside" the gate we can narrow the area down. The Catholic church in which he ministered was situated at the right hand side of the present cathedral. The Countess of Thurles, a Catholic, resided in the castle in the town, still extant, and she would have afforded a certain amount of protection for Catholic clergy. It is not unreasonable to suppose that Brin would have visited the castle.

Abelly tells us that during the mission in Thurles a butcher, in public in the marketplace and while one of the missionaries was passing, uttered a blasphemy. He was reprimanded and accepted blame, and asked the missionary to bring him to jail. A relative said that that would dishonour the family and collected some stones and threatened the missionary. His arm was suddenly paralysed and his tongue protruded and turned black, and he could not withdraw it. Prayer and holy water cured him (17).

Up to 1660 three men from the diocese of Cashel joined the Congregation. Gerard Brin from near the town of Cashel, Peter Butler from Drom, and Philip Dalton from Culiny. Dermot O'Brien was the only man from the diocese of Emly. Drom is a small village about fifteen kilometers north of Thurles, just off the R501 between Borrisoleigh and Templemore. Map 65 of the Discovery Series is needed to locate Culiny (Cooleny). It is a townland a couple of kilometers from the village of Moyne. About halfway on the R502 between Johnstown and Templetuohy there is a crossroads, and the turn to the left (coming from Johnstown) after about four kilometers brings one to a turn to the right on to a minor road, followed by a turn to the right on to a lane, and one has arrived in Cooleeny. One needs to enervise the imagination when visiting Drom or Cooleeny (18).

Confreres and their birthplaces;

The native places of the remaining Irish confreres who joined the Congregation up to 1660 are in the register as follows:

Cork city: John Skyddie, James Water, Nicholas Arthur and Donat Crowley.

Carrick-on-Suir: The three Cogleys, Mark, Gerard and Laurence.

Dublin, in the neighbourhood of St Michael's: Patrick Taylor.

Girly, diocese of Meath: Luke Plunket.

Diocese of Cloyne: Edmund Barry.

Ireland: Dermot Duggan.

Donal Cregan told me once that the Irishmen who joined the CM in the 17th century must have come from fairly wealthy backgrounds, or they would not have been on the continent. He suggested that those from ports such as Cork, Limerick or Waterford would have been from merchant families. Later I came across these lines in a statistical survey of Irish clerics in France in the 17th and 18th centuries:

Given that in the seventeenth century, especially before the establishment of funded scholarships, virtually every Irish student must have come from a relatively prosperous background, then presumably the majority were sons of landowners. (19).

MacLysaght also refers to the increase in foreign travel at this time among wealthy Catholics (20).

In various conversations over the years Donal Cregan mentioned that in his historical research he had come across references to the families of some of the Irish confreres of the seventeenth century. I tried to get him to write an article on this topic for *Colloque*, but he always said he had not yet got the material sufficiently organised for such an article.

During my sabbatical in Paris in 1981-82 I transcribed the evidence given by John White (c1630-1705), a confrere from Limerick, at the process for the beatification of Vincent de Paul. I wrote to Donal Cregan that White mentioned that his parents were Stephen White and Felicia Fox. He replied:

You are right in thinking that I am most interested in the names of the parents of John White. There were three Stephen Whites property owners in the city of Limerick in 1641, and seven property proprietors named Fox in the city alone. Unfortunately we do not know the name of his mother's father.

On 20 October 1981, I went from Paris to Rome to spend a fortnight doing research in the archives at our curia. Donal Cregan happened to be there, and we had many conversations on this whole topic. He mentioned that the mother of Robert Barry, bishop of Cloyne & Ross, who died in 1662, was a Water, and that Edmund Barry from Cloyne, who entered the CM in 1641, was a relation. There was a James Water from Cork who entered the CM in 1638, and he had a nephew Nicholas Arthur from Cork who entered in 1654. Were they also relatives of Bishop Barry? In Vincent's correspondence there are three letters in which he refers to helping Bishop Barry with money (21).

Donal Cregan contributed an article to *Studies in Irish History Presented to R Dudley Edwards*, (1979), entitled "The Social and Cultural Background of a Counter-Reformation Episcopate, 1618-1660". He gave me an off-print of this. It is thirty-two pages in length, with 108 footnotes. The amount of background information on the bishops and their families, and the range of sources given in the footnotes, show what material is available for researchers. It was while he was engaged in this sort of research that he came across material about our seventeenth century confreres.

After his death his historical papers were given to James McGuire, in the Department of History in University College, Dublin. At the suggestion of Paddy O'Donoghue CM I wrote, in September 1999, to James McGuire asking if he had come across anything in the Cregan papers about seventeenth century Irish Vincentians and their backgrounds. He replied by phone, and said that he had not found anything like that. What I had had in mind was a file or a notebook with that sort of title. It occurs to me now, of course, that Donal probably did not organise in that way whatever material he found, but would have left it in the context in which he found it. That was probably why he was not ready to turn it into an article for *Colloque*. It would be necessary to go through all his notes to find what he had found and recorded. I hope some interested confrere will tackle that in the future.

Tailpiece

This is from the eighteenth century, not the seventeenth, but worth recording.

In the *Attestations des Vœux*, in the archives of the curia in Rome, under the date 9 February 1769, an entry begins with the words: *Ego Jacobus Barry....* The letter M has been written after, and slightly above, the last letter of the surname, apparently in a different hand. The signature, in a further different hand, which has to be his own, is *Jacobus Barrymore*, very clearly written. In spite of much effort I have never found any further reference to this man in any other source.

Near Carrigtwohill, Co. Cork, is Barryscourt Castle, a 15th or 16th century tower house which, over the past number of years, has been gradually and beautifully restored, and partially furnished, by *Dúchas*, The Heritage Service, (later by the Office of Public Works). Restoration is not yet completed. In a leaflet, which is on sale at the castle, it is stated:

As a family the Barrys were very prolific and a large number of branches developed, the most powerful headed by the Barrymore, or ‘Great Barry’ in Barryscourt.

This could be the explanation for the difference between *Ego Jacobus Barry*, the letter M and his own signature *Jacobus Barrymore*. A visit to this castle, open all the year round, is well worth while, to see the sort of background some of the 17th and 18th century Irish confreres came from.

Fr E Barry, PP, MRIA, VPRSA, wrote a series of articles with the title “Barrymore” in the *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, starting in Vol. 5, No. 41, January-March 1899. I went through all these articles but could not find any reference to the James Barrymore referred to above.

NOTES

1. See my articles dealing with 17th century Irish confreres in *Colloque* Nos 3 and 31.
2. Lynch, J: *De Præsulibus Hiberniæ*, ed. O’Doherty, J F, Dublin 1944, Vol. 2, pp. 93-94.
3. Letter 1095.
4. Begley, J: *The Diocese of Limerick in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, Dublin 1927, p. 438.
5. *History Ireland*, Vol. 10, No 2, Summer 2002, p. 25.
6. Abelly, L: *La Vie du Vénérable Serviteur de Dieu, Vincent De Paul...*, Paris 1664, Book II, Chapter I, Section VII. These divisions are the same in the original French edition and in the English translation.
7. Letter 1473.
8. Maurice O’Neill CM drew my attention to this report.
9. MM 519A.
10. MacLysaght, E: *The Surnames of Ireland*, Dublin 1973, p. 376.
11. Begley, J: *op. cit.*, p. 450.
12. MacLysaght, E: *Irish Life in the Seventeenth Century*, 3rd edition, Shannon and Dublin, p. 119.
13. On the use or otherwise of O and M(a)c, see MacLysaght as in note 12, p. 120
14. Boyle, P: *St Vincent de Paul & the Vincenians in Ireland, Scotland and*

- England A.D. 1638-1909*, London 1909, p.52.
15. Begley, J: *op. cit.*, p. 259.
 16. Fr Walter Skehan, of the diocese of Cashel & Emlly, who died in 1971, did much research on 17th century Tipperary priests. He published extracts from some wills which had been copied by Dr Martin Callinan of Thurles, who had had access to them before the fire at the Public Records Office in the Four Courts in 1922. In May 1986 Mgr Maurice Dooley sent me a photocopy of Skehan's transcript of Brin's will from the Callinan papers. I published the will in *Colloque* 31.
 17. Abelly: Book II, Chapter I, Section VIII.
 18. Mgr Maurice Dooley helped me with names of places in Tipperary.
 19. Brockliss, W. B., and Ferté, P: "Irish Clerics in France in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: a Statistical Survey", in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, Vol. 87 C (9) (1987), page 542. This passage does not appear in the version of Brockliss & Ferté's work in *Archivium Hibernicum*, Vol. LVIII, 2004.
 20. As in note 12, pages 122 and 268.
 21. Letters 1908, 2171, 2227.

In the Maison-Mère and Villebon

June and July 1949

Tom Davitt CM

In *Colloque 50* Stan Brindley mentioned that after First Arts he and I were accepted by Professor Louis Roche into the Honours course. One of the conditions of our acceptance was that we would go to France for a period after Second Arts. We had no previous experience of packing for such a holiday, and Stan decided he needed a larger suitcase than his own, so he borrowed a bigger one from Justin O'Connell, who was in the year after us.

I cannot recall the exact date of our departure, but a day or two after our arrival in Paris we went to the funeral of Cardinal Emmanuel Suhard, archbishop of Paris, in Notre-Dame; he had died on 30 May, so we obviously arrived in the early days of June.

The arrangements for our travel were made by James Rodgers, who was provincial bursar. I have consulted in a library the timetables for the summer of 1949. We left Dun Laoghaire on the Mail Boat at 09.20, arriving in Holyhead at 12.45. We left on The Irish Mail at 13.35, had our lunch on board, and arrived in Euston at 19.35. It was the first time that either of us had been out of Ireland. We were met at Euston by Dermot O'Dowd, who had been ordained the previous year and was stationed in Strawberry Hill. He took us on the Underground to Waterloo, and then by train to Strawberry Hill. The Going-down Ball was in full swing in the college, and we fell asleep to the accompaniment of a loud dance band. Stan was lodged in the Holbein Chamber and I was put into the room which in the 1970s was that of the superior, or else it was the matching one immediately above. Kevin Cronin was superior and principal, but I do not recall meeting him. In fact I think we did not meet any confrere other than Dermot O'Dowd. Years later Charlie McGowan told me how worried he had been that two susceptible young students from the Rock might be disedified by the idea of a dance being held in a community house.

The next morning Dermot said Mass for us, organised our breakfast and took us to Victoria for the Boat Train to Newhaven. We left Victoria at 09.35, arriving in Newhaven at 11.45. I am not sure why we were routed via Newhaven-Dieppe, instead of the much shorter crossing from Dover or Folkstone to Calais. I have a vague memory that it was thought that the longer Channel crossing, of just over three hours, was less likely to induce sea-sickness, for which the Dover-Calais route was infamous. Perhaps the Newhaven boat was bigger. In the 1930s the students of the

Irish College in Paris always used the Newhaven-Dieppe route, as it was the cheapest. Perhaps that was still the case in 1949. We did not experience *mal de mer* and left Dieppe by train at 15.35 to arrive at the Gare Saint-Lazare in Paris in good form at 18.19, in spite of wooden seats in the train. Even the oldest carriages on the trains serving Blackrock had upholstered seats. We took a taxi, and told the driver the address 95, rue de Sèvres; to be on the safe side we also gave it to him in writing, and we got there.

Maison-Mère;

I have no clear recollection of our actual reception. We met Maurice Duvaltier, the director of students and seminarists, and were brought to our rooms. In my many subsequent visits to that house I have tried to recall where our rooms had been, but without success. I think we were also brought to pay our respects to St Vincent's body above the high altar in the chapel.

A student of about our own age, Jacques Belin, was appointed to look after us during our stay, which he always did very competently. As in the Rock, Christian names were not used, and the French equivalent of our *Mr* was *Notre cher frère*, abbreviated in speech to just *Frère*, and on notice boards and in other contexts to NCF, not to be confused with SNCF.

It was probably on the next day that we had a long session with Fr William Slattery, who had been elected Superior General in 1947. He had visited Ireland at the end of September 1947. He was very friendly and mentioned a lot of the peculiar French customs which we would encounter. He explained about the common clothing system, where shirts, underwear, socks etc. were distributed to each confrere, priest, brother, student and seminarist, each week; no one had his own. Fr Slattery told us that while he went along with most of what the French asked of him he did not accept this particular matter and retained his own clothing and arranged for its laundering. He told us to keep our own also. He told us that while the rising in the house was at 4.00 he had arranged with the director that we were to be allowed rise at 5.00.

I think the attendance at the cardinal's funeral was our first outing. We walked from the Rue de Sèvres to Notre-Dame, though not in crocodile. We were amazed to see people weeping in the street outside the cathedral. It was our first experience of wearing our soutanes out on the streets, as was normal in France at the time. Under the soutane we wore a pair of football togs instead of trousers, not having the special clerical shorts. As we came prepared for this, obviously we had been advised by someone. It was probably James Cahalan, drawing on his experience in the ICP. These were worn, of course, along with, and not in place of,

underpants. On our heads we wore berets, suitably sloped to one side. I still have a photo of the two of us, thus attired, on top of the Arc de Triomphe. I cannot recall whether we bought the berets ourselves or whether they were issued to us by some sort of Soin of Poverty in the house.

The 1949 Catalogue shows that there were 60 priests in the house, 34 brothers, 36 students, 31 seminarists and three seminarist brothers. Not all the students were French. I can recall three Lebanese, three from what was then the Polish Vice-province in Brazil, now the Province of Curitiba, two Belgians, one Spaniard and one from Monaco. Checking in the Catalogues in later years I found that quite a large number of the students and seminarists whom we had met left before ordination.

We did a lot of sight-seeing in the city, being taken to all the obvious tourist places: Notre-Dame, the Madeleine, Les Invalides, the Panthéon, the Sainte Chapelle, the Eiffel Tower, the though we did not go up it. This was either because it had not yet re-opened to the public or because of the high entry charge. As well as admiring the façade of Notre-Dame and exploring its interior, we also went up on to the towers and came face to face with the gargoyles. The student who was with us got us to admire the symmetry of the façade of the cathedral and enthused about it, ending up by exclaiming *C'est juste!*, which could be rendered "Spot on!". We also were taken out to Clichy. At that time Metro line 13 did not go as far as it does today, and we had quite a walk from the last station to the church in Clichy. I do not remember being brought to the location of old Saint-Lazare.

We also made one rather unusual visit, to the sewers of Paris. This was available on the first Thursday of each month. We went down a manhole in the Place de la Madeleine and had a boat trip of about half an hour, re-emerging through a manhole in the Place de la Concorde. It was cool down there, and there was no smell, nor did we see any rats; perhaps they were scared off by the headlight of the boat. It was somewhat different from what we had seen in the 1930s film *The Phantom of the Opera*, in which Claude Rains had managed to have a grand piano down there. The main sewers ran under the main streets and each one had a nameplate in blue enamel, just like those on the streets above. Charles Mercier was our student guide on this trip. We made a few longer trips outside of Paris, but as some of these were from Villebon during July I will deal with all of them further on.

Though Jacques Belin was appointed to look after us this did not mean that only he took an interest in us. On our sight-seeing in the city we had many different students as *socci*, and Stan and I, obviously, kept apart to practise our spoken French. Most of our sight-seeing was done on foot, though we also used the Metro. In 1949 Vaneau station opposite

the house was closed, and we would go to either Sèvres-Babylone at one end of the street or Duroc at the other, or to Saint-Placide a bit further away, depending on which line we wanted.

Daily routine;

The students and sems rose at 4.00 and so had prayer 4.30 to 5.30. Stan and I rose at 5.00 and joined the others for Mass, in the seminaire oratory up on the top floor of the house. It could be very hot up there, because of the low ceiling. I cannot recall what we did as regards our hour's prayer.

On some occasions, perhaps on Sundays when it was not at 4.00, we were present at community morning prayer in the Salle d'Oraison. The structure of the hour was governed by the clock in the small clock tower on the roof, in the centre of the building. Not only did this sound the hour and the quarters, but also it gave one stroke at ten minutes past, at twenty-five minutes past, forty minutes past and fifty-five minutes past, in other words five minutes before each quarter. When it sounded at ten past, all sat up and the second point was read. At twenty-five past the third point was read and all stood up. When it rang at twenty minutes to the hour all knelt down, and when it rang at five to, the Angelus was said and all went to the refectory. The five-minute bell regulated many other activities during the day. The clock continued sounding the five minutes bell for many years after it had ceased to serve any practical purpose, but it was eventually discontinued. There was a student whose office was winding the clock each week, an operation which I once witnessed.

As in the Rock, we did our ordinary daily spiritual exercises in private, as did the French students. The students were not on holidays and had their classes. We studied French in our rooms. No French confrere, student or priest, was assigned to give us any formal tuition, but individual students did help us with pronunciation and grammar. I remember reading aloud in my room while a student corrected me. None of the students spoke English. For confession we went to Pierre Dulau, the Secretary General, who spoke English. We attended the weekly students' conference, given by either the director Maurice Duvaltier, or the sub-director Maurice Vansteenkiste. This was in the Philosophy Hall, which was reached through the Salle d'Oraison, and the seating was tiered as in 64 and 66 in UCD. This is now the Salle Ozanam, where the CIF sessions are held, though the tiered seating has been removed.

On Sundays there were solemn vespers, with very elaborate ritual in the sanctuary. There were either four or six students in copes, with the celebrant in the centre. This line had, at times, to swivel, with the celebrant as the hub and the students on one side of him walking

backwards. Stan and I were given one experience of being involved in this, the first time we ever vested in a cope. We had what in the Rock was called "Ceremonies Practice" beforehand. However, when the day came on which we were appointed as two of the copemen (a word I remember from the Rock) Vespers were to be in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament exposed, which involved several changes of ritual. This may have been on the feast of Corpus Christi which was on 16 June in 1949.

Meal-times;

Our meals were in what is still the main refectory. Before each meal we assembled in the Salle d'Oraison for examen, regulated by the before-mentioned striking clock. It was presided over by the Superior General at a special individual, slightly raised, stall, in the base of which was a special heating apparatus. The Salle d'Oraison is a large room immediately above the refectory, and of identical dimensions. It is now disused. In the refectory the tables and seating are no longer as they were. There was a table the whole length of the room along each side, and three more tables of similar length between them. The tables had bench seats, not chairs. At the top end, furthest from the door, was the Superior General's table, facing down the room, at which he normally sat alone unless he had a guest or guests. To one side were the traditional two poor men, different every day, who must have been quite embarrassed at the experience. The students had their own tables, each student having his own place, indicated by his serviette in a marked ring. The brothers ate in a separate smaller refectory, parallel to the main one, which is now used by non-CM residents.

Along the right hand side of the refectory was a long table occupied by the most senior priests. This was colloquially referred to as Montparnasse. To understand the allusion one would have to imagine in the dining room in Phibsboro a special table for old confreres, nicknamed Glasnevin. Many of these old men were returned missionaries with long beards and I still retain a mental picture of one of them squeezing spilt soup out of his beard.

Inside the door of the refectory, over on the left at the end of the table on that side sat a German general, still wearing his field-grey uniform jacket. He came in unobtrusively at the last moment and departed in a similar way at the end of the meal. He was a Catholic and we were told he was being lodged at the request of the American army to Fr Slattery. Apparently many confreres did not agree with his presence, but Fr Slattery remained firm. In subsequent years I have been unable to get any further information on this man, though I have to confess that I have not made a great effort to do so. Maybe I will, as there are at present in

the maison-mère some confreres who were there in 1949.

There was reading, by a student, during meals. There was a sort of pulpit about half way along the left side of the room considerably more elevated than the reader's desk in the Rock. It is still there, though unused. Reading was done in a monotone, and I can still see and hear in my imagination one student, Serge Marie, announcing "*L'église des apôtres et des martyrs*", par Daniel-Rops, chapitre cinq, suite.

Serving was done by the students and sems. Each one carried an extraordinary tray. It was circular, quite large, perhaps two or two-and-a-half feet in diameter, with a long vertical handle rising from the centre by which it was held. As seating was on only one side of each table, the servers could move easily along the other side.

Stan and I suffered no ill effects from the French menu, nor did we find it inadequate in either quality or quantity. There were always salads, cheeses and fruit. It was the first time we had ever eaten fresh apricots, being acquainted only with dried ones served stewed. During our stay cherries came into season and there were lots of fresh ones available. We were introduced to artichokes, and the peculiar method of dealing with them. There was also coffee. The French were, of course, puzzled by our abstaining from wine.

When we had finished eating we rinsed our cutlery in the glasses from which we had drunk and wiped them in our serviettes, and then wrapped them in them and left them ready for the next meal. Serviettes were changed once a week.

After meals we all went into the chapel. At that time it had rows of choir-stalls, with only a few benches at the back. These stalls have been long removed. The front row of the stalls had no kneelers, and one had to kneel awkwardly on the floor.

I think that it was at this time that the director "took a line", as in the Rock, where students and seminarists queued up to ask permissions. Others in the line could not overhear what was asked, but the director would grant permission with a very audible *Entendu*.

Recreation;

After leaving the chapel the Superior General, priests, students and seminarists, went out into the *cour*, the sort of garden-yard behind the building, stretching to the back gate on to the Rue du Cherche Midi. The priests took their recreation in the area nearest the house, on the side opposite the refectory windows, while the students and seminarists, separately of course, took theirs in the outer, wider, part of the property. Groups of three or four were formed, randomly, and each group faced another. For the first length, away from the Rue de Sèvres, one group walked backwards while the other group walked forwards, to the end of

the path, at which point the previously backward walking group went forwards and the other group walked backwards. In the Rock we had heard about this weird system, probably from Fr Kevin O'Hagan, who had been in Paris shortly before us. It was, though, a sensible method of coping with the limited space available.

There was also a handball alley, and the players played in their soutanes, developing much sweat, which could be detected! There was also a table-tennis table in the open.

I mentioned above that there were thirty-four brothers in the house, but I never saw them taking recreation like the rest of the community; as far as I know brothers never had recreation periods. Stan and I can recall only two brothers. He reminded me of the brother who used to do the rounds of the rooms delivering letters, who was always ready for a chat. In July there was a shuttle service operated by a brother, ferrying supplies, mail and even confreres, between the Maison-mère and Villebon. The brother in question was Frère Nagel, who later spent many years in the secretariate of the curia, at first in Paris and then in Rome.

Post-War Paris;

It was 1949 was only four years after the end of the war, and many things had not yet returned to normal. Many of the students and seminarists had lived through a time of scarcity, including shortage of food. They were weighed and medically checked-out regularly, and given medicine and extra, or special, food as required. Razor-blades were still scarce and shaving was only once or twice a week. Paper was also scarce and every Metro ticket could be used twice. There were no electronically activated turnstiles then, and at each entrance to the platforms of a Metro station sat an elderly woman who punched each ticket. The hole she made was quite large, so that there was no way that it could be disguised in order to get more than two journeys on a ticket. Then, as now, there was a flat rate per journey, irrespective of distance. I think most of these women were war-widows. As a train approached the station the door at each approach to the platform began to close automatically. These were massive heavy doors, taller than a person, operated by compressed air, which gave an audible hiss when they started to move. Inevitably, some people tried to get through the slowly diminishing aperture, not always successfully.

On the Metro the cost of a journey did not depend on its length; there was one price. On the buses the cost of a journey depended on the length of the journey, so that bus journeys tended to be expensive, and we did not make many. One of the features of most of the Paris buses at that time was an open platform at the back of the bus, usually crowded,

and we, naturally, made sure of sampling that mode of transport. Those buses have been phased out long ago.

The system of street lighting was not back to normal full power, and shop owners were encouraged by the city council to have well lit shop windows and neon signs, to help lighting the streets.

The students were, naturally, interested to hear about our province, and about Ireland in general. They all knew about Daniel O'Connell, and many also knew of Terence MacSwiney (The Republican Lord Mayor of Cork who died on hunger strike); his death, after all, was less than thirty years previously. I was unable to answer some of their questions, such as the average industrial wage in Ireland, and the level of unemployment. In such conversations I was amazed to find that many of the students had never seen the sea. I was also surprised that many of them did not see the French Revolution as a completely bad episode in their history. I was surprised at the frequency with which Napoleon came up in conversation. He obviously was a great hero to those young Frenchmen.

On our walks in the city we saw many commemorative plaques on walls of buildings, with inscriptions giving a person's name, followed by words like "murdered by the filthy Germans" on a date during the war. These were all removed later and replaced by inscriptions like "who gave his life for France during the liberation of Paris".

One day Fr Willy McGlynn came to the Maison-Mère. He was living in the Irish College, on the Rue des Irlandais. Pat Travers had stayed in the college all during the war, as Fr Pat Boyle had done in 1914-18, till he was relieved by Henry Casey, who was a demobilised army chaplain. When, for reasons of health, he had to return to Ireland Willy McGlynn took his place. Like Fr Travers, both of them had been on the staff of the college in pre-war years. He invited us over to the college for a meal, an invitation which we gladly accepted. To the best of his ability he made it more of an Irish than a French meal.

Montmartre;

The only time Stan and I got up at 4.00 was for the annual Vincentian pilgrimage to Montmartre, where Fr Slattery was the celebrant of the Mass. We left the house at 4.30. The eucharistic fast from midnight was still in force. We walked right across the city, quite an experience at that hour on a summer morning. At that hour of the morning the streets were washed down. There were hydrants at frequent intervals at the edge of the pavement, and these were turned on to send quite a powerful stream of water along the gutters. Workmen with brooms, exactly like those traditionally associated with witches, guided all sorts of refuse into the flow of water, which at the next corner vanished into a large opening in

the vertical face of the curb.

In a conference to the confreres on 5 December 1659 Vincent said that in the early days of the Congregation, when it numbered only three or four, a decision was taken to go on pilgrimage to Montmartre to implore the intercession of the holy martyrs. He mentioned, though, that he himself was sick at the time and did not go (XII 411). In a conference to the Daughters on 6 June 1656 he told them that there was no merit in going on pilgrimage to places which he named, including Montmartre, unless such pilgrimages were ordered by superiors (X 168). In that conference he did not use the name Montmartre, but said *aux martyrs*, referring to the derivation of Montmartre as the Mount of Martyrs, an interpretation no longer accepted. The later annual pilgrimage, of course, was to the 19th century Sacré Cœur basilica. I cannot remember what arrangements were made for our breakfast that day.

We went on one other minor pilgrimage, though I don't recall why. It was with some of the students to a church in the suburb of Auteuil. It was in honour of St Teresa of Lisieux. There was a hymn in honour of St Teresa to the tune of *We stand for God*, which, of course, was taken from the French hymn *Nous voulons Dieu*.

Villebon;

On 1 July the students' holidays began, and we all went to Villebon, the holiday château of the Maison-Mère. Villebon was then a small village south of Paris, over an hour's journey by train. It is reached by what in 1949 was the Ligne de Sceaux, now part of RER Line B4. We joined it at the Metro station Denfert-Rocherau. Although there is a station at Villebon we got off the train two stops before that, for financial reasons. At Massy-Palaiseau the fare structure changed from "outer suburban" to "rural", or something like that, so that to go on for two more stations was considered disproportionately expensive. We walked from the station, mainly by tracks through, or along the side of, fields. On a later occasion, as we made our way to the station by that route we were taunted by some teenagers and called *corbeaux*, the French word for crows, a standard insult for clergy in soutanes.

I will never forget my arrival at the house. We went in a gate into what appeared to be a disused farmyard. I looked around and asked "Où est le château?" The French student with me was nonplussed, and pointed to what I had thought to be an old farm building and said "Le voilà". His face indicated clearly that he recognised that I was unpleasantly surprised. I had, of course, mentally translated *château* as *castle*, thinking of photographs of Ashford or even Glenart. The one in Villebon was a medium sized country house, probably of the 18th century. During the inter-war period it had been an up-market boarding school for English

boys. Two free-standing dormitory buildings had been constructed. One of these had been burned down, before the war. Because of something like bankruptcy or a lost court case the school had to close and it was forfeited to the state. When the state needed a lot of the land around Gentilly, the former holiday house, for construction of an *autoroute*, the Congregation was given the Villebon property in compensation.

The majority of the students and seminarists were lodged in the dormitory building. Some, including myself, were accommodated in the château. Another, small, group, including Stan, were put in a sort of wooden bungalow in the grounds, known as Le Pavillon du Nonce, because a Nuncio had used it.

The château could have done with a lot of renovation, but money was scarce. The main staircase worried me quite a bit, as it seemed quite dangerous, particularly at one corner where it sagged noticeably. I must confess that I always stayed very close to the inner wall while on it! I seem to recall hearing that later on the final upper section of the staircase was closed off from general use.

There was no chapel, and a temporary one was rigged up in a former stable, with loose wooden beams as kneelers, an uncomfortable arrangement.

During the holiday in Villebon there were “corporals” of various sorts, voluntary as far as I can recall. The only one I remember clearly is shelling peas, as I had a photograph of us doing that, which a few years ago I sent on to Paul Henzmann, the archivist in Paris. The peas were shelled in rhythm to a sing-song. Some of the students tackled gardening jobs, rather like in the early days of Glenart. I do not recall any organised football, but there was certainly footballing activity of some sort, and after this, and after gardening, many of the students stripped naked and sluiced themselves at a trough under an outdoor tap. Most of them would have done their compulsory military service and would not be embarrassed by such a procedure.

It was while in Villebon that we were introduced to the French custom of drinking *tisane*, also called *infusion* (a French word, not an English one). This is a brew, like tea, made from various herbs or plants. The only flavours which I can recall are *Tilleul* and *Verveine*. The former was from the leaves of the lime tree. I rather liked these drinks. Some years later, in Glenart, when walking in the evening along the path beside the garden wall above the bootroom steps, I noticed a scent, which seemed familiar but puzzled me for a while. I traced it to a flowering bush, which I learnt was lemon-scented Verbena, and the penny dropped. I was being reminded of the verveine tisane from my time in Villebon.

Other journies: Chartres, Lisieux, Amiens

I mentioned above that I would include in the Villebon context all our longer trips, even though at least one may have been from Paris. That one was to Chartres, not a very long journey. It was, however, well outside the Metro system and meant travelling by SNCF. Our student guide for an SNCF journey had to be a son of an SNCF employee, since that meant he had free travel. Charles Mercier, who had brought us down the sewers, met that requirement and guided us to Chartres. The one thing which had been emphasised beforehand was to see the extraordinary blue in the stained glass of the cathedral.

One of the places which Stan and I wanted to visit was Lisieux. When we asked the director about this he said it was too far. However, he consulted Fr Slattery who authorised it. The director, though, would not give permission for a French student to accompany us, so we went on our own. We found out much later that what we thought was her body in the shrine was, in fact, a statue. It was a full day's journey there and back, with quite a late return to Villebon. I think that it was on our return from that trip that we were interrogated by the director as to whether we had smoked just before we entered the building. We were able to convince him of our innocence. I think the situation was that we had passed some nook in which the smell of tobacco still lingered after one of his own students had been smoking; I think we both knew who was guilty.

We also had a trip to Amiens, with a French student, who pointed out to us the first skyscraper to be built in France, a recent construction. He also was able to laugh at the fact that no lifts had been installed, only staircases. Years later I discovered that this defect had been remedied subsequently.

I cannot recall how July 14th was celebrated, but at that time the feast of St Vincent was on 19 July, and on the 18th we all left Villebon and returned to Paris. There was a tradition that on the feast the Papal Nuncio came to the house, presided at the High Mass, and dined with the community; he also, in Rock terminology, "gave a talk", meaning that he lifted the rule of silence at dinner. As we were going into the refectory he was standing at the door near the refectory leading out into the garden, and shook hands with each of us as we passed. The nuncio at the time was Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, later Pope John XXIII.

Journey's end;

This return from Villebon marked the beginning of the end of our stay. When the students heard that we were returning to Ireland after the 19th, they told us that it was a pity that we were not staying for the 15th of August, a very big day in France. When they first mentioned *le quinz*

août, pronounced as if one word, with the final consonant sounded, I had not the remotest idea what they were talking about.

On the 20th the two of us served Fr Slattery's Mass, at the High Altar, and on the 21st we got back into trousers and chesterfield coats and headed off to the Gare Saint-Lazare. We decided to break our journey at Rouen. Or perhaps this was necessitated by the train timetable, because of a change of trains there. We left our baggage at the *consigne*, and looked around to see where we could go for the few hours we had. Out of the town there was a road parallel to the Seine, and we saw a sort of knoll or hillock about a mile or so out along that road, which we christened Bray Head, and went on towards it. We found a suitable spot to stop and have our *casse-croûte* and rest. We were unable to get into the cathedral, as it was still closed after war damage. The result of bombing was also visible in the railway marshalling yard. There was a large oil refinery on the opposite side of the river, which had also been targeted during the war.

Our train from Rouen arrived in Dieppe at twenty-nine minutes past midnight, and the boat sailed at 01.30, due into Newhaven at 05.00, and the train arrived into Victoria at 07.35. There was no arrangement that we were to contact the confreres in London. We had been told, presumably by Fr Cahalan, that we could attend (or "get", in the terminology of those days) Mass in St James', Spanish Place, which was fairly conveniently situated with respect to both Victoria and Euston. We discovered, though, that time did not allow this as The Irish Mail left Euston at 08.15. We took a taxi between the two stations. We were fasting from midnight, having intended to receive Communion in Spanish Place. Having missed out on that we decided to maintain the fast and receive Communion on arrival in Castleknock that evening! However, common sense eventually prevailed and we had a meal either on the train or the boat. The Mail Boat arrived in Dun Laoghaire at 18.05 and we took a taxi to Castleknock. *Evangelizare* carried the following notice:

Among the passengers who disembarked at Dun Laoghaire on Friday 22nd July were M Brindley and M Davitt, after their six months stay in Paris and Villebon.

"Six months", of course, should have read "seven weeks". Since then I have heard confreres refer to our haggard looks after our weeks in France. The said looks, though, were after our overnight train and boat travel rather than after the stay in France.

Did we enjoy the experience? Yes, but it was not really a holiday in the ordinary sense. It certainly gave both of us a desire for further foreign travel later on, and showed how much even an imperfect knowledge of

the language can add to the enjoyment of a foreign trip.

We had been given money to cover expenses while away, but I cannot now remember how much we were given. When we handed back whatever remained, James Cahalan said, then or perhaps later, that we should have spent more. When Joseph Sheedy was appointed rector of the Irish College in Paris in 1932, he broke new ground by encouraging the students to make the most of the opportunity they had to visit Paris and other places. James Cahalan was there during his rectorship and would have picked up this and agreed with it.

Note: Early drafts of this article have been read by Stan, and as a result of subsequent discussions with him this final version has been completed.

Talks given at the Launch of
Duncan McPherson's book,
Living Stones,
published in memory of
Michael Prior CM.

All Hallows College, 16 May 2006

Mark Noonan CM:

I am very honoured to welcome you all to All Hallows for the launch of Doctor McPherson's book in memory of Michael Prior. I welcome Michael's family from Cork especially his brother Jim and his sister Nuala and some of his nieces and nephews and wider family members. I welcome Doctor Deacon Duncan McPherson who was a colleague of Michael in St. Mary's College, Strawberry Hill for many years. I welcome also Duncan's wife Ann and a whole bevy of friends and acquaintances. I welcome the staff of All Hallows College and my Vincentian confreres. After this introduction, Dr McPherson is going to speak and introduce the book which he has edited. Then Perry Gildea, a Vincentian priest, will speak and finally Jim Prior – Michael's brother – will address you on behalf of the family.

Michael was larger than life. Michael and myself were students together in the Vincentian Seminary in St Joseph's, Blackrock. I was ordained with Michael on May 31st 1969 in Castleknock College. After our ordination we went different routes but we kept contact over the years. I enjoyed our visit to the Holy Land in 1994 when Paul Roche, Jimmy Sheil, Michael and myself went on a pilgrimage to mark our Silver Jubilee of Ordination.

Michael's knowledge of the Holy Land was phenomenal and of course his championing of the cause of the Palestinians was legendary. He had a great sense of justice and fair play and he threw himself heart and soul into the Palestinian Cause, not only in Palestine and Britain but in many parts of the world as well. He got himself into all kinds of trouble with the Israelis over his activities on behalf of the Palestinians. When we were in the Holy Land in 1994 he took great pride in showing us the police barracks not far from Jerusalem, where he spent the night after being arrested for taking part in an illegal march to highlight the plight of some Palestinian family. I have to admit I spent my time during that visit wondering when the Israeli Secret Service were going to arrest

us and charge us with subversive activities.

Michael threw himself heart and soul into everything-whether it was playing hurling for the North Mon in a Hearty Cup Final-which the North Mon won by the way- or playing the guitar and singing his favourite songs or his love for the Irish language. One of Michael's favourite pieces was the *Dream of Gerontius* parts of which I have heard him singing on many occasions with great feeling.

There were times when I used to think that Michael's middle name was love-he just gave himself so fully to everything. There were no half measures. Michael loved Cork. He loved the family. He loved the scriptures and published a number of books on scripture, which have made an enormous contribution to scholarship in scripture. He loved Strawberry Hill and gave most of his priestly life in the service of the College. He was very proud to be honoured with a professorship within the last year of his life. He loved the church and being a priest. He loved the Irish language and music. He loved a party and there was nothing he liked better than having us all rolling in the aisles with laughter at his stories and his recalling incidents from the past in his own inimitable style. He embellished the stories to get the last ounce of humour out of them but that only added to the craic. He was a great mimic.

He loved the Vincentian community and its mission of evangelization of the poor. For many years Michael championed the cause of the travelling community in Britain and got himself into all kinds of trouble on their behalf.

I don't think it is an exaggeration to say that Michael made a difference no matter where he was. Whether you agreed with him or not you couldn't ignore him. He was a man of very strong views and he articulated them forcefully and with great conviction.

And now he is gone-taken from us so suddenly and unexpectedly on July 22nd 2004. We miss his colourful personality so much at our Vincentian gatherings. May he rest in peace.

Perry Gildea CM

I was very pleased to be asked to pay tribute to Michael at this evening's function. He was a long time friend and companion. He was also a rich and complex personality, and much has been said and written about him at the time of his death that need not be repeated.

What can be emphasised is the deep nature of his Vincentian identity. The motto of the Congregation is 'He sent me to evangelise the poor.' One of Michael's earlier works was an in-depth analysis of the significance of the original passage from Isaiah and its development in the preaching of Christ. A treatise on Jesus the Liberator followed soon after. Michael gave all of us involved in the academic world an

example of how we could equally be committed to the service of the poor. Duncan has already referred to the founding of the Living Stones, as an attempt to address the plight of the Palestinian Christians.

But Michael's concern for the poor and those often deprived of just or fair treatment was not simply an academic concern. For many years he said mass every week at one of two travellers' camps in London. It was another of his great gifts to be at ease with everyone. Simply because he saw the worth of everyone. He enjoyed the irregularity of the travellers' culture too. One Sunday he came back for lunch laughingly describing a woman ironing tenners which had fallen in the washing. The table she was using was to be the mass altar. He became their active champion on a number of occasions. In one case helping them overcome an eviction from their site in Ealing in favour of a Tesco supermarket. They got their site back and with improved facilities. Similarly, he battled successfully with some of the College administration in favour of one of the students whom they tried to exclude on the grounds that she had a baby. Michael was always ready to take a stand against injustice as an attack on the Gospel values he so sincerely treasured.

Some of us were privileged to travel with Michael to the Holy Land (He always referred to Israel and the occupied territories). Not only did he bring us to all the significant sites connected with the life of Christ, where he eloquently broke the living word of the scriptures. He also brought us to meet Palestinian students at the Catholic University of Bethlehem. Memorable though the visit was to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, it was the visit he also arranged to a refugee camp on the outskirts which added a whole new living dimension to the poverty of the Messiah and the phrase "no room at the inn". Sadly, the situation there is much worse now than then.

Michael was also a committed teacher. I was fortunate for a number of years in having to teach students in second and third year that had already been fashioned according to Michael. He believed in academic discipline in the production of work. Even more he believed in encouraging his students to think for themselves. Some would come in their early days to complain that he was a bully in seminars. Later they would express their gratitude. Certainly students 'trained' by Michael were a delight in seminars. They really understood the necessity of reading and thinking.

Michael was a colleague and a friend. While we all appreciated his academic worth and commitment to his various causes especially the lot of the Palestinians it was his companionship that I miss most. He had a great sense of solidarity with his community and a great sense of fun. He was at heart an entertainer and his stories with actions and accents are fond memories. At one time in Strawberry Hill a tradition of staff

student concerts developed. Michael was always ready to take part. I remember, along with everyone else being spellbound as he sat on with his guitar and sang songs in English, Italian, French, Hebrew and Irish. Someone remarked, 'in London you would not even get the likes in the best cabaret.' He loved his environment and living among the students. There was one character in particular whose exploits he loved to chronicle with his famous 'cockney' accent. Coming to his door his face all blood and denouncing Michael as a hypocrite. For no apparent reason was one such memory.

Michael loved company and many people counted him as a best friend. In particular he enjoyed the company and was enjoyed by some of the members of London Irish. In Michael's own term he loved to move around among them swapping yarns as they 'breast-fed' their pints.

The sporting environment was home to Michael as well. I am open to correction but I think he had a schoolboys all Ireland hurling medal. He enjoyed sports either gaelic, rugby or football. He played tennis enthusiastically with Donal O'Leary. Again in Strawberry Hill he turned out as goalie in staff-student football games. He was particularly proud of a diving penalty save after which the students called him 'the cat'.

Scholar, linguist, passionate about causes, entertainer. Michael was all these but under it all lay his priesthood. It sat easy with him as he could integrate his ministry into every aspect of his life. The pastoral side of Michael's ministry is the quieter one as many people went to him for advice and help. They were never turned away, and students could come at any hour and often did.

The larger than life element of Michael's personality disguised the gentler compassionate side. It was there. I owe personal gratitude to Michael. As my father's body was being carried from chapel to grave, it was Michael who intoned and led the *De Profundis* as we processed with the coffin. That was twenty years ago and someone was recalling to me the beauty of the moment just a few days ago. At the end of my time in Strawberry Hill, Michael insisted on preaching the homily at the farewell mass. It was a generous tribute, which he later sent to my mother.

Michael was truly human. That can be taken in the sense of the largeness of his personality and gifts. It can also be taken in the sense of a human being who was above all compassionate. It is part of the Vincentian charism to experience and share compassion in community and with those to whom we minister. It was Michael's compassion that moved him to practical measures either for the Palestinian Christians, for the Irish travellers in London, for students in difficulty, and to be loyal community member and friend.

We are fortunate that he has left us a large body of writing. He has left us a storehouse of memories too. Anamnesis or remembering is at the heart of Christian celebration. As we celebrate his gifts let us tell each other our memories and keep his giftedness alive among us.

Obituary

Fr Diarmuid O'Farrell CM

When I began to write this obituary and tried to choose words that best summed up Diarmuid for me, I settled on "Strength and Gentleness". I know that some people will be surprised by the first of these words but no one better exemplified the truth that gentleness does not mean weakness than Diarmuid.

I remember when I first came to work with deaf people, John Cleary arranged a meeting for the chaplaincy and he invited Diarmuid to chair it. I was surprised at his choice, having expected that John would have chaired the meeting himself but no other Vincentian knew Diarmuid as well as John and I soon saw the wisdom of the choice; Diarmuid was a superb chair, combining clarity and incisiveness with understanding of each person's views.

I was to see this ability again when Ireland, led by Diarmuid, agreed to host the CDA (Catholic Deaf Association of Britain and Ireland) Conference in 1993. He had a year to prepare this conference and started immediately setting up a working group that would meet every week until the theme and plan of the Conference for 350 people was complete. Both the preparation and the Conference went "like clockwork". I used to wonder where Diarmuid got the strength and authority he showed on these occasions. Eventually I realised this was a classic example of the meaning of authority which I had been taught resided radically in those over whom it was exercised. Diarmuid's goodness and holiness gave him such respect and indeed love from others that they easily accepted his leadership and guidance. The conference symbol of the tree and its leaves that the committee accepted came from David Cooke but Diarmuid was the one who led its choice and use. The conference, like anything else I saw Diarmuid undertake was a great success; what he did seemed blessed.

I have already referred very briefly to Diarmuid's holiness and goodness: His great friend, Canon Charles Hollywood of Salford always spoke of the qualities when we spoke of Diarmuid. It was Charlie who said that for him Diarmuid was the embodiment of St Vincent de Paul in our time. The truth of this view was evinced firstly in Diarmuid's poverty; he always travelled with an unlocked bag (a grip) and nearly always attracted a fellow passenger whom he got to know very thoroughly. Again, I believe it was that holiness and goodness that shone from him and that enabled him to give joy and trust to others. Diarmuid imitated Vincent de Paul not only in his poverty but also in his prayer;

people who knew Diarmuid spoke of his closeness to God and his attachment to prayer. So it is not difficult to understand Charlie Hollywood's view that "For me he was the St Vincent of our time". Though he made no show of it he was a saintly person.

Diarmuid's other great friend was John Cleary; they shared many holidays together and I was often struck by the ease with which they shared Eucharist and the Prayer of the Church on those holidays. The driving force of the lives of all three of those friends was love, love of God and of the neighbour. All three had a genuine love of deaf people and a commitment that enabled them to give themselves for the good of the deaf community. So, in Diarmuid we are dealing with someone whose life was one of love of God that he showed in prayer and poverty and of love of the neighbour that he showed especially in his commitment to deaf people. Diarmuid had already learned the lesson described by Pope Benedict XVI:

Only if I serve my neighbour can I be open to what God does to me, and to how much he loves me. Love of neighbour is no longer a 'commandment' imposed from without. It is a freely bestowed experience of love from within, a love which by its very nature must then be shared with others until in the end God is "all in all". (*Deus Caritas Est* 18)

This is the love that Charlie Hollywood saw in Diarmuid and led him to see Diarmuid as being like Vincent de Paul. Finally, if love of God and of the neighbour was what most marked Diarmuid O'Farrell, it was not the only quality that made him so attractive; Diarmuid also had a lovely sense of humour that shone from him always. This is why he was so loved and respected by everyone.

May he rest in peace.

Tom Woods CM

Born: Dublin, 10th April 1930
 Entered the CM: 7th September 1948
 Vows: 8th September 1950
 Ordained Priest: 4th June 1955 at Holy Cross College, Clonliffe by
 Dr John Charles McQuaid, Archbishop of Dublin

Appointments:

1955-‘56: St Vincent’s, Castleknock
 1956-‘62: St Vincent’s, Sunday’s Well, Cork
 1962-‘82: Glasgow – attached to Lanark
 1982-‘88: St Mary’s, Lanark
 1988-‘94: Park View
 1994-2005: St Peter’s, Phibsborough

Died: 30th November 2005
 Buried: Glasnevin

A life of Dedication – served in two cultures

Jim McDonald

Every so often life produces outstanding people whose strength of character and abilities are masked by their life-long focus on inspiring other people. Positive things seem to happen around them, but their approach to success is one of humility.

Such a man was the late Fr Diarmuid O’ Farrell, CM, Chaplain to the Catholic deaf people of Glasgow and a national motivator in the promotion of new innovations in meeting their needs. People conversing with him for the first time would have no perception of the dynamo that drove him relentlessly to seek out more effective ways of improving the lives of those who were deaf. He was a quiet unassuming gentleman who did not attract attention to himself and who it would be easy to misread. His physical stature was not imposing, but his attitude and ideas were those of a giant. His fertile imagination and intellect overcame problems and simplified philosophies. He also did not accept the word “NO” into his vocabulary.

He was born on the 10th of April 1930 and grew up in Dublin. He was educated by the Christian Brothers in Dun Laoghaire and com-

pleted his education at Castleknock College, Dublin. On completion of his Secondary schooling, he joined the Vincentians in 1948 and was ordained as a Priest in 1955. His first priesthood duties were with St Vincent's Church, Cork, where he served from 1956 to 1962. He had a great love of choral work and while in Cork he produced a number of parish musicals. He had been a keen swimmer in his youth and throughout his life, took a keen interest in Irish Rugby and visited Murayfield when Ireland was playing there. He also became aware of the deaf community and helped the chaplain, Fr Nolan, in his ministry.

It was natural then that in 1962 he should be appointed by his provincial superior to work full time with deaf people in Glasgow and the west of Scotland. Thus began his second life commitment and dedication in which he was to demonstrate so ably, his drive, determination and power to overcome obstacles to progress.

In working with deaf people in Glasgow he followed in the tradition of Fr Derry Sweeney and Sr Brendan Cussen. At a very early stage he demonstrated that his pastoral ministrations could only be effective with a national remit. Since he was the only full time Catholic Chaplain for deaf people in the whole of Scotland his tentacles, and his car, were to include many, many journeys south of the Border. His activities however, involved international links with religious and secular bodies – particularly in Education.

When the second Vatican Council decided that the Liturgy should be celebrated in the vernacular it heralded a period of frantic activity for Chaplains throughout the country. The significance for deaf parishioners was that suitable sign language had to be introduced. This led to the establishment of the Catholic Association for the Deaf. Fr O'Farrell was at the centre of this venture and led him and Fr Hollywood of Manchester to set up a World Conference hosted by the Catholic Association for the Deaf. Many benefits to deaf people resulted from this venture and made his regular journeys to and from Manchester - usually on the same day – extremely worthwhile.

In the midst of all this activity he decided that his deaf parishioners needed a new building in which to meet for both social and spiritual discourse. Working with Sr Eileen (Augustine) O'Mahony, Mr Joe Hughes, Friends of the Deaf, Strathclyde Regional Council, and countless others, money was raised and a new Centre for Deaf People opened up in Tobago Street, Glasgow. This was to have far reaching effects on the local deaf community and the ability of Fr O'Farrell to provide services which specifically met their needs.

Within this Centre, a new, national organisation with deaf people was born. With the enthusiastic involvement of Sr Eileen O'Mahony, Fr O'Farrell supervised the development of specialist provision for deaf

people who had additional problems. The numbers attending Tobago Street with special needs grew, so that it became essential that a larger setting was found for this group. A building became available in Moffat Street and, after adaptations, became a new place for the assessment and rehabilitation of this specific group of deaf people. This Centre has grown over the years and is now known as Hayfield Support Services with Deaf People. Fr O'Farrell was very involved with the setting up of Hayfield, but once established, Hayfield became an independent entity which is recognized both locally and nationally as being a significant resource for certain deaf adults. Hayfield will remain as a very real monument to Fr O'Farrell's ministry in Glasgow.

Fr O'Farrell was respected and loved by his deaf parishioners because of his human qualities as well as their knowledge that he was totally dedicated to doing his best to improve their lives. Many people look back at the end of their lives and feel they should have achieved more. Knowing the nature of Fr O'Farrell, he would certainly include himself in that sentiment. However, his humility and determination combined disarmingly to ensure that he inspired people to do better and achieve more. When people remember him, as they most certainly will, their recollections will be of warmth, humility, dynamism and effectiveness. "He allowed people to be free". His human skills may have been unusual, but it was the way he honed, developed and applied them that made him such a unique human being. May his dear soul be at the right hand of God.