

COLLOQUE

Journal of the Irish Province of the
Congregation of the Mission

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Editorial

The last number of editions of *Colloque* were given over to the notes on our Necrology and a translation of Bernard Koch's work. Now, with this edition, we return to our more accustomed flow. There are quite a few articles by various confreres and some which come from our, now not-so-recent, Provincial Assembly. We are, as ever, grateful to all those who have contributed and given permission for their work to be used.

This past year saw the deaths of some of our most elderly (though no less spry and active) confreres. Fr Des McMorrow had sent two brief articles for consideration; the first I had ever received from him. He was also actively considering writing some more for *Colloque*. Sadly, this edition also contains his obituary, since Des died quite suddenly last August. I am particularly grateful to his brother, Fr Frank, for penning the obituary. Joining him in the ranks of Heaven were Hugh Murnaghan and Eugene Sweeney, who departed this life just eight months before he would have entered his 100th year; I have a feeling that God will have had some explaining to do on that front. The obituaries for Hugh and Eugene (who sometimes referred to himself as Hugh James) will be in the next edition of *Colloque*.

Acta of the Provincial Assembly of the Irish Province 2009

The Assembly took place in Emmaus Retreat and Conference Centre, Lissenhall, Swords, Co Dublin and began on the evening of 6th October 2009.

Tuesday 6th October 2009

The confreres assembled for prayer led by Fr Perry Gildea and, at its conclusion, the Visitor, Fr Brian Moore addressed the confreres (printed separately in this edition).

Following the address, the Assembly elected Fr Eugene Curran as Secretary: his nomination being unopposed. Fr Paschal Scallion was elected First Moderator on the second count and Fr Sean Farrell elected Second Moderator on the first count.

The Assembly then accepted the proposed Agenda, Timetable and Method of proceeding.

When the elections were completed, the Assembly was addressed by Sr Collette Stevenson PBVM of the National Office for the Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland, in Maynooth. Sr Collette dealt with the developments in Child Safeguarding policies and procedures and emphasised the need that the Province have clear and recognised policies in this regard.

She dealt with several of the issues which have arisen and the resources that are available to individuals and to Congregations. She outlined the key-elements in Child Safeguarding;

- All actions are based on Gospel teaching
- There are clear written policies and procedures
- These are recognised within and supported by the organisational structure
- There are sufficient human resources to deliver the services
- There is the will to safeguard children

She then further detailed seven key standards for the National Office;

- i. the importance of the written policy
- ii. clear procedures on how to respond if any allegations are made
- iii. a commitment to preventing harm to children
- iv. training and education provided
- v. The importance of communicating the Church's message about safeguarding
- vi. provision of access to support and advice

vii the importance of implementing and monitoring the standards

In light of events unfolding in Ireland, it was a timely and much-appreciated presentation.

Wednesday 7th October 2009

The morning began with Prayer, again led by Fr Perry Gildea.

Greetings were received from the Visitatrices of the Provinces of Ireland and Great Britain, assuring us of their prayers.

During the first session of the day, we had an opportunity to listen to a presentation by Dr Alison Forrestal of the National University of Ireland, Galway, on “A Case-Study of the Expansion of the Congregation of the Mission: Sedan 1642-1660”. Dr Forrestal is a professional historian with an interest in St Vincent de Paul and has already written for *Colloque* and made presentations for the DePaul Trust. Her presentation was lively, interesting and apposite and it indicated that Vincent is still a living figure for many people.

There was an opportunity for reflection as people considered the question: “What does the experience in Sedan say to us today”. There was also a opportunity for dialogue and questions with Dr Forrestal.

Following a brief break, there were presentations by a number of people who had been asked by the Preparatory Commission to reflect on green shoots and signs of hope in the Vincentian Family today.

1. Mary Hanlon, co-ordinator, gave a power-point presentation on developments in the Vincentian Lay Missionaries
2. Clare Williams, CEO, gave a power-point presentation on developments in the Vincentian Housing Partnership (Rendu Apartments)
3. Geraldine Murphy offered a reflection on a Vincentian Parish
4. Margarita Synnott, co-ordinator, gave her thoughts on developments in the *Pathways* Programme, an adult faith formation programme from All Hallows College in Dublin
5. Fergus Kelly gave a report on what has been happening in the International Chaplaincy based in Isleworth, London
6. Maireen Fortune, web-master, presented the up-dated web-page for www.vincentians.ie, which is soon to go on-line

In the afternoon session, the Assembly voted on a number of topics:

- a) *Changes to the Statutes of the CM as proposed by the Preparatory Commission for the General Assembly:*
in each case, the Provincial Assembly supported the opinion of the Commission (full results are given in Appendix)

b) *Postulate for submission to the General Assembly by the Irish Province.*

This postulate was submitted by the Iona Road Community and Fr Stephen Monaghan proposed it and addressed the rationale behind it. Fr Bernard Meade seconded the proposal.

That the General Assembly instruct the General Curia to appoint a committee to oversee the drawing up and implementation of a safety and welfare policy for the protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults for the international Congregation which may then be adopted or adapted by local provinces, vice-provinces and regions.

and

that the General Assembly instruct the General Curia to nominate a committee or individual to undertake an audit and give a report of current safety and welfare policies for the protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults in the provinces, vice-provinces and regions of the Congregation

There was a full and open discussion and Fr Kevin O'Shea suggested an amended text. This proposal was seconded by Fr Perry Gildea and voted on by the Assembly. (22 in favour, 6 opposed, 4 against) The amended text was voted on and accepted by the Assembly. The vote was carried (29 in favour, 1 opposed, 2 abstentions). The final text is as follows;

That the General Assembly instruct the General Curia to appoint a committee to highlight and stress for the provinces world wide the importance of drawing up and implementing a safety and welfare policy for the protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults.

and

that the General Assembly instruct the General Curia to nominate a committee or individual to undertake an audit and give a report of current safety and welfare policies for the protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults in the provinces, vice-provinces and regions of the Congregation.

a) *Alteration to the Provincial Norm on Formation*

It was proposed to change the wording from: "aged between 18 and 35" to "aged not less than 18 years"

This was proposed by Fr Brian Moore and seconded by Fr Noel Travers.

Fr Brian Moore addressed the Assembly on the rationale behind it: it is noted, both by us and by other Congregations, that the average age of such applicants as there are has increased significantly. While there may be difficulties in formation for men of older years,

we ham-string ourselves if we exclude them altogether.

There was a full and interesting discussion (with some 9 confreres noting that they had been received before the age of 18 without this having greatly disturbed them!)

The proposal was carried. (31 in favour, 1 abstention)

a) *Voting on proposals made to the Provincial Assembly*

These were two proposals made with regard to the planning of future Provincial Assemblies. Both these proposals came from St Joseph's, Blackrock and Fr Tom Davitt gave the rationale behind them.

I

Defeated (4 in favour, 22 against, 5 abstentions)

II

That the Provincial organise a series of talks
for the Province on a number of topics.

This was proposed by Fr Frank McMorrow and seconded by Fr Joseph Cunningham.

Fr Brian Moore indicated that there will be four such talks in the course of the year 2009-2010

- a) Dr Alison Forrestal on Vincentian History (October)
- b) Dr Andrew O'Connell on Vocations Ministry
- c) Dr Lochlan Sofield on Priesthood & Ministry (February)
- d) Sr Evelyne Franc DC on Vincentian Spirituality (May)

This proposal was defeated

- a) A query was raised about the criteria used for the selection of proposals raised by the Domestic Assemblies for the Provincial Assembly.

This was answered by Fr Brian Moore; all proposals coming from the Domestic Assemblies were brought to the Provincial Assembly.

After the session the members of the Assembly joined in prayer, led by Fr John Gallagher, and were then joined by other confreres of the Province and some visitors to the Province for a celebratory meal.

Thursday 8th October 2009

The Theme of the Morning Session was ‘*Creative Fidelity to the Mission*’

The morning session began with prayer, led by Fr John Gallagher.

Fr Brian Moore gave brief updates on confreres of the Irish Province serving abroad; P Roche (Ss Cyril & Methodius), J Murphy (Chicago), J Loftus (China) and H Slowey, R Crowley & E Raftery (Kenya)

After prayer, there was a time a time for reflection and sharing, introduced by Sean Farrell. This morning’s work was based on and would develop the responses received from the Domestic Assemblies. Confreres were divided into smaller groups to discuss the themes;

- What have we learnt since the last Provincial Assembly?
- What challenges us?
- What gives us energy?
- Where do we need to grow and change?

In plenary session, they then gave brief reports from the groups: these reports will be used for reflection and action by the Provincial Council in the coming months. (Appendix)

Following the break, the election for delegate and substitute delegate to the General Assembly took place.

Fr Eugene Curran was elected delegate on the third count.

Fr Michael McCullagh was elected substitute delegate on the second count.

When the elections had taken place, the Visitor, Fr Brian Moore, again addressed the Assembly. He noted, with thanks, how well all had participated and how creative the process had been. He regretted that, in fact, there had not been time for an ‘open session’ but promised that this would take place at the annual AGM in the Autumn. He assured the Assembly that the Provincial Council would take cognisance of all that had unfolded during this meeting and he thanked all those who had prepared for, facilitated and moderated this Assembly.

With the consent of the Assembly, he declared the 2009 Provincial Assembly closed.

There followed a common Eucharist and a meal at which we were joined by some other confreres of the Province who had not been able to join the celebration on the previous night.

Appendix

Reports from the discussion groups on the themes;

- What have we learnt since the last Provincial Assembly?
- What challenges us?
- What gives us energy?
- Where do we need to grow and change?

Group 1

There is a greater acceptance of our situation

We have become more humble

There is less anxiety and greater calm

There is a recognition that all is in God's hands

There is the hope of the Holy Saturday waiting

Appointments are stimulating

We depend on others

Expending energy is, itself, energising

People have extolled the contribution of priests (CM) in education in Ireland

The use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Have we become more effective since we have had to step back from Administration?

Have we come to understand Leadership in a new way?

There is satisfaction in ministry; to the homeless, the prisoners, the young

The significance of All Hallows and the role of theology in the programmes there

Our Catholic identity has become more deliberate

The ecumenical appeal of St Vincent

We have come to affirm and encourage others in mission – and let them free

Group 2

We see small seeds of collaborative mission and ministry

We need to meet felt needs... seen in yesterday's presentations

People are hungry for God

We need networking and solidarity in ministry

We need a common ownership of the work of evangelisation

Group 3

Energy seen in the links between Vincentian Lay Missionaries and our Schools and the University in Galway and the Travellers

The Castleknock Deaf Project for Ethiopia

We have learnt that the Vincentian Charism is not our sole possession; we share it with others

The Vincentian Charism does not require us but we do contribute to it in a unique way

Young people give us life and hope; they enthuse us as we seek to enthuse them

Don't confuse hope with resignation

There is a high level of holiness and goodness among the confreres of the Province

God does, and will, act in his own way and time

The Holy Saturday experience; it leads to hope, though perhaps not to optimism

Group 4

There was enthusiasm and energy in those who spoke to us yesterday; they show that we have 'got something right'

We are moving from 'fossil fuel' to 'renewable energy'

We are expanding in new and unforeseen ways; the Spirit is working

Our Constitutions are a source of energy.

We seek to be, and are, men of holiness and prayer; we need to be mystics

The quality of community life is good; do we need to evaluate if further

Group 5

We need to be honest about how long houses (and we ourselves) can survive

We get energy from confreres from other provinces who join us; might we seek more?

We are more linked with the European Provinces than in the past; might we seek closer links?

We have focussed our mission; do we need to work on this more?

Vocations bring life; have we done all we might? Is our identity clear?

Provincial Assembly 2009

Brian Moore CM

6th October 2009

Thank you for coming to Emmaus Retreat & Conference Centre for our Provincial Assembly of 2009. Unfortunately, All Hallows College is not available for these dates.

Our gathering here is our Provincial preparation for the 41st General Assembly of the Congregation, which will be held in Paris from June 28th – July 16th, 2010. The motto of our General Assembly is:

“Creative Fidelity to the Mission”

and the Theme of the Assembly will be:

Faithful to the Gospel... attentive to the signs of the times...

open up new ways and use new means.

...remain in a continued state of renewal.

This is a challenging theme in the context of the community profile of the Province, the situation of the Church in Ireland and the UK and the uncertainty, the fear and the anger that is growing in society with the recession and the apparent void of political leadership.

We are not here for a “wake-keeping” on the diminishment of the Province, or of the Church or of the prosperity and growth of our society, but to seek creative ways, to open up new ways and use new means to respond to both our existing ministries and to emerging needs in society.

Our gathering is small in number. Since our last Assembly we have lost 12 confreres, this year losing Eamonn Cowan, Myles Rearden, Eugene Sweeney and Desmond MacMorrow. Myles was a member of the Preparatory Commission for this Assembly. May the Lord of the Harvest acknowledge and reward them for their years of ministry in the Community.

The care of our aged and ill members is a blessing and a challenge. It is my own wish that ill confreres could stay in our houses, with care staff, until they are in need of regular nursing care.

We then try to place confreres in a setting where there is a regular prayer life and the opportunity to celebrate the Eucharist. We remember during these days our confreres needing that nursing care at present:

- Tom Woods and Sean Johnston in Rickard House
- Brian Mullan and Tony Clune in Newpark Care Centre
- Hugh Murnaghan and Sam Clyne in Sacred Heart Residence
- Denis Collins temporarily in Belmont Nursing Home.

Some of these confreres will be with us for part of the day tomorrow.

We also acknowledge the need to create and adapt community buildings to facilitate a better quality of life, through ease of access without and within, *en suite* adaptations and disability awareness: to this end work has taken place and continues to do so in St Paul's, Castleknock and St Peter's.

We have a fulltime carer based in St Paul's but also with responsibility for the interests of confreres in Rickard House, Sacred Heart Residence and Newpark Care Centre. His name is Mannix Kearney and you may get the opportunity to meet him tomorrow.

Our commitment to each other is best shown in the care and interest we continue to show to our sick/housebound confreres. I know many of you do that frequently. The value of individual visits cannot be overrated. They are often the best medicine for confreres – a tangible sense that out of sight is not out of mind. Postcards and letters are welcome symbols of remembrance also. Where possible, invitations to events are always welcome and I am happy to report that Sean, Jim and Con were able to travel to Lourdes recently.

I wish to extend my profound thanks to Aidan Galvin for the personal care he extends to the confreres and for co-ordinating hospital and doctor visits and the work of the care assistants.

The past year was a traumatic one for the Church, especially in Ireland, with the findings of the Ryan Report on Child Sexual Abuse. One felt deeply the pain of the victims and the life-long damage done to their lives.

Equally, many religious that have given a lifetime of service in education, hospital care and child care feel that all the good that was done appears to be forgotten. These religious are disillusioned and disheartened. They need our support and ministry to rediscover their Gospel love and renew their great virtues of compassion and care.

The Archdiocese of Dublin is awaiting the publication of the Report of the Commission set up to enquire into child abuse in the Diocese. This report is delayed for legal reasons. I don't know if any Vincentian will feature in this report. The challenge to us going forward is to have best practice of child safeguarding in all our ministries and in handling allegations according to the guidelines of "Safeguarding Children."

There are allegations against confreres that are now deceased. Two cases have had a monetary settlement and other cases are in a legal process. I wish to thank Fr Desmond Beirne for the work he did when he was the Designated Liaison Person. Fr Paschal Scallion is now the designated person for the Vincentians in Ireland and Fr Fergus Kelly is the designated person in the UK.

This evening Sr Colette Stevenson of the National Board for Safeguarding Child in the Catholic Church will speak to us on the implementation of best practice that we as a Congregation have signed up to in accepting the guidelines of this National Board.

The Church in Ireland is in an 'exile' experience. The certainties of the past are left behind and there is a feeling of alienation in the present. Therefore we are invited to rediscover our calling in the light of the needs of our society today. It is a time to be humble, to show the compassion of Jesus to all, to identify with the poor Christ. We await a renewed hope in the resurrection, as Moltman stated, "*hope lies precisely at the place and time where we can no longer see any future ahead of us.*" Our hope gives us our future as we continue our own Provincial mission and share in the mission of the Congregation worldwide.

Our Assembly encourages us to reflect upon three aspects of our Vincentian life:

1) Our calling as Vincentians:

we come to our calling with our own uniqueness, our own gift of faith as the foundations for our growth in the spirit of the Gospel, the way of St Vincent de Paul and the Constitutions and Statutes of our Congregation today. Last Friday saw an aspirant coming to live in our community at Iona Drive. This is a sign of hope. It is also a challenge to each local community. Should an aspirant join us what will we offer in terms of prayer life, community life and apostolic ministry? Will we offer a meaningful and challenging life?

2) We are called to live in community;

a community where we can share faith, apostolic experience and vision. It is where we journey together as 'dear friends.' Community is also where we express our challenges, our loneliness and our hopes. If at present we do not have that level of trust in each other, can we begin? If we can begin to share faith, share ideas for homilies we can take that further step of sharing our hopes and our struggles.

3) Apostolic Activities:

I thank each of you and your local communities for your apostolic activities in a rapidly changing society. Again, we are called to be creative, to collaborate with others, to share the administrative burden. Also, we need to safeguard our own health, giving ourselves some time off work and allowing ourselves to be creative with that time. Tomorrow we will have presentations on some of the ministries of the Province.

As part of our Constitutions each local community is requested to draw up a community plan. This Plan is our expressed commitment to each other as Vincentians, to our lived life in community, to our apostolate and to our use of goods. (Const 25. Statute 16)

Financial Report:

After a presentation on the financial situation of the Province, the Provincial continued:

Going forward, the main areas likely to affect us in the coming 12 months are:

- 1) Government cutbacks already in place and likely after the next budget
- 2) Significant increases in VHI and BUPA premiums
- 3) Importance of dividend and interest receipts being maintained
- 4) Changes in the sterling/euro exchange rates

As a Province we are beginning the Jubilee Year of the 350th anniversaries of the deaths of St Vincent and St Louise. I invite each community or groups of nearby houses to have some celebration with their co-workers, collaborators and friends to celebrate this occasion. The Provincial Council is meeting with the Provincial Council of the Daughters in Ireland on October 22nd to arrange some events to mark this significant moment in our history.

Over the next 12 months beginning from this October, the Heritage Commission is forwarding to all confreres of the Congregation a monthly reflection on aspects of Vincentian life. I invite each local community to set aside some time to share these reflections.

We begin this Jubilee Year asking the intercession of St Vincent and St Louise to guide us, to inspire our deliberations and to grant us the

strength to live out the calling that God has given us in the Vincentian Community.

I now declare the Provincial Assembly of the Province of Ireland open.

Parish

Geraldine Mallon Murphy

When Father Stephen asked me to speak at this Assembly, I was initially very complimented. However, this pleasant feeling quickly gave way to a dawning realisation of the enormity of the task and of my own shortcomings. In desperation, I took a leaf out of De Valera's book and looked into my own heart. What follows here then is an attempt to formulate a notion of *parish*, and more especially *parish* in the Vincentian mode, based on personal experience.

Because I managed to live over 40 years of my life without ever having any meaningful sense of *parish*, I am inclined to suspect that this may be the norm for a great many people. It is possible, eminently possible, to go up and down to Mass, receive the sacraments on a regular basis, take one's children to church in due course as well, contribute to the upkeep of the clergy and the church and yet not have any sense at all of belonging to a *parish*. Does that seem strange? Well, it has been my experience. You have the worship, but you haven't any sense of neighbour. You are alone. It should be said in that context as well, that if you have no sense of belonging, then it matters little which church you attend, be it in your own parish or elsewhere.

Coming to a sense of belonging

Only when we decided as a family that we would give our allegiance to one church – and that St Vincent's – did things begin to change, as we began to acquire a growing familiarity with the church landscape, that is to say, with the priests and the people. Becoming a real member of a parish takes time and an awful lot depends on the welcome. A major step in the integration process is when one is approached by someone with an invitation to join some parish group or take on one of the lay ministries. This is a hugely important milestone, because the outsider feels that he or she is being drawn over a threshold into the fabric of the parish. The value of that initial invitation cannot be overestimated, even if the invitation is not taken up. A seed has been sown. Strange as it may seem, despite the volumes of church rhetoric devoted to the proclamation of the unique worth of every individual human being, a great many people do not really believe it, or at least feel that, whatever about someone else, they are not fit or suitable for a role in the church. To be asked, therefore, can mean a great deal.

Viewed from the outside, a parish can seem a closed unit, full of groups and societies, all of which seem to have a clearly defined role,

a secure place in this universe, a purpose and an identity, which render them inaccessible to the person on the margins. How to break into this hallowed circle is a mystery, that is if the outsider gets as far as considering himself a candidate in the first place. Imagine then the surprise and delight that an overture from a member of the inner circle so to speak, can produce. It is so very nice to be considered worthy of being asked.

The Parish Pastoral Council can be a similar experience. Viewed from the outside, parishioners can be very hazy as to its composition or indeed its function. It can easily be perceived as a parish group which is not for them, for whatever reason. It can even be seen as an élite. Having thus closed one's mind, the doings of the Council become remote and lacking in relevance. This in turn can make the notices in the weekly bulletin largely meaningless. Thus the excluded feeling continues. And to be that outsider is to be poor and needy. This is a rather depressing picture of what going to church represents to many people today, especially at a time when all the talk is about lay involvement. Worse than that, it is an evocation of parish as failure and it is a far cry surely from the Vine and the branches.

The Parish in Sunday's Well

So, back to St Vincent's. At the risk of leaving myself open to the accusation of myopia or rose-tinted spectacles, I have to give our Vincentian parish in Cork some accolades. Having failed for so long to buy into a parish community, I can truthfully say that over these last couple of decades, we have come, as a family, to experience that elusive thing *a sense of parish*. We got the invitations, we were pulled in and welcomed. Mulling over this since Father Stephen's phone-call, I have slowly come to the conclusion that it has much to do with the Vincentian ethos.

This is difficult terrain that I am entering now, and I do not presume to be able to supply comprehensive definitions or blueprints. Just parish, Vincentian-style, as I know it. And I must preface this by saying that we have all the usual warts in the parish too: the grumbling and the criticism, even the odd row. But I don't see that as a contradiction – just human nature I'm afraid.

So to the Vincentian ethos. I see this as a kind of fabric composed of many strands, some of them of more significance than others, some big, some small, but all important. In no particular order these are:

- the fact that there is an Order of priests living in community;
- the fact of the proximity of the Daughters of Charity and the presence of the parish Sister – or, on occasion, Sisters;
- The ever-present dimension of the Vincentian ideal, which is

- constantly held up as an aspiration;
- A deep spiritual dimension, helped by beautiful liturgies and wonderful music;
- The openness to lay involvement and a real appreciation of lay contribution;
- a sense of history associated with the church building and with the Vincentian Order, which imbues the parish and gives people both a sense of pride and of continuity;
- a sense of concern for the well-being of each parishioner which permeates the fabric of the parish;
- a real affection for the priests and Sisters;
- the existence of several very active groups who are intensely loyal to the parish, even if they do not always pull together!
- a welcoming, vibrant Parish Office;
- a well-functioning Parish Pastoral Council;
- a hugely successful weekly coffee-morning;
- a weekly parish bulletin with a good circulation.

All of these factors seem to contribute in different ways to the Vincentian package.

Community and Collegiality; Vincentian mission

Taking some of these strands separately, let's look at the notion of the priests as a community. It is hard to quantify this, but there seems to be a very positive sense of collegiality if you like, stemming from the fact that we have our small group of priests living in community. It seems to give a lead, show us a way which we can follow in relation to each other. Maybe it's effective because it is not remote, but rather right beside us and accessible. The parishioners also love to see other Vincentian priests coming on holiday to St Vincent's – the extended Vincentian family, if you like. The community of priests has a different feeling from the secular set-up, within which many of the parish priests now live, quite separately from their curates. When you add the feminine dimension, in the form of the Daughters of Charity who give us our Parish Sister, you have a seriously enriching nucleus in the parish. At any rate, there has always been a perception in the parish that the presence of the Vincentian community makes us special.

Any parish which has the luxury of a Parish Sister is to be envied. She can do so much good. She can mediate in difficult situations where the intervention of a man, albeit a man of God, might be less welcome. She can be the agent of invitation I mentioned earlier. She can work her way into homes, where people are not so receptive to visits from their priests, and certainly not from the laity. There are just so many things she can

do, and in so doing, she can be an inspiration to parishioners. Seeing how effective a Parish Sister can be, I feel the Church is making another mistake in not having female deacons. But there you go. At any rate, our Parish Sisters do a great deal towards keeping the Vincentian ideal before us, as much by example as anything else. In Cork, apart from all her other duties, our Sister leads the Baptismal Team. This is a vital area, of course, with the constant attack on the sacraments for commercial purposes. The Baptismal Team engages with the new parents, and tries to prepare them for their baby's christening by giving them an awareness of the awesomeness and beauty of this God-given sacrament. There is a crying need for this preparation in the first instance. It also offers the possibility of cementing ties with the church and the parish, leading to a long-term involvement. This is a vital crusade, as we have all sorts of difficulties in the area of trying to get young parents to come to church and bring their children. We hope it will be the initiation of a process leading to the sacraments of Penance, the Eucharist and later Confirmation. Altogether, it is a hugely important ministry, in which, with the Parish Sister at the helm, lay members of the parish community are prepared to become involved. Much of our hope for the future lies here.

Gifts at the service of all

I mentioned the Coffee-Morning. This is an event which is central to parish life. It occurs each Tuesday morning after 10 o'clock Mass and is immensely popular. That doesn't mean, of course, that it is always thronged. On the contrary, there are days when there is only a handful. Yet many or few, it is always enjoyable. It affords a rich mix of old and not so old, (I hesitate to say young!), more and less educated, well-off and not so well-off. It does veer more towards the female, but it has its loyal male supporters as well. And of course, it provides an opportunity for the people to meet the priests socially. Sometimes the conversation is laboured, other times it is lively and interesting. But at all times, there is a wonderful sense of welcome. The ladies who organise it, put themselves out to set a very nice table each week and treat each parishioner as an honoured guest. They even do a bit of highways and byways canvassing in the church after Mass. What everybody present feels, without a doubt, is that sense of parish I mentioned earlier. Sometimes the occasion is harnessed for a special event. Last year we celebrated the birthdays of two marvellous old ladies, both living alone, both fully *compos mentis* and both turning 90 at around the same time!! There was a great feeling of joy that morning.

The importance of this kind of gathering in a parish resides, surely, in the positivity it generates, above and beyond the actual get-together.

It is the Spirit at work. There is a feeling of parish solidarity, a reaching out to each other, a camaraderie, a fellowship in the church to which we all belong. You take that with you when you leave and I am certain it bears fruit.

This activity also represents one type of lay involvement. The catering committee is a vital group in the parish and its services get called upon quite frequently. What is noticeable about them when they are at work preparing for some occasion, is the vibe: it is so positive. Hard work is no problem: table setting, food preparation, serving, washing endless dishes, none of it is a problem. They seem to do it with a heart and a half.

And again in these parish groups, there is a wide cross-section of people, of different social backgrounds and education, yet each person at ease with himself or herself, just happy to be involved.

Looking for a moment at the Parish Pastoral Council, it is indicative of something, I think, that St Vincent's was at the forefront of the movement towards bringing this new lay ministry into being. I know this because, when the diocese started pushing parishes into getting a Council or Assembly up and running, I discovered at the general meetings, that we were way ahead of most parishes. In some parishes it seems that the parish priest was the biggest difficulty, being unreceptive to anything smacking of innovation. We, on the other hand, had already gone through many stages of honing and developing our Council, in tune with the needs of the parish. Again, that is not to suggest that we are perfect, no, but rather that our priests were up for the change, ready to embrace a new vision of church. It is fair to say also, that, in the main, they are sincerely committed to giving the laity a meaningful role in the church of today. The result is a real feeling of collaboration between clergy and laity, a feeling of ownership, to use one of these buzzwords, and these are great feelings. Despite all these pluses, however, I have to admit that we often have difficulty recruiting new members to the Council. Indeed, it can be an uphill struggle. Nonetheless, it rolls on, we do our best and good things seem to happen. Has it made a difference? I think it is fair to say that it has. At the very least, it affords the parish priest a bedrock of support and advice, and relieves him of some of the burden of organising parish events and it provides a medium of communication for parishioners.

What I'm doing here is evoking a perception of parish, an ambiance, a positivity, all of which are hard to translate into concrete terms. If you were to visit a session of the Council, for example, you could be disappointed or even perplexed. You might say, *sure nothing much happens*. And it's true that lots of meetings are ordinary affairs, dealing with ordinary things. But you would be missing something: the mere

fact of attending the meeting brings its own benefit, of that I am in no doubt. Members gather, pray, think and talk together about parish affairs. There is a real desire to do good, to promote the parish and the welfare of its people. It may offer people a chance to bloom and to develop hitherto unsuspected talents and gifts. In other words, parish involvement blesses the participants as well as the parish.

Parish in action, I call this. It epitomises that Vincentian aspiration of support and concern for others. After all we are, each and everyone, poor and needy in our own way. The Vincentian ideal is usually perceived as outreach to the poor, but surely it is also *inreach* to the poor in the widest sense. That is how I perceive it in the context of parish. And by the way, one other detail I have noticed: there is a strong democratic dimension in parish activities, whereby people do not seem to begrudge others their particular gifts, but rather to take pleasure in seeing the job well done. And people are happy to receive as well as to give.

Conclusion

I have been selective in the areas I have discussed because of time constraints and there are many aspects of parish life which have not been mentioned. If I have seemed to leave the priests a bit to one side, I apologise. It goes without saying that they are at the heart of the parish, leaders, mentors and friends. I can assure you, the parish would not be the same without them!! They have brought us, by example as well as by guidance, to a deeper understanding of the Mass, the sacraments and the liturgy. It is from that central core that everything else emanates. They maintain an extremely high standard of preaching, weekdays as well as Sundays, never shirking the task or taking a day off. And their words are full of encouragement. There is nothing stale or perfunctory about them. They are a constant reminder to us of what service really means – that the purpose of each day is to serve God and serve others. I must admit that I am often taken aback by the extent of their selflessness. Maybe it's the same in other parishes, but this is what I have seen in St Vincent's. It is their lead which inspires the parishioners to do the things they do.

Our *Parish Vision* runs as follows:

*“We would like to see St Vincent’s
as an open, welcoming parish community,
where the love of Jesus is found and grows in our lives;
where all have an input,
giving a sense of joy and purpose in belonging.
We would like a parish that develops faith,
Encourages listening, shares and receives gifts and talents,
in a spirit of faith and love that reaches out to all.”*

The extent to which we are realising that vision is the extent, I think, to which we may be said to be a truly Vincentian parish.

Seeing New Shoots – Not Necessarily Green Shoots

Margarita Synnott

When Stephen asked me to speak to this gathering he said in his email that he wanted to “hear from those people who are involved in ministries which are associated with the province and which people have identified as being signs of new life for the church, collaborative, Vincentian etc.” I work on the *Pathways* programme with Eugene Curran in All Hallows and before I tell you more about that particular ministry I think I should say that right now I see the Church in Ireland in a state of both wandering in the desert and of waiting. I suspect that a theology of Holy Saturday may well help us in the Irish Church right now. During the Easter season I am often struck by how we slide over Holy Saturday, with little acknowledgement of what sort of day it might be, its ‘between-ness’, its ‘waiting-ness’, seldom acknowledged. Those of us involved in Church often make it a busy day of getting ready for the Vigil. And yet the mystery of Holy Saturday is at the heart of the Easter Mystery for me – in the descent of Jesus into Hell I see a Jesus who enters completely into a state of abandonment. The hope for me, of that abandonment, is that there is no place where my Lord and Saviour has not been – He has plumbed the depths, there is no depth that I can go to where Jesus has not been already, even though I may have absolutely no sense of His presence at the time. Thus, if the Irish Church is today in a place of low morale, abandoned by many, unsure and uncertain, perhaps we need to spend time in a Holy Saturday place, dwell in that place, know it, with the sure and certain hope of the Easter day which will come – I don’t know when, but I am sure that a new Church will come about.

So, back to what I do in All Hallows: *Pathways* is an adult faith formation programme, which has no academic entry requirements and indeed has no exams or required papers either. We are in our 25th year in *Pathways* in All Hallows – quite an achievement. *Pathways* began life entitled Lay Ministry and in the first twenty or so years classes averaged in the region of 55 people. In the early days those who attended *Pathways* were people who, in the main, were excited about their faith, involved in their parish and/or community, people looking for some nourishment for themselves while they ministered to others. The programme has a director, Eugene, a co-ordinator, me, and a further 7 people who, having completed the programme, work with us on a purely voluntary basis. As a committee we try to work collaboratively

and I think, that for the most part, we succeed.

This year we have 29 people in 1st year in All Hallows and 18 in 2nd year so you can see that our numbers are decreasing, at least in All Hallows. However, in the last 7 years or so under Eugene's direction and encouragement *Pathways* has developed as an outreach programme and it is currently running in Larne, Co Antrim, Naas, Co Kildare, Cork city and in two venues in the diocese of Clogher. All in all there are approximately 320 people doing *Pathways* at the moment.

And yet I still hesitate to call these numbers green shoots, I am unsure. I find that I encounter very different churches in our various venues. In Dublin many of those in our classes in the last few years are people who are, for the most part, disassociated from or dissatisfied with their church. They are disillusioned with the dichotomy they see between what the Church teaches and what the Church does. Many of them come from parishes where their priests are also disillusioned and disheartened and so they come to us because they miss what they had, are still seeking to discover God in their lives and perhaps because they have done the rounds of new age things and found them wanting. And then there are those who are hanging onto Church by the skin of their teeth. On our outreach programmes the percentage of such people is lower and many of those who come on the outreach *Pathways* come at the invitation of their local parish curate or because they have been involved in their parish for years with little or no ongoing formation. Those in the North of Ireland are emerging from "The Troubles" when they had no safe place in any sense. They often came from communities where they defined themselves as Catholics and yet they had little food for their souls. Now they come to *Pathways* and spend one day per month exploring subjects like their image of God, Sacraments, Eucharist and the Moral Life. But this basic theology is only part of what we do, the most important thing, to my mind, is that we try to do something which Vincentians do really well – we welcome people. We go out of our way to make people feel that they are appreciated and welcomed even if they

- don't go to Mass
- don't know what they believe or
- don't know why they have come.

Indeed when we run *Pathways* in venues outside All Hallows we have to work even harder to make people feel welcome. That welcome, that sense of being accepted just as they are, is one of the recurring things which people mention when they evaluate the two years they spend in *Pathways*. Such a welcome requires work, working at learning names, remembering people's concerns, sending a card when someone is ill,

but it pays off – it pays off in terms of the self confidence which builds in people who feel affirmed and appreciated. Accepting people where they are leaves them free to ask questions, to disclose their worries and their struggles with faith and faith issues. These questions are the green shoots which I see today – people leaving *Pathways* have discovered a new confidence in themselves, in their ability to question not just their faith but to also question those who are in authority in the Church.

Pathways is certainly Vincentian in the way that it takes people where they are, doesn't set out to change them but tries to give them a safe place within which to question their own faith commitment. Although they may not put theological language on where they are, many of our participants seem to me, to be in the desert, in a waiting place and whether or not they go on to be the people who will renew or rebuild the Irish Church is, for the most part, a moot point. For my part I see my role as one in which I stand alongside our *Pathways* people in this waiting place. This programme works because it allows adults to be adult, it doesn't use a seminary model but encourages the participants to take responsibility for their own faith formation. When they leave *Pathways* some go on to formal study of theology, others look for skills training that they put at the service of their parish and/or community, others thank us for what they have received and continue their search for God and belief. Whatever they do most of them have changed in some way, perhaps they appreciate that they are not the only one feeling the way they do about God and Church, perhaps their horizons have been broadened, perhaps they have come to believe that they really are beloved sons and daughters of God and perhaps, in time to come they will be the people who will, with others, help to bring forth a new, renewed, revitalised Church; one which I might not see but which I am sure will be born.

On Re-Reading Calvet's 'Louise De Marillac'

Tom Davitt CM

Mgr Jean Calvet's book was published in French in 1958 and the English translation followed the next year. I read the English translation around that time but never re-read either it or the original until much later, when preparing a talk based on it.

I want to draw attention to some defects which are in the original, and then some which are peculiar to the English translation.

Straight off I must say that the biggest defect of both the original French and the English translation is that Calvet hardly ever gives a reference to the source of the quotations he uses. This is very annoying if we want to see the quotation in its full context, or to know the date of the letter, or sometimes even to know to whom it was written.

Calvet's *Saint Vincent de Paul* was published in Paris in 1948 and he had his second book, *Louise de Marillac par Elle-même: Portrait*, finished that same year, but it was not published until ten years later, before the 1961 or 1983 editions of her letters and writings were available to him. This means that he had inaccurate dates of some letters and documents and so sometimes a quotation which he uses to show a development from an earlier one is, in fact, itself earlier than the other.

When we come to the English translation we see that all these defects are, naturally enough, still present, but in addition there are some new ones. The translator has omitted some material, including *by Herself* from the title. Perhaps he thought that the readership of the translation did not need everything that the French readers were given; this is a problem facing all translators. There are also what seem to me to be somewhat inaccurate translations of some words or expressions. I would therefore advise anyone who can read French to make use of the original edition, but must also say that those who read the English translation are not going to miss very much by not reading the French, apart from the translator's inexplicable omission of Calvet's *Note Préliminaire*. Either version will certainly give you an adequate picture of Louise.

I have sometimes heard that the ten-year delay in publishing the book on Louise was because Calvet explicitly stated that she was illegitimate, even quoting her father's documentary statement of the fact. The story seemed to be that there were two bodies of opinion, one for and one against, but I never could unravel who was in each camp. Allied with this is the story that Sisters were in some way dissuaded from reading

the English translation when it came out in 1959. I have often asked about this at retreats in both provinces, but I never could get a clear answer. What is a fact, though, is that shortly after its publication I noticed that a rather surprising number of copies of the book appeared in secondhand bookshops!

I mentioned above that I wrote the original version of this article, as a talk, immediately after re-reading the book, so that it would precisely justify the title, and not suffer from intrusive memories of other authors' ideas.

In a two-and-a-half page *Note Préliminaire*, which is not in the English translation, Calvet makes three points which are very important. First, what he is giving is a portrait and not a life. This is an important distinction; he is trying to show what she was like rather than what she did. Second, he regards the fact that she was illegitimate as having had a great effect on her character. He calls his work a psychological meditation on a woman who suffered more than most, and yet who brought into being a work of fantastic importance which is still thriving. Third, he wants to bring her out from under the shadow of St Vincent and show her own originality and personal greatness.

The fact that she was a member of the Marillac family is important, as it meant she was in contact with the upper levels of French society and could use such contacts for the benefit of her work. At the very end of the book Calvet sums this up in an imaginative way by saying that the poor would probably feel like kissing Louise's hand because she was of the nobility, whereas they would probably want to shake Vincent's.

Being a member of that family also meant that she was beautiful, something which does not come out in the usual portraits of her. However, in 1974 a book called *Louise de Marillac, ou la Passion du Pauvre* by a Sœur Vincent was published in Paris. On the back cover of this book there is a reproduction of a portrait of Louise as a young woman. It does not say where the original portrait is. I think that prayer-book size copies of this used to be available in the rue du Bac, but I have not seen one for a very long time. It is a pity that it is no longer available. I think that maybe some doubts were cast on its being Louise.

Her father was Louis de Marillac, and Louise was born in 1591 a couple of years after the death of his first wife and three and a half years before his second marriage. There is no indication at all who her mother was, but she probably was a servant in the Marillac household. The important point is that Louis publicly acknowledged Louise as his daughter, though by law she could not inherit from him. However, he made good financial provision for her, drawn up in proper legal fashion. He also saw to her education because he could not keep her on in his house after his second marriage. He sent her to the royal convent in

Poissy, where he had an aunt in the Dominican community. This was a school attended by girls from the best families in France, and Louise received there an excellent education. Her grand-aunt was mentioned in a book about illustrious ladies of the day, as someone who knew Latin and Greek and could write elegant French verse. This nun found Louise to be an excellent pupil with exceptional gifts and refined taste. She learnt how to paint, and acquired enough Latin to read the scriptures in that language.

Her father died in 1604 when she was thirteen. Though there is no evidence for saying so, this is probably when she left the Dominican school. Calvet suggests that with her father dead no one else was prepared to pay the fees. With the financial arrangements made by her father she had enough to live on, though not at the level she would have had had she been legitimate. Someone, not identified by Calvet, made arrangements for her to lodge with a poor woman who took in a few girls of that age. He suggests, while admitting he has no evidence whatsoever for saying so, that this woman might well have been her mother. She lived there until her marriage in 1613, at the age of twenty-two.

We have very little information about her life in the ten years from 1604 to 1613. Some of her surviving paintings probably date from that period. We know, from what she herself said later, that she read a lot, including the works of the 16th century Spanish Dominican, Luis de Grenada, and the *Imitation of Christ*. She went to hear sermons by Capuchin and Jesuit preachers, and she told Sister Marguerite Chetif later on that she had practised meditation since her childhood.

Because of her being kept at a distance from her relations she got the idea that her feelings of isolation and abandonment would be healed by becoming a nun. She refers later on to what she called a vow to enter a religious order, though there does not in fact seem to have been any formal vow as such. She felt attracted to the Poor Clares and sought advice from the famous Capuchin Fr Honoré de Champigny, a friend of her uncle. He advised her that her fragile health would not stand up to the hard life of a Poor Clare, but told her that he thought God had some other plan for her.

With the religious life closed to her the obvious alternative was marriage. She said later that she married to please her relations. Calvet asks: what relations? He thinks it most likely that it was female relations, as they would have a better understanding of her predicament. Even though she was outside the Marillac family circle the fact that her father was a Marillac still counted for something in looking for a husband for her, and again Calvet thinks the female relations made the selection. The chosen man was Antoine le Gras, a secretary in the royal household,

and the marriage contract, which still survives, was drawn up in the presence of several of her Marillac relations; in it it is specifically stated that she is the illegitimate daughter of Louis de Marillac.

Calvet does not give the precise date of the wedding, so I want to depart from him for a moment. The wedding took place in Paris, in the church of Saints Gervais & Protais, on 5 February 1613, and there is an extraordinary coincidence here which is interesting, though of absolutely no significance. That same day, in that same church, was baptised René Alméras, a nephew of Madame Goussault. Later Louise would be associated with both of them, since Mme Goussault was to become a leading Lady of Charity and her nephew would succeed Vincent as Superior General.

In the years after her marriage she continued her interest in matters spiritual, and she obtained permission for herself and her husband to read the bible in French. This was a privilege which was quite unusual for lay people at the time. Her uncle, Michel de Marillac, held high offices in the government but got involved in 1630 in a plot against Richelieu and for just one day was the cardinal's successor as Prime Minister, but Richelieu made a come-back and Marillac was imprisoned. In prison he translated the *Imitation of Christ* into French. Earlier on he had been one of those, with Bérulle and Mme Acarie, who brought the first Carmelite nuns into France from Spain. Calvet quotes parts of two letters from him to Louise, in 1620 and 1621, that is, in the seventh and eighth years of her marriage. In the first he writes that God is not necessarily involved in our own plans and ideas, but that He is to be found by those who search to see how he is revealing himself and that such people are content to await God's revelation of himself without expecting that it should be in any particular way. A person should not wish to prescribe to God how He should deal with him. The second letter is also on being receptive to God's revelation of Himself in everyday affairs, and the necessity of humbly recognising one's dependence on Him.

At this point it is necessary to point out that Calvet, through not having available an accurate edition of her writings, has wrongly dated some of the documents he quotes, thus placing them in the wrong order. The correct order of all the quotations he uses here is as follows: 1620 and 1621 the letters from Louis de Marillac; 1623, her vow of widowhood; 1624 the letter from Bishop Camus; 1625 the letter from Mother Catherine de Beaumont.

In the early 1620s her husband became seriously ill. She began to think this was a punishment from God for her because she had not kept her vow to enter a religious order. She wondered whether she should abandon her sick husband and her son, who was about ten at the time,

and in that way keep the spirit of the vow. A note which she made, dated on the feast of St Monica 1623, has survived (At that time the feast was 4 May, and not 27 August as at present). In this note she says that just before Ascension Thursday that year God gave her the grace to make a vow of widowhood, should her husband die. On Pentecost Sunday, while she was at Mass in the church of St Nicolas-des-Champs in Paris, her parish church, God enlightened her that she should stay with her husband, and that later on she would be involved in a vowed life of helping others. She realised that accepting the existence of God there was no reason for any of her other doubts. She regarded this grace as coming through the intercession of Francis de Sales, who had died three years previously.

In January the following year, 1624, she wrote to Jean-Pierre Camus, bishop of Belley, who was a nephew of her father's second wife. He wrote her a very sympathetic letter about her husband's illness. He tells her it is her cross, and that she is well able to bear it and needs neither spiritual books nor advice, and that God will see to it that she has the strength to bear it. He also tells her that the Holy Year, the Jubilee, is supposed to be a period of joy, not just a chance of another general confession. That last point leads Calvet to say that she was on the dangerous slippery slope of too much self-questioning and self-analysis, and of under-estimating herself.

The following year, 1625, she consulted Mother Catherine de Beaumont, prioress of the Visitation monastery in Paris; the month is not indicated. Mother Catherine advised her not to try to discover the "reason" for her husband's illness, but to accept it as a fact, and as being part of God's will for her, and then to settle down to caring for the sick man. Antoine le Gras died later that year, on 21 December.

In the letter from Mother Catherine there is a short sentence: "No, I have no news at all of Fr Vincent". This means that at some date before that letter was written in 1625 Louise and Vincent had met. Vincent was, of course, superior of the Visitation nuns, he and Louise lived in the same section of Paris, and through Francis de Sales he was known to Bishop Camus, so they could have come into contact in any of these ways. Calvet suggests that when Camus had to leave Paris to reside in his diocese he handed over direction of Louise to Vincent. Camus is buried in the chapel of the Laënnec Hospital, across the rue de Sèvres from the Vincentian mother-house. The hospital is now closed but I have been told that one may still visit the chapel. In the experience which she had in St Nicolas-des-Champs at Pentecost 1623 she understood that God would give her a director, whom in some sense she saw and did not like. I think it is quite likely that, as they both lived in the same area of the city, she had seen him in the street, and his appearance did not

please her. She probably had had the curiosity to try to find out who this priest was. When she eventually was put in contact with her new director she recognised that he was the man in question.

Calvet regards the meeting of these two as something of incalculable importance in the history of the world, mainly for two reasons: it brought about the phenomenon of a non-cloistered congregation of women engaged in active work for the poor, and through that drew attention to the need for such work.

Vincent did not want to take on the direction of this woman, or of anyone else, on the grounds that it would divert him from his primary work as a missionary, and Louise felt no attraction whatever for going to him for direction, as he was from a different social background to herself, Francis de Sales and Jean-Pierre Camus. Calvet then goes on to make the point that the two of them soon came to realise that each of them had need of the other, though detailed clarification of that need came only gradually over the years. He says Vincent held her back, induced moderation and calmed her down; he brought on to the supernatural level the policy of "wait and see". He uses the three English words in his French original. She needed self-discipline in order to deal with her lack of patience, to recognise her mistakes and to identify what was causing them.

The earliest surviving letter from Vincent to her is dated 30 October 1626, and the earliest from her to him is dated 5 June 1627, so for the few years before that we have to rely on other sources for documentary information about their relationship. The letter from Mother Catherine de Beaumont shows that Louise had been asking for news of Vincent, probably away on a mission. That letter was from an un-recorded date in 1625. On 26 July 1625 Camus wrote to her, and it looks as though she had also been on to him, and probably around the same time. Camus tells her that she is too attached to her directors and relies too much on them, and says that as soon as Fr Vincent is away she gets all upset. He goes on to say that one must see God in one's director, but sometimes one must look directly at God without the intermediary of a director. The quotation from the letter which Calvet gives ends up by saying that Camus is sorry to see her showing these weaknesses, as he knows she can see clearly and has the necessary strength. He also says that he is not reluctant to be her director because he learns more from her than she does from him; that is an interesting statement from such a man as early in her life as 1625.

One of the problems which Vincent had to deal with in directing Louise was her attitude to her son, Michel. He was born in 1613, so that at the time Vincent first met her Michel was about twelve years old. He clearly became a difficult teenager and caused his mother a lot of

worry, though she seems to have worried far more than was called for. In a letter from the late 1630s, quoted by Calvet, Vincent tells her she is over-doing motherly affection; at that stage Michel was in his early twenties. In a second letter, later but undated, Vincent wrote:

I have never seen a mother so much a mother as you; you are hardly a woman at all in anything else. (I 584).

These two letters are quoted on page 50 of the English edition. Two things need to be said; first, in both the French and English editions Calvet runs the two quotations together, as though they were from the same letter, which is misleading. But far more misleading is the fact that the English translator misses the whole point of Vincent's second remark and translates it wrongly. He renders it: "In no other respect are you so much a woman as in this", when it should be almost the exact opposite: "You are hardly a woman at all in anything else".

One of the things which Vincent wanted to break her from was her over-loaded spiritual timetable, which she had made out for herself, with all sorts of devotions specified for almost every quarter of an hour. As a result of this programme she used to get scruples about missing out on any detail of it. He tells her to stop over-loading herself with such devotions, and to stop worrying about missing out on any of them. She is to take things quietly and to be joyful, something she certainly was not at that time. He tells her she must be available to others. Vincent has been waiting for some situation to arise which would clearly indicate just how this was to be. Eventually she herself put her finger on it. She knew that every mission conducted by Vincent or his priests involved setting up confraternities of charity. She wondered how they subsequently got on, and saw the need for someone to visit them and see. Vincent agreed that she was the one to undertake this. It was what both had been groping towards, and now they saw clearly.

She spent four years, 1629-1633, in a series of journeys around the charities which had been founded during the missions. This idea of touring the countryside visiting the charities was quite a novel one, and it is interesting that neither Louise nor Vincent thought her poor health a reason for not undertaking it. Experience soon showed her what was practical for her and what was not, and she was able to keep within the limits which prudence dictated with regard to her health. Naturally enough she encountered difficulties with people, from bishops on downwards, and Vincent advised her to explain simply and clearly what she was doing, and if her explanations were not accepted she was to move on somewhere else, without any further attempts to put her case.

During these tours she gradually came to see the direction her life

could take. Her practical common-sense came into play as she visited charity after charity and realised that for very many people the initial goodwill soon wore off and the charities' effectiveness diminished. It soon became clear to her that they could survive in doing their work only if they were carried on by persons working full-time in them. This realisation led to her bringing together four or five young women in her house on 29 November 1633.

Gradually the number expanded, but she always went for country girls rather than city ones, as she thought city girls would not be able for the work. Good health was of prime importance, and also good humour, and she also steered clear of country girls who just wanted to come to Paris for a change. Finally, it also soon became clear that these girls or young women would have to live in small communities together, rather than as individuals, if they were to persevere and if the work was to get done. She also had them taught reading and writing so that they in turn could teach the girls of the neighbourhood where they would eventually work. Calvet also makes the point that Louise kept her eyes open for the more talented girls who would be capable of profiting from training in nursing care, and that the training which they received in this area was good by 17th century standards.

On the vigil of Pentecost 1642 (though Calvet says, wrongly, 1644) the ceiling of the conference-room in the mother-house fell, just after Louise and other sisters had left the room. She and Vincent both regarded the fact that all escaped unhurt as a special intervention of Providence, and she made a link between Pentecost of 1623, when she had been specially enlightened by God, and this Pentecost of 1642 when he protected her in this special way. Calvet regards this as a sort of turning-point in her life, when, because of the non-availability of Vincent, she had to take more responsibility both for her community and her own spiritual life.

With regard to the formation of the members of her community Calvet says that at the start, because of the pressing needs, she was content that they should be good Christians, with a competence in basic nursing. Later she saw that her task was to bring them further along the path of holiness. For this reason it was written into all the contracts which were made with various bodies that the Sisters had the morning hours from 4 to 6 to themselves, for prayer and other community exercises. After that they were available for their work for the sick and poor. Calvet sees Louise as blending the roles of both leader and mother, and that her principal means of carrying out this double role was by letter-writing.

He singles out some points from her spiritual direction by means of letters. The sisters are to show tenderness in their work, which is an

element of real robust charity. It is contrasted with the sort of softness which is a defect. Reason and understanding must guide affairs, but the heart, that is, sensitivity and feelings, must be involved in all exercise of authority.

Louise was a well educated woman, with a high degree of intelligence and a well-developed sense of artistic values. She believed firmly that human beings were created to use their intelligence and other gifts to come to, and develop, their knowledge of God. She regarded ignorance as something which contradicted the whole purpose of a human person's existence. Calvet makes the very interesting point that when Vincent became aware of what had happened in country areas devastated by the wars he was struck by the material poverty of the people; Louise, on the other hand, when she made her tours through the country she was struck by the people's ignorance. She was particularly struck by the fact that almost everywhere young girls were not taught to read. She felt that this deprived them of an important means of learning more about God. When she visited the Charities she always tried to find someone who could teach reading, and she soon came to realise that this would have to be organised on a systematic basis. In 1641 she petitioned the clergy of Notre Dame, in Paris, and was granted permission to start a primary school for girls in the parish where she lived. After that start she was able to repeat her initiative in other towns. Vincent was enthusiastic about this venture and, typically enough, sought to get some uniform approach to the problem; he advised that the Sisters in Paris should learn about schooling from the Ursulines, the experts. She herself wrote a catechism for the sort of girls she was aiming to reach, and her concern was to use words which would be understood by such girls. She succeeded in this, both in what she wrote and in what she said when she was dealing with such girls.

She also knew the right words and style for dealing with the ladies of the nobility and upper classes in Paris; after all, she was one of them. They recognised this and felt no problem in going to her for spiritual direction and even making retreats under her. They accepted that she was not a nun, and that they could relate to her in a way that they could not with a cloistered woman. This idea of her giving retreats and spiritual direction was rather novel, yet Vincent encouraged her in this ministry. When Louise was dying it was one of these ladies, the Duchess of Ventadour, who came to be with her in her final hours.

At this stage in the book there is quite a lot about abandoned babies, and particularly about the problems connected with the move to the old château of Bicêtre and the eventual withdrawal of the Sisters from this work. I am not going into that. I want to finish off my comments on Calvet's book by picking out some of the points he makes in the final

section of the book, which he calls “In Herself”.

He regards 1650 as another key year in her life. Most of her problems had been overcome, her son was married, houses of the community had been set up and were running well, and members of the community had settled down into a worked-out pattern of living and working. He mentions something about her at this stage, which contemporaries also note about Vincent, namely that callers were always welcome and she never indicated that they were in any way disrupting or disturbing her. He sees this as a combination of a natural quality and a genuine desire to be available and of help, but achieved only by a slowly-acquired degree of self-discipline stemming from charity.

He has a page on her health. She had some sort of recurring gastric problem which brought on sudden bouts of fever. There was only a limited range of foods which she could tolerate, and she was very sensitive to cold weather, especially a cold winter wind which blew in Paris and which affected her gums. Whatever this problem was it prevented her from being able to wear the same headdress as the other Sisters. She often had to take to her bed, and she kept changing doctors when she heard of others who were supposed to be better, and was always a ready listener to anyone who had some new prescription or remedy; she often passed on these to Vincent. He also makes the point, which might surprise us, that she had good financial ability, something to which Vincent also refers. Her education and learning have already been referred to but at this point in the book he gives a few more pages to summarising this, and adds that she knew how to choose the precise word or expression in a letter so that the recipient would realise that this had been written in a very special way for her.

Humility was an important virtue for her, but Calvet says that she did not go in for the theatrical gestures of humility in which Vincent often indulged. In one of the spiritual notes which she made for herself she mentions that she wishes to avoid publicity, but then wonders whether that in itself might conceal a desire to be esteemed! In a letter to Fr Guy de Vaux, Vicar General of Angers, she wrote, in 1643:

Since you ask me I'll tell you quite simply that we must quietly wait until grace brings about real humility in us; by letting us see our powerlessness it enables us to put up willingly with what you call minor infirmity, pride and sensitivity, without hoping that all this can be eliminated in us who are, and who will be for all our lives, disturbed by such upsets.

Her prayer was very scriptural, and Calvet contrasts this with Vincent's prayer which, he says, was more popular and sprang from his daily

occupations. It was Trinitarian, with clear appreciation of each of the three persons; she had great devotion to the Holy Spirit. She was very conscious of the varying liturgical seasons in the year, and also of particular feastdays. She had great devotion to our Lady and was ahead of her time in honouring the Immaculate Conception. Calvet does not refer to it, but it is worth noting that she had the unusual idea of honouring Mary as a widowed mother, something to which she could relate particularly well. She had, of course, her own special private devotions which very often had a mathematical dimension, certain prayers having to be said a specified number of times. Vincent advised her to go easy on this sort of thing, and told her not to give to such devotions the time which should be given to work or sleep.

I mentioned earlier on that Calvet, in trying to distinguish between the differing approaches of Louise and Vincent to the poor, had made the imaginative suggestion that the poor would have felt inclined to kiss Louise's hand but to shake Vincent's. I referred to this earlier, but it is from here, at the end of the book, that I borrowed it. Louise was aristocratic by birth and intellectual by inclination. She approached the poor from the point of view of an intellectual noblewoman who understood where her Christian duty lay. She came to the poor because of her knowledge of God. Vincent did not have to go to the poor, as he was one of them. For Louise, her experience of God led her to the poor; for Vincent, his experience of the poor led him to God.

On Re-Reading Joseph Dirvin's 'St Louise De Marillac'

Thomas Davitt CM

Dirvin's book is about twice the length of Calvet's and is certainly the better of the two, though Calvet's is probably the easier to read. There are less copies of Dirvin than Calvet this side of the Atlantic. When it was published not a large number of copies were printed and it has never been re-printed. The author told me that the publishers were not really interested in the book as they thought it would not have a large sale in the United States. They were very interested in his book on Mother Seton because of its American setting, and they agreed to publish his book on St Louise as a sort of favour to him.

When I had re-read Calvet and written my article on it, I re-read Dirvin, which I had not read through fully for very many years. As I went through it this time I made notes about points which struck me as important additions to what Calvet had written, or significant differences of opinion from him, so these two articles could be more accurately described as on the difference between Dirvin and Calvet as biographers of Louise. Needless to say each gives the broad outline of her life in roughly the same way; it is in the filling out of the portrait with detail and interpretation that they differ. It is also worth recalling that Calvet's book, though published in 1958, was written ten years previously. Dirvin's was published in 1970, so he had two advantages over Calvet; he had access to the first collected edition of Louise's letters and writings, published in 1961, and he was also writing in the light of the insights of the Second Vatican Council.

In his Preface, Dirvin speaks strongly against what he calls the "injustice" which has been done to Louise. The first element of this injustice is the fact that until his own book in 1970 there had not been what he calls "a fully documented biography" of Louise. The first really good book on her was that by Mgr Louis Baunard in 1898, which was never translated into English. He then goes on to list some of the things written about her which contributed to the rise of a false image of her:

Her faceless childhood, the arbitrary assumption that her adolescence was unhappy and frustrated, the abominable portraits, and especially the very real morbidity that characterised her young adulthood into the thirties... The greatness of Louise de Marillac can never be understood until this false image of a timid, dour, drab and cheerless woman has been put aside (numbers in brackets refer to pages in Dirvin).

His use of the word "arbitrary" in the above quotation is interesting. He admits, of course, that she was "nervous, withdrawn and timid throughout the first half of her life" (6) because of the fact of her illegitimacy and the problems that created for her in her family circle and in Paris society. He thinks she spent all her childhood from infancy with the Dominican nuns in Poissy (10); this would explain why she never mentioned home or family life. On the other hand it is important to remember that her father did not disown her; he openly acknowledged her as his daughter, which was unusual at that time for men in his position to do. In his will he referred to her as

his greatest consolation in the world, and that God had given her to him for his peace of soul in the afflictions of his life (10).

Her father's second marriage was very unhappy from the start, and the quarrels between husband and wife resulted in a court case. His second wife later left him, and lived with various other men and eventually became a Protestant. All this contributed its share to Louise's problems and her unhappiness, as it was all very public (15).

Dirvin does not accept Calvet's suggestion that the woman with whom Louise lodged in her adolescent years was her natural mother (18). He points out that even Calvet himself admits that Louise's mother was from the lower social classes and therefore could not have taught her the social graces which she learned from this woman. Secondly, if Louise had spent these years with her mother it is hard to explain why she never mentions her mother in any surviving writings of hers. In this context he also notes the surprising fact that, in spite of the circumstances of her own birth, Louise never allowed girls of illegitimate birth enter the community. In her late teens Louise seems to have gone to live with her aunt the Marquise d'Attichy and that, in spite of her birth, was accepted in the wide Marillac family circle. It was from this house of her aunt that she was eventually married (20).

A lot has been made, in writings and talks on Louise, about the worries she had later on about having got married after having, earlier on, made some sort of private vow or promise to become a nun; she even wondered whether she should leave her husband. Dirvin makes the interesting point that these worries should be interpreted in the opposite way from that in which they usually are. She loved her husband and enjoyed married life and the social life that went with it. After her marriage she lived in the fashionable Marais section of Paris and built a turret on to the house, an important status symbol at the time. Under her father's will she had an income of 300 *livres* a year, but in one year of their married life the Le Gras couple spent 18,000 *livres*. What she was

worried about was that maybe a confessor or director might tell her she had to give up her husband, whom she really loved, and this lifestyle which she certainly liked (24, 28). As some basis of comparison it is interesting to note that Vincent, in a letter in 1655, mentions that 1,000 *livres* would keep two priests and a lay brother for one year (V 479).

Her husband Antoine died in December 1625, when Louise was thirty-four. Dirvin regards the years 1619 to 1623, when she was between twenty-eight and thirty-two, as the important formative years for her. He disagrees with the labels “neurotic” and “scrupulous” which have been applied to her, and which seem to have stuck. He admits she had scruples and fears and that “conquering them was her giant step towards sanctity” (37). What he objects to is the blanket application of the two words “neurotic” and “scrupulous” to Louise. Probably everyone has some trace of neurotic tendency but only those afflicted with this to an abnormal degree should be classed as “neurotic”; he is quite sure Louise is not in this category. “Scrupulosity” in the strict sense is a manifestation of pride where a person is constantly nit-picking in order to try to have 100% certainty that God can hold nothing against him. This sort of pride was certainly not in Louise’s make-up. What has been too facily labelled “scrupulosity” in her case was a genuine desire to root out of her life anything which could damage her relationship with God. The giant step to which Dirvin refers was that she was able to get her fears and worries into proper perspective and not let them damage her sense of proportion. She had to learn, the hard way, that holiness comes slowly; there is no “instant perfection” (37-38).

Another item which, in Dirvin’s opinion, has been mis-represented is Louise’s vow to remain a widow after her husband’s death. She took this vow on May 4, 1623. She herself states that “God gave me the grace” to make this vow and it would seem that it was made with the approbation of her director, Jean-Pierre Le Camus, bishop of Belley, the nephew of her father’s second wife. Four days later, on 8 May, Camus gave written permission for Antoine and Louise to read the bible in French. She herself has left it on record that from Ascension, May 25, till Pentecost, June 4, she was in “great desolation of spirit” because of her worries about the apparent conflict between her original promise or vow to become a nun and her actual married state. The vow of eventual widowhood was probably an attempt to reconcile the two. On Pentecost Sunday, during Mass in the church of Saint Nicolas des Champs, she suddenly saw how all this apparent contradiction and worry could be sorted out. She should stay with her husband and later on she would take vows of poverty chastity and obedience and live with others in some form of community life helping other people. She wrote all this down, including the important comment: “I could not imagine how it

would come about" (42-43).

He does not tease this out completely. The way I would see it is this. On that Pentecost the penny dropped, or the last piece of the jigsaw puzzle dropped into place. She saw that she was on the right path, that all the various elements from the past right up to that moment fitted into a pattern, but that this pattern was not yet complete. She did not see clearly how what had developed up to that point would develop from that point onwards. In other words, she had come to the point to which everyone who is serious about their relationship with God has to come sooner or later, and which Newman so well summed up:

*I do not ask to see the distant scene,
One step enough for me.*

Somewhere in the middle 1620s she came into contact with Vincent de Paul and he soon became her director. In an early letter, which Coste cannot date more accurately than between 1626 and 1629, Vincent wrote to her: "Leave it to me; I shall think enough about it for both of us" (I 62; ET I 54).

Dirvin quotes this but does not comment on it. I think, however, that it should be pointed out that the sentence occurs in a letter from very early on in their acquaintance and that it refers to one particular item at the time. Unfortunately, for a long time writers and speakers gave the impression that the lifelong relationship between them was that Vincent would think for both of them; that was definitely not the case. She certainly consulted him about very many things, all through her life; and at the beginning relied almost totally on him. In the notes which she made at what is called her first retreat (though this must mean "first" after some turning point rather than "first ever") she wrote:

I must attach myself strongly to Jesus by the holiest imitation of his life... I have resolved on every doubtful and irresolute occasion to consider what Jesus would have done... (65).

That certainly seems to echo something which was always basic in Vincent's spirituality. The clarification which she received at Mass on Pentecost 1623 is also echoed in these retreat notes when she wrote that she would wait "for as long as he [God] pleases, to learn what he asks of me" (66). To help her in trying to put these and other similar spiritual decisions into practice she composed what she called her "Rule of Life in the World". In it she lays down a timetable covering the whole day. There is nothing very remarkable about this timetable, though I was a bit surprised to see that she spent nine and a half to ten hours in bed (68).

Devotion to our Lady features prominently in her spirituality, unlike that of Vincent, with unexpected (for that time) emphasis on her Immaculate Conception. Louise being a mother herself was fascinated by Mary as the mother of Jesus (69-70). Later on she would stress Marian devotion as an important element of the community (111-112). In 1646 she presented a portrait of our Lady to St Lazare; she paid for it by selling some rings which she still had (243).

Perhaps one of the reasons why Vincent took so long in making up his mind how best to channel her zeal was the fact that her health seemed frail. All her life she would have less than normal good health yet she was able to achieve an enormous amount; much later Vincent would refer to her life as a miracle. She herself took the attitude of total reliance on God. This, however, did not mean that she was never ill; her correspondence reveals plenty of occasions when she was laid up or incapacitated. She took all this into account in the resolutions which she made; they are practical and realistic (78).

One of the things I like about Dirvin's book is that he sometimes spells out explicitly what other writers either didn't really notice or left their readers to deduce. For example, while it was rural conditions which led to the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission it was city conditions which led to the foundation of the Daughters of Charity (112-113). He also stresses, though he is not alone in this, that in her early trips making visitations of the Confraternities of Charity she regarded the provision of education for illiterate girls as one of her chief concerns (84). Later on when she had established the motherhouse at La Chapelle one of the first things she did was to establish a school for girls in the house, in which she personally taught the catechism on Sundays. She next went a step further and wanted the girls trained in how to run a school, and for this she wanted the help of the Ursulines. Though Vincent was not in favour of this he let her go ahead (166). Later on again, when the controversial foundling home was established in Bicêtre Louise took charge of the teaching until a schoolmistress could be found. She wanted alphabet charts to put on the walls, following the Ursuline method (266). Later on again she gave advice to Sr Anne Hardemont who was teaching in Montreuil. She was not to say "Do your catechism" or "Come to catechism" but rather "Let's do some reading..." (269), which was a neat bit of psychology.

On page 100 Dirvin quotes from a letter of Vincent to Louise about 1631. She had written to him in some agitation because a man was claiming she had been promised to him in marriage. Vincent tries to calm her down by saying she is over-evaluating the trouble; it's merely someone telling a lie about her. He starts this section of the letter with the words, in Dirvin's translation: "How troubled I am that you are

upset!" The translation in the recent Volume I of the English version of the letters is not so good, in my opinion: "How sorry I am about your suffering!" (I 142; ET I 138). At the time of the celebrations for the fourth centenary of Vincent's birth a poster was issued of the usual portrait of St Vincent, and under it the French original of that expression: "Que j'ai peine de votre peine!" I think it was rather unfair to use that sentence without indicating the context in which Vincent wrote it. Most people took it to refer to his compassion for those who were suffering, whereas it was a somewhat ironic comment on Louise's exaggerated worry about a man who falsely claimed she was promised to him in marriage.

Another point brought out by Dirvin is that the early Daughters of Charity met with a lot of opposition and hostility as they went about their business through city streets. This hostility came both from the ordinary people and from the poor whom they were trying to help. Later on Louise said: "We scarcely dared to appear in the streets at first" (118).

It is interesting to find Vincent urging Louise to take a week off and go to a country village, leaving someone else to look after affairs in Paris (I 325; ET 317); this was in May 1636, so it was after the foundation of the community (142). An interesting parallel here is that Brother Alexandre Veronne, the infirmarian in St Lazare, used to order Vincent from time to time to go down to the St Lazare farm in Freneville, and Vincent used to go.

Around this time, the mid-1630s, Louise was following a lead given by Vincent; in St Lazare he used to have retreats for wealthy Parisian men. She started retreats at her motherhouse for wealthy Parisian women, which became very popular. Sometimes there were not enough rooms for those who wanted to come (153).

Louise's problems with her son Michel come up at several points in Dirvin's book. One of the things that struck me this time round was that it would be very useful if someone were to investigate this whole area, preferably a psychologist. It clearly was a very significant element in Louise's life yet I have never seen it fully investigated. Michel certainly seems to have been a difficult person. Dirvin uses the expression "his abilities were limited" which certainly seems to have been the case, and he also says that Louise found it hard to accept this. I remember that when I was a student in Glenart the late Fr James Rodgers CM said that any of us who would be appointed to schools would soon discover that most mothers were unwilling to accept that a son of theirs was "thick". Experience shows this to be true, and Louise conforms to pattern (155). Part of the problem, of course, was that Louise wanted him to be a priest and Vincent certainly thought at first that he should try his vocation, but later on Michel admitted that his wish to be a priest was only to please

his mother (174).

When things went wrong Louise was always inclined to blame herself for it. In 1638 a Sister from whom much had been expected was discovered to have hoodwinked everybody; she had got on the right side of two old bachelors and accepted gifts from them and joined them for wine and cake. Louise thought that she herself might be the cause of such scandal (170. I 494; ET I 484). On another occasion, in 1649, which is not referred to by Dirvin, she thought she was the Jonah who should be thrown overboard (III 511). Later on, in 1657, she wrote in a letter:

When I become aware of some little disturbance among certain Sisters and have studied it carefully to discover the cause I must confess with simplicity that frequently I see it to be my fault, whether from a lack of cordiality or of setting the example I should (358).

In spite of being wrong about the Sister with the two old bachelors Louise had, in Dirvin's words, "a really phenomenal knowledge of her daughters and the peculiarities of each, and treated them accordingly" (192).

As I went through the book I began to notice after a while that Dirvin many times referred to the Marillac stubbornness coming out in Louise (194). There were times when she was determined on some course of action which she felt to be right and nothing would deter her from it, and if she met refusals or difficulties she would keep coming back to the matter. A slightly different aspect of her stubbornness came out on the eve of Pentecost 1642. Louise was in the main room of the motherhouse in La Chapelle; a Sister came to warn her that there were worrying creaks coming from the ceiling but she brushed aside the warning. Then a second, more senior, Sister came and repeated the warning; Louise gave in and she was just out of the room when the ceiling collapsed (217). Vincent later on marvelled at the Providence of God in getting Louise out of the room just in time, and also in delaying his own arrival (218). He realised Louise's propensity for blaming herself for misfortunes which happened, so he wrote to her the following day to reassure her that this was not a punishment for her sins. He used the incident of the fall of the tower about which Jesus was questioned (Lk 13:4), though he calls it the tower of Jericho instead of Siloam. He repeats Jesus' answer that this tragedy was not a punishment (218. II 258; ET II 289). The odd thing about all this is that Louise admits that it never crossed her mind that it was a punishment on herself (218. *Ecrits* 761).

As well as stubbornness another family failing which used to come out was her temper (295). In 1647 she wrote Vincent what Dirvin calls "a curt and angry note" (263). But that did not mean she was possessive. Guy Lasnier, Abbé de Vaux, so prominent in connection with the hospital in Angers, thought Louise might object to local girls who wanted to help the Sisters in the hospital as what would now be called nursing aides; he thought Louise would want all the work done by her community. She was only too pleased to encourage such girls and showed absolutely no possessiveness (194-5).

It is interesting to note that even as far on as her 50th year she had normal curiosity. Vincent had had to go to the town of Loudun, and when he returned she asked him about the nuns there who were reported to be possessed by the devil (211). Another interesting little item is mentioned by Dirvin, showing what he calls Vincent's "perversity". Louise wrote him a letter containing twenty questions. Each question was numbered, and she left a blank space after each one to allow Vincent space to write an answer. Vincent's perversity comes out in the fact that he ignored these spaces and wrote his answers in the margin! (217. II 259; ET II 290).

Twice in 1651, when she was sixty, she mentions that her memory is failing rapidly (298 & 315) and that is also the year when she says she has no teeth (315). These are two items which help us to keep in mind that she was an ordinary woman and not some sort of super-person. And another item which reinforces our picture of her humanness is that Dirvin points out that, in spite of her failing memory, she can at times remember very clearly certain things which disconcert other persons (298).

In August 1653 she spent a few days of recollection and wrote to Vincent afterwards about a new insight she had received into the words "God is my God". I presume she had been praying Psalm 62, the one we use at Morning Prayer on Sunday I and on feasts. Vincent is pleased at her reaction to this but he told her that perhaps God was preparing her for some cross by giving her this consolation in advance (323). I'm not sure that we can agree fully with Vincent here, even though there is the common saying about a calm before a storm. This is not the only occasion on which Vincent expresses this idea, but it seems to me a somewhat unbalanced idea of God to say that some grace, or consolation received from Him is just to ready us for some suffering.

About three quarters way through the book (322) it struck me that there had been quite a number of references to Sisters leaving the community. This helps us to realise that things were not ideal in those days just because Vincent and Louise were in charge. Vincent also had this problem with his priests, particularly with men who

came to get educated at the expense of the Congregation and then left after ordination; this was one of the main reasons why he introduced vows, especially the vow of stability. Another down to earth human phenomenon which comes appears in those years is that there was no shortage of internal personal squabbles between Sisters; this comes out in the letters of both Louise and Vincent. Needless to say, Louise was tempted at times to wonder if she herself was to blame for both the departures and quarrels.

Dirvin makes an interesting point (326) which I do not remember noticing before. Louise and Vincent were both involved in the running of the community and both received letters from, and sent letters to, individual Sisters. To avoid giving conflicting advice they had the habit of showing each other such letters before they sent them. One letter Louise received from a Sister smelt of perfume! Needless to say the Sister was told off (328).

In 1655 she was worried that Sisters engaged in nursing might get above themselves and fancy that they knew more than the doctors. She told some in Fontainebleau that, if that were the case, they were abusing God's grace (335). In connection with some Sisters who were appointed to go to Poland she wrote to Fr Charles Ozenne, the superior in Warsaw. He apparently had set very high standards for the Sisters he wanted there, and Louise told him not to make the mistake of thinking they were perfect; but she assured him that they were very good indeed (326). In that year, 1655, twenty-two years after the foundation of the community, there were 143 Sisters in it (339). Vincent had been given official ecclesiastical authority to set up the Company, and this meant that the administration of it needed some sort of organized structure, in fact a Mother General's Council, although Louise had had an assistant since the early 1640s (242). At the council meeting on 8 September 1655, when this was formally inaugurated, Vincent gave his opinion of Louise, much to her embarrassment:

[The superioress] is the soul which animates the members of the whole company. She is the living rule who must be the model of what the others should do, teaching them as much by her good example as by her words. Well, that will be enough about Mademoiselle's office. There is no need to go any further since by God's grace she does and always has done what a good superioress should...Up till now Mademoiselle has conducted affairs well by God's grace and so well that I don't know a religious house of women in Paris in the condition in which you find yourselves... You have certainly not had a superioress who let the house go by default; ... No, I tell you, I don't know of the

like in Paris and it is due, after God, to the good management of Mademoiselle.

At this stage Louise interrupted and scored off Vincent:

You know well, Mon Père, and our Sisters also, that if anything has been done it has been by the orders Your Charity has given me (340; XIII 693 ff).

In that year, 1655, Vincent was 74 and Louise 64, and neither of them, especially Louise, was in really good health, yet, Dirvin says, they sometimes worked twelve to sixteen hours a day (343). Obviously this could not have been every day, and we know that there were days, individual days or periods of several days, for each of them when they could do very little, or nothing at all. Dirvin has an interesting sentence:

Louise, well aware that she bore the chief responsibility for the Sisters, gave the tired old man no peace until he had given the Company of the Daughters of Charity that full and authentic commentary on their Rule which has sustained their profound and knowledgeable spirituality to the present day (343-4).

In the middle of that year, 1655, during a period of illness, she had a lawyer add a codicil to her will instructing the Congregation of the Mission to give, from the money she had bequeathed to them for alms, a sum of eighteen *livres* a year to her grand-daughter, to provide a dinner for the poor of her parish at which she would wait on them (346).

"Vincent depended on Louise for the finer points of housekeeping at St Lazare" (361). On one occasion he needed sixty blankets and asked her to buy them for him, apparently because the brother he previously sent did not understand that the retailer had to make his own profit over the manufacturer's cost. Vincent said he was enclosing about 600 *livres*. Louise counted the coins and noted at the end of Vincent's letter that there were only 595 *livres*, so she was able to get only fifty-two blankets (361).

In June 1658 she admitted to a Sister that she had "extreme trouble" in reading and used to get upset because she could not remember what the Sister had asked in previous letters (368). On 31 December 1658 she began a letter to Vincent which she did not, or could not, finish until the next day:

I begin this year very feebly and sorrowfully in mind and body" (376).

One of the sorrows she had in mind was the death of Sister Barbe Angiboust, one of the most outstanding of the early Sisters. In a letter to another Sister she referred to the fact that

the Son of God accomplished the work of saving everyone through sorrows and griefs (377).

Living Sisters also caused her sorrows and griefs, some of them, in Dirvin's words, "having grown increasingly insolent towards her" (377). Vincent took two Sisters to task over this in January 1659. To one he wrote:

You are a little too handy with your advice and you have on occasion lost the respect you owe Mademoiselle. I know very well that your heart has not failed in its respect but, in your attempt to justify yourself over some little reproach she made you, your words have been too bold (377. VIII 429).

All through 1659 her health was deteriorating. At Christmas she was able to visit the community crib only on her way back from Mass (383). Dirvin makes the point that the deterioration noticed in her later letters comes from failing eyesight and not from senility (384). The real final stage of her illness began in early February 1660 and she died six weeks later.

The Moderation of Vincent De Paul

Jim McCormack CM

In a book of dazzling intuition about St Francis of Assisi, GK Chesterton memorably remarked that Francis and Thomas Aquinas *had saved us from spirituality*. You may well blink. If you didn't, you haven't really been paying attention. The wisdom of this insight grows ever-deeper in me. One thinks of all sorts of transient phenomena posturing as spiritual wisdom, including recent outbreaks such as 'New Age', 'apparitional', so-called Celtic, and Charismatic in various manifestations, – don't start me on "Ignatian", nor on much of the arrant nonsense that passed as spirituality during our programming in religious life. Chesterton's insight [he seems to have been alluding to the Albigenses] – came back to me recently when I was ruminating about the life of Vincent de Paul. I found myself wondering if Vincent himself had been saved from spirituality?

Probably "yes" – at any rate from two prevailing "spiritualities"; one purveyed by de Bérulle (the so-called 'French School') and the other by the Jansenists (and, of course, he steered clear of Ignatianism if there was such a thing then). Bérullism favoured a "High" spirituality of priesthood... rather conceptualised, and heady... which really would not have suited Vincent's purposes at all (he wouldn't say that he had purposes – but his missionaries were to be simple priests speaking simply to rural, unlettered peasants about the mercy of God. The Jansenists disapproved of the liberal way in which Vincent's missionaries offered absolution in the sacrament of reconciliation.

Vincent's moderation is further variously evidenced by the style of communication he favoured on parish missions; and by the methods he employed in the renewal of the clergy, and in tackling the innumerable socio/economic problems that called out for justice. All were characterised by low-key, common sense matter-of-factness.

As for the parish missions: emphasis was to be on catechism – during instruction given at noon and in the evening. When, later, Vincent found that some of the missionaries were turning the evening slot into a preaching session, he was disappointed. What was wanted, he believed, was instruction, not a rousing of people's emotions – nor indeed of the preacher's. He seemed convinced that these simple people did not really want or need "preaching": what they needed was an exposition of basic truths. The exposition was didactic; and though its purpose was to move the heart to repentance, there was to be nothing that even hinted of emotionalism. Vincent was all too aware of the dangers of delusion in religious matters. The transformation in preaching was truly innovative – its style of communication actually effecting change in the Parisian

theatre. It was a change from the melodramatic to the conversational; from the affected to the real; from the erudite to the simple; As for Jansenism, the case is interesting, for Vincent may temperamentally have had inclinations in that direction.

Early in his ecclesiastical career when he first came to Paris, he lodged with and was friendly with Jean Duvalier, usually known to history as the Abbé St Cyran – a circumstance that was brought up against Vincent by the devil’s advocate at the process of his Beatification.

Before he meets any of those who apparently were to some extent significant spiritual influences – de Bérulle, Duval, Duvergier, de Sales – Vincent had made his first visit to Rome, in 1601, shortly after his ordination, and was moved to tears by the experience, speaking feelingly of the holiness of Pope Clement VIII. Among the pluses in Clement’s able and momentous pontificate was the effecting of a cessation in the wars of religion which had racked France for forty years (the great minus was the affair of Giordano Bruno – it would be very interesting to know if Vincent’s path crossed his during their respective sojourns at the University of Toulouse, which coincided chronologically).

There would have been graphic memories of religious denominational struggles in the conversations Vincent would have heard in his youth. Their way of life was always a struggle for the peasantry. For as well as the usual hazards of hand-to-mouth subsistence farming, Vincent’s own region near Dax, where his parents had raised their six children, had suffered considerably in what are referred to as the wars of religion. The area had been pillaged and terrorised by the Protestant gangs of Jeanne d’Albret (mother of King “Paris is worth a Mass” Henry IV). It will also be recalled that Vincent’s ordination to priesthood was unable to proceed in the cathedral of St. Etienne, seat of the Bishop of Perigeaux, because the town was under the control of militant Huguenots, who had rendered the cathedral unusable.

Vincent never alluded to these events and always preached a humble dialogue with Protestants. Presumably he learned such restraint in his family milieu – more than restraint, toleration. He was also fortunate in having for a time Francis de Sales as a spiritual guide – a man whose charity and prudence in dealing with Calvinists, were legendary. It’s one thing to have a good teacher, another to be a good pupil. Vincent showed that he was open to the moderation taught and modelled by the Bishop of Geneva. He doesn’t let matters of religious strife infect his ministry. His pastoral work in Châillion-sur-Challaronne was a model of ecumenism for its time.

He doesn’t intervene in Richelieu’s fierce suppression of the Catholic party – which had an added grief to it in that the uncle of Louise de Marillac, Vincent’s closest associate in the works of charity – was

summarily executed at Richelieu's orders. Vincent advises her calmly to see it all in spiritual terms (nothing could be done about it anyway).

When he does intervene, during the Fronde, it's to go to Mazarin and plead with him that the people are suffering – they are hungry, they exist in miserable conditions, they are being terrorised... his pleas fail to get Mazarin to change his policies. Indeed, Vincent nearly loses his life in consequence – and with it would have fallen his projects for the poor, and the good name of his various organisations – for a false report begins to circulate that Vincent is collaborating with “the enemy”. But though Mazarin didn't change his policies, Vincent managed to orchestrate a whole raft of agencies to minister to the casualties of the fighting... So successful was he on so many fronts, that it almost seems necessary to assert that there was nothing underhand about Vincent – he was not a “Fixer or an “operator” nor glory-seeker, as these terms would now be applied to many successful men in public life, civil and ecclesiastical. There were no deals done in smoky taverns, or promises that led to compromised pay-back times; nor any hint of brown envelopes. Nor, despite the revolution he wrought in France, was there anything confrontational about him. Quite the contrary; for though he was passionate about the poor and marginalised, there is no suggestion of anything that could be construed as being politically subversive.

Vincent's two greatest contemporaries in 17th century France were Descartes and Richelieu. Descartes was all about separations, Vincent all about bringing things and people together. Richelieu, with whom Vincent would have had dealings, also brought some things together – brought France and the French together, but at the cost of great human suffering; and with such violence, that inevitably there would be repercussions in the years ahead. Vincent's projects, being holistic, and gentle, and prompted by the Holy Spirit and the grace of God, took root and grew amazingly. And this was achieved without anything that could be termed a revolution in either church or state. It was, rather, the quintessential mustard seen of the Gospel.

With his intelligence, the influential contacts available to him, both secular and religious, with his passion for the poor and weak, and with the possibilities available to him when people in their hundreds sat at his feet whether at parish missions, at retreats, in seminaries, or in formation as Daughters of Charity, Vincent could easily have wreaked mischief had he been an extremist, or even unbalanced – like Calvin, for example, or the Jansenists, or the devotees of Port Royal.

Instead of becoming an ideologue, he became wise; and the grace of God purified him, and moderated and mellowed his judgements and decisions; “moderation” was an expression of that wisdom, which is the gift of the Spirit of God.

Rejoicing at Deepcar

Tom Lane CM

Ever since Fr Harney, in his kindness, invited me to speak to you this evening, I have been reading and re-reading the lovely story of St Ann's, Deepcar and St Mary's, Penistone. I became very aware that I was coming to a parish ready for all seasons.

Winter

The parish had its beginnings in darkest winter. The story has often been told. Fr Michael Burke and his Vincentian colleagues were preparing for Christmas in the Croft area or Sheffield. It was in the days before St Vincent's Church, Solly Street, and the other parish buildings took their final shape. On the evening of December 17th, 1853, the priests heard the heavy thud of weary feet. They were the feet of twenty Irishmen who had walked all the way from Deepcar. They had come for just one purpose: to have their sins forgiven in preparation for Christmas. The priests obliged and, with the help of kind parishioners, they provided the welcome travelers with some food to eat and beds for the night.

Spring

As soon as the more kindly weather of spring came, Fr Burke decided to walk the path trodden by his fellow Irishmen. On further visits to Deepcar, he allowed himself the luxury of the parish pony. It was in the days before the Duke of Norfolk gave the gift of a horse to the Vincentian community. As Fr Burke talked to some of the enthusiastic Irishmen, he was delighted to find a man who had a remarkably good knowledge of the Catholic Faith. His name was Mr Dillon. He right away accepted the invitation to be catechist to all interested Catholics. In his enthusiasm, and with roguish tongue in check, he suggested that the day might come when Deepcar would be a parish in its own right. Fr Burke smiled and he wondered. He had already detected a touch of spring in Deepcar. He himself belonged to a community who were having their Irish and English springtime. Two hundred years earlier, St Vincent de Paul had sent a small group of missionaries to war-torn Ireland. In Fr Burke's young days, a group of St Vincent's admirers became the first structured group of Irish "Vincentians" with the aim of bringing good news to the poor and providing the Church with good shepherds. In their springtime enthusiasm, they decided that a foundation among the working Irish in Sheffield would be an ideal flowering of their first fervour.

Summer

So much for the winter and spring of the early St Ann's. The foundation stone of the new church was laid at high summer time, on August 15th, 1859. It was a day of surprises. Fr. Burke was apprehensive. He feared strong opposition from the articulate no-popery citizens. He decided to have a quiet and dignified celebration. Imagine his surprise when at the instigation of his fellow priests, and not without some humour, large members of the CYMS and guild members from St Vincent's, Sheffield, came out of the train. The result was a joyful celebration worthy of a people who knew they were themselves living stones in the building of the new house of God.

Autumn

The opening of St Ann's church took place in mid-autumn, on October 10th, 1860. It was the feast day of a great but little known saint, St Francis Borgia. It was to be long remembered as a day of drenching rain. There was some difficulty in ringing the bell. One could say that the whole day was a day of quiet joy that no contrary bell and no bad weather could destroy.

The story of the beginning of St Ann's is a story of hospitality. It is the story of a good shepherd who more than once found himself penniless and setting out to beg from his benefactors. It is the story of a group of believers who celebrated with joy in the midst of hostility. It is the story of a community who learned to give thanks to God, always and everywhere. All this, of course, is a blueprint for every good parish. It is the story of what St Ann's has always stood for. Faith in Jesus Christ has brought you through all your winters, all your springs, all your summers, all your autumns.

The second spring

Talking about seasons; in the midsummer of the year before St Ann's had its beginnings, a very famous sermon was preached just an hour's journey from here. The preacher was none other than John Henry Cardinal Newman whose date or beatification will be announced very soon. He preached the sermon at Oscott seminary, Birmingham. The topic of the sermon was *The Second Spring*. The occasion was the end of the last stages of the penal laws against Catholics in England. From now on, they were to have their own bishops to preach the Catholic faith that comes to us from the apostles. When I was a young novice in the Vincentians, a wise old priest introduced us to the art of preaching. He got us to memorise and even to attempt to preach two great sermons. The first was by Saint Vincent de Paul. In fact, St Vincent called it his only sermon. It was a call to the fear of the Lord as the beginning of

wisdom. It was really a call to a continual change of heart. The second was Cardinal Newman's *Second Spring*. Our wise and elderly priest teacher told us that in these two sermons we had a foundation for a lifetime of preaching. I believe the messages of the two sermons are very closely related. Shortly after my ordination; I made a pilgrimage to Oscott. I stood on Cardinal Newman's pulpit and I even dared to preach some of the *Second Spring*. I felt the Cardinal was smiling gently from heaven. As he continues to smile on us this evening, my prayer is that St Ann's parish will never lose the freshness of spring.

Arise my love

For his Oscott sermon, the Cardinal chose a text from the Song of Songs, one of the most beautiful books of the whole Bible. The Song is about a young man and a young woman who are passionately in love. The love song gives us a glimpse of God's passionate love for us, his chosen people. The young bridegroom addresses his bride and tells her to arise. He addresses her as his love and his beautiful one. He invites her to come. In the New Testament, in the letter of the Ephesians (V:22-33), Christ himself is presented as the passionate lover. He is described as loving his bride the Church and delivering himself up for her.

I believe that if the saintly Cardinal was here this evening he would invite us to a new springtime. I believe he would alert us to the fact that, from the glory of heaven, Christ the Church's bridegroom is inviting us, all together and each of us personally, into the intimacy of his love. This is the mystery of the Mass. Jesus is telling us to arise. He addresses each of us as his love, his beautiful one. He invites us all to come to him. It is really he himself who will ask us, in a few moments time, to lift our hearts to where he is. Gladly we will say "we have lifted them up to the Lord". In the Eucharistic prayer, it is he himself who will remind us that it is for our sake he opened his arms on the cross; we will pray that we will grow in love. It is the desire to promote this mutual love that prompted Pope Benedict to tell the world, in his very first Encyclical, that God is love. In his love for the Church, Jesus addresses us as his beautiful one. He wishes us to be a spotless and beautiful Church. It is this wish of Jesus that makes Pope Benedict continually appeal for a Church that is beautiful. Beautiful in our Church buildings. Beautiful in the way we worship God. Beautiful in every aspect of our daily lives. Beautiful in the way we carry our crosses. Like the lover in the Song of Songs, Jesus keeps inviting us to "come". He tells us to come to him in our labours and burdens, and he will give us rest. He asks us to learn from him for he is gentle and humble of heart (Matt X I :28) It is in response to his loving invitation that we all are here this evening.

Saints, martyrs, and miracles

In celebrating what he saw as a new spring, John Henry Newman put much emphasis on the place of the saints. He called especially on the Church's martyrs. He saw the Church as a community of countless miracles. He thanked God for what the Church in England had contributed to the universal Church. This evening, I would like to call on the saints who are special to Deepcar. We call on St Ann, grandmother of our Saviour. We pray for the many grandparents who are worried because the new generation of their families have ceased to practise their faith. I pray that the beauty of your own lives will be a magnet drawing the young to the Way, the Truth and the Life. Less known than St Ann is St Francis Borgia on whose feastday St Ann's was opened. Believe it or not, he was the grandson of a Pope! We label his grandfather Pope Alexander VI, as one of the really "bad" Popes. But our loving God can draw great holiness out of very sinful stock. Francis Borgia had prospects of a very brilliant worldly career. But, touched by God's grace, he left all and managed to refound the Jesuits, the Society of Jesus. We pray also this evening to the "blessed" Newman whose great motto was "heart speaks to heart" and to St Vincent who is often called the apostle not of the fear of the Lord but of charity.

Of course, our very special saint in Deepcar is Mary of the Assumption, Mary to whom the church in Penistone is dedicated. May she keep praying for all of us, now and at the hour of our death. Since the laying of the foundations of this lovely church on Assumption Day 1859, the Assumption of Mary has been declared a special part of our faith. More recently again Pope Paul VI declared her "Mother of the Church".

As we thank God for our saints who are praying for us this evening, let's not forget the countless men, women and children, including members of your own family, who have prayed here over the past hundred and fifty years and who truly can be numbered among the saints.

From among the saints, the Cardinal singled out the martyrs. We were brought up in the lovely teaching that the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians. England has had countless and wonderful martyrs, defending the Catholic faith that comes to us from the apostles. John Henry Newman was very clear that even with the second spring, the Church here in England would have many more martyrs. He didn't mean the red martyrdom of blood only. He was talking primarily about the many shades of martyrdom that are involved in following Christ, step by step, in taking up the cross, day by day.

With the saints, and especially with the martyrs, we associate miracles. In one sense, a miracle is a very rare occurrence, as witness the very slow process of the Newman beatification. In another sense,

indeed I would say the biblical sense; we are surrounded by miracles all the time. Miracles are the many and wonderful works of God, the God described in the Bible as being wonderful in all his saints. When Cardinal Newman wished to restore what was distinctively English in the Catholic tradition, he wasn't talking in a nationalistic, narrow way. He wanted to see a new flowering of the holiness which made England a country of saints, building up a distinctive Catholic culture.

We thank God this evening for all those who helped people to become saints and martyrs at Deepcar, in the last hundred and fifty years. As I read the new history of the parish, each chapter invited me to say "thanks be to God". Thank God for all the priests who were good and faithful servants to the people of Deepcar. You will pardon me if I single out the one I knew personally. Fr John Callanan. About twenty years ago, he invited me to preach a retreat here. I experienced a parish fully alive with the Presentation sisters whom he had introduced to the parish and with countless lay people who knew how to make stones come alive; there was a beautiful setting for listening to the word of God and doing it. Together with them he planted many seeds of goodness, seeds that are bearing new fruit in the day to day ministry of Fr Gerard Harney and of the many women and men who joyfully put all their talents at the disposal of the parish.

Ready for all seasons

I began by talking about the seasons. I would like to end on the same topic. Has Newman's dream of a second spring been realized? Not, I think, in the way he might have hoped and expected. He looked around him at a Catholic population largely in small groupings of Irish and Italian emigrants, along with a small number of English born Catholics rooted in the ancient faith. He regarded all of these as being full of the seeds of a great spring. The miracles he hoped for came in a way he didn't envisage. I see the real miracle in parishes like St Ann's which has grown from the weary footsteps of faith in December 1853 to the thriving parish of 2009. And whenever I face a congregation of Catholics in any part of England, I see a community "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation (cf. Rev:VII:9)". With one voice they are calling on the name Jesus Christ who continues to plead for us all at the right hand or the Father (Heb VII:25). Here indeed is the real miracle.

What season are we in now, in the whole church, in England, in the parish or St Ann's, in your family, my answer is "in all four!" I am reminded of the American humourist Mark Twain who once said that in New England you could have the four seasons on any day. It's good to remember too that Newman had no illusions about an English spring. It can, he said, be uncertain. It can be an anxious time. It can be a time of

both hope and fear, or joy and suffering. It can be a time of cold showers and sudden storms. What a wonderful description of the Church at all levels today! The weeds are never far from even the best of spring seed. We have continual concern about large numbers lapsing from the faith, about Church scandals, about the indifference that has replaced the old anti-popery. This is today's martyrdom. But we take heart from the number of people who, in parishes like St Ann's, have found the pearl or great price and living the Gospel in ways that lift up our hearts. We take heart too that what seems like winter in one part of the Church is spring in another. Communities like the Presentation sisters, and my Vincentian community who shepherded the faithful of Deepcar till 1875 are experiencing a dearth of vocations in this part of the world. But there are many ways of being Vincentian. There are several thousand Vincentian men and women in the St Vincent de Paul Society in England today. Half a century ago our Vincentian priests made a foundation in Nigeria. Today the seminaries cannot contain all the applicants.

Blessed Pope John XXIII got us to pray for a new Pentecost. We cannot programme the Holy Spirit. Like the wind, God's Spirit is always breathing, sometimes in new and unexpected ways. My prayer for Deepcar is that the Spirit of God will keep breathing on you, with all his gifts and all his fruits. I thank God for founders like St Vincent de Paul and Fr Burke who brought a continual touch of spring into people's lives. I realise, of course, that the Church has only one founder, one foundation. This is why I invite you to keep on saying, with all your heart, "praised be Jesus Christ".

Aspirations and Mantras

Con Curtin CM

Lord God, true light and creator of light, grant that faithfully pondering on all that is holy we may ever live in the splendour of your presence.

We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Psalter, Morning Prayer, Week 2 Thursday)

Our spiritual life must not be only offered *for* God but in company *with* God. That necessarily requires some degree of recollection in our lives, which in turn calls for sacrifice. Recalling the presence of God's demands the exclusion of other thoughts.

It is particularly difficult in our modern world where there are so many distractions. So many voices through television, radio, newspapers, commercial advertisements keep incessantly screeching for our attention.

A simple and popular help to recollection and to our prayer life is the use of aspirations and spiritual ejaculations. A simple act of the love of God can be expressed in a variety of ways. I mention just a few: "*Jesus, I love you*"; "*Oh Sacred Heart of Jesus I implore that I may love you daily more and more*"; "*Sacred Heart of Jesus I place all my trust in you*". Indulgences are attached to many of the most common aspirations. Many people will have their own home-made aspirations.

One of the most popular aspirations is the "*Jesus Prayer*". It had its origin in the Orthodox Eastern Church; "*Jesus, son of the eternal Father, be merciful to me a sinner*". Some people breathe in with the first half of the prayer and breathe out, when reciting the second half.

Another simple aspiration which many people use to invoke God's help is "*Jesus, Mary and Joseph help me.*" Or there is also the invocation to the Paraclete; "*Come, Holy Spirit*".

These are but a few of the many aspirations in common use. By constant repetition they become instinctive and keep us in touch with God, as we move about in a very secular and often godless world. The advantage of aspirations is that they can be said at any time and in any circumstances without any previous preparation. They are, as it were, little darts of love sent up to God, and in return the Spirit fills us with his love.

The late Fr Willie Doyle SJ was a celebrated army chaplain in the First World War, and an enthusiastic advocate of the frequent use

of aspirations. Through this means he reached a very high degree of holiness.

A mantra and an aspiration are alike in that they involve saying a short prayer. The mantra is used in contemplative prayer. With the spread of contemplative meditation or centring prayer, as it is sometimes called, more people have become familiar with the use of the mantra. The mantra is a short phrase which is repeated during prayer. It is like background music in a restaurant to create the right atmosphere. It serves to keep distractions away. It has a purpose similar to the chain on a boat moored in the harbour. If the tide drags the boat out, the chain will drag it back. Likewise the mantra helps recall our wandering thoughts to the presence of God.

In centring prayer one does not dwell on the meaning of the mantra used, but rather on the presence of God. When repeating the mantra one reaches out to God in love.

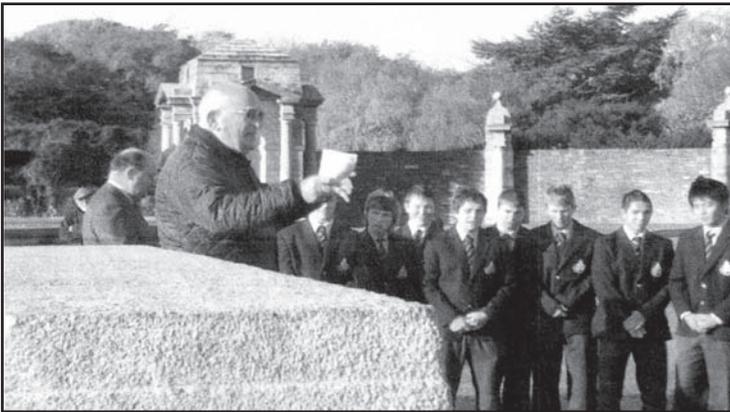
In the use of the mantra, the repetition of the phrase, serves to help us to stay in God's presence. One does not have to dwell on the meaning of the mantra. It creates an atmosphere of God's presence. Among the most common mantras are "*Jesus*" and "*Abba*." A mantra that is widely used is "*Maranatha*" which means "Come Lord" (cf 1 Cor. 16:22). It is a very ancient Christian prayer derived from Aramaic, the language used by our Lord. The word is used in the closing sentences of St Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. Such words help us to give a loving attention to God which is the essence of all prayer.

The mantra and the aspiration both help us to live not only *for* God, but also *with* God.

Remembrance Day 2008

Desmond MacMorrow CM

Homily delivered to students and staff members of Castle knock College by Rev Desmond MacMorrow CM in the Irish National War Memorial Gardens, Islandbridge on November 11th 2008; the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the Armistice that signalled the end of the Great War.



What does Remembrance Day mean to you? For many, Remembrance Day brings memories for all we trust it brings a generous response of prayer for the souls of those who died or who, having survived the conflict, have now passed on.

I recall meeting, in Lanark, Fr Joe Lavery CM, a chaplain in World War I and a fine upstanding Pastman, who over forty years on from Armistice Day used challenge us young Vins to see if we could touch our toes, which of course we could. Father Joe had volunteered as a chaplain and left St Mary's Lanark to join up after Morning Prayer, having on his person the key of the house. After the armistice he arrived back at Carstairs Junction and walked to St Mary's.

When the Confreres came down for Morning Prayer he was there at his prie-dieu. Would that all could take such care of a key that tells us all we have a place to lay our head.

Mention of World War II brings before me the faces of four classmates in Knock who joined the RAF and did not survive the war. Then there was Fr Willie Gilgunn CM who taught me in second year, killed in action. Also Fathers John Carroll CM, pastman and Dean, Fr Henry Casey CM,

Pastman, Fr Michael Devlin CM, Fr Eddie Conran CM and Fr Bernard Buckley CM, well known to me as fellow Vincentians.

It is possible that some of us do not realise enough the freedom that we enjoy. It is possible that for some freedom means a licence to pursue lives of selfishness and a non-Christian materialism. Whether we appreciate it let us all remember; freedom is not free – there is a price to pay, the price that so many paid comes across with a sense of horror and sadness when we see in film how so many died.

The case against war is gathering increasing momentum in our time; it becomes more and more compelling.

We pray today, impelled by our Catholic faith.

Homily on the Occasion of the Memorial Mass for Fr Myles Rearden CM

Fr Desmond MacMorrow CM

Castleknock College, March 27th 2009

Welcome to this Mass in memory of Fr Myles Rearden CM, Vincentian Father; be you members of his family, friends, or Vincentian confreres. We recall how his passing was honoured by the presence of the President of Ireland, Mrs Mary McAleese, and of Cardinal Sean Brady, Archbishop of Armagh. There have also been tributes to the way in which the College honoured Fr Myles in a truly Vincentian way from the boys lining the avenue to welcome his remains on the Friday to the lovely Liturgy on the Friday and at the Saturday Requiem Mass involving students and staff.

We offer this memorial Mass in thanksgiving for the life of Myles and commend him to God's love and mercy, God whom he served so faithfully.

St Paul told the early Christian converts, "Do not be like the pagans having no hope". Pagans at that time worshipped false gods, deities like the sun and moon and even emperors. Christians by contrast lived by "Faith, Hope and Charity". It is the same with us today. In the Credo which we recite every Sunday at Mass we profess our faith in God the creator of heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ, his only son Our Lord who died to redeem us and save us, who rose from the dead, and will come again when the time has run its course. So we are not pagans without hope. Rather we look in faith to the eternal life that God has in store for us.

We have already noted that Fr Myles was that faithful servant whom the master found watching when he came. Myles was a faithful servant of Christ and his church, always at the ready when the call came. We were all aware of his more recent involvement in ecumenism, the search for Church unity, peace and justice, his membership of the Vincentian Provincial Council, as well as his main work of guiding future priests at the national seminary at Maynooth. Above all else Myles was a man of prayer. His nurturing of his own spiritual life was the key to his work for others. Myles was the picture of contentment when in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament with his breviary or the scriptures on his knees.

There is one remarkable fact about Fr Myles which we may not have known about before his funeral Mass. It is that he had become involved in a very public way with the God and anti-God debate. The March

issue of *The Furrow* featured a very lengthy essay by him under the title of “Turning Dawkins”, Professor Dawkins of Oxford being the leading figure of the anti-God lobby whose declared objective is the turning of believers into atheists. Myles did not underestimate the influence of the anti-God lobby, nor must we coming be it from whatever source such as the media or a material view of life. This we must keep in mind as we go about our calling to pass on the faith.

In his essay Myles is at pains to point out the flaws in the anti-God argument. It used to be said here in Ireland that the Faith is not so much taught as caught. Do we see need to adjust the balance in favour of “taught”, with emphasis on Christian apologetics? Myles in his preparation of future priests for their mission of evangelisation would have been aware that for many young people today faith may not be something caught and so taken for granted, but must be shown to be something reasonable. This is the thrust of his last contribution to the current God debate.

For the likes of you and me the philosophical language makes heavy going – but the message is clear. The fact of a Creator God is the only satisfactory answer to the human questioning. To quote Myles: “The coming of God in human form, and the impetus that coming gives to human life fits in well with this form of the God Hypothesis”.

What this means in practice is that man’s best path through life is to follow the teaching of Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. This He himself summed up in His call “to love God above things and our neighbour as ourselves”.

In conclusion: Myles was a good priest. We are proud to claim him as a confrere Vincentian, and so we share with you his family and friends our sense of loss.

Father Kevin Rafferty CM

We believe that Jesus died and rose again and that it will be the same for those who die in Jesus; God will bring them with him.

Since news of Fr Kevin Rafferty's death began to break last Tuesday morning, we have been flooded with emails and phonecalls from friends of All Hallows, past students of the seminary and more recent past students. All the messages are along the same lines. Kevin's vision of a future church with much more lay involvement, his gentleness, his interest in people and their work, his enquiring mind, his extraordinary ability as an administrator and his leadership ability to bring people with him. One of the emails came from a present member of staff who came here to do a course in the 1980s. In its own way the message sums up Kevin's personality and the way he was with us here over the past few years. This is how the email goes:

Many tributes will be paid to his memory and all of them richly deserved. I first met him when he interviewed me for a place on the Lay Ministry Course in the late 80's. I was struck then by his graciousness and dignity and have been impressed by those same qualities ever since. My last meeting was just after Christmas when he was returning to the nursing home and he stopped for a few minutes. We chatted and he asked me to fasten his jacket for him. I tucked his scarf cosily around his neck and we wished each other a happy new year. I will treasure the memory always.

The readings of this evening's reception, focus our attention on the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. When Jesus was crucified there was darkness over the land. Human death always has darkness around it. The death of Father Kevin Rafferty has its own darkness and numbness around it which many of us share. We live daily with the great mystery of human suffering and death. But when someone close to us is living the mystery day by day before our eyes it affects us in a different way. It becomes very real. We saw Kevin living out the Paschal Mystery of Jesus for the past 3 or 4 years. First with his gradual loss of sight and then with the debilitating illness which gradually slowed him down. Those of us who live here and his family watched the paschal mystery of Jesus unfold for Kevin day after day, week after week, month after month. He lived with the darkness with great patience right to the very end.

Yet within that darkness there was some resurrection. Kevin remained buoyant and vibrant and interested right up to his last breath in the early

hours of last Tuesday morning. He never felt sorry for himself. He never complained. He remained interested in people and in the world of ideas. I spent some time with him on Sunday afternoon. He made a fleeting reference to his weak and deteriorating condition. Then we got talking about his life story *Fragments of a Life*.

The resurrection was obvious too in his courage in spite of his visual impairment in completing a series of lectures on Evangelization on the continent of Europe which he delivered on line. Week after week he met the deadlines which an online series of lectures demands. He was so conscious that the secularization and loss of a sense of God which had happened to the church in Europe was happening the church in Ireland before our very eyes. He saw that lecture series through to the end. The completion of the series must have been a little resurrection for Kevin. The triumph of the human spirit in a time of great adversity. Kevin was a resurrection man.

Kevin and myself were appointed to the staff of All Hallows in 1982 – Kevin as President and I was Dean of Students. Being newcomers to All Hallows, we spent a lot of time together. We walked around the ring on the grounds on hundreds of occasions. We talked about all kinds of things especially the future of the church and the future of our seminary. With only 45 students for the priesthood, All Hallows was facing a critical period in its history. Fr Tom Lane had during his Presidency begun the regeneration of the college with the establishment of a Conference Centre in Purcell House – then Junior House – for the renewal of both lay and religious. There were seeds of a future All Hallows already present during the Presidency of Fr Tom Lane but Kevin faced a huge challenge of how to develop the seeds.

Kevin's first task was to get to know the missionary tradition he inherited. Shortly after his arrival in the college, he set out on a whistle stop tour of the United States to visit former students ministering in different dioceses across the United States. He visited 22 centres in 26 days. This trip was followed in time by trips to Britain, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand and other centres where All Hallows priests ministered. Kevin said to me on many occasions that it was only when he began to visit the "pastmen" that he began to realise what All Hallows was all about. It was about mission and ministry. Respectful of this tradition he began to see how he might play his part in shaping the future.

Over the next 12 years slowly but surely All Hallows was transformed. Kevin's vision of a future church with much involvement of lay people began to become a reality... But with careful nurturing, thoughtful planning and the willing and enthusiastic co-operation of a very gifted staff, a new All Hallows emerged from those seeds. A new coffee dock

and a new dining room were built and paid for by fundraising. New and gifted staff were added. If you want to see Kevin's legacy look around you. It is here in the people, in the buildings and in the graduates of All Hallows scattered across the world. The 150 celebration in 1992 of the founding of All Hallows in 1842, which Kevin masterminded, must have been a real resurrection moment for Kevin. The past students of the seminary and the present students of the new All Hallows met in a week long celebration of the All Hallows mission. It was certainly a defining moment for All Hallows past and present.

Given the rather downbeat mood in the church at the time, Kevin's thirteen years as President was a resurrection for All Hallows. But it must have been a resurrection too for Kevin. Kevin was a resurrection man. He was a dawn man. In this liturgy we pray that Kevin is now experiencing another kind of resurrection with God. The sadness of death gives way to the bright promise of immortality. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He has risen he is not here.

I am conscious that there is so much more that could be said – his work as Head of the Religious Studies Department of St Mary's, Strawberry Hill, London, his work as Provincial of the Irish Province of the Vincentians, his passionate commitment to the mission of the church, his enthusiastic interest in the church in Europe and his visits to different dioceses in Europe at a time when he was visually impaired. There is so much more... no doubt others will take up the story.

Mingled with the thought of resurrection and the mystery of suffering and death, I feel an enormous sense of gratitude as we gather here this evening. Gratitude to God for blessing Kevin with so much giftedness, gratitude to Kevin for giving his time and talents so generously to the work of our Congregation in St Mary's College Strawberry Hill, London as Provincial of Congregation of the Mission and as President of All Hallows; gratitude to his family in Glenamaddy who gave him to the Congregation of the Mission in 1954.

On a personal note I will miss Kevin very much but my sadness and loss is tempered somewhat by the fact that I lived and worked with an extraordinary man – wise, kindly, intelligent, and prophetic.

Mark Noonan CM

Kevin Rafferty CM

Born: Glenamady, Co Mayo, 29 April 1936
Entered the CM: 7 September 1954
Vows: 8 September 1959
Ordained Priest: 7 March 1962 in Holy Cross College, Clonliffe, by
Dr John Charles McQuaid, Archbishop of Dublin

APPOINTMENTS:

1962 – '63: St Vincent's, Castleknock
1963 – '66: Louvain (studies)
1966 – '82: St Mary's College, Strawberry Hill
1982 – '95: All Hallows College
1995 – 2001: Provincial of Irish Province
2001 – '08: All Hallows College

Died: 29 January 2008
Buried: All Hallows College

Fr Kevin – The Quiet Man

If Hallowed Halls could speak at will
And I'm quite sure they can
They'd tell a tale of one we loved
And called the quiet man.

For that is what Kevin was you know
A man of quiet heart
A wise man, a Philosopher
A man God set apart.

To see All Hallows change its style
To oversee the Vins
To teach all nations about love
And let the women in!

We have so much to thank him for
So much to treasure too
As now his Lord invites him in
The quiet man we knew.

He has a special place for him
The man who quietly lived
The motto of All Hallows
And had so much to give.

Go teach all Nations now
Dear friend
Your journey here is o'er
Your God surrounds you now with love
He's opened Heaven's door.

Father Desmond Martin MacMorrow CM

When invited by the Editor to write an obituary notice for my deceased brother, Desmond, I demurred initially. However, on reflection, the suggestion made good sense.

Desmond Martin MacMorrow was born on June 8th 1917. He was the eldest of five children, three boys and two girls. His birthplace was Kilbricken, Mountrath, Co Laois, where father was principal teacher in the local national school; mother being assistant teacher at the Oak National School, midway between Mountrath and Portlaoise. Des was born one year after the Easter Rising. Our district did not escape the consequences of years of violence that followed.

We were a family of moderate means – like all our neighbours. We had no car, no electricity, no running water, none of the prerequisites taken for granted in a modern home. Yet for all that we were well cared for, lacking in none of the basic needs of life. A strong bond both within the family and with our neighbours ensured that life ran smoothly – as indeed it did, the influence of our shared Catholic faith being the strongest bond of all.

Like all the members of the family, Des received his primary education in Kilbricken National School. All the boys were into hurling in a big way. Even in those early days Des showed his organising ability. It was he who arranged the matches, told each one where to play and anyone who did not do his bit was left in no doubt. He was a bad loser: had a flinty temper and many times I was on the receiving end!

When the time came to choose a secondary school, the choice seemed to lie between Ballyfin (Patrician), Ballinakill (Salesian) or more likely Roscrea (Cistercian). But that is not what happened. The question might reasonably be asked: “how did it happen that a family living in rural Co Laois come in contact with the Vincentian Community?” Here we have another example of the inscrutable ways of God’s Providence. Our father was an enthusiastic supporter of the Gaelic League and the language revival movement. It was his custom to go the Aran Islands each summer, usually bringing Des with him. In time they were both bi-lingual in Irish and English. While there he became friendly with two Vincentian priests, Fr Alex McCarthy and Fr Austin Murphy. They impressed him so deeply that he decided, there and then, to entrust the education of his three sons to them and he told them so. When he came home, he told mother what *he* had arranged. When she, a little piqued perhaps, asked him who these gentlemen were, he is reputed to have answered “Well, they are a religious order: they have a college in Dublin: they told me their names but I can’t remember them”. So

in the most unlikely circumstances Des went off to Castleknock. Not surprisingly the idea of by-passing the local schools and going to “faraway” Dublin gave rise to a suspicion of “snobbishness”. He seems to have had a successful passage there. Among those in his class was the brilliant Martin Dyar, older brother of our deceased confrere Fr JP. His siblings considered Des the most talented member of the family, academically, athletically and musically.

When he completed his Leaving Certificate, he announced his intention to be a priest and a Vincentian. It is said our parents were very surprised because they did not think he was “holy” enough! Holiness posed no problem to our parish priest. He arrived on our doorstep to ask Des to go to Carlow College and go forward for the diocese of Kildare and Leighlin.

He was ordained in 1943 along with Frs John Roughan, Derry Sweeney, James Murphy, Con Curtin, Frank Cleere, Maurice O’Neill, and Hugh Murnaghan. Following some years of teaching in Castleknock and St Paul’s, he joined the Mission Team, giving parish missions in Ireland, England and Scotland. His next assignment was one of twelve years as chaplain to the University of East Anglia in Norwich. Next he was appointed parish priest of Hereford. When he reached the age of retirement, by arrangement with the local bishop, he was appointed as parish assistant in the parish of St Theodore’s, Hampton, Middlesex. There he formed a close friendship with the parish priest, Fr Bernard Boylan, that lasted right up to his death, with an annual return visit of about six weeks. When Des finally returned to Ireland in 2001, he was warmly welcomed by the Castleknock Community. He was very appreciative of this welcome, often referring to the kindness of the President of the time, Fr Sam Clyne and the late Fr John Doyle.

Des had two hobbies in life – golf and racing. Both of these were rooted in his childhood environment. Our father was deeply involved in founding Mountrath Golf Club in 1929. Initially, the whole family became involved. Des showed natural flair for the game which rapidly developed. So very soon it was goodbye to hurling and welcome golf. Likewise there was a great interest in racing, nurtured by the fact that a well-known trainer lived not far away. Betting however was minimal; people could not afford it.

No one is exempt from the ups and downs of life. In this respect Des was no exception. Our father was a man of strong convictions. He lived by his own principles. He wouldn’t agree with anyone just to please them. It was a trait of character that Des inherited. While, generally speaking, it can be admirable, in community it can cause problems. And it did for Des, albeit in matters trivial. In the course of his long life, it was inevitable that some relationships would be difficult. The same

aspect of personality showed itself in his preferred theology which was strictly orthodox and traditional. All who knew him in pastoral ministry would describe his as a “Pope’s man”. That was why in my funeral homily I fulfilled his wish to ask forgiveness for any pain or hurt he had caused to anyone whether within the community or without.

About six weeks before he died, Des often spoke to me about death. He had a premonition that his end was approaching. After a period in hospital for tests and convalescence, he was, thanks to the kindness of Fr Peter Slevin and Fr John Gallagher, able to return to his room in Castleknock. However, it was only to be a short stay. The following day he suffered a severe stroke and death followed about five days later. Among the things he said to me in his final illness was that he could not visualise himself in any other walk of life except as a priest and Vincentian. Many of us would accept that as an epitaph.

Deo Gratias.

Frank MacMorrow CM

Desmond MacMorrow CM

Born; Stradbally, Co Laois, 8 June 1917
 Entered the CM; 7 September 1936
 Vows; 8 September 1938
 Ordained Priest: 30 May 1943 in Holy Cross College, Clonliffe, by
 Dr John Charles McQuaid, Archbishop of Dublin

APPOINTMENTS

1943-’55; St Vincent’s, Castleknock
 1955-’60; St Mary’s, Lanark
 1960-’63; St Paul’s, Raheny
 1963-’67; St Vincent’s, Sheffield
 1967-’79; St Mary’s, Dunstable
 (serving as Chaplain,
 University of East Anglia, Norwich)
 1979-’83; St Stephen’s, Warrington
 1983-’89; St Mary’s, Hereford
 1989-’98; St Mary’s, Strawberry Hill
 (serving in Hampton-on-Thames)
 1998-2001; St Vincent’s, Mill Hill
 (serving in Hampton-on-Thames)
 2001-’09; St Vincent’s, Castleknock

Died; 25 August 2009
 Buried; Castleknock College

Tribute to Fr Des MacMorrow CM

Fr Bernard Boylan and the parishioners
St Theodore's, Hampton

Last Monday afternoon, the mortal remains of Fr Des MacMorrow were borne with great solemnity on the shoulders of the senior boys at the school to his last resting-place in the grounds of Castleknock College, where he had attended as a boy, had taught as a young priest and had spent the last eight years of his life in retirement. That was after the Mass which had been attended by the remaining members of his own family, many priests of the Vincentian Congregation in Ireland and the UK, scores of his friends, boys from the school and the personal representative of the President of Ireland, Mary MacAleese, in whose State House in Phoenix Park, Fr Des had recently offered Mass. The funeral Mass had been concelebrated at the altar by Fr Des' brother priest, Fr Frank (Principal Celebrant), the President of the College, Fr Peter Slevin, and Fr Bernard Boylan of St Theodore's, Hampton. At the foot of the coffin, the Headmaster of the school had placed a high-quality framed enlargement of a photograph of Fr Des in the sanctuary of the Jesus Chapel at Canterbury Cathedral; addressing parishioners from St Theodore's who had travelled there with him on pilgrimage in 1991.

When Fr Des arrived from Hereford to live with the priests at St Mary's College in 1989, he was asked by Bishop MacMahon to come on permanent supply to Hampton where Fr Joe Scally had suffered set-backs in health and was in need of assistance. Then began a 20-year association with this parish which he last visited this Easter. At the age of 91, he drove here – in his beloved Renault Megane – stopping off on the way to stay with Fr Tom Regan in Abergavenny and with the monks at Belmont Abbey on his way home. As he was leaving Hampton after a 6-week stay he was talking about what he would like to do when he returned in 2010!

He will be remembered by us for all sorts of things. His opinions were always strongly held and he had no hesitation in asserting them. Nevertheless, he was forever the Pope's man and you knew exactly where you stood with him. He loved to discuss the topics of the day – especially if they touched on rugby, the horses or Irish hurling. His special resort while in Hampton was the Royal Mid-Surrey Golf Club in Richmond where he had many friends. Fr Des, in his heyday, boasted a 3-handicap in golf and would have given any golfing professional a good game.

Despite his abiding and life-long interest in sport, his heart was centred on the life of the Church and, specifically, in the last 20 years, the life of this parish. Even at the age of 91, he wanted to hear about what was going on at St Theodore's and the people of the parish as keenly as any new curate. He didn't hang back in giving his views about the way the Liturgy especially should be conducted. He will be remembered here, as he is in Castleknock, for his musical talent and he left a collection of his musical scores and books for our reference.

Fr Des suffered a serious stroke towards the end of July which landed him in hospital for almost a month. Having made extraordinary progress, he was allowed to return home and was full of optimism again for everything he was planning. But it wasn't to be. Having suffered a severe recurrence of his illness and heart attack he went from this world in the evening of Tuesday 25th August.

*Miserere mei, Deus
secundum magnam misericordiam tuam.*