

COLLOQUE

Journal of the Irish Province of the
Congregation of the Mission



V. Rev. Richard McCullen, C.M.,
Superior General.

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Editorial

The election of Fr Richard McCullen as Superior General of our Congregation and successor of St Vincent has made it desirable to provide for the Province a tribute to him in the form of a diary written very soon after the election and drawing on the first reactions to the election within and without the Congregation. To this has been added, *ad perpetuam rei memoriam*, the words of acceptance spoken by Fr McCullen and the address of Pope John Paul II to him and to delegates shortly after. Instant history is hazardous and the items presented here are a fortuitous collection rather than a carefully balanced presentation. They reflect, however, the seriousness of purpose among those deputed to elect a General for our Community, and a happiness and satisfaction with the choice that has been made. The Editor of *Colloque*, which came into existence on Father McCullen's direction, shares this happiness.

Election of Father McCullen as Superior General

“Ce P. General qui nous est venu des vertes prairies d’Irlande...”

Diary of Events Wednesday 9th — Friday 11th July.

Once upon a time in the presence of Father James Richardson I heard a confrère expressing mystification about the actual work done by the Institution we know as the College of Cardinals. The General cut in tersely: “Father I’ll tell you what they do ... They give us our Pope!” So, if you want to know what we have been doing in the assembly the answer is we have given 5,000 confrères and also, let it be said, 39,000 Daughters of Charity a new Superior General.

Speculation in the Assembly about the choice of a General had been quite muted and desultory, that is until the announcement of the date of the election. Friday July 11th. Appetites were now slightly whetted, groups met and discussed. The Latin-American confrères, for example, were invited by our English-speaking group to a meeting which tended to be a tiresome affair. Long dreary lists of requisite qualities for the office reminding you of a similar document drawn up by European theologians before the election of Pope John Paul II. About half a dozen names were mentioned — all foreigners! Most felt that the clear favourite was Father Florian Kapusciak, the Polish confrère who had been on the Curia for 12 years. At the 1974 Assembly he had been appointed Assistant for the Foreign Missions to gain worldwide experience, grow a little older and generally stay in the wings and wait for his cue in 1980.

Anyway, the Rules called for an Indicative Vote on Wednesday 9th to see who was in the field and in what order (number of votes not given, only the order of preference). As expected, Fr Kapusciak topped the polls but followed by Fr Perez Flores of the Province of Salamanca in second place, and by Father McCullen in third place. Almost twenty other names figured as is usual.

Then came the bombshell that changes lives! Father Richardson took the microphone and in measured terms explained that Fr Kapusciak did not wish to be considered for reasons explained by him

to the General. He, the General, felt the reasons were valid (and, if he did, thought we, they must be pretty good ones!) and so the scene had changed dramatically. How would Kapusciak's votes be distributed?

Now there was indeed a need for reflection and prayer. . . . As provided for by the Assembly Directory the next afternoon had been laid aside for just that purpose with a special Penitential Service in the Aula at 7 p.m.

Friday 11th Feast of St Benedict

I remember Fr Joe Leonard telling us one time that of all the "spirits" of the great Religious Orders that of the Benedictines was closest to ours. Relevant perhaps to the day's choice?

8.30 a.m. For the last time Fr James Richardson presided as chief Celebrant of the Eucharist in his role of Superior General. I fell to thinking there of the atmosphere... one so entirely free from politics or pressure groups, an atmosphere that seemed to set the tone for the Liturgy which in turn gathered up and expressed in itself the very genuine, very deep, aspirations of the 120 confrères from every Province in the world that the Spirit of God would direct and guide us to choose the man He had chosen to be our Superior General and the present day successor of Saint Vincent.

9.45 a.m. The importance of the day, the importance of the choice which we, or rather the Lord, were about to make was known to us and the words of Jeremiah, in the Reading were there to remind us:

"Before I formed you in the womb

I knew you before you came to birth I consecrated you,

I have appointed you as prophet to the nations." (*Jer 1*).

Acta of the Assembly... "Sessio inchoatur cantu Veni Creator. Formula iurisiurandi simul recitata a P. J. W. Richardson una cum adstantibus, initium habet suffragatio ad eligendum Superiorem Generalem... Primi scrutinii exitus:

McCullen R —39

Perez Florez — 25 etc

Secunda suffragatio:

McCullen —61

Perez Rorez — 34 etc.

The Directory allows only two votes in the course of the same session so all adjourned to the cortile for refreshments... all except Fr McCullen and myself. We went up together to the flat roof-top where we had paced up and down the night before. I had often noticed the Hungarian confrère delegate praying alone there and he was there now.

In a very moving way he came over to Dick, kissed his hand and said he was praying for him. *Les jeux sont fails!* and we all knew it.

The third voting session was a matter of form:

“Exitus tertii scrutinii: McCullen R — 81 votes.

Cum duas ex tribus partibus suffragiorum obtinisset P. Richard McCullen, Provinciae Hiberniae Visitator. SUPERIOR GENERALIS electus est. Hic omnes Conventus consodales surrexerunt novo Superiori Generali plaudentes...”

The Election was over but Father McCullen had yet to accept formally. This he did in his address which crystallised his acceptance not just of an office, but of a sacrifice, the greatest he had ever been called to make in his life. “In manus tuas Domine. commendo spiritum et vitam mean, . .

Each of the 118 other delegates then came to greet him. From the French bulletin:

“Je regarde le moment où les deux délégués d’Irlande vont à la rencontre de leur ancien visiteur. L’un d’entre eux jeune malgré ses cheveux blancs, et d’une corpulence qui impose un certain respect, se cache pour essuyer une larme. On devine le regret qu’il éprouve en “perdant” un père très aimé. C’est un signe de bonne augure!”

The *TE Deum* was sung and, to end the Session, Fr McCullen recited the *Angelus*, as the *Acta* duly noted, in the calm reverent tone that we know so well.

I p.m. Lunch: Lunch saw a happening that could only remind me of Pope John Paul’s Mass for the youth in Galway... something quite unscheduled, quite spontaneous.

As we know from talking about Liturgy it’s hard to define good “Celebration” but we do recognise it when we see it. *This* was celebration. Before the end of the meal, helped admittedly, as the French said — *le vin mousseux aidant*, someone began to sing and soon the dining room rang with the songs of the nations. “Quand les yeux irlandais sourirent tout le monde se sent jeune et joyeux,” dit la chanson populaire. Et c’est vrai. Il semble qu’à travers l’Assemblée passe *un certain souffle inespéré de jeunesse et de joie...*”

For me that last phrase cannot be bettered. If anyone asks what was the occasion really like, what did it feel like to be there, well that’s what it meant to us. “A sense, a spirit, a feeling of youthfulness and joy”.

Immediately after lunch the news was being flashed to every Province in the world. Michael Prior and myself were scratching our heads wondering where to start, but we needn’t have worried; already telegrams of congratulations had begun to pour in, mainly, as you might expect,

from the Daughters, before they were even supposed to know the result of the Election! Even our own confrères from the Philippines; France and Spain had a bulletin published within the hour. Exit Mick and myself as P.R.Os! This is what they were saying in the bulletins:

“Qui etes vous, P. McCullen?” and they proceeded to answer their own question: “the man with the remarkable gift for self effacement... an exquisite attention to persons... his lovely Irish sense of humour that forbids one to be serious except about really serious things... frail figure, but a decidedly firm step”.

Meanwhile the real Fr McCullen was quietly and efficiently presiding over an evening Session of the XXXVI General Assembly!

And next morning we read at Mass from Isaiah 6, “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying: Whom shall I send? I answered: “Here I am Lord, send me”.

ACCEPTANCE ADDRESS OF
Richard McCullen C.M.,
ON BEING ELECTED SUPERIOR GENERAL

When Fr Richardson appointed me Visitor of the Irish Province five and a half years ago, I recall that very soon afterwards I began to see new light in the way St Vincent ended his letters when writing to his confrères: *Indignus Sacerdos Congregationis Missionis*. And in my communications with the confrères of my own Province I have used them since, “Unworthy Priest of the Congregation of the Mission”, and now this morning I see even greater depths in those words, *Indignus Sacerdos Congregationis Missionis*. Since I have come to this Assembly four weeks ago I have felt humbled, because I have seen many Confrères here whom I would judge to have greater love for the Congregation, greater concern for the poor than I have. I have always found Assemblies to be a humbling experience. I have always gone home feeling a smaller man, and I feel it intensely this morning. At the level of nature I have felt many times that confrères have over-estimated my talents. I listened to the words of Jeremiah in the reading of the Mass this morning, “Ah, ah, Domine — nescio loqui” — my command of languages is very small, and I have told confrères that. Two or three days ago I communicated it to Fr. Richardson, and last night with my own confrères from Ireland I began to get afraid of what might happen, and one of them said, “No matter how unworthy you are, or what you have failed to do, it would be a call to conversion”, and it is in that spirit that I accept the election this morning as a call to conversion, to a greater love for the Congregation and for its ends.

Fr Richardson, there will be another time when I will be able to express to you the deep sense of gratitude and appreciation for what you have done for the Congregation in the past twelve years. All I can say now is I accept the election and the office, and for the rest, all I can say is.

In Manus Tuas, Domine
Commendo Spiritum et vitam meam.

Pope John Paul II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE
36th GENERAL ASSEMBLY AT CASTEL GANDOLFO
JULY 27, 1980

Beloved Sons,

I am happy today to be meeting with you who make up the new General Curia of the Congregation of the Mission, or Lazarists, elected by the 36th General Assembly of the same Institute.

So I am pleased to greet your new Superior General in the person of Father Richard McCullen, the present-day Successor of St Vincent, and with him the Vicar General, Father Miguel Perez-Flores, and the Assistants General.

While expressing my esteem for you and my satisfaction on your election to positions that are so important, I cannot but offer you my paternal good wishes for a diligent and profitable fulfilment of the mission to which you have been delegated.

Religious life today, as always, and even more than ever, is called upon to give a shining witness to the Church and to the world, through an unconditional and total following of Christ in this life, and must conform itself to living in such a way that men may fruitfully see how dynamically concerned with the good of everyone an authentic consecration to the Lord can be.

You must know, therefore, how to unite harmoniously in yourselves a necessary activity and irreplaceable contemplation and, above all, how to realise effectively the synthesis of the two in all the members of your Congregation.

I know that your proper fields of apostolate are many: missions, above all, in the widest understanding of the term intended by your great St Vincent; then the direction of, and the teaching in Seminaries; the direction of the Daughters and Ladies of Charity; spiritual retreats to the clergy and laity. You deal with activities which are very significant, touching diverse and relevant areas in the life of the Church, and demanding the full, intelligent, and zealous commitment of the Lazarists in the great and urgent name of the Charity of Christ. And you, from your new positions of responsibility, will surely know how to impress on all your illustrious religious family those impulses which are demanded by the times and by the conditions both of the Church and of the world in which we live today.

Be assured that I will remember you in prayer so that you may not lack the inspiration and strengthening Divine grace on your decisions and on your delicate ministry.

My apostolic blessing is a pledge of the heavenly favours which I hope will abound. I impart it with a full heart on you and on your worthy confrères spread throughout the world, as an assurance of my affection and of my encouragement.

Simple Father Vincent

Kevin Murnaghan

(This is a slightly edited reprint of an article which the late Fr Murnaghan wrote for the February 1952 issue of EVANGELIZARE)

Hilaire Belloc says somewhere that one of the great faults in history writing is simplifying a complex problem. Gibbon tells us that sitting near the ruins of the Capitol he heard the monks chanting Vespers and decided Catholicism was the cause of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire; he certainly was simplifying a complex problem. In the same way, to sum up St Vincent de Paul as a simple, kind, old man, of no great intellectual acumen, is misleading. Certainly he was a kind old man, as his pictures portray him, searching the Paris streets at night for abandoned children. And most certainly he was a father to the poor, but he was also a father to both the rich and poor of the whole of France, and by his double family a benefactor of the whole church, clergy and laity, for over three hundred years. “Father of the Poor” doesn’t begin to cover all this.

Saint-Cyran in a moment of exasperation called him a great ignoramus, and said he wondered how the Vincentians bore with him; Vincent said he wondered at it too. The great Condé did NOT wonder, or agree at all. He said in front of Queen and Cardinal: “Fr Vincent, you are for ever harping on your ignorance, but I notice that in a few words you settle the most complicated canonical difficulties. You seem to have been most judiciously chosen by Her Majesty”. Cardinal Richelieu would have been surprised if the Vincentians couldn’t bear with Fr Vincent. He consulted him when he wished to fill an episcopal see. Cardinal Mazarin had experience of the saint’s ability when for ten years he had to outwit him to make political church appointments. It was Vincent who succeeded in giving Saint Sulpice to Fr Olier against Mazarin’s wish.

The Jansenists were clearly showing spite when they treated Vincent as an ignoramus. Wasn’t he the man who persuaded the majority of the bishops to sign a letter to the Pope against Jansenius? It was a pitched battle. Eighty-five of them signed, eleven refused, a few abstained. Didn’t he write several memoranda against their doctrine, to influence two bishops and his wavering confrère Fr Dehorgny? Didn’t he send to Rome papers which influenced the Holy Father in condemning

Arnauld? Didn't he oppose them inside the four high-class Visitation convents he ruled in Paris? Didn't they call him one of the most dangerous enemies of the disciples of St Augustine? Didn't one of them have a vision of a coming persecution in which Fr Vincent would be one of the cruellest persecutors? Didn't people say that as St Ignatius was raised up against the Protestants so was Fr Vincent raised up against the Jansenists?

How could the Jansenists be expected to forbear calling him an ignoramus when he dared oppose such lights as Saint-Cyran, of whom his friends said: "What a pity he died; the Scriptures were clearer in his brain than even in the sacred text", and Arnauld, the great Arnauld, who despised the priests of St Lazare where, he said, everyone pretends to be a director of souls without knowing the first rule on the subject, and against whom Fr Vincent dared even to be sarcastic, as Pascal had been against the Jesuits. The shoe was decidedly on the other foot when people were told, not by the witty Pascal but by the ignoramus Vincent: "Is there anyone who would dare receive Communion? Certainly not. Except Fr Arnauld who, after putting conditions so high that not even St Paul would dare approach, then calmly tells us that he, Fr Arnauld, says Mass every day. In this his humility is admirable when you consider the good opinion he has of many directors and people who dare go, and against whom he is never finished inveighing".

The very astute and terrible cardinal met his match in Fr Vincent whom he tried to browbeat in a judicial process, the object of which was to try to procure the death sentence against Saint-Cyran. The cardinal had letters between the two and only needed Fr Vincent's admission of the subject matter. This is what he got: "As to whether or not the Abbe had said he meant to ruin the Church, Fr Vincent dis-remembered anything like that, but what he did know was that the Abbe had invited the Vincentians to give a mission when he knew we gave absolution immediately, whether it was true or not that the Abbe refused absolution till penance had been actually done". Another statement was: "He is one of the best men I ever met". Maybe Richelieu should have asked Cardinal de Bérulle's opinion on Vincent. The great Oratorian had a personal knowledge of, and a singular respect for, Vincent's depth and resourcefulness.

St Francis de Sales and St Chantal, who preferred Fr Vincent to the famous Oratorians as director of the four Paris Visitations, and the Archbishop of Paris who obliged him to withdraw his resignation in 1646 and remain at their head for thirty-eight years, undoubtedly hadn't been told what an ignoramus he was in the eyes of Port Royal.

The Company of the Blessed Sacrament, all powerful secret society, approved of by the Pope. King, Nuncio and Richelieu, though not by the Archbishop and Mazarin, broke their rule against having any Community man in their ranks to profit by the accession of Vincent de Paul, who thus took his place with de Bérulle, Bossuet, Olier and the most distinguished figures of French society of the day. The intellectual Fr Condren, who didn't think much of the priests of St Lazare, grudgingly admitted: "Fr Vincent has the character of prudence; the whole country consults him". The Queen of France for five years obeyed him as her director.

For ten years Vincent de Paul was a member of the Council of Conscience. He ruled the Church of France for the spiritual, and Mazarin for the temporal. He surprised the great Condé by his grip of affairs, he withstood Mazarin to his face. A furious duchess breaking a chair over his head didn't even budge him. The Tuesday Conferences — the elite of the French Church — were held under his direction, and if there was a clash of wills or ideas he won, as when he wanted a mission in Saint Germain and they didn't. He insisted, and they grew angry, so he knelt down and said: "I am a foolish old man; I thought God would be honoured: forgive me". This was too clever for them; they gave the mission. Which reminds one of the other "foolish one for Christ" who said: "We are stupid, you are wise", and "I know nothing but Christ crucified". The King of France said: "Ah, Fr Vincent, if I recover, all the bishops of France will have to pass three years with you". And at his deathbed a place had to be found for Vincent beside two bishops and Fr Binet, SJ.

I don't know what species exactly of ignoramus he was who founded the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. Take the former: although he says: "It is pitiable the aversion all have for the religious state, from the Pope down; they will not allow vows", through a maze of projects for vows, solemn or simple, oaths, fulminations of excommunication in chapter etc., he brought his project to reality after thirty years of fighting. And the same for the latter, though they were to have no religious habit, only modesty for a veil, the street for a cloister, the Parish Priest as chaplain, and a Sister Servant instead of a Superior. And he also had his system of retreats for ordinands imposed on all France and accepted in Rome by the Holy Father, over-riding all opposition. Of course, though he didn't go around shouting it, he was a Bachelor of Theology and had a Licentiate in Canon Law; he himself said he was a fourth grade scholar, and the Jansenists said he was a great ignoramus; that was spite. The facts mentioned here speak for

themselves. It's up to the candid reader.

As he walked down the Louvre in an old patched soutane the courtiers may have smiled at the simple old man, never dreaming what may have been going on in the Council Chamber. And as he trudged along the dusty Saint Denis road and was seen by Condé and a group of horsemen who said: "Let's have a joke on Fr Vincent"; galloping along firing their pistols and shouting, they meant to force him into seeking the first church in sight to thank God for his safety; to them he may have appeared a simple old man.

And Cardinal de Retz may have thought he had the laugh on Fr Vincent when, as he said, he "acted the devotee and went to the Tuesday Conferences". But did he? He quotes Vincent as having said: "He (de Retz) hasn't enough piety, but he isn't too far from the Kingdom of God". Now it is to be remembered that the saint knew de Retz from a baby and refused to have any part in his education and when we hear him say de Retz hadn't enough piety, doesn't that dispose of the idea he was duped by de Retz appearing at the Conferences? And when he said de Retz was not too far from the Kingdom of God, instead of a fool he was simply being a prophet; the cardinal ended up as an abbot, and pious. If either of them had the laugh on the other, who laughs best? Very different in his complexity is the Vincent who wrote his 30,000 letters. They would have very much surprised the courtier, the galloping horsemen and the masquerading devotee, de Ritz.

They would have seen Fr Codoing out-generalled in his brilliant, hasty, obstinate projects; Fr Dehorgny and Fr Du Coudray receiving dogmatic instruction on Scripture and St Augustine where they thought they excelled; Fr Lambert, the saint's right hand, being taught humility for neglecting to stay in bed when told to; the scrupulous being tenderly coaxed through countless interviews, four in the hour if necessary. The obtuse confrère being handled as he needed: "My God, sir, is it the missions you must have? Why! we find it hard to understand you here in the house".¹ And delicate situations handled in masterly fashion: "The letter I wrote to you is conceived so as not to make Madame X angry, nor allow her to ask you the questions you fear. Show it to her; it is composed purposely for this; watch her reactions, which you will tell me. If she does ask you something you can't answer, say you must write to me. Act simply with her. Your fear is from a good source. I thank God for the wisdom he has given you" (V 230).

Or this: "I am sending a sister to replace Sister Marguerite who is

1 Fr Murnaghan seems to have in mind Vincent's letter to Luke Plunket, from Co. Meath, who was stationed in Saint-Méen (cf VII 562).

so high and mighty and obstinate. It will be difficult to announce the new one as superior; it is to be feared the other would not submit. But after a month or two, seeing the humility, gentleness and true submission of the other, she (Sister Marguerite) will be betrayed into some extravagance against her will which will necessitate her being recalled” (V 359).

And when Fr le Vazeux in Rome took action against Fr Authier who wanted to assume the name “Priests of the Mission”. Vincent wrote to him that he should leave these things to Providence: and then the saint took the matter up himself in Paris with the Duke de Ventadour who was behind the whole thing: Fr le Vazeux was the simple one in this case; it was deeper than he knew. It involved the man who had founded the Company of the Blessed Sacrament, as Vincent de Paul, that “simple old man”, knew very well; he was a member.

Who ever heard that Gascons are supposed to be simple? In France they stand for *finesse* (Dictionary: shrewdness, ingenuity). We have seen Vincent fencing with three cardinals who were of the cleverest. There was a fourth, de la Rochefoucauld, who could have done great injury in the matter of St Lazare. Vincent argued with him, and when that failed he knelt down at his feet and won his case. Goldsmith said of Dr Johnson that if his musket mis-fired he clubbed you with the butt. Vincent de Paul knelt down simply; and while the Doctor only won his argument by being rude and shouting, the Saint gained his point, edified his adversary and remained on good terms with him. Surely there is genius in such simplicity.

Fr Coste tells us that when Vincent was canonised his old enemies the Jansenists were annoyed. Some professed to be scandalised at a man being canonised for “giving a house to madmen and incorrigibles, and his missions for the ‘soup-pot’ Sisters”. Such callous understatement of the Saint’s work didn’t even get by with the Jansenists, and we have another Jansenist replying for him: “20,000 missions is some thing; 5,000 poor cared for every day is no bagatelle, and if all you can think of to say is ‘soup-pot’ Sisters you might as well try to sum him up as ‘The Bonhomme Vincent who raised brats and gave clean hay to galley-slaves’ ”. This seems to have made the offenders look very ridiculous, and when the “simple” Fr Vincent achieved that through the help of a Jansenist of common sense, nothing remains to be said.

Pierre-René Rogue

Thomas Davitt

To his mother he was “Renotte”, to the townsfolk of Vannes he was “the wee priest”. He was only 4’ 11” in height, and at the time of his death at the age of thirty-eight he was described as having brown hair around a bald pate, brown eyebrows above weak-sighted blue eyes, a red beard on a dimpled chin, and a fine singing voice. He had poor health from early childhood, with six bad bouts of pneumonia before he was twelve years old.

He was born on 11 June 1758 in Vannes, in Brittany. His father was a hatter and furrier from Angers who had come to the town with his new wife to set up business. A short while after Pierre-René’s birth the father died while away from home on a business trip; it is possible that he never saw his only child. The widow decided to continue the business, but in a less expensive part of the town.

Pierre-René finished school somewhat on the young side and went to spend a year with his mother’s relatives in Bourges; on his return to Vannes he entered the major seminary, at the age of eighteen; this was in 1776.

The seminary at that time was under Vincentian direction. Back in 1642 there had been some moves to get St Vincent to start a seminary in Vannes, but these came to nothing. In 1667 a start was made, and by 1679 the buildings were finished; this was thanks to the Vicar General, Louis Eudo de Kerlivio, though he died four years before their completion. He had spent four years as a seminarian in the Collège des Bons Enfants and had been prepared for ordination by St Vincent in 1645. From his return to Brittany as a priest he kept in touch with St Vincent, and some of their correspondence may be found in the Coste set and in the supplementary volume XV. The seminary opened for students in 1680 under the direction of diocesan priests. In 1693 the bishop invited the Vincentians to open a house for missions in the town, and then in 1701 they were given charge of the seminary. In 1706 they were given the church of Notre Dame du Mené, which served both as parish church and seminary chapel. Another Vincentian link with Vannes is the fact that a grand-uncle of St Louise had been bishop there.

We know from a legal document drawn up in connection with his mother’s business that he attended the seminary as a “day boy” apart from his two final years; this document lists all the contents of his room

in his mother's house, including a soft green armchair.

The seminary course was six years; he received tonsure and minor orders in 1779, subdiaconate in 1780, diaconate in 1781, and priesthood on 21 September 1782: he received all orders in Notre Dame du Mené, where he also celebrated his first Mass.

His first appointment was as chaplain to a women's retreat house in Vannes. Eudo de Kerlivio, before his death, had founded a retreat house for men, motivated by what he had seen St Vincent do in Paris. Shortly after his death a noblewoman in Vannes founded a similar house for women. Pierre-René held the post for four years and then decided he wanted to join the Vincentians: he has left no indication of what prompted this decision.

In late October 1786 he entered the seminaire in St Lazare. The normal duration of the seminaire was two years, but only one year for seminarists who were already priests; Pierre-René spent only three months there, probably for reasons of health. His first Vincentian appointment was back to Vannes, to teach dogma in the seminary; betook his vows there on 22 October 1788. The seminary catered also for seminarians of dioceses other than Vannes, and in addition provided courses in theology for laypeople; this latter point was to have some significance later on. About two and a half years after taking up his appointment he was given the additional one of curate in Notre Dame de Mené.

After 1789 the problems of the French Revolution, particularly that of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, began to have their effect in Brittany. In August the bishop of Vannes, Sébastien-Michel Amelot, rather inexplicably gave an undertaking that he and the chapter would accept all decrees already made, or which would in future be made, by the National Assembly. On 25 October 1790 the decree imposing the Civil Constitution of the Clergy was officially promulgated in Vannes. At that stage Amelot refused to take the required oath and waited for directives from the Pope, Pius VI. The civil authorities, in a memo, estimated that only about six priests out of more than four hundred would probably take the oath.

At mid-day on 14 February 1791 some priests, including Jean-Mathurin LeGal CM, superior of the seminary, were summoned to appear before the city authorities. There is a surviving summary of what happened at the meeting, and after it they signed the following declaration:

The National Assembly having declared by its decree and instruction of 21 January that it neither intends to nor is empowered to interfere with spiritual matters I swear to fulfil my duties exactly, to be loyal to the state, to the law and to the

King, and to uphold with all my power the constitution decreed by the National Assembly and accepted by the King.

We declare that at the end of the parish Mass next Sunday we will take the above-mentioned oath.

Vannes, 14 February 1791.

The authorities were overjoyed at this document, but when word of it reached Pierre-René he went to Le Gal, whom he found slumped in a chair exhausted.¹ He realised that the reputation of the superior of the seminary was such that if it became generally known that he had agreed to take the oath then many of the clergy would be prepared to follow his lead. He therefore made Le Gal write a letter to his dictation:

To the civic authorities, Vannes:

Gentlemen,

Having thought over everything that is involved I think that the preamble to the oath is not a sufficiently clear exclusion of spiritual matters, so I am notifying you that I will not take the oath next Sunday. I am therefore leaving and I will return to settle my accounts when peace returns to the town. If anyone interferes with what is in my room I will be unable to settle my accounts properly. My senior colleague will take over the running of the house; only outsiders need be feared. I request you to publish my retraction.

I am also notifying you that the seminarians wish to leave. I am of the opinion that there is nothing which they can do in the seminary.

I am, Gentlemen, with respect, your very humble and very obedient, servant,

Le Gal, Superior of the Seminary.

This retraction is dated the same day as the original letter. Pierre-René was the senior confrère and he took the letter and delivered it personally to the municipal authorities. When this became known all the other priests who had signed the original document also withdrew their undertaking; as a result there was only one priest in Vannes who took the oath. The records are extant and the names of the priests who refused are listed; Pierre-René is mentioned twice, once as a professor in the seminary and again as a curate in Notre Dame du Mené.

A week later Le Gal returned to the seminary and things were reasonably quiet for some weeks; at this time Francis Clet spent a night in the seminary on his way from Paris to Lorient where he was to catch the boat for China.

On 1 April Le Gal and the seminary staff were declared suspect because they had not taken the oath. On the 20th the contents of the seminary were put up for sale and the staff were told to leave. They decided they were not going to leave without a fight, making use of every possible loophole which they could find in the decrees and laws.

The law about the confiscation and sale of ecclesiastical property had one exception. Church establishments which had been involved in public education, and had been providing it openly on 2 November 1789, were exempt from confiscation and sale. The seminary in Vannes had, on that date, been providing courses in theology for lay people. This was the first legal provision on which the staff intended to base their resistance. The second one was that the deed of foundation of the seminary dated 17 January 1701 made it clear that the seminary and its contents were the property of the Congregation of the Mission, a secular society which was not included in the suppression of the religious orders. The Congregation was not suppressed until 18 August 1792.

The date fixed by the authorities for the staff to leave the seminary was 24 April, four days after the sale: the seminarians had left by then but the staff stayed on. Four days before the sale the authorities had provisionally fixed a salary scale for the superior and members of the staff; this had been in answer to a letter from Le Gal of 31 March in which he complained that although tithes had been collected in 1790 they had not been passed on to the clergy; he also complained that they had received no income for the first part of 1791. The authorities said that the arrears in tithes would be paid, and they also fixed a salary scale for the priests in the seminary; these sums were in fact paid. This encouraged Pierre-René to try something else. As well as being a professor in the seminary he was a curate in the parish, and therefore entitled to payment for that as well:

Gentlemen,

In the month of November 1789 I was assigned to parish work in the church of Le Menez. I think the decrees authorise me to receive a salary for 1790. Please forward a warrant for payment. During that year I was due only 5 *Livres* 12 *sols* in stole fees.

You fixed my salary at 800 *livres*; since the church of Le

Menez was not closed until the last day of April I request you to authorise the payment of my salary for the first four months.

I have the honour to be, with respect, Gentlemen,
Your very humble and obedient servant,
Rogue, Mission Priest.
Vannes 10 May 1791.

The authorities complied with this request, so he decided to raise a further matter. Since ordination he had had a small income from a benefice in the diocese of Angers, and this had been stopped. He had obtained a certificate from the authorities in Angers that the money had been paid into the public treasury and that the authorities in Vannes were to pass on the payment to him. He had to write twice more before the end of the year before he got his money; it was paid in instalments up to July 1792.

On 21 May 1791 an unlawfully consecrated, State appointed, bishop arrived in Vannes, taking over the cathedral and one other church; for each of these he appointed priests who had taken the oath. Priests who had refused the oath were forbidden to exercise any function other than celebrating Mass, and for that they were confined to parish churches; all other churches and chapels were closed. The Vincentians in the seminary were allowed celebrate Mass only in their community oratory, and with this no one interfered until January 1792. In December 1791 Le Gal had been asked by the authorities to prepare a detailed statement of the finances of the seminary; he tried to gain time by requesting that the statement should maintain the distinction between Vincentian and other ownership. He achieved only a slight delay, and at eight o'clock one evening towards the end of January they were forced out of the seminary. All the staff except Le Gal and Pierre-René left the town; the latter was able to take up residence with his mother and he tried to continue to work as curate of Notre Dame du Mené although it had been officially suppressed on 30 April the previous year. He also tried to recover furniture and other personal property of the confrères who had been in the seminary, pointing out that he was entitled to this by a decree of the authorities of December 1791; however, by June 1792 earlier decrees were no longer accepted. In July he received a letter from the authorities saying that it appeared that he had received in error a double salary, and asking for the return of the excess. He replied:

Vannes 13 August 1792.

Gentlemen,

I have the honour to acknowledge receipt of your recent letter together with that of the Department concerning the payments I have received, and to add my comments.

My first comment is that, no doubt through a copyist's mistake, it is said in that letter that I was given some 2.600 *livres* for the final four months of my ministry as curate, while a curate's salary had been fixed at only 700 *livres*; but I worked for the entire year, so why should I be paid for only the final four months as referred to in the letter? Besides, since the salary was to be paid in one lump sum the right to it no longer existed when a salary for me as professor was fixed provisionally; this was fixed for us only in January 1792, while my salary as curate had been paid in May 1791,

A further comment I have to make is that if I have to pay anything back I must deduct the following:

1: 125 *livres* for my final term, which you refused to send me, and the same for Fr Le Gal, by order of the Department;

2: the sum of 21 *livres* 2 *sols* 5 *deniers* which M Bachelot (the Collector) held on to as the balance of the patriotic contribution which is claimed on the 200 *livres*. This leaves only the paltry sum of 100 *livres* and if you put that against the balance of 6,000 *livres* which has not been paid to us and which the Department admits is still due, you will see that I am not in arrears and that if there is anyone against whom you should take proceedings it is obvious who it is.

I even dare, Gentlemen, to take advantage of this opportunity to point out that I have the right to ask for my money. This is not on the ground of my being a salaried official but on the ground of compensation due to me; our property has been sold in spite of a veto referring to secular Congregations, and even in Paris the St Lazare property is still respected. Since, then, in accordance with the latest decree religious will receive their salary even if they do not take the oath, provided they do not wear the habit, we who do not present the same problem have the right to receive ours without taking the oath; the only difference between us is that their property was sold in accordance with the law while ours was sold independently of and antecedent to any law.

Such, Gentlemen, are the comments which I have to make after an initial reading and which I forward to you as requested.

I have the honour to be, with respect, Gentlemen,

Your very humble and obedient servant,
Rogue, Priest of the Mission.

He carefully maintained good relations with the civil authorities and was not molested in his celebration of Mass in parish churches. Even before things got really difficult in Vannes in September 1792 he had probably begun the practice of celebrating Mass in private houses.

Three days before the letter just quoted the King had been arrested in Paris. Then came more trouble about another oath, that of Liberty and Equality; things worsened so rapidly that while Pierre-René had been on reasonably good terms with the authorities and able to negotiate with them on financial matters in mid-August, by 8 September he had gone underground, "on the run". On 18 August secular Congregations were suppressed; on 26 August a law deporting all priests who had not taken the required oaths was promulgated and all such priests had a fortnight to leave the country. On 13 October a further law provided that any priest who had not registered his place of residence was to be considered as having emigrated; all priests who had not taken the oath were to be arrested and deported to French Guyana. Priests therefore had three options: they could go into voluntary exile, they could submit to forced deportation, or they could go underground in disguise. Most of them saw no point in allowing themselves to be forcibly deported, so the choice was really between voluntary exile and going underground. Le Gal, as Parish Priest of Notre Dame du Mené was inclined to see it as his duty to stay. Guesdon says that Pierre-René convinced him that there was no point in the two of them staying, and that as he was determined to stay Le Gal might as well leave; he added: "If later on I become a victim of the Revolution you will be able to see what you will have to do to come to the help of your flock". He does not explicitly say so but it would appear that his thinking was that since he was a native of the town he would have a much better chance than Le Gal in maintaining an underground ministry during the troubles. Le Gal went into voluntary exile in Spain.² Three other priests of the town stayed on with Pierre-René. He couldn't pay anything more than hurried flying visits to his mother's house because it was constantly raided in the hope of trapping him. It was a peculiar period in the town; on one occasion he was brought by a police officer to police headquarters to administer the last sacraments to the officer's wife, and nobody interfered. It appears that he also secretly prepared seminarians for ordination, those who had already been ordained sub-deacons before the troubles started; many such sub-deacons made their way to Paris and were ordained there.

His decision to go "on the run" in September 1792 was precipitated by the law requiring an oath of Liberty and Equality. The

wording was:

I swear that, preserving Liberty and Equality, I will be faithful to the nation or die defending it.

At first sight this seems innocuous; the trouble lay in the meaning that “liberty” carried at that time; it was explained as meaning that every individual had the right to choose between good and evil, and the right not to have to submit himself to anyone else’s authority. On 21 October 1793 the penalty was increased from deportation to Guyana to sentence of death; it was under this law that Pierre-René was eventually to be executed. The first priest victim in the Vannes area was executed on 11 December 1793; during 1794 twelve more were guillotined.

Robespierre fell in July 1794 and there followed a relaxation of many of the anti-religious laws. In Vannes the civic authorities promulgated a decree of this nature on 26 March 1795; it granted an amnesty to all priests who were in prison for refusing the oath of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. These released priests, as well as all those who had been in hiding or “on the run” were to appear before an official and state in what area they wished to live “in peace, in submission to the laws and loyal to the Republic”. Pierre-René waited for a while before doing this; around the end of May he came out and admitted that he had been in hiding in France for refusing to take the oath. As a result he was able to resume the public exercise of his ministry. This respite lasted only two or three months.

At the end of June a group of emigrant royalists landed in Brittany from an English fleet; they were attacked by General Hoche, the man who eighteen months later was in command of the 14,000 troops which tried unsuccessfully to land in Ireland to help the United Irishmen. After the battles Vannes was filled with wounded, among whom typhus broke out. Guesdon reports that Pierre-René ministered to the plague-stricken as well as to the wounded, even Republican soldiers.

In September the authorities once again enacted anti-religious laws. On the 6th they banished again those priests who had been deported and who had returned. On the 21st they forbade all priests who had not taken the oath to exercise any public or civil functions. On the 29th they passed a law which included the following:

No one shall be allowed to carry on any religious ministry in any place whatsoever without previously having made, before the municipal authorities of the place in which he wishes to minister, a declatation such as the following: “I acknowledge that the entire body of French citizens is sovereign

and I promise submission and obedience to the laws of the Republic". Any declaration which shall contain anything either more or less shall be null and void.

A lot of priests in Paris took this oath, apparently thinking it was wide enough in its wording to allow them to do so; down the country it was different, and priests remembered some of the laws already passed by the authorities since the Revolution. They decided that the wording was so wide that it could be regarded as advance acceptance of any laws passed, irrespective of what they were about. They once again refused the oath and opted for underground ministry. Pierre-René refused it, and at his subsequent trial he was specifically questioned about it and admitted that he had never taken it.

On 25 October 1795 the laws of 1792 and 1793, which had been temporarily suspended, were re-activated. Vannes became a heavily guarded town, after the attempted invasion, and its streets were constantly patrolled; no one could enter or leave the town after eight o'clock at night.

On Christmas Eve that year, between nine and ten at night, Pierre-René was bringing communion to a sick parishioner when he noticed he was being tailed by two men; outside the house to which he was going they came up to him and apprehended him. One of them, a cobbler named Le Meut, owed his job to his victim, and was also receiving financial help from Madame Rogue. They brought him to the hall where the municipal authorities were in session, but got a far different reception from what they had expected. They were told that they had no authority to make arrests and that if they wanted their victim detained they would have to go and find some police officers. When they left the members of the council, most of whom had been at school with Pierre-René, offered him the chance to escape. He declined, saying that that would get them into trouble; he got their permission to consume the Hosts he was carrying. Then the two returned with the police and he was handcuffed and removed to the jail, a double-towered building which incorporated one of the town gates.

The local reaction to the arrest is described by Guesdon:

The following day when the townspeople of Vannes heard of Fr Rogue's arrest there was consternation everywhere; a cry of indignation escaped from every mouth. The patriots themselves, who had seen him born and growing up among themselves, were dismayed and couldn't help expressing their indignation; everyone thought so highly of this holy priest that those who

arrested him were not welcome at meetings, meetings at which priests were insulted and slandered every day.

The impression which the Canon gives is that the local civil authorities, even if they carried out the revolutionary laws, were of the opinion that they did not apply to someone like Pierre-René.

On Christmas Day he wrote to his mother: Madame,

Please accept my gratitude for everything so far. Give my regards to the whole heavenly court.³ I'm well aware of the interest they take there in my little accident (as the fashionable expression goes)! Give my regards also to the pigeon-house. I pray that their health may improve; mine is perfect, thank God. So, till we meet again, God willing, or at least on the way to the main square if I leave. There, with a full heart, I'll give you my last loving blessing, at least in spirit, and also to all the others I'd be pleased to see then; but I'm unworthy of this. However, be that as it may, if it comes to pass I'd very much like to see all my friends, at least in passing. Keep well, always good and charitable, and believe me in life as well as afterwards your very humble and obedient servant

Renotte.

Guesdon gives this letter in its entirety and he presumably saw the original; it was probably brought out of prison the day it was written. A woman who had sheltered him when he was "on the run" came to visit him in prison and offered the jailer a watch to let him escape; the jailer was willing but the prisoner was not prepared to be the possible cause of other retaliatory arrests.

In prison he exercised his ministry for the other prisoners, hearing their confessions and helping them in whatever ways he could. His mother was allowed to visit him from time to time, and she used to send in his meals; when she discovered he was sharing them with others she doubled up the quantity. During his time in prison he wrote poetry; Brétaudeau quotes a five stanza canticle which he wrote, and which he later sang on his way to the guillotine; he was well known for his singing.

The revolutionary Tribunal of Vannes set itself up at first in the seminary, and then in February 1796 it transferred to the women's retreat house, which had been the scene of Pierre-René's first ministry after ordination; the chapel was used as the actual courtroom, while the rest of the building was used for offices. In that same month a circular came from Paris urging all local authorities to arrest, try, convict and execute as quickly as possible all refractory priests. On the 15th, in Vannes, twelve prisoners, including Pierre-René, were

listed for trial. The public prosecutor, Lucas Bourgerel, refused to act against Pierre-René's. He said that before the Revolution he had known him and three others of the imprisoned priests very well and for that reason he was not prepared to act and requested a replacement; his request was granted.⁴

At his first interrogation on 29 February it was established that he had not taken the oath to uphold the Civil Constitution of the Clergy; that he had not taken the oath of Liberty and Equality; that he had neither voluntarily left France nor been deported; that he had continued to exercise priestly ministry after having given an undertaking to live peacefully and contribute to peace and good order; that he had not made the declaration recognising the sovereignty of the people of France; and finally that he had not promised submission and obedience to the laws of the Republic. The Prosecutor then concluded that it had been established that the prisoner must be numbered among the refractory priests and should be brought before the Tribunal as soon as possible in order to be sentenced.

On 2 March he was brought before the Court to receive sentence. He was again put through the same sort of questioning as before, but this time the question of his health was raised. The previous day he had been examined by two doctors and the history of his weak health was established. The judges, however, did not consider his health was sufficiently poor to warrant a mitigated sentence since he had been able to carry out all his functions at the seminary; he was sentenced to death, without the right of appeal, and the sentence was to be carried out in public within twenty-four hours. His mother was in Court and a bystander asked her if the prisoner was her son; when she replied affirmatively he said: "You have reared a monster!"

On his return to prison he wrote a last letter to his mother; Guesdon does not quote it but says that in it he asked her not to discontinue the financial aid which she had been giving to Le Meut. He also wrote to his confrères,⁷ and Guesdon quotes this letter, though apparently omitting a section, indicated by three dots. The letter is in the ANNALES, Brétaudeau, Misermont and Gonthier. Brétaudeau omits both proper names, and Misermont and Gonthier omit Robin. Yves Le Manour was a Breton priest who had been executed in January; Alain Robin was in prison and due to be executed the same day as Pierre-René; neither was a Vincentian:

Gentlemen and my dear confrères,

God is granting me the same favour as our friend Manour. I ask for your prayers; I hope you won't deny them to me, nor to Robin either. God honoured me by making me bear a

cross; necessity added another one, that I don't have the chance to embrace you one last time: on top of these God arranged another, the sight of my poor mother in Court, where she broke down like a Mother of Sorrows, though sustained by her religion as I expected. I want you to pray for her. . . It appears that the speedy carrying-out of the sentence will be about ten o'clock. Let us love each other in time and eternity. Amen.

After his sentence had been passed some of his friends once again tried to engineer an opportunity for his escape, but as on the previous occasions he refused to avail of their offer because of the troubles such an escape would bring to others.

He spent much of the time remaining to him in trying to prepare Robin to accept death; he had refused all the oaths, had remained at his post in his parish and had been condemned to death, but as the time drew near for his execution he seemed to want to draw back. Pierre-René was successful in getting him to see things in their proper perspective and when the time came he faced death calmly. Pierre-René's whole attitude during his time in prison was also the cause of the conversion of a young sergeant among the guards. He had been notoriously cruel in his treatment of Catholics in another part of France earlier on; what he observed in the prison in Vannes made him seek out a priest later on and change his life.

At three o'clock in the afternoon of 3 March 1796 the two priests were led out from prison with the collars of their shirts cut back, the hair shaved from the back of their necks, and their hands tied behind them. Pierre-René sang the canticle which he had composed in prison, and with his glance he gave his blessing to all to whom he had promised this. On arrival at the guillotine he noticed Le Meut, and he gave him his watch. The executioner was one of his former pupils and was worried about what he should do; he was told to do his duty. He did.

The two priest-victims were buried in the same plot, unmarked, but from then on poor Robin was more or less forgotten; it was simply Pierre-René's grave and became a place of pilgrimage. Although it was forbidden to identify it in any way Madame Rogue and very many others knew exactly where it was. When times improved she had a cross erected over it, and when she died in 1812 she was buried in the next plot. In 1856 Canon Guesdon started a subscription to have a granite and marble monument erected over the grave; this remained until 1934, the year of the beatification, when the body was exhumed and transferred to a shrine in the cathedral. It was in connection with this subscription that Guesdon wrote his biography of Pierre-René. At

the end of it he refers to the crowds who were already coming to the grave and to cures which were being claimed there.

The cause for beatification was introduced in 1907, sponsored jointly by the diocese of Vannes and the Vincentians. Two Vincentian priests working on it were Léon Brétaudeau and Lucien Misermont, each of whom wrote a biography; Brétaudeau's was ready for the formal opening of the cause and Misermont's came out in 1937, three years after the beatification. The earlier one is the better, being more fully documented, and Misermont bases much of his work on it. Misermont, though, adds much in the area of the various oaths during the Revolution, a subject on which he also published six specialist studies. The latest biography is by Jean Gonthier CM, published in Mulhouse in 1979.

Notes

1. Details like this are provided in a short biography written by Canon Alexandra Guesdon, who was born in Vannes in 1804. While a seminarian he acted as secretary to the Rector, Jean-Mathurin Le Gal CM, who had been Rector during the early revolutionary period. Guesdon learned from him about the happenings of those years and he became very interested in Pierre-René; this led him to seek for more information from first-hand sources in the town. He often told his nephew, Canon Chauffier, that he would like to see Pierre-René canonised. He died in 1885. His biography of Pierre-René is printed in a slightly abbreviated form, without mention of its authorship, in *Recueil des Principales Circulaires des Supérieurs Généraux de la Congrégation de la Mission*, II, pp 613-621; it is given in its entirety in the ANNALES, tome 99, pp 494-514.
2. When things became more settled in France Le Gal returned and resumed his work as Rector of the seminary in Vannes. Gradually the Vincentians began to re-organise themselves in France under a succession of Vicars General. One of these, Dominique-François Hanon, died in 1816 and nominated Le Gal as his successor, but he refused the post. He died in Vannes in 1831.
3. Guesdon says that "the heavenly court" and the "pigeon-house" refer to two houses which he did not want to name explicitly.
4. The document in which Bourgerel makes this request was found in 1937 after Misermont's book had been set up in print; he gives it in an appendix.

Were *Two* of the 1646 Irish Mission Killed?

Thomas Davitt

Mary Purcell writes: “Of those who had served on the Irish mission during the previous six years two, Brother Lee and an unnamed Vincentian priest, met death in Ireland. . .”¹ Unfortunately the evidence available does not admit of quite so categorical a statement. This evidence is in St Vincent’s letters and in Abelly’s life of the saint.

Who were appointed to go to Ireland?

On 15 October 1646 Vincent wrote to Edmund (O’) Dwyer, bishop of Limerick. In the first draft he wrote:

At last we have eight missionaries who are off to Ireland. Five of them are Irish, with a priest and student who are French, and an English laybrother (III 79).

The brother, Solomon Patriarche, was not in fact English but was from Jersey. For some reason Vincent was not satisfied with the first draft, and in the letter which he sent to the bishop the above passage had been reduced to:

We have eight, My Lord, who are going to prostrate themselves at your feet (III 80).

Later on in the same month he wrote to Antoine Portail. This letter has undergone some interesting changes in its presentation in print. The portion of it about the Irish mission was presented by Pémartin in this way:

M. Brin, M. Barri, le frère Aubriez, le frère Le Clerc, et notre frère Patriarche sont partis pour l’Hibernie, et doivent prendre MM. Leblanc et Duing, et le frère Vacher au Mans, et peut-être M. Bourdet en Bretagne.²

Pémartin had seen the original, entirely in Vincent’s handwriting, in a Paris salesroom and had made a transcription of it. Coste had not access to the original but was convinced that Pémartin had mis-read some words and had given conjectural reconstruction to some words in defective portions of the manuscript; the defective portions of the original do not impinge on the matter about the Irish mission. Coste presented the above passage in this way:

M. Brin, M. Barry, le frère (O’Brien), le frère Leclerc et notre frère Patriarche sont partis pour l’Hibernie et doivent prendre

MM. Le Blanc et Duiguin et le frère Vacher au Mans, et peut-être M. Bourdet en Bretagne (III 82).

Coste died in 1935 without ever having seen the original letter; it was not again offered for sale until 1937, when Fr Fernand Combaluzier CM had the opportunity to examine it and make an exact copy. He published a transcription of it in the ANN ALES, and the above passage reads as follows, with the spelling and division of lines as in the original:

Monsieur Brin, M. Barri et le frère
Aubrien le clerq et nre frère Patriarche sont
partis pour l'Hyvernie et doivent prendre Mrs
le Blancq et Duing et le frère Vacher au Mans
et peut-estre Mr Bourdet en Bretagne...³

This shows that in place of Pémartin's reading *Le Clerc* as a proper name it should be taken as part of the phrase "le frère Aubrien le clerq".⁴ This correction restores the number of missionaries to eight, the number given in both drafts of the letter to the bishop of Limerick. The number nine, which Coste accepted from Pémartin's reading, was obviously a factor in the difficulty which he had about the exact number who went to Ireland in 1646.⁵

In the final draft of his letter to the bishop Vincent kept the number eight but did not offer a breakdown by nationalities; perhaps this was because he was still not sure about the final composition of the group. In a letter to Antoine Portail on 27 October 1646 he wrote:

Fr Barry and 4 or 5 of our other Irishmen have left for Ireland, and Fr Bourdet is to join them in Nantes as their superior. Brother Vacher who used to be in Le Mans is also one of them, and Brother Patriarche (III 92).

In French usage students and laybrothers are both referred to as "brother"; Philippe Le Vacher was a cleric and Solomon Patriarche was a laybrother.

By the end of October, therefore, the precise make-up of the group was still uncertain. On 2 November Vincent wrote to Etienne Blatiron in Genoa that he had despatched seven to Ireland and had written to Bourdet to make up an eighth (III 96). In early December he wrote to Portail that he had replaced Jean Bourdet by Pierre Duchesne (III 127), so there is nothing unlikely about a further change in the period between the departure of the first members of the group from Paris (referred to in the letters to Portail) and the final departure from France via Nantes and Saint-Nazaire.

Vincent mentions the possibility of five or six Irishmen; so far

only five have been mentioned by name, Bryan, Barry, White, O'Brien and Duggan.

Who definitely went to Ireland?

From other letters of Vincent it is known that Gerald Bryan (III 486), Edmund Barry (IV 290), and Dermot Duggan (III 486) actually got to Ireland. For Dermot O'Brien (III 82n) and George White (II 621n)⁶ there is no certain evidence. Solomon Patriarche (III 486), Philippe Le Vacher (III 274) and Pierre Duchesne (III 274) also were in Ireland. As well as all these there was one other confrère who reached Ireland and has not yet been mentioned by name in any of the correspondence. In march 1652 Vincent wrote to Lambert aux Couteaux in Warsaw, mentioning that Bryan and Barry had escaped from Limerick. In a postscript he mentioned that Brother Thady Lee had been murdered (IV 343). Lee could well have been the sixth man in Vincent's mind when he wrote that five or six Irishmen would go on the mission; there are further indications which tend to support that view.

What confrères stayed on in Ireland?

In April 1650 Vincent wrote to Bryan in Limerick and referred to the fact that he had decided to stay on in Ireland, and continued:

Since those other men who are with you are in a similar frame of mind about staying on. . . (IV 15).

This indicates that at least two stayed on with Bryan. Abelly mentions that three stayed on.⁷ Unfortunately, Abelly in his entire account of the Irish mission never mentions a single confrère by name. In a letter dated 21 December 1651 Vincent told Lambert in Warsaw that Bryan and Barry had been in Limerick during the siege (IV 342). Who, then, was the third? Of the other men already mentioned Dermot O'Brien had died in 1649 (IV 494n), George White was in Saint-Méen in 1649 (III 463), Dermot Duggan was in Paris in 1649 (III 486), Philippe Le Vacher was in Marseille in 1650 (IV 23), Solomon Patriarche was in Saint-Méen in 1649 (III 486) and Pierre Duchesne was in Paris in 1649 (III 409). Clearly none of these could have "stayed on" with Bryan and Barry.

It would seem likely that the third confrère was Thady Lee. Abelly says "three priests" but he may not have known that Lee was a cleric. Never once in his account does he refer to the fact that there were priests, a laybrother and cleric(s) in the group⁸; when referring to the appointment of the group by Vincent he refers to them as missionaries. Although Abelly says "three priests" Vincent says "those other men".

Later on in his account of the Irish mission Abelly writes:

One of the three priests of the Congregation of the Mission who stayed on in Ireland also ended his life gloriously while on mission work.⁹

This could refer to Lee, and since Abelly says he died “gloriously” the possibility that it does so is strengthened. According to Abelly Bryan wanted to write an account of the Irish mission but Vincent dissuaded him, saying it was enough that God knew what had happened. Abelly then says: “He added ‘that the blood of these martyrs will not be forgotten in the sight of God. . .’ “. At first sight the use of the plural “these martyrs” might seem to indicate that more than one confrère was killed, but since Abelly does not quote the preceding sentences of Vincent’s reply we cannot say to whom he referred. What is certain, though, is that Abelly states quite clearly that *one* of the missionaries died (see above). This is the opening sentence of a paragraph which follows one in ‘which he dealt with the killing of four prominent Limerick citizens; this explains the “also”. It is quite likely that Bryan in his account of the mission to Vincent would have mentioned these four and that Vincent’s use of the plural reflects this.

Coste’s Difficulty

Coste was clearly puzzled about the exact number of men who went to Ireland, and also about who they were. In connection with Vincent’s April 1650 letter to Bryan in Limerick (IV 15) he has a footnote, which is worth examining in detail; the first part reads:

Four priests, two clerics and two laybrothers went to Ireland in 1646. Brother Lye and a fifth priest, whose name has not come down to us, joined them there.

At the end of the note he refers the reader to Letter 877 (III 81), the letter to Portail which names Bryan, Barry, O’Brien, Leclerc, Patriarche, White, Duggan, Le Vacher and Bourdet as having been chosen for the Irish mission. Coste is accepting Pémartin’s reading of “Le Clerc” as a proper name so he clearly means Patriarche and Leclerc as the two laybrothers and Le Vacher and O’Brien as the two clerics. He mentions only four priests in his note although five are named in the letter; presumably he excludes White, the only one for whom there is no corroborative evidence. His “fifth priest” who went to Ireland later is, according to his reference, the one Abelly mentions as dying there.

Volume IV, containing this note, was published in 1921. Eleven years later he published his life of Vincent, and in it he deals with the Irish mission in this way:

Five priests were then chosen: Jean Bourdet, Gerald Bryan,

Edmund Barry, Francis White and Dermot Duggan, together with one or two clerics: Philippe Le Vacher and perhaps Thady Lee; and two laybrothers, Pierre Leclerc and Solomon Patriarche. In all, eight or nine missionaries...¹⁰

He thus sidesteps the issue of who actually went by listing those who were originally chosen to go. To this he adds “perhaps Thady Lee” since he knew that Lee actually did go. He appends the following note:

Thady Lee certainly went to Ireland before 1650 but it cannot be stated definitely that he went right at the start of the mission.

Note also that Coste opts here for Francis White, although earlier he had favoured George (II621).

In 1921 therefore Coste was of the opinion that the original group consisted of four priests, two clerics and two laybrothers and that at a later date Lee and an unnamed fifth priest went to Ireland to join them. In 1932 he still was not clear about the composition of the group so he sidestepped the issue. In the course of his narrative, though, he mentions both the death of Lee (which he takes from Vincent’s letter) and the death of a priest (which he takes from Abelly).

Coste’s narrative, therefore, necessitates the following suppositions:

- (a) A later reinforcement of the 1646 group, of which there is no indication in Vincent’s letters;
- (b) The death of a confrère in Ireland, at about the same time as the death of Lee, about which all information has been lost.

If there was such a second confrère who died, who could it have been?

It has already been shown that none of the following stayed on with Bryan and Barry: George White, Dermot Duggan, Philippe Le Vacher, Solomon Patriarche, Pierre Duchesne. Therefore if Abelly’s narrative does not refer to Lee it must refer to either: (a) a confrère who went with the first group but about whom there is no information, or (b) a confrère who went to Ireland later. If the first is correct then it seems that nothing further can be said, through lack of information. If the second is correct some further investigation is possible. If a confrère went to Ireland between 1646 and 1652 when most of the original group had returned to France the probability is that he would have

been Irish; if he was not, then once again nothing more can be said.

Coste's biographical notes list thirteen Irishmen who joined the Congregation before 1652.¹¹ Could one of these have been the man referred to by Abelly? In the case of twelve the answer is a clear negative as it is known where they were after the material time:

Edmund Barry was in Notre-Dame de Lorm in May 1653
(IV 583);

Gerald Bryan was in Dax in September 1652 (IV 481);

Donat Crowley was in Paris in February 1653 (IV 550);

Dermot Duggan was in the Hebrides later than May 1652
(IV 494);

John Ennery was in Paris in April 1652 (IV 358);

Thady Molony was in Paris in July 1652 (IV 427);

Dermot O'Brien had died in 1649 (IV 494n);

Mark Cogley was in Sedan in April 1652 (IV 366);

John Skyddie had died before October 1646 (III 79);

Patrick Walsh was in Genoa in July 1652 (IV 426);

James Water was in Cahors in October 1654 (V 205);

Francis White was in Scotland in January 1657 (VI164).¹²

The thirteenth Irishman is George White. The last certain information which is available about him is that he was in Paris in 1649; Coste points out that after that date there is no further reference to him in Vincent's letters "at least with certainty". He raises the question whether the George White who was involved with Irish students in the Sorbonne in 1651 was the same man, but he does not suggest an answer (II62In). Mary Purcell says it was the same man¹³ but gives no reasons for saying so. She also says that George White was in Le Mans in 1656 and in Richelieu in 1659; nothing in Coste's index (XIV 312), in his biographical note (II621) nor in the *corrigendum* for the note (XIII 848) supports this statement. With regard to Richelieu there is a letter dated 28 September 1659 in which there is a reference to a Monsieur Le Blanc arriving at the house; in a footnote Coste identifies this man as George (VIII 137), but in the *Corrigenda* he suppresses this identification (XIII 850).

So, if the confrère mentioned by Abelly was not Lee it must have been:

- (a) A non-Irish confrère about whom nothing is known;

- (b) An Irish confrère whose name has not been recorded in connection with his death, and about whom all other particulars have been lost; no Irishman admitted to the Congregation before 1652 is unaccounted for except George White;
- (c) George White was in France in July 1649 (III 463) so it would have to be supposed that he went to Ireland at a time when most of the original group were returning to France from there, and that no record of this separate departure has survived.

That the confrère was Thady Lee seems much more likely than any of these.

The Alternatives to Coste's Hypothesis

When Vincent decided to respond to the appeal to send missionaries to Ireland he did not immediately make up his mind about who would go. This is reflected in the change which he made in the letter to the bishop of Limerick, and also in the letter to Portail where he says that "four or five" other Irishmen would accompany Bryan.

Between the departure of the first members of the group from Paris and the departure of the entire group from Nantes he appointed Pierre Duchesne to replace Jean Bourdet. Between the departure from Nantes, up-river, and the final departure from Saint-Nazaire on the estuary there was another interval, and Abelly says that the group had time to give "a sort of mission" to their fellow-passengers while awaiting the Dutch boat on which they were to travel.¹⁴ There would, therefore, have been time for Vincent to make other changes.

One might suggest, then, that the story of the Irish mission might be summarised as follows: Around the end of 1646 Pierre Duchesne, Gerald Bryan, Edmund Barry, Dermot Duggan, Thady Lee, Philippe Le Vacher and Solomon Patriarche left Saint-Nazaire for Ireland; possibly George White and Dermot O'Brien were also in the group. By 1649 all those who had left for Ireland were back in France, except Bryan, Barry and Lee. Bryan and Barry escaped after the fall of Limerick, but Lee was captured and killed.

This hypothesis necessitates only one supposition: that when Abelly wrote "three priests" he included Lee.

Notes

1. *The Story of the Vincentians*, Dublin 1973, p 20.
2. *Lettres de Saint Vincent de Paul*, four volumes, Paris 1880, vol. I p 591. A translation of the passage reads: Fr Brin, Fr Barri, Brother Aubriez, Brother Le Clerc and our Brother Patriarche have left for Ireland and are to pick up Frs Leblanc and Duing and Brother Vacher in Le Mans, and perhaps Fr Bourdet in Brittany.
3. *Annales de la Congregation de la Mission*, tome 102 p 730. Dodin in *Mission et Charite*, 19-20, publishes this letter and includes the words “le frere” before Leclerc. This is all the more astonishing since he gives in a footnote the reference to Combaluzier’s transcription in the *Annales*, and also refers to the “arrangements” of the Pemartin edition.
4. The late Fr Jerome Twomey used to argue that “le frere O’Brien le cleric” was an unlikely way of saying “Brother O’Brien the cleric”, but French confrères with whom I have discussed it see no such difficulty. The fact that O’Brien immediately precedes Patriarche who was a laybrother may explain why “le cleric” was added after his name.
5. Once Coste accepted Pemartin’s reading of Le Clerc as a proper name he had to identify him as Pierre Leclerc as he was the only confrère with this surname at the time, according to the *Catalogue du Personnel de la Congregation de la Mission depuis l’origine (1625) Jusqu’d la fin du XVIIIe Siecle*, Paris 1911, p 326. Yet in making this identification Coste seems to have overlooked a letter from Vincent to Leclerc dated 12 November 1656 in which Leclerc is said to have been in Gascony for the past ten years (VI127).
6. In this note Coste states that George White went to Ireland, but it will be seen later that he was not certain of this. He also mentions in this note the difficulty of distinguishing between George and Francis White. One might add that there is the added difficulty of a French confrère called Le Blanc.
7. *Vie de Saint Vincent de Paul*, 1865 edition, vol. I p 517.
8. In livre II, section vii Abelly, when dealing with the confrères in Barbary, never mentions the fact that Jean Barreau, while there, was just a cleric, he was not ordained till he returned to France. (cf. II, 622, n). Abelly at the time he wrote simply may not have known whether some confrères were priests, brothers or clerics.
9. op. cit. vol. I p 524.
10. *Le Grand Saint du Grand Siecle, Monsieur Vincent*, Paris 1932, vol. II p 195.
11. Boyle in *Saint Vincent de Paul and the Vincentians in Ireland, Scotland and England*, London 1909, p 26, and Mary Purcell, op. cit. p 39, mention a fourteenth Irishman, William Cart. He is mentioned in the 1911 *Catalogue*, but he does not figure in the fourteen volumes of the Coste edition; Purcell says he was in Richelieu up to 1669, but gives no source.
12. Coste in his index volume has “en Irlande” (XIV 313) but the context shows it must be Scotland.
13. op. cit. p 14.
14. op. cit. vol. I p 514.

Provincial Archives

THE DINGLE MISSION, AUGUST-SEPTEMBER, 1846.

In Appendix I (pp. 317-338) of his *Memoirs of the Congregation of the Mission in Ireland, England and Scotland*, Father Thomas McNamara gives a detailed account of the mission given by himself and five other missionaries in the parish of Dingle, August-September, 1846. He introduced his account as follows:

“Almost immediately after this mission I wrote an account of it which in circulating amongst confrères and friends was lost. I hoped for a long time it would be found, but this hope was not to be realised... and now, after a lapse of more than 40 years, I venture to make some record — as well as my memory serves me — of a mission so memorable, that I feel it due to our missionary history to preserve the recollection of it...” (p. 317).

A second account of this mission is to be found in “*A Life of Fathers Dowley and Lydon*” (pp. 232-247). The author is unknown. Internal evidence suggests that it dates from the decade 1860-1870. Father Peter Lydon was one of the missionaries at Dingle: he was to die two years later.

Now a third account has surfaced among the papers donated by the late Father Jerome Twomey to the Provincial Archives about a year before his death. It consists of two extracts from the Annals of the Christian Brothers, Dingle. Chronologically, it may well be the earliest of the accounts.

1. “For many years previous to the Christian Brothers being established in Dingle, that town was known throughout Ireland as being one of the principal centres of the proselytising society. Taking advantage of the want and destruction entailed by the failure of the potato crop in 1846, the agents of that society held out employment, food and clothing to the poor people as a reward of their apostasy, and in many instances the abandonment of their faith was the result. The good P.P., the Rev. Ml. Devine, endeavoured by his piety and zeal to stem the torrent, but while his meekness and sanctity tended to confirm the healthy portion of his flock in their adherence to Catholicism and its concomitant virtues, it left the wavering to follow the bent of their corrupt inclinations, and undeterred by his charitable remonstrances they bartered their conscientious convictions for the necessary but miserable aid afforded them. All this was effected in a comparatively silent manner. At least it was unknown to the public in general that the evil had made such alarming

inroads on the faith and morals of a once faithful and pious people.

A lawsuit however in which Lord Chief Baron M. Pigot was counsel for the Catholic party at the assizes in Tralee, revealed the whole circumstances of the case, and proved that if some strenuous effort was not made to resist the progress of proselytism, the faith of nearly all the inhabitants would be endangered.

Nothing practical however was done until a singular event took place, which excited the zeal and indignation of a number of Catholic gentlemen in Dublin, who at once resolved themselves into a committee to adopt means for remedying the above disastrous state of affairs.

It happened that Mr James O'Farrell, the brother of the celebrated Moore O'Farrell, was at this period a passenger on board the fly-boat plying between Dublin and Athlone. On hearing a conversation between some Protestant ministers on board as to the practicability of converting the Irish to the Protestant faith, one of them quoted the success of the Rev. Thomas Moriarty of Ventry, and stated that nothing more was required than adequate means to bring over the entire population of the Dingle Peninsula to the established church. Little imagining that the careless looking aristocratic passenger was one of the most fervent Catholics existing, they indulged in a vehement tirade against Catholicity and its supporters.

He made no remark, but determined at any cost to interfere with their sport and counteract if possible the insidious attempts of the Dingle proselytisers.

Having returned to Dublin from his brother's mansion, Ballina, Enfield, he called together a number of influential Catholic gentlemen, the Chief Baron among the rest, to devise the best means of meeting the requirements of the case.

After some time held in consultation, it was agreed that a mission should be given in Dingle by the Fathers of the Lazarite (sic) Community at Phibsboro. The proposal was a very delicate one, as emanating from an assemblage of secular gentlemen, none of whom resided in Kerry, and the mere mention of it to the bishop of that diocese conveyed a silent censure on him and his clergy. The gentlemen however who undertook this work were not of a nature to be deterred by trifling considerations of a personal nature; hence they waited on the Right Rev. Dr Egan, who was then in Dublin, and explained to him the object of their visit. He suppressed the momentary feeling of indignation which their interference in the affairs of his diocese excited, said the matter should receive his careful consideration,

and that he would write to them on the subject. Mr James O'Farrell whispered to the Chief Baron that if the occasion were allowed to pass, it would end in forgetfulness, and advised that His Lordship should at once authorise the Vincentians to undertake the Mission.

The Chief Baron immediately wrote out the form of a letter to that effect, and handing it to the bishop said: 'My Lord, our time is very limited, and we may not have the opportunity of seeing you soon again. Please put your signature to this, and we shall do the remainder without giving you any further trouble.'

There was no getting out of this without renouncing all further aid from these gentlemen; hence he signed the document, rather as he felt prematurely, for he wished to consult the dignitaries of his own diocese before doing so.

The Mission took place in 1846. Two of the Christian Brothers, Br. Patrick Corbett and Br. Vincent Culkin, were sent as catechists to assist the missionaries in preparing the youth of the parish for the sacraments, and in giving instructions to the people in general.

The undertaking was crowned with complete success, but to perpetuate the good thus effected became a source of anxious consideration to the gentlemen in Dublin. They unanimously agreed that to save the rising generation in Dingle from becoming the prey of the proselytising party, the services of the Christian Brothers were indispensable in that town. It was therefore proposed that the Superior should be solicited to send a community there for the purpose indicated, and that the usual provision should be made for their maintenance and the establishing of their house and schools.

After having secured the bishop's sanction, the next question was where would a proper site be obtained for the contemplated work. . . . An old tenement however, which was formerly the residence of the P.P. and which stood in John St., was selected. It consisted of a ruinous house, and of still more ruinous outoffices that heretofore served as a linen hall, into which the inhabitants of the surrounding country poured the products of their labour, when the weaving trade was in a flourishing condition in that part of Ireland, and by which they maintained themselves in comfort and independence, and rendered the name of Dingle linen famous throughout the entire kingdom.

The gentlemen in Dublin, with the P.P., effected an arrangement with Mr Michael Galway, Sol., the immediate owner of the property, by which the premises were to be transferred to the Brothers at an annual rent of £18..."

II. "In 1846 the Vincentian Fathers gave a mission in Dingle. This

was considered one of the most effectual means of opposing the system of proselytism then at its height in the district. Two Christian Brothers, viz. Patrick Corbett of Carrick and Vincent Culkin came to aid the missionaries by catechising and instructing the people. Rev. Fr. McNamara, conductor of the mission, represented to some zealous and influential Catholic gentlemen viz. Mr James O'Farrell, the Chief Baron, Honourable Wm. Browne, etc., etc., that the good effects of the mission would not be permanent except means were adopted to educate and instruct the people, especially the youth. He therefore advised that a community of the Christian Brothers be located in the town to accomplish that object.

The advice was followed and the above-mentioned gentlemen and their colleagues who formed the committee undertook to provide the means. They guaranteed £30 for each of three Brothers, viz. two school and one lay Brother, £20 to pay the rent and taxes of the premises, and £10 for casualties, making in all £120 a year."

A REQUEST REFUSED

In 1889 Father Patrick Boyle succeeded Father Thomas McNamara as Rector of the Irish College, Paris. He was to retain this office until 1926 when he was replaced as Rector by Father John McGuinness. The latter, who had himself received an honorary Doctorate of Divinity, sought some honour from the Holy See for Father Boyle. The two letters which follow tell what happened. Archbishop Paschal Robinson O.F.M. was the first Nuncio accredited to the new Irish State.

I.

Ara Coeli, Armagh.

Jan. 12, 1932

My dear Fr McGuinness,

The enclosed letter from the Papal Nuncio to Ireland is a great disappointment to me. When I found that a Doctorate in Divinity was out of the question, I asked His Grace to get for Father Boyle the title of Monsignor, promising that I would pay whatever tax might be imposed, and last night I received from His Grace the enclosed reply. I am sorry, as I know you will be, for it would have given me the greatest pleasure

to have some honour conferred on one so deserving in every way. I leave it to your own judgement whether you will mention the matter at all to Father Boyle...

I have had some controversy with our separated brethren here lately. It arose out of an impudent and ridiculous claim made for the Irish Prot. Church by my brother *Primate* here last October. It was really at him I was hitting.

Believe me,

My dear Fr McGuinness,

Yours v. faithfully,

+Joseph Cardinal MacRory

II.

Villa S. Francesco,
Rome 36

7 January, 1932

My Lord Cardinal,

Cardinal Pacelli, to whom I duly referred the matter, asks me to express his great regret that it is not possible to comply with Your Eminence's request to have the Very Rev.d Patrick Boyle, C.M. made a Monsignore, for the reason that it is contrary to the practice of the Holy See to confer this title upon any priest who is a religious.

I beg leave to add my own expression of regret that I am not able to send Your Eminence a more favourable reply.

With deep respect, I remain, My Lord Cardinal,

Very devotedly & gratefully in Xto,

+ f. Paschal Robinson, OFM

THE VINCENTIANS IN BRITAIN

(Although this article has not previously been published it is not the only one Fr Twomey wrote on this subject. Over twenty years ago he wrote a very detailed one which Charles Siffrid CM translated into French for publication in the ANNALES. Fernand Combaluzier CM made some small alterations to the text, provided a brief introduction and added four and a half pages of supplementary notes. All this is to be found in volume 123 (1958). The article is in the form of brief biographies of sixteen emigre French Confrères who worked in England for at least part of their lives: Boullangier, Cardan, Carré, Chantrell, Chevrollais, Cormier, Darthe, Delgorgues, Desessment, Dumazel, Duval, Fr emont, Gondouin, Gamier, Magny and Richenet. Combaluzier's supplementary notes give added material on Boullangier, Cordon, Carrie, Darthe, Dumazel, Gondouin and Richenet. In many cases he also gives additional source references.

In 1957 (not 1956 as given by Combaluzier) Fr Twomey had published in EVANGELIZARE Biographies of Boullangier, Darthe, Chantrel, Chevrollais, Dumazel and Goudouin which are almost identical with those published in the ANNALES; the slight differences are possibly due to Combaluzier.

Finally, in EVANGELIZARE in 1960 he gave a much more detailed biography of Chevrollais.

Some time before he died I had asked Fr Twomey if he would prepare a "definitive" edition of his work in this field but he said that he was not up to it.

One point in this present article is puzzling. Fr Twomey says that St Vincent tried to establish his community in England and sent one of his priests there for that purpose. I wonder what is the basis for this statement. A check of the index references to England, and Cromwell, in Coste's Monsieur Vincent and in the fourteen volumes of the works does not reveal any basis, nor does Poole's History. I do not recall Fr Twomey ever mentioning this point in conversation. Any clarification from any confrère would be welcome.

The history of the connection between the Vincentians and Great Britain goes right back to the days of St Vincent de Paul himself. He had a noble record of devotion to the interests of the many exiled English and Scottish Catholics on the Continent during his own lifetime and that care and interest was continued by his Congregation after his death. In his address to his own community, in his letters to individual members of it, he frequently recalled the persecution then being suffered by British Catholics under the regime of Cromwell and fervently urged all to prayer for their fellow Catholics in those countries as well as to practical help for any they might meet in exile in France.

With the help of the Baron de Renty he organised an association of French noblemen to seek out and help in every possible way English and Scottish exiles driven from their homes by persecution. Several of these were among his closest personal friends, men like Richard Smith, Bishop of Chalcedon, formerly Vicar Apostolic in England, and Henry Holden, the Lancashire theologian, like St Vincent a prolific writer and prominent figure in the Jansenist controversy at the time. Holden was a Douay man and it is not without significance, perhaps, that Dr Patterson, President of Douay when Challoner was a student there, tried to introduce the Vincentian system of seminary training. Challoner himself, as Dr Milner recalled in his funeral oration over that astonishing English prelate, “had a particular veneration for Saint Vincent de Paul... read his life regularly every year, and still found fresh matter for his admiration and devotion in each perusal.”

It is tempting for a Vincentian to surmise that a lot of the commonsense and down-to-earth spirituality of Challoner’s *Meditations* and *Garden of the Soul* on which the spirit of Catholic England was nurtured for so long may have come from these “perusals”. St Vincent himself, of course, was strongly influenced in his own spiritual thinking by the writings of another English writer, Benet Canfield the Capuchin (otherwise William Fitch from Canfield, in Essex).

During Cromwellian times, St Vincent, apart from sending very successful missionary bands to both Scotland and Ireland, tried to establish his community in England also on a permanent basis and sent one of his priests to England for that purpose. The French Ambassador at the time, however, was violently opposed to the project lest it give offence to the Lord Protector, and despite Vincent’s influence at the French Court political considerations proved

too strong and he had to withdraw. The work accomplished by his missionaries in Scotland, however, Fathers Duggan and White from Ireland, working in the Gaelic-speaking islands mainly, and Father Thomas Lumsden from Aberdeen working in the Lowlands, is still remembered in those areas. It is only five or six years since a new church was dedicated to St Vincent de Paul on the island of Barra in tribute to the memory of the work of Father Duggan in preserving the faith there in the seventeenth century.

Both in his own lifetime and for many years after his death the connection between the young Congregation of the Mission and the English students and priests receiving their education on the Continent was close and constant and many instances of it find record in the Douay Diaries and in the Register of St Gregory's, the English seminary in Paris, both published in the volumes of the Catholic Record Society. Many English priests received the whole or part of their education in the Vincentian seminaries of *Bons Enfants* and *Saint-Lazare* in Paris, including such well-known men as George Bishop, afterwards Vicar General to Bishop Stonor and Archdeacon of the Old Chapter, and George Gage, also an active member of the Old Chapter, Archdeacon of London and Protonotary Apostolic in England. When James II became king in 1685 he asked for and received four Vincentians to be chaplains to the court; they were, in fact, the last Catholic Chaplains to the Court of Saint James but the renewed persecution that followed the "Glorious Revolution" sent them back to France a year after James himself, in 1689. James and his Queen, during their long exile in France, maintained their contact with the Vincentians and Saint-Simon records in his memoir's that they both used to drive from their palace at Saint Germain to the Vincentian Motherhouse at Saint Lazare in Paris every Sunday and feast-day to attend the Solemn Mass and Vespers there. When the Cause of Beatification of Vincent de Paul was opened in the following century, among those who petitioned the Holy Father to beatify him were the then Queen Dowager, Maria d'Este, widow of James, and "His Holiness's most devoted son, James R.", "the Old Pretender".

The French Revolution brought the next large Vincentian contact with Britain. The acknowledged leader of the French emigre clergy in the country was the Bishop of St-Pol-de-Leon in Brittany, and his right-hand man in this work was the ex-superior of his seminary, the Vincentian Luc Chantrel. First in Jersey, and from 1796 onwards in London, Father Chantrel was indefatigable in opening up chapels, houses of residence, workshops, even baths for the use of his fellow-

countrymen, to whom the English King, Government and people were, in all the circumstances, so astonishingly generous. In London his first chapel was at the corner of what was then Brill Place and Garden Gate and bore the charming dedication of "Our Lady at the Garden Gate". The whole area is now covered by the group of buildings comprising St Pancras station. With a second chapel at the Polygon, also in Somers Town, and a third in Chalton Street, a "parish" soon developed and resulted in the building of the present St Aloysius' near Euston in 1798.

At the same time Father Francis Joseph Chevrollais, with two companions from the same seminary in Tréguier, Fathers Cardon and Magny, were deported to England on their refusal to take the oath to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. Father Chevrollais worked first near Edmonton, but in 1809 was put in charge of the parish of Stratford by Mgr Douglas, Vicar Apostolic of the London District. The congregation then met for Mass and other Services in a private house on West Ham Lane. By 1811 he had built a small chapel, to which he quickly added two schools and a presbytery. In 1816 he returned to France to ask and receive his Superior's permission to remain at work in Stratford, where he was found dead at his prie-dieu on 18th September, 1823, leaving a flourishing parish of 2,000 souls. A sign of the changed times was that his funeral to St Mary's, Moorfields, was followed by the whole parish in procession. With him at St Mary's for a century and a quarter, until they were removed, lay the bones of his colleague at Tréguier, Father Jacques Louis Cardon who died in Gee Street, Sommers Town, in 1830. Others who left their bones in English soil and whose names are kept in the records that have so far been examined were the Vincentian Fathers Charles Cormier (+1798), Jean Louis Claude Desessment (+1799), Marie Joseph Augustin Fremont (+1798). The records also contain the names of many others who ministered in England in various places until they could return to France or take their departure for the Vincentian Missions in China especially, which, in fact, were largely administered from London by Father Joseph Mansuet Boullangier for many years. So we read of the work in England of Fathers Langlois, Combes, le François, Duval at Bristol (where he died), Carré in Somers Town, Darthe, Prefect Apostolic of the He Bourbon, Dumazel, Delgorgues, Gamier, Gondouin, Magny, Richenet, and others. But it was not until twenty three years after the death in Somers Town of the last of the Vincentian emigre clergy from France that the dream of St Vincent was realised and the Vincentian community definitively established on British soil.

In November 1853, on the invitation of the Bishop of Beverley — now the territory of the dioceses of Leeds and Hexham and Newcastle — a group of Vincentians established the parish of St Vincent's, Solly Street Sheffield. Six years later the Vincentians returned to Scotland at St Mary's, Lanark. In 1889 they settled in Mill Hill on the invitation of Cardinal Vaughan and ten years later took charge of St Mary's Teacher Training College at Brook Green, now St Mary's College of the University of London Institute of Education at Strawberry Hill. In 1901 the French Vincentians opened a house to continue the foreign mission administration of Father Boullangier. In 1922 the Spanish Vincentians opened a house for students of their Province (Madrid) destined to work as priests on English-speaking mission fields in India and the Philippines. In 1927 they took charge of the parish of Dunstable, where their confrères of the Anglo-Irish Province succeeded them later. (In 1925 Gateacre, Liverpool, was opened). In 1954 the Archbishop of Cardiff entrusted to them a new parish in Hereford and in 1956 they went to work, first administering and teaching in and later solely as chaplains, in the Ullathorne School, Coventry. In 1963 the Madrid Province accepted an invitation to open a Spanish Catholic Chaplaincy at Palace Court in London. In 1966 the Vincentians accepted the invitation of the Bishop of Brentwood to open a new parish at Goodmayes in Essex; in 1967 they accepted a parish and university chaplaincy in Norwich; in 1968 they took over the parish of Christ the King at Filwood Broadway in Bristol; in 1969 they are opening a new work for under-privileged youths in Glasgow where, as in London and the Leeds area, they have long been at work among deaf-mutes. It took a long time, but the dream of St Vincent seems now firmly realised.

GREAT BRITAIN — BEGINNINGS.

In 1853 the first foundation of the Irish Province in England was established at St Vincent's, Sheffield. Earlier contacts can be summed up under the following headings:

- (a) Missions and retreats:
- (b) Direction of the Daughters of Charity:
- (c) Requests for foundations:
- (d) Events leading up to the foundation in Sheffield.

(a) Missions and retreats.

In the early years, Father Dowley used send annually to Father Etienne a “State of the Union” message in the form of a lengthy letter describing the situation of the young Community and its apostolate. In 1834, he writes that the Little Company in Ireland “has won the esteem and confidence not only of their Lordships, the Archbishops and Bishops of Ireland, but also of those of England. Repeated and pressing requests have come to us from some of the latter that we give missions in their districts, still infected with heresy. . . .” In 1844, he writes of fresh requests for missions in England and Scotland, but adds that “pusillus grex” — lack of personnel — is his reply to all such appeals. A similar remark is made in 1845, but earlier that year Father James Lynch gave their annual retreat to the clergy of Glasgow. Father James Dixon was to do likewise in 1846, and Father Dowley notes in his report to Father Etienne later in the same year that the Vicar Apostolic remarked to his clergy at the end of this retreat that “as long as he could find a son of St Vincent, he would never choose anyone else to direct their retreats.” In subsequent years it would seem that he had to look elsewhere, as apart from the following brief reference: “That Mr (Michael) O’Sullivan of Cork be named, if needed, to conduct the S(piritual) Retreat of the clergy at Glasgow next Summer.” (MFC 9.04.1850), there is no other record of any Vincentian having given a clergy retreat in England or Scotland prior to 1853.

The following is the first reference to a mission in England or Scotland:

“The Visitor may in deference to the Bishop of Beverley’s kind wishes hold out to the Incumbent of Sheffield, Rev. Mr Scully, that a mission may be given there before the close of the present year, and the forces for this mission may be had from the more robust of the ordinary missionaries and other supernumeraries here (Castleknock) or at St Peter’s.” (MFC, 13.01.1851).

It is unlikely that this mission was ever given: no other reference to it is found in the archives. The Bishop of Beverley, Dr Briggs, and Father Edmund Scally, the parish priest of St Marie’s, Sheffield, were to be mainly responsible for the Vincentians coming to Sheffield two years later.

Later in 1851 a mission was given in St Mary’s Benedictine Church, Liverpool. It opened on 2 November, and lasted three weeks. Father Dowley writes to Father Etienne on 2 December 1851.

Divine Providence has provided us with the means of strengthening our ranks and enabled us to name six confrères for each

mission. . . . You will also be glad, if not surprised, to learn that our last Mission, which ended a week ago, was in Liverpool in England. But I had accepted it a long time ago, and the esteemed pastor held me to my word. He kept telling me that all his people were Irish, poor, and in a deplorable state of misery and destitution, every bit as great as anything endured in this country. I have been all the more encouraged to undertake this Mission by the knowledge I have of the zeal which fills your paternal heart for this country of England, and of the charitable desire you have that it should benefit from the works of St Vincent. We found, however, that the truly apostolic zeal of the pastor surpassed the reality of his representations. There, as everywhere else, “the Mission” has been none the less an “opus prorsus necessarium”, and I am happy to tell you that my dear confrères have assured me that they have never seen a Mission more blessed by God and more solidly fruitful than the one they have just given in Liverpool...”

(b) *Direction of the Daughters of Charity.*

Father Dowley in the letter just quoted mentions Father Etienne’s desire that England should benefit from the works of St Vincent. The first permanent step in that direction was the coming of the Daughters of Charity to Manchester in 1846. On hearing the news, Father Dowley wrote to Father Etienne offering the service of the Irish Province, and expressed the hope that the Daughters would come later to Ireland to make available there “the invaluable blessings of their charity”.

One gets the impression that the coming of the Daughters to England made the Vincentian authorities in Paris very favourably disposed towards a foundation by the Irish Province in England. It was one of the arguments put forward in favour of Mr Middleton’s project (Cf. below). Moreover, whenever an Irish confrère was visiting England, he used, if at all possible, visit the house of the Daughters in Manchester, and from time to time Father Dowley would be ordered to visit them personally, or send a delegate to do so. There is an interesting reference in a letter of Father Dowley to Father Etienne, dated the 22 February 1849:

When passing through Manchester, Fr (James) Lynch visited our dear Sisters. I am happy to be able to tell you that he found them well, and in a much more encouraging state than when I had the pleasure of visiting them last year. The persecution, and the ridiculing on the streets of the Habit of these children of St Vincent, has moderated to a certain extent. But there is still sufficient of it to give them a taste for the spirit of martyrdom.”

(c) *Requests for foundations.*

One of these can be dealt with briefly: what follows is the only reference to it.

“The Rev. Mr Montgomery of Wednesbury, England, having with the sanction of the Ordinary invited us to take charge of a fixed Mission there, with a cure of 10,000 souls scattered over a vast district, this offer was declined:

- 1° because such fixed Missions may be regarded as an exception to our general rule of the Missions;
- 2° such a charge at this moment would interfere with our missions generally, and other works in Ireland, where they are so much needed;
- 3° It would interfere with arrangements already entered into with other people.” (MFC 16.02.1852).

Wednesbury is listed in the 1980 English Catholic Directory as in the diocese of Birmingham, and 1850 is the date given for the first establishment of a Mission there.

MFC, 10.09.1850 refer to a request from the Earl of Shrewsbury.

“The Earl of Shrewsbury wrote to the Visitor requesting that the Mission & Church at Cheadle would be taken charge of by a branch of our missionaries, requiring at the same time that the Visitor or someone deputed by him should proceed in less than three days to the spot and that a decision should be come to as to this project at once, his Lordship being on the point of setting out for the Continent. To this application the Visitor, though absent, with the consent of some of his consultors returned a civil yet decided *negative*.”

The peremptory nature of the request would hardly have helped. Father McNamara, on leave of absence because of eye trouble, learned of it and wrote on 8 October 1850 from Beirut to a confrère in the Maison Mere. He favoured acceptance.

“...I am sincerely delighted that a new prospect is opened for introducing the Congregation into England. The remarkable conversions which every day witnesses and the wonderful progress which the true religion continues to make in that country seem to indicate that the “day of its visitation” is nigh at hand, if not already arrived, and that the Almighty has special designs of mercy in its regard for the speedy enlightenment and conversion of its people. On this account I am of opinion that we should take notice of any invitation but more especially of an invitation from so distinguished a character as Lord Shrewsbury to found a branch

of our Institute in England. He is distinguished not only by rank & property, but still more for the zeal with which God has inspired him for the conversion of his countrymen to the true faith and the extraordinary sacrifices he so constantly makes for the advancement of Catholicity. An invitation from such a quarter may well be an indication of the divine will in our regard, denoting that divine providence desires to employ our ministry for carrying out his blessed designs in that country, and we should take care not to be wanting to these designs. I am therefore strongly inclined to think that having examined the proposition which is made to us with ordinary prudence, we should if possible accept it, and in deliberating upon it we should not be too solicitous about conditions or guarantees. It is difficult to expect all at once and in the commencement strict conditions or guarantees from an individual whose goodwill, evinced by a large sacrifice of property, should seem to afford sufficient security against future contingencies. At all events in looking forward to such contingencies, I would calculate largely upon Providence and next to it upon the conduct and services of the confrères who would be chosen for such a mission. If they would give satisfaction, that would be their best guarantee, and if their conduct should be open to censure, no guarantee would be of any use to us. ...”

Father Dowley, writing on 23 October 1850 to Father Etienne looks at the matter from a different viewpoint.

“...As regards the project of Lord Shrewsbury, I have had little difficulty in giving him a decisive reply for *the present*: ‘that our forces and our numbers, the present position of the little family in Ireland, and the absence of sufficient resources do not permit us to undertake the works which he has, in his goodness, wished to entrust to us.’ I hope this reply showed sufficient respect and gratitude for the goodness he has shown in our regard. But, in fact, I had strong reasons on other grounds for taking this decision. According to the principles which guide Lord Shrewsbury in his dealings with the priests, religious male and female, in these same posts of which he wishes us to take charge, I had known well that the position of our little family under him would be infinitely more dangerous and disadvantageous than it would under the good and always esteemed Mr Middleton. These are the reasons which have led me to make use of the discretion which you have had the great goodness to leave me in all that concerns Missions in England..

The request, however, which caused most trouble was that of Mr Middleton of Sickling Hall, Yorkshire. He first made his request — towards the end of 1848 — directly to Father Etienne, seeking the services of two Vincentians to be chaplains to his family and his dependants and to take charge of a small mission on his estate. One is immediately reminded of St Vincent and the De Gondi family. Father Etienne referred the matter to Father Dowley who expressed serious misgivings, and listed some objections, the principal one being shortage of personnel for the missions in Ireland, then in great demand. This viewpoint was accepted by Father Etienne, but the question was reopened some months later. In February 1849, Father James Lynch travelled over to Sickling Hall and finds that Dr Briggs, the Vicar Apostolic of Northern District, is Mr Middleton's guest. On 22 February 1849, Father Dowley writes to Father Etienne:

“Monsignor Briggs, the loveable and truly zealous Bishop of York, was staying with Mr Middleton while Father Lynch was there. By his wise principles and the good advice he deigned to give our confrère, this good prelate showed himself a true father and friend. He ardently and sincerely wants the sons of St Vincent to come to his diocese; but on condition that we be established there on a solid foundation, and be independent of the humour and caprice of individuals, however pious they may be, and that sufficient financial resources be made available for the support of two or three confrères. His Lordship isn't at all in favour of personal chaplains for rich English families — and still less that such chaplains be Vincentians. In this he shares our views on the matter...”

Father Dowley goes on to point out that the women of the family are part of the trouble. Mr Middleton is changing his residence. The letter continues:

“I think that when Mr Middleton and his family will have settled twenty miles from the site where we are to live, when he will have built the church and the house, and finally when he will have made provision for our support, we should then make every necessary sacrifice to respond to your zeal for the poor English people.”

But Mr Middleton goes back on some of the arrangements he has made with Father Lynch, and negotiations are broken off.

In November 1849, Bishop Briggs reopens the question with Father Dowley and informs him that Mr Middleton has consented to withdraw all the conditions to which Father Dowley had objected. The latter

writes to Father Etienne on 15 November 1849:

“Having received this assurance from Mr Middleton, we have decided that we should accept the work which his piety has led him to offer us. I have written to Dr Briggs to this effect. The conditions under which we propose to go there are those already submitted to you more than once, namely, to accept possession of a small church, a community house, a garden and £3,000 which will be invested for our maintenance — to serve the church there, and to lay the foundation of our community in the diocese of York, without any condition or other obligation whatsoever. These very strict terms will never prevent our rendering every little service in our power to this good and highly esteemed family...”

In December 1849 Mr Middleton informs Father Dowley of the progress being made on the buildings. The project is still on in April 1850, as the Provincial Council discusses the appointments to be made to this new foundation. In June, Fathers Duff and Dixon are proposed “for the English Mission, Sickling Hall, Yorkshire.” In the same month, Father McCann travels over to Yorkshire to finalise the arrangements. But things now go seriously wrong:

“Mr McCann’s report of the Middleton project as taken upon site received. It was unanimously ruled that the project should be entirely and finally abandoned. The singularly fickle character of the family, the terms insisted upon as to the Trusteeship, the refusal to admit the Bishop as a Trustee, from a fixed determination on their part that the Mission sh(oul)d not be in his gift, show clearly the powers and rights they hoped to exercise over the men and measures there; the concealment on the part of Mr Middleton of the erasure in the Deed of Assignment of the Premises from Mr McCann, and the substitution of the name of Middleton himself for that of the Bishop, the stingy & essentially most uncomfortable house erected for the dwelling of the missionaries, the exposed spot on which it stands, its remoteness from any town which would offer an open(ing) for doing good, and the hopelessness of making provision for a mission beyond its own precincts arising from the insufficiency of the funds proposed, *all* clearly prove the inexpediency of our entering upon such a project & under such circumstances, and that the Visitor will intimate the determination come to absolutely & finally to Mr Middleton.” (MPC 1.07.1850).

There was to be no going back on this decision despite further attempts by Mr Middleton to reopen negotiations. The Visitor and his

Council finally lost confidence in him.

(d) Events leading up to the foundation in Sheffield.

Though Mr Middleton's project finally came to nothing, it can perhaps be regarded as part of the designs of Providence for the introduction of the Congregation into England. The visits of Vincentians to Yorkshire in connection with this affair would have familiarised them with the conditions of the Church there. And more important, relations — obviously warm and cordial and characterised by mutual sentiments of high esteem — were established by the Irish Vincentians with Dr Briggs, the Vicar Apostolic of the Northern District, who, on the re-establishment of the Hierarchy was to become the first Bishop of Beverley in 1850. In 1851, the year following the final break with Mr Middleton, there was question — as noted earlier — of a mission in Sheffield for Father Edmund Scully, then the parish priest of St Marie's. Fr Scully had entered the Congregation in 1839, but had not persevered.

An account of the Sheffield foundation is to be found in Father Michael Burke's history of St Vincent's, Sheffield, and also in the Centenary Souvenir, published in 1953. What follows here is some documentation which may not have been available to those responsible for the earlier — and fuller — accounts.

On April 1852, the Provincial Council ruled:

“In pursuance of a consent on our part to Dr Briggs, with the sanction of the Sup. General to found a Branch of our Institute at Sheffield, a plot of ground was purchased there on which may be erected schools, church & community house, permission was sought to have said plot invested in the names of two of this community, together with those of the Bishop of the diocese, his vicar general, Rev. Edmund Scully and others as trustees, it was ruled that the Visitor's name & that of the Rev. Mr Lynch be forwarded to the parties for that purpose.”

Eighteen months later, on 10 October 1853, Father Dowley writes to Father Etienne:

“The time has come to submit for your paternal consideration and approval a matter of great importance. The ancient project, so dear to your heart, to make a foundation in England, to give to that heretical country — one of the most important in the world — a branch of our little Irish Mission, is about to be carried out. Because of the fatherly directives you gave me some time ago, I have never ceased to devote my attention to it. We have had always in mind the diocese of Monsignor Briggs. We have

decided to begin our labours in Sheffield, a large enough city with a Catholic population of 10,000. There is only one church there — a truly magnificent one — under the care of our very worthy compatriot, Mr Scully. A piece of land has been purchased in a poor quarter and schools under the auspices and protection of St Vincent, have just been built on it. For the moment these are sufficiently spacious to serve as a church, and a house has been rented close by to provide accommodation for three or four missionaries. The plan is to entrust to their care a considerable portion of the Catholics, and to make of them a parish, or a kind of parish. The poor people there are very ignorant, and are involved in frightful vices: the majority of them are Irish. Most Honoured Father, it is a very difficult Mission, but one full of merit in God's eyes. It has been forced on us by a chain of events, which I cannot but regard as an indication of the divine will. With the consent of our little Provincial Council, I submit everything to your judgement and your wise and fatherly decision. If you approve of it, I propose — with the consent of the same Council, our very dear confrère, Mr Michael Burke, as superior of the new house at Sheffield, England. He is, as you well know, one of the more senior confrères, well-informed, full of piety and zeal: he has a great attraction and talent for the poor. The Mission in question provides a favourable opportunity for the exercise of these virtues... P.S. Finally, I should tell more clearly, Most Honoured Father, that enough property has been bought in the said area to allow for building later of a church and community house: and that the income from the parish will provide the means to support three confrères and one laybrother, the number we plan to send."

Father Etienne replies on October 22:

"It is with very lively satisfaction that I learn of your small Province extending its labours to England. Through it the Congregation will make its small contribution to the great task of the Catholic regeneration of this kingdom. I am confident that this little grain of mustard seed which you are about to sow in this land, so long sterile, will one day be a large tree laden with fruit, and that it will be through you that the two families of St Vincent will be introduced into this new field which can offer such a fine harvest to be garnered. I approve then of your proposal, and I convey my best wishes that its execution will produce the good results you expect from it. I enclose the Patent for Father Burke, as superior of the new house of Sheffield. ..."

On October 31, the General Council of the Congregation sanctioned the new foundation at Sheffield, and approved of the choice of Father Burke as superior. And on December 9 Father Dowley writes again to Father Etienne:

“...You will learn with joy that the little branch of our family here, with your blessing and approval, has crossed the Irish Sea and has already sunk its roots in the soil of England, one of the most important countries in the world, and one with the greatest need of the zeal and labours of the children of St Vincent. I feel I should tell you frankly that your zealous confidence and fatherly wisdom have been entirely responsible for the establishment of this house and mission in Sheffield, England. The small number of labourers, insufficient to gather in the fruits of a harvest, — in Ireland very much exposed to the danger of being lost, — lack of means to begin the work, the frightful difficulties of the apostolate itself destined for us, were all against it. But our dear and Very Honoured Father indicated so often his wish to see his sons established in England that difficulties are forgotten and with filial submission all cried out: “Our Most Honoured Father, the successor of St Vincent, wills it. We go there.” And the result. The Mission is already established under the protection of the most kindly bishop in the world, Monsignor Briggs, in the midst of poor people, as destitute of the succours of religion as is possible to imagine. When our missionaries arrived, the Catholics and some others rivalled one another in manifesting their joy and happiness in seeing us in their midst. In all humility, then, we hope that the blessing of heaven, the special protection of our Mother, ever Immaculate, and of St Vincent, will confirm the blessing you have given to this work. ...”

Sheffield, Lanark, Mill Hill, Hammersmith.

AUSTRALIA — BEGINNINGS

(*Sources*: It would appear that a lot of material which one would expect to find in the archives of the Irish Province was at some period transferred to Australia. Who authorised this transfer—and when it took place—is not known to me. In a sense it has turned out to be *afelix culpa* as Father Frank Bourke, CM, the archivist of the Australian Province, has forwarded typed copies of all the early material in their archives. In return, I send him photocopies of all the original material in the Irish archives, as well as of material in the CM curial archives, which has a bearing on the story of the Irish Vincentians in Australia. Both archives have benefitted from this *sacrum commercium*. I would like to take this opportunity of thanking Father Bourke for his generosity in sharing the contents of the Australian CM archives and for his expert help in so many other ways.

The originals of Father O'Callaghan's letters of 6 November 1885 and 28 January 1886 are in the Australian CM archives. A French translation of them is printed in the *Annales*, t. li (1886) pp. 208ff and 530ff.
JHM, April 1980)

The first Irish Vincentian to work in Australia was Father Patrick O'Grady. A native of Cong, he was born in 1837, joined the Congregation in 1858 and was ordained in 1863. He suffered from tuberculosis, and for reasons of health he set out for Queensland in January 1866. It was also hoped that he might be able to collect funds for the church then being built at Phibsboro. His health did not improve and he died in Queensland on 14 March 1867.

His presence in Brisbane may have led the bishop, Dr Quinn, to apply to the Superior General for some Vincentians. The request was turned down. Similar applications from Melbourne in 1875, Maitland in 1880, Ballarat in 1882, were also declined. In 1883-1884 the major seminary in the diocese of Bathurst in 1882 was offered to the Irish Province. It was accepted and plans were being made to send five confrères to staff the seminary when it was learned that Propaganda wished to have but a single regional major seminary in Australia and had requested the bishop of Bathurst to defer until after the Synod of Australian bishops, shortly to take place, any further arrangements with the Irish Vincentians concerning the staffing of his seminary at Bathurst. The bishop then requested that a house of missions be established in his diocese, but it was decided to do nothing about this proposal until the situation with regard to the major seminary had been settled.

In 1885, Archbishop Patrick F. Moran of Sydney came to Rome to receive the red hat. A nephew of Cardinal Paul Cullen and ordained for the diocese of Dublin, he had been vice-rector of the Irish College,

Rome, and later bishop of Ossory, before his appointment in 1884 as archbishop of Sydney. In January 1885 he wrote to Father Duff from Sydney requesting that he make a foundation in Sydney. It would seem that he had in mind principally the giving of missions. The matter was submitted to Father Fiat and he approved the sending of two confrères to explore the feasibility of making a permanent foundation in the diocese of Sydney of a house of missions. Father Malachy O’Callaghan, then President of Castleknock, and Father Anthony Boyle were chosen to accompany the Cardinal on board the liner *Liguria* which left Tilbury on 16 September 1885. They arrived in Sydney on 4 November 1885, the feast of St Charles Borromeo, and two days later Father O’Callaghan sent Father Terrason, the Secretary General in Paris, the following account of the voyage.

Sydney, 6 November 1885

My dear Confrère,

The grace of Our Lord be with us forever!

His Eminence Cardinal Moran, having expressed a great desire to have a house of our Congregation established in his diocese of Sydney, Australia, our Most Honoured Father decided that two priests of our Province of Ireland should set out to examine the situation, assess on the spot the future of such a project, and report back. Father Anthony Boyle and myself were chosen for this task. After our annual retreat we made our preparations. On September 16 we were to embark on the *Liguria*, a steamship of the Orient Line, leaving London for Sydney, a distance of 12,029 miles.

On the 14th September, having said “Good-bye” to our students, lay-brothers and confrères I left St Vincent’s College, at Castleknock. Prolonged good-byes, enthusiastic farewells and fervent prayers followed me from that loved home and those dear hills. I arrived at St Joseph’s, Blackrock, for dinner. There the enthusiasm of the Province for foreign missions strongly manifested itself. Twenty priests of the Province were with the Visitor, the students and the seminarists. The superiors of seven houses were present, and a large number of the priests accompanied the Visitor to Kingstown whence the steamer leaves for England.

In London I was to find Father Boyle, my worthy confrère and companion of the voyage. He had gone to Paris for some days to draw the primitive spirit of St Vincent from its sources, to receive instructions from our Honoured Father, and to obtain his blessing for the first foreign mission accepted by our Province.

In London I had the pleasure of visiting our Sisters’ new internal seminary at Mill Hill.

On September 16th we embarked on the *Liguria*. His Eminence Cardinal Moran was accompanied by eleven priests and sixteen religious. An oratory was prepared for the Holy Sacrifice which we celebrated every morning. How good Our Lord was to come down to our vessel with His graces, His mercies and His blessings!

On the morning of the 18th we arrived at Plymouth. Ten priests offered the Holy Sacrifice, an altar having been put up in my cabin. What an honour! What a privilege! The day was beautiful and the sea like a mill pond. At midday we turned towards the Bay of Biscay.

On September 19th the wind rose and foam began to cover the waves as we approached the beautiful land of Spain. On Sunday at 5 o'clock we sighted Cape Finisterre by the rays of the rising sun. Today at midday we had done 320 miles since Saturday. At midday Mass was celebrated on deck in an improvised chapel, and the Cardinal preached. The weather was beautiful and the seas perfectly calm, and those who had been sick till then were now well again. On Monday we steamed along the coasts of Spain and Portugal, and Gibraltar was seen in the moonlight.

We arrived at Naples on the 25th September, our arrival being awaited by our confrères. The Visitor had the kindness to send someone to meet us early in the morning to bring us to the house, and to show us the city. We have a house in the "Via Vergini". It is a very large house with thirty three priests and twenty four students in the College. The church is very beautiful and rich in every kind of ornament. Our confrères were kind enough to show us the miraculous picture which preserves the fiery print of the hand of a damned soul. I could only be doubly impressed with both terror at the sight of God's vengeance on the sinner, and with recognition of His mercy towards me whom He had so often saved. I have seen one form of His Divine Anger with my eyes and have touched it with my hands.

We visited the cathedral dedicated to St Januarius. It was during the octave of the feast; and I found that the miracles attributed to his holy relics were incontestable. We arrived just in time to see the procession of bishops and priests bearing the holy relics to the main altar. Our excellent lay-brother obtained a good place for us near the altar rails. The saint's head rested on the gospel side contained in a silver box surmounted by a mitre. A bishop held the silver box containing the phial of miraculous blood. Glass placed on both sides of the box, whilst an assistant held a lighted candle behind, made it easy to see the phial and to make sure that the blood was perfectly coagulated and solid. The bishop showed each side of the

box, and as the eager crowd passed the rails and knelt as far as the altar steps, we found ourselves on the highest altar steps where we could examine the phial with ease. The people prayed and invoked the saint in a loud voice, whilst the bishop turned the reliquary to every side up and down for a quarter of an hour. The clergy and people who filled the church recited the Nicene Creed aloud; and the box containing the phial of blood was again displayed by the bishop. After about six minutes the coagulated blood began to stir, first at the side and then in all directions and the phial became full of red liquified blood. At a signal the whole church resounded with the chanting of the 'Te Deum'. The relic was venerated by the people for the rest of the day.

Later we visited the Museum alone and saw all the curiosities that came from the excavations of Pompeii and Herculaneum. We left the city and the beautiful bay of Naples on the same day as we arrived — 25th September.

On the morning of the 26th the *Liguria* was falling and rising gently in the classical straits of Messina, leaving Scylla on our left and Charybdis on our right. Next day we sighted the isle of Crete.

On Tuesday 29th we arrived at Port Said at seven in the evening. As Naples whence we came was infected with cholera, we were placed at Port Said quarantine. We left on the 30th.

Mount Sinai, 7,000 feet high, was sighted on October 3rd. The passage across the isthmus of Suez was not too difficult as the heat was moderated by a breeze, but from the 3rd to the 8th October the days were exhausting and the nights more so. We crossed the equator on the 11th, and for the first time we were in the Southern Hemisphere.

On 28th October we arrived at Adelaide which promises to be, they say the Brindisi of Australia. We visited that new and picturesque city comprising with its suburbs 60,000 inhabitants. The Bishop was exceedingly kind to his compatriots. He placed a steam launch at our disposal, and a carriage awaited us at the quay. We went to the Dominicans' House to pay them a visit, and to carry out some commissions.

On 30th October, we came to Melbourne the most imposing and the largest city of the Antipodes. Including the suburbs it has a population of 128,000 people.

On the Feast of St Charles we at last entered the magnificent Sydney Harbour, unrivalled in the whole world. With an Italian sky over our heads, the refreshing breezes would have made us believe that we were in Ireland had not the burning sun, darting his rays upon us, quickly dissipated the illusion. A veritable flotilla of

steamers richly beflagged and laden from stem to stern with enthusiastic crowds spread over the waters. They crowded around the special tender which carried His Eminence, and escorted us with instruments to the quay, making the air and waves resound with prolonged acclamations. The whole of Sydney put itself 'en fete' to receive its first Cardinal. The flags and banners streamed in the wind, the choirs sang their most joyous harmonies. Gradually the procession formed and conducted us to the cathedral. A choir as rich as it was varied made the new edifice resound with the chant of the 'Te Deum'. His Eminence replied to the address which the Bishops of the six dioceses had just presented to him in the name of the clergy and the faithful.

Here we are poor children of St Vincent de Paul in the presence of a new world, having for our sole strength our confidence in Providence, Who there, as elsewhere, will sustain us by the all powerful virtue of the cross of the Saviour.

Your most devoted servant,
M. O'Callaghan, I.S.C.M.

First weeks.

The late Father Reginald King CM takes up the story:

"On their arrival in Sydney, Fathers O'Callaghan and Boyle took lodgings at Arnott House, but they remained there only ten days, for on 14th November they changed to Mrs Grogan's house at 219 Macquarie St. ...

The first ten days after their arrival must have been busy ones for the missionaries, for Father O'Callaghan had been appointed as a Theologian for the Australasian Plenary Synod which was to sit in Sydney from the 14th to the 28th of November; and both had to prepare for a Mission in St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney, which was to be conducted during the same two weeks.

Though the previous missionary experience of Father O'Callaghan could not have been very extensive, seeing that most of his life had been spent in scholastic work, the exercises of the mission at St Mary's Cathedral, which commenced on the 13th November, were attended by very large crowds. The very title of Priests of the Mission, and the warm recommendation of His Eminence, together with the zeal and earnestness of the missionaries contributed not a little to the filling of the cathedral each night. A large number of conversions was reported, and over 4,000 people received Holy Communion during the first week of the mission.

The "Freeman's Journal" of 21st November 1885, writing of the Mission makes this comment: "Father O'Callaghan had a mild, per-

suasive, homely, eloquent manner of preaching”.

On the Sunday following the conclusion of the cathedral mission, the two missionaries went to the Lewisham parish, then known as Petersham. This parish... comprised four districts: Petersham, Ashfield, Canterbury and Kingsgrove, with a Catholic population of 1,233.

The mission at Petersham commenced on 6th December and ended on Sunday, 20th December. The Sacred Heart Sodality was there erected, and at the conclusion 60 adults were confirmed.

The third mission was in the country — in the Maitland diocese at a place referred to as Haydonton, the present town of Murrurundi of which Father Foran was Parish Priest. Father Foran was an old friend of the missionaries who, in answering his invitation to come to him, spent their first Christmas Day in Australia travelling north. The mission in Murrurundi lasted for a week only, commencing on 27th December 1885, and ending on 3rd January 1886. The day following the close of this mission saw Father O’Callaghan on his way back to Maitland where, on Monday night 4th January 1886, he commenced a three day’s retreat for the Dominican nuns.

Both priests were at their lodgings in Sydney — in Macquarie Street — on the following Sunday, 10th January.

A week later — on 17th January — Father Boyle alone opened a week’s mission at Mount Victoria, whilst Father O’Callaghan went on to Bathurst, to St Stanislaus’ College, to give the annual retreat to the priests of the Bathurst diocese.

At the conclusion of the mission and the retreat the missionaries took a spell off, and together had a week’s rest in the Blue Mountains. Opportunity was taken to write some letters and among them was the following, written by Father O’Callaghan to Father Bettembourg, CM, Procurator General at the Mother House at Paris:

Sydney, 28 January 1886

I am happy to send you some details of these distant countries where Providence has just opened a new field for the zeal of the sons of St Vincent de Paul. I will also speak of the first missions we have given, in the hope that this will give you some pleasure.

Australia is an English colony dating from the beginning of this century. Until that time the country had been inhabited only by aboriginals. These were cannibals. The missionaries of the various (Protestant) sects have sought hard to convert them, but all their efforts have been in vain. The new colonies made rapid progress as the gold mines attracted many newcomers. There are also iron and coal mines; and sheep raising also gives rise to considerable trade.

Sydney has a population of 200,000 inhabitants. Among its remarkable monuments must be mentioned the Cathedral which cost more than £50,000. It was there that under the presidency of Cardinal Moran the first Provincial Council was held, sixteen bishops being present. Opening on 10th August, the feast of St Laurence, the Council closed on 14th November 1885. In order that the faithful should share in all the blessings which God bestowed on the august assembly of the Synod, at the request of His Eminence we preached a mission in the Cathedral lasting a fortnight. Vast as was the building it could not contain the crowd which pressed every evening to hear the word of God. We have had the consolation of leading to the right path a large number of souls who had been far from it for a long time. There were many restitutions, and about 4,000 persons approached the Holy Table.

On the 5th December a new mission was opened in one of the suburbs of Sydney, and was no less edifying than the first. We had 820 communions. On the final day His Eminence administered the Sacrament of Confirmation to 60 adults.

Having left on December 23rd for the diocese of Maitland, we travelled 200 miles by land and sea. We commenced the mission on 27th December. The church is very beautiful, being situated in a magnificent valley surrounded by forest clad mountains. One would say that it was an Irish church transplanted to the plains of Australia. The district had an area the same as that of a diocese in France. These poor people come from great distances — some even from 25 miles — on horseback. From beginning to end we have not had a free moment. They were waiting at the confessional for us from five in the morning. The children are simple and innocent, and one would think that they had been trained by religious. At this time of the year the heat is so excessive that it would be dangerous to leave the house without protection from the rays of the sun.

Whilst returning to Sydney I stopped at Bathurst to preach the ecclesiastical retreat presided over by the bishop of the diocese. Then I joined my confrère, Father Boyle, who was giving a mission in the mountains. There was neither priest nor church there. The nearest priest who lives nineteen miles away comes once a year to say Mass and hear confessions. We were told that there were 20 Catholics; but we found 100. Some old men made their First Communion; and others, who had not been regarded as Catholics although they had been baptised, were instructed and admitted to the sacraments. God had visibly blessed this small work. Nearly all the Catholics of the colonies are Irish, or of Irish descent.

When we had finished the mission we rested for a few days. The air in the mountains is very good, and we are not troubled by the mosquitoes. Although it is the middle of summer it is hardly

as warm as the same season in Ireland. Nature offers to the eye a scene of magnificent grandeur. The valleys are bordered by rocks five hundred or six hundred feet high. The mountains are covered with thick forests in which bears and snakes abound.

Next Sunday we will leave to evangelise a vast district not far from Sydney. During Lent we will work in the most distant part of the diocese. After Easter we will give missions 600 miles to the north, until June. Our health is very good, thank God, and we are very pleased with the work that has been given to us, as it is a true mission country.

Many Chinese are to be met with in Australia. They are vegetable and fruit merchants, and they travel the country to sell their goods. The Protestants do all they can to attract them. We would like to have a Chinese confrère to work for the conversion of their souls, for they think only of commerce and money.

M. O’Callaghan, I.S.C.M.

After their rest in the mountains, the two priests entered on a programme of work which was to go on without interruption for the next six months.”

Reports to the Superior General.

Fathers O’Callaghan and Boyle were to examine the situation and report back to the Superior General as to the advisability of making a permanent foundation in Sydney. Naturally, they were also to advise on the Vincentian apostolate to be undertaken. Father O’Callaghan writes to Father Fiat on 25th January, 1886.

“St Mary’s Cathedral, Sydney.

...From all that we have seen and heard, I am convinced that this country offers a vast field for our apostolic zeal. Missions are sought on all sides and are needed here more than in Ireland, as the faith and morals of the people are in greater danger. Moreover, missions are as well attended as in Ireland. In this diocese there is a great opening for our Congregation, as there isn’t yet a similar Institute here. His Eminence and the clergy, both secular and regular, seem to desire greatly to see us established. The secular clergy want very much our services for retreats.

In a neighbouring diocese, the Redemptorists have had a parish for the past three years. There were four of them at the start, but now the work of giving missions occupies more than nine. In fact, if you are to get them, you have to book well in advance. Now they are building a new house, and are determined to give up the parish ministry. Their house of missions and retreats will cost £12,000. Money isn’t short

here, and it is easy to collect; the people show great generosity for religious undertakings.

A small school-chapel has just been built — nearly as close to Sydney as Phibsboro is to Dublin — and it is dedicated to *our* St Vincent. His Eminence gladly gives us the use of it until we decide to build another. A house nearby can be rented on a temporary basis for the missionaries until Providence provides us with the means of building a suitable one. This will do for a start, and I have no doubt that after some years an important foundation, destined to render immense service to the Australian church, will be established here.

As in America, England, Ireland and Scotland, the bishops, the priests and all works of religion are supported, and their expenses defrayed, by the people. In this diocese there is no collection at the church door, but an offertory collection takes its place. This offertory collection, and it *only*, is taken up during all the missions given in these colonies; over and above, a suitable sum is always offered to the missionaries on their departure. Whether they accept this offering or not, the people make it and the priests receive it.... The Jesuits and Redemptorists... always accept the offering make them after a mission, though both — so they tell me — have a rule similar to ours in this matter. The General of the Jesuits has decided that this offering can be accepted when there is no “foundation”; and a General Congregation of the Redemptorists reached a similar conclusion. I have been told that our missionaries in the United States follow this course of action.

To support ourselves here, we would need to do likewise, at least until our church be sufficiently provided for, — if we ever have one.

In any case, it wouldn't perhaps be wise to make ourselves singular by giving our missions at a cheaper rate, so to speak, than these other religious groups. I can add, moreover, that in acting thus, the cause of the poor will not be furthered thereby and the missions will not on that account be more fruitful.

In this vast land “foundations” are unknown, even for Masses. Mass stipends are at least 5/-; hence, they can be of considerable help. The income from the little church of St Vincent mentioned above would be sufficient at present for the support of one priest, and after some time, perhaps even of two. One priest is enough for the work. It isn't a parish; if we were to ask for a parish, His Eminence would be glad to give us one.

A house of missions and retreats would be supported easily without any church, if we are permitted to accept the offering made after a mission. I think that five missionaries and two laybrothers could be supported.

Considering the dangers in this country of mixing with people ill-disposed towards community life; considering too how desirable

it is that we retain our primitive fervour and the state in which our Congregation should continue to exist, I would say, — were I asked for my opinion, — that the best course to follow would be to rent on a temporary basis a suitable house out in the country and not too near to the city. That there live there *at least* four missionaries and two laybrothers who would constitute a community, and that they are engaged exclusively in missions and retreats, renouncing any idea of having a church of any kind whatsoever. Alternatively, start with the little church of St Vincent with a residence beside it housing four or five missionaries, before coming to a final decision. In the latter case, we will be helped especially by the people of Sydney to build our residence. Mass strip-ends and the offering at the end of missions would certainly suffice to support our missionaries without any church. A house of missions and retreats without a church has very great advantages, in my opinion, to preserve us from the dangers of the world.

We are booked for missions and retreats until June. Mgr Byrne, the worthy successor to Bishop Quinn in Bathurst, will keep for us — so he has told me — his College and Seminary until we are ready. In Bathurst there is a great desire that we take over the direction of this establishment. ...”

A second letter from Father O’Callaghan to Father Fiat covers much the same ground. It is undated, and could perhaps be an earlier, or more probably a later, version of the letter just quoted. He is quite convinced that the main contribution of the Vincentians should be the giving of missions:

“.... Australia has great need of this first and principal work of our Congregation. There are very many Catholics here, but so intermingled are they with Protestants and infidels always ready to ridicule the mysteries of Holy Religion, that they are in great danger of losing the Faith. The little experience I have had since my arrival in Australia convinces me that missions are the best and most efficacious means of conveying to these poor people an idea of the treasure they possess in their Holy Faith. Missions here attract nearly all the Catholics no matter how indifferent they are, stir them up to practise their holy religion and thus remove all danger of a loss of Faith. It seems to me that our Holy Founder would have made a sacrifice to evangelise this country.

I have no need to say to you that only true Apostles will bring forth fruit, — or even persevere, — here. The number of priest-religious who have lost their vocation, and the always greater number of them who have lost the spirit of their state and become a source of trouble to their Lordships the Bishops, is really frightening. The climate, the manners and customs of

this people, and other causes are for religious, more than in any other country, a stumbling block for their vocation.

Hence it is of the first importance in establishing the Congregation to secure that the missionaries be exposed to the least possible danger of losing the spirit of their state. From all that I have been able to learn on this point, I have concluded that religious who have lost the spirit of their state, and those who are in danger of doing so, have been led to their ruin through making useless visits, and as a bishop put it to me recently — by undertaking “good works” which are not at all in accord with their spirit. ...”

He then takes up the problem of material support and urges strongly that permission be given to accept the offering that is always made at the end of a mission. The income from the school-chapel “being not more than £4 or £5 per week” wouldn’t be of much help. “The Cardinal Archbishop and the priests are unanimous in telling us that we should accept the offering from the priest of the parish at the end of each mission”. Were this permitted, they would have no financial difficulty, nor would there be any need of a church to help with their support. His clear preference is for a house of mission and retreats without a church attached.

He writes again to Father Fiat on 21 May 1886:

“Since sending you my report in January, nothing has happened to make me wish to change anything. Since then, we have had the pleasure of preaching missions and retreats, some in towns, but a greater number in the country — in the mountainous areas. By next November, God willing, we will have preached 23 missions and 5 retreats; two of the retreats have been to the diocesan clergy. Up to now we have found it impossible to oblige all those who have sought our services.

Our labours have produced great fruit everywhere, thanks to the good God, even in the most backward and least favoured districts. Sometimes we have had to give the mission in a public hall in the village, or in a tent, having travelled for long periods sometimes on horseback, with soutane and surplice attached to the saddle. . . . Our health keeps very good. ...”

Decision

In addition to these letters of Father O’Callaghan, Father Boyle had also written to Father Fiat. We haven’t that letter, but the minutes of the General Council held on March 14, 1886 gives its substance: “We shouldn’t have a public church, but should concentrate on the work of

missions. However, it would be difficult to give them gratuitously.”

The Provincial Council, at its meeting on March 26, concluded as follows:

- “1° It is the opinion of the Council of the Province that the work should be taken up in Australia.
- 2° That we ought to confine ourselves to Mission work alone, accepting the honorarium voluntarily presented at the end of each Mission.”

This conclusion was sent to the Superior General, but his Council in early April decided to defer a decision on the question.

The decision was taken at the meeting of the General Council on 9 August 1886. It is worded as follows:

“On the advice, which is almost unanimous, of the Superiors of the Province of Ireland, the Council accepts definitively the Mission of Sydney. Measures will be taken that, there as elsewhere, one conform as far as possible to the usages of the Company.”

The rather enigmatic concluding sentence seems to indicate a somewhat grudging consent to the acceptance of the offering made at the end of a mission. This is confirmed by a phrase in Father Fiat’s letter to Father Duff announcing the decision to go ahead with the Sydney foundation: “You may take the measures you have decided on (“vos mesures”) for the definitive foundation of the Australian house”. A telegram was sent to Father O’Callaghan on the 9th, and on the 11th both Father Fiat and Father Duff write informing him of the acceptance of the Mission. Father Duff added: “It is hoped that we shall be able to send two confrères and two laybrothers”. Later in the same month Fathers Cornelius McEnroe and John Hagarty were appointed to Sydney, and on the 30th Father O’Callaghan was named superior of the new foundation.

FATHER MICHAEL GLEESON, C.M. (1826-1889)

Michael Gleeson was not one of the founding Fathers of the Province. He was, however, among its pioneers and reflects in his apostolate and outlook the vision of those early days. The work of giving missions remained primary, but there was also a strong missionary dimension. The independence of view manifested in his letters was a characteristic of many of his contemporaries in the Irish Province.

He was born in Ballinahinch, Co. Limerick, on 29 September 1826, entered the Maison Mere in Paris in 1848, took his vows in Castleknock in 1850, and was ordained a priest on 19 February 1853. His first appointment would seem to have been to the newly established house in Sheffield.

In June 1854, the Provincial Council considered a request — which had been made some years previously and then rejected — that an Irish confrère be sent to the College at Smyrna, directed by the French confrères, to teach English. The minutes record:

“The appeal of our confrère M. Fougeray at Smyrna for the services of an Irish confrère having been submitted, it was n(emine) c(ontradicante) agreed to on the grounds of the necessity of the case, of the known accordance of the measure with the wishes of the S. General, and more especially as the vocation of our Rev. confrère, Mr Gleeson, (who offers himself for Smyrna) to a Foreign Mission is admitted by all.”

The Crimean War was raging and there was a great shortage of Catholic chaplains. Towards the end of 1855 Father Gleeson became chaplain at the General Hospital, Balaclava, where Irish Sisters of Mercy, with Mother Bridgeman of Kinsale as their superior, cared for the sick and wounded. Writing from Phibsboro on 14 April 1858 to Mother Bridgeman, Father Gleeson says:

“You are aware that from the time I came to Balaclava until the time you left, I had been attached to the General Hospital and did duty there. During that period of time I do not think a single day passed without my visiting the hospital. On that account I had an opportunity of judging the attention paid to the patients both by the Sisters and by the medical men in attendance. ...”

In March 1856, the Irish Sisters of Mercy withdrew from the hospital, and were replaced by Sisters of Mercy from Bermondsey. The trouble was that Florence Nightingale decided to take over personally complete control of the hospital. There was considerable opposition to the Sisters from Bermondsey working under Miss Nightingale. One of

the chaplains, Father Michael Duffy, S.J. refused to have any further contact with the hospital. Father Gleeson did not take such a strong line. On April 21 1856, he writes to Sister M. Joseph of Kinsale:

“Mother M. Clare (the superior of the Bermondsey Sisters) has gone home, hence the responsibility of superior necessarily devolves upon Miss Nightingale. This is the first time I ever heard of a religious community being governed by a Protestant Superior; but then it is only a natural consequence, for since these ladies came up here under the guidance of a Protestant Minister, without even consulting a Catholic chaplain beforehand, they have not, I am sure, any difficulty in placing themselves under a Protestant Superior.

I never came in contact with any of them except on Saturday last when they presented themselves for Confession. Although I do not approve of their manner of acting, yet I cannot refuse hearing their confessions as long as I am here, when they present themselves in that way. But I have taken the resolution that as long as I am here, I will never visit the Sisters in the Land Transport hospital. ...”

The Treaty of Paris, signed on 29 March 1856, brought the Crimean War to an end, and the General Hospital at Balaclava gradually ceased to perform a useful service. This is the background to the following letter of Father Dowley to Father Etienne:

“Castleknock, 22 June 1856

...I have just received a letter from our dear confrère, Fr Gleeson, in Smyrna. In it he tells me he is no longer employed at the military hospital, not has he any missionary work inside or outside the College other than teaching English; and that a year on the mission at Sheffield would accomplish more good than an entire lifetime spent in Smyrna. ... He — and I also — would consider it a great favour if, in your fraternal charity you would arrange... that this dear confrère return and resume the worthwhile and very important work which he carried out so worthily in Sheffield. In justice to him I should say that he has not asked me to make this request, but I can see clearly his mind on the matter. We shall appoint him to Sheffield and his return there will be deemed a favour and a blessing. ...”

He does not remain long in Sheffield, because in January 1857 he is appointed a member of the mission staff in Phibsboro. In 1862 we find him in Lanark, virtually in charge due to the absence, because of ill-health, of the superior, Father Matthew Kavanagh. He fulfills the office

“with great success”. In 1866 he returns to Phibsboro and presumably continues to give missions.

In 1876 the archbishop of Melbourne invites the Irish Province to make a foundation in his diocese. On June 1, Father Duff, the Visitor, writes to the Superior General:

“...The Provincial Council has decided to ask your approval of our acceptance of the invitation of His Grace to send out to Melbourne two confrères to examine the prospects for the success of the work of our Congregation in Melbourne, and to send home their report thereon. ... We propose as the two confrères for this important mission M. Gleeson of St. Peter’s, Phibsboro, and M. Gavin at present the Director of our Seminaire Interne at St. Joseph’s, Blackrock. In the Questionnaire you will perceive that the piety and goodness of these two dear confrères give solid ground to hope that the blessings of Providence will be poured down abundantly on their efforts. ...”

But the project fell through, and almost a decade was to pass before the Irish Province became involved in an Australian foundation.

In March 1877, Father Gleeson writes from Phibsboro seeking permission to visit the Maison Mère to renew his acquaintance with the confrères he had known there during his noviciate. On the letter is written “Accordée” — granted. But something went wrong and we find him renewing his request in August. He has not received any reply to his previous letter, he elaborates his reasons for the visit: he wants to end his days in Paris “beside the shrine of our Holy Founder, S. Vincent, the better to prepare myself for a happy passage out of life. This is no new idea of mine; it is one I always entertained since entering the Community.” Permission is granted. He goes to Paris, but events are to take a strange turn. In September he writes from Paris to Father Duff:

“I suppose you have already heard from Fr Dixon (Superior, Phibsboro) to whom I wrote yesterday that I am no longer a member of the Irish Province. I explained to him how this came about, not certainly from myself for I never asked to be sent on a Foreign Mission, nor did I even desire it, but the way in which the Superior General put the matter before me I could not refuse nor even make the slightest objection. He spoke in the first place of the want of generosity of the Irish to go on Foreign Missions, that even we were bound to aid in helping

them by actual service, that a short time ago it was notified to him that the Australian Mission would be taken up & since that failed why not supply the want of those already in existence. He then told me how for a long time he was most anxious to get an English speaking confrère for the Mauritius, in fact that he had his heart set on it, and then asked me if I would go. I told him distinctly that I did not come to Paris for the purpose of making a change of that nature, but that of course if he wished me to go, I would put no obstacle to the fulfilment of his desires. I then explained to him the great want of missionaries in Ireland & the innumerable missions that could not be given for want of subjects. To this he replied: 'I do not wish to oppose any obstacle to the work of the missions in Ireland. I will consult and let you know what my wishes are a little later on.' Things remained in this state until the close of the Retreat when he sent for me and said: 'I have been considering during the past few days what you ought to do & I have come to the conclusion that you ought to go to the Mauritius & I even wish you to start this very day.' In all this there is not a particle of my will, on the contrary the thought furthest from my mind in coming to Paris was to go on a foreign mission. However, as it is now settled I look upon it as the will of God and as such accept it willingly, but not without a little feeling of pain in being separated so suddenly from those who have been always so kind to me. I leave then this evening for my new destination. I now thank you sincerely for all your kindness to me & humbly ask pardon for any annoyance or trouble I may ever have given you. I recommend myself earnestly to your fervent prayers... and I beg you will have the kindness to get all the confrères in St Joseph's to pray likewise for me..."

Some weeks later, on 18 October, Father Bore writes to Father Duff:

"Our Lord, through St Vincent, has arranged a new mission for Father Gleeson. For a long time I have hoped that England would contribute through one of her missionaries to the progress of the Mission... of Mauritius... The bishop, an Englishman and very pleased with the work of our confrères, has asked me several times for an English — at least English-speaking — missionary. I believe I have found in our dear confrère, M. Gleeson, the man capable by his virtue and age

of being the superior of our five young confrères. With truly apostolic detachment — which greatly edified us — he agreed to set out immediately, since his help is awaited impatiently.

I had previously thought of M. Reynolds for this mission, but his previous history and character did not offer me a like guarantee of stability. Henceforth, I shall regard him as belonging definitively to the Province of Ireland, and I take M. Gleeson in his place. If I mention these details, it is to have you understand that I am not really depriving your Province of a subject, though I could, and should, do so in a case of necessity, such as this is. Besides, I know that your Province is generous enough to come to our aid in developing such an important mission. ...”

Father Boré’s reference to his preference of Fr Gleeson on grounds of stability is rather ironical. In fact, Father Gleeson hardly spent more than a few weeks in Mauritius. What happened we don’t know. But we do know that he was back in Europe in January 1878. In June of that year, Fr Mailly, the Bursar General, submitted to the General Council the following query:

“Who is to pay for M. Gleeson’s journey? The Bishop doesn’t intend to do so. Neither do our confrères in Mauritius. The Irish Province? But it is not its concern. The Congregation? That is to say, really the Maison Mere. It is a question of more than 3,000 francs.”

On his arrival in Sheffield, Father Gleeson informed Father Duff that the Province had been billed for 1,500 francs — the cost of his return journey from Mauritius. Father Duff made immediately the necessary arrangements to pay.

Father Gleeson was transferred to Phibsboro towards the end of 1878, but before leaving Sheffield he had written to the new Superior General, Father Fiat, calling his attention to the fact that certain recommendations made by his predecessor, Father Bore, in the circular letter to the Province were not being fully implemented. Father Bore had focussed attention on the work of giving missions, had deplored their decline and the present lack of enthusiasm in the Province for this work. More and more retreats were being given to particular groups. By rule it was forbidden to accept any remuneration — apart from travelling expenses — for a mission: on the other hand financial remuneration could be accepted for retreats. Both Father Mailer, who had made a visitation of the Province in 1877, and Father Bore had recommended that “*nihil omnino sive pro exercitiis sive pro missionibus acceptatur.*” The second point made by Father Gleeson concerned Sheffield.

Father Bore, while recognising the obligations of the confrères to their parishioners, pointed out that they should never forget that they were “Missioners” and should devote whatever time they could spare from parish duties to the giving of missions. Missions, in Father Gleeson’s opinion, were absolutely essential for the welfare of Catholics living in Protestant England. And his letter called on the Superior General, in his prudence and wisdom, to see that these recommendations of Father Bore were fully carried out.

In May 1879 he becomes a member of the House Council, Phibsboro. In July he writes of Father Fiat to complain of certain abuses: the renting of holiday houses, the violation of the whisky-punch prohibition on the missions, lengthy dinner parties with the secular clergy during missions, and to crown all — at the end of a recent mission a picnic was organised at which women were present! It would seem that the Superior General passed on these complaints to Father Duff who replied on the 27 September 1879:

“My inquiries relative to the three points contained in your honoured communication of the 7th of this month have resulted as follows:

1° Two houses only of the province hired vacation lodgings this year. The Superiors of both these houses, remembering the wish expressed by our late revered Superior Gen., did to my knowledge, endeavour to secure moderate and retired lodgings, and I think with fair success, considering the difficulty of finding such, sufficiently near the coast for sea-bathing.

2° Regarding the use of “Punch” by our confrères, I have not discovered even one case in which it could be positively asserted that your directions in this matter have been violated.

3° The time spent at dinner by our confrères when they dine with the Parochial Clergy varies from half an hour to two hours, according to the usage of the place, but I am glad to learn that our confrères prefer taking their recreation in the open air.”

In March 1880, Father Gleeson learns that he is appointed superior at Lanark. This news prompts a letter to Father Fiat protesting his unworthiness; however, he accepts as he judges it to be God’s will for him. In April, he again writes to Father Fiat — from Lanark — to express his concern, which he says is shared by others, at the numbers of Daughters of Charity who are leaving their Community. His remedy is the appointment of a Visitatrix; in other

words, that they become a separate Province. He lists at some length his reasons. On the letter is written: "Requests the establishment of a Province for the Sisters. Reply: the matter is being looked in to."

In January 1881, he describes the situation in Lanark in a letter to Father Fiat:

"...The personnel of this house consists of three priests and a brother. One of the priests is sick and incapable of work: his sole contribution is the celebration of Mass. We have charge of a parish of more than 1,000 Catholics. In addition, there is the orphanage with 400 children, the hospital with always 20 or so patients and also a hostel with 30 girls. We have three schools, one for boys, a second for girls a third for infants: all three are looked after by our Sisters. In Carstairs village, a mile or so from Lanark, there is another infants' school: a mistress is in charge there.

We have a public Mass daily in the Church, another in the orphanage and a third — three days a week — in Mr Monteith's house. On Sundays, we have two public Masses in the orphanage, and a third in Carstairs in Mr Monteith's. We teach catechism twice each week: once to the children of all the schools assembled in the church and once to the children cared for by our Sisters at Smyllum orphanage. We preach three times every Sunday: the sermon is given at the 11.00 o'clock Mass in the church, the instruction after the evening devotions which begin at 6.00 p.m., and the third at the Mass in Mr Monteith's house; although the oratory is in the house, the faithful are admitted. This then is our work on Sundays...

It is a subject of great regret to all the confrères that the work of giving missions — our first work — does not occupy, as it should, the first place. Due to lack of missionaries, missions are given only rarely — whenever we can secure the service of missionaries from other houses. Last year only two missions, each of three weeks' duration, were given.

We have only three priests, one of whom is sick and can hardly do anything. For quite some time the Visitor has been anxious to increase the number of confrères here so that the work of giving missions could get under way — something very dear to his heart — but finds it impossible to come to our assistance, as he has no confrères at his disposal to send us. This is a great pity I can assure you, Most Honoured Father, and very unfortunate for there is great scope here for the apostolate of zealous missionaries. Requests for missions come from all quarters, and it is a cause of great sorrow to us that we are not in a position to meet these requests. And what makes it even more

harrowing is that we are really convinced that missions are almost the sole means of salvation for a great number of souls. Despite this, we cannot come to their aid. Oh, what a fine mission centre Lanark would be if we had missionaries, and how many souls would be saved if we were in a position to give missions...”

In reply, Father Fiat suggests that they get a secular priest to help in the parish and thus free confrères for the work of giving missions. Father Gleeson, however, does not regard the idea to be feasible. He adds that he hopes to get an additional confrère from the Visitor, as three confrères were to be ordained for the Province later in the year.

In 1882, he is appointed superior of Sheffield, but pleads successfully with Father Fiat to be excused on the grounds that responsibility for nearly 6,000 souls — the Catholic population of St. Vincent’s, Sheffield, — would be too heavy a burden for him to carry.

“Three years later, in 1885, he was nearly on his travels again. It had been decided to establish a foundation in Australia, and we read in the minutes of the Provincial Council of 27 March, 1885:

“Ruled that if the Superior General approve of our going to Australia, Father Gleeson be recommended to the General as the superior, and Father A. Boyle and Whitty be appointed with Father Gleeson.”

This arrangement was changed and it was Father Malachy O’Callaghan, — as superior — accompanied by Father Anthony Boyle who set out for Sydney in September 1885.

The following year he must have been thinking of giving a series of missions, for we find the Visitor, Father Duff, writing to him from Blackrock on May 21:

“On the subject of the obligation of the superior of house of Missions, with *cura animarum* attached, I asked the Sup(erior) Gen(eral) how such a superior was to discharge this duty of care of these souls. He replied that he should have the *per-mission* of the Ordinary of the diocese to be absent from his parish or mission of which he has the “Cura”...”

Father Duff’s health failed in 1888 and Father Thomas Morissey, superior of Cork, was appointed Vice-Visitor, but with the full powers of a Visitor. On 4 October 1888, Father Gleeson was appointed superior, Sunday’s Well, and was succeeded as superior in Lanark by Father Joseph Walshe, to whom he writes on November 11:

“I got your letter on Friday which was a source of great pleasure to me. I was glad to hear the poor people turned up

so well during the Mission. You have now a clear stage before you. The Sacred Heart Association has done a large amount of good in Lanark. It has kept many away from sin. If you could only prevail on those who have not yet given their names to join, you would do an incalculable amount of good for them and for the whole community. A word from the new pastor will I hope have its effect....

It occurs to me to say to you that I think you ought to take charge of the Sacred Heart (Association) yourself, to go round the Church on the occasion of the monthly meeting, to examine in detail the registers, ask about absent members and to be sure to go after them during the coming week and call them to account for their absence. By acting thus you will keep up the members and make the members be regular in their attendance. This constant looking after will be sure to do a world of good. In this I failed for I was not able to go amongst the people. My body became too heavy for my legs and consequently I neglected this all important duty. You will not be displeased with me for saying that I think you ought to make it a point to visit all the people at least a couple or three times a year, especially those of them who may happen to neglect themselves. In those visits your patience will be often put to the test; in such circumstances nothing remains but to practise meekness, never to get excited, nor to say a single word capable of hurting their feelings. I have met in Lanark sad instances of harsh remarks and I fear myself have done harm in that way more than once — don't be displeased with me for speaking thus. It is only to put you on your guard against these defects to which we are all exposed.

A few days before I got my letters of dismissal from Lanark, I got permission to establish the "Apostleship of Prayer" in connection with the Mission. I left after me the Diploma of Aggregation which you will find in my room, or rather in the room I lately occupied

I hope you are attending to the Votive Candlestick. This devotion has done good for the short time it is established in Lanark. It has stimulated the people to greater devotion to the B. Virgin and is a means of getting them to pray for the conversion of those who are neglecting themselves. Keep before the minds of the people the advantage of offering prayers through the intercession of the B. Virgin for drunkards, people leading bad lives etc. Get them to burn a candle for that purpose and offer a little prayer at the same

time for those of their friends that are going astray. In addition to the spiritual good that will follow, you will also make a little of the offerings of the people...

I am glad to hear that Mr Monteith is about to decorate the Lady Chapel. It wants decoration badly and when beautified will help devotion to the B. Virgin. Don't forget to remind him of this promise. He very often purposes to do something, but afterwards forgets all about it. He is good and generous and will do anything you ask if you go about it gently. He will be flattered by this, you will be entirely in his good graces and can do what you like with him .

Keep writing to Father Morrissey till you get a third permanent confrère. Lanark cannot go on with two priests. In the first place the work on Sunday is too much for two Besides without a third priest you can never attempt anything but the home work. I feel convinced that more good can be done in Scotland than elsewhere, if there were only a good staff of missionaries stationed in Lanark. — We are going to the ends of the earth in Cork for work and in Scotland we have an abundance at our very doors and cannot do it for want of workmen. Besides if only two confrères are stationed in Lanark, the church will have to be left frequently without a Mass and the orphanage at Smyllum will also have to do without Mass occasionally. This too is a point for consideration. The orphanage is now paying £100 a year for a chaplain. Consequently the Sisters are justly entitled to Mass every day. Unless there are *three* priests permanently at Lanark, this cannot be done as I have already said — and as a consequence the Sisters will justly complain

I had almost forgotten to tell you not to let anyone know the monies that come to the house. Not even the Visitor — don't say a word about the Marquis of Bute's £60. Don't make any return to the Bishop at the end of the year. You will get a sheet to fill up. Merely put in the confessions, confirmations etc.

I wrote to His Grace (the Marquis of Bute) asking him to pay for the support of a missionary at Lanark. He did not answer me yet....”

Father Gleeson's stay in Cork is to be of short duration. Due to ill-health, he leaves at Christmas 1888 and goes to St. Joseph's Blackrock, where he dies on 22 March 1889. He is buried in the Community cemetery in Castleknock.

MICHAEL GLEESON, C.M.

Born: Ballinahinch, Co Limerick, 29 September 1826.

Entered the Congregation: Maison Mere, Paris, 13 September 1848.

Final Vows: Castleknock, 21 September 1850.

Ordained a priest: 19 February 1853.

APPOINTMENTS:

1853-1854 St. Vincent's, Sheffield.

1855-1856 Smyrna.

1856 St. Vincent's, Sheffield.

1857-1862 St. Peter's, Phibsboro.

1862-1866 St. Mary's, Lanark.

1866-1867 St. Peter's Phibsboro.

1877 Mauritius.

1878 St. Vincent's.

1878-1880 St. Peter's Phibsboro.

1880-1888 St. Mary's, Lanark, Superior.

1888 St. Vincent's, Cork, Superior.

1889 St. Joseph's, Blackrock.

Died: 2 March 1889.

Forum

THE BEGINNINGS OF A NIGERIAN COMMUNITY: 1960 -1980

First Steps; 1960-1970

When our first confrères went to Nigeria in the autumn of 1960, the country was just celebrating its independence from British rule. Nigerians were taking over all the important positions in government. The Catholic Church, however, depended very heavily on expatriate personnel whose two largest groupings were the S.M.A. in the Western and Northern Regions and the Holy Ghost Congregation in the East. The majority of the bishops were also expatriate, but the change to Nigerian bishops had already begun.

Although our own confrères did not set out to establish a Nigerian Vincentian community, the seeds were sown in the retreat and mission work they began in the east of Nigeria at that time. This work brought them into contact with many people and attracted two young seminarians, Timothy and Anthony Njoku, to ask for entry into the community. Others also began to enquire, but the political situation worsened during 1966 and by 1967 the country was torn in two by a Civil War which was to change the face of the Church in the east of Nigeria.

The confused situation of the war made it impossible for our confrères to begin accepting candidates into the community, especially after Ikot Ekpene had to be abandoned as it became part of the front line of the battle. Still the first two aspirants and some others retained contact with our priests throughout the three-year struggle.

January 1970 saw the end of hostilities and the deportation of the missionaries found in the Biafran enclave. That left the Vincentians with only two priests on the mission: Roderic Crowley, who moved to Port Harcourt and Thomas Devine in Makurdi.

The Holy Ghost mission in the East was reduced from more than 300 men before the war to 4 priests in the diocese of Enugu in 1970. These were the only expatriate priests left in the four large Ibo dioceses of the east. These dioceses were short of personnel, but they did have their own bishops, priests, sisters and brothers, an active laity more than one million strong and a great many candidates for the priesthood and the religious life.

Here was a Church struggling to cope with the sudden loss of

foreign missionary personnel, but here was also a Church, for the first time in West Africa, relying on its own indigenous personnel — and managing. This was an important example for the rest of Nigeria.

Indigenisation: 1970-1971.

The sweeping changes of the war and the consequent insecurity of expatriates, both missionary and otherwise, made the word 'indigenisation' a household word in the immediate post-war years. The military government issued a decree on the indigenisation of foreign businesses below a certain annual turnover. There were quotas of expatriates allowed to each firm. And the Catholic bishops were asked to show how many expatriates they required. The presence of every expatriate had to be justified by the needs of the work.

In these circumstances the indigenisation of the Church at every level became an urgent priority. Rome gave a dramatic lead by appointing no less than seven new Nigerian bishops in 1971, some of these only three or four years in the priesthood. A number of religious communities such as Dominicans, Jesuits and Augustinians began to receive Nigerian candidates. And already there was the example of the Holy Ghosts and Holy Rosary Sisters who had received quite a number of Nigerian members before the war. These were now an active force in the Church after their European brothers and sisters had departed.

Knocking on our own door were Timothy and Anthony Njoku with a number of other young men who came to visit us in Port Harcourt. Father Padraig Regan was given the task of vocations-director and he organised retreat-days for them at Our Lady of Lourdes, Creek Rd. The dilemma we faced in that summer of '71 was that our base was so insecure, having only four priests in the country and no house of our own, much less any novitiate in which to form our members. (St. Vincent's, Ikot Ekpene was staffed by diocesan priests at this time.) Since Timothy Njoku was within two years of ordination it was finally decided to send him with Anthony to Dublin for their novitiate and to maintain contact with the others as they continued their studies in the Bigard Seminary. In the autumn of '71 Timothy and Anthony were received into the community in St. Joseph's, Blackrock, as our first Nigerian members. Indigenisation had begun.

Formation: 1972-1980

The problem of formation had not, however, been solved. We very soon realised that the aspirants we sent to the Senior Seminary without any Novitiate-year had no idea of community life or the aims and ideals of the Congregation. During the years 1971-'75 this unsatisfactory situation persisted. Fr. Paul Roche tried to run a Novitiate at Emmanuel College, Ugbokolo, for two years but the school environment and his own heavy school-commitments prevented the real spirit of a community seminaire from developing. None of the candidates of this period have persevered with us although some of them have continued for the secular priesthood. Our own formation programme was only properly launched when St. Justin's, Ogobia, opened in September '75.

Looking at our numbers today, June '80, — 9 students and 5 novices, it might seem that all the steps taken were quite logical or obvious. At the time, however, many vexing questions presented themselves. In Ireland the seminary at Glenart had been given up and Blackrock was under question because of reduced numbers. How could we be sure that we would get any candidates for St. Justin's? Some of the confrères on the mission positively opposed the building of a seminary. In that first year things did not look very bright. Three joined us (the bare minimum) and later one of these left. In the second year we had three, of whom only one finished the year. Then there was the problem of adapting to the Nigerian way of life, a life-style in the seminary that would reflect in some ways the way of life of the people around us. To what extent would it be possible to build on the spiritual traditions of the people, on their respect for the dead, or their traditional prayer-forms, for example? The financial cost of educating all our students, bringing most of that money from outside Nigeria, setting up a community that is financially dependent on another country — this is a problem we have only begun to tackle but have not yet resolved.

The Future

Through all these difficulties there has been a strong sense of confidence in God who has blessed our efforts to welcome new members into our family and join with them in work, prayer and mutual friendship. To further our vocation-effort we have produced a few simple leaflets and pamphlets and have presented the community to young

people in schools and Churches and at vocations' rallies. So we now have members from the Ibo, Ibibio and Tiv areas with the possibility of some from Idoma this year. Our students themselves are often our best vocations-workers as they tell their friends and encourage those interested to join, rather like the way Andrew told Peter and Philip told Nathaniel that they had found the Messiah. (John 1: 41;45).

Twenty years have passed since Frs. Mullan, Morrin and Hughes sailed out to answer the invitation of Bishop Moynagh to come into the land that he would show them. In that time Providence has led us step by step in surprising ways and through the interaction of civil and religious events outside our control to found a seminaire at Ogochia in which the Nigerian Vincentians are being formed for the work of evangelisation. At present we are trying to launch a community house for our philosophers at Ikot Ekpene so that they can have a community life during their studies instead of being a tiny group in a huge seminary as at present. We hope to have a similar house at Enuga for our theologians. So there is quite a lot of work to be done yet. We always seem to find ourselves groping towards the future, finding our plans changed or modified as unexpected events suddenly change the scene. It is never easy but always worthwhile.

Another twenty years will bring us to the end of the century and by then, if God wills, a Nigerian hand may record the further blessings we have received in the work begun twenty years ago.

THAT WAS THE YEAR THAT WAS —A REPORT FROM DE PAUL HOUSE

Eugene Curran

Originally there was to be no seminaire in 1980 and the two aspirants were to start their courses in Maynooth with the intention of forming a seminaire with the next year's recruits. However, with the advent of two more vocations it was decided that all would continue as normal. So it was that on the Feast of St Francis the seminarists were officially received into the Congregation, following a preparatory retreat from Fr Scan Johnson. It would be difficult to find a better introduction to the Congregation and we thank Fr Scan very sincerely.

From the beginning the tone was set for the rest of the year; to the delight of the bursar we did much work in the garden, to the despair of our lecturers we did less in class. On Fridays we worked in Stewart's

Hospital in Palmerstown and I think it was of great benefit to us all. We made many good friends amongst both staff and residents.

It was decided that the seminaire would use their “Desert Day” to build a grotto to the Blessed Virgin in the grounds. This became so much a part of our lives (and those of the many long-suffering confrères who helped us) that it is a tale unto itself to be published anon. To all who helped us in any way with this project we owe a debt of gratitude. The “Desert Day” was a new idea whereby each seminarist was free on Wednesdays to fulfil his spiritual duties in private and in his own time. It allowed much time for reflection and, though it took some getting used to, was a success ... I think.

Occasionally we took off for the far reaches of the Wicklow Hills or, rations packed, set off to cross the city of Dublin (slightly shorter than a three day journey). With the students we saw the “Messiah” and the “Elijah”.

In November Fr Mark Noonan arrived to give the “Promises Retreat”. It is to Fr Noonan’s credit that this retreat is still spoken of, especially amongst the seminarists.

Then we started preparing for Christmas and the efforts of our confrères and, indeed, our own efforts made this a most moving time for us all. It would be fair to say that life in the house has made us all more aware of the mysteries of our faith and the beauty of the liturgical cycle. The season was heightened in its beauty when David Phipps and John Gallagher took their promises in December.

For the week after Christmas, the students having gone home, the seminarists were dispatched with all speed to the confrères in Cork. They stood together bravely and treated us like kings. They were still standing together when we left, but with looks of relief on all faces. For a most enjoyable time we thank all in Sunday’s Well.

On returning to the fold, with Cork accents predominant, we made final arrangements for the show-biz spectacular of the year, the pantomime in St Teresa’s. It was such a success that we played the following day in Stewart’s Hospital. We were delighted to see some gallant confrères at the opening night. It was, of course received with rave reviews.

Throughout the year we were happy to have some of Fr McCullagh’s pupils out to the house, either for afternoons or, especially at Easter and Christmas, for all-night vigils. We had one other vigil when John Gallagher’s Bible Study group came in February. The vigils, though tiring, were very up-lifting. Occasionally, confrères gave us lectures or talks on various aspects of the apostolate

or on subjects of interest. These were instructive, and, thanks to the confrères, amusing.

Lent, though by no means as rigorous as in former times was nonetheless a time of growth and a great build-up to the Easter celebrations. Indeed, at Easter it seemed as if the seminaire had lost the use of its legs and had taken to floating on air.

The week after Easter was the seminaire retreat with Fr Kevin O’Kane. Following the example of those other confrères who had directed our retreats this year Fr O’Kane left us with much to mull over.

The seminarists were then sent out to a community house for three weeks. In our time there we were to get some idea of community life and one aspect of the apostolate. To the now recovered confrères in Damascus House, Phibsboro’, Armagh and Glasgow and Lanark many thanks. We know you enjoyed having us with you.

We returned to see the extension to the house begin to surge upward and to enjoy the only good weather that we have had this year. That same good weather was to break on the night of May 30th as the seminarists (with a little help) put the finishing touches to the Grotto which was to be officially blessed the following day, the Feast of the Visitation. In the afternoon the storms abated and the statue was blessed. We take great pride in this as it was, we think, Fr McCullen’s last official function before going to the Assembly in Rome. With this event the working year could be said to have been crowned and we began to prepare for the holidays.

After their exams (finals for John and Joseph) the students set off for their summer destinations: John Gallagher to London, Joseph Loftus and David Phipps to Munich, Jim Lyons to Westmeath and James Murphy to Dundalk (where he is preparing for final exams).

The seminarists spent a fortnight in a thatched cottage near Tramore, then back to base for a further fortnight. Three weeks in Glencree and two more at base were followed by a week with our families.

I think that of all the things that gave us pleasure during the year the greatest were the visits from confrères. It is good to know the interest that confrères have in us. Those of you who have escaped the nest we will greet with open arms, providing you can endure hours of the other seminaire project, the photo album.



BROTHER SEAN O'DELL, C.M.

Among the printed slogans displayed on the walls of the De Paul Press in Phibsboro was — WHEN I GO, THIS PLACE COMES TO AN END.

Brother Scan is gone — gone to his rest in the hope of rising again; and the De Paul Press has come to an end. No one in the Province has the skill or the time to continue the service which Scan provided for the Double Family of St Vincent. This was brought home in a dramatic way two weeks after Brother Sean's funeral when Father McCullen was elected Superior General. What a 'scoop' that would have been for the editor of *The Bulletin*. The election of a pope or even a Taoiseach would only have been an aperitif to the meal Sean would have made of the next issue of *The Bulletin*.

The town of Listowel, Co. Kerry is famous for its writers and storytellers, and Sean was proud of his birthplace. But it nearly became infamous back in the forties when young Sean O'Dell was a junior officer in the F.C.A. (Local Defence Force) and at the same time an active member of a political party. He did not always see eye to eye with his Commanding Officer whose greatest fault was that he was of a different political persuasion.

Sean once availed of the absence of his C.O. to raise the National Flag contrary to standing orders but in line with his own political viewpoint. The C.O. was so incensed that he ordered Sean to be courtmartialled. Stretching his own political muscle which was not inconsiderable, Sean dared the C.O. to go ahead. The latter wisely, if very reluctantly, backed down. This was the period of the first Coalition Government. Many years later, Sean, now a Vincentian brother, and his former C.O. shared a laugh at the memory.

It was during this period that Sean was earning his living working for the Kerryman newspaper. He learned the printer's trade and became a fully trained compositor. Prior to this he was earning 5 shillings an hour as a freelance gardener in the Terenure-Rathmines area of Dublin. Both these skills were later put at the service of the community at St Joseph's, Blackrock. There was nothing Sean liked more by way of a break from the printing press than a day in the open, mowing lawns, trimming hedges and tidying the grounds — or if it was wet, using his carpenter's tools to fashion shelves and presses

for his workshop.

When the curse of emigration touched the O'Dell family, Sean with his brothers, Eamon and Christy, found work at the Luton Rubber Factory in England, and made the acquaintance of the Spanish Vincentians in charge of the nearby parish of Dunstable.

Soon Scan was the priests' right-hand man and leader of the local Boys' Scout Troop, whom he brought on camping holidays to Ireland in subsequent years. He often recalled the warm memories of his association in those days with the confrères in Dunstable and Potters Bar, and he kept up a correspondence with many of them right up to the time of his death. He had in fact a vast fan-mail with confrères and Daughters of Charity in many corners of the world, and it was from this source that he culled much of the material that went into the making of the Bulletin.

It was at Potters Bar (Province of Madrid) that Scan entered the Little Company in 1954. He spent some time in the novitiate in Spain and then transferred to the Irish Province where he made his Final Vows in 1960 at St Joseph's, Blackrock. This was to be his home for the next 20 years and he became, with his mop of white hair, his stooped shoulders and his faithful dog at his heels, a familiar figure in the little seaside town of Blackrock. He had a salute for everyone he met, he was a frequent caller on shopkeepers and the Garda station where he picked up local gossip or discussed current affairs. He was often to be found manning the desk of the Blackrock Community Information Service.

The confrères have calculated that at one time or another, Sean, to the best of their knowledge, was a member of at least ten societies or organisations. One such was the Irish/Spanish Society. Casually one day he dropped the remark that he would like to invite the Spanish Ambassador to lunch in St Joseph's. Just as casually, the Superior said, 'sure, sure'. Picture his dismay some months later, when he received a message that His Excellency would be delighted to accept the invitation to lunch on St Patrick's Day — the next day! Panic stations. More panic when it was discovered that the only wine in the cellar came from Portugal. A visit to the local wine shop led to the following exchange:

"Can you give me a nice but not too expensive Spanish wine?"

"No problem."

"Are you sure this is O.K. because we have the Spanish Ambassador coming to lunch?"

"God almighty, give that back quick." And a more expensive wine

was passed over the counter at the cheaper price. The distinguished guest was delighted that the community were such connoisseurs, and the original villain of the story preened his feathers for many a day.

Like Nathanael, Brother Sean was a simple man, “in whom there was no guile” — well, not for a Kerryman! He made little secret of his likes and dislikes. The fortunes of his favourite politicians were reflected in his own moods, and his initial reaction to Vatican II was ‘Give me that Old Time religion’. All his days in community, he faithfully paid a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, prayed his Rosary, and read the passages in the New Testament and the Imitation of Christ as he had been taught to do in the novitiate.

Sean had something in common with another gospel character; like Nicodemus he was a night owl. Not for him a 9 to 5 job at the Heidelberg printing press that he cared for with the tenderness of a nurse as much as with the skill of a mechanic. When the ‘paper’ was finally put to bed, Sean had letters to write, accounts to make up or an interesting book to read.

The story of Our Lady’s Tumbler comes to mind thinking of Brother Sean. Not that he was any acrobat, but morning, noon and night he offered to God and his Blessed Mother his compositor’s skills and his talent for communication within the Little Company.

An old Irish prayer ends with the wish — ‘May you be in heaven half an hour before the devil knows you are dead’. Brother Sean was inside the gates of heaven before even he himself knew he was dying.

“Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s. Blessed be God forever.

D. O’Hegarty.

SEAN O’DELL

Born: Listowel, 12 May, 1919.

Entered the Congregation: 19 July, 1954 (Potters Bar — Province of Madrid).

Final Vows: 25 July, 1960 (Blackrock — Irish Province).

Appointments

1958-1978 St Joseph’s, Blackrock. 1978-1980 St Peter’s, Phibsboro.

Died: 24 June, 1980.