

COLLOQUE

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Congregation of the Mission

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Editorial

1833 – 1983

John McCann in the letters in this issue, writing a century and a half ago, uses the word “missions”. Recently there has been a tendency in many contexts to use “mission”, but as a collective rather than as a singular. *Lumen Gentium* in §1 refers to the “mission” of the Church and *Gaudium et Spes* in §4 speaks of its “task”. One of the means for carrying out this mission or task is “the mission” in the traditionally understood meaning of “the parish mission”, though not of course in a stereotyped “traditional” way. In VINCENTIANA 1-2/81 there is a report of what Pope John Paul II said at the first ever national Italian convention of missionaries in Rome in February 1981 on the subject of parish missions. He dealt with this again in November of the following year when speaking to those giving the general mission in Rome. The Superior General referred to this in Bogota in January of this year (cf VINCENTIANA 2/83). Both Pope and Superior General see “missions” as a very important element in the overall “mission” of the Church. Much of the material in this issue of COLLOQUE came together fortuitously but “mission” is a theme which runs through most of it.

Approaches to “Mission” in the 1980s

Kevin Rafferty

Introduction

To promote discussion and interaction between the various staffs now living on the All Hallows College campus, a seminar on a theme of common interest was organised running through the five days from Monday, January 31st to Friday, February 4th, 1983. The theme chosen was that of “mission”. The staffs participating included The All Hallows College Seminary Staff; the Mission Team, (now resident in All Hallows); the Director of the Retreat and Conference Centre; the National Director of the Catholic Marriage Advisory Council (which has its Headquarters in All Hallows); one member of the staff of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers (who now occupy one floor of O’Donnell House). Also participating were students from All Hallows College and De Paul House; a small number of Vincentian Fathers and Daughters of Charity from Dublin houses. In all ten sessions took place, two per day, the first beginning at 4.30 p.m. followed by a break for Evening Prayer of the Church and supper — and a second session beginning at 8.00 p.m. What follows is a brief account of some of the ideas which surfaced during the seminar, and a personal comment on the relevance of some of these ideas to the different ministries now taking place on the All Hallows campus, and on our apostolates in the Anglo-Irish Province of the Congregation of the Mission.

I. A Theology of Mission Today

Father Brendan O’Reilly, Secretary of the Irish Missionary Union, opened the batting with an outline of some of the main components of a contemporary theology of mission. When one looks at the Church on a world level, one can see how the different continents make their own distinctive contribution: the Africans teach us how to celebrate; the Asians how to contemplate; the South Americans how to make a preferential option for the poor at many levels but particularly in basic communities. From the North Americans we learn something of the place of woman in the Church of the future and European Christians still have much to teach us about the sources of our doctrinal teachings.

A Church, missionary of its very nature, receives its vitality from the periphery, that is from the stark confrontation between belief and unbelief, justice and injustice, unity and disunity. Rosemary Haughton's image of the Church as Mother Church — a Church that is well ordered and structured with everything in its place — has to leave room for *sophia*, that is for various activities on the fringe which the Church eventually takes over.

A contemporary theology of mission reflects deeply on what Proclamation, Dialogue, Inculturation and Liberation mean in our world today.

The *Proclamation* of the Gospel message is not just an appeal to come and join us. It is also an effort to help people to interpret their own lives, to reflect in a Christian way on their own story. *Dialogue* is not a second-rate kind of mission. It is the Christian being open to secular realities and being ready for conversion. *Inculturation* means that the Gospel becomes incarnated in each community and at the same time safeguards a universal or transcendent aspect. Finally, *Liberation* will take many forms depending on the many forms of slavery, individual and social, which afflict us in our different contexts.

II. Mission in the Family

Monsignor Larry Ryan, former Rector of St. Patrick's College, Carlow, and now a busy Parish Priest in Naas, introduced this session by outlining some ways in which couples can build their own "domestic church". A Marriage Encounter couple then outlined stages in the development of their relationship and relationships with their four children, through a marriage encounter experience. Up to this point God's love for them was abstract. They did not have ears to hear the Church's teaching about marriage. The Church had merely a functional role to play. With the deepening of their own relationship and their relationship to their children, they now discovered the part they had to play in the mission of the Church in their own homes, but also with other families in the parish.

The discussion which followed covered many different points, including the possible contribution of a married couple in a parish mission context, the limitations of the formal mission sermon for this kind of contribution, the possible use of a video presentation on marriage in a small family group situation, family prayer, the work of organisations such as CMAC, Choice, CFM, Adult Religious Education directed to parents, the need for some liturgical rite for married couples to express their renewed commitment to one another, how to help married couples

handle conflict, machismo in the Irish context and the task of “reintegrating fathers back into the family”.

III. *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*

Father Seamus Ryan introduced us to some of the theological thinking behind the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, RCIA. Christian initiation is wider than sacramental initiation. *Fiant, non nascuntur, Christiani* (Tertullian). To become disciples of Christ means going on a long journey. The journey is to god, the living God — not just a milestone along the way. The whole Church is involved in welcoming newcomers to the Church and the New Rite outlines a whole galaxy of liturgies to get this across to both the neophytes and those welcoming them into the Church.

Father Jim Nolan OMI, Parish Priest in Inchicore, Dublin, followed on with an outline of some of his attempts to operate inside the RCIA framework in his large Dublin parish. With the help of a trained catechist and twelve trained leaders he has managed to communicate to large Sunday Mass congregations their involvement in First Communion and Confirmation programmes. Along the way one discovers the importance of ministering to the needs of teachers — their own personal difficulties in believing and their need for retreats and periods of reflection. An excellent relationship with teachers in the local schools has helped these programmes get off the ground, but also the insight that the priest presents his leaders with a clear-cut task, and the means of accomplishing that task. Too often with lay people we do the first but not the second, and leave many frustrated.

IV. *Parish Renewal*

Father John Doherty CSSR spoke about the beginning of the Parish Renewal movement in Ireland. Through a study of Vatican II Documents and Pope Paul’s *Evangelii Nunciandi* he and his companions came to realise that if parish renewal is to take place priests themselves would first of all have to be renewed. This requires facing reality— the fact that many priests have “given up”. Through Parish Renewal weekends priests find ways of being reconciled with their people for their lack of prayer, lack of belief and lack of real familiarity with the Scriptures. They are called to be one with their people, to travel with them and not to engage in a private spirituality.

Themes for other kinds of weekend were also discussed: Healing weekends to overcome the anger generated by unemployment; separation in marriage; poor housing; overcoming divisions between parents

and children; reconciliation with those who have “gone away” and whose departure leaves us impoverished.

The discussion which followed, or rather which took place at various points in Father Doherty’s talks, centred on the need to involve the local priests in the parish mission. Priests of the parish, too, need to be evangelised and called to share in the work of the mission. Discussion also took place on a mission as part of a two-year programme of parish catechesis, and the need to win over parish priests who might not be too eager to buy into a new mission approach.

V. An Urban Parish Mission

Father Christopher Mangan, Parish Priest of Dun Laoghaire since 1975, gave a run-down on the organisation of a mission held in his parish over a ten-week period — five weeks in the autumn of 1981 and five weeks in the summer of 1982. This mission was conducted by six Redemptorist Fathers. Its beginnings and the method of its organisation owed something to Father Mangan’s three years experience in Chile before he became Parish Priest of Dun Laoghaire and the experience of the active team of lay people he had built up in this parish during the previous five years. With leaders coming through his adult education programme, and sessions for Readers and Eucharistic Ministers, he had sixty lay leaders to draw on to conduct the visitation of the parish at the beginning of the mission. The task of these leaders in conjunction with the priests of the parish, and the visiting missionaries, was to organise “neighbourhood groups” in different parts of the parish. With a Community worker, a qualified catechist and a Sister home from the Philippines, as part of the core team, discussions took place in these “neighbourhood groups” on a weekly basis on such topics as The Person of Our Lord; Sin; Conscience; The Church; Preparing for the Eucharist. One of the consequences of this mission was the decision to maintain these basic groups in existence. Three core groups meet regularly and various programmes of Adult Religious Education have followed on. Some consequences of this mission: Helps people to pray together in small groups; eliminates some of the anonymity of a large parish; leads to personal reconciliation between people; initiates Adult Religious Education in an informal way; people with various gifts and charisms begin to surface.

Father Mangan suggested that this kind of mission might take place every five years. In between, one week retreats to the parish and to different groups — engaged couples, youth groups etc. — need to be explored.

VI. *How Young People See the Mission of the Church Today*

Four members of a Christian youth group, some of whom are associated with Father Mangan’s parish in Dun Laoghaire, gave us a run-down on what they see and hope for in the Church today . . . Christianity as a revolution of love; sharing of goods; withstanding pressures of a consumer and exploitive society; the need of community; a gospel to be loved; that all be one; the value of meditation on one-line phrases of the Gospel — these and many other themes were touched on.

They communicated their enthusiasm for simple Gospel values and also something of the excitement of discovering the Christian way of life for the first time.

VII. *Mission and Ministries*

Father Brian Magee CM drew our attention to the official documents of the Church (*Ministeria Quaedam* 1972 and *Immensae Caritatis* 1973) which opened up the question of the reform of the old ministries and the institution of new ministries in the Church today. The development of new ministries has proceeded from different starting points and in different directions from one country to another. The French, faced with increasing secularisation and a grave shortage of priests, jumped the gun and proceeded with the rapid development of ministries to fill the vacant gaps left by shortage of priests. The Italians have realised that the Church is only fully realised where there are a variety of ministries and where the priesthood is complemented by lay people exercising their universal priesthood in different forms of ministry. With an increasing number of lay people available with theological formation the Germans have been concerned with incorporating them into the life of the Church and also in demarcating the role of the ordained minister (direct service of the Church) from the role of laity (service of the world). They realise the importance of not putting lay ministers into a clerical ambiance. The Third World, especially the Church in Brazil, has viewed the question of ministries in the context of the Church community evangelising the human community.

A list of the different kinds of ministry operating in the Church today would include the following:

- Ordained ministers — bishops/priests/deacons;
- Special ministers of the Eucharist and of the Word;
- Liturgical ministry and presidency;
- Lay offices of a permanent nature;
- Occasional services without office;
- Daily Christian involvement in secular affairs.

As regards ministry in the Church today we are still in the eye of the whirlwind and a good deal of questioning is going on about

- (a) the differentiation and recognition of ministries;
- (b) liturgical ministries in relation to other forms of ministry;
- (c) how different kinds of ministry are to be structured.

In all this one of the key questions is not so much these new forms of ministry but what is priesthood? Until we are more sure of this perhaps the other forms of ministry will not really take shape. One must also recognise that the important thing is the vitality of the Christian community and no amount of structuring or theorising about ministry can replace this. It also needs to be recognised that a lot of work has to be done to make the Ministry of the Word come alive in parishes and until there is a real thirst for the Word, and a deep spiritual formation of those undertaking this ministry today, the quality of Christian life will be impaired. The same also applies to the Ministers of the Eucharist who need continual formation and support.

Ministries must come now and in the future from the real needs of Christian communities and in all this perhaps it is RCIA that will provide the right context for the development of ministries. Seeing that ministry should not be restricted to liturgical ministries we might ask if we make enough of the many different kinds of ministry in a parish community and do we give sufficient recognition to the roles of these ministries in the Christian community.

Perhaps it is the abundance of priests in Ireland that retards the development of ministries, and also the fact that lay people are often regarded, and hence act, as passive partners in the mission of the Church.

VIII. Ministry to the Poor

Sister Catherine Prendergast began the session with a slide presentation of Dublin inner city and asked us to discuss the following questions in small groups: What do you see happening? Why is it happening? What implications has it for us?

Groups responded differently. We are on the outside looking in/ makes me aware of my indifference/presentation is a bit simplistic — not all property developers are baddies — not all the poor people in the inner city are goodies... Makes one aware of one's powerlessness... Many people are trapped in exploitation.

Sister Pauline Lawlor, Provincial of the Daughters of Charity, spoke about the importance of making a preferential option for the poor. To do that means having a vision — a vision of the Church, of what it is all about in any particular context. One gets this vision in prayer. Without

this contemplative aspect one's spirituality can be too precious on the one hand or one can get lost in involvement and activities on the other hand. What is the Kingdom for the exploited people of the inner city? One has to listen to them and allow ourselves to be evangelised by them. Do you ever walk down to the inner city which is only ten minutes away? The fact that a Parish Priest was appointed for the Travelling People was a way of affirming them and showing their importance in the eyes of the Church. Our preaching and theologising can lack credibility if there is not some direct contact with the poor. The faces of some of those children on these slides are brutalised by violence, suffering etc. What can we do about this?

IX. Mission in the Latin American Context

Peadar Kirby gave a slide presentation of places he had visited and people whom he had met on his various trips to Latin America: Mexico, El Salvador, Ecuador, Chile, Peru, Brazil, Bolivia etc. He spoke about the influence of Paulo Freire, Gustavo Gutierrez and a number of Latin American Liberation Theologians. The Church has always been political. The task is how to engage, or be politically involved, as Christians, in the right way — on the side of the poor and the voiceless.

It is not a question of importing liberation theology as such into the Irish context but of being aware of what has happened in the Latin American context and realising that we have lessons to learn. One could speak about this as "reverse mission" and one of the tasks of Irish missionaries working in Latin America is to feed back some of this to the Irish situation.

Some of the lessons to be learned: the change in Latin America came from the bottom; one must respect and reflect on the significance of popular religiosity, not reject or dismiss it; could it be that people are even more oppressed here in Ireland in their spirits, manipulated by mass media, given a fixed mind-set by our educational institutions etc? We too are in need of liberation.

We have a rich spiritual tradition and a rich Church tradition but there is evidence of people becoming more and more alienated from the Church and Christianity in this country. We have to humbly return to the sources of our Christianity and learn again how to preach the Gospel to a new generation who find the Church in this country either oppressive or irrelevant to their lives.

X. Bogotá Meeting of Vincentian Provincials 1983

Father Frank Mullan's report began by pointing out that the

meeting centred on the two “foundational charisms” of the Vincentian Congregation — Popular Missions and Work for the Formation of the Clergy. Father McCullen’s opening sermon was based on Luke 5:1-11: Jesus instructs Peter and his disciples to get back into their boat and go out again. He gives them precise instructions. Can this meeting provide specific instructions on how to do this today in relation to both foundational charisms?

Some provinces are alive, some are dying. Do we mourn them, Father Mullan asked; Did we really ever get to know them? One sign of life in certain provinces is where Vincentian priests and Daughters of Charity are co-operating in evangelising the poor. Pope John Paul has indicated that we should not set aside our foundational charisms too easily.

In the world today, there are only 80 out of 3,500 confrères engaged in popular missions. We are directly involved in only twelve seminaries. We now have four to five hundred parishes. There is the danger that we will lose our pilgrim status of being mobile, on the move, itinerant preachers. We need to reflect a Pilgrim Theology in our apostolates. Remember Father Purcell’s words to All Hallows College students: “Home has had its innings. You must be up and out”. There is the great danger that we are being used as “suppleants” to clergy in parishes.

Kierkegaard spoke about “the despair of possibilities” — so many possibilities today in evangelisation. Do we not have to keep in mind Vincent’s warning “You should not neglect popular missions under the pretext of other work” (Common Rules 11:10).

José Chavez’s paper seems to give the impression that popular missions have ended. We need to look again at *Evangelii Nunciandi* and break through some of the traditional parameters in order to discover a new view of mission, especially mission in relation to the poor.

XL. Personal Comment

Most of the following reflections were jotted down during the various sessions reported above, or discussed in informal discussions afterwards. In some cases they are questions which I know members of our Mission Team have been asking for some time; or they are personal reflections of my own, coming as I do from the context of an “education ministry” where I have been very happy to work for the past twenty years.

If one takes seriously the idea that “the vitality of the Church comes from the periphery” a mission team might have to make a preferential option for missions in parishes most in need of evangelisation, parishes where there is increasing disbelief and lack of faith, parishes where Christians are deeply divided, deprived or forsaken, parishes where

young people feel alienated from the traditional Church. The Gospel injunction to preach the Gospel to the poor would call us in this direction anyway.

If married couples are the best people to evangelise one another, how can they contribute to this on a parish mission either in the formal sermon context or in some other context? Are there ways in which the "domestic Church" can become a focus of interest on a parish mission and are there ways in which married couples can ritually express a renewed commitment to one another and to their children?

So much effort on parish missions seems to be aimed at "getting people back to Church" or "back to the sacraments". Taking the point that Christian initiation is more than "sacramental initiation" or "sacramental return" and that Gospel values take precedence over institutional Church values, what can be done to bring people back to God, the living God, the God revealed in Jesus Christ?

RCIA makes it clear that the initiation process is a long one with many different entry points. Must the parish mission not choose a limited number, or even one group, to concentrate on? Otherwise there is the danger that in attempting to speak to everybody it speaks to nobody.

To overcome the viewpoint which sees the priest as the active-giver and the layperson as the passive-recipient of the Church's activities how can one involve laypeople in parish missions so that their ministries, and the ministry of the priesthood, will complement one another rather than cancel one another?

How can a Retreat Centre and a mobile mission team co-operate so that the work of one complements that of the other, especially where a mission is stretched over a two or three month period and may involve the training of leaders, Ministers of the Word, Ministers of the Eucharist, Adult Religious Education, marriage preparation or renewal, social justice programmes etc?

If "neighbourhood groups" are an important part of an urban mission how can leaders be found and trained to take an active part in such a mission? What role can these leaders play in a parish when the formal parish mission as such has come to an end?

If it is true that young people are themselves the best evangelisers of young people how can we recruit such young people as part of our retreat centre or mission teams on a part-time, temporary or permanent basis?

A constant theme running through many of the sessions was that of "hunger for the word of God" keenly felt by some, *or unnecessary and*

dormant in others. How can people be made more aware of this hunger? And how can one set about satisfying this hunger?

There is need for a vision of the Church which takes seriously the Gospel teaching about the poor in different contexts: the parish, the parish mission, seminaries, retreat/conference centres. Have we worked out *how* to do this both from the point of view of preaching to the poor and from the point of view of looking at the causes of, and helping to alleviate, different kinds of poverty?

What bearing has the notion of “reverse mission” on the organisation of life in All Hallows College with its outreach in so many different parts of the world, and also on the relationship between All Hallows and the local community?

Popular missions and work for the formation of clergy may well be the “foundational charisms” of the Congregation of the Mission, but it begs the question to say that because they are “foundational” we should continue to be involved in them in precisely the same way in the 20th century. What form should they take in a renewed and changing theology of the Church, of mission and of ministry today? Certain forms of popular mission, and certain forms of seminary training, can only perpetuate a view of the Church and of ministry out of tune with the Church and the world in which we are living today.

There is indeed something evangelical in going out “two by two” to the “other towns” to preach and give witness to Gospel values. But perhaps we need to demythologise a too romantic view of mission which gives first place to “going on the foreign missions” or engaging in “itinerant parish missions” in the Anglo-Irish Province. What form our “missions” should take in each of our houses stretching from St Paul’s on the one hand through to Celbridge on the other hand, and stretching through some of the great housing developments in the north Dublin area and, indeed, what form our mission should take in all our houses on both sides of the Irish Sea and in Nigeria is a matter of urgent consideration for all of us.

The importance of Adult Religious Education surfaced many times at this seminar. Could one say that it was one of the hidden foundational charisms in St Vincent’s day, and the one that has the most potential to draw together the two great works of the Anglo-Irish Province which unfortunately divided and went each its own way?

Vincentian Parish Mission — An Australian Model

Kevin Cronin

(KC is at present working on a project for the Westminster Adult Religious Education Centre in which he is investigating the need for adult religious education in the context of the parish mission. When he has completed a report on this for the Centre he will contribute a second article to COLLOQUE.)

At the entrance to the parish church in the little town of Feakle on the Co. Clare side of the Shannon you will see if you visit the place a large wooden cross. The inscription underneath the cross reads: “In memory of the Vincentian Mission 1897”. I first saw the cross nearly half a century ago (I presume it is still there: these things don’t easily disappear from churchyards) and wondered who the confrères were who gave the sort of mission that moved the parishioners of Feakle to erect a monument to record their appreciation of it. But then, those were the days when “the Mission” was really an event in an Irish country parish, when every man woman and child would be expected to attend, and when a really good mission would transform, would re-vitalise the religious life of the little community.

Where are the missions of yester-year? Gone, with the *neiges d’antan*. And not only in rural Ireland.

The Superior General’s letter following the meeting of the Visitors at Bogotá earlier this year makes sad reading. He records that in 1972 there were 289 confrères engaged full-time in preaching missions; in 1978 the number had shrunk to 129; and in 1981 there were only 80.

What has happened that could explain such a falling-off? The Superior General suggests four possible reasons. Two of these are: — “sociological and religious reasons that have rendered this ministry less useful than in former times; — a failure on our part to be inventive of new ways and forms of reaching the mind and heart of modern man”.

Father McCullen goes on to say — and here I feel he is speaking for each one of us:

“This however does not dispense me from reaffirming and recalling the importance and the precedence which, in order to be faithful

to St Vincent, we must give to missions among the works of the Congregation.”

Bold words! How are we to reverse the trend? At the Bogotá meeting a few suggestions were put forward:

- all confrères should show “willingness to be employed in the giving of missions”;
- our missions should “respond to the needs of the local church and be inserted into the pastoral plans of the dioceses and of the parishes”;
- collaboration with others should be encouraged, “with the local clergy, with the Daughters of Charity, with religious, with associations of the laity”;
- our preaching should be directed “to the whole of the parochial community with its different components”;
- and finally, “the most desirable result of any mission is that those who have been evangelised become evangelisers themselves.”

It is on this background and in this context that I take the liberty of presenting to the readers of COLLOQUE some information I have recently received from our Australian confrère (and former Provincial) Keith Turnbull. I had occasion to write to him on some personal matter when I remembered that since his term of office as Provincial ended he had joined the newly formed Renewal Team of the Province. Also, word had got about that this Team was very much in demand, as it had worked out a whole new approach to the giving of parish missions. I asked Keith to send me any documents he had that would illustrate this new approach — programmes, news-letter articles, handouts, anything. He very obligingly sent me a batch of assorted items, from which a picture emerges fairly clearly. I hope I can convey it to you in the few pages the Editor of COLLOQUE allows me, and I hope you will find it as interesting as I do.

Stage One: The first thing the Vincentian Team does is to send a detailed Questionnaire to the parish priest and to the parish team of the place from which the request for a mission has come. The first sentence in this long six-page document reads:

“The Vincentian Renewal Team considers that its work for parish renewal should be part of the ongoing renewal of your parish, as part of the local Church and according to the directions pointed out by the Second Vatican Council.”

Marvellous! And this was before the Bogotá Provincials had laid this

down as a basic principle of our mission strategy.

(Query: Could it be that the Australian Provincial at Bogotá was responsible for writing this item into the report?)

The information asked for in the Questionnaire is exceedingly detailed:

- Profile of the parish, socio-economic, ethnic groups.
- The Parish Council, its role, members' names, the goals it sets itself.
- The liturgy committee, present and future developments of parish liturgical life.
- “Renewal Groups”, if they exist, charismatic prayer groups, Scripture groups, etc.
- V. de P. Society, Refugee groups, Social Justice.
- School Youth; Post-School Youth.
- Catechetics and Catechists.
- Sacramental Programmes.
- Adult Education in the Faith.
- etc., etc.

Stage Two comes when the Renewal Team accepts the invitation to give a mission in the parish. Its acceptance is conveyed to the parish priest and his pastoral team in a second document in which the “Aims” and the “Principles” of Renewal are set out.

The Aims are:

To develop within the community:

- individual personal commitment to Christ,
- a deep sense of the faith Community within the Parish and beyond,
- the growth of Christian Communities at basic and Parish level,
- awareness of personal vocation in the life of the Church and community,
- the role, value and types of leadership which are essential in the life and formation of the Parish.

The above Aims are primarily realised by giving the people time and space to experience their God.

(Query: Should “reconciliation” and “instruction in the Faith”, the two chief Aims of the older type mission, have been hinted at?)

There follows the “Principles of Renewal”, the most revolutionary section of which reads:

“We have no fixed programme, but we offer broad outlines and

approaches.

We recognise the fact that each parish has different needs. With the assistance of:

- (a) parish priest/assistants/religious,
- (b) other pastoral agents,
- (c) parish committee groups

we try to discover the needs of the Parish and through this process we determine:

- (a) the preparation required,
- (b) the programme for the Renewal.”

This is a startling statement. What! No fixed programme? Only broad outlines and approaches?

(Query: What would M. Portail have said?)

Memory jogs me. I recall conversations I had years ago with missionaries of the old school, such as my cousin John Roughan who died, R.I.P., in 1938, who told me he had given 180 missions in his time. He must have given 15 or 20 missions a year, and he would have gone from one to another often at short notice, with no time at all to “discover the needs” of the new parish. His “programme” was his stock of sermons and instructions, and the only variation in his “approach” would have concerned the timing of his round of house-to-house visits which he would allow would not be the same in Sheffield as in Cahirciveen.

But it makes sense, doesn't it? The “needs” of one particular group of parishioners could be quite different from those of another. And to ask them to state those needs, to consult them, must surely be a sensible first step to take. In the spiritual order of things there is probably no such thing as “medication for every case.”

Stage Three is now set up: the drawing up of a Renewal Programme suited to the needs of this particular parish, following consultation with representative parishioners.

All this has to take place well in advance of the mission. I don't know how early the Australians get to work on it, but it must be weeks, months perhaps, before the actual opening.

The Vincentian Renewal Team now therefore joins the parish pastoral team to examine, discuss, and finally to hammer out a programme.

At this point, according to the documents I have received, the Renewal

Team puts forward some tentative suggestions. These are not to be seen, it insists, as a definite programme, only as “suggestions of possibilities of broad outlines.”

(Comment: This must surely be an ultimate in falling over backwards to avoid dictating the outcome; “suggestions”, “possibilities”, “broad outlines”!!)

In effect, what they ask is that the planners agree that:

- (a) all those mission activities that are open to the entire parish, or to large groups of parishioners, should be programmed to take place only on Saturdays and Sundays, and
- (b) smaller groupings and special categories could be dealt with, by arrangement, on week-days.

This makes sense too. Nowadays, a parish mission that announces an instruction every morning and a sermon every evening in the parish church, and expects the majority of parishioners to attend, is certain to be a flop. How many people would be free to attend a morning instruction every week-day, at whatever hour? In any city or suburban parish you could take it for granted that even the women couldn't do it. Most mothers are working full-time or part-time. And with the competition from popular evening television programmes, what family would be willing to come to the parish church every evening in the week for two/three weeks on end? Very few, I fancy.

The Renewal Team's “suggestions” are:

- (a) *Sundays: Weekends*
 - (i) Retreat Day. Prayer and Reflection,
 - (ii) Day of Eucharistic Devotion and Reconciliation,
 - (iii) Parish Formation Day.
 - (iv) Homilies and Instructions at all Masses,
 - (v) Community Experience and Discernment programme,
 - (vi) Youth Programmes (during School Term),
 - (vii) Training Day for Discussion Group Leaders,
 - (viii) Courses in Ministry, Eucharistic ministers, readers, etc.
 - (ix) Preparation of Host Families for Home celebrations.

Obviously, suggestions (i) to (vi) are related to the first two Aims of the Renewal: personal commitment to Christ, and development of a sense of the faith Community within the parish. Suggestions (vii) to (ix)

spring from the other three Aims.

(b) *Weekdays*

- (i) Home Masses,
- (ii) Mini-Missions,
- (iii) Home Visitation,
- (iv) Visitation of Schools,
- (v) Youth Programmes (during School Holidays).

“Home Masses”, or neighbourhood Masses are something we are all familiar with. The “Mini-Mission” is a new idea. It consists of one-hourly sessions from Monday to Friday for various particular groups within the parish, e.g. the aged, mothers and wives, fathers and husbands, families, youth leaders, nurses, workers, etc., etc.

Once the planning group, comprising the confrères who are going to conduct the “mission” together with the parish clergy and their pastoral assistants, have decided which of the “suggestions” to adopt, there is one important decision to make before the programme of events is finalised. This is, how long is the mission to last? Here in Ireland and England a mission has come to mean a short, sharp affair. The Australian approach, with its concentration on large-scale weekend activities, would obviously need rather longer time. The programmes I have seen are all six-week or seven-week exercises.

(Query: Isn’t this rather a strain on manpower? If three confrères are allocated to each enterprise, and this is apparently the Australian pattern, then six such missions a year would be the maximum the trio could manage. I suppose the answer is that the longer-lasting mission is what the new format requires. And anyway, it is more in accordance with St Vincent’s type of country parish mission which could last, I seem to remember, for two to three months.)

One final decision the planning group have to take is what they are to call this mission. The Australians have, apparently, opted for “Parish Renewal”.

(Objection: Are we to allow ourselves to be talked into abandoning the sacrosanct term “Mission”? Admittedly it has an old-world ring, and “renewal” is the current popular word. But should we not allow other religious communities, Redemptorists, Oblates, etc., go for the newfangled terminology if they wish, while we retain the word given to

us by the Founder? I can imagine my old cousin John Roughan feeling robbed and cheated if denied the use of his familiar slogan “Come to the Mission”. The alternative “Come to the Renewal” doesn’t come across quite as compellingly. But I am sure the Australian confrères have an answer to this.)

Stage Four is where a lot of donkey work has to be done, and I suspect the responsibility will fall mainly on the three confrères. This is the actual compilation of the programmes for the individual exercises. It is one thing to agree that there will be a “Day of Prayer and Recollection”, or “Community Experience and Discernment programme”, but someone must then draw up an order of day and a sequence of events for the parishioners who will present themselves, and this must be prepared well in advance and shown to those interested or likely to be interested.

I regret that space does not allow me to reproduce one or two of the programmes the Australian confrères have compiled. I hope I can describe these sufficiently to give you an idea of what they contain. Because here, make no mistake about it, is where the “renewal” is achieved or not. The confrères in St Vincent’s time were convinced, obviously, that their mission procedure — instructions, sermons, parish visitation, general confession, Confraternity of Charity — did achieve a genuine renewal of the Christian life, individual and parochial. What reason have we to think that something different is better? I think the answer must be that the adults, adolescents and youngsters in our community, but especially the adults, do not respond to the older approach any more, but are more likely to do so if dealt with in this new way.

Catholic adults in today’s world do not consider that being seated in a pew and being talked at from the pulpit is going to have any particular effect on their religious beliefs and practice. They don’t get anything from this sort of treatment. And they don’t learn very much.

How *do* adults learn? It is worthwhile posing the question and trying to answer it before going any further.

Let us put the question to the experts. In this Province there are two colleges of education, Drumcondra and Strawberry Hill, under the direction of our own confrères, to which young adults, men and young women come to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for those entering the teaching profession. How are they taught? How do they learn? The answer is: in three different ways. There are three distinct and separate yet co-ordinated learning situations provided for them in these colleges. First, the library: they can read, study their subject, discover what eminent scholars have written about it, increase their

factual knowledge. Second, the lecture hall: here they sit at the feet of the experts who interpret this knowledge in the light of their experience, their acquired wisdom. Third, the seminar, the tutorial: here they join groups of fellow students with a tutor or lecturer as a member of the group, where a particular topic related to their studies is analysed, discussed; where everyone has the opportunity to articulate his/her opinion, to question, to disagree or agree.

Every educational institution worthy of the name, every university, college, evening institute, would never dream of confining its teaching to the first two situations. Every one of them is aware that it is especially in the seminar that real learning takes place.

Look now at our Catholic body. Is it too fanciful to suggest that the Church, so far, has confined its teaching to the first two situations and has ignored the third? Any educated Catholic can read about the Faith in Catholic periodicals and religious literature. Every Catholic is required, periodically, to sit at the feet of the expert, the priest, and to listen to him when he expounds the teaching of the Church from the rostrum, the pulpit. Very, very seldom is the Catholic adult given the experience of the seminar, is brought face to face with fellow adults and guided through the experience of talking with them about what they all believe. Very seldom will any adult lay Catholic find himself/herself in the position of meeting the expert, the priest, the catechist, in such a situation, and being encouraged to discuss matters of faith with him.

It is possible this is the real reason for the falling off of attendance at parish missions, old style. Not the awkward hours, the working mums, the counter-attraction of the media. Our adults have simply outgrown the kindergarten teaching methods the Church is still employing: they have voted with their feet.

(Query: Is it being suggested that St. Vincent, so up-to-date, so ahead of his time, was lacking in educational know-how when he operated a pulpit-based method of instruction and taught his missionaries to do likewise? In answer I would say that St Vincent was as up-to-date in this matter as he was in everything else. He knew that the village or small town community in which the mission was given was in fact a collection of extended families, each one a small community in itself, that when he preached he was listened to with rapt attention by a congregation, every member of which knew that he/she would have the opportunity — indeed could not opt out of it — of discussing the sermon or instruction in the family circle that same evening. He was aware that with his fellow missionaries he would be able to visit and re-visit those small com-

munities, probably several times in each case, in the course of the two to three month long mission, and that each visit would become what we would call a “house group”, with open discussion of anything and everything that had been said from the pulpit.)

Back to the Australian confrères and their Stage Four task of drawing up programmes for the weekend sessions approved by the pastoral planning group. The sessions last, it would seem from the documents, from 11.00a.m. to 5.00 p.m. on Saturdays, and if it was to be a two-day event, again on Sunday. The sessions would begin with a little socialising — coffee, welcome, introductions. Then prayer. Then a talk by one of the team on an appropriate topic. Brief discussion. Reflection, lunch. In the afternoon, perhaps the showing of a film. Small group discussion. Open discussion, with experience shared. Perhaps a second talk. Summary of individual reactions. Finally, a Eucharist, prepared in common, with the day’s topic as its special theme.

At the end of such a day it would be strange if everyone who took part did not feel that he/she had been given ample opportunity to examine in common some area of the Church’s teaching, and to evaluate his belief, his understanding, in open and friendly discussion.

(Query: Doesn’t all this throw a great responsibility on the confrère who presides over this exercise, and isn’t it far more demanding in terms of knowledge and skills than was ever the case in the older missions? Answer: Yes.)

Once the planning and the programming are complete, *Stage Five* begins. The Team and all their associates and voluntary workers have still a major task to accomplish, the *Preparation* for the mission.

(a) The Parish Diary for the six or seven weeks of the mission has to be examined, and all meetings, celebrations, happenings of any sort, have to be re-programmed so as not to clash with any events of the Renewal. Renewal takes priority.

(b) A reasonably up-to-date Census of the parish has to be produced. Lists of parishioners and families. Division of the parish into zones and sub-zones in preparation for Home Masses.

(c) Parishioners are invited to offer their homes for a Eucharistic celebration. From volunteers, host people are chosen who will be expected

to invite 20 to 25 families per home. The zoning list will enable them to invite those closest to them.

(d) Sufficient lay Eucharistic Ministers must be recruited who will take Communion to the sick and elderly.

(e) A suitable Parish “Logo” needs to be prepared for use on all publications connected with the Renewal.

(Admiring Comment: These Aussies think of everything!)

(f) A special Renewal Prayer needs to be composed for printing and distribution to the people and the institutions of the parish.

(g) Publicity is of tremendous importance. Any publicity channels (e.g. newspapers) available to the parish should be presented with material which could help to make the local people aware of the approaching Renewal.

(h) Finally, there is a very extensive and very specialist job of printing (and of drafting and composing what is to be printed) to be done.

Of prime importance is the Brochure containing information about the members of the Team and the opportunities offered by the Renewal. I have seen some specimens of these, and I assure you they are works of art. They must have taken many many man-hours to produce. The style is simple, easy.

For example, in one where the three members of the Renewal Team are being introduced, one of them is described as:

“This red-headed Vin has spent a good part of his life with secondary school kids, but has had his turn in parish work, seminaries and renewal.”

In another you are asked to tick off which of the main items of the Programme you are going to attend:

- “one home Mass near my home,
- a day of prayer and reflection,
- two evenings of adult education in the faith,
- reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation,
- give up a weekend to come with my family to the Community

Experience Weekend.”

In addition to the Brochure there are other things to be printed:

- A Prayer Card (with Logo),
- Invitation cards for Home Masses,
- Posters, large, for public display, and of course
- The Programme for the Renewal, with full details of each event.

Once the actual Renewal has started, the Team are already considering the final *Stage Six*. This is the Follow-up Programme, designed for what the planners and organisers call on-going Renewal.

This obviously cannot be finalised until the Renewal is in full progress, and the Australian confrères wisely refrain from putting forward any “suggestions” regarding the form it might take.

The only “follow-on” that St Vincent gave to his missions was the setting up of the Confraternity of Charity in the parish, thus institutionalising the “caring community” that was one of the byproducts of his mission work. Presumably this historical fact has not escaped the notice of the Australian confrères, so that we might expect their follow-on programme to include setting up one or more of those associations of laymen and laywomen such as the St Vincent de Paul Society, Catholic Women’s League, Catholic Marriage Advisory Council — that is, if they were not already there.

And if the third Aim of the Renewal has been reasonably achieved, then the parishioners will welcome in the follow-on programme the continuation of some of those Home Groups, Prayer Groups, Adult Education Groups to which they had been introduced in the brief period of the Renewal.

(Query: Is this the parish mission model we have been waiting for?)

Vocation

James Cahalan

*(Paper read to the seminar on the Constitutions
held in Nigeria in April 1983)*

The present Constitutions were produced by the General Assembly of 1980. They are definitive in the sense that they represent the final thinking of the Congregation on the Constitutions. They are also final in the sense that there is no further period of experimentation permitted to the community. We may have to wait quite a long time for final approval from Rome. Provisional approbation has already been given.

Vocation

The title of the chapter under discussion this morning is a new one in our Constitutions as far as I know. The chapter which is dealt with under this title was formerly described as: “The End and Institute of the Congregation”. I feel that this choice of the word “Vocation” was a very deliberate one and that it has a very special significance. In the first place the term is a very biblical one — used very liberally in both Testaments to describe God’s special intervention in summoning people to accept a way of life and a mission. Hence the title, as I see it, emphasises God’s intervention in the Vincentian vocation . One is reminded here of the oft repeated phrase of St Vincent: “Neither I nor M. Portail ever thought of the Congregation.” In the introduction to the Common Rules we have the same sentiment expressed: “Regard them as coming not from the human but from the Divine Spirit from whom all good things proceed.” In the second place the word “Vocation” denotes *Livingness* and *Actuality* — a kind of experience of God all the time tugging at our elbows. This is not the kind of experience one gets from the rather prosaic and dull title: “The End and Institute of the Congregation.” In the Bible vocation is never thought of as a once for all matter, but rather as an on-going reality which demands constant awareness of the actualities of life in the here and now. The vocation or call keeps resounding through the whole of one’s life always summoning to the same objective but requiring a constant newness in the manner of responding to it. Thirdly the word “Vocation” evokes the idea of *Response* — a living response which challenges all the time rather than leaving one lifeless before a declared *End*.

I think that an examination of the nine paragraphs of the chapter on

Vocation in the New Constitutions will bear out at least some of the meanings I have been giving to the term. There is a *Livlgness* about this first chapter which certainly justifies the title: *Vocation*.

St Vincent thinks aloud and does and writes at last.

As the present Constitutions find their roots in the thinking of St Vincent, and as this is true especially of the section which we are examining this morning, it is important to refresh ourselves briefly on some of Vincent's fundamental thinking about the Congregation. It was on 17 May 1658 that Vincent distributed the Common Rules to the community for the first time. It was at that conference that he said that the making of the Common Rules had taken thirty three years. These rules therefore embrace a period of densely packed history beginning from the first sermon of the mission in 1625. It was within that period in fact that all the major works of Vincent were accomplished. He had personally experienced the missions on the Home Front. He had seen the ravage of the civil wars in his own country and had been a major figure in the relief schemes of the time. He had heard the cry of Madagascar, Poland, Ireland, Scotland and answered it. He had met a weak and battered Priesthood and Episcopacy. He had carried orphans in his arms through the streets of Paris. He had seen the advantages and the flaws of the Lay Apostolate. He had founded the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. He had sat in on serious discussions on the setting up of Seminaries and in fact had played a major role in establishing them. He sat on the Council of Conscience, and so on. And all through this amazing series of works and preoccupations with the whole world our Common Rules were "fermenting". These must surely be the rules which found their source in two great *Lights* — the light of the Spirit with which Vincent was filled because of the constancy of his communion with God and the light of thirty years of such varied experience. Surely in them one must find the distilled experience of a whole lifetime. It would be difficult to find a book which could possibly contain more wisdom and insight.

St Vincent had reached the evening of his life and certainly the completion of his works when he began to explain the rules which he had just distributed to the confrères. Here I just want to reproduce some of the most striking of Vincent's declarations about the vocation of the community. "Our Saviour calls us to evangelise the poor. This is what He did Himself and this is what He wants us to continue. We certainly have very good reason to humble ourselves seeing that the Heavenly Father calls us to fulfill the designs of His Son who came to evangelise the poor

and who gave this very mission as a sign that He was the Son of God and the Messiah for whom the world was waiting” (XII 79). Vincent’s vision of Christ was of *One* whose passion was the poor. Therefore when Chapter I of the Constitutions on Vocation opens with the words “The end of the Congregation of the Mission is to follow Christ the evangeliser of the poor” it is certainly revealing the very heart of Vincent. But Vincent went even further and emphasised that the evangelisation of the poor was the *speciality* of the Congregation. In that same Conference of 17 May, 1658 he put questions to himself on this matter of the end of the Congregation and of course he answered them himself too! “But Sir, we are not the only people whose work is to evangelise the poor; don’t the Parish Priests do the same thing? What else are the preachers doing as they go through the towns and villages preaching the word of God? In fact the Carmelites preach to the poor and make a better job of it than we do. All this is true, *but there is no Company in the Church of God which has the poor for its exclusive portion and which gives itself entirely to the poor; so much so that they never preach in the big towns. This is what our missionaries make profession of, this is their speciality — to apply themselves to the poor as Jesus Christ did Himself* (XII 80).

Vincent loved to come back time and again to the Christocentric nature of the community. He had a deep conviction that the community was established to do what Christ did and to do it the way He did it. “The purpose of the Congregation is to imitate Our Saviour in so far as poor and miserable people like us can in fact do this.” He was further convinced that one does not try to imitate what Christ did until one tries to be what Christ was. He has this thought in the very introduction to the Common Rules: “...the men who are called to continue the mission of Christ Himself should be filled with His sentiments and affections and while following in His footsteps should be replenished with His spirit.” In that Conference of 17 May, 1658 from which I have been quoting Vincent said “It is important that we work unceasingly at our own perfection and do our actions in such a way that they may be according to the good pleasure of God and, above all things, so that we may be worthy to help others” (XII 78). This may seem to be a rather long introduction to our topic but I feel that it is necessary to approach this work animated as far as possible with the rich thinking of St Vincent. It is from this background of a man filled with the mind and thought of Christ that we should tackle the chapter on Vocation.

Assemblies of 1968, 1974, 1980

The Assemblies of 1968-69 and 1974 were certainly very much

preoccupied with the *End (Vocation)* of the Congregation. This was so, probably, because over the years and indeed over the centuries something had happened which Vincent himself had predicted might happen after his death. He was afraid that some might water down the meaning and end of the Little Company. For one reason or another it is true that down the years various works were taken on by Provinces which as they developed seemed to be at variance with the intent of St Vincent. Again the concept of "indirect" service of the poor crept into the community. This is not of course an evil concept but it can easily lead to the whittling down of enthusiasm for direct service of the poor. Another idea that was prevalent over the years was that Vincent established the Daughters of Charity for the direct service of the poor while the Vincentians were regarded as being only remotely involved in this service. There is I suppose a grain of truth in all these things but the grain has tended to burst into a mighty tree which may need severe pruning. Vincent founded both communities to *Evangelise* the poor. Clearly from the nature of the case the method of doing so will vary in the case of the Daughters and the Vincentians. So there must be a constant *revision de vie*. This is in fact the "in" thing since Vatican II. Our own new Constitutions and in particular the chapter on Vocation remind us of this need for constant *revision de vie*. "Moreover it shall strive to evaluate and plan its works and ministries and in this way remain in a constant state of continual renewal" (Const. I, §3).

The Assembly of 1968-69 produced a revision of the Constitutions which was of course only an interim production. It had already been decided at that Assembly that the definitive Constitutions would be the work of the Assembly of 1980. In the new revision the "Vocation", called "End" up to this, was stated once more in the very terms used by the Common Rules. The Assembly of 1974 is in many ways a unique one. It did not produce a new Constitution for the Congregation, it produced what were called *Declarations*. The purpose of these Declarations was more or less to assess the experimentation that had taken place since the 1968-69 Assembly. Paragraph 10 of these Declarations bears out what I have been saying about the ambivalence that crept into the thinking of the Congregation down the years. The 1968-69 Assembly adverted to this very definitely and directed that new initiatives should be taken by the Congregation especially in the areas of work for the poor and the clergy. §10 of the Declarations has this to say: "The General Assembly now in session is happy to note that the study begun in 1969 has advanced and in fact has frequently led to pastoral action of great importance in the Provinces. Sensitive to the signs of the times and to

the many urgent needs of the Church the Provinces have in many cases initiated serious projects to make their service of the poor and the clergy effective; many too, through a timely re-appraisal of their works, have drawn up a daring programme of returning to the poor; still others have given effective priority to the *Missiones ad Gentes*.” This paragraph is a very good summary of the objective of the Declarations. Hence because of the work that had been done between 1968 and 1974 the confrères at the 1980 General Assembly were in a very good position to produce a very direct and unambivalent statement about the Vincentian vocation.

Chapter I. Vocation

I find that this chapter can be conveniently divided into three sections,

Section I: The clear statement of the two aspects of the Vincentian Vocation, its *Being* and its *Apostolate*.

Section II: The Being of the Vincentian (4, 5, 6, 7, 8).

Section III: The work of Evangelisation (2, 3, 9).

So the first thing to notice about this paragraph is the preponderance which is given in it to the *Being* of the Vincentian and the *Being* of the Congregation. This is very much in line with the whole thinking of St Vincent. Reading through his Conferences and his Correspondence one is struck by the fact that the majority of his Conferences and very many of his letters are devoted to the character of the confrère and indeed the character of the Little Company. He devotes a great deal of space in the Conferences to the virtues of the Company or as we would put it today to the *Formation* of the confrères. In St Vincent’s mind the primary means of evangelisation is the character of the Evangeliser. This is very close to the thinking of the late Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. St Vincent said on one occasion “How can you talk about forming Christ in others if he is not living in yourself?” So the fact that the New Constitutions lay special emphasis on Vincentian formation is very much in line with the thinking of St Vincent.

Commentary on the Sections

Section I: As I have already said the first section is a statement about the two aspects of the Vincentian Vocation — the Being of the Vincentian and the Ministry of the Vincentian. In the very first lines of the Constitutions we are presented with the Person of Christ. It is an echo of *Perfectae Caritatis*, §1: “They follow Christ, virginal and poor.” And again in *Lumen Gentium* we have: “Let Religious show forth Christ... contemplating on the mountain or proclaiming the kingdom of

God to the multitudes or healing the sick and the maimed and converting sinners to the good life.” As the paragraph goes on to describe how exactly this following of Christ the poor man is to be accomplished we are reminded of the words of St Vincent: “No, it is not enough to give ourselves to the works of the mission, *but we must do them in the spirit of Christ* — we must judge, speak and work as the Eternal Wisdom of God clothed with our weak flesh judged, spoke and worked” (XI, 53). Or again as in the introduction to the Common Rules: “This we have done because we thought that the men who are called to continue the mission of Christ Himself should be filled with His sentiments and affections.” Hence we are called upon to be earnest in trying to copy into our lives the mind of Christ. Vincentians are not simply professionals doing an efficient piece of work, or rather doing a piece of work efficiently, we are people who are following out a vocation which is intended to transform our whole beings. This particular point about the need to think of the meaning of the Priesthood today is very important. Is it a vocation or just a Ministry to be done? Having ensured that we get our priorities right then the first paragraph directs our minds to the ministry of the Vincentian.

Our Ministry

Here the evangelisation of the poor takes pride of place and we have said a lot about this already as being the revelation of the very mind of Vincent. However there is a new element in the expression of our vocation to the evangelisation of the poor. It is the words “more abandoned”. As we all know so well, in the Common Rules the expression used in this context is “chiefly the country people”. We know that in Vincent’s time they were precisely the most abandoned people and it was because they were such that Vincent accepted them as the object of the Vincentian vocation. But as Pope John Paul said last year on the occasion of his letter to the Superior General “If Vincent were to return to us today he would probably find his poor concentrated in the urban areas and the built-up areas of our society”. St Vincent’s interest is the most abandoned, especially perhaps the “marginals” in our society. It is because this category of the “more abandoned” can change so often that the New Constitutions emphasise the need to evaluate our works frequently. This vocation to the “more abandoned” sounds wonderful in theory but it carries a certain amount of stigma with it in practice. It certainly does not hit the headlines and people who dedicate themselves to the “marginals” of society will probably be admired by the few but they will be forgotten by the majority. There is no prestige value in this kind

of apostolate and I think this is an aspect of our vocation which deserves a great deal of attention. We are certainly opting for the unpopular. As a Congregation we are totally committed to the more abandoned and we must prepare ourselves for it in the first place by putting on the spirit of Christ. This will need also professional training of course.

The Clergy

The third aspect of our vocation is “to help in the formation of the clergy and laity and lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelisation of the poor.” We all know St Vincent’s interest in the clergy which grew of course from his experience of them as he went about giving missions. He rightly felt that unless something was done for the clergy the work of the missions would be more or less fruitless. In Ch. XI of the Common Rules Vincent places the work of the Missions and the formation of the Clergy on almost equal footing. “To both functions we are bound almost equally by our Institute when called upon by the bishops and superiors, though the missions are to be preferred.” I think that there are few places in which we find St Vincent’s eloquence so reaching the heights as when he speaks about the formation of the Clergy. “Oh how happy you are to serve Our Lord as an instrument to form good priests... In this you perform the work of the Holy Spirit, to whom alone it belongs to illuminate and enkindle hearts. Rather it is the Holy and Sanctifying Spirit who does this through you. He lives and operates in you not only to make you live the Divine life, but also to establish His own life and operations in the gentlemen called to take up the highest ministry on earth” (VI, 393-394). Again he waxes eloquent on the kind of people who should be employed in this work: “The chief thing is to form ecclesiastics in a spirit of devotion. And for that, Sir, we must be filled with it ourselves... We must be vessels filled to such an extent that we can pour out grace on others without losing any ourselves and we must possess this spirit with which we wish that the Seminarians should be animated because no one can give what he does not possess himself” (VI, 64, 61: IV, 596-597). A few remarks here may be pertinent. We know that in many parts of the world the priesthood has gone through a great deal of agitation and disturbance over the last twenty years. So obviously for us who are called upon to train priests there is great need for deep personal convictions within ourselves with regard to the priesthood. We must have no doubts in our minds about the priesthood in general and perhaps about the Vincentian priesthood in particular. What I have in mind here is the need to realise that our priesthood is not a priesthood of prestige but of humble service after the manner of

the Suffering Servant. The priest is not a big man in the conventional sense of the word — he is in fact a small man as Jesus was Himself. We must be Vincentian priests whose delight is to be amongst the poor and the abandoned. Another point about this vocation is that we are all expected to train for it, as it were. No one can say “this is not for me”. I am a Vincentian and therefore, automatically as it were, this ministry is for everyone of us.

There is a significant addition to the statement of this third aspect of the vocation in the New Constitutions. In the New Constitutions we are called on to form not only the clergy but also the laity and lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelisation of the poor. This addition is there because of the many provinces where the confrères are engaged in various kinds of educational work. The idea is that in all our works for the people, whether educational or otherwise, the true Vincentian will be all the time leading people to give their services to the poor. Again this is very much the thinking of Vincent who used lay people so much in the ministry of evangelisation of the poor.

Section II — The Being of the Vincentian

In §4, where the Being of the community and the individual Vincentian is treated, we are referred to the Common Rules as a very important handbook of Vincentian spirituality. In fact the experts on Vincentianism have always emphasised that our Common Rules are much more a compendium of Vincentian spirituality than they are rules. Perhaps here again we get another insight into the perennial character of Vincent. I say this because in the directive issued to various religious bodies when they were setting about the revision of their Constitutions the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes emphasised the fact that the Constitutions should be heavily weighted on the spiritual side and not be just a series of legalistic directives. St Vincent pays special attention to the “spiritual potential” of the Common Rules as we can read in the Introduction to the Common Rules: “For what will you find in them that will not animate and help you to shun vice and acquire virtue and carry out in your lives the maxims of the Gospel.” Pope Paul VI of happy memory praised the Vincentians in 1974 for the “essentially evangelical character of their spirituality.” Everywhere today we are hearing appeals to Religious to return to Evangelical values. We have these values in compendium form in the Common Rules and of course in the context of the Vincentian way of life. They are a treasure of Vincentian spirituality and let us hope that even though we have new Constitutions we will constantly return to the Common Rules to drink

from the well-springs of St Vincent's thought and spirituality.

Still on the *Being* of the Vincentian §§5 and 6 bring us back once again to the Person of Christ. It was in a conference on Ch. II of the Common Rules that St Vincent came out with his famous remark about the relationship between Jesus and the mission: "Jesus Christ is the rule of the mission, it is He who speaks and it is for us to be attentive to His words and to give ourselves to His Majesty to put them in practice" (XII, 130-131). Like St Paul, Vincent is constantly appealing to us: "Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus." Practical man that he was, Vincent translated this dogma into practical terms in §6 where he singles out some of Christ's virtues *ad extra* which we should make our own. For example love and reverence for the Father which is reminiscent of the Common Rules Chapter X where our first obligation is "to reverence in a special manner the ineffable mysteries of the Most Holy Trinity and the Incarnation". Indeed closely related to His dedication to the Trinity is his teaching on Providence to which as Vincentians we should have a very special devotion. It is to be expected of course that in this paragraph too he would single out the virtues which are so important when dealing with people, especially the poor: "compassion and love for the poor".

Following on to §7, which is still part of the build-up of the Vincentian *Being*, we meet the five virtues of the community. These five virtues I am calling *Ad intra*; this of course is not entirely accurate as they obviously have an *ad extra* dimension also. But they are basically intended as builders of a special Vincentian character. They are growths from the contemplation of Christ and it is through that contemplation that they develop and not through approaching them individually. These virtues insert us into the field, as it were, of the common man, just as Christ through His Incarnation was inserted into the field of the common man too. They are virtues which are intended to make us approachable and which remove from our characters the idea, or the sense rather, of superiority. It is because the Vincentian tries to put on these virtues that it is often said of him "that he has the feel for the common man".

The final *Being* paragraph is §8 which really needs no comment. It simply tells us that we must be constantly replenishing ourselves with this *Being* by returning to the Gospel simplicity and to the teaching of St Vincent. Here again we can say that the Common Rules keep us in touch not only with the spirit of St Vincent but also with the spirit of the Gospel.

Section III. Evangelisation

It remains to make a few remarks about §§2, 3 and 9 which I am stating deal mostly with the evangelisation dimension of the community. §3 places the community in its new place in Canon Law by naming it “An Apostolic Community”. This is a new title which apparently means that the community is based on the community of the Apostles who gathered around Christ “to be with Him” and to go out as it were *a latere Christi* to preach the Good News. The community is a clerical one, exempt, and of course it is a community in the deepest sense of that word. I wonder if the term “clerical” is not used in a loose sense here. One becomes a cleric today by the reception of the Diaconate. If one does not receive the Diaconate can he not become a member of the community? Surely he can. The Brothers are not clerics in that strict sense of the term because they do not receive the Diaconate. “Exempt” is also a legal term indicating that in certain areas we are not under the jurisdiction of the local bishops. But the most important thing is that we are a Community. One would think therefore that all this should have been done under the heading of “The Being of the Community”. I do not think so, because “community” with the Vincentians, while it is a very real thing, is community for the purpose of Evangelisation. We are a community brought together with a view to the Apostolate. It is within the community that we grow in these virtues about which we spoke under the heading *of Being*. It is in the community too that we do all our planning and *revision de vie*. We do not operate as individuals but rather as a body, so that a purely personal apostolate must always be seen as the exception rather than the rule. §9 makes it clear too that community is regulated by our end, namely evangelisation. Through our community life our evangelisation should be more effective and lasting because of the wisdom and the insights which come to us in community life — that is through prayer and through fraternal communion with one another.

Conclusion

This chapter places a very definite challenge before us today. In a sense it would be a much less demanding chapter had it concentrated on how we do things, how to evangelise. But in fact, as I have said so often in the course of the paper, it concentrates on how we become Vincentians. The chapter lays before us the challenge of being a special type of people and it gives us the means of effecting this in our lives. I have emphasised the role the Common Rules play in the formation of the Vincentian. The chapter which we have been examining clearly indicates the areas of our evangelisation. We are told in a very definite

manner what the Church expects of us today. It is a wonderful ideal — to reduce the simplicity of the Gospel to practice in the simplicity of our own lives and the simplicity of our approach to others. It is not an easy task for human nature; it requires courage and sacrifice. But let us end with the encouraging words of Our Lord: “In the world you will have trouble, but have confidence, I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33).

As the last word to you may I say in all humility that we older confrères won't mind if you do better than us in virtue and learning. You are the Vincentians of tomorrow. You have the example of solid piety and learning which have made Irishmen and Vincentians so well known in the Church. They were always ready to tackle a difficult job. They have sent you a high ideal and I am sure you will do your best to maintain it.

*William M. Slattery, Superior General,
to the students and seminarists,
St. Joseph's, Blackrock,
in October 1947.*

The Just Man Liveth by Faith

William Hederman

(Reprinted from *EVANGELIZARE*, February 1958)

Many of the saints are represented in painting and sculpture carrying their symbol. St John the Baptist has a lamb, St Peter carries the keys, St Anthony carries the Infant Jesus, St Therese has her roses and St Vincent de Paul has his hands full with little beggarly orphans. For an historian who has read of the place of St Vincent in the making of the seventeenth and following centuries his popular statue might invite a disapproving query. Why represent the founder of the Congregation of the Mission, the revolutionary Daughters of Charity, the seminaries and retreats for priests, the Ladies of Charity, the Tuesday Conferences, why present such a man with beggarly little children? While the art is sometimes poor the idea meets with popular Catholic approval. Even in an age when the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ did not get its due prominence in the pulpit the Catholic instinct welcomed this teaching in the cheap plaster statues of St Vincent de Paul. These statues showed Vincent loving and serving the needy Christ in his little members. Christ in his little ones was the *raison d'être* of Vincent's foundation of priests, sisters and lay apostolate.

Vincent's faith was not only deep but complete. His vision of Christ was not confined to the Mass, the tabernacle, sacraments and sacred scripture. He saw Christ in the bishops, frail as some were, in priests, ordinands, nuns, helpless sinners, beggars, criminals, lunatics and little orphans. It was the same Christ as that of the Eucharist though present in a different manner and state.

It was Christ-ruling in the bishops and civil authority. What one may be sometimes tempted to call his diplomatic prudence in speaking to bishops was fundamentally a deep reverence born of faith in Christ-ruling. Christ was exercising his authority in the person of the bishop as truly as he exercises his power in the sacred host. Knowing his great humility, how otherwise can we understand his accepting obedience from a whole congregation unless his great faith showed him Christ working in his unworthy self?

In addition to his obeying Christ in his superiors and ruling his subjects through Christ the greater part of his life was spent in serving the needy Christ, Christ in his little ones. His every action began and ended in Christ because his faith showed him Christ in everyone. St Patrick's Breastplate, and likewise St Paul's "For me to live is Christ", stems from the same great faith. This view of Christ in all is summed up in a letter to a priest whose faith could have been stronger: "But though he (the Superior) were even better it is not so much on account of his virtues that you respect him but because he represents to you Our Lord and because Our Lord is in him to conduct you, as he is in the person of the poor to receive the alms of the rich; and thus, Sir, in opening your mind to him you open your mind to God". In another place he says: "Our Lord takes to himself the contempt we entertain for persons who represent him". The doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ is one thing, its practice is another thing. Doctrine without example remains barren. Only when it is lived can others catch the flame. The life of Vincent makes the encyclical *Mystici Corporis* a burning light. He shows us today how to see Christ in the refugee, the emigrant, the proletariat, the teddy-boy and all the needy. Men need this model today. On the continent Communists accuse the clergy of favouring the rich at the expense of the poor. Some outstanding priests who have suffered in the concentration camps have admitted that there is a foundation for the charge.

Many humanitarians still admire Vincent, but not for the right reason. *Monsieur Vincent* was a film of brilliant artistry both in acting and photography, but it was like *Hamlet* without the Prince; the faith of Vincent was absent. It showed a brave man fighting social injustices, just as any good Communist fights. No wonder it could be used as Communist propaganda!

Even among Christians there are some who reject what they call "charity", saying they wish to be loved purely for their own sakes. Perhaps they have been the victims of "cold charity" which can give alms to a beggar to make him move on and not because he is Christ. No Christian would throw a coin at Christ in his natural body, yet if his faith is weak he could throw it at him in a beggar.

Since all men are members of Christ, or destined to be such, it is unrealistic to love them for themselves alone, for they are not themselves alone. One never loves a hand merely for its own sake but because it belongs to a person. Everyone is, or at least is destined to be, a member of Christ. Just as the person makes the hand valuable so Christ makes the person lovable; that is why St. Vincent had beggars dine with him and kept fools at St Lazare.

It was this same vision of the needy Christ that could make Vincent firm and severe. Saint-Cyran had lost the faith, at least to all appearances, and Vincent was patience personified with him; he would not quench the smoking flax. But when it was a question of Jansenism attacking the divine life of faith in souls he was severe. His own companions who handled the poison were banished from the Little Company. To do battle for Truth and Justice was noble; to fight for the salvation of souls was supernatural; to obey God's law with love was sanctity; but to save Christ's life in souls gave charity a special tone of tenderness and strength such as a mother's love for her child. He reflected the Immaculate Heart in her motherly love.

In his conferences to the Daughters of Charity on the care of foundlings he returns more than half a dozen times to this truth of helping the needy Christ: "If you care for them, seeing God in them, you will say that the pain entailed will be very sweet to you and easy to bear;... reflect that the only way to overcome self when difficulties arise is to see God in these little ones and to think he is saying to you 'My daughter, the trouble you are taking in these little ones is so pleasing to me that I feel its effects, and the services you render them I regard as done to myself'. And again: "Accustom yourself to see God in them and to serve them in God and for his love". This is the vision which evokes such tender and strong love.

St Vincent loved Christ as his Creator and Redeemer, as his God and his All. He finds no contradiction in being carried through life in the arms of his heavenly Father while at the same time he carries and defends in his own arms the needy Christ. That sense of serene paternity and that identification with Providence in Vincent comes from his constant childlike dependence on his Father. Everything, even the docile mules outside St Lazare, reminded him of his dependence on God. Those who trust in Our Father's Providence are rewarded in turn with a share in that active Providence.

It is interesting to recall the circumstances of St Vincent's call to the service of the Mystical Body of Christ. After a year or more of great anguish (troubled mind and temptation against the faith) Vincent vowed to spend the rest of his life in the service of the poor. The relief brought by this resolution was immediate; he was never afterwards tempted against the faith. The women he most influenced experienced a similar relief. St Louise de Marillac suffered severe temptations against the faith, such as doubting the immortality of the soul. She, too, was cured suddenly. While praying she heard a voice telling her that she would belong to a community vowed to the service of the poor.

Such a radical experience in two lives must have shown Vincent, in a way no theological treatise could have shown him, that peace of mind was to be had in serving the needy Christ. Theodore Maynard, speaking of Vincent's cure of Louise's neurosis, says: "Many of the world's most notable achievements have been brought about by such people (former neurotics). This Vincent instinctively understood. Genius has, time after time, anticipated the conclusions of modern psychology". Frank Duff, in his book *The Spirit of the Legion*, repeats what Vincent de Paul did three hundred years ago: "If neurotic sufferers could be induced to minister to some other sorts of suffering (such as could be found in a Cancer Hospital etc.) it must have a counter-balancing influence, sometimes even a decisive one. In other words, if you could bring your neurosis subject into membership of the Legion or kindred organisation you would have brought him no small part of the road towards amelioration". There is a new race of the poor today; they have the material wealth but not the peace of mind. Worry has never been more prevalent than in our century. Vincent has the remedy: "...reflect that the only way to overcome self when difficulties arise is to see God in those little ones and to think he is saying to you The trouble you are taking with these little creatures is so pleasing to me that I feel its effects".

St Francis of Assisi, who certainly had no worries, experienced a similar conversion to that of St Vincent. Francis in his *Testament* wrote how he was converted: "In the time of my sinful life nothing disgusted me more than to see lepers. It was the Lord who made me go to them. I did his bidding and everything was changed for me so that I found sweet and easy what previously had been painful and impossible". St Vincent and St Louise could make those words their own. Actually St Vincent said those identical words: "What! My Lord has called me to serve him in the person of the poor. If you look at the poor they will inspire disgust; see Jesus Christ in them and you will be attracted and charmed". Both confess that the initiative came from God: "I did his bidding"; "My Lord called me".

Priests should direct souls to the needy Christ. It is not enough to tell them to pray and to offer up their cross. Vincent, Louise and Francis did that, and something more. They took that step which "changes everything"; "My Lord has called me to serve Jesus in the service of the poor". Priests must direct souls into the various forms of the Lay Apostolate and Catholic Action, for Christ has called them again through his Vicar, Pius XII:

"That such a love, solidly grounded and undivided, may abide

and increase in our souls we must accustom ourselves to see Christ in the Church. It is Christ who lives in the Church, who teaches, governs, sanctifies through her. It is Christ too who manifests himself differently in different members of his society. Once the faithful try to live in this spirit of conscious faith they will not only pay due honour and reverence to the superior members of this Mystical Body... but they will take to their hearts those members who are the objects of Our Saviour's special love, the weak, the mean, the wounded and the sick, who are in need of natural or supernatural assistance; the children whose innocence is so easily exposed to danger nowadays...; and finally the poor, in helping whom we touch, as it were, through his supreme mercy, the very person of Jesus Christ" (*Mystici Corporis Christi*).

In his conference on charity, given to his fellow-priests on May 30, 1650, St Vincent reveals the hidden life-source of his activity. Vincent speaks at times in the first person plural; change it to the singular and you have Vincent speaking of his own vocation. He makes it quite clear that divine faith is its source: "The love of the neighbour for the love of God is so lofty a matter that human reasoning cannot grasp it; light from on high is needed". He explains what divine faith reveals about the neighbour: "All men are members of a mystical body; we are all members of one another. It has never been heard that one member did not share the pain of another". He illustrates why we should weep or rejoice with our neighbour: "St John, speaking of our Lord and himself, says that the friend of the bridegroom is gladdened by his voice. Let us in the same way rejoice at the sound of our neighbour's voice, rejoicing because he represents Our Lord to us; let us rejoice at his success and that he surpasses ourselves in honour, esteem, talent and virtues". He shows that because this faith is supernatural he must pray for it, and he bursts into a prayer, profound and universal, like the prayers of the Missal: "My Saviour, I no longer wish to see faults save in myself; grant that from this moment, enlightened by the light of your example, I may bear all men in my heart and suffer them in your strength; grant me the grace to do so, inflame me with your love". He notes that he has a share in God's Providence: "We have been chosen as instruments of his fatherly and boundless love which desires to be established in, and replenish, souls". He is conscious that it is his double mission to love Christ in all men and to make all men love Christ: "It is true that I am sent not merely to love God but to have him loved". Finally, he becomes so happy at the thought of his mission that he concludes his conference: "Saviour, how happy I

am to be in a state of love for my neighbours, in a state that of itself calls you, cries out to you, implores you on his behalf. Grant to me the grace to know my happiness, truly to love this blessed state and to do all in my power that this virtue may reign in the Company now and forever, Amen". A prayer of petition born of gratitude.

Jesus was Vincent's treasure. He saw what some of us blind ones fail to see, this treasure hidden in the field of humanity. He sold all, self, to buy that field with its treasure. And because it was his treasure he did it "in his joy". "The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a treasure hid in the field, which a man findeth and covereth; and in his joy he goeth and selleth all that he hath and buyeth that field" (Mt. 13:44).

On the film *Monsieur Vincent*:

In this "Catholic" film not once do we get a hint of the *motive* behind St Vincent's charity. Nowhere do we see the supernatural side of the saint. The representation is non-Christian, even pagan, in outlook, with strong Lettish tendencies. The character of Monsieur Vincent as thus depicted is no better than a second-rate Minister of Health. Even the graveside *De Profundis* seems to have been introduced mainly with the object of letting us know of and listen to the fine speaking voice of Pierre Fresnay. St Vincent's death, as we know it, was the death of a saint, a most moving and holy death. In the film there is no mention even of the Last Sacraments. Monsieur Vincent sits down to instruct his latest recruit and though his words are earnest and moving not once does he refer to the principal motive behind the life of a Sister of Charity, love of God. The film portrayed mere philanthropy.

*Dr Louis P. Roche, Professor of French in U. C. D.,
to the students and seminarists,
St Joseph's, Blackrock
14 May 1950.*

More About the Early Years

In the last issue of COLLOQUE there was an abridgement of Thomas McNamara's memoirs about the origins of the Irish Province, followed by some other items from various sources about the same period. Up till then the earliest known extant letter from the early days was one in the archives of the curia in Rome dated 30 May 1842 written by James Lynch to Louis-Michel Redon, Visitor of the Province of the Ile-de-France; this province comprised the houses of Paris, Tours, Castleknock and Phibsboro.

Since the last issue some earlier letters have been discovered by Kevin Condon in the course of his research into the beginnings of All Hallows; they are in the archives of the Irish College in Rome. They are all addressed to Paul Cullen in Rome and are almost all written by John McCann.

Cullen was born in 1803 and in 1820 he began his seminary course in Rome at the *De Propaganda Fide* College. After ordination in 1829 he was appointed professor in this college and in February 1832 he became rector of the Irish College in Rome. McCann was about three years younger than Cullen and had done some legal studies in Dublin before going to Rome to study for the priesthood at *Propaganda*. Back in Dublin after ordination McCann, even in the early years at 34 Usher's Quay, was authorised to transact business on behalf of the Irish College, Rome, and students' fees for that college could be paid through him.

The earliest of this group of letters which is of interest here is dated 16 July 1833 and is written by McCann to Cullen from Usher's Quay:

My dear Rev^d Friend,

You must have been greatly surprised at not hearing from me before this. I shall at the same time account for my silence and the determination I have come to of not going to Italy at least for some time — a number of young clergymen distinguished for their piety and talent have united together for the purpose of establishing an order in this country similar to that of the Missioners in Rome. The undertaking has been approved of by Dr Murray, Dr Kelly and other distinguished prelates. Tho' not of the body myself I thought I could not confer a greater benefit on the Church than by assisting them to commence it by taking on myself the management of their

temporal concerns, a situation admirably suited to my present circumstances, being still unable to study. A day school in Dublin has been determined upon as the most practicable mode of commencing, as it will ensure them an independent support for the present and ultimately enable them to accomplish the object for which they have come together. I have taken a house for them on Usher's Quay, the centre of the Catholick part of Dublin . . .

You will of course be cautious in speaking of this new affair as they only look forward to establishing the order at some future period. Remember me to all friends & be assured that as soon as we are settled you shall have a long letter from me.

Your sincere friend in JC
J^{no} McCann

The Dr Murray mentioned in the letter was archbishop of Dublin and the Dr Kelly was probably the archbishop of Armagh.

The next letter is again from McCann to Cullen, from Usher's Quay and dated 2 February 1834:

Dear Rev^d Friend,

I delayed answering your letter in order to give you every possible information with regard to the little society with which I am at present connected. Previous however to enter into any details I wish to mention that our present undertaking did not originate with me as the weak state of my eyes does not allow me even to think of becoming a Religious. It originated with a few pious young men in Maynooth with whom it formed the constant subject of conversation during their course. After mature deliberation with the most enlightened Prelates and distinguished clergymen & with the prospect of being soon joined by the Rev^d Mr Dooley, Dean of the College, as their Superior they determined upon commencing with a Day School in Dublin. God Almighty has been pleased so far to crown their labours with unprecedented success. The school is open but 6 months & the scholars already amount to nearly 100. Their next step will be when their community increases to take a house in the immediate vicinity of the city & then establish a small seminary from which they expect a constant supply of Novices. When all the Machinery shall thus have been set at work & when the present members shall have acquired a little more experience they look forward to the opening of the

missions. It is also in contemplation to have a House attached to the establishment to which Priests can occasionally retire from the distracting care of the Mission & in which superannuated clergymen may peaceably end their days. Thus you have a brief sketch of what my Rev^d companions have already done and what they yet propose to accomplish. Their rules at present are very simple & consist principally of a certain distribution of time adapted to their present duties & of a few regulations necessary to ensure good order and regularity — they never dine out — they have not bound themselves in any solemn manner but hope to have everything established on a proper footing when Mr Dooley & this other clergyman whom they expect will have joined them. If on your return to this country everything shall have succeeded according to our expectations and our plans and views can be combined nothing will give us greater pleasure than to co-operate with you in the same glorious cause. We expect Mr Dooley & the other clergyman at Pentecost. Mr D however does not wish it to be publicly known as yet that he is to join us. As it was known there (?) that some of the students of your college had formed the idea of introducing the Missionary Society into Ireland, I read your letter to some of my companions, suppressing your name. They were all delighted with it & join with me in the most ardent desire for your spiritual and temporal welfare.

Your affect, brother in JC
J^{no} McCann

Most of the next letter is not about the new community. It is from Usher's Quay, dated 19 May 1835, and contains only one sentence about the venture:

We feel much obliged to the good Missioners for their friendly feeling towards us & to you for the exertions you have made to procure us a copy of their rules.

This shows that a few years before the initiative of John O'Toole of the Irish College in Paris (see COLLOQUE 7, pp 46-50) an approach had been made to the Vincentians in Rome. I wrote to the archivist of the Roman province asking if any letters from McCann, Dowley or Cullen were in their archives. The reply was that a quick preliminary check showed no such letters but that if anything showed up after a more

detailed search he would let me know; so far I have not heard anything further; that was in May of this year.

The next letter, from Usher's Quay on 20 November 1835 has this passage:

Our little seminary at Castleknock opened last September. It has succeeded beyond our expectations — we have 35 students, lay & ecclesiastical. However, we are about to suffer a severe loss in the death of a most amiable young clergyman who lately joined us & who had scarce been a week engaged in teaching when he was declared to have been for some time in a rapid consumption. Notwithstanding these frequent trials the “missionaria congregatio” continues to prosper.

Anthony Reynolds, whose illness is referred to in the letter, died in January 1836. He is the only member of the original Usher's Quay community to have died before the amalgamation with the Congregation of the Mission.

The next letter, again from McCann to Cullen, is from Usher's Quay, dated 16 May 1836, and has nothing of interest in the present context, nor has the following one of 15 August 1836. The latter mentions that the writer's uncle, Rev. William Mathew McCann died on 5 August in St Vincent's, though it does not specify whether it was Usher's Quay or Castleknock.

A letter from Philip Dowley from Castleknock, dated 7 March 1837, is all about the vacancy in the see of Waterford but a second PS to it asks:

Any hope of the rules from the House of the Mission?

A little over a month later, on 16 April, McCann writes to Cullen:

The cause of St Vincent, thanks be to God, continues to prosper. In order to accommodate the young growth of the society it has been found absolutely necessary to enlarge our buildings. We are therefore at present to erect the wing of the new seminary of St Vincent's. His Grace lays the foundation stone on Tuesday next. As we are partly trusting to Providence for the completion of this wing His Grace, after having subscribed £250, encouraged us to make known our case to such clergymen & lay gentlemen as are known to support similar institutions. With this view I

propose in a day or two to write to Cardinal Weld & have taken the liberty to refer him to you for particular information. You will be kind enough to explain to him how particularly useful such an institution would be in Ireland & also to *receive* any notice His Eminence may be kind enough to take of our project. Should Lord Shrewsbury, Mr Phillips & he be in Rome you might probably introduce the matters to them.

The building in Castleknock referred to is the three-story block of which the “Trunk Door” forms the centrepiece. Thomas Weld was from an old Catholic family in Dorset. He had given much financial help to many religious communities. After the death of his wife he became a priest and was later created Cardinal and resided in Rome; he died in 1837, the year of this letter. John Talbot, 16th Earl of Shrewsbury, was also from an old Catholic family and was also noted for helping in a financial way religious institutions; he spent much of his time in Rome. The Mr Phillips referred to is almost certainly Ambrose Phillips who had become a Catholic at the age of fifteen, and although eighteen years younger than the Earl was associated with him in very many of his financial aid schemes to religious institutions. The three were certainly within the terms of “such clergymen & lay gentlemen as are known to support similar institutions”.

On 9 April 1838 McCann wrote an eight-line letter to Cullen asking him to advance £20 to a student in Rome and to charge the student the full postage on the letter. Philip Dowley added a two-page postscript to this letter as a result of which McCann had to add “I was not aware that Mr D was going to write so long a letter when I told you to charge the postage to Mr Wall.” Dowley’s addition is as follows:

My Dear Doctor Cullen,

I have once more to claim your attention to the little “Society of the Missions” (sic). We cherish here the most fervent desire of being ingrafted on to the parent stock, could this incorporation be effected without interfering with the vital principle of subjection to the Ordinary, the Archbishop of Dublin. Would you have the charity to submit this point to the Reverend Father Hugo who is, I understand, the present superior at Rome, and in whom we have so much confidence. Pray, ask him whether our idea could be at all entertained, or likely to be patiently received by the General in Paris. If so, could it not be made the subject of a friendly correspondence with him in France. Or I might undertake a journey

to see him and have a full personal interview with him. Any Society, or Community, of men, or females, starting into existence in Ireland & claiming *exemption* from the Ordinary, will not be countenanced. This explains our views. Pray, make another appeal to Father Hugo's charity. Beg of him to let us have the forms under which their vows are made. If this were in the nature of *rules* I could not presume to ask it, having been already informed that the General alone is competent to permit the use of this rule to others. We have, thanks to God, two copies of St Vincent's original rule, such as that you kindly offered to Mr McCann. We want, you perceive, very little except the spirit to act upon these admirable constitutions. We live in hope that God will one day impart it to us. If you find a convenient opportunity, be so kind as to send us a copy of St Ignatius' rule. This holy rule of the Jesuits would assist us, in case of failure with our Brother Missioners, in tracing out the *governing portion* of the Congregation which is principally wanting in the general rules of St Vincent, which we have. Perhaps those good & holy men, Fathers Hugo & Cremisini, would take compassion upon the helplessness of our infancy and accomplish something for us. Forgive this long letter. You have so many correspondents from Ireland that I need no apology for the omission of news.

Believe Dear Doctor Cullen me
truly & sincerely yours
P. Dowley

The two Roman confrères mentioned in the letter are Simon Ugo and Antonio Cremisini; the former became Provincial in 1835 and was succeeded by the latter in 1839.

The next letter is nearly a year later, 14 March 1839, and is again from McCann to Cullen. In the present context its main bit of news is this:

You will no doubt be glad to hear that Mr Dooley had been invited to Paris by the General of the Missioners. He is there at present & will remain for a few months. From the accommodating dispositions of both parties we have every reason to hope that the final accomplishment of our wishes is near at hand by a union with that most excellent body. Get the Missioners in Rome to pray for us.

A week later Archbishop Murray wrote to Cullen about several different matters, but mentioned in the first place Dowley's departure for Paris:

Mr McCann has also, I suppose, informed you of Mr Dowley's departure for Paris. We are very anxious that our little Institute at Castleknock should be formed as nearly as our own circumstances will admit, on the model of St Vincent's admirable Missioners in France. On this account Mr Dowley is gone to Paris to make arrangements either that two or three of our young people may go to imbibe the true spirit of the Institute there, and infuse it afterwards among their Brethren at home; or that two or three of the French Members may be allowed to come and dwell among us to impart to our youthful members here the same advantage.

At this point the reader should return to COLLOQUE No 7, page 50.

TD

Fr Ned O'Hanlon died on 20 November 1959. The following was found among his papers, written in his own handwriting and signed; it was undated but was clearly written considerably earlier. It is in the archives in Sunday's Well.

In December 1912 when making, at Saint Peter's Bearsden, a retreat conducted by Father Gavin CM I experienced a desire to become a Vincentian. After my ordination I was appointed as curate at Saint Agnes', Lambhill, and there I worked for seven years. As the desire to be a Vincentian frequently recurred I prayed to Our Lady of Lourdes and Saint Vincent to help me to come to a decision. Well, this is what happened. One morning about ten o'clock as I was walking in the presbytery garden there suddenly flashed through my mind "Go immediately to a certain place in the Central Station and there you will find a Vincentian who will tell you what to do!" I went to the spot indicated, stood there, and within a few seconds the Vincentian Father appeared, viz Father Gavin who had given the retreat. I did not tell him how I was directed there. I there and then told Father Gavin that I intended to be a Vincentian. "Come away", says he, "to Lanark". I did so and there met the Superior Father Kickham and within six weeks I was in the novitiate at Blackrock, thanks to Our Lady and Saint Vincent.

Homily at the 150th Anniversary Commemoration of the St Vincent de Paul Society

RDS, BALLSBRIDGE, 16 OCTOBER, 1983

Richard McCullen

Your Excellency The Nuncio, Uachtaran na h-Eireann, My Lord Bishops, Reverend Fathers, Brothers and Sisters in Christ.

There is a little phrase in the second reading of today's Mass which captures, I think, the spirit of what all of us are experiencing here today. The phrase is a short, pithy piece of advice which the aging St Paul wrote to the young Timothy: "Remember who your teachers were." (2 Tim. 3:14). All of us can remember who our teachers were and, when we have long forgotten many of the details of grammar, science or whatever else they imparted to us, we can remember what manner of people they were. And it is that, I imagine, which St Paul is evoking for Timothy. In as many words, St Paul is saying to him what he said to others on different occasions: "Become imitators of us and of the Lord." (1 Thess. 1:16; 1 Cor. 4:16).

The particular teachers whom we are evoking today are two. They are separated from each other by 200 years or so and, although they shared the same nationality, they came from very different backgrounds: one from the land, as we might say, and the other from the professional or business world. One was to die young, leaving a wife and a child; the other was to live into old age as a priest, until the end an active mediator of God's love for the world. The contrasts between St Vincent de Paul and Frederic Ozanam are many, but what is more striking still is the depth and intensity of the vision both men shared. To each of them was given a penetrating insight into the mystery of Christ and His presence in the persons of the poor.

"We must not consider", wrote St Vincent de Paul, "a poor agricultural worker or a poor woman according to their external appearance, nor according to their apparent intellectual abilities... Turn the medal and you will see by the light of faith that the Son of God, Who wished to be poor, is presented to us through these poor people." (XI 32)

The life and work of Frederic Ozanam was an endorsement of that reflection of St Vincent de Paul.

“Remember who your teachers were.” Neither of our teachers could be described as a “remote, ineffectual don”, for even if Frederic Ozanam held with great distinction a professional chair in the Sorbonne University of Paris, he still could find time, along with the other founding members of the Society, to climb the stairs of high tenements in Paris to visit, talk with and assist the poor families who eked out their existence in them.

Not only the poor of Paris, but of other European cities as well, touched the heart of Frederic Ozanam. In 1851 he was persuaded to visit the great exhibition which was being held in the Crystal Palace in London. It was during his visit to the Crystal Palace that Frederic became quite distracted, not by what he saw there, but by the poverty of the Irish immigrants who were to be found, some 14 to a room, in buildings only 5 minutes’ walk away from Regent Street. It was not the exciting discoveries of the scientific world of the time that riveted the attention of the brilliant professor from the Sorbonne, but the sufferings of the poor of Christ in the heart of the British capital. What captured the admiration of Ozanam in the London of 1851 was the work of some English members of the Society who were able, as Ozanam expressed it, to “rise above the prejudices of their birth” and come to the help of some poor Sicilians and Irish people who were showing so clearly the effects of poverty in their bodies, and which to a man of Ozanam’s spiritual insight, was a revelation of the features of the suffering Christ.

Of our other teacher, St Vincent de Paul, and his concern for the poor of this country, 300 years ago, we know more. Into the Dioceses of Limerick, Cashel and Emly, he sent priests of his community at a time when to be a priest in Ireland was to live dangerously. Because of that danger, many Irish priests had become refugees in the city of Paris, and we know for certain that St Vincent de Paul commissioned one of his community to seek them out and to offer them some financial help in order to save them the embarrassment of having to beg their bread in the streets of the capital.

“Remember who your teachers were.” The memory of Timothy’s teachers is evoked by St Paul, not in any nostalgic way, but rather as a stimulus to become, as St Paul himself expresses it in the final phrase of today’s second reading, “fully equipped and ready for any good work”. In evoking our teachers, St Vincent de Paul and Frederic Ozanam, we do so, not only to allow our wonder grow as we reflect on their monumental lives, but also that in some small way we may be able to go and do likewise.

These two teachers of ours will not object, I am sure, it at this point we recall with gratitude some of those teachers which the Society of St Vincent de Paul has known since its foundation some 150 years ago in Paris. There is the illustrious line of International Presidents that culminates for us today in the person of M. Amin Terrazzi, men who have inspired the Society — and have given its members a sense of unity throughout the world in their work of lifting up some of the broken forms of humanity that are lying on life's road. Besides the International Presidents, each of us here today would like to honour the memory of the Irish National Presidents of the Society, predecessors of Don Mahony. Perhaps they, as well as many other members of the Society, would lay no claim to being teachers. However, their devotion to the Society and to the poor of Ireland is a demonstration lesson to us on the meaning of the two great commandments of the law — on which in the evening-time of our lives we will be examined. “At evening-time, I will examine thee in love.” By the grace of God, they have made themselves, in St Paul's phrase, “fully equipped and ready for any good work” that would lighten the burden of those whom St Vincent liked to call “our lords and masters”, the poor.

Yes, we have had many teachers in the Society whose memory we treasure today, — and whose work is a stimulus for us not only to seek out the poor, (did somebody say that 25% of Ireland's population could be classified as poor at the present time?), but also to engage the interest, or I should say, the love of the young to work in the Society for the poor who are always with us.

In this large classroom where this afternoon so many pupils or disciples of St Vincent de Paul and Frederic Ozanam are gathered, what would our teachers say to us today?

Would Frederic Ozanam find us so engrossed in the great exhibition of affluence, that we had become a somewhat depersonalised society? Perhaps he would marvel at the phenomenon that while the 5 continents of the world can become present to us in the intimacy of our homes through a television set, loneliness and depression in our society have reached almost epidemic proportions. Would he, picking up the title of a present-day film — “The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner” — have a pertinent word for us all on the importance of giving generously of our time to those who are the long-distance runners on life's road — the aged in our society? Frederic Ozanam might remind us, that the Society of St Vincent de Paul is rooted and founded in the experience of the Eternal Word of God, Who came, in St John's phrase, “and pitched His tent” among us and visited His people, especially the poor,

in person. In person — yes, what has characterised the Society from its beginnings — and must continue to do so — is its determination to be more than an agency of relief. Its members are called to be not only dispensers of food and fuel and clothing to the poor — both obvious and not so obvious — but dispensers, too, of the love and compassion of Christ which has been poured into their own hearts by the Spirit of God. The Society recognises that if —

“The whole earth is our hospital
Endowed by the ruined millionaire”

then personal contact, patient listening, a profound acceptance of the individual will be a very effective therapy in healing the wounds which poverty or injustice has left in the hearts of so many today.

“The hint half-guessed
The gift half-understood
Is Incarnation.”

Perhaps St Vincent de Paul in addressing us might begin by protesting at the publicity which the Society has given to his name, for he would vigorously assert that he was not the founder of it. However, he would pardon the Society for the publicity, if he could be persuaded that it was done so entirely in the interests of God and His poor. With a smile and a little touch of irony, he might add: “At least in the matter of publicity, the two Communities which I did found have been much more successful in respecting my wishes to be unknown ...” Of St Vincent de Paul, it could be said that he had a hard head but a soft heart. I say he had a hard head, for at a time when there was no organised government social assistance, he succeeded in providing it, principally through the Ladies of Charity and the Daughters of Charity whom he founded, along with a network of other organisations which he set up to make the basic necessities of life available to the poor. He was not a politician, but he had no fear of going to the rich, influential people of his day to help him with his projects for the poor, and in doing so, sensitising their consciences to their social obligations. For such planning and courage, a man needs a hard head. He had, however, a soft heart and in his approach to those who held authority or enjoyed prestige, There was nothing shrill or aggressive. His respect for the individual person was too deep to allow him to adopt tactics that were faintly menacing or remotely violent. The sufferings of refugees, one-parent families, dropouts, victims of violence, hostages

and prisoners, all tore his heart out, because in their cries of pain he could hear only the voice of Jesus Christ on His cross.

“Remember who your teachers were.” Perhaps we should on this occasion, when we are celebrating here in Ireland the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, leave the last word to our two distinguished teachers. In 1651 St Vincent de Paul addressed a letter to a city Council in France that had shown an unusual degree of sensitivity to the needs of the poor in its society. The Council members had written to St Vincent, expressing the hope that he might be able to assist them in the work of alleviating distress. Characteristically, the Saint replied that he would do what he could, and then added a few words of encouragement (did he think that State agencies, such as they were at that time, needed encouragement as much as goading, if they were to be more just and generous to those whom we today rather clumsily call the ‘underprivileged’?). For St Vincent de Paul, the poor were not names in a register or, had he been living nowadays, cards to be fed into a computer. For him the poor were the open and raw nerve of the suffering Body of Christ. And so he wrote to the City Council:

“Gentlemen, how pleasing to Our Lord is your anxiety to relieve His suffering members. I beseech Him to be your reward, to bless your persons and your government, to give peace to the State and to deliver His people from the evils they endure... and I am in the love of Our Lord, Your most humble and obedient servant,

Vincent de Paul

unworthy priest of the Mission”

(IV 196-7)

And now for Frederic Ozanam’s last word. On a spring day in 1853, looking out on the Mediterranean Sea, Frederic Ozanam began to feel the tide of life ebbing from his body, so he wrote what he called a “codicil of gratitude” to his Will:

“I commit my soul to Jesus Christ, my Saviour... I die in the bosom of the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church. I’ve known the misgivings of the present age, but all my life has convinced me that there is no rest for the mind and the heart except in the faith of the Church and under her authority... I implore the prayers of my friends of the Society of St Vincent de Paul and of my friends in Lyons. Let not your zeal be slackened by those who say, ‘he is in heaven’. Pray unceasingly for one who loved you all much,

but who has sinned much. Aided by your supplications, dear kind friends, I shall leave this world with less fear. I firmly trust that we shall not be separated and that I shall remain in the midst of you until you rejoin me. May the blessing of God, the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit rest upon you all. Amen.”

M. Le Prévost, as spokesman for several members of the Society, asks that the Society place itself under the protection of St Vincent de Paul and that it celebrate his feast-day; also that a prayer be said at the opening and the closing of each meeting. No proposal could be more welcome to the Society; all comments are summed up in the congratulations and praise for the member who proposed it.

*From the Minutes of a meeting of
the first Conference, Paris,
4 February 1834.*

Forum

JUSTICE AND COMPANIONSHIP IN LIVERPOOL

This piece of reporting is an account of a personally chosen summer activity. It is not submitted to COLLOQUE for that reason but since the outing was undertaken by me as Director of Students in conjunction with the summer programme of the students at De Paul House it may serve to inform confrères about one aspect of our student summer formation.

Towards the end of five weeks in the Victoria Settlement in Liverpool's inner city I sit down to write: Why have I come here? What did I hope to achieve? What has, in fact, happened during these sub-tropical weeks?

Frank Murphy suggested this outing to me last May. It would, he said, be modeled roughly on the Jesuit *Companions for Justice* exercise. We would not appear or act as priests; a supervisor would give us a "placement" in England and we would be answerable to her. That much, and little else, was clear. Since there was no Seminaire this summer and I therefore was free I applied for and was given permission to go. So, why have I come? Many reasons, personal, ecclesial and community are present. For five years I have been sending students to pastoral projects among the poor. Often they have been accountable to me for their experience. No officer, the principle runs, should order his men into a situation to which he has not gone, or would not willingly go, himself. There was some tenderness around this Achilles heel that I could feel. But more important, I was conscious that since the 1971 Synod of Bishops the Church has invited me to a greater awareness of injustice and oppression in the world which leaves some (me, my community?) to enjoy material abundance while many are becoming dehumanised by poverty. But the most important reason of all for me is that St Vincent founded the Congregation to evangelise the poor, materially as well as spiritually poor: *Evangelizare pauperibus misit me*. "The poor are our masters, they are our kings", as he told the Daughters (X 612). Since returning from Nigeria my life has not brought me into much contact with the poor.

Before leaving De Paul House Frank and I and the students met in conference. We each read our Constitutions relating to formation and each tried to choose the one which seemed most relevant to the summer pastoral placement. I picked out §130:

The formation of our (confrères) should be in close contact with the reality of society... (they), through a conversion of heart, should begin to involve themselves in work of Christian justice and more and more they should become conscious of the roots of poverty in the world and discern the obstacles to evangelisation.

That constitution was apt not only for students but for me as well. Each of us at the conference was to write what he hoped to gain from the summer project. My expectation was this: "To experience in the poor the presence of Jesus Christ, as Vincent did, and to be evangelised by them". I was also mindful of the Superior General's invitation to me, after the Bogota meeting of Provincials, to be available and mobile for the work of evangelisation.

At the start of our time in the Victoria Settlement, locally known as the Vickey, our supervisor Liz Emery, lecturer in Applied Sciences at Southampton University, met Frank and myself. She asked us about our expectations and made useful suggestions about activities which might interest us and immerse us in the life of Liverpool. She suggested some points to help us reflect on our experience: get into the situation; see the state of things; ask how this situation has come about; what factors have contributed to it; who is to blame; what remedies, resources, persons, attitudes materials are now needed; why are these resources being withheld? Thus did we begin our stay at the Vickey challenged by Liz's questions and suggestions as well as enlivened by her good humour and encouraged by her depth of faith.

Companions for Justice is at least as much about companionship as about justice. Community, prayer and life-style were central aspects of our five weeks. The Victoria Settlement, one of about thirty charitable agencies in deprived locations in UK cities, was our base. One single room played versatile host to us as bedroom, diningroom, study and prayer room. We had part use of a kitchen on another floor for cooking purposes. The living was simple; we lived somewhat below the unemployment allowance for food, transport etc. And it was close—five weeks, two persons, one room close to the slates during a hot summer. Mental prayer, morning and evening Hours and the Eucharist sustained us daily and, latterly, a reflection each evening on the quality of our companionship helped us to live "after the manner of dear friends".

Our plan of action was, for me, uncomfortably vague. We had no one specific job to do. Instead, we had to look about and ferret out where the action, or inaction, was and make enquiries and/or arrangements and go there. Our day began about 0700 hrs. Prayer for an hour, Mass

and breakfast took the day to about 0930 hrs. Two pieces of practical advice had been given us: eat a robust breakfast each day and wear a stout pair of shoes. We valued that advice and breakfasted and walked mightily almost always eschewing any “wheeled thing” for transport. We walked our area with the devotion of the bobby on the beat. Everton and the Vickey have not been chosen as subjects for picture postcards. As one walks one sees why. Since the Victorian days of back-to-back dwellings much demolition and rebuilding has splintered and scattered a closely-knit community. Catholics from the apron along the docks and protestants, strongly Orange, on the hinter-hill, have been integrated in huge high-rise dwellings, with about fifteen of these up to twenty-two storeys within a square kilometer; and the elderly have been despatched to ear-marked housing blocks. These developments have made Everton neither happy nor beautiful. And Everton is an internal organ of a city in an advanced stage of decay. People told us consistently and insistently that Liverpool is dying: “Liverpool is dead but it won’t lie down”. The decline of the city as a great port has had its effects on industry, employment, housing and social stability as consecutively as links on a chain. Twenty years ago, we were told, 33,000 worked on the docks and now fewer than 2,000 do. In our part of Liverpool about 60% of adults and 80% of the young are unemployed and most of these have little prospect of ever being in any regular job: “A boy or girl retires at 16 years”. So the blinding and unavoidable human condition of inner Liverpool today is the cancer of unemployment and its social, psychological and spiritual spin-offs: fear, poverty, vandalism and crime. In our early days, once we had reached 0930 hrs., we often found ourselves with little or nothing to do, as though we were unemployed. Unsatisfying as it was, this experience of aimlessness had its function: I was having a taste of the corrosive condition in which increasing numbers of Liverpudlians are forced to live permanently.

Our experience brought us into contact with many aspects of life in Liverpool. We had contact with some of the activities of its youth, its adults, its elderly and its leaders.

In the early weeks Frank and I helped to run a youth club in the Vickey. Later we became involved in a playground pressure-group and holiday play-schemes. I paid some visits to a Catholic primary school presided over by a genial Dubliner whose mild irony mocked his institute which prepared under-privileged children for unemployment and crime.

We joined and participated with the adults of Everton and beyond in a variety of activities. There was Mother Teresa’s (of Calcutta) soup

kitchen, the Fazekerley post-psychiatric day centre, the Vickey citizens' advice centre, the city Appeals Tribunal, the club for unemployed young men, public relations meetings between police and people, the Labour Exchange (though on a non-participative basis) and many more like activities. We joined in the beginnings of a tenants' association which founded itself, presented and won its case for re-housing at the City Council; this was an interesting example of how, with guidance, the poor may make the political machine mill their grain a little. However, though they seemed to have had their demand met with it looked to me as though they still were the losers as they remained powerless to determine and direct their own lives. Their expulsion from the broader social and economic participation which is open to others is, to me, the essence of their poverty.

I became friendly with one young unemployed man. George is a practicing Catholic, a rarity there, intelligent and hard-working. His marriage is still surviving (the only one I came across) though it has been under strain from his involvement with various pressure-groups. Some unemployed are so busy on these activities that they complain of burn-out. George's health has deteriorated since he became unemployed. However, he still hopes to become employed and escape the trap of the supplementary benefit mirage. George spoke movingly of the plight of the unemployed, the indignity of being made to feel worthless.

Twice each week we attended a lunch club for old age pensioners, and also got our lunch for 20p. This is one of the services offered by the Vickey to the old people of the area. Most of them live alone, separated from their families and in continuous fear of the young unemployed people who often attack their persons or their homes. These were a delight to meet. They were cheerful and spoke feelingly about the Liverpool that they knew and loved and that has gone.

I have indicated that we were in contact with social workers for the area of Everton. We met two of the City Councillors and managed an interview with the MP for the Riverside constituency of Liverpool, Bob Parry. We paid visits to three presbyteries, two in Everton and one in Toxteth. We tried to contact the Anglican bishop David Shepherd and the Catholic archbishop Derek Warlock but both of these were away. We paid a couple of visits to the men involved in the very interesting Passionist Inner City Mission in Toxteth. This is an imaginative attempt, even if small after twelve years, at an alternative model of Christian presence in the inner city. It was a most interesting aspect of our experience, and finding them was, in a sense, an experience, of failure, but perseverance rewarded us with two long and challenging meetings with

the two priests and one brother of this mission. We met them towards the end of our five weeks. This was good on two counts, because we had read rather carefully their two papers: *Two Years Later*, unpublished paper on the Passionist Inner-city Mission, Liverpool 1973; and *Passionist Inner-city Mission: Interim Analysis*, unpublished paper, for private circulation, by Austin Smith CP, Liverpool 1974. This mission deserves a lot more attention than space here permits me.

I went to Liverpool with specific hopes and expectations. I believe that the experiment of living in the Victoria Settlement was a worthwhile one. My expectations, perhaps, were not realised exactly as I had formulated them before leaving De Paul House. For example, I spent at least as much time with leaders and organisers, in Everton and elsewhere, as I did in contact with people in various states of deprivation. But I think that this was a necessary condition of my making any intelligent assessment of that which I was living with. Before going to Everton and the Vickey I had heard the expression “institutional injustice” but it was no more than a concept. After living there for five weeks and in some way experiencing the existence of the unemployed my mind has become a little more open to comprehend the significance of the neat phrase. I think I may have experienced, less visibly but not less of the reality, the crucified Christ in the people of the inner city.

Unemployed people are not free to shape their own lives and destiny; they are kept in a kind of benign servitude to a number of human institutions. Unemployed people are, by reason of their condition, effectively excluded from participating in the society of which they are a part. The unemployed feel this deeply but often they are unable to express it (except, occasionally, with the language of violence). These, rather than some very visible physical deprivation, are what constitute the essence of their poverty, the silent, eerie, almost electronic poverty that leaves the facade but annihilates the inner person.

Just as central and local government, trade unions and educational institutions ought to promote the well-being and freedom of the people, particularly the more vulnerable (but somehow they seem to do the opposite) so also the ecclesiastical order as received and practiced seems to keep the clergy distanced from the experience of the people whose evangelisers they are. What is required is a change in attitude as well as in approach: to help people without having to control them. There is lacking the element of courage, imagination and initiative which would change from doing things for people (paternalism) to doing things with the people (participation). One thinks especially of those religious Orders who, in an earlier time, were gifted by God to break new ground

in evangelising the poor. The charism seems run down, the gift gone out.

For the Church, any movement towards evangelisation of the new poor of the inner city seems to pass over from the side of control towards that of powerlessness by beginning to share in the condition of the excluded ones. It will be a long and hard struggle to shake off old structures and practices. It is much easier to be for the poor of the inner city than to be with them and share their exclusion. That may be the extent of the revolution, a revolution of the evangelisers. If that happened the poor might begin to understand that “the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us”.

Since I came to Liverpool with St Vincent in my mind I think it is reasonable to give him the last word. I have been reading *The Holiness of St Vincent* by Jacques Delarue while here and have been struck by how down to earth and alive Vincent is. Towards the end of his life he warned his sons of the dangers of cowardice in the face of fresh demands and challenges:

But who is it who is going to turn us aside from these good works we have begun? It will be the pleasure-seeking, yes, the pleasure-seeking, who ask nothing but amusement, and as long as they have something for dinner worry about nothing else. And who else? It will be... Better not to say it... It will be those pampered people, those people who have such a limited outlook, who fix their sights and their plans on a near horizon and shut themselves up in it as if they were on a pin's head; they don't want to leave that spot; and if you show them something further afield and they do go out to have a look at it, they hurry quickly back to their centre like a snail into its shell.

That, in a way, may be how my hope of being evangelised may have been answered. I think I can see more clearly then before that more than new methods are required to evangelise the new poor. Painful as it will be, I will have to leave the security of my shell if I am to be Vincentian and answer my vocation: *evangelizare pauperibus misit me.*

Padraig Regan

EVANGELIZARE PAUPERIBUS

Several times on the floor of the General Assembly in 1980 Fr Hugh O'Donnell, Visitor of the Western Province of the USA called for some attention to be given to the term *evangelizare* in our motto, rather than spend all our energies on the meaning of *pauperibus*. While I was in Paris in the summer of 1982 the thought struck me that perhaps I should consider offering some biblical reflections on the matter, and I even bought a book to sharpen my focus. But the day I arrived back in England, September 8, fifteen gypsy families to whom I had ministered every fortnight for nearly five years were evicted from an official, but temporary site in the London Borough of Haling. I consider that the nature of my ministry to them before and after eviction may cast some little light on the varying forms of evangelisation.

Before Eviction

It was while I was discussing a document which I had helped to compose on suggestions for a reorientation of our apostolates towards the service of the poor that the thought struck me that reorientation must begin with myself. Since Stan Brindley whispered several suggestions into my ear I cannot claim that the thought came from God, directly at least. Stan suggested that I might like to come with him to two gypsy sites in the London area, and if it were agreeable to both sides that I should take over his responsibilities. And so for nearly five years I have gone, together with a number of different Sisters, to each site once a fortnight. I stayed over two hours on the site, and during that time I was careful to visit every caravan, and invite the people to Mass in one of the caravans. The car served as a confessional, and each Sunday we celebrated Mass in a very simple but deeply impressive way in each of the caravans in turn. Occasionally I would find someone who could read the reading, and such a young person was acclaimed "a great scholar" by the group. The spontaneous prayers were very moving — the gypsies spoke their preoccupations to God as if he were by their side in the pub lounge. Shared homilies were the norm. Occasionally I had to hold back my own reflections when one of the gathering, usually a mother, presumed to issue the authentic exegesis of the readings, and to give us a complete profile of the good Catholic in our day and to condemn the state of the world. One of the many high points for me was the occasion when old Paddy gasped "Isn't that wonderful!" after the first reading one Sunday — I had never heard a more authentic response to a reading.

After Mass I called on those who had asked me to see them before

I left. On the way home in the car I always had a sense of having done something worthwhile with those hours, but I also knew that my ministry was a very restricted one.

Eviction

But on September 13 I got a phone-call from one of the gypsies appealing to me to come to a meeting in Haling Town Hall at 5.30. When I got to the meeting my eyes were opened. It was a classic Goliath-David affair, and there was no chance that David was going to win this one. The Council Officials looked in total control, and incapable of being ruffled. They had got their way so far, and all that remained to be done was for those gypsies to get into their trucks and caravans and drive to, well, to anywhere outside Baling Borough. The gypsies, however, were not disposed to oblige. They had been around that area for too long. They had established links with the local shops, schools, pubs and neighbours, and they were not going to allow those gains to slip away. The options for them were to stay and fight what looked like a lost cause, or go back on the road and try to find a space where they could park their vans, and from which they could work. The accommodation of gypsies on this island presents the same kind of difficulties as it does in Ireland and several other countries. The difficulties here are compounded in that while the gypsy groups wish to maintain their independent way of life away from the settled community economic opportunities are more available to them in the urban areas. There are about eight or nine thousand gypsy families in England and Wales, and there is accommodation for only about half of them on permanent sites. The other half has to settle on unofficial sites of their own choosing, and they are constantly harassed and evicted; recently one family I know was "moved on" twice on a Thursday, and once again on the following day. In 1968 parliament passed an act obliging every local council and London borough to provide a permanent site for 15 caravans of gypsies. Haling has done no more than provide a temporary one on a year to year basis, and last year they withheld planning permission to allow the site to continue as a gypsy encampment. Haling had applied to *be* exempted from the requirement to provide a site, but had been refused already. But they were trying again, and of course if you have no gypsies in the borough at the time of application the obligation to provide a site looks superfluous.

The September 13 meeting of the gypsies and the councillors responsible for the gypsy question showed me the nature of the conflict, because it was precisely a conflict, particularly a conflict of values. The

basic value judgement of the councillors was that gypsies did not warrant any attention. The site they had been living on for years was to be converted into a more scenic landscape, and was to cease being a visual obstruction. They were being accommodated as “homeless people” at that moment in accordance with the council’s obligation to provide for them. The councillors spoke with predictable calm and clinical propriety, and preferred their perfunctory sorrow and sympathy to the representatives of the families. The representatives were deeply aggrieved, but could do little more than register their protest. Members of the national gypsy council, whose help up to that point had not been overwhelming, used threatening language that they would ensure that within a short time the borough of Baling would have more gypsy caravans on their territory than there are leaves on a tree. A well-intentioned exile from the southern states of the USA predicted apocalyptic disaster for the councillors in the genre of the OT prophets. I called for attention to be given to the people concerned, rather than to sites. The councillors looked well satisfied with themselves, folded their papers and retired to the comfort of their suburban homes. The gypsies, on the other hand, had no papers to fold, but brought me to their residences. The conditions were appalling. One building housed eleven adults and eleven children, with two families living in each room, and all using one toilet, and without any cooking facilities. The second accommodation was so repulsive that one of the gypsies chose to sleep in his van and would not allow even his dog to enter the house. We caused the council embarrassment on a local and even national scale when we published the findings of an independent Public Health Inspector who declared that the conditions in one of the houses were a gross infringement of the law, and that in the other the presence of exposed asbestos was such as to be a severe risk to any occupant’s health. I typed up the report on a stencil, had it duplicated at 1.30 one day, had it collected at 2.00 and saw my own typescript on the national TV that evening at 6.00. At that stage we had interested the local and national press, radio and television. Their level of interest varied. I became convinced that the media people were interested primarily in conflict which would entertain their viewers, listeners and readers. Radio London, LBC, Radio 4, BBC Nationwide, Independent Television all kept the matter before the public. The local paper, the nationals, *The Guardian*, *The Universe*, *The Irish Post* carried several items on the question, and all of this helped to focus attention on the plight of the families. It was all, in the words of the spokesman from the Department of the Environment, “bad publicity for Haling Borough”. In addition we opened the “Baling Gypsy Eviction Fund” which brought

in little money, but was a valuable psychological weapon. The gypsy families protested outside the Town Hall and tried to interest passers-by in their plight. An extensive petition-signing campaign was launched. In addition we made available to people the phone numbers of the 70 councillors, and invited people to phone them and protest.

Without either planning or even intending it my role as priest to the families was changing. I said Mass in the overcrowded house a number of times. The families went to the local parish on some Sundays, and came out here to Strawberry Hill for Mass several times. In fact we all gathered here one Sunday afternoon together with the two solicitors who were interesting themselves in our case. Perhaps the Waldegrave Drawing Room had not had such an assorted gathering before. We planned our campaign there, went to the College Mass, and then to the bar to enjoy each other's company. It was the first time for students to meet gypsies, and they were surprised to find them so normal, indeed such very nice people.

During this period the most important aid to the gypsies was John Hall of the Ealing Housing Action Service whose dedication to the poor, and particularly the homeless, impressed me very much. He knew the workings of the council and had already established himself as a spokesman for the oppressed in the area. The hours he spent on the matter and his attention to the families never ceased to amaze me. I am quite sure that St Vincent would recognise in him a fellow-traveller. He made it clear to us that the people with whom we were in conflict would not be convinced by humanitarian principles, but would budge only if they were obliged to by law, and, what was more unlikely, public outrage.

But what about the priest as minister of reconciliation? Is dialogue, rather than conflict, not the option for a Christian? I would have hoped so initially, but soon it became clear to me that dialogue operates only where there is mutuality of respect and consideration, but where one side is the oppressor and the other the oppressed interpersonal niceties are of no avail. My first attempt at dialogue turned out to be a literary soliloquy. I wrote an open letter to each of the 70 councillors, expressing my concern for the families and deploring the way they had been treated, and stated that I was not any more impressed by a policy of expulsion from a borough than by Hitler's solution to the problem of gypsies. A Jewish Conservative councillor phoned me and expressed her concern. Another Conservative councillor phoned and told me how he had spent time with some gypsies in concentration camps during the war. A few Labour councillors phoned and expressed their support. I wrote a second letter the following week. In it I made a case for a person-based

treatment of the problem, and made the point that I considered a society to be great to the degree to which it accommodates itself to, and makes sacrifices for the economically poorer and socially weaker members of that society, and that a society that does not exercise such concern, but rather compounds the sufferings of the oppressed, is unworthy of esteem. In addition I phoned the Conservative leader of the council and several other councillors. The level of ethnocentricity and racial prejudice astounded me. Words like "dirt" and "filth" occurred like choruses, and one senior councillor almost spat out his judgement that "They're not gypsies. Gypsies are nice people. They're Oirish tinkers"!

And so what could not happen through goodwill and concern for the poor had to be referred to law. Our two Oxford graduate solicitors impressed me by their concern for the families. Whether they ever got paid for it or not was not of any concern to them.

The situation at the time of writing (May 1983) is that the families are spread over a wide area, each living in a house. In general they find the houses unacceptable. Their normal opportunities for comradeship are much reduced. The spokesman told me yesterday that if a gypsy feels lonely or out of sorts while on a site he would go to the outdoor fire and join the lads there, or he would simply light a fire and gradually the others would gather around. Lighting fires outside Victorian houses on the side of one of the busiest roadways in the London area is not a real option for them! The legal situation is that Baling is obliged to provide a site, and two are under consideration, the first choice of the council being altogether unsuitable to the families because of the dangers of gas pollution. In the first week of July a public enquiry will be held for planning permission for the site from which they were evicted on September 8. If that succeeds it will be a great triumph. If it fails it will not be a disaster. At best the site will be ready about April 1984, and by that time we hope that the families will have received some compensation for the damage done to their property and for loss of earnings. The families have suffered considerably since they have moved into the houses. The schooling has stopped, and the men have lost the opportunity of finding regular work. The bond between the families has been considerably weakened, and there are times when they wonder if they have done right to stand and fight rather than submit to being swept off the road like garbage. They have fought a good fight, at great cost to themselves, and at little cost to anyone else. Such is the plight of the poor.

Michael Prior

THEOLOGY—THE ENGLISH EXPERIENCE

Heythrop College, formerly situated in the rural isolation of Oxfordshire, is now a college of London University offering degree courses in theology and philosophy; James Murphy and I have just finished our three years there.

Heythrop is not a seminary and the students there are preparing for a number of different careers. A theological degree is a valuable degree in the English school system because religion is an examination subject. This means that the degree course has a very broad base and there are students coming from many different backgrounds both lay and religious. Our year was a very cosmopolitan group including a Chinese person and a former resident of the Falkland Islands.

The course itself is quite varied. Each student must take nine subjects, six of which are compulsory. The emphasis in the compulsory section is on scripture with courses in philosophy, dogmatic theology and church history. The options allow for specialisation in select areas such as liturgy or biblical studies. As our course was in preparation for priesthood we were recommended to choose ecclesiology, Christian anthropology and Christian ethics. These names will be unfamiliar to Catholics and reflect the influence of the university and the Anglican tradition on the formation of the course.

Of the nine subjects I found ecclesiology and Christian anthropology the most interesting. Ecclesiology opened my eyes to the richness and complexity of the church while Christian anthropology showed me how man has always struggled to describe his relationship with God in a way which does justice to both God and man. I enjoyed exploring these issues and I am looking forward to applying them to the circumstances of everyday life.

Another aspect of three years formation in England was the opportunity of getting first-hand experience of the other half of our province and the very different circumstances which operate in Britain. It was only by living there, studying with English people and, to a limited extent, involving myself in the "local church" that I was able to see what it is like to work in a society whose concerns are quite different from those of Irish people. Of many pastoral experiences two stand out, that of Brixton Prison and Cricklewood Catechumenate.

Brixton Prison is rather like British society in miniature and the problems faced by the Roman Catholic Chaplain are broadly similar to those of any priest in Britain: how to minister effectively to a com-

munity which is culturally diverse; how to liaise with an established church without loss of identity or becoming isolated. I liked working there, meeting the men and sharing their lives, even if only for a while. It was a good experience to be in a prison, learning how it affects a man and seeing at first hand the strains of working within a structure which recognises the Catholic church only by an extension of the privileges extended to the Anglican church.

The other useful pastoral experience is not one that could have occurred in Ireland, that of the catechumenate. For a good part of last year James and I worked with a group of people who were preparing for baptism. The experience of trying to present what one was learning in college to people who had very little knowledge of Catholicism was very revealing. I found it very difficult to transform the concepts of the classroom into a living message for those eager listeners. I was often humbled by the faith and insights of the catechumens themselves and the lay people who were helping them to the faith.

My experience in England was, all in all, a happy one. The early "loneliness of exile" was more than compensated for by a welcoming community in Mill Hill. To them, and to a host of people who helped to make me feel at home in a strange land, my sincere thanks.

Joseph Loftus

APOSTLES ABROAD...

In the capacity of a B.A. candidate, or any other degree or diploma aspirant for that matter, the students in Celbridge were involved in full-time university activities. These were, in the main, academic activities but, as our diverse natures would have it, some enterprising students also involved themselves in extra-mural engagements in the college. This, of course, added to the full-time commitment to Maynooth. However, the perennial problem of deviation from primary duties called for the exercise of caution in the area of university activities. For some this was not a problem, but the students' responsibilities in Maynooth and their commitment to the community in Celbridge were known, more than once, to clash. It is not the issue in this short article to discuss the various and understandable tensions which arose out of such a delicate

position. On the other hand this does present us with some insight into the place of the student with regard to his pastoral commitment. The time factor alone often created difficulties. There was, moreover, embedded in the student's mind an attitude towards his pastoral work which could not help but be fashioned by his other major areas of formation. Such a position emphasises what I feel to be the experimental nature of his pastoral work. As a result we were not "full-time" pastoral workers. Each was confined to minor roles but not necessarily insignificant ones.

It is hoped, at this point, that reference to the works of the B. A. students of the third and final year will be sufficiently representative of the works of the student body as a whole. The works undertaken by Jay Shanahan, Eamon Devlin, Jerome O'Drisceoil and Eugene Curran were as follows:

- Jay — Youth project, Celbridge.
- Eamon — Traveller visitation, Clondalkin.
- Jerome — Youth centre, Ballyfermot.
- Eugene — Old people's home, Ballyfermot.

Youth project: Jay attended numerous, and for the most part heated, committee meetings during the course of the year with other members of Celbridge parish. They discussed the role, administration and even the very viability of the youth club there. The club seemed to centre its activities around the disco hall which was seen to provide the platform for class integration between the separate social groups in the teenage community. It was also an occasion for Jay to relate in a personal and pastoral way with the youth of this rapidly expanding parish very much on their terms.

No doubt Jay experienced the tension between supervision and participation. He recounts, in fact, that much success was had during the year as the club not only became settled and confident in its own right but also came to be established more harmoniously in the parish.

Traveller visitation: This pioneering included, as well as calling regularly on allotted families, accompanying their children on the school bus and, eventually, preparing travelling children for Communion if not Confirmation. Indeed, as Eamon will willingly tell you, the disgruntled and often hungry dogs alone were a force to be reckoned with! But having completed the year in one piece, Eamon, and Peter Byrne

who also worked with the travellers, acquired an understanding of and compassion for travellers that only a cold winter's work with them could afford.

Youth centre: Candle is a youth centre set up in the heart of Ballyfermot, beside the church, "to release the vast potential for good in these young people... who have been in most cases at serious risk to themselves and a destructive force in the community." My role here, along with Paschal Scallon, was one of leadership. On a time-table of one night a week we participated in the ordinary running of the centre. This included anything from washing the cups for them to joining in the games with them. Incorporated into the facilities and schedule of the outfit is a workshop where the boys can put into practice their artistic and other manual skills. Some of these creative activities helped marginally to finance the place.

My own experience conflicted with that rumoured and reported. The lads there were friendly and welcoming on the whole. The problem which I isolated in many cases was simply a difficulty with communication. This meant an alienation for them from those not on their wave-length. It often led to a hostility born out of a sense of inferiority. If it was a stumbling block for them it was also one for me.

Old people's home: Eugene Curran faithfully frequented this homely establishment every Friday. During his work at the home he hearkened attentively to story upon story of reminiscences about the good or bad old days. That is not to say that these people's lives were not without their moments in the present. Indeed, it was often Eugene's delicate duty to alert the individual's attention to the actuality of the present, with its many needs. Perhaps Eugene was even helping himself to face the many-faceted reality of his own life as part of the edification he reports having received from these wise old men and women from Dublin. This two-way process of giving and receiving, teaching and learning, assisted, I am sure, in passing away the hours pleasantly and speedily.

By way of generalisation at this point I will briefly draw some comparisons that seem relevant to me before I embark finally on a more personal analysis of the import of the work. The works in which we were involved can be split into two separate categories with often different if not opposing attributes. I have divided them as follows:

(A) Youth project and traveller visitation.

(B) Youth centre and old people's home.

Very simply, I see these separate groups as embracing the following characteristics: (A) the worker's function is one of improvisation in an environment that is insecure, placing demands on the individual that are personal and valuable, as opposed to (B) where the role is one of consolidation in a secure and institutional setting, drawing on, initially surface, perhaps purely conversational, qualities.

This comparison is perhaps a rather simplistic one and hardly immediately enlightening for the students, particularly in view of the many hours of discussion already spent in the course of the year with our pastoral director Sr Antonina Curran, O.P. However, if the criteria outlined above are used as guidelines to facilitate a deeper and more personal appreciation of one's work they might begin to appear relevant in some small way to the students also. The three main criteria of examination are: (i) function (role of worker): (ii) nature of environment; (iii) demands on worker.

Already I can hear my better senses prodding me to "give examples" and be specific. An illustration of the above model in my own case should help to clarify it somewhat as well as testify to my work and God's in a more personal manner.

In the first instance my own feeling about my role or function in *Candle* was more about what it was the absence of than of what it was the fulfilment. Admittedly, it is a rather negative way to look at it. Nevertheless, the responsibility held in the role of night leader was minimal. This gave me the distinct feeling that, before I started, my field of work was limited and my horizons somewhat curtailed. Neither was there the space within the limited number of months available to develop and formulate in a definite way my personal contribution. My scope was restricted to a degree that it might not have been if operating in a *milieu* of less structures and more freedom. As I have already indicated the environment of *Candle* was a heavily structured one. Because of what the centre offered to its visitors one had a situation where the objectives of leaders like myself were already set. An institution like *Candle* has to define its own boundaries of operation if it is to be clear-sighted in its goals. Where I am in disagreement with this system though is where it fails to penetrate surface behaviour and does not alert itself to the individual person. Indeed, it is often the case that the relatively secure institution glosses over insecurities in an artificial environment.

Finally, may I say that the experience of such work for me was like an

injection of stark, unadorned reality into the more idealistic and sometimes removed lifestyle of De Paul House. Given my minor role in the well-ordered *Candle* community it was not so much a question of what it gave to me as of what I gained from it. It made demands on my spirituality. Some very pertinent questions were raised in my own mind. The foundation for many of my moral values was seen for what it really was — prejudiced. It dawned on me that my own socially selective practices were by no means the only valid ones. Hence the development of an openness to the valuable customs of a different social group as well as a resultant appreciation of its basic goodness. This aspect in a strange way highlighted and confirmed the pastoral nature of our work. We were not social action workers but out to imbue in those with whom we worked a sense of their own worth, based on the Christian ethic, despite their obvious weaknesses.

Jerome O'Drisceoil

SEMINAIRE '82 IN OGOBIA

There was great laughter and questioning on the lips of everyone as each of the six of us arrived at St Justin's on 23 September 1982. Some of us had left home at dawn and were exhausted. It was good to be welcomed by the seven seminarists of the previous year and by the four priests.

And then, after a few days, we were all one family celebrating the Feast of St Vincent while last year's seven made their promises with much rejoicing.

By now we had inspected our fine new compound. The central building is the chapel. To the left stands an L-shaped series of ten rooms with the priests' common room at the apex, though, of course, they prefer to sit outside for their nightly relaxation. To the right of the chapel is the main building in the shape of a H, where we sleep and eat and study. Behind that are the kitchen and the cook's house. Further back are two large henhouses, and then the rest of our large compound is just bush. Well, not quite, because we have a hundred young orange trees and the two front fields on either side of the quarter-mile avenue. It is on this avenue that we say our rosary after chop each evening, carrying

torches and ready to slay the occasional snake which interrupts us.

Soon we were into our three-day retreat. The Feast of All Saints saw us clothed with soutane and cincture and clasping a copy of the Common Rules. Since we were now well able to take over the various jobs we had been allocated and to become responsible for running the house we told last year's lot they could shift themselves off to Ikot Ekpene, which they did before long.

In November there was never a dull moment. At the middle of the month came Nigeria's first ever National Eucharistic Congress up in the North. The end of the month brought the official opening of the new Vincentian Community House near Ikot Ekpene. Each event calls for elaboration.

The week-end Congress at Jos required a lot of preparation, spiritual and material. As we reflected on the theme "The Eucharist as a Source of Peace, Unity and Love" we were also listing the equipment and provisions we'd have to bring with us to the cold far North. Warm clothing and jerrycans of water would be essential. We'd also strip our Hiace of one seat in order to make room for our own butagaz and cooker.

The city of Jos is at the centre of a vast plateau which is almost entirely without vegetation. Instead it is decorated with ridges of very curiously shaped rocks which give a sort of prehistoric air to the whole scene. It took us a whole day to drive there and we felt a million miles away from Ogbia. A bitterly cold wind swept across the bleak plateau during the all-night vigil. Yet it was astonishing how ready the people were to endure this unaccustomed "air-conditioning". This was the joking phrase used by the priest who was very professionally directing proceedings from the microphone. Joyful singing together with great patience and consideration for others made us feel that the Lord was in the midst of his people. The preaching was good, the atmosphere was very prayerful. For many the most memorable moment was when the whole crowd knelt before the monstrance in total silence for five minutes. And this on hard stony ground at about 4 a.m. What an excellent proof of eucharistic piety in the Nigerian church!

Abiakpo Ntak Inyang is the name of the locality, at five minutes driving distance from Ikot Ekpene, where the very fine Vincentian Community House was opened on 28 November 1982. While living here under the patronage of Blessed Ghebre-Michael the students have only a five minute walk to the Bigard Philosophy Campus. But it took us about eight hours to drive down there from Ogbia on Saturday 27.

The Sunday was a joyful occasion indeed with two bishops and many

priests and laity from far and near. Bishop Obot's sermon was praised by all for its knowledge of St Vincent and his spirit. After Mass until 6 p.m. the occasion was filled with the traditional chiefs, Nzes and Egwes and also the colourful dances of the local people and by the visitors from our parish at Oraifite.

Back in St Justin's the nearest we get to dancing are our frenzied bouts of table-tennis. This is by far the most popular game. The teacher has hardly gone out the door when bobbing and jumping players have occupied the table at the back of the classroom. Even the hottest weather doesn't deter us. Outdoors we sometimes play football or badminton. On Sundays we move down the road to the Catechetical Centre for our evening chop and recreation. Here boules, Scrabble and our native games of cards and draughts bring us recreation and excitement. Often we have films instead, e.g. Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth*, *Death on the Nile*, the thirteen parts of Bronowski's *Ascent of Man*, not to speak of *Mr Sneeze* and *The Wombles* and of course Fr Vinnie O'Brien's film which challenges the theory of evolution.

Tuesdays see us heading to our various stations to do our evening's apostolic work. Our three bicycles are useful for this. Last year's seminarists had initiated us into this catechumenate work. It enables us to begin preaching the good news to the poor and challenges us to read and reflect and discuss so that we can be better equipped to prepare our young and old for first and second anointing and for baptism. More demanding and more varied apostolic work awaits us during six weeks in July and August. This will be at the Marist Brothers' Rehabilitation Centre in Uturu.

Not that we had to leave St Justin's to find challenges. Problems of all sorts keep turning up. Our water tank let us down badly. Filled to the brim one night after a fantastic downpour it was empty four days later. The water had seeped away in spite of last year's new plastering. This made us beggars in search of water, like so many others in the locality. The situation wasn't really solved until we got the tank properly re-plastered and the rains came in early May. The generator broke down several times, which meant that we had to become skilled at lighting Tilley lamps and at pulling water out of our tank in buckets because the electric pump was out of action. A very peculiar problem came out at the height of the drought, a sort of water war between our hens and some bees from the neighbourhood. The only place where bees could find exposed water was in our compound, particularly in the hens' drinking dishes. So they infested these, scared off the hens, and brought down egg production

seriously. In spite of this they seem to have been religious bees, competing with us for use of the chapel. Hardly would the generator have sent a blaze of electricity through our buildings when the bees would hasten to the chapel, seeking the light. They were in possession when we arrived for prayer. After a few of us had been stung we were obliged to transfer our praying to another place.

Stan Brindley (*Edited from material supplied by
Paul Odjugo, Peter Agina, Michael Njoku,
Emmanuel Akpan and Louis Anyanwu*)

OBITUARY

Father Thomas Finnegan, C.M.

Born in the closing years of the last century Father Tom entered Maynooth after his early studies in St Macartan's Seminary in Monaghan. Ordained in 1924 for the diocese of Clogher he laboured there for some nine years. In 1933 he applied for permission to enter the Congregation of the Mission and was duly received.

His first appointment was to St Vincent's, Sheffield. It was from there he began his missionary labours. Giving missions was the work which occupied him for the next thirty years until poor health compelled him to give up that particular activity in the Lord's vineyard. Appointed to the parish staff of St Mary's, Lanark, he found further scope for his talents and energy. Given charge of the district of Douglas he worked untiringly for the spiritual welfare of the Catholics in that outlying district. He was particularly active in renovating a newly purchased hall to make it a worthy place for the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Even the surroundings were not neglected, for he planted trees and shrubs to beautify what had hitherto looked rather drab.

Eventually, with health deteriorating, he returned to Ireland where after a prolonged infirmity he was called to his reward.

To the work of giving missions in town and country Father Tom brought that nervous energy so typical of him. He laboured throughout Ireland, England and Scotland and everywhere his zeal was outstanding. He never spared himself, whether it was in the pulpit, the confessional or in visitation of the parish. If a bit "uptight" at times his naturally friendly nature would invariably come out on top and all was well. We will miss Father Tom. May he rest in peace.

John Carroll CM

To the above "Anonymous" adds some personal reminiscences:

My first meeting with Tom Finnegan was in Blackrock Sacristy during a mission given jointly by himself and Fr Tim Manning. Two of us had gone to hear them and were "hijacked" by one of the curates who introduced us to the "Holy Fathers" and subsequently placed us on each side of himself on the sedilia, the cynosure of all eyes during the sermon. Tom launched into his rousing best on the subject of Hell,

and I pondered often since on how his concentration before the event must have been tested by an introduction to two fledgling confrères whom he might never meet again. I suppose you could say that the word to describe Tom's approach to this work (and to life in general) was "dispatch". The task of the moment demanded complete attention.

Our paths did not cross again — that was 1941 — until June 1968 when I found myself on a Community Retreat with him, a retreat made memorable by an audible snoring session by some *innominatus*. Two years later we were together in Lanark, where with great doing and inconspicuous success I tried to launch the Pioneer Association. This gained his unqualified and most generous approval, staunch Pioneer that he was, and nothing subsequently was too much for him in his efforts to make some sort of a pastoral, preaching confrère of me. Did I say "nothing"? Well, let us qualify that as at least one disastrous act of unpunctuality threatened to rock the boat.

I well remember the great joy with which he would be first with the news. His capacity for giving you every detail of a match he had seen — and many that he had not — the recital punctuated by numerous re-lighting of cigarettes and the dispatching of same to all corners of the Community Room with a gesture normally reserved for incensations, his pride in recalling his own prowess as a goalkeeper in the Maynooth days, his evident gratitude for any little favour — even the most casual benefactor was a "prince" — most of all, however, one recalls his pleasure at being able to do a good turn for another. After many unsuccessful attempts to teach yours truly the proper use of the microphone he would say "That was better; I'm delighted to be able to help".

He derived immense satisfaction from recalling from the error of their ways those who wandered from the canons of rectitude that he would have set himself— and them: "So and so preached badly (or preached too long, or missed out a vital instruction) and I told him so". And the question on every lip would be the same: "What did he say, Tom?", and unerringly the triumphant, and demolishing, reply: "What *could* he say?"

Above all he was a powerful missionary and a zealous advocate of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. I bhfochair na bPrionsai Neamhdha go raibh se.

THOMAS FINNEGAN, C.M.

Born: Kennellyduff, Carrickmacross, Co. Monaghan, 18 May 1899.
Ordained a priest for the diocese of Clogher in Maynooth by Dr Byrne,
Archbishop of Dublin, 22 June 1924.

APPOINTMENTS

1925-1927 Tempo, Co. Fermanagh.

1927-1930 Clogher, Co. Tyrone.

1930-1932 Killevan, Co. Monaghan.

1932-1933 Kilserry, Co. Tyrone.

Entered the Congregation 15 September 1933

Final Vows 15 September 1935

1934-1935 St Vincent's, Sheffield.

1935-1936 St Mary's, Lanark.

1936-1943 St Vincent's, Cork.

1943-1952 St Peter's, Phibsboro.

1952-1961 St Vincent's, Sheffield.

1961-1983 St Mary's, Lanark.

Died 2 March 1983.