

# COLLOQUE

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## Editorial

This issue is going to the printer just after 25 January, traditionally regarded as the “birthday” of the Congregation. The first article investigates the sequence of steps from the Folleville sermon on 25 January 1617 to the foundation and development of the Congregation. This article makes use of material which has appeared in Spanish and Italian in recent decades.

The second article looks at some aspects of day to day life in St Lazare during the founder’s lifetime, drawing on what he himself is reported to have said.

The third article gives impressions of a visit to the old St Lazare shortly before its demolition in the 1930s. It is interesting, for those who knew the author in later years, to read of his reactions to this visit and to see his style of recording them.

The fourth article answers the question “What’s going on in All Hallows these days?”

Fr James Dyar’s death occurred too late for an obituary to be written for inclusion in this issue.

# The Origins of the Congregation of the Mission: Memory, Myth and Reality.

Stafford Poole

Myth making is as old as the human species, yet the term myth eludes precise definition. It has as many meanings as people wish to give it. Oden has listed a number of characteristics of myth as found among primitive peoples: 1. It is a story; 2. It is traditional; 3. Its character(s) are more than merely human; 4. It treats of events in remote antiquity (1). In this description myth is an attempt to explain puzzling phenomena or to give meaning to things and events that are little understood. It can then be seen as a primitive form of science in that it seeks explanations and meanings.

In all ages human beings have created stories, stereotypes, and ceremonies that have sought to explain their history, their origins, or their concept of reality. Myth, then, is an outgrowth of memory, both individual and collective. As individuals grow older, they often seek to find a pattern in their lives, sometimes by superimposing an order or meaning that never existed. At other times they discover the significance of events and decisions whose meaning eluded them in day to day living. Human communities do the same. They reflect on their history, analyze it, and seek to draw meaning from it. These meanings are sometimes wish fulfillment imposed on a recalcitrant reality. As is evident from the reflective processes so pronounced in Sacred Scripture, however, what can be found is a meaning, an order, and a process in events that were not apparent at the time the events occurred. In the Old Testament, this process revealed God at work in the history of his people. For many peoples myth has provided comfort, coherence, or even a dangerous self-glorification.

The formation of myth requires the simplification of complex realities, the telescoping of events and times, the creation of heroes and villains, the intervention of providence or divinities. Historical events

in themselves are complex and confusing, an amalgam of motives and causes. On a more positive level, however, this process can rescue basic truths from the tangle of historical circumstances and allow their essential meaning to emerge. What is obscure in the struggle of daily living and doing can be seen in hindsight with greater clarity.

In historical times the myth making process is easily seen in national histories, autobiographies, and memoirs, especially those of political figures. In the lives of saints and founders of religious communities the process is often initiated by the individual and enhanced by his community and biographers. Thus it is that myth, viewed as the collective expression of essential truths told in simplified or symbolic form after a period of reflection, can play a pivotal role in the history of religious life. If, however, the myth strays too far from the truth it seeks to explain, it can also be misguided or manipulative.

Has such a process affected the Vincentian Community's view of itself and its founding? Are the commonly accepted accounts of its origins, beginning with Vincent de Paul himself, attempts to simplify or find meaning in a complex reality? Or are they a dangerous romanticizing that gives a simplistic and perhaps distorted view of the Congregation's origins? This study will attempt to find some answers(2). It will begin by examining the various accounts of the origins of the Congregation as given by Vincent de Paul and Antoine Portail, especially about the sermon given at Folleville, 25 January 1617. These will be compared with the events from that date until the contract of organization between Vincent and the Gondis, 17 April 1625, and the process followed by Vincent in seeking diocesan, royal, and papal approval. In the conclusion an attempt will be made to evaluate, and disentangle, the mythical and historical aspects of the community's origins.

### *The sermon at Folleville*

On three different occasions Vincent de Paul described the origins of the Congregation of the Mission. Two of his accounts were quite similar, whereas the third was notably different. The best known was given in an undated conference to the Priests of the Mission quoted by Louis Abelly, the saint's first biographer. Abelly described how Vincent heard the confession of a peasant in the village of Cannes, a man with a reputation for goodness. The village was on the lands of Philippe-Emmanuel de Gondi (?-1662), count of Joigny, marquess of Iles-d'or, baron of Montmirail, Dampierre, and Villepreux, and his wife, Françoise-Marguerite de Sully (1580-1625), for whose children Vincent was tutor. The peasant later

told Madame de Gondi that out of shame he had for years concealed sins in the confessional and that he would have been damned had it not been for Monsieur Vincent. Abelly then added Vincent's description of what followed:

On the feast of the conversion of St Paul, which is the 25th [of January], this lady asked me to preach a sermon in the church of Folleville and to exhort the inhabitants to make a general confession. I pointed out to them its importance and usefulness and then I instructed them how to make a good one. And God had such regard for this lady... that he gave his blessing to my discourse; and all these good folk were so touched by God that they all came and made their general confessions. I continued to instruct them to prepare for the sacraments and began to hear their confessions, but the crowd was so great that even with the help of another priest we could no longer suffice, and so Madame sent to the Reverend Jesuit Fathers in Amiens to come to our assistance... We then went on to the other villages belonging to Madame in those places and did the same as in the first. And that was the first sermon of the Mission (3).

In a conference to the missionaries on the observance of the rules, 17 May 1658, Vincent gave another, somewhat abbreviated, version of his first account.

One day I was called to go to hear the confession of a poor man who was dangerously ill. He had the reputation of being the best person or at least one of the best in his village. Nevertheless he was burdened with sins that he had never dared to mention in confession. So he himself afterward declared clearly in the presence of the late Madame [de Gondi], telling her: "Madame, I would have been damned if I had not made a general confession because of the great sins I did not dare confess". This man died soon after and Madame, seeing in this way the need for general confessions, wanted me to preach on that subject the next day. I did so and God so blessed it that all the inhabitants of the place immediately made general confessions. So great was the crowd that we had to have two Jesuit fathers come to help me hear confessions, preach, and catechize. This is why we continued the same practice in the other parishes on Madame's estates for several years (XII 7-8).

The two accounts are in basic agreement, although the last sentence abridged events somewhat, since the sermon at Folleville was not immediately followed by any extended missionary activity.

Another account, and the first one chronologically, was given, not by Vincent, but by Antoine Portail, his first companion. On 9 March 1642 he replaced Vincent at the weekly conference to the Daughters of Charity. The subject was the service of the sick and one of the sisters said that she considered it necessary to prepare the sick to make a general confession.

Monsieur Portail added that in fact this was very important and that God blessed this practice, since he used it to bring Madame la générale [Madame de Gondi] to found the priests of the Mission. It happened as follows.

During one of her visits to a man aged eighty-four years, the said lady advised him to make a general confession. After this confession, heard by Monsieur Vincent, the old man, again being visited by Madame la générale, said to her several times: “Madame, I would have been damned without this confession; yes, Madame, I would have been damned; I have sins that I had not dared to confess and I never would have confessed them without this confession”. From that moment on the said lady made the resolution to found the Mission (IX 58-59).

In Portail’s account, the emphasis is on the actions of Madame de Gondi. It was she who encouraged the first general confession. The peasant appears but there is no mention of the sermon at Folleville. In this account the peasant’s declaration led immediately to Madame de Gondi’s decision to found the Mission, without any of the intervening events mentioned by Vincent. Madame de Gondi was acknowledged as the founder of the Community.

Despite variations of detail, these accounts have become the accepted story of the origins of the Congregation of the Mission. They stand in stark contrast to a fourth one, the earliest datable description from Vincent’s own lips, given at a repetition of prayer, 25 January 1655. He began by recounting how, on an occasion when Madame de Gondi, then a young woman, went to confession, she noticed that the confessor did not know the words of absolution. “He muttered something between his teeth and did the same the other times she went to confession” (XI170). So she asked a religious of her acquaintance to write down the formula of absolution, which she carried with her whenever she confessed to

that particular priest, “because he did not know the words that should be pronounced, so ignorant was he” (XI170). In later years she told Vincent about the incident. “I was on my guard”, he told the priests, “and paid special attention to those to whom I went to confession and found that in fact it was true that some of them did not know the words of absolution” (XI 170). This, in turn, led to the first sermon of the mission.

Now, this good lady, who was still only a girl when that happened to her, remembered it later and considering the peril that all those poor souls were in and in order to remedy that evil, thought about having someone preach to them about the manner of making a good general confession and the need that there was for making one at least once in a lifetime. That is what happened, as I have just said. The result was that since we could not hear all the people who came from all around, it was necessary to send a request to the father rector of the Jesuits at Amiens to send help. He came himself, but only until the following day, because he had other things to do, and he sent some of his fathers to help us. After that, seeing what had happened, thought was given to some way of having someone go from time to time to the lands of the said lady to give missions there. I was sent to speak with the Jesuit fathers to ask them to accept this foundation... But they answered that they could not accept this foundation and that it was not in accord with their institute. As a result, since this was the case and there was no one who wanted to take on those missions, the decision was made to form an association of good priests (XI 170-1).

This account minimizes Vincent’s own role. The elderly peasant is not mentioned, and the chronology of the years 1617-1625, especially regarding the attempts to enlist the Jesuits for the missions, is abbreviated. A different motivation is given for the sermon on general confession, that is, Madame de Gondi’s youthful encounter with an ignorant confessor that still affected her thinking years later. Vincent himself then had a similar experience and a similar concern. In general this account is more simplified than the first two versions. Two points are especially significant: 1. the different motivation for the sermon; 2. the long standing concern of both Vincent and Madame de Gondi for valid and proper confessions even before the events of 1617 (4).

While there are notable differences between this account and the first three, there are also similarities. It was Madame de Gondi who was responsible for the preaching of the sermon, which arose from a pastoral

concern, that is, the need for general confession. The initial response to the need made clear the extent of spiritual destitution in the rural areas and the good that could be done in meeting it. It also became clear that there was no organized way of responding to this need and that a new one would have to be found. The founding of the Mission was viewed as the work, after God, of Madame de Gondi.

In the course of Vincent's life the sermon at Folleville emerged as the primary catalyst of his vocation, and he came to see it as the turning point of his life. He also viewed it as the first sermon of the first mission, from which arose all the later work, missionary and otherwise, of his Congregation. Abelly testified to the fact that by 1664 the Vincentian Community was accustomed to celebrate 25 January as the anniversary of its founding, a custom that endures to this day (5). Yet, as has been noted, there is evidence that the pastoral concern that led to the sermon was not discovered suddenly, as if on the road to Damascus, as the result of one incident. Vincent's third version of the story relates the origins of the Congregation of the Mission to Madame de Gondi's youthful experience with an ignorant confessor. If Vincent is correct in stating that she was "still only a girl", it would have had to occur before her marriage in 1600. His own experience, paralleling hers, would have had to come after he had entered the Gondi household in 1613. This testifies to Madame de Gondi's long-standing concern for valid confessions, especially general ones. Evidence that this was also Vincent's concern, even before Folleville, is found in a petition he sent to the vicar general of the archdiocese of Sens, in which some of the Gondi estates were located, on 20 June 1616. "Sometimes we meet good people who wish to make a general confession, and because we very often encounter reserved cases and find it difficult to send them away", he asked for and received faculties to absolve in those cases (I 17-18). Such faculties were routinely given to missionaries at home and abroad.

The four versions given above present a simplified picture of the origins of the Congregation of the Mission because the myth making process had already begun. At another point in the conference on 25 January 1655, drawing a lesson from what happened, Vincent simplified the matter even more.

Alas, my dear priests and brothers, no one had ever thought of that, no one knew what a mission was, we did not think about what it was, and that is how we see that it is God's work, because where men have no part, it is God who does it and it comes immediately

from him. So, then, he makes use of men to carry out his work (XI169).

In another, undated, conference to his missionaries Vincent drew this same lesson.

I ask you, who is it who founded the Community? Who is it who dedicated us to the missions, to the ordinands, to the conferences, to the retreats, etc.? Was it I? Certainly not. Was it Monsieur Portail, whom God brought to me at the very beginning? Not at all, for we did not think about it, we did not plan it. And who is it, then, who is the author of all this? It is God, it is his fatherly providence and his unalloyed goodness... It is then God who has done all this (XI 38).

In the conference on the rules (17 May 1658), cited above, he went even further.

Where do they [the rules] come from? Did I think of them? Not at all. Because, Messieurs, I never thought of our rules nor the Community nor even the word "mission". It is God who has done all that. Men had no part in it. For my part, when I consider the means by which it has pleased God to make use of me to give birth to the Community in his Church, I confess that I do not know where I am and it seems to me that every thing I see is a dream. Oh, that is not human, it is from God. Would you label as human something that human understanding did not foresee and that human will did not seek or desire in any way? Poor Monsieur Portail never thought about it. And neither did I think of it... It was done against all my hope and without my having dreamt of it in any way. When I look at it and see the Community's works, in truth it seems to me a dream and that I am dreaming... Would you label as human the origin of our missions? (XII 7).

He cut through secondary details in order to arrive at his basic conclusion: the divine intervention that led to the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission without any human causality. This conclusion, however, was reached only after many years of reflection. Although there was a tenuous connection between the sermon at Folleville and the contract with the Gondis in 1625, it was not clear at that time. Vincent's entry into this apostolate was certainly not planned nor was it envisioned. In

hindsight he was able to see this as a clear indication that providence, not human calculation, had guided the whole process. Though the lessons he drew from this may have been valid, they also required a reshaping of the original events, or at least a certain lack of concern about all the details. Once the apostolate was undertaken and once Vincent understood his role in it, there would be a great deal of human calculation. The course of events between the sermon at Folleville in 1617 and the organization of the Mission in 1625 showed that the myth was already moving from the reality.

### *The events of 1617-1618*

Although Vincent's first account indicates that there were further missions in the immediate area of Folleville, in fact the sermon of 25 January did not immediately lead to any concerted missionary activity in the rural districts. Within a few months he arranged his escape from the Gondi household in order to become pastor of Châtillon-les-Dombes. His response to the sermon was not to inaugurate a systematic evangelization but to flee to a life that he had long sought, that of pastor in a small town parish. By December 1617 he was persuaded to return to the Gondi household, where his primary function was to act as chaplain to the family. One of the conditions of his return was that he would give rural missions, but that may have been as much at the insistence of Madame de Gondi as his own. A young priest, Antoine Portail (1590-1660), whom Vincent had first met in 1610, came to help him (6). Some of Vincent's biographers have written of a feverish missionary activity at this time, resulting from his discovery of his vocation at Folleville (7). It is rather difficult, however, to reconstruct what missions were given and in which ones Vincent personally participated. Abelly wrote that after 1617 Vincent gave missions in all the villages on the Gondi lands (8). Collet spoke of missions in the dioceses of Beauvais, Soissons, and Sens, but added no details (9). Missions were given in those areas after 1625, but there is no documentary evidence for any before that date. Collet also mentioned a mission in the diocese of Chartres in July 1623, citing a manuscript at St Lazare as his source (10). Between 1618 and 1625 there is clear evidence of Vincent's personal participation only at Villepreux in February 1618, Montmirail in 1620, Marchais in 1621, the mission to the galley slaves in Bordeaux in 1623, and possibly Chartres in July 1623 (11). Coste and Roman refer to missions at Joigny and Montmirail in 1618, but there is evidence only for the foundation of Confraternities of Charity in those cities (12). Vincent may well have

organized some missions without participating. The missions, however, were not his only work, nor even necessarily his primary one. During these years he occupied himself not only with the spiritual needs of the Gondis, but also with aid to the galley slaves and the foundation of various Confraternities of Charity. Monsieur de Gondi was the general of the galleys and the post of chaplain-general of the galleys was created for Vincent on 8 February 1619 (13). It is impossible to say how many priests were involved in these missions. Vincent seems at times to have persuaded local clergy to join in the work, but there are no recorded names or numbers. Thus, while the sermon at Folleville did lead to some missionary activity after his return from Châtillon, it was not the systematic evangelization that later characterized the missions, nor did it mark any dramatic shift in the direction of Vincent de Paul's life.

On 1 March 1624 he was named principal of the College des Bons Enfants by Jean-François de Gondi, the archbishop of Paris and Monsieur de Gondi's brother. It was not an educational institution but a boarding house for upper class boys (the good children of the name). Vincent later said that Madame de Gondi intended it as a residence for the priests who might join him in missions on the Gondi lands (XII 8). It was clearly not intended as a source of income, since its major burse was intended for a specific family, the Pluyettes. In addition, the buildings were in bad condition, and in 1625 Vincent had to seek approval to have major repairs done (I 22-23). The Bons Enfants loomed large in Vincent's life because it was destined to become the first headquarters of the Congregation of the Mission. As far as can be determined, he had only two assistants, Portail and another priest whose name is not known. The securing of the Bons Enfants as a residence indicates an expectation that the work and personnel would expand.

#### *The contract with the Gondis, 1625*

Attempts were made to put the missions on a more stable basis, particularly by getting a religious community to take them over. As an inducement Madame de Gondi was prepared to establish an endowment of 16,000 *livres* for any community that was willing to give missions on the Gondi lands every five years. Both the Jesuits and Oratorians refused. Finally, she put a clause into her will, which she rewrote each year, leaving the money for the missions but to be administered by Vincent de Paul (14). It was eventually decided that it would be necessary to establish an association of priests if the work was to have any permanence. Apparently the initiative for this came primarily from

Madame de Gondi. However it came about, the decision to form an association drastically changed Vincent's approach.

The concept was put into legal form in a contract signed by the Gondis and Vincent de Paul on 17 April 1625 (XIII197-202). The solution to the spiritual needs of the country people was to be

the pious association of some ecclesiastics of known learning, piety, and ability, who would be willing to renounce both the conditions of the said towns and all benefices, charges, and dignities of the Church in order, at the good pleasure of the bishops and within the boundaries of each one's diocese, to dedicate themselves totally and completely to the salvation of the poor people. They will go from village to village, supported by their common purse, to preach, instruct, exhort, and catechize these poor people and bring them all to make a good general confession of their entire past life (XIII 198).

All of this was to be done gratis. The Gondis gave Vincent 37,000 *livres* in cash, with an additional 8,000 to come later, which was to be invested in real estate (*fonds de terre*) or some secure source of income (*rente constitute*) (XIII 199). Vincent was to choose six priests, or as many as the income from the foundation would support, to do this work during his lifetime. The association was to catechize all the Gondi estates every five years, from October to May. In their free time the priests were to apply themselves to work they thought best and to helping the galley slaves, for the rural missions were their primary but not their exclusive work. They were not to preach or administer the sacraments in cities where there was a bishop, archbishop, or presidial court – this was the definition of “rural”. They were to live a community life with a community of goods in obedience to the superior under the name of the “company, congregation, or confraternity of the Fathers or Priests of the Mission” (XIII 201). Vincent de Paul was the superior, and on his death the group was to elect a successor to a three year term (XIII200). In the meantime, however, he was to continue living with the Gondis as their personal chaplain.

Though the distinction may seem somewhat academic, it can be said that whereas the sermon at Folleville came to be seen as the origin of the Congregation of the Mission, the contract of April 1625 clearly was its historical foundation. The new establishment was a private and personal agreement between Vincent and the Gondis. It had no further ecclesiastical or corporate status. Its work was confined to the Gondi estates (which, however, did include a number of dioceses). The new foundation

was not merely a passing response to a particular need. The contract was a detailed instrument, well devised to meet various exigencies. It viewed the Congregation of the Mission as something permanent that would outlast the lifetime of its founders. The priests who constituted the foundation came together for the sake of a specific apostolate, the rural missions, but these occupied them for only part of the year. It was clearly foreseen that the priests were to be involved in other works. They were also to live a stable community life in a fixed residence under the guidance of a superior. The location was not specified in the contract because there was as yet no legal relationship between the new organization and the College des Bons Enfants, only a personal union of the superior general of the former with the principal of the latter. In order to give themselves totally to this apostolate the priests were to have their income in common and to renounce the various ecclesiastical positions and incomes so coveted by many clergy in that age. Although the number of six was specified, it was foreseen that more might come if the income from the invested money was sufficient (XIII 199).

Vincent de Paul was to be the dominant voice in the new foundation. He was not only superior of the group but he was also to choose the priests who would join him. The contract clearly reflected his experience and ideas. It was a remarkably detailed blueprint for an association composed of two people, a superior and a subject.

The stipulation that Vincent was to remain in the Gondi household kept him from the Bons Enfants where Portail, who was his only helper, now made his residence. Madame de Gondi, however, died in June 1625, and Vincent was free to join his colleague and begin the serious business of missions. Vincent himself later gave a nostalgic account of those days. They hired a third priest for fifty *ecus* a year to help with the missions:

Thus all three of us went to preach and give missions from village to village. On setting out we would leave the key with one of the neighbours or we would ask him to come and spend the night in the house. All the same, I had only one sermon that I twisted a thousand ways. It was on the fear of God (XII 8).

*A national, corporate institute, 1626-1627*

How does Vincent de Paul's description of the origins of the Congregation of the Mission as unexpected and totally providential agree with his organizational efforts after 1625? To answer this question it will be nec-

essary to examine those efforts in the years immediately following the contract with the Gondis.

Just a little over a year after the contract with the Gondis, on 24 April 1626, the new community received the approval of the archbishop of Paris, Jean-François de Gondi, who, by a happy coincidence, was the brother of Monsieur de Gondi (XIII 202-203). Besides extending archdiocesan recognition to the group, it also gave the missionaries permission to reside in Paris. This permission, however, was granted on condition that they would give their missions only where the archbishop assigned them and that they would give him an account of them on their return. The archbishop had intruded himself into the workings of the new group. His right of assignment to the missions not only impinged on Vincent's authority, it also meant that missions would be given outside the Gondi estates. This was a move beyond the original contract. In retrospect this control by the archbishop could hardly have been welcome to Vincent, and his later efforts to secure canonical exemption may be interpreted as an attempt to evade it. The wording of the act credits the Gondis as being founders of the institute but does not mention Vincent de Paul.

A few months later, on 4 September 1626, Vincent and three companions signed an act of association (XIII 203-205). This was an agreement between Vincent and the first missionaries for the work that had been envisioned by the Gondi contract:

by which contract we are given the power to make a choice of such ecclesiastics as we found proper to be employed in this good work...

We, in virtue of the above, after having made a proof, for a notable period of time, of the virtue and ability of Franfois du Coudray, priest, of the diocese of Amiens, of Messire Antoine Portail, priest, of the diocese of Aries, and of Messire Jean de la Salle, also priest, of the said diocese of Amiens, have chosen, elected, admitted, and associated them and we do choose, elect, admit, and associate them to us and to the said work, to live together like a congregation, company, or confraternity, and to employ ourselves to the salvation of the said poor country people (XIII 204).

These three missionaries, the act declared, had asked to be part of this congregation and promised to observe the foundational contract and the specific rule that would be drawn up for them. They also promised to obey Vincent and his successors "as being under our direction, conduct, and jurisdiction" (XIII 204).

This act of association constituted the legal bond of the first missionaries with their community. As in the original contract, the concept of permanence was strong. Again, Vincent de Paul played a dominant role. It was he who chose the first members, after they had requested association with the Community. They promised obedience both to him as superior and to the rule that would be drawn up. The Congregation of the Mission, which by that time consisted of four people, was very much the creation of Vincent de Paul.

Another major step forward came in May 1627 when Louis XIII gave royal approval for the new foundation (XIII 206-208). After briefly summarizing the original Gondi contract, the decree stated that the king had been “duly informed of the great good that the said ecclesiastics have already done in all the places where they have been on mission, both in the diocese [*sic*] of Paris and elsewhere” (15). The decree also made it appear that it was Monsieur de Gondi who solicited the royal favour (XIII 207). Specifically this favour forbade “anyone, no matter of what quality or condition he may be, to cause any trouble or obstacle to the said priests living in common, in the exercise of their functions and their dwelling in such parts of our kingdom as they desire, wishing in addition that they be able to and be permitted to accept and receive legacies and alms” (XIII 207).

The royal decree of approval gave the Community legal status throughout the kingdom of France. In addition to royal protection, it permitted the missionaries to receive donations to carry on their work. It also permitted them to work throughout France, subject always to the approval of the local bishop. The Congregation of the Mission was now national in character. Although the initiatives and process that led to these various approvals are not clear, they do show careful planning. The status of the Congregation of the Mission in 1627 was not something casual or accidental.

The next step in achieving permanence was to give the fledgling group a fixed residence. On 8 June 1627 the archbishop of Paris approved the union of the Bons Enfants with the Congregation of the Mission (XIII 208-213). One of the reasons given for granting the union was the great good that the Priests of the Mission were doing in Paris and other parts of the kingdom. Vincent appeared personally before the vicar general to request the transfer. The vicar general visited the college to investigate its condition. It was necessary to verify that the college was no longer suitable for its original purpose and that the buildings were in a perilous state (XIII 209). Vincent resigned as principal, and the archbishop donated the school and

building to the Congregation in perpetuity on condition that it would fulfill the obligations of masses and divine offices found in two burses that had been left to the college.

The transfer took effect on 15 July 1627 (XIII 213-214). The act of possession was performed by Vincent de Paul, François du Coudray, Jean de la Salle, Jean Bécu, and Antoine Lucas, all of them members of the new institute. They carried out the formalities required by law and custom for such an act. They went to the chapel, received holy water, prayed before the altar, kissed it, rang the bell, while a notary read the decree of incorporation in a loud and clear voice. Vincent had followed a similar procedure when he took possession of the parish of Clichy (16). On 15 September the king issued letters patent granting royal approval for the transfer (XIII 215-216). These specified a second condition for the annexation, that is, that the collège continue to be subject to the rector of the university of Paris, in the same way as the other colleges. The Congregation of the Mission had its first motherhouse. In December 1628, an unnamed priest wrote to Vincent:

I am back from a long journey through four provinces. I have already told you about the good reputation being spread, through the provinces where I have been, by the implantation of your holy Company, which is working for the instruction and improvement of the rural poor. Truly, I do not believe that there is anything in the Church of God more edifying or more worthy of those who bear the mark and order of Jesus Christ (I 35-36; ET I 33).

On 10 April 1628 the archbishop of Paris granted special faculties to the priests of the mission (XIII 217-218). These allowed them to go through all the towns and villages of the archdiocese in order to teach, absolve from ecclesiastical censures and cases reserved to the archbishop, found and visit Confraternities of Charity, commute vows, and grant the same indulgences as the archbishop. These went beyond the ordinary faculties to hear confessions or give missions. The Community had a special missionary status in the archdiocese of Paris. At the time of this concession the Congregation of the Mission was a nation-wide, corporate organization, recognized by the crown and archbishop of Paris. Its progress was all the more remarkable in view of the fact that it was only a few years old and consisted of nine persons.

*Toward an international status, 1627-1628*

Of all Vincent de Paul's moves in establishing the Congregation of the Mission, perhaps the most startling was his early, almost premature, efforts to secure approval from the Holy See. In 1627, the same year in which the nascent congregation received royal approval, he undertook a series of complex negotiations designed to give it international status by obtaining recognition from Rome. His first step was relatively modest, as befitted such a small institute (17). His agent was Blaise Féron, later a doctor of the Sorbonne and archdeacon of Chartres, who had worked with him on the mission at Montmirail and who was then in Rome. Through him he submitted a petition to the recently established Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (*Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*, often referred to simply as Propaganda), requesting a special blessing from the pope and the granting of the faculties that were customarily given to missionaries. The reason for approaching the Congregation was its jurisdiction over missionary activity in the Church. There seemed to be no intention of seeking the erection of the small community into a congregation properly so-called, and so the petition spoke only of "mission" (18). After a description of how the institute came into being, the petition described its functions and structure, but without mentioning the common life of the missionaries. The missionaries were working in the dioceses of Sens, Paris, Chartres, Soissons, Amiens, and Châlons. It then came to the main point of the request.

And in order that the said missions may be carried out with greater effect, Blaise Féron, priest of the Sorbonne, one of the said missionaries (19), present in this curia, in the name of the said Vincent and his companions, humbly asks Your Holiness to give it your holy blessing and to grant it the faculties listed below which are customarily granted to missionaries to be used with the permission of the ordinaries and in no other way (20).

The specific faculties that Féron was seeking were apparently listed in a separate document.

What was the precise intent of this request? It did not ask directly for papal approval or confirmation of the new group, but at the same time the granting of a blessing and of extraordinary faculties would involve some degree of pontifical recognition. Nevertheless, this would not involve erection into a community of common life or pontifical right. It was still only a "mission" (21).

The proposal was studied by the Congregation for the first time on

5 June, and it was decided that the papal nuncio in France, Monsignor Giovanni Francesco dei Conti Guidi di Bagno, should be asked to conduct an inquiry and submit an opinion. The nuncio, who was favourable to Vincent and his work, responded on 26 September.

Reports from absolutely trustworthy persons and my own inquiry make clear to me the suitability of the said Monsieur Vincent and his eight companions who live together with him. They have been well received in many dioceses in France and from their labours we can hope for great benefit in this kingdom (22).

On 5 November the officials of the Congregation, with Pope Urban VIII present, having had testimony from the papal nuncio in Paris of the “suitability of Monsieur Vincent de Paul, priest of Dax, prefect of the said mission, and his eight companions,... confirmed and approved” the mission of Vincent de Paul (23). According to Coppo, the confirmation applied to the apostolate, the works of the new group, but the approval added a new dimension, that is, the mission was now that of the universal Church rather than of one diocese (24). Perez Flores believes that the use of the term mission made the Community immediately dependent on the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith and hence moved it beyond diocesan control (25). The approbation, however, also stipulated that the missionaries were subject to the local ordinaries in the use of the faculties, which were granted to them for a period of seven years. The pope himself suggested the need of an ecclesiastical protector for the association and proposed the archbishop of Paris for this role. In a letter to the papal nuncio (13 November 1627), the Congregation emphasized the importance of the fact that the idea came from the pope.

Your Excellency can point out to the said Vincent and his companions the mind of His Holiness, that, because this is His Holiness’s very own instruction, it can be piously believed that it comes from divine inspiration, for the support of such an outstanding work (26).

The same letter said that both the pope and the cardinals had highly praised the founders and ordered that the special faculties be sent immediately. It was a victory for Vincent, but a limited one.

The ink was hardly dry on this approval when Vincent took a much bolder step. A mere seven months later, in June 1628, he sent a petition

to Pope Urban VIII, which was signed by him and his eight companions: Louis Gallon, Antoine Portail, François du Coudray, Jean de la Salle, Jean Becu, Antoine Lucas, Joseph Brunet, and Jean Dehorgny (27). They began by describing how the institute had begun and what its functions were. In recounting the work of the missions they mentioned the large number of archdioceses and dioceses served, specifically Paris, Sens, Chalons, Troyes, Soissons, Beauvais, Amiens, and Châtres. This was the same listing to be found in the previous year's petition. The purpose of the new institute, later enshrined in the Common Rules, was to "strive for their own perfection and to devote themselves entirely to the salvation of the country people" (28). It is interesting, as Perez Flores points out, that this petition makes no reference to the previous approbation by the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (29). The reason for this omission is not known. The petition asked for the approbation of the institute, even if this meant that it would be established anew, with Vincent de Paul as the superior general. The pope was to be asked:

to grant to this same Vincent, whom the Archbishop of Paris has already chosen for the work and whom the founders [the Gondis] earnestly desired, the permission, power, and full and entire authority to establish this Congregation in the city of Paris, as well as in all other cities, towns, estates, and places to which the local Bishops might call him, and there only (I, 59; ETI, 50).

The petition asked for faculties for Vincent to receive new members, whether clerics or brothers, and to establish norms and rules, subject to the approval of the Holy See.

May he be commissioned and appointed to do and to transact all and each one of the other things which the founders and other Superiors, even General Superiors, of similar Congregations or of any approved Orders may usually do or transact, either by law or custom, by privilege, or in any other way (I, 60; ETI, 51).

The petition asked authority to establish new houses outside the archdiocese of Paris with the permission of the local bishops, but which would depend in every respect on the house in Paris and the superior general, and that all the houses be able to receive donations and legacies. The pope was also asked "to grant them all the faculties ordinarily granted to religious and secular priests whom Your Holiness sends on mission

to pagan lands (I, 60; ET I, 52-53). These included the faculties to preach, catechize, establish Confraternities of Charity, and absolve from reserved cases.

The most important request, however, was for canonical exemption from the authority of the bishops with direct dependence on the Holy See.

May it also please Your Holiness to exempt the superior, priests, and all the members of this Congregation from the jurisdiction of their ordinaries, and to make them dependent upon the Holy Apostolic See, in such a way, however, that these individuals shall be obliged, in what concerns the missions, to obey the Most Reverend Bishops and Ordinaries of their residence, and to go wherever and to whomever they send them... However, the choice of the priests shall be left to the superior of the house; and to the Superior General shall be reserved the power of appointing and removing superiors and officials of the said Congregation and also of other congregations (30) to be erected in the future, of dismissing from the congregations those who are unsuitable, likewise of transferring the said priests and others from one house to another, and of recalling them, wherever or in whichever house they may be, if the mandate of Your Holiness for some mission, or some necessity may require it (I, 60; ET I, 51-52).

On the face of it, these requests were extraordinary and went far beyond the petition which the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith had approved the previous November. A mere nine persons were petitioning to set up a new congregation that would be the equivalent of established religious communities. The concept of the Congregation of the Mission as described in this letter was clear and well planned. Rather than being a spontaneous or improvised response to a pastoral need, it was both permanent and autonomous. The fact that the fledgling group already had lay brothers and envisioned having more showed an affinity with the structure of religious communities. It was foreseen that the institute would expand and probably have houses in cities other than Paris. Again, Vincent de Paul was the dominant personality. Although the requests were made in the name of the nine signatories, some of the most important were on behalf of Vincent alone. It was he who would be invested with the highest authority.

The fact that the request was directed to the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith was bound to cause difficulties. It had approved

the “mission” in the previous year, and it had entrusted many missions to existing orders and communities. It had never, however, approved the foundation or erection of a new community. To have done so would have been a major innovation (31). On 21 June 1628 the papal nuncio in Paris wrote to Cardinal Ludovico Ludovisi, prefect of the Congregation, to support the requests (XIII, 218). The correspondence on this did not mention Vincent de Paul by name, but indicated that the request comes from the fathers of the Mission. The nuncio minimized the seriousness of some of these by referring to “some privileges”, thus making it sound as if they were nothing more than a few additions to the previous year’s approbation. He called the work of the Congregation “very necessary and it will be very beneficial to the dioceses of this kingdom”. In this letter, as in all his correspondence with the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, the nuncio referred to Madame de Gondi as having founded the Mission. Three days later King Louis XIII made the same request of the pope (XIII, 219). Saying that the good work done by the institute “makes us desire that this Mission be formed into an establishment that can grow and endure for the future”, the king asked that it be erected into “a formed congregation”. His emphasis on permanence is significant. At the same time he sent a letter to his ambassador in Rome, instructing him to work to secure the approval (XIII, 219-220). Both letters were forwarded to Rome by Bagno. On 23 July the nuncio wrote to the secretary of the Congregation, Monsignor Francesco Ingoli, to ask his help in securing the approbation (XIII, 220-221). Since Ingoli was hostile to religious communities and made no secret of his opinions, he was hardly the appropriate person for the task (32).

On 1 August Vincent addressed a supporting petition to the Congregation that included recommendations from Bagno and from Anne of Austria, the queen of France. It is the first known reference to his acquaintance with the queen (33). The petition was not sent directly by him but forwarded through the nuncio. The latter wrote to Cardinal Ludovisi on 15 August, telling him that the Priests of the Mission had a new request that sought some additional privileges that they were asking of the Holy See (XIII 221-222). They had also asked the nuncio to second this request “warmly”, something that he was happy to do, “knowing the great utility that can be hoped for with the most probable certainty from this congregation”. Vincent’s new requests did not differ substantially from the previous ones but added specifics. These concerned his right to appoint and remove superiors, to expel the unworthy, to transfer his priests from one house to another, and to make them available to the Holy See as needed (34). The petition arrived too late to be of any help

in Vincent's campaign (35). As Coppo has pointed out, however, it did exemplify Vincent's concept of the missionary: an apostle, one who is sent, both within the limits of his own institute and in the larger horizon of the universal church (36).

In a report to the cardinals on 22 August Ingoli presented his recommendations. The first obstacle to approval was that "by the introduction of a new religious order and with the exemption from the ordinaries, it is notably prejudicial to the latter because many priests in order to flee it would enter this Congregation" (XIII 223). This would also serve to weaken the secular clergy. A second obstacle was that it tended toward the introduction of a new religious order with the missions as its object. As it grew, it would want to become a "formed religion", something that would arouse the indignation of the other orders, so that they would then be reluctant to offer missionary help to the Congregation (XIII, 224).

His recommendation was a compromise. The Congregation should not reject the petition altogether but give the institute full faculties "for all of France with the permission of the ordinaries", the institute would be limited to twenty or twenty-five priests and would not have the status of a congregation or confraternity, because the nature of the mission did not require this. There was also the fact that when the need for the missions ceased, it would have to cease also. Finally, he suggested that the nuncio in Paris be instructed to inform the Priests of the Mission that

the Apostolic See does not judge it appropriate to institute either a religious order or confraternity or congregation of missions, because, in addition to the fact that the very nature of the mission is inconsistent with these bonds, the permanence of congregations, religious orders, and confraternities is also inconsistent with these same missions, which are established for needs that end with the conversion of the people to whom they are sent (37).

Vincent's requests were rejected by the Congregation. At a meeting held on 22 August 1628 with the pope and six cardinals present, it was decided that the requests went beyond the terms of a mission (which the Congregation had already approved), tended toward the establishment of a new religious order, and consequently should be rejected altogether (XIII, 222-224). The nuncio was directed to instruct Vincent and his companions to remain within the simple terms of mission, as it had been

approved the year before. While following Ingoli's overall suggestions, the pope and cardinals did not accept his proposal to restrict the number of missionaries. The climate at the Roman Curia was not favourable to the religious life. In its letter to the nuncio, 1 September 1628, the Congregation said that the requests "seemed exorbitant and tended to erect a new religious order rather than a mission" (38). The tone of the letter, however, was not abrupt or authoritarian. The nuncio was asked "to try to persuade the said Monsieur Vincent and his companions to put aside the establishment of a new religious community and to be content with the simple terms of the mission" (39). The Congregation approved of the new group's works but wanted to keep them within their original limits.

At a meeting of 25 September 1628 the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith rejected Vincent's additional requests of 1 September.

The question arises: why did Vincent move to secure Roman approbation for a French community that had at the most thirteen members? Why enlist the support of the king, queen, and papal nuncio? The Congregation of the Mission already had permission to cross diocesan boundaries within France with the consent of the local bishops, and there was as yet no real possibility that it would extend outside the kingdom. Roman writes:

In a man who, as we have seen, declared that the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission had not been his idea, it is difficult to explain the haste with which he rushes to the business of pontifical approbation. There is no doubt that Vincent's project had been, from the first, more ambitious than the letter of the contracts (40).

The answer is to be found in the nature of his requests, which sought autonomy and permanence. Vincent wanted a stable institute that would be free of outside interference by the bishops, at least in its communitarian life. The response of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith was a denial of the permanence of the Congregation of the Mission and a rejection of its independence. In its view, the Community was essentially impermanent because it had arisen in response to a specific pastoral need. When that need was met, the Community would no longer be necessary. That was how the Congregation understood the term "mission". Unlike Vincent, Rome did not want to transform an ad hoc stratagem into an enduring organization. The Congregation saw the

mission as an apostolate, whereas Vincent saw it both as an apostolate and as an organization to carry out that apostolate.

*The parlement of Paris, 1630-1631*

In the France of the old régime royal laws, decrees, and ordinances had to be registered by the parlement of Paris before they attained the force of law. The parlement was not a legislative body in the sense of the British parliament but rather a supreme law court. Over the course of centuries it had obtained the right to register laws, and thus equivalently to ratify them. If the parlement refused to register a law, it did not take effect until the king overruled the parlement. This was done by a quaint ceremony called the *lit de justice*, or bed of justice, so called because the king was carried into the parlement on a litter and there ordered the registration of the law.

Because the royal letter of approval of May 1627 had not been registered, the king wrote to the parlement on 15 February 1630 to secure the registration (XIII 225-227). His letter stated that he was acting at the request of the priests of the Mission, an indication that Vincent and his companions were aware that the royal approval could still encounter difficulties. And so it did. On 4 December 1630 the diocesan clergy of Paris entered a protest against the approbation of the Congregation of the Mission (XIII, 227-232). They asked that if the royal approbation was ratified, it should be with three conditions. The first was that the priests renounce all employment in the parishes and churches of all the towns in France. The second was that while on mission they should dedicate themselves exclusively to that work and nothing else. This meant that they should not come to any church except when expressly sent by the local bishop and with the permission of the pastor, that they carry out no function during the times of ordinary services in the church, and that their mission be entirely gratuitous. The clergy of Paris had learned, they said, that the priests of the Mission were attempting to “erect” their congregation and that the registration of the royal letters was a way of doing this (41). The clergy had resolved to oppose the registration of the letters. They claimed that their intention was not to hinder the good of the church, if the new congregation served that purpose, but “so that, under the pretext of piety, there should be no trouble and dissension in the churches under the pretext of this new institution”. The third condition was that it was not enough that the priests themselves renounce all employment in towns but that the parlement itself should order that no one could enter the congregation without expressly renouncing this

work. So many congregations, the clergy claimed, began in a pure and exemplary fashion and eventually gave way to greed and ambition. They foresaw that gradually the missionaries would intrude themselves into the work of the parishes and eventually claim part of the parochial revenues. This last was apparently their primary concern.

On 14 April 1631 the parlement registered the royal letters patent together with the original contract of foundation, but at the same time it included the three conditions sought by the clergy of Paris (XIII, 232-233). These conditions, of course, had been part of the Congregation of the Mission from the outset. It is interesting that the name of Vincent de Paul did not appear in either the protest by the clergy or the registration by the parlement.

### *Victory in Rome, 1630-1633*

In his next attempt to secure Roman approval, Vincent changed his tactics. He directed his requests to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars rather than the Propagation of the Faith, and he dispatched a personal representative to the Eternal City. The latter was Fr François du Coudray (1586-1649), one of Vincent's first companions (42). A capable and learned man whose speciality was the study of scripture, he knew Hebrew so well that Vincent once exclaimed somewhat hyperbolically that "he could uphold the cause of the Son of God in His original language" (I, 252; ET I, 245). He also knew Syriac and while in Rome became involved in a project to translate the Syriac bible into Latin, an undertaking that Vincent strongly opposed (I, 251; ET I, 244-245). Coudray was a devoted and conscientious missionary, though a strong and perhaps wilful personality, who rendered important services to the Congregation. He and Vincent later became estranged, and at one point the latter thought seriously of dismissing Coudray from the Congregation. The ostensible reason was some supposedly unorthodox opinions that Coudray refused to abandon, but it may also have been Vincent's constitutional inability to deal with men other than from a position of superiority (43).

Coudray arrived in Rome shortly before July 1630. The negotiations that followed were complex, with Vincent keeping abreast of them through an active correspondence. In Paris Vincent relied heavily on the advice of Andre Duval (1564-1638), his confessor and a well-known doctor of the Sorbonne. Despite gaps in the correspondence, it is possible to trace the main outlines of the negotiations. In 1631, after urging Coudray to impress on the pope the desperate spiritual condition

of the rural poor, Vincent listed five conditions that he with Duval's advice considered indispensable for the mission.

1. He would leave to the bishops the power of sending the missionaries into the part of the diocese they choose;
2. The priests were to be subject to the pastors where they went to give the mission, for its duration;
3. The missions were to be given at their own expense, not that of the poor country people;
4. The missionaries were neither to preach, nor catechize, nor hear confessions in cities where there was an archbishopric, a bishopric, or a presidial court, except in the case of ordinands and those who would make retreats in the house;
5. The superior of the Company was to have complete control over it (I, 115-116; ET I, 113).

Vincent had learned the value of gradualism. These "bottom line" requests were more moderate than those of 1628, nor were they such as to arouse opposition from bishops, pastors, or curial officials hostile to new religious communities. A notable addition, however, is found in the works, which now included retreats for ordinands.

Apparently his proposals still met with opposition, although there is no specific documentation of it. To judge by a paragraph that has survived from one of Vincent's letters to the Company, 12 September 1631, one objection was that the missionaries' residence in Paris showed that their dedication to the rural poor was suspect, or at least weak. This led to one of his most quoted, and misquoted, statements:

We are leading a life in Paris almost as solitary as that of the Carthusians. Since we are neither preaching, nor catechizing, nor hearing confessions in the city, almost no one has anything to do with us nor we with them. This solitude makes us long for work in the country; and that work, for solitude (I, 122; ETI, 120).

In this sentence Vincent clearly was not describing an ideal for life in the Congregation of the Mission but the reality of the situation in Paris, as a means of forestalling criticism that his community was not living where its apostolate was (44).

In January 1632 Vincent addressed a new appeal to Pope Urban VIII, which in reality meant the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars

(ET, I 140-144); [this letter is not in the original French edition]. At the same time Vincent was taking possession of the ancient priory of Saint-Lazare, which was to become the new motherhouse of the Community. It is impossible to say if this fact had any impact on the negotiations with Rome. The petition began, as was customary, with a description of the spiritual desolation that gave rise to the Community and its response. It also contained a description of its works. The principal differences from earlier petitions were a reference to the community's devotion to the Trinity and the Incarnation (later incorporated into the Common Rules) and to retreats for parish priests and ordinands. The description of the organization of the Congregation of the Mission was more detailed than before and again included terminology that would later be incorporated into the Common Rules:

1. It was to consist of laymen [coadjutor brothers], clerics, and priests who were to have all things in common;
2. The laymen were to be content with the service of Martha and the care of domestic matters;
3. Clerics were to be seventeen or eighteen years old before they could be admitted into the Congregation, and were to become members of the Congregation after a year of probation;
4. Vincent de Paul was to remain superior of the house of Paris, and after the other houses of the Congregation had been founded, he was to be elected for his lifetime as superior general of the Congregation;
5. After the death of Vincent de Paul, the superior general of the Congregation was to be elected every three years, but not beyond two terms;
6. The superior general was to appoint superiors and other lesser ministers and remove them at his discretion;
7. He was to visit each house of the Congregation, its property and members, and have other authority and superiority which the superiors general of similar or other congregations had, may have had, or would have in the future (ETI, 143).

The requests would certainly have strengthened the hand of Vincent de Paul and his successors as superior general. Perhaps the most interesting proposal was that while he would be superior general for life, his successors would be limited to six years at the most, a request that was

very close to the clause in the original Gondi contract (45). Vincent also sought canonical exemption, but in a more diplomatic and subtle way than in 1628, that is, by communication with other communities:

May the Congregation itself and each one of the present and future members enjoy all and each one of the privileges, immunities, freedoms, exemptions, faculties, favours and graces, indulgences and other concessions which other Congregations use, have, and enjoy, or may or will be able to use, have, and enjoy in the future. May they use, have, and enjoy them in the same way and to the same extent and without any difference, as if they had been specifically and expressly granted to the said Congregation, its Superiors, and other members (ET I, 144).

This petition was submitted to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, which examined it on 13 February 1632. On 30 April Cardinal Guido Bentivoglio, who had served on the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith at the time of Vincent's dealings with that body, recommended that the papal nuncio in France and the archbishop of Paris again be consulted. On 12 July Vincent wrote to Coudray that he had requested letters from the nuncio and archbishop (I, 162; ET I, 164). He was concerned that he might have trouble getting their support because of opposition that his project was still meeting in Paris. It seems clear that some members of the Oratory, following the lead of Pierre de Berulle, their founder in France and formerly Vincent de Paul's spiritual director, opposed the design. "I could not express to you how much the deceit amazes me" (I, 162; ET I, 164). These opponents, however, did not include Charles de Condren, Berulle's successor as superior general of the Oratory, or Monsieur de Gondi, who after his wife's death had become an Oratorian priest.

The opposition did not prevail and on 12 January 1633 the pope issued the bull *Salvatoris nostri* (46). The fact that the approbation was given by a papal bull rather than a rescript from the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars marked an important victory (47). The bull began in the usual way, with a description of the hapless spiritual condition of the rural poor, the pastoral needs, the response of the Congregation of the Mission, and the good work that it had done up to that time. In delineating the fundamental structure of the Community, the bull closely followed Vincent's petition of the previous year. The grant of exemption from the authority of local bishops in the community's internal life, a vital condition for its independence, was particularly important. The

description of the daily exercises of piety foreshadowed what was later to be put in written form in the Common Rules. Vincent had won his fight. The Congregation of the Mission was a permanent, autonomous, and expanding legal entity within the universal church.

### *Conclusion*

In the myth of the origins of the Congregation of the Mission there are three constitutive elements.

The first of these is that the sermon at Folleville, 25 January, 1617, was the first sermon of the mission and occasioned Vincent's discovery of his vocation. This, however, immediately encounters the problem of his flight to Châtillon-les-Dombes just a few months later. If, as is claimed, he had discovered his life's work through the sermon, why did he flee? Vincent's earliest biographers, Abelly and Collet, depicted him as fleeing from the worldliness of the Gondi household, the stifling dependence of Madame de Gondi, and the turmoil of Paris (48). Roman attempted to resolve the problem by interpreting the bizarre episode as the Vincent's "first response":

In reality what Vincent was meditating since 25 January was not a flight but a response. He had discovered his vocation and understood that it was not in the house of the Gondis... The people were calling him, the simple and poor people of the country (49).

On the contrary, it can be persuasively argued that Vincent's stay at Châtillon was not a flight to the rural poor. Certainly, if giving missions to the poor country people was to be his life's vocation, he did not pursue it at Châtillon. His work was that of a good small town pastor, the same that had given him such happiness at Clichy. His parishioners remembered him primarily for his reform of the local clergy, conversion of heretics, and the foundation of the first confraternity of charity (50). Except for the last named, which had its origin during his stay at Châtillon, it is impossible to discern any of the future apostolates of the Congregation of the Mission during his seven or eight months stay there. Further, if he had truly discovered his life's work at Folleville, why did he make such intensive efforts to turn it over to religious communities prior to 1625? It was only in hindsight and after reflection that Vincent found a connection between Folleville and the Mission. Châtillon was an attempt to recapture Clichy, not Folleville.

A second constitutive element, and the one articulated at the earliest

known date, was that Madame de Gondi was the true founder of the Congregation of the Mission (51). This is true, at least in the sense that she realised the need for the rural missions, constantly encouraged them, and finally, together with her husband, supplied the financial base on which the Community was built. Shortly after the original contract, however, she died. The creative years of the Congregation of the Mission, 1625-1633, belonged to Vincent alone. The inspiration came from her, the organization from him.

The third element, and the one farthest removed from reality, was that human calculation had nothing to do with the origins of the Mission, for it was entirely a divine work. "Men had no part in it". Vincent made it sound as though the Community had sprung up as if by surprise, contrary to any human expectation, and that it was fully emerged before anyone realised what was happening. The reality was that divine providence gradually led both Madame de Gondi and Vincent to meet a pastoral need. Both were conscious of that need long before the sermon of 25 January 1617. Madame de Gondi began by supporting missions on her estates and then sought to make these stable, first by seeking the help of religious communities, and then, together with her husband, by subsidising an association of priests and giving it a residence. Once the decision in favour of the association had been made, Vincent followed it up with meticulous planning. Little or nothing was left to chance. The association was to be stable, permanent, and well defined. At an early, almost premature stage in its history, it was also to have recognition by the universal church. Roman is correct in asserting that from the beginning Vincent's project was more ambitious than the letter of the contracts.

Vincent de Paul came slowly and even reluctantly to his vocation in the years between 1617 and 1625. After the sermon at Folleville he did not set out consciously to become a holy founder. Once it became clear, however, that only through an association of priests could his work be carried on, he moved with determination. The process by which the Congregation of the Mission came into existence involved careful planning, human prudence, and a clear vision of what the new institute was to be. Contrary to Vincent's assertion that no one knew what a mission was, the concept was clear from the time that the first ones were given on the Gondi estates (52). The same is to be said for the origin of the rules; these were seen as an integral part of the foundation from the beginning and, together with the exercises of piety, assumed a clear shape at an early stage, though it would take three decades for them to receive their final written form. The Community was more than an ad hoc response to a specific pastoral need. Permanence, autonomy, and

growth were, from Vincent's perspective, essential characteristics of the new institute.

The vision of the Community came from Vincent de Paul and no one else. Madame de Gondi's concern was with the missions themselves, born from her concern for the people on the Gondi estates, for whose spiritual and temporal good she and her husband were responsible. The communitarian response owed everything to Vincent de Paul. His was the dominant voice in it, from its inception to the day of his death. He was also the person in control of it. Canonical exemption was one of the most important elements in this control. At a later period this dominance would be made most manifest in the imposition of vows on a community that to some extent was reluctant to accept them. In seeking to obtain a permanent status for his community he showed a dogged persistence, a refusal to accept rebuff, and a growing sophistication in dealing with the Roman Curia.

There was a remarkable consistency in Vincent's vision in the eight years between the Gondi contract of 1625 and the *Salvatoris Nostrī* of 1633: no work in the cities, the giving of missions gratis, the renunciation of benefices, a common purse, and community life governed by rule under the superiority of and in obedience to Vincent de Paul. Somewhat later in that time span came the definition of the community's end as self-perfection and evangelization of the rural poor (with the retreats for ordinands and priests being added after 1628), the devotion to the Trinity and Incarnation, the role of the coadjutor brothers, a period of probation, and the secular nature of the institute. Except for the vows the essential nature of the Congregation of the Mission was defined within the space of eight years.

This can lead to interesting speculation about the place of the vows in the charism of the Congregation of the Mission. They were clearly not part of Vincent de Paul's original vision as elaborated between 1625 and 1633. He began to think about them in 1635 as a way of binding the missionaries more closely to the Community. After protracted discussion and negotiations they were formally introduced in 1655, but over the opposition of many members of his community (53). From a purely historical point of view, there is justification for considering them as extraneous to or a deviation from his original concept of the Congregation.

In the myth of the origins of the Congregation of the Mission, a myth that originated with Vincent de Paul himself, one paramount truth has been preserved: the role played by providence. At the same time the overall process has been simplified to such an extent that it has lost touch with the underlying reality. Vincent's contention that "no one

knew what a mission was, we did not think about what it was”, and “we did not think about it, we did not plan it”, quite simply was not true. The same is to be said for his assertion that “I never thought of our rules nor the Community nor even the word ‘mission’”. From 1618 on he had a clear concept of the missions and the need to make them permanent. What providence did was to make him accept the fact that he, not others, would have to take the responsibility. His biographers have augmented this process of simplification, at the risk of enlarging the gulf between myth and fact. The role of myth is to transmit truth. If, however, it strays too far from its historical substratum, it can degenerate into facile or superficial generalizations. Myth is a valuable guide, but it must be followed with caution.

### Notes

Editor’s note: The author’s punctuation and use or non-use of capital letters have been retained, but American spellings have been changed. “Saint” has been abbreviated to “St” before proper names. References to the 14 volume edition of St Vincent’s works have been brought into line with what has become standard for *Colloque*, as explained in note 3 below.

1. Robert J. Oden, Jr., “Myth and Mythology”, in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, David Noel Freedman, editor-in-chief, 6 Vols. (New York, London: 1992), 4:949.
2. I would like to pay credit to two individuals whose work helped to inspire this article: the late Father K. Murnaghan, C.M., whose article “Would St Vincent Favour Advertising?” (*Colloque* 20 [Autumn 1989]: 92-104) traced the discrepancies in many of St Vincent’s words and actions; and Father Edward Udovic, C.M., who pointed out to me how the myth making process was to be found in Henri Maupas de Tour’s funeral oration on St Vincent. See “‘On the Eminent Dignity of the Poor in the Church’: A Sermon by Jacques Bénigne Bossuet”, Introduction and Translation by Edward R. Udovic, C.M., *Vincentian Heritage* 13, n.1 (1992): 37-58.
3. Louis Abelly, *La vie du Venerable Serviteur de Dieu Vincent de Paul Instituteur et Premier Superieur de la Congregation de la Mission* (Paris 1664), book 1, chapter 8, pp. 32-33; *Saint Vincent de Paul: Correspondance, entretiens, documents*, ed. Pierre Coste, C.M., 14 vols. (Paris: 1920-1926), III, 126 27. (Editor’s note: All subsequent references to this edition will be given in the body of the article, or in these notes, after the quotation, with volume number in Roman figures and page number(s) in Arabic). Coste reprints Abelly’s version. Abelly said that the peasant died three days later at the age of sixty, though Portail later gave his age as eighty-four.
4. Differences in detail in the first two accounts may possibly be attributed to mistakes made by the amanuenses who secretly recorded the conferences or to Abelly, who often had no qualms about changing texts. This would not,

however, explain the notable differences in the third account. In the description that he wrote to St Jane Frances de Chantal, 14 July, 1639, Vincent made no mention of the origins of the Congregation of the Mission. See the letter in *Saint Vincent de Paul: Correspondence, Conferences, Documents. I Correspondence*, vol. 1 (1607-1639), newly translated, edited, and annotated from the 1920 edition of Pierre Coste, C.M., ed. Jacqueline Kilar, D.C., trans. Helen Marie Law, D.C., John Marie Poole, D.C., James R. King, C.M., Francis Germovm'k, C.M., annotated John W. Carven, C.M., (Brooklyn: 1989), I, 552-57. (Editor's note: Subsequent references will be given in the body of the article, or in these notes, preceded by ET [i.e. English translation] after the reference to the original French edition).

5. Abelly, *Vie*, book 1, chapter 8, pp. 34-35.
6. On Portail, see Pierre Coste, C.M., *The Life and Works of Saint Vincent de Paul*, trans. Joseph Leonard, C.M., 3 vols. (Brooklyn, New York: 1987), 1: 152-53. Portail's name is inextricably connected with Vincent's early missionary activity, but to what extent did he actually participate? Coste writes: "As he was excessively shy, this may have been the reason why he hesitated so long before entering a pulpit; he only decided to do so in 1630, and the line of congratulation is still extant which was sent him by the holy founder when he had summoned the courage" (Ibid). Perhaps he performed other functions, such as catechizing or organizing Confraternities of Charity. For St Vincent's note of congratulation see I, 88; ET I, 82-83.
7. Abelly, *Vie*, book 1, chapter 8, pp. 46-47; chapter 13, p. 53; Coste, *Life and Works*. 1:95; José María Román, C.M., *San Vicente de Paúl, I. Biografía* (Madrid: 1981), 139-42, 159, 165.
8. Abelly, *Vie*, book 1, chapter 13, pp. 53-54.
9. Pierre Collet, *La vie de St. Vincent de Paul, Instituteur de la Congrégation de la Mission, & des Filles de la Charité*, 2 vols., (Nancy: 1748), 1:88-89.
10. Ibid., 1:111.
11. Abelly, *Vie*, book 1, chapter 10, p. 47; chapter 13, pp. 54-57; Collet, *Vie*, 1:88-97; Coste, *Life and Works*, 1:95; Roman, *San Vicente de Paúl*, 139, 142, 158, 159, 160.
12. Coste, *Life and Works*, 1:95; Román, *San Vicente de Paúl*, 139.
13. See Coste, *Life and Works*, 1:118.
14. Abelly, *Vie*, book 1, chapter 8, p. 35.
15. XIII, 207. Paris became an archdiocese only in 1622. Prior to that time it had been a suffragan of the archdiocese of Sens.
16. XIII, 17-18. Other standard procedures at the time, not mentioned in these acts of possession, included opening and shutting doors and windows and breaking branches from trees.
17. The documentation for these first steps is taken from Angelo Coppo, C.M., "Document; inediti per la storia della Congregazione della Missione, presso l'archivio della S.C. 'De Propaganda Fide': I. la prima approvazione pontificia della Missione nel 1627", *Annali della Missione* (1972): 222-55, and "II. Le due suppliche del 1628 per l'erezione dell'Istituto in Congregazione di diritto pontificio non accolte dalla Sacra Congregazione", *ibid.*, (1973): 37-73. These are summarized in Roman, *San Vicente de Paúl*, 212-17.

18. Whether the word is intended to be a proper name or generic description is difficult to say.
19. He was a missionary in the sense that he had been associated with Vincent's work, but he was never a formal member of the Congregation of the Mission. See Coppo, "La prima approvazione". 227.
20. *Ibid.*, 226.
21. *Ibid.*, 228.
22. Coppo, "La prima approvazione... Appendice: Ritrovata la lettera del Nunzio Bagno sull'idoneità di San Vincenzo a dirigere la Missione", 248.
23. Again, the officials seem to have interpreted this word in a more generic sense than Vincent did, that is, as an apostolate, not an organization.
24. Coppo, "La prima approvazione", 240.
25. Miguel Pérez Flores, C.M., "Del equipo misionero a la Congregación de la Misión", *Vicentiana*, 4-5-6 (1984): 693.
26. Coppo, "La prima approvazione", 242-43.
27. I, 52-57; ET I, 47-53. Gallon later returned to his home diocese but was always regarded by Vincent as a member of the community. Lucas was ordained to the priesthood three months after the petition. In addition to these nine persons, there were two coadjutor brothers, Jean and Hector Jourdain, a theological student Jacques Régnier, and perhaps Robert de Sergis, who was received into the community in the same month that the petition was sent.
28. *Ibid.*, 50.
29. Pérez Flores, "Del equipo misionero", 695.
30. In this context, the term refers to individual houses.
31. See the comments on this in Coppo, "le due suppliche", 41.
32. Coppo, "Le due suppliche", 46.
33. Román, *San Vicente de Paúl*, 216.
34. Coppo, "Le due suppliche", 53-54.
35. Pérez Flores, "Del equipo misionero", 698.
36. Coppo, "Le due suppliche", 55.
37. XIII, 224. The consultor was not alone in opposing the new foundation. Pierre de Bérulle, Vincent's former mentor and spiritual director, worked against Roman approval. In 1628 he wrote to Father Berlin, his representative in Rome: "The design of which you inform me and on behalf of which those who are petitioning, in this matter of missions, in various and, in my opinion, oblique ways, should render it suspect and compel us to depart from the reserve and simplicity in which it seems to me one should abide in the management of God's affairs, if all persons conducted them in this spirit". (Coste, *Life and Works*, 1:157). Bérulle's motives may have been based on envy of a former subordinate who was making good. On the other hand the wording also shows that he disapproved of the approach being used by Vincent, which he viewed as devious.
38. Coppo, "Le due suppliche", 51.
39. *Ibid.*, 51-52.
40. Román, *San Vicente de Paúl*, 212.
41. The implication may be that having been refused by Rome, Vincent was

using the registration as a means of giving a more official and stable character to his congregation.

42. For biographical information on Coudray, see I, 312, note 3; ET I, 28, note 3.
43. See Jaime Corera, C.M., "Vincent de Paul and Human Formation", *Vincentian Heritage* 9, n. 1 (1988):76-80.
44. Although Abelly credited Vincent with saying this at various times (*Vie*, book 2, chapter 1, section 1, p. 16), see Roman's comment, "An absolutization too sweeping for an idea that he never sought as the norm for the community's model, but a description of a reality attacked by poorly informed opponents" (*San Vicente de Paúl*, 219).
45. In 1655 the term of all superiors general was set for life. Time limitations were not reimposed until the general assembly of 1968.
46. XIII, 257-267. The date given in the bull itself is 12 January 1632. It is, however, "the year of the Incarnation of Our Lord 1632". At that time the business year for the Roman Curia began on 25 March and so the civil year for 12 January 1632 was 1633. For a discussion of this see Coste, *Life and Works*, 1:158, n. 32; Román, *San Vicente de Paúl*, 221, n. 33; ET I, 140, n. 2. [Editor's note: this letter is not in the original French edition of the letters].
47. Román, *San Vicente de Paúl*, 220-221.
48. Abelly, *Vie*, book 1, chapter 9, pp. 35-38; Collet, *Vie*, 1:49-52.
49. *San Vicente de Paúl*, 121-122. Román expressed the same opinion in "El Año 1617 y la biografía de San Vicente de Paúl", *Vincentiana*, 4-5-6 (1984): 451-452.
50. "Rapport de Charles Demia sur le séjour de Saint Vincent á Châtillon-les-Dombes", XIII, 45-54.
51. By reason of the contract of 1625 Monsieur de Gondi was also a juridical founder of the community; he never, however, entered into the myth in the same way as his wife.
52. The concept of mission was generally known, since it did not originate with Vincent.
53. In marked contrast with his consistent vision in the formative years 1625-1633, Vincent's attitude toward the nature and obligation of the vows was uncharacteristically vacillating between the years 1635-1655. see Coste, *Life and Works*, 1:479-500.

## The “Repetitions of Prayer” in Volumes XI and XII of Coste.

Thomas Davitt

During a conference to the community in St Lazare on 5 August 1659 Vincent said:

We'll postpone repetition of prayer till some other time. As you know, it's one of the most essential means we have for encouraging one another towards holiness. We've reason to thank God for giving the Company this grace, and we can say that it was never in any community other than ours (XII 288).

Volumes XI and XII of the Coste set contain two hundred and twenty-four talks given by Vincent to the community in St Lazare. The bulk of this material is in the form of reconstructions of what he said at the weekly Friday night conference, but there are also “extracts from conferences” taken from Abelly's biography, and fifty-five items headed “Repetition of Prayer”.

Some time ago I had occasion to read these fifty-five in sequence. The most interesting fact to emerge from this reading was that, in spite of what Vincent said on 5 August 1659, I never even once found any reference to how he himself had prayed. It is unlikely, I think, that the confrere(s) who made notes of what Vincent said on these occasions would have omitted such material had Vincent spoken about it.

Most interesting, though, are the glimpses we are given into everyday life in St Lazare. Vincent, after some other confrere(s) had made repetition, frequently took up some point mentioned and gave a sort of mini-conference on it, but he also very often used this time to give news of community interest or to comment on community life in St Lazare itself. It is this latter material which gives us a fascinating insight into day to day life in St Lazare.

In spite of the more rational side of our nature we may all, perhaps, have some lurking feeling that because Vincent de Paul, later declared to be a saint, was at the head of St Lazare the affairs of that house ran

smoothly or even ideally. These repetitions of prayer are a healthy corrective to such a feeling, and make us realise that the fact that Vincent was later declared to be a saint does not mean that his superiority in St Lazare was free of problems or that his handling of them was ideal.

It does not appear that Repetition of Prayer was held on a regular basis, in the way that the weekly conference was always on Friday night. Vincent seems to have called for it on a random basis. On 15 November 1656 he said that there would not be Repetition because they had had it on the previous two days, so he was just going to give some community news. Vincent used to invite the community to come closer and gather around his stall (XI 372).

It also, apparently, was the custom for various confreres to leave the chapel either before or during Repetition, because on 12 March 1656 Vincent forbade anyone to leave until the end, even though some priests asked permission to go to attend to their duties with the ordinands and some brothers asked to go to their work; and the note-taker added that this was the only occasion Vincent ever insisted on this (XI 326).

On 17 October 1655 a brother admitted that he often missed morning prayer and other community exercises because of pressure of work. Vincent contented himself with merely telling him that his work would not suffer by his attending community exercises (XI 316).

That was a very mild admonition, and there are several instances reported where Vincent was far more severe. Public admonitions on these occasions seem to have stemmed from either what someone had confessed at chapter or from what someone said during Repetition. Vincent gave admonitions with varying degrees of severity; his knowledge of the individual concerned obviously influenced what he said.

At the end of Repetition on 13 June 1655 he told a brother to kneel down. He then said to him that in spite of many previous admonitions he was making no effort to correct his faults, which Vincent then enumerated for the benefit of the community. The note-taker added that these faults were very great but that he did not wish to specify them, one of the many tantalising allusions in this collection. Vincent forbade the brother to receive the eucharist until further notice, and he told the priests to refuse to administer it to him if he approached them. He was also forbidden to have any wine for a week and the brothers in charge of catering were to see that he did not get any (XI190).

On 20 July 1655 another brother, when called by Vincent for repetition, went down on his knees and asked to be excused. Vincent said:

“Now that you’re on your knees I’m going to refer to a fault you committed yesterday”. Someone had called to see the brother and he had taken him out into the garden without permission. Apparently even senior confreres never did that, something which used to edify Fr Alméras. Vincent then used this as a stepping-off point for an admonition to the students, launching into the sort of speech he obviously enjoyed:

Instead of taking recreation in the garden on days which are not free days they take it out in the estate; I’m talking of what I’ve seen; I recently went out into the estate, for the third time this year, and was surprised to see them there. Is this garden not enough for us? Is it not big enough, top and bottom? Very few gardens in Paris are as big as ours; go to all the houses, those of merchants, financiers, legal people and you’ll hardly ever see them in their garden; they’ve almost all got to work day and night; having spent the whole morning in court they have barely finished dinner before they see fresh items to take them on into the after-dinner period. And we, we are not satisfied with large gardens; we must have the estate. Do we have to lead a life – I don’t know how to say it – *lautior*; if one could find a French word for this Latin, more comfortable: that does not go far enough, more voluptuous, more delicate, to excess, the easy life, spreading ourselves, in comparison with lay people? And the ordinands, looking out their windows and seeing us at all hours walking around the estate, in the gardens, with no restriction; and the poor mentally handicapped and those in charge of them who are walking there, and the others who work there, won’t they all say to themselves: “There’s a crowd who certainly live well and have nothing to do!” (XI 197).

The St Lazare estate was about 100 acres (IV 573).

On 12 March 1656 something similar happened. A seminarist, after his repetition, knelt down to confess a fault. Vincent immediately took the opportunity to point out that he should have confessed a much more serious one from earlier in the week, which Vincent then made public. The seminarist had asked permission from his director to go in to listen to a conference which was to be given to the ordinands. This was refused, as it was most unusual. The seminarist, however, went to the conference. Vincent labels this as formal disobedience and exercises his usual fluency in elaborating on this. At the end the seminarist was told the he would have to spend an extra six months in the seminaire.

Someone later on wrote in the margin of the manuscript that the man in question left the community after ordination (XI 324-6).

On 17 November 1658 Vincent called a senior priest for repetition, but the priest asked to be excused. Vincent then said that this was not the first time this had happened, but rather was normal for this man. He then pointed out that this exercise was important, that the brothers, students and seminarists all responded when called. At that stage Vincent noticed that the man was still on his feet, and not on his knees, so he said: “Are you ready to receive the admonition you’re about to get?” At that, the priest knelt down. On the previous Friday he had missed the conference, even though he had been explicitly told to be there; formal disobedience again. At this the priest said he had understood that he had been given permission to be absent. Vincent said that was not true, that he himself had told him to go in and later on when the brother who had been making his rounds during the conference reported that the priest was up in his room Vincent was very surprised. He told him also that he should not make excuses when admonished. He then went on to say that the priest often took a sleep in the morning and missed prayer. And finally, this priest “being out in the estate did a certain action which was very uncouth for a priest and which would have greatly disedified anyone from outside if they had seen it”; he would not name the two others who were there. This priest used to be so good, even when he was a little boy, when he was ministering in Le Mans and even in St Lazare; it was only in the past two years that he had slackened off. He then went off on a tangent explaining how useful admonitions are, and eventually came back to the man in question and forbade him to celebrate mass that day and the next (XII 70-72).

On occasion Vincent would interrupt the speaker. We have already seen this in the form of “now that your’re on your knees...”, but he also interrupted to give an admonition if the speaker had said something Vincent did not like, as when a priest referred to the community as “the holy company” (XI 439), or if the speaker had voiced some thought that appealed to Vincent: repeating verses of the psalms (XI 196), not just doing things but doing them well (XI 435).

On 16 August 1655 a student started his repetition by saying he had tried to place himself in the presence of God and then began to wonder whether the presence of our Lord in the blessed sacrament might be only *une bagatelle*; perhaps “a gimmick” would be today’s equivalent. At once Vincent interrupted (XI 252-3). I have often wondered whether this student did it deliberately, knowing that this was precisely the sort of bait that Vincent would rise to, and that the interruption would mean he

did not have to continue with his repetition. I have sometimes wondered whether the man in question might have been Nicholas Arthur, from Cork, the only Irishman in formation in St Lazare at the time.

On the same occasion Vincent also said that he had got the impression that some confreres did not have the right approach to this exercise; their mentality appeared to be: "I must think up something to say in case I'm called".

Liturgical ceremonies were sometimes mentioned on these mornings. The velvet pall was to be removed from Brother Eloi Le Boeuvs coffin, as that was worldly pomp (XI 114). He asked Fr Admirault, the prefect of the church, whether there was any ceremonies practice and on being told there was not he said that there should be (XI 186), and visitors were always to be celebrants on feastdays (ibid). In processions, Vincent said, there is a genuflexion followed by a bow. Fr Portail interrupted and said: "No bow", and Vincent said that showed that ceremonies practice was needed (XI187).

On 28 July 1655 the question of genuflexions came up again. Vincent said that the previous day during the hour's prayer he had been keeping an eye on how the confreres genuflected, a rather odd admission of how he had spent his time at prayer. He had noted this on previous occasions and had always meant to say something about it but kept forgetting. This time he had made a written note to remind himself, and this morning he had noted the same careless genuflecting again. He admitted that he himself found it difficult to genuflect because of the trouble in his legs, and that old men ("of 65 or 66"; he was a decade older) usually found it hard to get up from a genuflexion (XI 205-8).

In 1655 Vincent had been told there was no ceremonies practice in the house and the following year he asked one morning at prayer whether the seminarists and students were taught singing. On hearing that they were not, his reaction was typical and, as printed, has plenty of exclamation marks: The embarrassment at being unable to sing when the country people sing so well! The account he'll have to render to God for such a state of affairs! Priests sent to teach in seminaries, and unable to sing! (XI 362-3).

Reading also did not come up to the mark, either in chapel or at meals. This matter arose on one occasion when the confrere called for repetition asked to be excused as he had been unable to hear clearly the points for meditation when they were read. Vincent interrupted, and agreed; and the confrere was "let off the hook". Vincent told the reader that he read too quickly and in too low a voice. He had told the reader the previous week to read more deliberately. From reading in the chapel

he went on, on the same lines, to speak about reading in the refectory (XI150-2).

Inability to hear the reading in the refectory was not always the fault of the reader, though. The brother in charge of the pantry made so much noise there that the reader in the refectory could not be heard. In spite of being admonished the brother did not improve, so he was admonished in public at prayer one morning, and Vincent added that when somebody knocked to attract the attention of this brother he let on to be deaf (XI 210). Noisy washing-up also came in for comment, as well as banging doors (XI 125). Leaving doors open was also a failing in the house, with Vincent excessively generalising: "I always find all the doors open" (XI198).

In July 1655, after dealing with the students who went out into the estate, Vincent passed on to the priests: "Yes, priests; not many, thank God, but there is always one to be seen at that door keeping an eye on who is going out and coming in, and who is passing in the street". This man asks the brother on duty at the door: "Are there no letters for me? There should be some. Was no one looking for me?". The brothers on this duty were told to report any such priests to Vincent (XII198).

There was another priest who did only what he liked, turned up at prayer only when he wanted to. He snooped around everywhere, rummaged in other people's rooms, went through their papers; he even did this in the room of a counsellor who was on retreat in the house (XI 325).

Perhaps it was the same priest to whom Vincent referred eighteen months later, or perhaps there were two with somewhat similar inclinations. On the later occasion Vincent mentioned that the man in question came to prayer only when he felt like it, especially recently. He spent the day wandering around, in the cloister, through the sleeping quarters. If confreres missed anything from their rooms it would be found later in this man's room (XI 424).

Then there was the brother who confessed at chapter that he tore up a garment which did not appeal to him. Vincent accepted that this was a serious fault, but pointed out that perhaps it stemmed from a more serious one; the previous day the brother had been drunk and had fallen asleep in the kitchen. Vincent dealt with him in his usual way with such men, with plenty of rhetorical questions about what would people think, and so on (XI 299-300).

An interesting fact about the brothers' life in St Lazare emerges when Vincent says they do not need recreation after meals like the priests, students and seminarists because they do not engage in intellectual

work. This was occasioned by Brother Alexandre Veronne, the infirmarian and second in seniority among the brothers, confessing that he and some others had got together for a bit of a chat after the mid-day and evening meals (XI 368).

When confreres of my time were students in Glenart we used to hear a lot from Fr Joe Cullen about the sacrosanct custom of “three free days” for missionaries on returning from a mission. On 16 March 1656 Vincent mentioned that he had recently heard of what went on in St Lazare when a missionary returned:

When someone returns from the country he is brought either to the infirmary or to another room. Dinner or supper is brought up to him, and there are some who have had this treatment for two or three days running. This is an abuse and the source of much evil, because there is talking and laughing, and people being encouraged to drink. One will say: “Drink to my health!”, and the other does so. There is no limit to the wine brought along, and for that reason much evil can arise. There’s cackling and gossip. It’s lamentable. Now I ask those in charge to be firm and see that this does not happen again, and that those returning from the country are brought to the refectory for the evening meal, where they can be given something extra. If they have come a long distance, and on foot, and are very worn out and tired, if they need to change their clothes because of being too hot, well and good; they can be given a rest and have their dinner or supper in the infirmary or in some other room set aside for that. But apart from that I ask each one in the company to go to the refectory where he will be given what he needs (XI 327-8).

All this led him on to generalise about fastidiousness about clothes, food and so on. There were confreres who did not sufficiently water their wine. There were confreres who wanted to bring friends or relatives into the refectory; such confreres were not to get even their own meal! And if his listeners were surprised at such a prohibition, he said he made it because the matter was so serious; if it were tolerated “our refectory would become a *cabaret*”. All this, however, did not mean that poorly prepared meals would be tolerated.

Vincent’s response to each of these situations shows us some aspect of the man himself. Some other insights into his character may also be noted, without going into the details of the occasion. In July 1655, having interrupted the speaker, he got around to suggesting that there

might be lax confreres saying: "There'll be great changes when Fr Vincent is dead". Such men, he said, are Antichrists (XI194).

He was not above a bit of name-dropping: "There used to be great silence in the late Cardinal Richelieu's house, where I was many times..." (XI213). He was also in Michel de Marillac's study; this was Louise's uncle, the Keeper of the Seals. This reference comes in an anecdote which he must have told with his tongue in his cheek. He noticed that there was a cobweb on the crucifix on the prie-dieu and went over to inspect it closely, presuming that it had been spun during the night. This closer inspection showed that it had been there for some time, and he deduced from this that Marillac was so recollected when praying before the crucifix that he never noticed the cobweb (XI253). Seven months later, as already noted, he would comment adversely on confreres who go snooping around other men's rooms!

Twice during 1658 he referred to the need to learn foreign languages, as the Jesuits do (XII 26-29, 64-67). The interesting thing about this is the example he gives to illustrate the need: the Hurons do not speak the same language as the Iroquois and therefore they cannot understand each other.

On 20 July 1642 he asked the brothers in charge of the lavatories to see to it that none of the paper used there had any printing on it which referred to God or the Blessed Virgin as this would be a disrespectful use of such material (XI 125). Joseph Leonard fudged his translation of this: "... always and everywhere to treat respectfully papers...". (*Conferences of St Vincent de Paul*, Philadelphia 1963, p 128). In this he was following a tradition going back through many writers, including Coste, to Abelly in omitting or altering certain things which Vincent said or wrote, having decided subjectively that they were "disedifying". The real Vincent, however, is far more interesting than their sanitised portrait of him.

## A Visit to St Lazare, 1 January 1933.

Kevin Cronin

(In September 1991, in Strawberry Hill, KC offered this piece for publication, but said he would like to revise it. Because of the illness and death of his sister, followed by his own illness and death, he was unable to do so. It is printed as he wrote it, sixty years ago, three months after his ordination.)

It was with great curiosity and deep interest that we stood outside the old building, only a step or two from the throngs on the Boulevard Sebastopol, and gazed up at the dull grey walls and barred windows of what had been old St Lazare. What a historic building it was! This was the very house where good, kindly, Vincent de Paul lived and died., where he carried on and directed those thousand and one labours that fill with their tremendous complexity his forty years of amazing effort. This is that little spot, dear to God, which is indeed the cradle where was born that new sanctity which leavened the clergy of France and whose vigour, triumphing over baneful Jansenism, endured down to the Revolution.

“Could we enter in?” we asked each other. Surely we could, we felt, for this is not the particular property of a French ministerial department. This is part of our common inheritance as Christians, and it is ours also in a more intimate way as sons of St Vincent.

We walked into the dark hall and were met by some sort of warder whom we accosted and asked whether it would be possible to see the old place. Of course we knew there would be no difficulty; we felt there could not be. Nor was there, for we were directed upstairs to the old chapel which we might see if we cared. We mounted, and came to a door with the inscription “Communaute”.

St Lazare has indeed changed in character since St Vincent’s time. For years the centre of charitable works, and the spot where grew the little Congregation of the Mission, it became after the death of our holy Founder the mother-house of that Congregation whose priests hence earned the name of Lazarists. Here the Superior General lived, and here the business of St Vincent’s lifetime, retreats, conferences, works of charity, missions, etc., were projected and carried out. But at the

Revolution, when the Congregation was suppressed, the old house was lost to the Lazarists, and since those days it has remained a government possession. Today it is a female prison.

The little Sister who opened the door to our knock is one of those good Sisters of Joseph and Mary who direct and control the prison as agents of the government. It is strange to us to think of a prison being run by nuns, but in Catholic France it is not uncommon. These good Sisters must exercise a wholesome influence by the example of their lives and the odour of their virtues on many a poor woman who has been led to crime, perhaps through weakness or evil example.

Yes, she said it would be possible to view the place. And what of the old chapel? Was it the same as the one of St Vincent's time? Alas!, no. The old chapel of St Vincent and the whole wing which comprised the room occupied by the saint had lately been condemned to demolition by the municipal authorities to make way for some new thoroughfare. The demolition had, in fact, partly commenced and there was nothing to see in the old wing except the walls. No matter, we will see what we can. And so we are brought up those broad stairways that were so grand and imposing in dear St Vincent's eye when St Lazare was first given to him, and we traversed those long roomy corridors which Lavedan has so admired. But now the cells in which those old monks of St Victor worked and prayed are occupied by the inmates of this sad house of correction, and at the end of the corridors heavy wooden wickets and grilles remind us where we are.

So we come to one long corridor in which there is no light and one stumbles along to one doorway which the little Sister opens to us, and we peer into a dark empty room which she tells us was the room of our dear saint, and we enter another, more roomy, which was his bedroom during those last years of his life when the infirmities of his legs rendered it impossible for him to leave his room, but did not diminish the energy with which he continued to direct the mighty system he had set in motion. This was indeed holy ground on which we were walking, for if the dwellings of the saints are holy places then surely there are few spots in this vast city of Paris so sanctified as these few dusty rooms and these dark corridors.

Downstairs then we were conducted down those stairs, which were such a mortification to the infirm M. Vincent, to the room on the ground floor which had been the chapel of the community. It is now divided into two compartments, or rather a corridor and an apartment leading off it. As we stood on the flags of the corridor the Sister told us that under our feet, somewhere, were buried all the Superiors General of the Lazarists

up to the Revolution. No inscription marks their resting place and the exact position of their remains is uncertain, but in the forthcoming demolition the present Superior General has arranged that their bones will be transferred to the rue de Sèvres, the present maison-mère.

And the apartment off the corridor, the other section of this consecrated spot, what of it? We stood in the doorway and gazed at an assembly of chairs in woeful disarray, a dirty and rubbish-strewn room, with a stove in one corner where two slovenly women were engaged doing something; and the little Sister whispered to us in an ashamed voice that it was the section where the prostitutes were placed. I do not think anything in this visit to St Lazare moved me so much as this; such a contrast it was between the two epochs in the history of this humble room, its past redolent of glory and sanctity, its present: how sordid and tainted it seemed. O great kindly St Vincent, whose heart was large enough for every miserable waif and stray and whose special inheritance are the hopeless and abandoned, look to those poor fallen ones who now tread where your footsteps have so often led you, and through the virtue of your great prayers guide them to a new and better life.

Upstairs again we followed our guide this time to the *grande chapelle* of the prison, a recent structure, only of the last century, yet full of the memory of St Vincent. From the walls look down his statue, and pictures of events in his life, while under a dust-cover is the altar, removed from the condemned wing, upon which he so often had said mass. The little Sister took an obvious pleasure in showing us everything which might attract our interest, and on our enquiring said that we could always come and visit the old place whenever we chose.

Back again we went, up the stairways, along the corridors, thinking of St Vincent at every step, seeming to feel his quiet kindly figure accompanying us, past several groups of inmates or wardresses, we could not be sure which, to the little doorway marked “Communauté”, where we took leave of our good Sister with many thanks. We could hear the murmur, just behind the door of their small oratory, of the other Sisters reciting the office; so she told us, with the remark that it was that that braced them up to carry on in this hard work of the prison. May God bless their work and may St Vincent’s prayers prosper their endeavours.

# Vincentians at All Hallows

Kevin Rafferty

On February 3, 1992, All Hallows celebrated one hundred years of Vincentian administration. Fr Richard McCullen CM, our superior general, came from Rome to participate in a seminar on mission and ministry, organised by the staff, and to preside at a eucharist attended by staff, students and representatives of the many religious orders and missionary societies who have sent students to All Hallows over the years. What follows is a brief account of various aspects of the Vincentian administration over the past one hundred years and an outline of some of the new directions All Hallows has taken in recent years.

Founded as Ireland's first missionary seminary in 1842 All Hallows caught the springtide of the great tide of emigration in the 1840s. To a great extent the Irish famine determined the thrust of the All Hallows mission, as its graduates responded to the call of many Irish men and women who cried out for priests to minister to them in the United States, Canada, South America, New Zealand, South Africa, Australia, East and West Indies, England, Scotland and Wales. The founder of All Hallows, Fr John Hand, a priest from the diocese of Meath, had spent a number of years with the founders of the Irish Province of the Congregation of the Mission in St Peter's, Phibsboro, with the intention of joining them but, when he proposed his plan for setting up a missionary seminary, he parted company with them. There is a certain irony in the fact that exactly fifty years later, in 1892, the Vincentian Fathers were invited by the bishops of Ireland to take up the administration of the seminary Fr Hand had founded.

Fr Kevin Condon CM has written a very interesting account of the arrival of the Vincentians in All Hallows and the first years of their administration. At the time of his death in January 1990 he had, in fact, written two chapters of his second volume of the history of the seminary, one describing the arrival of the Vincentians and the second on Fr Tom O'Donnell CM, the longest-serving rector/president of All Hallows (1909-1948). Arriving in All Hallows after a period of crisis - intense internal conflict among the members of the staff about the direction of All Hallows - the new Vincentian administration had a delicate task to play in winning over the support of the members of staff who had

remained on, and the students who had also been dragged into the conflict over the previous five years. The man assigned to the task of setting up the new Vincentian administration was Fr James Moore CM, who had previously been president of St Vincent's College, Castleknock. Fr Moore succeeded in healing the divisions among both the staff and students and set the seminary on its course for the following one hundred years.

From 1842 to the present day over four thousand priests have been ordained in All Hallows who have ministered in dioceses throughout the world. The number of priests ordained from year to year would have ranged from twenty-five to forty, and it went above that in the 1950s and early 1960s, the most flourishing period for priestly vocations in Ireland.

The founding of All Hallows in 1842 marked the beginning of an extraordinary period in Ireland's missionary history, written up recently in Fr Edmund Hogan's book *The Irish Missionary Movement*. The first chapter is devoted to All Hallows and subsequent chapters deal with the founding of many missionary groups of men and women in Ireland, SMA, Holy Ghost Fathers, Columban Fathers, St Patrick's Missionary Society (Kiltegan), Medical Missionaries of Mary, Holy Rosary Sisters (Killeshandra) and many other groups.

During the past one hundred years about fifty Vincentian priests have served on the staff of All Hallows and over one hundred diocesan priests from various dioceses in Ireland have worked in partnership with the Vincentians. Vincentian priests tended to remain longer, some for a lifetime, and this of course is what gave stability to All Hallows College in contrast to many other seminaries. One explanation given for this very fruitful period of collaboration between diocesan priests and Vincentians is that Vincentians are, in fact, "secular priests living in community" and hence there is an affinity between them and their diocesan colleagues. Another explanation offered is that many of the Vincentian priests who have worked in All Hallows, especially in the earlier period, were, in fact, Maynooth men who had seen the light and responded to the grace to become Vincentians! One might not like to press that line of thinking too far but certainly what is true is that the past one hundred years are evidence of very fruitful collaboration between both groups.

In recent years members of religious orders of men and women have joined the staff of All Hallows on both a full-time and part-time basis. The Capuchin Fathers were the first religious order to send its students to All Hallows, in the late 1960s, and since then other groups have followed, including the Salesians in recent years. A number of

Dominican Sisters have also been on the staff since the early 1970s, followed by sisters from other orders in the 1980s.

Begun as a seminary 150 years ago All Hallows has now developed into an Institute for Mission and Ministry, responding to a variety of needs in today's Church. The enrolment for this current year (1992-93) is 150 full-time students and over 300 part-time. Over a twenty year period All Hallows has evolved rapidly from being a seminary preparing students for priestly ministry to an institute responding to a whole variety of needs in Ireland and overseas.

After a good deal of discussion among our staff, and after consulting a number of experts outside All Hallows, the following Mission Statement was put together:

EUNTES DOCETE OMNES GENTES  
GO TEACH ALL NATIONS

Since its foundation by Fr John Hand in 1842 thousands of its alumni have gone to the ends of the earth to gather and nurture communities of Faith. Now in fidelity to its founding charism All Hallows feels summoned anew by the urgent needs of the present times:

- large scale alienation from the Church even within traditionally Christian societies such as our own;
- a serious shortage of priestly ministers in dioceses overseas;
- the desire of many laymen and women to fulfill their baptismal commitment in the life and mission of the Church;
- uncertainty among many priests about their ministerial role;
- the need to heal divisions among Christians, especially in Ireland.

Hence All Hallows is newly resolved in its historic mission of ministering to ministers – and this at three related stages of their call:

- that of initial discernment, when those who come as enquirers seek to determine how best to use their gifts for the mission of the Church;
- that of deepening personal appropriation of the Christian Faith, when those intent on ministry strive to acquire the virtue, knowl-

edge and skills proper to this vocation;

- that of renewal and new directions for those already in ministry.

Formation in All Hallows, rooted in God's choosing of us to be holy and blameless before Him, centres on:

- the Church as a community of disciples, existing in order to evangelise;
- a spirituality which integrates body, feelings, mind and spirit;
- ministry as partnership and collaboration among all God's people;
- leadership as service, especially of the poor;
- the pursuit of academic excellence, validated by Church and State;
- a learning process which values the experience of all participants;
- a living environment which is Catholic, ecumenical and prayerful.

Mindful of its long tradition of hospitality All Hallows aspires to be a welcoming community living the Gospel with enthusiasm, hope and courage. *[End of Statement]*

This Mission Statement has provided the framework against which All Hallows has mounted a number of courses in recent years:

The *Graduate Diploma in Pastoral Leadership* was established in 1982, under the auspices of the All Hallows Pastoral Department. Initially it was designed for All Hallows deacons in the year leading up to their ordination. The course developed and changed and now its participants are a diverse group. Lay men and women, religious sisters and priests, join deacons from a variety of seminaries and religious orders in a creative mixture of ages, talents and life experiences. This new development allows the course to reflect and foster the trend in the Church towards collaborative ministry. Since 1988 suitably qualified participants have been eligible to receive a Graduate Diploma in Humanities: Holistic Development, from the Irish National Council for Educational Awards, on successful completion of the course. The course is designed to enable students to become aware of themselves as potential spiritual leaders and to discover ways in which their own spirituality may be of service to others. Students are facilitated to grow in an awareness of

how their attitudes, values and assumptions will affect the sort of leaders they will be. They are helped to develop a facility for reflecting on their pastoral work in order to enhance their effectiveness as leaders. The course invites them to establish a relationship of trust with their tutors and with their fellow participants. The fifty places on this one-year course are usually filled up by Easter of the previous year.

In 1973 All Hallows was one of the first seminaries in Ireland to link up with the newly established National Council for Educational Awards to have its philosophy courses recognised at certificate and diploma levels. In the summer of 1988 it went a stage further by mounting a *Four-Year Degree Programme* with theology as its major component and philosophy as its subsidiary component. This has also been recognised by the NCEA. In September of that year All Hallows seminarians and students from religious orders of men and women, as well as lay students, many of whom had graduated from the All Hallows Lay Ministry Course, began this four-year degree programme.

In September 1990 the NCEA accepted a cluster of electives in psychology and spirituality as an alternative to philosophy for the subsidiary component of this degree. Additional electives were also added, especially in the area of pastoral theology, thereby strengthening the practical orientation of this degree. Over the years the enrolments have increased steadily. This year (1992-93) there are over eighty students following the BA Degree programme. The first fourteen graduates were conferred in the summer of 1992.

This degree programme, with the certificates and diplomas already recognised, provides seminarians with a solid theological foundation for their ministry as priests. It provides laymen and women with a degree qualification, enabling them to become active members of pastoral teams in schools and hospitals, as well as preparing them for careers in other professions such as the media, social services and the caring professions. It also equips them to take an active role in the life of the Church in the future in Ireland and overseas and to face the challenges presented by contemporary society in making the gospel come alive in our day.

All Hallows began a course called *Preparing for Lay Ministry* in September 1985 in response to requests from a number of lay people who did not have the time to engage in a full-time course or who lacked the finances or theological background to enrol in our one-year *Pastoral Ministry Course*. Initially, after consultation with priests in local parishes, a two-year course was set up for twenty-five people on one evening per week, concentrating on reflection on one's own faith story, input on a variety of theological topics: Church, ministry, spirituality, etc. By

September 10 of that year over one hundred people had applied for the course and, after interviewing them, the staff responsible decided, because of their enthusiasm and desire to participate in the mission of the Church today, to take eighty people on board. These numbers have been maintained, with minimal advertising, over the years, confirming the late Cardinal O Fiaich's statement on the eve of the Synod on the Laity, that Ireland has a vast resource of interested people keen to take forth the mission of the Church today if they can only be affirmed in their vocation and prepared in practical ways.

In recent years All Hallows has set up a *Master's Degree in Pastoral Studies*. Its objectives are to enable an individual, already competent in general pastoral leadership, to develop a facility for strategic pastoral leadership: the ability to examine pastoral issues systematically and to devise strategies to deal with them, by means both of field and academic research. Such a facility ought to assist the student to develop as a creative leader, capable of handling a high level of responsibility.

This coming year – September 1993 – an alternative taught *Master's Programme in Pastoral Leadership* is being launched, whose aim is to prepare students for positions of authority and leadership in the pastoral field, at a level which involves them in pastoral planning and requires the ability to examine pastoral issues systematically and devise strategies to deal with them. In this course emphasis will be given to:

- the human and spiritual growth of the candidates;
- interpersonal and communication skills;
- building up a sensitive, integrated theological approach allied to a knowledge of the behavioural sciences;
- learning to adapt principles of organization, computer techniques and media evaluation to specific pastoral projects.

In addition to the MA programmes on offer All Hallows has also put in place *Short Sabbatical Courses* (three-month modules) in the autumn and spring, offering an opportunity for rest, renewal and reflection on current trends in the Church, to priests and sisters who are on sabbatical leave. These students can avail of a variety of courses on offer in All Hallows in both pastoral and theological subjects, including spirituality.

For over ten years the Vincentian Fathers directed a *Retreat/Conference Centre* in All Hallows. It responded to the needs of schools, hospitals, religious orders, local parishes, etc., by providing retreats,

courses, workshops. In 1988 it was decided to upgrade the facilities and accommodation available. This work was completed in the summer of 1990.

When the work of a new Centre recommenced in September 1990 two changes took place. The Centre was renamed Purcell House in memory of a former rector of All Hallows, Fr William Purcell CM (1949-1961), who for many years was a friend and guide to many All Hallows students. The bust of Fr Purcell in the entrance foyer of this building is a reminder to all of us that the preparation for new ministries taking place in this building today must be rooted in a life of prayer and contemplation.

The second change in the work taking place in this building today is that focus is on “ministering to ministers”. Lay people are being prepared for their ministry in the Church of the future - those who are, or who wish to become, actively involved in the renewal of parish life, in evangelization and in specialised ministries of nursing, social work, youth work, etc., and also men and women who will proclaim the gospel message “in the market place”. During the past year over 10,000 people have participated in courses in Purcell House.

Just about half the full-time students in All Hallows today are seminarians, preparing for priestly ministry, a number for priestly ministry in dioceses overseas and a number from various religious orders who participate in life in All Hallows through the week.

Today there is a serious shortage of priests in many countries of the western world and All Hallows continues to respond to requests from bishops from overseas dioceses. In recent years we have focused our attention on the acute shortage of priests in a number of inner cities such as London, Los Angeles, Sydney, Melbourne, Johannesburg, Liverpool, Miami, etc.

In the wider context of an Institute for Mission and Ministry All Hallows seminarians learn about the desire of many lay people to participate in the life of the Church and its mission to proclaim the gospel in the market place. They learn how to discern the gifts of lay people, how to work side by side with them, and how to affirm them and support them in their ministry as they in turn are affirmed and supported by them.

The formation programme is divided into three periods. In the first year All Hallows students join first-year seminarians and novices from orders and congregations in a special course organised by the Mater Dei Institute. In the second period of formation – years II, III, IV and V – there is a strong emphasis on academic formation. All students engage in a variety of pastoral tasks: visiting hospitals, prisons, schools, youth

groups, and working with adult religious education teams. Through these supervised placements students grow in understanding and develop the confidence and skills necessary to be a priestly minister in today's world. During their six years they are facilitated in integrating the different aspects of their formation through human development groups, spiritual conferences, workshops, weekly reflection groups, and dialogue with their Year Directors.

Also under the auspices of our Retreat/Conference Centre, known as Purcell House, a *Summer School* takes place each year. The All Hallows Summer School began in the summer of 1986 and over the past six years it has invited some of the best theologians and speakers to Dublin, as well as drawing from our own rich sources in the Irish Church.

The various courses have been designed to respond to the needs of people engaged in pastoral ministry in today's Church – parishes, schools, hospitals, etc. The variety of courses on offer – Theology, Human Development, Skills for Ministry – has been of immense help to participants in previous years. There are opportunities in each day's liturgy for prayerful reflection.

Speakers are invited who have the ability to communicate in an interesting way with their listeners, and who have something important to say about various aspects of pastoral ministry and parish renewal. A balance is maintained between speakers from Ireland and speakers from overseas with whom All Hallows has had many contacts through its network of alumni.

Participants in Summer Schools frequently comment on the value of sharing experiences of success and failure in the struggle to build up the Church today and the importance of the contacts made during the weeks.

In recent years All Hallows has become much better known in Ireland because of the *Intercession for Priests* launched in 1976 in response to the need experienced by priests for a place where they could come together and find space, support and healing. It was initiated by Fr Kevin Scallon CM with the help of Sister Briege McKenna and a team of priests who help to organise it each year through the month of August. Priests from dioceses, religious orders and missionary groups, from Ireland and overseas have participated in this month of intercession. In recent years the numbers have increased so that over 500 priests met in All Hallows in August 1991 and 700 in August 1992.

Since 1980 the *Vincentian Mission Team* has taken up residence in All Hallows, where they have been close to a centre of theological and pastoral renewal. In recent years the number of parish missions they

have taken on in the Dublin area has increased and they have involved both the staff and students of All Hallows in these missions, especially in workshops of various kinds.

One of the most interesting undertakings of All Hallows has been the staffing of a mission to young Irish people in Munich in 1988. *Sr Kilian's Pastoral Centre* is now well established and is responding to the pastoral needs of over 3,000 Irish people in Munich, as well as many other English-speaking ethnic groups in the city. The dialogue begun with the German Catholic Church has opened up interesting possibilities for us here in Ireland, struggling as we are with how to evangelise in a much more secularised society in our own country today.

When the Vincentians arrived in All Hallows on February 2, 1892, they were aware of a strong All Hallows tradition, centred on sending priests to those living in darkness and the shadow of death. As Ireland's first missionary seminary, there was a strong emphasis on bringing the gospel to those living in exile, especially the diaspora Irish. All this was reflected in college songs and student traditions, and was also maintained by the Vincentians who have administered the college over the past one hundred years. There was a consciousness of engaging in a work which was urgent – a work sustained by a particular theology of mission and ministry right up to Vatican II.

The challenge facing all of us who work in All Hallows today is how to sustain this “myth”/vision and express it in a challenging way in a new theological framework, faithful to all the insights of Vatican II, which takes account of new needs and new challenges in today's world. All of us who work in All Hallows are very conscious of the powerful tradition of mission and ministry we have inherited and on which we are hoping to build for the future.

## Homily at Mass at the Meeting of Confreres of the Irish Region, All Hallows, 21 December 1992

Richard McCullen

One of the most sensitive and lesser-known pieces of writing done by Pope Paul VI was a pastoral exhortation to the entire Church which he wrote in 1974. It is a piece of writing remarkable not only for its content and its delicate expression of ideas but also because of the circumstances out of which it was written.

Since the death of Pope Paul VI a few pages of some personal notes he had made at the end of one of his annual retreats have been published. These notes were written in the form of a reflection on his life. They also reflect what would seem to have been a period of mild depression through which Pope Paul was passing about the year 1972. It has been said that, as a consequence of some of the fall-out of the theological debate on the death of God at that time, Paul VI began to wonder if many Catholics had lost their taste for prayer and had marginalised it in their lives. Of course that preoccupation was only one of the many pressures and concerns that were bearing in on this saintly and sensitive pope. In the personal note to which I have referred Paul VI wrote:

The hour of my death is coming. I have a presentiment of it for some time. Apart from the physical fatigue which is ready to surrender at all times, the drama of my responsibilities seems to suggest that my departure from this world would be a providential solution, so that Providence could manifest itself and lead the Church into better circumstances. Providence has so many ways of intervening in the terrible play of circumstances which enfold my poor person! But it seems very clear that I must be called to the next life in order that I be replaced by another who is stronger and who will not be tied down by the present difficulties. "I am an unprofitable servant".

It would seem that some time elapsed after Pope Paul had written those words when, during the Holy Year of 1975, he gave to the Church his short but beautiful pastoral exhortation on Christian Joy. It has been said that it was the sight of so many pilgrims in prayer in the basilicas of Rome that restored and confirmed Pope Paul's conviction that the Church indeed had not lost its vision of the importance and efficacy of prayer.

It is joy that is, of course, the central theme of today's two readings (Zeph. 3:14-18a, Lk 1:39-45). The gospel passage is a recitation of the second joyful mystery of our rosary. In the presence of Mary, joyful and pregnant with the Word of God, the babe in Elizabeth's womb "leaped for joy". And the first reading, from Zephaniah: "Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion... Rejoice and exult with all your heart... The Lord your God is in your midst... He will rejoice over you with gladness... He will exult over you with loud singing, as on a day of festival".

It is difficult to define Christian joy. Like so much else in life, I suppose, it has to be experienced to be fully known. Perhaps the most cardinal point in the theology of Christian joy is that it is a by-product. St Thomas Aquinas has made this point clear. Joy is not a virtue. It is a by-product of a person's charity (cf II-IIae, q 28, a 4). And Pope Paul echoes St Thomas' thought:

Technological society has succeeded in multiplying the opportunities for pleasure, but it has great difficulty in generating joy. For joy comes from another source. It is spiritual. Money, comfort, hygiene and material security are often not lacking; and yet boredom, depression and sadness unhappily remain the lot of many (p 10).

Because each of us does possess a degree of Christian charity each of us radiates a measure of joy. The signal, of course, will be stronger in some than in others. Because, too, Christian joy is, in the words of Pope Paul, "the spiritual sharing in the unfathomable joy, both divine and human, which is in the heart of Jesus Christ glorified", the degree of joy will be related to the degree to which in prayer I allow myself to be possessed by God, to be loved by God and to enter into the heart and mind of the risen Christ, who has prayed that his joy may be in us. So much of what we call the spiritual life could be reduced to a phrase of the first reading: "He will rejoice over you with gladness". Much of my trouble and difficulty in living my Vincentian vocation is that I will not, because of the priorities which I have set up in my life, allow God to rejoice over me. I will not allow myself to be loved by him. I cannot somehow fully

grasp the depth of significance of another phrase in today's first reading: "The Lord God is in your midst". I like very much a one-sentence prayer of Teilhard de Chardin:

God, grant that you will always find me as you desire me, and where you would have me be, so that you can lay hold of me fully.

Allowing oneself to be possessed by God, and to be loved by him, is at the heart of all authentic prayer, of charity, of Christian joy.

We may feel like saying that we could radiate more joy if we had been given different temperaments, if we had not been psychologically bruised in infancy, or hurt by experiences in community. That may be true to a degree. However, I think of a confrere of another Province, dead a number of years now, who, as a young priest, was slanderously accused of some impropriety. His Provincial took his faculties away from him. He protested his innocence but to no avail. He accepted the deprivation and he lived his life in community tranquilly, and without bitterness. He was unable to hear confessions, so he devoted some time to writing and to giving conferences. His books proved to be quite popular, and one of them was simply entitled *Joy*. It was a sustained meditation on Christian joy. A few months before his death the slander was acknowledged as such, and his faculties were restored. Pain, misunderstanding, suffering, can cohabit, and would seem in a mysterious way to nourish the roots of Christian joy, as it did with Mary, Cause of Our Joy. Christian joy, concludes Pope Paul,

is not just a matter of psychology. It is also a fruit of the Holy Spirit. This spirit, who dwells fully in the person of Jesus, made him, during his earthly life, so alert to the joys of daily life, so tactful and persuasive for putting a sinner back on the road to a new youth of heart and mind! It is this same spirit who still today gives to so many Christians the joy of living day by day their particular vocation, in the peace and hope which surpass setbacks and suffering. It is the Spirit of Pentecost who today leads very many followers of Christ along the paths of prayer, in the cheerfulness of filial praise, towards the humble and joyous service of the disinherited and those on the margins of society. For joy cannot be dissociated from sharing. In God himself all is joy, because all is giving...

St Vincent wrote to a correspondent:

You have a thousand reasons for rejoicing in God and for hoping for everything from him through our Lord who is living in you... Say, then, to God, as did David, "Give me, Lord, the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit". Stimulate yourself to this joy as much by reflecting on the misfortunes you have avoided through leaving the world... as by reflecting on the fact that you are numbered among the children of God and spouses of his Son. This is the grace of graces. It comprises all the rest and puts you already in possession of eternal glory. Be very grateful for that and thank God often for it. Ask his mercy for me who shudders at my ingratitude and who am, in the love of Jesus Christ, our Liberator, yours devotedly,

Vincent de Paul

(VIII, 313-314).

## Forum

### SOME PERSONAL REFLECTIONS - SIX YEARS ON

No need to recall the past,  
no need to think about what was done before.  
See, I am doing a new deed,  
even now it comes to light: can you not see it?  
Yes, I am making a road in the wilderness,  
paths in the wild. (Isaiah 43:18-19).

In November 1992 I completed my term of office as Provincial. Because I believe that reflecting on the past is a means of facilitating growth in the future I would like to share with you some of my thoughts about the six years 'ended. I won't pretend that it was an easy six years, but it had countless rewarding moments, many of which arose from the whole-hearted support and encouragement which I received from the confreres of the Province. To each of you, my sincere thanks.

First of all I am very conscious of much change, including much dying. Twenty-seven confreres died, including a student in Nigeria. We experienced death, too, in our departure from Armagh in June 1988 after 127 years. We left De Paul House, Celbridge, in September 1988. The dioceses of Southwark and Westminster took over the Chaplaincy to the Deaf in the summer of 1987. We handed back the care of our parish in Hereford to the archdiocese of Cardiff on 1st October 1989. St Vincent's Primary School in Sheffield was closed in June 1988. We sold Nithsdale Place, Glasgow, in April 1991. We have been diminished, too, by the departure from the community of a number of confreres.

I am very conscious that in those six years nobody was accepted into the community in Ireland and Britain, while in Nigeria there has been a steady flow of seminarists and students. At the moment we have 30 students in Nigeria, between novitiate, philosophy and theology. Our biggest problem in Ireland and Britain is our lack of vocations. The problem is not ours alone. The present vocations crisis in the western world is a mystery, which we have to believe is providential. The Church and our community are in a kind of desert and experiencing much of the spirituality of the desert – the lack of direction, the murmuring against the leaders, the longing to return to the security of Egypt, the uncertainty

about the future.

In the western world we are in a stage of transition from one model of Church to another. We are, in a way, like the apostles on the road to Emmaus, who have experienced the death of the Lord but haven't yet experienced the glory of the resurrection. Having experienced the death of the Church of our youth we are searching for a new model of church. Under the guidance of the Spirit of God we are actively working towards a new renewed Church. While we are waiting we have to remain at peace, confident that the plan of God is being worked out in each of us, in the community and in the Church.

Meanwhile, we attend to the traditional works and spirituality of our community - the service of ministry in the Church, especially to the poor and the clergy, scripture and prayer, the vows, the five virtues, and the writings of St Vincent. At the Provincials' meeting in Rio de Janeiro three years ago Bishop Helder Camara spent an afternoon with us and celebrated mass. During his homily he talked about the temptations of pessimism and cynicism for those ministering in today's Church. He said that there is no place in the Church for pessimism, as pessimism is not a gospel value.

Something is dying in the community. That is the reality and we have to face it. But something is also being born:

See, I am doing a new deed,  
even now it comes to light;  
can you not see it?  
(Is. 43:19)

During the six years we had sixteen ordinations to the priesthood, seven for Ireland and Britain, and nine in Nigeria. Brother Paul Odjugo took his vows on 11 April 1992. St Vincent de Paul House in Enugu was opened in 1988. In March 1989 the house in Park View, Dublin, was opened, with a view to establishing a new experimental community of confreres working with underprivileged people. The new Church of the Resurrection and of St Bridget, in Cinnamon Brow in Warrington, co-owned with and shared by the local Anglican parish, was opened on 17 September 1989. Iona Drive, Dublin, was opened in January 1990 as a student house. We have built two new rooms for the care of sick confreres in Rickard House, Blackrock, thanks to the Daughters of Charity. We moved into St Leo's in Lagos in March 1990, St Mark's, Glasgow, on 9 November 1990, the Sacred Heart parish in Ankpa, Nigeria, in September 1992, and preliminary moves have been made

to establish a Vincentian presence in the diocese of Down and Connor, Northern Ireland, from January 1993. The Tooting experimental mission had three confreres at one stage and completed a number of missions in the diocese of Southwark; there is now one confrere working with the homeless in London.

The Nigerian mission has continued to grow, thank God. The two foundational ministries of the Congregation - evangelization of the poor and work for the clergy - are very well established in the minds and hearts of all the confreres. However, much work remains to be done to flesh out the vision in reality. I am very confident that, in time, these foundational ministries will be well established in Nigeria. In Nigeria we are working towards a separate Province, hopefully, by the year 2000.

Our finances have been given a lot of attention, thanks to the relentless work of Fr Bernard Meade and the finance committee. An external audit has been completed now for two years following the visitation of Fr Bob Maloney.

Lay administrators were appointed: Miss Siobhan Kennedy in St Vincent's Centre for Deaf People in Glasgow in February 1990; Mr Dominic McQuillan as Principal in St Paul's College, Raheny, Dublin, on 1 August 1990; Dr Arthur Naylor took up his appointment as Principal in St Mary's College, Strawberry Hill on 1 September 1992, (and the Vincentian community moved across the road to take up residence in 293 Waldegrave Road). In January 1993 it is planned to advertise for the post of lay Principal in St Vincent's College, Castleknock. The appointment of lay people involves losing some control, but a diminishment of control does not necessarily mean a diminishment of influence. The appointment of lay people to posts of responsibility can be an opportunity for a renewed growth. Fulfilling our mission through collaborative ministries is a new country for those of us who are used to working in an individualistic way. It involves learning a whole new set of relational skills. Involving lay people in our mission, especially those who share our charism, is the way of the future. It is a big challenge for us to invite people to work in equal partnership with us, to give them the freedom to do things differently, and to live with the incompleteness which that entails.

I am also conscious of an ever closer coming together of the community and the Society of St Vincent de Paul. This was very obvious in Britain, where the Society moved its offices into Damascus House, London, on 4 November 1991. In Ireland we have also been working much more closely with the Society and, as in Britain, their headquarters are symbolically next door to us in Cabra Road, Dublin. Much collaboration is also continuing with the Daughters of Charity.

The confreres working with the travellers moved their offices from Exchange Street, Dublin, to Cook Street, and the confreres working with the deaf moved from Rathmines to the Sacred Heart Home in Drumcondra.

The Convocation of August 1989 involved the whole Province in planning for the future by drawing up Lines of Action. At the Provincial Assembly of 29 and 30 June 1991 it was decided that future Assemblies would be open to all confreres in Ireland and Britain, with elected representatives present from the Regional Assembly in Nigeria. The Provincial Plan, completed in June 1992, was the result of the Provincial Council developing the Convocation Lines of Action in a more detailed form after consultation with the Province. During the next three years we will have to implement our Province Plan. Much work remains to be done to develop new forms of community life. Community life can no longer be presumed or taken for granted. It has to be developed and fostered. Much work has been done through using the Community Plan, but more remains to be done. Ongoing formation is a must for anybody striving to be a relevant preacher of the Word.

During the next three years we will be concentrating on new forms of mission to poor people. That is the thinking behind our move to Belfast. We are the Congregation of the Mission and we have to keep our eye steadily focussed on the mission to the poor of the community. Already, many confreres are in contact with poor people. We can hope that our love for poor people is caught by those with whom we work and to whom we minister so that they, in time, may be motivated to share good news with the poor (cf Provincial Plan, page 4). With an ageing community we could become introvert, yet to be missionary means to be open to new ways of evangelization of the poor, especially in a collaborative way.

A vocations drive in Ireland and Britain is necessary if we are to continue to serve the Church in a Vincentian way. It is also necessary for morale. Vocations are not as plentiful as they were in the past, but there are vocations. The Provincial of the Paris Province told me at the General Assembly that they got many of their recent vocations in the Paris Province through a confrere working with young people in Lourdes. A Provincial of a religious community in Dublin recently said that they got their vocations through the Young Franciscan Movement where, to quote his own words, "young people had a lot of contact with apostolic men who were happy in community". I believe a man who is happy in community, who gives time to community and who draws energy from community, is in a position to draw people into the community.

While we have much contact with young people in our different ministries, especially in our schools, colleges, parishes and other ministries, yet I think we will also have to work at contact with young people in neutral settings, like pilgrimages to Paris, Taizé, Lourdes and Knock, work with Marian Vincentian Youth, Vincentian Volunteers and Young Vincent de Paul Society. We should look at the possibility of a house for young adults who could live some form of Christian life. We will also have to organise meetings of confreres who are interested in promoting vocations, in order to mobilize our energies and to discern the way forward.

I think we have to be clear that we are not seeking contact with young people only with an eye to vocations. Let me quote the Provincial Plan, page 4:

By involving young people actively with us in our mission and by making the necessary changes to welcome them wholeheartedly into our works and communities, we will be taking the first step of sharing our Vincentian gift, and can hope that some will be led to a permanent commitment with the Community.

Fr McCullen, in one of his letters or talks, said that each generation of youth was a new continent to be won over for Christ. This has to be our approach in our ministry to youth, but let us also continue to pray for vocations – pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth labourers into his vineyard.

As people of faith we have to journey forward in hope and confidence. We hope that God is re-founding our Community in the light of the Second Vatican Council through the purification that is going on at the moment. We trust that the present lack of vocations in the Community and in the Church is part of the mystery of God's plan for us and for our Community. We could become frustrated by the mystery of God's plan, but so many things give me hope.

The zeal and talents of so many confreres is a source of confidence for the Province. Their continuing success in different works, including the work of the parish missions, gives me hope. With reduced numbers in Ireland and Britain confreres are being called to do things that they would never have been called to do ten or fifteen years ago. The vast majority of confreres have responded to that call with great generosity and courage. I have been humbled many times by the extraordinary generosity of so many confreres. The fact that we have confreres who never grow old, but who always remain open to new ways and new ideas, gives

me great confidence for the future. The fact that in Ireland and Britain we have a number of very talented younger confreres who are committed to working with the poor gives me great hope. The fact that we meet regularly as regions gives me hope. Somebody said "all life is about meeting". When we stop meeting we die.

There were times in the past six years when I believed that the only crisis we have is a crisis of imagination. We have what we need, but new eyes are necessary to see the possibilities in our present situation. We have to find new ways of using our Vincentian charism to build the Kingdom according to the insights and teachings of Vatican II. In trying to discern new means of evangelization I have asked myself where God is calling us at this time in our history. I believe that God is calling us to evangelize the poor in a new collaborative way with lay people and with those who share our charism, that God is calling us to renew ourselves with the attitudes, teaching and mind of St Vincent de Paul, that God is calling us to be poor and to be with the poor, that God is calling us to take prudent risks in planning, to allow new growth to take place.

Mark Noonan

#### STUDYING URBAN THEOLOGY IN SHEFFIELD, 1991-1992

"We share a simple lifestyle, eat, worship and relax together. We reflect and study, supporting and inspiring each other in our work and ministries".

This is part of the Urban Theology Unit's statement of intent. I found it very Vincentian. Moreover it was being lived out in day-to-day practice - which may not be the case with all Vincentian proclamations.

It comes from a man called Vincent. UTU was founded thirty years ago by an enthusiastic young Methodist minister named John Vincent from the north of England. He still directs the small but significant centre with great enthusiasm, and has published many short but challenging books which would draw approval from St Vincent.

The two other tutors, Frances and Ed, are even more directly involved with the poor. Deliberately they took a drop in their living standard in order to live closer to the immigrant and poor people of one of Sheffield's Urban Priority Areas. They felt quite at home, as I soon did, with the delightful Pakistani children in colourful clothes who, on their way to or from school, swirled around the two semis which adequately

house UTU.

Such was the backdrop to our three-days-a-week studies. It sounds not very much at first but could, in practice, be almost as demanding as university studies. We started at 9.30 a.m. and ended after 3.30, having had a morning coffee break and a very basic lunch in the kitchen (prepared by us in turn). A simple lifestyle, unquestionably.

The *Standard Course*, which I was following, led to a Diploma in Theology and Mission. Student numbers varied from year to year. In our 1991-1992 group there were only five, so we got to know each other well. I was the only Catholic. Methodists and Anglicans predominate at UTU. For me, one of the advantages of this was that I got a good chance to see at close hand the different ways that other Christians practise, and theorise about, their following of Christ.

Topics dealt with were as follows:

*Cities and Peoples*: trips to meet workers in various challenging situations; social analysis of poverty, class, race and culture.

*Radical Bible*: working together on bible passages to discover the actions and interests behind key scriptural narratives; seeking to find ways to use the bible as a means of transforming people's attitudes.

*Feminist Theology*: seeing its urgent relevance not merely to half of humanity, but to everyone. I challenged some of the shallow assumptions being made by rightly angry feminists, in my summer term paper.

*Urban Theology*: how people's experiences in cities lead to a new agenda for theology and call for new resources.

*Christianity and Politics*: Catholic expert on Marxism, Professor David McLelland, led this off to a good start.

In our *Liberation Theology* course one of the ten (so few!) black African theologians, Itumeleng Mosala, gave us a whole new perspective on the subject. John Vincent is striving to put together yet one more book; it will attempt to present a British Liberation Theology.

To the *Community Work* course there were brought in many people working at the coal-face in a struggle to empower ordinary people and battle with property developers and politicians. One of our Wednesday students was herself an Afro-Caribbean Social Worker with deep faith.

The *Discipleship* course was all about following Christ the evangelizer of the poor. And the radicality of Jesus led to reflections on how this leads us into a *Radical Theology*, one of John Vincent's favourite topics, expressed, for example, in his "Discipleship in the 90s".

For *Urban Mission Consultation* we shared four intense two-day sessions with eight or ten ministers who, in various parts of Britain, were working out new models, alliances and strategies. Here it became clearest to me how shrinking church attendance has led other Christian clergy to concentrate a good deal more on social work than I consider appropriate. Sacramental life and prayer tend to give way to finding Christ solely in social action, whereas each needs attention. I was glad to experience an attempt to redress the balance when I was requested to give their first ever retreat to an Ashram Community associated with UTU. They asked for, and observed, silence like good-old-days' sems!

*Spirituality* dealt with ways in which disciples working in an urban context can be supported spiritually. Issues of vocation (one of our group discovered he seems not to be called to the full Methodist ministry), discipleship, life-style, community, were addressed. An orientation was given to Catholic (including Matthew Fox's) mystical and contemporary spirituality.

Ed Kessler in a provocative and over-assertive way tried to convince us that all previous interpreters of *Parables* failed to grasp what they are really about. The book in which he was expounding his views should have appeared before the end of 1992. Buy it and judge for yourself.

"It was the best time of my priestly life" Fergie Kelly commented to me on his time at UTU. I didn't take him to mean this *stricto sensu* but I'd make the same statement *lato sensu*. And I'd quite like to have taken up John Vincent's request last November to become one of the tutors at UTU. "I wouldn't envisage novices studying here", I told him, "but I would recommend it for students – if we had any". And the course was a good preparation for my new apostolate in Lagos.

Stan Brindley

#### A FURTHER ENDORSEMENT

I have noted in the most recent issue of COLLOQUE Stafford Poole's comments agreeing on the need for a thorough study of the Common Rules. I would like to suggest that there is need for an even larger study than just that of the Common Rules. Over the years in the course of my own research on various topics in the history of the Congregation I have become convinced that there is also a need for a "Constitutional History"

of the Congregation of the Mission to be undertaken.

I would envision that this in-depth “Constitutional History” would be in two parts. The first part would consist of gathering together and publishing all of the documents (in translation) which together record the juridical development of the Congregation throughout its history. These documents would begin with the 1625 contract of foundation, and would also include approbations and decisions of the Holy See, the Codex Sarzana, the Common Rules, the Constitutions of 1668, the *Selectae Constitutiones* of 1670, relevant constitutional decrees of successive General Assemblies, the nineteenth-century directories, the authoritative rules of office for the Congregation, the post-World War II constitutions, the post-Vatican II constitutions, and our present Constitutions and Statutes.

The second part of this history would then specifically analyze and examine the effect of these constitutions and other governing documents in the “lived experience” which is the history of the Congregation. It seems to me that except for the Common Rules almost all of these other crucial documents in our history are now all but forgotten. I do not believe that the Congregation can afford to have such a large gap in its memory. The Community has an incredibly rich and complex history in the three hundred years from the death of Vincent to the Second Vatican Council.

Since the time of Coste the Congregation has rightly spent a great amount of time and effort recovering our “memory” of Vincent and the primitive era of the Congregation. Perhaps in the coming years we can begin to pay greater attention to restoring the rest of the collective “memory” of the Congregation. The present efforts at writing the history of the Congregation by Roman and Mezzadri are an important step in this direction, as would be the Constitutional History that I am suggesting. It would seem that separate in-depth national histories, such as that written by the American Provinces, should have a high priority in the future. What a tremendous contribution it would be to have separate histories written for the Provinces of Ireland, Italy, Poland and Spain!

Edward R Udovic

# Miscellanea

## Twickenham bombed

20 June 1944. Yesterday will go down to history, I suppose, in Simmaries. The first bomb fell during the students' mass, and everyone, including Fr Hurley at the altar, held his breath for a few seconds awaiting the impact. Poor Twickenham got its first taste. Then in the evening around 7 p.m. the second fell, at The Grotto. This time I could distinctly hear the whistling of the air in the struts of the machine as it came down. Yet I do not think I was really frightened. I have been far more frightened lying in bed listening to one passing overhead (and seemingly taking ages to do so). Some things will stick in my memory, I think:

- the sight of that poor legless corpse which I anointed in the roadway, literally unrecognisable.
- the first sight of the woman trapped beneath the wreckage in Holmes Road; one bare dusty arm at first, then the bent figure freed to the waist, and over us the solid mass of the chimney hanging, with the two youths levering it upright.
- the conversation of the two men above me: “First The King’s Head and now The Grotto; the two best pubs in Twickenham”. Yet not serious, I think. Just he-man stuff.
- the sight of Fr Shannon roaming around, hatless and tired, and respected.
- the tangled mass of the infernal machine lying in the roadway, with curious spectators pushing it around.
- the poor woman, her face covered with blood and her two eyeless sockets gory messes, yet breathing calmly and answering questions in a steady voice.
- the opinion voiced by Gerry [Shannon] that night as we sat in a huddle at the door of the Principal’s office: “Our Lady has protected us today, Father: Monstra te esse matrem”.

Kevin Cronin