

COLLOQUE

Journal of the Irish Province of the
Congregation of the Mission

Gerardus Brin

Marcus Cogley.

Donatus Crowley.

Franciscus de Blane

The Latin signatures of Gerard Brin, Mark Cogley, and Francis White, from the Acta of the St Lazare domestic assembly of 17 November 1660, and that of Donat Crowley from the Acta of the 1668 General Assembly.

Contents

Editorial	4
Keeping the Rules <i>V de Paul</i>	5
St Vincent on Pardon <i>E Flanagan</i>	14
Irishmen in the Congregation of the Mission during the Founder's Lifetime <i>T Davitt</i>	19
"Our Kind of People": What a Vincentian Parish ought to be about <i>K Lawlor</i>	38
St Vincent and Prayer <i>R McCullen</i>	44
St Vincent de Paul – our Model and Patron <i>M Noonan</i>	56
St Cedd's, Goodmayes <i>T Bennett</i>	61
Forum	
A (delayed) 1993 Letter from Brazil <i>K Scallon</i>	66
Centre for International Formation (GIF) <i>M McCullagh</i>	69

Editorial

St Vincent figures prominently in the contents of this issue. There is a new translation of his talk on keeping the rules, as well as articles on his thinking on pardon and on prayer, on how he can be a model and patron of the St Vincent de Paul Society, and on the Irishmen who joined his congregation in his lifetime.

An American confrere gives his views on what difference it should make to a parish to have Vincentian priests in charge, and a confrere who ministered in St Cedd's parish, Goodmayes, for almost half of the time it was in Vincentian hands, reflects on his experience.

In the Forum section two confreres give their reflections on personal experiences. The first reflects on his retreat ministry in Brazil and the second on his experience of following the first course in the Centre International de Formation in Paris.

Keeping the Rules

Vincent de Paul

(Confreres should always remember, if possible, what Fr Vincent said, because in everything he says there is something instructive for themselves or for those who come after them. But this is especially true when he speaks to them as their father and calls them his dear children, and when it's on some important topic. The talk he gave on Friday 17 May 1658, when he gave out copies of the Rules, was full not just of good and useful instruction, but even more so of the fatherly attitude he had towards the community (1). That's why some (2) tried to note it down with the greatest possible accuracy, and even to describe everything which happened on that occasion, so that those who were absent could share the extraordinary edification and consolation of those who had the happiness of being there.

The subject of the conference was “Keeping the Rules”, and it had two parts: first the motives and then the means for keeping our rules well. Fr Vincent arrived while a brother was speaking. On the first point this brother had said that if we didn't keep the rules well now then clearly they would not be kept well in a hundred or two hundred years' time. Fr Vincent made him repeat this, then let him carry on. Then Fr Vincent spoke more or less as follows:

Fathers and Brothers, God did not give me the grace to think of such strong motives for keeping our rules, nor of such good means for doing so, as those mentioned which I've just heard. Blessed be God, and may his holy name be ever blessed!

(He paused for a moment)

There's one motive which should make us keep our rules well. It seems to me that, through God's grace, all the rules of the Mission are geared to withdrawing us from sin, from imperfection even, saving souls, serving the Church and giving glory to God. That's how I see it, that all of them, by the grace of God, aim at that. So much so that anyone who keeps them as he should will be as God invites him to be,

personally free from vice and sin, useful to the Church, and giving our Lord the glory he expects from him. What a motive, Fathers, for the community to keep its rules well, to be free from faults as far as human weakness allows, to glorify God and see that he's loved and served on earth!. O Saviour! What happiness! It beats me!

In the past a good servant of God used to say to me, about the *Introduction to the Devout Life*: "You know, anyone who does well what's in this book would reach great holiness, even though it all seems ordinary and within reach for human weakness". Couldn't I say the same about our rules? They don't seem to oblige us to anything more than an ordinary sort of life, yet they can lead those who put them into practice on to great holiness; and not only that, but even to destroy sin and imperfection in others. Really, Fathers, can those who don't put them into practice be attending to their own holiness or to that of others? And what glory will they give our Lord? If, on the other hand, the community has, by the grace of God, made some progress in virtue, if each one has broken with sin and advanced in holiness, isn't it keeping the rules which has brought this about? If the community, by the mercy of God, does some good on missions and for the ordinands, isn't it once again the rules which have caused this? And without our rules how could we have done this? We've plenty of reason, then, for keeping them exactly, and won't the community be happy if it's faithful to this?

And there's another reason why we should be careful about keeping our rules. They're all drawn from the gospel, as you'll see, and they all aim at aligning our lives with that which our Lord led on earth. Our Lord came, sent by the Father, to evangelize the poor. *Pauperibus evangelizare misit me* (Lk 4:18). *Pauperibus*, the poor! The poor, Fathers, as the little Company tries, by the grace of God, to do.

There's real reason there for the community to be a bit embarrassed by the fact that there never was a group, quite unheard of in fact, whose purpose was to do what our Lord came into the world to do, to preach the gospel just to the poor, to the neglected poor: *Pauperibus evangelizare misit me*. For that is our purpose, you know, and it pleased God to put up recently a sort of marker for the community and a reminder to posterity about this.

Some time back the Queen heard that the way things were in Metz indicated little faith but much disorder, even among the clergy. She decided to have a mission given there, and she contacted me through two bishops and asked me to go and see her, so I went. She told me of

this good idea she had, and that she wanted our community to go to Metz to give the mission. I said to her: “Madam, Your Majesty obviously doesn’t know that the poor priests of the Mission are only for poor country people. But we have another group of priests who meet in St Lazare every Tuesday and, if Your Majesty has no objection, they could do it far better than we could”. When she heard this she admitted that up till then she had not known that our community did not work in towns, that she wouldn’t want to make us act contrary to our Institute, and she’d be quite willing to have the Tuesday Conference men give the Metz mission. They gave it, with great results, thanks be to God. They’re coming back from it right now.

So, Fathers and Brothers, the poor are our share, the poor: pauperibus evangelizare misit me. What happiness, Fathers, what happiness! To do what our Lord came down from heaven to earth to do, and in doing it we, in turn, go from earth to heaven, continuing God’s work. He bypassed the towns and headed for the countryside to look for the poor. That’s what our rules involve us in, helping the poor our lords and masters. O poor but happy rules of the Mission, which oblige us to serve them and ignore the towns. Look, this is something unheard of: blessed are those who keep them, for they will make all their life and all their activity match those of the Son of God. God, doesn’t that give the community reason to keep the rules, to do what the Son of God came into the world to do. That there should exist a community, and that it should be the Congregation of the Mission, composed of poor men, whose sole purpose is to go around hamlets and villages, but never towns, preaching the gospel only to poor people; that’s something which has never been done, yet that’s the way our rules have it.

But what are these rules? Are they the ones which the community has had in its hands up to now? Of course; but it seemed like a good idea to tease them out a bit and get them printed, so that each of us could have them in a handier form. We’ll give them out to the community this evening. You’ve waited a long time for them, Fathers, and we’ve put off giving them to you for a long time; there was good reason for this. First of all to imitate what our Lord did; he started by doing things, then later on he taught: *coepit Jesus facere et docere* (Acts 1:1). For the first thirty years of his life he put the virtues into practice and gave only the last three to preaching and teaching. The community has also tried to imitate him not just by doing what he came on earth to do but even by doing it the way he did. For the community can say this, that it did things first, and then taught: *coepit facere et docere*. It’s

a good thirty-three years since God set it up, and since that time, by the grace of God, we've always lived by the rules which we're going to give out in a moment. And you're not going to find anything new, anything different from what you've been living for several years now with great edification.

Secondly, if we had given out the rules at the start it would have been difficult to get rid of certain inconveniences which might have emerged; by taking our time we've avoided this, by the grace of God. If the community had been given rules which it had not been putting into practice it could have run into trouble; but by giving it what it has done and practised for so many years with edification, and from which no problems arose in the past, there is nothing which it won't find equally easy and acceptable for the future. We've done the same as the Rechabites, who are mentioned in holy scripture (cf Jer 35); in their traditions they held on to the rules which had been handed down by their forefathers even though these were never put in writing. Now that we're going to have ours written and printed the community has only to keep going as it has been for a number of years, keep on doing what it has been doing and practising up to now.

In the third place, Fathers, if we had given out the rules at the start, before the community had been putting them into practice, there might have been reason to think they were more human than divine, that they were a plan drawn up and worked out on the human level rather than a work of God. But all these Rules, everything you see, came about in I don't know what way, for I never thought them up. And all this happened little by little, so that no one can say whose idea it was. Now St Augustine has an axiom that when we can't find the cause of some good thing we must refer it back to God and recognise him as its origin and maker. According to St Augustine's axiom, then, isn't God the author of all our rules, for I don't know how they all came about, brought in in such a way that I can't say how or why?

Such rules, O Saviour, and where do they come from? Did I ever think them up? No way, Fathers! Neither the rules, nor the Congregation, nor even the word "Mission" itself, I never thought them up; God did all that; men had no hand in it. When I reflect on the means God was pleased to use to bring the Congregation to birth in his Church I must admit I don't know where I am, and it all seems something I'm dreaming. Oh in no way is it human; it's divine. Can you call human what human intelligence never foresaw, what the will never intended nor sought in any way whatsoever? Poor Fr Portail (4)

never thought of this, any more than myself; it all happened against my hope and without my thinking about it in any way. When I look at all this, and when I see the community's works, it really seems like a dream, as if I'm dreaming; I can't explain it to you. It's like the poor prophet Habakkuk whom an angel grabbed by the hair and carried off a great distance to console Daniel who was in the lions' den. Then the angel brought him back to where he'd taken him from, and when he found himself back where he'd started from he thought it was all a dream, that he had dreamt it.

Would you call it human, the way our missions began? One day I was called out to hear the confession of a poor man who was dangerously ill. He had the name of being the best, or at least one of the best, in his village. He had, however, a load of sins which he'd never dared tell in confession. He admitted this out loud to the late wife of the General of the Galleys; he told her: "I was damned, Madam, if I hadn't made a general confession, because of the big sins I'd never dared confess". The man died later and this lady, having realised the need for general confessions, asked me to preach on this the following day. I did so, and God blessed this so much that all the people of the place made general confessions. Because of the numbers I had to get two Jesuits to help with the confessions, preaching and catechism. This led to doing the same in other parishes on Madam's estates over a number of years. Eventually she wanted to support priests for giving missions, and for this reason she got us the Collège des Bons Enfants, and Fr Portail and myself took up residence there, bringing with us a good priest whom we paid fifty *écus* a year. The three of us would head off together, giving missions from village to village. When we were leaving we used give the key to one of the neighbours, or ask them to sleep in the house. However, no matter where we went I had only a single sermon which I adapted in a thousand ways; it was on the fear of God.

That's what we, for our part, used to do; yet God was doing what he had foreseen from all eternity. He gave our work good results, and when some good priests saw this they joined us and asked to stay. O Saviour, O Saviour, who would ever have thought that that would lead to what we have today? If anyone had said so to me I'd have thought he was pulling my leg, and yet that's how God wanted to start off what you now see. So Fathers, so Brothers, would you call human what no one ever thought of? For neither myself nor poor Fr Portail were thinking of it; no, that's not the way we were thinking, far from it!

Were we thinking at all about the community's works, for example the ordinands, who are the most valuable and precious treasure the Church could entrust to us? It never even crossed our minds. The Confraternity of Charity, did we ever think of that? How did we ever ensure saving the abandoned babies? I don't know how all this happened; as far as I'm concerned, I just don't know. There's Fr Portail, he can bear me out that all this was the last thing we were thinking of.

And how did what we do in the community come about? The same way, little by little, I don't know how. Conferences, for example, like this one, which might be the last I'll be at with you, were something we never even thought of. And repetition of prayer, something unheard before of in the Church of God and which has since been brought in to several well-run communities where it is going very well, how did that idea come to us? I just don't know. What about all the other practices and works of the community, how did the idea of these come to us? Once again, I just don't know.

All this happened as if by itself, little by little, one thing after another. The numbers joining us went up and up; everyone was working away at virtues; at the same time as the numbers were going up day by day good practices were brought in to help us live well, united together, and to do our work in a uniform way. These practices have always been kept up, and are still here today, by the grace of God.

Eventually it seemed a good idea to get all this down in writing and make it into rules, the ones we're going to hand out to the community in a moment.

Now there are two sorts of rules, Fathers: special ones for the superior, the assistant and other office-holders, and these are to be given only to those in office, as is done in all well-run communities. Then there are other rules for everyone, priests, students and brothers; these are the ones we've had printed and which we're going to give you. I'm hoping, Fathers, that just as the community has always practiced them with good faith and sincerity, I'm hoping, I say, that it will accept them, now that we've drawn them all together, with the same good faith, sincerity and simplicity as usual, that it won't regard them as coming from men but as coming from God and emanating from his spirit, *a quo bona cuncta procedunt* and without whom *non sumus sufficientes cogitare aliquid quasi ex nobis* (2 Cor 3:5).

O my Saviour, Fathers, am I asleep? Am I dreaming? Rules given out by me! I don't know what we've done to reach a pass like this;

I don't know how it has all come about; it always seems to me that I'm still at the start; and the more I think about it the more distant it all seems from human invention, and the more I see that it is God alone who inspired all this in the Congregation, yes, Fathers, in the Congregation. If I've contributed anything to this I'm afraid it's the little bit that hinders their proper observance and blocks the good results they might have achieved. What's left, then, Fathers, but to imitate Moses; when he had given the law of God to the people he promised, to all who kept it, all sorts of blessings in their bodies, possessions and everything else. So, Fathers and Brothers, we should hope for all sorts of blessings from God's goodness for all who faithfully keep the rules which he has given us; blessings for themselves, for their plans and for all they do, blessings going and coming, in fact God's blessing on everything connected with them.

But as this same Moses also threatened vengeance and God's curse on those who would not keep his holy commandments there's reason to fear, great reason to fear, that those who don't keep these rules, which come to the community through God's inspiration, will experience his curse, will be cursed in their bodies and souls, cursed in all their plans and enterprises, cursed in fact in everything which concerns them.

But I have confidence in God's grace and in your goodness, Fathers, that on this occasion you'll all renew the fidelity with which you have kept them, even before they were written down. I'm confident that whoever would have scored three in keeping them will now score four, and whoever was marked four will now get five or six. Finally, Fathers, I hope that this past fidelity with which you have kept these rules, and your patience in waiting so long for them, will earn you, from God's goodness, the grace to keep them more easily in the future.

He asked someone to bring him up the rules, and then went on:

O Lord, you have given so many blessings to certain books, for example the one now being read at meals (3), that well-prepared souls draw great benefit from them in getting rid of their faults and advancing in holiness, grant, Lord, your blessing to this book, and anoint it, please, with your spirit, so that it may bring about, in the souls of all who read it, separation from sin, detachment from the world with all its vanities, and union with you.

Then he said he'd give the rules only to the senior priests, that he'd give them to the students the following day, and that there'd be one or two copies for the seminarists, which would be common property, so that each one could read them; for the brothers, since they couldn't read Latin, he'd get them printed in French and give them to them as well. He then asked the senior men to come forward to get them, saying that if he could he'd like to have spared them this trouble and to have brought them to each one in his place. He then went on:

Come, Fr Portail, come up here, you who have always put up with my infirmities; may God bless you!

Then he gave them to Fathers Alméras, Bécu and Gicquel who were nearest to him on each side, and told the others to come up in the order in which they were sitting. Each man knelt to accept them, with great devotion, respectfully kissing the book and Fr Vincent's hand, and then the floor. While they were doing this Fr Vincent said a little word to each: "Come, Father, may God bless you!".

When they were all given out Fr Alméras knelt down and, in the name of the community, who also went down on their knees, asked for his blessing. At this, Fr Vincent also went down himself and said:

O Lord, you are eternal law and unchangeable reason, and you rule the entire universe by your infinite wisdom. All that creatures do, and all laws for good living, come from you as from their living source; may you be pleased to bless those to whom you have given these rules, who have accepted them as coming from you. Grant them, Lord, the grace needed for keeping them always without fail, right up till death. Confident in this, and in your name, I, wretched sinner, will say the words of blessing: *Beedictio Domini Nostri Jesu Christi descendat super vos et maneat semper, in nomine Patris, et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.*

When he had said this he began the prayer "Sancta Maria, etc", and the community left the room.

These talks of Fr Vincent were given in a medium tone of voice, humble, charming and reverent, and in such a way that the fatherly affection of his own heart was felt in the hearts of all his hearers. Those who were listening to him felt as if they were with the apostles

listening to our Lord talking, especially at that last sermon he gave before his passion, when he also gave them his rules in giving them the commandment of charity and love: Mandatum novum do vobis; hoc est praeceptum meum ut diligatis invicem, sicut dilexi vos (Jn 13:34). Several couldn't hold back their tears, and all experienced different emotions of joy in their souls at what they were seeing and hearing, love of their vocatiuon, a new desire to advance in virtue and a firm proposal to be faithful in keeping their rules. And if it had been allowed, each one would have said, there and then that evening, what they used to say to each other, especially these words of St Luke's and St Matthew's gospels: Beati oculi qui vident quae vos videtis (Lk 10:23), et aures vestrae, quia audient (Mt 13:16); blessed are the eyes which see what you see, and your ears because they hear!

Notes

1. In the French the word *Compagnie* is used. As we do not use *Company* in this context in English I have substituted either *Congregation* or *community* all through this translation, except once in the expression "little Company". TD.
2. Fr Jacques Eveillard and Brother Bertrand Ducournau. (Evidence of Brother Pierre Chollier at the process for the beatification of Vincent de Paul).
3. Whoever made the copy of this conference noted that the book in question was that by Fr Rodriguez.
4. Fr Portail had been seriously ill in December 1657 and January 1658 (VII 17, 58, 60).

Editor's note:

For an in-depth examination of some of the matter in this conference the reader is referred to "The Origins of the Congregation of the Mission: Memory, Myth and Reality" by Stafford Poole, in *Colloque* No. 27, Spring 1993.

St Vincent on Pardon

Eamon Flanagan

(Written for a Spanish dictionary of Vincentian spirituality)

In the sacramental rite of Reconciliation we hear the words pronounced over us: “May God give you pardon and peace”. In a certain sense it might be said that St Vincent’s whole thrust in ministry was to mediate God’s pardon to all with whom he came in contact. As we look at his work and labours showing the mercy of the Lord, we also turn to his words and teaching for the same purpose.

His directives to his missionaries exhorted them to preach repentance and hear confessions (1). And a great encouragement for the practice of gentleness is that by this great virtue people are assisted to return to the Lord (2). St Vincent’s great sense of God’s salvation led him to have a profound desire to extend that embrace of mercy to more and more people, especially the marginalized poor. He urges and organizes his followers, imagining that Jesus himself is calling them to go out and preach to others, for “perhaps their salvation depends on your preaching and catechesis” (XI134).

The saint is aware that bringing redemption and pardon to the neighbour can be costly. Here he typically invokes the example of Jesus, who suffered so horribly and bore a crown of thorns to save us (XI 137). When Vincent recounts the origin of his congregation in the Church, there is a joyful sense of how God’s compassion has been proffered to the poor by the Mission priests. On the same occasion the possibility of widening that good influence is contemplated, and the Founder himself asks pardon for his own faults and those of the missionaries (XI 169ff).

In the ministerial experience of St Vincent, strong evidence of God’s pardon is clear to see. He had a personal witness in hearing a man’s confession at Gannes, in Picardy. This left a deep impression on him regarding the need of forgiving grace among the neglected country people. The penitent in fact went on to make public confession of his sins and how he had kept them hidden for many years. This

and similar episodes caused the noblewoman, Madame de Gondi, to request the young priest to found a community of good priests with the aim of sharing God's mercy with the poor (XI 3-4) (3).

Soon afterwards, on 25 January 1617, Vincent gave the far-famed first mission sermon at Folleville in the same region, exhorting the inhabitants to a general confession (XI 4). His words were so blessed by the Lord, that droves of people came to be pardoned in confession, and the Jesuits of Amiens were invited to lend a hand as confessors. From there the movement rolled on outwards to surrounding villages, like a great wave of goodness, "by the power of God's mercy" (XI 5). Bringing the grace of pardon through confession went hand in hand from the beginning with preaching and catechizing in this new mission movement (XI 5).

Vincent was so convinced of the value of offering divine mercy to sinners, that he was also concerned for the condition of the clergy, some of whom did not even know the words of absolution (XI 170). And so he moved along gradually to establish a community for mission in order to release a stream of God's forgiveness to poor, needy people of his time, and help form other priests to administer the sacraments worthily (XI 171). Similarly, the same man's prophetic urge initiated retreat work in the motherhouse and other locations. He had reason on one occasion to defend this ministry on various grounds, not least the potential conversion of persons attending, "whom the Lord may will to convert" (4).

In the story of the beginnings and effects of Jansenism, St Vincent played an important role as opponent to that heresy. Logically the evangelizer of the poor forgotten people saw in this elitist, but pessimistic, doctrine the very antithesis of his strong drive to renew the Church. The Jansenist view, akin to Luther's, of the virtual corruption of human nature was like a restricting of the power of salvation. The seeming inescapability of damnation for some and widespread rejection of frequent communion were not at all welcome to Vincent de Paul, who was such a staunch figure in advocating God's merciful love as against cold, Jansenistic austerity (5). A proof of his doughty endeavours in this regard is the fact that the Jansenists saw in him an adversary they could not easily ignore (6). The saint's own brief study on the subject of grace clearly refutes Jansenistic claims, and shows that God's salvific will embraces all people. God gives sufficient grace, but we must also choose to play our part. St Vincent expresses it thus in the work referred to:

All the glory is due to God, like a master writer holding and guiding the hand of a child in order to produce the writing (XIII156).

Regarding sacramental confession, so much part of Vincentian evangelization, one can see the developed sense in which it was understood. One of the founder's conferences to the Daughters of Charity is devoted to this sacrament (IX 543ff). There we find a means of personal growth, in addition to forgiveness of sins. The treatment given is like a long catechesis full of wisdom, with a strong concluding statement to underline the doctrine:

It [a good confession] is the basis of perfection, and I should like to think that if you make your confessions in this way, God will fill you with graces (IX 553).

The pardon we receive from God ought to be extended by us to those who may have offended us. This deep Christian imperative is expounded by Vincent in the context of personal reconciliation with others. The text about not letting the sun set on our anger (Eph 4.26) is alluded to (X 470). There is a particularly strong note of inner conversion and gentleness in the manner that this movement is elaborated. One is drawn to an attitude of thanking God for this gift:

Because we are all sinners, let us thank God for letting us have a means to be so easily reconciled to one another (X 473).

This survey of the experience and message of St Vincent in relation to the pardon of God shows us how central it is in the total pattern of his missionary vision.

Evaluation

The tenor of Vincentian thought on pardon is predominantly focused in the direction of God's mercy. There are, it is true, some references to divine justice and the fear of God (cf XI 388, XII137), but the use of punishment as a motivation, widely enough in vogue in post-Tridentine times, is not stressed at all by Vincent. A modern theology in the spirit of Vatican II emphasizes love for God as the supreme incentive for conversion and growth in Christian life. This is based on a solid scriptural foundation (7), particularly evident in the gospels where Jesus saves sinners in many celebrated encounters. Love of the Father inwardly calls the prodigal son, who then of course must

personally decide to accept that love, and advance towards the pardon offered (Lk 15). There can be serious or less serious sin, but the forgiving Lord extends the healing touch of forgiveness (8). The Vincentian perspective harmonizes with all of this, and would be welcome to our own contemporary mentality so much involved with persons in their wholeness. Any kind of severity towards sinners was something that the founder wanted his priests of the Mission to avoid like the plague (9).

A prevalent scholastic view that salvation required explicit knowledge of the Trinity and Incarnation is apparently upheld by St Vincent. That could well be a spur to zeal and mercy towards the uninstructed (10). In this regard, however, today's attitude is more benign, following the doctrine of Vatican II on the universal saving will of God, and availability of his grace outside the boundaries of a specific Christian membership, to all people of goodwill (11).

In our appraisal of his doctrine on pardon, we must not forget the influence of Vincent's own conversion and the Lord's compassion that surrounded it. He came to see the greatness of his call and the meanness of his backsliding in adolescence and young adulthood. But, over about four years to 1612 he was somehow moulded with the definite contours of the new man in contrast to his former self (12). His oft-repeated expression of his sin-potential (no doubt exaggerated by humility) implicitly reflects the maturely-formed conviction of God's pardoning grace indelibly stamped upon his person. The man who had received much pardon could indeed be a credible witness to it in his own life and words. Such a living testimony carries much weight at this time.

The great Good News of Christ begins and continues with the outpouring of pardon, and peace as its companion. The sinner can rejoice and look forward to a new life of real fulfilment every day. Vincent de Paul grasps the essence of this evangelical truth. By his words and fruitful life he shares it abundantly with us.

Notes

1. *Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission* 1.2.
2. *Ibid.* 2.6; for further development of this point, see M. Pérez Flores and A. Orcajo: *El Camino de San Vicente es Nuestro Camino*, Burgos, 1986, pp 128-130.
3. See R P Maloney: *The Way of St Vincent de Paul*, Brooklyn, 1992, especially pp 22-26.

4. JM Román: *San Vicente de Paul*, Vol.1 (Biografía), first edition, Madrid, 1981, p 364, quoting from Abelly.
5. JM Román: *op.cit.*, pp 598ff. P Coste: *Life and Labours of St Vincent de Paul*, translated by J Leonard, 3 Vols, London, 1935, Vol III, 113-181.
6. Coste: *op. cit.*, Vol III, 180.
7. X Leon-Dufour: *Dicrionary of Biblical Theology*, translated by P J Cahill and E M Stewart, 2nd edition, London, 1982, pp 404 ff.
8. V McNamara: *The Truth in Love*, Dublin, 1988, see pp 172 ff.
9. *Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission*, 12.11.
- 10.
11. See for example X 336.
12. Vatican Council II: *Constitution on the Church*, 16.
13. R Stafford Poole in *Vincentiana*, 28, 1984, 435 ff.

Irishmen in the Congregation of the Mission during the Founder's Lifetime

Thomas Davitt

Most biographies of Vincent de Paul include some reference to the group of missionaries he sent to Ireland in 1646, usually mentioning that most of them were Irish. Jean-Baptiste Pémartin (1827-92), secretary general (1874-83) of the Congregation of the Mission, was the first to give any biographical details about the Irishmen who joined the Congregation in the founder's lifetime. These facts are in footnotes in his edition of Vincent's letters, published anonymously, in 1880 (1).

Understandably it has been Irish confreres, and Mary Purcell, who have shown most interest in seeking out further details on their seventeenth-century compatriots. Patrick Boyle was the first who dealt with this matter in some depth, first in articles in *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record* and then in book form. In his book he gives translations of letters from Vincent de Paul to some of these Irish confreres, and in the Appendix gives a list of all Irishmen who joined the Congregation up to 1790, taken from the *Registre des Entrées*, now in the French National Archives in Paris (2). When he published his book in 1909 Pierre Coste's fourteen-volume edition of Vincent's letters and conferences was not yet in existence. I have heard that when Coste was preparing the footnotes for this edition he consulted Joseph Leonard about Irish names.

Jerome Twomey did further research, and queried some of what Mary Purcell had written in the first (unpublished) draft of her book (3). Shortly after this he wrote his *Disjecta membra Vincentiana* in which he said:

Generally I have omitted for obvious reasons dealing with matters that can be found fully dealt with already in such works

as those of Fr Boyle or Miss Purcell and have confined myself to items I have collected from all sorts of sources but which are not, as far as I know, easily available to the interested confrere in any one place (4).

In this article I have the same aim as that of Jerome Twomey in that quotation.

Personal names

When Irishmen joined the Congregation in St Lazare they gave various personal details about themselves, which were written into the *Registre des Entrées*. I had the opportunity of consulting it in 1981-2, and I transcribed all the material about Irish confreres.

First names were simply given their French equivalent, if there was one: John/Jean, Peter/Pierre, Mark/Marc (5).

Surnames were treated in one of four different ways:

1. If easily pronounceable by Frenchmen they were left unchanged: Arthur, Barry, Butler, Dalton, Molony, Plunket, Skyddie, Water, [Mc]Ennery. This last man's birthplace is recorded as "Chasteau de MaKennery", but in France he probably dropped the "Me" in his surname. Some, of course, may have used the original Irish form of their names. This would seem to have been the case with the man who appears as Brin in many of Vincent's letters. I have seen his signature, and he signed very clearly "Brin". The Irish form of his name was probably O'Broin, generally anglicised as Byrne. But Byrne would have been very a difficult sound for a Frenchman to pronounce, whereas Broin would be easy; the spelling would have been changed as *oi* would have conveyed the wrong sound to a Frenchman. In his will he signed himself Birn, and called his sister Byrne; spellings, of course, would not have been standardized at that time.

From Boyle's and Leonard's works we are used to the name Dermot Duggan. In the *Registre des Entrées* he appears as Duiguin. This would not represent how a Frenchman would have heard *Duggan*, whereas it would represent how he would hear *Deegan*. Both Duggan and Deegan would have come from the same original Irish name.

2. Sometimes letters were changed in the spelling, indicating the sound as heard by a Frenchman: Broin/Brin, Crowley/Cruoly, Cogley/Coglee, Lee/Lye.

3. Sometimes the meaning of the name was translated into French: White/Le Blanc. (An Italian confrere was similarly dealt with: Giudice/Le Juge).
4. Sometimes the name was Gallicised: Walsh/Valois.

Placenames

It would appear that Irish placenames were written into the *Registre* as they sounded to the French confrere who was writing them down. Some, especially those of dioceses, are easily recognized: Cassel, Limeric, Liberic, Beathe, Kork, Korck, Cluons. The three Cogleys from Carrick-on-Suir, Gerard, Laurence and Mark, who entered at different times, were listed as from Carik, Caric and Carrie. Other places, particularly parishes, were not so easy to identify (6).

Peter Butler entered in Richelieu in 1654; he was from the parish of *Drome* in the diocese of Cashel. Coste changes this to Dromore, and omits the diocese (VII 313). In fact it is the parish of Drom and Inch, a few miles north of Thurles. Philip Dalton, who entered in Paris in 1656, was from *Culiny* in the same diocese; this is Cooleeney, a few miles east of Thurles, in the parish of Moyne. John Fogerty, who entered in Paris in 1665, was from *Douc  * in the same diocese; this could be Dovea (two syllables, stress on the second; from the Irish Duibh Fh  ith, black wood), in the parish of Drom.

Gerard Brin CM

Fr Walter Skehan (who died in 1971) did much research on 17th century Tipperary priests. He published extracts from some wills, which had been copied by Dr Martin Callanan of Thurles. Callanan had had access to wills which were in the Public Records Office in the Four Courts, Dublin, before the fire. Among the Callanan papers, now in the National Library, there is a will of Fr Gerald Byrn, curate of Thurles (7), dated 9 October 1683, proved 25 February 1684. This is almost certainly the Vincentian, as Skehan did not find any other Cashel priest of this name at that time. Skehan made a complete transcript of this will (see below).

According to the *Registre des Entr  es* Girard Brin joined the Congregation in St Lazare on 14 October 1639, aged 21; he was born near the town of Cassel in Ireland; he was ordained in 1644; he took his vows on 2 November 1642 and 22 September 1656 in the presence of Antoine Portail.

His various appointments from 1644 to 1662 are clearly documented, including four superiorships. The latest Vincentian appointment which Brin held in France was superior in Toul. In the same note Coste says Brin was probably the best of the Irish confreres and “one of the worthiest sons of St Vincent”.

René Alméras, in his circular letter of February 1664, wrote:

Fathers Brin and Vuater (8) are working, each on his own, in different parts of Ireland, maintaining the Catholics in their faith and bringing back to the Church those who had fallen away. Fr Vuater, in three letters which he sent me in the nine or ten months he has been in that country, reports many conversions which God has worked through him, among others that of a rather important Englishman who had been brought up in heresy but who died a good Catholic. Fr Brin (9), who spent a month in prison on his arrival, followed by an illness which brought him close to death, eventually, by the grace of God, recovered both the health and the freedom to work for the salvation of his unfortunate countrymen, as is only right, with good results (10).

This letter shows that Water arrived back in Ireland early in 1663; it is likely that Brin arrived around the same time. This would fit in with the fact that his last documented appointment in France was as superior in Toul from 1660 to 1662.

The will of Gerald Byrn

In the name of God. Amen. I, Gerald Byrn, curate of Thurles, though sicke of body, yet of perfect sense & memory, God be praised, doe make this my last Will & Testament in manner following, that is to say:—

First, I bequeath my Soule to the Almighty & my body to the earth to be buried wthin the Churchyard Gate in Thurles. I doe declare to the world now in my death bed my whole substance in Cash to be as followeth – that is to say, in my own hands the summe of Seventeen pounds, nyne shill. & three pence, twenty pounds now in the hands of a friend by way of a loan, whose note for the same is to be produced, and Eleven shillings in the hands of Thomas Grace of Lisduff, all amountinge to the sume of thirty eight pounds & three pence, wch I name & leave to be disposed of as followeth, vizt.

Imps. [?] I leave to be paid unto Mr James Ryan of Dublin, my sollicitor, in a wrongfull suit agt. me comenced in the name of one Hogan, the contents of the bill of fees & charges to be produced & brought by the said James & by him laid out in my behalfe (his own fees to be added), the totings whereof I leave to His own conscience. I^m I leave unto my servant, Laurence Racket, the said Eleven shillings due to me of the said Thomas Grace being arrears of wages due of me to the said Laurence. I^m I leave and bequeath unto my nephew, Theobald Ryan, on accompt of prayinge for my Soule the sume of Eight pounds of the said twenty pounds in my friend's hands when received, the said Theobald beinge by my trusty hereafter named, for disposition of things found adeserved of said sume by his good life & ... dealings. I^m I leave to be employed in the reparacon of the causeyes & high wayes in Thurles towne the sum of forty shillings ster, of the said twenty pounds in my friend's hands. I^m I leave to be paid unto my Land Lord, George Mathew of Thurles, Esq or his ords the sume of thirty shillings, ster, in discharge of Michas gale rent last, due to him of me for a park in Thurles. I*TM I leave unto the said George Mathew as due to him for a Heriott, one of my best coves. I^m I leave & bequeath unto my sister, Joane Byrne, one moyty of my household stuffe & one cove. I^m I leave & bequeath unto my servant, Ellin Butler, (besides wages) the other moyty of my household stuffe together wth a heiffer, and that for her care & attendance about me in my sicknesse. I^m I leave & bequeath unto my brother [-in-law ?] David Bourke wth a shute of cloaths, vizt. coate & briches broadcloath & a large rideinge coate. I leave & bequeath unto my servant Laurence Hackett the rest of my wearing cloaths wth a hatt. I^m I leave to be paid unto Robert Sail the sume of seaventeen shillings and six pence due to him of me for grasinge. I^m My will is that a bullock of my property shall be sold to help the payinge of the said grasinge money. I^m I leave & bequeath unto Theobold Mathew of Annefield, Esq. on accompt of prayinge for my soule, my little mare colt together with a watch of my property now in the hands of Edward Boyton of Thurles & by me put into the said Edward's hands to be mended. I^m I leave my funeral expenses to be performed out of the remainder of the wth in sume, the wth in debts & legacyes being first paid unto the said Theobald Mathew towards the rents & arrears of rents due to him of me for several years past out of my dwelling house & garden. And I name & appoint the said Theobald Mathew my Exer. & I beg out of him his accustomed charity & to take the trouble of ordering and seeinge the said disposicions made.

And I declare & publish this to be my last will & Testamt, revoking & annulling all & every other will & wills whatsoever by me at any time heretofore made and published. In witness whereof I have hereunto put my hand & scale the 9th day of October 1683. (sigd.) G Bryn,

Being present at the signing & sealing & publishing hereof we whose names ensue

his

James Boy ton. Laurence X Racket

marke

Endorsed:– 25 die mensis ffebruarij Anno Dm 1683 Quo die ... hī testamentū Geraldī Bryn [sic] probatū fuit in commu juris forma juramentī Laurentij Hackett unius ex testibus subscriptis coram nobis Tho. Robinson Con Cassotty [?]

The date in the last sentence should obviously be 1684, as the will is dated 9 October 1683. He died, therefore, between these dates, aged 65. His date of death is not found in any CM sources. Presumably he was buried in accordance with his instructions, inside the gate of St Mary's churchyard, in Thurles. This is the churchyard around the present (later) St Mary's (Church of Ireland). The church in which he ministered was situated at the right hand side of the present cathedral.

Mention of Vincentians in other wills

Elizabeth Mathew, Countess of Thurles, lived in the castle in Thurles. She was a staunch Catholic and no priest under her protection was arrested, even though her Protestant son from her first marriage, James Butler, Duke of Ormonde, was responsible, as Lord Lieutenant, for the apprehension of many priests elsewhere in Ireland.

Frances Mathew, a daughter of the Countess, and a Benedictine nun from the suppressed convent in Drogheda, included in her will, dated 3 September 1678:

Item. The twenty & two pounds tenn shillings due to me from my said brother [-in-law ?] Coll. J Fitzpatrick I desire may be divided between father Leonard Sail [?] father Gerald Birn & father Walter Conway & father James Meagher (11).

Fr Daniel Meagher, a curate of Thurles, drew up his will on 17 March 1666. In it he wrote: "I leave all my books for my soul and my Becan to fa. Phill Dalton". This is almost certainly Philip Dalton CM, as

Skehan did not find any other Cashel priest of this name at that time. Meagher also wrote in his will: "Father Gerald Byrn or my niece shall know wheare and to whom the standing cup shall be given", referring probably to a chalice (12).

According to the *Registre des Entrees* Philip Dalton was already a priest when he joined the Congregation in St Lazare on 16 May 1656; he was born in Cullyny (13), diocese of Cassel, in Ireland; he took his vows on 11 November 1658 (14). There is no indication of his date of birth. His appointments are not clearly documented; we know he was in Troyes and Sedan between 1657 and 1661, but have no information after the latter year.

The return of 17th century Irish Vincentians to Ireland

Students in Irish colleges on the continent "might be ordained in virtue of their acceptance for the Irish mission, on the nomination of the rector of their college, without the need of a recommendation from any bishop in Ireland. This was a privilege granted to the colleges by a brief of Paul V ..." (15). This brief was issued in 1614.

The next step was an apostolic indult of Urban VIII, dated 23 December 1623, allowing students in the Irish colleges on the continent to be ordained on the sole title of mission to Ireland, but imposing on them the obligation to take an oath, which had to be signed and witnessed, to return to Ireland after ordination (16).

This oath may have raised problems for students or priests who later joined the Congregation of the Mission. Of the twenty-three Irishmen who joined during Vincent's lifetime six were already priests. Ten were in their twenties and were ordained fairly soon after entry, indicating that they had already completed part of their studies, almost certainly in France.

In the Acta of *Propaganda*, 29 November 1644, Edmund Barry is granted a year's delay in the fulfilling of his oath to return to Ireland from France. This could be the Edmund Barry who was ordained in Cahors in 1639 and entered the Congregation of the Mission in 1641 (17).

This oath is also probably the reason why the Sacred Congregation *de Propaganda Fide* wanted Vincent to send some of his Irish confreres back to Ireland.

The earliest (surviving ?) letter to Vincent on this matter is from Cardinal Francesco Barberini, Prefect of *Propaganda*, 25 February 1645. The Sacred Congregation was being very quick off the mark,

because at that date only five (or possibly six) of the Irish confreres were ordained (18). *Propaganda* wanted Vincent to send some of these back to Ireland to teach sacred ceremonies to Irish clergy (II 505).

Under the date of 5 December 1645 the Acta of *Propaganda* indicate that a letter was to be written to Vincent de Paul asking him to send some of his priests, “especially Irish ones”, to Ireland to instruct priests and those preparing for ordination (19).

Under the same date the Acta have another entry, mentioning John [Mc]Ennery, Donat Crowley and Thadeus Lee, who have been in the Congregation of the Mission in Paris for two or three years. They had asked for dimissorials to receive tonsure and minor orders, as they could not contact their bishops in Ireland. *Propaganda* says that, in spite of the war, recourse to Ireland is possible, and the decree of Urban VIII about the ordination of Irishmen is to be observed (20).

On 7 April 1646 Vincent wrote to Guillaume Delattre, superior in Cahors:

We’ll send you someone to teach in the seminary in place of Fr Water (21), who is to return here, please. We have been ordered by Rome to send missionaries to his country and are being pressured by its bishops (II 579-80).

A group from the Congregation of the Mission left for Ireland at the end of 1646. This matter is dealt with in Coste and other biographies (22). According to Abelly, Gerard Brin wanted to publish an account of this mission but Vincent, unfortunately, would not allow him (23).

Under the date of 18 October 1649 in the *Propaganda* Acta Thadeus Molony is granted permission to receive all orders including priesthood *ad titulum missionis*, but he is to be declared a “missionary for Ireland” (24).

After Brin had returned from Ireland Vincent wrote to him in Dax on 22 September 1652, and said, in passing, that maybe conditions would improve in Ireland and the community would have to send men there again (IV 483).

Peter Butler’s dimissorial

On 25 October 1658 Vincent wrote to Edme Jolly, superior in Rome:

We have a problem with the dimissorial you sent us for our Brother Peter Butler (25), cleric of the diocese of Cashel in Ireland: 1) because he is not described as of the Congregation;

2) that the said dimissorial says that he must make a promise, to be filed in the acta of the chancellor or the secretary of the diocese in which he will be ordained, to go to Ireland as soon as possible after completing his studies; 3) that this will be to carry out the work of a missionary, under the direction of the Sacred Congregation *de Propaganda Fide*, to whom he will report by letter every year on what he is doing. This last point, above all, is unacceptable since it would mean moving from obedience to his superior to that of the Congregation *de Propaganda Fide*. Is there no way of getting it without at least this last point? (VII 313).

On 1 November 1658 Vincent wrote to him again:

I want you also to let me know for what diocese in Ireland they are saying that Fr du Loeus (26) will be bishop, because if it is Cashel then he could give a dimissorial for our Brother Butler, to whom I referred in my last letter. Here again are the questions I asked:

1. Does the Sacred Congregation *de Propaganda Fide*, in giving a dimissorial *sub titulo missionis in Hibernia*, mean that a man has to go there as soon as he is ordained a priest?

2. Does it intend a man to stay in Ireland all his life, or only for some years, and how many years, so that later he is free of this obligation?

3. Does it mean going there no matter what disastrous conditions prevail, such as at present, when there is a lot of danger? For, if that is the case, or if it meant for a lifetime, our Brother Butler does not want a title on that condition; and the community also would have a great disadvantage in that, having maintained and educated him for eight or ten years (27).

Because of this, Father, I don't know whether you should go to much trouble to get another dimissorial for him from the Sacred Congregation unless, in order to fulfill the obligation it imposes on him, it would be agreeable to leave it to his superiors to send him to his own country or elsewhere, when and for what time they judge appropriate. It would be very awkward if the community could not make use of Irishmen, whom it receives and educates at great expense when they have no title, except on condition that they go to their own country, solely dependent

on the said Sacred Congregation; in that case, we would be doing wrong to receive any of them; and yet it pleases God to do good by their means everywhere we make use of them. If there was hope of the same thing in Ireland we would willingly send them there; but at present there is little to be achieved and much danger to be overcome. What does it matter where God is served as long as he is served, and that it is for the souls for whom Jesus Christ died, and in the way that is best for them, such as the works of the community! (VII 331-2).

On 20 December 1658 Vincent wrote to him again:

We would almost prefer not to have any Irish priests than to have some of whom we cannot make any use. Now it is up to us to have them freed from the obligation to go and work in their own country; for even if the Sacred Congregation does not send them it is a temptation for them later on to get themselves sent, or a pretext to make themselves independent of the community, after it has educated them well. That is why, Father, I ask you to make an effort to procure another dimissorial for our Brother [Butler] without the obligation of the Irish mission, or at least with this clause: that he cannot go there unless sent by us (VII 403).

On 2 May 1659 he wrote that he was awaiting the dimissorial “which you cause me to hope for” (VII 524). Butler was in Treguier, still undained, in October 1659 (VIII147). That is the latest reference to him in CM sources, and he probably left the Congregation.

Two others with perhaps the same problem

As well as Peter Butler there were two other Irishmen who joined the Congregation but for whom we have no information about ordination or later life. Perhaps they also had trouble in getting dimissorials and left. They may, of course, have left for other reasons: William Cart, born in Limerick in 1626, entered in 1648 and took his vows in 1650; there is no later information about him.

Patrick Taylor was born in Dublin in 1631 and entered in Paris in 1657. According to a letter written by Vincent in April 1659, the latest reference to him, he had no dimissorial from his bishop at that stage (VII 477).

In that same letter, to Denis Laudin, superior in Le Mans, Vincent mentions that he is trying to get permission from Rome to have Irish confreres ordained.

The eventual solution

Alexander VII (1655-67) and Clement IX (1667-69) granted to the Congregation of the Mission, by apostolic letters valid for ten years, the privilege of promoting its Irish members to orders *ad titulum mensae communis*. On 5 April 1744 Benedict XIV in *Aequa apostolicae benignitatis* made this permanent (28).

Irish confreres who returned to Ireland

James Water and Gerard Brin are mentioned in Almeras' letter, already quoted, as having returned.

Philip Dalton is also known to have returned, from Daniel Meagher's will. On 2 November 1658, two and a half years after Dalton's entry to the community, Vincent wrote to him in Troyes, where there were many Irish refugees. He was already a priest when he entered, and we do not know his age. Vincent expresses joy that Dalton now wants to take his vows

without reserve and with no preference for any country in the world and with every sort of submission to holy obedience and the will of God, which will be indicated to you by your superiors. That's how really apostolic souls speak and act; being totally consecrated to God they want our Lord, his Son, known and served equally by all the nations of the earth for which he himself came into the world, and like him they want to work and die for them. That's the extent to which missionaries' zeal should reach, for, since they cannot go everywhere, nor do the good they wish, they do well, though, in wanting that and offer themselves to God to serve him as instruments in the conversion of souls, at the time, in the places, and in the way it pleases him (VII 333).

This reads very much like answering previous objections which Dalton had made, because of a preference for returning to Ireland. He took his vows on 11 November 1659 and was in Sedan in 1661, after which there is no further record in CM sources. It would appear from Daniel Meagher's will that he returned to Ireland shortly after that.

Information about Thady Lee is very sparse. In the *Registre des Entrées* he is recorded as having been received in Paris on 21 October 1643, aged 20, a native of Tuoa in Ireland, and took his vows on 7 October 1645. His birthplace has been identified as Tuogh near Adare, in Co. Limerick. He was chosen by Vincent as a member of the missionary team sent to Ireland in 1646, though still a student. It would

be interesting to know why he was picked. He was not the senior Irish student at the time, John McEnnery and Thady Molony both being senior to him. Patrick Walsh and Francis White were junior to him in vocation but senior in age. He was twenty when he entered so perhaps he had begun his seminary studies. If so, he would have them almost completed by the time he went to Ireland. Had Vincent some idea of getting him ordained in Ireland, a simple solution perhaps to a missionary oath conflict? No details have survived about his period in Ireland except the brief account of his death in the postscript of a letter Vincent wrote to the superior in Warsaw, 22 March 1652:

Poor Brother Lee fell into the hands of the enemy while at home; they smashed his skull and chopped off his hands and feet, in the sight of his mother (IV 343).

Irish confreres who died outside Ireland

We know the dates of death for the following Irish confreres: Edmund Barry, 1680 in Montauban; Dermot Duggan, 1657 in Scotland; Dermot O'Brien, 1649 in France; John [Mc]Ennery, 1657 in Genoa; John Skyddie, before October 1646 in either Rome or Paris; Francis White, in Scotland in 1679; John White, in Paris in 1705.

Irishmen who may have returned to Ireland

The following Irish confreres vanish from CM records after certain dates; this *may* indicate that they returned to Ireland.

Nicholas Arthur, born in Cork in 1632. By the end of September or the beginning of October 1659 Vincent was still waiting for an *extra tempora* to have him ordained (VIII49, XV 128), after which there is no trace of him.

Mark Cogley, born in Carrick-on-Suir in 1614, was present at the vows of two confreres in October 1659, after which there is no trace of him. He had left the Congregation in 1646, three years after ordination, but was brought back by Gerard Brin (II 613). In 1659 he wanted to leave again, though wishing to stay in France; he had trouble with his eyes and apparently some mental problem as well (VII 569-71). He was only forty-five in 1659 so he may have returned to Ireland.

Donat Crowley was born in Cork in 1623. He was superior in Le Mans in 1690 (29), after which there is no trace of him. He was sixty-seven then, so perhaps it is more likely that he died in France than returned to Ireland.

Thady Molony was born in Limerick in 1623 and entered the community in Paris 1643 and was ordained in Rome in 1650. He was in Genoa in January 1652. Vincent wrote to his superior there that if Molony wanted to return to Ireland with Patrick Walsh he would let him (IV 306). In 1658 he was in Le Mans and did not want to continue as bursar (VII356). He threatened that he would become a Carthusian if he was not taken off the job, and Vincent suggests to his superior to send him on a mission (VII 394). That letter was dated 11 December 1658. On the 28th Vincent wrote to the superior again:

If, when the said Fr Molony gets back, he seems to you to have changed, seems happier, more co-operative and regular, please let me know, as well as how he will have got on with his confreres, and we'll see. But if, on the other hand, you find him still in the same unsatisfactory frame of mind I think you would do well to speak to him about the suitcase which he sent off; but this should be with respect and kindness; say, for example: "Do you mind if I have a word with you, Father?" and tell him that you know about this business, and then ask him about what is in it and where the books and other things which he put in it came from, to see what he'll answer, and in the end persuade him in a friendly way to bring everything back (VII 423).

In a postscript Vincent added that no matter what form Molony is in on his return the superior should do what was suggested. In April 1659 he was in temporary charge of the seminarians while their director was on a mission. Vincent tells the superior to let him know that he, Vincent, is willing to let him continue in this work. If, on the other hand, he wants to do something else the superior is to let Vincent know and he will write him a letter (VII517-8). The first draft of that part of the letter was stronger: "Make him realise that in the community a person must obey⁷, and that we would prefer to get rid of a man who wants to do only what suits him, rather than keep him". A month later the superior was told to leave him with the seminarians if he still did not want to be bursar (VII575). That is the last mention we have of him. He was only thirty-six then, and, being obviously unsettled, he may have returned to Ireland.

Luke Plunket was born in Meath in 1630 and was received into the community in Richelieu on 24 September 1653. It is on record that he took his vows there, but the date is not given.

In July 1657 Vincent thanks Edme Jolly, superior in Rome, for Plunket's dimissorial "with a memorandum on the validity of his title"

(VI342). In October of that year Vincent asks Jolly to get an *extra tempora* for Plunket (VI 565), but Jolly gave “rather weighty reasons” for not making the application and Vincent agreed with him in a December letter (VII 31). Perhaps these references are about possible conflict between a missionary oath and his vows.

In September 1658 Vincent explains to the bishop of Tréguier that he had to withdraw Plunket from the seminary in Tréguier where he had been teaching (though still not ordained) because the students could not understand him (VII262). He was transferred to Saint-Méen. He was still not ordained by Christmas Day that year (VII 412), but was a priest by 19 April the following year when Vincent wrote to him. Plunket was unwilling to teach chant and ceremonies in the seminary, so Vincent writes about obedience, and explains that teaching in seminaries is as much part of the community’s work as are missions:

[Do you think] that if you work in the places and in the way that best pleases you you will do greater good than you are doing? But that is something you cannot promise yourself; on the contrary you should be afraid that if you shake off the yoke of holy obedience God will withdraw his spirit and leave you on your own. And then where will you go? What will you do? If you stay on in France you run the risk of being left out on the street like so many other priests from Ireland. If you went back to your own country, what would you do there? There are other workers there who have lots of problems not only with surviving but also with working, because of persecution by the heretics (VII 509).

That was apparently calculated to ensure Plunket got rid of any idea of returning to Ireland. Vincent wrote to him a month later, as he had received no answer to his April letter. Vincent had heard, though, that Plunket still did not want to work in the seminary. He repeats the same sort of arguments as before, about obedience, and says that “It’s a very strange thing that no sooner have you become a priest through the favour of the community, than you begin to resist it”. (Vincent had very strong views on men who joined the community to be educated and ordained, and then left). He then refers to Plunket’s wish to be a missionary, and uses an argument which may well have backfired:

You are not yet ready to go on missions since you don’t know our language well enough to speak in public. We have trouble here in understanding you, so how would the poor people understand you? (VII 561).

That letter is the latest reference to Luke Plunket in CM sources. As he was only twenty-nine at the time perhaps Vincent's rather blunt reference to his inadequate knowledge of French, and the earlier uncomplimentary references to Irish priests, may have tipped the scale and decided him to leave the community and return to Ireland.

Patrick Walsh was born in Limerick in 1619. The last reference to him in CM sources is that he was in Genoa in 1656, apparently unwilling to teach philosophy (VI 51). That was the year of the plague there, in which several confreres, including John [Me] Ennery, died. In letters around this time Vincent mentions by name the confreres who died, so it is unlikely that Walsh was one of them as he is not mentioned. In January 1652 he had wanted to return to Ireland and Vincent had been willing to let him go if he really wanted to (IV 306). This may, perhaps, be behind what Vincent wrote to Firmin Get, superior in Marseille, on 14 May 1655:

It is true that there was a time when Fr Valois had the same desire which you mention to me but, by the grace of God, he got over it; nevertheless I want you to hold on to the letters which that Irish priest, about whom you write, will send him, as well as those which the said Fr Valois will write to him, and to forward them to me (V 378-9).

When we last hear of him in Genoa in 1656 he was only thirty-seven, so with his previous desire to go to Ireland, and perhaps his contacts with the Irish priest mentioned, he may well have returned there.

George White was born in Limerick in 1608 and was already a priest when he joined the community in 1645. The latest reference to him in CM sources is that he was in Richelieu in 1659, when he would have been fifty-one.

The two lay brothers Gerard and Laurence Cogley were cousins, and Laurence was a brother of Fr Mark Cogley. Gerard entered in 1655 and took his vows in Paris on St Patrick's Day 1660. He was then thirty-six, and there is no further record of him. Laurence entered in 1654 and took his vows in Paris on 25 March 1659, after which there is no record of him. In the *Registre* his birthday is given as 10 August, but the space for the year is left blank, so we do not know his age.

On 14 January 1660 Vincent wrote to Edmund Barry, superior in Notre Dame de Lorm, telling him to send the young Irishman who wanted to join to Richelieu (VIII 224-5). In a letter to the superior in Richelieu on 2 May 1660 Vincent expresses thanks to God that the

young Irishman recommended by Fr Barry has been received into the seminaire (VIII286-7). In the *Registre* there is no mention of any Irishman being received between these two dates.

Speculation

Did the death of Vincent in September 1660 cause some of the Irish confreres to decide to return to Ireland? Perhaps he himself was the attraction, rather than the community or its work. One would also like to know what contact they maintained among themselves while in France. The dates of the latest reference to them in CM documents are certainly suggestive: Laurence Cogley (March 1659), Patrick Taylor (April 1659), Thady Molony (May 1659), Luke Plunket (May 1659), George White (September 1659), Nicholas Arthur (September-October 1659), Mark Cogley (October 1659), Peter Butler (October 1659), Gerard Cogley (March 1660), Philip Dalton (1661), James Water (early 1663), and Gerard Brin (early 1663).

A phantom Irish confrere

On 23 October 1654 Vincent wrote to Etienne Blatiron, superior in Genoa that he was thinking of sending him two young men who were to join the Congregation that day, and who had already done their philosophy. One of them had studied in Cahors, and “is a nephew of Fr Water” who has been teaching in Cahors for the last ten or twelve years (V 205). In his footnote Coste names him as Nicholas Water, born in Cork in December 1632, joined the Congregation on 23 October 1654 and was ordained in 1659 and was sent to Ireland shortly after his ordination. Apart from this footnote there is no other reference in the Coste set to a Nicholas Water, he is not in Coste’s 1911 list of confreres (30), nor does he appear in the *Registre des Entrées*. On the other hand, the place of birth, the dates for his birth, entry to the Congregation and ordination are the same as those given in the *Registre des Entrées* for Nicholas Arthur, who was, in fact, the only person to be received on 23 October 1654. In a second note on the same page Coste makes precisely this last point, but with the name Nicholas Water. It looks as though he regarded “Arthur” in the *Registre* as a mistake for “Water”, perhaps because the uncle’s name was Water. In the *Attestations des Voeux*, however, “Ego Nicolaus Arthur” is quite clear, as also is his signature. Also, Nicholas Arthur is mentioned in two later letters from Vincent (VI 290, VIII 49), and in a biographical note at the first of those references all the dates are given which in his earlier note Coste

gave for Nicholas Water.

He mentions in the earlier footnote (V 205) about Nicholas Water that he was sent to Ireland shortly after his ordination in 1659 and that he worked there with great results. That seems to be an echo of what Alméras said, in the letter quoted above, about James Water, who went to Ireland shortly after 1659. It would appear, then, that Coste, for some reason, did not think the Water referred to by Alméras was James. In his biographical note about James he has, after noting his 1644 appointment to Cahors, "then probably in his own country"; he makes no reference to the Alméras letter.

It is difficult to understand how Coste got so confused, but it seems quite clear that no Nicholas Water entered the Congregation.

Irish confreres after the death of the founder

Between 1660 and the French Revolution twenty-two Irishmen joined in France and one in Italy. Between the Revolution and 1839, when the priests in Castleknock and Phibsboro joined the Congregation, six Irishmen joined in Italy and three in the United States.

From 1638, when John Skyddie and James Water entered in Paris, until 1809, when Edward Ferris died in Maynooth, there was an unbroken Irish presence in the Congregation. Then comes a gap of eleven years until 1820 when Daniel Harrington, born (according to the American records) in Ballistaea in the diocese of Cloyne and Ross, entered in St Louis. The Irish presence has been unbroken since then.

Notes

1. *Lettres de S. Vincent De Paul, fondateur des Prêtres de la Mission et des Filles de la Charité*, four volumes, Paris 1880.
2. Boyle, Patrick: *St Vincent de Paul & the Vincentians in Ireland, Scotland and England, A.D. 1638-1909*, London, 1909. For a list of his articles see *Colloque* No. 11, Spring 1985, pp 391-3, and No. 12, Autumn 1985, p 502. The *Registre* is filed as MM 519 A and MM 519 B in the French National Archives, Paris.
3. In his *Book Notes* for Autumn 1976.
4. In his *Book Notes* for Christmas 1976.
5. Donal Cregan CM wrote to me in 1981 about the first name of the Crowley who joined the CM in Paris on 9 May 1643:

I have found Davids, Daniels and Dermots, but no Donough. Nevertheless I am inclined to think his Christian name was either Donough or Donal. All the documents I've been reading derive from the English administration and Donal at this time was being changed to Daniel. It was later that Dermot was being changed to Jeremiah. David would have presented no

- difficulty to a Frenchman. Whoever enrolled Crowley's name would have tried to give him a saint's name (i.e. Donatus), hence I think Donal (a name in the family) or Donough which sounds a bit like Donat! I've unearthed a lot about the Crowleys but since I can't identify his particular family - at least at present - I'll leave it at that.
6. Place names in the dioceses of Cashel and Emly were identified by Fr Maurice Dooley, PP, Loughmore.
 7. Skehan noted that "curate" at that time meant one with the care of souls, not just assistant priest.
 8. This is James Water, born in Cork in 1616, joined the Congregation in St Lazare on 9 October 1638, ordained in 1641, took his vows in 1644. John Skyddie, also from Cork, joined on the same day; they were the first Irishmen to join. Water's appointments from 1644 to 1662 are reasonably well documented. He returned to Ireland in 1662. There is no information as to his date of death.
 9. In the printed version of the letter the name is "Brun" at this point but that is almost certainly a printer's error.
 10. *Recueil des Principales Circulaires des Supérieurs Généraux de la Congrégation de la Mission*, three volumes, Paris 1877-80, vol. I, p. 64.
 11. Skehan microfilm reel II of Callanan papers, in St Patrick's College, Thurles; apparently from MS 1668 in the National Library of Ireland.
 12. His Becanisthe *Compendium manualis controversiarum*, by Martinus Becanus SJ; this was Martin van der Beck (1563-1624). In a letter to Francois du Coudray in the Collège des Bons Enfants, 15 September 1628, Vincent wrote, from Beauvais: "Is debate being studied and practised? Do you abide by the prescribed schedule? I beg you, Monsieur, to work on that and master the abridged Bécán" (166; ETI 57).
 13. This part of the will is taken from Skehan's transcript of Callanan's transcript of it. The part about the standing cup is quoted by Mary Purcell in *The Story of the Vincentians*, Dublin 1973, p 23.
 14. This is Cooleeney, a few miles east of Thurles, in the parish of Moyne, as mentioned earlier.
 15. The figure 11 has been altered from another figure now illegible.
 16. Silke, J: "The Irish abroad in the age of the Counter-Reformation, 1534-1691" in Moody, Martin and Byrne (Eds.): *A New History of Ireland*, London 1977, Vol. 3, p 625. 16. Walsh, T J: *The Irish Continental Movement*, Dublin & Cork 1973, pp 48-9.
 17. He was born in Drom, Cashel diocese, in 1632, entered the Congregation in Richelieu in 1654 and took his vows in 1656.
 18. By 25 February 1645 five Irish confreres were already priests: Edmund Barry, Gerard Brin, Mark Cogley, John Skyddie and James Water. John [McJennery entered in 1642, aged twenty-six; there is no record of the date of his ordination.
 19. Quoted in *Archivium Hibernicum* Vol. XXII, p. 126.
 20. *Ibid.*, p. 127. As printed the passage includes "Richardi Lye, Alladensis". Donal Cregan saw the original in the Vatican archives and he told me that he thought a copyist had misread "Thadei" as "Richardi" and "Imolacensis"

- (Emly) as something like "Ardalacensis". He was quite convinced that the original was "Imolacensis" and he checked with other words beginning with a capital T and found that this letter often looked like an inverted 'V, with a tail which curved up and re-crossed the vertical, making it look rather like a capital 'A'.
21. See note 8.
 22. For who were in this group see my article: "Were *Two* of the 1646 Irish Mission Killed?" in *Colloque* No. 3, Autumn 1980.
 23. Abelly, L: *La vie du venerable serviteur de Dieu Vincent de Paul...*, Paris 1664, three volumes, vol. II, ch. I, sect. VIII, p 155. English translation, New Rochelle, N.Y., pp 133-4.
 24. Quoted in *Archivium Hibernicum*, Vol. XXII, p. 133.
 25. "Frere" was used for clerical seminarists and students as well as for lay brothers. Peter Butler was born in the parish of Drom, in the diocese of Cashel, about 1632. He entered the CM in Richelieu on 12 August 1654 and took his vows there in the presence of Denis Laudin on 19 August 1656.
 26. James Dowley, a doctor of the Sorbonne, vicar general of Limerick. He became bishop of Limerick in 1676.
 27. This letter was written in October 1658, at which time Peter Butler had been just over four years in the community (Cf. note 25 above). The eight or ten years referred to by Vincent include also the earlier years Butler spent in the Collège des Bons Enfants. On 22 September 1652 Vincent wrote to Gerard Brin in Dax: "I approve of the request you made to Monsieur de Burgo to forward the outstanding portions of Thomas and Peter Butler's pensions" (IV 482-3). He goes on to say that Peter's father wants to withdraw him from the Bons Enfants and bring him home, so Vincent wants, from Peter, a written statement on "how long we have maintained him and how much this maintenance has cost".
 28. *Acta Apostolica... in gratiam Congregationis Missionis*, Paris 1876, pp 144-151. I have been unable to find the exact dates of the letters of Alexander VII and Clement IX.
 29. Contassot, Félix: in "Le Mans" (typescript), p 75, in CM archives, Paris.
 30. *Catalogue du Personnel de la Congrégation de la Mission (Lazaristes) depuis Vorigine (1625) jusqu'à la fin du XVIIIe Siècle*, Paris 1911. This was a supplement to Volume V of the *Notices des Prêtres, Clercs et Frères Coadjuteurs de la Congregation de la Mission*.

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“Our Kind of People”: What a Vincentian Parish ought to be about

Kevin Lawlor

(The author is of the U.S. Eastern Province, and gave this talk to the confreres of the U.S. Midwest Province in Perryville)

Recently a confrere and I were talking about the possibility of running in a five-mile race called “Turkey Trot” that is sponsored by the firemen of New York City. In the course of the conversation one of us said: “Let’s run the race; they’re our kind of people”. The “they” refers to the firemen and firewomen. Many of them come from the neighbourhood where both of us grew up. The neighbourhood was a police and firemen producing factory. The fire people running in the Turkey Trot are all blue-collar types who are easy to be with when you’ve grown up in Brooklyn.

The operative phrase, if you haven’t guessed it by now, is “our kind of people”; we used it spontaneously. The upper class use it with disdain for anyone below their social level. What I want to do today is turn the tables and let the poor have the use of the phrase.

What makes a parish Vincentian is my topic today and what I want to say in summary form is this: a parish is Vincentian when the poor can very spontaneously proclaim that a parish community is “our kind of people”.

Just what I think is necessary to make that happen is what I will share today. But first some preliminaries.

My background

I want to share some of my background/prejudices so you can know where I come from on this topic.

My background is a middle-class, Irish Catholic, parish-oriented, neighbourhood in Brooklyn. I went to a Vincentian high school where “the priests were good to me”. My seminary formation was pre/post

Vatican II. I was touched by a “60s” concern for the poor. I have had twenty years of ministry in Panama, urban parish, rural parish and novice master. I have had Hispanic ministry in Long Island that is parish based with a view to expansion beyond the parish. I have no time for arguments about “where we should work” as Vincentians. I just ask does the work help the poor? I don’t care if we work in a parish or a university or on the missions or preaching missions or whatever. Others can argue the point; I will not get involved. For me, we can serve the poor directly or indirectly as long as the work helps/serves/evangelizes the poor.

I happen to like to be parish based because I like to dig in. I admire/support/applaud the individual work of other confreres, but their work is not my cup of tea. My preference for a parish base from which to work comes from my desire. In no way do I want to project this on to others. This is what works for me. Hopefully it works also for the poor.

I say these things so you know where I am coming from, and also so that you might know that in no way do I intend here to respond to the tone of the Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation on parishes. I find that the tone of the Constitutions and Statutes, when they talk about work in parishes, is a somewhat reluctant or hesitant tone. Parishes are clearly acceptable as a work of the Congregation, but the wording has a few words that set a tone of hesitance - parishes are “accepted” ... “provided that” ...

I will make no response to that. For me parishes and any other works are fine – as long as they are works that serve the poor.

That is where I am coming from.

How do the poor experience us?

(These questions were asked in a reflective tone, while slides were being projected)

1. As the poor pass in front of our churches, what stirs in their hearts?
 - i) Do they bless themselves and feel that it is their home?
 - ii) Are they drawn to us by something we project in the community?
 - iii) Is there a “turn-off”? Does the “turn-off” occur because we are not really involved in the community? Do we come across as distant or withdrawn?

2. As the poor gather in their spontaneous groupings:
 - i) What do they say about us, beyond comments about individual idiosyncrasies or talents? That priest is nice? The other one is a grouch? He sings well? The other guy ought to take a bath?
 - ii) What do the poor say about our parish community as they sit in the laundromat?
 - iii) Are we part of the problem or part of the solution?
 - iv) What is the line of conversation as the poor wait on line at the welfare office?
3. And what is our attitude toward the poor?
 - i) As we sit to sup, what is the tone of our conversations?
 - ii) What attitudes creep into our conversations?
 - iii) Do we project a knowledge and understanding of the plight of the poor?
 - iv) Is there *a* negativity, a rejection, a distaste for the poor?
 - v) Would St Vincent encourage or criticise us, were he to sit round our supper table?

What I hope the poor experience in us

I have here a few points which, when present in a parish, would make the poor say: "That parish community is our kind of people".

1. The poor are present.

As the poor look at our parish they are able to see other poor people. This gives them confidence to approach. As the poor look at us they see other poor people in our outreach programmes receiving needed help, they see the poor worshipping in our churches, they see that this community is obviously a place where they are welcome.

And this is one of the things that need periodic evaluation. Ed Koch, as mayor of New York, was a pain in the neck on many points, but one of his lines was worth stealing. He used to ask: "How am I doing?" Ed Koch would ask this question in controlled situations where he knew that the positive response was forthcoming, but the question was a good one. Periodically we should ask ourselves, and ask the poor: "How are

we doing in our service of the poor?”. Maybe this gets done at an annual evaluation meeting such as this. Maybe it is an agenda point at an annual evaluation meeting of the parish staff. Any number of mechanisms will do the trick. The point is to ask oneself: “Is this parish community a place where the poor are present and where the poor are served?”. And, of course, when the answer is positive, “How can we improve?”.

2. Community life.

A second characteristic that comes from our heritage which will make the poor say that “these are our kind of people” revolves around community life. As Vincentians we are secular priests living in community. It has been my experience that this way of living priesthood spills over into our parish life. Something happens when our community life is good that touches the lives of the people of our parishes. It is usually just the way that we can joke together that gives a special tone to a Vincentian parish, but it can also be something more profound. Maybe the fact that we do not schedule anything on a night reserved for community that sends a message about the importance of primary relationships -such as family life - to those who use the parish as an escape from family life commitments. Maybe a community life commitment to community prayer will spill over into a prayerful tone in the parish community.

There are many many manifestations of community life in our parishes. What is definite is that community life is a part of our Vincentian spirit, and when it is working it gives a special tone to our parish.

3. Approachability.

The third characteristic that I want to highlight is approachability. When the Vincentian embodies the first three of our characteristic virtues, humility, meekness and simplicity, the end result is an approachable person, a person that the poor feel comfortable with, a person that is down to earth, a person to whom the poor are attracted. I have a classmate who is an example of this. I have seen people respond to him in many many different situations, in the seminary, in Mexico, in Panama, in Long Island. He’s got it. People flock to him. People approach him. What is it that underlies this dynamism? I call it a combo of these three Vincentian virtues, humility, simplicity and meekness. (For me, it is difficult to see the dividing line between humility, simplicity and meekness. They sort of blend together and the summary word for me is “approachability”).

When this characteristic is present in the Vincentian, then the spirit often flows into the parish community. There is a welcoming spirit. Someone happens along and feels drawn to stay. There is a high comfort level for all those who happen to come in contact with the parish community.

4. Mortification.

The next distinguishing feature that should make us unique, that should make the poor feel at home, flows from another characteristic virtue, mortification. When we embody this virtue there is a spirit of service that sends out a clear message to the poor: "Count on us!" Count on us even if it is beyond "office hours". Count on us even if the paperwork is a little complicated. Count on us even if the request seems far removed from the usual requests. Count on us late at night and early in the morning. Of course this line of thinking lends itself to workaholic abuse which is to be avoided. As in so many things it is a question of balance.

5. Zeal.

The last characteristic that should permeate a Vincentian parochial experience is a zealous spirit flowing from another characteristic virtue. Zeal makes a Vincentian parish never satisfied. Zeal moves us to search out the lost sheep. Zeal moves us to try new things. When the spirit of zeal is present there is a vibrancy at hand that touches everyone. The poor catch the spirit and want to be part of the same. New programmes, new approaches for young and old, abound. Creativity is rampant and the place is jumping. There may be other parishes operating along the same line, but the Vincentian parish is this way because of the heritage of this characteristic virtue, zeal.

A Problem

One of the things that I have heard the poor say to me recently when I was encouraging them to come back to a parish community where they had participated before was: "How do I know that you will stay? Maybe you will take off too, just as Father Pablo did before?"

We know that there is a value in the Vincentian missionary spirit of availability. We know that we should be ready to go to the most needy. But there is a danger of not "digging in", of projecting a certain "temporary" posture in all we do, if we overly emphasise "availability".

That is what the person was saying to me recently. Why should the person risk entering into a relationship with this parish and with this priest when at any moment the priest might be changed and the personality of the parish change radically.

I leave that problem for your ruminations. It is something of a dilemma for me. Again, balance will help us find a solution, but I'm hearing very loudly what that poor person said to me.

Summary

And there you have it, a few thoughts from yours truly on what makes a parish Vincentian. The key lies in how we come across to the poor, the way that they experience us. We just hope that they experience us as “their kind of people”.

St Vincent and Prayer

Richard McCullen

(Talk to European Vincentian students, Le Berceau,
26 August 1994)

It was the historian Daniel-Rops who remarked about St Vincent that the great charitable works he launched surround him like a forest, while his humility envelops him like a fog, and consequently one can experience a certain difficulty in seeing the monumental man that is Vincent de Paul in his totality. The man - and the saint - would seem to be too big for the screens of our minds. However difficult it may be to measure the dimensions of this spiritual giant, the sources of his prodigious energies and activities are open for all to see. They lie in the intensity of his own personal union with Jesus Christ, through whom he had access to the Father, and the throne of grace where he was able to receive “mercy and find grace to help him in time of need” (Hb 4:16). His great works of charity and the breadth of his apostolates are evidence that he did receive much mercy and grace in time of need.

The works of his hands are his greatest monument to both the intensity of his union with God and to his devotion to prayer. It must be said, however, that he was not directly communicative about his own inner life of prayer. Of its intensity there can be no doubt: it can be gleaned from the burning sincerity of his observations in his conferences and in his voluminous correspondence. The fruit cannot flourish unless it abide in the vine: “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5). A gloss on that text fell from his lips when at a conference he remarked:

One knows those who do their prayer well, not merely in the way they recount it, but still more by their actions and by their behaviour, by which they show the fruit they draw from it (XI 403).

If St Vincent does not speak directly of his own personal experience in prayer, neither did he evolve any special method of mental prayer

that bears his name today. In his counsels about prayer - and they are numerous - one can trace the influence of those writers and saints who had speculated more deeply about the nature of prayer. To Cardinal de Bérulle – his spiritual director for two years - one can trace his very strong devotion to the humanity of Christ. The experiences of Jesus Christ, recounted in the gospels, were an inexhaustible source upon which he drew for strength and-example. He encouraged innumerable other people to do likewise. He credits his friend St Francis de Sales with the method of mental prayer which he often proposed to his communities. St Francis gave much prominence to what he called “affections” in prayer. Affections could be described as the spontaneous unfolding of the desires of a person’s heart in prayer. St Vincent was, however, a sufficiently independent-minded man to modify to some degree St Francis’ teaching, and so we can note that St Vincent leans heavily on the importance of the practical resolutions taken at the end of prayer. The making of resolutions

is one of the most important parts, indeed the most important part, of prayer ... The principal fruit of prayer consists in making good resolutions, convincing oneself of them, foreseeing the obstacles in order to surmount them (XI 87).

Prayer was to issue in action and work. The experience of work and action should bring one back to prayer. So the rhythmic cycle would go on: the pendulum-like swing that one notices in the life of Christ - particularly in the gospel of St Luke - between Christ on the mountain communing with his Father, and Christ among the people, healing all manner of diseases, preaching “good news to the poor”.

To present some aspects of St Vincent’s approach to prayer, I propose to open two windows and two doors. The windows open on to two individual members of St Vincent’s community, while the doors open into the saint’s two communities, as he is addressing them. Standing at these two doors we will, as it were, eavesdrop as the saint makes some observations on the topic of prayer.

Window 1

On 21 May 1652 St Vincent wrote a letter to a priest whose name we do not know and who sometime earlier had written to the saint. We can surmise from St Vincent’s letter that the priest had tried to join the community, and had been received at St Lazare. Before the end

of his “séminaire interne” he decided to leave, because of what Coste describes in a footnote as a “tightness in the head”. The condition seems to have eased and disappeared sometime after the priest had left St Lazare. He now thought that he should re-apply for admission to the community. Here is the extant part of St Vincent’s reply:

I have no trouble believing that you are still attached to our Company and its works; your past behaviour has convinced me only too well of this. I also respect the opinion of the monk who told you that it would be a temptation if, because of your difficulties in prayer, you stopped being a Missionary, for it is true that in every Community there are many persons – of ten, the best – who cannot apply themselves to meditation, where the imagination or reasoning play a part, because that hinders them. But the blessed Bishop of Geneva taught his nuns another kind of prayer, which even the sick can make: to remain peacefully in the presence of God, manifesting our needs to Him with no other mental effort, like a poor person who uncovers his sores and by this means is more effective in inciting passers-by to do him some good than if he wore himself out trying to convince them of his need.

So we pray well when we remain in this way in the presence of God, with no exertion of the understanding or will. Therefore, you will do well to listen to God in the urge you feel to return to us. I should simply like to know how you are doing with preaching, teaching catechism and hearing confessions, especially since it is a good sign if you are not upset by them.

Please ask God, Monsieur, to make known to you what He wants of you. Begin some special devotion for this purpose, and try to place yourself in the greatest possible indifference so as to be more ready to follow His attraction and His will in such an important matter. Then, after the feast of Our Lady next August, let me know your disposition so that we can reflect on whether it is advisable for you and for the Company for you to come back to it (IV 390-1).

This letter – simple, straightforward and practical - reveals some of the veins of St Vincent’s teaching or outlook on prayer.

Firstly, prayer is a gift from God. “Therefore I want you to understand ... no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3). Prayer is, then, a waiting on the Lord: “My soul is waiting

on the Lord, I count on his word” (Ps 129). Rather like the paralytic we must wait for the moving of the Holy Spirit. Hence overstraining and forcing could be a too human approach. Undoubtedly there are conditions that depend on us for the moving of the waters of the Spirit. We must, so to speak, position ourselves around the pool of God’s healing waters - and hence in his instructions to both Missionaries and Sisters -St Vincent will stress the importance of recalling the presence of God at the beginning of a period of prayer or meditation. Hence the very basic and practical advice offered to the priest is “remain in the presence of God, with no exertion of the understanding or will . . .”. It was a point that would be touched upon on a number of occasions over the years. If one succeeds well at this initial stage of the dialogue with God in prayer, all else would follow (XI 405). One tried to sustain that lively sense of being in the presence of God throughout the period of prayer. However, as the priest of May 1652 was counselled, it was always to be done quietly and not agitatedly, “without, however, making too great an effort, for excess is always harmful” (Ibid. 404).

Making the effort to keep oneself in the presence of God was in effect trying to discipline what St Teresa of Avila liked to call “the fool of the house” – the imagination. For St Vincent the imagination is a “wandering vagabond”.

Perhaps it was because the imagination was a wandering vagabond that St Vincent insisted much on following a method of prayer. It must be noted too that for St Vincent prayer was a discipline, which had to be matched with a measure of discipline in one’s general life outside prayer. He invoked the authority of spiritual writers in general for saying that interior and exterior mortification of the senses was necessary if one was to make progress in the way of prayer (Cf XI 90-91).

Following a method in the making of mental prayer ensured a measure of discipline, and the method of prayer he explicitly recommended to his communities was that of St Francis de Sales as proposed in his book *The Introduction to the Devout Life*. On occasion St Vincent outlined the method when he spoke on prayer. Indeed it might have been that he had touched on the point so often that one detects a note of apology when, during his conference to the Sisters on 17 November 1658, he alludes to the place of method in prayer:

You know how to make meditation because you have often been told about it and learned it by rote; perhaps it is not much use for me to tell you of the method of the Blessed Francis de Sales; nevertheless, as it is the easiest, I will do so... (X 586-7).

Then follows a detailed and orderly outlining of the method with all its divisions and subdivisions.

Methods of prayer, however, are not prayer, and St Vincent readily recognized that, as the advice he gave to the priest in May 1652 so clearly shows. The Spirit of God breathes as He wills, and to adhere slavishly to a particular method, when one's will has already been inflamed to action, would be to constrain the Holy Spirit. It was a point which St Vincent would make from time to time, using - as he so often did - a simple metaphor. It was this: "There is no need to keep lighting matches if you already have got the fire going ..." (XI 406). Given his own intense union with God in the final years of his life, it is unlikely that in his own personal prayer he would have been following step by step the outline proposed by St Francis de Sales.

It must be remembered that much of St Vincent's teaching on prayer was given to people who were taking their initial steps in the spiritual life, and hence still in the purgative way. Consequently he did not treat of contemplation. Being the friend of some of the great contemplatives of his time, but at the same time well aware of the dangerous currents of false mysticism, St Vincent deliberately was reticent about contemplative and mystical prayer. There is, however, one interesting reference to it in a conference to the Daughters of Charity:

The other kind of prayer is called contemplation. In this prayer the soul, present to God, does nothing else but receive what He gives it. The soul is inactive and, without its taking any pains, God Himself inspires it with all it could seek for, and a great deal more. Have you not, my dear daughters, experienced this kind of prayer? I am sure that it has been quite often so in your retreats, and that during them you have been yourselves astonished because, without any contribution on your part, God Himself has filled your heart and given such insights as you never had (XI 420).

In his direction of the priest of May 1652 St Vincent makes no mention of method: just the simple counsel to remain peacefully in the presence of God, manifesting our needs to Him with no other mental effort, like a poor person who uncovers his sores and by this means is more effective in inciting passers-by to do him some good than if he wore himself out trying to convince them of his need.

It is an accepted axiom that one should pray as one can, and not try to pray as one cannot. The anonymous priest who had written

to the saint had clearly been trying to pray in a way he could not. St Vincent's counsel is to be still and learn to wait on God and so come to know Him. "Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps 45).

Prayer, however, was not to be merely a simple placing of oneself in the presence of God. The priest of May 1652 may have been straining too much at prayer, thus disturbing his mental and physical equilibrium. He needed to relax more in the presence of God, but he was not to lose sight of the action that he was to take when leaving prayer. The Lord was to be loved with the strength of the arm and the sweat of the brow. God was not to be loved in a cupboard, as it were. Prayer that remained in the cupboard was seriously defective and suspect. So skillfully St Vincent evokes the apostolate of catechising and hearing confession and expresses the desire to hear from his correspondent to hear how that work was going. It was characteristic of the saint to always insist strongly on the need of taking practical resolutions before one finished praying. Just how detailed and practical these resolutions should be is well illustrated from this extract of a conference the saint gave on 2 August 1640:

Your resolutions might be like this: "I am going to serve the poor. I will try to go to them in a pleasant way, to console and edify them. I will speak to them as if they were my masters. There is one of them who only rarely speaks to me. I'll put up with it. I usually wound a Sister on such and such an occasion. I'll refrain from doing so. She annoys me sometimes on this subject. I'll bear it. That woman scolds me; another blames me. I'll try not to deviate from my duty, and give her the respect and honour I'm bound to give. When I am with So-and-so I almost always suffer spiritual damage. I'll avoid the occasion as much as possible". That is how it seems to me, my Sisters, you ought to make your prayer (IX 30).

St Vincent patented no methods of prayer. He did patent, however, a practice that harmonizes with the principle that each one goes to God in prayer differently. Speaking to the community in St Lazare on 17 May 1658 he refers to the practice of Repetition of Prayer:

Repetition of prayer – a thing unheard of in the Church of God, and one that has since been introduced into several well-regulated communities in which it is now practised ... (XII 9).

And again on 2 August 1659 he remarks on postponing the Repetition of Prayer:

We have reason to thank God for having given his grace to the Community and we can say that it is a practice which has never been in vogue in any other community except our own ... (XII 288).

The exercise of the repetitions of prayer- and someone reckoned that St Vincent presided at some 4,000 of them in his lifetime - was, with the saint's strong emphasis on speaking one's mind simply, very often a revelation of the diverse ways the Spirit of God was leading the Community in prayer. The repetition of prayer was often a multi-purpose exercise: guidance, correction, information on the part of St Vincent, but also a sharing in simplicity and confidence of the enlightenment participants had received in and through the exercise of mental prayer. In the course of three centuries the exercise often became stylized and formal, losing that spontaneity and simplicity which St Vincent intended it to have. Happily in recent years, however, it has recovered something of its initial character of simple sharing, and is now an exercise which appeals to an increasing number of people, who find it both an aid and a stimulus to prayer.

In addition to mental prayer or meditation that St Vincent recommended to the priest as a means of finding out what God wished him to do, St Vincent suggests that he "begin some special devotion for this purpose...". He does not indicate any particular one. We know that he himself had a particular devotion to contemplating the sufferings of Christ, and in his conferences to the Daughters of Charity, many of whom were unable to read or write, he suggested on a number of occasions that they would find the contemplation of the Passion of Christ a fruitful subject for their meditations (Cf IX 217, X 569). We know too that when testifying in 1628 to the holiness of St Francis de Sales he commented on the practice which the bishop had of reciting daily the rosary (Cf XIII76). In the Rule he wrote for his missionaries we know that he was not in favour of a multiplicity of devotional practices; that the devotions he recommended explicitly should not be added to. His outlook on prayer, did, however, make room for setting up some shrines in the temple of our hearts and, as his recommendation to this priest shows, he saw them as means for discovering more surely the will of God. Through the practice of the particular devotion the priest was to "try to place yourself in the greatest possible indifference so

as to be more ready to follow His attraction and His will in such an important matter”.

Instant responses to prayer must not be expected (a valuable counsel for people who live in an age which, with its systems of telecommunication, faxes and computers, could be described as the “instant generation”). “After Our Lady’s feastday in August, let me know how you feel about things, so that we will be able to judge”. Spring must slowly give way to summer before the priest will know what God may be asking of him. “After the feast of Our Lady next August, let me know your disposition so that we can reflect on whether it is advisable for you and for the Company for you to come back to it”. That point of direction is in harmony with St Vincent’s profound conviction that “Grace has its moments. Let us abandon ourselves to the Providence of God and be on our guard against anticipating it ...” (II 453).

Window 2

Let us look into Window 2. We see a young priest talking to St Vincent. There is an age difference of nearly 50 years. St Vincent is 75 years old and the young priest is only 27 years of age. The young priest, Fr Antoine Durand, has just been named superior of a seminary, and he has had the humility and prudence to come to the saint seeking advice on how he should act as superior. After he had left the room Fr Durand had the good sense to jot down the points St Vincent had made. The few pages of what was just an impromptu talk which we still have are among the jewels of St Vincent’s writings. They could be described as an epitome of St Vincent’s spirituality. Time will not allow me to take each point made by St Vincent. Only let me draw your attention to his observations about prayer in the life of this young and newly appointed superior.

An important matter, to which you must carefully apply yourself, is to have a wealth of communication with our Lord in prayer. That is the reservoir where you will find the instructions necessary in order that you may acquit yourself properly in the office to which you are going. Whenever you find yourself in doubt, have recourse to God saying: “O Lord, Thou who art the Father of lights, teach me what I must do in this turn of events”. I give you this advice not only for the occasions you will find distressing, but also in order that you may be enlightened by God in what you have to teach ... You ought also to have recourse to

prayer in order to ask our Saviour for the things which those in your care have need of. Believe most certainly that you will reap a better harvest in this way than in any other. Jesus Christ, on whom you could model your whole conduct of affairs, was not content with preaching and good works, nor with fasting, nor with shedding his blood and dying for us; for to all this he added prayer ... (XI 344-6).

One gets the impression of a man to whom prayer had become second nature, and who found prayer to be an infinite treasure from which he could draw forth new things and old. It would seem that for St Vincent his book of meditations contained on one page the life of our Lord, and gradually developing on the opposite page the life he himself was called upon to live from day to day. In his prayer it would seem that St Vincent was concerned that the life appearing on the second page should, as it developed, be in the image and likeness of the man Christ Jesus, whom he once prayed would be "life of our life and only desire of our hearts" (VI 652).

Door 1

Let us move from these windows to the door of the conference room in the house of the Daughters of Charity. M. Vincent is holding one of his weekly conferences. Sitting by his side is Mademoiselle Le Gras surrounded by a group of young girls. It is a conference in the full sense of that word, because each person present is encouragingly invited to participate in the reflection that turns upon some spiritual topic or point of the "little rule".

As has already been remarked, many of the participants had not ever learned to read or write, and to judge by the number of allusions St Vincent makes to the fact that a number could not read, he shows himself very conscious of the diffidence which the Sisters might experience as they set about the intellectual exercise of meditation. With much gentleness and encouragement and without sounding any note of condescension St Vincent draws out from the Sisters the enlightenment each has received in prayer from the indwelling Spirit of God. These pages of conferences to the Daughters of Charity are among the most charming in St Vincent's works. Genius meeting illiteracy, all bathed in the warm light of M. Vincent's charity and authentic humility. Indeed an often-quoted text on the lips of St Vincent during these conferences is that the Son of God praises His Father for revealing great mysteries to little ones (Cf Mt 11:12).

Excellent psychologist that St Vincent was, it is interesting to note the points that he most frequently touched upon when he spoke about prayer to the Sisters. Encouragement was the note most often struck in the observations he made. Very conscious that some of the Sisters might be discouraged by their inability to read, M. Vincent returned often to the theme of praying by means of images. A Servant of God, he tells them, learned to pray in that way, while St Teresa could not pray for twenty years. "Above all else, I must tell you, my Sisters, never to give up because you think you are no good at it" (IX 424; Cf X 567-9).

Door 2

Crossing over the road to St Lazare and eavesdropping on the conference that is being held there, it would seem that there is less dialogue taking place. Perhaps because the community was largely made up of priests, M. Vincent felt that less explicit instruction on prayer was needed. Indeed what needed to be countered was a tendency to turn prayer into a too cerebral exercise. The saint speaks with candour and directness when he begins a repetition of prayer by saying

I notice, my brothers, that in all the prayers you make everyone tries to get in a lot of reasoning, reasons piled on reasons; that's noticeable. But you don't get in enough affections. Reasoning is one item, but it still is not enough; something else is called for; the will has to be engaged and not just the intellect. All reasons are barren if we don't move on to affections. You don't get to the purpose for which the whole thing was instituted (XI183-4).

The same point would be made on other occasions. To pray is not to engage in study. Repeatedly, too, the importance of practical resolutions is emphasised. One must pass from reflections to affections and then to resolutions, which for St Vincent, as has already been noted, was the principal part of prayer.

You mustn't skim quickly over the resolutions, but go back over them again and get them well fixed in the heart (Ibid. 406).

The final act of prayer was one of gratitude and a petition for the grace needed to carry out the concrete and practical resolutions that had been taken. There is deep conviction and great clarity of vision in the statement which St Vincent made at the repetition of prayer on 10 August 1659:

If we persevere in our vocation it is thanks to prayer; if we remain in charity, if we succeed in our work, it's thanks to prayer; if we do not fall into sin it is thanks to prayer, if we are saved, all this is thanks to God and prayer (Ibid. 407).

Two final observations

It is gratifying to note that our present Constitutions reflect with fidelity St Vincent's vision of prayer in the life of one who takes him as a Master in Israel, as indeed he is. The paragraph on prayer synthesizes what should be the general orientation of the prayer of any disciple of the school of St Vincent. I quote:

Christ the Lord, remaining always in intimate union with the Father, used to seek his WILL in prayer. That WILL was the sole aim of his life, mission and giving of himself for the salvation of the world. He likewise taught his disciples to pray always in the same spirit and never to lose heart. We too, sanctified in Christ and sent into the world, should try to seek out in prayer the signs of God's WILL and to imitate the responsiveness of Christ, discerning everything according to his mind. In this way our lives are changed by the Holy Spirit into a mutual offering, and we become better disposed to participate in Christ's mission (C & S No. 40).

When you analyze that paragraph you will notice that the word *will* occurs no less than three times. Christ sought in prayer the *will* of His Father. That *will* was the sole aim of his life and of his mission. We, too, should try to seek out the *will* of God in prayer. Discerning and fulfilling the *will* of God, we participate in the mission of Christ. The emphasis on finding or discerning the will of God and then carrying it out to the best of our ability is the fruit of all sincere, humble and loving prayer.

Lastly, something of the richness of St Vincent's vision of Christian prayer is intimated to us by the rich variety of metaphor he uses to describe the experience of speaking to our heavenly Father through Christ and in the Spirit. Prayer is a mirror in which the soul can see itself. Prayer is nourishment; what food is to the body, prayer is to the soul. Prayer is the soul of the soul; what the soul is to the body, prayer is to the soul. Prayer is the life of the soul. A body without a soul is a cadaver; without prayer the soul has not vigour. What air is to the

body, prayer is to the soul. There is one metaphor which is particularly intriguing. One is tempted to think that it might have echoes in the disputed captivity episode of the saint's life.

The Fathers of the Church ... say that prayer is a fountain of youth in which the soul grows young. Philosophers say that amongst the secrets of nature there is a fountain called the fountain of youth, and if old men drink its water they grow young. However that may be, we know that there are mineral springs that are most beneficial to nature. But prayer rejuvenates the soul far more truly than the fountain of youth which the philosophers speak of rejuvenate the body. In prayer your soul, weakened by bad habits, grows quite vigorous; in prayer it recovers the vision it lost when it went blind; ears formerly deaf to the voice of God are open to holy inspirations, and the heart receives new strength, is animated with a courage it never felt before (IX 417-8).

On that note of the God who gives joy to my youth - or as a variant on Psalm 42 which I once heard puts it - the God "who gives me back my youth" I will end.

St Vincent de Paul – Our Model and Patron

Mark Noonan

(Talk given in Warwick, at the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Society of St Vincent de Paul in England and Wales, 3 & 4 September 1994.)

A saint as patron is not just an ordinary name to give a society as if it were a cabaret. A saint as patron is a life that is to be continued, an example on earth and a protector in heaven (Frederic Ozanam).

A few years ago I visited the church of Clichy in the suburbs of Paris, where Vincent de Paul worked as a priest. On the wall of the church is a plaque which states that Frédéric Ozanam and the members of his Conference of St Vincent de Paul made a pilgrimage to the church to honour his patron saint. Frédéric Ozanam must have had a great love for the way of St Vincent. Frédéric and his Conference members attended mass on the feast of St Vincent in the rue de Sevres where the body of St Vincent is kept, and prayed to the saint to help them in their work. I have little doubt that when the founding members of the Society looked among the saints for somebody to be a model and patron for the Society, the name of Vincent de Paul must have come very readily to mind. In choosing St Vincent de Paul as patron of the Society, Frédéric Ozanam was saying to the members: “Look at the life of this man. Look at his attitudes to poverty and to poor people and let him be a light for you in your work among the poor”.

What kind of a man was Vincent de Paul? First of all he was a man who noticed the need. Just before mass one Sunday morning in Châtillon-les-Dombes in southern France where he was Parish Priest some parishioners came and told him about a family dying of hunger on the edge of the town. He preached a sermon looking for aid for this family. He was astonished by the generous response. There was so much food left over that he got the idea of distributing it to other families in need. So he came to set up his first confraternity of charity.

On that fateful morning his life of service to the poor was launched. He could so easily have missed that opportunity, but he was alert, open to the Spirit of God, and listening. Incidentally, until then he was afflicted with a crisis of faith. As soon as he turned to the poor the crisis was lifted. The direction of his life was changed.

He was listening also to the people of Lorraine during a famine. He organized the collecting of money to buy food for the starving people of Lorraine, and Brother Regnard was appointed by St Vincent to take money from Paris to Lorraine – sometimes at great risk to his life. Again, St Vincent could easily have missed this opportunity, but he was listening well. He heard the cry of the poor and moved heaven and earth to do something, however small, to alleviate the famine.

Vincent was listening also in the small church of Folleville in 1617 on the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul. There he preached a sermon on general confession, which moved many people and resulted in many conversions. Following his experience there he was inspired to get a number of priests to join him in travelling around France giving parish missions and preaching renewal through general confession in the sacrament of Penance. This was a God-sent moment which directed the course of his life, because the founding of his community of priests, which he called The Congregation of the Mission, originated from that sermon.

St Vincent is our model and patron in the way we listen to the needs of people today. It is so important to give the poor what they need, not what we think they need. We have to continue to ask, what are we doing? How are we doing it? Could we do it differently? One might think that the needs of people, or the needs of the Church, are obvious. Sometimes the needs can be hidden from us. We can sometimes be at one remove from where poor people are, and can miss so much unless we are listening very well. With the benefits of education, and a reasonably comfortable style of living, we can sometimes find ourselves at a distance from the real needs of people. Like St Vincent, it is so important for us to notice the need and to respond to it in a practical way. (Sometimes members of the Society can also be poor. We have to listen to the poverty of the members of the Society as well as to the poverty of the poor).

Another way in which he is our model and patron is his ability to motivate people in service of the poor. On one occasion he inspired the wealthy women of Paris to give their jewellery and valuables in aid of the abandoned babies of Paris, an incident which inspired many

pictures of St Vincent with little children. He also motivated people not only to give money but to give their time and talents as well. He was able to pick people's brains, he was able to involve people in decision-making and, having got a group together, he gave them a set of rules. Then he gave them the freedom to get on with the work in hand while he went on to another project. The ability to be able to motivate those who are blessed with the world's goods to give generously of their time and talents is part of the Vincentian vocation. So is the ability to involve others in the work.

St Vincent was also a bridge-builder in society. Vincent had an extraordinary ability to move from the world of the rich to the world of the poor with consummate ease. He was doing it all his life. In this way he united extremes. He made the rich aware of the plight of the poor and enabled the poor to benefit from the generosity of those who were blessed with the world's goods. He was not a nobleman himself, yet he was present at the death-bed of King Louis XIII of France. The Society also has to be a bridge-builder between all strata of society. The Society has to work with local authorities and governments, in order to make the cry of the poor heard in the highest echelons of society. This is what St Vincent did and this is what the Society has to continue to do. To be able to move from one world to another demands great flexibility and great humility. St Vincent had both qualities in abundance.

The work of justice is also an important part of the Vincentian vocation. In the handbook for the Society in Australia there is a very Vincentian paragraph:

Ward off the most urgent needs. Organize charity so that it is more efficient. Teach reading and writing. Educate with the aim of giving each the means of self-support. Intervene with authorities to obtain reforms in structure, in the area of justice ... There is no charity without justice.

St Vincent, with St Louise de Marillac, worked for justice all their lives. If Vincent was alive today he would be concerned not only to bring material aid to the poor but also to tackle the root causes of poverty and to influence governments and the leaders of society in changing structures which result in the poor becoming poorer and the rich becoming richer. During the Fronde, a civil war which tore France apart in St Vincent's lifetime, Vincent made many efforts to bring the warring factions together to make peace. Part of his strategy was to get

the bishops of France and the Queen to make an appeal to the nobles to make peace.

Vincent was a man of prayer. He prayed every day for one hour. He believed that the vocation of the Vincentian was to bring good news to the poor. Good news is that God loves us where we are, no matter who we are. But if we are to be good news for people on the margins of society we have to have experienced something of God's love ourselves, through prayer, through our Vincent de Paul work, through the Church. This is why the development of the spirituality of the Society is so important. It is not enough to bring material aid, we also have to be bringers of hope to people who have no hope. We do this, not by preaching about God but by the quality of our presence among those whom we serve.

In his spirituality St Vincent was very practical. He saw the events of his life as the unfolding of the plan of God. He believed that God was guiding his life in a very real way and he took great pains to see the guiding hand of God in ordinary situations and events. Vincent saw God present in the bits and pieces of every day. That we begin to see the finger of God in our lives through the people we meet and through the things that happen to us is an important part of Vincentian spirituality.

St Vincent spiritualized many of his contacts with poor people. He saw in those who were afflicted the face of Christ, and so this enabled him to get over his natural revulsion and the difficulties that he encountered. This seeing of the person of Christ in the poor person resulted in a non-judgemental attitude to people in difficulties. The Society is the compassionate face of Christ for the poor.

St Vincent said on one occasion:

I shouldn't assess a poor countryman or a poor woman according to appearance or mental capacity, because very often they scarcely show the appearance or capacity of rational beings, so crude and earthy are they. But turn the medal over and by the light of faith you'll see that the Son of God, who chose to be poor, is represented by these poor people ... It's great to see the poor if we view them in God and with the value Jesus Christ put on them. But if we look at them with natural feelings and from the material point of view they'll seem contemptible (XI 32).

St Vincent de Paul is a true apostle of charity. His life and work was a pillar of light in the Church and in society of 17th century France.

His life must inspire all members of the Society which bears his name to be what he was and to serve the poor as he served them. He is our model

by the way he listened to the needs;

by the way he motivated other people in the service of the poor;

by his practical organizational skills;

by his ability to be a bridge-builder in society;

by his spirituality, which saw the person of Christ in every poor man and woman;

by his attitude to life, which he saw as the manifestation of the unfolding plan of God for him;

by his ceaseless work for justice for victims of poverty.

The Society has an extraordinary saint as a model and patron. My prayer on this occasion, as you celebrate 150 years of the Society in England and Wales, is that his attitudes would be our attitudes, that his vision of service of the poor would be our vision, that his quality of presence with people is our quality of presence with people, that his life and his vision will continue to inspire all of us to do great things for God and for poor people.

A saint as patron is not just a name to give a society as if it were a cabaret. A saint as patron is a life that is to be continued, an example on earth and a protector in heaven.

St Cedd's, Goodmayes, 1966-1994

Thomas Bennett

This is a brief history of the parish of St Cedd's, Goodmayes, dealing with its origin, and Vincentian involvement until 1994.

Early in 1966 the diocese of Brentwood was informed that the Methodist Community was about to sell its church and church halls that were situated at High Road and Blythswood Road, Goodmayes. The diocese was anxious to acquire this property as, for a considerable time, the need was felt for a new parish in this area of Ilford. The mother church of SS Peter and Paul, Ilford, was much overcrowded. In the late 1950s and 1960s there was a large influx of men into this area. The large motor plant of Ford's, at nearby Dagenham, and the post-war construction scheme, easily absorbed all these workers.

The sale of the church property was held up for some time as some of the Methodist Community were not in favour of sale to Catholics. However, in the end all was settled and the diocese purchased the entire property for the sum of £57,000. On 7 November 1966 the solicitors for the Methodists handed over the keys to the diocese.

As far back as May 1966 it was proposed that the Vincentian Fathers take charge of the new parish. Fr James Cahalan CM, the Provincial, had discussions with the bishop and vicar general. Then came a formal invitation from Bishop Bernard Wall that we accept the parish. The Provincial and his council gave their approval. Much thanks was due to the vicar general, Mgr John Howell, for his great friendliness to the Vincentians. He was more than pleased that the Vincentians had accepted the invitation.

Fr Maurice O'Neill CM was appointed the first Parish Priest of the new parish, and Fr James Rooney CM as curate. On 8 November 1966 they both arrived and took charge of the parish. As No. 4 Blythswood Road was still occupied, Canon Eric Goldingay, Parish Priest of St Anne Line, South Woodford, offered Fr O'Neill the hospitality of his presbytery. Fr Rooney stayed with Fr Michael Jacob, the chancellor, at Great Crescent, South Woodford. The stay at South Woodford was to last until February 1967.

No. 4 Blythswood Road had been let out in flats. One family vacated it but another was slow to move. This was a cause of great inconvenience, as the journey to and from South Woodford had to be made each day, and in mid-winter.

Fr O'NeiU's first impressions of the church and halls were not very favourable. The church had not been in use for some time. The interior was drab and musty. The church, as a building, was sound. It was built in 1904. Renovations on a large scale were necessary in order to adapt it to the required needs. The old Methodist caretaker agreed to stay on for a few weeks, to stoke the furnace.

During the first week professional cleaners were brought in to do some of the heavy work. The area of the church which was going to be the focal point for the celebration of the liturgy needed much adaptation. Some choir stalls were removed, a temporary altar erected, and two confessionals installed. Voluntary workers scrubbed and polished the church benches. A fresh coat of paint on the main entrance door indicated to passers-by that something was about to happen in St Cedd's. The Legion of Mary took a rough census of the parish. On Sunday, 27 November, four masses were celebrated in the church. About 800 people attended.

In January 1967 work commenced on the presbytery. The Provincial gave much needed financial assistance, and the Daughters of Charity at Warley helped in furnishing the new presbytery. The halls and committee rooms were in need of much repair. A whole new layout for the interior was devised. The many skilled workers in the parish undertook this work. Most of it was done in the late evenings. It was to take four years to complete this.

On 27 November 1967 the official opening of the church took place. Bernard Wall, bishop of Brentwood, concelebrated mass with the vicar general, John Howell, and the Provincial, James Cahalan. Over 1,200 people were present, including the mayor and mayoress of Ilford. Also present were twenty-two diocesan priests, ten Vincentians, and the Daughters of Charity from Worley Hospital. After the mass a buffet reception for the guests took place at the Seven Kings Hotel. At last St Cedd's was truly on course. Much remained to be done, but already a great parish community spirit had emerged.

In October 1974 Fr Michael Dunne CM, the then Parish Priest, invited the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, to take up residence in the parish. Besides their own special duties they assisted the priests in their parish ministries.

As the years passed many improvements took place in the church and halls. The people of St Cedd's were rightly proud of their parish. They were fortunate that they now had three priests to minister to their spiritual needs. St Cedd's became a focal point for many, beyond the boundaries of the parish.

In 1983 Bishop Thomas McMahon indicated to the clergy that he would like to see the sanctuaries of their churches re-arranged for the proper carrying-out of the revised liturgies. This mammoth task was undertaken by the Parish Priest, Fr Hugh McMahon CM. The church was closed from August till December of that year, and masses were said in the ample first-floor hall. The sanctuary of the church was re-designed. A new ambo and baptismal font were installed, matching the Wicklow granite of the altar and tabernacle. It was decided to invest in a new organ console, to be situated facing the sanctuary. This console was detached from the manual pipe organ situated above the altar, but connected with it by an electronic cable system and transistorized computers. The back wall of the sanctuary was re-modelled and included a large oval screen. The large hanging crucifix was positioned on this screen. The original artist, Sean Crampton, made the necessary adjustments. A new design of wallpaper, embossed with silvery wool, was chosen for the inner sanctum wall. The two reconciliation rooms were re-designed.

The people of the parish agreed that it would be the right time to have the church consecrated. The date chosen was 1 December 1983. The consecration by Bishop McMahon was a liturgical fiesta, with a large attendance of parishioners and many diocesan and Vincentian priests, including Fr Frank Mullan, the Provincial. It was another proud occasion for the people of St Cedd's parish.

Parish Priests come and go. During Fr Con Curtin's term as Parish Priest the spiritual and temporal well-being of the parish maintained its momentum. Pastoral and liturgy groups were formed. Preparation courses for baptism, confirmation and first communion were established. St Cedd's Catholic Social Club continued to make a great impact on the social and spiritual life of the parish.

Another landmark in the life of the parish was the celebration of its silver jubilee. In the autumn of 1991 a worthy celebration of the event was supervised by Fr Jimmy Sheil CM, who had been appointed Parish Priest the previous year. Once again Bishop McMahon and a large number of clergy joined in the joyful event. The parish had made great strides since its humble origin. The editor of *The Brentwood*

News wrote: "The Cinderella has become a lovely lady". And so, as the people made a toast to the Vincentians and to the next twenty-five years, they could not have guessed that in a few years time their beloved Vincentian priests would be withdrawn from the parish.

The lack of Vincentian vocations to the priesthood in recent years had increasingly put heavy pressure on the confreres working in parishes in Britain. This had been discussed at various Regional Meetings, and it was felt that something had to be done very soon. After much agonizing about the matter at Provincial Council meetings it was decided to withdraw the Vincentians from St Cedd's parish. Fr Mark Noonan, the Provincial, had the difficult task of informing the bishop of his decision. But a much more daunting task lay ahead for him.

On Sunday, 26 June, 1994 he spoke to the parishioners at all the masses. He spoke to them about the present difficulty of continuing to staff all our parishes, and why such circumstances had come about. He told them that it was with great regret that he was withdrawing the Vincentian priests from St Cedd's, a vibrant parish and much loved by all the priests who had worked there. It was with much sadness that the people received the news.

Earlier, in a letter to the Provincial, the bishop wrote:

I really am enormously indebted to the Vincentians for their tremendous contribution to the life of the Church in my Diocese and the news of your departure will be received with much sadness. We have been so blessed with the calibre of the priests who have served at Goodmayes, all of whom have very much integrated into the local Deanery and the Diocese as a whole.

A week later, on the occasion of his pastoral visit to the parish, he told the people that he shared greatly their shock, sadness and sense of loss, and that fortunately he was able to send them three priests of the La Salette order. He also indicated that he would be with them on 25 October, the vigil of the feast of St Cedd, for a special mass before the departure of the Vincentians. It would be a mass of thanksgiving for all that the Vincentians, and many wonderful laypeople of the parish, have given so richly for the past twenty-eight years.

When the day came the church was packed to capacity and beautifully decorated. The bishop of Brentwood, Most Reverend Thomas McMahon, was the celebrant and preacher. While it was a sad occasion the mass was full of joy. The bishop, in his homily, was very

appreciative of what had been done by the Vincentians. Many tributes were paid. The chairman of the Parish Council, Mr Tom Donnelly, in a moving address of thanks to the Vincentian priests, indicated that a plaque, in Wicklow granite to match the altar, would be erected in the church to mark the Vincentian presence in St Cedd's.

And so, after twenty-eight years of fruitful ministry, the torch was handed on to the La Salette missionaries. They took charge of the parish on 5 November 1994.

Forum

A (DELAYED) 1993 LETTER FROM BRAZIL

Sister Brieger McKenna OSC and myself landed in Fortaleza in a torrential downpour, which delighted the locals who had not seen rain for seven years. They told us that in the country areas of the north-east the drought was so bad that most of the livestock had died, nothing was growing, and people were reduced to eating lizards and a special kind of root that contained a lot of water. Thousands of them were leaving the countryside and coming into the city, thus creating enormous problems for everyone.

As on all our journeys we found ourselves in the hands of lay leaders, usually people of great faith and love for the Church. That evening, the third Sunday after Easter, we were taken to the closing mass of a pastoral visitation of all the parishes in the city of Fortaleza, presided over by Cardinal Lorscheider, whom we met and who welcomed us warmly to his diocese. He spoke beautifully to the thousands of poor, gathered for this open-air mass, about how they must centre their lives on Jesus Christ:

Many will make you promises they don't intend to keep, but Christ will never break his word, for his word is life. He is the Word. Come always to Jesus, who alone can save you. Turn, and you will find him again.

As a concelebrant I was sitting near two Irish Redemptorists, with dozens of children hanging from the rails on the raised platform. As a new person on the block I was welcomed by almost all the local insect life, who obviously wanted to give me their own special kind of welcome.

Northeastern Brazil is the home of lived liberation theology. Even to the casual observer it is obvious that a great divide exists between the clergy and the people. The people, it seems, want something quite different from what they are getting from their pastors. Earlier we had met with one of the cardinals who spoke lyrically about the poor and about the ineptitude of the government. His large city diocese is swarming with charismatic prayer groups, who remain largely unattended, because

the cardinal thinks they are eccentric and irrelevant. Meanwhile tens of thousands leave the Church every year to join local Pentecostal groups, because they say they no longer hear the word of God, or find any spiritual nourishment, within the Catholic Church. Even to me, it was evident that the clergy are quite negative towards all forms of spiritual renewal. It seems that while the Church was embracing the option for the poor, the poor were embracing evangelical Protestantism. No one can deny the basic principles of liberation theology, but it is hard to see how you could help the poor by organizing them to break the windows of the local bank, and encouraging them to hate their oppressors.

I think that if I have learned anything from my life as a priest, and from St Vincent de Paul, it is that it is not enough to love the poor, but you must love Jesus Christ in the poor. I would suspect any person sent to love the poor who does not also have an unqualified love for the rich. Liberation theology can be a dangerous weapon in the hands of an angry man.

Our reason for going to Fortaleza was to give a priests' retreat. About 120 came from all over the region, and some from over near the Bolivian border, a journey of about 5,000 kilometres. They came in all shapes, sizes, ages, and ethnic and theological backgrounds.

What was most interesting about this retreat was the way in which it came about. A married couple in Sao Paulo, (the wife had worked as our interpreter in the past), asked us if we could come, and then asked some of the bishops if they would be interested in having us give a retreat for priests. So they got in touch with the Shalom Community of Fortaleza. Shalom is a lay community, mostly charismatic. Shalom in turn hired a huge retreat centre, sent out invitations to the priests, registered them when they arrived, did all the cooking and serving of the meals, and charged the priests just a nominal fee. They gave each priest an envelope, which contained a card from a family which would be praying for him during the course of the retreat.

This Shalom Community was founded and led by a young layman called, appropriately, Moses who, I am sure, has the makings of a magnificent Christian leader. In other words, the whole retreat was rooted in, and organized by, the laity. The local bishops, while they gave permission, made it clear that they did not want to be involved personally with these retreats, which seems a great pity to me.

The enigmatic thing about liberation theology here is that it has accomplished two things at one and the same time. Firstly, and most importantly, it has shifted the identification of the institutional Church

from the rich and powerful to the poor. Secondly, and most unfortunately, it has alienated whole sections of the believing community. The reasons for this were manifold, but mostly the fault of a handful of bishops and very many priests who militantly espoused the option for the poor in an angry and aggressive fashion that literally drove professional and business people, and many others, out of the Church. People who loved the Church found themselves being “read from the altar” for employing even one person. How exactly giving a poor man a job at a decent wage could be “oppressing” him is hard to see. One woman I spoke to, who is a language teacher and a leader in the Charismatic Renewal, told me that her parish priest put her out of the church because she was not working directly for the poor.

After the retreat for priests ended we had a weekend for the laity, culminating in a stadium rally of about 7,000 people, on the theme of the Blessed Eucharist.

Our next port of call was Recife, the former see of Dom Helder Camara. We did not meet him, because he was not there at the time. In Recife we had a few days’ retreat for Sisters, among them about twenty Daughters of Charity who made me most welcome when they discovered I was a Vincentian. On Sunday, May 9th, we left Recife for Porto Alegre, stopping at Rio and Sao Paulo en route. This is about the same length of flight as from Dublin to New York, without leaving Brazil. Here the weather was cool. We had come for a priests’ retreat, at which there were about 130 priests in all, including a bishop from an island at the mouth of the Amazon. Again the response was great, and the retreat was most blessed.

The fastest growing movement in Brazil, by far, is the Charismatic Renewal which, despite being ignored by bishops and denigrated by the clergy, simply refuses to die out or go away. The big difference between the Brazilian charismatics and charismatics in other places is quite marked in that while charismatics generally tend to be inward-looking the charismatics in Brazil are very outward-looking. Their most remarkable charism, as far as I have been able to observe, is the charism of evangelization, and in all my travels I have not met any group who have answered the Pope’s call for a decade of evangelization as enthusiastically as the Brazilian charismatics. It is evident that where the charismatics were pastored they have proved to be very powerful in working for the renewal of catechesis, liturgy, and all forms of evangelization. Where they have been ignored, many have fallen prey to Pentecostalist and others, who seduced them away from the Church.

I have heard of a bishop who warned his people against getting involved with charismatics and with people who were interested in Medjugorje. Rome is extremely worried about the exodus from the Church, and is trying to persuade the bishops to pay more attention to these movements of the Holy Spirit, and to the alienation of the educated and professional people, with a view to getting them to come back to the Church.

On Sunday, May 16th, we had a meeting with about 20,000 charismatics from all over this part of Brazil, and from Uruguay, Paraguay, and parts of Argentina. It was one of the most wonderful celebrations of our Catholic faith I have ever experienced, focusing entirely on the eucharistic celebration by the local archbishop. On the same day there was a rally in honour of our Lady in the city of Pôrto Alegre, attended by over 50,000 people, and another gathering somewhere else attended by 30,000. The hunger of the people here in Brazil to hear the word of God, and to experience their faith in a living way, is inescapable. The death of liberation theology is leaving a vacuum, which many hope will be filled by a spiritual revival, and by the new evangelization now being spear-headed by the communities of the Charismatic Renewal.

Our final retreat, then, for priests was in an enormous retreat centre in Campinas, a city about two hours drive from Sao Paulo. Here we had a retreat for about 200 priests. Again, the local bishop and his clergy ignored the retreat, while priests and some bishops made long journeys, literally from every corner of Brazil, and great sacrifices to get there. With so many priests, it is hard to work and hard to cope, except to minister to them in large groups, which we have learned to do very effectively. At the end of six weeks of so much hard work and travel, we were glad to return home.

Kevin Scallon

CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL FORMATION,
PARIS (CIF)

The first session of international formation for English and Spanish speakers was run from 4 September to 9 December, 1994, at the Maison-mère, Paris. Much preparatory work had been done over a period of a year by the newly-appointed directors, Frs John Rybolt (USA Mid-west), Jean-Pierre Renouard (Toulouse) and Luis Alfonso Sterling (Colombia), in conjunction with the Curia in Rome, to ensure that we had a wide variety of speakers, a well-balanced timetable, and comfortable accommodation.

Purpose of the course

Paragraph 81 of our Constitutions states that “The formation of our members should be continued and renewed all through life”. The focus of CIF, therefore, is on our formation as Vincentians. This formation, Fr Maloney hoped, would bring about a unity of the Congregation and a greater commitment from its members.

Methodology

From the outset it was obvious that the emphasis of the session was to lead us to become followers, rather than scholastic students, of St Vincent. While we had a wide variety of experts on topics such as the biographies of Vincent and Louise, the Constitutions, the vows and virtues, Vincentian spirituality, and community life, the participants were also given a generous forum in which to contribute.

Privileged participants

All thirty participants from places diverse and rich in cultural and religious experiences, such as the Philippines, Indonesia, Madagascar, Eritrea, India, Europe, the new international mission in Tanzania, and the Americas (from which came the largest number), felt indeed privileged to be participants in this international formation programme.

From the beginning we were made most welcome by the community at the Maison-mère. At our opening prayer-gathering in the chapel Fr Facelina assured us of this welcome when he said that all of us were both guests and hosts of the house, functions we were able to exercise during the next three months.

Variety of experiences

At our introductory session we realized what a wealth of experience there was in the group, representing popular missions, seminary formation, specialized ministries in prisons and lay formation, parishes, educational apostolates, and overseas missions and ministries. What was indeed fruitful for the course was that, following this introductory session, confreres were no longer over-identified with their particular roles or apostolates. This sense of detachment meant that we could read the Constitutions and listen to the speakers and each other with open minds and hearts, and with a pre-disposition to follow the call to a new evangelization.

The new Constitutions

“The new Constitutions” was the central text for the session. I imagine, however, that the session was very different from a General Assembly in that the Constitutions were a finalized text -neither the text nor those who put it together were on trial. Various speakers brought the different constitutions alive for us, and we, in turn, both personally and communally, assessed both our apostolic and community lives in the light of these same Constitutions. As before-mentioned, participants did not feel the need to uphold, defend or advocate their own individual apostolates. There was, therefore, an openness to hear the call of the Church, how that call is interpreted for us Vincentians in our Constitutions, how Vincent heard it and, finally, how we are responding to that call in our apostolates and communities today.

The central apostolates

Overall, the apostolates which received the greatest thrusts were the ministry of popular parish missions and, secondly, the ministry to clergy. At his presentation Fr Maloney stressed that we should give up parishes to attend to these central ministries of the Congregation. When challenged on this we learnt that there are twenty times more confreres in parishes than in popular missions, and fifty times more than in ministry to clergy – such a statistic left little room for further challenge!

Worldwide we heard many accounts where houses offered hospitality and opportunities for rest and renewal to fellow-priests.

Community for mission

We were reminded that in the new Code of Canon Law we are listed under Apostolic Societies. Our *raison d’être* is for the apostolate of the mission, and it was, indeed, for the mission that Vincent gathered his priests together. While the group clearly accepted that our primary purpose is the apostolate it was reluctant to accept that any apostolate justified a confrere living alone or cut off from the support of community life. It emerged quite strongly from the group that neither individualism nor private practice were the Vincentian way of ministry for the future. There were no dissenting voices on this one.

Community is indeed for mission. However, because of the great demands of the mission today, greater efforts are needed at supporting each other in our apostolates. From the time of Vincent there has

been a great change from the father/son, superior/subject, relationship to one of a fraternal and affective union. Research has shown that priests as sacred tribe rarely communicate at a deep level, failing to accompany each other on the journey, thereby putting the apostolate in jeopardy.

During our time at CIF it was as if we re-discovered the value of community. In his final oral evaluation one confrere said:

I came here believing that “my apostolate” was the most important thing of my whole life – here I learnt the importance of community life. I have experienced the best community life here ever.

A call to personal sanctification

Many gatherings in recent times concern themselves with the apostolate and how we can best exercise it. However, at this gathering we were challenged by Vincent’s life of prayer centred on Christ. From 1610 onwards, when he came under the influence of Bérulle, his main concern was to imitate Christ, who sought and did the will of the Father. Later Vincent discovered that to be “devoted to”, in the sense of being “vowed to”, Christ, was the same as being devoted to the poor. (In this, Vincent chose a different path from Bérulle).

In a world where people are valued on their successes and achievements the voice of Vincent was distinctly heard calling us to keep searching for, and obeying, the will of the Father as Christ did. And if we needed further proof of this, it was pointed out to us that of the twelve chapters of the Common Rules nine are devoted to the spiritual life, whereas only three are devoted to the service of the poor.

Highlights

The journal for CIF records that there was

a wonderful warmth of welcome in the group before Fr Maloney’s presentation, and this found melodic expression in the song *Damos gracias*. Everyone present seemed to find voice and language for the expression of a song of genuine thanks to God for this moment. As John Rybolt, in his introduction, said: “We are here because Fr Maloney has invited us here”. This was indeed one of the many highlights, as we received a call to the international mission.

Another moment came at the end of the session on the vows with Fr Ubillus of Peru. (It came as a new challenge to the group that the vow of stability to spend our entire lives in the evangelization of the poor in the Congregation is our most important vow). It was like a new Pentecost - a time of clarification, enlightenment and freedom, a time of rejoicing and a time of new promise that we would live our vows to the best of our ability. At the end of this session one of the participants described the CIF experience as a second seminaire, not as a criticism, but rather a statement about the quality of renewal we were experiencing.

Other great reflective moments came as we visited places associated with Vincent, Louise, Catherine Labouré, and the Perboyre family. For us priests Château l'Evêque was certainly a highlight as we had time to reflect on the young nineteen year old being ordained to the priesthood. In that little side chapel we had time to think of our own calling, while being challenged by Vincent, as he said that if he had known that day what priesthood entailed, he would have remained working on the land.

We also had the privilege of spending a week in Dax, four days of which were spent on retreat. During this time we had opportunities to walk in pilgrimage to the basilica of Buglose, as Vincent did with his family in 1623, walk on the marshy lands of the Barthes where he herded the cattle, and pray in the chapel of Pouy which contains the font in which he was baptized. At the end of our retreat, and before returning to Paris, all of us renewed our vows as an expression of our willingness to continue, as the Constitutions tell us, "to follow Christ evangelizing the poor" (Par. 1).

Final project, assessment and words of thanks

Back in Paris each person prepared and presented a paper to their respective groups, evaluating their apostolic and/or community lives in the light of the Constitutions and the experience of CIF.

In our final session each of the directors and participants had an opportunity to offer a few short sentences of assessment. Once more a positive attitude prevailed, and the ultimate compliment was to the group when John Rybolt expressed his gratitude towards us for being so "professional", adding the hope that it was not the wrong word. The group had taken responsibility for their own formation and for the creation of community life.

Our hope is that the compliment redounds on the directors, initiators and presenters of the first session of CIF, and that many more will avail of it.

CIF has been a great learning experience covering a wide variety of topics and themes, many of which are already, or will in the near future be, published as formal texts. We were encouraged to read Vincent and Louise with new eyes, and to come to a new understanding of foundational people like Marguerite Naseau, the penitent at Gannes (Folleville), and the almsgiving parishioners of Châtillon-les-Dombes. While the thrust of the course was to make us followers rather than scholastic students, there were many occasions when the presenters challenged us to become the privileged interpreters of our Vincentian heritage for our times. Fr Ubillus, in his concluding remarks, said:

How extraordinary that God waited sixteen hundred years for a Congregation to be founded which would imitate the Christ of Luke's gospel in evangelizing the poor.

How wonderful, thanks to the establishment of CIF and the generosity of our Provinces and confreres, that so many of us can avail of the opportunity to re-discover what this foundation means for us, and how it calls us to pray and work with greater zeal for the entirety of our lives in the work of evangelization.

Michael McCullagh