

COLLOQUE

Journal of the Irish Province of the
Congregation of the Mission

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Editorial

As mentioned in the Editorial of the last issue of *Colloque* the Superior General asked editors of Vincentian publications to bring out a special number on John Gabriel Perboyre in view of his forthcoming canonization.

In that Editorial it was stated that there would be three issues of *Colloque* in 1996, a short Spring number being the special one, and what had been planned as the Spring number becoming a once-off Summer number. It has proved more practical to stay with two issues for 1996, with this Spring number not being a special one devoted exclusively to John Gabriel Perboyre but rather one devoted mainly to him but also containing other material.

It contains a reprint of my article from No 6, Autumn 1982. I have eliminated a lack of clarity in one or two places but I have not seen a need to make any substantial changes.

The second article, on the history of the cause, was requested for the American publication *Vincentian Heritage*.

The third may meet the needs of those who wonder whether there is any point at the present time in formally canonizing a martyr.

John Gabriel Perboyre

Thomas Davitt

I. Le Puech and Montauban 1802-1818

In his book on the Congregation of the Mission, Georges Goyau suggested that it would be a good idea to study the documentary evidence about the martyrdom of John Gabriel Perboyre and “very carefully distinguish what is said by the witnesses from what is said by later panegyrists” (1). Some panegyrists, preachers and biographers have ill-advisedly tried to show that he was faultless, and a model of every virtue, even in childhood. Some have over-emphasised, exaggerated and, in part, invented resemblances between his sufferings and those of Jesus.

He died in 1840 and two years later Jean-Baptiste Etienne CM published, anonymously, the first book about him (2). Towards the end of the 1840s François Vauris CM wrote to many people who had known John Gabriel asking them to let him have their recollections of him, with a view to his writing a more complete *Life* (3). It would be very interesting to know how exactly he worded his letter, what exactly he asked for, because there is a certain sameness about many of the replies. A typical example is this extract referring to the three years John Gabriel spent teaching in Montdidier before ordination: “I remember that he was the perfect model of all clerical virtues, modesty, humility, meekness, simplicity and mortification, but unfortunately I cannot furnish you with any details in all this”. Another correspondent, who knew him in his days at secondary school, says that the brainier boys, including himself, used to amuse themselves during class by annoying the others and sticking pins into them, and that when John Gabriel was the victim he used to turn round to his tormentors “with a really divine look” and ask to be allowed to listen to the teacher. Now if he really was as priggish as that, some trace of this would be bound to appear in his letters, yet the one hundred and two of them which have survived are refreshingly normal, and healthily free from such aberrations (4). Bishop Jean-Henri Baldus CM wrote to

Vauris in 1853 that there was nothing in John Gabriel's manner which was out of the ordinary, nothing different from any good confrere (5).

He was born on 6 January 1802 on his father's farm, Le Puech, near the little village of Montgesty about seventy miles north of Toulouse; he was the eldest of eight. His father's brother Jacques was a Vincentian priest, ordained at the start of the French Revolution. He had wanted to go to China but was appointed to the seminary in Albi. He was able to continue his teaching there until 1791, when he had to go on the run. He returned after a while and took up residence in a cave from which he used to venture out in various disguises to carry on his ministry. He survived the Revolution and when things were returning to normal he was offered a parish by the bishop of Cahors. As the Congregation was still officially suppressed in France he took the parish, but after a few years he asked to be relieved of it as he wanted to start a school in Montauban, mainly with the idea of preparing boys to enter the major seminary to study for the priesthood. He got some financial help from his relatives and in due course eighteen of his nephews were educated there.

On 16 April 1816 Jacques Perboyre wrote to Dominique François Hanon CM, who had been Vicar General of the Congregation in Paris since 1807. He said he was at Hanon's disposition and was willing to accept any appointment, and that at the moment they were trying to live a Vincentian community life as far as their position allowed (6). He gave the names of thirteen pre-Revolution confreres working in the diocese of Cahors and said that there were many others in the diocese of Agen and several in Toulouse, and he continued:

I have had several of our students wanting to join the community; some of them have gone off elsewhere. There is still one, who has done his philosophy, a good lad who very much wants to join the Congregation. What can I tell him? What hope is there for him? ... all he's waiting for is some sign from us and he'll join (7).

Hanon died a week after that letter was written, so Jacques Perboyre probably did not get any answers to his final questions.

On 6 October the same year a Circular Letter informed confreres that Marie-Charles-Emmanuel Verbert CM had been elected in Paris to replace Hanon as Vicar General. Jacques Perboyre wrote to him on 29 October thanking him for the two copies of the letter, which he

says he will pass on to other confreres. He says he is glad that things are returning to normal in the Congregation, and once again says he is at the Vicar General's disposition, but explains his own position at the time. He is alone in the house with Fr Gratacap, who had suffered a lot during the Revolution and is still ill. There are 150 boys, mostly boarders. Then he has more questions: a priest friend called to see him, saying he and some others wanted to become Vincentians. Although they worked in parishes they also gave missions and retreats. Jacques wanted to know what he could say to these men (8).

The following month, November 1816, John Gabriel, aged almost 15, and his nine-year old brother Louis took up residence in their uncle's school. It was Louis' education which was being planned, but because he was so young and of delicate health the parents decided that John Gabriel should go along with him to keep him company and prevent homesickness. It was winter and he could be spared from the farm work. As well as that, they felt that the rather rudimentary education he had received in Montgesty could be improved by a few months with his uncle, but he was to return to the farm in early summer.

His first letter home was not written till May 1817:

My dear Father,

I haven't heard any news of you for a long time and I'm anxious to know if you're all in good health. I've been wanting to write to you, but since I've never written any letters, nor even read any, I hadn't the courage to take up the pen to do so. I'm doing it today for the very first time. It is very fitting that you, my very dear Father, should receive the first efforts of my limited skill (Letter 1).

He then continues in rather typical schoolboy fashion to add that his brother is well and that they both need jackets, trousers and socks.

His father seems to have been pleased with this letter, but he was thinking of his vines and the help John Gabriel could give him with them. He took the stagecoach from Cahors to Montauban to collect his eldest son, but found a surprise awaiting him. The teachers had approached his brother to suggest that John Gabriel should be asked to stay on to complete his secondary education and then enter the major seminary to study for the priesthood. Jacques Perboyre had the delicate task of breaking this news to both his brother and nephew, as neither of them had been thinking along those lines at all. John

Gabriel had not even been doing Latin, although young Louis had. The outcome was that the father returned alone to his vines, and the son got down to some serious thinking about his future.

A couple of weeks after the visit from his father John Gabriel wrote to him, on 16 June 1817:

My dear father,

After you left town I thought over your suggestion that I should take up Latin. I prayed to God to know what life I should choose in order to arrive safely in heaven. After lots of prayers I came to the conclusion that I should go on for the priesthood, so I've started to study Latin but with the intention of giving it up if you don't agree with what I'm doing...

If you do want me to go on I'll have to get some new clothes made. You'll be good enough to send me some money as I don't think uncle's purse is so full that he can lend me any. (Letter 2).

That John Gabriel had not previously been thinking on these lines, or at least had not shown that he had, is confirmed by a letter from Verbert to Gratacap dated 25 October 1817. It is about the need to recruit vocations for the Vincentians and refers to a young person whom Gratacap had mentioned; Verbert says:

If it is Fr Perboyre's nephew you mean, I saw him last year and he didn't indicate to me any wish to join us (9).

As his father did not make any objection John Gabriel continued his study of Latin and other subjects in which he was behind the other boys of his own age. His uncle got him special lessons from a Fr Theyis, with whom he studied all through the summer holidays. After John Gabriel had been killed his uncle wrote to Theyis asking for some memories of this period. Theyis answered:

You ask me for all the details I can give you, going back over the past, about your glorious nephew Fr John Gabriel Perboyre's schooldays in Montauban...

If I remember rightly, when he first came to the seminary it was not with the intention of staying; he came only to be with his brother Louis, a pupil at the school. He himself was supposed to return to the family home after a while. I can still see him, fair-haired, fresh faced and rosy cheeked...

We urged you to get him to follow the curriculum; at first you refused. You used to say that his father had to have one of the

sons to look after the vines...

You then gave in, and John Gabriel found himself with a Latin grammar in his hands... Then came the summer holidays; you were kind enough to hand him over to me for special attention. I had a good foundation to work on and he amazed me with his progress...

At the end of the holidays, say six months after he had begun his studies, he entered second year; with the first exercise he got second place, and immediately afterwards first, a place he almost always kept (10).

He mentions John Gabriel's progress through the various classes. He was fifteen and a half when he started his special lessons, and in the next term, in November, he went into second year; at Easter 1818 he went into third, and the next November he jumped a year and went into fifth, and a few weeks later into sixth.

In May 1853, thirteen years after his death, Bishop Jean-Henri Baldus CM, who was nine years younger, wrote of him:

I always thought him very intelligent, a deep mind capable of dealing with any sort of scientific, philosophical or literary subject; in such matters there were few confreres of his time, I think, who were his equal, not excluding Bishop Rameaux even though he had a higher reputation among the Chinese, but they are very poor judges of ability (11).

In late 1817 a mission was given in Montauban and John Gabriel got the idea he would like to be a Vincentian, and said so to his uncle. His uncle laughed at the idea, so he kept quiet for the moment and prayed, including a novena to St Francis Xavier. His idea took on the additional aspect of wanting to go to China. He took the matter up again with his uncle, who eventually gave in. In May of that year his uncle had written to Michel Wuillerme, Director of the Daughters of Charity, that he had seven boys in his school who wanted to become Vincentians, but he had made no mention of John Gabriel (12). On 23 December, however, he wrote to Verbert that the house in Montauban would be suitable for an internal seminaire as much repair work had been carried out during the year, and added:

I have a nephew of mine here, quite exceptionally gifted, who is going to don our habit soon. There are several others as well but they need some further testing (13).

II. Seminaire and studies, Montauban and Paris, 1818-1823

Joining the Congregation in those days was not quite as simple as it sounds. The Congregation had been suppressed in France during the Revolution. It was re-established during the Napoleonic period only to be suppressed once again. It was finally re-established under Louis XVIII on 3 February 1816, but it took some time for things to get going again in an organised way, and by December 1817 there was still no internal seminaire. Jacques Perboyre's suggestion of establishing one in his school in Montauban was taken up, and John Gabriel was received into the community there on 10 March 1818, two months after his sixteenth birthday, the first seminarist in France since the Revolution; two more were received on 4 October and another in October of the next year (14). Jean-Baptiste Maisonneuve, a pre-Revolution confrere born in 1752, was sent to Montauban as Director.

During his seminaire John Gabriel continued his secondary education, then did his philosophy and at the same time taught some junior classes. He took his vows on 28 December 1820, nine days before his nineteenth birthday, and shortly afterwards was called to Paris to begin his study of theology.

In 1817 the former town-house of the Due de Lorges, 95, rue de Sevres, had been given to the Congregation as a mother-house by Louis XVIII, as the original mother-house, Saint Lazare, had been confiscated during the Revolution. About fourteen old pre-Revolution confreres had come together to resume community living there.

Jacques Perboyre had arranged his nephew's travel in such a way that he had to spend a few days in the seminary in Cahors before catching the Paris coach. This was to enable his parents to have a chance of seeing him before he left for Paris; he had not been home to Le Puech since he left in 1816.

He was in Paris from January 1821 till October 1823, but the only memory of his period there which seems to have survived is that he was very keen on St Thomas Aquinas. There is one letter, though, to his father, dated 20 January 1822, a year after his arrival in Paris:

My very dear father,

You must find it odd that I have put off writing to you for so long. It's true that lack of opportunity is partly the reason, but it's not the main one and if I didn't have others I would consider myself inexcusable, as indeed I would be. What really caused me not to write to you sooner was the fact that I knew my uncle would have passed on news about me, as I asked him to do in the

letter I wrote to him as soon as I arrived in the capital.

I was very glad to hear recently that you are all in good health, but was also saddened to hear of the deaths of several relatives. Don't worry about me. I've got all that I need here. I'm in good health, thank God, and very happy. It may happen that I won't always be writing to you directly; since I'll be writing from time to time to my brothers to give them bits of news I'll get them to pass on news of me and to give me some about you.

I embrace my very dear mother and all at home.

Give my regards to Fr Gizard and lots of greetings to all my relatives around Le Puech. No matter how far away I am from you I won't love you any the less and all my life, my very dear father I'll never be less than

Your very obedient and respectful son
John Perboyre
(Letter 3)

III. Montdidier 1823-1826

In October 1823 he was sent to Montdidier, about three quarters of the way on the road from Paris to Amiens. The Congregation had a boarding school there, which before the Revolution had been run by the Benedictines and later by the civil authorities. In 1818 it was handed over to the Congregation. It was not a preparatory seminary, but the superior hoped to turn it into one eventually. John Gabriel was put in charge of first year, with only eight boys.

At the start of April 1824 he went back to Paris and on the Saturday before Passion Sunday he was ordained sub-deacon by the archbishop of Paris, Hyacinthe-Louis de Quelen, in his private oratory. He returned to Montdidier, but this time as professor of philosophy for a course in the college which had recently received university approval. In May 1825 he was up in Paris again, this time to be ordained a deacon in Saint-Sulpice by Jacques-Louis de la Brue de Saint-Bauzille, titular bishop of Tempé, and then went back to Montdidier for another year's teaching (15).

On 18 September 1825 he was issued an Internal Passport, which has survived. It gives the following particulars of his appearance: Height 1m 65cm (about 5'6"), black hair falling down over the forehead, brown eyebrows, grey-black eyes, ordinary nose, small mouth, black

beard, round chin, round face, ruddy complexion (16). The reference to the black beard must refer merely to his stubble, as he does not seem to have grown a full beard until he went to China.

There do not appear to be any surviving reminiscences of those who knew him in Montdidier. There is no letter of his own until one he wrote to his father on 24 August 1826:

My very dear father,

In your letter of 9 June you give out to me for not writing to you and you urge me, both strongly and lovingly, to show a bit more diligence in this matter. After that I couldn't very well try to make excuses for myself for this further delay of two months. However, I'll say first of all that the reason for the delay is not forgetfulness, for since I got your letter not a single day has passed, I think, without my thinking of it. I could then add that lack of opportunity must take some of the blame. The day normally starts for us at four o'clock and never ends until nine or ten, and often what we have to do keeps us going till midnight. Above all, as the holidays draw near our work doubles, just as yours does at harvest time. A week ago I started a letter to Fr Gizard and I'd no sooner started it than I had to break off, and it's only today that I got a chance to take it up again.

Finally, my dear father, I was putting off my reply so that I could tell you whether I'd be staying on in Montdidier for another year. I had some hopes that I might be going to Montauban. My uncle made great attempts to get me but I know now that I am not being appointed there. It seems certain, though, that I will be changed, and if little rumours which have reached me can be believed I may even be sent somewhere in the Quercy region. Be that as it may, I'll let you know my new appointment before leaving Paris; I'm going up there in a fortnight's time and don't expect to be leaving it until the end of September.

So, my very dear father, the day isn't very far off when the Lord is to place on my shoulders the yoke of priesthood; that day will be the greatest of my life. What happiness for me if I could receive the priesthood with all the necessary dispositions! What a source of grace for myself and others! God's mercy must be very great for him to select such unworthy servants; you know how little I deserve such an extraordinary favour. Pray to our Lord, please, that I don't waste the graces he wants to give me.

In a month's time I'll be a priest, as I'm to be ordained on 23 September.

I hope that you, my very dear father, my sisters, all my relatives, will all join your prayers to draw heaven's blessings down on me; I particularly ask for the prayers of my aunt Rigal. You'll be well rewarded for this when I have the joy of celebrating mass, not because of my own prayers but through the merits of him who offers himself to his Father in my hands. Please let me know the names of any relatives who have died since I left home.

You'd very much like if I could get to see you these holidays; for my part it would be the peak of my desire if I could kiss my parents who are so dear to me and whom I have not seen for so long. I can't yet promise you this for this year; it depends a lot both on where I'm appointed and the work I'm given, and what I'll have to do during the bit of holidays remaining after ordination.

Don't be too surprised, my very dear father, that I didn't let you know of Louis' illness; I didn't know about it myself until it was all over. They kept it from me in case I'd be worried; as a matter of fact it was so serious that at one stage they had given up all hope for my poor brother. But by the grace of God he's completely over it now. I'm told that during this crisis he grew a lot, that his character has matured well since, and finally that he's more charming than ever and his superiors are very pleased with him. Please give my regards to my uncle Jean-Louis, my Caviolle cousins, and pass on my greetings to all my relatives.

I am, for life, etc.

J G Perboyre, deacon.

(Letter 5)

His brother Louis, referred to in the letter, had been received into the seminaire in Paris a year previously, on 9 September 1825.

On 23 September 1826, the anniversary of St Vincent's ordination, John Gabriel was ordained a priest in the chapel of the mother house of the Daughters of Charity in the rue du Bac, Paris, by Louis-Guillaume Dubourg, bishop-designate of Montauban, who had been bishop of New Orleans (17). Two other confreres were ordained with him, Jean-Baptiste Torrette and Pierre-Jean Martin, and eleven Irishmen, nine for priesthood and two for diaconate, from the Irish College in Paris

(18). He celebrated his first mass at the altar in the rue du Bac chapel in which St Vincent's body was kept since the re-establishment of the Daughters of Charity after the Revolution.

IV. Saint-Flour 1826-1832

Jacques Perboyre did not succeed in getting his nephew appointed to Montauban. He was sent to Saint-Flour, about fifty miles south of Clermont Ferrand in the Massif Central. Shortly after his arrival he wrote to his father, on 2 November 1826:

My very dear father,

I'm not much more than thirty leagues from you; I've been sent to Saint-Flour where I'm professor of theology in the seminary.

I'm very pleased with my new appointment. It looks as though the Auvergne climate will suit me just as well as that of Picardy; my health couldn't be better. I got here about three weeks ago; important work didn't leave me a moment to write to you before now; I hope you'll forgive me as you have done so many times before.

I was ordained priest on 23 September, as I told you I would be. Every time I've had the happiness of offering the holy sacrifice I've never forgotten, my very dear father, to recommend you to God, as well as my very dear mother, my brothers, my sisters and all my relatives. I've said mass several times for my poor sister Mariette and also for my other deceased relatives (19). What I've done up to now I'll continue to do for the rest of my life.

When I left Paris my brother Louis was quite well, his health getting better every day and there is now no longer any doubt that he will make a complete recovery; he's always very happy.

You'd have very much liked, my very dear father, if I could have gone to see you this year, and the chance of embracing you would have fulfilled the most cherished wish of my heart, but it was absolutely impossible. These past holidays, if I can call them that, I was busier than at any time during the year. I hope to make a trip to see you next year, unless Providence arranges something else. I must thank you for praying to God for me at the time of my ordination; I still look to your fatherly goodness for the help of your prayers, for the present and the future; I've

so much need of them, as my duties are so heavy and so difficult to carry out. I heard from Fr Gizard that everything's well at home; I thank God for this and ask him to continue to shower you with his blessings.

Please give my best love to all my relatives, my very dear father. I embrace you, and also my loving mother, with all the filial love in which I am for life

Your very obedient and respectful son
J G Perboyre, Priest of the Mission.
(Letter 6)

At the end of his first year in Saint-Flour he wrote again to his father, on 14 July 1827, the last day of class. His health is good but he is very tired. He has written to Paris for permission to go to Le Puech and expects to get it, but he will go via Montauban where he wants to be present at Prize Day. From there he will go on home with his second brother Jacques, known as Jacou, who was a pupil there. In the course of the letter he wrote:

I don't see very much chance of your wine catching on here. It's rated very highly but the transport causes too many problems.

There is a PS to the letter:

If I end this letter without showing any signs of filial love for my very dear mother it's not because I forget her but because I know that you will perfectly interpret my feelings (Letter 7).

There had been no superior general since the death of Jean-Félix Cayla de la Garde in 1800, and the Congregation had been governed by a series of vicars general, with a certain amount of confusion as to whether some of them were for France alone or for the entire community. On 16 January 1827 the Pope appointed Pierre-Joseph de Wailly as superior general; he was sixty-eight years old. On 20 July, six days after John Gabriel's letter to his father, Jacques Perboyre wrote to the new general, and added a PS:

I'd very much like if John Gabriel could absent himself from Saint-Flour and come to see me during the first days of his holidays. His presence here could be very useful to me at the moment (20).

John Gabriel arrived in Montauban on 26 August, and on 2 September he wrote to his brother Louis in Paris with various bits of news: on 28 August he had to give a one-hour sermon on St Augustine, which the Ursuline nuns “threw on by back”; Prize Day was one of the best he had ever been at, with the music never better; his health is good because his uncle and the Ursulines are treating him well; he’s off for a fortnight to Le Puech, and then back to Saint-Flour; he ends by speculating on probable appointments for various confreres (Letter 8).

His uncle still had hopes of getting him appointed to Montauban. On 2 September he added a PS to a letter he sent to Jean-Baptiste Etienne, the Vincentian procurator general:

My nephew was here to see me. Would there be any chance of getting him as professor of philosophy? I think he’d be good at it (21).

He was not successful in his appeal, and his nephew returned to Saint-Flour for the start of the new academic year, but to a different house.

By 1827 all the Church organization disrupted by the Revolution had not been fully re-established. The laws restricted the number of minor seminaries and the number of pupils who could attend them. If a state secondary school existed in the vicinity of a minor seminary all the pupils in the seminary had to take their courses in the state college, from first year right up to philosophy. In 1825 Jean-François Trippier, the Vincentian superior of the major seminary in Saint-Flour, had tried to alleviate the situation by establishing in the town a boarding house for secondary schoolboys attending the state college, a day school, who wanted to become priests. They lived in this house outside of class hours. During the school year 1826-27 Trippier had been rather unsettled and at the end of the year he told the bishop he was leaving his post at the boarding house, and suggested as a replacement a priest whom the bishop thought too young. At the same time the superior general withdrew another confrere from the major seminary without prior notice, very close to the start of the new academic year. All this caused a major row between the bishop, Trippier, and the superior general. The unfortunate Vincentian who had to deal with all this was the man on the spot, Jean Grappin, superior of the major seminary. On 2 October he wrote to the superior general and said he had returned early as he had foreseen “a great storm brewing”. He explained the situation and described a meeting with the bishop, one outcome of which

was that the bishop accepted that Trippier was almost entirely to blame. He added that John Gabriel had not yet returned from his holidays; the new term was to start on 18 October. On 4 October he wrote again to the superior general using the Latin expression *in angustiis extremis* (at the end of his tether) after a very stormy meeting with the bishop which ended in “partial rupture” and could lead to “total rupture” and get into the papers, with the Vincentians, the bishop and religion itself all being held up to ridicule. To prevent all that; Grappin “had an idea”:

I thought I should send Fr Perboyre there [the boarding house] on a temporary basis and let people think that that is how things will remain, and let the bishop presume that you will be agreeable to this... (22).

John Gabriel returned for the start of the new term, and on 31 October he wrote to Louis in Paris, congratulating him on having taken his vows in September, and also congratulating a cousin who had entered the seminaire (23). He gave an account of his summer travels: twelve days in Le Puech, three in Cahors, twelve in Montauban, one in Toulouse, four or five in Carcassonne or Montolieu, saying that the trip was long in distance but short in time, useful, pleasant, and not too expensive. He then went on:

Eventually I got back to Saint-Flour at the height of the row which I have neither the time nor the inclination to describe to you. Neither will I mention the various phases of my position here which have followed each other so rapidly since then: promoted to authority I was then demoted, and now here I am in authority again. Tragedies could be written about all this, or even an epic poem...

The rest can wait till some other day; it’s nearly eleven o’clock at night (Letter 9).

He held this appointment as superior for five years, until August 1832, and “it was certainly he who put this minor seminary on a stable footing” (24). Twenty-three of his letters from this period have survived: one to his father, one to his parents, one to his uncle, one each to two cousins, two to an education official, two to his brother Jacou, one to his youngest brother Antoine, and thirteen to Louis.

Towards the end of his first term, on 5 December 1827, he wrote to the rector of the Clermont Ferrand Academy, starting off with an apology for any deficiencies in his previous letter. He explains how

his appointment was made by the Vincentian Congregation and says he is willing to comply with any necessary formalities. There had been an agreement between Trippier, the bishop, and the education authorities that students in the hostel who were going on for the priesthood were exempt from certain fees paid by the others. In the first year of the agreement there were eighteen such students, and the authorities apparently then took that as the agreed number for each year. John Gabriel pointed this out, and added:

Apart from the stated fact itself please note the absurdity of your hypothesis,

which he then goes on to expand, asking that if in future the numbers went up considerably and only eighteen were exempt what good would that sort of exemption be? He ends formally, by asking to be numbered among the rector's most devoted and respectful servants (Letter 10). The following year the same rector petitioned successfully for the conferring on John Gabriel of the degree of *Bachelier-ès-Lettres de l'Université de France* in view of his pre-ordination studies (25).

During his first two terms John Gabriel was in correspondence with Trippier, his predecessor, largely about financial matters, to judge from the replies, four of which have survived; his own letters have not. Trippier also asks for some enquiries to be made about his baggage, which was lost en route, and in one reply mentions that he is writing from Carcassonne where he is "giving a retreat to the cornettes" (26).

The thirteen letters to Louis from this period give much information about the two brothers, and about the Congregation at that time. Louis, who had started his philosophy that autumn, complained that John Gabriel did not write sufficiently frequently. In May 1828 he had his reply, that his brother is much busier than Louis realises, with class every day and also acting as "bursar, etc.", and being wanted by everyone, for everything, at every moment. The letter in question got written only because he had neglected a cold and as a result was laid up for a week.

Louis had apparently suggested a philosophical debate by correspondence, so John Gabriel reminds him that he no longer teaches philosophy, but that if a debate on grammar would do he will give one. He then pointed out all the grammatical mistakes in Louis' letter. Louis thought he might be appointed to teach philosophy, and he didn't like the idea; his brother sympathises with him but suggests that in case he is appointed he should be prepared beforehand as "*nemo dat quod non habet*", no one gives what he has not got (Letter 11)

Just like the earlier cold another fortuitous circumstance provided the opportunity for the following letter to Louis, dated 11 July 1828. It was written after ten o'clock at night as John Gabriel had caught two boys disturbing the others in the dormitory, and had brought them out and put them standing in his room. The letter mentions that Jacou, the younger brother who was eighteen at the time, was first in his class in their uncle's school in Montauban, and thinking of following the other two into the seminaire. As John Gabriel had been more or less out of touch with Jacou he passed this matter on to Louis (Letter 12).

The next letter to Louis was written on 16 August: Jacou is to complete his studies in Montdidier, and John Gabriel will bear part of the expense. He will be spending part of his holidays in Saint-Flour, and having worked so much for others he is entitled to do so for himself now (Letter 14).

The following day he wrote to Jacou himself suggesting that he go to Montdidier via Saint-Flour; he continued:

The courses in Montdidier are very stiff and it would be as well for you to repeat fifth year. I was very pleased with your report. The only thing I'd suggest is that you make some effort to be less gloomy, more outgoing; if you don't get down early on to trying to train your character in this matter you'll later on find yourself up against insurmountable problems in trying to be sociable and pleasant company. I know myself what an effort it takes.

He ends the letter with advice about health care, as Jacou had been working too hard (Letter 15).

In September he wrote to Louis and told him he had spent a fortnight in Cahors, including his retreat, and that Jacou would be passing through Paris and that Louis was to keep an eye on him and see him safely on his way to Montdidier. He added that there were community rumours that Louis himself might be sent to teach philosophy in Montdidier (Letter 16).

Louis next received a letter the following April, 1829, which started off in very stilted artificial language in which the elder brother poked fun at the younger for his opinions of himself as a writer, and chiding him for not having mentioned that he had been ordained sub-deacon:

... but that would be too many complaints. It is better for me to grant you a plenary indulgence; all circumstances are favourable for me to forward you my brief ...

On re-reading your October letter (I have to read your old ones as I have not received any recent ones) I've noticed some mistakes which I must point out to you. I know it's not very nattering for a writer in the capital to be given lessons by a small-time country teacher... (Letter 17).

In July he wrote to his father that he was quite willing to look around in Saint-Flour for a horse for him, provided he was told what age and so on, and also that his father didn't expect him to pay for it out of his own pocket (Letter 18).

In November he wrote again to Louis, and here we have the first reference to Louis wanting to go to China after ordination. John Gabriel's advice is that he should take some courses in physics in a state college, as such qualifications would be useful in China. He also mentioned to Louis that he himself had formerly hoped to go to China, and that maybe even still he would go. He enclosed the bill for Jacou's education in Montdidier and said he had agreed to pay the pension but not extras like laundry and some others; as Louis had made these arrangements he could deal with them. Towards the end of the letter he wrote:

Don't make so many demands on me. If you knew the state I'm in you wouldn't treat me so pitilessly. Although we still have only a hundred boys I'm overwhelmed with work. I'm extremely tired mentally and physically. I don't know what the outcome will be of a general malaise which I've had for a long time and which is getting progressively worse (Letter 19).

In February 1830 there is further mention of China, and Louis is advised to get all the theological learning he can while he has the chance:

... for you won't have the means to do so if you go on the foreign missions, and you won't have the time if you ever happen to get an appointment like mine (Letter 20).

At Easter he again referred to his tiredness:

The Easter fortnight, which for most priests is a period of extra work, is one of rest for me. The boys are on holidays. I needed this break. During the last six months I don't think I've had two days without my head splitting, aches in all my limbs and my

blood all on fire. Nothing wears me down like the details of administration; nothing saps my strength like worry (Letter 21).

In 1830 there was a revolution in Paris and John Gabriel was so worried that he mentioned Louis in the memento for the dead in his mass, as he told him in a letter in August. He also said he was glad to hear that the rumours about St Vincent's body being thrown into the Seine were untrue. He added:

There's not much chance I'll see you these holidays. Circumstances are critical. My funds are low. My presence is needed in Saint Flour. However, I very much want the opportunity to see you before you leave for China. Although I'm not far from taking the same course as yourself I'm neither sufficiently ready nor sure enough of myself to do so this year (Letter 22).

They did not meet, though. Louis was ordained on 3 October and left for Le Havre on 3 November. In mid-October John Gabriel wrote a very emotional farewell letter to him, and a later one on the 27th in which he said:

When I get the chance to write to you I'll let you know everything likely to interest you about family matters, the Congregation, and our country (Letter 24).

At the French island colony of Réunion Louis changed ships and started on the second leg of his journey. Between Reunion and Java he caught a cold which developed into a fever, and on 2 May 1831 he died and was buried at sea. News of this did not reach Paris for some time, and in July John Gabriel kept his promise about sending news, in a letter which he sent to Macao to await Louis' arrival there. He said he hoped to get to both Le Puech and Montauban during the holidays, and that Jacou was to stay on in Montdidier and start philosophy. He then gave a detailed account of political developments in France since Louis left, as well as describing the political situation in Italy, Poland, Belgium, Holland, and also Ireland where the poor Catholics were dying of hunger; French Catholics, though, were sending great help to Ireland (Letter 26).

One of the things which worried John Gabriel in his educational ministry was that the boys under his care were exposed to the anti-religious atmosphere of the state educational system. In a letter to his cousin Fr Caviolle, parish priest of Jussies, he exclaimed:

My God, have pity on us and grant us freedom to teach (Letter 28).

Around that time a priest philosopher named Hugues Felicité Robert de Lamennais was much in the news because of his efforts to reverse the anti-religious trends which had persisted after the Revolution. Part of his campaign was for the Church to be allowed to run educational establishments. There was some opposition to his ideas, and his expression of them, in certain Church quarters and he was denounced to Rome. Pope Gregory XVI set up a commission of enquiry and some aspects of Lamennais' ideas and campaign were censured, and he was reprimanded for meddling in delicate matters which should have been left to leaders of Church and state. The whole matter was handled badly by two French bishops and Lamennais became embittered and left the Church, dying without ever being reconciled.

When John Gabriel was appointed superior in Saint-Flour he adopted the educational ideas of Lamennais and put them into practice with the knowledge and approval of the local bishop, with whom he often discussed them (27). The letter to his cousin, Fr Caviolle, referred to already, was written in January 1832. In it he wrote:

My uncle in Montauban has written to me that a big storm has just blown up against our confreres in Cahors because of the opinions of Lamennais. This I find hard to believe, both because his great dislike of Fr de la Mennais could easily have led him to exaggerate and because our confreres are very cautious in this matter. And how could there be protest against men who claim they hold only the views of the Holy See, and who hold on to them until the Holy See declares them wrong? You're well placed to know the truth, going often to Cahors as you do. Would you let me know what it is all about? (Letter 28).

In February 1832 he at last heard of his brother's death, and wrote rather emotionally to his parents and to his uncle; to the latter he admitted that no one had been closer to him than Louis, and he continued:

Why am I not found worthy to go and fill the place he left vacant? Why can't I go and expiate my sins by the martyrdom which his innocent soul longed for so ardently? Alas, I'm already over thirty, years which have passed away like a dream, and I haven't learned to live! When, then, will I have learned to die? Time is passing like a light shadow, and we arrive at eternity without noticing (Letter 30).

He also wrote to Jacou about Louis' death, but did not omit other topics:

I've a complaint to make, dear brother: you don't write to me often enough. Maybe you don't want to interrupt your philosophical meditations. Very well, send me dissertations in the form of letters. In that way, without leaving your element, you'll still be in contact with the living (Letter 31).

He spent part of the summer of 1832 in Le Puech with his parents, and returned to Saint-Flour in August to find a letter appointing him to Paris (28).

Paris 1832-1835

His new appointment was to be assistant to the director of the seminaire, Pierre Le Go, a pre-Revolution confrere who in September 1832 was approaching his sixty-fifth birthday. That September there were very few seminarists, but by the following summer there were more than twenty (29). One of those who entered in September was Jacou, who had passed his twenty-second birthday some months previously. It would appear that the new assistant director was given plenty of work to do, and he did not get around to writing to his father until mid-January 1833:

I hadn't time to write to you before I left Saint-Flour. My new appointment is better for my health than my previous one, and my health is quite good at the moment. Jacques is also quite well and you needn't have any worry at all about either him or myself (Letter 32).

In June he wrote to his uncle in Montauban referring to the fact that the latter had sent him a copy of *Méditations* by the 18th century Vincentian author Pierre Collet, which he had found in a bookshop; he asked his uncle to forward any further copies he might find, and added:

This work is becoming very scarce and we probably won't delay too long in getting it reprinted (Letter 37).

This is the first reference in his letters to pre-Revolution Vincentian books, and he brought this matter up again in a letter written in August:

If you have, by any chance, old books connected with the Congregation, *coutumiers*, rule-books, circulars, etc., I would like to ask you to make me a present of them (Letter 38).

A *coutumier* was a book in which an office-holder, such as the sacristan, wrote down various practical hints about carrying out the office.

The General Assembly of 1829 had been the first held since that of 1788, before the Revolution. At it Dominique Salhorgne was elected superior general, and he had expressed a wish that a study be undertaken of pre-Revolution community decrees. A commission was set up to do this, with seventy year old Charles-Francois Lamboley as chairman and John Gabriel as secretary (Letter 44). He wrote to his uncle in December and included the following item of news:

Fr Boullangier was on the point of death. He was given the last sacraments; the surgeon said there wasn't anything more he could do; he embraced him as a sign of final farewell and then took his leave. But in the midst of the most frightful attacks, when nothing more was expected from one moment to the next except to see him die, Fr Aladel gave him the miraculous medal of the Immaculate Conception, which he accepted with the greatest devotion and placed over his heart. From then on his cruel pains disappeared almost completely; the massive hernia, which the skill and prolonged efforts of the surgeons were unable to reduce, softened and receded almost of its own accord. The news of the cure was responsible for the very extraordinary conversion of an elderly sinner (30).

The medal I referred to is the one revealed by the Blessed Virgin to a seminary sister in the Daughters of Charity. Thousands of these medals have spread through all parts of France and Belgium; they work numberless miracles, cures and conversions; I'll send you some the first chance I get (Letter 40).

The following month he had a dozen medals ready to send to the uncle, but he sent them instead to his youngest brother Antoine at home on the farm when he heard that their father was in a lot of pain with rheumatism. To compensate his uncle for the delay he promised to send him two dozen (Letters 43 & 44).

Jean-Baptiste Torrette was one of the other two confreres ordained with John Gabriel, and he was sent immediately to China. On 10 March 1834 John Gabriel wrote to him and said he had recently been talking to the third man and they had decided to send Torrette some books as a gift. He continued:

I used to flatter myself that I'd be able to go and join you later on, but the precarious state of my health and, above all, my unworthiness, seem to preclude for ever such a fine ambition. My position as director of novices enables me to compensate you amply for having failed you myself; I'll do my best to encourage any vocations for China which appear. I hope that in that way I'll share to some extent in the good which will be achieved, even if I don't have the honour of sharing in your work.

I won't fail to offer my poor prayers to God for you and your missions. For your part, recommend to him myself and our good seminarists, the hope of the Congregation. They are angels; the novitiate has never been in such a thriving state. It seems that God plans that the little Company should reveal his glory (Letter 45).

During early 1834 he reported two items of family news to his uncle: his sister Antoinette completed her seminaire in the rue du Bac and had received her first appointment, to be a teacher in central Paris, and Jacou had received tonsure (31). In another letter to him he asked about rumours in Montauban that they were wanting the confreres to resume direction of the major seminary; this prompted him to reflect:

Anyway, as regards ourselves, we've no need to ask for foundations because, apart from that not being in any way the practice of St Vincent's sons, this year we have been offered several seminaries which have not been accepted because of the pressing needs of our missions, which are going to be very much strengthened. The quality of our internal seminary and the excellent dispositions of the young confreres in formation there promise resources for the Congregation which will enable it to tread a worthwhile path of some use to the Church (Letter 50).

His uncle Jacques in Montauban had not resumed living in a community house after the Revolution, apart from the short period when his school in Montauban became a temporary internal seminaire. However, he still regarded himself as a member of the Congregation,

and was regarded as such by the confreres, old and young, in Paris, as John Gabriel discovered when he was appointed there (Letter 44). In January 1835 John Gabriel sent him a copy of the superior general's New Year circular letter. It must have interested John Gabriel that roughly a quarter of the letter dealt with the missions in China, including this comment:

It is a very welcome consolation for us that in such evil times we can send so many workers for the gospel to pagan nations, and the successes they achieve are very apt for sustaining our trust and spurring us on to new efforts to co-operate with God's plans (32).

Three weeks later he wrote to his uncle that he has forwarded to him part 3 of volume I of the *Annales de la Mission*, the contents of which also dealt with the missions in China. These two documents reflect the thinking in the Vincentian mother-house in Paris at the time, and it is not surprising that John Gabriel's old hopes of going to China were re-awakened.

In February 1835 he achieved his ambition and was appointed to China. He passed this news on to his uncle:

I've great news for you. God has just granted me a very precious favour which I certainly don't deserve. When he was pleased to give me a vocation to the priesthood the main reason which made me answer his call was the hope of being able to preach to pagans the good news of salvation. Since then I've never really lost sight of this target, and above all the idea of the Chinese mission always made my heart beat faster. Well, my dear uncle, today my prayers are at last heard. It was on the feast of the Purification that I was notified of my appointment to China, which makes me think that in this matter I owe a lot to the Blessed Virgin (Letter 56).

A year after he had arrived in China he wrote to Jean Grappin, who had been superior of the seminary in Saint-Flour in John Gabriel's time, and had since become one of the assistants to the superior general. The letter is dated 18 August 1836, but it is relevant here because one section of it gives his own account of the development of his vocation to the Chinese mission:

As for myself, here I am launched on a new way of life. There are reasons for thinking that it's the one God was wanting me to follow. It's what he showed me from a distance when he called me to the priesthood, and it's what I was asking from him insistently during a novena which I made to St Francis Xavier almost twenty years ago; the memory of this has often come back to me to stir my remorse or to re-invigorate my hope, for I had the impression that I had been heard. It's the way of life I more or less always had in view; it's the one which of its own accord revealed itself to me when the moment of Providence arrived. It's true that you yourself and my other directors used to dissuade me from my hope every time I spoke of it. But the main reason you put forward was lack of health, and experience has shown that this had less foundation than it was supposed to have had (Letter 82).

For the last half of 1834 he had been trying his best to get sent to China, but the superior general and his council kept insisting that his health would not be up to it; finally they decided to ask the doctor directly whether John Gabriel could be sent, and the doctor said yes (33).

Among the letters from those who knew him when he was director of the novitiate, written some ten years after his death to Vauris (as mentioned above), are the usual generalities:

After much effort all I can recall is an unforgettable impression of edification, without being able to detail anything in particular (34).

There were, however, some who could remember details. Antoine-François Peyrac had been a teacher of philosophy in Saint-Flour in 1832-33 before he entered the internal seminaire, and because he was older than the others and had already done his studies, he was better able to appreciate what sort of a man his director was:

He had a particular gift for going back to the truths of theology to seek out in depth the reasons for, and meaning of, spiritual exercises and the maxims of spirituality. He was especially attracted to the great masters, St Thomas and St Bonaventure for example; he also had a high opinion of Monsieur Olier.

In order to heal more effectively he knew how to bide his time, turn a blind eye, go easy, when dealing with spiritual ills. His zeal was unhurried, never crude, and without bitterness; what he wanted to achieve he went for wisely, determinedly and with strength, calmly making use of the means available (35).

An unsigned letter is along the same lines:

He was genuinely zealous, but his quiet devotion did not bore with endless warnings those whom he wished to form spiritually. He spoke little, but always kindly and charitably. His character was well-balanced and he was never shocked by anything said or done. He relied a lot on the future for a person's improvement, and he was never discouraging (36).

A much later unsigned letter, dated 8 December 1888, is in answer to a request for further details and says that one of his main principles seems to have been never to pester by constantly repeated advice or admonition those whom he was directing (37).

VI. To Macao

In Le Havre he went on board the *Edmond* on 20 March 1835 with two other confreres, Joseph Gabet and Joseph Perry, the latter being still a deacon. On the 28th Jean-Baptiste Etienne, the Vincentian secretary general and procurator general, wrote to Jacques Perboyre:

I don't know whether Fr Perboyre wrote to you from Le Havre to let you know of his sailing. In case he didn't I have the honour of telling you that he set sail last Saturday, the 21st instant. He was in very good health and full of himself with happiness. We are confident that he won't meet his brother's fate and will arrive safely in Macao. He is destined to do a lot of good. He'll be a missionary the like of which is rarely found (38).

They arrived in Batavia (now Jakarta) in Java in June, changed ships and continued on to Surabaya at the other end of the island. He spent three weeks there before resuming his journey, arriving in Macao on 29 August. Macao is a small Portuguese colony on the Chinese mainland. He availed of the two breaks in his journey to

write to the superior general, to his brother Jacou, to his uncle, and to Jean-Baptiste Torrette; the latter was stationed in Macao and was provincial of the French missions in China. John Gabriel, referring to himself as “that J G Perboyre who was ordained with you”, told him he was ready to do whatever he was asked, and was willing even to go to Tartary or beyond (Letters 58 & 62).

In these letters he describes the boredom of sea travel and the attempts to relieve it by sing-songs, chess, discussions and arguments with the officers and members of the crew. These arguments and discussions were often on religious topics and he wrote that most of those on board went to confession; the missionaries celebrated mass on Sundays when possible. One of the two letters to the superior general had this to say about colonial life in Java:

Here, unfortunately, as happens in other colonies, the behaviour of the Europeans has given a very false idea of Christianity to the natives. Mention to a Malay about becoming a Christian and he'll say he's not rich enough to live like a lord.

In fact pride and the desire to dominate have created such an empire of prejudice that a European cannot go on foot or do servile work without losing face. Each European has in his house a more or less large group of Malays who serve him and whom he treats as if they were of a different species of man than himself. Never before have I understood so well the distinction between the pagan *servus* and the Christian *domesticus*. As long as they remain slaves the Dutch government couldn't care less whether they become Catholics or Protestants (Letter 62).

His first letter from Macao was to Le Go in Paris, and in it he covered much the same matter as in the others, but with additions. Although they spent much time at prayer and study during their three weeks in Java they also went on excursions along the coast:

On one occasion some of my confreres who had already been in swimming urged me to go in. I recalled your advice and the doctor's about this, and decided to go for a swim; this was two days before we left. I stayed in the water for an hour and a half, came out to dress and had gone on board the boat to put on my socks when, stepping carelessly, I rocked it and an involuntary somersault gave me another dip. Luckily the water wasn't deep;

I had been having fun in it and it found me accustomed to it and I soon reappeared on the horizon without either damage or fear. When I recovered my hat, which the current was sweeping away, I rejoined my friends on the beach, where they were waiting for me, for a meal of bananas and biscuits.

Towards the end of the letter he mentions that he has begun to study the Chinese language:

I think it will take me a long time to learn this language; going by the first indications I won't be as successful as Frs Gabet and Perry. It's said that Fr Clet spoke it only with difficulty. May I, right to the end, be like that venerable confrere whose long apostolic life was crowned with the glorious palm of martyrdom... (39)

He ends the letter with details about his own improved health and the health of the other two. Those two read a lot of scripture and the catechism of the Council of Trent, while he read the life of St Vincent (Letter 63).

In Macao there were two internal seminaires, one French and one Portuguese. The Portuguese one had been asking for some time for the loan of a French confrere, and John Gabriel was lent to them. He taught French in return for receiving lessons in Chinese. As a result of his experience there he passed on some suggestions of practical politics to the new superior general in Paris, Jean-Baptiste Nozo, in a letter of 19 December 1835:

The Portuguese are still asking for more men for their missions, and the needs are in fact rather grave. We already help them a bit in Peking and in Ho-nan province, and we'll try to do so more and more. They are waiting for us impatiently in Kian-Nan. As our missions border theirs we can work inside their territory without leaving ours, so to speak, for the moment. It seems that the best thing is to infiltrate little by little without attracting attention, so that when Propaganda (whose good graces Providence seems to want us to purchase dearly) would have to see to these missions it would acknowledge among our titles that of possession justified by works (Letter 70).

VII Into China

Two days later he departed for his mission in the interior of China. Before leaving he wrote to his brother Jacou to describe the sort of journey he was starting:

At first, although I have only about 600 miles to go by sea I'll need perhaps more than two months for it, because the monsoon is blowing contrariwise, and anyway Chinese boats move very slowly. Then, to cover six or eight hundred miles overland I won't do it all in one go by the mail-route. I'll go on foot, or upstream by boat. I'll make a stop in Fo-kien with the vicar apostolic, then another in Kiang-si with our confrere Fr Laribe, then another in Ho-nan with Fr de Besi, so that I won't reach my destination till near Easter...

If you could see me for a moment now I'd present an interesting sight in my Chinese garb, my shaved head, my long pigtail and my moustaches, stuttering my new language, eating with chopsticks which do for knife, spoon and fork. I'm told I don't make too bad a Chinaman (Letter 71).

At various stages on this long journey he sent off letters to different correspondents; Torrette got one, the printed version of which takes ten and a half pages, and his uncle got one which runs to 22 pages of print. He told Torrette that he had left both his pipe and his fan behind in the rush of departure, but also dealt with more serious matters:

As regards the Fr Clet business I think we'd do well to push it, that is to work towards having him declared Venerable, and if Fr Rameaux shares my opinion he'll ask you by the next post from Hou-pe to get the authorisation and documents *ad hoc* [for this]. After gathering information on the spot it will be necessary for someone to make the journey to Paris and Rome for the formal process (Letter 74).

A few days after his arrival at his destination in Ho-nan province he wrote back to Torrette and asked for a large quantity of Miraculous Medals, and

... a large number of pictures of O Land the Bl Virgin, of the mysteries; small ones of the apostles. More or less pointless to send other types. As regards the ones of St Vincent, they'll take them only if forced to, so to speak (Letter 78).

The next letter to Torrette has this intriguing paragraph:

You will, perhaps, have heard that the parish priest of Batavia was not pleased with our group of seven or eight missionaries who spent some time with him. Someone has had the charity to blame me in part for this sort of discontent. I've no comment to make on that, since we should be very glad that we are made to obey the law *alter alterius* etc... I'll just say this, that you need neither worry about this nor attach any importance to it (40) (Letter 79).

On 18 August he wrote to Grappin the letter already referred to, in which he gave a summary of the development of his vocation to China. In a PS he asked him, a fellow-sufferer, for "two or three trusses for an inguinal hernia of the right side"; he said he could not manage without one.

Within a week of his arrival he wrote twelve letters, the final one being to his father; this was his first in two and a half years, though all letters to other relatives had messages for his parents. This letter contained a reference to possible martyrdom:

If we have to suffer martyrdom it would be a great grace given to us by God; it's something to be desired, not feared (Letter 83).

There are no surviving letters between late August and 28 December 1836, when he again wrote to Torrette; he reported that his health had been giving trouble, he had contracted some sort of fever and had received the last sacraments. He recovered, but had been unable to resume his language study until mid-November (Letter 84).

In spite of all his own protestations to the contrary his health was clearly a continuing problem. Eight years after his death Jean-Henri Baldus CM, by then a bishop, wrote to Vauris and took issue with the statement on page 164 of the *Notice* written by Jean-Baptiste Etienne, who had become superior general, that John Gabriel used to get up regularly at four o'clock each morning:

I simply want to get the point across that our dear confrere couldn't get up at four without serious repercussions which would prevent him from doing almost anything for the whole day. That's what he told me. So, even though it may be edifying to read the contrary in his *Notice*, this latter nevertheless makes

those who knew the facts stop for a moment for a bit of reflection. One sees in many *notices*, in the *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi* and those of our own Congregation, statements which are so far from the truth as to be hurtful, and even to cast doubt on the whole thing and reduce the value of reading them (41).

In December 1836 he preached for the first time in Chinese, and within a week was giving his first mission (Letter 84). From then until August 1837 there are no surviving letters. In August 1837 he told Torrette that he had come to realise, after more than a year in the interior of China, that a confrere who has not personally experienced life there cannot really understand the problems faced by missionaries. For this reason, he suggested that there should always be in Macao a Vincentian who had actually worked in China, and the same should apply to Paris also:

This China is so different from other countries that if you haven't been there, on the spot, you can never fully understand anything connected with it (Letter 87).

In the following month he described in detail, for Pierre Martin in Paris, exactly what missionary life was like. On arriving at a mission station the first thing they did was to draw up a list of all Christians, old and young, good and bad. Then, like an examination board in a seminary, they questioned all of them on the catechism. They began with the children in order to judge how good the parents were. Then there would be baptism of children, and confessions. There was mass every day, with many receiving communion. Towards the end of their stay there would be baptism of adults, confirmation, and marriages. This sort of mission lasted eight, ten, fifteen, or even more days (Letter 89).

News of the serious illness he had had in the autumn of 1836 took over a year to reach Paris, and, as soon as it did, Etienne wrote to Jacques Perboyre in Montauban, on 12 December 1837:

I've just received very satisfactory news from China telling me that your nephew had been very seriously ill and had even received the last sacraments, but that God did not want to deprive our mission just yet of someone so capable of doing good. He has completely recovered and is working with plenty of zeal and success (42).

Once again there is, unfortunately, a long period without any surviving letters, until September 1838 when he wrote to Martin in Paris, to his cousin the parish priest of Catus, and to Jacou. Apparently the latter had said something in a letter about praying that John Gabriel might become a second Francis Xavier, to which he replied that that would take two miracles, one in his body and one in his soul:

No, I'm no more a wonder-worker in China than I was in France; it's enough, my dear brother, if I can be a good potterer-around, like you in your sacristy (Letter 94).

In the same month he also wrote to Lamboley in Paris, saying that he had heard about a plan to write a life of St Vincent in Latin, for the use of Chinese confreres. He thinks this a great idea, but as usual has several suggestions to make as to how it should be done, including the very sensible one that after it had been written, but before printing, it should be sent to Macao so that a judgement could be made as to its suitability for its purpose; he said that many Chinese confreres had difficulty in reading the *Imitation of Christ* in Latin (Letter 95).

The same month he sent off a second letter to Torrette criticising, among other things, an article in the *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi* in which he noted six geographical, historical, and other factual errors. What he really objected to, though, was the fact that the Vincentian missions were called Chinese, whilst those of the Paris Foreign Missions Society were called French. He thought that the Vincentian missions had equal right to be called French, and suggested that Etienne should do something about this; he said all this, however, "without any spirit of jealousy or bias" (Letter 96). The trusses which he had asked for had also arrived, but they were of no use to him as they were for the left side, while his hernia was on the right.

Sometime after this Torrette apparently told him that many of the points he made in his letters were trivial, because in a letter to Torrette in November he admits that perhaps this was so, but he would not back down on the point he had made about the necessity of having a confrere who had actually worked in China stationed in Macao and/or in Paris, adding that Torrette himself had never been a missionary in the interior of China (Letter 98).

There are no further surviving letters until August 1839, after the trusses had finally arrived. This time they were for the correct side, and twice the requested number arrived because both Torrette in Macao and Grappin in Paris had ordered them separately. One of

them, though, lasted only a week as “it suddenly broke of its own accord when I was sitting motionless in my chair”. Torrette seems to have complained about the expenses John Gabriel was incurring, because the latter apologised and said that all expenditure on him for the previous twenty-five years had been a waste of money (letters 100 & 101).

VIII. Arrest, trials and execution

From September 1838 until Pentecost 1839 John Gabriel gave seventeen missions, and even since then had not really had any free time (Letter 99, of 10 August 1839). He was scheduled to go on a further round of visits to mission stations in Hou-pé, but François Alexis Rameaux decided to relieve him of this “out of pity for his poor legs” (43). This meant that during August and September John Gabriel was in the Vincentian house in Kou-tchen.

On the feast of the Most Holy Name of Mary, 15 September, an Italian Franciscan, Giuseppe Rizzolati, also known as Fr Giuseppe of Clauzeto, was visiting and John Gabriel asked him to be celebrant and preacher at the feastday high mass, which about 1,500 people attended. After mass, John Gabriel, Rizzolati and Jean-Henri Baldus were at breakfast when word came that a band of soldiers was approaching. The three priests had just enough time to make their getaway, without being able to take anything with them. Rizzolati and Baldus went off in one direction, while John Gabriel went the opposite way. The soldiers looted the house, and in the course of burning books and other items which they did not want they succeeded in setting the house on fire (44).

Two letters written to Torrette, one by Rameaux on 6 December 1839 and the other, in Latin, by André Yang CM on 8 January 1840, mention that the reason for the anti-Christian persecution was not clearly established, though it was known to have had its origin in a certain Christian family. According to Rameaux it was a persecution so terrible

...that it will give us a Martyr. You know who is the holiest among us; it's only right that he should be the first to receive his reward (45).

The day after their escape Rizzolati and Baldus separated. John Gabriel, who had fled in the opposite direction to them and was hiding

in a wood, was found and arrested. Etienne in his *Notice* quoted a long letter written from Macao on 27 January 1841 by Evariste Huc CM, which includes an account of John Gabriel's arrest. Baldus read this, and he described his reaction to it in a letter to Vauris:

After reading the *Notice* on the life and death of this dear confrere, at the end of which Fr Huc's letter was inserted as an account of his precious death, I wrote into the book itself notes correcting where necessary the numerous inaccuracies of his narrative.

He tore out these pages and forwarded them to Paris (46). In the letter which he sent with them he pointed out that Hue was nowhere near the place in question and had composed his narrative from hearsay. One of the corrected errors of fact was that the burning of the Vincentian house was accidental, not deliberate.

A much more serious error was the account given by Hue of what led to John Gabriel's being caught in the wood where he was hiding. Hue says that John Gabriel had a catechumen with him acting as guide, and that when the soldiers came upon the pair unexpectedly they did not recognise John Gabriel. They said they were looking for a fugitive European. According to Hue, the catechumen asked how much would be paid to someone who pointed out the man in question and was told "Thirty taels", whereupon he pointed to his companion. Baldus wrote that this was incorrect. The arrest came about because the soldiers met a catechumen by chance and threatened him, and as a result he told where John Gabriel was. He also wrote that Hue's story of a conversation about an agreed price of thirty taels was "romantic, and at a minimum very exaggerated".

The Baldus version is also contained in another letter, of which, unfortunately, the final pages are missing, but which seems to be a comment on Etienne's *Notice*:

Secondly, the handing over, or betrayal, was not brought about by money, but by fear, for Fr Perboyre's supposed guide had been beaten up, according to messengers from Houpe (47).

Rizzolati, in his subsequent evidence for the process of John Gabriel's beatification, said he wanted to distinguish clearly between what he knew from personal knowledge and what he had heard; he said he had heard that a catechumen had been offered 30 taels to betray John Gabriel. In another place, though, he mentioned this without saying it was hearsay (48).

The most complete account of the arrest is given by a Chinese Vincentian, André Yang, in a letter to Torrette in November 1840:

The day after the destruction of our chapel Fr Perboyre was found in a grove of trees on a hill near our school by a catechumen who had been captured by the soldiers earlier. The soldiers used force and beat the catechumen to make him betray the missionaries. The catechumen himself was forced to lead the soldiers for the arrest of Fr Perboyre, so he arrived at the place which he knew, with the soldiers, and they arrested Fr Perboyre; and later on two Christians and a virgin named Anna Kou were captured.

Fr Perboyre was bound, and taken by the soldiers to Kou Tchong Syen. Before being bound he received a blow from an iron bar. When Fr Perboyre saw the mandarin he at once went down on his knees in front of him. The mandarin told Fr Perboyre to get up and be seated, which the Father did not want to do. Then the mandarin ordered him to be seated, and told the mandarin of Syen that Fr Perboyre was to be well treated. For this reason he was well treated all the time until he arrived in Siang Yang Fou (49).

Rameaux, in a letter to Torrette in March of the same year, had also said that the prisoner was well treated up to the time he was taken to Siang Yang Fou (50).

When he was brought before the mandarin in Siang Yang Fou, according to this same letter

... he was interrogated, and endured all the sufferings reserved for the worst criminals: he was made to kneel on iron chains, on pieces of broken crockery, and beaten in all sorts of ways with the result that his flesh hung off him in strips.

André Yang confirms these details, and adds that John Gabriel was made to put on mass vestments and read from the missal in Latin.

Rizzolati wrote to Torrette, in Latin, on 15 January 1840 and included an account of what the prisoner went through in Ou Tchong Fou; he said he heard the details from a Chinese Vincentian who had been able to pass himself off as a layman and visit him in prison. This was André Yang who, in his evidence for the beatification process,

said he presented himself at the prison as a merchant, Mr Y, who was interested in learning more about his country, especially its prison system (51). Rizzolati himself was able to remain in the general area as he spoke Chinese fluently, did not look like a European and could pass for a native Chinese, according to himself. The interrogators were interested primarily in getting the prisoner to betray other priests, particularly Rameaux. In the Viceroy's court he was very badly treated "with newly devised tortures which we never heard of being used even in the time of Nero's persecutions". They also tried to get him to trample on a crucifix and abjure his faith. He was forced to kneel bare-kneed on the floor, with his pigtail pulled upwards and tightly tied to a beam; his arms were tied to a plank, and another plank was placed across his calves with two soldiers standing or jumping on the ends of it; his bones were visible in places and his skin and flesh hung off him in strips (52).

Yang himself had written to Torrette a week previously saying that from the date of John Gabriel's capture in September 1839 up to the end of the year it had not been possible to visit him, but

Now, after more than three months. . . we have found some friends of a Christian who, by means of our money, have worked out a way of getting us in to visit Fr Perboyre; on the first and second days some Christians went to see him, and on the third day I went with two Christians.

Yang was able to hear his confession. One of the guards told him that he need not worry, as they would take good care of the prisoner. Yang was allowed to bring bread, wine, clothing, blankets and money. Another guard refused to accept money, saying that he had already been given some by someone else; he said that when John Gabriel had got somewhat better he would get him whatever food he liked, saying he had pity for him in view of what he had suffered.

At this time it was known that the mandarin who had originally arrested John Gabriel had been deposed from office, and in despair had hanged himself (53).

In a letter to Rameaux in March 1840 Yang wrote that John Gabriel had received 100 strokes of a bamboo cane on the body and 70 on the mouth, and had appeared more than twenty times in court. He said that at the time of writing he had recovered fairly well, and could walk a bit again. Yang was unable to visit as frequently as before, and the

prisoner himself had advised against it because of the danger to Yang himself. The prison governor, however, had allowed a catechist named Fong to make weekly visits and bring anything needed (54).

In May an Italian Franciscan, Filippo Grosso a Sant'Agata, wrote to Torrette and covered most of the already known facts, but added that the case had been referred by the Viceroy to the Emperor (55). Later on, the court records were copied out by a Christian civil servant, and from them it is clear that the charges against John Gabriel were that he entered China illegally to preach Christianity "and to deceive and seduce the people" (56).

In a letter written two and a half months after John Gabriel's death Yang gave Torrette some further details of the prisoner's sufferings. Dog's blood was poured over his head and he was made to drink it, to counteract the supposed magic which had enabled him to hold out against the interrogations and torture. The Viceroy ordered some Chinese characters to be incised on John Gabriel's left cheek, to indicate that he had seduced men by an evil religion; his beard later obscured these (57).

On 15 September 1840 Rameaux wrote to François-Xavier Danicourt CM in Macao:

Our dear prisoner is still alive and patiently putting up with his chains. His wounds are almost healed and he is in fairly good health, although the mandarin took his truss, believing it to be something magic (58).

He added that there was a rumour that John Gabriel would be exiled to Macao but he did not think it likely. The new vicar apostolic believed that his release could be purchased. What Rameaux did not know, of course, was that the prisoner had been executed four days earlier.

On 22 September an Italian Holy Family Missionary, Francesco Saverio Maresca, wrote to Rameaux to give news of the execution, saying that only one Christian had been present as no others knew about it. Maresca learnt about it a few hours later and sent some people to retrieve the body, the cord which had been used to strangle him, and other relics (59). By 15 October Rameaux was able to send some details to Torrette:

... he was strangled in accordance with all the Chinese rules, that is to say in three stages, and a kick in the lower abdomen put an end to his suffering.

Although I have done my utmost to get detailed information on the different circumstances of his trial, his interrogations and his replies, I have been unable to get very much (60).

A week after the execution Maresca wrote to Rameaux that several witnesses said that in death his face did not have the distortion normal after such a mode of execution (61). A year later Hue wrote to the superior general from Mongolia, saying that at the moment of John Gabriel's death a luminous cross had appeared in the sky, seen by many Chinese, which caused many conversions to Christianity. He said that Rizzolati, who by then was a bishop, had been sceptical at first but later had held an enquiry in to matter and stated that, according to many people, the cross was quite distinct and seen from places far apart (62). In 1851 Baldus, who was also a bishop by then, wrote to a correspondent, whose name is not on the letter, that he was doubtful about this story in view of the credulity of the Chinese, adding:

In most *Lives* of this sort, or in letters on this subject, both in France and in Italy, and perhaps even more so in letters from the missions, it would seem that a taste for the wonderful and miraculous leads to exaggeration (63).

A fortnight after John Gabriel's death Baldus had written to Torrette:

If you were to ask me what's being said about Fathers Rameaux and Perboyre, do you think I'd have nothing but praise to pass on to you, from both Christians and confreres? Speaking only of Fr Perboyre, on whom you counted so much in Macao and from whom you expected great things, I don't know what it was about him that displeased the Chinese, but of all the Europeans I've seen in China I haven't seen one who was less to their liking. His great merit would not have been appreciated here; he would have ended up not making a go of it. These are Fr Rameaux's words, and he also used to say that if you haven't better idea of how to get a move on you shouldn't come to China. In many areas the Christians showed great reluctance to have him, made great efforts and used many ruses to get someone else, some other European, but not myself. I know that the question of his physical appearance had nothing to do with it.

Alas! Perhaps I'm going too far, but I feel sort of bound to let you know. In my opinion, and I was there, and in that of all the other confreres, both European and Chinese, the reason for the persecution being so violent was because Fr Perboyre was caught. If he was caught, then, humanly speaking, it was because he was a wet hen, and through his own stupidity.

There's no point in going into details. It wasn't just a question of having legs, but rather of being slick. Everyone agrees on this; the Christians are well able to repeat it; in a similar situation Fr Rameaux would not have been caught. Our belongings, our vestments, would not have been destroyed. The other confreres counted on Fr Perboyre, who had been recently appointed assistant superior. I saved only the money and myself.

Such happenings, when attributable to Providence alone, raise no problems for Christians, but when personal blame enters in there is always something which hurts.

Anyway, knowing Fr Perboyre's personal holiness I'm quite convinced that he is not guilty in the sight of God, and I'd willingly change places with him. . . (64)

Notes

1. Goyau, G: *La Congrégation de la Mission des Lazaristes*, Paris 1938, p. 243.
2. *Notice sur la Vie et la Mart de M. Jean-Gabriel Perboyre*, Paris 1842, 286 pages.
3. Vauris' book was published anonymously in 1853 with the title *Le Disciple de Jésus*. In passing, it should be noted that Aristide Chatelet CM, in his biography of JGP (Meudon 1943), in all his footnotes giving page references to Vauris is, in fact, referring to another work, written by Mgr Demimuid but published anonymously in 1891.
4. *Lettres du Bienheureux Jean-Gabriel Perboyre*, edited by Brother Joseph van den Brandt CM, Peking 1940. All quotations from the letters are translated from this volume and are indicated by the number of the letter in it.
5. The three letters are in the archives of the Congregation of the Mission in Paris. (In the rest of these notes these archives will be referred to by the initials CMAP). Baldus was nine years younger than JGP, was ordained in 1834 and went to China the same year; he became a bishop in 1845 and died in 1869.
6. "They" refers to Perboyre and Antoine Gratacap, who together ran the school. There is some doubt as to whether Gratacap was a Vincentian, though Perboyre always refers to him as such, and says in a PS to a letter in 1817 that the late Vincentian vicar general, Hanon, received him into the

- Congregation on 25 March 1809. Gratacap in his will does not refer to his being a Vincentian. The letter and the will are in CMAP.
7. CMAP.
 8. CMAP.
 9. CMAP.
 10. CMAP.
 11. CMAP. This is the letter already quoted from. François-Alexis Rameaux was four months younger than JGP, was ordained in 1826, went to China in 1832, became a bishop in 1840 and died in 1842.
 12. CMAP.
 13. CMAP.
 14. Maisonneuve to Charles Boujard CM, vicar general, 10 December 1819 (CMAP). Van den Brandt and others give the date of his reception as 15 December 1818.
 15. The details of his ordination as sub-deacon and deacon are in a transcript of an original document which was in the Vincentian house in Shanghai. The transcript is in CMAP.
 16. This passport is in CMAP. The details are entered in handwriting in blank spaces after printed words such as "Height", "Hair", "Beard".
 17. Letters 5 and 6, and also the Shanghai document mentioned in Note 15, show that he was ordained priest in 1826. All the early biographies gave 1825, thus shortening his stay in Montdidier and lengthening that in Saint-Flour. At the time of his ordination the house of the Daughters of Charity in rue du Bac was No. 132; the number was later changed to the present 140.
 18. The names and dioceses of the eleven Irishmen are given in the *Annales de la CM*, vol. 112-113, page 508. The Archives of the Irish College in Paris do not have a complete register of students for that year, but five of those listed in the *Annales* held burses in the ICP.
 19. Mariette, born in 1809, was fourth in the Perboyre family; she died young, in a Carmelite convent, probably before the age of 20; few details are available.
 20. CMAP.
 21. CMAP.
 22. These letters from Grappin, and some from the bishop of Saint-Flour, are in CMAP.
 23. The cousin referred to is Gabriel Perboyre, born in 1808. He joined the Vincentians on 23 June 1827. He wrote extensively in the *Annales* on Vincentian history, especially about the French Revolution period. He died in 1880.
 24. Pierre Peschaud CM to J B Etienne, from Kiang-si, 30 July 1844 (CMAP).
 25. CMAP.
 26. CMAP. "Cornette" was the name of the butterfly-like headgear worn by the Daughters of Charity at the time.
 27. Vauris: op. cit. p. 289.
 28. A persistent rumour has survived that his removal from Saint-Flour to Paris was a disciplinary measure taken against him. I first heard this from Fr Kevin Murnaghan CM when I was a student in the early 1950s; Fr

Murnaghan had done all his studies in France in the 1920s. Edouard Robert, the vicar general, referred to this rumour in the *Annales* in 1939, saying that he had first heard it about forty years previously from a confrere “venerable by age and holiness”, who said that JGP had not been a success in Saint-Flour and was therefore “recalled to Paris where the superior general is supposed to have told him that he didn’t know what to do with him for the moment, but that in the meantime he could help the director by looking after the seminarists’ walks. This was never written down and when I spoke of it several years later to other confreres they said that it hardly seemed likely” (*Annales* vol. 104, p 271). I have heard the additional detail that it was because JGP advocated the ideas of Lammenais that he was removed. Their condemnation by Gregory XVI was in August 1832, the same month in which JGP was recalled to Paris.

29. Pierre Peschaud to Etienne, 30 September 1844, in CMAP.
30. Joseph Boullangier was bursar in St Firmin’s seminary, Paris, during the French Revolution. The butcher’s boy told him, on 2 September 1792, that every priest in the seminary was to be massacred the following day. With the help of two other boys he dragged Boullangier out of the house, and so he escaped that part of the September Massacres which took place in the seminary the following day. He later wrote an account of that period.
31. Jacques-Jean Perboyre was received into the seminaire in Paris on 18 September 1832. Less than two years later he received tonsure, though he did not take his vows till nearly eight years later, on 15 March 1840, and then as a lay brother; he became sacristan in the mother-house. He resumed his studies for the priesthood, though, and was ordained priest in 1845. Fr Joseph Sheehy CM told me in Blackrock about 1947 that when he had done part of his studies in Paris in the 1880s he had known Jacques Perboyre, and he said that he had resumed his studies for the priesthood so that he could celebrate mass after the beatification of his brother. He died in 1896. Fr Sheehy also said that Jacques was the model for all portraits of John Gabriel, of whom no actual portrait from life exists.
32. *Recueil des Principales Circulaires des Supérieurs Généraux de la CM*, vol. II, p. 461.
33. Etienne: *Notice*, pp. 26-27. Chatelet in his *Jean-Gabriel Perboyre*, Meudon 1943, p. 135, gives additional details but does not indicate his source.
34. CMAP.
35. CMAP.
36. CMAP.
37. CMAP.
38. CMAP.
39. Perry was ordained priest in Macao on 11 October 1840.
40. As well as the three Vincentians there were some priests of the Paris Foreign Missions. The passage alluded to at the end of the letter is *Alter alterius onera portate et sic adimplebitis legem Christi*, from St Paul’s letter to the Galatians: Carry one another’s burdens, and in that way you will fulfill the law of Christ (021.6:2).
41. CMAP.

42. CMAP.
43. *Annales de la CM*, Vol. 6 (1840), p. 354.
44. The events of 15 September are given in three letters written to Torrette, from Rameaux (06-12-1839), Yang (08-01-1840) and Rizzolati (15-01-1840). These, together with other letters from around the same period, were published by Fernand Combaluzier CM in 1953 in the Swiss periodical *Nouvelle Revue de Science Missionnaire* (NRSM) pages 201-268. In CMAP there is a typewritten copy of the same collection, with a covering note saying they were copied from the originals in the Vincentian house in Shanghai by Henri Crapez CM in 1940. Some of these letters, in whole or in part, are incorporated into the printed documentation of the process for JGP's beatification. The typewritten collection also includes one letter not printed in NRSM (see below). Apart from the letters of Rizzolati (15-01-1840) and Maresca I have not found the originals in CMAP.
45. NRSM p. 204.
46. His letter, together with the annotated pages from Etienne's *Notice*, is in CMAP.
47. The original letter is in CMAP. At the top of the page, in handwriting different from that of the letter, is written "M. Lavissière". Pierre Lavissière CM was from Saint-Flour; he joined the Congregation in Paris in 1835, and was ordained in 1837; he went to China the following year, became a bishop in 1846 and died in 1849.
48. Printed documents of the beatification process have been bound together into an "omnibus volume", and the pages re-numbered. There are two copies of this, one incomplete, in CMAP. Page references are to the re-numbered pages in the complete volume. The Rizzolati material referred to is on pages 288ff, and 393.
49. The letter is in Latin, NRSM pp. 264-268. In this and in other letters Yang spells the surname either Belboyre or Berboyre.
50. "Omnibus volume" p. 356.
51. Yang in evidence at the beatification process, "Omnibus volume" p. 299.
52. NRSM pp. 208-213.
53. NRSM p. 213.
54. NRSM pp. 253-254.
55. NRSM p. 256.
56. "Omnibus volume" p. 419.
57. NRSM p. 267.
58. NRSM p. 258.
59. Original in CMAP.
60. "Omnibus volume" pp. 377-378.
61. "Omnibus volume" p. 381.
62. There is a typewritten transcript of Hue's letter in CMAP.
63. The original is in CMAP.
64. This is the letter referred to in Note 44, which was not printed by Combaluzier in NRSM. It is incomplete, and all that appears in the transcript is given here.

The Cause for the Canonization of John Gabriel Perboyre

Thomas Davitt

John Gabriel Perboyre was executed in China on 11 September 1840. On 9 July 1843 a decree of Pope Gregory XVI authorized the introduction of the causes for beatification of forty-three martyrs, including Francis Regis Clet and John Gabriel Perboyre. John Gabriel's cause was separated from the others, because of the amount of documentation, evidence of witnesses and graces received. On 10 November 1889 Pope Leo XIII beatified him. His liturgical commemoration was originally celebrated on 7 November, but in the last revision of the calendar it was changed to 11 September, the anniversary of his death.

In 1891 a decree was issued authorizing the resumption of the cause, with a view to canonization. At that time two miracles attributed to the intercession of the beatified person were required for canonization. In the case of John Gabriel the two allegedly miraculous cures both involved Daughters of Charity, Sisters Gabrielle Isoré and Joseph Destailleur. Medical experts examined the cures and gave their opinion in 1897. There were further comments, questions, and answers during 1900-1902, and then the revised medical opinion was submitted in 1902.

In correspondence between the Postulator General and the Superior General it was taken almost for granted that this would be accepted without any problems. In the old St Joseph's, on Temple Road, Blackrock, a stained glass window was installed at this time with "St John Gabriel Perboyre" on it. However, it is interesting to note that in the Superior General's New Year circular letters there is no indication of such a degree of expectancy. In the letter of 1900 it is said that the cause had received a momentary set-back, but that there was nothing to worry about. In that of the following year it was reported that the cause was moving forward. In the *Annales de la Mission* around that time there was no reference to John Gabriel's canonization in the immediate future.

The new *Positio* was discussed at a Preparatory Congregation on 28 April 1903, and objections were raised. There were 21 members voting and on the allegedly miraculous cure of Sister Gabrielle Isoré, the only one of interest now (see below), 9 voted affirmatively, 4 negatively, 6 abstained, and 2 abstained pending further expert medical opinion.

The reason for the negative votes and abstentions was a doubt as to whether the illness of the Sister was organic or functional. “Functional” would mean the illness had a hysterical basis, and therefore the apparently instantaneous cure could be natural and not miraculous.

The result of the voting was presented to Leo XIII by the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation of Rites, Cardinal Serafino Cretoni. The Pope decided that two more experts should be appointed to undertake further investigation.

It seems that for many years after this disappointment no further move was made by the Congregation of the Mission. Once again it is interesting that neither in the Superior General’s New Year letter of 1904, nor in the *Annales* of that year, is there any reference to the disappointment.

In 1943 new norms were promulgated about presenting alleged miracles, but at that time the war was still going on.

In 1959 the sponsors of the cause approached the Promotor General of the Faith with a view to moving the cause forward. He asked Professor Vincenzo Lo Bianco to re-examine the evidence. The professor’s conclusion was that with the long lapse of time since the original diagnosis he could not, from the documents, make a “definite diagnosis”.

In 1969 and 1983 there were new Apostolic Constitutions on canonization. The second one decreed that only one miracle was now needed for canonizing a beatified person.

In 1993 Fr Giuseppe Guerra CM, the Postulator General, decided that of the two alleged miracles voted on in 1903 the cure of Sister Gabrielle Isoré had the better chance of succeeding as it was better documented. All the documentation on it was given by the Congregation for the Saints to two medical experts, Professor Franco De Rosa and Professor Cristoforo Morocutti, for re-evaluation. The decision of the former was that the instantaneous cure of Sister Gabrielle merited discussion at a meeting of the medical commission, while that of the latter was that the cure was inexplicable. The medical commission discussed it at their meeting on 17 November 1994 and their unanimous opinion was that the cure was inexplicable according to current

medical knowledge. The case was then passed on to the theologians and once again the decision was affirmative. Finally, on 6 April 1995 the decree for the canonization of John Gabriel, along with those for other beatifications and canonizations, was read in the presence of the Pope, and now (January 1996) all that remains is for a date to be set for the canonization ceremony.

The cure of Sister Gabrielle Isoré, DC

Céline Isoré, according to the documentation of the cause, was born “in Quaid-Ypres in northern France” in 1851. In 1871 she entered the Daughters of Charity, and was known as Sister Gabrielle. Her first appointment was to the hospital in Nivelles, then to Ghent for home care of the sick and then to Héverlé near Leuven to teach in a girls’ school. During all this time she enjoyed good health. After fourteen years in Héverlé she began to get ill, in February-March 1889. She began to experience pains in her feet, then right up her back, intermittent at first but later continuous. Her movements became gradually restricted and eventually this necessitated her being confined to bed. The Sisters judged her condition to be rheumatic, and treated her accordingly. But her condition got worse, and the doctor, Joseph Boine, was called in for the first time in July. He was the only doctor who saw her during the period of her illness. She suffered also from insomnia, urinary and respiratory problems. From September she was also partially paralyzed in her lower limbs.

On 2 November her Sister Servant arranged with a priest of the Fathers of the Sacred Hearts (Picpus Fathers) for a novena of prayer and masses for Sister Gabrielle’s cure through the intercession of John Gabriel Perboyre, to end on 10 November, the day on which he was to be beatified. On the 9th the doctor saw her as usual; he said later that he had by then given up all hope of her recovery and expected her to die soon.

On the 9th/at 11.30 in the evening, she fell asleep without any medication, and slept till 4.30 the following morning, something which had not happened before. When she woke up she had no pains, could move normally and was able to get up, dress herself and go down to the chapel. In the chapel she cried out “I’m either off my head or I’ve been completely cured”. She stayed for mass with the others, then went to the refectory and ate a normal breakfast.

Diagnosis

Dr Boine's diagnosis, which he put in writing for the Sister Servant, was that Sister Gabrielle was suffering from a severe form of myelitis. When the medical experts discussed the case in 1891-92, with a view towards the introduction of the cause for canonization, they came to the conclusion that she had suffered from ascending spinal leptomeningitis of a sub-acute form. Two other experts, though, tended towards accepting a hysterical basis for her condition. (She was still alive at that time; she died in 1906). At the voting on her cure in 1903 the eight members who abstained did so because they were not completely satisfied that her illness had been organic; they thought there was a possibility it had had a hysterical element. If the latter were true then her instantaneous cure could have been merely natural and not inexplicable.

In 1959 Professor Lo Bianco felt that after such a lapse of time he could not give a definite diagnosis from the evidence available to him.

In 1993 the documentation was once again submitted to medical experts, Professors Franco De Rosa and Cristoforo Morocutti. The former said the case was worth discussion by a medical commission, especially the instantaneous nature of her cure, the latter gave a positive opinion on the inexplicable nature of the cure.

Professor Morocutti first dealt with the possibility of hysterical illness. He decided that from what was known of the Sister before her illness a hysterical basis was unlikely. Also, it would be unusual for someone aged 38 to develop such a hysterical condition for the first time.

He did not agree with Dr Boine's diagnosis of myelitis, as many of the symptoms associated with that illness were not mentioned in the documentation as being present.

He thought the diagnosis made in 1891-92 of spinal leptomeningitis was more probable. But here again he noted that in the documents there was no evidence of the presence of symptoms he would have expected if that were the correct diagnosis. Not only that, he also noticed reference to the presence of signs which should not have been there if that were the correct diagnosis.

He then gave as his final opinion that the most probably correct diagnosis of Sister Gabrielle's illness would be ascending polyneuritis, the Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS); more recently this has been called acute idiopathic polyradiculopathy.

His report was dated 9 June 1994. It was accepted by the medical commission on 5 December 1994.

Good News About Martyrdom

Thomas Lane

The author of *The Imitation of Christ* advised us not to enquire into and dispute about the merits of holy people, or to ask which of them was holier than the other, or which will be greater in the kingdom of heaven. But his advice came too late. For well over a thousand years Christians had been showing a strong bias in favour of those who were virgins or martyrs, or, better still, those who were, at the same time, both virgins and martyrs. If there were to be a choice between the two the preference would seem to have been in favour of the martyrs. The oldest listings of saints were simply known as martyrologies, even though a number of people who were not martyrs found their way into the lists.

Eventually, the old lists of martyrs crystallized into the Roman Martyrology. Many of us can recall that, in that venerable book, the saint's day of death was described as his or her "birthday". The order was reversed on 24 December when we anticipated the birthday of the Son of God; presumably we were celebrating the beginning of his "martyrdom", the "emptying" of himself which was involved in every stage of his dwelling among us, from birth-day to death-day. At the end of the list of birthdays we came to *et alibi* – "and elsewhere the birthday of many holy martyrs and confessors and holy virgins". That daily conclusion was a clear reminder that to be in the Martyrology you didn't have to be a martyr in the normally accepted sense. As we became more sophisticated we learned the reason why. We discovered that, in the language of the New Testament, martyring basically means witnessing. We learned that, according to a well-used triad, the Christian community is, of its essence, a sharing community, a serving community, and a martyring community. Following the teaching and example of their founder, and seeing the manner of death of the cream of their members in time of persecution, Christians soon grasped the reality of the assurance of Jesus that "no one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (Jn 16:13). They saw that the apex of all martyring was martyring in blood. Blood martyrdom became the norm for all martyring, all witnessing.

Blood is life

The thought of blood-martyrdom has the advantage of touching the depths of human basics. The language and symbolism of blood speak to every culture, every age. You cannot be human without speaking of life-blood, about the flesh and blood that are kith and kin, about blood-relationships. In our days we have come to know a lot about blood tests, blood transfusions, blood donors. More than ever before, we have learned that blood is truly a matter of life and death. That the pelican gives its own blood to its young may be a myth, but it has proved a powerful symbol for houses that specialise in seeing blood as an incomparable gift.

The religious meaning of blood is a variation on the basic human meaning of blood. In the whole of Christian tradition we are never far away from the conviction that blood means life. The very ancient belief that life was somehow in the bones did not contradict this. It expressed a deep awareness that bones, flesh and blood form a living unity. This is the key to the many powerful Christian texts that speak of blood. Three of them, in particular, capture the essence of Christian martyrdom: the text about blood poured out (Mk 14:24); the text about blood and water from the side (Jn 19:34); the text that inseparably links blood and forgiveness (Hb 9:22).

Many forms

Over the centuries the Church came to recognise many forms of heroic sanctity. An old category, now discontinued in its wording, spoke of saints who were “neither virgins nor martyrs”. To the contemporary ear it sounds a very odd category indeed. But it was making a very profound point. It was stating strongly that neither physical virginity nor martyrdom in blood is a requirement for heroic holiness. But it did not dispense with the conviction that, without the undivided love which is characteristic of virginity and the fidelity unto death that is characteristic of blood-martyrdom, nobody can find a place in the Christian Martyrology.

The conviction that there are many authentic forms of martyrdom received a delightful expression in the Irish-Celtic tradition. Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich loved to point out that the earliest surviving homily in the Irish language is intertwined with a seventh-century Latin homily and it highlights the topic of martyrdom. It was written in Cambrai, the city in which, over a thousand years later, the Daughters of Charity from Arras were martyred by guillotine. The author was an Irish monk

who, presumably, saw himself as experiencing the martyrdom of exile for Christ. He speaks of white martyrdom, blue (green) martyrdom, red martyrdom. He sees each of these martyrdoms as a separation, a kind of “letting go” that makes us leave all to find all.

Preparing for the new millennium

It is interesting that those who first edited the Irish text, in 1903, pointed out an analogy with the Arabian “white death”, “black death”, “green death”, and “red death”. I believe that Pope John Paul II is drawing on a similar nuancing of the language of dying and martyrdom in his frequent returning to the topic, most notably in his encyclical directing us to the third millennium. He sees a special contemporary relevance in the statement that the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians. He images the Church of the coming millennium as a Church of martyrs. He is very conscious of the coming of new forms of persecution for Christians. He delays on the significance of the Christian martyrologies of the past. He draws our attention to the project of an updating of the Roman Martyrology. It is clear that, in this, his concern is far from being antiquarian and academic. He sees the Church of the new millennium as one that will need a lot of support, notably the support of the martyrs. This support he sees as particularly needed in the living of the Christian ideal of marriage.

Our proto-martyr

For his disciples, Jesus himself is the great teacher and exemplar of martyrdom. His way of living interpreted his way of dying; his way of dying interpreted his way of living. Every Christian country has its proto-martyr or proto-martyrs. St Stephen is usually presented as proto-martyr for the entire Church. It would be more correct to reserve that title for Jesus himself, as did St Ignatius of Antioch who saw his own martyrdom as an act of eucharist. The martyrdom of Jesus is the paradigm and archetype of all martyrdom. It was identical with his sacrifice. The hill of Calvary was a real place. But it is also a symbol. It is the interpretative centre for the whole life of Jesus, and for the lives of all those who have been and are willing to imitate his sacrificial love than which there can be no greater. In the ethos of that interpretative centre people can make the most outlandish and apparently contradictory claims for the blood of Christ. In one biblical image, disciples faithful to the end are seen as having “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb” (Rv 7:14). In

Christian prayers the only time we pray for the gift of drunkenness is when we say “blood of Christ inebriate me” (*Anima Christi*).

Martyrdom and sacrifice

The interpretation of Christian life in terms of martyrdom and of sacrifice throws light on one of the most intractable of all questions: “why bad things happen to good people”. It helps us to see whether God can be said to suffer with his people or whether it is more orthodox to stop at saying that God overcomes evil by his continual compassionate presence to us in the ongoing mystery of the living, dying and rising of his Son. The best light I have recently got on these topics is in a new book by a Scottish non-Catholic theologian, Ian Bradley. The book is entitled *The Power of Sacrifice*. In exploring more deeply the notion of sacrifice, he thinks he can find new light on the nature of God himself. He sees sacrifice not as a human initiative in response to God, but as God’s loving initiative in the very creation of the universe. He sees God as somehow deciding to empty his power and energy into a world which he made and sustains out of self-giving love. He invites us to look again at our rather secure, inherited understanding of God’s omnipotence, his impassibility, his freedom. He encourages us to seek new ways of speaking about God whose compassion makes him vulnerable and makes him personally experience suffering.

In my seminary days I was taught about the Patripassians who were rejected for saying that God the Father suffered. As I read Ian Bradley’s book I wondered whether they had raised their heads again. But I came to realise that the author’s real search is for a language that will remove any vestiges of a remote, detached God, and that will do full justice to God’s total entry into the continual struggle of a world that is the overflow of his love. He sees the sacrificial principle as one of life coming through death, as the loving self-giving started by God in the decision to create. He is searching for a language that will do justice to God’s omnipotence but that will also do justice to God’s full involvement in the travail of the world since the beginning of time. In this perspective, the Incarnation and the continual self-emptying of the Word of God are a kind of visible sacrament of what was going on from the beginning, at the heart of the creating Trinity.

We die every day

As creatures made in the image of God we come to realise that sacrifice and martyrdom are not peripheral to Christian life. They are the

very stuff of every Christian life. They are our loving response to a sacrificing God. At the core of every Christian vocation is the invitation to self-giving, to dying in order to live, to living for others and to dying for others. It is only in this setting of the continual call to martyrdom that we can courageously face the pain and the humiliation, and the many dyings, that the Church is enduring in our own day. It should cause no surprise that those who are in two intimate forms of Christian discipleship, in priesthood and in consecrated virginity, should be experiencing the demands of sacrifice and of martyrdom in a particularly acute way. The call to be disciples is also a call to be teachers, a message stressed by Pope John Paul, as it was by Pope Paul VI. Both popes have been seeing themselves as helping to engender new fortitude for the new martyrdoms in which we are both endurers and teachers. They have both come to learn that it is easy to speak of martyrdom but that it is very difficult to “die every day” (1 Cor 15:13). They would agree with the woman in the drama who said that there is a great gap between a “gallous” story and a dirty deed (John M Synge, *The Playboy of the Western World*).

John Gabriel Perboyre

I believe that it is in this perspective we are invited to prepare for the canonization of John Gabriel Perboyre. The doubting part of us may wonder whether it will make any difference. A few things are certain. Firstly, the canonization will achieve what we allow it to achieve. Secondly, the living story of the generous shedding of blood or the letting go of one’s life, for political or religious motives, has still a great power of appeal. Think of the Kevin Barry song in Ireland, think of the influence of Oscar Romero, think of Thomas More, *The Man for all Seasons*, think of the hero of *Murder in the Cathedral*. Thirdly, it would appear that canonization, in itself, does not suffice to restore life to the memory of a forgotten holy person. In John Gabriel, though, we are fortunate to be dealing with the memory of a man whose story has been kept alive, at least for men and women in the Vincentian tradition. The popular representation of his martyrdom picks up its resemblances with the betrayal and death of Jesus. This ensures a continuous appeal for his story. In presenting the story to new generations of young people, perhaps our biggest challenge will be in the way we continue to make the story of Jesus himself come alive. It has been said that martyrs are remembered not just by their death but by their charisms and human qualities that led up to and coloured their death.

This is why, at the time of the canonization and after, we sorely need the services of preachers and teachers who will make the story of John Gabriel come fully alive. In the same spirit it would be good for us to personalise the intercession in Morning Prayer of Saturday, week 1: “Pour out your Spirit on artists, craftsmen, and musicians...”. The representation of John Gabriel with which most of us are familiar has its own haunting quality. But there is room for more and better.

Conclusion

The canonization of a martyr is good news. It is a call to “greater love”. A biographer of Oscar Romero has said that the ordinary campesinos still speak of him in the present tense, as if he were still around. The martyrs and the other saints help us to think and speak about Jesus Christ in the present tense. May St John Gabriel help us to realise that the proto-martyr for all Christians is indeed around and that we are encircled by his risen presence. May he teach us to be martyrs in the style of Jesus the martyr. May his canonization make us all experience anew the power of the *martyrum candidatus exercitus*, the radiant army of martyrs.

Ministry

Perry Gildea

(Talk given at the Provincial Assembly, Marino, June 1995)

Ministry and into the Future

This is not the place to attempt an elaborate theology of ministry, nor is it my intention to claim the ability to project a daring prophetic look into the future. Rather this is a personal reflection on what I see to be happening, with some intuitive suggestions as to how we might proceed in the future.

My starting point is a comment Kevin Cronin was wont to make when discussing the need for a British Vincentian Community, or, indeed, the future of the Community. He refused to believe St Vincent's vision for his Community had nothing important left to contribute to the present-day Church. It is this confidence in St Vincent's contribution contained in the Community's charism which should perhaps sustain us. However, having said that, and reflecting on the excitement of this morning's session, generated by positive thinking, one recognises such excitement must be tempered with an acknowledgement of the age-profile in the Irish and British Regions of the Community, and the consequent prospect of dramatic changes in the near future. It should also be remembered that sometimes we cannot anticipate the consequences of decisions for change, try as we might to wisely foresee them. I have said these are personal reflections flowing from some of my recent experiences in the Community and in work.

Some years ago the local community at Strawberry Hill spent several days with a facilitator attempting to decide the best option that had regard both to the work and the needs of the community. Much that has happened in my own experience of ministry in the last few years is a direct consequence of that facilitated community meeting at which we decided to relinquish the principalship and administration of St Mary's College, Strawberry Hill. Looking back one can see the intertwining thread of cause and effect mixed with the twists of divine providence, but much of what has happened was unanticipated. It is this experience and its consequences which forms the basis for much of what I have to say.

Collaborative Ministry

In our colleges, schools, and many other institutions we are accustomed to working in partnership with lay people. Such team work and cooperation can be good and effective, but I have discovered that it is not what is meant by collaboration in ministry. In the College Chaplaincy where I now work we are two Chaplains, the other being a lay woman. Apart from presiding at eucharist and the sacraments she shares in every other aspect of the work (and, indeed, presides at eucharistic services in the absence of a priest, as do other eucharistic ministers). It is in this experience of a collaborative partnership that one begins to realise the serious implications of the developing theology of ministry.

The Second Vatican Council began a process, which is still ongoing, of rewriting a theology of ministry. The laity are beginning, not only to know, but to want to exercise, their proper share in the priesthood of Christ which flows from their baptism. In our particular ministry, in relation to this change, liturgy has a very important symbolic and creative function. As the liturgical renewal of Vatican II continues to unfold and exercise its influence, people can often unconsciously be led to deeper perceptions of Church and ministry. They become aware of possibilities, and are encouraged to seek a greater and proper part. All this has especial significance for the role of women in liturgy and Church ministry.

The situation now exists where lay women, admittedly still too few, are being offered formal employment in pastoral roles. In our own situation we were able recently to advertise in the Catholic press for a female assistant chaplain. That such an advertisement was in keeping with the equal opportunities legislation is significant, but more significant is the statement the advertisement made about the opening up of opportunities for full-time lay ministry for women in the Church.

Such developments also alert us, as does much recent writing on the theology of ministry, to an important element which determined many of the ministry patterns of the very early Church, namely the importance of personal charism. People are called to serve not simply because they desire to serve, but also because of the talents they can bring to particular ministries. From those who replied to our advertisement for a Chaplain we were able to shortlist a number of young women, all of whom had degrees in theology, were musicians, already had pastoral and liturgical experience, none of them were religious sisters, and one was married. This one event shows the considerable

wealth of expertise and talent which exists among the laity and which can supply many of the pastoral needs of the present Church. As a Community we need to give serious thought to those aspects of our Vincentian ministry which we can share.

I have mentioned these actual situations first to establish that an increase in interest and suitable formation among the laity coincides with a decline in the actual number of priests, and an even greater decline in the number of candidates for the ordained ministerial priesthood. I emphasise the word *coincides* because it is important to assert that the increase in the desire to exercise ministry within the Church as a right flowing from baptism is not a consequence of the decline in the number of priests; it is something which is happening anyway, and therefore we must regard it as both felicitous and providential. There are, increasingly, lay people, suitably skilled and available, who want to share in ministry with us. This sharing calls for true collaboration, which means a sharing of responsibility and power. The laity in general, and women in particular, don't want to be treated as "Santa's little helpers". The true sharing of power will undoubtedly be very difficult for some. This will require learning to be sharers, partners and, whenever possible, co-equals, with these new ministers, acknowledging, too, that we must learn from them new skills. However, if we proceed along this path it promises life and vitality both for the Church and for the Vincentian charism in the Church.

Into the future

Against this background perhaps we should be developing new strategies for ministry. This would involve:

1. The selection of a few areas for future concentration of resources and the development of ministry and ministerial strategies, and the sharing of gifts as just mentioned.
2. This might require the choice being made on a geographical basis.
3. It might also require thinking about new styles of community living, where the ministerial team shares in the community and some or all of the collaborators live in community.

As it happens, there are many, especially young lay, people who are searching for some form of Christian communal living, at least for a period of time. (In 293, Waldegrave Road, Strawberry Hill, we have four young lay people who share in our community living; these

include a married couple and two single people). Such a combination of clergy and laity is obviously not always easy, but it is a necessary and useful experience for the future.

4. If we think in terms of collaboration, in terms of the available giftedness of many lay people, of the desire to live in and share community, surely there is no reason to despair about the continuation of many of the works dear to Vincent. Much of the work of evangelization and, indeed, formation for ministry, can be done by talented lay people. One can imagine a team of five or six persons, only one of whom might be a Vincentian priest, formed and committed to carrying specific Vincentian Apostolates. In fact this process is already under way in a number of our communities in the Irish and British Regions, where the involvement of the laity as partners has already become a reality. Such are the Chaplaincy already mentioned, All Halows College, Damascus House, and, most recently, the Irish Region's Mission Team.

While the age profile and the vocation situation of the British and Irish Regions of this Province require that we urgently address the future, the possibilities of new forms of community and collaborative ministry offer exciting and challenging ways of continuing to offer the world and the Church the vision of Vincent enshrined in the charism of the Congregation of the Mission.

Provincial Assembly 1995: Homily at Mass of Reconciliation

Myles Rearden

Mark invited me to be the main celebrant at this mass. He did so as a kind of going-away present from the Province to me as I get ready to take up my appointment in Tanzania. I am very grateful to him and to you all, and in return I am offering this mass for God's blessing on all the confreres of the Province, including myself, and on this assembly in particular.

The assembly planning group independently decided that this should be a mass with a theme of reconciliation. What a mystery reconciliation is! It goes to the depth of what Jesus desires for the world, for didn't he shed his blood so that sins might be forgiven? And doesn't he make reconciliation the hinge on which all prayer, all spirituality, turns? "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive those who are in debt to us". There is something breathtaking about reconciliation when it happens. It is as amazing as a miracle. Maybe we have felt something of that in recent years and decades on the world political and religious stage. Peace was painstakingly negotiated in Palestine, South Africa and here in Ireland; long may it continue. In Nigeria 25 years ago the Biafran war ended with very few reprisals. The sacred quality of reconciliation came through when the council launched the enterprise of Christian reunification. Peace is divine and peacemakers are children of God.

I spent a year in Rome once, soon after the end of the Falklands/Malvinas war. It was a time when many Argentines, including some of Italian descent, were disappearing, never to be seen again. This fact led the then President of Italy, Sandro Pertini, to state that those responsible were outside the scope of civilised humanity. I was telling someone at table about this when, to my horror, a South American confrere from down the table exploded in fury and described Pertini, and by extension me, as a First World exploiter of the peoples of Latin America. When the meal was over I decided that something would have to be done by way of reconciliation, and that it would probably

have to be done by me. So I swallowed my pride and went along to knock at Alfonso's door. It didn't take very long, we were all smiles, and peace was restored.

I have no doubt that this was the greatest grace of my year in Rome, tiny though the whole incident was. Reconciliation and forgiveness are such sacred things that even the smallest scrap of them is like the miracle of the loaves and fishes. And I think that whatever we can do by way of increasing the amount of it in the world will be our chief contribution to evangelization.

The keystone of today's spirituality, as I have learned it over the past six years, is the awareness that people have to forgive God, that we are often furious with God and so need to forgive God, not because God has done anything wrong but because we are angry. One of the main occasions for doing this is when we realise that we are going to die, or when someone we love does die. That is the fault of no human being in particular, and so it may be against God that our anger is directed. Growth lies in the direction of forgiving God and accepting what he planned for us. We reconcile ourselves to our destiny and we become reconciled to God.

This also happens in the smaller bereavements of life: unemployment, loss of property, or the corporate misfortunes we have all experienced and will continue to. The closure of our three formation houses has not been easy for us. We have had to stay in the darkness, the Holy Saturday darkness, of our anger and resentment. Inevitably this anger and resentment are directed at God. If we come through them it is only in the honesty of saying to our God what we really felt about it, about him. We all have to write our own Book of Job, I think.

Jesus often speaks to us of the great sacrifice of our own life: it is something he asks each of us for, once. But in the gospel we read just now (Mk 10:28-31) it is the lesser losses that Jesus speaks of. He lists the things we can lose: the family members and possessions. They are not small, and they are frequent. They are the things the exile and the missionary lose, and losing them is no light matter. The missionary at least knows that he is parting from familiar and well-loved people and things of his own accord, but it is still something he has to get reconciled to. The things a person has to forego against his will are harder to let go.

My sense of this assembly is that it has catapulted us all on to a road we would, perhaps, rather not travel. I know I am on that road,

and that I am on it voluntarily. But even if I had not made the choice for Tanzania when Bob Maloney asked for volunteers, I would be on a road without maps anyway. There would be nothing for it but to be reconciled to God, as the only one responsible.

I am going to Tanzania with a mysterious certainty that I will find God there. I feel sure also that every one of us, and not just “the blessed fourteen” who will still be under 60 in 2010, will find God along the road we are facing. We will find him in solidarity with those he has given us as our life’s companions, our confreres.

Perhaps the most prophetic song of the Irish revolution has been the one about being “on the one road, maybe the wrong road, but the road to God knows where”. Not only the Vincentians, but the whole country, I think, are well and truly on it now. God has given us our confreres, and our compatriots, and our contemporaries, as our companions on the road. If we are reconciled and united to one another, we shall enjoy the journey, and I think we will arrive.

Miscellanea

A LETTER OF NEAL McCABE, 9 December 1867

19 December 1996 will be the centenary of the death of James Lynch CM. While doing research in the archives of the Irish College, Rome, with a view to an article on him for the next issue, I came across some other letters from Irish confreres to Tobias Kirby, rector of the college for most of the second half of the last century. Kirby acted as Roman agent for many Irish bishops and priests.

In *Colloque* No. 29, Spring 1994, Richard Kehoe dealt with Jean-Baptiste Etienne's views on confreres becoming bishops. In the following letter, dated 9 December 1867, written from the Irish College, Paris, by the rector, Neal McCabe CM, we can see that Etienne was not always opposed to confreres becoming bishops. McCabe was appointed bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnois. The letter is also interesting for some views on the international politics of the day.

My dear Father Kirby,

I return you my most sincere and heartfelt thanks for your truly affectionate letter. It gives me great consolation to learn that my letter to His Eminence Cardinal Barnabo was taken into consideration by the Sacred Congregation & subsequently by the Holy Father himself. As soon as I received the letter of His Eminence I went to our Superior General & showed it to him & to my surprise he said "It is the will of the Holy Father – hence accept it". Therefore I humbly submit to God's Holy Will. As it is His Will so I trust in Him alone for the necessary grace.

I enclose a letter for His Eminence the Cardinal Prefect. Will you have the kindness to forward it to him? It gives me the most holy joy to hear the miraculous protection of Heaven in favour of the Holy Father & Rome. Many an anxious hour have we passed during that painful crisis: & our anxiety during the past fortnight during the debates in the Senate & Chamber of Deputies was no less painful. After the debate in the Senate our hopes were lost in all human aid – we placed our trust in Heaven alone & thank God we have not been disappointed.

The Chamber of Deputies were almost unanimously in favour of the Temporal Power. There were 237 against 17. It was only a fair expression of the Catholics of France in favour of the Holy See. It was at the same time the triumph of Catholicity. It was the strongest manifestation of Our Holy Church since the Great Revolution. The Infidels & Heretics feel & acknowledge their defeat.

All your devoted friends here desire to send you their best regards.

Please give my affectionate respects to Father Maher. I again thank you for your consoling letter & beautiful Photograph of the B. Virgin. In her I trust. On her most Blessed Day 8th Dec. I received your kind favour. I recommend myself to your prayers.

I remain, Dear Fr. Kirby, yours very sincerely

N McCabe C.M.

A LETTER OF BISHOP LAWRENCE GILLOOLY,
4 September 1876

Lawrence Gillooly was superior in Cork when he was appointed bishop of Elphin, his native diocese, in 1856. He was the first Irish Vincentian to become a bishop. In 1876 a coadjutor with the right of succession was being sought for the archbishop of Tuam. Gillooly's name was being mentioned but he did not want to leave Elphin.

My Dear Dr Kirby,

I received in due course your esteemed favour relative to our meeting at Tuam – and in obedience to the request conveyed therein, I wrote the enclosed letter to the Card. Prefect. I leave it open that you may read it, and kindly favor me with your opinion on the views I express in it. If you do not think it advisable to present the letter *in English* I beg you will oblige me by turning it into Latin or Italian, and sign my name to the translation.

I so seldom write Latin that it wd take me a good while to translate it myself and I do not wish to delay the communication so long. From the 29th until this day I have not had a free half-hour.

The reference made in the letter to myself is owing to predictions & reports, that have given me no small annoyance for some time past. My determination not to leave Elphin was well known to the clergy of Tuam – and I feel grateful to them for having entirely omitted my name. It is the fear of outsiders that makes me think it prudent to make

known my feelings to the Card. Prefect. I hope the unhesitating and unanimous recommendations of the Suffragan Bishops will decide the choice of the S. Congregation and of our Holy Father. The danger to be apprehended from Dr McE's appointment would, I believe, be entirely removed by the promotion of *Dr Tom* to Galway. This is my own idea. I have not yet spoken to our Cardinal about it, but I will at our next meeting. I think all the Suffragans would approve of such a compromise. Dr McE has some sort of wish to retain the administration of Galway, during his coadjutorship, but to that, we the other Suffragans, are most decidedly opposed for many & grave reasons. I hope the project, if proposed, will not be entertained. There is not one priest in Galway or Kilmacduagh that could be appointed Bishop of Galway. This fact would of course go far to justify & recommend the appointment of Dr McHale.

Excuse great haste & believe me, my dear Dr Kirby,
gratefully & devotedly yours

+ L Gillooly

A LETTER OF JOHN MYERS, 26 April 1877

This letter, written from St Vincent's, Sheffield, is interesting because it shows how the parish was dealing with a particular problem of the day.

Dear Monsigr. Kirby,

We are Vincentians here. I believe this will be sufficient introduction for me to you.

Father Hickey, our Superior, when leaving home last week told me to write to you about our "Saturday League". The Tablet of the 14th inst. had a paragraph regarding this S. League, under the heading of the Diocese of Beverley. I enclose you a copy, cut from the Universe of last Saturday.

I might add that *Saturday* is the ruin of most of our people here. Work ceases at mid-day on Saturdays and the people are then paid. You can easily imagine what follows in a town like this, crowded with public houses and temptations of every kind. Then the absence of restraint, the bad example of parents, the uncomfortable houses &c. drive crowds of our young people to low singing houses, theatres, &c, &c. and absolute ruin.

The Saturday League would be *a* remedy for much of this evil, and we are anxious to work it up as much as possible during this Month-of-May. You could help us greatly by getting the Holy Father to say a word in approbation of it, or to give his blessing, or to attach some indulgence to it. You will know best, yourself, what to get. Allow me then to put it into your hands and to ask you to do what you can for it.

I do not know the exact number of members at present, but I think it must be about five hundred, of actual Saturday abstainers. I believe that considerably more than double that number have been enrolled, but the devil is very strong in Sheffield. I can safely say that the Saturday league, on the whole, is much better kept than any other form of temperance we have tried.

The only devotions attached to the S. League at present are:-

1. Three Hail Marys, every day.
2. The Rosary, in the Church every Saturday night.
3. H. Communion on the second Sunday in each month.

Whatever you do for us will be the more immediately useful the nearer it will be to the beginning of the Month of May.

I suppose we may count on you to present the address (mentioned in the printed resolution) about the end of May. Of course I do not imagine there could be anything *formal* about the presentation of *such* an address at *such* a time.

I remain, dear Monsigr. Kirby,
sincerely & humbly yours in Christ,

John J Myers C.M.

The following is a transcript of the cutting Fr Myers enclosed:

ST VINCENT'S SHEFFIELD AND
THE JUBILEE OF THE POPE

For some years past sympathy with the Pope has led to very practical and useful work in this mission. A large number of the people have formed what is called the Saturday League. What the Saturday League is will be best explained by the form used for enrolling its members. It is as follows:

Form of Enrolment

When the first Pope, St Peter, was in prison, “prayer was made without ceasing by the Church unto God for him”, until “the Lord sent His angel, and delivered him out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews” (Acts xii).

Mindful of this, I desire to join earnestly in the prayer that the Church is now again making for her revered and beloved Pope, who is the same to us that St Peter was to the faithful of his time.

And, that my unworthy prayer may be more acceptable when purified by self-denial, and more powerful when offered to the Sacred Heart of Jesus through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I promise to abstain from all intoxicating drinks on Saturdays until God, in His mercy, shall grant peace and triumph to the Church, and liberty to the Holy and Apostolic See.

“Let God arise and let His enemies be scattered; and let them that hate Him flee before His face” (Ps.).

At a meeting of the League on the 9th inst., the Very Rev. C. Hickey in the chair, the following resolutions were passed unanimously:

1. That the members of the league commence forthwith their preparations for the jubilee of our Holy Father the Pope.
2. That the preparations shall include an address and an offering to our Holy Father.
3. That the names of members enrolled up to the 24th of May shall be sent to Rome for the blessing of the Holy Father on the most happy occasion of the jubilee.
4. That the members are invited to contribute for the purposes of the foregoing resolutions.

The above letters are printed here with the permission of the rector and the archivist of the Irish College, Rome.

TD

OBITUARIES

Father Donal F Cregan CM

Donal Francis Cregan was born in Newcastlewest, Co. Limerick, in May 1911, where he spent his early boyhood before going to Castleknock for his secondary education. For his native Limerick and its countryside he had a romantic attachment all his life, frequently referring to himself as a country boy. This, needless to say, caused some surprise for those who knew him only as a sophisticated academic College President. It was a surprise I think Donal Cregan enjoyed. Just as he enjoyed the story he himself told of a boy from the North of Ireland asking him in class one day why he did not speak like another youth in the class from the same locality whose accent was broad and flat west Limerick. That the two educational centres where he worked were countryside in their clientele and not locally based, always had a strong appeal for him.

In his final two years as a boy in Castleknock, 1928-30, he was made a prefect of the house, a recognition of his exceptional qualities as a student, having as his partner in shared responsibility the late Fr Jerome Twomey. An interesting sidelight on changes in clerical education is the fact that in his last year, along with Jerome, they both took the First Arts course in UCD while remaining boarders in Castleknock. In 1930 Donal threw in his lot for life with the "Vins" and entered St Joseph's, Blackrock, as a clerical student. During his theology studies he was also awarded his MA degree with first class honours for work on the life of Daniel O'Neill, an Irish Cavalier soldier of the seventeenth century. Ordained in 1936 Donal, having completed his studies, was appointed to Castleknock in 1937 and was to remain there for twenty years as a member of the teaching staff, Prefect of Studies and finally as President 1950-57.

As a history teacher in the college he was outstanding, and gave to many an historical perspective on life which was invaluable. His treatment of the lives of Renaissance Popes was so open and enlightening that the present writer has often gone back to it in the face of current difficulties in the Irish Church. Dr Jim Walshe, head of the government programme on AIDS, in a recent newspaper interview when asked about what interests he had outside of his work, mentioned history, and said that he had acquired it at school from a gifted teacher, Fr Donal Cregan, who made the French Revolution come alive in such

a way that you were almost part of it. In 1948 Donal was awarded his doctorate in history by the National University of Ireland.

When Prefect of Studies his academic interests naturally enough had a wider field to operate in. Within the structures imposed by outside agencies Donal tried to have available as broad a curriculum as possible and as wide a choice of subject for every student. This was particularly true of continental languages. His European interests were always strong, and long before it was either fashionable or profitable. Two years after the ending of the second world war he was a member of the Vincentian pilgrimage to Rome for the canonization of Catherine Labouré.

As President of the College he got a chance to do something for the fabric of the institution and erected the Cregan wing so as to bring all the teaching facilities into one manageable area. By the time his stewardship of the College was over a unique collection of reproductions of all the major schools of painting was hanging on the different corridors, and the chapel with its beautiful plasterwork had been repainted. The temporal and spiritual welfare of the boys was always a particular concern of Donal Cregan. I remember as dean having to report morning and evening on the sick list, whether walking or in bed, and in the book of discipline there was only one grave matter and that was the question of bullying.

His approach to the role of Catholic educator was rather the indirect method than the direct. Feastdays were to be days of celebration and all that would appeal to a boy's body and soul. His all round education was to be such that he would look back on it in after life with gratitude for its excellence, for the values it imparted, and for the quality and dedication of its staff. Thus the faith would be matured *humano modo*. He felt that Catholic colleges were not by divine right always the best. It was a crown to be won by each individual institution, and kept by hard work and continuous dedication.

In 1957 Donal's services were requested for St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, by the then archbishop of Dublin, Dr J C McQuaid, and he started on the second half of his career and in many ways the most fruitful. T J McElligott in his book *This Teaching Life* gives pen pictures of six Irish pioneering educationalists, among whom is Donal Cregan. He writes:

By the time, some twenty years later, that he left St Patrick's, the teachers had a magnificent new College, a college that he expanded from an enrolment of two hundred male students to one of nine hundred male and female students. A full degree

course had been devised, a research centre created, a department for teachers dealing with special problems established, and a Journal of Education launched.

He later added:

Of few educationalists can it be said that they influenced education at all levels. Father Cregan was, in turn, headmaster of a secondary school, president of a primary teachers' training College, and briefly, at his request, Professor of Education (UCD).

In the midst of all this extraordinary activity Donal was always conscious that he was a priest and a member of the Vincentian community. It was a matter of great pride for him that he was elected as one of the two representatives to the General Assembly in 1968-69. The international aspect of the Congregation appealed to him and the fact that the assembly was meeting in Rome was an added bonus. He sometimes mused in a humourous way that time robbed him of the one appointment he really would have liked, namely Rector of the Irish College in Paris.

He was naturally an intensely private person with a highly developed degree of self-discipline, and yet nothing gave him more pleasure than the company of the community, outings with confreres, and celebration of the great feasts of the Church and the Congregation. Even today the community meetings held in Drumcondra to discuss the changes brought about by the Second Vatican Council are distinctly remembered by several confreres, because of the insights contributed by Donal into the documents of the Council. The meetings, incidentally, were held in the open, on the flat roof.

One of his salient characteristics was a conviction of the need to change continually in order to meet the challenges of a changing world, provided always that change was fully thought out, based on sound principles, and competently researched.

He had an inherent sympathy for rogues, some would say dangerous, but I think it went further than that. For people in trouble the pastoral side of him came out, and for those who faced real crisis of faith and intellect he had a ceaseless concern and deep understanding. In this area many were helped in a quiet, unobtrusive and unpublicised way. Perhaps the extraordinary diversity of his friends, who crossed all frontiers of faith, race, and opinion, was itself the ultimate recognition of a catholic scholar in the Newman mould. I think it would be fair to say that he shed the light of the gospel among many, who never quite saw it

in that way before, and realised for the first time that the Church was not the monolithic bastion of authoritarian mind set that they had imagined.

Reading a paper on the Irish system of education in University College, Cork, in 1965 and speaking at some length on its problems and offering possible solutions he ended a masterly survey with these lines:

This idea of education as the panacea for all evils has grown stronger with the years. An interest in education is admirable of course. But there is a danger that, in our desire to improve and perfect by educational means we forget the most important factor of all, the mysterious operation of Divine Grace in the soul of each individual child. And it is a salutary thought to remember that many a child advances in wisdom and age and grace almost in spite of systems and curricula, and sometimes even of the well intentioned efforts of parents and teachers. For education is essentially a cooperation with Divine Grace: "Unless the Lord builds the house they labour in vain who build it".

Patrick O'Donoghue CM

DONAL CREGAN CM

Born: Newcastlewest, Co. Limerick, 16 May 1911.

Entered the CM: 7 September 1930.

Final vows: 8 September 1932.

Ordained a priest in Clonliffe College, Dublin, by Dr Francis Wall, auxiliary bishop of Dublin, 27 September 1936.

APPOINTMENTS

1837-1957 St Vincent's, Castleknock.

1957-1976 St Patrick's, Drumcondra.

1976-1995 St Vincent's, Castleknock.

Died: 13 October 1995.

Buried: Castleknock.

Father Thomas Bennett CM

On September 3rd 1945 nine new seminarists were presenting themselves in St Joseph's, Blackrock. First to arrive was Armagh born Tom Bennett. Some time later Fr James Cahalan ushered me into the small parlour. Tom Bennett was the first to greet me. Fifty years later I would be the last to bid him adieu, in the Mater Hospital around 11

p.m. on Friday, 3rd November 1995.

We could recall a hundred endearing characteristics of him in a thousand human memories of him, but before I start I had better temper my efforts with this sober reflection:

There is and always will be in each of us as an individual a private sector which will be incommunicable except to God; only he reads the human heart.

Tom Bennett was a friendly, down to earth, young man, who had completed his secondary studies in St Patrick's, Armagh. He seemed to be made for community, with a good balance of twinkling fun and a delight in companionship. "A man is more of himself if he is ope of a number", he would seem to say.

Soon we were to realise he was a good athlete. The first games of Gaelic football revealed a sureness and a rippling vitality which found him always in the right place to catch the ball, and the ability to connect with his team-mates with an effortless clearance. Yes, the boys from the County Armagh had trained him well. Soon he would take to the game of Rugby with growing ease and aplomb.

Tom was a man for all ventures. The many farming skills he had acquired in Whitecross bore fruit in the little Rock farm. Hay making, potato picking, apple collecting, gardening, hedge clipping and all the many jobs inside and outside the house, were all within his range. You can still see him heaving trunks and cases and, of course, the boat, into the lorry for the Castleknock summer holiday, and on arrival there he was ever ready for a swim, a cycling outing, or a game of cricket, soccer, handball, or just joining the craic. Yes, "all companionship is good". By the swing of his body and the ease of his limbs he was a man of energy in good tune with his surroundings. No wonder Fr Charlie McGowan found it necessary to remind him on a certain day of crisis: "Mr Bennett, this is no laughing matter!".

Fr Matt Ryan tutored him in philosophy and literature and sparked off in him a great interest in the writings of Belloc and other writers.

After the famous "Nature never forgives, nature never forgets" retreat of Fr Jack Gill Tom took his final vows on 8 September 1947. His piety was unpretentious, his outlook practical. He didn't take himself too seriously.

In September 1949 Glenart became our new house of theology. "Bliss was it in that hour to be alive, but to be in Glenart was very heaven". Dr Rodgers' challenge, "Not so much a matter of taking the

rough with the smooth, as of smoothing out the rough”, found willing ears and generous hands in Tom Bennett. The farmer in him came alive. Those three years 1949-1952 must have been the happiest in his life. Belloc’s recipe if “laughter and the love of friends” kept pace with solid study, and the gentle direction of Fr Joe Cullen, not forgetting the buggy trips, and the swimming pool that was not to be.

Tom developed a great interest in photography. His album of the time and tide of events in the Rock and Glenart must be quite the best around. The radiant joy of his ordination and post-ordination photographs show a truly blissfully happy young priest. Even so, how much maturing we all still need. How little we know of the “still sad music of humanity”, and of “the lives of quiet desperation” of so many people. Forty-three years of priestly life as missionary and curate and bursar held many new lessons and surprises.

Sheffield, the steel city, grey in smogs, with a Catholic population of 5%, was to be Tom’s first appointment. In St Vincent’s parish he experienced the loyalty of the committed and the indifference of the lapsed. Not surprisingly, his beloved Glenart claimed him back as bursar from 1953 to 1955. After a further two years in Our Lady’s parish in Hereford Tom was ready for the great work of his life, parochial missions.

St Vincent proved himself the priest of the parish mission. Interesting to recall that from 1625 to 1632 140 missions were preached by Vincent and his priests, and from 1632 to 1660 the priests from one house alone, St Lazare, gave 700 missions.

Tom Bennett was to be the priest of the mission in a special way from 1957 to 1981. *Colloque* No. 24, Autumn 1991, contains his description of these 24 years. The parish mission in Ireland after Easter was a thorough delight, especially in a country parish. People “knew from long experience that missionaries of contrasting styles and temperaments were sent to them”. Tom’s style was practical, direct and encouraging, with homely illustrations and a flicker of humour that convinced one that the missionary was human and approachable. Tom enjoyed the visitation of the sick and elderly.

In the homes, sprinkled round the countryside, they met “the salt of the earth”. Their joy at receiving absolution and the Lord in the eucharist is a memory that remains.

Missions in England and Scotland made different demands. In the past year Tom particularly enjoyed the scene in the film *Priest* where the young priest set out to visit the high-rise flats and experienced the doors

being banged in his face, the snarling of Alsations, and the quite inhuman and sometimes hostile reception. He had met them all in his time.

In 1981 Tom was appointed to the London parish of St Cedd's, Goodmayes, as bursar. The former Methodist church and hall had been transformed from the Cinderella of neglect and dry rot to the beautiful lady of a flourishing parish centre, free from debt by 1978. Tom did a wonderful job of consolidating that good work, and endeared himself to the people for thirteen years. News of his death brought many tears, and one parishioner spoke for all when she said it was like losing a member of her family. Three devoted parishioners travelled all the way to Dublin for the requiem mass.

In 1994 Tom returned to Phibsboro as bursar. The years had taken their toll. He had slowed down, and sometimes he looked aged and grey. No doubt the Lord was transforming him to his likeness by some touches of the Dark Night of the Soul. He continued his generous work for the community. He could resonate to Belloc's:

I challenged and I kept the faith,
The bleeding path alone I trod;
It darkens. Stand about me, wraith,
And harbour me, almighty God.

Michael Dunne CM

THOMAS BENNETT CM

Born: Carrickgollogly, Belleeks, Co. Armagh, 11 October 1927.

Entered the CM: 7 September 1945.

Final vows: 8 September 1947.

Ordained a priest in Clonliffe College, Dublin, by Dr John Charles McQuaid, archbishop of Dublin, 25 May 1952.

APPOINTMENTS

1952-1953 St Vincent's, Sheffield.

1953-1955 St Kevin's, Glenart.

1955-1957 Our Lady's, Hereford.

1957-1961 St Mary's, Lanark.

1961-1968 St Vincent's, Cork.

1968-1981 St Peter's, Phibsboro.

1981-1994 St Cedd's, Goodmayes.

1994-1995 St Peter's, Phibsboro.

Died: 3 November 1995.

Buried: Glasnevin.