

# COLLOQUE

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## Editorial

The past months have seen many changes for the Irish Province; there are times when it seems that ‘we have become fewer than any nation upon the earth’. And yet, as always in life, there times of joy and hope mingled with the sense of loss.

This year saw the 50th anniversary of ordination of Frs Stan Brindley, Tom Davitt, Charlie Gardiner, Brian Mullan and Philip Walshe. Stan and Tom (who, for the information of readers not from the Irish Province, are also cousins) have written on their time in the seminary. One of last years jubilarians, Tom Lane, shares some reflections on service of the Lord.

Pat Collins writes on the psycho-spiritual development of St Vincent and Paschal Scallon has kindly given us permission to reprint an article of his published in *The Furrow*.

I know that most confreres turn firstly to the obituaries; this time, there are quite a few. The sudden death of Michael Prior shocked us all but was also noted in various publications in these islands. I have published a selection of these obituaries in honour of Michael, who contributed so much to scholarship and justice. Fergus Kelly has reflected on the confrere many of us knew best as ‘Micky P’.

The death of our confrere, Seamus O’Neill, who also died in these past months will not have been noted in many publications but Seamus, in his own way, touched many lives and will be as missed by his confreres as Michael.

# Vincent de Paul's Transformation: A Psycho-Spiritual Study

Pat Collins CM

Psycho-biographies are a relatively new genre of literature. They have become increasingly popular since the end of World War II. There are many of them, such as Erik Erickson's *Gandhi's Truth*, (1) William Meissner's *Ignatius of Loyola: The Psychology of a Saint* (2) and Robert Waldron's, *Thomas Merton in Search of his Soul: A Jungian Perspective*.(3) To a considerable extent, the success of books like these depends on the accuracy of the available biographical material and the validity of the psychological theories used to interpret it. The legitimacy of examining Vincent de Paul's early adulthood, from a psychological point of view, is justified by the fact that, as St Thomas Aquinas pointed out, "grace presupposes nature."(4) To examine the dynamics of Vincent's natural growth is to study the anthropology of the Spirit.

This brief study will examine a period of St. Vincent de Paul's life from his ordination at the age of nineteen in 1600 to the time he vowed to serve the poor in 1614. For the sake of clarity we will divide these 14 years into three separate stages.

- 1600-1605 early-adult transition, when he got his degree in theology.
- 1605-1608 a time of crisis when Vincent went missing.
- 1608-1614 years of purification and transformation.

These reflections will focus mainly on the significance of Vincent's missing years, when he claimed to have been a captive in North Africa.

We will use three complementary kinds of information. Firstly, there are the known historical facts: biographical details in letters, conferences and Louis Abelly's three volume *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God, Vincent de Paul* (1664).(5) That said, we know very little about his early days. For example, Pierre Coste devotes only fifty pages of his 1500 page biography to the first third of Vincent's life.(6) Secondly, we will attempt to interpret the available facts in the light of contemporary psychology, especially of the developmental and Jungian kinds. Thirdly, we will use the Ignatian notion of two distinct stages in spiritual maturation, one self-centered, the other God-centered. By using these varied resources we can hope to gain some insight into the psycho-spiritual dynamics of Vincent's inner life during the formative

years of his early adulthood. Not only was his future sanctity rooted in this period, it also marked the time when his experience of the Christian life was most like our own. It is my hope that, as we become aware of the process of Vincent's early growth in human and Christian maturity, we will be enabled to: "become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" Eph 4:13.

### *1. Early-adult transition 1600-1605*

In his *Seasons of a Man's Life*, Daniel Levinson says that men can expect to enter an early-adult transition between the ages of 17 and 22.(7) This is a bridging period between adolescence and early adulthood. The main pre-occupations at this time are a desire to get established in the world and to begin working out an adult sense of identity. These issues tend to be highlighted in what he calls "marker events". Vincent reached one such event when he was ordained. Having become a deacon at the tender age of 17, Vincent had applied to the Bishop of Dax for permission to be ordained a priest. It would appear that the teaching of the recent Council of Trent (1545), which stipulated that a man was not eligible for ordination until he was 24, had not yet been fully implemented in France. Vincent may have lied about his age to get his dimissorial letter. Then he was ordained by an eighty four year old bishop, Francois de Bourdeilles, who was to die one month later. The future reformer of the clergy got off to a rather shaky start himself by means of an irregular, though not an invalid, ordination.(8) No wonder his confreres were never to know anything about its date, place, or circumstances. Prudence, rather than modesty, may have been the motive.

Vincent found it hard to get established in his priestly role. The bishop of Dax offered him a parish but there were legal problems, so he continued to live as he had before. He ran a small school, continued to study at the university and visited Rome. It was a time when he seemed to rely mainly on his own considerable talents for success. He got his bachelor's degree in theology in 1604, which entitled him to comment, before university students, on the second book of Peter Lombard's Sentences. However, he was beset by financial difficulties. He had borrowed money to set up his school. As he admitted, he had a "need for money to take care of debts I had incurred."(9)

We don't know what the priesthood meant to him. There is no indication that he had a personal vocation as a boy. As a talented member of a large family, his parents urged him to become a priest, much in the same way as a suitable marriage might be arranged. They hoped that, besides doing his pastoral work, he would be able to help them financially. While Vincent seemed content to go along with their wishes, there is no clear indication that he had fully embraced the priesthood in an interior

way. As a devout young Catholic he was committed to the role of priesthood in an extrinsic rather than an intrinsic way. Gordon Allport, proposed such a distinction in his *The Individual and His Religion*. He maintained that there were two forms of religion, an immature and a mature variety.(10) Those who espouse extrinsic, immature religion: “are disposed to use religion for their own ends... Persons with this orientation may find religion useful in a variety of ways - to provide security and solace, sociability and distraction, status and self-justification. The embraced creed is lightly held or else selectively shaped to fit more primary needs. In theological terms the extrinsic type turns to God, but without turning away from self.”(11) The beliefs of those with extrinsic religion don't necessarily impinge upon the way they live. They tend to re-write the commandments, e.g. in business matters, to suit themselves.

Allport says that those who espouse intrinsic religion: “find their master motive in religion. Other needs, strong as they may be, are regarded as of less ultimate significance, and they are, as far as possible, brought into harmony with the religious beliefs and preoccupations. Having embraced a creed the individual endeavors to internalize it and follow it fully. It is in this sense that he lives his religion.”(12 ) People with mature, intrinsic religion are usually those who, as a result of a religious awakening and deep personal conviction, have committed their lives to God in a real, as opposed to a notional way. Their growing relationship with the Lord impinges more and more on the way they live. They tend to go against cultural trends by taking conscientious stands on all kinds of ethical issues. At this point in his life it would appear that Vincent was more motivated by what God would do for him than by what he could do for God. Fifty years later he seemed to admit as much, when he wrote: “As for me, if I had known what it was all about when I was rash enough to enter it, as I have come to know since, I would rather have worked the soil than engage in such a fearsome state of life.”(13) Two incidents in 1605 seem to confirm the fact that Vincent's religion tended to be immature and extrinsic in the period just after his ordination.

Early in the year 1605, Vincent de Paul headed off to Bordeaux on a secret mission. He said it would be rash to mention what it was about. He did acknowledge that he was “on the track of a project my foolhardiness forbids me to mention.” It is possible that he had the hope of being offered a good abbey or a rich parish. “What we do know for certain - on Vincent's own admission - is that the business promised to be *of great advantage to him*, and that it would involve considerable expenditure.”(14) But it all came to nothing, and Vincent returned home with an empty purse as a result of the travel expenses incurred.

When he got back from the South, Vincent found that he had been left some tracts of land and furniture in a woman's will. However, there was a complication. The only way he could get his hands on the 300-400 *ecus* his property was worth, was to extract the sum from a man in Marseilles who had defrauded the old lady. To finance his trip and prospective legal action, Vincent had to borrow money. He hired a horse and set off. The future apostle of charity showed little compassion when he tracked down the man he called "a scamp." He had him thrown into jail until he would agree to pay the debt. This he did in due course. This was a far cry from the text "be mindful of prisoners as if you were sharing their imprisonment" (Heb. 13.3). Meantime Vincent sold the hired horse. It was a bit like selling a rented car to raise money. As Bernard Pujo observes: "with this transaction, he made himself guilty of a crime which, in those days, was severely punished with imprisonment or even forced labour on the galleys."(15)

In 1605 Vincent was undoubtedly a talented and well-qualified, and well-intentioned priest of 25. But he had his faults. He could act in an unscrupulous, callous way if it served his desire for ecclesiastical and financial advancement. In fact he was the kind of young priest that a present-day bishop or provincial would probably ask to see for "a wee chat"! Clearly he wasn't saintly at this point in his life.

## *2. The missing years, 1605-1608*

Levinson says that early-adulthood begins about 22 and ends when a man is 45 or so. During that time he can expect to experience more marker events; periods of transition that will challenge his values and sense of self. For Vincent one of these crises took place between the ages of 24 and 27 when he decided to return from Marseilles to Narbonne by sea. We are not absolutely sure where he ended up. In letters, written in 1608, to his mentor Monsieur De Comet, he said that he had been a prisoner in Tunis, having been captured by Turkish brigantines during a sea voyage. While it is certain that Vincent wrote the letters, doubt has been cast on their veracity.

Stafford Poole suggests that there are three possibilities.(16) Firstly, the letters are completely true. However, a scholar named Grandchamps, has shown that this is not viable from the historical point of view. Secondly, the letters could be dismissed as completely false. Thirdly, parts of the letters could be accepted as true, other parts rejected as false. After weighing all the evidence Poole concludes that the letters are probably false. This would explain why Vincent never mentioned his captivity. Both Brother Ducournau and Louis Abelly testify to his life-long silence about it. It would also explain why Vincent made such frantic efforts to have the letters destroyed when they were discovered



some 50 years after their composition. At the age of 79 he wrote these words to Canon de Saint-Martin; "I entreat you by all the favours that God has been pleased to give you, to do me the favour of sending me that wretched letter that makes mention of Turkey. I speak of the one that was discovered among the papers of the late Monsieur De Comet. I beg you again by the heart of Jesus Christ Our Lord to do me this favour that I ask you, as quickly as possible." (17) Was Vincent's silence about his captivity and his desire to have the letters destroyed, motivated by the same kind of embarrassment he felt about his ordination?

If Vincent wasn't in North Africa where was he? There are a number of possibilities. Jean Calvet says, rather gratuitously, that Vincent may have been in Provence where "he was leading a dissipated life on the money obtained from the debtor and the proceeds of the horse." (18) When he came to his senses, he surfaced again. Calvet believed that the account of Vincent's captivity in North Africa was merely a tall tale that he told Monsieur de Comet and his family. Marcel Emerit has suggested that Vincent disappeared because he had been condemned to the galleys for the theft of the hired horse. Having rowed for two years, he was supposed to have escaped and taken refuge in Avignon, a papal enclave. (19)

While some scholars are of the opinion that Vincent was never a captive in North Africa, others say that there isn't sufficient reason to think that he lied about the missing years. Having weighed all the pros and cons, Jose Maria Roman concluded: "As long as we have no proof that Vincent was in some other part of France, or in some foreign place, between 1605 and 1607, we have to accept his statement that he was a captive in Tunis at that time." (20) Since writing his biography of Vincent, Roman has published an interesting article entitled, "The Priestly Journey of St Vincent de Paul; The Beginnings 1600-1612." It refers to recent studies by Pierre Miquel, Bernard Pujo and Bernard Koch CM, which support the substantial truthfulness of the letters. (21) Wherever he was, I believe that Vincent endured a time of transition and crisis.

### *Jungian Archetypes*

Having looked at the missing years from a strictly historical point of view we switch, now, to the perspective of personal narrative, where we look at the available data from a more psychological perspective. It could be argued that Vincent's letters constituted, what is known as a root metaphor. *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* defines a root metaphor "as a fundamental perspective or viewpoint based on a supposition of similarity of form between mental concepts and external objects which though not factually supportable determines the manner

in which an individual structures his knowledge.” Vincent’s account of his captivity is an obvious example of a root metaphor. He used the experience of his captivity in an alien land, whether true or fictional, as an analogy for his quest for a personal, as opposed to a formal, sense of priestly identity. This personal myth enabled him to articulate the religious meanings that surfaced in his life at that time. Like a number of other writers, James and Evelyn Whitehead have suggested that there are three phases in the experience of psycho-spiritual passage.

1. *Onset and restlessness.* A time when our usual accommodation with life is disrupted. Old securities are challenged. There is a feeling of having been hi-jacked, of being a hapless and helpless victim in a sort of no-man’s-land. This is what happened when Vincent disappeared from society.
2. *Darkness and exploration.* A time of increased vulnerability, questioning and doubt. As illusions are challenged, the person begins to ask basic questions about his identity and values. As defense mechanisms break down, *chronos* i.e. unredeemed, sequential time, becomes *kairos* i.e. redeemed sacred time, as God begins to reveal the divine Self in a way that invites the person to change his or her values and sense of identity. This is what Vincent experienced during the missing years.
3. *Resolution and re-stabilization.* As a person lets go of old ways of perception, s/he enters into a new stage of maturity and stability. This would be the symbolic implication of Vincent’s re-emergence in French society. (22)

Some time ago it occurred to me that Vincent’s captivity letters, whether fact or fiction, seemed to reveal a great deal about his unconscious state of mind. The story he told Monsieur de Comet had an archetypal quality. I wondered whether the events it described could be interpreted in a Jungian way as a metaphor of the hero’s journey into the underworld where he has to do battle with all kinds of powerful foes, only to re-emerge, endowed with new strength and wisdom. As one Jungian reference book observes: “The hero is a transitional being. His most human form is the priest...he represents the will and capacity to seek and undergo repeated transformations.”(23) I think that Vincent’s account can be understood as a metaphor for a personal inner journey. So I’d like to propose a tentative interpretation.

Unlike Freud, Jung believed that besides the personal unconscious, where our personal memories and their associated feelings are stored, there is also the collective unconscious. According to Jung, it includes the collective memory of the human race. Its dynamics are structured by

archetypes, which have developed over the centuries. They are psychic capacities whose potential can be consciously activated by feeling laden symbols in myths, dreams and fairy tales. Archetypes are psychological equivalents of our biological instincts, which have such a profound effect upon the way we experience the world. There are four of them, the persona, animus/*anima*, shadow and the self.

1. *The Persona*. This is the self we present to the world, the one that we think will be accepted, approved and liked. It is the packaging of the ego, its mask, its uniform. As such it is the social self, the one that conforms to the expectations associated with one's role. Because we have many roles we can have many sides to our personas. There is always a danger that one's persona takes over to such a point that a person identifies entirely with it.
2. *The Animus/anima*. The word *sex* in English comes from the Latin *secare* which means "to cut", i.e. "to divide". The sexes are divided in two inter-related ways. Firstly, men and women are divided from one another by physical and psychological differences. Some of the latter are due to *nature*, others to *nurture*, i.e. the influences of our cultural prejudices and stereotypes. Secondly, men and women are divided within themselves. Carl Jung has suggested that all of us are bi-sexual from a psychological point of view. As a man I am consciously, and predominantly male. But at an unconscious level there is a feminine dimension or *anima*, as Jung called it. Conversely, while women are predominantly and consciously female, at an unconscious level there is a masculine dimension or *animus* to use Jung's terminology. (24) It is mainly by means of heterosexual intimacy that men and women are reconciled to one another in love and experience an inner reconciliation of the male/female side of their natures. Jung believed that repression of the *animus* is very common in Western culture. In practical terms it means that many people tend rely on a left-brained, typically masculine approach to reality, one that stresses the importance of detached, objective reason and is epitomized by empirical science. What is often neglected and undervalued is a right-brained, typically feminine approach; one that stresses the importance of relationships, intuition and feeling, and is epitomized by religion and the arts. Christian wholeness is only possible when the man is aware of his *anima* because the soul is feminine in relation to God the Father and Jesus his Son.
3. *The Shadow*. Jung called the rejected, unaccepted side of the personality the shadow self. He wrote: "Unfortunately there can be no doubt that man is, on the whole, less good than he imagines

himself or wants to be. Everyone carries a shadow. The less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is." In 1945 Jung gave his most succinct description of what the shadow involved when he said that, "it is the thing a person has no wish to be."(25) Robert Louis Stephenson's story of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, epitomizes this polarity in the personality.(26) Whenever the darker side of our personality with its primitive urges threatens our ego ideal based, as it is, on idealistic beliefs and values, we reject it. It is buried alive in the unconscious. From there it can poison consciousness with negative feelings and attitudes. These we tend to project on to other people, seeing and disliking in them what we fail so acknowledge or accept in ourselves. Incidentally the shadow often appears in dreams in the guise of an inferior individual e.g. a beggar, or an inept person, who is the same gender as the dreamer.

4. *The self.* This is the central archetype which unites the personality, giving it a sense of oneness and firmness. In Jungian psychology the self encompasses the whole personality including the ego. "The self is not only the center," Jung writes, "but also the whole circumference which embraces both the conscious and unconscious; it is the center of this totality, just as the ego is the center of the conscious mind."(27) Jung believed that the ego should not only be attentive to the external world, it should also be open to the inner whisperings of the self. In this connection feeling laden images, myths and dreams can be important. They can enable a person to become sensitive to the personal and collective unconscious.

It would also be true to say that in Jungian psychology, the self is virtually synonymous with God because, at its core, it contains a God archetype which can only be filled and satisfied by means of religious experience of a numinous kind. For Christians, Christ is the supreme symbol of the self. Jung wrote: "In the world of Christian ideas, Christ undoubtedly represents the self. As the apotheosis of individuality, the self has the attributes of uniqueness and of occurring once only in time."(28) The self archetype is the one which orientates, directs and enables the development of the psyche and its other archetypes, so that the person increasingly achieves the goal of individuation i.e. becoming whole through experiential contact with the numinous. If the self is unable to experience the divine, the personality becomes confused and neurotic.(29)

*A Jungian Interpretation of the Missing Years*

Using the Jungian hermeneutic, we can try to understand Vincent's root metaphor. We begin with his sea journey. In the Bible there are a number of marvellous accounts of eventful sea voyages, such as Jonah's vicissitudes on the way to Niniveh (Jonah 1:4-15); the tempest described in Ps 107:23-30; the storm on the sea of Galilee (Mt 8:23-27); and St Paul's scary trip from a seaport in Asia Minor, to Rome. (Acts 27). While these voyages can be understood in strictly historical terms, they can also be interpreted as metaphors. For example, the boat can be seen as the conscious ego which is buffeted by threatening wind and waves of emotion that emanate from the unconscious self. However, the person learns to cope by relying solely on the Lord. As Ps 89:8-9 puts it: "O Lord God Almighty... You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them."

Vincent's tranquil voyage was suddenly and unexpectedly disrupted by his violent capture. He literally became the unwitting victim of "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" when he was wounded during an attack upon his ship. Soon afterwards he had to endure the humiliation and hardship of captivity in a foreign land. These events were outward symbols of the onset of a traumatic inner crisis. It would involve a movement from self-determination to dependency, strength to weakness, from a sense of belonging to alienation. Paradoxically this dynamic, represented Vincent's inner journey from an immature identification with his extroverted ego and its different roles, to a more introverted awareness of his spiritual self and his need to depend absolutely upon God. Arguably, divine providence had allowed his sufferings for a purpose. "The Lord has led you...in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what is in your heart...he humbled you by letting you experience hunger" (Deut 8:2-3).

Vincent's captivity was punctuated by the fact that at different times he was the property of four slave owners. Each one of them seems to have symbolized some aspect of his inner conflicts. His first owner was a fisherman who wanted his help in catching fish. In the case of a priest this role would have had a strong symbolic resonance. In the gospel we read: "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men" (Mk 1:17). But Vincent wrote: "I was sold to a fisherman, but I have always been a very bad sailor; he was obliged to get rid of me."<sup>30</sup> In other words, he didn't seem to have the stomach for the demands of priestly mission.

Vincent's second owner was a learned and amiable alchemist. This is fascinating from a symbolic point of view. Carl Jung wrote a number of books on the psychological implications of alchemy.<sup>31</sup> I'd like to draw attention to points mentioned by Vincent, while suggesting a

symbolic interpretation. He refers to the practice of trying to turn base metal into gold and mercury into silver, by human efforts. Surely this is symbolic of a Faustian desire to be like God. It is also implicit in the reference to the philosopher's stone. As one author had written, "If the Alchemist could impregnate the Stone with his own life, then he had discovered the secret of the Creator."<sup>(32)</sup> It would seem that Vincent was becoming aware of the fact that he had a Promethean tendency to depend, more on his own human efforts, than on God. But to his credit, when the alchemist promised him riches and occult knowledge, if only he would convert to Islam, Vincent resisted this temptation against faith. <sup>(33)</sup> He also referred to the alchemist's talking skull. By means of ventriloquism he made it appear that he was receiving oracles from Allah. Symbolically, this may indicate that, at an unconscious level of awareness, Vincent saw himself as a false prophet, a priest who had only pretended to speak God's word. His account also refers to the fact that he had assisted the alchemist "by keeping the fire going in ten or twelve furnaces." Normally, fire is a symbol of strong emotion and passion. For instance, in 2 Tim 1:6 St Paul urged Timothy, a fellow presbyter, "to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands" (i.e. in ordination). By his reference to the fire, did Vincent, inadvertently, reveal a desire for an inner ratification and renewal of his vocation to the priesthood?

When the alchemist was summoned to work for the supreme Sultan he gave Vincent to a third owner, his nephew, who Vincent described as "an absolute heathen." This seems to be a reference to his own shadow self, i.e. that part of himself which was the very antithesis of what a good priest should be. Jung believed that the extent that a person failed to recognize or accept his or her inferior self, was the extent to which s/he would be inclined to project it on to others. It looks as if the farmer, who owned him, was the carrier of some aspects of Vincent's shadow. However, when this man heard that the French king had dispatched an ambassador to Tunis with letters permitting him to reclaim Christian slaves, he dashed Vincent's hopes of freedom by selling him on to a renegade from Nice in Savoy.

Vincent referred to his fourth owner as his "natural enemy," presumably because he had renounced his Christian faith and married three wives. Once again there is reason to think that this man too, represented his alter-ego, and as such, was also a carrier of Vincent's shadow. Inwardly, Vincent was split between his acceptable, idealistic priestly self and his unacknowledged heathen self i.e. his instinctual urges unfettered by Christian ethics or beliefs. Jung once wrote: "What drives people to war with themselves is the suspicion or the knowledge that they consist of two persons in opposition to one another."<sup>(34)</sup> On

another occasion he said: "That I love my enemy is undoubtedly a great virtue...but what if I should discover ...that I myself stand in need of the alms of my own kindness, that I myself am the enemy who must be loved – what then?"(35) He saw and despised in his master's infidelity what he failed to recognise or accept in himself.

### *The Women in the Account*

The women in the story are also very interesting. There were the renegade's three wives, one Greek Orthodox and two Moslems. From a Jungian point of view they seem to be projections of different aspects of the *anima*, i.e. the repressed, feminine aspects of Vincent's un-conscious mind. They are reminiscent of the three graces in classical mythology.(36) The Greek could have epitomized wisdom. She liked Vincent and treated him with kindness. But it was one of the non-Christian women who, surprisingly, had the greatest influence on Vincent. Having heard him talk about Christianity, it was she who urged her husband to return to the practice of his religion. It has always struck me that it was unlikely that the Moslem wife would have suggested - in such a self-sacrificing, benevolent way - that her husband should leave her in order to return to his homeland and the practice of his faith. Presumably, she, and any children she had, would have had been left with no means of economic support. Furthermore, the other two wives would have been furious. From a Jungian point of view, however, it would make sense to interpret this vignette as a reference to the way in which Vincent's unconscious mind urged him to sacrifice the many joys of marriage, symbolized by, not one, but three wives, in order to willingly embrace the charism of celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom.

From a Jungian point of view, the benevolent power of Vincent's *anima*, was personified by the two sympathetic wives. Psychologists, who have written about the *anima*, say that that this archetype can be either negative or positive. Vincent's experience, as symbolized by the Moslem wife, in particular, was entirely positive. Erich Neumann's study of the feminine archetype maintained that it had two possible characteristics, *the elementary*, i.e. to do with birth, nourishment, and caring; and *the transforming* i.e. to do with change and action.(37) Vincent had the latter kind of experience. It is significant that he ultimately attributed his deliverance to another woman, in the person of Our Lady. For many Catholics she is the supreme symbol of the benevolent aspects of the *anima*. Vincent testified: "God always enkindled in me a belief in deliverance, through the ceaseless prayers I raised to him and the Holy Virgin Mary, by whose sole intercession I firmly believe I was rescued."(38)

Not only was Vincent influenced by the benign feminine archetype,

so was his owner, who symbolically, was Vincent's alter-ego. Some time later, they both made good their escape to Europe. Symbolically, it sounds as if, inwardly, the dividing wall of division between Vincent's acceptable priestly self and his unacceptable, secular-self had been breached in such a way that inner alienation began to give way to a new form of integration (Cf. Eph 2:14). The crossing of the Mediterranean was reminiscent of the people of Israel crossing from slavery in Egypt, via the Reed Sea, to the freedom of the Promised Land. There is reason to believe that during the missing years, Vincent had got in touch with unconscious archetypes in such a way that he was enabled to make an inward exodus from his selfish, controlling ego, to a more God-centered sense of priestly identity.

### *An Ignatian Perspective*

Needless to say, the Jungian interpretation proposed here, is of necessity, tentative in nature. We are on firmer ground when we suspect that Vincent experienced spiritual disillusionment which exposed his shortcomings. In his *Spiritual Exercises*, St Ignatius describes two stages of Christian growth, which are epitomized by the dynamics informing weeks one and two of the *Exercises*, respectively.(39) In the first, the main dynamic at work is that the person is motivated by a self-centered need to receive the mercy, love, consolations and the spiritual or material gifts of God. I may say in passing that there is nothing wrong with this kind of desire; it is prompted by the Lord and is a necessary preparation for the second stage of spiritual development. In some respects it corresponds to Allport's description of immature religion. However, a problem arises when individuals get stuck at this stage and, and fail to move on to the second.

In the second stage, the main dynamic, at work in the person, is motivated by a God-centered desire to be united to Jesus as he really is, i.e. poor humble and dependant on God. S/he no longer focuses on the gifts or consolations of God, but rather on the God of consolation and the gifts. Inwardly, s/he shifts from asking, 'what can God do for me?' to 'what can I do for God?' There is evidence that this is what happened in Vincent de Paul's case. During and after his captivity, he shifted from a self-centered to a more God-centered spirituality. I suspect that he came to acknowledge how his worldly desire for money, status and advancement were incompatible with the spirit of Jesus. It would seem that, during this period, he began to be motivated by a desire to imitate Jesus by willingly embracing poverty, humility and dependence on God. He had a growing desire to be united to him by humbly serving the Lord in the poor of his day. We can infer that this dynamic was at work in Vincent's life by the way in which he lived, following his return to



Paris, in 1608. As the Lord says, "by your fruits you shall be known" (Mt. 7: 16).

### *3. Purification and transformation 1608-1614*

Vincent was 27 when he returned to the capital. As we look at three subsequent events we will see how much he had changed. The first concerns the way he handled a threat to his good name. He was sharing an apartment with a judge at the time. One day while he was sick in bed, a thief made off with the judge's money. Vincent describes what happened next: "A member of the community was once accused of having robbed his companion, and that before the house where he was staying. The charge was not true. Finding himself falsely accused, although he never meant to justify himself, the thought nevertheless did occur to him: 'See here; you are going to justify yourself, are you not? You are being falsely accused you know!' 'Oh no', he said, as he lifted his mind to God, 'it is necessary that I suffer this patiently'." (40) What a change. At 24 years of age Vincent demanded his rights, now he was willing to renounce them even if it meant the loss of his good name.

His attitude to money had also changed. In 1611, he received a gift of 15,000 *livres* from John Latanne, master of the Paris mint. He immediately gave it to the Charity Hospital "to tend and nurse the sick poor". Gone was his earlier preoccupation with cash. In its place is evidence of a growing sensitivity to the poor. However there is also evidence that Vincent was tempted to resist his growing attraction to a life lived in total commitment to the poor. For example in 1610 he wrote to his mother: "I put great hope in God's grace, that he will bless my efforts, and soon give me the means of an honourable retirement so that I may spend the rest of my days near you" (41) Retirement at the age of 29! Vincent still had mixed desires, his purification was not yet complete.

The year 1610 inaugurated another marker event. Vincent knew a priest who was experiencing terrible temptations against faith. (42) He prayed that God would allow him to accept this man's burden in return for his peace of mind. As a result the theologian's trial ended while Vincent entered the period of interior struggle. Later he was to say "God often wishes to establish, upon the patience of those who undertake them, the good works that are to endure, and for that reason he allows such people to suffer many trials." (43) Well, Vincent battled with doubt and dark moods for about three years. During this time he learned, with the help of Cardinal de Berulle and others, to die to the last vestiges of his pride. Finally, as William Purcell wrote, "he made up his mind to devote himself wholly and irrevocably to the service of the poor out of love for his Divine Master and in order to imitate him more perfectly." (44) When his doubts disappeared at this time, Vincent's

faith was as strong as his commitment to the poor was complete. Faith and commitment found a united focus in the person of Jesus poor and humble.

### *Conclusion*

Over thirteen years or so Vincent had gone through a remarkable interior change. Because of the constraints of space, I have chosen not to describe many of the significant events that occurred in his life between 1609 and 1614, such as his appointment as Chaplain to Queen Marguerite of Valois (1610), absentee abbot of Saint-Leonard-de-Chaume (1610), parish priest of Clichy-la-Garenne (1612), tutor to the de Gondi children (1613). Suffice it to say that he made the following words of scripture his own: “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph 4:22-24). Instead of making him bitter, his many trials had made him better. During his time of passage he had discovered “the potency of disorder.” Bit by bit he had become disillusioned with his youthful sense of identity and priorities. He learned to embrace his priestly vocation in a new, more interior way. As a priest from a humble, peasant background, he had tried to escape from the implications of material and spiritual poverty, as from an enemy. But between the ages of 20 and 33 he learned to love this enemy within. When he finally befriended this inner and outer adversary in 1614, he found that it was Jesus he was loving in the guise of the poor of his day. He discovered the truth of the words: “As often as you did it for one of these the least of my brothers, you did it for Me” (Mt 25:44) Vincent was about to commit himself, as a priest, to follow Christ the evangelizer of the poor. Surely the dynamics of his gradual transformation can act as a template for our own journey to sanctity by means of intimate union with the King of the Beggars.

1. (New Haven, CT : Yale University Press, 1992)
2. (New York: Norton, 1969)
3. (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1994)
4. *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation* ed. Timothy Mc Dermott, (London: Methuen, 1991), 296.
5. (New York: New City Press, 1993)
6. P. Coste, *The Life and Works of St Vincent de Paul*, Vols 1-3, (New York: New City Press, 1987)
7. (New York: Ballentine, 1979), 20, 56.

8. On the subject of the ordination see Jose Maria Roman, "The Priestly Journey of St Vincent de Paul: The Beginnings 1600-1612" *Vincentiana* (May-June, 2000), 209.
9. Pujo, *Vincent de Paul: The Trailblazer* (Notre Dame University Press, 2003), 21.
10. (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 31-112.
11. David Wulff, *Psychology of Religion: Classic and Contemporary Views* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1991), 228.
12. Wulff, *Psychology of Religion*, op. cit. 229-229.
13. Letter from Vincent de Paul to Canon Saint-Martin (S.V 5:567)
14. P. Coste: *The Life and Works of St Vincent de Paul*, vol. 1 (New York: New City Press, 1987), 26.
15. *Vincent de Paul: The Trailblazer*, op. cit., 25
16. *Tunisian Captivity: A survey of the controversy* (St John's Seminary, California), 71.
17. Coste, op. cit., 40.
18. *St Vincent de Paul*, op. cit., 31.
19. Pujo, *St Vincent de Paul: The Trailblazer* op. cit., 269.
20. *St Vincent de Paul: A Biography* (London: Melisende, 1999), 83.
21. *Vincentiana*, (May-June, 2000), 214.
22. Cf. Pat Collins, "The Pain of Self-discovery" *Intimacy and the Hungers of the Heart* (Dublin: Columba, 1991), 58-73.
23. Samuels, Shorter & Plaut, "The Hero," *A Critical Dictionary of Jungian Analysis*, (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1986), 66.
24. Cf. John Sanford, *The Invisible Partners: How the Male and Female in each of Us Affects Our Relationships* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980)
25. Collected Works, vol. 16, par. 470.
26. Cf. John Sanford, *Evil: The Shadow Side of Reality* (New York: Crossroad, 1981)
27. *A Critical Dictionary of Jungian Analysis*, op. cit., 135
28. "Christ as a Symbol of the Self" quoted by June Singer, *Boundaries of the Soul: The Practice of Jung's Psychology*, (New York: Anchor Doubleday, 1994), 393.
29. Cf. C. Jung "Psychotherapists or Clergy" *Psychology and Western Religion* (London: Ark, 1988), 202.
30. Jean Calvet, *St Vincent de Paul* (London: Burns Oates, 1952), 24.
31. The letters are printed in full in J. Calvet, *St Vincent de Paul*, op. cit., 22-30.
32. Cf. *Psychology and Alchemy; Alchemical Studies; Mysterium Coiunctionis*.
33. In "The Priestly Journey of St Vincent de Paul: The beginnings 1600-1612" op. cit., 215, Jose Mara Roman, indicates that many other captive priests in North Africa, engaged in scandalous dissensions and licentious behaviour, while failing to strengthen the faith of other Christian slaves.
34. "Psychotherapists or the Clergy" op. cit., 209
35. "Psychotherapists or Clergy" op. cit., 207.
36. T. Chetwynd, *A Dictionary of Symbols* (London: Paladin, 1982), 7.

37. *The Great Mother* (New Haven: Princeton University Press, 1963), 24ff.
38. Calvet, *St Vincent de Paul*, op. cit., 24.
39. D. Fleming (ed): *A Contemporary Reading of The Spiritual Exercises* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Resources, 1980), pars 137-146; K. Rahner, *Meditations on Priestly Life*, 'The Two Standards' (London: Sheed & Ward, 1974), 170ff.
40. Purcell, "St Vincent de Paul: Spiritual Life" *All Hallows Annual 1959-1961*, 55.
41. *All Hallows Annual*, op. cit., 55
42. Cf. Luigi Mezzadri C.M. *A Short Life of St Vincent de Paul* (Dublin: Columba, 1992), 15.
43. Coste: op. cit., vol. 1, 44
44. *All Hallows Annual* op. cit., 74

# Ad Perpetuam Rei Memoriam: The First Year Seminaire of 1946-47

Thomas Davitt CM

As the sort of spiritual formation which we received in 1946-47 has long gone out of fashion I decided to “write it up” for the Provincial Archives. Over a period I jotted down items as I remembered them, then got them into some sort of order and filled out the account with material from the archives. This preliminary version was then sent to each of the five other surviving members of the 1946-47 seminaire for emendation, comment and correction. (Paddy Hopkins left during the first year and Eddie McGlinchey was incardinated into the diocese of Clifton many years after ordination). Some of these consulted other confreres from around the same time. All this was done in 1992-93, and this final version is being prepared in Rome in December 1993.

## *Arrival at ‘The ‘Rock’*

On 3 September 1946, eight youths arrived at the old St Joseph’s, on Temple Road, Blackrock, always known as The Rock, to “join the Vins”. They were: Edmund McGlinchey, Brian Mullan, Patrick Hopkins, Stanislaus Brindley, Thomas Davitt, Philip Walshe, Charles Gardiner and Brian Magee. The first and last named had been at St Patrick’s College, Armagh, the others at St Vincent’s College, Castleknock. We were assigned an order of seniority (in Vincentian terminology “order of vocation”), which was simply that of age, as given above, though that was not the usual manner of reckoning. Four of us were still under 18.

[*A note en passant*: There were many words, expressions and titles special to the community. To indicate these in this article I will be using more capital letters and inverted commas that would be normal practice]

We were brought up to our sleeping quarters on the top floor. There were two dormitories, though that word was not used. Each was called a “seminaire”, the Big Seminaire with eight cubicles, and the Small Seminaire with five. That gave thirteen places; eight of these were taken by the new arrivals; one cubicle in the Big Seminaire was taken by the Soin of Seminaire and one in the Small Seminaire by the Admonitor. The thirteenth cubicle was taken by a second year seminarist. Other second year seminarists were in double rooms, and one triple room, on the middle corridor.

The word “seminaire” had three meanings: it was used for the dormitory, it was used as a collective noun for the group of seminarists

and it was used to designate the two year probation period before vows (e.g. He began his *seminaire* in September 1946). The words novice, noviceiate and novice-master were never used. The word seminarist was colloquially abbreviated to *sem*. Sometimes, even more colloquially, *bolshie*, abbreviated from Bolshevik, was used by students about seminarists, though that may not have come into use until after a series of lectures on communism by Fr Gerard Shannon a few years later.

Each cubicle in the *seminaires* was curtained off at night, with the curtains drawn back during the day. Inside the cubicle was a bed, a marble-topped washstand (sometimes known as a Donovan, reason unknown) with a washbasin and jug; in its press was a chamber pot, colloquially known as a charlie. The final items of furniture were a chair and desk. The desk was in the form of a locker about three feet high, in which our clothes were kept. Hinged to the top of this was a slanted writing surface, supported in position by two sliding wooden arms, which could be drawn out when this was in use. On top of the desk were two wooden bookshelves. At one end of the Big *Seminaire* was a large wardrobe in which our good *soutanes* and suits were hung. Just inside the door was a table with the handbell used for *seminaire* exercises, notepaper, envelopes, and sewing materials, etc. Hanging over this table was the printed *seminaire* timetable (which I have been unable to find in the archives).

The next day we began a four-day retreat, given by Fr Patrick Travers; this took place in the Immaculate Conception Oratory, on the first floor of the new wing built in the 1930s. One of the seminarists who had finished the first year was assigned to us as “*ange*”, a shortened form of *ange gardien*, the French for guardian angel. He initiated us into the routine and brought us to where we should be at any given time. He also initiated us into the practice of using “Mister” plus the surname instead of Christian names. Our *ange* was Mr McCullen. On the evening of the 7th, we were officially “received” into the community when the Director, Fr James Cahalan, tied a cincture around each of our waists; cinctures for students and seminarists did not have the tassels which the priests’ ones had.

The following morning during Mass, five seminarists who had completed their two years of *seminaire* took their vows. (At that time there were only perpetual vows; temporary vows came in a few years later). Eight who had completed their first year *seminaire* took their “Bon *Propos*”, a sort of official good resolution to persevere into the second year. Two who had entered some weeks later than 3 September 1945 still had to complete the twelve months of their first year *seminaire*.

We discovered right from the start that many French words were part of the everyday vocabulary, including *ange*, *Bon Propos*, and *seminaire*

already mentioned. The student or seminarist in charge of any office was called the “soin” of that office, though the word was always pronounced like the English word “swan” and not in the French way. We would meet “faute” and “colloque” later.

After breakfast on the 8th we were greeted by all the students and seminarists and heard, for the first time, that peculiar greeting: “Welcome off retreat, Mr...”. We also learnt that “Mister” without a surname was a recognised form of address.

There was a High Mass at 10.00 [?], as on all feastdays, but there was never a sermon at High Mass. (A conference on the feast would be given on some day preceding the feast). Holy Communion was not given at the High Mass as all had received at the community mass before breakfast; fasting from midnight was still in force as a condition for receiving.

After High Mass there was a walk. In early September this was usually to the Forty Foot for a swim, as it had been all during the summer. Tram fare was provided for one direction, most using it for the return journey. There was a rule of separation between students and seminarists; they did not normally mix with or talk to each other. On feastdays, however, the Soin of Seminaire asked permission from the Director for “amalgamation”, which was granted for a specified period. On a feastday this usually meant that a student invited a seminarist to accompany him on the walk.

Before dinner everyone went to the chapel for Vespers and Compline. This was in Latin, not sung. This was our first introduction to the complications of the Latin office, and our ange had tried to explain in advance how to find our way in our new copies of the *Horæ Diurnæ*. (No one seems to have thought it rather odd to be praying Vespers and Compline before lunch!).

After grace at dinner and the reading of a passage from the New Testament, the superior raised his biretta and said “Tu autem, Domine, miserere nobis” at which everyone else raised their birettas and replied “Deo gratias!”. This was the recognised formula that the customary silence in the refectory was suspended.

On coming out of the chapel after dinner all the students and seminarists went into the Students’ Library for coffee and biscuits, known as a *Gaude*. As dinner was at 3.00 this had brought us into the late afternoon. I cannot recall how the rest of that 8 September was spent. I think it may have been then that we were assigned our various offices. The next day we began our routine seminaire timetable, as detailed below.

### *The daily time-table*

Early on, probably on 9 September, (or earlier if our own new ones had not been delivered by Clery’s), each of us was issued with an old

soutane from the Poverty Room by the First Soin of Poverty, as well as an old biretta. Our new soutanes and birettas, brought in with us, were reserved for Sundays and feastdays. (These old soutanes were sometimes called “boilers”, an abbreviation, apparently, of “boiler suit”). Later on in the term, as it got colder, douillettes were available for those who wanted them. These were long overcoat-type garments reaching to the ankles, standard winter-wear for priests in France over their soutanes. The winter of 1946-47 was exceptionally cold and the fuel situation was very bad.

In the house students and seminarists always wore the clerical collar, soutane and cincture, and on many occasions had to wear, or carry, the biretta. Some also favoured wearing the biretta outdoors, though this was optional. On all occasions away from the house everyone wore a hat, clerical collar and chesterfield suit. The jacket of this was long, technically *usque ad genua* but in fact not as long as that; short lounge jackets were not permitted for students or seminarists. At University College the students from Clonliffe and All Hallows wore a black tie; we always felt somewhat superior with our clerical collars!

Sometime later in September each new seminarist paid a visit to Dr Martin Morris, on Idrome Terrace, for a medical check-up, even though we were supposed to have had this done by our own doctor before entering.

#### *The first-year seminaire timetable for weekdays, 1946-47*

##### *5.00 Rising.*

At 5.00 a.m., one of the lay-brothers rang the electric bell and sounded the big gong, which stood at the end of the bottom corridor outside the sacristy. The Soin of Seminaire in the Big Seminaire, and the Admonitor in the Small Seminaire got out of bed, turned on the lights, and said *Benedicamus Domino*. All responded *Deo gratias* and immediately got out of bed, kissed the floor and said a short Latin prayer, then washed, etc. There were special Latin prayers for washing, for putting on the soutane and for putting on the cincture. Then beds had to be made (though the preferred word was “dressed”). Washbasins were brought out and emptied into a small sink between the door from the corridor and the door into the toilet; chamber pots were emptied into the WC.

##### *5.25 The five-minute bell*

This was again both the electric bell and the gong, sounded by the students' Soin of Bell. Birettas were worn on the way down to Prayer. (The single word “prayer” was usual, rather than Morning Prayer). There were no fixed places in the choir stalls, except that the seminarists were always in the front stalls. The priests were at prie-dieux on the



left, inside the door, in front of the Passion Altar; some priests might go to the benches on the right. The brothers always occupied the two rear benches.

### *5.30 Prayer*

This began with vocal prayer, but not from the breviary. The presiding priest gave out the antiphon *Veni, Sancte Spiritus* and its versicle and collect, in Latin. Then a student or seminarist read the rest of the vocal prayer from a Formulary of Prayer. It was mostly in English, but the Pater, Ave and Credo were in Latin. The reader was appointed for a week, and this assignment went down in descending order of vocation of students and seminarists throughout the year. After the final prayer in the Formulary the First Point was read from the meditation book. After about fifteen minutes kneeling the presiding priest rapped on his prie-dieu and everyone sat up, and the Second Point was read. After about another fifteen minutes the Third Point was read. At 6.00 there might be a priest going to one of the oratories for Mass. If so, the seminarist appointed to serve Mass in that oratory for that week would leave to serve him, bringing up with him the chalice, paten and cruets from the sacristy. At about 6.15 the presiding priest again rapped on his kneeler and all knelt down. Some time later he gave out the Angelus in Latin, and then the reader gave out the Litany of the Holy Name, also in Latin. At the end of the litany the presiding priest said the two following collects in Latin, and then the reader read two more prayers, in English, and everything ended about 6.30. During Prayer a student or seminarist might get up and ask a priest to hear his confession; for this they went into the sacristy.

### *Variations in the routine of Prayer*

On Sundays and feastdays rising was one hour later than normal. On Sundays, about twenty minutes before the end of Prayer, the Superior or Assistant Superior (but not, I think, any other priest in their absence) called a student or seminarist to "repeat" his prayer; he simply called out the name "Mr So-and-so". The student or seminarist called then stood up and began with a fixed formula: "Sir, I began my prayer this morning by placing myself in the presence of God and invoking the help of the Blessed Virgin, St Vincent, my patron saint and the other saints to whom I have a particular devotion". He then explained how he had spent the time of prayer. He concluded with the formula: "Sir, this is how I spent my time at prayer this morning. I humbly ask pardon of the community for the scandal I have caused it and beg of you to recommend me to its prayers". He then knelt down and kissed the floor, while the Superior muttered: "Mr So-and-so recommends himself to your prayers". After

this the Superior “repeated” his prayer in the same way; on rare occasions a priest might be called for “repetition”.

On Fridays, after the opening vocal prayers, there was Chapter of Faults. The Superior, (rarely the Assistant Superior and never any other priest) went up to the sanctuary step and sat on a chair facing down the chapel. The students, seminarists and brothers left the chapel while the priests made chapter. When the priests were finished the students and seminarists re-entered the chapel and made theirs, and then the brothers came in and made theirs.

Each person, in descending order of vocation, knelt down in front of the Superior, kissed the floor, and used a fixed formula; three faults were always mentioned: “Sir, I humbly tell my faults and accuse myself in the first place of...”, ending with: Sir, for these and all my other faults I humbly ask pardon of God and penance and absolution of you”. The faults mentioned were supposed to be public breaches of rules, not sins. When each had finished, the Superior would say: “Say a *Pater* and *Ave*”; on rare occasions he might say: “Say a *Miserere*” (i.e. Ps 50).

Chapter also involved “asking for charity”. Each Friday, one student or seminarist, in rotation in descending order of vocation, would “ask for charity” in a standard formula, (which I cannot now recall or find). The Superior would then say: “Mr So-and-so asks for your charity”. If anyone wished to respond he would go down on his knees and say: “Sir, in a spirit of charity and humility, it seems to me that my dear confrere Mr So-and-so should...” Giving of charity like this was, in fact, very infrequent.

### 6.35 approx., *Mass*

All the students and seminarists left the chapel after Prayer and went to get their surplices and missals. The theology students, (known as first, second, third and fourth “divines”), usually kept these in their desks in the Theology Hall. This was the large classroom in the new wing at the other end of the bottom corridor from the chapel; it was the same size as the Immaculate Conception Oratory above it. Philosophy students left theirs in their desks in the Philosophy Hall, a small classroom next to the Theology Hall, also part of the new wing, and the same size as the bedroom above it. The first year seminarists kept theirs in their places in the seminaire, and usually brought them down with them on their way to Prayer, leaving them in the Seminaire Hall or on a convenient windowsill. (I seem to recall that leaving them on windowsills was officially frowned upon). There was a Latin prayer to be said while putting on the surplice.

Those who were appointed for the week to serve Mass in the various oratories went to the sacristy to find out if there would be a Mass in

the oratory for which they were marked. If there was, they were given, by the student sacristan, a chalice and paten in a carrying case, and the cruets of wine and water, and brought these up to the oratory.

Mass was in the Tridentine rite, all in Latin, with only the server making the responses; there was no homily. Mass was followed by a period of thanksgiving, measured as a fixed number of minutes after Mass had ended; this was noted by the student Soin of Bell, who rapped on the woodwork to indicate the period was over, and all then left the chapel. Surplices were taken off and carefully pleated on some convenient flat surface and rolled up in their sleeves and returned to wherever they were normally kept. Whatever time was then left before breakfast was spent merely hanging about in some way or another, perhaps getting a breath of fresh air outside a door, or leafing through a book at one's desk or at the seminaire bookcase on the top corridor, or saying a "suffrage" rosary somewhere. (A suffrage rosary was one said for deceased confreres; each seminarist had to say a specified number of these).

### 7.30 [7.20?] Breakfast

The bell was rung for breakfast and all went into the refectory. There were fixed places at table, in descending order of vocation, the senior students being nearest to the priests' table. All took up position, facing the crucifix over the fireplace at the end of the refectory furthest from the priests' table, holding birettas in joined hands at chest level. The Superior gave out, in Latin, Grace before Meals, which varied according to the liturgical season. At the end of this the reader turned and faced him and said *Jube, Domine, benedicere*; the Superior then gave the final blessing and all sat down. The students or seminarists who were appointed for serving that week then gave out plates of porridge, served at a side table from a large pot by one of the lay brothers. The rest of the breakfast fare was tea, bread and butter and a boiled egg; sausages replaced the egg on Wednesdays.

The reader at breakfast was always a seminarist, appointed for a week in descending order of vocation. When all had sat down he went up into the raised reading desk and began by announcing: "Maxims and Counsels of St Vincent de Paul; maxim for September 9th", or whatever the date might be. This was read from a small book with that title which was kept on the reading desk. He then announced the title and author of the book currently being read, and "Chapter four, continued" or whatever the chapter was.

The book at breakfast was always a spiritual book, usually a biography. If the name *Jesus* occurred everyone raised his biretta; if it occurred often, the Superior removed his biretta and everyone else did the same.

During the reading, the Superior or Assistant Superior (but not normally any other priest) might correct a mispronunciation by simply calling out the correct pronunciation. The reader raised his biretta, and re-read the sentence from the beginning, incorporating the correct pronunciation. If there was a footnote to be read, the reader announced “Footnote” and read it, and then said “Text” and resumed the reading. The first book we heard at breakfast was *Father Bernard Vaughan*, by C C Martindale SJ.

Breakfast lasted about half an hour and its end was signalled by the Superior ringing a small handbell, which was on the priests’ table. Everyone stood up, faced the crucifix, and Grace after Meals was said, in Latin. All then filed out and went to the chapel, saying silently a *Miserere*. If someone was not finished his breakfast when the bell rang, he could sit down again after Grace and finish off. The servers and the reader then had breakfast together, but not in silence. The others left the chapel after a very short stay, the end of which was signalled by the usual rap on the woodwork.

If any student or seminarist, by reason of his office or otherwise, wanted to ask something from the Director, a “line” was formed opposite the sacristy and library doors, and the Director dealt with each one in turn. On an odd occasion he might raise a laugh from the others at the expense of a petitioner.

### 8.00

For the first year seminarists there followed a period of “corporals”, i.e. corporal, as opposed to spiritual, exercises. The Soin of Seminaire assigned some work, out in the grounds, to each seminarist. For the autumn period this was usually raking up fallen leaves. For the Second Soin of Games it meant removing fresh cow dung from the football field. These deposits were colloquially known as “blocks”, and he was unofficially called “Soin of Blocks”.

During our first year seminaire, James Johnston, a fourth divine, was in poor health. During the day he spent a lot of time in the room at the end of the top corridor, at the seminaire end. This was a small room, just the width of the corridor. It was used, as necessary, as a sick room. It was known as *The Bailey*, because the beam of the Bailey Lighthouse on Howth shone into it after dark. One of us had to maintain a fire in this room during the day, bringing up turf or logs, and cleaning out the grate each morning.

Three minutes before the beginning of the next exercise the Soin of Bell rang the small bell fixed to one of the posts of the ambulatory (which was, in fact, used as a turf store). All the seminarists then returned to the house, changed their shoes and went up to their desks in the seminaire, to be in place for 9.00 [?].

*Timetable for the rest of the day*

At time of writing I cannot recall (and cannot find in the archives) the exact times of the exercises, nor the exact sequence, but the following things were done, and roughly in this order.

*Reading the New Testament*

On coming in from corporals there was a period of half an hour of reading the New Testament at one's desk. The NT was divided into 365 sections, starting on 1 January with Mt 1:1 and ending on 31 December with the final section of the Apocalypse. We marked these divisions into our NTs. The passage for the day was first read through on one's knees, prefaced by the *Veni Sancte Spiritus* and a special prayer in Latin for beginning NT reading, which we had all written on a blank page at the back of our NTs. Then we sat up and held the NT in our hands; it was not permitted to rest it on the desk. Three verses from the daily passage were to be learnt by heart, and a few minutes before the end of the period each seminarist went to the seminarist next senior to him in vocation and repeated these verses from memory. The period ended with another special prayer in Latin for ending NT reading, and the hymn *Maria, mater gratiae*. (All seminaire exercises, whether in common or in private, started with the *Veni Sancte Spiritus* and ended with the *Maria, mater gratiae*; this also applied to classes, conferences and Colloque). This reading was done every day. On Wednesdays and Sundays it was done in one's own time, but no spirituals were permitted in the interval between Mass and breakfast. The Rheims-Challoner version of the NT was obligatory, though some seminarists had copies of the Knox or Westminster versions (with permission, of course) for private use. The end of the period, and of all other similar periods, was signalled by the Soin of Bell (officially "of Cloche") ringing a handbell and announcing the next exercise.

*10.30 Sweeping.*

This was done twice a week, on Tuesdays and Fridays. Each seminarist was allotted a particular area of the house, a corridor or part of the stairs, the big or small seminaire, or an oratory. A sweeping brush, a small handbrush and a dustpan were got from the brush press on the top corridor. Then one went down to the entrance to the kitchen area (an area which one never entered) and from a receptacle there took a handful of wet tealeaves and went off to one's assigned area. The tealeaves were spread over the floor and then swept up, collecting the dust in the process. For this, and similar exercises, the skirt of the soutane was pulled up and out through the pocket opening on one side, to leave one's legs more free. Sweeping lasted half an hour.

Some time later in the morning there was “dusting” (for 15 minutes?) when each seminarist returned to his swept area and dusted all the flat surfaces, such as windowsills.

### *Preparation for class*

This was a special period [of half an hour?] before each class, indicated by a ringing of the bell and an announcement by the Soin of Bell.

### *Classes*

There were two classes each day for the first year seminarists, except on Wednesday which was the day for the Walk. Elocution class was taken by Fr Joseph Sheehy in the Seminaire Hall, a large three-window room, on the bottom corridor between the Refectory and the Philosophy Hall. Fr Joe was not able to climb the stairs to the top corridor, where all other seminaire classes were held in the Sacred Heart Oratory. This had about ten single desks in it, plus a table at which the Director sat.

All classes were taken by the Director, though in our year Fr Gerard Galligan sometimes replaced Fr Cahalan; this seems to have been some sort of occupational therapy for Fr Galligan, following surgery for a brain tumour.

The following were the class subjects, all once a week except those marked (2), and I’m not completely sure about those. Each class lasted half an hour: New Testament (2), Old Testament, Regulæ, Common Rules, Etiquette, Council of Trent (2), Liturgy, Elocution. Regulæ was explanation of the rules of the seminaire, the book being in Latin. Liturgy was really a class in rubrics: how to serve low Mass, the duties of thurifer at Benediction and High Mass, and many other ceremonies in which seminarists might be involved. Council of Trent was, I think, merely to familiarise us with ecclesiastical Latin, using the Catechism of the Council of Trent as a textbook. In elocution class Fr Sheehy led us in breathing exercises and tried to teach us how to read out loud properly. We used *Bell’s Standard Elocutionist* and Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*. There were also two very small pamphlets written by Fr Sheehy and privately printed, originally for use in All Hallows, on voice production. He always referred to these as his “two volumes”.

### *11.30 a.m.*

“*Elevenses*” (though this word was not used; I cannot recall what this function was officially called).

Tea, bread and jam were available in the refectory. The jam was a concoction prepared by Br Jerome Collins, being a mixture of various jams and marmalades, diluted with water. Because of this dilution it dropped through the bread and stained the tablecloth on the serving table, and

frequently also our soutanes. This refecton was taken standing up.

### *Rosary*

This was after Eleveses. It was around Angelus time, but probably not exactly midday. It was said out loud, in Irish [once a week or always?] by the first year seminarists as a group in the tribune. In October and May, Rosary was said during Benediction in the chapel, and this seminaire exercise was omitted.

### *Oratories*

Each first year seminarist who had been assigned an oratory spent half an hour “doing” it. This involved putting away the vestments, taking the missal, missal stand, charts and candlesticks from the altar, spreading the altar cover over the altar and doing any necessary tidying up. The oratories were: Sacred Heart, on the top corridor; Immaculate Conception on the first floor; St Vincent’s, in the tribune of the chapel; Sacred Passion, in an alcove at the rear of the chapel on the left side as one faced the high altar; Blessed Virgin’s, off the first landing in the Priests’ House. The Blessed Sacrament was not reserved in any of these oratories. The two first year seminarists who were assistants to the student sacristan spent this time in the sacristy or in the small room on the bottom corridor known as the “caboose”, where candlesticks were cleaned and polished, and similar work connected with the chapel was done. These two seminarists were known as “cabooseers”. Any seminarist who did not have an oratory went outside for corporals at this time.

### *Reading the Imitation*

Sometime during the morning [or was it the evening?] a section of *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis was read for fifteen minutes, preceded by the hymn *Ave, maris stella* (in Latin). As with the NT, the *Imitation* was divided up into sections marked for each day of the year.

### *Lecture*

This was another example of a French word remaining in current use, in this case the word for “reading”; it was pronounced in the English way, not the French. It referred to spiritual reading. It was, I think, from 2.00 to 2.30 on ordinary days. It was done at one’s desk and, as with the NT, the book had to be held in the hands all the time. For first year seminarists the book was Rodriguez’ *The Practice of Christian and Religious Perfection*, Volume I. This exercise was colloquially known as “Reading Rod”. On Sundays the lecture was from the Common Rules, and on Wednesdays from Bougaud’s biography of St Vincent. On feastdays there was “Lecture of the Feast”, with suggested suitable reading matter

put on the notice board by the Soin of Spirituality, and the books in question laid out on one of the top corridor window-sills.

### *Writing Regulæ*

This took place for fifteen minutes, starting after Lecture. It simply meant transcribing into a notebook the text of the Regulæ. The purpose seems to have been twofold, getting us acquainted with the text of the rules and accustoming us to writing ecclesiastical Latin. Perhaps a third reason was that the books were so tattered that they were rather inconvenient for normal use.

### *Ad lib.*

This was a fifteen-minute period between the end of Writing Regulæ and the bell for dinner, for washing hands, etc.

The start of each seminaire exercise was indicated by the Soin of Bell (sometimes called Soin of Cloche, but that title was, I think, gradually becoming less used) ringing a small handbell, and announcing in each seminaire what the exercise was. The sole exception to this rule was the ad lib period, when the bell was rung but no announcement was made. The bell for any activity which was not confined to the seminarists was rung by the student Soin of Bell.

### *Particular Examen*

This took place in the chapel, five minutes before dinner. It consisted of the *Veni, Sancte Spiritus* in Latin, a couple of minutes of silence, and the *De profundis*, also in Latin. Each seminarist was assigned by the Director some subject for his particular examen.

### *3.00p.m. Dinner*

Grace was as at breakfast, though with a different formula. The reader at dinner was always a student. He started by reading a section of the New Testament. In 1946, the version used was Mgr Ronald Knox's first one, printed for private use in 1944. The books at dinner were of general interest, biography, history, travel or current affairs. The first book we heard read at dinner was *American Impressions*, by John Ayscough. This was the pen-name of a Mgr Bickerstaff-Drew, and the book was in the form of letters written to his mother in England; it was taken off after four days and replaced by *Travels in Tartary, Tibet and China* by the Abbé Huc. When the Superior rang the bell at the end of the meal the reader read the current day's section of the *Martyrologium Romanum*, in Latin, after which the Superior said grace and all went to the chapel, as after breakfast.



*Football*

On Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays (not Thursdays, for some unknown reason) there was a game of rugby in the afternoon. We togged out in the seminaire, put on a coat or douillette over our togs, put on boots in the boot room and went up to the football pitch, which was beyond the cemetery and along the Dunardagh wall. The Soin of Seminaire had to approach the Director on each occasion to ask for permission to have amalgamation during football, as students and seminarists mixed for the game. Sometimes the Director himself togged out with us. The referee was always a student who, for some reason, was off tog-out.

A quick shower was available after football, at least for some, as the number of showers was small. Most contented themselves with washing their lower extremities in one of the two baths. Because of the fuel shortage the water was not always hot. The time for all this was rather limited.

*5.00 p.m.*

This was the time at which the evening part of the seminaire timetable started; the activity at this time varied according to the day of the week.

On Monday there was a conference for students and seminarists, given by the Director in the Immaculate Conception Oratory. As the door of this oratory closed automatically someone [Soin of Oratory, Soin of Seminaire?] held it open until the Director had come in. There was Chapter before the conference. The conference lasted half an hour. No student or seminarist was "called" at this conference. The conference was followed by a visit to the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel; the seminarists went to the tribune. The visit was for fifteen minutes, and one of the "visits" was read from a book by St Alphonsus Liguori; some other similar books were also available in the tribune. If there was no conference or other exercise this visit was at 5.00.

On Tuesdays the visit was followed by Faute, for students and seminarists. Each one, in order of vocation, went in to the Director's office, knelt down, kissed the floor, and used the following formula: "Sir, I humbly ask pardon of God and penance of you for..." As at chapter, the fault mentioned was not supposed to be a sin but a non-public breach of some rule.

To indicate that someone was with the Director a biretta or book was left outside the door by the person concerned; sometimes a handkerchief was left, but this was frequently the subject of an admonition (See below). There was no Faute on doubles of the first or second class, according to the old liturgical classification.

On Thursdays at 5.00, there was a conference for the seminarists, again in the Immaculate Conception Oratory, by the Director. The

subject of the conference had been previously given to the Soin of Spirituality by the Director and put up on the seminaire notice board. Each seminarist was expected to have given some thought to the subject and before he began his conference the Director would “call” some seminarist to give his thoughts. The called seminarist would stand up, holding his biretta in his joined hands at chest level and begin with a fixed formula: “Sir, the subject for this evening’s conference is.... On thinking over this subject I thought...”. He would then speak for a few minutes and end up with another fixed formula: “Sir, these are my few thoughts on the subject”. For this conference, as for Repetition of Lecture, Colloque and Psalm Colloque, no notes were allowed; all had to speak from memory.

On Fridays at this time there was singing class for students and seminarists, taken by Fr Matt Ryan in the Theology Hall, where there was an old harmonium. It usually took the form of preparing for the next High Mass, with possibly also some items for Benediction. As well as the general singing body there was a smaller group, consisting of some with better voices and more competence in music, called the Schola. This group prepared polyphonic motets, usually four-part, for special occasions, especially Christmas, Holy Week and Easter.

### *Colloque*

On Saturdays at this time there was Colloque, in the Sacred Heart Oratory. It was preceded by Chapter of Offices. Each seminarist who had been appointed to some weekly office ending that day (e.g. reading at breakfast) confessed “all the faults committed while reading at breakfast, particularly for... On occasion the Director might indicate some fault which he had noticed, but which the seminarist had not mentioned.

The subject for Colloque had been given earlier by the Director to the Soin of Spirituality, who had put it up on the notice board. Each seminarist was expected to have prepared something to say on the subject. After Chapter of Offices the Director might have some things to say (though not on the subject for Colloque), and he then left the oratory. The Soin of Seminaire would then take the Director’s place at the table and call the senior seminarist to begin, who then stood up, holding his biretta in the usual way, and said: “The subject for this evening’s Colloque is... In the first place I thought... and in the second place... and in the third place... These are my few thoughts on the subject”. What was said lasted only about three minutes, or even less. Each seminarist was called to speak, in descending order of vocation. If all had had their say before 5.30 was reached, each then had the opportunity to give “further thoughts”, or to say, “I have no further thoughts”.

*Admonitions*

I think it was also on Saturdays that the seminaire Admonitor came around to each seminarist in his cubicle and asked if he had any admonitions for the seminaire in general (general admonitions) or for any individual seminarist (particular admonitions). He then went to the student Admonitor to ask if he had any admonitions for the seminaire. Finally he went to the Director, told him of the admonitions which he had received and asked him if he had any to give. On Sunday, he again went round to each seminarist individually. He read out the general admonitions to each seminarist. If there were particular admonitions for a particular seminarist, he read them out only to the seminarists concerned. Each seminarist wrote the general admonitions, and any particular ones for himself, into a special notebook. As with all visits to seminarists' cubicles or students' rooms, such transactions were conducted on one's knees, and in as low a tone of voice as possible.

Perhaps this is as good a place as any to mention that the basic rule was silence in the house, but that speaking was permitted in certain places and at certain times. If outside of these times and places speaking was necessary (reasonably liberally interpreted) in a corridor, the usual practice was for the two persons in question to go into the nearest doorway and whisper!

On one day each week [Thursday?] the Soin of Poverty came round to each seminarist to ask if he needed anything from the Poverty Press, such as razor blades, toothpaste, copybook/notebook, and so on. He entered these requirements into a notebook (and, I think, read them to the Director) and then went to the student Soin of Poverty who was in charge of the Poverty Press, and kept its key. It was a large press on the top landing at the head of the stairs. There was also a Poverty Room, on the middle corridor above the bootroom; in this were kept items of clothing.

*Weekly offices*

Reading at breakfast, serving in the refectory, serving Mass, Big Polish, and perhaps some others, were assigned to seminarists on a weekly basis. There was a small peg-board on the top corridor, opposite the door of the Big Seminaire. Each seminarist's name was on one of the pegs and the peg was inserted by the Soin of Seminaire into the appropriate hole in the board to indicate the office for the week. The students had a similar board beside the student notice board on the landing of the middle corridor.

*Oratories: [time?]*

At some time in this evening period there was half an hour for preparing

the oratories for the following morning, laying out vestments, uncovering the altar, putting out the charts and missal, and doing anything else necessary. All this was done each evening, even though there seldom was a Mass in the Sacred Heart Oratory or in St Vincent's in the tribune. Two seminarists who did not have an oratory spent this time on Small Polish, polishing the floor of the chapel. (For Big Polish see below). If there were any other seminarists they went outside to do corporals.

### *Evening Meditation*

This was in the Immaculate Conception Oratory, and was for the seminarists only. It was colloquially known as Pom, an abbreviation of *Meditatio pomeridiana*. It lasted half an hour. It started with some prayers read by the Soin of Seminaire, plus a "point" for meditation. Then everyone made a full-length prostration on the floor. Sometimes, for example in preparation for some feast, novena prayers were incorporated.

With regard to Pom certain months were designated "privileged months", the rest being "non-privileged". The privilege in question was that if there was Benediction in the chapel on any day in a privileged month the seminarists had *both* Pom and Benediction! In the other months there was no Pom if there was Benediction.

After Pom we went straight to the chapel for Particular Examen, as before dinner. The priests (and sub-deacons and deacons, if there were any) were already in the chapel having just finished anticipated Matins and Lauds (!). The student Soin of Bell had been waiting in the sacristy, listening for a particular point in the Office. When he heard the words in question he went out and rang the electric bell and sounded the gong. This was the sign for the Soin of Seminaire to say the concluding prayers of Pom.

### *7.00 Evening Meal*

This meal was just tea, bread and butter, quantity unlimited (within reason). There was no reading at this meal, but on some days one of the theology students would preach a sermon, mission style, from the reading desk. This was not to instruct us but was part of the student's work for the Sacred Eloquence class.

### *Common Recreation*

This was common, in the sense that it was taken together by the entire seminaire. It normally took place after dinner, if there was no football, and after the evening meal. It also took place after breakfast on Sundays and feastdays. The students took theirs on the Students' Walk, along the Dunardagh wall beyond the cemetery. The seminarists took theirs on the

Seminaire Walk, along the Sweetman's Avenue wall. On wet days the students walked up and down the bottom corridor, while the seminarists did the same on the top corridor; on these occasions the normal rule of silence in the house was suspended.

On coming out from the visit to the chapel which followed all meals we went to the bootroom and changed into outdoor shoes. The first seminarist to have changed went outside the bootroom door and waited there in the yard until another arrived. The arriving one said *Laudetur Jesus Christus* to which the other replied *Nunc et semper, Amen*. When a third arrived, and the greeting was exchanged again, they headed off as a threesome to the Seminaire Walk. Those who were delayed for any reason made their individual way to join the others. There were elaborate rules about how latecomers joined already existing groups, twos joining threes, and whether they joined on the right or left, and so on. Three was the normal grouping at recreation. The basic idea was that all groupings were to be random, to avoid what were called "particular friendships". We walked up and down the length of the Walk, which was partially illuminated by the lights on the other side of the wall. Periodically admonitions would be given about the first group not going down to the extreme end of the Walk, but turning round too soon! The student Soin of Bell signalled the end of recreation by ringing the small bell attached to one of the uprights of the Ambulatory. In 1946, the Ambulatory was not used as such, but was full of stored turf. Silence re-commenced as soon as the bell was rung.

*8.15 p.m.*

On coming in from recreation we changed back into house shoes in the bootroom and went up to the seminaire for study, except on Wednesdays when there was Repetition of Lecture. Our spiritual reading on Wednesdays was an assigned section of Bougaud's biography of St Vincent. The pages to be read had been indicated on the seminaire notice board in the morning by the Soin of Spirituality. As Wednesday was a sort of mid-week free day (see below), spiritual exercises were done in private, at our own convenience.

On coming in from recreation on Wednesdays, the seminarists went to the Immaculate Conception Oratory. After Chapter the Director called on some seminarist to "repeat" his lecture, in other words to summarise what he had read in the assigned section of Bougaud. The seminarist who was "called" stood up, held his biretta in the usual way and began: "Sir, I read for my lecture today chapter...of Bougaud". He then gave his summary of what he had read, ending with: "Sir, this is what I read for my lecture today". The Director might then question him, or some others, and would usually elaborate on some point(s) from the assigned

section of the book.

The only other weekday on which this evening period of study was broken into was Friday. On Fridays, priests, students, seminarists and brothers all went to the chapel at 9.00 [9.15?] for a conference. After the *Veni, Sancte Spiritus* the Superior called a student (never a seminarist) to give his thoughts on an assigned section of the Common Rules. This was very short, and was followed by a much longer reflection on the same passage by one of the priests, in descending order of vocation throughout the year. The three very old priests did not normally contribute to this or to most other exercises. Sometimes this form of conference was replaced by a “read” conference, which consisted in the reading of part of one of St Vincent’s conferences. In January and February, the Friday conference took the form of reading the Superior General’s very long New Year’s letter, after it had been translated from the French.

Apart from Friday, the study period for the seminarists ended at 9.15 with “ad lib”. This was the time for filling water jugs and drawing the curtains around each cubicle. Night Prayer was at 9.30 in the chapel. As with Morning Prayer it was from a Formulary, with a mixture of Latin and English. The reader was the same person as at Morning Prayer. Before the concluding section of the Formulary he read a short portion of one of the points for the following morning’s meditation.

After Night Prayer there was “solemn silence” until after breakfast the following morning. “Lights out” was at 10.00, the lights being turned out in each seminaire by the Soin of Seminaire and the Admonitor respectively. Each seminarist kissed the floor before getting into bed.

*Variations in the normal weekday routine;*

*Wednesdays*

Everything was the same as on other weekdays as far as the end of breakfast. After breakfast the Soin of Seminaire asked the Director for the destination of the Walk. The Dean of Students did the same for the students’ Walk, always in a different direction from the seminarists’ one. The Soin of Spirituality also asked about the section of Bougaud to be read. Each then put the appropriate notice(s) on the notice board.

All were supposed to be out of the house by 8.45. We changed in the seminaire and then went down to the chapel. If there was already a seminarist in the chapel the next arrival went out with him. As with Common Recreation, this was a method of ensuring that pairings for the walk were random. Second year seminarists (except those at university, during term time) also went on the Wednesday Walk. The destination of the walk was only a general indication and any route could be chosen. We did not go in a crocodile, and generally the pairs of seminarists were

quite a distance from each other, and on different roads.

On Wednesdays, spiritual exercises were done at our own convenience, provided we had them completed by 6.00 p.m. It was usual on the walk to call in to some church(es) and “do” either the NT or the “visit”. I think it was also permitted for the pair to say the rosary together while walking. We were not supposed to be back before 11.30, the time for “elevenses”.

It was possible for individual pairs of seminarists to ask, from time to time, for a “Long Walk”. This could be for the purpose of visiting some church, or other place out of range for the duration of the normal length of walk, or perhaps merely for the sake of going for a longer walk. On these occasions some form of “elevenses” was taken along. One could return from a long walk at any time up to examen before dinner.

At the end of common recreation after dinner on Wednesdays there was Psalm Colloque for the seminarists. Unless the weather was bad this took place at the seats beside the tennis court off the Seminaire Walk. As with most appointments the giving of a psalm colloque went in descending order of vocation. The Soin of Spirituality notified in advance the seminarist in question, and indicated the psalm to be explained. The psalms chosen were those we would meet with in Sunday Vespers and Compline, and, later in the year, those we would meet with in Holy Week. He also gave to the seminarist an English translation (by a Fr O’Sullivan) of St Robert Bellarmine’s commentary on the psalms. At the actual colloque this volume was not in evidence and the seminarist expounded the psalm, in its Latin version, from his *Horæ Diurnæ*; all the rest of us brought our copies of the *Horæ Diurnæ* along. Until it came to my turn, I did not know about the Bellarmine-O’Sullivan book and thought that my predecessors had worked out the commentary for themselves! If it was raining Psalm Colloque was held in the Seminaire Hall.

After Psalm Colloque there would have been about an hour before study at 5.00. As far as I can recall this period was totally free. We could spend it in the Seminaire Hall, in the grounds or up at our desks reading a library book (see below), or doing anything else which was optional.

Free time on Wednesdays was often used for giving or getting haircuts. Some students and seminarists were much better than others at haircutting.

### *Weekends*

Four seminarists were assigned to Big Polish each week, and it took place during Common Recreation after the evening meal on Saturdays. This was the only activity officially authorised to take place during Common Recreation. Two of those designated, on their knees, rubbed

wax all over the floor of the chapel. The other two had “polishers” with which they went over the waxed floor to bring it up to a shine. These polishers were weighted lumps of wood, with some felt attached, at the end of long wooden handles, and they were pushed and pulled over the whole floor. This did produce a good shine, but it was quite hard work. If it were finished before the end of Common Recreation this four would go out and join the others. Small Polish, mentioned earlier, consisted of a daily run over the floor with the polishers, but without any waxing; the absence of the latter made this a considerably easier task.

On Saturday or Sunday each seminarist made the Stations of the Cross, in his own time, in either the chapel or the Immaculate Conception Oratory. The method of doing this was optional, in the sense of using a book or otherwise, but the form of it was prescribed: Kneel down, kiss the floor, “do” the station, kiss the floor and proceed to the next station.

### *Sundays*

Rising was at 6.00, with Mass and breakfast correspondingly later. There was Common Recreation after breakfast. There was a practice sermon by one of the theology students in the chapel at 9.30, which seminarists had to attend, after which we were free. Oratories had to be done, of course, as well as spiritual exercises, but these were not at prescribed times.

At some time during the morning the Student Soin of Spirituality went around the house replenishing the holy water fonts. If anyone was present when he arrived at a place he would say “*Aqua benedicta*”, and anyone present would answer “*Sit nobis salus et vita*”

A special singing class for first year seminarists was held in the Theology Hall on Sunday mornings. It was taken by Fr Matt Ryan.

Spiritual reading (“lecture”) for the seminarists on Sundays was from the Common Rules.

The students had a Walk on Sunday mornings, somewhat shorter than that on Wednesdays. They had asked for this at a Visitation some years before. At subsequent Visitations they had asked for it to be abolished, but unsuccessfully.

Everyone attended Vespers and Compline in the chapel before dinner on Sundays and feastdays. There was Common Recreation after dinner, and then we were free till 5.00.

There was benediction every Sunday and feastday, and every day during October and May. It was in the evening, with time taken partly from recreation and partly from study. The Student Soin of Singing put a notice on the notice board appointing the organist (i.e. harmonium player) and two chanters, as well as the hymns. The organist and chanters could be students or seminarists. The normal hymns were *O*



*salutaris hostia*, *Tantum ergo* and *Adoremus/Laudate Dominum*. The notice indicated which versions of these were to be sung, from a small two-volume Plainchant Hymnal. Sometimes, especially in seasons such as Advent, Lent and Paschaltide, something from the *Liber Usualis* was assigned. Vernacular hymns were never sung.

### *Monthly Retreat*

Once a month, on a Sunday, there was a one-day retreat for both students and seminarists. The Director gave a conference in the morning in the Immaculate Conception Oratory. Special readings from the NT and the *Imitation* were assigned. Silence was, of course, observed. The retreat did not last all day, but I cannot recall when it ended; perhaps at 5.00. The main feature of the monthly retreat was writing "Communication". Each one wrote out something about his spiritual life, sealed it in an envelope and put it in the letter-box in the door of the Director's office. During the week the Director called each seminarist and student to his office and discussed what each had written. This was the basic structured form of spiritual direction, though, of course, anyone could go, at any time, to see the Director.

### *Vocation*

Another monthly happening was "Vocation". In spite of the wording used, as given below, the day was assigned. Each seminarist, individually, went in to the Director, knelt down, kissed the floor and said: "Sir, I celebrate my vocation about this time; please, may I make chapter". Chapter was then made in the usual way, after which the seminarist said: "Sir, please admonish me of my faults that I may correct them".

After leaving the Director's office the seminarist went, in turn, to each of the other seminarists in their cubicles. Both knelt down and kissed the floor. Then the visiting confrere said: "My dear confrere, I have come to ask the assistance of your prayers to help me to thank God for the great grace of my vocation, which I celebrate about this time. I humbly ask pardon for all the scandals I have caused you and beg you to admonish me of my faults".

The other seminarist then said: "My dear confrere, I congratulate you on the great grace of your vocation, which you celebrate about this time. I freely forgive you for all the scandals you have caused me, and I will remember you at Mass and Holy Communion. But it seems to me, in a spirit of charity and humility, that..." Both then kissed the floor.

### *Visitors*

Seminarists were allowed to receive visitors on the first Sunday of each month, except during Advent and Lent. Those of us who were from

Dublin, or near it, usually had visits from our parents and family each permitted Sunday. When we were told that our visitors had arrived we had to find the Director, usually in the priests' Community Room, and ask permission to go to them. This was granted for half an hour, after which we could return to the Director to ask for an extension, for another half-hour; this was always given, but normally only one such extension was granted. Seminarists who were not from the Dublin area usually received less frequent visits but of longer duration.

#### *Letters in and out*

Letters for the seminarists were given by the Director to the Soin of Seminaire, who handed them out or left them on the seminarist's desk. The Director had the right to open all incoming letters and to decide whether to give them to the addressee or not. This right, as far as I know, was never exercised, but on a few occasions in the year, the Director might partly slit open the envelope as a reminder.

A seminarist was allowed to write one letter per month, but had to ask permission first. For any reasonable cause permission would be given for extra letters. The envelope had to be left unsealed. It was put in a letter-box on a windowsill on the top corridor. The Director had the right to read all out-going letters, but I do not know how frequently he might have used this right, if ever.

All out-going letters, from students and seminarists, were later collected by the Soin of Seminaire from the Director. He went out the back gate on to Sweetman's Avenue at the end of the Seminaire Walk; for which the Director had given him a key; this was the gate used by the priests going over to Carysfort for Mass. He posted the letters in the box near the junction with Carysfort Avenue.

#### *Amalgamation*

As mentioned already, there was a Rule of Separation between students and seminarists. (And also, incidentally, between students, seminarists, priests and brothers). Amalgamation was asked for by the Soin of Seminaire from the Director on various occasions; it was always given for a specified duration. It was granted for football, for feastedays, for the *gaudes* during the Christmas season, and for any special occasions which might arise. Amalgamation meant that students and seminarists took recreation together, either inside or outside. Seminarists could go into the Students' Hall, a large room on the ground floor of the new wing, under the students' rooms, stretching to the back of the building. On such occasions seminarists were allowed to make use of the gramophone there. For students the gramophone was allowed on feastedays and during the holidays. It was an old spring-powered model, the spring of

which frequently broke.

Amalgamation was also usually granted on Saturday afternoons of international rugby matches. There was an extension loudspeaker on the mantelpiece of the Students' Hall, connected to the radio ("wireless" in those days) in the priests' Community Room; this would be switched on for the commentary on the match. Some kind priest once notified the students that in certain circumstances this loudspeaker acted as a microphone, transmitting to the Community Room. The first radio for the students was presented by Fr Tom O'Donnell at Easter 1947.

### *Advent*

During Advent seminarists [and students?] were not allowed to have visitors. Instead of "recited" Vespers and Compline before dinner on Sundays there was sung Compline.

### *Christmas holidays*

The holidays started on Christmas Eve. For the seminarists they ended on New Year's Day, for the students on the Epiphany. Rising was at 6.00 every day and all normal seminaire exercises were done in private, but had to be finished by 6.00 in the evening.

Preparation for Christmas started some time in November. Singing Class dealt with the propers from the *Liber Usualis*. The seminarists learned a four-part Latin version of *Silent Night* for Midnight Mass, whilst the students [or the schola?] learned a four-part *Adeste, fideles*. No vernacular carols were sung.

Non-liturgical preparation also started much earlier. Every day during the holidays there was a fire in the Seminaire Hall. The sawing and chopping of logs for this started weeks in advance, and the logs were stacked up at the end of the Hall furthest from the fireplace. The usual sort of Christmas decorations were put up in the Hall, and all Christmas cards received by the seminarists were put on the mantelpiece, or on any other convenient flat surface.

Permission had to be asked from the Director to keep Christmas presents. I think the official attitude was that seminarists should not receive presents at all. Money was handed in to the Director to be kept for possible use later, after vows. Books, depending on what they were, could be retained by the seminarist, or kept by the Director till after vows, or even confiscated. Presents, such as fountain pens, propelling pencils, or clothing were dealt with by the Director on an individual basis.

One type of present, received by both students and seminarists, however, became common property. This was what was usually known as "grub": sweets, chocolate, biscuits, Christmas cakes or fruit. All such

grub was handed to the Dean of Students and stored away in a press. Each day, after dinner, there was a gaude in the Students' Library, with amalgamation. Coffee was served, plus a selection of the grub. This went on every day until supplies ran out, even if this was after the end of the holidays. The Dean of Students would notify a student or seminarist of the day on which his cake was to be used.

On Christmas Day there was the full traditional Christmas Dinner, with turkey, ham, plum pudding, and all the rest. I think it was on the evening of Christmas Day that there was a concert in the Students' Hall. Our seminaire had prepared a four-part version of *Denver is nearer tonight*; where this song was found, or why it was chosen, I do not know. The usual bareness of the Hall was reduced by the erection of a stage at one end, in preparation for the students' play during their half-year holidays.

Each day during the holidays there was Common Recreation outside after each meal for a fixed period. This period was shorter than usual for evening recreation, and the seminarists could go in to the fire in the Seminaire Hall.

Outside the periods of Common Recreation, the seminarists spent a lot of time in the Hall, around or near the fire, reading or chatting. This was in such contrast to the usual routine that it was greatly appreciated. There was a billiards table in the Hall, but the cushions were so perished that it was almost impossible to make use of it.

As regards reading, seminarists were normally confined to the spiritual books in the seminaire library, which was merely a large bookcase on the top corridor. During the holidays, though, they were allowed to borrow non-spiritual books (but only by Catholic authors) from the Students' Library. This had to be done through the Seminaire Librarian, the Students' Librarian via the Director

On one day of the holidays the gramophone from the Students' Hall was brought over to the Seminaire Hall and someone (probably the Soin of Hall) could go into the Students' Hall to obtain any records requested.

The highlight of the holidays was the visit to Castleknock for another Christmas Dinner, followed by a film. Wine was put on the tables, but seminarists were let know that the tradition was that seminarists did not avail of it; the tradition, though, was not 100% observed. Lemonade, in the old-style siphons, was also available. Students and seminarists from Dublin were allowed to go home on the way to Castleknock, a much-appreciated concession. Those not from Dublin were compensated by extra visits from home during July.

St Teresa's, on Temple Hill in Blackrock, was run in 1946 as an old-style orphanage by the Daughters (Sisters, then) of Charity. One

afternoon during the holidays the seminarists went over there to put on a concert for the children, and afterwards to enjoy yet another Christmas Dinner (in this context, colloquially known as a “feed”).

At the end of the holidays all seminaire offices were changed, as well as places in the seminaires and rooms. The same happened again at Easter. For the students, whose year was divided into two rather than three, offices and rooms were changed at the half-year holidays.

### *Lent and Holy Week*

During Lent, as during Advent, visitors were not allowed, and sung Compline replaced recited Vespers and Compline before dinner on Sundays.

Preparation for the Holy Week and Easter liturgy (“ceremonies” was the usual word) started quite a while in advance. A special notice was put up by the student Soin of Ceremonies appointing students and seminarists for the various ceremonies in St Joseph’s, Dunardagh, Carysfort [and St Teresa’s?]. This notice was most elaborately done, largely in “Gothic” or “Olde Englishe” script. The weekly seminaire Liturgy Class covered these ceremonies, dealing especially with the assignments traditionally given to seminarists, such as thurifer. Singing Class also prepared for these ceremonies.

As there was still the rule of fasting from midnight before receiving Holy Communion, all Holy Week ceremonies were in the morning.

On Holy Thursday the custom of “doing the seven churches” was observed by those who wished to do so [or by everybody?].

On Good Friday, when the Blessed Sacrament was removed to the Altar of Repose in the Small Parlour, the seminarists did a thorough spring-cleaning of the chapel. They also did the two seminaires.

On Holy Saturday, the twelve prophecies were chanted by the seminarists, in ascending order of vocation.

*Tenebræ*, (Matins and Lauds for the final three days of Holy Week) was a mixture of reciting and singing. Hymns were sung, psalms recited and the canticle sung. The Lamentations of Jeremiah were sung and the other lessons chanted. The Schola usually had polyphonic versions of some of the Responses.

### *Easter to Summer*

In Easter Week the seminarists had a five-day retreat, starting on the evening of Easter Monday. The students were still on holidays and had a visit to St Patrick’s, Drumcondra, during the week. At the end of the retreat there was another change of offices and of places in the seminaires and rooms.

When the weather began to warm up the destination of the Wednesday

Walk was automatically the Forty Foot, designated on the notice board as 40'. This would continue until the weather began to get colder in the autumn. There was, of course, no obligation to swim in the Forty Foot and, while many did so on each occasion, others did so only when they felt so inclined. I cannot recall if there were any students or seminarists who never entered the water. Tram fare was provided for one direction only. Most preferred to walk there and return by tram.

*Summer: July*

All the students and seminarists spent the month of July in Castleknock. Most of the seminaire exercises in common were suspended, though the Thursday Conference and Wednesday Repetition of Lecture continued; these took place in the Drawing Hall. Pom also continued, in the Chapel, though it was frequently dispensed. Amalgamation was readily available for games, which included football and cricket. Silence was very frequently suspended at meals. Fr Tommy Hickey, the college bursar, was often presiding and was very liberal in this matter.

The old enclosed swimming-pool was open, and could be used at any time. Some would even get up early to have a swim before Prayer. Most, however, preferred to swim in the Liffey

There were two swimming places on the Liffey. The first was approached down a steep pathway from the Porterstown Road at The Sandpits, meeting the Lower Road at the Strawberry Beds. A family by the name of Halpin had a house there, opposite the end of this path, and they allowed us keep our boat there. We used it to cross to the other bank, and for rowing up and down the river. The place where we swam and sunbathed was slightly upstream from Halpin's house, and on the opposite bank. This location was known simply as "The River". The other location, quite a bit further upstream, was known as "The Weir". This was approached by the narrow road downhill from Somerton Cross on the Porterstown Road. I cannot now recall whether permission was needed from the Director *toties quoties* for going to either of these places, or whether there was a general permission for the month. I am inclined to think that the former was the case.

Students who could borrow bicycles from home were allowed to do so but such bikes were for general use. Seminarists were also allowed to use them. Bicycle trips to places such as Maynooth were popular.

In 1946, the feast of St Vincent was still on 19 July, and the students and seminarists went in to Phibsboro for the High Mass, doing both the singing and the ceremonies. Back in the college after this there was a feastday dinner and film.

During July, there was a visit (colloquially a "binge") to the Daughters of Charity in Clonsilla, where the students and seminarists provided a

concert for the Sisters and residents, and the Sisters provided a “feed”. Most walked to Clonsilla along the tow-path of the Royal Canal, having a swim in one of the locks on the way.

Another binge during July was to the Daughters of Charity in Termonfeckin, Co Louth. For this a bus was hired from the GNR (Great Northern Railway) as we were going north of Dublin. We brought all the necessities for a picnic lunch, and the first stop was at Clogher Head, where we swam in the harbour before having lunch. We then went to Termonfeckin, where there was more swimming, from the beach. The Sisters provided an evening meal and the students and seminarists put on a concert for the Sisters and the children. The programme was more or less the same as that in Clonsilla.

Those of us who were from Dublin were allowed a day at home during the month. The others were allowed two days out with their visitors.

### *August*

Back in Blackrock for August we were still on holidays, with most of the structured timetable suspended. We went to the Forty Foot every day, weather permitting. The tennis court and handball alley were in frequent use, especially the former, and there was croquet on the front lawn.

The second year seminarists had Vows Class during August, as they were preparing to take perpetual vows on 8 September. I think the first years attended at least some of these, in preparation for Bon Propos on the same date.

There was one more binge in August, to the Holy Faith Sisters in Kilcoole, Co Wicklow. For this a CIE bus was hired, as we were going south. The pattern for the day was similar to that for Termonfeckin. There was swimming from the beach and a picnic lunch before continuing on to the convent for a concert and feed. As the concert was for the nuns the standard was somewhat higher than in Termonfeckin or Clonsilla.

On the evening of 30 August, the annual eight-day retreat for the whole house began. University students who had autumn exams made only the first four days, merely attending the conferences on the other four.

On the evening of 3 September 1947 eight “new men” (the usual expression) were welcomed: Daniel Morgan, William O’Neill, Francis Maher, Desmond McGinley, John MacNamara, Austin O’Driscoll, Justin O’Connell and Philip Hennessy. Mr Brindley was their ange.

During Mass on 8 September, all the second year seminarists who had completed their two years of seminaire took their vows, and the seven remaining first years took their Bon Propos.

*The Community in St Joseph's, September 1946*

Thomas K Donovan (aged 53): *Superior; Moral theology & canon law*

Vincent McCarthy (62): *Assistant superior*

Thomas Rafferty (55): *Bursar*

James Cahalan (36): *Director*

Michael O'Callaghan (42): *Dogmatic theology & sermons*

Matthew Ryan (33): *Philosophy*

John A Conran (43): *Old Testament\**

Joseph S Sheehy (81)

Gerald Robinson (80)

Patrick Quinn (78)

Gerard Galligan (35)

Vincent O'Dea (33)

Br Patrick Normoyle (74)

Br Charles Boyle (69): *Part-time kitchen, and carving*

Br Michael Donnelly (67)

Br Jerome Collins (33): *Kitchen*

Br Francis Drennan (19): *Infirmarian*

Fr O'Callaghan's dog, Pongo

\* (New Testament was taught by Mgr Donal Herlihy,  
who used to come over from All Hallows)

Twenty-six students

Eighteen seminarists

*Lay personnel*

*Cook* "Pat the Cook" (surname now irretrievable)

*Gardener* Martin Burke

*Farm* Martin O'Neill

*Gate lodge* Ned Cullen, retired gardener, and his daughter Sis

*Doctor* Martin Morris

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"The things that I have seen I now can see no more"

Wordsworth: *Intimations of Immortality from  
Recollections of Early Childhood*



# UCD Studies for Sems in the Forties

Stanislaus Brindley CM

University College Dublin was situated in Earlsfort Terrace on the site now occupied by the National Concert Hall. Opposite was Alexandra Girls' College, where there now stands the Conrad Hotel.

In September 1947, five Vincentian Seminarists, who had completed one year of 'dry seminaire' or noviciate, were deemed fit to be released on to Earlsfort Terrace where they would study for their Bachelor of Arts Degrees. Brian Mullan and Philip Walshe would specialise in History and Latin; Tom Davitt and myself in English and French. But, for our first year, we'd tackle a few other subjects, including Logic. Charlie Gardiner, studying Maths and Maths Physics, would have no 'socius' to travel with and we'd not see much of him in UCD. Going about our studies together was obviously a helpful support for our two pairs but Charlie managed all right by himself.

A flash-back comes to me occasionally; it's an image of Tom and myself just about to make our exit through the iron-work pedestrian gate at the bottom of the curved avenue sloping downwards from the religious seclusion of St Joseph's, Blackrock, to the Temple Hill Road leading into Dublin City. We had just finished reciting in Latin the *Itinerarium* (Prayer before a Journey) getting us off to a good, safe start!

The 'Number Eight' tram from Dalkey or the 'Number Seven' from Dun Laoighre were, at first, our carriers from Blackrock to Clare Street. Here, we'd get off and walk up past the front of Leinster House, seat of Government. But 1949 saw the removal of trams from Dublin's streets. So, we transferred ourselves to buses. Later, we found the trains were more satisfactory from the point of view of spiritual reading as we journeyed towards college.

One memorable tram trip in the 'number eight' sticks in my mind. At each extremity of its upper deck, there was a long seat parallel to the tracks and finishing in a curve. While Tom and I were travelling along smoothly, dutifully reading our pious books, two women came to occupy the long seat nearby; their loud conversation soon became such a distraction that we had no option but to lay aside our Rodriguez and simply listen to the enchanting chatter of these ladies. The unforgettable punch-line came something like this;

- and have you seen Penelope's new hat?
- No. I can't say I have.

- Oh, make sure you see it, my dear! It's quite a creation! She said she goes to *Chez Michelle* in Ann Street.
- Fancy that, now! Michelle must be French then?
- Not at all, my dear! Pure Dublin...born and bred!

I don't know what our two ladies thought of the Clery's hats Tom and I were wearing. I used not feel too comfortable in mine although, after one year's practice of having it on my head, I was somewhat used to it. But there was trouble about its brim. To turn down the brim was forbidden, in case we might look like gangsters. But my brim tended to turn up and look rather silly. An old photo of Tom and myself, taken by a street photographer, shows the solution to my problem. On my head can be seen an Anthony Eden whose brim had no option but to remain static and safe. Maybe it was passed on to me when my father changed his head-gear to a bowler.

When we started using the train, a choice faced us on arrival at Westland Row (later Pearse) Station; we could pass in front of the parish church, where many years previously we had both been baptised and where some of my relatives reside in a vault, or we could descend the ramp leading to Sandwith St and Holles St.

This latter route would lead us past the convent of Perpetual Adoration (now a business premises). In this haven of calm, we would sometimes make a visit during total silence or while the high-pitched voices of the nuns recited the Divine Office. Closer to College, we came to the Eye and Ear hospital, which caused no great interest, since all our faculties were in fine fettle. But we with also pass, perhaps with something of a shiver, the Dublin Spiritualist Association, which may have reminded us of Madame Blavatsky.

While humble Vincentian were slumming their way to College by public transport, the good sisters of Loreto used to arrive in what one might describe as an elastic extension of the Rathfarnham *clausura*, namely a mature and copious Daimler, driven by a male chauffeur. This rather precious procedure did not pass without negative comment.

Positive comments, however, could be heard about the two young Nigerian priests as they almost danced their way towards their places in our English lectures. At other times, they used to sit on the radiators, still wearing overcoats. The infectious jollity of Anthony Nwedo and Mark Unebo still remains in my memory and I was happy to mention it to them when I met them in Umahia or Owerri after they had become bishops in Igboland. Yet, in those early days, foreign BA students were very few in UCD; although another memory is of Roland Quesnel CSSp from Trinidad, who used to read Virgil for recreation.

A schoolmate, who had just completed his first arts year, gave us the

wise advice; “Skip Timoney’s maths classes; we did it all in honours maths”. Without many qualms, Tom and I carried out this advice and never regretted it. The many CSSp students (the ‘Holy Ghosts’ were known as ‘Spooks’ since the name ‘Spiritans’ was to come much later) were by no means ready to follow our example.

Much more numerous, in their white shirts and black ties, were the students of the Dublin Diocese from Clonliffe and the students from All Hallows. Not having been put through a noviciate, they seemed to us a bit frivolous. One was observed eating twelve cream-buns at elevenses! And among those from All Hallows, it was rumoured that the Vins informed the All Hallows Dean, James H Murphy CM, about the behaviour of his students.

But, towards the end of the year, we attended a few Maths lectures and admired the cool sarcasm of our prof. On one occasion, when his words of wisdom were meeting opposition from a student whistling outside the door, Timoney opened the door and, saying nothing, just threw down a few pennies; thereby gaining much admiration from his class.

Students for the BAg degree used to join us for some maths lectures and sit at the back while the nuns always sat in the front seats. Occasionally, some trickster from the back would affix a whistle to the end of a long rubber tube and, blowing down this pipe, would make a whistling noise come from among the nuns. Probably this would take place only before the prof arrived in the room because Timoney would have been well able to deal with such a situation if his teaching had already started.

The subjects we studied in First Year were; English (hons), French, Maths, Logic and Latin. We were given no say in the choice of these subjects. In English, we enjoyed two excellent teachers; Head of Department Jeremiah Hogan and our own Fr Tom Dunning CM. We used to look forward to their lectures. Slightly heron-like in posture, Jerry poured out his learning in deep melodious tones which he could vary delightfully when reading the different voices in a Shakespearean drama. The story was that he had lost his voice through surgery on his uvula and then had to re-learn how to speak. This he did brilliantly, if the story is true.

Tom Dunning’s mellifluous Oxford accent was likewise impressive. Tom some who judged it to be ‘over-the-top’, his chuckling riposte was; “Well, if one is speaking a foreign language, one should try to speak it like the natives, shouldn’t one?” And Tom’s perfect fluency in Gaelic was a complete ear-opener when he addressed the Irish Society. Here was someone we were really proud to have as a confrere.

People used to contrast Tom’s professionalism and hard work with

the slack efforts of other lecturers. Mrs McCarville's lectures we used to skip often. A bit of skipping or very late arrival was done by lecturer Roger McHugh. *Fisk* was the nickname invariably used for referring to our teacher of Old English, where nouns were declined rather like Latin and the word for fish was the first declension we had to learn (like *mensa* in Latin). *D'you follow?* was his repeated phrase. An All Hallows student, to enable himself to keep awake, used to keep score; how many times was the phrase repeated? It was usually about 150 times per lecture. Really Tom Dunning, a true expert in Old English (crowned by his publication of *Piers Plowman*) was the one who should have been teaching us instead of Fisk. He was superb in handling Hamlet in our third year. And he generously allowed us to borrow some of his own books to study during the summer.

Louis Roche was professor of French during our time. He displayed a strong personality, worked vigorously and expected us to do the same. In his forthright way, he used to state that the nuns sitting in the front row studied much harder than the clerics at the back. But we didn't have Louis in our first year because our superiors had enrolled us for Pass French and landed us at the feet of Nellie Harnett who was somewhat the opposite "Give me your compeeeaat attention!" was her frequent appeal, which, as good seminarists, we tried to do. It was not very exciting.

To her credit, at the end of our first year, she approached Louis and then ourselves, urging us to move up to Honours French, which we should really have been doing from the start; yet this meant a lot of 'catch-up' work. It also entailed visiting Professor Roche in his study. There he laid down two conditions for our admission to the honours course; we would have to spend quality time in France at the end of second year to develop fluency and we would have to attend meetings of the Société Française. These meetings took place in the evenings and also some lectures were in the afternoon. Since dinner in the 'Rock was at 3 p.m., we used to eat our lunch in college on three days a week. Such a procedure had never been acceptable for previous Vin students. Weren't we fortunate in having an enlightened director like James Cahalan and a superior like TK Donovan who brought flexibility to the law of the Medes and Persians? Quite a breath of fresh air, n'est-ce pas?

Another exception allowed to us two students was listening to the radio (the only one in the 'Rock apart from the priests') during study-time in the students' hall. Not 40's Rock-and-Roll but BBC news bulletins in French. By dint of concentrated listening, we began to get the hang of what was being said, since the word-patterns of reports tended to become familiar.

One more departure from recognised procedures was our exemption from the last four days of the eight-day retreat in 1950. This was to facilitate revision-work for the autumn exams. I remember betaking myself to an unused student room together with a past question-paper and sheets of foolscap paper in order to carry out a test-run.

Louis was a great admirer of St Vincent. He even recommended in class that students would do well to read the saint's letters! When the film, *M Vincent*, was released, Louis came out to the 'Rock to speak about it, complaining slightly that it under-played the spiritual side of Vincent's life.

The unforgettable president of the Société Française was a De La Salle brother called Patrick. He had been out in the Far East teaching for years. His written French would probably have been rather good. But no trace of a French accent could be detected when he would begin proceedings by pronouncing, as if speaking English; *Je déclare cette réunion ouverte*.

The French ambassador had, by nature, an excellent Parisian intonation when he said exuberantly in response to Louis Roche's words of thanks for the loans made by the French Cultural Centre; *Mais continuez à demander!* This was after we had listened to a moving recording of Fauré's *Requiem* lent by the Centre.

Less successful and less uplifting was the mistake made when the wrong film was loaned to us for showing to a mixed group. Instead of the cultural treat we were expecting (I can't remember what it was), there appeared on screen a film aimed at demonstrating to make athletes the finer points of how to race over hurdles. Most of the time, the performers were clothed only in jock-straps. Slow motion sequences and close-ups bodies from all sides and angles fuelled the intense embarrassment injected into the unprepared audience. What a relief when *Fin* appeared!

Eugène Cognon was the one Frenchman who lectured to us. Excellently done, even when almost swinging out of the window-rope! During Lent, he gave up smoking and, as a result, became a bit cranky until Easter. At one stage later in his career, he returned to his own country and taught for a while in a secondary school near Lyon. But he found the pupil-discipline there so exasperating that he came back to Ireland.

Among the facilities near Earlsfort Terrace was Iveagh Gardens leading from the back of the University to Newman House and University Church on St Stephen's Green. This often provided a quiet haven of rest from the lecture-room or library. Fresh air and a walk on the green grass after lunch was a pleasant restorative, weather permitting. Green grass, however, gave way to brown turf if you peeped into

the spacious area where we now enjoy symphony concerts. What a facility! Can you believe that this double cube with its perfect acoustic had been used during World War II to store turf? Privileged turf indeed, compared with the open-air turf which lined both sides of the main road through the Phoenix Park!

The National Library of Ireland on Kildare Street was another nearby facility which we used. Slightly further away, but more or less on our route to the train, was the Central Catholic Library where we sometimes saw books signed out by 'Wicklow' (The Earl of...)

What about studying philosophy? Well, the nearest we got to it at UCD was by taking Logic with large-domed Mgr Horgan. However, in the 'Rock, Home Philosophy was the name given to classes of various disciplines that under-pinned the theology we would later study in Glenart. Barbadette was the author of our text-book, in Latin, of course. Of our teachers, Fr Matt Ryan, with his Oxford degree and his laid-back humour, was the best. Fr Ned O'Hanlon was at the other end of the scale; maybe Tuesday and Thursday evenings were no more appetising to the teachers than to the scholars. After Easter, Fr Cahalan took over Ned's theodicy class on Sunday mornings.

Maths was part of our first year UCD course. Greek wasn't but, when 'Young Tierney', as he was called, offered to provide classes in Beginner's Greek, Tom and I sought this widening of our horizons and began attending the afternoon sessions. For a while we persevered but, reluctantly, we found this extra commitment became impossible. The delights of studying Greek we would leave to later in life!

# A Workable Idea

Paschal Scallon, CM

*This article was given as an address to the annual conference of the National Conference of Priests of Ireland in 2003 and was later published in **Doctrine & Life** in February 2004. It is reprinted here with the kind permission of the editor.*

For some years now there has been an active discussion within the National Conference of Priests of Ireland (NCPI) on the issue of establishing a national assembly of the Catholic Church in Ireland. A national assembly is envisaged as a representative body of the Catholic faithful in Ireland. That is to say, once a year there would be a public convention of clergy and laity that would discuss, advise on and make decisions concerning the life and mission of the Catholic Church in the country. Such a gathering would seek to complement the existing structures which regulate the life of the Church at present: the Conference of Bishops, the Episcopal Commissions and their Advisory Bodies, the Councils of Priests as well as other canonically established structures.

Ireland is small enough to make such a body viable without it becoming unwieldy. It is also possible that, as the public profile of the Catholic Church in Ireland changes, a national assembly may serve as a unifying influence for Irish Catholics and as a means of communicating with the country and beyond. As such, it would be a forum within which and from which the Catholic community in Ireland could articulate an ecclesiology that actually reflects the Irish Catholic Church's understanding of itself and how it relates to the formal ecclesiology outlined in Vatican documents. An assembly would also seek to articulate a public theology that would "communicate the socially significant meanings of Christian symbols and tradition."<sup>(1)</sup> In speaking more representatively the Church would hopefully communicate more effectively.

At present there is no forum in which Irish Catholics as a whole can speak to one another about their experience of being part of the Church. There is some movement in parishes and some dioceses are exploring models of consultation but such developments are sporadic. One might ask; if this is the case why should an initiative at national level be any more successful? Paradoxically, a national assembly may be the catalyst that inspires the development of local assemblies at diocesan level or regional level because issues enter the public forum in Ireland at

national level, take on local significance and stimulate discussion.

*The Second Vatican Council;*

It has been almost forty years since the Second Vatican Council ended. For most Catholics alive in the world today that was a moment in time before they were born. There have been at least two generations born since 1960. Those who were young in the 1960s, or were at least of an age to appreciate what was going on, are now approaching retirement. The Fathers of the Council are now either dead or quite elderly indeed. It is against this background that one reflects on the community of the Church as it enters its third millennium.

The *Dogmatic Constitution of the Church*, most often referred to by its Latin title *Lumen Gentium*, is particularly interesting in the present cultural context. Published in November 1964, *Lumen Gentium* is the document which redefined the character of the Church in the understanding of Roman Catholics. It spoke of the Church as the People of God. This renewal of the Church's understanding of itself can be traced in modern theology to the early nineteenth century when, fifty years before Vatican I, Catholic theologians such as Johann Sebastian Drey and Johann Adam Möhler had begun to revive the idea of the Church as an *organic* reality in which tradition, animated by the Holy Spirit, incarnates the presence of Christ. (2) When Yves Congar revisited the work of Möhler in the 1930s, opportunities opened up again that may have been missed during a period in which the Church had become very defensive. The interpretation of the Church as an organic reality revived the notion of the Church as the Body of Christ, culminating in the publication of Pius XII's encyclical *Mystici Corporis* in 1943, which spoke of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ. This element of mystery was retained in *Lumen Gentium* which devotes a chapter to it.

*Lumen Gentium* says that, while the Church is essentially a mystery hidden in the mind of God, it is also a "People" that God wishes to bring together in order to gather them into a community centred on Christ. This "People" is gathered in *Communio* by a shared "profession of faith, the sacraments and ecclesiastical government and communion." (*Lumen Gentium* no. 14,2)

As a communion, brought together by Christ, certain members receive responsibility to oversee the life of the community and do so as bishops. With priests and deacons, they form the hierarchy of the Church. The laity are said to enjoy equal dignity with the bishops and participate with them in the mission of the Church but they are excluded from the hierarchy and participation in its governing function.

Forty years after Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* appears now to express itself in very ambiguous terms. Probably because it reflects the era in



which it was written and the formation, as clerics, of those who wrote it, *Lumen Gentium* gives a predominant place in the Church to the clergy. We also know at this remove of forty years that the Council documents reflect the compromises that the authors made as progressive and conservative thinking advanced and gave ground, sometimes paragraph by paragraph.

Chapter four of *Lumen Gentium* begins by saying that the special circumstances of the time require a thorough examination of the place of the laity in the mission of the Church. Any examination of the role of the laity, however, will raise a question that must linger in the mind of any questioning person reading *Lumen Gentium* today: why do so few people in the church, drawn from such a narrow base, have such wide authority over so many? Many will understand that the episcopal office is central in Catholic ecclesiology but they will balk at the idea that other forms of leadership in the Church cannot share in the governance of the Church.

What seems most lacking in *Lumen Gentium* is a lay voice; that is, a lay voice that speaks from a genuinely lay point of view. Some lay voices are unfortunately thoroughly clericalised, which is to say they express an idea of the Church that excludes the possibility that clergy and lay people could share authority in the governance of the Church. One wonders, for example, if a lay-person today would define the lay calling in the same terms *Lumen Gentium* does when it states, “Their secular character is proper and peculiar to the laity.” (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 31,2).

The notion of catholicity itself is built on “the transcendence of all divisions in Christ.”(3) If all things have been reconciled in Christ, the one whom we call Emmanuel – God With Us – then what is sacred and what is secular stand in transformed relationship. Indeed, the opening paragraph of the Pastoral Constitution of the Church (otherwise known as *Gaudium et Spes*), affirms:

The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts . . . That is why Christians cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history. (*Gaudium et Spes*, no.1.)

One year after the publication of *Lumen Gentium*, the Council published its decree on the laity called *Apostolicam Actuositatem* in November 1965. It seems to have been rushed through in order to make it to the final session of the Council and it speaks about the “special and indispensable role” of the lay person in the mission of the Church (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 1) but then seems to suggest that such

a role is a remedy for the shortage of priests. The lay apostolate comes across as an assisting office and is described as a consolation to the pastors of the Church in the same way that the men and women who helped St Paul were a consolation to him (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 10,1). While it is true that the document envisages the laity performing a necessary role in the Church's evangelizing mission (especially in what it terms the "apostolate of like towards like" (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 13,1)) and is, in many ways, very encouraging, it never seems that lay people are accorded any real authority or leadership. On the subject of authority, the decree on the laity is very explicit when it says: "the laity are fully subject to superior ecclesiastical control in regard to the exercise of these charges." (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 24, 2-5)

It is the assumption that leadership and authority in the Church are fixed that will dismay the younger Catholic today or indeed the person who is seeking God and hopes to succeed in that quest among Catholics. The assertion in *Christifideles Laici*, published in 1989, that the ordained ministries are in a 'primary position' in the Church (*Christifideles Laici*, no. 22,1) will do little to convince people that there has been much development where the leadership and the authority of the laity are concerned.

The excitement with which the teaching of the Second Vatican Council was received was real and, whatever shortcomings are apparent to a contemporary reader in a document like *Lumen Gentium*, these must be offset against the awareness that the period in which the Council met is often portrayed as a sort of *renaissance*. The optimistic spirit of the early 1960s was brittle but in the Church it revived the idea that the world, essentially the human community, is the milieu within which redemption takes place.

### *Reception;*

One of the more pressing questions facing the Catholic Church is how the clergy, especially the bishops, should "relate as teachers to . . . [a] highly intelligent and trained laity."(4) For some years now, theology has featured in the subject choices many students have made at third level. There are more lay people than seminarians studying theology in Ireland today. Most of them are women and many of them pursue their studies to post-graduate level.

An increasingly theologically literate people will have much to say in the Church here and, as the Church depends increasingly on moral force to assert its authority, they must be heard. Moreover, in presenting the teaching of the Church, the magisterium has to look not only to the content of what it teaches but also to the manner of its presentation and to the receptivity of its audience.

The principle of reception “refers to the process through which an ecclesial community incorporates into its own life a particular custom, decision, liturgical practice or teaching.”<sup>(5)</sup> It is heavily determined by culture. This means that when the teaching authority of the Church addresses the faithful it must do so in a way that connects with their experience. Where there is a gap between the utterances of the magisterium and peoples’ actual experience, the result can be mutual incomprehension.

An example of this occurred in Britain and Ireland in 1998, when the Bishops Conferences of Ireland, Scotland and England and Wales published a joint document on the Eucharist called *One Bread One Body*. The document was meant to clarify the teaching of the Church on the matter of receiving communion but many people expressed surprise that the issue of inter-communion was still so restricted in Catholic teaching. For some this was reassuring; the Church was standing by its traditional teaching. Others expressed disappointment and anger. The surprise on both sides may have been the result of inadequate catechesis but the fact remained that, when confronted with the issue, many Catholics thought the teaching was out of touch with their personal experience and inappropriate for the needs of the country in the light of religious tension in Northern Ireland. In Ireland, at least, there is a real need for discussion of this and other matters but beyond the letters pages of the newspapers and panel discussions before live audiences on television, there is no public forum in which to raise them.

The receptivity of the People of God to a particular teaching or development in ecclesial discipline is not a reflection, necessarily, on the validity of what the magisterium is saying. It is, rather, an indication of where the people are. It is generally recognised, for example, that abandoning the exclusive use of Latin in the liturgy was a truly prophetic thing to do. The universal acceptance of the move indicated both a readiness for the change among the peoples of the Church and a profound understanding of the needs of the Church by the Council. An equally revealing illustration of the principle of reception, however, concerns the response of the faithful to the magisterium’s teaching on artificial birth control. This is perhaps one example in the modern era of resistance which may ultimately lead to a more significant reiteration of what the Church wants to say about human life. How that discussion will be conducted will be critical.

The principle of reception in the contemporary Church must rest on the widest possible consultation and active contribution of the faithful. One cannot assume today that the faithful are content to receive Church teaching without being part of its formulation. This means that the task of the magisterium will become more difficult but the authority of the

Church is at stake and even, perhaps, the charism of infallibility. In a rather lyrical explanation, Francis A Sullivan SJ maintains “reception does not confer infallibility on the act of the magisterium, but it provides infallible confirmation of the fact that an infallible definition has taken place.”(6)

*Democracy and Democratisation;*

In his first encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam*, which was published in 1964, Pope Paul VI reflected on how best the Church might relate to societies and cultures where Christianity has little influence. He wrote:

The dialogue of salvation was made accessible to all. It applied to everyone without distinction. Hence our dialogue too should be as universal as we can make it. That is to say, it must be catholic, made relevant to everyone . . . It is demanded by the dynamic course of action which is changing the face of modern society. It is demanded by the pluralism of society, and by the maturity man has reached in this day and age. Be he religious or not, his secular education has enabled him to think and speak, and conduct a dialogue with dignity. (Paul VI *Ecclesiam Suam*, nos. 76-78)(7)

Pope Paul seems fearless in his openness to the possibilities that dialogue presents but his words challenge the Church itself where its own experience of dialogue among the faithful is concerned. If one understands “the dynamic course of action which is changing the face of modern society” to mean the emergence of democracy in civil political life, then it seems that sooner or later the Church must respond to that same dynamic and examine what democratisation of life in the Church might entail.

Democracy and democratisation are not quite the same. The Church cannot be a democracy in the sense that civil societies ought to be. Even though the Church is a human society, it also believes that it is a divinely convened *communio*. The Church locates all authority in the person of Christ. Civil democracies derive their legitimacy and authority from the will of the people.

It is one thing to affirm that Christ is the source of all authority in the Church and another thing to decide who may exercise that authority or participate in its procedures. Tradition in the Church holds that Christ chose the Twelve by name and placed Peter at their head. The problem of continuity, however, compelled the Apostles and the leadership of the early Church to use their own initiative in the choice of their successors who would act in their turn with the authority of Christ. From the first generation of the Church, therefore, its leaders have had to be *designated* by the community of the day to assume the authority conferred on the Apostles by Christ. (8)

Edward Schillebeeckx argues that there are “intrinsic ecclesiological reasons for preferring a democratic exercise of ministerial authority.”(9) He bases this statement on Christians’ belief in the power of the Holy Spirit, which is at work throughout the life of the Church. The Holy Spirit operates in what Schillebeeckx calls “differing historical mediations” to which the faithful may or may not be attentive. In other words, the Church must constantly be reading the signs of the times and not assume that just because certain developments in human society are not reflected in the life of the Church at a particular time, they therefore have no place in the Church.

There have been interesting moments in the recent history of the Church that may prove helpful in trying to develop a more democratic ethic. Speaking in 1950, Pope Pius XII said:

She [i.e. the Church] would be lacking something in her life if public opinion were absent within her, an absence for which the clergy as well as the faithful are to blame. (10)

Pius XII’s reference to public opinion in the Church was not the first time it had been discussed. In an essay written in 1819, Johann Sebastian Drey (1777-1853), who was a theologian at Tübingen, suggested: “That there must exist within the Church an analogy to what within the state is called public opinion.” This assertion became known as *The Tübingen Axiom*. (11) Public opinion in this sense does not correspond to contemporary understanding of the term. For Drey, an undefined element in Christian doctrine is an *opinion* and, insofar as interested and competent parties, in communication with one another, research these opinions, they become public. (12) Drey maintained that from the earliest years of the Church the formulation of doctrine had emerged from the work of scholars and authors. He was not calling for *public opinion* in the Church, as he felt it already existed, but for recognition and accommodation of it.

Drey’s comments, made during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, are still most interesting, almost two hundred years later. There is a particularly contemporary feel to one passage;

...church government neither can nor ought to suppress the activity and influence of individuals which are addressed to the church at large through the spoken or written word, because it would at the same time deprive itself of the devotion and insight of the mass of its members. (13)

In referring to “church government” Drey had the hierarchy of the Church in mind. But this was 1819 and the idea that the laity could have something to contribute to the mission of the Church lay much further in the future. The more expansive thinking that was brought to bear at the Second Vatican Council had yet to crystallize, though Yves Congar

would find the inspiration for a modern Church in the Tübingen School of this period.

Given that there has emerged in our church an educated and theologically literate laity, the Tübingen Axiom remains a highly compelling idea, which can inform current reflection on who may participate in the governance of the Church and illustrate that present debate on the matter has a noble pedigree.

At about the same time as the Tübingen School was emerging in Germany, one of the interesting features of a developing Catholic Church in the United States was *Trusteeism*. By 1820, about one hundred and twenty four Catholic churches had been established in the new republic. (14) The Catholic communities, which built these churches, were as much taken by the spirit of American democracy as their fellow citizens and were eager to apply it to the administration of the Church. There were two other factors which assisted the initiative. In France and Germany, from where a significant number of American Catholics had come, there had been a tradition of lay trusteeship in many areas. The other reason for the system flourishing in America at this time was a shortage of clergy. There was considerable scope for lay leadership to prove itself.

Bishop John Carroll of Baltimore insisted on the Episcopal right of appointment of clergy but actually strongly supported Trusteeism, which he saw as an endorsement of democracy in the local Church and a favourable adaptation within the Church to American life. Bishop Flaget of Bardstown, Kentucky, and Bishop Cheverus of Boston agreed with him in this. Trusteeism had its high point under Bishop John England of Charleston. Together with lay trustees in his diocese, he published a diocesan constitution. It catered for general meetings of clergy and laity that would discuss the life of the Catholic community in the diocese. Bishop England saw the potential of Trusteeism, saying that it “empowered the laity to co-operate but not to dominate.”(15)

*The Principle of Subsidiarity and the Sensus Fidelium;*

Proposals for the democratisation of the Church are best served by finding that thinking within the Church’s own tradition that articulates it. The Tübingen School and American Trusteeism provide examples of such thinking but perhaps the most telling idea of all is the principle of subsidiarity which emerged in Catholic social teaching in the twentieth century. The term first appeared in 1931 in Pope Pius XI’s encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* and outlined the principle of subsidiarity as:

a fundamental principle of social philosophy, fixed and unchangeable, that one should not withdraw from individuals and commit to the

community what they can accomplish by their own enterprise and industry. So, too, it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and a disturbance of right order to transfer to the larger and higher collectivity functions which can be performed and provided for by lesser and subordinate bodies. (*Quadragesimo Anno* no.79) (16)

*Subsidiarity*, in the sense in which it is used in Catholic social teaching, refers to the act of subsidising and not to *subsidiary*, which implies inferiority and subordination. As outlined in *Quadragesimo Anno*, subsidiarity seeks a balance between lesser and greater entities but it favours preserving the identity and integrity of the lesser as much as possible. (17) The principle also holds, however, that the community may intervene when a person or a group of persons is experiencing difficulties from which they cannot extricate themselves on their own.

In fact, where the internal organization of the Church is concerned, terms such as ‘higher’ and ‘lower’, ‘greater’ and ‘lesser’ may not be appropriate, as the local Church, that is the Church in a diocese, is not the delegate of a central body. The local Church *is* the Church universal in a particular place. Cardinal Kasper, the president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, argues that:

The local church is neither a province nor a department of the universal church; it is the church at a given place. The local bishop is not the delegate of the Pope but is the one sent by Jesus Christ... This understanding of the bishop’s office should have led to decentralization in the church’s government. (18)

The Second Vatican Council defined the magisterium of the Church in terms of Christ’s prophetic office and since all the faithful make up the Body of Christ that prophetic function is the responsibility of the entire People of God who must discern how to exercise their Christly power. Yves Congar wrote that a clerical church confronting a laicised world would not be the People of God in the fullness of its truth. (19)

If the Church were to extend the principle of subsidiarity to its own internal reorganisation, it would allow the local Church to exercise its own initiative where its knowledge of local issues would make it the best judge of the pastoral needs of people. Such freedom demands responsibility, of course, and the local must always relate to the universal. If Cardinal Kasper is correct, however, this relationship is off balance in the Catholic Church at the moment. He maintains, “the right balance between the universal church and the particular churches has been destroyed” and this is not only his own perception but also, “the experience and complaint of many bishops from all over the world.” (20) He is also critical of local churches that “promote centralisation whenever they abdicate their responsibility and turn to Rome for a

decision – a ruse to evade their duty and find cover behind a superior order.”(21)

The principle of subsidiarity is a legitimate development in doctrine, which the Church may use to renew relationships throughout the Church. It has emerged in tandem with developments in democratic political theory during the course of the twentieth century. The exercise of the principle of subsidiarity would allow for the establishment of a national assembly of the Catholic Church in Ireland or in any episcopal conference area. An assembly could contribute much to the life of the local church, complementing structures that already exist. The *sensus fidelium* would have a legitimate forum in which, over time, the mind of the Church might not only be known but might be more effectively communicated.

### *Modernity;*

A sociological perspective on the current reality of the Irish Catholic Church indicates that it is a ubiquitous presence in Irish life. It is an organized institution rooted in the culture of the people. But it appears to be in trouble. There have been changes both in peoples’ perceptions of the Church and their place in it, which have affected peoples’ commitment to the Church. But, if the commitment of some has waned, the commitment of others has strengthened. The evidence for this is in parishes around the country where committed lay people have had to assume responsibility for their local communities in the absence of a priest. The Kilmore Diocesan Congress in October 2000, at which six lay people from each parish joined with the clergy and religious of the diocese, “to begin plotting a course” for the future of the diocese, indicated that the Church in Kilmore is alert to changing circumstances and eager to ensure that it will meet whatever challenges arise. (22) If such gatherings were to meet regularly – on an annual basis – in all of the dioceses of Ireland, a national assembly of the Catholic Church could become feasible and even necessary.

Chesterton’s admonition that ‘when people stop believing in God, they do not believe in nothing; they believe in anything’ has an acerbic quality but today one can believe in anything and unbelief is a real option in a way it was not for other eras and worldviews. Michael Paul Gallagher suggests that in recent decades unbelief took three forms: anger, alienation and apathy. (23) Today, he suggests that anger is rare and alienation is in decline, leaving unbelief to feed on apathy. The International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) found that, of those born in Ireland since 1970, only 7% reported a high level of confidence in the Church as an organization. Moreover, during the 1990s the loss of confidence in the leadership of the Church among people ranging in



age from seventy years to younger than thirty years was such that, in the long term, less than 20% of Catholics will have significant confidence in the Church as an organisation. (24)

It is in dialogue with the culture that pressure will increase on the polity of the Church. Pope John Paul II has said that the Church of the Council saw itself as the ‘soul of modernity’, i.e. “the convergence of conditions that permit a human being to express his or her own maturity, spiritual, moral, and cultural, in dialogue with the Creator and with creation”. (25) Part of the difficulty perhaps that has existed between the Church and the modern age has been a failure to recognize that modernity has been ‘an accumulating reality’, originating much earlier than usually recognised. (26) If modernity has been an accumulating reality for the better part of a millennium, then there is more to the relationship between modernity and the tradition of the Church than simply seeing the two in contradistinction.

The sociologist José Casanova maintains that, “when religion discerns and accepts what is genuine within modernity, then not only can it find new authority for itself within the open societies of today, but it can save modernity from some of the inhuman logic of its own unbalanced ideology”. (27) Chapter four of *Gaudium et Spes* identifies the processes of democracy as consistent with the common good and thus reinforces Gallagher’s idea that while culture is a human construct and thus ambiguous, requiring discernment and purification; it is nevertheless a place of human transcendence and creative encounter with God. As such, culture plays an essential role in the mediation of faith for people at whatever stage of receptivity. (28) However, contemporary culture has formed people in such a way that they are unwilling to allow others, to whom they have not given that authority, to speak for them.

Ross Scherer, a former Professor of Sociology at Loyola University in Chicago, proposes organizational design as a form of analysis that can serve good management and, in the case of the Church, “good churchmanship.” As such, he emphasises that models are judged not as true or false but as “useful.”(29) The model of organization must serve the organization’s purpose. Proposing ‘usefulness’ as a category instead of insisting on the truth or falsity of an organizational model can generate a progressive momentum in the debate on whether the Church can be democratic or not.

If the Catholic Church in Ireland were to establish a general assembly – and it is the policy of the National Conference of Priests of Ireland (NCPI) that we should – then the bishops must be at the heart of it. They are, after all, the pastors of the Church. Their leadership is distinct and unique in Catholic ecclesiology. The writer and broadcaster, Charles Handy, asserts, however, that in organisations “authority increasingly

has to be earned – it cannot be assumed”. (30) The Church is learning this lesson along with other institutions and it has been a humbling experience. But humility, properly understood, is about the reality of a situation. Current reality, according to Handy, requires recognition that “any decision must increasingly be taken with the consent of those who have to implement it. This does *not* mean that they have to participate in it... but it does mean that they must *know what* is happening and have the chance to comment”. (31)

It is not possible to say at this stage what weight the thinking of a national assembly would have. But it is not envisaged simply as a ‘talking-shop’ even though such a provision on its own could be construed as a step forward given that there is no permanent forum for public debate at all in existence at the moment. Clearly, however, an Assembly would have to work within the parameters of the life of the Church. Its voice would be added to those already engaged in turning over the issues which concern Catholics everywhere. A significant difference where a national assembly is concerned, however, is that for the first time a voice might reflect more fully the thinking of the Catholic community. In pursuing this venture the Catholic community in Ireland would be giving a lead in modeling a form of church government that would express a renewal of relationships within the Church and in its mission to the world.

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# At the Service of the Lord of the Margins

Tom Lane CM

*This is the text of a talk presented at the University of Salford*

## *Seeking his face*

In *The Imitation of Christ* which, in my days of preparation for the priesthood, had a standing second only to the Bible, we were encouraged to keep asking “why did I come here?” I certainly didn’t come here today to talk about myself. And still, it is important that, to put it the American way, I tell you something of “where I’m coming from”. Later this month, I hope to celebrate fifty years as a priest. I was ordained as a Vincentian, a member of the Congregation of the Mission. For a motto, we have “he sent me to bring good news to the poor”. By one of the many ironies that make up our lives, I was appointed to help prepare students for a way of life I had never experienced – being pastoral priests outside of Ireland (All Hallows was “for export only”). In 1958, my superiors decided that I didn’t know enough. I was sent to Rome to study with the Dominicans. In the course of my two years in Rome, Pope John XXIII announced that he was calling an ecumenical council. Understandably, the announcement didn’t affect our programme of studies at the Angelicum. From 1960 to 1982, I was back in All Hallows, teaching theology this time. My subjects were the Church and the Sacraments. From 1970 to 1982, I was president of the College. They then decided that they had had enough of me.

From 1982 to 1991, I was director of Damascus House Retreat and Conference Centre in London. England was no real stranger to me. Over the years, I had often crossed the water to be part of various renewal courses. I had frequently availed of the hospitality of past students of All Hallows for longish periods. The Lord gave me a strange Christmas present in 1990. Towards the end of December, I joined eight other priests for a day of recollection at the shrine of Julian of Norwich. Our signature tune for the whole day was Julian’s “...and you will see for yourself that all manner of thing will be well”. By midnight, I was in hospital with a severe stroke. The following summer, I was re-appointed to All Hallows with a roving pastoral commission. From 1998 to 2000, I helped as a spiritual director in the Beda College, Rome. Since 2000, I have been working at Knock Shrine, Co Mayo, where our attention is drawn to a message that we all sorely need these days – that the Lamb of God keeps taking away the sins of the world.

So why have I come here today? The simple answer is that Fr Ian

Kelly has invited me. As one who is in the departure lounge of life, I am not going to add two more lectures to the umpteen that I have given over the past half century. Rather, I want to think aloud and wish aloud with you, in a way that may help us all to know the good Lord more clearly, love him more dearly and follow him more nearly. Certainly, in terms of work, my first and continuing love over the years has been serving my fellow priests. I enjoyed teaching the theology of priesthood. I gladly accepted many invitations to direct retreats for priests, at home and abroad. After my stroke, the Lord slowed me down and I achieved a long-cherished ambition. I wrote a book entitled *A Priesthood in Tune* (some of my colleagues were amused; they said they never heard me in tune; a quick-witted student said I had the rare gift of lecturing without a note and singing without a note). During the jubilee year, I went into print again. In *The Cry of Christians*, I developed some of the points I had made in the *Tune* book.

Over the years, I had a recurring scruple. I often asked myself “how, with my limited experience of pastoral ministry, can I speak convincingly to men who are at the coal-face?” Some of my comforters told me that working with seminarians is itself a unique pastoral experience. Certainly, it calls on all one’s resources of faith, hope and charity. A very wise and holy priest who spent most of his life on the staff of All Hallows used to say that it takes great faith to work in a seminary. When Charles Davis was making sad news at the time of his break with the Church, I identified with him when he said he had spent too much time weaving patterns of theological words, in making what he called beautiful constructs of words. Pope Paul VI made the same point when he said that people are more moved by seeing the Gospel lived than by words. Some years ago, a beggar-man at the door of All Hallows put the message in a more down-to-earth way. In reply to my polite, meaningless words, he said “these are grand words you’re talking, Father, but they never put froth on a pint!”

In my efforts over the years to provide some substantial froth for the glasses of busy priests, I kept looking for ways of being in tune. I made myself available regularly for hearing confessions in neighbouring parishes. I did countless summer supplies. In my years as president I so arranged my teaching periods that, between term time and vacation time, I spent three months of each year in some directly pastoral setting. My years in Damascus House provided me with many opportunities to preach the word of God and to exercise the ministry of reconciliation. Doing the full Ignatian Exercises in Guelph, Canada, in 1988 was a great time of grace. Helping in a Dublin parish between 1993 and 1998 put flesh on some of my theological bones.

### *A Face*

An Irish poet who has been more and more coming into his own, Patrick Kavanagh, wrote of God being in the “bits and pieces” of every day. Naming some of the bits and pieces of my own days as a priest makes me approve of the author of *The Diary of a Country Priest* who, following St Thérèse, wrote that “all is grace”. As I accompany you today and help you to recognise God’s grace at work in the bits and pieces of your own lives, I now invite you to do your thinking and wishing in terms of one great image: THE FACE OF CHRIST. It is an image that we often hear of nowadays but I don’t think we explore it enough. We are called to live before the face of Christ, to recognise the face of Christ, to be the face of Christ. When we think of being the face of Christ, we tend to confine ourselves to the face of compassion. This is, of course, understandable, since Jesus expresses in human form the compassion of the God who offered a fickle people a covenant of compassion again and again. But there is a sense in which, in the Gospels, Jesus shows many faces: the face with eyes lifted up to heaven, the face of anger, the face of sadness, the face of agony, the face inviting to discipleship, the face of happiness in the company of friends, the face eliciting the bitter tears of the repentant Peter, to mention but some. Our priestly search is to look at, to recognise, to be all these faces: “Your face, O Lord, is what I seek; do not hide your face” (Ps. 27: 8, 9).

Pope John Paul keeps returning to the topic of the face of Christ. He has done it in his Letter introducing the new millennium. More recently, he has done it in his Letter introducing the year of the Rosary and, more strongly again, in his encyclical on the Eucharist. I wonder does he make connections between his emphasis on the face of Christ and the description of ordained ministry which, I think, is dearest to his heart. This is the priest’s call to be *in persona Christi*, a call clearly spelled out by the Second Vatican Council. In the Church’s history, we have sometimes made heavy weather of the word *persona*. For St Paul there was no such heavy weather. It is he who gave us the expression *in persona Christi* (2 Cor 2: 10). He was describing an important decision he had made, not without some opposition. Interestingly, it was a decision to show the reconciling face of Christ for the people’s sake. Most modern translations say simply that he had made his decision “before the face of Christ”, “in the presence of Christ”. The face of Christ, the “person” of Christ and the presence of Christ are all the same. My priestly ministry is defined in relation to that face, that person, that presence. As I preside daily over the eucharistic sacrifice, as I lead up to it and journey away from it, I am enabling people to present their bodies as a living sacrifice (Rom 12: 1) before the Lord’s face, in union with the Lord’s “person”, in the Lord’s presence. I am inviting them to let the Holy Spirit make

them an everlasting gift to the Father (Eucharistic Prayer 3). I am asking them to open their eyes and, like the blind man in Estelle White's hymn, to come to see "the perfect face of a real and perfect man, the man who brought me from the dark, into light, when light began". I was ordained to be a man of the word of God, to preach that word, to celebrate it at its highest level of sacramental intensity, to bring a pastoral word, the word of the Good Shepherd, into every area of human living. All of this before the face, in the presence of Christ.

### *The Marginal Jew*

And now I ask myself what face of Christ has been most showing itself to me in recent times? Like many of you, I was brought up on the great "lives" of Christ: Fouard's *The Christ, the Son of God*, Ricciotti, Goodier. For spiritual reading, we had Marmion's great books. All of these gave us many glimpses of the face of Christ. Most times it was the majestic face of Christ or the face in agony. It was the same with our introduction to the great painters, largely the Renaissance painters. I thank God for the glimpses they gave me of the great face. Recently, I have been looking in a new direction for new glimpses. I am getting very striking glimpses of the face of the man I am calling "the Lord of the margins". I take the title from the yet unfinished work by Mgr John Meier, priest of the diocese of New York. Ironically, though he says you cannot today write a "life" of Christ, he has already written three massive volumes on the man he calls "a marginal Jew" and the fourth volume is in preparation. He gives six reasons for his choice of title. Each of them keeps ringing bells – sometimes alarm bells – as I reflect on the situations in which Catholics and their priests find themselves in today's society. I invite you now to listen and let them ring bells in you:

1. From the point of view of Jewish and pagan literature of the century following Jesus, he was, at most, a blip on the radar screen;
2. He died the ghastly death of slaves and rebels;
3. He marginalised himself in his way of living, being "jobless" and itinerant;
4. Some of his teachings and practices, e.g. his total prohibition of divorce and his voluntary celibacy, were marginal;
5. His style of teaching and living was offensive and he alienated many individuals and groups;
6. He was a poor layman from a rural culture, lacking a power-base in the capital.

In this list, John Meier doesn't mention the attitude of Jesus to



marginalised people. So I like to supplement his six reasons with his article “Jesus” in the New Jerome Biblical Commentary. There he says that Jesus delighted (note the word!) in associating with the religious lost, with the marginalised of the day; this put him in a constant state of (again note the word!) impurity; he also associated with the common people, in a spirit of mercy without measure, love without limits. I supplement my reading of John Meier with occasional forays into the findings of the “Jesus seminar” which, though from the point of view of Catholic orthodoxy it has many gaps, manages to keep putting the spotlight on words that give me a good glimpse of the face of Jesus; words like itinerant, healing, exorcising, teaching with a wisdom style, calling unexpected people to table fellowship. All these words help to illustrate the call of Jesus to the margins and my call to the margins.

The marginal image has, of course, its limitations. It is one, but only one, effective lens through which to look at Jesus Christ. But I have to say that these days it is providing me with endless material for meditation, prayer and action. It helps provide me with a language of ministry. It helps me to “keep looking to Jesus” (Heb 12: 2). It helps me when I feel the pain of being myself marginalised and of seeing the priesthood generally being marginalised, lacking influence and “clout”. It helps me to recognise and deal with marginal people – there are plenty of them around! It helps me to see that being marginalised can be good for me. In his third volume, John Meier describes the margin word as a riddle word, helping us to do what Jesus himself was continually doing, putting people guessing and making them wonder. It helps to bring me to the “edges”, to the “liminal”, words that are having a good deal of prominence today in writing on such topics as sacraments and religious life (on reading the *Confessio* of St. Patrick on his feast-day this year, he reminded me, in no uncertain terms, that I live in a country which he saw as being “on the edges of the earth...beyond where anybody lives”. It was a salutary lesson for me who for long thought that the Irish Church was in every way at the centre!).

### *Good News to the Marginalised*

Which brings me to the question: did Jesus come solely or principally to minister to the marginalised? If you read his great mission statement in Luke, chapter 4, the answer would seem to be yes: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...to bring good news to the poor...release to captives...to let the oppressed go free”. St Vincent de Paul, who constantly preached humility, used to tell his priests that they were the first community founded to do what Jesus himself came to do! But the full truth is that Jesus didn’t come primarily to bring good news to the poor. His mission was universal. He came to “gather into one the dispersed

children of God” (John 12: 52). That was why his group of apostles symbolically numbered twelve. His body was given “for all”. His blood was poured out “for all”. He was lifted up to draw not just the poor but all people to himself (John 12: 32). Going for people in the margins was his way of bringing all people into the centre and of showing that his Father’s reign had really come and that no section of the human family was to be excluded from that reign. In the service of the poor we find God’s most characteristic style: God’s style of creating *ex nihilo*, of having pity on the widow and orphan because it is they who most deserve the compassion and love by which God is defined, of continually lifting up the lowly from the dunghill. The same style is at work in God’s Son who emptied himself that we might all be filled with God’s fullness. He turns all our limited human values upside down and asks us to lose our lives if we are to save them. But Jesus didn’t come to form a classless, egalitarian society. He showed that, whatever the structures of society, each person is enormously important in God’s eyes. He invited the most insignificant of people from the margins right into the centre. In the words of some aboriginal people, he invited everybody to come near the campfire. For the Christian, the structures of society are good to the extent that everybody has access to the campfire. Nobody has a prior right to a place at the fire. According to Mark’s Gospel, the brothers and even the mother of Jesus were, if you were to go on the mere grounds of biological ties, outside the “circle” of his disciples (Mark 3: 31-35).

In the years after the Second Vatican Council, I took part for three summers in an international assembly of Vincentians. We spent several tedious weeks discussing the simple question “what are we for?” The “purpose” of the Congregation of the Mission was looked at from several directions. A lot depended on where you came from, geographically this time. Some delegates from the USA tended to argue that St Vincent founded us to attend to the most urgent needs of the Church which happened to be the evangelisation of the poor country people. Those who came from the “third world” kept stressing the evangelisation of the poor in a more absolute way. After all the weeks, we ended up with the obvious: we exist “to follow Christ evangelising the poor”. When we came home we were asked why we had spent all the community’s money stating the obvious. In retrospect, I think we did rather well! We put the spotlight on the poor, not in a restrictive way but rather to emphasise the evangelising style of Jesus. The style of Jesus must be the whole Church’s style. It is not just an option for some. It is a requirement for all. As a Vincentian, I keep drawing attention to the style of the Lord of the margins, by what I say and what I do.

*From Margins to Centre*

So, with or without my Vincentian hat, how would I describe my mission to the marginalised today? Not by any practices that could themselves be called marginal. It would be easy to make a fetish out of the kind of car I drive or don't drive, out of the kind of clothes I wear or don't wear. In a host of ways, I am called to keep bringing people from the margins into the centre. Very often these margins are social or psychological. But, whatever their social or psychological conditions, I am called to help bring all people from what is superficial on any level into what has depth, from what stays on the lips to what comes from the heart, and leads to the heart. The priesthood of Jesus consisted of entering, once-for-all, into the holy of holies. One could say that my work as a priest is to enter every day into the holy of holies and to enable others to enter the holy place. And where is the holy place? Is Knock, where I live and work, a holy place? Is Lourdes? Is Norwich? (It was recently rated the most godless city in England!). Certainly, all three places provide great incentives to holiness. But I have found that the people who live in them are in continual need of being evangelised! The only holy place is the heart of God, the inner depths of God. In relation to the heart of God, the human heart is or can be holy. What a pity that the various "heart devotions" in our churches can come across as so pietistic and so peripheral. All priestly ministry, drawing on the resources of Christ the priest, is an expression of Newman's *Cor ad Cor Loquitur*: heart speaks to heart. A priest is one who touches into hearts. All the Church's concern about the beginning and end of human life, about genetics, about cloning, arises or should arise out of a sense of the unique holiness of every human heart.

To touch the hearts of others, to help them go from margins to centre, I must be in touch with my own heart. The task is far from easy. The psychology textbooks in my formation days emphasised that there was within us a principle of life altogether distinct from the energies of matter. In the meantime, I have been learning, in theory and in painful practice, about my chemistry, my genes, my adrenalin, my hormones, my three billion DNA letters. I have read Ruth Burrows saying that if St Teresa had access to valium, there might have been no levitations. A contemporary in the seminary with whom I used to love to discuss spiritual books tells me a lot now about his problems with his sodium; I tell him a lot about my potassium problems. We don't have much time now to talk about what I call the biblical heart.

And how can I be in touch with the hearts of those to whom I minister? They too are experiencing difficulty in finding their real hearts. In an age when the raw wounds of priests are being exposed, my own vulnerability can help me to be a man of true sympathy and

empathy. A dedicated, elderly nurse in a large, enclosed seminary used to say to every sick student “I know how you feel; I used to have that complaint myself”. I don’t think we would be wise as priests to follow literally the good nurse’s practice. But we shouldn’t be afraid to let it be seen that we are “subject to weakness” (Heb 5: 2). I am called to be a man of heart. The biblical heart was equivalent to the human depths, what went beyond the surface and the margins, from what is superficial to what is innermost. If I am to keep finding my heart, to touch other hearts, to help people find their hearts, I am called to be a man of depths, a man of nothing less than contemplation (Remember Karl Rahner’s dictum that the Christian of the future must, if anything, be a mystic). As I search for my heart, I find my soul. I need to keep finding plenty of place and space to let the chemistry, the genes, the adrenalin, the hormones be at peace with one another, to let the sediment settle at the bottom of the well of my life, to let the Spirit of God move over the water of that well, to let my real face be reflected in the water and to bid the Lord come to me on the water.

#### *New Faces and Old*

I began by talking about the face. I ended up talking about the heart. It is by living before the face of Christ, by recognising the face of Christ, by being the face of Christ, that I become a man of heart. Jesus Christ has one heart, many faces. It is something like his presence. He has only one real presence; and yet he has many real presences. And wherever his presence is there his heart is. For the rest of us mortals, there can be an immeasurable distance between face and heart. Only God can see fully into any human heart: people look on the outward appearance but “the Lord looks on the heart” (1 Sam16: 7). Only in Jesus does the face disclose what is going on in the heart. As servants of the Lord of the margins, it is good for us to keep asking what face does he wish to show us these days as we feel the need of a new heart and a new spirit.

#### *New Leprosies*

I have always been interested in portrayals of the face of Christ. I have followed the story of the shroud of Turin. I have several books of icons of Christ. I have a number of collections of paintings that try to capture his look. I have two books of portrayals of the face of Christ from all periods of history. None of the countless portrayals is really satisfying. Yet, each of them gives me a glimpse of the perfect face of that real and proper man. Which of the faces of Christ attracts me most in these days of diminishing numbers, of scandals, of abuse, of low levels of morale? The face of Christ that is speaking most to me is the one by Mathias Grunewald who flourished in the early sixteenth century. He painted

it for the patients in a hospital in Isenheim. The hospital specialised in caring for people suffering from leprosy which has, significantly, been called the “scourge of the Middle Ages”. Christ is depicted as himself suffering from the same disease. His skin is covered with green boils. He is clearly taking on himself the ailments of the patients. It is a realistic and startling portrayal of the words of the prophet: “he has carried our diseases” (Is 54: 4). The painting is one panel of an altarpiece. On a side panel of the same altarpiece, the Resurrection of the Lord is portrayed in light more dazzling than that of the sun. His wounds are glorified. The distortions of his body are healed and transformed. The panels and their story have a place of honour in Sister Wendy’s *Thousand Masterpieces*.

In his book *Letters to Marc about Jesus*, the late Fr Henri Nouwen makes the daring claim that this work of art summed up and brought to its highest point the whole pictorial art of the late Middle Ages. He identifies with those who say that this is the most moving altarpiece ever made. On it, he says, the plague-stricken and dying sufferers saw their God with the same suppurating ulcers as their own. It made them realise with a shock what the Incarnation is really about. Nouwen goes on to say that, by watching the panel and staying with it for three hours, he learned more about suffering and resurrection than from days and days of reading. Clearly, it helped him to take into the depths of his heart the words of St Paul “he made him to be sin who knows no sin” (2 Cor 5: 21). In the recent humiliations of priesthood, we priests are being called to become sin. It was precisely in his sinlessness that Christ became near to sinners. Maybe this can also provide reassurance for those who wonder whether the woman conceived without sin can really be a role model and intercessor for us sinners. I have a feeling that there was a divine providence in the partial disfigurement over the centuries of the image of Our Lady of Czestochowa. Far from distancing her from us, her sinlessness keeps bringing her close to us in our disfigurements. The prayer of the harassed priest who, after a number of enquiries from devout parishioners about reported Marian apparitions, prayed “I wish that good woman would stay at home for a while” will not be heard! A priest who works in a troubled diocese in the United States recently told me that the priesthood today is receiving a scourging. Would I be going too far by saying that the principal agent of the scourging is the Lord himself who made whips in order to clear out his temple? I am consoled to think that the Lord who is cleansing his temple or who is at least allowing it to be cleansed is all the time interceding for us and that his mother never stops praying for us sinners who have become sin. I get great encouragement from Hans Urs von Balthasar who wrote so much about beauty. For Christians, he says, the disfigured and broken body of Christ is the greatest expression of God’s beauty. He could also have

called it the leprous body, the body marked by many scourgings. I have described the margin word as a lens word. These days, I find myself using the leper word as a lens word for the lens word! In the light of the Paschal Mystery, it is a word leading to resurrection. St Francis knew what he was doing when he kissed a leper. His divine Master would have approved

As priests in pastoral ministry, we are continually in touch with various forms of human leprosy in the hospital ward of life. And still we can be strangely inoculated against the reality of what people are enduring. Coming to realise this has led some priests to move into the world of the poor and share their lot in ways that have got a lot of attention. I believe that each of us is asked to taste in some direct way the real poverty and pain that are in the body of Christ. Each of us needs to keep in living touch with some group of marginal people. We need to keep touching and tasting the margins. I have been re-reading the life and poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins. While being overpowered again by the beauty of his poetry, I couldn't help wondering whether he was too immunised from the lives of "this jack" and that jack. And then I read that he died of the typhoid fever that came through the same contaminated water that was being used by the poor of Dublin. I think there is a rich symbol at work somewhere here. Having re-read the life of Hopkins, I met a religious sister who, in her eighth decade, continues to be immersed in the world of the poorest of the poor. I could see that she was somewhat less than enthusiastic about my praise of a priest whom we had both known and who has gone to his reward. When we talked further, she spoke of the shock and sadness she experienced when she once asked him to bring holy communion to a poor man who lived alone in a very slum area. "No", he replied, "it would be an insult to the Blessed Sacrament to bring it in to that filthy room". I remain convinced that the priest was a good man. He was caught in the beginning of a paradigm shift in attitudes towards reverence for the body of Christ.

It is not enough for me to identify with the well-healed (sic) ecclesiastic in the cartoon who is saying "I know what poverty is; I've been driven through it!" In my years as a priest I have been "driven through" many forms of poverty. But I have rarely been touched by any of them. I have been close to or part of many of the places in Ireland that have become part of our language of humiliation. One of my fellow novices was from a lovely Irish village. He often sang its praises. It had a reformatory for boys that has recently become a by-word. He never talked about it. When I was "driven through" the village after my ordination, I said "what a beautiful place!" and of course it was; but there was another side to it that was hidden from my eyes. I said my first Mass in an orphanage. All my guests were enchanted by the heavenly singing

of the lovely children. I didn't know that the word orphanage was to become a bad word. I loved the breakfast and the breakfast company in a convent to which a laundry was attached. It was the days before "the Magdalene Laundry" became a box-office success. For many years I said Mass in a beautiful setting for a large group of young religious on the day of their final vows. It never occurred to me that one day the very title of that community would, with some people, be a term of opprobrium. As I record my examples of places I was "driven through", I am not for a moment suggesting that awful things were happening all the time in all of them. Far, far from it. But we can no longer deny that many people have been experiencing inhumanity in institutions directed by men and women vowed to make people fully human. All of these vowed people started with the highest ideals. They were ready and willing to serve those on the margins. But the system didn't, in all instances, enable them to bring people from margins in to the campfire. Some of them ended up as impoverished culturally, educationally and religiously as those whom they were vowed to serve. In the meantime, many of us were like the rich man in the Gospel; we didn't even notice that there was a Lazarus at our doorstep.

### *New Faces*

So I keep searching in new places for new glimpses of the face of Christ. I am no longer automatically impressed by numbers. A sea of faces on a Sunday morning doesn't assure me of a good view of the face of Christ. In Knock, I am continually moved by the deep religious faith of the same marginal people whose presence makes me ensure that my door is locked and that the car-park is being properly looked after! Until I read the very fine Vatican document on "Popular Piety and the Liturgy", I tended to be cynical about parishioners in a poor Dublin parish who are rarely at Sunday Mass but who pack the church for the Novena of Grace in honour of St Francis Xavier. I am, I hope, getting better at recognising sparks of faith. I find myself giving more nuanced answers to the question "who are the real believers and practisers?" I am getting slower at describing today's culture as "pagan". The original *pagani* were, in a sense, the marginal people, the non-enlisted. I am finding a lot of faith in people who, by ordinary Church reckoning, are non-enlisted, not in the books. I can understand how Pope John Paul is impressed by the teaching of the Second Vatican Council that the grace of God is at work in every human heart.

Which brings me to one of my boasts. On my mantelpiece I have the faces of three saints – well, one saint, one blessed, one almost blessed! I have a photo of myself in a small group with Pope John XXIII, for his first semi-private audience, in 1958. I have a very alive picture of St Pio

of Pietrelcina to whom I confessed my sins in 1960. I have a picture of myself with the almost Blessed Teresa of Calcutta on one of her visits to Dublin. When I looked at the face of Pope John (the embalmers did a poor job on it!) in a very close-up way I felt I was getting a good glimpse of the face of the Lord himself. It was the face of a man who had a feel for people in all kinds of margins and leprosies. Here was the *contadino* who would teach the world so much. A month later, he was paying a visit to the prisoners in the *Regina Coeli* and telling them, without affectation, of his cousin who had to go to prison because he had stolen sheep. A few years later, he was setting the tone for the Council and its aftermath when he disarmed other Christian leaders by saying simply "I am Joseph your brother". His devotional life was simplicity itself. I am intrigued, though, by his emphasis on the precious blood of Christ. It must have come from his conviction that whatever mess the world is in, whatever our poverties, whatever our leprosies, we were all bought with a great price.

Two years after my meeting with Pope John, I knelt before Padre Pio for the forgiveness of my sins. I must admit that I was somewhat nervous that the searching eye of his noble face would give me a kind of spiritual x-ray and bring some of my hidden sins to light. I was relieved when I got the kind of warm encouragement that I had received from my parish priest the day I made my first confession. Reading the story of St Pio now, I realise that, at around that very time, he was experiencing the pettiness and jealousy of some of his own brethren who were bugging the parlour where he received people for spiritual direction. This must have been more painful by far than the stigmata themselves. Here was a nasty form of human leprosy. In his patience and forgiveness, and not in any of his preternatural gifts, was Pio's heroic practice of virtue.

I have long been an admirer of Mother Teresa. My admiration for her has trebled in recent months. I read about her struggles in some of her prayer. When she tried to raise her mind to heaven, there was such utter emptiness that her very thoughts returned like sharp knives and hurt her soul. Between her and God there was a terrible separation. As I read this part of her story, I found myself saying "Teresa, thanks for joining the club!" I was further encouraged as I read about her convalescence a year or so before she died. She became very agitated at night. She couldn't sleep. She pulled off the drips and monitoring wires. And what did they do to this gallant woman whose face and body were worn out from being in the service of all forms of human leprosy and who shared the lot of the poor up to the geriatric stages? She received the ministries of an exorcist! Was it the right decision? I wonder. It is in reading the story of great men and women like Pio and Teresa that I find myself re-assessing my understanding of the "three stages" of the spiritual life:



purgation, illumination and union. I do a similar re-assessing when I find responsible writers numbering St Thérèse and Ignatius of Loyola among those who experienced obsessive compulsive disorder.

### *Lifestyle*

And what kind of lifestyle is best suited today for the servant of the Lord of the margins who has shared in our leprosy? Certainly, the aspect of our life that is most under public scrutiny is celibacy. Is there anything new that can be said about it? It is as much “under fire” as it was when the English translation of Edward Schillebeeckx’s book was published over thirty years ago. It will continue to be under fire for the old reasons and for new reasons. With the continuing and growing phenomenon of communities without the Eucharist, it is reasonable to expect some new combination of the ministry of women and of men, of celibate ministry and married ministry. Married people will need to call the best out of celibates; celibates will need to call the best out of the married. I don’t know what the new combination or combinations will be. On this topic, we all have our opinions and our preferences. I have found that expressing mine on reflection days like this tends to polarise rather than to generate light. But one thing is certain. We are all called to help shape the ordained ministry of the future. Whatever forms it will take, there will always be a tension between living as an “elder” in secular society and being in continual touch with the sacred dimension of life.

On the celibacy issue, I have a few strong convictions. There is, I believe, a certain lack of confidence in the celibate way of life. I smiled and did some nodding of my head recently when I re-read the story of CS Lewis. Till he met his wife, at the age of sixty, he sometimes wondered whether God had been an invented substitute for love. There are times when I wonder whether, with all its sores, the celibate dimension of priesthood is really worth salvaging. In my times of doubt I take heart from Cardinal Danneels’ simple but profound statement that the only motive for a celibate life is the following of the celibate Christ. It remains a powerful motive. The celibacy of Jesus, like his total prohibition of divorce, was closely connected with his marginality. Both issues have to do with the way God joins people together.

Having said that, I find myself more and more unaccepting of what I call the bachelor, microwave aspects of celibacy. This can have a dreary, squalid side that all of us have in some way experienced. Which brings me to the question of supports.

### *Supports*

Celibacy needs supports. The supports are not forthcoming from today’s society. Far from it. Recently this was put very trenchantly by Maximos

Davies, a Byzantine monk in California (*First Things*, Dec 2002). Part of the genius of the Eastern churches, he writes, is the fostering of a culture of asceticism, with its combination, for example, of fasts and feasts. He goes on to say that celibacy can only flourish in this setting; otherwise it is seen as merely a legal requirement. It needs, he says, an ascetical and mystical ethos, as was provided in the early Church. I had just read the article when I went to collect my morning newspaper. All the papers were giving full coverage to yet another clerical scandal. The priest was well known to and admired by the newsagent and his wife. "Let's face it, Father", said Jimmy, "it's an unnatural life for any man". Jimmy's wife nodded agreement. My first reaction was to get defensive. All I managed was a silent smile.

One of the supports needed by all celibates is the support of community. St Augustine saw this clearly in the way he organised the life of his presbyters. New supports are called for and not just only in the area of celibacy. John Meier points out that, in his time of final testing, Jesus had few supporters. He did have some supporters, though. Think of the daughters of Jerusalem, of the women at the foot of the cross, of the reluctant - turned willing - Simon of Cyrene, of Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea waiting in the wings. In the days of his public ministry, Jesus said he didn't come to be served. But the Gospels record that he didn't object to being served. Yet there was a sense in which he died alone. There is also a sense in which we must be celibate alone. In life and in death, alone or with others, we marginals keep needing the support of one another. I recently heard it said of a controversial archbishop that he was a very good man to his priests when they were in trouble. It was a genuine and deserved tribute. It would even be better, though, if people could say, "he was so supportive of his priests that he helped them anticipate even their moments of trouble".

#### *Attitudes and Regrets*

What would I regard as the basic attitude that can best sustain us through all the bits and pieces of our priestly ministry? My answer at present is one word – humility! I need it as I look at the whole story of creation, from the big bang to the bleak winding down of the universe which, some of the learned people tell us, will come trillions of years from now. I need humility to recognise the hand of God in the unfolding mystery of creation and in the bits and pieces of every human life. I need humility if I am to avoid any manipulation of the truth as I enter into the painful world of the abused (and, indeed, of the abusers) so that we may all be re-filled "with all God's fullness" (Eph 3.19). I am called to humility if I am to appreciate fully the *kenosis*, the self-emptying of God. TS Eliot has written that humility is endless. Certainly the

humility of God is endless.

Have I any regrets as I revisit the half-century? The honest answer is that there are times when I feel like the proverbial pincushion. The first time I had to read the Roman Martyrology publicly in the seminary it was for the feast of St Sebastian, martyr. There was not in his body, the Martyrology said, “a spot without a wound”. How often have I recalled that line as I have, at various stages of life, nursed my “Sebastian complex”! I realise now that most or all of the ravages in my pincushion and most of my Sebastian wounds came from my own lack of humility in my response to life’s slings and arrows and the refusal to keep humbly asking pardon. I take consolation from St Thérèse’s desire to go to God empty-handed. I take heart from the advice of the Imitation of Christ: do now what you feel you should have done then. I take heart from Cardinal Hume’s deathbed words. Having expressed his regrets for all the might have beens and might have dones in his life, he said, “stop it, Basil...O God be merciful to me a sinner”.

In the 1970s, I told students very dogmatically that they were not to be taken in by Frank Sinatra’s “I did it my way”. Now I’m not so sure. Each of us can only do it our way. Each of us is called to priestly ministry in one, unique period in history, each of us with our own unique blend of chemistry, genes, adrenalin and hormones. God protects us by not giving us the answers to most of our questions. A distinguished archbishop said recently that if he had known at his ordination what state the priesthood would be in by the time of his silver and ruby jubilees, he probably wouldn’t have gone ahead. “Thank God”, he said, “I didn’t know and I am more than happy to be a priest now”. One thing I do know at the beginning of the third millennium: “I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him” (2 Tim 1: 12). The one in whom I have put my trust is risen from the dead. He is with me in all my bits and pieces, all my experiences of the margins, all my tinges of leprosy. He keeps inviting me to the campfire.

# Three Letters from Irish Confreres in China

Tom Davitt CM

## *Introduction*

In the eighteenth century one Irish confrere went to China. This was Robert Hanna (1762-1797) from Newry, about whom I wrote in *Colloque* 25. In the nineteenth century there were three, Michael Dowling (1820-1858), from Caltragh, Co Sligo, Thomas Fitzpatrick (1835-1865), from Dublin, and Patrick Maloney (1846-1882), from Doon, Co Tipperary. Patrick Maloney was a first cousin of the grandmother, neé Ryan, of Frs Tom and Paddy Dunning. Frs Dowling, Fitzpatrick and Maloney were members of the Irish Province but did not go to China as part of an Irish Province mission to that land.

In the twentieth century the Irish Province eventually made a foundation in China, being given charge of a church in Beijing (formerly referred to as Peking or Peiping) in 1919. That particular episode in the history of the Irish Province came to a complete end with the release from prison and expulsion from China of its superior, Maurice Kavanagh (1897-1964).

During the period of the Irish Province's involvement in China, there were three other confreres, two Irish and one English, working elsewhere in China, who were not members of the Irish Province. These were Denis Nugent (1885-1968) from Kinsale, Michael McKiernan (1888-1951) from Dromod, Co Leitrim, and William O'Hara (1903-1994) from Manchester.

Frs Nugent and McKiernan did their philosophy in Mungret and then went to Panningen in Holland to join the Vincentians and complete their studies, with a view to going to China. William O'Hara entered in Paris and did all his studies in France, and was sent to China. All three were appointed to the Ning Po.

Another man who took the Mungret-Panningen route to China was James Feely (1897-1957), from Kinlough, Co Leitrim. He was appointed to Kiang Si. Shortly after the Irish confreres started in Beijing Fr Feely was lent to them by his bishop but the loan soon became a transfer to the Irish Province.

Denis Nugent was superior of St Paul's Seminary in Ning Po from 1930, and was elected delegate of the South China Province to the 1947 General Assembly in Paris. By the end of the assembly it was clear that it would not be advisable for him to return to China, in view of the deteriorating situation there. Shortly afterwards, he transferred to the Irish

Province and served in St Vincent's, Mill Hill, in Glenart and lastly in Cork.

Michael McKiernan, known to everyone, irrespective of language, as Mac, was ordained in Panningen in July 1914. According to a minute of the General Council, dated 7 September 1914, he was in Blackrock at that date and was told to stay there to see how things developed, as war had been declared in August. There is no reference to his being in Blackrock in the minutes of the Provincial Council. He left for China and arrived in Shanghai on 3 January 1915. According to the custom current in the 1920s and 1930s he would have been due home leave around 1925 and 1935, but I have not found any reference in our archives to such visits. That does not mean, of course, that he did not come back then. He died under house arrest in Ting Hai on the island of Chusan on 13 November 1951. I owe this information, and much else about Mac, to Clotaire Givry CM, who is approaching his hundredth birthday as I write this. He was with Mac at his death and was allowed out from house arrest to officiate at his funeral.

William O'Hara left China and went to Hong Kong in 1950. The community had an apartment in Stanley and, later, a different one nearby and much of the financial arrangements for confreres in Taiwan was organised from there. The apartment in Hong Kong was given up in 1988 and Bill O'Hara was accepted into the Western US Province. At the age of 85 he needed to end his days in a climate similar to that of Hong Kong. He died in Los Angeles in December 1994.

The involvement of the Irish province in China lasted for slightly more than a quarter of a century. Unfortunately, there are very few original letters or copies about this mission in the provincial archives.

The three letters printed below are all connected with the Boyle Fund, established by Anthony Boyle CM (1845-1926) while he was spiritual director in Maynooth. In a period of twelve years he sent £87,600 to foreign missions, mainly China. With advancing age he handed over the running of the fund to his brother John Boyle CM (1851-1936) who was living in St Vincent's, Sunday's Well, Cork. By the year 1933 £127,920 had been sent abroad, mainly to China.

The three letters printed below were addressed to John Boyle. They are very interesting, particularly to those of us who knew the writers or persons mentioned in the letters, as they give some idea of the situations in which the writers were living at the time.

Andrew Kavanagh CM, Tung T'ang, Peiping, to John Boyle CM, Cork,  
20 September 1937.

Rev. and Dear Confrere,

Gratia D.N.J.C. sit semper nobiscum.

A few days ago I received your kind letter. It was delayed because it was not directed "Via Siberia". To come by sea it takes up to two months to arrive here. Well I immediately went to see the Secretary of the Delegation and found that the burses had not been distributed on account of the TROUBLE. So I exchanged cards with him and am enclosing the discarded one herein.

His Excellence, The Apostolic Delegate, was away in the North West (Suiyuan and Shansi) when the trouble came on about July 6<sup>th</sup>. Since then communications have been practically cut off with the outside world. It was possible to get around as a foreigner until the last big push but now except via Tientsin all communications are cut off. So the Delegate has not been in Peiping since the end of June. For this reason it was not possible to distribute the said burses. In fact at the Major Seminary here only about ten clerics have come back after holidays.

The Secretary however wishes to take this opportunity to thank you and all the kind donors INFORMALLY. He has the formal letter ready and is only waiting for the return of His Excellence. He thanks you also for the new system of printed cards. He says it is a wonderful boon to him. He also told me that the money is already invested and has accrued a big interest. I suppose it is only temporary.

We are all in the best of health here. Everything is quite peaceful. Fr Feely is completely [recovered]\* from his ordeal in the hands of the Bandits. Our school is going strong. How are all the confreres? Remember us to all of them.

I remain

Your devoted confrere

A. Kavanagh

\* *There is no word between "completely" and "from".*

*Denis Nugent CM to John Boyle CM and the other confreres in Cork*

St Paul's Seminary  
Ningpo Chekiang China  
1 June 1938

Reverend and Dear Confreres,

The Grace of Our Lord be with us for ever.

Your letter of 9 March has taken a long time to come, but it has arrived, which is the important thing, and it gave me great pleasure, coming from St Vincent's of which I have so many happy memories of true Vincentian kindness shown to me during my peregrinations in 1923. Need I say how gladly I will answer your questionnaire, & send you the desired information. However "man-man-tu-Sul". Our files are no longer in their place, for reasons you can guess, but they can be had, and I shall endeavour to give you news as fully as possible. I am sending this in order that you may not be anxious about your letter.

At present we are living in statu expectationis. We are in peace, except for air raids, which are made often, too often, on the airfield outside the city & on the Railway Station, situated only a quarter of a mile from the Seminary. The R.Statn has been wiped out, and after that the local military had the rails pulled up, & there is not now a sleeper to be found anywhere. Even the cinders have been raked up every where, on the platform & along the line, by starving people who get two coppers for a Chinese pound of it if it will burn.

Last week they threw bombs in the city itself, and as a result the population is in terror. When the raid alarm is sounded people pour into the seminary grounds, & little girls from the match factory nearby come & disappear into the shrubs & in the bamboos. Last Nov. the seminary was closed & the students sent to their homes. At Easter it was decided to bring the students of St Paul's back. We felt that they would be as safe here as anywhere else, judging from how things were happening. So Father O'Hara and I went off on a journey, as from Cork to Belfast, to reach the Hang Chow students who were with their P.P.s — all of them cut off from their Vicar Caps ever since Hang Chow was taken in December. It took the students 15 days to get to Kinhua in Nov., for all the cars were in the hands of the military. I went some of the way with them. We got there on Easter Sunday in ten hours in a bus kindly lent to us by the Commissioner of Customs (Mr Ashdowne), an English gentle-

man and a spiritual son of Fr P O'Gorman. The Customs had bought the motor bus in case the staff may have to get away in a hurry

Monsignor Fraser who is P.P. in Kinhua (City of the Golden Flower) had gathered the students for us, and we repayed him by bringing in our bus, besides the staff of life and potatoes etc, Mass Wine and the Holy Oils for the 25 priests he is looking after since they were cut off from their bishops.

On Thursday we started back for home, bringing the cream of the youth of West Chikiang to rejoin their brothers of Ningpo, Taichow and Lishui. Going and coming in this military occupied area we had a clear run thanks to the notice on our waggon telling the world that we belonged to Military Headquarters. As we passed we could see, in the valleys, volunteers drilling in preparation for the supreme sacrifice. Wishah!, 'tis a sad thing as it should never have taken place.

Three of our students will be ordained this month. Two belong to Hangchow, and one belongs to Ningpo Vicariat. He has been educated on a burse sent by Father A. Boyle, and given by Sister Mary Teresa O'Laverty.

I am sure this news will be pleasing to you and to the good Nun who gave the burse, and a promise of other information in a short time.

If you write again, it will be better to address the letter to the Procure des Lazaristes, 44 Rue Chapsal, Shanghai for me, as we may be cut off for a time. A letter can be more easily sent to us by other means than the Post, if that occurs. Meanwhile kindly keep us in your prayers. I shall [be] 25 years ordained 13 July, so I need this.

Will you please give my kindest wishes to all the confreres at St Vincent's.

I wish you both success in your good work,  
And remain your devoted confrere in St Vincent

Denis Nugent i.s.C.M.

P.S. I am having this posted in Shanghai

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*Denis Nugent CM, Ningpo, (to, presumably, whoever was his contact with the Boyle Fund since the death on John Boyle CM in 1936) 17 November 1946.*

*My dear Confrere:*

*It is not too late, I hope, to send you an answer to your Questionnaire of March 9, 1938. It arrived at a time when we were preparing for the worst! The "Chinese Incident", as the Japanese called the attack on China, was already in full swing. Our Seminary was empty, for in November 1937 frequent air bombings have become a constant danger; it was judged prudent to disperse our seminarists. All documents had been put in security, and all that I could do at the moment was to inform you by my letter of June 1, 1938, that a reply would be forthcoming when the clouds of war had rolled away.*

*This grace has at last been given us, and I am happy now to be able to give you a report on the activities of this seminary during the twenty years that I have had the privilege of co-operating in the formation of the Chinese priests who are destined to labour in the four ecclesiastical divisions of the province of Chekiang.*

*Educated on Boyle Burses*

*In 1927 St Paul's Seminary, which, until then, formed priests for the Vicariate of Ningpo, became a Central Seminary, to which the Vicars Apostolic of the other three vicariates of Chekiang began to send their students. During these twenty years 81 seminarists have received the priestly unction, and most of these have been educated on burses sent from Ireland through Fathers Anthony and John Boyle.*

*To the benefactors who sent them is due in large part the flowering and the fruiting of our seminary work during those past years, as it will be during the prosperous years, let us hope, which lie before the Church in this land of China.*

*Though it may seem incredible, no period was more fruitful in every way than that during the occupation of Ningpo by the Japanese. This happened on Low Sunday 1941 and continued till the war came to an end. As I mentioned, the seminarists had been dispersed at the beginning of the war. Later on there were signs that the Japanese did not have Ningpo for an objective, so it was decided to recall our students who had been scattered in the mission districts of the interior. At Easter 1938 they were back again in their old Alma Mater, and work began anew, often indeed interrupted by air alarms and bombings - but we*

*carried on as best we could.*

*On Low Sunday 1941, a day we shall never forget, the Japanese took Ningpo. Although in the line of the advancing army, we were not molested. We owe this to God and to the general who commanded the operations. And now we entered "the sphere of East Asia co-prosperity", this privilege bringing with it an accumulation of privations, a continual feeling of utter human powerlessness, and the continual apprehension that our seminaries would be occupied by the hordes of military continually passing through Ningpo. We were encircled by enemy posts, could not go anywhere without knocking up against them, were made to feel that we were under their heel, till we hated the very sight of their ugly uniform. Besides, they were a bad lot.*

*More than ever before we were cut off from all communication with the outside world. Even aid from the Royal Pope could not reach us. The Japs soon introduced their new dollar, and overnight our bank account was halved. Prices began to sky-rocket - servants quit because we could not pay them. However, we carried on. The priests and students took over the kitchen and domestic services, worked in the garden and felled trees. We all went on a diet that just kept body and soul together. The good God took things in hand, for nobody went sick during that time and, in spite of accumulated difficulties, twenty-six of our seminarists were ordained priests. When the last group of six were ordained, just on the eve of the Japanese surrender, the seminary funds were worn to a thread. Until then the Bishops had managed, God alone knows how, to keep us afloat. They could continue no longer and, in June, the seminaries, both minor and major, were closed for an indefinite time.*

### *Neophytes and Children of Neophytes*

*I am sending you a list of the benefactors whose burses were sent to Bishop [Paul] Reynaud [CM, 1854-1926] by Fathers Anthony and John Boyle. To each name is listed the name or names of the students ordained with the date of ordination. The number is 47. This would be much larger but for the fact that not all persevere. A relatively large number fall out on the long road that leads to the Altar of God. 81 were ordained out of a total of 149 students who entered St Paul's since 1927. Such a proportion of failures does not exist in Christian lands. Here it is not surprising when one considers that the majority of our students are neophytes and the children of neophytes.*

*I have not a list of the founders of burses for the students of the diocese of Hangchow. But the number ordained here for that diocese is 26, and most of these, I know, enjoyed burses from Ireland. The diocese of Taichow had 13 of its students ordained priests in St Paul's since that*

*district was divided off from the, up to then, Vicariate of East Chekiang. Of these 13 I happen to know that 7 were educated on Boyle burses. Finally, three students on the list belong to the Apostolic Prefecture of Lishui, detached from the Vicariate of Ningpo in 1931. These were also educated on burses sent by the Fathers Boyle.*

*I close this letter on a note of thanksgiving to Almighty God who sent the means of giving so many priests to the province of Chekiang, to the generous souls who were His instruments by their donations, in helping on the grandest work a Christian can be called to do, and to the two devoted sons of St Vincent, who inspired this great work, and carried it out with such ardent perseverance. Their names are in benediction in many a mission and seminary in China.*

*Yours devotedly in Christ*

*DENIS NUGENT C.M.*

*St Paul's Seminary  
Ningpo  
Chekiang  
China.  
November 17, 1946*

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*Items about Irish confreres in China may be found in previous issues of Colloque:*

- CLQ1: The Irish Vincentian Mission to Peking – Origins, compiled by James H Murphy CM*
- CLQ2: The China Mission , compiled by James H Murphy CM*
- CLQ5: Irish Vincentians in China, compiled by Tom Davitt CM*
- CLQ19: Recollections of Tung Tang, March 1947 thru August 1948, by John Lawlor CM, of the US Eastern Province.*
- CLQ25: Robert Hanna, by Tom Davitt CM*
- CLQ25: Obituary of Andrew Kavanagh CM, by Aidan McGing CM*
- CLQ28: Two Letters from Peking, by Patrick Barry CM*
- CLQ32: Robert Hanna's Tombstone, by Joseph Houston SSC*
- CLQ36 Two Interviews with Maurice Kavanagh CM, by Tom Davitt CM*

## Father Michael Prior CM

“Don’t put Mick and X on opposite teams because they’ll fight.” As we arranged the basketball teams on that summer’s evening in 1968, I can hear that peacemaker making that request. Michael was a competitor and, from that day in September 1962 when I first met him in St Joseph’s, Blackrock, that’s how he struck me. He really wanted to win that casual bit-of-fun basketball game. He wanted to win.

I have so many memories of Michael that it is hard to know what to write about and what to omit. He loved his native county and city. Cork city, with its hills and river – but, particularly, its characters – was something that was part of the life-blood of Michael Prior. He was a great mimic; I can hear him talking of Roger of Sunday’s Well telling Father O’Kelly that he had found a sum of money behind a statue in the Church – Roger’s accent, John O’Kelly’s walk, gesture, tone – all were grist to the mill for Michael, and then the punch line: “... and we had a good drink and went home full happy.” I think I have never laughed so heartily as at one of Michael’s all singing, all dancing, jokes and stories – Arabic, Irish, or Serbo-Croat – could be used to illustrate some side-point in the story. After Michael’s death a confrere who lived with him said of Michael that he felt it was his – Michael’s – mission to cheer people up. Fr John Hurley once said to me of Michael: “Every community needs a court jester.” I have to admit that over the years, I have recycled and plagiarized many of Michael’s stories.

But it wasn’t all singing and dancing. There was a very serious side to Michael. He was a determined student who spent fully nine years before ordination. Essays were written with care and enthusiasm whether it was on “quasi-formal causality” for Jim Tuohy or “What is Church History?” for James C Sheil. Comhairle Colmcille was a place where Michael could bring to our attention an issue he felt strongly about. In our student days we wrote and edited and printed a magazine called “Evangelizare”. In the issue of Easter 1969 Michael wrote an article on “Faith and Secular Man”. He concluded the article with:

what is called for is a true *aggiornamento*, not only at the institutional level, but also at the individual one. Each of us is part believer, part atheist, in that there are areas of life which go along with our religious beliefs affecting them: the draught of liturgy we drink in on Sunday does not spill over into the rest of the week. Mass for many people is not a symbolic expression of their commitment to Christ, but is merely one more activity, which the climate of the moment

regards as desirable. We need to integrate the human and the divine in ourselves first of all, and then proceed to do it in our society.

I think Michael spent the next 35 years of his life trying “to integrate the human and the divine”. He loved liturgy and vestments and plainchant. He was an enthusiastic guitarist and tin whistle player. He had a lovely quality to his singing voice. Fr Hugh Murnaghan recently gave me a tape Michael made in Coventry in 1977. On the tape Michael sings hymns, reads from one of Louis Evely’s books and tells us “this is for posterity.” He records his voice for an elderly lady whose sight was fading. If in some day in the far distant future “Colloque” will be audio as well as visual, we could then do full justice to a confrere like Michael Prior.

Michael was a good priest, first and foremost. He loved the little Company of St Vincent. He was a delegate chosen by his own to represent our Province at a general assembly in Rome. He was entrusted with the formation of our students for some years after his ordination. He ended his life as superior of our community in Eversley Crescent. In just he would say that these various offices were “worthy of my talents.”

Michael was no plaster cast saint. He hated cant and hypocrisy and false pious talk. He had no time for temporizing and place-serving and the “safe” course of action. At Michael’s requiem Mass in St Mary’s, Strawberry Hill, I said that Michael was human. He did not always get it right. He could be abrasive and very argumentative. He probably would not have been a good candidate for the diplomatic service. He was sensitive to criticism, yet fought his corner with vigor and zest. He did not crawl into a corner to lick his wounds. What you saw and heard was what you got. There were no “sides” to Michael Prior.

Michael spent almost all of his priestly life in education, most of it in Strawberry Hill. He was very happy there. He was consistent in trying “to integrate the human and the divine.” I can remember going with Paddy McCrohan to St Mary’s in 1987 to speak - at Michel’s behest - to the theology students and see if there was some way of involving them in an inner city project which Paddy and myself were involved with at that time. Michael brought students to the Holy Land on pilgrimage - not the “Disneyland” bits of Palestine (what he called “the dead stones”, the safe bits) but to meet the “living stones” of the suffering and abused Palestinian people. Michael was a seed planter, an ideas thrower, a challenger. Only God knows how many upwardly mobile lives were challenged and changed by Michael’s lectures, and articles and books and songs and jokes and banter.

On the tape from Coventry of 1977, Michael, accompanying himself on guitar, sings at breakneck speed:

His believers, when they've met,  
 Know he's there with them, and yet -  
 He's with God.  
 (What makes us think that's somewhere else?)  
 Deep, deep, deep, is the mystery I sing.  
 Dark, dark, dark, is the riddle.  
 He was born like you and I,  
 In a body which must die.  
 Yet his death is not forever -  
 He lives on.

In the last year or so before his tragic death Michael became very keen on gardening. He loved to retell the detective work he and Tom Davitt had done to locate the memorial garden somewhere in the Holy Land dedicated to the memory of Tom's grandfather, Michael Davitt. So in the months of the past spring and early summer, Michael and Padraig Regan could often be found clipping and pruning and cutting and relaxing in the garden of Eversley Crescent with suitable beverages close by. The poet Dorothy Gurney wrote "The kiss of the sun for pardon, / the song of the birds for mirth, / One is nearer God's Heart in a garden / than anywhere else on earth." I like to think that on that July day before Michael died in that self same garden he heard the birds singing and as he died the kiss of the sun was on his face.

Professor Prior, Father Prior, Doctor Prior, Uncle Michael, Michael, Mick, Mickey P – we all had different names for him. He was known and respected as a son, as a brother to Nuala and Jim, as an uncle to his nieces and nephews, as a friend, as a colleague, as a confrere, as a writer and scholar, as a fighter for those who were, and are, being unjustly treated; "he lives on".

Fergus Kelly CM

## MICHAEL PATRICK PRIOR CM

Born; March 15 1942  
 Entered the CM: September 7 1960  
 Final Vows; October 7 1965  
 Ordained Priest; May 31 1969 in St. Vincent's College, Castleknock  
 by Dr John Charles McQuaid, Archbishop of Dublin.

## APPOINTMENTS:

1969 - '70 St Joseph's, Blackrock  
 1970 - '72 Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome  
 1972 - '75 St Joseph's, Blackrock  
 1975 - '77 Bishop Ullathorne School, Coventry  
 1977 - '96 St Mary's, Strawberry Hill:  
 1983-84: Sabbatical: Ecole Biblique, Jerusalem)  
 1996 - '97 Sabbatical; Visiting Professor of Theology at  
 Bethlehem University  
 1997 - 2001 St Mary's University, Strawberry Hill  
 2001- 2004 St Vincent's, Isleworth

Died July 22 2004  
 Buried St Finbarr's, Cork

*The Guardian*; Friday, August 6th, 2004

Readers will note some inaccuracies: Michael joined the Vincentians before and not after ordination; the school in Coventry is Ullathorne and not Ullathorpe; Michael also leaves a sister, Nuala (ed)

FATHER MICHAEL PRIOR

*Liberation theologian passionately committed to the Palestinian cause*  
 Father Michael Prior, who has died aged 62 following a fall from a ladder, was priest of the Vincentian Congregation, professor of biblical theology at St Mary's College, Surrey University, and a passionate liberation theologian - at a time when this radical understanding of the Christian gospel was meeting with cool scepticism in Rome. He saw no conflict between scholarship and political commitment to the oppressed; to follow St Vincent de Paul, and to walk in the steps of the radical rabbi Jesus of Nazareth, was to be on the side of the poor, not in general but in particular.

Michael chose a cause conditioned by his studies in the Holy Land: the injustice, as he saw it, suffered by the Palestinian people since the establishment of the state of Israel. His last article, published since his death in *The Tablet*, warned that the Catholic-Jewish liaison committee's decision to equate anti-Zionism with anti-semitism was a grave mistake. He was convinced, as were most Jewish theologians at its beginnings, that Zionism, the establishment of an exclusively Jewish state, flew in the face of the Hebrew scriptures.

Warm-hearted and nearly always good humoured, he rejoiced in many friends of all religions and none. But with quintessentially Irish fighting spirit, he was not afraid to make enemies; his humour left him when he was faced with what he felt to be purveyors of injustice and humbug.

Born in Cork, Michael was educated by the Christian Brothers. He studied science at University College, Dublin, and completed his theological studies in 1969. After ordination, he joined the Vincentians, took up the study of semitic languages and gained his licence in sacred scripture in Rome in 1972. Studies in the theology of St Paul led to a doctorate at King's College London.

Returning from Rome, he spent three years as director of the Vincentian Formation, and then taught for two years at Ullathorpe grammar school, Coventry. In 1977, he went to St Mary's College, first as lecturer in theology, then as department head (1987-97), and, from earlier this year, as professor.



Most formative in Michael's life was a sabbatical year in Jerusalem, and a year spent as visiting professor of theology at Bethlehem University. This experience enabled him to root his praying, thinking and teaching in the life of the people of the Holy Land.

In 1982, he became co-founder and chair of Living Stones, an ecumenical organisation dedicated to promoting links between Christians in the Holy Land and Christians in Britain. He did every thing possible to support the dwindling number of Christians, caught between Jewish and Islamic nationalisms in the Middle East. Living Stones promoted pilgrimages from Britain, concerned primarily with the daily lives of local people rather than with the holy sites.

Though he rejected ivory-tower academia, Michael was nevertheless a respected scholar and author. *The Bible And Colonialism: A Moral Critique* (1997) was an examination of the way in which the narratives of the Hebrew exodus and the Spanish conquest had been utilised to justify colonialism in Latin America, South Africa and, of course, Palestine.

Michael was convinced of the active and passive collusion of much western biblical scholarship with the enforced removal of the Arab population from its ancestral lands. Though it is now religiously underwritten by the Orthodox rabbinate – and by many fundamentalist Christians – Michael saw what is now generally admitted to have been ethnic cleansing as a secular plan long predating the Holocaust. He discovered that, in 1895, the founder of modern Zionism Theodor Herzl had written that “we shall endeavour to expel the poor population across the border unnoticed – the process of expropriation and the removal of the poor must be carried out discreetly and circumspectly.” In the context of the 1948 war, it was neither discreet nor circumspect, a theme explored in Michael's book *Zionism And The State Of Israel: A Moral Enquiry* (1999).

Prophets are seldom recognised as reconcilers, but Michael was in no sense anti-semitic. An increasing number of Jews agreed with his critique of Israeli policies as inhumane. He stubbornly fought against the view that they were a case of Jewish self-hatred. This minority – rather than the majority – he believed, had the true interests of Israel at heart.

That Muslims, Jews and Christians could and should live in equality and harmony was his conviction. If he was, at times, blind to Jewish fears and Arab failures, it was because of his passionate solidarity with those who had, in his eyes, become victims.

Michael's favourite text, read at his funeral, was the story of Jesus preaching in his home-town synagogue, quoting the prophet Isaiah anointing him to preach good news to the poor, liberation to captives

and freedom to the oppressed. When Jesus used this text to illustrate the idea that God's love

was for foreigners – as well as for Israel – the congregation tried to lynch him. I do not think it unfair to say that Michael recognised himself in that role.

Yes, this radical priest was singleminded to the exclusion of many things. Those who did not know him might have thought him a fanatic; those who did, however, knew a gentle man with a warm sense of humour, often at his own expense. “Modesty,” he liked to joke, “is one of my chief virtues.”

Michael Prior, priest, teacher and activist, born March 15 1942; died July 21 2004

Paul Oestreicher

*The Coventry Observer*; Thursday, 5th August 2004

*Scholar and teacher is buried in Ireland*

A VINCENTIAN chaplain and teacher at Bishop Ullathorne Roman Catholic School from 1975-1978, Reverend Professor Michael Prior CM died when he fell from a ladder in his London garden on Wednesday, July 21, aged 62.

Although Fr Prior was only at the school for three years, he left an unforgettable impression. He had continued to keep contact with his many Coventry friends and was last in the city earlier in July to attend the celebrations for Bishop Ullathorne School's 50th anniversary.

Born in Cork in 1942, Michael was educated by the Christian Brothers and joined the Vincentian Fathers. He was a graduate in experimental physics mathematics and divinity

His Biblical studies were done in Dublin, Rome Jerusalem and London. He was a Biblical scholar, prolific writer and founder of The Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust the aim of which was to develop understanding between Christians in Europe and Middle East.

From Coventry Fr Michael went to teach at St Mary's College, Twickenham, where he was professor of Bible and theology and senior research low in Holy Land studies.

Fr Michael devoted much his life in the service of justice and liberation for the poor including the Irish travelling people in London and Palestinian people.

Friend and former colleagues Bernadette Feehan said: "He will be remembered not only for his academic work but for his love of life, his exceptional kindness, his wicked sense of humour and his ability to mimic anyone. He was a talented singer guitar player, and a passionate champion of all those who were underprivileged or oppressed".

Former colleague Ann Farr added: "Michael was very well liked by both staff and pupils at Bishop Ullathorne School. He was a dedicated teacher with a great sense of fun and willingness to be involved in the whole life of the school, its families and its wider community. He has worldwide respect for his scholarship and for work for justice for all people".

Friends from Bishop Ullathorne School joined his sister, Nuala, brother Jim, and friends and colleagues from all over the country in the crowded chapel at St Mary's College Strawberry Hill, Twickenham on Friday (July 30) for the requiem mass for Fr Michael. His body was then flown home to his native Cork for the funeral mass and his burial.

*The Times*; Saturday 21st August, 2004

FATHER MICHAEL PRIOR;

*Roman Catholic priest and scholar who campaigned for the rights of Palestinians*

Father Michael Prior was a biblical scholar who spent much of his life writing and campaigning about the rights of the Palestinians in the Holy Land. A radical priest, he was also an out spoken critic of Zionism, which, he argued in his books, articles and lectures, was unbiblical.

Born in Cork in 1942, Michael Prior was educated by the Christian Brothers. He studied science at University College Dublin, completing his theological studies in 1969. After ordination he joined the Vincentians and went to Rome to study Semitic languages under Dermot Ryan, later to become Archbishop of Dublin. Prior gained his licence in sacred Scripture from the Pontifical Biblical Institute in 1972.

Upon his return to Ireland, he spent three years as director of Vincentian formation before moving to Coventry where he taught at Ullathorne Grammar School for two years. In 1977 he was appointed lecturer in theology and religious studies at St Mary's College, Strawberry Hill, Middlesex. He gained a PhD from Kings College London, taking as his thesis Paul's second letter to Timothy.

In 1982 he co-founded Living Stones: an ecumenical organisation building links between Christians in Britain and Christians in the Holy Land. Living Stones promoted pilgrimages from Britain and was concerned primarily with the daily lives of local people rather than with the holy sites.

Father Prior spent a sabbatical year in Jerusalem in 1983-84. It was during this time that he questioned his view that Israel's occupancy was justified in term of its own security needs. "The aggressive programme of Jewish settlement in the territories during that period, and the religious fervour of the terrorist group caught in the act of attempting to blow up the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque raised for me questions about the role of the biblical narrative of promise and possession of land in the expansionist activity of Jewish settlers", he later wrote.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s he made frequent visits to the Holy Land culminating in his tenure as visiting professor at Bethlehem University and scholar in residence at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute, Jerusalem. He became head of the department of theology and religious studies at St Mary's College in 1987.

In 1997 he published *The Bible Colonialism: A Moral Critique* which examined the way the Bible had been used to support colonialism in Latin America, South Africa and Palestine. He pointed to what

he called acts of genocide and “ethnic cleansing” in the Testament. He wrote that “a God who insists on the destruction of people a sact of devotion to him is one from which most decent people should recoil”. In *Zionism and the State of Israel: A Moral Enquiry*, published in 1999, he pursued his theme, tracing the history of modern Zionism from its founder Theodor Herzl to the present day. He claimed that the expulsion of the Palestinians in 1948 was not a consequence of the Holocaust but that it had been planned by Herzl from the beginning.

In an interview in *Witness* in 2003, Father Prior said: “The God they portray looks to me to be a militaristic and xenophobic genocide who would not be sufficiently moral to conform to the Fourth Geneva Convention. How, I constantly ask myself, are such people so concerned about others being kicked out of their homes, children being shot, people struggling for survival against very oppressive forces of occupation?”

Needless to say, he was sometimes accused of being anti-Semitic. But he was careful to distinguish between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism. He believed that Muslims, Jews and Christians could and should live in equality and harmony. In his last article, published in *TheTablet* shortly before his death, he warned that the Catholic-Jewish liaison committee’s decision to equate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism was a grave mistake. He was convinced that Zionism flew in the face of the Hebrew Scriptures.

He believed that Zionist ideas dominated thinking about the Arab-Israel conflict in the West, even in the Church; “The situation within the Christ churches and mainstream Christ theology is even more alarming.

“They, too, have been seduced into accepting a Zionist rendering of all Jew history. I am disturbed that some sectors of these agencies concur, either by direct support or silence, in the ongoing humiliation of an innocent people.”

Prior was a tireless campaigner for justice for the Palestinians and for peace the Holy Land. Genial and with a lively sense of humour, he was never worried about getting into controversy. St Mary’s College, University of Surrey, honoured him with a professorship in 2004. Father Michael Prior, priest, lecture and activist, was born on March 15, 1942. He died on July 21, 2004, aged 62.

*The Independent*, 23 August 2004

PROFESSOR MICHAEL PRIOR

*Controversial priest and theologian who was an outspoken supporter of Palestinian rights*

Michael Prior, priest, scholar and activist: born Cork 15 March 1942; ordained priest 1969; Senior Lecturer in Theology and Religious Studies, St Mary's College, Strawberry Hill 1977-97, Head of Department 1987-97, Principal Lecturer 1997-2002, Senior Research Fellow 2002-04, Professor of New Testament Studies 2004; died Osterley, Middlesex 21 July 2004.

Michael Prior was a Vincentian priest, a scripture scholar, a liberation theologian, peace activist and supporter of Palestinian rights. He was one of the more colourful and controversial figures in the Catholic Church in Britain, and a trenchant and outspoken critic of Israel and of Zionism.

Born in Cork in 1942, Prior joined the Congregation of the Mission on leaving school and took a degree in Physics at University College Dublin, completing his theological studies in 1969. After ordination he studied Semitic Languages, gaining his Licentiate in Sacred Scripture in Rome in 1972.

After two years as a schoolmaster in Coventry, he became Lecturer in Theology and Religious Studies at St Mary's College, Strawberry Hill, later a college of Surrey University, in 1977. Prior gained his doctorate from London University in 1985 and became head of department in 1987. Apart from a sabbatical year in Jerusalem and a year as Visiting Professor of Theology in the University of Bethlehem, he spent the remaining years at St Mary's.

In his pursuit of biblical scholarship he contributed *Paul the Letter-writer and the Second Letter to Timothy* (1989) and served as chair of the Catholic Biblical Association of Great Britain. However, Prior became dedicated to the proposition that scholarship could also be politically committed, an approach reflected in his *Jesus the Liberator: Nazareth Liberation Theology (Luke 4.16-30)* (1995).

This commitment found earlier expression in his campaigning for the rights of travelling people but time spent in the Holy Land led him to become an enthusiastic advocate of the Palestinian cause and in 1982 he became co-founder and chair of Living Stones, an ecumenical organisation promoting link between Christians in the Holy Land and in Britain.

He was convinced that much Western biblical scholarship encouraged active or passive collusion in the oppression of the Palestinian people, and his *The Bible and Colonialism: a moral critique* (1997) examined the way in which the biblical narrative of the Exodus from Egypt and the Conquest of Canaan had been deployed to justify colonialism in Latin America, South Africa and, of course, Palestine.

Prior's scholarly interest later shifted to the historical evaluation of Zionism. His *Zionism and the State of Israel: a moral inquiry* (1999) developed a moral critique of Zionism, underlining its secular roots and the relatively recent character of support for Zionism by religious Jewry. He also argued that the expulsion of the Palestinians, far from being a consequence of the Nazi Holocaust or of the fortunes of war in 1948, had been planned by the founding fathers of Zionism from the beginning. In a climate where many liberal commentators sought to combine concern for the Palestinians with support for Israel, Prior insisted on the "original sin" of 1948 (as against the fashionable theory that depicted Israel as "falling from grace" subsequent to the occupation of the territories in 1967).

His stance often brought opposition and in 2002, the Jesuit Holy Cross College in Massachusetts withdrew a lecture invitation. Fortunately Prior thrived on opposition and, knowing them to be unfair, he shrugged off accusations of anti-Semitism. The day before his death he expressed the hope of establishing a forum for Jewish-Christian dialogue that would not exclude anti-Zionist Jews and Christians.

Prior will be remembered for his unique combination of kindness and his belligerent sense of fun. Once, when challenged to state his religion by an Israeli soldier, he answered humorously: "Well I was Zoroastrian, but I lapsed." On another occasion, when arrested on a peace march in Jericho, he was told that he was allowed one telephone call and replied that he wanted to ring the Pope.

He could engage in an argument with relish and the determination of a dog with a bone and, although he sometimes practised his polemical skills on his friends, he reserved the full treatment for those he regarded as purveyors of injustice or humbug. Prior was the quintessential Irish rebel and enabled many to understand better why Britain no longer rules all of Ireland.

His attitude to death, too, was typically Irish and Catholic. He was a man of substantial build and once responded to kindly expressions of concern over the advisability of jogging with the reply, "Well, if I die, at least I'll die healthy!"

Duncan Macpherson

*Irish Times*; Saturday, 28th August 2004

*Readers will note that this is, in essence, a re-working of Paul Oestreicher's earlier obituary notice in The Guardian (ed)*

*Working for justice in the Holy Land*

Father Michael Prior, who died recently aged 62 following a fall, was a Vincentian priest, professor of biblical theology at St Mary's College, Surrey University and a passionate liberation theologian at a time when this radical understanding of the Christian gospel was meeting with cool scepticism in Rome.

He saw no conflict between scholarship and political commitment to the oppressed; to follow St Vincent de Paul to walk in the steps of the radical rabbi Jesus of Nazareth, was to be on the side of the poor, not in general but in particular.

Father Prior chose a cause conditioned by his studies in the Holy Land: the injustice, as he saw it, suffered by the Palestinian people since the establishment of the state of Israel.

His last article, published since his death in *The Tablet*, warned that the Catholic-Jewish liaison committee's decision to equate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism was a grave mistake. He was convinced, as were most Jewish theologians at its beginnings, that Zionism, the establishment of an exclusively Jewish state, flew in the face of the Hebrew scriptures.

Warm-hearted and nearly always good-humoured, he rejoiced in many friends of all religions and none. But with quintessentially Irish fighting spirit, he was not afraid to make enemies; his humour left him when he was faced with what he felt to be purveyors of injustice and humbug.

Born in Cork, Father Prior was educated by the Christian Brothers. He studied science at University College Dublin, completed his theological studies in 1969. After ordination, he joined the Vincentians, took up the study of Semitic languages and gained his licence in sacred scripture in Rome in 1972. Studies in the theology of St Paul led to a doctorate at King's College London.

Returning from Rome, he spent three years as director of the Vincentian formation and then taught for two years at Ullathorpe grammar school, Coventry. In 1977, he went to St Mary's College, first as lecturer in theology, then as department head (1987-97), and from earlier this year, as professor.

Most formative in Father Prior's life was a sabbatical year in Jerusalem and a year spent as visiting professor of theology at Bethle-



hem University. This experience enabled him to root his praying, thinking and teaching in the life of the people of the Holy Land.

In 1982, he became co-founder and chair of Living Stones, an ecumenical organisation dedicated to promoting links between Christians in the Holy Land and Christians in Britain. He did every thing possible to support the dwindling number of Christians caught between Jewish and Islamic nationalisms in the Middle East.

Though he rejected ivory-tower academia, Father Prior was a respected scholar and author. *The Bible And Colonialism: A Moral Critique* (1997) was an examination of the way in which the narratives of the Hebrew exodus and the Spanish conquest had been utilised to justify colonialism in Latin America, South Africa and, of course, Palestine.

Father Prior was convinced of the active and passive collusion of much western biblical scholarship with the enforced removal of the Arab population from its ancestral lands.

He discovered that in 1895, the founder of modern Zionism, Theodor Herzl, had written that “we shall endeavour to expel the poor population across the border unnoticed - the process of expropriation and the removal of the poor must be carried out discreetly and circumspectly”.

In the context of the 1948 war, it was neither discreet nor circumspect, a theme explored in Father Prior’s book *Zionism And The State Of Israel: A Moral Enquiry* (1999).

That was his conviction. If he was at times blind to Jewish fears and Arab failures, it was because of his passionate solidarity with those who had, in his eyes, become victims.

This radical priest was single-minded to the exclusion of many things. Those who did not know him might have thought him a fanatic; those who did, however, knew a gentle man with a warm-sense of humour, often at his own expense. “Modesty,” he liked to joke, “is one of my chief virtues.”

He leaves his brother, James, and an extended family.

Michael Prior: born March 15th, 1942; died July 21st, 2004.

*The Tablet*; 31st July 2004

OBITUARY; Fr Michael Prior

The Scripture scholar Fr Michael Prior has died in London, aged just 62, after falling off a ladder while gardening at the Vincentian house in west London.

Born in Cork in 1942, Fr Prior was educated by the Christian Brothers. He studied Science at University College Dublin, and completed his theological studies in 1969. After he was ordained and joined the Vincentians, he studied Semitic Languages under Dermot Ryan, later Archbishop of Dublin, gained his Licence in Sacred Scripture in Rome 1972, and on his return spent three years as Director of Vincentian Formation before doing a two year teaching stint at Ullathorne Grammar School in Coventry.

In 1977 Fr Prior became Lecturer in Theology and Religious Studies at St Mary's College, Strawberry Hill, and head of department in 1987. In 1985 he obtained his PhD from London University for a thesis on St Paul's second letter to Timothy. Apart from a sabbatical year in Jerusalem and a year as Visiting Professor of Theology in the University of Bethlehem he spent his remaining years at St Mary's.

Michael rejected the detached character of much Scripture scholarship. His life became dedicated to the proposition that academic scholarship could be both committed and serious, an approach reflected in his *Jesus the Liberator: Nazareth Liberation Theology*. During his time in the Holy Land he became a conscientious supporter of the Palestinian cause. In 1982 he became co-founder and chair of Living Stones, an ecumenical organisation dedicated to promoting links between Christians in the Holy Land and Christians in Britain.

Convinced of what he perceived as the active or passive collusion of much Western biblical scholarship in the oppression of the Palestinian people, he developed this thesis in *The Bible and Colonialism: a moral critique* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1997). In it he examined the way in which the narrative of the Exodus and the Conquest had been utilised to justify colonialism in Latin America, South Africa and, of course, Palestine.

In *Zionism and the State of Israel: a moral inquiry* he analysed the history of Zionism, underlining its secular roots as well as the relatively recent character of the support for Zionism by religious Jewry. He showed that the expulsion of the Palestinians, far from being a consequence of the Nazi Holocaust or of the fortunes of war in 1948, had been planned by the founding fathers of Zionism from the beginning.

Fr Michael was a gentle, kind man with an infectious sense of

humour. Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor's tribute can speak for all those who grieve for him. "I knew Michael well and admired him. He was a very dedicated priest and a great Vincentian. As I got to know him better over 14 years I found him to be a committed scholar. Now he is truly a living stone." His last article was written just a week before his death and is published on page 9.

Duncan Macpherson and Kieran Magovern CM