

COLLOQUE

Journal of the Irish Province of the
Congregation of the Mission



CAPTION TO FRONTISPIECE

see page 155

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Editorial

All the articles in this issue were given as talks at CEVIM 95, the annual meeting of the European Vincentian Provincials (Conférence Européenne des Visiteurs de la Mission), which this year was held in All Hallows College, Dublin. In two cases, though, a shorter version than that printed here was given; this is indicated at the start of the articles in question.

In the Miscellanea section there is fuller information about the portrait of St Vincent which is printed as the frontispiece of this issue. This portrait was mentioned in No. 24, Autumn 1991, where I promised further information when available. There is also an interesting addition to my article on Robert Hanna, which appeared in No. 25, Spring 1992.

At the moment of writing (July 1995) the Holy See has not given a date for the canonization of John Gabriel Perboyre, but it is expected to be towards the end of 1996. The Superior General has written to the editors of Vincentian publications asking for a special issue on the new saint. *Colloque* normally has two issues per year, Spring and Autumn. It is proposed to publish three issues in 1996, with the Spring issue the special one on John Gabriel Perboyre, and a Summer one containing what had been planned for the Spring number.

Working in Northern Ireland

Eamonn Cowan

The conflict in Northern Ireland today has roots deep in the history of both Ireland and Britain. The early years of this century brought to a head the long struggle for Home Rule and independence from Britain. That independence grew out of a guerrilla war and a general election in 1918 which produced a majority of Irish in favour of self-rule – or Home Rule as it was called. That election also highlighted the existence of a large group located in the north of the island strongly opposed to Home Rule. These million people saw themselves as Protestant and British – they regarded Home Rule as Rome Rule and had no wish to be submerged in Catholic Ireland. For the most part these people were the descendants of those who, many generations before, had been brought from England and Scotland to settle on the land and help pacify the native Irish.

In 1920 the British Parliament passed the Government of Ireland Act, as a result of which Ireland was partitioned. Self-rule was granted to the greater portion of the island and it became the Irish Free State, the six northern counties remained under British rule and formed part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. This Northern state had a population of 1.5 million – 1 million Protestants who were British and 0.5 million Irish Catholics. In 1921 a new Parliament was opened in Northern Ireland – a Protestant Parliament for Protestant people. With a permanent Protestant majority and a system of government which ensured majority rule, the scene was set.

The Catholic Irish minority never really accepted the new Northern Ireland and were not given any reason to “belong” by the majority. There was concern among the Protestant community that they would remain the majority. With that end in view there was discrimination against Catholics when it came to jobs, public housing, and voting rights. Put simply. Catholics found it difficult to get work, houses, and voting rights were linked to possession of property.

Attempts to draw attention to the state of affairs were ignored by British governments, on the grounds that such matters were the concern of the regime in Northern Ireland. In 1968, Catholics began a campaign

for what they regarded as civil rights. There was a tardy response to those demands and finally the response from the majority government was violence – Catholics were burned out of their homes in Belfast and were fired on by units of the police. The British army was introduced to protect the Catholic community from attack. At that stage the Irish Republican Army began an armed campaign in the belief that only through the breaking of the link with Britain and the reunification of the island could justice be secured by the minority in Northern Ireland. The armed campaign of the Irish Republican Army did not have the support of the people of Ireland, nor of the Catholic population of Northern Ireland. In fact, Catholics themselves suffered from the actions of the IRA as well as the attacks of Protestant paramilitary groups – this was true especially in Belfast where Catholics were killed in large numbers for no reason other than that they were Catholics. Terrible things were done on all sides – IRA, Protestant paramilitaries, and the security forces. The armed struggle continued for 25 years, resulting in over 3,000 deaths, thousands of wounded, and much destruction. There are very few families in Northern Ireland who have not been touched by the events of these years, and both communities have suffered much. Since last August the guns have fallen silent and the search is now on to find a settlement which may lead to a permanent peace.

Between 1862 and 1987 the Vincentians staffed St Patrick's College, Armagh, which is located in Northern Ireland. St Patrick's was originally the minor seminary for the archdiocese of Armagh, but had in recent years become a secondary school for boys. Because of the problem of declining vocations and the consequent difficulty in staffing schools, the community made a decision to withdraw from Armagh. Our departure from there in 1987 meant that we no longer had a presence in Northern Ireland, and that at a time when people were experiencing so much trauma. We were anxious to find a new way to serve the Church and people in the North. In 1992 Fr Frank Mullan and I went to the diocese of Down & Connor, Fr Frank to Ballymena and I to live and work in a very poor parish in West Belfast – one that had suffered a great deal in the years of violence. Since 1993, at the request of the bishop, I have joined Fr Frank in living and working in Ballymena. Ballymena has a population of about 50,000 people and lies about 40 kilometers north of Belfast. It is a very Protestant town with a minority Catholic population of about 7,000. We work with two diocesan priests, one of whom is Parish Priest. Frank and I live in a part of the town with a large Protestant community not well

disposed to the presence of a Catholic church, much less two priests. Many Catholics have been intimidated into leaving the locality over the past 20 years. Life can be uncomfortable at times, e.g. church and house are stoned, and one of our parish churches was bombed some years ago. There is a poverty of smouldering suspicion, fear, and even, at times, hatred, in many of those living around us. Here we are at the core of the Protestant community in Northern Ireland and it could be a “bridging point”. We are searching for small ways in which we can link persons in the work of healing that is necessary

Each month we meet a small group of Protestant ministers serving in the town – let it be said that not many ministers are interested in such contacts. We have come to realise how difficult it is for them to be involved with Catholic priests, or indeed with any ecumenical contacts, due to the hostility of their local congregations. In Ballymena it demands courage for a Protestant minister to be part of cross community contact. Our monthly meeting might be small, but it is not without significance and importance in the task of healing.

The Vincentian Mission team, based in All Hallows, will give a two week parish mission in Ballymena at the end of May. We are presently involved in preparing the parish for that event. Two groups from the parish have joined other lay groups here in All Hallows linked to mission preparation, but also gaining insights into the emerging theology of both Church and ministry. The Church in Ireland is faced with the challenge of something dying and something coming to life. Both the present ceasefire in the North and the possible settlement resulting from present negotiations will present a new scene and new opportunities.

Recently, the diocese of Down & Connor completed an audit with a view to identifying the needs to be addressed in a Pastoral Plan for the diocese. Each diocese in Ireland is involved in a similar audit aimed at putting in place a Pastoral Plan for the whole country. Among the issues raised in this diocese were:

- 1) Pastoral care for young people, especially those in second level schools, many of whom are alienated from the institutional Church.
- 2) Adult religious education and formation.
- 3) Priests are looking for help in the areas of human development, pastoral theology and spiritual direction.
- 4) There are many people in the more deprived areas of Belfast who are angry with the Church – victims of violence, women, and

those who feel the Church did not speak for them when they had been victims of injustice.

5. The perceived link between violence and religion has fuelled the movement towards growing secularism in Ireland. Many young people are disillusioned with church and all organised religion – Protestant and Catholic.

Recent years have seen a great deal of attention given to the matter of collaborative ministry, especially in our attempts to work with and for poor people. The Daughters of Charity have been working and living in some of the poorest Catholic areas of Belfast for many years. We have already made public our interest in working with the Daughters and the Society of St Vincent de Paul in the more deprived areas of Belfast. Presently, this avenue of possible development is being explored with a view to establishing a common project in the future. In some small ways this is already taking place. Fr Frank has recently been appointed chaplain to the Northern region of the Society of St Vincent de Paul and I have been asked to work with some adult groups in a poor parish in Belfast.

In preparing this statement I have been conscious of the difficulty of trying to make sense of a situation which is complex, even for those living in Ireland and Britain. Only those who have lived here can have an insight into this reality. A question of politics for those in London or Dublin is a matter of life and death for the people in Northern Ireland.

“Little” was a big word in the thinking of St Vincent de Paul. *“Now the little Congregation of the Mission wants, with God’s grace, to imitate Christ the Lord, in so far as that is possible in view of its limitations”*.

In many ways it would have been good to present a grand and coherent scheme for our involvement in Northern Ireland. As you can see, what has been described is small, uncertain, tentative, and, possibly, temporary – our position here will be open to review and evaluation in the coming months. The first form of service to any community is presence, but our presence here in Ballymena has a “mission tent” quality – a time of wondering, searching, and being able to stay with the process. It clearly falls within the ambit of that word “little” so valued by St Vincent. What is certain is that Northern Ireland is a place in need of much healing. It is good to be here at this time. What we are about is seeking to place a Vincentian thread in a garment of healing for a broken people.

Vincentian Mission Team in Ireland

Michael McCullagh

The Church in which we work

In order to understand better our apostolate of parish mission it is important that we situate it in the context of the Church in which we work.

The Catholic Church in Ireland holds a place in the culture and history of the people that is unique in Europe. For almost eight hundred years the island of Ireland was colonised. After the Reformation the Catholic religion became an integral part of Irish identity. Large numbers of Protestants (notably Scottish Presbyterians) were “planted” in Ireland, given the best lands in return for their loyalty (notably true in Northern Ireland where the “plantation” began in 1609). The effect of these policies was probably the opposite of what was intended and it served only to enforce the link between being Irish and being Catholic. Gradually the pressure was lessened, and in 1829 an Act of Parliament provided for Catholic Emancipation. This enabled the hierarchy to become established, and a tremendous era of development, organization and growth began in the Irish Church.

The Vincentian community

The Vincentian, community, founded independently from the Congregation on the continent in 1833, gave its first parish mission in 1842. From the 1840s to about 1880 the Vincentians and Jesuits (later joined by the Redemptorists and others) were engaged in a very successful campaign of parish missions. These really established the parish structures throughout the country, countered the proselytizing campaigns of Protestant denominations, regularized marriages and established a sacramental life for the people. Later the community concentrated on education, formation of clergy, yet without abandoning missions. By 1859 there were central missions houses, two in Ireland and one each in England and Scotland, the latter two catering for Irish emigrants.

The decline of the mission teams

As Church structures were established parish missions tended to become more devotional and less directly evangelical and catechetical, and the leading place of the Vincentians was taken over by the Jesuits, Redemptorists, Passionists and others.

The centrality of the Catholic Church

By the time of Irish independence from the United Kingdom in 1921 the Church had taken a very central place in the life of the country. The new constitution of 1937 enshrined the “special” place of the Catholic Church “as the religion of the vast majority of the Irish population”. Virtually every town had schools (primary and secondary, for boys and girls) run by large communities of religious. Most of the health care was also in their hands, in both cases they had become involved long before the government had any such concern. (It was an era of large numbers of priestly and religious vocations, sodalities and confraternities, and the era of the establishment of the St Vincent de Paul Society and the Legion of Mary).

The emerging secular state

It could be that the Church remained in positions of power and influence for too long. Gradually there was pressure from government and trade unions for control, and more recently, with a dramatic reduction in vocations, religious in particular have had little option but to hand over control of both educational and medical institutions. (In some instances religious, prompted by their own charism and thrust, took the initiative in handing over control, and engaged in a servant role once more).

Present-day political and social reality

In the 1990s there is considerable opposition to the institutional Church coming from a variety of directions, government, media, the European Union, and the impact of materialist-secular thinking. In a country with a well-educated population, but also a high level of unemployment, there is considerable disillusionment. In recent years much of this anger has been directed at the Church, which many regard as part of their problem rather than a sign of hope. The Church, in the main, is fighting a rearguard action to protect its place in society. A series of scandals among the clergy has greatly damaged the credibility of the Church, and despite relatively large church attendances, there is a

rapid deserting of the Church. The schools – so long the central means of “control” – are no longer effective in this role. There is a sad lack of any means of getting “Vatican Two” thinking to the people, so many of whom, though well-educated and professionally trained, remain very poorly informed about their religion. Some will say that parishes provide little more than masses and sacraments – very little in terms of reading, education, formation, or prayer. It is in this environment that our missions are taking place.

New images of Church

It is only in the past fifteen years or so that a special need for evangelization has arisen in this country. Our Mission Team sees itself as playing a part in this work. We strive not to *revive the Church*, nor even to reform it, but somehow to play our part in bringing to birth, if not a *New Church*, then at least a very new model of Church, with a different style than before.

Increased alienation

The Church of the 1950s is becoming increasingly alien to Irish culture and society. The Church which is more and more middle-class seems to have lost much of its confidence and has tended to turn in on itself, and is withering. Changes seem to be made only because they have to be, and as a last resort, rather than with a sense of excitement and being led by a creative Spirit. There is widespread alienation in Irish society, and by and large those people are also alienated from the Church.

New emerging voices

Reflective women are not attracted to a Church which brooks no criticism. Groups of people who cannot fit their lives into the officially sanctioned patterns of sexual behaviour feel excluded from the Church. There is a yawning gulf between the youth pop-culture and the experience of boredom in Christian worship.

Church as community rather than institution

The new Church will be more community based, and less dependent on institutions or education as vehicles of control and order. There will be a greater sense of people choosing to belong. There will be far more participation, and less clerical domination. It will be a Church more concerned with the needs and problems of society, rather than being preoccupied with its own preservation as something separate – a

sort of “perfect society”. It will be more prayerful and less dogmatic, more scripturally nourished and less centred on the sacraments, more trusting of women and the young, and much more given to listening than dictating.

These are the images which support our efforts as a Mission Team.

A call to a new model of mission

There is a call to a new evangelization in a society such as ours, Western and European in terms of culture, economic policy and future legislation. People are now enlightened; traditional devotions have waned or disappeared; people are informing their own consciences; the God of retribution has fallen into disfavour. Since Vatican Two we have been trying to adapt.

A time of re-founding

Since 1980 a new team has been formed with people specifically qualified for popular parish missions, and that team, with changes in personnel, has been fully operational to the present day.

A call by the whole Congregation to a new model of mission

1. Provincials’ meeting, Bogota, 1983: The Superior General calls for a renewal of the traditional mission and a Congregation which would reflect a pilgrim theology in our willingness to go from place to place in the work of evangelization.
2. Constitution 1:3 calls us to collaboration with clergy and laity.
3. We have been called to serve the “more abandoned” (Cons, par. 1). (Designated in the Provincial Plan as the “urban poor”).
4. The call to the work of justice. The General Assembly of 1992 called us to study the root causes of poverty and to carry out a social analysis of the lives of the people among whom we work.

Pre-mission, mission-event, and post-mission

The majority of Mission Teams in Provinces around the world are now working on a three-fold approach to missions which recognizes the on-going mission of the parish.

Proclamation Sunday and first public meeting

A member of the Mission Team preaches at all the masses, announces the mission and calls the people to a public meeting at which there is a random survey of the needs of the parish. This first public meeting

is chaired by *a lay person* from the parish. At this meeting also there is a call from various committees who will undertake the task of the mission. (Further reflections on this later).

Mission and ministry weekends

We run two separate weekends in January each year here in All Hallows for the adults and young adults of the parishes to which we have been invited. (We expect at least six representatives from each parish). The purpose of these weekends is to help the parishioners to clarify their vision for their parish mission, acquire the skills to do a social analysis of their community and to draw up a tentative plan for the task ahead.

The Pastoral Ministry Team in All Hallows are the primary contributors at these weekends, together with other students from the All Hallows Institute.

On-going formation of mission teams in the parish

Each member of the Vincentian Mission Team takes responsibility for the formation of the parish teams in the time leading up to the mission event. Other parishes who have experienced a parish mission help the parishes in their preparations also.

Mission event: The community and the institution

In many instances there would be 50% or less attendance at church services. (We have observed that many of the upper classes and almost all of the lower classes no longer attend church). To address this we run two weeks of a mission event, the first week being in the community reaching those who, for a variety of reasons, no longer worship in their local churches.

This is the week of *outreach*. The events of this week are concentrated, not in the church, but in halls, homes, even pubs – wherever people meet. A range of activities will be held throughout this week, trying to reach the young, the elderly, the unemployed, all sorts of people, without expecting them to come to church. There would be prayer gatherings, scripture-sharing sessions, educational sessions on aspects of faith, music sessions – all depending on the work the groups set up in advance. We simply give them ideas, tell them of what others did, and encourage them. It is their community, their Church, and their mission.

Mission event: Commissioning Sunday

The parishioners are missioned to bring the good news of the mission to each home in the parish one week before the mission-event begins.

Mission-event: The gathering week

This week is celebrated in church, concentrating on good preaching and a quality of liturgical expression for the sacramental lives of the people. Drama, mime, a variety of speakers and voices from various sectors of the community feature this week, in addition to the missionaries.

*The role of the parish community in mission (Presented by Maureen, a parishioner and member of the mission team).**From passivity to activity*

In recent times there is a growing awareness of the need within communities to come together and help shape their future. A more active participation will be demanded from many if their parish is to grow and develop. It is a call from passivity to activity. A mission can be a great opportunity in a parish to get people involved and to help them to discover their gifts and opportunities for ministry.

For most people in Ireland it is within their parish that they experience what it means to be part of the Church. For them there is little difference between the local and the universal Church. It is the local Church which touches their reality in a very real and tangible way, particularly in the “Key Life Moments” and celebrations, such as births, marriages and deaths.

A call to live our baptismal vocation

The Second Vatican Council gave us a new vision of the Church as the People of God where each and every person has a part to play. Yet many people in the Church have still not fully assimilated its message and meaning into their lives. Pope John XXIII spoke of the parish as the “village fountain” to which all would have recourse in their thirst. In the document *Christifideles laici* the role of the laity is clearly defined:

It is necessary that in the life of the faith *all rediscover the true meaning of the parish*, that is, the place where the very “mystery” of the Church is present and at work ... The parish is not principally a structure, a territory, or a building, but rather

“the family of God, a fellowship afire with the unifying spirit”, a familial and welcoming home, the community of the faithful.

As a lay person I can explain my own experience of parish, of my own experiences as a wife and mother bringing up a family and trying to live a life of faith in today’s world. For many people it is a new experience to see a lay person and a woman speaking to them about Faith and Parish and the Church.

In the lead up to mission we are helping people to become aware of the gift of their baptism and what they have to offer to the building up of the community. We stress that this is their mission and that they will have a big part to play in the final shape of it. For many people this may be the first time they have ever been invited to get involved in Parish. So, following the Proclamation Sunday as mentioned above, all are invited to a public meeting.

The function of this initial public meeting is to try to bring people to explore their vision of Parish and mission. This first meeting is important in that it helps people to focus on the needs of the parish and it gives them a place to voice those needs. Mission is not just about a team of people coming to a parish for a short time. Rather it is about a life-long journey of faith, and the mission-event is just a small step on that journey. It can be a very important step, one which can effect the future of individuals and communities.

The mission of “Like-to-like”

In many communities there is a growing number of support-type groups where people minister to one another, and in such an atmosphere of care and compassion, healing takes place. The mission-event can help to develop this *like-to-like* ministry in a parish setting. In the preparation for mission many will have a chance to discover that they do have something to share with others in their community. The mission-event can be a celebration of all that is taking place in a parish community.

Post-mission

Many of the following are taking place or are in process as follow-up to the mission-event.

1. An evaluation by an outside facilitator of the work of the mission, in the presence of the Vincentian Mission Team and the parish-based team.
2. The formation of a Pastoral Council.

3. Lay ministry educational programmes in the parish.
4. Further study of lay ministry, or a degree in theology at All Hallows.

(Much of the above is facilitated by the All Hallows Institute for Mission and Ministry).

Future developments

1. Concentrating on the urban poor as requested by our Provincial Plan.
2. Continue to collaborate with other agencies of parish renewal.
3. Invite diocesan clergy, and others in lay ministry, to join us on missions.
4. Have a Social Justice element in our missions resulting in some concrete action for the materially poor.

Conclusions

The problems which we are facing in the Church in Ireland today were faced in many European countries during the 1960s and 1970s. This is a significant advantage to us. We have possibilities which were not readily available to others then, both in terms of theology and an increasing number of lay people interested in, and trained in, theology and related skills. Many people have a strong basic faith, and while we might complain about the inactivity of the institutional Church there are many competent people to fill the roles of leadership in all of this. It is an exciting time in the Irish Church, and Vincentians as missionaries have a part to play with a lot of others, in the age-old task begun by Him who came to bring the Good News to the poor.

APPENDIX ONE

Major points from the Provincials' meeting in Rio de Janeiro in 1989

These were their main conclusions regarding the evangelizing of the poor.

1. All of our apostolic activity must be realized in union with Christ, in contact with the poor, and in fidelity to the Church.
2. We need to be inserted in the local Church and participate in the life of the local community.

3. Every missionary (sic) should feel the need to be a professional in the work of evangelization.
4. There must be a greater commitment to the poor, in order to re-evangelize the Church and missionaries through the poor.
5. Encourage on-going formation for clergy and laity.
6. There must be a commitment to social justice. Investigate seriously the “root causes of poverty” (NB the words of Pope John Paul II, cited above).
7. For the evangelization of the poor, use should be made of the best means of social communication.

APPENDIX TWO

Provincial Plan of the Irish Province, 1992

Target One: Mission Teams.

To develop strategies for evangelization, especially in urban parishes in Ireland and Britain.

Why?

- a) It is a practical expression of the kind of missions for which we were founded.
- b) Today the lapsed and unchurched and the poor are found in great number mainly in urban areas.

How?

- a) Form a working party composed of members of the current mission team, parish priests of designated parishes, designated staff from All Hallows, Damascus House, and Strawberry Hill, and members of the Provincial Council to research and draw up clear models of parish mission.
- b) Focus the work of teams on the urban poor, and highlight priority areas for missions (e.g. North Dublin, south London, Cork, Glasgow).
- c) Collaborate, where possible, with Daughters of Charity. Society of St Vincent de Paul, clergy and laity.
- d) Dialogue with priest in the highlighted areas, with the hope that we are invited to work with him.

e) Investigate financial implications of (c).

Who?

- a) Directors of Mission Teams.
- b) Designated confreres.

Where?

Damascus House. London: All Hallows. Dublin.

When?

- a) Initiated by Directors of Teams by December 1991.
- b) Teams to develop so that the new direction is more clearly visible by Autumn 1993.

APPENDIX THREE

The major points which emerged from the presentations of confreres engaged in parish missions, at CIF, Paris, Autumn 1994:

1. Today our work in parish missions is almost a case of going after the 99!
2. Young people must be encountered – they have a new image of Church.
3. There was a strong emphasis on ministry to priests.
4. New ways are being sought for mission – the old are obsolete.
5. The mission is on-going, hence pre-mission, mission-event, post mission.
6. A wide chasm is evolving between priests and people.
7. Missions must be collaborative in character.
8. The mission must operate within the pastoral plan of the parish.

Spiritual Direction in the Life of the Priest

Richard McCullen

Part I

It was in 1993 that some members of the theological faculty in the Pontifical University of Maynooth, where most of the diocesan clergy of Ireland are formed, decided to organise an international seminar to reflect on and discuss the ideals proposed by Pope John Paul II on the formation of priests outlined in the newly published Pastoral Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*. Incidentally, it was in the national seminary of Maynooth that shortly after 1830 a small group of seminarians conceived the idea of forming themselves into a band of priests who would devote themselves to the task of preaching popular missions in the parishes of Ireland, and who would, after some years, formally become members of our Congregation, were educated and ordained. It was in the year 1888 that our community was invited by the episcopal conference to send two of its members as spiritual directors to the seminarians in Maynooth, and the Congregation has since been providing at least two confreres whose sole task within the college is to be available to the seminarians as confessors and spiritual directors. Already from 1856 (until 1939) the formation of the seminarians who pursued their ecclesiastical studies in the Irish College in Paris had been entrusted to the Province by the Irish bishops, while almost from its foundation in 1861 the official spiritual director/confessor for the seminarians of the major seminary of the Dublin diocese has been a confrere.

It was particularly in the light of the historical fact that for more than 100 years now the majority of the Irish clergy have been open to and influenced by the spirituality and charism of St Vincent in the years immediately preceding their ordination to the priesthood that I was invited to contribute a paper on *The Spiritual Direction of Priests* at the four-day seminar in May 1993. The substance of the present paper is what was presented to the participants at that particular seminar, with, however, more explicit reference to the topic of spiritual direction as envisaged by St Vincent.

Putting the topic into a scriptural context, I have for many years now regarded Ananias, of Acts of the Apostles fame, as one of the patron saints of those whom we qualify with the title and role of spiritual director. Some people, like Ananias, experience a certain reluctance to exercise this particular form of ministry in Christ's Church, especially when the one seeking direction is a man who has answered the call to share in the pastoral priesthood of Christ. Reluctant Ananias certainly was to be St Paul's spiritual director. There is something charmingly simple in his reaction to the particular demand that was made upon him. He is audacious enough to question the divine wisdom:

Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias". He answered, "Here I am, Lord". The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands upon him so that he might regain his sight". But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name". But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name". So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit". And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength (Acts 9:10-19).

Another charmingly human feature of this narrative is that not only did Ananias blindly obey the instructions that had been given to him by the Lord, but he goes forward and warmly accepts Paul as brother. "Brother Saul" are the words he addressed to this erstwhile enemy of the followers of the Way, thus accepting Paul as spiritual brother and friend. Ananias disappears from the pages of the New Testament, after he had befriended Paul and carried out what the Lord had asked him to do. Presumably he remained close to Paul during the time that Paul stayed in Damascus before making, as the chapter in Acts notes,

his return journey to Jerusalem – and from Jerusalem then to an ever-widening circle of peoples and nations, proclaiming all the while Christ crucified and the power of his resurrection. Those early days of companionship of Ananias must have been crucial for Paul, completing the transfiguring process of conversion that had begun as he lay on the road in the dazzling light of the risen Christ.

On a different road and in a less dramatic manner, scales fell from the eyes of Cleopas and his anonymous friend when the risen Christ joined them on the evening of Easter Day. “Their eyes were kept from recognising him”, remarks St Luke. That walk of seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus could be said to be the outward sign of that inner journey which the two disciples made before they recognised the risen Christ, not so much as director and teacher but as companion and friend. With a finesse and delicacy that must remain to the end of time as a paradigm for all spiritual directors, our Lord first puts the disciples in touch with their depression:

And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?”. They stood still, looking sad (Lk 24:17).

As often happens in spiritual direction, the two disciples tried to avoid the issue:

Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” (Lk 24:18).

Our Lord, however, directs their minds to the experience with the question “What things?” They began to talk about the hopes that they had nurtured, the disillusionment they were now experiencing and their puzzled astonishment at the news of the empty tomb. Christ, the healer, knew that healing invariably follows when feelings and experiences find expression in words. On reaching Emmaus Cleopas and his companion had been confronted with their mental blocks and were experiencing a new-found freedom.

They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” (Lk 24:32).

The risen Christ had left them with not only a new vision of himself but with an enthusiasm and joy that impelled them, even at a late hour,

to return to Jerusalem to share with the eleven the wonder of their experience.

Into these two scriptural episodes – and there are others – I would root the whole experience of the meaning for a priest of spiritual direction – either received or given. At the heart of both incidents is Christ, and his Spirit. In a complementary way the two passages throw into relief those elements which in one way or another must always be present whenever any two disciples of Christ decide to advance along that road, which is by no means straight, that leads to a clearer vision of Christ and to the understanding of the meaning and value of a life shot through and lived in companionship with him who for all of us *is* the way, the truth and the life.

In the scriptural passages referred to, companionship is thrown into bold relief. Paul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus had, we are told, his companions. How they were affected by all that happened we do not know. The companionship he found, however, in Ananias in his house on the street called Straight was of a different order. What Paul was called to share with Ananias was his vision of Christ. Scales fell from Paul's eyes, we are told, after his baptism. Scales of another kind must have fallen from the eyes of Ananias as he began to look on Paul as a fully convinced and authenticated disciple of Christ. Significantly the two men shared bread (and is not the meaning of the word *companion* that of one with who one shares the bread of friendship?). Launching Paul, then, on his pilgrimage of faith, as a disciple, of Christ, is Ananias.

For many years now I have much preferred the title of “soul-friend” as more accurate and appealing than that which undoubtedly is the more common and traditional one, “spiritual director”. The expression “soul-friend” has its origin in the Irish language term *anamchara* which has been literally translated as “soul-friend”. The Irish expression touches the very heart of all spiritual direction whatever form it may take, be it with priest, religious or lay-person, for it throws into bold relief what must be the foundation of the relationship of any two disciples who in the company of Christ are intent on being authentic pilgrims to that City which is above. At the heart of this spiritual relationship and companionship is friendship, as it was between Christ and the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and between Paul and Ananias. In a profound page on the meaning of friendship Jurgen Moltmann in his book *The Open Church* remarks:

Friendship is an unpretentious relation, for “friend” is not a designation of office, nor an exalted title, nor a function one

must perform from time to time, nor a role one is supposed to play in society... Friendship is no passing feeling of affection. It combines affection with faithfulness... Between friends there rules no prejudice that defines one, and no ideal image after which one must strive. Nor is friendship an alliance for mutual advantage, as is the case with so-called business friends. Between friends there rules only the promise to walk with each other and to be there for each other, in other words, a faithfulness that has to do not with acting and possessing but with the individual person and with being... Friendship is then a deep human relation that arises out of freedom, consists in mutual freedom and preserves this freedom (1).

Centuries before Moltmann St Thomas Aquinas had perceptively remarked that

... goodwill alone is not enough for friendship. A mutual loving is necessary, for it is only with a friend that a friend is friendly. But such reciprocal goodwill is based on something that is shared (II-II, 23, 1).

It was because authentic friendship was at the basis of the anamchara relationship that in the Irish tradition the ordained priesthood was not considered to be a necessary requirement for the exercise of this spiritual ministry of being an anamchara. While the practice of having an anamchara was a distinctive feature of life in the Irish monastic settlements, there is some evidence to suggest that the practice may very well have been borrowed from the hermits of Egypt. What is clear is that non-ordained men and women widely exercised this ministry. No less a personage than St Columbanus sought direction from an "ancient anchoress", while three women saints, Brigid, Ide and Samhthann, were noted for their skill in the practice (2). Increasingly it would seem that over a period of time the ministry of being an anamchara merged into that of the priest confessor. This in turn paved the way for the later "confession of devotion".

Making a quantum leap into the present decade we will note the phenomenon of the growth in interest in what one might call formal spiritual direction. To meet this growth of interest we have seen an increased number of men and women receiving formal training in the art of spiritual direction. Indeed one might say that while there has been a notable decline in the number of people receiving regularly the sacrament of reconciliation, there has been a marked rise in the

number seeking regular spiritual direction. It would seem that the figure of the anamchara as distinct from the confessor is once more emerging as a ministry in its own right. The growth in the number of trained and competent women spiritual directors over the past fifteen years or so must be adding to the accidental glory of those two valiant women who were highly accomplished anamcharas in their own time, and who in our own day have been declared doctors of the Church, Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena.

It would be a pity, and indeed positively damaging, if the development of which I have been speaking would in any way take from the importance and centrality of the ministry of reconciliation in the sacrament of penance. The two ministries, that of spiritual director and of confessor, are not in competition. They are complementary and correlative. While the two ministries are complementary, the sacrament of penance holds a primacy which the ministry of spiritual direction must not be allowed to dislodge. Pope John Paul II in the post-synodal document on *Reconciliation and Penance* explicitly states that while spiritual direction is different, it is “readily linked” with the sacrament of penance (3). The Church would undoubtedly lose immeasurably if its priests were to become, or the laity allowed them to become, less aware of the uniqueness of their ministry as confessors. All priests may not be trained counsellors or spiritual directors, but there is no priest who cannot, by reason of his priesthood and his formation, be a good confessor. In the post synodal document *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* Pope John Paul II lists among the reasons that bring a Christian to sacramental penance

... a need for personal reconciliation and readmission to friendship with God by regaining the grace lost by sin; a need to check one’s spiritual progress and sometimes a need for a more accurate discernment of one’s vocation; on many other occasions a need and desire to escape from a state of spiritual apathy and religious crisis. Thanks then to its individual character, the first form of celebration makes it possible to link the Sacrament of Penance with something which is different but readily linked with it; I am referring to spiritual direction (4).

It may well be that the emphasis which, since the Council of Trent, has been put on the confessor as being judge of the penitent’s condition as well as on the importance of securing the formal and material integrity of the penitent’s confession has obscured somewhat the

confessor's role of being an *anamchara*. It is true, as I have already noted, that the two ministries of confessor and spiritual director are distinct, and there are those who would maintain that it is better that it be so. Because sometimes our real problems are not very clearly connected with sinful acts, the context of the sacrament of penance may not always ensure that we will recognise, acknowledge and confront them. The ministry of spiritual direction embraces the entire range of a person's religious identity, while the confessor's ministry focuses on the turning away from sin and a turning to God.

While there is undoubted validity in that viewpoint, we must never lose sight of the very personal action of Christ in the sacrament of penance. The confessor in the context of the sacrament of penance is an authorised agent for the imparting of God's pardon and peace, thus facilitating the divine work of reconciling all things in Christ, who made peace by the blood of his cross. He formally prays *in persona Christi* that the penitent pilgrim before him "through the ministry of the Church may be given pardon and peace" along with the forgiveness of sins. A condition for receiving the fullness of that peace which Christ offers in the sacrament of penance will often require that a priest not stop at a material listing of sins and failures, but that he try, helped by his confessor, to penetrate the motivation that may lie behind such failures.

Thomas Merton wrote:

The whole purpose of spiritual direction is to penetrate beneath the surface of a man's life, to get behind the facade of conventional gestures and attitudes which he presents to the world and to bring out his inner spiritual freedom, his inmost truth, which is what we call the likeness of Christ in his soul (5).

At a seminar in which I participated some years ago, attended by two or three hundred priests, a number of priest-participants were invited to speak of their personal experience of priesthood in their lives. The priests ranged from newly-ordained to golden jubilarians and even beyond. I recall being struck at the time by the number of priests of, say, 10-20 years experience of priesthood, who in their testimony rather triumphantly announced that they had recently found a good spiritual director – and in a number of cases the spiritual director was a woman. Listening to them I felt a slight pang of regret at their implied admission that their regular confessor, presuming that they had one, had not been of more assistance to them in their growth into

a greater likeness to Christ, Priest, Pastor and Head. I was reminded of an observation of Georges Bernanos in his book *The Diary of a Country Priest* apropos of the priest's experience of hearing confessions:

The least "gifted" end by evolving their own particular idiom which still remains incredibly abstract. They don't hide much but their sly candour reminds one of a dirty window-pane, so blurred that light has to struggle through it and nothing can be clearly seen. What then remains of confession? It barely skims the surface of conscience. I don't say dry rot has set in underneath; it seems more like petrification (6).

Ideally the priest's awareness of the loving acceptance of him by Christ in the sacrament of reconciliation should be creative of a certain openness to accepting the observations of a soul-friend, and for some that may be sufficiently adequate. Whether a priest finds his anamchara in his confessor or in someone apart from him is a question of lesser importance than that he should have one. Over the last two decades I have often wondered if priests tend to seek out an anamchara only when they have reached a crisis point in their living of the priesthood. They may have already been experiencing a certain isolation and loneliness which they strive to dissipate through diverse forms of external activity. Then a crisis point is reached. Counsel, direction, advice is sought. But by that time the crisis point may already have been passed, and unknown almost to the priest himself, something of the priesthood is already dead within him. One is left wondering if there had been some truly concerned spiritual companionship (I prefer that term to the word "direction") along the road before what seems to be an acute and sudden crisis has arisen, would the death of the *sensus sacerdotalis* have occurred?

Apart from the experiencing of a crisis in one's priesthood many priests today are aware of the pressure of stress in their lives. And the sources of such stress are many and varied. The priest finds that he must try to keep abreast of a rapidly developing theology and pastoral practice amidst the confusion that invariably accompanies rapid change. Increasingly he is being encouraged to become familiar with a collegial style of leadership as well as becoming accepting of newly emerging ministries in the Church. Confronted with so many challenges and demands, (and there are many others), a good and generous priest may experience difficulty in rating the order of many

the priorities that crowd in upon him. Feeling unable to fulfill all the expectations and demands that are made upon him, a priest may begin to suffer signs of stress in his life, which can often result in a condition we know today as “burn-out” (7). Much of the stress a priest experiences may arise from a lack of reflection on his own life, with its disappointments and limited successes in the perspective of his apostolic priesthood and of the gospel.

An inability or a failure to establish a hierarchy of priorities in one’s life can often be the most hidden and deepest source of stress in a person’s life. For that reason the statement and setting out of the various contending priorities in his life might well be the first topic that a priest could profitably present to and discuss with his anamchara.

A periodic and honest review of the priorities of one’s life with his anamchara will lead a priest to reflect on other areas of his life and facilitate the revealing of the secret aspirations of his heart to his anamchara, and often for the first time to himself. The psalmist may have been showing a knowledge of the unconscious when he prayed: “From hidden faults acquit me” (Ps 18:12). A priest’s anamchara may well assist him in recognising those compromising compensations which a celibate may unwittingly be introducing into his life, and for which he may have already found rationalisations. It is such rationalisations and other secret aspirations that are often the refuge into which we retreat to escape from reality.

“Human kind”, wrote T S Eliot in *Burnt Norton*, “cannot bear very much reality”. A wise and experienced anamchara will lovingly study with what degree of reality a priest who has chosen him or her as a soul-friend can bear. Christ, the anamchara par excellence, did not allow the weight of reality to crush the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s Well. Delicately, gently, step-by-step he allows the clear light of the true reality of her life to dawn on her. The dialogue proceeds slowly, thus allowing the friendship to grow and to deepen until the moment arrives when Christ can say to the woman: “You are right in saying ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true” (Jn 14:17-18). Could Christ have been more compassionately confrontational? Yet he was so, because he knew that the woman before him could now bear reality. A true anamchara will never break the bruised reed.

A priest’s anamchara should be thought of as a fellow pilgrim who is content to walk a lonely mile and, like Christ on the road to

Emmaus, to help his companion to face, and thus free himself from, disillusionment through patient listening, before opening up new perspectives of hope and enticing horizons of untried possibilities.

The wounded surgeon plies the steel
That questions the distempered part;
Beneath the bleeding hands we feel
The sharp compassion of the healer's art
Resolving the enigma of the fever chart (8).

The Christ of the Emmaus Road did ply the steel and did question the distempered part of the two disciples' incredulity, and at the end of the day had resolved the enigma of the disciples' fever chart. All was achieved through the compassion of the healer's art. An anamchara is more than a good friend. He or she will be an artist of the supernatural. An anamchara moves in a world of mystery, awed by the awareness of the trust that is being reposed in him/her by Christ and by the priest seeking the street called Straight. It is, in fact, this respect for the mystery of personality, together with prayer, penance and sympathy, that make an authentic soul-friend.

It may be the consciousness of being a bruised reed, and living with the fear that he will be broken by one to whom he reveals the secrets of his heart, that perhaps may hold a priest back from seeking an anamchara to companion him on the road to the new Jerusalem. Lodged as a deposit in the minds of priests, particularly of the middle-age group, may be the memory of directors in seminaries who may at times have been too directive in their manner of guiding seminarians. It is interesting to read some of the standard textbooks of some decades ago on ascetical and mystical theology. The spiritual director was one who expected to be, and was, obeyed. A priest with an older image of spiritual directors may say to himself: "But what if he misunderstands me? What if he proposes something which I have not the will or the strength to carry out? Will I lose my independence? Better not venture into something that may demand that I climb out of what I vaguely recognise to be a living grave of mediocrity".

The true anamchara will be distinguished by a sharp compassion that, after the example of the divine and wounded surgeon, will not hesitate, when necessary, to ply the steel and question the distempered part of a priest's soul. That calls for much delicate precision in timing, but above all it demands a compassion and tenderness that has been authenticated beforehand in prayer by the divine and wounded surgeon.

“Who shall find a friend?”, asks he whom St Vincent used admirably refer to as *Notre bienheureux Père*, St Francis de Sales, one of the most gentle, perceptive and skilled of anamcharas the Church has known.

The wise man answers “they that fear the Lord”, in other words those who are humble and sincerely desire to progress towards holiness. Since it is so very important, Philothea, that you travel with a good guide, implore God to send you one after his own heart, and be sure that he who sent an angel from heaven to guide Tobias will send someone good and faithful to guide you. . . Open your heart to him truthfully and sincerely, tell him everything good and bad, hide nothing and pretend nothing; in this way. . . you will be comforted and strengthened in time of trouble, moderated and restrained in time of prosperity. . . Blessed John of Avila tells us we should choose one in a thousand, and I say, one in ten thousand, for those fitted for such a task are unimaginably few. I say again, pray for such a man and thank God when you find him; then remain constant and seek no further but go forward in simplicity, humility and confidence, for your journey will be attended with every success (9).

If anamcharas are so “unimaginably few”, must we priests abandon the search for one? The Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, although it does not explicitly raise the question, is clearly supportive of a priest having his anamchara. Within the Church the wide diversity of charisms with which the Spirit has gifted different religious orders and congregations throughout the centuries affords a priest the possibility of finding an anamchara with whom he can, corresponding to his temperament and the attractions of grace, most easily establish that spiritual friendship which is the basis of all direction. That, of course, does not imply that an anamchara can only be found in religious communities. The Spirit of God is not an alumnus of any particular school of spirituality.

The entire final chapter of the document is entitled “The Ongoing Formation of Priests”. Ongoing formation in the priesthood is seen, to quote the words of the exhortation itself, as:

The continuation of the process of building priestly personality which began and developed in the Seminary or the Religious House with the training programme which aimed at ordination (10).

Ongoing formation is progress along “a path of continual conversion” (11). It is not difficult to see the discreet presence of a priest’s anamchara in paragraph 77 of the document, where the Pope focuses his attention on priests of middle age and their need of ongoing formation. He writes:

Ongoing formation is a duty also for priests of middle age. They can face a number of risks, precisely because of their age, as for example, an exaggerated activism or a certain routine approach to the exercise of their ministry. As a result, the priest can be tempted to presume he can manage on his own, as if his own personal experience, which has seemed trustworthy to that point, needs no contact with anything or anyone else. Often enough, the older priest has a sort of interior fatigue which is dangerous. It can be a sign of a resigned disillusionment in the face of difficulties and failures. Such situations find an answer in ongoing formation, in a continued and balanced checking of oneself and one’s activity, constantly looking for motivation and aids which will enable one to carry on one’s mission. As a result the priest will maintain a vigilant spirit, ready to face the perennial yet ever new demands of salvation which people keep bringing to him as the “man of God”.

An attitude of “resigned disillusionment” of which the Pope speaks, thus echoing the observation of Thoreau that “most men lead lives of quiet desperation”, needs confrontation if it is to be dispelled. It is an attitude – a demon is hardly too strong a word – that often can be cast out only by being challenged by an external agent. A priest, like any other human, will tend to gravitate towards those who share his viewpoints and confirm his prejudices. Consequently there is the risk that youthfulness of spirit, which must be considered one of the crowning glories of a priestly life, will be in danger of being quenched. An anamchara, because he is a true and deep friend, will not lack the courage to disagree gently, when necessary, with a course which may be favouring the hardening of a priest’s spiritual arteries. Not indeed that an anamchara is concerned solely with altering a man to signs of impending spiritual sclerosis. The Emmaus journey ended eucharistically. In every encounter of a priest with a true anamchara there will be not only a *confessio fragilitatis* but a *confessio laudis*. I once heard a priest appreciatively described as a “little piece of the resurrection”. However mountainous the difficulties of a priest, and whatever his

failures may have been, an encounter with a true soul-friend should leave him feeling, despite everything, that he is more appreciated and valued in his uniqueness as a special creation of God's love. A session with a psychotherapist or counsellor could conceivably send one away feeling rather raw and angry through the insights gained. Ideally an encounter with one's anamchara will always be bathed with the light, hope and power of the resurrection of Christ. Nor is that too idealistic, for such was the experience of those who sought out Christ as an anamchara, whether it was in the intimacy of the walk to Emmaus, or in the weary heat of the noonday by Jacob's Well, or stealthily under cover of night, or in the urgency of a last minute appeal when life on this side of the Cross had no more to offer.

Part II: St Vincent and spiritual direction

(Because of the length of this paper Part II was not read at the CEVIM 95 meeting)

The assigned topic for this paper is *Spiritual direction in the life of the priest*, and up to this point no reference has been made to St Vincent. Give, however, that all the participants of this meeting are members of St. Vincent's community, our ideas on the topic will have been moulded, both consciously and unconsciously, by our founder's views on spiritual direction. His convictions on the subject of spiritual direction are both broad and deeply woven into the whole texture of his multi-coloured spiritual fabric. They are not systematized. Precisely because his ideas are so embedded in his mature thought, and given the fact that he never set out his views on spiritual direction in any formal treatise, one finds that St. Vincent will modify, accent different principles, at different times. In doing that he shows himself to be not only a consummate psychologist but, more importantly, a good shepherd who, like his Master, knows his sheep. Invariably he is at pains lest he extinguish the smoking flax.

A study of our founder's writings will, however, throw into clear relief some broad general principles on which St. Vincent based his spiritual direction of those who were privileged to avail of the spiritual insight of a saint whose gaze could reach down far into the *deep things of God*.

For the purposes of this paper I propose to limit my observations to some points which in view of the charism divinely given to our Congregation might merit longer and deeper reflection on our part in order that we, both as individuals and as a Congregation, may be faithful to the vocation which is ours. To attempt more would be to go beyond the limits of my competence, if, indeed, I have not already strayed over that boundary.

When from 1617 onwards the spiritual vision of St Vincent became sharper and better focused, a twin objective became his goal. First, reestablishment of the poor of Christ in the kingdom of Christ by the preaching of missions to those who were spiritually abandoned. This would be achieved through resurrecting them to the life of faith through catechesis. That in turn would lead to an encounter with the risen Christ in the sacraments of the Church. However, reestablishment in itself was not sufficient. To consolidate the gains so made it was necessary to re-energize the pastoral zeal and knowledge of the diocesan clergy. From that there emerged the three-fold aim stated in the Constitutions which he gave definitively to the Congregation of the Mission:

... the whole purpose of the Congregation is (1) to have a genuine commitment to grow in holiness, patterning ourselves, as far as possible, on the virtues which the great Master himself graciously taught us in what he said and did; (2) to preach the good news of salvation to poor people, especially in rural areas; (3) to help seminarians and priests to grow in knowledge and virtue, so that they can be effective in their ministry (CR 1:1).

That clear and simple statement could serve as St Vincent's most brief, and at the same time most exhaustive, autobiography. It is interesting to note that he placed both apostolates – the preaching of missions and assistance to the clergy – almost on the same scale of importance (CR 11:12). Given the changing social pattern and in the light of Vatican II our present Constitutions have re-phrased that aim of the Congregation which remains substantially the same. Reflecting Conciliar thinking on the pastoral priesthood, our present Constitutions emphasise that it is in and through ministry in the Congregation that our holiness is to be achieved.

In pursuit of the two-fold apostolate proposed to it by St Vincent the Congregation has, by and large, been faithful to it over the centuries down to the present time. Among the most glorious pages of its

history must be the work that has been done in the formation of priests both before and after ordination. The most intimate part of that work is done through spiritual direction. The history of this work, much of it hidden, has not been chronicled as has the history of the work in seminaries. The Recording Angel, I am sure, has filled many pages of the Book of Life with the names of Vincentian priests of different nations who have been to their fellow-priests true *soul-friends*.

There can be no doubt that, in the optic of St Vincent, the foreground was occupied by the poor. The world of the poor was, in St Vincent's vision, to be penetrated by priests, messengers of God, who in turn were to be penetrated by a love of the poor. For St Vincent, the great world of the poor and the smaller world of ordained priests were like two concentric circles. The living person of Jesus Christ was "*the still point of the turning world*". During the last thirty years of his life St Vincent moved easily in these two worlds, introducing one to the other. Two years before he died he wrote in his Rule for missionaries:

Though our preference is for missions, giving them should not mean omitting our work for the clergy, whenever we are asked to do this by bishops or superiors. The reason is that by the nature of our Congregation we are bound almost equally to both (CR *ibid*).

"Almost equally to both..." is a strong statement. It is a call to the Congregation to assist seminarians and priests to "press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:14). St Vincent had no blue-print or scheme as a means of accomplishing his aim. The priests of the Mission were simply to live the ideals of priesthood within the community and in the light of their experience to guide seminarians and priests to closer union with Jesus Christ, the good Shepherd. St Vincent could confidently face the challenging criticism heard more frequently after the end of the Second Vatican Council that the spirituality offered by priests of religious or monastic orders was ill adapted to the life and ministry of the diocesan priesthood, for by Constitution and nature the Congregation of the Mission pertained and still pertains to the body of the secular clergy.

Two rather important and practical corollaries of the last two sentences follow. First, the broad principles of specifically Vincentian spirituality (in so far as one can use that phrase) as outlined particularly in the second chapter of the Common Rules will be the basis of the direction offered by confreres to diocesan priests. The title of the

second chapter “The maxims of the Gospel” is considered to be the most concise summary of St Vincent’s spirituality. Its very title is indicative of the starting point of St Vincent’s spiritual vision, and indeed of any Christian spirituality. What distinguishes the chapter are the points on which St Vincent leans most and which he considers to be particularly well adapted to proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ and to furthering the proclamation of the gospel and the conversion of people to acceptance of its message.

Second, the spiritual principles outlined in that chapter were written for the group of men whom Divine Providence had called to the Congregation. In St Vincent’s vision the principles were to be lived, reflected on, and lived corporatively. It was through the experience of living them corporatively, each helping the other, that progress would be made. In a word, the spirituality which the Congregation offers and has offered to so many generations of seminarians and diocesan priests is a Congregational spirituality, first lived by the group and communicated corporatively and individually to the secular clergy.

Some key concepts

The foundational concept underpinning the values which St Vincent considered to be essential for attaining the end of the Congregation cannot be expressed more clearly than the saint does himself in the second chapter of the Common Rules:

Humility was very often recommended by Christ himself by word and example... Humility is the basis of all holiness in the Gospels and a binding together of the entire spiritual life. If a person has this humility everything good will come along with it. If he does not have it, he will lose any good he may have and will always be anxious and worried (12).

Humility is the basis of all holiness in the Gospels.

The brevity and unrestricted nature of the assertion is indicative of the depth of the saint’s conviction on the point, a conviction borne out by so many allusions to the principle in the corpus of his writings. The depth and density of M. Vincent’s humility envelops him like a fog at times making it difficult to reach him. Yet the two final sentences in the quotation cited above would fit easily into any modern textbook

of the psychological sciences and be considered as seminal ideas and desirable objectives to be achieved.

The principal “good thing” that anyone can receive from God is the perception of, and the strength to do, the will of God in which lies one’s peace. For if God is love then all that he wills for every human must be considered to be in the highest interests of the well-being and peace of that person. Because his love respects the freedom to choose of all his children, the difficulty for fallen humans is one of perception and strength of will to pursue the good. Hence the prominence given in St Vincent’s spiritual teaching to the discernment of the will of God. Fr Jozef Kapusciak presented, and obtained a doctorate in 1983 from the Faculty of Spirituality of the Gregorian University in Rome for, a dissertation entitled *Il compimento della volontà di Dio come principio unificatore fra azione e preghiera in San Vincenzo de’ Paoli*

The word “discernment” evokes the name of St Ignatius and the centrality discernment holds in the Ignatian Exercises (13). Undoubtedly St Vincent was familiar with the Ignatian Exercises but, as in so many other ways, he was eclectic in his choice of those means which he considered to be better adapted to the realisation of the apostolic purpose of his own Congregation. It would seem that according to Brother Ducournau what St Vincent spoke most frequently about was the good use of inspirations, and not the discernment of them, a view that is borne out by a conference *Concerning true light and illusions* on the relevant article of the Common Rules (XII 340ff). St Vincent makes a selection from the ordinary rules of Ignatian discernment, and he is well aware of the fact of having done so, when he proceeds to set out the elements he has retained:

These four marks [i.e. of discernment] are quite common, but when I had considered whether there were any others (I have heard various persons dealing with this matter at different times) I decided that these were quite sufficient, or that all others might be reduced to these (XII 351; cf CR2:16).

From the doctrine of St Francis de Sales on discernment it is clear that M. Vincent also selects certain elements but not all (14). St Vincent relied much more on action and the disposition it entails than on self-examination and reflection in order to regulate his making of judgements “according”, as he himself expressed it, “to the mind of Christ”. The simplification of the Ignatian rules of discernment, with

some additions from the intuitions of St Francis de Sales, are all the more remarkable since St Vincent was aware that he was addressing his remarks to priests. Clearly he had in mind the difficulties they would encounter in their ministry. After he has almost reduced the whole question to obedience and self-denial, he stresses the importance that priests collaborate in the enlightenment of people's consciences by the application of the principles:

We priests are obliged to acquire a knowledge of these matters and to learn what are the true lights so that we may be able to enlighten those who are walking in darkness and console those harassed by false illusions (XII 344).

In reading the writings of St Vincent the office of spiritual director is not always clearly delineated. For the saint the responsibility of being a superior entails also the obligation of being a spiritual director to the community. The point is clearly illustrated in the well-known *entretien* with Antoine Durand, the newly appointed superior, where St Vincent lays as much emphasis on the spiritual leadership and guidance required of a superior as on his administrative abilities (XI 342ff). Nor is discernment of the will of God to be limited to an intellectual process or to dialogue between a person and his director. The will of God can manifest itself "in many and various ways". Hence the need of attentiveness and alertness to every event, meeting and happening in one's life, however accidental and casual such a manifestation may seem at first sight to be. This emphasis is but an insistence on the importance of reading "the signs of the times", a phrase which has been so current, and often incorrectly interpreted, since Pope John XXIII used it in connection with his hopes for the ecumenical Council. To read "the signs of the times" was for St Vincent to be devoted and sensitive at all times to the Providence of God. It was a very personal devotion of St Vincent, according to Abelly, and far from it being a fatalistic acceptance of events, it entailed the practice of much prayer, reflection, and consultation (V 318).

No spiritual director, then, would lay claim to have the monopoly on indicating the will of God to a directee, nor can anyone be said to have an immediate "hot line" to the wisdom of God.

It is here that one comes to meet what we could call the second of two key concepts of St Vincent on spiritual direction as one of the means of discovering and accepting the will of God. It is the virtue of evangelical simplicity (15). What is interesting about St Vincent's

presentation of evangelical simplicity in the Common Rules is his allying it with the virtue of prudence. The two relevant numbers in the Common Rules contain a depth of spiritual wisdom that calls for much study and prayerful reflection if their richness and practicality are to be fully mined. In St Vincent's observations about the necessity to complement the practice of the virtue of simplicity with that of prudence, there are clear overtones of the *Summa Theologica*. Instance the following assertions of St Thomas:

Augustine says that prudence is the love which well discerns between the helps and the hindrances in our striving towards God. Love is called discerning in that it moves the mind to discriminate (II-II, 47, 1, ad 1).

To be generously docile calls for much effort, that of a person who carefully, frequently, and respectfully attends to the teaching of men of weight, and neither neglects them out of laziness nor despises them out of pride... Even people in authority – “*majores*” – ought themselves be docile in certain matters, for, as we have mentioned, in matters of prudence no one is wholly sufficient (II-II, 49,3, ad 2 & 3).

Sinners can make right judgements about general principles, yet as we have explained (I, 63, 1 ad 4) their judgement is always impaired in coming down to a particular issue of conduct (II-II 51,2 ad 3).

The prominence that St Vincent gives to the virtue of simplicity among the means of reaching genuine holiness cannot be attributed solely to a reaction on his part to the ornate and often convoluted style of preaching so common in France at that time. If it is only “the pure of heart who will see God” (Cf Mt 5:8) then purity of intention is paramount for vision. Seeing the way forward in faith – even if it be through a valley of darkness – is a motive for seeking spiritual direction. Again it is to be noted that St Thomas Aquinas discovered that the “imprudences” of “omission” have their origin in unchastity, in a surrender to the goods of the sensual world which splits the power of decision in two (Cf II-II, 53, 1). If it be humility that lays low the mountains of self-preoccupation, it is simplicity that beams the light of God on the road ahead. In M. Vincent's love and desire to grow

in simplicity which he described as “my gospel”, in his candid and unusual admission that he had made “progress” in the virtue, along with his conviction that humility is the essential element in the spiritual life, therein must lie the secret of his sureness of touch in guiding people in the ways of the Lord. While insisting on the application of the rules of prudence in seeking spiritual direction in decision-making, it was not an absolute rule, as the following extract from a letter to Sister Lepeintre shows:

It is true, Sister, that spiritual direction is very useful. It is an occasion for advice in difficulties, encouragement in weariness, refuge in temptations, and strength in dejection. In a word, it is a source of well-being and consolation, when the director is truly charitable, prudent and experienced. But are you well aware that where men are lacking the help of God begins? It is He who instructs and strengthens us. He is our all and leads us to Himself by Himself. If He does not allow you to have a spiritual father to whom you can have recourse in every circumstance, do you think it is to deprive you of the benefit of the direction of such a father? Not at all. On the contrary, it is our Lord who takes his place and in His goodness directs you Himself. It would seem that He has done so until now, and you can be sure He will do so until He provides otherwise. I have always noticed this particular attention of Providence for many pious persons deprived of similar help from men. I could quote you many beautiful examples of this and tell you some wonderful things on this point, but this is not necessary for you, who have no doubt of it and who have daily experience of the effects of the divine protection (III 614-5).

The spiritual director’s role is to perfect the infused prudence of the directee. The director is not to usurp or supplant that faculty which every baptised person possesses. Every person is called to share in the creative activity of God which is his Providence, and the faculty that enables one participate in the creativity of God is the virtue of prudence. “*Recta ratio agibilium*” (II-II 47 2). To over-direct a person is to violate in some degree the faculty of prudence, unless of course the good order of society calls for the intervention of authority. Such an intervention must then be considered as a perfecting of the individual’s prudence. Expressed in terms of counselling technique, the

respecting of the prudence of the directee could, *ceterisparibus*; be described as non-directive counselling.

Conclusion

Only a very small number of points on the science of spiritual direction are described by St Vincent in his *entretien* with Antoine Durand. They are, however, seminal ones and illustrative of his genius at once spiritual, psychological, and practical. It is he himself who has described the practice of spiritual direction as *ars artium regimen animarum*. And he continues:

Certainly, Father, there is nothing human in that; it is not the work of a man, it is the work of God. *Grande opus*. It is the continuation of the works of Jesus Christ, and consequently human industry can do nothing but spoil everything, if God does not intervene. No, neither theology, philosophy nor discourse can act upon souls. It is necessary for Christ to intervene with us, or we with him; that we act in him, and he in us, that we speak as he did and in his spirit, just as he himself was in his Father and preached the doctrine the Father had taught him (XI 343).

In an era that has opened up the sciences of psychology and psychiatry it can be said with assurance that just as M. Vincent did not devalue the science of philosophy nor theology in his time, but only pleaded that they be not substituted for the *science of the saints*, so neither would he disdain or devalue any skill or profession today that acknowledged and respected God's economy of grace and thus facilitated coming to a more precise knowledge of the will of a mysterious but loving God.

Lastly, may I be permitted to express a hope that our Congregation which has had acknowledged success in the formation of thousands of seminarians and priests over a span of three centuries in each of the continents of the world, may preserve its divinely given charism for that apostolate. The only sure way of preserving and maintaining that charism is an ever renewed appropriation of it by the Community. In effect that will be achieved through an ongoing, prayerful reflection on those elements to which St Vincent returns in the final chapter of our Common Rules and which he places under the rubric of that chapter: *Some useful means needed for properly and effectively carrying out the above-mentioned ministries* (16).

Notes

1. Moltmann, J.: *The Open Church*, London 1978, p. 51.
2. Maher, M.: "Learning from the Past", p. 4, in *Introduction to Irish Spirituality*, Dublin 1981.
3. *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, # 32.
4. Ibid. # 32. Cf also Pope Pius XII in the encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi*, # 88.
5. Merton, T.: *Spiritual Direction and Meditation. What is Contemplation?*, Wheathampstead, 1975.
6. Bernanos, G.: *The Diary of a Country Priest*, London 1937, p. 97.
7. Cf *The Priest and Stress*, The Bishops' Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry, USA, 1982.
8. Eliot, T S: *Four Quartets: East Coker*.
9. *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Part I, chapter 4, nn. 16-17.
10. Ibid. n. 71.
11. Ibid. n. 70.
12. CR2:7. The celebrated "Five virtues" that St Vincent wished should distinguish the members of the Congregation are treated in the second chapter of the Common Rules. For a modern presentation and interpretation of these virtues see the work of the present Superior General: *The Way of St Vincent de Paul*, by Robert P Maloney CM, Brooklyn, 1992. At the time of writing a second book entitled *He Hears the Cry of the Poor* by Fr Maloney has recently appeared, from the same publisher, New City Press.
13. For a recent study of discernment in the Vincentian tradition see an article by Fr Hugh Adenyl CM in "Vincentian Heritage" Vol. 15, n.1, 1994.
14. "To sum up – the three best and surest marks of lawful inspirations are: perseverance, as against inconstancy and levity; peace and meekness of heart, as against uneasiness and restlessness; humble obedience, as against obstinacy and whimsicality" (*Treatise on the Love of God*, Book 8:13).
15. Cf Maloney: *The Way of St Vincent de Paul*, pp. 37-39, 53-57.
16. Significantly, St Vincent returned to the subject of the five virtues again and underscores the centrality of the three sister virtues of humility, simplicity and prudence for growing in holiness which our vocation calls for, leading to our working with ease and efficacy for people's salvation. Cf CR 12:13.

The Intercession for Priests: Ministering to Priests in the Charism of St Vincent

Kevin Scallon

I began the *Intercession for Priests* out of a great concern I experienced while working as spiritual director at All Hallows College during the early 1970s. Reports kept coming back about alumni who were leaving the priesthood, sometimes after only a few years in the ministry. The question was, what could be done and, while much was said about it, it seemed there was little anyone could do. In 1974 I had heard of a movement in the US called *Intercession for Priests*. I was struck by this idea and said to myself: “Yes, at least we could pray for the spiritual renewal of the priesthood”. It was about that time that I had a sudden and very significant conversion experience of the reality of Christ in my own life which greatly affected my interior life and my priestly ministry.

So it was that in 1976 with Fr Myles Rearden CM I planned to hold the first *Intercession for Priests* hardly knowing what I was doing. The initial response from priests was most disappointing. People would register to come and withdraw at the last moment, so that I was left in great doubt whether I should continue with it or not. I put my dilemma to Bishop Dermot O’Mahoney, auxiliary bishop of Dublin, who was in All Hallows making his annual retreat. I said: “Bishop, I have planned this *Intercession for Priests* and nobody is coming”. I shall never forget the reply he gave me. He said: “Even if there are only two of you, begin”. It seemed to me the Lord had spoken to me through him that day. We started with twelve priests on the feast of our Lady of Mount Carmel, July 16, 1976.

At that time the charismatic renewal was in full bloom and many of the priests who came had experienced great spiritual reawakening through it. That year 1976, over the four weeks of its duration, about 150 priests participated in the first *Intercession for Priests*. Now in the 1990s hundreds of priests from all over Ireland and from many countries outside of Ireland come to take part. Over the last number

of years about 1,000 priests have participated in the *Intercession for Priests* during the month of August.

Development

It became quickly apparent that for the *Intercession for Priests* to appeal to the many different strands of priestly experience it would have to be firmly rooted in what priests had in common, rather than in what sometimes divides them. From the beginning until now we allowed great freedom to those who came. For example, they were not required to pre-register or to notify us of their coming. In the seminary we always had plenty of rooms. Nor did they have to tell us how long they were going to stay or when they would be leaving. This arrangement seemed to suit very well. We did however ask that they would participate in what went on while they were there.

Why the Intercession for Priests?

Intercession is the response we make to our belief in the Holy Spirit who is present and praying within the Church, the whole body of Christ (Rm 8:26). For the ordained minister of the gospel it is a mysterious participation in that prayer which the Holy Spirit prays within us; the prayer of Christ himself who "...in the days of his flesh... offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears (Hb 5:7), and is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (Hb 7:25. Cf CCC 2634).

Intercession, an essential element of the eternal priesthood of Jesus, is also essential to the priestly ministry. *Intercession for Priests* means praying for the intercessors as Jesus himself did. "Simon, Simon, behold Satan desired to have you that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren" (Lk 22:31-32).

There is only one priesthood, the priesthood of Christ; there is only one saving sacrifice, that which Jesus offered on the cross. Through baptism all of God's people share in this priesthood in a spiritual and mystical way, representing the Church – the Body of Christ. Ordained priests share in it uniquely because they represent Christ, the Head of the Church. It is the ordained priestly ministry that makes it possible for the whole Church to exercise its spiritual priesthood because only the priest acting *in persona Christi* can make the offering of Christ

really present among the people of God who unite with him in offering themselves.

Acting *in the person of Christ* involves more than ordination to the priesthood. *Lumen gentium* reminds us that the first requirement for the priest is holiness of life (Par. 41). This is why we have *Intercession for Priests* – to pray for holiness for ourselves as priests and for bishops and priests everywhere:

We pray that priests will be filled with the love of Christ, that they will be secure in their identity and vocation and alive with the power of the Holy Spirit.

We also pray in thanksgiving for the vast army of faithful priests that they may grow in the love of Christ and that the title “Father” may have meaning because of all those who are brought to new life and holiness.

We pray for priests who are persecuted and imprisoned, who are rejected and poor.

We pray for a deep interior life that will liberate priests from materialism and sensuality, and for an end to discouragement, indifference and cynicism.

We pray that they will be protected from the deception of the evil one and safeguarded from confusion of doctrine and rebellion against authority in the Church.

The *Intercession for Priests* has always been characterized by great sincerity. Gossip and cynicism are noticeably absent. Everyone humbly acknowledged the need for repentance, healing and spiritual renewal. The joy of the Lord is very evident. Every year we make the claim that priests who come to pray for others go away greatly blessed themselves. It has certainly been true in the past. The *Intercession for Priests* is a work of faith, but more than anything else it is a gesture of great love for the gift of priesthood and for all the “vessels of clay” in which it is carried.

Themes for each day

Each day has a particular emphasis, based on the theme for that day.

e.g. Monday: *Repentance and Reconciliation*.

The secular world’s widespread denial of sin has affected the thinking of many in the priesthood. The emphasis on social sin,

very necessary in its own context, has prevented many priests from addressing sin in their own personal lives. In the context of a penitential rite we deal with the need for repentance very directly and in considerable detail. We urge the priests to the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Tuesday: *Healing and Growth*

The healing ministry has been one of the great fruits of renewal within the Church. As with Jesus in the gospels, healing and evangelization go hand in hand. The sciences of psychiatry and psychology are useful as diagnostic tools; but it is only the Lord who heals. It is only the grace of Christ which can bring wholeness to a broken life. That is why we offer the sacrament of the anointing of the sick at mass on this day, with a healing prayer service later on in the evening. The fruits of this ministry over the years could hardly be exaggerated.

Wednesday: *Mary, Mother of the Church*

More and more we see the importance for the priests to have an enlightened devotion to the Mother of God. On this day we speak of this, finishing off with an Act of Consecration to our Lady.

Thursday: *Priesthood and Eucharist*

On this day the emphasis is on the renewal of our priestly ordination and on conversion to the priesthood (2 Tm 1:6-7). For this we celebrate a para-liturgy, involving the renewal of our baptismal promises and pledges made to the bishop during the Holy Thursday Chrism Mass, culminating with prayer ministry around the Most Blessed Sacrament. Priests find this little ceremony to be a very powerful and moving experience.

Friday: *Discipleship*

“Bishops, with priests as co-workers, have as their first task ‘to preach the gospel to all men’, in keeping with the Lord’s command. They are ‘heralds of faith, who draw new disciples to Christ; they are authentic teachers’ of the apostolic faith ‘endowed with the authority of Christ’” (CCC 888).

“The Bishop and priests sanctify the Church by their prayer and their work, by their ministry of the word and of the sacraments. They sanctify her by their example, ‘not as domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock’. Thus, ‘together with the flock entrusted to them, they may attain to eternal life’” (CCC 893).

“Our vocation is to embrace the hearts of all men, to do what the Son of God did, he who came into the world to set it on fire. It is true therefore that I am sent not only to love God but to make him loved. It is not enough to love God if my neighbour does not love him” – St Vincent de Paul (XII262).

“Now if it is true that we are called to preach the love of God far and near, if we must inflame the nations with this love, if we are called to cast the divine fire on this earth, if all this is so, my brothers, what a great fire of divine love should be burning in my soul” – St Vincent de Paul (XII 263).

Daily Horarium

This is rooted in the kind of prayer experience familiar to all priests.

8.30 Breakfast

9.30 Morning Prayer (Divine Office), Intercession

10.15 Quiet Time (for private prayer, intercession and reflection in silence)

11.15 Coffee

11.45 Eucharist (On Tuesday and Thursday the Liturgy of the Anointing of the Sick will be included for anyone who requests it)

1.00 Lunch (afterwards free for rest, recreation, etc.) 3.30 Tea

4.00 Monday – Penitential Service

Tuesday – Healing Service

Wednesday – Faith sharing

Thursday – Renewal of the Priesthood

5.15 Evening Prayer (Divine Office) and Intercession with Eucharistic Adoration

6.00 Supper

7.15 Rosary – followed by a talk and short discussion

Over the years we have learned how important it is that priests who come to the *Intercession for Priests* have a fresh experience of the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours and the Eucharistic Liturgy. For that reason we have tried to maintain as high a standard of liturgical celebration as possible. Many priests have told us how helpful they have found this.

(For a complete explanation of the daily running of the Intercession for Priests may I refer you to the little booklet entitled *Guidelines for the Intercession for Priests*).

On-going development

From Ireland the *Intercession for Priests* has spread to England, Scotland, France, Australia, Papua New Guinea, Nigeria, the Philippines, and back again to the United States.

To give some idea of the extent of this ministry and of how it is accepted it might be helpful to refer to our experience in the Philippines. In November 1993 we conducted two retreats in the Philippines, one in Manila and one in Cebu. The Manila retreat was attended by 380 priests and 13 bishops. The one in Cebu by 210 priests and 9 bishops, among them Cardinal Vidal. In November 1994 we again conducted two retreats. The first one, in Tagaytay, Luzon, was attended by 620 priests and 10 bishops. The second, in Mindinao, was attended by 230 priests and 80 seminarians. An American confrere who had spent most of his life in China and Vietnam, and who attended the first retreat, said of it. "That is the best retreat I have ever made in my life". So, in the last two years in the Philippines we have ministered to priests of 42 dioceses. Next year we are planning to have two more retreats for the remaining dioceses. In 1996 we have been asked to conduct the *Intercession for Priests* retreat for the entire hierarchy of the Philippines.

When we were finished in the Philippines in November 1994 we went to minister to priests in Hong Kong and Macao. There we met three bishops from the underground Church in China who begged us to come into China and give retreats to the priests there. Already there are plans being prepared to do this.

In all of this work the power of the charism of St Vincent is evident and palpable, but like all such things it has to be experienced to be

really understood. However, this approach to working for the spiritual renewal of the priesthood has not been without its critics. It is perceived by some as not being relevant to a Church which has come to stress the role of the laity. Others think of it as too priestly, too clerical, as placing too much emphasis on the priesthood. No one knew better than St Vincent the relative importance of the role of the laity and the ordained ministry. Any emphasis on the role of lay people and the exercise of their baptismal priesthood should never be allowed to diminish the importance and the unique role of the ministerial-hierarchical priesthood:

While the common priesthood of the faithful is exercised by the unfolding of baptismal grace – a life of faith, hope and charity, a life according to the Spirit – the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood. It is directed at the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians. The ministerial priesthood is a means by which Christ unceasingly builds up and leads his Church. For this reason it is transmitted by its own sacrament, the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

In the ecclesial service of the ordained minister, it is Christ himself who is present to his Church as Head of his Body, Shepherd of his flock, High Priest of the Redemptive Sacrifice, Teacher of Truth. This is what the Church means by saying that the priest, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, acts *in persona Christi Capitis* (CCC 1547-1548).

Others criticize the *Intercession for Priests* for harking back to a kind of old church devotionism with an over-emphasis on Eucharistic Adoration, personal confession, the rosary, etc. Perhaps; but in over twenty years of working with priests I have learned that it is not possible to come to any kind of spiritual renewal either as a person or as an ordained minister without the grace of on-going repentance from sin and without encountering the healing Christ through prayer and in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. The struggles I have experienced with sin in my own life in addition to the many long hours I have spent hearing the confessions of priests in every corner of the world, convinces me of the perennial necessity for this kind of ministry. In these years amidst much talk about renewing the priesthood I know that the Lord has blessed the *Intercession for Priests* and that it has been a source of grace, renewal and salvation for countless priests.

Sister Briega McKenna OSC

Sr Briega is a Poor Clare, an Irish member of a congregation called the Sisters of St Clare. She is the author of the book *Miracles Do Happen*, which has become a kind of spiritual classic in its own right and which has been translated into fourteen languages, including Chinese, Korean and Japanese. In 1970 she was instantly healed of acute rheumatoid arthritis during the celebration of the eucharist in Florida, where she had lived since 1967. She came to visit me because she was interested in the work of the *Intercession for Priests*. It was immediately obvious to me that the Lord had blessed her with many gifts. She was already well known for her gift of healing, but what struck me about her was her extraordinary charism of helping priests in the renewal of their spiritual lives and in their priestly ministry. Since that time Sr Briega has ministered at the *Intercession for Priests*. Since 1985, with the blessing and full-hearted support of our respective superiors, Sr Briega and I have travelled to many places in the world to work for the spiritual renewal of priests. I am keenly aware that the fruit of our ministry is due in no small measure to the unique gift that the Lord has given to her for the priesthood in these times.

Core group

In addition to the ministry of Sr Briega I have also been blessed by the assistance of several other priests: two Vincentian confreres, a Franciscan, two diocesan priests, a Pallotine, a Salesian, a Dominican. All of these men volunteer their time each year to come and work during the four weeks of the *Intercession for Priests*. Their dedication in helping with this ministry and their faithfulness to it has been a source of very great blessing to the priests who attend.

Lay involvement

From the beginning of the *Intercession for Priests* the laity have been involved in many different ways. For the first eight or nine years all the catering and housekeeping was done by the Daughters of Charity. Every Friday evening people gather in the chapel in All Hallows to pray before the Blessed Sacrament for the priests of the world. The rosary leaflet was prepared especially for them and at their request. This leaflet has been translated into several different languages, and already tens of thousands of copies of it have been distributed in different parts of the world. Lay people feel a great urgency, as well as a great willingness, to pray for the priests of the Church.

Conclusion

This ministry of the *Intercession for Priests* was begun in the spirit of St Vincent whose zeal for the renewal of the priesthood is unique in the history of the Church. Let me finish with these words from our holy founder:

Oh Fathers, what a wonderful thing a good priest is. Is there anything a good priest can not do? What conversions would he not bring about? Take for example Monsieur Bourdoise, this excellent priest. What does he not do and what is there that he cannot do? The happiness of the Christian way of life depends on priests because the good parishioners look up to a good priest; they respect a charitable pastor and they follow his lead; in fact they try to imitate him. Oh, let us strive to make them all good since this is our work and because the priesthood is such a sublime calling. O my Saviour, how totally should the poor missionaries give themselves to you for the formation of good ecclesiastics since this is the most difficult and sublime work, and of course the most important for the salvation of men and the progress of Christianity (XI 7-8).

Places travelled:

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|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Canberra/Goulburn, ACT, Australia | Singapore |
| Brisbane, Australia | Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia |
| Canberra, Australia | Melaka-Johore, Malaysia |
| Melbourne, Australia | Miri, Sarawak, East Malaysia |
| Armidale, NSW, Australia | Hong Kong/Macao |
| Bathurst, NSW, Australia | Taiwan, China |
| Dubbo, NSW, Australia | Fukuoka City, Japan |
| Oberon, NSW, Australia | Ibaraki-Ken, Japan |
| Caims, Queensland, Australia | Kumamoto City, Japan |
| Perth, W. Australia | Seoul, S Korea |
| Gorka, Papua New Guinea | Cheju, S Korea |
| Medang, Papua New Guinea | Kumasi, Ghana |
| Wewak, Papua New Guinea | Nakuru, Kenya |
| Kiribati, Pacific Union | Mzuzu, Malawi, Central Africa |
| Agana, Guam | Jos, Nigeria |
| Cagayan, Mindinao, Philippines | Awka, Nigeria |
| Cebu, Philippines | Abakaliki, Nigeria |
| Iloilo City, Philippines | Onitsha, Nigeria |
| Manila, Philippines | Benin City, Nigeria |
| Tagaytay, Philippines | Lagos, Nigeria |

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|---|-----------------------------|
| Split, Croatia | Moodus, Connecticut |
| Ljubljana, Slovenia | North Haven, Connecticut |
| Medjugorje, Yugoslavia (Hercegovina) | Norwich, Connecticut |
| Magdalenka & Gostyn, Poland | Miami, Florida |
| Eindhoven, Netherlands | New Port Richey, Florida |
| Brussels, Belgium | Orlando, Florida |
| Glasgow, Scotland | Palm Beach, Florida |
| Paisley, Scotland | Palm Harbor, Florida |
| Mid-Glam, Wales | Pensacola, Florida |
| Cheshire, England | Safety Harbor, Florida |
| Clifton, England | St Augustine, Florida |
| London, England | St Petersburg, Florida |
| Middlesbrough, England | Tampa, Florida |
| Plymouth, England | Peachtree, Georgia |
| Preston, England | Chicago, Illinois |
| Sheffield, England | Notre Dame, Indiana |
| York/Leeds, England | Wichita, Kansas |
| Fatima, Portugal | New Orleans, Louisiana |
| Carlow, Ireland | St Cloud, Minnesota |
| Clare, Ireland | Biloxi, Mississippi |
| Cloyne, Ireland | Jackson, Mississippi |
| Cork, Ireland | Pass Christian, Mississippi |
| Donegal, Ireland | St Louis, Missouri |
| Dublin, Ireland | Omaha, Nebraska |
| Galway, Ireland | Larchmont, New York |
| Kerry, Ireland | Syracuse, New York |
| Kildare, Ireland | Yonkers, New York |
| Knock, Ireland | Dunbar, Pennsylvania |
| Louth, Ireland | San Antonio, Texas |
| Meath, Ireland | Barbados, W Indies |
| Raphoe, Ireland | Trinidad & Tobago, W Indies |
| Wexford, Ireland | Lima, Peru |
| Armagh, N Ireland | Campinas, Brazil |
| Belfast, N Ireland | Fortaleza, Brazil |
| Derry, N Ireland | Itaici, Brazil |
| Down, N Ireland | Porto Alegre, Brazil |
| Fermanagh, N Ireland | Recife, Brazil |
| Tyrone, N Ireland | Sao Paulo, Brazil |
| Edmonton, Alberta, Canada | Tempe, Arizona |
| Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada | Tucson, Arizona |
| Grand Falls, Newfoundland, Canada | Manhattan Beach, California |
| Nova Scotia, Canada | San Bernardino, California |
| Irondale, Alabama | Vista, California |
| Douglas, Arizona | Denver, Colorado |
| | Bloomfield, Connecticut |

All Hallows: From a Seminary to an Institute for Mission and Ministry

Kevin Rafferty

I. Historical Background: All Hallows 1842-1974

All Hallows, Ireland's first missionary seminary, was founded in 1842 by a young priest, Fr John Hand from the diocese of Meath. After visiting Saint Sulpice in Paris and after collecting information about missionary societies in Lyons and Rome, he succeeded in obtaining a rescript from Propaganda Fide to set up a missionary seminary in Dublin. With the backing of the archbishop of Dublin, Daniel Murray, and the support of the Lord Mayor of the day, Daniel O'Connell, he obtained a 1,000 year lease on a property in the open countryside north of Dublin, today known as All Hallows. The words of the Risen Jesus carved on stone above the main entrance of this building announce the All Hallows mission: EUNTES DOCETE OMNES GENTES.

From 1842 to 1992 All Hallows ordained over 4,000 priests, 1,400 for dioceses in the United States and over 1,000 for Australia and New Zealand. Others went to England, Scotland, Canada and South Africa. All Hallows was ordaining an average of 30 priests each year right up to the late 1960s, when a dramatic fall in vocations to the priesthood began in all Irish seminaries.

For its first 50 years All Hallows was staffed by diocesan priests, but in 1892 the Irish Province of the Congregation of the Mission was invited to staff and administer the seminary, which it has continued to do right up to the present day. Now in collaboration with diocesan priests, priests and sisters from religious orders, and men and women graduates of the College, the ten Vincentian priests continue to administer All Hallows. Today there are 212 full-time students and close to 300 part-time students. (Cf Appendix 1 for details re numbers of students and staff).

II. Developments in All Hallows 1974-1994

Against a background of the theology of mission and ministry developing in the post Vatican II Church the following developments have taken place in All Hallows in the past twenty years:

1) 1976 – The setting up of a retreat/conference centre.

With the falling number of seminarians beginning around the year 1970 a number of buildings became available for alternative uses and in 1976 it was decided to move a Vincentian retreat/conference centre from St Joseph's, Blackrock, to All Hallows. Purcell House, All Hallows, is now a thriving Retreat/Conference Centre offering a variety of courses, programmes and workshops focused on the renewal of parish life. It is through the Retreat/Conference Centre that All Hallows has access to parishes in the Dublin area and indeed to many dioceses around the country.

2) 1976 – Intercession for Priests

Founded by Fr Kevin Scallion CM, Sr Briega McKenna OSC, and a core group of priests, this one month long retreat for priests was set up in 1976. As it evolved and developed it has become one of the most important events that takes place in All Hallows every year. In recent years up to 500 priests take part through the month of August, some staying for one or two days, others for a week, and others for even longer. The participants are drawn from diocesan priests in Ireland and overseas, priests from religious orders, and priests from a variety of missionary groups and societies. One of the great strengths of the All Hallows Intercession for Priests is that it challenges priests about the most important aspects of their lives, their commitment to priesthood, and the manner in which they exercise their priesthood.

3) 1981 – Vincentian Mission Team moves to All Hallows

The Vincentian Mission Team had been located in St Joseph's, Blackrock, for a number of years and in 1981 it was decided to base the group in All Hallows. Having a home to return to when a mission is over, and an opportunity to participate in various workshops etc. that take place in All Hallows over a year, are some of the advantages of using All Hallows as a base. The Vincentian Mission Team is a very important outreach for the College. The members of the Mission Team draw attention to the various courses available in All Hallows, especially the Lay Ministry and Pastoral Ministry Courses, when they visit the parishes, and they also contribute to the courses and programmes

in All Hallows during the times of the year when they are resident there. The coming and going of this Mission Team has kept the All Hallows staff in touch with the coal-face.

4) 1982 – Pastoral Leadership Diploma Course

The Pastoral Leadership course was set up at first for deacons from All Hallows and from various religious orders. The thrust of the course is centred on holistic formation – personal, spiritual, academic and pastoral. Over the years it has evolved and developed, and now numbers on it have been limited to 48, allowing the organisers to break down this number into four groups of 12. Much of the group process work takes place in small groups. As time went on more and more lay people have applied to do the course, and at present about one third of the group are deacons and two thirds are sisters and lay men and women, and a number of priests.

5) 1985 – All Hallows Summer School

Since the Retreat/Conference Centre was set up in 1976 All Hallows ran a variety of courses through the summer months – retreats, conferences, renewal courses for religious, etc. In 1985 it was decided to organise a four/five week Summer School centred on renewal of parish life. Each year the organisers try to strike a balance between speakers from Ireland and speakers from overseas. The All Hallows Summer School is a kind of crossroads or networking centre for good pastoral practice. In organising these courses the focus is on theological updating and the acquisition of practical pastoral skills that will enable people to renew parish life.

6) 1985 – Lay Ministry Course

In the summer of 1984 a number of All Hallows staff had discussions with local parish priests in relation to the training possibilities for lay men and women in their parishes. It was decided to set up a pilot course on the basis of one night a week over a two year period, with the assumption that 25 people would be needed to make it viable. About 100 people applied for the course in the first year and 80 were accepted. This number has been maintained since then.

One of the main achievements of the Lay Ministry Course is to strengthen the confidence of people in their call to ministry in the parish and other contexts. With participants coming from a variety of parishes around the archdiocese of Dublin, a good deal of networking goes on about good pastoral initiatives taking place in different parish

contexts. It also whets the appetites of the participants for further information about theology, scripture and pastoral practice, and quite a number of graduates of this course have gone on to do the BA Course and other courses in All Hallows.

7) 1988 – The BA Degree Course

In 1988 All Hallows offered a four year BA Degree Course with the possibility of majoring in theology and taking a minor subject in philosophy, psychology or spirituality. For the first time it was possible for All Hallows students to obtain a degree validated by the State. During this current year All Hallows is evaluating this Degree Course and working towards a better balance between the academic and ministerial components of the Degree itself. Efforts have been made to try and make sure that there is an opportunity for students to engage in ministry in the parish or other contexts.

8) 1988 – The Munich Mission

Over the years many young people leave Ireland, and the recent wave of emigration reached its peak around 1986. All Hallows began to do research about the number of young Irish people going to various European cities, and was encouraged by a number of bishops to investigate the situation in the city of Munich. Three of the All Hallows staff spent an eight week period in Munich in the summer of 1987 and, as a result of that, recommended the Irish Bishops to set up a Mission there which would cater for English speaking people. With the backing of the German Catholic Church a mission was established, known as St Kilian's, which has grown from strength to strength over the years. A graduate priest from All Hallows was appointed Chaplain, and in recent years a lay graduate has been appointed as Pastoral Assistant.

One of the reasons behind this venture is to explore the possibility of All Hallows setting up a number of new missions in the years ahead. At present All Hallows is exploring the possibility of linking up with a number of East European countries, including Russia, and at present is gathering information about the situation in Lithuania and various places in Russia. One of the offshoots of this work is that a number of students from Europe, both Western and Eastern Europe, have come to All Hallows in recent years. At present there is one student in All Hallows from Munich, three from Erfurt and two from Lithuania. In previous years there have been students from the Society of the Divine Word from Slovakia in All Hallows.

9) 1991 – Evening BA

Over the years All Hallows has organised a number of evening courses providing basic introductions to key theological and scriptural areas. It was decided in 1991 to set up an Evening BA Degree Course, offering Theology as the major subject and Philosophy as the minor subject. There are many people who, for a variety of motives, want to learn more about the Church and various theological disciplines. The people taking this course do not necessarily want to be engaged in a full-time way in parish ministry. Indeed the opportunities for this kind of work are quite limited in the Irish context. However, there are quite a few people engaged in this Evening Degree Course who want to deepen their theological knowledge and bring it to bear on their situation in the work place.

10) 1991 – MA (Research)

It was decided in 1991 to offer people the opportunity to do research in an area of theology with the concentration again on the practical pastoral situation. This course is organised on the basis of visiting All Hallows fortnightly throughout the first year, and the linking of each student to a supervisor. The MA Degree Course (Research) offers students the possibility of investigating an area of their own choice, especially an area that they may be involved in already in a pastoral context.

11) 1992 – Three Month Sabbatical Course – Renewal for Ministry

In 1992 a Three Month Sabbatical Course was set up, mainly because of requests to provide a course of shorter duration. The Three Month Sabbatical Course provides the participants with an opportunity to rest and to stand back from their pastoral involvement, an opportunity to tell their story to other members of their group and to reflect on it, and an opportunity to attend lectures on a variety of topics.

12) 1993 – MA (Taught)

The MA (Taught) Degree was set up to provide an opportunity for people holding leadership positions in the diocesan context, or in religious orders, or in society, to engage in a serious reflection on the theological, psychological and sociological factors that impinge on their ministry today, as well as providing them with an opportunity of writing a dissertation on a topic of their choice. The participants are offered a variety of workshops on various topics, and also the oppor-

tunity to engage in various processes to help them articulate their own view on ministry, and also an opportunity to evaluate what they have been doing in their previous ministry. One of the aims of this course is to provide ministers with the skills they need to engage in strategic planning at both parish and diocesan levels.

III. All Hallows Mission Statement

In 1988 the All Hallows Institute staff, together with the Resident Mission Team, came together on a number of occasions to work on a Mission Statement. This Mission Statement runs as follows:

The words of the Risen Jesus carved in stone above the main entrance announce the All Hallows Mission: EUNTES DOCETE OMNES GENTES – Go Teach All Nations.

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

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

Hence All Hallows is resolved:

- * To assist initial enquirers in determining how best to use their gifts for the mission of the Church;
- * To prepare seminarians for priesthood by following an integrated programme of personal, spiritual, theological and pastoral formation with a strong focus on mission;
- * To provide programmes in ministry which prepare lay men and women for their mission in the Church and in the world;
- * To provide renewal programmes for those already active in ministry to enable them to engage in it anew.

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

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

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

IV. Theological Comment

(A) *A Theology of Mission and Ministry Today*

1) Implicit in this Mission Statement is the view that there are three levels of call in regard to formation for ministry:

The first is that of an initial call, when people take the first step to discover what their role is in the Church – a step which entails their discovering their identity as Christians – Christians with a mission. Implicit in this discernment is working out how their particular talents and gifts can be used to build up the Church in society today. The shorter courses in All Hallows, including the Lay Ministry Course, focus on this level.

A second level of call is to those who are already engaged in some kind of ministry but feel called to deepen their theological knowledge or to acquire better ministerial skills. The BA Degree Course concentrates on this level.

A third level implicit in this Mission Statement is the call that goes out to those already engaged in full-time ministry but feel the time has come to withdraw to reflect on what they have been doing and also to refocus their energies for the future. Corresponding to this level of discernment are the Sabbatical Courses, the MA Courses and the Diploma in Pastoral Ministry.

2) In working out this Mission Statement the staff tried to take into account the considerable theological developments in the Roman Catholic tradition since Vatican II. Two concerns of the staff were:

- a) How to make sure that future priests are prepared to exercise their priestly ministry in a collaborative manner;
- b) How to set up a variety of courses and programmes for lay men and women which would enable them to exercise their ministry in the Church today and to be able to work closely with priests.

3) Another assumption of this Mission Statement is that mission today takes many different forms and that it should not be restricted, as it was in the past, to engaging in an overseas mission or mission in a far away country. It is felt that the Church is of its very nature missionary and there must be a looking out to the needs all around us as well as keeping in mind a mission *ad gentes*. In Ireland as in many other countries in Europe today the Church has to engage in new forms of mission and evangelization in order to touch the lives of the people who either have never been evangelised or who are alienated from the Church for a variety of reasons.

(B) *The Challenge Ahead*

Amongst the challenges facing the All Hallows Institute for Mission and Ministry now and in the future are the following:

1) *Transcending the Clerical/Lay Divide.*

The starting point for many discussions today about formation for priestly ministry and formation for lay ministry fail to take into account that the real starting point is people belonging to the Church as the people of God. The initial call to be a Christian, highlighted today by the whole RCIA process and the awareness of what it is to be a Christian with a call to evangelise and build up the Christian community is the starting point of ministry of all kinds. In that context a number of people will be called to priestly ministry and a number will be called to various forms of lay ministry in the Church and in society. Part of the malaise in the Catholic tradition in Western Europe today comes from the fact that the starting point is often a clerical one that sets up a false and artificial barrier between lay men and women and those who exercise the ministry of priesthood in the Church today.

2) *Transcending the Man/Woman Divide*

There is no doubt that one of the most serious movements in the Church and in society is the feminist movement, a movement to redress serious injustices in both the Church and in society. I think we have reached a point where we now are in a position to take a more balanced view of the role of men and women in society and in the Church and this means transcending the usual conflictual framework in which the problem is posed. It will only be when a starting point is taken, which transcends the usual conflictual framework, that we will move to a more balanced view of the roles of men and women in the Church today.

3 *Restating the Church/World Polarity*

One of the most important developments of the second Vatican Council was stating the Church/World polarity in a new context. One does not do away with the tension that will always exist between the Church and the world, but one needs to state it or restate it in a new register. Many people, of course, feel that in the post Vatican II Church the world has conquered and, in the words of Jacques Maritain, the Church is now “kneeling to the world”. In the review of twenty years of the Vatican Council in 1985 much was said about the Church/World polarity. I think we have to take this polarity seriously, but it means many problems are seen and stated in a new way. One of the dangers of the Church today is to retreat into a ghetto and cease to interact constructively and positively with the forces that work in society today. Many fundamentalist groups in the Church seem to be taking this latter path.

4) *Transcending the Mission Sending/Mission Receiving Church*

In the past Ireland and many European countries saw themselves as mission sending countries, and much could be said in favour of the great mission movement in the European Church from 1830 to 1970. However, we now know that there are many things in our theology of mission which were limited or defective. Many developments have taken place in the theology of mission in recent years and if we take these developments seriously it means that we will transcend the mission sending/mission receiving Church divide and realise that the Church wherever it

exists is missionary of its very nature.

5) *Transcending the Divide between “Pastoral Theology” and “Academic Theology”*

Finally, a good deal of tension exists in theological institutes today between people who want a strong pastoral focus in the way theology is taught and those who believe that students should be grounded in a strong academic theological tradition. This sometimes takes the form of opposition between those who prefer to concentrate on experience as a starting point and those who want to concentrate on initiating students into a tradition of theological wisdom. Again one of the challenges facing places like All Hallows is working out ways to transcend this divide and in a creative way do justice to both points of view.

V. Questions for European Provincials re Formation Today

- 1) What developments have taken place in your own country re formation for priestly ministry and lay ministry?
- 2) Give examples of continuing education of priests that your Province may be engaged in.
- 3) Do you think that the Congregation of the Mission has a specific contribution to make to any of the above?

APPENDIX 1

All Hallows Vincentian Community
Seminary/Institute for Mission and Ministry 8
Mission Team 4
Ministry to priests (non-resident) 2
 Total 14

All Hallows Staff
Full-time Academic 20
Full-time Administration 10
 Total full-time 30

Part-time Academic 42
Part-time Administration 8
 Total part-time 50

Full-time Student Intake 1994-95

Resident seminarians 8

Seminarians of religious orders 18

Brothers 8

Priests 29

Sisters 67

Lay men 25

Lay women 59

Total 212

Part-time Student Intake 1994-95

Men 78

Women 212

Total 290

APPENDIX 2

Full-time Students and Courses

1. BA Degree

Morning 82

Evening 16

2. Graduate Diploma in Leadership 48

3. MA

In Pastoral Leadership (taught) 16

In Pastoral Studies (research) 16

4. Sabbatical:Renewal for Ministry 33

5. PhD 1

Total 212

Part-time Students

Accumulation of Credits and Certification of Studies

Morning 14

Evening 71

Audit

Morning 11

Evening 33

Preparing for Lay Ministry

Year 1 76

Year 2 52

Facilitators 16

Prayer Guides 17

Total 290

APPENDIX 3

Geographical Distribution of Students, Intake 1994-95

Republic of Ireland

Connaught 9

Leinster 120

Munster 17

Ulster (Donegal, Cavan, Monaghan) 2

Total 148

Northern Ireland

Antrim 1

Deny 2

Down 3

Tyrone 2

Total 8

European 'Union

Germany 4

Great Britain 22

Total 26

Rest of Europe

Lithuania 2

Malta 1

Total 3

America 5

Africa 10

Asia

India 2

Malaysia 2

Total 4

TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS 212

The Vincentian Volunteers

Joan Moriarty DC

The inspiration

In 1990, at the Provincial Assembly, the Daughters of Charity of the British Province reviewed their various services to the poor. It was noted that we had withdrawn from most of our works with young people. We no longer had teachers to staff our schools; new legislation had gradually necessitated withdrawal from Child Care; Sisters visiting in parishes were growing old and perhaps less able to involve young people in traditional church activities. Our services to youth were very marginal indeed.

Many suggestions were made as to how this situation could be changed and, eventually, a resolution was taken by the Assembly:

To set up a research team to look into ways and means whereby young people could make a short-term commitment to our Vincentian ideals while working alongside us.

What shape this “short-term” commitment was going to take was left to a small group of Sisters who volunteered to explore the possibilities. The group met for the first time in November 1990, but it was not until August 1992 that the first group of young people came together.

In the interim period extensive research was carried out. Many existing volunteer communities were visited; all available literature perused; a number of names chosen and discarded, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit and our founders earnestly sought.

At first the project was to be a solo venture of the Daughters of Charity. It was based on an adapted model of projects set up in Australia and the USA and, like them, would be known as DC AIMS (Daughters of Charity, Associates in Mission). We also looked to the Vincentian Service Corps managed by the Vincentian Fathers in the USA.

Finally, the VINCENTIAN VOLUNTEERS emerged as a joint venture in collaborative ministry under the umbrella of the Daughters of Charity, the Vincentian Priests/Brothers, and the Society of St Vincent de Paul in England and Wales, and Scotland.

The aims

In response to the call of the Church, moving towards the millennium, in a decade of evangelization, our focus would be: THE EVANGELIZATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN A VINCENTIAN WAY.

Owing to our decreasing vocations and increasing age it was tempting to some, perhaps, to make this “movement” an oblique way of getting vocations. This notion needs to be speedily dispelled – there was, and is, no hidden agenda.

The AIM IS TO SHARE our Vincentian charism:

- by inviting young people aged 18 to 30
- to live simply in a faith community for one year
- to pray together and share their faith
- to serve the poor and reflect with others on their service.

Administration

To launch and carry the programme forward it was necessary to establish an administrative network:

The Provincials of the Priests and the Daughters of Charity, together with the National Presidents of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, would become the Trustees and Governing Body.

Trustees would appoint “liaison” people as a link between the Councils and the Management Committee. The Management Committee would be responsible for the overall planning of the programme, selection of Volunteers, funding, etc.

The National Director supervises the Volunteers and is generally responsible for their individual and overall well-being – ensuring that each Volunteer is happy; that community living and prayer are working and that they are appropriately placed in their service of the poor.

The National Chaplain, a Vincentian priest, visits each group; celebrates the eucharist with them, and is available for spiritual direction.

Local Coordinators and Community Support Workers are responsible, at local level, for each community – prayer and service dimensions.

Initially the Vincentian Volunteers came under the umbrella of four registered charities. Present *independent charitable status* is being sought.

Selection and programme

a) Selection:

Advertising is done through a wide Catholic network of schools, colleges, diocesan youth workers, parishes, youth SVP, advertisements in Catholic newspapers, and through individual contacts.

All prospective Volunteers complete a detailed application form and write an essay on themselves and their Christian faith. They are then given two interviews, one relating to community and prayer and the other relating to service placement; this is followed by group discussion before a choice is made.

b) Programme:

(i) The programme begins with an *Orientation Week* during which the Volunteers are introduced to one another; to prayer; to Vincentian spirituality; to the dynamics of living in a faith community; and to testimonies given by men and women in the Vincentian family, etc. This is a valuable and indispensable week, during which the foundation of the year is laid. The week ends with a eucharist, during which each individual and each community makes a COMMITMENT to COMMUNITY – PRAYER – SERVICE.

(ii) Regular weekends thereafter, move deeply into prayer, the spirit of service, apostolic reflection, personal development, spiritual direction, the use of scripture, liturgical celebration.

(iii) Each Volunteer is placed and supervised in some appropriate service of the poor: the homeless, the elderly, prison work, pastoral work in schools/parishes, youth work, etc.

(iv) Each local community group has a “coordinator” and support worker who leads them in prayer and discussion, weekly, and who is immediately available should any crisis occur. The community itself plans time for group prayer; personal prayer is the responsibility of each individual. The National Chaplain visits each group and celebrates the eucharist with them.

(v) The year ends with a three-day retreat followed by a COMMISSIONING mass – “Go out to the whole world and spread the Good News”.

Progress

1992-93: The “pilot group”, seven in all – four men and three women – came together at St Vincent’s Centre in Scotland in August 1992. They

were all engaged in youth retreats and also worked with the elderly and handicapped. Despite many problems they all “survived” the year. For us also, this year was a good learning process and our evaluation, and theirs, led to several changes in the following year.

1993-94: Sixteen young people in three separate communities began the Vincentian Volunteer programme in 1993. Two of these groups became strong cohesive communities. One community only partly bonded as a community, although they prayed and served together. Service placements included day and residential work with homeless people, youth work, parish pastoral work, the elderly, school retreats, etc. The personal and group evaluation at the end of the year was most encouraging. Many found the year difficult but were happy they had persevered and had matured and broadened their Christian horizons by the challenge of the experience. However, all, without exception, stated that their faith had grown and deepened – and that, after all, was the purpose of the programme. *Deo gratias.*

1994-95: There were over 60 enquiries this year, and eventually 15 young people were selected to participate in the programme; again in three communities. Changes in the service placements depend on the aptitude of each Volunteer and what is available in the local area.

Each year sees a new development or new insights and adjustments. All in all, many very wonderful things have happened. There have been ups and downs, laughter and tears, misunderstandings and reconciliations, and enduring friendships. Faith has been renewed and deepened, and the faith journey of each one has become a little clearer. For many it has been a year of discernment and an opening up of young lives to a compassionate commitment to the service of the poor.

The presence of the Volunteers working alongside us Vincentians has been an inspiration and challenge, a time of joyful faith and apostolic sharing. I believe there is HOPE for the WORLD, HOPE for the CHURCH of the POOR, HOPE for the future of the VINCENTIAN tradition, with young men and women of such Christian calibre about.

Maturing as a Priest

Patrick Collins

(This is the paper as originally written. At the CEVIM 95 meeting the author delivered a shorter simplified version)

The twentieth century has experienced an unprecedented growth in human knowledge. What was known about the world doubled between the time of Christ and the mid-18th century. It doubled again between 1750 and 1900. Nowadays it takes less than ten years for another doubling to take place. The practical application of this growing body of information has transformed the modern world. The age of atomic power, lasers and computers has had an enormous impact on our secular and religious culture. Because he recognised this, Pope John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council. The implementation of its decrees has transformed Catholic life in many different ways. Nevertheless, it becomes increasingly clear that the Church, like secular society, is in a crisis of change. It will lead to either growth or decline. The choice is ours. To choose wisely, we will have to identify the basic issue that lies at the heart of the often bewildering and disconcerting changes of recent years.

I believe that the interpretative key to this complex phenomenon is that the centre of gravity in modern Catholicism is shifting from the experience of religious authority to the authority of religious experience. As a result, increasing numbers of people accept the authority of Church teaching in so far as it is meaningful and relevant in their lives. While many Catholics may be aware of a tension between their personal experience and the teaching of the Church, I believe that both factors are important. While dogmatic faith unsupported by personal experience remains empty, personal experience unrelated to the faith of the Church remains blind.

As a result of the documented shift from religious authority to the authority of religious experience (1), essentialist spirituality is being increasingly augmented by an existentialist kind (2). The former is ecclesiocentric and puts the emphasis on the importance of obediently conforming to the objective teachings of the Church. The latter

is more subjective and puts the emphasis on either a personal search for meaning or an immediate sense of felt relationship with Christ by the power of the Spirit (3). If this shift is the interpretative key to the religious crisis of our times, I believe that the experience of intimacy is the interpretative key to most forms of existentialist spirituality.

I use the word “intimacy” in its etymological sense, meaning “to publish, to hint at, or to make known that which is inmost”. I believe that religious experience as conscious relationship with God involves three interrelated forms of intimacy. Firstly, self-intimacy whereby I get in touch with what is innermost in my own heart. Secondly, intimacy with other people, whereby I reveal my true self by self-disclosure and pay sustained and loving attention to what is inmost in another. Thirdly, there is intimacy with God. It is a heart to heart conversation with him by whom we know ourselves to be loved, “the Beyond in the midst” of our everyday lives. Not only do these three forms of intimacy facilitate a priest’s human development, they enable him, like Jesus, to speak and act with the kind of inner authority that is rooted in the depths of his personal experience. As Carl Jung once observed: “Too few people have experienced the divine image as the innermost possession of their own souls. Christ only meets them from without, never from within the soul”. I am convinced that, in the future, the bishop or priest who substitutes the authority of objective religious truth for the authority of subjective, but orthodox, religious experience, will contribute by default to the decline of the Church.

Self-intimacy

It seems to me that there is something paradoxical about self-intimacy. While it is the *sine qua non* of interpersonal intimacy, and intimacy with God, it is at the same time dependent upon both. Self-intimacy is the point of intersection where these other enriching intimacies meet. In this connection it is important to appreciate the much-neglected distinction between self-knowledge and self-intimacy. Self-knowledge refers to a way of looking at oneself; it leads to knowledge about myself. For example, in recent years many priests and religious in English speaking countries have used personality tests for this purpose. There are two of them worth mentioning. The Myers Briggs Personality Type Indicator (based on Jung’s monumental study *Personality Types*, 1920) and the Enneagram Personality Typology which suggests that there are nine basic personality types. While I have found that taking

one or both tests increases knowledge about the self, it takes time and reflection to use them as an aid to the kind of self-awareness which is in touch with the deeper things of the heart.

Self-awareness is a way of going beyond the narrow and arbitrary confines of the conscious ego and its many masks and roles to get in touch with the hidden-self which is pre-conscious, and the unknown-self which is unconscious. The most important way of doing this is to get in touch with one's emotions and feelings (4). A person can have an emotion such as anger or grief and not be aware of it. But a feeling is an emotion that has articulated itself in a conscious way. While it is true that feelings are not facts, they are the fingerprints of subjectivity, similar to those of other people and nevertheless unique. They put us in touch with two realities, the external world and our own inner world, conditioned as it is by personal memories, values, beliefs, and attitudes. Feelings are revelatory because they tell us what we *really* perceive, believe, think, and value, as opposed to what we *imagine* we perceive, believe, think, and value. In that sense, feelings never lie. If there is anything "wrong" with our feelings it is because of the way we look at the world and ourselves. To have a healthy affective life we need a healthy *outlook*. To grow in self-awareness five things are necessary: to recover, name, own, understand, and express, our feelings (5).

Recovering feelings

As we have seen, a person can have an emotion, e.g. anger or grief, and not be consciously aware of it. This is usually because it was buried alive in the unconscious, either because it was too painful or thought to be inappropriate. To recover lost feelings a number of things are necessary. Firstly, we need to stop all activity in order to have an appointment – free from distractions – with ourselves. Secondly, we need to relax our bodies as much as possible. There are many recognised ways of doing this. It is only as we relax physically that our feelings begin to emerge from the shadows of anonymity to declare themselves. Thirdly, by paying attention to our bodily sensations, because all our emotions express themselves physically; e.g. a headache or an upset stomach could be due to repressed anger or resentment. We can dialogue with our bodies, letting images float freely into our minds. Often the unconscious will suggest some symbolic representation of a repressed emotion. As we savour the image we may find that we begin to get in

touch with its associated affect. It is a psychological fact that, by and large, feelings are evoked by images rather than by ideas. Fourthly, we can recall and reflect upon our dreams. So often these letters from the unconscious remain unopened and unread. In fact they are psychodramas which are symbolic representations of our deepest feelings. Usually the main feeling in the dream is one that was evoked during the previous day or two, but went unnoticed. Frequently feelings like these will also be related to emotionally charged memories from one's earlier life. We cannot go into the subject of dream interpretation here (6). Suffice it to say that, usually, everyone and everything in a dream is a personification of some aspect of oneself.

Naming feelings

Many of us are emotionally illiterate in the sense that we find it hard to distinguish one feeling from another. For example, many men, when asked what they feel, will tell you what they think or believe. Others may not go much further than saying: "I feel good", or "I feel bad". Others will get the general feeling category correct: e.g. "I feel angry", without being able to nuance what it is they feel precisely: e.g. annoyance, rage, irritation, fury, resentment, impatience, etc. Incidentally, psychologists suggest that there are about six primary feelings: surprise, fear, disgust, anger, happiness, and sadness.

Owning feelings

Self-knowledge says: "I know there is anger inside me". The person knows it is there, but he/she keeps it at arm's length, so to speak, by looking at it objectively. We own our feelings when we stop thinking about the anger, to become directly aware of its content. It is at that point that we can say: "I feel really angry and cheesed-off by the way that decision was made".

Understanding feelings

According to Ellis, our feelings are not directly evoked by people and events, but rather by the way we think about them. The way we think is coloured by a unique cocktail of our values, beliefs, and past experiences. For example, unlike some of my friends, I hate to be licked by a dog. I feel a sense of aversion and disgust, mixed with feelings of aversion and fear. Because we had no animals at home I have grown

up with the questionable belief that dogs are dirty and liable to attack for no good reason. So, when we want to understand a feeling we can ask ourselves three important questions: What thought or belief provoked my feeling? What in my earlier life conditioned the way I think and believe? Is my way of thinking and believing realistic and Christian?

Expressing feelings

We can appropriate our affective life by expressing our feelings either verbally or on paper. We will examine the dynamics and effects of affective self-disclosure later. But self-awareness can also grow by “journaling”, i.e. not only recording external events in a diary, but also one’s subjective reactions to them. For example: “I realised that I felt jealous and insecure when Tom told me that he really liked Sr Louise. As I thought about it I suddenly realised that she means more to me than I had been prepared to admit. Now I’m afraid that the two of us will never have a chance of becoming friendly”. As one layer of feeling is recognised and expressed in this way, another is likely to float into consciousness, and so on. Not only that, previously unrecognised affective patterns can come to light as one re-reads the journal every now and then.

Nowadays an increasing number of priests and clerical students are growing in emotional self-awareness as a result of receiving counselling/therapy/spiritual direction, or attending group dynamics and human development courses. Self-awareness can have an important religious dimension. It enables one to get in touch with what spiritual writers have called holy desires. These desires, as distinct from merely physical or psychological ones, are initiated by God in our souls, i.e. in that part of us which can only be satisfied by conscious relationship with God. As a result it could be said that the dynamics of our spiritual lives are rooted in holy desire. No wonder St Ignatius says that all prayer begins with the question: What do you want? To be out of touch with one’s God-prompted desire/s for God (cf Jn 6:44) is to be absent from the first and foundational way in which we experience the action of the Holy Spirit.

Besides, self-intimacy enables us to reflect on our relationship with God. This kind of examen of consciousness, to use an Ignatian term, enables us to discern the origin and orientation of thoughts, feelings, impulses, etc. Did they come from God, or from myself, or even from

the evil one? Like Ignatius, Vincent de Paul says that inspirations that come from God and tend towards God will be associated with ongoing consolation, e.g. feelings of peace, joy, elevation of spirit, hope, tears, etc. Those that are not from God will be associated with desolation, i.e. feelings of agitation, sadness, morbidity, aridity, etc. As St Vincent observed: "A mark of illusions and false inspirations is that they are persistent and troublesome and make us uneasy". Self-awareness, then, is a pre-requisite for discernment of spirits (7).

Interpersonal intimacy

From the 1960s onward the developmental psychology of Erik Erikson has exercised increasing influence. It maintains that the life of men and women involves a succession of stages, each one of which is characterised by a specific developmental task. For example, while one attains a sense of identity in adolescence, the basic challenge of early adulthood is to develop a capacity for intimacy with another person/other persons. It involves an ability to go beyond one's public persona, made up of roles and masks, in order to increasingly reveal one's true self to a trusted confidant or friend. This will be possible only to the extent that we are in touch with our own inner life. Erikson maintains that while our sense of identity is actualised and consolidated through self-disclosure, the reverse is true when it is absent. We feel isolated and lonely without anyone to share with or care for. It seems to me that there are two forms of interpersonal intimacy, unilateral and reciprocal.

Unilateral intimacy

Intimacy is unilateral when sharing is one-sided rather than mutual. It can take many forms. For example, in a religious community John likes Joe. Because he trusts him he tends to tell Joe about many of his experiences, worries, etc. John may tell other people that Joe is his best friend. Strictly speaking this is not true. Joe has one or two close friends of his own. But he does not confide in John. Indeed, he suspects that if he did, John would not be really interested. He has a need to be understood rather than to understand. While this is not reciprocal intimacy it can be therapeutic in so far as it can prepare the dependent person for shared intimacy by first helping him to grow in self-awareness, confidence and trust. This is the kind of dynamic that operates when a person confides in a counsellor or therapist. As helpers skilled in the art of empathic listening, these "professional friends" can assist a person to recognise and overcome conscious and

unconscious blocks to self-intimacy and intimacy with others. I know many priests who have been helped along the road to deeper more satisfying relationships in this way.

Reciprocal intimacy

Despite its importance, apparently only one man in twenty experiences genuine intimacy (8). This lack of interpersonal intimacy in the lives of men in general, and of priests in particular, has many causes. Chodorow and Stoller have suggested that in early childhood boys develop their sense of male identity by suppressing their empathy for their female mothers. On the other hand, girls develop their sense of female identity by doing the opposite. As a result, males find it harder either to tune in to their feelings, or to express them to other people, especially other men. A sense of emotional closeness, what Vincent referred to as “cordiality”, i.e. feelings of affinity, affection, warmth, etc., is often substituted for intimacy, i.e. honest disclosure of feelings and experiences. Men are also competitive and hampered in relationships by macho stereotypes that imply that all sense of vulnerability has to be hidden. Besides, many priests were taught to avoid so-called “particular friendships” (9). As a result, they can end up being friendly with all and friends with no one, either inside or outside the community. This lack of interpersonal intimacy in the life of a priest can have many knock-on effects.

Firstly, he may identify almost entirely with the role of priesthood. As a result, his relationships will tend to be formal and dutiful rather than personal and spontaneous. This will be evident in his preaching style, which will tend to be objective and didactic rather than a sharing of faith based on personal experience. Secondly, the priest will tend to be immature. Research has indicated that a significant number of priests have to cope with an unrecognised, but significant, block in their lives (10). So, although they may be intellectually sophisticated and accomplished, they can at the same time be emotionally quite immature. As long as it is un-dealt with, this state of affairs can have serious knock-on effects. For example, many priests will be inclined to displace their intimacy needs in the form of unhealthy attitudes and behaviours (11). Thirdly, priests who are emotionally underdeveloped in some-way or other will often fail to understand or satisfy the legitimate needs both of confreres and of the lay people they are called to serve. Fourthly, priests who lack intimacy, and therefore adult maturity, will find it difficult to “live after the manner of dear friends”

as St Vincent advocated, or to engage in meaningful collaborative ministry. The latter involves an ability to engage in such things as planning by means of process, (as distinct from mere discussion), faith sharing, theological and pastoral reflection, constructive conflict resolution, etc. This inability will often be due to the insecurity, excessive self-absorption, or unhealthy individualism, which are so often the characteristics of those who, through mistrust and fear, avoid the challenges of intimacy. Fifthly, such priests will tend to substitute saying prayers, e.g. parts of the divine office, for spending regular periods of time in affective prayer and contemplation. In the light of these points alone I am convinced that a recovery of interpersonal intimacy is essential if priests are to mature as men and as Christians.

Needless to say, intimacy with a relative or a confrere or a lay man is desirable (12). However, many priests will be more inclined to disclose that which is innermost to a trusted female, either a nun e.g. a Daughter of Charity, or a lay woman (13). Intimate relationships of this heterosexual kind have been viewed with considerable suspicion in the Western ascetical tradition. There were two main reasons for this. Friendship requires equality, and women were considered inferior to men. As well as that, there was a cynical view that male-female friendships would inevitably end up in sexual intercourse. Of course there are obvious dangers and difficulties in these kinds of relationships. But there are even more difficulties associated with the life of isolation, devoid of intimacy. It is inevitable that some of us will discover the meaning of intimacy as a result of falling in love after our ordination.

This happened to me in my late twenties. Because my friend and I were both convinced that I should remain faithful to my vow of celibacy we were able to negotiate our way through that sometimes painful experience. As a result of a lot of discussion, prayer and the help of understanding colleagues and friends we eventually “fell out of love”, only to become deep and lasting friends. Now, twenty years later, I thank God for that experience, because through it I underwent an affective awakening. As trust began to outweigh fear we began to move beyond closeness to an intimate non-romantic relationship. Slowly we learned to tell one another the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Happily since then I have grown to have the same level of trust and communication with two or three other women. I know that many conscientious celibates have already discovered that genuine non-romantic friendships with women are possible. However, a number of conditions are necessary.

Firstly, and most important of all, the priest and his friend need to be wholeheartedly committed to the Person and will of God. Secondly, they should focus their energies on mutual self-disclosure rather than the physical expression of affection. As the *New Dictionary of Theology* comments:

One key to keeping the physical or genital dimension of a relationship in proper perspective is to develop the affective dimension of sexuality. It is, indeed, possible to live fully and happily without the pleasing experience of genital sexuality, but it is impossible to do so without developed affective sexual relationships (p. 952).

Thirdly, the friends should be prepared to share honestly about their sexual feelings so that they can adjust to one another in a responsible way. After all, what might trouble one might present no problem to the other. Fourthly, while privacy is necessary at times, a priest should not be secretive about his friend/s. He should tell trusted relatives and colleagues about his relationship. Because it is so easy to deceive oneself in this area, it is important to be receptive to any observations or misgivings they might want to express. Fifthly, he should avoid an exclusive or possessive type of relationship which would resent his friend getting close to other people, especially other males. Sixthly, if a priest is friends with a married woman, he has to be sure that the relationship, no matter how honourable it is in itself, does not come between her and her husband. In my experience, same-sex and heterosexual friendships have many good effects.

In adult life most of us are aware of inner hurts. We lack integration. As a result, we are debilitated by neurotic fears and compulsions. Psychologists argue that many of our adult problems can be traced back to childhood experiences. Some of these experts maintain that healing can come only through psychotherapy or psychoanalysis. Both are expensive and time-consuming. Other experts, Erikson for example, believe that emotional and spiritual healing, of a retrospective kind, can come about as a result of intimate relationships. When we are aware of the love of a friend or friends we begin to have the freedom to take off our masks. We sense a growing urge to give our friend/s the greatest gift we have, the gift of our true selves. As this desire strengthens – surely it is a holy desire, prompted by the Spirit – it begins to override our fear of rejection which echoes back to childhood. We begin to lower our defences and to tell our friend about the more vulnerable side of our

nature. As we sense the understanding acceptance and love of our friend a wonderful healing begins to take place. In the light of this friendship love we begin to understand accept, and love, ourselves as we are and not as we have pretended to be (14). Conversely, as we focus our loving attention on the inner life of our friend in an admiring, approving, and sometimes challenging way, we enable the potential which has been manifested in him or her to blossom and thrive. In doing this we learn what it is to love another person as a second self. Not only that, two other benefits follow. Firstly, because of the complementarity of the sexes, male-female friends grow in psychosexual maturity. It is unlikely that such integration could take place in the life of a priest without heterosexual intimacy. As John Powell has written: "For any individual to actualise his potential as a human being he must have experience of true and deep friendship with a person of the opposite sex". Secondly, in the course of commenting on the relationship of Dante and Beatrice, Joseph Pieper has said: "If we look to well-documented experience of great loves, we learn precisely this intensity of love turned toward a single partner seems to place the lover at the vantage point from which he realises for the first time the goodness and loveliness of *all* people". And because they learn to love the beggar and the idiot in one another, intimate friends of whatever kind learn to love him or her, not only in themselves but also in the wider community, especially in the poor (15).

Intimacy with God

Self-intimacy enables us to get in touch with our own experience. Interpersonal intimacy schools us in the arts of self-disclosure and loving attention to the inner life of another. Not only are these two forms of intimacy a prerequisite for prayerful intimacy with God, they find their fulfillment in this way. Indeed one could say that we are no closer to God than we are to our true self and our closest neighbour. As St Aelred of Rievaulx wrote: "God is friendship... I would not hesitate to attribute to friendship anything associated with charity as, for instance, he who abides in friendship abides in God and God abides in him". As we relate to others, so we will pray. If our human relationships are formal, it is almost inevitable that our prayerful relationship to God will be much the same. But if some of our human relationships are intimate our prayerful relationship with God will tend to be more personal. So, not surprisingly, St Vincent wrote: "Prayer is a conversation of the soul with God, a mutual communication in which he interiorly tells the soul what he wishes it to do". St Teresa of Avila

was even more precise when she wrote: “Prayer is nothing other than an intimate friendship”. I would have little hesitation in saying that prayer as conscious relationship with the Lord is potentially the greatest single source of psycho-spiritual development in the life of a priest. To this end we will suggest three things that will facilitate this kind of transforming intimacy, namely affective prayer, directed retreats, and spiritual direction.

Affective prayer

When it comes to prayer many priests are like brains on stilts, all head and no heart. Of course rational reflection has its place, but it should normally give way to a more personal kind of self-disclosure. For example, St Vincent once wrote: “We have need of reflection in prayer when special assistance from the Holy Spirit is not forthcoming. But when the heavenly breeze blows upon the heart we must yield to its influence”. We do this when we tell the Lord about our feelings, e.g. anger about his apparent failure to answer prayers on behalf of a sick parishioner, joy about the birth of a nephew, distress upon hearing of another atrocity on the news. Usually it is not too difficult to share our positive feelings with the Lord. The trouble arises when we have to come to him, not in our Sunday best, but in the ragged clothes of our anger, fear, and guilt, associated as they often are with negative images of God. The extent to which we control our dialogue with the Lord by suppressing our true feelings and desires is the extent to which we will be unreceptive to his self-revelation through scripture, nature, people, art, etc. In my experience only a minority of priests are comfortable with this kind of affective prayer. Even those who are, not to speak of those who are not, would be enabled to develop a more intimate relationship with the Lord if they had the assistance of a skilled spiritual director.

Spiritual direction

St Gregory the Great said that “the supreme art is the direction of souls”. Nowadays, “professional directors” receive intensive training, as a result they develop the skill of helping directees to notice the presence and inspirations of God in their lives because, as Cardinal Newman once wrote, “God’s presence is not discerned at the time when it is upon us, but afterwards when we look back upon what is gone and over”. Directors do this by asking four main questions:

1. When were you most aware of the Lord’s presence in the recent past?

2. What did you feel when the Lord revealed his presence to you?
3. What did you notice about the Person of the Lord that evoked the feelings you have described? How was he for you, what was he like: e.g. attentive, forgiving, loving, understanding, etc.? These are the crucial questions in spiritual direction.
4. How did you decide to respond to the presence and/or inspirations of the Lord?

By asking questions like these directors focus on religious experience, thereby enabling their directees to recognise and reject false images of God. They are also skilled in the discernment of spirits. They can help their directees to judge whether a revelation or inspiration comes from God or not, by focusing on its associated inner states of either consolation or desolation. In these, and many other, ways directors help their directees to grow in conscious relationship with the mysterious Other we call God.

Directed retreats

Unfortunately there is a real shortage of trained directors. One way a priest can overcome this difficulty is to consider the possibility of doing a directed retreat. Normally they last between five and eight days and are conducted in total silence. Apart from the homily at mass there are no talks. The emphasis is placed on personal prayer. Each day the retreatant goes to see the director to chat about the way things are going. This intensive exposure to spiritual direction can be extremely helpful in developing a more personal way of praying, one in which self-intimacy and interpersonal intimacy merge in an intimate encounter with the God who is both with us and within us.

Conclusion

In an increasingly pluralistic society like ours, where belief is only one option among others, the rock which people are longing for cannot ultimately be someone else's knowledge of God. What they are looking for are spiritual guides who can help them in their search for religious experience. If we encourage the three interrelated intimacies mentioned in this paper we will mature in nature and grace by finding our true selves in the love of the God whose presence is discerned in other people, especially our closest friends. So, adapting a charism statement formulated in the Irish Province, we could say: "We Vincentians are called to experience the gentle and compassionate

love of Christ both in community and in our friendships, and to share that love with those to whom we are sent”.

I want to conclude with words written by the British theologian Charles Davis shortly before his departure from the priesthood in 1966. They are still relevant today:

People are looking for something that will fill the void in their lives, but what they hear does not do that. The more perceptive know they are looking for God. He seems to have withdrawn from the world and from them. They come to talks by speakers like myself. They hear about the new liturgy, about the new understanding of the layman's role, about the Church and the world, about a thousand new and exciting ideas. But who will speak to them quite simply of God as of a person he immediately knows, and make the reality and presence of God come alive once more?

Notes

1. See *The Irish Report of the European Value Systems Study*, ed. Fogarty, Ryan, Lee: “There is a shift across generations from stronger to weaker acceptance of orthodox beliefs, religious practices and the authority of the Church”, p. 12.
2. For more on this see R Maloney CM: *The Way of St Vincent de Paul*, p. 48.
3. For more on models of spirituality see John Haughey SJ: “Contemporary Spiritualities and the Spirit” in *The Conspiracy of God*, pp. 96-117.
4. See Jack Dominian's “Why is Human Development an Issue for the Priest of Today?” in *Priestly Development in a Changing World*, p. 17. Bernard Lonergan SJ: “Feelings” in *Method in Theology*, pp. 30-34.
5. P Collins CM: “Fingerprints of the Heart” in *Intimacy and the Hungers of the Heart*.
6. P Collins CM: “Dreams: A Christian Understanding” in *Growing in Health and Grace*, pp. 72-87.
7. Conference to the St Lazare community, 17 October 1659 on True Lights and Illusions (XII 350).
8. The McGill Report on male intimacy, quoted in Donna Tiernan Mahoney: *Touching the Face of God: Intimacy and Celibacy in Priestly Life*, p. 104.
9. Both St Thomas and St Francis de Sales say that friendships are by definition particular; what the books of old were afraid of were exclusive friendships of an erotic kind. It is interesting to note that par. 2.17 of the *Constitutions of the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul* wisely says: “This supernatural motivation opens their hearts to non-exclusive and genuine friendships”, i.e. in community and, presumably, outside of it also.

10. For example, a report entitled *The Health of Catholic Priests* (1985) by the US bishops' committee on Priestly Life and Ministry indicates that 39.8% of those studied in the previous twelve months of their lives had experienced "severe personal, behavioural or mental problems". Vince Dwyer says in his *Lift Your Sails* that when a test based on Jane Loevinger's stages of human development was administered to priests and religious he discovered that very few of them got beyond the immature stage of *conformity*; its "cognitive preoccupations are appearance, material things, reputation, and social acceptance", p 16.
11. See Barbara Schneiders: "Friendship in the Life of Consecrated Celibates", *New Wineskins*: "Besides the immaturity that failure to engage the challenge to intimacy of adulthood involves, it also almost necessarily results in the displacement of intimacy needs in unhealthy ways. Over-dependence on and subservience towards superiors, reliance on authoritarian uses of power in work relationships, hypochondria, over-eating and addiction to drugs and alcohol, compulsive masturbation, drivenness in work, perfectionism, unhealthy forms of ritualistic piety and rigid adherence to rules and rites are just some of the ways unmet intimacy needs surface in the disguise of narcotization control and defense mechanisms, and alienation of authority" pp. 219-220.
12. See "Priestly Friendship", par. 28 of the *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, and John Rybolt CM: "As Good Friends: Reflections on the Development of the Concept of Fraternal Life in the Congregation of the Mission", *Vincentiana* Spring 1994.
13. Dominian, *Op. cit.*, p. 20.
14. This point is really the key to step five of Alcoholics Anonymous, namely to admit one's hurts and wrongdoings to oneself, to God, and to *another human being*.
15. This kind of interpersonal love has a healing effect. It ends the neurotic civil war of the heart which is adverted to in this well-known quotation from Jung: "Perhaps this sounds very simple, but simple things are always the most difficult. In actual life it requires the greatest art to be simple, and so acceptance of oneself is the essence of the moral problem and the acid test of one's out look on life. That I feed the beggar, that I forgive an insult, that I love my enemy in the name of Christ – all these are undoubtedly great virtues. What I do unto the least of my brethren, that I do unto Christ. But what if I should discover that the least among them all, the poorest of all beggars, the most impudent of all the offenders, the very fiend himself – that all these are within me, and 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?" ("Psychotherapists of the Clergy" in *Psychology and Western Religion*, p. 207.

Miscellanea

AN INTERESTING PORTRAIT OF ST VINCENT

In *Colloque 24*, Autumn 1991, I wrote a short piece about a hitherto unknown portrait of St Vincent, which had been shown to a Daughter of Charity of the British Province, and I said I would keep readers informed of any further news about it. It is painted in oils on wood and, unframed, measures 13 5/8th inches x 19 inches. Sister Judith Greville, the archivist, has furnished the following account, including a paragraph written by the owner.

TD

The original hangs on the staircase in Provincial House, Mill Hill. It was given to the British Province on 1 October 1993 by a lady who wishes to remain anonymous and this is the history of it as she related it to us:

My mother was Russian Orthodox and, before her marriage to an Englishman, worked in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence, which gave her an eye for good paintings. On coming to London she spied this painting in a junk shop in the Portobello Road, bought it for a small sum and took it home. I grew up with it and none of us knew who it was. His very expressive eyes seemed to follow me and were, by turns, disapproving or amused. I later became a convert and was almost sure he was St Vincent de Paul, so I decided to show him to you.

In fact this lady eventually donated the picture to us, but not before she had taken it to Christie's and Sotheby's. They told her it was French, 17th century, and that the child had been added considerably later. This accords with Fr Roman's statement that Fr Fiat (1878-1914) had tried to further popular devotion to St Vincent by having him painted, or statues made, with children. In fact, in St Vincent's day clerics would not have touched children.

Neither the professional cleaning of the picture, nor the X-ray, revealed any trace of a signature or date. However, we have the professional verdict of two prominent auctioneering houses that it is

contemporaneous with St Vincent. It is certainly the youngest looking portrait of him and has some resemblance to the one by Simon Fra^ois that hangs in St Lazare.

It was thought better to have post-cards of “our” portrait printed minus the child, which is at any rate a later addition to the portrait.

Copies are available through the St Vincent de Paul Society, Damascus House, or the Heritage Room at Mill Hill, price 15p each.

Judith Greville DC

ROBERT HANNA'S TOMBSTONE

In *Collogue* No. 25, Spring 1992, there was an article on Robert Hanna CM, from Newry, who died in Peking in 1796. Recently a Columban priest, Joseph Houston, sent to the Irish Provincial an article on Fr Hanna's tombstone, which is re-printed here with his permission. A central section, summarising Hanna's life is omitted, since his life is more fully dealt with in the above-mentioned article:

The Five Pagoda Temple is situated in the north western suburbs of Peking. In the course of its long history the temple compound has seen the intermingling of very diverse cultural influences, from Hinduism to Christianity, from Sanskrit to Latin. In the 15th century an Indian prince named Pantita arrived in Peking, bringing gifts for the Emperor Cheng Hua. In addition to five golden statues of the Buddha the gifts included a model of the Diamond Throne temple in Bihar, northern India, which marked the place where Sakyamuni (the Buddha) had received Enlightenment. The Emperor, in turn, presented this visitor with a site on which to build a temple. The temple consists of a huge square base, surmounted by five pagodas (i.e. pyramid-shaped towers consisting of several stories, each with overhanging eaves). The sides of the base are covered with innumerable small carvings of the Buddha, in addition to carvings of traditional Buddhist symbols. The pagodas represent different aspects of the life of Buddha, and four of them have inscriptions in Sanskrit, the ancient language of India.

In recent years this temple compound has been turned into a “Stone Monument Museum” where monuments and statues from various periods have been put on display. Inscribed stone monuments were a very common feature of Chinese culture. A typical monument is made up of a plain stone slab, surmounted by a top section in which there

is often a dragon carved in high relief. The plain section contained an inscription recording some important event, or an account of the life and death of some important figure. Some of these monuments were erected on a base formed by a carved stone tortoise.

This is the museum where the former grave headstones of Fr Hanna and many other missionaries from different European countries, and also of some Chinese priests, have been put on display. The missionaries and priests all belonged to two Congregations, Jesuits and Vincentians. The headstones are in two lines facing each other. Fr Hanna's headstone is made up of a large rectangular slab placed on top of a fairly narrow plinth. Both parts are decorated with an interesting combination of Christian and Chinese symbols. A cross, surmounted by clouds, which are a frequent decoration in Chinese art, is carved on the upper part of the stone. The plinth has a carving of two dragons chasing a pearl in the middle of the clouds. The main part of the stone is inscribed with a short account of Fr Hanna's life and death, in a vine framework. The inscription is in Latin and Chinese, and reads:

Robert Hanna, Irish, priest of the Congregation of the Mission, lived in the Congregation fourteen years, in the Chinese missions eight years. Died in Peking on the tenth of January in the year of Our Lord 1796, aged thirty-five.

The Chinese inscription adds a few extra details, including the precise time of his death.

(The biographical paragraphs are omitted here)

He was buried in the French Cemetery in Peking where his grave was visited in 1834 by Fr [Joseph-Martial] Mouly, who was later to become Vicar Apostolic of Peking and a bishop. However, because of the religious persecution then raging, the visit in 1834 was a fleeting and secret one.

Fr Hanna's tombstone remained in the French Cemetery until some years after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The cemetery was subsequently confiscated, and just recently a hotel and other buildings have been erected on the site.

After the decision to establish the "Stone Monument Museum" in 1986 Fr Hanna's headstone was transferred there and remains as a silent witness to the presence and work of the first Irishman to preach the gospel in China in modern times.

One of the most important symbols on one of the five pagodas in

honour of the Buddha which I mentioned at the beginning is a pair of soles. This is one of the most important symbols in Buddhist art and represents the weariness of the foot-sore Buddha as he went around preaching the way to Enlightenment. Perhaps they could also be taken to symbolize the long journey of Fr Hanna to bring the gospel to China, and also as an invitation to acknowledge his achievement by making us recall the words of the prophet Isaiah: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings glad tidings (Is 52:7). But, no doubt, Fr Hanna's life and work are best symbolized by the Cross on his headstone, for Fr Hanna, who also came to show the way to Enlightenment, did so by preaching "Christ crucified..., the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:23-4).

Joseph Houston

THE POOR IN LUKE'S GOSPEL

In *Colloque* Nos. 22 & 23, Autumn 1990 and Spring 1991, Michael Prior had two articles on *Evangelizarepauperibus misit me*. He has now expanded this material into a book of over 200 pages, *Jesus the Liberator. Nazareth Liberation Theology (Luke 4:16-30)*, published earlier this year by Sheffield Academic Press £12.50 or \$18.50.

CORRIGENDA

In the last issue there were some typographical and other errors in my article on 17th century Irish confreres:

Page 24, some words got misplaced towards the end of Gerard Erin's will. One of the witnesses was Laurence Hacket. As he was illiterate he "made his mark", by placing an X where someone else had written his name. So the words should have been printed as follows:

his
Laurence X Hacket
marke

With regard to the date of the proving of Gerard Erin's will (page 24), Fr Maurice Dooley has kindly pointed out that the date 25 February 1683 would have been correct according to the ecclesiastical calendar. The ecclesiastical year ran from 25 March to 24 March of the following year. This means that the ecclesiastical date 25 February 1683 would have been in the civil year 1684.

Note 17 gives details of Peter Butler, not Edmund Barry. The article went through many drafts, and when the note on Butler became 25 I unfortunately forgot to alter 17. The relevant details for Barry are as follows: Born in the diocese of Cloyne, 24 June 1613; ordained in Cahors in 1639; entered CM in Paris 21 July 1641; took his vows in October 1646. He was in Ireland 1646-51, Richelieu 1652-3, Montauban 1653-80, being superior for two periods; he died there in 1680.

Finally, there were some question marks in the transcript of Brin's will. The first of these, after *imps*, was inserted by myself. Fr Dooley tells me that at the time this was very common in wills as an abbreviation of *Imprimis*, meaning "in the first place". The other question marks were all inserted by Fr Walter Skehan in his transcription of the will. Fr Dooley tells me they can all be omitted, as Skehan's guesses were all correct.

TD

OBITUARY

Father Denis O'Donovan CM

(Homily at funeral mass, St Vincent's, Sunday's Well, 13 June 1995)

My dear brothers and sisters, there is a line in the Psalms which says: "Their plans that day come to nothing". Whatever plans we had for today, none of us could have foreseen that we would be celebrating a funeral mass for Fr Denis. He always seemed so full of life that it is really hard to believe that he has gone from this world.

The ways of God are not our ways. None of us could have guessed that the moment had come for God to say to Denis: "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your Master".

In Denis' life anyone can see how he used his gifts and talents every day, how he valued his daily work for the Lord. His workshop for more than twenty-five years was St Vincent's College, Castleknock, where he was engaged in what he called "the mission to youth". He then spent the last two years of his life here in another St Vincent's, but with the same dedication to the Lord's work and, indeed, a particular interest in the welfare of young people, as he showed by taking up some chaplaincy work in Deerpark College and by teaching French to young people preparing for the Leaving Cert.

The teaching of French was, of course, a labour of love. He loved France. He loved the French language, which he spoke so fluently and with such a perfect accent that I found him difficult to understand myself, more difficult than some of the French people with whom I converse when I go to France!

Intertwined with his love for things French was his enormous interest in, and knowledge of, the French origins of our little community, the Congregation of the Mission. We are immensely influenced by the big man himself, St Vincent de Paul. You can see various scenes from his life in the stained-glass window behind me. It was from this man that Denis took on a missionary approach to all his work, a sense of witnessing to the values of the Kingdom of God in all circum-

stances, values of kindness, integrity, honesty, and helping people out when they were in difficulties or trouble of any kind.

Denis loved our community, the Congregation of the Mission, and was very proud of the fact that the first Vincentians to come to Ireland came to his native county of Limerick. This was during the time of Oliver Cromwell and the Vincentian missionaries soon got caught up in the siege of Limerick, where they preached a mission during the siege itself. They escaped on to the Clare side of the River Shannon, and the tradition is that they ministered out there for some time before being forced to go back to France. One of them, however, did not escape, a Limerickman, Brother Thady Lee, martyred for the faith by Cromwellian soldiers.

Denis knew a lot about this mission to Limerick, and he found a church dedicated to St Vincent de Paul in the part of Clare that the missionaries had escaped to. Mass has been celebrated on this site since the time of the Vincentian mission. Last Easter Denis brought a young Vincentian student to visit this area and show him the church of St Vincent. This was his way of passing on a tradition that was very important to him, as a Vincentian and as a Limerickman. This was the missionary tradition that inspired him and by which he lived.

And what about Cork? Denis was no stranger to Cork as his grandfather was from west Cork, and he did a lot of work on the family tree from records there.

What about Sunday's Well? Fr Denis is so well remembered here that everyone has his or her own personal memories of a friendly, warm-hearted priest, always full of life and chat.

So many people will have got to know him from his visits to homes in the parish, from his preaching and celebrating mass and the sacraments, and from all the daily contacts that are part of parish life, as well as from his special interest in flowers, gardening, cooking, music, and many other things too numerous to mention. Really, the grief and tears of so many people as the news of his death came to us – these speak more volumes than I could express in this short homily. He was loved by very many people in Cork and will be sorely missed, as he will be missed by his own family, to whom he was very close and whom he visited in Limerick every week.

I have spoken of the two main missions in which Denis worked, but there is a third, and who knows whether in God's eyes this one is even more important, even more filled with grace than the other two? Of course it was supposed to be for only two months and it lasted less

than a day, but the important thing is that he obeyed the call to go on that mission.

Denis went to the mission in China because it was suggested to him by our Provincial, Fr Noonan. This mission is now being revived after the communist persecutions of Mao Tse Tung had caused the deaths, the imprisonments and the expulsions of the missionaries there. Denis could have made excuses that a younger man should go, or that someone on holidays from a college should go, etc. But that was not Denis. He was a missionary at heart, and St Vincent spoke of that very thing on many occasions. Here are some of his words to his missionaries:

Consider, brothers, what cause we have to tremble if we are “stay-at-homes”, if on grounds of age or under pretext of some weakness we grow slack or relax our fervour... You could plead that that means shortening our days! Oh, brothers, what if it does! Is it a misfortune for the exiled wife to be re united with her husband? Is it a misfortune for those who sail at sea to be coming into port? What? Be afraid when a thing we cannot long for enough, and which will always come too late, comes in the end?

And on another occasion St Vincent wrote to encourage a brother who was dying, telling him he was going to the mission of heaven, a mission of love that will last for ever. These are his words:

Well, my good brother, how do you feel now? So you think it is all to the good that our great general, the first of all missionaries, our Lord, wants to have you in the mission of heaven. You see, he wants us all to go there, each in his turn, and that is one of the principal rules and regulations he made on earth... Yes! What a consolation you must feel at being chosen as one of the first to go on a mission, on this eternal mission, all of whose exercises consist in loving God...

Similar sentiments are echoed in the Irish Poem *Ag Críost an Stól*:

O fhás go h-aois is ó aois go bás
Do dhá láimh a Chríost anall tharainn;
O bhás go críoch ní críoch ach athfhás,
I bPárathas na ngrás go rabhamaid.

From growth to age, and from age to death
 Your two arms, O Christ, draw around us;
 From death to our end, not an end but a new life,
 May we come to the Paradise of Grace.

Amen.

William Clarke CM

The people of St Vincent's Parish, Sunday's Well, Cork, are trying to come to terms with the unexpected death of one of their beloved Vincentians, Fr Denis O'Donovan, who died suddenly in Taiwan.

He left St Vincent's on May 24, having been asked by the Provincial of the Irish Vincentian Province to go to Taiwan for two months, in support awareness of the Vincentian Mission.

Fr Denis was born in Limerick 54 years ago and joined the Vincentian Order after completing his schooling. He then went to Castleknock College where he spent 27 years. He is fondly remembered by all his students.

He came to St Vincent's in Cork as a curate just over two years ago and immediately made an impact in the Parish. He was a shy man and with the true spirit of St Vincent de Paul he went out about the Parish visiting people – the old, the sick and the house-bound listening to them and giving them advice and help. He had a particular interest in young people and helped a great number of them in their studies, giving them grinds in French, of which he was a fluent speaker.

Fr Denis was full of life. No request for help was ever turned down. Since he came to the Parish a Parish Register was put on computer; the Weekly Bulletin took on a new look. He always had encouraging word and he was very positive about everything which might help the Parish into the next decade. He helped in no small way to make the Pastoral Council – which is in its infancy – the success that it is.

Fr O'Donovan loved music. He could be heard on a Sunday morning playing the organ in the church for his own pleasure. He was a very keen gardener and he loved to grow all kinds of herbs and then use them to make some of his great sauces.

This kind and caring priest will be fondly remembered by all at St Vincent's.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam.

(From *The Cork Examiner*)

DENIS O'DONOVAN CM

Born: Limerick, 14 December 1940.

Entered the CM: 7 September 1959.

Final vows: 8 September 1964.

Ordained a priest in Clonliffe College, Dublin, by Dr John Charles McQuaid, archbishop of Dublin, 20 May 1967.

APPOINTMENTS

1967-1993 St Vincent's, Castleknock.

1993-1995 St Vincent's, Cork.

Died in Taipei, Taiwan, 6 June 1995.

Buried: Castleknock.