

# COLLOQUE

Journal of the Irish Province of the  
Congregation of the Mission



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## Editorial

It is an indication of the life and growing need of communication in our Province that since the last issue of COLLOQUE, and suggested by the experience of this journal, a Provincial Newsletter has begun publication from Damascus House. A province has multiple communication needs. We must feed our minds on the inspiration of St Vincent and the example of our predecessors in the works of the Congregation. This is the primary function of COLLOQUE. But inspiration is also to be gained from the day to day life and the human happenings within our communities and the experiences they share with other agents of the church. For this purpose COLLOQUE makes its appearance too infrequently and in too formal a shape. The publication of the Newsletter is therefore timely and welcome. Like COLLOQUE, however, it is inward looking, concerned with the sharing of insight and information among ourselves. Another publication must surely follow in which we endeavour to communicate our living of the Christian life with those outside our community, the supporters of our works, the members of our parishes and colleges.

# The Dynamism of St Vincent's Works<sup>1</sup>

Eamonn Flanagan

Earlier this year I walked along the country road in southern France to the village called Saint-Vincent-de-Paul. In the local church stands the font where the infant Vincent was baptised 400 years ago. At this baptistery there arose the tiny spring from which a powerful stream of charity would flow, albeit gradually and with many laborious vicissitudes. Back in Ranquines one can see a reconstructed building in the style of St Vincent's own birthplace which was located about this spot. The simplicity of his early years is somehow evoked amid the rafters and baked brick of *Le Berceau*. Inside, the walls are decked with maps and charts illustrating the great works and travels of the saint. In the fields close by the soil is cultivated by local men with shrewd, sharp features reminiscent of the Vincentian portraits. Dignity and humility show through in them as in the saint who originated here. The dignity is God's, reflecting the inner glory of the human person, even the poorest. Humility searches for man's true place before his Creator, and finds grace in weakness.

Power for St Vincent, like St Paul, is discovered and thrives in weakness. "My power is made perfect in weakness. I will all the more gladly boast of my weakness..., for when I am weak then I am strong" (2 Cor 12:9-10). The strength of God shining through the "weakness", poverty and recognised need of St Vincent was the solid rock on which his spiritual life and all his works were founded. He wrote to Philippe Le Vacher in 1651:

*God wishes good to be wrought as if by itself, without a person even thinking of it; thus was born the Congregation of the Mission; thus we began the missions and the exercises for the ordinands. Thus was the Company of the Daughters of Charity founded, as also that of the Ladies of Charity...; finally, that is how all our present works came into being. (IV 122-123)*

The motive force behind St Vincent's achievements is inscrutably wrapped in God's loving power and in his plans. The *dynamis* of God was allowed to control his natural will and mind. Vincent, the man of faith, was given a vision proportionate to faith, and it is never completely

analysed or intelligible in human terms. He himself saw the vision in the context of belief, and not as a complete programme like political strategists might see an economic plan. Economics and mundane realities would in their time find due recognition, but it was the noble providential outlook which always prevailed. Ultimately, human wisdom would have no place, but only the power of God, *dynamis Theou* (1 Cor 2:5).

To underline this unshakable conviction we find Vincent proposing a true response on our part to the active power of God. He recommends the following prayer to the Daughters of Charity: “O my Saviour, grant me the grace to love my own abjection, and never to seek to be esteemed but rather to love the most lowly exercises and the last place”.<sup>2</sup> This is not an expression of poor self-concept, so much deprecated today, and rightly so. It is rather a summons to authentic humility and to a discovery of our real selves, our better selves, to use Merton’s phrase, in the Saviour himself. Such a discovery of one’s riches in God (or true humility) is closely related to the works of charity which mostly popularise St Vincent de Paul. He adds in the same discourse to the Sisters: “Humility preserves charity. A sister who has humility is not out of harmony with others, for humility begets charity”.<sup>3</sup>

### *Key formative events*

In trying to look at the central dynamism of any saint it must be imperative to seek for some occasion or set of circumstances which proved crucial for his or her spiritual development. Vincent the young priest, was no saint, though a man of integrity. His pursuit of a benefice to ensure a passably well-off life characterises his early ordained years. He reached Paris in 1609. If the Landes gave him birth it was the capital which set him on the “narrow road” of sanctity. In the first Parisian years two events, or rather Vincent’s response to them, had a critical and transforming effect on his life. Both events ploughed deeply into the being of the saint and searched out the areas where his true affections lay, nudging and attracting him to radical decisions. Both were agonising and humiliating and placed him in absolute poverty of spirit, in utter human incapacity before the mystery of evil and the unfathomable trials permitted by God for his purification. Not long after his arrival in Paris he was wrongly accused of a theft. He was expelled from his lodgings and defamed before certain influential people, including Cardinal de Bérulle, by then his spiritual guide. Yet Vincent kept his peace, was patient and accepted the grinding humiliation until at last the storm passed.

This affliction of at least six months duration introduced him into the ranks of the really poor, and he himself would later confess: “God

sometimes wishes to test souls and therefore permits such things to happen" (XI 337). Scarcely had this trial ended, or perhaps it was still taking its course, when another, more refined and deeper, was offered to him. The former possessed an active quality in the sense that the subject had some control, but the latter was an interior purification of soul, a trial of faith, a passive purgation of the spirit. St Vincent was trying to help a doctor of theology who was in a most distressing temptation against faith and hope. As soon as this man was set free from his trial Vincent himself was assaulted by a similar temptation which lasted four years or more. The words of the *Credo* were his salvation in the midst of his darkness. He performed his priestly duties, prayed with fidelity, and began to visit the sick in the hospital beside where he lived. All this was of no avail for immediate relief, and the temptation continued unabated. It was only when St Vincent offered himself and his whole life to the poor that all his doubts of faith disappeared never to return. This was the Lord's will, the call to a certain area among mankind, at least broadly understood. His time and money were not enough in this adorable, loving, plan of Providence, but a definitive unconditional oblation of himself was necessary. I cannot say if at first there was resistance in the young priest to the design God was portraying for him, but at least there had been uncertainty about the exact way ahead, particularly before his positive surrender. It would be normal enough if there was some human resistance to a plan so all-absorbing. Other great ones before him had surely felt resistance in the light of the divine fire of love, calling them to a higher life. St Paul was told to let go his grip: "It is hard for you to go on kicking against the goad", i.e. to go on offering resistance (Acts 26:14). St Ignatius wavered between chivalry and sanctity, and St Teresa felt torn asunder as she left her home and made her way across the city to enter the Carmel of Avila.<sup>4</sup> It may well be that St Vincent was feeling for a time the Lord's invitation to abandon all and that his darkness of faith was associated in some way with this. At all events when he did make the generous surrender of self a great clarity of belief enfolded him.<sup>5</sup>

These events gave the saint a remarkable insight into the psychology and real positive value of temptation. He said in later life about severe temptation, even against faith: "We should not ask God to free us from it but that we make good use of it and that he save us from falling" (XI 148-149). But also from these experiences he felt in a prolonged way his need of God who alone can give the victory, with the addition of our own personal co-operation (cf I 510, III 407). St Vincent had thus passed through the fire of intense testing. Wisdom was harvested from the experiences. Then the whole rich terrain of his personality was

opened to growth. The great exploits of charity and evangelisation would follow but they could never be accomplished by somebody of mediocre spiritual calibre. That is why it is necessary to stress the man himself and his own relationship with God who led his faithful, prayerful, servant forward to cultivate his neglected vineyard. Once Vincent had submitted his unreserved affirmation to his Lord he was thereafter the yielding clay in the hands of the omnipotent Potter. Bérulle was his closest guide in the years 1609-17 and along with him the saint learned to “confront himself, to distrust the illusions of nature, but above all to discover the meaning of his own priesthood and the sacerdotal mission of Jesus Christ”.<sup>6</sup> Clearly he was gradually but profoundly maturing from his darkest hours and working the lesson into the very fibres of his spiritual existence. This period of gestation, so to speak, was most valuable for assimilation, for prayer, for discernment. A precipitate rush into activity could have produced a stillborn saint.

#### *The darkness enlightens*

The night of the faith trials had given way to a new personal enrichment in St Vincent. He was now in possession of a great light and soon it would be allowed to shine on the spiritual and material indigence of his neighbour. In 1617 along with some other priests he preached a mission to the country people at Folleville and spent several months evangelising in the villages of Picardy. This was a time of discovery, for the saint felt an inner impulse to seek his way to God in the footsteps of the poor, whatever the modalities of realisation might be in the long run. Bérulle, his director, approved of this and then suggested he go as Parish Priest to Châtillon-les-Dombes near Lyon. It was here that St Vincent spoke from the pulpit calling the people to bring aid to a destitute family. He himself visited the family and noted the generosity of the help provided. He had found more than a poor household, he had come face to face with the living Christ in the poor. The specific vocation of Vincent was now becoming more clearly focused. Folleville had crystallised the ideal of the Church renewed through and through by means of evangelisation with the word and a clergy reformed in the spirit of their vocation. Châtillon reinforced an inner predilection towards those with little or none of this world’s advantages, “the weak and little ones”, a love of whom is a certain sign of divine authenticity since there is nothing humanly attractive about them, not having riches, esteem or visible beauty. St Vincent goes to the heart of things when he says “Oh yes. Sisters, the poor are our masters. Therefore you should treat them with sweetness and cordiality, reflecting ... that God has created your Company for this purpose” (IX 119). And

he exhorted his priests that following the example of Jesus and the saints they ought to take care of the poor (cf XII 87, XI 202), with a reminder that if our love is strong other workers will join in. "attracted by the perfume of a great charity" as he wrote to Etienne Blatiron in 1647 (III 257).

The poor are "our masters" like the Master himself who lives in them (Mt 25), and so the one who serves them is being favoured with a grace and has no reason to boast. Again, the Lord leads, his power prevails, and he loves through us. The doctrine of the vine and the branches takes on a particular significance (Jn 15). The providential God does not neglect his children and those he chooses to do his work may rightly depend on his goodness to accompany them. "You were thinking that all was lost, but as it was God's goodness that gave its beginnings and progress to the Charity we must hope that he will continue to maintain and perfect it".<sup>7</sup> This caring love of God brings forth a response of humble dependent love from us. Vincent expressed this to Louise de Marillac: "It is not for God one is concerned if one is worried in his service. God is love and wants us to go to him by way of love".<sup>8</sup>

#### *The sun never sets*

"The light shines in the darkness" and it was too powerful for the darkness to extinguish. The same light unveils God's truth for all peoples (Lk 2), and he is the One to reign for ever (Lk 1:33). If the cosmic sun did not set on certain former empires of the world neither does the love of Jesus stop shining on his brothers and sisters everywhere and for all time. And the life and work of St Vincent de Paul and his followers are a great incarnational channel of that Sun which always shines. In the above pages I have looked at a few aspects of the many-faceted "immortal diamond" which is the humble man from the Landes. Vincent's love for the poor and his service to the priesthood were unquestionable. Along with his quest for peace and God's reign in all hearts these were his most typical fields of labour. Always, however, even within the parameters mentioned, the saint was circumspect and prudent and was ever reluctant to assume a new responsibility without the clear indication of the Lord's will. A case in point is the invitation to assist in the work of Madame Goussault for the sick poor of the Hôtel-Dieu. He asked for time to reflect and after reflection he felt that he would be "putting his sickle into another's harvest". Only on the special plea of the archbishop of Paris did he accede to the request.<sup>9</sup> Of course when a work was discerned as divinely ordained for him then his whole heart was devoted to it with a paramount stress on the right perspective. He says to the Sisters looking after the foundlings:

“Only the love of God impels the Daughters of Charity to take care of these children” (IX 133). That is the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ (Jn 15:9). The God who first loved us asks us to love in return, and Jesus models for us this ineffable yearning of the human soul. The fundamental option of love, if authentic, has to lead to many others (Jn 15:10). No person could have realised this better than Vincent. With resonances of Paul he exclaims in a letter to Antoine Portail in 1635: “Remember that we must live in Jesus Christ by the life of Jesus Christ..., and that in order to die like Jesus Christ we must live as Jesus Christ lived” (1295). There, one might say, is the total vision of life for a Vincentian. In the following words one can find a hint of Bérulle’s “religion towards the Father”, but tinged by Vincent with a Salesian affective-effective love towards God and mankind. In them there is a perception of the Saviour’s life as an act of obedience and continual love:

His humiliations were nothing but love; his work was love; his sufferings love, his prayers love, and all his interior and exterior exercises were nothing but repeated acts of love. His love gave him a great contempt for the spirit of the world, a disesteem for possessions, pleasures and honours. (XII 19)

In a real sense St Vincent caught this Johannine-Pauline vision of Jesus. The saint’s love for God became flesh in the profundity of his prayer life, in the “complacent love” he interiorly enjoyed and radiated from his person to enlighten and uplift those to whom his Master sent him.

### *Conclusion*

The man of great works whose horizons were boundless reaching far away even to missionary fields was a man who related all external activity to an awareness of God’s providence and will for him. God’s will was always first and the works a consequence, not an end in themselves. This will of God was something to which Vincent was attuned by a rich prayer life and a contemplative world-view in which all created things were seen from a divine standpoint. He saw interior prayer as “a conversation of the soul with God in which God speaks interiorly to the soul what he wishes it to know and do, and in which the soul speaks to God ...” (IX 419). In prayer he found knowledge of God’s ways and signs of discerning how they should be followed. Following God’s will, just as discovering it, is for St Vincent a whole way of life in which Jesus is his strength and exemplar. The dynamism of St Vincent’s works is paradoxically distilled

from the chalice of humiliation, and possibly of disgrace: "our life must be hidden in Jesus Christ" in order that our sorrow may be turned into pure joy.<sup>10</sup> His attachment to Christ was the unfailing fountain giving him in his lowliness an enormous measure of love and fruitfulness in a perennial stream.

### Notes

1. This article is made up mostly of reflections arising from two Spanish works on St Vincent: J M Ibáñez CM, *Vicente de Paúl y los pobres de su tiempo* (Vincent de Paul and the Poor of his Time), Salamanca 1977, to be referred to as Ibáñez; and A Orcajo CM and M P Flores CM, *San Vicente de Paúl*, Volume 2 (Spirituality and selection of his writings), Madrid 1981. referred to as Orcajo-Flores.
2. Leonard (trans): *Conferences of St Vincent de Paul to the Sisters of Charity*, London 1938-40, Vol IV p 146.
3. *ibid* 147.
4. *The Book of her Life* (Autobiography), chapter 4.
5. Coste: *The Life and Labours of St Vincent de Paul*, London 1934-35, Vol I p49.
6. Orcajo-Flores p 59.
7. Orcajo-Flores, p 301 (Letter to Sr Marguerite Chétif, 24 May 1660).
8. From two separate letters of about 1629-30, (168,186).
9. Cf Ibáñez p 139.
10. Orcajo-Flores p 243 (from the Collection for the Beatification Process).

# John Gabriel Perboyre

Thomas Davitt

## *I Le Puech and Montauban 1802-1818*

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

He died in 1840 and two years later Jean-Baptiste Etienne published, anonymously, the first book about him.<sup>2</sup> Towards the end of the decade François Vauris CM wrote to many persons who had known John Gabriel asking them to let him have their recollections with a view to his writing a more complete *Life*.<sup>3</sup> It would be interesting to know how exactly he worded his letter because there is a certain sameness about many of the replies. A fairly typical example is this extract referring to the three years which John Gabriel spent teaching in Montdidier before ordination: “I remember that he was the perfect model of all clerical virtues, modesty, humility, meekness, simplicity and mortification but unfortunately I cannot furnish you with any details in all this”. Another correspondent, who knew him in his secondary school days, says that the brainier boys, including himself, used to amuse themselves during class by annoying the others and sticking pins in them, and that when John Gabriel was the victim he used to turn round to his tormentors “with a really divine look” and ask to be allowed to listen to the teacher. Now if he was as nauseating as that some trace of it would be bound to surface in his own letters, yet the one hundred and two of them which have survived are refreshingly normal and healthily free from such aberrations.<sup>4</sup> Bishop Jean-Henri Baldus CM wrote to Vauris in 1853 that there was nothing in John Gabriel’s manner which was out of the ordinary, nothing different from any good confrère.<sup>5</sup>

He was born on 6 January 1802 on his father’s farm, Le Puech, near the little village of Montgesty about seventy miles almost due north of

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

On 16 April he wrote to Dominique François Hanon, who had been Vicar General of the Congregation in Paris since 1807. He says he is at Hanon's disposition and is willing to accept any appointment, and that they try to live a Vincentian community life as far as their position allows.<sup>6</sup> He lists thirteen pre-Revolution confrères who are working in the diocese of Cahors and says there are many others in the diocese of Agen and several in Toulouse, and continues:

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

Hanon died a week after that letter was written, so Jacques Perboyre probably did not get any answers to his final questions. On 6 October 1816 a Circular Letter informed confrères that Marie-Charles-Emmanuel Verbert had been elected in Paris to replace Hanon as Vicar General. Perboyre wrote to him on 29 October thanking him for the two copies of the letter, which he will pass on to other confrères. He is glad that things are returning to normal in the Congregation, and once again says he is at the Vicar General's disposition, but explains his position. He is alone in the house with Gratacap, who suffered a lot during the Revolution and is still ill, and there are 150 boys, mostly boarders. Then he has more questions: a priest friend called to see him, saying that he and some others wanted to join the Congregation. Although they worked in parishes they also gave missions and retreats. What are they to be told?<sup>8</sup>

The following month John Gabriel, aged almost 15, and his nine-year

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

His first letter home was not written until May 1817:

My dear father,

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

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

The father seems to have been pleased with this letter, but he was thinking of his vines and what John Gabriel could do for them. He took the stagecoach from Cahors to Montauban to collect his eldest son, but found a surprise awaiting him. The teachers had approached the uncle to suggest that John Gabriel be asked to stay on and complete his studies and then enter the major seminary. Jacques Perboyre had the delicate task of breaking this news to both his brother and his nephew, as neither of them had been thinking along those lines at all. John Gabriel had not even been doing Latin, although young Louis had. The outcome was that the father returned alone to his farm and the son got down to some serious thinking about what had been suggested.

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

My dear father,

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

If you do want me to go on I'll have to get some new clothes made. You'll be good enough to send me some money as I don't

think uncle's purse is so full that he can lend me any. (Letter 2)

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

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

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

You ask me for all the details I can give you, going back over the past, about the student days in Montauban minor seminary of your glorious nephew Fr John Gabriel Perboyre...

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

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

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

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

He mentions John Gabriel's progress through the various classes; he was fifteen and a half when he started his special studies, and in the next

term, in November, he went into second year; at Easter 1818 he went into third, and the next November he jumped a year and went into fifth and a few weeks later into sixth.

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

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

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

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

## *II Seminaire and Studies, Montauban and Paris, 1818-1823*

Joining the Congregation in those days was not quite as simple as it sounds. The Congregation had been suppressed in France during the Revolution. It was re-established during the Napoleonic period only to be suppressed once again. It was finally re-established under Louis XVIII on February 3, 1816, but it took some time for things to get going again in an organised way and by December 1817 there still was no intern seminaire. Jacques Perboyre's suggestion of establishing a seminaire in the house in Montauban was taken up, and John Gabriel was received into the Congregation there on 10 March 1818, two months after his sixteenth birthday, the first seminarist in France since the Revolution;

two more were received on 4 October and another in October of the next year.<sup>14</sup> Jean-Baptiste Maisonneuve, who was born in 1752, went to Montauban as Director.

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

In 1817 the former town-house of the Due de Lorges, 95 rue de Sèvres, had been given to the Congregation as a mother-house by Louis XVIII, and about fourteen old pre-Revolution confrères had taken up residence. Jacques Perboyre had arranged his nephew's travel in such a way that he had to spend a few days in the seminary in Cahors before catching the Paris coach. This was to enable his parents to have a chance of seeing him before he left for Paris; he had not been home to Le Puech since he left in 1816.

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

My very dear father,

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

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

I embrace my very dear mother and all at home.

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

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

### III Montdidier 1823-1826

In October 1823 he was sent to Montdidier, about threequarters of the way from Paris to Amiens. The Congregation ran a boarding school there which before the Revolution had been run by the Benedictines and afterwards had been under the civil authorities. In 1818 the authorities handed it over to the Congregation. It was not a minor seminary, but the superior hoped to be able to make it one eventually. John Gabriel was given charge of first year, with only eight boys.

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

On 18 September that year he was issued an Internal Passport which has survived; it gives the following particulars of his appearance: Height 1m 65cm (about 5'6"), black hair coming down over the forehead, brown eyebrows, grey-black eyes, ordinary nose, small mouth, black beard, round chin, round face, ruddy complexion.<sup>16</sup> The reference to the black beard must mean *in potentia* rather than *in facto esse* as it does not seem that he grew a beard until he went to China.

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

My very dear father,

In your letter of 9 June you give out to me for not writing to you and you urge me, both strongly and lovingly, to show a bit more diligence in this matter. After that I couldn't very well try to make excuses for myself for this further delay of two months. However, I'll say first of all that the reason for the delay is not forgetfulness, for since I got your letter not a single day has passed, I think, without my thinking of it. I could then add that lack of opportunity must take some of the blame. The day normally starts

for us at four o'clock and never ends until nine or ten, and often what we have to do keeps us going till midnight. Above all, as the holidays draw near our work doubles, just as yours does at harvest-time. A week ago I started a letter to Fr Gizard and I'd no sooner started it than I had to break off, and it's only today that I got a chance to take it up again. Finally, my dear father, I was putting off my reply so that I could tell you whether I'd be staying on in Montdidier for another year. I had some hope that I might be going to Montauban. My uncle made great attempts to get me but I know now that I am not being appointed there. It seems certain, though, that I will be changed, and if little rumours which have reached me can be believed I may even be sent somewhere in the Quercy region. Be that as it may, I'll let you know my new appointment before leaving Paris; I'm going up there in a fortnight's time and don't expect to be leaving it until the end of September.

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

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

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

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

Don't be too surprised, my very dear father, that I didn't let you know of Louis' illness; I didn't know about it myself until it was all over. They kept it from me in case I'd be worried; as a matter of

fact it was so serious that at one stage they had given up all hope for my poor brother. But by the grace of God he's completely over it now. I'm told that during this crisis he grew a lot, that his character has matured well since, and finally that he's more charming than ever and his superiors are very pleased with him. Please give my regards to my uncle Jean-Louis, my Caviole cousins, and pass on my greetings to all my relatives.

I am, for life, etc.,

J. G. Perboyre, deacon.

(Letter 5)

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

On 23 September 1826, the anniversary of St Vincent's ordination, he was ordained priest in the chapel of the mother-house of the Daughters of Charity in the rue du Bac, Paris, by Louis-Guillaume Dubourg, bishop-designate of Montauban, who had been bishop of New Orleans.<sup>17</sup> Two other confrères were ordained with him, Jean-Baptiste Torrette and Pierre-Jean Martin, and eleven Irishmen, nine for priesthood and two for diaconate, presumably all from the Irish College.<sup>18</sup> He celebrated his first Mass at the altar in the rue du Bac in which St Vincent's body was enshrined since the re-establishment of the Daughters after the Revolution.

#### *IV Saint-Flour 1826-1832*

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

My very dear father,

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

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

I was ordained on 23 September as I told you I would be. Every time I've had the happiness of offering the holy sacrifice I've

never forgotten, my very dear father, to recommend you to God, as well as my very dear mother, my brothers, my sisters and all my relatives. I've said Mass several times for my poor sister Mariette and also for my other dead relatives.<sup>19</sup> What I've done up to now I'll continue to do for the rest of my life.

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

You'd have very much liked, my very dear father, if I could have gone to see you this year, and the chance of embracing you would have fulfilled the most cherished wish of my heart, but it was absolutely impossible. These past holidays, if I can call them that, I was busier than at any time during the year. I hope to make a trip to see you next year, unless Providence arranges something else. I must thank you for praying to God for me at the time of my ordination; I still look to your fatherly goodness for the help of your prayers, for the present and the future; I've so much need of them, as my duties are so heavy and so difficult to carry out. I heard from Fr Gizard that everything's going well at home; I thank God for this and ask him to continue to shower you with his blessings.

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

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

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

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

There is a PS to the letter:

If I end this letter without showing any signs of filial love for my

very dear mother it's not because I forget her but because I know that you will perfectly interpret my feelings.

(Letter 7)

There had been no Superior General since the death of Jean-Felix Cayla de la Garde in 1800 and the Congregation had been governed by a succession of Vicars General, with a certain amount of confusion as to whether some of them were for France alone or for the entire community. On 16 January 1827 the Pope appointed Pierre-Joseph de Wailly as General; he was 68 years old. On 20 July, six days after John Gabriel's letter to his father, Jacques Perboyre wrote to the new General, and added a PS:

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

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

His uncle still had hopes of getting him to Montauban. On 2 September he added a PS to a letter he sent to Jean-Baptiste Etienne, Procurator General:

My nephew was here to see me. Would there be any chance of getting him as professor of Philosophy? I think he'd be good at it.<sup>21</sup>

He was not successful in his appeal and John Gabriel returned for the start of the new academic year in Saint-Flour, but not to the major seminary.

By 1827 all the Church organisation disrupted by the Revolution had not been fully re-established. The laws restricted the number of minor seminaries and the number of pupils who could attend them. If a state college existed in the vicinity of a minor seminary all the pupils had to take their courses there, from first year right up to philosophy. In 1825

Jean-François Trippier CM, at that time superior of the major seminary in Saint-Flour, had tried to remedy this situation by establishing in the town a boarding house for secondary schoolboys attending the state college who wanted to become priests; they lived in this hostel outside class hours. During the year 1826-1827 Trippier had been rather unsettled and at the end of the year he told the bishop he was leaving, and suggested as a replacement a priest whom the bishop thought too young. There was also the withdrawal by the Superior General of another confrère from the major seminary very close to the start of the new school year without prior warning. All this caused a major row between Trippier, the bishop and the Superior General. The confrère who had to deal with this was the man on the spot, Jean Grappin, superior of the major seminary. On 2 October he wrote to de Wailly, Superior General, that he had come back early as he had foreseen “a great storm brewing”. He explained the situation and described a meeting with the bishop, one outcome of which was that the bishop accepted that Trippier was almost entirely to blame. He adds that John Gabriel had not yet returned from his holidays. (The new term was due to start on 18 October). On 4 October he wrote again to de Wailly “*in angustiis extremis*” after a very stormy meeting with the bishop which ended in “partial rupture” and could lead to “complete rupture” and get into the papers, with the Congregation, the bishop and religion itself all being ridiculed. To prevent all that, Grappin “had an idea”:

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

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

Eventually I got back to Saint-Flour at the height of the row which I have neither the time nor the inclination to describe to you. Neither will I mention the various phases of my position here which have

followed each other so rapidly since then: promoted to authority I was then demoted, and now here I am in authority again. Tragedies could be written about all this, or even an epic poem...

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

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

Towards the end of his first term, on 5 December 1827, he wrote to the Rector of the Clermont-Ferrand Academy, starting off with an apology for any deficiencies in his previous letter. He explains how his appointment was made by the Congregation and says he is willing to fulfill any necessary formalities. The main point of the letter is money. There had been an agreement between Trippier, the bishop and the education authorities that students in the hostel who were going on for the priesthood were exempt from certain fees paid by the others. The first year of the agreement there were eighteen such students, and apparently the authorities then took that as the agreed number for each year. John Gabriel points this out, and adds:

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

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

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

The thirteen letters to Louis from this period give much information

about the two brothers and about the Congregation at the time. Louis, who had started his philosophy that autumn, complained that John Gabriel did not write sufficiently frequently. In May 1828 he had his reply, that John Gabriel is much busier than Louis realises, with class every day and also acting as “bursar, etc.” and being wanted by everyone, for everything, at every moment. The letter in question got written only because he had neglected a cold and as a result was laid up for a week. Louis apparently had suggested a philosophical debate by correspondence, so John Gabriel reminds him that he no longer teaches philosophy, but that if a debate on grammar would do he will give one, and then proceeds to point out all the grammatical errors in Louis’ letter. Louis thought that he might be appointed to teach philosophy and he didn’t like the idea; John Gabriel sympathises with him but says that in case he is appointed he should be prepared beforehand as *nemo dat quod non habet*. (Letter 11)

Just like the previous cold another fortuitous circumstance provides an opportunity for the next letter to Louis, on 11 July 1828. It was written after ten o’clock at night as John Gabriel had caught two boys disturbing the others and had them standing in his room. Jacou, the younger brother, was eighteen at the time and first in his class in the uncle’s school in Montauban and thinking of following the other two into the seminaire; as John Gabriel had been more or less out of touch with Jacou he passes this question to Louis (Letter 12). The next letter is on 16 August; Jacou is to complete his studies in Montdidier, and John Gabriel will bear part of the expense. He says he is spending his holidays in Saint-Flour, and having worked so much for others he is entitled to do so for himself now. (Letter 14)

The next day he wrote to Jacou himself suggesting that he go to Montdidier via Saint-Flour, and continues:

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

He ends by advice about care of health which Jacou has weakened by overwork. (Letter 15)

In September he tells Louis he has spent a fortnight in Cahors, including his retreat, and that Jacou will be passing through Paris and

Louis is to keep an eye on him and see him safely on his journey to Montdidier, adding that there are rumours in the Congregation that Louis himself might be sent to teach philosophy in Montdidier. (Letter 16)

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

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

On re-reading your October letter (I have to read your old ones since I received no recent ones) I've noticed some mistakes which I must point out to you. I know it's not very flattering for a writer in the capital to be given lessons by a small-time country teacher... (Letter 17).

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

November finds him writing again to Louis and for the first time there is reference to Louis' wanting to go to China. John Gabriel's advice is that he should take some courses in physics in a state college as such qualifications would be useful there. He also mentions that he himself had formerly hoped to go to China and that maybe even still he would go. He encloses the bill for Jacou's education in Montdidier saying that he had agreed to pay the pension but not extras like laundry and some others; as Louis had made these arrangements he could deal with them. Towards the end he writes:

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

In February 1830 China is mentioned again and Louis is advised to get all the theological learning he can while he has the chance:

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

At Easter he is writing again of his tiredness:

The Easter fortnight which for most priests is a period of much work is one of rest for me. The boys are on holidays. I needed this break. During the last six months I don't think I've had two days without my head splitting, aches in all my limbs and my blood all on fire. Nothing wears me down like the details of administration; nothing saps my strength like worry. (Letter 21)

In 1830 there was a revolution in Paris and John Gabriel was so worried that he mentioned Louis in the memento for the dead during Mass, as he tells him in a letter in August. He also says he is glad that the rumours that St Vincent's body had been thrown into the Seine are untrue, and adds:

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

However, they did not meet and Louis was ordained on 3 October and left for Le Havre on 2 November. In mid-October John Gabriel wrote a very emotional farewell letter to him and a further letter on the 27th in which he said:

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

At the French island colony of Réunion Louis changed ships and started on the second leg of his journey. Between Réunion and Java he caught a cold which developed into a fever, and on 2 May 1831 he died and was buried at sea. News of this did not reach Paris for some time, and in July John Gabriel kept his promise about sending news, in a letter addressed to Louis in Macao. He hopes to get to both Le Puech and

Montauban during the holidays; Jacou is to stay on in Montdidier and start philosophy. Then comes a detailed outline of political developments in France since Louis left, as well as those in Italy. Poland. Belgium. Holland and Ireland; in the latter the poor Catholics are dying of hunger and the French Catholics are sending them great help. (Letter 26)

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

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

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

When John Gabriel was appointed superior in Saint-Flour he adopted the educational ideas of Lamennais and put them into practice with the knowledge and approval of the bishop, with whom he often discussed them.<sup>27</sup> The letter to his cousin referred to already was written in January 1832, and later on in it he said:

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

In February 1832 he eventually heard of Louis' death, and wrote rather emotionally to his parents and to his uncle: to the latter he admitted that no one had been closer to him than Louis, and continues:

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

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

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

He spent part of the summer of 1832 in Le Puech with his parents and returned to Saint-Hour in August and found a letter appointing him to Paris.<sup>28</sup>

#### *V Paris 1832-1835*

His appointment was to assist the Director of the seminaire. Pierre Le Go, a pre-Revolution confrère who in September 1832 was coming up to his sixty-fifth birthday. There were very few seminarists in September but by the following summer there were over twenty.<sup>29</sup> One of those who entered in September was John Gabriel's brother Jacou who had passed his twenty-second birthday some months previously. It would appear that the new Assistant Director was given plenty of work to do and he did not get around to writing to his father until mid-January 1833:

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

In June he writes to his uncle in Montauban referring to the fact that the latter had sent him a copy of Collet's *Méditations* which he had found in a bookshop and asking him to forward any further copies he may find, adding:

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

This is the first reference in John Gabriel's letters to pre-Revolution books connected with the Congregation and he returns to this topic again in August:

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

The 1829 Assembly, the first since 1788, had elected Dominique Salhorgne as twelfth Superior General and had expressed a wish that a study be undertaken of pre-Revolution community decrees. A commission was set up for this purpose by Salhorgne with Charles-Francois Lamboley, a septuagenarian, as chairman and John Gabriel as secretary. (Letter 44)

He wrote to his uncle in December and included the following news:

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

The medal I referred to is the one revealed by the Blessed Virgin in 1830 to a seminary sister in the Daughters of Charity. Thousands of these medals have spread through all parts of France and Belgium; they work numberless miracles, cures and conversions. I'll send you some the first chance I get. (Letter 40)

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

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

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

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

During early 1834 he reported two items of family news to his uncle: his sister Antoinette completed her seminaire in the rue du Bac and received her first appointment as a teacher in central Paris, and Jacou received tonsure.<sup>31</sup> In another letter to him he asks about rumours that in Mountauban they are wanting the confrères to resume direction of the major seminary; this prompts him to reflect:

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

His uncle Jacques in Montauban had not resumed living in a community house after the Revolution, apart from the short period when his house in Montauban became a temporary intern seminaire.

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

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

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

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

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

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

As for myself, here I am launched on a new way of life. There

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

For the last half of 1834 he had been trying his best to get sent to China but the Superior General and his council kept insisting that his health would not be up to it; finally they decided to ask the doctor directly whether he could be sent, and the doctor gave his consent.<sup>33</sup>

Among the letters of those who knew him when he was Director, written some ten years after his death to Vauris. are the usual generalities:

After much effort all I can recall is an unforgettable impression of edification without being able to detail anything in particular.<sup>34</sup>

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

He had a particular gift for going back to the truths of theology to seek out in depth the reasons for and meaning of spiritual exercises and maxims of spirituality. He was especially attracted to the great masters, St Thomas and St Bonaventure for example; he also thought a lot of M. Olier. In order to heal more effectively he knew how to bide his time, turn a blind eye, go easy, when dealing with spiritual ills. His zeal was unhurried, never crude, and without bitterness; what he wanted to achieve he went for wisely, determinedly and with strength, calmly making use of the means available.<sup>35</sup>

An unsigned, undated and unaddressed letter is on the same lines:

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

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

#### *VI To Macao*

He left Le Havre on 20 March 1835 with two other confrères, Joseph Gabet and Joseph Perry, the latter being a deacon. On the 28th Etienne wrote to Jacques Perboyre:

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

He arrived in Batavia (now Djarkata) in the Dutch East Indies in June, changed ships and continued on to Surabaya at the other end of the island. He spent three weeks in the Indies before continuing on to arrive in Macao on 29 August. He availed of the two stops to write to Salhorgne, Jacou, his uncle and Jean-Baptiste Torrette; the latter was stationed in Macao and was Visitor of the French missions in China and John Gabriel, referring to himself as "that J. G. Perboyre who was ordained with you", says he is at his complete disposal and is willing to go to Tartary or even beyond (Letters 58-62). In these letters he describes the boredom of sea travel and the attempts to relieve it by sing-songs, chess, discussions and arguments with the officers and crew. These latter were often on religious topics and he says that most of those on board went to confession; the missionaries celebrated Mass on Sundays when possible. One of the two letters to the Superior General has this to say

about colonial life in Java:

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

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

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

On one occasion some of my confrères who had already been in swimming urged me to go in. I recalled your advice and the doctor's about this and decided to go for a swim; this was two days before we left. I stayed an hour and a half in the water, came out to dress and had gone on board the boat to put on my socks when stepping carelessly I rocked it and an involuntary somersault gave me another dip. Luckily the water wasn't deep; I had been having fun in it and it found me accustomed to it and I soon reappeared on the horizon without either damage or fear. When I recovered my hat which the current was sweeping away I joined my friends on the beach, where they were waiting for me, for a meal of bananas and biscuits.

Towards the end of the letter he says he has begun to study Chinese:

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

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

In Macao, which was a Portuguese colony on the Chinese mainland, there were two intern seminaries of the Congregation, one French and the other Portuguese. The latter had been asking for some time for a French confrère to be lent to them, and John Gabriel was sent. He gave lessons in French in return for receiving some in Chinese. As a result of his experience he passes on some suggestions of practical politics to the new Superior General, Jean-Baptiste Nozo, on 19 December, 1835:

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

## *VII China*

Two days later he departed for his mission in the interior of China and before leaving he wrote to Jacou to explain the sort of journey he was starting:

At first, although I have only about 600 miles to go by sea I'll need perhaps more than-two months for it, because the monsoon is blowing contrarywise and anyway Chinese boats move very slowly. Then, to cover six or eight hundred miles overland I won't do it all in one go by the mail-route. I'll go on foot, or upstream by boat. I'll make a stop in Fo-kien with the Vicar Apostolic, then another in Kiang-si with our confrère Fr Laribe, then another in Ho-nan with Fr de Besi, so that I won't arrive at my destination until near Easter... If you could see me for a moment now I'd present an interesting sight with my Chinese garb, my shaved head, my long pigtail and my moustaches, stuttering in my new language, eating with chopsticks which do for knife, spoon and fork. I'm told

I don't make too bad a Chinaman. (Letter 71)

At various stages on this long journey he sent off letters to different correspondents; Torrette receive one, the printed version of which takes up 10½ pages and his uncle got one which runs to 22 pages of print. He told Torrette that he had left both his pipe and his fan behind in the rush of departure, but also dealt with more serious matters:

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

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

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

The next letter to Torrette has this intriguing paragraph:

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

On 18 August he wrote to Grappin the letter already referred to in which he gave a summary of the development of his vocation to China. In a PS he asks him, a fellow-sufferer, for "two or three trusses for an inguinal hernia of the right side", saying he can't get on without one.

Within a week of his arrival he wrote twelve letters, the final one being to his father; this was the first in 2½ years, though all letters to other

relatives had messages for his parents. This letter contains a reference to possible martyrdom:

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

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

In spite of his own protestations to the contrary obviously his health was a continuing problem. Eight years after John Gabriel's death Jean-Henri Baldus CM, by then a bishop, wrote to Vauris and took issue with the statement on page 164 of Etienne's *Notice* that John Gabriel got up regularly at four o'clock each morning:

I simply want to get the point across that our dear confrère couldn't get up at four without serious repercussions which would prevent his doing almost anything for the entire day. That's what he told me. So, even though it may be edifying to read the opposite in his *Notice* this latter nevertheless makes those who knew the facts stop for a moment for a bit of reflection. One sees in many *notices*, *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi* and those of our own Congregation, statements which are so far from the truth as to be hurtful and even to cast doubt on the whole thing and reduce the value of reading them.<sup>41</sup>

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

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

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

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

I've just received very satisfactory news from China telling me that your nephew was in a very serious way and had even received the last sacraments but that God didn't want to deprive our mission just yet of someone so capable of doing good. He has completely recovered and is working with plenty of zeal and success.<sup>42</sup>

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

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

In the same month he also wrote to Lamboley in Paris and says he heard that there is a project for writing a life of St Vincent in Latin for the use of Chinese confrères. He thinks this a great idea, but as usual he has several suggestions to make as to how it should be done, including the sensible one that after it has been written but before it gets printed it should be sent to Macao so that a judgement could be made as to whether it would meet the needs of the Chinese confrères, many of whom had difficulty in reading the *Imitation* in Latin. (Letter 95)

The same month he sent off a second letter to Torrette criticising, among other things, an article in the *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi*

in which he noted six geographical, historical and other factual errors. What he really objected to, though, was the fact that the Vincentian missions were called Chinese while those of the Paris Foreign Missions Society were called French. He thought that the Vincentian mission had equal right to be called French and suggested that Etienne should do something about this; however, he said all this “without any spirit of jealousy or bias” (Letter 96). The long-awaited trusses were also mentioned; they had arrived but were of no use as they were all for the left side while his hernia was on the right.

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

There are no further letters until August 1839 when the famous trusses had eventually arrived. This time they were the correct ones and he received twice the requested number as both Torrette in Macao and Grappin in Paris had ordered them separately. One of them, though, lasted only a week as “it suddenly broke of its own accord when I was sitting motionless in my chair”. Torrette seems to have complained about the expenses John Gabriel was incurring in all this because the latter admits as much and apologises for them, adding that all expenditure on him for the past twenty years has been a waste of money. (Letters 100 & 101)

From September 1838 until Pentecost 1839 John Gabriel gave seventeen missions, and even since then had not really had any free time (Letter 99, of 10 August 1839). He was supposed to go on a further round of visits to mission stations in Hou-pe but Francois-Alexis Rameaux decided to take on this journey himself “out of pity for his poor legs”.<sup>43</sup> This meant that during August and September John Gabriel was in the community residence in Kou-tchen. The feast of the Most Holy Name of Mary, 15 September, coincided with the visit of a Franciscan, Giuseppe Rizzolati, also known as Giuseppe da Clauzeto, who later became a bishop. John Gabriel asked him to be celebrant and preacher at the High Mass, at which about 1,500 people were present. After Mass Rizzolati, Baldus and John Gabriel were having breakfast when they were warned that a band of soldiers was approaching and that they should leave quickly. They had just enough time to escape, without enough to take anything beyond the clothes they wore. Rizzolati and Baldus went in one direction and John Gabriel in the opposite. The soldiers looted the premises and in the course of burning books and other objects which they

did not want they set the whole house on fire.<sup>44</sup>

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

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

The day after their escape from the house Rizzolati and Baldus separated. John Gabriel had taken the opposite direction to them and was hiding in a wood, where he was found and arrested. Etienne in his *Notice* quoted a long letter written from Macao on 27 January 1841 by Evariste Hue CM which includes an account of John Gabriel's arrest. When Baldus read this he described his reaction in a subsequent letter to Vauris:

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

He tore these pages out and forwarded them to Paris later on.<sup>46</sup> In the covering letter he points out that Hue was nowhere near the area in question and composed his narrative from hearsay. One of the corrected errors of fact is that the burning of the community residence was not deliberate but accidental.

A much more serious error is the account given by Hue of what led to John Gabriel's being caught in the woods where he was hiding. Hue says that John Gabriel had a catechumen with him acting as guide and that the soldiers who were searching for him came upon the pair unexpectedly and did not recognise their quarry. They got into conversation with them and explained that they were searching for a fugitive European. The catechumen asked what would be paid to someone who would reveal where the person in question was, and was told "Thirty taëls", whereupon the catechumen pointed to John Gabriel and said he was the man they were looking for. Baldus says that John Gabriel's arrest came about because the soldiers met a catechumen by chance and threatened him, and as a result he betrayed where he was, and that the Hue version of a conversation and agreement about a price is "romantic, and at a

minimum very exaggerated”.

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

Secondly, the handing over, or betrayal, was brought about not by money but by fear, for Fr Perboyre’s supposed guide had been beaten up, according to the messengers from Hou-pé.<sup>47</sup>

Rizzolati in his subsequent evidence for the beatification process says he wants to distinguish clearly between what he knows from personal knowledge and what he has heard; he says he heard that a catechumen was offered 30 taëls to betray John Gabriel. In another place, though, he mentions this without saying that it was hearsay.<sup>48</sup>

André Yang CM, in a letter to Torrette in November 1840, gives the most complete account of the arrest:

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

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

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

When he was brought before the mandarin in Siang Yang Fou, Rameaux says in the same letter,

... he was interrogated and endured all the sufferings reserved for

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

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

Rizzolati wrote to Torrette, in Latin, on 15 January 1840 and included an account of what John Gabriel went through in Ou Tchang Fou. He says he heard the details from a Chinese Vincentian who had been able to pass himself off as a layman and visit him in prison. This was Andre Yang who in his evidence at the beatification process said he presented himself at the prison as a merchant, Mr Y, who was interested in learning more about his country, particularly its prison system.<sup>51</sup> Rizzolati himself was able to remain in the general area as he spoke Chinese fluently, did not look like a European and could pass for a native Chinese, according to himself. The interrogators were primarily interested in getting John Gabriel to betray other priests, particularly Rameaux. In the Viceroy's court he was very badly treated *novisque excogitatis tormentis quod neque Neronis persecutionis tempore factitawn fuisse audivimus*. They also tried to get him to trample on a crucifix and abjure his faith. He was made to kneel bare-kneed on the floor with his pigtail pulled upwards and tightly attached to a beam; his arms were tied to a plank and another plank was placed across his calves, with two soldiers standing or jumping on the ends of it; his bones were visible in places and his skin and flesh hung off him in strips.<sup>52</sup>

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

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

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

pity for him in view of what he had suffered.

At this time it was known that the mandarin who had originally arrested John Gabriel had been deposed from office and in despair had hanged himself.<sup>53</sup>

In a letter to Rameaux in March 1840 Yang says that John Gabriel had received 100 strokes of a bamboo stick on the body and 70 on the mouth, and had made more than twenty appearances in court. He says that at the time of writing John Gabriel has recovered fairly well and can again walk a bit. Yang cannot visit as frequently as before, and the prisoner himself has advised against it because of the danger to Yang. However, the prison governor has allowed a catechist named Fong to make weekly visits and bring anything needed.<sup>54</sup>

In May an Italian Franciscan, Filippo Grosso a Sant' Agata, wrote to Torrette and covered most of the already known facts but added that the case had been referred by the Viceroy to the Emperor.<sup>55</sup> Later on the court records and the Viceroy's report were copied out by a Christian Civil Servant and from them it is clear that the charges against John Gabriel were that he entered China illegally to preach Christianity "and to deceive and seduce the people".<sup>56</sup> In a letter written two and a half months after John Gabriel's death Yang told Torrette some further details of the martyr's sufferings. Dog's blood was poured over his head and he was made to drink it to counteract the supposed magic which made him hold out against the interrogations and torture. The Viceroy ordered some Chinese characters to be incised on John Gabriel's left cheek to indicate that he had seduced men by an evil religion; his beard later obscured these.<sup>57</sup>

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

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

He then says that there is a rumour that John Gabriel will be exiled to Macao but he does not think it likely. The new Vicar Apostolic believes his release could be purchased. What Rameaux didn't know, of course, was that John Gabriel had been executed four days earlier.

On 22 September an Italian Holy Family Missioner, Francesco Saverio Maresca, wrote to Rameaux to announce the death, saying that only one Christian was present as no others knew about it. Maresca learned about

it a few hours later and sent some people to retrieve the body, the cord which strangled him, and other relics.<sup>59</sup> By 15 October Rameaux was able to send some details to Torrette:

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

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

A week after John Gabriel's death Maresca wrote to Rameaux that several witnesses said that in death his face did not have the distortion normal after such a mode of execution.<sup>61</sup> A year later, from Mongolia, Hue wrote to Nozo that at the time of John Gabriel's death a luminous cross appeared in the sky and was seen by many Chinese and resulted in many conversions to Christianity. He said that Rizzolati, by then a bishop, was at first sceptical but later held an enquiry into it and stated that according to many people the cross was quite distinct and seen from places far apart. In 1851 Baldus wrote to an unnamed correspondent that he was doubtful about this story of the cross in view of the credulity of the Chinese, adding:

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

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

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

great reluctance to have him, made great efforts and used many ruses to get someone else, some other European, but not myself. I know that the question of his physical appearance had nothing to do with it.

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

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

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

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

#### Notes

1. Goyau: *La Congregation de la Mission des Lazaristes*, Paris 1938, p. 243.
2. *Notice sur la Vie et la Mart de M. Jean-Gabriel Perboyre*, Paris 1842, 286pp.
3. Vauris' book was published anonymously in 1853 with the title *Le Disciple de Jesus*. In passing it should be noted that Aristide Chatelet CM in his life of JGP (Meudon, 1943) in all his footnotes giving page references to Vauris is in fact referring to another book, published anonymously by Mgr Demimuid in 1891.
4. *Lettres du Bienheureux Jean-Gabriel Perboyre*, edited by Brother Joseph van den Brandt CM, Peking 1940. All quotations from the letters will be according to the numbering of this edition.
5. The three letters are in the CM Archives, Paris (henceforward CMAP). Baldus was nine years younger than JGP, was ordained in 1834 and went to China the same year; was ordained bishop in 1845 and died in 1869.
6. "They" refers to Perboyre and Antoine Gratacap, who together ran the school. There is some doubt as to whether Gratacap was a confrère, though Perboyre always refers to him as such and says in a PS to a letter in 1817 that the late Vicar General, Hanon, received him into the Congregation on 25 March 1809. Gratacap in his will does not refer to his being a member of the CM. The letter and will are in CMAP.
7. CMAP.

8. CMAP.
9. CMAP.
10. CMAP.
11. CMAP. This is the letter already quoted from. Francois-Alexis Rameaux CM was four months younger than JGP, was ordained in 1826, went to China in 1832, was ordained bishop in 1840 and died in 1842.
12. CMAP.
13. CMAP.
14. Maisonneuve to Charles Boujard CM, Vicar General, 10 December 1819 (CMAP). Van den Brandt and others give the date of his reception as 15 December 1818.
15. The details of his ordination to the sub-diaconate and diaconate are in a transcript of an original document which was in the CM Procure in Shanghai. The transcript is in CMAP.
16. The original passport is in CMAP. The details are entered in in handwriting in blank spaces after printed words such as "Height", "Hair", "Beard".
17. Letters 5 and 6, and also the Shanghai document referred to already, show that he was ordained priest in 1826. All the early lives gave 1825, thus shortening his stay in Montdidier and lengthening that in Saint-Flour. At the time of his ordination the Daughters' house in the rue du Bac was No 132; the number was later changed to its present 140.
18. The names and dioceses of the eleven Irishmen are given in *Annales de la CM*, vol. 112-113, page 508. The Archives of the Irish College, Paris, do not have a complete register of students for that year but five of those listed were recipients of burses in the ICP.
19. Mariette, born 1809, was fourth in the Perboyre family; she died young, in a Carmelite convent, probably before the age of 20; few details are available.
20. CMAP.
21. CMAP.
22. These letters from Grappin, and some from the bishop of Saint Flour, are in CMAP.
23. The cousin referred to is Gabriel Perboyre, born 1808. He entered the CM on 23 June 1827. He wrote extensively in the *Annales* on community history, especially about the period of the French Revolution; he died in 1880.
24. Pierre Peschaud CM to J B Etienne, from Kiang-si 30 July 1844 (CMAP).
25. CMAP.
26. CMAP.
27. Vauris, op. cit. p 289.
28. A persistent rumour has survived that his removal from Saint-Flour had a *ratio poenae* about it. I first heard it from Kevin Murnaghan in Glenart about 1951. Edouard Robert referred to it in the *Annales* in 1939, saying that he first heard it about forty years previously from a confrère "venerable by age and holiness" who said that JGP had not been a success at Saint-Flour and was therefore "recalled to the Maison Mere where the Superior General is supposed to have told him that he didn't know what to do with him for the moment, and that in the meantime he could help the Director by looking after the seminarists' walks. This was never written down and when several years later I spoke of it to other confrères they said that it hardly seemed likely" (*Annales* vol. 104, p 271). I have heard the added detail that it was because he had advocated the ideas of Lamennais that he was removed. Their condemnation by Gregory XVI came in August 1832, the month in which JGP was recalled to Paris.
29. Letter of Pierre Peschaud CM to Etienne, 30 September, 1844 in CMAP.
30. On Boullangier see article on Louis-Joseph Francois in COLLOQUE No. 5.
31. Jacques-Jean Perboyre was received into the seminaire in Paris on 18 September

1832. Less than two years later he received tonsure. He did not take his vows, though, till nearly eight years later, on 15 March 1840, and then as a lay-brother. On 23 December 1843 he received minor orders and in the following year sub-diaconate and diaconate; he was ordained priest on 20 September 1845. He died in 1896. Fr Joseph Sheehy told me in Blackrock about 1948 that he had done his seminaire in Paris in the 1880's and had known Jacques. He said that the decision to change from lay-brother and resume his clerical studies was made in view of the hoped-for beatification of his brother. He also said that Jacques was the model for all portraits of John Gabriel.

32. *Recueil des Principales Circulates des Sup. Gen. CM*, vol. II p 461.
33. Etienne, *Notice*, pp 26-27. Chatelet in his *Jean-Gabriel Perboyre*, Meudon 1943, p 135, gives more details but does not indicate his source.
34. CMAP.
35. CMAP.
36. CMAP.
37. CMAP.
38. CMAP.
39. Perry was ordained priest in Macao on 11 October 1840.
40. As well as the three Vincentians there were some priests of the Paris Foreign Missions. The passage alluded to at the end of the letter is *Alter alterius onera portate et sic adimplebitis legem Christi* (Gal. 6:2).
41. CMAP.
42. CMAP.
43. *Annales de la CM*, Vol 6 (1840) p 354.
44. The events of 15 September are given in three letters to Torrette. from Rameaux (06-12-39), Yang (08-01-40) and Rizzolati (15-01-40). These and other letters from around the same time were published by Fernand Combaluzier CM in 1953 in the Swiss periodical *Nouvelle Revue de Science Missionnaire* (NRSM) pp 201-268. In CMAP there is a typewritten copy of the same collection with a covering note saying that they were copied from the originals in the CM Procure in Shanghai by Henri CrapezCM in 1940. Some of these letters in whole or in part are incorporated into the printed documentation of the beatification process. The typewritten collection also contains one letter not published by Combaluzier in NRSM (See below). Apart from the letters of Rizzolati (15-01-40) and Maresca I have not found the originals in CMAP.
45. NRSM p 204.
46. His letter and the annotated pages from Etienne's book are in CMAP.
47. The original letter is in CMAP. At the top of the page, in handwriting different from that of the letter, is written "M. Lavissiere". Pierre Lavissiere CM was from Saint-Flour; he entered the seminaire in Paris in October 1835, was ordained in December 1837 and went to China the following year; he became a bishop in 1846 and died in 1849.
48. Printed documents of the beatification process have been bound together into an "omnibus volume" and the pages re-numbered. Two copies of this, one incomplete, are in CMAP. Page references are to the re-numbering in the complete volume. The Rizzolati material referred to is on pp 288 ff and 393.
49. The original letter is in Latin, NRSM pp 264-268. In this and in other letters Yang spells the surname either Belboyre or Berboyre.
50. "Omnibus volume" p 356.
51. Yang in evidence at the beatification process, "Omnibus volume" p 299.
52. NRSM pp 208-213.
53. NRSM p 213.
54. NRSM pp 253-254.

55. NRSM p 256.
56. "Omnibus volume" p 419.
57. NRSM p 267.
58. NRSM p 258.
59. Original in CMAP.
60. "Omnibus volume" pp 377-378.
61. "Omnibus volume" p 381.
62. There is a typewritten transcript of Huc's letter in CMAP.
63. Original letter in CMAP.
64. This is the letter referred to in note 44 which was not printed by Combaluzier in NRSM. All that appears in the typescript is given here.

## CORRIGENDA

## COLLOQUE No. 2,

- page 60: Fr Morrin's appointments should read:
- 1923-1925 Theology studies, Rome.
  - 1925-1928 St Joseph's, Blackrock.
  - 1928-1929 St Vincent's, Castleknock.
  - 1929-1930 St Vincent's, Gateacre.
  - 1930-1939 St Joseph's, Blackrock.
  - Subsequent appointments as printed.

## COLLOQUE No. 3,

- page 46: For *Hexham & Newcastle* read *Middlesbrough*.

## COLLOQUE No. 5,

- page 43: For the sake of completeness the name of John McVeigh should be added, though he was neither an Irishman nor a member of the Irish Province. He was a Scot who was born in 1856 and entered the Congregation in Paris in 1876 and was ordained there in 1881 and went to China the same year. In the CM archives in Rome there are letters from him from Lanark in 1896 and from Phibsboro in 1897. He went to America and left the Congregation; he died in Chicago in 1906.
- page 65: For *Dalymount* read *Dollymount*.

# Provincial Archives

## VINCENTIAN STAFF OF THE IRISH COLLEGE, PARIS

In July 1981 the Irish Episcopal Conference appointed me custodian of the key of the archives of the Irish College for 1981-82. The majority of the archival material which is of purely Vincentian interest, as distinct from College interest, is, of course, in 4 Cabra Road. However, there is a certain amount of material where the two interests overlap, and this is in the College archives. One such item is a notebook bound in half-leather, 70B in Fr Liam Swords' classification, which has the following on the flyleaf: "Copied from a small manuscript commenced by V Rev James Lynch CM in Dec. 1858 with the following title: 'Register of the members of the Congregation of the Mission appointed to the direction of the Irish College, Paris'. Patrick Boyle CM, Paris 1919". I have photocopied the original for our archives, and have also typed out an exact transcript of it with notes where necessary. What follows here is a slightly edited version, with certain parts omitted as indicated. I have inserted some explanatory matter in the body of the text; this is indicated by the symbols « ». T.D.

### **Rectorate of the Very Rev James Lynch CM (1858-66):**

*December 1858: Rector:* James Jos. P. Lynch. *Assistant:* Matthew Kavanagh. *Moral Theology:* Andrew Campbell. *Dogmatic Theology:* Théodore Clue.<sup>1</sup> *Philosophy:* Thomas Fitzpatrick. *Rhetoric:* John McCann.<sup>2</sup> *Econome:* Dominique-Jean Bergheaud. *Porter:* Brother Depouillant. *Refectorian:* Brother Le Roy. *Care of Rooms:* Brother John Dowting.

### **1859:**

*August 17:* Our dear confrère Mr McCann died a most holy death. *Assistant:* Mr Campbell in place of Mr Kavanagh, appointed superior of new house at Lanark, Scotland.

*October:* Philip Burton appointed to the classes of Church History, Belles Lettres & Sacred Eloquence. Brother Larghaud appointed porter in place of Brother Depouillant retired from ill health. Brother Noyer appointed dependier in place of Brother Le Roy who died a most holy death.<sup>3</sup>

*November:* M. Clue appointed Econome in place of M. Bergheaud, obliged to retire from ill health. Mr Fitzpatrick appointed to class of Philosophy. *December:* Mr McKenna appointed to classes of

Church History, Belles Lettres & Ceremonies. Mr Fitzpartick to class of Sacred Eloquence.

**1860:**

*January:* Brother Rooney taken in place of a French servant. Brother Noyer left the Congregation. He had not taken the holy vows.

*February:* M. Bergheaud died a most holy death.

*August 18:* Mr Myers arrived to succeed Mr Clue who had been sent as procurator to Amiens.

*August 20:* Mr Plunket arrived to replace Mr McKenna who had been appointed to our house in Sheffield.

**1861:**

*February 10:* Mr Myers left and was replaced by Mr Murphy.

June 3: Mr Plunket left in a delicate state of health.

June 20: Rev Mr Kinane appointed professor. (Fr Kinane was a secular priest).

August 21: Fr Plunket died at St Vincent's, Castleknock, a most holy death & truly edifying.

**1862:**

*February:* Fr Fitzpatrick left for China & was replaced by Fr McKenna.

*October 4:* Fr Burton left to profess Physics at St Vincent's, C'Knock. Fr Cooney arrived to profess Moral Theology as substitute for Fr Campbell still seriously indisposed.

*December 13:* Our ever dear Fr Campbell died the death of the saints in our St Vincent's, Castleknock. *R. ipace.*

**1863:**

*January 15:* Fr Timlin arrived to complete the number of the professors of the College.

*July:* Fr Timlin left in a very delicate state.

*October:* Brother Murray lately received in Cork was sent to the College, I dare say the last appointment of our dear departed Visitor Fr Dowley, who died January 31 1864 a most holy and happy death at St Vincent's, Castleknock. R.I.P.

**1864:**

Brother Flanagan was sent by the Visitor as the third Brother of this house.

**1865:**

*May 17:* Fr Cooney left for Ireland in very delicate health.

*August 8:* Fr Guerin arrived as a substitute for Fr Cooney; took charge of the Rhetoric class.

(Nota: In a diary kept by Fr Lynch the following entry is made under date of 8 December 1865: "On this auspicious day our ever dear confrère the Rev Fr Thomas Fitzpatrick, who left the College for China 17 Feb. 1862 was called to receive the rich reward we fervently hope of his many painful sacrifices. His death was caused by accidental poisoning or cholera. Nothing was said of poisoning in the official report of his death. *R. i pace.* Amen.)

**Rectorate of the Very Rev Neal McCabe CM (1866-68):****1866:**

*October 3:1,* Neal McCabe CM, was appointed superior of the Irish College. Received my diploma of office on the 5th of Nov. 1866

*November 4:* Fr Lynch was consecrated in our chapel bishop of Arcadopolis and coadjutor to the Vicar Apostolic of the Western District of Scotland.

*November 27:* Dr Lynch left for his diocese on the same day. James Murray left the Congregation with Dr Lynch. He never made the vows.

**1867:**

*June:* Fr J Burke was appointed by our respected Visitor my Admonitor.

*September 22:* Fr Campbell (George) came as professor of Rhetoric.

*October:* Fr. Byrne (Peter) came as professor of French, Ritual, &c, &c.

**Rectorate of the Very Rev Thomas McNamara CM (1868-89):****1868:**

«After 1868 there are several years for which there are not any entries.»

*January 30:* Fr McNamara was installed by the Superior General as superior in room of Fr McCabe who was appointed bishop of Ardagh.

*February 2:* Fr McCabe was consecrated in the College chapel by the Nuncio Mgr Chigi, and left on the 4th of the same month.

*May 24:* Brother John Doolin left, having been removed by order of the Superior General.<sup>4</sup>

*May 26:* Fr Byrne left on account of impaired health in company with the Visitor Fr Duff.

*May 29:* Brother Cusack arrived in room of Brother Doolin. *August 1:* Fr Ryan (Robert) arrived to succeed Fr Byrne.

**1870:**

*June 20:* Fr Ryan left for Ireland in bad health, and died September 4 1871. His place was provisionally supplied by Mr Matt Ryan a subject of the diocese of Cashel, who had finished his studies and was ordained priest at the time.

**1872:**

Rev Thomas Hardy CM was appointed professor and remained with a couple of intervals until 1887.

**1873:**

Rev Daniel Brosnahan CM was appointed professor. Held the chair of Rhetoric and then of Philosophy and subsequently Dogmatic Theology. Died at St Joseph's, Blackrock August 16 1887.

**1881:**

Rev Michael Maher CM was appointed professor of Philosophy. He left to go to Maynooth College as Spiritual Father in 1889. Rev John Ward CM was appointed professor of Rhetoric.

**1884:**

Rev Michael Carrigy CM was appointed to succeed Fr Ward as professor of Rhetoric. He left in 1886 to become superior of St Patrick's College, Armagh.

**1886:**

*September:* Rev Joseph Hanley CM arrived to take the place of Rev Thomas Murphy CM as Econome and professor of Ecclesiastical History. He left to go to St Vincent's, Sheffield, in 1893. Rev Patrick Boyle CM arrived in the College to be professor. He had been appointed by the Visitor as professor of Dogmatic Theology, but as Fr D Brosnahan declined to accept the office superior at Armagh that chair did not become vacant. It was then in contemplation to appoint him professor of Rhetoric. However, having been selected to be one of the Spiritual Fathers at Maynooth he left Paris on September 20 after a residence of less than three weeks.

*October:* Rev Michael Gannon CM was appointed professor of Rhetoric.

**1887:**

Rev William Byrne CM was appointed professor of Rhetoric.

**1889:**

*September:* Rev John McGuinness CM was appointed professor of Dogmatic Theology in the room of Rev Michael Maher CM transferred to Maynooth as Spiritual Father. In the same month two secular priests, Rev Michael Quinn and Rev John Clarke, both of the diocese of Armagh, took up their residence in the College, the former as professor of Mental, and the latter of Natural, Philosophy. Fr Quinn remained until 1893 and Fr Clarke until 1892.

**Rectorate of the Very Rev Patrick Boyle CM (1889-1926):**

*October 25:* Rev Patrick Boyle CM arrived in the Irish College, Paris, having been appointed superior in succession to V Rev Thomas McNamara who had resigned his office.

*September 25:* Rev Martin Whitty CM arrived having been appointed professor of Moral Theology in succession to Rev John Burke who in consequence of advanced years was placed at St Vincent's, Mill Hill, London. He died at St Joseph's, Blackrock, August 17 1894. At the same time Rev Michael Flynn CM, novice priest, arrived to succeed Rev William Byrne who was retained in Ireland.

*December 19:* Very Rev Thomas McHale DD died in the College after a short illness. R.I.P. He had been appointed professor in 1848 or 49. After thirty years service he retired on a pension but continued to reside in the College.<sup>5</sup>

**1892:**

*September:* Rev Michael Flynn CM remained in Ireland, there being no class for him on account of the reduction of the number of free places by the Bureau Gratuit and in consequence the reduction of the number of students.

Rev John Clarke accepted an appointment in his own diocese.

Rev Joseph Boyle, a priest of the diocese of Raphoe, arrived to take the place of Fr Clarke as professor of Natural Philosophy.

**1893:**

*March 8:* Rev Martin Whitty CM left in consequence of ill health and was appointed to St Vincent's, Sheffield. *June:* Rev Michael Quinn and Rev Joseph Boyle ceased to be professors and returned to their own dioceses in consequence of the temporary extinction of the

Philosophy classes resulting from the limitation of the number of burses to fifty.

*September 8:* Rev Patrick McKenna CM arrived having been appointed Econome. He had twice previously belonged to the College staff.

*September 13:* Rev George Campbell left for Ireland today having ceased to belong to the Irish College at his own request. He was appointed to the Training College at Drumcondra, Dublin.

*September 18:* Rev Joseph Hanley CM left for St Vincent's, Sheffield, having been replaced by Fr McKenna.

*September 21:* Rev William Byrne CM arrived having been appointed professor of Moral Theology in the place of Rev Martin Whitty CM who had left in March on account of delicate health.

*October 6:* Rev John Flynn CM arrived having been appointed professor of Scripture and Canon Law in succession to Rev George Campbell.

#### **1894:**

*September 12:* Rev James Rooney CM arrived having been appointed Econome in place of Rev Patrick McKenna.

*September 20:* Fr McKenna left for Ireland after a severe attack of illness. He was appointed to St Vincent's, Cork, where he died in 1896. At the same time Rev Michael P Brosnahan CM arrived having been appointed professor of Moral Theology in succession to Rev William Byrne whose health was unsatisfactory.

Rev Patrick O'Regan CM arrived having been appointed professor of the Philosophy class now re-established after a temporary suspension.

#### **1895:**

*July 31:* Rev Patrick Hullen CM arrived to replace Rev J Rooney as Econome; the latter returned to Ireland.

*September 21:* Rev Patrick O'Doherty of the diocese of Raphoe arrived having been appointed to the chair of Natural Philosophy.

#### **1897:**

*September 10:* Rev Patrick Dowling CM arrived having been appointed professor of Scripture in place of Rev John Flynn who left on September 19 and was appointed professor at All Hallows College, Dublin.

**1898:**

*September 6:* Rev Patrick O'German CM arrived having been appointed professor of Mental Philosophy in place of Rev P O'Regan who had been promoted to the chair of Moral Theology vacated by Fr M Brosnahan who was appointed professor at All Hallow.

**1899:**

*September 24:* Rev John Flynn CM arrived having been appointed to take charge of the classes of Ritual and Ecclesiastical Chant.

**1900:**

*January 30:* Rev John Ballesty CM arrived to be professor of Mental Philosophy in place of Rev Patrick O'Gorman whose health was unsatisfactory.

*February 7:* Rev Patrick O'Gorman CM left for St Mary's, Lanark.

*August 29:* Rev Denis O'Sullivan CM arrived to take the place of Fr Dowling who left on September 5 for St Vincent's, Cork.

**1901:**

*September:* Rev Michael O'Farrell CM arrived to replace Fr O'Regan as professor of Moral Theology. Rev John O'Connell CM arrived to replace Rev Denis O'Sullivan promoted to the chair of S. Scripture vacated by Rev John Flynn who was appointed to All Hallows, Dublin.

**1902:**

*September 11:* Rev John Gilmartin CM arrived to take the place of Rev John O'Connell who remained in Ireland.

*September 20:* Rev Charles Dineen CM arrived to succeed Fr O'Farrell as professor of Moral Theology.

*October 2:* Rev Patrick O'Gorman returned to the College having been appointed professor of Mental Philosophy in place of Fr Ballesty.

**1903:**

*September:* Rev Timothy O'Herlihy arrived having been appointed professor of Ecclesiastical History and Dean in place of Fr Gilmartin who at his own request remained in Ireland.

**1905:**

*October:* Rev James Wigmore CM arrived to take the place of Rev Patrick O'Doherty who resigned the chair of Natural Philosophy and remained in his own diocese.

**1906:**

*October:* Rev Edmund Cullen CM arrived having been appointed professor of Scripture in succession to Rev Denis O'Sullivan.

**1909:**

*September 13:* Rev James Rooney CM arrived having been appointed Econome in place of Rev Patrick Hullen.

*September:* Rev James Downey CM arrived having been appointed professor of S. Scripture in succession to Rev E J Cullen. Fr Downey remained in Ireland in 1914. «The final sentence, and similar ones in subsequent entries, was added in later.»

**1910:**

*August 26:* Rev Thomas Gavin CM arrived having been appointed Econome in place of Rev James Rooney who went back to St Vincent's, Sheffield.

*October:* Rev James Doyle CM arrived to take the place of Rev Patrick O'Gorman as professor of Mental Philosophy. Fr Doyle remained in Ireland in 1914.

**1911:**

*February 9:* Rev Thomas McGrath CM, recently ordained, arrived having been appointed professor of Natural Philosophy in place of Rev James Wigmore who was transferred to St Vincent's, Sheffield, for which he left Paris on February 11.

**1912:**

*March 8:* Rev Daniel Walsh CM arrived having been appointed Econome in succession to Rev Thomas Gavin who obtained a doctor's certificate that his health rendered a change desirable. Fr Gavin left the College on February 1.

*October:* Rev John Gill CM arrived to take the place of Fr D Walsh as Econome. Fr Gill remained in Ireland in 1914.

**1913:**

*September 10:* Rev Vincent McCarthy CM arrived to take the place of Rev Thomas McGrath as professor of Natural Philosophy. Fr McGrath was changed from the College at his own request and was sent to St Vincent's, Castleknock.

*October:* Rev Patrick Kilty CM arrived having been appointed professor of Ecclesiastical History. He was also appointed Dean, that office having become vacant by the transfer of Fr McGrath to Castleknock.

Fr Kilty remained in Ireland in September 1914 and was appointed to St Vincent's, Cork.

### 1915:

*March 4:* Rev Charles Dineen CM remained in Ireland in September 1914. He died after a few months' illness from Bright's Disease at St Joseph's, Blackrock, March 4 1915. R.I.P.

«At this point in the Notebook there appear four lists in Patrick Boyle's writing, each signed by him and dated May 31 1919:

1. Vincentian priests, fifty-seven in number, who were appointed to the College between 1858 and 1919. All have been mentioned in their chronological place in the text.

2. Vincentian laybrothers, nine in number, all mentioned in their place in the text. To this list is added, in PB's hand, "Brother Michael O'Sullivan 1927". No brother had been appointed since Brother Cusack in 1868.»

3. Students of the College who entered the Novitiate of the Congregation of the Mission from 1858 to 1919:

Peter Byrne	Waterford	1859	
Thomas Corcoran	Kildare	1860	
Michael Roche	Dublin	1860	
William Jones	Cashel	1866	<i>Abiit.</i>
Maurice Quish	Cahsel	1866	
Patrick Moloney <sup>6</sup>	Cashel	1866	
William Madden	Cork	1867	<i>Abiit.</i>
Joseph Canton	Tuam	1872	<i>Abiit.</i>
Daniel O'Sullivan	Kerry	1881	<i>Abiit.</i>
John O'Shea	Cloyne	1884	<i>Abiit.</i>
William Byrne <sup>7</sup>	Cloyne	1886	
Patrick Murphy <sup>8</sup>	Waterford	1893	<i>Abiit.</i>
Patrick Lynch	Ardagh	1893	
Nicholas Comerford	Ossory	1896	
Paul Donnelly	Down & Connor	1896	
James Wigmore	Cloyne	1897	

John Aloysius Fitzgerald, a Kerry student, was received into the Congregation and with permission of the Superior General made his vows on his deathbed in the College in the presence of Fr Lynch, October 13 1863.

«On the tombstone over the earlier TCP plot in Cahan cemetery he is described as a Kerry student; there is no CM after his name. He died on November 5 1863.

4. List of secular priests who were members of the College staff from 1858 to 1905. In another hand the names of three more priests who were on the staff in the 1920's have been added.»

### **1919:**

*September 29:* Rev William Hastings CM arrived having been appointed professor of Scholastic Philosophy.

*November 6:* The College re-opened. Rev John Gallagher, a secular priest of the diocese of Derry, arrived having been appointed by the Rector as professor of Natural Philosophy for one year.

*November 14:* Rev Robert Wilson CM arrived having been appointed Econome. He left for Ireland on account of his health January 16 1920.

### **1920:**

*September 27:* Rev William McGlynn CM arrived having been appointed Econome in place of Fr Wilson who left in January 1920.

*October 1:* Rev John Thompson CM arrived having been appointed professor of Philosophy in place of Rev William Hastings who was transferred to Hammersmith. Fr Thompson transferred to Hammersmith in September 1921.

### **1921:**

*October 3:* Rev Denis O'Sullivan CM arrived to be professor of S. Scripture & Eccl. History.

*October 5:* Rev John McGuinness arrived to resume work as professor of Dogmatic Theology after an interval of seven years in Ireland.

*October 16:* Rev Henry Casey CM arrived to be professor of Natural Philosophy to take the place of Rev John Gallagher appointed to Moral Theology.

### **1922:**

*January 6:* Rev John Fahy of the diocese of Dublin arrived to be professor of Scholastic Philosophy.

*September 28:* Rev John Ryan CM arrived to be professor of Natural Philosophy *vice* Rev H Casey transferred to Castleknock. Fr Ryan was ill on arriving and was unable to meet his class. Went to the Hopital Saint-Joseph October 13; returned to College November 17 and left for Ireland December 5 1922.

*October 26:* Rev John Russell CM arrived to be professor of S. Scripture & Eccl. History *vice* Rev Denis O'Sullivan appointed Econome

to replace Rev W McGlynn who on account of his health left for Ireland on October 13 1922. Rev E O'Hanlon CM arrived to take charge of the Natural Philosophy, Fr Ryan not having been able to undertake the work.

**1923:**

*October:* Rev Patrick McLaughlin, priest of the diocese of Raphoe, arrived as professor of Natural Philosophy *vice* Rev E O'Hanlon who took charge of the Scholastic Philosophy class, Fr Fahy having left in June 1923. Fr McLaughlin left for Maynooth in September 1928.

**1925:**

*September:* Rev Maurice Kavanagh CM, a student priest ordained by dispensation after three years theology, arrived to take up the office of Econome which had been vacant since the departure of Rev Denis O'Sullivan in August 1923, the duties being discharged by the superior. At the end of September Rev Timothy O'Herlihy CM arrived to take charge of the classes of S. Scripture & Eccl. History in the room of Rev John Russell CM transferred to St Mary's College, Twickenham in the diocese of Westminster.

**1926:**

Rev John Gill CM arrived to be Econome in place of Rev Maurice Kavanagh who left to go to China.

*June:* The Very Rev John McGuinness CM became superior in place of Rev P Boyle CM who had been Rector since October 1889.

**1928:**

Rev John Oakey CM, a student priest, arrived to be Econome in place of Rev John Gill who returned to Ireland.

*September:* Rev John Walsh CM arrived to be professor of Natural Philosophy in place of Rev Patrick McLaughlin DS who went to Maynooth College.

About Christmas Rev E O'Hanlon, on account of his health, went back to Ireland and his place was taken until June 1929 by Rev James Feely CM who was on vacation from China.

**1929:**

*September:* Rev Peter Mullan CM arrived to replace as Econome Fr Oakey who went back to Ireland. Rev Joseph McNamara CM arrived to be Dean in place of Rev James Feely who had temporarily filled

that office in succession to Rev E O'Hanlon. About the same time Rev James O'Donovan CM arrived to be professor of Natural Philosophy in place of Rev John Walsh transferred to the class of Scholastic Philosophy. In the course of the year Fr O'Donovan also took charge of the class of Eccl. History.

### 1930:

*September 16:* Rev John Oakey CM arrived to be professor of Scholastic Philosophy in place of Rev John Walsh who was removed to Ireland.

*September 17:* Rev Denis O'Sullivan CM arrived to be professor of S. Scripture in place of Rev T O'Herlihy transferred to St Peter's, Phibsboro, Dublin.

*September 25:* Rev John Roughan CM arrived to be professor of Moral Theology in place of Rev Dr John Gallagher who went back to his native diocese (Derry). Rev James O'Donovan CM, 1929 to 1931. Appointed to Gateacre in 1931. Returned in 1934. «The name is in PB's hand, the rest of the entry is in three other different hands.»

### 1931:

Rev James Milner CM arrived having been appointed Econome. «This is the last entry in PB's hand. The remaining entries are in seven different hands.»

### 1932:

*July:* Fr McGuinness having been six years in office as superior was transferred to Blackrock to be professor of Dogmatic Theology. Fr Joseph P Sheedy CM succeeded him as superior arriving in Paris on August 20.

*September:* Fr Michael O'Callaghan CM DD succeeded Fr McGuinness as professor of Dogmatic Theology. He had been professor of Dogmatic theology in Blackrock before coming to Paris, and also bursar.

*October:* Fr Kevin Cronin CM was ordained at Dublin on October 9 and appointed to Paris where he replaced Fr Peter Mullan who was changed to Castleknock. Fr Cronin teaches Latin, English and Irish to Philosophers, and History to Theologians.

Fr Patrick Boyle CM retired from active work as a professor in the summer of 1932. His class in Canon Law was taken by the Moral Professor Fr John Roughan CM and his Sacred Eloquence class by Fr Joseph Sheedy CM who also took classes in Pastoral

Theology with the 4th Divines. Fr Boyle continued to live in the College as retired superior and acted as confessor to the students until his death which occurred unexpectedly on the morning of January 3 1933. He had been superior of the Irish College from 1889 to 1926. He was buried in Arcueil<sup>9</sup> in the plot where rests the late Dr McHale on January 5 1933. R.I.P. Present at his Requiem Mass were Right Rev Joseph Byrne CSSp, bishop-elect of Kilimanjairo, Mr Boland of the Free State Legation, the members of the Bureau Gratuit and its Past President. Requiems were held in St Peter's, Phibsboro, and St Vincent's, Cork on January 31 and February 14 respectively, organised and attended by Past Students and many priests. Both masses were celebrated by the Very Rev Nicholas Cooke, President of St Patrick's College, Thurles, who was President of the Past Students' Union.

**1933:**

*September:* Fathers John Oakey CM and Joseph McNamara CM were placed in Gateacre and Cork respectively and Fr Patrick Travers CM DD replaced them as professor of Philosophy and Dean. As the students were going for History lectures to the Institut Catholique Fr Cronin substituted Natural Philosophy for History in his professional work. Five Sisters of St Joseph of Annecy were installed on September 5. Fr Travers arrived on the 18th.

**1934:**

*September:* Fr James O'Donovan CM arrived from Gateacre to replace Fr James Milner who was appointed to his place in Gateacre. Fr O'Donovan was appointed professor of French and Natural Philosophy. He arrived in the College on September 17. He had previously been on the College staff. Fr Milner attended a course in the Sorbonne and obtained a Strangers' Teaching Certificate in French. Fr O'Callaghan acted as Community Bursar and the superior as College Bursar.

**1935:**

*September:* Fr Edmund O'Hanlon CM who had been professor of Philosophy in Blackrock arrived to replace Fr John Roughan as professor of Moral Theology & Canon Law. He was also asked to be Spiritual Director and Fr Travers was appointed Vice-Rector. Fr James Sheil CM replaced Fr Cronin, coming from Gateacre. Fr Cronin departed to be professor in Strawberry Hill.

**1936:**

Fr James Cahalan CM arrived September 13 to complete staff, Fr Denis O'Sullivan remaining as retired professor being unable to teach owing to deafness. The staff and their work for the year was arranged as follows:

Fr O'Hanlon — Moral, Canon Law and Spiritual Director.

Fr O'Callaghan — Dogma, Social Sc. and Community Bursar.

Fr Travers — Philosophy, Music, Liturgy and Vice-Rector.

Fr Sheil — 1st Yr French, English, Ceremonies and Dean.

Fr Cahalan — Latin, Logic, History of Philosophy, Natural Philosophy.

Fr Sheedy — Elocution, Sacred Eloquence, Pastoral Theology, Old Testament, College Bursar and Rector.

Fr O'Sullivan — (Retired).

**1937:**

*May 20:* Fr O'Sullivan was recalled to Blackrock. He died in hospital in Dublin a few months later.

*September:* Fr Thomas Fagan CM replaced Fr Cahalan who was appointed bursar and professor of Philosophy in St Joseph's, Blackrock. He arrived on the 14th.

**1938:**

*September:* Fr Sheedy transferred to Mill Hill as Director of the Sisters of Charity. Fr Patrick Travers CM succeeded him as Rector, commencing on September 18. He took classes in Sacred Eloquence, Pastoral Theology and Sacred Chant. Fr Cahalan returned to the College to teach Mental Philosophy in place of Fr Travers. Fr Fagan was appointed Dean in place of Fr Sheil who taught English, Latin and 2nd French. The students attended lectures in Sacred Scripture at the Catholic Institute as last year, the professor taking them over the matter again subsequently in the College.

«That is the final entry in the notebook. Fathers Vincent O'Dea and Thomas Cashin were appointed to the staff in 1939 but never took up their appointments. In 1945 Fr Henry Casey was appointed Rector and took up residence. He became ill after a short while and was replaced as priest-in-residence but not as Rector by Fr William McGlynn. Fr Travers was re-appointed as Rector in 1949 but instead of residing in the College he visited it a few times a year. He was replaced as Rector in 1972 by Fr Thomas Fagan who likewise does not reside in the College.»

### Notes

1. Théodore Clue and Dominique-Jean Bergheaud were French confrères.
2. John McCann was a sub-deacon who died before receiving deacon's orders. He was buried in the cemetery of Arcueil-Cachan in a grave opened a month earlier for a Cashel student. This grave was used until April 1891; there are eleven burials in it. When Arcueil cemetery was opened in 1903 the old cemetery became Cachan cemetery, but in ICP usage continued to be referred to as Arcueil.
3. Depouillant, Larghaud, Le Roy and Noyer were apparently French laybrother confrères but I have been unable to find any trace of them in the CM archives in Paris.
4. John Dowling and John Doolin would appear to be the same person.
5. Dr McHale was a nephew of Archbishop McHale of Tuam. He was the first person to be buried in the second ICP grave in Arcueil-Cachan. There are ten burials in it, the last being that of Patrick Boyle CM in 1933.
6. PM was ordained in 1866 and entered the CM in the same year. He went to China in 1871 and died there in 1882. (Note of P Boyle).
7. WB also entered in the year of his ordination.
8. PM entered "for a few weeks". (Note of P Boyle).
9. See note 2 above.

## Forum

### **“This is thy house...”**

De Paul House opened its doors on 25 September 1981 to Sean Farrell, John Larkin and Conor Shipsey and two weeks later to Killian Hannigan and Michael Murphy. Together the five spent the next four weeks as postulants, working themselves into the routine of the house, aided by the capable guidance of Fr Regan their director.

The postulants did a retreat and on 6 November were accepted into the community, and except for some difficulty at the notorious cincture-tying ceremony it was a joyous occasion. Joy was the theme on the next night also when the lives of two of the seminarists were miraculously spared after a road accident. They both received minor injuries and shock but were inspired with their new lease of life which God granted them. Thus began the year.

The students returned to their studies in Maynooth; the seminarists worked and studied in the house, with the customary day's pastoral work in Stewart's Hospital where we gained infinite experience working with the residents and staff. Fr Nolan took us for Scripture, Fr Rafferty for English and Fr Murphy for Human Development; many thanks to them for their time, as we know there was much progress made. The priests in the house guided us in other studies, Fr Moran, Fr McCullagh and Fr Regan in Vincentiana, Psalms and pastoral work, and New Testament way to community respectively. We wish Fr Rafferty every blessing in his new assignment.

The usual retreats were done during the year, the sems joining the students for a retreat done at the start of the year. It was preached by Fr Lane and was most fruitful; many thanks to Fr Lane, and we wish him God's grace in his new office. We also had many weekends of recollection, one of which was preached by Frances Hogan; she gave us many new insights from the Gospel on community life.

We are most grateful to people who speak to us on any topic. This year was very fruitful indeed. We had Mr Bewley speaking about the Travellers, Fr Flanagan on St Teresa of Avila. Sisters Guy OSU and Philomena MMM who were on the missions in South America spoke to us about their work there. Fr Dermot McCarthy came and showed us the film which he made on St Vincent with the *Radharc* team, and gave

us many insights into the way of life and spirituality of St Vincent. Mrs McStay spoke to us about the problem of battered wives. We will never tire of welcoming Fr Davitt, who on one of his visits this year took us on a nostalgia trip through the history of Glenart, including interesting background to some of the furniture we have here in De Paul which was salvaged from Glenart.

Visits from Fr Mullan gave us information about what the confrères in the Province and in the rest of the world are doing. On one visit in particular he spoke of the confrères in China and their struggle. In all his conversations he offered us much guidance and enlightened us in the spirit of St Vincent. Our most honoured visitor was Fr Cullen who made a surprise visit. In efforts to prepare for his coming with only half an hour's notice we were, I am sorry to say, in a state of panic.

Of course on Christmas Day we were glad of the tradition of having the confrères visit us. It gives us a chance to get to know them and their work, and they can hear about us. After Christmas, when the students went home for their holiday, the sems went to Sunday's Well, Cork. Though legally continuing our seminaire we had a marvellous time, living in the parish and exploring the city.

On another outing we went to the Liturgy Centre in Carlow and saw contemporary trends in liturgy in operation; this caused interesting and varied reactions. We also spent a weekend in the Columban Fathers' house in Dalgan, Co. Meath, doing a Value Clarification course directed by Fr M Maguire; needless to say everyone was "clarified".

For our pastoral formation one went to Damascus House, one to St Patrick's, Armagh, one to Phibsboro, and two to Trudden House in Co. Wicklow to work with Travellers' children. Those in community houses partook of the work of those houses, but what we all valued most was being able to see another community in action, giving us a second point of view on Vincent's ideas.

We had a "Come and See" weekend in February when a group of young men came and lived with us for the weekend, just to have a look at the place. Talks, prayer sessions, films and general chat was the order of the day; some people got evicted from their beds to make room, and had to sleep on the floor. The happy atmosphere of the house prevailed and everyone benefitted.

Certainly the most profound thing for the seminarists was our pilgrimage. This was the first year any such venture was undertaken. It was to be a journey on foot to any place of pilgrimage in Europe, spending two weeks walking to it, a week at the destination making a retreat, and a week to make the return journey by whatever means we could. Two

went to Taize and three to Lourdes. It involved a lifetime of experiences, both good and bad. The sheer physical stress of the journey was nearly too much for us and our success can be attributed only to God's help in response to our earnest prayers. We travelled without the comfortable supports of modern living, with sandals to walk in, a tent to sleep in and a map and God's grace to guide us. Many difficulties were encountered. Hunger, fatigue, frustration and total insecurity brought us to a greater awareness of God's plan for us; we were laid bare before our maker and could not avoid him. We still rejoice when we think of the hospitality we received from the people we met, and the obvious guidance of God with each struggling step we took. We were humbled, but made certain and strong as to what God wanted of us. Thus began the summer.

Academic life might have quietened a little but the running of the house and gardens did not. Our enigma is grass. We spend months trying to make it grow, and when it starts growing we can't control it and it causes many hours of sweat and labour.

Eight of us went to Rosstown in Co. Donegal where we spent two weeks in a rented house. Though the weather was not great we had a marvellous time. The rest of the students went to Kerry where, I believe, they had great weather; but I think Donegal looks so much better when the sun is not shining.

We were honoured this summer with visits from Donatus, a Vincentian student from Nigeria, and Job and Twalde, two Ethiopian Vincentian students. We spent much time together and were enlightened by them, as I hope they were by us. We took them with us on our revived traditional visit to the Holy Faith Sisters in Kilcoole and a great night was had by all. The Africans were amazed by the amount of songs we knew, but we were amazed when they got up and danced as they sang their song; they said it was part of the song. I hope we will see them again sometime.

After everyone had been home for their week's holiday we returned to finish our summer work and prepare for the re-opening of Maynooth. On 1 October Stephen Monaghan joined us as a student; he will probably do his seminaire next year when the numbers are right. We are now all studying in Maynooth but still living here as a community in De Paul House where there is never a dull moment, only peaceful ones. "Keep them in thy name whom thou hast called and sanctify them in truth".

Michael Murphy.

## TRANSITION

**James McCormack**

Would Vincent de Paul in his 45th year have been accepted for Celbridge? (Would he have applied?) What would the psychological test have made of his North African interlude — if such there was? I'm only joking — digressing before I commence: missionary's old rope-trick to see if you're paying attention.

Latterly, when stuck for something to say to a group of Religious, I grope for a hank entitled "Breakdown in Religious Life". In bare outline it goes something like this:<sup>1</sup>

Religious Orders, like any other social group, go through a 5 stage life-cycle.

- 1. Foundation:** the Founder and his companions make a new response to the Gospel in terms of their own historical situation and its needs. This is the pneumatical, charismatic phase: there is a strong sense of cohesion and purpose — a simple profound sense of destiny.
- 2. Expansion:** more and more people wish to join the community because of its manifest relevance and authenticity. New foundations take place. But in order to keep the movement alive and going in the right direction various control measures are increasingly introduced to help guide and train the growing numbers. The original charisma or inspiration is institutionalised.
- 3. Stabilisation:** innovation and adaptation tend to slow down; members feel that a successful formula has been found for maintaining their apostolic activity. The expression of faith begins to shift from taking new initiatives to remaining faithful to the established regime and pattern of life. Indeed, such fidelity becomes the touchstone of orthodoxy. The Order becomes wealthy and influential as people wish to support its worthy medical/educational, etc. projects. It becomes comfortable — the process of decay has thus begun, though on the face of it, things couldn't be better.
- 4. Breakdown:** there is doubt and questioning about the whole purpose and form of the established regime and way of life as maintenance of the institutional structures has come to loom larger than the original inspiration. Individuals, dissatisfied, begin to go off to do their own thing. Received rules, explanations, symbols (clothing e.g.) no longer persuade or unify as formerly — there is something out-of-date about them. Things fall apart. There is a loss of confidence, and because the community transmits ambiguous or irrelevant signs, it no longer attracts sufficient new personnel.

**5. Transition:** a transition period ensues during which the Order either slides into extinction (— less likely, decides to wind itself up —), or successfully adapts to the changed circumstances, leading to a re-formation and a new start to the cycle.

Sociologists stress, and it's hard to disagree, that there is an inevitability to the cycle — the breakdown has been the result of a social process. It can take several centuries for it to work itself through, or it can happen in the lifetime of an individual, depending largely on the prevailing rate of change in society at large. The evidence seems to show that Religious Life on a worldwide scale has been going through a period of Breakdown in recent years and entering a Transition phase.

So, latterly, the Irish Vincentians have found themselves at the Breakdown point — gurgling down the plughole in fact — which wasn't fair as we're such a harmless, well-intentioned crowd of lads. Now we are in Transition, caught between life and death. What's to be done? A currently-fashionable response among Religious Orders and Congregations, so straitened, is to retrace one's steps towards one's origins in order to investigate the life of the Founder and try to identify his charism. We ourselves have laboured industriously at this, and come up with three expressions of the Vincentian charism as lived and experienced by three groups of confrères of this Province — each of them valid, by definition. Necessarily, compromise was used in reaching the final text — compromise achieved by the assurance of the Directors that what we were coming up with was a valid expression of the charism — hence, by implication, not the only one, as indeed the products of the other two groups established. Already comparisons have been made between the three formulae — which seems self-evidently pointless: If sixty-odd confrères agree after five days deliberation that such and such is a valid expression of *their* lived experience of what it is to be a Vincentian, what sense does it make to say that this is better or worse than another sixty confrères' valid expression of *their* lived experience of the charism? (If it was not a valid expression then, of course, the process was at fault). It does underscore the fact, however, that there can be several — or is it several dozen — valid expressions of what the charism is, sufficiently different to cause argument. At other times, in other circumstances, yet further valid expressions of the charism could be arrived at: people's lived experiences are different, and are differently perceived and expressed at different times. What would really be needed in order to evaluate the process would be a comprehensive hermeneutics of how any statement was arrived at, including an investigation of what every confrère thought

he had subscribed to in accepting that particular formula as a valid expression of his experience — and if he still subscribes to it; not to mention the extent to which five days on the trot of this type of going-on darkens the understanding, weakens the will, and leaves in one a strong inclination to sign anything and be done with it.

So much for the “lived” charism. Then there is the original charism: how many valid expressions of *that* can there be? And is squaring any valid statement of it with any valid statement of the lived charism the same as squaring any other expression of the original with any other of the lived? And is all this to follow a star or to chase a mirage?

If the search for charism is fraught with perplexity, less obviously the relentless search for the historical Vincent de Paul may be an even more fruitless pursuit — a harmless enough pastime in itself, I suppose, but, like all pastimes, in danger of becoming an end in itself; as though, if we really tracked down his every last thought, health symptom, spiritual antecedent and earthly dwelling place we would somehow be the better equipped — indeed *only* then be equipped — for the task which confronts us.

Soon the complete correspondence and writings of St Vincent will be with us in English/American. What did the originals do for the French Provinces? They didn't read them? Neither will we. Of course, they will be dipped into at retreats and occasional “conferences”, but the well-known ordinary confrère does not find the letters of Vincent to Louise de Marillac or to Jane Frances de Chantal sufficiently interesting to induce him to read them in any sustained way; and he remains unpersuaded that a systematic application of himself to them will significantly benefit his apostolate. St Vincent's contemporaries in the Congregation did not know what he wrote to Madame Goussault or to the various de Gondis — was their ministry thereby impaired? Is there any evidence of a similar pre-occupation among the first generation of Irish Vincentians? Had there been, we could scarcely be unaware of it, however rudimentary our knowledge of our origins. St Vincent wasn't the point for them: what they thought the Lord was calling them to do in order to meet the pressing needs of the Church in Ireland was the point; and if it seemed canonically tidier to others that they have a revered patron whose Congregation was ostensibly already engaged in the sort of work that they themselves seemed called to do, then so be it. (The initiative seems to have come from Paris, not from Usher's Quay). And look how the French connection began to bedevil the Irish Province with a dozen years of its foundation: the push for conformity of life-style and order of day with the then Parisian model. (A nice topic for investigation for the 150th

anniversary of the Usher's Quay community would be the extent to which the latter's foundation really became integrated with the Congregation of the Mission: throughout its history it seems to have had little or no sense of belonging to an international organisation. I'm joking — the old rope trick again: just testing the blood pressure).

For practical purposes we know enough about Vincent, and how he thought, and what he did: anything more is probably escapism. If we want to find the saint, then we shalln't do so by a further riddling of his literary remains, or by chateau-bottled pilgrimages through rural Gaul to built-over vestiges of his erstwhile quasi-domiciles. Only the poor will lead us to him as we minister the Gospel of Jesus Christ to them. If we do that, we shall recognise what St Vincent was on about — and that's to have found him, and indeed Jesus Christ, in the only way that ultimately makes sense.

A few weeks ago I heard a Jesuit priest ruminating on Breakdown in Religious Life and about what should be done. His thesis was roughly as follow: What is the Holy Spirit saying to the established, declining Congregations about Religious Life? He is telling them to look at the new communities that are being raised up everywhere by the same Spirit of God in response to the needs of the Church and the world. What is characteristic of such new communities? Three recurring common factors are observable:

1. a lively belief in the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through them;
2. face to face relationships — both *ad intra* and *ad extra*: such are the dynamics of evangelisation and making disciples;
3. meetings of small groups to share freely what the Spirit is saying to them, and doing in their lives.

It seems to me that the latter was the original nature of the community conferences before they become ossified in their familiar form. Possibly the idea can now best be actualised by confrères of like mind from different local communities getting together regularly in small groups for fellowship and sharing. Often local community conferences and spiritual get-togethers, including liturgies, cannot work because they take place under a heavy burden of relationship and work problems which prevent that openness and trust which is required. Would this not be divisive? Well, divisions already exist, in the sense that confrères perceive and react to the Breakdown differently; and some will always view negatively anything that disturbs the *status quo* however little the *quo* any longer

deserves such status. Further, there is no historical evidence that any Congregation has been re-formed *en-bloc*: it has always been a matter of some people hiving off to start again, or of others dropping out when the ball game changes radically. All that having been said, though, it would be very important that such informal get-togethers would not become semi-secret closed shops paralleling ordinary community life. On the contrary, openness, simplicity, and a free flow of information and brotherly love would seem to be of the essence. It might be a step from Transition to Re-foundation.

#### REFERENCE

1. As far as I know, the earliest elaboration of this thesis was that by Lawrence Cada s.m. and Raymond Fitzs.m. in "The Recovery of Religious Life", *Review for Religious*, vol. 34, no. 5, (Sept. 1975).

For my own convenience I have here simply presented the exposition of it as given by Bernard F. O'Connor O.P. in "The Future of Religious Life", *Supplements Doctrine and Life*, vol. 16, no. 74 (March/April 1978), pp. 71-97.

## OBITUARY

### Father Gerard Galligan, C.M.

It would be said of Fr Gerard Galligan as it was said of The Little Flower that he was sick most of his Community life. Yet his Apostolate like hers, was far-reaching and effective. Even in those last months of his illness, troubled in mind and body, he reached out and touched the lives of others. Witness — that wreath of Red Roses on his coffin from a fellow patient in Claremont Nursing Home, 'To my dear friend, Fr Gerard Galligan with love from H'. She too had walked the Via Dolorosa, strengthened to carry her cross by Gerry's example.

Gerry knew and loved the people of St Vincent's Parish. He had amazing knowledge of family ramifications in the parish (not just where the best cups of tea could be had!) and it would be an act of extreme rashness to challenge his opinion especially if he was seen to reach for his "moleskins" to emphasise a point. In better, happier days I can remember him using the same gambit at the Card Table to scare away the fainthearted!

In the Rock Gerry played a part in our formation. He could have done a commercial for a certain Hair Cream product with his dark, well-groomed hair and his good-looking tanned features. I do not think Gerry took his post as Sub-Director too seriously. We welcomed his keen sense of humour in rather grim days. Years after he would accept responsibility for some of his products, not so for others!

Never to be forgotten were his classes on Etiquette. His examples were obviously drawn from real life. Little did I know at the time that soon after ordination I would encounter one of those examples in the flesh — the Tón le Teine' character addressing the freezing Community from his vantage point in the Community Room.

'Never again — North or South'. Those were his prophetic words when he returned from Ireland in 1977 and so it was to be.

During his many years of very restricted ministry, he found in Mary's Medal a great means of a very effective Apostolate. Through Gerry many people came to know and love her. She did not forget him. On her Birthday September 8th 1981, she took him to meet her Son. No doubt through her intercession Gerry was given a merciful judgement. May he rest in peace.

Denis Corkery CM.

**GERARD GALLIGAN CM**

Born: Enniskillen, 21 August 1911.

Entered the Congregation: 7 September 1930.

Final vows: 8 September 1932.

Ordained priest by Dr Wall, Auxiliary Bishop of Dublin, in the Pro-Cathedral on 22 May 1937.

**APPOINTMENTS**

1937-1943 St Vincent's, Sheffield.

1943-1945 Sacred Heart, Mill Hill.

1945-1946 St Joseph's, Blackrock.

1946-1982 St Vincent's, Sheffield. Died 8 September 1981.

## Father John Kenny C.M.

In October 1982 at a diocesan area meeting in Damascus House I met Fr Michael Barrow SJ, a native of Goodmayes. Within minutes he spoke of John Kenny and the wonderful way he had with his mother Mrs Agnes Barrow and Arthur, his father, who has helped with the finances of St Cedd's parish from the beginning. Yes, John had a wonderful way with everybody — men, women, teenagers and children. He met each one's need with an ingratiating warmth and respect. People knew he was a good priest, a genuine person. The confrères know John's mixture of mirth, wit, laughter, deep concern, and disarming gentleness; so did the people.

I often felt that John had taken a vow not to waste a minute. In Goodmayes he rose about six every morning. He opened the church and attended to the chores in the furnaceroom, sacristy, church and kitchen before morning prayer at 6.45. The regular life since his joining the community in 1933 until his leaving Armagh in 1969 made discipline and order look easy.

As bursar he provided for everybody's needs before his own. He got good wine for the confrères and I cannot recall our not having our little cellar stocked. He was most austere towards himself. He was the confrère nearest to St Vincent for eating crusts of bread and the last scraps. He was severe on Brother Ass. His only concession to self was a stretch on the bed after lunch which was often interrupted by phonecalls, door bells for parishioners and for deliveries to the club rooms and social centre.

John planned his forays into his district with characteristic order. He was probably at his very best in visiting people. Did his little breakdown before leaving Armagh add an extra dimension of understanding to his tenderness with people? He joked, laughed, consoled and encouraged, and sat on the carpet to play with children, and before leaving he had found an affirming word for everybody in the house. During the 1975 mission the missionary, who had thirty years experience, found John's district the best visited he had ever known. "The Lord takes delight in his people" and so did John.

He was very much at home with a typewriter and Gestetner. After so many years of studying the classics he had a gift for the simple and accurate turn of phrase. His book-keeping and filing were impeccable. His work for building up parish finances, and especially the Covenant Scheme, was second to none.

John put the Mass and the preaching of God's word as the central way of helping people to know more and to serve God in community. The fever of his busy life never prevented him from a thorough preparation. He found preaching quite a burden, so his preparation began on Monday. By mid-week he had pencilled out his homily and by Friday it was neatly typed. After that he took it to the confessional with him on Saturday and if he had a little break he would write in a few words here and there. By Sunday it was well mastered and delivered with conviction. It savoured more of the practical St James than of the high-soaring St John. He never forgot the challenge of the good news and the cost of discipleship. His listeners knew he lived what he preached and he was himself good news to them.

Fr Vincent Dwyer O Cist. would disagree with John in his hardly ever taking a day off. All I can say is that John got great fulfilment and refreshment from his many conversations with all the characters about the parish. If virtue means joy and ease in doing good, John's virtue of living for the people recreated his spirit. Of course, he was probably far too hard on Brother Ass.

His poverty was remarkable. He often sported a patch on the knee of his trousers, and his clothes were shiningly well worn. His room, which was bedroom, bursar's office and store for parish odds and ends, was crying out for renewal! After some years we prevailed on him to have it decorated but only on certain conditions. A parishioner, Jim Coady, and himself had got a tin of paint and (provided he had not to vacate the room) would paint it wall by wall. Jim Coady worked on buildings and some secondhand desk was bought very cheaply; John's furnishings were complete. After his death I noticed the same paint on the walls, no

armchair, just a chair and the desk. Each year after his summer vacation he handed back at least half of his holiday money. He was happy to follow the poor man of Nazareth to an austere degree.

As we awaited the Reception of the Remains in St Cedd's church in June Mgr Creede (who used to choose John to hear the priests' confessions on Diocesan Days of Recollection) said to me: "Wait till you see what the people think of John! They're shrewd judges". The men insisted on carrying the remains from Seven Kings to St Cedd's church, fifty priests concelebrated and 1300 people filled the church. People wept for a long time afterwards as though mourning a dearest brother. Married people said they found his advice better than CM AC, teenagers found inspiration and children great affection in John. He had served the Church with a constant devotion. He has entered into the story of Armagh and the parish of St Cedd's, and he has entered into the lives of so many people by showing how the gospel became a reality in his life — the good news with a smile. People have travelled from London to visit his grave in Armagh. A wooden carving of St Vincent has been presented to St Cedd's in memory of John. The Boys from the County Armagh have a corner!

Michael Dunne CM.

#### JOHN KENNY CM

Born: Markethill, Co. Armagh, 6 December 1912.

Entered the Congregation: 3 September 1933.

Final vows: 12 September 1935.

Ordained a priest by Bishop Wall in the Pro-Cathedral, Dublin, 18 May 1940.

#### APPOINTMENTS

1940-1968 St Patrick's, Armagh.

1968-1982 St Cedd's, Goodmayes.

Died 12 June 1982.