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The Catholic Motor Missions in Missouri

Patrick McKenna, C.M.

Feeling the pains of prejudice is not a new experience for Catholics in America. Indeed, since the founding of the colonies they have suffered greatly because of tremendous misunderstandings of Catholic doctrine, misconceptions of Catholic life and institutions, and just plain hate on the part of non-Catholics. For this reason the American Church has had to live defensively for most of its existence.¹ This defensiveness was not merely apologetic for there were times when anti-Catholicism became extremely violent as the burning of the Ursuline convent in Boston showed in 1834. For the most part, anti-Catholic prejudice would flare-up randomly. In 1887, however, some of it found an organized expression in the founding of the American Protective Association (APA).² Founded solely as an anti-Catholic organization, the APA, through literature, lectures, and campaigns for more rigid immigration laws, worked to curb what it saw as the very grave danger of the growth of the Church.³ It was believed that by cutting off the flow of foreigners, particularly Europeans, one would cut off the main source of growth for the church in America. What motivated the members of the APA was the belief that there was a "Romanist" movement growing throughout the country which had as its goal the overthrow of the public school system⁴ and the institution of

¹Vincent F. Holden, C.S.P., *The Yankee Paul: Isaac Thomas Hecker* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1958), pp. 189-190.

²Gustavus Myers, *The History of Bigotry in the United States* (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 219.

³Myers, p. 219.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 220.

the Roman hierarchy in the American government in order to give the Pope complete control of the government and make Papal subjects of the American citizenry.⁵

In time, the APA withered away, but its seeds of violent anti-Catholicism had been sown all around the country and it did not take long for them to sprout and flower. They grew uncultivated until the 1920's when the nation witnessed the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan. The Klan still possessed all of its old prejudices but this time also made it quite clear that they did not accept Catholics because of their allegiance to an institution foreign to the government of the United States.⁶ It was the same fear of Papal "invasion" and "conquest" that the APA spread during the last century.

One is inclined to inquire as to the cause of all this hate for Catholics. It has been observed that one reason for it is that the founding of the colonies was primarily a Protestant endeavor and so they considered America their land and their heritage. Consequently, Catholics were looked upon as intruders. This attitude was inflamed during the mid-1800's with the large-scale immigration of (especially) Irish. The rapid growth in the social, political, and financial prestige of these immigrants also served to increase the bitterness felt towards them.⁷

Another source of conflict is that the Catholic religion is radically different in focus from Protestant religions. Protestantism in America focuses on the individual and his relationship to God, and church services serve primarily as a means to individual union with Him. Also, because of this focus

⁵Ibid., p. 226.

⁶Ibid., p. 276.

⁷Ibid., p. 222.

on the individual's relationship to God, Protestants tend to be conscious of not letting their religion get in the way with the functioning of society.⁸ Catholicism, on the other hand, centers around community and the communal witnessing of the Good News to the world. Its respect for tradition also sets it apart from Protestantism which values independence and development.

To hold non-Catholics entirely responsible for misunderstanding the Church would be neither true nor just. On June 29, 1908 the Apostolic Constitution "Sapienti Concilio" was promulgated by Pope Pius X, in which the United States was declared to be an independent diocese and thus no longer to be considered as mission territory.⁹ Conceivably this recognition of the maturity of American Catholicism should have relieved some of the pressure surrounding the issue of Papal domination for it gave the Diocese of the United States a certain amount of freedom to develop its own identity. Indeed, it did begin to function on its own and make a distinctive mark upon society. There were outspoken Bishops who made themselves heard throughout America both in speech and in published pronouncements such as the "Bishops' Program of Social Reconstruction" drafted in 1919¹⁰ The Bishops' Program was a rather radical pastoral letter which called for numerous labor and social reforms as a response to some post-war problems. There were others, too, who called upon Catholics to promote social reforms and to

⁸John Tracy Ellis, *American Catholics* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1956), p. 155.

⁹"Sapienti Consilio," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 1 (1909), p. 12.

¹⁰James Hennesey, S.J., *American Catholicism: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1981), p. 229.

take an active part in them rather than simply fulfilling their religious obligations.¹¹

Yet, for all this, in the mid-1920's there was still a tendency for the Church to look to Rome for its leadership.¹² And though there appeared to be a lively spirit of reform and renewal within the Church itself, one writer observes that these things were superficial:

The pageantry, the ebullient popular spirituality, the beginnings of liturgical awakening, broad social concern and the philosophy of self-confidence that underlay it all masked a serious deficiency in American Catholicism....Little, if any, serious theological reflection emerged from the American experience, certainly nothing accepted as comparable to the imports.¹³

The imports that the writer refers to were from Europe and bearing this in mind it does not seem difficult to understand the Protestant perception that Catholicism was not an American but a foreign religion. How else could they be expected to interpret American Catholicism when it sought to reflect on the experience of its people using primarily European thought and method?

The American Church was learning quickly, though. It was also growing rapidly. In the ten years from 1920 to 1930 the number of Catholics in America grew by more than two million, with immigrants from southern and eastern Europe contributing greatly to this increase.¹⁴ This influx of

¹¹Ibid., p. 247.

¹²Ibid., p. 243.

¹³Ibid., pp. 258-259.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 237.

foreigners prompted passage of the Reed-Johnson act in 1924 which set quotas upon the number of immigrants allowed into the States annually, based upon the census of 1890. The passage of the act was not purely political but also had roots in the fear of Vatican conquest.¹⁵

All these fears were laid bare after the defeat of Alfred Smith in the presidential campaign of 1928. During his campaign he had been continually questioned about the extent of his allegiance to the United States. People were seriously concerned whether, in the event of conflict between the needs of the state and the dictates of Rome, he would not, as a Catholic, be bound by obedience to the Pope. To the non-Catholics of the country this situation would be completely unacceptable and they let their disfavor be known. Catholics began to see very clearly now that "they and their Church were an object of mistrust and suspicion" to most of their fellow Americans.¹⁶ Somehow, they had to show the rest of the nation that they were indeed patriotic Americans and that the principles of American democracy and the Catholic religion were really quite compatible rather than mutually exclusive.

When the stock market crashed in 1929 and the Depression ravaged the country, Catholics were affected along with everyone else. Ironically, there was an advantage in this for them for they had a chance to prove their loyalty to the United States by supporting the government in its efforts to resurrect the economy. Church leaders were careful, however, to show that their actions were well grounded in the Constitution in order not to awaken any latent anti-

¹⁵Ibid., p. 237.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 247.

Catholicism.¹⁷ Their loyalty during this time did not go unnoticed or unrewarded. Despite any prejudice which may have flourished throughout the populace of the country, many Catholics were given government appointments at all levels of the Roosevelt administration.¹⁸ Roosevelt himself had many friends in the Catholic hierarchy and was greatly impressed by the Church's ideas for social reform particularly as expressed in the encyclicals "Rerum Novarum" and "Quadragesimo Anno." Though the New Deal would have developed independently of the Papal pronouncements, it was still quite flattering to the Church that eleven of the twelve proposals made in the Bishops' Program became law during his administration.

But presidential favor did not guarantee acceptance or even tolerance from the people. Particularly in areas where Catholics were scarce, rumors, misunderstandings and stories, when convincingly presented, were readily accepted as fact and, once accepted, were not easily forgotten. Knowing this, anti-Catholic campaigners flooded these usually rural areas with literature and lectures defaming virtually every aspect of Catholicism.¹⁹ After doing this, it was merely a matter of letting human nature run its course by word-of-mouth with the aid of embellishment and lack of contrary information.

As has been stated, the Smith presidential campaign brought much of this anti-Catholicism into the open. In Perryville, Missouri, three Vincentian seminarians in particular were "deeply moved" by reports of especially

¹⁷Daniel J. O'Brien, *American Catholics and Social Reform* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 213-214.

¹⁸Hennessey, p. 260.

¹⁹Myers, p. 223.

malicious bigotry coming from the Bootheel area of the State. Not content to be merely concerned about the situation, Lester Fallon, Joseph Phoenix and Joseph McIntyre conspired and agreed to work in whatever way they could to dissipate at least some of the bigotry that existed. As students, however, they were not in a position in which they could easily act. So they drew up a contract between themselves "to the effect that [they] would, given the first opportunity, join together and go down into the towns of southern Missouri...and there ask for the privilege of talking in public."²⁰ This was in 1927.

They were not the first to feel the call to defend the Church in such a way. For many years the Catholic Evidence Guild and its forerunners had been explaining the Catholic religion in the streets of England, where the roots of strong anti-Catholicism reach back to the time of the formation of the Church of England. Recently the work of the Guild had been brought to the States and numerous Evidence Guilds were preaching in the streets of some East Coast cities. These guilds were not the seminarians' model, however, though they were aware of the work they were doing. Rather, they had read an article and seen a picture of a priest in Indiana who used to travel throughout the State explaining the Catholic religion. His very simple method was to arrive in the town, stand up a crucifix, and talk from the back of his car.²¹ Upon learning of him, the three were convinced of the feasibility of the work as well as the method they would use.

Fallon, Phoenix and McIntyre were all ordained to the

²⁰Recorded interview with Joseph E. McIntyre, C.M., conducted by John Rybolt, C.M., May 10, 1981. Herein referred to as "McIntyre/Rybolt Interview." Tape located in the De Andreis-Rosati Memorial Archives (DARMA): Oral history section.

²¹McIntyre/Rybolt Interview.

priesthood within the next three years, but it was not until 1934 that anything came of their promise to venture into southern Missouri in defense of the Faith. While teaching at Kenrick Seminary that year, Fallon learned through one of his students of Fr. Stephen Leven of the Diocese of Oklahoma City-Tulsa. Within the jurisdiction of his parish (which took in nearly an entire county) there were towns which had experienced violent KKK activity and as a result were very prejudiced toward Catholics.²² In response to these "sowers of error and discord," Fr. Leven began a campaign to teach the truth of the Catholic religion which involved speaking in the streets of the towns to any who would listen to him:

He rigged up a portable pulpit, had signs painted, and with this modest equipment he started out. He would go to a town and post his sign announcing that on a given night a Catholic priest would give a public lecture on the Catholic Church. Then throughout the summer months he would visit the towns with his pulpit once a week and give his talk.²³

Still quite interested in working to dispel anti-Catholic prejudice in Missouri, Fallon, desirous of an opportunity to work with him, contacted Leven. His request having been accepted and having acquired the necessary permission to do so, Fr. Fallon, during the summer of 1934, worked with Fr. Leven preaching in the streets of Oklahoma.

Upon his return from Oklahoma, Fallon contacted his confreres Phoenix and McIntyre and reminded them of the contract they had drawn up as students. Having acquired some definite ideas as to the method and logistics of

²²Lester Fallon, C.M., "It was in Bristow...", ante 1938, p. 1, DARMA box 3. Both authorship and date derived from text.

²³Fallon, p. 1.

conducting this kind of work, they began that autumn to plan their own apostolate. The planning progressed rapidly and by the spring of 1935 Frs. Fallon, Phoenix and McIntyre, along with Frs. Frederick Coupal and Joseph Daspit, who they also interested in the work, had all but completed the organizing of what came to be the Catholic Motor Missions. All they needed to do at this point was to acquire appropriate permission to do the work and to choose the towns in which they were going to preach.

From the beginning, the missionaries never lost sight of the primary end of their endeavors which was the "creation of tolerance."²⁴ They knew, because of the nature of the prejudice, that an approach aimed at harvesting converts would be "too bright a light to shine in the faces of the people they were going out to meet." If any good was to come of the Motor Missions, they would have to present their case gently and with patience, leaving the work of conversion to God.

With this as their purpose and in eager anticipation of a summer of successful and rewarding work, the missionaries began to search for towns in which to speak.²⁵ They knew that the Bootheel was the source of much anti-Catholic bigotry. Yet, this first year they did not want to wander into too remote areas for they wanted a central place where they could reside and from which they could work with relative

²⁴Joseph E. McIntyre, C.M., Outline of talk to Kenrick Mission Club, Personal Papers, December 12, 1935. DARMA box 2.

²⁵The five missionaries divided themselves into two groups with Coupal and Daspit working the Diocese of St. Joseph and Fallon, Phoenix and McIntyre the Diocese of St. Louis. This paper follows the latter group primarily because there is very little information regarding Coupal's and Daspit's missions and also because it was the successors of Fallon, Phoenix and McIntyre who eventually conducted all of the Motor Mission activity in the State.

ease.²⁶ Having chosen Cape Girardeau as their central location, they began to inquire about sources of bigotry in the area. From these inquiries they learned of the small town of Lutesville, Missouri, approximately thirty miles due west of Cape.²⁷

After they learned a little about the town and also the background of its bigotry, Fallon, Phoenix and McIntyre decided that Lutesville would be a good place for them to start their motor mission work.²⁸ A day or so prior to the first night of their mission, the three of them went to Lutesville to seek the permission of the mayor to speak in the town. Inquiring at the post office for him, the missionaries were told that there was no mayor but only a sheriff and that he could be found down at the power plant, which he owned and operated. They were warned, however, that the field they would have to cross to reach the plant was badly overgrown and that they probably would not want to cross it dressed as they were (they were in full clerical garb). Instead, it was suggested that they throw a rock onto the tin roof of the building and the sheriff would come across to them. The missionaries thanked the man for the information, and, following the road out of town, they found the field and the power plant just as they had been told. One of them picked up a rock and threw it onto the tin roof and, just as the man had said, out came a man to greet them who identified himself as the sheriff. The missionaries introduced themselves, told the sheriff of their intentions,

²⁶McIntyre/Rybolt Interview.

²⁷The missions conducted by both teams in 1935 were as follows: Fallon et al.: Lutesville, Bloomfield, Fredericktown, Benton, Cape Girardeau, Sikeston, Ironton. Coupal/Daspit: Plattsburg, Smithville, Kearney, Richmond, Hamilton, Brookfield, Macon. All ten towns are in Missouri.

²⁸The Lutesville story is taken from the McIntyre/Rybolt Interview.

and asked if he would mind if they spoke in the town. Seeing no reason why they should not, the sheriff gave them permission to speak from the town pump, located in the center of town, provided that they did not attack other religions. They assured him that this was the last thing they desired and thanking him for his kindness they returned to the town. They then commenced advertising by distributing handbills and posters throughout the town. These they placed in cars and carts, on telephone poles, and in shop windows (the barber was the only one to refuse them his window). They then returned to Cape to await the first night of the mission.

The missionaries arrived late in the afternoon on June 21, 1935. Pulling up to the pump where they were to speak from, they began to ready their equipment for their first lecture. They had acquired a second hand delivery truck to transport the gear they needed and on the sides had painted "Catholic Motor Mission." They had a small portable pulpit of wood with a very simple cross on the front. They also had a second hand public address system which enabled the talks to be heard easily at a considerable distance.²⁹ This resulted in many of the missionaries' listeners not visibly attending the lectures but instead listening from their porches or from their cars parked down the street, thus rendering it impossible for the priests to know just how many people they reached by their talks. This did not bother them, though, for they considered it enough that they were listened to attentively.³⁰

The most important piece of equipment for the Motor Missions, however, was the question box. This, as the name denotes, was a box, set up in as conspicuous a place as possible

²⁹Photographs of early equipment can be found in DARMA box 5.

³⁰Fallon, p. 5.

in the town, into which the people were invited to drop *any* questions they might have about anything Catholic. A pad of paper and pencil were placed with it as well as a sign reading, "If it is a question about the Catholic Church, ASK A CATHOLIC."³¹ The importance of the question box to the missionaries cannot be understated. It was through this means that the priests learned just what types of prejudice and ignorance prevailed in the town. They also discovered what it was the people were eager to learn, and this enabled them to direct their talks in such a way as to answer their questions. The question box became the most popular aspect of the missions as far as the people were concerned and once they understood its purpose the missionaries found "stuffing the box" unnecessary.³²

The success of the Motor Missions lay in their simplicity. Although an evening's meeting would last a couple of hours, it consisted of only one or two talks and then the answering of questions. This was the pattern the missions were to follow, with only one or two minor changes, throughout their existence.

The lectures were simple and focused on the basic points of doctrine that were most misunderstood and most controversial. Following this order, Fallon, Phoenix and McIntyre gave these talks during the first summer:

- 1 — The Need for Religion.
- 2 — The Credentials of the Church/The Bible.
- 3 — Sacraments in the Catholic Life.
- 4 — The Papacy.

³¹Joseph E. McIntyre, C.M., "Our Pulpit is the Street," *The Vincentian*, 13 (August 1935), p. 232. ε

³²Fallon, p. 5.

5— Penance and Matrimony.

6— Mary the Mother of God.³³

The presentation of these talks was done on a rotation basis with one man giving the lectures and another one answering the questions every night. The third man made himself available to the audience, judged their reaction and distributed literature.

Unfortunately, copies or outlines of these first talks are either non-existent or unavailable. However, it is safe to assume that the talks outlined in the *Motor Mission Manual*, compiled in 1949, were composed with the same regard for simplicity. From these, then, it is possible to get some idea of how the speakers treated their topics. For example, the outline for "The Pope and Infallibility" is almost four pages long.³⁴ It consists of twelve concise paragraphs each of which develops one point of the doctrine in such a way that it could be easily understood by anyone with minimal education.

Two things were key to any presentation. First, the topic had to be delivered with simple but precise logic so that those who were listening could comprehend its reasonableness. Secondly, it had to be delivered with the appropriate style. The speaker had to be careful to always be "expository and explanatory" and not to become argumentative, condescending, or resentful.³⁵ To become the latter would result in the speaker losing his audience at least and the team losing the mission at most.

The use of Scripture was also important to the

³³McIntyre, "Our Pulpit is the Street," p. 234.

³⁴Philip J. LeFevre, C.M. et al., *A Motor Mission Manual*, Mimeograph, August 15, 1949, pp. 23-26. DARMA box 6.

³⁵LeFevre, p. xiii.

presentation. Because the people the mission bands were preaching to were predominantly fundamentalists, their inability to ground their teaching in the Word, particularly as expressed in the New Testament, would have been disastrous. Indeed, even though the lectures were replete with Scripture references, the people still perceived contradictions between what they read in the Bible and what they heard or knew of Catholic practices. This is evidenced by the frequent request to “give a scriptural answer” to questions placed in the box.³⁶

“The King James version of the Bible [was] used for Scriptural quotations because this [was] the Bible most familiar to the majority of [the] audience.”³⁷ The missionaries found, however, that the use of this version helped in another way too. Because these non-Catholics were taught and believed that the Catholic Church was a perversion of the true church, it was quite a surprise to them to see that Catholicism could be grounded in “their” Bible. This was a tremendous first step in getting the people to see that the Catholic Church was not really what they thought it to be.

But despite the care the missionaries took to be simple and reasonable and despite their constant citations of Scripture, they kept receiving questions of all sorts through the question box. As was stated earlier, the question box was the most popular and interesting part of the program in the minds of the people and they would stay and “listen to a dry talk just to

³⁶This point can be illustrated by the questions that were placed in the question box. Typed reprints as well as original slips can be found in almost every box in DARMA.

³⁷LeFevre, p. xii.

hear the questions and answers.”³⁸ The popularity and success of the question box resided in the anonymity it provided the questioner. Anyone could put anything in it and, of course, this resulted in some rather inappropriate questions. But these questions were few. Usually the questions were asked from a sincere desire to understand some practice or point of doctrine. Realizing this, the speaker always made it a point to answer fully, plainly, and with sensitivity every question that was asked, excepting the most inappropriate. In the event that he did not know the answer he was expected to say so and promise to get the information for the next time.³⁹

It is impossible in this essay to list, even simply, all the different categories of questions that were asked during the Motor Missions. Some were silly, some searching, some curious, and some quite challenging. The practice of the missionaries was usually to leave the question box alone until the talks had begun since most of the questions could easily be answered in a sentence or two. Often they would receive questions which they presumed to have been written by the local minister because of their subject matter and style. Many times these were complex questions about doctrine or Church history which required lengthy answers. Rarely did they get questions of such depth that they could not be readily answered at the time, e.g. “Give us an honest explanation of the Western Schism; what happened and how it came about.”⁴⁰ But when they did, they did their best and made a

³⁸Fallon, p. 5.

³⁹LeFevre, p. xi.

⁴⁰McIntyre/Rybolt Interview.

point to supply, as simply as possible, the information requested.

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

What was our reaction after this first week's stand? That the work, first of all, is decidedly worthwhile and deserves to be promoted as intensely as possible. Whatever be the after effects, whatever be the disappointments we will undoubtedly meet, whether there be converts at once or not, the prime end of the movement has been realized. We have been allowed to stand in public and to explain the Catholic Church in a section where, a few years ago, bigotry was strong.⁴¹

Fr. McIntyre spoke also for Frs. Fallon and Phoenix when he made this expression of satisfaction with the Lutesville mission in 1935. Their satisfaction was to increase as the weeks of the summer passed so that by the time their seven week tour of southern Missouri towns was finished they could say with confidence that their work had been "successfully begun."⁴² They knew, however, that there was still much to be done and that without the support of other Catholics and additional personnel they would have neither funds nor men enough to carry on the work with any great effect.

Money for the first year of the Motor Missions was collected from unknown sources and amounted to approximately \$450.⁴³ The smallness of their fund forced the

⁴¹McIntyre, "Our Pulpit is the Street," p. 236.

⁴²Joseph E. McIntyre, C.M., "Preaching in the Street," *The Vincentian*, 13 (October 1935), p. 301.

⁴³Recorded interview with Joseph E. McIntyre, C.M., conducted by Patrick McKenna, C.M., March 16, 1983. Herein referred to as "McIntyre/McKenna Interview." Tape located in DARMA: oral history section.

missioners to be frugal and was part of the reason for choosing Cape Girardeau, with its inexpensive accommodations, as their base of operations. In the autumn of 1935 they began to appeal for funds in the parishes of St. Louis. The response was good and in this way they acquired sufficient funds to run the Missions for the next year. The practice of appealing to parishes was to continue until 1947 when the Office for the Propagation of the Faith began to provide substantial support in the name of the Diocese.⁴⁴

As early as the second week of the Missions they began to generate publicity in order to arouse interest in what they were doing. Fr. McIntyre, editor of *The Vincentian* magazine at the time, took care of most of the early publicity. It consisted primarily of articles in *The Vincentian*, *The St. Louis Register*, and a few secular periodicals. Later, they also made short, weekly reports on WEW, the Jesuit radio station in St. Louis. These means were effective in creating interest among the Catholic community of the diocese which, as has been seen, showed its support by contributing financially to the Mission. Their publicity spread the news of their work rapidly and proved to be effective in soliciting support from sources other than the parishes as well. Many donations came from people who had only read or heard of the work of the Motor Mission. One came in the form of two station wagons donated by a Community of Sisters in New Orleans. Another came from a St. Louis man who offered the missionaries his skill as an electronics engineer. This was indeed a blessing for with his consultation they were always insured sound equipment that functioned well at minimal cost.⁴⁵

⁴⁴*Financial Report for 1947*. DARMA box 3.

⁴⁵McIntyre/McKenna Interview.

Reports of the first summer of missions had quickened the interest of the Vincentian Community as well. Although there were a few skeptics, the confreres were generally supportive of the endeavor. This is evident by the fact that the number of regular missionaries tripled in the second year. This increase in the number of men allowed them, as a result, to increase the number of missions given that year by the same amount.⁴⁶

After two successful years of teaching the Catholic religion in the towns of Missouri, the organizers of the Motor Missions were confident that the apostolate was becoming established and could continue for some years. For this to happen, however, they needed a source of man-power that they could rely upon. They decided to ask for volunteers among the deacons of Kenrick and St. Mary's Seminaries. The participation of the deacons in the Motor Missions served a twofold purpose; for besides supplying men to preach, it also served as a training process for the future ministers. The experience of composing talks and delivering them to critical and sometimes hostile audiences proved to be invaluable to them. Street preaching also taught them "to think on their feet, to answer totally unexpected questions, to handle an adversary in a crowd, to meet people of all sorts, to compromise in certain situations, and to suffer embarrassment and humiliation in public."⁴⁷ Since the deacons received no formal training in street preaching before going on the missions, the experienced men in the hand would listen closely to their talks, observe their style, and after the program evaluate their performance. Usually this was simply a matter of

⁴⁶*Motor Mission Statistics: 1935-1949*, p. 1. DARMA box 6.

⁴⁷William Gillespie, C.M. Response to "Motor Mission Questionnaire," Q#9, March 3, 1983.

advising the neophyte to replace his technical language with more common terminology.⁴⁸

Now that they had sufficient personnel, money and equipment, the Motor Missions were ready to penetrate deeper into anti-Catholic Missouri. The summer of 1937 took them to the south-central portion of the state where they gave missions in Montier, Mountain View, Cabool and other towns in the area. Because there were no Vincentian houses in this area, it was necessary to seek residence in the vicinity of the missioned towns. Local pastors were usually happy to provide room and board for the missionaries because of the good work they did for the Church and also because they provided a bit of relief from his many duties.

The missions were conducted in the usual manner and the response of the non-Catholic participants was much the same as they had experienced in the past — cool and suspicious at first, but by the end of the week friendly and more relaxed. Catholics in the area, on the other hand, were immediately thrilled at the arrival of the priests. Many of them had not received any of the Sacraments in years because they lived so far from the parish church and found it either impossible or too inconvenient to make the journey regularly. When the missionaries would arrive in the town, therefore, these Catholics would soon make contact with them and ask to have the Sacraments ministered to them. This most often consisted in Confession and Communion in one of their homes.

It was in this way that the community at Piedmont was united and the Church founded.⁴⁹ Attie Blaine, a Catholic convert from the town, and her mother offered their home to

⁴⁸McIntyre/McKenna Interview.

⁴⁹McIntyre/Rybolt Interview.

the Vincentian missionaries to use as their residence while they gave their missions in the area. At this time, 1939, there was no church in the town. This became a great concern for Miss Blaine. She therefore proceeded, with the encouragement of her close friend Fr. Cyril LeFevre, to locate as many Catholics as possible living in the Piedmont area. Her method was to place a notice in the newspaper announcing the celebration of Mass at her home. The Catholics in the area, appreciative of the opportunity, happily responded to the invitation. At her insistence, Mass was celebrated every third Sunday of the month and the new found Catholic community responded faithfully.

There was not much of a possibility of them building a house of worship for themselves since they did not have the money for such a project. (Their collections each month were usually less than ten dollars.)⁵⁰ A group of Protestants, however, had been greatly moved by the work of the missionaries. As a token of their appreciation they approached Fr. McIntyre and asked him if he would be willing to take over the duties of a Catholic parish in Piedmont.⁵¹ They were apparently willing to supply labor, materials, and a site for the building of a church. McIntyre replied that he himself would be unable to take on the parish but that he would contact those who could arrange for someone to do so. It was not until a few years later, in the mid-1940's, that St. Catherine of Siena Church was finally built and the gift given over to the diocese.

This response was more than typical. Though the missionaries generally found themselves well received, they

⁵⁰Attie Blaine, Letter to Cyril LeFevre, C.M., October 29, 1940. DARMA box 4.

⁵¹McIntyre/McKenna Interview.

had to earn the acceptance and respect of the people. Many of the residents of the towns they visited had never seen a Catholic priest but had only heard stories. They were suspicious of these men dressed in black and wearing their collars backwards. Those who came to the lectures the first night or two were usually the more curious, perhaps wanting to see if all they had heard was true. Thus, the number attending at the beginning of a stand was notably smaller than on later nights.⁵² The missionaries were aware that their appearance and presentation on the first night could be key to the success of the mission, for those in attendance were watching and listening closely and were sure to discuss the program in the town the next day. This advertising by word-of-mouth was important for it was by this means that the number of listeners was to increase or decrease during the week and it was precisely by the number of listeners that the teams judged their success.

The men were able to allay many of the peoples' suspicions and convince them of their good will by two important practices. Most notable was that they never took up a collection, charged admission, or sold anything they gave away. Because many of the peoples' misconceptions were about the Church's constant desire for money, the conspicuous omission of a collection served to dispel one of the major sources of mistrust among them.⁵³ The speakers were also conscious of not attacking or demeaning other religions in their talks. This too was noticed by their listeners. The knowledge that they had nothing to fear from these strangely

⁵²Lester Fallon, C.M., "Preaching Christian Doctrine in the Street," ante 1938, p. 5. DARMA box 3. Both authorship and date derived from text.

⁵³P.J. LeFevre, p. v.

dressed men put them more at ease and made them more receptive to what the speaker had to say.

Yet, in the end, no matter how large or receptive an audience they spoke to, the missionaries could expect little, if any, tangible evidence at that time that they had done any good. Of course, they received gracious thanks for the time they freely gave to the people and also signs of good will such as they received at Piedmont. Once, at the end of a mission, the predominantly Baptist audience took up a spontaneous collection for the men as a token of their appreciation.⁵⁴ But how many falsehoods they laid to rest and how much relations between non-Catholics and Catholics improved they could not know then. These things they had to learn later through reports from pastors and other contacts they may have had in the area or by way of their own observation if they returned to the town later.

The only real proximate sign that they had struck a spark in the people was the request they received for further information at the end of a mission. At first, the missionaries would simply take down the addresses of those who were interested in more information and later would send them what they could. But soon it became evident by the number of requests they received that some regular method of providing this further information was going to be needed. Setting to work on an idea, Fr. Fallon soon created a new apostolate which was to become an immediate success.

The Catholic Correspondence Course, or Crusade Course as it was also known, began originally as the means of providing the people reached by the Motor Missions with further information about Catholic doctrine.⁵⁵ Within two

⁵⁴Fallon, "It was in Bristow...", p. 1.

⁵⁵McIntyre/Rybolt Interview.

months after it began in February 1938, however, it had already burgeoned into something much more. By this time the Course had students in eleven states and many more were constantly joining.⁵⁶ The format of the course was quite simple. The student was sent a copy of Bishop Noll's *Father Smith Instructs Jackson*, a simple Catholic catechism, as a text book. The book was divided into eight sections, each of which the student was tested on. When the test had been completed, it was sent back either to Kenrick or Perryville where it was corrected by a seminarian. Once it was corrected, it was returned to the student along with explanations and the next test. The entire process was free for the student; even return postage was provided for the completed tests.⁵⁷

The Motor Missions began immediately to promote the Correspondence Course. Starting the third or fourth day of the mission, the preachers would advertise the Course and encourage any who were interested to join. Then they would distribute registration forms along with their regular literature. The response of the people was good, with many joining the Course. This, then, became a good sign to the missionaries that their work was to some avail.

By the beginning of the 1939 season, the Motor Missions were a well established, albeit unofficial, apostolate of the Community. They were an effective apostolate as well. Reports were received from towns visited once that the tension between Protestants and Catholics was markedly diminished. In towns where the Missions were repeated the

⁵⁶ *Correspondence Course Scrap Book*, p. 1. DARMA box 7.

⁵⁷ Fallon, "Preaching Christian Doctrine in the Street," pp. 7-8.

missioners saw for themselves the improved atmosphere.⁵⁸ New towns were always being added to the mission lists and the number of people reached continued to grow. This growth was to continue until the call to arms was to beckon Americans to the defense of their country.

THE WAR & POST-WAR YEARS

As American soldiers continued to defend their country, so the men of the Catholic Motor Missions continued to defend the Catholic Church. World War II was somewhat of a mixed blessing for the Motor Missions. The most notable effects of the war were partially expressed in the number of missions given. In 1943, twenty-one missions were given, twelve fewer than the previous year.⁵⁹ This decline in the number of missions was to continue for the next five years, with as few as seventeen missions being given in 1945 and 1947. This was not a problem of personnel for there were still enough men interested in the work, both in the Diocese and the Community, to sustain a heavy season. Rather, it was the demands of the wartime economy that restricted the amount of work they could engage in.

The most prevalent obstacle to the Missions was the rationing of automotive parts and gasoline. Numerous letters written during the 1944 season contain requests for more ration tickets of all types in order to keep the vehicles in running order and to have enough gasoline to go from town to town. Because of the strict allotments of these goods, the missionaries were forced to be thrifter than ever. It also required that the towns they visit be not too distant from one

⁵⁸Clarence J. Bogetto, C.M., Response to "Motor Mission Questionnaire," Q#5, March 5, 1983.

⁵⁹*Motor Mission Statistics: 1935-1949*, p. 2.

another so as to conserve gasoline as well as mechanical wear and tear.

These economic restraints were not particular to the Motor Missions. The entire country was made to cut back in order to supply the troops abroad. This created an ideal situation for the missionaries at that time. The people were unable to travel far for entertainment and indeed many entertainers themselves were at war. Technology had not yet put a television in every living room and in the country movie theaters were "not too plentiful." Thus the missionaries were able to draw crowds if for no other reason than they provided the local citizenry with something out of the ordinary to do in the evening.⁶⁰

The format of the missions was essentially the same as that first night in Lutesville in 1935. In 1945, however, a new feature was added to the presentation. It was a silent movie on the celebration of the Mass, during which one of the men would explain the actions, elements, and accoutrements of the rite.⁶¹ This proved to be quite a successful feature and helped to clear up many misunderstandings about this central Sacrament. Later, other movies would be added to the Motor Mission repertoire and these too would prove to be popular.

Advertising methods also underwent a few minor changes. As always, posters and handbills were distributed throughout the towns and announcements for the lectures were placed in the local newspapers. The missionaries added to these through the tactic of sending penny post cards to all box-holders listed at the local post office, inviting them, in a

⁶⁰Gillespie, Q#8.

⁶¹Orlis F. North, C.M., "Street Preaching in 1945" *The Vincentian*, 23 (October 1945), p. 304.

more direct way, to attend the lectures on the Church.⁶² Announcements made over the local radio station rounded out the campaign whenever possible. This increase in advertising, however, did not insure the attendance of multitudes. The men began to realize that if they advertised too early, local Protestant ministers would either plan special services for their congregations on mission nights in an attempt to keep them from the lectures, or forbid them to attend all together. To remedy this, it was suggested that the mailing of post cards and distribution of posters and handbills be done on the preceding Saturday.⁶³ In this way, the posters would serve as a general announcement to the town while the post cards would arrive in the mail Monday as a last minute reminder.

Catholic interest in the Motor Missions had never waned. Throughout the first half of the 1940's collections were still being taken up in the parishes of the Diocese. These provided the majority of the income for the Missions. There were also donations from various religious groups as well as from the Diocese itself. Yet the directors of the Missions saw the value of Catholics' help in ways other than financial and with this their view toward Catholic participation in the Missions changed.

In 1935, it was made a point to remind local Catholics that the lectures to be given were specifically intended for non-Catholics. Thus they were asked not to attend.⁶⁴ This was not because they should not have heard what was being said in the talks. Rather it was felt that the presence of many

⁶²Gillcspic, Q#3.

⁶³P.J. LeFevre, p. ix.

⁶⁴McIntyre/Rybolt Interview.

Catholics would make the meeting appear to be some sort of service which would only serve to turn away non-Catholics for whom the talks were intended. There were always some Catholics in the crowd though, and the missionaries began to realize the good that was being done for them because of their talks. Many were having their own confusions dispelled and many who had fallen away were brought back into the Church. Seeing this, they began subtly to change their attitude toward the presence of Catholics at the meetings. Of course, Catholics had never been spurned or turned away from the talks, but it was not until 1949 that they were expressly invited to participate in the lectures and, if possible, to bring a non-Catholic friend along.⁶⁵

It has already been seen that, from the beginning, the missionaries were also called upon to minister to the Catholics scattered throughout the non-Catholic areas of Missouri. At first it was done by home visitation during the day. But eventually the need was felt for some means of regularly celebrating the Eucharist, not only for the missionaries themselves, but also for the many dispersed Catholics. Fr. McIntyre had an idea for a trailer of specialized design that could be hooked-up to one of the cars and taken with them to those places that were distant from a Catholic church.⁶⁶ Having contacted, with the help of a friend, a company outside of Detroit that built trailers, McIntyre explained his idea and purpose for the trailer and was told that one could be customized rather inexpensively.

⁶⁵Philip J. LeFevre, C.M., "A good number of registered readers....," July 1, 1949, p. 1. DARMA box 7

⁶⁶McIntyre/Rybolt Interview.

The trailer was built in 1940 and brought from Detroit in time to be used for that season.⁶⁷ It was a simple white trailer, but what was distinctive about it was the retractable altar. This feature was made possible by first cutting out a large panel on one side and near the front. The panel was hinged so as to drop down into a horizontal position where, supported by a pair of legs, it served as a platform on which to stand. With the side of the trailer thus opened up, the altar could be swung out from where it was stored in the nose of the trailer and locked into place in the opening where it was ready for use. When not in use, the altar was swung back and the trailer was ready to be used as a pulpit for the evening talks. For this purpose, two poles were set into the front of the platform and were used to support lights for whoever was speaking. Special mounts were also put on either end of the trailer to hold the PA speakers. All other equipment, literature and paraphernalia could be stored in the rear where it was readily available yet out of sight.

The St. Anthony Motor Mission Chapel, as the trailer was christened, saw many years of active duty in the Motor Missions. It was joined in the fleet by the Blessed Phillipine Duchesne Chapel Car the following year. This Chapel Car was a converted delivery truck and served the same purpose as the trailer. That both of these were popular attractions among the people is evident by the number of photographs showing people examining them.

Support for the Motor Missions at this time (1944-1949) was still high. Certainly they were in no financial difficulty. This was not only because of the generosity of the Diocese and its people but also because the missionaries were very

⁶⁷The trailer can be dated via a photograph of it under construction. DARMA box 5.

careful with the money that was given them. Even during the period of post-war inflation when prices went up dramatically the Missions managed to stay solvent.⁶⁸ By this time, too, the success of the apostolate had gained attention throughout the country and other dioceses around the country were engaging in the work.⁶⁹ From many dioceses that were not engaged came requests from priests who sought street preaching experience so they could begin it in their own areas.

Within the Congregation, however, some tension was being felt. Fr. Philip LeFevre, director of the Missions from 1938-1946, was heavily involved in the work not only during the summer but throughout the year. Difficulty arose when his work with the Missions began to conflict with his regular assignment of teaching. It became necessary at this point to open up serious discussion of the apostolate within the Province in order to clarify its position as a work of the Community. In a summary of the work, presented to the Provincial Council in July 1944, Fr. LeFevre stated the standing of the Missions:

From this point of view, The Motor Missions can hardly be said to be organized. The work from its inception has not been backed by an authoritative declaration of intention, but only by a permissive approbation. It has been called an appendage to the works of the Community and factually it has occupied this position. Its original director and its present director do not possess letters patent of such office and its general headquarters has been identical with the particular house of the Community to which its

⁶⁸See *Financial Reports: 1944-1949*. DARMA box 3.

⁶⁹Beginning in January 1941, the *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* began to publish annual reports on the progress of various motor mission groups throughout the country.

director has been appointed. Since the authoritative appointment of its director has always been for *other* work, the *incidental* value (emphasis his) of the mission work has been emphasized by implication.⁷⁰

It was LeFevre's intention to make the Provincial and his Council take a definite stand on the Motor Missions. To this purpose he also submitted a list of recommendations and questions to be considered. Three of the recommendations in particular, if accepted, would act to establish the Missions as an officially sanctioned apostolate of the Community:

- 1—The appointment of a full time director of the Motor Missions.
- 2—The granting of quarters specifically for the offices of the Motor Missions.
- 3—The levying of a Provincial Tax on the Motor Missions.⁷¹

The response of the Council to Fr. LeFevre came two weeks after he had submitted his summary. In a letter from Fr. Marshall Winne, the Visitor at the time, he was informed that the Council had "voted to continue the motor missions" and that he was to "continue as the director" of them but that the request for offices had been rejected.⁷² No mention was made of a provincial tax nor is there any indication among the financial reports that one was ever demanded or paid.

⁷⁰Summary Report to the Meeting of the Provincial Council, July 19, 1944, Philip J. LeFevre, C.M. DARMA box 4.

⁷¹P.J. LeFevre, C.M., Summary Report..., p. 3.

⁷²Marshall Winne, C.M., Letter to Philip J. LeFevre, August 3, 1944. DARMA box 4.

All in all, the response of the Provincial visitor appears to have been perfunctory and noncommittal. Two years later, many of the same questions were being asked again among the leadership of the Missions.⁷³ Once again, the question of the Community's formal dedication to the apostolate was raised, especially as it affected the "prestige of the Congregation." Also raised again was the problem of men having to divide their time between the Missions and their regular assignments. Added to these old concerns, however, was a new one: that of justifying the investment in the Missions. This concern was based upon what was seen as a "disproportion between the preparation and the expense of the actual duration of the work," and centered around four main criticisms:

- 1—Seven thousand dollars was being invested for no more than seven weeks work.
- 2—Most of the equipment was unused except during those seven weeks.
- 3—The mission season covered less than half the summer.
- 4—Less time was actually spent in the field than was generally assumed.⁷⁴

For the missionaries, these were problems that had to be dealt with immediately, but they realized that it was "beyond their power to solve" them.

There is no evidence to indicate that any of these problems were seriously and formally confronted. But

⁷³This time is estimated and is based on an untitled document which was found in the folder of 1946 correspondence. There is penciled in the upper left corner of p. 1, "To Father Barr" and authorship is unknown. This document will herein be referred to as "To Father Barr."

⁷⁴"To Father Barr," p. 1.

despite this, the work of the Missions continued. The confreres were eager about the work and when those with previous experience were unable to accept invitations to work another summer, they responded in much the same way that Fr. James McHardy did:

Not just as a gesture, but in all sincerity, I wish you will list me for future summers, for I really like that work, and would be anxious to help out when possible. I don't know what is in store for next summer, but, if possible, I will be with you.⁷⁵

In 1948 the five year mission slump ended. During that season, which spread over ten weeks, the teams conducted fifty missions for more than nineteen thousand people. This growth carried into the 1949 season as well, during which they gave seventy-six missions. This was more than four times the seventeen missions given in 1947.⁷⁶ This period, the middle to late 1940's, was the height of the street preaching apostolate. This is true not only by reason of the number of people reached but also by reason of the zeal of the missionaries. Those who were involved were very enthusiastic about the work and labored ardently in order to spread the good news of the Catholic Church. Despite the organizational problems that were experienced, the Missions for most had truly become one of the Community's regular apostolates and perhaps it was this familiarity of the work to the Community which may have made it seem ludicrous or redundant to go through the formalities of Provincial recognition.

⁷⁵James McHardy, C.M., Letter to Philip J. LeFevre, C.M., June 6, 1947. DARMA box 4.

⁷⁶*Motor Mission Statistics: 1935-1949*, p. 2.

If these were the peak years, it follows that those which came after were on the descending slope of the mountain. There was still much good work to be accomplished by the Missions, however, and it would be another fifteen years before the apostolate was to end as a Vincentian work. But American society was changing and advancing technology was offering new and more fascinating ways for people to divert themselves. This was to have a profound effect on the future of the Missions. The unavailability of personnel was also to hinder their continuation. Eventually, the Missions were to reach a point of "diminishing returns" when the effort expended greatly outweighed the good accomplished. It was at this point that they had to be abandoned.

THE END

On May 4, 1965 a meeting was held between Fr. James Fischer, Provincial of the Western Region, and Fr. Oscar Miller, director of the Motor Missions, concerning the future of the Motor Missions as a Vincentian work. In the years immediately preceding 1965 the Community was unable to provide more than one or two men for the work of the Missions due to an increase in educational commitments. In the spring of that year, however, it became obvious that the Province would not then, nor in the foreseeable future, be able to provide any men for them. It was at this time that the Community decided to withdraw completely from the work.⁷⁷

Lack of personnel was not the only factor which brought about the end of the apostolate. By the 1960's televisions were becoming common fixtures in most homes even in rural areas. Unlike earlier years, the popularity of television

⁷⁷Oscar J. Miller, C.M. Letter to Most Rev. Ignatius J. Strecker, Bishop of Springfield-Cape Girardeau, May 6, 1965, p. 1. DARMA box 6.

now made it possible for people not only to be entertained but also to keep abreast of current world events in the comfort of their homes. Even evangelizers could be seen and heard preaching the Word of God on T.V. As a result, the missionaries had to compete with television and the convenience, comfort, and entertainment it offered and, in the words of Fr. Miller: "How [could we] compete with 'I Love Lucy'?"⁷⁸ The convenience and affordability of automobile travel also figured into the decline. This made it possible for those inclined to "get out of the house" to seek perhaps more lively pursuits than Catholic missions and to travel farther to do so.⁷⁹

These two developments, television and convenient personal transportation, made it necessary for the Motor Missions to undergo some alterations in format in an effort to create greater interest and appeal. The missionaries still gave the customary lectures in the evening followed by the answering of questions. But those who attended the nightly presentations did not appear to be overly interested or, at least, participatory. This can be inferred from the preachers' practice of answering prepared questions after the talk since those from the question box were few.⁸⁰

An experiment in 1958 proved to be unsuccessful in attempting to create a renewal of interest. Having rented the local movie theater in one of the towns, the missionaries planned to show one of their movies to the crowd that came

⁷⁸Oscar J. Miller, C.M., Response to "Motor Mission Questionnaire," Q#9, March 27, 1983.

⁷⁹James McHardy, C.M., Response to "Motor Mission Questionnaire," Q#8, March 5, 1983.

⁸⁰Oscar J. Miller, C.M., *Report for the Summer of 1960*, p. 4. DARMA box 3.

to their talks. The talks were held in front of the theater and had seemingly attracted a bit of a crowd. But when the time came to go inside for the movie, "only about four adults and four children" did so. The rest had refused thinking that a service of some sort was being held.⁸¹

The missionaries were undaunted by this lack of success and soon a new idea arose which was successful in supplementing the evening lectures. This was the creation of a display booth to show the people some of the things (e.g. books and vestments) that were used by the Church. This booth was occasionally erected at county fairs also and captured the interest of many who saw it. This display of Catholic articles at fairs had the added advantage of attracting many who would probably not attend the regular lectures in the evenings. This greatly increased the number of people the missionaries came in contact with and hence the number of people to whom they could present the Catholic faith.

Another change in the approach of the Missions was the making of house-to-house visits. This was a way of advertising the talks for the coming week in a personal way. It consisted in going from house to house and personally inviting the people to the missions. The people would then be given free literature by the person making the call. This method of advertising proved to be effective in improving attendance at the talks for it was found that the number increased "in proportion to the number of homes visited."⁸² These home visits gave the caller a chance to do a little mission work outside the context of the talks as well, just as

⁸¹*Report for Ash Grove, Missouri, Summer 1958.* DARMA box 1.

⁸²Miller, *Report for the Summer of 1960.* p. 3.

the display booth did at the county fairs. It was also a chance to find estranged or lax Catholics and possibly bring them back into the Church.

Though the missionaries had to work hard for success in the field, their work was made easier by the Missions being financially healthy. During the last years of the apostolate, the annual budget was approximately three thousand dollars, which was provided almost entirely by the Archdiocese of St. Louis.⁸³ They were also supported by various chapters of the Knights of Columbus and the Daughters of Isabella, as well as other individuals and religious groups throughout the country. Much moral support was received too, often in the form of requests for information to be used in articles about the Missions.

Yet for all the success that the Motor Missions achieved and for the incalculable amount of good that they had done throughout the state of Missouri, their end was imminent. True, in virtually all of the nearly three hundred towns that the Missions visited during their thirty year existence, much tension between Protestants and Catholics had been eased to the great relief of both groups. Many falsehoods about the Church, too, were dispelled. These were both results that the missionaries heard of and could witness for themselves if they returned to the towns at later dates. It was, in fact, such results which gave them the encouragement they needed to continue their work. But in the end, they could not survive the dwindling numbers of available men nor the rapidly changing American society.

In May of 1965 The Motor Missions were turned over to

⁸³The absence of financial reports for these years makes it necessary to estimate this amount. This is possible by examining the correspondence between Oscar Miller and Bishop Flavin of St. Louis in 1963 and 1964.

the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau and placed under the directorship of Fr. Leonard Chambers. With funding from Bishop Strecker, and with equipment he acquired from Fr. Miller, Fr. Chambers continued the Missions in his diocese with relative success. His endeavors, however, did not last very long and eventually the Motor Mission apostolate was laid to rest.⁸⁴



Zeal consists in a pure love of rendering oneself pleasing to God and useful to our neighbor: zeal to extend the empire of God, zeal to procure the salvation of our neighbor. Is there anything in the world more perfect?

St. Vincent de Paul



Teach the poor girls all you can, and remember that the most necessary is what concerns the knowledge of God and His love.

St. Louise de Marillac

⁸⁴Miller, Questionnaire, Q#9.



I beseech you to preserve henceforth the letters which will be written to you and those in your house, from wherever they come, when they contain something especially notable which could be important or which could provide knowledge in the future. You only have to make different folders according to their subject or the year in which you receive them; and, bundled so, to keep them in a place reserved for this where those who succeed you could have recourse to them when needed.

St. Vincent de Paul



It is necessary to be attentive in affairs to the smallest circumstances in order that nothing may be wanting in what we do.

St. Vincent de Paul