

## *Fr. Gary Banks, S.T.*

Our Teacher Fr. Vincent: A Reflection

### *I. Introduction*

It is difficult to write about a person you knew well and admired greatly, because memories always seem to be at flood tide. I am motivated nonetheless so that other Cenacle members, especially the young men in our formation programs, will know who Father Vincent Fitzpatrick was: an ordinary man who left us a powerful legacy. He can be viewed not only as a founding prototype of the Missionary Servant of the Most Holy Trinity but as a model for us all.

Vincent was a man who gave much to *all* of us. He had no favorites; he loved us all. That love flowed easily into abundant generosity. My special regard for him began as an intellectual bond – he was my teacher – but quickly grew into admiration and love. It started with him teaching me Greek, developed through our mutual committee work, and finally flowered in me catching his desire to translate our Cenacle story into the present. It happened over many hours working and traveling together. He was my teacher; I visited him when he was our Novice Director; he was my companion through my biblical studies – especially in reading Greek. Through all of this and through much advice from him on so many Cenacle projects, I come to this particular privileged view point from which I write.

### *II. The Early Years (1915-1933)*

Father Gabriel Hannan is much more familiar with the early history of the Fitzpatricks, their early lives and their interrelationships. I only know what Vincent himself told me. It was 1928 and he was thirteen years old when he went south to Holy Trinity, Alabama. One motivating factor was that his pastor knew and was

impressed by Father Judge. He was by all accounts small for his age; at Holy Trinity, he played baseball on a team called the “Rinky-dinks,” its members united by their diminutive stature. He was a good fielder with quickness and agility, who always liked playing sports and being physically active. Father Paul Anthony Fursman guided and encouraged the “Rinky-dinks.” Vincent was fourteen when his father died. Thereafter Paul Anthony became a sort of father figure for him. Tom O’Keeffe was a member of Paul Anthony’s circle of youth, and even at this early juncture Vincent saw Thomas as the leader of the group. He remained a follower of Tom throughout his life. Jimmy Norris was another member of that group.

From 1928 onward, Father Judge’s visits to Holy Trinity were limited by the extensive time he spent traveling, attending to the growing missionary movement that he was fashioning. His followers, especially Tom O’Keeffe and Jimmy Norris, attended to the practical operations at Holy Trinity. They were admired and imitated by the younger men. Both, but especially Jimmy, had a special relationship with Father Judge. They were all members of the group that met Father Judge and Gerard Fredericks when they arrived in New York from Puerto Rico by boat on 14 August 1933 and took them to Gold Street, where Father gave his famous “last testament” [Monographs 2]. This moving talk, regarded as a “passing on of the spirit,” strongly affected all who heard it.

When Father did visit Holy Trinity, the younger eyes viewed him as an “interruption.” The boys would be called together, whether from classes, the sports field or late at night, so Father could speak to them. Father would talk at great length and many of the boys would nod off. Vincent, however, admired Father very much and became enamored of his vision. Father’s effect on Vincent was strengthened by Vincent’s ongoing relationship with Thomas O’Keeffe, who, as leader, did much to implement Father’s vision. Throughout his lifetime, Vincent never lost the ability to relate Father Judge’s vision as something new and fresh. It

was never a nostalgic remembrance, but always a way of experiencing the past so as to see its implications unfolding in the present and reaching into the future.

For Vincent, Father Judge's character was crystallized in two experiences, both of which had such a strong impact on Vincent that he would tell them vividly decades after they happened. I heard him relate the first story in a retreat he preached to us in 1967. Thirty-five years later, in 2002, on a trip to our formation program in Costa Rica, I heard him tell the story again with the same vigor and freshness. The detail and vividness with which he told the story on both occasions underscored its importance for him. It was about Father Judge selecting the candidates for Fr. Bede's first Novitiate class in 1931. Vincent was sixteen at that time. One afternoon Father called the young men, one by one, to sit with him under a pergola on the south side of the chapel at Saint Joseph's, near where the present parish center now stands. One of the first to be interviewed was Bernardine Bouland. After an initial exchange of pleasantries, Father Judge asked Bernardine why he wanted to enter the Novitiate. Bernardine apparently responded with this and that pious platitude, but none of his answers was acceptable, and each wrong answer made Father more impatient and more insistent in his questioning. Father's total intensity bore down on Bernardine until the brow-beaten boy finally came up with the acceptable answer. Coming out from the interview mightily relieved, Bernardine ran to all the others awaiting their turn to share with them the magic answer, the only answer that Father Judge would accept: "For the love of God." The rest of the interviews with Father, according to Vincent, went much easier. Vincent would describe this encounter with much glee, physically moving back and forth, from one side to the other, while he acted out the interchange between Father Judge and Bernardine, putting the words into each one's mouth.

It was an impressive story to hear and it still rings alive for me today, for it reveals the deepest motivation of Vincent, Donald Lynch, Raphael Toner and all

those early followers of Father Judge: whatever you did, you did it for the love of God. There could be no other nobler motivation. All boiled down to that. Father demanded that of his followers. These simple, carefree, non-reflective boys had to be brought to the right answer. It was as if Father Judge intuitively knew that these would be the people who realized his vision. For Vincent, it was – no matter what he was doing – all about the love of God. Whether it was teaching Latin and Greek, silk screening shirts, or preparing his next talk, it was all for the love of God.

The second experience Vincent loved to relate was one that involved Father Judge's severity. (All the old timers seemed to have these types of stories. Initially, it can be perplexing, since, if Father Judge was so severe and scolding, why did they all admire him so?) On one of Father's visits to Holy Trinity – it was a Sunday – the students were told that Father would speak to them some time during the day. Right after the morning High Mass, the boys rushed out of the chapel, leaving it in disarray, to play some ball before Father would call them back and deliver what was sure to be – because it usually was – a very long conference. Later, with the ball game still in progress, Father was driven over from the Sisters' side. He made his customary visit to Saint Joseph Chapel, finding it in complete disorder. Everyone was summoned immediately from the ball fields to be reprimanded by Father for the condition in which they had earlier left the chapel. Vincent's classical remark was, "Oh, Father Judge. Father could be severe."

Many years after, I questioned Vincent about that incident. There was no doubt that Father was strict and could be severe. But Vincent contextualized it by explaining that because Father was so seldom at Holy Trinity in those days, he put great energy into the future of his movement when he *was* there. Father's intense love of God and for all things holy made it difficult for him to see holy things, the chapel among them, disregarded or mistreated. His scoldings were never mean, unreasonable, or unjust, but the intensity of his personality and his way with

words made those scoldings quite impressive. Father was forming those young men for an important role; he was inculcating in them the supreme importance of the holy. God was a reality in Father Judge's life and he wanted that to be so in the lives of his followers.

Interestingly, my impression of Vincent when I was his student was that he also was stern, strict and demanding. I would not use the word 'severe,' but Vincent's persona demanded respect and radiated seriousness. Vincent was not the type of person with whom you would joke around, especially during class. He was attentive and would give much time to you, but he was also occupied with his projects of preaching, preparing class, working in the dark room, and so many others. He gave the impression of a serious man who did not have time for idleness or useless chatter. He was strict with himself and therefore strict with others. Was this a reflection of, something he learned from, Father Judge?

Vincent was not much given to talking about people in an emotional or affective way, so it is all the more impressive that for the people of my generation that it was Vincent who could open up for us Father's heart and mind. Others, like Father Tim Lynch could give us knowledge of Father Judge and transmit Cenacle lore, but it was Vincent who taught us to love the vision as deeply as he did. This love impelled him as a man well into his eighties to travel to Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico or wherever in the world the ST or the Cenacle Family was forming the next generation. He would share with us Father's mind and heart.

The other figure from those early years who affected Vincent deeply was Mother Boniface. He spoke of her always with great affection. He saw her as his mother and especially enjoyed her visits to Saint Joseph's. She knew every boy by name, was very loving and lovable, was definitely in charge of the daily operations, and seemed to be the embodiment of common sense and wisdom – this in an early world that was filled with youth, enthusiasm, idealism – and basic

impracticality. The vision of Holy Trinity was a dream in potential; Mother Boniface the key component in making that dream a reality.

### *III. The Middle Years (1933-1969)*

I know little about the first part of this time period, except they were difficult years after the death of Father Judge and the abandonment of his movement by his presumed successors. They were times of boys leading boys. They were the years from which Thomas O’Keeffe emerged as leader.

Father Vincent was in the Novitiate when Father Judge passed away on 23 November 1933. He had entered the third Novitiate class on 10 June 1933. He liked Father Bede, the Capuchin Novice Director, and felt that the class received the fundamentals of the religious life and a life of prayer. One of the interesting things that Bede did, as part of his pedagogy on humility, was to ask Francis Xavier Toner to pile up wood and then, without rhyme or reason, to move the pile to another place. This made Pappy Toner livid, much to the amusement of the rest of the novices group. Bede did have pedagogy for teaching the virtues.

For a period of time after Novitiate, Vincent, all the while involved in his studies for the priesthood, was the Procurator at Stirling and Holy Trinity, in both places trying to make ends meet with next to no money at all. In the ST archives is a bounced five-dollar check from Holy Trinity signed by Vincent. It is clearly stamped “Insufficient Funds”. Interestingly, Vincent did not seem to have any “war stories” from this time about how difficult things were. He preferred not to talk about the hard times. From 1933 to 1940 confusion and uncertainty reigned – as did some strong personalities. He liked Bishop Shaughnessy, SM, the Rome-appointed Apostolic Visitor and Superior General (from 16 September 1937 to 31 May 1949). He found him to be competent, thoughtful, and very thorough in

his investigation of the Congregation. The community that emerged from that process was more defined, more stable, economically viable and under more solid leadership, mainly the person of Father Thomas O’Keeffe.

In this more stable environment, Vincent returned to school in Washington, at Catholic University and then White Friars Hall with the Carmelites, to finish his studies for the priesthood. He divided his time between class preparation and general construction work at Holy Trinity Heights, Silver Spring, where he dedicated himself to pouring concrete, roofing – with his classmate Albert Koklowsky – and general carpentry work, his specialty. Vincent was a classic ‘hammer and saw’ missionary.

The first large group of ST ordinations was in 1941. In 1944, Vincent was part of the second large ordination group, twenty priests, the result of joining three classes together. Amy Croke [Sister Marie Baptista, MSBT] remarked about how fitting it was that in 1944, the forty-fifth ordination anniversary of Father Judge, we should have forty-five priests.

With a sufficient number of priests, Thomas O’Keeffe now had the prime material to begin implementing the vision of Father Judge. He continued our presence at Stirling and expanded it in the South. He also began to set men apart for further studies, especially canon law. Thomas had the vision to create our own seminary system, to form young men in our charism, with our pastoral vision, our own way. He also wanted to obtain pontifical recognition for this young Congregation. His years of leadership and his life were dedicated to achieving those two goals.

Thomas had a willing follower in Vincent, but only after an initial struggle. After ordination, Vincent, waiting for his missionary assignment, was surprised to learn that he and another classmate, Stephen Quinn, had been assigned to Silver Spring to be assistants to the Vicar General, Thomas. (Bishop Shaughnessy was still Superior General.) Since Vincent had joined a *missionary* community to become

a *missionary*, this assignment came as a great shock and disappointment to him. He consoled himself with the fact that at least he was not sent to become a teacher. His brother Joe Fitzpatrick, the Jesuit, was preparing himself to become a teacher and Vincent's feeling was, "Had I wanted to become a teacher, I would have become a Jesuit."

Thomas inculcated into his group of collaborators at Silver Spring the philosophy of *sustineo alas*, "I sustain the wings." He took this theme from the ground crews of the war planes of World War II. Every plane that became airborne was supported by a considerable group of mechanics and general support staff, who never saw the front lines of combat, but who made these air missions possible. The motto of this group was "*Sustineo alas*" and their existence was a necessary part of the war effort. Thomas instilled that philosophy into everyone who worked with him at Silver Spring – their behind-the-scene efforts were vital for all the men who were out on the missions. If you asked Vincent what his first assignment was, he would tell you, *Sustineo alas*.

Less than two years later there was even greater disappointment in store for Vincent. Thomas had sent Jerome Hovanec, also ordained in the class of '44, to Catholic University to study the classics. The program did not work for Jerome, so one day Thomas called Vincent to his office, handed him a typewritten letter and told him, in his classic laconic way: "Go study Latin, study Latin." This assignment was hard for Vincent to accept, but he saw it as his obedience and in a short time was converted to Thomas' vision for our own seminary system. He studied Latin and Greek and after his introductory courses found himself, in September 1946, teaching classes to some students a few months his junior. He accepted the changed situation, and applied himself as a teacher – while still being a student – "all for the love of God." After summers of work and study, he completed his Master's Degree in the classics in 1954. From 1946 to 1970, for twenty-four years, year in and year out, Vincent taught some level of Latin and

Greek to every student who entered our programs, all the while continuing with the many hours of cement pouring, carpentry, and general construction work that he did at Holy Trinity. He also dedicated himself to the physical hobbies and, with his undiminished strength and agility, proved to be an implacable player of sports. It was on the playing fields that he earned his nickname of “The Tiger.”

The Vincent I met in 1965 had grown, prospered and become a considerable influence through his teaching of Latin and Greek, and his love of his Missionary Servant priesthood vocation.

He also served on the General Council from 1961-1967 under Father Gerard Fredericks, but he did not share with me much of those years. What was obvious to me at Monroe was that he still appeared a follower of Father Thomas, who was then our rector. In the old system, the priests and Brothers would eat apart in their own refectory, sitting on the outer part of tables which had been joined to form a “U” with squared corners. Thomas sat at the head table, in the middle, with Vincent at his side. They sat in ~~some type~~ of vocational hierarchical order. When, in his usual staccato grunts and quips, Thomas would ask for something from the student waiter, Vincent, acting the interpreter, would say, “Can you please bring more bread?”

Without generally showing much emotion, Vincent was always a consoling presence. This was especially apparent when he celebrated Eucharist. His preaching was always memorable. On one occasion, when we all thought that Harry Baczkowski had just been killed by a car in front of our school (he was not!), Vincent was the stable comfort. The only time that I can remember him moved to tears was at his twenty-fifth Ordination Anniversary in 1969, when, after some short words, he broke down and said very emotionally, “Thank you for twenty-five years. Thank you for my priesthood.” He was a man in love with his vocation, finding the love of God in all things.

#### *IV. The Classics*

Vincent taught Latin and Greek in our seminary from 1946 to 1970. Latin was crucial to our system at that time. It was almost the *sine qua non* of the priesthood. The Mass, all sacraments, and the official prayers of the Church were all celebrated in Latin. A priesthood student would study philosophy, theology, canon law and Sacred Scripture from Latin text books. An insufficiency in Latin was a sign of a lack of a vocation. The Monroe that I visited as a student still had Sunday High Mass and afternoon Vespers in Latin. Vincent gave himself to that mission of teaching students Latin and Greek with all his heart, even to the point of having special summer school for students who had to “catch up” on the subjects. Imagine spending all summer long in the heat of the pre-air conditioned Holy Trinity making sure that slower students and new college students were able to qualify in Latin.

He not only *taught* Latin, but he enjoyed it. It was the basis of his life of prayer. He had an old, tattered black Breviary for his Liturgy of the Hours. He knew the Psalms in Latin almost by heart. He read every day something of the Fathers of the Church. When he read the Scriptures in Latin at Mass, they were almost understandable to the hearer. It was obvious that he knew what he was reading.

Vincent was a classicist with an eye for structure. He knew how to read a text as literature and would delight over the various literary devices the ancient authors would use to enhance a point.

As a classroom teacher, he always prepared assiduously. He would hone in on the grammar. If the group responded well, he would push them into composition. At the end of every class, he would always give a little exercise, a spot quiz, just to see if we had done the work and how we were integrating the material.

By the time we had him in class, he had been teaching Latin and Greek for eighteen years. That year in Latin, he taught us Augustine's Confessions; for Greek, Xenophon's Anabasis and selections from Saint John's Gospel and the Psalms. You wonder how many times he had gone over the same material in those eighteen years. He, always a demanding teacher, was always prepared himself, and it would be suicidal for you to come unprepared. He would expect you to be prepared to translate and explain every form of thirty-five to forty lines per class. As the end of class approached, you were always afraid that you would be called on and not have sufficient lines prepared. And to run out of lines while translating made you anxiously nervous, sometimes even sweaty. To be called upon to translate and to have to say, "I am sorry, but I did not get this far" was a fate, we thought, close to death itself.

During what seemed to be the never ending sessions of that Fourth General Cenacle, the first renewal chapter (June 1967 to June 1968), Vincent was frequently away from Monroe and unavailable for class. However, we were left volumes of work to have prepared for his arrival. He would tell us that he would be back on such a day, at such an hour in the evening. We would all be sitting in the classroom waiting for him. He would come up the stairs, fresh from the car ride from Silver Spring, still in his overcoat, with his suitcase in one hand and his briefcase in the other. He left his suitcase in the hall, threw his coat over his teacher's chair, said the opening prayer, took out his book and would call on someone to translate. We would have an hour and a half of class, just as if he had not been away. Only later did I realize how hard he was working on that General Cenacle. The Spirituality Committee and its document were his handicraft. Imagine a week of General Cenacle sessions, a four hour car ride from Silver Spring and, immediately upon arrival, a ninety minute evening class with reluctant twenty year olds. Obviously, Vincent was just as strict and demanding on himself as he was with us.

In class, it was clear that he loved Saint Augustine, the subject of his Master's degree dissertation. We could never read too much of Augustine. Toward the end of the sixties, Vincent was moving with the times; he was doing less and less Scripture work in Latin and more in Greek. For the Gospels he used a worn Merk text, a New Testament with Greek on one side of the page and Latin on the other. The second semester of the year we translated the Psalms and passages from Saint John's Gospel. Vincent was inspiring as he taught us to analyze and translate the text; there was always an excitement. I am certain that this is where my love of the Bible was born.

I spent a year with Vincent at Stirling in 1990 after I returned from Rome. Vincent (he was seventy-five years old then) was on his third tour at the Shrine, this time having come from Colonial Beach. By the middle of my stay there, we were chatting daily and soon were reading Greek together late at night in the library at the end of the hall in the residence building. What an experience! He came every night prepared with pages of notes scribbled on the sheets of his rolled over yellow legal pad, which by this time had become his constant companion and trade mark. At this point of my life, I had studied eight years of Biblical Greek. When I was studying Greek at Catholic University, both professors, Frank Gignac, my Biblical Greek instructor, and Tom Halton, the classicist, commented that whoever trained me initially had trained me well. I made sure that Vincent heard that.

Our sessions at Stirling every night were excitingly exhausting. Vincent would prod me on: "I was wondering how you were going to translate that phrase and relate it to the similar configuration in the previous section." And, "That was an interesting use of the imperfect; how would you nuance that use in the translation?" One thing I learned during that year was structure, how to notice the author's use of structure. Vincent's eye would pick up these structures and he would translate accordingly. This is a direct quote from him which I included in

an article which I wrote about Saint Mark's Gospel: *The disciples again come to the forefront, this time as direct participants in the mission, sent out two by two (6,7-12). True discipleship is only learned in praxis. Using an ancient technique to derive more meaning from a passage through the use of structure, Mark separates the narrative of the sending out and return of the disciples and strategically positions the story of the Baptizer's demise (6, 14-29) in the middle. In doing so, he highlights the shadow of the cross as an integral part of the mission. What happened to the precursor, John, will also happen to whoever follows along the way.*

My surprise in these sessions was that after we had worked all day, we were also going to work all night. I thought that two chapters of Greek well read were enough. Vincent would push us on. "There is an interesting passage two chapters ahead where he develops the same idea with a different structure." And we would push on. He was correct: you did have to read enough of an author every day to develop a flavor, and only constant readings of considerable text permitted you to develop such an appreciation of the whole piece. Of course, all of this was in preparation for the Sunday homily. In 1991 we read through Mark's Gospel in Greek every week and did extensive preparation together on the Lenten texts. Vincent was especially taken with those A-cycle readings on conversion and insisted we map out very carefully the probing questions of Jesus that brought about the changes in the Samaritan Woman in John 4 and in the Man Born Blind in John 9.

I also recall with great fondness Vincent's influence on the development of my thesis. I returned from Rome in 1986 in the final stage of my thesis. I was in the process of rearranging material I had investigated. Brother James McPike had a computer with a word processor (these were the early days of PCs) that I could use to get the material organized. I brought it all together and packed it off to Vincent who at that time was stationed at Colonial Beach. I wanted him to review it. During those previous four years I spent in Rome, I thought of Vincent

often. Not only would he have delighted in the Roman and early Christian ruins, but he would have thoroughly enjoyed every lecture on the Bible. He would have understood them well and used the new insights to pass on to others. He returned my paper to me with about thirty pages of observations and corrections, hand written on his trade mark long yellow legal sheets. Father Bob Shay, the pastor at Colonial Beach at the time, later told me that Vincent would sit at night in the community room, going over my paper line by line, with his Greek New Testament at his side and his yellow pad on his lap. His notes showed me changes where he had correctly re-accented the Greek. He asked so many pointed questions that I went back and reorganized the whole paper to respond to his questions. When I sent it on to Rome, it received a *magna cum laude*. The Pontifical Biblical Institute, always very conscious of its traditions, had on its alumni roster for “the MSSsTs”: Alphonsus Benson, Nathan Kay and me. It should also have included Vincent Fitzpatrick.

I write this section so personally because I feel it is important for future generations to know how the love of God was lived out in this man’s life. I knew a very careful, extremely intelligent, well versed classical scholar, who could hold his own against any professor I had in any university in Germany, France, Italy, Greece, Egypt and Israel. Vincent was a man who loved and lived these ancient languages because they were prayer, and the language and treasury of the Church. He was a man who worked constantly and assiduously for twenty- four years of his ministry so that Missionary Servant priests would be well trained to assume their role in the Church. A man, so steeped in learning, who lovingly and patiently every day dealt with students who little appreciated the difference between *puella* and *puellam*. A man who imparted the *sine qua non* subject for ordination and gave his life so that others could learn it. A man of devoted, day-in-and-day-out, cheerful, prayerful service.

Then came the winds of change, and Latin along with many revered traditions were soon to move from a center stage to the wings.

### *V. The Years of Change (1968-1980)*

For Vincent these years were the most difficult of all and the years of greatest suffering. It was a turbulent time, and he was in the middle of it all, for he would be an architect of building the future through his contribution to the Fourth General Cenacle, his major work on the Constitution Committee, and his role as Novice Director of a whole generation of STs. He would also see the minor seminary system, to which he had given so many years of his life, come down before his eyes. The language of his beloved Psalms and other revered literature – the treasure house of so many of his insights – was now relegated to the category of “useless and dead.”

In the beginning, in 1968, everything seemed possible. There was a unique ferment not only in the world, but also in the Church. In the United States, the Enlightenment came to its ultimate fruition with the dicta that all authority was to be questioned and all systems had to be rethought. We went about Church renewal with an iconoclastic glee. Like all eras of upheaval, these were times of extreme opinions and polarizations: we witnessed the extremely good and the extremely bad. Everyone had an opinion and it was difficult to determine who really had anything meaningful to offer. It felt like we were groping through the darkness. The ST community that would emerge would be very different from the ST community I had entered.

These years were also years of great creativity. Even today, to look back at the documents of our Fourth General Cenacle is to see that they were prescient and insightful, and that they positioned us to walk into the renewal and forge a different future. It is amazing to see that our formation document anticipated *Pastores Dabo Vobis* by twenty-five years. The document created by Vincent and

the Spirituality Committee gave us a good summary of what our spirituality was and laid the ground work for renewal.

In these turbulent times, Vincent was again called to leadership on the General Council, with Father Stephen Quinn, from 1973-1979. He served as Councilor and member of the Constitution Committee, while also being the Novice Director. These were three major tasks, demanding and consuming of time, effort, and self.

It was a difficult time in leadership for Vincent because he was often assailed by people who wanted an instant decision – something which Vincent was constitutionally incapable of giving. As a leader, he could never be a front line commander; he saw every possibility and would be locked into indecision. Especially in these times where everything was questioned with so much new and enlightening thought, it was even harder for him to make a decision. He had to weigh, ponder, and think through every option, a gift not particularly appreciated at that time, but surely a sign of wisdom and stability that brought us into the future.

Vincent's gift as a leader was as a war room strategist. He would present a thorough, well reasoned appraisal of every scenario and provide excellent counsel to the group so a good decision could be reached. His power was that he was an opinion former – to promote any program or idea you had to have Vincent supporting you. If he would shake his head and say, "I don't know," or if he would just stare at you from over his glasses, you knew that your idea was dead in the water.

He knew the importance of the Constitution Committee, thinking it one of the best committees that he had ever worked on, and he gave himself to it with heart and soul. He especially enjoyed being with the MSBTs, and his subsequent close collaboration with Sr. Sara Butler to explain the Rule of Life and the Constitution to the ST-MSBT rank-and-file. His ST collaborators were Tim Lynch,

Shaun McCarty and Jordan Baxter, who worked with Catherine Steiner, Mary Tonra, Sara Butler and Joseph Miriam Blackwell, their MSBT counterparts. It was arduous work to cull through everything that was written, to sift through all our traditions, and to be attentive to all the best literature that was being written about renewal. As part of this process, Tim Lynch produced the renewed Meditation Book and the Monographs, all with the close collaboration of Vincent and others of the committee. Their work could only have been extremely taxing, entailing constant meetings and deadlines. As I write now, I am looking at copies of some seventy typewritten pages that Vincent and Tim brought together to create an historical development time-line, gleaning passages out of Father Judge's writings for the work of the committee and probably for the Monograph on which Shaun worked so diligently, "Grace of our Founder." These documents not only put us all in touch with the thought of Father Judge, but they were the touchstones of renewal and the undergirding of the new Rule of Life and Constitution.

Vincent's real trial of that time was the Novitiate. In 1970 he terminated his career as 'teacher of the classics' and became the 'former of novices,' right in the midst of the upheaval in the Church. He would hold this position for ten years until 1980, and would see the generations change before his eyes. Our novices themselves would change. When the old minor seminary system dissolved, the candidates whom we attracted knew less of us and our traditions, let alone of the foundational truths of the Catholic faith as they were taught in the pre-Vatican II catechism. There was an ongoing symphony of confusion in the congregation at-large playing in the background. Confreres were opting out of the congregation – some in anger, some for ideology, others for love. Key people took leaves of absence.

During his years as Novice Director, Vincent would become a divided soul, torn among those formational responsibilities, his duties as General Councilor and as a member of the Constitution Committee. The Novitiate was physically

on the move in those years: from Winchester to Monroe (1972), to the Villa at Stirling (1973) – only to end up at Silver Spring (1980). He would also lose the help of his Novitiate collaborators; Brother Peter Claver died in the Novitiate at Monroe; Father Joe McNutt went to Puerto Rico for health reasons; Brother Gerard O’Boyle requested a leave of absence from Stirling. Each group of Novices also became progressively more vociferous about Vincent’s required, repeated, and prolonged absences from the Novitiate.

My insights into Vincent’s point of view of this time come from the extensive conversations we had while I was working with our Novitiate program. Vincent went into the Novitiate ministry suffering the personal loss and pain of the end of his minor seminary career. He felt himself a part of the “out of touch” older generation, but was now suddenly asked to be the major companion of youth, a task he had left to others in the minor seminary. Not only did he feel disconnected from the new mentality, but the new mentality itself *was* radically different and would change from year to year with each incoming group. All this questioning and change forced Vincent to examine the very essence of what it meant to be a religious and a Missionary Servant, and to rethink what he would transmit to the next generation. He told me that he emerged from the Novitiate directorship a very different person from the one that had begun it.

Vincent felt during that whole time that his opinion was in peril. His voice was just one among many, though he felt that his voice was important in giving these young men the foundations of Cenacle spiritual life. It would drive him to despair to know that whatever he had just termed as important would be contradicted or trivialized by some other confrere. Postmodernism had dawned: all opinions were of equal weight, with the most important truth being *my* truth. Vincent would never agree with that.

At that time Vincent found himself unsure and wary. He was slow in adjusting to new opinions and following trends. At first, for instance, he did not

allow Don Goergen's book, *The Sexual Celibate*, onto the novitiate reading list, so I am sure that it *was read* by all the novices. He was old school: very uncomfortable in talking about sexuality and sexual matters, but now thrust into the new age of open dialogue. Vincent's own personality did not suit this new age. In one-on-one or polite conversation, Vincent always gave you the impression that he agreed with you. His classic response in any conversation was, "You don't say," or "How about that?" If he agreed with your anger or upset, he would say, "For crying out loud." He was very insightful into human personality but was not very conscious of growth dynamics or how to move people along to the next step, other than through prayer. He would have a hard time speaking of his own growth process, his personal disciplines, or the values that under-girded his life. He was reflective and self-sharing, but he was not personalist. His sharing would be more at an analytical, thoughtful level, but always as a gift of self. He knew that things were not proceeding correctly with some Novices, but he would have no idea how to alter that course. He would just moan and shake his head. And, at that time, those from whom he could take counsel were few and far between.

What he did try to give to the Novices in those years was a love of the community and of the vision of Father Judge. He was a living historian who tried to pass on our spirituality, our history, our customs. He was an historical fount of information about the early years of the congregation and he reflected upon this much, especially in the course of the Constitution work. He brought the Novitiate community into closer contact with the ST community both at Monroe and at Stirling. He moved the Novitiate into closer relationship with the Sisters' Novitiate by frequent trips to Philadelphia and meetings in Stirling. And perhaps most important, he was always an exemplary man of prayer.

His greatest loss was the minor seminary, a system which he had given so many years of his life to create. He was in a quandary as to what to do, and he knew the power of his opinion. At the General Cenacle in 1973, if it were not for

his talk, “This is the work of God and it must go on,” in which all heard his implicit endorsement of the necessary steps into the future, we would never have closed our minor seminary. This decision was not without personal consequence for Vincent and brought him to a period of grief, soul searching and brooding. The times were changing and Vincent painfully continued to grow and change with them.

I now wonder whether Tim Lynch, with his colorful costumes and rants, was not exteriorizing in his uniquely creative way what was going on inside of many of his generation. Vincent worked through the situation in prayer, and, as was his artistry, he was able to bring things to resolution a short time later in a beautiful, charged, emotional homily, “Why did the Triune God reject this prayer?” In it, with his artist’s eye, he described Monroe, but especially the student chapel, a physical hymn of praise to the Triune God. He remembered the brass polished door handles, all in the form of a triangle. He could describe each and every stained glass window, upon which he must have meditated often. Then he described the lights, the long lights hanging from that high ceiling, coming down in threes, their long stems punctuated by periodic brass triangle designs. He reminded us of the floor, set out in waving triangles with a small triangle in the middle. “Why did God reject this prayer?” This beautiful, moving homily was his way of grieving with us the loss of his life work and the vision of Thomas of creating our own system. This homily was his way in prayer of letting go of the past and moving into the future. Another deep loss for him was Latin, both for his daily prayer life and the life of the Church. Personally, Vincent had woven his life into those Latin Psalms. His Breviary was worn thin from their daily recitation. Painfully he made the transition to English, and was overjoyed when the new English Liturgy of the Hours finally made its appearance in 1975. He was ambiguous about the change away from Latin for some practical reasons, “Where will the Canon Lawyers come from?” but more for the fact he feared the next generation would be cut off from

the fullness of the fount of the Fathers and the Classical Tradition, a fount that had nourished him so. He was a lover of those readings. His fear was that we were heading down the road to becoming less.

## *VI. The Mission Years (1980-2000)*

Of these years, I can offer some chronology and comment. Others can provide more details.

Leaving the Novitiate, Vincent did a brief residency at Silver Spring to complete the Constitution work. He then did his first year in retreat work at Stirling. In 1982, he became an associate pastor in Lawtell, Louisiana, and a whole new world of pastoral practice was opened to him. He was like a young priest doing his first marriage. His was the eternal youthful spirit, ever eager to learn. He returned to the Shrine for another year in 1984, and then soon afterward, moved to Colonial Beach. After five years he moved back to the Shrine.

I used to see him when he came to Silver Spring from Colonial Beach in the late eighties. At that time work on the Constitution and the Rule of Life was done and Vincent spent his time preparing talks and homilies. He gave us one on the Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul, 1987, pointing out how Father Judge was a true Vincentian, a theme that would occupy him to his final days.

I rejoined him at Stirling in 1990. Vincent was starting his third tour at the Shrine. He was busy with the retreat work, homilies, and Bible classes. His role in the Missionary Cenacle Family flourished as he served as Spiritual Guide to the BTMI, worked often with the MCA, and made frequent trips to the MSBT Motherhouse. He was present at the Motherhouse for every major celebration and was the requested homilist for so many special occasions and funerals. At seventy-five he had lost his ability to say “No!” and was more in demand than ever. He looked upon every speaking occasion as an opportunity to nourish the

Missionary Cenacle Family and would sit up late at night in the library with the Catholic Encyclopedias open, preparing his next day's talk, writing his notes on those legendary legal pads. He would forever have a pad full and would have to roll the pages to find his place. In 1990 he was also discovering the wonders of the computer. He started as a MAC man, but would later move to PCs.

His talks in those days were classic "Vincent": simple, profound, and well developed, with practical consequences. His retreat talks centered on his favorite themes: why Father Judge founded Stirling; the purpose and history of the Missionary Cenacle; a theme of the liturgical season. Mass would always contain a well thought out homily on the day's Scriptures. Most were gems. Whenever I could, I would sneak into the chapel and listen to his artistry. When I shared this with Guy Wilson later on in Los Angeles, Guy commented that when he was a Novice, Vincent's teaching and preaching was a draw back; it was so well prepared and thought out that it was like a diet of thick, sweet pastries. You could take one or two, but more was overload. A daily diet of Vincent was just too rich.

Vincent always exercised early in the morning. He would put on his sweats and run. He loved physical work. His "old hammer and saw missionary heart" stayed perpetually young. Once that January, we shoveled snow for an entire day. Vincent was as agile with the snow blower as with his shovel. His care for his body and his careful diet – especially helpful with his heart problems – were a regimen that probably prolonged his life.

If there was a theme emerging during this time in Vincent's life, it was the need for transformation. Renewal was not a question of changing just the externals. Vincent began to express it as "the good is the enemy of the better." He was trying to prod us out of the self satisfied renewal rut we were getting into and push us on in the work of being faithful to our charism and true spiritual renewal. He expressed this well in January 2004, writing a reflection for the ST Spiritual Life Committee on The Identity of the Missionary Servant. The theme he latched

on to was from John's Gospel, "I came that you might have life and have it to the full." This theme was interwoven into many of his talks.

These years also saw his constant and dedicated involvement at Camp Trinita. He loved it as an expression of Cenacle Family working with families. The summer program, sponsored by the Sisters, in collaboration with the MCA and volunteers, took place on land that had been purchased by Father Judge in Connecticut. I visited him there a number of times throughout the years. He had a workshop over the main barn and a desk, all that he really needed. In the early years I always found him with his hammer in hand or digging fence post holes the old fashioned way, with physical strength. After his heart problems, the Sisters were vigilant that he would not do this, but he continued his silk screening, creating a new logo tee shirt for each camping season. At the camp fiestas, he would also sing and dance, wearing a wig, no less. He would do a famous two-step with Sister Peggy Cosgrove, singing the camp song. One year the young counselors began to call our feared and revered teacher "Vinny, the Care Bear." It was a different world, one that he loved very much.

Even in this time at Trinita, the fires continued to burn inside "the Care Bear" – formerly "The Tiger!" They would flash out every day in a poignant homily about the mystery of the Trinity as Family, the Missionary Cenacle Family, and the need for good, healthy family life in general. All this in language that every camper, young and old, could understand. Each and every homily would be a Vincent masterpiece. Trinita would be one of his most meaningful and beloved projects until the end of his life.

### *VII. The Final Years (2000-2006)*

Vincent being eighty-five was a milestone on the road of his life. When I returned to the East from California, I found Vincent physically different. He was thinner, older and had undergone a noticeable change.

The change was appearing in little things, things that would make you smile. As a formator, Vincent would go ballistic if he caught you lying down during the day. Neither “siesta” nor “afternoon nap” had been a part of his vocabulary. Now, you might find him dozing off in a chair, especially in his room. At night, he would be fast asleep in his favorite chair in the library at the end of the hall in Stirling, the Catholic Encyclopedia still open and the classic signature yellow legal pad still at his side. What happened on the yellow legal pad was also interesting; his writing was becoming so big that now only two or three sentences would fit on a page. His clothing was always simple. By this time his summertime attire was simplified to black pants, occasionally khaki, but with his classic blue shirt with the worn out collar, or the black clerical shirt, most often a shade of gray after so many washings. In winter, he wore whatever with his black pants and red cardigan. He would still jog, but now it was slower. A younger person could walk faster. It took him ages now to run a short distance, but he still ran.

His life was still wrapped up in the Scriptures and the Psalms. He continued to work painstakingly on his homilies; preaching never lost its importance for him. But gone were the Greek texts and the commentaries. The emphasis now seemed to be in getting the message across. I would call these last years “wrestling with the Word.” He worked everyday to create a message that would let God’s Word – not his – shine forth.

The Psalms were his great love. Whether waiting for a meeting, idling time before the next commitment, or sitting waiting for a doctor’s appointment, his Liturgy of the Hours was his constant companion. Many a time I would walk in on him and there he would be with his Breviary in hand. During our long flights on the airplane, he would pray the Psalms.

He came to appreciate community life all the more. After his brother Cy’s death, he remarked to me: “You know, when your family is gone and the nieces and nephews are so far away, you come to realize that our community is really our

family, the family we really have.” Vincent enjoyed being with his Cenacle family until death.

Always young at heart, Vincent never stopped growing. He was always contemplating issues and wrestling with ideas. As the apostolate at the Shrine of Saint Joseph became more oriented to the immigrant, as more Hispanic confreres came, Vincent had his daily dialogue in Spanish. His personal journey was even more impressive. On a 2004 retreat he gave in Mexico, he spoke openly about chastity and how he found God in his sexuality. It was quite startling and out of character for him, especially to those of us who had known him over the years. But again it showed his great capacity to grow, to change, and to integrate the constant newness of life.

The topic of that 2004 retreat in Mexico was the vows. Vincent had chosen the theme. He brought extensive paper work and notes. He was very concerned in his final years about the vows. On three separate occasions he gave me a copy of the survey that he and Sister Mary Tonra had done for the Constitution Committee. The study revealed that as a whole, the men have a very pragmatic, utilitarian sense of the vows. The vows gave us the detachment and mobility to be missionaries – a work centered orientation. There was very little awareness of their eschatological witness value. He was concerned that for STs the vows were not definitive of our identity, that we did not embrace them and renew them in love. He was afraid that we were somewhat clueless about their witness value. He felt this last point very strongly in light of the sexual abuse scandal in the Church and the growing lack of simplicity in our lives.

For me, Vincent never mellowed and I saw this especially when we were traveling companions. He remained fiercely independent with that determined resolve of steel. We would never take an elevator when we could walk up a flight of stairs. Never, never offer to help him up a flight of stairs. Never offer to carry his overloaded brown leather briefcase, but always be there as he hands it to you and says, “Could you please take this?” Our long journeys by car and plane were

always enjoyable as he was an engaging conversationalist. We always took time to pray. On a car ride, especially as we drove along one of his favorite routes, highway 29 as it goes along the Delaware River, he would love to pray the rosary, which he always did in a unique, inimitable way, forever cadencing the last words “of thy womb, Je-e-e-e-sus.” In our car conversations, he was always working on some new little project or talk, or planning for the upcoming summer at his beloved Trinita.

As the years passed, the burden of our work together shifted to me. In previous years, Vincent would pull the stack of papers out of his brief case and set the work pace. He would never lose his place or train of thought. Now, I was the one doing the work. About two weeks before our meeting, I would send up a number of pages for him to review and then drive up to Stirling to meet on them. We would meet all day and Vincent would have gone over the material and made his notes. Whenever a question came up, he would run to his room and bring out an old wrinkled yellow paper from his treasure trove that had exactly addressed the point in question. It seemed to me he saved his every paper from ordination on. But where? His room never gave the appearance of clutter. During our discussions, he was not as quick now as he used to be to come to a point or take a position. On tough issues, he would lean back, put his right hand, holding his pencil, under his chin in his classic thinking pose and say, “Let me think about that. I will get back to you.” And two or three weeks later, a computer written document of a few pages would arrive in the mail. He was especially interested in the project of writing the biography of Father Judge and would review all the preliminary ideas and proposed sections very carefully.

Our sessions now were also marked by the signs of aging. Some days he would have taken his diuretic and would have to excuse himself every few minutes. When he detected a twinkle in my eye, he would look at me from over his glasses with that classic stare: “Don’t laugh. You too will get old one day.” He would scoot off and come right back and take up his thought exactly where he had left

off in the discussion. When things became cloudy and detail could not be determined, Father Stephen Quinn and Sister Mary Gerald were always nearby to share facts and memories.

Maybe I am reading too much into it, but these sessions were also something of a “legacy.” He would stop in his thought, look at me and say something like, “Always remember, Father Judge wanted...” or “In any decision you make, you should always think about...” If there was one thing that was clear in his message, it was never to get caught up in the immediate, always try to see the big picture of Father’s vision, especially regarding the laity and the Missionary Cenacle Family. He was absolutely convinced of the Family idea being at the center of our charism. One of the most memorable talks he gave was to the Missionary Cenacle Family Council about Father’s vision for the laity and the Family. [This talk is available on DVD.]

Vincent valued to the end the work of Camp Trinita, not only of working with families – the focus of their summer program – but being present as the Missionary Cenacle Family. When I saw him in November 2005 for his birthday, I asked him what he had in mind for Trinita that year. His answer was an unusually vague, “We’ll see.” In our last conversation in January, when I again asked, he said, “I am not sure.” I should have realized then that he was getting ready to set out on the different journey.

He ended up his journey of ninety years on his knees. He always liked to pray kneeling. It was the position from which you honored God and asked for favors. Father Judge once remarked that kneeling itself was a sign of praise to the Triune God. As far back as Monroe, I can remember Vincent kneeling – in our student chapel early in the morning. I can remember him in the 1970s kneeling in the chapel at Alonso Manso, in Puerto Rico, praying with Sister Sara Butler for the success of the Constitution meetings with the Island STs and MSBTs. I remember him kneeling at Stirling as he recited the daily rosary. A man of prayer, he would

kneel down and pray at the side of his bed before retiring when we shared a room in our travels. He had such a grateful heart in prayer and would give free rein to expressions of that gratitude.

### *VIII. Vincent's Legacy*

1. Love of God. This was the only acceptable motivation. All other motivations had to be examined and transformed into a love of the Triune God. Vincent loved God in others and in all that he did. It was expressed concretely in a love of Jesus Christ, the Word Incarnate, and in drawing closer to the Word by a constant, penetrating, prayerful wrestling with the written Word of God. He was a man of integrity, deep devotion and constancy.

2. Love of Father Judge. Vincent was inspired by Father and his vision. He admired him, remembered key aspects of him, and tried to imitate Father in his life. He pondered often Father's vision and what it meant.

3. The Particular. In talking about the practices that Father Judge gave to the Cenacle, Vincent taught the three "P's" – the practices must be *Personal, Practical* and *Particular*. The first two were readily understood, but "particular" referred to our degree of intensity, our "spiritual temperature." For Vincent, it meant giving a thousand percent in all things. And that is how he lived his life, at that 1000% intensity.

4. Love of the Missionary Servants and of his Cenacle priesthood vocation. Religious Life was very important to him. The theme of the meaning and the witness of the vows was a constant preoccupation. His ministry was to nourish all in the life, history and customs of the Cenacle, and especially to form Missionary Servants. He was generous and self sacrificing in that labor. He felt as deeply a responsibility for the MSBTs as he did for the STs. He knew how to praise us and he knew how to help us realize our potential.

5. Love of the Missionary Cenacle Family. Vincent gave of all of his talents - spiritual, intellectual, and physical – to make this dream of Father Judge live for the present. He was devoted to the Missionary Cenacle Apostolate, but especially to the Blessed Trinity Missionary Institute, and worked hard and long preparing reflections for them.

6. His inquisitive probing mind. This factor kept him eternally young.

7. Everything was to be examined rigorously, thoroughly, painstakingly, slowly.

8. What did it mean in the here and now? It was important to know the past and be nourished by it, but never to be trapped in the past. Vincent was forever rethinking who we are for the present. *Sentire cum Ecclesia – to think, to feel* with the mind and heart of the Church was very important in making the message relevant for today's world. He wanted – for himself and even more so for us – God's life and that life in its fullness. His fear was that the good of the present would blind us to the better that the future can be.

Vincent Fitzpatrick taught us the mind and the heart of Father Judge by who he himself was. He was greatness, intelligence and integrity in an ordinary, approachable wrapper. What a gift from God! *“Do give this much thought, as you are, so also others will be...”*

