

DOCUMENTA

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LE PÈRE JOHN FURNISS ET LES MISSIONS POUR ENFANTS EN GRANDE-BRETAGNE ET EN IRLANDE DE 1851 A 1862

CONTENU

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1. – *Débuts des Rédemptoristes dans les Iles Britanniques*

Pour situer la personne du P. Furniss dans un contexte historique plus large, il ne serait pas inutile de rappeler comment les Rédemptoristes ont pris pied en Grande-Bretagne¹.

Dès 1837, Mgr Baines, Visiteur Apostolique coadjuteur du District Occidental d'Angleterre² de passage à Liège, rencontre le Supérieur belge, le P. Held³ et lui propose d'envoyer des missionnaires au Pays de Galles, région particulièrement défavorisée au niveau spirituel⁴. Held ne dit pas non, il ira même l'année suivante se rendre compte sur place, mais il jugea la situation peu propice et le projet fut abandonné.

¹ La plupart des informations rapportées ici proviennent des huit volumes des *Chronica Provinciae et Collegiorum Provinciae belgicae* compilées en grande partie par Célestin Hovois et déposées à la fois aux AGHR et aux archives CSsR de la Belgique Nord. Citées désormais: *ChPCprB*.

² Peter Baines (OSB) († 1843). R. RITZLER – P. SEFRIN, *Hierarchia Catholica medii et recentioris aevi*, vol. VII:1840-1846 et vol. VIII: 1846-1903, Padova 1968, ici VII, 302 (cité désormais: *Hier.Cath.*).

³ Friedrich von Held (Brunn 1799 – Vaals 1881). Profès à Vienne en 1821. Supérieur en Belgique de 1833 à 1847. Puis, Visiteur en Angleterre et Recteur de Clapham jusqu'au début 1854. *Catal.Gén.* [aux AGHR], XIII n° 72.

⁴ *ChPCprB* I, 194-195, 262-263.

En juillet 1841, la Congrégation transalpine est divisée en trois Provinces: autrichienne, suisse et belge. Le P. Held, en Belgique depuis 1833, est tout naturellement choisi pour diriger la Province belge. Cette fois c'est de Tournai que lui arrive une autre proposition via la famille Edgar of Keithock, catholique d'origine écossaise. Held se rend donc en Ecosse en avril 1842 et y rencontre Mgr Scott, Vic. Apost. du District Oriental d'Ecosse⁵ qui lui demande non pas une maison de religieux mais des missionnaires isolés comme curés de paroisse, ce que Held se voit obligé de refuser.

Mais les Iles Britanniques sont grandes et Held rencontre une nouvelle fois Mgr Baines qui lui propose une fondation, cette fois en Cornouailles à *Falmouth*. C'est donc en juin 1843 que commence véritablement l'implantation en terre britannique avec le départ de F.X. Lempfridt⁶, accompagné du tout jeune Louis De Buggenoms⁷ et du Frère Félicien Dubucquoy⁸. Ils avaient comme compagnie Madame Edgar et sa suite. Généreux mais peu préparés à cette tâche dans un pays à majorité protestante, nos missionnaires connurent des débuts difficiles. Du côté du Recteur Majeur Ripoli⁹ ce n'était pas l'enthousiasme non plus, il écrit une lettre à Held lui reprochant, ainsi qu'au Vicaire Général à Vienne Passerat¹⁰ d'aller trop vite en besogne, de fonder des petits postes – qu'il appelle des *conventini* – sans aucune garantie financière, sans grand espoir pour le futur et peu propices à l'observance régulière¹¹.

⁵ Andrew Scott (1795-1876). *Hier.Cath.* VII, 188.

⁶ Le Lorrain Xavier Lempfridt (Lixheim 1809), profès en 1833 et prêtre en 1837. Dispensé en Angleterre en août 1845. *Catal.Gén.* [aux AGHR], XIII n° 198. – Oblat de la CSsR en 1868. *SHCSR* 26 (1978) 85 n.57 et p.102.

⁷ Louis (De) Buggenoms (Liège 1816 – Bruxelles 1882), profès en 1838 et prêtre en 1843. *Catal.Gén.* XIII n° 261.

⁸ Le Frère belge Félicien Dubucquoy (Dottignies 1816 – Limerick 1897) profès en 1841. *Catal.Gén.* XIV n° 100.

⁹ Giancamillo Ripoli (Corato 1780 – Pagani 1850), profès en 1789. Recteur Majeur de mai 1832 à 1850. [ANON.], *Series Moderatorum generalium eorumque Vicariorum et Consultorum*, dans *SHCSR* 2 (1954) 38-43.

¹⁰ Le Vénérable Joseph Passerat (Joinville 1772 – Tournai 1858), profès en 1796. Vicaire Général transalpin de 1820 à 1848. *Catal.Gén.* XIII n° 4. [ANON.], *Series Moderatorum generalium ...*, cit. dans *SHCSR* 2 (1954) 44-50.

¹¹ Ripoli à Held le 6.IX.1843 (Brouillon aux AGHR 30060001, 84358) qui répond à une lettre enthousiaste de Held du 30.VII.1843 (Original aux AGHR 30060001, 84348) et une autre adressée à Sabelli du 4.VIII.1843 (Original aux AGHR 30060001, 84352).

Quoi qu'il en soit, de St Trond devait naître en septembre 1844 une autre fondation grâce à Vincenzo Gandolfi, neveu de Thomas Charles Hornyold, venu y faire sa retraite en 1842. Séduit par l'esprit de la Congrégation, Gandolfi nous offrit une propriété et une église à *Hanley* (Blackmore Park) dans le comté de Worcester¹².

Chassés par la Révolution de 1848, quelques Pères autrichiens acceptèrent de commencer d'autres fondations en Angleterre, comme celles de *Great Marlow* dans le Comté de Buckingham¹³, de *Llanherne* en Cornouailles¹⁴ non loin de Falmouth, de *Rotherwas* en terre galloise¹⁵.

Nous voilà arrivés en 1850, l'année où la branche transalpine reçoit un nouveau Vicaire Général en la personne de Rudolph von Smetana¹⁶. Lors d'une célèbre Consulte tenue au Bischenberg en octobre-novembre 1850¹⁷, il fut décidé de supprimer toutes les petites fondations au profit, si possible, de maisons plus grandes et plus stables. Held n'avait pas attendu cette décision pour porter ses regards vers Londres où, dès 1848¹⁸, il avait acheté une maison dans le quartier de *Clapham* et s'y installait avec Petcherin¹⁹. Bientôt

¹² Michael Hodgetts, *Blackmore Park* (Upton-upon-Severn 1996).

¹³ Sur *Great-Marlow*: *ChPCprB* II, 384-385; III, 47-48; 206-207; 313, 385.

¹⁴ Sur *Lanherne*: *ChPCprB* II, 396; III, 47, 206, 312-313.

¹⁵ Sur *Rotherwas*: *ChPCprB* III, 46, 206.

¹⁶ L'Autrichien Rudolph von Smetana (Wien 1802 – Gars 1871), profès et prêtre en 1831. Nommé *Vicaire Général Transalpin* par Décret du St Siège [Orioli] le 1er juillet 1850 [AGHR, vol XII D 15]. Réside à Altötting jusqu'en juin 1851, puis à Coblenze, enfin à Rome depuis le printemps 1854. Sa charge prit fin à l'élection du Recteur Majeur Mauron en mai 1855. *Catal.Gén.* XIII n° 172. [ANON.], *Series Moderatorum generalium...*, cit. *SHCSR* 2 (1954) 54-55.

¹⁷ Sur cette Consulte triennale d'octobre-novembre 1850 au Bischenberg: cfr Carl DILGSKRON, *P. Rudolf von Smetana. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Congregation des allerheiligsten Erlösers*, Wien 1902, 166-172; DU MÊME, *P. Friedrich von Held. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Congregation des allerheiligsten Erlösers*, Wien 1909, 263-264; Maurice DE MEULEMEESTER, *Le Père Frédeéric von Held, rédemptoriste (1799-1881)*, Jette 1911, 219-220.

¹⁸ Sur *Clapham*: *ChPCprB* II, 124, 195, 379-382; III, 43-47, 204-206, etc. – George STEBBINGS, *The Redemptorists*, New York 1924, 155-158; DU MÊME, *History of St Mary Clapham*, London 1935.

¹⁹ L'ukrainien Vladimir Petcherin (Dymerka 1807 – Dublin 1885), profès à St-Trond en 1841 et prêtre à Liège en 1843. Depuis fin 1844 à Falmouth, mais en mai 1848 Held l'appelle à *Clapham*, *ChPCprB* II, 223; III, 41. Inscrit à Limerick le 27 mars 1854. Dispensé des vœux en 1861. *Catal.Gén.* XIII n° 311. Nous a laissé d'intéressants Mémoires sur Falmouth et *Clapham*, Mémoires publiées en néerlandais par Tom EEKMAN sous le titre *Van over het Graf*, Amsterdam 1990.

arrivèrent des germanophones comme Petrak²⁰, Haklik²¹, Kittel²², Schneider²³; des Belges ou Hollandais comme Buggenoms, Theunis²⁴, Vanderaa²⁵, Vanderstichele²⁶; et surtout les premières et précieuses vocations anglophones telles que Douglas²⁷, Weld²⁸, Furniss, Bradshaw²⁹, Plunkett³⁰, Coffin³¹, Vaughan³²...

Une mission prêchée en la paroisse de St Nicolas de Liverpool du 11 au 31 mai 1850 par Buggenoms, Walworth³³ et Weld³⁴ eut tant de succès que Mgr Brown, Vic. Apost. du Lancashire³⁵, voulut aussi

²⁰ Ulrich Petrak (Kunzak/Bohême 1791 – Eggenburg 1876), prêtre en 1819 et profès en 1821. *Catal.Gén.* XIII n° 69. [ANON.], *Series Moderatorum generalium*, cit. dans *SHCSR* 2 (1954) 48-49, 266 n°129.

²¹ Wenceslas Haklik (Prague 1799 – Prague 1862), prêtre en 1841, profès à Finale en 1843. *Catal.Gén.* XIII n° 390.

²² Germain Kittel (Neustadt/Silésie 1818 – New York 1851), profès à St Trond en 1845. *Catal.Gén.* XIII n° 468.

²³ Hans-Nicolas Schneider (Eupen 1821 – New Orleans 1873), profès en 1843. *Catal.Gén.* XIII n° 381.

²⁴ Le Limbourgeois Franz Theunis (Hasselt 1821 – Roeselare 1882), profès en 1840. *Catal.Gén.* XIII n° 292.

²⁵ Le Holl. Jan Vanderaa ('s Hertogenbosch 1822 – Paramaribo 1872), profès en 1845. *Catal.Gén.* XIII n° 461.

²⁶ Le Belge Leo Vanderstichele (Wevelgem 1825 – Dundalk 1887), profès en 1845. *Catal.Gén.* XIII n° 469.

²⁷ L'Écossais Edward Douglas (Edinburgh 1819 – Roma 1898), profès à St Trond en 1849. *Catal.Gén.* XIII n° 570.

²⁸ L'Anglais Francis Weld (Weymouth 1819), profès à St Trond en 1849, *ChPCprB* III, 169. Dispensé à Clapham en février 1853, *ChPCprB* III, 6 et IV, 136. *Catal.Gén.* XIII n° 564.

²⁹ L'Anglais J. Bradshaw (Aston-le-Willows 1818 – Leamington 1892), profès en 1851. *Catal.Gén.* XIII n° 614.

³⁰ L'Irlandais Will. Plunkett (Corbalton 1824 – Sydney 1900), profès à St Trond en 1851. *Catal.Gén.* XIII n° 621.

³¹ L'Anglais Robert Coffin (Brighton 1819 – Teignmouth 1885), profès à St Trond en 1852. *Catal.Gén.* XIII n° 632.

³² L'Anglais Edmond Vaughan (Courtfield 1827 – Bishop Eton 1908), profès à St Trond. *Catal.Gén.* XIII n° 633.

³³ L'Américain Clarens Walworth (Plattsburgh 1820), profès à St Trond en 1846 et prêtre à Roermond en 1848. Dispensé en 1858 avec Isaac Thomas Hecker. *Catal.Gén.* XIII n° 501.

³⁴ Tous les travaux apostoliques de cette période sont soigneusement consignés dans quatre registres intitulés *Chronica Laborum Apostolicorum extra Collegia* (aux AGHR, cités désormais: *Chron. Lab. Ext.*). Pour Liverpool: *Chron. Lab. Ext.* II, 104-105.

³⁵ George Hilary Brown (1786-1856), sera évêque de Liverpool de sept. 1850 à 1856. *Hier.Cath.* VIII, 347.

une fondation dans son diocèse³⁶. Ce fut le début de la maison de *Bishop Eton*.

Bishop Eton c'était un regard tourné vers l'île toute proche, vers la catholique Irlande qui ne tarda pas à appeler les Rédemptoristes. Ici encore, l'Histoire se répète puisque tout commence par une mission en octobre 1851 dans la *pro-cathédrale* Saint-Jean de Limerick à la demande de Mgr Sean Ryan³⁷. L'équipe des missionnaires reflétait bien le caractère international des débuts. Il y avait l'Autrichien Joseph Prost³⁸, l'Ukrainien Wladimir Petcherin³⁹, le Hollandais Jan Van Antwerpen⁴⁰, le Belge Leo Vanderstichele et tout de même un anglophone, l'Écossais Edward Douglas. La mission eut un retentissement énorme. Six mois plus tard, une autre mission fut prêchée toujours à Limerick à St-Michel, puis ce fut le tour d'Enniskillen, Waterside, Derry, Letterkenny, Omagh, Gorey, Wexford... Entre-temps, les Pères missionnaires louaient à Limerick une maison au n° 8 Bank Place pour, entre deux travaux apostoliques, y trouver un pied-à-terre commode. Comme chacun sait, le provisoire devient souvent définitif. Un membre du Parlement, William Monsell, alla trouver le Père Held à Londres pour lui demander une fondation stable à Limerick. Ainsi Held, accompagné du P. Buggenoms, visita les lieux en novembre 1852. Un an plus tard, en novembre 1853, arrivait comme Supérieur Buggenoms lui-même avec l'Eupenois Hans

³⁶ *ChPCprB* III, 339-340; 385-386; IV, 77-78, 212-213; 289-290.

³⁷ Sur Limerick et l'Irlande: *ChPCprB* III : 340-341; IV : 39-40; 138-139; 213-214; 290-292. [Anonyme], *Fifty Years at Mount St Alphonsus 1853-1903*, 1-5. Eduard HOSP, *First Redemptorist missions in Ireland according to Fr. J. Prost's Diaries*, dans *SHCSR* 8 (1960) 459-482; LE MÊME, *Leben des Paters Josef Prost (1804-1885), nach seinen eigenen Aufzeichnungen*, dans *SHCSR* 11 (1963) surtout 410-412. Samuel J. BOLAND, *Early Redemptorist missions in England and Ireland (1848-1865)*, dans *SHCSR* 33 (1985) 298-301.

³⁸ L'Autrichien Joseph Prost (Freinberg 1804 – Puchheim 1885), profès à Mautern en 1831 et prêtre en 1832. En Amérique de 1835 à fin 1842. Expulsé d'Autriche en 1848, se rendra successivement à Hanley, Lanhern, Great-Marlow. Premier Supérieur de Bishop Eton. Reste en Angleterre jusqu'en 1855. *Catal.Gén.* XIII n° 174. Mader 509-5110. Eduard HOSP, *Leben des Paters Josef Prost (1804-1885), nach seinen eigenen Aufzeichnungen*, dans *SHCSR* 11 (1963) 404-412.

³⁹ L'Ukrainien Vladimir Petcherin (Dymerka 1807), profès à St-Trond en 1841 et prêtre à Liège en 1843. Dispensé en 1861. *Catal.Gén.* XIII n° 311.

⁴⁰ Le Holl. Jan van Antwerpen (Eindhoven 1822 – Bishop Eton 1853), profès en 1841 *Catal.Gén.* XIII n° 318.

Schneider et l'anglais John Furniss, ainsi que le Frère Peter Franken⁴¹ qui ne quitta plus l'Irlande. Bientôt on dut chercher un autre endroit pour pouvoir y bâtir une église et un couvent. On choisit une petite colline appelée *Court Brack*, rebaptisée par nous *Mount Saint-Alphonsus*. Une chapelle provisoire y fut élevée en attendant la construction de l'église définitive (décembre 1862).

Louis Buggenoms fut la cheville ouvrière des constructions et du début de la fondation. Tâche difficile à cause des oppositions dont il eut à souffrir⁴². A la création de la Vice-Province provisoire Hollando-anglaise (mai 1854), ce fut le P. Bernard Hafkenscheid qui reprit le supérieurat jusqu'au Chapitre Général de 1855. Après quoi, Buggenoms y redevint Supérieur.

Ce qui frappe dans la correspondance de ce temps-là, c'est l'émerveillement soudain que manifestent les Supérieurs rédemptoristes et les missionnaires devant le champ qui s'ouvre devant eux, dans cette Irlande si pauvre mais si chaleureuse en comparaison de ce qu'ils avaient vécu dans l'Angleterre protestante. Par bonheur nous avons conservé la première lettre de Buggenoms à Douglas en provenance de Limerick⁴³ qui décrit leurs premiers travaux apostoliques, le premier Noël vécu à Bank Place, la ferveur du peuple:

«Chaque matin notre cloche résonne à 5h moins le quart. Aussi, bon gré mal gré, nous devons nous lever à temps, car beaucoup de personnes attendent pour faire avec nous la méditation du matin. Certains d'entre eux, comme vous le savez, ont une dévotion fort expansive et à peine avons-nous lu quelques lignes que nous entendons des exclamations d'amour, de contrition, etc. Bien que j'apprécie beaucoup le coeur chaleureux de nos bons Irlandais, c'est un peu ennuyeux de ne pas avoir un oratoire à nous où nous puissions faire notre méditation en privé».

Dès fin 1852, le Vicaire Général Smetana, au vu des succès des missions irlandaises et des difficultés en Angleterre, a dans l'idée qu'il serait préférable de se fixer en Irlande plutôt qu'en Angleterre. Ainsi

⁴¹ Le Frère Peter Franken (Leuving/Köln 1814 – Limerick 1892), prof. à St Trond en 1847. *Catal. Gén.* XIV n° 171.

⁴² Lettres de Buggenoms à Douglas du 22.III; Buggenoms à Mauron 6.VII; Buggenoms à Douglas 24. IX. 1855; Buggenoms à Mauron 28. XII. 1855, etc. [aux AGHR Prov. H.A.] De Buggenoms encore: récit détaillé dans son *Mémoire confidentiel* de 1865, 42-49.

⁴³ Buggenoms à Douglas, Limerick 13. I. 1854 [AGHR 30110001, DO 06].

écrit-il à Held qu'il vaudrait mieux concentrer toutes nos forces sur l'Irlande et abandonner l'Angleterre dans la mesure du possible, et même ne plus y accepter des missions, nous occuper au minimum de la *quasi-paroisse* de Clapham, et nous débarrasser à tout prix de la chapelle allemande à Londres. Ce serait même bien si le Cardinal Wiseman reconnaissait notre intention de nous retirer de l'Angleterre. Celle-ci n'est pas, du moins pour le moment, un pays où la Congrégation pourra prospérer car les évêques font tout pour nous contrecarrer⁴⁴. Un peu plus tard Smetana se félicite du succès des missions en Irlande et il se voit conforté dans l'idée que l'Irlande et non l'Angleterre est la *bonne terre* pour notre Congrégation⁴⁵.

Buggenoms ne dit pas autre chose lorsqu'il écrit à Douglas que certes l'Angleterre a besoin de plus de missionnaires que l'Irlande, mais il ne croit pas – contrairement à l'avis du Pape – que nous, Rédemptoristes, soyons qualifiés pour travailler parmi les Protestants, alors que nous sommes faits pour un pays comme l'Irlande où le clergé et le peuple ont bien besoin de notre exemple et de nos services. On frissonnerait si l'on connaissait les misères qu'ils ont trouvées parmi le clergé, pas à Limerick précisément, mais dans d'autres diocèses. C'est bien dommage qu'ils n'aient pas une maison qui puisse accueillir des prêtres en retraite⁴⁶.

Quoi qu'il en soit, les Rédemptoristes ont travaillé aussi bien en Angleterre qu'en Irlande et parmi leur travail missionnaire, est apparue une forme originale qui nous occupera à présent: la mission spécifique auprès des enfants qui rendra célèbre le P. Furniss.

2. – *Furniss et ses missions pour enfants.*

John Furniss est né d'une famille catholique aisée à la *Villa Bellevue* près de Sheffield en 1809⁴⁷. Il fut d'abord formé par les Franciscains de Baddesley (Birmingham), puis passa dans les prestigieux séminaires d'Oscott et d'Ushaw (Durham). C'est à Ushaw qu'il fut ordonné prêtre en 1834 par Mgr Briggs. Commence alors sa

⁴⁴ Smetana à Held, Koblenz 17. XII. 1852 [Orig. à Köln; photocopie AGHR 30060001, 85298].

⁴⁵ *der rechte Boden*, écrit-il. Smetana à Held, Koblenz 29.I.1853 [Orig. à Köln; photocopie AGHR 30060001, 853016]. La même idée revient le 1. II. 1853 [Orig. à Köln; photocopie AGHR 30060001, 853020].

⁴⁶ Buggenoms à Douglas, Limerick 24. IX. 1855 [AGHR 30110001, DO 024]

⁴⁷ La biographie la plus ancienne et la plus documentée est celle de Thomas LIVIUS CSsR, *Father Furniss and his work for Children*, London 1896, 193 pp.

vie pastorale à Bradford d'abord puis à Doncaster. Très zélé, mais de santé délicate, après six années de labeur apostolique, il doit prendre du repos. Pour changer d'air il entreprend alors de grands voyages en Italie, Tyrol, Espagne, puis Malte, Chypre, Libye, Syrie, Liban, Terre Sainte, Egypte... partout étudiant, prenant des notes qui lui serviront plus tard dans ses conférences aux enfants.

Au retour de cette longue pérégrination, il rencontra à Londres les PP Douglas et Buggenoms et décida à 41 ans d'entrer chez les Rédemptoristes. Il prit l'habit en Belgique, au noviciat de St Trond avec onze autres candidats [dont l'Irlandais Plunkett, les Anglais Bradshaw et Bridgett] le 15 octobre 1850⁴⁸ et prononça ses vœux dans les mains du Père Maître, Paul Reyners⁴⁹, neuf mois plus tard, le 2 juillet 1851⁵⁰.

Après un bref séjour à Liège, il s'embarque pour l'Angleterre, pour Londres Clapham où il arrive en septembre 1851⁵¹. Deux ans plus tard, fin novembre 1853, il fait partie de la première équipe qui s'installera vraiment à Limerick avec Buggenoms et Hans Schneider⁵². Pendant ces deux années passées à Londres, il a déjà prêché treize missions, huit en Irlande et cinq en Angleterre, avec toujours une prédilection pour les enfants envers qui il avait une grande sollicitude et qu'il savait captiver par son éloquence appropriée à leur âge.

Tout allait fort bien jusqu'à l'arrivée du P. Bernard Hafkenscheid⁵³. Ce robuste Hollandais de 46 ans avait déjà derrière lui une flatteuse renommée de prédicateur extraordinaire pouvant remuer les foules à son gré, trop au goût de certains. Revenu des Etats-Unis où il venait de terminer son mandat de Provincial – le premier qu'ait connu cette jeune Province créée en 1850 – il arriva à Limerick en avril 1854⁵⁴. Il y trouva comme chef des missions l'autrichien Joseph Prost, lui même grand missionnaire. Comme il arrive souvent lorsque deux fortes personnalités se rencontrent, il y

⁴⁸ *ChPCprB* III, 279.

⁴⁹ Le Belge Paul Reyners (Tongeren 1812 – Tournai 1887), profès à St-Trond en 1839 *Catal. Gén.* XIII n° 276.

⁵⁰ *ChPCprB* III, 345.

⁵¹ *ChPCprB* III, 356, 383.

⁵² *ChPCprB* IV, 136, 138.

⁵³ Le Hollandais Bernard Hafkenscheid (Amsterdam 1807 – Wittem 1865), prêtre à Rome en mars 1832 et profès à Weinhaus en octobre 1833. *Catal. Gén.* XIII n° 193.

⁵⁴ *ChPCprB* IV, 210, 213.

eut des points de frictions. Le P. Prost avait ses idées sur la façon de conduire des missions, le P. Bernard en avait d'autres⁵⁵. Par exemple sur l'argent: Prost avait défendu toute collecte durant les missions afin de ne décourager personne à y venir, le P. Bernard passa outre et permit les collectes; il permit aussi le vin à table; Prost était pour des missions assez longues, le P. Bernard les voulait plus courtes. Divergence aussi dans la façon de prêcher, Bernard faisait appel aux émotions et n'hésitait pas à employer les grands moyens pour y parvenir, Prost était plus sobre, il s'adressait plus à l'esprit de ses auditeurs qu'à leurs sentiments.

Il n'est pas étonnant dès lors que le bon Père Furniss ait eu à souffrir du nouveau chef des missions, au point de ne pas faire long feu à Limerick. Arrivé en avril 1854, le P. Bernard eut soin de faire nommer Furniss à Clapham deux mois plus tard⁵⁶ et tout le rapport qui va suivre n'est qu'une défense de ses méthodes à lui et une longue plainte contre la façon de faire du P. Bernard.

Ce rapport est intéressant à plus d'un titre: il donne une image saisissante de la situation religieuse en Irlande, à la fois grande ferveur et profonde ignorance religieuse du peuple, le prosélytisme protestant jouant sur la pauvreté des Catholiques, la situation sociale et économique du pays, le rôle du clergé, etc... Furniss écrira encore plusieurs fois à Douglas⁵⁷ et à Smetana, répétant inlassablement les mêmes arguments en faveur des missions pour enfants, missions qu'il veut nettement séparer de celles des adultes. Pourquoi écrit-il à Douglas et en ce moment? Parce qu'il sait qu'un Chapitre Général est en vue à Rome⁵⁸ dans lequel Furniss espérait bien voir en Douglas un avocat de sa cause car Douglas était sur place à Rome au côté du Procureur Queloz⁵⁹ et qui plus est, allait devenir Provincial de la

⁵⁵ Eduard HOSP, *First Redemptorist Missions in Ireland*, dans *SHCSR* 8 (1960) 479-480.

⁵⁶ *ChPCprB* IV, 211, 214.

⁵⁷ Furniss à Douglas 25. II., 30.V, et 26. VI. 1855 [AGHR 30110001, DO 019, 021, 023a], de nouveau à Smetana le 29. VI. 1855 [AGHR 30110001, DO 023b]. Puis encore à Douglas le 17. VI et 21. VI. 1856.

⁵⁸ La convocation officielle par Smetana date du 15 août 1854, mais l'idée avait été imposée par la Congrég. des EE et RR [Cardinal Della Genga] dès le 8 octobre 1853. *Acta integra Capitulum Generalium CSsR ab anno 1749 usque ad annum 1894* (Roma 1899) 304-309.

⁵⁹ Smetana avait envoyé Douglas négocier une maison à Rome à l'automne 1853. Smetana à Held, Roma 18. X. 1853 [Orig. à Köln; photocopie AGHR 30060001, 853094]. Le Bernois Brice Queloz (St-Brais 1802 - Roma 1882), prêtre

Province Romaine, donc membre de droit du Chapitre Général, plus tard encore Douglas est nommé parmi les Consultants Généraux⁶⁰. Quant au P. Bernard, il sera nommé Vocal au Chapitre à la réunion de Wittem du 13 novembre 1854⁶¹, nomination qui inquiète grandement Furniss car il sait que le P. Bernard n'encouragera pas les missions pour enfants, bien au contraire.

Sachant tout cela, nous pouvons maintenant lire le rapport que Furniss envoie au Vicaire Général Smetana par l'entremise de Douglas (v. Document).

3. – Conclusions

Comme nous l'avons dit, le rapport de Furniss du 26 juin 1854 fut encore suivi d'une série de longues lettres de Furniss qui reprennent inlassablement les mêmes arguments en faveur de son travail auprès des enfants.

Quel fut l'impact de ces plaidoyers enflammés? A lire les actes du Chapitre Général de 1855, il semblerait que les capitulaires ne se soient pas penchés particulièrement sur la question, et on les comprend: il y avait tant d'autres matières à traiter! Toutefois, dans la session du 11 mai, on retoucha un peu la Constitution qui concernait les enfants dans les missions pour répéter qu'il fallait séparer les garçons des filles et désigner un missionnaire pour chaque groupe.⁶² On recommanda aussi les associations pieuses en citant nommément la *Sainte Famille* créée à Liège⁶³. C'est tout, et on imagine la déception de Furniss.

Ajoutons qu'un rapport du P. Bernard rédigé pendant le Chapitre Général, sans doute à la demande du P. Mauron, n'était pas fait pour disposer les esprits en faveur de Furniss:

«Une dernière difficulté qui dans les derniers temps a beaucoup agité les esprits est le nouveau système introduit par force par le P. Furniss de donner des missions aux enfants. J'ai examiné le système, j'en ai pesé les avantages et les désavantages, j'ai consulté tous les Pères et finalement je l'ai trouvé défectueux, nouveau dans la

en 1832 et profès au Bischenberg en 1847. *Catal.Gén.* XIII n° 526. [Anon.] *Series Moderatorum generalium* cit. in *SHCSR* 2 (1954) 55, 268.

⁶⁰ Le 19 juillet 1855, *Acta integra Capitulum Generalium CSsR ab anno 1749 usque ad annum 1894*, Roma 1899, 617-618.

⁶¹ *ChPCprB* IV, 189.

⁶² *Acta integra* (n.59), 321 et 501.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 508.

Congrégation, contraire à l'esprit et aux traditions de notre Ordre, impraticable à la longue et ruineux pour l'oeuvre des missions en général. Il faudrait écrire des volumes pour communiquer à Votre Paternité tout ce qu'on a dit de part et d'autre depuis deux ans sur cette fâcheuse affaire. A mon avis, le P. Furniss doit être mis à l'ordre, il doit se soumettre à son Supérieur de la maison et à celui de la mission et ne pas s'en aller seul pendant des mois entiers dans des paroisses distantes, vivant loin de la communauté et surtout de la société des autres missionnaires»⁶⁴.

Quatre mois plus tard, lors de la première visite du nouveau Provincial Swinkels⁶⁵ en Grande-Bretagne, le jugement porté sur notre homme n'est pas moins sévère:

«Tous, absolument tous, se plaignent de lui, de ce qu'il est difficile pour ses confrères en mission, qu'il ne se soumet en rien au directeur de la mission, qu'il se donne dans des extravagances dans ses instructions, qu'il discrédite la Congrégation en admettant à la première Communion des enfants de huit ou neuf ans sans le consentement du curé, etc. Vraiment je crains beaucoup pour lui, il n'est qu'exception en tout et partout, je ne vois en lui de Rédemptoriste que l'habit, il ne plie pour qui que ce soit ou il semble le faire en votre présence; quand il est de nouveau en mission, il suit sa tête. Ni à la maison, ni en dehors, il ne fait absolument rien que pour les missions des enfants»⁶⁶.

Nul n'est prophète dans son pays, c'est bien connu. Furniss en a souffert plus que d'autres. Sous son aspect chétif, vieilli avant l'âge (les enfants le prenaient pour un centenaire!), il cachait une grande énergie, un entêtement peu commun et une idée que l'on pourrait qualifier de fixe, une obsession: il fallait s'occuper de l'éducation spirituelle des enfants, surtout en Irlande. Dans une lettre pathétique au P. Douglas – devenu consultant général – il écrit qu'il a bien essayé d'éteindre en lui ce désir de mission pour les enfants d'Irlande mais en vain; ce désir revient continuellement. Il sait que les chances de son salut seront moindres hors de la Congrégation, mais il est prêt à prendre ce risque et faire confiance à la Providence pour le bien de

⁶⁴ Buggenoms à Mauron, Roma, juin 1855 [AGHR 30110001, N 0007].

⁶⁵ Joh. B. Swinkels (Woensel 1810-Paramaribo 1875), prêtre à Warmond en 1834 et profès à St.-Trond en 1845. Le 14 juillet 1854, est nommé Supérieur de la Viceprovince provisoire hollando-anglaise avec comme Consultants Paul Reyners et Charles Janson, *ChPCprB* IV, 144, 145, 188, 201 *Catal.Gén.* XIII n° 439. *Monumenta Historica Provinciae Neerlandicae* III (1951) 15 n.23 et V (1953) 126.

⁶⁶ Swinkels à Mauron, octobre 1855 [AGHR 30110001, N 0008].

ces pauvres enfants qui, selon certains confrères, ne sont pas l'affaire de la Congrégation, qui ne sont pas non plus l'affaire des curés, des enfants qui en somme ne sont l'affaire de personne... Cette pensée lui est intolérable⁶⁷.

Il semble qu'un seul l'ait compris et défendu: le P. Lans, longtemps Supérieur à Bishop Eton⁶⁸. Sans être aveugle, Lans écrit à Douglas que Furniss a un esprit subtil à l'extrême et que laissé à lui-même il est parfois imprudent en mission et *sur-zélé* dans son travail, mais dans l'ensemble son action est très appréciée et de grande importance pour les enfants aux yeux des parents et des prêtres eux-mêmes. Cependant Furniss voudrait se fixer en Irlande, ce qui serait pour bien des raisons fatal pour sa vie religieuse et son bien spirituel⁶⁹. Lans loue également les livrets que publie Furniss, moyennant quelques corrections qu'il juge nécessaires⁷⁰.

Ainsi après 1855, de plus en plus isolé, Furniss donnera encore plus de 80 missions et retraites aux enfants, principalement en Angleterre. La dernière connue est de septembre 1864 dans notre église St Mary's à Clapham⁷¹.

Deux ans avant sa mort il écrit au Général Mauron une lettre qui est un peu son testament:

«Ma longue maladie vient de me donner l'occasion de voir combien a été imparfaite ma vie religieuse, surtout en conséquence de mon trop grand attachement aux oeuvres extérieures. Je prends donc cette occasion d'implorer le pardon à Votre Paternité et aux autres Supérieurs. Jamais je ne pourrai assez remercier notre S. Père Alphonse pour m'avoir obtenu la grâce de mourir comme son enfant dans la Congrégation du T.S. Rédempteur. Qu'il me soit permis de recommander très humblement à V.P. l'oeuvre parmi les pauvres petits enfants de N.S. Jésus-Christ à laquelle j'ai été occupé, mais si indignement. J'ai disposé en faveur de la Congrégation de tous les biens que je pouvais aliéner»⁷².

Les deux dernières années de sa vie furent assombrées par la maladie, il sortait peu mais en profitait pour écrire ses petits ouvrages

⁶⁷ Furniss à Douglas, Bishop Eton 4.VIII.1856 [AGHR 30110001, DO 0034].

⁶⁸ Le Hollandais Jan B. Lans (Haarlem 1808-Bishop Eton 1886), ordonné à Oegstgeest en 1833 et profès à St-Trond en 1843. *Catal. Gén.* XIII n° 372.

⁶⁹ Lans à Douglas, Bishop Eton 10. VI. 1858 [AGHR 30110001, DO 0054].

⁷⁰ Lans à Douglas, Bishop Eton 18. I. 1859 [AGHR 30110001, DO 066/2].

⁷¹ LIVIUS, *Furniss* (n. 47), 173-181.

⁷² Furniss à Mauron, Clapham 3. IV. 1863 [AGHR 30110001, N 0076].

aux titres éloquents tels que *God Loves little Children*, *The Great Question*, *The Great Evil*, *Confession*, *Holy Communion*, *Schools in which Children lose their holy Faith*, *The Book for young Persons*, *The Sight of Hell*, etc.⁷³ Il s'éteignit paisiblement à Londres Clapham le 16 septembre 1865.

Il serait un peu vain de porter un jugement définitif sur Furniss. Mais il fut certes un missionnaire zélé, original et tellement en avance sur son temps! Bien avant le Pape Pie X il préconisa d'initier à la Sainte Communion les enfants de 8-9 ans; sans être diplômé de psychologie, il était fin connaisseur de la mentalité enfantine et avait un grand souci d'expliquer à ses jeunes auditeurs les gestes qu'on leur demandait de faire, il décrivait la messe et les sacrements pas à pas, s'assurant que tous avaient compris. On peut lui reprocher certaines exagérations, notamment certaines représentations de l'enfer que les enfants n'ont pas dû oublier de si tôt! Mais cela faisait partie du style de l'époque. D'après son biographe, Thomas Livius⁷⁴, ce qui est resté le plus longtemps en vigueur là où Furniss est passé, c'est la messe mise à la portée des enfants, et cela trente ans après sa mort⁷⁵.

⁷³ Tous ces petits ouvrages furent réunis en un seul volume par la maison d'édition James Duffy and Co (Dublin, s.d.). DE MEULEMEESTER, *Bibliographie Générale* II, 151 qui en omet quelques-uns.

⁷⁴ Thomas Livius (Bristol 1828 – Clapham 1903), profès en 1858. *Catal.Gén.* XIII n° 921.

⁷⁵ Livius à Douglas 25.XII.1888 [AGHR 30110001, DO 429].

DOCUMENT

LE RAPPORT DE FURNISS DU 26 JUIN 1854⁷⁶

St Mary's, Park Road, Clapham 26 June 1854

My dear Rev. Father Douglas,

Will you be so good as to do me the favour of communicating to our very Rev. Father Vicar General at the earliest opportunity the contents of the enclosed letter which I have written in English as it would have been difficult for me to write it in French. The length of the enclosed only leaves me time to recommend myself to your prayers. Believe me your faithful and affectionate brother and servant in the sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

*Fr Furniss CSsR**I hope you received the little book which I sent you.*

Very Reverend and dear Father Vicar General,

Having during the last three years been employed by the Superiors in giving missions to the children in Ireland, I beg the permission of Your Reverence to expose some facts regarding the state of children of that country. The poor children of Ireland are, I believe, the most abandoned class in the world.

1. The Irish children have no religious instruction from their Parish Priests born in the South where the clergy are more numerous than in the North. The most that is done for the children is to assemble together such as like to come and then some of them read the answers of the Catechism to the others who, if they are able to catch up the words they hear, repeat them. And in many, I believe, most of the country Parishes, even these miserable repetitions take place only during the summer months. The children receive no oral instruction from the clergy on the Decalogue, the Sacraments, the Mysteries, the eternal truths or on any subject. The consequences of this state of things may easily be supposed. There is almost a common ignorance even of the four essential mysteries. I was informed by Br. Harbison, formerly a Parish priest in Ireland, and now a novice at St Trond⁷⁷, that the united Bishops of Ireland have made a declaration that there is generally in Ireland a frightful ignorance of the essential mysteries.

⁷⁶ Le document autographe se trouve aux AGHR 30110001, DO 013.

⁷⁷ L'Irlandais Henry Harbison (Money more 1820 – Dundalk 1888), profès en 1854. *Catal.Gén.* XIII n° 740.

Only a few days since one of our Fathers, Fr Coffin, received a letter from a Priest describing the sad state of the Western parts of Ireland; the letter stated that the people know three or four things and nothing more and these things which are the objects of their knowledge are: the Priest, holy water and extreme unction or, as they call it, anointing. If there is this ignorance among the grown up people, it exists in a hundred fold degree among the children.

With regard to the First Communion of the children of which I wish to speak particularly, the care is as bad as it possibly can be. The whole preparation is nothing more than the miserable repetitions of catechetical answers which I have already described. There is no instruction, immense //p.2// numbers of them do not go to the Sacraments at all, and of these who do make their First Communion I have often found especially in the North of Ireland that many do not go again to H. Communion for years.

It is obvious that under such a pressure of extreme spiritual neglect combined with unexampled poverty, the immorality of the Irish children must be enormous and yet it is a very common practice with the Irish Priests to refuse to attend children on their deathbeds when they have not previously made their First Communion.

This state of ignorance on the part of the poor children has a special relation to the *Emigration* which is now going on with immense activity in every part of Ireland, to such an extent that some places are for the moment almost depopulated. It is calculated that there are now five millions of Irish catholics in America, of this number two and a half millions remained catholics, the remaining two and a half millions are become either protestants or infidels or socialists or indifferent. The principal reason assigned for this immense falling off from the Faith is that the *children* leave Ireland *without any religious impression* on their minds.

The fanatical Protestants of England now and for some years past have been moving Heaven and earth to shake the faith of the people of Ireland and draw them into apostasy. Lately their efforts have been directed chiefly to the children. For this purpose they subscribe in England annually several hundreds of thousands of pounds. No poverty can be imagined greater than that of the generality of the Irish children. They are commonly in this cold climate without shoes and stockings with the most wretched cloathing, usually mere rags, sometimes half naked, their food is meal made of Indian corn, or potatoes and they are happy if they can get one or two scanty meals during the day. They are truly in a half savage state and treated with the greatest harshness by their Priests. They live in a permanent state of starvation and ignorance and so Protestant emissaries come among them and offer them food, cloathes [sic!] and situations if they will go the Proselytizing Protestant schools and the success of these Proselytosers has been such that the Primate of Ireland, the most Rev. Dr.

Cullen⁷⁸, told Father Petcherin and myself in Dublin that he does not fear much for the grown up people, but that for the faith of the poor children of Ireland //p.3// he entertains the most serious fears.

On the other hand notwithstanding all these disadvantages the Irish children have exceedingly good natural dispositions. Their patience in the midst of unexampled privations and sufferings is absolutely astonishing and with regard to the mission, there could not be dispositions more calculated to profit by them. I have known them travel great distances to come to the mission and remain all the while begging a bit to eat and at night lying on the bare ground. At a First Communion at Letterkenny⁷⁹, being a country place, most of them lived at a considerable distances, the number of first Communicants was about 800, the morning was exceedingly rainy and stormy, but this was no obstacle to them. They came many of them with their bare feet bleeding. They were wet to skin with the rain, in this state and of course fasting, they knelt for three hours on the church floor which was the bare earth. During the mission their pressing earnestness to get to the confessional is so great that they fight for it. At the last mission at Cork they remained in the church during whole nights in order not to lose their turn at confession. These children retain in a wonderful manner the instructions they hear and tell them word for word to their parents. At recent a mission given in Limerick to the children⁸⁰, the Nuns who taught the poor school told me that some of the children have written down word for word every instruction which had been given and I saw myself one of their manuscripts almost as large as an Octavo book. The Nuns also told me that during the hour previous to the time of commencing the instruction it was almost impossible to keep the children in the school so great was their eagerness to get at the instruction. At the conclusion of the missions nothing can exceed the sorrow manifested by the children, weeping, crying, howling and sometimes falling into fits. I remember being at Doe in the Northwest of Ireland with Father Petcherin. The Bishop //p.4// had expressed a particular wish that the children of this remote place should be spoken to. It was winter and an exceedingly wet stormy morning, nevertheless the children came in crowds soaked with the rain. A simple crucifix was held up

⁷⁸ Paul Cullen (Prospect 1803 – Dublin 1878), archevêque de Dublin de 1852 à 1878. *Hier.Cath.* VIII, 122, 252.

⁷⁹ Letterkenny, comté de Donegal, diocèse de Raphoe. La mission y eut lieu du 21 novembre au 14 décembre 1852, par Petcherin, Furniss, Prost, van Antwerpen, Vanderstichele, Coffin. Les travaux apostoliques de cette période sont soigneusement consignés dans les *Chronica Laborum Exteriorum extra collegia* [aux AGHR] (désormais *Chron. Lab. Ext.*). Pour Letterkenny: II, 212, 227. Eduard Hosp *First Redemptorist missions in Ireland according to Fr. J. Prost's Diaries*, dans SHCSR 8 (1960) 469-471.

⁸⁰ Mission donnée aux enfants à Limerick par Furniss en décembre 1853, *Chron. Lab. Ext.* II, 297.

before them and at the very sight of it, there was a universal screaming and shouting through the whole church.

2. Having laid before Your Reverence the actual state of the Irish children. I now beg permission to mention what we have been doing for them since the missions began in Ireland about three years since, this I am better able to do having, as I before mentioned, been charged by the Superiors with the affair of the children, excepting at times when I was ill.

In the first place we prepared the children for their *First Communion*. I believe I mentioned before that the children in Ireland are not as in Belgium and other countries prepared for their First Communion by a careful course of instructions. They are not instructed at all, they are simply taught to repeat a certain number of catechetical answers. We prepared them by a course of instructions which as facts showed, were on a level with their understandings and deeply penetrated their feelings. I have heard some of the most educated and respectable of the Irish people, ladies educated in convents, lament that they have not been prepared for their First Communion with such a preparation as we gave the children. The First Communion we gave had also this advantage that they were an example to the Irish clergy and stimulate them to rise out of their donothing system for the children. I cannot however blame the clergy altogether, their number is in no proportion with the wants of the people in Ireland, for it is calculated that if they attend well to the sick and the dying, they have no time left for any other ministerial duty. Besides it is a rare thing to find an Irish Priest who has the capacity to speak in a way on a level with the understandings of the children. The Parish Priests //p.5// entered most heartily into our system of First Communion for the children so that the Parish Priests have been so much pleased with the First Communion that they have usually themselves given a sum of English money equivalent to three or four hundreds francs in order that the children might have a good breakfast on the day of their First Communion. The numbers for our First Communions were about eight hundred, but when two Fathers were engaged in the work about fourteen hundred.

Another great element in our missions for the children was the establishment of *Confraternities* of the *Holy Family*⁸¹ for them. I must remark that the establishment of *Confraternities* for *grown up people*, excepting the towns where we live ourselves is impossible and has never yet been attempted because the clergy will not and, in the present circumstances of the country, have not time to watch over the working of the *Confraternity*. On the other hand *Confraternities* for the children, from the age of about 9

⁸¹ L'Archiconfrérie de la *Sainte Famille* fut créée en 1844 à Liège en Belgique par le lieutenant Hubert Belletable et deux ouvriers, Joseph Hacken et Gilles Jongen. Maurice DE MEULEMEESTER, *L'Archiconfrérie de la Sainte Famille*, Louvain 1946.

to that of 18 are very practicable, because under the *general* superintendance of the clergy, they are conducted and managed *well* by the most respectable lay persons and by religious communities where they exist. Then children's Confraternities have been established nearly in every place where a mission has been given. There are now about twenty three of them in Ireland, altogether containing about ten thousand members, not one of them has failed, they have all gone on prospering and improving. The first Confraternity was established two or three years since at Letterkenny⁸² in the Bishop's Cathedral⁸³, the town itself was very small, the great majority of the members came from the country. In some cases a distance of 15 miles, so that they had to travel a whole day. I saw this Confraternity a year after its beginning. I found that the number //p.6// of its members had increased from 500 to 1200. They were most admirably organized, all their voices united in singing produced a most wonderful effect. The parish priest told me the Confraternity had made a great change in the physical condition of the children, their dress, etc. He told me the Confraternity had become a spectacle to the whole country, that strangers had travelled from considerable distances simply to see it that the children had an extraordinary affection for their Confraternity, that when they emigrate they say their biggest sorrow is to leave their Confraternity. A gentleman from Letterkenny came here two weeks since and told us that the effects of the mission at Letterkenny, where this Confraternity is founded, are as fresh after a lapse of two years as they were in the first week after the mission. The Confraternities do a great deal for their poorer members in charity, in one Confraternity last winter 76 shawls were given to the poor girls. In Limerick the ladies who conduct the Confraternity have a room where they meet every week to give charity to the poor members of the Confraternity. Each Confraternity gives once a year a grand breakfast to the children. I have received many accounts of the beautiful and edifying deaths of many of the children of the Confraternities. Each Confraternity sends to us a monthly report of the numbers each Sunday present and absent, sick, and newly associated. On Sundays with the exception of a simple low Mass, there is no other religious exercises for the children except the exercises of the Confraternity and as the Sunday afternoon is wholly at their disposal, the Confraternity exercises keep them out of bad company.

I beg now to lay before Your Reverence the opinions of the Irish Bishops and of others regarding these Confraternities. The first Confraternity was established in the Diocese of Raphoe (Letterkenny). Since that time this Bishop has established five others in his diocese. Six additional Confraternities have been established in the same Diocese by

⁸² Ceci est signalé dans *Chron. Labor. Ext.* II, 227.

⁸³ Patrick McGettigan († Rathmullan 1861), évêque de Raphoe de 1820 à 1861. *Hier.Cath.* VII, 317.

various parish priests. The Bishop of Derry⁸⁴ in whose Diocese we have established several Confraternities //p.7// wrote to us to express his conviction of the great utility of these children's Confraternities. The Primate Archbishop and the Bishop of Nottingham⁸⁵ did the same. The Government Inspector of schools visited one of them and expressed his wish to have one established in Dublin. The Rev. D^r Cahill⁸⁶ who is celebrated for the lectures he gives to public assemblies in England and Ireland came to the Confraternity of Letterkenny and he said he had never before seen such a clean orderly well arranged assemblage of girls. Lastly, Father Bernard⁸⁷ visited the Confraternity in Limerick and he told the children that he had not seen a finer Confraternity in America or Belgium.

Having thus endeavoured to give Your Reverence some general idea of our mission to the children, I will lay before you the impression produced on the public mind by them. Till the arrival of Father Bernard, all the previous Superiors as well as the other Fathers rejoiced at and assisted in every way they could the good work for the children. For they felt the full force, especially in the desolated state of the Irish children, of those words of St Alphonsus in his *Livre des Missions* "Les missions sont aussi utiles pour les enfants que pour les autres"⁸⁸. The parochial clergy were always delighted with the exercises for the children, and although they seldom assist regularly at any of the missionary exercises, they have in some cases attended the children's exercises from beginning to the end of the mission, as the Bishop of Derry also did. At the opening of the Enniskillen mission⁸⁹ the Dean of that town spoke especially about the children. He said he had

⁸⁴ Francis Kelly (Omagh 1813 – Derry 1889) évêque de Derry de 1849 à 1889. *Hier.Cath.* VIII, 242.

⁸⁵ Richard Roskell (Gateacre 1817–1883), évêque de Nottingham de 1853 à 1874. *Hier.Cath.* VIII, 418.

⁸⁶ Le prêtre irlandais Daniel CAHILL (Ashfield 1796 – Boston 1864), scientifique irlandais, conférencier et prédicateur renommé. *The catholic Encyclopedia*, New York 1908, III, 140-141. HOSP *First Redemptorist missions in Ireland according to Fr. J. Prost's Diaries*, dans SHCSR 8 (1960) 482-483.

⁸⁷ Le Hollandais Bernard HAFKENSCHIED (Amsterdam 1807 – Wittem 1865), prêtre à Rome en mars 1832 et profès à Weinhaus en octobre 1833. Premier Provincial d'Amérique de 1850 à 1853. Début avril 1854 prend la place de Buggenoms comme Supérieur à Limerick, *ChPCprB* IV, 213. *Catal.Gén.* XIII n° 193.

⁸⁸ Furniss a pu utiliser les *Oeuvres complètes du Bx AM de Liguori publiées par une société d'ecclésiastiques sous la direction de MM les abbés Vidal, Delalle et Bousquet*, Paris 1834-1842, dont le Volume XV parle des missions. Furniss cite le Chap. V § 3. Maurice DE MEULEMEESTER, *Bibliographie Générale*, tome I, Louvain 1933, 256.

⁸⁹ La mission d'Enniskillen (comté de Fermanagh, diocèse de Clogher) eut lieu du 12 septembre au 3 octobre 1852, avec Prost, Petcherin, Furniss, van Antwerpen, Vanderstichele et Coffin. *Chron. Labor. Ext.* II, 211, 226-227. HOSP *First Redemptorist missions in Ireland...*, dans SHCSR 8 (1960) 466-467.

heard of a mission given by us in another Diocese and that in consequence of that mission, multitudes of poor children who had been accustomed to do nothing but run about the streets and get into all kinds of mischief, were now an edification to the public. Even very lately at the opening of our new church in Limerick⁹⁰ the Dean of the Diocese who preached on that occasion⁹¹ spoke in the strongest terms of the singular and wonderful influence which our Congregation exercised on the abandoned children of Ireland and of the //p.8// striking improvement we had worked in them. In every mission we have been to where there were Religious concerned in the education of children, such as Christian Brothers⁹² Sisters of Mercy⁹³ Sisters of the Presentation⁹⁴ they have in every case testified to us the extraordinary and unprecedented change which our missions worked in the poor children.

3. I will now lay before Your Reverence what has been done with reference to the children since the arrival of Father Bernard. As soon as he came to Ireland, before he has seen a mission, he gave notice of his intention to abolish the system of children's missions which had grown out of the experience of the three years missionary working we have had in Ireland and he apprised us of his intention to substitute for them pretty nearly the form of missions he has made for the children in Belgium, although the difference between the two countries is simply this, that in Belgium the children are exceedingly well instructed and taken care of, in Ireland they are grossly and utterly neglected in every thing and especially in the matter of First Communion.

He took in hand the two principal things we had done for the children: First Communion and Confraternities. He at once abolished all First Communions. He expressed his dissatisfaction at the idea of having Confraternities for children, which however he said he would permit not as a *general thing or for a general good*, but by way of *exception* if there should happen to be a place where the children were in a very extraordinary state of abandonment. He said the missions should be for grown up people and

⁹⁰ L'église provisoire de Limerick fut ouverte le 28 mai 1854, Paul Reyners à Douglas, Limerick 25.V.1854 [AGHR 30110001, DO 15].

⁹¹ Le Doyen Coll. *Fifty Years at Mount St Alphonsus*, Limerick 1903, 4.

⁹² Les *Irish Christian Brothers* ou *Fratres Scholarum Christianarum de Hibernia* (FSCH) fondés à Waterford en 1802 par Edmund Rice (Westcourt/Kilkenny 1763-Waterford 1844). *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione*, Roma 1973-1997 [désormais: *D.I.P.*], IV, 604-605; VII, 1710-1711. Rice fut béatifié à Rome par Jean-Paul II le 6 octobre 1996. *L'Osservatore Romano* 136 (1996) nn° 230 et 231.

⁹³ Les *Sisters of Mercy* fondées à Dublin en 1831 par Catherine Mc Auley (Stormanstown 1778 - id. 1841). *D.I.P.*, V, 1103-1106, 1374-1402.

⁹⁴ Les *Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (PBVM) fondées à Cork en 1775 par Nano Nagle (Ballygriffin 1718 - Cork 1784). *D.I.P.*, VI, 243-246; VII, 753-773.

for children only in a very limited way. I beg in passing to make a remark. It seems to me that even if our past exertions had been of no service to the children, they would still have been valuable on account of the effect that they have through the children on the parents themselves, for the children invariably carry to their parents what they hear. I will mention only one example. When we settled in the house of Limerick, we were three Fathers⁹⁵. For two or three months the confessions we heard were by no means numerous, in fact it seemed as if our existence was scarcely known to the general population. Then came a retreat for the children. The influence of this retreat at once struck through the whole grown up population surrounding us. From that day forward we were overwhelmed with confessions.

//p. 9// I now continue the account of the plan of action which Father Bernard determined on with regard to the children. His first mission was at Cork where he appointed me to take charge of the children⁹⁶. He began immediately to execute what he had announced: the principle of diminishing the children's mission as much as possible. He gave orders that no man, woman or child should be admitted into the church, excepting those children only who had made their First Communion during the two previous years. I went to the church at the appointed time and I found what I had anticipated was realized. The children had been perplexed and embarrassed by the distinction about two years, so comparatively very few of them had come to the instruction, the body of the Church was completely empty, although Cork contains about ninety thousand Catholics. After the instruction I went to Father Bernard and told him, I feared that unless the church was freely opened to all, the mission for the children would be a failure. He then consented that during the *actual* mission the church should be freely opened. The mission of Cork continued for three weeks, but for the children about two weeks. For the confessions of the grown up people there were all the Fathers, seven or eight, besides a considerable number of secular confessors provided by the Bishop⁹⁷ on some days as many as forty. For three or four thousand children only one confessor. Two days in each week, the children were left without anyone, as Father Bernard sent me over to Limerick every week. There were three instructions every day for the

⁹⁵ En novembre 1853, avec Buggenoms, Furniss et Hans Schneider, *ChPCprB* IV, 138.

⁹⁶ La première mission de Cork (Cathédrale St Mary's) eut lieu du 21 avril au 22 mai 1854 avec Hafkenscheid, Theunis, Hans Schneider, Furniss, Prost, Vanderaa, Gibson, Coffin, Paul Reyners. *Chron. Labor. Ext.* II, 370. 384-385. *HOSP First Redemptorist missions in Ireland...* dans *SHCSR* 8 (1960) 479-481.

⁹⁷ William Delany (Bandon 1804 – Cork 1886), évêque de Cork de 1847 à 1886. *Hier. Cath.* VIII, 225.

grown up people, besides lectures to the Society of St Vincent of Paul⁹⁸, and also on the new university and education. There instructions and lectures for the grown up people took up those periods of the day which were most convenient for instruction, so that the instructions of the children had to take place at a very inconvenient time during the time when the Fathers dine. On the previous missions there had been two instructions for the children, morning and evening, the latter the most important because convenient for the working children. F^r Bernard abolished it. In the beginning of second week I asked Father Bernard if he would wish a Confraternity to be formed for the children. He answered "ask the Bishop". I went to the Bishop //p.10// and explained the whole nature of the Confraternity. He said he was very much pleased with it and wished very much to have it, and that he would appoint one of his priests to be the chaplain of the Confraternity. I told Father Bernard afterwards that I had executed his command, that I had been to the Bishop who was delighted with and wished to have it. On hearing this Father Bernard ran up immediately and said that there should be no Confraternity, that he would put the missions of the children on their proper basis, that the missions were for grown up people. Of course I immediately laid aside all idea of a Confraternity. However a day or two after the priest who had been appointed by the Bishop to take care of the Confraternity came to me. I told him Father Bernard did not wish to have a Confraternity. It seems, this priest who was anxious to have the charge of a Confraternity then went to the Bishop and the Bishop went to Father Bernard and begged of him to allow a Confraternity. The next time Father Bernard saw me, he told me the Bishop desired to have a Confraternity so I must form one, but he absolutely forbade the erection of a Confraternity in the *church* and said I must find some other place for it. There was a general Communion of 1300 children and on the same day at dinner Father Bernard rose and said to the Fathers that I had labored prosperously and successfully and he proposed to the Fathers to drink my health. The mission concluded and as far as I was aware, I had acted in perfect conformity with all Father Bernard's views. He returned to Limerick and when we had been there two or three days I received an intimation from Father Bernard that I was not to work any more on the missions.

I will now lay before Your Reverence the objections made by Father Bernard to *First Communion*. They are grounded, I believe, chiefly on a circumstance which occurred at Limerick. It happened that at Limerick a retreat was given to the children exclusively. With regard to the results of this retreat, it would not become me to be a judge in my own cause. Only

⁹⁸ La Société de St Vincent de Paul fut fondée en 1833 par Antoine-Frédéric Ozanam (Milano 1813 – Marseille 1853). *Catholicisme* X, 364-366. Ozanam fut béatifié à Notre-Dame de Paris par Jean-Paul II le 22 août 1997.

this I may say that the parish priest for whom the mission was given wrote on the newspapers a full account of it and certainly as favorable an account as was ever written of any of our missions in Ireland. //p.11// 800 girls made their First Communion, of them about 500 were working in the factories from six in the morning till past eight in the evening, their pay being about six pence or half a franc per day. The Masters of the factories, who were Protestants, consented to let the children leave the factories for a certain portion of time every day to attend the instructions, provided the children would consent to lose a corresponding part of their pay and for four successive weeks these children cheerfully sacrificed two pence out of their six pence. On the day of their First Communion the children received a breakfast which cost fifteen pounds and was paid for by some of the more wealthy Catholics amongst whom a little child six years of age gave one pound. Immediately after the retreat a Confraternity was formed. Six of the most respectable ladies in Limerick undertook the offices of the Confraternity. It is now about three months since the Confraternity began and there are 1200 members including some of the most respectable children of the town, the school children and above all about 800 children of the factories about whom the parish priest was most anxious, the majority of whom used to spend their Sunday afternoon in running about the streets, frequenting bad company and dancing houses, which is a reserved case in the diocese. And these poor girls are now an example of edification to the town. During the retreat it happened that there was a certain priest who had nothing to do with the parish, who on several occasions had shown himself unfriendly to our Congregation. This priest went to the Bishop who is a very old man⁹⁹, slow and adhering to the old abuses in Ireland which the Holy See is now laboring to abolish, he told the Bishop we were admitting persons to their First Communion without knowing the usual formula i.e. the Catechism of the Diocese. What he said to the Bishop really meant this -- that 500 poor girls many of them 20 years of age, shut up incessantly in the factories, stupefied by a continual routine of hard labour and incapable of learning a long series of difficult answers from the diocesan Catechism and for this reason excluded from the Sacraments, and taught by us in a simple way what S. Alphonsus requires rude people to know and taught to repeat these things by heart, were then admitted by us to the Sacraments. Probably if we had not done this //p.12// they might never have been to the Sacraments as long they lived, as is the case with multitudes without number in Ireland. Had the objection come from the parish priest for whom we worked, one might have suspected there was something in it, but it came

⁹⁹ John Ryan (1783 – Limerick 1864), évêque de Limerick de 1852 à 1864. *Hier.Cath.* VII, 239.

from one who was a stranger to the parish and who, as Father Bernard confessed, was actuated by jealousy.

However this fact is the principal reason for which Father B. has put an end to First Communions. May I be permitted to mention on this subject of First Communion the following facts:

1. the little inconvenience at Limerick could easily have been avoided by a previous arrangement with the Bishop for he himself tacitly approved of it when he heard the reasons.

2. It is an infinite advantage to the neglected children of Ireland, to get a good preparation for First Communion from us, as they never get any preparation from their own clergy, beyond a mere exercise of the memory in learning a routine of answers from the Catechism.

3. the First Communions have been a special benefit to a peculiar and very large class of children in Ireland. Those who do not go to school as there is no law which compels them to do so; amongst them are those who work in a great many different ways, those who live by begging who are very numerous, those who stay at home etc. In fact I have no doubt that those who do go to school are generally the minority when compared with those who do not go. It is a fact proved by experience that very few of this large class of children make their First Communion unless they are drawn to it by some very extraordinary occasion such as a mission. I heard a London priest speak of a First Communion managed in London by some Nuns. He said there were some twenty children at it and that he knew of his own knowledge that for every one individual there ought to have been at least one hundred. The Vincentians¹⁰⁰ told us they had found a parish in which not five persons had ever been to Holy Communion. Our missions have acted powerfully on these unknown and uncared for children. The whole mass of them in the districts where the missions were given were brought to their First Communion.

4. The parish priests have always been delighted with our First Communion during our three years course of missions. There never was one instance in which any one disapproved of them excepting the one case of the priest of Limerick who was a stranger to the parish and acted through personal motives.

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5. The Religious of the Order of St Vincent of Paul have been in Ireland twenty years giving missions and they invariably give First Communions. I mention this fact merely to show that First Communions by missionary bodies must be agreeable to the parochial clergy or else the Vincentians would not have continued the practice for twenty years,

¹⁰⁰ Les Vincentians ou Lazaristes ou *Prêtres de la Mission*, fondés à Paris en 1617 par St Vincent de Paul (Pouy 1581 – Paris 1660). *Catholicisme* VII, 114-120.

especially as it is no peculiar duty of their Order and they do it only on account of the sheer necessity of the case.

6. Father Bernard, I believe, apprehends a difficulty inasmuch as the children who do not go to school cannot learn the long formula of answers out of the Catechism of the Diocese, most of them cannot even read. But then comes a question: is it better for these neglected children to be taught by word of mouth simply what is necessary and what they can learn and go to the Sacraments or that they should be excluded from the Sacraments altogether? There is no alternative. When children of this description go to confession, the first word of the priest is: "Do you know your answers?", the reply is "no", "Then go away and learn them". So they go away and never return. I have seen some of these children leap off the ground with joy when they heard there was a possibility they might make their First Communion.

7. I almost forgot to mention another objection alleged by Father Bernard against First Communion viz. that *some places are well supplied with clergy and religious Orders*. There may be perhaps half a dozen such places in Ireland, for example Dublin, Cork and Limerick and some others. Now we had experience of Cork, I think the second town in Ireland. Now I found Cork overrun with children from 14 years to 20 who had not made their First Communion. With regard to Limerick I may refer to the fact I mentioned before of 500 great girls, in the factories alone, who had not been admitted to the Sacraments. I seldom went out of the house when I was in Limerick without meeting troops of boys who were in the same circumstances. Besides in these large towns the time of the clergy is absorbed by other things, so that the children there as elsewhere get the usual Irish preparation for a First Communion, a sort of parrot repetition of certain answers of the Catechism free from all explanation and instruction.

8. Fr. B. says a First Communion is the affair of the parish priest. This is true but it is also true that, although an affair most important for the children, still it is an affair done by the parish priests in the most wretched way for want of time and capacity, it is also an affair which the parish priests have always been delighted for us to undertake. There are many other things *affairs* also of the parish priests which necessity compels to do e.g. to instruct people in the elements of religion. If Fr. B. fears what has never yet happened i.e. an objection from the parish priest it would be very easy to say to the parish priest at the beginning of the mission: "Do you wish a First Communion or not?"

//p.14// With regard to the *Confraternities* for the children, Father Bernard said he would allow them only in exceptional cases, on the principle which he has often expressed (which he applies also to Ireland where the children are in the extreme of abandonment) that our Congregation is to have as little as possible to do with children and to devote itself almost exclusively to grown up people.

The preceding Superiors on the contrary encouraged these Confraternities as much as possible as I understood in consequence of the wish expressed by St Alphonsus in his *Livre de Missions* that "at the conclusion of the missions a Congregation or Confraternity should be formed for the children". They found that the children had no other religious exercises whatever, except the simple low mass on Sunday, which in fact multitudes of them cannot hear, the churches being more than filled with the crowds of grown up people, so it is a very common thing for a large part of the children to remain in the church yard during the mass, where of course they amuse themselves in the best way they can. The Confraternities were also found to be an attraction for the children which kept them out of bad company on Sunday afternoon. The Confraternities were found in an especial manner useful in keeping alive the spirit of preserving the fruits of the missions. *In fine* they were most acceptable to the Bishops and the parish priests who themselves formed others, taking as a model those we had established during the mission. They were also in harmony with the wants of the children as appeared from the eagerness with which they came to be enrolled. The stability and perseverance of all the Confraternities, the rapidity with which they spread, so that there was reason to hope that in a few years they would have spread more or less throughout all Ireland. I should not forget to add that the Confraternities taught the children habits of order, of quietness, of respectful behaviour in the church, which habits do not enter into their education and of which they have no knowledge and of course not the practice, their common way, the result of the manner in which they are brought up, being to talk, laugh, play and run about the church as freely as in the street. The objections I have heard from Father Bernard are

1) that the Confraternities are for *children* i.e. up to about the age of 20, for if people were admitted beyond that age, there would be no power sufficiently authoritative to control the Confraternity, since the clergy have not time for much active superintendance //p.15// and the inference drawn is that, since there cannot be Confraternities for grown up married people, neither must there be for children.

2) Another objection of Father Bernard is that the church should be left free for the people on the Sunday afternoon to perform Stations of the Cross etc. On which I may remark that there are scarcely any churches in Ireland, where there are religious exercises for the people except mass and perhaps, not always a sermon along with it, so that the churches are free from midday till seven o'clock in the evening. Out of these seven hours the Confraternities need only one hour or at most one hour and a half and even then the grown up people may, if they please, be present and say the rosary and listen to the chaunts of the children. It is worthy of remark that no parish priest or Bishop ever found this to be a difficulty.

Another regulation of Father Bernard forbade free admission into the church during the exercises of the children. He forbade admission to all children except those who had their First Communion during the two preceding years, he allowed no adults to enter. The experience of three missionary years had led the previous Superiors to a contrary conclusion. I believe St Alphonsus remarks in the *Livre des Missions*, that there are many grown up people so dull and rude that they will profit more by the simple instructions for the children than by the more profound instructions for the adults. In Ireland it was found that there was a much larger proportion of most ignorant people than in any other country. The Superiors also found that the church was often indeed generally not large enough to contain the crowds of grown up people and it was thought better for those who could not get to the instructions for the adults either for want of room or because the time of the children's instructions was the only time when they could attend, should be admitted rather than get no instruction, so the Superiors had been accustomed to recommend the children's instruction strongly to the grown up people. Nevertheless generally on the mission it has been found that in fact the grown up have not in any notable number come to the children's instruction. Only Father Bernard's regulation operated as a great damper on the children's mission, for, when the children saw officers of the church standing at the church door beating people back and putting them out, they were discouraged to that extent, that if the regulation had been rigorously enforced, there is no doubt the children's mission would have been a failure. //p.16// The limitation of entrance to children who had made their First Communion during the two previous years was a simple exclusion of the really abandoned children; it made the mission a school exercise or a mission for those children who stood least in need of a mission. Father Bernard had beforehand announced to us his principle about these things viz that of making the mission of the children as small and hidden an affair as possible. That Father Bernard has been successful in carrying out his principle is, I believe, clear from what I have already mentioned as well as from the following fact. At the mission of Cork where I had charge of the children, there were 1300 communicants, at the following mission, the last given by our Fathers, at Mallow¹⁰¹ there were 350. The time devoted to the children at each mission was about the same and at each of the two missions one Father was employed. At the last mission at Barntown, following that of Mallow,¹⁰² the number has been further reduced

¹⁰¹ La mission de Mallow (comté de Cork, diocèse de Cloyn) eut lieu du 3 au 18 juin 1854 avec Bernard Hafkenscheld, Theunis, Hans Schneider, Lans, Vanderstichele, *Chron. Labor. Ext. II*, 370, 385.

¹⁰² La mission de Barntown et Glynn (comté de Wexford, diocèse de Ferns) eut lieu du 8 au 24 juin 1854 avec Bernard Hafkenscheld, Theunis, Petcherin, Coffin, Vanderaa. *Chron. Labor. Ext. II*, 350, 371, 385.

to 250 by one Father. As I mentioned before, I was at one mission, that of Cork, with Father Bernard, after which I was excluded from all missionary work in Ireland.

I am now in England¹⁰³ where there is no work worth speaking of for children. I am scarcely fit for any other work as well on account of long previous habits as because a disease of the heart makes it difficult for me to any thing else, the work for the children being easy and gentle and at the same time sufficiently stimulating to keep back the progress of the disease, which advances more rapidly when I am in a state of inactivity. With regard to the success of my past missions in Ireland, I would not of myself pronounce any thing, except that I have had a strong testimony of the Superiors on this subject. I might perhaps also refer to the facts already mentioned in this letter as well to the different results of the mission before and since I left, the difference being in figures: 1300-350, later 250. There are millions of abandoned children perishing in Ireland and supposing they are saved in the proportion of 350 children per mission, the work done for them is a drop of water in the sea. In Limerick under the general superintendance of the then local Superior, unassisted I gave a retreat in which 800 children made their First Communion. Besides, many others being confessed and the formation of Confraternity of 1000 children, and whether considering the indescribable misery of the Irish children and our inadequacy to their wants, the repetition of such retreats be possible or impossible, of course I am not a competent judge.

//p.17// With regard to my exclusion from the missions of Father Bernard, I will expose to Your Reverence the cause as clearly as possible. I must remark that during the mission, I adhered faithfully to the regulations communicated to me by Father Bernard; in fact he never objected to me that I had deviated from them. I perceived however that Father Bernard was slightly displeased on one or two occasions during the mission. Once when I found it necessary to apprise him that, in consequence of the regulation which prohibited the free entrance of the children into the church, only a small number of them had come. And again when having been sent by him to the Bishop to ask about the Confraternity I informed him that the Bishop desired it.

In order to explain the cause, I must remark that the instructions given to the children are pretty nearly on the same subjects as the instructions for adults, only they are given in a simpler way. Some of the more solemn ceremonies for the adults are practised also for the children, such as the solemnity of the Blessed Virgin and the farewell sermon. But there is this difference that for the adults there is music, lights, incense,

¹⁰³ Mi-juin 1854, Furniss part de Limerick avec le Fr. Peter Franken pour Clapham. *ChPCprB* IV, 211, 214.

benediction of the B. Sacrament, attendance of the clergy, circles of girls dressed in white, etc. whereas for the children there are none of these accompaniments, so that if there be any solemnity for the children, it must be found altogether in the solemnity of the words addressed by the instructor to them. Now it so happened that at the farewell exhortation to the children, they showed much greater demonstrations of feeling than the adults did at the farewell exhortation addressed to them by Father Bernard. This displeased Father Bernard exceedingly. In like manner one day a Father came into the house and told us that on the day in question the auditory of children had been more numerous than the auditory of grown up people. In point of //p.18// fact this was not true, it was a mistake. However Father Bernard was exceedingly displeased at it. I mention these instances by way of example, and Father Bernard called these things *want of unity of action*, meaning thereby not that there is any departure from the principles of the missions or from the particular regulations he himself has introduced, this he has never said but meaning, as he himself explained, "want of unity of effect" meaning that nothing conspicuous or notable should be visible in the fruits of the children's part of the mission, in fact that no great good should be done to the children, for if it be a great good it must of necessity manifest itself, meaning that all this must be exclusively confined to the adult part of the mission, as in fact he has said in express words many times since the first moment of his arrival in Ireland, and this principle since the Cork mission he has brought with full operation in things which must have a serious consequence for the abandoned Irish children, for example with regard to number of communions which we have been accustomed to consider as the chief criterion of a good mission. As I mentioned before he has reduced the number of children communions from 1300 to 350.

Now if it be well that I should have been abruptly excluded from missionary labor, after the experience of only one short mission, in which I had faithfully executed the injunctions given to me, this exclusion being not in conformity with any wish of the other Superiors but the reverse, if it be well that I should have been placed in a state of inactivity, contrary to all my former habits, and certain to increase the serious organic disease under which I am suffering, if it be well for the successful exertion the Congregation was making for millions of the most helpless and abandoned creatures on the face on the earth to be reduced comparatively to a nothing. All this is a question which with all humility and most respectfully I submit to Your Reverence.

//p.19// It may not be amiss for me to remark that, in Ireland where the state of the children is without example, their mission is a great and serious affair, the union of the two missions of the children and of the adults has always practically been attended with great inconveniences. The mission of the children is to a certain extent an obstruction to that of the adults, but

the mission of the adults is still more serious obstruction to that of the children. The children are necessarily knocked about in every way, they are deprived of what is most important for them, that is of all that can have any influence on their senses: music, benediction, etc. all this is exclusively absorbed by the mission of the grown up people. After the confessionals of the adults have been chosen, then the most inconvenient places are left for the children; but the most material point is about the instructions, as for grown up working people, so far the working children and the really abandoned children, the evening is the best time for instruction and in fact is the only time when they can come. But the instruction for children takes place in the middle of the day, when at most only the *school* children can come as the church in evening is occupied by the adults. It is true that before Father Bernard came, the Superiors had an instruction given to the children in the evening, but it had to be given in building or room we might chance to meet with, we seldom could meet with a place which could hold half the children, and even so, they were pressed one against another so and squeezed in such a manner that it became a moral impossibility almost for them to give attention to the instruction. On the other hand, in two instances at Limerick and at Liverpool¹⁰⁴ retreats were given to children exclusively and these two cases were amongst the most successful of the missions given to children. Something also, I believe, was said about the children's mission taking place before or after that of the adults, but this was //p.20// never carried into operation.

I beg now to lay before Your Paternity Fr. Bernard's objections to various points in the children's mission.

FATHER BERNARD'S GENERAL OBJECTIONS TO THE CHILDREN'S MISSIONS IN IRELAND

I. Fr Bernard's first objection: *The children's missions in Ireland differ from the children's missions in Belgium.*

Answer: 1° the Irish children are in a state essentially different from that of the Belgian children. The Irish children are grossly neglected and abandoned. They are in an unexampled state of poverty, ignorance and immorality. They are so much the victims of protestant proselytism that the Primate Archbishop Cullen has stated that there is danger of their apostasy. Emigrating in immense numbers, it is calculated that one half of them lose their faith in other countries. Also it is a frequent custom not to give the Sacraments to these unfortunate children when they are dying.

¹⁰⁴ La mission de Liverpool (St Anthony) eut lieu du 20 février au 18 mars 1853 avec Prost, van Antwerpen, Vanderstichele, Vanderaa, Theunis, Petcherin, Furniss. *Chron. Labor. Ext.* II, 271, 288.

2° Our missions have been proved from experience to be an adequate remedy and the only adequate remedy for these evils. The secular clergy, the Religious, the newspapers have given testimony to this fact.

3° if the missions to the children be abandoned or substantially abandoned as they have been since the arrival of Father Bernard, the missions fifty years hence will present the same extraordinary difficulties as now because the children will grow up and be as their fathers.

II. Objection: *The children are to be converted through their parents and by means of schools.*

Answer: It is certain that after a mission the greater part of the Parents relapse, so at all events the greater part of the children will not be converted by their parents. With regard to the schools, the secular knowledge acquired in them does not supply the place of a mission, vast masses of children never go near the school. The English protestant government every day is gaining more power over the schools and introducing a mixed system of catholic and protestant education. St Alphonsus prescribes for the children not schools but direct missions.

OBJECTIONS OF FR. BERNARD REGARDING FIRST COMMUNION

(see the advantages of First Communion page 10)

I. Objection of Fr. Bernard: *The secular clergy prepare the children for First Communion.*

Answer: It is true the clergy have what is called a preparation //p.21// for First Communion, but it is a mere nothing, a mere nominal preparation, they simply make the children learn by heart certain answers from the Catechism, they give the children *no instruction* on ten Commandments, Sacraments, eternal truths or on anything. This miserable preparation such as it is reaches only the *school* children, so that vast masses of children grow up without going to the Sacraments. Our *former* missions were a remedy for this evil, they were a solid and in Ireland an unexampled preparation for First Communion for the school children and they attracted those large masses of abandoned children who, but for our missions, might never have gone to the Sacraments.

II. Objection: *First Communions are the affair of the parish priests.*

Answer: They are an affair which the parish priests grossly neglect through want of time, capacity and the force of the custom.

III. Objection: *The parish priests will themselves object to our First Communions.*

Answer: The parish priests have never yet objected in any one instance during our three years course of missions, on the contrary they always expressed their delight. Parish priests from distant parishes brought their children that they might partake in our First Communions. It is true in

one single instance at Limerick a certain priest (who had nothing to do with the parish) did raise an objection but it was known that he was influenced by personal motives. Also the Congregation of S. Vincent of Paul, having given missions in Ireland during 20 years, have always given First Communions on theirs, which fact proves that parish priests do not object to it.

IV. Objection: *Some places are well supplied with clergy.*

Answer: There may be half a dozen places in Ireland which comparatively with the rest may be called well supplied. But experience has shown that preparation for First Communion in these places is merely nominal as elsewhere, so in Limerick probably the best supplied town in Ireland, we found in the factories alone 500 girls from the age of 10 to 20 who had never been admitted to the Sacraments. If there really be fear of a difficulty which has not yet been //p.22// found to exist, it would seem that there is a very simple [way] of making what already seems certain doubly secure, if for example at the commencement of the mission, the question were put to the parish priest: "Do you wish a First Communion?" if he should object, then the mission could be given to the same class of abandoned children but without First Communion and so the neglected children could at all events go to confession. (Since writing the above, intelligence has reached us that Fr. Bernard has abandoned his first determination of *absolutely no First Communions*. On the last mission he admitted a very small number, about 100, such only as the parish priest present, but the large mass of abandoned children to whom the parish priest's care does not or cannot perhaps extend then he excluded.)

FR. BERNARD'S OBJECTIONS TO CONFRATERNITIES

(see the advantages of Confraternities at page 5)

I. Objection: *They are for children.*

Answer: It must be remarked that the children in these Confraternities are commonly from the age of 10 to 20. It is admitted by all that the future perseverance of Ireland in the faith depends very much on the children. These Confraternities are in harmony with the wants of the children, as is proved from the eagerness with which they become members, their attachment to the Confraternities and their perseverance. It is the only religious exercise the Irish children have, except a simple low mass on Sunday, if they can get at it; it teaches them habits of order in the church, which they are unaccustomed to, keeps them out of bad company, brings the poor into connexion with the better classes; there are substantial charities given through these Confraternities to the poor children. These Confraternities have had the approbation and encouragement of the Primate Archbishop, of the Bishop of Raphoe, of Derry, of Nottingham, etc. of the government inspector of schools. The parish priests and Bishops have found

them of their own accord, taking as a model those we established. S. Alphonsus in his *Livre des Missions* desires that at the missions, Confraternities should be established for the children.

II. Objection: *The children occupy the church on Sunday afternoon and keep the grown up people from performing the Way of the Cross.*

Answer: The Irish churches are commonly empty on Sunday //p.23// from the last mass at 12 o'clock until 7 o'clock in the evening. The Confraternity exercises take at most an hour and a half, leaving *five hours* for the people to go round the Stations if they choose, which, I believe, they seldom do in any notable number. Also the grown up people may be present at the exercises of the children and say the Rosary with them. No parish priest ever made or discovered the above objection. I know of one or two places in Ireland, of which Limerick is one, where their Vespers [*are*] on the Sunday afternoon, but I am certain there are not six such places in Ireland. But even where there are Vespers, there is abundance of time for other things.

FR. BERNARD'S OBJECTION TO FREE ENTRANCE INTO THE CHURCH DURING THE
EXERCISES OF THE CHILDREN

Objection: *It may happen that some people will hear the same instruction twice, once when given to the adults, again when given to the children.*

Answer: 1° This would seem to be an advantage rather than a disadvantage, as it would make the instruction penetrate more into the mind.

2° Fr. Bernard's plan excludes from the benefits of the mission the *really abandoned* children for he admits to the instruction only those children who made their First Communion in the two previous years, for if in Ireland there are any children who may be called not abandoned, certainly it [*is*] those who are thus excluded from the exercises. N.B.: Fr. B. at his first mission of Cork gave a precept for the exclusion of all except those who had made their First Communion during the two previous years, whether he has since changed his mind on the subject, I do not know.

3° It excludes ignorant adults who, according to S. Alphonsus, profit more by the simple exercises for the children than by the more profound exercises for grown up people: It excludes also those who cannot get to the exercises of the adults, because the time is inconvenient for them, the church too full, etc.

4° *De facto*, on our missions, the adults have not come in very notable number to the children's exercises, only the exclusive //p.24// system was a grievous discouragement to the children themselves, so that the Cork Mission was in consequence near being a failure. Also the operation of

excluding certain persons was in practice an exceedingly, perplexing affair which caused the loss of much time.

With regard to the general affair of the children's mission, it is true *Fr. Bernard* has said: "that he would not neglect the children". On the other hand he has also often said to me that "the children are not our affair". It may therefore be well to lay before Your Paternity the changes which Father Bernard made in the children's mission as soon as he came.

ALTERATIONS MADE BY *FR. BERNARD* IN THE CHILDREN'S MISSIONS

1. Instead of two or sometimes three Fathers being employed for the children as before, Father B. employs but *one*. So at Cork there were 48 confessors hearing the confessions of the adults and one confessor employed for 4000 children. By this change alone, the children's mission was reduced considerably more than *one half*.

2. The evening instruction, by far the most important for the children because the working children could come only at that time was entirely abolished. This regulation made the children's mission simply an exercise for school children.

3. The one instruction left for the children was fixed at a most inconvenient time, about dinner time. There never before on our missions was an example of an instruction given at this time. The Father who instructs the children must in this case either dine at a time different from the other Fathers, in which case I know by experience he gets a very insufficient dinner not equal to his work, or if he dines with the other Fathers, he must go to give the instruction immediatly after his dinner, so which ever course he takes, a series of missions is pretty sure to damage his health.

4. The mission is not given as formerly to the abandoned and neglected children but to those who are school children.

5. The number of children's communions has been reduced by *Fr. Bernard* as appears from comparing the late missions from 1300 to 350, and since 250, although in each of these cases he employed but one Father.

6. The abolishment of the Confraternities (except in some exceptional cases permitted by *Fr. Bernard*) is an irreparable loss for the children. There are clear facts to prove that the Confraternities preserved in the children most wonderfully the spirit and good effects of the mission.

7. In consequence of *Fr. Bernard's* arrangement the children's mission //p.25// begins after and ends several days before that of the adults. It is also suspended on Sundays (the best day for the working children) and on several other days. Before *Fr. Bernard* came, this was not the case.

8. The children's mission formerly lasted a month. This time was scarcely sufficient to hear their confessions and to get them well instructed.

Fr. Bernard has shortened it to a period of about ten days. I must remark that there are two evils in Ireland among the people which create great difficulty: 1) ignorance of the essential truths 2) a great confusion of conscience and ignorance of moral duties. To remedy these two evils, two remedies were applied: 1) repetitions of the essential truths, 2) an examination of conscience. Father Bernard has laid aside these things for the adults and it is feared the shortness of the missions will necessitate the omission of them for the children. So adults and children will come to the conclusion of the mission in a state of the greatest excitement but ignorant of the essential truths and of the state of their own conscience.

Begging pardon for the length of this letter and recommending myself to the prayers of Your Paternity, I remain

very Reverend and dear Father Vicar General

Your obedient and humble servant in the HH Hearts of Jesus and
Mary

J. Furniss CSsR

APPENDICE

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