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Becoming a Bishop and Remaining a Vincentian: The Struggles of Archbishop John Joseph Lynch, C.M.

BY
RICHARD J. KEHOE C.M.

Introduction

The Congregation of the Mission provided a rich source of bishops as the rolls of the early American hierarchy testify. A study of the lives of some of these men reveals their efforts to avoid the burden of the episcopate, to heed the needs of the Church manifested in the mandate from Rome, and to preserve their Vincentian heritage.¹ Their reluctance to assume the episcopate reflected the tradition of the Congregation of the Mission not to seek ecclesiastical dignities.

During the first half of the nineteenth century the general assemblies of the community reaffirmed this ideal several times. The eighteenth general assembly (1835) echoed this tradition when it declared:

The Assembly especially laments at this time the very frequent promotion of members of our community to the episcopate, which inflicts great loss both on the spirit and the body of the Congregation. Therefore it earnestly begs the Very Reverend Superior General to exhort our confreres to be mindful of the humility of St. Vincent de Paul, our Father, and chapter three of the Common Rules, where it is forbidden to seek an ecclesiastical dignity under any pretext whatsoever.²

The nineteenth general assembly (1843) discussed the same problem. The delegates went a step further, however, and imposed a sanction on those who accepted episcopal office without the consent of

¹Editorial Staff, Vincentian Studies Institute, "A Survey of American Vincentian History, 1815-1987," 43-45, and "Appendix D: Vincentian Bishops," 475-81, in *The American Vincentians. A Popular History of the Congregation of the Mission in the United States 1815-1987*, John E. Rybolt, ed. (Brooklyn: 1988).

²*Collectio Selecta Decretorum Conventuum Generalium Congregationis Missionis* (Paris: 1837), 80. Unless otherwise noted all documents have been translated by the author.

the superior general. The assembly decreed that Vincentians "who accepted the episcopal office will not enjoy the accustomed suffrages [for the dead] unless they have received the permission of the superior general."³ The twenty-first general assembly (1861) endorsed the same provision.

The delegates who gathered for the twenty-second general assembly (1867) rescinded this sanction. In the interim Rome had intervened. On 17 September 1862 Rome directed that the suffrages be restored to Vincentian bishops who had accepted the episcopate without the general's permission. The assembly unanimously revoked the decree of 1843 "in order to give a new sign of the filial obedience and reverence which the Congregation of the Mission has always shown the Holy See."⁴

This action was taken as a result of the initiative of John Joseph Lynch, C.M., the third bishop and first archbishop of Toronto, Canada, who had incurred the sanction when he became coadjutor bishop of Toronto in 1859. His exclusion from the community and the suffrages offered for deceased Vincentians troubled him deeply. He successfully challenged the decree of the nineteenth general assembly to assure the restoration of his Vincentian heritage. He carried his case to Rome and won.

John Joseph Lynch was born on 6 February 1816 near Clones, County Monaghan, Ireland.⁵ During his early childhood his family moved to Lucan, near Dublin, where he began his education. In 1835 he enrolled in Castleknock College, Dublin, which the newly founded Vincentian community in Ireland had just opened. He entered the Congregation of the Mission in 1839 and was sent to Paris for his novitiate and studies. Lynch remained in Paris for three years and returned to Dublin in 1842 as a deacon to teach at his alma mater. He received priesthood on 10 June 1843. In early 1846 John Mary Odin, C.M., vicar apostolic of Texas and later bishop of Galveston and archbishop of New Orleans, visited Dublin to recruit volunteers for his

³*Collectio Selecta Decretorum Conventuum Generalium Congregationis Missionis* (Paris: 1845), 75.

⁴*Collectio Completa Decretorum Conventuum Generalium Congregationis Missionis* (Paris: 1882), 165.

⁵H. C. McKeown, *The Life and Labors of Most Rev. John Joseph Lynch, D.D., Cong. Miss., first Archbishop of Toronto* (Montreal and Toronto: 1886); Charles W. Humphries, "John Joseph Lynch," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: 1982), 11: 535-38. (Hereinafter cited as DCB). These should be read in the light of a "Sketch of the Life of Archbishop Lynch" n.d., by J. F. McBride, Secretary of J. J. Lynch, Archives of the Archdiocese of Toronto (hereinafter cited as AAT) and "A Synopsis of the Chronology of the Life of J. J. Lynch to 1849" written by J. J. Lynch (AAT, JJJL Box D).

mission which had been confided to the Vincentians.⁶ Lynch answered the call. He labored only a short time in Texas where he became very ill. While recuperating in New Orleans he ministered to the wounded from the Mexican War. Since his poor health prevented his return to Texas, he went to Saint Mary's, the Barrens, where he taught and eventually became superior. In 1856 at the invitation of John Timon, C.M., first bishop of Buffalo, he founded the Seminary of Our Lady of Angels, Niagara Falls, New York. In 1859 he was appointed coadjutor bishop with the right of succession to Bishop Armand-François de Charbonnel, who had ruled Toronto since 1850.⁷ The latter had long sought a coadjutor to assist him in meeting the demands of a diocese burdened by debt, rent by clerical strife, and buffeted by an aggressive and powerful Protestant community. Charbonnel resigned immediately, and Lynch became bishop of Toronto in 1860. When the archdiocese of Toronto was created in 1870, Lynch became its first archbishop.

The Search for an Auxiliary in Toronto

As the Catholic Church in Canada spread westward it frequently turned to the French-speaking clergy of Canada and France to find bishops. The appointment of French-speaking bishops did not pass without protest from the English-speaking, Irish clergy who served the dioceses of Ontario, then called Upper Canada. At times during the 1850s French-speaking bishops ruled all four dioceses of Upper Canada: Toronto, London, Kingston, and Ottawa.

This practice moved the clergy of Kingston, Upper Canada, to protest to Rome what they perceived as French domination. Their memorial of 4 September 1855, while conceding the virtue of the bishops, faulted them for their poor English. The document reminded

⁶Jean-Marie Odin (1801-1870) was born in Ambierle, France. He studied at the seminary of Saint Sulpice, Lyons, where he was recruited for the mission of Louisiana. After he arrived in the United States, he entered the Congregation of the Mission. He engaged in pastoral work in Arkansas and Texas. He declined the see of Detroit on the advice of John Timon, C.M. On 16 July 1841 he was elected vicar apostolic of Texas. He became bishop of Galveston in 1846 and archbishop of New Orleans in 1860. While attending Vatican Council I he fell ill and returned to his home, Ambierle, France, where he died 25 May 1870. See H. C. Bezou, "Odin, John Mary," *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: 1967), 10: 643-44 (hereinafter cited as NCE).

⁷Armand-François-Marie de Charbonnel (1802-1891) was born at Château du Flachet near Monistrol-sur-Loire on 1 December 1802. He was the son of a nobleman who had supported the royalist cause during the French Revolution. After studies at Saint Sulpice, Paris, he entered the Sulpicians. He came to Montreal in 1839. On 2 May 1850 he was consecrated bishop of Toronto by Pius IX. He resigned Toronto in 1860 and returned to Europe where he entered the Capuchins. He served as auxiliary bishop of Lyons and died in Crest, France, on 29 March 1891 (Murray W. Nicolson and J. S. Moir, "Charbonnel, Armand-François-Marie de," *DCB* [Toronto: 1990], 12: 182-85).

the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith that the inhabitants of Upper Canada were mainly English and Irish. The signers complained that the hierarchy of Quebec, whom the Congregation consulted, recommended "for the episcopate men from France rather than [men] from Ireland or England to rule a clergy and a people completely different from them in character, language and education."⁸

The memorial dwelt on the language deficiency of the bishops. This, it alleged, provoked ridicule, led English-speaking priests to leave dioceses, and deprived the Church of competent spokesmen to defend its interests. The document faulted especially Bishop Charbonnel of Toronto who, it charged, jeopardized the cause of Catholic education by his lackluster defense of Catholic schools.⁹

The plaintiffs circulated the memorial among the bishops. Bishop Eugène Joseph-Bruno Guigues of Ottawa¹⁰ wrote to Rome on 29 October 1855 to neutralize the effect of the memorial.¹¹ He spent most of his energy attacking its authors. He felt obliged to rescue Charbonnel "against whom this memorial seems to be especially directed." He listed the achievements of the bishop of Toronto, the reduction of the diocesan debt, the foundation of new parishes and schools, the introduction of the Christian Brothers into the diocese, and the doubling of the number of the clergy. Significantly he omitted any reference to the prelate's command of English. He closed his letter with a warning certain to carry weight in Rome buffeted by the liberal winds of the Risorgimento: "If the democratic spirit causes so many evils among the laymen of America, its consequences are much more disastrous among ecclesiastics."

What Bishop Guigues omitted in his brief to Rome he confided to a fellow bishop. Like Charbonnel he was a native of France and had to learn English in order to serve his bilingual diocese. He noted that Charbonnel began to study English late in life and confessed that he

⁸Epistola Sacerdotum Diocesis Kingstoniensis Scripta in Conventu Habito die 4 Septembris 1855," Archives of the Archdiocese of Ottawa, Registre des Lettres III (1850-1860), 156-60. (Hereinafter cited as AAO.)

⁹Franklin A. Walker, *Catholic Education and Politics in Upper Canada* (Toronto: 1955), 76-212.

¹⁰Eugène Joseph-Bruno Guigues (1805-1874) was born at La Garde, near Gap, France, on 26 August 1805. He joined the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. After pastoral work in France he came to Canada as visitor in 1844. In 1848 he became the first bishop of Bytown, renamed Ottawa in 1855. He sided with the ultramontane party in the Canadian hierarchy headed by Bishop Ignace Bourget, who had recommended him for the episcopate. He died in Ottawa on 8 February 1874. See Gaston Carrière, "Guigues, Joseph-Bruno," *DCB* (Toronto: 1972), 10: 322-24.

¹¹"Epistola Sacerdotum Diocesis Kingstoniensis . . . die 4 Septembris 1855," AAO, Registre des Lettres III (1850-1860), 156-160.

was "far from speaking it well enough; it is said he makes one rather weep."¹² He admitted that Charbonnel's lack of a command of English had prejudiced the cause of the Catholic schools. And he observed that the prelate had frequently asked Rome to name a coadjutor to assist him in Toronto.

Charbonnel, the son of a French nobleman, became the second bishop of Toronto, Canada, in 1850. He found the diocese burdened with considerable debt, served by a factious Irish clergy, and, as capital of Upper Canada and the seat of the provincial parliament, the scene of the heated debate concerning public taxes for Catholic schools. Long before the complaint of the clergy of Kingston, Charbonnel realized his shortcomings and had requested a coadjutor. On 3 June 1852 he wrote to Bishop Guigues asking for his signature on such a petition. He pleaded: "I have the greatest need of an assistant. . . . He must be an Irishman."¹³ He unsuccessfully recruited Patrick Dowd, a Sulpician from Montreal, for the post.¹⁴ Dowd refused episcopal appointments on three different occasions despite the pressure from both Rome and the Canadian bishops that he accept.¹⁵

During 1857-1858 Bishop Charbonnel spent twenty months in Europe. He visited Rome to present his plea for a coadjutor directly to Pius IX. He described his emotional meeting with the pope to whom he confessed "my great difficulty and sometimes my inability to understand English, to speak it and to write it as my position demands [Pius IX] stopped my sobs by telling me to nominate my Vicar General [Jean-Marie Bruyère] despite his French background and he promised him as my coadjutor."¹⁶

The Canadian bishops again refused to second Charbonnel's plans. He returned to Toronto greatly disappointed and shared his frustration with his flock in a surprisingly candid pastoral letter which ends on a note of desperation.

¹²AAO Dioceses: Toronto, Évêché, 1848-1860, 11 October 1855.

¹³Ibid., 3 June 1852.

¹⁴Patrick Dowd (1813-1891) was born in Dunleer, Ireland, on 24 November 1813. After studies in Ireland and he went to the Irish College, Paris. He was ordained in 1837, engaged in pastoral work in Ireland, and joined the Sulpicians in 1847. He arrived in Montreal in 1848 where he became the pastor of Saint Patrick's Church. For more than half a century he labored energetically in the care of the Irish immigrants in the city. In addition to declining the appointment to Toronto he also turned down the offers of Kingston and Halifax. He died in Montreal 19 December 1891. See Bruno Harel, "Dowd, Patrick" DCB (Toronto: 1990), 12: 266-68.

¹⁵Charbonnel to Bourget, 13 August 1855, Archives of Archdiocese of Montreal 255.104; 855-6. (Hereinafter cited as ACAM.)

¹⁶Charbonnel to Bourget, 18 October 1857, ACAM, 255.104; 857-9.

Pius the Ninth was induced by what we said of our insufficiency, and directed us to appoint our present Vicar General with the hope of promoting him as coadjutor Bishop. The Most Eminent Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith was similarly disposed. However . . . Archbishop [Gaetano] Bedini, the Secretary of that Congregation, and the Bishops of Canada were consulted on the matter; and in their opinion we did not need any coadjutor bishop.¹⁷ You have been doomed to receive me again . . . as your sole Bishop.¹⁸

A Vincentian Candidate: John J. Lynch, C.M.

At the time the Catholics of Toronto were in an uproar. A group of Irish led by disaffected priests posted placards throughout the city attacking Charbonnel.¹⁹ The besieged prelate continued to search for a collaborator who would attract the support of his fellow bishops. In March 1859 he broached his new plan to Bishop Ignace Bourget of Montreal.²⁰ Charbonnel had served in Montreal during the decade prior to his appointment to Toronto and presumably shared the ultramontane and francophile sentiments of Bourget. Charbonnel mentioned that he had been urged to turn to the Congregation of the Mission for a coadjutor. He was convinced that

the Lazarists would be the best door at which we could knock in order to have a good Irish missionary bishop for Toronto. It is certain that their community in Dublin is the most regular. I was edified there. The superior, Father McNamara, is the confessor of the archbishop. In the United States they have given two holy bishops of Buffalo and Galveston, Timon and Odin. There is a Lazarist, Father Lynch, superior of a college on the American side near Niagara Falls, who preached our last diocesan clergy retreat in September. All the priests were very happy with him. I esteem and love him greatly for his good sense, zeal, spirit of poverty and his facile and practical speaking.²¹

¹⁷Gaetano Bedini (1806-1864) was born at Singaglia, Italy, on 15 May 1806. After ordination he served in the papal diplomatic service and the administration of the Papal States. In 1856 he was named secretary of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. He was raised to the see of Viterbo-Toscanello in 1861 and shortly thereafter became a cardinal. He died at Viterbo 6 September 1864. See J. F. Connelly, "Bedini, Gaetano," NCE 2: 219.

¹⁸Pastoral, 12 June 1858, AAT Charbonnel III, 1856-1860.

¹⁹ACAM 255.104, 858-859; AAT Charbonnel III, n.d. (c. 1857).

²⁰Ignace Bourget (1799-1885) was born in the parish of Saint Joseph (Lauzon), Quebec, on 30 October 1799. After ordination he served as secretary to the bishop of Montreal and in 1837 was named auxiliary bishop with the right of succession. He became bishop of Montreal in 1840 and directed the expansion of the diocese to meet the rapid growth of the city. He led the ultramontane party in Canada, echoed the views of the French ultramontanes who clustered around Louis Veuillot, and is reported to have been praised by Pius IX as "the guiding light of the Canadian episcopate." Declining health and the controversy over liberalism which embroiled the Canadian Church led to his resignation in 1876. He died at Sault-au-Recolleton 8 June 1885. See Philippe Sylvain, "Bourget, Ignace," DCB (Toronto: 1982), 11: 94-105.

²¹Charbonnel to Bourget, 5 March 1859 ACAM, 255.104; 859-3.

Although Charbonnel preferred John Joseph Lynch to other candidates advanced by his Canadian colleagues, he stated his willingness to leave the choice to others. He suggested enlisting the services of the archbishop of Dublin to negotiate the matter with Rome. He concluded with yet another plea for the support of the Canadian hierarchy.



*Most Reverend John J. Lynch, C.M., Bishop of Toronto,
1860-1870, Archbishop, 1870-1888.*

Three months later with the process for the appointment of Lynch well advanced, he defended his choice of Lynch with none of the indifference he had shown earlier. He indignantly denied the charge of having revealed his plans to Lynch. At the same time he reminded Bourget of the impatience that Rome had with candidates refusing appointments. In view of that Charbonnel opined, evidently referring to Lynch's nomination, that it would have been better "to be assured of the consent of our first candidate before sending his name to Rome. His superior in Paris has promised to leave him free."²²

²²Charbonnel to Bourget, 24 June 1859, ACAM, 255.104; 859-12.

The embattled prelate had evidently succeeded in placing Lynch at the top of the *terna*. In addition he had secured the support of at least some of his fellow bishops, notably Bishop Bourget of Montreal. This new effort to procure a coadjutor met with surprisingly quick success. On 17 October 1859 he wrote to Bourget to announce the reception of the papal bull appointing Lynch coadjutor bishop "with the right of succession." The same letter included the plans for the episcopal ordination on 20 November 1859.²³ With evident personal relief he announced the news to the diocese. "Thank God, at last we have a coadjutor of Toronto, *cum futura successione* in the person of the Rev. Jn. Lynch, C.M., Superior of the College of Our Lady of Angels, N.Y."²⁴

On 20 November 1859, the twentieth anniversary of Lynch's entrance into the Congregation of the Mission, Bishop Charbonnel assisted by Bishops John Timon, C.M., of Buffalo and John Farrell of Hamilton ordained Lynch bishop of *Echines in partibus infidelium*.²⁵ The *Toronto Globe* noted the event and the large number who attended, and reported that "the selection of Mr. Lynch is said to be looked upon with great favor both by the clergy and laity."²⁶

Charbonnel left Toronto shortly after the ceremony never to return again. He turned over the administration of the diocese to Lynch "with all my faculties and full jurisdiction in temporal and spiritual concerns."²⁷ He went to Rome "with a common letter signed by all the bishops of the Province mentioning the object of our application to the Holy See for an ultimate decision."²⁸ The "application" which he carried to Rome was his petition to resign the see of Toronto and enter the Capuchins. With undisguised relief Charbonnel reported to Lynch from Rome that "yesterday [2 May] the Holy Father granted everything I desired: my renunciation of Toronto and of the new plans for New Orleans, and my becoming a Capuchin. . . . I shall have a decree dispatched on this matter which will be sent to you and establish you as Bishop of Toronto."²⁹

²³Charbonnel to Bourget, 17 October 1859, ACAM, 255.104; 85923.

²⁴"Circular to the Clergy and Laity of the Diocese of Toronto," 21 October 1859, AAT, Charbonnel

III.

²⁵AAT, Letters Vol I, 247-248.

²⁶*Toronto Globe*, 21 November 1859, I.

²⁷Charbonnel to Lynch, 28 January 1860, AAT, Letters Vol I, 249.

²⁸Charbonnel to Lynch, 21 December 1859, AAT, JJJL Box I.

²⁹Charbonnel to Lynch, 3 May 1860, AAT Letters Vol I, 256-257.

The Roman documents appointing Lynch the bishop of Toronto arrived within the month, and he took possession of see on the feast of Corpus Christi, 7 June 1860.

Lynch's Campaign to Remain a Vincentian

In Lynch's mind, however, the process of becoming the bishop of Toronto was not complete. He had asked Charbonnel, as he passed through Paris, to inquire at the motherhouse of the Congregation of the Mission about the letter he had sent to the superior general, Jean-Baptiste Étienne, C.M.³⁰ He had evidently requested the general's permission or at least his blessing for becoming a bishop. Lynch had received no response before his episcopal ordination. Charbonnel informed him that "Father Etienne assures me that he had responded to you in a timely fashion and that since his letter had not reached you, [he] has written to you again."³¹

Lynch wanted to preserve his bond with the Congregation. By accepting the episcopate without the permission of the general he had incurred the sanction of the decree of the nineteenth general assembly which excluded from the suffrages for the dead members of the community those who acted as he did. He prized his Vincentian heritage and wished to keep it to the extent his new office permitted.

His studies in Paris from 1839 to 1842 had created a special bond of affection for the motherhouse. This affection Lynch showed by the frequent and lengthy letters he wrote to the superior general as a missionary in the United States. In addition he had represented the American province at the assemblies held in Paris in 1849 and 1855. His letters reveal a deep attachment to the community and his reverence for the superior general. After returning from the sexennial assembly of 1855 he wrote to Étienne revealing his regard for the general and his attachment to the motherhouse. "I had the consolation of opening my heart to my Father and my Superior General. Thanks be to God the two principal temptations of which I spoke to you have diminished."³² He

³⁰Jean-Baptiste Étienne, C.M., (1801-1874) was born at Longeville-Jez-Metz on 10 August 1801. He entered the Congregation of the Mission in 1820 and was ordained on 24 September 1825. He served as procurator general and secretary general of the Congregation during the stormy generalship of Jean-Baptiste Nozo and was elected to succeed him on 4 August 1843. He died in Paris on 12 March 1874. See *Recueil des Principales Cijculaires des Supérieurs Généreaux de la Congrégation de la Mission* (Paris: 1880), 3: 1-4.

³¹Charbonnel to Lynch, 7 March 1860, AAT Letters Vol I, 257- 258.

³²Lynch to Étienne, 21 May 1856, Archives of the Congregation of the Mission, Paris. (Herein-after cited as ACM).

went on to express his conviction that Étienne should visit the American province to have first-hand knowledge of conditions and to initiate reforms. He supported the general's proposal that the American students be sent to the motherhouse for their formation and studies. This proposal led him to exclaim, "What new life for the Congregation in this country if it had its members formed at St. Lazare!"

The American authorities opposed sending novices and students to Paris for formation. As a compromise Lynch brought from Paris the rules of the novitiate which were introduced at the Barrens where he was superior. After he left for Buffalo, James Buysch C.M., an ally of Lynch, reported to Étienne about the new novitiate program and Lynch's part in it.

Finally the Seminary has been set up in the same way as that of Paris, in so far as it is possible. I nourish the quiet hope of seeing one day in our seminary a true copy, so to say, of that of Paris. I assure you, Most Honored Father, that if Mr. Lynch had a fault in this regard, it was that he showed too much attachment to the motherhouse of Paris, that he did not hide it enough from the eyes of those who, it was known, were less than enthusiastic for an intimate union with France.³³

In view of his known attachment to Paris and his support of the proposals of the superior general, Lynch could have expected that his Vincentian identity was above reproach. He evidently hoped for a favorable reply from Paris even though he knew, presumably, of the negative response his fellow bishop and friend, John Timon, had received.³⁴ In addition he was probably encouraged by the assurance given to Charbonnel that Lynch's Vincentian superiors would "leave him free." This freedom, of course, meant neither that he had the general's approval for his decision to accept the episcopate nor that he would remain a member of the Congregation with the privilege of the suffrages for the dead.

Lynch soon realized that he had incurred the sanction of the decree of 1843 as had his fellow Vincentian bishops, John M. Odin and John Timon, one of his consecrators, the preacher at his episcopal ordination,

³³J. Buysch to Étienne, 25 June 1857, ACM.

³⁴John Timon (1797-1867) was born in Conewago Township, Pennsylvania, on 12 February 1797. He entered the Congregation of the Mission in 1823 and was ordained on 23 September 1826. He taught and engaged in missionary work, especially in Texas. He served as the first visitor of the American province from 1835-47. After turning down six attempts to raise him to the episcopate, in 1847 he agreed to become first bishop of Buffalo for fear that he appear intractable and later be ordered to accept a diocese in a slave state. He died in Buffalo on 16 April 1867. I. F. Mogavero, "Timon, John" NCE 14: 165.

and his spiritual director.

On 3 May 1844 Étienne asked his council in Paris its advice in the face of the imminent consecration of Odin as vicar apostolic of Texas. The council advised that he be not permitted to accept the office for fear that "this would establish an unfortunate precedent. And if Monsignor Odin decides to accept without permission, he will find himself, by that action, outside of the Congregation."³⁵ This decision evidently fashioned the policy which Étienne adopted with regard to the requests of other American Vincentian bishops.

In 1847 Timon informed the superior general that he had accepted the see of Buffalo. He asked to continue to be considered a member of the Congregation and receive the usual suffrages at his death. The general council in Paris reviewed his petition but concluded as it had for Odin. Since he had accepted the episcopate without having asked permission, it was of the opinion that Timon's petition "ought not to be granted, in accord with the decree of the nineteenth General Assembly."³⁶

The issue was raised again with Lynch's nomination. He wrote to Étienne for the superior general's permission to accept this appointment. He waited more than two months for the response which never arrived. Later Lynch recalled that at the time archbishops and bishops pressed him to accept the call. Among those who urged him to proceed with his episcopal ordination without the blessing of the superior general was Timon.³⁷ It is reasonable to surmise the bishop of Buffalo had informed his fellow Vincentian of the negative response he had received from the superior general when he had made a similar request a dozen years earlier.

The Appeal to Rome

If and when Étienne eventually responded to Lynch's petition is unknown. The young bishop, however, soon realized that he had fallen under the same sanction which had cut Odin and Timon from the Vincentian community. Unlike his Vincentian episcopal colleagues Lynch did not accept the general's decision as final. He turned to Rome. He took his case to the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith.

³⁵Meeting of 3 May 1844, in Félix Contassot, "Extraits des Registres du Grand Conseil" (Rome, 1966), 31.

³⁶Meeting of 2 November 1847, *ibid.*, 40.

³⁷Lynch to A. Fiat, 4 March 1887, ACM, Dictionnaire du Personnel, 2e serie, 1801-1850, Vol J-M.

Prodded by Lynch's complaint Cardinal Alessandro Barnabo, the Prefect of Propaganda, wrote to Étienne for an explanation of the decree of the nineteenth general assembly.³⁸ The superior general responded at length to the prelate. He expanded on the basis and the motives for his refusal to extend the privilege of the suffrages to the North American prelates.³⁹



Jean-Baptiste Étienne, Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, 1843-1874.

After quoting the decree of the assembly of 1843 Étienne pointed out that Timon himself had requested the decree while a delegate at the assembly. He added: "despite this [he] accepted the bishopric of

³⁸Alessandro Barnabo (1801-1874) was born in Foligno on 2 March 1801. He filled various posts in the papal administration and became a cardinal in 1856. He served as prefect of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith and prefect of the Congregation for the Affairs of the Oriental Rites. He died on 24 February 1874.

³⁹Étienne to Barnabo, 23 July 1862, ACM, Correspondence de M. Nozo et M. Étienne. Lettres importantes aux externes 1831-1873, 239-241.

Buffalo, without the approval of the Superior General." He went on to emphasize that the suffrages were not granted by the "Rules or Constitutions" of the community but by a decree of a general assembly as a "favor to members of the family who have edified it by their virtues and aided it by their works."

Étienne explained further that the assembly felt that a number of Vincentians secured the episcopate in ways "which the spirit of their state could not approve." Ambition in this matter "had become dangerous and risked altering profoundly the spirit of St. Vincent who was characterized by humility." The assembly believed it was its duty to remedy this disorder in whatever way possible.

He added that the assembly believed that some Vincentians were raised to the episcopate although "their conduct and disposition made them hardly worthy of this and it [the assembly] wanted to free the Congregation of all responsibility for the consequences which might result." Étienne noted that some of those who became bishops even turned hostile to the Congregation. Hence the assembly believed that it should not grant to these prelates a favor "which belonged to the true children of St. Vincent."

Finally Étienne appealed to the constitutions of the Congregation "approved by the Holy See [which] forbid the Superior General to accept any ecclesiastical dignity without the consent of a general assembly. It [the assembly] believed to be acting in the spirit of these Constitutions by demanding that a missionary not accept the episcopate without the authorization of the Superior General." He then assured the cardinal that the assembly intended in no way to inconvenience the "Sovereign Pontiff to whom our entire Congregation is committed without reserve."

Étienne's View of his Role in Episcopal Appointments

Étienne then proceeded to sketch what he saw as his role in the process of designating Vincentians for the episcopate, a role which probably raised the eyebrows of the Roman authorities.

The Superior General will always consider as his sacred duty that he himself designate for him [the Pope] the subjects most suitable to serve the church when he judges that circumstances demand that he choose them in order to raise them to the episcopate. He knows that he must be able to make sacrifices when it is question of procuring the general good of the church. As much as he is disposed to enter into the views of the Holy See in this regard, he is grievously affected when missionaries are raised to so high a dignity whom he does not judge worthy of his confidence and to

whom he would not dare confide the direction of the Daughters of Charity. When your Eminence asked me to prod M. Amat to accept the bishopric of Monterey, I hastened to urge his consent because I saw him as capable of all the services to this church.⁴⁰ I shall always be disposed to act in a similar manner when the same circumstances present themselves.

In this response Father Étienne fashioned for himself a role in episcopal appointments which went far beyond the rather modest wording of the decrees of the general assemblies. He found in them the basis for his being actively consulted when Rome planned to raise Vincentians to the episcopate. He evidently believed that he should judge of the suitability of the candidates and the needs of the diocese they were to govern. The "consent of the superior general" looked not only to the spiritual welfare of the Congregation and its members but assumed an ecclesial dimension. In Étienne's eyes there was more at stake than the grant of suffrages to Vincentian bishops.

An examination of the text of the decrees makes clear that their goal was to preserve the spirit of humility among the members of the Congregation and to save for the works of the Community its talented members. The eighteenth general assembly (1835) gave but one reason for its action, "the great injury to both the soul and body of the Congregation" which episcopal promotions from its ranks caused.

The nineteenth general assembly (1843) mandated the withdrawal of the suffrages and spoke for the first time of the consent of the superior general with regard to episcopal appointments. Again the only motive for the action of the assembly was concern for the loss suffered by the Congregation through episcopal appointments. Both assemblies focused on the internal needs of the community. One finds no support for a claim to a role for the superior general in the process of episcopal appointments.

No transcripts or summaries of the discussions of the assemblies which passed these decrees exist. Étienne's letter to the Cardinal Barnabo mentions for the first time that a concern for the quality of those designated for the episcopate moved the assemblies to take the action which they did.

⁴⁰Thaddeus Amat (1811-1878) was born in Barcelona on 31 December 1811 and entered the Congregation of the Mission at the age of twenty. He was ordained 23 December 1837. He came to the United States and served in missions and seminaries. In 1853 he was named bishop of Monterey and was consecrated in Rome 12 March 1854. He died in Los Angeles on 12 May 1878. See N. C. Eberhardt, "Amat, Thaddeus," *NCE*, 1: 367-68.

On 22 April 1839 Étienne, not yet superior general, wrote to Timon about American Vincentians becoming bishops. He discussed the rumors surrounding Timon and Odin as candidates for the episcopate.⁴¹ He complained that the efforts of Bishop Joseph Rosati, C.M., to secure Timon for Saint Louis showed that Rosati had "very little zeal for the Congregation." He concluded with the hope that should they be nominated "God would inspire in the both of you the generosity to refuse a dignity which would inflict such a terrible blow to our mission in America." At this time Étienne's only concern was to preserve for the works of the Congregation its talented members. He does not see any role for the central administration of the Community beyond exhorting the members concerned.

Jean-Baptiste Nozo,⁴² superior general, echoed the same concern when he wrote to Timon a month later on the same subject.⁴³ He saw the appointment of Timon as a threat to the future of the American Vincentian mission. He begged his confrere to refuse the appointment and supported his plea by appealing to the "general assemblies, especially the last one." The superior general's authority at this point did not go beyond exhortation.

These and other letters dealing with the same subject give no hint on the part of the administration in Paris of a concern for anything but the preservation of a tradition of not seeking or accepting ecclesiastical dignities in order to foster humility and to husband the personnel for the works of the Congregation.

As noted earlier by 1862 Étienne had fashioned for the superior general a much more ambitious role in the designation of Vincentian bishops. He saw it as a "sacred duty" that he "propose" to Rome the Vincentians he deemed suitable for the episcopal office. In addition to judging of the suitability of candidates he expected the superior general to take an initiative in the process. While he recognized the need to make sacrifices for the common good of the Church, he claimed the right to judge whether the needs of the Church warranted such action. In addition it is clear that any dialogue concerning episcopal appoint-

⁴¹Étienne to Timon, 27 April 1839, The Vincentian Collection at Notre Dame University, Reel 2.

⁴²Jean-Baptiste Nozo (1796-1868) was born at Ablaincourt in the diocese of Amiens on 4 January 1796. He entered the Congregation of the Mission in 1820 and after ordination taught in seminaries and served as director of the interior seminary at Paris. While serving as visitor of the province of Champagne he was elected superior general on 20 August 1835. After a troubled administration he resigned on 2 August 1842. He died on 24 June 1868.

⁴³Nozo to Timon, 29 May 1839, The Vincentian Collection at Notre Dame University, Reel 2.

ments would take place between the superior general and the Holy See, not between a subject and the Holy See. He cited his intervention in the appointment of Thaddeus Amat in 1853 as a model of how he conceived his role. He also gratuitously questioned the suitability of unnamed Vincentians who had been made bishops without following this scenario.

Rome responded directly to the question of the suffrages and made no judgment concerning the pretensions of the superior general in the matter of episcopal nominations. Cardinal Barnabo directed Étienne to abolish the decree and restore to the Vincentian bishops the right to the suffrages which had been denied. Always obedient to the Holy See Étienne complied. The cardinal informed Lynch of this on 7 January, 1863. "M. Etienne . . . affirms that the said decree was abolished according to the sanction of His Holiness given on August 30. I am sure that you will be pleased at my acquainting you of the favorable result of an affair which concerns your Lordship."⁴⁴

Étienne and Vincentian Bishops

One may conclude that both Timon's and Lynch's petitions to Étienne failed to receive a favorable response because neither had followed the pattern of Amat's appointment. Unlike Amat they both wrote to Paris to inform Étienne of their appointment and to request that they continue to be considered members of the Community with a right to the suffrages for the dead. The general was not asked to "consent" to their accepting the episcopate. Amat had written Étienne to request that he block his nomination.⁴⁵ Rome intervened and asked the superior general to press Amat to accept. In this case the general was involved in the judgment concerning suitability of the candidate as he was not with Timon and Lynch.

With regard to the appointments to Buffalo and Toronto Étienne apparently received no consultation from Rome. He evidently thought that the "consent of the Superior General" implied more than approval of a *fait accompli*. And while he might not attempt to block their advancement, he wished to avoid giving any indication of his approval of promotions in which he believed he should have been involved and from which he was excluded.

⁴⁴Barnabo to Lynch, 4 January 1863, AAT, Roman Correspondence II.

⁴⁵Amat to Étienne, 20 May 1852, Letters to the Superiors General From Early Confreres in the U.S.A. 1816-1915, Reel 5, 534.

Lynch Maintains Vincentian Connections

It appears that the superior general never informed Lynch of the restoration mandated by the Holy See. More than a year later on the occasion of writing to a friend at the motherhouse in Paris Lynch reflected with some bitterness:

I enclose the copy of the letter of Card. Barnabo. I presume I need add nothing from myself. St. Vincent had too much reverence for Rome and Bishops to suggest any other course to his successor than to conform to the intentions of the Sovereign Pontiff. I get no information of the death of any of our confreres and of course, mine will not be noticed either Whether our poor confreres in Purgatory will rejoice in their not getting a Bishop's Mass for their benefit, I leave to the theologians to decide. Still when I hear from the newspapers of the death of any of them, I celebrate a Mass knowing that some will rejoice in it.⁴⁶

Despite this clash with the superior general Lynch maintained as close ties as possible with his Vincentian confreres. He corresponded frequently with his fellow Vincentian bishop, John Timon. He visited him on occasion, traveled to Rome with him for *ad limina* visits, and celebrated the last sacraments with Timon when the bishop of Buffalo died in 1867.

Lynch received letters from his Vincentian brothers. No doubt he was heartened by the likes of the one he received from Hyppolyte Gandolfo, C.M., with whom he had labored in Missouri. Gandolfo wanted to cheer a

poor bishop who believes still that *filii matris meae pugnaverunt and pugnant contra me*. At any rate I send you a small purse for the carrying of the B. Sacrament, . . . that the frequent use of it may in some measure mind [*sic*] you that *non omnes pugnant contra te*. . . . I hope that this my short preaching to you who should preach to me will determine you to come [to visit in Emmitsburg, Md.] and then, wine, wine, wine and wine, macaroni, macaroni, etc.

Excuse my impertinent and rather funny way, but I can't help it, as somebody say [*sic*] you are still my good, old Johnny that was used [*sic*] to live at Barrens and once in a while trot to St. Genevieve. I give you permission to laugh at these my *sottises*, [jests] provided I have your benediction.

⁴⁶Lynch to Mariano Maller, 12 May 1864, ACM.

P.S. I heard that at the next big Sanhedrin to be held in Paris they will strike out that odious, I should say between our two noses, ridiculous *statutum*, the author of which has been *ab initio* our good, old John Timon.⁴⁷

"The next big Sanhedrin to be held in Paris," of course, was the twenty-second general assembly which met in August 1867 and formally repealed the decree of 1843 against which Lynch had fought. One has little difficulty in sensing the bonds of affection which bound Lynch to his Vincentian community. He showed this by his attempt, ultimately unsuccessful, to establish a Vincentian house in his diocese.⁴⁸ At times he returned to the Seminary of Our Lady of Angels which he had founded for ordinations and celebrations. At the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the seminary he delivered a major address.⁴⁹ In 1874 he traveled to the Vincentian motherhouse in Philadelphia to ordain Vincentian candidates for sacred orders.⁵⁰

Lynch's Formal Rehabilitation

Unfortunately Lynch had to wait until the year before his death to receive from Paris official word of his rehabilitation in the Congregation. A letter of Antoine Fiat, C.M., the superior general, officially informing him of his restoration moved him deeply.⁵¹ In his response to Fiat the aging prelate recalled the circumstances of his episcopal promotion and the tension, if not anguish, he experienced before accepting the episcopate.

I received with great pleasure and gratitude your New Year's greetings. . . . I am very grateful to you, Most Honored Father, for the external rehabilitation which you have given me in our dear Congregation. His Holiness, Pius IX, however, had already assured me that I possessed all the privileges of one of its members. It caused me very great pain to think that after having worked constantly for twenty years in our dear Congregation to procure the glory of God and the salvation of souls, I had been cut off for the sole fact that I had consented to become a coadjutor bishop without the permission of the Superior General.

⁴⁷Gandolfo to Lynch, 18 May 1866, AAT, JLL Misc. Rel. Orders, Sisters of Charity.

⁴⁸Lynch to Mariano Maller, 12 May 1864, ACM.

⁴⁹[L. A. Grace], *History of the Seminary of Our Lady of Angels and Niagara University* (Buffalo: 1906), 43-55.

⁵⁰AAT, JLL Seminary Papers 1850-1911: Ordination in Germantown 1874.

⁵¹Antoine Fiat (1832-1915) was born in Auvergne on 29 August 1832. He entered the Congregation of the Mission in 1857 and taught in seminaries after ordination. He filled several posts at the motherhouse and was elected superior general on 4 September 1878. He resigned in July 1914 because of sickness and died 1 September 1915.

Before making my decision I waited more than two months for the response and counsel of M. Etienne. I only gave in following the advice and the almost formal order of my holy confessor and confrere, Bishop Timon as well as other archbishops and bishops. One of them went so far as to say that I would commit a mortal sin if I refused to submit.⁵²

Lynch described his prayers to discern the will of God, the repugnance he felt in leaving his beloved community to assume the life of a diocesan priest, and the aversion he experienced in surrendering his American citizenship to become once again a subject of Great Britain. He suffered great spiritual turmoil in arriving at his decision, which only dissipated when he surrendered himself to the will of God.

He went on to assure Fiat that he still lived like a missionary and found great pleasure in reading the *Annales* and "your letters so full of edification." He recalled with affection the Vincentian priests, brothers, students, and novices with whom he lived at the motherhouse from 1839-1842, many of whom had died. He closed with the protestation that "my affection for our dear Congregation is not lessened in any way and my devotion for St. Vincent and his works is as lively and ardent as ever."

The superior general did not allow this protestation of filial piety and Vincentian devotion to pass without response. Fiat testified to the edification he experienced in reading Lynch's letter. He added that "I have always considered the bishops chosen by the Holy See in the bosom of the family of St. Vincent as living intimately united to it in spirit and heart and for that reason I have determined that they be listed in the *Catalogue* in a place of honor, at the beginning of the provinces to which they belonged."⁵³

Vincentian Bishops and the Congregation

This correspondence in the evening of Lynch's life makes clear that Étienne never informed the prelate personally of the rehabilitation mandated by the Holy See and unanimously approved by the twenty-second general assembly. The annual catalogues of the personnel of the Congregation did not reflect this restoration during the Étienne's regime and for the following decade. The names of some Vincentian bishops found a place in catalogues. Those named held some office in

⁵²Lynch to Fiat, 4 March 1887, ACM, *Dictionnaire du Personnel*, 2e serie, 1801-1850, Vol. J-M.

⁵³Fiat to Lynch, 22 March 1887, AAT, JJJ Box VII.

the Congregation, usually that of superior and in some cases visitor of a mission. In addition these bishops labored in missions staffed by the French provinces, for example, Persia and China. Étienne apparently was satisfied with the selection of these bishops and the role which he may have played in their appointment. He apparently could not expand his vision of Vincentian episcopal ministry beyond this French missionary matrix.

Étienne did show some flexibility in this matter. In 1847 he extended to Bishop Ferdinand Girardi, C.M.,⁵⁴ of the province of Naples "the favor of continuing to be part of the Congregation and to enjoy its suffrages after death" because Girardi had been promoted before the decree of 1843 and continued to be devoted to the Company.⁵⁵ His name, however, never appeared in the catalogue as did those of the French missionary bishops. The same must be said of Thaddeus Amat whose episcopal promotion Étienne had seconded at the request of the Holy See. Amat's name disappeared from the personnel catalogue as did those of Odin, Timon, and Lynch, who failed to win the general's approval.

One can detect a change in the attitude of Étienne toward the appointment of American Vincentians to the episcopate after the assembly in 1867. The *Annales*⁵⁶ carried the letter which Stephen V. Ryan, C.M, wrote to Étienne to announce his appointment to succeed John Timon in Buffalo.⁵⁷ Ryan spoke of his reluctance to accept the office and his desire to remain "always a humble and devoted child of the Little Company." The general noted with approval Ryan's elevation which he had accepted only after having received a formal order from Pius IX.⁵⁸ It does not appear, however, that he played any role in the appointment.

⁵⁴Ferdinand Girardi (1788-1866) was born 2 October 1788 at Lauria in the Diocese of Policastro, near Naples. He served as successively as bishop of Sant Angelo de' Lombardi (1842-1846), Nardo (1846-1848), and Sessa (1848-1866). He died in Genoa 8 December 1866.

⁵⁵*Recueil des Principales Circulaires*, 3: 123-24.

⁵⁶*Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission* (Paris, 1869), 34: 36-37.

⁵⁷Stephen V. Ryan (1826-1896) was born in Almonte, Ontario, Canada on 1 January 1826. His family moved to Pottsville, Pennsylvania and after studies in Saint Charles Seminary, Philadelphia, he entered the Congregation of the Mission in 1844. Following ordination in 1849 he taught in seminaries in Missouri. He was named visitor in 1857. He was consecrated bishop of Buffalo on 8 November 1868 and died in that city on 10 April 1896.

⁵⁸*Recueil des Principales Circulaires* 3: 419.

Conclusions

One is warranted in concluding that Étienne failed to show a breadth of spirit in this entire affair. It is not clear how he responded to the petitions from his American subjects who sought his approval for their episcopal appointments. Charbonnel testified that Étienne claimed he had answered Lynch's petition in due time, although no trace of or reference to this response exists.⁵⁹ In addition Lynch had some reason to anticipate a favorable reply from Paris in 1859 since Charbonnel in the days before Lynch's consecration reported that "his superior in Paris has promised me to leave him free."⁶⁰

Moreover one has to say that Étienne complied only minimally with the directives of the Holy See. While the twenty-second general assembly ratified the papal decision by rescinding the noxious statute, Étienne never mentioned the revocation in his long circular letter which described the work of the body.⁶¹ Nor did he have the graciousness to inform those affected by the revocation of their changed status. Lynch had to depend on the Holy See for this information. Furthermore Lynch served as one of the consecrators of Bishop Stephen V. Ryan and presumably knew of Étienne's response to Ryan's letter informing the general of his elevation to the episcopate in circumstances very similar to those which surrounded Lynch's promotion nine years earlier. Yet Étienne allowed Lynch's status in the Congregation go without official notice on his part.

Finally the revocation of the decree had no effect on the annual catalogue which listed the members of the Congregation. Lynch and his fellow non-French bishops had to await the 1880s for their names to reappear. And only in 1878 did the annual necrology of the Congregation carry the names of the deceased non-French bishops when it reported the deaths of two Americans, Bishops Thaddeus Amat and Michael Domenec.

Little more than a year after his formal reconciliation with Paris, on 12 May 1888 Archbishop John Joseph Lynch, C.M., died. As was his wish his name appeared on the annual necrology of deceased Vincentians.⁶² He is buried beside the cathedral of Saint Michael in

⁵⁹Charbonnel to Lynch, 7 March 1860, AAT, Lettres, Vol I, 257258.

⁶⁰Charbonnel to Bourget, 24 June 1859, ACAM, 255.104; 859-12.

⁶¹*Recueil des Principales Circulaires*, 3: 392-413.

⁶²*Lettres du Supérieur General 1878-1910* (Paris: n.d.), 1: 297.

Toronto where he had served and preached for almost thirty years. He left his Vincentian mark on his final mission. He had adopted as his episcopal seal the seal of the Congregation of the Mission. It graces the stained glass window above his grave and for many years served as the quasi official seal of the archdiocese of Toronto.