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Father General's Missionary Meditation The African synod - "a breath of fresh air"

Oblates have been present in Africa since Saint Eugene's time and its importance for our Congregation keeps increasing. What do we know about Africa? While the Continent occasionally appears on the world news there is still too much silence about it. Very recently we got an opportunity to hear what our African Church leaders are saying about their Continent and I invite us all to lend them listening ears.

The first Synod for Africa was held 15 years ago. I still remember the opening ceremony, I had just settled here in Rome. As it seems, that synod was mostly a time to become acquainted. The post-synodal document, "Ecclesia in Africa", inspired us with the image of "the Church as God's Family" which it took "as its guiding idea for the evangelization of Africa" (EIA 63).

The "Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops" ended a week ago. It focused on "The Church in Africa in service to reconciliation, justice and peace". Among the 240 participant bishops, eight were Oblates, and among the almost equal number of auditors, experts, fraternal delegates and helpers we had, for the first time, five of our scholastics involved, offering different services.

We will have to wait a few months for the main document to appear but the message given at the conclusion is already out. I found it particularly outspoken and striking, and to read the whole text is worthwhile. Let me highlight just a few points, in three steps. While the message tells us how the African Synod sees its continent, it may

also offer us inspiration for our mission in other parts of the world.

I. At the outset, the synod offers an overall view of the Continent and does so in a balanced way. It starts off with the statement that "*We live in a world full of contradictions and deep crisis. ... In all this, Africa is the most hit. Rich in human and natural resources, many of our people are still left to wallow in poverty and misery, wars and conflicts, crisis and chaos.*" Analyzing these situations it appears that those "*are very rarely caused by natural disasters. They are largely due to human decisions and activities by people who have no regard for the common good and this often through a tragic complicity and criminal conspiracy of local leaders and foreign interests.*" On the other hand the light of a new dawn is already shining. "*Africa must not despair. ... There is much good news in many parts of Africa. But the modern media often tend to emphasize bad news and thus seem to focus more on our woes and defects than on the positive efforts that we are making. Nations have emerged from long years of war and are moving gradually along the path of peace and prosperity. Good governance is making appreciable positive impact in some African nations, challenging others to review past and present bad habits.*"

II. Following this overview, the synod turns to its main theme, which concerns reconciliation, justice and peace. We are invited to contemplate the heart of Christ: "*The Church in Africa, both as family of God and as individual faithful has the duty to be instruments of peace and reconciliation, after the heart of Christ,*

who is our peace and reconciliation.” Is not reconciliation one of the great missionary tasks of the Oblates all over the world? The African Synod issues a call to help *“break the vicious circle of offence, revenge and counter attack. In all this, the virtue of pardon is crucial, even before any admission of guilt. Those who say that pardon does not work should try revenge and see.”* What a powerful message coming as it is from Church leaders who often are living in the in the midst of war and strife, or in its aftermath! It indicates as the only way out, making ours that pardon which flows from Christ’s heart. There is no alternative to it. *“Those who say that pardon does not work should try revenge and see”.*

III. A number of other themes follow, and I mention just a few. There is the appeal to the local Churches to *“ensure real participation of women at appropriate levels”*. There is the reference to HIV/AIDS when the Synod affirms *“The Church is second to none in the fight against HIV/AIDS”* and launches an appeal to follow programs that propose fidelity. *“We address ourselves particularly to you, the youth. Let no one deceive you into thinking that you cannot control yourselves. Yes you can, with the grace of God.”* There is finally the call on the great powers of the world: *“we plead: treat Africa with respect and dignity.”* *“A change in the world economic order”* is needed and the Synod is quite specific:

“A change is called for with regard to the debts burden against poor nations, which literally kills children. Multinationals have to stop their criminal devastation of the environment in their greedy exploitation of natural resources. It is short-sighted policy to foment wars in order to make fast gains from chaos, at the cost of human lives and blood.” The appeal finishes with a loud cry: *“Is there no one out there able and willing to stop all these crimes against humanity?”*

I was touched by the whole message which contains both deep, faith-filled reflections and passionate, outspoken appeals. At the General House we got a taste of this spirit when about a dozen bishops, Oblates and others, visited with us during the second week of the proceedings. With this synod, the continent has made visible how much Africa is part of Christ’s body, the Church – part of all of us. Pope Benedict said at the inaugural Mass that *“Africa represents an enormous spiritual ‘lung’ for a humanity that appears to be in a crisis of faith and hope”*. Indeed, the synod’s message can help the whole Church to breathe some fresh air.

“Africa is not helpless. Our destiny is still in our hands. All she is asking for is the space to breathe and thrive. Africa is already moving; and the Church is moving with her, offering her the light of the Gospel.”

General Administration

ROME

Oblates at the Synod for Africa

On October 25, Pope Benedict XVI officially closed the II Synod for Africa with a Pontifical Mass at St. Peter's Basilica. For three weeks, some 200 Bishops from all 53 countries of Africa, and about 40 observers, had deliberated on the theme: *“The Church at the Service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace”*. Pope Benedict was present at most of the sessions, but did not intervene except for his opening and closing statements.

Some especially grave and urgent issues were among the many that were discussed:

widespread poverty and underdevelopment; the murderous civil and tribal wars causing millions of refugees and migrants; political instability and dictatorships; rampant corruption on every level; lack of basics such as food, water and shelter; the devastating pandemic of HIV/AIDS; discrimination and exploitation of women and children. In the face of such seemingly overwhelming problems, what should be the task of the Church, called to be the *“salt of the earth, and the light of the world”*? More specifically, how is the Church to work for *“Reconciliation, Justice and Peace”* at this time?

The process that was followed was much the

same as at the First Synod. In the first week, they began by listening to each other in plenary sessions, with only 5 minutes allowed for each presentation. The second week was dedicated to small-group discussions in various languages. Finally, in the third week, they returned to plenary sessions to discuss and vote on the proposals to be sent to the Pope. He will now consider them, and produce an official document which will, in his words, “offer some appropriate pastoral guidelines”.

There was an Oblate presence at the Synod as well, eight bishops in all. There were seven from the different parts of Africa:

*Three from South Africa: Archbishop Buti TLHAGALE (Johannesburg), Bishop Barry WOOD (Auxiliary of Durban) and Bishop Edward RISI (Keimoes-Upington).

*Two from Namibia: Archbishop Liborius NASHENDA (Windhoek) and Bishop Joseph SHIKONGO (Rundu).

*One from Chad: Bishop Jean Claude BOUCHARD (Pala).

*One from Lesotho : Gerard LEROTHOLI (Maseru).

Among the bishops invited by the Holy Father was Archbishop Orlando QUEVEDO (Cotabato, Philippines). He serves as General Secretary of the “Federation of Asian Episcopal Conferences.”

Together with a couple of other Synod Fathers, they were invited for supper at the General House. Afterwards, they shared their impressions of the Synod with the assembled community, in both serious and often humorous ways. In general, they were all pleased with the spirit among the Bishops, the process, and the work being done.

Besides sending their proposals to the Pope, the Synod Fathers also prepared a powerful concluding statement. They made a heartfelt plea to African leaders to end wars, exploitation and corruption, and pledged the full support of the Church in the search for justice and peace. For the Oblates, it was significant that during the last week of the Synod there was a meeting of the Oblate Commission for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. And so, for the Church, and

for the Oblates, the importance of Africa should not be underestimated. Africa has some 165 million Catholics, but it is estimated that 40% of all adult Baptisms in the world take place there. About one-half of all Oblate vocations come from Africa. Despite the huge problems facing that continent, the Spirit is at work, and inspires guarded optimism. That can be seen in the words of the Pope when he presented the working paper for the Synod during his visit to Cameroon : The Synod "is a moment of great hope for Africa, and for the whole world".

Four scholastics from the International Scholasticate had the unique opportunity of serving as “assistants” to the Synod Fathers during the three-week event at the Vatican:

*Bro. Bonga Thamsanqa MAJOLA (Northern Prov. South Africa)

*Bro. Thabang NKADIMENG (Northern Prov. South Africa)

*Bro. Ndodana TSHUMA (Zimbabwe)

*Bro. Andreas Sekake THAMAE (Lesotho)

*Bro. Marcin SERWIN (Assumption)

(Richard WOLAK)

GENERAL POSTULATION

Towards a celebration of the Founder

On May 21, 1861, **Saint Eugene de Mazenod** left Marseilles to join the “Oblate community in heaven.” Therefore, on May 21, 2011, we will celebrate the **150th anniversary** of his “*Dies Natalis*.” We must not let it pass unnoticed.

Proposals and initiatives to celebrate it are being gathered. Do you have any suggestions in this regard? You can let the Postulation know.

One proposal would be to celebrate a Beatification or Canonization of one of his spiritual sons in that year.

The Cause with the most probability of success would be that of the **Oblate Martyrs of Spain**.

In order to demonstrate to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints that “their memory is still alive” and that we consider them authentic martyrs for the faith, one could send a personal, communal or collective letter to the Prefect of the Vatican

Dicastery, asking him to accelerate the Cause for Beatification, in order to be able to celebrate it, if possible, in 2011, in order to emphasize the “Year of Saint Eugene de Mazenod.”

Here is the address:

His Excellency, Archbishop Angelo Amato, S.D.B.
Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints
Piazza Pio XII, 20
00193 Roma (Italy)

Please try to write....and many thanks. (*Joaquín MARTÍNEZ, o.m.i., Postulator General*)

ROME

Cardinal George: “The Difference God Makes”

At the Lateran University in Rome, on October 7th, Cardinal Francis GEORGE presented his new book *The Difference God Makes* (New York: Crossroads, 2009). In the audience were numerous dignitaries such as the Ambassador of the United States to the Holy See, as well as about 20 Oblates, including members of the General Administration.

After a short introduction by the director of the Redemptor Hominis Pastoral Institute of the

Lateran, the Cardinal briefly presented the main themes of his book. After he spoke, he answered questions, in both English and Italian.

The overall theme of the book is “being-in-relationship,” or that relationships constitute our personhood, just as they do in the Blessed Trinity. Taking very concrete examples, mainly from current American problems, the Cardinal argues that the modern focus on individualism ultimately leads to a weakening or diminishment of the very person. We can truly grow as persons, and realize our potential, only by living out our relationships, first of all with God, in the Church, and in charity towards others. Modern culture is very often based on confrontation and competition -- focused on winners and losers. The Cardinal insists that, instead, we must work together in harmony to establish justice and peace -- to build a universal community. It is precisely our faith in God and in Christ, as well as our work in the Church, that “makes the difference.”

The session ended with a presentation to the Cardinal of a medal from the University. This was followed by a reception in the foyer. There, the Cardinal personally autographed and presented a copy of his book to the General House of the Oblates, dedicating it to “all my brother Oblates.” (Richard WOLAK)

Latin America

URUGUAY

Catechesis Day

On Sunday, October 4, we celebrated the long-awaited Catechesis Day at the Parish of Nuestra Señora del Carmen (San Gregorio de Polanco); the motto of the day was: “Jesus Christ: Good news for everyone.” Our community had the joy of welcoming more than a hundred catechists from different parishes in the diocese.

We began the day with an introduction to our community. Representatives from the Base Communities, the social ministry, the Oblate family, the youth group and, of course, the catechists explained to the visitors about their activities and projects.

After some lively singing, we accomplished our group work, based on the planning instrument for 2009, which invites us to reflect on this journey which we have undertaken together, catechists and students. After lunch, amidst skits and much laughter, the different groups presented their work; Father Mario GAZZOLA and Liber told of their experiences as well. We ended this beautiful day with the celebration of the Eucharist where the bishop spoke to us of how important it is to live in unity and to see ourselves as part of this great family.

We need to thank all those who helped in the preparation: the catechists and the youth who prepared our meeting place, Centro San José; the Base Communities that prepared the lunch;

and all those who gave of themselves so that this meeting would be a joyful moment in the Risen Christ. (October 2009, *BOLETIN N° 19 Información de la Comunidad Parroquial*)

Asia-Oceania

COLOMBO

Valiant Children of Action

The name La-Kri-Vi is an abbreviation using the initial letters in Sinhalese of “Lama Kriyakari Veerayo,” which means “Valiant Children of Action.” The La-Kri-Vi movement originated in France and was introduced in Sri Lanka by Fr. Felix MEVEL in 1954. Affiliated with the *International Movement for the Apostolate of Children*, La-Kri-Vi leads children through a process of action and reflection. It harnesses the innate tendency and the very nature of children to be active, and invites children of all religions to be its active participants.

It aims at stirring up the dynamism and idealism of children to be active participants in transforming their own destiny. The movement endeavors to create a better world by the initiatives of children themselves, a world where consumerism, accumulation of wealth, communal conflicts, religious disharmony and disoriented education will be eradicated or minimized, a world in which children will refuse values which enslave and will learn a set of values which will enhance growth, freedom and mutual support.

The Movement conducted “Communication and Leadership” programs for a representative group of children in each of the dioceses except in Ratnapura from May to August 2009.

An historical event was added to the history of the Movement when its *National Committee of Children* came together for their first official meeting at Gerard House in Mattakkuliya, from August 21-23. About 24 children of the 7th, 8th and 9th years in school, from six dioceses, participated. During the colorful opening ceremony, the participants went in procession into the hall where they honored the late Fr. Felix Meval with an offering of flowers and the lighting of oil lamps before his photo. The

participants also remembered with gratitude and love the late Fr. Sarath SILVA and others who labored to realize the prophetic vision and mission of the La-Kr-Vi Movement.

This Movement demonstrates that different ethnic and religious groups can live and work together. There is the added beauty of “unity in diversity.” La-Kri-Vi remains faithful to the command of Jesus Christ who said: “Let the children come to me.” (Fr. Joe COORAY, National Director of La-Kri-Vi in Colombo Province Newsletter, July-September 2009)

COLOMBO

Sri Lankan Religious to President: Free Tamil refugees

The religious of Sri Lanka committed to helping Tamil refugees have demanded that President Mahinda Rajapaksa release the over 200 thousand Internally Displaced People (IDPs) from refugee camps in the North of the Country, where they are suffering “torment”. The Center for Society & Religion (CSR) and the Conference of Major Religious Superiors (CMRS), promoters of the so-called “ministry of presence” among IDPs, sent President of Sri Lanka a letter in which they show their appreciation for the government’s work to assist refugees to date, but in which they also demand a fast solution to the refugee emergency and reiterate the extreme conditions of stress and frustration in which the people are forced to live.

Fr. Rohan SILVA, Director of CSR, hopes that “the president responds positively to the request” sent on September 30. The OMI missionary explains that the two sponsoring organizations appeal to the authorities “as religious and as citizens of Sri Lanka” who want to give “voice to the voiceless and defend” their rights and their freedom. The CSR Director explains to AsiaNews that “through the ‘Ministry of presence’ our sisters and our brothers are tirelessly working

to alleviate suffering and pains of the refugees and working to ensure an education for children living in refugee camps”.

“The long wait to return to their homes and loved ones - continues to appeal - is exacting a high price from these tormented people” and it recalls that “in places like Kallimoddi and Sirukkandal refugees have been imprisoned there for more than 18 months.” The religious cite the country's constitution, and Article 14 that guarantees all citizens “freedom of movement and residence in Sri Lanka.” Promoters of the “ministry of presence” stress the importance of the government's decision, made known on September 9, to allow IDPs who have relatives willing to house them, leave the refugee camps. They hope that all refugees who wish to leave the centres will be allowed to do so. CSR and CMRS are very worried about the conditions of “alienation” and “depression” among refugees forced to live in the camps and remind the President that “they only want to put behind them the tragic experience of war and begin a new life”.

– (Melani Manel Perera for www.asianews.it)

COLOMBO

Scholasticate celebrates 50th anniversary

The Oblate Scholasticate of Mary Immaculate is situated on a fertile little hill in the midst of the serene and tranquil atmosphere of Ampitiya, about one kilometre from Kandy, Sri Lanka. Its foundation stone was laid by the late Bishop of Kandy, Bishop Bernard Regno, OSB, on December 8, 1957, and the building was completed and blessed by the late Superior General of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Fr. Leo DESCHÂTELETS, on February 17, 1959.

The first group of 48 Oblate scholastics, with their Superior, Fr. Anthony DHARMARATNE, moved into the new building on June 2, 1959. Accordingly, this year 2009 is the Golden Jubilee Year of the Oblate Scholasticate of Mary Immaculate, Ampitiya.

The first Oblate Scholasticate in Sri Lanka was started in Jaffna in 1871 by the Apostolic

Vicar, Mgr. Ernest Christopher BONJEAN. It functioned as the minor and major seminary of the diocese of Jaffna and as the Oblate Scholasticate. Later, when Bishop Bonjean took charge of the Vicariate of Colombo in 1884, he started St. Bernard's Major Seminary at Kotahena, Colombo. The Jaffna Seminary, together with the Oblate Scholasticate, was moved to Colombo.

Over the years, the seminary was located at various addresses around Colombo. In 1934, the decision was made to separate the Oblate scholasticate from the diocesan seminary. In the following years, the scholastics too were housed at various locations.

In 1955, the Papal seminary that had been established in 1893 in Kandy became the National Seminary of Our Lady of Lanka and was entrusted to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate by the Holy See. The first Oblate Rector of the National Seminary of Our Lady of Lanka was Fr. Frederick SACKETT, an American from Texas. A team of Oblate professors arrived with him. Once again, the scholastics moved, this time into a section of the National Seminary building.

It was at this time that the Oblates purchased 21 acres adjoining the National Seminary premises and laid the foundation stone for the new scholasticate complex in 1957. In 1959, the Oblates were able to move into their new home, the Oblate Scholasticate of Mary Immaculate.

Over the past 50 years, the scholasticate in Ampitiya has formed hundreds of Oblates, of whom one Bishop, one Vicar Apostolic for Pakistan, and nine Oblate Provincial Superiors, of whom five for the province of Jaffna and four for the province of Colombo.

At present there are six priests and one Brother on the scholasticate staff: Frs. Reginald LUCIAN, Superior; Robert LUCHART, first assessor; Gamini SILVA, second assessor; Jacob THIRUCHELVAM; Jude SAPERAMADU; Jerome VELICHOR; Bro. Rabindra RAJAPAKSE, bursar. Some of the staff

members serve as full time spiritual directors the others serve as formators as well as professors at the philosophate, and the theologate of the National Seminary. Currently there are 28 scholastics, including the two theologians pursuing their higher studies at the Gregorian University in Rome

As we celebrate the Golden Jubilee of this hallowed Institute on December 8, 2009, we gratefully remember all those past Superiors,

the members of the staff and the students who worked so hard for the success of the Institute. Motivated by the motto of the Oblate Founder, St. Eugene De Mazenod, *He sent me to preach the good news to the poor*, hundreds of alumni of this scholasticate now preach the good news, not only on our own soil, but also in numerous other countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Japan, New Zealand, Australia and Korea. (Fr. Reginald Lucian, OMI)

Europe

ROMANIA

Missionary fever

In recent months, the whole world has been alarmed by swine flu (H1N1), a disease that can kill, especially if not treated in time, a disease of special interest to those who travel. For this reason, every country is trying to defend itself with various precautions. In this context, the words of Benedict XVI in his message for the 83rd World Mission Day seem rather strange: "The Church's mission is to spread hope 'contagiously' among all peoples." But is it possible that the Gospel of Jesus can be passed on like a disease? The truth is that, many times, the way of communicating the Gospel by the Church is very cold, and risks turning the enthusiasm of the faith into ice. Without the joy that is born of a living relationship with Jesus, every missionary endeavor becomes an indoctrination destined for failure. "Proclamation of the Gospel must be for us, as it was for the Apostle Paul, a primary and unavoidable duty." (*Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI for World Mission Day 2009*)

In Romania, in order develop the proposal of the Holy Father, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate prepared a survey with some questions that focus on the profile of a Christian missionary. But two other special events also brought the missionary month of October to the attention of the people.

The first was the preaching of a mission in the parish of Popesti Leordeni, an important moment,

according to Fr. Sante RONCHI, superior of the Oblate community and Fr. Ioan Solomon, the local pastor. For the priests and the laity, this meant a deeper commitment to pastoral service, especially by listening and discerning what the Father asks of them through the Word and the spiritual needs of the people.

The second event was celebrated in conjunction with the 83rd World Mission Day. On Saturday, October 17, in the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul in Pitesti, the deacon Damian CIMPOESU was ordained a priest by the imposition of hands and the consecratory prayer of Bishop Cornel Damian, Auxiliary of Bucuresti. On Sunday, October 18, World Mission Day, Fr. Damian presided for the first time at the Eucharist in the same church where he had been ordained. He is the first Oblate Romanian priest.

In a lovely interview in Romania, found on www.youtube.com/omisatnet, Fr. Damian speaks of the contagion mentioned by the Holy Father. If Damian has been ordained a priest, he is probably considered contagious; therefore, whoever does not want to be infected should keep a distance! (Elio FILARDO)

SPAIN

The Oblates and WYD 2011

Preparations for World Youth Day 2011 in Madrid have begun. The provincial of Spain, Fr. Fernando DE LA PAZ, with his council, has decided to begin an Oblate program to prepare for

WYD, in order to continue a beautiful tradition begun 10 years ago. The Province of Spain will welcome youth coming from all over the world to participate in this program.

Fr. Ismael GARCÍA is heading a commission made up of Oblates, Oblate sisters and lay youth. The details of the program will be prepared by the European Commission on Youth Ministry that will bring together Oblates and lay representatives from each Unit in Europe. This

meeting will take place on November 13-18 of this year. After this meeting, we will be able to give more information about the program. For now, we can announce that the Oblate program of preparation for WYD will take place at Pozuelo (Madrid) on August 11-14, 2011. The World Youth Days with the pope will be in Madrid on August 16-21. Thanks to the Province of Australia, we will use the website of Oblate youth: www.omiyouth.org. (Ismael García)

Canada-United States

NOTRE-DAME-DU-CAP Installation of the new Rector

On September 25, 2009, St. Paul University in Ottawa celebrated the installation of its new Rector, Mrs. Chantal Beauvais. After the Mass of installation, she addressed the assembly. What follows is an excerpt from her talk.

First of all, I wish to say how much today's celebration has moved me; I wish to express my thanks for such great generosity and goodness. The beauty of the music and of the chants, the biblical texts which we heard, the homily of our Chancellor: all of this focused on the mission which the Church bestows upon me as Rector of St. Paul University. I accept this service with a great sense of availability, knowing that the Spirit precedes all those whom the Lord sends out on mission. . . .

We are correct to rely on our resources because we possess an incredible richness within our institute. Through our programs, through the dissemination of research done by our professors, and through the spirit of service which animates all of our employees, St. Paul University contributes to the training of men and women who, by the use of their technical skills, their managerial skills and their interpersonal skills, are able to nourish the life of the community (both the human and the ecclesial) wherever they work. We should not be surprised at this special charism of St. Paul University since it has been bequeathed us by the Oblates of Mary

Immaculate who had this dream and who built it, one stone at a time. Actually, we are not left to ourselves in this search for our future: the steps taken by our predecessors have led us to the place where we are. The Oblate charism is alive in all that we have become and it will continue to be so in all that we have been called to become. Like their founder, Bishop de Mazenod, the Oblates are men of action and daring: they are not afraid to roll up their sleeves to confront the needs of the moment, wherever they might be. They are also our mentors: not only do they build institutions, but they call forth and accompany leaders who can assure their development. By their works and their institutions, they contribute to the enrichment of the human patrimony. Therein you will find an essential trait of St. Paul University: missionary vision. The name which the Oblates chose for us, St. Paul University, recalls the apostle who played an enormous role in the universal spreading of the Christian message.

Our university is a missionary one: it is made up of men and women who are part of the work of evangelization that is found at the heart of a pluralistic society with serious social problems, who are banking on existing strengths, and who have concern for people who are marginalized. It is in this firmly missionary context that the Catholic dimension of Saint Paul University finds its roots and its relevance for today, as, in the words of Cardinal Poupard, "Evangelization without humanization is impossible." For this reason, all the programs offered by the University (and all those that will be offered in future years)

carry the hallmark of the Oblate charism and call our world to a greater humanity. "Grace does not destroy nature, but presupposes it and perfects it." This belief is handed down to us from the Christian Middle Ages where, for the first time, the peaceful co-existence of faith and reason was fully articulated. There is extraordinary strength in the belief that motivates Christian thinkers: we believe insofar as the object of our faith sustains and nourishes our search for understanding.

For believers, there are not two truths, but one truth that we approach in various ways. All subjects contribute to the building of a true perspective on the world. This search for truth is a value in itself. For believers, the Christian message is a way of looking at the truth which can nourish every authentically human quest. In a particular way, it is the role of theology to articulate this link between faith and reason in today's world. With all my heart, I hope that St. Paul University will more and more be an regular participant in the creation of a theology for the era of post-modernity and globalization. . . .

I am firmly convinced that Christianity holds great riches for the world and that Catholic Universities, each in its own way, are called to participate in the challenge of the civilization of cultures. It is with a hope-filled heart that I see us being part of our own future, in the light of a rich tradition that will guide us toward innovation in enriching the human patrimony.

OMI LACOMBE

An extraordinary missionary

Since its founding in 1908, **Catholic Missions In Canada** (CMIC), then known as *The Catholic Church Extension Society of Canada*, has come to the aid of isolated missions across the country where a lack of resources makes it impossible to maintain a Catholic presence without outside financial help. The CMIC each year honors a person who has done extraordinary work in the mission field of Canada; it is called the "St. Joseph Award." In a letter to Fr. Philip Kennedy, the president of CMIC, Oblate Archbishop Sylvain LAVOIE OF Keewatin-Le Pas, has nominated a long-time Oblate missionary for the 2009 St.

Joseph's Award: Fr. Bertrand MATHIEU.

Born in the Province of Quebec in 1923, Fr. Mathieu has been a missionary in Saskatchewan since his ordination in 1949.

His first obedience was in La Loche, SK, where he ministered for 37 years. His biggest challenge at that time was to learn the language of the Dené people. It was a very difficult language to learn and he admits that he is still learning but does communicate in the Dené language fluently. After being in Wollaston, SK for many years and now in Patuanak, SK, for 14 years, he still ministers to the people in their language. He has kept the peoples' language alive for them as he communicates daily with them through liturgy at daily Mass as well as through home and hospital visits. Dené is still the first language of the youth of La Loche, an exceptional situation in today's world, primarily because of his influence.

Fr. Bertrand is a man of the people and for the people. He is involved in community affairs all the while looking out for the well-being of the people. Over the years, he has been instrumental in having proper health care and schools in the missions. He was administrator of the hospital in La Loche for 21 years.

Father Bertrand has not had an easy life, but he has no regrets. He thanks God every day for his good health and the courage to continue for so many years. He has a great sense of humor and enjoys playing tricks on his fellow Oblates and others. He was an accomplished boxer in his youth, and also a competent barber. He cut many a head of hair as a service to others, and even cuts his own hair to this day. His old weathered barber chair is proudly on display in a local restaurant in La Loche.

To survive in the harsh northern climate called for extraordinary skills at times. Fr. Bertrand was usually up to the task. He remembers having to travel by dog sled or by foot to cover the 45-50 miles between missions in his charge. This lasted for about 13 years. He would bring his own food, stay for 3 to 4 days and then journey back. Once he had a team of dogs pull him sitting on a bicycle over the frozen ground to Turnor Lake.

A typical day in the 50's included people coming to confession almost every day, more than was necessary, then there was the Rosary, daily Mass and the teaching of the Sacraments for Baptism and First Communion. To be a missionary in our remote areas today is still quite a challenge. In earlier years, people were less mobile and stayed in their communities, close to home. Today, with the addition of roads and affluence, people travel more and are greatly influenced by materialism. To keep the people praying and to be faithful has become a difficult task and Father Mathieu has been able to do just that in the missions that he serves. Father continues to prepare a daily homily for Mass in both English and Dené and encourages parents to spend time with their children and to teach them church values as well as their language.

At one time, Father lived in community with other priests, Brothers and Sisters, but now he is alone in the rectory at Patuanak. He does have some fervent churchgoers who are willing to help. He does not get discouraged and takes it day by day. Many may have strayed away if it were not for Father Mathieu calling them back. He has made a difference in many lives. (Archbishop Sylvain Lavoie, OMI)

OMI LACOMBE

Ministry with migrant workers

In British Columbia

The Okanagan Valley in central British Columbia is the fruit growing center of western Canada. The excellent climate supports orchards of pear, cherry, apple and plum trees. Besides these well known fruits, there are many berry and vegetable crops that are harvested each summer and fall. Within the Valley, there are approximately one thousand migrant Mexican workers who come to pick the fruit and work in the orchards. They arrive in March and work until October.

These migrant workers come into Canada under the SWAP program (Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program). The orchard owners must make their contacts through the Canadian Consulate in Mexico City to obtain workers. Our

Canadian government has a staff person who can handle complaints from these migrant workers should they not be treated properly. Workers are paid about \$8.50 per hour.

It is very difficult to contact these workers as they are living on the farms and orchards and have no method of reliable transportation. The workers are seasonal and live on the periphery of the life of the city. The major determinant of their time in Canada is the weather: when the weather is good they must work! It is very difficult for Otto ROLLHEISER to go out to meet them because if the weather is good, the workers will be picking the fruit. The work schedule is entirely dependent on the weather. This makes it very difficult for these Mexican workers to come to the Spanish Mass that is celebrated once a month in St. Theresa's Parish. The core of this Spanish speaking congregation are the South Americans who make permanent residence in the Valley; some have been in Canada for nearly twenty years.

When asked how this ministry is good for him, Otto immediately replies, "That's why I am here!" After twenty years in Peru [one of the founding members of the Peru mission], Otto wants "...to give back to the South Americans what they have given to me." St. Theresa's Parish, on the north end of Kelowna, serves as a base to make contact with the migrant workers.

If the influx of migrant workers continues, there will be a future for this ministry. Otto added, "Our Founder went out to the fishermen, he didn't wait for them to come to him. If they are here, this is the place for our Oblates, especially those who have worked with Latin Americans. In Southern Ontario, there are quite a few migrant workers. The Church should not be forgetting about them." With a chuckle Otto finished the interview in summary fashion. "Have language, will travel!"

In Manitoba

Just outside the city of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Thomas NOVAK has been involved with migrant workers working in central Manitoba. This involvement began ten years ago and is a

monthly ministry during the summer and autumn. The focus is on a monthly Sunday Mass with fellowship and community building following the Eucharist. When Albert LAFRENIÈRE was pastor at St. Eustache, (which is close by two farms that employ Mexican workers) the parish invited the workers to hold a Spanish Mass in their Church. The parish welcomes the workers and provides beverages and snacks for a convivio after the Eucharist. One of the nearby farms, (which employs nearly 150 workers) provides a bus to drive the workers to the Sunday Mass, a distance of nearly fifteen kilometers.

Thomas has worked hard to involve members of Winnipeg's Hispanic Community in the ministry, hoping that they will eventually make it their own. He is delighted to see them sharing in the Oblate spirit, bringing "good news" to these lonely and marginalized men. Many of those who have joined in the ministry are themselves newly arrived immigrants or refugees.

Besides the monthly Eucharist, Thomas and his

companions try to help improve conditions for the workers in other ways: by mediating when they have had difficulties with local merchants, writing articles and organizing public events to educate Canadians about the harsh realities faced by these "strangers in our midst" and by lobbying governments to change the laws so as to lessen the hardships faced by the workers: "Last year I made a presentation to the Manitoba Workers Standards Commission. They adopted some of my recommendations especially with regard to having rest time and not working seven days a week, every week."

When asked why this ministry was important Thomas briskly continued: "This is our way to be involved with some of the most marginalized people in Canadian society. Their lives are so constricted; they live almost like they are in jail. Yet they are just trying to help their families back home. This is one of the important ways I live out my Oblate vocation." (*Submitted by Nestor GREGOIRE in www.omilacombe.ca*)

Africa-Madagascar

CENTRAL PROVINCE OF SOUTH AFRICA A talented Oblate artist

This information is from the web site of Fr. Wilfried JOYE, a talented Oblate artist in the Republic of South Africa. One can find examples of his art at <http://www.wilfriedjoye.com/>.

Wilfried Joye was born in the little village of Dadizele, Flanders, Belgium on the 4th of July 1939.

From an early age, he displayed a clear ability for drawing and painting. As a young boy, his interests in the arts led him to copy the paintings of the Flemish artist, Adriaan Brouwer (1605 Oudenaerde - 1638), who is famous for his paintings of rural life.

While doing his secondary studies, he was privileged to receive art lessons from two talented artists: Boniver (a landscape painter) and Geukens (a painter) who taught the history of art.

After completing his secondary studies, he studied philosophy and theology for six years. He was ordained a priest in 1964 as an Oblate of Mary Immaculate.

During these years of study, he was involved in illustrating with lino cuttings the scholastic magazine, which was printed three times a year and sent all over the world to the Flemish members of his congregation.

Here again he lived in close contact with some gifted artists: Walter Debock (ceramics, oils, sculpture) and Willem Vermandere (sculptor and well known Flemish folksinger). He has been working as a missionary in Potchefstroom, South Africa, since 1966.

In 1992, he followed a course in icon painting under the well-known icon painter, Egon Sendler, and his team at Meudon, Paris, France. He has often been exhibited in South Africa and

Belgium. His vibrant and appealing paintings often portray rural life and the human situation.

The paintings often have a religious theme as he presents to the world a journey of deep faith, the sacredness of life and the joy of hope. In some of the paintings, he uses the fish as his symbol. For him, the fish reminds us of how we should live... with open eyes (the fish never closes its eyes). The mouth of the fish is also always open, ready to absorb food. This symbolizes the open attitude we should have to enrich ourselves with the abundance of life that the Father offers us.

His style is strongly influenced by Flemish expressionism: (Servaes, Permeke, De Smet, Brusselmans) and his longstanding friend, the late Oblate Father Frans Claerhout, who died in South Africa in 2006.

Fr. Joye's first works were done in oil pastels on paper, but since the 1980's, he has worked chiefly in oils; occasionally he produces lively charcoal drawings. His first solo exhibition was held in 1968 at the church hall in Klerksdorp. He also exhibited with Father Claerhout.

NATAL

The poor with their many faces

(Kimau Fidelis MUTHENYA is one of the OMI Lacombe Canada scholastics from Kenya, presently in South Africa studying for the priesthood.)

In the South African diocese of Durban, there exists a home for the chronically ill operated by the Dominican Sisters of Montebello. Originally, their founder, Sr. Trufena, established it as a home for the aged; however, due to urgent societal needs of the time, its focus shifted to caring for those with health problems. One cannot help but notice the wonderful ministry done by those who care for the patients. Despite the lack of personnel and resources, the staff radiates love and faith for these, the most abandoned.

St. Joseph's Scholasticate in Cedara has responded generously to the needs of Montebello Home by making sure that during the June-July pastoral

appointments, a number of Oblates are assigned there. Having been fortunate enough to minister there during my winter break, I would say it was a profound experience that I will always look upon with nostalgia. I had the opportunity to work with Oblates from Zambia and the Central Province of South Africa. My duties involved feeding and bathing the patients, playing cards with those able, changing linens, making beds, and cleaning the floors. The home or hospice has three wards for men, women and children; at different times, I worked in all three.

While I have been questioned as to what working in a home for the chronically ill has to do with my formation, I truly believe that participating in the ministry of the Dominican Sisters has everything to do with being formed as an Oblate. The heart of the Founder's vision was the call to serve the poor with their many faces and Montebello is certainly an excellent location for an Oblate to encounter God's work of healing the hearts and minds of the poor. So as to learn to be an effective voice for the voiceless, it is important that future ministers of the Church be exposed to those who are so wholly dependent upon others. I have found that the patients helped me to appreciate and to learn from a segment of society generally disregarded because of the belief that nothing good can come from the handicapped.

The time at Montebello Home has been a time of discernment because it has given me the opportunity to implement what we learn at the Scholasticate. At the same time, it gave me a foretaste of the realities that I will face as a future Oblate ministering amongst the poor.

I am most thankful to the staff of Montebello Home for the example of loving service they gave me; the patients who showed me that it is possible to be joyful with so little, and the Scholasticate staff for having given me the opportunity to minister there. (www.omilacombe.ca)

ZAMBIA

A goat for the missionaries

On Aug. 7, 2009, three Oblates arrived in Shangombo's St. Leopold Parish. Frs. Evans

C. CHINYEMBA, Valentine KALUMBA and Kelvin LUBINDA set out from Mongu and arrived in Shangombo after travelling for more than 8 hours. The distance from Mongu to Shangombo is about 268 kilometres on a road filled with pot-holes. With a good road network, the journey should take two and one-half hours.

The arrival of the Oblates was an exciting moment for the people of St. Leopold Parish. The parishioners and those from far distant places such as Santa Cruz in Angola formed lines to welcome the Oblates together with the bishop of the Livingstone Diocese, Bishop Raymond Mpezele. The greeting included Kwamashi songs.

On Sunday, Aug. 9, Bishop Mpezele installed Fr. Evans as the parish priest and his associates, Fr. Valentine and Fr. Kelvin. In his homily, the Bishop thanked the Oblates, through their Delegation Superior, Fr. Joseph PHIRI, for taking up the responsibility to shepherd the people of St. Leopold Parish.

After Mass, the Oblates were presented with gifts which included a goat. Goats hold a prominent place in the history of Shangombo. It is told that in olden times, the place Shangombo was full of goats (ngombo in Kwamashi). Actually, Shangombo means the place of goats. Hence it was fitting for the people to present the missionaries with a goat.

Shangombo district has a population of more than 82,000 people. One of the remotest districts

in the country, it is 870 kilometres from Lusaka. Currently, the district lacks a proper infrastructure such as schools, hospitals and a decent road network. Despite the harsh economic condition of Shangombo, the people are hardworking. They grow maize as their source of income and to feed their families.

As Oblates, we are happy to be present in Shangombo. Our history as missionaries is a history of being available in places where no one else wishes to serve. We gather in community and Jesus becomes our focal point. We realize that the people of Shangombo have had no resident priest for a number of years. The parishioners took up the responsibility of running the parish on their own. Our task will be to help reestablish the functioning of the parish pastoral structures in line with the diocese of Livingstone. As Oblates, we come to Shangombo as learners. We shall learn from the people so that together we can make Christ known and embraced. To those who have known Christ and have abandoned Him, our task will be to re-introduce Christ to them and let Him shape their lives. We begin our mission by calling to mind the place which our Mother Mary holds in the life of each Oblate. We are confident that Mary, the first disciple of Jesus, will help us to learn from her and in turn, listen to the voice of Christ as he urges us to minister to the people of St. Leopold Parish. (*Fr. Evans Chinyemba in OMI USA, November 2009. A few weeks after becoming pastor of this new Oblate parish, Evans was named Delegation Superior for Zambia. He will leave his new parish for the delegation office in Lusaka in December.*)

Anniversaries for December 2009

65 Years of religious life

1944.12.25	07933	Fr. Jean Selvez	France
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60 Years of religious life

1949.12.08	09410	Fr. Robert Filion	Lacombe
1949.12.08	08790	Fr. Camillo Prosdocimo	Italy
1949.12.08	08785	Fr. Rudolf Rüttinger	Central European Prov.

50 Years of religious life

1959.12.08	10819	Fr. John Chai	Australia
1959.12.08	11397	Bro. Hans-Bruno Hubig	Central European Prov.
1959.12.21	10820	Fr. Heinrich Rink	Central European Prov.

50 Years of priesthood

1959.12.06	09619	Fr. Mario Amadeo	Italy
1959.12.06	09798	Fr. Martino Ferraro	Italy
1959.12.06	09493	Fr. Sante Gazzola	Italy
1959.12.06	09491	Fr. Umberto Nespolo	United States
1959.12.08	09642	Fr. Duncan Mackenzie	Natal
1959.12.08	09645	Fr. Garth Michelson	Natal
1959.12.08	09644	Fr. James Towell	Northern S. A.
1959.12.19	10197	Fr. Donald MacDonald	Lacombe
1959.12.19	09508	Fr. Robert Michel	Notre-Dame-du-Cap

25 Years of priesthood

1984.12.15	12568	Fr. Pascalis Leoela	Lesotho
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Suffrages for our Deceased

No. 81-91

NAME	PROV./Del.	BORN	DIED AT	DATE
Fr. Pavilupillai Mariampillai	Jaffna	19/10/1921	Columbuthurai	08/09/2009
Fr. Sjaak Terken	Belgium/Holland	02/04/1929	Nijmegen	09/10/2009
Fr. Gaspar Alonso Díaz	Spain	06/05/1932	Diego de León	11/10/2009
Fr. Guy Gaudreau	Notre-Dame-du-Cap	13/03/1927	Richelieu	13/10/2009
Fr. Antonio Coletta	Italy	04/10/1923	Santa Maria a Vico	16/10/2009
Fr. Jan van der Zee	Belgium/Holland	26/07/1925	Nuth	19/10/2009
Fr. Hervé Delisle	OMI Lacombe	01/03/1917	Winnepeg	23/10/2009
Fr. Gerard Heimerikx	Namibia	11/03/1923	Hünfeld	25/10/2009
Fr. Louis-Paul Lachance	OMI Lacombe	06/02/1916	St. Albert	26/10/2009
Fr. Jacques Lehay	France	04/10/1921	Pontmain	29/10/2009
Fr. Paul Plamondon	Notre-Dame-du-Cap	01/01/1925	Québec	01/11/2009

“They are before God, bearing the sign, the kind of character proper to our Institute, the vows common to all its members, the firm habit of the same virtues. We are linked to them by the bonds of a special charity. They are still our brothers and we are theirs. They now live in our mother-house, our main residence. The prayers and the love they retain for us will one day draw us to them and we shall live in our place of rest together with them.” (Letter of Founder to Fr. Courtès, 22 July 1828)