

**FATHER JETTÉ AND FORMATION**  
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If I agreed to write the pages which follow in memory of Fr. Fernand Jetté, it is not that it was easy to treat the topic entrusted to me; it is rather because of the affection which bound me, and which binds me to this figure whom I consider, just like many other Oblates of my generation, as "my Father General", because during the most important stages of my religious and Oblate life, he was present, precisely like a father. It is he who received my perpetual vows in 1974. It is he who gave me my first obedience in 1978 and who supported me during my first years of ministry as a formator at the Roman scholasticate and later as a missionary in Zaire.

I must first of all define the limits of this short research. I will refer almost exclusively to his twelve years as Superior General (1974-1986). Moreover, attention will be paid especially to the first formation of the younger generations of Oblates. Fr. Jetté took seriously the ongoing formation of his Oblates as well as the formation of the "Oblate laity", but here we will consider mainly the first formation of young Oblates.

The general situation of formation in our Congregation before the General Chapter of 1974 is well described in number 43 of *OMI Documentation* (November 15, 1973), which is entirely devoted to the topic of formation.<sup>1</sup> Let us point out that the General Chapter of 1972 had suppressed the General Conference of Formation in order to encourage the research and the exchange of the experiments at the regional level, while maintaining the Secretariat of Formation, as a body of study and research.<sup>2</sup> The number of *OMI Documentation* just mentioned had three objectives: to publish the text of the 1972 Chapter on formation, to give an overall vision of formation and to communicate some experiments in progress during this period, in the hope of starting a dialogue between the persons in charge of formation inside the Congregation.

### **Report to the 1974 General Chapter**

At the time of the 29th General Chapter, convened following the resignation of Father Hanley, it was Fr. Jetté's duty to present a report on the state of the Congregation. This report « covers a period of only two and one-half years; but certainly two very important years in the life of the Institute, years which speak to us in diverse ways.» It has five parts: the personnel of the Congregation; its missionary activity; its religious life; its government and its finances. In each part Fr. Jetté describes briefly the situation as he sees it, and points out the problems. He treats the topic of formation in the first part, concerning the personnel of the Congregation: after having traced the framework of the situation, both dark and realistic, he adds some notes relating to the future and especially to vocations and formation.<sup>3</sup>

A first feature, characteristic of his view on the Church, the Congregation and formation, is a healthy and balanced realism which always helped him look at problems without closing his eyes and letting himself be discouraged. It is a view based on a solid faith in the Holy Spirit who guides the Congregation.

The picture is somewhat discouraging, he writes. It reflects the problem of the Church today, and to read it fairly, one must consider it in the larger context of the life of the Church. In this crisis through which both we and the Church are passing, some see the call of the Spirit to develop the ministries of the Christian laity, while others see the call of the same Spirit to reform ourselves and to interest ourselves more deeply in recruiting and in our survival. Both interpretations of the call are probably true, and it is to work at both levels that the Spirit beckons us.

With regard to Oblate vocations and formation he says this : « [...] It is not only a question of building anew, but also of building from new foundations; a new approach is necessary in a world which has changed profoundly. There are many problems. The important thing is not to lose hope. »

For years, there had been talk of a turning point in the history of the Church, one of which we had probably not gauged the real dimensions. The situation that presented itself to the eyes of the new General was this one: « Many less vocations than 10 years ago, the dissolution of a large number of formation houses, the appearance of the novitiate "ad personam" and a wide variety in the methods and programs of formation. »

The four questions that Fr. Jetté raises vis-à-vis such a situation are a concrete way to involve all the Oblate family in an effort of renewal.

1. « What evaluation has been made or is presently being made of past experiments in the field of formation and of novitiates "ad personam"? » Fr. Jetté calls for an effort at evaluation in order to benefit from the experiments «and not just go from one experiment to the other».

2. « Are the experiments and changes sufficiently planned and controlled by competent authority, and by what norms?». By this question, he points to two crucial points of this historical moment: on the one hand, certain ways of thinking which seem to him «almost irreconcilable with an objective and final commitment of faith like that of the religious life and priesthood»; on the other hand, « certain areas may be possibly too closed in upon themselves or too constantly negative in respect to the institutional Church and to the Congregation ». Even if the times invite us to develop attitudes that are more critical than formerly, these attitudes must however remain founded « on a true love and loyalty above suspicion. »

3. The third question concerns « the future of the International Scholasticate and the Studium Generale. » During the past two years the General Council had addressed the problem of these two institutions; Fr. Jetté raises them again and underlines their importance. As for the scholasticate, it develops « an awareness of the catholicity of the Church and of the unity and international character of the Congregation »; the Studium, he says, « has definite advantages and offers an excellent experience of sharing, of prayer life, and of intellectual activity for the Fathers studying in Rome. »<sup>4</sup>

4. The fourth question flows from his reflections on the International Scholasticate and the Studium. Fr. Jetté calls for the continuation of the efforts already being made

regarding renewal and ongoing formation, but he is convinced that the Congregation itself should «offer more to its members in this area, especially concerning Oblate life and spirit». The responsibility of organizing the De Mazenod Retreats had been transferred to the Regions, but Fr. Jetté wonders how much that was a real progress. He sees the need to increase the number of the spiritual animators who are at the service of the entire Institute – «animators in touch with the needs of the world today and who know well the Founder and the history of the Congregation. »<sup>5</sup>

In 1974, Fr. Jetté is elected Superior General of the Oblates. During his first six years as General, he guides the Congregation in a process of renewal and towards a new edition of the Rule. "It is time, he writes in his report to the Chapter, for us to undertake seriously the study of the text of the *Constitutions and Rules* in view of a more definite edition." He sees the Rule as an element of first importance for the formation of an Oblate: "A religious Institute is not only a spiritual reality, a communion of souls, it is also a community, a social body whose members are committed to a common apostolic aim and to a common style of life." He adds a further reflection of great importance.

The drawing up of a common Rule, however important it may be, will change nothing if, in fact, it is not really accepted and applied to daily life. The first and best rule is love. And to learn to live in the Oblate way, to love the poor and to love them without limit even to the giving of one's life for their liberation and salvation, for that we need models and saints. Which is to say that we need a radical return to Christ, the unique model, and to our Blessed Lady, our Patron and Immaculate Mother, with more time for prayer in our lives – for real prayer – and a return to the early inspiration which was at the beginning of our Institute and which animated our greatest missionaries.

These are some of the fundamental lines which Fr. Jetté will develop during his first six years as General and which will appear regularly in his papers and in his speeches on various occasions.

### **During his first term**

We can neither present nor analyze here all his speeches and writings on formation. We will limit ourselves to some of the most significant ones. We will examine them in chronological order, while considering also the period represented by the Chapter of 1980, that reelected Fr. Jetté as Superior General, by a big majority.

His teaching on the formation is not always direct. I would say even that in many occasions, Fr. Jetté taught what Oblate formation was for him by his behavior, in his personal relations with Oblates, without losing an occasion to go back over the points that he deemed of a vital importance for Oblate formation. For example, on the occasion of perpetual vows, he explains to a group of scholastics the mystery of religious life and the Oblate vocation; or again when he installs them in a ministry, he reminds them that the Oblates are men of the Church, men of the Word and the Eucharist; or again when giving a first obedience, he recalls that the Oblates are sent.<sup>6</sup> They are so many occasions where even if Fr. Jetté does not treat of formation, he shows himself to be an extraordinary formator, by communicating his faith, his life, his ideals, and he incites his audience to be filled with the same faith, the same life, the same ideal.<sup>7</sup> The proximity of the International Scholasticate and the one of the Italian Province, transferred to Vermicino in 1973, offered him many occasions to give to the Oblate family and specially to all the Oblates engaged in formation ministry, some basic

points that reveal his deep spirituality in the domain of formation. Number 11 of the *Quaderni Vermicino* collected several speeches, sermons and other similar talks, that cover his first term as General. These words, addressed to a formation community, have a special meaning in this context.

Some papers in which he speaks more explicitly about the ministry of formation deserve however a particular attention.

One of the first speeches in which Fr. Jetté confronted the subject of formation was at the first meeting of the *Permanent Formation Committee*.<sup>8</sup> After expressing his delight for this first meeting of the Committee, «a sign of a new hope in formation» and an organism of exchange and of reflection to help the General Council by making recommendations about formation, Fr. Jetté opened his heart, communicating something personal, starting from his own experience as formator and expressing his expectations concerning formation.

Referring to his experience in the field of the formation – from 1948 to 1967 as formator of scholastics in Ottawa, then in Montreal as Vicar Provincial, finally in Rome, from 1972 – Fr. Jetté shared with the Committee three impressions drawn from his past experience and three points that constitute his expectations concerning formation.<sup>9</sup>

It is worthwhile dwelling a moment on these two aspects, that will be taken up again, re-worked and developed in successive conferences. Here are his impressions with regard to the past.

- The first point concerns the doctrinal and spiritual content which is passed on during formation.

The content [...] while being objectively rich and valid, did not, I believe, really penetrate a good number of the young men of this period (1945-1965). And that was either because of a lack of pedagogy on our part or because these young men were already of a religious sensitivity, of a world very different from ours. Our center of reference, for example, was the being, the object; theirs was more and more the human person, the subject. And also, we advanced maybe far too fast for them. I remember the reflection of one scholastic after a thirty day retreat, on the eve of his perpetual vows: "You speak to us about the second conversion; we have not made the first one yet!"

- The second point concerns an aspect to which Fr. Jetté will often come back: inner consistency.

Some of the young people whom we formed either had insufficient inner consistency or were not well prepared to face, as priests, the new world which waited them. They were chosen and formed for another world, a much more structured one. This explains many of the requests for laicization.

- The third point is similar to the second and goes beyond first formation: « [...] Some young Fathers were, I think, left too alone or put in situations that were too hard without having – or without accepting – the necessary support. They were quickly crushed.»

As for the present period, he says he expects much of formation, and he will clarify and will develop his expectations afterward. Here are three things which, in the

circumstances, appeared to him "more necessary than ever" and whose importance he will stress after his election as General:

- a) A truly solid virtue, based on a serious and deep gift of self to Jesus Christ. Some, sometimes filled with talents, have never chosen completely Jesus Christ. Consequently the Congregation can only half count on them;
- b) Solidity of doctrine, and a doctrine well rooted in the Church. It is maybe not easy today, at a time of pluralism, but it is thereby all the more necessary. The Oblate has to be strong enough doctrinally so as not to be carried away by passing currents;
- c) A sense of belonging to an apostolic body, or a sense of mission. Nowadays there is much insistence on personal project and personal charisma. This is good but insufficient. Above all there must be an attitude of profound availability and the conviction that in both his missionary activity and in his religious life, the Oblate is part of a body.<sup>10</sup>

Another significant intervention to note is the talk given at a meeting of the *European Conference of Formation* (April 1, 1978).<sup>11</sup> He asserts clearly that formation, not only is not indifferent to him, but that it is the domain which worries him the most. In answer to one of the questions put to him, he summarizes in seven points what he expects of formation. It is a synthetic but dense text, which he will take up the following year for the scholastics of Europe meeting in congress in Vermicino. We quote most of it here.

What I expect of formation, what it must especially give, is this :

- a) Men with a real inner consistency and human maturity. They are capable of free decisions and of fulfilling their commitments. Nothing disappoints me more than a request for laicization after one or two years of priestly life.
- b) Men who have really chosen Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ crucified, with a view to consecrating themselves to his saving mission: the salvation of the world by the mystery of the Passion, the Resurrection and the Pentecost. That means : men who knew Jesus Christ in the prayer, who let themselves be filled with his spirit. They have become men of prayer.
- c) Men who have understood and accepted the renunciation inherent in the three vows, and now are capable of sustaining it in peace, love and joy.
- d) Men open to the calls of the poor and determined to give their lives for them, in close communion with the Church and the Congregation. Their personal charism has allowed itself to be imbued, inspired by that of the Congregation. They are men of mission and feel themselves to be members of an apostolic body.
- e) Men who have chosen to serve the poor in a way that is clearly related to evangelization and which tends always – even if it cannot be done immediately – toward the explicit preaching of Jesus Christ and the celebration of salvation in the ecclesial community and by means of the sacraments.
- f) Men who have a solid doctrinal foundation in philosophy and theology, which will give them stability as well as openness and discernment when faced by current movements.

g) Finally, men who know that they are never alone, because an internal presence lives in them, that of Christ and the Virgin, and an outside community supports them, that of their Oblate brothers.

For me, these are the foundation stones on which the Oblate has to be built. Other elements are necessary also, even essential, like a renewed ecclesiology, a sufficient knowledge of the human sciences and the socio-political currents of the contemporary world, but if the building does not rest on these foundation stones, it eventually collapses, whether it is after a few years of priesthood or after 20 years, or, if it does not collapse, it will always remain a little bit shaky and the Church cannot completely count on him.

During the homily which he gave on April 1st, 1978, Father General underlined the other points which translate into life what has just been said. To live in depth the spirit of our vocation, the missionary spirit of our first fathers, like the Apostles we have to overcome some fears and allow ourselves to be taken over by the Spirit of the risen Christ. Here is what he sees as necessary:

- *Being able to resist fear and withdrawal into self.* "They had locked the doors for fear of the Jews." We feel ourselves aging, we feel we are becoming foreign in a world which changes, we think of the good old days and we settle down, we do not dare to go out and to go towards the world to reveal Jesus Christ. We risk thinking so much about ourselves, that we become incapable of hearing the calls of the poor, or too paralyzed to answer them.

- *Being able of saying no to dispersal and apostolic individualism.* It is still very often fear that makes us suspicious of others – be they lay people, priests, or Oblates – and prevents us from working with them, from involving them with us in a common work. Each one, every small group, chooses its action and holds on to it feverishly, as if there were no other means to save the world and to save oneself.

- *Being able to overcome sadness and despondency.* Some Oblates have decided not to have a future anymore and took a stand there. A Father said to me a year ago: «For me, the Congregation is finished. It has had its time. It contained certain values... I try to transmit them to my Christians before dying.» While listening, I thought about the Emmaus disciples: «He was a just man and right. We had confidence. But it is now three days since he died, and it is finished. Our beautiful dream has flown away.»

The situations in the Provinces of the Congregation, explains Fr. Jetté, are very diversified:

Presently, certain Provinces are experiencing their Good Friday. A few know the joy and the momentum of childhood. Others – and these it seems to me are the biggest number – are moving towards the Pentecost.... These Provinces experience more and more the pervading power of the Spirit of the Risen Christ. And this Spirit is communicating its fruits.

First of all, *liberation* from fear and withdrawal into self. On Easter Day, and especially after the coming of the Spirit, the Apostles no longer fear anything and are attached to nothing other than to Jesus Christ.

Then there is *apostolic daring*. «As for us, say Peter and John, whatever the threats and difficulties, we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard» (Act. 4,20). They do everything to spread the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Finally, *assurance and joy in the service of the Kingdom*. The Apostles are sure of themselves because they are sure of Jesus Christ, and they possess a steadfast joy. "They left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing to have been found deserving to undergo insults for the Name of Jesus" (Act. 5, 41).

Internal freedom, apostolic daring, assurance and joy: such are fruits that the Spirit instills in the formators and in the young people confided to them. "More than ever, said Fr. Jetté in concluding, our world needs men who want to be authentic witnesses of Jesus Christ and missionaries who are totally available."

### **A masterly text : *What I expect of formation***

July 16 of the following year, Fr Jetté, returning to this speech on the occasion of the Congress of European scholastics, notes that he had had several opportunities to express his expectations regarding Oblate formation<sup>12</sup>. This speech is more elaborate than the preceding ones and is made up of two parts.<sup>13</sup>

**A. *The background of my expectations.*** In the first part, he refers to the Founder, to what he wanted when he founded the Congregation. This is the point of departure of his expectations.

In founding the Congregation, Father de Mazenod wanted to set up a society of « *men of interior life, truly apostolic men,* » perfectly trustworthy and zealous men, to constitute an « *elite corps* » at the service of the Church, devoted especially to the evangelization of the poor. In this respect one must re-read his first letters to Father Tempier [...]. They show clearly the kind of men he wanted in the Institute.

Fr. Jetté refers to the letter of December 13, 1815, in which Eugene writes that he is looking for men to form an «*elite corps*», «men who possess a genuine human strength and well-trying virtue. In this matter he is sometimes cutting.» Then, there is a letter to Fr. Courtès, of March 6, 1831, in which Eugene accuses an Oblate of not knowing how to reconcile apostolic work and religious regularity: «The world will not be won with apostles of this kind. If I had been like that at 25 years of age, I think I would have begged God to let me drown in a lukewarm bath as punishment for such cowardice.»

Finally he quotes from the 1818 manuscript of the *Constitutions and Rules*, in which Eugene «gives a lengthy description of the kind of men that he wants as candidates for the Oblate life»:

It is important for the good of the Church and so as to obtain for the Society the means of attaining its end, to admit within its bosom none but subjects who are able, with the help of God's grace, to serve it and to build it up. It is impossible to be too careful in making sure of the vocation of those who ask for entrance and in getting to know thoroughly their virtues, their talents, and their other good dispositions. [...]

But let the Superior General and his Council consider carefully in the presence of God that, to be worthy of admission into the Society, one must be called by God and have the qualities proper to a good missionary and be capable of becoming a

good priest. One must have a strong desire for one's own perfection, a strong love for Jesus Christ and his Church, a strong zeal for the salvation of souls. One's heart must be free from all inordinate affection for earthly things, a strong detachment from one's family and birthplace, a disinterestedness that goes so far as to scorn riches. One must have the desire to serve God and the Church, be it in the missions or in the other ministries taken on by the Society, and the desire to persevere for the whole of one's life in fidelity and obedience to the holy rules of the Institute.

It would be desirable that whoever wishes to enter into the Society should have an aptitude for the sciences, if this has not already been acquired; that they should be endowed with common sense, intelligence, good judgment, memory, goodwill under every trial; that they should be polite, respectable, well brought up, in good health....

Then Fr. Jetté continues saying:

Necessary at the time of the foundation, these requirements remain so today and will continue to be so tomorrow. To achieve its end the Congregation has to rely on its personnel, on the human and Christian value of each of its members. It is, and will be, as good as its personnel. The Founder thought often along these lines. And the thought brought to mind, not without a certain envy, the beginnings of the Company of Jesus for which he had a great admiration. «[It] was, from the beginning, an army of generals (to Tempier, August 1, 1830). - «Each soldier alone was worth an army!» (To Tempier September 25, 1832). He would very much have liked it to be the same for his little Society!

**B. What I expect.** What follows is one of the most masterful texts by Fr. Jetté in the field formation. In these six points, which are like the framework of all his papers and talks about formation, he shows himself a true master and formator. It is on the basis of these elements that he took important decisions for the Congregation. His expectations refer constantly to two points: the ideal of the Founder and the demands of the current world to which the Oblates are sent as missionaries.

They are, we must repeat, elements of a synthesis and for that reason might give rise to some perplexity or some fear. Fr. Jetté is aware of this:

I know quite well that life is less absolute, more complex, personal evolution more varied. In one sense, a lifetime is needed for the formation of the perfect Oblate. Do not let the picture give rise to fears. On the other hand it should help you to be aware of the seriousness of the task and give you food for thought when, on the eve of a permanent commitment, you have to make a discernment before taking that definitive step.

For an Oblate these factors are the guarantee not only of an effective missionary activity but also of a life that is happy and that really finds fulfillment in the Congregation.

This then is what I expect of Oblate formation:

*1. Men with a real inner consistency and stability and human maturity.*

They have personality, a personality that is more and more self-affirming, a personality of which they are in firm control. That is the starting point. Oblate formation must produce men who are adults, capable of free decisions and of



fulfilling their commitments, who are responsible and can be counted on, men who have acquired a certain experience of men and events and are therefore less severe, more nuanced and more understanding.

*2. Men who have really chosen Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ crucified, with a view to consecrating themselves to his saving mission, and who have already acquired a sufficient knowledge of him, through the experience of prayer, of obedience, of brotherly love, of apostolic work, of a real poverty and disciplined life.*

This absolute choice of Jesus Christ is at the very root of Oblate life. It is its basis and principle of unity. Until this choice is made there is no progress, religious formation does not take hold, one is only marking time on the spiritual path. That is why it is so important that, from the entrance into the novitiate, one should be already put clearly before this choice.

«Why am I here? What have I come to look for?». That is the first question to ask, and until I can reply: «I am here to seek Christ, and to let him live in me, so that I can give him to the world,» my novitiate has not really begun.

That is the starting point of the spiritual life and of Oblate formation. The deepening of the knowledge of oneself and of the person of Christ, through formation, will transform gradually the choice of Jesus Christ, "generous but superficial in the beginning", into a choice that is "firm and enlightened at the time of priestly ordination."

It is then that I renew my choice of Jesus Christ, and I renew it in joy, but now I know much better what it costs to be with Jesus Christ, and I am more humble, I rely more on his grace.

The knowledge that is in question – this must be quite clear – is above all the kind gained from experience. The years of Oblate formation have allowed me to know Jesus Christ through a long and sometimes difficult experience of prayer, obedience, community life and fraternal sharing, which has cost me something, through the experience of human misery in the world and of detachment, of real poverty in my life, through a constant personal effort to discipline my existence and to conform it to the Gospel.

There is no other way to know Jesus Christ and to really make him one's choice. No one can escape it. If you do not set out on this path at the time of formation, you are preparing a future as an Oblate of suffering, disappointment and bitterness.

You will have observed the relation between the first two points : sufficient human maturity and choice of Jesus Christ. The second is hardly possible without the first. There must be real inner consistence and human maturity to commit oneself, as an Oblate, to the following of Jesus Christ.

This are then the two basic requirements, the columns holding up the Oblate structure. The others will in a sense serve to clarify and to complete these two requirements.

*3. Men who have understood and accepted the renunciation inherent in the three vows, and now are capable of sustaining it in peace, love and joy. [...] This point is important not only for the prudent discernment of vocation, but especially*

as an expression of religious maturity. The integration within our whole being of the renunciation of the three vows can only be brought about progressively. At the beginning, this renunciation – which is also a surpassing of self – exists especially in the will. The sensitive or instinctive part of our existence has not accepted it. There will be days [...] when veritable battles will rage within us. The spiritual effort will have the effect, little by little and with a lot of patience, of making the senses and instincts as chaste, poor and obedient as the will.

This is a slow task. It lasts the greater part of one's life. Success is only partial as long as the movement of the senses is opposed to and obstructs the gift, the oblation chosen by the will. The attitude of freedom, of peace does not exist; the senses are sad, they look for compensation.

In this area, concludes Fr. Jetté, what I expect of first formation is that it will lead the Oblate to a clear vision of the situation and give him the chance to know if he can or cannot in a normal way live the consecration of the vows in peace, love and joy. To this end, the help of a spiritual director is necessary.

*4. Men open to the calls of the poor and determined to give their lives for them, in intimate communion with the Church and the Congregation..*

Under this title, Fr. Jetté develops an important point. Formation has to lead the Oblate to let the charism of the Congregation penetrate and inspire his personal charisms. Sensibility to the calls of the poor men and availability to give one's life for them are two essential features of the Oblate vocation, as are also membership in the apostolic body of our family, "whose history and the saints they are familiar with." Fr. Jetté was always very sensitive to this "community" aspect of the Oblate charism.

Our response [to the cry of the poor] must not be individualistic, independent; it must be written into the action programme of the Congregation and be taken up by the Institute. Our Founder and various Superiors General such as Fathers Fabre and Labouré laid a great emphasis on this.

He quotes his predecessor Fr. Fabre:

Never lose sight of the fact that our works must never be personal. It is as religious that we do them and so it is in the name of the community and for the community that we do them.... In a Congregation, the greatest danger that there could be is an over-strong spirit of individualism. Just as the religious must not consider himself, so the house must not consider only itself; it forms part of a province, which itself forms part of the Congregation.... We must keep alive amongst us the sense of being a Congregation, an esprit de corps.... In the moral as in the temporal order this esprit de corps is indispensable to preserve the family spirit [...]»<sup>14</sup>.

And Fr. Jetté continues:

The Oblate vocation is a vocation to community. It is necessary for the work of evangelization, to assure its permanence and effectiveness; it is necessary too for the apostolic worker, to assure his development and faithfulness. If we are alone, there is something missing in our witness; it will also be more difficult to hold out for long.

In the demand for a more committed community life, felt by many young, Fr. Jetté sees «a sign of health and a reason for hope in the future.» This point, which he esteems of fundamental importance for the future of the Congregation, will be taken up and deepened in the coming General Chapters.

5. *Men who have chosen to serve the poor in a way that is clearly related to evangelization and which tends always – even if it cannot be done immediately – towards the explicit preaching of Jesus Christ and the celebration of salvation in the ecclesial community and by means of the sacraments.*

By these assertions, Fr. Jetté hints expressly at the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Paul VI. The history of the Congregation also teaches us that «the content of evangelization is vast and complex, that it follows a variety of paths and that there are close relationships between evangelization and the promotion of human values, development, and liberation. Nevertheless, in this matter, our *Constitutions* and our history teach us that there are choices to be made [...]». Formation precisely must help us to understand which activities are more in accordance with our vocation in the Church. Wherever we may be, we must, «preach Jesus Christ to the poor by word, proclaim the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ .»

6. *Men who have a solid doctrinal foundation in philosophy and theology, which gives them stability as well as openness and discernment when faced by current movements.*

At the meeting of the Oblate formators of Europe, held in Frascati, from March 29th till April 5th, 1978, two questions were put to him on this subject: "You seem to give a lot of importance to doctrinal formation. Why? " And this other one: "Yes, but how to make doctrinal teaching acceptable today, the truths which normally have to last? " He explained then, as he had during his first meeting with the Permanent Committee of Formation, how in the last twenty years, a considerable evolution had taken place in intellectual circles and also in the sensibility of the young generations: from an objective formation, centered on the being or on the object, we had crossed over to a more subjective formation, one centered mainly on the person, on the subject. The existential approach to the data of the faith is important but cannot supplant the speculative approach. This attitude can have a negative influence on the way of confronting the definitive commitment of the perpetual vows or of the priesthood.<sup>15</sup>

Otherwise, according to circumstances and one's own tendencies, a person becomes the easy prey of passing currents, the prey of fundamentalism, or marxism, or of cosmic sciences, or of the search for the extraordinary, while one should be an evangelical guide, and a sure guide of the man of today.

Fr. Jetté says that he is concerned by the fact that in several countries,

The level of philosophical and theological studies had decreased.... Adaptations were necessary; more flexibility was imperative but, because of circumstances (especially the decrease in the number of scholastics, the closing of some scholasticates, changes in the educational systems) we reduced considerably the time dedicated to the study of philosophy and even to the theological formation properly speaking, and this at a time when the laity were becoming more and more specialized and being more demanding on the priest, as the counselor and spiritual animator.

[Doctrinal formation] is indispensable to the evangelizing mission of the Oblate [...]. The Congregation needs men like those, men specialized in the ecclesiastical sciences and in the human sciences for the benefit of the mission.

In conclusion, he draws the ideal portrait of the formed Oblate, and describes him "as somebody who has already managed to substantially unify himself on the human, spiritual, intellectual, community levels." And here are his characteristics :

He is first of all somebody who has a centre in his life. He has met Christ, loved him profoundly and given himself to him to continue with him the work of the Redemption, especially of the poorest.

He is somebody who knows himself well enough, with his strengths and his weaknesses, who accepts himself well, without resentment nor vanity, and who has gradually succeeded in mastering his imagination, his sensibility, his passions. With effort, he has managed to discipline, to order his being.

He is somebody who possesses, in a well integrated way, the system of Christian values. By his life of study and prayer, he has acquired a "philosophy", a "wisdom" which allows him to welcome everything, to judge and to order it from a Christian perspective. He is distraught by nothing, be it failure, humiliation, a tragedy or a big joy.

He is somebody, finally, who loves profoundly his brothers, who knows how to contact them, and share with them and on whom they can completely count. But somebody also who remains healthily autonomous: he is capable of praying alone, of suffering alone, of working alone, and of spending long moments alone with God.

### **Report to the 1980 General Chapter**

This report explicitly presents the problem of formation in the Congregation. It shows the attention that Fr. Jetté intends to give to this subject, one of which he would like to make the whole Oblate family aware. After having talked about the missionary action of the Congregation and of its religious life, he takes up, in third place, the theme of the formation of its members.<sup>16</sup>

Convinced that «together with the promotion of vocations, formation remains a key area for the future of the Institute», Fr. Jetté treats this subject by distinguishing first formation and ongoing formation. A rapid analysis of the general situation offers reasons for hope :

In regard to vocations, I shall say only one thing. Since the last Chapter, a re-awakening has become apparent. With the exception of a few rare Provinces, we are no longer afraid to call young people, to invite them to join us. Let them come and let them see! We will be happy to receive them in our midst, if the Spirit is urging them in this direction. The results, without being spectacular, are certainly more encouraging than they were. Poland, Italy, Sri Lanka and its Delegations, Zaire, Ireland, the Philippines, and Lesotho are the Provinces which are gathering in the most. However, this is only a beginning. We have to pursue this effort with patience and courage, being convinced that the world today more than ever needs priests, religious, missionaries who are totally available and happy in the choice of life they have made. A deep bond exists between vocations, the dynamism of missionary commitments, and the joy in our lives.

Concerning first formation, he praises the efforts made in this field during the preceding six or eight years : «There as been a serious, constant, discreet effort. The Permanent Committee on Formation and the regional Conferences have certainly had their share in this, and I thank them for it. This remains a difficult area.»

When it comes to the formation of candidates, each person in religious life credits himself with a certain competence, and in consequence easily passes judgment on the formation being given, the pedagogy being used, the conduct of the formators. Furthermore, in a period of vocation drought such as we have been living, people quickly become bitter and there is the tendency to blame the formators for all the misfortunes: for the scarcity of vocations, lack of perseverance, the extravagant ideas of this or that young Oblate.... But things are more complicated than that! Formators at every level need our understanding and support more than our criticism.

He begins with a look at the actual situation :

[...] Some juniorates remain, as well as some colleges or youth centres with a vocational orientation; a certain number of well-organized and truly consistent novitiates, plus others which are more fragile with very few novices; several residences for scholastics, and some well-structured scholasticates with their own staff of professors [...].

Next he underlines the importance of the period preceding the entry to the novitiate and refers to the novelty of the «Youth Centers», that allow a rather long period of Christian maturation, and that have produced excellent results.<sup>17</sup> The experiments in inter-community novitiates have been more positive and given better results than the novitiates «ad personam.»<sup>18</sup>

Fr. Jetté refers to the need to draw up new directives and norms for formation at the level of the whole Congregation, as was done at the level of the Church. He notes three «serious problems»:

The first is the *scarcity of competent formators*. Just when vocations are increasing and the need is felt to reorganize the structures of formation, we discover that there are only very few qualified formators left. This domain was neglected for several years: the needs were elsewhere, the necessity of preparing men for this task was not felt since there were so few candidates to be formed. Today, we have to begin anew. It is an illusion to think that every good Oblate can be good formator.

This statement shows well to what point Fr. Jetté believed that the ministry of formation required a particular vocation.

A second problem concerns the leading thinkers and the differences which exist between theologians on questions as important as that of the mystery of Christ and of the Church, the nature of the priesthood, the foundations of the natural law, the role of the Church's magisterium.... The candidates ought to become aware of the pastoral anguish which exists when confronted with human situations that are apparently insoluble; and at the same time, they ought to base their theological knowledge on the certitude of faith «in full communion with the

authentic Magisterium of the Church [...]». Otherwise, they themselves will have much to suffer and they will easily become a source of suffering for the Church.<sup>19</sup>

A last problem is that of *integrating young Oblates into their Province*. Fr. Jetté approaches this problem with realism and objectivity, attentive to the action of the Spirit that orients the young Oblates. While they have their limitations and weaknesses, they sometimes have a different way of conceiving common life and ministry, another way of preaching, and the communities are not always welcoming in their regard, nor ready to accept them as they are, to support them and to help them.

This last point leads him to ongoing formation, which he takes up in the next paragraph of the report. He examines the situation, the content, the means, and concludes by a word on the ongoing formation of Brothers.

Today, this formation is at least as necessary as first formation. It is necessary for the Oblate himself, if he wishes to pursue his own growth and not become paralyzed in his ministry. The world has changed and continues changing; the Church, too, has changed a great deal since Vatican II. We must accept change, accept it with simplicity, with discernment, and make an effort to enter into it with a good heart. Ongoing formation is necessary also for the Congregation as such. Oblates are called to live and work together. Each group, each generation has its riches, and the greatest wealth, the best apostolic service can come only from the complementary contribution of each of these groups and generations.

Father General passes next to an analysis of the current situation. Conscious of the efforts that the Provinces and the Regions have made, he invites them to continue, for there remains a lot to do.<sup>20</sup> The main problems are a lack of planning, and thus improvisation: we take what is offered. Distrust continues, and sometimes fear. The initiatives to promote ongoing formation require tact and adaptation.

Through the choice of teachers, through the choice of the themes and the way of treating them, we must create an atmosphere of confidence and desire. The Oblates must feel that the experience will be of use to them, and that, far from shaking the foundations of their life, it will only purify and strengthen them.

As for *content*, ongoing formation covers a vast field. «It should provide for a regular updating in the areas of theology, Sacred Scripture, pastoral practice, Oblate living, spiritual and human growth.»

On this point, Fr. Jetté shows himself very sensitive to the problems of the Church and the world, and he asserts that every Oblate, specially if he is a priest, should know about questions on subjects such as «the mystery of the Christ and the Church, the nature of the priesthood, the foundations of the natural law, the Church's Magisterium.... »

The same in regard to conjugal morality, the promotion of women, the ministry for justice, the ecumenical movement.... These problems are being raised everywhere in the Church and in the world. We cannot ignore them.

Likewise, attention must be paid to spiritual growth.

The Oblate himself evolves, changes, and goes through stages, some of which are painful. He needs to pause, to reflect in God's presence, to be enlightened and confirmed in his choice, so that he can resume his journey with renewed fervor.

Some ask themselves: how can the evangelical ideal of losing one's life for Christ be integrated to the other ideal, constantly proposed to modern man, of searching for the full self-realization of one's being? According to the masters chosen or the renewal centers attended, this integration can be favored or become more difficult. Here again, the Congregation ought to provide the necessary help.

*The ways and means* of achieving ongoing formation are many. The organizing of these programs is the responsibility of the Provincials, who should give them the attention the question merits.

It is their role to make their Province aware of the benefits of this formation; and it is their role also to plan it, to provide or organize sessions, courses, or meetings which will assure it, and to direct Oblates toward not only specialized but also judiciously chosen centers.

Nevertheless, the primary responsibility lies with each Oblate. If he himself is not convinced of the necessity of this formation, if he feels no need for it and refuses it, then there is little hope. Among the means available to him, we must mention those which we are too much inclined to forget and which remain necessary for religious growth, that is to say, fidelity to personal and liturgical prayer, to spiritual reading, to confession.... Then there is the reading of modern works of pastoral practice, of theology, of Sacred Scripture.... There is the taking part in the study days, sessions, and retreats of his Province, as well as attending special programs of re-training.... There is also the effort of maintaining contact with the novices and scholastics. Personally, I have noticed this: a Province is entering a situation of crisis and experiences division when contacts cease between its formation communities and its other communities. Very quickly, then, distrust sets in and a period of malaise, of mutual criticism harmful to both sides begins.

On the topic of the *Brothers' formation*, Fr. Jetté notes the following:

In the area of formation, our Brothers are often neglected. The provinces which have a clear program for them after the novitiate are rare. This is a weakness. The Brothers have always been an important group in the Congregation's life and activity. Without them, the Congregation would be incomplete. A person can have the vocation of being a religious missionary to the poor according to the Oblate charism without being called to the priesthood. Provinces ought to assure these Oblates, our missionary Brothers, an adequate human, religious, pastoral and professional formation, one which respects their own distinct vocation and which provides, for them as for the Fathers, opportunities of re-training and means of integral growth.

### ***The post-Chapter Oblate***

That was the theme of a meeting of St-Joseph and N.-D.-du-Rosaire Provinces, held on the occasion of the second centenary of the Founder's birth. Fr. Jetté gave an important conference during that meeting on May 20th, 1982. It was not a conference on formation, but while drawing the portrait of the Oblate, Fr. Jetté touched upon several features of Oblate formation. It was an indirect way of speaking once again, "about what the Founder would expect from us, if he returned today." Toward the end, Father General underlines a point which is closely related to formation: *the quality of the evangelizer*. Referring to the thinking of the Founder, who wanted top-grade men for the mission,<sup>21</sup> he said:

The present-day world needs first quality missionaries, missionaries who are solid in their faith and in their virtue. It needs them for two reasons. First of all, as has been mentioned, this world is fed up with speeches : it will accept the message only if it is based on the holiness of the witness, on the authenticity of his life. And then, precisely because of the world's great achievements and indifference toward God, there is the risk that it will seduce and devour the witness, if the latter is not sufficiently strong or if he is not too sure about his religious and priestly identity.

These references are of primary importance for formation, and Fr. Jetté will not miss an occasion to return to them over and over.

He recalls what our *Constitutions* ask of us: «to be by means of our religious life, in the midst of the world in order to challenge, in Jesus' name, its self-importance, its egotism, its refusal to share with the poor, its closed attitude toward God.» Then he gives some concrete examples<sup>22</sup> and concludes with this:

Now, either these things are only mere words or they are a very serious challenge addressed to us. As an evangelizer, the Oblate cannot be satisfied with half-measures: « he leaves everything to be a disciple of Jesus» (C. 2), his choice can only be a «radical» one (C. 12). In order to be credible when «we announce the liberating presence of Jesus Christ and the new world born in his Resurrection» (C. 9), we ourselves have to be really free with the freedom that Christ brings, and wholly detached from the present world with its concupiscence and enslavements.

The speech finishes with a paragraph on what modern man expects of the Oblate: here again, Father General asserts indirectly the type of Oblate that formation should give to the world and to the people of our time:

- *a serene man and a peacemaker*, «who is never troubled in the midst of life's anxieties and struggles»; because his life «is based on a well-enlightened faith and on what is most stable and solid in faith : the existence of God, his love for man, the incarnation of his son, and the salvation God brings us in Him.»
- *a man completely open to others and capable of loving them all*, with an attitude « enabling us to be of service to all, cooperators with all, and always ready to share with whoever has less than we, especially the poor and the deprived »;
- *a man capable of both admiring and being detached* from the realities of this world, «because he has found Christ, and in Him discovered everything»;
- *a fully authentic man*. Here Fr. Jetté quotes Paul VI: «Either tacitly or aloud – but always forcefully – we are being asked : Do you really believe what you are proclaiming? Do you live what you believe? Do you really preach what you live? (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, No. 76).»

Two conferences in 1983 deserve special attention. The first one was a lecture at a session for Oblate formators (Rome, June 8); the other, at the congress of European formators (Rome, August 29). In the first talk, he spoke of the Oblate formator as a man of Jesus Christ, guided by the Spirit; in the second, Oblate formation according to the *Constitutions and Rules*.

### ***Jesus Christ, the first formator of Oblates***

In this conference, Fr. Jetté wants to share his convictions on the most profound aspect of Oblate formation. The presentation is very linear, as usual. He starts from two texts of



the *Constitutions*, which he considers as the most basic of those relating to formation. The first one is taken from the Preface<sup>23</sup>, the other, from Constitution 45.<sup>24</sup> Based on these two texts he develops his thought in two points : *What did our Lord do ?* and *What must the Oblate formator do ?* In the first point, he underlines three aspects of the method used by Jesus, and illustrates them by an attentive reading of some Gospel passages. «In this approach of Christ we perceive a first lesson : we are to accept the other person as he is, accept him in the simple reality of his being, and adapt ourselves to him. Jesus takes people as they are, loves them as they are, and only then does he try to transform them and lead them on to his objective.» Secondly, «he tries to transform them from the men of the flesh that they were into men of the Spirit.» Next Fr. Jetté comments on two incidents in Peter's life, his confession of faith at Caesarea Philippi and his refusal to accept the passion and death of Jesus :

In the pedagogy Christ used in forming his Apostles, we have therefore two elements worth noting : that on which he insists and the criterion he gives them for discerning which spirit animates them. What Jesus insists on most is that they be able to go beyond a purely human and earthly perception of the kingdom of God. The criterion he gives them is the mystery of the cross, of salvation through the cross – a scandal to the Jews, foolishness to the pagans, but the very wisdom of God.

This is the sum total of all that Jesus tried to bring home to his disciples during the three years of his public ministry. He does relatively little pastoral planning; instead, he goes straight to the heart of the problem: he initiates them in the central salvation mystery which ought to be the soul of every apostolic man. Not that he comes back on this even after his resurrection. To the disciples of Emmaus he said, «What little sense you have! How slow you are to believe all that the prophets have announced! Did not the Messiah have to undergo all this so as to enter into his glory?» (Lk 24, 25).

The Apostles' initiation was complete with Pentecost. They had finally understood the essence of the mystery of salvation. They understood it in their hearts, through humiliation and suffering, as well as in their minds. They could now go anywhere in the world to proclaim this mystery to the people. They had become true witnesses.<sup>25</sup>

In the second part, Fr. Jetté deals concretely with the task of the Oblate formator.

He must do what Jesus did. He welcomes and sincerely loves the candidate; as soon as possible he brings the candidate face to face with the mystery of Christ the Savior and gradually initiates him to spiritual discernment. And thus the candidate will be able, in fidelity to and under the leadership of the Spirit, to carry on the great work of the world's redemption.

The rest of the conference develops these three aspects.

- *Welcome and love the candidate.* Starting from the *Constitutions*, he underlines three points on which they insist: "the *person* of the candidate who is central: formation exists for his benefit"; his growth, "which happens within the candidate"; and finally the apostolic *community*, the "natural environment" where formation takes place.

It is very important that the young men admitted to the novitiate already have an adequate human and Christian maturity and show sufficiently clear signs of a real vocation. Otherwise the process of religious formation is slowed down for months and sometimes for years. Moreover, the formation community is burdened and often paralyzed.

- *As soon as possible, bring the candidates face to face with Christ the Saviour.*

We said that it is Jesus Christ who forms his apostles. The sooner you eclipse yourselves in his presence, the greater the chance that the religious formation you want to give will succeed. So do not hesitate to put the candidate, right from the moment he enters religious life, face to face with Jesus, and with Jesus crucified, with Jesus who saves the world through the mystery of his cross and resurrection. Confront him with this mystery and allow him to react. This is the starting point for Oblate formation. Religious life can be lived only in a perspective of faith.<sup>26</sup>

After quoting the Preface in which the Founder asks: «How should men who want to follow in the footsteps of their divine Master Jesus Christ conduct themselves if they, in their turn, are to win back the many souls who have thrown off his yoke?», Fr. Jetté finds the same outlook, the same demands in the 1826 Rule as well as in articles 2 and 4 of the present Constitutions:

Putting the aspirant into the presence of the mystery of Christ who gives his life for the world, bringing the candidate back regularly, as circumstances require, to contemplating the mystery, and this throughout all the years of formation, is the greatest service a formator can give him. For it is in the mystery of Christ the Saviour that the candidate will gradually discover the center of his Oblate life and the basis for his missionary zeal and perseverance.

The process of the candidate's formation is essentially an interior reality. What takes place is that the novice or the young Oblate, «led by the Spirit living within him, develops his personal relationship to Jesus and gradually enters into the mystery of salvation» (C. 56). The formator assists him from the outside, supporting him, accompanying him, and helping him always to keep in sight this central focus of his formation. The first step consisted in placing the novice face to face with Christ the Saviour so that a dialogue of friendship can begin between them. The second step is :

- *Initiate the young Oblate to spiritual discernment.* This is the third point of this lecture. The true value of the Oblate is determined by the fervor and the generosity that animate the dialogue of friendship established with the person of Christ during first formation.

Once the scholasticate or the years of initial formation are over, the formators are no longer present; nevertheless Christ's Spirit within each Oblate will be active and continually at work. Other spirits will also be present, clamoring to make themselves heard. Hence the paramount importance that formators initiate the new Oblate to spiritual discernment; that formators bring him to recognize, through experience, the concrete objective and subjective signs that will enable him throughout his entire life to identify which spirit is leading him on.<sup>27</sup>

Fr. Jetté cites the example of Peter:

One day it is God's Spirit who inspires him and some time later it is the spirit of Satan. Every disciple of Jesus, no matter how far advanced he may be, remains subject to this diversity of influences or inner motions. [...] The objective rule for Christian discernment is accepting in faith the mystery of the cross, both in Jesus and in ourselves, as the road to salvation. Fidelity to the Church and obedience are also indispensable discernment criteria. The subjective rule for discernment corresponds to the spiritual movements Jesus mentioned in the Gospel and which are manifest in ourselves: joy, peace, truth, openness to others.... God's action is recognizable in its effects. Feelings of joy and peace usually come from God; one that is troubling and brings on sadness is at least questionable. A feeling which draws us out of ourselves, which opens us to others, usually comes from God. One which causes us to withdraw within ourselves, which makes us complacent, is bad. We need only to think of the rich young man. [...] <sup>28</sup>

And he concludes this way:

The Oblate formator is there to put [the candidate] on this road and accompany him all along the way through all the years of formation. His task is to be discreet, constant, and completely oriented to the Founder's ideal, namely, of giving to the Congregation «men of interior life, truly apostolic men.» (Letter to Tempier, December 13, 1815).

### **Oblate formation according to the *Constitutions and Rules***

Fr. Jetté was invited to give an address at the European Formators' Congress held at Vermicino, August 27, 1983. He spoke on Oblate formation according to the *Constitutions and Rules*, focusing on the four following points: the basic traits that characterize it, the general orientation of the period that goes from first vows to final commitment, the steps that are proper to this period, and finally three «extremely important» privileged areas: living the life of the theological virtues, the missionary spirit and the self-denial proper to the three vows.

1. *Fundamental traits of Oblate formation.* The 1966 text of the *Constitutions* has a whole part on formation, giving it much more space compared to previous texts. The text of 1980, «is more concise, more unified, better balanced; it has both preserved and improved the tenor of the 1966 text.» Fr. Jetté points out in the new Rule three aspects which characterize Oblate formation:

It is *personal*, that is, it takes into account – indeed, very much so – the person of the candidate. Oblate formation exists for him, it is centered on him. It takes him as he is; it tries to respect the values he bears within him; it strives to adapt to his tempo; it presents him with a challenge, namely, the Oblate ideal as it is presented in Part One of the *Constitutions*; and it aims at his “integral growth” (C.47) according to this ideal. Its goal, therefore, is to lead the candidate to the fullness of his being as an “apostolic man, capable of living the oblate charism” (C.46).

It is a process of *growth* with some special characteristics.

It takes place from within : it is not a « mould » or « shape » imposed from without. It will be gradual and require much patience. It will not be judged primarily on the objective value and quality of the programs offered – although these are indispensable – but on the degree in which the candidate has assimilated them. [...] It is presupposed that the candidate is capable of reacting,

of deeply responding, not only at the level of the intelligence but also at the level of the will, the sensitivity, of one's whole being.

It is a *community oriented* formation. The apostolic community is its normal milieu, a community wherein, according to the Constitutions, «all are involved in a process of mutual evangelization.» (C. 48) Then Fr. Jetté presents the traits of the formator :

Like Christ with his Apostles, he will be very close to the candidates : novices, scholastics, young Brothers. He will live with them, share with them, adapt himself to each one, accepting them as they are and helping them grow through the example of his life, through his prayer, his reflections, his everyday behaviour. He will be, in their midst, an elder brother and a friend more than a man endowed with authority. At the same time, however, he will be an animator and a guide; his principal task will be to accompany the candidate, to enlighten him and initiate him in genuine spiritual discernment.

2. Then he deals with the *general orientation of Oblate formation*. He refers to article 56 of the Constitutions, which even though it concerns the novitiate, is equally valid for the years that follow it:

«Led by the Spirit living within him, the novice develops his personal relationship to Jesus and gradually enters into the mystery of salvation through liturgy and prayer.» Growing in friendship with Christ and entering into the mystery of salvation, striving to develop an apostolic friendship with Christ, this is indeed the basic thrust in the years of temporary commitment!

The formed Oblate should be a friend of Christ, a friend who is sound and faithful, capable of suffering and giving his life for Christ, one who «cooperates» in His work of salvation, who «shares in his mission» and «devotes himself to the evangelization of the poor.»

This friendship with Christ will impel him «to go out to the world, to go out to all the peoples of the earth, especially to “those whose condition cries out for salvation and for the hope which only Jesus Christ can fully bring” (C. 5).» Fr. Jetté sees this as a journey of continuous growth, from a starting point – the novitiate – where «the candidate will be brought face to face with Christ, with the crucified Christ who saves the world through the mystery of his cross and resurrection», up to final commitment – at the end of the novitiate – when the candidate, «touched by this mystery», seeks «to make a deeper commitment to following Christ the Saviour.» Finally there is the point of arrival, the «total gift of self» through perpetual vows. Helping the candidate go forward along this path «will be the principal task of Oblate formation during the years of temporary commitment.» Article 56 of the Constitutions already points out the means to a greater penetration of this mystery<sup>29</sup>, and Fr. Jetté underlines some terms that express an important means to develop this friendship with Christ: self-denial, asceticism, discipline in one's life. Even if the text remains very reserved in its wording using a term like «dépassement» or self-transcendence [...].

But let us leave aside the question of terminology. The necessity for the cross and for self-denial is clearly stated in other articles of the Constitutions, especially in articles 2 and 4. This is the experience of all the Saints: only if we accept to suffer with him will we really experience Christ's friendship.

3. What are the *steps proper to this period* of formation?

During this period of temporary commitment, a number of values are presented to the young Oblate. They are more numerous and varied than during the novitiate: intellectual and cultural values such as study or professional specialization ; the benefits accruing from leisure and social activities, a rather open milieu, the possibility of pleasant and enriching outside contacts and sometimes of travel ; apostolic and missionary values, different forms of pastoral commitment ; and finally there are values strictly spiritual or liturgical, or values of Oblate history and Oblate Spirituality. At the same time the young Oblate feels that he is becoming more adult, freer, capable of undertaking things and succeeding.

The novitiate is important on the Oblate's journey, in as much as it lays the foundations for the building.

As far as formation is concerned, the period which follows novitiate is usually more important and will leave an ever deeper impression on the Oblate than the novitiate itself. The novitiate has laid the foundations but it is now that the building will be constructed, a building which will be either well made or, on the contrary, fragile, with little consistence and badly proportioned. The multiplicity of values presented is a grace for some; for others it may be an occasion for failure. The former will finish this period more adult, more generous, more culturally developed and better equipped to serve the church and the poor, in a word, more deeply Oblate. Others, on the other hand, if they do reach the end, will be more superficial and disorganized. They will have touched upon everything but without ever succeeding in getting things into order. They will not have achieved a deeper unity within themselves.<sup>30</sup>

Our new Constitutions do present an answer to this question. The reply consists essentially in requiring an effort of integrating all these values and unifying one's life in friendship with Christ and in missionary service. We find this taught in articles 50 and 65.

Article 50 reminds us first of all of the aim of Oblate formation: «to develop those whom Jesus calls to total discipleship, until they are mature religious, capable of carrying on the Oblate mission. »

To reach this objective it is necessary to integrate in faith «all the dimensions of our vocation», specially the self-denial of the three vows: «evangelical poverty, consecrated celibacy and availability for the missionary service».

Article 65 takes up the same idea and develops it further. [...] It reasserts the need for integrating all the activities and aspects of daily life. [...] This article then reminds us of the aim we must have in view. «Helped by the formation team and their spiritual advisors, they will gradually become men of God, missionaries rooted in Christ who are ready to give themselves totally by their perpetual oblation.»

This process of integration also includes, naturally, the Oblate charism and the tradition of the Congregation. The following rules resume the same idea on the importance of one or the other of the already mentioned aspects: Rule 52 deals with spiritual maturity: «Spiritual formation aims at maturity in faith based on a personal decision for Christ.»

«Rule 53 is concerned with acquiring human maturity towards oneself, one's brothers, particularly those in authority, and also toward the self-denial inherent in the

commitments of Oblate life.»<sup>31</sup> To attain this maturity it is necessary to develop also «a spirit of daring and creativity». Finally, Rule 54 deals with the integration of pastoral experiences and maturation of the apostolic man: «Capable supervisors will initiate them into the ministry and show them how to reflect on their experience in the light of the Gospel.»

4. In the last part of his conference Fr. Jetté singles out three privileged areas that he considers, «of supreme importance in this period of formation : the deepening of the lived theological virtues, the development of a missionary spirit and the integration of the vows. It is by these means that the young Oblate will achieve interior unity and attain sufficient maturity for perpetual profession.» Let us look at his thought on each of these three points.

a) *Deepening the living of the theological virtues.* The insistence of the new Constitutions on living the theological virtues, asserts Fr. Jetté, represents a true novelty in comparison with the preceding Rule.<sup>32</sup>

[...] All religious life, even the most missionary, places one in a state of consecration. It commits the whole person to a relationship with God, and is based and centered on values not accessible to the human eye alone, the values of the Beatitudes.

Being consecrated to the glory of God and to the setting up of his Kingdom is something beyond man's capability. It is only in living the theological virtues, under the Spirit of God within us, that we can possibly penetrate this mystery and arrive at a total commitment within the mystery itself. To reach the point of «seeing the world through the eyes of the crucified Saviour» (C. 4) and «leaving all things to follow Jesus» and «desiring to cooperate with him» (C. 2), requires a self-transcendence that one cannot possibly achieve on his own. God alone can do this, and he does it through growth in living the theological virtues.<sup>33</sup>

It is essential that the Oblate, during initial formation, should seriously and consistently practice seeing things as God sees them, valuing them as God values them and walking in Christ's footsteps with a heart that is generous and fully awake in faith, hope and charity.

b) *Development of a missionary spirit.*

It is a characteristic aspect of Oblate life; it is everywhere throughout the Constitutions. Article 5 states: «We are a missionary Congregation. Our principal service in the Church is to proclaim Christ and his Kingdom to the most abandoned. We preach the Gospel among people who have not yet received it and help them see their own values in its light. Where the Church is already established, our commitment is to those groups it touches least.»

Our religious consecration is intrinsically missionary. Not only does it intensify the desire for God and for friendship with Christ, not only does it promote the practice of the virtues, but it also and in an altogether special way impels us to go out to the world and to work tirelessly for the evangelization of the poor. It is, moreover, an offering constantly renewed by the requirements of the mission (cf. C. 2).

The missionary spirit animates all the dimensions of the Oblate's life, especially his prayer<sup>34</sup> and his ascetism.<sup>35</sup>

The missionary aspect is symbolized by the Oblate cross received on the day of perpetual profession. This cross, in the words of Article 63, «is a constant reminder of the love of the Savior who wishes to draw all hearts to himself and sends us out as his co-workers.» (C. 63)

c) *The progressive integration of the self-denial proper to the three vows.* Fr. Jetté draws attention to this aspect which he considers «essential during the period of temporary commitment. Great attention must be paid to it, not only to ensure prudent discernment of vocation but also as a path specially suited to lead to religious maturity.» Growth, integration, unification of one's being and life: emphasis is laid on these aspects especially in that part of the Rule that deals with formation.<sup>36</sup>

This applies in a special way to the area of the vows.<sup>37</sup> The objective of the vows is to create within us a new being, the Gospel being, a being who reacts instinctively as Christ himself reacted. This implies a complete change of direction of our being which is so deeply stamped with original sin. The vow, like the cross, is accepted only because it causes us to live more intensely: it completes rather than goes against our being, but it begins by going against it. This going against it, this renunciation comes into us like a purifying fire. Our whole being must become chaste, poor, obedient as was that of Christ. This integration or permeation is a process that takes place only very slowly.<sup>38</sup>

At the end of this talk, Father General notes Mary's role in Oblate formation. Even if her place remains discreet, specially in the Second Part of the Rule,<sup>39</sup> Mary is proposed as «the example who inspires the apostolic man»:

«The goal of formation is that each of us become an apostolic man, capable of living the Oblate charism. *Inspired by the example of Mary*, we live... our personal commitment to Jesus Christ, while serving the Church and God's Kingdom» (C. 46). In fact, in Part One of the Constitutions, she is mentioned in every one of the aspects we have examined.

Mary is present in the development of our friendship with Christ,<sup>40</sup> [...] in the deepening of our living the theological virtues,<sup>41</sup> [...] at the heart of our missionary life.<sup>42</sup> [...] Finally she is at the very center of our religious life and therefore present with us as we strive to assimilate the vows: «Mary Immaculate in her faith response and total openness to the call of the Spirit, is the model and guardian of our consecrated life» (C. 13). Let us hope that formators, in their turn will not neglect to impress upon young Oblates their duty to make Mary known and loved: «Wherever our ministry takes us, we will strive to instill genuine devotion to the Immaculate Virgin who prefigures God's final victory over all evil» (C. 10).

### **Towards the 1986 General Chapter**

During the Inter-Chapter Meeting in May 1984, Fr. Jetté presented some « reflections » on the Congregation's life. It is a very deep reading of reality, seen from the prospective of faith. Among the calls perceived during his ten years as General, he mentions the mission *ad gentes*, the new poor and the major concerns of the world and the Church today: social justice and the peace in the world, unbelief and religious indifference, ecumenism, the evangelization of cultures, the means of communication. The Oblates must give a response to these calls. In this response, Fr. Jetté takes into consideration

the two basic dimensions of the Oblate charism: missionary action and consecrated life. The answer which he would like to give to these calls contains some points which we could interpret as directives for Oblate formation.

Were you to ask me how an Oblate can evangelize today's world, I would give as my first answer not an indication of this or that activity; I would rather tell you : Be present to this world; love this world, and especially the poor within it; love them with the heart of Christ (R 12). In the midst of this world, be authentic witnesses of the Gospel Beatitudes – by your life, your activity, your works. And do not be afraid to speak openly to this world of Jesus Christ. This is what it expects of you, and this is why you exist in the Church.<sup>43</sup>

He then proposes five conditions which seem to him indispensable to help the Congregation to progress and gain strength. The fourth of these conditions concerns precisely formation: «that we pursue the work undertaken for vocations, and that we assure a solid doctrinal formation to aspirants who come to us, one which has "firm roots in the Scriptures, the living tradition of the Church and the teaching of the Magisterium," as our Rules say» (n. 59). [cf.R. 66a].<sup>44</sup>

The fifth condition is closely linked to the area of formation: «that we develop availability and the sense of belonging to the Institute, the sense of being an apostolic corps.» Without mincing words, Fr. Jetté goes on to condemn the negative attitude of some Oblates:

The Congregation is not a springboard for achieving one's own personal charism and individual projects. On the contrary, when we enter it we must be ready to put ourselves entirely at the Congregation's disposal to carry out the evangelizing work it will assign to us. If this attitude is not present, there is no apostolic corps: our common undertaking, the mission received from the Congregation takes priority over individual tastes and projects. We must be clear on this point during the time of initial formation. And, after initial formation it is normal that Superiors can count on such availability, even though, for their part, they ought to strive as much as possible to respect the aptitudes and tastes of each person.

January 3, 1985, Fr. Jetté gave a talk at the General Assembly of the Province of Italy. The theme was: *The Present-day Challenges Facing the Congregation and the Apostolic Project of a Province*. The four great challenges that he saw facing the Congregation were: inculturation, evangelization, authenticity and formation. He linked the first ones to the fourth in the following way: «When we look ahead to the future, everything mentioned above – the challenges of inculturation, evangelization, religious and priestly authenticity – is largely dependent on formation.».

If the formation given at the novitiate and the scholasticate is solid, if it is faithful to the Church's teaching and to the Founder's spirit, if it is sufficiently open to the present world's needs, then we need not be concerned : the Congregation will live and bear much fruit, fruits of salvation for the world, fruits of holiness in its own members.

Father General then touches upon two points that are of particular concern to him:

First, the shortage of qualified Oblate personnel, especially in the intellectual field, for responding to our current needs ; secondly, apart from a few exceptions, the



little real control we have over the doctrinal formation given to our scholastics. [...] In a number of countries the level of philosophical and theological studies has declined. The time allotted to these studies has been considerably reduced and this has happened just when the laity are specializing more and more and are making demands on the priest as a spiritual advisor and animator.<sup>45</sup>

### Report to the 1986 General Chapter

The last text that we will examine is the fourth point of the report that Fr. Jetté presented to the 1986 General Chapter. It deals with the formation of Oblates. After having taken a look at the encouraging statistics of recent years and underlining the considerable effort of almost all the provinces and delegations «to invite young men to consider a state of life such as ours, and to sustain and accompany those who showed a greater interest in it,»<sup>46</sup> he expresses his appreciation because «some serious work has been done in the vocation apostolate and in formation. I want to extend my very warm thanks to those who laboured in these fields with courage and competence.» Then he calls attention to what he considers the «priority of all priorities», the training of qualified formators. He mentions three particularly important aspects :

#### 1. To strive for a certain *universality and modernity*.<sup>47</sup>

A candidate who enters the Oblates does not belong to this or that house, to this or that Province; he joins the Congregation and belongs to the Congregation. He should, therefore, be gradually formed to an attitude of availability: to be disposed to go wherever the Congregation needs him most in its endeavor to evangelize the poor.

He singles out two elements of modernity: the study of foreign languages<sup>48</sup> and a serious and practical initiation to the modern means of communication: the press, radio, and television.<sup>49</sup>

#### 2. The second point he touches on is the *unity of discernment criteria* in formation. «This is both a delicate and very important matter.» Much prudence is needed, especially when calling a candidate to perpetual vows or to the priesthood. The first responsibility for this call lies with the formators and the Provincials.<sup>50</sup>

In the external forum, formators and authorities who call ought to have precise discernment criteria in regard to the candidate's human and affective balance, his understanding of the religious life and the priesthood, the choice he has made of these realities, his fitness for common life, his missionary availability, how serious and correct his theological formation has been, his strength of spirit in difficult situations – in a word, that he is truly mature, humanly and religiously speaking.<sup>51</sup>

Most of these points are already contained in the *General Norms for Oblate Formation*. It is very important that we be faithful to them, as it is also important that the formators and spiritual advisers be a team and come to an agreement on the discernment criteria which are to guide them in their respective domains.

#### 3. The third point he calls to everyone's attention is the need for a *formation that is both "contextual" and "Catholic"*. Formation must of necessity respond to the «needs and aspirations of a given milieu.»<sup>52</sup>

In our formation houses we must of necessity strive to maintain a strong and solid common doctrinal base which unites us from one Region to another, and allows

us to commune and share, in dialogue and mutual comprehension, values that we hold in common, a common spirit and a common spirituality.<sup>53</sup>

## Conclusion

In concluding this quick presentation of the thought and teaching of Fr. Jetté on Oblate formation, we cannot pass over in silence another contribution of this great figure of father and master: *The Commentary on the 1982 edition of the Oblate Constitutions and Rules*.<sup>54</sup> The various chapters of Part Two offer Fr. Jetté a fine occasion to make a synthesis of his spiritual teaching on formation: formation as a *community process*; *initial formation* (with its four sections: *discovering and fostering vocations, the novitiate, religious commitment, formation after novitiate for the scholastics and the Brothers*) and *ongoing formation*. We find there practically all the points examined here, which he explains under various forms and in a more systematic way, by going through the text of the new Rule. We find especially his love for Jesus Christ, for the Church and for the big Oblate family. His work, his teaching, his decisions always had as objective to pass on to all the Oblates, especially the younger generations, this love which animated the life and the vocation of our holy Founder.

It is said that, in a way, Fr. Jetté was for the Congregation what Paul VI was for the Church.<sup>55</sup> Called to guide the Congregation in difficult times, he answered this call with love, confidence and courage; this could be seen clearly in certain passages of these pages which might also help Oblates of the 21st century to profit from this invaluable teaching. There would be other texts to quote, other events to note.<sup>56</sup> That will be the task of a more complete and precise work.

<sup>1</sup> The document aims to answer the question: « What is the present status of formation throughout the Congregation? »

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Administrative structures*, Rome, 1972, No. 26, 28, 35.

<sup>3</sup> Number 55 of *OMI Documentation*, (January 15, 1975), published the decisions of the 1974 General Chapter; a good part is devoted to formation (p.3-7) and contains a body of recommendations that the Chapter presented to the Superior General and to his Council for effective action in the area of formation.

<sup>4</sup> Frs. A. Taché and R. McEvoy had presented to the 1972 Chapter a well detailed report on the International Scholasticate and on the Studium Generale (of which they were the Superiors). It was at the end of the well-known «Pineta Sacchetti» years, that Fr. Taché qualified as «an eventful era, animated by the spirit of Vatican II and marked by an evolution that one could foresee only with difficulty at the time of the 1966 Chapter.».

<sup>5</sup> The three month De Mazenod Experience, begun in 1990 at Aix and offered regularly in different languages, proves right the question put by Fr. Jetté and is a response to his concern at that time.

<sup>6</sup> See *Quaderni di Vermicino*, 11, pp. 11-38.

<sup>7</sup> Another significant example is the splendid lecture on *The Oblates and the Virgin Mary, Yesterday and Today*, given March 23, 1979, at the Oblate meeting at Cap-de-la-Madeleine: Cf. *OMI Documentation*, 87, especially the second part: *The Place of Mary in Our Life Today* (pp. 6-10).

<sup>8</sup> This committee was established upon recommendation of the 1974 Chapter, with the mandate "to study the current problems in the vocations apostolate and formation" and "to propose lines of reflection and action to those responsible for formation." (*Acts of the General Chapter 1974*, p. 69).

<sup>9</sup> Among the sources of information which add other elements to those of his own experience, Father General refers to the reading of files for secularization, which are very enlightening, especially when it is about persons known since the beginning of the scholasticate.

<sup>10</sup> He finishes this way: «He cannot in all honesty choose to live and act in a way completely independent from the group, and without a mission received from it.»

<sup>11</sup> During the same session, the European Conference of Formation also met with Father General to ask him some questions, which revealed the sensitivity and the problems of the time. Six of these questions were linked, directly or indirectly, to the domain of formation: 1. What is the General Administration doing to help formation, to direct it and keep a certain control over its orientation? 2. You seem to give a lot of importance to doctrinal formation. Why? 3. Yes, but how to make acceptable today a doctrinal teaching, the truths which normally must last? 4. Are there still values accepted by all Oblates which we can present today to young people? Are there not grown-up Oblates who refuse openly these values and that authority does nothing to intervene? 5. Are the requirements which you mentioned valid for the Brothers as for the

Fathers? 6. What kind of certainty is necessary to call somebody to perpetual profession or to the priesthood?

<sup>12</sup> The first time at the Permanent Committee for Formation in January 1977, then during a session for Provincials in January 1979.

<sup>13</sup> For the complete text of this important speech see F. JETTÉ, *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate. Addresses and Written Texts, 1975-1985*, Rome 1985, p. 215-229.

<sup>14</sup> See *Circulaires Administratives*, 1, p. 203,212,246.

<sup>15</sup> In answer to another question – how to make doctrinal teaching acceptable today – Fr. Jetté notes the difficulty and insists on the way of presenting the doctrinal content; it is necessary to avoid the current tendency which considers all truth as relative.

<sup>16</sup> Father General had not presented explicitly this subject in his speech to the Oblate Provincials at the Inter-Chapter meeting of April-May 1978, although we can find some elements under the title "The Religious Life of the Congregation." He draws attention to four particular points: the desire for community life, the desire of a radical return to Jesus Christ, interest in the Founder and the participation in movements outside the Institute. The elements which he mentions here are most important for formation.

<sup>17</sup> «The young people who today want to enter religious life are often little prepared to begin the novitiate. Their prior religious formation is weak; their decision needs to be enlightened, purified, made more mature. On the other hand, they are generally more moderate, less contentious, more traditional perhaps than their predecessors. They are looking for God, and want to commit themselves to the mission, but as being first integrated into a community and supported by the same. Are they perhaps in search of affective, psychological security? Some formators are asking this very question. Pretty well everywhere a pre-novitiate is considered necessary.»

<sup>18</sup> «It is impossible for one man alone, who is already occupied with other things, to assure all the required elements.... The present trend is to regroup the novices so as to have a viable community and a more competent formation personnel.»

<sup>19</sup> Fr. Jetté quotes Jean Guiton who observed a few years ago, «the strange, extraordinary prestige» that the teachers of unbelief enjoyed in Catholic circles (*Osservatore Romano*, Sept. 1, 1967). More than once Father General associated these masters with the «masters of suspicion». Their influences on formation are many and varied. Their doctrines can be a wealth, but this is a wealth that demands much competence and discernment on the part of the formator.

<sup>20</sup> Fr. Jetté had already drawn attention to ongoing formation in a previous document, drafted by Fr. Francis George, Vicar General. In that text - entitled precisely *Ongoing Formation* - the General Council intended to follow up a statement of the 1972 Chapter, repeated by that of 1974, where it is said that ongoing formation for all the members of the Congregation is perceived as a particularly urgent necessity which requires everywhere immediate attention in all areas. The document focuses on three points: 1. it presents the thinking and planning of the General Council concerning ongoing formation; 2. it reports some experiments at the regional and provincial level; 3. it gives some criteria for evaluating ongoing formation programs and some reflections on their importance for the future of the Congregation. See *OMI Documentation* 62 / 75 (Dec. 15, 1975).

<sup>21</sup> Fr. Jetté quotes again from the Founder's letter to Fr. Tempier, of 13 December 1815, and from a note in his diary of 19 July 1846, where he wrote about an Oblate whose conduct left something to be desired: «I do not at all want any smoking wicks in the Society: let them be burning, giving warmth, providing light or let them leave.»

<sup>22</sup> By consecrated chastity we challenge «the tendency to use others for selfish purposes» (C. 15), by poverty «the excesses of power and wealth» (C. 20), by obedience «the spirit of domination» (C. 25), by perseverance the inconstancy in love, and at the same time we remind the world of «Christ's [unfailing] fidelity to the Father» (C. 29). Furthermore, by living as brothers in community we want to «bear witness before the world that Jesus lives in our midst and unites us» (C. 37) and that «in Christ, God is everything for us» (C. 11); likewise by our frequent «recourse to the sacrament of reconciliation», we proclaim «the joy of God's pardon to the world» (C. 33).

<sup>23</sup> «How, indeed, did our Lord Jesus Christ proceed when he undertook to convert the world? He chose a number of apostles and disciples whom he himself trained in piety, and he filled them with his Spirit. These men he sent forth, once they had been schooled in his teaching, to conquer the world which, before long, was to bow to his holy rule.» (*Préface*)

<sup>24</sup> «Jesus personally formed the disciples he had chosen, initiating them into "the mystery of the Kingdom of God" (Mk 4:11). As a preparation for their mission he had them share in his ministry; to confirm their zeal he sent them his Spirit. This same Spirit forms Christ in those who endeavour to follow in the Apostles' footsteps. As they enter more deeply into the mystery of the Saviour and his Church, he moves them to dedicate themselves to the evangelization of the poor.»

<sup>25</sup> He adds that Jesus' pedagogy could be studied also under other aspects, as for example, «how he initiated the Apostles to prayer, to compassion and goodness toward others, to inner freedom [...]».

<sup>26</sup> Fr. Jetté recalls here «The radicalism of the Founders of different religious Orders, of St. Francis of Assisi, Ignatius Loyola, Father de Mazenod [...] also of those who are the inspiration of contemporary religious renewal like Father de Foucauld or Mother Teresa. In the general examen which precedes admission into the Company of Jesus, St. Ignatius wants the Jesuit aspirant put face to face with Christ our Lord and then asked "if he accepts and desires with all his might everything that Christ our Lord loved and embraced... and this to the point of desiring injustice, false witness, insult, being treated and considered a fool (without giving reason to be) because he wants in some way to resemble our Creator and Lord Jesus Christ and to imitate him by putting on his garment and livery...."»

<sup>27</sup> He first recalls a definition of spiritual discernment : "the ability, acquired through experience of recognizing the influences that come from God in order to accept them, and those which come from the world or the devil in order to reject them." Then he refers to St. Ignatius' 30 days of Spiritual Exercises which «are an excellent experience to learn, in practice, the rules governing discernment. All the formation at the novitiate and scholasticate should strive for this goal. The greatest service you can give a young man is to make him into a man of God, a Christian adult in the faith, led by God's Spirit.»

<sup>28</sup> «A heart that is calm and pure is needed to discern spiritual influences, and these latter must always be related to the objective rule. For any pious joy or apostolic desire to be authentic, it must conform to the teaching of the Beatitudes : the choice of Christ who is poor, obedient, humiliated. Once again we can recall the zeal of James and John ready to invoke Heaven's fire on those who did not receive them, or the Apostles' insistent longing for the coming of the temporal kingdom: sentiments such as these cannot come from the Spirit of God.»

<sup>29</sup> «[The novice] gradually enters into the mystery of Salvation through liturgy and prayer. He becomes accustomed to listen to the Lord in Scripture, to meet him in the Eucharist and to recognize him in other persons and in events. He comes also to contemplate God at work in the life and mission of the Founder, as well as in the Congregation's history and traditions. Opportunities for pastoral experience in an Oblate setting help him realize the demands of a missionary vocation and the unity of apostolic religious life.»

<sup>30</sup> Fr. Jetté notes that as early as twenty years earlier, at the time of Vatican II, this problem was raised in connection with priestly formation, and he quotes a text from a review of the day: «If they must, at one and the same time, do their theology, read newspapers, develop friendships, take up carpentry, learn to distinguish Mozart from Bach, keep up with the social evolution of the diocese on the pretext of integrating human values into their formation – not to speak of their liturgical and sacramental life, their faith problems, their discouragement in mental prayer – are they not being confronted with an impossible balancing act in a setup that is all too complex? Will they not end up by resolving the problem touching upon everything, being content with over flying the lot at a distance, with seeing everything in a sort of featureless line-drawing – their spiritual life as well as their favorite sport?» (M. PAISSAC, «Valeurs humaines et formation sacerdotale», in the review *Vocations sacerdotales et religieuses*, N° 224, Oct. 1963, pp. 491-517).

<sup>31</sup> Fr. Jetté notes the use in the French text of the word *renoncement*, (renunciation) and not *dépassement*, (surpassing or self-transcendence) while previously we found no such precision of language, maybe by fear of being too demanding!

<sup>32</sup> This insistence appears especially in expressions like : «Growing in faith, hope and love, we commit ourselves to be a leaven of the Beatitudes at the heart of the world.» (C. 11); «We are pilgrims, walking with Jesus in faith, hope and love.» (C. 31); «an assimilation in faith of all the dimensions of our vocation.» (C. 50); and in the Rules: «maturity in faith based on a personal decision for Christ» (R. 52).

<sup>33</sup> Fr. Jetté notes that at the origin of many defections in priestly and religious, «it is possible to detect a gradual weakening in living the theological virtues. Faith, hope and charity have become progressively stunted in the soul. God, Christ as the Son of God, the Church as the Sacrament of Salvation, are no longer for these people sufficiently living realities. Human values, the earthly world, the things that can be touched by the hand and seen by the eye have taken the place of these values and are eventually the deciding factors.»

<sup>34</sup> «It is as missionaries that we worship the Lord, in the various ways the Spirit suggests to us. We come before him bearing with us the daily pressures of our anxiety for those to whom he sends us (cf. 2 Cor 11:28). Our life in all its dimensions is a prayer that, in us and through us, God's Kingdom come.» (C. 32). «As they enter more deeply into the mystery of the Savior and his Church the [Spirit] moves them to dedicate themselves to the evangelization of the poor.» (C. 45). In return, every act for them becomes a search for and an encounter with Christ : «We achieve unity in our life only in and through Jesus Christ. Our ministry involves us in a variety of tasks, yet each act in life is an occasion for personal encounter with the Lord, who through us gives himself to others and through others gives himself to us. While maintaining within ourselves an atmosphere of silence and inner peace, we seek his presence in the hearts of people and in the events of daily life as well as in the Word of God, in the Sacraments and in prayer.» (C. 31).

<sup>35</sup> The Oblate's asceticism springs from his apostolic commitment and from real life and is oriented toward the redemption of the world. «Faith moves us to accept for the love of the crucified Lord our personal sufferings, the various trials of the ministry and the daily demands of community life.» (C. 34). Constitution

4 reminds us that «the cross of Jesus Christ is central to our mission. Like the apostle Paul we preach «Jesus Christ and him crucified» (1 Cor 2:2). If we bear in our body the death of Jesus, it is with the hope that the life of Jesus, too, may be seen in our body (2 Cor 4:10). Through the eyes of our crucified Savior we see the world which he redeemed with his blood, desiring that those in whom he continues to suffer will also know the power of his resurrection.» (Cf. Phil 3 :10). (C. 4)

<sup>36</sup> See especially C. 47: «Formation is a process which aims at the integral growth of a person and lasts a lifetime. It enables us to accept ourselves as we are and develop into the persons we are called to be.»

<sup>37</sup> Fr. Jetté cites Rule 11 which in speaking of consecrated chastity «makes a discreet reference to this progressive growth or integration: «In living their consecration Oblates will endeavour to help each other to grow in maturity.»

<sup>38</sup> Here Fr. Jetté comes back on a point he had treated in his talk on *What do I Expect of Formation* (No. 3) «At the beginning, this renunciation – which is also a surpassing of self – exists especially in the will. The sensitive or instinctive part of our existence has not accepted it. There will be days, inevitably, when faced with a particular experience of solitude, or sensual attraction, or the behavior of someone in authority, veritable battles will rage within us. The spiritual effort will have the effect, little by little and with a lot of patience, of making the sense and instincts as chaste, poor and obedient as the will. This is a slow task. It lasts the greater part of one's life [...]. In this area what I expect of first formation is that it will lead the Oblate to a clear vision of the situation and give him the chance to know if he can or not in a normal way live the consecration of the vows in peace, love and joy.»

<sup>39</sup> «In Part Two of the Constitutions she is mentioned only once, but the phrase used gives us to understand that we must often come back to her who is «the Patroness of our Congregation» and «the Mother [of Oblates]» (C. 10).

<sup>40</sup> «With Mary Immaculate, the faithful handmaid of the Lord, and under the guidance of the Spirit, we enter into closer union with Jesus Christ. We will contemplate with her the mysteries of the Incarnate Word, especially in praying the rosary.» (C. 36)

<sup>41</sup> «She received Christ in order to share him with all the world, whose hope he is. In her we recognize the model of... our own faith.» (C. 10)

<sup>42</sup> «In the joys and sorrows of our missionary life we feel close to her who is the Mother of Mercy.» (C. 10)

<sup>43</sup> Fr. Jetté adds an interesting comment: «From time to time it is good to reflect on the fact that we get tired of everything, even of the best things. We get tired, for instance, of the Beatitudes: poverty fatigues us, we get tired of purity, we weary of meekness; tears and injustice tire us out; in trying to hope, we get tired of hope.... (Cf. Marie Noël, *Notes intimes*, ed. Stock, p. 131). And yet, «we commit ourselves to be a leaven of the Beatitudes at the heart of the world.» (C. 11)

<sup>44</sup> He then invited all the Provinces to put into practice the *General Norms for Formation* which thanks to Fr. René Motte and the General Formation Committee had been recently published.

<sup>45</sup> The first competence that is expected of the priest is doctrinal competence. He recalls a statement by John Paul II to the Augustinians during their General Chapter : «This is a matter of the greatest importance, especially today in our modern world which is so rightly in search of religious persons who are doctrinally solid and spiritually well formed.» (Aug. 25, 1983).

<sup>46</sup> Fr. Jetté points out other areas where a lot of good work has been done in the field of formation: the introduction of a prenovitiate in almost all the Provinces, the 21 novitiates and the 25 scholasticates of the Congregation, the meetings of the General Formation Committee, the three international sessions for formators organized by the General Administration in view of fostering an exchange of experiences in a perspective of faith and in view of a deeper understanding of the *General Norms for Formation*. As for ongoing formation he mentions *An Oblate Renewal Program based on the Constitutions and Rules* by Fr. Desmond O'Donnell, the session for new Provincials (Rome, May-June 1982), the two sessions on evangelizing the secularized world (Ottawa and Rome in 1982), the November 1985 session for the preparation of Oblate animators, and finally the founding of the *Association for Oblate Studies and Research* in 1982 plus the various publications of the General Administration and of other Oblates.

<sup>47</sup> To avoid all misunderstanding he hastens to add : «It is not a matter of having a novice or scholastic visit the Congregation's six Regions in order to give him a "universal" sense, nor of providing him on the day of his first vows with a computer, a car and a videocassette recorder so that he will be "modern".»

<sup>48</sup> The knowledge of languages gives this availability a concrete form and opens the Oblate to the world. «In the beginning of the Congregation the Founder insisted very much on the study of English, and rightly so. It was his missionary zeal that prompted this attitude. This same zeal must today engender a similar attitude in Provincials, formators and scholastics, so that all young Oblates are eventually able to speak at least two modern languages.»

<sup>49</sup> Even though the Rule explicitly requires this (R 61) and that he himself had mentioned it on several occasions, the results remain insufficient. That is why he invites the Provincials and those responsible for formation to take concrete steps «to see to it that each scholastic, during his initial formation, be given sufficient initiation in this domain. Their apostolic ministry requires it and will demand it more and more.»

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<sup>50</sup> «When I read the dossiers of those who are asking for laicization, I see that a certain number of errors were made by the spiritual directors, formators or authorities who advised or called these candidates. Prudence was lacking when the call was given. According to the new Constitutions, the General Administration intervenes only at the time of perpetual vows to approve or disapprove a call that is given on the provincial level; it intervenes in the light of the documents received and recommendations made by formators and Provincials.»

<sup>51</sup> In the internal forum, he continues, «there should be a sufficient number of spiritual advisers available to assure the candidate freedom of conscience and to accompany him in his interior growth. In particular, they ought to dispose of precise and substantially identical criteria for discerning all that is required in terms of consecrated chastity for a prudent commitment to the priesthood or the religious life.»

<sup>52</sup> Here Fr. Jetté alludes to the emergence of «a theology which responds to the needs and aspirations of a given milieu : an African theology, an American theology, an Asian theology, a Latin American theology or a theology of the Third World. It is linked to the current movement of inculturating the faith.»

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *Letters to the Oblates...*, pp.146-148.

<sup>54</sup> In presenting the book Fr. Marcello Zago wrote: «On September 13, 1986 when I was called to be his successor, as though by instinct I requested him to continue teaching us as a spiritual guide and I proposed that he draw up a commentary of our Constitutions and Rules. This invitation he accepted as an obedience. He set perseveringly to work, all the while coping with the fluctuating conditions of his health. After five years of work this commentary is now complete. I present it to you as his gift and as the compendium of his teaching to the Congregation.».

<sup>55</sup> See M. ZAGO, *Sulle orme di sant'Eugenio. Lettere e testi sulla formazione*, Frascati 1998 (Quaderni di Vermicino, 32), p. 6.

<sup>56</sup> By way of example, we recall an important event that took place during Fr. Jetté's time as General: the congress on the Oblate Brothers. We have said little about the Brothers in these pages. It is a topic for another time. Fr. Jetté took seriously the vocation, and therefore the formation of the Brothers; he had wanted this congress not only to study this subject or to take stock of the situation, but precisely to show and promote this vocation.

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