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“Witnessing to Hope: A Call, Our Mission”

Reflection Papers

(Part 2)

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(A North/North-West Perspective)

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The Precapitular Commission invited ten Oblates from different parts of the world to write a non-academic reflection on the Chapter theme, “Witnessing to Hope...” and the missionary situation in their respective Regions. This issue presents the last of those papers. (See Documentation #256 for the first part.)

Theological Hope or Human Optimism?

(A North/North-West Perspective)

Richard G. Cote, O.M.I.

Introduction: A Real Difference

We have all had the opportunity these last couple of years to reflect on our common project “Immense Hope” and no doubt we have all tried to articulate – for ourselves and our Oblate brothers – “the reason for the hope that is in us” (1 P 3:16). Yet we must not confuse real Christian hope with mere human optimism. The former has little or nothing to do with the observable signs of progress or improvement we may occasionally observe in our ministry or mission. The theological virtue of hope we received at baptism is not based on any such tangible signs or encouraging statistics. As St. Paul said: “*Hope that is seen is not hope. For who can hope for what is seen*” (Rm 8:24). Mere human optimism, on the other hand, depends very heavily on signs that things are getting better. We are optimistic when “everything is going well,” when we notice an increase in vocations, for example, or when we reckon that our disposable financial resources are adequate to insure the future of our missionary projects.

The theological virtue of hope is much more demanding! It obliges every Christian – and every missionary – to “see *beyond* what meets the eye,” beyond statistics and any observable indication of progress, beyond everything that can be measured, calculated or appraised. In short, real hope leaves us no other alternative than to either become a mystique...or disappear (K. Rahner). For us, as for every Christian, the only thing that cannot be measured in this world, that cannot be fully grasped, and that upon which Christian hope alone is based, is the living Christ and the infinite love of his Father who places his own hope and trust in us. He knows only too well the risk involved in placing his hope in us. He knows this risk and he lives it! The French biblical scholar, Jacques Guillet, puts it well: “The pages of the Bible are full of scenes in which God is busy cultivating the soil, working his vineyard, corralling his sheep, building his house, establishing his city, choosing and dreaming about his betrothed” (*L’Homme, espoir et souci de Dieu*). Our missionary hope is grounded and takes its origin in the very hope that God has in us, his missionary spouse, the Church.

Witnessing hope: “A Call”

In our secularized, pluralistic, technological and rapidly changing world, how can we be witnesses of hope? Our world seems so self-sufficient, so consumed with its own mundane agenda that one might think it is altogether impervious to any kind of Christian witness. Does it not take seriously, almost as a dogma, the worldly non-necessity of Christian hope? As though its own self-generating optimism were sufficient unto itself! And what about us Oblates in the Western world? What must we do, what must we change, so that our witness may become more authentic and therefore more credible, seductive and contagious in this complex world of ours? That is the sixty-four dollar question! That is our real challenge!

First of all, our missionary hope summons us to a new kind of exodus, namely: “*Letting go!*” Many of the responses to the pre-capitular Questionnaire highlight the need to “let go”, especially concerning our involvement in parish ministry. We read in the summary report: “Some members deplore the fact that Oblates at times feel like prisoners in the parishes...they quickly lose their availability when other new missionary needs arise.” Or again: “In keeping with their charism, should the Oblates not leave parish ministry and risk taking on more specialized ministries?” One thing is certain: “Letting go” is very much a proper feature of every missionary life and endeavor. Have we let go enough?

A second challenge facing us Oblates today in the Western world is to become, with the help of God's Spirit, grateful enough, free enough, humble enough, letting go enough to be able to see and read clearly the signs of the times in us, and around us. In 1971, Pope Paul VI described what is involved in this 'reading of the signs of the times'. And what an absolutely beautiful, breathtaking description it is!

"The Spirit of the Lord, who animates men and women renewed in Christ, continually breaks down the horizon within which their understanding likes to find security and the limits to which their activity would willingly restrict itself; there dwells within them a power that urges them to go beyond every system and every ideology. At the heart of the world there dwells the mystery of man and woman discovering themselves to be God's children in the course of a historical and psychological process in which constraint and freedom as well as the weight of sin and the breath of the Spirit alternate and struggle for the upper hand. The dynamism of Christian faith here triumphs over the narrow calculations of egoism. Animated by the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, our Savior, and upheld by hope, Christians involve themselves in the building up of the human city, one that is peaceful, just and loving and acceptable as an offering to God." (*Octogesima Adveniens* – Call to Action, § 37)

Pope Paul VI goes on to remind us that we can only 'read the signs of the times' in dialogue with other Christians, other faiths, and people of 'good will,' who are also spirit-led, and that respectful, critical dialogue with them will keep us from the evident dangers of pseudo-prophetism and neo-clericalism, as well as of undervaluing the insights of science. The key word for witnessing our hope today is dialogue. Not for tactical or opportunistic reasons, but because dialogue is a constitutive dimension of the loving exchange in which God is forever taking the initiative. What can be more necessary or more urgent today than to create places and space in which we can receive and look at one another, and collaborate with the stranger (the other). This is all the more necessary in a pluralistic world in which everyone has a message, a truth, a conviction that he or she would like to share. If pluralism is one of the major challenges of our times, dialogue becomes one of the major summons of missionary hope today.

Underlying this dialogue and this 'reading the signs of the times' is a spirituality – very old and very new – a mystical way of seeing, which seeks to see and find God present and acting in all things. At the heart of a secular and profane world promoting scientific and technological rationalism, our missionary hope will consist in deciphering the mysterious presence of God and His Kingdom in this very world. Instead of being a "pearl merchant," the missionary today will be more of a "treasure hunter." If knowing how to "*let go*" is one of the constitutive elements of our missionary hope today, and knowing how to "*dialogue*" a second one, to hunt and "*search for God*" is certainly a third component. How can one seriously speak of Christian (or Oblate) hope if it is not embedded and lived as a real existential quest, namely, the adventure of a living and daring faith which never tires of searching for God everywhere, in all places and at all times. There can be no authentic hope without a real quest! He who does not seek God everywhere runs the risk of not finding him anywhere. Hence the numerous exhortations of the psalmist: "Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually" (Ps 105:4). And the reason why St. Augustine prayed so ardently: "Lord, do not allow me to get tired of searching for you. But put in my heart an even more ardent desire to search for you." And why St. Gregory of Nyssa could exclaim: "To find God means to look for him continually."

In today's secular world, one might think that the arms of God are shorter than in years past, that he is absent, more distant and removed from the world. Such is not the case! The question is: "Are we looking for him in the right places?" The God of our missionary hope is a God who never repeats himself, who is forever making things new. This is the way Gustavo Gutierrez put it: "A God who

does not appear with evident clarity, who is not inclined to let himself be always encountered in the same place, will erupt before us in ways that are always unexpected; he will inspire us with new forms of adoration; he will create unknown paths to bring us closer to him.” Can we Oblates envisage the God who sends us on mission as a youthful God – eternally young – a God who is both full of life and full of surprises, and one who is always ready to embark on some new adventure with those whom he loves unconditionally? In short, a God who likes nothing better than to take risks on our behalf by putting his own hope in us and in this world he created. Is it possible to envisage our Oblate life and mission as a genuine odyssey, a real adventure that requires considerable audacity (à-la-De Mazenod) and also a “new creativity in charity” (*Novo Millennium Ineunte*, § 50)? What may well be lacking in the Congregation’s public image is audacity. It’s as though we have practically forgotten the parable of the treasure hidden in a field. What we need is a little more daring. To borrow the beautiful expression of St. Theresa of Avila, we need to “venture life.”

One of the salient characteristics of our modern world is without doubt the rapid pace of change. As we launch out into the deep of the new millennium, we can expect to experience more, not less change – indeed change at an ever-increasing pace. According to Bishop Howard Hubbard of Albany, New York, what we need is a better understanding and theology of change. “We must accept the reality of an ever-increasing pace of change, be comfortable with it, and become leaders and managers of change rather than its victims.”

Witnessing hope: “Our Mission”

It should come as no surprise that religious imagination is a function – indeed the proper function of Christian hope. What actually makes hope possible is the possibility of taking some initiative, the possibility of “mission.” Out of the imagination arises the anticipation of missionary possibilities and their eventual realization. In this sense one can say that imagination is a function of hope. It enables us to not only envisage “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev 21:1), but also to “open” and “project” what we see and to propose it to the world as a real possibility of life.

The credibility of our hope – and therefore of our mission – comprises two main ingredients: a certain discourse and a doing. In fact our word must be supported by our action; our word must represent a word that is kept, that is, a word that is verifiable in risks actually taken. It is when people take real risks in life that they become *believable*. Matthew 25:31-46 captures this dynamic well. Mother Teresa is a beautiful example of this. She took some real risks in India. The credibility of this woman stems from the fact that she really risked her life, indeed gave her life. She wasn’t content to merely utter words. She kept her word. We all know Oblates who take similar risks on behalf of justice, the poor and the excluded ones in our society. “But on the whole, this is generally an individual initiative. What strategies must we adopt so that these *personal* initiatives may become more often a *collective* involvement and action?” (*Synthèse*, p. 10). In short, *how can we enhance the credibility of the public image of our Oblate units, communities, and regions?*

One prophetic way to enhance our public credibility is to join forces and collaborate more closely with the NGOs [Non-profit organizations]. Father William Ryan, S.J., a well-known thinker on issues of faith, economics and social justice, says that the recent dramatic rise in the number of NGOs is one of the great social phenomena of our times. Some modern scholars even suggest that the NGOs are as significant for our times as the rise of the nation states was for the 19th century. These new NGOs include the women’s movement, social justice movements, ecology movements, anti-globalization and anti-war movements, and the list continues. While many NGOs may still lack administrative skills and research competence, they are fast becoming masters at global networking. Herein lies their strength and visibility in the media and public arena. Witness their

recent stunning successes in promoting the International Land Mines Agreement, and a temporary stalemate on MAI [Multilateral Agreement on Investments], that would have given free rein to foreign investors in host countries. They are offering a beacon of hope to the poor and excluded by proclaiming and advocating the real possibility of a more just world, one that is not intrinsically tied to a global free market.

Like religious organizations, NGOs stand for certain values such as sustainable development, welfare services for the poor, human rights, conservation of nature, solidarity, equality, etc. These are values that we ought to embrace, conspicuously and prophetically, in all our Oblate units, communities and regions. In the summary report on the responses to the pre-capitular Questionnaire, many Oblates voiced the need for more collaboration between the Oblate units within the regions and even at the inter-regional level. To such a need, I would also add the urgent need to join forces and collaborate more closely with the existing NGOs, not just with the religious-based NGOs, but also with the modern secular NGOs. In order to better respond to the missionary situation today, we must achieve a greater interdependence amongst ourselves – “*ad intra*” – as many Oblates are calling for, but also a more effective and believable interdependence “*ad extra*” with all who struggle for peace and justice. If the credibility of our Oblate public image is to be enhanced, I am suggesting that the mission of our hope in today’s world requires this twin commitment.

Some Reflections Regarding the Government of the Congregation

Francis G. Morrissey, O.M.I.

When I was asked by Father Bernard Keradec to share some thoughts with the Capitulars regarding the present form of government within the Congregation, I was a bit concerned that these ideas might be seen to be some type of recommendation for Chapter consideration. This is not my intention.

However, having been actively involved in preparing the revision of Part III of the Constitutions and Rules that was adopted at the 1998 General Chapter, I was aware of some of the issues facing those who were trying to apply this part of our CC & RR.

It goes without saying that the present Part III is, in some ways, a compromise text. It tried to take into account various viewpoints and interests. The form of government we now have is but one possibility for an international Congregation.

Certain basic assumptions serve as a background for an understanding of our present text: (1) we were structuring a missionary presence and not simply a group of priests and brothers, or some secular enterprise; (2) we did this to enable us to face the future; (3) each level of government was to be structured as an organic whole. Nevertheless, there are various ways in which these three principles could have applied, for they try to express values based on our missionary spirituality.

But, in addition to the spiritual characteristics of any authentic missionary body, a number of other significant values should be readily identifiable in our governance structures. Among these we could note four principal ones: (1) respect for the dignity of the persons involved; (2) flexibility, allowing for adaptation in various parts of the world according to circumstances; (3) subsidiarity, within the context of a well-functioning centre, allowing for decisions to be taken at the most appropriate level; and (4) strong leadership at all levels.

In addition, it follows that any governance structure would have to promote participation and co-responsibility. Likewise, animated by a spirit of service, it would have to be structured in such a way as to foster even greater interdependence and profound communion within the Congregation.

This being said, there still remains much room for adaptation.

Looking back in time, in 1995, at the Inter-Chapter meeting held in Bangkok, Thailand, a proposal on government was presented for consideration by the participants. Although it met with approval in many aspects, some dimensions caused concern, and so the text to be presented to the 1998 Chapter was modified in consequence. What were some of the points that did not then meet with general satisfaction?

Perhaps the first one was the proposal that Major Superiors (Provincials, etc.) and their Councillors would be elected. The purpose of this recommendation was to promote more direct involvement of Oblates. By exception, a Unit could request appointment of a Provincial or Major Superior.

Other proposed changes concerned terms of offices (12 years for the Superior General, non renewable; five years for Provincials and other Major Superiors); the characteristics of various Units (Provinces, Delegations, Missions), especially regarding a minimum number of members, caused concern; the re-organization of local communities (established, constituted and district communities) was not well understood; etc. But these were more in the line of details than substantial changes.

It was perhaps at the level of the Central Government that more significant changes were proposed and caused concern. Among these:

(1) There would be at least four full-time Assistants General, in addition to the Vicar General; at least some of the Assistants would have a specific portfolio, others would be at large, being available more particularly for visitations.

(2) There would no longer be General Councillors; this would have simplified the dynamics of the General Chapter, because it was felt that the elections of the Councillors were not always taken as seriously as they warranted.

(3) The Superior General (or Vicar) and two members of the Council would take ordinary decisions.

(4) The full Council would meet three times a year; at one of those meetings, the presidents of the Regions would attend. This third meeting would be more consultative in nature and have as its major purpose the sharing of information and long-range planning and animation within the Congregation.

(5) Also, a revision of the General Offices was envisaged. There were varying opinions as to which office holders should be considered to be part of the Central Government.

(6) Although the Bangkok document did not retain the suggestion, there had also been a rather strong call to give some measure of authority to the Regions, in view of the fact that two Regions, rather than individual provinces, were already sponsoring new missions. The same applied to regional novitiates, scholasticates, etc.

(7) There were also very new proposals regarding membership in the General Chapter.

It could be asked why these suggestions were not accepted. Many reasons could be given, not all of them of equal importance, nor all of them shared by the same persons.

- (1) A number of Provincials felt that since the President of the Region would be called once a year to the meeting of the Central Government, this would make him a sort of super provincial, thus taking away the autonomy of the individual Provincials.
- (2) Also, a number of participants felt that the Unit represented by the President of the Region might be unfairly advantaged.
- (3) If a Provincial from a large province were elected President of the Region, he would have too much work to do, and would thus be unable to assume all his responsibilities towards the Oblates of his Province.
- (4) On the other hand, while recognizing the ambiguity of the job description of General Councillors, a number of participants felt that their presence and role in the Region was very positive, since the Councillor was not identified with any particular Province or Unit; this also provided for a broader input when decisions were taken at the level of the General Government.
- (5) A number also felt that, without the General Councillors, the Central Government would no longer be as representative of each of the Regions and could even become too inward looking. Indeed, major decisions might have been taken by only three persons.
- (6) In addition to these points, many also objected to the idea of having elections of provincials as the ordinary form of selecting of leadership. The same could be said regarding the proposed term of office (5 years for provincials, with an exceptional possibility of a second term).
- (7) As to representation in the General Chapter, one proposal that was seriously questioned, but which eventually was retained by the 1998 Chapter, concerned the counting of Oblates in first formation. In order to favour those Units where there was strong growth, Oblates in first formation were counted twice.

So, where did this leave us? At the 1998 General Chapter, it was decided to maintain the general structure that had been in place since 1972: a Superior General, a Vicar General, two Assistants General, and six General Councillors. The number of Councillors depends on the number of Regions within the Congregation, and the General Chapter determines this before the elections take place.

In my opinion, the system has worked well, although perhaps it does not fully meet the criterion of inter-dependence that was to mark our structures. The ordinary Oblate feels somewhat removed from government and related issues. The model proposed had arranged for inter-dependence between the Central Government and the Regions, by having the Presidents of the Regions sit once a year with the General Administration. It provided for inter-dependence between the Provinces and other Units and the Region by having the officers of the Conference of the Region chosen from among the leadership of the Units. It also allowed involvement by individual Oblates in favouring elections, rather than relying on consultation.

Of course, as with so many other points, none of these were absolutes. There are many ways of fostering inter-dependence. Indeed, no form of government is perfect or will satisfy everyone.

So, what will be the position of the 2004 General Chapter? Without taking any position on the issues, I could mention a certain number of areas that might be considered by the forthcoming Chapter:

1. The number of Regions

No matter how the Central Government is structured after the 2004 Chapter, there will still be a need for the Regions. Since there is a strong likelihood that Canada and the United States will become one Region, it might be an appropriate moment to reconsider the other Regions within the Congregation. Perhaps some of the more extensive ones could be divided into two, taking new growth into account. Of course this would have serious implications for membership on the General Council, if we retain our present form of government.

2. A governance role for Regions?

Although there is reluctance in some quarters to recognize that the Regions could have a government function, in addition to their animation role, nevertheless we must recognize that, in practice, they do exercise such a role, as, for instance, when joint formation projects are undertaken. It might be time to consider the nature of the Region within the Congregation.

3. The criteria for being a Unit within the Congregation

Another factor that will have to be addressed, it seems to me, is the multiplicity of government Units within the Oblates. Many of these are small; they do not all have appropriate leadership potential, or sufficient human and financial resources. Since, originally, our Units were often based on language factors and on the country of origin of the original missionaries, perhaps it might be time to consider what are the implications of being an international Congregation, as distinct from an Institute established in some 65 countries.

4. An international Congregation?

In this regard, if we were to move to a more international model, there would be serious implications for the way our finances are managed. Presently, we are very decentralized in this regard, as we are in other matters relating to government. Is this the only way to proceed? I doubt it, particularly since the financial and personnel resources are not evenly distributed among the Units. Some well-established Units are growing older, while others are in full expansion, but with very limited resources.

5. Chapter representation and Oblates in first formation

Although any time a General Chapter touches the thorny issue of Chapter representation, there usually are serious difficulties, perhaps this Chapter could consider whether it is necessary, or even appropriate, to continue the practice of counting Oblates in first formation twice. This would return us to a more realistic understanding of the principle, one Oblate, one vote, and its application in daily life.

6. The relation between Assistants General and General Councillors

A revision of the present form of Central Government should not be undertaken lightly, since there are many ramifications. A change in one article often entails modifications in other ones. So, an overall view is preferable.

Perhaps it might be better to have the Chapter request that a post-capitular commission be established, to examine anew, in the light of proposals received from the Capitulants, new possibilities for government, which would then be examined at the next General Chapter. On the other hand, it might be necessary to make some changes now, particularly as we listen to the experience of those who have applied the new Part III of the CC & RR over the past few years and have noted some deficiencies in our present text.

No matter which option is chosen, a lot of serious work is required, since this has very practical implications for the life and mission of the Congregation in the years ahead.

A Few Reflections on the Significance of the General Chapters

Michel Courvoisier, O.M.I.

N.B. These reflections are the sole responsibility of the author. They arose in my mind as a member of one Chapter and a relatively close witness of many others. A rapid rereading of history has enriched my thoughts. I have no other pretension than to advance research. It should be added that these remarks are limited to the Oblate experience; other Institutes of men and women also have their original experience.

1. The General Chapter, a useful concept, a great diversity of realities

The Oblate tradition considers the coming Chapter, convoked for 2004, as the 34th General Chapter. This manner of counting includes the Chapter of 1818, which brought together all the Missionaries of Provence, the Founder, three scholastics and a priest who had been ordained six weeks. The same designation is given to the Chapter of 1861, which united 22 Oblates, almost all French; to the Chapter of 1947, with 70 capitulars from ten nationalities; to the Chapter of 1998, with a hundred capitulars coming from forty countries...The definition of the term "General Chapter" also changed in Canon Law and in the Oblate Constitutions.

The words of 1980: "The General Chapter is the highest authority in the Congregation" (C. 125) was unthinkable at the time of the Founder. It seems to date merely from the time of Vatican II. Canon 631 #1 of the 1983 Code has an equivalent formula.... What about the 2004 Chapter?

My remarks bear on three points:

- In what way does the General Chapter represent the Congregation?
- How much authority does the General Chapter actually have in the Congregation?
- Significance of the General Chapter.

2. In what way does the General Chapter represent the Congregation?

This reflection must begin from the factual history of the Congregation in its different stages. First, a major observation must be kept in mind. No one seriously questions the historical continuity from the small "Society of the Missionaries of Provence" of Aix in January 1816, to the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in the course of the 188 years of its existence. Crises were not lacking, some of external origin (expulsions, world wars with their ruptures), and others of internal origin. Some Institutes have known schisms or major changes in orientation. Up to the

present, the Oblates have lived with both fidelity and renewal, maintaining ties between themselves throughout space and time. This effort must not be forgotten.

This having been said, the Code of 1983 reminds us that: “the general chapter is to be so formed that, representing the entire institute, it should be a true sign of its unity in love...” This concern that the Chapter must represent the “entire institute” does not seem to have been explicitly formulated among Oblates. Although implied, this concern was present over the years, as in the many attempts to formulate rules for the selection of the capitulars.

Setting aside the time of the Founder, the Congregation has lived for more than a century with a clear rule: the Chapter consists of the members of the departing General Council, the provincials and vicars of the missions, the delegates of the provinces and vicariates (one, each time), and four members invited by the Superior General. Since the vicars apostolic were also religious superiors, the photos (in black and white) of former Chapters contained a lot of purple (!) This rule of one delegate per entity harbored a serious inconvenience. In the Chapter of 1959, the mission vicariate of Whitehorse, with 31 Oblates, had two capitulars (the vicar of the mission and the elected delegate), the same number as the St. Joseph Province (Montreal) with 631 Oblates. The Constitutions of 1966 decided that the provinces with more than 200 members would elect two delegates...

It would be tedious to recall the successive answers that the following Chapters brought to this difficult question: delegates from the Oblate Delegations of more than 20 members, provincials of vice-provinces, or of provinces containing less than 100 members could come to the Chapter only if they were elected as capitulars by their province (some provincials were not elected!). The Oblates in formation were counted twice in the total membership of the province. The configuration between electoral units and actual entities, considered as arbitrary, was not taken into account. The present Rules determine the number of delegates per Region, charging the regional conference of provincials with the responsibility for assigning them as equitably as possible within their district.

The history should also be told, though less exemplary, of the place of the Brothers. They were electors for the first time (but not eligible) for the Chapter of 1972. Since 1982 they may be elected as capitulars. The Congregation has come up with various rules to allow the Brothers to be capitulars (usually one per region)...

What can we say? Even modern democracies approach the problem of representation with arguable solutions that are always being questioned. Does “representing the entire Institute” mean representing the persons? Surely each Oblate has a right to be represented, but does that mean that the older Oblates should be represented by an elder, and the younger Oblates by a younger one, just by way of example? How can electoral units be established? There will always be Oblates, perhaps even a fairly large number, who will not be represented. Does this mean rather to represent by dynamic missions, or as we say sometimes, *the vital forces*? But, according to what rules? Can we envisage, for example, that China be without representation at the Chapter, if its Delegation has only 10 members? Should not any undertaking that is felt to be of major import at that moment in history have a voice at the Chapter? The designation of four capitulars by the Superior General (it is a personal responsibility, but is usually taken after consultation with his Council) sometimes affords some correctives for the manifest insufficiencies of the elections...

The problem, with the Oblates as elsewhere, remains open and crucial... It becomes serious with the evolving age pyramid, since the community reality (all the Oblates) no longer coincides with the missionary reality (the active Oblates). The wager is that a balance needs to be found, for better

or for worse, between these two aspects that are always in tension with one another in a religious missionary Congregation.

3. How much authority does the General Chapter actually have in the Congregation?

Our Constitutions, in keeping with the Code of Canon Law, state that the General Chapter is the supreme authority in the Congregation. It may be worth asking ourselves a few questions. Has this always been the case? How does this apply? Is it even advisable? Here are a few modest thoughts on this point:

We can say that in the course of history, the decisions of the Chapters fall into five categories: approval of the outgoing administration's management, elections, modifications in the Constitutions, directional documents, and various kinds of decisions. We shall pursue each of these categories in succession, keeping in mind that the question was evidently posed very differently at the time of the Founder...

- a. The approval given by the Chapter to the outgoing administration** is an important moment in each Chapter. It follows the report presented by the outgoing Superior General. Here the Chapter is fulfilling its role as supreme authority, since the Superior General is rendering an account. The same applies to the approval of the financial management.
- b. The elections.** This refers mainly to the election of the Superior General (which occurred 13 times since 1861, and is now on the program every six years, except for major reasons), the election of the Vicar General (6 times up to now) and the other members of the General council. Undeniably, this is the moment at which the Chapter exercises its supreme authority. We need not emphasize the importance of the choices made at this moment for the life and mission of the Congregation. Often enough, certain capitulars, perhaps even most of them, must admit that they have a very inadequate acquaintance with one or the other candidate whose name comes before them. Hence the interest in everything that precedes the vote, namely, the positive and discreet exchanges among the capitulars, the gatherings of capitulars from the same Region, or of those who already know each other. The elections must be prepared as much on the part of the electors as on the part of those to whom the Congregation hopes to confer responsibilities (it is normal that one to be elected have the time to prepare himself spiritually and psychologically for a task that is often heavy, and that he be reminded that all are counting on him, this avoids refusals which could have a serious impact). Procedures for selecting the candidates are indispensable; they must follow up on the previous informal exchanges.
- c. The Constitutions and Rules.** Eight or nine of the Chapters had as their main, if not exclusive, theme the revision of the Constitutions. Each time, an ad hoc commission prepared the text. Twice, the text prepared by this commission was not accepted as the basis for work by the Chapter, due to a lack of precise directives from the commission, and due also to the lack of consensus within the Chapter... Refusals as well as positive votes are authoritative acts of the Chapter.
- d. Recent Chapters have published Directional Documents.** Three documents in 1972: *Missionary Outlook*; *Community*; *Structures. Missionaries in Today's World*, in 1986;

Witnessing as Apostolic Community in 1992; *Evangelizing the Poor at the Dawn of the 3rd Millenium*, in 1998. These documents are meant for the whole Congregation, and setting them into practice is conferred specifically to the newly elected General Administration. They are in a sense the charter of the new government (cf. C.126). Up to what point do the capitulars who have voted on these documents feel responsible for applying them? The development of these documents is often difficult, due to the lack of time, the attempt to say too much, not being accustomed (or disciplined enough?) for editing this type of document, etc. The Chapter would benefit, without a doubt, by limiting itself to what is essential (and not keep restarting everything) while relying on the help of experts, as was done at the Council. Even in conditions that are far from optimal, a Chapter can also exercise its authority here.

- e. Various other decisions are adopted by the Chapter.** One is taken aback by the attention given to the questions of precedence at the time of the Founder, or the importance given to whether or not a specific invocation should be included in our litanies... We are no longer at that point. *Filters*, for better or worse, are in place to receive or not, the intentions of the capitulars. The Chapter of 1992 voted in five declarations and messages, one of which was on the 500th anniversary of the beginning of evangelization in the Americas, and another on social communications and the media. The most important decision was on finances and sharing; pledging to share the capital so as to increase the financial autonomy of all the provinces. The Chapter of 1998 reopened the question of sharing and that of the media (Obcom). The letter of the General Chapter to the laity who share in our charism (some lay associates addressed the Chapter) was very significant. The proposition to annihilate the debt of developing countries, which was accepted by the Chapter, should not be forgotten.

Having said all this, it remains difficult for a General Chapter to accept its dimensions as the highest authority in the Congregation, and it will become more and more difficult for many reasons. The main one is the extreme diversity of the missionary and community situations in which the Oblates live and work, (these situations being seen as the place in which we choose to hear the call of Jesus Christ), a diversity which allies itself to the extreme diversity of cultures (and languages - cf. translation problems at the Chapter and elsewhere...). This diversity already exists within provinces. Besides the Delegation of Belém, which is presently integrated into the Brazil Province, the Province of France is now aware of its diversity, counting at least fifteen basic languages among its members... It would be useless to insist on the problems that this diversity poses to the capitulars. Yet it is from this point that the Chapter must build. Uniformity, cultural unity, even the predominance of one country or a group of countries (France, during one hundred years, North America) are now and will become more and more a thing of the past. The Chapter tends therefore to look for someone with leadership, from whom solutions are expected.

For a long time, the authority in the Chapter, in fact, if not by right, was that of the Superior General. It is not, or rather it is no longer in conformity with our Constitutions. A new balance must be found. The preparation for the Chapter, as it was being organized these last years, was at the same time indispensable and difficult. It is impossible for a poorly prepared Chapter to find the needed serenity or efficiency, and thus find its rhythm. On the other hand, a Chapter that is too carefully prepared will find itself cramped in a pre-established and rigid enclosure, which does not allow it to take up its incumbent responsibilities.

It appears basic that the capitulars must be well aware of the stakes involved at the Chapter, that

they keep the whole Congregation on their horizon, and not just the community that sent them there, so that they can prepare themselves appropriately for the responsibilities they will exercise.

4. Significance of the General Chapter

Constitution 125: "The General Chapter is the highest authority within the Congregation. It meets regularly to strengthen the bond of our unity and to express our members' participation in the life and mission of the Congregation.

United around Christ, the Oblate family shares the lived experiences of our communities as well as the challenges and hopes of our ministry. The Chapter is a privileged time of community reflection and conversion. Together, in union with the Church, as we discern God's will in the urgent needs of our times, we also thank the Lord for the work of salvation which he accomplishes through us."

Constitution 126: "The General Chapter elects the Superior General and his Council, articulates our missionary vision, determines General policy for the Congregation and makes whatever decisions are required."

Let us reconsider these different objectives:

- ***Strengthen the bond of unity***, suggests the will to be, and the sense that they are, all Oblates, entirely together and thus open to the dimension of the Congregation. This means recognizing (and sometimes just discovering) that there are Oblates in provinces other than my own, who speak another language, are involved in other projects, have other ways of announcing the Gospel and living in community. This must be acknowledged, and an effort must be made to accept the consequences for myself and for the life of my province.

It is the appropriate responsibility of the Superior General to be the link of unity (C.133). But the Chapters also share that responsibility. The capitulars meet firstly to affirm that we are all of the same Congregation, choosing once again to build together. Implicit in the idea of the General Chapter is the notion we have of the unity of the Congregation. Perhaps we should re-tell what is in 2004, a religious and missionary Congregation with a worldwide dimension and vocation.

- ***share the lived experiences***. That was accomplished formerly by the reports of the provinces that filled hundreds of pages in the volumes of *Missions*. We have not found a means of truly sharing lived experiences. How should we proceed?
- ***share the challenges***, which the Oblates perceive along with the Church, sensing the need of people for salvation... Here again, in such a complex world as ours, how to rise to the occasion?
- ***discern God's will***: Considering the needs for salvation, in the midst of the calls that are heard, how can one discern concretely what is God's will for the Congregation. Where is God leading us, in what missionary endeavors, by what means, etc? Can there be only one answer, or rather differentiated answers, and to which point? The *Will of God* would rather deserve theological elucidation.
- ***a time to thank the Lord***: it is good to mention this, as a necessary reminder, especially when times are difficult. Luke 10: 17-24 should be re-read. May this thanksgiving express itself in

our sharing as a Congregation... may the liturgy not be experienced as an extra, after discussions that are at times animated, may our prayer reveal our shared life and the mystery of Jesus active (through us) in the world.

- ***a time of conversion***: each one can discover the places where he is called to personal conversion, and to believe in the Good News for others as well as for himself. Living in Chapter means to accept, at each moment, becoming and making one's self other, to meet, greet, share, search together, pray together, hear new callings, and set off on the road to answer with others.

All of this is evidently the task of the Chapter. How can we not recognize that each Oblate is called to this level, to this step forward?

In the convocation letter for the Chapter, our Superior General wrote: following up on the *Immense Hope* project: the precapitular commission "has proposed the theme: 'Witnessing to Hope: A Call, Our Mission' ... The Chapter is the time of grace to receive anew this spiritual fire and revive its flame, letting it stir in our hearts a renewed missionary zeal. It is a moment to build the unity and spirit of communion among ourselves, especially at a time when the landscape of the Congregation is turning increasingly multi-cultural... We realize more and more how precious a gift St. Eugene's charism has been and is for our time..." *Witnessing to Hope*, the call must reach everyone, the missionary response is in our hands.

Justice and Peace through Inter-Religious Dialogue

Eliseo "Jun" Mercado, O.M.I.

A. Religions' New Assertiveness...

Zogby International Polling Firm and the University of Rochester's Religion Department (www.zogby.com) reveal that people accord a higher priority to religion than to politics. To add flavor to the survey, religion polled as a high priority in the lives of more than two-thirds of the Israeli, Muslims and born-again Christians.

Another important phenomenon that baffles "modern people" (the secular man) is the re-introduction of religions in the public discourse, more specifically in peace making. Religions are no longer considered as simple variables in the equation that go up and down depending on the moods and tempers of the protagonists. Today, there is a growing awareness that religions are considered neither simply a dimension in a conflict or peace building, nor merely a mobilizing vehicle for national or ethnic passions. In fact, "religious identity permeates groups and provides the well of assumptions that direct decisions and behavior" (Roy Hange. *The Curtain of Fire: Religious Identity and Emerging Conflicts* at MCC Web Site).

This consciousness begins to emerge prominently after the publication in the mid 90s of the seminal work of Prof. Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*. It is his thesis that religion forms civilizations and it is the defining element of culture. His thesis contends that the fundamental source of conflict in the postmodern world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. He believes that the great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. The new divisions in the world are defined not in terms of their political or economic systems or in terms of their level of economic development but rather in terms of their culture and

civilization (Huntington, Samuel P., *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

In this light Huntington sees seven major civilizations that are characterized by certain consanguinity and a basic belief system. His theory indicates that through these civilizations, peoples will share understanding, concerns, a belief system and worldview. And these are the natural ways for people to come together. This is not something that is often misunderstood as a return to the “pre-rational” and the superstitious stage. Instead it points to a post rationalist period in which a new set of human sensibilities and an urgent and promising new agenda is emerging.

In a similar vein, Francis Fukuyama (cf. his two works: *The End of History* and *Trust, Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*) notes that for prosperity in business there is need for trust between people. He acknowledges sets of values cited by Weber as keys to capitalism: diligence, saving, rationality, innovation, risk-taking, etc... But Fukuyama opines that these will not work in the economic order unless they are under girded by a sense of honesty, reliability, cooperation and responsibility. If these are lacking and there is no trust, then initiative cannot go forward nor will it achieve its reward. This foundational set of virtues comes from the cultures, which in turn are grounded in faith.

It is very interesting that the two most popular and thought-provoking thinkers today view the future by pointing that rationality has not been enough and will not be enough, and that there is need for an under girding confidence and trust in culture built upon family and faith.

Moreover, both Huntington and Fukuyama seem to point out the shifting focus from the economic and political concerns to self-identity and its religious roots in terms of values, cultures, religions and civilizations. The same shift appears in various forums and bodies that include the UN, the White House and the Capitol Hill in the US, the EU and the International Financial Institutions (WB, IMF and ADB). This is particularly discernable in various forums like the World Social Forum (WSF), WTO, and the Summit Meetings and Conference in Rio on the Environment, Kyoto on Climate Change, Johannesburg on Sustainable Development, Cairo on the Family and Beijing on Women.

B. A New Paradigm in our Inter-religious Relations

Our departure from Huntington is the fact that we hold that relationships involving values, cultures, the self-identity of cultures and religions that generate civilizations need not be conflictual.

What we need today is a new hermeneutic of religions. It is a hermeneutic that reads and interprets religions and civilizations albeit their diversities as able to contribute one to another. It also provides the capacity to the “secularists”, both in the academe and the halls of power, who have neither the capability to deal with religious differences or people who for their own purposes manipulate religions. The present “incapacity” is a result of enlightenment prejudice and the seeming blind commitment to a 19th century nation-state concept in international relations that exclude religions from the equation. Thus a new hermeneutic makes possible new attitudes and paradigms in the construction of new relations between religion and civilization, which are most important in peacemaking and reconstruction work.

We live amid many and diverse faiths, cultures and peoples. Though many and different, we need not be hostile or indifferent to each other. In fact, these diversities invite us to make a shift in our

paradigm from hostility to partnership; from indifference to involvement; and from being closed to being open to one another.

This relational paradigm teaches us that notwithstanding our differences and diversities we all live on this earth, in fact, on this piece of land. The bottom line is the affirmation that we are together in the journey through life. For better or worse, we are neighbors and we hope and believe that as neighbors, we can be partners in building not only a better world but also a friendlier community where you and I, and our children live as brothers and sisters. I offer three examples that present this type relational paradigm.

First is the story of the Buddhist Monk Kaha Ghosananda (The Supreme Patriarch of Cambodia's Buddhism) on using the traditional Buddhist practice to build peace. He shows the way out from the great chasm created by defeat-victory, killer and killed, enemy and friend. In the traditional Buddhist way, these contradictions are embraced and find "resolution" in the loving kindness that flows from the hearts where seeds of goodness are once again sown.

Second is the experience of Rusmir Mahmutcehajic in Bosnia on the religious roots of tolerance. The story revolves around a Bosnian word "gehuta" which for him holds the key to social reconciliation and social cohesion between and among different "sacred" communities. The "gehuta" is often translated as "wrong" or "sin" that violates the connections with all that is in and about us. On the basis of "gehuta", the door opens to the deepest content of one's being, the deepest content of sacred communities and the dominant content of each Bosnian inhabitant to re-establish the connections among the inhabitants – Muslims, Christians and Jews – to live together again.

Third is the story of Raya Kalisman, founder and Director of the Center for Humanistic Education in Israel. In the story of the Tower of Babel, God commanded people to speak in different languages so that they would NOT understand each other. In Raya's center, the teachers and the pupils pray that the day will come when peoples again speak the same language and begin re-build the tower... the Tower of Peace. This is NOT an attempt to change the world, it is an attempt to find a common language, to look people straight in the eye and ask "Hey brother/sister, how are you?"

C. Religious as People of Peace

Concretely, we (Religious) are challenged to walk into the following steps:

The first step is to take our pluralism seriously. We need to seriously experience amid diversities, our kindredness.

Second is to be open – to learn not only from each other but rather to live with each other in tolerance. We need a willingness to accept, to trust and to live together.

Third, is our commitment to guarantee the rights and dignity of every person regardless of faith, gender, culture and color within our society/community.

The basis of this commitment is our belief that all peoples, even though they belong to different religions, nations and ethnic tribes - all form ONE human family, created by the ONE and same God, living in the same world/community, and destined for a common end.

In inter-religious relations there is one word that can describe our efforts and endeavors – TRUST! Trust is NOT a universal element in human relations. It has to be slowly, patiently and sometimes painfully built through time.

For emphasis, I take a portion of John Paul II's address at Casablanca Morocco on 18 August 1985.

“People do not accept their differences. They do not know each other sufficiently. They reject those who have not the same civilization. They refuse to help each other. They are unable to free themselves from egoism and from self-conceit. But God created all equal in dignity, though different with regard to gifts and talents. Mankind is a whole where each one has his/her part to play. The worth of the various peoples and of the diverse cultures must be recognized. The world is as it were a living organism. Each one has something to receive from the others and has something to give to them.”

The promotion of inter-religious dialogues is now being undertaken everywhere, precisely to promote, advocate and “school” people and religious to the basic concept of religious tolerance and partnership in our diverse world.

John Paul II's Addresses in Syria in May 2001 once again reiterate the Church's commitment to inter-religious dialogue. “It is my ardent hope that Muslim and Christian religious leaders and teachers will present our two great religious communities as **COMMUNITIES IN RESPECTFUL DIALOGUE, NEVER MORE AS COMMUNITIES IN CONFLICT**”. It is crucial for the young to be taught the ways of respect and understanding, so that they will not be led to misuse religion itself to promote or justify hatred and violence. Violence destroys the image of the Creator in his creatures, and should never be considered as the fruit of religious conviction.”

“Better mutual understanding will surely lead to a more objective and comprehensive knowledge of each other's religious beliefs at the practical level, to a new way of presenting our two religions **NOT IN OPPOSITION**, as it happened too often in the past, **BUT IN PARTNERSHIP FOR THE GOOD OF THE HUMAN FAMILY.**”

“Many serious obstacles remain, yet the first step towards peace must be a steadfast conviction that a **SOLUTION IS POSSIBLE WITHIN THE PARAMETER OF INTERNATIONAL LAW AND THE RESOLUTION OF THE UNITED NATIONS**. I appeal once more to all the peoples involved and to their political leaders, to recognize that confrontation has failed and will always fail. Only a just peace can bring the conditions needed for the economic, cultural and social development to which the people of the region have a right.”

There are an increasing number of believers and faith-communities that have embraced peace as their lifetime commitment and advocacy and they have also become peacemakers themselves. To cite a few examples...

- The Mennonites had spent time, resources and expertise to bring about the conciliation between the Sandinistas and the Miskito Indians. The MCC is active worldwide in being peace “activists” both in the advocacy of non-violence and the promotion of justice, peace and integrity of creation.
- The Quakers did likewise in their conciliation and mediating role in the Nigerian Civil conflict. Similarly, the Quakers through their “Friends” network continue to spearhead peace movements all over the world.
- The Community of Sant'Egidio in their advocacy and actual mediation in the peace settlement in Mozambique. The peace-building constituency of the Community has become one of the biggest worldwide. Their active peace advocacy and participation in the shaping of the new

peacemaking role of expanded Europe are two major activities that re-define the role of Church peacemaking and the leadership of the laity in such a movement.

- The various Christian churches in South Africa in their role to put an end to apartheid, peaceful settlement, and in the healing and reconciliation process as symbolized by the Anglican Archbishop and Nobel Peace Laureate, Desmond Tutu.
- Notre Dame University's active participation in the peace processes in Southern Philippines both in the Philippine Government and Moro National Liberation Front Peace Settlement in 1996 and in the on going peace talks between the Philippine Government and the Islamist group, MILF. The University has spearheaded peace education in Southern Philippines and the NGOs active participation in the peace process that has been, for years, seen as the sole competence of the government and the rebel front.

Religious leaders, particularly the peoples of the Book, with few exceptions, are coming together to pray and work for peace. A new peace movement on the basis of religions has become a reality with a growing peace constituency worldwide following John Paul II's initiative at Assisi in 1986 by inviting religious leaders to pray for peace and to discover at the very core of their varying religious traditions the peace that the world sorely needs.

Today, there is a growing sentiment/movement among the peoples and communities of faiths to oppose the use of religion not only in "legitimizing" wars but also in arousing hatred and inciting peoples to violence. More and more, a program of inter-religious dialogue for peace and common action for justice and integrity of creation is becoming a mainstream thrust in churches and religious movements. John Paul II is actively pursuing this new direction in all his efforts to exact from the religious leadership a strong commitment to peace. Thus in Assisi on January 24, 2002, the participants of the Vatican-initiated Inter-religious Assembly once again vowed to "work tirelessly in the great enterprise of building peace."

For peoples of faiths, the mission of peace making is NOT an option. It is a duty and an obligation (JP II). We are all called to be peacemakers. "Blessed are the peacemakers, they shall be called sons and daughters of God" (Mt. 5:9).

In Today's World....

Yves Chalvet de Récy, O.M.I.

The window of my office looks out on the Rosary Square in the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes. From there I can see, throughout the year, the pilgrims who go to the Grotto of Massabielle: men and women of every race, age, country, culture, of every language and of every color. This is my outlook! It is just like the mission I have to young people for many years now.

I'm French and thus European! I am Parisian by birth and thus French! But I am, above all, by choice and the grace of God, a son of Eugene de Mazenod. I dare to hope that in my genes as a Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate, there is a little of the fire and the Mistral that we are accustomed to say that Eugene de Mazenod carried in him all the time.

The following are some notes to play with according to how you wish to hear them, all together or one by one. They are seven in all, like the notes of the music scale, the days of the week or the sacraments.

The First Note: To the closest from the furthest away.

I have always been struck by the daring of Eugene de Mazenod. His constant difficulty, it appears to me, was to respond in the best and quickest possible way to all whose human, Christian or spiritual conditions required special care and attention.

The needs of human beings are still just as urgent: to find permanent employment, accommodation, clothing, food and care, to establish links with those in like situations... to hear that a life has a price and that we should not reduce it to performance or a well endowed bank account. The poor and weak of every kind make up the cost of a society that moves quickly, too quickly at times. The acceleration of time and conditions is, without doubt, one of the most striking elements of our modern world.

Our mission in today's world must be to make contact with those who have no hope, to be with those who are living in situations that lack comfort and basic justice. To the verbs "to be with" and "stay with", we can probably add "to go away", "to leave behind", and "to allow". In order to follow Jesus, the disciples had, with a certain regret, to leave everything. Our mission demands of us to be faithful to the Gospel.

The Second Note: The Grace of Mobility

To belong to an International Congregation is a great richness and opportunity! We often have the opportunity to move from one place to another, to establish new contacts, to discover other missionary realities, to visit one another, to maintain links. We don't necessarily have to go too far to have good experiences, but our world (which, fortunately, is not perfect) allows us to travel long distances quite quickly. I'm always astonished at the great number of journeys and the distances traveled by Jesus to proclaim the good news and "God knows" that at the time of the gospels destinations were unreliable and methods of transport were limited.

For six years now I have belonged to the International Community of Lourdes and during that time the composition of the community has changed by 80%. The great mobility of the Oblates (and often the efforts made by the Provinces of Europe and Africa) has always provided men for this mission. Once again, this is a great opportunity as well as a great grace that we have received. Let's not lose it!

The Third Note: Audacious for the Gospel.

Many years ago now, the Sunday program "Jour du Seigneur"¹, on French television, showed a documentary about Religious Life. It showed how, over the centuries, Religious Orders and Congregations were born in response to the urgent needs of society at the time, respecting at all times the contemplative and apostolic life.

Witnesses and events have brought forth a superb audacity. In every kind of situation and above all in situations of need and injustice (in society or in the Church) men and women have shown themselves as extraordinary witnesses to the Gospel.

In the course of the different meetings and exchanges that make up my daily mission, I'm struck by the vitality and by this audacity for the Gospel that is carried out in the tasks, sometimes humble and unrecognized, of the Missionary Oblates. I'm not sure if we pay enough attention to them.

¹ A Catholic production for the French television channel France 2 each Sunday.

“A new need, charity invents what is necessary, new means!” The Gospel always takes on the characteristics of the emigrant, the prisoner, the young person searching for security, the sinner, the wounded lover, the abandoned, those seeking justice, the condemned, the suffering, the voiceless, the homeless, the exploited, those searching for meaning and those seeking God. We must be daring in how we work with these characteristics!

The Fourth Note: Plural, International and Living Communities.

More than ever, to respond to the mission and accompany people at the cross-roads which can be the large metropolis, economic centers, and places of transit and passage, the immense hope that we wish to communicate to our contemporaries should push us to create, organize, or found plural, international and missionary communities.

International: made up of Oblates from different cultures, languages, coming from different provinces who wish above all to serve all peoples by showing the universality of the Good News.

Plural: organized around a given mission but not exclusively to that mission, the members of this community can exercise different ministries, each having the intention of placing their talents and abilities at the service of the mission. You can imagine, for example, a community in a large city whose main mission could be ongoing formation, or the spiritual exercises or again the media and communications but in which there is a direct link with those who are in charge of youth ministry, as well as chaplains to prisons, hospitals or refugees.

Here and there, the way is already available; the situation of the International community of Lourdes, although a little special, can be one example of this.

The Fifth Note: Special Care for Young People.

If my memory serves me right one of the first missions of Eugene de Mazenod was to young people. At the time of the Founder the situation of young people was very different from today. For young people the world of today often takes on the allure of “an obstacle course”, time moves fast, racing for results, having the right qualifications, difficulty in finding employment, exclusion from many things, difficulties with integration, seeking consolation in drugs, loss of landmarks, marginalizing those who cannot succeed in school, broken families. BUT in spite of all of this young people show a real dynamism, they respond to needs, give themselves to causes that touch them deeply, experience a deep solidarity with those of the past who were searching for meaning.

The concern with forming young Oblates, the investment of personnel, even the preparation of formators, their qualifications and above all the mission given to them by the Congregation, should not allow us to forget all the young people already in the world and in the Church. Young people very quickly cross frontiers and the Gospel as well!

The Sixth Note: The Age of the Media and Communication

In the age of the computer, giga-bytes, the Web, cable television, digital images and data, satellite radio and television have we ever thought about how, in Europe or elsewhere, a community could harness the mission of linking people with each other and providing them with a quality communications method that is based on the Gospel? Efforts to do this are provided in the past and continue today. Could we ever think of Oblates from the different European provinces coming

together to create a communications centre for this mission? Of course, you need the men, the competence, the imagination, the means... and the daring. I think this is a dream that can be turned into reality! I'm convinced that it can happen! It is once again for the sake of the Gospel that pushes us to cross all frontiers!

The Seventh Note: "In the name of God, be saints!"

The young volunteer helpers in the Youth Service at Lourdes voice their fears for the future, their hesitations in choosing their path in life and succeeding in living it – they say how much their generosity and their good will were taken seriously. In the discussion that followed, one person made the following profound statement: "You say that the Lord did not choose those who were capable, but he makes those he chooses capable."

This is our starting point: even the weak, the unrecognized, those without roots, the scorned have their chances if only we can give them a hand and a voice.

The holiness that we are called to is not an accumulation of merits or capacities, it appears to me to be a gift that is given to everyone: to be a reflection of a little of the Holiness of God. This reflection will take on the colors the Spirit gives us. To one the gift of teaching, to care, to invent, to preach, to accompany, to others that of preparing the ground, to give themselves to working for justice and respect for creation, to establish new plantations... and new missions! We are no better than others, we are no more competent than others, but, by the grace of God, the Lord has called us to be missionaries in the world of today with the mission: *tell the men and women of your time that God saves all people.*

This should be for us and for others an immense hope.

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