

VIE OBLATE LIFE

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Être supérieur majeur aujourd'hui¹

SUMMARY - Father Zago brings to our mind the role of the Major Superior. His article is divided in five sections. 1. To be Superior is not only a fonction but it is also a vocation and a mission inside and to the service of the Congregation. 2. The Major Superior of a Congregation is not the head of an enterprise but he is at the head of a body the like of the Church or of a community such as the one of Jesus with the Apostles. 3. As leader, the Major Superior must know what is happening in the world, in the Church and in the Institute, and take into consideration the new characteristics of the religious leadership. 4. The fields of leadership are many: the mission, the community life, the persons, the vocations, the primary formation and the continual formation. 5. A last aspect is the participated leadership which can be found at different levels: general administration, Congregation as a whole, a country or a region, all this functioning through the same oblate charisma that makes us one body and one family.

In conclusion, the author invites us to meditate on the leadership's characteristics of the Founder. If the future of the Congregation is mostly in the hands of the Provincials, it is also the responsibility of each Oblate, whether sick or healthy.

La vie religieuse est une réalité charismatique et communautaire. Et c'est à l'intérieur de la communauté que s'exerce le service de l'autorité. Avec l'évolution de l'expérience et de la compréhension de la communauté à différents niveaux, apparaît aujourd'hui une nouvelle manière de comprendre et d'exercer le service majeur, mais elle est aussi valable pour la fonction du supérieur local.

De l'autorité religieuse, je soulignerai cinq aspects:

- elle est une vocation et une mission;
- elle a un rôle important dans la vie de chaque communauté;
- son exercice exige certaines conditions et attitudes;
- son champ d'action est intégral;
- elle appelle à la participation à tous les niveaux.

I. Une vocation modelée sur le Christ

Être supérieur n'est pas seulement une fonction, mais encore une vocation et une mission à l'intérieur et au service de la Congrégation.

La charge de supérieur est un appel pour vivre plus authentiquement la vocation oblate et pour servir les confrères de telle sorte qu'ils puissent vraiment vivre le charisme oblat.

La première condition pour être supérieur est de vivre la vocation de tout Oblat, centrant sa vie dans le Christ, cherchant en lui lumière et force dans le service, voyant et aimant ses confrères, comme il les voit et les aime. Dans l'exercice de notre fonction de supérieur, nous avons certainement besoin de savoir-faire, de ressources, de techniques appropriées. Mais la source ultime est notre rapport avec le Christ, qui est source et modèle de l'autorité dans l'Église². Le Fondateur disait du supérieur: «Il remplira sa charge avec un grand esprit de foi, demandant souvent à Dieu le secours de sa grâce et examinant en sa présence comment il s'en acquitte³. Dans les décisions et les difficultés, le supérieur doit prendre conseil auprès de ses collaborateurs, mais il doit aussi savoir se mettre à genoux au pied du Crucifix, pour exercer convenablement sa tâche, comme le Fondateur y invitait souvent ses compagnons.

Les actes que j'exerce comme supérieur doivent être modelés sur le Christ, maître et guide de ses Apôtres. Jésus n'était pas seulement un missionnaire pour le peuple, il était aussi un maître, un guide pour ses Apôtres. Le supérieur est appelé à imiter le Christ dans son attitude

envers ses Apôtres.

Dans cette attitude, je vois trois domaines principaux:

1) Jésus a révélé à ses Apôtres d'une manière spéciale qui est son Père. Il les a éduqués à avoir un rapport de confiance et de communion avec Lui. D'une manière semblable, les supérieurs sont appelés à guider leurs confrères dans leur expérience de Dieu, à les aider à devenir de meilleurs religieux.

2) Jésus fait de ses disciples des apôtres, comme le souligne la Préface de nos Constitutions. La tâche du supérieur est d'aider ses confrères à devenir meilleurs missionnaires.

3) Jésus a vécu une authentique vie humaine avec ses Apôtres, les aidant à croître comme personnes. De pauvres pêcheurs sur le lac de Génésareth il en a fait des apôtres pour le monde. Les supérieurs sont appelés à aider leurs confrères dans leur croissance personnelle, parfois à les accompagner dans un processus de guérison.

Ainsi, les supérieurs, dans leurs communautés respectives, deviennent un signe du Christ Jésus⁴ et exerce un ministère semblable à celui du Christ à l'égard de ses Apôtres.

Les supérieurs majeurs, en particulier, ne devraient pas chercher à être missionnaires en exerçant d'autres ministères. Leur mission est d'être de bons supérieurs. Ce service est au coeur de la mission oblate, la mission qu'ils doivent favoriser chez leurs confrères.

II. Le rôle du supérieur majeur dans la vie de la Congrégation

La Congrégation n'est pas une entreprise, mais, comme aimait la définir le Fondateur, elle est un corps à l'image de l'Église, une communauté comme celle de Jésus avec les Apôtres ou de celle de Jérusalem, une famille semblable à celle de Nazareth, une communion qui se modèle sur la Trinité, un cénacle comme celui des Apôtres autour de Jésus, ou des Apôtres autour de Marie dans l'attente de l'Esprit. Toutes ces images chères au Fondateur indiquent que la Congrégation est une unité et que sa mission est solidaire⁵. C'est en fonction de cette unité qu'existent les différents échelons entre la communauté locale et la communauté provinciale, comme les autres regroupements tels que les <<clusters>> et les régions.

A l'intérieur de cette unité, se trouve aussi le service de l'autorité. <<Leur service est de coordonner et de diriger les efforts de tous dans l'évangélisation des pauvres; il est aussi de nous encourager à mener une vie inspirée par la foi et à partager intensément notre amour du Christ⁶. Être supérieur n'est pas seulement un rôle à exercer, mais aussi une manière d'être dans et pour la communauté.

La vie de la Congrégation repose en grande partie sur le supérieur majeur en raison du contact direct et constant qu'il a avec les personnes et les communautés et en raison de son leadership. Surtout dans les époques de changement et de transition, comme celle que nous vivons, le rôle du supérieur majeur est très important. Comme je le constate à l'occasion des visites, la stagnation ou le dynamisme, l'égarement ou la focalisation d'une Province sont souvent liés au leadership des supérieurs majeurs, actuels ou anciens.

Pour cette raison, le rôle du Supérieur général et de l'Équipe centrale est avant tout un service aux supérieurs majeurs, pour les rendre aptes à exercer leur fonction d'une manière efficace.

III. Les exigences du leadership du Supérieur majeur

L'exercice de l'autorité a des exigences qui évoluent avec la vie de l'Église, la compréhension et la nature de la vie religieuse et la situation du monde. Quatre aspects me semblent importants dans l'exercice de l'autorité aujourd'hui:

a) Celui qui est appelé au service de l'autorité dans la vie religieuse doit être conscient de ce qui se passe dans le monde, dans l'Église et dans l'Institut.

Le leadership se situe dans l'histoire, tout comme la vie religieuse est en pèlerinage avec l'humanité et le Peuple de Dieu. Dans le monde, la vie religieuse doit être signe et réponse évangélique. A l'égard de l'humanité, les religieux doivent partager l'amour du Père qui a envoyé son Fils pour le sauver⁷ et la compassion du Christ pour les foules abandonnées⁸. Le leadership

doit tenir compte du monde, petit et grand, dans lequel nous vivons parce que la mission doit toujours être une réponse aux défis actuels.

Dans l'Église, chaque Institut est un charisme spécifique et complémentaire. Il est donc nécessaire de marcher avec l'Église, suivre son mouvement d'ensemble. De grands événements, les synodes par exemple, ne peuvent être ignorés dans l'exercice de notre leadership.

La Congrégation est le milieu immédiat du leadership. Le supérieur majeur doit tenir compte des grandes orientations et du cheminement de l'ensemble de la Congrégation. Il y a avant tout les Constitutions et Règles et les directives des derniers Chapitres: <<Missionnaires dans l'aujourd'hui du monde>> (1986) et <<Témoins en communauté apostolique>> (1992). Puis viennent les Directoires et les Communiqués du Conseil général. Il est important également d'être attentif au cheminement de l'Institut, dont le Supérieur général donne un exposé de la situation à chaque Chapitre. Une Province ne peut être une barque autonome, autrement elle se perdra. Le leadership du supérieur se situe à l'intérieur du cheminement commun.

Je rappelle ici quelques traits de la Congrégation qui me frappent:

- nous nous trouvons dans une étape de transition et de renouveau vrai mais fragile;
- le dynamisme de la mission dépend toujours de la qualité et de l'authenticité des missionnaires;
- la présence oblate continue de changer en raison de la <<géographie>> des vocations;
- les situations sont différenciées dans la Congrégation, à l'intérieur d'une même Région, et quelquefois dans une même Province; l'accompagnement doit donc être différencié;
- lucidité, espérance, courage me semblent des mots d'ordre actuels.

b) Le leadership religieux a acquis, au cours des dernières années, de nouvelles caractéristiques.

Et ce, en raison de la nouvelle conscience de la vie religieuse, de la communauté, et de la mission. On peut souligner, en effet, quelques tendances dans le leadership religieux, un leadership caractérisé par la priorité:

- de *l'animation sur l'administration*. Celle-ci a son rôle - qu'il ne faut pas oublier - mais c'est l'animation qui est prioritaire.
- de *l'accompagnement* des personnes et des communautés *sur la dimension bureaucratique*. Plus que des structures, tout dépend de la qualité des personnes et des communautés.
- du *discernement de la volonté de Dieu sur la décision autoritaire*. Nous sommes tous au service de Dieu, dont nous devons découvrir la volonté. La mission est avant tout oeuvre de Dieu.
- de *l'animation intégrale* de tous les aspects du charisme *sur une préoccupation sectorielle*. Par exemple, dans les Vicariats apostoliques, le Provincial était chargé autrefois seulement de la vie des personnes et des communautés et non de l'apostolat, tandis qu'en d'autres Provinces on se souciait d'abord de la mission en oubliant le reste.
- d'une *subsidiarité* qui favorise la participation *sur la centralisation*, en respectant les divers paliers ou niveaux de la vie communautaire et donc de l'autorité. Il ne faut pas que le Provincial remplace régulièrement les supérieurs locaux ou que la communauté locale soit privée de ses responsabilités économiques ou missionnaires.
- de la *participation sur l'autoritarisme*. Aujourd'hui, il faut développer un *leadership collégial* pour comprendre les situations, discerner les solutions, prendre les décisions et animer l'exécution. Ce leadership collégial, pour un supérieur majeur, doit se réaliser à différents niveaux:
 - avec son Conseil: il faut développer solidarité et unité entre le Provincial et son Conseil;
 - avec les supérieurs de communauté: pour faire avancer la Province ou la Délégation, il faut bien choisir les supérieurs locaux, les préparer à leur tâche, les rendre partie prenante dans l'animation d'une manière régulière;

- avec les formateurs en vue de la formation première et continue;
- avec les différents comités: ceux-ci pourraient être suivis par des membres du Conseil.

J'ajoute deux remarques:

1) Dans les Provinces nombreuses, il est bon que le Provincial ait un ou plusieurs Vicaires qui pourraient être responsables de secteurs particuliers. Il est important qu'il y ait une vraie unité entre eux.

2) Pour parvenir à des décisions, il existe plusieurs méthodes, comme celle du vote démocratique ou du consensus. Il me semble que la méthode du consensus obtenue par discernement est la préférable dans la vie religieuse, qui est par nature, communautaire. Même en cela le supérieur a un rôle irremplaçable et une responsabilité qui lui revient.

c) Dans l'exercice de l'autorité religieuse, il faut respecter quelques priorités pratiques, sans se laisser conduire par ce qui est immédiat et sans se laisser accaparer par quelqu'un qui prétendrait s'imposer.

- Donner la priorité au *bien commun* sur le bien particulier. Par exemple, il ne faut pas se laisser absorber par les cas spéciaux, qui ne manquent pas et qui peuvent être difficiles. Il ne faut pas non plus donner priorité aux intérêts personnels, même apostoliques, au détriment de la tâche de supérieur majeur, qui est la mission principale.

- Donner la priorité à *ce qui favorise la vie* plutôt qu'à la gestion des structures. Aujourd'hui, par exemple, la promotion de la vie communautaire est à la base du renouveau des personnes et de l'apostolat. Dans la restructuration des oeuvres, garder ce qui donne courage aux membres, ce qui a le plus d'impact dans la mission.

- Donner la priorité à *ce qui prépare l'avenir*, à ce qui bâtit la vie et la mission de demain. Cela peut se réaliser dans l'affectation des personnes et dans la destination des fonds.

- Donner la priorité aux *personnes* sur les structures. Il s'agit de favoriser la croissance intégrale des Oblats, à travers la formation, dont l'animation est une dimension essentielle.

- Donner la priorité à la *qualité*, par exemple, dans l'acceptation des candidats et même dans l'apostolat.

- Le supérieur doit constamment pratiquer le discernement pour découvrir la volonté de Dieu. Il doit le faire personnellement et avec ses collaborateurs, en favorisant chez les individus et dans les communautés la même attitude.

d) Attitudes nécessaires dans l'exercice du leadership

Pour bien exercer le leadership, quelques dispositions de l'âme me semblent nécessaires. J'en indique quatre:

- *Accepter volontiers la tâche confiée*, trouver en elle notre joie, sans trop regretter ce que nous pourrions faire autrement. Notre sanctification, notre croissance personnelle, notre mission oblate se réalisent dans et par ce service de l'autorité bien accompli.

- *Croître dans l'amour de nos frères oblates*. Nous sommes une famille où doit régner la charité. L'autorité chez nous doit avoir ce caractère familial, tout comme l'obéissance doit être vécue dans la charité. Pour croître dans cet amour nous devons connaître nos confrères d'une manière empathique et dans la foi, prier pour eux.

- *Avoir confiance dans les collaborateurs*, les vicaires, le conseil. La confiance peut s'acquérir et peut grandir. Elle est nécessaire également entre les Supérieurs majeurs et le Supérieur général et les membres du Gouvernement central.

- Enfin, *trouver un équilibre* entre les différents aspects de notre vie et de notre ministère de Supérieur majeur. Même le pape a besoin de prière et de repos! Nous aussi nous en avons besoin.

IV. Les champs de notre leadership

Les champs de notre leadership sont multiples. Il est important de ne pas les oublier, parce que l'animation du supérieur doit tenir compte de tous. Je souligne quelques traits à l'égard de chaque secteur.

Pour la mission, je souligne l'importance d'avoir une vision complète de notre charisme oblat, sans sous-estimer un aspect ou l'autre de ses caractéristiques essentielles. Le Congrès sur le charisme oblat de 1975 en a indiqué neuf et les congrès de l'Association de Recherches et Études Oblates cherchent à les approfondir⁹. Au niveau pratique, chaque Province doit avoir des priorités qui soient une réponse aux besoins de l'Église dans laquelle nous vivons, selon notre charisme et nos possibilités réelles.

Pour le moment, je me contente de rappeler deux champs d'action privilégiés: 1) la nouvelle évangélisation à l'égard des trois secteurs de l'humanité¹⁰ et 2) les laïcs, sans oublier les associés oblats.

Pour la vie communautaire, je soulignerais 1) l'importance du choix et de la formation des supérieurs locaux, et 2) le besoin d'un rythme de vie communautaire qui permette l'éclosion des différentes dimensions: humaine-chrétienne-religieuse-missionnaire-financière. Il n'y a *pas d'avenir* pour les personnes et pour la mission sans communautés apostoliques authentiques.

Pour les personnes. -- Comme supérieurs, nous sommes responsables de ce que les Oblats font et de ce qu'ils sont, de leur apostolat et de leur croissance de missionnaires consacrés. D'où l'importance des rapports personnels, des contacts.

Pour les vocations. -- Il faut croire aux vocations et investir dans ce ministère. Le discernement est partout nécessaire.

Pour la formation première, je souligne l'importance 1) d'équipes de formateurs bien choisis et bien préparés, 2) de la confiance réciproque entre candidats et formateurs, et 3) de l'accompagnement personnel et communautaire.

Pour la formation continue, je souligne les aspects ordinaires de sa réalisation (rythme personnel et communautaire) plus que les programmes spéciaux, qui restent importants pour les individus et pour la Province. Un rythme régulier de vie personnelle et communautaire, qui favorise les différentes dimensions de notre vocation, vaut beaucoup plus que des sessions-chocs, faites de temps en temps.

V. Un leadership participé

Les Provinciaux partagent avec le Supérieur général la responsabilité et le souci de toute la Congrégation; ils auront avec lui des communications régulières et entretiendront des relations étroites avec les autres Provinces, spécialement celles de leur Région¹¹.

Les manifestations de ce leadership participé se situent à différents niveaux. J'en distingue quatre:

Au niveau d'un même pays, je pense qu'il faut augmenter la coordination. Comme elle existe au niveau politique et ecclésial, elle devra s'intensifier au niveau de la Congrégation. Je pense non seulement aux États-Unis et au Canada, mais aussi à la Belgique, à la République d'Afrique du Sud, au Cameroun, au Sri Lanka, au Brésil. Le mouvement est en marche en plusieurs endroits (v.g. France, Cameroun-Figuil) et doit s'intensifier pour le bien de la mission.

La collaboration régionale s'intensifie partout et les conséquences positives sont nombreuses pour la formation et l'échange de personnel. De cette manière, nous pouvons consolider certaines présences missionnaires et certaines priorités. Les Conférences régionales des Supérieurs aident au soutien réciproque, à l'information et à une meilleure planification.

Au niveau de toute la Congrégation, il y a des instances constitutionnelles, telles que les Chapitres et les Rencontres intercapitulaires. Il me semble qu'il faut valoriser davantage le Chapitre, en impliquant l'ensemble des Oblats autant dans la préparation que dans la mise en pratique de ses décisions ou orientations.

Les rapports entre l'Administration générale et les Supérieurs majeurs sont multiples, en vue surtout de l'animation. La Maison générale et le Centre international de Mazenod, à Aix, sont devenus des centres d'initiation, de formation, de renouveau. Le Service d'Information OMI, la Postulation et le Conseil général s'efforcent de produire des instruments d'animation: publication des <<Écrits oblats>> et de ressources pour l'animation communautaire. Cela a été rendu

possible grâce à la collaboration entre Supérieurs majeurs et le centre de la Congrégation. L'envoi des minutes des sessions des conseils et les contacts épistolaires sont des formes de communication et de communion.

Et tout cela est en fonction d'un même charisme oblat, qui fait de nous un seul corps et une seule famille. A un moment où l'on va vers une décentralisation administrative, il faut que l'unité de la Congrégation s'approfondisse.

V. Conclusion

Pour enrichir notre réflexion sur la tâche des Supérieurs majeurs, il est bon de regarder le Fondateur, et de rappeler certaines caractéristiques de son leadership.

Le Fondateur était un homme qui aimait ses Oblats comme un père, jusqu'à en mourir. Cela explique non seulement ses expressions d'attachement mais aussi ses réprobations pour ceux qui devenaient infidèles. Il pouvait dire qu'aucun fondateur ou supérieur général d'autres congrégations n'aimait les siens autant que lui. Il priaït constamment pour ses Oblats, il gardait avec eux un contact personnel.

Le Fondateur était animé d'un zèle missionnaire ouvert aux besoins de l'Église et prêt à prendre des risques. Il avait un grand cœur qui le rendait sensible aux appels, comme le montrent ses lettres pastorales ou ses mandements. La Congrégation s'est développée en dehors de France, parce qu'il avait dès les débuts un cœur ouvert sur le monde. Ainsi, 25 ans après la fondation, il s'est lancé dans toutes les directions du globe.

Il était prudent avant de prendre une décision et persévérant dans son exécution. Son ami Forbin Janson l'avait défini <<cul de plomb>> tant il lui semblait qu'il prenait du temps à se décider. Mais une fois la décision prise il ne lâchait pas.

Il a été homme de communication, à travers les rencontres personnelles et par ses lettres. Il s'appuyait sur ses collaborateurs et leur faisait confiance. Eugène de Mazenod n'aurait pas pu animer et administrer sans des collaborateurs comme les Pères Tempier et Casimir Aubert.

Mais la vraie source de son animation était son attachement au Christ et à l'Église. Le Fondateur était un passionné de Jésus Christ. Le Christ était au centre de sa vie, il était la source de son dynamisme. Il était aussi un incondicional de l'Église qui pour lui était un mystère à contempler et à aimer. Il a su répondre aux appels et aux défis de l'Église de son temps, malgré les difficultés.

L'avenir de la Congrégation dépend de chaque Oblat, du plus actif au plus malade. Mais l'avenir est surtout dans les mains des supérieurs à tous les niveaux. Les Supérieurs majeurs jouent un grand rôle, rôle quelques fois ingrat et délicat. Mais nous ne sommes pas seuls. Nous marchons ensemble. Et surtout nous faisons <<route avec Jésus dans la foi, l'espérance et l'amour¹²>>. Et cela nous donne confiance et joie.

Marcello ZAGO, o.m.i.

Notes :

1 Conférence donnée aux supérieurs majeurs (23 provinciaux et 4 supérieurs de délégation) dans la session d'initiation.

2 C 73.

3 MAZENOD, Eugène de, lettre au Père Mille, 26 août 1831.

4 C 80, 26.

5 ARENA, Domenico, o.m.i., *Unità e Missione nelle lettere del Beato Eugenio de Mazenod*, Roma 1992, pp. 183-241.

6 C 73.

7 Jn 3,16.

8 Mt 9, 35-38.

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- 9 Actes de ces congrès, dans *Vie Oblate Life*, 1977, fasc. 1 et 2; 1983, fasc. 2 et 3; 1990, fasc. 1 et
2.
10 RM 33-34.
11 R 97.
12 C 31.

The Life Cycle of an Early Oblate Establishment: St. Peter's Mission, Reindeer Lake¹

SOMMAIRE - A titre d'une des plus anciennes missions oblates du Nord-Ouest canadien, la mission Saint-Pierre du lac Caribou présente un excellent microcosme de l'implantation et du développement de l'apostolat oblat dans cette région. Dans l'historique du lac Caribou, on discerne les grandes lignes de l'oeuvre missionnaire et les facteurs qui déterminaient l'endroit et la date de l'établissement d'une mission. On observe aussi les rapports entre Oblats et le personnel de la Compagnie de la baie d'Hudson, les concurrents protestants, les populations autochtones, de même que l'adaptation d'une congrégation religieuse française au milieu canadien et le rôle du personnel. Dès son établissement, la mission Saint-Pierre est dans un état de changement et d'adaptation pour faire face aux nouvelles circonstances qui se présentent.

The establishment of St. Peter's Mission on Reindeer Lake (Brochet, Manitoba) provides an excellent case study of the early Oblate experience in the Canadian North West. At the time this establishment was proposed the Saulteaux missions in southern Manitoba had been abandoned in favour of the Chipewyan much further to the north who appeared to be more favourably disposed to the Christian message preached by the Oblates. In the history and establishment of St. Peter's Mission one finds the complex and interrelated factors which determined when and where missions were built, as well as the support services and resources that were available for their maintenance. The personnel who served there had varied characters and personalities and these were reflected in the relationships established with the local representatives of the HBC, the Native populations and rival denominations.

The history of St. Peter's Mission also demonstrates that the missionary experience was in a continuous state of flux, beginning with a difficult establishment followed by a period of consolidation and expansion. What is unique about Reindeer Lake is that throughout its history it always maintained the reputation of being the most difficult of all Oblate missions because of the isolation and hardship associated with serving there. In addition, the mission's history also reflects the administrative changes and expansion within the Oblate order in the North West. At the time of its establishment in 1861, St. Peter's mission was under the jurisdiction of the Vicar of Missions of St. Boniface (Alexandre Taché). In 1871, it came under the jurisdiction of Vicar of Missions of St. Albert (Vital Grandin) and twenty years later, in 1891, it passed to the Vicar of Missions of Prince Albert (Albert Pascal) and finally, in 1911, to the Vicar of Missions of Keewatin (Ovide Charlebois).

While on their way to Île-à-la-Crosse in 1846 Taché and *abbé* Louis-François Laflèche stopped at Frog Portage on the Churchill River where the HBC boat brigade bound for Île-à-la-Crosse transferred goods to other boats bound for Deer's Lake Post located at the mouth of the Reindeer River on Reindeer Lake. There, the two missionaries met the Chipewyan of Reindeer Lake, baptized those that were sick and were asked by the Indians to come to Deer's Lake Post and instruct them². At Île-à-la-Crosse, Taché discussed the matter of establishing a mission at Reindeer Lake with Roderick McKenzie, the district's Chief Factor, who supported the proposal and urged Taché to act as quickly as possible. McKenzie hoped that the presence of missionaries and a mission at Reindeer Lake would entice the Chipewyan to trap and trade in his district rather than at Fort Churchill³. At first, Taché was reluctant to undertake the venture because of his lack of experience but later agreed to go when it appeared that a mission among the Chipewyan would be successful. Charles Thomas, the clerk in charge of Deer's Lake Post, was instructed to publicize Taché's forthcoming visit and he informed McKenzie that the Chipewyan not only consented to Taché's mission but ardently desired the missionary's presence. To facilitate the long voyage, McKenzie asked his son Samuel, who was in charge of the HBC post at Rapid River, to arrange his annual voyage to Île-à-la-Crosse in order that Taché might return with him. Furthermore, McKenzie instructed Thomas to send a party to meet Taché at Rapid River and guide him to Deer's Lake post⁴.

Taché arrived at Reindeer Lake on 25 March and was astounded by the cordial and generous reception provided him by Thomas. A few days later, the Chipewyan began to arrive and as Taché began to instruct them he noted that they were much better disposed to the Christian religion than were the Cree who also were present. In this early stage of his career, Taché's knowledge of Chipewyan was very slight and he used Cree and Chipewyan interchangeably to the point of being unintelligible. He required an interpreter to provide instruction and to preach to a large audience but there was no competent person to provide this essential service. Thomas spoke Cree and had a knowledge of French whereas, among the Chipewyan, only two individuals understood Cree. During his two month stay at the post, Taché had no choice on Sundays but to make his sermon or instruction in French, have Thomas translate it into Cree and then have one of the two Chipewyan translate the Cree version into Chipewyan. The situation bordered on the humorous because neither Thomas nor the two Chipewyan could be said to have mastered the language they were translating. Furthermore, Taché described one of his Chipewyan translators as "*un des plus mauvais sujets*" whereas Thomas was Protestant and alleged to be fanatical. Taché was not overly concerned by these circumstances because "*on n'est ni éloquent ni persuasif quand on ne sait pas ce qu'on dit*". This comment clearly illustrates the conviction of the Oblates that a successful ministry necessitated a sound knowledge of the language of those who were being evangelized⁵.

On 22 May, Taché left Reindeer Lake via Frog Portage and returned to Île-à-la-Crosse where he arrived on 13 June. Prior to his departure, he had been asked by the Chipewyan to return and, thus, on 8 March 1847 he again set off for Reindeer Lake. On his arrival, he found the Indians he had met the previous year had returned and brought with them a number of more northern Caribou-Eater Chipewyan from Fort Churchill⁶. Among the latter Taché found a large number who responded positively to his presence and his message. Others had come out of curiosity, while a few hoped that the missionary would provide them with gifts or goods. There were others who sought Taché's spiritual powers in the form of "*la bonne médecine*" to combat an epidemic that had afflicted them in the winter⁷.

Taché had no facilities to group the Chipewyan together for instruction and, hence, had to visit them in their lodges. Although the number of Indians who attended the mission was not very significant, Taché was determined to continue his ministry because of the fear that Protestant rivals might establish their influence over the Chipewyan. Furthermore, Taché was convinced that the Indians had undertaken a long voyage to see him and be instructed in the Catholic faith and, hence, would be disappointed and resentful if they did not receive instruction⁸. At the conclusion of his mission, Taché was asked by the Chipewyan to establish a permanent mission in their midst to eliminate the problems associated with transitory visits. Deer's Lake Post offered little in the way of local resources and, consequently, a large number of individuals could not gather there and remain for a lengthy period of time. The Chipewyan suggested that the northern end of Reindeer Lake was more suitably endowed with resources and would permit a longer sojourn. Taché promised that he would return the following year to examine the location and to make a decision. For their part, the Indians promised to send guides to take the missionary from Deer's Lake Post to the agreed rendezvous⁹.

In 1849, Taché set out once more for Reindeer Lake to meet the Chipewyan and evaluate the potential of the more northern location but circumstances prevented him from reaching his destination. When the guides promised by the Chipewyan did not arrive at Deer's Lake post and none could be found to undertake the journey, Taché had no alternative but to abandon his journey and return to Île-à-la-Crosse although he feared the repercussions of not keeping his rendezvous. In the meantime, the Chipewyan waited for the missionary at the north end of the lake. Taché's worst fears were realized because, although the Chipewyan were at fault by failing to send the promised guides, they resented his absence and retaliated by asking the Anglicans to send a missionary¹⁰.

The following year, in 1850, Taché was alone at Île-à-la-Crosse and could only go as far as Frog Portage to meet the Indians from Reindeer Lake. Since two other Oblates, Jean Tissot and Augustin Maisonneuve, were being sent to Île-à-la-Crosse, Taché promised that a missionary would be sent in 1851 to the north end of Reindeer Lake¹¹. Taché himself was unable to undertake the mission that year because he had been named coadjutor to Bishop Joseph-Norbert

Provencher of St. Boniface and the Superior General of the Oblates, Bishop Eugène de Mazenod, insisted on consecrating Taché in Marseille¹². In the summer of 1851, Maisonneuve left Frog Portage to begin a difficult journey to the north end of Reindeer Lake. When the rendezvous was finally reached, no Chipewyan were to be found and two days of fishing resulted in less than a dozen poor quality fish¹³. In the circumstances, Maisonneuve returned to Deer's Lake post and from there to Frog Portage where he ran out of provisions and released his guide. Fortunately, Maisonneuve's arrival coincided with that of the Red River brigade commanded by Baptiste Bruce who provided Maisonneuve with flour and meat. A few days later, another brigade led by Joseph Lespérance provided additional supplies and Maisonneuve and his party were able to return to Île-à-la-Crosse¹⁴.

The suffering and hardships experienced by Maisonneuve and his pessimistic report on potential of the northern part of Reindeer Lake as a mission site made Taché abandon the proposed establishment. While Taché felt that missionaries could not avoid difficulty and hardship in performing their apostolic duties, prudence forbade him as a superior to expose those under his jurisdiction to conditions such as those encountered by Maisonneuve¹⁵. Shortly after his consecration as bishop in 1851, Taché was forced to suspend subsequent missions in Reindeer Lake but he never abandoned the idea of a permanent establishment¹⁶.

In the meantime, the Chipewyan continued to ask for a missionary and the inability to respond positively to this request was a source of concern to Taché for the next eight years. Finally, in 1859, Taché asked Valentin Végréville if it were possible for him to visit Reindeer Lake without neglecting the mission at Île-à-la-Crosse and, the following year, Végréville was sent to definitely establish St. Peter's Mission¹⁷. Two factors had contributed significantly to this decision. To begin with, there was a fear that Protestants would establish themselves in the region. During the time that Taché was forced to suspend visits to Reindeer Lake, the Chipewyan began to visit Robert Hunt the Anglican missionary at Lac La Ronge (Stanley Mission). In 1859, Hunt had visited Deer's Lake Post to select the site for a mission and there were rumours that the Anglicans were attempting to establish themselves at Wolloston Lake¹⁸.

At the time that Végréville was evaluating the potential of the northern end of Reindeer Lake, Julien Moulin informed Taché that it was imperative that the northern posts be visited by a Catholic missionary. Moulin reported that Hunt was denouncing Catholicism and declaring that the Pope would soon be rejected. Moulin affirmed that the person in charge of Deer's Lake post had threatened to deprive the Indians of trade goods if they did not worship with the Protestant minister but the Indians had countered with the threat to trade elsewhere. According to Moulin, many Natives had embraced Protestantism because there were too few Catholic missionaries to visit them¹⁹.

While the activity of Protestant rivals was sufficient to galvanize the Oblates, the actions of the HBC at that same moment in time also had a crucial bearing in fashioning the Catholic decision and they are indicative of the symbiotic relationship between trading post and mission. In 1859, George Deschambeault, Chief Trader at Île-à-la-Crosse, decided to establish a provisioning post at Lac du Brochet located on the northern Caribou-Eaters. This action would facilitate provisioning costs for HBC posts and brigades in the region and also integrate the Caribou-Eaters more closely into the Bay's trade²⁰. On the other hand, the advantages for the Oblates were perhaps even more significant. To begin with, the presence of a post in such an isolated area would ensure presence of the Chipewyan in region. In addition, the post could be used as a source of supply for the mission and the Bay's brigades as a source of transportation thereby reducing costs and avoiding a duplication of expensive services. The fact that a French Catholic Métis was placed in charge of the post and the presence of others as servants, provided a Catholic nucleus which was very useful in the conversion of the larger Native population²¹.

Thus, in June 1860, Végréville was sent to evaluate the northern end of Reindeer Lake as a potential mission site. Arriving at Deer's Lake Post, Végréville was informed that the northern Indians had already left for the caribou hunt and so he confined his apostolic duties to the vicinity of the post. Végréville also learned that the provisioning post had been visited by a large number of Chipewyan and he became convinced that the area was in fact a suitable location for a mission and he arranged for the construction of a small house there for the missionaries²². Végréville returned to Île-à-la-Crosse and, when Taché and his coadjutor, Vital

Grandin, met there in November 1860, the decision to establish a permanent mission at Reindeer Lake was taken and Végréville was again sent out to evaluate the region²³.

When Végréville returned to Reindeer Lake on 31 December he spent a few days completing the house that was being built for him. He reported to Taché that the Protestant minister had been told not to come and that Samuel McKenzie of Rapid River was very pleased with the proposal to establish a Catholic mission. Apart from two individuals, one a Protestant and the other a concubinarian, Végréville claimed that the Chipewyan were happy to see him and desirous of converting to Catholicism. Végréville was very optimistic concerning the potential of a permanent mission at Reindeer Lake. The north end of the lake had a large population base, the provisioning post was attracting Indians who normally traded elsewhere and the mission could be used as a base to expand into new regions. In addition, he warned, that there was no time to lose because the Protestants from Lac La Ronge were contemplating their own establishment at Reindeer Lake²⁴.

Végréville's report convinced Taché and Grandin to continue the mission and to locate St. Peter's on the north end of Reindeer Lake. In 1861, Alphonse Gasté, who had made his religious vows a few months earlier and a lay brother, Jean Pérréard, received obediences to assist Végréville in the establishment of the mission that had already earned the accolade, "*la plus difficile*"²⁵. In the meantime, Grandin was informed that Deschambeault was contemplating abandoning the provision post. A devastated Grandin informed Taché that this placed the Oblates in an embarrassing position because, while they could purchase the buildings from the company, it would be impossible for the mission to exist by itself. Grandin was convinced that the directors of the Bay would not close the post if they knew the Oblates were establishing a permanent mission because it would attract the Indians²⁶. In the end, the post remained open, but its continued existence was always a source of concern.

As was the case in most of the early Oblate missions there were no luxuries at St. Peter's. The one-room log structure that had been constructed for the missionaries served the dual function of domicile and church for Végréville, Gasté and Pérréard. They had one table which alternated as an altar for mass in the morning and later as the dining table. The trunks of the missionaries were used as chairs²⁷. Gasté complained that during the winter he was unable to devote as much time to the study of the Chipewyan language as he wanted to because he had to prepare the meals and look after the house. Although he wanted to study in the evening he was prevented from doing so because the mission did not possess sufficient candles to permit this. The use of candles was limited to the celebration of mass in the morning and at supper time. Gasté claimed that unless Taché sent assistance to the mission there would be no candles for the celebration of mass the following year²⁸.

Gasté's problems were compounded by the fact that relations between himself and Végréville were far from cordial. To begin with, Végréville had aspirations of becoming a bishop and he felt slighted when Grandin was named as Taché's coadjutor in 1857. Mazenod himself referred to Végréville's preoccupation with ecclesiastical rank as a "deplorable madness"²⁹. Afterwards, Végréville regarded many of his colleagues, including Gasté, with contempt and entertained an inflated view of his own worth as a priest and as a member of a religious order³⁰. Gasté complained that Végréville, provided no assistance and expected him to do everything. More serious, however, was the fact that the Chipewyan had an aversion for Végréville as a result of his involvement in the fur trade and his business practices. Gasté claimed that Végréville demonstrated no interest in or affection for the Chipewyan and was indifferent as to their instruction³¹. Gasté had also complained that Végréville, a skilled linguist, had refused to assist him in the study of Chipewyan. For his part, Taché had recommended that Végréville help his younger associate but, when the latter departed Reindeer Lake in 1864, Gasté complained that nothing had been left to assist him in studying the Chipewyan language³².

In addition to being a talented linguist, Végréville considered himself to be an exceptional missionary with a very successful technique for evangelizing Indians. He claimed that in four years at Reindeer Lake, he had converted 1300 individuals and declared that anyone who attended one-third of his instructions was certain to be converted. He affirmed, furthermore, that his method could accommodate any level of religious instruction and that at Reindeer Lake he had exposed most of his neophytes to a knowledge of the sacraments. In addition, he declared

that while his converts might still fear martyrdom they, nevertheless, resisted the temptation of the material goods displayed by Protestant ministers to entice them³³. Végréville had informed Taché of his method and its successes but the former was far from convinced. In a very stern communication, written in 1866, Taché affirmed that Végréville's claims were absolutely impossible and he urged him to cease making ridiculous and mendacious statements: "*réservez de pareils contes pour ceux qui ne connaissent ni les lieux ni les personnes ni les choses*". An exasperated Taché could find solace in the fact that, henceforth, he was no longer Végréville's religious superior and he concluded his admonition by declaring: "*Ce sera la dernière fois que je vous parlerai de choses pénibles*"³⁴.

Confessional rivalries and the role of the Bay and its personnel were also significant factors in the history of St. Peter's Mission. Shortly after the mission was established, Végréville advised Taché that, if another Oblate could be spared to spend a winter or two at Reindeer Lake, the Protestant threat could be reduced significantly. He suggested, furthermore, that a visit by one of the two Catholic bishops, Taché or Grandin, would turn the tide in favour of Catholic efforts and convince those who were wavering to convert to Catholicism³⁵. A short while later, Végréville reported that the Chipewyan were shocked at the poverty of the Catholic mission and probably would visit the Protestant mission at Wollaston Lake to obtain goods from the minister³⁶. To make matters worse, the individual hired by Végréville at Île-à-la-Crosse to assist the mission refused to fish with the result that the mission was faced with famine in January 1863. To overcome this critical situation and reduce food consumption, Gasté and brother Pérréard were sent back to Île-à-la-Crosse while Végréville remained alone at the mission³⁷.

For his part, Gasté claimed that there was a plot on the part of Charles Thomas of Deer's Lake Post and the Protestant minister to starve the mission and turn away the Indians. Gasté also noted the presence of an aboriginal prophet among the Chipewyan who was attempting to create an indigenous religion in opposition to Catholicism³⁸. Grandin, who visited the mission in 1866, complained about the promiscuity and immorality that was being tolerated at Deer's Lake Post. Grandin claimed that if the souls of Indians were in fact fox skins, traders would go to great lengths and make numerous sacrifices to obtain them³⁹. Needless to say, the missionaries were not upset by the rumour that Thomas' post would be closed⁴⁰.

In the meantime, the Oblates' benefactor, George Deschambeault, Chief Trader at Ile-à-la-Crosse, assumed personal responsibility for Reindeer Lake in 1864-1865 and the status of the post as well as that of the mission was enhanced by his presence. His attempt to increase the trade of his district and to integrate the Caribou-Eaters into its commercial orbit by means of the provisioning post at Reindeer Lake was resented by other neighbouring HBC traders who witnesses a corresponding decrease in their own trade as a result. When Deschambeault was transferred to the Cumberland District, his successor staffed Reindeer Lake with a simple clerk and the post received considerably less trade goods. Julien Moulin reported that the Chipewyan were disappointed when they witnessed the arrival of only a few bundles of trade goods. Moulin also stated that attempts were being made to have the Indians return to Churchill where they originally traded by that they objected to this manipulation and threatened to cease trading furs if it continued. Moulin hoped that the obstinacy of the Indians would convince the HBC to maintain Reindeer Lake as an important post, adding that this was indispensable if the mission were to prosper⁴¹.

After his visit to the mission in 1866, Grandin informed Taché that the mission had to be close to the post and that it could not moved any great distance even to facilitate access to firewood. Grandin recommended that, prior to undertaking any new construction at the mission, the status of the post would have to be more definite and the Indians would have to pray more resolutely. Contrary to what Végréville had reported earlier, Grandin claimed that the Chipewyan were "*peu christianisés*"⁴². Other serious problems identified by Grandin included the fact that there was little arable land around the mission, winters were long and severe, and there was no wood for construction purposes⁴³.

Given the insecure status of the post and the reduced number of trade goods after Deschambeault's departure, the Chipewyan began to trade elsewhere to obtain essential objects such as fishing nets. To maintain contacts with the Chipewyan and to continue ministering to them Gasté and Moulin devised a plan whereby every year one missionary would leave Reindeer

Lake in the spring to accompany the Indians and remain with them in their summer encampments. Moulin would be the first to go in 1866 and if this project proved successful, it would be used in the future in the event conditions at the post did not improve⁴⁴.

Grandin's report on the missions of the Vicariat of Saskatchewan in 1867 identified St. Peter's as the one that caused him greatest concern of all. Despite the hardships they encountered, the missionaries persisted and also made visits to Lac La Ronge and Frog Portage⁴⁵. As a result of instructing the Chipewyan in their summer camps contacts were made with the Inuit and, in 1867, three Inuit families accompanied the Chipewyan to Reindeer Lake⁴⁶. The following year, on Easter Monday, 21 April, Gasté began a seven month journey in the company of the Chipewyan hunters that eventually would take him to the camps of the Inland Inuit or Caribou Eskimo in the vicinity of Lake Dubawnt. When their hunt was completed, the Chipewyan and Gasté visited a large Inuit camp on the upper Kazan River. Gasté was unable to instruct the Inuit because he did not understand their language but he nevertheless invited them to come to trade at Reindeer Lake instead of Churchill. An agreement was made whereby five Inuit and their families would accompany the Chipewyan back to Reindeer Lake⁴⁷. Given the language barrier, the distances and the shortage of personnel and resources, Gasté's venture was but an attempt to establish preliminary contacts with the Inuit and to become familiar with their language and customs. A serious attempt to evangelize the eastern Inuit would have to be put off until a future date. Gasté made notes on the Inuit language and vocabulary and these were later incorporated into the Inuit language dictionary compiled by his colleague, Émile Petitot, who was evangelizing the Inuit of the western Arctic⁴⁸.

In the meantime, a few of the Inland Inuit continued to come to Reindeer Lake to trade but the language barrier prevented them from receiving religious instruction. Furthermore, those that came did not bring their families and they could not remain for long at the mission. The rate of conversions and the level of spirituality among the Chipewyan were also a source of anxiety for the missionaries who were aware that local resources and conditions at St. Peter's were not conducive to proper instruction and extensive contacts with the Indians⁴⁹. For his part, Grandin spent three months at Reindeer Lake in 1870 and he was profoundly shocked by the hardship and isolation which his missionaries faced as well as the indifference of the Chipewyan to the message of redemption. Consequently, he decided to close the mission but Gasté implored him to reconsider, claiming that more time was required to evangelize the Chipewyan⁵⁰.

Conversions increased after 1870 because Grandin's threat to close the mission had the desired effect upon the Chipewyan who did not want to lose the mission and the missionaries⁵¹. Another factor that contributed to the consolidation and stability of St. Peter's Mission after 1870 was the closure of Deer's Lake Post. Those who normally traded at this more southern location migrated north and established themselves at Brochet near St. Peter's⁵². With respect to spirituality, the apparition of an Oblate which took place on 5 November 1870, hardened Gasté's determination to continue his apostolate among the Chipewyan and it made a significant impression on the latter. On that day, as Gasté was preparing to celebrate the annual mass for deceased Oblates a figure, later identified as that of an Oblate, began to appear a few feet from the altar. It was visible to those attending the service but not to the celebrant or his assistant. At the beginning of the mass, the Oblate's face displayed suffering whereas at the elevation, it became radiant and was crowned with a luminous halo. Towards the end of the mass, the apparition displayed a more joyful face and disappeared after the last prayers. When Gasté was informed of this phenomenon after mass, he questioned those who had been present and their descriptions were identical. From the information obtained from the eye witnesses Gasté concluded that the figure was that of Charles Mestre-Lagrenade, his former master of novices in St. Boniface. The following spring the significance of the apparition became obvious to believers when the news reached Reindeer Lake that Mestre had passed away in Paris in April 1870⁵³.

It was the conversion of the Chipewyan chief Redhead in 1875 that altered the pattern of conversions among the Chipewyan. Redhead was baptized the day after Christmas and he took the Christian name Étienne. Previously individuals and family units had been converted and hence the number of neophytes had been small and had not increased significantly over time. As the undisputed leader of the tribe, Redhead's acceptance of Catholicism entailed the conversion of his tribe and fifty adults followed him to the baptismal font⁵⁴.

While Gasté was overjoyed by this *en bloc* conversion after fifteen years of effort much still remained to be done before the Chipewyan became truly Christianized. In 1877, for example, during a mission near Reindeer Lake, Julien Moulin complained about the small number of confessions given the size of the Chipewyan population and making allowances for the difficult living conditions in the region. He alleged, furthermore, that "*bien qu'ils voulussent tous de la prière, ils n'en désiraient cependant prendre le moins possible*". He identified impurity and gambling as the two disorders which prevailed in the camp. His fulminations made the former disappear but he claimed that gambling was so ingrained in the Chipewyan character that they saw no wrong with the practice. Moulin succeeded only in reducing the frequency of gambling and securing the promise that the Indians would not neglect his instructions in order to gamble⁵⁵.

Prior to his departure, Moulin deemed it necessary to reawaken the zeal of the Chipewyan by threatening to ask the bishop to withdraw the missionaries unless the Chipewyan mended their ways and obeyed the teachings of the Church⁵⁶. Some thirty some years later, Arsène Turquetil remarked that the Chipewyan accepted religious instruction so long as it corresponded to their customs and traditions. He affirmed that they accepted confession because there was a variant in their culture but they had difficulty with the Catholic corollary that insisted on contrition and a firm resolve not to sin again. Turquetil claimed that the Chipewyan wished to keep their traditions and that this tendency was accentuated by the fact that many of their traditions and customs were related to the caribou, their principal means of subsistence⁵⁷.

In the meantime, Gasté lamented the fact that he did not possess the resources to undertake the evangelization of the Inuit. Since his visit to the Barren Land in 1868, the Inuit had come down to Reindeer Lake but none had been converted because of the language barrier. In 1875, Gasté reported that the Inuit had not come that year because of efforts made by Fort Churchill to have them return there. He felt they would return but, if they did not, he was prepared to return in their midst to convince them to resume trade at Reindeer Lake⁵⁸. Contacts between the Inuit and the mission were resumed and, in 1884, an elated Gasté reported that for the first time an Inuit had assisted at the mission's Christmas celebrations. Gasté was astounded when the Inuit, upon visiting the new chapel, identified the statue of Mary as the mother of Jesus Christ. Gasté asked the Inuit to leave one of his children at the mission in order that he might assist the missionaries in learning the language. When the father expressed a reluctance to leave one child, Gasté proposed to keep the entire family but the former replied that he would have to first consult with his compatriots⁵⁹. Much to Gasté's dismay, many years were to pass before the evangelization of the Inuit became a reality.

During this same period, the efforts of missionaries from St. Peter's among the Cree located to the south and south-west were rewarded with more success. As early as 1874, Gasté had informed Grandin of the different regions that required the presence of a Catholic missionary. According to Gasté, one should be sent to Grand Rapid as soon as possible because this post would grow in importance as a consequence of steam boat navigation on the Saskatchewan River⁶⁰. While missions to the south and south-west had been undertaken earlier by those serving at St. Peter's, the extension and consolidation of that missionary frontier was the work of Étienne Bonnald who arrived at Reindeer Lake in 1875. In 1878, Bonnald was sent to establish St. Gertrude's mission at Pelican Narrows. From Pelican Narrows visits were made to the Cree located near the Churchill and Nelson Rivers⁶¹. Another mission, St. Joseph's, Cumberland House, established in 1877, was also dependent on Reindeer Lake. With respect to hardship and isolation, the history of these satellite posts duplicated that of the mother mission.

Evidence of consolidation and stabilization at St. Peter's is to be found in the establishment of a small school at the mission in 1870 and the recruitment of a handful of orphans as its first students under the direction of Brother Célestin Guillet⁶². A small school was started at the mission in 1870. Seventeen students were present on 20 June to participate in the opening ceremonies. As was the case in most Oblate missions the school also functioned as an orphanage. One week after the school opened, the mission accepted its first orphans, two young Chipewyan boys, who were about six years of age. A short while later the missionaries took in a ten year old Cree boy⁶³.

The school grew in size and its students reflected the diverse elements that comprised the local population: there were Chipewyan, Cree and Métis children as well as children

belonging to those employed by the HBC post. The latter attended as day-students and, as in other missions, the Oblates received rations or other gifts from the parents or the post as tuition fees⁶⁴. The school grew to fifteen children by 1874, but local resources imposed limits on the number of children who could be accommodated especially orphans whose care and maintenance were the sole responsibility of the mission⁶⁵.

Life at St. Peter's Mission was difficult at the best of times but, nevertheless, it was enhanced by the presence of Oblate lay brothers. In the formative years of a mission these individuals provided invaluable support for the missionaries by liberating them from construction work and domestic duties thereby allowing them to devote more time to evangelization. The first lay brother to serve at Reindeer Lake was Jean Pérréard who arrived with Végréville and Gasté in 1861 and whose health had previously been undermined during the establishment of St. Joseph's Mission, Fort Resolution⁶⁶. At Reindeer Lake, Pérréard went fishing every day and was also responsible for preparing the meals. He also cut the firewood and hauled it on his back because the mission did not yet have a dog team. Within a year of his arrival Pérréard was also occupied with the cutting and squaring of trees to build an addition to the small residence which housed the missionaries⁶⁷.

If St. Peter's Mission provides an excellent case study of early Oblate life and missionary activity in the Canadian North West then the career of Célestin Guillet who arrived there in 1869 is the archetype of the lay brother, the "*apôtre inconnu*" who served in those missions⁶⁸. The early entries in Guillet's journal present a graphic description of the lack of amenities at the mission eight years after its establishment. He was appalled by the sight of the chapel. In contrast to the small but beautiful church at Ile-à-la-Crosse, he described St. Peter's chapel and its make shift altar as a "*vraie étable de Bethléem*"⁶⁹.

Like the majority of Oblate lay brothers, Guillet was a versatile and resourceful individual whose activities contributed significantly to ameliorating conditions at the mission. In 1877, for example, Guillet was at Cumberland House with the mission's barge and purchased three head of cattle for the mission. He paid for the animals by transporting supplies and trade goods destined for the HBC post near St. Peter's Mission and using money given to him by his parents and benefactors in France and funds accruing from the sale of his needlework⁷⁰. In 1886, Guillet again purchased three animals for the mission. A pasture was enclosed and a barn constructed for the animals and these facilities and the small herd impressed HBC inspectors who visited the mission⁷¹. The milk from the cows was a welcome addition to the spartan and monotonous fare available at the isolated mission. More important, however, the manure produced by the animals permitted Guillet to regenerate the garden whose soil had been exhausted as a result of a lack of fertilizer⁷². In a posthumous eulogy published in 1931, Louis Culerier paid tribute to Guillet's thirty years of service at Reindeer Lake and described him as:

le <<Manitou>>; au sens sauvage, l'esprit directeur du temporel, au sens français le manie-tout, le touche-à-tout, le Jean fait tout. Il tenait les diplômes de cuisinier, gâte-sauce, fourrageur, pédagogue, apothicaire, tailleur, chantre, bedeau ... quelque peu prédicateur, catéchiste⁷³.

In addition to the harsh conditions and hard work, the poor diet associated with missions such as Reindeer Lake contributed to undermining the health of mission personnel. Caribou meat and fish were the mainstay of a somewhat monotonous diet but there were times when one or both failed to provide adequate provisions. In March 1885, for example, the hunt had failed and the mission had not had any meat since the previous autumn and had to rely entirely on fish for sustenance. So much fish was being consumed that it was feared that the supply would not be sufficient to sustain both personnel and dog teams⁷⁴.

Mission personnel often encountered illness and injury. In 1883, for example, Gasté was seriously ill and had to remain in St. Albert to receive proper medical care. So many missionaries had come to St. Albert to convalesce that Bishop Grandin was forced to affirm that his residence resembled more a hospital than a bishop's palace⁷⁵. Illnesses that were less serious and injuries received homeopathic treatment. When Guillet gashed his leg and exposed the bone a compress of chewed tobacco was applied to the wound to stop the bleeding. Afterwards this compress was replaced by one consisting of red spruce bark that had been shredded and boiled. The wound

was washed with the infusion that had resulted from the preparation of the poultice⁷⁶. After eighteen years of service in Reindeer Lake Guillet informed another lay brother that he had aged sufficiently to be considered venerable. He complained that his exterior physical appearance betrayed his forty-three years by many years and that, consequently, young Chipewyan referred to him as their grandfather⁷⁷.

There were also occupational hazards associated with service in isolated missions such as St. Peter's. In 1881 for example, Brother François Gagnon drowned at Reindeer Lake⁷⁸. In 1933, Brother Urbain Drouin was fishing with Saluste Dumais, a young missionary who had recently arrived at Reindeer Lake. While on their way to their fishing station their canoe began to take on water and capsized. Both individuals were able to climb on the overturned canoe but Dumais drowned while attempting to swim to shore⁷⁹. Three years later, in 1936, Joseph Egenolf had a life threatening experience while traveling on snowshoes behind his dog team. Some caribou emerged out of the woods in front of the dog team and the dogs gave chase. He was left behind but followed the sled tracks and eventually caught up to the team. However, Egenolf was unable to return to the original course and meet up with his companion who had all the provisions on his sled and, consequently, Egenolf and his dogs had to spend the night without food. Later the following day, Egenolf found the tracks of the other sled and followed them and was met by his companion's father who had been sent to search for him when the latter returned alone⁸⁰.

While being stationed at isolated missions entailed hardship, the amicable relations between mission and HBC post at Reindeer Lake made life more tolerable for all who resided there. In George Deschambeault, Chief Trader at Île-à-la-Crosse and later personally in charge of Reindeer Lake, the Oblates had a kind benefactor. While his transfer to Cumberland House was a great loss for the missionaries, they found consolation in the presence of a relative, Pierre Deschambeault, as clerk at the post. In 1873, when Pierre spoke of leaving, the mission was understandably perplexed. Gasté attempted to convince him to remain and urged Bishops Grandin and Taché to second his efforts⁸¹.

There were numerous occasions where fort and mission could render services to the other. In 1885 when the mission had not had meat for a prolonged period of time and the brother was unable to accompany the company's hunters because of other pressing occupations, Pierre Deschambeault provided the mission with the meat of two caribou⁸². A short while later, during the haying season, the mission was able to use the company's barge to transport two loads of hay from islands in the lake⁸³. For its part, the mission repaid such favours and services as best it could. When the mission's chickens first produced eggs in 1886 half of them were given to Mrs. Deschambeault who returned the favour by giving the missionaries a fresh gooseberry pie⁸⁴.

Certain social conventions were also established which contributed to alleviating the monotony and isolation experienced at Reindeer Lake. On New Year's Day, for example, Bay personnel accompanied by their families would come to the mission to exchange greetings with Gasté. After vespers on New Year's Day, the personnel of the mission gathered at Deschambeault's house and then visited the homes of others employed by the post. Orphans from the mission were given sugar coated almonds by Deschambeault and in the evening, a celebration was held at Deschambeault's followed by a meal⁸⁵. In 1887, however, Pierre Deschambeault broke with this tradition and did not visit the mission to exchange greetings nor did he invite the missionaries for supper. His brother Henri, however, came to the mission, dined with the missionaries and then brought them to the post on the pretext that they were expected. Gasté felt that Henri had been told to do so by his sister-in-law who desired to provide her husband with an opportunity to make amends for his blunder⁸⁶.

Despite significant differences in their objectives, the Oblates and the Bay reached a remarkable accommodation in the North West. To begin with, the Oblates attempted to be self-sufficient and they did not impose significant demands on the Bay's supplies and transportation system. In addition, the Oblates did not interfere in the internal affairs of the Bay and they impressed on Indians the necessity of respecting their contractual obligations. More important, however, was the fact that the Oblates made certain that the activities of personnel attached to a mission did not compete with the commercial interests of the Bay. At Reindeer Lake, a mission employee had obtained a large quantity of caribou hides despite the fact that he had been forbidden to do so. When this matter was brought to his attention as superior of the mission,

Gasté proposed to reprimand the individual so severely that he would either cease this illicit activity or else leave the mission's employ. While the possibility of losing a rare employee in such a remote mission would be a calamity, Gasté felt that he had no choice in the matter and furthermore, he was not willing to compromise the future of the missions for the actions of one individual⁸⁷.

In practice, the Oblates favoured the Bay as opposed to free traders whose presence disrupted traditional stable relationships and exposed neophytes to nefarious influences. However, the fact that the Oblates generally favoured the Bay rather than free traders did not translate into a blanket approval of company policy. The opinion of missionaries in the field was dictated by local circumstances. In 1894, for example, Indians at Reindeer Lake complained that the company was offering them absurdly low credits for the coming trading season and they asked Gasté to intercede on their behalf. Gasté agreed to speak to the company inspector who was visiting the post and recommended that the credit advanced to the Indians be increased. With respect to Indians from Churchill who not been advanced credits and told to return to that post to trade Gasté affirmed that they were free to trade where they pleased so long as they had repaid their debts to the company⁸⁸.

When the Bay refused to agree to Gasté's recommendations the Indians were disgruntled and threatened to leave Reindeer Lake. This departure had significant repercussions for the stability of the mission and Gasté had no choice but to organize a system of transportation independent of the Bay to bring the furs of Indians to market⁸⁹. Gasté was convinced that the low credits offered at Reindeer Lake were but the first step in the company's attempt to close the post and force Indians to trade at other posts where expenses were not as considerable. He went to Prince Albert to discuss the matter with his religious superior and to inform free traders located there of the opportunities that were available. As a result of Gasté's efforts, the Bay faced competition and was forced to keep the post at Brochet open⁹⁰.

The changes in ecclesiastical jurisdiction that took place did not significant alter the isolation and hardship associated with St. Peter's Mission. In 1898, for example, the report of the Vicariate Apostolic of Saskatchewan identified St. Peter's as the most remote and difficult of its missions. In view of the shortage of personnel and a decrease in revenues the possibility of abandoning the mission was discussed because its maintenance was so expensive. Such a proposal was sent to the Superior General and his council but it was not accepted⁹¹. The report for 1904 indicated that considerable effort was required to reach Reindeer Lake. A period of eighteen days was required to travel by dog team from Prince Albert to St. Peter's and forty days if the trip was made by canoe. Needless to say, the missionaries received only rare visitors⁹².

In such circumstances, the pastoral visit of the bishop was a high point in the history of an isolated mission such as Reindeer Lake. For the missionaries, the pastoral visit provided an opportunity for spiritual and religious regeneration through confession, a retreat as well as advice and guidance from one's religious and ecclesiastical superior. The bishop's presence and the accompanying ceremonial also made a significant impact on the Native population. The neophytes made considerable effort and sacrifice to meet the bishop whom they referred to as "*le grand chef de la prière*", or "*le grand priant*". The esteem with which the prelate was held by the Natives was not lost on the missionaries who capitalized on his reputation to promote their apostolic work. At the time Reindeer Lake was being established, and Protestant rivals posed a serious threat, Végréville urged Bishops Taché and Grandin to visit the mission. Végréville claimed that a visit by one of the bishops would enhance conversions and result in a "*coup mortel pour nos ennemis*"⁹³.

Despite the sense of urgency described by Végréville, the first episcopal visit by Grandin only took place in 1866. Grandin visited Reindeer Lake on three other occasions: 1870, 1875 and 1884. Because of the means of transportation at his disposal were limited, Grandin was unable to bring all of the paraphernalia associated with his episcopal office. His portable chapel and clothing for the entire trip had to be compressed into a trunk that measured 1 x .5 x .3 meters. He was forced to leave his crosier at Nativity mission and when traveling on ice, the small trunk had to be replaced by a bag⁹⁴. Consequently, in remote and isolated missions such as Reindeer Lake, the episcopal visit was not accompanied by the same level of ceremonies, festivities and decorations that characterized visits to more accessible missions such as Île-à-la-

Crosse especially on solemn feast days as Corpus Christi⁹⁵. Grandin felt that the bishop in his purple robes and ceremonies such as the benediction of the Blessed Sacrament produced a more powerful impression on the Indians than did the material goods offered them by the Protestant ministers⁹⁶.

Once the bishop's visit had been announced and the Indians were invited to attend, disenchantment was keenly felt if the prelate failed to arrive. To begin with, Natives had to undertake a lengthy voyage to meet the bishop and had to ration their food if his arrival was delayed. Bishop Albert Pascal, who assumed jurisdiction over Reindeer Lake in 1891 sent a delegate to visit the mission in 1895 and his first personal visit took place in 1897. On two earlier occasions the Chipewyan had gathered to await his arrival, and, having remained at the mission for some time, they were reduced to the point of starvation and were very disappointed when circumstances forced him to cancel the visit. In anticipation of Pascal's presence in 1897, the Indians decided to camp at some distance from the mission where the fishing was good and prepare sufficient dried to enable them to remain at the mission during his visit⁹⁷.

In the twentieth century, the remoteness and isolation that had characterized the early history of St. Peter's Mission gradually disappeared. That became evident in 1931 as government aircraft undertook a photographic survey of the region. Joseph Egenolf was given a ride in the aircraft and was able to survey the extent of his mission from an altitude of 5000 feet. Despite having spent twenty-five years in the mission he felt that he was in an unknown country. Prior to this aerial reconnaissance, Egenolf had been under the impression that most of the area consisted of water. From his vantage point he now realized that Reindeer Lake was only one-quarter the size of the surrounding area⁹⁸. Within a short period of time traders, prospectors and miners were using aircraft to penetrate the northern regions in the same way that settlers and homesteaders had appeared a half century earlier in the southern plains. In 1933, for example, a fur trader was overdue on a flight north of Reindeer Lake. Other aircraft began to search for the trader but got hopelessly lost in the process. The searchers returned to the mission and asked Egenolf to guide them to the place where the trader was to have landed⁹⁹. The aircraft made it possible to evacuate personnel who were seriously injured or ill. In 1949, Alphonse Waddel was stricken by a serious illness and an airplane was sent to transport him to Flin Flon and later to Le Pas where he was hospitalized and treated¹⁰⁰. Three consecutive summers normally were required for a visit of all the missions of the immense Vicariat Apostolic of Keewatin. This time was reduced dramatically by the use of the airplane and the vicar apostolic was able to remain for a longer period of time in each mission¹⁰¹.

The radio was another technological innovation that the Oblates used to facilitate their ministry in the north. In 1931, the news of the death of the Superior General, Bishop Augustin Dontenwill, was telegraphed to Le Pas at 10:00 AM and, twelve hours later, it was broadcast to the Oblates serving in the north. In 1933, Bishop Ovide Charlebois used radio station CKY in Winnipeg to transmit messages to his missionaries in the north. Messages sent to the station were broadcast on Wednesdays¹⁰². The introduction of short wave radios further reduced the barriers of time and distance for isolated missions such as St. Peter's. Finally in 1982, telephone service was provided by means of a communications satellite¹⁰³.

Despite these technological and the advance of civilization, life was still difficult at St. Peter's well into the twentieth century. The cost of transporting supplies was very high. In 1935, it cost thirty five dollars to purchase and deliver a bag of sugar to the mission. Not only did the missionaries have to make their requirements known at least one season ahead of anticipated delivery, they also had to limit themselves to the necessities and these essentials often did not always arrive in good condition. A report on the mission described 1935 as one of those fortuitous years when supplies arrived in perfect condition. This was deemed providential because one of the two barges carrying supplies for the northern missions capsized near St. Peter's and only a small portion of the sugar and flour that was on board could be saved. All of the supplies for Reindeer Lake were on board the other barge¹⁰⁴.

Given the high cost of supplies and the uncertainties associated with transportation personnel in remote missions not only had to content themselves with the strict necessities, they also had to attempt to become self sufficient. In the case of Reindeer Lake there was no arable land around the mission and the garden planted by mission personnel was in fact soil that had

been accumulated over the years and transported by a means of a small boat from a distance of three miles. As a result of such Herculean efforts, a small quantity of fresh vegetables complemented the dried meat and fish that were the staple foods during the summer months. 1935 was indeed a banner year because Egenolf received his seeds in February and, consequently, would be able to plant his garden before summer¹⁰⁵.

In addition to a spartan existence, mission personnel continued to experience long periods of isolation at St. Peter's. Egenolf, who arrived at the mission in 1905, was often the only person at the mission and for a twelve year period his only companion was Brother Drouin¹⁰⁶. In 1930, when Egenolf left the mission to visit Indians in their encampments Drouin was left alone for six months. To alleviate this situation, the mission accepted the offer of the services of a young man who had returned from eastern Canada to work with his father. As was customary with *donnés* in other missions, the young man would not be recompensed for his services but would be lodged and fed by the mission and provided with clothing when necessary¹⁰⁷. While such an arrangement provided Drouin with a companion and assistant, a lay person could not assist an Oblate in satisfying the requirements of religious life. In 1935, during Drouin's absence, Egenolf himself was alone for more than two months¹⁰⁸.

Needless to say, the remote location of St. Peter's Mission and the absence of local resources for construction purposes resulted in buildings that were primitive. In 1882, a separate residence was built for mission personnel and seven years later, in 1889, a chancel and transept were added to the church¹⁰⁹. The report of the Vicariate of Keewatin for 1922 referred to the church as "ancient" but added that, as a result of recent restoration, the structure "*présente maintenant un joli aspect*". The residence, constructed of split logs plastered with mud, was also old and on the verge of collapse but the report stated that it would be replaced by a more modern residence¹¹⁰. Some thirty one years later, the vicariate's report noted that St. Peter's Mission defied recognition because a "beautiful church" had been constructed in 1948 and a solid presbytery in 1952¹¹¹. With the construction of a new church, the old structure was used for various parish and community activities until it was destroyed by fire on 7 October 1992¹¹².

Despite its poverty and remoteness, St. Peter's exercised a powerful influence on those who served there and they remained for unusually long periods of time and were very attached to the mission. The hardships and isolation experienced on the missionary frontier were, to some extent, overcome by dedication and indifference of the Oblates who served there. The conviction that, like the ancient Apostles, the Oblates were the bearers of the message of salvation and contributing to the greater glory of God not only produced a powerful motivation, a spiritual "high", so to speak, it enabled them to make considerable personal sacrifices. It was only in 1901, for example, when he left Reindeer Lake because of ill health that Guillet was able to travel to British Columbia to visit his brother who was also an Oblate lay brother. The two had not seen each other for thirty-nine years¹¹³. In 1909, two years before his death, Guillet returned to his native France for his only visit since coming to Canada in 1868¹¹⁴. Alphonse Gasté served at St. Peter's for forty years between 1861 and 1901. Joseph Egenolf who succeeded him served for a full half century (1905-1955). He returned to Europe only once during this time and that was in 1932 when he attended his congregation's General Chapter as a delegate from his Vicariate¹¹⁵. Egenolf's record of service was surpassed by Brother Urbain Drouin who spent fifty-one years, seven months and five days at the mission¹¹⁶. Adrien Darveau arrived at the mission in 1946 to assist Egenolf. Three years later, in 1949, Darveau assumed responsibility for the mission and is still its pastor¹¹⁷.

St. Peter's Mission Reindeer Lake provides an excellent case study with which to analyze the establishment, development and consolidation of early Oblate missions in the Canadian North West. The Oblates established themselves in the midst of the more distant northern Chipewyan because their apostolate among the more readily accessible Saulteaux to the south had not been successful. Reindeer Lake, despite its remoteness and local deficiencies, was selected as a mission site because the Natives who frequented the region had requested the presence of a missionary. The mission could not have existed independently of an HBC post, not only because the latter was a source of transportation and supply, but because the post ensured presence of Indians at specific intervals for the purposes of trade. Anything that tended to affect the status of the post was bound to have repercussions on the mission. By the same token, however, the Bay

realized that the mission also had a significant impact on the post and its prosperity.

With respect to Reindeer Lake, the Oblates were fortunate in that in the early period the Bay's district administrator was a French Canadian co-religionist. Despite this affinity, George Deschambeault was aware that the clergy's presence was advantageous to the Bay. In 1859 he advised Sir George Simpson that Grandin, then in charge of the mission at Ile-à-la-Crosse, was promoting temperance and that this was beneficial for the Chipewyan as well as the company's servants who had renounced that "detestable custom of drinking"¹¹⁸. On the other hand, while the Oblates did not interfere with the HBC, they could not remain indifferent when the standard of living of the Indians was threatened as a result of company policy.

Reindeer Lake remained a desolate and remote mission throughout its history and it never attained impressive facilities such as those found in St. Albert, Lac La Biche or Île-à-la-Crosse. Nevertheless, St. Peter's underwent a phase of consolidation and stabilization although at a more modest level. Like other Oblate missions St. Peter's also served as an advance base for visits to outlying areas. In time, these visits led to the establishment of permanent satellite missions such as Saint-Joseph at Cumberland House (1877) and Sainte-Gertrude at Pelican Narrows (1878). From Pelican Narrows the missionaries reached the Cree of the Churchill and Nelson River basins. The missionary frontier continued to expand with the establishment of missions at Pukatawagan (Sacré-Coeur) in 1888, Cross Lake (Sainte-Croix) in 1901 and, finally, Norway House (Notre-Dame du Mont Carmel) in 1905¹¹⁹. To the north, Arsène Turquetil established Notre-Dame de la Délivrance at Chesterfield Inlet (1911), the first serious attempt to evangelize the Inuit. This decision influenced the HBC to build a post there at the same time. Chesterfield Inlet has the distinction of being the only Bay post that did not antedate a Catholic mission¹²⁰.

The history of St. Peter's Mission clearly identifies the complex nature of the Oblate missionary experience in the Canadian North West. The establishment of this mission was part of the frontier experience whereby a French missionary congregation adapted itself to a new milieu and to its Aboriginal populations. In the process of adapting, the Oblates had to master new and difficult languages and develop a missionary strategy that responded to the needs of the region and its population. In addition to issues that were apostolic in nature, the Oblates had to concern themselves with matters related to supplies and transportation and the establishment of ancillary services and institutions on the frontier. The Oblate missionary experience also entailed complex relationships with Protestant competitors, nomadic Native populations and the largely Anglo-Protestant officers of the Hudson's Bay Company. In the final analysis, the Oblate experience in the North West is an important chapter in the larger history of western Canada.

Raymond HUEL

Notes:

¹ An earlier version of this study was presented at the seventh symposium of the Centre d'études franco-canadiennes de l'Ouest held at Faculté Saint-Jean, University of Alberta, 15-16 October 1987 and included in its proceedings: "La mission Saint-Pierre du lac Caribou: une des premières missions oblates du Nord-Ouest canadien", in *Écriture et Politique. Les actes du septième colloque du Centre d'études franco-canadiennes de l'Ouest*, ed. by G. ALLAIRE et al, Edmonton, Institut de recherche de la Faculté Saint-Jean, 1989, p. 151-163.

² McCARTHY, Martha, *To Evangelize the Nations: Roman Catholic Missions in Manitoba, 1818-1870*, Papers in Manitoba History, Report No. 2, Winnipeg, Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Recreation Historic Resources, 1990, p. 133.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 133-134. The previous year, in 1845, McKenzie had invited *abbé* Jean-Baptiste Thibault to visit Ile-à-la-Crosse in an attempt to influence the Cree in the southern part of his district to continue trapping for the company rather than pursue the buffalo hunt which gave them a more independent existence. Taché was aware of McKenzie's ulterior motives.

⁴ TACHÉ, Alexandre-A., o.m.i., "Notice sur la Mission du lac Caribou [hereafter Notice], Archives

Deschâtelets [hereafter AD] LC 7001 .K26R 3.

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Ibid.*

7 McCARTHY, Martha, *To Evangelize the Nations*, p. 135-136.

8 TACHÉ to Mon rév. et bien cher père, 16 avril 1848, AD, HE 2224 .T12R 1.

9 TACHÉ, Alexandre-A., o.m.i., "Notice", AD, Lc 7001 .K26R 3.

10 *Ibid*, McCARTHY, Martha, *To Evangelize the Nations*, p. 140, TACHÉ, Alexandre-A., o.m.i., *Vingt années de missions dans le Nord-Ouest de l'Amérique*, 2^e ed., Montréal, Librairie Saint-Joseph, 1888, p. 43.

11 TACHÉ, Alexandre-A., o.m.i., *Vingt Années*, p. 47; TACHÉ, Alexandre-A., o.m.i., "Notice", AD, LC 7001 .K26R 2.

12 MAZENOD, Bx de, *Lettres aux correspondants d'Amérique 1851-1860, Écrits Oblats II*, Rome, Postulation générale O.M.I., 1977, Mazenod to [Taché], 19 jan. 1851.

13 TACHÉ, Alexandre-A., o.m.i., "Notice", AD, LC 7001 .K26R 3.

14 *Ibid.*

15 *Ibid.*

16 CARRIERE, Gaston, o.m.i., "Fondation et développement des missions catholiques dans la Terre de Rupert et les Territoires du Nord-Ouest", in *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa*, 41 (1971), p. 277. The individual who did not wish to go was Valentin Végréville.

17 TACHÉ to Mon bien cher père [Végréville] 5 déc. 1859, Provincial Archives of Alberta [hereafter PAA] Oblates of Mary Immaculate Alberta-Saskatchewan Province [hereafter OMI] Administration [hereafter ADM] St-Boniface, Correspondance de Mgr Taché 1854-1859; TACHÉ, Alexandre-A., o.m.i., *Vingt Années*, p. 127.

18 McCARTHY, Martha, *To Evangelize the Nations*, p. 143.

19 MOULIN to Mgr et bien aimé père [Taché], 31 juillet 1860, AD, HE 2224 .T12R 1.

20 *Ibid*, p. 142.

21 *Ibid*, p. 142-143.

22 *Ibid*, p. 143-144.

23 *Ibid*, p. 144; TACHÉ, Alexandre-A., o.m.i., *Vingt Années*, p. 127; CARRIERE, Gaston, o.m.i., "Fondation et développement", p. 278. Carrière inadvertently errs in identifying Maisonneuve as the missionary who was sent out to explore the region around Lac du Brochet in 1860. Maisonneuve had made an earlier reconnaissance in 1851. Carrière also errs in identifying René Gasté as one of the individuals sent to assist Végréville in the establishment of the mission. It was Alphonse Gasté; CARRIERE, Gaston, o.m.i., *Dictionnaire Biographique des Oblats de Marie Immaculée au Canada*, vol. II, Ottawa, Éditions de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1977 [hereafter DBOC] entries for "Gasté, Alphonse", and "Gasté, René", p. 64-65.

24 VÉGRÉVILLE to Mgr et rév. père [Taché], 10 déc. 1860, AD, HE 2221 .T12Z 249; VÉGRÉVILLE to Taché, 2 avril 1861, *Ibid*, HE 2221 .T12Z 250.

25 TACHÉ, Alexandre-A., o.m.i., *Vingt Années*, p. 139.

26 GRANDIN to Mgr [Taché], 2 avril 1861, AD, HE 2223 .T12Z 1.

27 McCARTHY, Martha, *To Evangelize the Nations*, p. 148.

28 GASTÉ to Mgr et bien cher père [Taché], 6 avril 1863, PAA, OMI, Dossiers du Personnel [hereafter DP] A. Gasté 1861-1864.

29 MAZENOD, *Lettres 1851-1860*, Mazenod to [Taché], 7 nov. 1857. "*C'est une déplorable folie qu'il faudrait essayer de guérir par les exorcismes de l'Église*".

30 VÉGRÉVILLE, Valentin, o.m.i., Notes 1867: Noviciat. Végréville was also highly critical of Albert Lacombe. In 1859 Taché advised Végréville that he was wrong to have written the communication he sent to Lacombe. Taché implored Végréville: "*De grâce n'en écrivez plus jamais à qui que ce soit dans ce sens. De pareilles lettres font beaucoup de mal et ne sauraient faire le bien*". PAA, OMI, Papiers Personnel [hereafter PP]; TACHÉ to Mon cher père [Végréville], 3 juin 1859, *Ibid*, ADM, St-Boniface, Correspondance de Mgr Taché 1854-1859.

31 GASTÉ to Mgr et bien aimé Père [Taché], 10 avril 1864. PAA, OMI, DP, A. Gasté 1861-1864.

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- 32 GASTÉ to Mgr et bien aimé père [Taché], 7 mai 1864, *Ibid.*
- 33 VÉGRÉVILLE, Valentin, o.m.i., Notes 1867, PAA, OMI, PP.
- 34 TACHÉ to Mon cher père Végréville, 30 nov. 1866, "*Pour vous seul*". PAA, OMI, ADM, St-Boniface, Correspondance de Mgr Taché 1860-1869. After leaving Reindeer Lake in 1864, Végréville became superior of the Collège de St-Boniface. In 1865, he received an obedience for Notre-Dame des Victoires Mission at Lac La Biche, a mission under the jurisdiction of Bishop Grandin.
- 35 VÉGRÉVILLE to Mgr et rév. père [Taché], 20 août 1861, AD, HE 2221 .T12Z 255.
- 36 VÉGRÉVILLE to Mgr et rév. père [Taché], 1 août 1862, AD, HE 2221 .T12Z 258.
- 37 TACHÉ, Alexandre-A., o.m.i., *Vingt Années*, p. 159.
- 38 GASTÉ to bien cher et rév. père, 18 mai 1863, AD, HEB 6255 .A45C 4. A more detailed examination of the appearance and activities of the Chipewyan prophets is to be found in McCARTHY, Marthy, **The Missions of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate to the Athapaskans 1845-1870**, Ph.D. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1981, chapter 7, "Athabaskan Adaptations", and HUEL, Raymond, "The Chipewyan Prophets, Louis Riel and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Who Were the True Heralds of the Word in the Canadian North West?", in *Discipline and Dissent. Orthodoxy and Heresy in Religious Movements. Essays in Honour of M. James Penton on his Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. by GREENSHIELDS, M. and ROBINSON, T., Lewiston, N.Y., Edwin Mellen Press, 1992, p. 93-119.
- 39 BRETON, Paul-Émile, o.m.i., *Vital Grandin o.m.i. La merveilleuse aventure de << l'Évêque sauvage >> des Prairies et du Grand Nord*, Bibliothèque Ecclesia 58, Paris, Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1960, p. 201-202.
- 40 GASTÉ to Lestanc, 15 mai 1866, AD, HEB 6255 .A45C 6.
- 41 MOULIN to Vandenberghe, 28 mai 1866, PAA, OMI, DP, J. Moulin 1862-1894.
- 42 GRANDIN to Mgr et bien cher père [Taché], 28 nov. 1866, AD, HE 2223 .T12Z 3.
- 43 GRANDIN, Vital, o.m.i., *Rapport 28 xbre 1867*, AD, L 2003 .A33R 1.
- 44 GASTÉ to Lestanc, 15 mai 1866, AD, HEB 6255 .A45C 6.
- 45 GRANDIN, Vital, o.m.i., *Rapport 28 xbre 1867*, AD, L 2003 .A33R 1.
- 46 Résumés des lettres adressées au T.R.P. Sup. Gén. par les Pères des Vicariats de la Rivière Rouge, de Mackenzie et de la Saskatchewan, Paris, Nov. 1868: lettre du père Le Goff, 10 déc. 1867, AD, HPK 2001 .N82H 1.
- 47 "A Pioneer in the Eskimo Mission, Father Alphonse Gasté (1830-1919)", in *Eskimo*, 56 (1960), p. 3-15.
- 48 "Lettre du R.P. A. Gasté, o.m.i., à Mgr le Révérendissime Père Général, n.d.", in *Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée* [hereafter *Missions*] 50 (1912), p. 343. Although Gasté's mission among the Inland Inuit produced no tangible results it was, nevertheless, significant. He was the second white man after Samuel Hearne in 1770 to see the Inland Inuit and he preceded the topographer James Tyrell into the Barren Land by 25 years; G.M.R., "Importance du voyage du P. Gasté", in *Eskimo*, 57 (1960), p. 16-17.
- 49 Renseignements demandés par Mgr Taché sur les missions et les missionnaires de Mgr Grandin depuis l'érection du vicariat religieux de St-Albert 1868 jusqu'à 1872, p. 5, AD, L 2003 .A33R 1.
- 50 TURQUETIL, Arsène, o.m.i., "Chronique historique de la mission St-Pierre du lac Caribou depuis 1846 jusqu'à nos jours, 1912 [hereafter "Chronique"]", in *Missions*, 50 (1912), p. 195.
- 51 GASTÉ to Morice, 18 jan. 1912, AD, HEB 6255 .A45C 20.
- 52 McCARTHY, Martha, *To Evangelize the Nations*, p. 165-166.
- 53 GUILLET, Célestin, o.m.i., *Journal 1868-1879*, PAA, PP. Brother Guillet mistakenly states that Mestre's death took place in August 1870 (p. 24). "A Pioneer of the Eskimo Missions Father A. Gasté", in *Eskimo*, 56 (1960), p. 910; GASTÉ to Morice, 18 jan. 1912, AD, HEB 6255 .A45C 20; McCARTHY, Martha, *To Evangelize the Nations*, p. 166, errs in identifying the year as 1871.
- 54 TURQUETIL, Arsène, o.m.i., "Chronique", in *Missions*, 50 (1912), p. 198. In *To Evangelize the Nations* (p. 169), McCarthy draws from the same source but states that the baptism took place in 1877 at Midnight Mass and, furthermore, that Redhead took the name Alphonse.
- 55 "Extrait d'une lettre du R.P. Moulin, 6 fév. 1877", in *Missions*, 16 (1878), p. 352-355.

56 *Ibid.*

57 TURQUETIL, Arsène, o.m.i., "Chronique", in *Missions*, 50 (1912), p. 281-283.

58 GASTÉ to Mon rév. et bien cher père Maisonneuve, 19 jan. 1875, AD, HEB 6255 .A45C 10.

59 GASTÉ to Mon bien cher père Lestanc, 2 fév. 1884, PAA, OMI, DP, A. Gasté 1863-1894.

60 GASTÉ to Mon Rév. et bien cher père [Grandin] 3 août 1874, AD, HEB 6255 .A45C 9.

61 BONNALD, Étienne, o.m.i., "Notice sur la mission Ste-Gertrude du Pelican Narrows", in *Missions*, 29 (1891), p. 38.

62 Renseignements demandés par Mgr Taché, AD, L 2003 .A33R 1, p. 5. An informal venture into education had been made earlier in 1863 when Gasté had boarded and educated the two children of a local chief to prevent them from being schooled by the Anglican minister, McCARTHY, Martha, *To Evangelize the Nations*, p. 168.

63 GUILLET, Célestin, o.m.i., *Journal 1868-1869*, 20 juin 1870, p. 20; 27 juin 1870, p. 21, PAA, OMI, PP.

64 *Ibid*, 20 juin 1870, p. 20.

65 McCARTHY, Martha, *To Evangelize the Nations*, p. 169.

66 TURQUETIL, Arsène, o.m.i., "Chronique", in *Missions*, 50 (1912), p. 184.

67 *Ibid*, p. 187-188.

68 Guillet's service was continuous with the exception of a two year interval 1894-1896 when he was convalescing; CARRIERE, Gaston, o.m.i. *DBOC*, II, "Guillet, Célestin", p. 126. The term "*apôtres inconnus*" appeared in the title of the book by DUCHAUSSOIS, Pierre, o.m.i., *Apôtres inconnus. Nos coadjuteurs dans l'établissement de l'Évangile*, Paris, Éditions Spes, [1924]. An english edition published later was entitle *Hidden Apostles Our Lay Brother Missionaries*. The title was inspired by Phil. 4 : 3, "Fellow-labourers, whose names are in the Book of Life".

69 GUILLET, Célestin, o.m.i., *Journal 1868-1879*, 22 août 1869, p. 12, PAA, OMI, PP.

70 GUILLET to Boisramé, 6 fév. 1877, PAA, OMI, DP, C. Guillet 1877-1894.

71 GASTÉ, Alphonse, "Relations des travaux de mission et *Codex historicus*", lac Caribou, 1885-1887 [hereafter "Relations"], 6 août 1886, AD, LC 7001 .K26R 1.

72 *Ibid*, 28 juin, 15 juillet, 6 août 1866.

73 CULERIER, Louis, "F. C. Célestin Guillet, 1842-1911 (802)", in *Missions*, 65 (1931), p. 213.

74 GASTÉ, Alphonse, o.m.i., "Relations", 10 mars 1885, AD, LC 7001 .K26R 1.

75 GRANDIN to Mon rév. et bien cher père [Maisonneuve] 14 août 1883, AD, H 5102 .G75M 1.

76 GASTÉ, Alphonse, o.m.i., "Relations", 10 mars 1885, AD, LC 7001 .K26R 1.

77 GUILLET to Boisramé, 6 fév. 1887, PAA, OMI, DP, F. C. Guillet 1877-1894.

78 CARRIERE, Gaston, o.m.i., *DBOC*, II, "Gagnon, François", p. 57.

79 "Lettre du F. C. Urbain Drouin, o.m.i.", in *Missions*, 67 (1933), p. 482-483. Information on Oblates who died accidentally or violently can be found in PHILIPPOT, Aristide, o.m.i., "Missionnaires Oblats morts de mort violente ou accidentelle dans le Nord-Ouest canadien", in *Missions*, 72 (1938), p. 488-493.

80 EGENOLF, Joseph, o.m.i., "Égaré sur le lac gelé", in *Missions*, 70 (1936), p. 348-349.

81 GASTÉ to Mon rév. et bien cher Père, 19 nov. 1873, AD, HEB 6255 .A45C 7.

82 GASTÉ, Alphonse, o.m.i., "Relations", 10 mars 1885, AD, LC 7001 .L26R 1.

83 *Ibid*, août 1887.

84 *Ibid*, 17 fév. 1886.

85 *Ibid*, 1 jan. 1885, 1 jan. 1887.

86 *Ibid*, 1 jan. 1886.

87 GASTÉ to Mgr et bien aimé père [Taché], 7 mai 1864, PAA, OMI, DP, A. Gasté 1861-1864.

88 GASTÉ, Alphonse, o.m.i., "Relations", 8 avril 1885, AD, LC 7001 .K26R 1.

89 GASTÉ to MacFarlane, 19 nov. 1896, AD, HEB 6255 .A45C 19.

90 TURQUETIL, Arsène, o.m.i., "Chronique", in *Missions*, 50 (1912), p. 286-287.

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- 91 "Rapport sur le Vicariat de la Saskatchewan, fév. 1898", in *Missions*, 36 (1898), p. 171.
- 92 Vicariat de la Saskatchewan, "Rapport au chapitre général de 1904", in *Missions*, 43 (1905), p.
296.
- 93 VÉGRÉVILLE to Mgr et rév. père [Taché], 20 août 1861, AD, HE 2221 .T12Z 255.
- 94 "Voyage de Mgr Grandin, 1861", in *Missions*, 2 (1863), p. 241.
- 95 *Ibid*, p. 236.
- 96 *Ibid*, p. 241; "Journal de Mgr Grandin, 4 juin 1861", *Ibid*, 3 (1864), p. 277.
- 97 A. Gasté au Directeur des Annales, 15 mars 1898, in *Missions*, 37 (1900), p. 110.
- 98 EGENOLF, J. to Rév. et bien cher père, 15 sept. 1931, in *Missions*, 66 (1932), p. 700.
- 99 "Vicariat du Keewatin", in *Missions*, 66 (1932), p. 758-759.
- 100 "Vicariat du Keewatin. Un missionnaire rappelé à Dieu", in *Missions*, 76 (1949), p. 553.
- 101 "Au pays du Keewatin, 22 juin au 31 juillet 1937", p. 1, AD, LC 6003 .K26R 8.
- 102 "Keewatin", in *Missions*, 67 (1933), p. 224.
- 103 DARVEAU to Bien chers parents, bienfaiteurs et amis, 1 déc. 1982. Archives of the Oblate
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- 104 "Le <<jardin>> du lac Caribou", in *Missions*, 69 (1935), p. 669.
- 105 *Ibid*.
- 106 CARRIERE, Gaston, o.m.i., *DBOC*, I, "Egenolf, Joseph", p. 33-34.
- 107 EGENOLF, J. to Mgr et bien aimé père, 8 mars 1930, in *Missions*, 64 (1930), p. 185.
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- 109 DARVEAU to Bien chers parents, bienfaiteurs et amis, 22 nov. 1992, AOPM.
- 110 "Vicariat du Keewatin", in *Missions*, 56 (1922), p. 39.
- 111 "Rapport sur le Vicariat du Keewatin au Chapitre général de 1953", in *Missions*, 80 (1953), p. 433.
- 112 DARVEAU to Bien chers parents, bienfaiteurs et amis, 22 nov. 1922, AOPM.
- 113 CULERIER, Louis, o.m.i., "F.C. Célestin Guillet, 1842-1922 (802)", in *Missions*, 65 (1931), p. 218.
- 114 CARRIERE, Gaston, o.m.i., *DBOC*, II, "Guillet, Célestin", p. 126.
- 115 CARRIERE, Gaston, o.m.i., *DBOC*, II, "Gasté, Alphonse", p. 64-65; *Ibid*, "Egenolf, Joseph", p. 333-
334.
- 116 DARVEAU, Adrien, o.m.i., "Frère Urbain Drouin, 1893-1964", in *Missions*, 91 (1964), p. 282. Lay
Brother Drouin spent all his Oblate life at Saint Peter's Mission.
- 117 DARVEAU, Adrien, o.m.i., "Notes biographiques", AOPM.
- 118 CARRIERE, Gaston, o.m.i., "L'Élévation du père Vital-Justin Grandin, o.m.i., à l'épiscopat", in
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- 119 BONNALD, Étienne, o.m.i., "Notice sur la mission de Sainte-Gertrude au lac Pélican dans le district
Cumberland", in *Missions*, 29 (1891), p. 36-39; Vicariat de St-Boniface, "Lettre du R.P. Bonnard", *Ibid*, 40 (1902), p.
141; "Rapport du R.P. Bonnard au Directeur des *Grandes Annales*, *Ibid*, 45 (1907), p. 53.
- 120 MORICE, Adrien-Gabriel, o.m.i., *Mgr Turquetil, O.M.I., Apôtre des Esquimaux et le miracle de ses
missions*, Winnipeg, chez l'auteur, 1935, p. 84-85.

Oblation

SUMMARY - Following an introduction in which the author defines oblation in general and the Christian oblation in particular, he writes about the oblation in the Founder's life, fundamental oblation, regular oblation and decisive oblation. "Complete oblation of oneself made to God, our most characteristic spirit is this spirit of oblation without reserve, which our name really signifies" (Léo Deschâtelets). Their (Oblates) apostolic zeal is sustained by the complete gift of their oblation, an oblation always renewed in the exigencies of their mission (CC & RR, 1982, art. 2).

Introduction

1. *Vocabulaire* -- Le *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* assimile <<oblation>> et <<offrande>>¹. D'autre part, il distingue les notions voisines, don de soi, abandon et consécration. <<L'*oblation* désigne l'*acte* par lequel le chrétien, sous l'inspiration de l'Esprit-Saint, se donne à Dieu. Le *don de soi* est l'*état* auquel le chrétien parvient quand, aidé par la grâce, il livre à Dieu, de manière constante et autant qu'il le peut, toute sa personne, pensées, volontés, actions. Le don de soi suppose évidemment l'oblation. La *consécration* est une oblation. Mais c'est un acte qui engage l'avenir et le remet entre les mains de Dieu soit par une décision intérieure, soit par un acte extérieur oral ou écrit. L'*abandon* est une attitude de consentement et de soumission à tout événement, à toute situation permise par le Seigneur et qui affecte notre existence²>>.

On pourrait ajouter comme notions proches d'oblation celles de sacrifice, immolation, holocauste, etc. Elles se retrouvent toutes dans les littératures mazenodienne et oblate: <<Sacrifice d'amour, holocauste sublime>>, chantait le cantique d'oblation depuis 1844. Cependant, il ne faudrait pas y serrer ces notions de trop près et se rappeler que l'Oblat tout comme son Fondateur, Eugène de Mazenod, <<n'était pas homme à analyser ses dévotions³>>; qu'il était <<un homme d'action, de décision, un apôtre plus qu'un théologien. Il se révèle et s'exprime dans ses actes et ses choix plus que dans ses écrits⁴>>.

2. *Oblation chrétienne* -- Les Évangiles synoptiques nous révèlent que le Christ a défini <<en sa personne un nouveau type d'oblation. Elle prend tout l'être humain, car il ne s'agit de rien moins que de donner sa vie en rançon pour la multitude⁵. En même temps, le Christ donne à entendre que son disciple doit envisager le même genre d'oblation totale⁶... La matière de l'oblation, c'est toujours le Christ en personne... Cette oblation salvifique est unique. Elle demeure toujours actuelle, sacramentellement, dans l'Eucharistie⁷... Et c'est uniquement en relation avec l'oblation du Christ qu'il est désormais possible et légitime de parler d'oblation de la part de l'homme. Toute oblation a un fondement christologique⁸>>.

<<L'offrande de soi fait partie de la vie chrétienne, sous une forme ou une autre... L'heure privilégiée en est la *célébration eucharistique*, <source et sommet de toute la vie chrétienne⁹>. L'oblation est un élément de la vie spirituelle fervente... Le désir d'une oblation aussi totale et permanente que possible a engendré un *état de vie stable*, la vie religieuse. Les vœux expriment la volonté qui anime le religieux d'accomplir l'oblation de sa personne, totalement et définitivement¹⁰>>.

Il en existe de nombreux témoignages concrets, entre autres certains qui ont exercé une influence sur Eugène de Mazenod. Dans les *Exercices spirituels*, <<Ignace de Loyola conduit le retraitant jusqu'à l'oblation de sa personne et il la propose totale, illimitée>>. Chez Saint-Sulpice et l'École française, <<l'offrande devient une pratique, un exercice de piété... une donation totale <<de mon être et ma vie, mon état et mes affections>>¹¹>>. Une formule significative en est la prière *O Domina mea*, cette <<oblation mariale>> quotidienne que le Fondateur des Oblats a retenu pour lui-même et pour les siens¹².

I. Chez Eugène de Mazenod

On est loin de connaître Eugène de Mazenod comme il le faudrait. Surtout certains aspects de sa personnalité mériteraient d'être scrutés davantage, en particulier son idée d'oblation.

Cette tâche effraye notre faiblesse, écrit au sujet de Mgr de Mazenod Paguelle de Follenay, car il ne s'agit plus de décrire ces circonstances extérieures sans lesquelles certains traits de la physionomie morale demeureraient inexplicables; il s'agit de pénétrer dans le sanctuaire intime d'une âme éminente¹³.

L'idée d'oblation chez Eugène de Mazenod remonte aux plus tendres années de son exil à Venise: <<Ne serait-ce pas un grand honneur pour notre famille de finir par un prêtre>>, avait-il répliqué à son grand oncle un jour que celui-ci avait fait observer qu'il était l'unique rejeton des Mazenod¹⁴. Cet idéal a germé et poussé de racines profondes dans son cœur généreux au lendemain de la Révolution française, face à l'abandon où se trouvaient les pauvres des campagnes provençales et l'Église en général, <<ce bel héritage du Sauveur qu'il avait acquis au prix de tout son sang¹⁵. Je serai prêtre <<et remarquez, écrit-il à sa mère le 29 novembre 1809, que je ne veux pas être ecclésiastique pour huit jours, six mois, un an, dix ans même; je veux l'être toute ma vie¹⁶.>> Plus tard, ajoutera-t-il dans ses *Mémoires*: <<Certainement, si nous fussions restés un an de plus à Venise, j'aurais suivi mon saint directeur et son frère, devenu prêtre, dans la congrégation religieuse qu'ils choisirent et où ils sont morts l'un et l'autre dans l'exercice d'un zèle héroïque¹⁷.>>

L'un de ses meilleurs connaisseurs, Joseph Morabito, présentait Mgr de Mazenod au congrès mariologique international de Rome, le 26 octobre 1954. Il distinguait fort justement les trois étapes de l'oblation du Serviteur de Dieu: son oblation fondamentale, le 11 avril 1816, son oblation régulière, le 1^{er} novembre 1818, et son oblation décisive, le 13 juillet 1826.

C'est cette idée d'oblation qui, après être sortie de l'âme ardente du Serviteur de Dieu, après avoir été consacrée dans les Règles, après avoir donné le nom aux voeux du P. de Mazenod et de ses compagnons, finit par tout envahir, en donnant le nom non seulement aux voeux, mais aussi aux personnes et à la société toute entière, comme pour caractériser non seulement un acte de leur vie, mais leurs personnes mêmes, toute leur vie, leur mission dans l'Église¹⁸.

II. Oblation fondamentale

A deux reprises en fin de 1814 (12 septembre et 28 octobre), l'abbé Eugène de Mazenod avait fait part à son ami Charles de Forbin-Janson de ses désirs de vie religieuse. Il n'y a aucun doute qu'il y aspirait personnellement dès la fondation de ses Missionnaires de Provence, et il escomptait les amener peu à peu à ses propres vues. D'où ces pierres d'attente qu'il a ménagées dans le règlement du début soumis aux vicaires capitulaires d'Aix-en-Provence, le 25 janvier 1816, comme en fait foi l'analyse de ce document par Joseph Pielorz¹⁹. Autant de pièces qui confirment ce que Mgr de Mazenod écrira plus tard dans ses *Mémoires*: <<Je regardais les conseils évangéliques comme indispensables à embrasser... Ma pensée fixe fut toujours que notre petite famille devait se consacrer à Dieu et au service de l'Église par les voeux de religion²⁰.>>

On comprend son exultation en découvrant chez François-de-Paul Henry Tempier (1788-1870) un prêtre tout disposé à le suivre sans retard dans une première oblation fondamentale.

Le P. Tempier et moi nous jugeâmes qu'il ne fallait pas différer davantage, et le jeudi saint (11 avril 1816), nous étant placés tous les deux sous l'échafaudage du beau reposoir que nous avions élevé sur le maître-autel de l'église de la mission, dans la nuit de ce saint jour, nous fîmes nos voeux avec une indicible joie. Nous savourâmes notre bonheur pendant toute cette belle nuit en la présence de Notre-Seigneur, au pied du trône magnifique où nous l'avions déposé pour la messe des présanctifiés du lendemain, et nous priâmes ce divin Maître, si sa sainte volonté était de bénir notre oeuvre, d'amener nos compagnons présents et ceux qui, dans l'avenir, s'associeraient à nous, de comprendre tout ce que valait cette oblation de tout soi-même, faite à Dieu, quand on voulait le servir sans partage et consacrer sa vie à la

propagation de son saint Évangile et à la conversion des âmes. Nos vœux furent exaucés²¹.

Témoignage privilégié pendant plus de vingt-cinq ans des conséquences de cette double oblation, le père Joseph Fabre (1824-1892) nous en a déclaré la nature et l'importance primordiale.

<<A l'ombre de l'adorable victime qui fut obéissante jusqu'à la mort>>, les abbés de Mazenod et Tempier ont prononcé <<l'un après l'autre une formule contenant le vœu d'obéissance qu'ils se faisaient mutuellement>>.

Ce ne fut point une vaine cérémonie: de part et d'autre c'était un grand acte, un de ces actes qui influent sur les destinées. Le jour de l'éternité peut seul nous révéler le nombre de mérites dont cet acte a été le principe pour les deux religieux. Celui qui est demeuré toute sa vie le premier supérieur a su demeurer aussi le premier obéissant, et nous ne savons à qui accorder la plus belle part: au supérieur qui, bien des fois, a obéi à son inférieur, ou à l'inférieur qui a eu la vertu de commander à celui en qui il respectait et aimait la vivante image de l'autorité de Dieu. C'est peut-être un fait unique dans l'histoire des congrégations religieuses, nous l'enregistrons avec l'humble reconnaissance que font naître les dons de Dieu²².

III. Oblation régulière

L'origine du nom d'*Oblats de Marie Immaculée* reste entourée d'un halo de mystère: <<Il nous reste encore à dégager la signification précise de notre nom d'Oblats²³.>>

Le mot <<Oblats>> se présente pour la première fois sous la plume de l'abbé de Mazenod le 9 octobre 1815, avant même la fondation des Missionnaires de Provence. Il lui aurait été inspiré alors par <<les statuts de saint Charles pour les Oblats>>, son patron personnel; voire même le <<parrain>> de sa famille religieuse, pendant quelque temps, en 1825, alors qu'il s'appretait à la présenter à Rome comme les <<Oblats de Saint-Charles²⁴>>. Avant que son oncle Fortuné ne lui apporte de Palerme les constitutions et règles des Rédemptoristes, le 16 septembre 1817, il lui avait écrit: <<Vous aurez dans ma communauté de véritables oblats, prêts à tout bien²⁵.>>

Ayant trouvé le mot <<oblation>> dans les règles du bienheureux Alphonse de Liguori, le Fondateur des Oblats se l'appropriait au point d'y consacrer un long paragraphe de deux pages manuscrites où le mot <<oblation>> revient six fois et le mot <<oblats>> quatre fois.

Dans la Règle de saint Alphonse il n'y a pas de paragraphe sur l'oblation... Nous ne savons pas où notre Fondateur a pris cette matière, excepté pour le rite, et en partie pour la formule d'oblation, où il s'inspira de la Règle de saint Ignace²⁶.

Le plus sûr est que le tout a jailli de son cœur au moment où à Saint-Laurent-du-Verdon il venait de rédiger <<les principaux articles de la Règle>>, notamment après y avoir <<introduit résolument l'obligation formelle, pour tous les membres de son institut, d'émettre les vœux d'obéissance, de chasteté et de persévérance²⁷>>.

Un jour, raconte lui-même l'ardent novice qui l'accompagnait dans sa solitude, après avoir terminé le chapitre des vœux, il appela le jeune Suzanne, qui ne connaissait pas encore le projet qu'on avait formé: d'obliger par des vœux les membres de la société, lui lut ce chapitre tout au long, et lui demanda son avis et sa résolution à cet égard. Cette lecture et la demande qu'on lui fit, l'étonnèrent et le surprirent, au premier abord. Il demanda un moment de réflexion; il se rend au parc du château tout pensif, et après un quart d'heure de réflexion et quelques prières, il revient et promet au Supérieur de faire les vœux dès qu'on l'en jugera digne²⁸.

C'était en septembre 1818. Le même témoin poursuit son récit. Il dresse le procès-verbal de la première oblation régulière chez les Missionnaires de Provence. Elle eut lieu à Aix, comme il avait été convenu, le jour de la Toussaint.

Dès trois heures du matin, écrit Suzanne, ceux qui composent le Chapitre sont éveillés; avant quatre heures ils sont tous à l'église, prosternés devant l'autel, se préparant au plus beau, au plus consolant de tous les sacrifices.

Après avoir invoqué les lumières du Saint-Esprit par le chant du *Veni Creator*, le Supérieur fait une exhortation touchante à la petite assemblée. Cette exhortation finie, notre Père, revêtu des habits sacerdotaux, se prosterne au pied de l'autel, prend un cierge à la main droite, et dit à haute et intelligible voix la formule d'oblation, selon les termes du premier manuscrit de la Règle:

Au nom de Notre-Seigneur Jésus-Christ, en présence de la très sainte Trinité, de la sainte Vierge Marie, de tous les anges et de tous les saints, de tous mes frères ici réunis, je, Charles-Joseph-Eugène de Mazenod, fais profession, promets à Dieu et fais vœu de chasteté et obéissance perpétuelles. Je fais pareillement vœu de persévérer jusqu'à la mort dans le saint institut et dans la société des Missionnaires dits de Provence. Ainsi, Dieu me soit en aide. Amen.

Il commence ensuite la messe, qui est servie par les PP. Tempier et Maunier, les deux plus anciens prêtres de la Congrégation. Au moment de la communion, le Supérieur, tenant dans ses mains le Corps adorable de notre divin Sauveur, nous nous avançames l'un après l'autre, un cierge allumé à la main, prononçant nos saints vœux avec un sentiment de joie ineffable.

Après la sainte messe, le Supérieur général entonna l'hymne *Te Deum* en action de grâces, puis tous les membres de la communauté se rendirent à l'autel de la sainte Vierge pour mettre sous sa protection les saints engagements qu'ils venaient de contracter; ils se mirent aussi sous la protection de tous les saints en récitant leurs litanies.

Avec quels transports nous nous embrassâmes tous, quand nous nous revîmes à la sacristie! Après ces premiers moments de joie et de fraternelle expansion, le Supérieur bénit les croix des trois jeunes profès et les leur donna lui-même²⁹.

IV. Oblation décisive

Une fois établies les Règles de l'oblation des Missionnaires de Provence, il restait à les compléter et à les faire approuver par l'Église. Comme complément d'importance, le Chapitre général de 1821 y avait introduit le vœu de pauvreté; celui de 1824 avait sanctionné la disponibilité exceptionnelle des pères de Mazenod et Tempier qui les avait menés tous deux au vicariat général du diocèse de Marseille. Fort de l'approbation de plusieurs évêques, le Fondateur se présente à Rome, en novembre 1825, dans l'espoir d'y obtenir rien de moins qu'une sanction définitive du pape Léon XII.

C'est à ce moment que, pour des raisons restées quelque peu mystérieuses, connues de lui seul³⁰, le père de Mazenod décide de changer le nom de ses Oblats de Saint-Charles pour celui de Missionnaires Oblats de la Très Sainte et Immaculée Vierge Marie, <<pour éviter toute confusion de nom avec d'autres congrégations>>, insiste-t-il³¹.

Il est vrai que lui-même ne jugeait pas la chose de toute première importance. Il n'en demeure pas moins qu'une fois reconnu le caractère extraordinaire de l'approbation solennelle du Saint-Siège pour une société qui n'était encore que dans ses langes, une fois attesté le caractère sacré qu'une telle sanction conférait à l'institut, le changement de son nom a eu des conséquences remarquables.

<<C'est l'Église qui nous a donné ce beau titre>>, ne cesseront de répéter les Oblats à la suite de leur Fondateur, en dépit du fait qu'ils savent fort bien qu'ils le doivent à son inspiration.

<<Vous avez bien raison de dire qu'il vous semblait à tous d'être devenus d'autres hommes, écrit-il le 20 mars 1826; c'est qu'il en est ainsi. Puissions-nous bien comprendre ce que nous sommes³².>> Le père Joseph Fabre, son successeur, ira jusqu'à écrire: <<Vous n'oublierez pas que si notre vénéré Fondateur nous a faits missionnaires des pauvres, le Souverain Pontife nous a faits Oblats de Marie Immaculée³³.>>

De retour à Marseille, le père de Mazenod se hâta d'y convoquer un Chapitre général extraordinaire, le 10 juillet 1826, pour la promulgation des Lettres Apostoliques de Léon XII, en vertu desquelles la Règle et l'Institut avaient été formellement approuvés.

Deux cérémonies d'une solennité exceptionnelle marquèrent l'événement, le 13 juillet.

Tout d'abord, dans la chapelle intérieure des Oblats à Marseille, le Fondateur célébra la messe du Saint-Esprit devant le Très Saint Sacrement exposé. La messe finie, tous les profès se sont avancés, chacun à son tour, pour renouveler leurs vœux pour la première fois comme <<Missionnaires Oblats de la Très Sainte et Immaculée Vierge Marie>>. La même formule était écrite et signée par eux sur un papier qu'ils remettaient à l'instant au Supérieur général, qui la déposait sur l'autel. <<La présence de Notre-Seigneur au milieu de toute notre famille assemblée dans une si grande circonstance, le profond recueillement de tous, l'objet sublime qui nous occupait donnaient à la cérémonie une beauté céleste.>>

Au sortir de la chapelle, tous se rendirent dans la salle capitulaire. S'adressant alors à toute la Société assemblée, le Fondateur a déclaré:

C'est l'heureux commencement d'une ère nouvelle pour la Société. Dieu a ratifié les projets que nous avons formés pour sa gloire; il a béni les liens qui nous unissent; désormais nous combattons les ennemis du ciel sous un étendard qui nous sera propre, et que l'Église nous a donné. Sur cet étendard brille le nom glorieux de la Très Sainte Vierge Marie Immaculée; le nom même est devenu le nôtre, car c'est à la Sainte Vierge que nous sommes consacrés; nous sommes plus spécialement ses enfants; et sa protection sur nous, jusqu'aujourd'hui si sensible, le sera encore plus à l'avenir, si nous nous montrons dignes d'une telle mère³⁴.

En signe de cette appartenance spéciale à Marie, un Chapitre subséquent, celui de 1837, choisira <<parmi plusieurs objets proposés>> un scapulaire: <<Il a été adopté unanimement comme il suit: Le jour de l'Oblation on recevra avec la croix, signe authentique de notre mission, le scapulaire de l'Immaculée Conception, qu'on devra porter sous ses habits³⁵.

<<C'est l'Église qui nous a donné ce beau titre>> et c'est encore l'Église qui par la voix populaire persiste à nous distinguer des autres religieux comme <<les Oblats>>. <<J'aime bien aussi votre nom d'Oblats>>, a dit Jean XXIII au Chapitre général de 1959³⁶. C'est pourquoi, au terme de son analyse de *Notre vocation*, le père Léo Deschâtelets a souligné lui-même que <<Notre esprit le plus caractéristique, nous aimons à le répéter, est cet esprit d'*oblation sans réserve* que signifie bien notre nom³⁷>>. L'expression est désormais consacrée et passée en tête à l'article 2 des *Constitutions et Règles* de 1982: <<Leur zèle apostolique est soutenu par le don sans réserve de leur oblation, une oblation sans cesse renouvelée dans les exigences de leur mission.>>

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Herménégilde CHARBONNEAU, o.m.i.

Notes :

- 1 *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité (DS) <<Offrande>>*, 1982, p. 720-733.
- 2 *DS*, p. 731.
- 3 JETTÉ, Fernand, o.m.i., <<Essai sur le caractère marial de notre spiritualité>>, dans *Études Oblates*, 7 (1948), p. 16.
- 4 COURVOISIER, Michel, o.m.i., *Eugène de Mazenod Missionnaire*, France-Belgique, Maisons Provinciales OMI, 1975.
- 5 Mc 10, 45.
- 6 Mt 10, 39; 16, 24-25 et par.
- 7 1 Co 10, 16-21; 11, 23-30.
- 8 *DS* p. 722-723, 727; SIMON, Joseph-M., o.m.i., <<Essai d'une spiritualité oblate>>, dans *Études Oblates*, 15 (1956), p. 229-235; GILBERT, Maurice, o.m.i., <<Our Oblation and the Oblation of Christ the Priest>>, dans *Études Oblates*, 14 (1955), p. 148-153.
- 9 Concile Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* 11, 1; *Perfectae caritatis* 6, 2; *Christus Dominus* 30, 21.
- 10 *DS*, p. 727, 729, 730; LAMIRANDE, Émilien, o.m.i., <<Esprit d'oblation -- Approche historique>>, dans *Études Oblates*, 15 (1956), p. 333-336.
- 11 *DS*, p. 729.
- 12 MEUNIER, Ovila, <<Aux sources de notre spiritualité>>, dans *Études Oblates*, 1 (1942), p. 38; COSENTINO, Georges, *Exercices de piété de l'Oblat*, Ottawa, Études Oblates, 1962, p. 136.
- 13 *Vie du cardinal Guibert*, 1, 1896, p. 61.
- 14 *Missions*, 1866, p. 129.
- 15 *Missions*, 1951, p. 15.
- 16 PIELORZ, Joseph, o.m.i., *La vie spirituelle de Mgr de Mazenod 1782-1812 - Étude critique*, Ottawa, Études Oblates, 1956, p. 232; JETTÉ, Fernand, o.m.i., *Le Missionnaire Oblat de Marie Immaculée*, Rome, 1985, p. 44.
- 17 *Missions*, 1866, p. 129.
- 18 MORABITO, Joseph, o.m.i., <<L'Immaculée dans la spiritualité du Fondateur>>, dans *Études Oblates*, 14 (1955), p. 37.
- 19 *Missions*, 1957, p. 137 ss.
- 20 RAMBERT, Toussaint, o.m.i., *Vie de Monseigneur Charles-Joseph-Eugène de Mazenod, évêque de Marseille, fondateur de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, t. 1, Tours, 1883, p. 187.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 *Notices nécrologiques*, 2, p. 87.
- 23 LAMIRANDE, Émilien, o.m.i., <<Oblation--Oblats>>, dans *Études Oblates*, 17 (1958), p. 86.
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- 25 PIELORZ, Joseph, *Les Chapitres généraux au temps du Fondateur*, t. 1, Ottawa, Études Oblates, 1956, p. 6.
- 26 COSENTINO, Georges, o.m.i., *Histoire de nos Règles*, t. 1, *Rédaction et Sources (1816-1818)*, Ottawa, Études Oblates, 1955, p. 124, 126.
- 27 RAMBERT, Toussaint, o.m.i., *Vie de Monseigneur...*, t. 1, p. 285.
- 28 PIELORZ, Joseph, <<Le séjour du Fondateur à St-Laurent>>, dans *Missions*, 1957, p. 311-312.
- 29 RAMBERT, Toussaint, o.m.i., *Vie de Monseigneur...*, t.1, p. 290-291; PIELORZ, Joseph, o.m.i., <<Le séjour du Fondateur à St-Laurent et la rédaction de nos Règles (Août-octobre 1818)>>, dans *Missions*, 1957, p. 311-312.
- 30 PIELORZ, Joseph, o.m.i., *Les Chapitres généraux...*, t. 1, p. 50 ss.
- 31 *Missions*, 1952, p. 61.
- 32 MAZENOD, Eugène, o.m.i., *Lettres aux Oblats de France 1826-1830*, Rome, *Écrits Oblats*, 7, p. 65.
- 33 *Petites Annales*, 1891, p. 5.
- 34 PIELORZ, Joseph, o.m.i., *Les Chapitres...*, t. 1, p. 75-76.
- 35 DESCHATELETS, Léo, o.m.i., <<Le scapulaire oblat>>, dans *Études Oblates*, 2 (1943), p. 79.
- 36 *CASG*, 1959, p. 5.

Father Joseph Montfort, O.M.I. (1827-1895)

Missionary Extraordinary

SOMMAIRE - Le Père Joseph Montfort (1827-1895) est aujourd'hui un parfait inconnu. Même les oblats de Notre-Dame de Pontmain où il a exercé son ministère pendant plusieurs années n'ont gardé aucun souvenir de lui. C'est par pur hasard qu'on vient de le sortir de l'oubli. Comme bien d'autres apôtres il est passé en faisant le bien, sans faire de bruit. Il ne faut pas se faire d'illusion sur le souvenir qui reste après nous... en dépit de tout ce que nous ayons pu faire pendant notre vie. L'auteur, archiviste à la maison générale, a bien voulu le faire revivre à l'aide de la revue <<Missions>>, du père Edmond Thiriet et des archives de la maison générale. Cette vie écrite, dans le détail... d'un <<missionnaire extraordinaire>> saura certainement nous intéresser et nous inspirer.

En plus de nous entretenir sur le personnage en question l'auteur nous renseigne sur la mission de Notre-Dame de l'Osier et sur Notre-Dame de Pontmain où le père Montfort a passé la plus grande partie de sa vie.

Background to this article

Grzegorz SKICKI is an Oblate scholastic from Poland who has completed his basic theological studies at the International Scholasticate in Rome. On December 8, 1993, he made his perpetual oblation. Rather than receive a new Oblate cross, he asked to be given the cross of a former Oblate missionary. Now it so happened that among the "old" crosses kept in the General Postulation, the only one that could be clearly identified had the name MONTFORT engraved upon it, and this the cross that Brother Skicki received during the religious profession liturgy.

Since he wanted to become acquainted with the deceased Oblate whose cross he was going to receive, Brother Skicki came to the General Archives and together we began our research on Father Joseph Montfort (1827-1895).

The General Archives dossier on Father Montfort was not a promising beginning: it contained only his oblation formula and five original hand-written letters: three of them were addressed to Superior General Father Joseph Fabre and two to his successor, Superior General Father Louis Soullier.

The copious references to Father Montfort found in the volumes of *Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée* from 1862 to 1932 already provided an intriguing profile of an extraordinary Oblate missionary. Father Edmond THIRIET's biographical sketch published as a series of 14 installments in the *Annales de Notre-Dame de Pontmain* from 1895 to 1897 proved to be a wealth of information. Additional materials from the pages of the "Codex Historicus" of the Oblate House at Pontmain, kindly sent to us by Father Joseph Chardonnet, as well as the content of other sources found in the Oblate General Archives in Rome, transformed this profile into a revealing portrait.

We now have the clear image of an exceptionally gifted, zealous and effective preacher of missions and retreats who belongs to the generation of Oblates that immediately followed the death of the Founder. Father Joseph Montfort is a superb example of the kind of Oblate missionary whom Blessed Eugene de Mazenod would readily have described as "a truly apostolic man".

Both Grzegorz Skicki and I felt that this portrait of such an outstanding Oblate ought to be shared with all the Oblate missionaries across the world. Hence, the present article.

All the available sources about Father Montfort are in French, except for two documents which are in Latin. The English translations of these sources found in quotations throughout this

article is my own.

I. The Discovery of a Missionary Vocation

Father Joseph Montfort was already thirty-three years old when he entered the Oblate novitiate at Notre-Dame de l'Osier on September 3, 1860. The spiritual journey that led him to join the Oblates held but few intense moments and even these were lived in a basic atmosphere of peace, that did not result in high drama and emotion. Still, God's choice and direction is plainly discernible in this vocation odyssey.

A. The early years

Joseph Marie Mathurin MONTFORT was born on December 31, 1827, in the town of Loscou't (Côtes-du-Nord), France, in the diocese of Saint-Brieuc. He was baptized in the local parish church on the same day.

Joseph was the firstborn child of Mathurin Montfort and Anne Dugan. Four other children, all of them girls, were born in quick succession after him.

Mathurin Montfort, Joseph's father, came from a solidly Catholic family that had actively helped priests fleeing from the persecutions that occurred during the French Revolution. Two of his brothers had also become priests. He died in 1833. Joseph was then only five years old and his widowed mother was left to raise him and his four little sisters.

Joseph's mother, Anne Dugan, also came from a good Catholic family of the area. She also had a brother who was a priest. She had consecrated Joseph to the Blessed Virgin Mary even before he was born. She died in 1876.

The local parish church was but a short distance from the Montfort house and the clergy took a keen interest in Joseph. As soon as he had managed to learn the Latin responses, Joseph was a daily Mass server and it was noted that his service at the altar bore the stamp of respect and devotion. He showed a special liking for the ceremonies of the Church and seemed to be attracted to the Lord's presence in the Blessed Sacrament. It was not unusual for him to interrupt playing with the children of his age and go into the church and make a prayer visit to the Blessed Sacrament. Devotion to the Eucharistic Lord will be a constant feature that marks the course of his whole life and it is a pity that we do not possess any information about the day on which he made his first Holy Communion.

The abbé Potier, assistant-priest at Loscou't, furthered these sentiments and gave Joseph his first schooling. He kept him for long hours in his own room and taught him the first elements of the French language. He also initiated him to Church music, both plain chant and popular hymns. Joseph was exceptionally gifted for singing: he had a fine voice, sang well, and that with feeling and devotion. His talent he will develop and use to considerable advantage in his ministry as a missionary.

Joseph's devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary also dates from the early years in his life. As a very young boy he did his part to help introduce the devotion of the month of Mary into the parish. A young girl had the idea of decorating a special altar-throne of Mary in the church for the month of May and she invited everyone to come in the evening to sing hymns to Mary and to recite the rosary. Only Joseph heeded her invitation: he responded to her leading of the rosary and sang hymns. Very soon others joined them and thus the devotion was established.

After vespers on Sundays some women would remain in the church to pray the rosary. Even before he was ten years of age Joseph joined them every Sunday and he did so until he left the parish when he was twenty-four¹.

B. Vocation to the priesthood

The early death of Joseph's father most likely explains why the only semblance of formal schooling that Joseph received were the private lessons given him by the abbé Potier.

His father's farm was of a certain size and quality: if properly tilled and managed, it could provide any family a measure of reasonable security and comfort. As soon as he was able, Joseph was doing all kinds of farm work. He was robustly built, enjoyed good health, and turned out to be a good worker: at fifteen years of age he was considered to be the finest and fittest

farming lad in the area.

The time was fast approaching when Joseph would be eligible for military service. At the time this was determined by a system of drawing lots. While his mother became more and more anxious, Joseph himself remained rather calm about it. When the lots had been drawn, he held a number that exempted him unconditionally from all military service. This unusually good fortune he attributed to the Blessed Virgin Mary to whom he had entrusted his future.

Thus he continued to work and manage what had been his father's farm. It was only natural that people began to look on Joseph as a possible husband for their daughters and some moves in this direction were tentatively made. And it seems that until he was twenty-two years of age, Joseph himself entertained the idea of eventually marrying and settling down on what had been his father's farm.

At about this same time, however, he also became vaguely aware that God may be calling him to another way of life. As though in spite of himself he felt impelled to make a retreat for men that was offered at the nearby town of Merdrignac and it was there that something changed within him. Upon his return he seemed to be a different person. He was more reserved and pensive, sought solitude, and spent more time praying in the church. The insistence of his mother and friends to continue the manner of life he had led up till then had no effect on him.

After some time of this, he confided everything to his confessor and revealed to him that he had firmly decided to be a priest. A little later, after a sleepless and somewhat tearful night, he shyly approached his mother and told her that God was calling him to the priestly life. He was then 23 years old.

It was a terrible blow for his mother. She had seen him as her only support and future and she had taken it for granted that her son Joseph would carry on the family enterprise. She reminded Joseph that he had had no real schooling, that he was already 23 years old, that the family was not that well off, that she and the family needed him. She consulted her own priest-brother and the abbé Dugan also declared himself strongly opposed to his nephew becoming a priest.

Joseph's response to this negative reaction was surprisingly calm: he was confident that God would find a way and make it known to him. In the meantime he continued to work faithfully on the farm for another eighteen months and said nothing. He did not want to force his mother or confront her with a *fait accompli*: it was important to him that his mother would in her own good time freely consent to his departure and his priestly vocation.

In the town of Merdrignac a certain abbé Jounot was chaplain to a community of religious women. He had come to hear of Joseph and had informed himself discreetly about this young man's attitudes and situation. He concluded that the Church needed young priests such as Joseph Montfort's qualities indicated he would be. On his own initiative, therefore, the abbé Jounot offered to teach Joseph Latin and other subject matters that a normal schooling would have provided him.

Thus, at 24 years of age, Joseph Montfort said farewell to his mother and left the family farm at Loscou't for good. The parting had indeed been painful for all concerned but his mother took consolation from the fact that at Merdrignac her son was not all that far away. She was now resigned to his becoming a priest.

At Merdrignac Joseph Montfort lived with the abbé Jounot and earned his keep by being the gardener of the Merdrignac community. He spent the next two years under the abbé Jounot's tutelage².

C. Seminary formation and priesthood

When he was 26 years old, the abbé Jounot sent him to the Institution Saint-Charles de Saint-Brieuc, a minor seminary in the diocesan episcopal city. Here Joseph Montfort completed his secondary education one year later.

Now, at 27 years of age, he entered the major seminary at Saint-Brieuc. Somehow he managed to become the seminary infirmarian, a post which also netted him a reduction in what he had to pay for his stay there. He was well liked and appreciated both by the staff and his fellow seminarians. While working on his spiritual formation, he applied himself well in his

studies. In this regard, Father Edmond Thiriet writes:

He was also convinced of the supreme need he had to apply himself diligently to studies and thus make up for the time he had lost. Never was there a more studious learner. The many notebooks he filled with writing during the course of his philosophical and theological studies are incontestable evidence of the determined effort he put forth to instruct himself in everything. There is no question of dogma or moral that he did not go into deeply; he expressed his comments in writing; he noted down his research, discoveries, difficulties, the answers received from his professor, the explanations given in class, the different opinions of the theologians: of the latter he singles out that which appears to him to be the more certain and, in terms of practice, he adopts a method that manifests a great degree of good judgment. Good judgment is a trait that always characterized Father Montfort. Once he had taken a decision one could be sure that it was based on the most judicious motivation. This good judgment linked to an excellent memory and accompanied by a good practical sense will be a powerful help in the work he will undertake later³.

We do not know the dates when he received the minor orders or when he was ordained subdeacon and then deacon, but we do know that he was ordained priest at Saint-Brieuc on December 21, 1858. He was then 31 years old.

Through Edmond Thiriet we still have access to primary source material that provides us some insight into Joseph Montfort's spiritual outlook on the eve of his ordination to the priesthood. In regard to this source material Father Thiriet writes:

I have had the good fortune to locate several old notebooks written in his own hand, dirtied by time and use, for he must have re-read them often. These are precious pages because they allow us to penetrate into the intimacy of his soul... May I be allowed to quote extensively therefrom⁴...

Father Thiriet then quotes for us the "program of life" that the deacon Joseph Montfort laid down for himself three days before his ordination to the priesthood. The quotation is as follows:

I. Every year I shall make an 8 to 10 day retreat, be this at Saint-Brieuc, or at the Jesuits, or in private. In the latter case I will take care to lay down a special program. Above all I will keep silence as much as possible. During the weeks that precede I shall say special prayers for the retreat's success. Above all I will never forget to put it under protection of the Blessed Virgin.

II. The first Fridays of each month will be devoted to a shorter retreat. The topic of my meditation of that day will be the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, the sorrows of Mary, so that I may be more and more united to Jesus and to Mary and that I may be more persuaded that the one who wishes to follow Jesus Christ and to be glorified with Him must of necessity suffer.

III. On that day I will especially examine myself as to how I have fulfilled my duty, obligations, functions and commitments during the bygone month and I will make a resolution on the point that seems to have been neglected.

IV. I will make a very special effort to renew and strengthen within myself the virtues of chastity, charity and humility, constantly reminding myself of the humility, charity and chastity of Jesus and Mary.

V. I will go to confession every two weeks. For my confessor I will choose the most pious and enlightened man of the area. I will hold him in great respect, kneel before him in great humility, reminding myself that at that moment I am no longer priest but a sinner worthy of God's anger. I

will never go to confession without having examined myself well beforehand, without having striven to achieve contrition. To accomplish this, I shall pause at three stations: 1. - at the gate of Heaven; 2. - at the gate of purgatory; 3. - at the gate of hell.

VI. I will get up at 4.30 a.m. in summer, at 5.00 a.m. in winter: if that is possible and agreeable to my parish priest and parishioners. In getting up, I will always say the Angel's greeting; when I am dressing, the prayers "Indue me", etc., "Dominus pars", etc. Immediately afterwards I will say the usual prayers, but add the "Miserere" thereto. Every morning I will make a half hour of meditation. I will take care each time to make a resolution to which I will strive to be faithful during the day. I will always place it into Mary's hand.

When putting on the priestly vestments I shall properly recite the prescribed prayers. When my Mass does not follow right after my meditation, I will prepare myself for at least 10 minutes; if this cannot be done, I will simply say the prayer: "Ego volo celebrare", etc. I will always say the psalm "Judica me" in a spirit of contrition and humility. At the holy altar I will always conduct myself in such a way as to edify those present in regard to the dignity and piety that such a sublime and sacred function requires.

After Mass I will carefully say the prayers that are indicated and never, except for extraordinary cases, will I go to the confessional without having spent at least a quarter of an hour in thanksgiving. As much as possible I will make my thanksgiving in a way that I am seen, so that I may edify the people who use the brief thanksgivings priests make as a pretext to justify making none at all after Communion.

VII. I will say the small hours in the church before going for breakfast. It goes without saying that breakfast will never be taken in the kitchen nor in conversation with the cooking lady in the salon; rather I will breakfast as quickly as possible and then go up to work until ten minutes to twelve, which is the time for particular examen. I will then read Sacred Scripture. If I am impeded to make this examen because of outsiders, I shall do it after my rosary which I will say every day after Vespers.

During the meal I shall try and be as affable as possible without, however, speaking of banalities and other things of that kind. I will never get up from table without having offered to the good Lord some little mortification to benefit the souls in purgatory. I will never discuss there to sustain my own opinion, even if it is clear that I am right. In the latter case I will be content to say as does a model confrere of mine: "I myself thought like this, but it seems I have been mistaken."

VIII. My recreation will never go beyond an hour and a half, unless for an exceptional situation. After that I will say Vespers and Complines, my rosary, and that is followed by spiritual reading. Every afternoon I will spend half an hour before the Blessed Sacrament. I will also recite Matins and Lauds in the church. When I have returned to my room, I shall work until supper time. Ten minutes before that I will take up my "Tronson" for my personal examination of conscience.

I want to observe this daily program to the letter. I pray to Mary, my Mother, to Saint Joseph, my glorious Patron, to give me constant help so that I do not omit an iota of it. To help me keep this resolution, I will often meditate the words: "Qui regula vivit, Deo Vivit."⁵

In this "program of life" is reflected his Sulpician seminary training as well certain

elements of the French school of priestly spirituality. Blessed Eugene de Mazenod had himself been formed in the same tradition when he attended the seminary of Saint-Sulpice in Paris.

D. Assistant-priest at Merdrignac

Very shortly after his ordination he was sent to be assistant-priest in Merdrignac, a parish of some 3000 souls. He had become known to the parish-priest there when he was being tutored by the abbé Jounot, and it was the parish-priest himself who had asked to have him as his assistant. The people of the parish, too, were happy with the appointment⁶.

There are two written texts by the newly ordained Father Joseph Montfort that have come down to us through Father Edmond Thiriet. One relates to priestly obedience and reads:

I shall honour Jesus Christ in the Supreme Pontiff and the latter in the person of my Bishop. I will never forget that I have promised obedience: "Promitto!" I shall also see the Bishop in my parish-priest: I will obey him in everything and will have for him the fullest respect⁷.

The second text deals with his pastoral attitude in regard to the ministry of hearing confessions. At Merdrignac it was quickly evident that he was a model confessor and hearing confessions was, as much as preaching, a specialty of his throughout his long missionary career. It is therefore useful to quote this second text fully; it is dated 1858.

1.- Kindness. I will never betray a bad mood when they come looking for me, unless there are very special reasons that are well weighed beforehand. Everywhere I shall try and form my penitents so that they do not come to disturb me during my hours of work.

2.- Before going to hear confessions I will always implore the help of the Holy Spirit and ask for the grace I need to save others as well as myself.

3.- I will always go into confessional with a very pure intention. Never will I allow anything natural to be mixed into it; and if something of this kind did surface, I will immediately say a "Memorare" before going any further. O Mary, never allow that to be necessary!

4.- When entering into the confessional I will always remind myself:
1) that I am "Father" and therefore I ought to be filled with concern and goodness. 2) that I am "Judge" and therefore ought to watch over the integrity of the Sacrament, an integrity that is both clear and independent. "Clear": never will I give in either to laxism or to rigorism. "Independent": never will I cede to vain insistence or things of that kind. 3) "Physician", that is charitable and severe. Here one must know how to mix vinegar with oil. I will therefore indicate with kindness the remedy for the past and prescribe preventive measures for the future.

5.- I shall never forget these three expressions: 1) the dignity of souls; 2) the equality of souls; 3) the freedom of souls.

1) Dignity. All of them have cost God's blood; therefore nothing must be omitted to save them.

2) Equality. I will never make any distinction, nor show preference. The soul of the poorest of persons is as precious in the sight of God as is that of the most rich.

3) Freedom. I will never do anything either indirectly or directly to

attach myself to a single person, and above all not to hinder a person to go to someone else after he had been usually coming to me. On the contrary, I will show myself easy to deal with on this point.

6.- Strict attention not to betray the secret of confession. Never directly or indirectly will I make any allusion to what was told to me. If I find it necessary to consult I will take every possible precaution not to reveal anything.

7.- This is how I shall deal with different groups of penitents:

1) Children. I will always treat them with kindness, patience, and above all with extreme prudence; never will I ask them questions which may acquaint them with evil things. I will make a great effort to help them examine their conscience, but with prudence and reserve.

2) Men in general. Here I will always go about things frankly, to the point and with no beating around the bush. I will always try to make confession easy, for experience has shown that they are easily turned away if one is rude to them.

3) In regard to persons of the opposite sex: "Sit sermo brevis, rarus, et austerus."

A) "Rarus". I will not confess these persons more than every two weeks, at most once a week. Certainly only every two weeks for those who have the mania of wanting to confess every day and seem to put a certain passion into it.

B) "Brevis". "Breviter expediantur!" I will always limit myself to what is strictly necessary, especially in what concerns the 6th commandment. I will always employ the certain opinion that says one is not obliged to mention the aggravating circumstances. I will never listen to them for more than five minutes.

C) "Austerus". Perfect kindness and charity, but never will I allow tender expressions which may arouse sensitivities. I will always be firm and inflexible on this point.

4) Confession of priests. I will always treat them with the respect and goodness with which Jesus Christ treated the Apostles, but also with a holy firmness that never cedes ground on principles - while always remembering that the priest belongs to a group for whom refusing absolution is a grave thing. I shall keep in mind that things have to be weighed well and if I have to refuse absolution, I shall. May God keep me!

5) In regard to the scrupulous. I will remember that one needs patience and firmness according to the penitent's character. Absolute obedience is what I will always require from them.

6) General confessions can be necessary, little useful and even harmful. I will therefore strive to discern well so that I may know when they are to be permitted⁸.

In no time at all Father Joseph Montfort was most popular, a popularity that was based on more than simple good human savoir-faire and generous ministry. His priestly approach and work was founded on an authentic life of prayer. Father Edmond Thiriet writes:

It is in daily meditation, at the foot of the tabernacle that he

renewed his generous ardent efforts for doing good. He was a man of prayer... It was in constant prayer, vocal or mental prayer, that he gained the holy energies for his own sanctification and for the salvation of souls⁹.

Thiriet then substantiates this statement by quoting from Father Montfort's writings:

My meditation will always be prepared in detail. For that I must accustom myself to the constant practice of mortification, to watch over my tongue and my eyes; never any useless words or indiscreet glances. My resolution for each day will be quite precise and practical. Before going to bed in the evening I shall examine myself so that I may be aware of my infidelities for which I will penalize myself.

In my visits to the Blessed Sacrament, wherein I shall be careful to make a spiritual communion, I will not forget to ask the good Lord for the graces that I need. I will have a special devotion for the Sacrament of our altars. Each time that I enter the church I shall take on a humble and suppliant posture, reminding myself that I am in the presence of the King of Kings, the God of Hosts, the Master of Heaven and earth. In regard to all that relates to the Eucharist I shall maintain a deep respect by being exquisitely correct and extremely modest in the holy place.

I will take scrupulous care to say Mass well, to study and to observe well the rubrics. I want people to say of me: How piously he says Mass! I shall not fail to read the rubrics every two weeks.

As for my breviary, I will say it each day "digne, attente et devote", paying as much attention as possible to the meaning of the words, but especially paying attention to God. I shall consider as present Jesus Christ on my right side and Mary at my left, with all the angels and saints forming a choir with me. Besides the intention of the Church, I shall always have a special intention. I will never be in a hurry so as to gain three or four minutes, but will say my Office with the seriousness that such a sublime function requires¹⁰.

Father Edmond Thiriet says that the above describes well the character of Father Montfort: "Once he has taken a decision, it was not some passing or changing movement with him, but rather like the tenacity of the granite found in his native land". Father Thiriet goes on to say that 35 years later, when reviewing his life, Montfort said: "I have always kept my word, I have never failed in my duty." And finally Thiriet tells us that Father Montfort concluded the passage quoted at length above as follows: "Such is the program that I propose to observe, with God's grace, exactly through the course of my priestly life. Jesus, Mary, Joseph, do not abandon me, but always be my support¹¹!"

The only specific incident of Father Montfort's ministry in Merdrignac that has come down to us is the conversion of a hardened sinner. Father Thiriet writes:

In this parish, though quite Christian, there were always some trumpeters of iniquity whose conduct deeply saddened the soul of the pastor. One of these, the main leader of such a group, fell gravely ill. Father Montfort did not allow any comments about him: in secret he suffered for his condition and prayed for his conversion. How happy he was when they came in haste to tell him that the sick man was asking to speak to him! And yet he came trembling to the door of the unfortunate free-mason. His fears soon gave place to the greatest joy when he saw the good dispositions of the dying man. The latter humbly made his confession, publicly renounced his errors, made amends for the scandal he had given, and asked for the special favour of receiving the last Sacraments. Some time later he died, reconciled with God and blessed by Father Montfort¹².

Father Thiriet adds that when Father Montfort told him about this case, he also added: "It seems to me that the good Lord sent me to Merdrignac for the sole purpose that I was to collaborate in bringing his salvation to this poor soul¹³."

E. A missionary vocation

Father Montfort's first year as assistant-priest in the parish of Merdrignac could be described as an unqualified success, a success that made him uneasy. He was very popular, everything seemed to be in his favour, every ministry seemed to succeed; and he was even quite close to Loscou't where his mother and sisters lived. From all that he knew about God's usual way of dealing with those who have given their lives to Him, Father Montfort became more and more convinced that his situation at Merdrignac was too easy and that it would not last. For a good priest the way to Heaven could not be a continuous pleasure trip.

This made him wonder whether he was in the right place. More and more he felt he should be elsewhere, reaching out to souls who were neglected and in dire need of spiritual care. The thought came to him that he should perhaps ask to be a missionary to such a difficult place as China -- and in this context he even toyed with the idea that he might be called to martyrdom. In any case, he wanted to devote his life more fully to evangelization¹⁴.

Thiriet detects in this growing uneasiness the first signs that God was leading Father Montfort through a process of discernment whereby he would discover the fullness of the vocation to which God was calling him, namely, to be a Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate¹⁵.

But how did Father Montfort actually decide to join the Oblates? How did he come to know of this relatively small Congregation which was at that time only in the second generation of its existence?

At the time of the Oblate Founder's death on May 21, 1861, there were 414 professed Oblates (Bishops, Fathers, Brothers and Scholastics) and 215 of those were in France. There simply were no Oblate houses, residences or communities in the immediate area (i.e. Brittany) wherein Joseph Montfort was born and had lived. Though the Oblates had been a short while in Quimper, the oblate community closest to Father Montfort's world was Angers.

The whole northwest of France, it is true, had also been touched by Father Léonard Baveux's exceptionally successful recruiting tour and we know that on February 15, 1848, he passed through Saint-Brieuc¹⁶. At that time Joseph Montfort was 21 years old and still at home working on what had been his father's farm at Loscou't.

Still, this tour by Father Léonard had resulted in a certain awareness of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and their missionary field and activity. From 1851 on the Oblate novitiate at Notre-Dame de l'Osier began to receive candidates from the Departements that make up the northwest of France: Maine-et-Loire, Sarthe, Mayenne, Calvados, Ile-et-Vilaine, Morbihan, Finistère, Côtes-du-Nord. From Côtes-du-Nord, Father Montfort's own Departement, four came to the novitiate before him: one in 1855, two others in 1857, and one in 1858¹⁷. The Oblates were therefore well known in Father Montfort's home area of France.

Strangely enough, Thiriet, who seems to possess so much direct knowledge about Father Joseph Montfort, has to admit that he never learned the concrete circumstances which brought Joseph Montfort in contact with the Oblates. As he writes: "I do not know who was the instrument Providence used to make the mysterious star of his destiny shine before his eyes. How did he know the humble Congregation on which he would settle his definitive choice¹⁸?"

One can suppose that Father Montfort made the decision to join the Oblates in the same manner that he made other important decisions in his life: by weighing carefully the pros and cons, praying over the matter before the Blessed Sacrament, entrusting the whole question to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and all the while continuing to do his pastoral duties as assistant-priest at the same time. Then, when he had made his decision, he made it for good and proceeded to the next step: how to carry out his plan in a way that was both effective and as palatable as possible (or at least as little painful as possible) to those directly concerned.

The two main difficulties he had to overcome were: his position in the Diocese of Saint-Brieuc and in the parish at Merdrignac, and his own family at nearby Loscou't. On how he came to terms with his Bishop at Saint-Brieuc or with the parish priest at Merdrignac we have no information. There is only the following passage of Father Thiriet:

It was a very difficult matter because of the very success he had achieved at Merdrignac and especially because of his family for whom he retained such a tender affection. How does one break bonds which seem to be

so indissoluble? How to obtain the consent of his mother who had already suffered so much at the time of the first separation? How to leave behind the souls who were so devoted to him? What would people say, what would they think of it? Since God was blessing his apostolic work so abundantly, was he not in the place God wanted him to be? Why take the risk of compromising the future when the present already offered him such delightful consolations¹⁹?

Father Thiriet is able to tell us the following about Father Montfort's abrupt farewell to his family:

One day the abbé Montfort arrived in his home town radiant with joy. His good Mother and sisters flooded him with attention and he responded thereto in a delicate manner and with a great display of affection. But all of a sudden this scene changed when the priest announced his firm decision to become a religious. Now there were tears of desolation on both sides. In the end, the abbé Montfort fell to his knees in front of his mother and asked her to bless him. Then he embraced her lovingly and promised to love her always, from far away as he had done when nearby. The next day the parish of Merdrignac was sorry to learn that the abbé de Montfort had taken the road to Notre-Dame de l'Osier²⁰.

Thus we do not know whether it was difficult to obtain permission from his Bishop to leave nor do we know anything about his initial contacts with the Oblate authorities who needed to accept him before he could expect to be received as a novice in an Oblate novitiate.

Nor do we have any real indication as to the dominant motive that determined Father Montfort to join the Oblates. At this time Oblates were engaged in three main ministries: preaching parish missions, staffing diocesan seminaries, and foreign missions. Father Thiriet seems to offer us a clue in regard to this question of motivation. After he had described the reason for the founding of the Oblates and mentioned the papal approval in 1826, he lists the countries where Oblate missionaries were at work: in France, England, Scotland and Ireland in Europe; in Canada; in New England, Oregon, Texas in the United States as well as in Mexico; in Ceylon and in South Africa. Then he writes:

This was the field of action that presented itself to the abbé Montfort's devouring zeal. His heart opened up under the influence of grace and his ambition was like that of Francis Xavier. Like the great apostle of the East Indies he seemed to hear the cries of souls in distress: "Come over here and help us! Help! Come to our assistance! Leave the fertile plains of your Brittany where there is no lack of priests, come to us who are languishing in slavery to the demon. Bring us the light of faith, the benefits of Christ's religion..." Burning with this sacred flame of the apostolate that God kindles in the hearts of saints, he made his way to ...l'Osier²¹.

This strongly suggests that the Oblates' missions "ad gentes" was a major motive that induced Father Montfort to join the Oblates.

Notre-Dame de l'Osier, a parish and famous pilgrimage shrine in the Department of Isère, was quite a change of scene from Father Joseph Montfort. Here he will spend the next 17 years of his life, first as an Oblate novice and then as an Oblate missionary.

F. Novitiate

Father Joseph Montfort began his novitiate with the receiving of the Oblate habit at the novitiate at Notre-Dame de l'Osier on September 2, 1860. He was the only candidate who began his novitiate on that day. The record of this event reads as follows:

Joseph Marie I, the undersigned Joseph Marie Mathurin
Montfort,
Mathurin having the sincere determination to be affiliated

Montfort to the Society of the Missionary Oblates of the

2 Sept. 1860 Most Holy and Immaculate Virgin Mary, so as to live till death in the observance of the holy Rules of the said Institute, and having ascertained the principal rules and obligations which the said Institute imposes upon each of its members, promise to observe them, and urgently beg to be admitted to begin my novitiate.

Born December 31, 1827, at Loscou't (Côtes-du-Nord)

(signed) Montfort Joseph

This formula then bears the following note and signature:

Our Most Illustrious Superior General authorizes Joseph Montfort to begin his novitiate, 2 Sept. 1860

F[lorent] Vandenberghe, O.M.I.²²

Right after the ceremony of the taking of the habit, the new Novice Father Joseph Montfort knelt at the foot of our Lady of l'Osier and promised her the following:

From this day forth I am an Oblate at heart. I consecrate to Mary Immaculate all that I am, all that I have: my thoughts, words, deeds, works, etc. Above all I pray to our good Mother to come to my aid should some other thought trouble me. Everything for Mary! Everything for Mary! Everything for Mary! O good Mother, receive me, open your heart to me; I am yours for good. For ever! Yes, for ever! O Mother, obtain for me the grace to immolate myself completely for you and for your divine Son who offered and immolated himself first for me²³.

There are other passages Father Thiriet quotes from Father Montfort's notebooks that reveal somewhat the inner spirit with which the new Oblate novice lived his novitiate:

"Moriatur ne moriatur" [St. Augustin] To be a good religious one must therefore renounce himself, immolate himself, deny himself; no longer do anything in everything except the will of one's superiors and thereby the will of God whose place they hold. One must become humble: I need this very much. Consequently:

1. - I will always receive with respect, deep humility and lively gratitude the advice, counsels, remarks and reprimands of my superiors, and I will show them that I am content.

2. - I will never say a single word to my own advantage. If I should unfortunately forget myself on this point, I will immediately impose a penance and humiliation on myself with the prayer: "O Maria Immaculata, ora pro nobis".

3. - I must do nothing without the permission of my superiors. I will accomplish this act of obedience with humility and above all honesty, treading underfoot all human respect and always reminding myself of the divine Saviour carrying out Joseph's orders.

4. - When my superiors lay some penance upon me, I will gladly thank them and will do this penance with the thought that my sins merit a much greater punishment. If they forget to impose penances on me, I will myself request the same from the Reverend Father Superior.

5. - When they speak in praiseworthy terms to me about singing (I know very well that I owe this talent to the good Lord), and I will recall that God will one day ask me to render an account of it²⁴.

I want to live the greatest charity in regard to my brothers. So that I may truly succeed in this, I will see Jesus Christ in all the Fathers in the house, be they Oblates or novices; Mary in all the scholastic brothers; St. Joseph in the Oblate Brothers²⁵.

Novice-Masters at that time were expected to forward to the Superior General monthly summary assessments on each of their novices. Those sent in about Father Montfort read as follows:

[September 1860] Excellent and virtuous priest, an energetic character: gives an impression of solidity.

[October 1860] Exemplary for his good spirit, regularity, piety. One would wish he had had a more complete instruction, but he loves to work and has good judgment.

[November 1860] A very upright heart and dedicated to what is good: has good judgment, but one notes the lack of a good first education.

[December 1860] Shows perfect submission, great simplicity, fervent piety.

[January 1861] He is peacefully advancing on his way: a man of virtue and of faith with an upright and courageous heart.

[February 1861] He is on mission with Father Bonnemaïson.

[March 1861] Totally dedicated at heart: good spirit and a man of faith. Succeeds very well on a mission.

[April 1861] An excellent man, of piety, virtue, dedication, with a simple but acceptable external aspect. One would wish for more refinement and more finished studies.

[No month given; in 1861] Regular. Wants to do things well and to do lots of good. Very happy in his vocation²⁶.

There is one negative item that recurs in three of the above summary reports: the Novice-Master notes some deficiency due to the fact that Joseph Montfort had not had an orderly primary and secondary education. What this deficiency concretely consisted in is not clear. There is the statement in one report that more refinement would be desirable. From this one can reasonably infer that Novice Father Montfort was found lacking in terms of refinement in the French language: vocabulary, speech, literature and composition. It is also possible that his farming background coupled with his strong personality and energetic character may have been, while admittedly authentic, considered to be a bit rustic. In retrospect, when one considers the extraordinary preaching career and popularity that will be Father Montfort's, one wonders whether in his case this lack of "refinement" may have been an asset that enabled him to be closer to the people.

The Novice-Master noted that in February Novice Father Montfort was out preaching a mission with Father (Pierre) Bonnemaïson. Father Thiriet notes that this time; he also says that the mission was "given by some Fathers of l'Osier in an important parish of the diocese of Grenoble"; and he also notes that Father Montfort excelled in this preaching experience²⁷. The Novice-Master, too, noted in his March 1861 summary that Father Montfort "succeeds very well

on a mission".

This was not the only ministry that Novice Father Montfort was given during the period of his novitiate. According to Father Thiriet, Father Montfort accomplished an apostolic success that proved to be a record in the history of the Notre-Dame de l'Osier novitiate:

Some time after his Superiors sent him to assist the venerable parish-priest of Saint-Marcellin, a little town near l'Osier. He was to help the pastor to prepare his flock for their Easter duty. During the four weeks of Lent the novice organized a series of preaching sessions that attracted a crowd of listeners to the pulpit of truth. He preached with such apostolic force that he succeeded to bring back to God many who were indifferent -- this to the satisfaction of the parish-priest who could not find enough words of praise to thank the young apostle. This effort was a master stroke and his reputation as an eloquent speaker soon spread in the area. He quickly conquered the sympathy of listeners who came to l'Osier to benefit even further from the direction of someone who had already done much good to them. One even had to allow him to hear the confessions of these good people. This is perhaps the only time that something like this has happened since the novitiate was established at Notre-Dame de l'Osier²⁸.

This early missionary success prompted the following entry into one of Father Montfort's notebook:

To follow Jesus in his hidden life: that ought to be my ambition. Let there be no pretexts prompting me to put myself forward. The salvation of souls? Jesus-Christ could do more than I and He hid himself for thirty years!... Woe is me if I like to appear in public, if I put myself forward and have people talk about me, even if what they say may be true!... Obey and love being the least among all and soon you will accomplish great things. Strengthen, increase your zeal, your virtue, and don't immediately spend lavishly what you have; otherwise you will soon no longer have any sap, you will be dry and cold and your end will come much before its time. In deep solitude kindle in your heart a great fire of love and zeal and soon a great fire will break out and then the sparks that will arise therefrom will ignite other fires within souls: when that happens you can advance... "Ergo: Sta, ora, et stude in silentio... et ama nesciri et pro nihilo reputari:" Thank you, my Jesus, for inspiring in me these reflections during my oraison. I will be faithful thereto, I hope, with the help of your grace and the protection of my Immaculate Mother...²⁹.

G. Oblation and First Obedience

Blessed Eugene de Mazenod, Bishop of Marseilles, Founder of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate and their elected Superior General for life, was still living when Father Montfort had begun his novitiate on September 2, 1860: he died, however, on May 21, 1861, and, when the date for Father Montfort's perpetual Oblation came, the new Superior General had not yet been elected. It was therefore Father Henry Francis de Paul Tempier, in his capacity as interim Vicar General, who called Father Montfort to make his perpetual vows as an Oblate.

On September 3, 1861, before the Superior of Notre-Dame de l'Osier, Father Antoine Mouchette, Father Montfort made perpetual vows as an Oblate³⁰. At that time Oblates did not make temporary vows: the novitiate ended with the novice immediately making his oblation i.e. perpetual profession as a religious.

The newly professed Father Joseph Montfort was already a priest and had been in the active ministry in the diocese of Saint-Brieuc and so, having finished his novitiate, he was not sent to an Oblate scholasticate for further formation. Instead, he received his first obedience on the same September 3, 1861: he was assigned to the Oblate community at Notre-Dame de l'Osier primarily for the preaching ministry. It seems his own preference would have been to be a missionary in a foreign land, but he had no difficulty at all in giving himself wholehearted to the obedience he had received³¹.

On the verge of launching himself full-time into the active mission-preaching ministry, Father Montfort examined himself in terms of his apostolic zeal. He admitted that for him zeal for souls was a passion: "zelo zelatus sum"! But this zeal, to be authentic and valid, needed - in the words of Father Montfort himself -- the following qualities:

1. - It must be according to knowledge and true doctrine. Let us bring souls up to God by communicating to them what we have drawn from the holy Gospel and from Sacred Scripture. I will ask God to let me know well the way in which I am to lead them. I will often go to receive instruction at the foot of the crucifix.

2. - It must be prudent and filled with kindness - prudent in the manner of proceeding; filled with kindness in the manner of Jesus Christ who picks up the strayed sheep, places it gently on his shoulders and carries it back to the sheepfold. Let us put in virtue and not the things of nature. Let us take care never to indulge in the acceptance of persons, in spite of repugnance, rebuffs, failings... It is the soul that I must see; otherwise would only be looking for myself, I would no longer be "alter Christus". My God, keep such a thought far from me...

3. - Zeal must be supernatural and not carnal. If it lacks this quality, it will soon disappear and become a cause for ruin. What a terrible misfortune for a missionary who in his noble and holy functions seeks the miserable satisfactions of our corrupt nature, who does not take care to erase the human being in order to let only Jesus Christ appear, who replaces Christ with himself!... My God, keep me from such a terrible misfortune! O Mary Immaculate, be always at the side of your child; I want to die of zeal for souls.

To the above quotation Father Thiriet adds the statement that Father Montfort as a missionary had a motto which he would repeat and write again and again: "Jesus and souls for Him³²!"

II. Missionary at Notre-Dame de l'Osier

From September 2, 1861, (the date when he made his perpetual oblation and received his first obedience) until October 1876, when he received an obedience for Notre-Dame de Bon Secours at La Blachère, Father Joseph Montfort was part of a very active Oblate mission and retreat preaching team based at Notre-Dame de l'Osier (Isère), in the diocese of Grenoble.

Because he had made his novitiate at Notre-Dame de l'Osier and also because he became most instrumental in furthering the pilgrimage work at this shrine of Our Lady, one cannot but suppose that the events which lay at the origins of this pilgrimage shrine and their significance became part and parcel of Father Montfort's prayer life and preaching.

A. Notre-Dame de l'Osier: Origins

The region that today comprises the Vinay canton counted in the 17th century many Huguenots among its population. Albenc, for instance, was a totally Huguenot town. Relationships between Catholics and Huguenots were far from ecumenical in those days; they fluctuated between militant intolerance and reluctant tolerant coexistence.

Pierre Port-Combet lived in an obscure hamlet tucked away in a heavily wooded area referred to as Les Plantées. Though a Huguenot Protestant, he was married to Jeanne Péloin, a fervent Catholic. He nevertheless nurtured a real animosity against the Catholic faith and celebrations of the Catholic Church, especially those related to the Blessed Virgin Mary³³.

The extraordinary events began on March 25, 1649, that is, on the feast of the Annunciation. At that time this was a feast of obligation in the whole Church and in France everyone, Catholic and Huguenot alike, were obliged by civil law to abstain from servile work on Sundays and feast that the Catholic Church made obligatory for her faithful. Port-Combet quite deliberately took this occasion to insult Catholic worship by deciding to work on his terrain. Despite the strong pleading of his Catholic wife, he took a hooked pruning knife and a ladder and

went out to cut willow rods on his property not far from his house³⁴.

As soon as Port-Combet began to lop off willow branches, the stump of each cut-off branch began to bleed. His pruning knife, hand, shirt and trousers were soon soaked with blood. Amazed and frightened, he went to call his wife: he first had to show her that he was not hurt but that the blood had all come from the bleeding osier. Jeanne Péloin verified for herself that what her husband was saying was literally true. She climbed the ladder, lopped off some willow branches and nothing out of the ordinary happened; when her husband did the same, however, the stump of every branch he cut off began to bleed. Two neighbours were called to the scene and they witnessed and experienced the same occurrences³⁵.

It was natural that people from the immediate vicinity came to see for themselves this osier that had shed blood and to take a little piece of it away with them: the tree dried up and died from this practice. The popular interpretation spontaneously saw in this event a sign from God vindicating the honor of his Son's Mother. In not time at all miracles were said to be happening at the site of the osier.

Madame De Revel (Jeanne de la Croix de Chevrières) wanted a chapel to be built at the spot of this osier. To this effect, she approached the Company of the Propagation of the Faith and on August 16, 1656, Pierre Port-Combet sold the land on which the osier stood to this Company, with Madame De Revel footing the bill. A large metal cross was put up near the osier on September 14, 1656, feast of the exaltation of the Holy Cross.

People now began to come in greater numbers and by December 1656 a wooden chapel that enclosed the remains of the osier and that was equipped with whatever was required for Mass had been built. Priests began to come to offer Masses requested by people and to hear confessions.

What effect did the bleeding of the osier have on Pierre Port-Combet? He openly referred to it as "a great miracle" but remained in the dark as to what its meaning could be. He had testified against himself in the civil proceedings and he also accepted to testify even before the Catholic Church's investigative tribunal. He had no objection to people coming on to his own property and was quite ready to describe to them what he had experienced and he had no difficulty to their praying at this spot. He readily agreed to selling the land on which the bleeding osier had stood. He witnesses the cross being put up, then the little chapel, and he even consented to keep the key to this chapel and open it when people wanted to pray there. His wife has testified that he ceased mocking Catholics' devotion to the Blessed Virgin and began to show a certain veneration for her. Shortly after March 25, 1649, he contacted the Augustinians at Vinay and became friends with several of them. He did not, however, become a convert to the Catholic Church but remained a Huguenot.

A documented reason for this is the large Huguenot community in the whole surrounding area, a group that was cohesive and strong, very much on the defensive and vigilant in regard to its own situation. Pierre Port-Combet did receive some pressure, even some threats from his fellow Huguenots. On the other hand, Port-Combet may also have delayed to change religion because he simply did not know what the miracle of the bleeding osier tree meant, what religious message (if any) it was intended to convey. He was a convinced Huguenot; and for such a person the spontaneous interpretation that local Catholics gave to this miracle was not necessarily the only one.

So for the next seven years Pierre Port-Combet remained a Huguenot. During that time, two more daughters were born to him and they, like their three older sisters and older brother before them, were baptized at Albenc in the Huguenot faith. At the same time, he did not hinder his son Reymond from seeing the Augustinians at Vinay. Indeed, on January 21, 1657, Reymond, now 17 years old, abjured the Calvinist religion and was received into the Catholic Church³⁶.

The next exceptional event in Pierre Port-Combet's life occurred seven years later in March 1656. Between seven and eight o'clock in the morning he had gone to plough a field located near his house. When his wife brought him food at two o'clock in the afternoon, she found the oxen yoked to the plough and standing in the field but her husband was nowhere in sight. Two little shepherd girls told her that they had heard him talking to someone whom they

did not see and that they had seen him leave the field in haste. Her husband came home only about one hour before sundown and then she learned what had occurred³⁷.

As he was ploughing he noticed on the hill called Epinousa a young lady dressed in white and blue with a black shawl on her head. He thought she had lost her way to the chapel at Notre-Dame de l'Osier. She was directly opposite to him and had some difficult distance to go if she were to meet him, for there was a sizeable coulee between them. He was not disposed to help her find the right way and so he turned his back to her and resumed ploughing the field. When he came to the end of his short furrow, he was amazed to find that this lady had in such a short time crossed the difficult terrain and was now standing right in front of him. Later he told his wife that he suddenly found himself confronted by "the most beautiful creature one can see in this world."

The Lady greeted him in an unusual way: "May you be with God, my friend!" And then she asked: "What do people say about this devotion? Do many people come?"

Port-Combet replied: "Good day, Mademoiselle! Quite a few people come."

"Are many miracles worked there?"

"Ha! Miracles!" he retorted and then nicked his oxen to continue ploughing the field. The Lady, however, said: "Stop! Halt your oxen!" And when he had done so she asked: "And this Huguenot who was cutting the osier, where does he live? Does he not want to be converted?"

"I don't know", Pierre Port-Combet replied. "He lives over there a bit!"

"Oh you poor man", the Lady replied. "Do you think I don't know that you are he?"

Now Pierre Port-Combet wanted very much to resume ploughing and again he nicked his oxen. She autoritatively told him to halt them and then informed him that his end was near and if he did not change his condition he would be a choice log for hell; but if he did change, she would protect him before God. And she also gave him a message to communicate to the people: at the moment their prayers are not fervent enough; if they pray more fervently they will receive many graces and favors from God.

This was too much for Pierre Port-Combet. He turned his back on her, nicked his oxen and resumed ploughing the field. But in no time he regretted his rudeness and wanted to continue conversing with her. When he had finished the furrow he saw that she had turned around and was walking away in the same direction from which she had come. He left his oxen and began to run after her, calling out for forgiveness. She did not stop or respond but continued walking away. He kept running after her over the bad terrain which she herself had crossed with such amazing speed and ease. Finally she stopped, allowed him to draw near until he was only about 10 paces from her. Then, without turning around and looking at him or speaking another word, she suddenly disappeared. He remained rooted to the spot filled with inner consolation and a determination to become a Catholic.

His determination may have been quite real, yet it was not immediately put into effect. From March until August Pierre Port-Combet lived in a state of terror: he feared that the Huguenots would ambush and brutally kill him. He was in fact visited by them, pressured with both bribes and threats, warned that he and his conduct were under observation.

He came down with a sudden fever on August 14, 1657 which took a turn for the worse in the evening. He called for one of the Augustinians at Vinay and at 4.00 a.m. of August 15th, feast of the Assumption, he abjured protestantism and became a Catholic, confessed his sins and received Holy Communion, and received the anointing of the sick. He passed away on August 22, 1657 and, as he had requested, was buried in the chapel near the osier. On September 13, 1657, his five daughters all abjured protestantism and entered the Catholic Church³⁸.

It is not the purpose of this article to narrate the development of the pilgrimage and shrine of Notre-Dame de l'Osier³⁹; something must be said, however, about Notre-Dame de l'Osier during the French Revolution and thereafter for it is in response to those events that the Oblates of Mary Immaculate were called to take charge of this shrine.

B. Notre-Dame de l'Osier during the French Revolution

After the French Revolution had abolished all religious Orders in France, the

Augustinians, who had served the shrine and pilgrimage at Notre-Dame de l'Osier for 125 years, had to leave. Their monastery there stood empty and the shrine and its chapels were closed.

In 1792 or 1793 the shrine was also pillaged and desecrated. All the sacred vessels, precious vestments and reliquaries were carried off, and several cartloads of devotional materials were driven away and burned. The statue of our Lady of l'Osier itself, made of wood, was to be burned: cast down from its height, it broke into several pieces; but while the revolutionists were busy plundering the nearby Augustinian monastery, three women managed to remove the statue pieces and hide them. The remains of the osier that had bled were also to be burned, but the man assigned to do that hid it and kept it safe until, some years later, he handed them over to the Bishop of Grenoble.

The devastated shrine remained deserted. Some people still came to pray there and some left offerings with the local inhabitants to be presented to our Lady once the shrine would again be functioning.

When it was considered sufficiently safe to do so, the local people had the wooden statue pieces repaired and put back to its place in the chapel; the remains of the osier tree were also relocated in the chapel. This happened some time prior to 1808. But the shrine was not served by any clergy: a girl from the village would present the wood of the osier to pilgrims who wished to venerate it.

In 1808 the Bishop of Grenoble added the care of Notre-Dame de l'Osier to the responsibilities of the parish priest at Vinay. Since the ministry in this parish already demanded almost of all of his time, Mass was only occasionally offered at the shrine. Nevertheless, people kept coming to pray there and from 1817 the record of favours received began to be kept again⁴⁰.

A somewhat ironic development occurred: while people did come to pray and while there is real evidence that even during this dark period some obtained special favours from God through our Lady's intercession, during these same years the situation at Notre-Dame de l'Osier worsened. Without the pastoral care of clergy, the people who gathered on what had formerly been the great occasions of pilgrimage would, after fulfilling some token religious acts, indulge in country festivities of eating, drinking, dancing, and the like. This became a major concern for the Bishop of Grenoble who therefore in 1830 decided to establish an auxiliary parish in the area (it included four towns plus the shrine of Notre-Dame de l'Osier) with a resident priest.

C. Notre-Dame de l'Osier entrusted to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate

When mission preaching was banned because of the 1830 Revolution and missionary expansion into Algeria or into the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia was impeded, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate experienced a period of stagnation and all of them, from Bishop Eugene de Mazenod to the youngest Oblate, were hoping for a new field of ministry.

There had been a brief glimmer of hope when in 1828 the diocese of Grenoble approached Bishop de Mazenod in view of establishing his Oblates in the Isere River valley. Due to an unfortunate remark, however, this first approach led to nothing and even created a malaise that needed to be dissipated before another attempt would be successful⁴¹.

Father Alexandre Dupuy was, so to speak, the precursor to the Oblates' coming to Notre-Dame de l'Osier. He had entered the novitiate of the Missionaries of Provence on October 3, 1816, was ordained priest on June 21, 1821 and served as local treasurer at Le Calvaire in Marseilles (1821, 1823-1824), at Aix (1822), at Notre-Dame du Laus (1825-1830). In 1830 he left the Congregation wherein he had never made the vow of poverty and had major problems with community living. He nevertheless remained most attached to Father De Mazenod and to the Oblates⁴².

During a serious illness at Notre-Dame du Laus, Father Dupuy had taken the resolution to restore Notre-Dame de l'Osier if he regained his health. He did recover and became intent on achieving this objective. One can hardly doubt that he spoke about this in Oblate circles.

When he left the Oblates, he was appointed assistant priest in the parish of Saint-Martin at Marseilles. Here he became ill with the cholera in 1832 and just escaped death. He saw in his illness and recovery a sign that God wanted him to pursue his dream of restoring Notre-Dame de l'Osier and it was with this intent that he joined the diocese of Grenoble where he confided his

desires to Bishop Philibert de Bruillard.

With Bishop de Bruillard's encouragement, Father Dupuy purchased the old Augustinian monastery. Confiscated by the State in 1790, had been bought and sold a number of times since, and the present owners, a community of Chartreuse nuns who had received it as a gift from its last owner, were only too glad to get rid of it.

In 1833 Bishop de Bruillard put Father Dupuy in charge of the parish he had in 1830 established in the Notre-Dame de l'Osier area. Father Dupuy visualized a future wherein a religious community would once again be in charge of the shrine and pilgrimage at Notre-Dame de l'Osier and he naturally saw the Oblates of Mary Immaculate as being that religious community.

It was with Oblate Father Louis-Toussaint Dassy that Father Dupuy was able to achieve this portion of his plan. Ordained when only 23 years old on December 18, 1831 at Fribourg, Switzerland, Father Dassy launched into an intensive preaching ministry in Switzerland. He soon became very ill and was at the door of death. While the prayers of the dying were being recited around him, he had a mysterious dream in which he saw the Blessed Virgin Mary who said to him: "Take courage, you will not die now! -- You must remain and do something for me before you die!" He awoke from this comatose experience and felt that he was basically cured. Perhaps he too soon resumed his preaching activities for he began to cough up blood and so he was sent to Le Calvaire in Marseilles to rest and rebuild his health. In the early months of 1834 Father Dupuy came to invite him to come with him to N.-D. de l'Osier where the climate was better for Father Dassy's convalescence. The Founder, now Bishop of Icosia, readily consented and the two took possession of the former Augustinian monastery in early March 1834⁴³.

Once Father Dassy had recovered his strength, he began to do some ministry in the area, a ministry that was quite successful. Father Dupuy asked the Founder to leave Father Dassy with him at l'Osier for a time and again the Founder consented. From Father Dassy's letters to the Founder it is clear that the Oblates -- together with Father Dupuy -- were setting things in motion so that they would be called to form a community at Notre-Dame de l'Osier.

In July 1834, Father Eugene Bruno Guigues, also in poor health and coughing up blood, was sent by the Founder to N.-D. de l'Osier to be Father Dassy's companion and Superior. There were some delicate moments with the Bishop of Grenoble in regard to what was developing at Notre-Dame de l'Osier, but in August of the same year both Bishop de Mazenod and Bishop de Bruillard had come to an agreement. In October Father Ambroise Vincens was also sent to l'Osier and thus the 5th Oblate house community was a reality. Father Alexandre Dupuy remained parish-priest at Notre-Dame de l'Osier, while the Oblates were responsible for the shrine and pilgrimage as well as for preaching in the area⁴⁴.

The pastoral situation found by the Oblates at the beginning of their presence and ministry at Notre-Dame de l'Osier is well summed up in the July 16, 1835 act of visitation conducted and composed by the Founder:

We quickly perceived that only vestiges remained of what in the bygone century had been the devotion to Mary in this holy place. How could it have been otherwise after a revolution of forty years ago and the abandonment of the shrine which was a result thereof?

The Blessed Virgin did not cease to make her powerful intervention felt by those who confidently called to her during this lapse of time; inadvertently, however, people no longer perceived what was implied by these signal favours of God's Mother, who is especially concerned for the glory of her divine Son and the conversion of souls He has redeemed by his precious Blood. The faithful who came to this holy place to thank the Blessed Virgin for the graces and healings they had obtained by invoking Our Lady of l'Osier, and those who came in crowds to beg for new favours, usually found the gate of the shrine closed. There were no priests to receive their offerings and to be the mediators of their petitions. This service was entrusted to a girl of the hamlet, much to the surprise of so many pilgrims who returned home little edified and

often saddened because they had not found what their fervent piety had expected to experience at l'Osier. Thus there was no opportunity for confession, nor to go to Communion, nor to receive good advice or instruction. People had to return home weary without even having attended Mass which, if it was a Sunday on which they had come to visit the shrine, they had to do elsewhere.

And so little by little devotion declined. It came to amount to little more, so to speak, than the goal of an outing which people mechanically undertook so that they could say they had been at l'Osier. On certain days it was for many little more than a rendez-vous of dissipation to which one came solely for entertainment without any religious inspiration.

Moved by this state of affairs, the Bishop of Grenoble managed to establish the chapel of Our Lady as an auxiliary parish so that a priest could be permanently assigned to serve a place that was so frequented. However, the custom of coming to the shrine to offer, that is to say, to lay a feeble alms at the feet of the Holy Virgin, was too entrenched to enable one priest by himself, all the while fulfilling other pastoral duties, to lead these faithful back to a practice more beneficial to the sanctification of their souls. All who from the environs of ten to fifteen leagues continued to come to fulfil the vows they may have made were content to come and offer at the altar their weak witness as an expression of their gratitude, but made no effort to go beyond that. And so one could see them leave the shrine which should have been a haven of salvation for them, without even having thought of confession, and thus without being reconciled with God, as much sinners as they had been when they had come⁴⁵.

In the same Act of Visitation the Founder spells out the sense of the Oblate mission and presence at Notre-Dame de l'Osier:

Devotion to Our Lady of l'Osier was, therefore, clearly no more such as the Lord wanted it to be when He disposed to have his Mother's power manifested by so many miracles worked in this place. These miracles have continued, however, and continue up to our own day. This is evident proof that God's will is that the Blessed Virgin be especially honored in this shrine which her divine Son nearly two centuries ago chose for her to be the throne of his mercies.

The Bishop of Grenoble, as surely convinced of this truth as he was of the insufficiency of the means he had up to now applied to second the so clearly manifest designs of God's will, has now decided to call our Congregation, charged as it is by the Church to promote the cult of Mary and dedicated as it is by its explicit vocation to convert souls, to work effectively to bring devotion to Our Lady of l'Osier back to its pristine quality and at the same time to assign a certain number of its members to the holy ministry of preaching missions in the Diocese. The Congregation is thus sent to l'Osier precisely according to the spirit of its Institute: to evangelize the most abandoned souls of this Diocese and to contribute all it can to promote the glory of the Blessed Virgin by giving a better direction to the faithful's devotion to this good Mother of all Christians who is our beloved Patroness. Here we see how, through an admirable disposition of divine Providence, the Congregation responds to its great destiny, to the double mission it has received from the supreme Head of the Church⁴⁶.

The Oblates were indeed faced with somewhat discouraging beginnings. Excerpts from the 1834, 1835 and 1836 "Codex Historicus" of the Oblate House at l'Osier give us the following description:

For September 8th, the patronal feast, the shrine saw a prodigious gathering of people attracted very little by piety but very much so by the dancing

and the bourgeois musicians of Saint-Marcellin who had come to entertain this activity of dissipation... There is a scandalous coming and going around the place and the noise of the merchants is at times so loud that one has to remain at the church's door to quieten down the crowd. Inns and pubs are overcrowded during the day and even well into the night. Right up to the morning there are people eating and drinking, well satisfied with their manner of sanctifying the pilgrimage. On the vigil of this great day, some three or four people from far away ask to make their confession; and on the day of the feast only some twenty persons receive Communion. What a queer way of solemnizing this great feast⁴⁷!

The Oblates quickly took measures to improve the situation and their zealous approach was fruitful. Already in 1836 Bishop de Mazenod was happy to note that there was more devotion among the pilgrims. Father Mairot writes:

Every Saturday the Fathers gave an instruction and indicated to the faithful how their pilgrimage can be sanctified: they were advised to go to confession either in their own localities or at the shrine. The month of Mary was greatly solemnized: every evening there was the rosary, an instruction and hymns in honor of Mary... In 1837 they established an annual retreat which was given at the time of the patronal feast. This retreat was joyfully received and will rapidly become the very soul of the pilgrimage... While there were but 20 communions in 1834, four years later in 1838 there were 600 communions at the end of the retreat; and in 1845, that is ten years after the Oblates had taken charge of the shrine, the number of communions at the end of the retreat had risen to 1000⁴⁸.

In 1837, Father Alexandre Dupuy sold the former monastery of the Augustinians to the Oblates⁴⁹ and rejoined the Diocese of Marseilles⁵⁰. The Oblates were now in charge of the shrine and the parish at Notre-Dame de l'Osier.

Because of the success in restoring the pilgrimage, the chapel of the shrine had become too small and so it was decided to build a new church, one that could accommodate some 2000 people. The corner-stone for the new church was solemnly laid on May 17, 1858. By 1860 the walls of the naves and facade were up and so was the roofing. A debt of some 30,000 had accumulated in the meantime and, for lack of funds, all further building was halted until 1867⁵¹.

Such then was the scene of the shrine church when Father Joseph Montfort came to Notre-Dame de l'Osier as a novice and when he began his ministry there as a newly professed Oblate. He will himself be a major promoter towards the completion of the new church and manage to collect a considerable amount of money for this purpose. The content and sense of his activity in this regard can be better understood from the following 1863 entry in the local Codex Historicus:

In order to stimulate donations from the faithful, the missionaries also used copiously the following means. It was a matter of spiritual benefits offered to the faithful in return for their monetary offerings. By means of an offering of at least 50 centimes, they were made to share in the merits of the (Oblate) community's prayers and good works and, furthermore, they acquired the right to share in the fruits of a Mass said for them every Saturday in perpetuity. To propagate this means a special kind of holy card was adopted and this was thereafter distributed by the missionaries in every way available to them⁵².

By 1867 the debt had been liquidated and a surplus for future needs built up. The holy card campaign brought in from 20,000 to 25,000 francs and Mlle Francine de Murinais, a great benefactress of Notre-Dame de l'Osier, had herself contributed some 30,000 francs.

On May 6, 1868, the new church was blessed by Bishop Jacques M.-A. Ginoulhiac of Grenoble. On September 7-8, 1873, the same Bishop consecrated this church and presided at the solemn coronation of the statue of Our Lady of l'Osier⁵³. As we shall see, Father Montfort was personally very much involved in this key events.

D. The Preaching Ministry based at Notre-Dame de l'Osier

Besides looking after the parish as well as the shrine and pilgrimage of Notre-Dame de l'Osier, the Oblates there were also engaged in a regular preaching ministry. It was especially to be part of the preaching ministry that Father Montfort had been given his first obedience for Notre-Dame de l'Osier.

The l'Osier "preaching team" preached 5 parish missions and 15 retreats during February, March and April 1862⁵⁴; from October 25, 1862 to June 15, 1863, 9 parish missions, 7 Easter retreats or return missions, 21 first Communion retreats in parishes and institutions⁵⁵; 16 parish missions and 14 retreats during the preaching season (usually October into the late spring of the following year) of 1863-1864⁵⁶; 23 parish missions and 16 retreats from October 15, 1864 to May 20, 1865⁵⁷; 20 retreats and 27 parishes missions or jubilees from October 28, 1865 to June 24, 1866⁵⁸; 20 parish missions, return missions, Easter preparations and 20 retreats from November 1, 1867 to June 15, 1868⁵⁹; 60 retreats and parish missions from July 1, 1868 to July 1, 1869⁶⁰.

The above gives us some idea of the consistent and intense preaching ministry that Oblates based at Notre-Dame de l'Osier accomplished. No such summary statistics are now available for the other years that Father Montfort spent at l'Osier but everything indicates that the same intense preaching activity continued during those years also.

What activities, weekly or daily program, sequence of events, methods and approaches made up a parish mission, a return mission, a jubilee, an Easter preparation retreat, a first Communion retreat in the time of Father Joseph Montfort? What would an Oblate missionary in his time be expected to do when he went out to preach any of these things? What kind of a life of prayer, work, social and other activities did he live during the days when he was actively engaged in these kinds of ministries?

The beginnings of Oblate mission preaching, and how it was both an inheritance and continuation of what others had and were doing as well as a real innovation, has already been well described⁶¹. Two very important descriptions are found in Father de Mazenod's diary of the mission preached at Marignane from November 17 to December 15, 1816⁶², and what is found in the 1818 Constitutions and Rules on this topic⁶³. Father Joseph Pielorz's detailed study on the first missions preached by the Missionaries of Provence adds a wealth of additional information⁶⁴. The mission and retreat preaching experience of the years from 1816 to 1830 established what can be called the Oblate "tradition" in this regard.

We also know from the 1834 letters that he wrote to Father Eugene Guigues, the first Superior at Notre-Dame de l'Osier, and from his 1835 and 1836 acts of visitation given to the community at l'Osier, that the Founder strongly insisted that the Oblate Rules and tradition both in life and ministry be scrupulously observed at Notre-Dame de l'Osier... We can therefore safely assume to the Oblate tradition.

New things were also introduced and a number of adaptations were made. Some of these new elements can be found in the reports from the Oblate Houses in France that are published in *Missions* from 1862 onwards. Still, the hard core of the Oblate tradition remained intact. This is clear in the *Directoire pour les Missions à l'usage des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, published in 1881. This "mission preaching directory" was compiled and published at the explicit request of Superior General Father Joseph Fabre and its main author is Father Alexandre Audruger who had been Superior at l'Osier from November 1, 1867 until October 2, 1874⁶⁵.

Once again we can safely assume that the mission preaching activity described in this directory is essentially the same as that which Father Montfort carried out while he was based at Notre-Dame de l'Osier and, later on, at Notre-Dame de Pontmain. It would not be exaggerated to assume that this book was a vade-mecum which he took along on missions and retreats from 1881 onwards.

A good summary of what a mission given in the time of Father Montfort would consist of is contained in the published synthesis of the Oblate Preachers' Congress held in Rome from April to June 1955⁶⁶. According to this summary, the missionaries assigned to preach a given mission prepared by preparing their sermons and by praying for those whom they were about to

evangelize; and they also enlisted others to pray for the same purpose. Their arrival at the place of the mission included a solemn, ritualistic welcome. The first major mission activity was the visiting of each family, house by house, by the missionaries in person. Only when this had been done would the mission formally be opened. This opening too, was a solemn, ritual event that was often followed by a well-planned special penitential procession.

The mission basically consisted of evening, morning and special group services as well as appropriate ceremonies. According to the Oblate Preacher's Congress summary:

The Evening Services were regarded as the principal function of the Mission. They comprised evening prayer, Rosary, a hymn appropriate to the sermon-matter, a hymn to the Holy Spirit, the sermon, then "Parce Domine" with some verses of the "Miserere" and finally, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament... The evening sermons usually lasted from forty-five to fifty minutes. The missionaries stressed those truths which led to conversion, such as the fear and love of God, of salvation, sin, judgment, heaven, hell... They also preached on the duties of parents, justice, frequent communion, unworthy communion... and never neglected the special sermon on Our Lady... Great flexibility was allowed both as to length of sermons and the subject matter... After Benediction, talks or intimate "chats" lasting about a quarter of an hour were given... They covered a variety of subjects: preview of the next day's functions, explanation of the ceremonies, observations on the progress of the Mission and other matters of detail that had to be dealt with...

The Morning Services were as follows: Holy Mass..., hymn to the Holy Spirit, sermon. These morning sermons were intended to comprise a practical course of spirituality. Hence the subjects dealt with were: the Commandments of God and of the Church, Christian virtue, duties of state, prayer, chief practices of piety, the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance... The time of the morning service was arranged to suit the customs and working-hours of the people... The morning sermons were much shorter than the evening sermons⁶⁷.

According to this same summary, a mission included special services and exclusive gatherings for children, for women, for men. There were also special ceremonies or feasts during the mission: the opening ceremony, the penitential procession, the children's ceremony, the ceremony of the Bl. Virgin Mary, the ceremony of the Blessed Sacrament, the ceremony of the calling sinners to repentance, the ceremony for the dead, the ceremony of the promulgation of God's Law, the closing ceremony, the ceremony of the planting of the mission cross. During the mission various groups of people would be encouraged to receive a given scapular, to be inscribed in sodalities or other spiritual societies.

A more detailed description of each of the mission features just listed can be found in the sources is indispensable to anyone who wishes to understand concretely what Father Montfort and so many other Oblates of his day lived and practiced in their preaching ministry.

E. Father Montfort: A Missionary based at Notre-Dame de l'Osier

On September 3, 1861 Father Joseph Montfort was assigned to be part of the mission preaching team based at Notre-Dame de l'Osier. His first months, however, did not seem to involve him directly in this ministry. Father Antoine Cumin begins his report for 1861-1862 as follows: "The House of N.-D. de l'Osier, condemned to taking a rest during the first months of the winter campaign..."⁶⁸ This means no mission preaching was done from October 1861 to January 1862. Father Cumin does not tell us why they had been "condemned to taking a rest".

Father Mairot's summary notes based on the former Codex Historicus of l'Osier mentions that in 1861 Father Florent Vandenberghe was appointed Provincial of France-Midi and that Father Antoine Mouchette was named Superior at N.D. de l'Osier. The latter was not long in this post, however, for in January 1862 Father Cumin was appointed Superior. The building of the new church had accumulated a debt of some 30,000 francs and work on it had to be suspended⁶⁹. This gives one the impression that the community at l'Osier had experienced several months of important change and uncertainty which may have hindered the orderly

planning of mission preaching commitments.

In this same report we learn that Father Montfort was from February to April 1862 directly involved in the following preaching engagements:

- Mission at Saint-Pierre d'Entremont (Isère), with Father Augustin de Rolland, in March⁷⁰;
- Retreat of preparation for Easter and Confirmation in two parishes (they are not named), with Father Victor Baret, during the first weeks in Lent⁷¹;
- The same kind of retreat at Les Roches (Basses Alpes), with the Father Victor Baret, from the 4th Sunday of Lent onwards⁷²;
- The same kind of retreat at Saint-Véran near Saint-Marcellin (Isère), again with Father Victor Baret, during Holy Week⁷³;
- Mission at Saint-Pierre de Chartreuse (Isère), with Father Antoine Cumin, from Easter Week to Good Shepherd Sunday⁷⁴.

The wording of Father Cumin's report seems to suggest that on all of these preaching engagements it is he or Father Baret who is in charge, not Father Montfort. Only three moments are explicitly attributed to Father Montfort: his comments during the stations of the cross during the retreat at Les Roches, the fact that he was alone at the end of the retreat, and that at Saint-Pierre-de-Chartreuse, while Father Cumin was visiting the families, Father Montfort was organizing a choir of 40 women who were to sing during the mission.

Father Antoine Cumin again reports in *Missions* the Notre-Dame de l'Osier preaching ministry for the October 1862 to the June 1863 preaching season⁷⁵.

On November 30, 1862, the first Sunday of Advent, Fathers Joseph Montfort and Albert Depetro opened the mission at Montvendre (Drôme), in the diocese of Valence. This parish counted some 1200 Catholics and some 100 Huguenots: many of the latter also attended the mission sermons and ceremonies. An extraordinary event occurred during this mission. Father Cumin writes:

Two women from the parish were determined not to take part in the Mission. The weeks of grace were already nearing their end and the two unfortunate women still persevered in their intent; but they were not taking God into consideration. The evening before the closing had come. Impelled by what they had thought to be only an instinct of curiosity -- and that we call a measure of the One who holds human hearts in his hand -- they decided to go and listen to the sermon. Reverend Father Montfort was preaching on final unrepentance. He was speaking from his heart and his voice full of tears and marked with accents of an apostolic sorrow had already conquered the listeners. All of a sudden, as though fixing his vision on the secrets of the past and the mysteries of the future, he seemed to prophesy the misfortune of souls who refuse to return to God. At the same moment a great disturbance broke out amidst the assembly which until then had been silent out of respect and emotion. What was happening? One of the two women had passed out and, while she was being carried out of the church, the people were shouting: "God's punishment! God's punishment!" The other woman, terrified by this event, that very instant resolved to be converted; and she made it plain that she did not intend to delay her conversion, for, when the service was over everyone had gone out, she remained alone in the church, the sole woman near a confessional where a crowd of men were gathered to go to confession. Soon the Father arrived and said to her: "You are aware that we do not hear the confession of women at this time." "That is quite possible", she said with an assurance that was hardly feminine and in a way that she could be heard. "That is quite possible, but you see, Monsieur, I am worth at least two men. I need to be converted and I don't want to die like my friend who has just been taken away. So hear my

confession as soon as possible, or I shall not go out of this church." Her friend was not abandoned by God either for she regained consciousness before dying. The conversion of these two rebellious hearts made a deep impression on the whole parish and came as the culmination of God's blessings⁷⁶.

The mission closed with a superb ceremony of planting the mission cross on the 4th Sunday of Advent, December 21⁷⁷; we can therefore date the above incident as having taken place on December 20, 1862.

Fathers Cumin and Montfort next preached a mission at Saillans (Drôme) which began in January 1863 and ended on the following Mardi Gras⁷⁸. This was a town of some 1400 Catholics and some 600 Huguenots and had not had a mission for twenty-one years. The last one had resulted in the church becoming an arena wherein Catholics and Protestants hurled insults and worse at each other. When this mission had been announced, feelings were immediately high on the part of both groups. The two Fathers had therefore agreed that they would never pronounce the word "Protestant" in their sermons and instructions, that they would act as though everyone were Catholic and, if controverted points arose, they would respond to them gently and without acrimony. A special ceremony of consecrating the parish to our Lady and of illuminating the town for the occasion was also organized. Thereafter, all the tension and hostility was gone. On this occasion, Father Montfort also distinguished himself in a special way. As Father Cumin writes:

What made our evening services so pleasant was the hymn-singing especially. Thirty persons, led by a remarkable artist, made up the most powerful choir I have ever heard... They were at times up to 200 singers... Because of their large number, rehearsals could take place only in the church. After Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament Father Montfort held a practice which they always found to be too brief and during which everyone remained in the church even though they had been invited to go home. For three weeks this same spectacle occurred every day⁷⁹.

Fathers Cumin and Montfort then preached a mission at Andancette (Drôme)⁸⁰. Father Cumin's report narrates a number of marvelous conversion events that took place during this mission, but he does not attribute any of them as having been specifically occasioned by Father Montfort. Nor does he give us the exact dates when this mission was given.

Father Cumin next reports the mission at Saint-Martin d'Here (Isère). It opened on the first Sunday of Lent and lasted until the third Sunday of Lent. Because Father Augier soon became ill, Father Montfort had to conduct most of it alone⁸¹. On this mission, too, Father Montfort achieved some noteworthy results through singing. Father Cumin writes:

Father Montfort immediately organized choirs for hymn-signing and he soon had more than 150 performers who were very well disposed. These young people never got enough of singing and in the evening, in their homes, they repeated the hymns they had learned. As a balance, a choir of young girls was organised to rival with this magnificent men's choir. Through these powerful means, the missionary was from the outset master of all hearts⁸² ...

Several sinners who had resisted the Mission preached here in 1841 had the happiness to benefit from this one and draw near to God. One who is talked about is one of the honored citizens of this town, a man over sixty years of age, who had the reputation of having abandoned the Sacraments after his first communion. Education, wealth, social position, everything enabled him to live a most worldly existence of which Paris had been the centre. He had come back to the home of his ancestors tired of pleasure but he did not convert. God was waiting for him at this Mission. The old man had attended the first instruction. Father Montfort found him in the choir-loft where the men's choir had gathered and he hastened to hand him a copy of the hymns as though he were inviting him to take part in the singing practice. This was not

what the old man wanted; out of politeness however, he accepted the copy but remain stubbornly silent. The Father kept him in his eye and told himself, "If he sings, that will be a good sign!" The urge to sing grew more and more strong and the old sinner could no longer resist and so he began timidly to mingle his voice with that of the massed singers. When the practice was over, the Father gathered up the copies that had been handed out; when he received back the one from the old man, the Father silently nudged him with his hand and at the same time gazed at him with kindness and affection. The sinner had been won over. As he came down the stairs from the choir-loft, his tears already announced the triumph of grace. An invitation to come to the priest's house gave him closer contact with the missionary. Some days later Father Montfort taught him how to go to confession and to prepare himself for the Eucharistic banquet⁸³...

Thereafter, Father Montfort gave all alone two retreats at La Tour-du-Pin (Isère), one to prepare children for their first holy communion and the other a preparation for Easter retreat for the whole parish⁸⁴. This was followed by a retreat of preparation for first communion at Saint Philibert (Isère): it became a parish retreat for all and Father Montfort all alone heard nearly all the confessions⁸⁵. Next, replacing Father Cumin who had been unexpectedly detained with other matters, Father Montfort preached a first communion retreat in the cathedral of Grenoble⁸⁶. Then, during the first two weeks of June, he preached a first communion retreat first at Saint-Pierre d'Entremont and another at Saint-Pierre de Chartreuse (Isère). Here too he was alone in giving these two retreats⁸⁷.

Missions contains no detailed report for the 1863-1864 preaching season; instead, its editor published only a short summary of the reports it had received from the various Oblate houses. In this brief summary, Father Montfort is mentioned only as being teamed up with Fathers Joseph Simmerman, Jean-François Hermitte, and Albert Depetro for a mission preached at Saint-Pierre d'Allevard (Isère). No date is mentioned⁸⁸.

As already mentioned above, 1863 marks the decision to try a new approach and means in raising funds to complete the building of the church and from then on Father Montfort took every opportunity to gather funds for this project.

For the 1864-1865 (October 15 to May 30) preaching season we again have a published report by the Superior at Notre-Dame de l'Osier, Father Antoine Cumin⁸⁹. Father Montfort is mentioned in regard to the following:

-A retreat begun on October 15, 1864, at Roybon (Isère), which was prolonged into a full-scale mission. Fathers Antoine Cumin, Joseph Montfort, Pierre Avignon and Joseph Trotobas were active here⁹⁰.

-Thereafter Father Montfort alone preached a retreat at Varacieu (Isère)⁹¹.

-During November-December 1864, Fathers Albert Depetro, Joseph Montfort, François Busson and Joseph Trotobas preached a mission at Miribel (Isère)⁹².

-January 1, 1865, Fathers Albert Depetro, Joseph Montfort and Joseph Trotobas began a mission at La Chapelle du Bard (Isère)⁹³.

-February 3, 1865, Fathers Joseph Montfort and François Busson began to preach a Jubilee at Saint-Véran (Isère)⁹⁴.

-During Lent 1865, the same two Fathers preached a Jubilee at Mercuriol (Drôme)⁹⁵.

-During the same Lent, Fathers Joseph Montfort, Albert Depetro and Jean Garnier preached a mission at Crémieu (Isère)⁹⁶. Father Garnier was

still a novice and, as Father Pierre Bonnemaïson had done to novice Father Montfort in March 1861, Father Montfort now initiated Father Garnier to this ministry. In a report to Assistant General Father Aimé Martinet, dated July 20, 1889, Father Garnier wrote:

...Crémieu, a small town of 2000 in Isère. Allow me to tell you this in all simplicity, my Reverend and Dear Father, this name arouses in the one who is writing these lines to you the memory of his first and now long in the past experience as a missionary. At the beginning of 1865, after only some months of novitiate, he was appointed by Reverend Father Cumin... to take part in the great mission of which Father Montfort was in charge. He has never forgotten his emotions when he set out, his vivid anxiety when he considered his light oratorical baggage. But the attentive kindness and goodwill of Father Montfort reassured him in no time. His ardent devotedness joined to his spirit of charity marvellously made the task of the poor novice an easy one⁹⁷.

-Easter Monday, Fathers Joseph Montfort and François Busson began preaching a Jubilee at Varacieux⁹⁸.

-Father Montfort preached 4 other retreats alone in the spring months of 1865⁹⁹.

For the 1865-1866 preaching season we again have only a summary report by the editor of *Missions*. All we learn about Father Joseph Montfort's activity in that season is that he was part in its preaching effort¹⁰⁰, and that on June 28, 1865 he was at Le Mans on his way to visit his family¹⁰¹.

We have no information at all about his preaching activities during the 1866-1867 season.

Father Alexandre Audruger, the new Superior at Notre-Dame de l'Osier, authored the published report for the preaching season of November 1, 1867 to mid-June 1868¹⁰². In this report there is a general reference to Father Joseph Montfort which reads: "The tireless and dedicated Father Montfort, all whose works enjoy a special blessing, does a great amount of good, especially in retreat work¹⁰³."

On May 7, 1868, the new church at Notre-Dame de l'Osier was officially blessed and opened¹⁰⁴. While Father Audruger thanks all and sundry for the help and contributions made to make this new church possible, he has a special word for Father Montfort in this regard:

But even if Reverend Father Montfort's modesty may be offended thereby, it is impossible -- and it would be held against me were I to forget it -- it would be impossible, I say, not to make special mention of the main collector of donations, of the great distributor of holy pictures, of the one whom the Blessed Virgin has in these latter times preferentially chosen to bring the work of her shrine to a good completion. He shares this glory with the Superior, Father Cumin¹⁰⁵ ...

It was in the summer of this same year that Pierre Port-Combet's remains were found as well as remains of the l'osier tree that had bled, the sickle he had used, and wood of the plough he was using when our Lady appeared to him¹⁰⁶.

Father Alexandre Audruger tells us that from July 1, 1868 to July 1, 1869, the Oblates based at Notre-Dame de l'Osier preached 60 retreats and missions¹⁰⁷. In regard to Father Joseph Montfort, his report mentions only that Father Montfort and Father Antoine Chatel in March 1869 gave a mission in the parish of Saint-Martin in the city of Vienne¹⁰⁸.

No reports are published about the preaching seasons of 1869-1870, 1870-1871 and 1871-1872¹⁰⁹.

1873 was a special year for the Oblates at Notre-Dame de l'Osier for it marked the consecration of the new church (September 8th) and the special coronation of the statue of Our Lady of l'Osier the next day¹¹⁰.

Father Joseph Montfort also had a special part in the preparation for this coronation. We read in *Missions*:

M. Armand Caillat, an outstanding jeweller of Lyon, was given the task of making the crown. He was given a whole treasure of precious stones and diamonds by a great number of people who had vied for the honor of contributing to the diadem of their Queen and Mother. When the diadem was finished, the Bishop of Grenoble, displaying the greatest tact and achieving the peak of his good will (towards the Oblates), decided that Reverend Father Roux, Superior of l'Osier, and Reverend Father Montfort, so universally known in Dauphiné and who did so much for the building of the church, should in the name of the Diocese take it to Rome to have it blessed by the Sovereign Pontiff. The welcome that the two Fathers received at the Vatican was delightful in its loving and paternal character. Pius IX admired and praised the work of art laid before him; he wholeheartedly blessed it and also lavished expressions of goodness and personal favour on the two envoys¹¹¹.

We know nothing further about this trip to Rome. Fathers Marius Roux and Joseph Montfort arrived in Rome at a time when the Papal States were no more and also when there was no longer any other Oblate presence in the Eternal City¹¹².

For the remaining years that Father Montfort spent at Notre-Dame de l'Osier we have only small bits of information. We know he was second consultant on the local Council of the Oblate House at l'Osier in 1873¹¹³. He accompanied Bishop Vital Grandin to Faramans (Isère) and to Côte-Saint-André on November 17, 1873¹¹⁴. In 1874 or 1875 he preached a mission at Vaulx-en-Velin (Rhône) with Father Charles Besson¹¹⁵.

In his October 15, 1876 report, Father Auguste Lavillardière, Superior at l'Osier since October 2, 1874, says that Father Montfort deserves special mention for his activities in preaching "the last Jubilee"¹¹⁶. He does not elaborate further. He also says that Father Montfort deserves special mention for his contribution towards furnishing and decorating the new church at l'Osier:

The furnishing and decorating of the church took up the entire administration of Reverend Father Roux from 1871 to 1874. All the Fathers rivaled in zeal for this common enterprise which needed so many resources; but all will agree with me when I say that Reverend Father Montfort was the usual and privileged intermediary in regard to the most noble families and the most abundant offerings¹¹⁷...

Finally, Father Lavillardière mentions an incident that illustrates Father Montfort's heroic devotedness to his missionary duty. Father Lavillardière writes:

If one wishes to be just and thorough, one has to add that, while the works of this dear house of l'Osier are blessed by God, our good and much devoted Fathers do not balk before any extra workload nor do they shrink from any sacrifice. Their piety, abnegation, especially their fraternal spirit -- a trait particularly noted by the clergy who call upon us -- leave nothing to be desired. For me it is a pleasant duty to express this testimony in their favour, and in this family publication to thank them for their excellent religious spirit and their dedication that can successfully meet every test. Two of them have practiced love for duty to a heroic degree by renouncing to a final farewell to their father and mother in order not to endanger the success of important works that were just then reaching their crucial point. They are Reverend Fathers Montfort and Chatel, then busy with the missions at Meyzieux and of Saint-Martin de Vienne. Need I add that our Lord deigned to bless in a wholly privileged way the souls that had cost them such a heavy price¹¹⁸!

Father Mairot mentions this exceptional missionary devotedness as follows:

At Meyzieu in 1876, when Father Montfort had come to the decisive moment of his work, he received a message that summoned him to the side of his mother who lay dying. What a painful uncertainty as to what decision should be taken: refuse his mother the supreme consolation she so ardently wished for or sacrifice the fruits of his mission? Since in a missionary's eyes the good of souls holds the primacy over all else, Father Montfort remained at his post and left his mother to die without bringing her the consolation of letting her see him once more. This heroic sacrifice touched the people and merited a triumph of grace for the mission¹¹⁹.

Father Edmond Thiriet also mentions this event as follows:

To save a single soul he was ready to make the most painful sacrifice. He was even accustomed to cry out from the pulpit: "O my God, do you require the last drop of my blood as a ransom for my brothers? My life is in your hands, may I die! May I breathe my last right here for the salvation of these souls!" And his abundant tears are proof of the heroic sacrifice he was ready to make.

A message reached him that his mother was dying and that she wanted to see him one last time. Father Montfort was then totally immersed in the work of a mission in a parish near Lyon where the people were known for their gross impiety. What was he now to do?

He experienced vivid and cruel pain at this unexpected news. He so much wanted to be at the bedside of his sick mother to assist her in her last moments! And yet he could not: souls come before all else! He remained at his post of service and offered his pain to God for the conversion of sinners. Needless to say, his admirable conduct on this solemn occasion brought him the reward of having the whole parish return to God¹²⁰.

This happened, then, in 1876 and in the parish of Meyzieu (Isère). Father Montfort was then 50 years old.

The above quoted texts are quite self-explanatory and require little further comment. In laconic terms they mention the dilemma that awaited Father Montfort's missionary decision, a dilemma that very few preachers of missions are called upon to face. Father Montfort was challenged in his humanity and in his consistency as a missionary. It was not the first time that he had had to assert fidelity to his calling against the claims of a mother who loved him deeply and to whom he himself was deeply attached. He had thus been severely tested by God in his missionary vocation and was found to be faithful to a heroic degree. This was but the beginning of his trials: he would soon be subjected to a series of further severe tests and find himself reduced to the throes of a full-blown crisis.

Aloysius KEDL, O.M.I.
General archivist

Notes:

¹ Father Edmond Thiriet tells us that he received the above details concerning Joseph Montfort's early years from the abbé Préchaut, who in the 1890s was assistant priest at Loscouët. THIRIET, Edmond, o.m.i., "Un Apôtre de Marie: le R.P. Joseph Montfort", in *Annales de Notre-Dame de Pontmain*, Juillet 1895, p. 86.

² The above information about Father Joseph Montfort's early life, education, vocation and subsequent priestly formation is gleaned from Father Edmond THIRIET: *op.cit.*, Juillet 1895, p. 83-87, Août 1895, p. 122-126, Septembre 1895, p. 155.

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- 3 THIRIET, Edmond, o.m.i., *op.cit.*, Septembre 1895, p. 156. When Father Thiriet wrote his biographical sketch, he still had available to him Father Montfort's notebooks and other writings. Unfortunately, these items have since disappeared.
- 4 THIRIET, Edmond, o.m.i., *op.cit.*, Octobre 1895, p. 186.
- 5 THIRIET, Edmond, o.m.i., *op.cit.*, Octobre 1895, p. 186-187; Novembre 1895, p. 217-218.
- 6 THIRIET, Edmond, o.m.i., *op.cit.*, Novembre 1895, p. 219.
- 7 THIRIET, Edmond, o.m.i., *op.cit.*, Novembre 1895, p. 220.
- 8 THIRIET, Edmond, o.m.i., *op.cit.*, Décembre 1895, p. 249-251.
- 9 THIRIET, Edmond, o.m.i., *op.cit.*, Décembre 1895, p. 252.
- 10 THIRIET, Edmond, o.m.i., *Ibid.*
- 11 THIRIET, Edmond, o.m.i., *op.cit.*, Décembre 1895, p. 253.
- 12 THIRIET, Edmond, o.m.i., *Ibid.*
- 13 THIRIET, Edmond, o.m.i., *op.cit.*, Décembre 1895, p. 254.
- 14 THIRIET, Edmond, o.m.i., *Ibid.* - Going to the foreign missions was a great attraction to many clergy and religious in France during the 19th century. Also Father Eugene de Mazenod and his friend Father Forbin-Janson seriously asked themselves whether they should remain in France or go to China as missionaries. The Founder himself tells us: "We differed on one essential point, however. His zeal inclined him to get involved with (the conversion) of non-believers abroad, while I was concerned solely with the deplorable state of our decadent Christians." They had been debating this matter ever since their seminary days. Both accepted to be guided by the practical counsel of Pope Pius VII. In 1814 Forbin-Janson went to Rome, met the Pope and offered himself to be sent to evangelize China. Father de Mazenod gives us the Pope's reply in these words: "Your project is unquestionably a good one, but it is far more desirable to come to the aid of people around us: "maxime autem ad domesticos fidei". France especially has great need of parochial missions and retreats for the clergy", in RAMBERT, Toussaint, o.m.i., *Vie de Mgr Charles-Joseph-Eugène de Mazenod...*, I, p. 162-163. Father Joseph Montfort will in his own way experience a similar missionary tension.
- 15 THIRIET, Edmond, o.m.i., *Ibid.*
- 16 VERKIN, Henri, o.m.i., "La tournée de propagande du Père Léonard", in *Études Oblates*, 26 (1967), p. 79.
- 17 *Régistre des formules d'admission au Noviciat 1851-1911* [Osier] From 1851 until the end of 1860, this Régistre records the entry of the following number of candidates from the following north-western Departements:
- Maine-et-Loire: 3 (records #34, 68, 79)
 - Sarthe: 3 (records #11, 161, 212)
 - Mayenne: 17 (records #28, 31, 50, 51, 53, 56, 65, 102, 163, 164, 206, 225, 300, 351, 337, 355, 345)
 - Calvados: 1 (record #115)
 - Ile-et-Vilaine: 7 (records #135, 165, 166, 194, 217, 262, 287)
 - Morbihan: 8 (records #111, 213, 214, 231, 236, 283, 323, 324)
 - Finistère: 7 (records #110, 113, 192, 229, 233, 234, 350)
 - Côtes-du-Nord: 5 (records #191, 260, 268, 290, 336)
- 18 THIRIET, Edmond, o.m.i., *op.cit.*, Mars 1896, p. 348.
- 19 THIRIET, Edmond, o.m.i., *Ibid.*
- 20 THIRIET, Edmond, o.m.i., *loc.cit.*, p. 349.
- 21 THIRIET, Edmond, o.m.i., *op.cit.*, Juillet 1896, p. 81.
- 22 *Régistre des formules d'admission au Noviciat 1851-1911* [L'Osier], Record no. 336. The entry is entirely in French.
- 23 THIRIET, Edmond, o.m.i., *op.cit.*, Juillet 1896, p. 84. Father Thiriet is quoting from one of Father Montfort's notebooks.
- 24 THIRIET, Edmond, o.m.i., *op.cit.*, Juillet 1896, p. 85-86.
- 25 THIRIET, Edmond, *op.cit.*, Juillet 1896, p. 87.
- 26 General Archives: *France-Midi -- file on N.-D. de l'Osier: Novices 1859-1861*. All but the last of the above summaries are in Father Florent Vandenberghe's handwriting.

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- 27 THIRIET, Edmond, o.m.i., *Ibid.*, p. 87.
- 28 THIRIET, Edmond, o.m.i., *Ibid.*, p. 87-88.
- 29 THIRIET, Edmond, o.m.i., *Ibid.*, p. 88.
- 30 Rome, Oblate General Archives, *File of Joseph Montfort*.
- 31 THIRIET, Edmond, o.m.i., *Ibid.*, p. 88-89.
- 32 THIRIET, Edmond, o.m.i., *Ibid.*, p. 89-90.
- 33 On the origins and development of the pilgrimage and shrine of Notre-Dame de l'Osier cf. DELARUE, Louis, o.m.i., *Notre-Dame de l'Osier: Les origines du pèlerinage d'après les manuscrits et imprimés du temps de 1649 à 1686*, Lyon, M. Lescuyer et Fils, 1966; BERNE, Jean-Baptiste, o.m.i., *Esquisse sur le Pèlerinage de Notre-Dame de l'Osier*, Grenoble, F. Dardelet, 1926; BERNE, Jean-Baptiste, o.m.i., in *Missions*, 1868, p. 387 ff.; MAIROT, François, o.m.i., *Quelques notes sur l'histoire oblate de N.-D. de l'Osier d'après le Codex historicus* (typed manuscript), August 1948. An article on the Oblate house and community of Notre-Dame de l'Osier by BEAUDOIN, Yvon, o.m.i., is scheduled to appear soon as part of the "Oblate Historical Dictionary" being prepared by the Association for Oblate Studies and Research.
- 34 In that area the osier willow is often grafted into the trunk of a more common willow and thus the osier can grow to a certain height. The osier ("salix viminalis") produces long, yellowish, pliable rod-like branches that are used for wicker furniture and baskets.
- 35 The factual data of what happened on this March 25, 1649 are legally established, both in the civil and ecclesiastical forums: cf DELARUE, Louis, o.m.i., *op.cit.*, p. 7-16.
- 36 DELARUE, Louis, o.m.i., *op.cit.*, p. 17-18.
- 37 DELARUE, Louis, o.m.i., *op.cit.*, p. 18-26. In these pages the author establishes the seriousness of the sources on which the occurrence described in the above paragraphs is based.
- 38 DELARUE, Louis, o.m.i., *op.cit.*, p. 27-29.
- 39 This development is carefully detailed by DELARUE, Louis, *op.cit.*, p. 30-51; BERNE, Jean-Baptiste, *op.cit.*, p. 24-48.
- 40 For more details of this bleak period in the shrine's history, BERNE, Jean-Baptiste, o.m.i., *op.cit.*, p. 49-63; DELARUE, Louis, o.m.i., *op.cit.*, p. 51-52.
- 41 Vicar General Mr. Teston in the name of Bishop Philibert de Bruillard of Grenoble approached the Founder who immediately replied to him on June 17, 1828 and made it a point to visit the Bishop of Grenoble the following July 1st: cf *Oblate Writings XIII*, p. 88, 89, 160 (*Écrits Oblats XIII*, p. 103-104, 105, 163). By January 1829 everything seemed to be ready to proceed and Father Joseph Hippolyte Guibert, then at Nîmes, was to have been the Superior of the new establishment: cf *Oblate Writings XIII*, p. 89, footnote 23 (*Écrits Oblats XIII*, p. 105, note 23). Then the Bishop of Grenoble became suddenly evasive and when he visited Bishop de Mazenod in Marseilles in April 1829, he managed not to say a word about bringing the Oblates into his Diocese: cf *Oblate Writings VII*, p. 178-179 (*Écrits Oblats XII*, p. 182). A year or so later Father Guibert, then Superior at Notre-Dame du Laus, discovered the reason why this first approach came to nothing. Bishop F.A. Arbaud of Gap told Father Guibert that a spontaneous "plaisanterie" he had made when the Bishop of Grenoble had asked him for a copy of his circular letter against the social and political ideas of de Lamennais may have harmed the Oblates. When acceding to Bishop de Bruillard's request, Bishop Arbaud had quipped that his circular might even convert Father de Mazenod who was a great Lamennaisian. This visibly upset Bishop de Bruillard who began to pace up and down his room in agitation: cf. DEVES, Marius, o.m.i., *Le Père Dassy*, Paris de Gigord, 1938, p. 59-60. Father de Mazenod, in fact, was as much against the social and political ideas of De Lamennais as the two Bishops were, but at the same time he admired de Lamennais' literary talent and vigorous defence of religion and of the papacy... but this latter point would also offend a gallicanist mentality.
- 42 BEAUDOIN, Yvon, o.m.i., "Alexandre Dupuy", in *Oblate Historical Dictionary* (Association for Oblate Studies and Research) for a biographical sketch of Father Dupuy; also see DEVES, Marius, o.m.i., *op.cit.*, p. 50 ff.
- 43 DEVES, Marius, o.m.i., *op.cit.*, p. 51-63 for the above and for some of the things that follow.
- 44 For the development of events regarding l'Osier in 1834, see the following letters of Father Dassy to the Founder: March 18, April 19, May 6, August 1, October 12, Novembre 19 (all in the General Archives in Rome); also the letter of the Founder to Father Dassy on April 25, in *Oblate Writings VIII*, p. 119, *Écrits Oblats VIII*, p. 107; to Bishop Phlibert de Bruillard of Grenoble of August 18, in *Oblate Writings XIII*, p.

103- 105, *Écrits Oblats XIII*, p. 119-121; of Bishop de Bruillard to the Founder on August 30, in RAMBERT, Toussaint, o.m.i., I, p. 654-655; of the Founder to Father Guigues on August 18, in *Oblate Writings VIII*, p. 122, 124-125, 129-130, 130, 131, 138-139; *Écrits Oblats VIII*, p. 109-110, 111-113, 116-117, 117, 118, 125; letter of Father Dassy to Father C. Aubert on October 12 (in the General Archives in Rome).

⁴⁵ MAZENOD, Eugène de, *Acte de visite de la Maison de N.D. de l'Osier, 16 juillet 1835*. Copy in Oblate General Archives, Rome.

⁴⁶ MAZENOD, Eugène de, *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ MAIROT, François, o.m.i., *Quelques notes sur l'histoire oblate de N.D. de l'Osier d'après le Codex Historicus*, August 1948 (type-written manuscript: copy in the Oblate General Archives, Rome). These "notes" are precious because the Codex Historicus of the Oblate House at l'Osier perished in the December 25, 1948 fire that destroyed this House.

⁴⁸ MAIROT, François, o.m.i., *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ On May 5, 1837, Bishop de Mazenod wrote in his Diary: "Today I signed the deed of sale which Dupuy has made to me of Notre Dame de l'Osier. The purchase was made for the price of ten thousand francs. Good Dupuy, whose noble conduct and devotedness can never be too highly praised, came to say farewell to me. He is going up to N.D. de l'Osier to consolidate the good he has already done there and, should a propitious moment arise, to insist that the Bishop confer the title of parish priest on the Superior of the community."

⁵⁰ Father Alexandre Dupuy spent the last decade of his life at Notre-Dame de l'Osier (1871-1880): he had built himself a house near the Basilica for this purpose. When the monastery he had acquired and then sold to the Oblates burned down on Christmas Day 1948, the oblate community used this house as a temporary residence.

⁵¹ MAIROT, François, o.m.i., *Ibid.* This new church was designed to be perpendicular to the one already in place in such a way that the sanctuary of the new church would occupy the same space as that of the old church. Cf DELARUE, Louis, o.m.i., *op.cit.*, p. 53.

⁵² MAIROT, François, o.m.i., *Ibid.*

⁵³ MAIROT, François, o.m.i., *Ibid.*; DELARUE, Louis, o.m.i., *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Missions*, 1962, p. 407-426.

⁵⁵ *Missions*, 1963, p. 381.

⁵⁶ *Missions*, 1864, p. 585.

⁵⁷ *Missions*, 1865, p. 522-523.

⁵⁸ *Missions*, 1866, p. 582-583.

⁵⁹ *Missions*, 1868, p. 381-382.

⁶⁰ *Missions*, 1869, p. 444.

⁶¹ LEFLON, Jean, *Eugène de Mazenod, Bishop of Marseilles, Founder of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate 1782-1861*, II, p. 90-106. Also RAMBERT, Toussaint, o.m.i., *Vie de Monseigneur Charles-Joseph-Eugène de Mazenod, évêque de Marseille, fondateur de la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, I, p. 180-183, 203-229, 338-351.

⁶² French text published in *Missions*, 1865, p. 276-286, 418-431.

⁶³ The complete French text is published in *Missions*, 1951, p.11-160: see p. 20-38 for the parts that explicitly treat of the preaching of missions and retreats

⁶⁴ PIELORZ, Joseph, o.m.i., "Premières missions des missionnaires de Provence (1816-1823)", in *Missions*, 1955, p. 549-561, 641-655.

⁶⁵ MAIROT, François, o.m.i., *op.cit.*, p. 15. Very informative in this matter of the Oblate tradition of preaching missions is Father Joseph Fabre's circular letter no. 34 of September 1881 whereby he presents Father Audruget's Directoire pour les Missions to the whole Congregation: cf *Circulaires administrative*, I, p. 357-359.

⁶⁶ *The Parish Mission*, a special issue of *Missions*, 1957, xix-351 p. Especially p. 70-81.

⁶⁷ *The Parish Mission*, in *op.cit.*, p. 73-76.

⁶⁸ *Missions*, 1862, p. 407.

⁶⁹ MAIROT, François, o.m.i., *op.cit.*, p. 15.

⁷⁰ *Missions*, 1862, p. 411-412.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 414.

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- 72 *Ibid.*, p. 414-417.;
- 73 *Ibid.*, p. 417.
- 74 *Ibid.*, p. 425-426.
- 75 *Missions*, 1863, p. 381-410, 516-524.
- 76 *Missions*, 1863, p. 384-385. THIRIET, Edmond, o.m.i., *op.cit.*, Avril 1897, p. 375-376, also narrates this incident.
- 77 *Missions*, 1863, p. 385-386.
- 78 *Missions*, 1863, p. 404-410.
- 79 *Missions*, 1863, p. 407-408.
- 80 *Missions*, 1863, p. 516-518.
- 81 *Missions*, 1863, p. 518-521.
- 82 *Missions*, 1863, p. 519.
- 83 *Missions*, 1863, p. 520-521.
- 84 *Missions*, 1863, p. 522-523.
- 85 *Missions*, 1863, p. 522.
- 86 *Missions*, 1863, p. 523.
- 87 *Missions*, 1863, p. 523.
- 88 *Missions*, 1864, p. 585-586.
- 89 *Missions*, 1865, p. 522-546.
- 90 *Missions*, 1865, p. 523-524.
- 91 *Missions*, 1865, p. 524.
- 92 *Missions*, 1865, p. 526-527.
- 93 *Missions*, 1865, p. 528.
- 94 *Missions*, 1865, p. 530-531.
- 95 *Missions*, 1865, p. 535-536.
- 96 *Missions*, 1865, p. 537-538.
- 97 *Missions*, 1889, p. 361.
- 98 *Missions*, 1865, p. 543-544.
- 99 *Missions*, 1865, p. 546.
- 100 *Missions*, 1866, p. 583.
- 101 *Missions*, 1867, p. 610.
- 102 *Missions*, 1868, p. 379-402.
- 103 *Missions*, 1868, p. 381.
- 104 *Missions*, 1868, p. 382.
- 105 *Missions*, 1868, p. 383.
- 106 *Missions*, 1868, p. 384-387 gives a special report of this discovery. Also DELARUE, Louis, o.m.i., *op.cit.*, p. 53.
- 107 *Missions*, 1869, p. 444.
- 108 *Missions*, 1869, p. 445.
- 109 MAIROT, François, o.m.i., notes that the Codex Historicus of the Oblate community N.-D. de l'Osier was "neglected" during the years 1868-1874: cf *op.cit.*, p. 15. Superior during most of that period was Father Alexandre Audruger.
- 110 *Missions*, 1873, p. 463-472 describes this event.
- 111 *Missions*, 1873, p. 465.
- 112 Procurator General Father Jean Corne was the only Oblate in Rome when the City was invaded on September 20, 1870. In 1873 he left Rome to attend the General Chapter in Autun and did not return. The next stable Oblate presence in Rome was Archbishop Jean-François Allard from 1874 onwards.
- 113 *Personnel of France-Midi, 1873*: handwritten manuscript in the Oblate General Archives, Rome; also *Missions*, 1877, p. 20.
- 114 *Missions*, 1874, p. 136.
- 115 *Missions*, 1887, p. 421.
- 116 *Missions*, 1877, p. 6.
- 117 *Missions*, 1877, p. 18.

118 *Missions*, 1877, p. 9.

119 MAIROT, François, o.m.i., *op.cit.*, p. 5.

120 THIRIET, Edmond, o.m.i., *op.cit.*, Mai 1897, p. 21-22.

L'idéal du martyr et l'esprit d'oblation dans la congrégation des missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée

SUMMARY - This is the third and last article taken from the thesis of Father Maurizio Giorgianni. The first two were about the Founder; this one concerns the whole Congregation and develops the theme of the ideal of martyrdom and the spirit of oblation. The first part shows martyrdom as an ideal in the first formation of the Oblates. The second part concerns martyrdom and spirit of oblation in the oblate missionary evangelization. In both parts, the author names some Oblates as examples and gives their testimony.

I. Le martyr: un idéal dans la première formation des Oblats

Le Fondateur, tout en gardant bien vif le désir du martyr, n'obtient pas la grâce de le vivre lui-même jusqu'à l'effusion du sang. Toutefois, il transmet l'idéal du martyr de la charité comme <<charisme>> de la mission oblate. Il est possible de vérifier cette affirmation non seulement dans ses écrits, mais encore dans l'expérience vécue par quelques Oblats.

Chez lui, cependant, cet idéal du martyr évolue constamment. Il se présente de façons diverses selon les circonstances où il a à vivre son ministère sacerdotal. De même chez les Oblats, cet idéal revêtira un caractère dynamique.

Du vivant de Mgr de Mazenod, quelques-uns des missionnaires ont à subir un authentique martyr, comme lui-même en témoigne dans quelques lettres; d'autres, depuis leur période de formation au scolasticat, nourrissent un profond désir de vivre leur vocation oblate à la façon d'un martyr.

Le p. *Casimir Aubert*¹, dans ses notes de retraite, rédigées au cours de ses premières années de formation (1827-1835), exprime sa méditation constante sur l'imitation de Jésus Christ. Sa volonté de reproduire en lui la passion du Christ apparaît dans ses fréquentes méditations sur ce sujet. Une pensée le remplit d'ardeur: celle de vivre chaque moment de sa vie comme si c'était le dernier, dans l'attitude de celui qui est prêt à mourir comme son Seigneur².

On pourrait expliquer et justifier cette sensibilité en se référant à la spiritualité du temps, qui influençait également Mgr de Mazenod. Toutefois, ce qu'écrit C. Aubert dans ses notes de retraite avant son ordination au sacerdoce, aide à comprendre encore plus à fond son élaboration personnelle sur la spiritualité commune:

Oui, ô mon aimable Jésus, quand même il serait égal pour la gloire de Dieu et pour mon salut soit que je suivisse la voie des satisfactions, des richesses, des honneurs, etc., soit que je m'engageasse dans le chemin des croix, des humiliations, de la pauvreté, cependant pour l'amour de vous et par cela seul que c'est la voie pour laquelle vous avez marché, je l'embrasserais avec joie et m'estimerais mille fois heureux de pouvoir vous imiter³.

Aubert est ordonné par Mgr de Mazenod le 6 avril 1833. Le lendemain, il célèbre la première messe; sa pensée et sa prière vont aux personnes qui lui sont chères et en particulier à l'évêque ordinand pour lequel il sent le besoin de rendre grâce à Dieu pour son affection. Il note ainsi:

Pénétré de crainte et d'amour j'hésitais, je tremblais, mais enfin les paroles puissantes sont sorties de ma bouche, un miracle de l'amour infini s'est

opéré, vous êtes descendu entre mes mains, tous ensemble avec les assistants nous vous avons profondément adoré. Puissai-je avoir le bonheur de recevoir la grâce que je vous ai demandée alors, de mourir victime de la charité dans quelque calamité publique, ou au moins victime du zèle dans l'exercice du ministère très saint qui m'a été confié, ou plutôt puisse la prière que j'ai faite à l'élévation de votre sang précieux, puisse-t-elle avoir été exaucée et qu'un jour j'aie le bonheur de verser mon sang pour l'amour de vous et pour la religion sainte dont vous m'avez constitué ministre⁴.

On retrouve dans ces expressions l'écho de celles du p. de Mazenod à sa première messe. Il est intéressant d'y noter comment être victime de la charité équivaut à être victime du zèle. De sorte que le zèle pour les âmes, vécu de façon radicale, même sans conduire à une mort violente, mais sûrement motivée par l'amour pour les âmes, ce zèle vaut autant que le martyre de la charité. L'explication du désir du martyr, chez Aubert, confirme l'hypothèse que cet idéal soit transmis aux Oblats par Mgr de Mazenod. En outre, le fait que celui-ci ait nommé le p. Aubert comme maître des novices, laisse supposer qu'il l'estime spirituellement formé pour communiquer de tels idéaux dans la formation au noviciat.

Le p. *Joseph Gérard*⁵ n'a pas eu le p. Aubert comme maître des novices, mais il est intéressant de noter que, dès son entrée au noviciat, il connaît très clairement ce qu'est la vocation de l'Oblat et quel genre de dévouement comporte son ministère:

L'Oblat de Marie Immaculée doit toujours avoir ce beau nom devant les yeux, être toujours en l'état d'une victime qui n'attend que le couteau du sacrificateur, et cela pour ses péchés et ceux des peuples qu'il évangélise; ... Comme soldat, il a sa bannière aussi; sa devise est celle de mon Seigneur J.-C.: <<Evangelizare pauperibus misit me, pauperes evangelizantur.>> Voilà sa mission et quelle mission! ... Pour se maintenir à la sublime hauteur de sa vocation, il n'a qu'à observer sa Règle: <<hoc fac et vives>> (Lc 10,28). Tout est là⁶.

Quelques points sont à souligner dans ce texte. Selon le p. Gérard, l'Oblat doit être victime pour le salut des âmes abandonnées, selon le but de sa mission. En outre, l'offrande vicariaire, qu'on rencontre chez le Fondateur, est proposée de nouveau à côté de la Règle. C'est dire que l'observance parfaite des Règles permet à l'Oblat de se maintenir constamment dans l'esprit propre de sa vocation: évangéliser les pauvres tout en étant victime pour leur salut.

De cette contemplation de la vocation et du devoir de l'Oblat, le p. Gérard en vient à exprimer un désir:

Oblat veut dire immolé, homme offert comme victime à N.S.J.-C. Il faut donc pour entrer dans la signification de ce beau nom que N.S.J.-C. porte essentiellement, il faut m'offrir comme une victime au Coeur de Jésus, et cela continuellement et totalement, pour mes péchés et ceux des autres... Mon Dieu, puisque le monde vous persécute, vous méprise, vous foule aux pieds, faites aussi que le monde me persécute, me méprise, me réduise en poudre, afin que je vous imite en toutes choses, et que je sois véritablement Oblat⁷.

On remarquera donc comment le point d'arrivée de la spiritualité du Fondateur devient le point de départ de la spiritualité de l'oblation. Il semble maintenant évident qu'être Oblat veut dire avant tout être victime pour le salut des autres. Le martyr de la charité dont parlait E. de Mazenod devient oblation pour la mission. Chez le p. Gérard, tout comme chez le Fondateur, ressort le désir d'imiter le Christ dans son anéantissement.

Le jour de son oblation, en 1852, il écrit les lignes suivantes, qui expriment son désir d'habiter éternellement dans le coeur de son divin Sauveur:

Que je n'en sorte jamais que pour vous conquérir les âmes et les enflammer de votre amour. C'est là que je veux vivre, c'est là que je veux mourir! ... O mon Dieu, je vous en conjure, je ne vous demande qu'une chose, donnez-moi, je vous en conjure, l'esprit de sacrifice qui est l'esprit du vrai Oblat

de Marie Immaculée. Oui, que je sois une victime perpétuelle, consommée à votre gloire pour le salut des âmes⁸.

L'esprit de sacrifice est ainsi l'esprit du vrai Oblat, qui n'est autre chose qu'une victime perpétuelle. On pourrait donc dire que l'offrande de l'Oblat a toujours une connotation vicairie pour la mission et qu'elle ne s'épuise pas en un seul moment; il s'agit bien plutôt de se consumer graduellement, en vivant ce que demandent la Règle et la mission.

Chez le p. *Vital Grandin*⁹, on trouve exprimée de manière plus explicite la réalité que lui suggère le nom d'Oblat. Vers la fin de son noviciat, le 15 décembre 1852, il écrit à son frère:

Je recevrai le nom d'Oblat de Marie Immaculée, le jour où Notre Seigneur a reçu le nom de Jésus, le jour où il a versé les premières gouttes de son sang pour mon salut. Pour le salut des âmes, moi aussi, je devrai me sacrifier tout entier. Tu ne peux te faire une idée de mon bonheur: moi, en quelques jours, être l'Oblat de Marie! Pourtant je me sens effrayé; j'assume de terribles obligations. Le nom d'Oblat que je dois porter dit assez ce à quoi je m'engage. Je dois être une victime, et une victime non pas d'un moment, mais de tous les jours. C'est bien ce que signifie aussi la croix que l'on me suspendra au cou et qui, à chaque instant me rappellera que la vie de l'Oblat est une vie de sacrifice et d'immolation continue... Jusqu'à présent les martyrs manquent à notre congrégation. Si je pouvais avoir le bonheur d'être le premier Oblat martyr¹⁰!

Ainsi, chez Mgr Grandin, le désir de mourir martyr est exprimé de façon explicite. Ce qui est à souligner, pourtant, est cette idée, que l'on trouve toujours plus fréquemment: être Oblat signifie être victime, non pas un seul moment, mais bien tous les jours. Le martyr, dans sa réalité la plus intérieure, est pour l'Oblat une situation qu'il rencontre quotidiennement.

Le fr. *François-Marie Camper*¹¹, le 24 octobre 1854, trois jours avant son oblation, note ce qui suit:

J'ai un grand désir de perfection... Même désir de conformer ma vie et tous ses instants, toutes ses circonstances à la vie de Jésus victime au Calvaire et dans le Saint Sacrement. Oblat signifie victime, je voudrais être la victime de Jésus... je voudrais pouvoir, pour l'amour de lui, pour l'expiation de mes crimes, pour la gloire de son Etre, pour la conversion des pécheurs, des infidèles... pratiquer, en union avec lui, toutes les vertus qu'il y pratique, souffrir comme lui, m'offrir comme lui¹².

On voit ainsi comment la façon d'exprimer la réalité de l'Oblat reste inchangée.

Le fr. Camper mourra durant sa première formation, à l'âge de 21 ans. Sa figure est importante, car elle nous aide à mieux comprendre les points fondamentaux de la formation oblate. Dans ses notes spirituelles du 16 octobre 1854, le fr. Camper reconnaît, chez l'Oblat, deux caractéristiques particulières de son ministère missionnaire. La première est décrite ainsi:

L'esprit de sacrifice et le zèle, en tout ce qui intéresse la gloire de Dieu et le salut des âmes, ainsi que l'exige le beau nom qu'il porte Oblatus, victime¹³.

On retrouve les mêmes termes dans une lettre du 20 octobre¹⁴. Il raconte à un ami la cérémonie de son oblation. Pour le fr. Camper, une donnée établie est l'identification de la vocation de l'Oblat à la réalité signifiée par le nom, à savoir être victime, sacrifié, immolé pour le salut des âmes. On ne trouve pas ici une référence explicite au martyr, comme chez V. Grandin et d'autres pères¹⁵, mais l'idée de base, commune à ces Oblats de la première période après la fondation, est que l'oblation est la remise de tout son être à Dieu <<usque ad internicionem>>, y compris le martyr.

Si on s'éloigne de l'époque du Fondateur, l'esprit de sacrifice, de victime, prend une dimension toujours plus grande. L'oblation pour la mission, vécue comme martyr de la charité,

prend une signification plus large, tout en maintenant l'idée centrale.

Le p. *Wilbrod Perreault*¹⁶, jeune scolastique en 1910 écrit:

Oui, tout religieux est victime... Mais si tout religieux est victime, chacun l'est d'après l'esprit propre de sa Congrégation, le but qu'elle poursuit, les moyens qu'elle emploie. Quel est donc le tempérament, le caractère spécifique de ma famille religieuse? Dans quelles oeuvres consume-t-elle sa vie de victime?... Victime au profit des pauvres, c'est donc bien là la vocation spéciale de l'Oblat. Vocation sublime, parce que féconde en sacrifices... <<Evangelizare pauperibus misit me>>. Victime au profit des pauvres âmes, c'est là l'Oblat¹⁷.

D'après cet écrit du p. Perreault, il y a une façon particulière, pour l'Oblat, de vivre l'offrande de soi propre à toute vie religieuse. Par vocation spéciale, il se doit d'être victime au profit des pauvres. Pour le p. Perreault, la manière que revêt cette offrande vicariale consiste dans l'esprit d'abnégation requis par les Règles. Même si on est bien loin de l'influence de la spiritualité contemporaine du Fondateur, on retrouve le même rapprochement entre la vocation oblate et le don de la vie en vue de l'évangélisation et du service des plus pauvres. Ce lien étroit avec le zèle pour les âmes signifie avoir une charité sans limite. C'est là un élément essentiel de la spiritualité de l'Oblat, au moins dans les années de formation.

Un autre témoignage important de l'esprit oblat nous est donné par le p. *Mario Borzaga*¹⁸.

D'après une lettre du 18 mars 1956 à sa soeur Lucia, on peut voir la radicalité de sa vocation et le caractère spirituel de son choix:

... Jésus ne dit-il pas, dans l'Évangile: <<Celui qui veut sauver sa propre vie la perdra, et celui qui la perd la sauvera?>> Si je peux faire une confiance, c'est cette phrase de l'Évangile qui m'a déterminé, pour une bonne part, à laisser le monde pour me faire Missionnaire, et je me rends compte maintenant qu'il en est vraiment ainsi¹⁹ ...

Dès les débuts, le p. Mario désire mettre toute sa vie entre les mains de Dieu, jusqu'à la perdre pour Lui. Et cela, non seulement en esprit, mais très concrètement, comme il ressort de quelques écrits remontant à la période du scolasticat:

J'ai compris quelle est ma vocation: être un homme heureux jusque dans l'effort pour m'identifier au Christ crucifié... Si je veux être comme l'Eucharistie, un bon Pain à être mangé par mes frères, leur nourriture divine, je dois absolument passer auparavant par la mort de la croix. D'abord le sacrifice, ensuite la joie de me distribuer à mes frères du monde entier; si je me distribue sans passer d'abord par le sacrifice et me sublimer en lui, ce que je donne à mes frères affamés de Dieu, c'est moi-même, un chiffon d'homme, un reste d'enfer; si j'accepte ma mort en union avec celle de Jésus, c'est justement Jésus que je réussis à donner à mes frères, de mes propres mains. Ce que je dois faire, ce n'est pas tant renoncer à moi-même, mais accroître tout ce qui en moi peut souffrir, être immolé, sacrifié pour les âmes que Jésus m'a donné d'aimer²⁰.

Il est frappant de retrouver dans ce texte les sentiments et expressions propres aux premiers martyrs²¹. On y voit, tout comme chez Mgr de Mazenod, l'idée que le sacrifice de sa propre vie est missionnaire. Ce n'est pas un renoncement à soi-même, mais bien un accroissement en faveur des âmes à sauver. La mission oblate met un accent particulier sur la possibilité de sacrifier sa vie afin que les destinataires puissent recevoir les bienfaits de cette offrande²². Il faut ensuite vivre le sacrifice de manière constante, dans un esprit de mortification, comme le Fondateur le soulignait déjà.

Au cours de sa retraite préparatoire au sacerdoce, le p. Borzaga note dans son journal, le 19 février 1957:

Parfois la tristesse me prend quand je pense combien j'aurai à souffrir, puisque Jésus m'a choisi pour cela, mais ensuite je pense qu'il ne s'agit pas de discuter une possibilité pour demain, mais d'établir solidement un principe. <<Tota vita Christi fuit crux et martyrium, atque ego ero alter Christus, Ergo>>: le Christ qui m'a choisi est le même qui a donné la Vie et la Force aux martyrs et aux vierges... Moi aussi, j'ai été choisi en vue du martyre. Et si je veux être un saint prêtre, je ne dois pas désirer autre chose, parce que c'est le mystère que j'ai entre les mains chaque jour: le mystère du sang de l'immolation totale²³.

La souffrance en vue de la mission, même si elle est ressentie avec crainte, n'est donc pas, pour le p. Mario, une simple possibilité, elle est une dimension propre de sa vocation sacerdotale-missionnaire. Le martyre n'est plus, alors, une réalité qui se consume en un moment, mais jour après jour, dans l'accomplissement de sa mission oblate. Le p. Borzaga célèbre sa première messe le 25 février. Tout comme le p. de Mazenod, lui aussi sent le désir de demander la grâce du martyre. Et voici ce qu'il note, à la fin de cette journée:

Fête de l'apôtre retardataire saint Mathias. Je devais célébrer la première Messe de ma vie: heureusement c'était la fête d'un Apôtre et Martyr... Intention: pour l'Église du Sang... Et je priai bien, seul entre les murs de mon bien-aimé Couvent: oui, car ce matin j'avais pensé demander au Christ, né de moi, la grâce assurée du martyre, de l'apostolat à la manière de Saint François-Xavier, de la prédication et d'un ministère fécond; et voilà que je demandai plutôt d'observer toujours à la perfection la Règle des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée: la Grâce, à partir de ce jour, a été accordée: enfin réconcilié, il y fallait le Sacrifice de l'autel²⁴!

On voit de nouveau le même parallèle - déjà souligné chez le p. Gérard, - entre, le martyre et la Règle. Pour le p. Mario, il semblerait que l'observance parfaite de la Règle, c'est-à-dire le fait de vivre à plein la vocation de Missionnaire Oblat de Marie Immaculée, contient aussi la grâce demandée du martyre. Certainement, l'observance de la Règle requiert le même esprit d'abnégation et d'offrande de soi pour le salut des âmes, qui a caractérisé le modèle de tout martyr: le Christ Jésus.

Le p. Mario, dans d'autres passages de son Journal, parle de vouloir vivre sa vocation oblate pleinement, en particulier par le sacrifice de son existence pour le salut des âmes. Pour lui, mourir pour la mission a une force et une valeur tellement spéciales, qu'il faut mettre ce sacrifice au-dessus des capacités <<apostoliques>> du missionnaire. Il écrit, le 15 juin 1957:

Même si je ne réussis pas à faire quoi que ce soit dans l'apostolat, je serai comme le grain jeté qui pourrit, piétiné par tous: je sens que je serai ainsi, mais dès maintenant j'offre mon sacrifice²⁵.

Le p. Borzaga pense souvent au martyre. En effet, chaque fois qu'on fait la mémoire des saints martyrs, il arrête son attention sur cette réalité. Parfois il en ressent l'attrait²⁶, parfois il s'en trouve tellement éloigné²⁷ à cause de l'expérience de ses propres limites. La réalité du martyre est pourtant toujours la perspective à travers laquelle il pense et regarde son ministère de prêtre et de missionnaire. Dans l'action de grâce quotidienne après la communion, le p. Mario prie ainsi:

O Jésus, je renouvelle ma consécration à Ton S. Coeur et au Coeur Immaculée de Marie... Je suis disposé à mourir en ce jour, si tel est Ton plaisir. Je suis disposé à mourir en n'importe quel instant de ma vie, selon toutes les conditions de temps, lieu, circonstances que Tu voudras me donner... O Jésus, je T'en prie, fais-moi devenir, au sens vrai et propre du terme, religieux, prêtre, missionnaire, apôtre, martyr de Ton S. Coeur²⁸.

Il résulte donc que la réalité du martyre continue à être présente dans l'esprit de certains Oblats, au cours de leur formation, et c'est dans cette optique que, par la suite, ils comprennent leur oblation en vue de la mission. Dans les diverses périodes de l'histoire, on retrouve un

langage et des expressions parfois fort semblables à ceux du Fondateur, quoiqu'ils tendent à revêtir un sens plus large. La réalité qui demeure inchangée, c'est que l'Oblat, qui perçoit son appel missionnaire au service des pauvres, le comprend, de manière explicite ou implicite, en ayant conscience que ce don du Saint-Esprit le place en première ligne. Son appel le destine à être victime par amour pour les pauvres. Cette sensibilité particulière se traduit ensuite dans l'action pastorale, à travers des choix missionnaires qui peuvent demander de verser réellement son sang pour la mission, portant ainsi l'Oblation à son plus haut achèvement.

II. Le martyr et l'esprit d'oblation dans la pastorale missionnaire des Oblats

Les premières missions oblates outre-mer commencent au Canada. Les premiers Oblats à s'y rendre sont les pères Adrien Telmon, Jean Baudrand et Lucien Lagier ainsi que les frères Basile Fastray et Louis Roux. Ils arrivent à Montréal²⁹ le 2 décembre 1841. A la tête du groupe est le p. J.B. Honorat, qui sera supérieur de la nouvelle fondation³⁰ jusqu'au 8 août 1844, date de l'arrivée du p. Joseph Eugène-Bruno Guigues (1805-1874)³¹, nommé visiteur permanent ayant de larges pouvoirs d'action dans toute l'Amérique.

La mission est érigée comme Province en 1851, avec le p. Jacques Santoni comme supérieur. A la fin de 1861, la Congrégation est bien établie au Canada, et compte 53 membres³².

La mission du Canada, commencée dans l'est du pays se déplace ensuite vers l'ouest³³. En 1845, le p. Pierre Aubert et le fr. Alexandre Taché arrivent à St-Boniface; c'est de là que débute les premières tentatives vers l'ouest.

Le p. *Alexandre Taché*³⁴ rappelle, en 1866, son arrivée à la mission de Rivière-Rouge en 1845. Dans quelques pages de son Journal, il décrit la grande émotion de l'arrivée ainsi que les fatigues du voyage, mais il conclut par cette affirmation: <<Je compris alors toute la grandeur du sacrifice imposé au Missionnaire; j'en calculai ou du moins j'en acceptai toutes les conséquences³⁵>>.

En pensant aux premiers missionnaires de ces régions, massacrés, en 1736, par les Sioux, voici ce qu'il écrit: <<Nous priâmes ce zélé apôtre de nous obtenir le zèle de dépenser notre existence au service de la cause sainte, et au besoin, de verser, nous aussi, notre sang pour elle³⁶.>>

Dès son arrivée en son territoire, il prend clairement conscience du sacrifice que comporte la mission. Il y a chez lui une considération explicite sur le fait que le travail missionnaire conduit à un sacrifice réel et conduit aussi à verser son sang.

En 1846, le p. Taché fonde la mission de l'Île-à-la-Crosse, chez les Indiens Cris, et l'année suivante, il se rend vers le nord, pour y fonder la mission du Lac Caribou³⁷.

Puis, en 1854, c'est au tour du p. *Grandin* d'arriver au Canada. Lui aussi conserve inchangé le désir exprimé le jour de ses vœux, comme il l'écrit dans une lettre à son frère, en cette même année: <<En arrivant dans ce nouveau monde où j'espère me dépenser et mourir pour la gloire de Dieu et le salut des âmes, je te dois ma première lettre...³⁸>>.

L'attitude des missionnaires devant leur nouvelle tâche de l'évangélisation est de se dépenser corps et âme, de mourir pour cette oeuvre. De toute façon, ce n'est pas le missionnaire qui a à décider la façon de <<mourir>>, mais c'est Dieu à qui il s'est donné en toute disponibilité. Il ne sera pas demandé au p. Grandin de donner physiquement son sang, mais, comme il l'a exprimé dans son oblation, d'être *victime non pas d'un moment, mais de tous les jours*³⁹. Son martyr sera spirituel, quoique vécu de façon non moins consciente.

La mission du Nord canadien exige beaucoup de peines et de sacrifices. L'interprétation spirituelle que donne l'évêque Grandin s'éclaire dans la perspective du martyr:

Il se peut que nous mourions de faim et de froid. Nous n'avons pas cette chance de mourir comme martyrs. Nos pauvres missions ne sont pas tellement poétiques. Notre vie est un long martyr, connu de Dieu seul⁴⁰.

Donc, toute la vie de l'Oblat dans la mission, les privations, le froid, la faim, les dangers

des voyages, les difficultés d'inculturation constituent le martyre que l'on peut définir de <<charité>>, en autant qu'il trouve sa motivation la plus profonde dans cette vertu théologique vécue de façon radicale. Ce n'est pas le martyre de la foi, mais celui du don total et silencieux de chacune des énergies pour l'évangélisation, martyre connu de Dieu seul.

Telle est la <<conscience du martyre>> chez les Oblats, selon leur manière de comprendre et de voir la mission. Cette conscience met en évidence l'esprit d'oblation caractéristique de l'Oblat.

L'immense vicariat de mission de St-Boniface sera divisé plus tard en plusieurs vicariats. Le premier, en 1864, sera le vicariat d'Athabaska-Mackenzie, puis, en 1868, celui de Saint-Albert⁴¹. Ce dernier deviendra diocèse en 1871, et Mgr Grandin, son premier évêque. C'est justement au cours de son épiscopat que la mission exigera les premiers <<martyrs>> oblats.

Le premier est le fr. *Alexis Reynard*⁴², tué en 1875 par ses guides, lors d'un voyage vers la mission de la Nativité. Dix ans plus tard, le 2 avril 1885, le p. *Léon Fafard*⁴³ et le p. *Félix Marchand*⁴⁴ sont tués par les Métis, à Frog Lake⁴⁵. On retrouvera leurs corps avec, dans la main, la croix oblate ensanglantée, comme pour signifier l'identité de leur mission, participation à la *folie de la Croix*, celle du Christ.

Mgr Grandin, écrivant aux parents du p. Fafard, emploie quelques expressions significatives:

... Chère madame Fafard: vous pouvez comparer vos douleurs à celle de la très sainte Vierge, et avec d'autant plus de raison que la victime du Calvaire; le cher martyr aussi est mort pour le salut de ses frères, pour le salut de ses bourreaux⁴⁶.

La mort du p. Fafard, comme celle du p. Marchand, est mise en étroite relation avec le salut des âmes, et en particulier de leurs meurtriers. Mgr Grandin, en rappelant comment le sang des martyrs a toujours engendré de nouveaux chrétiens, écrit, à propos de la mort des deux pères:

Ils se soutenaient mutuellement dans leurs nombreuses difficultés; tous deux ont été en même temps victimes de leur dévouement, martyrs de la charité⁴⁷.

Leur martyre est donc l'acte ultime d'un dévouement constant, quotidien, que Mgr Grandin appelle martyre de la charité, reprenant l'expression chère au Fondateur. Le martyre est le sceau d'une mission vécue dans la charité. Tout comme le Christ, le premier martyr, vit sa mission en donnant sa vie, ainsi, avec une conscience semblable, l'Oblat adopte le même style missionnaire.

Le p. Henri Bujold, dans une présentation faite aux Oblats, soixante-cinq ans après le martyre du p. Fafard, rapporte quelques événements survenus dans la nuit du 31 mars 1885. Devant la gravité de la situation, et à la demande faite à deux pères de laisser la mission de Frog Lake, le p. Fafard répond qu'il n'abandonnerait jamais les Indiens à l'heure du danger. Il a couru des dangers en d'autres occasions, mais depuis longtemps déjà il a décidé d'accomplir son devoir, même au prix de sa vie⁴⁸. On voit ainsi ressortir la confirmation que le martyre ne s'improvise pas mais qu'il est un don de Dieu, et il s'accomplit dans une âme qui a vécu le don de soi, quotidien et radical.

D'après quelques informations sur la mission de Frog Lake, on voit plus clairement ce que signifie avoir un style missionnaire prêt à l'oblation totale de soi. Le p. Alonzo Gobeil décrit, dans un article de 1937, comment l'esprit d'oblation du p. Fafard le porte à tout partager avec les Indiens. Il voyage dans leur caravane, il dort dans leurs tentes, se nourrit de leurs mets, par amour du Christ et des Indiens.

Le p. Gobeil rapporte aussi le témoignage de Mgr Clut sur les fruits qu'a produits le *martyre de chaque jour* du p. Fafard. A l'automne de 1880, on a déjà enregistré trois cents baptêmes à la mission de St François-Régis de Fort Pitt. Le p. Gobeil commente ainsi: le p. Fafard continue ses voyages avec les Indiens afin de convertir leurs âmes, tâchant d'être un

missionnaire toujours plus identifié avec la croix oblate qu'il porte, en remplissant de vertus et de mérites le calice de sa vie missionnaire, jusqu'au jour où ce calice devient une coupe de sang⁴⁹.

Cette façon de lire la vie du missionnaire semble vouloir dire que le martyr de la charité précède le martyr du sang et se consume lentement dans le don constant de soi. Au fond, qu'il s'agisse du martyr non sanglant comme du martyr sanglant, on trouve toujours la charité comme fondement (de même pour le martyr de la foi) et comme cause finale.

En 1887, le p. *Ovide Charlebois*⁵⁰ est envoyé à la mission de Fort Cumberland, en Saskatchewan. De sa mission, il écrit, lors d'une retraite, en 1888:

... Tout ce que je vous demande (ô mon Dieu) c'est de vouloir accepter chaque instant de ma vie comme autant de petits martyres afin que si je ne suis pas digne de verser mon sang pour vous, ma vie entière devienne du moins un martyr continu. Oui, mon Dieu, dès aujourd'hui je veux commencer à vivre ainsi martyr. Je vous offre ainsi ce martyr de ma vie, ô bon Jésus, et je le signe de mon sang afin que vous ne me refusiez pas. Je veux que non seulement mes misères physiques contribuent à mon martyr, mais encore et surtout mes misères morales: tentations, sécheresses, distractions, dans les prières, mon orgueil, etc. Ainsi, je veux que ce soit l'acte principal de cette journée, je commence à vivre martyr. O Sacré-Coeur, enseignez-moi à vivre ainsi puisque votre vie entière a été un martyr continu⁵¹.

Ce texte se révèle riche de plusieurs éléments. Le désir du martyr du sang est évident, mais il apparaît comme une substitution: il est possible de vivre ce désir dans un style de vie qui est un martyr continu, dans l'imitation la plus parfaite du Christ.

Le p. Charlebois note dans son Journal, toujours en cette même année:

Depuis ma dernière retraite une pieuse pensée occupe mon esprit... C'est de devenir martyr. Ce n'est pas une petite prétention n'est-ce pas? Vous me demandez tout de suite quels seront mes bourreaux? C'est bien simple, ce seront les maringouins, ce sera mon Pierriche, ce seront mes enfants d'école, ce seront mes défauts, mes tentations, mes peines, mes privations, etc., etc., etc... Ce n'est pas un petit martyr de quelques heures que je veux; mais un martyr de toute la vie. Comme on n'est pas un seul instant sans avoir beaucoup à souffrir, je me suis dit: pourquoi n'accepterai-je pas tout en vue du martyr? Ce ne sera-t-il pas aussi agréable à Dieu que les souffrances momentanées des vrais martyrs? Ainsi je me considère comme sur un bûcher où l'on me brûle à petit feu de manière à me conserver la vie longtemps⁵².

Ce texte se révèle éloquent quant à la conscience et la spiritualité du martyr avec lequel le p. Ovide vit la mission dans tous ses aspects.

En 1913, deux autres pères Oblats vivent leur mission jusqu'au martyr: le p. *Jean-Baptiste Rouvière*⁵³ et le p. *Guillaume LeRoux*⁵⁴.

Dans une conférence donnée à St-Boniface à l'occasion d'une exposition missionnaire, le p. Alfred Bernier, jésuite, explique le sens de cette mort⁵⁵. Il parle d'un double martyr vécu par ces deux pères. Le premier est le martyr lent, qui prend plusieurs visages: la solitude, la faim, le froid, les tempêtes de neige. En choisissant la vie missionnaire, le p. Rouvière et le p. LeRoux ont prévu un tel martyr et l'ont accepté consciemment. Sans reculer, mais en continuant de vivre avec ce martyr, en un certain sens. Le martyr du sang également, est prévu comme possible, à cause de la vie missionnaire et des situations à affronter.

... S'ils surent accepter et désirer les deux martyres, le martyr de toute une vie de sacrifices et le martyr sanglant, c'est qu'ils portaient au cœur trois amours: l'amour de Jésus, leur maître, auquel ils s'étaient consacrés... l'amour de la Vierge Immaculée... enfin l'amour des âmes, surtout des plus incultes, des plus malheureuses, des plus pauvres et délaissées, parce qu'en

elles surtout ils entendaient la grande plainte de la détresse humaine qui a soif du sang de Jésus-Christ et parce qu'en elles plus que dans les heureux de ce monde ils distinguaient l'image de leur Jésus crucifié⁵⁶ ...

Le p. Bernier explique l'acceptation de ce double martyr, de la part des deux pères, en se référant aux pivots fondamentaux du charisme oblat, c'est-à-dire Jésus-Christ, Marie et les pauvres, en qui se retrouve l'image du Christ souffrant et aimé.

Le martyr qui s'identifie à toute la vie du missionnaire est le martyr quotidien de l'insuccès, de la dérision, de l'effort sans résultat. Tout cela est vécu jusqu'aux dernières conséquences, qui ne sont pas hors <<calcul>>, mais entrent pleinement dans le choix de la mission⁵⁷. L'ardente charité et le zèle conduisent à une disponibilité réelle à vivre le don de soi jusqu'à l'effusion du sang, si cela est demandé, pour la mission.

On rencontre la même sensibilité chez le Bx *Joseph Gérard*. Dans une lettre de 1861, il décrit les difficultés de la mission chez les Cafres du Natal⁵⁸. Les maladies, ainsi que la dureté de coeur de ce peuple, lui font dire:

Mais quelles circonstances pénibles pour moi, d'être tous les jours témoin de cette infidélité opiniâtre jusqu'à la mort! Quel affreux avenir j'aurais voulu leur épargner, même au prix de l'effusion de mon sang! Mais non, ils aimaient mieux mourir en Cafres, comme ils avaient vécu⁵⁹!

Le missionnaire qui, dans ses années de formation, a employé des expressions semblables sur le martyr, conserve plus tard la vision de la mission de l'Oblat, associée de façon particulière au sacrifice physique et sanglant. C'est d'ailleurs l'esprit demandé par les Règles:

Pour cela il faut vivre de mes saintes Règles, de leur esprit qui est la sainteté particulière de l'Oblat, saintes Règles qui nous disent que notre esprit à nous Oblats c'est l'immolation de toute notre personne, vie, aisance de la vie, accompagnée de l'humilité qui rend agréable notre immolation au bon Dieu, accompagnée de modestie qui édifie le prochain, lui rend la vertu, la religion aimable⁶⁰ ...

C'est dans cette perspective que se comprend également la mission de quelques Oblats qui se sont rangés du côté des plus pauvres, de manière pacifique mais décidée, pour défendre leurs droits, promouvoir la justice, et travailler pour leur développement. Ce choix les a conduits à subir des menaces, des intimidations et éloignements de la part des classes politiques, jusqu'au point de subir, pour quelques-uns, la mort violente.

C'est en octobre 1957 que le p. *Mario Borzaga*, ainsi que les pères Lionello Berti, Alessandro Staccioli, Bramante Marchiol, Luigi Sion et le fr. Pierino Bertocchi, partent pour le Laos⁶¹. Le p. Borzaga écrit, quelques jours avant son premier Noël en mission:

Les journées sont remplies d'activités... Nous poursuivons notre route avec la prière, la Croix, celle qui jette la petite lumière sur le Laos. S'il y avait un autre système pour sauver les âmes, le Seigneur nous l'aurait dit⁶² ...

La logique de la vie missionnaire est toujours la même: mourir pour apporter la <<lumière⁶³>>. Quoiqu'il ait exprimé, durant ses années de formation, le désir du martyr, dans ses années d'activité missionnaire, par ailleurs, on rencontre peu de textes sur ce sujet. Dans quelques pages du *Journal* du Laos, on note des moments de découragement, de solitude, de peine⁶⁴, toujours vécus en union au Christ crucifié. Même sans parler de martyr, le p. Mario comprend que rester fidèle dans les moments d'obscurité constitue son sacrifice, lequel, uni à celui du Christ, le rend continuellement actif dans la mission, donc en pleine <<vocation missionnaire>>. Il écrit, le 10 septembre 1958:

Nous ne souffrons plus rien si Toi tu as déjà tout souffert; nous pourrions aussi être des martyrs et des crucifiés, et notre passion ne sera qu'un

épisode de ta Passion... Qu'il n'y ait plus rien en moi qui ne soit un drapeau de triomphe de ton Amour sur le désert, sur la solitude, dans l'abandon, dans l'offrande de tout moi-même à Ton Amour⁶⁵.

Qu'il s'agisse là d'une offrande sur le modèle de celle du Christ premier martyr, on le voit dans un autre passage de son *Journal*, en date du 13 septembre de la même année⁶⁶. Son <<idéal>> du martyr devient <<concret>>, mais en prenant une forme inattendue: la peine et la solitude.

Dans une lettre de décembre 1958 à sa soeur Lucia, il laisse voir la manière dont il vit la mission:

Ici, le missionnaire n'est pas quelqu'un qui se nomme Tizio, Caio, Sempronio, mais c'est une personne, une chose donnée entièrement à l'Église, sa journée ne lui appartient pas, son temps et ses choses ne sont pas à lui, mais à l'Église ou à qui dirige la mission, et cela demande un détachement complet de tout, une abnégation dégagée et sereine, un esprit surnaturel comme celui des Saints. Et il ne faut pas croire que cela est de l'héroïsme ni que c'est une chose difficile à accomplir; au contraire, c'est une chose tout à fait normale, qui ne peut être qu'ainsi. Et pour faire tout cela, il suffit d'un minimum de bonne volonté... Alors, vois comme toutes les difficultés et les préoccupations ne sont autres que de grandes Grâces tellement utiles à notre sainteté et à la conversion des âmes. Tout est là. La vie missionnaire n'est nullement difficile avec la Grâce de Dieu et avec la bonne volonté⁶⁷.

Pour le p. Mario, être vrais apôtres signifie être des martyrs de l'amour⁶⁸, <<martyrs à petit feu⁶⁹>>. On ne sauve pas les âmes par le fait <<de se trouver bien, ou de ne pas avoir de tracas, mais en se sacrifiant pour elles⁷⁰>>.

Les années 1958-59 sont des années très difficiles pour la mission du Laos. La situation politique subit la tension de la guérilla du Pathet Lao⁷¹; même en constant danger pour sa vie, le p. Borzaga communique à Lucia:

Mais tout cela, je ne l'écris pas à la maison, autrement on en fera une petite tragédie, tandis qu'il n'y a personne au monde de plus calme et plus tranquille que nous, qui ne risquons rien, et si nous risquons quelque chose, comme notre peau, c'est pour le Règne de Dieu⁷².

On peut donc parler, à la suite de tout ce contexte, de la <<conscience du martyr>> avec laquelle le p. Borzaga vit l'esprit d'oblation demandé aux Oblats. C'est en toute conscience qu'il accepte le risque de sa propre vie.

On lit, dans un de ses derniers écrits, avant le voyage dont il ne retournera plus:

Quand le Seigneur a commandé aux Apôtres d'aller prêcher l'Évangile à toutes les nations, il n'a pas précisé d'aller prêcher aux nations qui étaient en paix ou à celles déchirées par la guerre; que dis-je?, du moment que l'Évangile est une annonce de paix aux hommes, on dirait que le Missionnaire doit préférer les nations en guerre à celles qui sont dans la tranquillité⁷³.

Cette <<préférence>> constante dans sa vie s'accomplit le 24 avril 1960, alors qu'il disparaît dans la forêt, avec un de ses catéchistes, probablement tués tous les deux par des communistes.

Deux autres témoignages aideront à approfondir notre thème.

Le p. *Maurice Lefebvre*⁷⁴, tué en 1971 à La Paz, Bolivie, illustre une mission vécue comme don aux pauvres. Son engagement pour ces derniers évolue de façon particulière. Dès ses premières années d'apostolat, il manifeste son dévouement et sa générosité, alors qu'il arrive en Bolivie, en 1953. Au début, son travail missionnaire consiste en un type de pastorale orientée vers la paroisse et l'administration des sacrements. Le premier problème qu'il affronte est l'alcoolisme répandu, auquel il cherche d'apporter remède par quelques initiatives. Mais c'est

son anticommunisme radical qui lui vaut diverses antipathies dans les milieux syndicaux des ouvriers. Menacé à plusieurs reprises, il ne se laisse pas intimider pour autant dans son action missionnaire. Il cherche bien à comprendre la racine des maux de son peuple, mais les schèmes mentaux qu'il hérite de sa formation antérieure ne lui permettent pas d'aller à fond dans son analyse. Aussi, les années 1962-1963 apparaissent fondamentales dans la vie du p. Lefebvre: il se rend compte alors que pour aider son peuple, il faut une action sociale bien programmée. C'est le motif qui le conduit à Rome, pour y étudier la sociologie. De retour en Bolivie en 1967, il comprend que sa mission doit changer de style. Avec une soif de justice qui le porte à se compromettre pour les pauvres, il conçoit un projet de développement communautaire, tout en refusant le recours à la violence⁷⁵. Cet engagement rejoint l'idée de la mission qui envisage le don de sa propre vie. En fait, le p. Lefebvre écrit, en 1967:

Puissions-nous voir et accepter, nous aussi, ce qu'il nous en coûtera d'être disciples du Christ en 1968... Il nous en coûtera plus que des mots. Il nous en coûtera plus que de pieux désirs; il nous en coûtera plus que de commenter certains documents de réformateurs ou de Papes⁷⁶...

A l'occasion du premier anniversaire de la mort de Che Guevara, le p. Lefebvre est invité à prendre la parole au cours d'une manifestation pour commémorer l'idéologue bolivien. En s'inspirant du fait que Guevara a risqué sa propre vie au nom de <<ses vérités>>, il dit:

En cet acte d'hommage à Che, puisse chacun de nous s'examiner et voir s'il est disposé à risquer sa peau pour ses vérités... Puissions-nous, au cours de 1969, rencontrer, dans le mystère de la Nativité, tout l'amour et tout le courage qu'il faut pour risquer sa peau, tout le reste, quand la justice et une vie authentique nous demandent de tout risquer⁷⁷. (*traduit de l'espagnol*).

Le p. Lefebvre, donc, a conscience d'être un proclamateur de la vérité en faveur des pauvres, même au coût de sa propre vie. En fait, il risque tout son être pour la justice des pauvres. Sa mort survient comme pour confirmer une vie menée dans le <<risque>> prévu et accepté, comme il l'a dit lui-même.

Le p. Gregorio Iriarte, se rappelant le p. Lefebvre, le définit un martyr de la libération. Lui aussi souligne comment la mort du p. Maurice n'est pas due à une simple imprudence ou à un accident, mais elle est plutôt la conclusion logique de sa vie. Ainsi, il écrit:

Mauricio obtint la mort de ses désirs: mort héroïque, car il sut vivre l'héroïsme quotidien du don de soi sans limite, sans mesure. Mort en un geste extraordinaire de charité comme le fut sa vie courante, en ses gestes les plus ordinaires. La vie n'improvise pas ses héros: elle les pétrit dans la douleur de chaque journée et dans le silence de la nuit⁷⁸.

En regardant une mort, c'est la vie qu'on met en évidence. En fait, on meurt comme on a vécu, et celui qui a vécu dans la charité, par amour, meurt par amour⁷⁹.

L'effusion de son sang confirme un style de vie missionnaire vécue dans <<l'effusion>> et la <<distribution>> de sa personne aux pauvres, en signe d'une oblation sans réserve. Le p. Maurice meurt dans l'accomplissement d'une oeuvre de charité. En fait, comme le rappelle le p. Bernard Crochet, qui se trouvait avec lui au moment de sa mort, le p. Maurice s'apprêtait à porter secours à quelques blessés, lors d'une rencontre armée dans le centre de La Paz. C'est une décision prise en toute simplicité, mais avec la conscience du danger⁸⁰. On peut dire que le p. Maurice est aussi un martyr de la charité.

Un dernier <<témoin>> de l'oblation pour la mission est le p. *Michael Paul Rodrigo*⁸¹, Sri Lanka⁸². Son oeuvre missionnaire s'oriente particulièrement vers le dialogue avec les bouddhistes, un dialogue fait d'amour concret. Il travaille à défendre les droits et le développement des fermiers bouddhistes de Lower-Uva. Il s'applique particulièrement à un accord pacifique entre les diverses factions politiques et groupes sociaux impliqués dans la location des terres. Cet apostolat l'amène à entrer en conflit avec ceux dont les intérêts, dans

ces zones de terrains, sont opposés à ceux des fermiers. On peut tracer la physionomie de cet Oblat par quelques écrits publiés. Il écrit, en 1964:

Ite Missa est. Vous avez été envoyés, mais dans le sens d'une ancienne expression: dépêchez-vous de faire un bon travail. Le Christ nous a montré comment vivre et mourir pour nos frères et comment offrir notre propre vie au Père. Allons et faisons comme lui. Lui, il est le Messie, celui qui a été envoyé en mission. Après la messe, nous aussi nous devons partir pour accomplir cette mission de sauver et de transformer le monde⁸³.

Pour le p. Michael, la mission du chrétien trouve son modèle dans le Christ lui-même, qui vit et meurt pour ses frères. En particulier, le p. Rodrigo souligne l'unité entre le sacrifice du Christ à la messe et le sacrifice du travail en faveur des pauvres et de la justice. Pour lui, être missionnaire signifie être comme Jésus, en s'identifiant à ses sentiments et à sa mission. Refuser de vivre ce type d'«empathie» avec Jésus et avec les pauvres, cela signifie choisir le «chemin large» et non le chemin «étroit», qui consiste à souffrir jusqu'à donner sa vie pour le monde. Dans une homélie, il rappelle l'évêque Romero:

Une seule balle a résonné à travers l'édifice quand il a élevé le calice. Il a été assommé, mort. Il est mort pour les paysans. C'était le «chemin étroit»... Mes chers amis, dites-lui deux choses dans la prière aujourd'hui. Dites-lui que vous êtes prêts à être ses ambassadeurs, avec courage; que vous n'avez pas d'objection à ce que votre sang se mêle au sang de Jésus, comme l'a fait le sang de Oscar Romero du Salvador⁸⁴.

Pour le p. Rodrigo, le prêtre est, tout comme l'Eucharistie, «un homme mangé, consumé à longueur de journée⁸⁵». Il est tué alors qu'il achève la messe. Parmi les phrases qu'il aimait répéter, il y en a une qui semble expliquer pleinement le sens de son sacrifice: «La messe est le prix de notre rachat. Pour participer à la communion, il faut d'abord verser son propre sang⁸⁶».

Pour lui aussi, on peut dire que la mort révèle la vie et la mission. On retrouve en lui un esprit d'oblation authentique dans la mort quotidienne commencée le jour des premiers vœux⁸⁷ et poursuivi jusqu'à la pleine identification avec le Christ martyr.

Il écrit à sa soeur Hilda, le 28 septembre 1987:

La Croix n'est pas quelque chose qu'on pend au mur ou que l'on porte au cou. Jésus y a été pendu le premier... Ainsi nous devons être prêts à mourir pour nos gens si l'heure vient, et au moment où elle vient. Jésus est mort à 33 ans parce qu'il s'est engagé pour son peuple, pour les pauvres, pour les abandonnés, pour les opprimés⁸⁸.

On dirait des paroles prophétiques; en fait, le p. Rodrigo a vécu le martyr pour la mission et pour le salut des pauvres, selon l'esprit et le rôle propres des Oblats de Marie Immaculée, que leur a confiés le Fondateur: être corédempteurs avec le Christ.

La pensée du Fondateur se vérifie donc à plein dans le style missionnaire des Oblats. Le désir, si fort chez le Fondateur, de donner sa vie pour la mission, n'a pas été atténué. La réalité du martyr est mise en évidence dès la formation, comme pour signifier que la façon de voir la vocation-mission des Oblats, a comme caractéristique l'identité entre mission et sacrifice de sa vie, et fait partie du bagage spirituel du missionnaire. C'est une mentalité, une perspective à travers laquelle on voit la mission. L'idée du martyr formulée par Mgr de Mazenod, comme esprit qui informe le style de l'évangélisation, s'étend et se développe de façon dynamique jusqu'à devenir la clé de lecture de toute l'oeuvre de l'Oblat dans la mission. Celle-ci est vue comme un lent martyr, qui a sa racine dans la charité.

L'idéal du martyr est devenu pour quelques-uns une profonde aspiration de l'âme, pour d'autres il s'est transformé en engagement en faveur des pauvres et de la justice au risque de sa

propre vie, pour d'autres encore il a été marqué historiquement à travers le don de leur propre vie avec effusion du sang. Le <<nil linquendum est inausum>> est vraiment un mot d'ordre pour l'Oblat.

Le numéro 2 des Constitutions affirme, en parlant du charisme oblat:

<<Mis à part pour annoncer l'Évangile de Dieu>> (Rm 1,1) les Oblats abandonnent tout à la suite de Jésus Christ. Pour être ses coopérateurs, ils se doivent de le connaître plus intimement, de s'identifier à lui, de le laisser vivre en eux. S'efforçant de le reproduire dans leur vie, ils se veulent obéissants au Père, même jusqu'à la mort, et se mettent au service du peuple de Dieu avec un amour désintéressé. Leur zèle apostolique est soutenu par le don sans réserve de leur oblation, une oblation sans cesse renouvelée dans les exigences de leur mission⁸⁹.

Maurizio GIORGIANNI, o.m.i.

¹ Le p. Casimir Aubert naît à Digne le 30 septembre 1810. C'est au cours de la mission à Digne qu'il fait la connaissance des Oblats. Il prononce ses vœux en 1827 et est le premier Oblat à être ordonné par Mgr Eugène de Mazenod, évêque d'Icosie, le 6 avril 1833. Il sera maître des novices de juin 1833 à février 1841. A ce moment il est délégué par le Fondateur pour fonder une maison en Irlande: c'est le début de la présence des Oblats dans les Îles britanniques. Il sera ensuite assistant général en 1846 et provincial de la Province du Midi à partir de 1854. Il meurt en 1860. Voir LEVASSEUR, Donat, o.m.i., *Histoire des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée. Essai de synthèse, I*, Montréal, 1983, p. 109-119. On trouve d'autres renseignements dans *Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée. Tables analytiques générales 1862-1961, I*, p. 1 et 6. Surtout BEAUDOIN, Yvon, o.m.i., *Le Père Casimir Aubert, o.m.i., fondateur de la province anglo-irlandaise et secrétaire général de la Congrégation. Biographie, Écrits spirituels et historiques, Correspondance*. Rome, Collection Écrits Oblats II, 5, 352 p.

² A la fin de la retraite préparatoire à l'oblation, il note, entre autres résolutions: <<Faire toutes mes communions et confessions avec tout le soin possible et comme si je devais mourir chaque fois. Dans le cours de chaque mois, une communion et confession en préparation des autres, et aussi une fois en viatique le jour de retraite; me conduire comme si je devais mourir le soir.>> AUBERT, Casimir, o.m.i., *Conclusion de ma retraite pour l'oblation, décembre 1827*, Arch. Gén. (Doss. Aubert C.). Noter comment il y a chez Aubert un esprit de satisfaction vicair.

³ *Idem*, Retraite pour la prêtrise, 24 mars-7 avril 1833, cinquième jour, Arch. Gén. (Doss. Aubert C.).

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ Le p. Joseph Gérard naît à Bouxières-aux-Chênes, le 12 mars 1831. Il entre au noviciat des Oblats à Notre-Dame de l'Osier, le 9 mai 1851 et fait sa première oblation le 10 mai 1852. L'année suivante il reçoit l'obédience pour le vicariat apostolique du Natal. Il est ordonné diacre le 3 avril 1853, et il part en mai pour l'Afrique du Sud. Il est ordonné prêtre le 19 février 1854 à Pietermaritzburg. En 1876, il fonde la mission de S. Monica au Lesotho. Il meurt le 29 mai 1876, à Roma (Lesotho). Il est proclamé bienheureux, le 15 septembre 1988, par Jean-Paul II. Voir BEAUDOIN, Yvon, o.m.i., *Le bx Joseph Gérard o.m.i. l'apôtre des Basotho (1831-1914)*, Rome, 1988, Écrits Oblats II, 3.

⁶ <<J. Gérard, L'Oblat de Marie Immaculée, (N.-D. de l'Osier, 1852)>>, dans *Lettres aux Supérieurs Généraux et autres Oblats*, Rome, 1988, Écrits Oblats II, 4, p. 167-168.

⁷ *Ibidem*, <<L'Oblat...>>, dans *Lettres...*, Écrits Oblats II, 4, p. 168-169.

⁸ *Idem*, <<Consécration au Sacré-Coeur par Marie Immaculée>>, dans *Lettres...*, N.-D. de l'Osier, 9 mai 1852, Écrits Oblats II, 4, p. 170-171.

⁹ Le p. Vital Grandin naît le 8 février 1829 à St-Pierre-sur-Orthe. Il entre au noviciat des Oblats le 28 décembre 1851 et fait sa profession religieuse le 1^{er} janvier 1853. Il est ordonné prêtre par Mgr de Mazenod, le 24 avril 1854. Déjà avant le sacerdoce, on lui propose de se préparer pour la mission de l'Amérique du Nord. Le 2 novembre 1854, il arrive à la mission de St-Boniface, dans l'ouest, sur la Rivière-Rouge. En août 1859, il rentre à Marseille, où il est consacré, le 30 novembre, évêque de Satala *in partibus infidelium*. A St-Boniface, il est aussi coadjuteur de Mgr Alexandre Taché. Le siège épiscopal de St-Albert est créé en 1871 et Mgr Grandin devient le premier évêque de ce diocèse. Il meurt à St-Albert, le 3 juin 1902. Avec Mgr Alexandre Taché, il est un des pionniers du Nord du Canada. Voir JONQUET, Émile, o.m.i., *Mgr Grandin Oblat de Marie Immaculée. Premier Évêque de Saint-Albert*, Montréal, 1903; DOLPHIN,

Frank J., *Indian Bishop of the West. The story of Vital Justin Grandin 1829-1902*, Ottawa, 1986.

¹⁰ JONQUET, Émile, o.m.i., *Mgr Grandin...*, p. 27-28.

¹¹ Le fr. François-Marie Camper naît le 13 janvier 1835, à Vannes. Il entre au noviciat de Notre-Dame de l'Osier en 1853 et fait son oblation le 1^{er} novembre 1854. Il meurt à Montolivet, le 19 janvier 1856. Voir *Missions...*, 1866, p. 667; *Notice nécrologique des membres de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, III*, Paris, 1879, p. 1-2.

¹² LAMIRANDE, Émilien, o.m.i., <<Esprit d'oblation. Approche historique>>, dans *Études Oblates*, 15 (1956), p. 329.

¹³ *Idem*, <<La vocation oblate d'après le frère scolastique F.-M. Camper (1835-1856)>>, dans *Études Oblates*, 17 (1958), p. 275.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 330.

¹⁵ Le p. Gabriel Salaün (1834-1874) écrit, le jour de ses vœux, qu'il se considère comme une victime prête à être immolée, *Idem*, <<Esprit...>>, p. 341. Dans ces considérations, on croit presque entendre un écho de l'idéal monastique primitif, où les vœux ne sont autre chose que la substitution du martyr du sang par un martyr spirituel à travers le renoncement au monde et la vie ascétique.

¹⁶ Le p. Wilbrod Perreault est né à Saint-Alexis de Montcalm, au Québec, le 27 juin 1886. Entré au noviciat de Lachine en 1908, il fait sa première oblation en 1909 et l'oblation perpétuelle en 1910. Ordonné prêtre en 1913, il reçoit l'obédience pour sa Province l'année suivante. Il meurt à Cap-de-la-Madeleine, le 28 octobre 1918. Voir CARRIERE, Gaston, o.m.i., *Dictionnaire biographique des Oblats de Marie Immaculée au Canada, III*, Ottawa, 1979, p. 66-67. Autres renseignements dans *Missions...*, 1909, p. 407; 1920, p. 399; 1932, p. 235.

¹⁷ LAMIRANDE, Émilien, o.m.i., <<Esprit...>>, p. 336-337.

¹⁸ Né à Trente, Italie, le 28 août 1932, il entre au noviciat des Oblats de Marie Immaculée, à Ripalimosani, en 1952. Il fait ses études de théologie au Scolasticat de S. Giorgio Canavese. Il rédige un Journal spirituel de ses deux dernières années de scolasticat (1956-1957). En octobre 1957 il part pour le Laos. C'est là qu'il trouvera la mort. Dans son Journal de cette période, on trouve aussi les traits caractéristiques de son expérience.

¹⁹ DRAGO, Gaetano, o.m.i., *Un eroe del Laos. Dalle lettere del P. Mario Borzaga, O.M.I.*, Roma, 1965, p. 156.

²⁰ BORZAGA, Mario, o.m.i., <<Verso la felicità. La mia scelta di sacerdote missionario>>, dans son *Journal*, 17 novembre 1956, Roma, 1986, p. 46-47.

²¹ En particulier S. Paul 2 Cor. 4, 7-12, ainsi que la lettre de S. Ignace d'Antioche aux Romains.

²² Le p. Borzaga, en pensant à l'invasion de la Hongrie, écrit, le 7 novembre 1956: <<Si je m'offrais comme victime au Seigneur: si j'offrais ma vie à Dieu pour le salut de la Hongrie? Et si le Seigneur acceptait? Je devrais mourir bientôt... brr... et si au lieu d'offrir ma mort (car, pratiquement, c'est ce que veut dire offrir ma vie), j'offrais ma vie pour vrai, en recueillant, sans me la laisser échapper, la moindre occasion de me mortifier et de me sacrifier? Je décidai ce plan d'action sur-le-champ et le Seigneur l'accepta, car à l'instant même il me donna la force de faire de bonnes mortifications...>>, BORZAGA, Mario, o.m.i., <<Verso la felicità...>>, p. 40.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 105-106.

²⁴ BORZAGA, Mario, o.m.i., *Ibidem*, p. 111.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 177.

²⁶ <<Fête des martyrs innocents. Puisque les martyrs sont tous innocents, si je veux être innocent, je dois être martyr, et notre plus grande innocence consiste à se laisser mourir sans discuter. Mourir comme ces enfants...>> *Ibidem*, p. 74. <<Quand je récite l'office des martyrs, je risque d'être pris par l'émotion. Les Martyrs! Agnès... pourrait être le modèle de mon martyr...>> *Ibidem*, p. 88. <<Je veux me former une foi et un amour profonds et inébranlables, autrement je ne peux pas devenir Martyr...>> *Ibidem*, p. 94.

²⁷ <<Aujourd'hui, c'était la fête des martyrs Jean et Paul, dont les noms reviennent chaque jour dans le Canon de la Messe. Dans mon diocèse, on fête aujourd'hui saint Vigilio 1^{er}, évêque, martyr également. Ce sont les martyrs qui font l'Église, seulement les martyrs: je crois que ma tiédeur est bien loin de mériter le martyr.>> *Ibidem*, p. 184.

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- 28 DRAGO, Gaetano, o.m.i., *Un eroe...*, p. 216.
- 29 Voir Planche 1.
- 30 SANTOLINI, Giovanni, o.m.i., *Evangelizzazione...*, p. 40-48.
- 31 Le p. Guigues deviendra évêque d'Ottawa, en 1847.
- 32 LEVASSEUR, Donat, o.m.i., *Histoire... I*, p. 131-132.
- 33 Voir Planche 2.
- 34 Le p. Alexandre Taché est né à Rivière-du-Loup, au Québec, le 23 juillet 1823. Il entre au noviciat de Longueuil, le 5 octobre 1844. On l'envoie à la mission de Rivière-Rouge alors qu'il est diacre, le 24 juin 1845, avec le p. Pierre Aubert. Il est ordonné prêtre à St-Boniface, le 12 octobre de cette même année, et le jour suivant, il fait son oblation perpétuelle. Le 24 juin 1850, il sera nommé évêque titulaire d'Arath, et consacré le 23 novembre 1851, à Viviers, par Mgr de Mazenod. Il devient évêque titulaire de St-Boniface, en 1853, et archevêque en 1871. Mgr Taché prend part au Concile Vatican I. Il meurt à St-Boniface, le 22 juin 1894. Voir CARRIERE, Gaston, o.m.i., *Dictionnaire...*, III, p. 210-211.
- 35 *Missions...*, 1866, p. 79.
- 36 *Ibidem*.
- 37 LEVASSEUR, Donat, o.m.i., *Histoire...*, I, p. 133-134.
- 38 JONQUET, Émile, o.m.i., *Mgr Grandin...*, p. 31.
- 39 *p. Vital Grandin*, p. 63.
- 40 DOLPHIN, Frank J., *Indian...*, p. 153.
- 41 LEVASSEUR, Donat, o.m.i., *Histoire...*, I, p. 232-246.
- 42 Le fr. Alexis Reynard est né à N^{mes}, en 1828. Le 23 janvier 1850, il entre au noviciat N.-D. de l'Osier et il fait son oblation l'année suivante. En 1852, il part pour la mission du nord-ouest canadien. Le 11 septembre, il arrive à St-Boniface, capitale de Rivière-Rouge, avec les pères Rémas et Végréville. Le 1^{er} juin 1875, il entreprend le voyage vers la mission de la Nativité, au cours duquel il est tué. On trouve plus de renseignements dans PHILIPPOT, Aristide, o.m.i., *Une page d'histoire des missions arctiques. Le frère Alexis Reynard o.m.i. (1828-1875). Premier <<Apôtre Inconnu>> du Grand Nord Canadien*, Lablanchère, 1931.
- 43 Le p. Félix-Adélar-Léon Fafard na^t à St-Cuthbert, au Québec, le 8 juin 1850. Il entre au noviciat de Lachine le 28 juin 1872 et fait sa profession temporaire le 29 juin 1873, et sa profession perpétuelle en 1874. Il est ordonné prêtre par Mgr Grandin, le 8 décembre 1875. Son action missionnaire se passe à parcourir les diverses missions du Nord canadien, avec le p. Joseph Lestanc. Il est nommé supérieur de la mission de Frog Lake en 1882. Voir CARRIERE, Gaston, o.m.i., *Dictionnaire...*, II, p. 13.
- 44 Le p. Félix Marchand est né à Châteaugiron, en France, le 8 avril 1858. Entré au noviciat de Neerbeek, en Hollande, le 15 octobre 1880, il fait sa profession religieuse l'année suivante. Il prononce ses vœux perpétuels le 8 décembre 1882, à Saint-Albert, en Alberta. Il est ordonné prêtre l'année suivante. A compter de 1883, il est à la mission de Frog Lake. *Ibidem*, p. 361-362.
- 45 Voir Planche 3.
- 46 <<Lettre de Mgr Grandin au père et à la mère du R.P. Fafard, martyrisé à Frog Lake, le 27 août 1885>>, dans *Missions...*, 1885, p. 421.
- 47 *Ibidem*, p. 429. Il est à noter qu'une copie de cette lettre est écrite, toujours par Mgr Grandin, aux parents du p. Marchand, le même jour, dans *Missions...*, 1935, p. 45-56.
- 48 BUJOLD, Henri, o.m.i., <<Le Père Adélar Fafard>>, dans *Prêtres et Missions*, 10 (1949), p. 56.
- 49 GOBEIL, Alonzo, o.m.i., <<Avant le martyr du sang>>, dans *La Bannière de Marie-Immaculée*, 45 (1937), p. 135.
- 50 Le p. Ovide Charlebois est né à Oka, au Québec, le 17 février 1862. Entré au noviciat de Lachine le 14 août 1882, il fait sa première oblation en 1885, ses vœux perpétuels le 15 août 1884 et il est ordonné prêtre en 1887, par Mgr Grandin. La même année, il est envoyé dans la mission de Fort Cumberland, en Saskatchewan. En 1900, on le nomme directeur à Lac-Pélican et supérieur de district. Le 8 août 1910, il est nommé évêque titulaire de Bérénice et premier vicaire apostolique du Keewatin avec résidence à Le Pas, au Manitoba. Il meurt le 20 novembre 1933, à Le Pas. CARRIERE, Gaston, o.m.i., *Dictionnaire...*, I, p. 186.
- 51 CHARLEBOIS, Ovide, o.m.i., *Notes de retraites*. Cumberland, 14 juin 1888, Arch. Dioc.

(Doss. Charlebois O.).

⁵² *Idem, Privatim (Journal)* 17 juin 1888. (Doss. Charlebois O.). Ce Journal fut envoyé par le p. Charlebois à son directeur spirituel. Il y nomme un certain Pierriche, un Indien orphelin, qu'il avait accueilli, sur le conseil de Mgr Grandin, pour ne pas vivre complètement seul à la mission.

⁵³ Le p. Jean-Baptiste Rouvière est né à Antrenas, en France, le 11 novembre 1881. Entré au noviciat de N.-D. de l'Osier en 1900, il fait sa profession, le 24 septembre 1901, et ses vœux perpétuels, en 1903. Il est ordonné prêtre, le 24 février 1906. L'année suivante, on l'envoie dans le nord-ouest canadien, et il fonde plus tard une mission chez les Inuit. Il sera tué à Coppermine, le 30 octobre 1913, par les Inuit. CARRIERE, Gaston, o.m.i., *Dictionnaire...*, III, p. 141.

⁵⁴ Le p. Guillaume LeRoux est né à Lanvilliau, France, le 30 mars 1886. Il entre au noviciat de Bestin, en Belgique, le 14 octobre 1904. Il fait ses premiers vœux en 1905, et ses vœux perpétuels, le 4 novembre 1906. Il est ordonné prêtre en 1910. Lui aussi oeuvre dans les missions du nord-ouest canadien et chez les Inuit. Il est assassiné, ainsi que le p. Rouvière, en 1913, à Coppermine. CARRIERE, Gaston, o.m.i., *Idem, Dictionnaire...*, II, p. 317.

⁵⁵ Le texte de la conférence se trouve dans *Missions...*, 1935, p. 64-87.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 78.

⁵⁷ <<... à présent l'illustre Congrégation des Oblats continue l'héro-que tradition de ses grands ancêtres et qu'à présent encore elle accepte héro-quement et elle va au-devant du martyr de la vie missionnaire...>> *Ibidem*.

⁵⁸ Voir Planche 4.

⁵⁹ GÉRARD, Joseph, o.m.i., <<A Mgr de Mazenod, à Marseille>>, dans *Lettres...*, Écrits Oblats II, 4, p. 25.

⁶⁰ GÉRARD, Joseph, o.m.i., <<Notes de retraite annuelle, mars 1880>>, dans *Lettres...*, Écrits Oblats II, 4, p. 186-187.

⁶¹ Voir Planche 5.

⁶² BORZAGA, Mario, o.m.i., *Diario di un uomo felice. Un'esperienza missionaria nel Laos*, Roma, 1985, p. 40.

⁶³ Dans une lettre du 14 avril 1958 au p. Del Santo, il écrit: <<... C'est pourquoi je me suis persuadé que dans la vie d'un prêtre, d'un religieux, il n'y a jamais une condition anormale, une situation d'urgence, tout est prévu par la bonté divine et tout est très normal dans son amour. C'est pourquoi chaque difficulté n'est autre qu'une grâce, chaque épreuve un don, chaque douleur et souffrance quelque chose de rigoureusement simple et naturel dans la vie de ceux qui ont choisi la croix pour sauver le monde>>. DRAGO, Gaetano, o.m.i., *Un eroe...*, p. 97.

⁶⁴ Le 27 août 1958, il écrit: <<Il est passé, l'heureux temps de l'espérance d'être saint: le temps est venu de l'être... Ma croix, c'est moi-même... Ma croix est ma timidité qui m'empêche de parler avec un Laotien. Ma croix est que je déteste amèrement ceux que je devrais aimer: les Laotiens; pourtant, c'est pour eux que je devrai donner toute ma vie.>> BORZAGA, Mario, o.m.i., *Diario...*, p. 107.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 111.

⁶⁶ Je transcris le Journal d'il y a deux ans: <<le 13 septembre. Les hommes étaient tellement éloignés de Dieu que, pour les rapprocher, Dieu descendit sur terre, revêtit la nature humaine et se fit tuer; maintenant, si Jésus m'assure que moi aussi, vêtu de la nature divine moyennant sa grâce, je me laisse tuer pour rapprocher mes frères de Dieu, c'est un signe que je suis comme Lui. C'est pourquoi je veux mourir. Je veux m'abandonner tellement à sa Volonté, que j'arriverai à la mort de mon moi, et la mort comporte toutes sortes de souffrances: et c'est seulement quand il y a en moi la douleur, que je peux parler de mourir.>> *Ibidem*, p. 112.

⁶⁷ DRAGO, Gaetano, o.m.i., *Un eroe...*, p. 181-182.

⁶⁸ Il écrit, le 15 juillet 1958: <<...les difficultés sont partout et nous pouvons devenir saints n'importe où. Nous pouvons et nous devons... Ou bien martyrs de l'Amour même, où que ce soit, ou rien. Le malheur est que je suis beaucoup plus porté à martyriser l'Amour qu'à me faire martyr de l'Amour.>> BORZAGA, Mario, o.m.i., *Diario...*, p. 100.

⁶⁹ Il écrit, en 1959: <<J'ai étudié beaucoup aujourd'hui. En lisant la vie du p. Lebbe, il m'est venu la tentation de ne pas fumer: quelle joie d'être des saints, être des apôtres, être des martyrs à petit feu!>>, *Ibidem*, p. 180.

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- 70 *Ibidem*, p. 183.
- 71 Dans ses lettres à Lucia, il dit avoir dû fuir trois fois, à cause du rapprochement des communistes, au cours de l'été 1959. De ces pages du journal du p. Mario en cette période, on voit transparaître un moment de forte épreuve spirituelle et physique. Dans son journal, il n'arrive pas à parler de lui-même, et c'est pourquoi il décrit les aventures d'un certain Armando, qui en réalité est lui-même. C'est seulement au mois d'août qu'il parlera de nouveau de lui. *Ibidem*, p. 225-241.
- 72 DRAGO, Gaetano, o.m.i., *Un eroe...*, p. 190.
- 73 *Ibidem*, p. 210.
- 74 Le p. Maurice Lefebvre est né à Montréal, au Québec, le 6 août 1922. Entré au noviciat de Ville-LaSalle, le 1^{er} août 1941, il fait ses premiers vœux l'année suivante et ses vœux perpétuels le 8 septembre 1945. Il est ordonné prêtre le 29 août 1948. D'abord professeur au juniorat de Chambly (1949-1952), il part ensuite pour la Bolivie où il oeuvre dans la région minière de Llallagua (1953-1958). Il est curé de la paroisse Saint-Esprit, de 1958 à 1962. De 1963 à 1967, il étudie la sociologie en Italie, en France et en Suisse. De retour en Bolivie, il participe au département d'enquêtes sociales et de promotion urbaine. En 1968, il est professeur à l'université de La Paz et co-fondateur de la faculté de sociologie. Il est expulsé de Bolivie en 1970 mais y retourne, profitant d'un changement de régime. Il est tué lors d'un coup d'État d'un groupe d'extrême droite, le 21 août 1971. CARRIERE, Gaston, o.m.i., *Dictionnaire...*, II, p. 294.
- 75 Tous les renseignements sur le p. Lefebvre sont tirés de quelques témoignages: LÉPINE, Rémi, o.m.i., <<Le p. Maurice Lefebvre>>, Arch. Desch. (Doss. Lefebvre M.), 1971, dactylographié, 4 p.; LECLERC, J.-C., <<Le témoignage percutant de Mauricio Lefebvre>>, dans *Le Devoir*, Montréal, 4 septembre 1971.
- 76 Cité dans un texte anonyme dactylographié: <<Maurice Lefebvre, un prophète, un martyr de la justice>>, Arch. Desch., Ottawa.
- 77 MANSILLA TORRES, J., *Arriesgar el pellejo...*, La Paz, 1983, p. 155.
- 78 IRIARTE, Gregorio, o.m.i., <<Le Père Maurice Lefebvre, martyr de la libération>>, dans *Missions...*, 1971, p. 464-465.
- 79 Sur ce sujet, on trouvera des propos fort éclairants dans RAHNER, K., <<Digressione sul martirio>>, dans *Sulla teologia della morte*, Brescia, 1972, 3, p. 75-108. L'auteur part du rapport entre le martyr et la mort comme réalité centrale qui enveloppe complètement la vie d'une personne. En fait, la mort, accomplissement de la vie, est un point d'orientation de la vie. C'est dire que la façon dont une personne se situe devant sa propre mort, ou selon la façon dont elle la conçoit en relation avec sa propre vie, elle établit sa vie sur des valeurs et des exigences particulières. La mort révèle alors la pensée et la vie d'une personne. Une mort survenue dans l'héroïsme de la charité est le signe d'une vie vécue dans le même héroïsme.
- 80 Le p. Crochet raconte: <<il a été appelé par le téléphone pour aller, avec sa camionnette, rechercher des blessés... Dans la camionnette est monté un jeune homme, qui d'ailleurs tenait à l'extérieur ce drapeau avec la croix rouge, et derrière un médecin et deux infirmières. En arrivant à une vingtaine de mètres de l'endroit où on devait aller chercher un blessé, on était juste en perpendiculaire à une colline qui était occupée par les militaires qui étaient groupés avec des éléments qui étaient contre le Gouvernement à ce moment-là; et cachés dans le coin d'une rue à droite, il y avait d'autres militaires qui étaient pour le Gouvernement Torres qui nous ont fait signe de rentrer pour nous mettre à l'abri sur la petite rue à droite. Mais avant même que le Père Lefebvre, qui était au volant, ait pu faire un geste, une première rafale est venue et une balle l'a pratiquement traversé...>>. CROCHET, Bernard, <<Décès du père Lefebvre>>, Arch. Desch. (Doss. Lefebvre M.), texte dactylographié, 4 pages.
- 81 Le p. Michael Rodrigo est né à Dehiwela, à Sri Lanka, le 30 juin 1927. Entré au noviciat en août 1947, il fait son oblation en 1948, et il est ordonné en 1954. En 1959, il prend un doctorat en philosophie, avec spécialité dans le dialogue avec les bouddhistes. De 1955 à 1975, il est professeur au séminaire de Kandy. En 1975, il choisit d'oeuvrer au <<Centre for Society and Religion>> de Colombo. En 1980, il fonde une maison à Buttala, qui devient un centre de dialogue chrétien-bouddhiste. Il est assassiné le 10 novembre 1987. Renseignements extraits de *Documentation O.M.I.*, 158 (1988).
- 82 Voir Planche 6.
- 83 *Ibidem*, p. 6.
- 84 RODRIGO, Michael, o.m.i., *Homily* (sans date), Arch. Gén. (Doss. Rodrigo M.).

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- 85 *Ibidem.*
- 86 Cité dans *Documentation O.M.I.*, 158 (1988), p. 4.
- 87 Dans sa dernière lettre à sa soeur Hilda, il écrit: <<... La vie est éphémère, moi je suis mort déjà depuis longtemps, exactement le jour où j'ai prononcé mes premiers voeux en 1948...>>. *Ibidem*, p. 8.
- 88 *Ibidem.*
- 89 *Constitutions et Règles de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Rome, 1982, p. 13-14.