

Oblatio

Oblati

Revue de Vie Oblate
Review of Oblate Life
Revista de Vida Oblata



Missionarii OMI

II - 2013/2

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Præfatio

OBLATE EVANGELIZATION: 200 YEARS OF TRADITION AND OF RENEWAL

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As I start writing *Evangelization in the World of Today* my mind and heart goes back to 1813 in Aix-en-Provence, to the Church of *La Madeleine* where Saint Eugene preached that famous Sermon this month of March. We are celebrating the 200th anniversary of Saint Eugene's Lenten Sermons to the poor of his time. That was the beginning of our 200 year old tradition of evangelizing among the poor of the world – a tradition that we have to value and to review often in the light of the spiritual needs of the poor we serve.

Every General Chapter has done precisely that – to value and review our efforts for evangelization. Every six years Oblates gather from all over the Oblate world and in tune with the Universal Church they analyze the socio-political-economic and spiritual needs of the poor and indicate to the whole Oblate Congregation the way to follow Jesus as Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

Since I have been an Oblate the whole Congregation has gone through a process of evaluation and planning after every Chapter trying to be faithful to this Oblate tradition of bringing the Good News to the Poor: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” (Luke: 4, 18-19)

In 1966 – the Oblate Congregation started a process that has lasted till the present time and it is still not over! We are still implementing the

directions given by the Church during the Second Vatican Council. The adaptation of our Oblate Constitutions and Rules to Vatican II started then and ever since we have tried to keep up with the times of the Church.

In 1972 – the Congregation produced the three prophetic documents entitled *Community*, *Missionary Outlook* and *Administrative Structures* that are still guiding us in many ways.

In 1974 – the Congregation was at the crossroads, asking itself: What happens after our Superior General, Fr. Richard Hanley, OMI, has resigned? The Chapter put us on the right path again, affirming the conclusions of the previous Chapter of 1972 and putting the Congregation “in the atmosphere of truth and authenticity” with the words of the new Superior General, Fr. Fernand Jetté, OMI: “It is God who guides both History and individual men – and he does so by paths known to Him alone. We must believe that on God’s part everything is grace.” (Acts of the General Chapter of 1974, p. 8)

In 1980 – the Congregation reviewed, discussed, and unanimously accepted the new text of our Oblate Constitutions and Rules. After that Chapter the predominant feeling was that of being a very united international congregation that led us to open new frontier missions in the coming years.

In 1986 – the Congregation took up the great challenge of reviewing and adapting its missionary strategy to the world. This Chapter showed us the way to be missionaries in today’s world, characterized by poverty and in need of justice, secularized and in need of the Transcendent. Our Oblate Mission was in need of enculturation and in need of collaboration with the Laity.

In 1992 – the Congregation evaluated its commitment to witness Gospel values as an Apostolic Oblate Community and we gladly accepted the new forms of association with the Laity as *signs of the Spirit*.

In 1998 – the Congregation, at the dawn of the third millennium, renewed its original call *to evangelize the poor* by putting “a strong focus on integral evangelization, in a world loved by God, but unequally shared by the human family.” (Chapter Document, *Evangelizing the Poor at the Dawn of the Third Millennium*, p. 9-10)

In 2004 – the Congregation was consolidating its recent past with an immense hope for the future: “Our future strength lies not just in increasing our numbers, but especially in increasing our solidarity.”

(Chapter Document: *Witnessing to Hope*, p. 11) Every Oblate Unit was asked to evaluate and renew its community life and missionary strategy in tune with its missionary vision and our Oblate Charism.

In 2010 – the Congregation at the last Chapter expressed that we were *surprised* by the Spirit present among us. We wanted to change our structures and we ended up changing ourselves! As I write today, we are in the middle of a communitarian and personal conversion process as an Oblate Congregation. The Chapter Document with the five calls on conversion is *daily bread* for all of us.

I am convinced that consciously or unconsciously we are *products* of the last General Chapter! We “breathe” in harmony with the spirit of the Chapter of 2010. We see everything through the “lens” of the Chapter; whatever we do is impregnated with the five Chapter Calls of Conversion. Everywhere we go we “talk” about the Chapter. All our Oblate gatherings, be they Mission, Delegation or Provincial Congresses, have as their major theme the *Calls to Conversion*. We are in many ways *products* of the last General Chapter.

Our Superior General, Fr. Louis Lougen, OMI, wherever he goes does not miss the opportunity to invite us to review our Oblate life in the light of these five calls of Conversion.

After 200 years of tradition of being sent to Evangelize the Poor we are still reminding ourselves to be faithful to our traditions. I remember reading an article written by Vito Mancuso on *The Job of Peter*. In this article which appeared in the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* on March 4th, 2013, the author described the enormous weight traditions have on persons. *Tradition* has become *Law* by the very fact that it precedes: “It has been done this way in the past, so you must continue to do the same!” We do not want to *repeat* St. Eugene’s sermons at the Church of *La Madeleine*, but we do want to be faithful to the Spirit that moved him to be:

1. simple in his preaching,
2. authentic in his lifestyle,
3. close to the poor in their sufferings,
4. faithful to the Church,
5. in solidarity with the poor by using in their own language,
6. constructive by empowering them in showing them their right place in society,
7. a servant and priest of the poor,

8. an ambassador for Christ by showing them their place in the Kingdom of God.

I am sure that the articles that follow in this **Oblatio** will help us better understand our place in *the puzzle of God's Kingdom* and in *the puzzle of Christ's Church*. These reflections will allow us not only to better situate ourselves in the right tradition of Religious Life as *prophets* in today's world but also as better collaborators with the Laity who are also called to follow Christ in the footsteps of St. Eugene.

What follows in this **Oblatio** will help us understand that our lifestyle and our missionary activity as consecrated religious put us in the tradition of the Old Testament Prophets and thus we should:

1. know the secrets of God by personally experiencing God's presence,
2. share God's Holiness by witnessing divine mercy,
3. preach God's word in all circumstances,
4. be without fear, knowing that God is with us.

As sons of Saint Eugene we are called to do all of this in the spirit of Mary our Mother and Model: she received the *Christ* and gave Him to the world. We want to do the same:

1. with the same Spirit that called Mary at the Annunciation: Luke 1:28,
2. with the same Spirit that accompanied Jesus in His ministry: Luke 4:18,
3. with the same Spirit that inspired Eugene to preach at the Church of La Madeleine during March 1813,
4. With the same Spirit that "blows" in the world and in the Church today.

EVANGELIZACIÓN OBLATA: 200 AÑOS DE TRADICIÓN Y DE RENOVACIÓN

Al iniciar la escritura de *Evangelización en el mundo de hoy*, mi mente y corazón van hasta el año 1813 en Aix-en-Provence, a la Iglesia de *La Madeleine*, donde San Eugenio predicó el famoso sermón en el mes de marzo. Nos encontramos celebrando el 200 aniversario de los Sermones de Cuaresma de San Eugenio a los pobres de su época. Ese fue

el inicio de nuestra tradición, que ha perdurado 200 años: evangelizar a los más pobres del mundo -una tradición que debemos evaluar y revisar a menudo, a la luz de las necesidades espirituales de los pobres a quienes servimos.

Cada Capítulo General ha hecho eso precisamente – evaluar y revisar nuestros esfuerzos de evangelizar. Cada seis años, Oblatos provenientes de todo el mundo se reúnen y en sintonía con la Iglesia Universal, analizan las necesidades socio-políticas-económicas y espirituales de los pobres, indicando a toda la Congregación cómo seguir a Jesús, como Misioneros Oblatos de María Inmaculada.

Desde que entré con los Oblatos, toda la Congregación ha pasado por un proceso de evaluación y planeación posterior a cada Capítulo, tratando de permanecer fieles a esta tradición de los Oblatos, de llevar la Buena Nueva a los Pobres: “El Espíritu del Señor está sobre mí. Me ha enviado a anunciar a los pobres la Buena Nueva, a proclamar la liberación a los cautivos y la vista a los ciegos, para dar la libertad a los oprimidos y proclamar un año de gracia del Señor” (Lc. 4, 18-19.)

En 1966 – la Congregación Oblata dio inicio a un proceso que ha llegado hasta este día y aún está por terminarse. Continuamos implementando las directrices proporcionadas durante el Concilio Vaticano Segundo. La adaptación de nuestras Constituciones y Reglas al Concilio Vaticano II comenzó entonces y, a partir de ahí, hemos tratado de seguir el ritmo de la Iglesia.

En 1972 – la Congregación elaboró tres documentos proféticos, titulados *Comunidad*, *Perspectiva Misionera* y *Estructuras Administrativas*, que continúan guiándonos en muchos aspectos.

En 1974 – la Congregación se encontró en una encrucijada, preguntándose: ¿Qué sucederá después de la renuncia del Superior General, el P. Richard Hanley, omi? El Capítulo nos llevó al camino correcto de nuevo, afirmando las conclusiones del Capítulo anterior de 1972, colocando a la Congregación “*en un clima de verdad y de autenticidad*”; según palabras del nuevo Superior General, P. Fernando Jetté, omi: “Es Dios quien dirige a la Historia y a los hombres, y lo hace según sus propios caminos; hemos de creer que todo es gracia, de parte de Dios.” (Actas del Capítulo General de 1974, p. 8)

En 1980 – la Congregación revisó, discutió y aceptó unánimemente el nuevo texto de nuestras Constituciones y Reglas. Posterior a ese

Capítulo, el sentimiento predominante entre oblatos fue el de ser una congregación internacional muy unida, nos guiaba a abrir nuevas fronteras misioneras en los años por venir.

En 1986 – la Congregación tomó el gran reto de revisar y adaptar su estrategia misionera al mundo contemporáneo. Ese Capítulo nos mostró cómo ser misioneros en el mundo actual, caracterizado por la pobreza y ávido de justicia, secularizado y requiriendo la trascendencia de Dios. Nuestra Misión Oblata necesitaba la inter-culturación y la colaboración con los Laicos.

En 1992 – la Congregación evaluó su compromiso de ser testigos auténticos del Evangelio como Comunidad Apostólica Oblata, aceptando gustosamente las nuevas formas de asociar a los Laicos como *signos del Espíritu*.

En 1998 – la Congregación, en el umbral del tercer milenio, revisó su llamado original de *evangelizar a los pobres*, dando una “fuerte insistencia en la evangelización integral, en un mundo amado por Dios, pero que la familia humana comparte de manera desigual.” (Documento del Capítulo, *Evangelizar a los Pobres en el Umbral del Tercer Milenio*, pág. 7)

En 2004 – la Congregación se encontraba consolidando su pasado reciente con una esperanza inmensa: “En el futuro, nuestra fuerza no se basará tanto en un aumento de número sino más especialmente en un aumento de nuestra solidaridad.” (Documento del Capítulo: *Testigos de la Esperanza*, pág. 10) Se solicitó a todas las Unidades Oblatas evaluar y renovar su vida comunitaria y su estrategia misionera, de acuerdo con su visión misionera y nuestro Carisma Oblato.

En 2010 – durante el Capítulo más reciente, la Congregación expresó que fuimos *sorprendidos* por el Espíritu presente entre nosotros. ¡Deseábamos cambiar nuestras estructuras y terminamos por cambiar nosotros mismos! Actualmente nos encontramos en un proceso de conversión comunitaria y personal, como Congregación Oblata. El Documento del Capítulo, con sus cinco llamados a la conversión, es *nuestro pan de cada día*.

¡Estoy convencido de que consciente o inconscientemente, somos *producto* del último Capítulo General! “Respiramos” en armonía con el espíritu del Capítulo de 2010. Vemos todo a través del “lente” del Capítulo; todo lo que hacemos está impregnado con los Cinco Llamados

del Capítulo a la Conversión. A donde quiera que vayamos “hablamos” acerca del Capítulo. Todas las reuniones Oblatas, ya sean Congresos de Misiones, de Delegaciones o de Provincias, tienen como tema central los *Llamados a la Conversión*. En muchas formas somos el *producto* del último Capítulo General.

Nuestro Superior General, el P. Louis Lougen, OMI, doquiera que va, no deja pasar la oportunidad de invitarnos a revisar nuestra vida como Oblatos, a la luz de estos cinco llamados a la conversión.

Después de 200 años de tradición de ser enviados a Evangelizar a los Pobres, aún nos exigimos ser fieles a nuestras tradiciones. Recuerdo haber leído un artículo escrito por Vito Mancuso sobre *El Trabajo de Pedro*. En este artículo, publicado en el periódico italiano *La Repubblica* el 4 de marzo de 2013, el autor describe el enorme peso que las tradiciones imponen sobre las personas. *La Tradición* se ha convertido en *Ley* por el mismo hecho que precede: “¡Así se ha hecho en el pasado y así se debe continuar haciéndolo!” No deseamos *repetir* los sermones de San Eugenio en la Iglesia de *La Madeleine*, sino ser fieles al Espíritu que lo llevó a ser:

1. sencillo en su predicación,
2. auténtico en su estilo de vida,
3. cercano a los pobres en su sufrimiento,
4. fiel a la Iglesia,
5. solidario con los pobres, al utilizar su mismo idioma,
6. constructivo al mostrarles su justo lugar en la sociedad,
7. un servidor y sacerdote de los pobres,
8. embajador de Cristo, al mostrarles su lugar en el Reino de Dios.

Tengo la seguridad de que los artículos siguientes en este número de **Oblatio**, nos serán útiles para mejor comprender el lugar que tenemos en *el rompecabezas del Reino de Dios* y en *el rompecabezas de la Iglesia de Cristo*. Estas reflexiones nos permitirán no sólo situarnos mejor en la tradición correcta de la Vida Religiosa como *profetas* en el mundo actual, sino también en una mejor colaboración con los Laicos, que también son llamados a seguir a Cristo, según la huella de San Eugenio.

Lo que sigue en este **Oblatio** nos ayudará a comprender que nuestro estilo de vida y nuestra actividad misionera como religiosos consagrados, nos coloca en la tradición de los Profetas del Antiguo Testamento, y que por ello, debemos:

1. conocer los secretos de Dios, al experimentar personalmente su presencia,
2. compartir la santidad de Dios, al dar testimonio de la misericordia divina,
3. predicar la palabra de Dios en cualquier circunstancia,
4. no tener miedo, sabiendo que Dios está con nosotros.

Como hijos de San Eugenio, somos llamados a hacer todo esto con el espíritu de María, nuestra Madre y Modelo: quien recibió a *Cristo*, entregándolo al mundo. Nosotros queremos hacer lo mismo:

1. con el mismo Espíritu que llamó a María en la Anunciación: Lucas 1, 28,
2. con el mismo Espíritu que acompañó a Jesús en Su ministerio: Lucas 4,18,
3. con el mismo Espíritu que inspiró a Eugenio a predicar en la Iglesia de La Madeleine el mes marzo de 1813,
4. con el mismo Espíritu que “sopla” en el mundo y en la Iglesia hoy en día.

L'ÉVANGÉLISATION OBLATE : 200 ANS DE TRADITION ET DE RENOUVELLEMENT

Tout en commençant à écrire au sujet de *l'Évangélisation dans le Monde d'Aujourd'hui*, mon esprit et mon cœur se reportent à Aix-en-Provence, en 1813, à l'église de *La Madeleine* où Saint Eugène prêchait son fameux sermon durant ce mois de mars. Nous célébrons le 200^e anniversaire des Sermons du Carême aux pauvres de son temps. C'était là le début de notre tradition, âgée de 200 ans, d'évangélisation parmi les pauvres de ce monde – une tradition que nous devons valoriser et réviser souvent à la lumière des besoins spirituels des pauvres que nous servons.

Chaque Chapitre Général a fait précisément cela – valoriser et réviser nos efforts d'évangélisation. À tous les six ans, les Oblats se rassemblent de toutes les parties du monde oblat et en accord avec l'Église universelle, ils analysent les besoins sociaux, politiques, économiques et spirituels des pauvres et ils indiquent ensuite à toute la Congrégation oblate la façon de suivre Jésus en tant qu'Oblats de Marie Immaculée.

Depuis que je suis Oblat, toute la Congrégation est passée à travers un processus d'évaluation et de planification après chaque Chapitre, en essayant d'être fidèle à cette tradition oblate de porter la Bonne Nouvelle aux Pauvres : « L'Esprit du Seigneur est sur moi, car il m'a oint pour prêcher la Bonne Nouvelle aux pauvres. Il m'a envoyé proclamer la délivrance aux captifs, le recouvrement de la vue aux aveugles, pour rendre la liberté aux opprimés et proclamer une année de grâce du Seigneur. » (Luc 4, 18-19)

En 1966 – la Congrégation oblate commence un processus qui a duré jusqu'au temps présent et qui n'est pas encore terminé! Nous en sommes encore à mettre en œuvre les directions données par l'Église durant le Deuxième Concile du Vatican. L'adaptation de nos Constitutions et Règles oblates à Vatican II a débuté alors et depuis, nous avons tenté de nous tenir en accord avec les rythmes de l'Église.

En 1972 – la Congrégation a produit les trois documents prophétiques intitulés *La Communauté*, *la Perspective Missionnaire* et *les Structures administratives* qui nous guident toujours de différentes façons.

En 1974 – la Congrégation avait atteint un carrefour, et se demandait : Qu'est-ce qui arrive après que notre Supérieur Général, le P. Richard Hanley, omi, ait résigné? Le Chapitre nous remis encore une fois sur le bon chemin, en affirmant les conclusions du Chapitre précédent de 1972, et en mettant la Congrégation « dans l'atmosphère de la vérité et de l'authenticité », avec les mots du nouveau Supérieur Général, le P. Fernand Jetté, omi : « C'est Dieu qui guide à la fois l'Histoire et les hommes individuels – et il le fait par des sentiers connus de Lui seul. Nous devons croire que du côté de Dieu, tout est grâce. » (Actes du Chapitre Général de 1974, p. 8)

En 1980 – la Congrégation a révisé, discuté, et accepté de façon unanime le nouveau texte de nos Constitutions et Règles oblates. Après ce Chapitre, le sentiment prédominant était celui d'être une congrégation internationale très unie, qui nous menait à ouvrir des missions de nouvelle frontière pour les années à venir.

En 1986 – la Congrégation a relevé le grand défi de réviser et d'adapter au monde ses stratégies missionnaires. Ce Chapitre nous a montré la façon d'être missionnaires dans le monde d'aujourd'hui, caractérisé par la pauvreté et le besoin de justice, un monde sécularisé et

marqué par le besoin de Transcendant. Notre mission oblate éprouvait le besoin de l'inculturation et de la collaboration avec les Laïcs.

En 1992 – la Congrégation a évalué alors son engagement à témoigner des valeurs évangéliques en tant que Communauté Oblate Apostolique et nous avons accepté de bon cœur les nouvelles formes d'association avec les Laïcs comme des *signes de l'Esprit*.

En 1998 – la Congrégation, à l'aube du troisième millénaire, renouvelait son appel original à évangéliser les pauvres en mettant « un accent fort sur une évangélisation intégrale, dans un monde aimé de Dieu, mais partagé de façon inégale par la famille humaine » (Document du Chapitre, *Évangéliser les Pauvres à l'aube du Troisième Millénaire*, p. 9-10).

En 2004 – la Congrégation avait à consolider son passé récent avec un immense espoir pour l'avenir : « Notre force à venir ne se situe pas uniquement dans l'accroissement de nos nombres, mais surtout dans l'accroissement de notre solidarité » (Document du Chapitre : *Témoins de l'Espoir*, p. 11). Chaque Unité oblate était appelée à évaluer et renouveler sa vie communautaire et ses stratégies missionnaires, en accord avec sa vision missionnaire et notre Charisme oblat.

En 2010 – à ce dernier Chapitre, la Congrégation exprima étonnement de constater la présence de l'Esprit parmi nous. Nous voulions changer nos structures et nous avons abouti à nous changer nous-mêmes! Comme je l'écris aujourd'hui, nous sommes, en tant que Congrégation Oblate, au milieu d'un processus de conversion communautaire et personnel. Le Document du Chapitre, avec ses cinq appels à la conversion, est *le pain quotidien* de nous tous.

Je suis convaincu que, consciemment ou inconsciemment, nous sommes les *produits* du dernier Chapitre Général! Nous « respirons » en harmonie avec l'esprit du Chapitre de 2010. Nous voyons toute chose à travers les « lunettes » du Chapitre; tout ce que nous faisons est imprégné par les Cinq Appels du Chapitre à la Conversion. Partout où nous allons, nous « parlons » du Chapitre. Toutes nos réunions oblates, qu'elles soient Mission, Délégation ou Congrès provinciaux, ont comme thème majeur les *Appels à la Conversion*. Nous sommes, de bien des façons, les *produits* du dernier Chapitre Général.

Notre Supérieur Général, le P. Louis Lougen, OMI, où qu'il aille, ne manque pas une chance de nous inviter à revoir notre vie oblate à la lumière de ces cinq appels à la Conversion.

Après 200 ans de tradition d'envoi pour Évangéliser les pauvres, nous nous encourageons à demerger fidèles à nos traditions. Je me souviens d'avoir lu un article écrit par Vito Mancuso sur *La Tâche de Pierre*. Dans cet article, qui est paru dans le journal italien *La Repubblica* du 4 mars, 2013, l'auteur décrit l'énorme poids que les traditions exercent sur les personnes. La *tradition* est devenue *Loi* par le seul fait qu'elle précède : « Il en a été ainsi dans le passé, et donc vous devez continuer à faire la même chose! » Nous ne voulons pas *répéter* les sermons de St. Eugène à l'Église de *La Madeleine*, mais nous voulons être fidèles à l'Esprit qui l'a entraîné à être :

1. simple dans sa prédication,
2. authentique dans son style de vie,
3. près des pauvres dans leurs souffrances,
4. fidèle à l'Église,
5. en solidarité avec les pauvres en utilisant leur propre langage,
6. constructif en leur donnant du pouvoir, en leur montrant leur véritable place dans la société,
7. un serviteur et un prêtre des pauvres,
8. un ambassadeur pour le Christ en leur montrant leur place dans le Royaume de Dieu.

Je suis sûr que les articles qui suivent dans ce numéro d'**Oblatio** nous aideront à mieux comprendre notre place dans *le casse-tête du Royaume de Dieu* et dans *le casse-tête de l'Église du Christ*. Ces réflexions nous permettront de nous mieux situer au sein de la véritable tradition de la Vie Religieuse en tant que *prophètes* dans le monde d'aujourd'hui, mais aussi comme meilleurs collaborateurs avec les laïcs qui sont aussi appelés à suivre le Christ dans les pas de Saint Eugène.

Ce qui suit dans ce numéro d'**Oblatio** aidera à saisir que notre style de vie et notre activité missionnaire, en tant que religieux consacrés, nous situent dans la tradition des Prophètes de l'Ancien Testament, et ainsi nous devrions :

1. connaître les secrets de Dieu en expérimentant personnellement sa présence,
2. partager la Sainteté de Dieu en étant témoin de sa divine miséricorde,
3. prêcher la parole de Dieu en toutes circonstances,
4. être sans peur, en sachant que Dieu est avec nous.

En tant que fils de saint Eugène, nous sommes appelés à faire tout cela dans l'esprit de Marie, notre Mère et notre Modèle : elle a reçu le *Christ* et l'a donné au monde. Nous voulons faire la même chose :

1. avec le même Esprit qui a appelé Marie lors de l'Annonciation : Luc 1, 28,
2. avec le même Esprit qui a accompagné Jésus dans Son ministère : Luc 4, 18,
3. avec le même Esprit qui a inspiré Eugène à prêcher à l'Église de La Madeleine, durant le mois de mars 1813,
4. avec le même Esprit qui « souffle » sur le monde et sur l'Église d'aujourd'hui.

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Historia

MISSIONARIES: MEN CALLED TO BE HOLY AND TO LEAD OTHERS TO HOLINESS

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The Oblate vocation is the continuation of the mission that the Father entrusted to Jesus and that Jesus in turn entrusted to the Apostles.

There is nothing on earth higher than our vocation, wrote St. Eugene de Mazenod to the novitiate in Billens. Amongst religious some are called to one good work, others to another; some are destined, be it indirectly, to the same end as ourselves. But for us, *our principal end*, I would almost say our only end, *is the self-same end that Jesus Christ proposed to himself on coming into the world, the self-same end that he gave to the Apostles*, to whom, without any doubt, he taught the most perfect way. And so our humble society knows no other founder than Jesus Christ, who spoke through the mouth of his Vicar, and no other Fathers than the Apostles.¹

The mission is at the center of St. Eugene's plan, as it was for the forty or so other similar Institutes born in France in the same period.² The difference is that almost all the other groups soon disappeared while the Oblates remained. What was the secret of this small Society of the Missionaries of Provence that made it different from the others beginning with those large and very organized ones like Forbin-Janson's Missionaries of France or the Missionaries of Laval? Surely the winning card was its openness to the mission *ad gentes*. I believe nevertheless that the originality of St. Eugene was above all to have well developed

the *subject* of the mission. For him the idea of the mission is tied inseparably to that of the *apostolic man*, or of the *truly apostolic man*, as it was customary to say; it is tied to that of an *apostolic community*, one able to bring together the life of holiness, of unity and of evangelical proclamation of the apostles and their disciples.³

THE APOSTOLIC MAN

“Apostolic men” is the first definition of the members of the Aix community. Right from the beginning, as he explained to Tempier, St. Eugene’s aim was to “choose men who have the will and the courage to walk in the footsteps of the apostles.”⁴ He wanted not just good preachers, but, to use two terms that could be considered equivalent, “truly apostolic men”, “men of interior life”, and finally, saints: “We must be truly saints ourselves. In saying that, we include all that can possibly be said.”⁵ To be “truly apostolic men” and “to walk in the footsteps of the apostles” will soon become keywords that characterize the Missionary of Provence. Eugene was not interested in numbers but in quality.

Not just any kind of preachers would suffice either, and not just individual apostolic men. To be “truly apostolic men” it was necessary to seek “common sanctification” as St. Eugene wrote to Tempier when he proposed a meeting of the future members of the community. “At this meeting we will draw up the Rule which we will have to follow. We will confer on the manner in which we will carry out our good work. We will help each other mutually with advice and with all that the good God will inspire in each of us for our *common sanctification*.”⁶

The conditions for beginning well the work were very demanding. It meant attaining perfect unanimity of sentiment, the same goodwill and disinterestedness. Everything, even the commitment to evangelization, had to be common.⁷ It meant then full unity, a harmony even of sentiments. Thus the community will be characterized by all having “one heart and one soul,” like the first Christians. Common life, then, appears as an essential element for the apostolic man, as well as for the effectiveness of his missionary activity and for his own sanctification. Already when he was in the seminary St. Eugene wrote that strength does not consist in numbers, but in unity, and that only united by the bonds of the same charity, and animated by the same spirit would it be possible to conquer the world for God.⁸

The need to have truly apostolic men, who were really united, appears also from the solution to a problem that St. Eugene had both before and immediately after the foundation: unification, or something like it, with the Missionaries of France. What at first holds him back from joining them is the difference of the field of activity: why abandon Provence that had such great need of missionaries to go to Paris? Only Provençals could evangelize Provence because ordinary people only understood Provençal.⁹ Other than that there would not have been any impediments to an affiliation. Some difficulties could have come from the Capitular Vicars or from his companions, but he himself seemed to favor it.¹⁰ As the months passed, however, the project of a union became more and more unrealistic because the life style of both Societies continued to make them more different.

Forbin-Janson was attracted more to numbers than to quality, to the expansion of the activity than to its incisiveness. St. Eugene very frankly reminds him of this:

If I were you, I would aim at somewhat less brilliance and I would insist more on soundness. Of what use are fine speeches if one is conceited? Humility, the spirit of abnegation, obedience, etc., and the utmost in the way of fraternal charity are also necessary for the good order and the happiness of a Society. Not all your people have properly understood that. I attribute this failing to a certain necessity wherein you find yourself to accept men capable of preaching. Here we agree on no such arrangements. We were six. Of these six, one did not have the spirit of a man of the Church. He did poor work. We asked him to withdraw. Our community is very fervent. There are no better priests throughout the diocese.¹¹

In a letter to Aubert announcing his plan to form a group of missionaries, St. Eugene had already outlined his strategy:

We wish to do modestly, but not less effectively, what they are striving to do at Paris on a larger scale. We would want to act without commotion but what blows we would strike at hell! (...) Ah! If we could form a nucleus, there would soon cluster round it the most zealous elements in the diocese.¹²

At that time vows were not yet foreseen in his plan. There was however something much more important, the evangelical counsels, the

authentic way to holiness, as the Founder would recall some years later:

In 1815 I laid the first foundations of our little society. The principal end that I proposed was the evangelization of the poor, the prisoners, the little ones.... Men disposed to abnegation were needed, men who had the will to walk in the footsteps of the apostles by practicing the evangelical counsels. I did not think it possible to do the good that I proposed myself under any other conditions.¹³

“Apostolic Men”, therefore, means men who follow Jesus, like the apostles, and make him the ideal of their life, evangelical men, so that they may become other Christs, and thus be able to announce the Gospel. “How, indeed, did our Lord Jesus Christ proceed when he undertook to convert the world? He chose a number of apostles and disciples whom he himself trained in piety, and he filled them with his Spirit. These men he sent forth, once they had been schooled in his teaching, to conquer the world which, before long, was to bow to his holy rule.” The same must be said today: “Men who want to follow in the footsteps of their divine Master Jesus Christ to win back the many souls who have thrown off his yoke.” More precisely, “They must strive to be saints. They must walk courageously along the same paths trodden by so many before them: apostolic labourers for the Gospel.” (*Preface*)

The Rule of 1826 outlines clearly the motives required of candidates called to be part of this religious family. They are repeated in the 1853 edition. They sum up St. Eugene’s vision of the apostolic man.

Whoever wants to be one of us must have an ardent desire of his own perfection, be inflamed with a love for Our Lord Jesus Christ and his Church and have a burning zeal for the salvation of the souls. He must have a heart that is free from every disordered attachment for the things of the world, free from excessive attachment to his parents and his place of birth. He will banish every desire of gain and consider riches rather like mud in order not to seek anything other than Jesus Christ, nourishing the desire to devote himself to the exclusive service of God and the Church in the Missions and in the other ministries of the Congregation. Finally he must have the will to persevere until death in fidelity and obedience to the Rules of our Institute.¹⁴

Finally, in order to work as Jesus did it is necessary to be Jesus. From the beginning St. Eugene intends to create a group of apostles who make

Jesus himself again present in the Church. He wants to mould each of his companions into another Christ and create an apostolic body, strengthened by their unity in the Lord and ready to work like the apostles.

READING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

St. Eugene de Mazenod's missionary plan is born from a particular reading of the "signs of the times" that helps him become aware of the abandoned state of the Church in his time. This reading is the fruit of his study, many personal experiences, and of the grace attached to the charism of a founder.

While still young, he reads books on the history of the Church, the great French Catholic writers of 17th the century, like Bossuet, Bourdaloue, Massillon, the *Oeuvres posthumes* of the Abbé Bonaventure Racine and the work of Chateaubriand, *The Genius of Christianity*, just published (1802). "Simple layman – he writes in a study on Jansenism, about which we will speak more below – I apply myself, it is true, to my religion because I consider this study like the first and most essential of my duties."¹⁵ These readings offer him the first criteria of discernment to understand the situation of the Church in his time.

Together with study, a series of experiences put him in touch with the real condition of estrangement from the faith of the poor and neglected classes. As soon as he returned to France he began visiting and helping the poor in their homes as well as in the prisons. But it is above all during his stays at the family's chateau at Laurent du Verdon, and in the home of his grandmother at St. Julien that he becomes aware of the spiritual abandonment of the people in the countryside.¹⁶

St. Eugene soon becomes an assiduous reader of the Sacred Scriptures, and it is especially in them that he will find the light to discern the signs of the times and to single out ways to answer.¹⁷ From his time in Venice, he always carried with him a small edition of the New Testament, which had belonged to his great-uncle Charles Auguste André de Mazenod, who died in exile.¹⁸

Three years after his return to France he has already an idea of the situation in which the Church finds itself. He writes to his father who is still in Palermo:

“I am really afraid that tradition and the example of [Christian] virtues are going to vanish from the scene altogether. I shudder at the very idea that we will one day be reduced just to our own, perverse generation which has imbibed nothing but the poison of every vice and has no understanding of virtue, which stagnates in such a depth of ignorance that there is every reason to fear that we will fall again into a state of barbarism even more wicked than that which prevailed in the sixth century, since at least in those unhappy times people did believe in God, while today there is an open profession of an appalling atheism.”¹⁹ He is especially struck by the situation of the youth: “especially those we call the children of the revolution, all those 18 or 20 years of age would be ignorant of God’s very existence.”²⁰

His reading, his experiences and the daily reading of the Word of God slowly lead St. Eugene to hear the call of the Spirit to respond with commitment and generosity to the needs of salvation that he is discovering around himself. And so he decides to become a priest.

After entering the Saint-Sulpice Seminary in Paris other experiences will lead him to evaluate in depth the real situation of the Church. He begins with catechism for children. He writes this about them: “These are the poorest in the parish, [...] but I am not concerned with that, and I am very happy to find myself in the middle of these poor verminous lads, whom I shall try to win over to ourselves.”²¹ The summer of 1810 he is not able to go back to Provence for summer vacation. He regrets not being able to go to Saint-Julien, where his grandmother lived, as he had in the past to instruct the poor.²² He follows closely the persecution of the Church by Napoleon who imprisons Pius VII in 1809 and deports the cardinals from Rome. It was precisely the difficult situation in which the Church found itself that initially motivated him to decide to become a priest. These events reinforced that decision.

Upon returning to his own city as a priest he encounters other evils, the first being a stale pastoral activity, lacking in creativity and incapable of responding to the new needs. In the *Nota Bene* of the Rule of 1818, a text that, after some revisions, will become the Magna Charta of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, he sums up the abandoned state of the Church, as he perceived it during those years:

The Church, that glorious inheritance purchased by Christ the Savior at the cost of his own blood, has in our days been cruelly ravaged....

The true end of our Institute is to remedy these evils and to correct as much as possible these disorders. To succeed in such a holy cause it is necessary first of all to seek the causes of the depravation that today enslaves men in their passions. These can be reduced to three main ones: 1. The weakening, not to say the total loss of faith; 2. The people's ignorance; 3. Apathy, laziness and corruption of the priests.²³

The first mission he leads at the head of the new group of Missionaries of Provence, confirms his reading of the situation:

The people were abandoned and had completely strayed. Faith had died out. They only knew about God to blaspheme his name in the most horrible manner, and that by women and children as well as by men. Needless to say, no one made their Easter duties. The parish priest did not even confess two men; even the women and children had taken the same part, and soon one could have closed the church, so seldom was it used; half the population had not set foot there for 25 years.²⁴

Fifty years later, at the end of his life, speaking of other wounds in the Church, he will write:

There is nothing new under the sun (Eccl. 1:10). The events that trouble us resemble those that plagued our contemporaries in past times and in our time.... What we are seeing is but a proof that God permits a plan whose secret we cannot foresee, but that can be none other than a plan of mercy for his chosen ones.... That is why the Church in the human part of its existence as in the divine, must share in the chalice of its founder.... History, a history filled with such terrible lessons, invariably confirms the thoughts of our faith. Even humanly speaking it is extremely reasonable to believe that what has always happened will happen again.²⁵

If he were alive today, St. Eugene would probably recognize in the present crisis of faith, the same challenges of the past and know through study and experience how to read the call for a positive response.²⁶

A READING THAT MOVES ONE TO “COMPASSION” AND “COMMOTION”*

The terrible situation in which the Church found itself, weakened by de-Christianization, anticlericalism, atheism, and the decadence of the clergy, could become an occasion for criticism or defection, or at least of taking some distance, as was the case of his contemporary, Robert-Félicité de Lamennais. The latter dedicated four volumes to the accurate analysis of the Church of his time (*Essay on Indifference toward Religion*), but his answer was wanting in much, even to the point of his breaking with the papacy. For Eugene de Mazenod the same analysis – for which he needed only a few pages – became a call to dedicate himself to the Church and the motive for a positive response.²⁸ Rather than discouraging him the negative situation incites him to immediately begin working to remedy the situation. It becomes, first of all, the motivation for his priestly vocation²⁹ and later for his decision to give birth to a missionary Society.

In the *Conference for the day of Ordination* to the subdiaconate that he gave to his seminary companions, there are already hints of his generous answer to the calls coming to him from the situation of the Church in his time:

How could we not but reflect with grief about her as we considered her sorrows and sufferings, how could we not be moved with sympathy for the condition of abandonment she is in? [...] The Church at bay cries aloud to her children for help in her distress, and does no one respond? No, no, tender dear Mother, not all your children desert you in the days of your affliction; a group, small it is true, but precious for the feelings that move it, draws close around you and wipes away the tears that men’s ingratitude provokes in the bitterness of your sorrow. Issue your orders; there is nothing that the prospect of your needs will not move us to undertake. We know [...] that strength does not consist in numbers, but in unity. Yes, united by the bonds of the same charity, anointed by the same spirit, tending to the same end, we will form that sacred Legion, that mystical phalanx that the world and hell cannot crush.³⁰

* [Translator’s note. The author makes a play on words in Italian with “compassione” and “commozione”. The English equivalent of the latter is usually “deeply moved”. We kept “commotion” to respect that play on words. It should be read to mean “deeply moved”.]

The abandoned state of the Church stirs up in him a passion for the Spouse of Christ and becomes an appeal to commit himself unconditionally to her cause through priestly ministry. Later the birth of the Missionaries of Provence will be due to that same “commotion” in the face of the evils of his time: “The sight of these evils has so *touched the hearts* of certain priests, zealous for the glory of God, men with an ardent love for the Church, that they are willing to give their lives, if need be, for the salvation of souls.”³¹

The deep feeling (“com-motion”) of St. Eugene and his companions is the fruit of “com-passion” in the etymological sense of the word: to enter the world of people and society, to share their anxieties, their problems, their needs, and finally “feel” the same “passions” and to have the same “pathos”. For Eugene and his first companions everything is born of this look of “compassion”, which is like a continuation of the way Jesus saw the crowds – lost sheep without a shepherd. It is the same way the Saviour looked upon the world from the cross.³² It is not by chance that the Gospel reading for St. Eugene’s Mass refers to the compassion of Jesus for the crowds (Lk 4:14-22). In other places the Gospel tells us that, moved by compassion, Jesus became a master to teach the truth, a shepherd to show the way, a doctor to cure illnesses, and bread to satisfy the hungry and to give life (Mt 9:35-38).

To read the signs of the times, to grasp the plan of God for humanity, one needs the same view that Christ has, a view that is born of love for humanity. St. Eugene’s encounter with Christ³³ gradually changed his way of seeing reality, seeing it as Christ did. It gave him the ability to read the world around himself in a new way, in the light of God’s plan for the Church and humanity. In the poor he recognizes “the poor of Jesus Christ”; the Church appears to him as “the beloved Spouse of the Son of God”, “born of the blood of a God who dies on the cross....” It is not just a reading of the signs of the times in sociological terms, but one done in faith.³⁴

A Church in crisis triggered his decision to respond by creating a group of men that could come to its aid and work effectively for its cause; men decided “to strive to be saints... to walk courageously along the same paths trodden by so many before them: apostolic labourers for the Gospel... striving solely for the glory of God, the good of the Church, and the growth and salvation of souls.”³⁵ “There is nothing that we are not capable of doing at the sight of your [the Church’s] needs,” he had once

said to his companions in the seminary. And today he says to the members of his community of missionaries, “*Nihil linquendum est inausum.*”

What to do concretely? There are attempts by the young priest de Mazenod to find new pastoral approaches capable of responding to the needs of the times: ministry to youth, the servants, craftsmen, the poor, the imprisoned, the seminarians.... Finally, hesitating between the desire to “bury himself” in a monastic community or to establish a group of missionaries, he confides to his friend Forbin-Janson that this second plan seems “more useful, given the dreadful plight to which the people have been reduced.”³⁶ He is thinking in particular of preaching missions to the people, as the most appropriate tool for the situation of his country and of his time.³⁷

Some events from his past lead him towards this type of ministry: the witness of Don Bartolo Zinelli, who had engaged in this ministry and had spoken favorably of it to his young disciple; Eugene’s knowledge, during the exile in Italy, of the writings and works of Saint Leonard of Port Maurice, who had preached missions in Northern and Central Italy in the early 18th century; the fascination for the then Blessed Alphonsus Mary de Liguori, whom he had come to know already in Venice via Don Bartolo;³⁸ the talk, during his seminary time, by Charles Bretonière about his preaching at Aix and Marseille.³⁹ But the decisive factor that led him to choose missions came from Pope Pius VII who, turning to his friend Forbin-Janson, showed him the urgent need to have missions for the people and retreats for the clergy in France.⁴⁰

Moved by “compassion”, St. Eugene began to respond to the Church’s urgent needs through the preaching of parish missions. His missionary “method” has been studied extensively.⁴¹ What I would like to highlight here is primarily one aspect of his method, the proclamation of God’s mercy, in an environment that still suffered the consequences of Jansenism.

MOVING AWAY FROM JANSENISM

During the period of the restoration of the monarchy religious thinking had returned to a kind of “aristocratic” rigorism on the one hand, and on the other to a “romantic” enthusiasm, especially among the middle class. Ordinary people were simply moving away from the Church. The

clergy was not sufficiently formed to be able to cope with the problems that a society in the process of gradual secularization was presenting on the moral level. Faced with this situation, St. Eugene understood that if he wanted to bring people back to the faith, it was necessary to abandon this rigorism.⁴² It was necessary to be close to the world, to understand it from the inside and to provide adequate responses. It was necessary to be freed once and for all from the influence that Jansenism still exercised, to announce and communicate the mercy of a God who is revealed as love.

He came upon the theology of the then Blessed Alphonsus Maria de Liguori, who paid special attention to the dignity of people's conscience and tried to move the Christian people back to frequenting the sacraments, thus going against that moral rigorism which, with the refusal of absolution, was in the end driving the faithful away from the Church and from Christ.⁴³

Jansenism, considered already officially dead, at least as a doctrine, had crept into the Church "as a subtle and tenacious malaise,"⁴⁴ still making felt its negative consequences. Eugene de Mazenod had to deal with it on his return to France, especially because he came in contact with Roze-Joannis, his mother's cousin, whom he called uncle. According to Eugene, this man "holds some religious principles which are sometimes a little too much in harmony with Jansenism, a doctrine to which he does not totally subscribe, but, such has been the influence of his education and his attachment for the Oratory and for Port-Royal, that he cannot keep himself from admiring these principles and preaching them."⁴⁵ His relative wanted to win him over. "He told me one day that I was made to be one, and that with my firm and decisive character and my strict principles, he was surprised that I wasn't one of the most zealous Jansenists." With such a person there was no avoiding the topic.⁴⁶ This led Eugene to study the issue.

Among the papers from his youth there is an 1806 notebook entitled *Jansénisme*, and another in 1808, *Conversation avec un Janséniste sur les convulsions* (a conversation with his uncle who gave him first-hand testimony on some phenomena of which Jansenism boasted) and finally, for the same period, *Comédie du cimetière St. Médard ou Faus miracles du diacre Paris*, a refutation of purported miracles that are rather gruesome.

He perceives in Jansenism, which he does not hesitate to call a "sect", one of the dark evils of the Church. Rather than studying in

depth its theological significance he prefers to search out the numerous condemnations against it by the Church. He says this in his notes:

Anyway, what motive would I have for denigrating those people? Truth is the sole end of all my researches and this truth is found only in the Catholic Church..... Complete impartiality has always guided my pen. Aloof from all partisanship, my eyes are under no spell. A simple layman, I apply myself it is true to my religion as I consider this study to be the first and most essential of my duties, but who will accuse me of belonging closely or loosely to any corps, any Society which is contrary to them?

His famous anti-Jansenist “Profession of Faith” dates from this period (1806).⁴⁷

Aside from that youthful interest, in later years Jansenism, as a doctrinal phenomenon, does not continue to interest him much. Moreover, at the end of his *Notes on Jansenism* he himself says that it has now lost any bite: “God who watches over his Church permitted that the means they – the Jansenists – used to regain the acceptance that they had lost when their doctrine was no longer supported by talented people, God allowed, I repeat, that these same means led to their confusion.”⁴⁸

He is however convinced that Jansenism was one of the major causes of the French Revolution. On a handwritten sheet pasted to the inside cover of the volume *Oeuvres posthumes* written by the Abbé Racine, Avignon, 1759, we read: “This book is invaluable. It alone conveys the spirit of the dangerous sectarians who have upset France for a century and a half and they ended up being a major cause and a powerful tool of the last revolution that has plagued the Church more than the State.” At the end his notes on the *Comédie du cimetière*: “The French Revolution has revealed this mystery of iniquity, and without going into details, I quite simply say that the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, the work of one of the supporters of the Jansenist sect and its leader in the National Assembly,⁴⁹ is but the summary of their doctrine.”

He expresses the same conviction in his pastoral letter of January 12, 1856, written to mark the discovery of the remains of Mgr Jean-Baptiste Gault (1595-1643): “The disastrous polemics with which Jansenism, with the intensity of a stubborn and subversive heresy, wore down France’s Church before delivering it over to the philosophizing

of the 18th century and later to the Revolution” are such that the holy Bishops of Marseille have been forgotten.

If the doctrinal debate was now closed, the consequences on popular piety and pastoral practice continued to be felt. For example, de Mazenod warned his sister, mother and grandmother about the negative influence of Roze-Joannis that even drove them away from Eucharistic communion. During his seminary years, he wrote to these three women about the necessity of frequent communion. He recommends to his grandmother:

Come, come, I am the bread of life; I am the strength of the weak, the stay of all. Woe to him who refuses my tender invitation, for whoever does not eat of my flesh will not have life in him.... What a mistake to believe that to dispose oneself worthily for frequent participation of that kind, one must shut oneself up in inaccessible solitude and leave to others the trouble of looking after one’s worldly affairs.... We will not be perfect until we get to heaven; and the one and only way to come anywhere close to it here below is to receive communion often. That is the doctrine of the holy Council of Trent which teaches that this divine Sacrament is a remedy to heal us of our daily failings. So let us listen to the Church and pay no heed to the importunate clamouring of the sectarians of these latter days who say we must be satisfied with just saying our prayers. Let us go as often as we can to the sacrament where our Lord’s love spent itself on our behalf.⁵⁰

He repeats the same thing to his sister and mother.⁵¹

WELCOMING AND PROMOTING ALPHONSIAN MORAL THEOLOGY

St. Eugene rejects Jansenist rigorism and adopts Alphonsian moral theology, which he introduces into France where it was virtually unknown.⁵²

At the Saint-Sulpice Seminary he had studied moral theology with enthusiasm. Although he received there an education that tended to be rigorist, he did not follow it.⁵³ In fact, a few years later, he wrote to his father that for some time already he had been studying the moral theology of St. Alphonsus.⁵⁴ While still a seminarian he wrote to his sister about the Neapolitan saint: “The more you are in the world, the more you need help”, says the Venerable Liguori....”⁵⁵ In 1816, in the early days of our founding, he looks to the works and the Rule of Alphon-

sus for inspiration: “I have studied his works extensively and we have taken him as one of our patrons; we would like to walk in his footsteps and imitate his virtues.... I have some of his writings, among others his moral theology which I like very much and have studied in a special way when I had the time to study....”⁵⁶ As soon as he received the biography of the saint, he thought of having it translated into French, a complex undertaking that ended with the composition of a new biography written by Father Jeancard, and published in 1828.⁵⁷ He entrusts Father Domenico Albini to teach the moral theology of St. Alphonsus in the moral courses at the scholasticate and later at the seminaries of Marseille and Ajaccio. In 1830 we find him recommending to one of the young Oblate students to temper his strictness by studying St. Alphonsus.⁵⁸

It is especially on the pastoral level that St. Eugene shows the leaning of his moral thinking. This is evident, for example, in the disputes with Mgr Arbaud, Bishop of Gap. In a long letter of January 22, 1827 he writes:

The bishop complained about the Fathers at Laus saying that they were lax in their moral principles. He noted among others, Fr. Touche who for this reason could no longer be tolerated in certain parishes. Having formulated in five propositions the implicit moral principles, supported and followed in the practice of the members of the Congregation, he ended his indictment writing: “What would Benedict XIV have thought of these corrupters of morality?” Father de Mazenod had no difficulty proving the innocence of his missionaries; he reminded the Bishop, who was a bit Jansenist, that the implicit moral principles, supported and followed by them, were nothing more than the principles accepted, supported and implemented by blessed Alphonsus de Liguori, principles that Rome was far from opposing.⁵⁹

THE MISSIONARIES, INSTRUMENTS OF GOD’S MERCY

Champions of the new morality, the missionaries of Saint Eugene want to be preachers of the mystery of God’s love for mankind and the instruments of his mercy towards the poor and sinners.⁶⁰

The Founder addressed some meaningful words to Fr. Mille who, during the mission at Malijai, had become discouraged by the indifference of the people:

My dear friends, I share the pain brought to you by the indifference of the people whom you are evangelising. I do not, however, approve the discouragement into which I understand you have fallen, you who are accustomed to be the instruments of God's mercy.... At most, bring down his merciful action by your urgent prayers and turn him away from executing his justice.⁶¹

The mercy of God, of which the missionaries wish to be an instrument, has the face of Christ at the highest moment of his love, when he gives his life for his friends. The missionaries are "the co-operators of the Saviour, the co-redeemers of mankind."⁶² The Founder will write at the end of his life that all their efforts must focus on "becoming worthy ministers of God's mercy, true apostles of Jesus Christ."⁶³ This great love is shown in the opening event of the mission by the symbol of the cross that the superior carries entering the village; he kisses it and then has all the missionaries do the same in a moving ceremony. At the closing of the mission there is the erection of a cross.⁶⁴ The heart of Jesus is a further manifestation of the infinite mercy of the Saviour. The reparation implied in this devotion, with its public celebrations during the mission, makes one more sensitive to the offenses of which the Lord is the object and draws one towards a more intense love.⁶⁵

Throughout his ministry Saint Eugene also gradually experiences the presence of Mary. He sees his religious family as an instrument of her merciful love for all, called to bring the lost children of God to her, the Mother of Mercy.⁶⁶ The Virgin is for him a special, maternal manifestation of divine mercy. We can thus understand his choice to serve at Marian shrines, starting with the second house of the young Society, Notre Dame du Laus. Shrines were regarded as a permanent mission where the divine mercy towards sinners could be shown.⁶⁷ The Oblates have continued this ministry up to this day in numerous small and large Marian shrines at Lourdes, Notre-Dame du Cap in Quebec, from Maria Taferl in Austria to Our Lady of the Snows in Illinois.

TEACHING CHRIST BY TOUCHING THE HEART

During a mission, the testimony of God's merciful love, manifested in the Savior and Mary's motherhood becomes the way to teach Christ. The fundamental task of St. Eugene de Mazenod's community, as noted

in the *Nota Bene* of the 1818 Rule, is “teaching (“apprendre” in French) who Jesus Christ is.” This verb is dear to him, one that he had also used when preaching during the Lent of 1813. It (“ap-prendre”) means “appropriate or make one’s own” what is taught. The Founder aims for a teaching that leads to an experience of personal knowledge of Christ.⁶⁸

The mission has as its purpose to make Jesus Christ known and loved, as St. Eugene recommends to Fr. Viala, although in this case he was referring primarily to the mission *ad gentes*: “Insist on making Jesus Christ known and loved. Speak often of this divine Saviour and of all he has done to save mankind. Make them resolve never to spend a day without praying.”⁶⁹

This demands of the missionary an ability to bring the Word of God close to the people and to make it understandable, “to chew it” for them. We read in the 1818 Rule:

We would go directly against the spirit of the Rule if we were to seek... elegance of style rather than the soundness of the doctrine.... Our only aim is to make disciples of the people.... Not content to break the bread of the Word, we must chew it; in a word, we must ensure that, hearing our preaching, they not be tempted to admire foolishly what haven’t understood but that they be edified, deeply touched, taught, able to repeat in their families what they learned from our lips.⁷⁰

We find this in St. Eugene’s first experience of preaching in the Lent of 1813, when turning to the poor of the city, he said he would place “himself within the grasp of the simplest among the ignorant, like the father of a family.”⁷¹ He in fact wanted to touch people’s hearts, as he wrote to Fr. Courtès: “During the missions especially one must act with faith and trust. After setting out the duties, make an appeal to the heart, don’t be afraid of letting go. It always worked for me; I don’t recall a single occasion of resistance when I used to exercise your holy ministry.”⁷² He loved to preach in Provençal, not only to be better understood, but above all to do as Jesus: to speak with a language that came from his own experience, able to identify with the experience of those he had before him.

This implied a real closeness to people, as we mentioned when speaking about “compassion”. Visiting families during the mission had an important role in this regard and it seems that it was an innovation

that he made in the missionary practice of the day.⁷³ He writes in his diary: “These visits are not very pleasant, but they are very important because they bring the missionaries closer to the people they have come to evangelize. They show themselves as friendly and having a charity that is for one and all.... At the same time, they sometimes discover some disorders that had escaped the care of an even zealous pastor, and can thus put people on the way to remedy them.”⁷⁴

A “COMPASSIONATE HEART” FOR SINNERS

The sacrament of penance, the culminating moment of the preaching in parish missions, is considered to be the ministry of peace par excellence and as a word of reconciliation.⁷⁵

In this Saint Eugene is inspired by the love and mercy of God manifested in Christ the Saviour, a view heavily influenced by Alphonsian moral theology, as is clear right from the early days of the foundation when he writes to the first community of Aix:

Christe salvator. That is the aspect under which we ought to contemplate our divine Master. Our particular vocation is such that we are associated in a special manner with the redemption of men; the Blessed Liguori has likewise put his Congregation under the protection of the Saviour. Would that we all endeavour, by the sacrifice of our entire being, not to render his redemption useless, both in regard to ourselves and in regard to those whom we are called upon to evangelize.⁷⁶

The confessional, so important during the missions, was the testing ground of Eugene de Mazenod’s new moral orientation. The ministry of reconciliation proved to be the most suitable tool to show God’s understanding, gentleness, and mercy. Already as a young priest, during his famous Lenten sermon at the Church of the Magdalene in Aix, he presents himself to the people with these words:

But my brothers our menacing tone is only for the pulpit, in the sacred tribunal our language is quite different, perhaps then we are all too indulgent.... Yes, my brothers, come, and you will see with what joy we will help you to take up your yoke that will seem too heavy only for the first few moments of your conversion... God will seem

so lovable to you, he will fill your hearts with so great a consolation, and he will invest you with so great a strength that ... you will fly to the summit of the mountain....⁷⁷

During the missions, confession made it possible to apply to every person the word proclaimed to all in the preaching, translating the teaching into the concreteness of each person's life, letting each one experience the merciful love of God who can forgive and renew. He finds it hard to believe how long the missionaries spent in this ministry. Already during the first mission at Grans in 1816 St. Eugene wrote: "The day after our arrival, we set up confessionals for the four missionaries. They were besieged from three o'clock in the morning. I tell you this because it is a fact, and we stayed there for the following 28 hours. Twenty-eight hours, I must repeat it so that you don't think I made a mistake in writing it."⁷⁸ It was necessary to give all the time needed for confessions: "Since we follow the confessional method of your holy patriarch, Saint Vincent de Paul, that is, hearing confessions without intermission, we don't go very fast."⁷⁹

In an age that required the penitent to come back many times to confess at regular intervals to be sure of the sincerity of his perseverance, St. Eugene asked not to delay too much the absolution, not to wait for a kind of impeccability. He explains this to a pastor who was not too happy with the results of the mission:

We must remember that reconciliation in the sacrament of Penance does not give impeccability any more than justification in baptism does. ... In instituting the sacrament of Penance in such a way that it may be worthily received several times by the same person, he has reassured in advance the priest who administers it according to the rules, and at the same time has held back the poor sinner from the despair to which he might have given in without this provident mercy.⁸⁰

The Rule of 1818 devotes a long chapter to the pastoral practice of this sacrament: neither too lenient nor too harsh; with inexhaustible charity; support with benevolence and mercy for one who is discouraged....

Why has Jesus Christ entrusted the message of reconciliation to us if not so that it be applied effectively to sinners... so that they be truly reconciled with God? He has entrusted us with the ministry of reconciliation, because God, was reconciling the world to himself in Christ,

not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. Woe to the cowardly minister... who would bury the talent received that was meant to bear fruit... and extinguish the abundant source for regeneration of souls that Christ Jesus had given him.

Finally, the directive the Rule gives missionaries is one of great mercy: "The missionaries will always welcome sinners with an endless charity; encourage them ... showing them a heart full of compassion; in one word, they will treat them as they would like to be treated themselves, if they were in their sad condition."⁸¹

SACRAMENTS FOR THOSE CONDEMNED TO DEATH

Another pastoral area in which Saint Eugene de Mazenod stands out among the French clergy is his position in favour of communion for death row inmates, another example of pastoral care focused on mercy.

The earliest example dates back to his ministry at Aix as a young priest, when he assumed the post of volunteer chaplain of prisons, where every day he visited, instructed, consoled, and encouraged the inmates. He was to accompany a woman named Germaine who was sentenced to death. The documents relating to this have been lost, but Achille Rey reports the event: "This innocent creature, who had aroused horror and outrage because of the enormity of her crimes, was so touched by the exhortations of the Abbé de Mazenod that she was completely converted. She was so well disposed that contrary to the prejudice of the times, the Abbé de Mazenod gave her communion."⁸²

In July 1837, on a visit to Notre-Dame du Laus, he learns that the prison chaplain in Gap had refused to give communion to a condemned man who was well disposed. He goes to prison himself and gives communion to the detainee to react publicly against this "horrible prejudice", this "barbaric abuse", inspired by Jansenism.⁸³ He celebrates Mass, gives a moving exhortation to the condemned, who burst into tears, administers the Eucharist and the sacrament of Confirmation. That day in his *Diary* he expresses his joy at giving religious help to a criminal who was now converted, and for having sanctioned "by example the doctrine I teach."⁸⁴

In October of the same year, with a tough letter he chides Fr. Courtès, prison chaplain in Aix, for refusing communion to a man sen-

tenced to death, recalling his own recent example in Gap and the past episode of Germaine.⁸⁵

In 1847 he protested a decision of the Attorney General of the Republic who wanted to forbid priests to assist the condemned. On that occasion, he writes:

But this magistrate doesn't know that we are by vocation men of mercy! We do nothing more than practice mercy not only in the prisons and on the gallows towards the biggest criminals but always and everywhere. It is our ministry.... We must not agree to certain demands... of those who want to shut up priests in the Church so that they cannot be seen anywhere and exert even the slightest influence on society.⁸⁶

After a trivial incident during a mission, where it seems that some young people had disturbed a service, he wrote to Fr. Eugène-Bruno Guigues rebuking him for having been too harsh with them: "God preserve you, my dear, from refusing communion to those who, after being guilty of the prank you told me about, backed off." As a result, he lays down a principle that goes far beyond the present episode, recalling who a missionary is:

Oh! You are sent by God to forgive greater sins than theirs and even greater scandals than the one they may have given by their thoughtlessness. Once they had been reconciled, it was your duty to admit them to the Holy Table to make them fulfil, at the same time, their Paschal duty and the obligation they had undoubtedly been feeling to receive Communion which they had neglected. I am afraid that the anxiety in which I find you has not permitted you to accord a fairly kind welcome to these young people. The opposite gesture would have won their hearts and would have urged them to draw towards you those who were more guilty than they. And if these latter end up by surrendering themselves, no doubt you must make them also receive Communion at the end of the mission. Remember that you are sent to sinners, and even to hardened sinners. You must expect resistance from the devil; he will not easily let go of his prey. This resistance manifests itself now in one way, and now in another. Jesus Christ is always the victor, "*Christus vincit.*" He demands sacrifices, "*Christus imperat.*" He establishes his reign in souls, "*Christus regnat.*"... We are the ministers of his mercy, and so let us always have

the tenderness of a father.... The father of the prodigal son was not content with putting the best robe on him and having a ring put on his finger, he had the fatted calf killed as well. In the same way, we must not only reconcile sinners, but in the view of all the graces granted to them during the mission, of the guarantees their fidelity gives to respond thereto and of the efforts they have had to make for all this, we admit them to the sacred banquet, we give them the bread of life so that they can advance in this new path which they are to follow, and may, at the same time, fulfil an imperative duty that urges them.⁸⁷

Fr. René Motte, in his article “Sacred Heart” in the *Dictionary of Oblate Values*, draws this conclusion: “Following Christ, and being a witness to God’s paternal mercy, even towards the greatest sinners, is the attitude that Father de Mazenod adopted in his ministry among the prisoners and later in preaching parish missions. It is with this mindset that he introduced the moral theology of St. Alphonsus into France.”⁸⁸

MERCIFUL BECAUSE ONE HAS EXPERIENCED MERCY

To understand in depth his rejection of Jansenist thinking and the decision to proclaim the mercy of Christ the Saviour, it is necessary to trace St. Eugene’s personal experience of God’s merciful love. We must go back to the years 1806-1808, when he was undergoing a gradual and profound conversion, the fruit of realizing his own sin together with the infinity of God’s merciful love for him. He felt the gaze of Jesus upon him, showing him the love with which God had always loved him.

The notes of his ordination retreat are particularly eloquent in this regard. St. Eugene takes a hard look at the sins and infidelities of his past life. It does not lay him low with grief, but rather it opens him to gratitude, recognizing God’s mercy that showed itself in his weakness. Despite the harshness of the negative terms he uses to label his past, the distance between the before and the after stands out in a dazzling light. It would have been impossible to “get out of that ‘past’ by himself”, he says; only God could introduce him to a new life.

Ah! I am well aware that in the sins of my past I made a quite different choice; I gave myself over to the devil and his perverse works.... My God! Although that hideous period is now far distant, it is still present to my mind. May I never forget it! It will be the

salutary counterweight to all the movements that my self-love would stir up in me. But you, O my Saviour, do you forget it, and keep in mind only your mercies.

With the same clarity with which he describes his past of sin, he becomes aware of the action of grace, testifying that he had repeatedly felt the mighty hand of the Father:

I will know better how detestable I am and how good and merciful you are.... Not only are you my Creator and Redeemer, as you are all men's, but you are my special benefactor and applied your merits in an altogether special way to me; my generous friend, you forgot all my acts of ingratitude to help me as powerfully as if I had been always faithful to you; my tender Father, who carried this rebel on your shoulders, warmed him against your heart, washed his wounds.

He felt himself the object of an extraordinary merciful love from God, to which he responds with a profound gratitude: "The patience with which this good Father waited for me seemed hardly conceivable, especially when I compared it with the blows that his justice had administered to right and left around me, while his mercy seemed to be reserved for me alone."⁸⁹

In his Testament, written in 1854, he writes in a more sober tone: "I implore God's mercy ... in whom I place all my trust, to obtain pardon for my sins and the grace of my soul being received in holy paradise."

His ministry of mercy is born of this experience of mercy: "I prefer to sink in the ocean of God's mercy.... God is infinitely merciful; it is no one's job to measure his mercy, much less to keep God from granting his mercy for the salvation of souls which his divine Son Jesus Christ has purchased with his precious blood."⁹⁰

APOSTOLIC HOLINESS

The ultimate aim of the Oblate's mission is to lead to holiness the people to whom he is sent: "We must lead men to act like human beings, first of all, and then like Christians, and finally we must help them to become saints." At the same time this leads the missionary himself to holiness: "They must strive to be saints. They must walk courageously along the same paths trodden by so many before them: apostolic labour-

ers for the Gospel who, while carrying out the same ministry to which they themselves now feel called, handed on such splendid examples of virtue.”⁹¹

The need for holiness for the mission has always been stated clearly by every spiritual author. It is enough to recall the famous book of Don Jean-Baptiste Gustave Chautard, *The Soul [i.e. prayer] of the Apostolate*. Less developed is the idea that the mission itself can contribute to the holiness of the missionary. Why not write a book entitled *The Apostolate, Soul of All Prayer*? If it is true that the apostolic zeal of the Oblate “is sustained by the unreserved gift we make of ourselves”, it is likewise true that our oblation “is constantly renewed by the challenges of the mission.” (C 2)

The holiness of the apostolic man develops through the constant self-giving that the mission requires, in love and in the concrete service of the brothers to whom he is sent. To go to the poor means to go to the Lord. Just as to go to the Father you must go through the humanity of Christ, so to go to Christ we need to pass through the brother with whom Christ identifies himself. That is the logic of the Incarnation (cf. Mt 25:31-46).

If we are all day with our brothers, in their service, moved by love and in continuity with the mission of Christ, animated by his Spirit, in the evening, when we stop, we will be able to experience a special union with God whom we loved and served in our brothers and sisters. God, who sees us taking care of others, will take care of us. Love given makes love grow. Here are the words of Jesus: “Give and you shall receive”. The Rule says the same: “We will let our lives be enriched by the poor and the marginalized as we work with them, for they can make us hear in new ways the Gospel we proclaim.” (R 8a)

The 1980 Chapter reminded us that “far from being turned away from the people and activity, we are driven towards them, and in return, meeting people and apostolic action become the source and food for our prayer.” The Constitutions say that, “We achieve unity in our life only in and through Jesus Christ. Our ministry involves us in a variety of tasks, yet each act in life is an occasion for personal encounter with the Lord, who through us gives himself to others and through others gives himself to us.” (C 31) Activity becomes a source of contemplation in a stupendous circle. It starts from Christ and goes out to a brother. There

we meet again with Christ and from there we return back to Christ, enriched by the experience of love towards a brother.

So, going to the poor becomes, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, a source of communion with God, as the *Instruction on the Contemplative Dimension of Religious Life* says: “The very nature of apostolic and charitable activity contains its own riches which nourish union with God. It is necessary to cultivate every day an awareness and a deepening of it. Being conscious of this, religious will so sanctify their activities as to transform them into sources of union with God....” (No. 6)

God’s will for the Oblate is the mission and it is through the mission that, under the mysterious grace of the Spirit and in response to the call of Jesus to follow Him, the Oblate gives himself totally to God, loved above all things, and puts himself in God’s hands, ready to do only his will. The total gift of self to God becomes likewise a total gift of self to the Church, to the poor, to the mission, and is an expression of his love for everyone.

St. Eugene repeatedly stated that the Oblate has the same mission as the Savior, sent by his Father to save sinners, to gather the scattered children of God, to remake the family of God’s children. The path followed by Christ to fulfill such a mission was that of the cross. He had to die to bring together the children of God that were scattered (Jn 11:52) and to bring everything together (Cf. Eph 1:10). To draw all to himself meant to be “lifted up” from the earth (Cf. Jn 12:32-33), making all one.... This is the logic of the grain of wheat which, because it dies, produces much fruit (Jn 12:24). Thus are united those far and near, those of diverse nationality and personality, social status and different sex, making them one people (Cf. Gal 3:28; Col 3:11). There, on the cross, He has accomplished the work of redemption, there He is truly and fully the Savior.

Those who with Him and like Him would work to build God’s Kingdom and gather all people into the family of God’s children, are called to follow the same path. Even for the Oblate the cross is at the heart of his mission (Cf. C 4). If he wants to be a genuine cooperator of Christ, if he wants to continue His work, the Oblate must relive His mystery of crucified love. “The Oblate cross which is received at perpetual profession is a constant reminder of the love of the Saviour who wishes to draw all hearts to himself and sends us out as his coworkers.”

(C 63) Thus one is truly co-redeemer with Christ and can work for the salvation of the world.

To enter into the dynamics of the Savior who draws all to himself, one must be grounded in His mystery, become another Christ who gives himself and gives all. This is *oblation*, to be united with the Lord to the point of becoming another him, and like Him to “live” in a constant offering of self, to be able to say to the Father: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire.... Behold, I have come to do your will” (Heb10:8-9). The “It is finished” of Jesus on the cross is proof of how His whole life has been an oblation of himself to the Father and to his plan of love, up to the last moment. In this fulfillment there is already the resurrection, the new world, the new people to whom He has given life.

THE APOSTLE’S WAY

The Oblate’s spirituality is an apostolic spirituality. It is therefore different, for example, from the monastic one that has constantly influenced every other spirituality. We are not asked to remain in our cell like the monk, but to go out to the world; not solitude, but being among people; not silence, but the word and proclamation of the Gospel. The mission is not a distraction from spirituality, but is itself our spirituality. We do not become saints *despite* the commitments of the mission, but *thanks* to the mission.

Our asceticism is not grounded mainly in penances, fasts, and vigils, typical of monks. It is experienced in the field of evangelization, the fruit of giving ourselves to others, of placing ourselves totally at the service of those that God entrusts to us; of giving our talents, time, effort, without reserve: hours and hours with young people or in the confessional; forced to give up speaking brilliantly because we do not know the language well; obliged to accept different foods and customs; at the risk of malaria; open to changes of place and ministry, detached from loved ones and the good we have done.... We have the example of Paul: 1 Cor 4:9-13; 2 Cor 4:8-9; 6:4-10; 11:23-28.

Even the Oblates’ “Nights of the Senses” and the spirit will have connotations typical of the apostle. Their trials can be occasioned by a sense of failure – apparent or real – from a feeling of inefficiency, lack of self-confidence, fatigue.... Confronted with the new challenges

of evangelization they may feel inadequate, incapable, not prepared. They might see the collapse of works built up with much passion, fewer people coming now than in the past. A sudden change of assignment may move them from a place where they worked with love and with results. They may feel tempted to rebel because the welfare of the souls entrusted to them until now seems to clash with the new will of God.... At a certain age they find they have less energy and feel unable to work like they did in the past.... The apostolic work is purified and with it the apostle himself.

As Jesus, so also the Oblate may have to face the supreme test, the test of faith. He no longer feels the closeness of God. He seems to lose sight of his horizon, until it disappears. As missionaries, we had set out with momentum to bring the faith and now we have no faith. We who wanted to make known the true God, no longer know Him. We, who wanted to save an atheistic world, find ourselves with atheism in our heart.

That is the path followed by Jesus. To take away the sin of the world he made himself sin. To give us God and make us god, he made himself without God. The effectiveness of missionary ministry reaches its climax at the very moment of helplessness, when we cannot do anything but accept the negative within and around us with the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world by taking it upon himself.

It is then that we understand and live in a new way some words of the Scriptures that we thought we already knew. We realize we carry the treasure of Christ's ministry "in earthen vessels, to make it clear that this extraordinary power comes from God and not from us" (2 Cor 4:7). At the same time we experience also the power of the Resurrection: "When I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor 12:10). "It is for this I struggle wearily on, helped only by his power driving me irresistibly" (Col 1:29). "I have the strength for everything through him who empowers me" (Phil 4:13).

Even in the midst of thousands of difficulties and problems we can live Paul's mystical experiences: Rm 8:35-39; 2 Cor 12:1-4; Gal 2:20.

It is our way to cooperate in the mission of Christ, completing in one's own flesh "what is lacking in Christ's afflictions on behalf of his body, which is the Church" (Col 1:24). Oblation finds its fulfillment in mission: to go to the brothers to whom we are sent and to love them that

they may have life, thus contributing to the building up of the body of Christ which is the Church.

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¹ November 3, 1831, *Oblate Writings*, I, 8, p. 40.

² The period of the Restoration was especially noted for parish missions. Besides the great Societies like the Missionaries of France and those of Laval, there were many other smaller ones. Provence and Lorraine were the most prolific regions. Cf. E. SEVRIN, *Les missions religieuses en France sous la Restauration (1815-1830)*, Paris, Procure des Prêtres de la Miséricorde, I, 1948, pp. 48-49. They preached close to 1,500 missions. The Missionaries of Provence preached 40 between 1818 and 1823. Cf. P. POUPARD, *Le Père de Mazenod et les premiers missionnaires de Provence (1816-1823)*, « Esprit de Vie », November 20, 1975, p. 687.

³ From my first study on St. Eugene de Mazenod I have always stressed this essential component for the growth and continuation of Oblate community. Cf. *Fisionomia e natura della comunità oblata nel periodo di fondazione (1815-1818)*, “Clar-etianum” 16 (1976), p. 173-275.

⁴ To Fr. Tempier, October 9, 1815, *Oblate Writings*, I, 6, p. 7.

⁵ To Fr. Tempier, December 13, 1815, *Oblate Writings*, I, 6, p. 13.

⁶ To Fr. Tempier, December 13, 1815, *Oblate Writings*, I, 6, p. 14.

⁷ Cf. Letter to Fr. Tempier, October 9, 1815, *Oblate Writings*, I, 6, p. 7.

⁸ Cf. Conference for the day of ordination (to the sub-diaconate), December 23, 1809, *Oblate Writings*, I, 14, p. 147-150.

⁹ Cf. Letter to L'Abbé de Forbin-Janson, October 28, 1814, *Oblate Writings*, I, 6, p. 3-4.

¹⁰ Cf. Letter to L'Abbé de Forbin-Janson, October 23, 1815 and July-August 1816, *Oblate Writings*, I, 6, p. 8-11, and 21-22.

¹¹ To L'Abbé de Forbin-Janson, October 9, 1816, *Oblate Writings*, I, 6, p. 23-24.

¹² To Fr. Hilaire Aubert, 1815, *Oblate Writings*, I, 6, p. 5.

¹³ *Mémoire justificatif*, T. RAMBERT, *Vie de Monseigneur Charles-Joseph-Eugène de Mazenod, évêque de Marseille, fondateur de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, I, Tours, Mame, 1883, p. 164.

¹⁴ *Constitutiones et Regulae*, Marseille, 1853, p. 145-146.

¹⁵ *Jansénisme*, 1806, Documents de Mazenod, OMI General Archives, Rome.

¹⁶ It is precisely from St. Julien that he makes known to his mother his intention of becoming a priest. “What the Lord wants of me is that ... I devote myself especially to his service and try to reawaken the faith that is becoming extinct amongst the poor; in a word, that I make myself available to carry out any orders he may wish to give me for his glory and the salvation of souls he has redeemed by his precious blood” (To Madame de Mazenod, June 29, 1808, *Oblate Writings*, I, 14, p. 55).

¹⁷ In a letter to encourage his friend Emmanuel Gaultier de Claubry who was having difficulty witnessing to his faith, Eugene – now 24 years old – offers him a series of Bible passages with this comment: “I have gathered together below some words of consolation that I have been careful to draw from the pure wellspring, in the book of life, that admirable code where all needs are foreseen, and remedies laid by. So it is by no means Eugene, it is Jesus Christ, it is Peter, Paul, John, etc., who send you this wholesome food which when received with that spirit of faith of which you are capable will certainly not be without effect” (November 1805, *Oblate Writings*, I, 14, p. 25). This letter shows a real familiarity with the Sacred Scriptures. Later during a retreat in October 1812 he refers to the practice of daily Scripture reading, which he must have already been doing for years, with this resolution: “I will read the Sacred Scripture for half an hour” (*Oblate Writings*, I, 15, p. 9). He will renew that resolution in his retreats in 1817, 1818, and 1824 (*Oblate Writings*, I, 15, p. 142, 154, 174). In the daily schedule that he proposes to follow as Bishop of Marseille he sets aside an hour a day for Scripture reading (“Daily Schedule”, *Oblate Writings*, I, 15, p. 242; “Daily Spiritual Exercises”, *Oblate Writings*, I, 15, p. 246). Based on his own experience he prescribes daily study of the Sacred Scriptures for his Oblates (*La Règle de saint Eugène de Mazenod / The Rule of Saint Eugene de Mazenod*, M. LESAGE and W.H. WOESTMAN, ed., Ottawa, Faculty of Canon Law, Saint Paul University, 1997, Part Two, Chapter Two, § 2, art. 2).

¹⁸ An unknown hand has written on the inside of the cover that Eugene de Mazenod “always had this New Testament with him and used it every day of his life”. (This book is in the museum at the Oblate General House in Rome.) There is still a small bookmark in the book on which one can read, “The New Testament has 25 chapters. Beginning the New Testament with the 1st chapter [and reading one] daily, the reading of the New Testament will be finished on September 7.”

¹⁹ To his father, May 24, 1805, *Oblate Writings*, I, 14, p. 17.

²⁰ To his father, August 14, 1805, *Oblate Writings*, I, 14, p. 19.

²¹ To Madame de Mazenod, February 4, 1809, *Oblate Writings*, I, 14, p. 96.

²² “I had intended to go and see grandmother in St. Julien, and I was thinking of giving a little instruction to these poor people who are so abandoned. I was already quite enjoying the idea of the fruit these instructions might produce. Poor Christians without the least idea of the dignity that is theirs, for want of meeting someone to break the bread of the Word.” (To Madame de Mazenod, July 3, 1810, *Oblate Writings*, I, 14, p. 163.)

²³ *Lettre-Circulaire... Au Clergé de son Diocèse, A l’occasion des dernières invasions dans les États de l’Église*, 14 October 1860, p. 2-3.

²⁴ *Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence. Premier manuscrit français*, Paul-Émile DUVAL, O.M.I., éd., *Écrits du Fondateur*, O.M.I. General House, Rome, fasc. 1, 1951, p. 16.

²⁵ To his father, Charles Antoine de Mazenod, in Palermo, from Aix, 1 May 1816, RAMBERT, *Vie de Monseigneur Charles-Joseph-Eugène de Mazenod*, I, p. 180.

²⁶ *Lettre-Circulaire... Au Clergé de son Diocèse, A l’occasion des dernières invasions dans les États de l’Église*, 14 October 1860, p. 2-3.

²⁷ Fr. Fernand Jetté interpreted the Oblate charism in the light of this attitude of St. Eugene: “The Oblate charism is first of all, a view, a love and faith filled view, of the world and the Church, a view which lets us see things that others miss and to hear appeals to which others are oblivious. I look at people and am struck by their suffer-

ings, their poverty... I perceive such suffering profoundly and suffer from it as though it were my own. And beyond it and through it I perceive another kind of suffering infinitely more serious: ignorance of Jesus Christ. How many people there are among the poor especially, who do not know Jesus Christ, who cannot believe in his love, because there is no one there to show them the way! It is in such a perspective that the Oblate sees people and sees the Church, which has the commission to gather all people in Jesus Christ. It is thus, too, that he sees priests who are the ministers of Jesus Christ in the work of gathering and saving. Such a vision of faith – his view of the Church and the world – cannot leave him indifferent. It triggers in him an efficacious will to give himself totally in order thereby to dare all, to undertake anything so as to free men from their suffering and to show them who Christ is and the meaning of their own dignity in Jesus Christ.” (*The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate. Addresses and Written Texts, 1975-1985*, General House, Rome, p. 57-58.)

²⁸ Jetté compared de Mazenod’s *Preface* to the CC&RR with another 1809 work of de Lamennais: *Réflexions sur l’état de l’Église en France pendant le dix-huitième siècle et sur sa situation actuelle*: Cf. *The Apostolic Man, Commentary on the 1982 Constitution and Rules*, General House, Rome, 1992, p. 18-24.

²⁹ “The abandoned state in which I saw the Church was one of the determining factors for my entering the ecclesiastical state,” he writes some years later in his memoirs. “During my seminary years I nurtured the idea of making myself as useful as possible to our mother the Church for which the Lord had always given me a filial affection.” (*Mémoire justificatif*, in RAMBERT, *Vie de Monseigneur Charles-Joseph-Eugène de Mazenod*, I, p. 161.)

³⁰ December 23, 1809, *Oblate Writings*, I, 14, p. 147-150.

³¹ *La Règle di saint Eugène de Mazenod*, p. 14.

³² *Constitutions and Rules*, 1982, C 4.

³³ Good Friday of 1807 remains a symbol of that encounter. Cf. J. PIELORZ, *Vendredi Saint de 1807, mythe ou réalité?*, “*Vie Oblate Life*” 56 (1997), p. 13-45; L. Paquet, *La conversion d’Eugène de Mazenod*, «*Vie Oblate Life*» 58 (1999), p. 403-427; G. MAMMANA, *Le vendredi saint d’Eugène de Mazenod*, “*Vie Oblate Life*” 58 (1999), p. 539-557.

³⁴ Through this experience of compassion the Oblates today continue to hear the call of Christ who sends them to “the poor with their many faces”. It is from this charismatic view, fruit of the action of the Holy Spirit, that is born the drive “to go to the most abandoned.” (*Constitutions and Rules*, 1982, C 5). This is the characteristic of the typical missionary aspect of the Oblate charism. Compassion and the resultant “commotion” – [being deeply moved] – are still today the driving force of the mission.

³⁵ *La Règle di saint Eugène de Mazenod*, p. 14-15.

³⁶ October 28, 1814, *Oblate Writings*, I, 6, p. 3.

³⁷ The Request addressed to the Capitular Vicars General of Aix requesting approval for this initiative shows that he and his companions “were deeply moved by the deplorable situation of the small towns and villages of Provence that have almost completely lost the faith” and had “experienced the hardness of heart and indifference of these people.” As a result they find “insufficient” and even “useless” the “ordinary help” offered by the diocesan administration. At the same time they are convinced that “missions are the only means by which these people who have gone astray can be brought back out of their degradation.” (*Request of Authorization addressed to the Capitular Vicars General of Aix in Writings of the Founder*, Paul-Emile DUVAL, O.M.I.,

ed., OMI General House, Rome, fasc. 4, 1952, p. 269)

³⁸ During his retreat in 1824 he read again the works of these two authors and notes in his diary: “Blessed Liguori and Blessed Leonard of Port Maurice were the main object of all these valuable readings. I retraced with consolation the main moments of the life of the latter reminding myself that, eight or nine years ago, this same reading (...) had maybe induced me (...) to follow the same path, to carry out the same ministry.” (*Oblate Writings*, I, 15, p. 172).

³⁹ Cf. A. Rey, *Histoire de Monseigneur Charles-Joseph-Eugène de Mazenod fondateur de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée...*, Rome, General House, Vol. I, p. 100.

⁴⁰ “Your plan is without a doubt good, but first of all you should think of your neighbors. *Maxime autem ad domesticos fidei*. There is a need especially in France of missions for the people and retreats for the clergy.” (*Mémoire justificatif*, RAMBERT, *Vie de Monseigneur Charles-Joseph-Eugène de Mazenod*, I, p. 162-163) There is an early inkling of this ministry during his seminary days. Writing to his mother about his future ministry he says: “It is in Aix and within the diocese I shall be working, and as I am quite resolved never, directly or indirectly, to make the least move towards becoming a bishop, in my whole lifetime I will not be budging anywhere, except to go and spend some months preaching missions in the countryside, which will be my summer holidays.” (To Madame de Mazenod, April 6, 1809, *Oblate Writings*, I, 14, p. 118).

⁴¹ This is described first of all in the Rules of 1818 and later in those of 1826. Of crucial importance is the report de Mazenod wrote about the first missions: *Journal de la mission de Marignane*, “Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée” 4 (1865), p. 276-286. Of much interest also is the letter to Fr. Guigues on November 5, 1837 in which he speaks of the main exercises that were to take place during the missions (Cf. *Oblate Writings*, I, 9, p. 71-74). See also, J. PIELORZ, *Premières missions des Missionnaires de Provence (1816-1823)*, “Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée” 82 (1955), p. 549-560, 644-655; M. NOGARET, *La mission d’après Mgr. de Mazenod*, “Vie Oblate Life” 37 (1978), p. 3-17; F. CIARDI, *The Apostolate of the Parish Missions in the Work of Blessed Eugene de Mazenod and in the Oblate Charism*, “Vie Oblate Life” 41 (1982), p. 87-100; E. LAMIRANDE, *À propos des premières missions d’Eugène de Mazenod et de ses confrères (1916-1823)*, “Vie Oblate Life” 6 (2001), p. 229-262, 61 (2002), p. 95-129; F. SANTUCCI, *Eugene de Mazenod Co-operator of Christ the Saviour, Communicates his Spirit*, Rome, AERO, 2004, p. 129-204.

⁴² On the relation of Eugene de Mazenod with Jansenism, Cf. A. D’ADDIO, *Cristo Crocifisso e la Chiesa abbandonata. Eugenio de Mazenod: un appassionato di Cristo e della Chiesa*, Frascati 1978 (Quaderni di Vermicino, 5), p. 172-173; É. LAMIRANDE, *Église et sacerdoce dans la formation d’Eugène de Mazenod*, “Vie Oblate Life” 55 (1966), p. 57-61; Y. BEAUDOIN, *Jansenism*, in *Historical Dictionary of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, I, Rome, AERO, 2004.

⁴³ Cf. G. ORLANDI, *St. Eugene de Mazenod, a Supporter of St. Alphonsus Liguori’s Moral Theology*, “Vie Oblate Life” 63 (2004), p. 296-300.

⁴⁴ B. MATTEUCCI, *Il Giansenismo*, Studium, Roma 1954, p. 179.

⁴⁵ Letter to his father, July 15 and 16, 1803.

⁴⁶ *Jansénisme*, 1806, Documents de Mazenod, Oblate General Archives, Rome.

He also wrote: "I must add that attached as I am by bonds of blood and friendship with one of the most enlightened of Jansenists and one who is at the same time one of the most obstinate of them, I often engage in conversation with him about these matters."

⁴⁷ *Oblate Writings*, I, 14, p. 27-28. See also the letter to his mother of December 14, 1810, *Oblate Writings*, I, 14, p. 168-169.

⁴⁸ *Comédie du cimetière*, 1806, Documents de Mazenod, OMI General Archives, Rome.

⁴⁹ In the margin he refers to S. Camus.

⁵⁰ December 3, 1810, *Oblate Writings*, I, 14, p. 166-168.

⁵¹ Letter to his sister, December 4, 1808, *Oblate Writings*, I, 14, p. 76, and letter to his mother, December 14, 1810, *Oblate Writings*, I, 14, p. 168. Cf. F. CIARDI, *L'Eucharistie dans l'action pastorale du Bx de Mazenod*, "Vie Oblate Life" 38 (1979), p. 39-50; *L'Eucarestia nella vita e nel pensiero di Eugenio de Mazenod*, "Claretianum" 19 (1979) 259-289; *Eugenio de Mazenod. La mia vita con Gesù Eucaristia*, a cura di F. CIARDI, Editrice Missionari OMI, Roma 2005, 96 p.

⁵² Claude Langlois writes: "The introduction of the moral theology of St. Alphonsus de Liguori was perhaps one of the elements that most changed the religious feeling in France. It was one of the most important events for pastoral practice. The purpose of this new theology was to bring down the "barriers between Christians and the frequent reception of the sacraments." In fact it clashed with the moral rigorism of confessors and reduced the consequences of their narrow-minded practice of refusing to give absolution. This new theology emerged gradually. From the South of Italy it spread into France, where Mazenod and his Oblates were its promoters. (*Histoire des catholiques en France : du XVI^e siècle à nos jours*, edited by François LEBRUN, Paris, Hachette, [1985], p. 340). For de Mazenod's contribution, Cf. G. ORLANDI, *St. Eugene de Mazenod, a Supporter of St. Alphonsus Liguori's Moral Theology*, "Vie Oblate Life" 63 (2004), p. 291-308; J. GUERBER, *Le ralliement du clergé français à la morale liguorienne. L'abbé Gousset et ses précurseurs (1785-1832)*, Roma, Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1973 (Analecta Gregoriana 193). The oldest studies are those of L. DELPEUCH, *Saint Alphonse de Liguori et Eugène de Mazenod*, "Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée", 14 (1876), p. 203-212; É. LAMIRANDE, *M^{gr} de Mazenod et la morale de saint Alphonse*, "Études Oblates" 16 (1957), p. 287-288. There is a very good synthesis by J. PIELORZ, *Alphonse de Liguori*, in *Historical Dictionary of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, II, Rome, AERO, 2009, p. 19.

⁵³ Cf. J. LEFLON, *Eugene de Mazenod, Bishop of Marseille, Founder of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (1782-1861)*, I, Paris, Plon, 1957, p. 350, 354.

⁵⁴ To Charles Antoine de Mazenod, May 1, 1816, *Oblate Writings*, I, 13, p. 6.

⁵⁵ The complete text is worth reading: "'The more you are in the world, the more you need help', says the Venerable Liguori, who by the way was going to be beatified just when Rome's hour of desolation arrived: 'the more you need help because you have greater temptations. So make it a rule to receive holy communion every eight days, (This is found in the programme he outlines for people obliged to live in the world.) with the firm resolve never to omit it on account of any worldly business; for there is no business more important for you than your eternal salvation'. This holy Bishop, who only wrote his works after exercising the ministry for 28 years, seems to link eternal salvation to this frequency of holy communion, and he is not wrong, for it is the opinion of all the saints

who have written best on this question, and the custom of the early Christians (who had their imperfections just like ourselves) is evident proof that that was the intention of Our Saviour which was handed down to them by the Apostles. You are aware that the early Christians received communion every day, which did not stop them having, or to express it better, even though they had their little quarrels, jealousies, in a word their imperfections as we see in Acts and in St. Paul's letters, and also from what the holy fathers tell us on the matter." (July 12, 1809, *Oblate Writings*, I, 14, p. 130)

⁵⁶ To Charles Antoine de Mazenod, 1 May 1816, *Oblate Writings*, I, 13, p. 6.

⁵⁷ Cf. J. PIELORZ, *Le rôle du Fondateur dans la publication de la première biographie française de S. Alphonse de Liguori*, "Études Oblats" 18 (1959), p. 163-180.

⁵⁸ To scholastic Alexandre-Marie Pons, January 28, 1839, *Oblate Writings*, I, 7, p. 195.

⁵⁹ G. SIMONIN, *Chronique de la Maison du Laus (1818-1841)*, "Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée" 35 (1897), p. 363-364.

⁶⁰ Cf. J. GERVAIS, *Mercy*, in *Dictionary of Oblate Values*, Rome, AOSR, 1996, p. 580-596. There is a valuable overview of the topic in the study by S. FRANCO, *Ministri di misericordia. Il ministero della misericordia e la rigenerazione della persona umana nel carisma di Sant'Eugenio de Mazenod e dei Missionari Oblati di Maria Immacolata*, Napoli, Editrice Missionari OMI, [2009].

⁶¹ December 13, 1840, *Oblate Writings*, I, 9, 158.

⁶² Cf. *Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence*, p. 15. There is an abundant bibliography on this aspect of St. Eugene's spirituality. I note the following: H. GRATTON, *La dévotion salvatorienne du Fondateur. Aux premières années de son sacerdoce. Essai psychologique d'après ses écrits*, "Études Oblates", 1 (1942), p. 158-171; È. LAMIRANDE, *Le sang du Sauveur. Un thème central de la doctrine spirituelle de Mgr De Mazenod*, "Études Oblates" 18 (1959), p. 363-381; M. BOBICHON, *Passionné d'amour pour Jésus-Christ*, "Vie Oblate Life" 36 (1977), p. 93-102; A. D'ADDIO, *Cristo Crocifisso e la Chiesa abbandonata, o.c.*; M- HUGLES, *Jésus Christ dans la spiritualité du Fondateur*, "Vie Oblate Life" 55 (1966), p. 379-430; F. SANTUCCI, *Eugene de Mazenod Co-operator of Christ the Saviour, Communicates his Spirit*, Rome, AERO, 2004.

⁶³ To Mgr Allard, June 11, 1855, *Oblate Writings*, I, 4, 199.

⁶⁴ The present Rules (1982) stress the centrality of the cross. "It is a constant reminder of the love of the Saviour who wishes to draw all hearts to himself and send us out as his co-workers." (C 63)

⁶⁵ This tradition has remained steadfast throughout the history of the Congregation. The testimonies are numerous. It is enough to mention the construction of the Basilica of Montmartre, the spread of devotion to the Sacred Heart around this shrine, the work and writings of Alfred Yenveux, Jean-Baptiste Lemius, Félix Anizan, Victor Lelièvre.... Cf. L.-N. BOUTIN, *La spiritualité de Mgr de Mazenod*, Montréal, Rayonnement, 1970, p. 57-61; R. MOTTE, *Sacred Heart*, in *Dictionary of Oblate Values*, p. 811-821.

⁶⁶ It is significant that St. Eugene prescribed the hymn *Sub tuum praesidium* as a kind of official prayer for the Oblates.

⁶⁷ Cf. È. LAMIRANDE, *L'apostolat des pèlerinages et Mgr de Mazenod*, "Études Oblates" 21 (1962) 41-56. In the Act of Visitation of the Notre-Dame du Laus community, in praise of the ministry of confessions to which the priests devoted themselves with zeal, St. Eugene writes : "Hence, an ever-increasing crowd of faithful run to the

feet of our good Mother, assured that they will meet on the steps of the earthly throne of Heaven's Queen, zealous ministers of her divine Son, specially entrusted with reconciling sinners, for whom this Mother of mercy asks for pardon and peace through her powerful protection. Hence too, there is a renewed fervour among so many pious people." (*Selected Texts*, Rome, 1985, No. 103) We have numerous testimonials of his trust in the Mother of Mercy. One example is the description of what the cholera epidemic in Marseille caused: "An explosion of devotion to the Holy Virgin.... My heart bursts amid this very wonderful devotion." (Letter to his mother, March 10, 1835, *Oblate Writings*, I, 15, p. 222). See also, H. NSOLO, *Aux origines de la dimension mariale du charisme des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée (1782-1861)*, Rome 2012.

⁶⁸ Cf. É LAMIRANDE, *L'annonce de la Parole de Dieu selon Mgr de Mazenod*, "Études Oblates" 18 (1959), p. 105-126; P. SION, *L'évangélisation dans les différentes éditions de nos Constitutions et Règles*, "Vie Oblate Life" 36 (1977), p. 103-126.

⁶⁹ January 17, 1849, *Oblate Writings*, I, 4, p. 166.

⁷⁰ *Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence*, p. 35-36.

⁷¹ *Homily instructions in Provençal, given at the church of the Madeleine in 1813. Notes for the preliminary instruction*, March 3, Ash Wednesday, *Oblate Writings*, I, 15, p. 114.

⁷² December 18, 1836, *Oblate Writings*, I, 8, p. 265.

⁷³ Cf. SEVRIN, *Les missions religieuses en France sous la Restauration (1815-1830)*, I, p. 161.

⁷⁴ *Journal de la mission de Marignane*, "Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée" 4 (1865) p. 278-279.

⁷⁵ To Fr. Courtès, March 12, 1825, *Oblate Writings*, I, 6, p. 166.

⁷⁶ July 1816, *Oblate Writings*, I, 6, p. 20.

⁷⁷ *Colloquial instruction on confession, preached in Provençal, on the fourth Sunday of Lent*, March 28, 1813, *Oblate Writings*, I, 15, p. 47.

⁷⁸ To Charles Antoine de Mazenod, May, 1, 1816, *Oblate Writings*, I, 13, p. 5.

⁷⁹ To M. Figon, October 5, 1822, *Oblate Writings*, I, 13, p. 58.

⁸⁰ To the pastor of Brignoles, August 23, 1821, *Oblate Writings*, I, 13, p. 54.

⁸¹ *Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence*, p. 36-37.

⁸² *Histoire de Monseigneur Charles-Joseph-Eugène de Mazenod*, I, p. 158. In his *Diary*, under the entry for July 14, 1837, St. Eugene notes the details of this episode which remained indelibly fixed in his mind. Cf. *Oblate Writings*, I, 18, p. 211-212.

⁸³ "I did not only administer Confirmation to the poor condemned man, but to sanction by my example the principles I have upheld, I gave him Communion during the Mass I celebrated in the small prison chapel in the presence of the prisoners, all of whom wept together with the condemned person and the other attendants, at the two sermons I saw fit to give, one before Communion and the other after the Confirmation. Father Lagier promised me that he would follow my example, and that on the day the condemned person is to die he would say Mass in the prison and once again give him Holy Communion. May God be blessed!" (To Tempier, July 18, 1837, *Oblate Writings*, I, 9, 45-46.)

⁸⁴ Cf. *Diary*, July 14 and 16, 1837, *Oblate Writings*, I, 18, p. 211-212; 215.

⁸⁵ "You have made a very great mistake in refusing Jouve Holy Communion.... I thought you were more loyal to my teachings which are those of the Church. You could not have forgotten what I have done at the execution of Germaine. Quite recently the

Quotidienne and so many other newspapers informed you what I did at Gap. Hence you have become a real weakling and I must tell you that you have greatly sinned.... Even if you had been interdicted afterwards, because you were in charge of his soul, your duty was to have him fulfil his obligation from which no power could dispense him.... Don't forget to confess repentantly the fault of which I accuse you and express the firm purpose of amendment. I am speaking to you very seriously" (To Fr. Courtès, October 11, 1837, *Oblate Writings*, I, 9, p. 64-65).

⁸⁶ Letter to the Bishop of Digne, in REY, *Histoire de Monseigneur Charles-Joseph-Eugène de Mazenod...*, II, p. 244.

⁸⁷ To Fr. Guigues, February 20, 1837, *Oblate Writings*, I, 9, p. 14.

⁸⁸ *Dictionary of Oblate Values*, p. 813.

⁸⁹ Notes made during the retreat in Amiens, December 1811, in preparation for the priesthood, *Oblate Writings*, I, 14, p. 213ff. He had expressed himself in a similar way earlier in the spiritual conference he gave to his companions at the seminary, March 19, 1809. "I will proclaim the mercy of God: *Confitebor tibi, Domine Deus meus, in toto corde meo, et glorificabo animam tuam in aeternum quia misericordia tua magna est super me* [Ps 85:12-13]; because he has used the treasures of his grace for me. *Misericors et miserator Dominus, patiens et multum misericors* [Ps 144:8]. (*Oblate Writings*, I, 14, p. 107). During his 1814 retreat he writes: "Blessed, a thousand times blessed, that he, this good Father, notwithstanding my unworthiness, lavished on me all the richness of his mercy. Let me at least make up for lost time by redoubling my love for him. May all my actions, thoughts, etc., be directed to that end. What more glorious occupation than to act in everything and for everything only for God, to love him above all else, to love him all the more as one who has loved him too late." (*Oblate Writings*, I, 15, p. 81)

⁹⁰ Quoted by B. Dullier, *Saint Eugene de Mazenod (1782-1861) Bishop of Marseille (1837-1861)*, OMI Documentation, No. 283.

⁹¹ *Preface*, As mentioned earlier, for St. Eugene, to be "truly apostolic men" means to be "saints", as he wrote to Tempier even before starting a community. "We ourselves must be truly saints. That sums up all that can be said." (December 13, 1815, *Oblate Writings*, I, 6, p. 13) Cf. F. CIARDI, «*In nome di Dio siamo santi*». *Il progetto di santità di Eugenio de Mazenod*, "Rivista di vita spirituale" 49 (1995), p. 737-767; *Holiness*, in *Dictionary of Oblate Values*, Rome, AERO, 1996, p. 378-401.

SUMMARY: What was the secret of the small Society of the Missionaries of Provence that made it different from the forty or so other similar institutes born in France in the same period? The originality was above all to have well developed the subject of the mission. For St. Eugene the idea of the mission is tied inseparably to that of the apostolic man, and of an apostolic community, one able to bring together the life of holiness, of unity and of evangelical proclamation of the apostles and their disciples. The article looks at the methodology of Oblate mission according to the experience of the founder: Reading the "signs of the times", that moves one have to compassion, welcoming and promoting Alphonsian Moral Theology, mov-

ing away from Jansenism. This brings the missionaries to a “compassionate heart” for sinners, to become instruments of God’s mercy, teaching Christ by touching the heart. At the root of this attitude of mercifulness there is the experience of mercy. The ultimate aim of the Oblate’s mission is to lead to holiness the people to whom he is sent. At the same time the mission leads the missionary himself to holiness, an “apostolic holiness”.

RÉSUMÉ: Missionnaires: Des hommes appelés à la sainteté et à conduire les autres à la sainteté – Quel était le secret de la petite Société de Missionnaires de Provence qui l’ont conduit à être différente parmi une quarantaine d’autres instituts similaires nées en France à la même période ? L’originalité est surtout d’avoir bien développé l’idée de la mission. Pour saint Eugène, l’idée de la mission est liée indissolublement à celle de l’homme apostolique, et d’une communauté apostolique, capable d’assembler la vie de sainteté, d’unité, jointe à la proclamation évangélique des apôtres et de leurs disciples. L’article s’intéresse à la méthodologie de la mission oblate selon l’expérience du fondateur : savoir lire les «signes des temps», être mêlé de compassion, accueillir et promouvoir la théologie morale Alphonsienne, tout en s’éloignant du jansénisme. Ceci développe chez les missionnaires un «cœur compatissant» pour les pécheurs, afin de devenir instruments de la miséricorde de Dieu, et d’enseigner le Christ en touchant le cœur. À l’origine de cette attitude miséricordieuse, il y a l’expérience de la miséricorde. Le but ultime de la mission de l’oblat est de conduire à la sainteté les personnes à qui il est envoyé. En accomplissant cette mission, le missionnaire lui-même est orienté vers la sainteté, une «sainteté apostolique».

RESUMEN: Misioneros: Hombres llamados a la Santidad y a conducir a otros a la Santidad –¿Cuál fue el secreto de la pequeña Sociedad de los Misioneros de Provenza que la ha diferenciado de los cerca de otros cuarenta institutos, más o menos similares, que nacieron en Francia en el mismo período? La originalidad fue, por encima de todo, tener bien desarrollado el sujeto de la misión. Para S. Eugenio la idea de misión está inseparablemente unida a la de hombre apostólico, y a la de comunidad apostólica, capaz de aunar la vida de santidad, de unidad y la proclamación evangélica de los apóstoles y sus discípulos. El artículo estudia la metodología de la misión Oblata de acuerdo con la experiencia del Fundador: Leer los “signos de los tiempos”, lo que lleva a la compasión y a acoger y promover la Teología Moral de S. Alfonso María de Ligorio, alejándole, al mismo tiempo, del Jansenismo. Esto lleva a los misioneros

a tener “un corazón compasivo” ante los pecadores, a ser instrumentos de la Misericordia de Dios, enseñando a Jesucristo, tocando los corazones. En la base de esta actitud de compasión se encuentra la experiencia de misericordia. El fin último de la misión Oblata es conducir a la santidad al pueblo al que se es enviado. Al mismo tiempo la misión lleva al mismo misionero a alcanzar la misma santidad, una “santidad apostólica”.

OBLATE CHARISM IN THE MISSION *AD GENTES*

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At the beginning of his apostolic journey, St. Eugene de Mazenod stressed that the addressees of Oblate preaching must not only be Christians who need spiritual guidance, the abandoned, people going through a crisis or people experiencing difficulties but also those who have already rejected God, lost their faith and cut ties with the Church. Therefore it is not just about the pastoral care of parishes which includes the traditional form of missions, but in terms of kerygma and spreading the faith.

The Founder insisted that Oblates try to fully imitate the Apostles and make an apostle of Christ out of everyone they go out and meet. The original concept of pastoral care with which St. Eugene founded the Missionaries of Provence has evolved, altered, grown and been changed according to the current needs of the people to whom the Church has sent missionaries. The Founder's response became fuller and more mature with time. Its full form can be found in the adoption of the mission *ad gentes* – the mission to non-Christians.

THE MISSIONARY COMMUNITY

The traditional historiography of the mission often focused on individuals described as “outstanding missionaries”. It is important to ask: how do we recognize someone's “excellence”? Does it depend on your teaching outcomes (i.e. number of baptisms), or maybe the merits received from involvement in organizations, as these are also very important in missionary work? Perhaps “excellence” is one's intellectual legacy, or – a very important criteria – life and personal holiness? It seems that all these criteria are important. When analyzing the history of missionary activity in the spirit of the charism of St. Eugene, we encounter outstanding individuals fulfilling all of the above mentioned criteria. However, the most success – using this inadequate and secu-

lar expression (because how can you talk about success in missionary work) – achieved by Oblates has not been reached as individuals but as a community.

Yes, one can list individual names and regard them as the pride of the Congregation. However when we compare the numbers and merits of similar religious congregations, it turns out that Oblates are “somewhere in the middle” – they achieve more than some missionary societies, but also less than other orders. The articles collected in this volume indicate this Oblate “center”, even from the very beginning of the birth of the charism. There is talk of extremes in the character, origin and spiritual road of St. Eugene, which he tried to balance, and which was an extension of the style of ministry and practical experience of the first Oblates.

Therefore, it is important to look at Oblates who work as a group in a specific project (i.e. Missiology group in Rome) or in a given territory. Oblates are identified much faster by a particular region rather than by individual surnames. Therefore it is Oblates working in Canada, Sri Lanka, the United States of America, South Africa (the oldest and “traditional” Oblate mission), or more recently north Cameroon, and other countries (presently a total of over 60).

This idea is also reflected in the thoughts of the Founder. It can be seen in his letter to Fr. Stephen Semeria (1813-1868), the director of the first Oblate mission to Ceylon, and later a very distinguished Apostolic Vicar of Jaffna¹. There was a suggestion to send only those excellently prepared, someone like St. Francis Xavier or in other words a “super-missionary”. St. Eugene responded that we should not disregard those he has sent, even if they have some trouble in the beginning. Just because someone is not as perfect as St. Francis Xavier does not mean that they cannot accomplish great things in the missions. If missionaries had an option - either to be outstanding or to not be involved at all – it would simply result in discouragement.

St. Eugene had exceptional understanding when it came to the work of his missionaries in foreign countries, and he believed that *ad gentes* ministry is not every Oblate’s vocation. Here we can see his hands-on approach, and the search for the “golden mean”. In his opinion, a missionary overseas must have a special vocation for this type of work, and should accept it with gratitude. The Founder himself, in contrast to many other general superiors of religious orders at that time, did not force any-

one to accept an obedience to a mission overseas. He insisted, cajoled, even sometimes very strongly, but never forced anyone, because he felt that this is a specific vocation, and its effectiveness depends on the spontaneous acceptance of such ministry with an open heart.

In his instructions on foreign missions, written in 1850 and published three years later, after the General Chapter, which adapted Oblate religious rules to the new reality (the growth of the Congregation after the adoption of the mission *ad gentes*), we see once again the ability of St. Eugene to continually develop the elements of the charism, already found from the beginnings. The traits of a candidate for an *ad gentes* mission, as expressed by the Founder of the Oblates, can be summarized in three points: he must be a man open to God, that is, to have zeal to spread the faith; at the same time, he has to be someone open to others (outgoing, full of mercy, good will, open and direct); and finally he must possess certain physical traits such as a high tolerance for pain, good health, be well-built and be willing to accept primitive living conditions.

What does this mean? The conclusion is simple – a missionary cannot be someone with superhuman abilities. He must love God, others, and be ready to endure some physical difficulties.

A SPECIFIC MISSIONARY OBLATE CHARISM?

In the text that speaks about the Oblate missionary method, (in terms of parish missions: see the present issue of **Oblatio**), Fr. Fabio Ciardi points out that besides the Missionaries of Provence – later, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate – a number of other congregations that were formed during the Restoration in France, were dedicated to traditional missions. A comparable situation occurred in the case of the charism of missions *ad gentes*. In the nineteenth century, during the missionary revival, a number of congregations were formed that were both fully or partially, geared towards foreign missions. Several dozen, if not hundreds, can be named, such as: the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary - 1805, the Pallottines - 1835, the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Mary - 1862, the Divine Word - 1875 etc. Their founders had similar desires as St. Eugene – to work with the poor, and convert the Gentiles (in accordance with the language at the time) – while adding more specific matters based on the individual

specialization of the congregation. Many of these institutes still exist today. A majority were formed in France – two thirds of missionaries *ad gentes* in the nineteenth century came from this country.

One might ask a similar question as the one above posed by Fr. Ciardi. Can we really talk about a specific – missionary – Oblate charism? Perhaps it is just the living faith and passion for evangelization that the Founder passed on to his spiritual sons, and they passed on to the next regions and provinces, to the present day?

If we look at today's reality of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, we can see how much they differ from one other in various parts of the world. Despite frequent references, the search for a common charism and identity, nothing changes the fact that Oblates are very different, even in some fundamental issues – the way they live their faith and their style of evangelization. The thing that unites them most is their Founder, even more than their lifestyle or way of evangelization.

Once again, we return to the evolution of thought of the Oblate Founder when referring to religious life. Following the profession of final vows, St. Eugene believed that religious and community life was the first most important element of Oblate life. There was an emphasis on all religious practices and fulfilling them regularly. With time, however, the practice of religious life and personal sanctification became less of a goal in and of itself, and became more about giving witness and an integral part of evangelization.

Concentrating on community life, the Founder stressed that, especially in difficult missions, Oblates live in at least groups of two. The preached Word was supposed to be verified by community life. Knowing that this was not always possible, he accepted that there will be exceptions to this rule. He stressed however, in one of his instructions, that wherever in the world missionaries are working, they must never forget that the further away they are from their fellow Oblates, the more they must desire and strive for excellence. They must be attached to their religious responsibilities and regular practices of Christian piety, especially when they are deprived of the benefits of community life.

Once again we see the Founder's thought process, and his remarkable pragmatism. Fr. Eugene was always sensitive and open to what the missionaries had to say and often times, under the influence of their stories, letters and meetings with them, (he would sometimes spend a

whole night talking to an Oblate bishop or just any Oblate), he would change his opinion on various issues.

A REAL EXAMPLE OF LIVING THE CHARISM

Ad gentes missions lead by Oblates first began in Canada, especially in the far north and west. After hearing the call of the Bishop of Montreal, Ignatius Bourget, St. Eugene invited all Oblates to make a decision. There were 40 Fathers and 5 Brothers at the time. All voted in favor of accepting the invitation to begin missionary activity, and making preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles equal to parish ministry in the Congregation. That is how the Oblate journey to the ends of the world began.

After arriving in 1841, the Oblates in Canada initially worked with francophone descendants from the former French colony, for example, in Montreal and surrounding areas, or in Bytown, later called Ottawa. They would make their way to lumber camps, which used rivers to travel to work in the vast Canadian forests, often forming groups of up to 500 people who would spend the entire winter in the woods. In 1844, Oblates began regular missionary trips to the Montagnais tribe on the right bank of the St. Lawrence river, and to the Iroquois south of Montreal. However, the true epic Oblate missions began in north-west Canada after 1845. A few years later, a young Oblate, Alexandre Taché, was appointed Bishop of St. Boniface, a diocese formed shortly before, which encompassed hundreds of thousands of square kilometers of prairie, subarctic forests and the arctic tundra. It was there that legendary Oblates distinguished themselves: Vital Justin Grandin, Albert Lacombe (in organizational-pastoral care), Adrien-Gabriel Morice, Émile Petitot (in linguistic and anthropological studies), and among Poles, the Servant of God Brother Anthony Kowalczyk, and very dedicated Fr. Leon Mokwa. Although these names are individually mentioned, the evangelization of western and northern Canada is the collective work of Oblates, which throughout history has included hundreds of religious.

Another similar Oblate “collective hero” are the missionaries in the territory of Oregon, and other regions of the United States, and from 1847, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), where in the twentieth century the Oblate Cardinal Thomas Cooray distinguished himself, and is currently a candidate for sainthood. From Polish Oblates working in Sri Lanka, it

is worth recalling Fr. Andrew Cierpka about whom much interesting material is still waiting to be published.

After a failed attempt to start missionary work in Algeria, another group of Oblates, still during the founder's lifetime, in 1852, travelled to Natal in South Africa. Interestingly, the first group of missionaries endured quite a bit of suffering at the hands of Fr. Jean-Francois Allard, a novice master from Canada, who was a person full of scruples and who put too much emphasis on sanctifying religious practices, to the detriment of a missionary dynamism. This created much discouragement, and even resulted in cases of abandoning missionary ministry and priesthood. Around the same time, there appeared a prominent missionary figure, Blessed Fr. Joseph Gerard (1831-1914) who, despite a failed mission among the Zulu, paved the way for the evangelization of Lesotho, which Oblates today identify with as much as northern Canada.

The Founder, as always, listening to the reports of missionaries, emphasized and encouraged that during the initial period, Oblates not engage in traditional ministry but have missionary zeal. He cautioned Bishop Allard, Apostolic Vicar, more or less in these words: "It seems to me that you are acting like a European bishop. You are a spiritual authority and administrator but not a father and a shepherd. Elsewhere, the Vicar Apostolic preaches the Gospel on a par with missionaries, assumes new ministries and passes them on to missionaries, is a leader, an inspirer of missionary work." In line with the vision of Saint. Eugene, a superior should develop a plan for missionary work, and persevere in the determination to preach the Gospel in the local language. Therefore, the next word of criticism from the Founder to Allard concerned language. "Six months is enough time for an Oblate in Canada to learn the Indian language and an Oblate in Ceylon to learn the Sinhalese language, but you have still not learned Zulu."

CONCLUSION

Thus, although in this short summary and reflection there appear the names of "distinguished" missionaries, we must place greater emphasis on Oblates as a "collective hero" in the *ad gentes* mission. Let the last example of this be from relatively recent times. In 1947, a group of 15 Oblates arrived in northern Cameroon and Chad, beginning the pioneering work of evangelization. They began to build a local church

from scratch. Today, in this vast and densely populated area, there exist five dioceses, the foundations of which were laid by Oblates. Once again, we can point out outstanding individuals, for example the Archbishop of Garoua, Yves Plumey, murdered in Cameroon in 1991. Ultimately, however, the collective evangelization effort of all Oblates overshadows even outstanding individuals. What was important in their case, and simultaneously manifesting the essence of the Oblate charism, is the fact that they searched for a response to the call of the Church and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in a collective effort.

As previously mentioned, St. Eugene himself was open to this collective search, thanks to which in the last ten years of his life, the Oblate Congregation was already present on all continents. Bishop Eugene was amazed by the growth of his initially small flock, whose first years in Aix-en-Provence were extremely modest. When he asked himself what he did to create this dynamic development of the Congregation, he had to admit that it was virtually nothing – he simply did not oppose the signs of God and was submissive to God. What were the criteria for recognizing the will of God? – the needs of the Church and of people. The Founder rushed to help with these needs. The rapid growth of the Congregation required modification of many rules which needed to be adapted to new conditions, and the division of the congregation into provinces was done by the General Chapter. There was a clear decentralization where local superiors, or Provincials, received many powers previously reserved for the Superior general and his Council. Decentralization, however, could not destroy the unity of the Congregation. The acts of the General Chapter of 1850, read: “Remember that all Oblates, united by one brotherly love and under the leadership of their superiors, must be characterized as one soul and one heart.” This also guided future generations of outstanding Oblates towards caring for a collective involvement of the whole Congregation.

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¹ E. de Mazenod to S. Semeria, November 19, 1851, *Oblate Writings*, I, 4, p. 82.

SUMMARY – Traditional missionary historiography privileged major missionary figures who were considered to be outstanding forerunners, effective evangelizers, or eminent scholars. The present reflection concerns a vital aspect of the Oblate charism, i.e. missions *ad gentes*. This part of St. Eugene’s heritage which is handed down to subsequent generations of Oblates is presented here not from the perspective of individuals, but of the whole community. So although the names of the best known Oblate missionaries are mentioned, priority is given to the “collective hero” – the Congregation’s missionary commitment. Such an approach is in keeping with the intention of the Founder, who did not hesitate to adapt the requirements of the Rule to the emerging new needs, thus giving the Oblate charism dynamism and orientation toward creative development.

SOMMAIRE – L’historiographie missionnaire traditionnelle favorise les grands personnages qu’on considère comme pionniers, évangélistes compétents ou érudits éminents. La présente réflexion vise l’aspect vital du charisme oblat, c’est-à-dire la mission *ad gentes*. On n’y présente pas selon la perspective de personnes individuelles cette dimension de l’héritage de saint Eugène, transmise aux générations subséquentes des Oblats, mais à partir de la communauté toute entière. Quoique l’on mentionne le nom des plus connus des Oblats missionnaires, on donne la priorité au « héros collectif » – l’engagement missionnaire de la Congrégation. Cette approche respecte l’intention du Fondateur, qui se préoccupe d’adapter les exigences de la Règle aux besoins nouveaux émergents. Il donne ainsi au charisme oblat un dynamisme et une orientation tournés vers un développement créateur.

RESUMEN – La historiografía misionera tradicional favorece a los grandes personajes que son considerados como pioneros, evangelizadores competentes o eminentes eruditos. La presente reflexión se orienta al aspecto vital del carisma oblato, es decir, la misión *ad gentes*. Esta dimensión de la herencia de san Eugenio, transmitida de generación en generación por los Oblatos que le siguieron, no mira tanto a las personas individualmente, cuanto al conjunto de la comunidad. Aunque se mencionen los nombres más conocidos de los Oblatos misioneros, se da la prioridad al “héroe colectivo” – el compromiso misionero de la Congregación. Este ensayo respeta la intención del Fundador, que se preocupa de adaptar las exigencias de la Regla a las nuevas necesidades emergentes. También brinda al carisma oblato un dinamismo y una orientación con miras a un desarrollo creativo.

Vita et missio

**“LIFT UP YOUR EYES” (JN 4:35)
MIDWIFING FREEDOM FOR FAITH:
DISTINCTIONS REGARDING EVANGELIZATION**

JOHN STAAK, OMI

Missionary Oblates are naturals at proclaiming the Gospel. We are naturals at midwifing peoples' freedom for faith, so much so, that we remain often unaware of the many fruits of the Holy Spirit blooming in our midst. We are sent to evangelize the poor; the poor are evangelized, and they, in turn, evangelize us. We learn from them, as they learn from us, the deep riches of the Gospel. Our most recent General Chapter asks us to rekindle our commitment to ongoing conversion, so that the Gospel might be more authentically proclaimed and received.

In addition, we find ourselves in the Year of Faith, which began on 11 October 2012, the fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of the Second Vatican Council. “The Year of Faith,” Benedict XVI wrote, “is a summons to an authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord, the one Saviour of the world.”¹ The Church calls us to explore the dynamics involved in this theological virtue. In addition, the recent synod on new evangelization was already underway as this Year of Faith began, beckoning us to assist the Church in her reflection on some of the new challenges to proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ in today's post-secular, global context of cultures struggling to express their wisdom. These cultures seek to maintain and celebrate their distinct identity, while also learning from the many other cultures with whom they now interrelate so frequently, due to the great advances in technology, communication and transportation. The dynamics of encounter prove critical for this interrelation of cultures, but

the guiding model for each culture's engagement stems from the deeper drama of their ongoing encounter with the living God.

My purpose in this brief essay is to tie these various recent events together by outlining certain distinctions regarding evangelization from the perspective of various stages of conversion. The first and more general stage of conversion is one of growing in awareness and recognition of reality, all levels of reality, especially the transcendent. As awareness grows, the many encounters of life lead one to face the reality of God's mystery and love, and the stage of freedom for accepting the gift of faith becomes most prominent. Once the gift of faith is embraced, we enter the stage of creatively engaging that faith for mission in today's world of local contexts, which find themselves immersed in an ever more acutely experienced global context. Because my focus here concerns especially some critical distinctions regarding evangelization, I want to begin with this final stage.

SEEING THE WORLD "THROUGH THE EYES OF OUR CRUCIFIED SAVIOUR"

For us Oblates, most of our life of conversion centers on our ongoing metanoia: growing in freedom, integrity, humility and the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, as we strive to live out our missionary consecration in apostolic communities. Constitution # 4 expresses one of the most critical elements of our missionary spirituality as we continue our ongoing conversion: "Through the eyes of our crucified Saviour we see the world which he redeemed with his blood, desiring that those in whom he continues to suffer will know also the power of his resurrection." Above all, Oblates are men of the resurrection, men of hope, who desire that all might come to experience the grace and power of the resurrection. Implied in this perspective is that we are acquainted with the reality of suffering, and that we have grown to such a level of faith to endure that suffering as a service to the people to whom we are sent, as a participation in Christ's own suffering. Though painful, difficult, often unjust and unnoticed by many around us, this participatory suffering reflects the highest honor of our vocation. Through this suffering, we begin to understand Christ's heart and are able to allow the Holy Spirit to shape our heart like his, so that the hermeneutics of God's love slowly overtake and guide our disposition.

In our present context of reflecting on conversion, mission and com-

munity, disposition becomes centrally important. God calls every Christian, especially the Missionary Oblate, to cultivate an *attitude of open participation for truth*. In one of his reflections on the Oblate charism, Fr. Jetté addressed two major challenges, the discussion of which led him to the critical subject of dispositions and the authenticity of the missionary.² He accepted that our external engagement as missionaries to the poor needs ongoing reassessment, but Fr. Jetté was more concerned about our interior disposition: the authenticity of our friendship with Christ. As he related, “the authentic Oblate is one who has truly left all to follow Jesus Christ, the Oblate who works seriously at becoming a saint and who at all times carries within his very being the concern for evangelizing the poor.”³ Embracing such an attitude or disposition necessarily involves our union with Christ on the cross, seeking to see the world through his eyes. From that position we can reliably interpret our relationship with others as an intimate communion founded on Christ’s love. An attitude of open participation for truth, then, allows us to listen to those who have nothing to offer but their suffering. We come to understand that truth is a hermeneutic work connected to Jesus’ life, mission and spirit (see Jn 18: 37-38). With it we also recognize that dialogue is a gateway to deeper truth, allowing us to refine the meaning in our own heritage.

In our efforts to proclaim the Good News, dialogue pushes us to re-contextualize our tradition, both structurally and existentially. Tradition remains the valuable resource it is, but in dialogue we discover new treasures in our tradition, so that we can be faithful to our future and the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit drives us to engage our horizon of meaning with the horizons of others. By so doing, we are called to respect their ambit of freedom. Our missionary response provides a *grammar of love from our faith for cultural expressions of freedom* in the people to whom we are sent. As horizons are shared, the grammar of love animates these expressions of freedom; the new horizon of shared meaning, in its turn, creates communion. This is the action of the Holy Spirit. By this action we appropriately express our gratitude at being evangelized ourselves, while having been sent out to evangelize.

What tends to happen in effective Oblate missions is something I would describe as a relational dialogue of cultures. In that relational dialogue, a creative discernment of truth and values mutually ensues. Together we discern with people to develop a language and mecha-

nisms for building the communion God intends, blending the grammar of love from the Gospel with their cultural expressions of freedom. The challenge is to understand differences as gifts and principles of cooperation, rather than as impediments or obstacles. *God remains the basis of subjectivity and the foundation for the unity* of our relationship with people. Expressed in a different way, the Holy Spirit in us recognizes and reaches out to the Holy Spirit in them, who simultaneously is recognizing and reaching out to us. Trusting in this action of God to overcome our fears and insecurities, we stand ready to place our horizon, our world of meaning at risk. Gospel love catalyzes human freedom so that our own subjective receptivity, as well as the people's subjective receptivity, can expand connaturally. Such mutual witnessing is a creative work that leads to an imaginative reconfiguration in charity of our understanding of the Gospel, as well as an understanding of a people's or culture's own horizon of meaning.

This creative work of the Spirit, in which we participate, results in what I call a permeable horizon of communion. Our Oblate horizon becomes permeable to the cultural horizon of the people with whom we find ourselves. Their horizon, in turn, becomes permeable to the Gospel. This permeability provides the driving force for that mysterious characteristic of the Oblate charism recognized by different cultures all over the world: "always close to the people." The Gospel speaks to their freedom and to their *aesthetic sense* for building communion. As missionaries, then, we do well to remember that attention to Gospel and cultural aesthetics must necessarily precede any effective cognitive expressions of the elements of faith.⁴ As a check to our permeable horizon of communion, we Oblates always look to the gift of the marginalized and abandoned. The marginalized often do not fit into any specific cultural categorizing, and thus remain the truest test of how open we are to God's active grace. They also help us to cultivate gratitude in our missionary hermeneutic as a demonstration of how well we interpret life as radical gift of God. That cultivation of gratitude spills over naturally to our Eucharistic thanksgivings, regardless of which stage of evangelization might dominate in our particular mission: growing in awareness; freedom for assent to faith; or creative engagement of faith.

The perspective of seeing the world through the eyes of our crucified Saviour while cultivating gratitude belongs to every Oblate no matter

which of these evangelization dynamics is primary for the mission. In my reflections which follow, the goal will be to explore the primary perspective or search underway in the hearts of people according to their stage of pre-evangelization, evangelization or new evangelization. In each case, however, our role is to facilitate authentic and intimate encounters with Christ. Primary in this regard remains the ever-present need to understand the background landscape of the intersubjective elements of encounter. These elements are critical for tapping in to the aesthetic sense of a people. They include such things as symbolic engagement, internal communication, and intersubjective communication. All of these are particularly distinctive to each context, since they are heavily influenced by cultural factors. As missionaries, we consider this background landscape carefully, so that any major impediments to full encounter with Christ might be recognized and addressed. Such considerations are especially important for the dynamics of pre-evangelization.

PRE-EVANGELIZATION DYNAMICS: GROWTH IN AWARENESS AND FREEDOM

“How vast the field that lies before them!”
(St. Eugene in the Preface to the Oblate Constitutions and Rules)

The field in which we prepare the soil to receive the seed of the Word in more direct evangelization efforts is indeed a vast one. In this preparation phase for full evangelization the real challenge has to do with awakening or re-establishing human sensibilities. By human sensibilities, I do not mean higher sensitivity to a particular moral issue or to a self-assured political correctness demanded by the surrounding culture’s development or deterioration. The sensibilities important for evangelization have to do with openness to transcendence, an openness or clear antenna to the Gospel and to the possibility of faith. In that realm human freedom must be very strictly respected, so that the person can explore, without threat or duress, the possibilities of new meaning. Through this journey of discovery and new awareness, the origins of one’s motivation come into play – those values that tend to influence a person at the almost unconscious level. Unconscious, however, does not mean inoperable, because such values continue to operate in the background, influencing our world of interpretation. Reaching people

who are at the stage of pre-evangelization requires a patient midwifing of their search for values and meaning. It has to do more with the qualitative domain of affectivity, than it does the quantitative exposition of dogmas or truths of reality and faith. In this realm we evangelize by listening attentively, pointing them towards the values of the Kingdom, and journeying with them in their search as Christ moves them towards an encounter of love. In situations where we may, indeed, be part of that catalyst for their encounter with Christ, proper timing is critical. Attentiveness to the movements of the Holy Spirit is essential. In pre-evangelization dynamics, then, a person's search is marked especially by what I call an inquiring hermeneutics of deliberation: questioning knowledge, questioning values, appealing to tradition, and referencing one's culture as a sort of normative text.

The more a person awakens to the fuller regions of reality through encounters and life experience, the more one's interests and life structures come into question. The knowledge that once seemed so sufficient comes to be understood as full of holes, and awareness of one's conditioning and its limitations become ever more obvious. The questioning of this insufficient knowledge drives the search for clarity, and reason necessarily widens its reach. The search leads naturally to questioning one's values as well. We have to respect fully a person's existing horizon before any shift can occur. The influence and respect for the broader community comes into consideration as values are questioned. All experience has to be considered, both positive and negative, but only the good is of genuine value concern for a person's freedom. Evil, as the absence of good, can only disguise the pursuit of true values. But the inclusion of positive and negative experiences allows one to explore the full affective landscape that emotional experiences have had on one's world of meaning and interpretation. Slowly, as the questioning and search continue, one discerns the signs of the times in one's own life, as well as in the broader community or culture. The search exposes various systems of manipulation and blocks to human freedom.

As one looks for answers and mechanisms for interpretation, one appeals to tradition as the most dependable resource. In this appeal to tradition, we need a critical distance to draw upon the wisdom appropriate for response in the present moment, rather than repeating responses of old that were made in other times and circumstances. In this appeal

to tradition, however, we have to encourage people not to try to purify the subjectivity of the past. Instead, we want to help them claim the full subjective struggle of past generations. In that struggle we can find previously unrecognized meaning, so that untapped wisdom might emerge for a new, creative response for today. Making use of the social sciences to uncover a social critique of the contextualized struggle aids us in getting to the riches of the wisdom hidden in the subjectivity of previous generations. It is important to remember that the data for which we are looking are those that indicate the people's struggle for freedom. In that struggle for freedom we seek to discern their receptivity to grace and their resistance to grace. To do so effectively, we need to be able to empathize with their struggle and enter into the depths of their subjectivity as best we can. This appeal to tradition, then, reveals the culture as a living text for interpretation. As people explore its riches the new awareness that ensues has to reveal itself from their perspective, their point of view, rather than being imposed from the outside. This demands respect and prudence on the part of the missionary: respect for the active dynamic taking place, and prudent discretion regarding timing as a vital element in accompaniment.

EVANGELIZATION DYNAMICS: CREDIBILITY FOR THE RECEPTIVITY OF GRACE

To seek out new ways for the Word of God to reach their hearts often calls for daring; To present Gospel demands in all clarity should never intimidate us.
(Constitution # 8)

Why are Oblates so good at evangelizing? How is it that Oblates continue to find new ways to present God's word with daring? The secret, I believe, is that Oblates have an inherent understanding of how God goes about reaching human hearts. Maybe this stems from St. Eugene's experiences of God's mercy and love, or from the movements of the Holy Spirit early in the life of the Congregation. God reaches human hearts by fully respecting each person's *lens of personal freedom*. Never does God violate our freedom; doing so would only jeopardize the fullness and depth of relationship God desires to have with us. In addition to respecting our freedom, God has given each person an *active imagination* to direct the lens of personal freedom in the exploration of truth and love. God also

understands that human reason is not limited to a myopically constrained empirical rationality, even when human history dips into periods in which many of the so-called intellectual elite present that sort of limited reason as the be-all and end-all of a human functionality at the service of unlimited material progress. No, God has blessed human reason with an *affectively influenced cognitive perception*, which extends human reason to limitless horizons. These horizons call out to be explored. The elements of freedom, imagination, and affective perception act as gates or checks for the human heart to the authenticity of any revealed truth or love. I contend that Oblates have an instinctive understanding of these elements, and thus are able to midwife the many ways in which the Word of God seeks to reach people's hearts. We can divide the credibility check that people employ as they validate God's revelation into three main categories: 1) respecting a new sensibility; 2) the discovery of meaning; and 3) hearing the invitation for personal assent.

As people develop a *new sensibility* for being open to the transcendent dimension and God's revelation, it is important for the missionary to know that the hermeneutic direction people employ begins with the affective dimension first, followed by the cognitive. Too often this simple fact can be overlooked, so that programs, retreats or conferences are wondering how they ended up with so few visible results after having presented such good material. For effective evangelization, we must address the affective and symbolic zones of a person before we try to convince with cognitive, rational, informative content. The affective, symbolic zone demands that we have a good awareness of the cultural context – awareness beyond the trite, but popular, cultural projections. Through analysis of the social sciences and the firm grasp of their narrative traditions, we can learn how a culture projects its life into the future. Among other things, this demands that we take time seriously. Tradition is always diachronic, developing and changing over time through the conscious acts of freedom made by a people. In the school of a culture's tradition, we come to know how they discern that reality offers them authentic novelty on the level of meaning. From this we gain insights into their affective, symbolic systems which influence their deepest religious sensibilities.

Any new *discovery of meaning* originates within the deep narratives of the providence of God alive in a culture's history. Culture communicates the religious heritage of a people. In their historical movement lives

God's dialogue with them. This deep current of divine dialogue alive within the culture's narrative forms the person's imagination and affectivity, long before specific articulations can be consciously made. The discovery of meaning, then, is related to and depends upon the community in which people live. But the narrative of every community is very complex, filled with light and darkness, joys and tragedies. The struggle of any people is to discover meaning from this mixed up experience of faith and history, victory and despair. The history of a people inevitably goes through periods that challenge their faith. Ultimately, only love can unify history and faith, so that the two come to be known as complementary disclosures of God's love affair with them. At its most challenging, love demands renunciation of self to the extent of suffering for another. The cross informs us of the movement from suffering love to new meaning and resurrection, giving us confidence to help people persevere on that journey. Amidst all the challenges, the Holy Spirit shapes our identity, both communally and personally. But the verification can be difficult, as hardships and the complexity of tragedies and fractured relationships discourage the discovery of one's identity in God. Through the cross, one's identity and community come to be seen in terms of gift, knitting a web of meaning that slowly comes into focus and provides us with a harmonious reference to God, neighbor and all of creation. The fruits of the journey are understanding seemingly contradictory things and events as complementary and a newly discovered generosity inspired by the discovered meaning.

With a new meaning having been discovered, God presents to the person an invitation to love. The last check for credibility, then, is *hearing this invitation* as one that asks for one's personal assent to this newly revealed love. God's revelation has to be understood as gift to one's own identity, not just as truth about God. The meaning that was discovered has to be seen as complementing and confirming one's identity as one's life narrative comes into clearer focus. The person becomes free to move beyond awareness and consciousness towards a formed conscience guided by God's love. The invitation for personal assent includes living one's freedom in relation to God for others. One reconciles personal suffering with God's love revealed on the cross. The paschal mystery becomes clearer – an integral part of the mystery of existence. The new-found freedom, however, needs the affirmation and conviction of the believing community in order to develop confi-

dently. As revelation's authenticity is accepted, the person can then, in solidarity with the community, apply it to the transformation of culture.

Returning again to the questions I posed at the beginning of this section, Oblates are experts at evangelizing because they have an inherent understanding of the dynamic manner with which God reaches human hearts. Freedom, imagination, and the affective zones of a person work together in a sort of pre-cognitive, inductive manner as the person moves through the process of assessing the credibility of God's love in the paschal mystery. That process has its ups and downs, but most of the time there is no need for us to be too concerned. Instead, we leave people free to move through their dynamic, probing and testing the mystery of God's love against the mystery of their own life narrative. In the process, they, and we, are evangelized.

CHALLENGES OF THE DYNAMICS OF NEW EVANGELIZATION

"Such is the state of things brought about by the malice and corruption of present-day Christians that it can be truly said that the greater number of them are worse off now than was the gentile world before its idols were destroyed by the Cross.

Faced with such a deplorable situation, the Church earnestly appeals to the ministers whom she herself enrolled in the cause of her divine Spouse, to do all in their power, by word and example, to rekindle the flame of faith that has all but died in the hearts of so many of her children."

(St. Eugene in the Preface to the Oblate Constitutions and Rules)

We do not speak in the same manner as St. Eugene and his contemporaries did in the early nineteenth century, as they were newly trying to evangelize the rural countryside of France. But we do share his concern and love for the Church, his anxiety that all would come to an authentic encounter with Christ, so that their faith might be rekindled. This passionate concern for the well-being of people's faith is one of the Holy Spirit's gifts to the Oblate Congregation, given through our Founder St. Eugene. We Oblates were founded to bring the Gospel to the poor and most abandoned. Our charism is tailor-made for a creative response to what the Church is calling the *New Evangelization*.⁵ My in-

tention here is not to try to offer any solutions or methods for new evangelization. Each Oblate in his specific context has the heart, tools, and training to pursue such solutions together with the people he serves.⁶ My aim is merely to begin a conversation of the dynamics we face, pointing out some of the impediments or blockages. People are having trouble digesting the efficacy of the paschal mystery, both the history of the Christ event and its relevance for their own life narrative. Allow me to offer an example of how a certain skepticism presents itself.

Some of today's modern cultures, especially those with radical secularizing tendencies, are trying to put Jesus back into the tomb. In their feigned sophistication and self-righteously claimed enlightenment, they tell us that we cannot even be sure that this Jesus of Nazareth ever lived, much less ever rose from the dead. How silly of us to be so naïve and gullible! We have just been duped for two millennia – easy prey for a clever mind control plot knitted together by a small group of so-called disciples, who were themselves devastated by their own misplaced hopes and overzealous charity. The message sent to us on a regular basis comes with a certain patronizing understanding: “It’s okay that you and the generations before you were taken in by this hoax – all of us fell for some sort of religious myth. But now we all need to grow up and accept the fact that only humanity can save itself and this beautiful planet, which somehow beat the odds of the cosmos and developed life under just the right circumstances.”

But why, when these dejected disciples decided to set their “story” to writing, why did they portray themselves as thickheaded simpletons who lacked any courage? Every generation, in some manner or another, struggles with the reality of the resurrection. The common sense, evidence-based approach assures us that every person who dies goes to a grave, not to return. But all generations of believers not only have to hear the report of Jesus’ empty tomb, they have to go to the tomb to see for themselves. Each has to make a personal check of this mystery, in order to confirm or discount the validity of the encounter each has had with Christ. The initial proclamation of the empty tomb is usually met with skepticism. Even when we are assured that the tomb is indeed empty, our tendency is to explain the situation with “more plausible” narratives, rather than the far-fetched singularity of Jesus’ resurrection, which forever carries universal significance for all peoples and cultures. The missionary Oblate understands that the basic kerygma, in its raw simplicity and perplexing

mystery, continues to hold the key to penetrating to the depths of the human heart by way of a person's freedom, imagination, and affectivity. But today there are significant impediments to the kerygma's communication – its proclamation and its reception.

All the dynamics of pre-evangelization and evangelization discussed above remain true for the dynamics of new evangelization as well. The mindset for the missionary, as I described it in the first section on seeing the world through the eyes of the crucified Savior, also remains as important as ever. For the missionary, *the real difference in the new evangelization is that all the dynamics of pre-evangelization and evangelization are at play simultaneously, but with the added challenge of breaking through impediments, false perceptions, and attitudes that reflect having already heard all there is to hear.* We know all too well some of today's challenges to ecclesial credibility: poor Church governance, sexual abuse, perceived corruption (e.g., the Vatican Bank scandal), cultural shifts, poorly understood teachings, etc. Depending on one's culture and nationality, many other items might be added to the list.

There are, however, some deeper currents that impede the ability for people genuinely to experience an authentic encounter with the risen Christ. The first impediment is what I would call a *shift from the intersubjective to the functional.* Some would say this is the natural result of today's dominant economic systems. Others would attribute it to advances in technology that give us the power to do so many things that we could not before. Still others would say that the easy access to information and facts has numbed our ability for critical thinking and intersubjective engagement. With an increased attention to functional instrumentality comes another impediment to engaging in encounter: a *diminished horizon of the world of meaning.* Rather than contemplating truth and the search for ultimate meaning, we find ourselves more interested in entertainment: sports, films, shows, concerts, etc. Even institutions that were originally founded to reflect on the pursuit of truth and meaning are now redirecting their energies and finances to other, more pragmatic zones. Finally, in a society of people understood as functional units with a diminished horizon of meaning, the understanding of *human freedom becomes distorted and reduced* to a raw autonomy. Negotiations have to ensue to mediate the autonomous needs of various people, institutions or countries. Rather than nurturing interpersonal

relationships for the pursuit of the common good, negotiations tend towards the legalistic. Slowly, things deteriorate to power and control contests and the survival of the fittest. Human relations become reduced to politically correct patterns of behavior and conformity. Freedom of expression becomes constrained by societal pressures that demand unquestioning adherence. The price of giving witness in such a state of affairs is just far too high for most people. The result is acquiescence to a functional living with a confined horizon of meaning, which at least allows for some personal autonomy, if not freedom. Basic survival ensues. Entertainment and distractions at least deaden the pain of these constrictions on human flourishing.

With the challenges of the dynamics of new evangelization, then, we must address the realities of the impediments, false perceptions, and skeptical attitudes, as we seek to guide people through their growth in awareness and freedom (pre-evangelization). Only then can we effectively proclaim the Gospel to satisfy their credibility checks for the receptivity of grace and the gift of faith (evangelization).

Oblates are naturals at mission, including the new evangelization. The Holy Spirit has prepared us specifically for this mission. Oblates leave people free to be who they are. We allow them to express their concerns, dissatisfactions, anger and disappointments. By so doing, people begin to explore the dignity of their fuller freedom. The deeper questions and search for meaning return to their consciousness as they are allowed to process their life narratives. In so doing, the richness of intersubjective relationships replaces the perfunctory occasion of functional engagement. Each culture, each nation, each context, and every person require a different response according to circumstances. Various life narratives cannot breathe freely under one programmed response or missionary method; they need patient Oblate missionaries who will midwife their life breath. The Holy Spirit is both the subject and object of our mission. As we midwife Christ's encounter with others, we seek to allow the Holy Spirit in us to recognize, listen to and engage the Holy Spirit at work in them – to evangelize and to be evangelized.

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¹ Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, Apostolic Letter “*Motu Proprio Data*”, 2011, # 6.

² See his discussion in Chapter II of *The Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate* (Rome: General House, 1985). My comments stem especially from his third section of this chapter, regarding the charism’s situation and outlook for the future (pp. 60-70). His two major challenges were the following: 1) finding an effective answer in the evangelical order to the appeals of the poor today, and 2) re-establishing confidence in certain fundamental values of our lives as priests and religious in the context of today’s world.

³ *Ibidem*, 65.

⁴ Too often we in the Church have limited the rational presentation of the faith to the cognitive domain. The aesthetic domain, however, belongs to rationality as much as the cognitive. Reason cannot be limited to the merely empirical or functional; Benedict XVI repeatedly pleaded for the broadening of reason’s reach beyond imposed, systemic domains. I would argue that in any person’s or culture’s credibility check of the faith, the aesthetic domain proves more important for free assent than does the cognitive. Aesthetic attentiveness, then, is critical for pre-evangelization, evangelization and new evangelization. Interestingly, what Benedict XVI repeatedly encouraged through his discourses concerning the expansion of reason beyond predetermined limits, Pope Francis tends to do symbolically in his actions through aesthetic attentiveness.

⁵ There has been, and continues to be, a lot of discussion about what is meant by *new evangelization*. I do not want to get into definitions and semantic analysis here. But for a thorough discussion of the term’s origin and development in official Church pronouncements see the Lineamenta, *The New Evangelisation: For the Transmission of the Christian Faith*, Synod of Bishops, XIII Ordinary General Assembly. In this document the Bishops name the new evangelization as “the courage to forge new paths in responding to the changing circumstances and conditions facing the Church in her call to proclaim and live the Gospel today.” (# 5)

⁶ For some examples of the challenges, see *The New Evangelization: Overcoming the Obstacles*, ed. Steven Boguslawski, OP and Ralph Martin (New York: Paulist Press, 2008). Our own Francis Cardinal George, OMI, has an article, “Evangelizing Our Culture,” 43-58, that highlights the challenges specific to any particular context – in this case the US Church. Another article I would highly recommend was written by the scripture scholar, Francis Martin, entitled “The Spirit of the Lord is Upon Me: The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Work of Evangelization,” (59-82).

POPULAR MISSIONS IN POLAND MISSIONARIES AS MESSENGERS OF SALVATION

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The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate perceive preaching parish missions as an essential and indispensable feature of their religious and missionary spirituality. The reason for our presence in the Church and in the world is to introduce the crucified and risen Christ to the poorest, the most spiritually neglected, and those plunged in dramatic situations, begging for salvation.

Even though the world is constantly changing, political parties falling, the economic basis of the Old Continent and the New World tottering, moral decay progressing, man is always the same. People are always the same because they love in the same way; they feel the same feelings, deserve the same things and... sin in the same way. They need God in the same way, they seek salvation and search the sense of life. Therefore, in the same way, they need Jesus Christ, for only Savior, and the only answer to the most important questions. As the Church, we have a special mission among those of our brothers and sisters who have been deprived of the Gospel. However, Christians, even though included in the Church, are far from Jesus Christ in their hearts. They feel troubled as sheep without their shepherd (see Mark 6:34), not because they are neglected by their priests, who are putting their heart and soul into fulfilling their duties, but because they lack a personal bond with Jesus the Shepherd. Can this problem be tackled? Definitely. All the necessary tools are in the Church. Pope Benedict XV mentioned them in his encyclical about preaching (*Humani generis redemptionem*, 1917), in which he showed the necessity of announcing a living Christ, who is the Light and Salvation of souls. Almost one hundred years ago the problem was taken up by the leaders of the kerygmatic renewal of preaching, among whom there were also Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, for example Max Kassiepe, a tireless priest and an outstanding missionary. It is his methodology, together with the mission-

ary kerygma, that has become an inspiration for the missionary method followed by Polish Oblates, both at the beginning of our Province and at the present time. In this article the term “missionary” will refer to a religious, preaching parish or “popular” missions.

Nowadays, a group consisting of about fifty Polish missionaries refers to book written over a dozen years ago. The principal methodological burden of the scheme described in that book is equally divided into two parts: 1) remembering the faithfulness of God, who forms the covenant of love with man (with beautiful ceremonies of announcing the Sinai Covenant and the Credo); 2) and a call for the faithfulness to God (with the ceremony of worshiping the Lord Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and entrusting oneself to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus). During the whole missionary week¹, the quiet but effectual presence of Mary Immaculate is immensely important. It gathers the parishioners for evening prayer, the so called Missionary Prayer at 9 p.m. In Poland it is a traditional time of praying in front of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa’s picture. During parish missions, every evening the parishioners gather for Marian prayer, accompanied by reading the Gospel, singing, a procession to the Missionary Cross, and the Ceremony of Light. The faithful go back home with the candles lit from the paschal candle. It is a way to reach those who have not yet been involved in the mission. However, there are more ways to manifest one’s faith publicly. Rosary processions, the so called way of light (*via lucis*), are held, as well as the *Via Dolorosa* (Way of the Cross), during which a cross is carried through the streets of the parish, and the missionaries preach at each station. A procession to the parish cemetery is another way of taking the Gospel outside churches.

Polish Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, who serve as a retreat leaders and missionaries, often perceive the great spiritual suffering and confusion which grips people living a consumer existence. They also notice how extraordinary God’s mercy is for those who open their hearts to the call of salvation, and decide to choose the way of inner conversion. The confessional, where human sin is washed with Christ’s blood and where the enthusiasm of new life is born, is the most frequent witness of wonders present in missionary service. Undoubtedly, what is very valuable is the more and more frequent practice of inviting worshippers to the so called Nicodemus’s Nights. Those are all-night vigils, often combined

with prayers for healing, prayers of worship and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. During this time priests wait for the faithful in confessionals. Busy businessmen, newly-weds, pupils and students take part after days filled with work and study, to be close to their Lord. Many of them use the opportunity for the sacrament of penance. One might think that only the most devout would venture to make a night visit in church. However, besides those constantly involved in religion, many people appear who have been indifferent to it so far, or those who want to make their confession for the first time after several dozen years.

Besides promoting parish missions, Polish missionaries lead Advent and Lent retreats, as well as retreats for pupils from primary schools, students from junior high schools, secondary schools, and retreats for priests and nuns. They preach the Gospel to their compatriots living in Poland, the Czech Republic, Belgium, Luxembourg, Sweden, Canada and Ukraine. It is also a common practice to lead the *triduum*² before the feast commemorating the patron of a given parish and preaching during the central festival organised in honour of the patron. Those are called *pilgrimage sermons*. A Lenten retreat seems to be the most meaningful in evangelizing terms, because it takes in the biggest audience. It gives a chance to preach the Gospel in a parish church, but also in hospitals, prisons and schools. It is a great opportunity for missionaries, because we find more and more religiously neglected children and teenagers. Thus, a retreat is for many people the time of coming to Jesus Christ. Confessions of the youth after many years of absence from the Church are very frequent. The missionaries often engage lay teachers of religion, class tutors, and parish groups during a retreat. Moreover, they activate the helpers at a retreat, who can lead the Way of the Cross, and prepare a pantomime or a drama.

The services around adoration of the Blessed Sacrament are also immensely important. The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate proposed these kinds of prayer from the beginning of the Province. The very characteristic description of the special events that took place during the pilgrimage of the sick to the Sanctuary of Our Lady in Kodeń July 2, 1934, was placed in *Gazeta Kościelna*: “The sick covered shorter or longer distances by carriage, some of them 200 km or more! Not all of them suffered from serious illnesses but a lot of ill people were carried into the basilica for the service. (...) The priests heard people’s

confessions till late at night, and again early on Monday morning. A lot of pilgrims spent the whole night in church. (...) The Bishop celebrated the mass and delivered the sermon for the sick. It was meant only for the sick, however, it was impossible to stop the pilgrims who filled the whole temple, so that one could not move. Because of the crowd, Holy Communion was given only after the service, and the blessing of the sick had to be postponed. (...) It took place after dinner, not in the morning as planned. The Bishop carried the Blessed Sacrament to the church cemetery and the sick were put around the basilica. Those who were able to do so were kneeling, the others were standing. The Bishop blessed everybody with the Monstrance. He was followed by priests of both rites³, placing their hands on the heads of each sick person, according to the Savior's words: "they will place their hands on the sick, and they will get better". It was so moving that many of the priests and the faithful cried openly. (...) Not surprisingly, Our Lady, seeing so much trust and love in the hearts of her children, gave them generous graces and gifts. Two wonders were widely discussed: a blind person was able to see, and a paralysed person healed⁴."

One day during a retreat or parish mission is usually devoted to visiting the sick with Holy Communion and anointing. Those who feel strong enough are invited for a special Mass with a sermon for the sick, the suffering and senior citizens, during which anointing is given, too. After the Mass, the service for the sick is celebrated. At the end, the missionary comes up to the sick and, walking among them, blesses them with the Blessed Sacrament. It is always a very touching time for all the people gathered in church. If possible, the sick are then invited to the "agape" organised by the laity.

As we preach during the mission or retreat, we always witness the amazing goodness of God, who embraces people with tender love. One fruit of the parish missions is sacramental convalidation of couples who have been living together for many years. There are also healings, reconciliation between belligerent parties, or the reinforcement of marriages on the verge of a break-up. People sometimes visit the missionaries to thank them, as for example, during the mission celebrations, when a married couple wants to renew their vows, or a family dedicates itself in the presence of a missionary, putting their hands on the Holy Bible. "The time of salvation has come..."

Undoubtedly, creating a prayer base has an enormous influence in fruitful preaching of the Gospel and introducing people to the dynamics of the Kingdom of God. Before they arrive at a given parish, the missionaries say prayers for those to whom they are sent and they engage the whole parish in praying for the blessed fruit of the mission. What is more, many of us have a good habit of entrusting ourselves to the prayer of the nuns from contemplative orders. Our academic communities also appreciate the meaning of prayer for parish missions and retreats. In the last three years, they have organised regular prayer meetings for the priests preaching missions and retreats. The majority of the Oblates regularly send the dates of their evangelizing works to the Major Theological Seminary, asking for prayers. We also note that prayers for the mission's success are encouraged. The Oblates in Poland preach some 330 parish retreats and missions each year.

More and more often, one hears about various pastoral activities, which are aimed at reaching the busy people of our time. The ministry of spreading the Gospel still has a privileged position there. In our family of the Oblates, that has always been close with parish missions. The question of choosing the style and supporting activities in leading the missions is, of course, still open. St. Eugene used different measures from other Oblates, who have become, since 1842, the pioneers of the so-called touring missions in the boundless prairies of America. The Oblates from Germany were also very creative. After World War II, they wanted to help Catholics reinforce their faith and sacramental life. Therefore, they travelled throughout in the Protestant regions in a special van, which had a chapel with the Blessed Sacrament, loudspeakers, confessionals and a flat with a kitchen for the missionaries. The missions led by them were called *Kapellenwagenmission*. Today, we see yet other supporting activities, such as evangelizing concerts in city centers, combined with announcing kerygma, conversations and an opportunity for confessions. Despite the variety of ideas, the central element of evangelization is the same. It is still immensely important and irreplaceable. It is delivering the message of Jesus Christ, the crucified and resurrected Lord, the only Savior of man, with faith and love, missionary enthusiasm and the zeal of saints. For God saves people through the mystery of the announced Word, listening to which with obedience gives birth to faith. The reason why our mission as Oblates

is still relevant, necessary, beautiful and attractive for the young, full of youthful vigor, is the fact that it takes up the dynamics of the evangelizing invitation: “From now on you shall catch men.” (Lk, 5:10) – not for yourself but for Jesus, for the Father who is in Heaven, for eternal life. Can one give more? Can one offer more? That is why the Church invites us to use one reliable form of preaching the Gospel – the parish missions, especially in the Year of Faith: “It is appropriate to support parish missions and other initiatives in parishes and workplaces, to help believers discover the gift of their baptismal faith, and responsibility for bearing witness to it, with the awareness that the Christian calling is in its nature the calling to missionary activity.⁵⁷”

Parish missions are an opportunity for us to bear testimony to brotherly life, and help young people to discern their calling. There are Oblates among us, whose calling awoke in their youth, while missionaries were preaching. One highly-regarded Polish preacher, Father Stanislaw Grzybek, said about his calling: “There are no coincidences in life but ‘a coincidence’ helped decide my life... I was 14 when missions were held in my parish. They were organized by the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. It was 1958. I was in the 7th form. One day I was standing in a queue to a confessional. Here you can see how important the role of a confessor is. One of them was hearing confessions very quickly and the queue was getting smaller and smaller. The other one was talking to people much longer. So I left the ‘fast’ queue and went to the other confessor. Then the missionary asked me which form I attended, talked to me about the future. I had already submitted the documents to one secondary school. After that confession I took them to the Minor Theological Seminary led by the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. First I spent four years there, then I was a novice at Holy Cross, finally I went to the seminary. After all those years of formation I took holy orders.”

There are also humorous situations in the work of missionaries. Father Krzysztof Czepirski told a story about one of them: “I started preaching in one parish at the German border, when people could hear a speaker’s voice together with mine over the loudspeakers. The man was announcing in German a violin concert of Henryk Wieniawski. Fortunately, the music did not deafen me, on the contrary, it gave my words some appeal. The people seemed to be listening to me with the

background of the master's music. When I felt the concert was reaching the end, I managed to finish the sermon with the last draw of a bow across the strings. You could hear the sound of general applause in the loudspeakers and the people in church started applauding, too. I have liked listening to violin concerts ever since."

Preaching the Gospel requires zealous preachers. Therefore, Polish Oblates have always tried to form a large group of missionaries. A very important initiative of this kind was taken up in 2004. The so-called missionary school was created in the Oblate house in Poznań. Father Krzysztof Czepicki was the originator and a tutor of the project. A group of young missionaries living together met regularly for lectures and homiletic workshops, during which parish missions, a school retreat, and audiovisual aids (a film about St. Eugene, multimedia presentations, the way of the cross, the rite of renewing parish missions, Marian service) were prepared. What was also considered precious was the diction and vocal emission workshops led by one well-known Polish theatre actor. Apart from those activities, young missionaries led an Advent or Lenten retreat, triduum, and helped local parish priests. The school program was carried out in a two-year period of time. The next three groups of missionaries were prepared that way. At present, the formation centre for young missionaries is going to be resumed. Other retreat leaders can improve their preaching technique thanks to science-formation sessions, which have been organised for many years by Komisja Misjonarska Polskiej Prowincji OMI (Missionary Committee of the Polish Province). Not only professors of theology but also interpersonal communication specialists and preachers of the Gospel are invited to this event.

Pope Paul VI said that preaching the Gospel "can't stand either negligence or mixing the rules of the Gospel with those from other religions" (*Evangelii nuntiandi*, 5). That is why it is necessary to care for the solid knowledge of preachers. Then the Pope reminded us that the Gospel is "the Truth and that is why the truth advocates must devote all their time, their strength and, if necessary, even life" (*see above*). The world, Europe, and Poland are still calling for such advocates of the Gospel, who would devotedly serve it, not conserving their strength, because "the Church is for evangelization, which means that it must announce and teach God's Word, through which people can receive grace and sinners can be reconciled with God. The Church should also

manifest Christ's sacrifice in celebration of Mass, which is a memento of His death and glorious Resurrection" (see above). Let this excellent example of life and the devoted service of Polish missionaries bear fruit of conversions, revive the spirit of faith, and stir young people to desire religious life and the missionary charisma of St. Eugene de Mazenod!

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¹ In Poland, parish mission usually lasts eight days. It starts on Saturday during an evening Mass, and finishes one week later on Sunday with an afternoon service, during which the missionaries bless the mission cross set outside the church.

² Triduum means 3-day preaching the Gospel before special events in a given parish (for example, the patron's day or a feast of Mary). It is usually led by one missionary. Occasional services are organized during the triduum, too.

³ It is about Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic priests.

⁴ Nr 33 (August 19, 1934), p. 385.

⁵ *Congregation for Education, on the Year of Faith*, nr 6, Vatican, January 7, 2012.

LE TRAVAIL DES OBLATS DANS L' APOSTOLAT DE LA MER À TOAMASINA (TAMATAVE), MADAGASCAR

WOJCIECH KLUI, OMI

A Madagascar, comme dans beaucoup d'autres endroits du monde, les oblats s'efforcent d'être proches des gens avec lesquels ils travaillent. En plus de l'accompagnement de communautés de base dans la brousse et de paroisses dans les villes, ils dirigent également, depuis quelques temps, un centre audiovisuel OMIFILM, à Fianarantsoa, et l'Apostolat de la Mer, à Toamasina. Cela vaut la peine d'apporter quelques informations sur cette mission, car elle est assez peu connue, quoique très oblate. Les structures ecclésiales normales ne touchent souvent pas ces personnes qui sont en mouvement la majorité de l'année.

Officiellement, les structures ecclésiales pour le travail pastoral, parmi les gens de la mer, ont été définies par le décret du Conseil Pontifical pour les Migrants et les Personnes en Déplacement, *Apostolatus maris*, du 24 Septembre 1977 [cf: AAS 69 (1977), p. 737-746]. Celui-ci crée les normes, les droits ainsi que les privilèges du travail pastoral des gens de la mer. Cependant, cet apostolat à Toamasina a une histoire longue de quarante ans. Et cela fait quatorze ans que les oblats y prennent part.

Toamasina (Tamatave) est la deuxième plus grande ville de Madagascar et elle est le plus grand port de l'île. Il n'est donc pas étonnant que depuis longtemps les évêques locaux ont perçu le besoin d'entreprendre un travail pastoral particulier avec les gens de la mer parce que beaucoup d'entre eux ne sont pas touchés par l'activité pastorale normale, notamment, les pêcheurs et les marins locaux qui demeurent périodiquement dans le port.

L'Apostolat de la mer, sous une forme organisée à Toamasina, a commencé en 1973. C'est l'évêque Jérôme Razafindrazaka qui a nommé le père François Le Gall SMM responsable du travail. Ce dernier a également été directeur de l'apostolat national de Madagascar dans les années 1973-1988. Les directeurs nationaux qui ont suivi sont le père

Marcel Batard CSSP (1988-1993), le frère Yves Aubron FSG (1993-2002) et, depuis 2002, M. Félix Randrianasoavina. Lorsque Mgr Jérôme Razafindrazaka a créé les fondements de l'apostolat de la mer, pour Toamasina ainsi que pour tout Madagascar, il en devint le premier responsable lors de la Conférence épiscopale de Madagascar. Après ce dernier, ce sont le Card. Armand Gaëtan Razafindratandra, Mgr Michel Malo, Mgr René Rakotondrabe, Mgr Zygmunt Robaszkiwicz qui ont rempli cette fonction jusqu'au responsable actuel, l'évêque Marcellin Randriamamonjy.

Quand est né l'Apostolat de la Mer à Toamasina, il n'y avait pas encore d'oblats à Madagascar. Ceux-ci ont commencé leur apostolat dans ce diocèse, en 1981. Dans la ville même, ils ont pris la responsabilité de la paroisse de N.-D. de Lourdes dès 1987, alors que l'Apostolat de la mer existait déjà depuis un certain nombre d'années. Jusqu'en 1999, quand l'Apostolat a été confié aux Oblats dans la ville de Toamasina, la fonction de responsable diocésain était rempli par le père François Le Gall, le père Sjef Ramaeckers, Fr. Noël Tombozandry et le père Julien Rakotoarinosy. Durant les quatorze ans de responsabilité de cet oeuvre, quatre oblats y ont travaillé en tant que responsable; tout d'abord, le père Robert Koniczek, ensuite le père Jean-Didier Razanadrafara, puis le père Marek Ochlak et, enfin jusqu'à ce jour, le père Stanislas Kazek.

En raison du fait que Toamasina est le principal port de l'île, elle a été le siège central de l'Apostolat de tout le diocèse, mais aussi de tout le pays pendant de nombreuses années. Depuis mai 2012, il y a un bureau de direction national distinct de celui du diocèse. A la tête de ce dernier, sous la direction de l'évêque local, le père Stanislas Kazek travaille comme aumônier diocésain. Le siège de l'Apostolat est situé à proximité du port à l'adresse suivante : 16 rue de la Réunion (BP 98, Toamasina 501). Le centre de l'Apostolat de la mer est actuellement ouvert à tous, du lundi au samedi, de 9h à 21h. Chaque année, il y a environ 3000 marins et pêcheurs (aussi bien étrangers qu'originaires de Madagascar) qui visitent ce centre. L'Apostolat se soucie de leur bien-être spirituel, assure le développement culturel et la promotion humaine.

L'Apostolat dirige *Le foyer de Marins : Stella Maris Club*. De nombreux marins malgaches fréquentent ce foyer. En ce qui concerne les marins étrangers, à l'heure actuelle, moins de bateaux font escale au port en raison de la crise. En outre, de plus en plus de navires qui s'y arrêtent

sont des navires porte-conteneurs, dont le déchargement et le chargement s'effectuent assez rapidement. Ainsi, la plupart de ces bateaux reste au port pendant environ 24 heures, ne donnant la possibilité aux marins d'effectuer qu'une seule sortie en ville. Aussi, compte tenu de l'instabilité de la situation dans le pays et des nouvelles dispositions l'ISPS Code [l'International Ship and Port Facility Security Code est un ensemble de règles et de recommandations visant à améliorer la sécurité des transports maritimes face au terrorisme], seul un petit nombre d'entre eux peuvent visiter le Foyer. C'est la raison pour laquelle l'équipe d'accueil du Foyer Stella Maris club de l'Apostolat de la Mer effectue, au quotidien, des visites à bord des bateaux, tels que les bateaux de cabotage nationaux et internationaux, les conteneurs, les vraquiers, les bateaux de croisières et les pétroliers. Parfois, quoique rarement, il arrive que le propriétaire ou le capitaine prenne l'initiative d'inviter l'équipe du Foyer à bord de leur navire. Cela se produit dans des circonstances exceptionnelles, par exemple si quelqu'un meurt à bord du navire au cours du voyage. Il est donc difficile, dans ces conditions, de mener une activité pastorale constante et concrète.

Il est plus facile d'entrer en contact avec les marins originaires de Madagascar qui visitent le foyer *Stella Maris*. Il est possible de les inviter à diverses célébrations ou événements organisés pour eux, et si cela est nécessaire, de les préparer à recevoir les sacrements.

Dans le centre de l'Apostolat de la Mer, les oblats consacrent la majorité de leur temps, au travail auprès de la population locale, constituée de familles de pêcheurs modestes. Ceux-ci souffrent ces dernières années, principalement en raison de l'instabilité politique et sociale, ce qui se traduit par une augmentation du chômage. Les pêcheurs traditionnels, réalisant leur pêche chaque jour à bord de leurs petites pirogues, ne sont pas en mesure de résister à la concurrence de ces innombrables grands bateaux qui longent les côtes et pratiquent la pêche à une échelle industrielle. Ces derniers préparent et congèlent directement ce qu'ils pêchent. Le nombre de poissons diminue donc dans la région, et de ce fait la rémunération des pêcheurs traditionnels aussi. Par conséquent, ils leur est de plus en plus difficile de subvenir aux besoins fondamentaux de leur famille, que ce soit au niveau de l'alimentation, des besoins matériel de base, et même de la santé. C'est donc dans ce domaine, bien au-delà des activités strictement pastoral, que les oblats travaillent dans le cadre de l'Apostolat de la Mer.

Schématiquement, les travaux de l'apostolat peuvent être divisés en plusieurs champs. Le travail, dans sa dimension pastorale, comprend l'éducation religieuse et la préparation aux sacrements, les célébrations liturgiques de chaque semaine, ainsi que celles des temps liturgiques importants, puis les événements importants pour les gens de la mer, tels que: 1) Le dimanche de la mer, 2) La journée mondiale du pêcheur, 3) La journée mondiale du marin, 4) La journée des disparus en mer. Ainsi, ces événements permettent aux membres de l'Apostolat de sensibiliser les gens de la mer aux valeurs spirituelles et de leur donner l'occasion d'approfondir leur foi chrétienne. Leur travail s'élargit à une dimension sociale, dans la mesure où ils soutiennent les gens de la mer en cas de difficultés alimentaires et d'accès aux soins médicaux et aux médicaments permettant de soigner le paludisme, la bilharziose, la tuberculose et le choléra (maladies les plus courantes à Madagascar), dans la scolarisation et la formation des jeunes leaders et l'alphabétisation (la majorité des pêcheurs est analphabète). Parfois, ils leur faut entreprendre aussi d'autres ministères, comme les visites aux pêcheurs ou marins emprisonnés, la préparation de divers documentations nécessaires, les visites à bord des navires, l'organisation des transports (dans la mesure des capacités locales), ou autres demandes particulières.

En ce qui concerne la dimension pastorale, chaque premier dimanche du mois la messe est célébrée pour l'ensemble de la grande famille des gens de la mer. À présent, la catéchèse qui leur est destinée (que se soit les enfants, les adolescents ou les adultes) est dirigée par une religieuse (Religieuse de la Sœur Réparatrice), deux oblats (Oblats de Marie Immaculée) et deux laïcs. Comme conséquences de ces actions, on peut constater par exemple qu'en 2011 21 personnes ont reçu le baptême et 7 la confirmation.

À l'occasion de la journée de la mer, le 13 juillet 2011, a eu lieu une messe solennelle, suivie d'une exposition de documentations, présentant les activités de tous les groupes d'Apostolat de la mer, c'est-à-dire l'Association des femmes de pêcheurs et des marins, puis l'Association des pêcheurs et des marins ainsi que leurs enfants. Tout cela illustré par des photos de diverses activités.

À l'occasion de la journée mondiale du pêcheur le 20 novembre 2011, à la messe diffusée à la radio locale dans une paroisse où vivent de nombreux pêcheurs, fut remis, après la célébration, « une Attesta-

tion » confirmant que ce groupe s'impliquait dans une formation au service d'une productivité qui met en valeur les méthodes traditionnelles de la pêche.

Depuis 1987, on célèbre la journée de prière pour les disparus en mer. Le 27 novembre 2011, cette commémoration a été présidée par l'archevêque de Toamasina, Désiré Tsarahazana. Après la messe au bureau de l'Apostolat, les gens se sont rendus en procession jusqu'à la plage qui se trouve à proximité pour y jeter leurs couronnes de fleurs. À cette procession commune, ont participé, en plus de la grande famille des gens de la mer, les religieux et religieuses, ainsi que les pouvoirs publics.

À noter que, dans le domaine social, diverses associations collaborent au service de l'Apostolat. Pour les enfants, il y a *Fizampirama (Association des enfants des gens de la mer)*. Dans les années 2010 et 2011, l'Association comptait 220 membres, parmi lesquels se trouvaient 18 animateurs. Les enfants y sont répartis selon leurs âges: de 7 à 10 ans, ils font du bricolage, les filles de 11 à 15 ans font de la broderie ou du crochet, les garçons de 11 à 15 ans font des travaux manuels et pratiquent différents sports. Pour la majorité des enfants, leurs parents sont en situation difficile, surtout en cette période de crise à Madagascar. Par conséquent, une trentaine d'enfants parrainés reçoivent de l'aide pour payer les frais de scolarité et de fournitures. L'Apostolat de la Mer considère la santé des enfants comme prioritaire. Pour cette raison, il participe aux frais de santé, dont les médicaments et diverses soins, suivant les besoins du malade. Tous les samedis, ces enfants reçoivent un repas chaud que les parents se chargent de préparer. En juin, on célèbre la journée de l'enfant, qui comprend la messe suivie de jeux et d'un repas commun. Des célébrations similaires ont lieu avant Noël. Habituellement, plus de 300 enfants viennent à la messe puis au repas. Ils réalisent des tableaux vivants sur la naissance du Christ, suivis de chants, de danses et d'une distribution de petits cadeaux. Le Vendredi saint, l'Association organise un chemin de Croix.

Il y a aussi *Les Associations des Femmes de Pêcheurs et de Marins*. Les Sœurs de la Congrégation des Filles de la Sagesse sont en charge pour la coordination des Associations de femmes dont les principales activités demeurent la vannerie et la broderie.

La plupart des activités entreprises impliquent principalement les pêcheurs eux-mêmes. L'Apostolat de la mer qui travaille au ser-

vice du bien des gens de la mer entreprend des actions permettant aux pêcheurs d'être plus professionnels dans leur métier. Une initiative simple de l'Apostolat, concrète et en même temps intéressante, est mise en place avec l'Association Fimpanato (*Fédération des Associations de Pêcheurs Artisanaux et Traditionnels de Toamasina*). Celle-ci comprend dix petites associations et compte plus de 300 membres. Ce chiffre inclut les pêcheurs de la région, aussi que des régions périphériques de Toamasina, mais aussi des régions situées au sud de la capitale du diocèse, dans les préfectures de Vatomaniry et Mahanoro. Depuis 2008, avec l'Apostolat de la mer, de l'archidiocèse de Toamasina, Fimpanato organise des formations régulières pour les pêcheurs traditionnels. Ces cours hebdomadaires, destinés à des groupes de 15 personnes, sont dirigés par des enseignants compétents, dont des officiers de la marine marchande, qui transmettent les rudiments de la navigation et de la sécurité, et qui initient aux techniques de pêche, des spécialistes en mécanique de moteur qui enseignent le service de combustion interne des moteurs et transmettent les bases de la loi sur la pêche. Ces cours sont partagés en deux sessions, l'une est consacrée à la théorie et l'autre à la mise en pratique des cours théoriques. Au terme de cette formation, les participants reçoivent de leur formateur, une attestation reconnue par l'administration d'État. L'objectif de ces programmes est de permettre à cette population de pêcheurs de pouvoir vendre le fruit de leur travail directement aux consommateurs, et de privilégier aussi la protection de l'environnement, afin que la loi sur l'emploi de matériaux soit observée (conformité avec la législation dans l'utilisation des matériels comme les mailles des filets etc...). Et ce tout en respectant les périodes de pêche, ainsi que la zone de deux milles marins dans laquelle la pêche commerciale est interdite aux grandes sociétés, mais exclusivement réservée à la pêche traditionnelle et artisanale.

De cette façon, les pêcheurs locaux sont soutenus. Concernant leurs compétences, elles augmentent en fonction des qualifications qu'ils ont acquises, ce que leur permet d'avoir une autonomie propre. Du point de vue de l'administration de l'État, l'application du respect des lois par la formation sur la réglementation de la pêche, implique une reconnaissance de la profession de pêcheur traditionnel. Cela entraîne un développement de la profession permettant aux pêcheurs qualifiés et reconnus d'accroître le travail, la sécurité en mer ainsi que la gestion

des ressources marines. Enfin, pour la société dans son ensemble, cela signifie reconnaissance du pêcheur traditionnel qualifié dans la communauté (dans son village, dans sa ville, et au niveau national). Le projet concerne une population pauvre mais dotée d'un potentiel considérable de développement, dans la mesure où la pêche traditionnelle compte plus de 150 000 pêcheurs qui ravitaillent le marché local à plus de 70 %. Il s'agit donc, d'une action qui permettrait de promouvoir cette population en situation de précarité structurelle.

C'est dans ces conditions que les oblats à Madagascar tentent de réaliser leur mission dans un travail avec ce groupe spécifique que constituent les gens de la mer, demeurant pour une bonne partie de l'année, en mouvement.

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Familia oblata

PARTNERS IN MISSION AND THE FRIENDS OF EUGENE SHARING THE OBLATE CHARISM IN THE ANGLO-IRISH PROVINCE

LORCÁN O'REILLY, OMI, MARY TYRRE

Over eight years ago Fr. Tom Murphy OMI set the Province on a new journey when he called for lay people to be invited to the Congress of the Province. The theme of the Congress was to be “Partners in Mission.” It was the first time we had invited the people we walk, with to such an event. The days we spent together helped shape the direction taken by the Province in the years that followed.

Four years later this new direction would lead to the establishment of the Partners in Mission team based at Denis Hurley House in London. The then Provincial, Fr. Willie Fitzpatrick, encouraged the team to find new ways to engage with people during a time of immense change within the life of the Province. He also committed us to finding new ways to journey with people in parishes from which we would have to withdraw, due to the limitations of our own personnel.

At present, we have a team of six people involved in the Partners project. The team is comprised of one Oblate and five lay people who share both our spirituality and mission. Two of them are devoted to youth ministry, two others work in the area of charism development, and the final member of the team takes care of the administration needs of the project. This commitment to the engagement of staff is a significant financial commitment of the Province, and a sign of the Province’s determination to “re-found” itself to meet the needs of the 21st century.

OUR VALUES

The values that underpin the work of the Partners in Mission team are: Continuity, Responsiveness and Innovation. By continuity we mean continuing the best practices of our Oblate heritage and building on our rich traditions. Responsiveness is for us to be faithful to the example of St. Eugene, and to reach out to the needs of the present moment. While innovation invites us to leave nothing “undared for the Gospel.”

There is a challenge to hold these three values together, and not allow any one of them to dominate, in this renewal project. Should ‘continuity’ dominate, then we would risk being locked in the past, and be simply repeating well-tried solutions to questions that may have changed. If ‘responsiveness’ were to dominate, then we would devote our time trying to be all things to all people, and in the process our energy would run into the sand. Finally, if ‘innovation’ were the dominant factor, then we would risk cutting ourselves off from our Oblate heritage.

DIFFERENT RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE OBLATE FAMILY

There is a recognition that there are different levels of belonging or relationships with the people we minister to and with, as is indicated in the illustration below.



We are trying to find ways to connect with people at each of these different levels of belonging, while at the same time respecting and

developing their individual faith journey. For the broadest group, such as members of our parish communities, we have been working to offer on-going faith formation, through a wide range of events such as the Oblate Summer School, and workshops with Fr. Frank Morrissey OMI. We also produce a quarterly newsletter called “Oblate Connections”, aimed at sharing aspects of the Oblate charism, and the story of how that charism is being expressed and lived out at home and throughout the wider Congregation and Mazenodian family.

The second group are people who share our missionary endeavour, but who are supported through other forms of spirituality. This is especially true for the many other religious we collaborate with across the Province.

The third group share our spirituality, but don’t have a day to day connection with the work of the mission. This group can include many of the supporters of MAMI. In responding to this group, we have offered a range of activities including workshops and retreats on the charism with Fr. Frank Santucci OMI. In addition, a range of materials has been developed in conjunction with Oblate Media. These include a range of DVDs on the life of the founder, The Lourdes Pilgrimage, and the story of the Anglo- Irish Province.

The final group are those who share both our spirituality and our mission. The two main examples of this in the life of the Province are the Oblate Youth Service, and the Friends of St. Eugene. The Oblate Youth Service has been in existence for over 25 years, and makes a significant contribution to a variety of endeavours both at home and abroad. Most people are familiar with the Youth Service through the key role they play each year as part of the Province’s annual pilgrimage to Lourdes.

The establishment of the Friends of St. Eugene is something that has taken place in more recent times. As it is a sign of great hope, I would like to spend the next part of this article exploring in depth some of the key aspects of this new endeavour.

THE FRIENDS OF ST. EUGENE

As part of the Re- Founding Process the Oblates had to withdraw from ministry in a number of parishes, some of which dated back to the

foundation of the Province itself. However in the months leading up to the handover to the different dioceses, it became apparent, that though the ordained Oblates were withdrawing from these parishes, the Oblate charism was alive and active in the lives of many of the parishioners.

The Anglo-Irish Province responded to these needs in 2010, by developing an association called the *Friends of St. Eugene*, for those who wish to be more closely linked with Oblate Spirituality. Rule 37a of the Oblate Constitutions and Rules was the framework which the Anglo-Irish Province used to develop the Friends of St. Eugene – in other countries sometimes referred to as Oblate Lay Associates. It states that:

The charism of St. Eugene de Mazenod is a gift of the Spirit to the Church, and it radiates throughout the world. Lay people recognise that they are called to share in the charism according to their state of life, and to live it in ways that vary according to milieu and cultures. They share in the charism in the spirit of communion and reciprocity amongst themselves and with the Oblates.

A decision was taken by the Partners in Mission Team with the support of the Provincial Council, to explore whether the people of the previously Oblate parishes in Birmingham, Rock Ferry and Norris Green on Merseyside would be interested in staying connected in a more formal way with the Oblate congregation and the Oblate charism. The answer was a resounding “Yes”!

The three original groups, located in the places named above, have been meeting, praying and studying the life and charism of St. Eugene enthusiastically for almost two years. They are very proud to be known as Friends of St. Eugene, and wear the badge they received at their enrolment as “Friends” with great pride.

As noted in their Mission Statement, they respond to the call to live the charism of St. Eugene de Mazenod in their daily lives, in their unique way. They support each other through Friendship, Prayer and Service, to make a difference in their local area and so further the Reign of God.

In 2011 in response to requests received, the project was extended to two parishes still being served by the Oblates, so that today there are groups of enrolled Friends at Tower Hill and Quex Road parishes in London. These parishes also have groups undertaking the formation process. In addition, there is also a group in formation in Crewe Parish, from

which the Oblates withdrew in 2010. Since the project began in 2010, we now have over 60 people enrolled as Friends of St. Eugene, with another 20 currently engaged in the formation process. There have been other requests too, from parishes where Oblates are currently on mission, for groups of Friends to be initiated and formally enrolled. At present, the Partners in Mission team are exploring ways of fulfilling these requests.

There is no doubt these groups are responding to a need of people to connect with Oblates or Oblate spirituality. As we worked with them, it became obvious that people were initially attracted to Oblate spirituality because of their experiences with Oblates they had known, without having any formal awareness of the charism of St. Eugene. However as participants journeyed through the full formation process, such individual attachments were transformed into a deep appreciation of the story of St. Eugene and his charism, as a source of inspiration for our daily living of the gospel.

The formation programme for those who are interested in becoming Friends of St. Eugene, is called “Impassioned for Christ”. This programme offers people the opportunity to explore, over the period of a year, what friendship with St. Eugene and the Oblates could mean for them. At the end of the formation programme, the participants discern whether they wish to continue as “Friends of Eugene”, and if so, how.

The formation programme was put together in early 2010 by the charism team under the guidance of Fr. Michael Hughes OMI. There are three introductory sessions open to anyone who is interested in finding out more about St. Eugene and the Oblate charism. They explore what it might mean to live as a Friend of St. Eugene, and to share in the Oblate story. At the end of this time, people are invited to join to the full formation programme. The following outline shows the wide range of topics that are dealt with during the formation period: *Impassioned For Christ programme (IFC)*.

1st session: Launching Impassioned for Christ.

2nd session: How Christ enriches the lives of Oblates and the Oblate family.

3rd session: How Mary enriches the lives of Oblates and the Oblate family.

4th session: How St. Eugene enriches the lives of Oblates and the Oblate family.

5th session: How the Oblates live out their mission in the world today.

6th session: How the Oblates live out their mission to the poor and marginalised in the (Anglo-Irish) local province.

7th session: How Community enriches the lives of Oblates and the Oblate family.

8th session: St. Eugene, the Church and reading the signs of the times

9th session: Christ the source of our unity.

10th session: Discernment.

The structure for each session involves prayer, input on the theme, followed by discussion / reflection / questions / comments, with the purpose always to seek ways to promote the charism of St. Eugene for the poor and most abandoned where we live. A wide variety of presentation techniques are used within the sessions, PowerPoint, Internet / YouTube, slides, photographs, photocopied sheets and music.

At the end of the formation programme, people are invited to discern whether they wish to be enrolled as Friends of St. Eugene. If the answer is yes, then they are asked to make the following promises for a one-year period:

As a friend of St. Eugene

– I will seek to deepen my relationship with Christ by imitating the pattern of his life.

– I promise to live the day to day realities of my life as St. Eugene de Mazenod did, so that each event will be the occasion for a personal encounter with the Lord, who through us gives himself to others and through others gives himself to us.

– I will make every effort to act and make choices that bear witness to my belief in the dignity of each person and the compassion of God for all peoples.

– I will take time each year to renew my commitment to the Friends of St. Eugene.

It has been our experience that people who make this journey very quickly become attracted to St. Eugene and his charism. Agreeing with the statement of Blessed John Paul II at the canonization of St. Eugene, “His influence is not limited to the age in which he lived. But it continues to have its effect on our time.” Most of the Friends would want add, “Why is St. Eugene so little known?”

The core values of the Friends are - friendship (in the fullest sense charity), prayer and service. Through these basic values they witness to

the dignity of each person and the compassion of God for all peoples, living the charism in ways that are appropriate to their personal gifts and situation. Faithful to the charism of St. Eugene, to be at the service of the local church, each of the groups undertake different missionary projects. Some projects are on going, others last for a shorter time, but to be of service to the Church and those who are poor or abandoned is always uppermost in the minds of the Friends. Many undertake service to the church as individual members of organisations and sodalities helping the poor, or as Ministers of Holy Communion or the Word. Group service projects undertaken as the Friends of St. Eugene are many and varied, and chosen by each group as befits the local Friends. One group has undertaken the care of the local graves of Oblates who have served their parish, while a newly formed group is looking into the possibility of a Prisoner support ministry. Yet another group has written letters in support of prisoners of conscience during Advent, while another group supported a local charity with collecting items of food or toiletries to support those in dire need. Along side these activities many of the Friends are raising funds to support the Missionary projects of the Oblates worldwide.

The relationship between the different groups within the Province is supported by the provision of a number of opportunities to come together for both retreat and workshop experiences. There is no doubt that there exists a deep sense of unity among the members of the different groups and that each group is making a significant contribution to the living out of the Oblate Charism in Britain today.

Over the last number of years, we have been supported and enriched by our sharing with people involved in the movement to share the charism of St. Eugene in other Provinces. As part of our contribution to this ongoing conversation, and in recognition that the IFC programme is something that can support the formation of people throughout different parts of the global Oblate Family, the material was compiled into a single book. This book has now been circulated to both the General Administration, and a number of other Units within the Congregation.

CONCLUSION

The Partners in Mission Project is a concrete expression of the Re-Founding initiative, and a sign of an evolving understanding of how we

are called to share life and mission with people who are inspired by the many aspects of the vision of St. Eugene. There are challenges ahead in terms of how we build towards equal partnership, and the implications for us in how we conduct our missionary endeavours, and how we engage in decision making with the people who share our mission.

As a Province, we remain committed to inviting young men to answer the call of the Lord to join our way of life as Oblate priests and brothers. But as scripture says, “there are many rooms in my Father’s house”, and the Friends of St. Eugene, the Oblate Youth Service and others who share both are spirituality and mission, are a reminder to us that no matter what the future may hold for the vowed members of the Province, the charism will continue to be present and nourish the life of many people in many different ways. As we move forward, it is timely to remember the words of St. Eugene, “Let us never waver in trusting God completely.”

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**ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT CHRIST, THE CHURCH,
AND HER MISSION
THE GROUP OF YOUNG OBLATE ASSOCIATES
IN THE CENTRAL EUROPEAN PROVINCE**

DIRK FEY, OMI, SEBASTIAN VEITS, BENJAMIN WEISS

How can we succeed in encouraging young adults to enter into the spirituality and charism of our Congregation? The Oblate missionaries of the Central European Province have asked themselves this question a few years ago and have, as a result, developed a model, the “Oblate Associates”, that is especially aimed at young adults. Thirtyseven young men and women have already joined our group, and six others are in a two-year formation program at the moment.

Caring for young people was always a heartfelt concern for Eugene de Mazenod. As it was during the foundation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, the Oblates of the Central European Province make an effort to open wide the doors, so to speak, for the youth and for young adults of today’s day and age. Therefore an intensive pastoral care for youth is a must, as it belongs to the cornerstones of our congregation on a global basis. The questions that young adults may have about their faith, and within their current phase in life, be it during vocational training, or study, or even in the first stages of their careers, may have increased in complexity and have become more labyrinthine than when they were still teenagers. More than ever before, young Christians, and especially Catholics, here in our country have grown up in an environment which has been critical of the Church. Professing oneself for Christ and His Church is no longer considered normal; it has become rare. Alongside these observations is also the fact that an increasing number of youth move far away from home, and even their country of origin, in order to begin their studies or apprenticeship elsewhere, so that a break in the support faith may offer threatens. People who have just begun a career, notice an atmosphere affected by the pressure to be efficient. This may cause the Christian faith to take a back seat, or even cause it to be a burden.

The answer to this challenge, to deliberately live the Christian faith in today's world, has helped us to delve into the charism of St. Eugene de Mazenod more deeply. For this purpose, the former German Province has been working on a well-trying model since 2007. The association with the spirituality of Eugene de Mazenod, which, until this time, was aimed at the daily reality of middle-aged adults, has now been fitted to the needs of young adults as well.

OMI ASSOCIATES

The canonization of Eugene de Mazenod in December 1995 confirmed him as an example of a successful Christian existence for the entire Church. Subsequently, the Oblates have made intensive efforts to ensure that the charism of the founder is made accessible to "outsiders". In 2004, the Oblates of the German Province gave people who already had a connection with individual communities, a chance to deepen this affiliation through a process of formation. A further step was taken when distinct communities, like Hünfeld and Munich, were established as regional headquarters for Associate groups.

It was during this time that regional groups of young Associates formed alongside the superregional group (which consisted of 37 members at the time). The following five groups were formed: The Burlo Group with five Associates, the Hünfeld Group with nine Associates, the Saxon-Sorbian Group with seven Associates, the South-German Group with eleven Associates, and the Czech Group with thirteen Associates. All six groups, including the superregional group, vote for a speaker coordinator. An Oblate Father serves as a spiritual guide for the Associates during their frequent meetings. Every year the Associates renew a promise to live according to the charism of St. Eugene, de Mazenod. Through a life in accord with the charism of St. Eugene the Associates strive to live a life of prayer and of service, in order to deepen their relationship with Christ. They live so that God can be experienced through them in this world. The foundation for this sort of life originates in their enthusiasm for Christ, for the Church and Her mission, and in their relationship with Christ.

The six Associate groups form the Associates of the Central European Province. Every year all of the groups meet in Hünfeld for the

Provincial meeting in October. The speaker coordinator, voted for by the Associates themselves, and the curate of the provincial structure (an Oblate Father appointed by the Provincial) are responsible for the unity of the Associates with the Congregation. They also care for the unity of the Associates among themselves, and with the Oblates.

The Associates describe three cornerstones of their identity in their statutes: spirituality, communion, and apostolate. The attribute of Oblate-Spirituality of the Associates is their essential and confident commitment to Christ. Together with St. Eugene their focus remains above all the Crucified Christ. It is through him that the Love of God is made tangible for all. This experience is placed in close connection with our mission through witness to this love, with a unique emphasis on their mission to the poor, and with love for the Church as the Body of Christ. This communion is based upon the bond to the charism of St. Eugene de Mazenod, and it is realized in companionship in regional and super-regional Associate groups, as well as in their relationship with Oblate communities. The apostolate of the Associates is fulfilled in day to day life, since they choose to live as convinced, approachable, and visible Christians. In many cases, they offer the Oblates support through prayer, and through concrete collaboration.

FORMATION OF YOUNG ADULTS

Even the young Associates meet at least three weekends each year. These weekends are different than the formation weekends, because of the great number of participants. The individual formation groups meet for a weekend of further training. The theme of each weekend is based on the concrete needs of each group.

The young Associates constantly reflect their identity as Catholics in a pluralistic society. Communication with ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical organizations has a high priority, along with the spiritual exchange that the Associates have with each other. This is demonstrated in the exchange that they have with Muslims, and with Protestant and Evangelical congregations. The Associates make an effort to keep in touch with diverse Religious Orders, and with charitable organizations.

The frequent encounters within the different groups and the companionship that results, are a source of strength for the Associates. Each

member brings their worries and experiences to the meetings, and can reflect on them with the group. Through this communion, the Associates are able to deepen their individual spirituality and grow in their faith. The purpose of these meetings is to support young adults in living their faith conscientiously, despite the monotonous routine of daily life. It should radiate through them and make them true witnesses of the Love of Christ wherever they are, be it in their families, or at work.

Our Congregation values alternating the places where the Associates and those interested in our work meet, so that they may get to know our Congregation and her different facets. This causes an automatic transformation in the communities themselves. It “forces” us, so to speak, to be open, and to let in fresh air. This openness also gives young people a chance to see what our life is about. It gives them a view behind cloistered walls that they would have otherwise never had. The times of prayer and meals is, therefore, a meeting point between the religious and the Associates. One could say that these encounters during prayer and meal times strengthen the bond to our Congregation even more than the meetings themselves. At the same time, these meetings with the Associates serve as enrichment for the Fathers and Brothers as well, because it gives us an insight into the lives of young people today. The elder members of our Congregation especially have benefited greatly.

All Associates are required to meet regularly with a spiritual director, and to make an annual retreat. The Province retreat is open to the Associates as well.

CHALLENGES AND CHANCES FOR ASSOCIATES AND OBLATES

The fact that the Oblates have decided in favor of having faithful laity associate themselves to the Congregation, and the decision of convinced Christians to affiliate themselves with the Oblate Missionaries, proves that the charism of St. Eugene de Mazenod is alive today, and that it is actively forming the Oblate family.

Young Associates make their decision to affiliate themselves to the Oblates during the eventful years of their vocational development, the first stages of their careers, and the beginnings of starting a family. Within the Oblate family, they find a spiritual home, where they

develop a positive identification with the Church through their experiences with the Fathers and Brothers. Meeting with elder Associates offers young adults a chance see what a life affected by Christian living may look like in later stages. The annual promises of the Associates are to be a reliable and life-giving source for those who make them, but in order for this to take place, a considerable amount of openness and accountability is necessary.

As religious, we can reach only a certain spectrum of people in today's changing world. With the foundation of the Associates, however, we have gained a new perspective, and have a chance of reaching, through them, people we would have had no contact with before. Our work together bears fruit. The young Associates have decided to support the Oblates in youth ministry. This work has become a common apostolate. For this reason it is important that the Oblates make a personal investment in the formation, and the continued formation, of the Associates. We have to open our doors, our ears, and our hearts to them.

Our experiences during the past years have proven that our courage is being rewarded. The Association has been enriching for both the Oblates and the young adults who have affiliated themselves to our Congregation. Together we are better able to read the signs of our times and we mutually support each other during the development of our specific vocations. This vocation, lived out in the charism of St. Eugene de Mazenod, forms a spiritual family that dedicates itself to God through its service for others. Our love for Christ and our neighbor, and the mutual respect that we share is a binding force that unites us, for "Love envelops all things. And for new afflictions she finds, when necessary, new means of handling it." (Eugene de Mazenod in a pastoral letter during Lent to his diocese on February 7th, 1847).

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Documenta

FERNAND JETTÉ, OMI, INTRODUCTION À SES ÉCRITS SPIRITUELS INÉDITS¹

EUGÈNE LAPOINTE, OMI

Quand j'ai rencontré le père Fernand Jetté, OMI, pour la première fois au scolasticat Saint-Joseph d'Ottawa en 1953, les scolastiques que nous étions en ce temps-là l'appelaient le « vieux Jetté ». Il marchait d'un pas plutôt régulier et sans hâte en se balançant par en avant: il avait trente-deux ans. Dans les moments ordinaires de la vie, il n'en imposait pas; pourtant, il commandait le respect, malgré « sa douce personnalité » (Wilhelm Steckling²) et sa simplicité désarmante. Il m'a semblé qu'il n'avait pas vraiment vieilli durant toutes les années que je l'ai connu jusqu'à son décès en l'an 2000. Il m'a toujours apparu comme un « vieux sage », un maître de vie, un spirituel profond. On aurait peut-être pu le prendre pour un gourou, mais il n'a jamais eu cette prétention.

Le souvenir personnel le plus remarquable que je garde du père, lorsque j'eus l'occasion de le rencontrer ou de vivre avec lui, concerne surtout les assemblées où il était présent. Quand on était en réunion avec lui à propos de questions de vie, il était très discret dans ces interventions; il parlait peu la plupart du temps, mais écoutait attentivement et prenait parfois quelques notes. On pouvait discuter toute une journée sans qu'on l'ait remarqué particulièrement. Mais soudain, quand nous avions atteint l'impasse, que la discussion n'avancait plus, il pouvait prendre la parole, nous faire un résumé, bref mais très clair, de nos conversations de la journée et proposer une solution possible qui s'avérait finalement presque une évidence. Il avait un don remarquable de la synthèse et une capacité impressionnante pour proposer une solution quand nous pensions avoir atteint un mur infranchissable. Il était un maître du discernement.

Le p. Jetté naquit à Sainte-Rose, à quelques kilomètres au nord de Montréal, le 13 décembre 1921, et il mourut le 6 novembre 2000. Troisième d'une famille modeste de quatre enfants, il était le fils de Napoléon Jetté, tailleur, et de Marie Bastien. Il avait un oncle oblat, le p. Roméo Archambault. Il fit ses premiers vœux de religieux oblat le 2 août 1942 et reçut l'ordination au presbytérat le 20 décembre 1947. C'est à l'Université d'Ottawa qu'il fit ses études de philosophie et de théologie et, un peu plus tard, il se dirigea vers l'Europe pour un stage d'une année en histoire de la spiritualité. Licencié et maître ès art en philosophie, ainsi que docteur en théologie avec spécialisation en missiologie, il a d'abord enseigné la théologie missionnaire et spirituelle à l'Université d'Ottawa. Il occupa aussi le poste de directeur spirituel au scolasticat Saint-Joseph d'Ottawa, puis devint supérieur de cette même institution (1965-67), vicaire provincial de la province Saint-Joseph (1967-72), ainsi que vicaire général de l'administration générale des Oblats à Rome (1972-74) pour devenir finalement Supérieur général (1974-86).

Rapidement, il s'adonna à la direction spirituelle auprès de religieux et religieuses, d'abord à Ottawa, puis à Montréal, à Trois-Rivières et même à Québec. Aussi, a-t-il pu dire dans un interview de 1995³:

Au fond, ce que je voulais, c'était de voir la grâce agir chez les autres. Et dès le début de ma vie sacerdotale, j'ai commencé à faire un peu de ministère à l'extérieur. Le soir, dans les maisons de retraites comme à Hull, ou encore dans les couvents de religieuses, dans certains monastères, comme les Sœurs du Précieux-Sang, ici à Ottawa. Et ça, ça m'a mis en contact assez rapidement avec certaines personnes qui cherchent Dieu profondément. [...] En voyant l'évolution de leur vie, je reconnaissais beaucoup l'action de Dieu, d'après ce que j'avais lu, étudié et essayé de vivre.

Cet intérêt pour la spiritualité commença très tôt, à partir de ses études classiques au séminaire de Chambly et au noviciat de Richelieu. Deux ouvrages le marquèrent en ce temps-là: d'abord l'*Imitation de Jésus-Christ* en latin qu'il avait reçu comme prix de fin d'année scolaire, puis le livre de J. CALVET, *Bossuet : Œuvres choisies ...* Hatier, 725 p. L'*Imitation de Jésus-Christ* l'a suivi tout au long de sa vie et lui donna le goût de la vie intérieure. En étudiant des auteurs tels que saint Ignace de Loyola et Marie de l'Incarnation, il découvrit peu à peu que l'*Imitation* avait été parmi les

ouvrages qui les avaient influencés profondément dans leur quête spirituelle⁴. En ce qui concerne Bossuet, il lut toutes ses œuvres au scolasticat, non « pas tant pour la littérature que pour le lien que ce dernier mettait entre la foi et la vie concrète, que ce soit dans la direction spirituelle, dans les conseils de formation qu'il donnait, dans les relations avec d'autres spirituels » et dans ses réflexions sur l'histoire. Il semble que les réflexions du p. Jetté sur la mort selon Bossuet en 1944⁵, mais restées à l'état de manuscrit, furent son premier écrit spirituel. Il n'était encore que scolastique.

Peut-être faut-il dire que, déjà au cours de ses études philosophiques, la dimension spirituelle et contemplative de la pensée poursuivait le père Jetté. C'est ainsi qu'en 1945 il présenta une thèse de maîtrise en philosophie qui s'intitule *Le sujet de la contemplation naturelle: Intellectus ou Ratio chez saint Thomas d'Aquin*. L'approche première de la thèse est assez spéculative, ce qui ne pouvait être autrement pour un tel écrit en ce temps-là, mais la conclusion nous oriente vers une dimension beaucoup plus contemplative, vers ce que saint Thomas appelait la sagesse⁶.

Le p. Jetté s'adonna à l'étude de la spiritualité, mais d'abord à travers les maîtres spirituels eux-mêmes, surtout ceux du 16^e, 17^e et 18^e siècles⁷: Ignace de Loyola (1491), Thérèse d'Avila (1515), Jean de la Croix (1542), François de Sales (1567) et Jeanne de Chantal (1572), Marie de l'Incarnation (1599), Bossuet (1627), Charles de Foucauld (1858), Thérèse de Lisieux (1873)⁸, et plusieurs autres qu'il n'a pas toujours eu le loisir d'étudier en profondeur comme il l'aurait voulu en raison des charges administratives qu'il a occupées dans la Congrégation à partir de 1967, comme Louis Lallemand, Jean Bosco, Edith Stein, René Voillaume, etc.

Mais de tous les grands spirituels, ses préférés, semble-t-il, furent Marie de l'Incarnation et Thérèse de Lisieux. Sur la première, il s'est expliqué dans un interview qu'il a donné à Radio Vatican à l'occasion de la béatification de cette dernière et dans une causerie qu'il avait préparée pour les Ursulines de Stanstead en juin 1989, mais qu'il n'aurait pas donnée, semble-t-il, pour une raison que nous ignorons⁹. D'après son interview pour Radio Vatican¹⁰, le père Jetté lut l'autobiographie (1664) de la bienheureuse durant ses études en théologie avant son ordination au presbytérat. Il s'était dit à ce moment-là: « Si plus tard j'ai à approfondir la spiritualité missionnaire, c'est là que j'irai! »

Effectivement, quelques années après, mes supérieurs m'orientaient vers l'enseignement, et de façon particulière, vers l'enseignement de la théologie et de la spiritualité missionnaires à l'Institut de Missiologie d'Ottawa. Je revins donc à Marie de l'Incarnation. Depuis lors, elle a toujours été pour moi quelqu'un de bien vivant et de profondément inspirateur.

Marie de l'Incarnation l'attirait pour son expérience de Dieu, comment celui-ci progressivement avait travaillé son âme et s'était révélé à elle; son esprit missionnaire aussi et comment l'Esprit de Dieu, en s'emparant d'elle, avait élargi son cœur aux dimensions du monde; ainsi que l'unité profonde qu'il y avait chez elle entre la prière et l'action. Car au milieu des tracas de toutes sortes, elle faisait sans cesse l'expérience de la présence de Dieu. « Je ne me trouve jamais mieux en Dieu, a-t-elle écrit, que lorsque je quitte mon repos pour son amour » (1^{er} septembre 1643). Le père publia le résultat de ses recherches sur la bienheureuse dans un livre intitulé *La voie de la sainteté d'après Marie de l'Incarnation*¹¹.

Quand à sainte Thérèse de Lisieux, ce qui chez elle plaisait beaucoup au père Jetté, apparemment, était sa « petite voie », la simplicité de son approche spirituelle, une voie toute petite qui pouvait convenir aux gens ordinaires, aux petites gens, « aux âmes simples », que ce soit des religieux, des religieuses, des prêtres ou des laïques. En ceci se révèle le but que visait le père dans son enseignement: rendre possible à toute personne de bonne volonté une rencontre intime et profonde avec Dieu.

Dans l'ouvrage en quatre volumes que nous présentons ici, nous publions surtout les écrits spirituels inédits que le père Jetté a rédigés au début de son enseignement et de son ministère pastoral, c'est-à-dire à partir de la fin des années 1940 jusque vers la fin de la décennie 60, soit à peu près les vingt premières années de sa vie comme professeur et responsable de formation religieuse¹². Car, ensuite, il fut nommé à des charges très importantes d'administration dans la Congrégation. Et alors, il n'a pu continuer au même rythme ses recherches et son enseignement. De plus, nous nous bornons aux écrits de spiritualité générale et de spiritualité apostolique, aux exposés sur les Maîtres dans ces domaines, ainsi qu'à son journal spirituel qu'il intitule *Notes spirituelles* (quadruple sujet qui permet la division en quatre volumes de l'ouvrage présent). Nous n'avons presque pas touché aux écrits sur la vie religieuse et presbytérale, en particulier la vie spirituelle oblate, sur laquelle le père Jetté a beaucoup

travaillé dans le cadre de ses tâches administratives et qui ont paru en grand nombre dans les publications officielles de la Congrégation¹³.

Si le père avait eu le loisir de continuer ses recherches, il aurait certainement pu développer encore davantage sa conception de la vie spirituelle. Cependant, il faut le dire ici, la recherche pour la recherche ne semblait pas vraiment l'intéresser ou du moins n'était pas son intérêt premier. Il n'a jamais prétendu faire œuvre originale en ce domaine, et s'il a beaucoup fréquenté les spirituels, c'était toujours en vue de son action apostolique, de la direction spirituelle et pour sa vie personnelle.

Au demeurant, on ne peut considérer les écrits que nous publions ici comme des œuvres définitives, toutes prêtes pour la publication. Ce sont souvent des notes de cours et des écrits de circonstance que le p. Jetté avait préparés pour des causeries à des religieuses ou ce que nous appelions autrefois des « conférences spirituelles » pour les scolastiques oblats en formation première. En revanche, le père s'inspirait, ou même parfois suivait assez étroitement les publications spirituelles qu'il pensait les meilleures en ce temps-là. Nous présentons ses écrits comme tels en suivant assez étroitement la présentation qu'il en avait fait, gardant en particulier les nombreuses subdivisions didactiques que l'auteur y avait introduites pour l'aider dans son enseignement. Nous nous efforçons de corriger les fautes grammaticales et d'orthographe qui proviennent souvent, nous le croyons, des copistes qui ont dactylographié ces textes. L'auteur affectionnait particulièrement les points de suspension, parfois même après l'expression « etc. », ce qui indique que sa pensée n'est pas exhaustive et qu'elle pourrait être prolongée bien davantage. Nous en avons éliminé beaucoup. Nous utilisons parfois les parenthèses carrées [], pour introduire des titres et sous-titres ou pour expliciter certaines expressions. Sauf quelques cas rarissimes où le père les a utilisées lui-même, ce qui se trouve à l'intérieur de ces parenthèses vient de nous¹⁴.

CONTENU DE CHAQUE VOLUME

Premier tome

Ce premier volume des œuvres inédites du père Fernand Jetté, OMI, est constitué d'écrits de spiritualité générale en opposition à la spiri-

tualité plus spécifiquement apostolique qui fera l'objet du deuxième volume. Nous avons distribué ces œuvres en dix chapitres.

Le premier présente une thèse de maîtrise en philosophie. Il ne s'agit donc pas de spiritualité proprement dite, mais d'un texte sur l'acte de contemplation naturelle. Il est intéressant pour quelqu'un qui étudie la pensée spirituelle du père Jetté, car elle indique, déjà au stade de sa formation philosophique et scolastique (1945), que la contemplation le préoccupait. C'est la raison pour laquelle nous publions ici cette dissertation plutôt aride, le langage étant de type spéculatif. C'est une recherche sur saint Thomas d'Aquin, mais elle aborde également saint Augustin. On pourrait s'arrêter à la conclusion de l'œuvre qui s'approche plus particulièrement des préoccupations de l'auteur.

Ceux et celles que le sujet du premier chapitre intéresse moins peuvent passer directement au deuxième qui aborde spécifiquement la spiritualité. Il s'agit d'un cours donné en 1958 qui s'intitule *Traité de théologie spirituelle*. L'auteur se propose « d'exposer les principaux éléments de la vie spirituelle et d'analyser les diverses étapes de son évolution dans l'âme chrétienne ». Le langage est didactique et comporte d'innombrables divisions et subdivisions.

Le chapitre trois comporte deux textes que nous avons chapeauté du titre [*Le monde et la vie chrétienne*]. Le premier est un exposé de 1945 intitulé *Le renouveau catholique dans la littérature française (1870-1925)*; le deuxième, composé, semble-il, après la deuxième session de Vatican II (1962), a pour titre *Vision chrétienne du monde*.

Le quatrième chapitre aborde la vie d'oraison et comporte une série de lectures spirituelles données en 1960 au scolasticat Saint-Joseph d'Ottawa.

Le cinquième s'intitule *Progrès dans la vie spirituelle*. Le manuscrit ne comporte aucune date, mais comme il mentionne le pape Paul VI et qu'il consiste en causeries données à un groupe de religieuses, on peut penser que le texte a été composé vers la fin des années 1960, avant que l'auteur parte pour Rome en 1972.

Pour le sixième chapitre, nous avons réuni trois textes sous le titre général de [*Spiritualité et le monde présent*]. Il comprend 1) *Les grands courants actuels dans l'Église* (de 1956), 2) *La sainteté aujourd'hui* (de 1963) et 3) *Courants actuels en spiritualité* (également de 1963 ou peu après).

Le septième chapitre rassemble, sous le titre [*Vie spirituelle et l'amitié*], un texte de 1954 intitulé *Amitié avec le Christ*, un deuxième

de 1947, *Amitié filiale avec Marie*, un troisième de 1963, *L'amitié dans la vie spirituelle: François de Sales et Françoise de Chantal*, et un quatrième de 1960, *Les amitiés dans la vie religieuse*.

L'expérience de Dieu et l'oraison mystique occupe le chapitre huit, tandis que le neuvième donne quelques éléments de vie spirituelle pour des laïcs engagés.

Le dernier et dixième chapitre aborde la question de *La formation du directeur spirituel*. Il illustre bien, pensons-nous, la manière du père Jetté de diriger les personnes qui s'adressaient à lui en vue d'une orientation plus assurée de leur vie spirituelle.

Généralement, à l'intérieur des chapitres que nous venons de présenter, nous conservons les divisions originales de l'auteur ainsi que leur nomenclature, comme « chapitre », « partie », « introduction », « conclusion », souvent même la table des matières originale, etc. Nous espérons que cela ne portera pas à confusion. Les notes en bas de page suivies du sigle (NDLR) sont de l'éditeur, tandis que les autres proviennent du p. Jetté.

Deuxième tome

Après un premier volume sur la spiritualité en général, ce second tome des œuvres spirituelles inédites du père Fernand Jetté, OMI, présente ses écrits de spiritualité apostolique et il compte cinq chapitres.

Le premier, un long texte de plus de deux cents pages, contient les notes d'un cours donné en 1954-55 à l'Institut de Missiologie de l'Université d'Ottawa. Il débute avec deux plans distincts et détaillés de plusieurs pages. Ceux-ci diffèrent quelque peu de l'organisation ultime du texte principal qui suit immédiatement et peuvent indiquer la façon du p. Jetté de travailler et de développer sa pensée.

Le chapitre II, intitulé [*La spiritualité missionnaire*] comporte trois textes: d'abord *L'esprit missionnaire*, présenté à la V^e Semaine d'études missionnaires de 1950, puis *L'engagement missionnaire*, une conférence donnée aux membres de Mundo-Ottawa en 1963, et finalement *Le ministère missionnaire, moyen de perfection religieuse*, un travail préparé pour le Congrès des Religieux, qui s'est tenu à Rome en 1950.

Le chapitre III s'intitule [*Modèles d'esprit apostolique*] et comporte trois textes: le premier du 16 août 1948 et donné au chalet du Lac Poisson-Blanc (au nord de Hull, Québec) à un groupe de confrères,

semble-t-il, présente *L'esprit apostolique à l'école de sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus et de Marie de l'Incarnation*; le second donné au Vieux-Monastère de Québec (des Ursulines), le 20 août 1958, fait le *Parallèle entre deux âmes* (Marie de l'Incarnation et Thérèse de Lisieux), tandis que le troisième parle de *L'homme apostolique selon s. Ignace, p. Lallemand, Bérulle, Olier, s. Vincent de Paul*. Ce sont des conférences spirituelles qui s'adressaient aux scolastiques d'Ottawa de 1962.

Une série d'entretiens avec les Sœurs Sainte-Marie de Namur au cours des années 1958-59, intitulée *Sainteté et apostolat*, constitue le chapitre IV.

Enfin, le chapitre V termine le volume avec l'article *Vocation apostolique et mariage spirituel: L'itinéraire de Marie de l'Incarnation*. Il s'agit d'une exception aux textes inédits qui le précèdent: l'article fut publié en juin 1955 dans la revue *La Vie Spirituelle*. Il permet, pensons-nous, de bien conclure le présent volume sur la spiritualité apostolique, la raison pour laquelle nous présentons ce texte ici.

Comme pour le premier volume, nous avons gardé les divisions et subdivisions de l'auteur, c'est-à-dire du p. Jetté, à l'intérieur des textes, ainsi que les termes pour les désigner comme partie, chapitre, paragraphe, table des matières, etc.

Tous ces documents peuvent paraître disparates à première vue et ils s'adressent à des auditoires très différents. Nous croyons cependant qu'ils représentent des intuitions importantes qui sont venues à l'esprit du père Jetté durant les premiers vingt ans de son enseignement. Elles lui ont servi pour le reste de sa vie dans son ministère apostolique même si, sans doute, il a dû évoluer profondément sur un point ou l'autre tout en restant fidèle à la même ligne directrice générale.

Troisième tome

Après un premier volume des écrits spirituels inédits du père Fernand Jetté, OMI, sur la spiritualité en général et un second sur la spiritualité apostolique, ce troisième tome présente ses écrits sur les Maîtres de la vie spirituelle et compte sept chapitres. Nous présentons ces Maîtres par ordre chronologique de leur naissance.

Le premier chapitre étudie l'auteur des écrits johanniques, comme maître de vie, selon sept thèmes: la vérité selon saint Jean, la voie de l'Esprit, la loi chrétienne, la foi, l'amour, l'espérance et le péché. Dans cet exposé, le p. Jetté démontre qu'il appuie son enseignement spirituel sur l'Écriture.

C'est la raison pour laquelle nous publions cette œuvre ici, même si elle suit assez étroitement un ouvrage d'un collègue: Noël LAZURE, *Les Valeurs morales de la théologie johannique*, Paris, Gabalda, 1965.

Le deuxième chapitre est une introduction à la spiritualité de Thérèse d'Avila: 1) le milieu, la sainte et son œuvre, 2) sa doctrine spirituelle et, 3) en conclusion, comment lire sainte Thérèse?

Puis vient une introduction à saint Jean de la Croix en six entretiens: 1) le milieu, l'homme et l'œuvre, 2) l'idéal à atteindre, la parfaite union à Dieu dans la contemplation, 3) les purifications ou le renoncement universel, 4) les purifications passives ou les nuits, 5) la récompense ou la parfaite union divine accompagnée de tous ses biens, 6) conclusion ou notre comportement devant saint Jean de la Croix.

Le quatrième chapitre, beaucoup plus long, rassemble un certain nombre d'écrits sur Marie de l'Incarnation que nous présentons en deux parties d'inégales longueurs. La première s'intitule: [Comment le père Jetté en est arrivé à étudier Marie de l'Incarnation] et contient deux textes: 1) *Ma rencontre avec Marie de l'Incarnation* et 2) *Interview à Radio-Vatican*. La deuxième partie présente douze études sur la Bienheureuse: 1) Marie de l'Incarnation, ursuline (1599-1672), 2) Marie de l'Incarnation, vie et doctrine, 3) Marie de l'Incarnation, vie et actualité, 4) La vocation missionnaire de Marie de l'Incarnation, 5) Marie de l'Incarnation et Thérèse de Lisieux, 6) Marie de l'Incarnation, Fille de France – Mère du Canada, 7) La dévotion à Jésus chez la Vénérable Marie de l'Incarnation, 8) Les trois grâces mariales de Marie de l'Incarnation, 9) Fond (de l'âme) [selon Marie de l'Incarnation], 10) Marie de l'Incarnation, vraie fille de sainte Angèle, 11) Prière et oraison à l'école de Marie de l'Incarnation, 12) La Vierge Marie dans la vie d'une de nos fondatrices, la vénérable Marie de l'Incarnation. À la lecture de ce chapitre, on prend conscience de l'intérêt particulier que le père Jetté a manifesté pour ce personnage spirituel remarquable béatifié par le Pape Jean-Paul II.

Le cinquième chapitre traite de Bossuet, l'auteur spirituel sur lequel le père Jetté a d'abord travaillé quand il était encore scolastique. Une première partie présente *Le XVII^e siècle et Bossuet*, tandis qu'une deuxième étudie *Le sens de la mort chez Bossuet*. Choisis par le père Jetté lui-même, plusieurs textes de cet auteur sont présentés en appendices.

Suit Charles de Foucauld, son itinéraire mystique et sa doctrine spirituelle, en deux parties: d'abord Charles de Foucauld, moine-missionnaire, puis Charles de Foucauld, Maître de vie apostolique.

Le volume se termine par un dernier chapitre sur Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus: 1) son itinéraire mystique, 2) sa doctrine spirituelle et, finalement, 3) Thérèse de Lisieux: être filles de l'Église. Après Marie de l'Incarnation, il semble que Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus était la sainte préférée du père Jetté.

On pourrait publier encore plusieurs autres textes du père Jetté sur les Maîtres spirituels. Ce sont souvent des textes brefs de quelques pages. Si nos lecteurs étaient intéressés à les consulter nous donnons ici la référence à plusieurs d'entre eux qu'il est possible de consulter aux Archives Deschâtelets, Ottawa: Ignace de Loyola (HB 2675 .J58F 03), Louis Lallemand (HB 2675 .J58K19 1), Baron de Renty (HB 2678 C R), Edith Stein (HB 2673 .J58 C 3 01), René Voillaume (HB 2675 .J58 K 18 1), Catherine de Hueck (HB 2678 .J58 C J), etc.

Il serait aussi possible de présenter quelques autres textes plus longs, comme les notes d'un cours sur saint Jean Bosco dont la référence est HB 2675 .J58J1 01. Mais nous l'avons omis ici, dans ce volume, parce qu'à notre avis il suit trop servilement un auteur particulier comme A. AUFRAY, *Un Grand éducateur, saint Jean Bosco*, Paris, Vitte, 1947, 600 pages, et présente donc moins d'intérêt comme œuvre personnelle du père Jetté.

Ceux et celles qui ont bien connu le p. Jetté seront peut-être surpris de constater que nous n'avons presque rien publié des études qu'il a faites sur saint Ignace de Loyola, car le père a beaucoup travaillé sur les *Exercices spirituels* du fondateur des Jésuites. Il aurait été possible de créer un huitième chapitre sur ce sujet ici dans ce troisième volume. Nous ne l'avons pas fait parce que le père a travaillé sur ce sujet dans le cadre de la spiritualité oblate, en particulier en vue de la création d'un programme de ressourcement spirituel pour les membres de sa Congrégation dans lequel une retraite d'un mois (les *Exercices spirituels* adaptés aux Oblats) occupait la place centrale. Au début, il s'agissait de créer pour les 35 à 45 ans quelque chose comme un « troisième an » de noviciat à l'image de celui des Jésuites. Mais peu à peu le programme fut étendu à tout Oblat qui sentait le besoin de s'arrêter un peu et de faire le point sur sa vie spirituelle. Pour cette raison, nous avons pensé que les recherches du p. Jetté sur Ignace de Loyola cadreraient mieux dans un volume dédié spécifiquement à la spiritualité oblate qui pourrait s'ajouter à la collection présente.

Quatrième tome

Ce quatrième volume des œuvres spirituelles inédites du père Fernand Jetté, OMI, se fait plus personnel, cette fois-ci, en présentant en première partie ce que ce dernier appelle ses « Notes spirituelles ». En dépit de cette appellation, nous les avons regroupées sous le titre général de *Journal spirituel*¹⁵ parce qu'il y a beaucoup plus que des notes de réflexion ou de méditation. Le père y révèle sa vie intérieure de relation avec Dieu après son ordination presbytérale en 1947 jusqu'à quelques semaines avant sa mort en l'an 2000. Dans un quatrième chapitre, nous avons joint à cette première partie les notes qu'il avait rassemblées en préparation de son ordination aux ordres majeurs en 1947.

Les trois premiers chapitres présentent donc le contenu de trois cahiers, intitulés *Notes spirituelles*. Un premier comprend les années 1947 à 1986 et, tout au début, le père présente lui-même ce texte après qu'il eut relu ses notes, qu'il les eut élaguées un peu, puis ait demandé au p. Roger Brouillette, OMI, de les taper¹⁶. Un fois ou l'autre, il affirme qu'il relisait ces textes. Peut-être aussi soupçonnait-il qu'on pourrait les publier un jour après sa mort. Le chapitre comprend trois sections :

I. Ottawa – Montréal (1947-1972), c'est-à-dire la période vécue par le père au Canada de son ordination à son départ pour Rome.

II. Rome (1972-1980), période qui comprend son élection comme Vicaire général, puis Supérieur général de la Congrégation et qui se clôt avec l'approbation d'une nouvelle édition des *Constitutions et Règles des O.M.I.*

III. Rome (1980-1986) quand, à la fin de cette période, se termine le deuxième terme du généralat du père et qu'il retourne au Canada.

À partir de 1986, il semble que le père Jetté ait interrompu ses *Notes spirituelles* pendant une période de dix ans. Du moins, on n'en trouve pas dans ses papiers personnels pour ce laps de temps. C'est le 11 novembre 1996 qu'elles recommencent pendant une retraite annuelle à laquelle il participe. Nous avons donc un deuxième cahier qui comprend les années 1996 à 1998 et nous les reproduisons ici au chapitre II.

Un troisième chapitre reproduit un dernier cahier qui date de janvier 1999 et dure jusqu'à la mort du père en octobre 2000. Nous avons déjà noté que le quatrième chapitre comprenait les notes spirituelles que le père avaient rédigées pour son ordination aux ordres majeurs : le sous-diaconat, le diaconat et la prêtrise.

On appréciera, pensons-nous, cette première partie, en particulier ceux et celles qui manifestent un grand intérêt pour le père Jetté pour avoir vécu ou collaboré avec lui, ou l'avoir eu comme guide spirituel. On y reconnaît la personnalité du père et la profondeur de sa vie spirituelle. On remarquera en particulier ses constantes oraisons jaculatoires en latin, tirées pour la plupart de l'*Imitation de Jésus-Christ*, surtout durant ses dernières années.

Le présent volume comprend également une deuxième partie qui s'intitule: Le directeur des *Exercices spirituels*. Durant les années 1960, le père Jetté avait contribué à l'établissement de ce qu'on a appelé d'abord *La Retraite de Mazenod*, puis *L'Expérience de Mazenod*, une période de formation comparable au « troisième an » des Jésuites au cours de laquelle avait lieu une retraite de trente jours. Pour l'organisation de cette dernière, on avait eu recours au service du père Jean Laplace, s.j., spécialiste des *Exercices spirituels* de saint Ignace. Le père Jetté reçut la formation du Jésuite et dirigea lui-même une fois ou l'autre la retraite de trente jours ou les *Exercices spirituels*.

Un premier chapitre présente donc une introduction d'une vingtaine de pages sur les retraites spirituelles dans laquelle le père Jetté explique la nature de la retraite, les moyens pour la réussir, la marche générale de la retraite de trente jours, ses origines, son but et sa doctrine.

Suit un deuxième chapitre assez long sur la marche détaillée des *Exercices spirituels* qui s'inspire constamment, nous dit le père, de la retraite de trente jours dirigée par le père Laplace. Ces notes sont destinées éventuellement à un directeur de retraite et présentées de manière assez schématique.

Le troisième chapitre ne manquera pas d'attirer l'attention, pensons-nous, car il comprend deux séries de conférences aux anciens retraitants des *Exercices* de trente jours, en tout seize conférences d'un intérêt certain, qui représentent le conférencier spirituel comme on a pu connaître, le père Jetté dans son meilleur.

Le volume se termine avec un quatrième chapitre intitulé *Retraite d'ordination*. Il s'agit d'une retraite que le père Jetté, encore à ses premières armes, semble-t-il, a prêchée à de jeunes confrères scolastiques qui se préparaient à l'ordination presbytérale. Il ouvre son premier sermon par ces mots: « C'est une occasion pour nous de faire un peu de bien dans l'ordre directement spirituel... et par là de témoigner de façon tangible [de] l'amour fraternel que je vous porte... Ce sera une occasion nouvelle et très particulière de me retremper dans cette ferveur sacerdotale... Je la ferai avec vous [la retraite], et toujours je serai à votre disposition... Je serai

toujours libre et heureux de vous recevoir... Vous n'êtes pas nombreux et, pour un jeune prédicateur qui en est à ses premières armes, il y a là un avantage, nous sommes plus en famille: c'est plus simple et plus communicatif¹⁷. » Cela inaugure bien de ce dernier chapitre, n'est-ce pas?

Voilà! Puisse le lecteur profiter pleinement de la lecture des œuvres spirituelles inédites du père Fernand Jetté, OMI, même si beaucoup d'entre elles n'ont pu atteindre leur état de maturité en raison des circonstances !

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¹ Cette introduction reproduit avec des changements mineurs un texte que nous avons composé pour présenter quatre volumes, édités par nous, d'écrits spirituels inédits du père Jetté, OMI, ancien Supérieur général. Notre but ici est d'offrir ces quatre volumes aux Oblats intéressés par la personnalité et la spiritualité du père. Où trouver ces quatre volumes ? Nous espérons qu'on pourra bientôt les insérer sur le site internet oblat. Pour le moment, on peut s'adresser aux Archives Deschâtelets à Ottawa. On peut en obtenir des photocopies ou encore des copies numérisées sous formats Word, PDF ou WordPerfect, soit sur CD ou DVD soit en pièce jointe à un message courriel.

² *Préface*, « Vie Oblate Life » 60 (2001), p. 291.

³ D'après la transcription d'une vidéo intitulée *Portraits d'Oblats: R.P. Fernand Jetté, OMI*, Production SAVO (Henri Beaudoin), Réalisation: Richard Avery, Dir. prod.: Lise Labarre, avril 1995.

⁴ Le p. Jetté était conscient de la critique qu'on a fait de la *Devotio Moderna*, l'école spirituelle de la fin du Moyen-Âge, dont l'*Imitation de Jésus-Christ* est issue ou constitue une manifestation. Dans l'interview mentionnée plus haut, il affirme: « À un moment donné, il y avait des critiques contre l'*Imitation*: c'était trop individualiste, disait-on, trop négatif concernant la vie intellectuelle, etc. Moi, je disais : Cette œuvre m'a donné [...] vraiment le goût de la vie intérieure, et [...] c'est resté comme ça. »

⁵ On trouvera plus loin la présentation de ce texte.

⁶ Parce que cet écrit nous indique déjà l'orientation de vie du père Jetté, nous avons pensé le présenter tout au début du premier volume, même s'il ne s'agit pas vraiment de spiritualité au sens strict.

⁷ Dans la vidéo de 1995, cité plus haut, le p. Jetté affirme que, lors de son séjour en Europe, ce qu'il avait aimé faire fut « certaines études de la spiritualité du 17^e siècle, en relation surtout avec Marie de l'Incarnation ». Par après, ses recherches dépassèrent de beaucoup ce cadre plutôt étroit.

⁸ Nous les avons donnés par ordre chronologique de leur naissance, et non pas selon l'importance que le p. Jetté leur a donnée.

⁹ On trouvera ce texte dans le troisième volume dans la section consacrée à Marie de l'Incarnation.

¹⁰ Qu'on trouvera également dans le troisième volume dans la section consacrée à Marie de l'Incarnation.

¹¹ Ottawa, Éditions de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1954, 219 pages.

¹² Les *Notes spirituelles* du père, publiées dans le quatrième volume, vont de 1947 à 2000, quelques semaines avant sa mort. Elles font donc exception à la règle ici établie.

¹³ On pourra trouver facilement ces écrits grâce à la longue bibliographie que nous avons publiée dans « Vie Oblate Life » de décembre 2001.

¹⁴ Pour en savoir plus sur le p. Fernand Jetté, on peut lire le numéro spécial de « Vie Oblate Life » de décembre 2001 consacré à sa mémoire, 60 (2001), p. 279-472.

¹⁵ Le père Jetté a aussi tenu un journal des événements de sa vie, en particulier durant son séjour à Rome, mais il ne s'agit pas d'un journal spirituel proprement dit. C'est pourquoi nous ne l'avons pas considéré pour une possible publication dans la présente série.

¹⁶ Quand il fut revenu de Rome en 1986, le père Jetté demanda à un confrère, le père Roger Brouillette, de lui aider à mettre de l'ordre dans ses papiers personnels, de les classer et d'en créer des tables.

¹⁷ Voir p. 402.

THE OBLATE PRESENCE IN OTTAWA (1844-2013) THE REQUEST FROM MGR. BOURGET TO MGR. DE MAZENOD

PIERRE HURTUBISE, OMI

On October 19th, 1843, Mons Ignace Bourget, Bishop of Montreal, wrote to Bishop Eugene de Mazenod asking him to send his missionaries, who had recently arrived in his diocese, to take care of the city of Bytown (later Ottawa), diocese of Kingston. The letter, preserved in the Archives of the Archdiocese of Montreal, is a particularly interesting document for the history of the Congregation in Canada. Its publication is preceded by a brief historical presence of the Oblates in Ottawa.

In 1844, barely three years after their arrival in Canada, the Oblates were entrusted with the parish of Bytown by the Bishop of Kingston, at the suggestion of Bishop Bourget of Montreal. Bytown, at the time, was a town of six or seven thousand people, whose main activity was the lumber industry, and because of this, the town did not have a very good reputation.

This foundation was important for the Founder. In a letter of March 1844, he called Bytown “a city which is wholly of the future”. The Oblates would be able to exercise ministries fully in accordance with their missionary vocation. Furthermore, because of the rivers nearby, they could spread their influence westwards and northwards to face the challenge of evangelizing or re-evangelizing the many native tribes living as far as the Pacific Ocean in the West, and the Arctic Ocean in the North. We recognize today the “prophetic” nature of the Founder’s intuition, as we look at the important role played by Bytown, which became Ottawa in 1859, and then the capital city of Canada in 1867, and as we consider the history of the Oblates since their coming to Canada in 1841, more than 170 years ago.

Father Adrien Telmon, who was a member of the first contingent of Oblates coming from France, arrived in Bytown in January 1844. Father Damase Dandurand, the first Canadian Oblate, joined him in May. In June the Bishop of Kingston erected canonically the Oblate parish. The following year, Father Michael Molloy, a native of Ireland, joined

the other two. He was to minister to the English-speaking faithful who represented one half of the population of the town. These three remarkable men give us a profile of what the Oblate presence in Ottawa would be during the following century and a half: two Francophones, one Anglophone; one Frenchman, one Canadian, and one Irishman.

From the very beginning, the Oblates served in the parishes of Bytown and the surrounding areas; they ministered to the lumberjacks in their camps and also to the native people scattered in the forests close by or further away. Soon they would be visiting these groups periodically. After ministering to the natives of River Desert (Maniwaki), they moved on to others in Témiscamingue and Abitibi, and finally Father Nicolas Laverlochère reached James Bay in 1847.

Quite unexpectedly, that same year, Bytown became the seat of a new diocese integrating territories from the dioceses of Montreal, Kingston, Toronto and the vicariate of Rivière-Rouge (Saint-Boniface). Even more surprising was the nomination of the first Bishop of Bytown: Joseph-Eugène-Bruno Guigues, who was the superior of the Oblate community which had arrived only six years earlier in Montreal. These changes were due to the initiative of Bishop Bourget who had invited the Oblates to Montréal and who wanted the sons of his friend, Bishop de Mazenod, to have a residence of their own, from which they could realize the great works that he expected from them.

Father Telmon and his companions had already begun working on a few projects: launching the building of a new parish church, which eventually became the cathedral, opening a hospital entrusted to the Grey Nuns of Montreal, setting up a school for girls and boys. The creation of the diocese of Bytown and the nomination of their confrere, Father Guigues, as bishop, allowed the Oblates to realize greater works, and especially to make sure that they had the necessary means to exercise their ministry.

Bishop Guigues, as expected, appealed to the services of several Oblates to help him in the organization of his young diocese where so many things had to be put in place. He entrusted them with the service at the cathedral and at several missions, which eventually became parishes. He put them in charge of the College that he created in 1848, and also of the Major Seminary which he established shortly afterwards. In 1856, after lengthy negotiations with the Founder, an agreement was

reached between the diocese and the Oblates. The College, which was created eight years earlier and was still called the College of Bytown, was entrusted in perpetuity to the Oblates. The diocese offered a new piece of land in a new neighbourhood called Sandy Hill, where the new College would be built. A new parish, called Saint Joseph's, would be attached to the College and would serve the Francophone and Anglophone Catholics of the neighbourhood. According to this agreement, the Oblates would continue to be in charge of pastoral work at the Cathedral. However, anticipating that the Oblates would probably be leaving the Bishop's Residence after his death, Bishop Guigues erected a parish called Notre-Dame de Grâces, in Hull, on the Quebec side of the river. He also entrusted this parish to the Oblates in perpetuity. According to plans, the rectory of this new parish would be a residence for Oblates working in other types of ministries in this part of the diocese, as was the case for the residence of the College on the Ontario side.

The agreement signed in 1856 continues even today to regulate the status of the works entrusted to the Oblates in the diocese of Ottawa. The University of Ottawa became Saint Paul University in 1965, and the parish attached to the College of Bytown in 1856, was replaced by two parishes, Saint Joseph's and Sacré-Cœur.

These two areas, which may be considered as Bishop Guigues' deliberate legacy to his confrères, in order to ensure their future in Ottawa, soon characterized the mode of presence of the Oblates in the city and in the diocese. On the one hand, we see a major investment in the world of education linked to the College of Bytown, and to the numerous institutions of learning and of formation that flowed from it, or were attached to it. On the other hand, there is the whole area of pastoral work, represented by the parishes of Saint Joseph's and Sacré-Cœur in Ottawa, by the parish of Notre-Dame-de-Grâces in Hull, and by others that will be accepted later on. These parishes gave birth to many works, movements, and ministries in response to needs of all kinds as they emerged. It is not possible here to recount the history of these two forms of service since the second half of the 19th century. As regards the College, it was elevated to the rank of university in 1866 through a royal charter granted by Queen Victoria, and it received the coveted title of Pontifical University, conferred by Pope Leo XIII in 1889. The College had been providing for the formation of the future priests of the diocese and

the future Oblates. In 1885, a new residence was built for the Oblate Scholastics at Archville, in the suburbs of Ottawa. It was called Saint Joseph's Scholasticate; today the building is known as Deschâtelets Residence. In 1895, the Juniorists moved into a new residence close to the University. The Anglophone Oblates, some of whom had worked with their French speaking confrères, expressed the desire to have their own institution, more in tune with their needs, where classes would be taught, if not entirely, at least principally, in their own language. In 1929 their wishes were fulfilled, and a new College was created which was eventually called Saint Patrick's College, and was entrusted to the Province of Saint Peter of New Westminster. This Province also took over Saint Joseph's parish which had been attached to the University of Ottawa. The new College retained its affiliation with the University of Ottawa, and the University itself continued to be under the responsibility of the Francophone province called Province du Canada.

Henceforth, there would be a two-fold Oblate presence in Ottawa: that of Saint Peter's, Anglophone, and that of the Province du Canada, Francophone, which covered the Eastern part of Canada. This presence, in the area of education and of pastoral service, especially in parishes, will not go unnoticed. At the beginning of the 20th century, there was a standard joke saying that, in Ottawa, there were three powers: first the government, then, closely behind, the Oblates, and the Grey Nuns, who, since 1845, had been working closely alongside of them. It is true that the Oblates occupied a prominent position both in the diocese and in the city of Ottawa. Already in 1881 there were, in Ottawa, 86 Oblates, 56% of the Canadian Province, and 30% of all the Oblates of Canada. In 1927, there were 219, 62% of the Oblates from the East and 27% of all of Canada. In 1933, the numbers had risen to 304, 231 belonging to the Province of Canada-Est and 73 to Saint Peter's Province. Those belonging to the Province of Canada-Est represented 45%, those from Saint Peter's 60% of their Provinces. Together they constituted 27% of the Oblates of all of Canada. The highest point was reached in 1960 with 558 Oblates. 417 from the former Province of Canada-Est (which now was divided into two Provinces: Saint Joseph and Notre-Dame-du-Rosaire), and 141 from Saint Peter's Province. This represented respectively 46 and 52% of these Provinces, and 26% of the personnel of Canada. The presence of the Oblates was felt especially in the field of

education. In 1960, out of the 417 Oblates from the former Province of Canada-Est living in Ottawa, 340, or 82%, were assigned to works of education. In Saint Peter's Province, the ratio was 80%, or 112 Oblates. These statistics include the Scholastics of the two Provinces: 139 for the former Province of Canada-Est, and 61 for the Province of Saint Peter.

These figures demonstrate without a doubt the importance of the Oblate presence in Ottawa. One could never find, in the Oblate world, a city and a diocese that benefited from the services of so many Oblates, to such a degree, and for such a long period of time. The Oblates served in the field of education and formation, but also in a great variety of pastoral ministries: parishes, retreat houses, chaplaincies of different kinds, preaching, and the apostolate of the press.

The brutal drop in vocations that occurred in the sixties brought about a rapid decrease of the Oblate population in Ottawa. There were 475 in 1966, 175 in 1987, and 129 in the year 2000. Today there are 84 Oblates in Ottawa. However this number remains proportionally important because it corresponds to over 15% of the Oblates in the whole country.

What remains of the many works established by the Oblates since their arrival in Bytown in 1844? There remains, first of all, Saint Paul University, where we are presently. There remain also several parishes: three French-speaking, two English-speaking, and until recently a parish for natives in Maniwaki. Oblates are also serving a Polish parish (since 1953), a German parish (since 1968), and an Italian parish (since 1984). Several Oblates of the Ottawa region, who are now retired, continue to do pastoral work in parishes or serve as chaplains, directors of retreats or workshops, spiritual directors, or as volunteers in the service of the sick and the poor. We can rightly affirm that the Oblate presence in Ottawa continues in the same direction that it took in 1856. It is worth noting that this presence was, in the beginning, the work of one Province, the Province of Canada, then, from 1929 onwards, the work also of Saint Peter's Province, and that today it involves several Oblate Provinces whose members are present at Saint Paul University and in a few parishes of the diocese of Ottawa, especially those who serve the immigrants to this city. It is desirable that this inter-provincial collaboration be maintained and even intensified, to ensure that the exceptional contribution of the Oblates in Ottawa be continued in a way worthy of

our predecessors. We are thinking here especially of Saint Paul University. The future of this Oblate work could depend largely on whether or not this collaboration will be maintained. The first three Oblates who came to Ottawa were a Frenchman, a Canadian and an Irishman. Could not this example continue to inspire us today?

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LETTRE DE MGR BOURGET À MGR DE MAZENOD*

Montréal, le 19 octobre 1843
Mgr C. Eu. De Mazenod
Evêque de Marseille

Mon très cher Seigneur,

J'ai reçu avec la plus vive reconnaissance votre lettre du 10 août par le bon P. Telmon, avec le renfort d'ouvriers Evangéliques que vous avez eu la charité de m'envoyer, et pour lequel je ne puis assez vous remercier. Je suis surpris seulement que vous nous faisiez tant de remerciements franche bonté que j'ai pour eux, tandis que c'est à moi à vous remercier les mains jointes pour tous les sacrifices que vous vous imposez si généreusement pour alléger l'énorme fardeau que je porte, en m'envoyant des collaborateurs si dévoués, si soumis à toutes mes volontés et animés d'un zèle toujours nouveau. En vérité il y a là une espèce d'excès de bonté qui me couvre de confusion. Quoiqu'ils en soit, nous allons tâcher de tirer bon parti de nouveaux auxiliaires et entrer dans vos vues, en leur donnant autant d'ouvrage qu'il en pourront faire.

Il est question maintenant de leur procurer un établissement dans une ville naissante du diocèse de Kingston, nommée Bytown, à 40 ou 50 lieux de Montréal. Cette ville est au centre de toutes les communications de la Grande Rivière appelée Ottawa. C'est là qu'abondent

* Copie authentique, Registe des lettres de Mgr Bouget, vol. 3, p. 206-208, Archives de l'Archevêché de Montréal.

les voyageurs et les hommes qui, par milliers, travaillent à abattre les immenses forêts qui bordent cette belle et magnifique rivière, qui sont tous, gens de bien, dignes du zèle de vos enfants. C'est de là que devront partir ces hommes Apostoliques pour aller évangéliser ce que nous appelons ici les chantiers. Je dois vous faire connaître avant tout ce que c'est que les chantiers. Comme le commerce du bois est ici un grand objet de spéculation nous comptons un grand nombre d'entrepreneurs qui à la tête de 4 ou 500 personnes vont s'héberger dans les forêts pour travailler à couper pendant cinq ou six mois de l'année, les bois de construction et de chauffage. Ils sont occupés la suite de l'année à faire descendre ces bois dans les nombreuses rivières qui arrosent notre pays pour venir les vendre dans nos villes de Québec et de Montréal, et l'exporter de là en grande partie en Angleterre et ailleurs. Chacun de ces chantiers est presque comme un village de votre France, avec la différence qu'ils sont tous à une assez grande distance de la population. Il faut même faire quelquefois pour arriver à quelques-uns d'eux 60 à 80 lieues à travers les neiges pendant l'hiver, et en sautant les rapides quand on y va en été. Vous sentez qu'on ne peut pas donner de curés à ces camps volants: ainsi il faut leur envoyer des missionnaires qui les visitent pendant l'hiver, dans leurs forêts, et qui, le printemps, les attendent à l'embouchure des rivières où ils se réunissent pour mettre leur bois en radeaux et faire des flottes qui couvrent notre fleuve St-Laurent une bonne partie de l'été. Ces pauvres gens se livrent à de bien coupables excès quand ils sont abandonnés à eux-mêmes. Mais quand ils ont le bonheur d'avoir une petite mission l'hiver et de rencontrer, le printemps, leurs pères spirituels avec qui ils ont commencé à arranger les affaires de leur conscience, ils sont des plus édifiants. Je crois que s'il y a sur terre des hommes qui soient l'objet de votre Institut, de vraies brebis dispersées de la maison d'Israël, ce sont ces pauvres gens des susdits chantiers. Pour en revenir à Bytown, je vous dirai de nouveau qu'il est le centre de tous les chantiers qui sont sur l'Ottawa. Tous les hommes qui y travaillent doivent nécessairement y passer en venant ici. pendant qu'ils sont occupés à faire leurs radeaux dans les environs de cette ville, les Missionnaires profitent de leurs moments de loisir pour les réunir afin de leur donner des instructions dont il ont un si grand besoin, de les confesser et de leur donner les autres secours de la Religion. De plus à 60 ou 80 lieues de Bytown se trouvent les terres de chasse des

Sauvages. Comme ces pauvres Infidèles sont errants et vagabonds dans leurs épaisses forêts pendant la plus grande partie de l'année, et qu'ils ne se réunissent qu'à certaines époques dans les Postes qu'a établis la Compagnie des Marchands qui fait le commerce avec eux, les Missionnaires qui travaillent à leur conversion devront avoir un établissement central pour de là faire des excursions chez ces Infidèles et revenir ensuite travailler au salut des Blancs. Sans cela, ils seraient à rien faire une grande partie de l'année. Bytown offre pour le moment [208] ce précieux avantage. En outre, les revenus de cette petite ville qui n'a en outre elle-même qu'une Mission, car il n'y a pas une seule Paroisse érigée dans ces lieux éloignés, suffiraient pour faire vivre plusieurs de vos Pères. Il y a encore un avantage précieux, c'est que les Missionnaires rendraient autant service au Diocèse de Montréal qu'à celui de Kingston qui est en grande souffrance. Car cette ville est située sur le côté sud de l'Ottawa qui appartient à Kingston, et tout le nord est de mon diocèse. Pour communiquer de l'un à l'autre il n'y a qu'une traverse à faire qui est très facile. Tout est néanmoins respectueusement soumis à votre sagesse et à l'esprit de Dieu qui vous dirige dans toutes vos voies.

Le Père Telmon m'a communiqué la lettre que vous avez écrite à Mgr de Québec. Comme je suis très convaincu que si vous aviez été sur les lieux, vous n'auriez pas fait offre de service à ce bon Evêque, j'ai cru de mon devoir de conseiller au P. Honorat de retenir cette lettre, me chargeant d'annoncer à ce digne Prélat que le jeune homme pour lequel il s'est intéressé est mort en de bonnes dispositions, et que vous lui annoncerez vous-même cette nouvelle en répondant à sa lettre. Vous me pardonnerez cette liberté peut-être trop grande parce qu'elle procède d'un ardent désir d'empêcher ce qui pourrait tant soit peu compromettre ici l'existence et les intérêts de vos chers enfants. Car je pense qu'il y a à Québec en ce moment de très grands préjugés contre eux et qu'on n'est pas du tout disposé à réclamer leurs services. Ces préjugés se dissiperont avec le temps et la Providence arrangera tout. En attendant, nous travaillerons ici de concert à avancer le Royaume de J.C. et nous ne ferons pas à coup sur tout ce qu'il y a à faire. Comme je n'ai rien de caché avec vous et que je me croirais coupable de ne pas répondre par une confiance sans bornes à la confiance que vous me témoignez. Je crois devoir vous prier de me vouloir bien écrire quelques mots de consolation au Bon père Baudrand qui a pu se tromper comme bien

d'autres mais qui n'est pas pour cela indigne de votre affection paternelle. Je crois qu'il est atterré de certaines reproches que vous avez jugé à propos de lui faire. Maintenant pour activer son courage et adoucir sa peine, envoyez-lui un peu d'huile qui guérisse ses plaies. Considérez que ce bon Père est ici en une terre d'exil, loin de son père et de sa mère qui l'a enfanté à la Religion. J'ose vous promettre qu'il réparera les torts qu'il a eus sous certains rapports. Recommandez-moi, s'il vous plait aux Sts Sacrifices et prières ferventes de tous vos enfants, de toutes vos bonnes communautés.

Mr Leduc, Prêtre de Québec vous remettra la présente. Il pourra vous parler des chantiers.

J'ai l'honneur, etc.

Ig. Ev. de Montréal

P.S. Je vous remercie de l'envoi que vous avez bien voulu me faire de votre Mandement contre les spectacles. Je l'ai fait imprimer presque en entier, pour arrêter la passion de ces malheureux divertissements qui s'étaient emparée de toutes les têtes de notre ville, l'été dernier. Ci-joint le mandement que j'ai adressé pour les Missions de vos Pères.

Ig. E. d. M.

NOTES DE LECTURE / BOOK REVIEWS / RECENSIONES

Luigi GIOVANNINI, *Ciao Marcello. Vita e ricordi di S. E. Mons. Marcello Zago*, Villorba, 2012, (Édition hors commerce, pro manuscritto), 150 p.

En mémoire du P. Marcello Zago, une association culturelle a été fondée à Villorba (Veneto, Italie), son pays natal, laquelle a pour but de maintenir vivante cette figure de Missionnaire Oblat de M.I. qui a donné de l'importance à sa contrée et au diocèse de Trévise; cette publication en est un fruit simple et modeste mais beau. Le titre lui-même (« Ciao! ») est le salut typique vénitien des amis qui se rencontrent ou qui se quittent) dénote la nature profonde, familiale et amicale, de ce petit livre et des diverses contributions écrites comme expériences personnelles des amis de sa région.

Une brève présentation historique de la région de Trévise, terre du Pape Pie X, paysanne et profondément catholique, permet de comprendre les racines culturelles et religieuses d'où provient la famille du père Zago. De brèves notes historiques soulignent les moments saillants de sa vie : sa vocation oblate, la mission au Laos, ses responsabilités comme formateur et ensuite comme assistant général pour la mission, enfin de Supérieur Général de la Congrégation; puis, à la fin, son service à l'Église universelle et au Saint-Siège, d'abord comme Secrétaire du Conseil Pontifical pour le dialogue interreligieux et puis de la congrégation de la Propagation de la Foi. Ses amis soulignent un aspect particulier de chacun de ces services : le témoignage et le zèle missionnaire, la recherche du dialogue religieux, la vie de prière, l'esprit de foi, de prière et de service.

On doit signaler, comme particulièrement belle, la publication en photocopies de quelques-unes de ses notes manuscrites, de brèves salutations, de quelques lettres assez récentes, de canevas d'homélies, brefs et concis. Cela manifeste l'âme de Mgr Zago qui revisite et exprime sa vie par ces paroles : « Comment est-ce possible qu'un pauvre missionnaire passe ainsi du village le plus éloigné du Laos au Centre de l'Église? Le Seigneur a ses vues, il guide les personnes et l'Église. Le Seigneur te prend par la main et te conduit ». (*Roberto Sartor, OMI*)

Gianni SANTOPIETRO, OMI, *Senso della vita e incontro con Dio*, Bologna, EDB, 2012.

El último libro del padre G. Santopietro, bien conocido por una rica serie de publicaciones, se ubica, en consonancia con el estilo de su autor, en el género “sapiencial”: una investigación entre antropología y teología, entre filosofía y espiritualidad, entre razón y fe, entre cultura humana y revelación divina, intercalando los interrogantes del hombre y las respuestas de Dios. No es por azar que encontramos asociados en el título dos grandes temas: el *sentido de la vida*, y el *encuentro con Dios*, en el cual emerge la novedad de la fe que explicita el tema teológico: respuesta de lo alto, revelación divina como auto-comunicación y auto-donación.

Para Santopietro esta dialéctica es constante, sin tregua. Sus publicaciones, fruto de una madura experiencia pastoral y de estudio, son un profundizar continuo en esa dirección. Él se coloca al lado del hombre contemporáneo y se convierte en su compañero de viaje, en la búsqueda de una sabiduría que no puede ofrecer toda la sabiduría humana junta.

De ahí la necesidad del encuentro con la fuente, con el “libro de los libros” (la *Biblia*), que resume el saber divino y el itinerario que Dios propone a toda la humanidad en su conjunto y a cada ser humano en particular: “El conocimiento de la Biblia es importante para alimentar la fe de los creyentes, para comprender nuestra historia, nuestra cultura e incluso como propuesta de sentido”, escribe el P. Gianni en la introducción, dejando entrever la línea a seguir en el libro. Este tema se entrelaza con otro, muy querido para el autor, que ya ha resaltado con viveza en las obra anteriores: el tema del *corazón*, conforme al sentido bíblico de *interioridad*. Un tema que une a Dios y al hombre, puesto que es, propiamente, el lugar privilegiado del encuentro. En palabras de Ivan Rupnik -¡las citas son el pudor del autor!- Santopietro escribe: “La verdadera integración se realiza sólo en el corazón, es decir en un contexto relacional en el que entran en juego todas las dimensiones de la persona, desde lo afectivo a lo racional, desde lo volitivo a lo religioso” (pp. 21-22).

El libro abarca cuatro capítulos. En el primero, *Búsqueda del sentido de la vida y sabiduría del corazón*, el autor propone los plantea los interrogantes fundamentales del ser humano, explorando literatura y filosofía, ciencia y teología.

Recupera el tema del sentido religioso, que se reviste de perennidad y trascendencia, “más allá de uno mismo, hacia Alguien”, concluyendo con las palabras del periodista I. Montanelli “porque una vida sin fe en el más allá es una vida sin esperanza”.

En el segundo capítulo, *Asombro, sentido de la vida y encuentro con Dios*, el lenguaje se hace poético y se convierte en contemplación de la creación, desde que el momento de la belleza es un rayo de la Belleza divina que se manifiesta en el universo.

En el tercer capítulo, *Cristo crucificado y resucitado, fuente de vida y de sentido*, Santopietro nos presenta las raíces de la reflexión, que nos mandan al núcleo central de la revelación cristiana, al amor crucificado: “En el silencio de Dios en el Calvario la luz de la fe nos hace, pues, contemplar el Amor infinito, que en Cristo entró con humildad en el drama de la historia. En Cristo, que nos ha amado “hasta el fin” (Jn 13, 1), se manifestó el amor sin medida de Dios.

“Cristo no bajó de la cruz mediante un milagro espectacular, sino que el milagro se dio y se cumplió en aquel su permanecer en cruz para que fuese destruido desde su interior el dominio del odio, del pecado y de la muerte, y se estableciera el reino del Amor. Por amor a nosotros vivió en cruz el abandono” (pp. 87-88).

En el capítulo cuarto el autor regresa a la actualidad, con sus provocaciones y sus interpelaciones, afrontando la relación entre *Ciencia, sentido de la vida y experiencia religiosa*: “El científico, como todo hombre, puede plantearse la pregunta sobre el sentido de la vida y puede preguntarse si existe un sentido que vaya más allá de lo verificable en un laboratorio de investigación” (p. 111).

El P. Santopietro muestra que no hay oposición, sino sólo distinción entre ciencia y religión, indicando el paso del “cómo” al “porqué”, que es lo que caracteriza respectivamente entrambas. Por consiguiente es oportuno y necesario un dialogo entre ciencia y fe sobre el sentido de la vida, para recuperar la contemplación y la alabanza del Señor.

En conclusión, desde la agradable lectura del libro, que documenta a cada paso con innumerables y sabrosas citas, resalta un moderno itinerario humano y cristiano, *per aspera ad astra*, desde el recorrido de las vicisitudes de la vida a la sabiduría del corazón, desde la cruz a la resurrección, que resume, de modo sencillo y atrayente, toda la sabiduría cristiana. (*Gennaro Cicchese*, OMI)