

# Oblati

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

Misión y Migración /  
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Mission et Migration

- Un “pastor herido”: misión con los migrantes en san Eugenio de Mazenod
- Oblate Ministry with Migrants in Korea / Hong Kong / Thailand / São Paulo / USA
- La mission OMI du Sahara et la mission migrants
- Les Oblats et les migrants à Palerme
- The Foundation “Giving a Home” in cooperation with the Oblates of the Central European Province
- Yves Bertrais (1921-2007): « La passion Hmong »



Missionarii OMI

X - 2021/3

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# Præfatio

## MISIÓN Y MIGRACIÓN

FERNANDO VELAZQUEZ SANCHEZ, OMI

**E**n el noreste de Italia, se encuentra una parroquia la cual durante el tiempo de Adviento y Navidad exhibía un pesebre muy peculiar y un poco provocador: tenía una linterna que irradiaba una luz verde. Junto a esta, una inscripción que decía:

“Jesús nació en el frío y gélida noche... como los refugiados. Sin embargo, así como los pastores y la sagrada familia, ¡también hay alguien más cerca de él! ... En la frontera entre Bielorrusia y la Unión Europea migrantes y refugiados, entre los que se encuentran varios menores ya sea solos o con sus familias, están atrapados en campamentos de tiendas de campaña improvisadas que luchan contra la hipotermia y el hambre. Sin embargo, la caridad no tiene fronteras, y el ejemplo nos llega de ciudadanos bielorrusos y polacos, algunos de los cuales en sus casas han encendido linternas che irradian luces verdes para señalar que en ese lugar se puede encontrar ayuda. Una luz verde emerge de las puertas especialmente de los pueblos más cercanos a la frontera. Es la señal acordada para indicar a los que consiguen cruzar la frontera que en esa casa encontrarán comida caliente, mantas, brazos abiertos, ¡y aquí ningún soplón llamará a la policía!»<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Desde junio de 2021, miles de personas procedentes de Irak, Siria, Afganistán, Congo, Camerún y otros países intentaban llegar a la Unión Europea a través de la frontera entre Bielorrusia y Polonia. La mayoría de ellos quedaron varados llegando a niveles de una crisis humanitaria. «El abogado Kamil Syller hizo un llamado a sus vecinos del pueblo de Dubicze Cerkiewne, en el noreste de Polonia, para que insta-

Este gesto no sólo refleja la experiencia de Jesús, sino que también nos recuerda la llamada de Mateo 25: 35, «porque tuve hambre y ustedes me dieron de comer; tuve sed y ustedes me dieron de beber. Fui forastero y ustedes me recibieron en su casa» (LBL). La comunidad de esa parroquia, aunque esté a kilómetros de distancia, estaba mostrando su solidaridad con los migrantes y refugiados en la frontera entre Bielorrusia y Polonia - era su forma creativa de participar en la misión de Dios con los más vulnerables y de practicar la llamada de Mt 25:35.

Reflexionemos sobre lo que entendemos como Misión. El Decreto sobre la Actividad Misionera de la Iglesia, *Ad Gentes*, nos dice: « La Iglesia peregrinante es misionera por su naturaleza, puesto que toma su origen de la misión del Hijo y del Espíritu Santo, según el designio de Dios Padre» (AG 2). La Misión es de Dios, y por su gracia estamos llamados a participar en ella. El amor de Dios por el mundo, se derrama así en la vida del ministerio de Jesús de esta manera: «La Iglesia, [es] enviada por Cristo para manifestar y comunicar la caridad de Dios a todos los hombres y pueblos, sabe que le queda por hacer todavía una obra misionera ingente». (AG 10). Como señala S. Bevans, «la misión tiene una iglesia...» y añade, «la misión no es sólo sobre la iglesia sino sobre el Reino de Dios. No se trata solo de la expansión sino de continuar la misión de Jesús. Eso hace que cada bautizado sea un misionero y que esté llamado al servicio de este», sin embargo, añade, «esto también incluye una invitación a pertenecer a esta Iglesia»<sup>2</sup>.

Todos los bautizados están llamados a ser misionero, están llamados a ser signos e instrumentos de la presencia de Dios para todos. Así, la misión de Jesús se lleva a cabo mediante el servicio, el anuncio y el testimonio del Reino de Dios (AG 11-18), ya sea dentro de la Iglesia (*ad intra*), o como signo de la presencia de Dios en el mundo, a todas las naciones y (*ad extra*) entre todos los pueblos y culturas (*ad gentes*), a

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len y enciendan una luz verde que indique a los migrantes que ahí recibirían alimentos y otros suministros de emergencia» .<https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/35889/green-light-initiative-help-for-migrants-in-polandbelarus-border-area>. Para llegar fácilmente a la gente se creó una página de Facebook en diferentes idiomas, <https://www.facebook.com/Zielone-Światło-ضوء-سوز-گلوبی-Green-Light-Lumière-Verte-113817444406350/>

<sup>2</sup> BEVANS, Stephen, «Mission Among Migrants, Mission Of Migrants», In Daniel G. GROODY – Gioacchino CAMPESE, Eds., *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey: Theological Perspectives On Migration*. University Of Notre Dame Press, 2008, 89-106.

hombres y mujeres en su contexto propio, en su vida cotidiana y concreta (*inter gentes*); como instrumento de salvación para todos (*LG* 1, *RM* 9). Por lo tanto, « La actividad misional es nada más y nada menos que la manifestación o epifanía del designio de Dios y su cumplimiento en el mundo y en su historia, en la que Dios realiza abiertamente, por la misión, la historia de la salvación. Por la palabra de la predicación y por la celebración de los sacramentos, cuyo centro y cumbre es la Sagrada Eucaristía, la actividad misionera hace presente a Cristo autor de la salvación» (*AG* 9).

Lo anterior resuena con la identidad de los Oblatos de María Inmaculada, tal y como la define nuestras Constituciones y Reglas: « La Congregación entera es misionera. Su primer servicio en la Iglesia es el de anunciar a Cristo y su Reino a los más abandonados. Lleva la Buena Noticia a los pueblos que todavía no la han recibido y les ayuda a descubrir a la luz del Evangelio los valores que poseen. Donde la Iglesia está ya implantada, los Oblatos se consagran a los grupos más alejados de ella.» (*C 5*). La Encíclica *Redemptoris Missio* señala a la «misión» como «una realidad unitaria, pero compleja, y se desarrolla de diversas maneras,» (*RM 41*). Los oblatos no son ajenos a esta «diversas maneras», ya que, como mandan nuestras Constituciones y Reglas, « Ningún ministerio, sin embargo, nos es ajeno, a condición de que nunca perdamos de vista el fin principal de la Congregación: la evangelización de los más abandonados.» (*R 7b*). Para cumplir la llamada misionera de servicio, anuncio y testimonio del Evangelio, muchas veces tendremos que cruzar fronteras, atravesar culturas, barreras de nacionalidad, salir de nuestras zonas de confort y salir de nuestras propias seguridades; la misión consiste en un constante cruce de fronteras, pero siempre en diálogo, con respeto, apertura y humildad<sup>3</sup>.

Aquí es donde entra nuestra misión entre y con los migrantes. A menudo los migrantes suelen ser objeto de injusticias, de malos tratos y de prejuicios. En muchos sentidos, experimentan el rechazo, quedándose sin una voz y convirtiéndose en invisibles para la sociedad en general. Los migrantes y refugiados ciertamente reflejan el rostro de

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<sup>3</sup> BEVANS, Stephen. B. – SCHROEDER, Roger. P., *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections On Christian Mission Today*. Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y, 2011.

Cristo, y sus sufrimientos son un continuo *Vía Crucis*. Son uno de los rostros de los pobres en el mundo de hoy. Como oblatos, dondequiera que trabajemos “Nuestra misión, en efecto, nos lleva en todas partes principalmente hacia aquellos cuya condición está pidiendo a gritos una esperanza y una salvación que sólo Cristo puede ofrecer con plenitud. Son los pobres en sus múltiples aspectos: a ellos van nuestras preferencias.” (C 5).

Las Actas del 36º Capítulo General de los Oblatos reconocen con justa razón a los migrantes y refugiados como uno de los nuevos rostros de los pobres de hoy (7.2). Las Actas nos recuerda de la experiencia vivida por Eugenio de Mazenod como alguien que fue él mismo un migrante, «El itinerario de Eugenio de Mazenod nos ayuda a ver algunos de los nuevos rostros de los pobres de hoy... Su periodo de emigrante nos recuerda el drama de los migrantes de nuestros días y los temas relacionados con la JPIC.» (10). En consecuencia, el Capítulo nos llama «a adoptar una actitud de peregrinación, como migrantes en camino» (12).

En la persona misma del migrante, en cierta forma, el mundo entero ha venido a nosotros. Por eso, hoy no solamente se debe pensar en ser misioneros en el extranjero, en otro país diverso al propio, o tal vez poder solamente encontrarnos con otra cultura o una religión fuera de donde nos encontramos. Con esta comprensión de la misión, estamos llamados a reflexionar sobre cómo nos comprometemos en la misión entre y con nuestros hermanos y hermanas migrantes. Estamos llamados a la misión de atravesar las fronteras en nuestra propia tierra; esperando que también estemos abiertos a recibir la riqueza y los dones que nuestros hermanos y hermanas migrantes ofrecen tanto a las naciones y a las comunidades religiosas locales que los recibe.

Reflexionemos ahora sobre la migración. La migración no es un fenómeno nuevo, ni es exclusivo de este siglo. Tal desplazamiento ha estado presente a lo largo de toda la historia de la humanidad. Sin embargo, en los últimos siglos, este movimiento de personas ha sido más significativo en número, ya sea voluntario o involuntario, dentro de una nación, transnacional, o internacionales. Son muchos los factores y razones que impulsan a la gente a emigrar, tan solo por mencionar algunos: los económicos, políticos, religiosos, la guerra, la violencia,

el cambio climático y los desastres medioambientales<sup>4</sup>. Lo que como Iglesia nos debería de preocupar, son aquellas personas migrantes que en sus diversas causas por desplazarse son los más vulnerables. Para comprender un poco mejor el contexto migratorio de hoy, vale la pena que consideremos brevemente algunas tendencias recientes.

Según informan las Naciones Unidas, para mediados del 2020<sup>5</sup>, el número total de personas que residían en un país distinto al de su nacimiento se estimaba en 281 millones<sup>6</sup>, lo que representaba el 3,6% de la población mundial de 7.800 millones<sup>7</sup>. Del total de 281 millones que migraron, se estima que el 51,9% son hombres, el 48,1% son mujeres (135 millones) y de los cuales el 12% (36 millones) son niños, todos ellos en su mayoría procedentes de un país subdesarrollado o por debajo del umbral de la pobreza<sup>8</sup>. Un indicador de migración global muestra que, para mediados del 2020, tres regiones específicas demuestran una afluencia de migración prevalente: Europa es el destino favorecido según señalan a las cifras (86,7 millones), teniendo Alemania como el principal destino; en segundo lugar, está Asia (85,6 millones), y en tercer lugar América del Norte (58,7 millones) donde Estados Unidos es el destino más popular<sup>9</sup>. La OIT estima que del total de migrantes internacionales, más de la mitad, 169 millones, son categorizados como tra-

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<sup>4</sup> Una tendencia reciente muestra como el cambio climático y ambiental había aumentado señalada como causa migratoria. Para una explicación más detallada sobre los tipos de impulsores y las causas fundamentales de la migración, véase: <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/migration-drivers>.

<sup>5</sup> BLACK, J., *Global Migration Indicators 2021*. International Organization For Migration (IOM), Geneva, 2021. Una cifra que incremento comparada con 173 millones a mediados del 2000 y de 153 millones a mediados del año 1990.

<sup>6</sup> International Organization for Global Migration (IOM) define “Las Poblaciones de migrantes Internacionales como: “Número total de migrantes internacionales que residen en un determinado tiempo en un país distinto al que nacieron” Esta cifra no incluye segundas generaciones nacidos de padres migrantes de nacionalidad extranjera; en IOM Portal de Datos sobre Migración: Una Perspectiva Global, <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/international-migrant-stocks>

<sup>7</sup> Fuente de cifras, United Nations Department of Economics and Social Affairs (UNDESA) en: <https://www.un.org/en/desa/international-migration-2020-highlights>.

<sup>8</sup> <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-migration-and-displacement/migration/>.

<sup>9</sup> J. BLACK, *Global Migration Indicators 2021*, 25.

bajadores migrantes, de estos, 70 millones (41,5%) son mujeres<sup>10</sup>. En su totalidad, los trabajadores migrantes representan casi el 5% de la mano de obra mundial<sup>11</sup>. Para el 2021, más de la mitad (60,6%) de los trabajadores migrantes se encontraban en tres regiones: el 24% en Europa, el 22,1% en América del Norte y el 14,3% en los Estados Árabes<sup>12</sup>. Según algunas fuentes, la pobreza y el desempleo han sido el principal factor para los trabajadores migrantes<sup>13</sup>.

La Agencia de la ONU para los Refugiados informó de que, a finales de 2020, 82,4 millones de personas en todo el mundo fueron desplazadas por la fuerza debido a conflictos, violencia, violaciones de los derechos humanos y persecuciones diversas<sup>14</sup>. Del total de desplazados y obligados a emigrar, 4,1 millones solicitaron asilo y 26,4 millones estaban registrados como refugiados, el 50% de ellos eran menores de 18 años<sup>15</sup>. Más de dos tercios de los desplazados y refugiados (68%) proceden de sólo cinco países; Siria es la nación de origen con el mayor número de registrados como refugiados (6,7 millones), y en segundo lugar está Venezuela con una estimación de 4 millones de desplazados

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<sup>10</sup> Fuente: Organización Internacional del Trabajo (OIT) en: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_protect/---protrav/---migrant/documents/publication/wcms\\_808946.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---migrant/documents/publication/wcms_808946.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> En (ILO): <https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/labour-migration/#>

<sup>12</sup> J. BLACK, *Global Migration Indicators 2021*, 28.

<sup>13</sup> J. BLACK, *Global Migration Indicators 2021*, 29. Los datos de la OIT muestran que de los primeros 40 países del mundo que se consideran “trabajadores pobres”, es decir, personas empleadas que ganan menos de 1,90 dólares al día y que se encuentran por debajo del umbral de pobreza son de la región africana; en otras palabras, que pueden convertirse en potenciales migrantes, de este grupo la mayoría de los jóvenes son mucho más propensos a ser “trabajadores pobres”, en: <https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/working-poor/>

<sup>14</sup> J. BLACK, *Global Migration Indicators 2021*, 34. Hay un aumento drástico de casi el doble en comparación con el final del 2010. Esto se debe principalmente al aumento de crisis como la de Siria, Venezuela, Afganistán, Somalia, Yemen y Congo, Camerún entre otras.

<sup>15</sup> La Agencia de Refugiados del ACNUR estima que de los 82,4 millones, 48 de ellos fueron desplazados internos en: <https://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/60b638e37/global-trends-forced-displacement-2020.html>.

en el extranjero; luego le siguen Afganistán, Sudán del Sur y Myanmar (también conocido como Birmania)<sup>16</sup>.

Según el Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Refugiados, los países en vías de desarrollo acogieron al 86% de los refugiados y desplazados de todo el mundo, siendo Turquía el país que acogió el mayor número de refugiados, seguido de Colombia que acogió el mayor número de desplazados que resultaron ser de Venezuela<sup>17</sup>. Alemania fue el tercer país en acoger y dar la bienvenida a los refugiados y solicitantes de asilo, y Estados Unidos en el sexto lugar. Todo lo anterior nos demuestra una tendencia significativa: el flujo actual de personas en movimiento en sus diferentes categorías es principalmente del hemisferio sur hacia el norte.

Comparemos el flujo de personas y la migración un par de siglos anteriores. Podríamos decir que ha sido un movimiento al revés. Los países o regiones de los que un par de siglos atrás procedían la mayoría de los contingentes migratorios, se han convertido ahora en receptores y destinatarios de las recientes oleadas migratorias. En tiempos pasados, el flujo de personas se producía desde el hemisferio norte hacia el sur. Es importante señalar que, en esa época, la migración hacia América del Norte procedía en su mayoría de Europa, a diferencia de los últimos tiempos, en los que la migración tiende a proceder principalmente de América Latina. Por ejemplo, desde finales del siglo XVIII hasta mediados del siglo XIX, los migrantes hacia América procedían principalmente del norte y del oeste de Europa, mientras que a finales del siglo XIX y principios del XX, el flujo migratorio procedía predominantemente del sur y del este de Europa. «Entre 1882 y 1914, llegaron a Estados Unidos aproximadamente 20 millones de inmigrantes. Sólo en 1907 llegaron 1,285 millones. En 1900, la ciudad de Nueva York tenía tantos residentes irlandeses como Dublín. Tenía más italianos que cualquier otra ciudad fuera de Roma y más polacos que cualquier otra

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<sup>16</sup> In: <https://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/60b638e37/global-trends-forced-displacement-2020.html>

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* Según el ACNUR, los países mucho menos desarrollados dieron asilo al 27% del total.

ciudad excepto Varsovia»<sup>18</sup>, la mayoría de los cuales llegaron como inmigrantes regulares documentados.

La categoría de migrantes a la que hay que prestar mucha atención es la considerada como «migración irregular». El tráfico ilícito de migrantes facilita gran parte de la entrada irregular de migrantes en un Estado. Supone una migración clandestina y es un negocio rentable para redes principalmente criminales. No hay cifras exactas y sería difícil estimar y evaluar la magnitud del tráfico de migrantes. Los migrantes en situación clandestina son objeto de trata de personas, lo que les expone a muchos riesgos como la violencia, la explotación, secuestros, robo entre otros muchos peligros<sup>19</sup>. Es por esta razón que los migrantes “irregulares” constituyen la categoría más vulnerable de la migración<sup>20</sup>.

La pertenencia y la afiliación religiosa siempre han sido fundamentales en la vida de migrantes y refugiados, especialmente en las maneras que participar dentro de las comunidades locales que los han acogido<sup>21</sup>. Las diferentes contingencias migratorias han mostrado una clara diversidad en la composición religiosa de estos grupos, ya sea desde el lugar de origen o hacia el lugar de acogida; por ejemplo, la ola migratoria del siglo XX que llegó a Estados Unidos era «mayoritariamente católica y judía», y procedía principalmente de Europa<sup>22</sup>. Es interesante señalar que, a principios del siglo XX, solamente en Europa se encontraban el 65% de los católicos del mundo, sólo superada por América Latí-

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<sup>18</sup> MINTZ, S., & MCNEIL, S. (2018). *The Huddle Masses: The New Immigrants. Digital History*. Consultado (January, 2022) from <http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/>

<sup>19</sup> La Oficina de las Naciones Unidas contra la Droga y el Delito ha publicado el primer estudio mundial sobre el tráfico ilícito de migrantes y los peligros a los que están expuestos, en: UNODC, *Global Study on Smuggling of migrants 2018*, Vienna: UNP.

<sup>20</sup> OIM define la “migración irregular” como: “Movimiento de personas que se produce al margen de las leyes, las normas o los acuerdos internacionales que rigen la entrada o la salida del país de origen, de tránsito o de destino” en: <https://www.iom.int/es/terminos-fundamentales-sobre-migracion>

<sup>21</sup> ZANFRINI, Laura, Ed., *Migrants And Religion: Paths, Issues, And Lenses. A Multi-Disciplinary And Multi-Sited Study On The Role Of Religious Belongings In Migratory And Integration Process*. Brill Academic Pub, Leiden, Boston, 2020, 507 -509.

<sup>22</sup> MINTZ, S., & MCNEIL, S. (2018). *The Huddle Masses: The New Immigrants. Digital History*. Retrieved (January, 2022) from <http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/>

na, con un 24%<sup>23</sup>. Por lo tanto es lógico que gran numero de migrantes de ese siglo eran católicos y el numero de comunidades católicas y de iglesias construidas de esa época fue de gran numero y sobre todo de pertenencia nacional o de lengua de origen. Es verdad que las comunidades de inmigrantes pueden ser un reto para las iglesias locales y, pero al mismo tiempo, pueden ser una fuente de riqueza - sólo hay que pensar en la vitalidad religiosa de los inmigrantes católicos italianos en Argentina entre 1800 y 1900, o en la comunidad mexicana que ha enriquecido durante décadas a las comunidades religiosas locales en Estados Unidos<sup>24</sup>. El Foro sobre Religión y Vida Pública del Centro de Investigación Pew informó que ya para el año 2010, casi la mitad de los migrantes del mundo eran cristianos, mientras que los musulmanes constituyán el segundo grupo siendo más de una cuarta parte del total de migrantes internacionales<sup>25</sup>. El informe muestra cómo Estados Unidos ha sido el primer destino escogido por los migrantes cristianos. Para los musulmanes, el destino principal ha sido Arabia del Sur. Por otra parte, la China ha sido el principal país de origen a nivel mundial de los emigrantes que se auto-identificaban como no-afiliados o no adherentes a alguna religión o tradición religiosa<sup>26</sup>. El mismo informe muestra que los migrantes cristianos se duplicaron y superaron a los musulmanes en la región de la Unión Europea. Han pasado más de diez años desde este estudio, estas cifras podrían estar variando, dados los diferentes acontecimientos y crisis en los últimos diez años, como por ejemplo el conflicto sirio, la crisis venezolana y crisis en algunas regiones africanas, unido al aumento de la inmigración a Europa y a Estados Unidos<sup>27</sup>. Algunas predicciones muestran como en los próximos años aumentará

<sup>23</sup> Pew Research Center, *Faith on the Move: The Religious Affiliation of International Migrants* en: <https://www.pewforum.org/2013/02/13/the-global-catholic-population/>

<sup>24</sup> L. ZANFRINI, ed., *Migrants and Religion: Paths, Issues, and Lenses*, 510.

<sup>25</sup> Pew Research Center, *Faith on the Move: The Religious Affiliation of International Migrants, Fact Sheet: Global*, in: <https://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2012/03/global-fact-sheet.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* Para el año del 2010, México era el país de origen con mayor numero de migrantes cristianos con destino a Estados Unidos. Los musulmanes que emigraban a Arabia del Sur son, en su mayoría, trabajadores migrantes de Indonesia, India y Filipinas.

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.pewforum.org/2012/03/08/religious-migration-exec/>

el número de inmigrantes musulmanes a Europa dada la llegada migratoria desde países principalmente considerados musulmanes, y se añade el hecho que los que han llegado recientemente son más jóvenes y con mayores tasas de fertilidad comparados con contingencias migratorias anteriores del mismo origen<sup>28</sup>.

Los analistas indican que el mundo acepta cada vez menos a los inmigrantes<sup>29</sup>. Hoy en día y a lo largo de las décadas, la afluencia de migrantes y refugiados ha desencadenado olas de sentimientos antiinmigrantes tales como la xenofobia y el nativismo. Tales sentimientos tienden a difundir diferentes temores y amenazas sobre los migrantes y refugiados, lo que hace que se conviertan en blanco de muchas injusticias, maltratos, prejuicios y problemas raciales. Podemos decir que, por un lado, se les criminaliza porque se les considera una amenaza para la seguridad de las fronteras, las tradiciones culturales y las costumbres locales. Por el otro, se les presenta con una imagen muy paternalista como inocentes, vulnerables y víctimas, una imagen que no los deja crecer e integrarse plenamente. Cualquiera que sea, tienden a ser deshumanizados y se convierten simplemente objetos de interpretación desde la perspectiva de los demás.

Sin duda no podemos subestimar la complejidad de lo que es el fenómeno de la migración y de sus diversos elementos que hemos presentado brevemente. Sin embargo, cuando se piensa sobre esta temática, nuestra primera tendencia es pensar directamente y a veces solamente en las políticas relativas a las fronteras físicas, en si se deben abrir o no, esto no debería ser solamente el criterio. El reto recae en reflexionar en una manera más amplia donde también se incluya la perspectiva de la fe. No obstante, hemos presentado aquí algunas tendencias sobre la migración y algunas cifras, los migrantes y los refugiados no deben ser vistos sólo en números y porcentajes; por el contrario, estas herramientas deben ayudarnos discernir como ser ministros eficaces y sobretodo encontrar mejores maneras de como practicar el discipulado encontrando a los más abandonados y necesitados.

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<sup>28</sup> Para ver las diferentes predicciones de escenarios en: Pew Research Center, *Demographic Study: Europe's Growing Muslim Population*, 2017, <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/11/29/europe-s-growing-muslim-population/>

<sup>29</sup> J. BLACK, *Global Migration Indicators 2021*, 48-49.

Tras repasar que es lo que entendemos por Misión y de haber descripto brevemente el contexto actual de la migración, parece útil hacer algunas observaciones finales:

1. Nuestro principio cardinal debe ser el del criterio cristiano: todo ser humano es imagen y semejanza de Dios y debe ser tratado como tal. Más aún, en los lugares donde esto no ocurre, nuestra llamada es a ser proféticos, trabajando por la justicia, la paz y la reconciliación.

2. Participamos en la misión de Dios y, por amor, esa misión debe impulsarnos a salir al encuentro y estar entre los migrantes. No sólo son uno de los rostros de los pobres, como reconoció el Capítulo General, sino que también son el rostro de Cristo que hoy nos llama. Como dice nuestra Constitución oblat n° 1: “El llamamiento de Jesucristo, que se deja oír en la Iglesia a través de las necesidades de salvación de los hombres, congrega a los Misioneros Oblatos de María Inmaculada y los invita a seguirle y a tomar parte en su misión por la palabra y por la acción... Cooperando con Cristo Salvador e imitando su ejemplo, se consagran principalmente a la evangelización de los pobres”. De este modo, estamos llamados a anunciar y predicar a Cristo y su Reino de manera donde «la Iglesia propone, no impone» (*RM 38-39*).

3. La Iglesia está llamada a servir y a ser testigo del Evangelio para todos, independientemente de su nacionalidad, cultura y pertenencia religiosa: «Al tiempo que se respetan los derechos humanos y la libertad religiosa de los inmigrantes, la misión debe realizarse de manera que sirva sus necesidades más profundas, tanto espirituales como físicas y a compartir con ellos también nuestros tesoros más preciados de la fe»<sup>30</sup>. De este modo, la Iglesia no se considera solamente un mero agente de servicio social, sino también un servidor y testigo de los valores evangélicos ante nuestros hermanos y hermana migrantes.

4. Aunque no se puede negar a ninguna nación el derecho a proteger sus fronteras, no podemos olvidar la responsabilidad que tienen las naciones desarrolladas hacia sus hermanos menos afortunados, como nos lo recuerda el Catecismo de la Iglesia Católica: “Las naciones más prósperas tienen el deber de acoger, en cuanto sea posible, al *extranjero* que busca la seguridad y los medios de vida que no puede encontrar en su país de origen. Las autoridades deben velar para que se respete el

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<sup>30</sup> S. BEVANS, “Mission among Migrants, Mission of Migrants”, 95.

derecho natural que coloca al huésped bajo la protección de quienes lo reciben” (CIC #2241).

5. Era usual que inmigrantes formaran sus comunidades e iglesias basadas en su pertenencia cultural, lugar de origen o lengua. Era habitual que un sacerdote propio de su país o lengua de origen les atendiera, convirtiéndose hasta cierto punto en las llamadas «parroquias nacionales» o comunidades “étnicas”. Esta dinámica funcionó mientras la comunidad continuó siendo vibrante, viva, y no faltaba la participación de sus fieles, se apoyaba al hecho que tenía suficientes vocaciones provenientes de su lugar de origen para atenderlas y así compartían sus mismas costumbres culturales y lingüísticas. Considerando que hoy en día muchas comunidades de fieles están multiculturalmente compuestas cada vez más, y que hay una disminución de vocaciones, se requiere un enfoque diferente de la misión y al modelo de «parroquias nacionales». Esto exige un enfoque intercultural en la misión con la comunidad migrante, un orientamiento donde existe una apertura intencional a servir fuera de la propia cultura o de la lengua madre. Esto requerirá preparación de manera que se pueda adquirir una sensibilidad cultural y se cultiven las habilidades interculturales en la persona.

6. Países que habitualmente eran lugares de origen de contingentes migratorios, en la actualidad se están convirtiendo en destinos y de acogida. Los oblatos están presentes en muchas de estas naciones, ya sean en los lugares que originan la migración o lugares de destino y recepción de migrantes. El desafío radica en cómo pueden colaborar creativamente para preparar y recibir a los migrantes y refugiados.

7. Indicadores migratorios demuestran cómo los cristianos siguen siendo el número más significativo que emigra. Sin embargo, análisis recientes demuestran cómo las personas que pertenecen a otras tradiciones religiosas conforman las nuevas oleadas de migrantes. De estas principalmente de tradiciones musulmanas, los cuales se han convertido ya en el segundo grupo los después de los cristianos, al cual pertenecen contingentes recientes de migrantes. El reto consistirá en preparar a las personas y formarlas para que se comprometan a trabajar interreligiosamente con respeto y humildad.

8. Dado el aumento de las cifras de personas que emigran como refugiados, de personas que buscan asilo y de personas desplazadas a causa de la guerra, la violencia y la persecución, las comunidades lo-

cales que ofrecen acogida pueden ser también lugares de sanación y reconciliación.

9. El mensaje del 36º Capítulo General dirigido a los Oblatos y a la comunidad Mazenodiana continúa interpelándonos con fuerza a reconocer las cuestiones urgentes de hoy como lo es la situación de los migrantes y refugiados donde “la Iglesia nos pide a voces que abandonemos nuestras comodidades para ir a las “periferias” y trabajemos para que el Reino llegue a su cumplimiento. Se nos invita a escribir una nueva página del Evangelio con creatividad y audacia mazenodianas”. Por lo tanto, tenemos que seguir apoyando a las comunidades oblatas que ya están comprometidas en la misión entre y con los migrantes y refugiados, y fomentar un discernimiento y un compromiso más profundo en los lugares oblatos donde todavía se necesita salir al encuentro de nuestros hermanos y hermanas migrantes.

10. Por último, pero no por ello menos importante, el fenómeno de la migración nos exige una hospitalidad radical. En un mundo que en muchos sentidos se está volviendo más hostil a los considerados «otros», «migrantes», “extranjeros”; el ser hospitalario es una forma de ser testigo del Reino de Dios. Exige una conversión y una transformación de los propios prejuicios culturales y actitudes nativistas. Esperando así que nos convirtamos en «linternas verdes» que brillen y acojan con corazones cálidos y espíritus llenos de esperanza.

## MISSION AND MIGRATION

In the northeastern part of Italy, there is this parish that during the Advent and Christmas season displayed a provoking nativity scene - its peculiarity was that it featured a lantern that shed a green light. Next to the green light, an inscription said:

Jesus was born in the shivering cold... like the refugees. However, like the shepherds with the holy family, there is someone close to him too! ... On the border between Belarus and the European Union, migrants and refugees, including several minors either by themselves or with their families, are stuck in makeshift tent camps fighting against hypothermia and hunger. However, charity has no borders, and the example comes to us from Belarusian and Polish citizens, some of whom have lit green lanterns in their homes to

signal that help can be found in that place. A green light constantly emerges from the doorways of villages closer to the border. It is the agreed signal to indicate to those who manage to cross the border, in that house, they will find a warm meal, blankets, open arms, and here no snitch is calling the police!<sup>11</sup>.

This gesture not only reflects Jesus' experience but also calls to mind Mathew 25:35, "for I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger, and you welcomed me" (NRSV). The community in that parish, although kilometers away, was showing solidarity with migrants and refugees on the Belarus-Poland border – it was their creative way to participate in God's mission to the most vulnerable and practice the call of Mt 25:35.

Let us reflect on what we mean by mission. The Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, *Ad Gentes*, tells us, “The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father” (*AG* 2). It is God’s Mission, and we are called to participate in it by grace. God’s love for the world is poured out into the life of Jesus’ ministry - “The Church, sent by Christ to reveal and communicate the love of God to all men and nations...” (*AG* 10). As S. Bevans points out, “the mission has a church ...” and adds, “mission is not just about the church but about the Reign of God. Not about expansion but continuing Jesus’ mission. That makes every baptized a missionary and is called into service” however, he adds, “[t]his also includes an invitation to belong to this Church”<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Since June 2021, thousands of people from Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Congo, Cameroon and other countries were trying to reach EU via Belarus – Poland border. Most of them got stranded in facing levels of a humanitarian crisis. “The lawyer, Kamil Syller, has appealed to his neighbors in the village of Dubicze Cerkiewne in northeastern Poland to install and switch on a green light to signal to migrants they can receive food and other emergency supplies.” <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/35889/green-light-initiative-help-for-migrants-in-polandbelarus-border-area>. In order to reach people a Facebook page was created in October 12 in different languages, <https://www.facebook.com/Zielone-Światło-خضراء-سوسن-گلوبی-Green-Light-Lumière-Verte-113817444406350/>

<sup>2</sup> BEVANS, Stephen., «Mission Among Migrants, Mission Of Migrants», In Daniel G. GROODY – Gioacchino CAMPESI, Eds., *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey: Theological Perspectives On Migration*, University Of Notre Dame Press. 2008. 89-106.

All baptized are called to be missionaries, called to be signs and instruments of God's presence to all. That way, Jesus' mission is carried out by service, proclamation, and witnessing to the Reign of God (*AG* 11-18), be it within the Church (*ad intra*), or as a sign of God's presence in the world, to all nations (*ad extra*) among all peoples (*ad gentes*), men and women in their context and their daily and concrete life (*inter gentes*) as an instrument of salvation to all (*LG* 1, *RM* 9). Therefore, "Missionary activity is nothing else and nothing less than the epiphany, or a manifesting of God's decree, and its fulfillment in the world history, in the course of which God, by means of mission, manifestly works out the history of salvation" (*AG* 9).

The above resonates with who we are as Oblates of Mary Immaculate as our Constitutions and Rules define us, "We are a missionary Congregation. Our principal service in the Church is to proclaim Christ and his Kingdom to the most abandoned. We preach the Gospel among people who have not yet received it and help them see their own values in its light. Where the Church is already established, our commitment is to those groups it touches least" (C 5). *Redemptoris Missio* defines "mission" as "a single but complex reality, and it develops in a variety of ways" (*RM* 41). Oblates are no strangers to these "variety of ways" since, as our Constitutions and Rules mandate, "There is no ministry, however, which is foreign to us, provided we never lose sight of the Congregation's primary purpose: to evangelize the most abandoned" (R 7b). To fulfill this missionary call of service, preaching and witnessing the Gospel, many times we will need to cross borders, cross cultures, barriers of nationality, leave our comfort zones and move beyond our own securities; mission is about a constant crossing of borders, but always in dialogue, with respect, openness, and humility<sup>3</sup>.

This is where our mission among migrants comes in. Migrants are usually the target of many injustices and objects of mistreatment and prejudices. In many ways, they experience rejection, becoming voiceless and invisible to society in general. Migrants and refugees reflect the face of Christ, and their suffering is a continuing *Via Crucis*. They are among the faces of the poor in today's world. As Oblates, "Wherever

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<sup>3</sup> BEVANS, Stephen. B. – SCHROEDER, Roger. P., *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections On Christian Mission Today*. Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y, 2011.

we work, our mission is especially to those people whose condition cries out for salvation and for the hope which only Jesus Christ can fully bring. These are the poor with their many faces; we give them our preference” (C 5).

The Acts of the 36<sup>th</sup> Oblate General Chapter rightly recognizes the migrants and refugees as one of the new faces of the poor (7.2). It recalls the experience lived by Eugene de Mazenod as someone who was a migrant himself, “Eugene de Mazenod’s life journey helps us to identify some new faces of the poor today... His period of migration reminds us of the drama of the migrants in these present times and the related issues of justice and peace” (10). Consequently, the Chapter called us “to adopt a spiritual attitude of pilgrimage, like the migrants who are on the move” (12).

In the very person of a migrant, the whole world has come to us. That is why today, we do not only think of being a missionary overseas, a missionary to another country, or encountering another culture or religion outside where we find ourselves. With this understanding of mission, we are called to reflect on how we engage in mission among our migrant brothers and sisters. We are called to mission across borders in our land; hopefully, we will also be open to receiving the richness and gifts our migrant sisters and brothers offer to the receiving nation and to the local faith communities.

Let us now reflect on migration. Migration is not a new phenomenon, nor is it unique to this century. It has been present throughout human history. However, in the last centuries, such movement of peoples has been more significant in numbers, whether voluntary or involuntary, within a nation or across nations, domestic and international. Many factors and reasons drive people to migrate, such as economic, political, religious, war, violence, climate change, and environmental disasters<sup>4</sup>. As Church, what should be of concern for us are the most vulnerable of those people in movement. It is worthwhile to briefly consider some recent trends to understand the context.

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<sup>4</sup> A trend in the recent driver showed that climate and environmental change had increase as a root cause for migrating. For a more detail explanation on the types of migration drivers and root causes see: <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/migration-drivers>.

According to United Nations, at mid-year 2020<sup>5</sup>, the total number of people residing in a country other than their country of birth was estimated at 281 million<sup>6</sup>; this represented 3.6% of the world's total population of 7.8 billion<sup>7</sup>. An estimated 51.9% are male, 48.1% are female (135 million), and 12% (36 million) of the total migrant population are children, many of whom come from a country that is underdeveloped or below the poverty line<sup>8</sup>. The Global migration indicator shows that as of mid-2020, three specific regions demonstrate an influx of migration; Europe is the favored destination by numbers (86.7 million), where Germany is the primary destination; second is Asia (85.6 million), and third North America (58.7 million) where the United States is the most popular destination<sup>9</sup>. ILO estimated that of the total stock of international migrants, more than half, 169 million, are migrant workers, of whom 70 million (41.5%) are women<sup>10</sup>. The total of migrant workers makes up nearly 5% of the global labor force<sup>11</sup>. By 2021, more than half (60.6%) migrant workers were located in three regions - 24% in Europe, 22.1% in North America, and 14.3% in the Arab States<sup>12</sup>. According to some sources, poverty and unemployment have been the primary factor for migrant workers<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> BLACK, J., *Global Migration Indicators 2021*. International Organization For Migration (IOM), Geneva, 2021. An increase number compared with 173 million at mid-year 2000 and 153 million at mid-year 1990.

<sup>6</sup> International Organization for Global Migration (IOM) defines “The Stock of International migrants” as: “the total number of people residing in a country other than their country of birth”. This number does not include second generation children born of migrant parents; in IOM Global Migration Data Portal, <https://www.migrationdata-portal.org/themes/international-migrant-stocks>

<sup>7</sup> Source of figures, United Nations Department of Economics and Social Affairs (UNDESA) in: <https://www.un.org/en/desa/international-migration-2020-highlights>.

<sup>8</sup> <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-migration-and-displacement/migration/>.

<sup>9</sup> J. BLACK, *Global Migration Indicators 2021*, 25.

<sup>10</sup> Source: International Labor Organization (ILO) in: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-/-ed\\_protect/-/-protrav/-/-migrant/documents/publication/wcms\\_808946.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-/-ed_protect/-/-protrav/-/-migrant/documents/publication/wcms_808946.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> In (ILO): <https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/labour-migration/#>

<sup>12</sup> J. BLACK, *Global Migration Indicators 2021*, 28.

<sup>13</sup> J. BLACK, *Global Migration Indicators 2021*, 29. ILO data shows that of the first 40 countries in the world that are considered, “working poor: that is employed people who earn less than \$1.90 a day and fall lower the accepted poverty line, are from

The UN Refugee Agency reported that, by the end of 2020, 82.4 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide due to conflict, violence, human rights violations, and persecutions<sup>14</sup>. Of the total number of those displaced and forced to migrate, 4.1 million were asylum-seekers, and 26.4 million were registered as refugees, 50% of them being under 18 years old<sup>15</sup>. More than two-thirds of the displaced and refugees (68%) come from just five countries; Syria is the nation of origin of the most significant number of registered refugees (6.7 million), and in second place is Venezuela with an estimate of 4 million displaced abroad; then follow Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Myanmar<sup>16</sup>.

According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, developing countries hosted 86% of the refugee and displaced population worldwide, with Turkey hosting the most significant number of refugees, followed by Colombia hosting the highest number of displaced who happen to be from Venezuela<sup>17</sup>. Germany was the third country to host and welcome refugees and asylum-seekers, and the United States in sixth place. This demonstrates a significant trend: the current flow of people on the move in its different categories is mainly from the southern hemisphere to the north.

Let us compare the flow of people and migration in previous centuries. We could say that it has been somewhat of a reverse movement. Countries or regions from where migration once originated have now become the receivers of recent migrant waves. In times past, the flow of people was from the northern hemisphere to the south. It is important to note that at that time, the migration to North America mostly came from

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the African Region, in other words they can become potential migrant, of these group mostly young people are far more likely to be the working poor, in: <https://ilo.org/topics/working-poor/>

<sup>14</sup> J. BLACK, *Global Migration Indicators 2021*, 34. There is a drastic increase almost double compared to the end of 2010. This mainly due to increase of crisis such as Syria, Venezuela, Afghanistan, Somalia, Yemen, Congo among others.

<sup>15</sup> UNHCR Refugee Agency estimates that of the 82.4 , 48 millions of them were internally displaced in: <https://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/60b638e37/global-trends-forced-displacement-2020.html>.

<sup>16</sup> In: <https://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/60b638e37/global-trends-forced-displacement-2020.html>

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* According to UNHCR, the least developing countries provided asylum to 27% of the total.

Europe, unlike in recent times, when migration tends to come primarily from Latin America. For example, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century, migrants to America were mainly from northern and western Europe, whereas, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the migrant flux came predominantly from southern and eastern Europe. “Between 1882 and 1914, approximately 20 million immigrants came to the United States. In 1907 alone, 1.285 million arrived. By 1900, New York City had as many Irish residents as Dublin. It had more Italians than any city outside Rome and more Poles than any city except Warsaw”<sup>18</sup>, the majority of which arrived as regular documented migrants.

The category of migrants that need close attention is that considered as “irregular migration.” The smuggling of migrants facilitates much of irregular entry of migrants to a state. It entails clandestine migration and is a profitable business to primarily criminal networks. There are no exact figures, and it would be difficult to estimate and assess the magnitude of migrant smuggling. Smuggled migrants are subject to human trafficking, exposing them to many risks such as violence, exploitation, theft, and other dangers<sup>19</sup>. Thus, irregular migrants comprise the most vulnerable category of migration<sup>20</sup>.

Religious belonging and affiliation have always been central to the lives of migrants and refugees, especially to their manner of participation in local receiving communities<sup>21</sup>. Different waves of migration have shown diversity in religious composition - either from the place of origin or to the place receiving them; for example, the 20th-century wave to the United States was “largely Catholic and Jewish,” coming

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<sup>18</sup> MINTZ, S., & MCNEIL, S. (2018). The Huddle Masses: The New Immigrants. *Digital History*. Retrieved (January, 2022) from <http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/>

<sup>19</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime published the first Global study on Smuggling Migrants and the dangers that migrants are exposed to, in: UNODC, *Global Study on Smuggling of migrants 2018*, Vienna: UNP.

<sup>20</sup> IOM defines it as, “movement that takes place outside the regulatory norms of sending, transit and receiving country” in: <https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms>

<sup>21</sup> ZANFRINI, Laura, Ed., *Migrants And Religion: Paths, Issues, And Lenses. A Multi-Disciplinary And Multi-Sited Study On The Role Of Religious Belongings In Migratory And Integration Process*. Brill Academic Pub, Leiden, Boston, 2020, 507-509.

mainly from Europe<sup>22</sup>. It is interesting to note that at the beginning of the 1900s, Europe alone had 65% of the Catholics in the world, only second place to Latin America with 24%<sup>23</sup>. Migrant communities can be a challenge for local churches and yet, at the same time, a source of richness - you only have to think of the religious vitality of the Italian Catholic immigrants in Argentina between 1800 and 1900<sup>24</sup>, or the Mexican community that has for decades enriched the local religious communities in the United States<sup>25</sup>. The Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life reported that as of 2010, nearly half of the world's migrants are Christians, while Muslims make up the second-largest group with over a quarter of the total International Migrants<sup>26</sup>. The report shows how the United States has been the number one destination for Christian migrants. For Muslims, the top destination has been South Arabia. China has been the top country of origin for unaffiliated migrants globally<sup>27</sup>. The same report shows that Christian immigrants doubled and outnumbered Muslims in the Region of the European Union. More than ten years have passed since this study, and figures might vary today by region given the different events and crises in the last ten years, such as the Syrian conflict, Venezuelan crisis, and the crisis in some African regions, the increased migration to Europe and the United States<sup>27</sup>. There are some predictions that the number of Muslim migrants to Europe will increase given the influx from primarily Mus-

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<sup>22</sup> MINTZ, S., & MCNEIL, S. (2018). The Huddle Masses: The New Immigrants. *Digital History*. Retrieved (January, 2022) from <http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/>

<sup>23</sup> Pew Research Center, *Faith on the Move: The Religious Affiliation of International Migrants* in: <https://www.pewforum.org/2013/02/13/the-global-catholic-population/>

<sup>24</sup> L. ZANFRINI, ed., *Migrants and Religion: Paths, Issues, and Lenses*, 510.

<sup>25</sup> Pew Research Center, *Faith on the Move: The Religious Affiliation of International Migrants, Fact Sheet: Global*, in: <https://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2012/03/global-fact-sheet.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. As for 2010, México has been the largest single country of origin for Christian migrants to the Unites States. Muslims migrants to South Arabia are mostly migrant workers from Indonesia, India and Philippines.

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.pewforum.org/2012/03/08/religious-migration-exec/>

lim countries, and the most recent of these are of younger age and have higher fertility rates<sup>28</sup>.

Analysts indicate the world is becoming less accepting of migrants<sup>29</sup>. The influx of migrants and refugees has sparked waves of anti-immigrant sentiments such as xenophobia and nativism through the decades. These sentiments tend to spread different fears and threats about migrants and refugees, resulting in them becoming targets of many injustices, mistreatments, prejudices, and race issues. However, on the one hand, they are criminalized because they are seen as a threat to border security, cultural traditions, and customs. On the other, they are portrayed in a very paternalistic image as innocent, vulnerable, and victims. Either way, they tend to be dehumanized and become objects of interpretation from the perspective of others.

We cannot underestimate the complexity of migration in its diverse elements presented here. When we think of this issue, we tend to think only about policies regarding the physical borders, of whether they should be open or not. Although we have presented here some trends on migration and some figures, migrants and refugees should not be seen only in numbers and percentages; instead, these tools should help us minister effectively and find better ways to practice discipleship and find the most abandoned and in need.

After reviewing the concept of Mission and describing briefly the context of migration today, it seems useful to make some concluding remarks:

1) Our guiding principle should be that of a Christian: every human being is the image and likeness of God and should be treated as such. Moreover, in the places where this does not occur, our call is to be prophetic - working for justice, peace, and reconciliation.

2) We participate in God's mission, and out of love, such mission should move us to reach out and be among migrants. They are not only one of the faces of the poor, as the General Chapter acknowledged, but also, they are the face of Christ today calling us. As our Oblate Cons-

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<sup>28</sup> To see the different scenarios predictions in: Pew Research Center, *Demographic Study: Europe's Growing Muslim Population*, 2017, <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/11/29/europe-s-growing-muslim-population/>

<sup>29</sup> J. BLACK, *Global Migration Indicators 2021*, 48-49

titution no.1 states, “The call of Jesus Christ, heard within the Church through people’s need for salvation, draw us together... Christ thus invites us to follow him and share in his mission through word and work... Cooperating with the Saviour and imitating his example, we commit ourselves principally to evangelizing the poor.” In that way, we are called to proclaim and preach Christ and his Kingdom in a way that “the church proposes not imposes” (*RM* 38-39).

3) The Church is called to serve and be a witness of the Gospel to all -regardless of nationality, culture, and religious belonging: “While respecting migrants’ human rights and religious freedom, mission needs to be done in a way that both serves their deepest spiritual and physical needs, and shares with them our most precious treasures of faith”<sup>30</sup>. In this way, the Church is not seen purely as an agent of social service but as a servant and witness of gospel values to migrants.

4) Although no nation can be denied the right to protect its borders, we cannot forget the responsibility that developed nations have towards their less fortunate brothers and sisters as the Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us, “The more prosperous nations are obliged, to the extent they are able, to welcome the foreigner in search of the security and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his country of origin. Public authorities should see to it that the natural right is respected that places a guest under the protection of those who receive him” (*CCC* #2241).

5) It was usual for migrants to form communities and churches based on their cultural belonging or place of origin. It was customary that a priest proper to their specific country or language of origin minister to them, becoming to a certain extent the so-called “national parishes”. This dynamic worked as long as the community continued to be vibrant, alive, and had enough vocations to minister to them coming from their place of origin and sharing their same cultural and language customs. Considering that today many church communities are composed more and more multiculturally, and there is a decline in vocations, it calls for a different approach of mission and a different model of that of the “national parishes.” This calls for an intercultural approach in mission where there is an openness to serve outside one’s own cultural

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<sup>30</sup> S. BEVANS, «Mission among Migrants, Mission of Migrants», 95.

or language. This will require some preparation to cultivate cultural sensitivity and intercultural skills.

6) Many countries that usually were places originating migration are becoming today receiving destinations. Oblates are present in many of these nations, whether places originating migration or places of destination and receiving migrants; the challenge lies in how they can collaborate creatively to prepare and receive migrants and refugees.

7) The migrant indicators showed how Christians are still the most significant number migrating. Analysts also show how people from other religious traditions make up the new waves of migrants, mainly Muslim traditions which have become the second group after Christians. The challenge will lie in preparing people and forming them to engage interreligiously with respect and humility.

8) Given the increased figures of people migrating as refugees, seeking asylum, and being displaced because of war, violence, and persecution, receiving church communities can be places of healing and reconciliation.

9) The message of the 36<sup>th</sup> General Chapter addressed to all the Oblates, and the Mazenodian community continues calling us to let ourselves speak strongly and recognize the urgent issues such as the situations of migrant and refugees where “the Church strongly calls us out of our comfort zone to go to the ‘peripheries’ and work for the fulfillment of the Kingdom. We are invited to write a new page of the Gospel with Mazenodian creativity and audacity.” Therefore, we need to continue supporting those Oblate communities already engaged in mission among and with migrants and refugees and encourage profound discernment and deeper commitment in oblate places where it is still needed.

10) Last but not least, the phenomenon of migration calls for hospitality. Mission today calls us to be hospitable and welcoming. In a world that is becoming more hostile in many ways to those considered “other,” “migrant,” being hospitable is a way to witness the Reign of God. It will call for conversion and transformation from own cultural prejudices and nativist attitudes. Hoping we will become “green lanterns” shining and welcoming with warm hearts and spirits full of hope.

## MISSION ET MIGRATION

Dans le nord-est de l'Italie, il y avait une paroisse qui, pendant la période de l’Avent et de Noël, exposait une crèche provocante. Sa particularité était qu’elle comportait une lanterne diffusant une lumière verte et près de cette lanterne, une inscription disait :

Jésus est né par un froid glacial... comme les réfugiés. Mais, comme les bergers avec la Sainte Famille, il y a aussi quelqu’un près de lui ! ... À la frontière entre la Biélorussie et l’Union européenne, des migrants et des réfugiés, dont plusieurs mineurs seuls ou avec leurs familles, sont bloqués dans des camps de tentes de fortune, luttant contre l’hypothermie et la faim. Cependant, la charité n’a pas de frontière et l’exemple nous vient de citoyens biélorusses et polonais, dont certains ont allumé des lanternes vertes chez eux pour signaler que l’on peut trouver de l’aide à cet endroit. Une lumière verte brille constamment devant les portes des villages proches de la frontière. C’est le signal convenu pour indiquer à ceux qui parviendront à traverser la frontière qu’ils trouveront dans cette maison des bras ouverts, un repas chaud et des couvertures. Ici, aucun mouchard n’appelle la police!<sup>1</sup>

Ce geste non seulement renvoie à l’expérience de Jésus, mais rappelle aussi les paroles de Matthieu 25, 35 : « Car j’avais faim, et vous m’avez donné à manger ; j’avais soif, et vous m’avez donné à boire ; j’étais un étranger, et vous m’avez accueilli » (Bible liturgique). La communauté de cette paroisse, bien qu’élargie de plusieurs kilomètres, a manifesté sa solidarité avec les migrants et les réfugiés à la fron-

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<sup>1</sup> Depuis juin 2021, des milliers de personnes originaires d’Irak, de Syrie, d’Afghanistan, du Congo, du Cameroun et d’autres pays ont tenté de rejoindre l’Union européenne via la frontière entre le Belarus et la Pologne. La plupart d’entre elles se sont retrouvées bloquées, confrontées à une crise humanitaire de grande ampleur. «L’avocat, Kamil Syller, a lancé un appel à ses voisins du village de Dubicze Cerkiewne, dans le nord-est de la Pologne, afin qu’ils allument un feu vert pour signaler aux migrants qu’ils peuvent recevoir de la nourriture et d’autres fournitures d’urgence.» <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/35889/green-light-initiative-help-for-migrants-in-polandbelarus-border-area>. Afin d’atteindre les gens, une page Facebook a été créée en octobre 2012 dans différentes langues, <https://www.facebook.com/Zielone-Światło-گلوبی-سوز-خواه-اخضر>-Green-Light-Lumière-Verte-113817444406350/

tière entre la Biélorussie et la Pologne. C'était sa façon innovatrice de participer à la mission de Dieu envers les plus vulnérables et de mettre en pratique l'appel de Matthieu 25, 35.

Réfléchissons sur ce que nous entendons par mission. Le décret sur l'activité missionnaire de l'Église, *Ad Gentes*, nous dit que : « Par nature, l'Église, durant son pèlerinage sur terre, est missionnaire, puisqu'elle-même tire son origine de la mission du Fils et de la mission du Saint-Esprit, selon le dessein de Dieu le Père » (AG 2). C'est la mission de Dieu et nous sommes, par grâce, appelés à y prendre part. L'amour de Dieu pour le monde se répand à travers la vie et le ministère de Jésus : «L'Église, envoyée par le Christ pour manifester et communiquer la charité de Dieu à tous les hommes et à toutes les nations...» (AG 10). Comme le souligne S. Bevans, «la mission a une Église...» et il ajoute que «la mission ne concerne pas seulement l'Église, mais le Règne de Dieu. Il ne s'agit pas d'expansion, mais de poursuite de la mission de Jésus. Cela fait de chaque baptisé un missionnaire et un appelé au service». Il ajoute cependant que «cela inclut également une invitation à appartenir à cette Église»<sup>2</sup>.

Tous les baptisés sont appelés à être missionnaires, appelés à être signes et instruments de la présence de Dieu pour tous. Ainsi, la mission de Jésus s'accomplit par le service, la proclamation et le témoignage du règne de Dieu (AG 11-18), que ce soit à l'intérieur de l'Église (*ad intra*), ou comme signe de la présence de Dieu dans le monde, auprès de toutes les nations (*ad extra*) parmi tous les peuples (*ad gentes*), les hommes et les femmes dans le contexte de leur vie quotidienne et concrète (*inter gentes*) comme instrument de salut pour tous (LG 1, RM 9). Par conséquent, «l'activité missionnaire n'est rien d'autre et rien de moins que la manifestation du dessein de Dieu, son épiphanie et sa réalisation dans le monde et son histoire, dans laquelle Dieu conduit clairement à son terme, par la mission, l'histoire du salut» (AG 9).

Ce qui précède trouve écho dans ce que nous sommes en tant qu'Oblats de Marie Immaculée selon la définition que donnent nos Constitutions et Règles : «La Congrégation est toute entière missionnaire. Son premier service dans l'Église est de faire connaître aux plus

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<sup>2</sup> BEVANS, Stephen., «Mission Among Migrants, Mission Of Migrants», In Daniel G. GROODY – Gioacchino CAMPESE, Eds., *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey: Theological Perspectives On Migration*. University Of Notre Dame Press, 2008, 89-106.

délaissés le Christ et son Royaume. Elle porte la Bonne Nouvelle aux peuples qui ne l'ont pas encore reçue et les aide à découvrir leurs propres valeurs à la lumière de l'Évangile. Là où l'Église est déjà implantée, les Oblats se vouent aux groupes qu'elle atteint le moins » (C 5). *Redemptoris Missio* définit la mission comme « une réalité globale, mais complexe, qui s'accomplit de différentes manières » (RM 41). Les Oblats ne sont pas étrangers à ces « différentes manières » puisque, comme le prévoient nos Constitutions et Règles : «... aucun ministère ne nous est étranger, pourvu que nous ne perdions jamais de vue la fin principale de la Congrégation : l'évangélisation des plus abandonnés » (R 7b). Pour répondre à cet appel missionnaire à servir, à prêcher et à témoigner de l'Évangile, nous devrons souvent franchir les frontières, les barrières des cultures et des nationalités, quitter nos zones de confort et aller au-delà de notre propre sécurité ; la mission consiste à franchir constamment les frontières, mais toujours en dialogue, avec respect, ouverture d'esprit et humilité.<sup>3</sup>

C'est là qu'intervient notre mission auprès des migrants. Les migrants sont généralement la cible de nombreuses injustices et font l'objet de mauvais traitements et de préjugés. À bien des égards, ils sont rejetés, sans voix et invisibles pour la société en général. Les migrants et les réfugiés reflètent le visage du Christ et leur souffrance est un chemin de croix permanent. Leurs visages sont parmi ceux des pauvres dans le monde d'aujourd'hui. « Partout, en effet, notre mission est d'aller d'abord vers ceux dont la condition réclame à grands cris une espérance et un salut que seul le Christ peut apporter en plénitude. Ce sont les pauvres aux multiples visages : nous leur donnons la préférence » (C 5).

Les Actes du 36<sup>e</sup> Chapitre général reconnaissent, à juste titre, chez les migrants et les réfugiés l'un des nouveaux visages des pauvres (7, 2). Ils rappellent l'expérience vécue par Eugène de Mazenod, lui-même migrant. « Le parcours d'Eugène de Mazenod nous aide à identifier certains des nouveaux visages des pauvres... Le temps où il a dû vivre à l'étranger nous rappelle le drame actuel des migrants avec les questions de justice et de paix qui en découlent (10). Nous sommes donc appelés

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<sup>3</sup> BEVANS, Stephen. B. – SCHROEDER, Roger. P., *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections On Christian Mission Today*. Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y, 2011.

« à adopter l'attitude spirituelle du pèlerin, comme ces migrants qui sont en chemin » (12).

Dans la personne même de l'immigrant, le monde entier vient à nous. C'est pourquoi, aujourd'hui, nous ne pensons pas seulement à être missionnaires à l'étranger, missionnaires dans un autre pays, en aller à la rencontre d'une autre culture ou d'une autre religion en dehors du lieu où nous habitons. En concevant ainsi la mission, nous sommes conduits à réfléchir sur la manière dont nous nous engageons auprès de nos frères et nos sœurs immigrants. Nous qui sommes appelés missionner au-delà des frontières de notre pays, espérons que nous serons également ouverts à accueillir la richesse et les dons que nos sœurs et nos frères immigrants offrent aux nations et aux communautés de foi qui les accueillent.

Réfléchissons maintenant sur le phénomène des migrations. Il n'est pas nouveau ni propre à ce siècle. Il a été présent tout au long de l'histoire de l'humanité. Cependant, au cours des derniers siècles, ces déplacements de populations ont été plus importants en nombre, qu'ils soient volontaires ou involontaires, au sein d'une nation ou entre nations, nationales ou internationales. De nombreuses raisons poussent les gens à émigrer, telles que les facteurs économiques, politiques, religieux, la guerre, la violence, le changement climatique et les catastrophes environnementales<sup>4</sup>. En tant qu'Église, ce qui devrait nous préoccuper, c'est le sort des plus vulnérables de ces personnes en mouvement. Examinons brièvement certaines tendances récentes pour comprendre le contexte de ces déplacements.

Selon les Nations unies, au milieu de l'année 2020<sup>5</sup>, le nombre total de personnes résidant dans un pays autre que leur pays de naissance était estimé à 281 millions<sup>6</sup>, soit 3,6 % de la population mondiale

<sup>4</sup> Une tendance dans les facteurs récents de migration a montré que le changement climatique et environnemental avait augmenté comme cause profonde. Pour une explication plus détaillée des types de facteurs de migration et de leurs causes profondes, voir : <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/migration-drivers>.

<sup>5</sup> BLACK, J., *Global Migration Indicators 2021*. International Organization For Migration (IOM), Geneva, 2021. Un chiffre en hausse par rapport aux 173 millions à la mi-année 2000 et aux 153 millions à la mi-année 1990.

<sup>6</sup> L'Organisation internationale pour les migrations (OIM) définit le nombre des migrants internationaux comme « le nombre total de personnes résidant dans un pays

totale de 7,8 milliards<sup>7</sup>. On estime que 51,9 % sont des hommes, 48,1 % des femmes (135 millions) et que 12 % (36 millions) de la population migrante totale sont des enfants, dont beaucoup viennent d'un pays sous-développé ou en dessous du seuil de pauvreté<sup>8</sup>. L'indicateur des migrations mondiales montre qu'au milieu de l'année 2020, trois régions précises connaîtront un afflux de migrations ; l'Europe est la destination préférée en nombre (86,7 millions), l'Allemagne étant la première destination, suivie de l'Asie (85,6 millions) et de l'Amérique du Nord (58,7 millions), les États-Unis étant la destination la plus populaire<sup>9</sup>. L'Organisation internationale du travail estime que sur le total des migrants internationaux, plus de la moitié, 169 millions, sont des travailleurs migrants, dont 70 millions (41,5 %) sont des femmes<sup>10</sup>. Le total des travailleurs migrants représente près de 5 % de la population active mondiale<sup>11</sup>. En 2021, plus de la moitié (60,6 %) des travailleurs migrants se trouveront dans trois régions : 24 % en Europe, 22,1 % en Amérique du Nord et 14,3 % dans les États arabes<sup>12</sup>. Selon certaines sources, la pauvreté et le chômage ont été le principal facteur de migration des travailleurs<sup>13</sup>.

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autre que leur pays de naissance ». Ce nombre n'inclut pas les enfants de deuxième génération nés de parents migrants, dans <https://www.iom.int/fr/resources/portail-sur-les donnees-migratoires> ; <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/international-migrant-stocks>.

<sup>7</sup> Source des données, Département des affaires économiques et sociales des Nations unies (UNDESA) in: <https://www.un.org/en/desa/international-migration-2020-highlights>.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/fr/enfants-migrants-refugies-deplaces>.

<sup>9</sup> J. BLACK, *Global Migration Indicators 2021*, 25.

<sup>10</sup> Source: Organisation internationale du travail (OIT) dans <https://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/lang--fr/index.htm>; [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_protect/---protrav/---migrant/documents/publication/wcms\\_808946.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---migrant/documents/publication/wcms_808946.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Dans (OIT): <https://ilo.org/topics/labour-migration/#>.

<sup>12</sup> J. BLACK, *Global Migration Indicators 2021*, 28.

<sup>13</sup> J. BLACK, *Global Migration Indicators 2021*, 29. Les données de l'OIT montrent que, parmi les 40 premiers pays du monde considérés comme pays de «travailleurs pauvres», c'est-à-dire que des personnes employées qui gagnent moins de 1,90 dollar par jour et se situent en dessous du seuil de pauvreté reconnu, se trouvent des pays africains, c'est-à-dire des personnes susceptibles de devenir des migrants potentiels ; dans ce groupe, les jeunes sont les plus susceptibles d'être des travailleurs pauvres. Voir: <https://ilo.org/topics/working-poor/>

L'Agence des Nations unies pour les réfugiés a indiqué qu'à la fin de 2020, 82,4 millions de personnes avaient été déplacées de force dans le monde en raison de conflits, de violences, de violations des droits de l'homme et de persécutions<sup>14</sup>. Sur le nombre total de personnes déplacées et contraintes d'émigrer, 4,1 millions étaient des demandeurs d'asile et 26,4 millions étaient enregistrés comme réfugiés, dont 50 % avaient moins de 18 ans<sup>15</sup>. Plus des deux tiers des personnes déplacées et des réfugiés (68%) proviennent de cinq pays seulement ; la Syrie est la nation d'origine du plus grand nombre de réfugiés enregistrés (6,7 millions) et, en deuxième position, se trouve le Venezuela avec une estimation de 4 millions de personnes déplacées à l'étranger ; suivent l'Afghanistan, le Soudan du Sud et le Myanmar<sup>16</sup>.

Selon le Haut Commissariat des Nations unies pour les réfugiés, les pays en développement ont accueilli 86 % des réfugiés et des personnes déplacées dans le monde. La Turquie a accueilli le plus grand nombre de réfugiés, suivie de la Colombie, qui a accueilli le plus grand nombre de personnes déplacées provenant du Venezuela<sup>17</sup>. L'Allemagne était le troisième pays à accueillir et à héberger des réfugiés et des demandeurs d'asile. Les États-Unis occupaient la sixième position. Cela démontre une tendance significative : le flux actuel des différentes catégories de personnes en mouvement se fait principalement de l'hémisphère sud à l'hémisphère nord.

Comparons les flux de personnes en migration dans les siècles précédents. On pourrait dire qu'il s'agit en quelque sorte d'un mouvement inverse. Les pays ou les régions d'où provenaient autrefois les immigrants sont devenus les pays ou les régions destinataires des récentes

<sup>14</sup> J. BLACK, *Global Migration Indicators 2021*, 34. Il y a une augmentation drastique de près du double par rapport à la fin de 2010. Ceci est principalement dû à l'augmentation des crises telles que celles de la Syrie, du Venezuela, de l'Afghanistan, de la Somalie, du Yémen et du Congo entre autres.

<sup>15</sup> Le Haut Commissariat des Nations unies pour les réfugiés estime que sur les 82,4 millions de personnes, 48 millions d'entre elles ont été déplacés à l'intérieur du pays, <https://www.unhcr.org/fr/news/stories/2021/6/60cc51fca/deplacements-forces-atteint-niveau-record-2020-malgre-diminution-voies.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Dans : <https://www.unhcr.org/fr/news/stories/2021/6/60cc51fca/deplacements-forces-atteint-niveau-record-2020-malgre-diminution-voies.html>

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* Selon le Haut Commissariat des Nations unies pour les réfugiés, les pays les moins avancés ont fourni l'asile à 27 % du total des demandeurs d'asile.

vagues d'immigrants. Autrefois, ces flux de personnes allaient du nord au le sud. Il est important de noter qu'à cette époque, ceux qui émigreraient vers l'Amérique du Nord provenaient principalement d'Europe, contrairement à l'époque récente, où ils proviennent principalement d'Amérique latine. Par exemple, de la fin du 18<sup>e</sup> siècle au milieu du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle, les émigrants vers l'Amérique provenaient principalement d'Europe du Nord et de l'Ouest, alors qu'à la fin du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle et au début du 20<sup>e</sup> siècle, le flux migratoire avait lieu surtout d'Europe du Sud et de l'Est. « Entre 1882 et 1914, environ 20 millions d'immigrants sont arrivés aux États-Unis. Pour la seule année 1907, 1,285 million d'entre eux est arrivé. En 1900, la ville de New York comptait autant de résidents irlandais que Dublin, plus d'Italiens que n'importe quelle ville en dehors de Rome et plus de Polonais que n'importe quelle ville à l'exception de Varsovie »<sup>18</sup>, la majorité d'entre eux étant arrivés en tant qu'immigrants réguliers avec des documents.

La catégorie de migrants à laquelle il convient d'accorder une attention particulière est celle considérée comme « migration irrégulière ». Le trafic de migrants facilite en grande partie l'entrée irrégulière d'immigrants dans un État. Il s'agit d'une migration clandestine et d'une activité lucrative pour des réseaux essentiellement criminels. Il n'existe pas de chiffres exacts et il serait difficile d'évaluer l'ampleur du trafic de migrants. Les immigrants clandestins sont soumis à la traite d'êtres humains, ce qui les expose à de nombreux risques tels que la violence, l'exploitation, le vol et à d'autres dangers<sup>19</sup>. Ainsi, les immigrants irréguliers constituent la catégorie la plus vulnérable de migration<sup>20</sup>.

L'appartenance et l'affiliation religieuses ont toujours été au cœur de la vie des immigrants et des réfugiés, notamment en ce qui concerne

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<sup>18</sup> MINTZ, S. & McNEIL, S. (2018). “The Huddle Masses: The New Immigrants”. Extrait de *Digital History*, janvier 2022, dans <http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/>

<sup>19</sup> L'Office des Nations Unies contre la drogue et le crime a publié une étude sur le trafic de migrants et les dangers auxquels les migrants sont exposés, dans: ONUDC, *Le trafic illicite de 2018*, Vienne, PNU.

<sup>20</sup> L'OIM définit ainsi la migration irrégulière : «Mouvement de personnes contrevenant aux lois, aux réglementations ou aux accords internationaux qui régissent l'entrée ou la sortie du pays d'origine, de transit ou de destination.», dans : <https://www.iom.int/fr/termes-cles-de-la-migration>.

leur mode de participation aux communautés locales d'accueil<sup>21</sup>. Les différentes vagues de migration ont révélé une diversité dans la composition religieuse, selon soit le lieu d'origine, soit du lieu d'accueil ; par exemple, la vague du 20<sup>e</sup> siècle vers les États-Unis était « en grande partie catholique et juive », provenant principalement d'Europe<sup>22</sup>. Il est intéressant de noter qu'au début des années 1900, l'Europe comptait à elle seule 65% des catholiques du monde, et juste derrière l'Amérique latine avec 24%<sup>23</sup>. Les communautés de migrants peuvent constituer un défi pour les églises locales et, en même temps, une source de richesse. Il suffit de penser à la vitalité religieuse des immigrants catholiques italiens en Argentine entre 1800 et 1900, ou à la communauté mexicaine qui, depuis des décennies, enrichit les communautés religieuses locales des États-Unis<sup>24</sup>. Le forum sur la religion et la vie publique du *Pew Research Center* indique qu'en 2010, près de la moitié des migrants dans le monde étaient des chrétiens, tandis que les musulmans constituaient le deuxième groupe le plus important avec plus d'un quart du total des migrants internationaux<sup>25</sup>. Le rapport montre que les États-Unis étaient la première destination des migrants chrétiens. Pour les musulmans, la première destination était l'Arabie du Sud. La Chine était le premier pays d'origine des migrants non affiliés dans le monde<sup>26</sup>. Le même rapport montre que les immigrants chrétiens avaient doublé et dépassé en nombre les musulmans dans la région de l'Union européenne. Plus de

<sup>21</sup> ZANFRINI, Laura, Ed., *Migrants And Religion: Paths, Issues, And Lenses. A Multi-Disciplinary And Multi-Sited Study On The Role Of Religious Belongings In Migratory And Integration Process*. Brill Academic Pub, Leiden, Boston, 2020, 507 -509..

<sup>22</sup> MINTZ, S. & McNeil, S. (2018). The Huddle Masses: The New Immigrants. Extrait de *Digital History*, janvier 2022, dans <http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/>

<sup>23</sup> Pew Research Center. *La foi en marche: L'appartenance religieuse des migrants internationaux*, *La population catholique mondiale* dans: <https://www.pewforum.org/2013/02/13/the-global-catholic-population/>

<sup>24</sup> L. ZANFRINI, ed., *Migrants and Religion: Paths, Issues, and Lenses*, 510.

<sup>25</sup> Pew Research Center, *La foi en marche: L'appartenance religieuse des migrants internationaux*, dans <https://www.pewforum.org/2012/03/08/religious-migration-exec/>; voir aussi <https://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2012/03/global-fact-sheet.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* En 2010, le Mexique a été le plus grand pays d'origine des migrants chrétiens aux États-Unis. Les migrants musulmans en Arabie du Sud sont principalement des travailleurs originaires d'Indonésie, de l'Inde et des Philippines.

dix ans se sont écoulés depuis cette étude et les chiffres peuvent varier aujourd’hui selon les régions, compte tenu des différents événements et des crises survenus au cours des dix dernières années, tels que le conflit syrien, la crise vénézuélienne et les crises dans certaines régions d’Afrique, l’augmentation de la migration vers l’Europe et les États-Unis<sup>27</sup>. Selon certaines prévisions, le nombre de migrants musulmans vers l’Europe va augmenter étant donné l’afflux de pays principalement musulmans. Les plus récents d’entre eux sont plus jeunes et ont des taux de fécondité plus élevés<sup>28</sup>.

Les analystes indiquent que le monde accepte de moins en moins les migrants<sup>29</sup>. L’afflux de migrants et de réfugiés a suscité des vagues de sentiments opposés tels que la xénophobie et le nativisme au cours des dernières décennies. Ces sentiments tendent à susciter différentes craintes ou menaces à l’égard des migrants et des réfugiés, faisant d’eux la cible de nombreuses injustices, de mauvais traitements, de préjugés et de problèmes raciaux. D’une part, ils sont criminalisés parce qu’ils sont considérés comme une menace pour la sécurité des frontières, les traditions culturelles et les coutumes. D’autre part, ils sont dépeints de manière très paternaliste comme des innocents, des personnes vulnérables et des victimes. Dans un cas comme dans l’autre, ils ont tendance à être déshumanisés et à devenir l’objet d’interprétations du point de vue des autres.

Nous ne pouvons pas sous-estimer la complexité de la migration dans ses divers éléments présentés ici. Lorsque nous réfléchissons sur cette question, nous avons tendance à ne penser qu’aux politiques concernant les frontières physiques, à savoir si elles doivent être ouvertes ou non. Bien que nous ayons présenté ici quelques tendances et quelques chiffres en matière de migration, les immigrants et les réfugiés ne devraient pas être considérés uniquement en matière de chiffres et de pourcentages ; au contraire, ces outils devraient nous aider à exercer un ministère efficace avec de meilleures façons de pratiquer l’apostolat et d’aller vers les personnes les plus abandonnées et dans le besoin.

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.pewforum.org/2012/03/08/religious-migration-exec/>

<sup>28</sup> Voir les différentes prévisions de scénarios dans : Pew Research Center, « La population musulmane croissante d’Europe », <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/11/29/europe-growing-muslim-population/>

<sup>29</sup> J. BLACK, *Global Migration Indicators 2021*, 48-49.

Après avoir passé en revue le concept de mission et décrit brièvement le contexte des migrations aujourd’hui, il semble utile, en terminant, de faire quelques remarques :

1. Notre principe directeur devrait être celui du chrétien : tout être humain est à l’image et à la ressemblance de Dieu et devrait être traité comme tel. De plus, dans les endroits où cela n’a pas lieu, notre appel est d’être prophétique en travaillant pour la justice, la paix et la réconciliation.

2. Nous prenons part à la mission de Dieu et, par amour, celle-ci devrait nous pousser à aller vers les migrants et à vivre parmi eux. Ils ne sont pas seulement un des visages des pauvres, comme l’a reconnu le Chapitre général, mais ils sont aussi le visage du Christ qui nous interpelle aujourd’hui. Comme le dit notre première constitution : « C'est l'appel de Jésus Christ, perçu en Église à travers les besoins de salut des hommes, qui réunit les Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée. Il les invite à le suivre et à prendre part à sa mission par la parole et par l'action... coopérant avec le Christ Sauveur et imitant son exemple, ils se consacrent principalement à l'évangélisation des pauvres. » « L'Église propose, elle n'impose rien » (RM 39). C'est ainsi que nous sommes appelés à proclamer et à prêcher le Christ et son Royaume.

3. L'Église est appelée à servir et à être un témoin de l'Évangile pour tous, indépendamment de la nationalité, de la culture et de l'appartenance religieuse : « Tout en respectant les droits de l'homme et la liberté religieuse des migrants, la mission doit être accomplie de manière à répondre à leurs besoins spirituels et physiques les plus profonds et à partager avec eux les trésors les plus précieux de la foi »<sup>30</sup>. L'Église n'est donc pas vue comme un simple agent de service social, mais comme un serviteur et un témoin des valeurs évangéliques auprès des migrants.

4. Bien qu'aucune nation ne puisse se voir refuser le droit de protéger ses frontières, nous ne pouvons pas oublier la responsabilité des nations développées envers leurs sœurs moins fortunées, comme nous le rappelle le Catéchisme de l'Église catholique : « Les nations mieux pourvues sont tenues d'accueillir autant que faire se peut l'étranger en quête de sécurité et des ressources vitales qu'il ne peut trouver dans

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<sup>30</sup> S. BEVANS, “Mission among Migrants, Mission of Migrants”, 95.

son pays d'origine. Les pouvoirs publics veilleront au respect du droit naturel qui place l'hôte sous la protection de ceux qui le reçoivent » (CEC § 2241).

5. Les immigrants avaient l'habitude de former des communautés et des églises en fonction de leur appartenance culturelle ou de leur lieu d'origine. Il était courant qu'un prêtre propre à leur pays ou à leur langue d'origine les desserve, formant dans une certaine mesure ce que l'on appelle des «paroisses nationales». Cette dynamique a fonctionné tant que la communauté restait vivante et qu'elle avait suffisamment de vocations pour s'occuper d'eux, venant de leur lieu d'origine et partageant les mêmes coutumes culturelles et linguistiques. Si l'on considère qu'aujourd'hui de nombreuses communautés ecclésiales sont de plus en plus multiculturelles et qu'il y a un déclin des vocations, il faut avoir une vision différente de la mission et un modèle autre que celui des «paroisses nationales». Une approche interculturelle de la mission permettra une ouverture à servir en dehors de sa propre culture ou de sa propre langue. Cela nécessitera que l'on acquière une certaine sensibilité aux autres cultures et des compétences dans ce domaine.

6. Beaucoup de pays qui étaient habituellement les lieux d'origine des migrations deviennent aujourd'hui des destinations d'accueil. Les Oblats sont présents dans beaucoup de ces pays, soit d'origine, soit de destination et d'accueil. Le défi pour eux réside dans la manière dont ils peuvent collaborer de façon innovatrice à préparer et à accueillir les migrants et les réfugiés.

7. Les indicateurs de migration ont montré que les chrétiens sont toujours les plus nombreux à migrer. Les analystes montrent également que les personnes issues d'autres traditions religieuses constituent les nouvelles vagues de migrants principalement de traditions musulmanes, formant ainsi le deuxième groupe après les chrétiens. Le défi consistera à préparer ces gens à s'engager avec respect et humilité dans un milieu où il y a plusieurs religions.

8. Compte tenu de l'augmentation du nombre de personnes qui émigrent en tant que réfugiés déplacés à cause de la guerre, de la violence et de la persécution et demandant l'asile, les communautés ecclésiales d'accueil peuvent être des lieux de guérison et de réconciliation.

9. Le message que le 36<sup>e</sup> Chapitre général a adressé à tous les Oblats et à la communauté mazenodienne nous interpelle pour que nous

nous exprimions avec force sur les questions urgentes que suscite la situation des migrants et des réfugiés alors que « l’Église nous appelle fortement à sortir de notre zone de confort pour aller aux «pérégrinages» et travailler à l’accomplissement du Royaume. Nous sommes invités à écrire une nouvelle page de l’Évangile avec la créativité et l’audace mazenodiennes. » Par conséquent, nous devons apporter notre soutien aux communautés oblates déjà engagées dans la mission auprès des immigrants et des réfugiés, et promouvoir un véritable discernement et un engagement encore plus profond là où le besoin se fait sentir.

10. Enfin et surtout, ce phénomène des migrations appelle à l’hospitalité. La mission d’aujourd’hui nous invite à être ouverts et accueillants. Dans un monde qui devient plus hostile à bien des égards envers ceux qui sont considérés comme « les autres », « les immigrants », être hospitalier est une façon de témoigner du Règne de Dieu. Cela exigera, au besoin, une conversion à partir de nos propres préjugés culturels et de nos attitudes nativistes. Nous deviendrons alors, c’est à souhaiter, des « lanternes vertes », brillantes et accueillantes avec des cœurs chaleureux et des esprits pleins d’espoir.

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# Historia

## UN “PASTOR HERIDO”: MISIÓN CON LOS MIGRANTES EN SAN EUGENIO DE MAZENOD

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Las múltiples llamadas del papa Francisco, sus gestos y su magisterio sobre el cuidado de los migrantes, han situado en primer plano social y eclesial la suerte de millones de personas inmersas en esta situación<sup>1</sup>. También en nuestra Congregación se multiplican esas llamadas a diversos niveles: local, provincial, regional y sobre todo en los documentos del Capítulo general del año 2016<sup>2</sup>. Los oblatos tenemos una historia misionera que valorar sobre el cuidado de migrantes y desplazados que en muchas ocasiones son los más vulnerables de las poblaciones a las que servimos.

Según la definición de las Naciones Unidas, “por migrante internacional se entiende “toda persona que cambia de país de residencia habitual” (DAES, 1998). Por población de migrantes se entiende “el número total de migrantes internacionales presentes en un determinado momento en un país dado” (UNSTAT, 2017: 9)<sup>3</sup>. Estas definiciones dejan amplio espacio para poder incluir las diversas formas en que se presenta este complejo fenómeno. Como contrapartida, estaremos obligados a definir en cada caso ante qué tipo de migrante estamos: no hay

<sup>1</sup> Según estimaciones de Naciones Unidas se ha llegado a 281 millones de migrantes en 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Actas 36º Capítulo General, “EPMMPPE” n. 7.2.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/es/themes/poblaciones-de-migrantes-internacionales>

dos migrantes iguales, nunca dos historias son idénticas ni por sus orígenes, ni por lo ocurrido durante el tránsito, ni por el final del proceso.

¿Qué tipo de emigrante fue Eugenio de Mazenod? ¿Qué podemos decir del ministerio de cuidar de los emigrantes que él y los oblatos desempeñaron hasta el momento de su muerte? El presente artículo comenzará estudiando la experiencia particular de migración de Eugenio de Mazenod. Posteriormente escrutaremos su ministerio al servicio de los migrantes antes y después de fundar los Oblatos y cómo se ha vivido este ministerio en la Congregación hasta el momento de su muerte en 1861. Terminaremos intentando sacar algunas conclusiones que, partiendo de lo estudiado, puedan inspirar sobre todo a aquellos oblatos que hoy dedican su esfuerzo misionero al cuidado de los migrantes<sup>4</sup>.

#### EUGENIO DE MAZENOD MIGRANTE

##### *El problema de las fuentes*

El periodo de emigración en la vida de Eugenio de Mazenod atrae la atención de la mayoría de los que han estudiado su vida, obra y espiritualidad. Desde diversos ángulos y con diversas motivaciones, casi todos los estudios dedican algunas páginas a esta etapa de su vida. Ya se estudie su biografía de forma más o menos histórica o novelada, su espiritualidad, su devoción mariana, su personalidad, su acción misionera o la trasmisión del carisma, pareciera que esta referencia es obligatoria. Lógicamente cada autor encuentra en esta etapa elementos para desarrollar la temática que es el objeto principal de su estudio.

Nuestro primer objetivo es intentar describir la experiencia de Eugenio de Mazenod como migrante en sí misma, es decir, intentaremos describir qué tipo de migrante fue. Para ello tenemos que alejarnos tanto de las idealizaciones romántico-espirituales como de las proyecciones que buscan justificar opciones misioneras actuales ajenas a aquel contexto.

No hay otro camino que hacer el esfuerzo de comprender el contexto histórico ajustándonos a él lo más posible. En nuestro caso se trata de un complejo proceso que abarca la “Revolución francesa” y sus con-

<sup>4</sup> Las palabras cursivas y algunas traducciones del presente artículo provienen del autor.

secuencias a finales del siglo XVIII y principios del XIX y más en concreto lo ocurrido en la Provenza francesa y en los Reinos de Cerdeña y Nápoles-Sicilia y la República de Venecia, lugares por donde Eugenio migró. A pesar de no poder abordar tan apasionante tema de forma exhaustiva debido a los límites de nuestro artículo, estaremos alerta para tener en cuenta esta perspectiva en todo lo que diremos. Por ello consideramos imprescindible prestar atención al amplio estudio histórico expuesto por Jean Leflon sobre la vida de nuestro Fundador<sup>5</sup> y que nos parece merece mayor atención y lectura. Acudiremos también a algunas de las aportaciones, siempre interesantes y críticas, del P. Pielorz<sup>6</sup>.

Será igualmente importante dar voz al mismo Eugenio de Mazenod. El P. Beaudoin nos advierte que lamentablemente se han perdido las notas que el joven Eugenio iba tomando durante su exilio. A pesar de ello, el texto *Souvenirs de famille* publicado en 1899 en Missions OMI por el p. Rey y posteriormente publicado por el P. Beaudoin en “Études Oblats” como *Journal d’émigration*<sup>7</sup>, junto con las notas escritas por el mismo P. Beaudoin, serán una valiosa referencia. Allí encontramos una relectura de su propia experiencia, hecho en primera persona y con la perspectiva de los años.

### *Breve descripción de las etapas del exilio*

El exilio que vivió Eugenio de Mazenod es un periodo que abarca desde su salida de Aix el 20 de abril de 1791, cuando todavía no había cumplido los nueve años, hasta el 24 de octubre de 1802, con 20 años ya cumplidos, fecha en la que desembarca en Marsella. Tengamos presentes las etapas que marcan este periodo: Niza (aproximadamente 5 meses a la edad de entre ocho y nueve años), Turín (dos años, 9-11 años de edad), Venecia (cuatro años, desde los 11 hasta los 16), Nápoles (un año) y Palermo (3 años, de 17 a 20 de edad).

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<sup>5</sup> J. LEFLON, *Eugene de Mazenod. Evêque de Marseille. Fondateur des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée 1782-1861*, I., Librairie Plon, Paris 1957.

<sup>6</sup> J. PIELORZ, *La vie spirituelle de Mgr de Mazenod. 1782-1861. Etude Critique*. Editions des Etudes Oblats, Ottawa 1956. Chapitre I-IV.

<sup>7</sup> *Journal (1791-1821)*, « Écrites Oblates », 16. Y. Beaudoin en las páginas del 9 al 15 explica la crítica histórica del documento.

## *Causas de la movilidad*

Conocemos bien la causa que desencadenó su exilio. Al estallar la Revolución francesa y el posterior desarrollo de los acontecimientos, el padre de Eugenio de Mazenod, Presidente del Tribunal y la Cámara de Cuentas de Aix y que participó en las Asamblea Nacional de París como representante de la Provenza, defensor de la monarquía y los privilegios de la aristocracia y colaborador con los que desean hacer abortar el proceso revolucionario, debe huir para poner a salvo su vida. De hecho varios nobles muy cercanos a él fueron ahorcados no lejos de su casa por las autoridades revolucionarias acusados de conspiración contra el nuevo Régimen.

Una vez en Niza y viendo la evolución de los acontecimientos, envía a su hermano, caballero y capitán de navío, para llevar al niño de ocho años junto a su padre quien teme que la amenaza de muerte se extienda también hacia los hijos de los nobles, por lo que el primogénito del “Presidente” corría peligro. Eugenio sale de Aix el 20 de abril de 1781 con su tío y se reunirá con su padre en Niza donde más tarde se re-agrupará casi toda su familia paterna y buena parte de la materna. Poco más tarde se desplazará a Turín pero en esta ocasión el desplazamiento obedece a la necesidad de proveer una educación sólida a Eugenio en el Colegio de Nobles de aquella ciudad.

A medida que el ejército francés avanza en su “misión liberadora”, la presión sobre las familias exiliadas francesas aumenta y se sienten doblemente amenazados: en ocasiones por la posible llegada de sus “enemigos” de los que temen represalias, en otras por la presión de la misma población local que los mira con desconfianza. Por eso los grupos de franceses huidos de la Revolución se van desplazando de unos Reinos o Repúblicas a otros. Con ellos también se irán desplazando los exiliados De Mazenod.

Poco a poco los recursos de la familia escasean y los negocios emprendidos en actividades comerciales fracasan. Esto influirá sobre todo en la toma de decisión para desplazarse hacia nuevos destinos buscando situaciones más favorables. Parte de la familia regresa a Francia (sobre todo la madre y hermana de Eugenio) para recuperar parte del patrimonio familiar evitando pagar las deudas que se acumulan. Además de las dificultades que experimentan todos los exiliados franceses en Venecia, será sobre todo el motivo económico para desplazarse a Nápoles y a Pa-

lermo donde la Reina Marie-Caroline, hermana de la Reina guillotinada de Francia Marie-Antoinette, favorecía a los exiliados nobles franceses que se habían mostrado activos de alguna manera en la “contrarrevolución”. A la familia de Mazenod asegura una pensión.

Por tanto, podemos señalar como los causantes de la migración de Eugenio en un primer momento la amenaza persecución violenta a causa de las posiciones políticas de su padre, más tarde la presión de la situación revolucionaria de la época que afectará a las poblaciones donde ellos emigran y las penurias económicas de la familia.

### *Condiciones de vida*

No es una familia pobre la que emigra, sino una familia noble que intentará, sobre todo los primeros momentos, llevar el mismo ritmo de vida que llevaba en Aix. Incluso son acompañados de sirvientes que poco a poco se van reduciendo hasta quedar con la sola presencia de la famosa Nanon que morirá en Palermo. Poco a poco el grupo se irá desintegrando. No queremos decir con esto que no pasaran estrecheces materiales que irán aumentando al mismo nivel que las deudas ya anteriormente contraídas o las nuevas por fallidos negocios.

Gracias a sus padres Eugenio queda preservado de muchas de las carencias materiales que sus familiares sí experimentan. En la etapa de Niza-Turín Eugenio vivirá la mayor parte del tiempo en un colegio internado para nobles en Turín. En Venecia, después de las primeras semanas en un alojamiento estrecho, vivirá durante tres años en un amplio palacio y prácticamente pasará casi todo el día en la casa de los burgueses Zinelli, donde además de la instrucción, recibe todo tipo de atenciones y afecto: solo llegará a la casa familiar para almorzar (y no todos los días) y dormir cuando ya todos están acostados<sup>8</sup>. En Nápoles pasan más estrecheces como veremos. En Palermo Eugenio vivirá casi todo el tiempo en las “casas” de los Duques de Cannizzaro compartiendo de alguna manera el desenfrenado ritmo de vida de la corte que lo rodea y colmado de atenciones: “tengo una cama excelente, una habitación elegante, armario, etc... un sirviente de cámara a mis órdenes que

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.18.

ha cepillado mis vestidos esta mañana, (cosa importante)...”<sup>9</sup> escribirá a su padre desde una de esas casas.

¿Queremos decir que Eugenio era ajeno a las estrecheces de su familia? No lo creemos. No pudo ser ajeno tampoco a las actividades de su padre que se implica en dudosos negocios de comercio que hoy podríamos calificar de contrabando, intentando eludir las aduanas para hacer pasar las mercancías que intentaba vender. A parte de un primer periodo de aparente éxito, estos negocios no le darán más que nuevas deudas a las que le esperan en Francia. Ironía de la vida, como señala Leflon<sup>10</sup>, ver al antiguo presidente del Tribunal de cuentas de Aix trabajando en aquello que perseguía con todas sus fuerzas en su antiguo oficio.

La situación llega a ser desesperada en Nápoles. El padre de Eugenio escribe a D’Antraigues, su amigo, del que dice que es su única esperanza: “...He renunciado a mi país para siempre. Ya no poseo nada...mi familia se compone de cuatro personas, a saber, mis dos hermanos... mi hijo y yo. Juntando todo lo que tenemos...no nos queda más que para alimentarnos mínimamente desde hoy hasta el mes de julio, después de esto, en agosto, nos encontraremos con nada,... la miseria y el abandono más absoluto son nuestra perspectiva...”<sup>11</sup>.

¿Qué podemos decir de los viajes? Del primero, de Aix a Niza, apenas tenemos noticias y Eugenio mismo parece confundir las fechas tal como señalan Leflon y Beaudoin. De Niza a Turín todo fue más tranquilo. Del viaje de Turín a Venecia Eugenio guardará un recuerdo más bien positivo y placentero, bajando por el río Po en un barco fletado por su padre en el que recibió numerosos migrantes que pagaron su travesía y que iba parando en distintos lugares cada jornada del viaje. En líneas generales eran bien recibidos a la excepción de algunas aldeas que desconfiaban de este gran grupo de franceses.

De Venecia a Nápoles fue un viaje duro, en malas condiciones y que duró 51 días. A causa de la escasez de recursos tuvieron que viajar en un barco usado normalmente para trasportar animales. Probablemente la pobreza del barco hizo que no fueran asaltados por los piratas

<sup>9</sup> LEFLON, *Eugene de Mazenod*, I, p. 209.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134: «Voilà donc le ci-devant Président à mortier, devenu le sieur Bloquetti, réduit à pratiquer la fraude que jadis il frappait de ses condamnations et arrêts».

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

argelinos cuyos navíos vieron de lejos y que abordaron otros muchos barcos haciendo numerosos prisioneros a los que canjear por dinero en esos días.

De Nápoles a Palermo Eugenio sufre dos situaciones que ponen en peligro su integridad física pero que a la vez nos muestran un joven que se desenvuelve con arrojo y es capaz de enfrentarse con ingenio a una masa descontrolada que asalta a los franceses que quieren escapar, junto con el Rey y la nobleza napolitana, del enfrentamiento con las tropas revolucionarias. Igual arrojo muestra al abordar su barco en medio de la tormenta. Su viaje de despedida hasta Aix está cargado de melancolía y una enfermedad que parece somatizar el estado interior del joven de 20 años que deja atrás el destierro y con él a sus padres y tíos con los que había convivido hasta ahora.

### *La familia*

Las dos primeras etapas del exilio de Eugenio lo llevarán a *Niza* (abril – agosto de 1791) y *Turín* (septiembre de 1791- 2 de mayo de 1794) ambos entonces pertenecientes al Reino de Cerdeña. Es aquí donde se produce un agrupamiento familiar que será bastante conflictivo. Con la madre y la hermana de Eugenio vienen su tía materna (con su marido y su hijo) y su abuela. El grupo Joannis hace la vida imposible al grupo De Mazenod compuesto por el padre y el tío marino de Eugenio al que se unirá más tarde la parte clerical: el tío abuelo de Eugenio y su tío paterno.

Al salir hacia Venecia se nos habla de la presencia de los padres de Eugenio y su hermana, el tío y los hermanos del padre de Eugenio (dos clérigos y un marino), su tía materna con su primo y la famosa sirvienta Nanon que permanecerá fiel hasta su muerte con los “exiliados de Mazenod”. La abuela de Eugenio había ya abandonado el grupo ante la insistencia de su marido para que regresara a Francia.

En *Venecia* se produce poco a poco la desintegración de la familia. El grupo de los Joannis regresará a Francia. En 1795 la madre de Eugenio y su hermana parten definitivamente y ya no se verán más hasta el día de su regreso a Aix. La distancia que se crea entre su padre y madre es más profunda que la mera distancia geográfica y que un divorcio civil, algo que dejará profundamente herido al adolescente y joven Eugenio de Mazenod. En ese mismo año 1795, muere el tío abuelo de

Eugenio, canónigo y ex-vicario general de Marsella, al que siempre acompañaba en sus misas: otra pérdida importante en la vida de nuestro joven adolescente.

### *La educación*

Interrumpida la educación del Colegio Borbón de Aix a causa del exilio, el padre busca en seguida en Niza una escuela en la que Eugenio proseguirá sus estudios. No estuvo allí mucho tiempo, lo justo para empezar a conocer el italiano, un idioma que terminará dominando más que su idioma materno<sup>12</sup>. En seguida ingresa en el colegio de nobles de Turín donde recibe, hasta casi cumplir los 11 años, los fundamentos de una formación humanística y cristiana en un internado con un ritmo casi monacal que es dirigido por los padres Barnabitas. Allí muestra su capacidad para seguir una regla y su espíritu de líder.

En Venecia recibirá una formación muy personalizada dirigida por los hermanos Zinelli en su propia casa. Es conocido y reconocido el efecto benéfico que esta educación ocasiona en Eugenio pero esto no puede hacernos cerrar los ojos a las carencias, entre otras sobre todo la ausencia de otros adolescentes de su edad. Allí estará hasta que cumple 16 años de edad.

El año de Nápoles contrasta con todo lo vivido hasta ahora. Para Eugenio es “una pérdida de tiempo”. Así lo describe : “¡Qué triste existencia para un joven de dieciséis años no tener nada que hacer, no saber en qué ocuparse, no conocer a nadie, no poder ver nada más que la iglesia donde iba a ayudar a misa a mi tío! Esto se explica por *la triste situación en que nos habían puesto tantos años de emigración*. Había que economizar el dinero que los diamantes de mi madre nos habían procurado para vivir. Por tanto, sin maestro. Yo era muy joven para ser dejado solo en una ciudad como Nápoles, y mi padre y mis tíos tenían tan poca curiosidad que, tras un año de estancia, dejaron Nápoles sin haber visto nada ni visitado los alrededores”<sup>13</sup>. Esto no impedirá que comience a estudiar el alemán, pero desgraciadamente su profesor fallece y en casa no hay más recursos para contratar otros profesores. A pesar de la insistencia de don Bartolo para que siga estudiando no parece que este estudio se haga en ninguna escuela ni con método alguno.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 233, cita una carta del padre de Eugenio a su hija.

<sup>13</sup> *Journal (1791-1821)*, p 31-32.

En *Palermo* es la vida cortesana la que hace que el joven de 18 años Eugenio se interese por “artes” que nunca antes había cultivado y que piensa están de acuerdo a su condición de “falso conde”: montar a caballo, la caza, ciertos juegos de cartas, etc. La Duquesa de Cannizzaro le pide que lea para ella algunos autores que para él serán un descubrimiento. Parece interesado por la historia aunque no es muy perseverante y carece de método.

Su formación antes de llegar a Aix ha sido deficiente<sup>14</sup> y según opina Leflon “nunca colmará esa laguna de sus primeros estudios. Le faltará ese algo de harmonioso, de la finura que aporta la cultura”<sup>15</sup>. Esa carencia, por otra parte común al clero de su época, es a la vez consecuencia y alimentación de una manera de ser y de ver las cosas del todo particulares en Eugenio de Mazenod.

### *El entorno monárquico, cortesano y conspirador*

Toda la etapa de migración de Eugenio está marcada por el hecho de convivir en un entorno que podríamos calificar de conspiradores contrarrevolucionarios, entre los que se encuentre su padre y las personas con las que él se relaciona. En efecto, ya en Aix el padre de Eugenio parece formar parte de los que intentan conspirar contra el nuevo régimen para restablecer el Régimen anterior con todos los privilegios monárquicos y de la nobleza. No solo eso sino que parece dar servicios de información para los que intentan hacer fracasar la Revolución en Francia y en los lugares por donde se va extendiendo el movimiento. Con Leflon creamos que la presencia de Eugenio en la cena de la embajada de España en Venecia solo se explica desde esta óptica. Lo mismo cabe decir de la pensión que la reina Marie-Caroline concede a los De Mazenod<sup>16</sup>.

En cualquier caso Eugenio vive rodeado de este ambiente y su pensamiento se forja una esta ideología que también engloba su manera de pensar la Iglesia: ser monárquico y católico es lo mismo para él, pero desde esa visión del mundo del “Ancien Régime”. Dos hechos nos ilustran esto muy bien: En una ocasión se enfrenta a un canónigo que se burla de los triduos de oración que organiza el papa en Roma en lugar de aumentar y preparar sus tropas frente al enemigo. Le parecía una ofensa

<sup>14</sup> PIELORZ, *La vie spirituelle*, p. 59-61; 84-86.

<sup>15</sup> LEFLON, *Eugène de Mazenod*, I, p. 230.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p 181-187.

contra la religión. Sin embargo, algo más tarde, criticará al papa por haber firmado el concordato con Napoleón dando la indulgencia plenaria a todos los franceses. En una carta cuenta a su padre el enfrentamiento que tuvo con un “monseñor” entusiasta del concordato. Eugenio le dirá que a su juicio “*el papa se ha ensuciado (“sporcificato”) las manos*”<sup>17</sup>, utilizando una palabra que en italiano suena bastante mal.

Como dice Leflon “esta reacción violenta, inspirada a la vez por su fervor monárquico y su mentalidad aristocrática, bien parece traicionar una cierta obnubilación del sentido religioso”<sup>18</sup>. En efecto, su fidelidad al papado todavía estaba supeditada a su pensamiento aristocrático de restauración del Antiguo Régimen.

Eugenio permanecerá firme en estas convicciones a lo largo de su vida y le costará ciertamente acoger y asimilar la nueva época que nace con la Revolución. Quizás no podía ser de otra manera. El exilio profundiza esta dificultad y, como ocurre en otros casos, Eugenio idealizará una época, un país y una ideología que en realidad no conoció: salió de su Aix natal a los 8 años y no regresará a una Provenza que ya es diferente hasta los 20 años de edad. Quizás esto hace más llamativo el que el noble De Mazenod quiera ser el sacerdote de los pobres. ¡Un hijo de “L’Ancien Régime” abrazando lo más noble de los valores propuestos por la Revolución!

### *Crecimiento espiritual*

Eugenio de Mazenod es educado en los principios cristianos que tenía su familia. Obviamente un periodo como el de la infancia y la adolescencia es siempre interesante para observar los fundamentos y la evolución de la vida espiritual de una persona. En el caso de Eugenio la idea religiosa y cristiana viene a formar parte de todo su universo ideológico y familiar.

Durante su exilio convive con unos tíos clérigos y nobles a los que sirve en la Misa y de los que recibe enseñanza y testimonio. En el Colegio de Nobles de Turín recibe su formación religiosa y hace la comunión y la confirmación. Con Don Bartolo tiene durante cuatro años un programa detallado de vida cristiana en el que las oraciones cortas y

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 249.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 250.

frecuentes juegan un papel importante, así como las lecturas espirituales y las noticias de las misiones.

Sin duda la etapa de Venecia marcará a Eugenio. Él mismo lo dice en sus memorias: “¿Podré alguna vez agradecer bastante a Dios infinitamente bueno el haberme procurado semejante ayuda justamente en la edad más escabrosa de la vida, época decisiva para mí?”. Y todavía más: “De ahí data mi vocación al estado eclesiástico y tal vez a un estado más perfecto; y ciertamente si hubiéramos quedado un solo año más en Venecia, habría seguido a mi santo director y a su hermano ya sacerdote en la Congregación religiosa que escogieron y en la que murieron ambos en el ejercicio de un celo heroico”<sup>19</sup>.

Si en Nápoles parece ser fiel a la práctica sacramental, incluida la confesión, se aprecia ya una cierta tibieza que se acentuará en Palermo aunque también allí continuará su práctica religiosa y en nombre de la Duquesa de Cannizzaro entregará las limosnas a los más pobres. Allí Eugenio experimenta algo que más tarde le ayudará a discernir: se encuentra fuera de su ambiente en las prácticas mundanas de la corte. La llamada “crisis” que desembocará en su “conversión” se está empezando a manifestar.

Es interesante lo que señala Dullier<sup>20</sup>, refiriéndose a unos momentos posteriores pero que iluminan lo que ahora está viviendo. Su sincera espiritualidad está concentrada en la vivencia de prácticas con un grado a veces excelente de generosidad y dando una imagen que piensa cabe esperar de él. Más tarde se encontrará de una manera personal con Jesús al que llamará su amigo, su benefactor particular, el que ha actuado con él con una ternura especial que lo ha llevado en sus espaldas y lavado sus heridas<sup>21</sup>. Sus expresiones para dirigirse a Jesús han cambiado y pueden ser también fruto de una relectura de su vida anterior, también su vida en el exilio, a los ojos de algo nuevo que ha descubierto en su vida: la misericordia de su Salvador.

Será acertado acoger las notas de las carencias en la personalidad y espiritualidad de Eugenio que hace Pielorz en su estudio<sup>22</sup>, para com-

<sup>19</sup> *Journal (1791-1821)*, p. 18-19.

<sup>20</sup> B. DULLIER, *Prier 15 jours avec Eugene de Mazenod*, Nouvelle Cité, Montrouge 2000, p. 32-36.

<sup>21</sup> *Notas del Retiro de 1811*, «Écrits Oblates», 14, p. 263.

<sup>22</sup> PIELORZ, *La vie spirituelle*, p. 89-101.

prender hasta qué punto le ha marcado su experiencia de emigrante tanto en su desarrollo humano como espiritual y vocacional. Entre esas carencias resaltan ciertas ausencias como la relación con personas de su edad, la del mundo femenino en el núcleo familiar, la permanente exposición a “dar” ejemplo, la falta de método en sus estudios... Según parece Eugenio no posee todavía las herramientas humanas y espirituales que le hagan integrar de una manera sana todas esas carencias cuando parte de Palermo hacia Marsella.

### *La relectura de Eugenio*

Tenemos el privilegio de contar con la relectura que el mismo Eugenio hace sobre esta etapa de su vida. Esto nos aporta un valor añadido ya que el paso del tiempo ha decantado su experiencia que ahora relee cuando ya es obispo y fundador. “Fue la Divina Providencia la que nos lo escogió en sus designios de misericordia para conmigo, pues debo a nuestra estancia en aquella casa todo el bien que he podido hacer en mi vida, si es que he hecho algo con la gracia de Dios... Esta fase de mi vida está demasiado marcada con el sello de la bondad divina para conmigo, para que deje de contar todas las circunstancias hasta el menor detalle, aunque solo sea para incitarme al reconocimiento que deberé a Dios mientras exista y para hacer que bendigan al Señor todos los que se interesan por mí o que de rebote han recibido a su vez alguna ventaja”<sup>23</sup>. Por tanto, todo lo vivido en el exilio parece responder a un plan de Dios que lo prepara a la vocación que la Providencia le tenía destinado.

No solo los aspectos positivos de su vivencia son leídos a la luz de la Providencia de Dios, también sus frustraciones y heridas reciben esa lectura de fe. Respecto a su aprendizaje interrumpido del alemán en Nápoles, dice: “Puedo decir que perdí allí el tiempo. ¿Fue por mi culpa? No lo creo. Estudié el alemán durante tres meses. En tan poco tiempo adelanté tanto en esa difícil lengua, que mi maestro me daba esperanzas de saberla pronto; pero cayó enfermo y murió y con él se fue mi ciencia. Era un suboficial al servicio del rey de Nápoles; se contentaba sin duda con poco. La miseria de la emigración impidió a mi padre procurarme otro maestro; hubo que tener paciencia. He deplorado toda la vida el no haber podido secundar la facilidad que yo entonces tenía para el apren-

<sup>23</sup> *Journal (1791-1821)*, p. 16.

dizaje y la buena pronunciación de las lenguas. Habría hecho algo más de bien en mi ministerio”<sup>24</sup>.

Quizás haya deplorado toda su vida otras muchas otras carencias que nacieron en esta época y quizás haya sufrido sin saberlo otras de las que fue menos consciente. Unas y otras, leídas desde nuestra perspectiva y desde la fe, fueron preparando el corazón de este hombre para ser el misionero apasionado en el que más tarde se convertirá.

### *Carencias y heridas*

Obviamente las carencias y heridas acumuladas en la etapa de su exilio dejarán profunda huella en la personalidad, temperamento, ideología, espiritualidad... del hombre Eugenio de Mazenod. No podemos comprender muchas de sus reacciones sin tener en cuenta esto. Otros han estudiado con profusión esta etapa<sup>25</sup>. Podemos señalar que todo lo vivido en el exilio explica las relaciones con su familia con todo el difícil entramado que además explicará no pocos rasgos de su temperamento. También decimos que esta experiencia lo predispone a tener esa profunda empatía que nace de su corazón, especialmente sensible hacia las situaciones que atraviesan los más abandonados.

Su fuerte temperamento y su capacidad de liderazgo va madurando durante el exilio: desde el Colegio de nobles de Turín<sup>26</sup>, donde ya es maestro de cámara y se le pone como modelo a otros estudiantes, pasando por Venecia<sup>27</sup>, donde Eugenio adquiere capacidades que lo hacen capaz de enfrentarse a personas con más edad y autoridad que él cuando siente que sus ideas o lo que él piensa es su religión, están comprometidas. También se hará visible su capacidad de liderazgo en situaciones extremadamente complicadas como es el caso de Nápoles donde con maestría se enfrenta a la masa para salvar las posesiones y literalmente abordar el barco que lo llevaría a Palermo<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31-32.

<sup>25</sup> A pesar de los límites de los estudios de psicología de su tiempo, Pielorz, en la obra citada en este artículo, todavía puede aportar cosas interesantes. Esperemos que nuevos estudios ayuden a profundizar el tema.

<sup>26</sup> *Journal (1791-1821)*, p. 11.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>28</sup> LEFLON, *Eugène de Mazenod*, p. 197-200.

En fin, no podemos olvidar que la experiencia del exilio hará de Eugenio un buen conocedor del idioma y de las costumbres italianas y una cierta apertura a otras culturas, algo que sabrá utilizar para sus propios intereses, los de la Congregación y la misión a lo largo de su vida como fundador y obispo. Toda la experiencia vital acumulada durante su exilio refleja un entramado de luces y sombras que nos hacen descubrir la humanidad del santo misionero que Dios ha ido moldeando.

### *Desarraigo*

Si algo tiene en común la experiencia d Eugenio de Mazenod con la de los desplazados y migrantes de todas las épocas, es la vivencia de *desarraigo*. En Eugenio esta experiencia es profunda debido a que es emigrante en un tiempo largo que además coincide con su infancia, adolescencia y primera juventud, momentos claves del desarrollo psicoafectivo humano. Además la ruptura familiar, el abandono de su madre y su hermana y la desestructuración progresiva de ese núcleo junto con el hecho de convivir casi siempre con adultos y varones, dejará una marca profunda. Su educación ha sido truncada e interrumpida en numerosas ocasiones: ha faltado método, pero también ha tenido ricas y diversas maneras de enriquecer su inteligencia haciendo de él un auténtico autodidacta. Es brillante en su dominio del idioma italiano. Su evolución espiritual e ideológica quedará igualmente marcada, con sus carencias y sus logros, por lo vivido en estos años.

En Nápoles y más tarde en Palermo aparecen algunos rasgos de un temperamento de tendencias depresivas que más tarde se volverán a manifestar a lo largo de la vida de Eugenio. Aunque este rasgo ha sido señalado por algunos autores<sup>29</sup>, es algo que quizás no se ha tenido suficientemente en cuenta y que pide ser estudiado de una manera más profesional. Quizás, además de un componente probablemente hereditario, las diversas experiencias de abandono, pérdida y desarraigo en su etapa del exilio hayan predisputado y condicionado este factor de tendencias depresivas.

Al regresar a su país, se siente un extraño, un extranjero en lo que debería ser su hogar y su patria. El desarraigo sufrido en el exilio marca y marcará los desarrollos sucesivos y nos ayudará a interpretarlos mejor.

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240.

## EL CUIDADO MISIONERO DE LOS MIGRANTES DURANTE LA VIDA DE SAN EUGENIO

Leyendo los escritos de Eugenio de Mazenod constatamos que raramente va a utilizar la palabra “emigrante”, excepción hecha de cuando se refiere a su propia experiencia o la de sus familiares. Tampoco utilizará este término en las redacciones de las Reglas atribuidas a san Eugenio durante su vida. Eugenio hará numerosas alusiones a las personas que viven la emigración en Marsella y en otros lugares y normalmente los nombrará por su lugar de procedencia: los italianos, piamonteses, irlandeses, españoles,... incluso árabes. Entre ellos ocuparán un lugar privilegiado en sus escritos los italianos y los irlandeses.

Nos podemos preguntar, ¿por qué sí utiliza la palabra emigrante cuando habla de su propia experiencia y no cuando se refiere a la de los demás? ¿Qué concepto de emigrante tenía Eugenio? ¿Esta ausencia es un mecanismo inconsciente o es intencional? ¿O tal vez sencillamente al ser experiencias diferentes las nombra también de forma diferente? Las respuestas que pudiéramos imaginar no pasarían de ser meras conjetas. Pero es importante tener ante nuestros ojos estas preguntas para obligarnos a estar atentos a la complejidad del fenómeno.

Podemos aventurarnos a decir que Eugenio como misionero ve a los emigrantes desde su situación de pobreza y abandono: son los grupos más abandonados en una determinada situación. Él se siente llamado a ofrecerles la instrucción religiosa y la acogida que nadie les brinda. En numerosas ocasiones creará instituciones para atenderlos en sus urgencias de una manera eficaz y organizada. Esta misma dinámica es la que propone a sus oblatos.

### *Antes de la fundación de la Congregación*

Las capacidades adquiridas durante su exilio, los idiomas que él había aprendido, pero sobre todo su sensibilidad y empatía hacia situaciones de abandono, hacen que Eugenio esté en una inmejorable disposición para atender a los grupos de migrantes que pudiera encontrar. ¿Dónde encontró esos migrantes antes de la fundación de la Congregación?

Será difícil encontrar vestigios escritos a su regreso en Aix-en-Provence. Cuando regresa a Francia, él mismo se siente extranjero en su

tierra. Quizás se siente más cercano a los que corrieron su misma suerte y que como él intentan hacerse hueco en la nueva realidad. A pesar de no tener muchas referencias, no nos parece descabellado pensar que hubiera utilizado su conocimiento de idiomas para atender a algunos de los presos de la cárcel antes de su ingreso en el seminario y más tarde en sus primeros años como “sacerdote de los pobres” en Aix.

Su ministerio con los presos austriacos merece ser tenido en cuenta. No pudo ser ignorada por la población de Aix la llegada de unos dos mil militares austriacos prisioneros, ni la explosión de la epidemia de tifus que matará a muchos de ellos, entre ellos a su capellán.

¿Cómo tomó Eugenio la decisión de atender a los soldados prisioneros austriacos en Aix? Sin duda Eugenio siente esta circunstancia como una llamada de Dios y pone en juego toda su vida: hay que atender espiritualmente a estos soldados extranjeros que hablan alemán y están sufriendo una epidemia mortal. Probablemente no habría muchos presbíteros que podrían atenderlos dirigiéndoles algunas palabras en su idioma materno cuyos rudimentos, recordamos, Eugenio comenzó a aprender en Nápoles. Por tanto él es el presbítero, probablemente el único, que puede acompañarlos espiritualmente. Esta opción le llevará a las puertas de la muerte. Se confirma aquí, como más tarde se hará en numerosas ocasiones, una máxima en el discernimiento pastoral de Eugenio: *dedicarse a los más abandonados, sobre todos a aquellos a los que la actividad ordinaria de la Iglesia no puede alcanzar.*

### *En Marsella*

Podemos seguir los pasos de Eugenio de Mazenod en Marsella, desde la predicación de la Misión (1820), su posterior nombramiento como Vicario episcopal (1823) que lo hace residir en esta ciudad y como obispo titular de la Sede (1837), hasta su fallecimiento (1861). En este periodo podemos ver la consistencia de su acción pastoral y su manera de discernir sobre las urgencias misioneras.

#### *Marsella en su contexto histórico*

Sin pretender ser exhaustivos, debemos dar algunas pinceladas de lo que fue el contexto histórico de Marsella en estos 41 años para situar la acción pastoral de Eugenio. En este periodo de tiempo, Marsella experimenta grandes trasformaciones sociales, económicas, urbanísticas,

etc. Por ejemplo, solo en el periodo que va de 1821 a 1836, la población de Marsella aumenta un tercio: pasa de 109.483 habitantes en 1821 a 146.239 en 1836. Llegará a ser la segunda ciudad más poblada de Francia. Además Marsella experimenta grandes trasformaciones urbanísticas, un fuerte desarrollo del puerto que pasará a ser uno de los más importante del Mediterráneo, el desarrollo industrial y la llegada del ferrocarril, entre otras cosas<sup>30</sup>.

Marsella tiene una situación estratégica y ha sido un cruce milenario de caminos y civilizaciones. En su puerto entran en contacto África y Europa, Norte y Sur, pero también el Este y el Oeste. Es uno de los lugares por los que entran las primeras generaciones de cristianos en Europa que dejarán tradiciones milenarias. Lógicamente los desarrollos económicos y sociales y su situación estratégica provocarán la llegada a la ciudad de millares de personas procedentes de Francia y de los países de la cuenca mediterránea principalmente, así como otros procedentes del norte, este y centro de Europa. La actividad portuaria, además de atraer mucha población a Marsella, trae consigo muchos problemas de todo tipo. Las condiciones de vida de la mayoría de estos migrantes son de extrema vulnerabilidad.

Además, casi todas las “crisis” que ocurren en los países del entorno tienen su repercusión en Marsella. Dejemos constancia de algunas de las que quedan reflejadas en los escritos del fundador: las guerras de Italia y la guerra de Crimea, la conquista de Argelia, la guerra en España y en Siria, el hambre en Irlanda. Como consecuencia de esas crisis no es extraño ver la afluencia de viajeros y de emigrantes pobres que vienen a Marsella por diversos motivos: económicos, exilio, persecución política o religiosa, refugiados o prisioneros de guerras, etc.

Eugenio de Mazenod mostrará su preocupación por los grupos más desfavorecidos de su diócesis. Se mostrará creativo frente a cada urgencia social o sanitaria. Intentará responder y en muchas ocasiones lo hará también de una manera institucionalizada pensando que la acción sea sostenible y duradera. Una las maneras de conseguirlo será llamando o creando nuevas comunidades de vida consagrada que puedan atender los pobres de múltiples rostros. La dedicación de estas comunidades

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<sup>30</sup> Leflon trata ampliamente esta evolución en el volumen II de su obra sobre Eugenio de Mazenod,

nos puede dar una idea de las urgencias de cada momento sin olvidar las necesidades espirituales. También animará a presbíteros de su Diócesis a crear instituciones religiosas o de servicio a los pobres.

Además Eugenio no duda en intervenir ante las autoridades locales o nacionales para poner todos los recursos al servicio de los pobres que padecen diversas necesidades. Con su ayuda se crean hospitales, orfanatos, casas de acogida para chicas en peligro, para los jóvenes, los presos, etc. No dudará de ponerse, personalmente o con sus oblatos, manos a la obra ante diversas urgencias, como lo son las sucesivas epidemias que diezman ocasionalmente la ciudad.

### *Cuidado pastoral de los emigrantes en Marsella*

Su opción por los emigrantes hay que enmarcarla en lo dicho anteriormente. Es una opción por los más abandonados entre los más pobres, una opción que busca dar una atención espiritual y humana hacia aquellos que normalmente quedaban al margen de lo que la actividad ordinaria de la Iglesia podía ofrecer.

En las Asociaciones que anima o crea el grupo de migrantes es el beneficiario en numerosas ocasiones, como por ejemplo el caso de los pequeños saboyanos que venían a trabajar deshollinando las chimeneas de la ciudad. Una de sus preocupaciones principales será que todos tengan acceso a la instrucción cristiana y a recibir los sacramentos. Parece que dar una sólida instrucción cristiana y a ser posible en su propio idioma es una de las preocupaciones principales del obispo. Incluso lo veremos editar un catecismo en alemán para atender a la instrucción de los migrantes que utilizaban este idioma<sup>31</sup>.

Este cuadro no sería completo si no recogemos la preocupación de Eugenio ante toda situación fuera de Francia que provoquen persecución política o religiosa (como es el caso de España) y las hambrunas y pobreza de algunos lugares (Martinica, Guadalupe e Irlanda). En todos estos casos Eugenio apela a la conciencia cristiana de sus fieles para salir al paso de estas “emergencias humanitarias” invitando a ayudar en lo posible a paliar una situación localizada más allá de las fronteras de su diócesis. Escribirá cartas pastorales específicas para concienciar a los cristianos y organizará colectas especiales. Podemos decir que

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<sup>31</sup> F. SANTUCCI, *Eugene de Mazenod. Cooperator of Christ the Savior, communicates his spirit*, AOSR, Rome 2004, p. 245.

hace un trabajo de concienciación y movilización de la solidaridad en el contexto de su tiempo. También acogerá a algunos emigrantes, clero y laicos, desplazados hacia Marsella por estos motivos.

### *La “Obra de los italianos”*

La “Obra de los italianos” en Marsella es especialmente significativa para nuestro estudio<sup>32</sup>. El mismo fundador comienza el ministerio con los “italianos” en la predicación de la misión de Marsella en 1820 y lo continuará, apenas llegado a la ciudad como Vicario general, en 1823. En este año reúne a los italianos en la Iglesia del Calvario que había sido confiada hacía poco tiempo a los oblatos, los instruye y consuela en su propio idioma materno.

En 1826 comienza oficialmente la “Obra de los Italianos”<sup>33</sup> y en muchas ocasiones será él en primera persona, incluso siendo obispo, el que realiza este ministerio. Así lo confiesa en una carta dirigida al rey de Cerdeña en 1856<sup>34</sup>. Eugenio de Mazenod confiará esta “Obra” a los oblatos con orígenes italianos entre los que encontramos nombres que han dejado su huella profunda en la historia de la Congregación, como es el caso del padre Albini (dirigirá la Obra entre 1828-1835) y el entonces padre Semeria (lo hará entre 1835-1839). Esta Obra sobrevivirá al Fundador y estará confiada a los oblatos hasta 1946.

La presencia de los italianos en Marsella era numerosa. Santucci nos habla de entre cinco y seis mil italianos en la década de 1820<sup>35</sup>, y serán 40.000 en 1873 ya después de la muerte del Fundador<sup>36</sup>. Sin duda la experiencia de Eugenio como emigrado y su familiaridad con el idioma y las costumbres de los italianos, tienen mucho que ver para que se produjera una gran empatía mutua: los misioneros y los misionados forman una familia.

Además la “Obra de los italianos” es exitosa. Es entrañable el testimonio que Eugenio de Mazenod confía a Guigues el 3 de mayo de 1835

<sup>32</sup> Y. BEAUDOIN, « Marseille, Oeuvre des Italiens », AERS, *Dictionnaire Historique des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculé*, Rome 2004, I, p. 430.

<sup>33</sup> G. COSENTINO, *Storia della Provincia d’Italiana*, Santa Maria a Vico 1950.

<sup>34</sup> A. REY, *Histoire de Monseigneur Charles Joseph-Eugene de Mazenod*, Maison Générale, Rome 1928, II, p. 626.

<sup>35</sup> SANTUCCI, *Eugene de Mazenod*, p. 243.

<sup>36</sup> BEAUDOIN, « Marseille, Oeuvre des Italiens », p. 430.

ante las dificultades que encuentra cuando quiere relevar al P. Albini de este ministerio<sup>37</sup>. Finalmente, el p. Albini parte para Córcega en octubre de 1835 y el que toma su relevo, padre Semeria, será igualmente querido y seguido. El esfuerzo de los misioneros es correspondido con el afecto y seguimiento de los beneficiados y esto se hace notar en toda la ciudad.

Esta actividad no dejará indiferente al Rey de Piamonte Carlo-Felice que, informado por su cónsul en Marsella, nombrará a Eugenio de Mazenod Caballero de la Orden real de San Mauricio y Lázaro en 1827, en agradecimiento a la atención pastoral de sus súbditos en Marsella y en los alrededores de Niza donde se predicaron misiones. Su sucesor Carlo-Alberto lo nombrará Comendador en 1836 y Vittorio-Emmanuel II lo nombra Gran Oficial de la misma Orden en 1855<sup>38</sup>. Otra muestra la repercusión de la Obra y el impacto que tuvo en su época.

¿Cuáles eran las actividades de esta asociación? Podemos saberlo gracias al testimonio del p. Thévenon en su declaración como testigo en el proceso de canonización del P. Albini iniciado en Ajaccio: ‘Reunía regularmente a su gente, predicaba, daba retiros y sobre todo pasaba largas horas en el confesionario; sobre él recaían también las visitas a domicilio, los mil servicios y gestiones que le pedían esas pobres personas en sus múltiples necesidades’<sup>39</sup>. Podemos decir que estas mismas actividades ocuparon el celo misionero de los sucesivos oblatos que fueron responsables de esta obra.

Así pues, había algo de lo que hoy llamaríamos una “asistencia social” como acompañamiento para resolver problemas o cubrir algunas necesidades básicas de las que tomaban conciencia gracias a las visitas a sus domicilios. Pero sobre todo las actividades se centran en la catequesis y la instrucción religiosa, cultivo de devociones, confesiones,

<sup>37</sup> « En Corse, par exemple, je croyais avoir fourni ce qu'exigeait l'importance de l'œuvre qu'on y entreprend, et dans le vrai, en y envoyant Guibert, Albini et Telmon, je ne laissais rien à désirer, mais quand il a fallu exécuter mon plan, six mille italiens qui n'ont d'autre ressource pour leur salut que le p. Albini, ont poussé un cri de détresse, et voilà que ma conscience s'est refusée à leur enlever l'homme vraiment de Dieu qui fait parmi ce peuple une mission non interrompue, avec des fruits merveilleux » (« Études Oblates », 8, n. 514).

<sup>38</sup> BEAUDOUIN, « Marseille, Oeuvre des Italiens », p. 430.

<sup>39</sup> Y. BEAUDOUIN, *P. Charles Dominique Albini. Écrits spirituelles*, « Écrits Oblats » II, 8, p. 56.

etc. El mismo Eugenio de Mazenod se referirá a este ministerio de la Obra de los italianos como una misión ininterrumpida<sup>40</sup>. De hecho sus actividades se corresponden a las que se hacían en la predicación de las misiones populares de los primeros oblatos en Provenza. Por tanto podríamos hablar de la “Obra de los Italianos” como una “misión permanente” en la ciudad de Marsella dirigida a este grupo de migrantes.

### *Cuidado de migrantes en los países de misión*

Con la apertura de misiones fuera de Francia se aprecia una progresiva evolución en la visión misionera del fundador<sup>41</sup> que a la vez nos ayuda a descubrir aquello que era esencial y accesorio en su ideal misionero. Esta evolución se observa tanto en la predicación de misiones (se corrigen y adaptan ceremonias antes inamovibles), como en la aceptación de ciertas obras anteriormente prohibidas (parroquias, escuelas), como los aspectos más llamativos.

Digamos que la experiencia de los oblatos sobre el terreno hace posible esta evolución que se plasmará incluso en la redacción de las Reglas discutidas y aprobadas en el capítulo de 1850, en donde se diseñará una restructuración provocada por la presencia de los oblatos en países de misión (creación de provincias), aprobando nuevas obras que ya se habían aceptado y elaborando un Directorio para las Misiones extranjeras que se presentaba en un anexo. Estas Reglas serán aprobadas por el papa en 1851 y se promulgarán oficialmente en Marsella en 1853.

¿Qué podemos decir del cuidado de los emigrantes en las misiones fuera de Francia?

### *Córcega, un caso particular*

Córcega puede considerarse como un caso particular. Por una parte la isla está bajo la autoridad de Francia pero, por otra, tanto las personas, como su idioma y costumbres pertenecen a una cultura diferente, quizás peculiar, pero más próxima a Italia que a Francia. Probablemente por eso Eugenio de Mazenod piensa en algunos oblatos de origen italiano para enviarlos a esta misión. Así veremos aparecer a Albini y Semeria

<sup>40</sup> « Écrits Oblats », 8, p. 141 (1837); «La grande oeuvre des Italiens... c'est une mission continuelle» (« Écrits Oblats », 13, p 160 [1847]).

<sup>41</sup> SANTUCCI, *Eugene de Mazenod*, Chapter V.

que habían trabajado en la Obra de los italianos en Marsella. De hecho ambos vienen a Córcega directamente desde Francia cuando eran los encargados de esta Obra. Podríamos hablar de la Obra de los Italianos como un entrenamiento para la misión de Córcega. Habrá por tanto una especie de continuidad entre lo que estos oblatos hacían en Marsella y lo que harán en Córcega, incluida la enseñanza en el seminario y la predicación de misiones.

En Córcega vemos cómo el cuidado de migrantes en Marsella prepara para la misión en otros países. Nos parece en este sentido interesante recoger la réplica que el entonces p. Guibert hace al Fundador y a Tempier ante las dudas que estos tienen para enviar a Albini a Córcega dejando la Obra de los Italianos en Marsella: “El padre Albini dejará mil doscientos italianos en Marsella y aquí (Córcega) encontrará doce mil, porque ese padre hará aquí un bien prodigioso....hace tanto tiempo que en este país no han visto un apóstol”<sup>42</sup>. Si el padre Albini se convertirá en el apóstol de Córcega, más tarde veremos al p. Semeria abandonar esta isla para ser el apóstol de otra, Ceylán.

### *¿Migrantes o locales? Argelia, África del Sur, Ceylán.*

Con la expansión misionera de los oblatos a partir del año 1841, se produce una interesante evolución: los oblatos encuentran territorios y situaciones desconocidas hasta ese momento y van aprendiendo poco a poco a adaptar sus prácticas misioneras a las nuevas situaciones. Los misioneros mantienen una buena comunicación con el fundador que de una manera admirable empatiza con ellos y con los pobres a los que son enviados. Eugenio no duda en dar consejos e incluso marcar direcciones de cómo debe ser el trabajo de los oblatos en esos territorios situados a miles de kilómetros de distancia y a los que jamás visitará. Además tiene que emitir su juicio sobre situaciones que son tan nuevas para él como para sus misioneros que están sobre el terreno.

Entre estos consejos y direcciones que muchas veces se traduce en órdenes, hay uno que se repite en casi todas las misiones. El fundador es consciente que los oblatos han sido enviados para anunciar el Evangelio sobre todo a la población local que en general no lo conocen porque nadie se lo ha predicado con anterioridad. No será pues la prioridad el

<sup>42</sup> Lettre du p Guibert au Fondateur et Tempier, 9 mai 1835, « Écrits Oblats » II, 7, p.142-144.

cuidado pastoral de los “europeos” que habían emigrado por diversos motivos a esos territorios. Incluso si a veces transige con las exigencias de algunos obispos que desean que los oblatos se dediquen a esos feli-greses europeos, Eugenio no dejará de animar a los suyos para ir hacia los locales e incluso los amonesta porque tardan mucho en hacerlo. En este caso para Eugenio los más pobres y abandonados no son los “emigrantes”, sino la población local.

Veamos algunos ejemplos.

En *Argelia* tiene que transigir con el obispo que asignaba a los oblatos a parroquias dispersas de colonos franceses, pero lo hace con disgusto: ‘‘Nosotros tenemos en vista la conversión de los árabes pasando por el camino que debemos tomar actualmente’’<sup>43</sup>. De hecho, no poder “evangelizar” a la población local será uno de los motivos para abandonar aquella misión después de poco tiempo.

En su carta a Monseñor Allard, obispo en África del Sur, escribe ante el desaliento del P. Sabon: “...no tiene confianza de que se puedan convertir. Pero, ¿cree que la Iglesia nos ha enviado para dar catequesis a los devotos?...180.000 paganos (cafres) para convertir, ¡es maravilloso!”<sup>44</sup>. Y más tarde al mismo Monseñor Allard amonesta, como en muchas otras ocasiones: “No puedo consolarme porque ustedes no han sido enviados a unos pocos herejes que habitan vuestras ciudades. Es a los paganos (cafres) a los que han sido enviados, es su conversión lo que la Iglesia espera del santo ministerio que os confía. Es hacia ellos que vuestros pensamientos se deben dirigir... *Necesitamos que todos nuestros misioneros lo sepan y se dejen penetrar por esto*”<sup>45</sup>.

En carta dirigida al p. Semeria que cumple su misión en la que por aquel entonces se conocía como isla de *Ceylán*, expresa lo mismo brillantemente: “¿Cuándo comenzaréis a congregar los infieles? ¿Es que no sois más que párracos de viejos cristianos? Siempre he creído que nuestro objetivo era la conversión de los paganos. *Estamos hechos para esto mucho más que para el resto*. Ya hay en Europa suficiente malos cristianos como para no irlos a buscar tan lejos”<sup>46</sup>.

<sup>43</sup> Lettre à Granier, 26 octobre 1849, « Écrits Oblats », 4, p. 172.

<sup>44</sup> Lettre à Mons Allard, 15 juillet 1852, « Écrits Oblats », 4, p. 118.

<sup>45</sup> Lettre à Mons Allard, 30 mai 1857, « Écrits Oblats », 4, p. 123.

<sup>46</sup> Lettre à Semeria, 21 février 1849, « Écrits Oblats », 4, p. 20.

*Canadá: los más abandonados, motor de la expansión misionera*

La situación en Canadá presenta algunas variantes a lo que venimos señalando. Allí encontramos una población de orígenes europeos estable, algunos de ellos asentados desde varias generaciones, la mayoría bautizados pero muchos abandonados con una fe adormecida. Es lógico que el Fundador encontrara algún paralelismo con Francia y viera que los oblatos están llamados allí a despertar a los cristianos a través de la predicación de misiones y otros actos de caridad pastoral.

Pero el celo pastoral de los oblatos en Canadá los lleva a desear acercarse a las poblaciones más abandonadas que van descubriendo poco a poco y que son el motor de la expansión misionera. Uno de esos grupos que primero identifican son las poblaciones originarias ya que la mayoría todavía no conocen el Evangelio. El Fundador alentará este movimiento y lo apoyará. Lo mismo ocurrirá con la presencia de los oblatos entre los trabajadores en los bosques o en las diferentes obras que preparan el desarrollo de las grandes ciudades en el país.

Esto nos muestra que el criterio utilizado por los oblatos y el fundador para discernir la urgencia misionera, será el de servir a los más abandonados en esa situación concreta, sean estos los obreros, los cristianos adormecidos en su fe o las poblaciones originarias que aún no han recibido el anuncio del Evangelio.

*Inglatera y los irlandeses: estamos hechos para los pobres*

Como anota el Fundador en su Diario, el P. Daly viajará a Inglaterra en 1841 con un objetivo: “examinar sobre el terreno, cómo se podría llevar a cabo allí una fundación de misioneros de nuestra Congregación que pudieran trabajar en la conversión de los heréticos ingleses y hasta extenderse si hiciera falta, y el número de los agregados bastará, para las colonias o las nuevas conquistas en América o cualquier parte del mundo”<sup>47</sup>. ¡Curiosa prioridad: herejes y vocaciones para las misiones!

Pues bien, enviados para convertir “herejes”, muy pronto vemos a los oblatos entregados con fervor para cuidar pastoralmente a los obreros emigrantes irlandeses en Manchester, Liverpool y finalmente en Londres. En efecto, en Inglaterra los oblatos encontrarán una gran masa de migrantes irlandeses que huyendo del hambre se han ido agrupando

<sup>47</sup> *Journal (1830-1841)*, 15 et 16 juillet 1841, « Écrits Oblats », 20, p. 149.

en torno a las ciudades portuarias que se están desarrollando industrialmente. Los irlandeses viven en una situación de penuria a la que se añade la ausencia de cuidado religioso ya que siendo en su mayoría católicos, habitan en un país de confesión anglicana.

Cuando el Fundador conoce esta realidad gracias a sus visitas sobre el terreno, lo vemos exultante con el trabajo de los oblatos. Como los italianos en Marsella, la respuesta de los irlandeses en Inglaterra es clamorosa: llenan las iglesias que los oblatos construyen y amplían, rodean de afecto al obispo que viene a visitarlos y que ha enviado a sus hijos para ponerlos a su servicio... Hay como una especie de comunión entre el ideal oblato que Eugenio concibe y lo que está viendo de primera mano como resultado del trabajo de sus hijos con estos pobres migrantes. También esa comunión existe entre los mismos emigrantes y los misioneros.

Ante este panorama que describe con júbilo y viveza, Eugenio de Mazenod nos deja esta reflexión: “Confieso que es algo prodigioso que en el centro de una ciudad protestante y con ocasión del paso de un extranjero, aunque ese extranjero era un obispo católico, y que ese pueblo, creo, tiene el instinto del bien que desearía hacerle y que hago en efecto por medio de los nuestros”<sup>48</sup>.

Por cierto que en Inglaterra e Irlanda se aceptarán las anteriormente prohibidas parroquias, en este caso situadas en las ciudades en los barrios donde habitan los más pobres. El Fundador describe estas parroquias en su Acta de visita a Inglaterra, el 22 de julio de 1850: “A esos servicios y establecimientos hay que añadir el servicio que hacen nuestros padres en Manchester y Liverpool; después de las dos misiones que han sido dadas por los nuestros en esas dos grandes ciudades se han mostrado contentos de verles establecerse allí. Mons. El obispo de Liverpool a ruego de los sacerdotes de esas ciudades, han encargado a nuestros Padres el servicio de una barriada de Manchester, donde se encuentra un gran número de pobres obreros irlandeses enteramente abandonados hasta la llegada de los nuestros... En Liverpool, no es un suburbio donde han colocado a los nuestros, sino en la parte más habitada y la más pobre de la ciudad. Monseñor les ha confiado la parroquia de la Santa Cruz, en la cual residen un gran número de pobres irlandeses

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<sup>48</sup> Lettre au P. Tempier, 10 juillet 1840, « Écrits Oblats », 3, p. 40-41.

que habían estado abandonados hasta entonces. Pero desde que nuestros Padres están allí, el bien que han hecho es incalculable... ¿No tenía razón para bendecir a Dios por ese maravilloso crecimiento? Es lo que no dejo de hacer, desde que he puesto el pie en Inglaterra, sobre todo durante el santo sacrificio de la Misa. *No; jamás agradeceremos bastante al Señor por todo cuanto se ha dignado realizar por el ministerio de nuestra Congregación en Inglaterra*<sup>49</sup>.

El 15 de diciembre de 1860, el padre Vincens escribirá, en una carta dirigida al P. Arnoux, superior de la casa de Inchicore en Dublín, esta frase lapidaria y que sin duda podría hacer suya san Eugenio: “*Estamos hechos para los pobres; es con ellos con quienes tenemos una gracia especial para hacerles un poco de bien*”<sup>50</sup>.

### CONCLUSIONES PARA ALIMENTAR NUESTRA ESPERANZA

#### “*Un pastor herido*”

Es la primera parte del título de nuestro artículo en el que hemos estudiado la experiencia de Eugenio de Mazenod como migrante. Esta experiencia ha marcado la personalidad y la espiritualidad de san Eugenio dejándolo con unas disposiciones extraordinarias para empatizar con las personas que atravesaban situaciones similares a las que él vivió. Sobre todo Eugenio ha experimentado un desarraigó que es la clave de comprensión de su conversión posterior y quizás de su opción por los más abandonados. En 1Pedro 2,24 se dice hablando de Jesucristo que “sus heridas nos han curado”. En san Eugenio podemos descubrir la profundidad de las heridas de su experiencia de migración que lo acompañarán y marcarán toda su vida. Desde una lectura de su vida desde la fe, como él mismo hace, esas heridas eran parte del plan providente de Dios que así enseña a amar con ternura a aquellos que pasan por situaciones de desarraigó, pobreza y abandono. Estas heridas que nos curan serán el motor de la misión de Eugenio<sup>51</sup>.

<sup>49</sup> Acte de visite de la Province d'Angleterre, 22 juillet 1850, « Écrits Oblats », 3, p. 122.

<sup>50</sup> Y. BEAUDOIN, « Écrits Oblats », 3, Introduction.

<sup>51</sup> G. MAMMANA, *An enriching wound borne by St. Eugene*, “Oblatio”, I (2012), p. 355-374; II (2013), p. 57-85.

### *Opción por los más abandonados*

Los migrantes serán objeto de su cuidado pastoral prioritario solo cuando son los más abandonados, los más pobres. Quizás nuestra Congregación no está llamada a la atención de los migrantes como una prioridad exclusiva, acaso tampoco como una prioridad estratégica. Pero estamos llamados a contemplar a los más abandonados de un lugar para darles nuestra prioridad misionera y en muchos casos estos serán los emigrantes. La dinámica misionera propuesta por Eugenio se aplicará aquí de una manera muy significativa: ayudarlos a ser humanos, cristianos y santos<sup>52</sup>.

*El cuidado del migrante no justifica por sí mismo la opción misionera de los oblatos en tiempos de san Eugenio.*

Al menos esto parece concluirse de lo que hemos observado en el trabajo de los oblatos dentro y fuera de Francia. Fuera de Francia en muchas ocasiones la prioridad está en predicar el Evangelio a los locales, no a los emigrantes o colonos, porque son los más abandonados y los que todavía no conocen a Cristo. La predicación a los “migrantes” que ya conocen a Cristo en esos territorios está condicionada a otras razones y se hace a veces de una manera temporal o estratégica (para establecerse en un territorio o financiar las otras misiones), subordinada a la prioridad de dedicarse a los más abandonados que en esos casos son los locales.

### *Cuidado personal y personalizado, pero atentos a la continuidad*

Eugenio nunca se acerca al migrante de una manera burocrática o con soluciones de oficina. Él entra en contacto directo, de corazón a corazón, predica, enseña, ofrece sacramentos, educa... incluso cuando ha confiado ese ministerio a otros oblatos no dejará de acercarse personalmente a tocar el sufrimiento. Sin duda su experiencia de lo que hizo con él don Bartolo Zinelli en Venecia marca esta dimensión misionera. Pero a la vez Eugenio piensa que ese cuidado tiene que asegurarse en el tiempo, institucionalizarse y por eso busca la colaboración de otros (con-

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<sup>52</sup> Prefacio de las CC y RR.

gregaciones, corporaciones civiles), crea asociaciones o busca recursos para que la acción perdure más allá de la urgencia del momento.

### *Respeto sagrado*

En cada emigrante hay un santo, al menos en potencia, incluso en las situaciones de mayor desesperanza o de mayor desintegración de la persona. Esto es lo que nos muestra la misma vida de san Eugenio. Cuando él relee su experiencia lo ve todo como dirigido por la mano de la Providencia para lo que luego sería llamado a ser: fundador de una congregación misionera y obispo de una ciudad como la Marsella de su época. ¿Acaso este emigrante que está delante de mí será canonizado? No lo sabemos. Pero la experiencia de Eugenio nos hace estar atentos. Además sabemos que Jesús nos dijo que Él se hizo forastero y... lo acogimos, o no. Delante de nosotros está Jesús y por tanto las posibilidades de esa persona son infinitas. Eso merece nuestro esfuerzo y entrega porque “amar al más insignificante de los seres humanos como a un hermano, como si no hubiera más que él en el mundo, no es perder el tiempo”<sup>53</sup>.

### *La misión con migrantes, nos ayuda y nos prepara para vivir nuestra vocación de santos y de misioneros*

Como Albini, Samaria y tantos otros, también la Providencia pueda estar preparándonos para “salir” de nosotros mismos y salir de nuestra tierra para alcanzar a los más abandonados. Mirar al migrante que está en nuestra tierra, descubrir si es el grupo más abandonado y ponernos a su servicio nos hace bien. Podemos decir que ser misioneros de los más abandonados nos hace mejores misioneros y mejores personas y, por qué no, nos hace más santos y más disponibles a los planes misteriosos de Dios que siempre nos da sorpresas con su Buena Noticia.

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<sup>53</sup> *Fratelli tutti*, n. 193.

# Vita et Missio

## PASTORAL WITH THE MIGRANTS IN KOREA PRESENT AND VISION

MAURIZIO GIORGIANNI, OMI

### A LOOK AT THE PAST

To understand well our present and to try to find some directions for the future to go, let me give a look to the past to see how we reached what we are today.

It is also important to find the direction, and to understand what we are doing, through the life of Jesus. Looking at his experience, at his care for the people, we can find some important points in order to understand how we have to care for the migrants.

The Gospel is the fundation of our activities. Our activity is a “pastoral care” which includes also social activities. But the model of our activity has to be the “Good shepherd” and we have to learn from Him what means to “shepherd” people.

If we forget or put the Gospel as a “second option” in our activity, the nature of our work would change radically. The Gospel will be the “light” that will give direction and meaning to what I am going to say.

I am working with the migrants since the end of 2005. It is not a long time.

The Korean church started to have some interest for the migrants more than 20 years ago, I would say.

I am an Oblate of Mary Immaculate and in 1994 we started working for the migrants here in Korea.

It was Fr. Giovanni Zevola that, at the beginning of 1994, went to meet Bishop of Suwon, Angelo Kim, to propose to start a pastoral care

for the migrants (illegal) in the diocese. At that time the answer of the Bishop was not very encouraging. There was the idea that migrants were just guests in Korea, and that the “illegal” workers were going to leave the country very soon.

Anyhow some activities for workers were going on in Inchon and Ansan, the help was directed to korean workers, and among them there were also some foreigners.

We, as Oblates, started some kind of activity in Gyonggido Gwangju. Fr. Giovanni used to spend some afternoons at the bus terminal of Gwangju, meeting foreingner workers (mostly form South-East Asia). Later he opened a small office, near the bus terminal, with the help of Fr. Mun, responsible of the social pastoral (**사회복지**) in Suwon diocese. Some meetings, also started between the people helping the “foreing workers” (**외국인 노동자**) (the word “workers” was more stressed than “migrant”) in Inchon, Seoul and Suwon. They were sharing some experiences, trying to organize together a festival for the foreing workers. That festival was done for few years in Myong-Dong with the Cardinal Kim (the second Sunday of Easter).

Activities for the workers were pointing more on their situation as a “worker”. The pastoral was directed in order to solve their problems in the workplace (visiting factories, salary problem, accidents, documentation problems, etc.). It was an important stage of the pastoral activity. That helped to know really the situation of the foreinger workers in Korea (legal and Illegal).

In May 1995 Bishop Angelo Kim, in Suwon diocese, gave his permission to start a pastoral program in the diocese. In that moment it was a “very new field”. The protestant churches still didn’t start any kind of care for the foreigner workers. Fr. Hong was the responsible of the **사회복지** and gave a room to start a counceling office.

#### PAST AND PRESENT AT THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL. SOME DIRECTIONS

The name of that office was “Emmaus”. Why Emmaus? The exeri-  
ence of the disciples going to Emmaus (Lk.24,13-35) was very similar  
to the experience of the foreigner workers. The disciple of Emmaus  
were people on the move, passing from a moment of great hope and  
expectation to a moment of disappointment. They loose all their hopes,  
they were afraid of what will happen to them in the future. Jesus ap-

porched them to accompany them on the way and to give them hope, security, love, food, strength, vision for the future... Jesus helped them to understand what was going on. He opened their minds and asking questions to them, he gave them back a hope that was lost during their present experience.

We saw in the experience of the disciples of Emmaus, the same experience and situations of many migrants. What Jesus did for the disciples of Emmaus, Jesus' attitude, His way of being with them has some basic points for the directions and the reasons of the pastoral care for the migrants. Those are the main points of Emmaus centers and the directions were to move. Jesus acts with that disciples moving from inside their hearts, not from outside. From outside it seems that the situation of those people doesn't changed much...but the inside changed and that made their situation changed.

An important point is to accompany the migrants in their life, a life that is characterized by the work, but not only. The mass for the catholic started in Kodungdong (close to Suwon station). We started some meetings according to the nationality. In Suwon there was a "African House" where people from Africa and with muslim faith were living together. Some activities like sports events, meals together were organized to help to break barriers between different nationalities. We started taking care of their health problems, organizing a kind of health insurance especially for the "illegal" workers. We put stress on celebrating important events in their lives. Like national days, birthdays. From the work we moved more toward the life, helping them in what they were asking for us to help. Some religious congregations started also having more interest for the migrants.

From other dioceses, priests or seminarians were going to Seoul or Suwon to learn more about the care for the foreigner workers.

An important moment and a step forward in this pastoral care was for sure when the CBCK recognized this activity and Bishop Kang becomes responsible of the pastoral for the migrants. The interest for the migrants, at that time, was only the Korean going abroad, but Bishop Kang, helped to point out also the migrants inside the Korean land.

Probably it is at that time that more than foreign workers we start talking more of migrant workers and also we started using the word migrants. Bishop Kang suggested that every diocese should have a re-

sponsible for the pastoral care for migrants. Regular meetings started in the CBCK.

We learnt a lot from the Scalabrinian and the Exodus program. First we were going to Philippines; later we were inviting the scalabrinian to Korea, and now we try to study and to reflect by ourselves and find directions of this pastoral care.

It was when Bishop Kang almost finished his mandate that I started working with the migrants.

I think that the parable of the Good samaritan (Lk10:29-37) can help us to understand the directions our pastoral care have been going up to now and also what other directions could also go. Let's read some quotes: «A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine.»

There were some migrants in our land who were suffering and having a lot of problems. Many see that situation but they were not much interested. Thanks to God and to our faith, we were able to see that situation of need and we tried to respond to that . We had eyes to see the person in need, the migrant.

We took care of his first need: The first stage of our action towards the migrants was an action of “emergency” What I mean, is that the direction of our pastoral care for the migrants was to take care of their situations of evident injustice (salary, discrimination, accidents, documentations...).

We were that samaritan taking care of the poor man beated and left hopeless because of his situation of migration in Korea.

The parable continues: «Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him.» In the parable the samaritan brings the poor man to an inn. In greek the word used is Πανδοχεῖο (Pandocheion). It is a public house for reception of stranger, in the context of the parable Pandocheion means the house (*oichia*) for all (*pan*). The Fathers of the church explaining this parable say that the pandocheion is the Church. The pandocheion is the community, the church. It is not enough just to take care of the “wounds”. We have to remember that we have to connect that people with the community, with the

“house of all” where he can find security, and protection, and meaning of life etc.

I think that the final of the parable of the good samaritan has an important question for us. The aim of the parable was to answer the question of the expert of the law: “Who is my neighbor.” Jesus asks a question in a very interesting way: «Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?»

He is not asking who was the neighbor for the Samaritan, but who was the neighbor for the poor man. The neighbor is not only the one I have to help, the neighbor is also the one from whom I receive help. Therefore, if the migrant workers are our neighbors they are also the people from whom we can receive help, or we are already receiving help... I see on this point something to reflect more, and we could also find another direction to go for the future.

The Catholic Church has to be the “House of All”. I think that the pastoral care for the migrants is helping the church to become the “House of All”. The church in Korea has to become the house of all, and it has to start from the parish that has to be the house of all.

The stage of “emergency” is not finished and it will not finish. We have continue taking care of the situations of injustice, discriminations, human rights od the migrants.

Compare to the past the rights of the foreigner worker are more respected now. There are also many others organizations that work for the “problems” of the workers and we have to work in more deep collaborations with the NGO. But the stage of “emergency” has to move on. The Church is not an NGO, it is the house of all that has to give something more than emergency help.

Looking at our action for the migrants we see that at the certain point, because the emerging number of the international marriages, the pastoral action has changed. The need now is larger than before. Because not only the foreigner are in need, but also the korean who are married to the foreigners have their needs. The pastoral for the migrants so now has more space for actions of “formation” (promoting the knowledge of the cultures, Korean, Philippines, Vietnam etc. study of the language, promoting the different religion and faith, differents food). The formation is directed not only to the foreigners, but to the Koreans , and among them to the children of those families. Formation in order to face

the problems of an international family and the problems of the children which now are the object sometimes of discriminations and injustice.

I think that this direction of formation is still at the beginning. Especially the formation of the koreans. Probably more formation, more interest, more contacts between the foreigners and the koreans have to improve.

### MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND DIRECTIONS

My personal experience of those years have been more with workers than **다문화가정**.

At the beginning, in my experience with migrant workers, I was very concentrated on their problems on the work. I found not easy to solve those problems. However, even after solving the problems there were other deep problems that were not solved. I got more interested on their life more than on their job. Of course, a problem with the job makes life more difficult. Nevertheless, I realized that a problem solved did not give them often a good life.

I had a very shocking experience for me when one young migrant, who was working here in Korea, died in his country because of drug problem. Here in Korea he had a big accident and was almost dead. Doctors and many financial help gave him the possibility to go back to work. When I heard that he died because of drug, I asked to myself if I gave him what he really needed. He never share with me what really was inside of him...the problem was the salary, the job, the money?

The situation of some “families” could be a big problem. Sometimes the lack of commitments, the responsibilities, and the endurance in difficult situations could be weak. Each one looks for his own solutions but sometimes are not the good solutions.

I can see that there is a relation between the “legal status” of the migrant and the situation of his family. Some of the workers that have a “legal status” are able to maintain a good relation with their families and children left behind. They frequently talk with their families through phones and computers and they regularly send money and news about themselves. By doing so, the relation remains strong.

It is also a reality that some of the workers come to Korea at a very young age and after just one year of marriage or even less. I wonder if there was any “time” to build a “strong family” relation. In the way of

planning their life and building relations with other migrants, I can see that instead of having a “married person” attitude, they still behave as “single”. Those migrants I can see that their life goes through many difficulties. Some are human difficulties due to their young age. They have difficulties in adapting and accepting the new situation. The fact that they cannot choose the work (because of the law) or they can change the company work up to three times but if they don’t adjust they have to go back to their country with the results of a failure for their families, going back or becoming weak psychologically and also affectively.

Another difficulty comes from the fact that not having built a strong relation with their loved ones (because of the short tile of marriage life) they are affectively weak. They become very lonely and it is a real danger that they get involved in a new relation, which will bring them to become far from their family.

For these categories of workers, I see that the fact of being part of the Catholic Christian communities is of help for their stability. It also helps them to stay focused on the purpose of their stay in Korea. The migrant center becomes a place where they find security and peace in their hearts and some good counseling.

Whenever a worker comes to ask for some help for a concrete problem in his job I realize that after talking to him/her there is a much bigger problem, which is related to his life, to the way he is living or thinking about his life in relation with his family. The role of accompanying them in the different stages of their life becomes very crucial. The problem in the work becomes for me an opportunity to give some orientations and some strength to his life. I try to help them to be focus on the values of honesty, family, love which are in danger because of the situation of instability of his life related with the fact that he is a migrant, a foreigner. The problem in the works sometimes reveals also a problem in the life. However, sometimes only the work problem and money not received are seen as a problem, while other problems remain hidden.

Another category of workers, which come to the center are the “undocumented” or so-called “illegal”. In many cases, I can see that “illegal” status as a worker is also related in an “illegal” status of life. What I mean is that in many cases the undocumented workers build a “new family”. In some cases, some are already married in their own countries

and meet a new “company” in Korea, in other cases they are single that build a “new family” but without being married. I cannot say how is the relation between the irregularity worker status and the irregular family relation, I just see the relation. For sure, the fact becoming “illegal” puts the family left behind and the personal life in danger. Since it is not possible to go back to his or her countries of origin for visit (while it is possible in some cases for a “regular” worker) or even when someone dies or it is sick (because it means the end of the work) the relation, the commitment become weaker and weaker. The physical distance become a distance of heart. Many misunderstandings start. For an illegal worker is not possible to have a bank account in Korea from where to send money to help his family and the result is that economic dependence become also weak and slowly in some cases the family problems can bring to a separation de facto and so a new relation starts.

I heard many stories especially when a “new family” comes to our center asking for the baptism of their baby. Because of that, I get to know the situation of each one. When they are single, I help and strongly suggest them to build a family through regular marriage (many times without success). When the situation cannot be “solved” the only suggestion is to focus them again on the values of their lives hoping that some good choices will be done by themselves for the good of all.

There are also few other categories of migrants where husbands and wives are both together in Korea, but their children are left in their countries. Those families are usually stable in their family lives but I had also experience where one of the two get involved in some gambling or not good business to get more money, which, as results, put the family life in danger. Also, to this category belong usually the undocumented workers.

Whenever the family life is in danger whoever comes asking for help, I always try to help him or her reminding the values and the family most of all, which is more important than money or anything else and try to make a good choice.

Sometimes when a choice cannot be done, I have to say the truth that to live the country and go back to their origin family life become the best solution...but of course, what would be the family life after that? It is difficult to verify and judge.

I think that this formation on life values is also another direction where the pastoral for migrants could go. However, it is not easy because some of the problems related with life's values are not seen many times.

Do we also see those problems? Do we also help them to see deeper in their lives or the money problem becomes also the urgent for me, the one who wants to help them?

Here also it comes to me others stories in the life of Jesus, where in the Gospel people go to ask for help, asking him to give them what they want...but Jesus ends always giving them not only what they ask for, but something else which they didn't ask for: "Your sins are forgiven", "you are saved." Did that people ask for it? Did they feel they needed the forgiveness or been saved? Probably not. Nevertheless, Jesus gave them not only what they asked for but also what they really needed for their life but they did not see.

I think that it also what I have to find out how to do it. Not only what the migrant asks me to do, but also be able to see what the needed thing in his life is, it is deeper than the problem that is on the surface of what they ask for.

I want to finish my sharing with a personal good experience of collaborations with the parish priest of the Korean parish where I say mass for the migrants every Sunday. After many years of working there, we started having at least two moments in the year where migrants and "Koreans" can meet and have together some activities. Those moments have been positive experiences for building trust and friendship between the two categories. It has also helped in growing in the knowledge of the common ground that is the common faith and the common Christian values.

Many positives feedback I heard from our migrants and they are more willing to participate in the life of the parish and with the Korean parishioners.

This also built strength and commitment spirit in them and a new way of looking at the foreigner from the Korean side.

### VISION?

My vision is that the community, the Church in Korea could become like the community in Antioch in the Acts of the Apostles.

Antioch was a city with a strong presence of people from different parts of the world. Now in the assembly that was at Antioch there were some prophets and teacher. Barnabas and Paul form the Judeo-Christian, Simeon who was called Niger (the black Africa), Lucius of Cyrene (Libya), Manaen the foster brother of Herod the tetrarch form the roman education background (Cf. Acts 13:1). They were from different nationality and culturally different. In that city happened that a new kind of behavior brought the people of Antioch to call this “strange community of people” with a new name. That name was “Christians”, and the church of Antioch was really the “house of all.”

What I said today is not the Holy Gospel. It means that it is just a presentation and a vision of what I was able to see. However, I am sure that many of you have different opinions or see things in a different way and we are here to listen and learn from one each other.

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## OBLATE MINISTRY TO MIGRANTS IN HONG KONG

MARK ANTHONY SERNA, OMI

*“Migrants as Missionaries of the Catholic Church:  
Overseas Filipino Workers Expanding the Church.”*

Many of the churches in the Diocese of Hong Kong are filled with migrants who are mostly Filipino domestic helpers. This is true as well for the two Oblate Parishes, Saint Alfred and Notre Dame, whose ministry includes responding to the needs of migrant communities. The Oblate Ministry to Migrants exerts the Oblates' best of their pastoral abilities and services such as providing migrants dignified place for religious services and recreational social gatherings on their rest days from work.

### NOTRE DAME PARISH (HONG KONG)

In 1993, Fr. John Wotherspoon, OMI, the parish priest of Notre Dame, started the English Mass to address especially the spiritual needs of the migrant faithful. Such decision was strongly opposed back then by the Chinese community, but Fr. John was adamant to such ministry and stood by the pastoral decision. When the English Mass started to be presided in the parish, only Filipino Migrants were attending, until other foreign nationalities started joining in. Migrant communities of different backgrounds started forming their own groups to be able to express their cultures, personalities, and spiritualities based on their own customs and norms as peoples of faith. The parish has since then been providing them with avenues and means to be able to practice their faith as a community of communities, as one Body of Christ.

### ST. ALFRED'S CHURCH (HONG KONG)

In 2006, the Oblates were entrusted with the pastoral care of Saint Alfred Parish. Among the ministries in the parish, the Oblates provide

special attention to the pastoral care of migrants. True to the hospitality of the Church as refuge that brings solace, the parish opens herself to the migrant communities, the Filipino workers having the most number, where they can deepen their spirituality and bond with one another as sisters and brothers in God. Here they are given the opportunity to serve the Church in various capacities such as in liturgy, music, faith education, and other spiritual exercises. They are also given access to parish facilities and amenities during their free time from their jobs. In this kind of ministry, the migrants are offered with the sense of belongingness to the Church and to the larger community of the local faithful.

These two Churches, which are ran by the Oblates, are the only Churches in Hong Kong that allow the migrants to stay until 9 o'clock in the evening because the Oblates believe that Churches are important spaces for them, not only for the religious aspect, but also are avenues for them to interact with others.

#### MIGRANTS AS MISSIONARIES

Nowadays, we cannot deny the fact that more lay people are considered missionaries. Specifically, it is surprising how the overseas migrant workers in Hong Kong have been involved in spreading the faith where they are. Through their generous and dedicated service to the Church, they make Jesus Christ present.

For the Oblates working in Hong Kong, it is indeed a great joy to spread the Good News and witness its fruits in many peoples' lives. We thank God for the gift of faith given to lay people, which includes the migrants, that bears much fruit as we witnessed during the Mass. The Eucharistic celebrations, especially on Sundays, become alive and enjoyable with their singing, proclamation of the Word, serving at the altar, and other services. Their smiles, laughter, and happy disposition despite many problems are also forms of evangelization. Hence, due to the presence of the migrants, which are mostly OFWs (Overseas Filipino Workers) in almost all Catholic Churches in Hong Kong, especially the two Churches ran by the Oblates, the parishes are very much alive. Cardinal John Tong, the Apostolic Administrator of the Hong Kong Diocese recognizes their deep faith in God and their services in different local churches where they belong.

## OFWs EXPANDING THE CHURCH

In Hong Kong, Churches are always filled with migrants, and mostly are Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). The term OFW denotes to Filipinos who are abroad indefinitely as citizens or as permanent or temporary residents, and to those Filipino citizens abroad for a limited, definite period, such as on a work contract or as students.

Coming from a predominantly Catholic country, these migrant Filipino workers in search of livelihood are equipped with the disposition and skills of lay missionaries, who take and practice their faith zealously wherever they go or are, who will not necessarily preach by word, but live the Gospel of Jesus in the context of different cultures and religions. They are really missionaries who help the Church in her mission to spread the Gospel.

Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle once said: “Our overseas Filipino migrant workers have become the big missionary presence.” This is true in Hong Kong context. There are Filipinos who are living and working in Hong Kong with varied professions like medical doctors, nurses, engineers, teachers, caregivers, domestic helpers, and others. They have been contributing in many ways, no matter how little, to the spread and growth of faith in and among other people. One example is when a Filipina Domestic Helper, taking care of children left alone by parents keeping up with young kids, shares the essentials of the Faith. Another example is when I met a 26-year college-graduate Filipino domestic worker, who has been working in Hong Kong for some years. She always makes a point to attend the Sunday Mass in one of the local churches, even if her employer and the family are not Catholics. She said that her employers have been impressed by the way she is practicing her faith. Aside from other good qualities that she has, they are also happy with her seeing her praying daily and doing good to others. Eventually, her employer and the family voluntarily embraced Catholic faith with their own will. They were inspired by her practice of faith in a simple and inspiring manner, witnessing to the Christian faith in her day-to-day life as a domestic helper.

Indeed, OFWs are expanding the Church, through the effort also of many of them who have become missionaries, living their faith, and setting good examples to others. Their efforts are effective, even with-

out training in theology or catechetics. The Oblates in Hong Kong can attest to the growing number of OFWs in our Parishes. Those who actively take part in church-related activities are also growing in number in spite of the strict restrictions brought by the existing pandemic.

### POSITIVE EXPERIENCE

At present, there are 4 Filipino Oblates working in Hong Kong. All of them have always the chance to mingle with the Migrants since they celebrate Masses in the Churches and Mass Centers where there is English Mass for migrants. The experience of multicultural mission in a foreign country, away from their own family, culture, and comforts of language and norms, has brought about various personal and pastoral struggles.

Coming from the Philippines where the Catholic culture is prevalent, they long for a strong support system personally and pastorally. Nonetheless, very much conscious of their mission to evangelize peoples, their experience of being evangelized by the migrants, especially the poor Filipino overseas workers here in Hong Kong, has been undeniably life-changing, faith-deepening, and pastorally enriching to them. The opportunity to interact and minister to their fellow Filipinos who are also experiencing the same loneliness, longing, and struggles that they at times feel has indeed been a grace that helped them cope with the demands and duties of evangelizing and being evangelized. The joy of being with them has made them feel like they are also still in the Philippines.

The Filipino migrants have indeed given the local people deep God-experiences as through them the Lord has shown them Himself in the faces of these poor and sometimes abandoned workers whose experience is like that of being exiled from their homeland and families. In such encounter with the Lord through the migrant workers, deep-seated selfishness and self-centeredness was crushed in them. God has taught them to look at the faces of the migrants with compassion by seeing the hidden tears of grief in their eyes, the traces of wound in their hands brought about by hard labor, the hunger for love and friendship burning in their hearts, and the thirst for belongingness crying out for God and communion with others in their souls. Seeing the face of God in the many faces of the migrants taught them to

interact with them sincerely even in the smallest gestures like casual conversations, simple affirmations, and shared laughter with them. Little gestures made with sincerity means the world to them who seek joy and meaning in their life and faith experience. The mission does not need to be grand, the missionary needs only to be sincere seeing himself as a true brother in the name of Christ and so bring light to the life and faith of people who are experiencing darkness in various forms.

Moreover, bringing light to people in darkness is a mission that brought the Oblates in Hong Kong to the disposition and the need to develop listening. Today more than ever, the mission must engage into a special and necessary form of pastoral care: Listening Ministry.

The Oblates' pastoral engagement with the migrant workers has moved to this form of ministry as each of them have stories, feelings, and life insights to be unloaded from their minds, hearts, and souls. In the celebration of the Eucharist, it is we as priests who do the talking, the people tasked to listen attentively to their core and find God's voice. But outside the Mass, it needs to be the other way around: they must be the ones doing the talking, and we must be listening most attentively to our core so that we may see their God experiences and from there bring into light the Lord's message to them. To listen to people is in a deep way listening to God as well. We must therefore not be quick to offer our "own" opinion and solutions to their life and faith struggles because it must be God's voice that we must find together. A Missiologist said: "We, Christians, tend to forget that the ministry of listening has been committed to us by God who is Himself the great listener and whose work we should share." Yes, that is very true. It is God's love for us that He not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear. This is what the Oblates in Hong Kong are also trying to pray, that they may always listen with the ears of God that they may also speak the Word of God.

Fr. Rodolfo Jacobe, Jr., OMI who is also directly involved in the Migrant Ministry, added that the Oblate presence in Hong Kong is very much felt and appreciated particularly in making available the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Eucharist which are the two main source of strength and spiritual food of the wandering Migrants being far from their loved ones and the demand of work.

## PRESENT CHALLENGES

If the Covid-19 pandemic persists, the safeguarding and promoting the Catholic faith of the Migrants, especially the domestic helpers, will be a big challenge for they will be limited by restrictions to move about during their rest days from work. Another challenge in ministering to migrants is the need for every Oblate, regardless of nationality, to develop a sense of love and charity for the migrants, especially the domestic helpers. It is understandably not easy to engage with other cultures and peoples. Hence, putting oneself in the shoes of people so different from us, to understand their thoughts, and share their life and faith experiences are real challenges in the pastoral care of migrants in the mission.

Dealing with loneliness due to being away from their family is a constant struggle that migrants face in a foreign land. How to fill this gap and how to remain strong emotionally by making available the spiritual nourishment to uplift their spirits and their faith in God who is their constant source of strength is another challenge, Fr. Rodolfo Jacobe, Jr. OMI who is directly involved in the Ministry with Migrants added. He also mentioned that financial management is also a big challenge that migrants need to resolve with their desire to have a house and lot of their own yet not having enough money to finance this project at the fastest time possible. Borrowing of money from others and cash advances from their employers are dominant issues they face. By the time they retire, they have no savings to support their medical and other needs. These are real issues the migrant workers face that need to be looked into as to how the Oblates can help them not financially, but in teaching them how to manage so that they don't get disheartened and lost.

The Oblate ministry to migrants in Hong Kong is a special ministry altogether. It is a ministry that entails evangelization in an integral way: spiritual, physical, social, and psycho-emotional. Oblate missionaries in Hong Kong takes painstaking effort to address their need for holistic pastoral care, evangelizing them by word and action that the presence of God to them is real and never fades. But at the same time, in ministering to the migrant workers, Oblates are being evangelized by their witnessing to their Christian faith against all odds, despite all tribulations, and

away from their homelands just like the Oblates to fulfill their mission in life. Through them, we learn as missionaries how to love God who is not distant despite our distance from our homelands. In them, we see the incarnate God, our Lord Jesus, who despite leaving His Kingdom, his homeland, kept His faith in God the Father and fulfilled His mission to bring the divine presence to the world. Catholic migrant workers in Hong Kong, indeed are incarnating the presence of God to the local people in this foreign land to them, just as Jesus did.

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## BEFRIENDING THE MIGRANTS IN THAILAND

THONGCHAI TONGROS, OMI

The Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Thailand has been working passionately for the migrants from the neighboring countries of Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia. This noble work was started by Fr. Ongart Kaeser, OMI in 2012. These people have come to work in Thailand with most of their family members left behind in their homelands. As an Oblate entrusted to evangelize the poor, the Oblate's identity is embedded in my heart: "We are sent to proclaim the Good News to all people of diverse backgrounds, nations, cultures, beliefs, and values (C 1). As missionaries, we are to be men set apart for the Gospel" (Rom. 1:1). To keep the Oblate identity alive, I realize that I ought, to begin with being friendly to everyone I meet. Thus, "Befriending" is always my vision of serving our migrant brothers and sisters putting into reality the idea that *the love of God is inseparable from the love of neighbor.*

"I no longer call you servants. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you (John15:15)." The call to every Oblate is to live Christ Jesus and to preach Christ crucified with Him on the cross (CC 1-2). Inspired by our founder St. Eugene de Mazenod, we recognize the power of Christ in us. Each member of the OMI Congregation is identified with Christ as He is living in him. We evangelize the poor and the needy by being close to them. In fulfilling Christ's mission, we give importance not only to the spiritual well-being of individuals but also take into consideration the physical, mental and emotional aspects of the person so that they might be receptive to hear spiritual matters. All actions of caring for their needs are expressions of genuine love; that unconditional love of God tangible in the love of a human person.

The following stories are indications of how God manifested Himself in every little act of kindness and assistance the Oblates in Thailand give to our migrant brothers and sisters.

## BECOMING FRIEND

On May 2020, as a deacon, I succeeded Fr. Phonsri Tongkham, OMI, as the manger of the Hospitality House in Bangkok under the supervision of the National Catholic Commission on Migrations (NCCM) whose vision is to promote *“a world without borders in which migrants and vulnerable persons live with respect and dignity as children of God.”* Coming into the post with no idea who these people were, I was struggling and grappling with how to begin. It was not easy, to be honest! I started with making friends with migrants and Thai neighbors by visiting their communities and workplaces. Normally, the migrants work in the fresh markets and factories nearby our center. At first, it was not easy to build a relationship as trust was a big issue being in a foreign land. Slowly, a mutual relationship was established and they began to tell their stories and shared their experiences about why they reached Thailand and how they lived a difficult life. They shared that they needed to adjust to the new environment, food, culture, and people of different backgrounds and personalities. The most challenging was communication. They struggled to learn the Thai language by memorization without formal education. They also endured poor housing conditions, overcrowded and unsanitary environments. The worst of all, they were exploited being underpaid of their wages.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic had worsened their situation, creating a threatening condition for the migrant workers in Thailand. A sudden surge of COVID-19 cases among workers from Myanmar ignited an anti-migrant sentiment among some Thais. They were blamed as the super-spreaders of the virus resulting in their termination from work forcing them to return home. They were sad and disheartened, yet they remained silent. For many months, like anyone else, they remained at home with no work and no income at all. Migrants who were Covid-19 positive had no proper treatment. They underwent self-quarantine lacking food, medicine, and money for their house rentals.

Our volunteer leader of the Myanmar group had her share of this sad story. While working, she got sick and contracted the Covid-19 virus. Being with our group, all of us who had direct contact with her had to self-quarantine for two weeks and submit ourselves for the Covid-19 test. Thankfully, each member of the group received a negative result.

Later on, I learned that our volunteer leader was terminated from her work while she was still sick.

As the country continues to face its worst COVID-19 outbreak since the pandemic began, various public and private organizations offer useful solutions to control the pandemic. They continue to organize activities and initiatives to reach out to the needy and the poor who have been badly affected by the pandemic including our migrant brothers and sisters.

In collaboration with the NCCM, the Hospitality House in Bangkok was able to distribute first aid kits, food bags, and hygiene packs for 300 migrant families. There are 11 ethnic communities of migrants, to wit: Karen, Muslim, Mon, Laos, Hmong, Khmer Krom, etc., and each group has their representative to coordinate and claim their packages from the Hospitality House. That process made the distribution of goods systematic with less physical contact.

#### CHILDREN OF GOD

One of the services of the Hospitality House is providing basic education to migrant children who have no chance of formal study. When I was starting the ministry, I could see many children roaming around in the market. I approached their parents and got to know their situations. Thus, I decided to gather the children and began to do some activities. Gradually, the initiative was known in the area and migrant parents were happy to send their children to the center. At present, there are 30 children ages 5 to 13 years old under our care. These children were grouped into 3 according to their age level. They learn Thai, English, and Myanmar languages. They also learn basic Computer and Mathematics. The children expressed their creativity and skills in various activities we have provided such as Art and crafts, fun learning activities like singing, dancing, drawing, and other creative workshops.

The Hospitality House has emphasized the education of the children because we believe that this would benefit them as they grow up. The knowledge and learnings are something they can be proud of themselves. True indeed that they are less fortunate, but it doesn't mean that they remain as such unless they choose to. We aim to inculcate to the migrant parents the value of education. If given the chance, these chil-

dren can be admitted to formal study in government schools. It is up to their parents to take the responsibility of enrolling their children, however, our initiative has given them the edge.

Last July 2020, we met a 5-year-old boy named Seven. He was born in Cambodia and was abandoned by his father. Since his mother was sick, his aunt played the role of a mother. One day, his aunt approached and told us the story of Seven who desired to go to a formal school. She tried many times to inquire in several schools but was refused because of incomplete documents. However, she said she will never give up and shall do everything for Seven to have a formal education. We decided to bring Seven to a bit farther school. After having inquired and prepared all the necessary documents, Seven was accepted. At present Seven is doing well in school and is happy with his classmates and friends. It is true what Jesus says to us: “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Mt. 7:7). This is how God loves us as his children, in our persistence He grants our desires and loves us unto the end.

#### WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

In November 2020, we visited a mother who was mentally sick due to failed relationship with her partner. The man left the mother and the baby behind without any communication and financial support. It caused the mother so much stress resulting in depression. She became violent and aggressively shout at people and destroy things in the house. The family brought her to the doctor for medication that made her condition improve, but she cannot breastfeed her baby due to possible side effects from the medicines. Moved with pity for her child, she repeatedly express her desire to get better so that she could nurse her baby.

The above-mentioned story is an example of a woman who needed empowerment to restore her self-worth and her ability to make good choices and decisions in life. The Hospitality House promotes women empowerment by providing short courses in Thai and English languages as well as basic tailoring courses. Among those who have joined this initiative were migrant mothers who live nearby our center. They were mostly at home taking care of their children while their husbands were out for a living. The mothers were very enthusiastic to join classes and were eager to learn. One of the advantages of this initiative is that they

were able to download to their children the skills they learned. With their skills in tailoring, the mother even dreamed of having a small business sewing bags to sell in the market, thus, responding to the call of zero plastic waste and the call of Pope Francis on *Laudato si'*.

#### HEALTH AND HUMAN CARE

The National Catholic Commission on Migration (NCCM) where the Hospitality House is affiliated, has great attention on the areas of health and rights of migrants by providing education, training, financial support, and basic needs. NCCM unceasingly promotes safe migration, migrant workers' rights, and health care to reduce human trafficking and labor exploitation, as well as to prevent health risks. Working closely with migrant networks in the local government and other NGOs from both in and outside Thailand, we commit ourselves to work for the good of the people by increasing our knowledge and skills regarding policy advocacy on migrant issues.

Care for the health of migrants living and working in an unhealthy environment is at the heart of the Hospitality House. I visited many rented rooms of Myanmar migrants that are overcrowded and with unsanitary living environments. This can be one reason why COVID 19 can rapidly spread among Myanmar migrants. They lived in a crowded building with a shared bathroom and kitchen. We aim to promote a happy and healthy lifestyle for migrants by having qualitative seminars on Reproductive Health Care, HIV, and AIDS, Family Planning, etc. In particular, during this pandemic, our staff had attended the training on the above-mentioned which qualified them to be volunteers of the Department of Disease Control for the communities of migrants. Moreover, St. Michel the Archangel's Church, run by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, has provided space for the vaccination of migrants, refugees, and the local people living nearby.

We also have provided education and information on human rights and human trafficking among vulnerable migrants. Most of the migrants don't know their rights and how to exercise them properly. They benefited from these organized seminars by being aware of their rights to be respected, to be treated with dignity, and to personal safety. By doing all these, I believe we can create a better world where people see each other with compassion as brothers and sisters that no one is regarded as

foreign any longer. God's love and care cover all people of every corner of the world.

#### OBLATES, FRIENDS OF MIGRANTS

As consecrated religious, our desire to love flow from the love of God. The evangelical counsels we have professed bind us to love the Lord and his people (ct. C12). In love, one Oblate doesn't succeed alone but with that community do we fulfill (cf. C11). By nature, not only we must love but we need to be loved. When we experience the love of God, when we allow God to touch our hearts, embracing us with his loving hands whether we are up or down in any state of our life, we are in love and lovely. That is the source of our mission—the foundation of love. Each Oblate must be able to have such a spiritual experience of God's love so that he would love others truly as God does. So that we can befriend the people we are called to evangelize, we must allow God to be our closest companion and confidant first and foremost.

As missionaries, we too are migrants for we are sent to proclaim the good news to all across the world. We have heard the call and we answered. In the beginning, these migrants were strangers to me, they are not Catholic, and maybe will never be. God's love is universal (Catholic), no one should be forgotten and alienated just because of their ethnicity, race, nation, belief, and color. This love of God is conceptualized in "Befriending" which in my point of view, can be translated as "to love your neighbor as yourself" (Mk. 12). No matter who they are, where they come from, and what they believe, God's unconditional love reaches every realm of humanity. Every time I encounter them, we seldom talk about God, but I always send a clear message across by being witness to the presence of our loving and compassionate God. In working with the migrants, I could see that they have experienced and felt the presence of God in our friendship.

#### FOR SALVATION OF SOULS

Genuine love of neighbors must include concern for their eternal salvation. Indeed love in the form of befriending is a pathway to eternal life. It is one love with two tracks consisting of the Love of God that is our source of Love; and the love of neighbor which is our response

to this love. St. John boldly puts it, “if anyone says my love is fixed on God; yet hates his brother and sister, he is a liar” (1 Jn 4:20). When these migrants experience the Love of God, they begin living on the way to salvation.

The work of salvation is dynamic and covers all aspects of those seeking eternal life; thus, what the mind has grasped must move to the heart, the heads and the feet are to translate the good insights into actions that honor God and benefit the neighbor. Love should always be coupled with action. Practice puts the seal of authenticity to the understanding. Thus, the heart of understanding is to be lived out. By doing so, we have understood how to love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. We can truly love others as a friend in Jesus Christ. The Oblates are friends of Jesus, as well as friends of all migrants.

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## LA MISSION OMI DU SAHARA ET LA MISSION MIGRANTS

### MISSION OMI SAHARA

**L**e contenu de cet article est écrit des extraits du Project Communautaire et Missionnaire 2021-2022 de la Mission OMI du Sahara dans la section de la Mission avec les Pauvres ou nous parlons des personnes migrantes. Nous croyons que partager ce que nous vivons et ce que nous voulons faire (nos rêves) peut permettre aux lecteurs connaitre la mission des Oblats du Sahara avec les migrants.

Pour l'élaboration du Project Communautaire et missionnaire nous suivons la recommandation du Chapitre General 2016 (EPMMPE) n. 16.1 « *Utiliser la méthodologie du Chapitre général pour discerner qui sont les nouveaux pauvres dans notre environnement immédiat et comment les rejoindre. S'assurer que les problématiques JPIC fassent partie de ce discernement* ». Par rappel, la ci-dite méthodologie a 5 étapes : 1) Identifier le contexte ; 2) Identifier les ressources 3) Discerner les appels ; 4 Choisir les Orientations et les Stratégies ; 5) Indiquer les liens et Implications avec d'autres domaines concernés (cf. EPMMPE n. 3)

### CONTEXTE

Appelés par l'Église et par la Congrégation à être les témoins du Christ dans ce territoire du Sahara, notre communauté veut vivre sa vocation chrétienne, religieuse et oblate dans ce contexte spécifique : dans ce territoire où la population autochtone est musulmane et une église composée des étrangers de façon temporaire pour la plus part. Il faudra ajouter à cette connotation religieuse d'autres caractéristiques qui déterminent notre société: notamment la diversité ethnique, linguistique et culturelle juxtaposées de manière conflictuelle pour des raisons historiques. Un conflit encore non résolu qui caractérise la vie de notre société et les relations humaines. C'est cette situation particulière qui donne un caractère différent et unique dans l'ensemble des réalités de la province oblate de la Méditerranée et dans la Congrégation...

## *Description de la réalité*

Tel que dit dans le document du 36ème chapitre général, il y a différents visages de pauvres: pauvreté spirituelle, humaine, économique, manque de justice, etc.... Par notre perception, nous pouvons cependant évoquer quelques formes de pauvres qui nous interpellent...

Nous voulons souligner cet aspect parce qu'il a changé depuis 2015 à cause du changement de la politique du pays. Le nombre et la présence des migrants ont sensiblement augmenté sur le territoire. Certains s'établissent dans ce territoire de façon stable et permanente et cherchent à régulariser leur situation tandis que la majorité sont ici de faisons transitoire (pour traverser vers l'Europe). En plus de tout ceci, il faudra y ajouter la situation due à la pandémie du coronavirus, en sigle covid-19 au niveau tant mondial que national. La situation s'est aggravée entraînant des nouvelles urgences et des besoins qui surgissent et qui se réveilleront dans un futur immédiat. Bien que le virus ne fait acceptation des personnes, entre riches et pauvres, toute fois, on constate que les pauvres subissent les plus et souffrent des conséquences de la pandémie.

Face à ces situations, la Mission du Sahara essaie de répondre en tenant comptes de ces deux grands facteurs qui la limitent notamment : nos ressources très limitées et la situation de conflit propre au territoire, en plus de notre insertion dans le monde musulman, requièrent une extrême prudence...

À Laayoune les migrants vivent une situation précaire et vulnérable. En général ils ne restent pas pour longtemps à Laayoune. Avec la pandémie, cette situation a un peu changé quelque chose. Les migrants vivent de plus en plus dans la précarité et la misère qui aggravent leur vulnérabilité. Par exemple, on voit de plus en plus de migrants mendiant aux croisements des rues et sur les places publiques. Cette nouveau phénomène jamais constaté au par avant.

On collabore avec une association locale dans ce domaine de l'immigration (Saquia Al Hamra) pour aider les migrants surtout pour le problème de santé. Caritas Rabat et la Procure de Mission OMI finance Saquia Alhambra tandis que la Mission oblate assure l'accompagnement et supervise le contrôle du projet.

À Dakhla les migrants trouvent du travail et s'organisent entre eux. Certains viennent à la messe à l'église. On a mis sur pieds un programme d'aide pour les soins médicaux des migrants qui se développe

peu à peu avec l'appui de caritas Rabat et de la Procure OMI. Nous avons aménagé un centre d'accueil et d'assistance des migrants au niveau de la paroisse de Dakhla. Avec la crise de coronavirus, les actions du service se sont intensifiées de façon ininterrompue. L'action de CARITAS DAKHLA se centre sur le problème de santé des migrants et l'aide aux mères célibataires et femmes vulnérables. Au fur et à mesure la situation perdure, nous contactons les institutions qui peuvent nous épauler. En 2019, avant la situation du confinement, on avait réfléchi avec les migrants pour répondre aux questions concrètes sur les quatre verbes proposés par le pape François lors de sa visite à Rabat: accueillir, protéger, promouvoir, intégrer.

A El Marsa (port de Laayoune), La ville se développe en toute vitesse. Malgré ça, la situation des migrants à El Marsa pendant la pandémie était dramatique et même aujourd'hui il y a des grosses difficultés. C'est qui a fait qu'après le confinement beaucoup sont partis, entre eux la majorité des fidèles à la Messe du samedi. Des autres migrants sont arrivés mais ils trouvent grandes difficultés pour trouver le travail, logement, etc. Malgré les efforts pour trouver des moyens, nous n'arrivons pas à faire arriver des aides convenables. Nous croyons que nous devons bien comprendre la situation et voir qu'il faut faire pour venir en aide des plus vulnérables.

On peut conclure qu'avec la pandémie du Covid19, le nombre des migrants a augmenté surtout à Laayoune et à Dakhla. Les sorties vers les îles Canaries des embarcations de fortune se sont aussi développées lors de la période du confinement. Les cas des migrants qui essaient l'aventure pour arriver aux îles Canaries est en augmentation exponentiel : pendant les deux dernières années (en 2020 les arrivés à Canarie sont de plus du 1.000 % en relation au 2019 sans y compter les naufrages ; les 6 premières mois du 2021 ont augmenté 157% en relation aux 6 premières mois du 2020. Chiffres du « Ministerio del Interior de España »)...

On constate l'augmentation des femmes enceintes, la forte natalité des enfants, le sentiment de racisme de la population locale vis à vis des migrants à cause de la propagation et la transmission du virus. Sans aucun doute, la situation actuelle est un grand défi pour les migrants et aussi pour envisager une quelconque action en leur faveur. Ceci rend encore la situation des migrants plus difficile et plus vulnérable.

Le monde des migrants est toutefois plus vaste et plus complexe par rapport au peu que nous connaissons jusqu'à présent. Mais cela peut nous permettre d'œuvrer dans ce domaine. Cependant il y a aussi d'autres regroupements ou structures que nous ne connaissons pas mais qui œuvrent pour les migrants dans la préfecture.

### QUELQUES QUESTIONS ET PRÉOCCUPATIONS

Comment faire pour mieux découvrir le monde de pauvres qui nous entourent sans attirer les suspicions et les mauvaises interprétations ?

Comment collaborer avec les pauvres pour leur promotion ? Pensant aux dossiers des associations locales dans ce sens, comment collaborer avec elles d'une façon adéquate ? Comment pouvons-nous être plus efficaces dans le service aux pauvres ? Que faire pour passer de l'assistance et dépendance aux actions plus efficaces et durables d'autonomie ? Peut-on établir quelque chose de semblable pour les migrants à Marsa ?

Sachant que nous ne pouvons pas tout faire, quelles actions pouvons-nous accorder la priorité ? Avec quels collaborateurs ?

Comment pouvons-nous venir en aide aux migrants: pour le logement, l'habillement, nourriture, santé, catéchuménat, situation des couples non en règle, etc... ? Comment mettre en œuvre des actions faisables en tour les quatre verbes proposé par le pape : accueillir, protéger, promouvoir, intégrer ? Comment faire pour promouvoir le toit, le travail et la terre pour tous ?

Comment élaborer des projets de développement durable et efficace à court et à long terme dans lesquels les pauvres seront eux-mêmes des protagonistes ?

Comment mettre en application les recommandations de l'encyclique *Laudato Si'* pour la sauvegarde et protection de la nature et les pauvres ? Comment pouvons-nous mettre en pratique et faire connaître les politiques pour la protection des mineurs et adultes les plus vulnérables ?

### *Moyens*

Preciser nos ressources : Écritures saintes, textes et pratiques oblats, documents de l'église, etc...)

*Parole de Dieu:* Sur ce thème, il y a beaucoup de textes inspirateurs dont nous signalons quelques-uns: Lc 4,18 “ Il m'a envoyé évangéliser les pauvres” ; Lc 10,25-37: Le bon Samaritain ; Mat 5,1ss Lc 6,20ss. Les bénédicteurs ; Mc 6,37 “. Donnez-leur vous-mêmes à manger... Mat. 25,35ss. Le jugement dernier... ”

*Documents ecclésiaux :*

*Envangelii Gaudium;* EG 37 La place de l'amour ; EG 186-216. L'inclusion sociale et ecclésiale des pauvres. ; Encyclique *Laudato Si'* et Encyclique *Fratelli Tutti*...

CERNA (Conférence des Évêques de la Région du Nord de l'Afrique) – « Serviteurs de l'espérance » : 2.2.2. L'arrivée de beaucoup d'africains subsahariens. 3.2. Une église envoyée vers les périphéries. 3.4. Une église pèlerine en compagnie (ensemble avec) des peuples en marche. 3.5 Engagement en faveur des droits humains et une participation citoyenne. 3.6. Une église eucharistique qui célèbre «la gloire de Dieu».

*Discours et homélie du Pape François lors de sa visite à Rabat.*

*Déclaration sur la fraternité humaine d'Abu Dhabi.*

*Inspiration charismatique*

*Saint Eugène de Mazenod et les premiers missionnaires oblats.* La même expérience de Eugène de Mazenod (il fut émigré, il visitait les prisonniers etc...) il a été évangélisateur des pauvres... Les activités des premiers compagnons du Fondateur et les oblats envoyés en mission étrangère qui étaient proches des pauvres...

*CC RR 1-10* c'est le cœur de notre charisme.

2.3.3. *36<sup>e</sup> Document du chapitre général «Evangelizare pauperibus...»*

Message du 36 ème Chapitre General a la Congrégation. N° 3- 4. “ L'église nous nous demande d'abandonner nos commodités pour aller aux périphéries et de travailler pour que le Règne de Dieu arrive. Partant du charisme de Saint Eugène, nous contribuerons à la défense des valeurs familiales, la défense des réfugiés, des migrants, et de toute personne victime de l'injustice, de la violence et autres formes d'abus. ”; La mission et les nouveaux pauvres (Num. 5-17) ; Num 5. Pourquoi les appelons-nous «nouveaux visages des pauvres»? Pourquoi dit-on que ce sont les nouveaux visages des pauvres ? ; Num 7. La pauvreté

spirituelle, les migrants, les situations qui demandent la justice. ; Num 12. Tels des Pèlerins et en constant discernement pour savoir identifier les nouveaux visages des pauvres dans nos provinces.

### *D'autres documents*

Le rapport de caritas Rabat sur la situation des migrants au Maroc. ; - Le Directoire pour la protection des mineurs et des adultes vulnérables de la Préfecture Apostolique du Sahara.

## DISCERNER LES APPELS

Face à cette réalité changeante des pauvres et vue la crise de la pandémie du Covid 19, vivre en état permanent de discernement : écouter la clamour des pauvres en tant que communauté. Connaître davantage et mieux la situation réelle. Découvrir les pauvres dans leurs différents aspects et dans leurs multiples visages, pour ne pas nous borner seulement à la pauvreté matérielle tout en ignorant la pauvreté spirituelle. Agir avec enthousiasme et réalisme.

On ne peut pas parler des pauvres sans remettre en question notre propre vie de pauvreté.

Être une Église en sortie, à la rencontre des pauvres. Sortir pour aller rencontrer ceux qui ne viennent pas chez nous. Encourager aussi l'accueil des plus pauvres et ce qui signifie (porte ouverte, apprendre les langues locales, etc.)

Face à nos insuffisances et aux nombreux besoins, après un serein discernement, chercher les ressources là où c'est possible d'en trouver.

Promouvoir une solide vie spirituelle qui nous aide à supporter la tension entre nos moyens précaires (impuissance) et le mandat du Seigneur de : «donnez leurs vous-mêmes à manger.»

Explorer les possibles champs d'action pour les pauvres et avec les pauvres.

Explorer la mise en pratique des propositions de l'encyclique Laudato si et Fratelli Tutti. .

Passer de l'action d'assistance à celle qui promeut les gens les plus touchés à sortir du circuit de la pauvreté et de la dépendance.

Mettre en pratique le document de politique pour la protection des mineurs et des adultes vulnérables.

## ORIENTATIONS ET STRATEGIES

Entrer en contact direct et humain avec les pauvres tout en essayant de les rendre protagonistes de leur propre cheminement. Susciter la vraie rencontre avec prudence. .

Un discernement permanent. Comme communauté, comment entreprendre une réflexion permanente sur notre action pour et avec les pauvres ? Essayer de connaître mieux et plus la réalité d'ici. Au niveau local, trouver des personnes averties qui aident les pauvres et avec lesquelles on pourra se réunir pour mieux connaître la réalité. Nous pouvons aussi profiter de l'expérience de caritas Rabat et d'autres

Trouver les stratégies communes. Identifier des possibles partenaires et Promouvoir le travail en réseaux.

Revoir les critères et la façon de faire de la Caritas à Laayoune. Discerner les besoins des personnes aidées et sur la meilleure façon de procéder. Il faudra aussi étudier les possibilités d'aider la population locale à Dakhla. Passer progressivement de l'assistance à la sensibilisation et à la promotion humaine. De même à Marsa, il faudra aussi agir de façon plus organisée pour aider les pauvres.

Les migrants: Évaluation et programmations périodiquement des projets tant à Dakhla qu'à Laayoune ou à El Marsa, visant toujours comment améliorer et les financer à long terme. Assurer la durabilité du projet.

Continuer la collaboration avec les associations locales (avec celle des enfants handicapés de Dakhla) qui nous permet d'entrer en contact avec la réalité du monde des pauvres.

Conscientisation de la communauté chrétienne sur cet aspect en l'impliquant par le biais de l'assemblée paroissiale.

Dans la mesure du possible, entreprendre aussi des actions dans d'autres champs tels, que: les prisons, les hôpitaux, etc.

Estudier la possibilité d'élaborer des projets pour la formation et la création d'emploi pour les natifs et les migrants ayant pour finalité de les faire sortir du circuit de vulnérabilité et de la dépendance créée par la pauvreté. Ceci serait une preuve de solidarité avec la société.

## LES IMPLICATIONS

Formation: Nous devons mieux connaître la réalité. Nous devons aussi nous former dans ce domaine en restant branchés sur ce que l'église fait au nord du Maroc et d'autres unités de la congrégation.

Certains parmi nous ou si pas tous, nous devrons consacrer beaucoup plus de temps pour ces activités. Études, réunions etc. Ceci concernera aussi d'autres secteurs pastoraux et missionnaires.

Il y aura aussi des éventuelles implications financières tant au niveau de formation qu'au niveau des opérations financières et les contacts avec les associations, agences, ONG etc...

Un des aspects du dialogue interreligieux est l'action commune avec les pauvres et pour les pauvres. Ceci est très important dans notre contexte et pour l'histoire de la mission. En cela, on a reconnu et apprécié beaucoup d'oblats.

C'est un aspect qui peut susciter la collaboration des ONG et des laïcs associés oblats de notre province et d'autres unités oblates, que ce soit au niveau des finances ou du personnel volontaire. Ceci a comme implication : continuer la collaboration, élaborer des projets durables et savoir rendre compte comme il se doit et dans la transparence.

*Mission OMI Sahara*

## LES OBLATS À PALERME : BÂTIR UNE COMMUNAUTÉ QUI MONTRÉ LE VISAGE CATHOLIQUE DE L'ÉGLISE

ADRIANO TITONE, OMI

**L**es Oblats de Marie Immaculée sont arrivés à Palerme vers la fin de l'année 1971<sup>1</sup>. Ils répondait à un appel du temps pour aider l'église locale à organiser la pastorale familiale. 1971-2021 : un demi-siècle de présence missionnaire riche en créativité qui a vu une bonne trentaine de frère au travail.

A leur arrivée ils habitent à « Ballarò », l'un des quartiers historique du chef-lieu de la Sicile, en plein marché, à deux pas de la Cathédrale et de la gare centrale du chemin de fer et des autobus.

A la demande de l'Archevêque, ils se consacrent à la pastorale en faveur des familles et organisent les premiers cours de préparation au mariage avec une perspective plus globale et pas seulement sacramentelle ou religieuse. « Homme – Chrétiens – Saints » : cet itinéraire très cher à notre Fondateur peut s'appliquer à la formation des couples plus que jamais.

Mais aussi, il sont nombreux les jeunes qui viennent de partout pour étudier à l'université et qui logent dans les alentour. Bientôt la maison des Oblats devient leur maison. Ils y trouvent un lieu accueillant pour étudier ou passer leur temps libre entre les cours universitaires. Là ils apprennent à partager leur vie, leur foi, joyeusement. Et voilà que la pastoral des jeunes devient un autre domaine de la mission oblate à Palerme. Avec ces jeunes, de plus en plus missionnaires avec nous, combien de missions populaires sont organisées dans la ville, mais aussi dans beaucoup de villages des alentours.

La Pastorale de la Famille, la Pastorale des Jeunes, les Missions Populaires. La Pastorale Paroissial. Un Oblat de la communauté aussi

<sup>1</sup> Le Codex Historicus enregistre au 15 septembre 1971 l'ouverture de la communauté et la signature de la convention entre S.E. l'Archevêque, Mgr Salvatore Pappalardo et le R. P. Remigio Salzillo, Provincial d'Italie. La communauté est constitué par trois Oblats : P. Giuseppe Destro, P. Carlo Bertolini et P. Luigi Russo.

s'est consacré pendant des années avec compétence et dévouement au service des toxicomanes.

### LES IMMIGRES SONT LES PLUS PAUVRES ET ABANDONNÉS

Mais les situations changent et le phénomène migratoire, qui n'est pas nouveau dans cet grande île en plein milieu de la Mer Méditerranée, prends néanmoins des proportions remarquables. Le centre historique de la ville, où les OMI habitent, est le quartier les plus intéressé. Beaucoup de familles laissaient leurs habitations vieilles et petites pour se déplacer dans des nouveaux quartiers construits ailleurs dans la ville. Et voilà que les ruelles et les nombreuses cours accueillent de plus en plus les immigrés : hommes et femmes, parfois familles entières. Venant de tous les coins du monde, ils se donnent de la peine pour gagner et envoyer de l'argent à leur chers au pays.

C'est naturel que l'attention aux immigrés porte la communauté oblate à chercher la manière de rencontrer ce monde : ils sont sans doute parmi les plus pauvres et délaissés.

Souvent les Oblats répondent à ceux qui racontent d'où ils viennent: « Mes confrères sont présent dans ton pays ! » Et la question et obligatoire : « que pouvons-nous faire pour ces pauvres frères et sœurs, pour les aider à vivre un peu plus dignement ici dans ce milieu ; à mieux s'intégrer ? ».

Dans leur cœur la mémoire des milliers d'italiens qui, à leur tour, avaient quitté leurs familles, leurs villages, leur milieu culturel et religieux pour aller en Allemagne, au Canada, en Australie, au Venezuela ou en Uruguay. Au départ, l'idée était de faire quelques années de sacrifice loin du pays pour gagner les moyens et donner un tournant au niveau de vie de leurs chers. Après les années deviennent décennies et pour beaucoup en fin cela devient pour toujours.

« Ce que vous voulez que les hommes fassent pour vous, faites-le de même pour eux ». (Lc 6,31). Ça suffirait cette parole de notre foi chrétienne, présente aussi dans le bon sens d'un saine humanité, pour se laisser interpeller directement par la vie de tous ces hommes et femmes.

Les Oblats se sont laissé interpeler toujours davantage par ces frères et sœurs qui devenaient de plus en plus nombreux dans le quartier. Ils ont commencé à chercher la manière de les rencontrer, de les aimer.

Les voilà collaborer avec les sœur Missionnaires de la Charité de Mère Teresa de Calcutta qui se dédiaient particulièrement au plus pauvre du point de vue matériel. Les Oblats de la communauté de ces temps avait pris l'habitude de parles des « pauvres de Luc » plutôt que des « pauvres de Mathieu » ses derniers étant pauvres « d'esprit » d'une manière plus générale, moins matérielle que les premiers. Les Oblats à Palerme sentent de devoir se consacrer aux uns comme aux autres.

Du point de vue religieux et de l'évangélisation, l'attention est allé aux chrétiens et particulièrement aux catholiques qui sont nombreux parmi les immigrés, bien plus que ce que l'on imagine habituellement. Permettre à ces frères et sœurs dans la foi d'être accompagnés du point de vue spirituel, est un grand service au bénéfice de toute leur vie.

### *Les Capverdiens, les Ghaneens*

Dans un premier temps un des Oblats célèbre l'Eucharistie pour les capverdiens. Peu après ils commencent à rassembler les catholiques ghanéens auprès de la paroisse du quartier nommé Albergheria. Cette communauté ethnique continue à exister jusqu'à nos jours.

### *Les Tamils*

Par ailleurs, un grand nombre de Tamil quittent le Sri Lanka à cause d'une guerre très violente qui provoque une véritable diaspora sans compter les dizaines de milliers de victimes au pays. Beaucoup se réfugient à Palerme devenant l'une des communauté plus nombreuses d'Europe. Ils atteignent le nombre de 6.000. Ils n'ont pas le temps d'apprendre l'italien, ils trouvent le travail le plus immédiat pour vivre et faire vivre leur famille. La majorité sont des catholiques et voilà que l'un ou l'autre prêtre qui vit à Rome, pour études ou autre, descend occasionnellement et prie et célèbre avec eux.

Bientôt le P. Victor Jeyasingham, qui sert à la maison générale OMI comme aide économie général, commence à descendre à Palerme tous les fins de semaine pour accompagner cette grande communauté : il les rencontre et les soutient ; il célèbre avec eux en langue tamoul et cela des années durant. Par la suite, terminé son service à Rome, il sera membre de la communauté oblate de Palerme pour continuer ce ministère à plein temps.

Après lui, la Province Oblate de Jaffna envoie un autre Oblat, le P. Vimal Parunanthu, lui aussi nommé par l'Archevêque chapelain des Srilankais dans l'Archidiocèse. Et après six années, en 2018, c'est le P. Peter R. Sebamalainathan qui prends la relève jusqu'à nos jours.

### *Les communautés ethniques s'organisent*

Entretemps, les communautés ethniques dans la ville de Palerme commencent à s'organiser d'un point de vue social et civil. Les catholiques, tout en participant avec les autres, eux aussi s'organisent entre eux-mêmes comme communautés de foi et de prière se soutenant concrètement mieux qu'ils peuvent les uns les autres. Il faut noter que ces frères et sœurs venant d'autres pays, normalement ils ont du mal à s'insérer tout court dans la vie des communautés paroissiales italiennes lesquelles généralement n'ont pas la sensibilité ni la préparation pour favoriser leur intégration ecclésiale. Eux-mêmes, de leur côté gardent dans leur cœur la nostalgie des célébrations vivantes et très animées de leur églises d'origine.

### EN OBLAT DANS LE BUREAU DIOCESAIN « MIGRANTES »

Voilà qu'un Oblat, le P. Sergio Natoli, revenu à Palerme en 2008, répond lui aussi à l'appel toujours plus fort de cette portion d'humanité, de ce défi ou mieux encore de ce « signe des temps ». Il s'insère dans le Bureau Diocésain pour les Migrants contribuant à le rendre progressivement plus actif et créatif au service de ces frères et sœurs. Il œuvre incessamment pour soutenir les communautés ethniques, que ce soit les philippins ou les mauriciens ou les latino-américains. Dans le cœur, dès tout de suite, le désir de favoriser une intégration qui respecte et valorise les richesses de chaque culture au sein de l'Eglise et de la communauté humaine. Il s'inscrit aussi à la faculté de Théologie de Palerme en essayant d'approfondir le phénomène du point de vue pastorale et théologique sans exclure toute dimension sociale, économique ou anthropologique.

Comme moyen et fruit en même temps de cette action pastorale, il donne vie à une association interculturelle qui prend le nom de « Arcobaleno di Popoli » (Arc-en-ciel de Peuples). Composé par des hommes et des femmes de plusieurs origines et cultures vivant à Palerme

depuis un certain temps, ce groupe fait d'abord l'expérience directe de la possibilité et de la richesse d'une intégration qui tient en compte le respect réciproque. Au fur et à mesure il grandit et consolide son expérience se mettant aussi au service de l'animation à l'interculturalité et à l'inclusion auprès des paroisses du Diocèse comme aussi dans d'autres milieux éducatifs et culturels de la ville. L'un des moyens étant le chant en plusieurs langues comme aussi le partage des expériences de vie, « Arcobaleno di Popoli » continue depuis des années ce précieux service de témoignage et d'animation à l'interculturalité en proclamant déjà par leur présence, qu'il est possible de marcher ensemble unis tout en gardant ses propres différences. Leur lieu de référence est une petite église intitulée à Marie Mère des Miracles que, déjà en 2009, le Cardinal de Palerme mets à leur disposition comme un lieu de visibilité pour cette animation à l'interculturalité.

Tout ce qu'on vient de raconter est la racine d'un nouveau départ que les OMI vivent à Palerme depuis deux – trois ans. Le nouveau projet missionnaire à Palerme est le résultat d'un dialogue de véritable discernement de l'Esprit soit-il interne à la Congrégation comme aussi avec l'Eglise locale.

Dans les dialogues avec le nouvel Evêque, consacré le 5 décembre 2015, les Oblats lui font part de cette volonté de se donner comme priorité à Palerme la mission avec les migrants avec la disponibilité à réorganiser la communauté en fonction de cette nouvelle orientation. L'Evêque, de son coté, exprime son désir de donner une réponse plus concrète à cet appel des pauvres. Le discernement commence à la recherche de la voie à suivre. L'Administration de la nouvelle Province Méditerranée étudie le projet qui pourrait entrée parmi les expériences de collaboration au niveau régional européen. En décembre 2016 commencent les pourparlers entre l'Evêque et le Provincial et c'est en 2018 que le discernement et après la décision deviennent opératifs : le personnel de la nouvelle communauté est choisi en partie parmi les OMI déjà à Palerme et avec l'arrivée des nouveaux. Le passage d'une situation à l'autre est progressif et permet de faire les consignes comme il faut aux nouveaux pasteurs de la paroisse que nous quittons. Entre-temps pendant que le chantier avance nous commençons à connaître et à entre dans la nouvelle réalité.

## UN NOUVEAU QUARTIER GENERAL

On choisit tout d'abord un nouveau « quartier général » pour ce nouveau départ en plein centre historique sur l'ancienne via Maqueda : une très grande église construite par les Augustiniens en 1609. Le couvent annexe abrite pour une bonne partie l'Archive historique de la Ville. Une autre partie est restaurée pour accueillir la communauté Oblate et une autre pour les activités paroissiales, culturelles et caritatives. Le passage de l'ancienne paroisse à la nouvelle est progressif surtout à cause des travaux de restructuration de la nouvelle habitation. La Paroisse de S. Nicola da Tolentino (un saint augustiniens du XIII), avec l'arrivée des Missionnaires O.M.I., devient une paroisse sui generis : pas simplement territoriale, mais aussi au service explicite des communautés catholiques ethniques.

Pour une mission interculturelle, il faut une communauté interculturelle. La communauté de Palerme connaît déjà la présence d'un frère tamoul du Sri Lanka depuis des années. Le P. Vimal qui avait remplacé le P. Victor, après 6 ans sera remplacé à son tour en fin 2018, par le P. Peter R. Sebamalainathan. Le soussigné, arrive en communauté le mois de septembre 2018 ayant terminé le service comme Procureur des Missions Etrangères de la Province. Entretemps se prépare le P. André Boucar Sène, un frère du Sénégal qui était déjà en Italie et qui arrive déjà .

Nous laissons parler le Pasteur du Diocèse de Palerme, Mgr Corrado Lorefice, en transcrivant ses paroles prononcées pendant l'homélie le jours du mandat officiel au curé et à la communauté Oblate. C'était le 11 janvier 2020, Dimanche du Baptême de Jésus au Jourdain :

S'il est vrai que cette Paroisse est une paroisse territoriale, elle est aussi une paroisse qui présente un visage particulier, spécifique. Ici, dans cette communauté, il sera évident de plus n plus que l'Eglise est rassemblée de par tous les peuples, les langues, les nations... Elle est convoquée ! Ici, dans cette communauté, nous aurons toujours davantage l'opportunité de goûter combien il est vrai que dans le Christ toute entière la famille humaine est appelée à la communion ! (...) Aujourd'hui nous sommes dans la joie puisque il est clair que l'Evangile veut entrer dans la vie des hommes en parlant la langue des hommes. (...) Nous tous, nous sommes les destinataires de la préférence de l'amour de Dieu puisque

Jésus a le pouvoir de faire de nous des enfants de Dieu. Ici, dans cette communauté il sera de plus en plus facile de comprendre que moi qui suis né en Sicile, j'ai la même vocation de celui qui est né au Burundi, en Inde au Sri Lanka, au Brésil... le même appel, la même prédilection de Dieu.

### UNE COMMUNAUTE DE COMMUNAUTES

C'est exactement dans cette direction que tous nos efforts sont orientée. Et le modèle que nous avons choisi pour réaliser ce projet est celui d'une communauté de communautés. Concrètement, nous encourageons que chaque communauté, que ce soit une des communautés ethniques ou bien une des confréries<sup>2</sup>, (nous en avons 8 dans la paroisse), puisse développer sa vie propre, sa spiritualité et sa spécificité, mais cela à l'intérieur et en harmonie avec les autres comme partie d'une seule, unique communauté chrétienne.

Voilà donc les OMI qui célèbrent l'Eucharistie ou d'autres prières avec ces différentes communautés, dans la grande église paroissiale ou bien a S. Maria dei Miracoli ou dans les chapelles gérées par les confréries.

La langue sera celle qui le plus convient à l'assemblée. Il est donc régulier que le dimanche matin pour la Messe ou le vendredi soir pour l'adoration, que l'on entende le Tamil : belle et riche langue qui revendique une tradition littéraire de plus de deux mille ans. Ce qui passent par-là, et même les touristes sont nombreux, restent admirés par l'intensité de la prière et l'harmonie des chants.

De même en est des mélodies des chants africains rythmées par les tambours et accompagnés par la danse irréfrénable. Ceux-là on les écoute tout les dimanches après midi par la communauté nigériane qui va se composant au fur et à mesure, ou chaque deuxième dimanche du mois par la communauté ivoirienne, bien nombreuse et organisée qui anime la Messe de la communauté entière.

A ce mouvement que l'on peut définir centrifuge qui va vers les différences fait balance le mouvement centripète. L'image du cycle car-

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<sup>2</sup> L'Eglise de Palerme compte 229 Confrérie de laïcs pour un total de 17.500 inscrits. Ces regroupements religieux ont commencé à exister ici à partir du XV siècle et souvent ont comme siège une église ou oratoire propre avec un patrimoine artistique considérable.

diaque de systole et diastole peut bien illustrer cette dynamique de la communauté : la systole pousse le sang à aller rejoindre les périphéries du corps pour les nourrir de ce qu'il leur faut pour vivre. Après c'est le retour du sang au cœur grâce à la diastole, pour y recevoir l'oxygène et tout le reste sans quoi la vie s'épuise. Il n'est pas facile de réaliser cette dynamique dans la communauté, mais pour ce qu'on arrive à le faire, les bénéfices sont là.

### *Les celebrations interculturelles*

L'un de ces moments intenses d'unité où la catholicité se fait visible et est la Messe interculturelle qui rassemble les différentes communautés chaque premier dimanche du mois. Plusieurs langues sont utilisées dans cette célébration, que ce soit pour les chants ou les lectures ou les prières des fidèles. Des écrans installés dans l'église assurent les traductions et donc une bonne participation des présents. La préparation demande de l'attention et des énergies, mais cela vaut la peine et l'apport de la chorale Arcobaleno di Popoli nous aide beaucoup.

Avant la pandémie, la célébration était régulièrement suivie par le repas partagés dans la joie et la fraternité : chaque groupe ou famille ou personne apporte de la nourriture typique de son pays et la table se remplit de tant de bonnes choses permettant aux présents de se régaler les gouts d'Afrique, ou d'Asie, ou d'Amérique latine qui bien concourent avec le bon plats siciliens. On recommence prudemment ces moments de fraternité qui nous ont manquaient.

Comme on le disait, la même dynamique nous l'avons appliquée avec les confréries qui vivent dans le territoire. Trois d'entre elles ont leur siège à la paroisse même : Celle d'origine et spiritualité augustinienne dite de « la Ceinture » et celle de la Soledad, d'origine et spiritualité espagnole. La troisième vient de se réorganiser après une longue léthargie. Quatre autres confréries ont leur siège dans une église dans le territoire de la paroisse. Nous partons célébrer chez eux un dimanche par mois et c'est le troisième dimanche qui les voit réunies ensemble. C'est un nouveauté qui surprend tous qu'on ait réussi à les mettre ensemble régulièrement et ce qui étonne encore plus c'est que le bien connu esprit de compétition entre les confréries fait place à l'acceptation mutuelle et à l'entraide.

### *Pas que des celebrations*

Nous avons pris du temps pour décrire une dimension de la vie communautaire, celle de LA célébration qui n'est pas l'unique et qui, en principe, devrait être le fruit et l'expression de bien d'autres telle que l'évangélisation ad intra et ad extra, la vie de charité avec les concrètes incarnations ad intra et ad extra et le témoignage prophétique qui passe à travers une insertion dans le territoire dans lequel nous vivons.

Nous pourrions exprimer cela en disant que l'autel est certainement un lieu autour duquel dans notre communauté tourne tout un monde, toute une vie. Mais nous avons un deuxième lieu central autour duquel tourne un nombre significatif de personnes : la table, la table du partage avec les pauvres aux multiples visages, la table de l'écoute... La table pourrait symboliser ce deuxième centre de vie.

Effectivement, il faut dire que la première chose qui s'est développée rapidement et presque naturellement dans la nouvelle communauté a été l'attention aux pauvres. Surtout que peu de temps après notre arrivée la pandémie a commencée à frapper très fortement surtout les personnes et les familles les plus fragiles. Nous avons donc organisé une distribution des genre e première nécessité, surtout de la nourriture, en activant aussi des canaux officiels. Un groupe de volontaire s'est constitué et, depuis lors, ne manque jamais au rendez-vous de l'accueil jusqu'à trois fois par semaine. Au temps du lock down, nous avons continué ce service tout en prenant les mesures adéquates.

L'autre table également importante est celle de l'écoute. Avec le soutien de la Fondation Migrantes Nationale et la collaboration de quelques associations déjà connues sur place, nous avons activé des points d'écoute et de services pour les besoins d'ordre légale, pour la recherche du travail ou du logement...

Ces services ouverts pas seulement aux immigrées, on connu quelques temps d'arrêt dans les moments les plus critiques de la pandémie, pour reprendre après. C'est des services bien compliqués qui nécessitent surtout de créer interaction entre les associations très nombreuses et qui s'engagent avec une incroyable générosité pour assister les sans toit comme aussi les femmes de la traite et les services sociaux et sanitaires. Mais souvent manque la coordination ce qui fait que l'efficacité n'est pas au rendez-vous. Nous avons contribué à créer un filet de rela-

tions entre tous ses agents bénévoles ou institutionnels jusqu'à rédiger une liste pour connaître et partager les contacts.

Et j'en viens au salon, symbole de la rencontre gratuite et libre. On s'assoit sur les fauteuils on parle et on se raconte ce que nous sommes, ce qui fait notre intérêt, ce qui nous fait vivre.

Actuellement cet aspect du projet est vraiment initial : le salon n'est pas encore bien aménagé pour être accueillant et capable de nous faire convenir rien que pour se connaître et partager dans la gratuité.

Nous sommes en train de constituer une bibliothèque interculturelle autour de laquelle favoriser la rencontre des personnes et des groupes de tout horizon qui désirent interagir, connaître et se faire connaître. Jusqu'à présent nous avons eu quelques occasions ponctuelles assez intéressantes ont ans en accueillant par exemple une association interculturelle qui met ensemble africains venant de plusieurs pays, avec expériences et chemins culturels et religieux très divers.

Le « salon » souvent nous le vivons sur la rue, assis sur les bancs en marbre tout au long de la via Maqueda. Là tu peux causer avec le monde. Et les enfants sont une véritable porte d'accès aux familles et aux différents groupes ethniques présents. Presque tous sont nés à Palerme. L'Italien qu'ils parlent est presque une sorte de créole chez les tout-petits et devient très bon lorsque il ont commencé la scolarisation.

Il est beau de les voir jouer ensemble tout ethnies confondus. Sans être naïfs, nous sommes bien conscients de la complexité des relations autour du phénomène de la migration et parfois les enfants avec leur simplicité révèlent tous les préjugés qui circulent dans les discours qu'ils écoutent dans leur familles ou dans la rue même. L'autre jour, un petit palermitain est venu me demander pourquoi nous avions coupé la tarte et fêté l'anniversaire d'une gitane. « Il sont salles et dangereux ! » - il m'a dit. Il s'agissait d'une mauricienne dont la finesse est la gentillesse sont vraiment rare !

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# **INTEGRATION WORK AND RESOCIALIZATION WORK: THE FOUNDATION “GIVING A HOME” IN COOPERATION WITH THE OBLATES OF THE CENTRAL EUROPEAN PROVINCE**

ALFRED TÖNNIS, OMI

## **WHY IN OGGELSBEUREN? HISTORICAL FACTS**

Oggelsbeuren is a small village of 450 souls in southern Germany, in Upper Swabia, between Ulm and Lake Constance - 15 km from the city of Biberach/Riss. It is predominantly Catholic and belongs to the municipality of Attenweiler and the district of Biberach. It borders the district Alb-Donau and the pastoral district “Ulrika Nisch” within the deanery of Biberach. In 1348, a monastery was founded here. In 1860, the Franciscan sisters of Sießen (religious sisters devoted to teaching) founded their convent in Sießen near Bad Saulgau from here. Church life and the presence of religious communities have a long tradition in Oggelsbeuren.

In 1860, the existing buildings were again utilised. Together with the “Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul”, whose motherhouse was still in Schwäbisch Gmünd, and some parish priests, the Foundation “Piuspflege” was established in Oggelsbeuren with the aim of providing support and education for the orphans.

In 1867, the children were separated by gender. 60 boys remained in Oggelsbeuren. The girls were sent to the St. Anna foster home in Leutkirch in the Allgäu. More than a hundred orphans and problem children found a temporary home in the “Piuspflege Foundation”.

In 1981, this institution received official government approval as a school for educational assistance.

In 1984, the last two Sisters of Charity were withdrawn by the provincial administration of the motherhouse in Untermarchtal.

The buildings were now used for various purposes: Kolping education work, civil war refugees, and others.

In 1998, the Hohenrodt Specialist Clinic for addicts (sponsored by Caritas) moved in.

In 2007, the clinic was handed over to the “Zieglerische Anstalten”.

On April 1, 2012, the tenant moved out.

### *Legal information*

The church foundation “Piuspflege” was managed by an administrative board and a board of directors (the respective pastor of Oggelsbeuren). The latter was changed in 1999 by an amendment to the statutes. The Oblates of Mary Immaculate, who had their community at the shrine in Schemmerhofen (11 km away) until 1.1.2016, nominated a member to the administrative board. First Father Josef Cramer assumed the task and in 2006, Father Alfred Tönnis took over. The latter became a member of the board of the “Piuspflege Foundation” after the change in the statutes in 1999 and the departure of the local parish priest, Father Max Stark.

### *On the history of development as an innovative project for receiving refugees*

With the termination of the lease by the “Zieglerische Anstalten” in December 2011, the question arose as to a sensible, alternative way to use the land and buildings. In 2011, a steering group was set up. The task was to collect ideas for the future of the foundation and to develop a concept. The foundation was again quite willing to become not only a landlord but also the sponsor of a facility. Many discussions were held. Through offensive public relations work, a broader public was also involved in this “search for the future”. The focus on receiving refugees increasingly emerged as early as 2012.

Those involved recognized and felt that something new had to be developed in this area. This was countered by the high costs of a large building property, the non-central location and the structural format.

In Germany, refugees and asylum seekers were less of a focus just a few years ago. The topic “receiving refugees” was more a marginal issue. The Balkan War and also the war in Kosovo at the turn of the millennium had set many things in motion in this area. Many still remember the reception of refugees in containers and other less humane

circumstances at that time. There was little talk of a welcoming culture and so on.

The steering group developed an initial concept. The focus was on reception, accompaniment and stabilization of refugees and asylum seekers. The board of directors supported these ideas, and the decisions were unanimous.

The attitude of the district was rather negative: the decentralized location counted particularly strongly. The diocese of Rottenburg - Stuttgart likewise adopted a more rejecting stance: there were, among other things, doubts over incalculable risks and high costs.

The Oblate religious community supported these ideas, and the Provincial Council decided that Father Alfred Tönnis should be involved in the development of the project and that two Oblate priests should support him in his work as the senior pastor of the Schemmerhofen pastoral district. Countless conversations were held by all involved. Discussions took place on various levels and a burdensome “door to door selling” was necessary.

The project was presented in the municipal council and in the local parish council - unanimous resolutions in each case motivated the activists tremendously. The local pastor, the joint committee of the Ulrika Nisch pastoral district and the local parish council were involved. A lot was done media-wise. The public was involved in the project development. There was also a constant search for sponsors. Volunteers were approached and thus a foundation for a possible project realization was laid.

A first image film was shot by Andreas Ege. A second image film was made by Lukas Hoffmann.

### *Arab Spring and the Syrian conflict*

These two major events naturally fueled the discussion about refugee reception. Mass migrations and more than 50 million refugees worldwide are facts that have to be faced. Parallel to the development of the project in Oggelsbeuren, there were these events, which attracted more and more media and political attention. There was and is hardly a day on which the topic of refugee reception was and is not present.

The years of war in Syria (from March 2011), the associated atrocities and the turmoil in the entire region are no short-lived phenome-

na. They will continue to be a major challenge - for the people on the ground, but also for Europe as a host region.

The warring conflicts in Africa are another factor in this happening and in this challenge.

### *Pope Francis' stance*

With the election of Pope Francis in 2013, the issue of refugee assistance and refugee reception received unprecedented support. The Pope boldly addressed this issue on his travels, through his life witness and his words to religious worldwide. They were clear words, and Francis exhorted and urged everyone to put the words into practice. How is the charism of the founders of religious orders lived concretely? With us Oblates, shouldn't the focus of our work lie in the care for the poorest of the poor?

For me, the election of Pope Francis is a gift from God, the right man at the right time. And then the stabilizing Pope Emeritus Benedict as support....

### WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT THIS NEW TYPE OF REFUGEE RECEPTION FACILITY?

The special feature of this refugee reception facility is already shown in its name “Giving a Home”. With our foundation, we want to give people who have lost their home a bit of home. However, this also means finding out in advance what ideas people associate with the word “home”. That’s why we traveled to these refugees in the run-up to developing the concept - whether in Lebanon, Egypt, Malta or Greece. Schools for the children, work, medical care and security were keywords in this context. Thus, we addressed these areas: three kindergartens in cooperation, a school, doctors, work and training places became part of our network. We also created a chapel as an interreligious space with a prayer rug and more - who knows what religion our refugees have and will have.

Picking them up at the airport or in the reception camp Friedland is part of a welcoming culture. We did as much as possible. Taking good care of our protégés and accompanying them characterizes the daily work of our whole team. Socializing in the evening, celebrating parties or evenings of encounter evoke feelings of being at home.

For our Syrians, smoking shisha is part of home. This must also be made possible.

Some children are difficult, traumas are noticeable and omnipresent. One can grumble about the light in the rooms all night, but sleeping is not possible without light.

Some volunteers offer activities such as going swimming, going to town, or exploring a farm. People meet people - both sides feel that. Sister Christina, Father Mayer and I as a refugee chaplain and religious priest experience no fear of contact with these Sunni Syrians or others in the house.

Many things are different in the daily rhythm with the Arabs, Africans, etc. Education is practiced differently. Women celebrate with women separately from men. There is no alcohol on the table. The food and the way of eating are different. But the laughter, the joy, the sadness, the crying and the outcry about more dead in Syria leave their mark in the faces of those who want to give them a home. Some things have to be endured - this is also part of giving a home.

Two religious communities were involved in this project: The Vincentian Sisters of Untermarchtal and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. They were present through their commitment on site. In 2017, the religious sister was transferred to another place. The Franciscan Sisters of Reute sent a novice for 3 months. The Oblates send pre-novices for practical training.

Many Syrians, Iraqis and Africans know Christian values from their homeland. Thus, Christmas Eve was celebrated interreligiously in both years: The Sura Maria from the Koran was read aloud in Arabic and German. The biblical story of Jesus's birth was also read in both languages. The manger was spoken about, songs were sung. Then there was a personal gift under the Christmas tree for everyone, lovingly wrapped by the countrywomen from Oggelsbeuren.

The Biberach district office has taken a new approach with our facility: the care of refugees and asylum seekers has been delegated to the foundation. In the steering group "Occupancy", arrangements are regularly made between the district office, the Protestant Church, Caritas and the foundation. Individual cases, anomalies and developments are also discussed.

In January 2015, the local council of Oggelsbeuren and the responsible local council of Attenweiler were invited to a meeting. All confirmed a conflict-free course of the refugee reception in Oggelsbeuren. This is how things can continue, they said.

At the end of 2015, the local council with the mayor Mrs. Brobel also decided to increase the number of refugees and to take them into the main house of the foundation. Starting in 2016, 120 refugees lived in the house of the foundation. The representatives of the foundation were always in favor of this. The district office Biberach welcomed this perspective.

Since January 1, 2016, two Oblates, at times there were even three, have been living under one roof with the refugees in the main house of the foundation. Rooms have been set up on the 3rd floor. Due to the dissolution of the Oblate community in Schemmerhofen, there was enough furniture and more available. Now there will be life on the 3rd floor. Regular church services are offered in the community chapel. Pastoral care is now well provided. We share life as a community, share grief and perceive worries and needs. We celebrate when there is something to celebrate. We accompany where accompaniment is needed.

#### PASTORAL CARE IN THE AREA OF TENSION BETWEEN RECEPTION AND DEPORTATION

First, it is certainly important to be clear about the term pastoral care. Are only ordained men pastors? What are the prerequisites for this? The topic is seen and discussed in many different ways, also in the field of ecumenism. In my view, there are two areas in pastoral care: accompanying pastoral care and selective pastoral care. Media work is a kind of selective pastoral care - we reach people selectively with spiritual impulses. We open spaces for encounters without setting a goal. We meet each other and let this encounter, this impulse work in us. Something moves man and works in him. Selective pastoral care extends to people of all colours. In addition, there is the accompanying pastoral care. It is a longer process and involves "meeting more often". The pastor accompanies this process by listening, by impulses and conversation or prayer.

It seems that pastoral care is a very complex topic. Especially when pastoral care has to distinguish itself from psychology, psychiatry, talk

therapy, trauma therapy and other therapeutic forms. Pastoral care is not a therapy - but it can open, support and accompany. Jesus is always the role model.

A brief digression: Jesus comes to Jericho. The tax collector Zacchaeus wants to see Jesus as he is. He climbs a mulberry fig tree and observes the scene. Then Jesus goes to him and addresses him: "Come down quickly from the tree. I want to be your guest." Zacchaeus takes Jesus with him. Then he goes through a major change: he wants to give half of his fortune to the poor and he wants to give back the multiple of his frauds. Jesus accepts this and blesses him and his house.

Zacchaeus wants to see Jesus. He is curious. He is not looking for pastoral care, for a meeting place. He hides in the tree, does not want to be seen. Jesus comes. He sees him. Why, we do not know. He organises a meeting place. He invites himself into Zacchaeus' home. He meets Zacchaeus in his safe zone at home. It is not a spectacular visit.

Encounter takes place. Zacchaeus changes. He offers repentance. Something is set in motion in him. Jesus takes up what Zacchaeus offers. He blesses his voluntary conversion. It is to be a blessing for Zacchaeus and also for his family.

Pastoral care is often a result of "coincidences". One meets a person by chance. The inner readiness for communication comes from this encounter. One can certainly include terms like curiosity, surprise, spontaneity in this dynamic of encounter. Jesus awakens curiosity. He surprises, provokes spontaneity. This is how this process of pastoral care begins. Hospitality follows and certainly the feeling in Zacchaeus: God is involved. Zacchaeus changes, he undergoes a transformation. He wants to start a process of making amends. Jesus blesses all this - without asking for more. This is how pastoral care must be. So much for the digression.

At the beginning of the work here in the "Giving a Home Foundation" it was about receiving refugees. For me, as a refugee chaplain, the question now was how I could best provide pastoral care for these refugees. I benefited from the fact that we developed our own project - the people responsible for the foundation and also the Central European Province through the provision of our brother Oblates.

I also benefited from the fact that, while still a parish priest in Mitterbiberach, I had been involved in the reconstruction of facilities and

the care of refugees in Kosovo in 1999/2000. I was there 12 times with relief supplies. We helped to build up the hospital in Prisren, the second largest city (once German occupied zone).

So now, from May 2014, the refugees came to us, mostly Syrians. Some families and many single people. Almost all of them were Muslims. Soon there were more than 70 people.

At first, it was about getting to know each other. To facilitate simple meeting spaces. The volunteers here and also both of us Oblates (Fr. Mayer and Fr. Alfred) gave language lessons. In this way, we supported the government agencies. Where can I find a doctor? How do I get there? What about professional training? What about the residence permit? These were some of the many questions.

Two joint projects were started. An opera project and a circus project. Own performances followed. Often we sat together. We liked to cook. We smoked shisha together. We conducted integration activities every year in August at Lake Constance in a youth hostel. Everything was aimed at getting to know each other, finding trust in each other. I saw it as important to let no one feel that they were objects of conversion attempts.

Later, some people told me that this fear had already been there for a while: we were a Christian foundation, the people in charge Christians or even priests and religious. However, as we came to know each other better, fears disappeared and turned into questions: How do you live as religious? Can you live without a woman? Do you Christians welcome us Muslims? And many more questions. A basis of trust developed, which also led to the fact that some went to church services.

We had designed our chapel in the house to be interreligious. The front part showed an altar, pews, etc. The back half of the chapel looked more like a mosque: laid out with carpets, the prayer rug on the wall faced toward Mekka, etc. This constellation, however, never worked out. The chapel was used only by Christians. They wanted to have their own room.

It had been shown, however, that the celebration of Christmas Eve saw positive development. The Sura Mary from the Quran and our Bible passage were read aloud. The nativity scene was the focus. - Who do you know? Who do you find in the Quran, etc. The volunteers had then wrapped a gift for each refugee. Good Friday was celebrated in the

same way. Each refugee was invited to recite an intercession and some had written down their story of suffering. In the conversation about it, of course, differences became clear, but also similarities.

All of this was the emphasis of my work here at the foundation for several years, together with the team, to give the refugees something of a home - without concealing the ultimate home with God. It was about accompanying the integration process into our German reality. Mutual appreciation for not only our cultural but also our religious differences is most important to us. We can indeed learn something from our refugees. They also may change us.

At this point, I would like to draw attention to a new dimension that was added in the course of the years: the situation of deportation. Sometimes we had accompanied these refugees for a longer period of time, also pastorally. In many cases trust had grown. And then the police would arrive at 2 a.m. to deport them. A bad awakening then follows. For these people, much is falling apart. But also for us companions. For me personally, the worst situation is when you know a few days in advance about the impending deportation and you are not allowed to say anything. Pastoral care sometimes means "carrying your cross", enduring the crying, even swallowing the anger. In these situations, I realize what Jesus must have experienced and also the people who were traveling with him. The mother under the cross! The blood sweating of Jesus!

THE UPROOTING OF MANY PEOPLE AS A SIGN OF THE PRESENT TIME. THE  
POOR, THE UPROOTED, COME TO US. WE DO NOT NEED TO GO TO THEIR  
HOMELAND - OR DO WE?

Flight is a huge topic: flight of entire peoples, flight of individuals, reasons for flight, and so on. In the Bible we find countless examples. For example, the flight of Jonah from God's command to go to Nineveh. We may know smaller tendencies to flee from our own lives: We don't want to meet with such-and-such and "flee" elsewhere. Or we cannot do much with tasks entrusted to us and concentrate our activities on areas we prefer.

Then there are escape tendencies that combine with alcohol, drugs or other things. Work is hard, I need a balance and then don't notice how this balance becomes my main activity. Addiction has a lot to do with escape.

I can escape from relationships or escape into relationships. I can escape to a purely religious world - which then becomes almost an oasis of peace for me.

I can flee to the Internet, build my own parallel world there. This then sometimes becomes my sole reality. There I am who I want to be.

I could continue this list. In this context, however, I am concerned with people's rootlessness. This certainly takes place through a flight into another world - especially if this is final. Many refugees come from collectivistic societies. They have grown up that way, socialized that way. Family is the most important factor. In contrast, here in Germany (Europe), they come to a more individualistic society. The well-being of the individual, the body orientation, but also the standards of individuality and happiness, which the media set here, are other aspects of life. In addition, there is the exuberance here. People are flooded with possibilities. Here you have to make decisions at an early age. Back home, there was no such thing. Things were decided by others - including the choice of the spouse.

In addition to this uprooting, there is the huge field of escape possibilities, which I have described above: Escape into violence, escape into drugs, escape into the Internet and much more.

These uprooted people come to us now, especially since 2011. Uprooted people need support - not a support that takes over their lives, but a support that values their past, their being, support that people have found in Jesus. We can this way think of the support that the tax collector Zacchaeus found with Jesus.

If we believe that God has created this world and that he loves every human being and has given an unconditional 'yes' to him, then this also applies to these uprooted people. God always wants conversion, that is, always change. These uprooted people change us:

By coming to us, they make it clear how well we are doing. They get us out of our revolving around ourselves - these uprooted people challenge us. Poverty is not somewhere in Africa, it is at our doorstep. We are reminded of the diaconal mission of our church, also very concretely at a local level. It changes all those who engage in it and place themselves in the mind-set of our refugees. It brings different religions together to talk to one another, bring God into play, show interest in the subject of interreligiousness.

After the many years that missionaries have gone to other countries and missions have been founded, we are experiencing the fate of uprooted people here with us. Giving money for mission projects can also be a way of pushing aside one's own personal readiness for confrontation. I can throw a euro on the beggar's plate and go on my way and at the same time can avoid asking him in a personally appreciative way, what he really needs.

In this context, I always think of the story in Luke 10:29-37. There lies one who had been attacked by robbers. A priest happened to pass by and went his way. A Levite came and passed by. A Samaritan did not just help with money. He took him with him and cared for him. The uprooted, the refugees challenge us - concretely here on location.

I also believe that it is important to bear witness in these countries, to testify about Jesus here on site, and to bear witness to his love for us.

In Syria (I have been to Lebanon twelve times and to Syria three times in the last few years) there are maybe 10% Christians left. There are hardly any religious communities there. Testimonies of the Good News, like our monasteries, give hope. And if such a witness site is still connected with a diaconal work, it encourages people to stay on the spot and also to deal with us.

God's charisms are so diverse. He moves some to go into the world - as Paul exemplified it for us. Others he moves to give witness here in a concrete and creative way. I am convinced that all charisms do exist. Are we looking for the ones we want? Or can we engage with what God sends us?

Cooperation is important, networks are important - across religious and cultural boundaries. Our network here includes many different people with different charisms. Sometimes a project suddenly develops because a person with a special charism has joined.

Are we charisma focused? Structure oriented or traditional oriented within the meaning of "it has always been this way"?

Uprooted people always confront us with our own roots. Where do I have my roots? How strong are they? In what state are they? My personal roots? My roots as an Oblate? As a family member or member of our religious family?

## BEING A BREEDING GROUND FOR UPROOTED PEOPLE SO THAT NEW ROOTS CAN GROW AND DEVELOP AGAIN

I would like to begin by quoting the Jesuit Father Alfred Delp who wrote while in prison in 1945: “Whether we will once again find the way to man depends on the return of the church to the service of humanity. By this I mean joining man in all his situations, following him and wandering after him even into the uttermost lostness.”

For me, such an “extreme lostness” is the state of being “uprooted”. I have lost my roots, my emotional bond, my support, my securities. This includes my homeland and also my perspective for the future.

Refugees have lost their homeland, lost their social environment, lost their accustomed surroundings. They have lost roots that formed them through their life story. In addition, there is sometimes violence that they have seen or experienced with their own body.

The Internet with its flood of images and the social networks with their unlimited contact possibilities and temptations produce dream worlds as a substitute for the present-day reality. This is how needs are being awakened. The idea to escape from the harsh reality is being reinforced. Thus, disappointments are in store for many. The dream world turns out to be a real “dream” world.

But how find a way back to reality again? How to cope with the mixture of disappointment, frustration and a longing for a life worth living?

I would like to bring the term “longing” into play. I believe that every human being has three particular longings:

The longing for people. The longing for God (or transcendence). The longing for oneself. These three longings move every human being. They move him quite differently through the different phases of life.

No human being can live without other people. He needs other people, the echo of others, community as encouragement, strengthening and corrective and much more. Even the monks on Mount Athos (an autonomous monastic republic with 20 monasteries and about 2500 monks of various Orthodox traditions in Greece) need community. Even the hermits - kept to a minimum, of course. I have been there seven times. The longing for people is lived differently. It can even become an addiction: I can't stand being alone. I always have to have people around me. Even if it's just through music or something else.

The second is the longing for God or for transcendence of any kind. We as religious have our eye on God the Creator. God who is present in his creation. God who is close to us and yet sometimes so far away. God whom we sense, to whom we would like to be close. But we will only see him face to face in heaven. We have a longing for him. As Christians, of course, we follow Jesus Christ. People without religion, in my opinion, have a similar longing for transcendence that they name differently: Karma or other perspectives. However, I believe that every human being has a longing of this kind. This longing is also lived differently. It too can become an addiction: Only God, only mission, only worship, and so on. And nothing else matters.

The third is the longing for oneself. What lives inside me? What are my talents and abilities? What has happened in my past? Where are my roots? How am I genetically determined? What have I experienced along the way? What is working in me? Doctors, healers, fortune tellers and many more are contacted. This longing can also become an addiction. Revolving around myself becomes my purpose in life.

It is important to keep a good eye on these three longings. When I deal with sick people, I often find scars, fractures, wounds in these three areas.

Surely, I can also include these longings into God's commandment of love: love for God, love for my neighbour, love for myself.

The refugees, the uprooted, have their longings working in them. Thus, we must encounter them in their longings.

When we encounter them in their longings, that is, create concrete connecting factors, we prepare a breeding ground for a new root formation. These connecting factors should be taken into account when addressing the scars, injuries and wounds of their longings. These can be religious connecting factors, but don't have to. The uprooted person is the focus. It is about him or her and not about what I would like.

In my view, something is crucially important. I work as a person, as a pastor, and as a religious to whom Jesus and his way of dealing with people is important. I work as an Oblate according to the charism of our Founder Eugene de Mazenod, who in 1818 wrote: "The Oblates are called to be co-workers with the Redeemer, co-redeemers of people". Through our work, the love of God has "hand and foot". We pass on what incites our longing again and again.

I can bring the nutrient soil to the uprooted. I can be nutrient soil myself. Which roots, however, will grow and how strong they will be and where they will reach out to must be set in motion by the one on whose behalf I work. In all the work I do, there is a testimony involved: God loves you. God wants to reach you. God wants to heal you. For me, this is also a reassurance. It is not I who bring happiness, but the one who works through me. It takes pressure off the daily burden. Thus, spirituality is down to earth and has a hand and a foot, so to speak.

At the end of this report, I would like to thank Fr. Athanasius Wedon who assisted me with it. Finally, with the above-mentioned quotation from Fr. Alfred Delp in mind, I also wish to add my voice to Father Delp's appeal. If the church sets out on this path again, it will find the way to the people again. Not only we as people, as Oblates, but the whole church must take on the "stable smell" of this world if we want to be really with the people. Pope Francis used this image of the "stable smell" shortly before he took office in 2013.

*Here at the "Giving a Home Foundation", we have a prayer that continually accompanies us:*

Loving God. Merciful God. Gracious God. Appreciative God.  
Show us the way. Send us Your Spirit.  
Give us the gift to recognize the signs of the times.  
Give us the strength to tackle the ills of this time.  
Give us the courage to jump over walls.  
Give us the love for the poor and the poorest.  
Give us the joy of serving You.  
Give us the courage of Saint Paul.  
Give us the competence of Saint Peter.  
Give us the spirituality of the Blessed and the Saints.  
Give us the consistency of Pope Emeritus Benedict.  
Give us a vision of the world which Pope Francis exemplifies for us.  
May God's blessing be with us.

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## A MISSIONARY WORK WITH HAITIAN IMMIGRANTS IN SÃO PAULO

SÉRGIO DE SANTANA, OMI

**T**he Tabor Social Project is an institution that was created in 2010 in the city of São Paulo - SP - Brazil, with the intention of welcoming families in situations of social vulnerability who need support and assistance so that they can have a dignified life. At its birth, at the time under the government of Fr. Rubens Pedro Cabral, OMI, as Provincial, he coordinated the Provincial Treasurer, Fr. Pedro Curran, OMI, remembered by all until today, for the good management with which he guided.

Later, it was necessary to replace his coordinator, and at this moment, Br. Geraldo Groenen, OMI, famous for his listening gift, contributed in a very positive way. The Project was born with the intention of welcoming Brazilian and foreign families, and most of the families of other nationalities that we serve come from Haiti.

This impelled us to create a scheme of work and social assistance that could meet the greatest needs of this contingent that comes to us every day. Further on, we will present a little more in depth the services offered and how this contributes in a very significant way to the social insertion of Haitians in our country.

Throughout these eleven years of existence, the Oblate Province of Brazil has been through changes of Provincials, and all of them have always supported in an unrestricted way the missionary work developed there with the Haitian people. We emphasize that the in memoriam Fr. Francisco Rubeaux, OMI, accompanied our work very closely and never spared efforts to offer everything we needed to move forward.

After my Priestly Ordination I was nominated Coordinator of the Project, and started to follow it closely, implementing new actions, projects and courses aiming at a growth of the activities we offer to our assisted ones. Fr. Lindomar, our current Provincial of Brazil, seeing in recent times that the facilities of the Project were not very adequate, at

the end of 2020, he gave us a new Headquarters, in a place that enables us to offer many more services as we will have the opportunity to show below.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE SERVICES OFFERED BY THE TABOR SOCIAL PROJECT

The main objective of the services we offer in the above mentioned Social Project is the strengthening of family bonds and a humanization in what refers to their social insertion since their arrival in Brazil until the moment we start attending them. The general situation of the Haitians when they arrive in our country is in general very difficult and cries out for a quick and effective response from our Church, especially us Oblates, as the Preface of our Constitutions and Rules teaches us.

In addition to printing a rhythm of social assistance in concern with the charisma of our religious family, we also have always in view what the laws of social assistance of the state, known as: "SUAS" Unified System of Social Assistance. And for this structure of social assistance to the Haitian people to function well and meet all their basic needs, besides my person as Coordinator, we count on the presence of three employees hired and paid by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, volunteers and the Post-Novitiate Formands who contribute a lot in this noble mission of being the voice of these voiceless people of society.

Generally speaking, dignity is the great flagship of all the services offered by our Project to the Haitians in Brazil, which is why, as we will show below, we are constantly updating our form of mission and presence in this Social Project. For several reasons, our mission is very challenging, and this only increases our vigor and desire to help them because we are aware that the greatest difficulty is their insertion into the Brazilian social reality. Therefore, we will now briefly describe each of the Workshops we have and their purpose.

#### *Art Workshop*

In this workshop, the families are encouraged to develop their gifts of creation, and this is a way for us to contribute to the strengthening of bonds, since the young professional responsible for this service is able to promote a great social interaction among the assisted ones. In the beginning, there was some resistance from some women, who didn't think

they were capable of being creative, but little by little this resistance was overcome thanks to the good dynamic that we have.

During the weekly meetings it is always proposed that each participant learns to create some kind of drawing on clothes or paper, and the result of this is usually kept for later exhibition, which makes them feel very valued. We usually talk about women because, as a rule, 90% of the public that comes in search of our services is formed by them. However, it is important to emphasize that whenever the male public comes to us, they are also offered the same possibilities of help, as we will show throughout this article.

### *Music Workshop*

The main objective of this workshop, when we included it in the program, was to use it as a way for the families to open up a little more, and then, to get more engagement from them in the other activities we have. We are very thankful to God for the Workshops we have, in the person of Carol, who has recently been working a lot on issues related to female empowerment.

It is remarkable and very gratifying to see how this workshop has been giving positive results in our mission. Thanks to God and to the support of the Provincial, Fr. Lindomar Felix da Silva, OMI, and his Council, for a better development of this workshop, the Oblate Province of Brazil has donated all the musical instruments, something that has greatly encouraged the participating families, many of whom had never had the opportunity to even play an instrument. This fills us with joy, because much more than just teaching them how to sing and play an instrument, we have been able, through this workshop, to show each family that they are capable of learning something new, which for immigrants is something of enormous importance.

### *Portuguese language Workshop*

This is one of the most sought after workshops by the Haitians who come to us, for obvious reasons, because without knowing the local language, everything becomes much more difficult. This led us to set up two classes, where one is coordinated by an oblate post-novice and the other by a workshop worker hired by the Project. We have a great

feeling of gratitude for each one of the workshop participants, because it is beautiful to see in the eyes of the men and women being assisted, the joy when they begin to learn our language, and when they manage to enter the job market, as we have seen so many times.

All the teaching material used in the Portuguese classes is offered by the Oblate Province of Brazil, and every month we follow up on the performance of the Workshops through the reports we receive. In the planning and evaluation meetings, we always try to improve the methodological conduct of the workshops, aiming to adapt them to what best meets the needs of the Haitians, because we know that much more than purely and simply teaching a language, we are concerned that they also know a little of Brazilian culture, as we consider very important in the insertion process of any foreigner.

#### DONATIONS DISTRIBUTION

Donations are distributed monthly to the Brazilian and Haitian families assisted by our Tabor Social Project. Normally they are offered food, clothes, shoes and other goods considered as basic necessities. This makes us very happy, because we know that the hunger, the cold, and the impossibility of acquiring these items on their own generates in them a great feeling of helplessness and hopelessness.

The food we get comes to us from different places. The Oblate Province of Brazil donates us 25 baskets of food every month. The parish of Santíssimo Sacramento, which is an old partner of ours, contributes monthly with the donation of a good quantity of food, clothes and shoes. And there are months that we still get food from other partners, thanks to the social assistance network we have.

By following the Gospel dynamic of sharing the loaves and fishes, we have been able to attend to a large number of families who come to us. Officially there are about 30 to 35 families, but in practice it is possible to reach about 40 to 45 families. In the last few years, there has been a growing network of social assistance institutions, confessional or not, in the city of São Paulo, motivated mainly by the great exodus of Haitians that every day are looking for more shelter in Brazilian lands, due to the delicate socio-political-economic situation in their country.

## VOLUNTARY SERVICE

One of the things that we have always valued so much in the mission carried out by the Tabor Social Project, was the work done by our Volunteers, who in a generous and effective way, are always with their hands outstretched to contribute to our efforts to offer quality social assistance as close as possible to what the Haitian immigrants need.

In this way, we have some men and women who, in a very beautiful way, dedicate a little of their precious and valuable time to help us in the different activities offered by our Social Project. There is a woman who accompanies our beneficiaries when they need to go to medical appointments or solve situations related to their visa with the Federal Police.

We also count on the presence of a Psychologist, very respected in the city of São Paulo, who meets with the women always bringing important themes to their lives and self-esteem. He is famous for always having a very loyal audience, considering the fact that, as in his lectures and conversation rounds themes from the daily life of these women are approached, they feel valued, represented, visualize their life stories, and leave each meeting with a new vision about how they should forward certain situations they face.

We also have a lawyer that helps us on a voluntary basis, whose function is to provide training to our assisted families about what their rights are in Brazil. This is very important when we work with Haitian immigrants, because as they are people who were not born or raised in our country, as a rule, it is common for them not to know how far they can go in terms of demanding from the State/Local Government due to their lack of knowledge of the laws that govern the whole issue of immigration in Brazilian territory.

Another group that participates voluntarily in the work of assistance to the Haitians are our Formands of the Post-Novitiate of St. Eugene of Mazenod. Their presence is very valuable and they contribute in a very significant way in assisting the Haitians. We have students in formation who are Portuguese-speaking; some help us by doing translations when we need to communicate with those who are arriving in Brazil and still don't speak a word of Portuguese; some help our Social Workers in the visits, where besides translating the dialogues, follow-

ing the example of what the vicissitudes of our Mazenodian Charisma teaches us, they try to be the voice of those excluded who have no voice or a turn in society.

### COVID-19 PANDEMIC IMMIGRANT ASSISTANCE

In these challenging times due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, the Tabor Social Project has tried to offer all the necessary support, so that the families we serve have their right to treatment safeguarded. Here in Brazil the federal government has created a program called: “Emergency Aid”, which consists of the donation of a certain monthly financial amount that has been helping families in difficult times.

However, for people to be able to get this help, there is a path to be followed, which for immigrants is not easy at all. In this sense, the Tabor Social Project, since the launch of the program until today, has been helping families to obtain this money that helps them a lot in their subsistence.

The biblical principle of sharing has never been more important, necessary, and put into practice than at this time that the whole of humanity has been going through. We highlight that we receive donations from some Non-Governmental Organizations, as well as from the Franciscans, with whom we have a joint work.

With the adoption of restrictive measures by the Brazilian health authorities to stop the advance of the Coronavirus, and considering that many of the Haitians we serve work as street vendors, and for many months could not be there, the requests for help increased substantially. Besides this, many other Haitian families started to look for our Project, with the most varied demands, including many cases of people who were not our assistants but who come to us and are helped; and in the months that followed the harshest government restrictions, we gradually adapted our form of assistance.

For many months the Project was closed, but working remotely by phone, and in person only for food donations. The temporary closure was due to the infection of one of our employees with the Coronavirus and also to protect our employees. During this time the Oblate Province of Brazil has maintained the salaries of all our employees, avoiding losses and layoffs for them, something that makes us all very grateful to the Provincial, Fr. Lindomar, OMI, and his Council, who have always

given much support to our efforts of evangelization and social action through this work with the immigrants.

### MISSIONARY DAY

In the pre-pandemic phase, we had an event called “Missionary Day”, which consisted of a moment of global action, where we offered several useful services to our assisted families. Its first edition took place in a hall kindly lent by the Scalabrinian Missionaries. The other editions took place at the Project’s headquarters.

On Missionary Day we provided cultural moments with groups we invited to present dances and songs. Each workshop worker is also guided to prepare a presentation of their workshop, and this is something very commendable, because it makes the assisted feel valued, since they see everyone appreciating the fruits of their labor.

Another positive factor of this event was the fact that it was a way to strengthen ties with partner entities, which saw in this event a way to see in practice the fruits of what we offered.

### SOCIAL MEDIA

Throughout my time as Coordinator of our Tabor Social Project, I have implemented means of disseminating our social and missionary actions through the modern Social Media available to us in the Oblate Province of Brazil. This is very important because it is a way that both the Oblates and all the people of God can closely follow the news that are emerging in our daily journey.

Another factor that makes us believe in the importance of spreading the word about our daily work in the Project is to help immigrants from Haiti and other nations to know where to find support when they arrive in our country. We also intend to implement a sense of transparency in everything we do, because it is only fair that the Oblates of Mary Immaculate know how every penny invested in the evangelization of our Brazilian and foreign brothers and sisters is used.

Another very positive aspect of our presence in the social networks is the credibility of our Project with the organized civil society organizations, which, as they perceive the smoothness and seriousness of our work, not only respect us, but can open doors for us to have more free-

dom in our actions. The organized charity makes the evangelizing journey of the Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate in the Province of Brazil, become, little by little, an authentic reference in the following of welcoming and guiding the immigrant brothers and sisters, within the concept so defended by our beloved Pope Francis of being a Church that goes forth.

### THE PASTORAL CARE OF THE POST-NOVICES IN THE TABOR SOCIAL PROJECT

Something very important that has been happening for some years now, is the presence of the Post-Novices of the Scholasticate of St. Eugene de Mazenod exercising pastoral activity in our Social Project. Every year two Formandi are assigned to accompany the Project, but remembering that all the Post-Novices during the year are there helping at some point in the various activities we have.

One Formandi helps as a Portuguese Language Worker, who helps the Haitians to learn our language, which helps a lot in finding a job and in their adaptation to the Brazilian culture and customs. Knowing the importance of learning the language, we have recently formed two classes, both full of students, which leads us to believe that they enjoy the classes and are satisfactorily absorbing the content always very well prepared by the two Specialists assigned to this function.

The other Post-Novice, usually a foreigner, is in charge of helping our Social Workers in their visits to the assisted families. The importance of this centers on the fact that Haitians often feel more comfortable sharing their lives and needs when there is a foreigner in the visiting group as well. In recent years, as we have a Nigerian and a Cameroonian Graduating Student, who can speak French, this becomes another factor of capital importance, because the Haitians who have recently arrived in Brazil, in their totality, come without speaking a word of Portuguese.

And in this aspect our Graduates often help as translators, which turns out to be very good, especially in forwarding their documentation to obtain a visa to stay in Brazil with the Federal Police. Having Trainees who help us with the translation is a great Grace from God, because it is not easy to find qualified people in this field.

Every month our Project receives donations from a parish in downtown São Paulo, and our Post-Novices are the ones who pick them up and take them to the Project. It is very beautiful to observe the availability of our Formands and their joy in collaborating in this work of charity and evangelization of the Haitian people. At the same time, it is also noteworthy to see the gratitude of the families assisted, who not only cherish a great consideration for these graduates who are currently working there pastorally, but also remember with nostalgia those who worked there in the past; this clearly shows us that much more than purely and simply a relationship at the level of Assistant - Assisted, our presence at the present moment goes far beyond, making us realize that we form a large family.

Another noteworthy fact of the Formandi's presence in the Tabor Social Project is in the construction of an oblate identity in that mission. We can affirm this because, in each work they do there, they make sure that the families are aware that behind all this social network is a religious missionary family founded by a French warrior, who, with audacity, confidence and humility, gathered men with the intention of taking the Gospel in a different way to the poor and abandoned.

## CONCLUSION

Thus, we can conclude that the missionary work of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate with Haitian immigrants in the heart of the fifth largest megalopolis in the world, which is the city of São Paulo, has been a focus of light in this difficult tunnel that is the life story behind every glance of a Haitian who arrives here every day. Working with them, we are in a way updating the vicissitudes of our Charisma, and breaking new ground.

I state without any fear of error that what is challenging is also Sacred in this ministry, where in each meeting, each workshop, each service given to them, we allow St. Eugene to continue living within us and through our missionary pastoral activities. The Haitians evangelize us a lot and teach us how to live well the Religious Vows that we once solemnly made in the Congregation; by their poverty they teach us that they possess a lot, because they always manage to share among themselves so that they form a well united community; by the way they show love for their family that stayed in Haiti and that they struggle a

lot in Brazil, and gather money to bring them back one day, they teach us what it means to be chaste and how to consecrate this to God in a simple and humble way.

With the respect they have for us and the way they manage to adapt to our Brazilian way of life, and in this way insert themselves in our way of being, they show us what it is to be obedient, learning to fully trust in God's will. And finally, we can attest to the fact that the Haitians clearly have the gift of living the spirit of the Vow of Perseverance, because even in the face of the many difficulties they face in their daily lives, we see the enormous and beautiful testimony of men and women who never give up, believing that tomorrow can always be better than today.

And already by way of conclusion I express all my joy and gratitude to God and to the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate of the Province of Brazil, in the person of our re-elected Provincial, Fr. Lindomar Felix da Silva, OMI, and his Councilors, Fr. Pedro Curran, OMI, Fr. Antonio Pereira Sobrinho, OMI, and Fr. Wesley Soares Araújo, OMI, for the trust deposited in me in this service that I provide, and for allowing me to live this beautiful faith experience that is being with our brothers and sisters Haitian immigrants. May God of life and Lord of history continue today and always illuminating our pastoral ministry with the Haitian people in the city of São Paulo and being able to make a difference in their life stories, which are so painful, but at the same time, as already mentioned above, so evangelizing for us, Religious people of a missionary family that was born and exists in the Church with the proposal to go where no one wants to go.

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## OBLATE PASTORAL CARE WITH HMONG MIGRANTS IN THE USA

HARRY E. WINTER, OMI

**D**uring the 2020 Olympics held in Tokyo in August, 2021, the first Hmong to win a gold medal in any Olympic event was Sunisa Lee (gymnastics). Sunisa, born in the USA, is the niece of one of the Hmong Catholic leaders who is an Oblate Associate in the USA, Kou Ly. The different spelling of the last name of uncle and niece is due to the uncle coming through France on his long journey from Laos to the USA. Lee is not an allowable last name in France. It must be Ly. An interesting example of how migrants must conform to their host country's customs.<sup>1</sup>

Three Oblates in three very different ways led USA Catholics to accept Hmong migrants: Daniel Taillez (1936-2019), Umberto Nespolo (1933-2019) and Lucien Bouchard (1929--). In order to appreciate their leadership, we first must go to Laos and examine who the Hmong are and why they had to flee Laos.

### THE HMONG IN LAOS

A 2010 census states that 9,426,000 Hmong live in South China, their place of origin; 1,393,000 in Vietnam; 595,000 in Laos, and 327,000 in the USA.<sup>2</sup> During the French and USA occupation of Vietnam in the 1960's, the Hmong in Laos were recruited to fight the Communists.

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<sup>1</sup> For more on Sunisa and her uncle, see Harry Winter, "Oblate Connection to the Olympics," Aug. 4, 2021, and "Olympic Gold Shines on Hmong Associates and Oblates," Aug. 31, 2021, [www.omiusa.org](http://www.omiusa.org). Kou Ly has served in several capacities in the Asian and Pacific Island Affairs in the Secretariat for Cultural Diversity in the Church of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops. I am deeply grateful to him and his wife Joua for their help in writing this article and for their friendship.

<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia, Hmong, accessed Oct. 13, 2021.

According to Taillez and Jerry Orsino, OMI, “In the middle of the nineteenth century, thousands of Hmong migrated to the highlands of North Vietnam, Laos and Thailand, and are therefore known as highland tribes. Hmong were sometimes called ‘Meo’ in China, Thailand and Laos, but this name has a pejorative connotation and should not be used.”<sup>3</sup>

Taillez and Orsino wrote probably between 1996 and 2000. They estimated between 100,000 and 140,000 Hmong in the USA, of which ten percent are Catholic. Although the Hmong are spread out in twenty-four states, the majority of the Hmong are in California, Wisconsin and Minnesota.

French speaking Oblates arrived in Laos in 1935. The three priests included the superior, Jean Mazoyer, originally from France and a veteran of twenty years of missionary work in Sri Lanka, and two young priests, Etienne Loosdregt from France and Jean-Paul Brouillette from Canada. From 1947-52, fifteen more arrived, including an Oblate brother.<sup>4</sup>

The Italian Province sent their first missionaries to Laos in 1957, six priests. One of these, Mario Borzaga, OMI, quickly learned both Lao and Hmong, and was quickly martyred, around April 25, 1960, with his catechist Paul Thoj Xyooj. Their bodies were never found.<sup>5</sup> We will treat the many martyrs in Laos in Part Three below, since their beatification in 2016 marked a new level of unity for the Hmong in the USA.

By 1963, when Fr. Taillez arrived, there were 75 Oblates, including two bishops, Etienne Loosdregt with the French speaking Oblates in the south, and Leonello Berti, with the Italian speaking Oblates in the north. They were soon joined by three Americans, Frs. Lucien Bouchard, Matt Menger, and Jerry Orsino. Bouchard explains how that happened: “Fr. Jean Drouart, OMI, the general counselor for Asia-Oceania, had visited the French Oblate Mission in Laos and noticed there was a large group of Americans working at the U.S. Embassy and also a large group working

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Taillez, OMI and Jerry Orsino, OMI, “Hmong Religious Life and Customs,” Cathedral of St. Paul, MN website, accessed Oct. 13, 2017 and recommended to me by Kou Ly, 2 pp. of text.

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Chevroulet, OMI, “Oblates Along the Mekong,” Oblate Heritage 14, 1998, Oblate General House, Rome, Italy, pp. 6-9.

<sup>5</sup> Luca Borzaga (sister of Mario), “Mario Borzaga, OMI, 1933-1960,” Oblate Heritage 4, 1992, Oblate General House, Rome, Italy. Chevroulet’s booklet includes more details on Borzaga’s ministry with the Hmong: pp. 16-19.

in USAID i.e. United States Agency of International Development. So when he came back to the general house he advised the superior general that it would be good to have a few American Oblates in Laos.”<sup>6</sup>

Fr. Bouchard arrived in Vientiane, the capitol city of Laos on Nov. 17, 1956. Vientiane was considered the administrative capitol while Luang Prabang was the royal capitol where the king resided. Fr. Menger had arrived few days before, and Orsino would follow in 1966.

Bouchard describes the language difficulty with Hmong: “It is a tricky language because it is tonal with seven different tones, which means the same word can have different meanings according to the tone you use when you pronounce it. This can be quite frustrating sometimes after saying a whole sentence, but they don’t understand you because you messed up on one of the tones.”<sup>7</sup>

The Hmong give those they admire a title. Bouchard’s is Txiv Plig Vaj Xwm, Father, King of News.

Bouchard also describes his experience with Father Marcello Zago, OMI (later superior general and archbishop), who was learning much about Buddhism in Laos, accompanying the Buddhist Patriarch to the Vatican in 1973. In Oct., 1960, Bouchard and Zago had to sleep under the cement stairs of the Vientiane Cathedral grammar school, to avoid mortar shells.<sup>8</sup>

During this secret war in Laos, many of the Catholic villagers fled. Bouchard explains: “as refugees, they set up guerilla outposts which were off limits to visitors, tourists and journalists. Only Americans directly supplying aid to the refugees or to the guerilla army were allowed in these areas. A French Oblate, Father Jean Subra, OMI, often went to the Vientiane airport in order to get permission to go visit the Catholic groups of refugees in these refugee areas but all his efforts were useless. So when I came back to Vientiane in 1962, I went to see the CIA guerilla army coordinator and insisted that those Catholic refugees had

<sup>6</sup> Lucien Bouchard, OMI, “Fr. Lucien J. Bouchard, OMI, Missionary Experiences in South East Asia,” 18 pp., May 24, 2018, p. 1. It may be accessed on the Mission-Unity-Dialogue website, Oblate Missiologists page, [www.harrywinter.org](http://www.harrywinter.org). Kou Ly is attempting to translate this into Hmong. (An earlier version, “The Face of an Oblate,” was written June 18, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, pp. 4-5.

a right and a spiritual need to be visited by a Catholic priest. I also said he would not have to worry about my having to give a regular report of my activities to the Vatican! To my great surprise he gave me permission to visit them, which meant not only the Catholics in the refugee areas but also the Catholics who were stationed in military outposts that I would usually visit by helicopter. So, for the next 13 years from 1962-75, my main work was to visit these small Catholic refugee groups where I would celebrate Mass and administer the Sacrament of Reconciliation.”<sup>9</sup>

Bouchard’s humorous reference to keeping the Vatican informed reminds us that some Oblates and some American citizens considered him mainly as a political agent for the CIA. His article details the humanitarian work the CIA did supplying the guerrillas and their families with rice, with medical supplies, and much work with lepers and victims of tuberculosis, “given free of charge and without discrimination between Christians and non-Christians.”<sup>10</sup>

In an interview published in 2020, Bouchard joked “that twice he was nearly killed by falling bags of rice.”<sup>11</sup>

Bouchard’s friendship with the many helicopter pilots enabled him to evacuate the women and children refugees across the border from Laos to Thailand. The men fled through the jungle, but rather than endanger the women and children, they were taken by helicopter. Many of these would become his lifelong friends and cooperators as they reached the USA as migrants. He barely escaped with his life, on May 8, 1975, and after twenty-eight years in Borneo, was assigned first to Florida and then to Massachusetts. We will see him again in Part Two.

Taillez was a central teacher and administrator in the trade schools which the Oblates established for teens (first boys and then girls) Si Muang, in Vientiane.<sup>12</sup> Hundreds of these graduates eventually came

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, pp. 5-6.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 8; see pp. 13-14 for the Freemasons of Vientiane money to help with cassava food.

<sup>11</sup> Mike Viola, “Placing His Life in God’s Hands,” *Oblate World* 11 (Oct. 2020, 3): 4-7, with 7 photos. The text was used by Seamus Finn, OMI, in USA OMI Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation posting of Oct. 19, 2021.

<sup>12</sup> More information on the location of Taillez’s trade schools and their relationship to Nespolo’s is welcome.

to the USA, and worked with the various migrant settlement groups to become the first generation of Hmong migrants in the USA. Some were able to bring their parents, so that the Hmong migrants relied very strongly on family ties as they adjusted.

Taillez's title was *Txiv Plig Txhiaj Foom, Father, Full of Blessings.*

Taillez himself had to flee Laos in 1975. He served the poor in Haiti until Nov., 1979, when he returned to France and worked especially with Laotian migrants. In less than a year, he came to St. Paul, MN, USA. From this center, his impact on Hmong would extend all over the USA, and by Radio Veritas in the Philippines, all over Asia.

Fr. Umberto Nespolo (1933-2019) was assigned to Laos on June 4, 1960. He administered a center for youngsters interested in becoming Christians, and for training Christians to become catechists. The center, in the town of Houei-Sai, opened in June, 1964. There also seems to have been a high school seminary for young Hmong and Khuu, also administered by Nespolo. His title was *Txiv Plig Nkaj Xyaum, Father, Full of Teaching.*

Manual labor by the students was an integral part of the day. They actually built the facility.<sup>13</sup>

Nespolo acquired some fame by purchasing a tractor which would mechanize the growing of crops. But the Oblates were very careful to make sure it was the Hmong and Khuu who would use and maintain the tractor. It could also be used as a generator when the electricity was down.<sup>14</sup>

#### TAILLEZ, NESPOLO, BOUCHARD AND OTHER OBLATES IN THE USA

Daniel Taillez was the first Oblate who had worked in Laos, to arrive in the USA and serve the Hmong Community. He ministered in Lowertown, St. Paul, MN, St. Mary's Church (in charge of the Oblates from 1976 to 2002). On Nov. 20, 1980, he administered baptism there

<sup>13</sup> "Directeur du Centre Hmong de Houei-Sai," *Missions des Oblats de Marie Immaculée* 1966b, pp. 557-58. My thanks to Fr. Roland Jacques, OMI, for sending me this material: Jacques to Winter, e-mail, Oct. 23, 2021, Catholic Hmong File, Harry Winter.

<sup>14</sup> Fr. C. Conti Guglia, OMI, "Mecanise l'agriculture a Houei-Sek, *Missions des Oblates de Marie Immaculée* 1968. p. 47.

to a Hmong for the first time. On Holy Saturday, March 30, 1991, he baptized and confirmed 108 Hmong there. One of the staff told me that her husband was holding the bowl of water used for baptism. He arms got so tired. In 2013, I asked the secretary at St. Mary's how many Hmong were baptized there by Taillez. Her count was 518.<sup>15</sup>

Taillez was strongly supported by several Oblates in the former Central USA Province. The pastor of St. Mary's at the time of Taillez's ministry there was Wilfrid Upson, OMI. Upson noticed that the stained glass windows in St. Mary's Church were falling apart. He sought estimates to repair them, and a group of Hmong men submitted the best estimate.

Upson gave them the contract, and shortly after, a city inspector hauled him into court because no women were working on the project. When the judge asked Upson to explain, he presented evidence that working with chemicals to remove the lead in the windows would harm women's reproductive organs. According to Upson, the judge immediately threw out the lawsuit and told the city inspector never to bring a lawsuit against Upson again.<sup>16</sup>

By 1983, Taillez was familiar enough with the Hmong especially in Minnesota and Wisconsin to found the Hmong American National Catholic Association (HANCA). Every summer, until the covid virus, HANCA would organize a week long meeting, bringing together Catholic Hmong from all over the country.<sup>17</sup>

With the help of Hmong Catholics including Deacon Va Thai Lo and Catechist Chong Thao Ly, he developed song and prayer books for Hmong Catholics.<sup>18</sup>

In 1998, Taillez wrote *Walking in Their Footsteps*, referring to the footsteps of Jesus and His Apostles. It contains meditations and reflec-

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<sup>15</sup> Harry Winter, OMI, Keynote Address for Fr. Dan Taillez OMI's 50th Anniversary of Ordination Appreciation Dinner, p. 2, June 29, 2013, Hmong American National Catholic Association (HANCA), Cousins Center, Milwaukee, WI.

<sup>16</sup> Winter, Keynote Address, pp. 2-3.

<sup>17</sup> See their comprehensive website: [www.hanca.us](http://www.hanca.us).

<sup>18</sup> "Hmong Celebrate Fr. Daniel Taillez's 50th Jubilee," [www.omiusa.org](http://www.omiusa.org), Aug. 13, 2013, accessed Oct. 13, 2021.

tions he preached to the Hmong over many years. It has been translated into many languages.<sup>19</sup>

In 2001, he went to Thailand, and worked with Hmong there. He also broadcast to Hmong all over the world on Radio Veritas. By e-mail, he sent homilies in Hmong every Sunday.

Taillez was able to visit the Hmong in the USA. For example, in 2011, he spent 21 days in the midst of some Hmong Catholic communities in Des Moines, IA, St. Paul, MN, and WI. He e-mailed the superior general of the time, Louie Lougen, about his heartbreak over a Hmong Catholic deacon who left the Catholic Church in St. Paul and became an Episcopalian, taking some of the Hmong Catholic community with him. He stated: “I’ve been told that there is ‘the presumption’ that all Episcopal priests are not validly ordained...So their Masses are not valid. So I’d like to know this: a statement of that kind: ‘their ordinations are NOT VALID ‘ (sic) has to be built on theological and historian and STRONG facts (or bases) that the Episcopal priests could never put in question.” He then asked Lougen to have a theologian tell him why those ordinations are indeed not valid.<sup>20</sup>

Lougen contacted me and I replied to Taillez, sketching the development from Pope Leo XIII’s papal bull *Apostolicae Curae* of 1896, declaring Anglican/Episcopalian Orders null and void because of defect of intention and form. I then mentioned the Malines Conversations of 1920 and especially Vatican II’s Decree on Ecumenism’s positive attitude towards Anglicans (#13) and declaring that some Protestant public worship could have positive results even if it did not have valid orders (#22).

I mentioned the roadblock in the 1980’s of the Anglican Communion’s stance on gay marriage, with prominent Anglicans joining the Catholic Church, and the Anglican Ordinariate of Oct. 20, 2009. Above all, the declaration of former Anglican John Henry Newman as

<sup>19</sup> Daniel Taillez, OMI, *Walking in Their Footsteps* (Queenship Publishing Company), 1998. The Forward is written by Cardinal Francis George, OMI. Taillez thanks especially St. Paul MN diocesan priest Robert B. Wellisch and OMI priest Joseph Paris for translating the book from its French original into English.

<sup>20</sup> Daniel Taillez, e-mail to Most Rev. Louis Lougen, OMI, Aug. 5, 2011; Lougen, e-mail to Harry Winter, OMI, Aug. 5, 2011, Catholic Hmong File, Harry Winter.

blessed made our attitude towards Anglicans/Episcopalians even more delicate.

Finally I suggested “if your Hmong friends who have joined the Episcopal Church are at all alert, they will sense this happening, especially if you mention Cardinal Newman. Some of them might come back to our Church with gentle prayer and nudging. On the other hand, a few might lose whatever faith they have and become confused, abandoning Christianity altogether. Would it not be better to leave those few ‘in their good faith’? I join you in praying to the Holy Spirit on what course to choose with which ones.”<sup>21</sup>

With the majority of Hmong in the St. Paul area (and elsewhere) still animists, who were quite active in observing and attempting to win back Catholic Hmong, I did fear for the few in good faith. Hmong Catholics are very aware that the religious leaders of the animists, called shamans, are available 24/7 to visit Hmong who are in difficulty. The lack of Catholic clergy who speak Hmong is a disadvantage to more Hmong becoming Catholic.

I also learned that the Hmong deacon who led the group to the Episcopal Church, on his deathbed, expressed a desire to be reconciled with the Catholic Church, but his wife interfered.<sup>22</sup>

I first met Taillez when Kou Ly and his wife Joua brought him to St. Casimir’s Church in St. Paul for dinner on June 14, 2013. I later learned that Kou and Joua were very hopeful that the Hmong Catholics might find a home at either St. Casimir’s or St. Patrick’s twinned churches in St. Paul. Taillez was against this, since the Catholic Hmong already had a home at St. Vincent’s Church in St. Paul, which was less traditional and more in favor of emphasizing their American identity (more about this below). St. Vincent’s website explains it is the home of the Twin Cities Hmong Catholic community. It provides a link to HANCA.

The Oblate provincial at the time, William Antone, OMI, was unable to go to Milwaukee for the huge celebration on June 29-30, 2013, for Taillez’s 50th anniversary of ordination, so I was sent with his greet-

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<sup>21</sup> Harry Winter, OMI, e-mail to Daniel Taillez, Aug. 5, 2011. There was no response from Taillez, but later, he did respond positively to the April 2017 article on the continuation of his ministry in St. Paul, MN: e-mail from him to Kou for me, May 11, 2017, Catholic Hmong file, Winter.

<sup>22</sup> My thanks to Kou Ly for this insight.

ings. First I had to learn not to pronounce the H in Hmong. Then when I visited their homes, I learned it was necessary to remove one's shoes. So I began from a very basic awareness of the Hmong people. However awareness of Laos was much deeper, since at our International Roman Scholasticate where I studied from 1958-65, we constantly met the Oblates serving in Laos and heard their stories.

Teen Hmong presented a skit on Taillez's life as part of the celebration at the Cousins Center in Milwaukee. Everyone, Hmong and non-Hmong guests were aware that Taillez had lost his driver's license due to many infractions. So the teens had a cardboard car with a teen inside, labeled "police" which a second car, labeled "Fr. Taillez" was being pursued.

During the dinner, as the Hmong spoke praising Taillez's teaching and administration ability at the trade schools in Laos, I kept hearing the words "BE GOOD BOY" during the Hmong presentations. I finally asked one of the Hmong if I was hearing correctly. He replied that for some reason, when Taillez was upset by the behavior of the students, he would say in English "BE GOOD BOY."

It was also evident that the older Hmong used the seven different tones, giving different meanings according to the tone as Bouchard explained in Part One above. But the younger Hmong did not use those tones. I still wonder how the different generations manage to understand each other.

Fr. Antone's letter stated in part "... you dedicated your life to those who had been set away from their homeland and scattered throughout the world. Thank you for your ministry among the beautiful Hmong brothers and sisters in diaspora. Thank you for helping them keep their faith alive and then persevere and grow in it, along with their children and grandchildren."<sup>23</sup>

I was the Sacramental Administrator at the two parishes of St. Casimir's and St. Patrick's, never the pastor. But in 2011, I was named the superior of all the Oblates in the North Central District of SD and MN. This gave me some encouragement to urge the pastors, Jim Loi-

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<sup>23</sup> Very Rev. William Antone, Dear Father Daniel, in "Hmong Celebrate Fr. Daniel Taillez's 50th Jubilee", as n. 18, p. 3. Some of the quote is from Antone's one page letter in Winter, Catholic Hmong file. My gratitude to Fr. Ray Prybis, OMI, who drove me from St. Paul to Milwaukee and stayed overnight to drive me back.

acono, OMI and then Greg Gallagher, OMI, to invite the Hmong to St. Patrick's Church. Gallagher was able to learn some phonetic Hmong and soon Mass was being celebrated by him with a little phonetic Hmong, and the Scripture readings in Hmong. Occasionally a priest more fluent in Hmong would be available.

Although the current pastor, Michael Powell, OMI, does not speak any phonetic Hmong, he too has welcomed the Hmong Catholic Community to make a home at St. Patrick's. The St. Patrick's website mentions they have been the home of the Hmong Catholic Community of St. Patrick's since 2012, with Mass in Hmong at 12:15 the last Sunday of each month. The Hmong at St. Patrick's have their own web site and Face-book in both English and Hmong, with many photos of past and current events.

The four of us, Loiacono, Gallagher, Powell and myself publicly welcomed the Hmong to make a home at St. Patrick's (Khmer were slowly coming to St. Casimir's). The Hmong were ecstatic, but we soon learned that not all the diocesan clergy were happy with St. Vincent's Church now having a rival for the Hmong Catholics in the Twin Cities area.<sup>24</sup>

Kou Ly and his wife Joua combine the two interpretations of Hmong Catholic culture. Kou makes the traditional string tying ceremony inspirational (see below). He has a strong Hmong accent. Joua could pass for a California girl, no accent and a great love of CA, with many of her family there.

When I moved to our 104 N. Mississippi River Blvd of St. Paul in 2014, a group of the Hmong wanted to learn more about Oblate spirituality. I gave a presentation on Oblate spirituality to them, and this led to the first group of Hmong Catholic Oblate Associates. Soon Fr. Lon Konold, OMI became their chaplain, all under the supervision of Ms. Geri Furmanek, National Director of Oblate Associates.<sup>25</sup>

When I moved from Superior of the Oblates in the North Central District to reduced active ministry, in Tewksbury, MA, in 2017, I was

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<sup>24</sup> See [www.omiusa.org](http://www.omiusa.org), "Fr. Daniel Taillez's Ministry to USA Hmong Continues," April 17, 2017, accessed April 26, 2017.

<sup>25</sup> This meeting at our 104 N. Mississippi Blvd. residence led to a presentation at St. Patrick's on May 15, 2016, which was the Associates' organizational meeting: Catholic Hmong file, Winter.

honored with a string tying ceremony on June 3, 2017. During these Hmong ceremonies, the guest of honor is seated and people approach the guest one by one and tie a short, white string around one of the guest's wrists, mentioning quickly their affection. Dances by young Hmong in traditional dress, and speeches are given before a banquet of traditional foods. Both these banquets, and dinners with guests in the Hmong homes feature fruit such as mangoes, dragon fruit, mangosteens, papayas and others not usually found in the USA.

The high point of the celebration was a presentation by Dr. Sia Lo, "A Love Letter to One Oblate and all Oblates." As the editor of our website noted "It is strikingly similar to countless other reflections made by individuals whose lives have been touched by Oblates who have dedicated their lives to be, 'Close to People.' So, this expression of love and appreciation is presented as a reflection on all Oblates everywhere, and the people who love them."<sup>26</sup>

### *A Love Letter to One Oblate and all Oblates*

On behalf of the Catholic Hmong congregation here at St. Patrick's, I want to Thank you Father for bringing us to this church. Without you, we might not be here today. So thank you so much for everything that you have done to find us a home.

About a Century or so ago, it was other Oblate Priest from France like you that found our people in the Jungle of Laos. They risked their lives to find us in that jungle. Once they found us, they took the time to learn our culture and our ways--in order to truly to teach us about our lord and saver Jesus Christ.

When they found us, we did not have a written language and so they create one for us. Using roman characters, they develop our written language for the first time. Today, all the Hmong around the world can communicate with each other either through writing or through the use of the internet--thanks to our Oblate priest. In fact, every time I write in Hmong, I cannot help but think about them.

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<sup>26</sup> Will Shaw, editor, [www.omiusa.org](http://www.omiusa.org), June 6, 2017, accessed June 7, 2017; also on the website Mission-Unity-Dialogue, [www.harrywinter.org](http://www.harrywinter.org)., Oblate Missiologists page.

When we were refugees in Thailand, the Catholic Church was instrumental in bringing our people into the U.S. and Minnesota. It was the Charity of the Catholic church that cloth and fed many of our families until we were able to provide for ourselves. So, our community are truly indebted to you and the Catholic Church.

But of all the good things that the catholic church has done for us, we are most thankful for our Oblate priest--and especially you today father for being who you are. For you are a true representative of Christ here on earth. Through Christ, you clean our souls every Sunday with holy water and protect us from Evil. Through Christ you taught us the blessing of heaven and the true purpose of life. Through the power of Christ, you have lead us to be closer to God and for that we cannot thank you enough.

*Close with a poem by Easter Almuena--Always for Others*

You are the image and likeness of God, But with you the morning awakens With the call to rise Not for you But always for others

God handpicked you from a myriad of souls Molded you since your were babe To prepare you for a journey Not for you But always for others

God blessed you with wisdom To use to give form to his plans And love to carry them out Not for you But always for others

Mary walks with you Guiding and loving you For to her you are a Christ Not for you But always for others

You hold the body of Christ Embrace his name and proclaim it And a father and counselor have become Not for you But always for others.

God forever bless you Walk and carry you when your feet are weary Bring peace and joy to your heart For though your life is never for you It is Christ's and he delights in you.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Dr. Sia Lo, "A Love Letter to One Oblate and all Oblates," [www.omiusa.org](http://www.omiusa.org), posted June 6, 2017, accessed June 7, 2017. My thanks to Fr. Ray Prybis, OMI, who did the initial blessing, and to my brother and sister-in-law Mike and Vaughan Winter, who were able to join the many Hmong, and St. Casimir parishioner Ray Gorski with his wife Donna who all attended.

When Fr. Yves Bertrais, OMI (1921-2007) was attempting to develop the written language for the Hmong in Laos, he was aided very much by three Protestant evangelicals, known only as Mr. Roff, Mr. Smalley and Mr. Barney. Each of the three had started independently. In April, 1953, they met and joined together what they had already accomplished. Out of their efforts came the language described by Dr. Lo.<sup>28</sup>

When editor Mike Viola published Dr. Lo's presentation, he added that Fr. Yves Bertrais, was the author of the first Hmong-French dictionary, in 1964.<sup>29</sup>

The President of St. Patrick's Parish Council, Wayne Craig, made a point of attending the ceremony, demonstrating the way that the Hmong are being welcomed into the former Irish-American parish, not giving up their culture, but enriching the parish with it.

During the July 14-16, 2017 annual HANCA convention, held at St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, MN, then newly ordained auxiliary bishop Andrew Cozzens gave the keynote address. Approximately 160 Hmong from 8 dioceses, including 60 from both St. Vincent's and St. Patrick's Hmong Catholic communities, attended. Cozzens had served as a chaplain to the Hmong Catholic community from 2006-2010, illustrating the concern of the Catholic Church for migrant groups.

Scalabrinian Sister Myrna Tordillo, assistant director of Asian and Pacific Island Affairs in the Secretariat for Cultural Diversity in the Church for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, stated: "I wanted to be able to say [to them] that the bishops are really encouraging you to

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<sup>28</sup> Long Her, TXHAUB, *Hmong Catholic Directory, 2018*, pp. 98-102, on website Mission-Unity-Dialogue, Oblate Missiologists page, "Oblate Yves Bertrais and Others Construct the Hmong Language," [www.harrywintger.org](http://www.harrywintger.org). Fr. Bouchard has mentioned to me that at least one and perhaps all three of the Protestants were USA Presbyterians.

<sup>29</sup> Mike Viola, editor, "Oblates Preserving Hmong Culture in Minnesota," *Oblate World* 9 (2018, 1, Feb.) p. 24, available on [www.omiusa.org](http://www.omiusa.org). When I inquired of Viola where he found this information about Bertrais, he replied that an Oblate in Rome inserted it into the article he used: <http://archive.omiworld.org/en/content/news/4218/the-hmong-say-thank-you/>. This item from Rome includes a photo of Gallagher baptizing a Hmong, and 2 photos of Hmong in Laos. E-mails, Winter to Viola, Oct. 26, 2021; Viola to Winter, Oct. 27, 2021. The poem by Easter Almuena is only printed in the [www.omiusa.org](http://www.omiusa.org) posting of n. 27, not in the *Oblate World* article or the *omiworld* posting.

continue living your faith life and not losing your identity as Hmong, but to continue to enrich the Church here in the United States.”<sup>30</sup>

When Bouchard was loading women and children onto the helicopters in Laos, to fly them to the proximity border of Laos and Thailand, one of the two year old girls was Joua with her mother Say Thao Yang. During my change to the semi-retirement center in Tewksbury, MA, Kou and Joua Ly wanted to visit Bouchard especially. So a memorable series of visits by Kou and Joua to Tewksbury, and Bouchard and myself to St. Paul, began Feb. 17-20, 2018. Kou and Joua, as Oblate Associates, joined vowed Oblates and Associates at the Shrine of St. Joseph, Lowell, MA, on Feb. 18 for the annual prayer service to celebrate the 1826 papal approval of our Constitutions and Rules. Joua loves to take photos, and several of these were posted on the Oblate USA website.<sup>31</sup>

On March 22, 2018, Kou wrote a 2 page letter to St. Patrick’s pastor Fr. Mike Powell, seeking his help with the Oblate USA provincial to bring the only Oblate Hmong priest, Fr. Antoine Yang, OMI, to the USA to help with older Hmong who do not speak English. Kou noted that the Hmong Alliance Church increased to 6,000 members, with many Catholic Hmong leaving to join Protestant Churches where Hmong is spoken. He knew “over 50 families at St. Patrick with a great number of elders who still not able to speak English.”<sup>32</sup>

Kou and Joua then invited Bouchard to come to St. Paul, MN, to be honored with a string tying ceremony. I indicated a willingness to carry Bouchard’s suitcase for him from Tewksbury, MA to St. Paul and they quickly accepted, paying our airfare and driving us around the Twin Cities. We arrived on May 3, 2018, meeting a Vietnamese Oblate, Tuan Pham, who serves as a vocation director for the Oblates in the USA and whom the Ly’s also know.

At 3:30 pm on Friday, we met with Archbishop Bernard Hebda, of Minneapolis-St. Paul, who was most interested in both Frs. Bou-

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<sup>30</sup> Joe Towalski, “Bishop speaks to Hmong Catholics on importance of prayer,” *The Catholic Spirit*, p. 7, July 27, 2017.

<sup>31</sup> [www.omiusa.org](http://www.omiusa.org), Mike Viola, “Oblates Preserving Hmong Culture,” posted Feb. 27, 2018, accessed Oct. 27, 2021, one photo of Bouchard, Winter, Kou, Joua and James Flavin, OMI, no date. Schedule for visit, 2 pp., Winter, Catholic Hmong file.

<sup>32</sup> Kou Ly, e-letter with 2 page attachment, March 22, 2018; Winter response, March 23, 2018; Catholic Hmong file.

chard and Pham's ministry in the USA with migrants. On Saturday, Bouchard presided in Hmong at a special 3:30 pm Mass, St. Patrick's Church, followed by his being honored with a string tying ceremony in the church hall. Father John Paul Erickson, director of the Office of Worship of the archdiocese, conducted the ceremony. Catholic Hmong from St. Vincent's Church, St. Paul, and also from Wisconsin and California participated, to honor Bouchard's many years of ministry to the Hmong in Laos.

On Sunday, Bouchard insisted on celebrating Mass at St. Vincent's, to keep both communities of Catholic Hmong happy. He was warmly received. On Monday we returned to Tewksbury, MA.<sup>3333</sup>

Kou and Joua returned to Tewksbury from Oct. 27-29, 2018. They were most eager to meet with Fr. John St. Cyr, OMI, who had served in French Guyana. Kou spent several years there on his way from Laos to the USA. They also made a point of visiting the Oblates in the medical wing who could not leave their rooms.

Sunday evening is the time when the Oblates in the medical wing who can leave their rooms, gather for supper with the other retired Oblates. Kou and Joua "hosted the Sunday evening dinner on Oct. 28, and spoke to all the Oblates there about their gratitude as Hmong Catholics, for all the Oblates have done in Laos, and with Hmong Catholics especially in Minnesota."<sup>34</sup>

Kou and Joua invited Bouchard and myself to visit St. Paul, MN from July 4-9, 2019, in order to meet the only Oblate Hmong priest, Antoine Yang, OMI, who had arrived on June 24, to hear confessions of the elderly Hmong who speak no English, and to bless the homes of the newly converted Hmong. Animist shamans bless homes often, and the Catholic Hmong feel a great need to have their homes blessed by a priest who speaks Hmong. Yang is a cousin to Joua.

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<sup>33</sup> [www.omiusa.org](http://www.omiusa.org), "Fr. Lucien Bouchard, OMI Honored by Hmong Community in St. Paul," posted May 8, 2018, accessed May 9, 2018; Kou Ly's two page e-mail, April 30,2018 with schedule, Winter, Catholic Hmong file.

<sup>34</sup> [www.omiusa.org](http://www.omiusa.org), "Oblate Hmong Associates Visit Tewksbury Residence," posted Oct.29, 2018, accessed Oct. 28, 2021. A lovely photo of Kou and Joua with St. Cyr is in this article, along with one of the Sunday supper, both taken by Joua. St. Cyr died on Dec. 7, 2019. "Kou and Joua's Visit," one page agenda, Winter, Catholic Hmong file.

Our visit had many highlights, among them the meeting with Archbishop Hebda Saturday, July 6, at 2 pm, when he opened the door of his residence himself. He was delighted to see Bouchard again, and marveled at Yang. Hebda himself had just returned from Laos, visiting in his capacity as a board member of US Catholic Bishops Relief Service. Kou worked up courage to ask if Yang could return for six months or more, to work with Catholic Hmong. Hebda replied he would welcome it most heartily.<sup>35</sup>

On Sunday, a string tying ceremony was held in St. Patrick's Hall, to honor Fr. Yang. Hebda came by during the ceremony, to give Yang a thank you note for his ministry since June 24. A Thai Redemptorist priest, Berm Chakrit, C.Ss.R., presided.<sup>36</sup>

We were also joined by Kou Ly's young uncle, Father Peter Ly, ordained last year for the archdiocese. Although he understands Hmong very well, his spoken Hmong is slight.

Yang, who ministers in French Guyana, needs to be available to his elderly father in France. So his return to the USA, despite much time and energy spent by Oblate leaders in both France and the USA, is being put off until the situation with his father clears up.

Yang and Chakrit hope to provide a much needed translation of the Bible and Mass texts into Hmong.<sup>37</sup>

The covid virus prevented further travel until Aug. 6-9, 2021, when Kou and Joua returned to Tewksbury, bringing with them shirts designed to help Kou's niece, Sunisa Lee, compete in the Olympics. They again hosted the Sunday evening dinner for all the Oblates at the retirement residence.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> www.omiusa.org, "Oblate Associates and Oblates visit Hmong Community in St. Paul," posted July 21, 2019, accessed Oct. 30, 2021. Eight pages, seven photos. Winter, "Luc Bouchard Visit, July 4-9, 2019," Catholic Hmong file.

<sup>36</sup> Chakrit had visited St. Paul for fifteen days in Dec., 2016, hearing confessions and blessing houses: Maria Wiering, "Hmong priest's visit a Christmas gift for local community," *Catholic Spirit*, Jan. 10, 2017 is an extensive 3 page description.

<sup>37</sup> Kou Ly, e-mail to Winter, March 26, 2018.

<sup>38</sup> www.omiusa.org, "Olympic Gold Shines on Hmong Associates and Oblates," posted Aug. 31, 2021, accessed Oct. 28, 2021. Joua took the photo of Bouchard and Winter wearing the shirts, in front of the statue of St. Eugene de Mazenod in the foyer of the retirement center.

Taillez died in Lyon, France, on Nov. 17, 2019, at age 83. The notice of this from our USA headquarters was composed in Rome by Father Roland Jacques, OMI: “He was a true apostle, especially for the Hmong people worldwide.” Jacques also noted that he “spent the last months of his life in the Oblate community of St. Francis in Lyon, France, with other Oblate confreres who, like him, needed constant care.”<sup>39</sup>

Kou and Joua visited Taillez at least twice when he retired to Pontmain, France. The funeral Mass for Taillez with his brother Oblates was on Nov. 22, 2019 at 9:30 am in the Church of Saint-Luc in Sainte-Foy-les-Lyon. The Hmong had asked the Oblate provincial, Fr. Vincent Gruber, to allow them time to come and pay their homage to their beloved Father Taillez. The permission was granted and the Hmong were able to hold a wake with the body at Domaine du Passeloup, 122 Chemin du Merloup, Liergues, about 60 kilometers from Lyon, from Saturday, Nov. 30th to Monday, Dec. 2nd. Kou and Joua attended the three-day funeral wake along with many Catholic Hmong from all over France. During the wake, many shared testimonies and memories about his ministry and love for them. Fr. Antoine Yang, OMI, now ministering in French Guyana, presided at the wake. Taillez was put to rest with his Oblate brothers at the Loyasse Cemetery in Lyon on Dec. 2, 2019 at 3 pm. Joua received his stole that was laid on his casket during the funeral Mass, from Fr. Gilbert Le Goff, assistant to the provincial. Kou and Joua returned to the USA on Dec. 5.<sup>40</sup>

The sad experience described above with the Hmong Catholic deacon who converted to the Episcopal Church meant that searches were always on for clergy who spoke Hmong. Fr. Taillez’s successor in the USA, although based in Thailand, visited St. Patrick’s on Aug. 12, 2015. An Oblate Thai priest, Fr. Thomas Narinaks Thotsaphon, OMI,

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<sup>39</sup> Fr. Roland Jacques, OMI, Death Notice of Fr. Daniel Taillez, OMI, from USA Provincial Secretary, who added my 8 page Keynote Address for Taillez’s 50th anniversary of ordination: <https://mail.aol.com/webmail-std/en-us/PrintMessage>, accessed Nov. 28, 2019.

<sup>40</sup> Kou and Joua’s first visit was in early April, 2017, see “Fr. Daniel Taillez’s Ministry to USA Hmong Continues,” [www.omiusa.org](http://www.omiusa.org), posted April 17, 2017, accessed April 26, 2017. Kou furnished the description of the funeral and recommends its portrayal on the French Catholic Hmong website: <http://www.aumonieriehmong.com/category/informations/>. He also sent me the Hmong program for the wake, in French and Hmong: Winter, Catholic Hmong file, Nov. 10, 2021.

speaks Hmong and was warmly received. He was accompanied by a Hmong layman, Lee Mi.<sup>41</sup> But his short visit could not meet the needs of the Catholic Hmong community.

Fr. Umberto Nespolo, OMI, arrived in Fresno, California in 1984. The Hmong migrants to CA came especially from 1977 to the mid 1980's, about 12,000. The majority were animists, but the next largest group were Catholics. Once in Fresno, Hmong Catholics obtained the use of the basement of Sacred Heart Church. Couple leaders such as Nelson Yang and Davone Yang were working closely with the parish and the bishop's office to meet the needs of the Hmong community. The difficulties of integration, and worshipping in a different language presented a real challenge for the community.

The community and the parish came together under the leadership of Nelson and Davone Yang, who were students of Nespolo when he was in Sayaoury, Laos, to seek ways to meet the spiritual needs of the Hmong Catholics. It was clear that the Hmong really needed a priest who spoke the language and knew the culture.

Nelson and Davone were baptized in Laos and ministered to by the Italian Oblates. At the request of the community, they approached Bishop Jose de Jesus Madera Uribe, to request the help of Nespolo. The bishop agreed and Nespolo was reunited with many of the Catholic members of the Hmong community he knew from Laos.

In CA, his ministry to the Hmong was a real challenge because of the size of CA. But he was able to attend to all of them, even neighboring states especially Washington. Like Taillez in the Midwest, Nespolo covered many dioceses, in CA from Sacramento to San Diego and WA from Portland to Seattle. And like Taillez, he not only baptized, but administered confirmation, reconciliation, anointing of the sick and dying and funerals. He understood the needs of the community and had a great vision to meet those needs. He planned to create a Hmong Catholic Center in Fresno, CA to provide assistance and resources for the community; promote vocations to the religious life; form lay ministers; form catechists, and promote vocations to the permanent diaconate.

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<sup>41</sup> Fr. Jean-Pierre Caloz, OMI, e-mail to Winter, Nov. 26, 2019, Winter, Catholic Hmong file.

He presided at Kou and Joua's wedding at St. Martin de Porres Church, Yorba Linda, CA, June 12, 1992, driving more than four hours to reach that church.

He also ministered to the Lao and Khmu. He was fluent in their languages, speaking Lao better than Hmong. But his heart condition led to surgery in March, 2010, returning to Italy on March 12, 2010. He died at the Oblate residence, San Giorgio Canavese, on March 26, 2019.<sup>42</sup>

#### BEATIFICATION IN LAOS AND THE USA OF THE MARTYRS OF LAOS

On Sunday morning, Dec. 11, 2016, the third Sunday of Advent, there was only one Mass in all of Laos.

The Church of the Sacred Heart, the pro-cathedral and the only place of worship in the capital, Vientiane, was filled to its capacity of 400 people. Early predictions were 4,000 participants at most. The faithful were more than 6,000.

The Communist government had indicated that the leading prelate should not be from the West. So Cardinal Orlando Quevedo, OMI, from Mindanao in the Philippines presided, reading the papal authorization. Quevedo was joined by 15 other bishops, from Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam, and the superiors general of the Foreign Missions of Paris, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, and the Voluntas Dei Institute, and more than 150 priests, of which a large number came from Vietnam and Thailand.<sup>43</sup>

These seventeen martyrs, priests and catechists, represent thousands of Catholics martyred in Laos for the faith: Fr. Joseph Thao Tien, born in Laos, 1918, martyred 1954; Fr. Jean-Baptiste Maio, Foreign Missions of Paris, born in France, 1899, martyred 1954; Fr. Renee Dubroux, Foreign Missions of Paris, born in France, 1914, martyred 1959; Paul Thoj Xyooj, catechist, Hmong, born in Laos, 1941, martyred 1960; Fr. Mario Borzaga, Oblate of Mary, born in Italy, 1932, martyred 1960; Fr. Louis Leroy, Oblate of Mary, born in France, 1923, martyred

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<sup>42</sup> I am indebted to Kou Ly for all this information about Nespolo. It has been posted on the Mission-Unity Dialogue website, Family/Laity page, [www.harrywinter.org](http://www.harrywinter.org), "Migrant Ministry to Hmong in USA: Fr. Umberto Nespolo, OMI" with three photos, including two of Kou and Joua 's wedding and two links from Kou.

<sup>43</sup> Roland Jacques, OMI, "The Church of Laos Joyfully Celebrates its Martyrs," [www.omiusa.org](http://www.omiusa.org), Dec. 14, 2016, accessed Oct. 18, 2021.

1961; Fr. Michel Coquelet, Oblate of Mary, born in France, 1931, martyred 1961; Joseph Outhay, catechist, born in Thailand, 1961, martyred 1961; Fr. Noel Tenaud, Foreign Missions of Paris, born in France, 1904, martyred 1961; Fr. Vincent L'Honoret, Oblate of Mary, born in France, 1921, martyred 1961; Fr. Marcel Denis, Foreign Missions of Paris, born in France, 1919, martyred 1961; Fr. Jean Wauthier, Oblate of Mary, born in France, 1926, martyred 1967; Thomas Khampheuane, born in Laos, 1952, martyred 1968; Fr. Lucien Galan, Foreign Missions of Paris, born in France, 1921, martyred 1968; Fr. Lucien Boissel, Oblate of Mary, born in France, 1909, martyred 1969; Luc Sy, catechist, born in Laos 1938, martyred 1970, and Maisam Pho Inpeng, lay leader, born in Laos 1934, martyred 1970.<sup>44</sup>

The Oblate leaders in East Asia had insisted that the lay catechist martyrs be included among the blessed. Our leaders overcame the opposition of some clergy. One of the catechists, Paul Thoj Xyooj, is Hmong, which showed all the Hmong community--animists, Protestants and Catholics--that Catholicism respects and honors the Hmong.<sup>45</sup>

In his remarks read by Cardinal Quevedo, Pope Francis emphasized these “heroic witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ and his gospel of peace, justice and reconciliation, at the cost of their lives.” Fr. Roland Jacques, OMI, then commented: “At the end of the ceremony, to the great astonishment of the assembly, the Deputy Director of the Lao Front for the Building of the Nation, a state agency under the leadership of the party and the Ministry of the Interior, which oversees the religions, praised at length the doctrine and action of the Catholic Church in Laos, and in his turn developed the ideas put forward by Pope Francis, telling of what the nation expected of this Church for the good common. The Apostolic Nuncio Paul Tschang In-Nam, himself deeply rooted in the culture of East Asia, did not hesitate to take hold of that outstretched

<sup>44</sup> Peter Phan, “Lao Catholic community celebrates ‘Ancestors of the Faith’,” *National Catholic Reporter*, June 27, 2017, pp.1-6, posted on [www.omiusa.org](http://www.omiusa.org), June 26, 2017, accessed Oct. 18, 2021. While Phan does not identify Khampheuane, Roland Jacques, in a French article translated by James Allen, OMI as “The Story of the Oblate Martyrs of Laos,” identifies him as “Student catechist:” [www.omiusa.org](http://www.omiusa.org), Dec. 14, 2016, p. 2, accessed Oct. 18, 2021.

<sup>45</sup> Roland Jacques, OMI, “Un catechiste hmong chez les Hmong du Laos: Paul Thoj Xyooj (1941-1960), *Revue Histoire et Missions chretiennes*, 6 (2008) 149-76, et 7 (2008) 147-66.

hand: he expressed his wish that harmony and collaboration will develop, so that all the people of Laos can progress in unity despite religious differences.”<sup>46</sup>

The Dec. 11, 2016 ceremony in Laos was followed by local celebration in several countries. The one in the USA at the Oblate Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows, Belleville, Il, June 17-18, 2017 concerns us for emphasizing how Hmong-American migrants led it. They now succeeded other hyphenated migrants, becoming fully American and fully Hmong.

Fr. Luc Bouchard, Cardinal-designate Bishop Louis-Marie Ling Mankhanekoun, Vicar Apostolic of Pakse, Laos and Apostolic Administrator of Vientiane, and Monsignor Tito Banchong Thopanhong, Apostolic Administrator of Luang Prabang, Laos concelebrated with 19 priests. About 350 people attended, most of Laotian origin. Khmu, Lao, Hmong and Burmese dancers and singers entertained the participants.<sup>47</sup>

### CONCLUSION

The Catholic Hmong at St. Patrick’s Church, St. Paul, MN have now become both Hmong and American. But the Karen at twinned St. Casimir’s Church are much more recent arrivals. There was a first response by the Hmong to give direction and aid to the Karen. The Hmong quickly backed off, realizing that the Karen would have to go through the same process of blending their culture with American culture, which would take several generations.

However, summer Bible school could not be held for the children without both groups cooperation. There were not enough children or

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<sup>46</sup> Roland Jacques, OMI, “The Church of Laos Joyfully Celebrates its Martyrs,” [www.omiusa.org](http://www.omiusa.org), Dec. 14, 2016, accessed Oct. 18, 2021. See “postulation,” [www.omiworld.org](http://www.omiworld.org) for more on this event.

<sup>47</sup> “A Celebration of the Martyrs of Laos,” [www.omiusa.org](http://www.omiusa.org), June 21, 2017, with photos, accessed Oct. 17, 2021. See *Oblate World* 9 (Feb. 2018, 2): 20-22, “Newest Cardinal is Part of Oblate Family,” for Cardinal Ling’s relationship with the Oblates of Mary.

adult supervisors in one group. So they do work together on projects such as this.<sup>48</sup>

The Catholic Hmong have also attended the national summer meetings of the Karen.<sup>49</sup>

Kou Ly was accepted into the Archdiocese of St. Paul's permanent deaconate program in 2019. Wives of applicants are very much part of the program, so Joua too is ready to assume even greater leadership of the Catholic Hmong Community. Kou wrote on Oct. 26, 2021: "My formation is going well. There is lots of readings as we study the Fathers of the Church, Christology and the incarnation. I enjoyed reading St. Anselm and St. Thomas Aquinas. Keep us in your prayers."<sup>50</sup>

With any migrant group settling in different areas, we should not be surprised that there are splits and differences, especially over how much of their original culture can be maintained. We have ample documentation that Bouchard, Nespolo and Taillez worked gently but firmly to overcome any antagonism.

When the women and girls dress in the Hmong tradition, especially for the dances, it is clear to the Hmong that there are slight and deliberate differences in their apparel. Hmong from Laos dress differently from Hmong from Vietnam. There seem to be differences in dress if one is from CA or MN. All to show the richness of the Hmong journey to the USA.

It has been my experience that following World War II, with the vast number of displaced persons and migrants moving to the USA, Catholic dioceses were quick to develop structures to work with migrants. Then thousands of Koreans and Vietnamese came to the United States following those wars. The most popular name for priests in the USA *Official Catholic Directory* is no longer Irish-American (O'Brian and its variations) but Vietnamese-American (Nguyen).<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> The Franciscan Brothers of Peace, some of whom live in a building at St. Patrick's, help very much with the Karen at St. Casimir's, which also brings the two cultures closer together.

<sup>49</sup> For example, the Karen-America Catholic Conference, Aug. 9-12, 2018, was held in St. Paul, MN, and some of the clergy who attended spoke both languages. Deacon Seraphim, later Father Seraphim, of the Franciscan Brothers of Peace was a leader.

<sup>50</sup> Kou Ly e-mail to Winter, Oct. 25, 2021, Hmong Catholic File.

<sup>51</sup> The directory has been published annually since 1917, by P.J. Kenedy & Sons.

These diocesan offices dealing with migrants and refugees have been the first place that Catholic laity could work in any large number within our Church structure. And even the smaller dioceses seem to fund these offices very quickly.

Fr. Jerry Orsino's time with the US Catholic Conference Department of Migrants and Refugees, 1996-97, is another example of the willingness of US Oblate leadership to minister to migrants. The catechists he knew in Laos travel from CA to TX to visit him.<sup>52</sup>

Ministry with migrants has brought great wealth to the USA Catholic Church, and to the Oblates, both materially and spiritually.

Let us thank God and remember the gratitude Dr. Lo above expressed to Mary. May the Oblate Martyrs of Laos and the martyred catechists intercede for us.

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<sup>52</sup> Phone interview with Orsino, Sept. 22, 2021.



## **IMMIGRANTS IN THEIR OWN COUNTRY MISSIONARIES OBLATES COME HOME**

JEAN EMMANUEL MELONCOURT, OMI

**L**iving in the retirement residence with many missionaries who came back home from their ministries gives me an experience of the inculcation of their missions. After many years in foreign places, each missionary came home to a new way of living, which gave them souvenirs. The missionaries, Fr. Jean Leopold Morin and Fr. Charles Heon, lived in Haiti. Fr. Jean Leopold Morin expressed a need for more Haitian culture.

Fr. Morin had been on a few other missions in his lifetime, but Haiti left an amazing impact on him, making him get dual citizenship. Many of his behaviors make thinking of the Founder carrying out his ministry creatively. In all his ministries, Fr. Morin always looked to serve Haitians and protect their culture. Through promoting learning Haitian Creole and supporting activities, he renewal/worked towards developing the Haitian community. For instance, when the second Haitian generation in the US had a newspaper written only in English and printed once a month, he worked with them to have a section in Haitian Creole, with newspapers to go out weekly. Since then, every week on Sundays, there is news in Haitian Creole and English where families can share their thoughts.

FR. JEAN LEOPOLD MORIN

Behind all this work, who is Father Jean Leopold Morin? I came to find more details from his obituary, that I was not aware of them previously. His whole story from the obituary gives me a better understanding of who he really was and why he was so open and generous to the Haitian community to the point that he became very tied to the Haitian culture.

1925 Reverend Father. Jean Leopold Morin, OMI 2019

Rev. Jean Leopold Morin, O.M.I. Missionary Oblate Priest for 68

Years Age 94, died on July 28, 2019, at the Immaculate Heart of Mary Residence in Tewksbury, Massachusetts. He was a son of the late Francis and Alma (Couture) Morin. He was predeceased by his four sisters, Madeleine Adams, Lucielle Landry, Gabrielle Rattey, and Yvette Morin. Fr. Morin was born in Central Falls, Rhode Island. He studied at the Missionary Oblate seminaries in Colebrook, New Hampshire, as well as Bucksport and Bar Harbor, Maine. He entered the Oblate novitiate in Colebrook in 1945. He professed his first vows on July 16, 1946, and his perpetual vows on September 8, 1949. He received his degrees in Philosophy in 1948 and Theology in 1952 at the Oblate College in Natick, Massachusetts. He later received a Master's degree in Religious Education from the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC. His ordination took place on July 29, 1951, at St. Jean-Baptiste Church in Lowell, Massachusetts, where Bishop Louis J. Collignon, O.M.I. presided. Fr. John's first assignment following ordination was to the missions in Haiti in 1952. He ministered in Haiti for a total of thirty-five years in parishes; teaching at the Mazenod Seminary; as Novice Master; and preaching parish retreats. He served in Port-Salut, Camp-Perrin, Rocheà-Bateau, Port-à-Piment, Ouaminthe, Port-au-Prince, La Victoire, and Mt. Organise. During his time in Haiti, he returned to the United States on two occasions: to attend Catholic University of America, and then to minister at St. Peter's Parish in Plattsburgh, New York, for a year. From 1991 to 1993, he assisted in the Oblate missions in Tahiti. Fr. John returned to the United States permanently in 1993 and was assigned to the Northern United States Province. He did parish ministry at St. Angela Parish, Mattapan, Massachusetts, where there was a large Haitian community to whom he ministered. He was appointed Coordinator of the Haitian Apostolate of the Archdiocese of Boston, Massachusetts, for two terms. In 2003, he was assigned to St. Joseph the Worker Shrine staff in Lowell. He served at St. Jude/Our Lady of Guadalupe Shrine in New Orleans, Louisiana, where he served the Haitian community from 2010 to 2015. He was assigned to the Immaculata Retreat House staff in Willimantic, Connecticut from 2005 to 2010 and again from 2015 to 2016. Due to health issues, he moved to the community of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Residence in 2016, where he remained until his death<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> McKenna-Ouellette, Funeral Home, *Obituary Father Jean Leopold Morin* Accessed August 15, 2021 [www.mckennaouellette.com](http://www.mckennaouellette.com)

I did not know Fr. Morin when he was in Haiti, I met Father Morin in his ministry with the Haitian community in Boston, Massachusetts, at Saint Angela Parish. At that time, we had only two significant parishes in Boston for the Haitian community, St. Angela and St. Matthew. Haitian community center created by Monsignor Jeannot - a Haitian priest who served the community before him. Fr. Morin came to help and supports. The community needed an expansion. Hence he vowed to open other communities for Haitians who lived far away and the radio station could not reach them at that time, so that they could participate in Holy Mass. Saint Angela's church was too small for the Haitian community, there was not enough parking. At that time, people traveled far to have pastoral care such as confession, the sacrament of the sick, or community support. It was a very tedious ministry with more than thousands of families Fr. Morin looked after them as a shepherd. As immigrants, Haitians needed their pastoral care along with other support to adjust to the new country. Being a tropical country, Haiti rarely has snow. So for many Haitians who recently moved to Boston, the winter is challenging for them. Some of them did not know how to dress appropriately for the cold weather. Fr. Morin looked for means to provide them with winter clothes so that they could better dress for the winter and not suffer from the cold.

During his pastoral care with the Haitian community, Fr. Morin covered many functions relating to spiritual health, counseling, and education. He emphasized on providing spiritual support services like counseling, visitations to hospitals and prisons, palliative and bereavement care, prayer sessions, and memorial services. Father Morin helped Haitian immigrants develop a deeper connection to the church by conducting worship meetings, sacrament, and other services. In those instances, Fr. Morin used Canon 564<sup>2</sup> of the Canon Law to emphasize his chaplaincy. He looked beyond our needs.

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<sup>2</sup> Provost, James H., ed. *Code, Community, Ministry: Selected Studies for the Parish Minister Introducing the Revised Code of Canon Law*. Washington D.C.: Canon Law Society of America, 1983, 564 566 §2. “A Chaplain is a priest to whom is entrusted in a stable manner the pastoral care, in part of some community particular group of the Christian faithful, to be exercised in accord with universal and particular law. In Hospitals, prisons and on sea journeys a chaplain, moreover, has the faculty to be exercised only in those places, to absolve from censures latae sententiae which are not reserved nor declared, with due regard for the prescription of can 976.”

After fifty years of priesthood, Fr. Morin decided to retire, leaving Boston for his retirement. Haitian communities started to grow across Massachusetts. Haitian communities in Massachusetts have expanded to Lynn MA, Everett MA, Cambridge MA, Randolph MA, Waltham MA, Roslindale MA, and Attleboro MA. All of those communities had a root from St Angela and St Mathew from Father Morin.

Many pastoral cares are provided by a church as part of its ministry, others by institutions like hospitals, schools, prisons, military/veteran's facilities, or nursing homes. Because these institutions can be religiously and culturally diverse, pastoral care must be able to handle the different spiritual needs of each patient with respect and understanding. Their duties also include maintaining a network of institutional/community contacts, organizations, and volunteers to ensure that each patient has access to appropriate, helpful resources.

In these turbulent times of proliferating personal and social crises, clergy are on the front lines of caregiving for millions of burdened people struggling with many types of crises, losses, and traumas. These demanding caregiving challenges include individual and family such as disputing conflicts, illnesses, and death<sup>3</sup>.

Fr. Morin expressed the need for the development of pastoral care. He took prayer with the community as a center of unity. We met every Tuesday evening for prayer, where we brought all our needs as a community. We prepared our spiritual needs and performed other pastoral needs like family union, youth gathering, counseling, and scheduled to visit sick people in the community. Father Morin provided good pastoral care and delivered spiritual guidance that is appropriate for each individual, especially to young Haitians. The ability to work through stress is also essential, as you may be mediating conflict, conducting crisis intervention, or giving support during a health-related emergency. You must be able to communicate well.

Fr. Morin went to Lowell, MA, for his retirement. It was hard for Haitians in Massachusetts to leave Father Morin alone. Despite the distance, they were still looking for his assistance. The Oblate community

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<sup>3</sup> Howard Clinebell, *Basic Type of Pastoral and Counseling*, Abingdon Press Nashville, 2011, 137.

sent Father to New Orleans, where there were few Haitians. After several years a Haitian community started in New Orleans.

During his time at St. Angela, I was new in the US. Fr. Morin was in his seventies. He should have been retired. I did agree that his community sent him far away from the Haitian people. I went to study in Lowell for my master's in Electrical Engineering and worked in the field for five years, and discerned later to be an oblate.

The call of Jesus Christ, heard within the church through people's need for salvation, draws us together as missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Christ thus invites us to follow him and to share in his mission through word and work.

We are a clerical Congregation of pontifical rights. We come together in apostolic communities of priests and brothers, united to God by the vows of religion. Cooperating with the Saviour and imitating his example, we commit ourselves principally to evangelizing the poor<sup>4</sup>.

I thought Fr. Morin now in the late eighties was free from ministry. Coming for mission experience in New Orleans, I found Fr. Morin again in full-time ministry. He lived at St. Jude Guadeloupe Parish and went to serve Haitians at St. Augustine one, meaning he drove there and took care of his community. This behavior put me to shame that I thought it was too late to discern my vocation. I observed him for a few days taking the stairs and driving to his ministry. All his work strengthened my discernment to fulfill my vocation. When he saw me, he was excited to talk about his research of Haitian families in New Orleans and had a retreat for them so that he could start a community there.

Anywhere Father Morin went, his passion was to bring the Haitian people together. In a sense, we can say that he became more Haitian than native Haitians. After the New Orleans mission, they sent him to the retreat center in Connecticut to really have a good retirement because the Haitians kept him restless. For most of the Haitians, Father Morin was the only one they could look to for help. Even at the retreat center, he found a way to have the Haitian community utilize the retreat center for their annual charismatic retreat.

<sup>4</sup> Constitutions and Rule of the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Rome, 2012, C 1.

Fr. Bouzi enjoyed visiting with the late, Fr. John Morin at the Oblate Residence in Tewksbury, Fr. Morin was quick to remind his brother Oblate that he was more Haitian than the native son. Father Bouzi may have been born in Haiti and lived there for 28 years, but Fr. Morin spent 41 years ministering on the island<sup>5</sup>.

Why did Haitians look up to Fr. Morin? The answer is after forty-one years living in Haiti, Fr. Morin felt more Haitian than an absolute Haitian. From his arrival, the Haitians treated him well making him feel at home. He later said that he never being better received. Further, he looked at the history and the culture of Haiti and discovered that it is more than just people suffering but carrying a message of hope. His voice resounds for the voiceless. When Fr. Morin listened to them, he saw the love of God, and when he talked to them, people heard him and he helped me to see God better.

I remember what my father told me about the rally in Miami, Florida, in the early 1990s Fr. Morin was there protesting in favored of legalizing Haitian immigrants who had to come the United States by boat. He went over the bridge and fasted with others until the government considered them. At Fr. Morin funeral, the large chapel at the Oblate Residence in Tewksbury. They were followed with Haitians, from Haiti and everywhere he lists ministered. They came because of the love him. As the gospel of John said in chapter 10 from verse 27 to 28 “My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand.”<sup>6</sup>

I feel truly fortunate to have been called to talk about Father Morin’s pastoral care to Haitian immigrants and their families. With his missionary spirit, he helped our newly arrived Haitians to feel welcome in Saint Angela parish so that they will continue to grow in their Catholic faith here in this country. His acceptance and love for the Haitian people have transformed some of them. He has helped them to accept

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<sup>5</sup> Mike, Viola, *Haitian Missionaries Spread Joy*, Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate US Province, Accessed November 8, 2021, <https://www.omiusa.org/index.php/2020/02/05/haitian-missionaries-spread-joy/>

<sup>6</sup> Donald Senior, John J Collins and May Ann Getty, *The Catholic Study Bible NAB revised edition*, Third edition (New York: Oxford University Press), 2015, John 10,27-28.

the great grace of vulnerability, dependence on the power of God working in the hearts of others, and the grace of appreciating how different they all are as well as how similar they all are. For Father Morin, it was all about finding joy and happiness by helping the Haitian community.

We thus find another very deep and at the same time subtle threat which makes it impossible to recognize and accept joyfully the ecclesia dimension which naturally marks every Christians vocation, and the priestly vocation in particular: As the council reminds us, priestly ministry acquires its genuine meaning and attains to its fullest truth in serving and in fostering the growth of the Christian community and the common priesthood of the faithful<sup>7</sup>.

#### FR. CHARLES HEON

With each missionary Oblate, I found a different need to express their inculcation. For instance, Fr. Charles Heon, OMI did not like his mission in Haiti at the beginning. As it was quoted in the article *Haitian Missionaries Spread Joy* in the OMUSA websites

On the first day Fr. Heon arrived there, he was shocked at the extreme poverty and chaos he saw on the drive from the airport to the Oblate house. He thought to himself, “What the heck am I doing here!” But soon, the poverty and chaos became secondary as Fr. Héon found much joy in ministering at parishes serving the poorest of the poor<sup>8</sup>

However, after forty years and more spent in Haiti, Father Heon came back to his country with a determination to return to Haiti. He nerve did return He spoke Haitian Creole with me all the time. Fr. Richard McAlear, OMI crowned him as a *king of mission* because he saw in him someone who was devoted to his mission. Even in his sickness, he still looked for news from his missions when the opportunity came. As our Constitution eight said:

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<sup>7</sup> Vatican, John Paul II *Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II, I Will Give You Shepherds Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Pauline Books & Media Boston MA, Rome, March 1992, 37, 4

<sup>8</sup> Mike, Viola, *Haitian Missionaries Spread Joy*, Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate US Province, Accessed November 8, 2021, <https://www.omiusa.org/index.php/2020/02/05/haitian-missionaries-spread-joy/>

We will always be close to the people with whom we work, taking into account their values and aspirations. To seek our 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. Awareness of our own shortcomings humbles us, yet God's power makes us confident as we strive to bring all people -- especially the poor-- to full consciousness of their dignity as human beings and as sons and daughters of God<sup>9</sup>.

I took my final vows as an Oblate in February 16, 2021. I am still discovering my own missionary future. As these beloved Oblates helped guide me in my discernment, I now continue to look to them for inspiration and direction. With their intercession I should be able to follow them in the creativity mission. According to *Evangelii Gaudium*, we are obliged to take seriously the word of the missionaries because they are on the frontier of the new Evangelization.

Indeed “today missionary activity still represents the greatest challenge for the church” and “the missionary task must remain foremost.” What would happen if we were to take these words seriously? We realize that missionary outreach is *paradigmatic for all the church’s activities*<sup>10</sup>.

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San Antonio, U.S.A.  
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<sup>9</sup> Constitutions and Rule of the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Rome, 2012, C 8.

<sup>10</sup> Vatican, Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father Francis The joy of the Gopel, Evangelii Gaudium*, Pauline Books & Media Boston MA, Rome 2013, 15.

# Familia Oblata

## REFUGEES ARE WELCOME HERE THE HOLY FAMILY OF BORDEAUX COMMUNITY IN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND IRELAND

*The Oblate Family is variously involved in the ministry of Migrants. Both the Lay Oblates and the many Institutes that live in communion with OMI are active and have many experiences in this field. We asked some Holy Family of Bordeaux members to share a few moments of their engagement with Refugees.*

### REFUGEES IN BRADFORD

This is the story of an experience at one of our local projects, *Abigail Housing*: a centre set up to support destitute asylum seekers. This organisation, with the support of many different charities, offers accommodation and food as well as a weekly allowance of £15 for up to 20 residents. Throughout lockdown these asylum seekers were denied all their usual supports. This included a weekly drop-in, regular appointments, English classes, access to medical care and the opportunity to meet their friends, etc. We, as a community, supported the residents of one of these houses which is local to us. The four residents living in this house are from Eritrea, Iran, Algeria, and Ethiopia. Can you imagine what it must be like living with strangers who have no common language? They have all been refused their claim for asylum, but they are allowed to stay if they can provide fresh evidence on their case to the Home Office. During the lockdown, some of their solicitors have been furloughed making it impossible to progress their asylum application in any way.

These refugees are living in a house where the only thing they have in common is helplessness with little light at the end of the tunnel. Each resident was allocated a volunteer to support them during lockdown which included regular phone calls. Sadly, as time progressed tension grew and the traumas of the past surfaced. The only help available with professionals was by phone. This too was a challenge due to language difficulties.

As conflict arose among some of the residents, one who had obvious mental health issues had to be removed and the only place available was a local hotel - Premier Inn - with no food or facilities to cook available. This move presented further issues of isolation for the individual concerned.

Unfortunately, due to the bad management at the hotel, this individual was seriously assaulted and is currently in a hostel for the homeless. His dream of asylum and receiving the mental health support he so badly needs, is fading more and more into the background.

We are aware that mental health issues have surfaced and caused a lot of concern during lockdown. We have further evidence of this as we read stories in the media about the more serious impact of mental health issues which often go unnoticed.

The reality for many asylum seekers in Bradford in recent months has been that, instead of being offered accommodation in a house, they have been sent to hotels which are most unsuitable for their needs. Some of these are mothers with small children and special dietary needs. Also, there is no provision for washing and drying clothes or a place to store their belongings. We can ask “what kind of accommodation is this?” “Is it a home?”

As you can well imagine this is not a holiday; it brings isolation as they are often assigned to a hotel in an area that is not familiar, away from their friends, social networks, and supports. They have “no choice”, “no voice”, and are penalised further if they don’t move. They struggle with access to education and health care. They need people to signpost them to the correct services and none of these are available during lockdown.

We have no idea of the journey they must go through to get from asylum to refugee status. Their emotional and mental pain and lack of security is heartrending. They are always “on the move”, always “Let-

ting Go” and leaving loved ones and security. They have to face a legal system that they don’t understand, and they have no one but those who befriend them to be their companions on this journey.

*Sr. Maria Crowley, Bradford Community*

## MINISTRY IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC

### *Phone Support*

Due to the restrictions of the pandemic the usual JRS (Jesuit Refugees Service) activities were suspended, leaving our refugee friends without what was a vital support and lifeline for many. Their sense of isolation increased as did their struggle to survive since they were no longer able to access the services that helped them meet their essential needs. Before the pandemic, they would visit the Day Centre, chat with their friends, have a hot meal, and receive various forms of help. Due to the restrictions arising from the spread of Covid-19, this was no longer possible.

Creative ways were found to enable as much support as possible to continue; one of these being the formation of a group of phone support volunteers. Faced with increased loneliness, isolation, fear, and insecurity many of the more vulnerable were needing this emotional support and friendship. With the closure of the usual activities, I became part of a team offering accompaniment through weekly phone calls. I have 10 refugees on my list.

Sometimes it is a question of a friendly chat, letting them know that they are not forgotten. On other occasions there may be concerns that need attention, shortage of food, toiletries, phone top ups, medical concerns, anxiety, fear, stress... When this arises, a report is given to one of the staff, who organises a response.

What is remarkable is that in the midst of a situation of abandonment and destitution they will always ask, “how are you”, and express interest, gratitude and appreciation for the smallest help received.

### *Hosting*

One of the greatest challenges faced by asylum seekers is the lack of accommodation. Often, they must resort to sleeping on night busses,

depend on a friend who may give them a sofa for a few nights, or else find a corner somewhere on the street. The hosting scheme organised by JRS is a wonderful opportunity for some of them to receive secure, friendly accommodation in a family or with a religious congregation.

The community I live in has had the privilege of hosting for nearly four years now. Normally, our guests stay for a period of 4-6 months and then move to another hosting place. We have a one-week break before the next guest arrives. Our present guest, originally from Ethiopia, has been with us for one year now. She arrived just before the pandemic was declared and lockdown became law. She will be leaving us shortly and we will welcome another one. We will miss her. Each guest makes her own unique contribution to our lives.

We learn a lot and get real insights into the experience of so many who find themselves in a foreign country, with no friends, and totally destitute. We marvel at their ability to survive and often we say to ourselves that we would find it almost impossible to walk in their shoes for one day, let alone one week.

We gain so much from our daily interactions with our guests, who come from several different countries; some may have been in the country for 18+ years without any response or support from the government. Our experience of hosting enables us to keep in touch with the reality of people “on the move”, opens us to the pain and struggle of people we wouldn’t normally be living closely with, and it relativises our own struggles.

*Sr. Margaret Muldoon, St. Gabriel’s Road*

#### REFUGEES ARE WELCOME HERE

“Refugees are welcome here.” This was the theme of the march organized in London, Saturday, September 17, 2021, to draw attention to the fate of refugees before the two decisive summits of world leaders on September 19-20.

The Solidarity with Refugees group, which includes the Jesuit Refugee Service, CAFOD, Caritas, Christian Aid, Oxfam, Amnesty International, the Refugee Council and other organizations, worked tirelessly to organize this London march. The march aimed to show the UK government and also the world that we care about Refugees.

We have all seen the images of the tragedies taking place in Syria, in the Mediterranean Sea, in Greece or in the “jungle” of Calais. In addition, there are fears that the injustices and ineffectiveness of the asylum system in England may contribute to the mismanagement of the crisis.

Prior to the march, there was an ecumenical service for refugees organized by CAFOD, Caritas, Christian Aid, JRS and other organizations. The theme of the service was “Changing History.” As Pope Francis said, “It is therefore about seeing, us first and then helping others to see in migrants and refugees, not just a problem to be dealt with, but a brother and sister to be welcomed, respected and loved”.<sup>1</sup>

We were reminded that the stories presented in the media about the subject of refugees often foster fear and resentment preventing those seeking safety from finding a proper welcome. The invitation to participants was to share the positive stories of our direct contact with refugees, stories inspired by our deep listening to refugees, to their personal stories. It is not simply a matter of listening but of allowing ourselves to be touched by these stories so that, through our witness, these stories may touch the hearts of others. We were equally invited to reflect on the following questions: “What if we listen to God’s story that transforms our story as strangers into a story of brothers and sisters?” “What if, by listening and trusting God, we change the history of the world to create a future in which our common humanity is recognized, and refugees are treated with dignity and respect?”

A copy of the Lampedusa Cross was solemnly brought to the altar. We remembered that the original crosses had been made by a Sicilian carpenter, Francesco Tuccio, from the wood of the first boat that had landed on the island causing the death of 349 refugees. The crosses were offered to the survivors as a symbol of their rescue and a sign of hope.

A refugee woman, Victoria, told her very moving personal story, followed by the story of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10: 30-36) ending with the question, “Which of the three do you feel was the neighbor of the one who fell into the hands of the robbers? “ We were given time to reflect on how this question had meaning for us today. Finally, the

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<sup>1</sup> Message of the Holy Father Francis for the 105th World Migrant and Refugee Day, 2019 [September 29, 2019].

CAFOD team asked us to write a short message of hope on cards. These messages will be used for a special event organized for the end of the Year of Mercy and shared with refugees.

As we exited the Church, we joined the already marching crowd and found ourselves in a sea of flags belonging to a wide variety of organizations. Holy Family was represented by members of the Provincial House, Clapham and Gabriel's Road. There were also numerous people with their own banners, including children and the elderly. The march lasted about two and a half hours and it was great to see how joyfully the young and frail people participated. The presence of a large number of youth and adults was a sign of hope for change.

The banners had messages of welcome, love and peace, respect and solidarity. There were also many calls for recognition of equality for all people and all men and women, that we all belong to one humanity. We had feelings of being one, of being connected there as we marched through the crowd. We were happy to be there. For a brief moment there were no longer strangers, but people united by the common belief that we must stand up to welcome refugees. The march led us through Downing Street where many people stopped to chant "Refugees are welcome here" while others continued to Parliament Square to hear various speeches calling on the British government to respond quickly, generously and positively to the massive arrival of refugees. Perhaps the best summary of this experience is the prayer used during this event:

*God, you transform our story as strangers into a story of brothers and sisters, help us to change the story*

*From frustration to freedom, for those stranded in refugee camps*

*From fear to peace, for those separated from their families*

*From trafficking to safe passage, for those on dangerous paths*

*From despair to hope, for hearts weary of pain*

*From disquiet to hospitality, for spirits in despair*

*From crisis to opportunity, for countries that welcome*

*From stranger to family, as we have been welcomed by you*

*May we never fail to meet your gaze, in the eyes of our brother and sister; the stranger. Amen*

*Aberdare, Clapham, St. Gabriel's Road*

# Documenta

**YVES BERTRAIS (1921-2007)**  
« LA PASSION HMONG »

**Y**ves Bertrais, « La passion Hmong », un des derniers missionnaires anthropologues du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, est le titre du livre par lequel Philippe Chanson a voulu rappeler le 100 ans depuis la naissance d'un Oblat qui a consacré toute sa vie à cette population du Laos et qui l'a suivie dans sa destinée migratoire jusqu'en Guyane française (Éditeur : Karthala, Collection : Histoire Des Mondes Chrétiens, 2021, 258 p.)

Philippe Chanson, théologien et docteur en anthropologie de l'Université de Louvain (Belgique) et chercheur associé de son Laboratoire d'Anthropologie Prospective (LAAP), a très bien connu le p. Bertrais et a travaillé longtemps avec lui, lui dédiant aussi plusieurs articles<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Le père Yves Bertrais, une figure incontournable de l'histoire de peuple Hmong. Hommage sous forme d'itinéraire, Rome, Archives de la Maison générale des Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 1992, 1996 pour la 2<sup>ème</sup> éd. Avec notice ; repris *in extenso* sous le titre « Le père Yves Bertrais O.M.I. », suivi de « Les Hmong : portrait d'un peuple méconnu », *Pôle et tropiques* (Lyon), n. 9-10, septembre-octobre 1993, p. 4-23 : le texte a également paru en version anglaise dans *Exchange, Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research, Interuniversity Institute for Missiological and Ecumenical Research* (Leiden-Utrecht), vol. 22, avril 1993, p. 1-17. « Le père Yves Bertrais des Oblats de Marie Immaculée (1921-2007). Une des dernières grandes figures de missionnaires-anthropologues », *Histoire & Missions Chrétaines* (Paris, Karthala), n. 4, décembre 2007, p. 183-191, repris *in extenso* dans René Charrier, *En chemin avec le peuple Hmong. Du Laos en Guyane et en France*, Paris, Karthala, 2015, p. 227-235. Parmi les écrits du P. Bertrais, on peut rappeler son témoignage : « Un missionnaire chez

*Les Archives générales de la maison générale à Rome permettent la publication de deux écrits par lesquels la revue « Oblatio » veut rendre hommage à cet Oblat, témoin éminent de l'amour pour les migrants. Le premier est l'éloge funèbre prononcé par Philippe Chanson à l'occasion de ses obsèques. L'autre est une lettre adressée par le p. Bertrais au Supérieur général, le père Fernand Jetté, pour le mettre au courant de son voyage pour visiter des Hmong en Chine. Le père Jetté lui avait répondu: « Le 8 mai 1985. Cher Père Bertrais, Votre lettre du 15 avril m'a beaucoup intéressé. Personnellement je suis tout à fait favorable à ce que vous mainteniez vos contacts avec le Chine. J'ai donc recommandé l'allocation de 20,00 FF au Fonds de Solidarité Oblate. Il faudra cependant renouveler la demande chaque année, selon les règlements du Fonds. Je serais très intéressé également à ce que nos Archives générales reçoivent une copie de toutes vos publications et même, si possible, de votre journal, en indiquant clairement : « Pas pour publication ». Vos amis de la Maison générale vous saluent. Soyez assuré de ma prière et de tous mes vœux. Fraternellement vôtre en N.-S, et M.I., Fernand Jetté, o.m.i. Supérieur général ».*

*L'Éditeur*

LAUDATIO DU PÈRE YVES BERTRAIS, O.M.I. (1921-2007)  
PAR LE PASTEUR PHILIPPE CHANSON  
OBSÈQUES DES 8-10 JUIN 2007 - PAROISSE SAINT-MARC, ORLÉANS

Chers amis Hmong, chers compagnons d'œuvre des Oblats, c'est avec beaucoup d'émotion que j'adresse aujourd'hui ces quelques mots de reconnaissance envers celui à qui nous disons « à-Dieu ». Je le fais dans l'élan du geste de fraternité œcuménique que le Père Bertrais m'a un jour tendu, de sa franche poignée de mains, pour évoquer à ma façon, en tant que pasteur et théologien protestant, quelques traits de mémoire nous rappelant sa personnalité attachante et la profondeur de l'œuvre à laquelle il s'était attelé.

C'est lors de mon ministère en Guyane française, de 1987 à 1994, que j'ai connu le Père. Et je dois dire que ce fut un grand privilège de

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les Hmong depuis 48 ans », *Omnis Terra. Rivista di cultura e missione delle Pontificie Opera Missionarie* (Rome), n. 346, septembre-octobre 1998, p. 312-326.

l'avoir rencontré en tant que frère dans la foi et très vite comme ami, parce qu'il m'a été d'une aide inestimable pour m'initier à l'univers Hmong, son histoire, sa culture et ses coutumes, m'aidant ainsi à célébrer dans les églises protestantes Hmong des villages de Cacao et de Javouhey. Avec lui, j'ai découvert ce qu'est et ce que peut être cette belle fraternité œcuménique que j'évoquais, basée sur une reconnaissance mutuelle de nos ministères au service du même Dieu, croyant au même Évangile et partageant avec joie des convictions communes faites de respect et d'ouverture. Et si ces moments se sont à jamais inscrits dans ma mémoire, c'est bien parce que le Père Bertrais est celui que la Providence aura placé sur ma route pour me permettre d'avancer dans mon propre ministère, au point même qu'il a été un des grands déclencheurs d'une manière nouvelle pour moi de l'aborder en m'offrant de réfléchir profondément comment penser et vivre l'Évangile au sein d'une culture différente de la mienne. C'est dans cette trace que j'aimerais très simplement partager avec vous quatre traits de mémoire qui m'ont particulièrement frappé à propos du Père Bertrais.

*Le premier trait de mémoire que je retiendrai est celui de sa personnalité remarquable qui a participé à forger la qualité de son engagement.*

Ce qui reste en effet singulièrement frappant, pour moi, c'est l'extraordinaire ténacité du Père Bertrais, pour ne pas dire son opiniâtreté, qui a soutenu toute sa vocation, une vocation dont il avait résumé la perspective dans une notice autobiographique que j'ai conservée : « En tout - disait-il (...) la motivation de fond est unique : servir Dieu qui m'a fait rencontrer les Hmong ». Tel a été sa ligne d'horizon intangible. Travailleur énergique, infatigable, de l'aurore jusqu'au milieu de la nuit, le Père Bertrais faisait preuve d'une persévérance et d'une abnégation à toute épreuve. Direct, droit, franc, d'une intelligence brillante, créative, imaginative, visionnaire tout en restant très pragmatique, j'ai rarement connu un homme si déterminé, clairvoyant et lucide. Le Père Bertrais savait exactement où il allait, ce qu'il voulait, ce qu'il faisait et ce qui était prioritaire pour le service de Dieu et de ses frères, s'en tenant - sans dévier - à ses choix, ses options, ses décisions. N'a-t-il pas renoncé à son doctorat pour venir aider ses frères Hmong à s'installer à Javouhey ? Et c'est pourquoi le Père nous laisse le souvenir si prégnant

d'un homme de conviction, adossé à une très profonde et inébranlable vocation que rien ni personne, ni ambition personnelle, ni aucune épreuve ne semblait pouvoir altérer - ce qui ne froissait d'ailleurs en rien sa modestie légendaire (tant le Père avait l'art de mettre toujours l'autre en avant) et la perception aiguë de sa fragilité et de la finitude de toute existence (me confiant avec insistance n'être qu'un simple maillon de la longue chaîne des témoins de l'Évangile parcourant l'histoire).

*Le deuxième trait de mémoire que me laisse le Père Bertrais est celui de sa passion et de son amour pour le peuple Hmong.*

Plus de cinquante pleines années au service de ses frères et sœurs Hmong, immergé, noyé dans l'univers et la culture Hmong, depuis qu'un beau jour d'avril 1950 il était arrivé en vélo à Kiu Katiam, un village Hmong de la montagne des Gaurs, au Laos, situé sur la route entre Luang Prabang et Vientiane. Vivant avec les Hmong, adoptant les us et coutumes Hmong, partageant leur mode de vie, leur nourriture, leurs chasses, leurs fêtes et surtout leur langue... Sans aucun doute, très peu de personnes au monde peuvent se prévaloir aujourd'hui de posséder la maîtrise de la langue Hmong et d'avoir une vue d'ensemble de la culture Hmong à la façon d'Yves Bertrais - considéré à juste titre, par ses pairs, comme un des meilleurs spécialistes mondiaux de cette ethnie. Son dévouement et sa passion pour le peuple Hmong a, là encore, été littéralement « extra-ordinaire » et exemplaire malgré les vicissitudes d'un parcours nomade entre le Laos, la Thaïlande, la Guyane, la Chine, les USA, les Philippines et la France, pays où le Père a tout traversé : les guerres, les menaces pour sa vie, les fuites à travers la jungle, la perte de précieux documents et de biens, les camps de réfugiés, les difficultés de réadaptation et la charge de la réimplantation des exilés dans les pays d'accueil... Dans tous ces lieux et ces événements, le Père est resté avec les Hmong et ne les aura jamais abandonnés. À l'égal de son amour pour Dieu, rien n'aura détourné son amour pour ce peuple et sa passion à respecter comme à préserver l'identité de ces hommes, de ces femmes, de ces familles arrachées si brutalement à leur terres. Le Père Bertrais aurait-il finalement reçu comme un signe prophétique ce beau nom Hmong que lui donnèrent les Anciens de Kiu Katiam, non seulement celui « fonctionnel » de *Txiv Plig*, le « père des âmes », mais celui de son adoption solennelle, *Nyiaj Pov*, « d'argent protégé »,

dont l'accent profondément imagé expliqué par Ya Tsong Yeng (présent lors de cette attribution à Kiu Katiam) est celui « d'un cadeau d'autant précieux à préserver qu'il est en espérance d'être partagé » ? En tous les cas, c'est aussi la métaphore de l'alliance et même celle du mariage, qui convient admirablement pour qualifier cette relation d'amour particulière du Père Bertrais avec les Hmong. N'est-ce pas ce que signifiait, scellait, la petite bague Hmong traditionnelle en argent, ciselée et colorée, que le Père portait toujours à son doigt ?

*Le troisième trait de mémoire que je garderai du Père Bertrais est sa manière radicalement incarnée de témoigner et de vivre de l'Évangile en lien total avec sa culture d'accueil.*

Ce trait que nous laisse le Père est encore une fois ici particulièrement frappant et m'a été d'une aide inestimable - comme j'en ai déjà témoigné - pour penser mon ministère : pas de coupure entre l'Évangile et la culture ! Le Père Bertrais croyait à un véritable processus dit « d'inculturation de l'Évangile », c'est-à-dire à un Évangile incarné dans toutes les fibres de l'humain et visant à tenir toujours debout cet humain, tel qu'il est, où il en est et là où il se trouve, dans la matrice de sa langue, et donc de sa culture, de ses valeurs et de ses traditions qui enracinent son existence au monde. En d'autres mots, pas d'Évangile importé, imposé, forcé sur une culture pour Yves Bertrais ! Mais un Évangile juste, vérifique, pensé à partir d'une culture, entièrement rivé à une culture, surgi, assumpté dans une culture à l'image du Christ, Parole et Geste incarnés dans sa propre culture. Nous avons tous ici en mémoire les deux impressionnantes et significatives collections d'ouvrages que nous a laissés le Père et dont on dit que l'accumulation dépassait même sa propre taille ! Des milliers et des milliers de pages de la *Collection Patrimoine Culturel Hmong*, fruits d'années de patientes collectes, sans censure (le Père y tenait), des traditions orales Hmong : des chants traditionnels de mariage, des rites funéraires et chamaniques, des légendes, contes et histoires touchant l'univers artistique, coutumier et sapiential Hmong... Et ces autres dizaines et dizaines de livres de la *Collection Pastorale Hmong* qui ont accompagné l'immense travail de la traduction de la Bible en Hmong : des histoires bibliques illustrées, une histoire de l'église, des commentaires, des catéchismes et autres

missel, lectionnaire, livrets de prières et cantiques religieux pour les chrétiens Hmong...

*Enfin, quatrième irait de mémoire que je conserverai précieusement du Père Bertrais, celui finalement des dimensions de l'héritage incalculable qu'il nous légue à travers l'ensemble de son œuvre, de son action et de son exemple.*

Un héritage sans aucun doute d'abord intellectuel qu'étaye l'étenue de l'œuvre que nous venons d'évoquer : presque une centaine d'ouvrages écrits en Hmong et publiés pour les Hmong, grâce surtout - et tout est là - à la création de l'écriture de la langue hmong. Car faut-il rappeler ici que c'est sous la plume du Père Bertrais que pris naissance la mise en graphie du parler Hmong, la collecte de son vocabulaire, l'élaboration de son dictionnaire, de sa grammaire, d'un syllabaire et, partant, l'apprentissage de la lecture de cette langue comme outil déterminant de communication grâce auquel des millions de Hmong aujourd'hui, des quatre coins du monde, par-delà toutes les frontières, peuvent communiquer entre eux, dans leur idiome, et qui plus est, aidé par un réseau de communication rendu singulièrement plus efficace grâce au Bulletin de liaison international qu'avait encore créé le Père Bertrais. C'est bien grâce à lui, à son travail acharné, intuitif, d'anthropologue de terrain, de linguiste, d'ethnographe, de communicateur, de pédagogue, d'éditeur, que les Hmong ont désormais une tradition écrite collectée et préservée des trésors de leur oralité. Ne serait-ce que pour ce seul apport radicalement majeur, le Père Bertrais est entré définitivement dans la mémoire du peuple Hmong.

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Mais c'est encore, par-delà, tout un héritage spirituel que nous laisse le Père Bertrais. Je veux parler de sa foi forte comme un roc, de sa passion et de son engagement pour l'Évangile accompagnant sa passion et son engagement pour les hommes et les femmes Hmong qui ont commencé par l'accueillir au village de Kiu Katiam. Est-ce d'ailleurs un hasard si le Père Bertrais, répondant à l'appel reçu, est parti au Laos exactement le 24 décembre 1947, à Noël, fête de la nativité, fête de la venue du Christ dans nos histoires quotidiennes, et qu'il vient de nous quitter le dimanche de notre dernière Pentecôte, fête par excellence de la mission ? Parabole magnifique et synthèse si parlante du sacerdoce du Père Bertrais tendu tout entier entre ces deux moments liturgiques forts parcourant le cycle de sa vie ministérielle : la fête de l'incarnation de l'Évangile et la fête du témoignage rendu à l'Évangile.

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En 1992, j'avais écrit qu'Yves Bertrais, personnalité unique, hors normes, s'imposait comme une figure incontournable et irremplaçable de l'histoire des Hmong et du christianisme Hmong dont il est bel et bien devenu, au plein sens du mot, le véritable Père, tant par la qualité et l'importance de son action auprès des Hmong (qui lui valut d'être fait *Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur*, à Cayenne, en 1991) que par sa vision prophétique d'un ministère au service des Hmong (qu'atteste la *Médaille vaticane de Serviteur de la Paix* qu'il reçut à New York en 1998). Je contresigne cette perception, et plus que jamais en pensant à la « surface » humaine inoubliable du Père Bertrais, capable de côtoyer aussi bien les hommes d'Églises que les scientifiques, les politiques et les fonctionnaires pour le seul intérêt des Hmong et au nom même - sans le cacher - de l'Évangile. Certes, son aventure humaine et spirituelle est exaltante, mais rappelons-nous qu'elle eut pour secret *le don total de soi*.

Avec son départ, nous prenons conscience que c'est une somme considérable d'expériences, de connaissance et de savoir être exemplaire qui retourne à Dieu, mais que nous héritons aussi en retour. Et ce sera bel et bien à nous d'en faire fructifier l'héritage et de ne pas l'oublier. En cela, malgré nos manquements, j'ai confiance. Non seulement parce que le Père Bertrais (qui m'avait plusieurs fois partagé le souci de la suite de son ministère après son départ) restera à jamais vivant dans la mémoire collective du peuple Hmong comme dans chacune de nos mémoires individuelles, mais surtout parce que par-delà les tristesses du départ et de l'absence, nous gardons comme une joie de le savoir accueilli et recueilli dans la Toute-Présence, dans la mémoire même de Dieu. Comme nos Ancêtres, il repose en Père « bienveillant » dans le souvenir de Dieu. Et c'est ce souvenir-là qui ravivera toujours en nous cette belle parole Hmong des Anciens :

« Pour toute sa vie, on a qu'un seul destin.  
Je ne sais que les jours où je vis.  
Je ne sais le jour de ma mort  
Le sabre tranchant, viendra un jour où il s'émoussera.  
Ma vie, viendra un jour où, à coup sûr,, elle disparaîtra  
Une génération ne dure qu'une génération.  
Celui qui vit, on l'écoute et on met en pratique.  
De celui qui part, on recueille  
et emporte pour marcher sur ses traces »

*Pasteur Philippe Chanson*  
Grand-Lancy, Suisse  
[philippe.chanson@unige.ch](mailto:philippe.chanson@unige.ch)

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YVES BERTRAS AU SUPÉRIEUR GÉNÉRAL, P. FERNAND JETTÉ,  
15 AVRIL 1985

Village de Javouhey  
97318 Acarouany  
France

Bonjour Père!

Il y a longtemps que je remets pour vous écrire. Vous avez peut-être su que l'an dernier, en Juillet-Août, je suis allé en Chine, précisément à

Kunming, dans la province du Yunnan. Je désirais y rencontrer un catéchiste, Ya Yia, qui avait étudié avec moi à Vientiane pendant trois années, vers 1970. Depuis, je l'avais vu souvent en Thaïlande où il s'était réfugié avant la chute de Vientiane. Il y animait une petite communauté de chrétiens. De Chiangmai j'allais célébrer chez eux environ tous les 4 mois. C'était dans les années 75-78. Puis je suis venu en Guyane en fin 79. Chaque année je retourne, en Thaïlande visiter les groupes que j'y ai connus et qui attendent une aide pastorale, principalement en livres de catéchèse. Ou j'y vais pour rester au courant de leurs problèmes pour des choix éventuels de migration dans un pays d'accueil. Je revoyais donc Ya Yia chaque année, jusqu'en 82, année où il projetait de choisir la Chine comme pays d'accueil. Ses raisons étaient aussi valables qu'un choix des US ou de la France par exemple. Il y est donc allé en 82.

Depuis qu'il est en Chine, il m'écrit régulièrement et demande un soutien pour son travail de catéchiste qu'il continue là-bas. Il m'avait même demandé une attestation en forme sur ses études de catéchiste à Vientiane pour la montrer aux autorités du camp où il se trouve. Au début, j'étais assez hésitant pour lui écrire, craignant de le compromettre: on reste sur l'idée d'une persécution religieuse intense. Mais depuis 83 il me demandait de venir le voir et disait que cela ne posait pas beaucoup de problèmes, au dire des autorités de son camp de réimplantation. J'ai demandé à mon supérieur le P. Chevroulet ce qu'il en pensait, et au prononcé de Bangkok aussi. L'un et l'autre ne savaient pas trop ce qu'en penser, mais si de ma part c'était réalisable, essayer d'y aller.

En fait, depuis 1980 l'attitude des officiels chinois tant à l'égard des visiteurs étrangers que des chrétiens<sup>1</sup> de leur pays a évolué vite. Il n'y a eu aucune difficulté pour avoir un visa. Et sur place, pendant 17 jours à Kunming, j'ai pu constater que des milliers de touristes voyaient avec une grande liberté, pas entière, mais grande. D'autre part, mon père, qui savait mon projet d'aller en Chine m'avait laissé avant de mourir environ 15.000 F. pour ce voyage. Je suis allé là-bas en touriste, en privé, avec des projets clairs, mais ne sachant pas très bien si j'y parviendrais.

Le projet: 1: essayer de rencontrer Ya Yia. 2: essayer de rencontrer un ou des prêtres Hmong que je savais être dans la région de Kunming. 3: prendre des contacts avec l'Université de Kunming, section Anthropologie. J'emportais quelques livres en Hmong, ou en Hmong et

français pour m'introduire, et une lettre du directeur du Laboratoire de CNRS dans lequel j'ai travaillé de 75 à 78.

En arrivant à Kunming je constatais que pour faire du tourisme c'est très facile. Mais pour rencontrer des personnes précises ou des organismes il faut soit être invité officiellement, soit avoir une mission officielle d'une organisme du pays d'où l'on vient. Or je n'avais ni l'un ni l'autre.

Cependant, grâce à un chinois de Kunming professeur, à l'Université et qui m'avait été indiqué par une chinoise de Hong Kong j'ai eu la visite à l'hôtel le troisième jour après mon arrivée de cinq professeurs de la Section Anthropologie. Ils sont restés 3 heures. Je leur ai donné mes livres. Ils sont revenus trois fois dans la semaine et m'ont demandé de faire une journée d'intervention à l'Université. Ce qui se fit le samedi: quatre heures le matin et trois heures et demi le soir. A la fin: un repas offert par l'Université au restaurant d'Etat. Deux jeunes anthropologues se sont décidés à apprendre le Hmong et l'écriture créée au Laos. Ils sont venus plusieurs fois à l'hôtel avec magnétophone pour enregistrer un livre de lecture. L'entrée à l'Université se faisait donc mieux que je n'avais pu le rêver pour un «privé» touriste.

Pour rencontrer un ou des prêtres hmong, un coup de chance encore: je suis arrivé un samedi soir. J'ai demandé s'il y avait une église catholique ouverte à Kunming. Le dimanche matin j'y suis allé en taxi. Une première messe, rite avant 1950, commençait. Aussitôt après une autre messe. Après la messe, j'ai voulu dire bonjour aux prêtres. Le premier était un Hmong qui a fait 32 ans de camps et travaux collectifs: Kou Tso Lin. L'autre était un chinois, sorti des camps en 79 à cause de ses connaissances en Italien, salésien, ayant étudié à Rome, parlant un peu français. Nous avons parlé ensemble chaque dimanche pendant des heures. Kou m'a emmené en promenade une journée en lieu touristique à 130 km de Kunming. Tous deux m'ont invité à manger chez eux. On s'écrivit depuis.

Ce à quoi je tenais le plus c'était de rencontrer le catéchiste Ya Yia. Il est à 300 km. de Kunming. 5 jours de cars par route difficile. Et de plus juste à côté delà frontière du Laos, en zone où il y a des bombardements de frontière. Impossible d'y aller en touriste: zone réservée aux officiels concernés. J'ai demandé à l'Université de le faire venir. Cela n'était pas de leur compétence, même pour eux c'est difficile d'y

aller. Il leur faut une autorisation. J'ai écrit deux lettres à Ya Yia, dont l'une avec des phrases en chinois et donnant les noms des professeurs de la section anthropologie, à l'intention des responsables du camp à qui Ya Yia demandait de venir à Kunming. Et j'ai envoyé aussi un télégramme. Ce sont les lettres qui ont été déterminées, et l'Université a été avertie avant moi du jour de l'arrivée de Ya Yia. Il est arrivé à l'hôtel le 13ème jour de mon attente là. Les deux anthropologues étaient justement chez moi. Ya Yia les a impressionnés, car il connaît le Hmong Blanc, le Hmong Vert, le Lao, le Thai, l'anglais et il leur parlait assez bien le chinois. Ils sont revêtus le voir le lendemain, et le troisième jours ils nous offraient une voiture et nous conduisaient pour une demi-journée de tourisme sur une montagne pleine de sanctuaires bouddhistes à 20 km de Kunming.

Ya Yia a assisté à la messe le dimanche et nous avons partagé longuement avec le prêtre Hmong. Ya Yia savait l'existence de ce prêtre Hmong à Kunming mais n'avait pas pu encore entrer en contact avec lui. Le 13 Août, le catéchiste qui avait mis 5 jours à venir et allait passer encore 5 jours sur les routes est reparti. Je n'avais donc plus rien de spécial à faire-en-Chine. J'ai pris l'avion le 14 pour Hong Kong. Puis les camps de Thaïlande.

En passant à Hong Kong, des prêtres, à cause d'expériences fâcheuses du passé, m'ont recommandé d'être très discret sur mon voyage, surtout de ne rien écrire. Je m'y suis conformé. Mais je pense que la consigne de silence n'est pas aussi rigoureuse que par le passé. Car je reçois des revues de Hong Kong et Singapour relatant beaucoup de contacts de visiteurs avec les chrétiens et les prêtres de Chine. L'ouverture se fait de plus en plus grande et elle est réelle.

De retour à Javouhey, je me demandais ce qu'il resterait comme résultat de ce voyage.

Depuis mon retour j'ai reçu des lettres de tous ceux que j'avais vus. Et surtout Ya Yia m'a dit d'abord qu'il avait reçu la visite des deux anthropologues chinois qui disaient vouloir étudier le Hmong et se spécialiser. Puis sa dernière lettre était datée de Kunming, à l'Université. On l'a fait venir pour donner des cours pendant Mars Avril et Mai à 11 chercheurs chinois et étudiants Hmong de Chine.

Il demandait des livres et dictionnaires. Je lui en ai envoyé 7 petits colis. De quoi lui donner de la matière pour ses cours. Car il a été pris de court!

Ya Yia reprend aussi contact avec le P. Kou et demande les permissions officielles pour que le P. Kou puisse aller voir les Hmong sur la frontière. Ya Yia voudrait aussi qu'il s'entraîne à célébrer la messe en Hmong. Mais ce n'est pas permis. Cela ne tardera sans doute pas. En attendant, le P. Kou se met à l'écriture hmong du Laos qui lui permet de renouveler un peu sa pastorale qui en a grand besoin. Il espère fort pouvoir aller voir Ya Yia sur la frontière. Une partie des hmong réfugiés en effet veut entrer en catéchuménat, surtout depuis que Ya Yia est revenu de Kunming en Août.

Et Ya Yia me demande de retourner le voir pour l'aider à faire face à tout ce qui se présente à lui. C'est très inattendu en effet qu'une université fasse venir un pauvre Hmong pour y enseigner, r

Depuis que je constate que mon voyage là-bas a été suivi de conséquences concrètes, j'essaie de faire le point pour envisager - ou non - une suite.

S'il s'agissait d'une petite aide aux prêtres chinois qui sont à Kunming, je laisserais tomber. Ce n'est pas mon rôle. Ils sont certainement contents d'avoir des amitiés avec des prêtres du dehors. Mais il y a d'autres prêtres et chrétiens beaucoup plus qualifiés pour cela. Par exemple, le salésien va recevoir une visite de son supérieur qui habite Hong Kong. Il m'avait confié une lettre pour lui. Mais il peuvent communiquer sans problème.

Par contre, pour ce qui est d'une aide à la pastorale chez les Hmong, il me paraît de plus en plus clair que je ne dois pas laisser tomber Ya Yia. Certaines choses pourraient se faire par correspondance. Mais pas tout, loin de là. C'est en touchant la situation concrète à mesure qu'elle évolue qu'on peut ajuster la suite. Il en est ainsi pour Ya Yia, et aussi pour moi.

Ya Yia est un homme fiable et qui a des atouts réels.

Il y a quatre ans, quand il me parlait d'aller en Chine, j'y voyais une mise en place possible de quelqu'un pour un travail d'évangélisation chez les Hmong de Chine (ils sont 5.000.000). Or c'est ce qui se présente.

Ce qu'il peut faire:

- former les catéchumènes dans le camp-village où il est, assurer les célébrations dominicales, mariages, enterrements etc.

- former des aides-catéchistes là où il est pour ne pas être lui seul responsable de tout.

- aider le Père Kou à se mettre à tout ce qui a été fait en catéchèse et liturgie, que le Père soit prêt pour le moment où les autorisations- seront données dans l'Eglise en Chine.

- profiter de ses temps de présence à l'Université pour parler aux Hmong qui se forment en anthropologie. Ya Yia y est connu comme catéchiste de même qu'il est bien su clairement que je suis prêtre.

- Il sera très probablement sollicité par les anthropologues chinois pour les accompagner de temps en temps dans leurs tournées dans des villages Hmong: il pourra parler de sa foi chrétienne et porter des livres chrétiens.

C'est ce que je peux voir maintenant. Mais progressivement on pourra voir d'autres possibilités.

Si Ya Yia est seul, que je ne vais pas le voir, il risque d'être accaparé par les anthropologues et d'abandonner même sa fonction de catéchiste dans son village.

D'autre part, la filière Université est à développer. Si je retourne là-bas, je tâcherai de prendre quelques jours pour entrer à l'Université de la province du Gui Zhou (Kouei Tchou), car dans cette province il y a encore plus de Hmong que dans la province du Yunnan. et je peux avancer des raisons de demander à y aller car les Hmong du Laos viennent de cette province.

On peut s'étonner que les anthropologues chinois se soient tellement intéressés à ma visite. C'est qu'ils sont plus des statisticiens que des anthropologues. Et quand ils m'ont fait raconter longuement tout mon travail au Laos pendant 25 ans dans des villages Hmong, leur Directeur plusieurs fois disait à tous que c'est cette démarche- là qu'il voudrait voir adopter par toute son équipe. Pendant toute la Révolution culturelle, les jeunes anthropologues ont fait plus d'étude du marxisme que de méthode d'anthropologie. Ils savent leur manque de technicité par rapport aux reste du monde et ils en sont honteux et mécontents contre le passé. Ce qui explique très bien que deux d'entre eux veulent faire vraiment de l'étude culturelle de l'ethnie dont ils s'occupent. Ils ne

veulent plus être des statisticiens ou des agents de propagande. Ils sont avides d'information venant du dehors.

En ce moment je commence un travail qui va les intéresser: je commence à mettre au propre les matériaux que j'avais fait collecter en Thaïlande pendant les années 75-78 par quatre équipes dans les camps. Pendant les cinq années qui viennent je pense pouvoir faire une vingtaine de livres d'environ 200 pages chacun qui seront imprimés chacun à 4000 exemplaires. La mise en forme des livres se fait à Javouhey. Je me suis procuré un ordinateur et une imprimante.» et un secrétaire Hmong travaille tous les jours chez moi. Les livres sont préparés à Javouhey prêts à photographier pour être imprimés en Offset à Bangkok où cela coûte trois fois moins cher. A mon dernier voyage à Bangkok je me suis mis d'accord avec un imprimeur qui a déjà imprimé des livres en Hmong. Et j'ai soumis mon plan à la Nonciature pour la recherche des moyens financiers. C'est le P. Fortin qui en fait s'en occupe au nom du Pro-nonce. Une première tranche du programme est déjà financée. Cela aboutira à une sorte de Corpus de la littérature orale des Hmong.

Ce travail est fait uniquement en Hmong pour les Hmong. Car je pense qu'ils doivent être les premiers bénéficiaires d'une recherche qui a été faite sur leur littérature orale. J'abandonne donc le projet tel que je l'avais conçu au début, en 75 : traduire progressivement et présenter cette littérature orale aux chercheurs du Centre National de Recherche Français. Ce sera peut-être pour plus tard.

Ces livres qui vont être faits vont aussi être un moyen intéressant de relations suivies avec les chercheurs chinois. Ils savent que je fais ce travail et ils attendent les livres.

Pour toutes ces raisons que je vous explique peut-être trop longuement on peut penser qu'une coopération à un travail pastoral en Chine n'est pas une idée sans fondement.

D'ailleurs ces années-ci, beaucoup de prêtres et pasteurs mènent des actions de ce genre. Quand je suis allé à Kunming, le P. Kou m'a montré une Bible hmong protestante qu'un pasteur Thai lui avait apportée quelques mois avant. Ils sont par centaines à aller, hommes et femmes, en Chine avec un but missionnaire.

Je suis prêt à faire le travail qui est en mon pouvoir. Je le ferai avec plaisir. Je sais, j'ai expérimenté qu'une tournée comme cela est fatigant. Mais si je garde la santé que j'ai maintenant, je peux le faire.

Physiquement ça m'est possible. Quoique je me demande quelque fois si je ne ferais pas mieux de rester tranquille.

Il y a cependant une chose qui me manque: c'est de quoi payer chaque année un voyage si long. Car pour avoir une action satisfaisante il faudra retourner périodiquement. Inutile de commencer une action si c'est pour la laisser tomber dès l'an prochain. Inutile d'engager! Ya Yia dans une aventure sans suite.

Le billet d'avion Paris-Kunming-Paris coûte environ 15.000 F.

Les frais d'hôtel sont d'au moins 300 F./jour, car la Chine exploite les touristes. Et pourtant Kunming est moins cher que Pékin.

Je dois prendre en charge aussi tous les frais que j'occasionne à Ya Yia. Je dois aussi prévoir quelques cadeaux qui ne soient pas dérisoires. Mon dernier voyage m'a coûté 25.000 F.

En ce moment j'ai un salaire: celui des prêtres de Guyane: environ 6.000 F./mois. Je puis donc prendre à ma charge une partie des frais. Puis-je demander à la Congrégation une aide de 20.000 F.?

Ce serait une participation de la Congrégation pour faciliter le travail de l'Eglise de Chine. Une part parmi des centaines d'autres et dont le nombre va en augmentant vite avec l'ouverture commencée. Puis-je vous demander de me dire ce qui pourra être fait? Cela me permettrait de donner une réponse à Ya Yia et de préparer ce voyage: si je dois demander à l'Université de Kunming qu'elle me prépare une tournée dans un village Hmong et une entrée dans l'Université de Guangzhou dans le Gui Zhou. Il faut s'y prendre au moins trois mois à l'avance.

Je pense que Octobre en Chine serait un bon temps.

Si je n'ai pas parlé de cela plus tôt c'est parce que je ne savais pas que Ya Yia passait trois mois à Kunming, et donc je ne savais pas si un voyage cette année était utile.

L'année dernière, chaque jour j'avais tenu un journal de voyage que j'ai ici. Le P. Fortin l'a lu quand je suis passé à Bangkok. Il voulait le photocopier. Mais comme on m'avait demandé d'être très discret, le journal n'a pas été photocopié. D'autre part comme je me suis toujours demandé si ce premier voyage aurait des suites utiles je n'ai rien écrit. Et je ne tiens pas du tout à ce que des extraits de cette lettre soient imprimés. On verra plus tard.

A la fin de cette lettre je me demande si mon idée ne va pas vous paraître farfelue. Mon projet peut en effet étonner. On peut se demander

si ce n'est pas de l'imagination. Mais il y a des faits. Et à cause d'eux on peut penser que cette démarche par des chemins difficiles à inventer doit être soutenue. En tout cas j'attends votre réponse. Le Prononce de Bangkok s'intéresse beaucoup à ce que je fais en Chine. Mais je n'ose pas lui demander d'aide financière pour cela, étant donné ce qu'il fait en faveur du Corpus de littérature orale.

Tous les jours depuis maintenant 7 ans je fais un peu de chinois. Cela m'aide. J'écris même de petites lettres -sans doute maladroites- à mes amis de là-bas. Cela aide à l'amitié.

A Javouhey, le village hmong se développe, ainsi que celui de Cacao où vit le P. Charrier. Le P. Gérard Sion vit avec moi. Depuis un mois il souffre d'une sciatique. Cela l'empêche de faire beaucoup de petits travaux auxquels il se plaisait. Mais il rend toujours des services et ne renonce toujours pas à son ascétisme. A côté de lui je suis très hédoniste ! Heureusement, car si j'étais comme lui notre maison serait dans un état peu attrayant! Jamais il ne se plaint, et il faut être très attentif pour remarquer ce qui peut lui manquer, car il ne le demandera jamais. On préférerait qu'il manifeste quelques désirs! Ce n'est pas lui qui vous demandera des voyages en Chine!

J'espère que vous avez eu la patience de lire cette lettre qui n'en finit pas.

Au revoir, Père. Et en ce temps de Pâques je vous souhaite Résurrection !

Fraternellement en Notre-Seigneur

Yvens Bertrais

15 Avril 1985









El itinerario de Eugenio de Mazenod nos ayuda a ver algunos de los nuevos rostros de los pobres de hoy... Su periodo de emigrante nos recuerda el drama de los migrantes de nuestros días y los temas relacionados con la JPIC (*Actas del 36º Capítulo General*, 10).

Eugene de Mazenod's life journey helps us to identify some new faces of the poor today... His period of migration reminds us of the drama of the migrants in these present times and the related issues of justice and peace (*Acts of the 36<sup>th</sup> Oblate General Chapter*, 10).

Le parcours d'Eugène de Mazenod nous aide à identifier certains des nouveaux visages des pauvres... Le temps où il a dû vivre à l'étranger nous rappelle le drame actuel des migrants avec les questions de justice et de paix qui en découlent (*Actes du 36<sup>e</sup> Chapitre général*, 10).

