



Documentation No. 256 (English)

February 2004

34th General Chapter

“Witnessing to Hope: A Call, Our Mission”

Reflection Papers

(Part 1)

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The Precapitular Commission invited Oblates from different parts of the world to write a non-academic reflection on the Chapter theme, “Witnessing to Hope...” and the missionary situation in their respective Regions. This issue presents five of these papers.

Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate in Africa?

Allan Ian Moss OMI

The distant guns could be heard during the siege of Paris. A great nation was falling as the Prussian army invaded France, in 1870. In a country village, people gathered in prayer for an all-night vigil. Nearby, two young boys, on their way home, looked up into the darkness of a hole in the sky and saw a bright light. There was the Blessed Virgin Mary smiling down at them. Excitedly, they ran to call their parents. Many people came out to see. The strange thing was that, only children could see her, not the adults. They described, with awe, her dazzling beauty. Another mysterious event was about to happen. For no apparent reason, the invading army halted and began withdrawing. Pontmain was the name of the village, and people still remember how Mary came to their aid in time of need. Her message was one of prayer, “*ask and the Lord will hear you.*” As a matter of interest, Eugene and Joseph Barbardette, the names of the two brothers who first saw Our Lady of Pontmain, became priests, one of them an Oblate of Mary Immaculate.

Earlier, in the same century, another Eugene, de Mazenod, also lived in troubled times. With a great devotion for our Blessed Mother, and concern for the plight of the people, he accepted her as the patroness of our holy Congregation. Today, we missionaries in Africa, live in a time when there are many dark clouds on the horizon, and I may add, some rays of hope as well. What are the storms facing us now? Are we succeeding in our work of evangelisation? Our most Catholic countries of Africa, such as Rwanda and Burundi, degenerated into a culture of hatred and genocide. Closer to home, are Congo and South Africa, riddled with conflict and social violence. It makes the words of De Mazenod, in his preface to the rule, ring true that “*the greater number of them are worse off now than was the gentile world before its idols were destroyed by the Cross*” (p.19). We have to ask ourselves how effective was our missionary endeavour? My presentation here makes a few suggestions and raises some questions in certain contexts, such as culture, language, evangelisation, catechetics, spirituality, and religious life. Some comparisons are made between de Mazenod and our time.

1- Culture

De Mazenod lived in the time of a political upheaval. It was in the wake of the French Revolution. Not that it changed much the lot of the poor. In wanting to communicate with them, he realized that to reach out to them there had to be a proper recognition and appreciation of their local culture.

How are we reaching out to our people of Africa? Do we expect them to be like the people of Europe? Here is an example of an African experience in Natal, which has a Zulu background. For the Zulu, basic trust and friendship is based on openness. They greet one another with the words, ‘*Sakubona*’ (we see you), which is more than just a personal ‘hello.’ The ‘we’ signifies a recognition of the person’s importance on many levels, namely, by me, family, humanity and ancestors. Likewise when approaching a homestead in the countryside, one calls out with a loud voice, ‘*Ngikhulekile ikhaya,*’ which means “*I hail the homestead.*” It implies that he is respectfully approaching, and not sneaking up unawares nor surprising people. Upon entering the house, he remains silent until spoken to, and his head should not be higher than that of his host. That is why a person sometimes addresses you in a crouching position. This could also happen when a Zulu enters your office, and without a greeting, silently seats himself before you. To a European, this is bad manners, but

in fact he is giving honour by not speaking first, and in being seated, keeps his head lower than yours. One could list many more examples of cultural differences. How sensitive are we to them? It seems De Mazenod could open himself to the local culture of Provence.

2- Language

Although De Mazenod could speak the French of an educated aristocrat, he chose to address the poor in their local dialect. Fortunately, he learned their language as a child. As their shepherd he was determined to always improve his level of communication with them and have an understanding of their mindset.

Oblate missionaries in Africa today, whose mother tongue is a European language, face a greater challenge. Words in our western languages are mostly conceptual and definitive. Our dictionaries testify to this. We use our language basically for communicating ideas. With an African language, such as Zulu, importance lies in the communication of feeling. Dictionaries are not the most helpful here. The many 'feeling words' which are not defined, are simply classified as ideophones. Lexicons are better, where explanations of words are given in their contexts of phrases and morphemes. Examples of such words are '*gqi*' for a sense of being here, or '*nto*,' for purity, and '*qwa*' for whiteness. They have some definitive equivalents, but the communication of feeling is important, and not simply an idea. Basically, African languages are existential, as are many of the oriental languages, including Hebrew. When the prophet, for example, hears the word of God, it is not just a word but the hearing of His voice, '*qol Yahweh*.' In a similar way, 'voice' in Zulu is '*izwi*,' which also means 'word.' To hear the word of God, is to listen to His voice. As a matter of interest, the Zulu word 'to hear' is exactly the same word as 'to feel' (*ukuzwa*). Are we into a proper understanding of our missionary language, as de Mazenod was into his?

3- Evangelization

St. Eugene saw the spreading of the gospel as a special challenge in his context. It warranted a type of incarnation, where he saw himself leaving his high ground, so to speak, and coming down to the level of the people. He could identify with the life situation of the people. Not only was he to become part of them but also the Good News that he was bringing Christ to them. For him, through an apostolic Oblate, the people will experience Christ.

Much of evangelisation today is done through a western mind-set. An African becoming a Christian meant also becoming a black European. No wonder, the Church is sometimes considered as part of western colonization. It is not to say that the west did not bring many good things, but there is a lack of sensitivity and failure to also recognize the genius of the people of Africa. Their animistic sense, for example, and awareness of ancestors, was scorned. Have we really studied all possible ways of spirituality in the Church, and not just the western ways? Are there cultural ways of understanding the Church's sense of the *communio sanctorum* (veneration of saints and the Church's ancestors)? In our work of evangelisation, how good is our missiology? The Church, in many ways, cut people from their roots and imposed a western understanding to the truths of our faith. Pictures of Christ on most of our church walls are European. Knowing that grace builds on nature. How are we doing?

Origen, one of our early Church fathers, when speaking of spreading the Gospel, said that the Church, like the Israelites, should use the spoils of Egypt to build the Ark of the Covenant. There is also the danger of course, of building a golden calf. This calls for wisdom and discernment on the part of the missionary. To draw an analogy, one has to know the difference between a

circumcision and a castration that totally cuts off everything from a people. One could, for example, do a study of their initiation rites, moral codes, and various socio-religious practices. How do we live in the spirit of de Mazenod's incarnation here? How much can we take in a culture, and how much the truth of the Gospel we bring to it?

4- Catechetics

St. Eugene no doubt, had some background in certain approaches to catechetics. He was trained at St. Sulpice, which also had a catechetical school of thought. It saw the classroom as an important place for teaching the catechism. Later in his ministry, it was not that simple to catechise through classrooms. He had to resort to other ways as well, such as the use of good liturgy, visiting, and making more time to be with the people, including youth and children.

In the Catholic Church, since the sixteenth century (Council of Trent), the catechism has been the chief means of teaching the faith. It has also been the way of our pioneering missionaries in Africa. It was one of their first translations of literature into the vernacular. The Catholic Church in Natal, on the other hand, has never translated the Bible as a whole into Zulu. It is indicative of how the Church focused on a doctrinaire approach to the faith, and shows the need for a greater proclamation of the Good News (kerygmatic approach). The missionary should maintain the pre-eminence of the Gospel in his teaching. Furthermore, one cannot expect the dogmas of catechisms to set Zulu hearts on fire. Rather, let it be the word of God in the Scriptures, as Jesus did on the road to Emmaus. In more recent times the old achromatic approach of question/answer has been updated, and a more African existential way of learning that begins with life experiences has emerged. Africans also have a wonderful tradition of storytelling. Why not use it? We should study again the techniques of Jesus, and his use of parables, catch-phrases, hyperboles, and the concrete life examples of his time. The language of the Bible is the language of Africa. What would Eugene de Mazenod do today in our present situation? The truth lies in the challenge of his spirit to read the signs of our times.

5- Spirituality

In France, in de Mazenod's time, the spirituality of many people, especially the poor, was like a dark night of the soul. They felt God-forsaken. He wanted to show them a loving and glorious Lord who offered hope, and salvation. Church history shows spiritualities in various ages, such as that of martyrdom in the early days of persecution. Devotion to the humanity of Christ, focusing on his birth in Bethlehem, his death on Calvary, and even the stigmata, became more apparent with the dawn of humanism and the renaissance. In de Mazenod's time, France witnessed a number of spiritual conflicts, from the extremes of devotionalism (e.g. Jansenists) to rationalistic scepticism (where is God, if he exists at all?) In all this, he refers to "*the Church's glorious heritage*," (Preface to the Rule Book).

Our African world today, is in the grips of a religious malaise that makes it difficult for us to relate to God in the old ways. Where we thought that traditional Catholic religion and devotion had worked, apathy is developing and even suspicion, by the laity, of a clergy that is seemingly less committed to them. Clerical advantages seem to predominate over the servant model of the priest. Besides this, the faithful are also looking at death in the face, in terms of violence, war, famine and AIDS. Where is God in all this? Is this a time of a dark night of the soul in Africa, as people desperately question God, or at least try to find Him? Here is a challenge of being a Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate. Basically, it calls for a witness that boils down to a whole life style and what it means to be a religious. Oblate spirituality should help to develop a local African spirituality, like the apostles, developing spiritualities in

the Early Church. It is a spirituality of incarnation, *kenosis*, and apostolic life. The people today, need to see a prophet in their midst, a light that shines in the dark, with which they can identify. It is not just a doctrine they need but Christ-like commitment. Incarnation means total self-giving, incarnating as an *alter Christus* into the life of the people. It involves self-denial in order to be Christ to the world. People need to see the face of Christ in the face of the missionary, the Son's eyes in a son of Mary Immaculate, and feel the touch of his loving hands in the hands of an Oblate. How else should they meet Christ, and want to be like him? Here is the *imitatio Christi*. *Kenosis* spells the dying to ourselves so that we may become more alive in Christ, to the point that "***it is no longer I who live but Christ living in me***" (*Gal. 2:20*). Here is a call for the spirituality of witness. I think St. Eugene will agree.

We could continue examining other various fields of our missionary endeavour, such as scripture, liturgy, doctrine and witness. The ***Bible***, for example, in former times, was underrated, compared to the emphasis given to the sacraments. Ideally, word and sacrament should be well presented together. What role did the Bible really play in our work of evangelisation? Did not St. Jerome say, "*Ignorantia scripturae, ignorantia Christi*"? Fortunately in the last few decades, together with the influence of Vatican II, ecumenism, and in some ways the so-called charismatic movements, the Bible is becoming more prominent in the life of the faithful. It is central to the building of our basic Christian communities, where the Word of God is broken and shared. Here also, people recognize many biblical characters with whom they can identify. Bible sharing has become an important ministry in the Church. Lumko, our local pastoral institute, also trains people for such ministries.

Another challenge is our ***liturgy***. Being of the Roman rite, it is very Europeanised, a far cry from the first Eucharist at the Last Supper. This is to be expected because of an evolution over the centuries, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Somehow the evolution crystallized itself in a medieval mind-set. Having captured the genius of the Latin culture, it could not go on to capture that of other cultures. In Africa, many of our hymns and tunes are translations from Europe. It can be difficult for an African to find himself at home in some of our strictly westernised liturgical celebrations. Song and dance are part of the African rhythm of life. It could have a natural place in the liturgy, as many European customs had found their way into our Christian worship, such as vestments, bells, sacramentals of local origin, paraliturgies, and music. One recalls how missionaries of former times insisted that the Zulus, who have a natural talent for harmonizing, sing plainchant. One should remember that even the Paschal time of the Church, has in English tradition, maintained the ancient seasonal name of Easter. It is a word derived from the pagan goddess of dawn, *Eas*, signifying the new light and new life of Spring. What are the possibilities of baptizing some of the good things in the African culture as well, for worship?

Not much will be said about ***doctrine*** because it has been mentioned already in catechetics. One should be careful not to import the religious conflicts of European history into Africa. Catholic/Protestant divisions create confusion and scandal. Some of the definitions of the Church councils do not make much sense either, to an existential African mind. They were based on theological disputations and Greek philosophical words that were uncertain even to the Europeans themselves. The emphasis, it seems, was more on orthodoxy than orthopraxis (Christian living). Presumably, what you say is more important than what you do. The Church is thus perceived to have a very dogmatic and doctrinaire faith, rather than the good news, which is the real business of evangelisation. The mention of ***witness*** ties in with the whole sense of our religious life style. This has also been hinted at under ***spirituality***. Ultimately, in our African situation, it is the face of Christ that has to be seen. Remember the priest is not his own. We are not here for ourselves but for others. "***What you do to the least of my brethren, you do unto me***" (*Matt. 25:40*).

Such is the challenge for a Missionary Oblate in Africa/Madagascar. I have posed more questions than answers. Ultimately, the challenge is, in the spirit of De Mazenod, to discern and do. Follow the way of Mary, who says “*Listen and do whatever he tells you*” (John 2:5).

Witness to Hope: Border-crossing!!

Clement Waidyasekara OMI

Saint Eugene de Mazenod saw the “situation” of the Church in his time and felt that he should do something. This was his “call.” How to discern this call was his “mission.” How do the Oblates discern the mission today? This is what the forthcoming General Chapter has to envisage.

Fr. Wilhelm Steckling, OMI, the Superior General, in his circular letter **Convocation of the XXXIVth General Chapter**, May 28, 2003 states: “...We realise more and more how precious a gift St. Eugene’s charism has been and is for our present time....” Hence, the dynamism of St. Eugene’s charism depends on how the Congregation tries to discern or interpret it meaningfully in the changing realities of today.

During St. Eugene’s time the situation of the Church, just after the French Revolution, was one of humiliation and abandonment. He foresaw that what the Church needed most was to return to the very sources. What he wanted was quite simple: that was to regenerate, re-evangelise as he puts it, “the people caught up in crass ignorance of all that pertains to their salvation.” And to accomplish that end he knew that two tasks were essential – to preach the Word of God to the poor and devote oneself to reforming the clergy. As he has further written in one of his letters, he said, “If you wish to win souls for God, without taking much trouble to be *men of interior life*, truly *apostolic men*, I think it would be not difficult to replace you.” He wanted fervent men filled with zeal prepared to give their all without reserve, men who were zealous for the glory of God, men with an ardent love for the Church and the liberation of humanity.

The one quality of St. Eugene was that he was a daring person. He would take any risks to step into the unknown, to take a leap into the dark trusting solely on God. Thus, Eugene’s charism and mission was to evangelise the poor and most abandoned – he called the poor and the most abandoned *the cherished portion of God’s inheritance*. The heritage that St. Eugene left to his men was that the Oblates should be daring persons to proclaim the Good News to the most “in need.”

In our attempt to be “Faithful to the Founder’s spirit” we need to understand what he personally intended and chose; for this a study of his writings and decisions of his life is therefore necessary. Moreover, we must understand his historical context, his horizon of meaning and action as man of his age. Finally we need to understand our own propositions and our own historical context. Interpretation of these three areas will give us the Founder’s spirit. The rediscovering of his spirit is a communitarian activity that has its origin in a particular historical person.

Any call for a mission commences with an invitation to “leave” your comfort zones or familiar shores, and launch into the unknown – where hope is waiting for you on the “other” side. Jesus said leave your nets and follow me, I shall make you something else – fishers of men and women. In the history of the people of Israel their faith begins with the call to Abraham: “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house” (Gn 12: 1); it begins with a cultural break. Such a break with its own antecedent history, such a going forth, will always stand at the beginning of a new hour of the history of faith and mission. But this new beginning reveals itself to be a healing power which creates a new centre and which deigns to draw to itself everything truly human, everything truly godly. “When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself” (Jn. 12:31). These

words of the Risen Lord also apply today. The cross is first of all breaking, expulsion, elevation away from the earth, but precisely thereby it becomes a new centre of magnetic pull, drawing world history upward and becoming a gathering of the divided.

In 1841, fifteen years after the Congregation's foundation, in spite of having a small number of Oblates St. Eugene opened up foreign missions in northern Canada, Sri Lanka and Africa. His understanding of mission from the beginning was crossing frontiers and reaching the "other." What the Founder envisaged in his time has become a reality in the present missionary thrust in the Christian world.

The heart of mission: crossing borders

The Church has always been 'mission minded,' but not always 'other minded.' This has meant that mission often served the Church's agenda rather than God's. Mission became something to do rather than attention to the mystery of what God is doing. Mission now, however, is not about 'getting done' but rather learning how not to do – the breaking of God's realm into the present reality.

We are on the frontiers of a new world whose contours have yet to be mapped. Instant communication and the effects of an ambiguous globalisation have made us aware of a world that is pluriform, in which the fastest growing religion is Islam. And we are more aware of the fact of difference. But we have also been made aware, from recent history in East Africa, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Pakistan and India, that there is often violent unwillingness to accept difference as a fact. Our frontier is a tottering fence – such as how to avoid the clash of civilisation, how to respect difference, and to honour the stranger, rather than trying to gobble everyone up into a single system or creed or culture.

New Challenges & forms of ministry

The youth, immigrants and refugees, and the poor, each require specialised forms of ministry. Urbanisation creates big cities where a new humanity is emerging and where new models of development are taking shape, and it poses a different set of challenges for missionaries, who used to carry out their work in isolated and undeveloped regions. Youth who in many countries make up more than half of the population, require associations, institutions, centres, and cultural and social activities that go far beyond the ordinary means of evangelisation and demand highly specialised skills not possessed by the average missionary. Immigrants and refugees not only raise the awareness of religious pluralism to an unprecedented level, but also create fresh opportunities for cultural and religious exchange among them and Christian missionaries. The poor and the marginalized demand new forms of evangelisation that restore their human dignity and freedom. These four groups create new and pluriform borders, not simply geographical but also social, economic, ethnic, and psychological, which missionaries have to be fully conscious of to marshal the skills required to cross them.

In the socio-cultural context, namely the world of communication and mass media, justice and peace, scientific research, international organisations, and religious revival, state terrorism in the garb of fighting against terrorism and ecological destruction, all pose challenges and risks. With all this technology many missionaries still find themselves incapable of crossing over into these unfamiliar worlds whose borders seem to extend everywhere and yet remain so elusive and forbidding. In other words, while the old borders have disappeared, new and numerous boundaries are constantly being drawn, are much less visible and identifiable than the older ones and thus make missionary crossing-over much more complicated.

In the midst of these contemporary challenges – those who live on the frontiers – there is *a new self-*

awareness where we notice who we are, how we are thinking, what we are doing. To come to a new self-awareness is to change – but it is always others (Buddhists and Hindus and Muslims, the poor), who open our eyes and reveal to us who we are. Part of this self-awareness is the realisation that they can reveal to us our true selves. There is also *an openness to change*, for when we encounter something different, our appetites are whetted for newness. The encounter with other believers who are non-Christians offers a possibility of seeing Jesus in a new way and his mission in a new way. And in the face of the different and unfamiliar, we seek to reassure one another as we organise our new forms of community: there is *a new community consciousness*. This new awareness of who we are leads us to redefine mission as ‘cooperation with other believers so that God’s purposes might be revealed. These three ways are helpful in our attempt to elaborate a new way of thinking about mission in this new world.

It is precisely ‘the challenge of religious pluralism that invites us to return to the heart of the Christian paradox as the religion of the Incarnation and the religion of the *kenosis* of God.’ It is for this reason that Claude Geffé can define Christianity as ‘a religion of otherness.’ This, then, is a challenge that invites us to return to ourselves, to our true identity, as people for others.

Is there a Christian way of living, a frame of mind, and a spirituality that facilitates and nurtures such crossing-over? The proposed spirituality for mission in our times that supports border-crossing is *kenotic* (self-emptying) spirituality – imitating Christ “who emptied himself” so that we might be filled with his spirit. Kenotic Spirituality means to risk being wounded in the act of loving, to seek understanding in a climate of misunderstanding – these are not burdens to bear. Crossing borders, finally, demands totally Christ-like self-emptying so that, led by the Spirit, we may be more effective instruments in building God’s kingdom. It is a spirituality that assists the missionary in transcending differences of all kinds and opening up new frontiers in order to build a “civilisation of love” which is not merely a conformation of old identities but a forging of a new, common identity in which the worst in each group is overcome and the best is combined to produce truly intercultural human beings, in the image of the Triune God.

Oblate identity as religious and missionaries needs to be “persons of the present” and “persons of the beyond.” As “persons of the present,” Oblates must live in contact with the realities of the people they seek to evangelise: the struggles of the people, their hopes and concerns, their vision of life, their experience of death, their methods of being community, their understanding of authority, their use of authority, and their whole system of values are, should be, of great interest to cross-cultural personnel. As “persons beyond,” they must go beyond their own cultures, histories, values, mother tongues, native symbols, even their religions, not in a sense of rejecting them, but in the sense of “emptying” themselves of them in order to be guests and strangers among the people they evangelise and to receive and adopt as far as possible their hosts’ cultures and ways of life.

Jesus performed his ministry of proclaiming and ushering in the kingdom of God always at the places where borders meet and hence at the margins of the two worlds separated by their borders. He crossed these borders back and forth repeatedly and freely, be they geographical, racial, sexual, social, economic, political, cultural, and religious. What is new about his message of the Kingdom of God, which is Good News to some and scandal to others, is that from him it removes all borders, both natural and man-made, as barriers and is absolutely all-inclusive. Jews and non-Jews etc... Even in his “preferential option for the poor” Jesus did not abandon and exclude the rich and the powerful. These too are called to conversion and to live a just, all-inclusive life.

Jesus the border-crosser and the dweller at the margins, renounced precisely wealth, power and influence (temptations). Because he was at the margins, in his teaching and miracle working, Jesus creates a new

different centre, one constituted by a meeting of the borders of many and diverse worlds, often in conflict with one another, each with its own centre which relegates the “other” to the margins. It’s at this margin-centre that marginal people meet one another. In Jesus, the margin where his life became the centre of a new society without borders and barriers, reconciling all peoples, Oblates are invited to become marginal people, to dwell at the margins of societies with marginal(ised) people, like Jesus, so as to be able to create with them new, all inclusive centres of reconciliation and harmony.

This perspective of mission demands a prophetic dimension in our lives. Without the prophet’s insight all that we have explored may only become a kind of political agenda. Prophecy demands that we see things from God’s perspective.

Having said all this, what are the reasons for our hope? What would be the core of our mission that could raise hope in ourselves, our communities and in the people around us? The source of Oblates’ hope and mission is what de Mazenod chose as a motto for his missionaries, the words of Isaiah echoed in Luke’s Gospel: “He has sent me to preach the Gospel to the poor; the poor have the Gospel preached to them.” This is the “spirit” that will respond to many different situations. Looking at the missionary demands and challenges in today’s world I wonder whether this Gospel injunction should be changed to “the poor (with many faces) will evangelise the Oblate”? It is the poor who hunger and thirst for what is just, what is true and what is right.

As Fr. Steckling has mentioned, “The Chapter is the time of grace to receive anew this spiritual fire and revive its flames, letting it stir in our hearts a renewed missionary zeal.” Thus planning of the future (discerning for the future) Oblates do not just understand their Founder in relation to the present, but are rather using him to judge the present. Likewise the act of interpreting his spirit now means they are not using the Founder only to justify the present but also to help them define the future. Take stock of emerging trends in the world, in the Church and in the Congregation today and try to envisage the challenge we will be facing in 20 years time. It is important to find the right balance between fidelity to the charism and traditions of our Congregation and openness to creative transformation and between the desire to control and the imperative of letting go to the new.

A General Chapter, where Oblates gather from America, Africa, Europe, Asia, and Australia, is a tremendous opportunity to think and discern together. The Chapter can help with an overview, keep in touch with the rest of the world, be alert and animate the Regions, sow the seed of hope. Leave much more to the Regions to discern and choose their ministry and strategies and methods of formation. Don’t runaway from the emerging world situations. Each Oblate Region is affected with enormous challenges and risks, and thus reacts differently. There is an invitation to move forward. Nothing remains the same and all things change; to refuse to move forward is to stagnate. But that moving forward has to be thoughtful, purposeful and spirit-filled.

As the Lord says, “I have overcome the world” – we need to have that courage to “do something,” and it is important to make the journey, trusting in God and ourselves.

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The Oblate charism in Europe

Jaroslav Rózanski OMI

1. The Oblate Charism

The debate about the Oblate charism took place mostly in the years 1970-1980. The General Chapter

of 1974 triggered this debate. The different presentations and exchanges that took place during this Chapter helped us to realize that the Oblates didn't have a spirituality of their own and that it was therefore necessary to define the most fundamental Oblate values. So the Oblate charism became the object and the theme of many publications, congresses and debates. The most important aspects of these works have been deepened by the General Chapters that followed. The fruits of this research are condensed in the first ten articles of our Constitutions and Rules published in 1982. The Constitutions and Rules of 1992 simply reused these texts without any change. These are the articles that form the first part of our Constitutions and Rules titled: "The Oblate Charism". This part is composed of two chapters: the first, the "Mission" of the community and the second, "Apostolic Religious Life". One finds there the themes coming from the Oblate tradition and reassessed in the previous debates, that is: following Christ, the apostolic community, the most abandoned, the Church, the preaching of the Word, the Oblates as prophets of the new world, Mary Immaculate, the evangelical counsels, community witness, and a few other themes. Looking for the dominant theme, the leitmotif of this part of the Constitutions and Rules, we find that the starting point is the communitarian announcement of God's Kingdom to the poorest. Therefore, the missionary aspect of our charism, which is directed towards the poorest, dominates throughout. It is in this missionary option that we must live the changes in the world and in the Church and order our ministry and our religious life. Without this option, our work and our life lose their most elementary foundation.

2. The Church before the most important challenges in Europe

In the past, Europe never formed a monolithic group, a homogeneous block. It remained rather like a task to achieve, a task of creation of unity in diversity. At the beginning, the economic and structural aspect was taken into account more than the cultural dimension in its form and its origins. Today Europe has widened its view of itself and its place in the world. It is not and should not be considered an isolated island.

- The most important topic that constantly comes back in debates on Europe and the role of the Church, is the phenomenon of the unification of Europe and the adhesion to the European Community of ten new countries. As the process of unification advances, the economic, social and political unification is no more the sole topic but also unification at the cultural level. With the project of the European Constitution surfaced the problem of the Christian roots of European culture. Reappeared at the same time with strength the dechristianized and lay mentality that existed for years. From now on, the duty of the Church is not simply limited to introducing the "appropriate" texts into the Constitution but is most of all to lead the inhabitants of Europe towards the source, that is, toward the Gospel that inspired from the beginning what is common to Europeans – a Christian vision and conception of Man and of his life. Hence, there is a great need to proclaim the Gospel that leads to conversion and to baptism.

- Globalization is a world phenomenon that concerns all of Europe of course. This process is above all visible in the economy and the trade sector as well as in data processing, and the social and political structures. It is threatening and at the same time it constitutes a challenge to the cultural diversity that since the beginning has made up the richness of Europe.

- The process of globalisation puts Europe among the richest countries of the northern hemisphere. This conventional division of the globe between the northern hemisphere and the southern underlines the differences between the countries, nations and regions, and accentuates the marginalisation of the poor countries. It expresses the injustice in the sharing of natural resources, the foreign debts so enormous that they won't ever be repaid, the revolutions and the military conflicts, etc. The Church in her teaching and action must take into account this reality.

- The process of internationalisation introduces the multicultural and post-modern mentality that are

characterized by a distrust of the human spirit, and a relativism of truth. It drives man in search of a new religion or even to the creation of his own religion. By way of consequence one witnesses the development of sects as well as atheism.

·Internationalisation influences also some aspects of the individual and social life provoking the flight toward the culturally different world and communitarian confinement. This tendency often expresses itself by a strong contestation of the “mandatory” culture. This flight toward one’s own culture is above all visible with the migrants who often form enclaves. These are the Asian or African “islands” in the middle of European cities.

There is a danger that once the unification of Europe is achieved the gap will grow between the first class countries and citizens, that is the most comfortable, and the second class, the social rejects. This diversification will be felt at the material level and therefore will increase the number of marginalized people, of people in precarious situations and without a stable home, of prostitution and the various forms of slavery.

Finally, unemployment and corruption are also part of the challenges that Europe and the Church must and will face.

3. The means of evangelisation

3.1. Witnessing, the first way of evangelising

While speaking of evangelisation in Europe it is necessary to evoke first of all the witness of Christian life that is the first way of evangelisation. Pope Paul VI notes in *Evangelii nuntiandi* that “contemporary man believes witnesses more than teachers” (No. 41). The witness given by the Church communities composed of different cultural groups, by the international religious and priestly congregations, helps us to realize the importance and the actuality of community witness in a context of internationalisation.

3.2. The proclamation of Christ the Savior

Witnessing does not replace however proclamation, which is the permanent priority in the missionary activity of the Church. Proclamation is not only the preaching of the Gospel but also the transmission of the Gospel through various individual and community activities. Here come to mind the utility of the media, of the press, theatre etc.

The New Testament presents two very distinct missionary activities, which are the proclamation of the kerygma and catechesis. Proclamation engenders faith and leads towards conversion. Catechesis on the other hand is directed towards the converts to strengthen and deepen their faith. The catechesis of children occupies here a special place.

3.3. The need for a sufficient number of faithful

The local Catholic communities must be rooted in the local social life and culture. The evangelisation of cultures is not brought about by Christians who have no influence on the social and cultural life. It cannot be directed towards Christians of only one age group, of only one profession or to a group of Christians composed only of women or children of school age. Evangelisation must aim at the conversion of the whole society and the transformation of its culture. Thus, even though the number of the faithful is still small, they must not become a group shut in on itself or a group that forges its own culture (subculture). Evangelisation cannot therefore be directed solely towards the inhabitants of the countryside or solely the inhab-

itants of the city. It should not be concerned only with the elite or the well educated or solely with the workers and the farmers. The Christian community must be a group that has its place in the society, a dynamic group capable of initiating changes and realizing them.

3.4. The need for committed lay people

The decree *Ad Gentes* affirms that the Church is not yet founded, doesn't fully live and is not a perfect sign of Christ present among us if, besides the hierarchy there is not an authentic effective laity. The decree evokes the need for the creation of multiple groups because it is only together that Christians can influence the local culture. Among these groups it is necessary that there be groups of lay people, like prayer groups, liturgical groups or groups of people committed to the social and political life, groups dedicated to works of charity and other apostolates.

The base communities are communities where the laity, engaged in the various sectors of life and leading a strong Christian life, influence society by their social, political and economic activities.

3.5. The need for Christian families

The necessity of the Christian family comes first of all from the fact that the family is the first place where the child is rooted in his/her culture; therefore it encourages the process of enculturation. This process does not only limit itself to knowledge and to taking root in the society while respecting its norms and ways of living. The process of enculturation of which we speak here is a process that lasts the person's whole life, but the first years lived in the family remain the most determining.

3.6. The need for a Christian school system

The education of the children and the young, which is at the same time a law and an obligation, rests above all on the parents. This education must show children the values necessary for their personality development in the Christian and ecclesial spirit. The Church helps the parents in this task of education by the creation of schools that guarantee a good education, the specificity of the Catholic education resting above all on the Christian conception of man and his vocation.

3.7. The need for theological and pastoral research

The work of evangelisation requires a continuing education that allows one to attain a good biblical and theological knowledge. It also requires a life of asceticism and creativeness in the research of the forms of pastoral work.

3.8. The need for ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue

Until the beginning of the 20th century the mission in Europe had been understood rather as the propagation of Catholicism and not as a christianisation. The Protestants and the Orthodox practiced it in the same way. The Second Vatican Council brought about an important change in our way of understanding the mission. The post-conciliar documents determined a new vision of the mission. Thus missionary activity that is directed to people and human groups that don't yet know Christ is dissociated from ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue. (...)

3.9. The preferential option for the poor

One cannot forget here the testimony given by the entire Church at the level of international and political relations. In *Redemptoris Missio* we read: "The Church is called to give witness to Christ by taking courageous and prophetic positions against corruption of the political or economic power; in searching for neither glory nor material goods; using what she possesses to serve the poorest, and imitating Christ's simplicity" (43). The option for the poorest expresses itself above all by the attention to those who are victims of discrimination, who are manipulated and merchandized by others (people without a fixed domicile, the contemporary slaves, the addicts, the prostitutes and the prisoners).

3.10. The need for works of mercy

Human poverty also exists in the very rich societies. Hence the need of specialized groups and new forms of mercy in which medical help is also included.

3.11. The need for the sanctifying activity of the Church

Among the most important tasks of the Church is the obligation of sanctification, which is actualised by the celebration of the sacraments and by the practice of virtues. This task is fulfilled in a particular way in the celebration of the Eucharist that is the source and the summit of the Christian life. (...) This task of sanctification is finally accomplished through prayer, acts of charity and love.

... *TIME FULFILLED*

Jean-Pierre Caloz OMI

TIME IN TODAY'S WORLD

What has happened to time? Planes carry us to the ends of the world in a few hours, telephones, especially portable ones, bring every point of space within our reach, computers send, receive, save and file away all our information: we are surrounded by time-saving devices... And in spite of all this, we don't have the time... We have time for nothing... not for ourselves, not for others, not for God... What has happened?

The dominant present

The past has disappeared. The past is gone; to speak of the past is to become suspect. Those who refer to the past reveal that they are not comfortable with modern times; they miss what was happening in bygone days. History is of little interest today and tradition is only a reference. Sometimes the elders are listened to, sometimes they are admired for their witnessing, but they have no voice in the chapter. Ancient history is hardly useful. Remember, a few years ago, Fukuyama decreed the "end of history".

The future? The future is problematical. No one had foreseen that an exiled holy man would bring about the downfall of the model dictatorship, friendly to the West, that of the Shah of Iran. No one had predicted the crumbling of the Eastern Block in the '90s. Who had foreseen September 11th? Our contemporaries are living in the short term – from one summer to the next, from vacation to vacation. If money is put aside, it is not for investment, but as insurance, since work has become so uncertain. Some of our cities had signs reading: "No future..."

The present remains. The present, yes of course. We are citizens of the present, we reside in it, we scrutinize it – the eight o'clock news has become indispensable – we live in it, we take advantage of it, we enjoy it. A present time that comes from nowhere and goes nowhere... who cares! Since it is short, it is self-sufficient. The present is always too short to accomplish everything we have to do, that's why we never have enough time.

"Today we are dominated by the present, from morning till night: ontology of the actual, hegemony of the instantaneous, authority of the so called real time. From now on, the only reality is the immediate. . . ." (Etienne Klein « L'avenir existe-t-il déjà dans le futur? » Études, Oct. 2003, pg.

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Lack of credibility in rationality

The triumphalism of science is dead. Medicine, which is so sure of itself, has its doubts. The ecological disorder was brought about by a science that is rigorous, abstract, and linear. Psychological dogmas have been abandoned, even by educators. Religions that had been declared dead are doing quite well. “Goddess Reason” is showing wrinkles.

This is not an occasion to cry victory, far from it. To abandon reason is to become the plaything of the most powerful interests and arbitrary powers. Without reason, the reasons of the most powerful will have the day. Isn't this what we see happening in the economy, where today, in each economically sensitive area, the only rule seems to be the global dominance of cartels. Would you call that globalization?

The sources of violence

If we combine the absoluteness of the present with the loss of confidence in reason we get quite an explosive mixture. In fact, when the present time deceives, when I find myself in dissonance with my immediate context, and I cannot have recourse to rational analysis, only two issues remain: despair or violence. Lately there was a congress at the Vatican on Depression, sponsored by the Pontifical Council on health concerns. It was said that there are actually 200 million “depressed” persons in the world! That is despair. And violence? I think of the daily violence expressing itself in vandalism, depredations, and gang rapes. The violence in our schools, on board busses, at rail stations, in certain neighborhoods... where does it come from? If depression is violence that I turn in on myself, violence against each day is born of the same frustration, of the same internal imprisonment from which I must escape by punishing the environment, or the society in which I live but with which I no longer maintain any link of solidarity. Violence and despair, they are two ways of reacting to the prison of the present, when the distractions, dreams or lust for life abandon you. Then suddenly the world is no longer interesting.

Giving back time to time

Up to now I have not described the daily experience of ordinary people, but the tendencies, the climate, the environment which somehow form the mentality of our times, occupy our dreams, and are part of our culture. Somehow there is a myth about being closed in by what we know, by what has been settled. Wherever we look, the world sends back our own image; there is no longer anything beyond us out there.

Do you not think then that TRANSCENDENCE is one of the essential needs of our time? Pierre Teilhard de Chardin said that the more we grow in the line of evolution, the greater need we must have for adoration. The ancient Romans had understood this, in the second century of our era, when they thought they had conquered the world and erected the Pantheon – a temple open at the top to allow communication with the great beyond.

Transcendence comes from the world of symbols. It is neither scientific nor rational. It is not the work of our hands, but it is offered to us along the way. Whoever can receive it in his home will discover a new world. Heavy planning, constraining statistical calculations, infallible laws of

history... all have failed. Transcendence, on the other hand, is a friend of music, of poets, of wisdom. On this symbolic horizon, the present time – a present that may seem too limited for what we expect of it – can open up perspectives and become once again what it really is: a passionate moment of growth, a simple step along a pilgrimage that will certainly end, though we know not where nor how.

TRANSCENDENCE

Starting from a Western perspective, I have established up to now the cultural basis for our reflection. It remains for me to elaborate on certain points of transcendence that are revealed in our Scriptures. From the rich evocation of the “last things” that can be found in the book of Revelation, I have chosen to develop three points: the City, the Nuptials, and the Heavenly Liturgy. I will recall each of the points and will attempt to show how they shed light on, and respond to, the questions of our current mentality.

The City

In Chapter 21, the Book of Revelation shows us the New Jerusalem, descending from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband... The city is where man dwells, the human abode par excellence, with its organization, its walls within which we feel secure, its culture, its Temple. The Psalms of Ascent vibrate with the joy and pride of recovering Jerusalem “the city where everything together makes one.” The city represents the summit of human “ascent”, the final outcome of culture. Now behold, that which rises from the world now descends from God, as a gift. As a place of Alliance and definite co-habitation of God with people “here is the house of God with men.”

The city of men, always somewhat Promethean, is now seen as a place of alliance. The constant movement of people, their migrations, their searches, their nostalgia for a home, for land, for a homeland, is now seen under a new light. The peacemakers, those who are involved, the builders, the servants of justice: trade unionists, journalists, NGOs, all the friends of the poor and citizens of the Beatitudes... where are they going? They are going to Jerusalem. And you, the nomads of deep desires, the nostalgic for celebrations, the seekers of absolutes, where are you going? You are going to Jerusalem, where “death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying, nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away... Behold, I make all things new.... Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true...” Therefore, you just of the world, you will not have believed in vain... The celebration is at the end of the road, and the feast will be beautiful.

The Nuptials

The celebration par excellence is the wedding feast, the feast of love, the feast of alliance between families, a celebration of the clan for which the couple is providing a future. More profoundly, all civilizations have sensed the sacred dimension of this unique pact, from within which new life appears. This sacred dimension has become manifest with Jesus. On the cross, Jesus espoused humanity in the mystery of His Church.

The Book of Revelation in chapter 19 verses 6 and following, already allows us to hear the nuptial song of the Lamb: *“Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunder peals. . . for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure – for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.”*

Thus, all the loves of the world, faithful, happy or deceived and hurt; all our attempts at communication, fragile and so often approximate; all our efforts to translate, interpret, overcome differences; all our inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogues... all of these begin to point, like the rising sun, towards the joy of nuptials. And we, who are privileged to celebrate the Eucharist so often, hear each time: "This is the Lamb of God... Happy are those who are called to his supper." Are we sensitive to the audacity of the liturgy that already makes us contemporaries of the "ultimate things"? Gathered around the altar, taking part in the Eucharist, we have mystically surmounted the barriers to communication and we are already celebrating the transparency of the charity that will be ours to share in the Kingdom. Hence, let us not despair before the task to be accomplished, the apparently insurmountable obstacles, let us return to the task of building bridges, not walls, as the Pope said recently, referring to what is going on in Israel.

The Celestial Liturgy

After the letters to the Churches, the Book of Revelation, in chapter 4, unveils the celestial liturgy. The principals in this heavenly cult are the 24 elders and four living creatures. The 24 elders can be understood as the 12 patriarchs of Israel and the 12 patriarchs (Apostles) of the new Israel. The four living creatures represent the created world, a Semitic version of the four elements of the Greek world: water, land, fire, and air. The four living creatures sing: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord..." The entire created universe, having arrived at the end of its progression, in full maturity, finally totally reconciled, proclaims, with all its component fibers, the holiness, the consistency, the ontological depth of "him who is seated on the throne... and of the Lamb." With this cosmic chant the 24 elders, representing the people of the full alliance, modulate their adoration as they: "worship him who lives forever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing: 'Worthy art thou, our Lord and God'." They seem as "inter-priests" [French: « inter-prêtres »] of creation, casting down their crowns to acknowledge that they have been saved, and that everything they are, their dignity, their royalty, their glory come from the One who is seated on the throne. That is from now on the eternal breathing of the cosmos and of the Alliance, fully alive because fully in praise. This celestial liturgy is constantly represented on Roman mosaics. A mosaic is placed in front of the community, not in the apse, but at the height of the nave. Thus the assembled community, upon seeing this mosaic, can understand itself and where it is going. Our world lacks a Utopia, it no longer has stars to gaze at, and that is why its horizon is flat and prosaic. Isn't it urgent to revive the vision of the apocalyptic mosaic, which offers us a foretaste of "what must take place after this"? (4,1)

I've arrived at the end of the second part, which has intended to show how eschatology is functional when it encounters today's culture. It is not a program, not a solution, not a prophecy, not a description of a hypothetical future; it is a quiet perception of today's depth, a secret truth about the somewhat vague, repetitive and uncertain ordinariness in which our lives are absorbed like dew on the desert sand.

The "City" is the secret hope of all that structures our world; the "Nuptials" is the secret hope of all that is spoken, hence, culture and communication in our world; the "Celestial Liturgy" is the secret hope that the tumult of history, the thousands of faces in crowds, will eventually delineate the face of Jesus.

KEEP YOUR LAMP LIT...

If that's the way things are, the Christian's condition is that of a NIGHT WATCH. That was said to us from the time of our Baptism. When the priest handed the lit candle to our parents and godparents, he said to them: "This light is entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly. This child of yours has been enlightened by Christ. He is to walk always as a child of the light. May he keep the flame of faith alive in his heart. When the Lord comes, may he go out to meet him with all the saints in the

heavenly kingdom.” All of our Christian life is thus placed in perspective. Gone is the flattening out of time, gone also are the idolatrous ideologies of “empires.” What remains is the intimate joy of knowingly belonging to the “God who is, who was and who comes.”

TO WATCH is to be responsible. The parables of the steward, the young women before the nuptials, and the talents, tell us that the Master returns when He is not expected for an accounting. That is the term “accountability” which we cannot translate into French. In the analytical index of our Constitution and Rules, the term “accountability” refers us to “Evaluation”, a close concept that is compatible with French and English. To render an account is to acknowledge that another has the right to examine me. To render an account presupposes that I see myself as a member of the community, and I submit myself to their evaluation. This attitude is the basis for the practice of the vows of poverty and obedience.

TO WATCH is to adopt the attitude of a servant. I am a manager, but not the owner. This is a fundamental attitude of missionary spirituality. To be a missionary is to be “missioned”, sent with a mandate, with objectives and a description of tasks to be accomplished, in line with a global mission that is greater than the individual. If we live out this logic of a servant, there can be no opposition between personal charism and the mission of the community. Each with his own charism carries out the common mission.

TO WATCH is to act honestly. The bad manager forgets that he is in a structural relationship with his owner; he then begins to beat his companions and get drunk, according to the parable of the steward. How many CEO’s of industry are actually in prison because they have stolen, unduly enriched themselves, created false accounts, lied... Ethics in the business world has become once again very timely. Morally corrupt conduct rightly comes from a lack of perspectives. Some take the short-term view, they say to themselves that no one will notice, and *voilà*... Neither are we, as religious, to be spared, as we are finding out today. It is therefore important not to doze off, nor to become uninterested, and thus allow the flame, the zeal, to become extinguished.... This idea was dear to St. Eugene who used to say: “Here we either burn or leave.”

TO WATCH is to read the signs of the times. The danger we face is to lose ourselves in ideologies, in the “politically correct”, in pastoral modes and recipes while neglecting the salutary needs of the people. (C.1) Men of hope are always prepared to be jostled, challenged by life and experience. The life of the poor is the norm, and it must guide our choices, direct our strategies, and serve as a criterion for evaluation. Prayer is basic to this attitude. Prayer is eminently an attitude of watching, as we read in Luke 21:36. “But watch at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of man.”

Today, as yesterday, we are invited to espouse the time, to espouse the day to day, be it glorious or crucifying, to carry out our human task with professionalism and perseverance.

MARANA THA

“Come, Lord Jesus” that is the last word in the Bible. Baptized in the death and resurrection of the Lord, we are living the paradox of hope: everything is already accomplished but we are not yet at the end. We are citizens of the final times, but history continues. There is a real dismemberment that must be lived. If we are not conscious of its weight we are oblivious to everything, but the Saints and Mother Church know it very well. That is why from the depth of their exile they shout this Morning Prayer: Marana tha, Come Lord Jesus! Come, and may the outer crust of time yield the Eternal One, and may God be all in all.

Seeing Far, Seeing Near

Omar Friedrich OMI

At this moment in our history, the missionary's task requires sharp vision, a vision that integrates the reality in which we live.

Today one must wear "bifocal" eyeglasses. Thanks to this feature, we can slowly read a text and look up at the audience, read a newspaper and keep an eye on the television, and while traveling I can read a book and at the same time admire the scenery. Seeing what is at hand and seeing what is distant: bifocals speak to me of integration. If I gaze at the horizon without paying attention to the road, I can risk tripping over a stone that I hadn't seen. Concentrating on only one objective may prevent me from admiring a beautiful sunset, or the stately beauty of our mountains. WE MUST LEARN TO SEE FAR AND LEARN TO SEE NEAR.

A "bifocal" attitude enables this type of vision. This is the attitude that best fits the present time. It stands up to polarizations, radicalisms, dichotomies, divisions, factions It rather speaks to us of unity, integration, harmony and communion. It is the attitude of Jesus. It allies the human and the divine. It integrates sin and grace, transcendence and immanence, the sacred and the profane, the temporary and the eternal.

Eugene de Mazenod lived through this process of integration and it is common to many aspects of our spirituality. Constitution 37 clearly reveals the integration of community and mission. The 1986 Chapter reminds us: "Oblate community is an essential dimension of our vocation. The report of the young Oblates to the Chapter reminds us of that again. Community life is not only necessary for the mission, it is itself the mission and at the same time it is a qualitative sign of the mission of the whole Church." (*Missionaries in Today's World* – MTW, no.109)

In the course of our community meetings or dialogues, we do not always grasp the whole picture. The totality is overlooked. The intensity of our concentration, the partiality of our reasoning, the immediacy and urgency of the situation seem to devour us, and prevent us from looking more thoroughly into things. This results in projects that lack social vision, have no reference to the Congregation, activities that have nothing to do with proclaiming the Gospel, options without daring or consideration for the future, personal positions that have no regards for the community, attitudes of resignation closed to anything that is new.

Also, some community projects arise that are so idealistic that they bring nothing to the community itself. Finally, certain problems appear that make us lose the prospect of our universal mission. In brief, the result is a routine and mundane life, deprived of all prophetic force.

Our charism also demands a greater integration of mission and prayer. "There is still too much separation between ministry and prayer. Prayer is not sufficiently nourished by missionary life, and mission is not adequately lived as a praise of God. This dualism impoverishes both prayer and ministry; for many this is a source of frustration." (MTW, no. 111)

The Preface and the first part of our Constitutions and Rules clearly reflect the Oblate ideal. To follow Jesus-Christ by reproducing His life in ourselves and by announcing it to others, are two intimately linked aspects of our spirituality.

Eugene lived out this integration in spite of difficulties. On the one hand, he was seeking solitude, to the point of longing for the monastic life, and on the other hand, he could not resist the cry of the most abandoned.

The two callings resounded forcefully in his heart. I believe that the moment has arrived for us to ask ourselves: where is that integration in our lives? We must admit that the searching gives rise to tensions, which can trouble us at times, but which we must recognize as the most authentic path for our Oblate vocation.

Many times, Eugene de Mazenod clarified the fundamental motives of his life and missionary activity in these words: the glory of God, the good of the Church, and the salvation of souls. This trilogy bears witness to his characteristic manner of bringing unity in his life. As Pope Paul VI emphasized, St. Eugene de Mazenod was “passionately fond of Christ” (*passioné du Christ*). The glory of God was the principal reason for, and the orientation of all his life. When he gathered his first group of priests for the sake of preaching to humble people, he did so precisely for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. This double theme, to which we must add the good of the Church, would then become the drive and center of his spirituality.

To recreate our charism we must see far ahead, without forgetting the context of what is near; dream of utopias, yet be realistic; aim for distant horizons yet enjoy the fresh water of the stream at our feet; leap towards the future with hope, and take on what our rich tradition had handed down to us; accept the obscurity of what is yet to be discovered with the clarity of what is already known. SEEING FAR AND SEEING NEAR. Yearning for transcendence while finding joy in the immanent. The risk of something new based on what is already known; continuity and rupture, fidelity and creativeness, the human and the divine.

In Latin America we are living in a moment that is critical and complex, requiring discernment and wisdom. We must remain faithful to the Holy Spirit, confirming, renewing, and questioning ourselves on our commitments and life styles. This invites us to revive the dialectic between the mystic and the prophet. We must reconcile and integrate within ourselves mysticism and prophecy, with the certain knowledge that we can be a “sign” for our times only on this condition.

To attain this integration two things are necessary: “to live in our house and to peregrinate over the roads of the world.” We must live in our house in order to remain for long periods at the feet of the Master. Thus, enriched, inspired and sent by Him, we can then take to the roads with words that are calm, strong, and always new, stemming from the depth of experience. We must be convinced that no mystical experience can exist without prophetic expression. We need to be convinced that being prophetic must be a mystical experience, and mysticism must shape prophets.

We cannot maintain only one aspect. We cannot lose ourselves in the infinite, and thereby lose the sense of reality that is represented by the brother who lives aside of me, the people with whom I work, my community, the poor person who knocks at my door, community quarrels We cannot allow ourselves to become absorbed in our house problems, constantly looking at ourselves in the mirror, overlooking the institutional aspect, the perspective of the Church, of society, of the Congregation SEEING FAR AND SEEING NEAR. We must maintain a “bifocal” vision. Reveal the traces of God in what is routine and lowly. The God Who is eternal, creating, infinite Who smiles at my brother and sends a letter to a friend. We must know how to recognize the divine traits in everyday landscapes. We must learn to feel the divine presence in a handshake.

SEEING FAR AND SEEING NEAR. The transcending horizon is a promise of God. The abrupt realism of sin and mediocrity can limit our imagination and our dreams. But our prophetic vocation does not allow us to live in discouragement and despair. With a “bifocal” attitude we can and we must integrate physical ageing with charismatic rejuvenation, the obscure and unforeseeable with what can be foreseen and planned, fidelity and creativeness, a future of hope with a dramatic moment in history, the boldness of change interacting with the sometimes slow rhythm of our brothers.

In certain countries of Latin America, these last years, we have lived through critical situations that invite us, and press us, to revise our missionary activity. We are responsible for an evangelization that has not succeeded in transforming the corrupt structures of our society. We are responsible (that’s how we have educated them) for a class of political leaders whose only aim is to satisfy their own interests.

For decades, the Church and society of Latin America have encouraged thousands of young people to commit their lives to the liberation of their people. Today, many of them, far from considering such a disinterested undertaking as a route to follow, are only preoccupied with their own lack of opportunities for living with dignity in a society of daily increasing injustice. Their field of vision has narrowed, and their eyesight is so deformed that they can no longer see clearly. It is this vision that must be refocused in order to show them the path of the Gospel: a path of conflict animated by brotherhood, justice, and respect of others: a path that leads to integration.

SEEING FAR AND SEEING NEAR. With the eternal, near, and temporal vision of God, it is possible. With Him, it is possible to go beyond our dichotomies, our internal divisions, and our different points of view. He alone teaches us to see far, to contemplate wider and wider horizons (His own), horizons that are bearers of grace and of life He alone teaches us to see concrete facts, and to read His Word, which is lovingly incarnated in reality and in history, in each brother, in each activity, and in each community.

OMI DOCUMENTATION is an unofficial publication
of the General Administration of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate
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