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**Oblate Mission Today
Confronted with Secularism, Globalization,
and Challenges to the Environment**

by David N. Power, OMI

Foreword

Father Oswald Firth, OMI, Assistant General in charge of the Mission Portfolio for the Central Government, has asked several Oblates to write brief essays on the topic of “Mission” from the perspective of their own experiences and expertise. This issue of *OMI Documentation* is the first in a series that will appear in the course of time.

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The essay which follows was written prior to the publication of Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical, “*Caritas in Veritate*.”

Oblate Mission Today Confronted with Secularism, Globalization, and Challenges to the Environment

by David N. Power, OMI

Since each of the topics listed in the heading would require minute and long analysis, the limited purpose of this paper is to suggest how they are tied together and constitute the context for a renewal of the Oblate mission to bring the Gospel to the poor. The essay will first address globalization, then ecology and in relation to these two, secularism. Some thoughts on mission will conclude the paper.

Globalization

The term “globalization” as widely used means that the lives of peoples across the globe are connected and interactive because of developments in fields that include economics, politics, technical advancement, healthcare, education, technological communication and of course entertainment. This is a fundamentally new way of experiencing the world that affects the way people as societies relate to the passage of time and to place, because along with the globalization of economy and forms of governance, goes the globalization of culture. Ever since colonization of other continents by Europeans began and ever since commerce took on a global character, new forms of trade and new technologies have served to bring peoples closer together and to make them more inter-dependent. What marks the present phase of globalization is its speed and the increased role of international bodies of one sort or another in production, trade, governance and promotion of aesthetic expression.

Because of certain economic policies which are linked with growing poverty and are detrimental to traditional ways of life, at times globalization is taken to imply the pursuit of classical liberal or neo-liberal policies in the world economy and so the growing dominance of western forms of political, economic, and cultural life. Those who

contest these policies are then said to be “anti-global”. However to have a better idea of how global interchange affects peoples’ lives, it is useful to sort out how this works in various specific areas of life and not focus solely on the economic.

First of all of course, it does mean economic exchange and one which favours the greater economic powers to the detriment of others. Trade and production affecting relations between countries often override the interests and behaviour of individual peoples and of local communities to the benefit of the more powerful. With the current collapse of economies worldwide, there is perhaps a readiness to look at another model which has always been promoted by those concerned by increasing levels of poverty. These search for a paradigm of international exchange which offers the possibility of sustainable local and community development, both agrarian and urban, and which would favour poorer populations. This fits with the observation of sociologists and anthropologists that adaptation to new realities and their integration into sustainable modes of existence have to occur within living local communities if this is to become a cultural and intercultural phenomenon and one that is beneficial. Motives for making change and motives for accepting the new come from traditional cultures and from the small concerns of ordinary life, even as the global intersects with the local. Accepting this paradigm would avoid giving primacy to market pressures in a supposed “world economy”. It may slow down some ideals of progress and invite openness to less affluent (but not impoverished) ways of living, something which makes it hard for affluent nations to accept.

Globalization also affects politics and institutions of government. It can mean attempts to impose western styles on other nations so that in this

too, another paradigm is offered. This is found in the effort to enunciate general goals and modes of action on which all can agree in a world where a nation as a self-contained unit is not viable and where interaction is vital and the enunciation of common interests. The aim is a world of trade and commerce and international relations which is built on a model of sustainable local government and development, helped and not hindered by global interaction. International bodies of different sorts can foster this kind of exchange and interaction but the success has to be measured in terms of enterprises that build communities that mutually enrich each other. This means an exchange between peoples on the exercise of some commonly recognized civic virtues that are vital to the creation of a world community. These often seem to have a necessary spiritual quality however this may be defined. They include openness to others, unselfish attitudes and actions, a readiness to allow religious pluralism and freedom, all of which imply a search for what breeds the sense of a common humanity.

Another area of globalization which receives much attention is the kind of exchange in communication promoted by new technologies and the facility of travel. It is often lamented that this can mean the divulgence of western modes of communication and of values that outwit traditional modes of expression and exchange. Some concrete studies show other possibilities in communication and technologies which allow for what are called "overlapping identities". This means the capacity of peoples and cultures to remain within their traditions but to become more open, more ready to assimilate links with others and capable of adjustment or adaptation. Some of the more helpful studies on this score actually focus on immigrant populations which settle in new places and become part of the community there but keep their own ways of speaking, of acting, of remembering and of communicating alive even as they adjust to new situations. What is learned from such communities offers insights into ways in which peoples may assimilate the new through openness to other cultures without abandoning their own, whether this be at home or abroad. This helps us to grasp what occurs in

a vast range of exchange between peoples often promoted and organized by bodies that engage people across boundaries in a variety of fields such as healthcare, education, sports contests, games like chess, and the arts. All of this may of course be commercialized but it can also enable peoples to enter into an enriching exchange which allows for cultural growth, an assimilation of new encounters that does not destroy particular cultural identities.

The place of religion in society is affected by this multiform globalization, for no religious ideal and practice can ignore it. The religious tenacity of some may well act as a force counter to globalized exchange, even hostile to it. A readiness for dialogue and cooperation on the other hand may enable members of different religions to work together and with the rest of society in building a universal human community on condition that no religion aspires to a dominating role in mapping the future or in governing common lives and actions. People of religious faiths have to be able to work among themselves and with others for the common good within a pluralistic society. While religion does not control public life it is not necessarily privatized. Religious bodies inspired by their own motivations look for what is commonly accepted as a goal and a way forward which can be shared also by non-believers. There needs to be room for religious practice and some autonomy for religious groups to work within the larger social reality, even as a contribution to the larger social reality, but this has to harmonize with common aspirations and activities.

As of now, Churches and other faiths are still working out the nature and the mode of their participation in globalized public life, and how this relates to secularism will be seen later. The Catholic Church opposes two kinds of globalization while promoting some forms of globalized exchange. One thing that it opposes is the set of economic policies that feed into the impoverishment of peoples and denies autonomy of interests and actions. The other is what is looked upon as a globalization of consumerist interests and practices which some quite frequently denounce. At the same time it

does try to promote a global interaction built on the ideal of an alternate world view, one which is guided by global solidarity and interest in the development of the poor, one which subscribes to religious freedom even while promoting spiritual values, one which requires respect for creation while looking to a future of a universal human community built on a common concern for peace and justice. In all of this it suggests that relation to the transcendent cannot be eliminated.

Seeking their place in this global community, organized religions, and in particular Christian Churches, act in two ways. They speak with a global public voice in those places where the future is being built but at the same time put a strong accent on the service of local communities. In the midst of change, Churches, and the Catholic Church in particular, wrestle with the implications of living the faith with a particular option for the poor, attentive to those who suffer the ill effects of certain forms of globalization. Integrating all that is human into the kingdom of God means respecting peoples and cultural heritages and allowing them to find their own particular growth within a globally interactive world. In the debate between defenders of a global democracy that is more or less universally normative and communitarian-minded peoples more intent on local well-being, Christian missionaries today tend to stand with the advocates of community and communitarian development, without suppressing the possibilities of interaction in diversity. As said, this may slow down some ideals of progress but it responds to the interests of the Church's option for the poor.

Naturally this has an affect on the life and ministry of international religious communities within the Catholic Church. How the issues of globalization are treated may be exemplified by the discussions and decrees of the general congregation of the Jesuits in January 2009. With the report of a preparatory task force in hand, globalization was described as "a phenomenon that expands interconnectedness in the world. In some ways this is a very old dynamic and in other ways the phenomenon is new. Globalization is not just an economic phenomenon - it also affects

cultural, political, social, legal and religious life" The report noted that reactions depended on what are the local and actual experiences of different peoples so that there is not a shared evaluative judgment on what is happening. It noted the risk of homogenizing peoples and cultures through the spread of the use of means of communication and most of all through an adoption of uniform economic and political ideals. The congregation asked how respect for traditional peoples and cultures may be kept in a world of exchange and how efforts may be undertaken that help local sustainable development, economic, political and cultural.

Ecological Perspective

The issues of globalization of late seem to crystallize around environmental or ecological consequences. The whole world seems increasingly conscious of ecological peril, either actual or pending, and this is tied in with the decline of economies that privileged the more prosperous. Both those of a secular creed and the religious minded see the need to develop an ecological consciousness, more respect for nature, and a sense of human oneness with all creatures in working out a historical destiny. The promotion of justice, peace and care of the environment go together.

Sins against the environment are one with sins, even structural ones, against humans, and unjust practices make victims of humanity and of nature. The full impact of trade, production and commerce on the environment shows up in the impact on peoples and cultures. Ecological change affects traditional environmental and social relations that built up over time around common life, production, commerce, and festivity. Change is adverse to peoples physically and culturally when culturally insensitive political and economic powers, national and trans-national, determine what use is made of natural resources, where people live, how they live and how peoples are to relate within and across boundaries. On the "glocal" scale (that is, in a local situation marked by the effects of globalization), this produces pitiful results.

There now seems to be a somewhat universal consensus on the need to see the integrity of creation as a “historical venture” in which human energy and cosmic, earthly energy are intertwined. The role of Christianity in this venture is ambiguous. A kind of dualism inherent to the history of Christianity has contributed to neglect of environment and nature; and missionaries from Europe have helped in changing traditional relations to place and custom. Even the development of liturgies has been both ecologically and culturally insensitive. In response to this history, there is a call to retrieve a biblical vision of creation in Genesis wherein humans and nature interrelate in God’s design and that in the prophetic books which interweave human destiny and the earth so that one cannot be restored without the other. Summing up frequent reappraisals Rosemary Radford Ruether writes: “In the biblical view, the raping of nature and the exploitation of people in society are profoundly understood as part of one reality, creating disaster in both. We look not to the past but to a new future, brought about by social repentance and conversion to divine commandment, so that the covenant of creation can be rectified and God’s Shalom brought to nature and society” (*Readings in Ecology and Feminist Theology*, 81).

In practice and theory, the matter is approached in different ways. Quite often, ecological concern is conjoined with concern over issues of social justice, highlighting the harm done to poor peoples through the exploitation of natural resources. This is exemplified in some resolutions of conferences sponsored by the World Council of Churches. The WCC assembly in Seoul in 1990 discussed the relationship between socioeconomic justice and ecological sustainability and at Harare in 1998 a subgroup listed the ways in which misuse of resources in the interests of globalized trade and markets harmed the poor peoples of the world. These include the shipping of toxic wastes from industrialized nations to the economic south, free trade agreements that favour richer nations, destruction of rain forests and pressure on poor nations to develop ecologically destructive agricultural policies that orient crop production

to paying off the national debt. [For more see the website www.wcc-coe.org].

Similar concerns are expressed in Catholic teaching. In his message for the World Day of Peace in 2007, Pope Benedict XVI had this to say: “The close connection between these two ecologies (human and social) can be understood from the increasingly serious problem of *energy supplies*...What injustices and conflicts will be provoked by the race for energy sources?... respect for nature is closely linked to the need to establish, between individuals and between nations, relationships that are attentive to the dignity of the person and capable of satisfying his or her authentic needs... Indeed, if development were limited to the technical-economic aspect, obscuring the moral-religious dimension, it would not be an integral human development, but a one-sided distortion which would end up by unleashing man's destructive capacities”. Returning to these themes in his message for the World Day of Peace 2009, Benedict suggested that to fight poverty, the global community needs a new model of development which is not based on the distribution of capital but on creating sustainable economies for people now living in poverty. While addressing all peoples, he pointed out to Christian believers that in faith in Jesus Christ they have the motivation to inspire them to act in this direction. (These documents are available in several languages at www.vatican.va).

Integral to concerns with justice is the promotion of culturally sensitive approaches to ecological questions which foster changes in humanity’s perception of nature. The universe and all created things are sacred and are to be viewed with an appreciation of their wonder and their beauty and of their own inner life and development, rather than being exploited for humanity’s service. From planting trees and gardens, going on vegetarian diets, doing outdoors meditation, to practicing earth-centered rituals, people try to breed in their souls more eco-friendly dispositions. The effect of this is sometimes dubbed a re-enchantment of the universe after a period when it was common to think of the world primarily in terms of human investigation and utilization.

More pertinent to poor continents is the link between ecological exploitation and changes in the life-situation of the poor which affect their cultural well-being and identity. It is where they live that people have to deal with the disequilibrium of indigenous cultures when relation to place, space, ancestors, traditions of earth and ancestry, are disturbed. It is necessary to be in touch with the actual relation of peoples to nature and what this means to their cultural identities. Human exploitation and nature's exploitation go together, and so there is a need to revise the possibility of economic policies that sustain agrarian and urban life of a sort where the relation to nature and its resources and what this means to cultural identity are integral to development. The cosmic vision of Asian and African traditions and religions, as well as of the indigenous populations of the Americas, embodies a knowledge and spirituality where human rights and responsibilities and the realities of community are intimately connected with relationship to the environment. Relationality and mutuality express how human and ecological realities are intertwined. Peoples do not divide their worlds between sacred and profane but think, feel and act as communities "embedded" (sic) in their place of habitation. Understanding and integrating traditional ritual practices is vital to an appreciation of how peoples relate to the environment but it is the people themselves who must tell us of this in their own ways for we cannot rely totally on the studies of anthropologists and sociologists.

On a more global scale, it may be that the force to drive the future of a more ecologically sensitive society comes from working with such perceptions, even as these cultures entertain the realities of global exchange and adjust to new movements. This is not to be naïve about traditional cultures, their pastoral and agricultural methods, their interpersonal structures or their rituals, which in their own ways can be harmful. It is however to respect their basic perceptions even as they are invited into a large field of exchange and development where traditions may be preserved but also adapted and internally purified where necessary, as the people themselves perceive.

With these ecological perspectives in view, in face of the disastrous exploitation on natural resources, the Bishops of the CELAM conference at Aparecida in 2007, in their concluding document (no.474), advocated a pastoral policy that would include several elements. Spread the Gospel of a respect for the gift of creation, pastoral workers their pastoral presence among the peoples who in the current world economy are most fragile and most menaced by the degradation of the earth and an unjust distribution of the profits from mining natural resources. The document also pointed to the effect on cultures in changes wrought to the environment and peoples' natural habitat (no. 480). In addition it supported a quest for an alternative model of development based on the principles of respect for the ecology and of justice and solidarity in the use of earth's resources.

None of this means foregoing the benefits which globalization of communication and economies and a concern with human rights brings but helps to put them to the service of a human community which sees the alleviation of suffering and poverty as key to true development. As stated by Pope Benedict XVI: "In order to govern globalization there needs to be a strong sense of *global solidarity* between rich and poor countries, as well as within individual countries, including affluent ones". This global solidarity has to take ecological solidarity, or what some call social ecology, seriously looking at the connection between human exploitation, the destruction of cultures and exploitation of natural resources.

Secularization and its Aftermath

Secularist thinking is behind much human progress but it is also behind some of the deleterious activities of a globalized world, especially those affecting industrial and economic development. Since reason has claimed a dominant place in human advancement, it is asked whether religion has a role to play or whether it is better for peoples to work together on the basis of reason and human ingenuity.

As with globalization, the word "secularization" has several meanings. It is sometimes criticized as the studied elimination of any reference to God

or to the transcendent from the public domain, as well as curtailments of one sort or another on the free practice and teaching of religion. Such criticism asserts that in a secularized world the human person alone is made the measure of the good and that this leads to a culture of individualism, hedonism and consumerism. While there are signs of such attitudes in the world today, most especially in parts of Europe, easy denunciation can be blind to the factors leading to religion's loss of place as a dominating force in society, as well as to the more complex situation in which we live. Disillusionment with the influence of religion in the public sphere and the gradual process of secularization which accompanied this is still at work today in the ordering of human affairs but it has a historical and social basis which has to be understood.

When enlightenment principles took over from religion in ordering society, this was in face of religious forces which seemed to run counter to true human advancement. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe, some were looking for ways to bring an end to the warfare fuelled by oppositions between members of Christian Churches as well as open up new avenues of research and thought unhindered by religious dictates. As modern trends to popular participation in government developed, the authorities of the Catholic Church often opposed the development of democratic societies and participatory government, seeing these as opposed to the role of religion and its ideals of human society under God. They also entered into a long conflict with what was called modernism in human thought, something from which the Church has not completely emerged. Explaining the disaffection with religion that still influences society and public life, some write of a triple disenchantment: it is doubted whether religion can be a beneficent influence in the public ordering of human affairs; it is thought that it may continue to curtail scientific advance; and finally its appeal to tradition seems an insecure base for understanding and progress.

It is clear that in the present world conflicts between Churches and now between religions have their part to play in making cooperation

and an order of peace difficult to attain. This is so not only when fundamentalism stirs up outright hostility but also when major religious establishments mistrust one another or oppose political powers on the foundation of ethical principles and civic virtues on which they themselves do not agree. Many continue therefore to believe that the effort to build a worldwide community should be based on common principles that are grounded in the appeal to human reasoning. This means that religion will be marginalized and play a lesser role in human affairs unless religions find new ways of working with others in the common arena. Because therefore many in our world and many economists, politicians and artists appeal to reason and human creativity rather than to religious faith, we talk of a secularized society or a secularized world. The terms secularism and secularized however are quite ambiguous just as the situations which they try to describe are quite fluid.

When the religiously minded decry secularism and secularist culture, they often seem to have two things in mind. One is the position taken by some governments or states that deny freedom of religious practice in one form or another; this could be, for example, its total elimination from schools or the denial of freedom allowed religious bodies in following their own principles in developing their own forms of contribution to society, whether these be voluntary associations or institutions such as hospitals and clinics. The other thing that is writ large in the denunciation of a secular culture is the degeneration into a culture of individualism and hedonistic consumerism.

The extent of secular thought, however, is not readily assessed. If secularism is taken to mean the absence of faith in human lives or its total privatization or relegation to domestic and personal life, sociologists who make it their business to describe societies on the basis of careful observation are unable to label any country or continent as completely secularized. They claim to find a continuing tension in mapping out a common life between appeal to religious principles and an appeal to human reason and creativity which prefers to leave

religion out of consideration in constructing a human and ecological order. There are always those who want all reference to God left outside the public domain or who deny freedom to the practice of religion, but this does not describe the approach of the majority of the citizens of the world or of any one country. Indeed, some sociologists contend that there is not a significant absence of religious belief and practice in what are called secularized societies but rather a different kind of religion. What has waned, they say, is the strength of religious bodies that exercise a strong authority over their members in matters of belief, ethics and worship. The motivations behind the movement from these bodies to more personal forms of religion or to less tightly controlled communities fall within the triple disenchantment noted above.

Churches make a bad mistake if they do not take the reasons for secularization into careful account and engage in frequent denunciation. It is better to take a cue from what was said at the Vatican Council in *Gaudium et spes* 35-36 and has been retrieved by Pope Benedict XVI when he distinguished between the positive and the negative contributions of a stronger appeal to human reason in mapping humanity's future: "It is a question," he wrote, "of the attitude that the community of the faithful must adopt in the face of convictions and demands that were strengthened by the Enlightenment. On the one hand one must counter the dictatorship of positivist reason that excludes God from the life of the community and from public organizations...On the other, one must welcome the true conquests of the Enlightenment: human rights and especially the freedom of faith and its practice, and recognize these also as being essential elements for the authenticity of religion".

While the decline in religious influence has roots in the past, building a future for humanity is now complicated by a growing disillusionment with reason itself and with human enterprise. The beginnings of this were already apparent in the nineteenth century with a renewed poetics of the sacred and an awareness of the limits of human control over nature and over society, but this did not mean the reinstatement of a God principle.

Further cause to doubt reason continues to build up in evidence of moral human failure. The extremity of the appeal to the capacity of the human person to create a world in which to live appeared on the scene with the Nazi regime and its holocaust of the Jewish people. Human disasters and the exercise of cruelty on a wide scale have only multiplied since then, leaving people doubtful about the very possibility of reasonable behaviour and a common good. With dismay over human disasters, there goes a new consciousness of the ecological peril created by global human activities. What is called progress in technological and political development seems to have failed us. People everywhere ask what possible future humanity may have, with or without religion.

This broad disillusionment with religion, with reason, with human traditions, with authority, with all that falls under the rubric of culture, is sometimes described as the post-modern condition which becomes most noticeable when it finds public voice and influences the world of artistic expression. Some see this as purely negative and use the term postmodernism in a pejorative sense, seeing it as a way of living in a world that is said to have no viable future and no objective truth on which to build. To counteract this trend and find another way forward, it is possible to fall back into forms of pre-modern religious fundamentalism or to try to constitute a place for religious faith that has its precedents in past centuries. However, as with secularism, it is possible to rush to too hasty a dismissal of the post-modern and so miss the positive contributions of those who see the limits of the modern. Even what is felt to be the needed deconstruction of models of belief, of action, of social unity and of the natural world because of their ideological hold, opens up fields of creativity that have been long held in check. Thinkers, leaders and some citizens dismissed as postmodernists often display a strong passion for justice and for justice for the marginal or excluded members of society who have been passed over in the process of human development. Not only do they want justice for these peoples, groups and individuals but they want to make room for them to develop

their own creativity in serving a more equitable human world order. Orientations that draw as it were on subterranean energies are found in those who promote “green politics”, in women’s activities that break cultural moulds, in social movements of solidarity among the poor and with the poor, in small communities of faith and resistance and in the re-emergence of indigenous peoples as partners in building the future. Serving humanity cannot be an abstraction but is located in communities of people and in movements of different sorts.

While it is not possible to take either secular or post-modern as a description of the world in which we now live, there are certainly forces at work to which such adjectives may be applied, but the religious instinct is likewise still living. In the western world and among other peoples who have harboured the trends of modernity instead of decrying the privatization of religion or hedonism, when people withdraw from the traditional ways of religious practice we have to understand their disillusionment and their quest. Likewise, in many places, religion is no longer necessary to social belonging and is much more a matter of free choice. It is not a strong exercise of authority but the witness and credibility of the lived testimony of Christian communities that have to convince people of the truth and fidelity of God and of the contribution to the human good of Christianity.

More loosely organized religion such as that found in Pentecostal communities is highly favoured by social belonging in this secularized age and where people suffer loss of place with new developments. These offer the promise of the divine, they are open to diversification and they retain elements that come from traditional or cultural religions which they link to Christ and Spirit. In what are called traditional societies, Pentecostalism is often a partner with the interest to retain traditional cultures. When these kinds of community find root in local communities, they take over an organic vision of society where relation to land and ancestry is inherent to religious sentiment. It is this relation between traditional views of society with their relation to place and to ancestors which has flowered

in African Initiated (sometimes called African Independent) Churches. It allows for localization, fluidity and diversity in the practical of religion but within the same model of the mutuality found in traditional religious perspective. These Churches can play an important role in an ecological recovery in which human communities and relation to earth are conjoined.

For Catholicism, the readiness for inculturation also tries to relate to this organic and cosmic vision of human community and society which has a place in the African Initiated Churches and on principle allows for a diversification in what is proper to peoples. The potential strength however of an inculturated Catholic faith is foiled by the continuation of a heavily centralized control and by demand for a continuing homogeneity in doctrine, catechesis, piety and liturgy. The relation to place and the safeguard of culturally identified community life which is necessary to the resolution of the culturo-ecological crisis of the world through which we are passing is foiled by this because the failure of diversification means that religious faith and practice cannot become a part of that kind of community.

In this perspective, we can understand why observers believe that the Catholic Church and the major Churches of the Reform can find a place in continuing religious practice on condition that they allow for diversification and pluralism. Alongside this, they have to engage ever more fully in dialogue with other living faiths if they are together with them contribute to the common good and the development of a new world order.

In relations between living faiths, there is much prejudice and hostility to be overcome, but the call to work out a shared positive reaction to the ecological crisis is favoured by post-modern disillusionment and query. All religions, whether they be theistic or not in the formulation of their beliefs and practices, have in common traditions that look upon creation and creatures as sacred. In other words in trying to understand one another without prejudice they may work together to revive a spiritual approach to the world and to the pursuit of a common good

that has been somewhat absent in mapping out human progress. Thus we find, for example, a dialogue between Islam and Christianity which evokes principles of transcendence in human life and includes a dialogue on how love of God and love of neighbour and love of creatures converge. Another example is a dialogue between Christians and Buddhist that develops attitudes and practices that increase the capacity to be attentive to the universe and its life-forces.

Church in the World

The Church is still struggling to find its true calling and its true role and identity as the Church of God in the World, not all being ready to espouse the same understanding of the Church. The struggle for self-understanding is a continuation of a process that has been going on for several centuries, ever since the Church lost its dominating role in the public order. Ever mindful of its call to serve the poor, the Church could school its members in the civic virtues but maintain its own religious organization with a focus on devotion and charitable works, providing for the devotional life of its members and caring for the poor in ways not offered by society. In our own times takes its place in a coming global world order by defining itself in terms of an option for the poor which means that is not only a matter of looking after them but of promoting their development. However, there is no clear consensus on what constitutes “integral human development”, nor on what is entailed in respect for creation, nor on the nature of the Church’s dialogue with the world, nor on how this affects the inner life of the Church, whatever the stress on the role of the laity and the appearance of a variety of lay movements, diverse in form and objective.

In looking for the way ahead, the scriptures have been given a new role in devotional and apostolic life and this has been encouraged by the 2008 Synod on the Word of God. On the public testimony to the kingdom of God in a secularized society, different paths are nonetheless being followed. Some wish for a strengthening of magisterial authority, for a restoration of the sacral profile of the priest and for the revival

of preconciliar devotions, such as adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, frequent sacramental confession and even a return of indulgences. Others believe that there needs to be a greater freedom left to local churches and a community life which integrates the role of the ordained and of all the baptized in new ways and which brings in the voices of the marginal. In face of a global world, however secularized, they wish for forms of prayer that bring Christian Churches together and become part of the dialogue between Christians and members of other living faiths. In reading the scriptures they find a renewed image of Jesus Christ which locates his own ministry in the service of people in a troubled world where cultural and social identity was challenged and political developments created its masses of the poor. This makes more sense of how Jesus testified to the kingdom in his preaching and suffering, and how God testified to him in his resurrection promising the victory of life over death. Following Christ in a “glocalized” solidarity means attending to the many sufferings experienced by people in their own immediate surroundings within the turmoil of a changing existence. While there is a more profound malaise and corruption of culture, society and ethics, it is in face of directly experienced sufferings and poverty that testifying to the Gospel can bring the hope of some greater promise when risen life prevails over death in all its manifestations.

Oblate Community

The Oblates are no strangers to ecclesial tensions; and how they resolve them will have a big influence on how they combine their founding charism of service to the poor with the newly professed mission to secularity. Finding the place for lay associates will be influenced by the resolution of such internal tensions, as will also the ways in which Oblates live more intentionally as an international body. There is at the same time some potentially creative tension between how they integrate the commitment to corporate action on issues of justice, peace and care of the environment to the service of which some Oblates are now commissioned with the more traditional presence of apostolic communities among the poor.

In the midst of a needed discernment, there are two things which should be able to draw all together and play a part in working out directions for the future. One is the integration of the Word of God read in the scriptures into the devotional life and apostolic works of Oblate communities. The other is the search for ways of living evangelical and apostolic poverty that are appropriate to mission and ministry. We might do well to return to Father Steckling's letter of 2002 on Apostolic Poverty and listen to Pope John Paul II on the place of poverty in the evangelical life in his letter on *Consecrated Life* 90: "The witness (of evangelical poverty) will be accompanied by a preferential love for the poor and will be shown especially by sharing the conditions of life of the most neglected. There are many communities which live and work among the poor and the marginalized; they embrace their conditions of

life and share in their sufferings, problems and perils". In hearing this, Oblates might readily resonate with the pastoral call of Aparecida to be present among the most fragile communities of the earth.

Oblates are called upon to review their practice of voluntary evangelical poverty to enhance their solidarity with the poor and to develop a living attention to the Word of God. They search for a true evangelical way of being present among the peoples whose lives are disrupted by the ill effects of a globalized economy and a globalized technology that imperil human life and ecosystems at one and the same time. In presenting some perspectives on these phenomena perhaps this paper, however brief, helps to bring this missionary effort into relief.

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