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ACTA OF THE CONGRESS
EVANGELIZATION AND THE OBLATES

(English Edition)

OTTAWA

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Rome, 29 August - September 14, 1982

(English edition)

Introduction

The Congress on *Evangelization and the Oblates* studied the theme of evangelization in the light of the Oblate ideal and history. This congress was an important step towards the deeper understanding of the Oblate missionary charism. Publishing, in French and in English, the studies prepared for the congress together with the congress conclusions will provide not only a valuable document of the work that was done but also an animation means and a reference point in the discernment of our missionary activity.

This Congress is linked to that of *The Founder's Charism Today* held in 1976. It deepened one of the nine main elements of the Founder's charism, namely, that of evangelization. The method used was somewhat different: the lion's share belonged to historical research, while the light brought by lived experience, biblical and theological science, and the challenges of the Church's and the world's needs was not omitted. Those who organized the congress chose this approach in response to the desires of the voluntary participants, keeping in mind the fact that another international Oblate congress had a more immediate objective: in fact, from August 9th to August 20th, a congress held in Ottawa struggled with the theme of the Oblates and the evangelization of secularized societies.

The General Council entrusted the organization and preparation of this Congress to a committee whose members were Fathers Marcello Zago, Edward Carolan and Aloysius Kedl. The latter was also its executive secretary. Seventeen Oblate experts accepted to study each a special aspect of Oblate evangelization and to prepare a basic work document for submission to the congress participants. The whole collection of these documents was meant to constitute the main mosaic, so to speak; the congress would then examine it, add to it, modify and complete it.

The Congress was held at the General House in Rome from August 29 to September 14, 1982. It did its work in a family atmosphere and with an intense pace of study, sharing, and prayer. The fifty-five congress members came from 27 Provinces and 15 countries and represented the different age groups as well as a wide variety of ministries. The largest single group was made up of historians and archivists. Still, all the participants were determined to discern and deepen that which constitutes the dynamism and requisites of Oblate evangelization right from the founding to our own day.

The method used proved to be very useful for the Congress' work. It included:

- a brief presentation of the basic work documents which were then distributed to each participant;
- a time of personal study so as to analyze these documents;
- a period of work in small groups so as to complete or modify these studies;
- a time to compare the study results with the participants' experience, the needs of the world and the Congregation's situation.

Evangelization was examined according to the full span of our history and in several socio-cultural contexts. It was analyzed in the light of the most important influential sources, such as the Founder, the Constitutions and Rules, the General Chapters, the Superiors General and the missionary activity of Oblates. From all this, it was found that evangelization understood as the proclamation of the Word lies at the very heart of the Oblate charism. Other dimensions were also highlighted and their close unity underlined. The main convergent factors are formulated in the synthesis

paper, drawn up by a Congress committee, revised by the assembly of the participants, and definitively written by Father Clarence Menard.

Here we are publishing the full text of the sixteen studies prepared for the Congress: two dealing with the Founder's vision and practice in France and elsewhere (Maurice Gilbert and Giovanni Santolini); eight on the response of the Oblates contemporary to the Founder (Yvon Beaudoin for those in France, Austin Cooper for those in England and Ireland, Romuald Boucher, Gaston Carrière and Claude Champagne for those in Canada, Clarence Menard and Bernard Doyon for those in the United States, and Robrecht Boudens for those in Sri Lanka); three outlining the positions taken by the General Chapters (Josef Pielorz, Aloysius Kedl, Francis George); and finally a study on the Constitutions and Rules (Paul Sion), the Superiors General (Donat Levasseur) and the present-day situation (Marcello Zago). The two interventions of Father General plus the synthesis overview complete this publication. Other contributions made on the occasion of this Congress will be made public in another form.

One of the fruits of this Congress was the organization of the Association for Oblate Studies and Research which now received its charter and appropriate structure. This was all approved by the General Council during its plenary session in Cotabato (from November 21 to December 10, 1982). The elected Executive Committee was about to begin its work when its president, Father Paul Sion, became gravely ill and died a few weeks later.

The cooperation of many people made the publication of the Congress Acta a reality. Father Aloysius Kedl was one responsible for the editing and translating; he was especially assisted by Father Maurice Lesage. Father Gaston Carrière capably handled the work of printing the same. Neither the Congress nor this publication could have come about without the support of the General Council and especially that of Father Fernand Jetté, the Superior General. A sincere thank you, therefore, to all who collaborated in this undertaking. To all the Oblates I express the hope that evangelization will be more and more the inspiration thrust of their life for the good of people today.

Marcello ZAGO, O.M.I.

The Opening of the Congress

(Sunday, August 29, 1982)

The Congress on "The Oblates and Evangelization" opened with a Eucharistic Concelebration at 17.30 o'clock on Sunday, August 29, 1982, in the main chapel of the General House. Father Fernand Jetté, O.M.I., Superior General, was the main celebrant. Concelebrating with him were fifty-two of the expected Congress participants, as well as a number of Oblates from the General House community. The text of the Mass used was that of the 22nd Sunday of the liturgical Year "B". After the proclamation of the Gospel, Father General, speaking partly in French and partly in English, gave the following homily:

At the beginning of this Mass, I told you how happy I was to see you take part in this Congress. There are veterans among you who have dedicated a great part of their lives to reflecting and writing on Oblate history and spirituality. They have known how to take care of all that has been entrusted to them¹, deepening it, making it bear fruit, and transmitting it on to us.

Please allow me to mention a name, that of Father Maurice Gilbert, founder and first editor of *Études Oblates*, which has become *Vie Oblate – Oblate Life*. This year, this review is celebrating its 40th year of existence. For the past 40 years, it has been endeavoring to make better known the Founder, the Congregation, its history and spirituality, all the values that it bears. At the beginning of this Congress, I want to pay tribute to this review and thank its present editor and all those who have assured its permanence and fidelity to its goals, sometimes in spite of great difficulties.

There are not only veterans at this Congress; there are also younger men, young Oblates interested in historical work who also have at heart the desire to know, in a scientific and spiritual way, all the wealth of the Oblate life, in order to live of it today and to enable those who will come tomorrow to live of it too. I am thinking, for example, of the community of Vermicino – some of its members are here among us – which, for a good number of years now, has in this field been accomplishing an admirable work of which I am a happy witness.

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Why the present Congress? Certainly to permit all of you, young and not so young, but interested in the same cause, to come together.

Furthermore, this Congress provides us with a special way of celebrating the 2nd centenary of our Founder's birth, Eugene de Mazenod. It will also give us the occasion to determine the structures of the Association for Oblate Studies and Research, and to establish it in a more stable way.

But above all, the Congress wants to be one more step, an important step, in the Congregation's efforts to renew itself.

About a year ago, Father Arrupe, the Jesuits' Superior General, was asked the following question: "In what way does a Superior General — yourself in particular — maintain the Company of Jesus as a Corps?"

He answered this: "I should say, first of all, that it is by way of prayer...; this is always the first Ignatian way for everything." Then he added:

But to go to more practical means of action, I think that the first one to use is to deepen - and to see to it that others deepen - the Ignatian charism, because it is this charism which makes us feel that we constitute a Corps, united and inspired by this spirit... I think that

knowledge of the Order's history is very important, but a history that does not only help us know the events - which is already very useful in itself - but also to reflect on the message that these events tell me personally. It is a method of extraordinary effectiveness.²

This I have personally experienced during the 10 years I have been living in Rome.

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Our *raison d'être*, as Oblates, is to evangelize the poor, today's poor and in today's world, and to evangelize them according to a spirit, a vocation that is proper to us, according to the charism of Blessed Eugene de Mazenod.

Since the Council, since the Chapters of 1966 and 1972, a considerable effort is being made in the Congregation to face up to today's world, to discern the new calls coming from it, in Asia, Africa, Latin America, Europe, the United States and Canada. That was the objective of the document on the Missionary Outlook, in 1972; it was also the main objective of the session at Saint Paul University, a few weeks ago, on evangelization in a secularized world. It is also the goal of many regional Congresses.

This study of today's world, our becoming familiar with this world is essential to the Congregation if we want it to keep on living and to remain faithful to its vocation in the Church.

At the same time, however, and for the same motive of fidelity to itself and to the vocation it has received, another effort is indispensable to the Congregation : that of deepening its proper charism by a better knowledge of its Founder, of its history and of its spirituality. The Congregation was not born on July 3, 1982, with the approval of the new Constitutions; it was born two hundred years ago, with the Founder. It is rooted in a past, in a history that is part of itself and that provides it with a wisdom, a broadness of views, a richness of experience and virtues, a knowledge of men and an apostolic vigor that it would not have were it born only yesterday.

We must, however, know this past and be able to draw from it the values which can nourish the present.

In 1976, after his beatification, the Congress on the Founder's charism was a step in this direction.

The present Congress on Evangelization in the Oblate mind and history will be another step.

What did "to evangelize the poor" mean to Bishop de Mazenod and his first companions? What did it mean to his missionaries in Asia, Africa, the Canadian Far North? On what aspects of evangelization did the General Chapters and the Superiors General insist? What does "to evangelize" mean for today's Oblate?

These questions are at the heart of our vocation. We must be able to tackle them objectively, without prejudice, with the required intellectual discipline and information, just as we must be able to approach today's world objectively, without prejudice and fear, and to analyze its real needs and together look for what kind of Gospel answer we must bring to this world,

according to our vocation.

As I express these thoughts to you, am I far removed from the message that the Church gives us today in her liturgy? I do not think so.

The first reading³ was an exhortation to faithfulness, faithfulness to one's history, faithfulness to the Law that had been received. Moses said: "You must add nothing to what I command you, and take nothing from it." And that will give you great wisdom and intelligence in the eyes of all other peoples. Thanks to this fidelity, it will be said of you: "No other people is as wise and prudent as this great nation."

On the other hand, the two other readings, that of James⁴ and that of Mark⁵ insisted on the necessary flexibility in applying the Law, on the primacy of love and of the inner disposition that must move each person, from generation to generation, and that gives it its real value. The tradition of the Elders, the history of men cannot bind the Word of God which dwells in us and is always *alive* in us. Tradition has put it into us, has planted it at the bottom of our hearts; that seed has sprouted and remains unceasingly active. As St. James says: "Accept and submit to the Word of God which has been *planted* in you; it can save your souls. But you must do what the Word tells you, and not just listen to it..."

This, I believe, is what Father Arrupe meant in the text I quoted at the beginning of this homily: "I think," he said, "that knowledge of the Order's history is very important, but a history that does not only help us know the events – which is already very useful in itself – but also to reflect on the message that these events tell me personally. It is a method of extraordinary effectiveness." And he even added: "I have often repeated that if we were faithful to what the Holy Spirit is teaching the Order concerning the different aspects of the Ignatian charism, we could today be more Ignatian than in the time of Ignatius himself"⁶.

May the Immaculate Virgin Mary, Mother of the Oblates, and Blessed Eugene de Mazenod, her great Servant, guide us throughout this Congress and help us have a better understanding of what "to evangelize the poor" means for us!

NOTES :

1. 1 *Tim.* 6: 20.

2 Pedro ARRUIPE, S.J., *Itinéraire d'un Jésuite. Entretiens avec Jean-Claude Dietsch, S.J.* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1982), p. 86.

3 *Di* 4: 1-8.

4 *Jm* 1: 17-27.

5 *Mk* 7: 1-23.

6 *Op. cit.*, p. 98.

Members of the Congress

Beaudoin, Yvon	General House	<i>Resource person</i>
Bissett, Anthony	Anglo Irish	
Blatz, Joseph	Saint Mary's	
Boucher, Romuald	Saint-Joseph	<i>Resource person</i>
Boudens, Robrecht	Belgium North	<i>Resource person</i>
Brady, John	Transvaal	
Carolan, Edward	General House	
Carrière, Gaston	Saint-Joseph	<i>Resource person</i>
Cassidy, Thomas	Saint Peter's	
Champagne, Claude	Saint-Joseph	<i>Resource person</i>
Choque, Charles	Hudson Bay	
Ciardi, Fabio	Italy	
D'Addio, Angelo	Italy	
De Jesus, Bejamin	Philippines	
Doyon, Bernard	Southern United States	<i>Resource person</i>
Drouart, Jean	General House	
Drouin, Éméric	Alberta Saskatchewan	
Fautray, Léon	Belgium South	
Fernando, Edmund	Auxiliary Bishop of Colombo	
Fernando, Modestus	Sri Lanka	
Ferkinghoff, Bernhard	General Council	
Ferragne, René	Chile	
Foley, Michael	Natal	
George, Francis	General Council	<i>Resource person</i>
Gilbert, Maurice	General House	<i>Resource person</i>
Greene, John	General Council	
Hayes, Thomas	Central United States	
Hughes, Donald	Australia	
Jetté, Fernand	Superior General	
Kedl, Aloysius	General House	<i>Resource person</i>
King, Arthur	Eastern United States	
Krasenbrink, Josep	Germany	
Kurek, Antoni	Poland	
Labaglay, Frederico	Philippines	
Laframboise, Ronald	Japan	

Lalonde, Albert	Saint Mary's	
Laquerre, Émile	Philippines	
Lascalles, Thomas	Saint Paul's	
Levasseur, Donat	Saint-Joseph	<i>Resource person</i>
Martin, William	Eastern United States	
McMahon, Maurice	Alberta Saskatchewan	
Menard, Clarence	Saint John the Baptist	<i>Resource person</i>
Mitri, Angelo	General Administration	
Moosbrugger, Robert	Central United States	
Morin, Gaston	Notre-Dame-du-Rosaire	
Motte, René	General Council	
Pépin, Lucien	Notre-Dame-du-Rosaire	
Philippe, Victor	Mackenzie	
Pielorz, Josef	Polish Vice Province	<i>Resource person</i>
Rodrigo, Michael	Sri Lanka	
Santolini, Giovanni	Italy	<i>Resource person</i>
Sion, Paul	General house	<i>Resource person</i>
St George, Howard	Natal	
Zago, Marcello	Italy	<i>Resource person</i>

The Congress Calendar

August 29: Liturgical opening of the Congress.

August 30: Introducing and Structuring the Congress.

August 31 - September 11: Evangelization and the Oblates.

- August 31 - September 1: The Founder's vision and practice.
- September 2-4: The Oblates' response to the Founder's vision and practice (in France, England / Ireland, Sri Lanka, S. Africa, Canada and the United States).
- September 5: Free.
- September 6-7: Evangelization according to the General Chapters and the Superiors General.
- September 7-8: Evangelization according to the Constitutions and Rules.
- September 8, p.m.: Papal Audience.
- September 9, a.m.: Visit to the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.
- September 9-10: Oblate evangelization today.
- September 11: Congress conclusions.
- September 12: Free.
- September 13-14: Association for Oblate Studies and Research.
- September 15-20: Pilgrimage to Aix / Marseilles.

The Congress Daily Program

9.00: Common prayer.

9.15 - 12.15: Plenary sessions or Work in small groups.

15.30 - 17.30: Plenary sessions or Work in small groups.

18.00: Concelebration of the Eucharist.

The Founder and Evangelization in France

The organizers of this Congress asked me to prepare a short study on evangelization in France according to the mind and practice of the Founder. If this very ample topic is to be treated with the space of a few pages, then, it seems to me, we must abandon all oratorical caution and adopt a rather schematic approach. Inherent in such an approach is the danger of reducing the Founder's thought to a system; in fact, his thought is quite flexible and empirical in character, quite inseparable from life and open to the calls from God above.

We assume here that Eugene de Mazenod cannot be divided into the layman, the missionary priest, the Founder, the bishop: throughout his long life he remained basically the same. However, since we are here concerned with a common reflection on the Congregation's mission, we must consider Eugene de Mazenod especially in his quality as Founder and Superior General. We know that he vigorously claimed the right to orientate the Congregation himself.¹

Furthermore, evangelization according to the Founder must be studied in its relationship to the Congregation as such, and not in the form it may have taken in the mission entrusted to one or the other of its members. We can recall, for example, the case of Father Pélissier whom the Founder roundly scolded for hesitating to accept parish work on the grounds that it would not be missionary to do so.² We must likewise note that the Founder's vision is at times only indirectly one of evangelization, as, for instance, when he wanted to introduce the Congregation into certain places in Canada in the hope of getting vocations there.³

The ideal which Eugene de Mazenod wanted to share with his Oblates he forcefully expressed in the double motto: "He has sent me to evangelize the poor - the poor are evangelized." These words he engraved on his own personal coat of arms and on that of the Congregation. To grasp the meaning of this ideal and the wealth that the word "to evangelize" contains here, we must recall the historical circumstances which sparked his apostolic dream. It is not the scope of this paper to present the history of Eugene de Mazenod's vocation; for that, it is enough to refer to Fathers Pielorz, Taché, Morabito and his biographers. Nevertheless, it is relevant here to reflect briefly on the years preceding the founding of the Congregation: for, as Father Rey rightly says, "Eugene's mission was being outlined without his being aware of it".⁴ This is therefore also true of his way of seeing and carrying on evangelization.

And so our treatment will centre on three headings: evangelization in France according to the mind and practice of Eugene de Mazenod:

- 1 - before the founding of the Congregation;
- 2 - in its founding and first missionary experiences;
- 3 - in his directives to his missionaries in France.

I - Before the Founding of the Congregation.

During the period following his return to France from exile in Italy, light and shadows alternated, not to say co-existed, in Eugene de Mazenod's life. While his first biographers, following the style of the time, focussed especially on the light, the more recent ones rather underline the shadows, the interior struggles, tensions and hesitations which more or less lasted until he entered the seminary. Whatever the fluctuations in his spiritual life at this time, it is certain and quite remarkable - and on

this point I think Chanoine Leflon fails by omission – that from his return from exile onwards, Eugene de Mazenod gave himself to apostolic and good works which are, in their way, ministries of evangelization appropriate for a layman.

Passing over his apostolate of example and word by which he preached fidelity to the Church,⁵ as well as his efforts against Jansenism and other errors of his day,⁶ we must mention his services to the poor and the ignorant, his work on behalf of prisoners, the "Oeuvre des petits savoyards",⁷ the catechism to rural children.⁸ He was also an apostle of the Sacred Heart, seeing in this a means for christianizing his milieu.⁹ Already in this we see the direction of his thought and activity.

At the same time, a deepening of his spiritual life was taking place. It reached that summit which he himself called his "conversion". This profound experience of Christ crucified and of the latter's mercy in his regard vividly revealed to him the priceless value of the Blood of Jesus. And there, before him, as his previous activity had already made plain to him, he again saw the Church, for whom Christ had shed all his Blood, abandoned and ravaged by the Revolution.

It is after this that he progressively felt ready to sacrifice everything and undertake anything to help the Church, especially in those domains wherein she suffered most and was most neglected: among the poor, the prisoners, the youth, immigrants, etc.

To increase the effectiveness and influence of his service to the Church, he became a priest. There can be no doubt, as Father Morabito wrote with discernment in his analysis of Eugene de Mazenod's vocation, "his personality is marked with such strong traits that anyone who tried to make an overall judgment of it which included all its elements in their proper proportion would find himself stymied." And he adds, "He was, in fact, before all else, a priest... He is a priest before he is anything else. This is quite clear in that, before his ordination, he had not as yet perceived any special vocational preference: at his first Mass, he asked God for the grace to know his holy will as to the kind of ministry he should take up...¹⁰ And as priest, he was so completely (i.e. he considered all the loves he found in his heart as so many calls from God) : priest of the poor, priest of souls, of the most abandoned souls, priest of the Church and for all her urgent needs".¹¹

We know the rest. Once ordained, he was called to replace the Sulpicians whom Napoleon had removed from the Seminary of Paris. This, however, was not his true place. He returned to his native city where he obtained the authority's concession not to be assigned to any given parish or other definite work. This decision regarding the orientation of his priestly apostolate is worth noting: it reveals the notion he had then and always retained concerning evangelization. According to the charism that was his, he now began preaching to the poor, the workers, housemaids, the little people, and at the same time he busied himself with the young.

First, he offered a series of popular instructions, given in the provençal dialect and in the early morning so that he could reach his people before they had to be at work. These talks, it should be noted, were meant to be a consistent teaching; they were, according to the advice of his director, Mr. Antoine du Pouget-Duclaux, contrary to "the lack of order and sequence found in announcements and sermons".¹² Then he organized conferences on the priesthood for priests, somewhat like the Conferences of Saint Lazarus and of St. Vincent de Paul.¹³ Next he came to the aid of youth, whose Christian formation was deficient because education had been laicized. This ministry led to the creation of the Association of the Christian Youth of Aix.¹⁴ In this way, according to the customs of the locality, he brought young people together for recreation and instructed them by means of conferences which were quite successful.

Father Rey tells us: "Other works attracted his attention and took up his activity:

preparing young people for the seminary, corresponding with his former students and confreres of Saint Sulpice, visiting the sick and the poor, helping out parish priests...¹⁵

II - In its Founding and first Experiences of Ministry.

Soon, overwhelmed by these undertakings, he sought for collaborators, priests like himself at first, and then Brothers who brought their invaluable contribution to the common effort. In the Preface of the Rule which he drew up for all of them and which the Church soon approved, he described in letters of flame the ideal which consumed him: "The Church, that glorious inheritance purchased by Christ the Saviour at the cost of his own blood has in our days been cruelly ravaged..." The missionary life is portrayed in it as a kind of renewing of the apostolic experience of Christ and his Apostles, "our first fathers", namely, being saviour with the Saviour.

Here we have the reason why the Founder chose as a motto for himself and his Congregation the Scripture words which Jesus had given as a sign of his mission: "He has sent me to evangelize the poor – the poor are evangelized." By a thoroughly supernatural intuition, the Founder had understood the deep meaning of this Gospel text. As a footnote in the Bible of Jerusalem points out in regard to *Matthew 4: 23*: "Good news is the primary meaning of the word 'gospel' ... It is not first and foremost a writing or even a proclamation, but rather the fact of salvation brought by Jesus Christ of which he is also the centre."

It was therefore evangelization that Eugene de Mazenod proposed as an objective for himself and for his companions. However, as he himself did gradually, in the Founder's ideal we must clearly distinguish the following:

- 1 – the objective, namely, evangelization: bringing salvation in Jesus Christ. This is an element common to all apostolate.
- 2 – the areas of action, namely, the suffering Church, the most abandoned souls. To me, this seems to be the specific element in Oblate evangelization. At a first stage, this will be *ad domesticos fidei*, according to the Pope's advice;¹⁶ afterwards, the regions where the Church is not yet planted, especially in the domain Pius XI called "the most difficult missions",¹⁷
- 3 – the apostolic means, that is to say, the various forms of ministry by which the Congregation strives to reach its objective, according to the calls of the Church and the needs of times and places.

If we were to restrict the meaning Eugene de Mazenod and his Oblates gave to the word "evangelization" to the sole proclamation of the Word, then we would understand nothing of his life and directives as Founder: we would then label these as incoherent and mere opportunism. The word "evangelization" would then include no more than one aspect of the Founder's charism, or, rather, it would indicate only a means – a privileged means, if you will – for actualizing his charism, for christianizing, for evangelizing, that is, bringing salvation to those who are farthest away, the poor, the most abandoned souls. Let it be said in passing that this requires us to give an exceptionally precise meaning to "the poor" mentioned in our motto: for we could be induced to reduce it too much, as though the social promotion of the deprived were the sum total of the Oblate vocation.

Once this is granted and supposed – even if it is for me a conviction, here it is being proposed as a working hypothesis, a study for a workshop – then the treating of evangelization in France according to the Founder comes to the same as studying the means he chose and, together with his disciples, put into motion in order to achieve his objective of evangelization. Stated in these terms, this study appears relatively easy.

Two sources are to be consulted: his writings and his life. Of Blessed Eugene de Mazenod we can say what has been said of St. Benedict: "If you want to know Benedict, read the Rule; but if you want to know the Rule, read his life"¹⁸ For the sake of brevity, we will treat both aspects simultaneously.¹⁹

For knowing the Founder's mind on evangelization at the time of the foundation, there is nothing better than re-reading the letter he wrote inviting the l'abbé Tempier to join him and share his ideal:

Since the Head of the Church is convinced²⁰ that, in France's unhappy situation, only missions can bring the people back to the faith which they have, in fact, abandoned, qualified ecclesiastics from different dioceses are joining together in support of the supreme Shepherd's views. We have likewise felt the indispensable need to apply this remedy in our territory: full of confidence in the goodness of Providence, we have laid the foundations of an establishment which will regularly furnish fervent missionaries to our rural areas.²¹

No less revealing is l'abbé Tempier's reply. It shows us how much he grasped the Founder's thought and concept of evangelization:

May God be praised for having inspired your project of preparing, for the benefit of the poor, the people of our rural areas, for those who need religious instruction, a house of missionaries who will go and proclaim the truths of salvation to them... While it is true that I do not possess the talent for preaching the Word, nevertheless *alius guidem sic alius vero sic*. What I will not be doing through great discourses, I will be doing through catechizing, conferences, in the tribunal of penance, and through all the other means capable of establishing the reign of Jesus Christ in souls"²²

Thus we see, both in the Founder's text and equally in that of his first companion, the Congregation's ideal at its beginnings were the re-christianizing of Provence's country areas especially through the preaching of missions.

Another document of the time, this one official, is equally explicit. It is the "Petition for Authorization addressed to the Vicars General of Aix." In it we read:

The undersigned Priests, deeply affected by the deplorable condition of the small towns and villages of Provence who have nearly all lost the faith;

Having come to know by experience that the hardened state or indifference of these populations renders insufficient and even useless the ordinary assistance your solicitude for their salvation offers them;

Being convinced that missions are the only means by which we can induce these erring people to come out of their foolish ways,..."²³

The Founder himself considered this petition as an expression of his evangelization ideal. He saw it as a very important document relating to the Congregation's orientation. "Get busy on our statutes..." he wrote to Father Tempier. "Reread St. Philip Neri and the petition we presented to the Vicars General".²⁴ It is from Marignane where he was preaching a mission with his confreres that he sent this recommendation to Father Tempier who had remained in Aix in order to provide the services of the House and the chapel of the Mission. While preaching missions was indeed their first work, the activity of the Founder and his companions did not stop there. There were also daily spiritual exercises given in the chapel of the Mission, the youth Association was growing, devotion to the Sacred Heart radiated from the church of the Mission which became a Confraternity centre where the First Fridays and the feast of the Sacred Heart were celebrated even by a large organized procession outside²⁵.

The Society was growing. It was clustered together at Marseilles, Notre Dame du Laus, Nîmes. There was talk of entrusting Corsica to its care.²⁶ The ideal was being confirmed by practice. Soon official confirmation came from higher up in the form of approbation by the Church.

Leo XII's letter of approval gives us a detailed description of the Oblate vocation. This text is certainly inspired by the Founder's request, and so it also helps us understand his thought. Once accepted by the Pope, this thought becomes the directing norm for Oblate evangelization. A few lengthy quotations are relevant here:

It is now eleven years since our predecessor Pius VII... openly stated that, due to the disorders of Church and State in France, preachers of the Gospel were needed for the work of recalling to the right path of salvation the sheep that had gone astray. And it was but a short time afterwards that a small band of priests was formed in the diocese of Aix, in Provence, in southern France to undertake this sacred ministry...

This Society has for its aim the following objects: its members, who are bound by simple but perpetual vows... devote themselves principally to the work of preaching missions to the poorer classes in the common tongue, especially in places destitute of the aid of religion; they give assistance to the clergy by providing them with suitable training in seminaries, and by being continually ready to assist parish priests and other pastors in the work of reforming the morals of the people through preaching and other spiritual exercises; they generously bestow devoted care on the young, and they strive to withdraw this chosen portion of the Christian people from the seductions of the world by forming them into pious associations; lastly, they preach the divine word and administer the sacraments to those in prison ..."²⁷

In the Pope's thought, therefore, as well as in that of the Founder, the idea which was at the origins of the Congregation was what we could call the "re-Christianizing" of the people least attained by the ordinary ministry of parishes; this would be done principally by preaching the Word of God in the form of missions and retreats, also by preparing the future clergy, and by trying to form true Christians through youth ministry.

Such would seem to be the idea of evangelization the Founder entertained for his Oblates at the time of our founding.

III - In his Directives to his Missionaries in France.

In order to know the Founder's subsequent thought, that is, after the first experiences of the founding, we have to consult his many writings, and, for our topic in particular, his directives to his missionaries in France. The correspondence relating to his theme is abundant. No less than 144 pages deal with the missions in Father Yenneux's work on the Rules commented by Bishop de Mazenod's writings. Father Yenneux begins this section with the following observation: "In the first chapter of the holy Rules, the Founder, speaking of the aim of the Congregation, indicated the many works he is offering the zeal of his missionaries; in the following chapters he returns to the more important ones in order to set out their course." To be noted is how he distinguishes "the aim of the Congregation" from "the many works" by which it strives to achieve its aim. And Father Alfred Yenneux adds, "According to our holy Rules, missions must be considered as the first among the Congregation's works".²⁸

The Founder was never hesitant in underlining this priority. On September 28, 1827, he wrote to Father Courtès, "Since our vocation is the missions, it is only by obedience that we may do something else".²⁹ He retained this conviction until the end of his life. On October 15, 1858, he lectured Father Marc de l'Hermitte, Superior of Notre-Dame de Cléry, in these terms: "In this regard, I recommend that you do not completely free yourself from the precious work of the missions. It is the principal goal of our vocation. I would not gladly see a community Superior abstain therefrom",³⁰

"Nevertheless," writes Father Lamirande, "the introduction of foreign missions among the Congregation's ministries occasioned, we believe, a change in emphasis. The 1831 General Chapter had already approved them in principle, once it had learned the dispositions of a good number of Oblates who wanted to bring to distant lands the knowledge and love of our Lord Jesus Christ."³¹ It is thus essentially the same missionary vocation

which impelled the Oblates forward in the Apostles' footsteps: 'to awaken sinners' in the old Christian countries and 'to proclaim and make known Jesus Christ' in the lands of unbelievers".³²

Why did missions occupy such a privileged place in the evangelizing thought of the Founder? He himself explicitly answers this question in a letter to Father Courtès on October 11, 1837:

I am sorry that the Archbishop of Aix has been influenced by such men as the parish priest of N... A person has to be completely ignorant of the people's condition to be at a loss as to how to silence these presumptuous persons who have the audacity to suggest that, since the people are not instructed, this is not the time for giving them a mission. Who, then, can ever undertake to instruct them? Don't we know that a mission is needed precisely to instruct a people which has strayed, because only a mission is able to draw the people to the church? The parish priest can preach all he wants, no one, except a few women, will come to hear him. Is it possible that we don't know these things?³³

The objective, then, is to instruct the people. But - and this is very enlightening - the mission is seen as a means for drawing the people to the church where they may hear God's Word, be instructed in the faith and made aware of their duties.

Therefore, for Eugene de Mazenod and his Oblates, evangelization is, first and foremost, promoting knowledge of Jesus Christ and extending his reign in souls, by means which reach the most abandoned, those least attained by the ordinary parish ministry. He had written in the Preface of the Rules: "to teach these degenerate Christians who Jesus Christ is... to spare no effort to extend the Saviour's empire..."

Our Society, the Founder said to Bishop Adinolfi, works in cities, as you have been able to see in the Rules, and is occupied there with all kinds of good works. By preference, however, it dedicates itself with all the zeal it can to evangelizing the poor abandoned souls... I briefly recall to you this one article concerning our Society's ministry, so that people may grasp the interest our Society should arouse in all who have the true spirit of Christianity, which is to spread knowledge of Jesus Christ and to extend his spiritual Kingdom in souls.³⁴

Bishop Jeancard, a witness of the very first days, writes: "We wanted to imitate Our Lord who covered the villages and countryside of Judea to proclaim his Gospel there in the language of the people".³⁵ The expression "walking in the Apostles' footsteps", recurring repeatedly in the Founder's correspondence with his Oblates, derives from this.³⁶

Such would seem to be the substance of the Founder's thought regarding evangelization in France. Would it then be correct to write: "It is the idea of parish missions which gave rise to the founding of the Institute, and it is because of this idea that the Congregation grew, developed, prospered and bore so much fruit of salvation"?³⁷

That would be making quite a claim! In 1813 when the abbé de Mazenod was embarking on the preaching of missions,³⁸ he had already laid the foundations of the Association of the Christian Youth of Aix. It has been said that the Congregation "was but a continuation" of this Association,³⁹ and the quite evident dependence of the Oblate Rules on the statutes of the youth Association would tend to confirm such a relationship.⁴⁰

Would it not be more correct to say that the idea of evangelization was at the root of both; that this idea of evangelization developed and expanded, always with the objective of remedying de-Christianization; that it ended up encompassing, though not necessarily on the same footing, a plurality of works among which parish missions remain the first?

As for the youth Association, it was copied only once in France, at Marseilles, and it passed away in 1840⁴¹ without the Founder making any fuss about this in his writings: "In his letters to the Oblates Bishop de Mazenod hardly speaks of it" ⁴² In spite

of the place this apostolate held in the Founder's life and in his first Rule, Father de Mazenod undoubtedly concluded that he should not insist that it become an established practice in the Congregation: other ministries were already keeping his small number of men busy enough.

During this same period, "the abbé de Mazenod, former administrator of prisons, was happy to resume on a higher plain the care of the unfortunate people struck by human justice. He freely became their chaplain. He visited them nearly every day and busied himself instructing them, consoling them, and encouraging them when they manifested the desire to return to the practice of their Christian duties. He thus achieved a noteworthy change in these fallen souls"⁴³. This, too, was evangelization for him: "He has sent me to evangelize the poor." He included this ministry in the Oblate Rules. "Prison ministry is too much in line with the aims of the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary for us to abandon this service," he wrote at the end of his life to the Bishop of Nancy ⁴⁴

We have already seen how, shortly after his return from the Seminary, he brought priests together for talks and conferences on the priesthood which have been compared to the Conferences of Saint Lazarus and of St. Vincent de Paul. He understood very well that evangelization would achieve no lasting effect without a clergy that was equal to its vocation. He also inserted a whole paragraph on "Reform of the Clergy" into his first Rule.⁴⁵ We must re-read this forceful passage written by our Father. This too, he saw as being in some way evangelization:

Finally, a no less important end of their Institute, to which they will try to apply as much zeal as to its principal one, is reforming the clergy and, as much as they can, making reparation for the evil done and still being done by bad priests who ravage the Church through their neglect, avarice, impurities, sacrileges, crimes and misdeed of every kind...

They will therefore give retreats to priests. The house of the Mission will always be an open refuge and like a saving pool to which these infected and purulently ill can come to wash themselves and begin a *new* life of penance and reparation. What purpose more sublime than that of their Institute!

After this comes the passage which became the Preface and which we keep as the expression of the Oblate vocation. This first edition of the Rules, however, contains this explicit prohibition: "They will not accept the direction of seminaries".⁴⁶ Only after the decisions of the 1824 General Chapter and especially because of the favorable view of the Pope did the Founder add also this ministry to the aims of the Congregation. He now possessed the means to undertake it, and had come to understand that "prevention is better than cure", that to clergy reform had to be added, and for the very same reasons, clergy formation. This was therefore put into the Rule in 1850.⁴⁷

In contrast with the work of major seminaries, the care of Marian shrines was not put into the Rule by the Founder. It seems that Father de Mazenod did not see the taking care of shrines as entailing a new form of ministry⁴⁸: Father Yenville assimilates shrines to the auxiliary external chapels of our houses.⁴⁹ In fact, the Founder himself saw these shrines as centres for popular preaching – this links them to our first aim – and centres of Marian cult, a mission which the Congregation received in 1826 together with the name of Oblates of Mary Immaculate. He himself affirmed this in the Act of Visitation of Notre-Dame de l'Osier in 1835:

Thus the Congregation is present at l'Osier precisely in conformity with the spirit of its being instituted to evangelize the most abandoned souls of this vast diocese and to contribute in every way to promote the glory of the holy Virgin by giving a better orientation of the faithfuls' devotion towards the Mother of all Christians, our most beloved Patroness. And so, by the admirable disposition of Providence, the Congregation is accomplishing its great purpose, the double mission it has received from the supreme Head of the Church, expressed in the apostolic letters of its establishment".⁵⁰

Here we notice that the Founder speaks of a double mission: "to evangelize the

most abandoned souls" and "to contribute to the glory of the holy Virgin". Let us also note that this second mission is in view of "giving a better orientation to the faithful's devotion." Basically, this is always evangelization. Shrines are privileged places which for a variety of reasons – not always the most informed – attract people, and which provide an occasion for enlightening their faith and religious practice, for evangelizing... somewhat like the full-scale missions which the Founder saw as the means of attracting people to listen to preaching which would otherwise not reach them.

We could pursue the list of the other evangelization works, those which Father Yenneux in his commentary calls "extraordinary": parishes, chaplaincies of hospitals and religious houses, apostolate of the press, finally the "different works of edifying the poor" including "corporal assistance".⁵¹ All these ministries are permissible as long as they do not divert the Congregation from its first duties.

These first duties comprise above all the missions. Why were missions granted such a priority in regard to evangelization? First, because of Eugene de Mazenod's intense faith in the efficacy of the proclamation of God's Word and in the Holy Spirit's assistance promised to preachers. He writes to Father Guigues:

What you tell me about your missions and retreats delights me and arouses in my heart sentiments of the deepest gratitude to the Lord who is working marvels through the ministry of our dear missionaries. Those at N. D. du Laus, with the force of God's Word and the powerful assistance of the Holy Spirit, have overthrown impregnable fortresses wherein the devil had been entrenched for centuries. It is the same in the dioceses of Aix and Marseilles... The harvest is ripe: let us pray, let us pray the Master to send labourers⁵²

But if the Word of God is to produce results, it must be heard. As has been pointed out above, it is precisely this that the Founder saw in parish missions, a means of drawing people who would otherwise stay away from the Church. Countering the risk of the result being a mere straw fire, missions had the advantage of offering a consistent and protracted instruction, a sort of catechism. For this reason they are preferable to the occasional sermon, even to retreats. Again in a letter to Father Bruno Guigues the Founder wrote:

What you tell me about the results of individual sermons given at Grenoble confirms me in the attitude I have always maintained in turning our own men away from that kind of thing which has never resulted in a single act of love for God, much less produced a conversion. Let us stick to our missions, our retreats, our catechisms: these are the channels through which grace comes to souls.⁵³

At about the same time he also wrote:

My dear Courtès, I was able to get our gentlemen together to coordinate the service of the different missions being asked of us. The outcome of our meeting was that we should not hesitate to prefer missions to retreats. Consequently... it is not opportune to give the retreat at Fonvieille because those exercises, given by two missionaries and lasting two weeks, would only produce a rather incomplete result... To achieve some good in such a bad place, we need three missionaries giving a mission for one month. We either take it or leave it.⁵⁴

We can therefore conclude that, according to the Founder in regard to the Oblates and evangelization in France, taking into account the circumstances, the limited number of his men, the urgent needs of the people, especially of the little people, parish missions must come before any other work, be it retreats, occasion sermons, parishes, chaplaincies, apostolate of the press,⁵⁵ or any other ministry.⁵⁶

Someone has written : "To extend the Kingdom of Jesus Christ by preaching his Gospel and making known his Name is the goal that must be kept in mind. It is surprising that, in this context, hardly anything explicit *is* said about the Church. No doubt, the Kingdom of Christ is identifiable with the Church. It nevertheless does seem that we must be attentive to the choice of terms. For Bishop de Mazenod, even though the Church is indeed the mystical Body of Jesus Christ and the immaculate Spouse he won with his Blood, the word itself would rather more

readily denote its visible and institutional aspects. On the other hand, speaking of the Kingdom of Christ refers less to the Church than it does to Christ".⁵⁷ According to the encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, in fact, evangelization includes the implantation of the Church. The Founder, however, did not have to develop this aspect. Since he was speaking to his Oblates in France, the Church in that country did not need to be implanted, but rather restored and brought to full life.

Likewise, according to *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, evangelization consists of the proclamation of salvation not only by means of different ministries and apostolic works but also through the witness of life. This study does not consider this aspect of the question. A whole book could be written about the value of witness in the Founder's thought. Let it suffice here to recall the Preface to the Rules and his exhortations "to walk in the Apostles' footsteps".⁵⁸ Here, in one word, is the basic reason for the Oblate religious life. As the Founder wrote to his first companion: "If it were only a matter of going out to preach, be it well or badly, the Word of God mixed together with a lot of human alloy, of running all over the countryside with the intent, if you will, of winning souls for God, without giving too much trouble to ourselves being interior men, truly apostolic men, then I think it would not be too difficult to replace you. But can you really believe that I would want that kind of stuff?"⁵⁹

Conclusion.

To end this brief inquiry, our conclusion is: For Eugene de Mazenod as Founder - as Bishop his thought will assume all the dimensions of his mission - evangelization in France consists in making Jesus Christ known and extending his Kingdom in souls by missions and retreats to the poor abandoned people, by means of a preaching that is simple and adapted to them. With this spirit there is also special concern for the youth, prisoners, immigrants, and other marginal and deprived groups. Finally, to consolidate this work of evangelization, there is the apostolate to the clergy, even the direction of major seminaries.

To be faithful to the Founder, we must, out of love for Christ and his Church, seek by every means to reach the souls of the most abandoned, that is to say, those least reached by the ordinary structures of the Church, to bring them the Word of God and through it, salvation in Jesus Christ.

Maurice GILBERT, O.M.I. *Rome.*

NOTES:

1 In a letter of June 24, 1851 to Father François de Paule Tempier, canonical visitor to Canada, he notes "how ridiculous, how absurd, how disordered it is to pretend during the life of the Founder to understand otherwise than he does the spirit of the Society " Eugène DE MAZENOD, *Letters to North America 1851-1860*, (Rome: General Postulation O.M.I.), 1980, vol. 2, p. 16.

2 "Know this well, my dear son, and loudly repeat it to all who may be tempted to avail themselves of this pretext in order not to give themselves zealously to the services demanded of them: there is nothing that is contrary to our Institute except that which offends God. Everything else is submitted to obedience. In the Congregation it will never be anyone's prerogative to rationalize regarding the ministry Superiors assign according to the needs of the Congregation or the Church." Letter of May 30, 1839, quoted in Achille REV, O.M.I., *Histoire de Monseigneur Charles-Joseph-Eugène de Mazenod, Évêque de Marseille, Fondateur de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, (Marseille: Imprimerie Marseillaise, 1928), vol. 2, p. 64.

3 I would insist that we establish ourselves at Quebec and Montreal... You say to me, that is not where

the most abandoned souls are. True, but in establishing yourselves there, you provide yourselves with the means to come to the aid of those most abandoned souls, without taking into account that you will also do much good to many of those who, while not abandoned, are nonetheless in need." Letter of October 7, 1843 to Father Jean-Baptiste Honorat (Eugène DE MAZENOD, *Letters to North America. 1841-1850*, (Rome: General Postulation O.M.I., 1978), vol. 1, p. 64.

- 4 Achille REV, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 54.
- 5 *Ibidem*, pp. 51, 63, 67.
- 6 *Ibidem*, pp. 57-58, 67.
- 7 Marius DEves, O.M.I., "Monseigneur de Mazenod, sa vie, ses oeuvres, ses vertus", in *Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 60 (1926), p. 43.
- 8 Achille REV, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 85.
- 9 *Ibidem*, pp. 83, 88.
- 10 Retreat of 1811, towards the end.
- 11 Joseph MORABITO, O.M.I., "*Je serai prêtre: Eugène de Mazenod de Venise à Saint-Sulpice*", (Ottawa: Éditions des Études Oblates, 1954), pp. 198-199.
- 12 Letter of February 23, 1813. See Achille REV, O.M.I., *Op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 152.
- 13 Achille Rev, O.M.I., *Op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 152.
- 14 *Ibidem*, pp. 155-156.
- 15 *Ibidem*, p. 155.
- 16 "Your project is undoubtedly a good one. However, it is more fitting to come to the aid of the people who are near us: *maxime ad domesticos fidei* (Gal. 6: 10). Especially in France we need missions for the people and retreat for the clergy. These are the words of the holy Pontiff." *Mémoires* of Bishop de Mazenod, quoted in Achille REY, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 169.
- 17 "We have seen once again how much you insist on your beautiful, glorious and holy specialty, which consists of consecrating your strength, talents and lives to the most abandoned souls in the most difficult missions." Pius XI, Address to the capitulars of the General Chapter, September 14, 1932. See *Missions... des... Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 66 (1932), p. 675.
- 18 Quoted by Alexandre FAURE, O.M.I., in *Missions... des... Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 60 (1926), p. 74.
- 19 In this paper we do not have to treat *ex professo* of the Rule or of the response given by the Oblates of France to the Founder's directives. Two studies are foreseen on these topics. We hope that all will understand the inevitable allusions we must make to this aspect as we deal with the question we have under study here.
- 20 An allusion, no doubt, to the directives the Pope had given to Forbin-Janson, which the latter had communicated to Eugène de Mazenod. See note 16 above.
- 21 Aix, October 9, 1815. See Achille REV, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 161.
- 22 *Ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 183.
- 23 *Ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 183.
- 24 Marignane, December 15, 1816 (*Ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 203).
- 25 *Ibidem*, vol. 1, pp. 199-206, *passim*.
- 26 *Ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 209.
- 27 Leo XII. See *Missions... des... Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 60 (1926), pp. 318-319. Alfred YENVEUX, O.M.I., "*Les saintes Règles de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*", (Paris, Imprimerie des Pauvres du Sacré-Cœur, 1903), vol. I, p. 92.
- 29 *Ibidem*, p. 95.
- 30 *Ibidem*, p. 113.
- 31 Session of September 29, 1831. See *Missions... des... Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 72 (1938), p. 186.
- 32 "L'annonce de la parole de Dieu selon M^{gr} de Mazenod. Le ministère évangélique de la

- Congrégation", in *Études Oblates*, 18 (1959), pp. 108-109.
- 33 Alfred YENVEUX, o.m.i., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 93-94. The author gives the date as 1831 but there are grounds to believe it is rather 1837.
- 34 Letter of December 23, 1825, in Paul-Émile DUVAL, O.M.I., *Écrits du Fondateur*, (Rome, Maison Générale O.M.I., 1952), fasc. IV, p. 72.
- 35 Jacques J. JEANCARD, *Mélanges historiques sur la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée à l'occasion de la mort du R.P. Suzanne...* (Tours: Mame, 1872), p. 66.
- 36 See Maurice GILBERT, O.M.I., "Sur la trace des Apôtres", in *Études Oblates*, 16 (1957), pp. 293-301.
- 37 Louis LE JEUNE, O.M.I., "Les origines et fins de l'Institut", in *Missions... des... Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 60 (1926), p. 276.
- 38 Letter of M. Antoine du Pouget-Duclaux, in Achille REY, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 157-158.
- 39 Emile LAMBLIN, O.M.I., "L'Immaculée Conception et la Congrégation de la Jeunesse fondée à Aix par M. l'abbé de Mazenod", in *Missions... des... Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 42 (1904), p. 473.
- 40 Emilien LAMIRANDE, O.M.I., "Les Règlements de la Congrégation de la Jeunesse chrétienne d'Aix et nos saintes Règles", in *Études Oblates*, 15 (1956), pp. 17-33 *passim*. at See Achille REY, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 186.
- 42 Yvon BEAUDOIN, O.M.I., "Le Fondateur et les jeunes", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 36 (1977), p. 141.
- 43 Achille REY, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 158.
- 44 Letter of June 4, 1858, in Alfred YENVEUX, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 148.
- 45 "Un Ancien manuscrit des Saintes Règles", Manuscript Honorat, in *Études Oblates*, 2 (1943), p. (4).
- 46 *Ibidem*, p. (8).
- 47 See Giorgio COSENTINO, O.M.I., "L'évolution de nos saintes Règles de 1843 à 1853", in *Études Oblates*, 9 (1950), pp. 225-227.
- 48 See Émilien LAMIRANDE, O.M.I., "La desserte des sanctuaires de la T.S. Vierge. Place parmi les fins de la Congrégation d'après M^{gr} de Mazenod" in *Études Oblates*, 17 (1958), p. 98.
- 49 Alfred YENVEUX, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 204.
- 50 Acte de visite de Notre-Dame de l'Osier, 16 juillet 1835" (Rome, General Archives O.M.I.).
- 51 Alfred YENVEUX, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 63.
- 52 Letter to Father Eugène-Bruno Guigues, April 7, 1835 (Rome, Archives of the Postulation).
- 53 Letter to the same, January 15, 1835 (*ibidem*).
- 54 Letter to Father Hippolyte Courtès, February 3, 1835 (*ibidem*).
- 55 Letter to Father Marius Suzanne, August 27, 1827 (*ibidem*).
- 56 Émilien LAMIRANDE, O.M.I., "L'annonce de la parole de Dieu selon Mgr. de Mazenod. Le ministère évangélique de la Congrégation", in *Études Oblates*, 18 (1959), p. 112. 58 See supra, note 36.
- 59 Letter to Father François-de-Paule Tempier, December 13, 1815, in Achille REY, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 187.

Evangelization "Ad Gentes": The Founder's Vision and Practice

Missions abroad have often and variously been treated in the field of Oblate studies, be it from a historical point of view, be it as inserted into the context of the Mazenod's missionary vocation. So it is not at all easy to nourish the claim of saying anything new: the sole intent of my work is to situate the missions *ad gentes* into the larger context of evangelization.

To arrive at this, we must read in full the life of the Mazenod and accept it as the unravelling in time of one and the same vocation. without dividing it into different periods separate one from the other, as v.g. his priestly vocation, his vocation as a missionary to the people, his vocation as Vicar General and then as Bishop... and finally his vocation as a missionary abroad. His life, in fact, was nothing else but the logical development of one and the same vocation. So we have to determine exactly the point from which it all began and which specified all his activity.

I - Christ: Source of Evangelization.

Eugene de Mazenod experienced an upheaval in his life as a result of his encounter with Christ. The sight of the crucifix on Good Friday of 1807 can be considered, ideally at least, as a central moment for his conversion and vocation. Eugene's communion with Jesus as Saviour draws its strength and origin in the experience he lived when confronted with the crucified Christ and recognized himself as saved by Him.¹ In this way there is born in him the desire to share Christ's own mission : from an individual person who is saved he becomes a co-worker in the very same mission of Christ.²

Having accepted in his own regard the mystery of God's salvation, de Mazenod wanted in some way to make amends for his past unfaithfulness. He decided to dedicate himself to the abandoned Church which in that moment appeared to him as the actuality of the suffering face of Christ:

I saw the Church threatened with the most cruel persecution... I therefore entered the Seminary of Saint Sulpice with the desire, rather with the firm determination to dedicate myself in the most absolute way to serving the Church in a ministry most useful to souls for whose salvation I was burning to commit myself.³

It is not our intention to examine the relationship between Christ the Saviour and the abandoned Church and how this double element influenced de Mazenod's vocation. It suffices here simply to affirm that this vocation developed in a context of total service of Christ and of the Church. In fact, when the Founder himself wanted to describe and explain his own vocation, he expressed it in these terms: the imitation of Christ the Saviour led him to form a religious family which would continue Christ's mission in the contemporary world. This idea is stated in the commentary on the Rules written by de Mazenod in 1831:

Will we ever have an exact appreciation of this sublime vocation? To arrive at it, we would have to understand the excellence of our Institute's purpose which is beyond any doubt the most perfect that can be offered here below: for our Institute's purpose is the very same as that which the Son of God had in mind when He came on earth, namely, the glory of his heavenly Father and the salvation of souls. "*Venit enim Filius hominis quæerere et salvum facere quod perierat*" He was especially sent to evangelize the poor: "*Evangelizare pauperibus misit me*" and we have been founded precisely to evangelize the poor.⁴

Missions abroad fit exactly into this context: imitating and continuing the mission of Christ himself who came to evangelize the poor. That is why they can be seen as the completion of the charism which God entrusted to de Mazenod, inasmuch as they are the full development of the same.

Consequently, in our study we will try to analyse how the choice regarding the evangelization of the poor developed with time. As a matter of logic procedure, we presuppose the historical development of the various missions as known; and we cite, as an example, the evolution which took place in understanding the term "Apostle", for it is, in our view, emblematic.

II - In the Apostle's Footsteps.

The idea of the following of Christ immediately puts de Mazenod in contact with Christ's imitators who were the Apostles: men called by Him directly to share and continue his mission.

For this reason, from the very outset after his entry into the Seminary of Saint Sulpice, Eugene decided to take them as his first companions, to imitate their life and retrace their footsteps. Now it is extremely interesting to note how the expression "walking in the footsteps of the Apostles" is given different meanings over the span of de Mazenod's life.

a) Before embarking on missions abroad.

From the beginning of his vocation, de Mazenod felt the need of himself being an apostle and of patterning his life on that of the Apostles.⁵

In founding the Missionaries of Provence, he had the intuition that, for reforming the Church, men were needed who were capable of reliving the same vocation as that of the Apostles who were the first to found and spread the Church in the world. Thus in his letter to Father Tempier he explains his intent:

We want to choose men who have the will and the courage to walk in the Apostle's footsteps.⁶

This same idea is repeated in the following letter and expressed more clearly: the missionary must be an extraordinary man, able to make a synthesis within himself of the proclaimer of the Word, the shepherd of souls, and one with a deep spiritual life lived under a Rule.⁸

The portrait of an apostle is exhaustively described in the Preface to the 1826 Rule⁹ and in the commentary to the same written in 1831.¹⁰

Imitating the holiness and virtues of Christ remains fundamental and will continue as the basis for the further development which begins with the acceptance of missions abroad. The Oblates are called, in virtue of their vocation, to evangelize the world around them, and they can do this only if they are holy.¹¹

b) After embarking on missions abroad.

Until 1841, "walking in the Apostles' footsteps" consisted in the unity of an intimate life with Jesus and preaching to others. From the acceptance of missions abroad onwards, other elements will be built on this foundation. Before everything else, there appeared the desire to reach the farthest ends of the earth according to Jesus' command: *Euntes docete*¹² and thereafter comes the possibility of carrying the proclamation and knowledge of Christ to those who have never received it, to unbelievers. These two activities are seen as being in conformity with the Apostles' conduct. The evolution here is gradual and increases in proportion to the Oblates' dedication to the peoples who are not yet Christian. In fact, when the Oblates originally left for Canada, imitation of the Apostles is still centred more on unity between the active life and the life internal to the religious community: being an apostle consists in harmony between the religious life and the missionary life.¹³

When Father Pascal Ricard, scarcely some six years later, left for Oregon together with the other Oblates, de Mazenod had already in some way deepened the meaning

of the apostolic vocation, so that he says:

The departure of our apostles for Oregon! Oh, how moving it was, how beautiful! While I was blessing them, I would gladly have cast myself at their feet to kiss them, these feet *'pedes evangelizantium bona'*. They left content, happy at having been chosen for this great mission.¹⁴

From this time onwards, the "royal career in the holy foreign missions"¹⁵ introduces a new understanding of the term "apostle":

I say nothing of how magnificent in the eyes of Faith is the ministry you are going to fulfill. One must go back to the birth of Christianity to find anything comparable. It is an apostle with whom you are associated and the same marvels that were wrought by the first disciples of Jesus Christ will be renewed in our days by you, my dear children, whom Providence has chosen amongst so many others to announce the good news to so many slaves of the demon who huddle in the darkness of idolatry and know not God. This is verily the real apostolate which is renewed in our times. Let us thank the Lord for having been deemed worthy to be participants therein in so active a manner.¹⁶

This went all the way to acquiring a completely autonomous value a few years later:

Foreign missions compared to our missions in Europe have a special character of a higher kind, because this is the true apostolate of announcing the Good News to nations which have not yet been called to knowledge of the true God and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord... This is the mission of the Apostles: *'antes docete omnes gentes!'* This teaching of the truth must penetrate to the most backward nations so that they may be regenerated in the waters of baptism. You are among those to whom Jesus Christ has addressed these words, giving you your mission as he gave their mission to the Apostles who were sent to convert our fathers. From this point of view, which is a true one, there is nothing higher than your ministry and that of our other Fathers who are wearing themselves out in the glacial regions to discover the Indians whom it is their task to save.¹⁷

This new way of seeing things shows that a mission is considered specifically apostolic and in conformity with the ministry of the Apostles when it strives to reach the farthest ends of the earth and has the conversion of unbelievers as its objective.

This new meaning does not render null the prior understanding regarding the harmony between the religious life and the missionary life, but rather qualifies it. The Oblates, precisely because they are sent into the whole world for the conversion of unbelievers, continue to be called to following Jesus the Master and to commit themselves to living an evangelical life. Moreover, because they are subjected to greater difficulties, a greater commitment is required from them. A life dedicated to the first proclamation requires, in fact, a constant deepening in living the religious life.¹⁸

This internal evolution of the concept of the apostolate allows us to understand the impact and importance the foreign missions had on the notion of Oblate evangelization. These missions show how de Mazenod's concept of evangelization was whole and complete : it is the proclamation of Christ and the Good News to every person, especially to those groups which remain marginal or totally excluded from the proclamation of salvation.

This is why De Mazenod saw, until the end of his life, the apostle as someone who evangelizes the poor, that is, those who, within their given milieu, are the last, the marginals in regard to salvation.

III - Missions Abroad: From A Pastoral Ministry of Re-Evangelization to the Mission of the First Proclamation of Christ

At the outset of his ministry in post-Revolutionary France, Eugene de Mazenod wanted to undertake a kind of extraordinary preaching to proclaim Christ to those clusters of people who were beyond the reach of the ordinary parish ministry. This is why he decided to commit himself to preaching missions to the people.¹⁹

The various foundations in France and in Corsica were dictated by the desire to cooperate with the Bishops in evangelizing the poorest. The determination to bring

Christ to souls He had redeemed at the price of his Blood,²⁰ led de Mazenod not to limit his vision to the people of Provence but rather to be open to every human being :

They are called to be the Saviour's co-workers, the coredeemers of mankind; and even though, because of their present small number and the urgent needs of the people around them, they have to limit the scope of their zeal, for the time being, to the poor of our countryside and others, their ambition should, in its holy aspirations, embrace the vast expanse of the whole earth.²¹

This is why de Mazenod always adopted what Father Perbal calls "an open door policy vis-a-vis the foreign missions",²² that is to say, he never limited his zeal for souls, when the apostolic field seemed rather narrow, especially during the years from 1830 to 1840.

When Bishop Bourget's request came to open a foundation in Canada, the mind of de Mazenod and of the Oblates regarding evangelization becomes clearly manifest. They do not want to limit their activity and zeal only to evangelizing Catholics in Canada; rather they are also aiming at the evangelization of the natives:

The Bishop of Montreal proposes to call our Congregation into his vast diocese to evangelize its inhabitants and perforce even to venture amongst the savage tribes which are in trading relations with his people.²³

They see the foundation at Montreal as the gate leading the Congregation into different territories.²⁴

One year later we see that, in spite of the enormous quantity of work among the Catholics in Canada, the Oblates considered working among the native peoples as a priority.²⁵

We will not analyze here the various foundations and missions opened in the Founder's time.²⁶ Rather, we would like to underline how the motives for choosing new foundations lean more and more to first evangelization in the measure that the Oblates' commitment to the conversions of unbelievers increases. The Red River mission was chosen precisely because there were many tribes to be evangelized there.²⁷ The foundation in Ceylon is motivated by the same intention of re-evangelizing degenerate Christians and evangelizing the pagans:

Here is a marvelous mission being offered us. Bishop Bettacchini, coadjutor of the Apostolic Vicariate of the island of Ceylon, has just spent two days with me. Our conversations lasted until eleven o'clock at night. What a field is opening up for us! One million five hundred thousand gentiles to be converted in the most beautiful country of the world! One hundred and fifty thousand Christians to instruct, and all these people disposed by the goodness of their character and a certain religious inclination to listen with docility to God's envoys!²⁸

Finally, the foundation in Natal, the last one undertaken by Bishop de Mazenod, was located in a territory inhabited almost entirely by Zulu tribes, a population entirely pagan. This mission was deliberately chosen because perceived in it was the possibility of evangelizing these people.²⁹

Later, when the Vicariate experienced grave difficulties in coming into being – because of the complexity of the language, of the lack of response by the unbelievers, of the scant pastoral planning of the mission – and the Oblates registered not a single conversion, de Mazenod did not hesitate to declare their work a mission that had failed,³⁰ inasmuch as they had not yet achieved their goal as evangelizers:

A Vicar Apostolic would not have to be sent to look after a few scattered Catholics, and I for my part would not have accepted the mission if that were all it involved. It is the conversion of the pagans that we must keep in mind. All our efforts must be directed to that end. If we kept no hope of reaching that goal, then we ought to give up the mission. But we would be very unlucky to find only among the Kaffirs an obstinacy that the grace of quells in all our other missions³¹

From all these things we see how a special outlook in favour of the non-Christians was born and gradually grew in de Mazenod.

We could define his vocation as follows: he felt sent to preach Christ to the poorest; at first, he saw these as being the abandoned and degenerate Christians in his own country areas; when, through his Oblates, he came into contact with the reality of the pagans and unbelievers, he held that the fullness of evangelization consisted in preaching salvation in Christ to them. That is why the Oblates had to envisage a priority; according to the place wherein they were working, as to whom their apostolic zeal is directed. The place where they are working is of no importance; but that which constitutes them missionaries and evangelizers is the call of God to proclaim the Good News to the poor and most abandoned.

I seem to see in each Oblate an apostle called, through a special favour of God's mercy, just as those whom our Lord chose, when He lived on earth, to proclaim in every place the good news of salvation: in Europe to awaken sinners who have forgotten or had never understood that they were Christians, in far away lands to proclaim and make known Jesus Christ and open the doors of heaven to so many unbelieving peoples who without our men would never have known or loved God.³²

The foreign missions, nevertheless, introduced a new and complementary element in regard to the Oblate charism: with them came the understanding that the people to whom the mission was addressed was everyone: both those in whom there was a need to reawaken the faith and bring about a conversion from corrupt morals, and those to whom it was necessary to proclaim for the first time the faith and salvation in Jesus Christ.

The charism deepened in confrontation with the purposes, with the recipients, with the ministry and with the apostolic thrust. The purpose is not only the reawakening of the faith, the change of habits and the return to the Church, but it is the conversion of infidels to Christ and to the Church. The recipients are not only abandoned Christians, in trouble, in need of religious assistance, but they are the non-Christians. It is not only a question of an extraordinary preaching of the Word by means of missions, but it is a question of the kerygma itself which transmits the faith. It is a complete imitation of the apostles, like the going everywhere and bringing people to Christ"³³

The missions among the pagans, therefore, throw full light on de Mazenod's original idea and confirm his apostolic intuition. He remained fascinated by Christ the Saviour and caught up in the latter's mission. That is why he never selected a particular field of apostolate, and instead opted to follow Christ wherever He may lead and thus discover different apostolic fields which were always new and which each time completed the modality of his concrete following of Christ.

Thus the entire life of the Mazenod consists of his effort to respond to the Church's loud cry addressed to her own sons.³⁴

The foreign missions are situated in the context of this basic option formulated once by de Mazenod, but then constantly repeated and unfolding throughout the span of his life and brought to maturity by an ever greater capability of response. He did nothing else than try to remain attentive to God's calls.³⁵

IV - Evangelization As a Complete Reality.

By situating the Oblate mission in the context of the following of Christ, the very reality of evangelizing also acquires a completely different meaning. The Oblate, in fact, is an evangelizer inasmuch as he shares in the Christ's own mission.

This entails a total revolution in the interior life of each Oblate in the sense that, if the Oblate is a missionary and evangelizer in virtue of his following of Christ, then the priority of his apostolic activity must preeminently centre on his personal and communitarian relationship to Christ.

Thus, for de Mazenod, evangelization involves the whole person, and the Oblates are constituted missionaries not so much by the post they occupy or the ministry they

do, as in virtue of their call to be apostles.

A study on the portrait of the missionary and its key features would be a long one and lead us far afield. Nevertheless, I do think it opportune to mention that in the Congregation during the Founder's time no specific formation was given to those who were to go to the foreign missions: Oblates were simply asked to be solidly grounded in their vocation.

You see that you can be called upon to found establishments at any time at all, that is, to be placed in a conspicuous position where strangers can see the worth of your virtues: *ut videant opera vestra bona*. What do I intend by this reflection? It is that you must be worthy of your vocation, truly apostolic men devoted to the service of the Church, fully zealous for the salvation of souls and above all, saintly as regards yourselves and your brothers. This degree of perfection is the normal state of the missionary. Fidelity to your Rule is sufficient to bring you to this state and maintain yourselves in it.³⁶

a) The religious life.

In this context, the Founder sees living the religious life as an essential element for success in the apostolate inasmuch as it is from the witness which flows from the religious life that the redemptive work of God is accomplished.³⁷

That is why the observance of the religious life is not an end in itself or in view only of the individual's personal holiness; but it is in function of the apostolate and evangelization.³⁸

b) Community life.

We can also understand de Mazenod's insistence that the Oblates, especially in difficult missions, will as much as possible be at least two together.³⁹

For the souls to be evangelized community life is a sign and a witness.⁴⁰

When all this cannot be achieved in practice, we must assure that each Oblate is convinced that his apostolate will succeed in the measure of his life of union with God:

To whatever missions in foreign countries they may have been sent, they will always bear in mind that they must be inflamed with a desire of perfection so much the more ardent the longer they are separated against their will, from the company of their brethren, and that they must be faithful to the duties of their religious state and to the exercises of Christian piety with a will so much the more determined, the more frequently they are deprived of the benefits of community life.⁴¹

This brief sketch of the apostolic man's commitment to holiness shows us the wholeness and universality of the mission in the outlook of de Mazenod.

V - Conclusion.

Every Founder is given to the Church in order to incarnate a definite Gospel word and present it to the world around him in a living form. Eugène de Mazenod felt his soul aflame with the desire to follow Christ in evangelizing the poor and with this in mind he placed himself at the Church's service.

From the very outset the charism entrusted to him by God for the Church's benefit was complete in all its elements; not all of them, however, were immediately manifest. As an intuition de Mazenod accepted God's call and developed it throughout the course of the years, perfecting and purifying it. It is our opinion that the foreign missions brought God's place to full maturity and manifested it in all its fullness.

Our study's aim was to situate the missions in the context of evangelization. In our opinion, the missions are the sign that the Oblate charism has evangelization as its aim. It is a fact that the Oblates, who apparently came into being like so many other groups of itinerant missionaries with the aim of re-Christianizing Provence and France

in the post-Revolution period, do not suffer the same fate. While these other groups, once their service in the Church had been completed, were absorbed into the web of the ordinary pastoral ministry, the Oblate, to the contrary, were found to be the bearers of something new: they had not been called into existence solely for re-Christianization, but to continue directly the very mission of Christ who came to evangelize and save every human being and to bring God's life to every person. Their openness to the whole world allows the Oblates to take their place in the Church among the great families of evangelizers, among those who continue to follow Christ's imperative command: "Go, preach the Gospel to every creature"⁴²

That is why de Mazenod could say:

Our little Congregation itself, since its enumeration among the Religious Orders, has increased in number and strength, has rejoiced in being inflamed with the same apostolic ardor, and, responding to the call of many Bishops, has for many years carried on zealously the work of foreign missions.

God showed how pleasing this enterprise was to Him by the great blessings showered on our labours, and in order that no incentive be wanting to us, the Church herself, who by the mouth of Leo XII, of happy memory, seemed to have given us the whole universe as our field of labour, solemnly approved it again when the Popes Gregory XVI and Pius IX, by Apostolic Letters, deigned to confirm our Institute. Foreign missions are consequently to be counted among the holy occupations of our Society.⁴³

At the end of de Mazenod's life we can see a prophetic value in the words he wrote to the missionaries of Aix in 1817: Oblate evangelization is a sharing in the very mission of Christ himself:

Our Lord Jesus Christ left us the task of continuing the great work of redeeming mankind. Our efforts should strive only for this objective. As long as we have not committed our whole life and given all our blood to succeed therein, we have nothing to say; and this is all the more true when we have given only some drops of sweat and some slight fatigue. This spirit of total dedication to the glory of God, the service of the Church and the salvation of souls is the spirit that is proper to our Congregation, a small one, it is true, but one which will always be powerful as long as it is holy... Each society in the Church has a spirit which is proper to it; it was inspired by God according to the circumstances and needs of the times in which it pleased God to raise up these reserve troops, or, better, these elite corps which go in front of the main body of the army's march, surpass it in bravery and achieve also the most astounding victories"⁴⁴

Giovanni SANTOLINI, O.M.I.

Vermicino.

NOTES :

- 1 Henri GRATTON, O.M.I., "La dévotion salvatorienne du Fondateur aux premières années de son sacerdoce", in *Etudes Oblates*, I (1942), pp. 159-171; Joseph MoRAALRO, O.M.I., "Je serai prêtre," *Eugène de Mazenod de Venise à Saint-Sulpice (1794-1811)*, (Ottawa: Études Oblates, 1954), pp. 61-86; Joseph PIELORZ, o.m.i., *La vie spirituelle de Mgr. de Mazenod, Fondateur de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée... 1782-1812* (Romæ; n.p., 1955, pp. 77-166 (Ms); Émilien LAMIRANDE, O.M.I., "Le sang du Sauveur, un thème de la doctrine spirituelle de Mr de Mazenod", in *Etudes Oblates*, 18 (1959), pp. 363-381; Angelo D'ADDIO, O.M.I., *Cristo crocifisso e la Chiesa abbandonata. Eugenio de Mazenod, un appassionato di Cristo e della Chiesa* (Frascati; Scolasticato O.M.I., 1978), 218 pp.
- 2 Joseph MORAELTO, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, pp. 191-197.
- 3 Eugène de MAZENOD, *Mémoires*, in Toussaint RAMBERT, O.M.I., *Vie de Monseigneur Charles-Joseph-Eugène de Mazenod...* (Tours: A. Mame et Fils, 1883), vol. 1, p. 47; see also Eugène de MAZENOD, "Conférence pour le jour de l'ordination", in *Etudes Oblates*, 4 (1945), pp. 255-258.
- 4 Eugène de MAZENOD, "Nos Saintes Règles", October 8, 1831, in *Circulaires administratives des Supérieurs généraux aux membres de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée* (Paris: Typographie privée O.M.I.), 1887, vol. 1, pp. 122-123.
- 5 See Joseph MORABITO, O.M.I., *loc. cit.*, pp. 167-199; Maurice GILBERT, O.M.I., "Sur les traces des

- Apôtres", in *Études Oblates*, 16 (1957), pp. 293-301; Eugene DE MAZENOD, *Mémoires, loc. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 164.
- 6 Eugène DE MAZENOD to Father François-de-Paule Tempier, October 9, 1815, in *Circulaires administratives...*, vol. 1, p. 133; Father Tempier to Father de Mazenod, October 27, 1815, *ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 135.
- 7 Eugène DE MAZENOD to Father Tempier, December 13, 1815, in *Circulaires administratives...*, vol. 1, pp. 136-137.
- 8 Eugène DE MAZENOD, *Mémoires, loc. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 187.
- 9 IDEM, *Constitutions, Règle et Institute Societatis Missionariorum Oblatorum Sanctissime et Immaculate Virginis Marie. Premier texte latin officiel* (1828), (Rome: Maison générale O.M.L, 1951), preface, p. 22 (Écrits du Fondateur, 2).
- 10 IDEM, "Nos Saintes Règles", *loc. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 123.
- 11 IDEM to Bishop François Arbaud, January 1, 1819 (Oblate General Postulation, Rome); IDEM to M. Vignier, January 6, 1819 (*Ibidem*).
- 12 This desire was already present in the *Nota Bene* of 1818, which then disappeared from the Preface to the Rule of 1826. See Eugène DE MAZENOD, *Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence. Premier manuscrit français* (Rome: Maison générale 1951), p. 15 (Écrits du Fondateur, 1).
- 13 IDEM, to Father Jean-Baptiste Honorat, September 29, 1841, in *Letters to North America 1841-1850* (Rome: General Postulation, 1972), vol. 1, p. 13.
- 14 IDEM, *Journal*, February 22, 1847 in Alfred YENVEUX, O.M.I., *Les Saintes Règles de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée* (Paris: Imprimerie des Pauvres du Sacré-Coeur, 1903), vol. 1, p. 103. The same expression is also used for Ceylon. See *Journal* October 21, 1847 in Alfred YENVEUX, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 76.
- 15 IDEM to Father Joseph-Bruno Guigues, May 14-16, 1846 in *Letters to North America 1841-1850*, vol. 1, p. 76.
- 16 IDEM to Father Pascal Ricard, January 8, 1847 (*Ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 148).
- 17 IDEM to Father Pascal Ricard, December 6, 1851 (*Ibidem*, vol. 2, pp. 29-30). The same idea is expressed in a letter to Father Henri Faraud, May 28, 1857 (*ibidem*, vol. 2, 147); to Father Etienne Semeria, January 25, 1848 in *Letters to Ceylon and Africa, 1847-1860* (Rome: General Postulation O.M.I., 1980), p. 8.
- 18 IDEM to Father Valentin Végréville, April, 1860, in *Letters to North America 1851-1860* (Rome: General Postulation O.M.L), vol. 2, p. 228; to Fathers Jean Tissot and Augustin Maisonneuve, June 1853 (*Ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 58).
- 19 See IDEM, *Mémoires, loc. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 162-164.
- 20 See Émilien LAMIRANDE, O.M.I., "Le sang du Sauveur. Un thème central de la doctrine spirituelle de M^{gr} de Mazenod", in *Études Oblates*, 18 (1959), pp. 363-381.
- 21 *Constitutions et Règles...*, *Nota bene* (Rome: Maison générale, 1951), p. 15 (Écrits du Fondateur I).
- 22 See Albert PERBAL, O.M.I., "La vocation missionnaire d'Eugène de Mazenod", in *Études Oblates*, 17 (1958), pp. 289-319.
- 23 Eugène DE MAZENOD to Father Vincent Mille, July 17, 1841, in *Letters to North America...*, vol. 1, p. 2; to Father Ambroise Vincens (*Ibidem*, p. 2, note 2).
- 24 IDEM to Father Jean-Baptiste Honorat, October 9, 1841 (*Ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 16).
- 25 One year after their arrival in Canada, the Oblates had not yet established contact with the Indians and Father Honorat regrets this delay in a letter to Father Casimir Aubert, December 21, 1842, quoted by Jean LEFLON, *Eugène de Mazenod Évêque de Marseille, Fondateur des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée 1782-1861* (Paris: Pion, 1965), vol. 3, p. 141.
- 26 For a historical study, see two rather complete articles by Albert PERBAL, O.M.I., "Les Missions acceptées par M^{gr} de Mazenod de 1841 à 1861", in *Études Oblates*, 22 (1963), pp. 227-284; 23 (1964), pp. 114-147.
- 27 See Eugène DE MAZENOD to Father Guigues, December 5, 1844, in *Letters to North America*, vol. 1, pp. 110-112 and May 24, 1845 in vol. 1, pp. 117-119.
- 28 IDEM to Father Ambroise Vincens, August 12, 1847, quoted by Achille REV, O.M.I., *Histoire de*

- Monseigneur Charles-Joseph-Eugène de Mazenod, Évêque de Marseille, Fondateur de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, (Marseille: Imprimerie marseillaise, 1928), vol. 2, p. 257. See also several letters to Father Etienne Semeria, January 17, 1850 in *Letters to Ceylon and Africa*, p. 48; April 2, 1850 (*Ibidem*, p. 54); March 12, 1851 (*Ibidem*, pp. 60-61); January 31, 1857 (*Ibidem*, pp. 135-136).
- 29 IDEM, *Journal*, March 27 - April 1, 1850, in Achille REV, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 331-332.
- 30 See IDEM to Bishop Jean-François Allard, November 10, 1857, in *Letters to Ceylon and Africa...*, pp. 208-210.
- 31 IDEM to Bishop Jean-François Allard, October 28, 1859 (*Ibidem*, p. 213).
- 32 IDEM to Father Antoine Mouchette, February 17, 1859 (General Postulation Archives, Rome).
- 33 Marcello ZAGO, O.M.I., *Connection between Popular Missions and the Charism of the Institute. A Hermeneutical Essay in the context of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, in *Vie Oblate Life*, 40 (1981), p. 170.
- 34 Eugène DE MAZENOD, *Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence...*, *Note Bene*, p. 16. (Écrits du Fondateur, 1).
- 35 Roger GAUTHIER, O.M.I., "Les réponses d'Eugène de Mazenod aux appels du Seigneur sur la Congrégation", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 40 (1981), pp. 27-47.
- 36 Eugène DE MAZENOD to Father Jean-Baptiste Honorat, April 20, 1844, in *Letters to North America*, vol. 1, p. 82. The same idea of the need to be what one's own vocation requires is expressed in a letter to the same of August 18, 1843 (*ibidem*, p. 56), and also in *Acte de la visite de la Province d'Angleterre*, July 22, 1850, in *Letters concerning England and Ireland*, (Rome: General Postulation, 1979), pp. 185-186.
- 37 See Eugène DE MAZENOD to Father Honorat, March 26, 1842, in *Letters to North America*, vol. 1, pp. 19-20. For Ceylon, see IDEM to Father Semeria, January 25, 1848, in *Letters to Ceylon and Africa*, p. 8.
- 38 IDEM to Father Honorat, October 20, 1844, in *Letters to North America*, vol. 1, p. 110.
- 39 IDEM to Father Semeria, January 25, 1848, *loc. cit.*, p. 7 and September 29, 1853, *ibidem*, p. 112.
- 40 See IDEM to Bishop Giuseppe Maria Bravi, 1858, (*ibidem*, p. 141).
- 41 IDEM, *Instruction of our Venerated Founder on Foreign Missions*, (Rome: General House, 1936), p. 8; a similar idea is expressed in another form in a letter to Father Honorat, March 1, 1844, in *Letters to North America*, vol. 1, pp. 79-81.
- 42 IDEM, *Instruction... on Foreign Missions*, p. 3.
- 43 *Ibidem*, p. 4.
- 44 Eugène DE MAZENOD to the Missionaries of Aix, August 22, 1817, in Toussaint RAMBERT, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 237.

The Response of the Oblates in France to the Founder's Vision and Practice of Evangelization

The theme I have been asked to treat continues that of Father Maurice Gilbert.¹ Even though mine is formally distinct from his, since it deals with the response of the Oblates of France to the Founder's vision and practice of evangelization, it resembles it quite closely in terms of the realities of life. The Founder, as we know, gave very clear directives to his sons and governed them with firmness. The Oblates, especially those who lived near him, such as the Oblates who were working in France, could not stray from his thought and direction without drawing down strong rebuke upon themselves.

Father Adolphe Tortel, who had arrived in Bytown a short time before, in March 1859 wrote to Father Joseph Fabre that he found a good Oblate spirit in America. "The missions to the natives," he specified, are being carried forward with a zeal which cannot have its source anywhere else except in the bishopric of Marseilles." If the ardent zeal of the Oblates of America had its source in the bishopric of Marseilles, the meaning and practical orientation of evangelization for the Oblates of France came from there too, and was nourished from the same source. Besides, the Founder was quite aware of the influence he wielded on his sons. He wrote, for instance, to Father Courtès at Aix on September 19, 1837: "I am rather satisfied to learn that you are hoping to be able, finally, to free yourself from the hospital. This is what you will have to achieve at all costs, for it is too inappropriate to do violence to the universal sentiment of a Society. As far as I am concerned, it is more than proven that the Fathers submit to this necessity only out of personal deference to myself." If this last sentence quite clearly tells us that in practice, the Founder's will was done, the preceding sentence, however, allows us to assume that there was "a universal sentiment" in the Society. Hence, it is not useless to inquire, if not what the practice was, at least what the vision of evangelization was, what the "universal sentiment" of the Oblates of France during the Founder's life.

The Founder's Vision.

It will always be in the text of the 1818 Rules that we will find, if not with more clarity at least with the greatest force and enthusiasm, the apostolic ideal of the Founder and of the Congregation. A very definite project appears very clearly in the first chapters of the 1818 Rules: evangelizing the poor by means of missions. Father de Mazenod's vision, however, does not stop there. He also expresses it at the beginning of the Rules. He thus avoids laying down limits which are too narrow, which would make future development of the Society impossible and would restrict too much the talents of his collaborators.²

At the beginning of the *Nota Bene* of the first chapter, Father de Mazenod writes: (The Society's members) "are called to be the Saviour's co-workers, the co-redeemers of mankind." This is the Founder's apostolic ideal in all its fullness: the continuation of Christ's mission.³ How? Here, too, his faith vision perceives a vast horizon. He expresses it in the three paragraphs of the first chapter on the ends of the Congregation, which are: preaching the Word of God to the people; supplementing for the absence of the religious Orders, especially by an exemplary religious life; and, finally, reforming the clergy. He therefore envisaged the renewal of the Christian people, of the religious life, and of the priesthood.

Fearing lest he may still be narrowing down his own zeal and that of his collaborators, he writes: "All the members of the Institute will dedicate themselves to do

all the good which obedience requests of them";⁴ and again: "They pledge themselves to all the works which priestly charity can inspire,⁵ "their ambition should in its holy aspirations, embrace the vast expanse of the whole earth" .⁶

But what does he want exactly? Where does he want to begin? He details his project in the second chapter which deals exclusively with missions to the people. Here he shows that one of the three ends of the Institute is a privileged one: "Missions being the principal work of the Institute, all will make it their chief concern to fulfil this duty effectively"⁷. In order to underline that it is really this which is the principal end, he lays down a whole series of clarifications and exclusions: "In the beginning, because of their youth, the missionaries will only indirectly be able to undertake (clergy reform)",⁸ "...Because of their present small number and the more urgent needs of the people around them, they will have to limit the scope of their zeal, for the time being, to the poor of our countryside".⁹ "So that the giving of missions is never neglected and that our members never lose sight of the principal end of their vocation, which is to dedicate themselves to the salvation of the most abandoned souls, they will not take on work which would distract them therefrom. Therefore, they will not take part in processions or public ceremonies; they will not take charge of seminaries; they will not direct religious women... For the same reasons, it is forbidden to take on parishes or to do Lenten preaching".¹⁰

Thus Father de Mazenod wanted to attempt everything for God's glory. He was nevertheless a realist. With his small Society, he can at first take on one task only, one which he sees as the most necessary and effective for that time: evangelizing the poor people of Provence through missions.¹¹

The Founder's Charism is that of an Evangelizer.

In the epistle to the *Philippians* (4: 11), St. Paul lists five gifts which are necessary for the building up of Christ's Body which is the Church. The first gift makes a person an apostle, who lays down the foundations of a community and supports it; the second makes him a prophet, who interprets God's plan for the community; the third makes him an evangelist, who proclaims the good news of salvation and thereby draws new faithful to the community; the fourth makes him a shepherd who watches over and directs the flock; and the last makes him a doctor, who with doctrine and theology deepens the community's spiritual heritage.

A healthy community possesses and develops these charisms. The charism of the Founder and of the Congregation belongs solidly within the boundaries of the third of these gifts: evangelizing the poor. Archbishop Martini of Milan writes: "The key trait of the evangelizer is a certain sense for taking initiative, for incisiveness, for attack, the ability of reaching those who think otherwise, to interpret the needs of those who live far from the Church, to enter into the deep need for truth, justice, search for God which exists in each man and make the same explicit. It is the action of one who goes and moves himself rather than wait for people to come to him".¹² The Oblates of France in the Founder's time were men like this. They covered unceasingly the countrysides, proclaiming the Good News.

Bishop de Mazenod wanted the Congregation which came forth from his heart to be essentially missionary. He gave it a motto of evangelizing the poor, and that especially through missions to the people. Thousands of times throughout his life he will say and write: our principal end is missions; we must not undertake anything which would take us away from them, we must prefer them to retreats,¹³ to individual sermons,¹⁴ to Jubilee, Advent, and Lenten preaching,¹⁵ to the apostolate of the press,¹⁶ to parish ministry,¹⁷ and to other ministries such as chaplaincies, teaching, etc.¹⁸

The essential response of the Oblates of France.

The Founder remain always faithful in maintaining the principal end of the Congregation, and it is on this point that the Oblates of France imitated him the best.

Nineteen of the twenty-four houses founded in France during the Founder's lifetime had missions as their main apostolate.¹⁹ It has been calculated that some 3 000 missions and retreats were preached in France by the Oblates between 1816 and 1861.²⁰ In 1926, on the occasion of the centenary of the approbation of the Rules, Father Louis Le Jeune wrote: "It was the initial idea of parish missions which gave birth to the project of founding the Institute, and it was because of this same idea that the Congregation has grown, developed, prospered and born so much fruit of salvation in thousands of souls..."²¹

It can be said that the Oblates never had to be pressured when it came to preaching missions. Missions was their great work and preoccupation. All their correspondence of those days proves this. In all their letters they speak of the missions, asking for advice in making a choice from among the parishes requesting them, mentioning difficulties they are encountering, or rejoicing over success attained. There are many Fathers who excelled in this apostolate: Albin, Mie, Honorat, Guigues, Martin, Dassy, Bernard, Hermitte, Françon, Nicolas, Audruger, Merlin, Chaîne, Burfin, Burtin, etc.

Even Fathers less endowed for this ministry took part in it in one way or other. Father Tempier, for example, who was not a good preacher and took part only in a few missions, which did not succeed, nevertheless always knew how to encourage his confrères and make them preach. During the six, seven months when the Founder was absent in 1825-1826, the Oblates preached so much that all of them became ill. Father Dupuy maintained that Father Suzanne's illness was partly due to Father Tempier's severity. On September 14, 1826, Father Jean-Alexandre Dupuy wrote to Father de Mazenod, "Father... Father Suzanne is a martyr, but only to obedience... If you had been here with us, we would not all be crippled. If the regime of your Vicar General had lasted a bit longer, upon your return from Rome you would have found nothing else except our last Wills..." When Fathers were without a definite assignment, for instance, at the end of their scholasticate or of an illness, Father François de Paule Tempier would always give them the same advice: prepare sermons for the missions.²²

Father Hippolyte Courtès, whose health was fragile, did not gladly go on missions. Nevertheless, the Founder obligated him to go on some together with his confrères, one of them being the mission at Cotignac in 1840. Father Martin wrote to the Founder on March 31: "We are on the verge of saying Father Courtès is about to breath his last, and yet, in the pulpit, he makes more noise than any of us." The mission was a success.

All his life the Founder marveled at the miraculous fruits of conversion worked by the missions and congratulated himself that his sons were excelling in this ministry.²³ On February 14, 1844, he published an ordinance of 26 pages on the importance and greatness of the missions. In it he wrote: "Beyond all doubt, the most powerful means, perhaps the only means today, for renewing a people is the holy work of which we are speaking. The greater the need for renewal, the more this means which we are proposing is necessary".²⁴ He concluded this ordinance with a thanksgiving to the Lord for having called him to exercise this ministry at one time, and for having made him the father of a family which is perpetuating this work.

After his death, the work of missions continues apace, even in the diocese of Marseilles were Bishop Cruice and the clergy at first behaved so unfavorably towards the Congregation. The pastors of the rural parishes were still calling in the Oblates.

Father Sardou wrote to Father Fabre on May 2, 1864: "At this time, twenty Oblates of Mary are preaching in the diocese (of Marseilles). This shows that we are not dead yet, and that those who entoned the *De Profundis* over our Congregation were in too much of a hurry. God is blessing the zeal of our missionaries."

In the Oblates' correspondence we do not find many theoretical reflections dealing with the objectives they had in their missions. They worked according to the letter and spirit of the Rules. They went on mission to proclaim the Word of God, to bring back God's life to sinners, to save souls. Father Dupuy wrote to Father Tempier on September 29, 1825: "We must instruct these poor souls..., wake them up, shake them up, and afterwards consider admitting them to the sacraments."

To achieve this goal, the whole community, at least in the beginning of the Congregation, took part in the mission, even those who stayed at home. Father Dupuy, away on a mission at Mazargues, wrote to Father Tempier on February 24, 1823: "At Aix, the whole community is fasting on bread and water to beseech the Lord to have compassion on this erring people; we have also had prayers in public."

No important study researching the content of the sermons has been made to verify whether it was really the Word of God which was being preached. Here and there one finds certain indications which give reason to doubt it in some cases. Father Balthasar Paris, for example, a professor at the Major Seminary of Marseilles, wrote to the Founder in 1831: "When one thinks of the triumph of the cross at Le Calvaire, noting that it is everywhere else despised, a person is glad and satisfied at the ardent zeal of our Fathers and I praise them with all my heart. However, I am hardly able to do the same when I consider the sermons they are giving... These thoughts, Father, inflamed me with a zeal I could barely contain. Then and there I would have liked to have prepared, deeply meditated the adorable Word of God contained in the Holy Scriptures and not in our own miserable ideas (I say this in real sorrow) in order to pour it out with an open heart on this people which is so filled with holy desire ..." ²⁵ However, we also know that like Father Balthasar Paris, Father Jean-François Hermitte, for a long time a missionary at Notre-Dame de Bon Secours, "daily read different commentaries of Holy Scripture. From this inexhaustible mine he extracted rich material destined for the composition of his sermons... A text of Holy Scripture served him for the most felicitous applications. Each word was researched, explored, squeezed for meaning... The inspired word expressed divine food which served as nourishment for the listeners ..." ²⁶

Evangelization in the Marian Shrines.

The Founder was lavish in his praise, not only when he spoke of the Oblates' apostolate in the missions to the people, but also in the matter of taking care of shrines. He accepted nine of them in France during his lifetime. ²⁷

The observation is made that the Rules does not speak of this ministry except indirectly when it recommends that Oblates promote the cult of Mary. ²⁸ As the Founder wrote in his act of visitation for Notre-Dame de l'Osier on July 16, 1835, this is because in these shrines "we are giving a perpetual mission and are, moreover, promoting the cult of the Virgin." People come to these shrines in great numbers, as they do to a mission. They are being evangelized there, and at the same time, a better direction is given to the devotion of the faithful. Bishop de Mazenod saw in the shrines an unusually favorable opportunity for his sons to exercise all the works of the ministry: evangelizing the poor, reconciling sinners, dispensing the Holy Eucharist, as well as making our blessed Mother known and loved.

Shrines proved to be ideal Oblate houses. At the shrines, the Oblates would be evangelizing on the spot, especially during the slack season for missions; then from

November until Spring they would cover the surrounding parishes. "Is this not an enrapturing sight!" the Founder wrote in the act of visitation for Notre-Dame du Laus on October 18, 1835. "When we consider that the Lord in this one single location offers our Congregation the means of so powerfully achieving all the ends of its Institute ! that it is from here our missionaries leave to evangelize the people of the surrounding area, and even those farther away, and that this centre, this haven is also one of the most famous shrines of our holy Mother and Patroness !"²⁹

Returning from the missions, the Fathers also were reunited in a large community, often a formation house, where they could intensely live their religious and community life. That is why they all gladly accepted an obedience to the shrines, as they did for the other mission houses. Their apostolate at the shrines was very fruitful, even though Bishop Hippolyte Guibert considered it rather difficult. In 1867 he was thinking of entrusting the shrine of St. Martin of Tours to the Congregation. On September 7 he wrote to Father Fabre that men of talent were required to preach there... "We also need men who are prudent and of solid virtue. You know that shrines and pilgrimage places easily become spiritual gambling places if the priests there are not sufficiently serious men and lend themselves too easily to the schemes of certain devout people." But the Oblates did know how to avoid these pitfalls. Further, the marriage of shrines / missions was a happy one. The missions attracted pilgrims and the pilgrimages continued in duration and depth the work of the missions.

A recent work on Notre-Dame de Lumières, written by Bernard Cousin,³⁰ heaps lavish praise on the Oblates and very well brings out this aspect. In the chapter entitled *Triomphe d'une pastorale populaire, 1840-1880*,³¹ the author details how, shortly after the Oblates' arrival at Lumières in 1837, the number of pilgrims increased and the Fathers could no longer respond to all the requests for missions that were coming in. They preached on the average some twenty missions a year.³²

Documentation relating to our shrines is abundant. Nearly all the letters of that time speak of them as much as they do of the missions. In particular, we have much detailed information about Notre-Dame de Bon Secours, and we can reach the same conclusions as Bernard Cousin. In 1851, the Superior, Father Martin stated that the Fathers had preached twenty missions during the course of the year.³³ In 1854 he said that the shrine's activity had tripled since the arrival of the Oblates in 1846.³⁴ He estimated that 20,000 pilgrims came for Christmas in 1857.³⁵ During the months of August and September 1860, there were more than 60,000 pilgrims at the shrine and some 10,000 Communion were distributed.³⁶ In 1860, the missions were still doing well at Notre-Dame du Laus. Father Martin wrote to Father Ambroise Vincens on February 1: The shrine is located near the boundaries of three very religious dioceses, Viviers, Mende and Nimes, "which promises a most important future for this place of pilgrimage, especially if, as I hope, we can continue our missions in Gard and Lozère and thereby promote the appreciation of pilgrimages in these important regions..."

During the 1860s, however, at Bon Secours as at Lumières, requests for missions decreased in number while the count of pilgrims, especially individual pilgrims, continued to rise.³⁷ The same can be said of Notre-Dame de l'Osier and of our other shrines.³⁸

The "Universal Sentiment" of the Oblates in regard to Secondary Ministries.

Father Émilien Lamirande writes:

The Rules and the Founder's directives express a universal ideal and some definite ministries subject to modalities with change, in harmony with an essentially apostolic intuition, with the outlook of a man of action who starts off by responding to the most evident and immediate needs of the Church without renouncing the tackling of other fronts as soon as he can, nor sacrificing an assured and concrete

result, modest as it may apparently be, for long range hypothetical advantages. All this was constantly operative in the Founder's soul and has been in that of the Congregation.³⁹

Thus it is that Bishop de Mazenod on occasion allowed Oblates to become chaplains of orphanages and various institutions,⁴⁰ that he accepted six parishes in France,⁴¹ that he also permitted some especially gifted preachers (Baret, Gondrand, Dassy) to preach Advent and Lenten sermons.⁴²

According to the Rules of 1818, all these ministries were excluded from the apostolic activity of the Oblates, at least at the beginnings of the Congregation. If the Founder did make quite a few exceptions of all kinds, it was for a number of reasons: a method for getting into a new diocese, the need for money, special insistence from the bishops, urgent needs, etc. He nevertheless praised the missions and recalled their priority to such a degree that the Oblates generally accepted these secondary ministries with some reluctance, at least when these ministries hindered mission work.

To illustrate: while the Founder had to invite Fathers Gondrand and Charles Baret to accept preaching Lenten sermons only occasionally, he himself invited Father Toussaint Dassy to undertake this in order to make the Oblates known in certain dioceses. In 1849 Father Dassy preached in a parish of Nancy, shortly after the Oblates had established themselves in this city. On March 11, 1849 he wrote to Bishop de Mazenod: "Many people come to listen to me (in the parish of St. Epvre)... Will I have done some good to souls at the end of this stint? God alone knows. So far I have not heard of a single conversion. What poor work this preaching Lenten sermons is in cities where one's only audience consists of people who are either bored or devout... Missions, missions, that is our great consolation! I will always return to them with the same satisfaction." In 1850 he preached Lenten sermons in the cathedral at Coutances. He wrote to the Founder on March 27 that he was ready to preach at Marseilles in 1851, but added: "... unless you prefer that in the coming years I give country missions during this time, something which would be a greater consolation for me."

In 1847, Bishop Bernard Buissas of Limoges asked the Fathers to preach the seasonal sermons in the churches of the city. Father Burfin, who liked the straight forward letters and peremptory arguments of Father Tempier, asked the latter on October 20, 1848, to write the Bishop and tell him that the Oblates do not exist to preach Advent and Lenten sermons but to go on missions to the poor.

We find the same reactions when it is a question of the parish ministry. In 1849, for instance, the Founder had to rebuke Father Jacques Pélissier for having neglected his parish duties at l'Osier,⁴³ Father Courtès, who in 1847 founded the missionary house of Limoges, established good relations with the Bishop and the clergy, but gradually allowed the Fathers to spend nearly all their time replacing parish priests and their assistants. Appointed Superior in 1848, Father Burfin wanted the house to be again what it was meant to be, a community of missionaries. On July 18, 1848 he wrote the Founder that the Fathers did not like being parish assistants or parish priests, that they did not become Oblates for such things. He paid a visit to Bishops Buissas to tell him that his Oblate confrères were not "auxiliary priests but Oblate missionaries".⁴⁴ He also had the Founder write, but there was no apparent change in the Bishop's attitude⁴⁵ After being asked by Father Joseph Melchior Burfin, and perhaps because he may have considered the Founder's letter too easy-going, Father Tempier for his part sent a forceful missive which finally convinced the Bishop. Father Burfin congratulated Father Tempier on July 25, 1848: "Your letter [to the Bishop of Limoges] vexed him; but do not in the least regret it. In my view, this is one of the best deeds of your life. Loyal anger is worth more than crafty moderation... The outcome will not be an unhappy one; on the contrary, now the agreement is commented according to its text. Now the Bishops speaks of missions and retreats only ; replacing parish priests is only an exception..."

Few Oblates were confessors to women religious. Some founded Congregations of Sisters (Tempier, Telmon and Allard, Guigues), but some Fathers strongly contested the ministry to women religious at the 1850 Chapter.⁴⁶ Affiliation with the Sisters of the Holy Family of Bordeaux in 1857-1859 occasioned a lot of talk but did not arouse any serious opposition. The main objection came from Father Chevalier, Superior of the house in Buffalo. The argument he used was: "We would be taking on an aim diametrically opposed to the original aim of the Institute ... A work so strongly forbidden by our Rules would become the first..."⁴⁷

The Oblates, therefore, were not afraid to manifest their desire that we do not veer away from the principal end of the Institute and to express in this way the "universal sentiment" of the Congregation.

The Religious Life.

The Rules of 1818 say that "the end of this coming together is also to supplement as much as possible the lack of so many wonderful institutions which have disappeared since the Revolution...; that is why they will try to revive in their own persons the piety and fervour of these destroyed religious Orders..." On the need for living an exemplary religious life, there was agreement in principle between the Superiors and the Founder. Hundreds of times the latter repeated to his sons that an exemplary religious life had to exist on a par with zeal. He even wrote to Father Daly that "a person preaches even more by his example than he does by his words." In practice, however, in spite of their good will, a certain number of Oblates did not succeed to keep up an intense apostolic life and a demanding religious life. One hundred and thirty-four Fathers and Brothers out of six hundred and seventeen professed Oblates, that is, 22% of those who had entered the Congregation before 1861, either left or were expelled. The Superiors supported the Founder in his effort to maintain the religious life in all its fervour. On occasion they even accuse him of sending them men who were not sufficiently virtuous. We find this complaint not only in the letters of Father Honorat or Bishop Allard, but also in those of the Superiors in France: Dassy, Martin, Telmon, etc. Father Martin, Superior at Notre-Dame de Bon Secours, for instance, wrote to Father Vincens on July 21, 1860:

Father Bretange would be more capable than the others; he has, however, retained a certain high school style which results in his being excluded by name in the requests sent to me by parish priests. I am sorry about this, for he is a rather good man. I cannot, however, change the tastes of this region which are perhaps more delicate here than elsewhere and which especially exclude anything that is not stamped with true piety and a truly apostolic style... The people like to see serious guides in their priests. If, however, you send me men who have adopted the crude manners of workers or army recruits, and who go about smoking without ever stopping both in public as well as in private, you can be assured that in spite of all the virtues they may possess, they will achieve nothing else here except draw down on themselves and on the house many adverse criticisms.

There is a famous case in which the Founder was accused of wanting to do something which would have brought harm to the religious life of the young Fathers and to the kind of preaching which was proper to the Oblates. In 1852 he wanted to put Father Charles Ferdinand Gondrand in charge of the formation of young missionaries. Father Tempier contested this appointment strongly because he saw Father Gondrand as a bad religious and as engaging in a style of preaching which was inadmissible in the Congregation. On August 5, 1852 he wrote to the Founder:

...So, if he is to be forming our young men... we will have to start by telling these young Fathers: I am giving you a teacher and a formator, but take care not to imitate his style, for, if you do, I shall condemn you... Also, be careful not to follow him into his flights of an unintelligible metaphysics which does nothing but tickle the ears of a few privileged people... for something like that never converts a single soul and make your discourses into a profanation of the holy word. Always be careful lest you imitate his gestures, his comportement and his delivery, for it is that of a comedian and I would not tolerate it for an instant. In the name of God be careful not to follow his example of regularity, not to imitate his dress, self-seeking, affectations of independence, his shameless bearing, the elbow-room he gives himself, the tone of freedom he assumes to judge and talk about everything. I do not want you to do this in this way... But

why, then, do you give him to us (as our master, they will ask?)... In the name of God, Bishop and beloved Father, do not do this, I beg you. Such an appointment would bring infinite harm to the Congregation...

In spite of setbacks, the religious life of the Fathers and Brothers of France remained at a high level. Sixty-nine Oblates died before the Founder and the latter marvelled at their virtues and holiness. Many others were great holy apostles both in France and in other countries.

Preaching, missions to the people, taking care of pilgrimage shrines were the ministries sought after and livingly carried out by the Oblates of France, not to mention the foreign missions which they also wanted very much. Nearly half the French Oblates were abroad when the Founder died. Missions to the people and foreign missions were the two burning passions of the Oblates. A letter of Father Charles Depetro, written to Father Tempier on September 23, 1848, forcefully reveals this double love. Father Depetro was assisting the novice master at Nancy and preparing sermons in view of becoming a preacher. He wrote: The people of Lorraine are aloof but, "they do not seem, in my view, to be as indisposed to receive God's Word as I have been told... It is true, however, that around here they no longer want anything said about missionaries or missions. Still, I am convinced that anyone who would for God's glory undertake the evangelization of these good people would discover an abundant harvest just waiting to fall into his hands..." Then he speaks about the railroads which were being built and also spoiling the beauties of Lorraine; after which he continues:

Nevertheless, the more railroads there are, the more quickly we will make our way to the good savages and poor unbelievers. Well! Can we go too quickly when so many of our brothers are dying in those lands without having received the sacrament of rebirth, when so many old people go to their graves without clearly knowing who it is that gave them existence. So let them dig canals, built steamships, sky-lifts, let them lay down a vast network of railroads covering France, Europe, the whole world. As once upon a time the gods in the fable reached the end of the earth in three steps, we must come to the point where in three days we missionaries can reach the most remote nations...

Clergy Reform.

There is yet another field of evangelization which was very dear to the Founder's heart: clergy reform. In the Rules of 1818, in his letters at the beginning of the Congregation and throughout his life, he was always very severe in his judgment of priests who were not too fervent or bad: he saw them as one of the main reasons for the decline of faith in the Christian people.

The third paragraph of the first chapter of the 1818 Rules deals with clergy reform; and it is in the form of the conclusion of this paragraph that we find the famous *Nota Bene* which later became the Preface. There is a bold statement there: "A no less important end of their Institute, to which they will try to apply as much zeal as to its principal one, is reforming the clergy and, as much as they can, making reparation for the evil done and still being done by bad priests who ravage the Church..." The second article, however, says: "At the outset, because of their youth, the missionaries will be able to undertake only directly the healing of this deep wound, by their gentle admonishments, their prayers and their good example; but, if it pleases God, in a few years they will be able to attack these horrible vices head on ..." "They will therefore give retreats to priests. The house of the Mission will always be an open refuge and like a saving pool to which these infected and purulently ill can come and wash themselves..." (art. 3).

The first apostolate directed to the clergy, then, consisted in this: gentle admonishments, prayers, good example, houses open to priests who could come there for a retreat. It seems that few ecclesiastics were received at Aix because this house was often filled with students novices and scholastics. But the shrines of Notre-Dame du Laus, de l'Osier and de Lumières received many priests, at least until 1839-1840. The Founder always mentioned them in his acts of canonical visitation of these

houses. Ortolan writes, for example, that in the time of Father Guibert, between the years 1830-1834, the house of Notre-Dame du Laus each year welcomed about one hundred and fifty priests who made their retreat there.⁴⁹ This apostolate declined in the 1840s, however, when Laus had to be abandoned, and Lumières became a juniorate and l'Osier a novitiate.

In the meantime, another form of apostolate to the clergy became available: major seminaries for clergy formation. This was a kind of apostolate more appropriate for our Fathers who were nearly all rather young and, except for good example, could only with difficulty help priests – generally quite older – who were coming to our houses for retreats or sometimes simply for a rest, to the detriment of regular discipline. At Bishop Fortuné de Mazenod's request, the Founder in 1827 had to accept the major seminary of Marseilles. Then, under pressure from Bishop Toussaint Casanelli d'Istria, he took charge of founding the major seminary in Ajaccio in 1834.

But in 1827 and especially in 1834, Bishop de Mazenod had so insisted on the importance and priority of the missions and had so regrouped the living forces of his flock around this principal end that the Fathers did not want to do anything else. If our first seminary directors fulfilled their tasks with dedication out of a spirit of obedience, we must not be surprised if, even among the best of them, the desire and nostalgia for the missionary life is apparent. We know, for instance, that Father Albin remained a professor out of obedience, even though he preferred preaching, a ministry in which he had an extraordinary success. He had, moreover, left the teaching of theology at the major seminary of Nice to become an Oblate so that he could be a missionary.⁵⁰ Father Paris, a good professor in the seminary of Marseilles, after teaching a few years wanted to be a preacher or to look after novices; he reminded the Founder that he did not become a Jesuit precisely because of a "natural repugnance" he felt for teaching: "I am burning to spend my strength for poor souls," he elaborated, "and not for a few lesser clerics who are only moderately interested, quite demanding, spiteful and ungrateful".⁵¹ Father Alexandre Pons, professor at Marseilles from 1833 to 1836, entered the Congregation with the desire of going to the foreign missions.⁵² Father Guibert himself, Superior of the major seminary of Ajaccio, in 1840 succeeded to free himself of the duties of his post in order to take part in a mission at Bastia. On April 24 he wrote to the Founder: "I was happy at being able to suspend my usual work for two weeks and once again take up a ministry which is no more than a memory to me now. It was a real pleasure returning to our apostolate. If my overly weak health did not stand in the way of giving myself to it with all the ardour which is in my will, I would ask you a thousand times to send me again to the poor Jesus Christ has given us to evangelize."

However, faithful to the ideal he perceived in 1816-1818, Bishop de Mazenod wanted his Oblates to be more involved with the clergy. Thus he accepted yet other seminaries and oriented a few Fathers towards preaching retreats to priests.

In 1850 it was decided to add a chapter on the direction of seminaries to the Rule. Bishop de Mazenod, Fathers Tempier, Vincens, Bellon and others felt the need not only to manifest their own conviction on this matter, but especially to highlight the benefits of this ministry and endow it with an apostolic meaning which the Oblates could more readily accept. The forcefulness of the texts is striking, and so is the enthusiasm which inspired them and the way seminary direction is intimately linked to the principal end of the Congregation, namely, evangelizing the poor. The first article reads: "After the missions, the most important work of our Congregation is undoubtedly the direction of seminaries, in which clerics receive their own special training. For it is in these seminaries, in the seclusion of God's house, and under the protection of the most holy and Immaculate Virgin Mary, that formation is given to those who are to teach sound doctrine to the people, and to guide them along the way of salvation." This

last sentence stressed that adding such an important secondary ministry to the Rule did not mean dispersing the forces, nor falsifying the first end of the Institute but rather complete it and make it more effective. The text continues: "The missionaries would vainly expend sweat and toil to snatch sinners from death if the parishes were deprived of holy priests who are animated with the divine Shepherd's spirit and responsible for feeding with constant vigilant care the sheep that have been led back to him." Professors, then, are missionaries just like their brother Oblates are, because they contribute, in their apostolate, at least indirectly, to the preservation and propagation of the faith by forming zealous priests.⁵³

From principles the Founder passed on to practice. During the last ten years of his life, he accepted three major seminaries in France (Fréjus in 1851, Romans in 1853 and Quimper in 1856), and he offered the Congregation's services of seminary direction to the Bishops of Arras in 1858 and St. Brieuc in 1859. The Oblates, however, did not respond to his hopes. One year after his death, they remained only in the seminaries of Ajaccio and Fréjus, and the bishops of these dioceses were not too satisfied with the personnel there.

It was quite noticeable that the Fathers in charge of seminary direction had a divided soul, especially after the acceptance of foreign missions which drew even more vocations than the missions to the people.

In 1858 Father Charles Baret wrote to his younger brother Victor who had just left teaching in the major seminary of Marseilles for preaching at N.D. de l'Osier, "You will be more at ease there than in the stagnant waters of the professorship."⁵⁴ Father Achille Rey himself, who was a good professor, wrote: "It is clear that my tastes are changing and that the blessings which God is showering upon my work seem to indicate that the missionary life would suit me better than that of seminary director".⁵⁵ Around 1855, Father Siffroy Andrieux at Ajaccio was, like Father Albini before him, professor and preacher at the same time, and Father Augustin Vassal of Vico longed for the same variety of ministry.⁵⁶ In 1860 Father Antoine Audric, professor at Ajaccio, insisted on a return to Vico as a missionary. "The work of the missions," he wrote, "has always been the *nec plus ultra* of my desires".⁵⁷ "In an extraordinary way I feel impelled to work for the salvation of these poor ignorant people... Missions have always been the object of my desires, even when I did not understand them well; and now that I have started and seen the great graces our Lord grants during these holy exercises, I ardently want to work during my whole life for the salvation of these poor abandoned souls".⁵⁸

Retreats to the clergy did not arouse much interest among the Oblates nor were they very successful. We know, for instance, that Father Paris, professor at the seminary of Marseilles, was asked by the Founder to prepare for this kind of ministry. Father Paris, however, did not hide his disagreement. He wrote to the Founder in 1832, telling him that he already was professor of Sacred Scripture, dogma and moral, and, besides that, was now studying sacred eloquence, because, he added, "you are asking for sermons and even pastoral retreats which by themselves would demand a lot of research and would keep a professional preacher occupied".⁵⁹ Father Dassy accepted to preach some pastoral retreats,⁶⁰ but only Father Vincens excelled in this type of preaching. Father Ortolan writes that Father Vincens preached forty pastoral retreats.⁶¹ During the last years of the Founder's life and the first years of Father Fabre's Superiorship, Father Magnan, Superior of the major seminary of Ajaccio, often wrote to Father Fabre saying that he couldn't find Fathers to preach the seminarians' annual retreat; that he himself had to preach it at least every second year.

Apostolate to Youth.

There is another category of souls the Founder would have liked to evangelize: the

youth. It is above all with the students of Aix that he worked during the first years of his priesthood. In composing the Rules, he began the text of the third paragraph of Chapter Three with the words: "The direction of youth will be considered one of the essential works of our Institute." In Chapter One, in article 3 of the second paragraph on the supplementing for the religious Orders, he had written: "The members of this Society also undertake to instruct the young in their religious duties, to withdraw them from vice and vain allurements, and to prepare them to fulfil worthily whatever tasks the Church and civil society may impose on them in the state of life for which they are destined."

One concrete way of evangelizing youth which he had in mind was the establishment of youth Congregations in each of our houses, modelled on that of Aix.⁶² He found easily enough, if not good preachers, at least men filled with good will for evangelizing the poor through missions; he could hardly find anyone, however, to look after youth. The youth Congregation at Aix itself lost all its vitality, little by little, once Father de Mazenod had left for Marseilles in 1823; it disappeared altogether in 1840. The Oblates of the house of *le Calvaire* in Marseilles ministered to the youth during the first years and founded a youth Congregation there which was still living a languished existence in 1837.⁶³ When the scholasticate at Autun was opened in 1862, Father Vincens wanted to establish there a congregation of men and another of youth, but Fathers Tempier and Aimé Martinet opposed this.⁶⁴ Obviously, the Oblates were not in favour of this kind of apostolate. Besides, Bishop de Mazenod hardly ever speaks of it in his letters. It would seem that the apostolic work which, in the circumstances of his time and place, he considered to be eminently evangelizing was the parish mission which made it possible to engage in full-time preaching and to absolve many people. Any activity which was not linked to direct evangelization did not interest him overly much because it may harm the essential purpose. The Oblates followed him in this outlook.

To be sure, the youth Congregations were a work of direct evangelization. They demanded time, however, patience, a climate of trust which had to be created through recreation and conversation. The Oblates preferred the missions for which they were everywhere in demand. The Founder preferred not to intervene on this point, and he left his sons follow more and more "the universal sentiment of the Society": mission to the people and missions abroad.

Conclusion.

At the end of this rapid and superficial study, two reflections are in order. The Founder's vision, which was one with a wide horizon embracing the whole world and a large spectrum of ministries, remained a rich and varied sowing from which one single species sprouted and marvellously grew in France before 1861: the missions to the people complemented by the Marian shrines. The rest of this sowing: clergy reform, care of youth, other forms of preaching God's Word, would take root in other countries or await the future for its growth, according to the needs of the times and the directives of the Church. During the Congregation's youth and on account of the small number of its personnel, the Founder wanted to limit its activity to the ministry of missions to the people. His family remained young during his lifetime, for it undertook only a few other ministries besides. When the increase of personnel made an evolution possible, it took place not by a greater variety of works in France but by the acceptance of missions abroad in order to evangelize the poor of many countries.

The question can be asked: did the Oblates of France perhaps interpret the Founder's insistence, and consequently, his vision of evangelization, in too narrow a fashion, so that they landed up identifying the Oblate with the missionary of missions to the people? I do not think so. One fact appears very enlightening in this regard. With the Revolution of 1830, which was at first very anti-clerical, missions to the people

became impossible. None were preached for a few years except in the Catholic cantons around Billens, in Switzerland. This brought with it the decline of the Missionaries of France. But nothing like that happened to the Oblates. In the 1831 Chapter, this impossibility of pursuing "the principal end" of the Society was not even mentioned. They simply adopted a resolution in the sense that "the Chapter express to the Most Reverend Father General the desire nourished by the Society's members, namely, that some of us be sent to the foreign missions as soon as he may judge the opportunity favorable".⁶⁵ In the meantime, the Oblates at Aix and Marseilles devoted themselves more readily to the secondary ministries. Father Honorat was considering going as an individual to evangelize in rural areas so as not to attract the attention of the civil authorities.⁶⁶ At Notre-Dame du Laus, Father Guibert and his collaborators were welcoming priests who were coming in ever greater numbers to make their retreat, and were also helping the pastors of the nearby parishes.

We can therefore maintain that, though they had their preference in following Bishop de Mazenod on one given point, that of missions to the people, the Oblates of France did not lose sight of the vast apostolic projects he had, and they knew how to adapt themselves well to circumstances - as they will also show in Canada and elsewhere - while at the same time remaining faithful to the Founder's spirit.

Yvon BEAUDOIN, O.M.I.

Rome.

NOTES :

- 1 Maurice GILBERT, O.M.I., "The Founder and Evangelization in France". See above, pp. 111-126.
- 2 Émilien LAMIRANDE, O.M.I., "Introduction à une étude sur quelques ministères de la Congrégation", in *Études Oblate*, 22 (1963), pp. 429-431.
- 3 See also Eugène de Mazenod to Father François-de-Paule Tempier, August 22, 1817: "Our Lord Jesus Christ left us the task of continuing the great work of redeeming mankind..."
- 4 Rules of 1818, Chapter 3, paragraph 1.
- 5 Preface to the Rule approved in 1826.
- 6 Rules of 1818, beginning of the *Nota Bene*.
- 7 *Ibidem*, Chapter 2, art. 1.
- 8 *Ibidem*, beginning of the *Nota Bene*.
- 9 *Ibidem*, Chapter 1, paragraph 3, art. 2.
- 10 *Ibidem*, Chapter 2, paragraph 1, art. 15-17.
- 11 The enormous needs evident in the Church in France after the ruins of the Revolution gave rise pretty well everywhere to projects which embarked on many kinds of activities and were grouped together under the same name of Societies of priests, of brothers, or sisters: v.g. the foundations of Basile A. Moreau, Félicité and Jean-Marie-Robert de La Mennais, Guillaume-Joseph Chaminade, Jean-Claude Coulin, Pierre-Bienvenue Noailles, etc. See Étienne and Tony CARRA, *Le T.R.P. Basile-Antoine Moreau (1799-1873) et les origines de la Congrégation de Sainte-Croix* (Montréal-Paris: Éditions Fides, 1950), vol. 1, pp. 385-386.
- 12 C. M. MARTINI, *L'evangelizzatore in San Luca* (Milano: Ancora, 1980), pp. 17-18.
- 13 Eugène de Mazenod to Father Jean-Joseph Courtès, February 3, 1835.
- 14 IDEM to Father Joseph-Bruno Guigues, January 17, 1838; Ordinance of February 14, 1844.
- 15 IDEM to Father Courtès, July 22, 1827; to Father Ambroise Vincens, January 17, 1835; to Father Toussaint Dassy, October 11, 1847; to Father Charles Baret, January 21, 1853.
- 16 IDEM to Father Marius Suzanne, August 24 and October 5, 1847; to Father Toussaint Dassy, March 29, 1842.

- 17 IDEM to Father Henri François-de-Paule Tempier, April 7, 1826, January 14, 1831; to Father Courtès, February 26 and March 2, 1848; to the Society of the Propagation of the Faith, April 5, 1860.
- 18 IDEM to Father Courtès, September 22, 1836; to the Society of the Propagation of the Faith, December 30, 1857.
- 19 It is generally said that the Founder opened 25 houses in France. In fact, however, Parménie, near Notre-Dame de l'Osier, was only a chapel where a Father went for the Sunday services during the summer.
- 20 Joseph PIELORZ, *Les chapitres généraux au temps du Fondateur* (Ottawa: Éditions des "Études Oblates", 1968), p. 116. (Archives d'histoire oblate, 23).
- 21 *Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 40 (1926), p. 276.
- 22 Charles-Albert Depreto to Father Tempier, September 23, 1848; Joseph-Alphonse Martin to Father Tempier, January 15, 1849; Fortuné Chavard to Bishop de Mazenod, October 5, 1849; Marc Sardou to Casimir Aubert, August 24, 1855.
- 23 Eugène de Mazenod to Father Ambroise Vincent, January 17, 1835; to Father Joseph-Bruno Guigues, April 7, 1835. In many of the Founder's letters and of Oblates, we find passages expressing their amazement at the conversions worked by the missions.
- 24 Ordinance of February 14, 1844, p. 19.
- 25 Balthasar Paris to the Founder, no date (1831), pp. 5-7.
- 26 See *Notices nécrologiques des membres de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée* (Paris: Hennuyer, 1887), vol. 5, pp. 378-379.
- 27 Émilien LAMIRANDE, O.M.I., "La desserte des sanctuaires de la T. S. Vierge. Place parmi les fins de la Congrégation d'après M^{gr} de Mazenod", in *Études Oblates*, 17 (1958), pp. 97-111.
- 28 *Ibidem*, p. 98.
- 29 See also Eugène de MAZENOD, *Journal*, June 2, 1837.
- 30 Bernard COUSIN, *Notre-Dame de Lumières. Trois siècles de dévotion populaire*, (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1981), 213 pp.
- 31 *Ibidem*, pp. 95-126.
- 32 *Ibidem*, p. 107.
- 33 Joseph-Alphonse Martin to Bishop de Mazenod, December 22, 1851.
- 34 IDEM to Father Casimir Aubert, September 11, 1854.
- 35 IDEM 10 *idem*, September 14, 1854.
- 36 IDEM to Father Ambroise Vincens, September 20, 1860.
- 37 Bernard COUSIN, *op. cit.*, p. 107; Joseph-Alphonse Martin to Father Ambroise Vincens, February 1, 1860 and to Father Joseph Fabre, January 20, 1862.
- 38 Théophile ORTOLAN, O.M.I., *Cent ans d'Apostolat dans les deux hémisphères. Les Oblats de Marie Immaculée durant le premier siècle de leur existence*, (Paris: Librairie Saint-Paul, 1914), vol. 1, pp. 135 ff (Notre-Dame du Laus), 309 ff (Notre-Dame de l'Osier), etc.
- 39 Émilien LAMIRANDE, O.M.I., "Saisir tout le bien qu'on nous propose...", in *Études Oblates*, 24 (1965), pp. 3-29.
- 40 Émilien LAMIRANDE, O.M.I., "Aumôneries acceptées au début de la Congrégation", in *Études Oblates*, 24 (1965), pp. 3-29.
- 41 Émilien LAMIRANDE, O.M.I., "Le ministère paroissial dans la Congrégation du vivant du Fondateur", in *Études Oblates*, 23 (1964), pp. 273-290.
- 42 Émilien LAMIRANDE, O.M.I., "Les dérogations aux règles générales dans la prédication des Oblats au temps du Fondateur", in *Études Oblates*, 24 (1965), pp. 368-385.
- 43 Eugène de Mazenod to Father Léon Pélissier, May 30, 1849.
- 44 Joseph-Melchior Burfin to Bishop de Mazenod, August 21, 1848.
- 45 Eugène de Mazenod to Bishop Bernard Boissas of Limoges, February 20, 1848.

- 46 Émilien LAMIRANDE, O.M.I., "Aumôneries acceptées au début de la Congrégation", in *Études Oblates*, 24 (1965), pp. 17-29.
- 47 Édouard Chevalier to Bishop de Mazenod, December 29, 1860.
- 48 Eugène de Mazenod to Father Daly, December 6, 1845.
- 49 Théophile ORTOLAN, O.M.I., *Les Oblats de Marie Immaculée durant le premier siècle de leur existence...* (Paris: Librairie Saint-Paul, 1914), vol. 1, p. 281.
- 50 Journal of Father Toussaint Dassy, August 31, 1829 (Archives of the Orphelinat des Aveugles in Marseille); Émilien LAMIRANDE, O.M.I., "Le Père Albini: sa pratique de l'obéissance", in *Études Oblates*, 21 (1962), pp. 240-266.
- 51 Balthasar Paris to Father de Mazenod, n.d., pp. 5, 8, 17.
- 52 *Notices nécrologiques des membres de la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée* (Paris: Typographie Hennuyer et Fils, 1868), vol. 1, p. 360.
- 53 Joseph REsLÉ, O.M.I., *Commentarium privatum Constitutionum et Regularum. I^a Pars* (Ottawa: Edition des Etudes Oblates, 1958), p. 91; Gérard FORTIN, O.M.I., "Réflexion sur la fin spéciale de la Congrégation", in *Études Oblates*, 21 (1962), pp. 193 ff.
- 54 Charles Baret to Victor, January 23, 1858.
- 55 Eugène BAFFLE, O.M.I., *Le bon Père Achille Rey, O.M.I., 1828-1911* (Paris: Librairie Saint-Paul, 1912), p. 50.
- 56 Casimir Aubert to Father [Joseph Fabre], February 12, 1855; Augustin Vassal to Father Fabre, December 28, 1863. The Founder himself in 1858 withdrew Father Ricard from the major seminary of Ajaccio and sent him to Cléry because this Father wanted "to initiate himself into the apostolic life"; Eugène de Mazenod to Marc de l'Hermite, October 5, 1858.
- 57 Antoine Audric to Father [Templer], August 25, 1861.
- 58 Antoine Audric to Bishop de Mazenod, November 4, 1860, to Father [Ambroise Vincens], July 24, 1860.
- 59 Balthasar Paris to Bishop de Mazenod, no date [1832], pp. 12-13.
- 60 Toussaint Dassy to Bishop de Mazenod, June 19, 1848.
- 61 Théophile ORTOLAN, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 307.
- 62 Yvon BEAUDOIN, O.M.I., "Our Founder in Relation to Youth Apostolate", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 31 (1977), pp. 128-129.
- 63 Victor GABON, O.M.I., *Chronique de la maison du Calvaire 1821-1962*, vol. 1, pp. 70-74, 82.
- 64 Aimé Martinet to Father Joseph Fabre, August 21, 1862.
- 65 Session of September 29, 1831, in the forenoon.
- 66 Eugène de Mazenod to Father Tempier, January 20, 1831.

The Response of the Oblates of the English Province¹ to Bishop de Mazenod's Vision and Practice of Evangelization

Introduction.

This Oblate Mission is unique in having been established prior to the Founder's death in 1861. Indeed, by that date the "shape" of the Province had emerged, although many foundations were undertaken later and the great overseas missionary contribution still lay in the future. When the history of the Congregation is set in a wider context (which gives meaning to dates and events) it is clear that the years after the Founder's death saw a marked change in Catholic atmosphere. The strengthening of authority, the "Syllabus of Errors" (1864), the vigour of Ultramontaniam, increased suspicion of other Churches, are all indicative of an increasingly defensive attitude. The earlier years of the century were still marked by some fluidity, flexibility and a good deal of optimism. For these reasons it seems preferable to terminate this study in 1861.

A Vision.

Bishop de Mazenod had an uncanny ability to grasp an opportunity and make a practical judgment. His fortuitous meeting with a visiting Irish priest (M. O'Reilly) in 1835 led to the eventual entry of William Daly into the Oblate novitiate.² The Founder saw his coming as opening the possibility for a mission to the United Kingdom with a twofold aim: the "conversion of the British heretics and even penetrate... into the colonies".³ So far as England itself was concerned, the vision was "to procure the salvation of souls, especially those beholden to error".⁴ And regarding the colonies he uncritically accepted the reality of imperialism:

(Once converted) it would be recognized that the special genius which made England such a great power on the seas and extended her empire so far into distant countries has been, in the designs of Providence... so that she would prepare the way for... the Gospels

A combination of vision and practical judgment was one thing. It was quite another matter to get a mission established.

Implementing a Vision.

The newly ordained Father William Daly left for England on May 3rd 1841. His hopeful reports from there and from Ireland, and the entry of several young Irishmen into the novitiate augured well for the future. The Founder dispatched his trusted Fr. Casimir Aubert to Ireland in July 1842. Understandably the inexperienced and impractical Daly could get no firm commitments; neither could the more astute Casimir Aubert in the months he spent in Ireland. A proposed merger with the Patrician Brothers,⁶ and suggestions for founding a seminary' both led to nothing. Little could be gained from the Irish bishops who seemed too demanding in their conditions, and too cautious in their hopes for the conversion of England.⁸ Despite what seemed the great needs and the boundless hopes the early years of the Province were marked by frequent changes of scene and direction. Visions, apparently, cannot be immediately (or easily) implemented.

Unable to establish the Congregation in Ireland the two Oblates set out for England at the beginning of 1843. Overcoming the initial opposition of the Vicar Apostolic of the Western District, Mgr. Baines, the Oblates undertook the care of the mission of Penzance in Cornwall.⁹ Fr. Aubert was there for some time, but Fr. Daly

worked with the local priest until a community was formed in 1846. The mission seemed to prosper. The Founder wrote in June 1844:

As for the good Fr. Daly, he is doing marvellously well. He is very pleased with his charming mission. He tells me that there is nothing more consoling than to see our beautiful church every Sunday filled with people. There are never less than three or four hundred Protestants of all denominations who come to hear the preaching of the holy truths of the Catholic religion. The protestant churches are almost abandoned while ours is always full even when the weather is very bad...

He adds that at the present time there is an extraordinary trend towards our holy religion and that minds are all agog seeking truth with extraordinary and indescribable avidity, to employ the terms of Fr. Daly which I am only copying... The holy day of Easter was truly a beautiful occasion for them... At the mass of eight o'clock, he gave holy communion to thirty persons. At the high mass of eleven o'clock, the church was full... The Protestants were ecstatic with all they saw and heard. For the eventide ceremony held at three o'clock, there were from two o'clock on at least 500 persons in the seats, in addition at least 250 persons standing in the church...¹⁰

Despite such promising results and the eventual growth of the Oblate community (there were three priests, a brother and two novices in 1848), the mission was eventually relinquished to meet the unauthorized debts of Fr. Daly."¹¹

Practical Limitations.

The Penzance experience illustrates the precarious economic basis of missionary work in the United Kingdom. This is borne out by a plaintive letter from Bishop Waring to Fr. Aubert in 1843. Seeking the help of some Oblates he states:

I have no means of providing a house. The utmost that I could do would be to defray the expenses of some pious man who might be willing to go and preach, catechize, offer the Adorable Sacrifice and administer the Sacraments for two or three months in one place, then remove to another,... to open the way for greater good hereafter in situations where Catholics are now living and dying without the Sacraments of God's Church ..."¹²

England was very much a missionary country. The Catholic Church still inhabited a sort of limbo. Although Catholic Emancipation (1829) changed the legal position of Catholics, economic and social realities only modified slowly.

Preaching at the Synod held after the Restoration of the Hierarchy in 1850, John Henry Newman sketched the situation of Catholics in the early years of the century:

...all of us can bear witness to the fact of the utter contempt into which Catholicism had fallen ... "No longer the Catholic Church in the country; nay, no longer, I may say, a Catholic community; but a few adherents of the Old Religion, moving silently and sorrowfully about, as memorials of what had been. 'The Roman Catholics': - not a sect, not even an interest, as men conceived of it... but a mere handful of individuals, who might be counted, like the pebbles and detritus of the great deluge... Here a set of poor Irishmen, coming and going at harvest time, or a colony of them lodged in a miserable quarter of the vast metropolis. There, perhaps an elderly person, seen walking in the streets, grave and solitary, and strange, though noble in bearing, and said to be of good family, and a 'Roman Catholic'. An old-fashioned house of gloomy appearance, closed with high walls, with an iron gate, and yews, and the report attaching to it that 'Roman Catholics' lived there; but who they were, or what they did, or what was meant by calling them Roman Catholics, no one could tell; - though it had an unpleasant sound, and told of form and superstition..."¹³

The restoration of the hierarchy in 1850 symbolised a renewal of confidence that had been slowly maturing. Although the restoration placed authority in the hands of the Bishops, it was only gradually that they were able to make effective use of their legal powers.¹⁴ For some time the Catholic gentry and nobility continued to give leadership and support to the Catholic community. In several instances they provided much needed support for the Oblates who were still struggling to establish a viable mission in the 1840's and 1850's. The Founder saw nothing incongruous to accepting this help; it was simply a practical and sensible way to proceed.

A Vision Expanded.

Despite the constant financial anxieties that beset this mission, the Founder kept

his vision high. His circular letter ordering prayers for the conversion of England added another dimension to his concern for England: the significance of the contemporary religious revival. Here, he quoted at length from Bishop Wiseman who was one of the few Catholics who managed to see positive value in the Catholic revival in the Church of England (Oxford Movement). Perhaps the most significant aspect of this letter of the Founder is his affirmation of the power of prayer as a necessary aspect of evangelization:

We certainly do not need, my dear brethern, to tell you of the efficacy of prayer on the heart of God. You know that man has at hand a sure means to obtain rather more than he thinks. Man thus has a kind of unlimited power to produce at times the greatest results. The whole thing happens, it is true, within the hidden intimacy of the Most High but this ineffable event which takes place in the supernatural order surpasses all natural action...

Its empire is not less extensive over the moral world for it can change human will, master events and save even nations in despair from the gravity of their wounds, according to the energetic language of sacred writ...

From the ecumenical point of view, the document showed (as one would expect) a marked lack of enthusiasm for or understanding of Anglicans or Protestants who are not distinguished. But it was typical of Bishop de Mazenod that devils at a distance took on a more human face when met personally. (His changing attitudes to Louis Philippe and Napoleon III were instances of this). On his second visit to England he happened upon the Catholic Apostolic Church in London. He was intensely interested in all that he saw, and found their devotion at prayer a reprimand for the casual and careless approach of many Catholics. But that was as far as his praises could go. The Catholic beauty of the services was simply "what the demon does here in order to seduce souls".¹⁶ At best Protestants were "poor strayed souls",¹⁷ and our "strayed brethern".¹⁸ So, in effect, this third aspect of his "vision" for England merges with the first aim, the conversion of that country.¹⁹

Lay Patrons.

But the Oblates were soon to have close associations with a Catholic lay leader whose ecumenical sensitivity was far in advance of his time. Ambrose Phillips de Lisle (1809-78) was a wealthy landowner who had become a Catholic at the age of sixteen. In 1845, through Bishop Nicolas Wiseman, he entrusted the pastoral care of his chapel at Grace-Dieu (Leicestershire) to the Oblates.²⁰ Father Frédéric Perron, the first Oblate to reside there, was in close touch with the exciting ecumenical events in those months after Newman's conversion.²¹ De Lisle never saw the Oxford Movement simply as a source for converts. He always thought it ought to be considered as a religious movement in its own right, and he worked for corporate reunion as well as for conversions. Doubtless life in this "charming locality"²² might have seemed far removed from the ideals of missionaries to the poor. Yet Fr. Robert Cooke has left an account of his ministry at Grace-Dieu which shows this was a mission with a purpose and had a genuinely Oblate spirit. These were people who needed to have the faith preached to them; and the Oblates had a vigorous programme of open-air preaching, dialogue with non-Catholics, conversions, pastoral visitation and community life.²³ The Founder, who was more interested in people than in mere ideas, was well pleased with what he heard of the mission in its early days²⁴ and for a short time the novitiate was there.²⁵

Despite de Lisle's kindness and all the polite public assessments²⁶ (and the de Lisle family still cherish the memory of Fr. Robert Cooke),²⁷ all was not well with this mission. De Lisle was endowed with a more than average share of eccentricity: his Cambridge background fostered an enthusiasm for the gothic reviva1,²⁸ and he established at Grace-Dieu a style of worship more akin to Anglican Ritualists of a later date.²⁹ In these matters rigid denominational barriers cannot be drawn; Romanticism was in the air and the gothic revival was one of its more evident and lasting manifestations. The Oblates

had difficulty too in being treated as chaplains to a medieval manor,³⁰ though for a time the General Council was happy enough with Fr. Perron's reassurances.³¹ Eventually it all proved too much; as personnel was so limited the decision was taken to withdraw.³²

De Lisle represents an important aspect of 19th century English religious experience that did much to shape Catholic, Anglican and even Protestant attitudes and practice. But clearly this was not the Oblate ethos.

The zeal of the Oblates at Grace-Dieu and the success of their efforts there impressed William Constable Maxwell (later Lord Herries) when he visited the manor in 1847. He obtained the services of the Oblates for his village, Everingham (Yorkshire).³³ This was one of those cases of Catholicism where the local landlord had used his leadership to preserve a Catholic community.³⁴ A person of deep piety, Maxwell built a church at the cost of £ 20,000 which he later gave to the diocese.³⁵ Bishop de Mazenod thought very highly of "the excellent Maxwell" and his "saintly family",³⁶ and was much impressed with the mission when it visited it in 1850.³⁷ In this case there was no difficulty with the patron, and the Founder resisted any pressures to relinquish this charge.

I see with utmost pleasure that you think exactly as I do on the subject of Everingham. I would never have taken it upon myself to show such ingratitude and egoism in the eyes of all the Catholics of England. How is it possible to forget that Mr. Maxwell was our recourse when we were left without any shelter and that he has never ceased to conduct himself most generously in our regard? It is better to suffer than to be lacking in delicacy or gratitude.³⁸

Eventually limited personnel necessitated withdrawing. The genuine note of regret in the General Council minutes³⁹ were reflected in Father Aubert's letter to Maxwell announcing the decision.⁴⁰ It is easy to appreciate Maxwell's disappointment.

Your announcement this morning of your intention to resign the Everingham Mission has distressed us much. It is not for me to criticise your reasons for so doing. After the many sacrifices I have made to further and support your Order here, and to promote Religion in this district, I was in hopes that it was for a *permanent object*

I have no doubt you have the strongest reasons for the course which you adopt, which otherwise might be considered as wanting in that steady and consistent perseverance so necessary to the welfare of a Flock of Christ.

I will, as soon as I can, obtain a successor or successors, till which time I hope you will not make your alterations. It will be with great regret that we shall lose Father Arnoux, whose zeal, piety and goodness have been so much good, and for whom I have had the greatest esteem and regard. He will be a great blessing to any flock he may have to attend and I shall ever feel most grateful for the blessings he brought us here.

I have not yet written to the Bishop but will do so in a day or two — I am anxious to know first whether there is any chance of obtaining the services of any other Religious Body.⁴¹

Maxwell's extant correspondence shows him to have been a genuinely devout man, practical and humane. He is representative of those upper class Recusants whose faith and leadership so greatly assisted the survival of the Catholic Church in England. As they were emerging from years of uncertainty and suspicion they needed the support of the wider Church and a missionary Congregation did well to serve in a place such as Everingham for a time.

Need for a Permanent Centre.

Several other foundations were made during this early and unstable period of the history of the Province. Aldenham and Ashbourne both date from 1848 and were short lived commitments. Both too were within the Founder's aim of working for the conversion of England. When Fr. François Rouisse left Aldenham there were more than 100 converts to the faith: by any assessment this was successful evangelization.⁴² If this work was to continue it was clear that proper provision would have to be made for a

formation programme. The novitiate had been housed in a succession of places,⁴³ but the purchase of Maryvale near Birmingham seemed to answer the needs of the young Province. It could serve as a novitiate and also a house of studies close by Oxford and the seminary at Oscott. This could be "our central establishment in England".⁴⁴ The property had been used by Newman and the Oratorians for some years, and its purchase offered renewed hopes for the conversion of England and for supplying missionaries to "evangelize distant and foreign countries". It was "a pretty house, ... a quiet and agreeable site ! It would be a pity if some day we had to leave such a central locality so suitable for our novitiate." The Founder had a clear sense of the value of such a place of "rest and studies" for those engaged in the work of evangelization.⁴⁶ However the constant anxiety about finance was acerbated by Fr. Daly who was in danger of "(ruining) us completely with new stupidities".⁴⁷ The precarious state of finances brought its future into question. Soon the cost of upkeep required the Oblates "to leave Maryvale as soon as possible so as to be able to provide for the needs of various communities".⁴⁸ The place of Maryvale was taken by Lys-Marie (Sicklinghall) in 1852.⁴⁹ This now became "our house of hope".⁵⁰ And the promise seemed fulfilled when the Founder met the "numerous community composed of eight novices, seven scholastics, four priests and (nine juniors)".⁵¹ Regrettably the establishment proved unsuitable as a House of Studies. It was both too small and not attractive to recruits from Ireland.⁵²

Another Lay Patron.

The early years of the Province were to see the Oblates work in close cooperation with one of the most eminent of 19th century converts. James Robert Hope Scott (1812-1873) was the grandson of the Earl of Hopetown; one of the few lay leaders of the Oxford Movement and the most successful parliamentary barrister of his day.⁵³ He became a Catholic in 1851 as a result of the Gorham Judgment (on the nature of Baptism). He was a warm and expansive man who always kept a deep appreciation for his Anglican friends: on his conversion he wrote to William Ewart Gladstone (later Prime Minister), "You... are *ex voto* at least in that Catholic Church which to me has become a practical reality".⁵⁴ His jovial charm and wide popularity were matched by his generosity : he was responsible for several church foundations in his days as an Anglican and later as a Catholic. His first wife was the grand-daughter of Sir Walter Scott, who had such a profound influence on the religious ethos of educated folk in those days.ss The mission at Galashiels (Scotland), close by Sir Walter Scott's home, Abbotsford, was entrusted to the Oblates through the Vicar Apostolic of the Edinburgh district, Bishop Gillis⁵⁶ With his customary munificence Hope-Scott provided generously for the Oblates while they served there 1852-1859,⁵⁷ and built the local church at his own expense. The Founder visited Galashiels in 1857 and was obviously interested in all he saw.⁵⁸ But the severe strains on personnel did not warrant retention of a community in a rural haven such as Galashiels. It was with regret that the Founder wrote to announce the decision to withdraw.⁵⁹

This was the last close Oblate contact with influential lay patrons of rural missions. The work had been blessed in many ways, and was an important contribution to the work of evangelization. The number of non-Catholics attending Oblate services, the number of converts and the strengthening of the faith of small communities of Catholics⁶⁰ all contributed to the Founder's aim of converting England. It is hard to see how this aim could have been achieved, had not a proportionately large number of Oblates been assigned to these foundations. Within the first decade of our presence in England the Founder was lavish in his praise and confident in his hopes for the future: the mission is "making great strides" and indeed compared more than favourably with Canada in the "truly miraculous prosperity of our establishments".⁶¹ But the Oblate scene was soon to change.

The Social Context.

"There is another side to the picture," as Mrs. Gaskell the novelist remarked ⁶² The most incisive social comments on contemporary England come from novelists; the most celebrated and trenchant was articulated by Benjamin Disraeli:

Yes, resumed the younger stranger after a moment's interval. Two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws. "You speak of..." said Egremont hesitatingly. "THE RICH AND THE POOR" ⁶³

Urbanization widened this gulf between the rich and the poor. The Irish famine dramatically worsened conditions in that country and the Founder was well aware of the sufferings of Ireland, now undergoing "one of the most cruel trials of her existence, exhausted as she is by so many other cruel trials". ⁶⁴ Many sought relief through migration.

The Irish population of England had been rising since the Act of Union (1801), and was concentrated in Liverpool where they numbered 19,000 by 1830. The failure of the potato crop in 1845, 1846 and 1847 swelled the inflow; in the first six months of 1847 some 300,000 Irish entered Liverpool (many to migrate elsewhere). ⁶⁵ As G. Kitson Clarke summarizes, they were "often bitterly unpopular... another race... mostly Roman Catholic... desperately needy... often disorderly and, worst of all, they threatened the wage rate of their neighbours". ⁶⁶

Oblate energies were soon to be drawn away from traditional "English" scenes, but not simply towards the other nation of the urban poor. Their main concern was soon to become the "third" nation, the Irish in urban England.

The Vision Amended.

There were already some suggestions for a foundation in Liverpool, and the Founder saw the importance of having Oblates work in the large industrial cities.

I had thought it was understood that you were to establish yourselves in the big city of Manchester, just as you were proposing to do at Liverpool. I am most concerned that you be able to establish yourselves in the big cities where there is so much good to do though you must be in a place of your own. ⁶⁷

And at the end of the same year he wrote:

We must envisage establishing ourselves in the big cities and not in isolated country places. Do not think of it. ⁶⁸

Already by 1850 the Oblates were preaching successful missions in the larger cities; and the Founder was full of admiration for the evident success of these ventures. There were crowds of 2000 in a Manchester church; the missionaries were kept busy in the confessional until well after midnight and Fr. Cooke enrolled some 500 people in Fr. Matthew's Temperance Society ⁶⁹

The Liverpool foundation delighted the Founder though he insisted that the Oblates have a place of their own. ⁷⁰ Visiting the Province that year he found at

Liverpool another kind of marvel was waiting for me. Our Fathers... are in charge of the district of Holy Cross inhabited by a great number of poor Irish to whom they provide the aid of religion. It would be too long to describe to you all that is done in this miserable shed which serves as a chapel and which fills up six times on Sunday. ⁷¹

He was equally warmed by the reception he received from the poor. This was obviously where his heart was.

Liverpool is an admirable battlefield. God preserve us from ever thinking of abandoning it. If there is too much work for three Fathers, we will put another there, five if necessary... The good which is done in

this population is immense. Everyone agrees on that.⁷²

The Oblates evidently welcomed this change of direction.⁷³ The needs were obvious and the challenge captivated them. There was a great deal of devoted work done in the "obscure and monotonous" apostolate,⁷⁴ in this "most densely inhabited and poorest part of the town" (Holy Cross).⁷⁵

After preaching successful missions the Oblates were given permanent establishments in both Manchester⁷⁶ and Leeds.⁷⁷ In the case of this latter, at least, the Founder's aim was to ensure some flexibility and freedom; he was most anxious that Mt. St. Mary's be a public church with a wide mission to the city, and not a parish.⁷⁸ The Founder wrote to Aubert, "How I relish this foundation at Leeds".⁷⁹ Part of his excitement was because of developments in a neighbouring Anglican church, St. Saviour's. This gift was the anonymous gift of Dr. Edward Bouverie Pusey, one of the leaders of the Oxford Movement. His idea had been to make this a "model" parish church, set in the heart of the slums and concerned to translate the Catholic revival from its academic setting into the wider mission of the Church. The new church was consecrated on October 28 1845, less than three weeks after Newman's submission to Rome. The hostility of Anglicans of various shades of opinion increased when most of the early clergy at St. Saviour's entered the Catholic Church.⁸⁰ The Founder's interest centered on one of these clergymen, the Reverend George Crawley, who expressed interest in becoming an Oblate.⁸¹ He wanted him given every encouragement and help; his coming to the Congregation was "of such great importance".⁸² The Founder hoped he would be something of a "drawing card".⁸³

Recruitment.

However this was not to be. Not only did local English vocations remain chronically scarce for the remainder of the century,⁸⁴ but among the 612 converts who became priests in the 1850-1910 period only three joined the Oblates.⁸⁵ Although the Founder hoped for vocations from England, they never came in any great number. Part of the answer is that Oblates opted to work in poor urban areas which were unlikely to provide vocations until social conditions (especially educational opportunities) improved; for the most part, too, Oblates worked among people who could feel happier with priests from Ireland.

As the 1850s advanced the strains on personnel was increasing and recruitment was not encouraging. Even Liverpool, the most demanding mission in the Province, seemed understaffed.⁸⁶ Aubert, now Secretary General, recognised the need to limit horizons; only four years before he had still hoped for a foundation on the Isle of Man "to prepare subjects for mission countries and the English colonies".⁸⁷

It was simply more realistic to look to Ireland for vocations. Even this was a tenuous enough source so long as the Oblates had no permanent foundation there; though the founder hoped that the missions preached there would bring vocations.⁸⁸ He wondered why people joined other Orders but not the Oblates. "Would it be that fervent souls wanting to embrace the religious state find not enough regularity?" he asked.⁸⁹ But the 1850s saw both a concentration of the Irish in England and also the establishment of foundations in Ireland.

By the time of the 1861 General Chapter the Province had taken on a most specifically Irish appearance. The Provincial (Fr. Cooke) reported that there were seven houses and one residence in the Province: Liverpool, Leeds and Sicklinghall in England; Leith in Scotland; Inchicore, Glen-Mary (the novitiate near Bray), Glencree,⁹⁰ (Reformatory) and a residence in Dublin (the juniorate) in Ireland. For the near future, at least, the real hope for vocations would be Ireland.

Assessing the Change of Direction.

Apart from the question of recruitment, the change of direction has other aspects. Having to relinquish more specifically English missions impoverished the Congregation on several counts. Oblates no longer inhabited the world of the Maxwells, Hope-Scotts, and the de Lises. It is hard to see how the Congregation could have taken on an English aspect in the 19th century without some contact with such traditional lay leadership and with a more specifically English ministry. Though ironically the founding of Kilburn some years later did not seem to alter the implications of the change of direction. By the late 1850s George Crawley seemed a lone figure, almost an exile from another time and place. The Congregation was impoverished too, in being generally out of contact with those influences which would later see the revived interest in English spirituality and with the ecumenical movement. The change did deflect Oblate interest from evangelization of non-Catholics.

But that is merely to state the negative aspects of the matter. The historian must be more impressed with the positive side. The change of direction indicated an ability to respond to the most urgent needs. Despite the great vision and the first enthusiasm, the Oblates did not really find a place in the English Church; it took almost a decade to clarify options, and that did involve a modification of the vision. On a broader plane, the adaptability of the Congregation is an indication of the ability of the Catholic Church as a whole to respond to the massive demands made by urbanization and immigration. The Church of England, with the weight of its mediaeval structure, has found the process much more tortuous and lengthy⁹¹.

Some Aspects of Oblate Practice.

A. Flexibility.

Finally, in assessing the "practice" of evangelization this flexibility and adaptability needs to be stressed. The Founder had his clear vision, and he sought to implement it by responding as best as he could to the demands. Even when the Oblates went to Leeds, every effort was made to keep this as a "mission"; it was to have a comprehensive ministry that would be limited if it became (as it later did) a parish. The same was the case with Liverpool (Holy Cross). But the difficulty with such an approach was that these larger establishments were bound to become more permanent; their physical size, and above all, the close relationship the Oblates had with their people forged bonds more lasting than any canon law or contracts could make.

B. Style of Oblate Leadership.

This very closeness to the people was an important aspect of the Mazenod's evangelizing practice. He himself obviously delighted in the warmth of the reception he received from the people in Oblate missions; in Leeds, Liverpool and Inchicore it was the same story.⁹² But this was also part of his style of leadership. His published letters are saturated with pleas for more news of his Oblates. His two visits to the Province are a clear indication of his belief in the importance of close and constant contacts with his men. He was a man for people; not for ideas or plans.

C. Unity and Diversity.

Despite this desire for keeping his finger on events, and maintaining close links with Oblates, it was obvious that he could not personally conduct the affairs of the Congregation once it spread to distant places. He showed a firm practical judgment in establishing Provinces; indeed he nominated Fr. Bellon "Provincial" in 1848, that is

before Provinces were formally made part of government structures at the 1850 General Chapter.⁹³

His advice on that occasion says something of his style of leadership, which is an essential aspect of the practice of evangelization:

...fulfil, in regard to our members who serve God in this region, by your words, your ardour and your deeds, the duties of a good Pastor and a thoughtful father, careful above all to maintain amongst them unity in the Holy Spirit and the bonds of peace while promoting without cease the will and the practice of regular obedience.⁹⁴

The Founder was well aware that local pressures and a diversity of nationalities in the Congregation would test its unity. But that unity must be kept: "Nothing is more dangerous than weakening family ties".⁹⁵ One practical aspect of that unity was that missionaries were to be available to serve in various mission fields.⁹⁶

D. Community.

Essential to the Founder's practice of evangelization was his insistence on formed and regular communities. Every effort must be made to have properly formed communities. Indeed the number of Oblates in the early rural establishments seems excessive by today's standards; even allowing for the preaching of missions and retreats in other places. Bishop de Mazenod did not seem willing to allow the same latitude here as he did in foreign missions where he was content if Oblates served on missions in pairs.⁹⁷ The size of the early communities compared to the relatively light pastoral charge must have led to some frustration; and makes it easier to understand the enthusiasm for the larger city missions.⁹⁸

Not only were these missionary communities to be regular: "The most pressing thing is provide for the needs of Liverpool both as to work and regularity".⁹⁹ He brought Fr. Pierre-Julien Amisse from Canada to achieve this:

(Your mission) has its difficulties, because our communities in England have up to now lacked the possibility of being constituted in perfect conformity with the Rule... Upon regularity in fact depends the whole future of our Congregation in the British Province. The house at Liverpool, more than any other, needs to be placed and maintained on a regular footing, given the importance of this great city and the kind of ministry our Father exercise there.¹⁰⁰

However, the Founder's view of community as a dedicated band of apostles was not just a matter of routine and regularity. Mention has already been made of his insistence on prayer as an essential aspect of evangelization. A constancy and regularity in prayer; a strengthening of the bonds of community and a growing attachment to Christ and his mission all merge in the Founder's teaching concerning the Oblate practice of oraison (prayer before the Blessed Sacrament).¹⁰¹

E. Renewed in the Spirit.

The active Oblate needs to constantly referbish the great ideals. De Mazenod fervently believed in the importance of a great vision constantly

renewed by prayer. This became the inner dynamism of his life. Twice in his letters to the English Province he reiterated this belief, and each time he counselled meditation on the Preface.¹⁰²

F. Oblates.

No vision of evangelization, however lofty, can be effective unless there are suitable instruments. Much could be said of the Founder's aim in formation. He wished the process to result in communities who would give an "edification (which) can perhaps produce as many conversions as (can) their words".¹⁰³ While the Province had its share of "problems" it also had its great men. The scope of this paper does not permit a biographical assessment of them.

Conclusion.

In conclusion it can be asserted that the Founder's aims and vision were clear. In our perspective it seems that the early Oblates opted not simply for the poor, but for the Irish poor. Perhaps that is to clothe the issue in terms of the nationalism which was increasing in the mid century, but perhaps not so evident to contemporaries¹⁰⁴. The great issue is that the Founder was able to modify his aims without any loss of enthusiasm; he was always the man of "unbounded confidence..."

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Australia*

NOTES:

- 1 The original title of the present Anglo-Irish Province.
- 2 Théophile ORTOLAN, O.M.I., *Les Oblats de Marie Immaculée durant le premier siècle de leur existence* (Paris: Librairie Saint-Paul, 1914), vol. 1, p. 512.
- 3 Eugène de Mazenod, *Journal*, quoted by Yvon BEAUDOIN, O.M.I., in *Introduction to Blessed Eugene DE MAZENOD, Letters and Documents concerning England and Ireland...* (Rome: General Postulation O.M.I., 1979), p. xix-xx.
- 4 Eugène de Mazenod to Father Casimir Aubert, 15 July 1846, in *Letters and Documents...*, p. 19.
- 5 Circular letter of 21 December 1845 (*ibidem*, p. 172).
- 6 Eugène de Mazenod to Father Aubert, 25 December 1842 (*ibidem*, p. 4, note 10).
- 7 Théophile ORTOLAN, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 518.
- 8 Eugène de Mazenod to Father Aubert 19 February 1843 in *Letters and Documents...*, p. 5; 1 February 1844 (*ibidem*, p. 7).
- 9 Théophile ORTOLAN, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, 524 ff.
- 10 Eugène de Mazenod to Father Aubert in *Letters and Documents...*, pp. 13-14.
- 11 Eugène de Mazenod to Father Aubert, 19 November 1850 (*ibidem*, p. 64-65); 6 December 1850 (*ibidem*, pp. 65-66).
- 12 Bishop William Waring to Father Aubert, 7 March 1843 (Oblate General Archives, Rome).
- 13 John Henry NEWMAN, *Sermons Preached on Various Occasions* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1892), pp. 171-172.
- 14 John Boss^y, *The English Catholic Community 1570- 1850* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1975), pp. 360-362.
- 15 Quoted in *Letters and Documents...*, p. 164.
- 16 Eugène de Mazenod to Father Fabre, 18 July 1857 (*ibidem*, p. 127-128).
- 17 Eugène de Mazenod to Father Tempier July 10, 1856 (*ibidem*, p. 62).
- 18 Act of Visitation of the Province of England, 22 July 1850 (*ibidem*, p. 191).
- 19 Jean LEFLON, *Eugène de Mazenod, Bishop of Marseilles, Founder of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, 1782-1861* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1970), vol. 4, p. 278, enumerates three ends.
- 20 *Letters and Documents...*, p. 25, note 6 and Théophile ORTOLAN, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 534.
- 21 Achille REV, O.M.I., *Histoire de Monseigneur Charles-Joseph-Eugène de Mazenod Evêque de Marseille, Fondateur des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée* (Marseille: Imprimerie Marseillaise, 1928), vol. 2, p. 218.
- 22 Eugene de Mazenod to Father Aubert, in *Letters and Documents...*, p. 21 and Théophile ORTOLAN, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 534.
- 23 Robert Cooke, O.M.I., *Sketches of the Life of Mgr de Mazenod Bishop of Marseilles and Founder of the*

- Oblates of Mary Immaculate...*, (London: Burns & Oates, 1882), vol. 2, pp. 142-155.
- 24 Eugene de Mazenod to Father Courtes, 11 January 1847, quoted in *Letters and Documents...*, p. 25, note 6.
- 25 *Ibidem*, p. 42, note 18.
- 26 See "The Oblates at Grace-Dieu 1845-1848" in *Missionary Record of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, 3 (1893), pp. 37-41.
- 27 Author's conversation in May 1982 with the Archivist of Mount St. Bernard Abbey (f. by Phillip de Lisle).
- 28 See James Floyd WHITE, *The Cambridge Movement: The Ecclesiologists and the Gothic revival* (Cambridge: University Press, 1962).
- 29 Edmund Sheridan PURCELL, *The Life and Letters of Ambrose Phillip de Lisle* (London, Macmillan and Co, 1900, Vol. 2, pp. 288-293 and *Act of Visitation*, August 1846 (Oblate General Archives, Rome, file Grâce-Dieu).
- 30 Ambrose de Lisle Correspondence (Pembroke College, Oxford).
- 31 Oblate General Archives, file Grâce-Dieu: extracts from the General Council Minutes, 14 January 1846; 18 September 1846 and 23 April 1847.
- 32 *Ibidem*, General Council Minutes 24 March 1848. At the Visitation of 1846 there were 3 priests, 1 scholastic and 1 brother in the Community.
- 33 Robert COOKE, O.M.L., *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 156 ff.
- 34 John Bossv, *op. Cit.*, p. 178.
- 35 Robert Cooke, O.M.L., *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 158.
- 36 Eugene de Mazenod to Father Tempier, 1 July 1850, in *Letters and Documents...*, pp. 58, 60.
- 37 Act of Visitation 1850 (*ibidem*, p. 187).
- 38 Eugene de Mazenod to Father Bellon, 11 July 1853 (*ibidem*, p. 99).
- 39 General Council, May 25, 1855. Quoted *ibidem*, p. 111, note 4.
- 40 Casimir Aubert to William Maxwell, 8 September 1855 in Arundel Castle MS (E) D DEV (Hull University).
- 41 William Maxwell to Father Aubert, 8 September 1855 (*ibidem*).
- 42 Eugène de Mazenod to Father Tempier in *Letters and Documents...*, p. 12.
- 43 See *Ibidem*, p. 42, note 18.
- 44 Eugène de Mazenod to Father Aubert, 19 november 1850 (*ibidem*, p. 64).
- 45 General Council decision, 8 July 1849, quoted *ibidem*, p. 33, note 2.
- 46 See his view re Longueuil in Canada in a letter to Father Tempier, 19 July 1851 in Eugène DE MAZENOD, *Letters to North America 1851-1860* (Rome: General Postulation O.M.L., 1979), p. 20.
- 47 Eugène de Mazenod to Father Tempier, 27 May 1851, in *Letters and Documents...*, p. 73.
- 48 IDEM to Father Aubert, 28 August 1851 (*ibidem*, p. 81).
- 49 *Ibidem*, p. 90, note 9.
- 50 Eugène de Mazenod to Father Arnoux, 22 October 1853 (*ibidem*, p. 103).
- 51 IDEM to Father Louis Souillier, 2 August 1857 (*ibidem*, pp. 134-135). And 10 novices in October of that year. The Founder took away 3 Scholastics (see his letter to Bishop Guigues, 16 Octobre 1857 in *Letters to North America...*, vol. 2, p. 160).
- 52 Eugène de Mazenod to Father Boisramé, 7 July 1860 in *Letters and Documents...*, p. 158.
- 53 Robert ORNSBY, *Memoir of James Robert Hope-Scott* (London, 1884). Re Oblates, at Galashiels see vol. 2, p. 203.
- 54 James Robert Hope-Scott to William Ewart Gladstone, 18 June 1850 (BM. AD. MSS. 44214 f. 349).
- 55 See John Henry NEWMAN, *Apologia pro vita sua* (London, Longmans, Green, etc., 1894), pp. 96-97.

- 56 James Gillis to Father Bellon, 29 November 1852 (Oblate General Archives, Rome).
- 57 See James Robert Hope-Scott to Father Bellon, 22 December 1852 and also Agreement, 31 December 1852, both in the Oblate General Archives, Rome.
- 58 Eugene de Mazenod to his nephew Eugene de Boisgelin, 7 July 1857 (Postulation Archives, Rome).
- 59 Eugene de Mazenod to James Robert Hope-Scott, January 1859 in *Letters and Documents...*, pp. 153-154.
- 60 See Small Catholic Community at *Howden* served from Everingham: 12 R.C. there and no Mass since the Reformation (Robert Cooke, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 160).
- 61 Eugène de Mazenod to Bishop Guigues, 4 March 1849, in *Letters to North America...*, vol. 1, p. 221.
- 62 Elizabeth Cleghorn GASKELL, *Mary Barton...* (London: Chipman and Hall, 1848), Chapter 6.
- 63 Benjamin DISRAELI, *Sybil on the Two Nations* (London: H. Colburn, 1845), Bk II, Ch. 5.
- 64 Circular letter... ordering a collection for the Poor of Ireland", 24 February 1847, in *Letters and Documents...*, p. 176. See also his letter to Mgr John McHale 14 April 1847 (*ibidem*, p. 23-24) and to Miss O'Connell, 15 April 1847 (*ibidem*, pp. 24-25).
- 65 Frank NEAL, "The Roots of violence" in *Tablet I*, May 1982, pp. 420-421.
- 66 George Kitson CLARK, *The Making of Victorian England* (London, 1965), p. 78.
- 67 Eugène de Mazenod to Father Aubert, 19 January 1850 in *Letters and Documents...*, pp. 49-50 and to Father Bellon, 4 February 1850 (*ibidem*, p. 51).
- 68 IDEM to Father Aubert, 19 January 1850 (*ibidem*, p. 64).
- 69 IDEM to Father Fleury Baudrand, 11-25 January 1850, in *Letters to North America...*, vol. 1, pp. 233-235 and to Father Semeria, 2 April 1850, in *Letters to Ceylon and Africa 1847-1860* (Rome: General Postulation O.M.I., 1980), p. 54-55.
- 70 Eugène de Mazenod to Father Bellon, 4 February 1850, in *Letters and Documents...*, p. 51.
- 71 IDEM to Father Tempier, 10 July, 1850 (*ibidem*, p. 61). On "Census Sunday" (March 30th 1851) 33, 132 attended Mass in the 10 churches in Liverpool. At that time there were 83,813 Irish living in the city. Total population was 376,000. At Leeds on the same Sunday 3,644 attended Mass in the two Churches in the city. There were some 8,466 Irish and a total population of 172,000. There were 3 priests in Leeds at that time (and 32 in Liverpool). Statistics quoted in George Andrew BECK, *The English Catholics 1850-1950* (London: Burns, Oats, 1950), pp. 48-49 and 80-81.
- 72 Eugène de Mazenod to Father Tempier, 27 May 1851, in *Letters and Documents...*, p. 74.
- 73 Eugène de Mazenod to Father Aubert, 3 July 1851 (*ibidem*, p. 78).
- 74 Charles Jolivet on Father John Noble in *Notices nécrologiques des membres de la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée* (Paris: Typographie Hennuyer, 1868), vol. 1, *Circular n° 35* (4 June 1867). Oblate General Archives and / or Father Noble's work see the Founder to Father Aubert, 14 July 1851 in *Letters and Documents...*, p. 80.
- 75 Act of Visitation, 22 July 1850 (*ibidem*, p. 188).
- 76 Founder to Father Bellon, 18 January 1850 (*ibidem*, p. 46) and to Father Tempier, 10 July 1850 (*ibidem*, p. 61). The Manchester Mission was ceded to the Bishop to help liquidate Father Daly's debts (Founder to Father Tempier, 27 May 1851, *ibidem*, p. 74).
- 77 *Ibidem*, p. 81, note 13.
- 78 Agreement between Bishop John Briggs and Fr. Belton, 24 May 1853 (Oblate General Archives, Rome).
- 79 Founder to Father Aubert, 4 July 1851, in *Letters and Documents...*, p. 79.
- 80 Henry Parry LIDDoN, *Life of E. B. Pusey* (London: Longmans, Green, 1894-1898), III, 3, pp. 154-168.
- 81 Founder to Father Aubert, 4 July 1851 in *Letters and Documents...*, p. 76.
- 82 Founder to Father Aubert, 20 July 1851 (*ibidem*, pp. 79-80); to Father Bellon (Archives of the Postulation, Rome).
- 83 Founder to Father Aubert, 28 August 1851, in *Letters and Documents...*, p. 82.
- 84 Mabel Vincent SWEENEY, "Diocesan Organization and Administration", in George Andrew BECK, ed.,

The English Catholics 1850-1950 (London: Burns, Oats, 1950), p. 142.

- 85 See also Communities with longer experience failed to fulfil their hopes v.g. English Benedictines and their Australian "dream" (see P. OFARRELL, *The Catholic Church and Community in Australia* (Melbourne, 1977), Chapter 2.
- 86 W. Gordon GORMAN, ed., *Converts to Rome 1850-1910* (London, 1910), p. xv.
- 86 Father Aubert to Father Cooke, 30 October 1859 (Archives of the Postulation, Rome, vol. 30, 3).
- 87 Father Aubert to Propagation of the Faith, 16 August 1855 (*ibidem*, vol. 26, 3).
- 88 Founder to Father Richard, 6 December 1853, in *Letters and Documents...*, p. 113 and also 17 April 1856 (*ibidem*, p. 115).
- 89 Founder to Father Noble (in Scotland), 21 July 1858 (*ibidem*, p. 144). Oblates there in close contact with the Kerrs. Lord Henry Keer had three sons two of whom became priests (not Oblates).
- 90 *Report 1861. General Chapter in Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 1 (1862), p. 6.
- 91 Trevor BELSON, *The Church of England in Crisis* (London, 1973), pp. 54-55
- 92 See especially Founder to Father Tempier, 1 August 1857, in *Letters and Documents...*, pp. 132-133.
- 93 Founder to Father Bellon, 18 October 1848 (*ibidem*, pp. 30-31).
- 94 *ibidem*, p. 31.
- 95 Founder to Father Aubert, 19 February 1843 (*ibidem*, p. 5).
- 96 Thus the Founder had some hard words to say about the recalcitrant Father Keating (see his letter to Father Aubert, 22 May 1849, *ibidem*, p. 38).
- 97 Founder to Bishop Guigues, 26 September 1848 in *Letters to North America...*, vol. 1, p. 204; to Father Gaudet, 28 August 1858 (*ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 189).
- 98 See *Circulaires nécrologique n° 35* (4 June 1867), re Father Noble, *loc. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 421 ff.
- 99 Founder to Father Aubert, 28 August 1851, in *Letters and Documents...*, p. 81.
- 100 Founder to Father Amisse, 1 December 1853 (*ibidem*, pp. 104-105).
- 101 See especially Founder to Father Aubert, 3 February 1847 in *Letters to North America*, vol. 1, p. 162; to Father Henri Faraud, 6 March 1857 (*ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 138); to Father Albert Lacombe, 6 March 1857 (*ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 140).
- 102 Founder to Father Bellon, 4 March 1850 in *Letters and Documents...*, p. 53; Act of Visitation, 22 July 1850 (*ibidem*, pp. 185-186).
- 103 Founder to Father Bellon, 15 December 1848 (*ibidem*, p. 32).
- 104 See Jean LEFLON, *op. cit.*, vol. 4, p. 290, where he follows Fr. Cooke's views.

The Evangelization Work of the Oblates in Ceylon During the 19th Century

"Vous savez, Éminence, que je me sens un cœur catholique."
Bishop de Mazenod to Cardinal Fransoni
11 August 1857.

In this contribution, we want to discuss the attitude of Bishop de Mazenod and the first generation of Oblates toward the evangelization of Ceylon. How did they see their task? What did the preaching of the Good News mean to them? What was their position on Buddhism and Hinduism? How did they perceive the evangelization by non-Catholic societies? These questions come down to the problem of the image of the Oblate missionary in the 19th century as it was conceived by Bishop de Mazenod and as the Congregation carried out its work in Ceylon after his death.

It is perhaps well to stress first of all that an answer to this question is meaningful only if one places oneself back into the ecclesiology of the time. There was as yet no true missiological thought. The universal Church interpreted history as a linear progression in which was woven an unbroken red line, namely, the evil that exists and that plots against God's plan of salvation. That plan of salvation, however, must be executed, cost what it may. Everything was centralized in Rome, and little or no room was left to the local churches to adapt themselves to non-Western peoples. Unity was *de facto* seen as synonymous with uniformity, with the unfortunate consequence that matters peripheral to the faith were drawn into the centre. This was all the more serious because the 19th century was characterized by a true missionary zeal. One of the most important motivating forces of this missionary movement was the general conviction that the pagans could only be saved if they had heard the Good News and received baptism. The 19th-century Church had a great sense of mission. In the Western Church, there lived the desire to give glory to God, to build up His Church, to assist, instruct, and inspire the faithful, and to create unity and religious concord among all peoples.

We can clearly observe this in Eugène de Mazenod, who had originally only planned the evangelization of his own de-Christianized region but who could not resist the requests for help sent to him from every continent. As he expressly wrote to the Central Council of the Association for the Propagation of the Faith in Lyons, the Oblates went to the missions not to be ordinary parish priests for the Christians there, but to carry out pioneering work among the pagans. "Our Fathers are not involved merely in performing curial functions. I never accept those functions on their own and only allow our Fathers to accept them insofar as they permit the Fathers to remain religious... and especially to be essentially missionaries."¹ Ten years earlier, he had pointed out to the same organization that those who joined the Congregation with the intention of working among the pagans actually received the opportunity to do so.²

We must limit ourselves here to Ceylon, however. Right after the first missionaries had departed, he wrote to an Oblate on another continent of how promising the newly accepted mission of Ceylon was: "Just think – there are twelve or fifteen hundred thousand unbelievers to be evangelised."³ In almost all the letters to Father, later Bishop, Etienne Semeria and to the Oblates, he returned to the greatness of their vocation: to be allowed to walk in the steps of the Apostles and to be allowed to introduce Christ to those who did not yet know Him. In a rather large number of letters, one can find traces of a kind of holy impatience over the fact that the missionaries apparently did not find the time to introduce Christ to the pagans. All of their energy

went to the neglected Christian communities. By way of typical examples, let me give six short citations from five different letters that clearly reflect this "impatience":

First: "When will you begin to win the unbelievers? Are you only on your island as parish priests of old Christians? I had always thought the idea was to convert the pagans. This is what we are made for rather than anything else."⁴

Second: "I search in vain in your letters to see what work you are doing, and up till now you have not told me of a single conversion, and frankly I only agreed to send missionaries to Ceylon in the hope of seeing them used for the conversion of souls."⁵

Third: "I have heard that you have done much good work, but there will be a great deal more for you to do when the moment arrives for you to attack infidelity and idolatry."⁶

Fourth: "You know that this is the ultimate goal of my hopes: to announce Jesus Christ to the pagans. It seems to me that you are too exclusively occupied with Christians."⁷

Fifth: "... when you are able to launch an attack on idolatry, you will see that you will find less difficulty and more consolations in that work than in battling with those degenerate Christians who discourage you so much."⁸

And, less than a year before his death: "When will you be able to start on your numerous pagans?"⁹

When he wrote to Cardinal Francesco Fransoni, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, this same theme occurs repeatedly. The specific task of the Oblates, he said in a letter, is "to launch an assault against the infidels."¹⁰ In another letter to Propaganda: "to [...] achieve their goal which is to undertake the conversion of the numerous infidels, more than 1 million, in Ceylon."¹¹

Father Constant Chounavel, as you know, succeeded in bringing a number of Buddhists to Christianity. When Mazenod learned this, he said that this was the achievement of his most beautiful dream.¹² For an Oblate is made to evangelize. Evangelization is his specific vocation. To announce the Good News to the unhappy ones who do not yet know Him - this task is set aside for the Congregation of the Oblates. And he compared his missionaries, who worked in Jaffna, with the Italian Silvestrines of Colombo who had not entered their order to go to the missions.¹³ Thus it was in an improper sense of the word that they called themselves missionaries. They "The priests ... are unfit to bear the name of missionaries. They [...] follow a routine which is not sufficient to bring about the conversion of infidels."¹⁴

It would not be difficult to compile an extensive list of citations from the letters of Bishop de Mazenod that would clearly indicate that he saw the conversion of the pagans as the primary objective of the Oblates who left for Ceylon. For example, when he suggested that Father Christophe Bonjean apply for subsidies from the Holy Childhood, he advised him to emphasize strongly that he was working for the conversion of the Buddhists, from whom he baptized the children that he would later educate.¹⁵ He repeatedly called his missionaries "evangelical workers". They had to work "for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls", "to save the unhappy unbelievers from the darkness and the shadow of death." What he indicated in the Rule as "docere quis sit Christus" is described in many letters as "your wonderful mission of making Jesus Christ known, and extending his kingdom as you walk in the footsteps of the Apostles"¹⁶; he marvelled at "the zeal of so many priests and religious working throughout the world to preach the Gospel truth and proclaim God and His Son Jesus Christ our Lord."¹⁷ He reminded the missionaries never to forget that they were called "to bring to the love of our lovable Saviour degenerate people who serve him so badly

and so late and to make him known to all those pagans who are sleeping so near to you in the sleep of death."¹⁵ He spoke over the sublimeness of this vocation : to open the eyes of the pagans to the light of Christ.

Bishop de Mazenod was very much concerned about the health of his missionaries. A recurring theme is that of the care they had to take to never work beyond their strength.¹⁹ But, on the other hand, we note that he, almost paradoxically, thought it self-evident that a missionary who was doing pioneering work had to accept the dangers of his vocation. This risk was justified by the fact that, according to the ecclesiological thought of the time, the eternal salvation of millions of people was at stake. The missionaries were liable to catch tropical diseases or to become victims of the inhuman climate. In Ceylon, one often had to contend with cholera. From 1850 on, this disease struck severely, and, after 15 August, it was so bad that one could speak of a real epidemic. People died practically every day, and, in Jaffna alone, between 10 and 20 people.²⁰ There were victims also among the Oblates: Joseph Ciamin died from cholera on 10 November 1853; Félix Leydier died of cholera on 16 June 1855. Soon, on 15 May 1861, the first native Oblate, Brother Paul Poorey, died of a strange disease that was associated with high fever. Several Oblates, Bishop Semeria included vomited blood.²¹

To the dying Father Ciamin, Bishop de Mazenod wrote:

If the good Lord calls you to himself, what does it matter whether it is through the arrows of the infidel, death inflicted by a torturer, or the little fire of a sickness contracted in the exercise of the great ministry of preaching the gospel and calling souls to sanctity? The martyr who dies for charity will be rewarded no less than he who dies for the faith.²²

These words are not alien to our subject. They show that, notwithstanding his paternal concern for the health of his missionaries; Bishop de Mazenod took it as self-evident that they were prepared to put their lives at stake in order to expand the Kingdom of God. What inspired him is expressed very well in the study of Father M. Quéré:

The essential is the obsession of bearing the message of the Redeemer to the world, it is this apostolic charity that burned in the heart of Saint Paul and launched him on the roads of the Roman Empire to win souls for Christ.²³

The method and the techniques that were applied to attain this objective could be found lacking from the point of view of the achievements of modern mission theology.

The "extra Ecclesiam nulla salus" is no longer interpreted as in the 19th century, and Buddhism and Hinduism is seen in a more positive light than then. Today, too, a more ecumenical attitude prevails with respect to missionaries of other Christian confessions, and account is taken more now of the culture of peoples. Still, it is striking how some of the concrete directives that De Mazenod gave are in the line of what has now become self-evident. Thus he stressed the thorough mastery of Sinhala and Tamil. He wrote expressly to Fr. Semeria, who was in charge of the first group of missionaries in Ceylon and who was consecrated bishop in 1856: "Insist firmly that our missionaries learn the languages. This is an indispensable duty for them, and you yourself must apply yourself to it."²⁴ Moreover, he did not have a negative outlook on the training of a native clergy. But, on the basis of what Semeria wrote to him, he saw no native clergy in the near future. In any case in Semeria's *Diary*,²⁵ we can read that he hoped to produce priests from the boarding school that he established, but, twelve years later, he had to admit that his hope was still unfulfilled. In any case, that de Mazenod cherished a real hope for a native clergy can be discerned from his insistence that the first candidate who applied to become an Oblate be given the opportunity to do theological studies. Poorey, however, died before he could complete these studies.²⁶ The first native Ceylonese to go through the seminary and reach the priesthood was Saverimuttu Sandrasaga, and that was only in 1876.²⁷

It is possible that Bishop de Mazenod did not sufficiently appreciate that his small group of missionaries were also responsible for the neglected Catholic population or that he at least regretted that the greatest part of their effort had to be devoted to them. But they were actually responsible for the entire population. Missions were preached for the Catholics on the Island of Kayts, in Valigamam, Trincomalee, Batticaloa, and Jaffna. Confraternities were established. All of this was not without success, but – as we have already noted – the primary intention of the Founder in sending missionaries to Ceylon was the conversion of the non-Christians, the preaching of the Good News so that ever more people could give glory to God. They were the poorest of the poor, because Christ was unknown to them. He never wrote a theoretical treatise on the subject, but the attitude that he adopted, the directives and the inspiration he gave, were of such a nature that it is clear that he meant primarily the preaching of the Good News among the pagans when he spoke of the evangelization of Ceylon. If the hoped for result was achieved only very partially, this was not only because the number of missionaries hardly sufficed for the work among the existing Christian communities but also because Christianity was felt to a greater or lesser degree as a Western and thus alien importation – a situation that was not unique to Ceylon in the 19th century.

The mission *ad paganos* on which the Founder laid so much stress met with little success in his lifetime. Bishop Semeria in 1857 conceived a plan to make someone based in Kurunegala available to devote himself exclusively to the conversion of the Buddhists, but was obliged to abandon it for several reasons, not the least being the shortage of missionaries. It would only be carried out by his successor, Bishop Bonjean. In 1878, Bonjean wrote a tractate for his missionaries entitled *De infidelibus et hæreticis evangelizandis* in which he primarily stressed the salvific will of God for the pagan peoples and the responsibility the Church had for them. He also spoke about the way in which non-Christians could be brought to faith in Christ and dealt with the catechumenate and contacts with the newly converted. The book was the fruit of many years of experience and was written with the express intention of providing guidelines for those concerned particularly with the apostolate among the pagans.

The missionary who had the most success in this area was Father Chounavel.²⁸ In the villages around Wennapuwa, where Chounavel was assigned in 1875, he began to address the non-Christians directly. Inside of a year, he was able to baptize 44 adults and 21 children. A year later, we find him in Talampitiya, not far from Kurunegala. He had already acquired the reputation of being the "Apostle to the Buddhists", and Bishop Bonjean was convinced that the movement of conversion was well begun and would go further.²⁹ At the end of 1876, Chounavel was excused from all other work in order to occupy himself exclusively with the Buddhists of the Chilaw District.³⁰ The official document appointing him missionary *ad paganos* and giving him special faculties regarding such things as dispensations of marriage impediments is dated 2 April 1879.³¹

One could get the impression that the explicit wish of the Founder, the evangelization of the non-Christians, was about to be fulfilled thanks to the involvement of Father Chounavel, who seemed to have a special charism for the apostolate among the Buddhists. Father Chounavel's efforts, however, did not produce the expected results. In a report on his activities,³² he concluded that a direct approach to the Buddhists offered little chance of success. He stated that he was everywhere received with honour and, because the people listened to him avidly, he thought that they would be receptive to the Good News. But this was not to be the case. They were silent out of politeness and remained cool and indifferent to Christianity. Chounavel also mentioned the difficulty of gathering them together except in large centres such as Kandy or Kurunegala, and he stressed that a Buddhist alienated himself from his own culture if he converted. Cases were known of Buddhists converting to Christianity merely to spite

their Buddhist opponents. Chounavel concluded that the indirect method was still the best way to accomplish something among the Buddhists: one had to establish oneself in an area where there already were Christians and carefully see to it that they could function like yeast in the dough.

Consequently, the success of the mission among the non-Christians may not be exaggerated. From 1868 to 1881, only 3623 adults in all were baptized in the Jaffna Vicariate.³³

Although one or more missionaries were always assigned to the apostolate *ad paganos* –and this was also the case in the Colombo Vicariate, which was entrusted to the Oblates in 1883 – Bishop de Mazenod's dream was not fulfilled. As I have argued in more detail elsewhere,³⁴ there is no doubt that the primary reason for this is that Christianity never became authentically Ceylonese. Its concrete form and its approach contained something that prevented this from ever occurring. Not only did the rigid policy originating in Rome and the canonical prescriptions leave little room for adaptation, the form of Christianity that was preached did not lend itself to interpretation in terms of the particular Ceylonese character. It seemed obvious to the missionaries that the Ceylonese would adopt Western norms, and the Western form of Christianity was taken to be definitive and unchangeable, without a conscious decision ever having been made on the matter. There was never a real encounter between the Christian faith and the Ceylonese soul. Manifesting a very natural instinct for self-preservation, Ceylon refused to abandon its own identity. The missionaries, therefore, were always seen to be aliens. Father Coudert, who worked in the southern portion of the Island and who later became the Archbishop of Colombo, noted in 1888 that the Buddhist who converted exiled himself, as it were, from his own social milieu with all the attendant consequences: he would be pointed at in public, no longer be able to find work, have family difficulties, and so on.³⁵

What conclusions can we draw from the information at our disposal?

For Bishop de Mazenod, the evangelization of Ceylon meant primarily the preaching of the Good News to the non-Christians : "docere quis sit Christus". For the accomplishment of this objective, the missionaries had to give everything, even their lives if necessary. Keeping alive and cultivating already existing Christian units was encouraged, but secondarily.

Because of the perennial shortage of missionaries, the Oblates in Ceylon, nevertheless, had to limit themselves for a long time to the pastoral care of the Christians, but when they did embark on a specific mission *ad paganos*, starting with Father Chounavel, they had only limited success. One of the reasons for this may certainly be sought in the fact that little importance was given to a positive approach to Buddhism or Hinduism. A rather paternalistic although very magnanimous attitude prevailed toward the non-Christians, while Rome allowed little leeway for giving Christianity an authentically Ceylonese form.

3. The greatest credit of the missionaries seems to me to have been their profound sense of mission. Notwithstanding much pettiness, it is clear that they were driven by an authentic desire to make Christ known, "for the greater glory of God". This was explicit in the vision of the Founder and was clearly expressed in the Oblate Rule. The way in which this evangelization was carried out was determined by the circumstances of the time.

Among the other major problems that I do not have time to go into here was the tension between the spiritual life of the missionaries and their apostolic labours. This problem was not peculiar to the Oblates alone, however, and all religious congregations

with an apostolic orientation had to contend with it.

Robrecht BOUDENS, O.M.I. *Leuven*.

NOTES:

- 1 Eugène m MAZENOD, *Letters to the S. Congregation of Propaganda Fide and to the Society of the Propagation of the Faith 1832-1861* (Rome: General Postulation, 1982), p. 304 (April 5, 1860).
- 2 March 20, 1850 (*ibidem*, p. 228). See also August 14, 1847 (*ibidem*, p. 209).
- 3 Eugène DE MAZENOD, *Letters to Ceylon and Africa 1847- 1850* (Rome: General Postulation O.M.I., 1980), p. 5, note 1.
- 4 Bishop de Mazenod to Father Etienne Semeria, February 21, 1849 (*ibidem*, p. 32).
- 5 IDEM to Father Semeria, January 17, 1850 (*ibidem*, p. 48).
- 6 To the Oblates of Ceylon, June 2, 1851 (*ibidem*, p. 66).
- 7 To the Oblates of Ceylon, January 31, 1857 (*ibidem*, p. 136).
- 8 To Father Semeria, September 10, 1851 (*ibidem*, p. 82).
- 9 To Bishop Semeria, July 8, 1860 (*ibidem*, p. 156).
- 10 To cardinal Giacomo Fransoni, July 21, 1853, in *Letters to the S. Congregation...*, p. 72.
- 11 To Bishop Alessandro Barnabd, October 5, 1853 (*ibidem*, p. 78).
- 12 To Bishop Semeria, October 10, 1857 (*loc. cit.*, p. 139).
- 13 To cardinal Barnabb, December 3, 1858: "In fact when did a Sylvestrian ever became a Sylvestrian to go to the missions among the infidels", in *Letters to the S. Congregation...*, p. 127.
- 14 To cardinal Bamabb, July 4, 1860 (*ibidem*, p. 137).
- 15 Bishop de Mazenod to Bishop Semeria, February 18, 1860 (*loc. cit.*, p. 151). See also Bishop de Mazenod to the Holy Childhood, October 31, 1857 in *Letters to the S. Congregation*, p. 289.
- 16 To Father Semeria, January 25, 1848 (*loc. cit.*, p. 8). See also Bishop de Mazenod to Bishop Barnabè, April 8, 1853, to cardinal Fransoni, September 25, 1847 and December 18, 1853 and to cardinal Barnabè, December 3, 1858, in *Letters to the S. Congregation...*, pp. 16, 82, 118.
- 17 To cardinal Fransoni, November 6, 1843 (*ibidem*, pp. 9-10).
- 18 To the Oblates of Ceylon, November 17, 1851, in *Letters to Ceylon...*, p. 85.
- 19 See for example Bishop de Mazenod to Bishop Semeria, October 10, 1857, February 18, 1860 (*ibidem*, pp. 137, 152) and to Father Christophe Bonjean, October 16, 1858 (*ibidem*, p. 142).
- 20 Father Semeria to Bishop de Mazenod quoted in a letter of Bishop de Mazenod to Bishop Bamako?), October 20, 1850, in *Letters to the Sacred Congregation...*, p. 46.
- 21 Bishop de Mazenod to Bishop Semeria, October 10, 1857 (*loc. cit.*, p. 139).
- 22 To Father Ciamin, 26 January, 1854 (*ibidem*, p. 118).
- 23 Martin (Mkt, O.M.L., *Mgr de Mazenod et les missions étrangères* (doctoral dissertation, Rome, 1960), p. 80.
- 24 Bishop de Mazenod to Father Semeria, May 14, 1849 (*loc. cit.*, p. 39). See also the letters of May 9, 1848 and October 1, 1855 (*ibidem*, pp. 10, 160) and to cardinal Fransoni, March 1, 1853 (*loc. cit.*, p. 65).
- 25 Etienne SEMERIA, O.M.I. *Journal* (Copy of the original in Jaffna), 1860, pp. 367-368). See also Nicholas KOWALSKI, O.M.I., "Mgr Semeria, O.M.I., Apostolischer Vikar von Jaffna (1857-1868) zur Frage der einheimischen Klerus", in *Neue Zeitschrift f. Missionswissenschaft*, 7 (1951), pp. 273-281.
- 26 See Edmund PEIRIS, O.M.I., *Sri Lanka's First Oblate*, P.S. Poorey, (Maggon: 1975). See also Bishop de Mazenod to Bishop Semeria, July 6, 1860 (*loc. cit.*, p. 154).
- 27 Robrecht BOUDENS, O.M.I., *Catholic Missionaries in a British Colony: Success and Failure in Ceylon 1796- 1893* (Immense: Nouvelle Revue des Sciences missionnaires, 1979), p. 113.

- 28 Father Constant Chounavel was born in Socourt (France) on April 9, 1825. He left for Ceylon in 1852 and died in Colombo on August 23, 1923. See *Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 59 (1925), pp. 121-186.
- 29 Oblate General Archives, Rome, file Bonjean. Bishop Bonjean to Father Fabre, October 22 and December 11, 1876, January 22, 1877.
- 30 Bishop Bonjean to Father Lelons, December 14, 1876 (*ibidem*).
- 31 "... per præsentés eligimus et deputamus quatenus ea omnia facere possis quæ ad conversionem hujus gentis promovendam apta tibi et utilia videbuntur, ad normam tamen instructionum quas, pro variorum temporum necessitatibus, identidem ad te dirigendas curabimus". (Diocesan Archives of Colombo, I-3 Varia).
- 32 Oblate General Archives, Rome, file Chounavel. *Rapport sur l'essai d'évangélisation des Bouddhistes Kandiens*, 6 octobre 1879. See also Diocesan Archives of Colombo, 1-3, Varia, Father Chounavel to Bishop Bonjean, September 15, 1878.
- 33 Joseph ROMMERSKIRCHEN, O.M.I., *Die Oblatenmissionen auf der Insel Ceylon im 19. Jahrhundert (18147-1892...)* (Hünfeld, 1931), p. 115, note 31.
- 34 Robrecht BOUDENS, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, pp. 168-170.
- 35 Diocesan Archives of Colombo, A-c, Ambalangoda. Report of Father Antoine Coudert, O.M.I., September 6, 1888.

The Response of the Oblates in Western Canada to Bishop de Mazenod's perception of "Mission"

In this brief exposé, it is impossible to show in detail how, in the course of their history, the Oblates of Western Canada have been faithful to the Founder's thought. This study ends with the year 1885, one which marks an important phase in the history of the Church in the West.

After a quick review of Bishop de Mazenod's thought on evangelization, we will pass on to the history of the missions in the Canadian West, and afterwards study the thrust which animated the Oblates' activity.

I - Bishop de Mazenod and Evangelization.

The Founder's apostolic activity flows from his love of the Saviour as its source. This love, in turn, leads him to love the Church, the Saviour's beloved bride who is abandoned; and to love souls, especially the most neglected.¹ This motivated him to recruit companions and found a Congregation which would multiply and prolong his own activity.²

In the seminary, his desire was "to reawaken the faith" among the poor,³ and to devote himself to serve the Church because she was persecuted and abandoned.⁴ To achieve this, he was ready for everything:

"As long as we have not shed all our blood, we have nothing to say," he wrote to Father Tempier.⁵ This was putting the *usque ad internecionem* of the Rule into practice. This supposes that we make known Christ the Saviour by proclaiming the "Good News".⁶ From this initial intuition of cooperating with the Saviour,⁷ first in favour of the poor in his own native Provence, his ambition will soon embrace "the vast expanse of the earth".⁸

This desire to expand is therefore evident from the very outset, and it is only the small number of missionaries which limits their zeal. The flame burning within the Founder soon envelops his confrères: the issue is brought to the attention of the General Chapter. In fact, in the session of September 29, 1831, a resolution was studied and unanimously adopted expressing to the Founder the desire that some Oblates be sent to the foreign missions "as soon as he will judge the opportunity to be favourable".⁹ This was the official outcome of an old wish Bishop de Mazenod had expressed in a letter to Carlo Cardinal Pedecini, on December 30, 1825 when the Rules were being approved, that some members would gladly go and preach the Gospel to unbelievers.¹⁰

The "favourable" opportunity came at length in 1841 when Bishop Ignace Bourget of Montreal passed through Marseilles looking for apostolic workers. He had come to Europe in order "to get a certain number of Jesuits... to establish and serve the missions."¹¹ After having experienced several refusals in Paris, the Bishop received six men from the Founder who wrote in his *Diary*: "Here is a fine mission opening up before us".¹² And in a letter to Father Jean-Baptiste Honorat, the Superior of the group, he wrote: "Montreal is perhaps only the gateway leading the family to the conquest of souls in several countries¹³... .. I have always been a man of desires and some of them have been heard and fulfilled".¹⁴

The Founder's love for the Indians showed itself in a striking fashion three years

later when Father Honorat was hesitating to accept the foundation of Bytown (Ottawa): "You certainly need to be enterprising if you are called to the conquest of souls... How could you hesitate? What more beautiful mission than this! Ministry in the lumber camps, *missions to the Savages*, establishment in a city which is wholly of the future. But it is a beautiful dream coming true and you would have let it escape! The thought makes me shiver!"¹⁵ He will show the same impatience in regard to the West when he wrote to Father Joseph Bruno Guigues, Superior in Canada: "You cannot risk the great setback that you fear of seeing this mission taken away from you and of losing the opportunity, as you argue very well and rightly, of evangelizing the whole of North America ..."¹⁶ For the Founder, evangelizing the Indians is "a heavenly mission and we can hardly thank the Lord enough for having confided it to us".¹⁷

Even though he cannot resist a call in favour of the "strayed sheep" and "the most abandoned souls", he does recognize that the work is painful. He said, "It must be admitted that this mission to the Indians of Hudson Bay is more than purely natural strength can endure. Ceaseless miraculous aid is necessary if a man is not to succumb in it".¹⁸

The *Instruction on the Foreign Missions*¹⁹ was certainly written in the light of the experience Oblates had been living in various countries. The document affirms, in particular, that "foreign missions will be considered by us as a means of procuring God's glory, and as most appropriate in promoting the spread of religion, and in increasing the honour of our Congregation".²⁰ The missions also bring great merit and are a source of spiritual good for the souls who are converted and those maintained in their faith.

After listing the required qualities,²¹ he adds: "The members of our Congregation will not refuse to undertake the task of teaching young men, whether clerical or not, besides their religious duties the divine and the human sciences".²² They must study "the sciences more appropriate to their vocation",²³ visit the most abandoned tribes,²⁴ compose a "summary of Christian doctrine in the language of the natives"²⁵ and produce illustrated catechisms. In short, they will use every means to present Christian doctrine to them in a good light, "in order that the doctrine may be more vividly impressed in the mind and more firmly retained in the memory".²⁶ We must give them a sense of temperance,²⁷ "train the inhabitants of the woods to the duties of civil life", for this is "intimately connected to the mission's welfare... Every means should therefore be taken to bring the nomad tribes to abandon their wandering life, and to select places in which they may learn to build houses, cultivate fields and practice the elementary crafts of civilized life... In every mission, as far as possible, a school should be opened, where... the children will be taught the elements of Christian doctrine and at the same time receive a suitable training in the human sciences and the civil arts".²⁸ Finally, they will be concerned about peaceful relationships between the tribes²⁹ and assure good order in elections within different tribes.³⁰

Such, according to the Founder, is the work awaiting the missionary. Nevertheless, we must not forget that, for bringing people to a spiritual regeneration, the ministry of the Word is the ministry «par excellence»³¹ and also keep in mind that we pledge ourselves «to all the works of zeal which priestly charity can inspire»³²

II - The Apostolic Activity of the Oblates in the West.

Father Albert Perbal says that the mission in Western Canada at Red River "became the most important, the most glorious and the best known by the general public".³³ For his part, Bishop de Mazenod wrote his sons in the diocese of St. Boniface that each year on his birthday, August 1, he received an incurable mortal wound. "It does not matter, I will have the consolation of leaving behind me a phalanx of good

missionaries who spend their lives in extending the kingdom of Jesus Christ... Live for God and for the Church, for the sanctification of the poor heathen, for the Congregation to which you give honour, in return for the favour that she does you in welcoming you into her bosom".³⁴

When they were established in Canada in 1841, from the very outset the first Oblates there were dreaming of the day when they would be able to dedicate themselves to the apostolate among the Indians.³⁵ This time came in 1844 upon the initiative of Bishop Norbert Provencher of Red River :³⁶ he persuaded the Archbishop of Quebec to call the Oblates for the Indian missions of his diocese.³⁷ He had been suffering from the little success achieved by the secular clergy of his diocese.³⁸ he had never had more than four priests at one time. He wanted the Oblates for Red River: in his view, this was the only way to get something done.³⁹ His request was approved by the General Council on December 16, 1844; it had been made through the intermediary of Bishop Bourget on October 10, 1844⁴⁰ who had described the mission as "a wonderful mission... one not to be passed up."

Father Guigues was enthusiastic at first,⁴¹ then began to hesitate ;⁴² and it is at this point that the Founder intervened authoritatively⁴³: two Oblates, Father Pierre Aubert and deacon Alexandre Taché left for the West on June 25, 1845 and arrived at their destination on August 25 after having made a trip of over 3000 kilometers. The welcome they received was a bit cool. Seeing the young Taché, the Bishop is supposed to have muttered, "Children they send me! Here it is men we need!"⁴⁴ and also, "If you are not a priest, you should have stayed at home",⁴⁵ The Bishop soon changed his tune and wrote to Quebec: "Tachés and Laflèches⁴⁶ you can send me without any worry".⁴⁷

After spending some months studying the Saulteux language and looking after the Métis and the Whites in the colony,⁴⁸ they undertook Indians missions at Wabassimong, Duck Bay and Lac La Pluie,⁴⁹ as well as the care of the Buffalo hunters on the prairies.

As early as 1846 Father Taché is sent with the abbé Louis Richer Laflèche to found Ile à la Crosse, some 300 leagues to the north.⁵⁰ This, for the Oblates, is the real beginning of the missionary life with its sufferings as detailed by Bishop Taché: the long, never ending trips in all kinds of weather, ignorance of the languages and lack of grammars and dictionaries, incertitude of success which sometimes creates the impression one is working in vain.⁵¹

From the mission of Ile à la Crosse, surnamed "the cradle of the bishops of the West",⁵² to which they had been sent with the assignment "of going as far as possible to carry the good news of salvation to the savages of the North-West".⁵³ Father Taché visited Caribou Lake during the winter⁵⁴ and the very next year came to Lake Athabasca.⁵⁵ So began the epic which led the Oblates to the Arctic Circle in less than fifteen years. Thanks to the dedication of Fathers Taché, Faraud, Grandin, Grollier and Gascon, the missions rapidly multiplied along the course of the majestic MacKenzie River: For Resolution (1856), Grande Ile (1858), Fort Simpson (1858), Fort Rae (1859), Fort Liard (1860), Fort Halket (1861), and especially the mission of Fort Good Hope (1859) by Father Grollier, the great apostle of the North, Fort Norman (1859) and Fort McPherson (1860) for the Loucheux and the Eskimos. Soon the region was asking for a "bishop king"⁵⁶: Bishop Grandin will refer to him as the "Slave bishop".⁵⁷ This results in the appointment of Father Henri Faraud and the creation of the Vicariate of Athabasca / Mackenzie in 1862. The arrival of aggressive protestant ministers at that same time certainly stimulated the development of these distant missions.

It is also from Ile à la Crosse that the West received its first Oblate bishop: Father Taché whose appointment in 1850, made without the Founder's knowledge,⁵⁸ saved all the Western missions. The Founder, seeing that success was slow in coming, had been wondering whether he should leave his Oblates there.⁵⁹ The plan of Providence was

now evident, and the new Bishop of Red River⁶⁰ directed the destinies of the diocese for forty-one years and became one of the great bishops in the whole of Canada.

Besides Ile à la Crosse, another centre had been established from which one went forth into the prairies and the area of lesser Slave Lake. After receiving repeated calls and have made a reconnaissance trip into the area of Lac Sainte Anne, the abbé Jean Baptiste Thibault established a mission at Lac au Diable (Manito) in 1844. With him was the l'abbé Joseph Bourassa.⁶¹ L'abbé Thibault was replaced there by the abbé Albert Lacombe who was soon to become an Oblate. The missions' influence had extended over a vast territory covering Ile à la Crosse and Portage La Loche until 1846, Fort Edmonton and Lesser Slave Lake. L'abbé Bourassa left in 1853 and was replaced by Father René Rémas. Lac La Biche, which had been visited from Lac Sainte Anne since 1844, was attached to it in 1853 and Father Rémas became its first resident priest.

In spite of the enormous difficulties endured during this first period: poverty, hunger, struggle against Protestantism, the mission grew. The missionaries succeeded in learning the Indians languages and even published some works of piety in these dialects⁶²; taught reading and writing in syllabic characters, and did not neglect the poor. Thus, by the time of the Founder's death, the territory from St. Boniface to the Rockies, from the American boundary to the Arctic Ocean was occupied by our missionaries. The two Oblates of 1845 were now 30, two of whom were bishops,⁶³ 20 Fathers and 8 brothers spread over 8 parishes or missions in Red River and 7 resident missions and 2 in formation (Saint Albert and Fort Providence) outside of the colony.⁶⁴

This success of the Oblates' work is due to their supernatural spirit; we must not forget, however, that without the help, given reluctantly at times, of the Hudson Bay Company, the entire enterprise would have been utterly impossible.⁶⁵ The help also of the Grey Nuns of Montreal and their missions at Lac Sainte Anne⁶⁶ and Ile à la Crosse (1860) were a most beneficial influence.⁶⁷

The thrust given to these missions by Bishop de Mazenod continued with as much ardour and zeal even after his death. In 1864 the religious Vicariate of St. Boniface was partitioned to form that of Athabasca / Mackenzie, and then again that of Saint Albert in 1867. Bishop Grandin, coadjutor of Bishop Taché, became bishop of Saint Albert in 1871. Father Faraud, made bishop in 1862, received Father Isidore Clut as coadjutor on August 3, 1864.⁶⁸ In spite of these partitions, the diocese of St. Boniface still had a surface area twice that of all France.

In what remained of the diocese of St. Boniface, the work with the Whites and Métis of the area immediately surrounding the episcopal city continued. The bishop, who was promoted to archbishop in 1871, created three main centres to care for the Indians. After the first failures, these latter had been somewhat neglected in favour of the more promising and prosperous missions of the North.⁶⁹

Father Laurent Simonet in 1861 founded the mission of Saint Laurent to serve the Saulteux. This foundation was so successful that Archbishop Adélarde Langevin in 1898 stated that this part of the Vicariate had "made giant strides on the road to progress".⁷⁰ By 1887 there were 8 mission stations attached to the principal mission. The slow beginnings were now producing an abundant harvest.

The mission of Fort Alexander, begun in 1876, gave rise to the important post of Portage-au-Rat (Kenora) on the shores of Lake of the Woods. Here, in 1880, Father Lacombe opened the first chapel in "an old service wagon" of the Canadian Pacific Railway.⁷¹ This, too, was the first phase in the founding of several missions.

Finally, to the north, Qu'Appelle (Lebret) became a very important centre. First

visited by Bishop Provencher in 1824, it next received Bishop Taché in 1865 and he promised the people to send them a priest. He did this in 1866, and then entrusted the post to the Oblates in 1868.⁷² The Oblates served several Indian tribes from here, Métis and Whites, as well as the hunters on the prairies. This location became the site of one of the first industrial schools in the West, at which Father Joseph Huggonard devoted himself for many years. Several missions are off-shoots from this foundation.⁷³

Thus, during this period of the diocese's history, the missions to the Whites, Indians and Métis are further developed. The works also grow and advance in the episcopal city itself where the Oblates were in charge of the College until 1877. They were also for a long time responsible for Saint Joseph and Pembina in North Dakota. It is from this latter mission that Father Alexis André was called to be a peace envoy on behalf of the American Government. More of this below.

In 1888, the archdiocese counted 1 bishop, 2 secular priests, 67 Oblates (30 Fathers, 2 scholastics, and 25 Brothers), 58 women religious, 33 churches or chapels, 27 out-stations, 2 hospitals and 2 hospices.⁷⁴

The religious Vicariate of Athabasca/Mackenzie was detached from St. Boniface in 1864. Father Grollier, who died in the harness in 1864, had been for a long time suggesting a vicariate with its own bishop for the Far North. Bishop Faraud, who had been made a bishop in 1862, was named the religious Vicar in 1864.

Missionary activity rapidly increased and many missions received priests. Five of these were in the region of Lesser Slave Lake: the main one was Dunvegen in Alberta⁷⁵; Fort Providence was opened in 1862.

Efforts to reach the Eskimo, first made by Father Grollier in 1860 and 1861, were continued by the missions of Father Séguin at Peel River from 1862 to 1867. Next came Father Petitot who went on long expeditions as far as the area of Great Bear Lake. He has left us written accounts of his trips, writings which have made him famous not only because of his geographical discoveries but also for his works in anthropology and linguistics.⁷⁶ The apostolic results of all these efforts were very meager: it was not yet Providence's hour.

Efforts were also made to penetrate another vast region, Russian America or Alaska. Father Séguin spent the winter (1862-1863) at Fort Yukon; Father Petitot went there too, but uselessly.⁷⁷ Bishop Isidore Clut and Father Auguste Lecorre in 1872-1873 went on an expedition to Alaska and reached the Bering Sea. They afterwards learned that this territory belonged to the diocese of Vancouver Island (Victoria), and so they withdrew. *Propaganda Fide* has several times asked the Oblates to take charge of this territory; the Superiors, however, faced with a shortage of personnel, had to decline.⁷⁸

In all of this territory we are here considering, the Oblates had much to suffer from poverty and had to accept superhuman sacrifices. The Brothers made a truly major contribution to the success of the missions, either in their maintenance, or in transportation, or in cultivation.⁷⁹ It would be unjust not to mention the extremely generous dedication of the Grey Nuns of Montreal who opened schools and hospitals at Fort Providence and Fort Chipewyan.⁸⁰ Nor can we pass over in silence the discreet but very beneficial part played by Bishop Clut who travelled from mission to mission at this time, giving advice and bringing comfort; the Bishop in office was kept at Lac La Biche because of his health.

We could also mention their efforts to make God's house as much as possible a place of beauty. The chapel at Fort Good Hope is a typical example: it is decorated with wood sculpture and paintings that cost twenty years of work and patience. The authorities of the land have declared it a historical monument.

In 1898, the Vicariate had 62 Oblates: 2 Bishops, 30 Fathers, 30 Brothers.⁸¹

Lastly, the religious Vicariate of Saint Albert was erected on March 20, 1868. Bishop Grandin took up residence within it the same year. It extended from the Rockies to the Hudson Bay and counted 14 Oblates established in 7 residences. Bishop Grandin became its Bishop in 1871.

The older residences were maintained: Ile à la Crosse,⁸² Lac Sainte Anne,⁸³ Saint-Joachim in Edmonton where Brother Constantine Scollen opened the first school,⁸⁴ St. Paul des Cris, started by Father Lacombe in 1866 in an effort to accustom the Indians to tilling the soil and thus rescue them from the famine which threatened because hunting game was disappearing from the prairies. It had to be abandoned because the Cree had no interest in tilling the soil. Lac La Biche became the headquarters for the Vicariate of Mackenzie: it facilitated transportation to the North.⁸⁵ The post at Lac Caribou was kept: from here Father René Gasté tried to reach the Eskimo territories of Hudson Bay in 1869.⁸⁶

It was during this period that the important mission of Saint Albert was founded; also that of Hobbema,⁸⁷ Calgary (1873) to serve the Blackfoot,⁸⁸ and Batoche⁸⁹ where our Fathers especially suffered because of the troubles in 1885. Seven churches or missions were destroyed or damaged on that occasion.⁹⁰ A residential school was opened at Dunbow, as well as a number of other mission stations.

The country was undergoing great changes due to the emigration to the West; to the construction of the railroad which brought a large number of settlers of different nationalities and who needed to be cared for; to the discontent of the Indians dispossessed of their lands and the creation of the reserves, which moved them to ask for priests in each one; to the anger of the Métis suffering from poverty, the source of the rebellion during which the Oblates played a role of pacification, often with success; to the struggles for Catholic schools, etc.

III - What Spirit Animated the Oblates?

We can say, in one word, and that without hesitation: keenly aware as they were of the sublime character of their vocation, they were working for the Church which was abandoned, for people who were materially and spiritually poor. They worked solely out of love for God and for the souls redeemed at the cost of Christ's Blood, hoping to lead them to the Saviour through knowledge of the Good News and the practice of the virtues. They were ready to sacrifice their ease and comfort, and to dedicate themselves unto exhaustion and death to extend the Kingdom to the farthest frontiers and to fight the enemy in his last outposts with firmness and meekness.

To achieve this, the Oblates became everything to everybody, arming themselves with courage and following in Christ's way which is that of Calvary. They became Jacks of all trades and undertook any work which was liable to improve the material and spiritual condition of their people.

Lastly, they found their joy and reward solely in serving the Lord, so much so that they were able to withstand everything and that Bishop Taché could rejoice in a letter to Father Pierre Aubert in that not a single Oblate under his jurisdiction had been unfaithful to his vocation.⁹¹

From everything that has been said thus far, we can readily understand that the entire region originally known under the title of the diocese of Red River was really a *regio depopulata*. For this whole area there were only four priests! When the Oblates penetrated the interior, they witnessed the abandoned condition of the Indians. On April 4, 1848, Father Taché described Ile à la Crosse as the centre of a vast region as large as France with a population of only some 2000 nomadic souls. He says: "Thus it

is that we have to look for the strayed sheep in these vast solitudes".⁹² He comes back to this same topic later. Describing a trip through the prairies where he had seen many animals wandering about, the Bishop shows he was preoccupied about something else: "In these prairies there are other wandering bands which fill my thoughts and capture my attention : I mean these poor savage nations, abandoned, without guides or shepherds, wandering along by chance through all the paths of vice and thus arriving at the horrendous abyss which swallows up their painful existence".⁹³ Pained by this situation, he begged the Founder to come and help him spread "the kind light of the Gospel." This same state of affairs existed everywhere.

The oblates are reminded of the sublime character of their vocation by their Father who thanked God for the marvellous things that were being accomplished through their ministry: "One has to go back to the first preaching of St. Peter to find anything similar. An Apostle like him, sent to proclaim the Good News to those savage nations, the first man to speak to them of God, to bring them to knowledge of Jesus the Saviour".⁹⁴

Father Taché, in trying to console his mother, gives us a faithful echo of this reflection when he draws a parallel between the soldier who fights for his country and the soldier of Christ: "Your son... has been chosen for this noble mission... Well, now! I ask you: is the lot of your son really such a miserable one? I appeal to your own judgment... especially to you as a Christian woman... Would the happiness of a Christian woman be less great when she saw her son, as a young soldier in the Lord's army who, seeing humanity engaged in combat with its most formidable foe, has armed himself with the Cross that saves and is running to the help of that portion, which is the most abandoned of mankind?"⁹⁵

In his relation of the life and death of Father Grollier, Father Jean Séguin, his companion, notes that the Father affirmed before his death: "The glory of God has been the only motive of my actions during my life, if it is still the glory of the Good God that I leave this earth, I do it very willingly." Father Séguin adds: "The glory of God and the salvation of souls were his only goal during his life and it is also the theme of his delirium."⁹⁶

That, in fact, ought to be the missionary's only motive. Bishop Taché said to Bishop de Mazenod: "What? Love for our divine Saviour would not bring here a certain number of Oblates, when love for a small monetary recompense floods the country with ministers of different Protestant sects", and the desire for gain brings many traders into it.⁹⁷ And to his mother: "Good Mother, it is so consoling to see God served and loved in these places where ten years ago even his supreme existence was, so to say, unknown ... How is it possible that I would not be satisfied in being a missionary ?"⁹⁸ And to his uncle: "I am always well, always happy to work for God's glory and for the salvation of my poor savages"⁹⁹

When consoling Father Clut, the Bishop told him, "Courage! You are working for that Jesus who, with his own soul sorrowful even unto death, isolated himself even from those who were to preach his Gospel... Our missions are so wonderful: souls are so precious in the eyes of God ..."¹⁰⁰

Father André wanted to know the Indians languages well in order to introduce the Indians to the knowledge of our holy religion: "And so I am quite determined to use the strength and health God has given me to make so good and so lovable a Saviour better known".¹⁰¹

It is in proclaiming the Good News that Bishop Taché finds his joy. "I assure you that I do not regret the kind of work which fills my days: working for God; working to make him known and loved by the poor savages who are opening their hearts to his grace. I assure you, there is a joy here which one can appreciate properly only when

one tastes its sweetness".¹⁰²

As is clear, they were ready to undertaking anything for the salvation of poor souls redeemed at the cost of Christ's Blood. This expression comes from a letter of Father Taché to a confrère: "This mission¹⁰³ is not very important in terms of the number of savages; but even if there were only one, is his soul not worth the price of the Saviour's Blood, and could a missionary hesitate coming to his help?"¹⁰⁴ He repeats this to Father Faraud: "These poor souls have cost the Blood of our God and they are worthy of our sweat, fatigue, & &"¹⁰⁵; and he exhorts him to instruct his flock well.

This instruction is given in different forms: missions, catechisms, visits to home, during free time and during the great hunt on the prairies.¹⁰⁶

For many - and we see this in the manuscripts and prayer books which remain - catechism by questions and answers was considered the great means for instructing the Indians.¹⁰⁷ The Catholic ladder,¹⁰⁸ picture catechisms, or pictures alone were used. Bishop Grandin sends Father Faraud some "chosen" pictures and "beautiful devils", adding: "I myself reap great benefit therefrom. With me the Devil has become a missionary. He makes the priest feared and respected, and he also reconciles spouses".¹⁰⁹ Father Végréville deems that "pictures are the best book for the savages".¹¹⁰ They were put up in rooms, the Indians would look at them and ask many questions, thus providing the opportunity for a more detailed catechesis. The Indians, moreover, put them up in their tents.¹¹¹

Through catechism and various other means the missionaries tried to root out vices and lead them to the practice of virtues. Many documents insist on the difference there is in the conduct of these poor people before the proclamation of the Gospel and after their conversion.¹¹² To help them persevere and show them the importance of fidelity, the missionaries did not hesitate to use "public penance"; at the same time, with firmness, they manifest great understanding. "I think we have been judging too much according to the principle that our evangelized savages ought to be perfect. Our poor neophytes are human beings and we want them to be without weaknesses! They are, moreover, savages and we would like them to have all the refinements of civilization!"¹¹³

A pernicious vice introduced by white traders became the target of the priests: the abuse of alcohol. There is a lot of evidence showing that their efforts bore fruit. Bishop Taché declares himself quite satisfied with the progress in temperance made in the region of St. Boniface.¹¹⁴ The Hudson Bay Company agent at Ile a la Crosse said that Bishop Grandin was doing all in his power to promote temperance; a number of the Montagnais and Company employees had given up this detestable habit.¹¹⁵

The spirit of thrift was encouraged in the territory¹¹⁶ as well as the life of settlement. As we have seen above, an attempt was made to interest the Cree in tilling the soil, but without success.¹¹⁷ Bishop Grandin regretfully recognized that achieving this was very difficult: "The adult savages will never dedicate themselves to tilling the soil: that is a condition which is too contrary to their way of life".¹¹⁸ To succeed in this, the little children would have to be taken and formed in knowledge and work at the same time. This method will be tried later in the industrial and residential schools.

School was a constant concern. Bishop Taché improved the Collège de Saint-Boniface by bringing the Brothers of the Christian Schools into it in 1852; and, when the Brothers left, he confided it to the Oblates. The missionaries also gave classes in their residences or in the forts of the Company. Father Jean Tissot of Lac La Biche

told Bishop de Mazenod, "Schools for both sexes are a prime necessity".¹¹⁹ They would deliver the final blow to superstition and would roll back the pernicious taste for being a vagabond which "while depriving them of temporal success, deprives them of a yet more precious good, namely, spiritual success." As for the women, school would teach the things which are indispensable to their constitution : how to manage a household, how to use possessions economically.

Bishop Grandin also saw the need for specialized schools. "Special schools are needed for the savages, schools where other things besides reading and writing are learned, schools which would give education in family living, something which the savages totally lack".¹²⁰ Thanks to the joint efforts of Bishop Taché and Grandin and Father Lacombe, the first Catholic industrial schools supported by the Government and under the direction of the Fathers and the Sisters were established in 1884. This system will last until the mid 1960s.

Another problem for the Oblates was maintaining peace between the different Indian tribes and between the Indians and the Whites. Several Fathers became peace-makers, as the *Instruction on Foreign Missions* urged. Father Grollier succeeded in restoring peace between the Loucheux and the Eskimos, who were implacable enemies. On the day of the exaltation of the Holy Cross in 1860, he invited them to the foot of the Crucifix and had them promise to help each other in the future... "and thus the Cross became the hyphen between myself, a children from the Mediterranean shores, and the inhabitants of the icy shores of the Polar Sea".¹²¹

In January 1861 Father Lacombe stopped the fighting between the Cree and the Blackfoot.¹²² Father Jean-Marie Caer did same in 1863.¹²³ Father André worked as an agent of the American Government to restore peace between the Sioux and the State in 1863-1865, and was thereafter shamefully betrayed by the military authorities.¹²⁴ Bishop Taché returned from the Vatican Council in 1870 at the Government's request to restore peace; he worked for the same goal in 1885, and he too was betrayed by promises made by the authorities and then not kept. Father Lacombe hindered the shedding of blood during the construction of the railroad in 1883¹²⁵, and in 1885 he was successful in keeping the Indians on the side of the authorities.¹²⁶ In spite of all these efforts, Fathers Léon Fafard and Félix Marchand fell under rebels' bullets at Frog Lake on April 2, 1885, and some Fathers were wounded during the battle of Batoche.

What made it possible for the Oblates to have a deciding influence in regard to the native peoples was in large part due to their knowledge of the different languages. Studying the languages was their first concern when they arrived in the West¹²⁷ and, regardless of the inherent difficulties, they saw it as especially useful.¹²⁸ They published prayer books in the languages of quite a number of tribes¹²⁹ and today's specialists must have recourse to these in order to study the language concerned.

In order to make the Good News known, they were ready for everything, and did not fear to sacrifice their ease and comfort for a life of constant poverty and difficulty, being badly housed and badly fed. Father Grollier said to Bishop Grandin, "If I am refused hospitality, tell me to go and live with the savages".¹³⁰

In a difficult time when, due to lack of means, there was the threat of having to close the mission at Ile à la Crosse, Fathers Taché and Faraud beg their Superior, Father Pierre Aubert, to leave them there; they will be satisfied if they have hosts and wine for the holy Sacrifice; as for their sustenance, they will live in Indian fashion.¹³¹

Bishop Taché, replying to Father Faraud who had complained about being ill, begs him to stay at his post for the salvation of the poor souls who "have cost our

Lord so much, when they also cost you the pain of being useful to them ... You ought not to be sad... Calvary is the road to heaven".¹³²

For the same reasons, the Fathers were determined to go to the very end of the world. Their joy was incomplete until the day they reached the polar circle. On October 1857 Bishop Taché wrote to Father Fabre that Father Grollier had gone some 800 leagues from St. Boniface, for one hand had to be extended to the Eskimos of the North Pole and the other to the savages of Russian America.¹³³ Father Grollier, for his part, dies filled with joy: "Now I die content, for I have seen the standard of our Lord raised at the farthest point of the earth. Oh, yes! I am content ! very content!"¹³⁴

Life does not count in comparison to the salvation of souls. When he was sick, Father Grollier said, "Our death will be all the more a consolation if we breathe our last with our arms in our hands... Let us not have any other desire than to continue the combat until our last sigh!"¹³⁵ To Ross, the official of Hudson Bay Company he said, "Because the work to which God has called me is not a human enterprise, no danger can stop me; for I do not value my life more than the salvation of souls".¹³⁶

In Bishop Grandin's view, Father Grollier died as a missionary: "The first Oblate to die in these lands... died as an Oblate. He died in the greatest poverty, without a doctor, without medicines, without even being able to have a drop of milk or a potato, 'luxuries' a person can hope for in certain parts of the country. He died, so to speak, in the act of instructing the savages ...".¹³⁷

The missionaries found their consolation in their work for God. "The missions offer consolations that are difficult to fathom," ¹³⁸ Bishop Taché noted. He wrote to Father Faraud, "What surprises me is the joy and satisfaction I am experiencing in a land which has so little that is interesting in itself... It is really true that a person finds himself well anywhere where he is doing God's will".¹³⁹ He also write to his mother, "Long live the North! I think it is the country in the world where one learns most effectively and most practically how little is really needed to make a person happy".¹⁴⁰

The texts are so numerous we would never end were we to quote them all. Elsewhere he says again: "I love Athabasca: not, to be sure, because of the pleasures this country's nature offers... but because here, perhaps more than in any other place, I have tasted the holy consolations which flow from the awesome ministry entrusted to me" ¹⁴¹ and "a missionary should find powerful encouragement in his state of life".¹⁴² Finally, as a summing up, Bishop Taché said to his mother on October 10, 1855, "To others, other joys; for me, the consolations of my holy ministry are sufficient for my happiness and for my ambition".¹⁴³

This is, I believe, the way the Oblates of the Canadian West responded to the expectations of that great apostle, Blessed Eugene de Mazenod.

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NOTES:

1 See Fernand JETTÉ, O.M.I., "Esprit oblat et Règles oblates", in *Études Oblates*, 21 (1962), pp. 3-31, 130-153 *passim*; "La mission ad Gentes et les Oblats", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 38 (1979), pp. 85-91; "Evangelizing in the Charism of de Mazenod", (*ibidem*, 38 (1979), pp. 86-91).

2 Donat LEVASSEUR, O.M.I., "La visée missionnaire de Mgr Charles-Joseph-Eugène de Mazenod", in *Études Oblates*, 30 (1971), pp. 150-169, *passim*.

3 Letter to his mother, June 29, 1908 (Archives of the Postulation, Rome).

4 Letter to his father, December 7, 1814 (*ibidem*).

- 5 August 22, 1817 (*ibidem*).
- 6 Donat LEVASSEUR, O.M.I., *art. cit.*, p. 157.
- 7 Fernand JETRÉ, O.M.I., "Le Bienheureux Eugène de Mazenod. De la mission populaire à la mission "ad Gentes", in *Vie Oblate Life*, to be published.
- 8 *Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires dit de Provence* (Honorat Manuscript, p. 5) in *Études Oblates*, 2 (1943), p. 4.
- 9 *Registre des Chapitres généraux*, vol. 1, p. 32 (Oblate General Archives, Rome).
- 10 *Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 70 (1936), p. 501. Father Hippolyte Guibert had already on October 17, 1831 suggested to the Founder that some Fathers be sent to the diocese of New York; he assured the Founder that there were Fathers ready to go at the first indication (Achille REY, O.M.I., *Histoire de Monseigneur Charles-Joseph-Eugène de Mazenod, Évêque de Marseille, Fondateur de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée* (Rome: Maison générale, 1928), vol. 1, pp. 534-535.
- 11 "Relation du voyage de l'évêque de Montréal en Europe", in *Registre des Lettres* vol. 9, p. 292 (Diocesan archives of Montreal).
- 12 July 12, 1841.
- 13 The Oblates of Canada furnished missionaries for the missions of the Canadian Arctic, Texas, Philippines, South Africa, Haiti, Sri Lanka, and several Latin American countries.
- 14 Eugène DE MAZENOD, *Letters to North America 1841-1850* (Rome: General Postulation, 1978), vol. 1, p. 16.
- 15 March 1, 1844, (*ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 79). We underline.
- 16 December 5, 1844, (*ibidem*, vol. 1, pp. 111-112).
- 17 To Father Guigues, September 25, 1844 (*ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 106).
- 18 To Father Guigues, January 25, 1844 (*ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 3).
- 19 "Appendix de exteris missionibus. Instructio"... in *Constitutions et Regular...*, 1853, pp. 167-182. We are using the English edition *Instruction of our Venerated Founder on Foreign Missions* (Rome: General House, 1936). For an analysis of the document, see Willie HENKEL, O.M.I., "The Mind and Heart of Blessed Eugene de Mazenod according to the Instruction on Foreign Missions", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 36 (1977), pp. 165-176.
- 20 Page 4. See also his letter to Father Pascal Richard, December 6, 1851, in *Letters to North America*, vol. 2, p. 29.
- 21 *Instruction...*, p. 6.
- 22 *Ibidem*, p. 6.
- 23 *Ibidem*, p. 9.
- 24 *Ibidem*, p. 12.
- 25 *Ibidem*, p. 12.
- 26 *Ibidem*, p. 12.
- 27 *Ibidem*, p. 13.
- 28 *Ibidem*, p. 14.
- 29 *Ibidem*, p. 14.
- 30 *Ibidem*, p. 14.
- 31 Émilien LAMIRANDE, O.M.I., "Saisir tout le bien qu'on nous propose", in *Études Oblates*, 22 (1963), p. 429.
- 32 Règles (1828 edition) in *Missions... des... Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 78 (1951), p. 344, 1. 8-10.
- 33 "Les missions acceptées par Mgr de Mazenod de 1841 à 1861", in *Études Oblates*, 22 (1963), pp. 241-242.
- 34 May 25, 1854, in *Letters to North America*, vol. 2, p. 75.

- 35 See Gaston CARRIÈRE, O.M.I., "Les pères du Canada et les missions indiennes", in *Histoire documentaire de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée dans l'Est du Canada* (Ottawa: Éditions de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1961), vol. 3, pp. 157-164.
- 36 Bishop Provencher knew Bishop de Mazenod, having met him at the Séminaire des Missions Étrangères de Paris in 1836 (Albert PERBAL, O.M.L., "Les missions acceptées par Mgr de Mazenod de 1841 à 1861" in *Études Oblates*, 22 (1963), p. 242).
- 37 Norbert Provencher to Bishop Pierre-Flavien Turgeon, April 19, 1844 (Quebec diocesan archives, RR II, 225).
- 38 In 26 years, he had obtained 12 secular priests for his immense territory. Most of them stayed for one, two, five or ten years, then "exhausted or disgusted", returned to the diocese of Québec (Dom Paul BENOIT, C.R.I.C., *Vie de Mgr Taché archevêque de St-Boniface...*, (Montréal: Librairie Beauchemin, 1904), vol. 1, p. 53).
- 39 To Abbé Félix Cazeau, June 30, 1844 (Québec diocesan archives, RR. IV-20).
- 40 *Registre des Lettres*, vol. 4, pp. 432-433 (Montreal diocesan archives).
- 41 See Bishop de Mazenod to Father Guigues, December 5, 1844, in *Letters to North America*, vol. 1, p. 111.
- 42 *Ibidem*.
- 43 Mazenod to Guigues, May 24, 1845 (*ibidem*, vol. 1, pp. 118-119).
- 44 Dom Paul BENOÎT, C.R.I.C., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 86-87.
- 45 "Quelques notes sur les commencements de l'histoire religieuse de ce pays; résumé des conférences données par Mgr Taché du 15 déc. 1881 à la fin de mai 1882 au collège de Saint-Boniface, in *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, 38 (1939), p. 158.
- 46 Dom Paul BENOÎT, C.R.I.C., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 87. Bishop Provencher had at first wanted Fr. Lafèche to be his coadjutor, but the latter's health ruled this out. He later became the bishop of Trois Rivières, Québec.
- 47 Dom Paul BENOÎT, C.R.I.C., *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 87.
- 48 Joseph-Étienne CHAMPAGNE, O.M.I., *Les missions catholiques dans l'ouest canadien (1818-1875)...*, (Ottawa: Editions des Etudes Oblates; Editions de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1949), p. 73; Alexandre TACHÉ, O.M.I. *Vingt années de missions dans le nord-ouest de l'Amérique* (Montréal: Eusèbe Senécal, 1866), pp. 11-14.
- 49 Gaston CARRIÈRE, O.M.I., "The Oblates and the Northwest: 1845-1861", in *The Canadian Catholic Historical Association*, 37 (1970), pp. 38-39; "The Early Efforts of the Oblate Missionaries in Western Canada", in *Prairie Forum*, 4 (1979), pp. 4-5.
- 50 The trip lasted from July 8 to September 10.
- 51 À MM. les directeurs, Saint-Boniface, July 16, 1888, pp. 4-12 (Archives of the Propagation de la Foi, Paris, file F. 193a Saint-Boniface).
- 52 Three Oblate Bishops of the West had done ministry at Ile à la Crosse: Bishops Taché, Vital Grandin and Henri Faraud.
- 53 Alexandre TACHÉ, O.M.L., *Vingt années de missions...*, p. 12.
- 54 Alexandre Taché, O.M.I., to Bishop de Mazenod, April 4, 1848, quoted by Dom Paul BENOIT, C.R.I.C., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 123. See also Alexandre TACHÉ, O.M.L., *Notice sur la mission du Lac Caribou* (Oblate Provincial Archives, Edmonton).
- 55 Alexandre TACHÉ, O.M.I., "Notes sur la mission d'Athabaska", in *Registre des baptêmes de la mission de Fort Chipewyan*. There is also a copy of these notes in the diocesan archives of Saint-Boniface.
- 56 Due to making a comparison with the Governor of the Hudson Bay Company, the "king" of the territory.
- 57 Bishop Vital Grandin, O.M.I., to Bishop Alexandre Taché, September 29, 1861, in *Oeuvres de Mgr Grandin*, vol. 9.
- 58 Bishop Provencher's letter suggesting Father Taché, dated November 29, 1849, remained en route at Montreal (Diocesan archives of Montreal, RCD 132) and never did get to Marseilles. The text of this letter is reproduced in *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, 20 (1921), pp. 154-155.
- 59 See Bishop de Mazenod to Bishop Taché, January 19, 1851, in *Letters to North America*, vol. 2, p. 9) and to Bishop Bourget, April 16, 1850 (*ibidem*, vol. I, p. 241). See also Alexandre TACHÉ, O.M.I.,

Vingt années de missions..., p. 42.

- 60 Bishop Taché became residential bishop of Saint Boniface on June 27, 1853, at the death of Bishop Provencher.
- 61 Bishop Provencher to Bishop Bourget, June 26, 1844 (Diocesan archives of Montreal).
- 62 See Gaston CARRIÈRE, O.M.I., "Contribution des missionnaires à la sauvegarde de la culture indienne", in *Études Oblates*, 31 (1972), pp. 165-204; "Contribution des Oblats de Marie Immaculée de langue française aux études de linguistique et d'ethnologie du Nord canadien", in *Culture*, 12 (1951), pp. 213-226; "Une riche collection de manuscrits en langue indiennes", *ibidem*, 18 (1957), pp. 105-112; "Manuscrits en langues indiennes conservés aux archives historiques oblates, Ottawa", in *Anthropologica*, n.s. 12 (1970), pp. 151-179; "Imprimés en langues indiennes conservés aux archives historiques oblates, Ottawa", *ibidem*, 15 (1973), pp. 129-151.
- 63 Father Grandin had been appointed Coadjutor to Bishop Taché on December 21, 1857. See Gaston CARRIÈRE, O.M.I., "L'élévation du Père Vital-J. Grandin, o.m.i., à l'épiscopat", in *Études Oblates*, 32 (1973), pp. 100-134, 159-191.
- 64 Donat LEVASSEUR, O.M.I., *Histoire des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, (Montréal: Maison provinciale, 1983), vol. 1, p. 138. On all that period, see Gaston CARRIÈRE, O.M.I., "Fondation et développement des missions catholiques dans la Terre de Rupert et les Territoires du Nord-Ouest (1845-1861)", in *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa*, 41 (1971), pp. 253-281, 397-427.
- 65 Bishop Grandin wrote to Bishop Taché on September 29, 1861: "What can I say to you about the poor King-bishop? The title of Slave-bishop would be more fitting than King-bishop. The poor bishop of this area will of necessity be the very humble servant of the least district clerk; he will not be able to do anything without the Company, not even provide himself with the necessities of life." (Diocesan archives of Saint-Boniface). See also Gaston CARRIÈRE, O.M.I., "L'Honorable Compagnie de la Baie-d'Hudson et les missions de l'Ouest canadien", in *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa*, 36 (1966), pp. 15-39, 232-257.
- 66 The Sisters left St. Boniface on August 3, 1859 and arrived at Lac Sainte-Anne on September 24.
- 67 Sister Pépin to the Superior general, December 6, 1850 (General archives of the Grey Nuns of Montreal).
- 68 On the controversy raised by Father Clut's appointment, see Gaston CARRIÈRE, O.M.I., "Nomination du Père Isidore Clut, o.m.i., évêque d'Arindèle et auxiliaire de Mgr Henri Faraud, o.m.i., le 3 août 1864", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 35 (1976), pp. 51-78.
- 69 See Donat LEVASSEUR, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, p. 226 and Joseph-Étienne CHAMPAGNE, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, p. 129.
- 70 "Rapport du vicariat de Saint-Boniface au chapitre général de 1898" in *Missions... des... Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 36 (1898), pp. 282-283.
- 71 Katherine HUGHES, *Father Lacombe. The Black-Robe Voyageur* (New York: Moffat Ward and Company, 1911), p. 249; Norman Tynan O'MAHONEY, "Going West with the Rails", in *Missionary Record of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, 19 (1921), p. 386.
- 72 See "Vicariat de Saint-Boniface. Rapport de MO' Alex. Taché...", in *Missions... des Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 25 (1887), p. 153; Alexandre TACHÉ, O.M.L. *Vingt années de missions...*, pp. 268-269; A MM. les directeurs, July 16, 1888, p. 46 (Archives of the Propagation de la Foi de Paris, File 193a Saint-Boniface).
- 73 See Irenée TOURIGNY, O.M.I., "Le Père Joseph Hugonard, o.m.i.: Son œuvre apostolique", in *La Société canadienne d'Histoire de l'Église catholique. Rapport 1848-49*, pp. 23 ff; Gaston CARRIÈRE, o.m.i., *L'Apôtre des prairies. Joseph Hugonard, o.m.i...*, Montréal, Rayonnement, 1967, 172 pp.
- 74 Alexandre TACHÉ, O.M.I., À MM. les directeurs, July 16, 1888 (*loc. cit.*).
- 75 The old mission, now abandoned, has been made a historical site by the civil Province of Alberta.
- 76 See especially the monumental work of Donat SAVOIE, *The Amerindians of the Canadian Northwest in the 19th Century as seen by Émile Petitot* (Ottawa: Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1970), 2 vol.
- 77 André SEUMOTS, O.M.I., "Étapes historiques de la mission esquimaude", in *Prêtres et missions*, Québec, 29 (1954), pp. 294-295; Joseph-Étienne CHAMPAGNE, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, p. 121.
- 78 Gilles MOUSSEAU, O.M.I., "L'Affaire d'Alaska", À propos du voyage de M⁸ Clut dans l'Amérique russe, en 1872", in *Études Oblates*, 5 (1946), pp. 161-188; Joseph-Etienne CHAMPAGNE, O.M.I., "First Attempts at the Evangelization of Alaska", *ibidem*, 2 (1943), pp. 13-22. See also *Missions... des...*

- Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 60 (1936), pp. 108-114.
- 79 Pierre DUCHAUSSOIS, O.M.I., *Hidden Apostles...* (Inchicore, Dublin: Lourdes Messenger Office, 1937), pp. 199-200. Brother Alexis Reynard died a martyr to duty: around June 20, 1875, he was killed and eaten by his Iroquois guide.
- 80 Pierre DUCHAUSSOIS, O.M.I., *The Grey Nuns in the Far North (1867-1917)*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, [1919], 287 pp.
- 81 Donat LEVASSEUR, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 237.
- 82 See Germain LESAGE, O.M.I., *Capitale d'une solitude* (Ottawa, Editions des Etudes Oblates, 1946), 192 pp.
- 83 See Éméric DROUIN, O.M.I., *Lac Sainte-Anne, Sakahigan* (Edmonton: Editions de l'Ermitage, 1973), 96 pp.
- 84 Éméric DROUIN, O.M.I., "The Beginnings and Development of the Catholic Church in the Edmonton Area"..., in *Vie Oblate Life*, 40 (1981), pp. 209-250; 41 (1982), pp. 37-67.
- 85 See "Le Lac La Biche", in *Missions... des... Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 14 (1876), pp. 411-434.
- 86 "Lettre du R.P. Gasté à Monseigneur Grandin, 15 juillet 1869", *ibidem*, 9 (1870), pp. 333-335.
- 87 Paul-Emile BRETON, O.M.I., *Hobbema. Ongoing Indian Mission of Central Alberta* (Cardston, St. Mary's Indian School, 1968), 59 pp.
- 88 M. Bernice VENINI-BYRNE, *From the Buffalo to the Cross. A History of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Calgary* (Calgary: Calgary Archives and Historical Publishers, 1973), viii-555 pp.; Jules LE CHEVALLIER, O.M.I., *Esquisse sur l'origine et les premiers développements de Calgary (1873-1913)*, (Calgary: Paroisse Sainte-Famille, 1936), 164 pp.
- 89 Jules LE CHEVALLIER, O.M.I., *Batoche. Les missionnaires du nord-ouest pendant les troubles de 1885* (Montréal: L'Oeuvre de Presse dominicaine, 1941), 310 pp.
- 90 See Donat LEVASSEUR, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 243.
- 91 January 25, 1859, quoted by Dom Paul BENOÎT, C.R.I.C., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 384.
- 92 To Bishop de Mazenod, April 4, 1854 (*ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 123).
- 93 To Bishop de Mazenod, July 7, 1854 (Oblate General Archives, Rome),
- 94 To Father Faraud, May 28, 1857, in *Letters to North America*, vol. 2, p. 146.
- 95 January 4, 1851, in *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, 31 (1934), p. 48.
- 96 To Bishop Taché, June 4, 1864 (Diocesan archives of Saint-Boniface, microfilm n° 1837 kept in the Archives Deschâtelets, Ottawa).
- 97 July 25, 1854, quoted by Dom Paul BENOÎT, C.R.I.C., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 265.
- 98 July 23, 1855, in *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, 3 (1904), pp. 249-250.
- 99 January 4, 1856 (*ibidem*, 3 (1904), p. 311).
- 100 January 29, 1865 (Oblate provincial Archives, Forth Smith, N.W.T.).
- 101 To Father Valentin Végréville, February 22, 1866 (Oblate provincial archives, Edmonton).
- 102 To his mother, May 19, 1856, in *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, 4 (1905), p. 93.
- 103 Reindeer Lake (Lac Caribou).
- 104 April 16, 1848 (Diocesan archives of Saint-Boniface, microfilm n° 1757) and *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, 32 (1933), p. 96.
- 105 To Father Faraud, August 23, 1853 (Oblate General Archives, Rome).
- 106 On that latter point, see Father Jules Decorby to Father Albert Lacombe, in *Missions... des... Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 18 (1880), pp. 198-199.
- 107 Bishop Taché to Father Faraud, August 23, 1853 (Oblate General Archives, Rome).
- 108 Father Lacombe published his own Tableau-Catechisme, printed at Epinal in 1874. It was very popular at the time and is still being used in a number of missions under the designation of Catholic Ladder.

- 109 January 31, 1849 (Oblate General Archives, Rome).
- 110 To Sister Marie-Colombe Cox, June 3, 1863 (Archives of Visitation Sainte-Marie, Le Mans, France).
- 111 Letter of Father Séguin to his sister, June 1, 1883 (Oblate General Archives, Rome and copy in Archives Deschâtelets, pp. 477-478).
- 112 See especially the letter of Bishop Taché to his mother, January 4, 1851, in *Rapport sur les missions du Diocèse de Québec*, 10 (1853), pp. 1-41 and *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi de Lyon*, 24 (152), pp. 329-354. An English translation appeared in *Études Oblates*, 32 (1973), pp. 224-255 and *Prairie Forum*, 3 (1978), pp. 131-156.
- 113 Taché to Faraud, September 20, 1852 (Oblate General Archives, Rome).
- 114 Bishop Taché to George Simpson, February 7, 1855 (Hudson's Bay Company Archives, D5/40, pp. 67v-68. Winnipeg). Also in microfilm 3 M 107.
- 115 Georges Deschambeault to George Simpson, January 18, 1857 (*ibidem*, D 5/48, p. 86 and film 3 M 118).
- 116 Bishop Grandin to George Simpson, July 19, 1854 (*ibidem*, D 5/39, p. 316 and film 3 M 106).
- 117 "Rapport sur le diocèse de Saint-Albert", in *Missions... des... Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 11 (1873), p. 352; Vital GRANDIN, O.M.I., "Vicariat de Saint-Albert. Les missions sauvages du Nord-Ouest" (*ibidem*, 21 (1883), pp. 125-126).
- 118 Bishop Grandin to Father Joseph Fabre, May 1, 1869 (Oblate General Archives, Rome).
- 119 December 20, 1855 (*ibidem*) and *Rapport sur les missions du diocèse de Québec*, 12 (1857), p. 44.
- 120 "Au rédacteur de *L'Étendard*, 23 février 1883" in *Missions... des... Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 21 (1883), pp. 128-129.
- 121 September 14, 1860. Letter of Father Grollier to Father Léonard Baveux, in *Rapport de la Propagation de la Foi... Montréal*, 13 (1861), p. 41.
- 122 Sr. Emery, S.G.M. to Sr. Deschamps, S.G.M., April 20, 1861 (General Archives of the Gery Nuns, Montreal).
- 123 Caër to Taché, January 6, 1863 (Diocesan Archives of Saint-Boniface).
- 124 See Robrecht BOUDENS, O.M.I., "La mission conciliatrice du père Alexis André auprès des Sioux, 1863-1865", in *Études Oblates*, 18 (1959), pp. 401-414; Gaston CARRIÈRE, O.M.I., "Une mission de paix: le Père André et les Sioux (1863-1865)", in *Études Oblates*, 27 (1968), pp. 189-224, 299-340; *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa*, 38 (1969), pp. 24-93; Louis PFALLER, O.S.B., "The Peace Mission of 1863-1864", in *North Dakota History*, 37 (1970), pp. 293-313.
- 125 Gaston CARRIÈRE, O.M.I., "Le père Albert Lacombe, o.m.i., et le Pacifique Canadien", in *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa*, 36 (1967), pp. 519-522.
- 126 *Ibidem*, 36 (1967), pp. 613-619.
- 127 Father Taché to his mother, July 31, 1848, in *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, 2 (1904), p. 72.
- 128 Bishop Taché to Father Faraud, July 3, 1846 (Oblate General Archives, Rome), Bishop Clut to his Fathers, November 19, 1874 (Oblate provincial house, Fort Smith).
- 129 Gaston CARRIÈRE, O.M.I., "Contribution des missionnaires à la sauvegarde de la culture indienne", in *Études Oblates*, 31 (1972), pp. 165-204.
- 130 February 2, 1860 (Oblate General Archives, Rome).
- 131 Alexandre TACHÉ, O.M.I., *Vingt années de missions...*, p. 30; Taché to Faraud, December 6, 1859 (Oblate General Archives, Rome).
- 132 April 25, 1857 (*ibidem*).
- 133 *Ibidem*.
- 134 See *Notices nécrologiques des membres de la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée* (Paris: Hennuyer et Fils, 1868), p. 172.
- 135 To Bishop Faraud, January 3, 1862 (Oblate General Archives, Rome, file Grollier).
- 136 May 29, 1862 (Oblate provincial Archives, Fort Smith).
- 137 To Father Fabre, June 30, 1864, in *Oeuvres de Mgr Grandin*, vol. 13, p. 71.

- 138 To his mother, January 6, 1847, in *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, 2 (1903), p. 213.
- 139 July 29, 1847 (Oblate General Archives, Rome, file Taché).
- 140 October 4, 1849, in *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, 2 (1903), p. 488.
- 141 To his mother, January 3, 1850 (*ibidem*, 32 (1933), p. 42).
- 142 To Father Faraud, May 5, 1851 and September 20, 1852 (Oblate General Archives, Rome).
- 143 *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, 3 (1904), p. 263.

Evangelization and the Oblates of Eastern Canada

I - The Notion of Evangelization.

The term "evangelization" is a relatively recent one. During these last years, evangelization has been quite a popular theme for congresses, conferences and Church synods, and religious Congregations.¹ This topic has been declared to be of "crucial importance for the future of the Christian faith".² In spite of all these expended efforts, we have not yet achieved a precise and well-formulated definition of evangelization.³ We are even less informed as to what exact activities evangelization comprises.

It is therefore important to ask, right at the outset, what is evangelization. Father Dominique Nothomb of the White Fathers offers us an interesting study on the subject which he entitles: "*Evangéliser c'est quoi?*"⁴ In order to have a fair idea of the ensemble of elements which make up evangelization, we will retain here what he tells us about "to evangelize according to the New Testament".

For the New Testament, "to evangelize" always means "to announce the good news". It is a verbal announcement, an oral proclamation. The Gospel designates this good news, its proclamation or its content.

The Gospel is the word of the joyful announcement of mankind's salvation through the one Lord Jesus Christ. The person who accepts this good news is converted and believes in Jesus Christ, Lord and Saviour, and in him receives salvation, peace, joy, guarantee of the resurrection, the revelation of God's grace, that is to say, his absolute love, and of God's glory, that is to say, the beauty proper to God: in a word, 'the unsearchable riches of Christ', what Jesus called 'the Kingdom' and St. John calls 'eternal life'.⁵

The evangelizers are the evangelists and the apostles, and their successors.

How does one evangelize? Through the word. The preaching of the Gospel is accompanied by external signs with which it is in no way identified. Christians take part in the Gospel through their struggles and sufferings: this is not evangelization but its acceptance or consequence.

Evangelization is not the sole activity of Jesus, of his Apostles or of the other disciples who dedicate themselves to it. All these also accomplish acts of power which are signs and accompany the preaching. God reveals himself as much in these deeds and signs as he does in the words. However, what the New Testament precisely calls evangelization is the oral preaching of the Gospel, that is to say, the message of salvation through Jesus Christ. As Father Henry - who later unfortunately retracts a bit - rightly says, 'To evangelize has a precise meaning. It does not mean everything and anything that is done in the Church. It means proclaiming the Good News of salvation, appealing to conversion, calling people into the Church in view of the Kingdom, in the name of Jesus Christ'.⁶ The ecumenical translation of the Bible always translates 'to evangelize' by 'announcing the Gospel'.⁷

Evangelization by the word alone has been strongly contested. At the 4th Synod of Bishops held in Rome in October 1974, Archbishop Henri Légaré, O.M.I., presented a text in the name of the Canadian Catholic Conference which maintains that evangelization by deed or witness of life is as much an essential element of evangelization as is evangelization by word.

It is beyond doubt that evangelization consists of two activities which are indispensable and complementary: verbal proclamation and witness of life. One without the other does not count. Word and life correspond to each other concretely, in a profound unity: they nourish each other and together constitute evangelization.⁸

The apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is very clear on this point: "Above all the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness.... Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one" (par. 21). "For

the Church, the first means of evangelization is the witness of an authentically Christian life, given over to God in a communion that nothing should destroy and at the same time given to one's neighbor with limitless zeal.... It is therefore primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize the world, in other words, by her living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus - the witness of poverty and detachment, of freedom in the face of the powers of this world, in short, the witness of sanctity' (par. 41).

How are we to evangelize? Without shame, boldly, by enduring all sufferings, by always going farther, with effort, and by giving one's entire life.

As for the aims of evangelization, we evangelize in view of arousing faith and inviting people to believe so that we may call them to conversion, that is, to turn to the living God for salvation : to beget God's life and walk correctly according to the Gospel, so that believers may possess the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, all with the objective of highlighting life and immortality.

Those to whom the proclamation of the Gospel is addressed are all the nations of the whole world, the pagans and the "circumcised". The sign of the coming of the Kingdom is the evangelization of the poor. In speaking of those to whom the Gospel is addressed, St. Paul makes no distinction between those who "are already Christian" and those who "are not yet Christian".

A few reflections in the guise of a conclusion :

The distinctions between "evangelization" and "sign-witness" on the one hand, and between "evangelization" and "pastoral action" on the other hand are quite blurred in practice. All these activities are so inter-connected and enmeshed that we necessarily pass from one to the other.

Confusing "missionary activity" with "evangelization" is quite harmful. When they are confused, it often happens that we land up in no longer evangelizing, giving as a motive that, through service, example, doing good, prayer, contributing to the development of peoples, etc., we are working at the accomplishment of other tasks which belong to the Church's mission. It should be quite clear, consequently, that a work of development, for example, or "humanisation" is not evangelization.⁹ As Pius XII pointed out: "One must never lose sight of the fact that the Church's objective is to evangelize, not to civilize. If it does civilize, it is done through evangelizing".¹⁰

While human promotion, development and liberation do have profound links with evangelization, we must not reduce the Church's missions to the dimensions of a merely temporal project. If this were to happen, the Church would lose her fundamental meaning. It is necessary to assert clearly the specifically religious finality of evangelization.¹¹

The only adequate definition of evangelization would seem to be the one contained in the document preparatory to the Synod of Bishops: *'Evangelization is the activity by which the church proclaims the gospel so that through it (i.e. this proclamation) faith is born, develops and grows'*.¹²

II - Our Founder and Evangelization.

1. Bishop de Mazenod's missionary thrust and aim, his ultimate apostolic objective is evangelizing the poor.

He felt called very early. Already in 1808 he writes in a letter to his mother:

What God is asking of me is that I devote myself in a special way to his service, so that I might rekindle the fire of faith which is dying out among the poor; in short, that I prepare myself to carry out everything he may demand of me for his glory and the salvation of the souls he has redeemed with his precious Blood.¹³

Later on, he wanted the members of his Congregation to be, as he himself was, a total gift of themselves to the Church and to the poor who were to be evangelized. He expresses this to Father Tempier in these terms:

Our Lord Jesus Christ has left us the task of continuing the great work of redeeming mankind. Our efforts should strive only for this objective. As long as we have not committed our whole life and given all our blood to succeed therein, we have nothing to say.¹⁴

2. Means to achieve this objective.

It is by means of the *word*, by *preaching*; for it is preaching which is the means "par excellence" for spreading knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Faith in the power of God's word was going to be the mainspring of all his priestly apostolate. We know that his first concern upon his return to Aix as a priest was to instruct the poor classes of the city. These conferences given in the provençal dialect in the church of the Magdalene are a prelude to the preaching of missions to the people, (which missions) are given as the principal end of the Society whose foundations he laid in 1815.¹⁵

According to Bishop Jeancard, the Oblates wanted to imitate the Apostles and to continue the ministry of Christ himself. "He wanted to imitate our Lord who covered the villages and countryside of Judea to proclaim his Gospel there in the language of the people".¹⁶

It is also by the means of the *foreign missions*.

Coming after the great religious Orders, our modest religious family "being inflamed with the same apostolic ardour... has for many years carried on zealously the work of foreign missions".¹⁷ Let us listen to Bishop de Mazenod telling us what he himself thinks of the foreign missions:

Foreign missions will be considered by us as a means of procuring God's glory, and as most appropriate in promoting the spread of religion, and in increasing the honour of our Congregation. This ministry is, moreover, the occasion of greater and more abundant merits. These missions are in fact a source of spiritual good for many souls converted to, or maintained in the true faith. At the same time, they are a clear proof of the Church's divinity and of the zeal of the Congregation for God's glory and of its tireless charity towards the most abandoned souls".¹⁸

He repeats these considerations on the foreign missions again and again to his missionary sons far away. Thus he writes to Father Ricard who has just received his obedience for Oregon:

I say nothing of how magnificent in the eyes of faith is the ministry you are going to fulfil. One must go back to the birth of Christianity to find anything comparable. It is an apostle with whom you are associated and the same marvels that were wrought by the first disciples of Jesus Christ will be renewed in our days by you, my dear children, whom Providence has chosen amongst so many others to announce the Good News to so many slaves of the demon who huddle in the darkness of idolatry and who know not God. This is verily the real apostolate which is renewed in our times. Let us thank the Lord for having deemed us worthy to be participants therein in so active a manner".¹⁹

Four years later, in a letter, again to the same Father Ricard, he makes a comparison between evangelization done in a civilized country and that done in foreign missions:

Foreign missions compared to our missions in Europe have a special character of a higher kind, because this is the true apostolate of announcing the Good News to nations which have not yet been called to knowledge of the true God and of his son Jesus Christ... This is the mission of the Apostles: *Euntes, docete omnes gentes!* This teaching of the truth must penetrate to the most backward nations so that they may be regenerated in the waters of baptism. You are among those to whom Jesus Christ has addressed these words, giving you your mission as he gave their mission to the Apostles who were sent to convert our fathers.²⁰

The ultimate goal of this evangelization, carried out with all the ardor of their soul and taken right to the farthest ends of the earth, can be summed up like this:

FOR THE GLORY OF GOD,
THE SERVICE OF THE CHURCH,
THE SALVATION OF SOULS,
THE HONOUR OF OUR CONGREGATION.

The Founder will repeat this thousands of times in his writings and his correspondence with his missionaries.

III - Tableau of the Apostolic Effort Made in Eastern Canada.

The 19th century Oblates of Canada do not seem to have posed too many questions about the exact theological notion of evangelization. They responded to the commands and directives of their religious Superiors. For its part, the General Administration made great efforts to respond to the urgent needs of the Canadian bishops. The sons of Bishop de Mazenod devoted themselves to their task with zeal, daring and renunciation. This caused Father A. Brossard, S.J., to say one hundred years after the Oblates' arrival in Canada:

To the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates belongs the unquestionable honour and merit of having achieved a dream of apostolic greatness, expanding the reign of Jesus Christ across the entire extend of the Canadian territories, doing so with the fullness of daring and zeal, of charity and forgetfulness of self which characterize all their evangelization".²¹

The following few pages hope to give some major moments of the Oblates' apostolate, or *their work of evangelization taken in a very wide sense*. I will limit myself to the 19th century. By Eastern Canada I mean the Provinces of Quebec and Ontario plus the North of these Provinces.

Almost immediately after their arrival in the country, in December 1841, the Oblates began preaching parish missions at Saint-Hilaire, Beloeil, and Saint-Vincent-de-Paul. In one year, fourteen parishes had received the benefit of their zeal. From 1843 to 1845 they were responsible for missions in the townships or the eastern counties. In January 1844 Father Telmon made his way to Bytown (Ottawa) to establish a mission there. From that place some missionaries, Father Laverlochère among others, went in the direction of Temiscaming and James Bay. Also from Bytown, one year later, other missionaries, Father E. Durocher and A. Brunet, go and visit the logging camps (cutting of lumber in the forests) along the Gatineau and Ottawa Rivers. Father Reboul's renown stems from this ministry. Also in 1844 Bishop Signay of Quebec offered them the care of the Indian missions along the Saint Maurice and Saguenay Rivers as well as those on the north coastline of the St. Lawrence.

In the meantime, Father Telmon had begun working in the education of children. Under the direction of Eulalie Durocher, the future Sister and Blessed Marie-Rose, he gathered together some young ladies to teach the children of Longueuil. He brought the Grey Nuns of Montreal to Bytown to provide education to youth and to look after the sick. The Collège Saint-Joseph was founded in 1848.

In 1849 the Oblates were at Maniwaki and were evangelizing the Indians north of the Saint Maurice River.

When the Founder died, twenty years after their arrival in Canada, the Oblate Province of Canada counted 53 Oblates with seven houses and two residences. One

of our men had become the Bishop of Bytown.

In 1861 the Congregation is firmly established in Canada. It had been faithful to the ministry of preaching parish missions and retreats; it had generously given itself to many dispersed groups who were without religious care; it had committed itself with daring and love, at the price of heroic sacrifices, to the work of the Indian missions; it had applied its zeal to parishes deprived temporarily and in religious need; it had accepted works of teaching, colleges and major seminaries. Everywhere the Oblates stayed close to the people and the clergy and were, in turn, respected and loved by them.²²

The work of evangelization, already well begun in Canada under the leadership and dynamic thrust of the Founder, saw some remarkable developments during the period from the Founder's death until the end of the 19th century. In the three vast regions of the Indian missions, the boundaries are rolled back - and this will continue as long as there are souls to be saved - and our works were stabilized. On the north coast of the St. Lawrence, we were in charge from Betsiamites to Pointe-Bleue. We went to Labrador and to Eskimo Bay where we reach the Naskapis, and we were at Fort Chimo in 1872, now in full Eskimo territory. This was the apostolic domain of Fathers Arnaud and Babel. In 1889 we got established at Ville Marie and at Tête du Lac in the Temiskaming area. After several annual visits to James Bay, we decided to establish ourselves there permanently. In 1892, Father Fafard and Guinard along with Brother G. Lapointe founded the residence in Albany. It was not possible to establish ourselves in the missions along the Saint Maurice where Father Guéguen was the assigned missionary: we had to be content with a long and difficult annual trip into that area. For his part, Father Burfin was looking after the Iroquois at Caughnawaga.

The Province of Canada also made an important contribution to the work of colonization. The centres of colonization were Maniwaki, Terniscaming, and Mattawa. In this domain, Brother Moffet became a legendary figure. "The missionaries were travelling constantly in these three colonization areas. They gave their priestly ministry to these people who were poor but full of courage and well disposed. They were laying the foundations of parishes and future dioceses, and sometimes bolstering the work of colonization besides".²³ Cardinal Taschereau in 1880 named Father Z. Lacasse the apostle of colonization. In its June 7, 1880 issue, the newspaper *Le Canada* wrote:

This young Oblate belongs to a Congregation which has already done a great deal for the work of colonization. For instance, we owe the establishment of the vast diocese of Ottawa to this Congregation, as well as many institutions, both religious and patriotic, which contributed considerably to the firm settling of our race in this important part of the country. The Oblates, for example, were the first to venture into the region of Temiscaming and of the Madawaska; they were the first to pitch their tent at Notre-Dame du Désert, beyond the Gatineau, one hundred miles from the Ottawa, where they formed the nucleus of a prosperous establishment. In short, in these latter times, no Congregation has so identified itself with the life of the colonists, with his difficult labour and sufferings, and thus pairing together the great cause of religion and native land.²⁴

The work at the logging camps continued and increased. Every year several missionaries visited hundreds of camps on the Gatineau, Ottawa and Mattawa Rivers.

The largest area of activity is obviously in the big centres of the south : Montreal, Quebec, Ottawa and Lowell. In each of these centres, besides parishes, preaching held the place of honour: parish retreats, retreats for institutions, in colleges, in religious communities. Confraternities, associations, charitable institutions, etc. are set up. In Ottawa, the Collège Saint-Joseph, started in 1848, became a university, receiving its civil charter in 1866 and its ecclesiastical charter in 1889. The parish of Notre-Dame-deGrâce was opened in Hull in 1870. The Oblates were also doing ministry in several centres of the United States.

In concluding this section, it is worth noting that the formation houses, after

many trial efforts, did succeed in finding a solid and definitive basis. In 1886 the novitiate is placed at Lachine. In 1885 the scholasticate is established in Archville, which later became an integral part of the city of Ottawa. The juniorate finally had its own house in Ottawa in 1895.

At century's end, the Province of Canada had 133 Oblates with 8 houses and residences.

IV - Reflections on Evangelization by the Oblates in Eastern Canada.

After this brief résumé of the evangelizing of different people in Canada, a few observations are in order. The statement of Bishop de Mazenod that "there is nothing that is contrary to our Institute except that which offends God"²⁵ was probably more applicable in Canada than elsewhere. In Eastern Canada, the missionary Oblates omitted nothing in coming to the aid of the people entrusted to them. Father H. Goudreault lists the areas in which the missionaries contributed to culture and to the development of the people: linguistics, education, catechesis, peace missions, social services and works of charity, care of the sick, Indian Reserves, struggle for liberation and maintaining independence, geography,²⁶ agriculture, religious beliefs, science, folklore and legend, architecture, etc.

1. Evangelization is always focused on God's reign.

To be sure, the Oblates were indeed involved in all of the above, but always for the salvation of souls and the glory of God. This enabled Cardinal Villeneuve to say:

With us, in fact, the foreign missions flow from the parish missions, and so do the works in the logging camps, in colonization, in the press, in the worker and social apostolate; and teaching itself at its highest level resulted from *the need of souls* and the call of the Church.²⁷

Father Flavien Durocher tells us why the Oblates busied themselves with colonization :

We urged, to the best of our ability, everyone whom we visited to occupy themselves with cultivating the land and to live more frugally; we are convinced that in thus working for their temporal good, they will be better disposed to look into their spiritual interests.²⁸

It is quite significant to note the angle from which Bishop de Mazenod saw the work at the logging camps and the missions among the natives. To Father Honorat he says it in these terms: "Ah yes, I willingly consent that our Congregation take on the *ministry* of the labour camps and the *conversion* of the Savages".²⁹

2. The oral proclamation of the Good News.

Above we mentioned that the two essential elements of evangelization were the oral proclamation of the Good News and the witness of life. We do not need to prove that the Oblates of Eastern Canada had these two characteristic features of evangelization as the prime objective in their apostolic work. Preaching retreats of every sort was their ministry of predilection. For most of them, their daily labour included the teaching of catechism and spiritual conferences. To show their concern in this area, here are a few texts:

Now the difficulty will be to form this new community. The ones chosen must prove to be men capable of *proclaiming the Word of God* and good enough to be presentable to the clergy of Montreal which is not without merit.³⁰

The mission exercises are given with full success for some five months. Father Laverlochère spends his days and part of his nights *instructing*, baptizing, hearing confessions.³¹

Alas! How many savage tribes are still ignorant of the truth and cannot be visited because of the enormous distances separating them from the missionaries! Pray God, Reverend Father, that he multiply the apostolic workers and, at the same time, may inspire the pious faithful to double their alms, so that the Gospel may be preached to everyone.³²

May the Lord help you to announce the Word mightily, to withdraw from sin the sons of the Church and lead them to holiness; and that He may open your mouth to make known with assurance the mystery of the Gospel to those ignorant of it.³³

Foreign missions compared to our missions in Europe have a special character of a higher kind, because this is the true apostolate of announcing the Good News to nations which have not yet been called to knowledge of the true God and of his Son Jesus Christ... This is the mission of the Apostles: 'Euntes, docete omnes gentes!' This teaching of the truth must penetrate to the most backward nations so that they may be regenerated in the waters of baptism. You are among those to whom Jesus Christ has addressed these words, giving you your mission as he gave their mission to the Apostles who were sent to convert our fathers. From this point of view, which is a true one, there is nothing higher than your ministry and that of our other Fathers who are wearing themselves out in the glacial regions to discover the Indians whom it is their task to save.³⁴

The Witness of Life.

When it comes to witness of life, we would have to quote the great majority of the Oblates. The tableau Father Carrière gives us of this is eloquent enough in itself. This applies to all the Oblates, but it would be easy to attach the names of Oblates from Canada to each of the categories of persons mentioned.

We could then admire a magnificent fresco in which we would see real saints, genuine martyrs, outstanding models of zeal and of knowledge. We would meet apostles with a heart of flame who became martyrs of the cold, heat, hunger, thirst, poverty, men of God who were happy only on the day that the preaching of the Gospel and the good name of the Oblates had reached the most primitive peoples and the most distant shores.³⁵

The Poor, Preferred Recipients of Oblate Zeal.

Even though the Oblates of Canada had worked pretty well in every imaginable domain, and had thereby reached every category of people, their preference went to the poor and to the most abandoned souls. Father Laverlochère, preparing to visit the Indians, speaks his feelings to Bishop Bourget:

With all the ardour I can muster, I am studying Algonquin, aflame with the desire of bringing the word of salvation to some of your flock who, even though poor and far away, are no less dear to your heart.³⁶

Four years later, the same Father had reached the Cree Indians of James Bay. He describes his flock:

This mission (Albany, James Bay), probably the saddest on the face of the earth, must have a character that is all its own. Everywhere the missions of the Bay present only limitless forests of stunted trees, a sterile and unsteady land, a somber grey sky and a frozen sea; and, dispersed here and there, a multitude of Indian families whose disgusting appearance reveals the deepest misery and the last degree of depravation.³⁷

Father Arnaud, the apostle to the Montagnais, tells us in his turn what he feels when he is about to leave for his missions with the Naskapis:

I am going to plunge into the woods, looking for the poor unbeliever. The bent which urges me to the most abandoned souls, linked to the desire of bringing them knowledge of holy prayer, make me sigh for the moment of departure.³⁸

Bishop de Mazenod tells us he is happy to accept the mission of Bytown :

They were overjoyed and rightly regarded this new mission as a sign of the protection of God and a means of doing immense good whether to the Savages or to the Christians forsaken in the forests for so long a period of time.³⁹

Father Nédélec was called to serve several different kinds of souls: logging camps, Indian missions, missions to the Whites, railroads, etc.; but "if he had a preference for any, it was for the poor. And the poorest were, obviously, the

Indians"⁴⁰

After his return from a mission journey on the Gatineau and du Lièvre Rivers, Bishop Guigues wanted to establish some priests permanently to serve the people in these remote areas:

It is infinitely desirable that these priests come from a religious Order, since the mission is difficult and poor... Naturally, these religious should be Oblates: they are already responsible for the logging camps which are very numerous there... There are many poor, abandoned souls there, and their Rule tells them to go in all haste to help those who are the most neglected"⁴¹

Father Deschâtelets, speaking about the Oblates of Eastern Canada during the period which concerns us here, gives this witness:

As a group, the founders of the Oblate Province of Canada Est strike us as being real apostolic workers, humble servants of the bishops, zealous, devoted missionaries ready for the humblest task *among the poor and the abandoned*, according to the spirit of their vocation.⁴²

5. Daring in Apostolic Ventures.

The work of the Oblates in Canada has been described as a daring apostolic adventure. Certainly, accomplishing so much in so short a time and with such limitations of available personnel required much daring, an ardent desire to propagate the faith, and all the other qualities the Founder wanted to find in his missionaries. Speaking very concretely, here is a typical example of this daring in the acceptance of the Bytown mission :

You certainly need to be enterprising if you are called to the conquest of souls. I was fuming at finding myself 2000 leagues from you and unable **to** make my voice reach you in less than two months. And yet your letter of February 2 arrived today, March 1. God grant that you may have at last received mine which not only approved this great project but applauded it with delight. This was not something tentative to be tried. You had to go there with the firm resolve to overcome all obstacles, go there to stay, take root there! How could you hesitate? What more beautiful mission than this! Ministry in the lumber camps, missions to the Savages, establishment in a city which is wholly of the future. But it is the beautiful dream coming true and you would have let it escape! The thought makes me shiver! Take all your courage in your hands once more and establish yourself there properly. Urge each one to do his duty. It is only thus you will bring upon yourselves the blessing of God..⁴³

6. Reasons for the Choice of Location.

The choice for the location of the residences and the kinds of apostolic work have often been discussed. They are not the result of chance. We have seen that there was a real preference for working among the poor and most abandoned. Other motives impelled Bishop de Mazenod and the Oblates to establish themselves in large centres such as Montreal, Quebec, Lowell, etc. It was a matter of finding revenue to provide for the needs of the community's members and to support the works undertaken. It was also a matter of having a good foothold in strategic places from which it would be easier to influence and reach the people to be evangelized: and that is why we established ourselves at Maniwaki, Mattawa, Temiscaming, Betsiamites, etc. It was a matter, finally, of easier recruiting. On this topic, here are a few texts:

It is agreed that I send four missionaries and two Brothers to staff our establishment in Montreal. The Bishop will provide them with a small benefice in the neighbourhood of the episcopal city of which the revenue, together with the produce of an adjacent field, will suffice for the upkeep of the community."

Knowing the special interest you have for the missions among the savages, I will give you some details about our establishment of the Assumption at Maniwaki, started two years ago, on the Gatineau, in the diocese of Bytown... The location of our establishment is one of the most favorable for attracting savages over a wide radius: especially those from the Saint-Maurice, the Great Lake, Temiscaming, even of Abbitibi: all of them can gradually come and locate here to till the sodas

I would insist that we establish ourselves at Quebec and Montreal... You say to me: that is not where the most abandoned souls are. True, but in establishing ourselves there, you provide yourselves with the means to come to the aid of those most abandoned souls, without taking into account that you will also do

much good to many of those who, while not abandoned, are nonetheless in need. Would to God you could take charge of this post tomorrow - I would consent to it. I gave verbal instructions on this matter to Father Telmon. He will discuss it with you. It was on purpose that I made him bearer of a letter to the Bishop of Quebec. He will map out the terrain and take, if necessary the preliminary steps for a work which I consider of the greatest importance.⁴⁶

Romuald BOUCHER, O.M.I. *Ottawa.*

NOTES :

- 1 To quote only a few let us note *Le Synode des évêques à Rome, 1974; L'Assemblée de la conférence des Églises de toute l'Afrique, 1974; International Congress on World Evangelization*, Lausanne, July 10-25, 1974. For the Oblates; *Congress on the Charism of the Founder Today*, Rome, 26 April to 24 May 1976; *The Missionary Outlook*.
- 2 Professeurs de la Faculté de Théologie de l'Université de Montréal, in *Relations*, 37 (décembre 1973, p. 344).
- ³ "No partial or fragmentary definition can explain the rich, complex and dynamic reality which is evangelization, but at the risk of weakening or even mutilating it" PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, paragraph 17.
- 4 *Kerygma*, 8 (1974), pp. 21-36.
- 5 Dominique NOTHOMB, P.B., "Évangéliser, c'est quoi", in *Kerygma*, 8 (1974), pp. 5-6.
- 6 Antoine-Marie HENRY, O.P., *La force de l'Évangile* (Tours: Mame, 1967), p. 18.
- 7 Dominique NOTHOMB, P.B., *op. cit.*, p. 27.
- 8 Henri LÉGARÉ, O.M.I., "Évangélisation: tâche de toute l'Église", in *L'Église canadienne*, 7 (1974), p. 314.
- 9 Dominique NOTHOMB, P.B., *op. cit.*, pp. 33-34.
- 10 *Gaudium et Spes*, note 59, paragraph 4.
- 11 *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, paragraph 32.
- 12 Dominique NOTHOMB, P.B., *op. cit.*, p. 36.
- 13 Letter to his mother, June 29, 1808 (Oblate Postulation archives, Rome).
- 14 Letter to Father Tempier, August 22, 1817, in *Lettres aux Oblats de France 1814-1825* (Rome, Postulation générale O.M.I., 1982), p. 39.
- 15 Émilien LAMIRANDE, O.M.I. "L'annonce de la parole de Dieu selon M^{re} de Mazenod", in *Études Oblates*, 18 (1959), p. 107.
- 16 Jacques JEANCARD, *Mélanges historiques sur la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée* (Tours, Marne, 1872), p. 66.
- 17 *Instruction of our Venerated Founder on Foreign Missions* (Rome: General House, 1926), p. 4.
- 18 *Ibidem*, p. 4.
- 19 Letter to Father Pascal Ricard, January 8, 1847 in *Letters to North America...* (Rome: General Postulation O.M.L, 1978), p. 148.
- 20 To Father Ricard, December 6, 1851 (*ibidem*, vol. 2, pp. 29-30).
- 21 Quoted by Maurice GILBERT, O.M.I., "Le sens des fêtes du Centenaire", in *Études Oblates*, 1 (1942), p. 59.
- 22 Donat LEVASSEUR, O.M.I., *Histoire des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, (Montréal: Maison provinciale, 1983), vol. 1, p. 131.
- 23 *Ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 206.
- 24 Quoted in *Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 18 (1880), pp. 326-327.
- 25 Bishop de Mazenod to Father Pélissier, May 30, 1839 quoted by Achille Rev, O.M.I., *Histoire de Monseigneur Charles-Joseph-Eugène de Mazenod, Évêque de Marseille, Fondateur de la*

Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée (Marseille: Imprimerie marseillaise, 1928), vol. 2, p. 64.

- 26 Henri GOUDREAU, O.M.I., "La question missionnaire aujourd'hui", in *Kerygma*, 10 (1976), p. 5.
- 27 Rodrigue VILLENEUVE, O.M.I., "Allocution prononcée devant les Facultés ecclésiastiques de l'Université d'Ottawa, 22 mai 1933", in *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa*, 3 (1933), p. 276.
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- 29 Letter to Father Jean-Baptiste Honorat, January 4, 1844 in *Letters to North America*, vol. 1, p. 70.
- 30 *Ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 4.
- 31 Father Antoine Paillier, to a brother Oblate, Bytown, December 1851, in *Rapport sur les missions du diocèse de Québec*, mars 1853, p. 83. It is here question of the missions of Temiskaming, Abitibi and Hudson Bay.
- 32 Letter to Father Andrieux, 18 February 1852, on his return from the missions of Saint-Maurice (*ibidem*, p. 121).
- 33 Letter of obedience to the first Oblate missionaries to Canada, in *Letters to North America*, vol. 1, pp. 12-13.
- 34 Bishop de Mazenod to Father Ricard, December 6, 1851 (*ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 29).
- 35 Gaston CARRIÈRE, O.M.L., *Cent cinquante ans d'action apostolique au rythme de l'Église* (Ottawa, 1966), p. 4. Ms.
- 36 Oka, December 9, 1844.
- 37 "Lettre à l'Archevêque de Québec, Lac-des-Deux-Montagnes, 25 décembre 1848", in *Rapport sur les missions du diocèse de Québec*, 8 (avril 1849), p. 46.
- 38 "Lettre à sa Grandeur ^{Mgr} l'Archevêque de Québec, 10 novembre 1854" (*ibidem*, 11 (mars 1855), p. 66.
- 39 To Father Honorat, February 7, 1844, in *Letters to North America*, vol. 1, p. 75.
- 40 Gaston CARRIÈRE, O.M.I., *Jean-Marie Nédélec, o.m.i.* (Sudbury: Société historique du Nouvel-Ontario, 1959), p. 36.
- 41 "Rapport de ^{Mgr} Guigues, évêque de Bytown, à ^{Mgr} de Mazenod évêque de Marseille, 5 mars 1849", in *Correspondance des Premiers Pères*, vol. 3, p. 365 (archives Deschâtelets, Ms.).
- 42 See Gaston CARRIÈRE, O.M.I., *Histoire documentaire de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie-Immaculée dans l'Est du Canada* (Ottawa: Editions de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1957), vol. 1, p. 8.
- 43 Bishop de Mazenod to Father Honorat, March 1, 1844, in *Letters to North America*, vol. 1, p. 79.
- 44 Bishop de Mazenod to Father Courtes, August 11, 1841 (*Ibidem*, p. 4). It is question of Saint-Hilaire, the first Oblate residence in Canada.
- 45 "Lettre du R. P. Clément, o.m.i. à ^{Mgr} de Montréal, Rivière-au-Désert, 1^{er} février 1852", in *Rapport sur les missions du diocèse de Québec*, 10 (Mars 1843), pp. 96-100 46 Bishop de Mazenod to Father Honorat, October 7, 1843 (*loc. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 64)

Grandin and Evangelization

In a few pages I would like to present the components of evangelization such as it was practised by Bishop Grandin and his collaborators and ranging from the first contact with the non-Christians to the establishment of the local Church.

The Good News was proclaimed in the native language.¹ As soon as he arrived in Red River, Grandin started to study Cree,² and the year after, when obedience had sent him to a mission where Montagnais was spoken, he began to study this language also.³ After one year of study, he was able to remain at the mission alone.⁴ It seems⁵ that the first generation of missionaries quickly mastered the native tongues.

If Grandin felt the need to preach in the native languages, it probably had nothing to do with preserving the cultural and linguistic heritage of the Indians. He saw some advantages in the Indians learning French: this would make it less difficult to instruct them. Other missionaries, like Father Henri Grollier, for instance, were opposed to this practice, but it is not possible for us to know why.⁶

Some missionaries of the succeeding generation, that is, of the 1880 to 1890 years, did not want to learn the Indian languages. As English was gaining ground with the Indians, the need for the native tongue was less

acutely felt.⁷ Until the very end of his life Grandin considered knowledge of the Indian language necessary for missionary activity.⁸

As long as the Indians were still nomads, the missionaries visited those Indians who came together at the Hudson Bay Company posts to trade their furs. This gathering was the occasion of a mission: it provided the opportunity for teaching catechism, preparing for baptism, for first communion, for marriage, for reconciliation of spouses, and the like...⁹

On each day of the mission, the missionary gave from two to four instructions which remained limited to the level of catechism.¹⁰ Catechisms in the Indian languages were published from the first years of the mission.¹¹ They included prayers, catechism and hymns. These catechisms were patterned after the same model as the catechisms at that time existing in France, French Canada and in other Western countries.¹²

During the first encounter with the non-Christians, Grandin would teach them the sign of the cross¹³ and the main mysteries (the Trinity and the Incarnation), prayers like the Our Father and the Hail Mary, as well as the most essential moral lessons, especially those relating to marriage.¹⁴ The young missionary proclaimed the existence of God who rewards good; he underlined the need for religion and also the reality of hell.¹⁵

Another tool for proclaiming the truths of the Christian religion were pictures portraying the mysteries of religion, the stations of the cross.¹⁶ Pictures of the Devil were the most effective.¹⁷ In the same way, the missionaries used a kind of "chronological ladder", first composed by Bishop Norbert Blanchet and then perfected by Father Albert Lacombe.¹⁸ The missionaries had come to the conclusion that the traditional catechism was not adapted to the Indians. Without really knowing it, they were returning to the kerygma of the Apostles. This option was not the result of a special theology regarding preaching; it was a matter of what means were effective with the Indians.¹⁹ This great tableau simultaneously contained history, dogma and moral, presented in a way that was clear and simple for the faithful. We also notice one or the other picture catechism wherein we cannot discover any concern for

adaptation : the scenes of Christian life in them reflect a French milieu.²⁰

Hymns were another important instrument for teaching the faith. The Indians had shown a taste for singing, and so catechism was presented in song-form. These hymns preached the message far and wide: Indians who had never met a priest knew them and were singing them.²¹

Finally, Grandin noted how important ceremonies were for the good progress of the mission: solemn Masses, wearing the purple soutane, processions of the Blessed Sacrament.²²

Grandin also mentioned giving the cross and medals to catechumens and unbelievers; these crosses and medals were meant to replace the symbols of protective animals.²³

During the mission, an effort was made to teach the more intelligent how to read, since these could become catechists to their own people.²⁴

Those too simple-minded to comprehend the catechism given in public could converse privately with the missionary. The catechumens also went to a kind of confession without receiving absolution: this was another means of instructing candidates for baptism to come.²⁵

Words alone were not sufficient: the missionaries' attitude was found to be very important in evangelization. The telling argument in converting the Indians was the kindness and charity of the priest, and herein lies the reason for the missionaries' popularity. The Fathers manifested their charity and affection for the Indians, visiting them and showing interest in them, and especially by caring for their children. Their concrete interest took the form of hospitals and schools.²⁶

The missions to the Indians copied several elements characteristic of the missions in France organized by Eugene de Mazenod and the Oblates, such as visiting the homes, holding processions, planting the cross at the end of the mission.²⁷

Regarding the catechetical tools, the catechisms, pictures, hymns were marked by what existed in France and in French Canada. The missionaries did not hesitate, however, to adopt certain methods such as syllabic writing, for example, which was easier for the Indians to grasp, or the "chronological ladder", and such...

If the Indians responded positively to the missionary preaching, it was time to prepare them for baptism, by which the merits of Jesus Christ were applied to them.²⁸

One of the first things catechumens were taught was how to administer baptism. Living far away from the priest, they were often required to baptize children or dying adults.²⁹

As a general rule, the missionaries baptized all the children who were brought to them, regardless of whether the parents were unbelievers, catechumens or Christians.³⁰ This was motivated by the high mortality rate and because baptism established a bond of belonging between the Church and the family of these children. The children of Protestant parents were also accepted for baptism.³¹ Thus we have a baptism here which preceded faith, not only in the children but even in the parents; this baptism was celebrated in the context of the priest's faith.

For baptizing adults, Grandin required knowledge of the main mysteries, of enough prayers to be able to say the rosary, and a Christian life since the time the priests had come into the area. He was less demanding in the cases of the sick and the aged in danger of death.³²

Before baptism, a person has to become a Christian. It was impossible to have an organized catechumenate or a support community, for the Indians were nomads. The missionaries tried to prepare them for baptism by means of the annual or bi-annual missions.

Baptism was not so much the goal as it was a step in a much longer process, that of christianization. If this latter word in general means the activity by which a person becomes a Christian, Grandin attached a more precise meaning to it. He clearly distinguished between an Indian Christian and a christianized Indian : by baptism one becomes a Christian, but this Christian will still be influenced by his pagan education for a long time to come. A person becomes christianized when he has achieved a better understanding of the realities of religion than he had at baptism and also has more courage to observe the same.³³ This christianization is achieved through instruction properly so called, through the sacramental life, with the help of catechists and the support of associations and confraternities.

Grandin was keenly aware of the precarious situation of the newly baptized: christianized supposed a slow growth during which the baptized could count on the missionaries' support and visits.³⁴

Oral and written teaching played a fundamental role in christianization. Preaching had to be very simple.³⁵ In the retreats we find the same emphases, the same themes as we do in the missions given in France during the period of the Restoration, namely, the importance of salvation, the reality of death and the last ends. It is all presented with the same religious mentality that characterized the French preachers of that period, including the danger of abusing the element of fear in preaching.³⁶

When it comes to writings, several Catholic families, influenced by the Protestant practice, owned a bible.³⁷ Works in the Indians' languages were also published, either for the faithful or for the missionaries.³⁸

The sacraments played a primordial part in christianizing the members of the Church of Saint Albert. Those baptized were not automatically admitted to the other sacraments. Those who indulged in gambling, dancing and drinking would see themselves barred from the sacraments. Taking part in certain traditional festivities would result in being excluded from the sacraments.³⁹

Confirmation was presented as "God's good medicine which makes the heart strong".⁴⁰ Pastoral experience had led Grandin to the following conclusion : confirmation leads to a better grasp of the faith, to a deeper understanding which then made it possible to be given access to communion.⁴¹

The scanty religious instruction the Christians of the North-West had received explains the missionaries' great reserve when it came to admitting them to first communion.⁴² Some missionaries manifested a jansenist severity in this matter⁴³ Bishop de Mazenod, for whom there were no Christians unless they were also communicants, criticized this reserve. From that time onwards, married Christians were admitted to confirmation and to communion⁴⁴ Then it was discovered how the Eucharist can be an evangelization factor⁴⁵

In the 1880s, the rules for admittance to first communion became more flexible, especially in the older missions.⁴⁶ Eleven or thirteen years of age was the outside limit for Grandin : young Christians of this age had a right to the sacraments, after suitable preparation.⁴⁷ The mysteries of the faith, the prayers, and the laws regarding marriage had to be known in order to be admitted to communion.⁴⁸

Other difficulties came to the missionaries from the celebration of the sacrament

of Penance. Its celebration was not too frequent, since the priest was usually far away, and the brief duration of the encounters did not allow for verification of the penitent's dispositions. Moreover, the religious knowledge of baptized persons in danger of death or of children was rather limited: they knew the sign of the cross, that they had been baptized, but could not even recite the Pater.⁴⁹

As for the sacrament of marriage, becoming a Christian did not settle all the problems: some Indians wanted a novitiate for marriage and many wanted to remain novices for good; some tribes have kept the ancient custom of trial marriage.⁵⁰

Because the Christians were dispersed over a vast area and the priest was far away, the sacrament of extreme-unction was not celebrated very often.

Because the faithful were scattered, because of their simplicity and little religious knowledge, the missionaries formulated particular rules for the sacramental life of the Church of Saint Albert. As Grandin pointed out, "these Christians are not the Christians of Europe": both he and his collaborators took this into account. He himself was less demanding than some of his confrères when it came to the administration of the sacraments. He showed great sensitivity to the special situation of the Christians.

Christianization, i.e. knowing the realities of faith better and living them with greater courage, can be achieved also through the ministry of catechists and the support Christians find in associations and confraternities.

We cannot speak of an organization of catechists in the diocese of Saint Albert similar to that found in other local Churches; nevertheless, Indians and Métis did become apostles to their own people.

Christian Indians were learning how to write from 1856 onwards, and these were able to teach writing and to pass on their knowledge of religion to others.⁵¹ Grandin mentions a few names, among them the métis patriarch François Beaulieu who exercised a certain form of ministry, presiding over the prayer and the first church in the small Christian community of Rivière-du-Sel.⁵²

The idea of forming catechists to offset the lack of priests surfaced in 1882⁵³ We cannot detail just how much the clergy of Saint Albert responded to this call of their bishop.⁵⁴ If there were some individual catechists, it does not seem that there was an organization of catechists. If the project of forming catechists was voiced, it does not seem to have received much follow-up in practice.

We do notice, on the other hand, the existence of some confraternities and associations whose purpose was to support the faithful by prayer and example. In the diocese of Saint Albert there were: the semi-perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament,⁵⁵ the Archconfraternity of the most Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary for the conversion of sinners,⁵⁶ the confraternities of the scapular of Mount Carmel and the Immaculate Conception,⁵⁷ the Association of the Propagation of the Faith and that of the Holy Childhood,⁵⁸ the third Order of St. Francis.⁵⁹ Grandin especially speaks of the Archconfraternity of the Suffering Heart of Jesus and the Compassionate Heart of Mary in favour of the dying. These associates were expected to be of assistance to the dying, preparing for baptism and baptizing those who were not, eliciting sentiments of faith, hope and love, and of a contrition as perfect as possible.⁶⁰

Through this last-mentioned Archconfraternity, there was a place for ministry by the faithful in the Church of Saint Albert. The missionaries, however, did not share their Bishop's eagerness in this matter. Some associates were inscribed, but Grandin never obtained the results he had hoped for. While we note the priests' slowness in

responding to this, we have not been able to determine the reasons for their reluctance. Grandin thought that they did not perceive the importance of the undertaking. It was, nevertheless, long before the documents, a first attempt at "lay ministry".

All these associations and confraternities came from Europe, and especially from France and Italy. The Church of Saint Albert had taken its place in the Church of the 19th century with its Marian devotions, keeping the month of Mary,⁶¹ the devotion to the Sacred Heart and the Apostolate of Prayer,⁶² taking part in the Jubilee decreed by the Pope.⁶³ There were few things which were special to Saint Albert.

Grandin and his collaborators had to create everything from the very beginning.⁶⁴ The Church of Saint Albert was a barely cultivated portion of the Lord's vineyard which included so much ground that had still to be broken up.⁶⁵ It was their task to form the Church where it did not yet exist, to extend God's reign.⁶⁶

The Bishop of Saint Albert manifested from the outset of his ministry his interest in the formation of a native clergy.⁶⁷ In spite of the opposition from some of his clergy,⁶⁸ he believed to the very end in the necessity of a local clergy for the spread and building up of God's reign : as far as he was concerned, "only when it is able to provide priests for itself can a country be considered truly and solidly conquered for the Church".⁶⁹ During his ministry as a bishop, Grandin had the joy of ordaining two Métis to the priesthood.⁷⁰

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62 "Visite à la mission d'Île-à-la-Crosse, 24 juin 1890" (*ibidem*, vol. 17, p. 175); "Actes des Délégations, 28 juin 1890" (*ibidem*, vol. 15, p. 190); *Journal*, June 2, 1899 (*ibidem*, vol. 3, p. 435).

63 *Lettre circulaire*, August 1875 (*ibidem*, vol. 17, p. 101).

64 To Father Charles Tatin, April 13, 1892 (*ibidem*, vol. 14, p. 645).

65 *Lettre circulaire*, April 14, 1872 (*ibidem*, vol. 17, p. 47).

66 "Notes – Retraite annuelle 1884" (*ibidem*, vol. 7, p. 86).

67 To Bishop Emile Legal, March 1898 (*ibidem*, vol. 12, p. 124); to Mr Sébaux, December 16, 1855 (*ibidem*, vol. 8, p. 503).

68 *Lettre circulaire*, March 5, 1900 (*ibidem*, vol. 17, p. 521); to Father Cassien Augier, October 16, 1897 (*ibidem*, vol. 14, pp. 331-332).

69 To Miss Jeanne Brigard, foundress of the Oeuvre de Saint-Pierre, July 30, 1901 (*ibidem*, vol. 16, p. 566); *Journal*, January 12, 1902 (*ibidem*, vol. 3, pp. 655-656).

70 Ronald P. ZIMMER, O.M.I., "Early Oblate Attempts for Indian and Metis Priests in Canada", in *Études Oblates*, 32 (1973), pp. 286-287.

The Response of the Oblates to the Founder's Call to Evangelize (American Region - U.S. Southern Province)*

* There are two presentors from the U.S. region at this Roman Congress on evangelization and Oblate history: Father Clarence Menard from the East, and myself from the Southwest and Mexico. We spoke almost exclusively of our own areas of concern. Participants at the Congress are aware that there are two more provinces: Western (or California) and Central. As mentioned in this paper, the California province was an offshoot of Texas and to this day is heavily involved in the evangelization of Hispanics. The Central province always had some works with the American Indians. Today it also commits itself to work among the increasing hispanic minorities of the central and north central states.

When I was still teaching Church History at Oblate College, San Antonio, our own students would try to unnerve me by asking: "Well, Father, What's new in history?" They forced me to realize that indeed history can reveal something new, even thought provoking, if you ask new questions, of course at the light of what is going on in the world right now, or after the reading of such book as *Future Shock* (already dated) or more significantly for us our new *Constitutions and Rules* and Paul VI's exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*.

Supposing one has a clear idea of the extraordinary expansion of our missionary society in the 19th century and during the very life time of blessed Eugene, in our case along the U.S. - Mexican border, some new questions to help learn from history could be the following:

- what did the Oblates do for minorities, here a largely immigrant population speaking a "foreign" language?
- did we make efforts to adapt to their culture? Were we sensitive to it? At least did we give it some thought?
- as a group, did we always have a clear sense of mission, that of evangelizing the poor?
- if blessed Eugene was living, would he be happy with the works of his Oblates of the American region?
- as a group, did we fight against injustice?
- did we set priorities in our ministries?
- did we try to develop lay leaders?
- did we honestly try to stir vocations to the priesthood among minorities (hispanic)? If we failed, why so?

You already guess I am approaching my topic from the point of view of the recently (1979) discerned first priority for our ministries in the whole U.S. region, namely "ministries to minorities, especially the Hispanics". How did we get there? In the past we tackled this work because we were available and we were sent, and the sender, Bishop de Mazenod just could not resist the urgent appeals of far-flung missionary bishops. The typical Oblate did not need a congress or a discerning process to involve himself in the work of "evangelization of souls". After he was sent, he generally let circumstances dictate the where and how of his efforts. But now we can reflect on this development and conclude that the Oblates have remained

faithful to the call of the Founder, so well expressed in the congregation's motto, "He has sent me to evangelize the poor".

A few more reflections on "ministry to minorities" will serve to clarify the central theme of the following overview of our history and to give an equally valid connecting link between past and present. Constitution # 5 clearly indicates to whom we should proclaim Christ and his Kingdom. Our preference is for "the most abandoned" or "those groups the Church touches least". Who are the most abandoned in the United States? It is clearly the "minorities". There is a difference between the hispanic minority(ies) and the other immigrants that came to these shores in the 19th and early 20th century. The latter (Germans, Italians, Poles, Irish, mid-Europeans) often came with their priests. There were efforts in Europe to recruit clergy for America. And now, even in Texas, vocations to the priesthood still come mostly from these small farming communities of Czecks, Poles or Germans. The Irish suffered at first of discrimination but did not struggle as much, because they could speak the language of the majority and soon they could participate in wards' politics and thus control their own destiny.

Not so with the now large Hispanic minority which forms 25% of the Catholic population in the U.S. Latin America is itself a mission land in need of evangelizers. They cannot help us. Quite a few Spaniards have

come to the U.S., including many Oblates, but it was and still is just a trickle. The Southern Province, therefore, is comfortable with its expressed priority in ministries, even if it came about less by choice than by circumstances. And now the other American Provinces have discerned it as the priority of the whole region.

I - During the Life Time of the Founder.

From the first rule book to the present, there is a most definite emphasis on *ministry to the most abandoned*. The description of "abandoned" or "destitute" vary from country to country, even between regions of the same country. In the case of the first Texas foundation, it was question of the immigrants of Mexican origin who together with a motley group from Europe and the eastern seaboard flocked the new towns (like Brownsville) along the Mexican border after the end of the Mexican-American war (1845-48). Bishop J.M. Odin of Galveston (now, there are 11 dioceses in Texas) simply did not have clergy to make the Church present on the new border. That is the plight he took to Montreal in 1849. We know that Father Pierre Telmon and three companions could not resist the call and undertook a 2,500 miles voyage to take up residence in the new frontier town of Brownsville. No arrangements had been made for their housing and maintenance. Obviously this was the age of romanticism and of daring. One wonders what the Oblate community in Montreal, just eight years old, thought of giving up that much personnel all at once, while the immense territories of the Canadian north and northwest beckoned at them. They showed daring initiative, but the Founder was not pleased. What did he know about Texas, south Texas or the American western frontier? I see no reason why the mission failed and was discontinued except that de Mazenod himself quickly recalled his troops. He wrote in his *Journal* of November 10, 1849, with more than a bit of reproach: "... and here is Father Telmon who takes upon himself the mission of Texas, using faculties I had given him while he was at Pittsburg (sic), and takes with him two men of his choice..."

Obviously the Founder had not been briefed by the proper authority, the ordinary of Galveston, and this was contrary to his criteria for accepting new works abroad. He also feared some unnecessary hardships. In brief, the Founder just did not have

enough information. It is possible that he also mistrusted some aspects of Telmon's brilliant but sometimes erratic character.

Not until Bishop Odin himself visited Marseilles did the Founder reconsider. Odin must have been eloquent in describing the needs of the Church in the worst part of his huge diocese. One surmises that de Mazenod was easily brought to tears and self-sacrifice at hearing such stories. Did he really know what he was getting into? Or is it that he could communicate so well with a fellow Frenchman? (All first bishops of Texas and many secular clergy came from the diocese of Lyons). The result is that the congregation committed itself to send six priests and one brother back to Texas in 1852. That is quite a decision, if we remember the Oblates did not yet count 200 members and were already spread out in many countries. Which arguments in favor of Texas more than others convinced the Founder?

In view of his recent discontent with Father Telmon's "foolhardy undertaking" the new decision could not spring from "irresistible impulse". Bishop Odin had written about spiritual neglect in the Brownsville area, of the scandalous life of priests who had previously visited the place, and of the opportunity to do authentic missionary work. De Mazenod always felt the need to respond to situations described as catastrophic and to which no one else was willing to respond. If there is any impulse, it was caused by Odin's description of the broken body of the Church. De Mazenod never could resist even if the decision seemed foolhardy. He would ask: "What would Jesus Christ do?"

If we used the language of our now clearly stated priority for ministry, one could ask whether the Founder was aware of the well publicized claim, since 1839, of South Carolina's Bishop John England that the Catholic Church in America had already lost three to four million members. England and other American bishops will continue to inflate the figure for purpose of recruiting men and money in Europe. But at least it shows graphically the tremendous missionary effort needed in America at the time.¹

In the nine years until the death of the Founder, there is absolutely no indication of regret or second thought. In the correspondence that can be traced, we find that (1) he suffered with his troops in midst of hardships, (2) encouraged them to stick to their work, (3) and even urged them look forward to expansion into Mexico.

(1) One reason for the suffering is that the Rio Grande had such a hot and unhealthy climate, that it claimed four lives before the first Oblate succumbed to the bitter cold of the Canadian North in 1858. In all, seven will have died by 1862, including the first superior who disappeared in a shipwreck on the Gulf of Mexico. No wonder de Mazenod exclaimed to Fr. Gaudet in November 1858: "Oh, cruel mission of Texas, how you wound my poor soul. Here's the fifth victim that you have swallowed. Who will be the next one? Reassure me immediately; hours are like days to my soul, and days like weeks".

Hardship is no criterion that one mission is more evangelical or Christlike than the other, but it makes you wonder about the cost of sacrifice one has to pay before the harvest. The Texas superior, Augustin Gaudet, expanded on the thought of the Founder, in 1862: "This mission is the calvary and tomb of our congregation".

(2) Yet the Founder was not disheartened. He was full of praise for the work of his Oblates and how they carried it out. He used a phrase, now fondly remembered, to characterize their itinerant ministry: he considered it a "*perpetual mission*".² The enthusiastic reaction might have been occasioned by the first report of incursions and foreseen expansion across the border, into Mexico. Yet the ministry was basically the same on the American side of the river: parish work with visits to outlying

settlements.

This expression, "perpetual mission", can be viewed as authentic approval of Oblate ministry in Texas, which was and will remain "parish work". The Founder never questioned it. Perhaps the expression "parish centered" is more correct. By then, we had residences with parishes in Brownsville and Roma, and for a while Matamoros and Ciudad Victoria in Mexico, but the Texas Oblate was more liable to be roaming the sandy plains, on horseback, under a large *sombrero*, and carrying a portable altar.

We know from the Founder's correspondence with other mission fields, that he did not want his Oblates to be mere "curés": he meant of the type he had seen in Marseilles and Provence. Clearly, he was most satisfied with reports that described them preaching and evangelizing everyday of the week, whether it be in bigger centers like Brownsville and Matamoros, or in distant mission chapels or tiny ranches reached by horseback on long missionary tours.

(3) One hope that sustained de Mazenod and the Texas Oblates amidst hardships is that they do something about Mexico, even before the Founder was officially contacted about it. It must have been one of those irresistible supernatural instincts that the Oblates of the region now love to recall. He approved *a priori* the project of a foundation in Mexico, keeping his troops on the border and resisting the temptation to accept charge of the major seminary of Philadelphia. This last offer touched a soft spot in his heart, but the call of Mexico touched him even more.³ Again the reason must have been the call of abandoned people and general spiritual neglect. The Oblates had reported to him that Mexican nationals would sometimes make a ten-day trip to receive the sacraments in Brownsville. A strange but constant leit-motif of Oblate thinking in Texas was that Mexico was the promised land and Brownsville the stepping-stone.

In March 1859, Don Musquiz, pastor of the parish of Matamoros across the border, and vicar general of the diocese of Monterrey, pleaded directly with the Founder in accents vividly reminiscent of de Mazenod's ideas and style in the Preface of the Rules:

If Mexico was conquered for Christianity, it was three centuries ago, and it was not completely conquered from the beginning. The state of Tamaulipas on the frontier of the United States, has not been Catholic for more than a century... The first missionaries who at the price of many difficulties and trials converted the Indians who populated Mexico, have left beautiful monuments which proclaim their zeal and the ardent faith which they were able to inspire... But the internal war against religion has caused much ruin in the country; the bishops have been persecuted and sent into exile; the priest have been banished from their parishes, and these have been reduced to the most abject misery... The churches are abandoned and deserted; the number of those who assist at mass on Sundays and days of obligation has diminished painfully...

The presence of missionaries would be the most efficacious remedy in bringing the 200,000 inhabitants of the state of Tamaulipas out of their lethargy, both spiritual and material... I have had the honor of knowing the Oblates, of admiring their work, and of loving them. Thus I have often asked them to help me in my immense parish and to establish themselves as a community of missionaries. As I am Vicar-General, due to the exile of the bishop of Monterrey, I wish them to preach missions throughout the whole state. I beg your Lorship to send apostolic laborers, who could do such in immense amount of good for the poor abandoned souls, and who could reap an abundant harvest.⁴

Such descriptions of situations can always be stretched to please the heart of a man like de Mazenod, but the beauty is that he believed it because it was and still is the truth. No significant foundations in Mexico were offered or accepted until 1901, forty years after the founder's death. During that period, especially during Father Fabre's generalate, the Texas Oblates will suffer of isolation, oblivion and occasional self-pity and discouragement, but they could never doubt they were evangelizing according to the mind of their Founder.

II - After the Founder.

The period between 1865 and 1880 were years of intense suffering. The Oblates of Texas felt bottled up in the southern tip of the state. (The railroad will not reach the Rio Grande Area until 1904). They thought they had nothing to show for their efforts, and were overlooked and by-passed by the vigorous westward expansion. Many thought the situation was hopeless and that the Congregation was not going anywhere. They felt they were misunderstood, even betrayed by major superiors in Europe, who even connived to give up the "useless missions" of Texas. The two superiors at the time, Augustin Gaudet and Florent Vandenberghe, were chronic pessimists. They could not minister in Spanish, which made them distant and judgmental. But some of the Fathers, because of the circumstances, never learned English either, and thus were unable themselves to assume a position of leadership among the ruling class. There was an unending list of mutual grievances among men of good will.

Why should their local superior, Vandenberghe, suggest: "Why not go among civilized people in Louisiana or North Texas?"⁵ Thus the crisis continued until a genial Father Martinet, Assistant General and Canonical Visitor, came up in 1882 with a double solution affecting administration and a needed re-direction of ministry.

(1) *Administration.* Martinet thought the time had come to start a separate Province in the U.S.A., uniting the houses of the northeastern states (until then depending on Canada) to the houses of Texas (previously under the care of the General Administration). It looked good on paper, but the arrangement will never work very well. The new province will have its feet in the hot waters of the Rio Grande, and its head in the snows of New England". And, as another Texas Oblate put it: "The new provincial will be as far from us as Moscow and Constantinople are from Paris". Indeed, there will be too much difference of language and nationality, not to mention distances. Martinet spoke of a "chain" on the feet of the new American Province. The arrangement will have to work until the next turning point in 1883.

(2) *Ministry.* Father Martinet read correctly that there was no immediate future in the Rio Grande area. He repeated the complaint of some of the Brownsville Oblates: "The Americans here are free-masons, and the Mexicans live in concubinage". But as if he were the Founder, he concluded: "Is that not the reason why we came here in the first place? Are we not missionaries of the poor?" Yet he argued correctly that the Texas contingent should walk with the rest of the country.

The opening came when, in the same year 1883, we accepted St. Mary's parish in San Antonio, which was conventional English-speaking work. It meant a certain deviation from our work with the most abandoned. But Providence did not let us forget our original and main thrust as missionaries, because Bishop Neraz insisted that we also take charge of the parish of Eagle Pass, 150 miles south-southwest of San Antonio on the Mexican border. (Interesting how when we accepted Laredo in 1922, Oblates had charge of all Spanish-speaking people - and others - from the Gulf of Mexico to near El Paso, or within a diameter of 550 miles). Eagle Pass included numerous missions that will later become separate Oblate parishes: Del Rio, Carrizo Springs, Uvalde, Bracketville, Crystal City, Asherton, etc. There, the ministry will remain basically the same as in the Rio Grande Valley since 1849, but the expansion and change of scenery served as a booster to Oblate morale. Besides, from the centers of San Antonio and Eagle Pass the Oblates were able to go out much more than before, and preach parish missions according to the dreams of the Founder.

The next development in terms of expansion happened in 1901-1903, when we finally accepted works in Mexico. This establishment is doubly significant because it

also explains the foundation of St. Anthony's Theological Seminary in San Antonio. Bishop Eulogio Gillow of Oaxaca who invited the Oblates to his diocese also deeded to the Oblates that excellent piece of property in Laurel Heights, San Antonio, with the condition that the future seminary to be built and staffed by Oblates, serve (1) for the education of priests who would work with the Mexican-Americans in Texas and (2) for the education of his own seminarians (he never sent any).

Thus, Providence arranged that we never forget the basic thrust of the ministry since 1849. It is worth noting that all the theology students and half of the staff came directly from France and Germany. This explains in part the multi-national composition of the future U.S. Southern Province, which remains a characteristic until today. That, in turn, might account for the missionary spirit of the Province, since the majority of its members could not insist that they work among "their own". Native vocations will not be recruited until 1905 when we added the High School department, but it will take a good ten years before we could see the results.

Following upon the building of the Scholasticate and the opening to Mexico, the decision was made in Rome to start a second American Province (now Southern U.S.). We surmise the step was also taken because of the presence in San Antonio of a capable and extraordinary man, Father Henri Constantineau, who will be provincial from 1904 until 1913. Under him will begin an amazing expansion towards the north (Dallas, Brown-wood, Mason, Brady, Stanton, etc.), eastward (Houston, New Orleans) and westward (New Mexico, California). Of course some of these foundations happened under later administrations, but Constantineau remained a powerful advisor and bursar until 1940, and he is the one who shook Texas out of its lethargy and gave it new impetus. We will not describe this journey on the map, but only mention how through this development the Texas Oblates remained true to the Founder's call to evangelize the poor. If Constantineau ever had other dreams or ambitions, Providence was always prompt in rectifying the thrust back to the line of original tradition.

This is particularly true of Dallas (1905) and the Mason-Brady area in the northwest part of the diocese of San Antonio. Constantineau tried to meet the human need of diversification of ministries, coupled with that of finding new works for Oblates who might not be compatible or comfortable in the traditional Mexican environment. Consequently the Oblates were offered and accepted a German national parish in the heart of Dallas. But it is interesting to read the correspondence of Bishop Dunn with the Provincial: he was aware "the Oblates have men who are masters of the Spanish language" and hoped that Constantineau might be able to spare some of them for his region. It is exactly what will happen. Without any formal invitation or contract, the assistant to the Oblate German-speaking pastor of St. Joseph's Dallas, for ten years will roam the western part of the diocese ministering to the small and scattered Mexican settlements. There were other priests in those areas, but they simply did not know Spanish. In those days, Mexican Catholics would not be seen in an Anglo church for fear of being rejected.

The same pattern obtained in the huge central and west central district of Texas, then under the care of the Bishop of San Antonio. We accepted the small parishes of Brownwood, Mason, Brady, Stanton, etc. because the Bishop wrote: "Many Catholic families have already lost the faith... These missions are the most abandoned of the diocese. It will take many long years to bring them up to satisfactory standing, but to do this we need the help of Catholic settlers who will not go to that part of Texas unless there is a Catholic priest, etc."

Clearly the Oblates were called again to work with minorities, this time not a hispanic but religious minority engulfed in a predominantly Anglo-Protestant sea. It

was a most valid Oblate ministry undoubtedly, but other clergy could have tackled that work if they could be found. Again the true Oblateness manifested itself when the Church soon realized there were more Mexican-Americans in that region than anyone had thought. The minority flock started to emerge from their hiding places in the farms and ranches, because they had confidence in Spanish-speaking Oblates. There soon began the pattern of building a separate Mexican church in every one of these towns, while in the Rio Grande Valley and along the border it was rather the Anglos who insisted on having a separate, exclusively English-speaking parish. More recently in both areas the trend has been to do away with separate parishes. In some places the diocesan clergy had already taken over the more affluent Anglo parishes.

We accepted so many small and isolated parishes between 1905 and 1925, that one could wonder whether it was not contrary to the letter and spirit of the rule that says Oblates should live in communities. Father Constantineau and successors had no difficulty explaining to the General Administration that this set-up was more conducive to mental health and to real priestly efficiency (today we would say "true evangelization"). The real compensating factor was that work among minorities could be carried out better in this way.

The coming of the Oblates to the metropolis of Houston in 1911 followed exactly the same pattern. We were given Immaculate Conception parish in a supposedly more affluent Anglo-Italian part of town, *provided* (and the contract clearly stipulated it) we also assume pastoral care of all the Spanish-speaking minority in the City of Houston and surrounding counties, extending east and south as far as 100 miles... and also if we took the chaplaincies of all state penitentiaries in the diocese.

In 1918, the Southern Province took up work in New Orleans, 600 miles from the provincial headquarters of San Antonio. Archbishop Shaw did not know how to staff his own cathedral church which was in sad condition of disrepair. But he remembered whom to call, because he has seen the Oblates in San Antonio during his previous assignment. Again we were specifically expected to work with minorities, this time French and Italian, in the poorest section of town. On this occasion we clearly read in the records that the Oblates accepted with the hope of recruitment... which was one of the criteria of the Founder for accepting or looking for new works or new houses. We know now from experience it was a well founded hope.

Geographical extension continued and went a full circle around San Antonio, with the opening of houses in New Mexico (1917) and California (1924) for the same basic reasons that prevailed elsewhere.

In this fast and vast development of parishes, schools and mission stations, the Oblates often counted on and received the financial backing of the Catholic Extension Society of Chicago. Provincial and bursar Constantineau cleverly cultivated the right friends up north where he was trusted and appreciated as a special advisor. The following excerpt from a letter of the President of Extension, Msgr. (later Bishop of Oklahoma) Francis Kelley to the chancellor of the diocese of Denver is typical of many letters of appreciation found in our Archives:

Oblates might wish for a place in Denver. So I want the Bishop to know that these men are perhaps the best *missionaries* I have ever had anything to do with; not in the sense of their being preachers of retreats and so called "missions" to the people, but in the real sense of the word. They have done and they are doing a missionary work for the poor Mexicans in Texas that is absolutely beyond praise. If I filled ten pages, I could not tell you the things I know to their credit... I make this testimony an official tribute from this Society.

Such testimonies in praise of the Oblates are quite commonplace in our files of correspondence with Bishops. We have heard from our friends and people to whom

we minister, that they can identify in us a very definite Oblate spirit. This is not the platform to discuss our charisms as a group of missionaries. But how did the Oblates see themselves in 1900, in 1910, in 1920 other than that they were expandable to bring the Gospel to the most abandoned? Did they seriously reflect on what *Evangelii Nuntiandi* calls "the means of evangelization"? Were there tools and methods they adopted to do their evangelizing mission to minorities more efficiently?

Unless they are culled more carefully, our Archives do not easily answer these questions. But I cherish a little book of minutes from the Brownsville district. It seems that in 1905-06, the provincial urged the Oblates to be a little better organized and to hold monthly theological

meetings as the Rule prescribed. This particular minute book reports on the topics of preaching and of home visiting.

(1) *Preaching*: Fr. Jules Piat wrote:

I am more and more convinced that the best way to preach in the ranchos, the most profitable for these simple and ignorant people and that which keeps their interest and attention is the *explanation pure and simple of the Holy Gospel...* the Sunday gospels and the parables. You should preferably read and dramatize the whole context. Under the pretext that you have before you people of little instruction, you should avoid incorrect expressions and careless style. They will often tell you candidly that they appreciate well prepared instructions, even elegant style.... Besides that, one must often talk about prayer: its necessity, beauty and power. A Mexican will neglect his religious duties, but will never completely forget prayer itself.... Lastly, there is always need to explain true devotion to the Blessed Mother, fighting their superstitious with prudence and tact... Moreover, All Souls day is generally a good occasion to get to them, because of their devotion to the communion of saints... But in all this, the missionary must respect the Word of God, by always preparing adequately. There are always some souls who are more intelligent and deeper than we think, etc.

(2) *Home visits*. Fr. Bernard Herrmann emphatically encouraged his confreres do to more visiting.

How can we administer the Sacraments to people who do not come to church? How else can we instruct those absent (and indeed how many men, and even women, have we got on a regular Sunday on the Mexican border)? The priest is the link between the people of God. He *is* the man of God but he must also be the man of the people. They must consider him as their own, as one who participates in their life. It is imperative for him to visit his people, to know them, and to promote even their material and social welfare in order to bring them to God.

Actually this had never been a problem among the missionaries who visited the ranches. On the contrary, how could they have been closer to the people when they slept, ate and said mass in their homes? But in the larger cities and residences it might have been a subject of discussion.

At the same monthly meeting, Fr. Juanito Bretault was assigned the topic, "Manner of visiting the ranches". He took things less seriously and only explained how to take care of your horse during those trips... "because the horse is the other part of the missionary".

Today we tend to take these matters for granted and we would not think the subject of home visiting is worth writing a paper about. There is also the tendency of delegating that work entirely to lay ministers. Yet *Evangelii Nuntiandi* dedicates all of paragraph No. 46 to the importance of personal contacts as an effective means of evangelization.

In those days there could hardly be question of the communications media. Yet an imaginative approach in proclaiming the Gospel message was the use of the *Chapel car* around 1912, soon after Mr. Ford had started to put America on wheels. The truck was covered like a van, with the back doors opening to show a regular altar with all the appurtenances. Mass could be celebrated any place where there was no chapel, and from the platform the Oblates often preached week long

missions.

The missionary expansion described above would have been impossible without the presence of so many Spanish Oblates in Texas, even before there was a Spanish province. At first Spain was under the patronage of the province of France-Midi which, however, could no longer support her after World War I. But there was such a need of Spanish-speaking missionaries in Texas that our province gladly made a deal in 1922 whereby Texas would financially and fully support the juniorate of Urnieta and administer the two or three houses of Spain. Until 1931, the provincial of Texas was automatically the major superior in Spain. The Spanish recruits generally made their novitiate in Europe, and the majority continued their theological studies at Castroville and San Antonio.

The arrangement had some incongruous and odious aspects, with the Texas bursar (Constantineau) complaining that he did not want to pay for more than 60 juniors, while sometimes they had as many as 100 at Urnieta. On this side of the Atlantic, some Spanish scholastics thought the intellectual and religious formation was inferior.... which General Assistant Isidore Belle emphatically refuted.

Spain probably gained a lot in this case of adoption: it helped her in hard financial times when Midi could not help. Texas benefited even more, and not only in terms of needed personnel for the missions. This multilingual, multi-national composition of the province, as we sometimes reflect, kept alive this availability to evangelize the hispanic minority in the southwest United States.

Another result of the Spanish liaison, as it turned out, is that the Texas province was asked to start the first Oblate missions in South America. The foundations in Uruguay in 1929 was made up of personnel (Spaniards) formed and trained in Texas. The work we were asked to do was exactly the same as in the days of young de Mazenod in Provence, preaching missions in the poorest parishes and most neglected towns of the diocese of Plata. We should note in passing that earlier, in 1925, Texas contributed in opening the missions of Pilcomayo, Paraguay: there, the personnel came from Germany, but the first superior (soon Prefect Apostolic) was our own Father Joseph Rose, because he hailed from Germany and spoke perfect Spanish.

III - Evangelization by Oblates Today.

As I reflect about the Oblate presence in the Southwest U.S.A. at the light of the Founder's call to evangelize the poor and of the papal Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, I become aware of the pitfalls of reading history with today's lenses. The danger is to easily justify both past and present. But there are also many advantages to this method. Is there any other way to learn, if history is to speak to us in our contemporary idiom? The advantage of the preceding overview from the point of view of the evangelization of an abandoned minority is that, if we let history speak to us in the accents of the new Constitutions and Rules and of recent papal exhortations, we all become more aware of the primary task of the Church, which is to evangelize. Then, it is up to each Oblate to discern what steps of evangelization are most needed in his milieu.

Individual Oblates will do it according to their own talents and opportunities. I find it impossible at this point to make a survey of their methods or of their success. I will only share a little of my own experience as pastor in Eagle Pass, Texas.

In the spring of this year, we organized a new type of parish mission that ran

simultaneously in the three parishes of Eagle Pass, all staffed by Oblates. The work started in the fall '81, with the training of a central team for each parish. Each team then formed four committees (liturgy, sick and shut-ins, youth and service) in order to involve as many active parishioners as possible, and to keep the coming mission in their awareness and in the news. In my parish, we then recruited and officially commissioned 72 co-missionaries. Their task was to find as many homes (or more) in predetermined areas, and invite all the neighbors to attend 7 consecutive evenings during the 5th week of Lent, for simple prayer and discussion upon a Gospel message. The Word was not proclaimed in church until the first days of Holy Week, ending with a huge, living Stations of the Cross outside, on Good Friday. We are satisfied that many more people heard about the Lord of their lives than they would have in a more traditional parish mission. Besides, it was done in their homes where Christianity is learned and lived.

This experience of evangelization has been very good, because we have many recent immigrants with one foot in Mexico and the other in Texas.

They have little contact with the large parish community. But the challenge of such a mission is to keep the organization alive and to think of a way to continue this evangelization either in small groups or through personal contact. Meanwhile a good by-product has been the formation of many lay leaders or ministers, which is the second priority for ministry in our U.S. region.

Another experience of evangelization has been my involvement in the movement called "Renovaci6n cristiana" and their "pequeñas comunidades". In the U.S. "basic Christian communities" work better among Hispanics, as the sociologists tell us. In all ethnic groups, Cursillo and especially the Charismatic movement can be credited with the growth of these "church groups" or "groups in the Church". In my parish we do not put on the "Seminar in the Holy Spirit" so popular elsewhere in the U.S. One hispanic substitute is the "Curso de Evangelizaci6n" imported from neighboring Mexico. It is given on a weekend or on two consecutive Sundays. The participants and others are welcome to attend the weekly prayer meeting (asamblea de oraci6n), although we remind our people not to consider it a priority or an obligation. The result of the Curso and its focus is rather the forming of small communities of which we now have 27, each comprised of 10 persons on the average. We do not refer to these communities as "de base" in order to avoid the militantly political connotation the word has received in much of Latin America. We call them simply "pequeñas comunidades". They are support groups, but in a real evangelization context. These weekly meeting in homes serve also as catechesis, following upon the first evangelization, because there one can learn what he actually lives. There is a weekly and more formal class called "crecimiento" faithfully attended by about 250 adults and young people.

These are the experiences of one man. However, I repeat that many other Oblates have become more conscious of the opportunity they have and always had to evangelize. We sometimes say that a large percentage of those attending church are only half evangelized. The expression is more correct than unkind, because Paul VI says: that "the Church must begin by evangelizing Herself by conversion and renewal".⁶

There is an on-going discussion in our province as to where and when a parish is sufficiently developed, and therefore should be given to other clergy, to help in that decision we have the "Del Vecchio criteria". Generally, the judgment is forced and hurried by expediency, as when a Bishop himself requests that we give this or that parish. At the light of this congress, I suggest we give more thought to the expression "sufficiently *evangelized*" than to sufficiently "organized", even though

the judgment is no less difficult to make.

In conclusion, I can safely voice our satisfaction as Oblates at the official call to work among an important minority group, which will surely become more visible and vocal in the American Church. Today's call, after a Congress such as this, is to do that work with renewed conviction and hope, whether it be in parishes or in special ministries like that of Retreat Houses.

Bernard DOYON, O.M.I.
Eagle Pass, Texas.

NOTES:

1 Gerald SHAUGHNESSEY, *Has the Immigrant Kept the Faith... 1790-1920* (New York: Macmillan, 1925).

2 Letter to Father Augustin Gaudet, August 28, 1858 (*ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 189).

3 To Father Augustin Gaudet, April 20, 1857 (*loc. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 179).

4 Quoted in Bernard DOYON, O.M.I., *The Cavalry of Christ on the Rio Grande* (Milwaukee: Catholic Life Publications Bruce Press, 1956), pp. 87-88.

5 See *ibidem*, last three chapters, pp. 177-234.

6 *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 15.

Oblate Evangelization in the United States

Early Phase (1842-1883)

Introduction.

On October 16, 1842, two priests arrived at Cooperville, N.Y., a small village on the shores of Lake Champlain at the mouth of the Great Chazy River, a village then known as Corbeau.¹ They belonged to the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, six of those members, under the leadership of Father Jean Baptiste Honorat, had just recently made the crossing from France to implant near Montreal the first foundation of the congregation on North American soil (December 2, 1841).² Heading south from their new residence at Longueuil, Quebec, Father Pierre Telmon and his Canadian-born companion Father Damase Dandurand, still a novice in the congregation, had traveled to St. Joseph's Church of Corbeau in order to conduct a parish mission. During the next four weeks, the two men adapted for the French Canadian immigrants scattered throughout eight different villages in rural northern New York State the familiar style of mission preaching developed in southern France by their founder Bishop Eugene de Mazenod. The French Canadian immigrants responded enthusiastically to the Oblate preaching. The mission was a real success in spite of some negative vibes occasioned by Telmon's burning of Protestant bibles and anti-Catholic pamphlets.³

The Corbeau mission marked the first step toward Oblate evangelization in the United States. From their center at Longueuil (after 1851, in Montreal) Oblate missionaries continued to penetrate southward into the northeastern states and westward as far as Chicago. By the end of the decade, under the distant but watchful eye of their founder Eugene de Mazenod, Bishop of Marseilles, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate extended their evangelizing efforts to the farthest corners of the rapidly expanding country – to the Pacific northwest in the Oregon Territory and to the Gulf coastal areas of Texas.

The present study will focus on the first forty-one years of Oblate activity in the United States – from the Corbeau mission of 1842 to the establishment of a self-governing American Province in 1883. Before dealing with the specific theme of Oblate Evangelization, however, a brief profile of the Catholic Church in the United States during the middle decades of the nineteenth century seems imperative. Against such a background, highlighting the problems and needs of the American Church, the actual response of the Oblates and the obstacles they faced will become clearer. The various apostolic endeavors undertaken by the Oblates will then be viewed thematically in order to do justice to the topic in such a brief space.

I - The Catholic Church in the United States.

With the birth of the new nation after the American Revolution, a nation which guaranteed religious freedom, the Catholic Church in the United States entered into a second history. What characterized its history during the next century was its astounding growth, especially through immigration. An insignificant minority of some 35,000 members when John Carroll became Bishop of Baltimore in 1790, the Catholic Church experienced a slow rate of development during the next twenty-five years, reaching approximately 100,000 by 1815.⁴ But the pace of immigration – especially from Ireland – increased dramatically after 1830, hiking the Catholic

population to 1.75 million at mid-century and doubling that mark a decade later. This rapid growth through immigration had transformed the Catholic Church into the largest single denomination in the country.⁵ Yet it remained a church of foreigners, viewed with suspicion and fear by the Protestant majority.

The new nation experienced not only a drastic demographic change during the nineteenth century, but also an unprecedented territorial expansion. Beginning with the purchase of Louisiana from France in 1803, the expansion continued with the annexation of Florida (including southern Alabama and Mississippi) in 1819 and of Texas in 1845. It reached the very shores of the Pacific with the acquisition of California (1848) and the delimitation of the Oregon territory at the forty-ninth parallel (1846). The purchase of southern New Mexico and Arizona (Cadsdan: 1853) and of Alaska (1867) rounded out the continental area of the United States. A constant stream of pioneers flowed westward during the middle decades to settle and develop these vast territories, gradually forming a nation that spanned the continent from sea to sea.

Both the extraordinary influx of Catholic immigrants and the steady westward expansion imposed heavy burdens on the religious life and evangelization of the American church, still missionary in character. From the simple organizational point of view, the single province of Baltimore with four suffragan sees (Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Bardstown) in 1808 was divided into three with twenty-three suffragan sees after the erection of the new provinces of Oregon (July 24, 1846) and St. Louis (July 20, 1847).⁶ When the First Plenary Council of the Church in the United States opened in Baltimore on May 9, 1852, it gathered together six archbishops (Baltimore, Oregon, St. Louis, New York, New Orleans, Cincinnati) and a total of thirty-five suffragan bishops.⁷

The rapid development of administrative structures, however, does not tell the complete story of the difficulties faced on the pastoral level, especially in the more remote areas of the country. Even with the increasing number of priests from France, Ireland and Germany and the financial support of European mission societies (the Lyons-based Propagation of the Faith and the Leopoldine Society in Vienna), the American church could hardly keep up with the pace of immigration and expansion. A further complication stemmed from the anti-foreign and anti-Catholic thrust of the Nativist movement which reached unprecedented heights between 1830 and 1860.⁸ Deeply conscious of the hostility and agitation of militant Protestants, the Catholic hierarchy countered with an increasing pastoral concern to preserve the faith of both immigrants and pioneers. Their pastoral letters issued at Provincial and Plenary Councils voiced some of their priorities: implanting of new churches and providing priestly leadership for the most remote communities; establishing Catholic schools and seminaries for the education of Catholic youths and future priests; evangelizing the Native Americans or Indians.⁹

In their evangelizing efforts the early Oblates in the United States were keenly aware of the needs of the fledgling church. They faced head on the immigrant problem in the northeast, the Indian missions in Oregon, the frontier scene in Texas. They even tried their hand at solving the educational dilemma, but with less success. Three of these four areas of Oblate evangelization will be examined more closely in this study. Father Bernard Doyon will present a picture of Oblate activities on the Texas frontier.

II - Evangelization of Immigrants in the Northeast

The Corbeau mission of 1842, with its follow up by Father Fleury Baudrand

during the next summer,¹⁰ is a valuable key to an understanding of early Oblate evangelization in the United States. It revolved around parish missions. From their center in Longueuil (later Montreal), the missionaries, traveling usually in pairs, penetrated into northern New York and Vermont, and gave missions to the Canadian and Irish immigrants scattered throughout the area. Writing to the founder on April 13, 1843, Father Honorat stated:

Fathers Baudrand and Dandurand, who made his oblation on Christmas day and who speaks English as well as French, are now in the United States, giving a second mission to Canadians and Irish spread out in rather large numbers near the border.¹¹

Even before the Corbeau mission, when the Oblates first set their sights on a apostolate in the eastern Townships with the mission in the newly-formed parish of St. George (May 1842),¹² they had included in their ministry Canadian immigrants living in northern Vermont. Responsibility for the itinerant missionary ministry in the eastern Townships was confided to the Longueuil Oblates in November 1843, especially to Fathers Baudrand and Dandurand. As they made their regular six-weeks mission tours through the Townships during the next few years, the Oblates visited also the Vermont communities of Derby and Franklin. On these apostolic treks they probably employed (with adaptations) the familiar missionary method developed by their founder in southern France. The new environment, however, rendered their undertaking a particularly difficult one.¹³

Still sporadic during the 1840's, Oblate evangelization through parish missions took on greater significance during the next two decades. Three memorable missions led to important early foundations in the northeastern states.

In Plattsburgh, N.Y., a fifteen-days retreat was preached to the Canadian immigrants by Fathers Jean-Pierre Bernard, Toussaint Rouisse and F.P. Royer during the late spring of 1853. The positive results of the mission prompted a delegation among the French-speaking settlers to open negotiations with the Montreal provincial, Father Jacques Santoni, in hopes of obtaining a more permanent Oblate presence. Their appeal succeeded so well that Father Bernard returned to Plattsburgh in late August of the same year and proceeded to establish St. Peter's parish. From this new center, the Oblates radiated throughout northern New York State, giving missions and founding other parishes.¹⁴

The very next year (April 23) Fathers Santoni and Royer opened a retreat for Canadians in Burlington, VT. Once again the mission paved the way for an Oblate foundation. In October of 1854 Fathers Augustin Gaudet and Eugene Cauvin took charge of St. Joseph's Church, Burlington's French-speaking parish, confided to them by Bishop de Goesbriand. Though forced to withdraw by early 1857 because they had overextended themselves, the Oblates accomplished an extraordinary missionary task during their brief stay, visiting some thirty Vermont towns from West Alburg in the northwest to Woodstock in the southeast.¹⁵

A decade later, in 1866, the veteran missionary André Garin and his companion B. Dédebant undertook a mission tour through Massachusetts, evangelizing the French Canadian immigrants in Springfield and surrounding localities.¹⁶ Touched by the plight of the immigrants and by their favorable response to the Oblates, Bishop John Williams of Boston invited the Oblates to establish a permanent residence in Lowell. In April of 1868, therefore, Garin and Lagier returned to Massachusetts, preached a retreat in Lowell and then implanted their community in that city to serve two different groups of immigrants: the Irish from St. John's Chapel (later, Immaculate Conception Parish) and the French Canadians in St. Joseph's Parish, newly founded by Father André Garin himself.¹⁷

Even though the 1851 foundation in Buffalo, N.Y., the first permanent residence

in the northeast, arose from an altogether different concern than the mission, it eventually assumed a leadership role in this form of evangelization. The college-seminary which had attracted the Oblates to Buffalo was closed after four years (1855), though Father Chevalier continued to teach the six remaining seminarians for another year. In November 1856 Chevalier inaugurated a whole new phase of ministry, a veritable campaign for the spiritual renewal of the Buffalo diocese through parish missions. The Buffalo Oblates, led by Chevalier, conducted a total of 108 parish missions or retreats during the next six years. In addition they preached a dozen retreats to religious communities during the same period. They extended their activities not only to the neighboring dioceses of Hamilton and Toronto, but also as far afield as Philadelphia and Quebec, where they gave two retreats for Irish settlers. All this accomplished while building a new church and ministering to their Holy Angels parish.¹⁸ With the departure of Chevalier (September 1862), the mission activity was curtailed, even abandoned for a spell. From 1866 onward, however, Fathers McGrath and Mangin sought to revive Buffalo as a mission center. They preached in twenty-two different localities in the space of ten months.¹⁹

Impressive indeed was this early missionary activity. From their centers in Montreal and Buffalo, the Oblates evangelized an immigrant population of Irish and French Canadian extraction over a broad area from Massachusetts to Illinois.²⁰ In giving themselves so wholeheartedly to this ministry of preaching to strangers in a new land, the first Oblates in the United States remained faithful to de Mazenod's vision of evangelizing the most forsaken. But they also touched upon the most important technique for Catholic revival then available on the American scene. Due to the impetus of the Second Awakening during the first three decades of the nineteenth century, revivalism had entered the mainstream of American Protestant life by mid-century.²¹ Among Catholics in America the parish mission played a role equivalent to the revivals preached among Protestants. Though they differed greatly in content – and slightly in style – the parish missions had the same goal of moral and spiritual regeneration of a population grown indifferent for being cut off from their religious roots. Catholics joined the scene of revival preaching around 1825, as parish missions became more widespread. But it is only around mid-century that the movement picked up momentum and took on the aspect of a real crusade. Quite clearly the early Oblates in the United States were open not only to their own tradition, but also to the spirit of the times.

The implantation of new parishes to serve an immigrant population was a task as difficult as it was necessary. First of all, the immigrants themselves were very poor and new churches were needed badly. In Plattsburgh alone the Oblates built not only St. Peter's Church (1854) for the Canadian population, but also St. John's Church for the Irish Catholics of the town.²² Father Claude Saliez was responsible for the construction of Our Lady of the Assumption (1854) in nearby Redford and St. Joseph's Chapel (1859-61) in Dannemora.²³ In spite of the financial difficulties that plagued the beginnings of their community, the Oblates in Buffalo began the construction of Holy Angels Church in 1856 and pursued the work for several years before completion. Even though there was no immediate building projects envisaged for the Lowell parishes, still a Protestant church was purchased and adapted for Catholic worship among the French-speaking parishioners. Because of the poverty of the immigrants, such heavy financial burdens fell in part on the Oblates.

Most of their energy, however, was devoted to the pastoral care and spiritual welfare of their immigrant parishioners. They not only preached and administered the sacraments, but also provided schools and organized pious associations to assure a deepening of Catholic life.²⁴ Indeed the Oblate foundations in the northeast became models as religious establishments among the immigrants.

III - Evangelization of the Native Americans in Oregon.

Once his decision had been made to open the Oregon mission, the first Oblate foundation in the United States, Bishop de Mazenod could not hide his enthusiasm at the prospect of evangelizing the Native Americans. Writing to Father Pascal Ricard in order to inform him of his new assignment as superior of the Oregon mission, the bishop of Marseilles gave full rein to his feelings.

I say nothing to how magnificent in the eyes of Faith is the ministry you are going to fulfill. One must go back to the birth of Christianity to find anything comparable. It is an apostle with whom you are associated and the same marvels that were brought by the first disciples of Jesus Christ will be renewed in our days by you, my dear children, whom Providence has chosen amongst so many others to announce the Good News to so many slaves of the demon who huddle in the darkness of idolatry and who know not God. This is verily the real apostolate which is renewed in our times. Let us thank the Lord for having been deemed worthy to be participants therein in so active a manner. (January 8, 1847).²⁵

De Mazenod's letters of January 1847 speak frequently of his deep concern in choosing the right personnel for the new missionary venture.²⁶ Three seminarians (George Blanchet, Casimir Chirouse and Charles Pandosy) and one lay brother (Célestin Verney) were selected to accompany Ricard.

Upon his arrival at Fort Walla Walla in September 1847, Ricard immediately worked out an agreement with the new bishop of the territory east of the Cascades, Magloire Blanchet. (The See of Walla Walla was later transferred to Nesqualley and finally to Seattle.) The bishop along with his diocesan priests would assume responsibility for evangelizing the Indians south of the Columbia and Snake Rivers, while Ricard and his fellow Oblates would concentrate on the areas north of the rivers. By October 11 the Oblates headed for the site chosen as their first mission post among the Yakima Indians, a mission dedicated to St. Rose.²⁷

Leaving the newly ordained priests, Chirouse and Pandosy, in charge of St. Rose of Simcoe, Ricard journeyed down the Columbia River in search of a more suitable site to serve as Oblate mission headquarters.²⁸ This he eventually found at the southern end of Puget Sound where he established St. Joseph's Mission, about one mile and a half north of the present city of Olympia, capital of the state of Washington.²⁹ Ricard's choice was determined not only by a keen awareness of the future possibilities of the area, but also by the presence of numerous unattended Indians in the vicinity.

The evangelizing efforts of the Oblates were hampered by many factors, especially in the five mission posts they served among the Yakimas and the Cayuses east of the Cascades. First of all, the extreme poverty of the fathers, cut off from any financial assistance from France because of the 1848 Revolution, forced them to devote an inordinate amount of time and energy in the struggle for survival. Then again, in the beginnings, they faced not only the distrust of Protestant settlers but also a strong propaganda campaign aimed against them as Catholic priests by Protestant missionaries. This was especially true among the Cayuses. The most serious obstacle, however, stemmed from the constant state of unrest among the Indians themselves east of the Cascades. The Whitman massacre of 1847, less than two months after their arrival, led to the Cayuse War of 1848. Any kind of progress was stymied for over two years. Their renewed efforts among the Yakimas and the Cayuses were brought to a halt once again by the general uprising known as the Yakima Wars of 1855-1858.

Discouraged by the all-pervading hostility between Indians and settlers; still unable to iron out their long-standing differences with the Bishop of Nesqualley, Magloire Blanchet,³⁰ the Oblate superiors decided to transfer the missionaries into

British Columbia where conditions for evangelization seemed far more favorable. D'Herbomez, who replaced Ricard as superior in 1858, established his new headquarters in Esquimalt on Vancouver Island, in the diocese of Bishop Demers. This was the first step in the gradual withdrawal from the Oregon missions. By 1861, only Chirouse, Durieu (later replaced by Richard) and two brothers remained in the Washington Territory. They maintained until 1878 a very exciting and fruitful apostolate in the Puget Sound region, with their center at St. Francis Xavier mission on the Tulalip Reservation.

In spite of the frustration they experienced, the Oregon Oblates were outstanding missionaries, not only for their endurance in dealing with overwhelming obstacles, but also for their loving approach towards the Indians they were sent to evangelize. Like so many Europeans of the nineteenth century, their first contact with the Native Americans provided a real culture shock.³¹ Before long, however, they began to pick up the various dialects spoken by the Indians. Indeed, they soon gained renown throughout the territory for their ability to speak the language of the Native Americans. Furthermore, "Chirouse wrote several works in Chinook and other Indian dialects – an Indian grammar, a dictionary, catechisms, and parables for the instruction of neophytes – and also translated many prayers and portions of the Bible into the Snohomish language."³² Whenever the natives, still nomadic to a great extent, gathered around the mission stations, the Oblates followed a retreatlike pattern of life, organizing for their people periods of prayer and lengthy instructions in their own dialects. The missionaries also spent a vast portion of their time traveling from camp to camp visiting the Indians in their wanderings.

The more stable conditions in the Puget Sound region enabled the Oblates to establish a school for boys, first at Olympia, then later (1864) on the Tulalip Reservation. The latter, along with the girls school opened in 1868 by the Sisters of Providence, was recognized as a model for Indian schools.

To sum up, a report of 1859 stated that 160 among the Yakima Indians, both children and adults, were baptized since the beginning of that mission. Among the tribes of the Puget Sound area, a total of 3,811 had been initiated into the Christian community in the twenty years between 1848 and 1868.³³ Statistics can hardly tell the story of Oblate evangelization in Oregon.

IV - Experiments in Education.

From the very beginning of his ministry in Aix-en-Provence, Eugene de Mazenod was keenly interested in youth ministry. This orientation remained strong in the congregation he founded and received institutional recognition in the form of Seminary education.³⁴ It is not surprising, then, that Bishop de Mazenod should attempt to comply with the requests of several American bishops who saw Catholic education – especially seminary education – as an indispensable tool toward the evangelization of the United States.

The first such invitation came from Bishop Chabrat of Louisville, who sought the services of three Oblates to direct his college in Bardstown (1843). Because the Jesuits already possessed two schools in the diocese, the founder judged it prudent to refuse in order to avoid over-extending needlessly his own forces, still modest in number.³⁵ An even more tempting offer had to be turned down in 1858, once again because of a lack of personnel – especially English-speaking men who could teach in a major seminary. Two years earlier Bishop John N. Neumann of Philadelphia had requested that the Oblates assume direction of his major seminary. The long negotiations which followed show the deep-seated interest of the superior general and his council, but to no avail.³⁶

In spite of the limited personnel, however, four other educational enterprises in the United States were accepted by de Mazenod and his council: the major seminary in Pittsburgh (1848), college-seminaries in Buffalo (1850) and in Galveston (1851), and a college in Detroit (1853). All were short-lived. The two priests in charge of the Detroit venture left the city after fifteen days.³⁷ In Pittsburgh Telmon and his companion grew impatient with the living situation and with the bishop's apparent indifference; they left before the end of the school year.³⁸ The Texas Oblates directed the Galveston seminary-college for two years (1855-1857) before turning it over to the Brothers of Christian Schools. Since it had ceased to be a seminary, the Oblates themselves longed for greener ministerial pastures.³⁹ Finally, St. Joseph's College in Buffalo opened its doors in 1851, but was closed in 1855 due to discouraging financial problems⁴⁰

A nagging question begs a solution. Why such apparent failures in this type of ministry? Perhaps the Oblates were misled into ventures (in Detroit, for instance) that could not possibly succeed without far greater resources in manpower and money than they actually possessed. Then again, personal failings, like Telmon's impatience with the bishop of Pittsburgh, can account in part for the insuccess. More basically perhaps, an apostolate in education required ingredients other than the characteristic Oblate trait of improvisation : it needed organization, a trained personnel, and long-range goals patiently pursued in unison.

Conclusion.

The early Oblates in the United States adjusted smoothly to the spiritual needs of the immigrants in the northeast. Their preferred method of evangelization, the parish mission, blended beautifully in the American scene. To the difficult task of evangelizing the Native Americans, they brought both stamina and deep sympathy. Circumstance more than anything else precluded a more permanent result. Only in their experiments in higher education were they completely stymied.

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NOTES :

- 1 Gaston CARRIÈRE, O.M.I., *Histoire documentaire de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée dans l'Est du Canada...* (Ottawa; Editions de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1962), vol. 4, pp. 135-141. See also Jean LEFLON, *Eugene de Mazenod Bishop of Marseilles, Founder of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate 1782-1861* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1970), vol. 4, p. 118. Leflon mistakenly locates the village of Corbeau in Canada.
- 2 Gaston CARRIÈRE, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 98-104; Jean LEFLON, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 135.
- 3 Gaston CARRIÈRE, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, vol. 4, pp. 136-141. Apparently did not have the kind of negative effect on Oblate opportunities in the United States as some of Telmon's confreres feared.
- 4 Gerald SHAUGHNESSY, *Has the Immigrant Kept the Faith?* (New York: Macmillan, 1925), pp. 52, 72-73; John Tracy ELLIS, *American Catholicism*. 2d ed. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1969), p. 43; Jay P. DOLAN, *The Immigrant Church: New York's Irish and German Catholics 1815-1865* (Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 2.
- 5 Jay P. DOLAN, *op. cit.*, p. 2; Sydney E. AHLSTROM, *A Religious History of the American People* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975), vol. 1, p. 650.
- 6 Peter GUILDAY, *The National Pastorals of the American Hierarchy, 1792-1919* (Washington, National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1923), p. 171.
- 7 *Ibidem*, p. 181.

- 8 Sydney E. AHLSTROM, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 661-681. For an indepth study of American nativism in the nineteenth century, cf. Ray Allen BILLINGTON, *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860* Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1964).
- 9 Peter GUILDAY, *op. cit.*: *Pastoral Letter* of 1883, pp. 72-79; of 1837, pp. 80-119; of 1840, pp. 120-148; of 1843, pp. 150-159 of 1852, pp. 187-195.
- 10 Gaston CARRIÈRE, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, vol. 4, p. 136.
- 11 *Ibidem*, p. 132.
- 12 *Ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 155. The eastern Townships, a triangular area stretching from Granby, Québec, in the north to Stanstead and Dunham near the Vermont border, were settled predominantly by American loyalist fleeing the Revolution and by English and Scotch immigrants. Few Catholics lived in the area.
- 13 *Ibidem*, vol. 1, pp. 158-164.
- 14 Jean-Pierre BERNARD, O.M.I., "Lettre du 19 novembre 1862", in *Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 2 (1863), pp. 122-131; Gaston CARRIÈRE, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, vol. 4, pp. 195-199.
- 15 *Ibidem*, vol. 4, pp. 178-195.
- 16 *Missions... des... Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 7 (1868), pp. 26-33.
- 17 *Ibidem*, 8 (1869), pp. 188-190.
- 18 *Ibidem*, 2 (1863), pp. 120-121; 4 (1865), pp. 100-109, especially pp. 106-107; Gaston CARRIÈRE, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, vol. 4, p. 245, quoting the *Buffalo Codex historicus*, states that 180 missions and retreats were preached.
- 19 *Missions... des... Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 8 (1869), pp. 186-187.
- 20 Gaston CARRIÈRE, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, vol. 4, pp. 267-273; mission in the Diocese of Chicago by Lucien Lagier and Alexandre-Auguste Brunet (October-November 1858).
- 21 Jay P. DOLAN, *Catholic Revivalism: The American Experience, 1830-1900* (Notre-Dame, Notre-Dame University Press, 1978), p. 24. On the importance of revivalism in American Protestantism, cf. William Gerald MCLOUGHLIN, *Revivals, Awakenings and Reforms* (Chicago: University Press, 1978), pp. 98-140; Timothy Lawrence SMITH, *Revivalism and Social Reform* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 45-79.
- 22 St. John's Church, dedicated in 1875, was served by the Oblates in Plattsburgh from 1860 to 1879.
- 23 Gaston CARRIÈRE, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, vol. 4, pp. 211-215.
- 24 *Ibidem*, pp. 201-202, 208-211, 243-244, 331-332.
- 25 Eugene de MAZENOD, O.M.I., *Letters to North America...* (Rome: General Postulation O.M.I., 1978), p. 148. See also Pascal RtcARD, O.M.I., "Les origines de nos missions de l'Oregon", in *Missions... des... Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 50 (1912), p. 68.
- 26 Eugène de MAZENOD, O.M.I., *Letters to North America...*, vol. 1, pp. 150, 151-152, 153-154, 157-158, 160, 163-164.
- 27 *Mission... des... Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 50 (1912), pp. 76-77. Cf. George M. WAGGETr, O.M.L., "The Oblates of Mary Immaculate in the Pacific Northwest of the U.S.A., 1847-1878", in *Études Oblates* (1947), pp. 7-99, for a full account of the Oregon missions.
- 28 A simple ceremony, the ordination of Chirouse and Pandosy on January 2, 1847 was the first in Washington State. Both Bishop Blanchet and Fr. Ricard left Walla Walla for Oregon City at noon of the same day. See *Missions... des... Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 50 (1912) and George W. WAGGETr, O.M.I., *art. cit.*, p. 25.
- 29 David NICANDRI, *Olympia's Forgotten Pionners* (Olympia: Publication of the State Capitol Historical Association, 1976), pp. 6-11.
- 30 *Ibidem*, pp. 39-47. From the very beginning, their relationship with the Blanchet brothers were rather strained. Cf. also Jean LEFLON, *op. cit.*, vol. 4, pp. 103-113; Louis D'Herbomez, O.M.L., "Lettre au supérieur général, du 22 juillet 1860", in *Missions... des... Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 1 (1862), p. 146.
- 31 Théophile ORTOLAN, O.M.I., *Cent ans d'apostolat dans les deux hémisphères* (Paris: Librairie des Annales, 1915), pp. 302-303; George WAGGETT, O.M.I., *art. cit.*, p. 30; David NICANDRI, *op.*

cit., p. 23.

32 George WAGGETT, O.M.I., *art. cit.*, p. 72, note 4.

33 *Ibidem*, p. 59; *Missions... des... Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 1 (1862), p. 119; George WAGGETT, O.M.I., *art. cit.*, p. 59.

34 For the beginnings of the Marseilles and Ajaccio seminaries, cf. Théophile ORTOLAN, O.M.I. *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 202-205, 310-323; Jean LEFLON, *op. cit.*, vol. 4, p. 245-262, describes problems met at other French seminaries.

35 Gaston CARRIÈRE, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, vol. 4, pp. 144-145.

36 *Ibidem*, vol. 4, p. 148-154.

37 *Ibidem*, vol. 4, p. 164.

38 *Ibidem*, vol. 4, p. 165-172.

39 Bernard DoYON, O.M.I., *The Cavalry of Christ on the Rio Grande, 1849-1883* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1956), pp. 49-57.

40 Gaston CARRIÈRE, O.M.I., *op. cit.*, vol. 4, pp. 226-232.

The General Chapters from 1818 to 1861 and Evangelization

Here I give to evangelization the same meaning that the Founder gave it, namely, witnessing to and preaching the Gospel, especially by means of mission to the people in order to renew the Church and by means of foreign missions to implant the Church in pagan lands.

Nine General Chapters were held during the Founder's life. The 10th one, held in 1861, was held after his death. Since it reflects the Founder's last years, however, we can consider it as belonging to his time.

For three years, from 1959 to 1962, I studied these General Chapters at length. I summed up the results of this study in my book, *Les Chapitres généraux au temps du Fondateur*.¹

My study is divided into two parts. In the first part, I examine each of the General Chapters separately, one by one, in chronological order. In the second part or conclusion, I try to sum up the effort of these General Chapters to assure that evangelization will always remain the principal end of the Congregation.

First General Chapter: October 24, 1818.

The first General Chapter of the Society of the Missionaries of Provence was held at Aix on October 24, 1818. Like all of the first nine General Chapters, this one was convoked and presided over by the Founder.

The assembly recognized itself as constituted in a Society and as meeting as a General Chapter according to the terms of the Rules which had just been accepted.²

The Rules mentioned here are those composed by the Founder in August-October 1818.³ According to this first Rule, the principal end of the Society was to evangelize the poor and the abandoned through missions to the people.

Second General Chapter: October 21, 1821.

This Chapter establishes nothing regarding the extraordinary preaching of the Gospel; rather, it insists on the missionaries living the Gospel: it introduced the vow of poverty into the Society.

Third General Chapter: September 30 – October 2, 1824.

The 1824 chapter treated two questions which directly concern the extraordinary preaching of the Gospel.

So as not to divert the missionaries from their chief duty, the Rule forbade the acceptance of ecclesiastic dignities.

Even though such should be offered to them, they are obliged to refuse and renounce them, unless they are constrained to accept them because of a formal command in obedience from the Sovereign Pontiff or from the Superior General, or from the General Chapter if it is a matter of the Superior General.⁴

Now in 1823, the Founder had thought it good for the Congregation to accept the post of Vicar General of Marseilles. The Chapter, therefore, had to ratify his acceptance. It unanimously voted its approval.

On this score, Leflon needs to be corrected.⁵ He has the Chapter take a stand not only on the Founder but also on Father Tempier's case. The Chapter did not have to pronounce itself on Father Tempier also being a Vicar General, for this question

fell within the competence of the Superior General, that is, of the Founder.

The second question treated dealt with broadening our aims so as to include educational institutions. After an intense debate, the Chapter excluded colleges but showed itself amenable to the acceptance of major seminaries. Consequently, the prohibition: "*They will not accept the direction of seminaries*" was struck from the Rule.

Fourth General Chapter: July 10 - 13, 1826.

This Chapter officially terminated the period of the founding or formation of the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate started in 1816. During this same period, the Society of the Missionaries of Provence had begun first with accepting the vows of chastity and obedience; then, in 1821 came the vow of poverty also. It was not yet, however, recognized by the Church as a religious Congregation. With Pope Leo XII's approbation of the Rules and of the Society in 1826, the latter really became a religious Congregation dedicated principally to evangelizing the poor and the abandoned. Furthermore, it also received its official title: *The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate*. Leo XII's Brief of Approbation, inserted into the Rule and also into the Minutes of the 1826 Chapter, lists the ends of the new religious and missionary Congregation:

*sacris missionibus praeceptam operam navent; in locis potissimum auxilio destitutis, ubi plebs inculta, vulgari idiomate evangelizent; clero, pro eodem idonea institutione qui in seminariis versantur, arnica praebeant subsidia; parochis ceterisque pastoribus ad reformandos populorum mores praedicatione aliisque spiritualibus exercitiis promptos sese exhibeant; curam iuventuti omnino sollicitam impendant, eamque populi christiani partem lectissimam pus coetibus a saeculi illecebris arcere contendant; tandem carcere detentis verbum divinum et sacramenta administrent, et capitis sententia damnatos ad extremum supplicium concomitentur.*⁶

Preaching missions to the people is therefore the first and principal aim of the Congregation.

Fifth General Chapter: September 28 - 30, 1831.

The 1831 Chapter will broaden the horizons of our Congregation. Already for some time, some Fathers, with Father Guibert at their head, were voicing their desire for going to the foreign missions to conquer pagans for Christ. The capture of Alger by the French army in July 1830 filled these Fathers with enthusiasm, and seemed to open to them a favorable terrain for evangelization. The Founder hesitated at first because of the small number of his sons; then he did accept the idea of sending Oblates to Algeria. He was making the required arrangements with the civil and ecclesiastical authorities. It was therefore normal that the question of the foreign missions was debated at this Chapter.

We read in the Minutes of this Chapter:

A proposal was studied which urged that the General Chapter express to the Most Reverend Father General the resolution formed by the Society's member that some of our members be sent to the foreign missions as soon as he will judge the opportunity to be favourable. Having learned of the dispositions of a large number of the Society's members who ardently look for the moment when we will have the opportunity to bring the knowledge and love of our Lord Jesus Christ to far away places, the Chapter thought it should associate itself to their holy idea and become their spokesman, all the more so because it considers the object of the proposal as extremely important for God's glory and the good of the Society. The proposal was therefore unanimously adopted; and the resolution it contains having by that very fact been expressed to the Most Reverend Father General, he deigned to respond during the same session that he accepted it and gave it his approval.

The question of accepting colleges, rejected in the 1824 Chapter, was again posed at the 1831 Chapter. The Founder was opposed in principle ; he added, however, that there could be an exception in missions, in overseas countries where the direction of a college could be an apostolic work and could be considered as a

means of achieving our ends rather than an aim. This exception to the Rule will allow Oblates to provide for the education of natives by accepting or founding colleges in countries overseas.

Sixth General Chapter: August 4 - 8, 1837.

In this Chapter, for the first time it is said that the Marian shrines of Notre-Dame de l'Osier in the diocese of Grenoble and of Notre-Dame de Lumières in the diocese of Avignon which the Founder had accepted, are in line with our missionary vocation. Resident in these shrines, the Oblate missionaries can cover these dioceses preaching "*the sacred Word in the popular dialect*" to the people. The shrines therefore appear to be an excellent means for achieving the Congregation's principal aim.

In speaking of our houses in Corsica, the Founder stressed that the Oblates there were evangelizing "*the people spread over this island in a semi-savage state*".⁸ In insisting on the evangelization of this "barbarian" people, the Founder got worked up and went so far as to say that he had "always resisted the idea and impression of some which held we ought to disperse into far away regions in order to evangelize the barbarians".⁹

In order to understand this last affirmation - one which is undoubtedly an exaggeration - we must remember that the Founder, during his stay in Rome in 1832, had vainly asked Propaganda Fide for a mission either in America or in Algeria.

At Propaganda Fide, Father Rey writes, he learned orally from Bishop Castracane that the missions in America were not in need and nothing made it urgent to send more men to those countries; that the mission in Algeria had received two missionaries who were under the jurisdiction of a Vicar Apostolic recognized by the French Government, and if the offer of the Oblate missionaries had come sooner, they would have been given preference.¹⁰

Since it could not go to foreign missions, the Oblate Congregation accepted the missions in Corsica and, in 1834, direction of the major seminary in Ajaccio.

As the Congregation was in charge of the major seminaries of Marseilles and Ajaccio, it had to be added to the Rule that the direction of seminaries was one of the Congregation's aims. The 1824 Chapter had lifted the ban against this; the 1837 Chapter went a step forward: directing seminaries was entered into the Rule as one of our objectives.

It should be noted, however, that the proposal to open a juniorate was rejected by the Founder, for two reasons:

1 - because the experience of a kind of juniorate at Aix and at Notre-Dame du Laus during the years 1816 - 1823 did not succeed, so that the Founder was "disgusted" with it;¹¹

2 - because the priests who would be in charge of the juniorate would thus be diverted from the missions, the principal end of the Congregation.

Seventh General Chapter: July 10 - 13, 1843.

The Congregation had considerably changed since the 1837 Chapter. The Founder had become Bishop of Marseilles, and Father Guibert Bishop of Viviers; and the Congregation was now planted in England, Ireland and Canada.

In his address, the Founder expressed his joy at seeing his sons working in these countries overseas. If in 1837 Bishop de Mazenod was "disgusted" at the idea of a juniorate, he was all enthused about it in 1843. In fact, the juniorate at Notre-Dame de Lumières founded in 1840 was an excellent means for forming young people of good will to enter the Oblate novitiate. If in 1837 the Founder preferred the

"barbarians" of Corsica to those of the mission countries, by 1843 he had changed his opinion. He attentively followed the signs of the times which revealed God's will regarding the Congregation to him, and he did not hesitate to conform his personal ideas thereto.

In truth, he had not foreseen such an expansion of our family. Had he dared hoping for it, he would have considered that counting too much on himself! Now he understood that this unexpected development required him to undertake the means of bringing our Rule into harmony with the needs of the Society and in line with the vast horizons opening up before us, by revising the points which the present circumstances were rendering inapplicable and by adding those which the expansion required.¹²

The reports of Father Telmon on the evangelization work of the Oblates in Canada and of Father Aubert on that in England and Ireland made a deep impression on the capitulars. On the other hand, the missions to the people in France remain always in honour, especially in Corsica "*where every mission gives birth to miracles*".¹³

We must also note the Chapter's insistence that young Fathers prepare sermons. Those who have not been formed by long experience in the ministry of God's Word must write out their sermons and learn them by heart, so as not "*to compromise the dignity of the holy word and the honour of the Congregation*".¹⁴

In the beginning the Founder had announced the updating of the Rule. In fact, however, this was limited to two points: from now on, a General Chapter would be convoked only every six years, and accepting colleges outside of France.

Eighth General Chapter: August 26 – 31, 1850.

The period from 1843 to 1850 is the golden age of our Congregation. In fact, in proportion to our personnel and to this brief span of seven years, the Congregation had never reached such a large territorial expansion and such a strong increase in numbers of personnel. In 1843, the Congregation counted only 68 members; in 1850 there were 223.

The territorial growth was truly extraordinary. In France, three houses were added to the already existing five. In England where there was only one house in 1843, the Congregation had six houses in 1850. It is especially in Canada that the expansion is by far the most striking. In 1850, our Fathers were already evangelizing in the dioceses of Quebec, Montreal and Bytown (Ottawa), founding missions at Red River and were advancing into the immense territories of the Canadian North-West. We were established in Texas, in the United States. The first mission in Ceylon had been founded, and we were getting ready to leave for South Africa.

The Founder, in his address to the capitulars, spoke about the "prodigious expansion", the zeal and admirable dedication with which the Fathers were carrying out the difficult activities of their ministry in the foreign missions. This should be a source of edification and a motive for noble emulation on the part of the missionaries in France and England. But, he added, in order to be a good missionary, we have to be perfect religious; in order *to work great fruit in souls*", *we have to be saints and faithfully practice all the duties of our state*".¹⁵

The reports of the capitulars certainly do speak of the successes in France and England in regard to the missions to the people; but from henceforth the emphasis is placed on the foreign missions among the natives of Canada, the United States, and Ceylon.

Besides these successes, there is also one failure, that of the mission to Algeria. The Founder had in 1848 accepted to send some Fathers there in order to evangelize the Arabs. But the local Bishop did not have the same view: he wanted to use the Oblates in order to provide religious services to the Catholics. Consequently

the Founder recalled the Oblates in June 1850.

To compensate for this loss, the Founder in 1850 accepted the missions of Natal which were being offered to us by Propaganda Fide. The same Congregation had also offered us the missions in Oceania which the Marist Fathers of Lyon had abandoned because of its unhealthy climate. Since the Founder could not afford to expose his young Fathers to certain death – he needed them for other missions – he declined the offer of Propaganda Fide.

The Congregation, now planted on four continents, needed a Rule adapted to this great territorial expansion. The Chapter therefore decided to divide the Congregation into Provinces and Vicariates, and to insert into the Rules a special section dealing with the direction of major seminaries.

In spite of the insistence of some capitulars, the acceptance of colleges or minor seminaries in France was again forbidden. To have accepted them would divert us from the principal end of the Congregation, namely, missions.

Because some Fathers, with the Founder's permission, were giving retreats to women religious and even went so far as to found new Congregations of women religious, the Chapter was concerned about the danger that these ministries could create for our chief ministry. After a lively debate, the Founder "having declared that nothing had been done without prior authorization, the Chapter unanimously agreed to allow this ministry to pursue peacefully the course it had begun".¹⁶

The modification made to the Rules allowed giving retreats to women religious, preaching Lenten sermons, and, by way of exception, accepting parishes; but in all these things, prior special permission was needed.

In 1853 the new Rule was officially approved by Rome and promulgated by the Founder.

Ninth General Chapter: August 4 – 12, 1856.

If the period of 1843 to 1850 was called the golden age or the period of the great missionary conquests, during the years from 1850 to 1856 the Congregation somewhat moderated its missionary thrust and sought rather to consolidate its position. To be sure, we were advancing further in the immense territories of the Canadian North-West, but everywhere else we were trying to consolidate our position within the same region rather than implant ourselves into new countries. An important fact to note: during this period the Oblates founded the first mission among the blacks of South Africa.

From the reports of the different houses we learn that the internal missions to the people are still in honour, but more and more the stress is on the foreign missions.

In 1856 the Congregation already has nearly 300 members. It is therefore large enough to direct four major seminaries (Marseilles, Ajaccio, Fréjus and Romans), eight Marian shrines, and to concern itself with the spiritual direction of women religious.

This was the most the Congregation could do without being diverted from its principal end, that is, from missions to the people and foreign missions. The Chapter therefore rejected the proposal to accept colleges and minor seminaries in France. Concretely speaking, it was a question of minor seminaries in the dioceses of Bourges and Carcassone and of the college of Langogne in the diocese of Mende, all of these being offered to the Congregation.

It should be noted that the Chapter decided that a directory on the foreign missions should be drawn up, and the Founder promised to carry out this decision.

This was the last Chapter held during the Founder's lifetime.

Tenth General Chapter: December 5 - 8, 1861

Though held after the death of the Founder, the tenth General Chapter nevertheless does reflect the last years of his life; it can therefore be considered as intimately linked to those which were celebrated during the time of Bishop de Mazenod.

This Chapter elected Father Fabre Superior General with 19 votes out of 20 capitulars.

It is interesting to note that at the Founder's death on May 21, 1861, 91 Oblates (22%) were working in the missions of Red River, Oregon, Texas, Ceylon and Natal; 48 Fathers and Brothers were zealously working in the apostolate in Canada, and 60 in England and Ireland. A total of 52% were working in France and 48% elsewhere.

Because of the Congregation's wide-spread expansion, it was decided to hold General Chapters only every nine years.

The only decision made regarding evangelization was that a manual should be drawn up both for the internal missions and the foreign missions; also a guide for the spiritual guidance of souls."

Conclusion.

At the beginning of our existence in 1816 – 1818, we were only a little band of Missionaries of Provence, dedicated to renewing the Church in Provence through the extraordinary preaching of the Gospel, i.e. parish missions. Other ministries such as directing youth, pastoral care of prisoners, retreats for the clergy were to be secondary only and reserved for those times when we were not actually preaching missions.

As the Society grew in numbers and expanded into other regions, it could allow itself to accept other ministries and responsibilities.

In this evolution we can discern four impelling elements: the practice at the base, the animation and direction of the Founder who was also the Superior General, the decisions of the General Chapters, and the codification of these decisions in the Rules.

First of all, the example comes from the Founder. In 1823 he had to accept the post of Vicar General of Marseilles in order to protect effectively the young Society from the attacks of certain bishops. The Chapter of 1824 proceeded unanimously to a *sanatio in radice*.

This same Chapter lifted the ban against major seminaries: the possibility of accepting the major seminary of Marseilles was foreseen. In 1826, at the Founder's suggestion, Pope Leo XII in his Brief of Approbation mentions the direction of major seminaries as one of the ministries proper to the Congregation. It is only in 1837, however, that it is decreed to insert this element into the Rule.

It is a question of major seminaries only: minor seminaries and colleges are excluded. A breach is opened in the Chapter of 1831: colleges in overseas countries may be accepted provided that such acceptance promote evangelization. The Chapter of 1843 puts this concession into the Rule.

Remaining faithful to this prohibition, the 1837 Chapter rejected the idea of a juniorate, always out of fear that we will be diverted from the missions, our chief ministry. It is true that in 1840 the Founder agreed to open the juniorate at Notre-Dame de Lumières; but as soon as the number of novices was sufficient, he ordered it closed. With the exception of this juniorate at Notre-Dame de Lumières, the Founder was always opposed to accepting minor seminaries or colleges in France.

The 1831 Chapter accepted the idea of foreign missions to be undertaken "as soon as the occasion arose". At the 1837 Chapter, the Founder put this idea into cold storage because he was peeved by the refusal his offer in regard to the missions in Algeria had met. However, already in 1841, he is all flame and fire with the idea of evangelizing the natives in Canada, and he sent his first spiritual sons there. This was the turning point in the Congregation's history. Bit by bit the foreign mission rival the missions to the people and land up relegating the latter to second place.

As the Congregation grows in numbers and spreads to other continents, it has to accept other ministries and responsibilities. To establish itself in certain dioceses and to exercise our Marian apostolate, the General Chapters authorize the acceptance of Marian shrines. They prolong the missions during the summer months and merit being called "a continual mission".¹⁸ From these shrines as a starting point, the missionaries went forth "to break and chew God's Word for the people".¹⁹ We also have to accept parishes, Lenten and Advent preaching, retreats to women religious; we also have to take on the direction of women religious, even the founding of new Congregations of women religious.

This broadening of our apostolic horizons was not meant to harm our principal aim; it was meant to lay solid foundations or infra-structures to assure success in our evangelization of the poor and the abandoned.

Even though the emphasis in the Chapters is on preaching the Gospel, there is also from time to time the reminder that, if the missionary is to do any good in souls, he must through a life of virtue give witness to the Gospel which he preaches. Such a witness can only be given through an exemplary religious life and the faithful living out of all the duties inherent in our state.

Before ending, a word on the Founder's role in the General Chapters.²⁰ If in the beginning the Founder dictated the law – the others had only to give their *placet* – in time, the voice of the capitulars began to bear more and more weight. The Superior General willy-nilly accepted this evolution and opened himself to dialogue. Nevertheless, his influence as Founder, Superior General, and then as Bishop of Marseilles is decisive in most of the solutions to be adopted.

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NOTES :

1 Ottawa, Éditions des Études Oblates, 1968, 2 vol. (Archives d'histoire oblate, vol. 22-23).

2 *Ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 16.

3 Joseph PIELORZ, o.m.i., *Le séjour du Fondateur à St-Laurent et la rédaction de nos Règles, août-octobre 1818*, dans *Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 84 (1957), p. 297-322.

4 Ms II de la Règle, Partie II, no. 1, art. 39. Voir Joseph PIELORZ, o.m.i., *Les chapitres généraux au temps du Fondateur*, vol. I, p. 35, note 22.

5 Jean LEFLON, *Eugene de Mazenod, Bishop of Marseilles, Founder of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate 1782-1861* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1966), vol. 2, p. 252).

6 Joseph PIELORZ, o.m.i., *Les chapitres généraux au temps du Fondateur*, vol. 1, p. 60-61.

- 7 *Ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 104.
- 8 *Ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 123.
- 9 *Ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 123.
- 10 Achille REV, o.m.i., *Histoire de Monseigneur Charles-Joseph-Eugène de Mazenod, Évêque de Marseille, Fondateur de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Rome, Maison générale, 1928, vol. 1, p. 548-549.
- 11 Joseph PIELORZ, o.m.i., *Les chapitres généraux au temps du Fondateur*, vol. 1, p. 149. On this first juniorate, see vol. 1, p. 12-31.
- 12 Joseph PIELORZ, o.m.i., *Les chapitres généraux au temps du Fondateur*, vol. I, p. 183.
- 13 *Ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 191.
- 14 *Ibidem*, vol. I, p. 198.
- 15 *Ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 265.
- 16 *Ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 289-290.
- 17 *Ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 175.
- 18 *Ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 269: "The shrine Notre-Dame de Lumières is being more and more frequented. During the months of August and September, the Fathers are giving to what amounts to a continual mission there." (Chapter of 1843).
- 19 Chapter of 1837: Notre-Dame de Lumières. Voir Joseph PIELORZ, o.m.i., *Les chapitres généraux au temps du Fondateur*, vol. 1, p. 124.
- 20 Voir Joseph PIELORZ, o.m.i., *Le rôle du Fondateur dans les Chapitres généraux*, dans *Études Oblates*, 24 (1965), p. 267-288, 342-367.

Oblate Evangelization and the General Chapters of 1867 to 1966

Some Noteworthy Elements.

1. A truly scientific study of the Oblate General Chapters and their influence (positive and negative) on the life and mission of the Congregation still needs to be undertaken. Existing efforts, while very valuable, are limited in scope. A truly scientific study of our General Chapters would be a difficult undertaking, both because of the vastness of the topic as well as the need for a valid methodology and criteriology. Such a study would have to situate each General Chapter in the context of the Church, the world, the Congregation of its time; it would have to ask what the real needs were and what needs the Chapter perceived and then compare these two; it would have to consider the competence and the attitudes of the Capitulars; it would have to consider the total "content" of a General Chapter: its preparation, its entire documentation, all its work, its methodology, its enthusiasms and depressions, its evolution (including distractions), its final conclusions; it would have to consider what effect, if any, the event and conclusions of a General Chapter had (or has still) on the life and mission of the Congregation. And for all this, a valid criteriology for interpretation is needed. There is an interesting, challenging, and useful field here for the courageous Oblate researcher.

2. It is striking how strongly all the General Chapters from 1867 to 1966 are centered upon, modelled upon, concerned with the Constitutions and Rules... in their working methodology and in their decisions and conclusions. This is true not only for those Chapters which had, as a major agenda item, the revision of our Constitutions and Rules (1867, 1908, 1926, 1966); it is true also for all the others, so much so that, if we consider only their conclusions and decisions, we are tempted to describe them as having been content to evaluate the Congregation's observance of the Constitutions and Rules.

3. This concern of the Chapters to maintain and promote the faithful observance of the Constitutions and Rules is certainly the continuation of a strong tradition which originates with our Blessed Founder; and, in the light of this tradition, it is a real contribution to Oblate evangelization.

4. Regarding the apostolic ministries and works of the Congregations:

a) There is the consistent, insistent affirmation that the first aim of the Congregation is preaching missions. This is asserted directly and "in obliquo" and repeatedly. It also results in 1947 Chapter calling for the establishment of mission-preaching houses in the so-called "foreign mission" countries where possible.

b) This concern for the primacy of mission preaching seems to be the major reason for a certain hesitancy in regard to Oblates engaging in the ministry of youth education. Thus the Chapter of 1867 declares that the education of youth is not adverse to the primary end of the Congregation; that of 1898 says it even is in conformity with this primary end; that of 1906 seems to rule it out all together in favour of mission preaching; that of 1920 restores it completely... and this attitude is maintained thereafter.

c) The great importance of the mission *ad gentes* is repeatedly affirmed in very

strong terms... though often as a sort of appendix to the Chapter Acts. The Chapters require that every Oblate, no matter where or in what apostolate he may be engaged, entertain a true "missionary ad gentes" spirit.

d) At times, the question arises as to whether new fields and works of the apostolate should be taken on or not... and the reply varies. The Chapter of 1904 categorically stated no new areas should be taken, but that we should rather consolidate those works we already have. That of 1947 said no new mission fields are to be accepted unless requested to do so by the Holy See.

e) Of special interest is the explicit declaration by several General Chapters (1904, 1920, 1926, 1932) that Oblates are to be fully involved in the mission to the working class... this in response to Leo XIII's *Rerum novarum*.

f) Equally interesting is the fact that the 1947 and 1953 Chapters discussed what Oblates could do in regard to communists in different parts of the world.

g) Regarding parishes, the problem arises mainly as to accepting parishes in what is referred to as "non-Mission countries". The 1947 Chapter says: "... if parishes are accepted, they should be in city suburbs, among the poor and the working classes, rather than richer city parishes."¹

h) The 1947 Chapter answered the following question, "How might we render our apostolate effective with the masses which are beyond reach of our ministry?" in this way:

1. We must not blind ourselves to the fact that the masses, at least in many places, are becoming more and more estranged, and that they are less and less affected by our ministry; we must honestly acknowledge this fact.

2. Therefore, we must find new ways and means to influence the masses. Let us, from the very start, honestly admit, that if the masses are separated and alienated from us, and that if we do not reach a good number of our people in the parish, it is very often due to the fact that we have not kept abreast of the times and of their needs. Sermons are very often not understood; some are not sufficiently prepared; high language is used; one talks to people as if they were still firmly grounded in the Faith. For lack of adaptation, sermons are not sufficiently understood; they do not influence people as they should.

Being missionaries we must not hesitate to adopt appropriate and up-to-date methods: we must learn a lesson from orators or present day movements, who have captured the imagination of the masses and now exert such great influence over them. Proportion guarded, we must borrow some of their methods. This task is not easy; but easy-going methods are a great loss of time. No one is really a missionary who is self-satisfied and complacent, and who does not search for new modern ways and means, to win over to Christ, the masses who are drifting away from Him.

Moreover, the Chapter's mind is that, in our apostolate, we ought to secure the active participation of the laity by means of Catholic Action... As missionaries, we must therefore adopt Catholic Action for every type of ministry...

It follows that our missionary methods ought to be revised and brought into harmony with our modern needs, but in keeping with our Oblate tradition."²

5. From 1867 onwards, each General Chapter manifests a strong concern with the formation of Oblates, precisely because of an equally strong concern for our mission and life. The formation concern becomes more and more developed, going beyond the call for a *Ratio studiorum generalis* to the establishment of a General Directorate of Formation (1947).

6. One can also consider the many efforts made by the General Chapters to bind the Oblates more closely together by favoring means of inter-communication among them (through studies, publications, information services, etc.) as an effort to further evangelization: the stronger the apostolic corps, the more effective will be their missionary action.

7. One has the impression that with 1947 begins a new style of General Chapter. The growing involvement with revising the Constitutions and Rules (decreed by the 1953 Chapter and undertaken successfully by that of 1959 and resulting in the "ad experimentum" text of 1966) perhaps further contributed to a different style of General Chapter from that of the past. This new style came into its own fully with 1972.

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NOTES:

1 Léo DESCHÂTELETS, o.m.i., *XXIV^e Chapitre général, Rome 1^{er} novembre 1947*, dans *Circulaires administratives des Supérieurs généraux de la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Rome, Maison générale, vol. 5, 1952, p. 173. (Circulaire n° 181).

2 *Ibidem*, p. 175-176 (Circulaire n° 181).

Evangelization and the General Chapters: 1972 - 1980

I - General Chapters and Evangelization.

The Oblate Congregation was founded to preach the Gospel to the poor, but no General Chapter has written a treatise on evangelization as such. Even since the word "Evangelization" entered our common vocabulary after the 1974 Synod of Bishops in Rome and the publication of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, discussion of evangelization in Chapters has been piecemeal. This is not surprising, because a moment's reflection reminds us that a Chapter is a governing body rather than a research team. Its agenda is set primarily by the internal needs of the Congregation.

One such internal need is, of course, an always deeper understanding of current missionary challenges. The Congregation is consequently reinterpreting what it means to preach the Good News to the poor each time it meets in Chapter. It is also often concerned with the reform of those internal structures which shape its members into an effective apostolic corps. Indirectly, therefore, General Chapters very frequently offer elements towards a deeper understanding of Oblate evangelization without writing directly on the topic and without offering explicit strategies for evangelizing.

This paper studies the General Chapters of 1972, 1974 and 1980, considering first, in each case, the context of the Chapter or the particular problems which were in the minds and hearts of many Oblates at the time the Chapter took place. Secondly, the discussions in Chapter will be gleaned to find comments relating to Oblate evangelization and to show the background for the documents touching the theme of evangelization which each Chapter wrote for the Congregation. Lastly, particular decisions affecting evangelization will be reported from the *Acta* of these General Chapters studied here. Some general observations will be presented by way of conclusion.

II - 1972: Evangelization and Missionary Outlook.

The General Chapter of 1972, which began on April 11th and ended on May 23rd, more often used the traditional term "mission" rather than the word "evangelization"; but the Chapter was held at a moment when the meaning of our traditional primary Oblate goal was undergoing much critical examination. The 1972 Capitular discussions therefore responded to a need, expressed by the entire Congregation, to clarify the Oblate mission in a changing Church and a sometimes tumultuous world. The need for clarification of our missionary outlook was succinctly expressed in the résumé of the oral regional reports given in the first *OMI Information* bulletin published after the opening of the 1972 Chapter:

A clear definition of the Oblate Congregation's entire missionary outlook - that appears to be what Oblates everywhere expect of the 1972 General Chapter. Implicit in such a definition, it was repeatedly stressed, are other proposed Chapter themes such as fundamental values, poverty and Oblate apostolic community.'

The felt need for clarification came from a desire to find a point of unity among us despite theological differences about the nature of mission and lived differences as a result of reforms in the Church. In parts of the Oblate world, the traditional twin goals ("*finis*") of the Congregation - personal holiness and collective mission to the poor - seemed to have become more and more dependent upon the person choice of individual Oblates, without much support from weakened structures of community.

An unhealthy individualism seemed to many to be replacing the personalism officially desired by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council.

The Chapter participants wanted both to reconstruct a common form of life and to give a collective sense of direction or mission. Along with this double desire, however, the Chapter seemed equally determined not to reimpose former structures. Perhaps tired by the debates on administrative structures and missionary outlook, the Chapter was unable to address adequately the reconstruction of the common Oblate form of life. It asked the new General Administration to take the Chapter discussions on community and write a circular. This was published in the fall of 1972. On the other hand, the Chapter's response to the need for a statement of collective purpose was the document, *Missionary Outlook*.

The document was not produced without a struggle. After rejecting the pre-capitular commission's working paper on missionary outlook as a basis for discussion, the Chapter went on to reject, after two weeks of discussion, a text submitted by the editing committee elected by the Chapter itself. Other proposals for moving the matter were considered and discarded and the writing was finally consigned to a special *ad hoc* committee composed from at least one Oblate from each region.² This committee's text, after discussion in regional groups and amendments in plenary sessions, was finally adopted by a vote of 119 to 7.

Many sources contributed to the finally accepted text. The regional reports on obstacles to evangelization around the world provided the basis for the first section, "A look at the world from where we are." The data gathered from the sociological survey of the Congregation, along with the Chapter discussions on Oblate identity, contributed to the second section entitled, "Faced with these missionary challenges, who are we?" The heart of this essay in self-definition lies in paragraph 13, a section of the document revised from the Chapter floor in order to emphasize the centrality of the vows and the place of Mary in our communal life.³

The third section of the document, "What concrete lines of action are now open to us?" presents areas of choice under three general headings: "preference for the poor",⁴ "solidarity with the men of our times"⁵ and "greater creativity".⁶ Under each heading, five or six lines of action are suggested. The six sections under "preference for the poor" are all variations on the theme of development and liberation.⁷ The five sections under "solidarity with the men of our times" speak about our unity with different classes and types of people: a) with all men, but especially the poor; b) with non-Christians; c) with the young; d) with other Christians, our separated Brothers; e) and, finally our personal unity with the Spirit. The six sections under "greater creativity" review our present commitments in the light of a renewed missionary outlook. These paragraphs treat of: a) the reevaluation of our present institutions; b) the evaluation of new experiments; c) new missions in the Church; d) new missions in the world, outside of formal Church structures; e) prophetic activity; f) formation for the mission.

Having reaffirmed "our common missionary consecration", as outlined in the *Constitutions*,⁸ the document concludes with a biblical foundation for missionary outlook, showing the unity between our mission, that of the apostles and even that of Jesus himself.⁹ The missionary outlook is rooted in a vision of faith.¹⁰ The entire document is more a manifesto, a source of ongoing reflection on our collective purpose, than it is a plan of action.

Did the missionary outlook document of the 1972 Chapter bring new elements to the Oblate understanding of evangelization? Yes, at least in its manner of treating new areas of constant Oblate concern: the poor and the Church. Theologically, the *Missionary Outlook* tried to clarify both the object and the purpose of our mission.

The object remains the Gospel poor; but these are now spoken of as the powerless or abandoned, the people marginal to the centers of influence in any society. We are to establish solidarity with them for the sake of their liberation and ours. The purpose of our mission is to establish the Kingdom of God, a kingdom of universal justice, peace and love. This kingdom is pre-eminently an accomplishment on God's part and is, therefore, the object of our hope as well as of our efforts. Implied in the document is the distinction, then new to Oblate documents, between Kingdom of God and Church.

In making this distinction, the *Missionary Outlook* made our own various currents of thought in the Council documents *Lumen Gentium*, *Ad Gentes* and *Gaudium et Spes*. It would be correct to say that the missionary outlook document "secularized" our mission, if "secularization" is understood to mean recognition of the saving action of God in situations where this was previously only inadequately recognized, e.g. in other ecclesial communities, in non-Christian religions, in the world of mass media and contemporary culture. The desired clarification of our notion of mission was, therefore, accomplished in expanding Oblate mission to cover concerns and works which had never been so explicitly encouraged.

Some of the ambiguities of this expanded notion of mission became evident even in the course of the 1972 Chapter. A "secularized" notion of mission seems to make less necessary those institutions which are explicitly ecclesial, e.g. parishes, retreat houses, etc. Yet most Oblates then – and now – were in such institutions. The most contested and most rewritten paragraph of the entire document was that in which we pledge ourselves to:

...seriously re-evaluate our present commitments in the light of the Gospel and of our missionary charism. Have our institutional works maintained their original fervor?... [W]e will have the courage to make those concrete decisions demanded of us if we are to remain faithful to the Spirit who speaks to us through the most urgent needs of the poor. With the mobility proper to a group of missionaries, we will be ever more free to commit ourselves to the service of the Church and the world. This was our original charism and is still fundamental to our life as a Congregation.¹¹

With this clear challenge to established patterns of ministry, the *Missionary Outlook* both legitimized present ministerial pluralism and refused to resolve the problem of discontinuity with the Congregation's recent past. The call to re-evaluate present works was taken up by successive General Administrations, most recently in early 1981 when the present administration asked each Province to submit a report on its priorities.

To govern the Congregation in line with this sense of mission, the Chapter elected a General Administration, all but one of whom was new, and passed a series of acts reforming the structures of Oblate government. In the introduction to the Chapter decrees on administrative structures, the rationale for the change not only spoke of structures as being at the "service of mission" but insisted even more strongly on structures which would be at the "service of life":

Structures, far from seeking to hinder freedom of persons and the expression of life, have as their end the furthering of these values by guaranteeing their communitarian dimension - interpersonal relations, mutual acceptance and help, collective action, etc.¹²

Government, administration and services are each distinguished and described in the Chapter *Acta*, and some traditional responsibilities of the General Administration are relocated at other levels in the name of subsidiarity and decentralization. Other responsibilities, while remaining at the general level, are recast in favor of greater "flexibility". Governing is presented as a process which moves from the bottom up as well as from the top down.

The impulse for change in governmental structures came therefore from two

sentiments: the desire to have a government which would institutionally incorporate the sense of mission spelled out in the missionary outlook document and the feeling, whether justified or not, that in years prior to the 1972 Chapter the General Administration had become too distant from the "base". This distance seemed to grow as Father Deschâtelets' health declined and he found himself unable to visit many parts of the Oblate world.

The new Superior General was elected for a six year term of office rather than for life, and he was expected to travel widely. He was therefore given a Vicar General who would remain in Rome to take care of the ordinary administration of the Congregation. The majority of Council members would spend most of their time in the six geographical regions into which the Chapter divided the Congregation (Europe, Canada, the United States of America, Africa, Asia, Latin America), replacing the old divisions of responsibility of Assistants General chosen to take care of various language groups. Major decisions were reserved to plenary sessions of the General Council, when all members would be present. The "base" would thereby influence all the deliberations at the center, which, in turn, was conceived as a provider of services and of encouragement as much as a giver of directions. At the same time, the para-governmental consultative bodies provided for in the 1966 *Constitutions* were judged too unwieldy to work well and were abandoned or reduced in function.

In reforming administrative structures, the need for a more responsive governmental model was the primary motive; but, in determining how we should be governed, the Chapter was also indirectly saying something about what it means to evangelize. Evangelization demands listening as well as preaching; it is a process of "incarnating" the missionary as well as preaching salvation in Christ. Evangelization, if successful, means that a person's life is centered in Christ. Therefore, he who symbolizes the Lord, as does the superior in a religious congregation, should be personable, open, kind, at the service of all. This notion, without being stated explicitly, seemed to underlie many Chapter discussions on government.

A new missionary outlook, a new set of administrative structures, a new governing team: the 1972 General Chapter has given clear directions to a new Oblate thrust in evangelization. Its accomplishments were greeted with enthusiasm in most sections of the Congregation; but the ambiguities mentioned above in the analysis of the *Missionary Outlook* document became concretized in a particularly poignant way with the resignation of the new Superior General, Father Richard Hanley, on June 11, 1974. His resignation made necessary another General Chapter, called to begin on November 12, 1974.

III - 1974: Evangelization and Religious Consecration.

Whereas uncertainty occasioned by a changing notion of mission set the stage for discussions during the 1972 Chapter, confusion about the relation between our mission and our religious life seemed to be the problem uppermost in the mind of many Oblates as the 1974 General Chapter convened. Some spoke of a lack of "spirituality" and others asked, in rather abstract terms, for further clarification of our "fundamental values" or for the official re-affirmation of our "consecrated life".

To prepare the Chapter discussions, three lengthy papers were written by the pre-capitular commission, after consultation with all the Provinces. The subjects covered in these papers were: fundamental values, administrative structures, and the role of the Superior General in the institute. The last two topics were by way of immediate response to Father Hanley's resignation and the problem of electing a successor. What did the Congregation expect of the Superior General? Were these expectations realistic or exorbitant? Had the difficulty of implementing the new

governmental structures helped cause the Superior General's resignation? These questions had to be examined before the Chapter could get down to its most important item of business : the election of a new Superior General. But the deeper malaise was surfacing under the rubric of "fundamental values".

The Chapter used three questions to get into discussion of Oblate values:

- 1) What are the values which are important in my life as an Oblate?
- 2) What are the obstacles which I meet in making these values real in myself and in my Oblate life?
- 3) What are the helps which permit me to make these values real?

The language and approach of value clarification in small groups helped the capitulars focus their attention on value-related problems such as those of Oblate identity and the formation of young Oblates, the character of the Congregation as both priestly and missionary, the role of the Brothers in Oblate life today, the witness value of our way of living religious poverty. What most of these problems pointed to was a concern for showing - to each other first and then to others - in what way religious life itself contributes to evangelizing. If, for purposes of evangelizing, what we are is as important as what we do, then it was inevitable that the question left hanging in the 1972 Chapter should come back in 1974 with renewed insistence: How do priesthood and vows and Oblate community life shape our mission? One small group expressed this question succinctly: "What does it mean for our missionaries to be consecrated?".¹³

In handling this topic all the capitulars had as common goal the reconstruction of Oblate unity. The realization grew in discussion that we are what we are because of common life as much as common mission. Nevertheless, the rhetoric in speaking of vows and priesthood and community varied considerably. Some delegates spoke of community as an action group strongly united under authority; others described community as a support group very respectful of the feelings of the individual Oblates who are called to create fellowship. Some capitulars stressed the need to admit our doubts about our way of expressing vows, priesthood and community, if not doubts about the nature of these realities.¹⁴ Others replied that, in the circumstances, what was needed was a reaffirmation of our belief in our way of life more than another recognition of its problems.¹⁵

The members of the Chapter finally decided not only to discuss values among themselves but also to send a message to their brother Oblates outside the Chapter.¹⁶ From the small group discussions, a general outline for a letter to the Congregation was drafted. From this outline, an *ad hoc* message committee drew up the final text, which was re-worked three times before being finally approved.

As a complement to the missionary outlook document of the 1972 General Chapter, the 1974 Chapter letter begins not with the world but with the Oblates in community at the Chapter. The question now is not, "What are we to do?" but rather "How are we to live?" The *Missionary Outlook* stressed a vision of faith and treated faith as a perspective on the world. The *Letter*, responding to the internal crisis which occasioned the 1974 Chapter, speaks of faith as a personal encounter with Christ and reaffirms the vows as an expression of this personal consecration, made in order to witness more effectively and radically to the world that our mission is His. From this concern naturally flows the question of our personal and communal authenticity. We are living authentically, the *Letter* says, if each of us is a living response to the questions put to us by an often skeptical world.¹⁷ The authors of the *Letter* thereby both recognized our awareness of doubts about our way of life and also reaffirmed

this life, lived in dialogue with the people to whom we are sent, as a valid answer to the difficulties of today.

Besides writing the letter on Oblate life and fundamental values, the Chapter discussed formation, asking for special programs in ongoing formation and spiritual renewal. The capitulars also set up a committee, without naming its members, to prepare a text of the *Constitutions and Rules* for consideration by the next General Chapter. They decreed some minor changes in structures at the general level.¹⁸ To help the new administration play a more active role in the Congregation, the Secretariate for mission and formation were re-established. They were placed, however, under the care of Assistants General rather than confided to Secretaries or Directors brought to Rome especially for this work.

Father Jetté, in a short talk to the Chapter at the time he accepted to be a candidate for the office of Superior General, had said that from him the Oblates could expect "a simple and direct way of speaking to say what I think is happening in the Provinces".¹⁹ When discussing leadership, the Capitulars had indicated that they wanted the new insistence on animation from Rome to continue, without allowing administration to be neglected. They also indicated that Rome would be expected to give orientations based on experience and expertise but that no one was asking for a *priori* planning from the center. Some spoke of the central team continuing the thrust toward government collegial in spirit and even in operation, charismatic and prayerful; while many of these same commentators insisted likewise on renewed fidelity to the Holy See and to Oblate traditions. The feeling seemed to be that only by touching all the opinions and elements among us could the General Administration both respect Oblate pluralism and yet also serve the Congregation by assuring its fundamental unity. Thus, it is clear that the same tensions existed around government as were expressed when considering community. The new administration, it was hoped, would resolve the tensions in practice, if not in theory.

Perhaps because the Chapter seemed to be asking the central government to resolve tensions and to exercise a more directive leadership in the future, some had the impression at the end of the Chapter that the Congregation ran the risk of searching for security rather than facing the problems of mission and religious life today. Others were of the opinion that an affirmation of identity should not be confused with a search for security. In any event, the new administration had its own path to clear. The Chapter of 1974, called primarily to elect a Superior General and Council, did not leave the new administration an agenda in the way the 1972 Chapter had given some explicit directives to the Hanley administration.

IV. 1980: Evangelization and Oblate Charism.

By contrast with the more frenetic atmosphere surrounding the General Chapters of 1972 and 1974, the Chapter of 1980 opened on October 27th and proceeded on its way in calm. It had been six years in preparation, inasmuch as, since the 1974 Chapter, all knew and accepted that the task of the 1980 meeting would be to approve a new set of *Constitutions and Rules* and many Oblates throughout the Congregation had been involved in drawing up the draft text for the Chapter. The final draft of this comprehensive statement of Oblate goals, ideals and practices had been written by a Constitutions Commission set up according to the mandate of the Chapter of 1974.

The Superior General's report to the General Chapter included among its general overview of Oblate life and mission some comments particularly related to Oblate evangelization. He detailed four trends in Oblate mission, trends which say much about the way Oblates conceive evangelization today. First, Father Jetté

pointed out, there is everywhere in the Congregation a renewed option for the poor; secondly, there is a search for specifically Oblate commitments; thirdly, there is a continued strong interest in the mission "ad gentes"; and, fourthly, there is a general concern for the promotion of the laity and the training of lay leaders for positions of responsibility in the Church.

Capitulants who questioned Father Jetté after his talk touched evangelization when they asked him about the relationship between personal charism and community mission, about temporary Oblate obediences to foreign missions, about plurality of patterns in evangelizing the poor, about ways of associating non-Oblates with the Congregation, and about his insistence that explicit proclamation of who Christ is lies at the heart of our Oblate charism.

Questions put to the various regions after their reports to the Chapter touched these themes too, but much of the discussion after the regional reports showed a deep concern for justice ministry. In fact, all six of the regional reports indicated efforts to come to terms with new demands brought into our ministry because of a concern for justice. No report except the Latin American made use of the word "evangelization", but all came back to three broad challenges related to evangelization, challenges which were further clarified in small group discussion. In the following years, most small groups reported, the Congregation will have to: 1) further clarify and intensify its mission to the poor; 2) integrate into its ordinary ministry a concern for justice and action toward furthering greater justice; and 3) develop means to foster truly local self-supporting Churches. There was, from the reports, a realization that mission is now truly on all six continents, and the terminology usual in speaking of missions "ad gentes" was seldom employed.

After the reports, the Chapter addressed the main item of its business; it began to study in commission the draft text of the new *Constitutions and Rules*. Again, most of the elements of Chapter discussion on evangelization took place under the rubric of mission. In the original draft, the first part of the *Constitutions* was entitled "Mission" and the second part "Community". Both these were later united into a single first section entitled "The Oblate Charism". This was done not only to keep firmly united in print what must always remain united in life – our mission and our community – but also to show that the prescriptions of the new *Constitutions*, concerning evangelization or any other aspect of Oblate reality, have to be understood and lived in relation to the spirit of the Founder, since this spirit is at the origin of the Congregation.

How do the 1980 *Constitutions* describe the Oblate mission? The concrete things we've actually done are succinctly mentioned in Rule 2: the "preaching of missions at home" (re-evangelization or secondary evangelization) and the "sending of missionaries abroad" (primary evangelization); but the Founder's Preface still opens all the doors when we are urged to pledge ourselves "to all the works of zeal which priestly charity can inspire".

The doing, or not doing, of a particular work does not automatically guarantee that evangelization is "Oblate", even if it is also clear that some ministries are better expressions of Oblate evangelization than others. The new *Constitutions*, looking at evangelization in the light of Oblate charism, place emphasis on the reasons for accepting certain works as Oblate apostolates.

What are these reasons? Why evangelize? First of all, because we've heard a call. The call, according to C. 1, is the call of Jesus Christ. We've heard it while gathered together in the community of believers, the Church, which pays close attention to the people's need, to their cry for salvation. We've heard it also because our own lives are centered in the Lord, because we have been converted.

CC. 5 and 7 sum up the Congregation's sense of mission: "We are a missionary Congregation. Our principal service in the Church is to proclaim Christ and his Kingdom to the most abandoned. We preach the Gospel among people who have not yet received it and help them see their own values in its light. Where the Church is already established, our commitment is to those groups it touches least. ... We will spare no effort to awaken or to reawaken the faith in the people to whom we are sent, and we will help them to discover 'who Christ is'. Our mission puts us on constant call to answer the most urgent needs of the Church through various forms of witness and ministries, but most of all by proclaiming the Word of God which finds its fulfillment in the celebration of the sacraments and in service to others. We have as our goal to establish Christian communities and Churches deeply rooted in the local culture and fully responsible for their own development and growth." In doing all this, we are to be open to new ways (C. 8) and we are "to proclaim a new world, born of the liberating presence of Christ" (C. 9).²⁰

This presentation of the major points on Oblate mission in the new *Constitutions and Rules* leaves open for further explication a number of topics which relate directly to Oblate evangelization and which figured in discussions during the Chapter. The relation between community and evangelization is expressed in articles which speak of community as apostolic support group and as witness to the Gospel (C. 35). Determination of ministries is to be, to the extent possible, communal (C. 67; R. 20).²¹

Oblate evangelization through the ministry of preaching is referred to each time the Founder's words about "proclaiming who Christ is" are recalled. But more than any particular article, it is the imagery running through much of the text which identifies Oblate evangelizers as preachers. Our vocation is expressed in terms of listening and calling, speaking, proclaiming, promising. The word – God's and ours – is central to our sense of being ourselves.

Action for justice as an essential element of evangelization is affirmed in the clear language borrowed from the 1974 Synod of Bishops (R. 9). The articles explicitly treating of justice and evangelization were among the most debated in the Chapter; but the acceptance of the principle and the commitment to this emphasis in Oblate evangelization are both quite clear.

The relation between priesthood and evangelization is not clearly spelled out in the new *Constitutions*. Throughout the Chapter discussions, two different theologies vied with each other. One defines priesthood more in relation to altar and sees the priests as personally consecrated to God to act on behalf of the people; the other defines priesthood more functionally, as a service among other services in the Church. The phrase in C. 7 relating evangelization and sacramental ministry is compatible with either view. So are the statements on priesthood in the section of the *Constitutions* dealing with formation of young Oblates. The clearest statement that we are a "clerical" Congregation is not in the *Constitutions* at all but in the Founder's Preface.²²

Nevertheless, the sense of satisfaction with the 1980 *Constitutions* indicates that the attempt to relate all the various elements of our life, including our goal to preach the Gospel to the poor, in the perspective of the Charism has been successful. The integrating notion running through the new text is our identification with Christ the Savior; and the dominant image is that of the apostles gathered around Jesus to share his life and to be sent out. This notion and this image are both so clearly from the Founder that the new text, even though the words are not De Mazenod's, is clearly a re-interpretation of Oblate life and mission both faithful to our tradition and adapted to the present.

The *Constitutions* were approved unanimously by the General Chapter on December 3rd; and the *Rules* were virtually unanimously approved on the same date.

Not much time was given in Chapter to topics outside of the immediate range of the *Constitutions and Rules*. A half day was devoted to present missionary challenges, and there ensued a lively discussion on evangelization in secularized societies. The Chapter indicated that it wanted the General Administration to follow up on that discussion, perhaps by organizing a Congress on the subject. A decree was passed instructing the new Administration to examine the status of Provinces and Vice-Provinces and to pursue restructuration of the Provinces, so that our structures will continue to be at the service of the mission. This decree should, I believe, be seen in continuity with the concern for supple structures which has been evident in each of the three Chapters studied here.

V - Conclusions.

A manifesto in 1972, a letter in 1974, a set of *Constitutions* in 1980 – these are the major documents of the last three Chapters in which Oblate evangelization has been re-examined and newly expressed. The literary forms correspond quite well to the emphasis of each meeting. In 1972, the Chapter wrote of mission. It reaffirmed in new language the Oblate commitment to the poor and opened up new modes of Evangelizing. The Chapter in a sense addressed the world and told it of our interests. The danger of this approach is that it could reduce Oblate identity to a function, a service we perform for others.

In 1974, at least partially in reaction and in order to complete the Oblate picture, the Capitulars wrote a letter not to the world but to their brother Oblates. They spoke of community and vows and how who we are is as important for evangelizing as what we do. The quest for authenticity, however, carried its own danger. We could become a very inward looking group.

In 1980, the Capitulars used the format of religious constitutions in the Church to express Oblate convictions about evangelization as an outgrowth of our charism. All the elements spoken of in recent years and rooted in the Oblate beginnings are presented in a newly integrated fashion. Oblates are called by Christ the Savior to live in intimacy with Him and with our brothers in apostolic religious community. We are sent out, again communally, in order to tell the poor who He is. Such are the essentials of the Oblate vocation and the sources of Oblate evangelization. Obviously, *Constitutions* are normative or prescriptive rather than descriptive. The *Constitutions* do not say where Oblate evangelizing is concretely taking place; they set out its conditions and its goals. Still to be more adequately integrated are items mentioned in the new *Constitutions* but awaiting further clarification in the course of events. Priesthood is clearly part of our charism, but its relation to evangelizing is variously explained and lived. Action for justice has to be given stronger biblical foundations and methods have to be devised to guide our choices in fields touching the political. Ecumenism is tied to evangelization by Christ's own prayer linking the unity of his followers and the belief of the world in Him, but there is not much evidence of deep concern for ecumenism among Oblates in some parts of the Congregation. Inculturation of the faith, in modern, secularized societies as well as in traditional cultures, has yet to be explored in depth. Modes of associating non-Oblates to our work and our communities have only begun to be experimented with. Our structures, essentially in place in the new *Constitutions* and working relatively well, will still have to be reviewed in future Chapters to be sure they remain both participatory in community and effective for mission.

Chapters respond to problems; they do not write theological treatises. But in responding to the needs of the Congregation each time they meet, General Chapters do interpret and re-interpret who we are. Because we are Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate and sons of Eugene de Mazenod, a fundamental part of saying who we are entails saying, every six years, what it means for us to evangelize.

Francis E. GEORGES, O.M.I.
Rome.

NOTES:

1 *OMI Communications/Informations*, no. 67/*72, April 18, 1972, p. 1. Some of the material for the first part of this paper was taken from a previous article: Francis E. George, O.M.I., "The Founder's Charism and the General chapter of 1972 and 1974", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 34 (1975), pp. 111-126.

2 Eventually, the chairman of this committee and its liaison with the Chapter editing committee was Father René Motte; its secretary was Father Francis George. For a presentation of the broader historical context of Oblate renewal, cf. René MorrE, O.M.I., "Fidélité et renouveau missionnaire chez les Oblats de Marie Immaculée", in *Neue Zeigschrift fat Missionswissenschaft*, Heft 4 (1974), pp. 291-294.

3 The references to Mary in paragraphs 13 and 18 recall her openness to the Spirit at the time of the Annunciation and at Pentecost. These were added to the text after the audience with Pope Paul VI on May 20, 1972, during which he spoke of Mary's "disponibilité" as a model for Oblates.

4 *Missionary Outlook*, 15.

5 *Ibidem*, 16.

6 *Ibidem*, 17.

7 In liberation theology, this becomes a technical distinction. Development is movement according to a pattern imposed from outside, and hence leads to a new form of oppression; liberation, on the other hand, means progress according to indigenous patterns of growth. In *Missionary Outlook* the two terms are used more loosely to mean merely economic progress (development) as distinct from a more total process, which process would include explicit evangelization.

8 *Missionary Outlook*, 12.

9 *Ibidem*, 18.

10 *Ibidem*, 1.

11 *Ibidem*, 17, a.

12 *Administrative Structures*, first sentence of text.

13 Minutes of the General Chapter of 1974, 7th plenary session, p. 34.

14 Minutes of the General Chapter of 1974, 55th plenary session, p. 263 ff: "Unfortunately, the Congregation appears... as belonging to another world; the Chapter is a custom which only concerns them from afar, its documents seem inadequate..." "We have to learn what it means to be a missionary in a world where the Gospel has been preached everywhere and in a society whose values are not those of the Gospel."

15 Minutes, same session: "Everything is changing, but the principles are still the same. The deep sense of the fundamental values does not change: our Oblates are living them." "...Doubts have arisen about what the Oblates think of religious life, the priesthood, the state of our Congregation, etc.... Many Oblates expect an answer – a clear, firm and courageous one." Cf. also the Minutes of the 44th plenary session for similar comments, p. 206.

16 Minutes of the General Chapter of 1974, 47th plenary session, p. 226. Three options were given to the capitulants in deciding the form of the message to the Congregation: a statement concerning our fundamental values; a letter to our brother Oblates; a discussion which would be written up and sent out later by the General Administration. The Capitulants chose the second option.

17 *Letter of the Capitulars to Their Brother Oblates*, pp. 2-3.

18 The particulars of all Chapter decisions were reported in *OMI Documentation*, no. 55/75; January 15, 1975.

19 Minutes of the General Chapter of 1974, 34th plenary session, p. 166.

20 See presentation of the section on Mission by Father Marius Bobichon, with background on the discussion surrounding each article; Minutes of the General Chapter of 1980, 23rd plenary session, pp. 165-169.

21 Cf. presentation of the section on Community by Father Paul Sion, with explanations and backgrounds: Minutes of the General Chapter of 1980, 24th plenary session, p. 174.

22 After the Chapter, the Sacred Congregation for Religious asked that a sentence declaring explicitly that we are a clerical Congregation of Pontifical right be included among the articles of the Constitutions.

Evangelization and the Superiors General of the Congregation

"Evangelization and the Superiors General of the Congregation" is the topic of our research, done within the framework of the general theme: "The Oblates and Evangelization". More precisely, our work is limited to the Superiors General from Father Joseph Fabre to Father Léo Deschâtelets inclusively, and makes use of only their public acts: decisions, circular letters and other published texts.

Being placed at the head of a Congregation which is totally missionary, the Superiors General have exercised, in conformity with the Constitutions and rules, a general animation in the missionary order. We cannot, however, without incurring the risk of falsifying or going beyond their thought, try to discover in this animation the different aspects of evangelization such as it has been defined so precisely in pontifical documents and elsewhere, especially in the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. We find the reality of evangelization expressed in their writings in other terms; and, with the passing of time, this reality was perceived somewhat differently.

Let us note that Superiors General do not give out theoretical treatises; rather they often express themselves according to the prompting of circumstances, in line with the needs of the moment, and with the accents proper to their personality, often in the form of lively exhortations. Each one in his own way has made a contribution to the evangelizing dynamism of the Congregation.

Our study will focus on the interventions of the Superiors General first in favour of the Oblate himself as an apostle and missionary and secondly, in favour of the works entrusted to him by the Church in Christian countries or in the missions. As we begin, let us point out that the jurisdiction of Superiors General is exercised fully on the Oblates themselves, but only relatively on the work of evangelization. While they are able, in the name of the Congregation, to accept or refuse given apostolic fields and works, to send into the missions that have been accepted the missionaries of their

choice, the work of evangelization itself, however, in its methods, phases, organization, depends in the first place on the ecclesiastical authority represented by the bishops and vicars and prefects apostolic. The Church retains as her own the first responsibility for evangelization; religious apostolic Congregations only lend her their concurring help.¹

I - The Missionary Oblate.

a. Holiness of life, source of apostolic fruitfulness.

All the Superiors General repeatedly and emphatically insisted on the necessity of a deep and genuine holiness of life as a condition and source of a fruitful apostolate. Their exhortations are most often inspired by the Founder's ardent words in the Rules.

The required holiness of life. From the very outset of his tenure as Superior General, Father Fabre clearly communicated his thought on this subject: "To what, my dear Brothers, are we called? To become saints in order to work effectively at the sanctification of the most abandoned souls. That is our vocation. Let us not lose sight of it and let us first apply ourselves to understand it well".²

A void excessive activity. Until the end of his tenure as Superior General, he manifested the same zeal for the integral observance of the Rule.³ In his report to the

1887 General Chapter, he gave the following strong admonition:

One of the great obstacles to the observance of the Rule is the multiplicity of outside works... Our Fathers are working too much, far too much, in outside ministry. Thus it happens that their health is rapidly worn down, the spirit of faith and recollection slackens, piety disappears, knowledge lessens, and an excessive ministry produces, neither for souls nor for the Congregation, the consoling results it should.⁴

Witness of an exemplary life. In his lengthy circular letter on preaching, Father Louis Soullier also reminds us that without "piety... our ministry will be absolutely sterile".⁵ Recalling the articles of the Rules on the duty of supplementing religious Orders which have disappeared, he exhorts the Oblates to give the witness of an exemplary life, "to practice every sort of virtue and that no virtue be foreign to them".⁶ He sums up as follows: "A living mirror of all the virtues is what the Oblate of Mary should be; it is only after he has acquired this quality that he may aspire to the ministry of the apostolate".⁷

Piety and zeal are inseparable. "Let us sanctify ourselves and we will be more fit to sanctify others," Father Cassien Augier wrote in his turn.⁸ There is a vital link which binds the apostolate to prayer. He goes on to write: "In carrying out our ministry, let us remember that prayer and true zeal are as inseparable as the flame is from the fire-box which nourishes it".⁹

Religious in order to be missionaries. Bishop Augustin Dontenwill expressed himself with equal clarity. "We are missionaries. What am I saying? We are religious before being missionaries, and we must be fervent religious to be and remain ardent missionaries... religious in order to be missionaries of the supernatural, religious in order to persevere unto death in the fatigue of the apostolate".¹⁰ Referring to the apostolic successes he had seen during his visit to Southern Africa, he wrote: "The success of our work is in direct proportion to the intensity of these (religious) virtues".¹¹

Intimacy with God. At the beginning of his tenure as Superior General, Father Théodore Labouré presented the example of the Founder to the Oblates. "As he did, we want to seek for the one and only greatness, that of holiness, that of intimacy with God. As he did, we would thereby give our life and apostolate a power and a fruitfulness which would blossom forth in benefits of salvation for souls and rays of glory for the Congregation".¹² His intense concern for the Oblates' interior life led him to hope that the principal objective of the 1938 General Chapter would be the interior life of the Oblate.¹³

Genuine religious. Father Léo Deschâtelets plunged the Oblate into the life-giving source of the Rules. "Let us meditate our Rules again so that we may be men of a true interior life... so that we may be genuine religious... so that we may be model priests... so that we may be conquerors of souls who do not yet believe...."¹⁴

Contemplatives. He is not afraid to mention contemplation to the Oblates. In his address at the close of the 1966 General Chapter, using the words of Father Loew, he stated: "As missionaries, and especially as missionaries to the masses, we must all be contemplatives... First we must be filled with God, first we must live with God, live intimately united to Jesus Saviour".¹⁵

Ponder the Mystery of Christ in the poor. A short while before, in 1965, he had indicated a privileged topic for Oblates to contemplate: the mystery of Christ's identification with the poor. "Our first task is to evangelize, to imitate the 'evangelizing' Christ. And in the meditation of this ideal, we should try to penetrate the mystery of his identification with the poor. We are born for the evangelization of the poor, especially for the evangelization of the most abandoned souls... We are missionaries so that we, in our turn, can bring the Gospel to the poor: and thus we

must ourselves first live this spirituality of poverty which penetrates all our spiritual and apostolic structures. The Founder wanted to give testimony of it to the Church".¹⁶

The cult and devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to Mary Immaculate, these "most precious treasures of our family",¹⁷ have been an integral part of the Oblate's interior and apostolic life.

The Sacred Heart and the missionary. Father Augier presented devotion to the Sacred Heart as "the foundation of all our hopes, as the great means of obtaining salvation for people".¹⁸ Father Deschâtelets, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the "mission of honour"¹⁹ we received from Pope Leo XIII to promote the devotion to the Sacred Heart, wrote a circular letter on the nature and richness of this devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, especially for us who are "the preachers of the mystery of God's love for mankind".²⁰

Mary, Mother of Mercy. The Superiors General have reminded us how in Pope Leo XII's Brief of Approbation "we are entrusted with a special mission, namely, to snatch souls from the Devil and from Hell and lead them to the bosom of the Mother of Mercy".²¹

The Mystery of Mary in the work of salvation. Bishop Döntenwill, who first solemnly consecrated the Congregation to Mary Immaculate, and Fathers Labouré and Deschâtelets insisted that the Oblates preach more often about the Immaculate Virgin Mary.²² In his circular letter no. 191, "the charter of our spirituality and Marian apostolate",²³ Father Deschâtelets says that "one of our principal obligations is to be apostles of Mary among the souls entrusted to our care, especially the souls of the poor",²⁴ he invites us to "be completely absorbed in the mystery of Mary, our mind, our heart, our whole life... This is the way we must follow if we are to live adequately our total dedication to the service of Christ and of souls".²⁵

As the Superiors General remind us, the Oblate should find the fruitfulness of his Gospel ministry in the holiness of his life and find, in the Heart of Jesus and the mystery of Mary Immaculate, inspiration and help.

b. The missionary's competence.

Some Superiors General have stressed the competence an Oblate ought to have for his evangelization work.

Necessity of serious study. Father Fabre warns: "Let us guard against compromising, through incomplete and insufficient work of preparation, the dignity of the Word which we are commissioned to preach".²⁶ In his report to the 1873 General Chapter, he complained that he had not been sufficiently understood in regard to the "necessity for study, and for serious study".²⁷ He especially expressed regret that the Fathers in the foreign missions had not been able to accomplish their "first and most essential duty",²⁸ namely, that of studying the country's language.

Knowledge, complement to piety. Father Soullier, his successor, wrote two long circular letters which are veritable treatises, one on preaching and one on studies in the Congregation. In the former one, supported by texts from the Founder and by the prescriptions of the Rules, he categorically states that piety and virtue "need an essential complement in a true missionary, namely, knowledge".²⁹ In the latter, he strongly exhorts the Oblates to give themselves to serious study, not only during the time of their scholasticate but also once they are engaged in the ministry. He wants to see the Oblates in the foreign missions possessing the required competence to be a propagator of the faith and a defender of the Church against heresies; and he has a special reminder in regard to learning the language of the country concerned.³⁰

Need for specialists. Father Deschâtelets, for his part, requires not only a serious general formation for the works of the ministry, but called for the preparation of greater numbers of specialists to provide for the needs of evangelization today in different milieux. In his conference to the Oblate Congress at Maseru, in March 1955, he stated that the Congregation needed Oblate specialists, not only in the ecclesiastical sciences but also in sociology, education, ethnology, etc. These sciences are a precious help to our ministry.³¹

Teams for the Social Apostolate. Shortly afterwards, he asked Provincials and Vicars of Missions to prepare specialists for the Church's struggle against communism; and he added: "It seems to me that we should have, at the centre of the Congregation or in all its different areas, a team of men perfectly prepared for the social apostolate in every degree and in every domain".³²

For so many sensitive tasks. At the close of the 1966 General Chapter, he again touched upon this need for specialists, a need which had become especially urgent. "When we closely examine the condition of our missionary front and the works of which we are in charge, we notice a gap which we ought to fill as soon as possible: a gap due to the lack of specialists for so many sensitive tasks we have to carry out. We could do more and do a more effect work if our formation was more developed, not only at the scholastic level but also during the course of the ministry".³³

c. Other qualities of the Oblate missionary.

Because of the special needs of their times and in line with their individual personalities, the Superiors General stressed also other qualities of the Oblate evangelizer.

Being united to the Church is essential. The Missionary's union with the Church. Bishop Dontenwill affirms that the Oblate have "received their strength and fruitfulness in their works" from their attachment to the Pope.³⁴ Recollecting that the Founder gave himself totally and exclusively to the Church's service, Father Deschâtelets asserts strongly and with conviction that the Congregation has no *raison d'être* except the Church through which it exists.³⁵ "The Congregation," he writes, "is nothing without the Church. Its life and apostolate are ecclesial. It has no other ideal, no other spirituality than that which the Church points out. As Oblates of Mary Immaculate, we are priests of the Church, missionaries of the Church, religious of the Church, as we are at the same time sons and members of the Congregation".³⁶

Unity of spirit, unity of action. Union and solidarity. One of the strong points in Father Fabre's animation was his effort to promote union and solidarity among the Oblates, both in their internal life and in their apostolate. He comments that the Oblate should be fully integrated into his religious family: each one lives and works in and through the Congregation and in its name, in whatsoever ministry this may be.³⁷ He writes: "Unity of spirit and unity of action constitute the life-element of every religious Congregation".³⁸

The Power of the Word. Preaching the Word of God. With conviction Father Soullier says that the grace of the conversion of hearts comes from God's Word. "Jesus Christ is not only the principal cause and the goal of the apostolic Word; he is also as though enclosed in that same Word. He transforms souls only by giving himself to them. Just as he gives himself to them in the Host, so also in the apostolic Word. The pulpit is therefore not only an altar; it is also a second Communion table".³⁹

Preaching Jesus Christ. Thus, in his practical recommendations for preaching, he specifies the following: "Let us draw abundantly from the living source of Holy Scripture. Let us bank on Tradition and the Holy Councils. Let us not overdo arguments drawn from human considerations, earthly and social gain..., let us everywhere and always be men of God and of souls".⁴⁰ "May our preaching always be the echo of that of our Lord; let us preach his doctrine, imitate his example".⁴¹

A zeal that is strong and joyful. Bold missionary action. In the writings of Father Deschâtelets, dynamic expressions about designed to stimulate the daring and ambition of the missionaries. "For us, the letter of our Rule ought to be a constant source of inspiration, a fire of apostolic enthusiasm, and a support for a zeal that is strong, joyful, always young, never blasé, never worn out, never a friend to tasks which are too easy and well laid out beforehand. Let us never be defeatist".⁴²

Let us always forge ahead. Elsewhere he gives the following advice: we must adapt ourselves to a changing milieu; we must never say our methods are the best and cannot be improved; we must be open to understand the needs of the times; we must never be satisfied with the *status quo* but rather forge ahead to conquer new apostolic fields, we must remain shock troops⁴³

II - The Work of Evangelization.

Evangelizing the Poor. All the Superiors General have been firm on maintaining the purpose of the Congregation which is expressed in its motto: "He has sent me to evangelize the Poor." This fact is clear, and needs no further demonstration. We will rather underline some of the Superiors' General comments relating to the special needs in their times.

a. In Christian milieux.

Missions, a privileged ministry. In Christian milieux, the parish mission remained the preferred method of evangelization, in conformity with the Constitutions and Rules. As Father Fabre saw it, "every other ministry is secondary; and we will never have it any differently".⁴⁴ Father Soullier stated, "For the Congregation it is a necessity of purpose and of precept that we give ourselves to missions as much as possible".⁴⁵ Father Labouré saw missions as "the work, or rather our dear Congregation's ministry par excellence".⁴⁶ Father Deschâtelets stated that "this is what makes us missionaries before anything else".⁴⁷

However, the work of evangelizing the poor has had to be adapted with the passing of time so that it would respond to the new needs.

In the "red" sections of the city – Catholic Action. Father Labouré situates a large portion of the poor whom we are sent to evangelize as being in the poor, abandoned, discouraging works of our "red" city sectors or in the foreign missions.⁴⁸ He suggested to the 1938 capitulars that Catholic Action should be a privileged ministry in the Congregation; he was himself convinced "that the Congregation had a role to play in this movement of Christian renewal".⁴⁹

Breaking new ground. Father Hilaire Balmés, Vicar General of the Congregation, considering the problem of quasi-pagan parishes in certain areas of France in which our traditional missions would not result in very much, accepted, at the request of the Bishops, works or parishes where new ground was to be broken, where re-Christianization work had to be undertaken. He explained his decision by referring to the Founder's words: "The members of the Congregation will make every effort to provide spiritual aid especially for the poorer classes of rural districts and also for the inhabitants of towns and villages who have the greatest need".⁵⁰

Efforts against communism. Attentive to the needs of the times, Father Deschâtelets invited the 1953 capitulars to favour the apostolate against communism. "It would be too bad," he told them, "if we were to hesitate in committing ourselves fully in this new apostolate... This is the hour for struggle, for combat... More than other priests, missionaries such as we are ought to be constantly alert and ready to fight and die for Christ".⁵¹

Penetrating the working masses - in favour of justice. He reminded the capitulars of 1959: "Our title of missionaries to the poor today confronts us with an apostolate to the masses, especially to the masses of workers who are more deeply affected by misery, economic and spiritual poverty"⁵². To those of 1972 he mentioned social justice which had just been the theme of a Synod of Bishops one year earlier: "This problem of justice in the world underlies our whole apostolate of evangelization. As missionaries of the poor, we are among those most committed in this struggle for peace in the world through the restoration of justice in every domain".⁵³

b. In missions.

An excellent Oblate work which is promoted Evangelization in the developing Churches and among unbelievers is, since the Founder's time, an eminently Oblate ministry which has attracted many men to the Congregation. The Superiors General have recognized the excellence of this work. This is shown by the many men they have sent to mission countries and the visits there they have made either personally or through their delegates. Some of the interventions in favour of this ministry which we are going to mention here also flow, at least in part, from their Council and from the General Chapters.

Developing the missions already started Even though he only accepted two new mission territories, Father Fabre presided over a vast missionary movement in the apostolic fields of the Congregation. One of his dominant concerns was to strengthen the missions already started by the Founder himself in so many and such vast areas. Thus it is that he refused every new field of apostolate. Only the new missions of Colombo in Ceylon and of Lower Cimbebasia (today a part of Namibia) were accepted as an exception : the first in response to a desire already strongly voiced by the Founder himself," and the second to favour the establishment of the Congregation in Germany.⁵⁵

Developments in Ceylon, Natal, Canada, Texas. The missions which had already been accepted experienced great development. Those of Ceylon, besides expanding into Colombo territory, became a Church established with its own hierarchy; the development in these missions induced the Holy See to grant part of the island to other missionaries.⁵⁶ In South Africa, Father Fabre in the 1870s brought about a reorganization of the missionary apostolate by proposing the appointing of a new apostolic vicariate in Natal; and later, in 1886, by requesting the creation of another apostolic vicariate and apostolic prefecture within the territory of the vicariate of Natal.⁵⁷ In the Canadian West, he gladly supported the setting up of four new apostolic vicariates and appointed as many vicariates of missions corresponding to them.⁵⁸ After some hesitations, he gave our missions in Texas a statute which would guarantee their future, integrating them into the new Province of the United States.

Encouraging. Father Soullier, the first Superior General to personally visit the Congregation's missions, gave them a great deal of encouragement. After his return from Western Canada he wrote: "With a heart deeply moved, we can repeat: Yes, our missionaries have really been walking in the Apostles' footsteps: with the Cross and the Word they have converted entire nations".⁵⁹ He proceeded with the establishment of missions in Lower Cimbebasia.⁶⁰

Religious authority and ecclesiastical authority. Carrying out the decisions of the 1906 General Chapter, Father Lavillardière introduced a policy in our mission territories which was in line with the Church's spirit: the separation of the religious authority from the ecclesiastical authority, entrusting the religious authority to a person different from that holding the ecclesiastical authority. He did this in the vicariates of Saint Albert and Saskatchewan in Western Canada, in the Orange Free State and Transvaal in South Africa, and in Jaffna in Ceylon.

Foreign missions written into the Rules. In Bishop Dontenwill, who had been a missionary for nineteen years in British Columbia, the Congregation had its first Superior General who came from the foreign missions. One of the first decisions of the new Superior General was to insert into the text of the Rules the Founder's Instruction on the foreign missions which up to that time had been an appendix only. He explains this decision to the 1920 Capitulars in this way: "There is such a large number of Oblates in the foreign missions; who would dare say that they are not working within the purpose of the Congregation? Is it not legitimate to enter them into the text in a definitive way with a text which puts an end to all hesitation?"⁶¹

The missionary's task. Bishop Dontenwill described the task which evangelization ought to assure as "maintaining converted people in the faith, creating and sustaining works of all kinds to assure their perseverance and the fervour of their supernatural life and to advance even further the evangelization of people who do not yet believe".⁶² In the measure that a missionary Church becomes more fully developed, the missionaries should abandon posts which have been ordinary parishes and become available to the Congregation's special works. His directive for such circumstances was: "Leave the small posts, the little parishes, etc., and concentrate on houses with large numbers... so that we may remain strong".⁶³

During his term as Superior General, the Congregation accepted the new missions of: in 1925, the apostolic prefecture of Pilcomayo in South America, and in 1931 the mission of Belgian Congo (today Zaïre).

Western Canada: favour the Indian missions. Twice Father Labouré intervened significantly in regard to the work of evangelization in the missions. When he visited the missions of Western Canada in 1935-1936, he invited the Oblates, who by force of circumstances had become the pioneers of the dioceses of the Whites, to restore Indians missions to first place in their concerns. He made agreements with the Bishops by which the Indian missions in their dioceses were entrusted to the Oblates. He strongly urged the missionaries to use the Indian languages and asked that language schools be set up for them. He invited the Oblates to live in the midst of the Indians. In order to facilitate the missionaries' relationships with the federal Government, to defend and promote the interests of our Indian works, he laid the foundations of an agency which thereafter gave invaluable service.⁶⁴

Ceylon: a Church which had reached adulthood. The main objective of his long visit to Ceylon in 1937 was to preparing minds and hearts for transferring responsibility for certain mission works to the native priests. He saw such a change as normal for a missionary Church which had reached adulthood, and he backed himself up with the encyclicals *Maximum Mud* of Benedict XV and *Rerum Ecclesiae* of Pius XI.⁶⁵

When he was Superior General, the Congregation accepted the missions of Laos, the Philippines, and Haiti. Under Father Hilaire Balmès, Vicar General of the Congregation from 1942-1947, the missions of Cameroon were accepted.

Twenty-eight missions founded With the Founder's daring and faith, Father Deschâtelets launched the Congregation into several new mission fields, in response to the urgent appeals of the Church, especially in Latin America, in Asian countries,

and Scandinavia. Twenty-eight new foundations were made during the time he was Superior General.⁶⁶ He himself explains in his *Mémoires*: "The Chapter (of 1947) felt that no new fields of the apostolate should be accepted, unless there was a formal command from the Pope. It would be a long story to describe our missionary evolution in spite of this declaration by the Chapter. The Lord's reply was so clear. He so filled up our novitiates and scholasticates that we could further develop the missions we already had and, moreover, open up new ones with a personnel that was young and of the first quality... We were thus able to respond to the Pope's appeals and to the cry of souls".⁶⁷

Missionaries in order to form new Churches. At the same time, he carefully saw to it that the Congregation remained missionary, that it did not all alone continue to bear the burden for Churches of which it had assumed charge of their beginnings and formation. As he says, "There was the danger in the long run that we would cease being missionaries in the Church's avant-garde and only be a sort of diocesan clergy".⁶⁸ He reminded the capitulars of 1972: "Our missionary aim commands us to adapt our religious apostolic action to the needs of the Church and of the people whom we are evangelizing; we must help these people take into their own hands, gradually and after the appropriate formation, the responsibility for their own spiritual and temporal welfare".⁶⁹

III - Conclusion.

What can we conclude from this collection of indications marking the Superiors' General animation in favour of the Congregation's evangelization work? Let us simply recall the main lines of their animation.

A major insistence of the Superiors General to the Oblates themselves, the agents of evangelization, bears on the holiness of life which is necessary for fruitfulness in their apostolic work. This holiness of life implies two aspects of evangelization which are today stressed: living witness to the faith and the establishing of the new spiritual Kingdom of Christ. The more he becomes a man of God, the more the Oblate gives witness to his own faith and the more he is focussed in his activity on the coming of Christ's Kingdom.

Other attitudes and qualities, whose importance for the Oblate missionary is readily obvious, were particularly called for by this or that Superior General: intimate union with the Church, solidarity with the Congregation, preaching the very Word of God, competence needed for the task, daring, confidence, spirit of conquest.

When it comes to the work of evangelization itself, the Superiors General held firm to assure the accomplishment of the Congregation's end: the evangelization of the poor, of the most abandoned, in both Christian and mission countries. They kept the Oblates' apostolic spirit and zeal alert to the new needs of the times, v.g. to the works of Catholic Action, to penetrating the masses of workers, fighting against communism, promotion of justice, and also reminding the Oblates they are meant to be missionaries of the vanguard. They presided over the progressive expansion of the evangelization fields: in Christian countries by creating new Provinces; in the missions, first by strengthening and developing territories already accepted by the Founder, and then by accepting new ones.

While respecting the competence of the ecclesiastical authorities, they worked in close collaboration with bishops, vicars and prefects apostolic, and furnished them with missionaries. In the missions, they insisted that the missionaries use the language of the natives in their evangelization work, and this implies a certain degree of Christian inculturation.

The Gospel thrust transmitted by the Superiors General to the Congregation clearly has its source in the Founder's apostolic zeal. To it, they often refer.

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NOTES :

- 1 Voir: *Instruction de la Congrégation de la Propagande aux Vicaires et Préfets apostoliques ainsi qu'aux Supérieurs d'Instituts religieux à qui le Saint-Siège a confié des missions, 8 décembre 1929.*
- 2 Circulaire n° 11, p. 2, in *Circulaires administratives des Supérieurs généraux aux membres de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Paris, Typographie privée O.M.1., 1887, vol. 1, p. [74].
- 3 See his principals circulars: numbers 11, 13, 14, 15, 24, 26 (*ibidem*, vol. 1).
- 4 Circulaire n° 42 (*ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 46-47).
- 5 Circulaire n° 59, p. 21, vol. 2.
- 6 *Ibidem*, p. 23.
- 7 *Ibidem*, p. 24.
- 8 Circulaire n° 66 (*ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 327).
- 9 Circulaire n° 71 (*ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 424). to Circulaire n° 113, (*ibidem*, vol. 3, p. 277).
- 11 Circulaire n° 130, (*ibidem*, vol. 4, p. 10).
- 12 Circulaire n° 154, (*ibidem*, vol. 4, p. 266).
- 13 See his report to the General Chapter of 1938, in *Chapitres généraux 1906-1938*, (archives Deschâtelets, Ottawa, p. 552). Typewritten copy.
- 14 Circulaire n° 175, dans *Circulaires administratives...* vol. 5, p. 6-7.
- 15 Circulaire n° 225, (*ibidem*, vol. 7, p. 334).
- 16 Circulaire n° 215 (*ibidem*, vol. 7, p. 17).
- 17 Circulaire n° 73, (*ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 441).
- 18 *Ibidem*, p. 442.
- 19 *Ibidem*, p. 437.
- 20 Circulaire n° 185, (*ibidem*, vol. 5, p. 254).
- 21 Circulaire n° 137, (*ibidem*, vol. 4, p. 91). See also Joseph FABRE, o.m.i., *Lettre au Rédacteur des Petites Annales*, in *Petites Annales des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 1 (1891), p. 5; Circulaire n° 59, p. 2, 3-4. vol. 2; Circulaire n° 73, (*ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 437-441); Circulaire n° 92, (*ibidem*, vol. 3, pp. 195, 196); Circulaire n° 191, (*ibidem*, vol. 5, p. 356).
- 22 Voir Circulaire n° 104, (*ibidem*, vol. 3, pp. 230-231); Circulaire n° 126, (*ibidem*, vol. 3, p. 349-352); Circulaire n° 129, (*ibidem*, vol. 4, p. 5 (421)); Circulaire n° 154, (*ibidem*, vol. 4, p. 259).
- 23 Irenée TOURIGNY, o.m.i., «Marie Immaculée et la vie apostolique de l'Oblat», dans *Études Oblates*, 14 (1955), p. 119.
- 24 Circulaire n° 191, in *Circulaires administratives...*, vol. 5, p. 378.
- 25 *Ibidem*, p. 364.
- 26 Circulaire n° 13, (*ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 86).
- 27 Circulaire n° 25, (*ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 274).
- 28 *Ibidem*, p. 277.
- 29 Circulaire n° 59, p. 25, (*ibidem*, vol. 2).

- 30 Voir Circulaire n° 61, p. 59, (*ibidem*, vol. 2).
- 31 See *Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 82 (1955), p. 45.
- 32 Circulaire du 17 juin 1955 aux Provinciaux et Vicaires de Missions, p. 4.
- 33 Circulaire n° 225, in *Circulaires administratives...*, vol. 7, p. 326.
- 34 *Circulaires administratives* n°s 115-116, (*ibidem*, vol. 3, p. 299).
- 35 See his exhortation in his circular to the Provincials and Vicars of Missions, January 25, 1955 and also the circular to the same, September 8, 1958.
- 36 *Pôles et Tropiques*, janvier-février 1963, p. 3.
- 37 See his Circulaires 11, 13, 14, 15, 24 et 26.
- 38 Circulaire n° 34, in *Circulaires administratives...*, vol. I, p. 357.
- 39 Circulaire n° 61, p. 29, (*ibidem*, vol. 2).
- 40 Circulaire n° 59, pp. 40-41, (*ibidem*, vol. 2).
- 41 *Ibidem*, p. 43.
- 42 Circulaire n° 175, (*ibidem*, vol. 5, p. 6).
- 43 See Circulaire n° 186, (*ibidem*, vol. 5, p. 266); see also his allocution on the occasion of the centenary of the missions of Natal, in *Missions... des... Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 79 (1952), p. 592-593.
- 44 Circulaire n° 13, in *Circulaires administratives*, vol. 1, p. 85; see also Circulaire n° 22, (*ibidem*, p. 203).
- 45 Circulaire n° 59, p. 41, (*ibidem*, vol. 2).
- 46 Circulaire n° 154, (*ibidem*, vol. 4, p. 259).
- 47 Circulaire n° 191, (*ibidem*, vol. 5, p. 320).
- 48 Circulaire n° 152, (*ibidem*, vol. 4, p. 245).
- 49 Circulaire n° 164, (*ibidem*, vol. 4, p. 328).
- 50 Hilaire BALMÈS, o.m.i., *Oeuvres de défrichement*, in *Études Oblates*, 7 (1948), p. 5.
- 51 Circulaire n° 201, in *Circulaires administratives...*, vol. 6, p. 66.
- 52 Circulaire n° 208, (*ibidem*, vol. 6, p. 304); see also Circulaire n° 191, *ibidem*, vol. 5, p. 319-320; Circulaire n° 201, (*ibidem*, vol. 6, p. 65).
- 53 Circulaire n° 247, (*ibidem*, vol. 8, pp. 428-429).
- 54 Circulaire n° 42, *ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 20.
- 55 Circulaire n° 60, p. 2, *ibidem*, vol. 2.
- 56 The territories which became the dioceses of Galle and Trincomalee.
- 57 The Vicariate Apostolic of Orange Free State, and the Prefecture of Transvaal.
- 58 The vicariates of Athabaska-Mackenzie, of British Columbia, Saint-Albert and of Saskatchewan.
- 59 Circulaire n° 59, p. 3-4, *ibidem*, vol. 2.
- 60 See Circulaire n° 60, p. 2, *ibidem*, vol. 2; *Missions... des... Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 36 (1898), p. 415.
- 61 Circulaire n° 128, in *Circulaires administratives...*, vol. 3, p. 370.
- 62 Circulaire n° 141, (*ibidem*, vol. 4, p. 150).
- 63 *Missions... des... Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 54 (1920), p. 250.
- 64 See Théodore LABOURÉ, o.m.i., *Acte général de visite des Missions indiennes du Nord-Ouest canadien*, Rome, Maison générale, 1936.
- 65 Théodore LABOURÉ, o.m.i., *Act of Visitation of the Vicariate of Ceylon, February-September 1937*, Rome, General House. 1938.

66 See Irenée TOURIGNY, O.M.I., *Father Léo Deschâtelets, O.M.L. (1899-1974), Superior General of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (1947-1972). A biographical sketch* (Rome, n.p., 1976), p. 82.

67 *Mémoires*, p. 75, quoted in Irenée TOURIGNY, o.m.i., *op. cit.*, pp. 86-87.

68 Circulaire n° 201, in *Circulaires administratives...*, vol. 6, p. 68. See also *Missions... des... Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 82 (1955), pp. 43-44.

69 Circulaire n° 247, in *Circulaires administratives...*, vol. 8, p. 425.

Evangelization According to the Different Editions of Our Constitutions and Rules

Introduction.

I readily admit that I first approached this study with a certain amount of malaise. After having recently made a commentary on our Constitutions and Rules in the light of the Founder's writings and example, I now felt as though confined by having to consider only one category of texts. There is *the letter* and there is *the life*. The historical studies which have preceded have convinced you, if this was necessary. The aphorism voiced by Father Maurice Gilbert the other day was already quoted by one of our ancestors on the occasion of the centenary of the approbation of the Congregation: "If you want to know Benedict, read his Rule; but if you want to know the Rule, read his life".¹ This aphorism fully applies also to our Founder and to his Constitutions and Rules.

Still, the Constitutions and Rules are *our official charter in the Church*, approved by the Church. It is truly remarkable how the Founder, when commenting them or referring to them, never says: "I wrote this in such and such an article..."; but rather, "The Constitutions tell us..." or "The Church speaks to us in this book..." We find such expressions, for example, in his retreat notes of October 1831.² Selecting "the articles which express more explicitly why we were established and what we are meant to be", he says: "Our Constitutions offer us this tableau as the prototype of the true Oblate of Mary".³ We can certainly try, following his example, to understand better our mission of evangelization.

This inquiry into the successive editions of the Constitutions and Rules is quite profitable in terms of both the continuity and the development of thought and directives. At times the mere change of a word, the suppression or addition of a given phrase or paragraph, or, as was done recently, completely new formulations - all these modifications express our charism as it lived in succeeding generations of Oblates. This gives us an idea of *the extent of this topic* and how difficult it is to treat it in a few pages. Moreover, when we study the texts as a whole, for instance that of 1982, we begin to see that evangelization is the theme not only of some articles, but that the whole book more or less directly is a guide for the accomplishment of our evangelization mission. Thus, for example, in Part Three - which evangelizers will certainly not readily consult - we find the following two statements: "Our organizational structures are set up in function of that mission" (C. 71); "The temporal goods of our Institute are, above all, at the service of the mission" (C. 122).⁴ We can say that nothing in our Constitutions and Rules is foreign to our mission of evangelization for "we are men set apart for the Gospel",⁵ men dedicated in the proper sense, that is, "consecrated to the preaching of the Gospel".⁶ Briefly put, I shall leave aside a certain number of aspects concerning our evangelization, such as, for example, the evolution in our apostolic commitments, a topic already mentioned in several talks. Instead, I shall especially treat of the spirit which guided our Founder and inspired the different editions of the Constitutions and Rules. Among all the texts which inspire the life and missionary activity of the Congregation, there is one which has a privileged place, which is like the heart or the lungs: the Founder's Preface. Father Yenveux remarks that of all the Founder's writings, "none is more admirable".⁷ All the Oblates have felt and do feel the same. That is why it is an integral part of our new Constitutions, as also the Sacred Congregation for Religious formally recognized in its first reply of March 25, 1982. The Preface remains the

essential reference point, the deep inspiration of our evangelization mission.

I - The Great Need for Salvation.

There are several factors which explain Eugene de Mazenod's vocation as an evangelizer and founder of a missionary society. It is not my task to recall them here. However, *certain especially meaningful quotations*, read in their chronological order, will help us to better situate our topic.

Captured by the merciful love of the Saviour, Eugene's heart responds: from now on he sees the Church and the world "through the eyes of our crucified Saviour".⁸ So many Christians around him have forgotten or are ignorant of God's love and of their own dignity. Jesus Christ is no longer known, no longer loved: entire sectors of the Church are abandoned.

- On June 29, 1808, he writes his mother to tell her that he is entering the seminary: "What God wants from me... is that I devote myself especially to his service, to try and *restore the faith that is dying out among the poor.*"⁹
- On July 3, 1810, he tells her his holiday plans while at the country house of St. Julien. He was hoping "to *instruct* a bit these poor people who are so abandoned, (these) poor Christians who don't have the slightest idea of their dignity, simply because they have not met someone to break the bread of the Word for them".¹⁰
- In his opening instruction of Lent in 1813, the young Father de Mazenod states: "The Gospel must be taught to all men, and it must be taught in such a way that it is understood. The poor, who are a precious sector of the Christian family, cannot be abandoned to their ignorance... Our divine Saviour gave as proof that his mission was divine the fact that the poor were being taught: 'pauperes evangelizantur'.¹¹
- On October 9, 1815, he addresses his first appeal to Father Tempier. "Take a good look at the situation of our country people, of their religious condition, of the apostasy that is daily spreading... Only missions can bring the people back to the faith..."¹²
- On January 25, 1816, the young Founder and his first companions address a petition to the Capitular Vicars of Aix. It begins with these words: "The undersigned priests, deeply touched by the deplorable situation of the small towns and villages of Provence, which have almost completely lost the faith..."¹³ This is the first text which has an official character: it is a first draft of the Constitutions and Rules, and it already contains the basic options of the Founder. Also, in the same year, when he asks Father Tempier to draw up the program of the Society, he recommends that among other sources, he re-read the petition addressed to the Vicars General.¹⁴

Thus Eugene de Mazenod gradually perceives his mission of evangelization, a mission he now wants to accomplish together with others, in community. This is the result of a painful observation, namely, of the religious ignorance and dechristianization of the small towns and villages of Provence. To be sure, he is not the only one to note this fact, either in Provence or across the whole of France;¹⁵ but he, at least, is touched to the quick by it, cannot be satisfied with simply "lamenting";¹⁶ he will make great efforts effectively to remedy this situation.¹⁷

In September 1818, the Founder drew up his first Constitutions and Rules. As

we all know, he borrowed copiously from those of St. Alphonsus. Some see a certain lack of originality in this; he himself never claimed any either. What mattered to him was that the best response to the urgent needs of the present be made as soon as possible. It is certain that he borrowed whatever suited him, whatever was in line with his own vision and plan. In some places, however, he did not copy from his main source which was couched in a rather juridical style; instead he expressed what he felt in his own personal style. These passages most reveal his thought to us. The long *Nota Bene* which suddenly appears already on the third page interests us especially. In it, the Founder defines his analysis of the situation and the remedy he proposes to apply to it.

Why this "deplorable situation" of the Church? *Why* the "shameful defection of the children she herself bore?" *Why* "the corruption of present-day Christians"?

And the Founder replies: "We must first of all seek out the causes for the depravity which today enslaves people to all their passions. They can be reduced to three main ones: 1. the weakening, not to say the total loss, of faith; 2. ignorance of the people; 3. the laziness, lack of caring, corruption of the priest." The Founder adds: "This third cause should be regarded as the principal one and as the root of the two others".¹⁸

This passage of the *Nota Bene* was revised when it became the Preface: some lines were dropped, especially those which spoke of the priests: no doubt, they were considered to be too severe.¹⁹ But the ideas remain substantially the same in the actual text: cf. the 2nd paragraph in regard to priests, and the paragraph beginning "How vast the field..." in regard to the weakening of the faith, especially the following: "The people are caught up in *crass ignorance of all that pertains to their salvation*. The consequence of their ignorance has been a weakening of the faith and a corruption of morals with all the license which that inevitably entails."

The 1818 text quoted above brings out better the connecting links of the Founder's thought. It clearly shows, for instance, the link he sees between the need to proclaim God's Word and to reform the clergy – this latter will later explain the direction of seminaries. A profound logic underlies commitments that are so very different from each other as are the missions and major seminaries: the logic of evangelization, of a full evangelization. This we will see later. At this point in our study, let us first retain the basic observation of the Founder: "the faith is on the point of dying out in the hearts of a great number of Christians" and this on account of their "crass ignorance" of religion,²⁰ and this again because "they have not met someone to break the bread of God's Word for them".²¹ It is in this that the great poverty consists, as he will write later in a pastoral letter dealing with atheism and indifference: "We can go to God only through Jesus Christ. If we separate ourselves from the divine Mediator, we enter into the night and the void and thus fall into the excessive misfortune and need that results from having lost God".²²

How are we to remedy this "deplorable situation"? The Preface of the Constitutions and Rules insist on especially two points:

- What kind of evangelization? "That we teach these degenerate Christians who Jesus Christ is".
- What kind of evangelizers? "Apostolic men... who want to follow in the footsteps of their divine Master Jesus Christ".

II — "To Teach Who Jesus Christ Is".

The Founder's initial objective was to seek out the lost sheep of Israel, to "lead the multitudes of lost sheep back to the fold", to *rekindle*, to *reawaken the faith*" in

"degenerate Christians". Later, he will broaden his objective: "to instill the faith" among those who have never known Jesus Christ. The Constitutions and Rules, however, will a long time remain - from 1818 to 1928 - marked by the initial outlook.

To be sure, modifications were brought in with each successive edition. For example, that of 1853 acquired a new paragraph on the direction of major seminaries and an appendix on the foreign missions: that of 1894 acquired a new paragraph dealing with parishes; that of 1910 suppressed the "Directory for parish missions" and (finally) inserted a paragraph on the foreign missions. The text as a whole, however, was never redone, so that of the 798 articles in the 1928 edition, 641 still came from the Founder. This means that, quantitatively at least, the initial thrust of reawakening the faith remains the dominant one. In 1966, in response to Vatican Council II, the General Chapter undertook a profound revision of the entire text: not only was the text reformulated, but an enlarged concept of evangelization was also introduced. For greater clarity in this study, I will therefore distinguish two categories of texts: those before and those after 1966.

"Spreading the knowledge of Jesus Christ" is the expression the Founder used in December 1825 when presenting the Congregation and its Constitutions and Rules in view of having them approved.²³

Preaching the Good News has as its foremost objective *making Jesus Christ*, Son of God and Saviour of all men *known*. This includes an invitation to love him and to conversion. But, as Father Lamirande points out, "The apostolate is first of all defined in terms of *faith*, and this is especially true of the apostolate among non-Catholics. There is, it seems to me, a characteristic emphasis here... [The Founder] must have strongly perceived not only the initial role but also the constantly basic role of faith in the union of man with God. He must have also understood that faith, by its own dynamism, leads on to charity and that charity is translated into works".²⁴ Hence the frequent expressions found in the Founder's writings: "to rekindle the faith",²⁵ "to bring back the faith",²⁶ "to bring back to the faith",²⁷ "to regenerate through faith",²⁸ "to propagate the faith",²⁹ etc.

The Founder does not say: to make known the doctrine or teaching of Jesus Christ, but "to make known Jesus Christ". "*The person of Jesus Christ* remains in the centre of the Founder's spiritual outlook".³⁰ Eugene did not learn "the knowledge of Jesus Christ" only in books; he met him, he understood the love of his "loveable Saviour",³¹ he experienced the Saviour's mercy towards himself, he experienced it during the course of the missions he preached.

Nevertheless, to make this knowledge of Christ available, to open hearts to the grace of faith and solidly ground the same, the Founder requires his missionaries to give solid sermons and instructions so that the people's faith is enlightened, adult, and not based on fragile sentiment.³² The words "to make known", "to instruct", "to teach" occur in the texts quoted at the outset of this paper. In 1813 he even translated "Pauperes evangelizantur" by "The poor are being taught", as though he considered teaching the equivalent of evangelizing. Perhaps he only wanted to translate the Latin with one simple word. It nonetheless is true that "teaching" remains a constant word in his vocabulary and thought. Father René Voillaume says, "The life of faith cannot grow or express itself if it is not supported on the intellectual level: for a faith which no longer receives any nourishment in the domain of the knowledge of the truths to which the faith introduces us, is a faith that is dying... In such a case, we no longer know what we believe, we no longer know who God is, who Christ is, what the Church is and teaches".³³ Please forgive this lengthy quotation: to me it

expresses so well what the Founder thought. The special Directory for the missions (CR 1818) is quite firm on this point: "It is explicitly recommended that we compose sermons which are simple and easy, outstanding for their solid quality and forcefulness, in a word, adapted to those to whom they are to be preached".³⁴ Farther on, in the paragraph on preaching, this is repeated: "Our sole and only objective must be the instruction of the people".³⁵ Simplicity of language and presentation does not exclude soundness. This special Directory for the missions was dropped from our Constitutions and Rules in 1910 on account of its excessive details; however, the Founder's recommendation remained almost textually in our Constitutions and Rules until 1966.³⁶ He insisted greatly on this principle and method and will repeat the same until the end of his life. In 1852, for instance, he wrote: «Do not aim for what is brilliant but for what is solid, for what is understood by all in your audience, for what is instructive and results in lasting conversions".³⁷ The 1928 Constitutions and Rules retained the lengthy articles of the Founder on this point: they were the fruit of his personal experience.³⁸

As the texts have shown us, that the Founder was not satisfied with a kind of passable preaching, a proclamation of God's word that was "more or less good".³⁹ He aimed at "instructing" in order to awaken (or awaken) the faith and give it solid nourishment, he wanted to make Jesus Christ the Saviour known. But it was not simply a matter of a proclamation; he in fact wanted *an integral evangelization*.

It is normal that a proper evangelization aims at its consummation, if we can speak in this way, for the work of evangelization is never really finished.

In 1825, when presenting the Congregation's evangelization work, the Founder wrote: "The true spirit of Christianity is to spread the knowledge of Jesus Christ and to extend his spiritual Kingdom in souls".⁴⁰

The Preface of the Constitutions and Rules expresses the same in the style of the day: "It is supremely important, it is urgently imperative, that we lead the multitude of lost sheep back to the fold, that we teach... who Jesus Christ is... We must spare no effort to extend the Saviour's empire... we must establish the honoured observance of every virtue. We must lead men to act like human beings, first of all, and then like Christians, and, finally, we must help them to become saints."

"To extend the Saviour's empire", "to promote the reign of Christ"⁴¹ is, in the Founder's mind, the equivalent of "comforting" the Church,⁴² embellishing the Church,⁴³ "this glorious inheritance purchased by Christ the Saviour at the cost of his own blood",⁴⁴ this "spiritual society that the divine Saviour himself founded in unity and sanctity and commanded his Apostles to extend over the entire earth".⁴⁵

The objective of the proclamation of the Word is "to make Jesus Christ known", to bring about an adherence to Jesus Christ in faith and love. This adherence must express itself in a conversion. The aim of preaching is, first of all, to lead the faithful to the sacrament of Reconciliation. "Preaching and the wise administration of the sacrament of Penance are most efficacious means of promoting and maintaining the welfare of souls".⁴⁶ "The pulpit has to be completed in the tribunal of Penance... Preaching, indeed, has no other end than to lead sinners to the pool of salvation ... It is beyond all doubt that the hearing of confessions is to be preferred to preaching, when there is room for choice... Preaching can never take the place of the sacrament of Penance, which was instituted by Christ our Lord for restoring men to the friendship of God".⁴⁷ In order to strengthen the will to conversion and change of life, we are to exhort "over and over again to make frequent use of the sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance".⁴⁸ The public religious services we give in our churches can

gradually propose a richer nourishment, "so that our hearers may be trained in the love of God and his divine Son Jesus Christ"⁴⁹ This evangelization program has recently been placed before us by the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, especially in no. 23. On the other hand, we must recognize that the Christian life presented in the former Constitutions and Rules contained hardly any community dimension. And yet, as Paul VI stresses, adhering to Christ means adhering to a community of faithful, to the Church, "The visible sacrament of salvation". On this point, the pastoral directives of Bishop de Mazenod are extremely rich ! Adhering to Christ means becoming an apostle also.⁵⁰ When we read through our former Constitutions and Rules, we do not find this invitation to prolong and multiply evangelization, except for an indirect allusion at the end of article 97 of the 1928 Constitutions and Rules: "We should see to it that... they will return to their homes instructed and well disposed, and able to repeat in their families what they have learned from our lips".⁵¹ In regard to the tasks of this world and responsibilities in society, we find a similar poverty; there is perhaps something in the article concerning youth: "We must also regard it as one of our obligations... to prepare the young to fulfill worthily whatever tasks the Church and civil society may impose on them in the state of life for which they are destined".⁵² From these few examples we can see how much the text of our Constitutions and Rules needed to be revised!

The Instruction on the Foreign Missions of 1853 contained new insights regarding evangelization. These certainly reflected the experience of our first missionaries *ad gentes*. I want to mention two points especially:

- the means recommended "to lead non-believers more easily to the knowledge of the needed truths": the use of hymns, pictures, etc.; "in a word, they will use all means apt to express the doctrine in a beautiful light before their eyes, to root it with greater force in their minds and to fix it more firmly in their memories".⁵³
- the recommendations concerning human and social, technical and material formation. "Far from considering the working of forming the natives to the needs of social life as foreign to their program, the Society's members will rather see therein an excellent means for the benefit of the mission and a more fruitful apostolate".⁵⁴

Unfortunately, those who composed the paragraph of the 1910 Constitutions and Rules did not retain these new aspects concerning evangelization. A single sentence recalls the second point I mentioned above, and this it does with a certain reservation: "The missionaries will not refuse to form the natives to the duties of civil life, so that they may better understand spiritual things".⁵⁵ This paragraph which deals with "so excellent a ministry",⁵⁶ which states that the foreign missions are held "in very great honour in our society",⁵⁷ does not offer us the development or the wealth of its predecessor, the parish missions: these latter are referred to as "the missions properly so-called". Elsewhere it is stated that the foreign missions, "in order to bring them closer to the principal end of the Congregation, (the missionaries) will take care to give missions properly so-called, according to the method in use among us".⁵⁸

In July 1816, the Founder wrote to the missionaries of Aix, "By our special vocation, we are associated in a special way to the redemption of people".⁵⁹ Further on, we shall come back to this point. It means we are called to participate in this "great work",⁶⁰ to "continue" it. The goal of evangelization is to "show the way to eternal life"⁶¹ to "degenerate Christians" and to "natives", to "guide them along the way of salvation",⁶² to "provide spiritual assistance" to those who lack them most,⁶³ to "devote ourselves for the salvation of the most abandoned souls", the "principal end

of their vocation".⁶⁴ These are frequent expressions in the Founder and in our former Constitutions and Rules.⁶⁵ Here we have one of the elements in the Founder's trilogy: "the glory of God, the service of the Church and the salvation of souls, especially the most abandoned, in conformity with our vocation".⁶⁶ This, too, was his last legacy: "outside, zeal for the salvation of souls".

From the above considerations we gain the clear impression that until 1928 our Constitutions and Rules present evangelization as *an explicit proclamation of salvation in Jesus Christ*. Witness is certainly not omitted, but "good example" (as the expression was then) is generally presented as a confirmation, necessary and even paramount, of the Word⁶⁷. The ideal constantly repeated by the Founder was explicit proclamation.

This explicit proclamation took on a variety of forms. Article 289 of the 1928 Constitutions and Rules gives an open-ended list: "missions, preaching, the hearing of confessions, catechizing the ignorant, directing the young, visiting the sick and prisoners, giving retreats and other works of this kind".⁶⁸ The paragraph on foreign missions requires that in them we carry out, as much as possible, the same spiritual works as well as "those duties of the sacred ministry which are looked upon as parochial"⁶⁹ in all the churches that are entrusted to us. Even the parish missions, which were always considered to be the Congregation's principal work,⁷⁰ have a wide variety of possible ways in which the Word can be proclaimed... from a rather doctrinal instruction to an informal talk and evening admonition, not to mention home-visiting, the exhortations in the confessional, etc.

One last remark before closing this section of our study. The evangelization thus conceived by the Founder, both for the first and the second evangelization, needs the priestly ministry if it is to attain its objectives. The Congregation, as an apostolic corps dedicated to this evangelization, needs the priestly ministry in order to carry out fully its mission in the Church and the world. It seems to me that this is crystal clear in the former editions of the Constitutions and Rules.

This section, based on the Constitutions and Rules of 1818, 1827, (1894), 1910 and 1928, has perhaps kept us too long in relationship to the rest. However, it is very important for us: 1) on the historical level, for these texts have for a long time guided the Congregation's evangelization; 2) on the level of inspiration, because in spite of the changes successively introduced, these texts help us to grasp better today the key directing guideliness of our Oblate mission.

III - The Constitutions and Rules of 1966 and 1982.

In the aftermath of the 1939-1945 War, many things changed, not only in the political sphere but also in the life of the Church, both in Christian countries as well as in the so-called mission territories. Along with others, we, too, felt the need for a new revision of the Constitutions. The 1953 General Chapter decided to undertake this; the "aggiornamento" launched by Vatican Council II, however, resulted in 1966 in a revision whose extent surpassed all foresight and preparation. The Council had deeply reflected on the mystery of the Church, reflected on its missionary activity, its relationships with other religions, its presence in the world. The 1966 text of the Constitutions and Rules benefitted from all these reflections and directives; that of 1982 further benefitted from the work of the 1974 Synod of Bishops and the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* on evangelization.

In regard to our topic, two questions could be asked: 1) what continuity is there between the 1966 and 1982 texts and those preceding? 2) what new elements do the

two most recent texts bring? Answering these questions could be the theme of group work ... but on the condition that the Rule books are used as sources.

Due to lack of time and opportunity, I shall now briefly indicate the new elements and emphasis found in these two texts. What is certainly most striking, first of all, is the new formulation; but also, underlying the change in language (unless words mean nothing!), there is also a change in outlook and attitude. Words like "dialogue", "participation", "collaboration", "service", etc. indicate a new style of evangelization, a new mentality.

From the outset of this inquiry, we must note the very first words of the Constitutions. The first article begins with *Jesus Christ*: he it is who calls, gathers together, sends out... It is HIS mission and not our own, for he is the "first evangelizer" as *Evangelii nuntiandi* points out.

This is not new for us. Three texts of the Founder are enough to make this clear. "How, indeed, did our Lord Jesus Christ proceed when he undertook to convert the world? He chose a number of apostles..."⁷¹ "What more sublime purpose than that of their Institute? Their founder is Jesus Christ, the very Son of God... They are called to be the Saviour's co-workers"⁷² "The end of our Institute is the same as that the Son of God had in view when he came on earth..."⁷³

It is, therefore, Christ's initiative. Evangelization is a divine work into which we are called as "Gospel workers", an expression dear to the Founder. The end of the Congregation was inspired by God and approved by the Church. It is not an end in the same way as human enterprises choose their purpose. The 1982 text expresses this key truth even more clearly : it changed the heading so that we no longer read "the end" but rather "*the mission*" of the Congregation.

This initiative and action of Christ are further underlined in the 1982 text by C. 2, an article of strong De Mazenod inspiration on our cooperation with the Saviour. The basic content is not new, as is clear; but it is so highlighted that this basic point cannot escape anyone.⁷⁴

Following this same line of thought, I would like to draw attention also to the first words of the 1966 C. 7 ("Consecrated to the Gospel of God") and of the 1982 C. 2 ("Set apart for the Gospel"). These expressions are very rich in meaning. We are chosen for, we are vowed (in the full sense) to the proclamation of the Gospel. This means, at the same time, that our whole "religious apostolic life" is dedicated to the proclamation of the Gospel. This new formulation intends to underline the deep orientation of our religious consecration and the unity of our life as evangelizers following Christ.

The proclamation of Jesus Christ.

"To teach who Jesus Christ is". Echoing these words from the Preface, the 1966 C. 3 says: "to reveal who Christ is", and the 1982 C. 7: "to discover who Christ is".

These three expressions basically express the same thing; nevertheless, the variants between them are not without meaning. Without making an exegesis here, I will only give some reasons for the changes. The composers of the text wanted first of all to avoid an intellectualist tone ("to learn", "to teach"), and this all the more so because the 1966 text speaks also of the witness of life and not only of the ministry of the Word. This intellectualist impression was strengthened by the expression "what... is": Jesus becomes like a thing, and he is Someone, a Person. Perhaps the expression "to discover" will appear as a retreating in regard to the other two, as though it implies a certain timidity in explicitly proclaiming Jesus Christ. In fact,

however, by this expression an initiative of faith was meant, together with respect for God's pedagogy: if we give witness to our own faith, by example and word, we still cannot "give" the faith to others: faith must be born in others by a gift from God and by a personal adherence to Jesus Christ."

"Awaken or reawaken the faith".

This 1966 formulation recalls others of the Founder which are quite similar. It is a striking abbreviation of the two main missionary situations in which the Congregation has been and is called to fulfill its evangelizing mission. The boundaries between Christian countries and mission countries are less clear today than they used to be, as the fact of secularization shows. And so the new text of the Constitutions puts the two situations together in the same article and in one expression.⁷⁶

A new outlook on the world.

In the Second Part of the 1966 text, the first chapter bears a heading which is in contrast to the former expression of the Constitutions and Rules ("Flight from the Word").⁷⁷ The Preface tells us that Christ sent out his Apostles "to conquer the world". Let us recall, in passing, that the Church today uses language expressing service. The 1966 heading "Mission to the World" strongly indicates a change of attitude which was inspired by the Council. "God so loved the world, that He gave up his only-begotten Son, not to reject the world, but so that the world might find salvation in him".⁷⁸

The 1965 *Textus Revisus* had prepared this change: its Part One, chapter three, entitled "The Apostolic Man" had a fourth paragraph with the heading "Presence in the world".⁷⁹ The 1966 Chapter accentuated this thrust: it replaced "presence" with the word "mission", and it placed this heading and the corresponding articles in the first chapter of Part Two, and not at its end.

The 1982 text did not retain this division and these headings. Why not? Was it a step backwards? I do not think so. For the sake of brevity, the Revision Commission simplified the project by suppressing this chapter while keeping most of its content and distributing it in other articles. The 1966 General Chapter's intent of expressing better the unity of the religious apostolic life was taken up in 1982 in a different manner: it united under the First Part the two chapters which deal with the Congregation's mission and its religious apostolic life. This has its meaning for evangelization.

Certainly, the new text says less, but the positive attitude towards the world remains: it sees the world as redeemed by the blood of the crucified Saviour.⁸⁰

The attitude of *openness to the world* is now expressed by the aspects of listening, awareness, respect, trust, dialogue. This supposes, as the Founder mentioned in his time,⁸¹ great humility in the missionary, a great availability. Many articles in the new text challenge us to this: for example, we are to take into account the values and aspiration of the people to whom we are sent;⁸² there is not only being attentive to (which could be paternalistic) but accepting, an attitude of receiving, learning from others: "We must always be sensitive to the mentality of the people, drawing on the riches of their culture and religious traditions."⁸³ Many other examples could be given in regard to our vows,⁸⁴ our relationships with people,⁸⁵ initial and ongoing formation,⁸⁶ etc. In a world that is changing, we are asked to be inventive and creative⁸⁷ "so that the message of salvation reaches everyone".

We find basically the same spirit of openness, dialogue, collaboration in regard to our worth within the Church.⁸⁸ The former texts used to speak about clergy

reform, of the support and spiritual assistance to be given the clergy,⁸⁹ but the perspective was quite different. One has the impression that it was a closed circuit. There was no reference to working with other Gospel workers, and even less in regard to the role of the laity.

A no less significant change is that which relates to ecumenism, the non-Christian religions, and "all those who, without acknowledging Christ as Lord, nevertheless promote the values of the Kingdom that is coming".⁹⁰

This attentiveness and listening to the world ought to make us more sensitive to the needs of this world, especially of those who are the most abandoned. There can be no doubt that the Constitutions and Rules of 1966 and 1980 put a new emphasis on this point: we are to be sensitive not only to the "spiritual famine" of the poor in the countryside or workers quarters in the cities,⁹¹ but also to their material poverty. The 1966 speaks of "those who are harassed by hunger or by the fear of insecurity";⁹² that of 1982 emphatically speaks of situations of injustice, oppression and poverty, reminding everyone – and not only some – that "action on behalf of justice is an integral part of evangelization"⁹³

This rapid study suffers from lacunae and lack of nuance. I am aware of some of these. They seem inevitable to me in a study that is so vast and must consider so many texts. I had intended a whole section, for example, dealing with the person of the Oblate evangelizer as an "apostolic man" and a "co-worker with the Saviour". Also, there is the relationship between the community and evangelization, the role of the Brothers in evangelization. A great deal of material remains for questions and sharing!

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NOTES :

1 Quoted by Father Alexandre Faure, O.M.I., in *Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 60 (1926), p. 74.

2 See Circulaire no. 14, dated May 20, 1864, pp. 15-24, in *Circulaires administratives des Supérieurs généraux aux membres de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée* (Paris: Typographie privée O.M.I., 1887).

3 *Ibidem*, p. 17.

4 The references to the articles of the 1982 *Constitutions and Rules* (CC & RR) follow the final numbers of the approved text.

5 CC & RR 1982, C 2.

6 CC & RR 1966, C 7.

7 "Of all the writings of our Venerated Founder, none is more admirable than these pages, where Bishop de Mazenod develops the sublime end he had in founding the Congregation, the beautiful plan he had conceived and the high perfection he requires..." (Alfred YENVEUX, O.M.I., *Les Saintes Règles de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée d'après les Écrits, les Leçons et l'Esprit de M^{gr} de Mazenod* (Paris: Procure générale des Oblats, 1902), vol. 1, p. 14.

8 CC & RR of 1982, C 4.

9 Archives of the Oblate General Postulation, Rome. See Joseph MORABITO, O.M.I., "*Je serai prêtre: Eugène de Mazenod de Venise à Saint-Sulpice (1794-1811)*" (Ottawa: Éditions des Études Oblates, 1954), p. 108.

10 Archives of the Oblate General Postulation.

11 Toussaint RAMBERT, O.M.I., *Vie de Monseigneur Charles-Joseph-Eugène de Mazenod, Évêque de Marseille, Fondateur de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée* (Tours: A. Mame

- et Fils, 1883), vol. I, p. 124.
- 12 *Ibidem*, pp. 165-166.
- 13 Achille REV, O.M.I., *Histoire de Monseigneur Charles-Joseph-Eugène de Mazenod, Eveque de Marseille, Fondateur de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée* (Rome: Maison générale, 1928), vol. 1, pp. 190-191.
- 14 *Ibidem*, p. 203.
- 15 V. G. Félicité de La Mennais made a similar analysis in his first book, *Réflexions sur l'état de l'Église en France pendant le XVIII^e siècle et sur sa situation actuelle*, published in 1809, without his name and immediately seized by the imperial police. The archives of the Postulation have a copy of the second edition (1814) which belonged to the Founder.
- 16 See the letter to his mother, April 6, 1809.
- 17 See the letter of October 9, 1815 to Father Tempier: "See the scarcity of the means used up to now.." (Toussaint RAMBERT, O.M.I., *Op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 165).
- 18 See *Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence*, in *Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 78 (1951), p. 16.
- 19 These changes were made in 1824 or 1825, at the time of the last French text in view of the approbation. In this manuscript, called Ms IV, these introductory pages are still entitled "Avant-Propos", which the latin translator rendered by the word "Prwfatio", whence afterwards the literal translation "Preface", which has become traditional.
- 20 Preface of the CC & RR.
- 21 Letter already quoted to his mother, July 3, 1810.
- 22 *Pastoral Letter*, February 18, 1849, p. 6. The 1972 General Chapter echoes the Founder in declaring: "the worse form of poverty is to ignore Christ" (*Missionary Outlook*, no. 15).
- 23 Petition to Leo XII, December 8, 1825, in Paul-Émile DUVAL, O.M.I., ed., *Écrits du Fondateur...* (Rome: Maison générale O.M.I., 1952), fasc. 4, p. 57. Letter to Mgr Pietro Adinolfi, December 23, 1825 (*ibidem*, p. 72).
- 24 Émilien LAMIRANDE, O.M.I., *L'annonce de la Parole de Dieu, selon M^r de Mazenod*, in *Études Oblates*, 18 (1959), p. 11. The article is mostly based on the letters and pastoral letters of Bishop de Mazenod.
- 25 Letter to his mother, June 29, 1808, already quoted.
- 26 Preface: "ramener... la foi prête à s'éteindre".
- 27 Letter to Father Tempier, October 9, 1815, quoted by Toussaint RAMBERT, O.M.I. *Op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 166.
- 28 Preface. The original French text said simply "to convert". The 1826 latin text had "fide regenerare", hence to "regenerate by faith" in the French texts of 1910 and 1928. The preface speaks of "degenerate Christians" who have lost the Faith.
- 29 *Instruction of our Venerated Founder on Foreign Missions* (Rome: General House, 1936), p. 5: "...inflamed with an ardent desire of spreading the Faith"; these words were then incorporated into the Constitutions and Rules of 1910 (art. 49) and of 1928 (art. 47).
- 30 Émilien LAMIRANDE, O.M.I., *art cit.*, p. 112.
- 31 Notes de retraite 1812.
- 32 It is also his intention when he wants to give a "better direction" to the marian devotion of the faithfuls (*Acte de visite de Notre-Dame de l'Osier*, 16 juillet 1835).
- 33 Meeting with Father René Voillaume, in *La Vie des communautés religieuses* (Montréal), 26 (1968), p. 315.
- 34 *Constitutions et Règles de la Société des Missionnaires de Provence*, *loc. cit.*, p. 24.
- 35 *Ibidem*, p. 35.
- 36 CC & RR of 1928, art. 25.
- 37 Letter to Father de l'Hermite, August 17, 1852 (Oblate General Postulation archives, Rome). The Founder added: "This is an advice which is not personal to you, but that I give to you all for your greater good."

- 38 See articles 96 to 116.
- 39 Letter to Father Tempier, December 13, 1815, in Toussaint RAMBERT, O.M.I., *Op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 171, or in *Lettres aux Oblats de France* (Rome: Postulation O.M.I., 1982), p. 13.
- 40 Letter to ^{Me}Pietro Adinolfi, December 23, 1825, already quoted p. 72.
- 41 See *Constitutions and Rules* of 1928, art. 548 (since 1853). At the beginning, of this paper, I quoted this article of our new Constitutions on the missionary orientation of the structures of our Congregation. This article of 1853 on the duties of the provincials and vicars of missions expressed the same thought: the exercise of their authority must at the end tend to "so that, in the field of labour entrusted to their care, the kingdom of Christ may quickly be enlarged more and more."
- 42 *Constitutions and Rules* of 1928, art. 682 (already in the 1827 edition).
- 43 *Ibidem*, art. 93 (since the 1853 edition).
- 44 Preface.
- 45 Instruction of February 16, 1860. See Herménégilde CHARBONNEAU, O.M.L., *My Name*
- 46 *Eugene de Mazenod...* (Boston: Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Eastern Province of United States, 1976), p. 178.
- 46 *Constitutions and Rules* of 1928, art. 96.
- 47 *Ibidem*, art. 118. as *Ibidem*, art. 112. 49 *Ibidem*, art. 116.
- 50 *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 24.
- 51 *Constitutions and Rules* of 1928, art. 97 (since 1818).
- 52 *Ibidem*, art. 5 (since 1818).
- 53 *Instruction of our Venerated Founder on Foreign Missions...*, pp. 12-13. Also in *Appendix* to the *Constitutions and Rules* of 1853, p. 178.
- 54 *Instruction...*, p. 13 and *Appendix*, p. 179.
- 55 *Constitutions and Rules* of 1928, art. 40.
- 56 *Ibidem*, art. 47.
- 57 *Ibidem*, art. 38.
- 58 *Ibidem*, art. 41.
- 59 See Toussaint RAMBERT, O.M.I., *Op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 191; Achille REY, O.M.I., *Op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 200 and *Lettres aux Oblats de France*, p. 23.
- 60 Letter to Father Tempier, August 22, 1817, in Toussaint RAMBERT, O.M.I., *op cit.*, vol. 1, p. 237 and *Lettres aux Oblats de France*, p. 38.
- 61 Preface.
- 62 *Constitutions and Rules* of 1928, art. 48 (also in 1853, p. 26).
- 63 *Constitutions et Règles* of 1818, ^{1re} partie, chap. 1, § I, art. 2.
- 64 *Ibidem*, ^{1re} partie, chap. 2, § 1, art. 15.
- 65 See for example in the *Constitutions and Rules* of 1928, the articles 6, 32, 47, 118, 142, 282, 433, 697.
- 66 Letter to Father Tempier, March 20, 1826, in *Missions... des... Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 10 (1872), p. 277.
- 67 See for example in the *Preface* and the *Constitutions and Rules* of 1928, articles 7, 35, 51, 94, 98, 290, 682.
- 68 This article is almost identical with the text of 1818. See *Missions... des... Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 78 (1951), p. 55.
- 69 See articles 39, 41, 42 of 1928.
- 70 See articles 11, 41, 48 of 1928.
- 71 Preface.

- 72 *Constitutions et Règles* of 1818, *Nota Bene*, p. 15.
- 73 Notes de retraite, octobre 1821, already quoted.
- 74 *Constitutions and Rules* of 1982: Constitutions 4, 10, 33, 45, 63; Rules 7, 59.
- 75 The account of the conversion of Lydia is suggestive (see *Acts* 16; 14). See also Constitution 8 of 1966.
- 76 *Constitutions and Rules* of 1966. C. 3 and of 1982, C. 7. Paragraph 3 of the 1966 brings a development that the 1982 text transferred under another title, that of the "most abandoned" (C. 5).
- 77 *Constitutions et Règles* of 1828, 2^e part, chapter 3, par 1. This title is not found in Manuscript I of 1818 and was added in Ms II.
- 78 *Constitutions and Rules* of 1966, Constitution 9.
- 79 *Textus revisus* of 1965, p. 31: "De presentia sodalium ad mundum".
- 80 See Constitution 4 of 1982, which repeats the idea of C. 9 of 1966, developing the reference to the blood of the Saviour, according to the Founder's spirituality.
- 81 See *Constitutions and Rules* of 1928, art. 290, 292, 309.
- 82 *Ibidem*, C. 8. See Constitution 10 of 1966.
- 83 *Ibidem*, Rule 8.
- 84 *Ibidem*, Constitutions 20, 25; Rule 8.
- 85 *Ibidem*, Constitution 31.
- 86 *Ibidem*, Constitution 47; Rules 29, 37, 59; *Constitutions and Rules* of 1966, Rule 2.
- 87 *Constitutions and Rules* of 1982, Constitutions 8, 46; *Constitutions and Rules* of 1966, Constitution 5; Rule 12.
- 88 *Constitutions and Rules* of 1982, Constitution 6; *Constitutions and Rules* of 1966, Constitution 2; Rule 1.
- 89 *Constitutions and Rules* of 1928, art. 6-8.
- 90 *Constitutions and Rules* of 1966, Constitution 2.
- 91 *Constitutions and Rules of 1928*, art. 2.
- 92 *Constitutions and Rules of 1966*, Constitution 4. Rule 14 mentions a certain number of groups particularly abandoned. Constitution 5 of 1982 summarizes: "...the poor with their many faces".
- 93 *Constitutions and Rules of 1982*, Rule 9; Constitution 9.

Oblate Evangelization Today

The perception of any reality always risks being personal and partial. To obviate this danger, I have analyzed certain landmarks which to me seemed significant in terms of knowing the Congregation's life and mission. These are the sociological survey of 1972, the 1976 Congress on the Oblate Charism Today, the Province and Region reports of 1978 and 1980, the Communiqués of the General Administration from 1972 to 1980, and the reports to the Chapter of 1980.

As has been the accepted way in these last few years, Evangelization is here taken in a broad sense. This same approach has been adopted in two important pontifical documents such as *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Paul VI and *Catechesi Tradendce* of John Paul II. However, the Oblate tradition of seeing evangelization as the preaching of the Word to the poor, to the most abandoned, and to non-Christians, and this in an extraordinary manner, has also been retained: it is the vantage point from which this study and its presentation is made.

I - The Sociological Survey of 1972.

The sociological survey made for the 1972 Chapter¹ is a significant landmark. More than half of the Oblates replied to it. Of the 3843 replies received, a sample of some 2000 was studied.

From this survey, we find that:

- 90% of the Oblates think that, in order to be a true missionary, the Oblates must be concerned before all else with preaching the Good news (Q. 145).
- 97% consider the preaching of the Gospel to the poor as an element which manifests the Congregation's missionary activity (Q. 150).
- 61% see working for the conversion of non-Christians as an element which manifests the Congregation's missionary activity (Q. 153).
- 61.20% think the Congregation ought to develop its apostolic activity in the mission countries even if this means sacrificing other established activities (Q. 143).

This survey tells us that by evangelization is meant the proclamation of God's Word to the poor, without necessarily limiting these latter to non-Christians and to non-believers. Evangelization appears as the value which is most esteemed and interiorized. Another value which is as much appreciated is charity among the Congregation's members:

- charity towards all the community members is a characteristic element of Oblate community life: 96% (Q. 238).
- living in a communion of spirit with the other community members is an essential element: 89% (Q. 205).

Some modalities of evangelization were less unanimous, for instance:

- prophetic denunciation of flagrant injustice is preferred by 45% as against 47% (Q. 147).
- development activity should be promoted as a priority is preferred by 54% as against 23% (Q. 149).
- greater closeness to those who are far from Christ is an element which

manifests the Congregation's missionary activity: 69% in favour (Q. 156).

We have no other sociological surveys with which to compare this one; thus it is difficult to say, with any kind of proper sociological measurement, what continuity or change among the Oblates has occurred since.

II - The Congress on the Oblate Charism Today.

The Congress on the Oblate Charism Today was a significant event in our recent history, not only because of the representative quality of its participants but also because of the method which was used. Besides historical studies, there was also a confronting of lived experience with the felt ideal, of the world's needs with the Church's conscience.²

Evangelization is one of the six characteristic elements unanimously accepted; it was even seen as one of the four most important elements needed for evaluating and renewing the life and works of the Congregation today.

Evangelization: That is our basic mission. We must "never lose sight that it is the principal goal of our vocation" according to the Founder's instructions. Following Christ himself who "was the very first and greatest evangelizer" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*), evangelization is accomplished by our words, action and life: all must be significant, evangelizing, bearer of the Good News. For us Oblates, to herald explicitly who Christ is has always been and remains a priority. We can be victims of a certain timidity, of an all-too-human prudence, either in shirking the heralding of the Good News or in contenting ourselves with proclaiming it solely by word.

We wish to evangelize, that is to say, to make him known, he who became fully man to save us completely and fraternally, remembering that our Founder gave priority to the preaching of the Gospel for conversion, we want to witness by our lives the joy of the Good News.³

Evangelization stands out all the more when it is seen in the ensemble of the other constitutive elements... in particular in relation to Christ, to the choice in favour of the poor, and community.

III - Province and Regions Reports.

The Provinces' and Regions' self-perception has recently been expressed in the reports drawn up for the meeting of the Provincials in 1978 and for the 1980 General Chapter⁴.

In the 1978 reports, the proclamation of the Word is not mentioned too much, perhaps because of the guiding grid which was used. The notes drawn up by Father Chevroulet⁵ show that the Provinces are sensitive to the following new calls:

- priority of the local Church;
- evangelization and development;
- building Christian community;
- lay leaders and new ministries;
- solidarity with the poor;
- social justice and the rights of man;
- liberation.

The traits which characterize our apostolic commitment are:

- going to the poor;
- being close to the "little" people;
- community commitment;
- creativity.

During the 1978 meeting, there were also Region reports,⁶ followed by a dialogue between the Regions in view of encouraging certain lines of action and of posing questions on other points.⁷

A compilation of the themes most often found in the 1980 Chapter reports has been made.⁸ In regard to the orientations chosen by the Provinces in regard to the mission, the evangelization of the poor and most abandoned is the one that is most mentioned.

This concern constantly recurs in the reports. One notices a serious effort to re-think the orientations of the Provinces in terms of this priority. This concern is expressed in a variety of headings, v.g. to reach out to the non-practicing Catholics, the unchurched, the alienated, the youth, the abandoned – ministry to the minorities, the immigrants – ministry to native peoples (especially in Canada), to the blacks (U.S.A. and South Africa).

Other orientations which are expressed are:

- promoting adult, autonomous Churches through the discovery and formation of local responsible people;
- ongoing formation of Oblate personnel;
- vocation apostolate and initial formation;
- social justice;
- the mission *ad gentes*.

Under the heading, "Works, areas of presence and of implementation", after parishes, it is the preaching of God's Word which is mentioned:

- the parish framework is one context in which the Word is preached;
- preaching parish missions and retreats has diminished in several Provinces;
- five or six Provinces clearly say that mission preaching remains a priority;
- Oblates have formed new contexts of spiritual animation for preaching the Word (Marriage Encounter, Charismatic Movement, Cursillos, etc.);
- several Provinces have kept retreat houses and others have opened renewal centres in which education in the faith is given and ongoing formation for Christians is provided;
- one or other report stressed that a new need for preaching parish missions seems to be becoming evident.

A closer look at the Province and Region reports reveals certain characteristic features and certain trends.⁹

In *Europe*, missions *ad gentes* remains a living priority: some 900 Oblates from Europe work outside the continent and there is extensive missionary animation carried on in Europe itself. The extraordinary proclamation of the Word by missions to the people no longer involves the majority of the Oblates. Nevertheless, there are 110 Oblates full-time engaged in this ministry, and in certain Provinces (Germany, Poland, Italy, Ireland, Austria) this ministry is a real priority. In the French-speaking

areas, this ministry has disappeared. Requests are multiplying and assessments being made are becoming more positive (cf. report of France-Midi, 1978 and 1980). In some instances, the purpose, mode and agents of the parish mission have been considerably modified. The extraordinary preaching of the Word also takes place in pilgrimage shrines, retreat houses, means of social communications, and youth ministry. A group especially from the French-speaking countries is engaged in the world of the workers: their intent had been to achieve a permanent mission; in fact, a good number of them are providing a presence of pre-evangelization. Parish ministry claims the largest number of Oblates, some 550 in all.

In *North America*, parish missions had been a success, but they almost completely disappeared in the 1960s. An important network of retreat houses was formed; after a period of crisis, the 25 houses have resumed an intense activity, often with new aims and new modalities. "We consider them as an extension of our apostolate of the Word" (St. John the Baptist Province, 1980). Some 30 Oblates of the St. John the Baptist Province and 15 from the Eastern USA Province work in these houses. The shrines maintained in both countries are especially significant in terms of evangelization work (USA Region, 1980).

Also in the North American continent "there is currently a certain renewal of parish missions and a significant interest on the part of certain Oblates to respond to this renewed apostolate" (St. John the Baptist, 1980). The Province of St. Joseph has decided the following: a) give priority to explicit evangelization and to formation of evangelizers in choosing ministries and assigning personnel; b) involve the laity; c) encourage or establish teams to evangelize deprived areas by the proclamation of the Word; d) create awareness among the younger Oblates (1980 report). In North America, the Amerindians and Inuit are given a preference, and so are the Spanish-speaking minorities in the United States. More and more the concern of "reaching non-practising Catholics, those who receive no care from the Church, those who are separated from the Church, the youth, the abandoned" (Eastern USA) is felt. There is a greater effort to form lay leaders and build communities. Inculturation is seen as an urgent need not only in the Amerindian but also in the American milieu.

In *Latin America*, parish missions are conducted in Argentina and Uruguay: new efforts in this line are being made in these countries. Recently, a highly mobile team for the integral evangelization of the Oblate parishes has been established. In Pilcomayo there are itinerant missionaries evangelizing the Indios. Everywhere there is the concern for a lifestyle that is more simple, closer to the poor, a preference for the poorer areas. Evangelization is seen and carried out as a liberation in Christ. The Oblates emphasize the formation of ecclesial base communities, the training of lay leaders, ministry for justice, and the use of the communications media. "They are engaged in an evangelization of liberation which is helping the oppressed and enslaved Latin American people achieve its full destiny" (Region Report, 1980).

In *Asia*, the most significant fact is the commitment of Asians to the missions "ad extra". The Provinces of Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and Australia are sending missionaries into other countries and are choosing areas in their own country which are not yet evangelized. In Sri Lanka there are also two houses of mission preachers, comprising a dozen Oblates. In the Philippines and in Australia there are a number of Oblates engaged in retreat preaching. The option for non-Christians is a priority in terms of the first proclamation (Indonesia, Pakistan), the evangelization of the low-castes (India), the promotion of Kingdom values (the moslems in the Philippines and the buddhists of Sri Lanka). Forming leaders and communities is becoming more of a reality, and there is a growing awareness of the problems in the area of justice.

In French-speaking *Africa*, the proclamation of the Good News remains a first

priority, along with the formation of self-sufficient communities animated by local ministers (catechists and community heads). There is a more intense evangelization effort in Southern Africa and more organizing of communities. Justice problems are more and more a painful concern. In Transvaal, "the Oblate missionary team ceased to exist some ten years ago. Besides their basic work of converting persons and renewing parishes, the preachers made us known throughout the country." Throughout the whole African region, the formation of lay leaders or ministers is receiving special attention : everywhere formation centres and initiatives are multiplying.

IV - The Attitude of the General Council.

The General Council members are in constant contact with the Oblates of all the Regions, and during each plenary session exchange views about the Congregation's life and mission. This is reflected in the issues of *Communique*. The General Council was especially concerned with evangelization in its sessions of autumn 1972, winter 1973, winter 1975, autumn 1976, and spring 1980.¹⁰

A common desire for evangelization, sometimes understood in a very broad sense, unites us all; it is expressed in an extremely wide variety of commitments.

In evangelization there is a pluralism of planned projects and interpretations.

But we also quickly realized that not only is there pluralism of activity and of structure in the Congregation, there is also, even among the members of the General Council, a great diversity of thought. Very basic terms are differently understood or, at least, differently emphasized.

Evangelization includes many elements and achieves its goal in a variety of ways. It includes witness, service, kerygma, conversion, presence and dialogue with other religions. Special attention is called to the connection between evangelization and development-justice-liberation.

A special place is recognized for the explicit proclamation of the Good News.

We must also preach the Kerygma, the Good News. We must announce to Asia's millions that God's ultimate and definitive word of salvation has been spoken in His Son Jesus Christ and that this calls for the free and loving response of faith. "The greatest poverty is not to know Christ".

Furthermore, whatever be the form of incarnating, our solidarity with the poor, or the battles waged, or the sufferings endured and shared with them, evangelization must lead to the announcing of Jesus Christ.

We found ourselves agreeing, again, that Christ's own proclamation of the Good News of God's reign is at the centre of Oblate missionary activity. We agreed that our own lives, as well as what we say and do, are signs of God's presence among men.

Among the trends of these latter years the General Council also noted "a desire to re-enforce the explicitly Oblate dimension of our mission: direct proclamation of who Christ is, finding our distinctive place in local Churches, collaborating across provincial and regional boundaries."

From this flows the missionary value of our religious consecration by vows and our constant need personally to accept God's Word. Knowing the experiences of others would help us improve presenting Jesus Christ to our world of today.

Other aspects are also underlined by the General Council: those to whom our evangelization is addressed are the poor; the integral quality of evangelization includes the element of development and justice; inculturation is a requisite of proclamation; essential conditions are regular evaluation, creativity, fidelity.

Special mention must be given to the reports given to the Chapter by the Assistant General in charge of the Mission and especially by the Superior General.

These reports, in fact, reflect both the outlook of the General Council and also their own personal views.

The Assistant General in charge of the Mission" listed ten trends in the developing picture of Oblate missionary activity. He also mentioned the positive and negative elements, and further indicated the direction to be followed as well as the ambiguities to be overcome. Among the trends he underlined the emphasis given to evangelization over that given to the various ministries:

In the past, one emphasized the different ministries, even sometimes opposing one to another: missions, parishes, schools, etc. At the present time, there is an effort to discover the goal of the different ministries as a means to bring about the evangelization of the poor. The Constitutions of 1966 had already formulated this principle which has been taken up by the new charism, distinct from the concrete incarnations demanded by the different situations. The diversification of ministries is often necessary to obtain the same end.

Theological reflection and the Magisterium have helped in a deeper understanding of the evangelizing role of the Church, in particular the Synods of 1974 and 1977, as well as the apostolic exhortations 'Evangelii Nuntiandi' and 'Catechesi Tradendæ'. Evangelization is aimed at the profound and integral conversion of individuals and cultures (EN, 18-22). All the members of the people of God are to be involved in it, according to the charism proper to each (EN, 59-73).

The principle of evaluation is not the concrete ministry, but the goal to be attained, which for us is the evangelization of the poor".¹²

Among the thirteen positive aspects, one concerns the explicit proclamation of God's Word:

There is a new interest in the explicit proclamation of the Word. The existing missionary teams for parish missions are being reinforced, small nuclei of missionaries are established where none existed, new forms of extraordinary preaching are found (T.E.C. in the U.S.A., mixed missions in Italy, etc.), interprovincial meetings are organized for those engaged in parochial missions (Europe) and in retreat houses (U.S.A. and Canada).

The demand for this ministry becomes very great, above all when the missionaries are well prepared, are creative and manifest a community witness".¹³

Among the ambiguities to be overcome, there are two which concern our topic:

Recently we have become conscious of the fact that evangelization must be integral, that it must transform the whole person and all society according to evangelical values. Each Christian must collaborate in this integral evangelization, but according to one's charism and state in life (cf. EN, 59-73). As a missionary Congregation which is religious and clerical, we have a specific contribution to make, complementary not only to that of the laity but also to that of the diocesan clergy and to members of other religious congregations. Concretely, this is not always easy because the Christian community does not assume its full responsibility and has not developed all possible and necessary charisms. Another difficulty arises from the fact that a charism must be incarnated and hence its fulfillment can be modified according to time and cultures. The extraordinary proclamation of the Word to awaken and reawaken the faith up to the sacramental insertion in the Church can take different forms. At the same time as we intensify our own Oblate identity, we should favour the blossoming of other charisms.

The privileged recipients of our evangelization are the poor according to differently perceived visions, with different situations demanding a variety of options. In their regard we must manifest a concrete love and because of them we must seek after justice according to the Gospel, but we also have a specific contribution: proclaim the Message, invite them to the life in Christ.¹⁴

Father General's report also dealt with the changes in our commitments. As the first reason for these changes, it mentions a more vivid and universal awareness of the present-day world's problems. It sees the Congregation's response as evident in four main ways: 1) the option for the poor; 2) the search for more specifically Oblate commitments; 3) constant interest for the mission *ad gentes*; 4) the promotion of the Christian laity.¹⁵

In regard to the option for the poor and action favoring justice, Father Jetté stressed: "In this matter, I would insist on one point: we need to situate properly this promotion in the very core of our mission as evangelizers of the poor. It is to be

accomplished with the explicit reference to Jesus Christ, the Saviour of men, and with reference to the dignity of men as sons of God and brothers of Jesus Christ".¹⁶

Father General concludes his report on the missionary action of the Congregation with an appeal: "Our Founder was explicit on this: we are to dedicate ourselves to the evangelization of the poor by `all the good works which priestly charity can devise, and above all by the work of the missions which is the principal aim of our Society' (Preface to the Constitutions). Today, do we still insist enough on this specific Oblate character? Do we allot the same research, manifest the same zeal and the same creativity in this as we do in other areas? The apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* is equally clear: `There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are not proclaimed' (no. 22). This fully applies to us. Our work of evangelization remains and will remain unfinished as long as we have not found the way, and also the strength and the courage, to explicitly announce Jesus Christ to men of today. It would certainly be profitable to reflect on this now, when we are involved in the approval of our new Constitutions."

Conclusion.

After this analysis of the content of our documents, we can, by way of a conclusion, list the following more evident trends, without either evaluating them or passing any kind of judgment on them.

1) *Attention is transferring from the various ministries to the evangelization of the poor.* Evangelization is rather seen as the finality and evaluation criterion for the ministries. Evangelization is achieved and incarnate in and through the latter. Evangelization is seen in a wider sense than simply the proclamation of Jesus Christ: it ought to enlighten and transform all the life dimensions of each person and of society. Evangelization is oriented to the formation of persons and communities, to the growth of the Church and of the Kingdom. It is also interesting to note a semantic factor: while the word "evangelization" is common in the magisterium and almost equivalent to the word "mission", within the Congregation the word "mission" and "missionary" dominates, especially wherever there is hesitation about explicit proclamation.

2) *There is greater emphasis on those to whom evangelization is adressed.* There is a preference for the poor and abandoned taken as human groups v.g. ethnic minorities, immigrants, youth, working classes. This sociological element is important but not generally exclusive. Attention is given not only to the non-Christians of other countries, but also to the non-believers and non-practicing in so-called Christian countries. More attention is paid to the global traits of a society to which evangelization is adressed v.g. the secularized society, the buddhist culture, the unjust or racist society, etc.

3) *Parish missions are less numerous,* but there is a renewed interest and new initiatives in this domain. This new interest is manifest in the reports themselves: *in* 1978 it was said that such missions were no longer feasible, in 1980 there is regret that we have no men to assign to this ministry. In some countries, existing teams are being strengthened, in other Provinces where there is no tradition in this area an effort is made. New forms have arisen, forms in which witness, sharing and participation play a greater role. Laity and religious have a full part in them. The aim in view is not only the integral renewal of persons, but also the formation of Christian communities and of their ministers or leaders.¹⁸

Retreat houses, having gone through a crisis period, have acquired a new importance. Their aims are similar to those of the missions. The integral nature of the person is kept in view, not only the spiritual but also the psychological, not only the personal but also the inter-personal dimension.¹⁹

Shrines are again becoming centres of direct evangelization. Here there are many different initiatives in every culture v.g. in the U.S.A., Canada, Sri Lanka, France, Austria, etc.

Parish ministry has grown to a considerable degree. It takes in very different situations. Nevertheless, everywhere one notes a choice favoring deprived groups as well as a greater mobility; also, there are efforts at forming communities or ecclesial groups, and a calling forth of lay participation in the ministries.

The means of social communications do not implicate a great number of Oblates. Nevertheless, pretty well everywhere there are significant initiatives of evangelization in this field. The centres of Lyon and Ottawa have a considerable influence.

Commitment in secondary education has diminished, but not the commitment to evangelize the youth. In this field there are noteworthy experiments and movements such as T.E.C. in the United States, the Fields in Poland, the Communities in Italy, the Catholic Action Youth among the moslems of Senegal.

If to the study of existing documents we add our personal contact with the life of the Oblate mission, we can conclude that this life continues to change and also, perhaps (why not?) to increase.

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NOTES :

- 1 COMMISSION PRÉCAPITULAIRE, *Enquête sociologique* (Rome: Maison générale, 1972), 15 pp.; Yvan TREMBLAY, O.M.I., *Recherche sociologique. Dossier de Travail* (Rome: Maison générale, 1972).
- 2 Marcello ZAGO, in *Acta of the Congress the Charism of the Founder today*, Rome, 26 April-14 May 1976, in *Vie Oblate Life*, 36 (1977), pp. 3-293, especially *Some insights on the fundamental values of the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate*, (*ibidem*, pp. 253-283).
- 3 Marcello ZAGO, O.M.I., *Final Declaration of the Congress*, (*ibidem*, pp. 285-293).
- 4 *Rapport des Provinces/Reports from the Provinces*, Rome, April 1978, 212 pp.; *30e chapitre général. Rapport des provinces*, Rome, 1980.
- 5 Pierre CHEVROULET, O.M.I., "Analyse des rapports des provinciaux", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 37 (1978), pp. 149-151.
- 6 "Réunion intercapitulaire/Inter Chapter Meeting", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 37 (1978), pp. 81-144.
- 7 "Plenary Session of the General Council, Rome, September 18 to October 13, 1978", in *Acta Administrationis Generalis OMI.*, 4 (1978). pp. 187-196.
- 8 Unpublished compilation made by Father Gilles Cazabon, O.M.I.
- 9 As indicated in note 4, we examined the reports of the Provinces and the reports of the regions published in *Acta Administrationis Generalis O.M.I.*, (*Supplement: Reports from the General Administration and the Regions to the Chapter*) 5 (1980), 296 pp.
- 10 Marcello ZAGO, O.M.I., "The Missionary Policy of the General Council Oblates of Mary Immaculate, 1972-1978", in *OMI Documentation*, n. 88/79, July 1, 1979, 12 pp. We quote the first part on evangelization. The evaluation made by the Council in Spring 1980 should also be added. See *Acta Administrationis Generalis O.M.I.*, 5 (1980).
- 11 Marcello ZAGO, O.M.I., "Mission. Report of the Assistant General for Mission to the 1980 Chapter" in *Acta*

Administrationis Generalis, O.M.I., Supplement, vol. 5, pp. 99-122.

12 *Ibidem*, pp. 104-105.

13 *Ibidem*, p. 108.

14 *Ibidem*, p. 117.

15 Fernand JETÉ, O.M.I., "The state of the Congregation. Report of the Superior General to the 1980 Chapter", *Ibidem*, pp. 1-11.

16 *Ibidem*, p. 6.

17 *Ibidem*, p. 11.

18 Marcello ZAGO, O.M.I., "Connection between Popular Missions and the Charism of the Institute. A hermeneutical Essay in the Context of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate", in *Vie Oblate Life*, 40 (1981), pp. 155-185.

19 Fernand JETÉ, O.M.I., *Conférence aux directeurs des maisons de retraites*, 1982.

Congress on Oblate Evangelization

Summary Report.

I - Overview of the Congress.

Background.

The Congress on Oblate Evangelization originated with the idea of an Association for Oblate Studies and Research which surfaced during the Inter-Chapter meeting of Provincials and the General Administration (April 1978). Pleased with the idea, the General Council appointed a committee to organize such a body. After two consultations by the committee, a group of Oblates interested in the project met during the 1980 Chapter. They suggested a congress of this kind as a favorable modification to the suggestion, the General Council approved the proposal and appointed a new committee to set up this Congress (Spring 1981).

Opening.

The motivating force and direction for the Congress was provided by Father General at the evening liturgy which convened the first session on August 29, 1982.

The Congregation was not born on July 3, 1982 with the approval of the new Constitutions: it was born two hundred years ago with the Founder. It is deeply rooted in the past, in a history that is part of itself and that provides it with a wisdom, a broadness of view, a richness of spirit and virtue, a knowledge of men and an apostolic vigor that it would not have were it born only yesterday... It is necessary to know that past; it is necessary to draw from it the values that can nourish the present.

Father General saw the Congress as an opportunity to bring together Oblates from all parts of the world to share their knowledge and experience, their research and study. He acknowledged them as men "who have at heart the desire to know, in a scientific and spiritual way, all the wealth of Oblate life in order to live it and to enable those who come tomorrow to live it too." A special event marking the Bicentenary of the Founder's birth, the Congress was indeed relevant for the present; it was "one more step, and a step forward, in the Congregation's efforts to renew itself."

Perspective.

Bishop de Mazenod and the early Oblates shared a common understanding of evangelization and a sense of mission still appreciable today.

In its study of key periods in Oblate history from the foundation in 1816, the Congress focused on the development of a missionary vision within the Congregation. Taking an historical approach, specialists examined pivotal moments in which a special view of evangelization was formed, shared and promoted in the Congregation. Based on testimony gleaned from various times and places, the presentations also analyzed the means and methods of Oblate mission from its beginnings. This scrutiny covered not only a broad time span, but also the major sources of influence including the Founder himself, the Rules, the General Chapters, the Superiors General, and the mission activity of priests and brothers the world over. Such an intense look at the past enlightened the present state of evangelization and gave hope for the future.

Procedure of the Congress

The Congress was a working assembly requiring the full participation of all fifty-four members. Input was provided at plenary sessions by specialists treating assigned topics. Individual group sessions shared their reflections and prepared questions on the studies. Chosen panels in plenary session weighted the reports

received and fielded questions both from group sessions and from the floor.

Throughout the Congress daily exhibits of professional publications written by members provided further resources for the participants. In a sense the Congress furnished its members the opportunity to know the scholars as well as their scholarship. Many informal gatherings after hours continued the discussions on the Congress topics.

Related Events

On September 8, Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, the members of the Congress, accompanied by Father Jetté, participated in a General Audience with Pope John Paul II in St. Peter's Square. The Holy Father recognized and thanked the Congregation in the name of the entire Church for all their efforts from the days of Blessed Eugene de Mazenod to evangelize, to implant and nourish the Church in many parts of the world. After the formal ceremonies, the Holy Father came to the Oblate delegation

and greeted the members personally. He again thanked Father General and extended his Apostolic Blessing to the whole Congregation.

The next day members of the Congress were received in a private session by the Secretary of the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. Archbishop Lourdasamy explained the work of his Congregation and expressed his appreciation to the Oblates for the excellent working relationship they have maintained with the *Propaganda* from the time of the Founder. He mentioned that the Sacred Congregation awaited the results of this Congress, the second on evangelization held by the Oblates this year.

Afterwards Father Metzler, Archivist for the Sacred Congregation, took the group on a tour of the archives where some of the original hand-written letters of the Founder were examined by the members. Father Henkel, official Librarian of the same Congregation, offered a similar guided tour through its voluminous collection.

That same evening Father Mitri, Postulator for our Oblate causes, introduced the Congress members to the Postulation Archives at the General House. There they were impressed by the rich resources relating to the causes of Blessed Eugene de Mazenod and other Oblates.

Conclusion.

The Congress itself with its related activities offered the members not only the benefit of well-prepared studies, but also valuable information on the resources available for further research.

Finally, a prayerful atmosphere permeated the Congress. The insights gleaned from serious study were integrated with skill and devotion in the morning prayers and liturgies led by the participants themselves. Bolstered by prayer and reflection, the Congress progressed smoothly in a spirit of enthusiasm, mutual help and friendship.

II - Converging Trends.

Evangelization According to the Founder.

1. The deep motivation, the orientation and the dynamism of evangelizer must be sought in the Founder's personal experience and love of Christ, the Savior. His vivid experience and burning love gave birth to a new perception of the world,

grounded in faith, and to the desire of participating in and continuing Christ's mission. From the conviction of

being saved personally, he progressed (through his oneness with Christ) to a real awareness of being co-worker in the very mission of Christ.

Cooperation with Christ is conceived as evangelization. Like Christ the Oblate is sent to announce the good news to the poor; he is constituted missionary and evangelizer by his following Christ, the Savior.

In accomplishing such a mission the Founder sensed that he was in direct continuity with the mission of the apostles; he was walking in the footsteps of the apostles.

2. The Founder's notion of evangelization contains a meaning at once broad and specific. Furthermore, it matured progressively throughout his life.

According to his view evangelization meant basically the proclamation of Christ and the good news for the regeneration of faith, a proclamation geared to extend the Kingdom of God within souls. (In this context Kingdom of God is identified with the Church.)

With the acceptance of missions *ad gentes* his understanding of evangelization moved logically from the idea of pastoral renewal to that of a first proclamation of Christ.

Announcing the Word in an explicit way remains fundamental. Witnessing through one's life, especially through community life, is equally essential - an inseparable facet of evangelization.

3. What characterizes Oblate evangelization is first of all its field of action: the poor, the most abandoned souls, the marginal (those untouched by ordinary pastoral care).

With the geographical expansion of the Congregation, the concept of "the poor" is also broadened to include, not only the rural inhabitants of Provence, but also the Anglicans of Great Britain, the Native tribes of Canada, the Buddhists and Hindus of Sri Lanka, the Blacks of Natal, the immigrants of the United States.

4. The means (ministries) employed to reach the most abandoned are numerous, a clear sign of the Mazonod's openness and burning zeal. The parish missions however retained a privileged position among all of them. All the other ministries are seen in relation to evangelization and remain subordinate to it. Notwithstanding the multiplicity of activities, a single goal links them together: the evangelization of the most abandoned.

5. The agent of evangelization is designated as "truly apostolic men." With this expression the Founder envisaged above all men of abnegation

(detached from everything), of dedication (zealous), of interiority; men who lived the evangelical counsels; men who formed an apostolic community; men who aimed toward holiness. Thus the value of religious life in community emerges as an essential element of evangelization.

6. The explicit content of evangelization is Christ. The parish missions to the people (indeed the total missionary proclamation) were far from mere exhortations; they were true expositions of the faith. From the limited scope of present study, it seems that the theological content reflected the mentality of the times.

7. Ultimately, what characterized the Founder's evangelization was:

- his powerful and limitless zeal for souls, a zeal however which remained open to every kind of ministry and to every local situation;
- his attentive reading of the signs of the times and his desire to respond to the urgent needs of the Church through an unconditional service;
- his fostering of particular traits, such as: a certain freedom from structures for a greater apostolic freedom, detachment, daring, dynamism, flexibility...

Evangelization According to the Early Oblates.

A series of historical studies were submitted to the Congress, dealing with the actual evangelizing efforts of the early Oblates in various parts of the world. These studies show a conscious and faithful acceptance of the Founder's vision by the first Oblates.

1. Like the Founder himself, the early Oblates were animated by a burning zeal to announce the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. At the very heart of their proclamation was the person of Christ, the Savior. Their desire was to walk in the footsteps of the apostles, bringing the gospel to the poor, the most abandoned souls. That such was their basic understanding of evangelization appears even more vividly in their action than in their words.

2. As a result the early Oblates attempted to fulfil in different areas of the world the threefold priorities of Bishop de Mazenod: to preach the Word of God to the poor through parish missions; to replace the former Orders in the Church through the witness of an exemplary religious life; to reform the clergy through retreats and the direction of major seminaries.

3. The parish mission therefore became the major focus of evangelization not only in France, but also among the Catholic population in eastern Canada, among the immigrants in England and in the northeastern region of the United States, and among the Mexicans along the Texas frontier. The evangelization of non-Christians - the Natives in Canada and the United States, the Blacks in South Africa - was also rooted in this same popular mission method of approach.

In the new world the popular mission method was skillfully adapted to fit the needs of differing populations and geographical situations. It often evolved into an itinerant ministry in certain areas of Canada and the United States.

4. For de Mazenod "the poor", or the most abandoned souls, signified the non-Christians in many areas of Oblate evangelization - in western Canada, in the Oregon territory, in Sri Lanka and in South Africa. In most of these regions the early Oblates concentrated their efforts toward a first evangelization of the non-Christian population. Because of circumstances beyond their control, the early Oblates in Sri Lanka (somewhat less in South Africa) seemed slow in responding to the Founder's priority, at least in his eyes.

5. In spite of the immense task of evangelization in the new fields opened by the Founder, the Oblates consistently attempted to witness through the very quality of their religious vocation. Fidelity to their Rule and to their style of community life remained a real concern for them, even though the exigencies of evangelization in extremely difficult environments called for great flexibility in adaptation.

6. Clerical reform through seminary education held an equally high position in the Founder's vision of evangelization. Both in France and in the United States, the early followers of the Mazenod made serious attempts to implement this facet of his vision. However, many diverse circumstances converged to impede much of their effort in this ministry.

7. Because of the many needs consonant with implanting the Church in new lands, the early Oblates outside of France showed a remarkable readiness to assume a diversity of ministries. The choices made however were consistent with their primary goal of evangelizing the poor.

8. Both in their attachment for parish missions and in their enthusiasm for missions *ad gentes*, the first Oblates, like their Founder, responded with sensitivity to crucial religious movements rooted deeply in their own times.

9. So many of the characteristic traits which the Founder attached to the true evangelizer are found in the lives of the early Oblates: extraordinary zeal for the renewal and spread of the church, love for the poor (the abandoned), dedication and detachment, daring, dynamism, flexibility.

Evangelization According to the Superiors General.

In continuity with the Founder, the Superiors General pursued a missionary animation of the Congregation.

1. Each one of them insisted repeatedly that an authentic holiness was necessary as both source of and condition for a fruitful apostolic ministry. Their motto: "let us become holy ourselves and we will be capable of sanctifying others." From such a view flowed their call for a full observance of the Rule. The Oblate missionary was encouraged to lead an inner life penetrated and nourished especially by the mystery of Christ, a life lived in intimacy with Mary. This strong accent placed on religious life by some of the first Superiors General may have contributed to the development of a dichotomy between religious life and apostolic action.

2. Other qualities and dispositions they sought to foster within the Oblate missionary can be listed as:

- an intimate union with the Church;
- solidarity with the Congregation;
- the proclamation of the very Word of God;
- ministerial competence;
- daring, confidence, a conquering spirit.

3. Within the context itself of evangelization, the Superiors General aimed at fulfilling the goal of the Congregation: the evangelization of the poor, the most abandoned, both in Christian lands and in mission territories.

4. They sought to awaken within the Oblate an apostolic spirit and a zeal open to the new needs of a changing world, for example: involvement in Catholic Action, solidarity with the working classes, the struggle for justice, the defense against Communism. They reminded the Oblate that his call as missionary placed him in the forefront of the Church's struggle.

5. They also guided the gradual expansion of the fields of evangelization by creating new provinces in Christian lands, by strengthening and developing those mission areas opened by the Founder, and by accepting new ones.

6. In mission areas, finally, they insisted that the missionaries evangelize through the use of the native languages, a policy which implies a certain degree of Christian inculturation.

Evangelization According to the General Chapters and the Constitutions and Rules.

Since the relationship between the General Chapters (as legislative and interpretative bodies) and the Constitutions and Rules is very close, their study and evaluation can proceed together.

Until the General Chapter and the Rules of 1966, the Congregation maintained a rather homogeneous notion of evangelization. The substantive continuity is remarkable, even with the gradual development that occurred inevitably. From 1966 onward however a profound revision begins to take place, broadening our conception of evangelization.

A. From the first Rule onward, the following points clearly emerge:

1. The objective of evangelization is to make Jesus Christ known in view of evoking a faith response, either in the form of a first awakening or of a re-awakening.

2. Evangelization is presented as an explicit proclamation of salvation in Jesus Christ by means of a simple but solid instruction, easily accessible to the people. The living witness is not forgotten, but it is seen as a necessary support for the spoken word.

3. Far more than a mere proclamation, the integral evangelization implied must lead to a full adhesion to Jesus Christ through a real conversion. The whole process of evangelization aimed at persuading people to participate in the sacraments and to live fully their Christian life. (Christian life however was understood in rather individualistic terms, without the communitarian and social dimensions of today.)

4. The Instruction of 1853 concerning foreign missions introduced new aspects of evangelization, such as: the search for suitable means "to lead the non-Christians more easily to an understanding of necessary truths;" and the recommendations relating to human and social education, to technical and material development. The Founder also acknowledged the role of the Brothers in evangelization by opening the way for them to teach as catechists.

5. If this idea of evangelization remained more or less constant, the methods and activities became more diversified. Debates whether or not certain ministries should be accepted recur often in the General Chapters and leave their mark in different editions of the Rule. They reveal the determination to remain faithful to the evangelizing mission of the Congregation. At the same time, though, they show a desire to find the means to render the mission possible and more effective by being open to the different exigencies of time and place. As a result, at various moments in the history of the Congregation, differing assessments were made of certain ministries, such as the direction of seminaries and colleges, or the acceptance of parishes.

B. With the Chapter and the Rules of 1966, there emerged a new sensitivity - one which continues to animate our present Rules. This is due to the fact that the Congregation lives in tune with the Church.

1. Evangelization is seen as the initiative of Christ himself, the first evangelizer. In Christ it is a divine work; we are called to participate in it as "evangelical workers." In this sense evangelization is not "the goal" but "the mission" of the Congregation.

2. The unity of our lives as evangelizers following in the footsteps of Christ is expressed with greater clarity. Our whole lives, at once religious and apostolic in character, are consecrated to the proclamation of the Gospel.

3. Evangelization is undertaken in an ecclesial setting, hence in collaboration with "the other Gospel workers."

4. A greater attention is focused on the close link between community life and evangelization.

5. The role of the Brothers is more integrated into the mission of evangelization.

6. The proclamation of Christ becomes less emphasized, since evangelization is not exclusively a question of preaching. Rather, the evangelizer aims at "fostering a discovery of who Christ is." (1982) We may witness to our own faith through word and example, but faith is born in the listener through God's gift and through his personal adhesion to Christ.

7. A new attitude in relationship to the world has emerged, an attitude of openness characterized by an attentive listening, respect, confidence, dialogue, a disposition to receive and to learn from others.

8. Since ministry for justice is an integral part of evangelization, finally, a strong call is made for a greater sensitivity to the spiritual and material needs of the world, especially of its poor.

Oblate Evangelization Today.

1. The vision of the Founder remains alive today among his Oblate sons. They still hold evangelization as a prime value and recognize the proclamation of Jesus Christ, Savior and Liberator, as their priority. A more wholistic approach to evangelization has surfaced, which aims at *both* personal *and* social transformation. It is oriented toward the religious transformation of *both* persons *and* communities, toward the growth of *both* the Church *and* the Kingdom.

2. As evangelizers the Oblates still manifest a marked preference for the poor, the most abandoned. However, they have a sharper sociological perception in that the poor are recognized in those human groups who experience particular needs: the materially poor, the oppressed, minorities, immigrants, the young, workers, the marginal.

3. In Oblate evangelization today greater attention is paid to those evangelized, the poor as described above. The deep respect shown to them is characterized by an attentive listening to what they have to say. Listening becomes even more important if evangelization takes place in an area where there are people of a different faith and culture. Hence, the need for a real humility on the part of the evangelizer.

4. The unity of religious life and apostolic action is stressed more strongly today. Because his role as evangelizer implies a wholistic approach to his religious and apostolic vocation, the Oblate strives to blend *both* the values of community life *and* a zealous concern for the needs of the people.

5. Though Oblates continue to evangelize through parish missions in certain areas, less focus is placed on their being identified through a single means of evangelization. Oblates are actually involved in a great diversity of ministries.

6. As self-image, the Oblate treasures that of evangelizer: bold, dedicated and apostolic. He shuns the image of a mere functionary. He bears a message filled with hope for the people today.

III - Relevance of the Congress and its Challenges.

A. Three major points show the relevancy of the present Congress.

1. The focus on evangelization enabled the Congress (and the Congregation) to

reflect seriously on one of the most vital issues facing the Church today.

2. By examining the past and touching our very roots, the Congress revealed the centrality of evangelization in the Founder's vision and in the life of the Congregation.

3. The studies dealing with evangelization in today's world indicate clearly the intense desire of presentday Oblates to be effective evangelizers in the fullest sense of the word, manifesting thus a real continuity with their Founder.

B. The Congress also presents a real challenge not only to the participants, but also to every Oblate throughout the world.

1. If evangelization is so essential to our Oblate calling, then a continued probing of de Mazenod's life and our Oblate history is necessary to sharpen our understanding of its significance in our lives.

2. Another challenge consists in living fully on a personal level de Mazenod's image of the Oblate as evangelizer, with all its implications:

- the following of Christ and the apostles through faith;
- the proclamation of Christ, the Savior, through word and action;
- the limitless zeal for the salvation of the poor, the abandoned;
- the loving service to the Church;
- the personal detachment, dedication, daring...

3. The need of forming and maintaining vibrant apostolic communities capable alike of inspiring its members and witnessing Christ to the world presents a further challenge to the Oblates of today.

4. Finally, the task of listening to our contemporaries with a respectful but critical ear seems awesome. To evangelize effectively, the Oblate must discern and tap the positive values in modern societies, while countering with Christ's message the disruptive forces at work in today's world.

IV - Recommendations.

Recommendations addressed to the General Council.

Since most gatherings of this kind function generally on the level of ideas, efforts should be made to facilitate means whereby an exchange on the lived experiences of presentday evangelizers can take place, for example: on the concrete problems and successes of their evangelization, the people they evangelize, the results of their activities, etc.

Recommendations Concerning the Provinces.

1. Besides the official publication of the Acts of the Congress, a special effort should be made by the participants to share the insights and information gained with the members of their respective provinces - through conferences, workshops, newsletters.

NB: Future planners and organizers should consider preparing slides and/or tapes that would report major congresses.

2. The Provincials should assure themselves that Oblate publications,

especially the writings of the Founder, are available in each house.

3. They should also insist that all houses of formation provide serious studies in Oblate history and spirituality.

4. Oblates who have retired from active ministry are encouraged to offer their time and services in order to organize and classify material of historical value, thus facilitating historical research.

Recommendations Addressed to the Association.

1. Because fewer studies of a serious nature have focused on the response of the early Oblates to the Founder's vision of evangelization, the Association should foster a more intense research on the lives of these men - their spiritual journeys, the conditions under which they labored, their methods of evangelization, the content of their message.

2. More studies are also needed on the populations, the people evangelized by the first Oblates in order to discern how those who "received the message" perceived the evangelizers.

3. The Association should consider ways of making available studies that have been already made on the spirituality and missionary vision of the Founder.

Elements from the Plenary Sessions: A Summary

I - The Founder's Vision and Practice of Evangelization.

1. For the Founder, being an evangelizer means to follow Christ: to be a co-worker, co-Saviour with Christ the Saviour; to follow Christ in the footsteps of the Apostles; to proclaim the Gospel to the poor as Christ did; to love the Church unconditionally (even the poor are to be seen in this context). As a consequence of following in the Apostles' footsteps there is the Oblate's life-style of poverty, his community life, his commitment to the foreign missions. The Oblate's proclamation of the Gospel is a proclamation done in the power of the Spirit, simple and readily understandable by the ordinary people, centred on teaching who Christ is, teaching the faith, aiming at true conversion.

2. Essential is a deep unity of life and mission. An Oblate evangelizes as much by what he is as by what he does. Witness of life is just as important as explicit proclamation and other ministry. That is why the Founder introduced the religious life, insisted so much on regularity, gave fraternal charity as part of his very last legacy. The Oblate is to be a saint, to incarnate the Gospel in his own life in order to proclaim it effectively to others.

3. Though the Founder borrowed many things from the Jesuits, the Redemptorists, the prevailing French school of priestly spirituality of the time, he also gave the borrowed elements his own personal character and tone. The Founder always appears as a man passionately in love with Christ and the suffering Church; he suffers like a man in love when he sees Christ and the Church not known and loved as they should be. There is a special style and manner that are uniquely the Founder's. There is also a universal objective regarding salvation: redemption for anyone, anywhere, anyhow.

4. Though it may appear that the Founder (and the Oblate) is a jack of all trades, there is definitely a clear direction and missionary objective and thrust, namely, the evangelization of the poor and abandoned, of those not being reached by the regular structures and ministry of the Church. Hence also a concern never to become a prisoner of established structures, but to remain free and available to serving the Church where she is suffering and in need.

5. The criteria according to which the Founder chose his apostolic commitments are:

- a) The Founder's trilogy: the glory of God; the service of the (abandoned, suffering) Church; the salvation of souls (Catholics in danger of losing their faith altogether; bringing Protestants into the Catholic Church; proclaiming the Gospel to non-believers).
- b) To know God's Will concretely: an irresistible impulse of the Spirit; certain sign-events; explicit call from the Holy See or from the Bishops; the needs of the Church, especially those to which only the Oblates can best respond.
- c) additional prudential criteria: promote the Congregation's vitality; promote the efficacy of the apostolate; provide for the Congregation's security; vocations; geographical unity.

It is the application of these prudential criteria that often explain the apparent contradictions in the Founder's choices of ministry for the Oblates. The concrete circumstances are always an important element in discernment.

6) It should also be noted that the Oblates did not follow the conquering armies, but went to where the Church asked them to go. What distinguished the Oblates in the first missions is: to whom they went; their preaching was to lead people to the confessional; their popular language and presentation; they did not proceed to attach people as a group to themselves.

7. In choosing concrete ministries, the Founder did know how to consult and weigh the views of his fellow-Oblates. This is often not readily apparent, but a close study of our early history does bring this out.

8. Some problems for interpreting the Founder:

- a) We need to have a full picture of the anthropology, sociology, christology, ecclesiology, theology of the time. Do we have this?
- b) Have we developed a valid criteriology for interpreting the Founder's writings?
- c) There is some danger in "systematizing" the Founder's thought.
- d) We need to study more the Oblates contemporary to the Founder and determine just how much they influenced him.

9. The question was raised about the Founder's negativism in regard to ministry to nuns. The criteria governing his choice of ministries (cf. above) explains this.

10. As to whether the Founder was sufficiently sensitive to the social issues of the day, the point was made that we should not read history backwards. Furthermore, the industrial revolution's effects became more clear in the 2nd half of the 19th century. Finally, the Founder laid down a diocesan organization in Marseilles that stood the test of time. At the same time, it must be admitted that he was not as keenly aware of this domain as he was of others.

II - The Oblates' Response to the Founder's Vision and Practice of Evangelization.

1. There is a strong convergence between the Founder's vision and practice of evangelization and that of the Oblates contemporary to him. The Oblates accepted the two main aims of the Founder, namely, re-evangelizing mediocre and fallen away Catholics, and evangelizing those who did not as yet know Christ. The Oblates also accepted the explicit proclamation of God's Word and the witness of life as being the two most effective means for achieving these evangelization ends.

2. The Founder's influence on the Oblates was very strong... in theory and in practice. This strong influence flowed from his strong personality, from the fact that he was the Founder and the Superior General until his death, from his regular correspondence with the Superiors. But it was not an absolute influence: it allowed a certain freedom, especially in the choice of ways, means, and forms. In some cases, the Founder's views were not followed or adopted. The Founder knew how to take advice from others. Also, nearly all the Oblates knew him personally, and they understood him and knew how to interpret him. These Oblates, too, influenced the Founder. The Instruction on Foreign Missions reflects the experience of the Oblates; there is also the change in orientation in England/Ireland; and there are other

examples. Where at first the Founder seems to have been somewhat set on methods, he became more moderate and flexible in time. But he always remained firm on the main ends of the Congregation, on maintaining regularity and community life.

3. The evangelization priorities of the Oblates in 1818 were: preaching missions to the abandoned, replacing the religious Orders of the past, reform of the clergy. The Oblates certainly preached missions to the abandoned: in France, England, USA, Canada, perhaps even in South Africa. Regarding the religious life, the Founder came back on this repeatedly in his letters, and there was a strong positive response from the Oblates, though there were differences in the way in which this was lived. There were attempts to train and form clergy: in the 1850's, we had three seminaries in France and four in the USA ... but the Oblates were never too convinced of this ministry.

4. The people to whom the Oblates ministered varied according to the area. In general, they were the spiritual poor, those not being reached by the Church's ordinary and regular ministry. Who these poor were, concretely speaking, depended on the circumstances of time and place: rural people, groups of dispersed whites, anglicans, Irish in England, native peoples, pagans, immigrants, minorities. In regard to immigrants, the Oblates often founded newspapers for them v.g. in German, Polish, French, Ukrainian. Here and there we also notice the danger of Oblates becoming attached and rooted to those who at one time were marginalized.

5. Though the preaching of missions remained the first end of the Congregation, there was no exclusivity or special preference of means... only that which, according to time, place, other circumstances (weather, movement of peoples, v.g.) was most practical. Often the French mission formula was used, often new forms were tried. They maintained a great mobility, except perhaps in the teaching and formation ministries.

6. Generally speaking, there was no prior missiological preparation : it was too early to expect ideas about inculturation, indigenization, being "prophetic", etc. There was an effort to learn the people's customs and language, to be close to the people. The 1851 Instruction on Foreign Missions is very revealing here.

7. We should also try and do Oblate history using non-Oblate sources. The Founder and the Oblates, in their missionary concerns, are typical of the 19th century. It was also good that French Oblates went to the British colonies in Asia, S. Africa, and North America.

8. The Blessed Virgin Mary had a clear place in Oblate evangelization. Besides the shrines in France, we see in Canada and the United States, the setting up of Associations of Mary Immaculate, confraternities, grottoes and shrines, plus abundant preaching and Marian devotions.

9. While the Founder directly concerned himself with the Oblate priests, Father Tempier looked after the Oblate Brothers... and Brothers were very important in so many of the mission territories, also as catechists.

10. Regarding Canada, we seem to have an imbalanced mythology: the conception seems to be that most Oblates in Canada are working with the Indian/Eskimo peoples, and thus we seem to overlook so many evangelization initiatives which exist.

11. There are some areas which need further study:

- the content of what the Oblates preached, be it in France or elsewhere.

- how the "receivers" looked at our Oblate evangelization.
- whether the Founder had a sufficiently realistic perception of what the Oblates were faced with in Canada, the USA, S. Africa and Ceylon.
- The Oblates and the evangelization of the natives in Canada. The Congress had considered only Oblate sources; perhaps other sources would reveal a less positive picture. How true is it that the Oblates neglected the natives' cultures, that the Indians schools were a mistake, that the Oblates were the instruments of the government, etc.

III - Evangelization According to the General Chapters and the Superiors General.

1. Regarding the *General Chapters*:

- a) Most of the exchange dealt with the Chapters in themselves as significant events in the Congregation's development; consequently, the evangelization aspect was not broached very much.
- b) The 1972 administrative structures and missionary outlook documents (and subsequently corresponding realities) mutually sustained and supported each other... both have had a basically positive effect on our evangelization.
- c) Good criteria for evaluating current trends flow from pragmatic truth (cf. St. Paul) and a good theology of history (cf. Gamaliel in the *Acts*), plus trying to see things as the Church herself does. We need to renew our ecclesiology in the light of Vatican II.
- d) A deeper study should be made as to the place the apostolate of the press and the other means of social communications has had in Oblate evangelization.

2. Regarding the *Superiors general*:

- a) Regarding Father Fabre's strong insistence on the religious life: His strong insistence was certainly justified in part. The Oblates were very dispersed outside of France, and, after 1890, in France also. They were also relatively young: more than half were under 40 years of age. Their mission often obligated them to pioneering, and this easily lead to over-activity. From the general history of the Congregation, it would also seem that many Oblates did not take Father Fabre too seriously; and it is certain that his strong insistence was not interpreted as calling a halt to the things begun in North America, Ceylon and S. Africa. His strong assertions, however, started a certain tradition among us: Father Fabre was much quoted later.
- b) Regarding the Superior General's personal influence through visiting the Congregation : Certainly, such visits established personal contact, but as the Congregation grew and diversified, it became more difficult for the Superiors General to personally visit the entire Congregation. Furthermore, the personal qualities and orientations of each Superior General are different. We must also distinguish canonical visits from other visits. The methods of remaining in touch with the Congregation at large and with individual Oblates has varied.

IV - Evangelization According to our Constitutions and Rules.

1. Comparing the 1982 Constitutions and Rules with the earlier editions of the same, we can say: 1) there is continuity in content and spirit with the Constitutions and Rules we received from our Founder, even if there has been quite a change in language and arrangement; 2) the dichotomy between the mission and religious life that seemed to be in former formulations of our Constitutions and Rules has now been eliminated; 3) the concept of poverty and the poor is now wider than before.

2. The Oblate evangelizer. The Founder insisted on quality proclamation and witness; to have this, he also insisted that the evangelizer, the Oblate, be a quality person (truly apostolic men). This too, was one of the major reasons for our foundation. And this is also clear in his letter to Father Tempier (1815), in the Preface, in the Constitutions and Rules, and in his writings. The Oblate was to be a truly apostolic man in the full sense i.e. just like the 12 Apostles chosen, formed, and sent out by Christ: self-denial like the Apostles, dedication and zeal like the Apostles, interior men like the Apostles, living the evangelical counsels like the Apostles, forming an apostolic community like the Apostles, holy and ready for martyrdom like the Apostles. Even deeper than this, the Oblate was to be a co-worker with Christ the Saviour... a person inserted into the mystery of Christ the Saviour, and becoming a co-redeemer and co-saviour with Him.

3. One of the elements that clearly stand out in our new Constitutions and Rules is social justice as an integral part of evangelization. Here there is a direct influence from Church sources v.g. the Synod of Bishops of 1971. It is not very important to discuss whether the ministry of justice is "constitutive" or "essential" or "integral" to evangelization. A distinction is made between the Church proper and Kingdom values, namely, the Lord's justice, his peace, truth, freedom, mercy and love. Our evangelization proclaims these values of the Lord's Kingdom and is at the service of the same. What the concrete demands of justice are must be discerned in the light of the Gospel, Church teaching, and prudential consideration of the concrete circumstances.

4. The sacraments (Eucharist and Reconciliation) are a major element in evangelization. The new Constitutions and Rules retain this, though the formulation in Constitution 7 is more concise than it used to be in the former texts.

5. Changes in our constitutions and rules required by the holy see and the reasons for the same.

a) In a matter of the Constitutions and Rules of a Religious Institute, there are *the concerns of the Church* to be considered; and there is *dialogue* with the given Religious Institute.

b) Regarding the 1st Article of the Constitutions: we had to add that we are a Clerical religious Institute of Pontifical Right. The Chapter, keenly aware of various sensitivities throughout the Congregation, did not see fit to make this explicit: it was taken for granted and left as such. In a larger context, we have to ask what principles are involved here, and what is the Gospel. The Holy See feels that, for the good of all concerned, the Constitutions have to state who we are in Canon Law, into what category we belong: this is important for all concerned. v.g. if we are a clerical institute of pontifical right, our major Superiors are also ordinaries; otherwise not.

c) Regarding changes that affect our communitarian character: they are such that they bring out more clearly our nature and our bonds with the Church.

v.g. the ministry for justice takes place within the Church and in dialogue with the community and with the bishops. There is a lot of experience behind this requirement.

d) Regarding changes which provide for the stability of Spiritual Exercises, of our Formation, and of the legal organization of the Congregation (specifically: retreats, rosary, community program; juridical details regarding novitiate; improving certain definitions in government, provincial authority and replacement, visits): all this sounds very legal, and in many ways it is legal. *Ecclesiae Sanctae* made the distinction between Constitutions and Rules, and also between what is in these and what is left to prudential judgment. We had our own approach and interpretation to *Ecclesiae Sanctae*; the Holy See, however, takes a different vantage point: the Constitutions must contain all that belongs to the nature of a religious institute and the religious life... the individual religious must know that there are certain things that his own religious institute cannot simply change on its own authority. So it is not simply a matter of what elements we put into the Holy See's competence to change and what matters we put into a Holy See's competence to change and what matters we put into a General Chapter's competence: all that really belongs to the nature of a religious institute belongs in the Constitutions.

e) Other changes regard the exactness of our government and administration.

VI - Oblate Evangelization Today.

1. Our best Oblate tradition of evangelization remains alive and we must continue it. The goal to be achieved is the credible proclamation of Christ, Saviour and Liberator, and this to the poor i.e. to those who do not know Christ, are far from him, and against the idols also of the Western World. We ourselves must not become pagan with a pagan world. In our pagan world, we should be especially attentive to youth. Regarding our modalities of evangelization, let us be truthful, show that we are challenged by the Gospel, and let us show that we are community: this is still credible in a de-christianized world.

2. We Oblates ourselves need to be evangelized. We need to be in a state of ongoing conversion... I, not only the Congregation. Each one of us needs to see the world through the eyes of our crucified Saviour. We seem to live in a context in which asceticism is by-passed. We talk a lot about our mission, but not much about our prayer life. Do we still know what we really believe in?

3. Decisions regarding our mission cannot be based on ideology or prejudice but on the Lord's will and work. Our future choices need to be made in favour of the poor, wherever they may be, whoever they may be. We need to serve the Church through the local Church. There is no need to feel guilty either about the past or the present. Oblates do not exist to start political revolutions; military or other violent solutions always lead to betrayal. The Oblate charism is not limited to certain projects only. We must beware of conceiving the world as a collection of ghettos of the poor. Responsibility for unjust situations is not easily discerned. Regarding "prophets", there can be a personality clash between himself and his message: the role of an authentic prophet in the Church is one of genuine humility.

4. To understand the world and the poor, Christ waited some 30 years. Our own life style must be credible in today's world. We need to read the world, not alone but also with the help of specialists. We are Oblates of our times, sons of our times, and, as such, also compromised. Many people are confused, and they seek clarity. The

secularized world, even if very negative, has a deep desire for the Gospel.

5. Our approach is too often too intellectual, and even so, lacking solid teaching. There is tyranny and injustice in all countries, everywhere a sense of powerlessness. Accepted "models" have proven to be deceptive. Many do not recognize the need for salvation in Christ. We are flooded with a deluge of useless words and also misinformation or distorted, slanted information. People, searching for God, are often indulging in sentimentalism, emotionalism, exotic cults.

6. We need to listen to Christ well: know his life and charity well, as the Founder did; we need to preach the same message Christ did, and communicate the same certitude. We also need to listen well to the world: see the evil in its structures, see its spiritual needs, see its independence, secularism, detachment from the Church. In our zeal we go to the poor, even if some of these seem less receptive than in the past. We go to them as religious and priests in the Church, presenting ourselves and what we believe and live very simply and honestly: we propose, do not impose.

7. While we cannot ignore the negative in our world, we are challenged by the positive: God loves our world as it is, wants to save it, and thus calls and sends us.

8. *Points made by Father Fernand Jette, Superior General:*

a) The orientation and conclusions of the report made to the 1980 General Chapter remain substantially the same now, two years later.

b) A concrete look at the Oblate Congregation today inspires convincing hope for the future, a hope based upon: human reasons: the 1980 Chapter event; the unanimously positive acceptance of the new Constitutions and Rules; the very positive interest in interiorizing these Constitutions and Rules (this is almost universal and in marked contrast with 1966); congresses like this one and the one in Ottawa, as well as other meetings on regional or provincial levels; when visiting the Congregation, noted deep generosity of Oblates everywhere, their will to give themselves to the poor in the name of the Gospel; reaction of laity who know the Oblates and can compare us to others; the vocation picture in certain countries and Provinces. Spiritual reasons: God's grace; the measure of our own fidelity to our own vocation. Our pride should be in following Christ, in living the mystery of the Cross. We should, each one of us, ask: am I in the sequela Christi? The more we are, the more we will be blessed.

The Association for Oblate Studies and Research

The Association for Oblate Studies and Research resulted from an idea that emerged at the inter-Chapter meeting of the Provincials with the General Administration in April-May, 1978. It first existed as a kind of network of Oblates interested in Oblate studies and research. A special "ad hoc" committee consisting of Fathers Marcello Zago, Angelo Mitri, Gilles Cazabon, and Edward Carolan had a task of bringing this network to a more precise definition and structure as an Association.' The work of this "ad hoc" committee reached its objective at this Congress: four-fifths of the Congress participants were also members of the Association network.

The Congress did three things regarding the Association: 1) it gave the Association its constitutional Charter; 2) it elected the Association's first Executive Committee; 3) it recommended certain work-projects to the Association.

Charter.

Name:

The official name of this Association is: Association For Oblate Studies and Research.

Nature and Purpose:

The Association for Oblate Studies and Research is a free association of Oblates actively interested in undertaking, promoting and coordinating research, study and exchange on the history, spirituality, mission and present life of the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

Activities:

With the approval of the competent authorities, the Association for Oblate Studies and Research will promote:

- a) specific projects of study and research as well as the publication and the translation of relevant materials.
- b) meetings furthering its aims.
- c) inter-communication between its members and with the rest of the Oblate Congregation.
- d) the organization and upkeep of Oblate archives.

Membership:

1. Membership for the Association for Oblate Studies and Research is open to all professed Oblates of the Congregation.
2. To qualify for membership in the Association, the following conditions are required :
 - a) serious interest and activity in the purpose of the Association.
 - b) explicit application for membership and acceptance by the Association's Executive Committee.
 - c) approval by the Oblate's Major Superior.

Executive Committee:

1. The Association for Oblate Studies and Research is directed and animated by an Executive Committee. This Executive Committee is composed of a President, Secretary-Treasurer, elected as such, and three other members.
2. The Executive Committee is elected by **the** Association's membership spread throughout the world, by direct ballot. A relative majority of the ballots cast is required for election.
3. All these members of the Executive Committee are elected for a term of three years, with the possibility of being re-elected for a second term of **three** years. A third successive term for the same office is excluded, except for the Secretary-Treasurer who can serve for more than two terms.
4. The Executive Committee is competent to determine the job-description of each of its members.
5. The Executive Committee should meet at least once a year.

Relationship to the Superior General and his Council.

1. The Association of Oblate Studies and Research will have regular communication with the Superior General and his Council.
2. The approval of the Superior General in Council is required for:
 - a) the promulgation of the Association's Charter and amendments thereto.
 - b) the convocation of the general congresses of the Association's membership.

Finances:

1. The Association for Oblate Studies and Research is responsible for its ordinary expenses.
2. The Executive Committee will seek funds from :
 - a) grants from agencies within and outside the Congregation.
 - b) free donations.
 - c) appeals to Oblate Provinces.

Amending the Charter:

The Charter may be amended by the Association's membership. This is done either by mail or by a general congress of the membership. A simple majority of the votes cast is required.

Appendix:

The first election of the Association's Executive Committee will be carried out by the Evangelization Congress on September 14, 1982 in Rome. From that time on, the election will be held according to the Charter.

The Executive Committee of the Association for Oblate Studies and Research elected by the Congress is as follows:

President: Father Paul Sion²

Secretary/Treasurer: Father Aloysius Kedl.

Members: Father Gilles Cazabon
Father Robrecht Boudens
Father Fabio Ciardi

Before this Executive Committee could begin its work, the Association's Charter needed to be approved by the General Council.

The Congress either recommended or suggested the following as possible Work-Projects to the Association:

1. An Oblate Lexicon of significant Oblate persons, places, works, events, deeds.
2. An Oblate dictionary of key Oblate values.
3. An inventory of Oblate archives.
4. Continue publishing *Les Notices Nécrologiques*.
5. Duplicate and exchange Oblate archive materials.
6. Index analytically all the writings of Bishop Grandin.
7. Re-publish certain items from *Les Missions...*
8. Expand the collection *Oblate Writings* so as to include other writings besides those of the Founder.

NOTES:

1 *OMI Information*, no. 149/79, pp. 1-2.

2 After the untimely death of Father Sion, Father Boudens was appointed President, and Father Clarence Menard, member.

Homily at the Closing of the Congress

Dear fellow Oblates,

We are at the end of the roman part of our Congress, a Congress that will certainly leave its mark on the Congregation, because of the seriousness of its work, the quality of its sharing, the fraternal and prayerful atmosphere that filled it from beginning to end.

Before we part, I would like to thank again, in the name of the General Council, Father Zago and the organizing committee of the Congress, and also the Superior of the General House and all those to whom more was asked during these days: Father Dolci, the Brothers, the Sisters, the lay employees.

You will also permit me to say to Bishop Edmund Fernando how happy we were to have him with us. Dear Bishop, when you return to Colombo, please thank His Eminence Cardinal Cooray for the good wishes he sent, and assure him of our sincere affection.

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Today's liturgy — that of the Triumph of the Cross — offers us a lot of food for thought as we close our Congress.

Oblates are evangelizers. It is Jesus Christ and through Jesus Christ that we are so, and it is only in him and through him that we can be so. He is "The Evangelizer", the one who brings the Good News to the world. He not only reveals the salvation of the world by his word, he is Himself the living Good News, the salvation of the world.

In today's Gospel, St. John tells us of *God's love for the world*, a love that infinitely surpasses all earthly limits; He gives eternal life. "God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son. He sent his Son into the world not to condemn it, but so that through him the world might be saved... may have eternal life."

In the first reading, St. Paul describes the way adopted by Christ: *that of the Incarnation, an Incarnation that would lead him to death for the salvation of all*. "Christ Jesus, he whose state was divine... emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, and became as men are; and being as all men are, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross."²

The Gospel finally, tells us what answer we must give to God, if we want to know salvation: *an answer of faith, of a living faith in Jesus Christ*. "...So that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him ... And thus, everyone who believes in him will not be lost, but will have eternal life."³

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It is in this context, I believe, that we as Oblates, should consider our role as evangelizers. I see several quite concrete calls in this.

A first call: to love people as God loves them.

To love people as they are, to love them with their glories and their miseries, to love them in all countries and places, in all conditions of life, to love them even more if they are poor, more alone and more abandoned.

To love people as God loves them, is also to want their good, their earthly good,

their health, their development, the improvement of their human environment. But more than that, and through all of that, to love as God loves is to want all people to enter fully into God's family with Christ and with us, that they become fully aware of their dignity as sons and daughters of God, and that they have eternal life.

To love as God loves, is likewise to go to the utmost limit, to the sacrifice of that which is most dear - his own Son - for the salvation of all. Our Founder would say: "be ready to sacrifice goods, talents, ease, even your life." (Preface to the Constitutions).

A second call is this; to become incarnate with people, to draw close to them, to enter into their lives and culture just as Christ did.

This means getting out of ourselves, out of our habits and ways of doing things; this means learning people's language so that it will be possible for Christ, who is in us, to establish contact with them. Because - and we must never forget this - it is Christ who evangelizes and saves people. Through us, it is Christ who is to become incarnate among people.

For the Oblate, becoming incarnate in today's world is the normal way of evangelization. We must travel along this road with confidence and courage, but we must do so while having Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, always present in our spirit. What saves the poor, what saves people of each culture and of every culture, is not the presence of one more poor man in their midst or of an "inculturated" foreigner joining their ranks; rather, it is the presence of Christ in their midst, of Christ who, because he loves them, has freely chosen to become poor and incarnate among them.

I quote the witness of Father Charles de Foucauld who lived among the Moslems. On June 1, 1903, he wrote in his diary:

If we want to lead Moslems to God, must we try to have them consider us as excelling in certain things that they highly esteem, for instance, by being daring, good horsemen, good shots, by displaying a somewhat ostentatious liberality, and the like; or by living out the Gospel in its renunciations and poverty...?

His reply is as follows:

Moslems make no mistake in this matter. Regarding a priest who is a good horseman, a good shot, and so forth, they say: "That's an excellent horseman, no one can shoot like he!" On occasion, they may even add: "He could be a Chambi!" They do not say: "He is a saint ." But let a missionary lead the life of St. Anthony of the desert and they will say: "He O a saint!" Following their natural inclination, they will often give their friendship to the first type, to the Chambi; but if they confide in anyone about what pertains to the soul, they will do so only in the latter.⁴

Out of this *a third call* comes to us: *constantly to live in a faith perspective, never to lose sight of the fact that our mission, in a sense, is greater than we are: it is the work of God*

It is God who evangelizes by sending His Son into the world; it is the Son of God who is evangelizing by founding his Church and sending out his Apostles: "Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to all creation. The man who believes in it and accepts baptism will be saved..."⁵

It is this same mission that is our *raison d'être* as Oblates in the world.

Our Saviour Jesus Christ has left us the task of continuing the great work of mankind's redemption", the Founder wrote to Tempier. It is only towards this goal that all our efforts ought to tend. As long as we will not have committed our whole life and

given all our blood to succeed in this, we have nothing to say; this is all the more true when we have as yet given only a few drops of sweat and some slight fatigue. This spirit of total dedication to God's glory, to the service of the Church and the salvation of souls is the spirit that is proper to our

Congregation – a small [Congregation], it is true, but one which will always be filled with power as long as it will be holy. The novice must fully convince themselves of those ideas: may they ponder them, meditate them often.⁶

Our mission is greater than we are; its effectiveness escapes us; its fruits can come only from God's Spirit unceasingly at work in the world. We are often tempted with impatience, by the tendency to reduce this work to human dimensions and thereby reap an immediate harvest.

Let us recall the attitude of St. Paul, expressed in the first lesson of last Friday's liturgy:

I do not boast of preaching the Gospel, since it is a duty which has been laid on me; I should be punished if I did not preach it! If I had chosen this work myself, I might have been paid for it, but as I have not, it is a responsibility which has been put into my hands.

He took great pains to adapt himself to people.

Although I am not bound to anyone, I made myself the slave of all so as to win over as many as possible. To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews ; to those who are without law, I became as one without law so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became a weak person with a view to winning the weak.

I have made myself all things to all men in order to save at least some of them.?

Adaptation and inculturation, personal experience of Jesus Christ and fidelity to the Gospel we have received, profound humility in regard to the task entrusted to us - all these things are necessary if, as our vocation requires, we are to be authentic evangelizers.

The studies and the sharing of the last two weeks have made us more aware of this. And this is a grace for which we must thank God. As the Holy Father urged us, may we be able "to carry out, with the zeal of our Blessed Founder, the evangelization our times need!"

"Through us, may the Word of God reach the farthest ends of the earth and penetrate hearts and minds to their very depths!"⁸

Fernand JETTÉ, O.M.I. *Superior General*

NOTES:

1 *John* 3: 13-17.

2 *Phil.* 2: 6-11.

3 *John* 3: 13-17.

4 René BAZIN, *Charles de Foucauld* (Paris: Pion, 1922), pp. 254-255.

5 *Mark* 16: 15-16.

6 August 22, 1817.

7 1 *Cor.* 9: 16-22.

8 Audience of September 8, 1982.

The Vatican and the Congress

The daily edition of *L'Osservatore Romano*, on page 10 of its August 29, 1982 issue, carried the following article which is obviously derived from the material contained on pp. 1-2 of *OMI Information* (no. 186/82):

Celebrations for the Bi-Centenary of Bishop de Mazenod.

The bi-centenary of the birth of Bishop Charles Joseph Eugene de Mazenod, Bishop of Marseilles and Founder of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, will be celebrated in the next days by a two-part study convention : the first held in Rome from August 29 to September 15, and the second in Aix-Marseilles from September 15-20.

Bishop de Mazenod was born in Aix-en-Provence on August 1, 1782 and died at Marseilles on May 21, 1850 (sic!). The Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate was founded by him in 1816, and approved ten years later by Leo XII. The theme of the celebration congress is: "The Oblates and Evangelization". To assure some follow-up to the work of the congress, the founding of an Association for Oblate Studies and Research has been proposed. In the meantime, the first series in the collection "Oblate Writings" has been completed with the publication of Bishop de Mazenod's letters to the Sacred Congregation of *Propaganda Fide*, which letters cover the period of 1832 to 1861.

His Holiness Pope John Paul II to the Oblates of the Congress (September 8, 1982).

I have especially noted the presence of the religious Oblates of Mary Immaculate, together with their Superior General, Father Fernand Jetté. I know the daring and fruitful work that your brothers have accomplished, not only in parish missions at home but also in implanting the Church in the far north of the American continent as well as in Central Africa.

I encourage you to carry on the evangelization that our age needs, doing so with the zeal of your blessed Founder, Bishop Eugene de Mazenod, born 200 years ago. Through you, may the Word of God reach the farthest ends of the earth and penetrate hearts and minds to their very depths ! The Church thanks you for this.

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