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The Beginning of the Marian Devotion of the Founder of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Blessed Eugène de Mazenod

SOMMAIRE - Comme le résume l'auteur lui-même dans sa conclusion Eugène de Mazenod a pensé sa dévotion mariale au sein même de sa famille; cette dévotion est la fine fleur de la foi provençale en la puissance et la tendresse de <<Bonne Mère>> comme on appelle la Sainte Vierge en Provence. Cette dévotion, germée en Provence, se consolida durant les séjours faits à Turin et à Venise au contact de la foi vive et profonde, qui en Italie inspire le recours constant à la Mère de Dieu. Finalement le <<bain de spiritualité mariale de Saint-Sulpice>> achève de pénétrer toutes les fibres de l'âme d'Eugène de Mazenod avant le sacerdoce. (Texte traduit et abrégé de l'article paru dans MILES IMMACULATAE, 1989).

The great and tender devotion of the Holy Virgin of Blessed Eugène de Mazenod has always been taken for granted; it has even been made the ruling power of his life¹. This devotion, he has left it as a legacy to his spiritual sons in an article of the Constitutions and Rules which were composed by him personally and written with his own hand; unfortunately, the revision of the text, undertaken after Vatican II, has not kept completely all the density of the Founder's thinking².

Be it as it may, nobody, until now, has thought of studying, of searching under what influences the marian devotion had germinated and had grown in the soul of Eugène de Mazenod.

It has been forgotten that the task of the historian is "to sift the remote and varied elements which make up heredity (...) and to know the atmosphere which surrounded his childhood at the end of a world and of an era³.

It is because this research has been neglected that we will see today excellent Oblates shrug their shoulders at the reading of a page of a book that has nourished the piety of many generations of the Congregation in the past. I mean the book of Father Baffie in which we read "(...) Still a child, Eugène de Mazenod liked to multiply the acts of devotion towards the Holy Virgin. Every day he recited the special prayer composed in her honour; Saturdays, he slept on a blanket on the floor to honour her by this mortification⁴".

Reading these lines some, as I said, shrug their shoulders because they think they were inspired by the literary form of a certain pious hagiography that was in style in the nineteenth century and which required manifestations of holiness since childhood.

It is because of this gap in the historical studies made on our Venerated Founder that it happened to me, personally, after having raised the question before some members, and not the least in importance, of the Congregation, to know if Eugène de Mazenod had acquired his devotion to the Holy Virgin from members of his family, to hear them dismiss the question categorically without even the possibility of discussion. This dismissal had nothing of a scientific nature; but it shows how important it is to undertake a serious study of the different circles in which our Founder had to live from his birth in 1782 to his priesthood in 1811. My study will not go any further because it seems that at that time he had attained a certain, if not a total, maturity.

I. Family circle

In reading the recent writings on Blessed Eugène de Mazenod, one is impressed by the stress that the authors put on the *ill-matched union that gave birth to him*.

We know that the de Mazenod family, in the XVI century, belonged to the nobility of apothecary commerce in Marseilles⁵. In time, "the following generations ... wished to rid

themselves of the commercial aspects of their origins. The drugs trade, no doubt, exhaled the perfumes of the Orient, but is also betrayed the humble origin of their family. It was now a problem of ... rising to a higher rank (...). Instead of joining the nobility of the sword which now became unattainable, Charles-Alexandre (grandfather of Eugène) came down a step and joined the nobility of the robe. In order to enter the magistracy, he began the study of law⁶.

When he secured the office of President at the Court of Accounts, Aids, and Finance of Provence, the Mazenods left Marseilles and settled at Aix; from that time on, they belonged to the parliamentary class which was to leave its permanent mark upon them.

The father of Eugène de Mazenod, Charles-Antoine, after brilliant classical studies with the Jesuits, took up law and obtained, thanks to his father, a Presidency at the Court of Accounts, Aids, and Finance of Aix. Such an important situation made him think of marriage. Unfortunately, he chose a young girl from Aix, Marie-Rose Joannis, who was *fifteen years younger than him*. This young girl "ranked far beneath him in birth, even though their respective ancestors had followed similar professions in the seventeenth century. For, while Charles de Mazenod, the Consul of Marseilles, was prospering in the wholesale apothecary business, François Joannis, the apothecary, was selling drugs retail to the inhabitants of Lambesque. However, while the Mazenods were rising up in the world by going from the life of commerce to that of the magistracy, the Joannis family continued to serve the sick and advanced in their profession only slightly⁷". The father of Marie-Rose Joannis, professor of Medecine at the University of Aix, was part of the rich middle-class of the city⁸.

As can be seen, there was no lack of contrasts between the two betrothed:

Their respective ages of 33 and 18 made him almost twice as old as she. (...) their intelligence was of extremely unequal cultivation. Miss Joannis, like other young girls of her time, had pursued rather summary studies at the Couvent School of Lambesque⁹.

She had received, with a good religious and moral education, the essentials of an intellectual formation; she spoke French satisfactorily but could not write it correctly¹⁰. "Charles-Antoine, on the other hand, being a humanist and an accomplished jurist, possessed a wealth of knowledge acquired from the study of the finest works of literature¹¹".

To these natural contrasts, we have to add the unfortunate escapades of Charles-Antoine¹². When he regretted them, he had partly alienated the affection of his wife¹³. Marie-Rose Joannis, on her part, was not faultless.

The character of this woman, writes Father Pielorz, easily goes from one extreme to the other, and her physical beauty, rare as it was, show traces of her impressionable temperament. Gifted of an extremely good and sensitive heart and self-sacrifice when the future of her children was in danger, she spoiled these qualities by her narrow mindedness and her love of money, neighbouring avarice. Impressionable and violent, she is guided by the emotions of the moment which lead her to eccentricities that are disagreeable and offensive. Illnesses and hysterics emphasized her unbalanced character. More agitated than active, she cannot adopt a firm line of conduct; if she expresses some principle with conviction, if she firmly proposes to follow a certain plan, she will not hesitate to renounce them later on if they are in opposition to her impressions of the moment. This instability has prevented her to face a faithful spouse the great upheaval of her life (the Revolution ...)¹⁴.

Based on these considerations, Father Pielorz concludes his chapter on the family circle of Eugène de Mazenod as follows:

(...) if we adopt the division of family circles as fervents, practicing, indifferents and unbelievers, we have to conclude that the family of Eugène de Mazenod belonged to the second category, the practicing one; it would be against the facts, to consider it as fervent or, as it is commonly said, as a school of holiness¹⁵.

Consequently, one could be tempted to consider right those who affirm categorically that our Founder cannot have drawn the marian devotion from his family.

"E pur' si muove!" was saying Gallilée.

However, it is truly in the home where he was born that Eugène de Mazenod got his devotion to the Holy Virgin. In fact, after having enumerated all the defects of character of our

Founder's mother, Father Pielorz writes:

... As a mother, she deeply loved her children and attended to their religious and moral education. *The recitation of the office of the Holy Virgin*, the frequent assistance to the parish's offices were her preferred religious exercises. Still, under the influence of her circle and mostly of her jansenist cousin, M. Rose, she rarely frequented the sacraments and the severity of *her fasts* must have counterbalanced in some way the lack of charitable tenderness towards her old and unhappy husband¹⁶.

This text reinforces the affirmation of Father Baffie, mentioned previously (note 4), when he said that Eugène de Mazenod, still a child, "recited every day the office composed in honour of the Holy Virgin". As Mrs. de Mazenod personally took care of her children, it is not surprising that as soon as Eugène could talk and read, because of the phenomenon of mimetism where young ones want to imitate adults, he wanted to join himself to his mother in the recitation of the office of the Holy Virgin. This same mimetism led him to imitate his mother in the penances she imposed to herself to make up for her rare reception of the sacraments. In the same vein, another affirmation of Father Baffie, to wit that "saturdays, he slept on a blanket on the floor to honour the Virgin by this mortification" becomes more than probable. Thus, it is easy to understand the tendency that our Founder had during his whole life for corporal penances; he had in some way absorbed the marian devotion and his love of mortification by osmosis: *he got them from his mother*.

Here, one could object that the example of the mother "pious in her own way", but pious just the same, could have been neutralized by the disordered life of his father. The answer is that, in well-bred families, the escapades of the father were never mentioned in front of young children and were silently borne by the mother. Moreover, Father Pielorz notes that in spite of his disordered life, Charles-Antoine de Mazenod, during his whole life, "had kept a special devotion to the Holy Virgin, never letting a day pass without invoking her many times¹⁷". It is not for nothing that the Mother of God has always been invoked as the Advocate of sinners and the Mother of Mercy.

Once admitted the personal devotion to the Holy Virgin of Mr. and Mrs. de Mazenod, the problem has to be studied a little deeper; this signifies that it is important to know if, on the one hand, Marie-Rose Joannis was an exception in the jansenist environment of the end of the eighteenth century and if, on the other hand, Charles-Antoine de Mazenod stood in contrast in the century of Lights where France was tormented by impiety and irreligion under the influence of the Encyclopédie, of Voltaire and of Rousseau.

II. Jansenist environment at the end of the eighteenth century

To give an idea of the jansenist environment at the end of the eighteenth century, I shall merely cite what Henri Bremond writes in tome IX of his "Histoire littéraire du Sentiment Religieux en France". Basing himself on the "Mémoires" of Legendre, Canon of Notre-Dame (of Paris) he writes: "His colleagues of the Chapter of Notre-Dame, almost all adherents to the sect (jansenist), exasperated him with their pet subject of bringing the religion back to its original purity", and their clamors against what they found as "superstitious in our church, in our office, in our ceremonies". And, he continues, "as if they had received a special mission for that, they were changing everything". Here is an example of their stupid vandalism that exasperates me:

*They had the nerve, in broad daylight and in front of everybody, to ignominiously remove a little image of the Virgin that was behind the sanctuary and in front of which people asked for the recitation of prayers and lighted candles. Two or three of us claimed in vain that we were well-intentioned; the priest who used to say the prayers in front of the image for the people protested bitterly against the removers of the image that had been his livelihood, but nothing brought back the image because the archbishop (Noailles) approved what they had done, because the leaders of the Chapter lacked the courage to protest, and maybe also because of the will to suppress their innovations. (Mémoires, p. 223)¹⁸. Immediately after this citation, Henri Bremond cannot keep from exclaiming: Ah! the idiots! Because, as I am concerned, I believe this to be the right expression. *Be sure that all recited everyday their beads*, and that all, except one or two, *would not for the world have consented to divest themselves of their scapular**

A few lines below, the same Henri Bremond adds in a cheerful way: "So as not to blacken them more than they really were, we must not forget that until the end of the eighteenth century, the jansenists did not cease to re-issue Duguet who had for the Holy Virgin the most tender devotion²⁰."

To confirm what he had just said, the author of *l'Histoire littéraire du Sentiment Religieux en France* gives a quotation of this Duguet: "Letter to a young ecclesiastic" seriously tempted against the essential duties of his vocation. ...

It is absolutely necessary for you to practice humility and chastity. Ask for them ceaselessly ... *I do not know if you have a tendency to confide to the Holy Virgin. If it is so, I judge you very lucky for, with such a protection, one can hope for everything, as long as the desires tend for the real goods and for the virtues that lead to them.* The humble and unimportant persons know better this secret than the other persons ... *Lettres*, IX, p. 143-144²¹.

Immediately after this citation, Bremond makes the following remark: "Note that this a posthumous letter and *that the jansenists would not have published it if they had believed its lecture dangerous*²²."

These texts are so clear and eloquent that I do not believe that anything needs to be added. Let us conclude, simply, that Mrs. de Mazenod, in reciting daily the Small Office of the Holy Virgin, was only following the current practice of the ladies of her time who had received a solid religious education.

III. Influence of the irreligion at the end of the eighteenth century

Let us see now if the case of Charles-Antoine de Mazenod who "had never read a book against the religion" was an extraordinary exception. After having remarked how the religion had been discredited during the Century of Lights, the author of a book titled "*La Provence au XVIII^e siècle*" hastens to add the following:

... in spite of the progress of irreligion, religious faith had remained (in Provence) much more solid than in Paris or other parts of France, and in all classes of the society. Besides, even in Paris, it was not the whole bourgeoisie that was given to impiety. Many did not go beyond gallicanism as shown by the Journal of Hardy, jansenist, anticlerical, but Christian, who detests the philosophers, "these heroes and leaders of the modern impiety". We must not believe the exaggerations of the princess palatine who wrote in 1722: "I do not believe that there is in Paris ... one hundred persons with the true faith and even believe in Our Lord ... Nothing is as rare in France as the christian faith." *It is certain, however, that this faith was not rare in Provence.*

Le Courrier d'Avignon announcing, on December 3, 1773, the death of the astronomer and mathematician Saint-Jacques de Silvabelle in his ninety-eight year, pointed out that *even during his last sickness he went to his parish church, with the help of a servant, to hear mass every day.* It would be easy to multiply these individual examples ... But it is more significant to note the collective examples as the proliferation in all parts of Provence of various societies of penitents where all classes of society mingled together to attest their piety and spirit of equality. Descriptions of popular devotion to the Holy Virgin in Arles, Grasse and Manosque are also given as examples²³.

If faith had remained stronger in Provence than in other parts of France, as demonstrated by the author just cited, other studies give us a rather comforting idea of the faith in these other parts^{24 25}.

In such a context, one should not consider uncommon, even strange, the case of the father of Blessed Eugène de Mazenod who, in spite of his escapades, "had never read a book against religion and had always had a special devotion to the Holy Virgin, invoking her many times every day" (see note 17).

IV. Influence of the schools attended by Eugene de Mazenod

Eugène's father, wanting to give to his son a serious education, entered him when he was six and a half years old (1789) at the Collège Royal Bourbon d'Aix, where he had himself studied.

Unfortunately, to the Jesuits unjustly expelled, had succeeded in 1773 les Pères de la Doctrine Chrétienne who were very different from their predecessors. When they approved the antireligious principles of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy in 1791, Eugène's father, who had taken refuge in Nice since 1790, took his son with him. Eugène stayed in Nice only five months. We do not know what influence his father used but he succeeded in registering Eugène in October 1791 at the Collège des Nobles de Turin where the permission of the King of Sardaigne was required to be admitted. The College had been placed under the direction of the Barnabites Fathers by the king himself and the first article of its statutes was the religious formation of the students. (The author gives a list of all the religious exercises).

To show that the piety of Eugène was not only sentimentalism, let us refer to "Souvenirs de Famille". In these we find for example that "finding him more reasonable than his classmates, his Superiors put him in charge of his dormitory. Father Rector as the other Fathers always liked him and presented him as a model because the child was showing qualities rare for that age²⁶".

V. Spiritual progress in Venice (1794-1797)

Eugène de Mazenod remained at the Collège des Nobles de Turin from October 1791 to February 1794. Why did he leave for Venice in February when his family was due to leave only in May is a mystery.

His stay in Venice had a great impact on his spiritual life; it marked him for life. In the "Souvenirs de Famille", we can read how he met the Zinelli family, how one member of the family who was a priest taught him every day during nearly four years. Our Founder writes: "It is at the school of this holy priest that I learned to despise the vanities of this world, to taste the things divine; away from all dissipations, having no contact with the youths of my age, I did not even think of what was the object of their unholy desires." During his years in Venice he assisted daily at mass, received communion frequently, went to confession weekly, and daily said the beads and recited the little Office of the Holy Virgin.

VI. Trial Year (1798)

The family had to leave Venice because of an anti-French sentiment caused by the invasion of Venice by the French army. They took refuge in Naples where Eugène felt miserable. His only consolation was to serve the mass of his uncle and to follow the little set of rules that Don Bartolo Zinelli had given him in Venice. Many years later, Mgr de Mazenod wrote: "Thanks to God, although I was devoid of all assistance, I stayed the same in Naples as I was in Venice."

VII. Years of crisis (1799-1805)

A. Stay in Palermo (January 6, 1799 - October 11, 1802)

Always because of political reasons, the de Mazenod family had to leave Naples for Palermo. There, Eugène met the family of the duke of Cannizzaro and was received as a member of the family. Unfortunately, although they were good people, their life was a frivolous one in which Eugène was caught. He condemned this type of life but nevertheless, being part of it, he neglected the practice of his pious devotions, keeping just the essential religious duties. Thus began a slipping towards mediocrity which preceded a true crisis.

B. Return to France (October 24, 1802)

The type of life started in Palermo increased in intensity in France. In 1812, he writes of this period in this way:

When I talk of my crimes, I mean mortal sins that I confess having had the misfortune to commit against God in the secret of my conscience ..., but ... I have always believed and acted in a way ... that I had to abstain of taking pleasure with something that belonged to another person, and to never consent to do with whomever actions that could be the subject of their true remorse. *In one word: that I never gave any kind of scandal in any period of my life.*

We suppose that Eugène, even in this period, fulfilled the precepts of the Church as to mass and annual confession and communion, that religion remained, as in Venice and Naples, an integral part of his life. But that would be all; we do not find in Eugène the christian vitality that animated him in Venice.

To conclude this part of the life of our Founder, Father Pielorz writes:

Without Palermo and Aix, Venice could have produced one of those very upright men, with a passion for great things, very sure of themselves and uncompromising for the weaknesses and faults of others. ... It seems that the proud and haughty personality of Eugène de Mazenod needed this trial to become the minister of the One who had been meek and humble of heart.

VIII. Conversion and vocation (1806-1808)

It was near the end of 1806 that Eugène de Mazenod came out of his spiritual listlessness. We learn by the correspondence with his mother that the thought of the priesthood was the dominant cause. At that time he was working in the field of prisons and was hesitant for a long time but finally God Himself *by a strong external jolt* (par une forte secousse étrangère) put an end to his hesitations. What this strong external jolt was, we will never know because our Founder kept it a secret to his grave.

IX. Last stage: Saint-Sulpice Seminary (1808-1812)

The state of tepidity that began in 1799 seems to have suspended his devotion to the Holy Virgin. I say: "seems", because we have no proof. It is possible that he behaved as his father who, in spite of his escapades, kept a special devotion to the Holy Virgin. We must not forget that this happens in Provence where the devotion to the Good Mother was always very strong.

Be it as it may. I am inclined to think that, when our Founder came to his senses in 1806 and wrote: "I tried *by a greater fervor* to obtain new graces from the Lord", he returned to the devotion to Mary that he had practiced in the past.

Contrary to what Father Pielorz writes, the formation of the seminarists at Saint-Sulpice was not only based on Jesus-Christ. The Sovereign Priest but also on a deep devotion to the Holy Virgin as is demonstrated in the article on "Marie" in the "Dictionnaire de Spiritualité".

Consequently, we can affirm that *Eugène de Mazenod, during his years in Saint-Sulpice, was plunged in a bath of marian spirituality. He absorbed by osmosis the marian heritage of M. Olier to his spiritual sons.*

Conclusion

If I had to resume in a few sentences the result of this research, I would say that the marian devotion of Eugène de Mazenod was drawn first of all from the family circle; it could be said that it was the flower of the faith of the people of Provence in the power and tenderness of the Good Mother (Bonne Mère) as the Holy Virgin is called in Provence. This faith had remained intact at the eve of the Revolution, in spite of the impiety in other parts of the country. This devotion was strengthened in Turin and Venice. Finally, "the bath of marian spirituality received in Saint-Sulpice" penetrated all the fibres of Eugène de Mazenod's soul before the priesthood and it came out.

In the expression: "in Matrem semper habebunt".

J.M. SALGADO, o.m.i.

1 The Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate was the first Congregation dedicated to Mary /Immaculate to be approved by Rome on February 17, 1826 (see R. BOUDENS, "Mgr de Mazenod et la définition du dogme de l'Immaculée Conception", in *Acta Congressus Mariologici Mariano Romae a. 1954 celebrati*, Pontificia Academia Mariana Internationalis, Roma, 1956, 5. II, p. 311.

2 In the first french text of the Constitutions and Rules composed in 1818 by Father de Mazenod we read: "II, Of prayer and other Exercises of Piety (...) Art. 4. At least once, they will visit Our Lord in the Most Holy Sacrament and the Blessed Virgin, *towards whom all the members of the Society will cultivate a special devotion, and to whom they will always look up as to their beloved Mother.*" On the other hand, in the first latin text of the Constitutions translated from the French text composed in 1826 we have: "Pars secunda. Caput secundum. par. 2, De oratione ... Art. IV. Semel saltem in dei Christum Dominum invisent adoraturi. Visitationis causa ad imaginem quoque Vel arae B. Virginis se conferent *dulcemque Mariam peculiaris prosequuntur devotionis affectu ac in Matrem semper habebunt.*" This text was faithfully kept even after the revision of the

Constitutions made in 1928 following the publication of the Canon Law Code.
In the revision of 1966, made after Vatican II, we *simply* read: *Mariam Immaculatam, fidelem ancillam Domini in mysteriis Verbi Incarnati contempletur et perfectum exemplar Deo respondendi cognoscat. Quam sodales semper in Matrem habebunt.*" (*Constitutions* no.61). - In the final edition of 1982, the text has been reduced to the following: "Mary Immaculate is the patroness of our Congregation (...) She received Christ in *pression of our faith in the maternal tenderness of the holy Virgin Mary.*

- 3 LEFLON, J., *Eugene de Mazenod, Bishop of Marseilles, Founder of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate 1782-1961*, t. 1, Fordham University Press, New York), 1961, p. 33.
- 4 BAFFIE, E., *Esprit et Vertus du Missionnaire des Pauvres, C.J. Eugène de Mazenod, Évêque de Marseille, Fondateur de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, Delhomme et Brigue, Paris, Lyon, 1894, p. 185.
- 5 LEFLON, J., *op. cit.*, p. 7.
- 6 *Ibid*, p. 8.
- 7 *Ibid*, p. 29.
- 8 PIELORZ, J., "La vie spirituelle de Mgr de Mazenod 1782-1812. Étude critique", in *Études Oblates*, Ottawa, 1956, p. 18.
- 9 LEFLON, J., *op. cit.*, p. 32.
- 10 PIELORZ, J., *op. cit.*, p. 18.
- 11 LEFLON, J., *op. cit.*, p. 32.
- 12 PIELORZ, J., *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18.
- 13 *Ibid*, p. 20.
- 14 *Ibid*, pp. 18-19.
- 15 *Ibid*, p. 31.
- 16 *Ibid*, p. 19.
- 17 PIELORZ, J., *op. cit.*, p. 17, note 35: "I almost died, tell President de Mazenod to his son in the letter of February 27, 1816, and if I am still alive, it is by a special grace of the Lord which, *I am convinced, I owe to the intercession of the Holy Virgin for whom, even in the midst of my worst escapades, I always had a special devotion, never letting a day pass without invoking her many times (...)*", Archives de la Bibliothèque Méjanes, Fonds Boisgelin (Aix-en-Provence).
Father Pielorz adds that Mgr de Mazenod complete these details in his journal of October 10, 1838: "I will say again for the edification of those who would like to report it that *he (my father) confided to me that not one day of his life had passed without having prayed to the Holy Virgin, and that he never wanted to read a book against the Religion; and yet his youth had been stormy*", Archives Générales de la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée, Rome.
- 18 BREMOND, H., *Histoire Littéraire du sentiment religieux en France depuis la fin des guerres de Religion jusqu'à nos jours*, t.IX, (*La Vie Chrétienne sous l'Ancien Régime*), Bloud et Gay (Paris), 1932, p. 275.
- 19 *Ibid*, p. 275.
- 20 *Ibid*, p. 276.
- 21 *Ibid*, p. 276.
- 22 *Ibid*, p. 172. - The same H. Bremond, on page 281 of the same book, enumerate the principal devotions in honour of the Holy Virgin: Angelus, Rosary or Beads, Scapular, enter her Congregations, ornate her alters, honour her images, recite her office.
- 23 MASSON, P., *La Provence au XVIII^e siècle*, t.2, Hachette, Paris, 1936, pp. 561-570.
- 24 RAYEZ, A., art. "France", in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, Beauchesne, Paris, t.V (1964), col. 955-956.
- 25 DE FIORES, S., art. "Marie", in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, Beauchesne, Paris, t.X (1980), col. 465-466.
- 26 "Souvenirs de Famille", in *Missions*, 1866, pp. 116-117.

Mgr de Mazenod, modèle vivant de la Préface?

SUMMARY - What the Founder required of others he lived it himself, because he was convinced that examples have more weight than words. The author wants to find out if Mgr de Mazenod has lived the fundamental ideas stated in the Preface: the love of Christ and of the Church, the tendency towards sanctity (the Oblates must try for perfection because he is priest, apostle, and religious), the desire for martyrdom, the reform of the clergy. Mgr de Mazenod could have said to his sons what Saint Paul has written to the Corinthians: "I beseech you then, be my imitators (as I am of Christ)".

Au cours de sa vie Mgr de Mazenod a beaucoup parlé. Il a fait beaucoup d'exhortations aux Oblats, mais je ne crois pas que le Seigneur ait pu jamais lui reprocher ce dont il accusait les Pharisiens: <<Faites donc et observez tout ce qu'ils vous disent, mais n'imites pas leurs oeuvres, car ils disent et ne font pas>> (Mt 23,3). Notre Fondateur s'est toujours efforcé de vivre d'abord ce qu'il exigeait des autres. N'a-t-il pas écrit un jour: <<Vous savez que l'on prêche plus encore par l'exemple que par les paroles¹.>> Dans sa biographie de Mgr de Mazenod, le père Rambert copie en entier le paragraphe 6 de la Préface des Règles sur les vertus et ajoute:

Qui n'aura reconnu à ces traits le portrait vivant du saint Fondateur des Oblats, tracé par lui-même? Et qu'y a-t-il d'étonnant qu'il demande des disciples semblables à lui? Pouvait-il ne pas souhaiter aux siens ce qu'il ambitionnait pour lui-même? Un père ne cherche-t-il pas à se reproduire et à se voir revivre tout entier dans ses enfants²?

Je me propose donc de voir avec vous si Mgr de Mazenod a vécu les points fondamentaux exposés dans la Préface: l'Amour du Christ et de l'Église, la tension vers la sainteté, le désir du martyre, etc.

I. L'Église³

L'intérêt et l'amour de Mgr de Mazenod pour l'Église est un des traits caractéristiques de sa vie. Ce n'est pas par hasard que la Préface commence par le mot Église, par la pensée des besoins de l'Église et que, au cours de sa dernière maladie, le Fondateur était encore préoccupé par les souffrances de l'Église et du pape dont la liberté était menacée. Mgr Jeancard écrit au cardinal Barnabo à ce sujet, en février 1861:

Il parle de l'Église et du Souverain Pontife avec l'amour le plus filial. Comme je lui disais un mot du secours que nous demandions à Dieu pour qu'il fût soulagé dans ses maux, et qu'en même temps je plaçais sous ses yeux des reliques des saints martyrs, il m'interrompit en disant que c'était pour l'Église qu'il fallait prier. Puis, s'arrêtant un moment en regardant les reliques, il dit: <<La situation de l'Église!>> et ses yeux se remplirent de larmes. Il pense toujours au Saint-Père et il exprime les sentiments les plus dignes d'un évêque profondément dévoué au Saint-Siège. C'est là comme le résumé de sa vie entière toujours animée d'un si grand amour pour Rome et jamais il ne fait aucun retour sur lui-même, ni sur ses espérances démenties par de douloureux événements. Il s'oublie entièrement en présence des maux de l'Église⁴.

Mgr de Mazenod a aimé l'Église et cela s'explique facilement chez lui. Ne vivait-il pas que <<par le coeur⁵>>? Mais il était également homme d'action. Son amour ne resta pas contemplatif mais se manifesta par le service de l'Église et le zèle pour toutes les Églises.

Son amour et son intérêt pour l'Église et l'Église d'Aix en particulier dont il connaissait mieux les besoins, ont d'abord contribué à sa conversion en 1807 et à sa décision de devenir prêtre⁶. C'est ensuite par amour de l'Église qu'il fonda la Congrégation. Cet amour brûlait d'une telle ardeur qu'il aurait voulu corriger tous ses désordres, remédier à tous ses maux, en un mot il aurait voulu tout faire pour elle: prêcher des missions paroissiales, réformer le clergé, remplacer les ordres religieux disparus, diriger la jeunesse, enfin porter la Bonne Nouvelle jusqu'au bout du monde. Dans le Nota Bene de la Règle de 1818, alors que la Congrégation ne comptait que six prêtres, il écrivait déjà:

... et quoique, vu leur petit nombre actuel et les besoins plus pressants des peuples qui les entourent, ils doivent pour le moment borner leur zèle aux pauvres de nos campagnes et le reste, leur ambition doit embrasser, dans ses saints désirs, l'immense étendue de la terre entière⁷.

Cette ambition, ce rêve est devenu peu à peu réalité avec l'accroissement du nombre d'Oblats. Ceux-ci allèrent travailler au Canada et en Angleterre en 1841, à Sri Lanka en 1847, en Algérie en 1849 et en Afrique du Sud en 1851-1852.

L'activité concrète de ses fils sur quatre continents ne lui suffit pas. Comme évêque surtout il s'intéresse à toutes les Églises. Il rappelle ce devoir à Mgr Bourget, évêque de Montréal: <<Vous êtes pontife dans l'Église de Jésus Christ et par conséquent vous avez votre part dans la sollicitude non seulement de votre troupeau mais encore de toute l'Église⁸.>>

C'est ainsi qu'il éveille sans cesse l'intérêt de ses diocésains aux besoins des Églises particulières. Il écrit pendant son épiscopat une dizaine de lettres circulaires et lettres pastorales à ce sujet dans lesquelles il demande des prières et des dons, par exemple, pour l'Église d'Espagne dont l'unité est menacée, pour les projets missionnaires en Algérie, pour l'Église d'Angleterre dont on espère un retour des protestants au bercail, à l'occasion de la famine en Irlande, du typhus au Canada, de la pauvreté chez les chrétiens de Syrie⁹, etc.

Son amour pour l'Église s'est aussi manifesté par sa fidélité et son obéissance aux Souverains Pontifes. N'avait-il pas déjà écrit à son père en 1805: <<Qui n'est pas avec Pierre s'égarer¹⁰>>. Lors de l'affaire de Lamennais au début des années 30, il s'exprime de la même façon dans une lettre à Montalembert:

Mes principes ... tiennent beaucoup à la foi du charbonnier ..., ils vont jusqu'à me faire considérer l'autorité du Chef de l'Église comme une règle et celles des miens, indépendamment de toute décision doctrinale et de tout décret solennel ex cathedra¹¹...

Son attachement au Pape se traduit quelque fois par des actes d'obéissance héroïque, en particulier lors de l'affaire d'Icosie en 1833-35, ou encore lorsque Napoléon III le proposa pour le cardinalat en 1859¹². Il se manifesta en plusieurs autres circonstances par un échange de vue franc et amical sur des points dont l'évêque de Marseille ne partageait pas les orientations de Rome, en particulier lors de la lutte entre le gouvernement et l'Église au sujet des ordonnances scolaires de 1828 et de la liberté d'enseignement au cours des années 1843-1847¹³.

C'est sans exagération que l'évêque de Marseille put écrire à Pie IX, en 1860: <<Le Saint-Siège fut toute ma vie à la tête de mes constantes affections pour l'Église¹⁴>>. Cette constante affection a d'ailleurs été reconnue par ceux qui l'ont bien connu. Mgr Guibert, qui échangea avec le Fondateur tant d'idées sur les problèmes de l'Église, écrivait un jour à un novice: <<Profitez de séjour que notre Père Général fera au milieu de vous pour vous nourrir de l'esprit véritable de notre Société, qui est celui de l'Église¹⁵>>.

Et Mgr Robert, troisième successeur de Mgr de Mazenod à Marseille, ne craignait pas d'affirmer dans une lettre circulaire à l'occasion du décès du Père Joseph Fabre:

La pensée directrice dans la vie de Mgr de Mazenod c'est l'amour de l'Église; mais, chez ce saint évêque, c'était un amour surnaturel, profond, persévérant ou plutôt croissant avec le nombre des années; un amour zélé, un amour ardent, un amour enfin plein de piété filiale ... Le service de l'Église, le bien de l'Église ... telle était la pensée fondamentale et essentielle qui dirigea constamment Mgr de Mazenod dans toutes ses entreprises, pensée principale qui donne à toutes ses oeuvres, malgré leur variété et leur diversité apparente, une grande unité de vie¹⁶.

II. Le Christ¹⁷

On peut se demander pourquoi Mgr de Mazenod et Félicité de Lamennais, également <<touchés>> par les maux de l'Église au début de leur vie sacerdotale, également attachés au Saint-Siège, ont pris bientôt une direction fort opposée: Lamennais, après la condamnation de quelques-unes de ses idées par l'encyclique <<Mirari vos>>, du 15 août 1832, a quitté l'Église et mourut en 1854 sans vouloir recevoir les sacrements ni la sépulture chrétienne; au contraire, Mgr de Mazenod, qui eut pourtant lui aussi à souffrir du Saint-Siège, ne cessa d'aimer et de servir le Pape et l'Église jusqu'à sa mort.

Dans un article sur Mgr de Mazenod et Lamennais, le Père R. Boudens propose la

réponse suivante:

Il semble ... que si les objets de leurs aspirations et leurs luttes ont coïncidé un temps, la façon dont ils les envisageaient, différait déjà complètement. *Ce lumen sub quo* où les mondes se divisent! Pour le Fondateur l'Église garda toujours sa vraie nature. Elle resta, selon la parole de Bossuet: Jésus-Christ répandu et continué; rien autre. La conception que Lamennais se faisait de l'Église a évolué, mais elle fut dès le début incomplète. Dans ses premiers ouvrages déjà il était aisé d'en découvrir la trace. L'auteur voit dans l'Église catholique l'incarnation vivante de cette croyance générale des hommes, à son avis unique garantie contre l'erreur. Après sa condamnation, il glissa sur le plan social: l'Église devint pour lui une institution sociale, mélangée d'un fade déisme, une régulatrice de la société civile d'où a disparu l'éclat divin. Bientôt il perdit de vue l'Église entière, et se tourna de plus en plus vers le peuple ...¹⁸.

Cette explication paraît vraisemblable. Pour Mgr de Mazenod, en effet, le Christ et l'Église c'est tout un. M. Duclaus avait bien compris Eugène lorsqu'il lui écrivait en 1813: <<J'espère que vous ferez beaucoup, parce que vous aimez sincèrement le bon Dieu et l'Église¹⁹>>. L'amour du Christ et de l'Église ne changera pas au cours de sa vie. Dans son dernier Mandement du 16 février 1860 n'a-t-il pas écrit: <<Et comment serait-il possible de séparer notre amour pour Jésus-Christ de celui que nous devons à l'Église? Ces deux amours se confondent; aimer l'Église c'est aimer Jésus-Christ et réciproquement>>.

Cette heureuse <<confusion>> saute aux yeux lorsqu'on lit le premier paragraphe de la Préface où l'Église est ce bel héritage du Sauveur, cette épouse chérie du Fils de Dieu, cette mère qui pleure la défection des enfants qu'elle a engendrés au prix du Sang de Jésus²⁰.

L'amour d'Eugène pour l'Église, qui a des racines profondes dans son enfance, s'est intensifié lors de sa rencontre avec le Christ le Vendredi Saint 1807. Saint Paul avait fait la découverte du Christ et de l'Église sur le chemin de Damas: <<Saul, Saul ... Je suis Jésus que tu persécutes²¹>>. Eugène est également <<saisi par le Christ au moment où il y pensait le moins²²>>. Il aime tout de suite passionnément ce Sauveur qui lui pardonne ses péchés, lui qui avait un si grand besoin de la rédemption²³. Aimé par le Sauveur il répond par un grand amour du Christ et par le don total de sa vie à l'Église et aux âmes²⁴.

<<Le Fondateur n'est pas un théologien, ni un exégète ..., écrit le Père M. Bobichon. Il ne connaît pas Jésus-Christ à la façon d'un Grec qui tente de dominer son sujet, de le disséquer ...; à la façon biblique, sa connaissance est un engagement personnel, un risque pris avec Quelqu'un qu'il adore²⁵.>>

Le Christ Sauveur, ses mystères, sa présence dans l'Eucharistie, ses vertus qu'on doit imiter, est vraiment au coeur des Règles de 1828; son nom apparaît au moins 80 fois²⁶.

Le Christ connu, aimé, adoré, loué est aussi au coeur de la vie de Mgr de Mazenod: souci pour la splendeur du culte, longues démarches pour établir l'adoration perpétuelle dans son diocèse, violence de ses expressions lorsqu'il déplore des sacrilèges contre l'Eucharistie, dévotion aux saints, amis de Jésus, en particulier saint Lazare et sainte Marie-Madeleine et, enfin, amour des hommes, radicalement sauvés par le sang du Christ²⁷.

Mais Eugène a été saisi par le Christ en croix, en contemplant ses souffrances le Vendredi Saint 1807. Il aima donc toujours méditer sur la passion de Jésus et accepta de l'imiter dans les souffrances de la croix. Cette imitation, il se l'imposa lui-même au séminaire et au début de sa vie sacerdotale par des mortifications extraordinaires: jeûne, discipline, sommeil limité, étude et travail apostolique pesant surtout dans les missions paroissiales, tout cela, écrit-il, <<pour conformer mon existence à celle de Jésus-Christ, dont la vie intérieure a été une croix perpétuelle et un constant martyre²⁸>>.

Mais peu à peu de nombreuses croix lui seront imposées providentiellement par les événements de la vie: opposition des curés d'Aix, incompréhension de Mgr de Bausset, archevêque d'Aix, en 1817 et 1823, division et défections parmi les Missionnaires de Provence en 1823, décès du Père Suzanne en 1829 et de plus de 60 Oblats avant 1861, opposition des autorités civiles lors de l'affaire d'Icosie en 1833-35, calomnies publiques contre lui en 1838 et en 1839, travail excessif au cours de son épiscopat pour répondre aux besoins du diocèse de Marseille et de la Congrégation, cardinalat manqué en 1859 et, enfin, six mois de grave maladie en 1861²⁹. Lors des fausses accusations de François Vèze, le Vendredi Saint 1838, Mgr de

Mazenod avait écrit dans son Journal:

Remercions le Seigneur de m'avoir fait participer abondamment cette années aux amertumes de sa passion. C'est à moi d'en profiter ... En voilà assez pour mon Vendredi Saint. Je puis dire cette fois que j'ai été crucifié. Que ce soit bien sur la croix de mon Sauveur. Elle adoucit toutes les amertumes³⁰.

Au cours de sa maladie et << sous l'étreinte des plus vives douleurs il remercie encore le Seigneur, écrit Mgr Jeancard. Quand on est sur la croix il faut s'y tenir >> disait-il³¹.

On ne peut s'étonner que le Fondateur ait donné la croix comme symbole à ses fils missionnaires pour qu'ils la portent jusqu'aux extrémités de la terre. On lit en effet dans les Règles:

Ils n'auront d'autre signe distinctif que celui qui est le propre de leur ministère, c'est-à-dire un crucifix, qu'ils porteront toujours suspendu à leur cou, pendant sur la poitrine, fixé par la ceinture et le cordon auquel il sera attaché. Ce crucifix sera comme le diplôme de leur ambassade aux divers peuples auxquels ils sont envoyés. Il ne servira pas seulement à leur concilier le respect de ceux qu'ils devront évangéliser, mais il sera pour eux-mêmes un moniteur continuel qui leur rappellera l'humilité, la patience, la charité, la modestie et toutes les autres vertus avec lesquelles ils doivent exercer leur très saint et sublime ministère³².

III. Tension vers la sainteté

On a vu que dans le paragraphe 6 de la Préface le Fondateur demandait aux Oblats de travailler sérieusement à devenir des saints. Pour devenir d'autres Jésus-Christ il leur proposait une longue suite de vertus et surtout le don total d'eux-mêmes jusqu'à extinction.

On pourrait écrire longuement sur chacun de ces points et démontrer comment Mgr de Mazenod les a vécus. Je ferai ici un bref exposé de sa tension vers la sainteté et de son désir de martyr, c'est-à-dire de se donner jusqu'à extinction. Parler de ses vertus exigerait un volume qui, d'ailleurs, a été fait dans la *Positio super virtutibus*³³ pour sa cause de canonisation. On a là un étude *ex professo* de l'héroïcité de ses vertus théologiques, cardinales et morales.

Lorsque, en décembre 1851, l'abbé de Mazenod écrivait à l'abbé Tempier << il faut que nous soyons franchement saints nous-mêmes³⁴ >>, et qu'en 1818 il consacrait le plus beau paragraphe de la Préface à l'exposition de ce thème, il proposait à ses fils une réalité bien vive en lui tout au long de sa vie, je veux dire: une véritable tension vers la perfection.

Le coup d'envoi fut sans doute donné lors de sa rencontre avec le Christ crucifié le Vendredi Saint 1807, mais il ne parlera clairement de cet événement qu'en 1814. Dans ses écrits, le désir, la tension vers la sainteté apparaît pour la première fois, après la période de Venise, dans une lettre à son ami Emmanuel Gaultier en décembre 1807:

Que Dieu ... renverse les nombreux obstacles qui s'opposent à ce que j'arrive à un état plus parfait auquel je me crois fortement appelé ... En un mot qu'il me rende digne de la Communion des Saints et me fasse occuper parmi eux la place qu'il paraît m'avoir destinée, mais qu'il me semble être loin encore de mériter³⁵.

Dès son entrée au séminaire, Eugène se considère << indigne ... d'habiter parmi les saints qui composent cette maison vraiment céleste³⁶ >>; il sent alors le besoin de s'humilier, de faire pénitence et de répondre désormais avec une générosité sans faille à toutes les grâces qu'il reçoit. Depuis sa rencontre avec le Christ crucifié en 1807, le Seigneur est et sera de plus en plus l'objet de son amour et de son imitation, mais dans une conférence spirituelle, faite le 19 mars 1809, il constate l'incommensurable distance qui le sépare de la sainteté de son modèle qu'il n'a pas imité dans son innocence mais s'efforcera de servir dans son dévouement³⁷.

A mesure que l'ordination approche, il comprend de plus en plus que le prêtre doit partager la sainteté du Christ et des Apôtres³⁸; c'est pourquoi il veut << établir avec le secours de Dieu, l'oeuvre de sa sanctification sur des fondements solides et inébranlables >> afin de se rendre propre << à sanctifier les autres en travaillant à son propre salut³⁹ >>. On a dans cette lettre à sa mère, du 31 mars 1811, deux des principaux motifs qu'il invoque sans cesse pour tendre vers la sainteté: le sacerdoce et la vie apostolique.

A. Il doit tendre à la perfection parce qu'il est prêtre

Il doit y tendre de toutes ses forces et par tous les moyens parce que <<le sacerdoce est un état de perfection qui exige de ceux qui ont le bonheur d'en être revêtus une fidélité scrupuleuse aux moindres mouvements de l'Esprit Saint>>, écrit-il en janvier 1812⁴⁰. Or, il est convaincu, surtout après l'ordination, qu'il reçoit <<plus de grâces qu'il n'en faut pour faire un grand saint⁴¹>>.

Avant de rentrer à Aix en 1812, il écrit à sa mère: <<Je veux avant de finir vous prévenir que, par état, je suis obligé de tendre à la perfection, et par conséquent de prendre tous les moyens pour y parvenir⁴²>>. Dans ses notes de retraite, en décembre 1814, on lit également: <<Puisque je suis prêtre, il faut que mon unique soin soit d'honorer mon caractère. C'est un état de perfection que le mien, l'ai-je bien compris?⁴³>> Il se reconnaît au contraire tiède et même toujours pécheur; il ajoute:

Étrange lâcheté que la mienne! Personne n'a eu peut-être plus souvent des désirs de perfection, personne n'a été plus épris des charmes de ce bienheureux état, et personne n'a sans doute été plus infidèle aux résolutions qui y ont rapport⁴⁴.

Lors de sa retraite de mai 1824, les instructions du Père Infantin ne le touchent pas beaucoup.

Mes lectures, écrit-il, ont roulé sur la dignité, sur la sainteté du sacerdoce, sur la grièveté des péchés dans les prêtres, sur le danger de pécher et de se perdre si l'on est infidèle à la grâce, négligent dans la pratique des vertus qui doivent constamment orner l'âme d'un prêtre et surtout d'un prêtre qui doit être le modèle, l'appui, le soutien de ceux que la Providence a confiés à sa direction, d'un prêtre à qui Dieu a fait la grâce de sentir que les vertus communes sont insuffisantes pour opérer les merveilles qui doivent accompagner les oeuvres de son ministère, et qui a cherché de se rapprocher des conseils pour mieux accomplir les préceptes ...⁴⁵.

Pendant sa retraite d'ordination à l'épiscopat, en 1832, il commence par faire une triste constatation: il était plus saint lors de ses premières années de vie sacerdotale qu'il ne l'est aujourd'hui⁴⁶. Et, plus loin il ajoute:

Je sais que le sacerdoce dont je suis honoré depuis 21 ans est un état de perfection, et que l'Église en m'élevant à l'épiscopat a dû me croire pourvu abondamment de ces vertus qu'à peine j'aperçois dans mon âme ou dont peut-être à ma honte je suis entièrement dépourvu, mais que puis-je répondre sinon ces paroles du débiteur de l'Évangile: *patientiam habe in me et omnia reddam tibi* (Mt 18, 26). Aidez-moi, Seigneur, et donnez-moi le temps, et je tâcherai de devenir ce que vous voulez que je sois.

Enfin, en 1837, il accepte avec une certaine crainte la lourde responsabilité du diocèse de Marseille. Il note au cours de sa retraite:

C'est une nécessité que Dieu m'impose, ayons bon courage et comptons sur sa grâce. Pour cela avant tout il faut sérieusement travailler à devenir saint. Cette nouvelle phase de ma vie doit être une époque de renouvellement total. J'ai échoué déjà plusieurs fois dans mes bonnes résolutions. La circonstance est trop favorable pour n'en pas profiter. Sans cela que deviendrais-je? ... J'ai vraiment besoin de retremper mon âme. Dieu m'en fournit l'occasion puisqu'il m'impose un grand devoir que je ne pourrai remplir convenablement qu'en marchant sur la trace des saints. C'est déjà une grâce insigne que de le comprendre; il faut que j'y corresponde pour en obtenir le complément⁴⁷.

B. Il doit tendre à la perfection parce qu'il est apôtre

Comme le Christ et ses disciples, Eugène se sent appelé à la vie apostolique, au don total de soi pour le salut des âmes. Dès ses premières années de ministère à Aix il se convainc que le degré de sainteté des âmes qui lui sont confiées dépend pour une bonne part de sa propre sainteté. Au cours de sa retraite de décembre 1812, il écrit:

Pour travailler au salut des âmes, il faut que je sois saint, très saint, premièrement parce que sans cela il serait inutile de tenter la conversion de personne. Comment donner de ce que l'on n'a pas? C'est de sa surabondance qu'il faut donner. Deuxièmement une vertu médiocre ne se soutiendrait pas au milieu du monde, même en y vivant comme je le fais. Il faut absolument que l'éclat des vertus d'un prêtre soit si vif qu'il dissipe toutes les vapeurs qui s'élèvent autour de lui, qu'il perce à travers les plus épais nuages ...⁴⁸.

Durant une brève retraite, faite le 30 octobre 1818 à la veille des premiers voeux prononcés dans la Congrégation, il fait la remarque suivante:

... de ma fidélité à correspondre aux grâces de Dieu, car ce secours est toujours proportionné aux besoins, dépend peut-être le salut d'une infinité d'âmes. Si je suis fervent la communauté, à la tête de laquelle je suis, le deviendra davantage et des populations entières se ressentiront de cet accroissement de zèle et d'amour ...⁴⁹.

En 1826, trois ans après avoir cessé d'aller en mission pour s'occuper d'administration comme vicaire général, il note ceci dans un examen de conscience:

Il est une considération qu'il faut bien se garder d'oublier, c'est l'obligation indispensable de tendre à la perfection. Cette considération me conduira à reconnaître une foule de péchés d'omission, car à quelle sainteté n'oblige pas la vocation apostolique, je veux dire celle qui me dévoue à travailler sans relâche à la sanctification des âmes par les moyens qui ont été employés par les Apôtres⁵⁰.

Enfin, au cours de sa retraite de 1837, il passe en revue les divers groupes de frères de son diocèse et se rend compte de l'étendue de sa mission et du zèle qu'il devra déployer:

C'est ici où se rencontreront les plus grandes difficultés, car s'il a toujours été très difficile aux saints évêques qui nous ont précédés de faire un peu de bien dans leurs diocèses ... que sera-ce aujourd'hui où il n'y a presque plus de foi parmi les chrétiens⁵¹!

C. Il doit tendre à la perfection parce qu'il est religieux

La décision prise avec ses confrères, en 1818, de prononcer des voeux et de devenir religieux ajoute encore à son désir, à l'obligation de devenir saint. Au cours de sa retraite de mai 1818, quelques mois avant l'invitation d'accepter Notre-Dame du Laus et la décision de composer les Règles, il fait cette confidence:

La pensée qui m'occupe, qui m'a charmé tout le temps de mon action de grâce, c'est qu'il faut que je sois saint et, chose surprenante, cela me paraissait si facile que je ne mettais pas en doute que ce ne dut être; un coup d'oeil jeté sur les saints de nos jours comme le bienheureux Léonard de Port-Maurice et le bienheureux Alphonse de Liguori semblait m'encourager et me fortifier. Les moyens qu'il fallait prendre pour y parvenir, loin de m'effrayer, me confirmaient dans cette confiance tant ils étaient aisés. La vue de la perfection religieuse, l'observance des conseils évangéliques se sont montrés à mon esprit dégagés des difficultés que j'y avais rencontrées jusqu'à présent. Je me demandais pourquoi aux voeux de chasteté et d'obéissance que j'ai fait précédemment je n'ajouterais pas celui de pauvreté, et passant en revue les différentes obligations que cette pauvreté évangélique m'imposerait, il n'en est aucune devant laquelle j'ai reculé ... Cet attrait qui m'a toujours porté vers une perfection dont je ne vois pas les exemples autour de moi, dans un pays qui ne sait plus ce que c'est que perfection, qui s'effarouche de tout, etc., cet attrait qui me fait trouver tant de charme dans le récit de ce qu'ont fait les saints, qui me donne des désirs si vifs de les imiter, qui me fait trouver à l'étroit, qui me fait ressentir une si grande gêne parce que je ne puis pas faire tout ce que le Seigneur m'inspire, cet attrait mérite que je le considère, que je m'applique à l'examiner de près, que je le suive en un mot sans m'arrêter davantage ...⁵².

En 1824, il regrette, à cause de sa charge de vicaire général, de ne plus pouvoir vivre dans une communauté oblate afin de s'édifier au contact des Oblats qui <<ont tous incomparablement plus de vertus>> que lui. Il ajoute:

Je vivrai donc toujours dans l'union la plus intime en esprit avec eux, et en attendant que nous puissions former à Marseille une maison régulière qui nous procure une partie des avantages qui se trouvent abondamment dans notre chère maison d'Aix, j'observerai autant qu'il me sera possible la Règle en mon particulier⁵³.

Durant sa retraite de la fin octobre 1831, il médite sur les Règles et en fait un commentaire. Après avoir recopié cette phrase de la Préface <<*serio sanctitati suae incumbere habent*, etc.>> il écrit:

Conçoit-on rien de plus parfait sur la terre? Qu'on relise attentivement ce paragraphe, et quand on l'aura lu qu'on le relise encore. Au jugement de l'Église, il fallait être cela pour embrasser le ministère auquel nous sommes appelés, et pour correspondance à cette perfection

de toutes les puissances de notre âme. Il y va de notre salut. Nous nous y sommes dévoués, consacrés, en entrant dans la Congrégation. Heureuse nécessité⁵⁴!

Quelques lignes plus loin il fait une réflexion analogue à celle de son examen de conscience de 1826:

Une seconde considération prise encore dans la fin de notre Institut me mettra à même de découvrir beaucoup d'omissions à ma grande honte. C'est que nous sommes appelés à remplacer autant qu'il est en nous les divers Ordres religieux qui ont été détruits par la Révolution. De là à quelle perfection ne sommes-nous pas appelés? à la perfection propre à chaque Ordre supprimé. Il n'est pas possible d'embrasser la perfection d'une manière plus étendue. Voilà la fin de l'Institut. Quel sujet de confusion pour moi de l'avoir si mal compris ...⁵⁵!

IV. Le martyre

Dans les Règles de 1818 et de 1827 il est écrit que les Oblats <<tâcheront de devenir d'autres Jésus-Christ⁵⁶>>. L'imitation de Jésus-Christ conduit jusqu'au don total de soi, comme il est dit de diverses façons dans le paragraphe 6 de la Préface. Il est intéressant de voir que Mgr de Mazenod a demandé toute sa vie la grâce de mourir martyr de la foi ou de la charité.

Au cours de sa retraite de préparation au sacerdoce, trois fois il manifeste ce désir⁵⁷. Dans une brève note sur les intentions de ses premières messes, la quatrième est la suivante: <<La persévérance finale et même le martyre ou du moins la mort au service des pestiférés, ou tout autre genre de mort pour la gloire de Dieu et le salut des âmes⁵⁸.>> Cette intention ne provenait pas d'un élan momentané de ferveur puisque pendant quelques années il fit la même prière chaque jour à l'élévation du calice⁵⁹.

Lors de la grave épidémie de choléra qui fit de nombreuses victimes à Marseille en 1835, Mgr de Mazenod écrivit plusieurs fois qu'il désirait mourir en travaillant auprès des malades à qui il ne cessa d'administrer les sacrements⁶⁰. Dans une de ses lettres il avoue alors qu'il envie le sort de ceux qui ont pu <<se sacrifier pour les âmes de leurs frères ... comme notre divin Maître qui est mort pour le salut des hommes⁶¹>>.

Au cours d'une épidémie du même genre en 1849 il exprime les mêmes sentiments, expose sa vie de la même façon et fait cette confidence au Père Tempier:

J'ai toute ma vie désiré mourir victime de la charité. Vous savez que cette couronne me fut enlevée dès les premières années de mon ministère. Dieu avait ses desseins puisqu'il voulait me charger de donner une nouvelle famille à son Église, mais pour moi il eut mieux valu qu'on me laisse mourir de ce bienheureux typhus que j'avais pris au service des prisonniers. Maintenant que cette oeuvre à laquelle Dieu m'avait appelé est faite, que pourrait-il m'arriver de plus heureux que de mourir, surtout si le sacrifice de ma vie pouvait être accepté non seulement pour l'expiation de mes péchés, mais comme un holocauste au Seigneur, pour apaiser la colère de Dieu et détourner le fléau de mon peuple et surtout de nos prêtres dont la vie est si précieuse ...⁶².

On voit donc ici qu'il offre même sa vie à Dieu comme victime en substitution de ses fidèles et surtout de ses prêtres. Il s'en était fallu de peu en 1814 pour que le Seigneur le prenne au mot; ses généreuses dispositions n'ont pas changé en approchant de ses 70 ans, d'autant plus que désormais sa Congrégation peut survivre sans lui. On voit donc encore ici que le Fondateur ne demande à ses fils que ce qu'il a vécu toute sa vie.

V. La réforme du clergé

Je voudrais encore dire un mot sur la réforme du clergé. On a vu que le 22 novembre 1812 M. Duclaus invitait l'abbé de Mazenod à ne pas se comporter en réformateur en arrivant à Aix. Il est intéressant de voir que Fortuné de Mazenod avait déjà donné un conseil semblable à Eugène à son retour en France en 1802:

Connaissant toute la délicatesse de tes moeurs et toute ta franchise, écrit-il, je ne pourrais trop te recommander de modérer ton zèle vis-à-vis d'une foule de jeunes gens insensés et corrompus dont douze ans de révolution ont dénaturé tous les principes. Sois persuadé qu'à ton âge une conduite exemplaire et souvent le silence sont la meilleure censure du vice ...⁶³.

Formé à St-Sulpice, le Père de Mazenod avait à coeur la sainteté des prêtres autant que

le salut des âmes. C'est pourquoi il a mis ce but parmi les fins de la Congrégation. On lit en effet dans le premier article du paragraphe 3 de la Règle de 1818:

Une fin non moins importante de leur Institut, à laquelle ils tâcheront d'arriver avec autant de zèle à la fin principale, c'est de réformer le clergé et de réparer, autant qu'il est en eux, le mal qu'on fait et que font encore les mauvais prêtres, qui ravagent l'Église par leurs insouciances, leur avarice, leurs impuretés, leurs sacrilèges, leurs crimes et forfaits de tout genre.

Quoique les jugements portés sur la gravité du mal soient excessifs, et bien selon le tempérament et le style d'Eugène, les remèdes proposés paraissent sobres, au moins dans l'immédiat. Le Fondateur fait preuve d'équilibre et de réalisme; il connaît ses limites et celles de ses collaborateurs. Les articles 2 et 3 le démontrent.

Art. 2 - Dans les commencements, les missionnaires, à cause de leur jeunesse, ne pourront entreprendre qu'indirectement la guérison de cette plaie profonde par leurs douces insinuations, leurs prières et leurs bons exemples, mais dans quelques années, s'il plaît à Dieu, ils attaqueront de front tous ces vices affreux; ils porteront la sonde, le fer et le feu dans ce chancre honteux qui dévore tout dans l'Église de Jésus-Christ.

Art. 3 - Ils feront alors des retraites aux prêtres, et la maison de la Mission sera toujours un asile ouvert et comme une piscine salutaire où ces malades infects et purulents viendront se laver et commencer une nouvelle vie de pénitence et de réparation.

La Règle de 1825-1826 atténue ces jugements à l'emporte-pièce et modifie ces articles. Le cardinal Pallotta en particulier les avait trouvés exagérés au moins dans la terminologie employée. L'article 2 perd le début << dans les commencements ...>> et la fin << dans quelques années ...>> pour ne conserver que les moyens les plus humbles << surtout la prière, les conseils et l'exemple>>, de même que l'accueil des prêtres dans nos maisons pour des retraites, etc. (art. 3).

D'ailleurs, en 1825-1826, le Père de Mazenod avait déjà une expérience personnelle de ce que peut coûter la réforme du clergé. Nommé vicaire général de Marseille en 1823, il y avait trouvé un clergé peu discipliné, après plus de 25 ans sans évêque résidant. Il avait essayé, d'une façon sans doute trop énergique et rapide, de réformer la partie la moins édifiante du clergé et s'était rendu compte des difficultés d'une semblable opération. Il était mal vu, critiqué, calomnié et avait beaucoup à souffrir d'être mal aimé par le clergé. On comprend qu'à Rome, en 1825-1826, il ait volontiers consenti à adoucir ses termes et couper les ailes à ses projets.

Pratiquement il se rendit compte qu'il était plus facile de bien former le futur clergé que de réformer l'ancien. C'est pourquoi, en France, il accepta pour la Congrégation la direction du séminaire de Marseille en 1827, de celui d'Ajaccio en 1834, de Fréjus en 1851, de Romans en 1853 et de Quimper en 1856, et d'autres au Canada et aux États-Unis avant 1861. Le chapitre de 1850 reconnut la direction des séminaires comme fin secondaire importante de la Congrégation et prépara un texte qui forma l'article 3 de la première partie de la Règle de 1853. Cependant les Oblats suivirent difficilement le Fondateur sur ce point. Peu de Pères aimaient enseigner. Les séminaires de Quimper et de Romans furent abandonnés en 1857. Quant à l'accueil des prêtres dans nos maisons, on le fit surtout à Notre-Dame de Lumières jusqu'en 1840-1841. Mais le Fondateur dut intervenir, s'apercevant que les jeunes Pères qui formaient ces communautés se laissaient plutôt entraînés par les habitudes irrégulières des prêtres peu édifiants qui venaient en retraite. On perdit d'ailleurs alors le sanctuaire de Notre-Dame du Laus, pendant que Notre-Dame de Lumières devint juniorat et Notre-Dame de l'Osier noviciat. D'autre part, d'instinct, Mgr de Mazenod parla de moins en moins de réforme du clergé. Il dut personnellement, comme évêque, prendre des mesures disciplinaires contre une centaine de prêtres⁶⁴, mais le clergé français fut peu à peu mieux formé au siècle dernier, de plus en plus généreux et zélé, avec des modèles de curés dont plusieurs sont aujourd'hui bienheureux et saints.

Saint Paul a écrit aux Corinthiens: << Je vous en conjure donc, soyez mes imitateurs (comme je le suis du Christ)⁶⁵>>; je pense que Mgr de Mazenod aurait pu faire la même invitation pressante à ses fils. A nous de répondre.

- 1 Mazenod à Daly, 6 décembre 1845, à Belon, 15 décembre 1848, dans *Écrits Oblats (Éc.O.)*, 3, 19, 32.
- 2 RAMBERT, T., *Mgr de Mazenod*, I, p. 464.
- 3 Nous avons déjà quelques bonnes études sur ce thème, cf. surtout: M. GILBERT, <<Le service de l'Église dans la vocation oblate>>, dans *Études Oblates (Ét.O.)*, 15 (1956), pp. 35 et ss.; E. LAMIRANDE, <<Le zèle de toutes les Églises chez Mgr de Mazenod...>>, dans *Ét.O.*, 19 (1960), pp. 108-146; P. SION, <<L'amour du Fondateur pour l'Église>>, dans *Vie Oblate Life (V.O.L.)*, 36 (1977), pp. 103-126.
- 4 Jeancard au cardinal A. Barnabo, 2 février 1861. A. Prop. Fide, Scrit. rif. nei Congressi, Francia 1857-1861, vol. 4, f. 707.
- 5 Mazenod à Vincens, 9 novembre 1853, dans *Éc.O.*, 11, p. 175.
- 6 PIELORZ, J., *La vie spirituelle de Mgr de Mazenod 1782-1812...*, Ottawa, 1956, pp. 145-150, 157-161; P. SION, <<L'Amour du Fondateur...>>, dans *V.O.L.*, 36 (1977), pp. 105-111.
- 7 Préface et premier chapitre des Règles de 1818 et de 1828.
- 8 Mazenod à Mgr Bourget, 15 février 1844, dans *Éc.O.*, 1, p. 79.
- 9 Volume des mandements, 10 avril 1842, 14 octobre 1843, 21 décembre 1845, 24 février 1847, 6 septembre 1847, 29 juillet 1860, etc., aussi E. LAMIRANDE, <<Le zèle de toutes les Églises chez Mgr de Mazenod>>, dans *Ét.O.*, 19 (1960), pp. 108-146.
- 10 Mazenod au Président de Mazenod, 16 août 1805, dans *Éc.O.*, 14.
- 11 Mazenod à Montalembert, 24 octobre 1831, dans T. RAMBERT, *Mgr de Mazenod*, I, p. 592.
- 12 SION, P., <<L'amour du Fondateur pour l'Église>>, dans *V.O.L.*, 36 (1977), pp. 119-120; R. BOUDENS, <<Mgr de Mazenod et Lamennais>>, dans *Ét.O.*, 8 (1949), pp. 233-234.
- 13 BOUDENS, R., *Mgr de Mazenod et la politique*, Lyon, 1951, pp. 215-248, 230-258; J. LEFLON, *Mgr de Mazenod...*, II, pp. 299-332, III, pp. 185-217.
- 14 Mazenod à Pie IX, 20 février 1860, dans *Reg. lettres adm.*, vol. VII, p. 79.
- 15 PAGELLE DE FOLLENAY, J., *Vie du cardinal Guibert*, I, Paris, 1896, p. 161.
- 16 Lettre circulaire de Mgr Robert, 28 octobre 1892, Arch. archevêché de Marseille.
- 17 On trouve de bonnes études sur ce thème, cf. en particulier: J. PÉTRIN, <<Qui est le Christ pour l'Oblat?>>, dans *Ét.O.*, 18 (1959), p. 127 et ss.; F. JETTÉ, <<La sequela Christi dans la vie oblate>>, dans *Ét.O.*, 28 (1969), pp. 3-13; M. BOBICHON, <<Passionné d'amour pour Jésus-Christ>>, dans *V.O.L.*, 36 (1977), pp. 93-112; A. D'ADDIO, <<Eugène de Mazenod et le Christ>>, dans *V.O.L.*, 38 (1979), pp. 169-200, etc.
- 18 BOUDENS, R., <<Mgr de Mazenod et Lamennais>>, dans *Ét.O.*, 8 (1949), p. 236.
- 19 Duclaux à Eugène, 2 octobre 1815, dans YENVEUX, *Les Saintes Règles*, I, p. 48.
- 20 Préface et art (682) des Règles de 1828.
- 21 Acta 9, 1-9.
- 22 Retraite de 1814, 13^{ème} méditation, dans *Éc.O.*, 14.
- 23 Retraite de décembre 1818, dans *Éc.O.*, 14.
- 24 SION, P., <<L'amour du Fondateur...>>, dans *V.O.L.*, 36 (1977), pp. 105-106; la thèse de Casimir LUBOWICKI traite entièrement de ce thème: *Mystère et dynamique de l'amour dans la vie du bienheureux Eugène de Mazenod*, Rome 1990, 422 pp.
- 25 BOBICHON, M., <<Passionné d'amour pour Jésus Christ>>, dans *V.O.L.*, 36 (1977), p. 95.
- 26 PÉTRIN, J., <<Qui est le Christ pour l'Oblat?>>, dans *Ét.O.*, 18 (1959), pp. 128 et 147; et A. D'ADDIO, <<Eugène de Mazenod et le Christ>>, dans *V.O.L.*, 38 (1979), pp. 181-185.
- 27 BOBICHON, M., <<Passionné d'amour pour Jésus-Christ>>, dans *V.O.L.*, 36 (1977), pp. 94-97.
- 28 Retraite de 1812, dans *Éc.O.*, 14, ?
- 29 D'ADDIO, A., <<Eugène de Mazenod et le Christ>>, dans *V.O.L.*, 38 (1979), pp. 191-199.
- 30 Journal Mazenod, 13 avril 1838. Orig. arch. Post. omi.
- 31 Jeancard au card. J. Barnabo, 2 février 1861.
- 32 <<Règle de 1818>>, dans *Missions OMI*, 1951, pp. 57-58.
- 33 E. de Mazenod, *Positio super virtutibus*, Romae, 1947.
- 34 Lettre du 13 décembre 1815, dans *Éc.O.*, 6, 13.
- 35 Doc. 22.

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- 36 Doc. 28.
37 Doc. 48.
38 Doc. 66.
39 Doc. 83.
40 Doc. 103.
41 Doc. 98.
42 Doc. 106 et 108.
43 Doc. 130.
44 Doc. 130.
45 Doc. 156.
46 Doc. 166.
47 Doc. 185.
48 Doc. 130.
49 Doc. 130.
50 Doc. 157.
51 Doc. 185.
52 Doc. 145.
53 Doc. 156.
54 Doc. 163.
55 Doc. 157.
56 *Missions OMI*, 1951, p. 55.
57 Retraite de décembre 1811; sur le jugement, sur la mort, dans *Ec.O.*, 14; même désir dans retraite de 1812, dans *Ec.O.*
58 Intentions des premières messes, décembre 1811, dans *Ec.O.*, 14.
59 Retraite pour l'épiscopat, 1832, dans *Ec.O.*, 15; Mazenod à Baudrand, 27-30 octobre 1853, dans *Ec.O.*, 2, 63. Dans cette lettre le Fondateur écrit: <<J'étais seul alors, je pouvais faire ce voeu>>. Il semble donc qu'il a cessé de demander cette grâce, chaque jour à la messe, lors de sa grave maladie prise dans les prisons en 1814 ou au début de la fondation de la Congrégation.
60 Mazenod à Mgr L. Frezza, 27 avril 1835, dans T. RAMBERT, I, 67-671; à Tempier, 19 juillet 1835, dans *Ec.O.*, 8, 151. Il expose la même pensée dans plusieurs autres lettres de 1835: à C.Aubert, 10 mars; à Mille, 19 juillet; à Tempier, 20 et 31 juillet, etc.
61 Mazenod à Guigues, 1^{er} août 1835, dans *Ec.O.*, 8, 158.
62 Mazenod à Tempier, 12 septembre 1849, dans *Ec.O.*, 10, 254; cf. aussi à Vincens, 12 octobre 1849, dans *Ec.O.*, 10, 260.
63 Fortuné à Eugène, 15 octobre 1802.
64 BEAUDOIN, Y., *François de Paule Henri Tempier - Second père des OMI*, Rome, 1987, pp. 59-60.
65 I Cor 4, 16; 11, 1; idem aux Phil., 3, 17, etc.

The Oblate "Establishment" in Rome

III. The First Oblate Community in Rome, 1863-1873 (continued)

B. Via Montanara, 115 (1865-1866)

The Oblate community's location at St. Bridget's on the Piazza Farnese in Rome was from the very beginning meant to be a temporary arrangement. It was only because no other suitable place had been found in time that the first Oblate community took up residence there in 1863. During the little more than two years that they occupied whatever space they had rented from the Holy Cross Fathers, Father Tamburini was looking for another location and the Roman friend of the Oblates, Msgr. Francesco Nardi was on the alert for a church in the city that might be entrusted to the Oblates.

Then Father Tamburini found another location, though we do not know how or exactly when he discovered it. In his register he made this terse entry:

After mature reflection and for good reasons we left St. Bridget's on March 31, 1865, and established ourselves on the via Montanara, 115, where we have rented rooms that are more spacious and suitable¹.

It would have been interesting to know how long this "mature reflection" was in progress, who was involved in it, what the "good reasons" for leaving St. Bridget's were, and also from whom the new space was rented and on what terms.

In the *Codex Historicus* of the Roman Scholasticate we find the following:

While our students were thus giving themselves completely to their studies, Father Tamburini had other concerns. Indeed, it was not possible to remain indefinitely with the Holy Cross Fathers at St. Bridget's, where, moreover, things were too cramped. The Reverend Father Procurator had found apartments very close to the church of Santa Maria in Campitelli, which evokes a cherished memory in every Oblate. (The *Codex* now quotes Father Tamburini's text quoted above²).

The only piece of new information here is that the space at St. Bridget's was "too cramped". The *Codex Historicus* entries for this early period were made years later and so are not always to be considered as a true source: more than one entry is rather the result of some research or interpretation.

The move from St. Bridget's to the Via Montanara was definitively made on March 31, 1865, which in that year was Friday in the 4th week of Lent. This was the day that they actually left St. Bridget's and took up residence on the Via Montanara. We do not know how much time or trouble the moving required; we do know that the student Fathers, at least Father Corne, understandably found the move a bit bothersome. In his April 22, 1865 letter to the Superior General we read:

In your letter to Father Lerond you expressed the desire of knowing the soonest date when we would be free from our examinations and what documents our successors ought to bring along. I had taken on the task of answering, for I counted on giving you that information very quickly. But then there unexpectedly came the change of residence and with that the thousand and one little things that take up one's time³.

What does Father Corne mean when he says that this change of residence came "unexpectedly"? It would certainly seem to mean that the two student Fathers were taken off guard, and this would indicate that Father Tamburini had left them out of the "mature reflection" process and more or less suddenly confronted them with the news of moving over to the Via Montanara.

We gain a few more grains of precious information about this new Oblate residence from

Father Augustin Gaudet, Vicar of Missions of Texas, who stayed there from May 27, 1865 until July of the same year. In his letter to Father Joseph Fabre, the Superior General, written on June 11th at the Via Montanara residence, we read:

All of our Fathers at the Procuratorship here are well and the two students are getting ready to pass their first examination which will be in theology. These two young priests are very edifying and studious. This is really a good beginning: may the good Lord and the Holy Virgin send us many others of their stamp and spirit.

The house that they presently occupy is at the foot of the Capitol. From my room I see the statues⁴ as well as the church of the Ara Coeli⁵ where I like to go and pray. If you know the church of Sta. Maria in Campitelli, where the tomb of Cardinal Pacca is⁶, well, the house of our Fathers almost touches it, something that makes it very convenient for going there to visit the Blessed Sacrament. But they will soon have the pleasure of being able to say Mass within their own house. I gave a hand in preparing the decoration of the altar and of the room they are setting aside for this purpose. This building has ten rooms which are somewhat irregular in shape, but quite spacious and well ventilated; their parlor is very convenient. Only they are on a street that is very noisy, at night as much as by day⁷.

Missions ... in 1865 published material about the Oblate missions in Texas and Mexico wherein is included Father Augustin Gaudet's own account of his trip to Rome in that year. He thus describes his May 27th arrival at the Via Montanara Oblate residence:

In the afternoon of the same day, a train brought us slowly to Rome. After five hours of monotony across the steppes which separate Civita-Vecchia from Rome, St. Peter's dome happily brought joy to my eyes and a special beat to my heart. Here I was in the Eternal City. But it was late, night was coming on, and I had to find quickly the Via Montanara where our Procuratorship was located. My driver at first knew everything, was familiar with everything; but the fellow, after giving me the run around for over twenty minutes in a maze of streets and lanes, passed through the Via Montanara without even being aware of it: I myself had to stop him and make him go back the way we had come to find no. 115. I went through a narrow lane, walked up a dark stairs. At the second landing I read on the door: R.P. TAMBURINI, *Procuratore de gli Oblati*. I had arrived. Brother François opened the door, and the Reverend Fathers Lerond and Corne came and did the welcoming honors. The Reverend Father Procurator, who was absent, did not delay in coming in. I was really glad to see this novitiate confrere of mine. These good Fathers showed in my regard an attention that was more than fraternal and that for the more than seven weeks that I had the pleasure of being their guest⁸.

From Father Gaudet we get more precise information about the location of this new residence. The Via Montanara is in a maze of little streets and practically borders on the church of Santa Maria in Campitelli; it is at the foot of the Capitol Hill and from inside the residence can be seen the church of the Ara Coeli and the statues of Castor and Pollux, all of which are on top of this Hill. The entrance to the building is up a staircase to a second landing. The Oblates have ten spacious rooms in the building, irregular in shape, all of them well ventilated; their parlor -- probably the community room -- is very suited for its purpose.

A small portion of the Via Montanara still exists today, but a part of the Via Montanara that the Oblates knew as well as the Piazza Montanara into which the street led was destroyed at the turn of the century when the area around the Capitol Hill was cleared to make room for what is today the Via del Teatro di Marcello. In this destruction, the building that the Oblates had rented also disappeared and the immediate vicinity around Santa Maria in Campitelli was also rearranged since the time that the Founder and the Oblates of the Via Montanara saw it. Both the Piazza and the Via Montanara took their name from the noble family Montanari who had their residence here. This family is now extinct.

Father Gaudet mentions the noise by day and night. The general area was a busy one and the Piazza and Via Montanara particularly so. The Piazza was surrounded by shops and businesses of every sort, as well as low class inns and drinking places. People already working or seeking to be hired to work in field and or vineyards gathered there to be hired, to be paid, to get tools, food, to relax and celebrate⁹.

Father Gaudet also mentions that one of these rooms was to be set aside for the Oblate's

own chapel where they would be able to say Mass and keep the Blessed Sacrament. Father Gaudet mentions how he himself helped to prepare and decorate the altar and the room concerned. In this regard, we also have the following entry in the Procurator's Register:

On October 19, 1865, the day of the feast of St. Peter of Alcantara, Bishop Sillani, former Bishop of Terracina and member of the Congregation of the Precious Blood, performed in our house chapel the consecration of the mobile altar destined for this same chapel; he did this in the presence of the community gathered together and of a priest of the Congregation of the Precious Blood. He also consecrated the silver chalice which we are using to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice¹⁰.

Father Gaudet was there from May 27th into July and this consecration took place on October 19th, that is, more than three months later. Does this mean that the Oblates on the Via Montanara had their own chapel only from the date of this consecration onwards or that they had already been using the privilege of a house chapel but on that day their altar and special chalice were consecrated? Whatever the case may be, having their own house chapel was also a distinct improvement from their situation at St. Bridget's; furthermore, this consecration would seem to indicate that at this time Father Tamburini saw the Via Montanara residence a something rather permanent, and not as an interim measure as St. Bridget's had been.

It should also be noted that the Oblate community that was gathered together for that event was a community that included Father Ambroise Tamburini, Brother François Gandolfi, and two new student priests, Fathers Théophile Dours and Victor Roux. Fathers Lerond and Corne had gone back to France in the meantime.

The Oblates stayed at this location on the Via Montanara from March 31, 1865 until May 25, 1866. With the exception of the convenience of having their own House chapel for Mass and the Blessed Sacrament, the tenor and rhythm of Oblate living already established while at St. Bridget's continued: Brother Gandolfi continued to do all the domestic chores; Father Tamburini as Procurator and Superior had his work as before; the student priests were finishing their examinations for degrees (Father Lerond and Corne) and, once the new academic year had started, Fathers Dours and Roux were studying and going to their classes.

1. Visit of Father Augustin Gaudet¹¹

Father Augustin Gaudet's first trip to Europe (via Canada) began in June 1863 and ended in January 1864. He had come to explain to the General Administration what the situation was in Texas, along the Rio Grande and into Mexico, and especially the new missionary needs and opportunities that were developing in that area. He had hoped to return to Texas with more Oblate personnel, and did indeed return with two Oblate Brothers, but with no new Oblate priests¹².

Father Gaudet's second trip to Europe is the one which brought him to Rome and to the Oblate community on the Via Montanara¹³. This second trip came as a total surprise to the Superior General in Paris¹⁴. In the written report that he presented to Father Joseph Fabre and his Council, Father Gaudet explains its origin as follows:

Towards the middle of the month of March, the Bishop of Monterey's secretary arrived at Matamoros. He was en route to Europe, to Rome, on behalf of his Bishop, to treat important matters concerning the diocese. As part of his mission, he was, when passing through Paris, to approach our Most Reverend Superior General and offer to our Congregation the direction of the major seminary at Monterey itself. The worthy Bishop, who had been our host at Brownsville for four months, at the time when all the Bishops had been expelled from the Republic, had strongly instructed his secretary to ask me, when passing through Matamoros, to accompany him to Europe so that I could second his request to our Most Reverend Father. In spite of my great desire to please this venerated Prelate who has been a long-standing benefactor of ours, reasons of propriety made me duty-bound to decline this honorable invitation. I was nevertheless happy to be thus afforded such a favorable opportunity to send along news of ourselves to France, to give an account of our work and our situation.

Our Fathers saw things from another point of view. The urgent needs of the Mission, the

uncertain status of our correspondence which for some eighteen months had not brought us any response, the actual circumstance which they considered as a manifestation of God's will, were for them all so many reasons they considered as sufficient to authorize them to take the resolution they had in mind. They deliberated together and unanimously decided to take upon themselves the responsibility in regard to our Most Reverend Father for my trip to France. In spite of my reluctance, I thought it best to comply. Armed with a collective letter signed by the Fathers ... I set out in the company of the Bishop's secretary¹⁵.

This is further reflected in the Minutes of the General Council meeting that took place on April 19, 1865:

Our Most Reverend Father invited Reverend Father Gaudet to present to the Council the reasons why he has come to France. Here is the summary of his presentation:

The sudden and extraordinary growth taken by the mission of our Fathers established along the Rio Grande, as a result of the war with the United States, makes an increase in the number of apostolic workers urgent. The Fathers of this mission have concluded that, seeing the great difficulty of informing the Most Reverend Father General of the situation and, as a consequence, of receiving prompt assistance from him, the most effective means were to send as their deputy to France the Reverend Father Gaudet, their Vicar. Independently of the Mission's needs, the Bishop of Monterey was offering to the Congregation the direction of his major seminary. All of these considerations together determined our Fathers of the Rio Grande to pronounce themselves in favour and urge this deputation. The Reverend Father Vicar says he considered it would be going against the Will of God if he were to refuse to go along with the unanimous decision of the Fathers of his Vicariate. He then set out and arrived here to us in Paris on April 18th after a crossing that lasted 25 days.

Our Most Reverend Father then communicated to the Council the collective letter written by our Fathers of the Rio Grande. In this letter the Fathers ask to be pardoned for the measure they undertook without the prior authorization of Our Most Reverend Father, as the canons of the Congregation require; and they explained as above the needs of their mission¹⁶.

Because some of the diocesan affairs that the Bishop of Monterey wanted his secretary to settle in Rome would also affect the work of the Oblates along the Rio Grande, Father Gaudet decided to go to Rome and stay there until the Monterey matters were dealt with at the Holy See and he could thereafter himself come to an agreement with the Bishop's secretary. Thus his trip to Rome and his stay with the Oblates on the Via Montanara.

Father Augustin Gaudet's own description of his arrival in Rome and at the Oblates on the Via Montanara was already quoted above. Father Tamburini noted this visit as follows in his register:

On May 27, 1865, Father Gaudet, the Vicar Provincial of Texas, arrived here. He came to Rome on business concerning the missions in his charge and to receive a special blessing from the Holy Father. He shared with us the difficulties and obstacles that Providence has confronted them with in their missions; and, after having edified us by his piety and regularity, and when his business was successfully concluded, he left us for Marseilles on July 19th of the same year¹⁷.

Father Augustin Gaudet himself is our chief sources about his stay in Rome and at the Via Montanara residence from May 27th to July 19th. One is his account published in *Missions*¹⁸; the other is a series of letters written while in Rome to Superior General Father Joseph Fabre¹⁹.

Father Gaudet seems to have been a rather open, active and out-going person. We can be reasonably sure that the things he mentions in the above sources were things that were also shared and in part lived by the Oblates on the Via Montanara. His stay in Rome was marked with several major interests: Pope Pius IX -- a papal audience and otherwise seeing him and praying with him; visiting Rome both as a pilgrim and as a tourist; contacts with significant ecclesiastical persons and looking after the affairs that concern the Texas/Mexico missions. The latter was his real purpose in coming; the rest was a very welcome bonus, all more appreciated because, in those days, the opportunity of coming to Rome was rare and was usually a once-in-a-lifetime occasion.

Father Gaudet seemed more than happy that his stay in Rome was such a long one. He rushed into Roman life immediately, so to speak, and his first objective was certainly to see the Holy Father. In his words:

I had all the time needed to get oriented in Rome, to see it and to enjoy it. My debut could not have been a more fortunate one: the day after my arrival²⁰, the beatification ceremony of the Bl. Berkmans²¹ took place in St. Peter's.

I shall not try to describe this imposing and stunning spectacle, no more than the various emotions one experiences there from. If one is not in Heaven, one must be quite near it. When they let the veil that hides the Beatified person fall: the silence that spontaneously settles in; the thousands who gaze immobile and fixedly at the Holy image -- these are things one does not describe. One can say that in such moments each one has a glimpse of the heavenly fatherland, a glimpse of God surrounded by the splendor of the Saints, as Scripture says.

I search in vain for the figure of Pius IX in this imposing Senate. He only comes in the evening to pray before the image of the Beatified person; only at canonizations does he assist in person. Our residence was too distant for us to return in the evening in order to see the Holy Father.

The next day²² I amply made up for having been thus deprived [when I went] into the Sistine Chapel where His Holiness assisted at the anniversary service for Gregory XVI. I had seen the Pope for this first time, but had he seen me? Probably not. So I had to furnish him with the opportunity -- such was the goal of all my wishes in coming to Rome²³.

Father Gaudet gives a most detailed account of his audience with Pope Pius IX in his June 11th letter to the Superior General:

In Rome, as you know, everything moves slowly. Father Tamburini is beginning to know this from experience. On the very next day after my arrival he advised me to write to Msgr. Pacca²⁴ and ask him for an audience with the Holy Father. I did this immediately²⁵, and after eight days of waiting an affirmative reply finally reached our Procuratorship. It was last Thursday, [June] 8th, at 11.30 that I climbed the marble steps of the Vatican in the company of Father Tamburini. At 11.45 the Holy Father's little bell gave the signal that my turn had arrived to present myself to His Holiness²⁶.

When he saw me, the Holy Father began to joke about my name, then gave me his hand to kiss so that his feet would not be bothered -- they had told me not to insist [on kissing his foot]. So there I was alone, standing face to face with the noble figure of Pius IX: he did give me a chance to begin speaking to him. "Well! What have you come to do in Europe, here in Rome?"

After I had replied to this in order, he exclaimed: "Mexico! Mexico! Things are certainly not going well there! This Emperor! I did not expect that of him. And then there's Juarez who come into the scene and now the Americans! And what you are doing amidst all that?"

I replied that very soon we will for fourteen years have been evangelizing the two shores of the Rio Grande; that we have an establishment on the side of Texas in the diocese of Galveston, another in Nuevo Leon and a third in Tamaulipas.

"I had given a Bishop to Tamaulipas and several others for Mexico. The country is such a large one." He then spoke to me about the *good* Bishop of Linares (Monterey) and [asked] what his secretary was doing, this man who has ideas that are somewhat ---- he did not finish the phrase but with a gesture had me understand what he wanted to say.

I replied that I had made the trip with him and that he is at this moment here in Rome. He had me talk about the accident that had happened to him and how it had occurred.

After I had talked to him about our works, our plans, the things that were asked of us, he seemed very pleased and immediately added: "Well! I bless you. Above all, do much good among the young clergy. The bishops are good, one can still get something from the secular clergy, but the religious, the religious, how bad they are, they are looking only for money²⁷."

As I noticed that my visit was drawing to a close, I took out from under my mantle the petition by which I requested His Holiness to give me in his kindness and authentic testimony of my visit, that is to say, his handwritten blessing for the Fathers and Brothers of my Vicariate, for

the Sisters of the Incarnate Work, and finally for all the Faithful entrusted to our care. This was the key moment of our interview. "But -- don't you know it is forbidden to present something in writing to the Pope?"

"Most Holy Father, I come from so far away that I can hardly know the practices of the Court of Rome."

"Come, come," he said smiling, "You will accuse yourself in confession of this little lie." At the same time he took my paper and his pen, read the petition and write: Die 9 Junii 1865.

Benedicat vos Deus et regat vos in viis suis.

PIUS PP. IX²⁸.

I took back my piece of paper, threw myself on my knees at his feet and asked His Holiness to bless the whole Congregation in my person. I kissed his hand and thus ended this visit which I will remember with all the more appreciation because I had never expected such a happy event in my life. It had all lasted only a short quarter of an hour; but I assure that this Father *par excellence* know how to fill it to overflowing. Those who had preceded me had only, so to speak, gone in and come out again, something that discouraged me a little; it is true that I was the last one, yet a Cardinal was in the waiting room and the Pope knew it, most likely to have more leisure with His Eminence, the Pope wanted against the etiquette to finish with the ordinary visitors, but that was not done at the expense of my poor person²⁹.

Father Gaudet had not yet finished with Pope Pius IX, so to speak. In his own words:

When someone has once seen Pius IX, has had the happiness to speak to him, he wants to see him again; one never wearies of contemplating this noble and venerable figure from which the majesty of the Supreme Pontiff shines forth without harming the gentle kindness of the Father's goodness. And so, during my stay in Rome, there was scarcely a public appearance of his at which I was not present, and always as close to his person as possible, so that I might better gather up the abundance of his blessings.

In the Sistine Chapel, at the procession of the Blessed Sacrament³⁰, at St. John Lateran, everywhere the Holy Father was the objective I sought. But it was especially on the solemnity of St. Peter³¹ that I contemplated him at leisure when he was celebrating Mass at the altar of the Confession. I had taken a place right close to the altar on the epistle side, touching the credence table where his chalice stood. You can appreciate how I was able to follow his every move. In that moment I regretted that I did not have beside me all our Fathers of Texas and Mexico. I was too happy, too much favoured; I would have liked them to be there to share my happiness and to accompany me elsewhere in so many visits and circumstances that are equally dear to one's heart, all eminently made fertile by piety³².

Like so many Oblates before and after him, Father Gaudet visited Rome as a pilgrim/tourist:

If I wanted to mention here all that places that are venerable by the memories attached to them and that I had the happiness of visiting, I would never finish and that would be an abuse of your time, to say nothing of your patience. I will tell you only that the pilgrimage that appealed to me most during my stay in Rome, the centre of my devotion, was the Mamertine prison. I always found it difficult to leave this frightful dungeon where St. Peter spend nine months, bound in chains. I had the great honor of celebrating Mass there once, and each day during the octave of the Holy Apostles I went there to drink from the miraculous fountain that the Saint had caused to spring up there in order to baptize his guardians; I am bringing a bottle back so that our Fathers can taste it. Since I am on the topic of St. Peter, I must tell you that I also saw his chains, that I touched them and kissed them on two occasions. My God, how much this long and heavy chain impressed me! I also visited the prison of the Apostle Paul, the room of St. Aloysius Gonzaga on the day of his feast³³, that of St. Francis of Assisi, of St. Dominic, of St. Pius V, of Blessed Leonard. Once I said Mass where his body is laid to rest; they were kind enough to let me see it. I asked from him the apostolic spirit. Twice I climbed the *Scala Santa*³⁴. At St Praxedes I venerated the pillar of the flagellation. Rome is nothing but a reliquary: one cannot enter a church without being deeply affected and impressed. Instead of stopping to admire works of art, one feels the need to kneel, one is inclined to remain and never to leave ...³⁵.

It would be an error on our part to see in these texts of Father Gaudet and in his approach and reaction to the Pope and to Rome as betraying a naive and effusive person, someone who has not matured beyond the level of a starry-eyed romantic who still labors under superficial appeal of an unenlightened and childish piety. Father Gaudet, as so many others of his time, may be uncritically receptive to many things but his piety is entirely authentic: we must not forget that he is a rugged Oblate missionary who has had much firsthand experience of a wild and violent frontier, who has seen life in the raw and has witnessed and been obliged to cope with chaos and suffering that is quite comparable to anything that the so-called Third World displays today.

There were also the many visits to important people that Father Gaudet made while in Rome. He tells us that right after his June 8th audience with Pius IX, he and Father Tamburini

went to dine at Monsignor Nardi's place. We had visited him the day before when he was about to go to an audience with several lawyers on unexpected and urgent business; and so he could only grant us a few moments. He imposed on us as a *penance* for having come to disturb him to come back the next day and dine with him. What a kind Monsignor! How much one is at ease with him³⁶!

Besides Cardinals Barnabo and Catarini, he also met with Bishop Ignace Bourget of Montreal, who happened to be in Rome to settle some matter of contention between his diocese and the Sulpicians. In Father Gaudet's words:

I have also been to visit the Bishop of Montreal. The first time I did not find him at home where he was residing; the next day, Pentecost Sunday³⁷, the Bishop came here to us and found in his turn that I was not at the Procuratorship. I had gone to the Sixtine Chapel where I found the Pope surrounded by the Sacred College ... Again I went to see the Bishop of Montreal and this time I found him at home. His Lordship found that I had really aged. I found the Bishop kind as always, but a little sad. His secretary, whom I have known for a long time already, came the next day to return my visit and gave me the reason for this sadness. The affairs he came to settle are running into difficulty and keeping him in Rome longer than he wanted to be. The Sulpicians, whom I have also been to visit, say they are strong in their cause and are unafraid³⁸.

The impression one gets when following Father Gaudet's activities in Rome is that he was indeed a dynamic person who, in terms of pursuing his business matters, did not let the grass grow under his feet, did not delay in meeting all the right people and made sure he touched all the bases, so to speak. His ubiquitousness in the Rome of the Pope, of the saints and churches, of the Roman Curia and its offices betrays the efficiency of one who is generally referred to as a "big time operator". This is especially true in regard to the business regarding his own missions which had brought him to Rome to begin with. As this question would lead us far afield into the history of the Oblates in Texas/Mexico, and as it is not likely that Father Gaudet shared these complex negotiations with the Oblate community on the Via Montanara, we will be content with merely quoting a scientific assessment of Father Gaudet's 1865 efforts in Rome: "Father Gaudet ... did the mission a very good service in Rome³⁹."

2. Fathers Charles Lerond and Jean Corne return to France

Because the negotiations about Mexico had taken so much time, Father Augustine Gaudet left Rome and the Oblate community there on July 19, 1865. He had been the second Oblate from elsewhere to come and visit the Oblate community in Rome.

The next ones to leave were the two student priests who had completed their "mission" of studies in Rome. As Father Tamburini notes in his register:

The Reverend Fathers Lerond (Charles) and Corne (Jean), having completed their studies in canon law and taken their degrees, have been recalled to France and have left Rome on August 16, 1865⁴⁰.

3. The possibility of a church in Rome

In the Minutes of the August 14, 1865 General Council meeting, we read:

Letter from Father Tamburini, Procurator of the Congregation, in Rome. He is negotiating

to obtain the church or oratory of St. Barbara and the adjoining house. We are of the opinion that he ought to promote this request and that he accept the direction of this chapel, called of St. Barbara and of St.[Thomas], even without a contract, if he cannot have one accepted that is in due form and reasonably advantageous⁴¹.

No other piece of evidence regarding this venture seems to exist.

The church of St. Barbara and Thomas was located on the Via Giubbonari which leads eastward out of Campo dei Fiori and into Piazza Benedetto Cairoli in front of the church of San Carlo ai Catinari. The origin of this church is unknown but its existence can be traced back beyond the 12th century. It was restored in 1306, again in 1680 and once more in 1858. Since 1600 it belonged to a Confraternity of booksellers. The church is still there today: in fact, it is presently being restored.

Though we do not know anything about Father Tamburini's negotiations for this church beyond the quotation above -- how he came upon it (through Mgr. Nardi, perhaps?), how he saw it serving an Oblate interest, why nothing ever came of it -- the keen intent of the General Administration to obtain a church in Rome is clear: the Administration was so keen that it was willing to take the risk of not even working out a prior proper contract.

4. Two new student priests

The Minutes of the August 28, 1865 General Council meeting tell us:

Brother Gubbins, an Irishman, will be professor of philosophy in the place of Father Dours who is sent to Rome with Father Roux (Victor) to take their degrees there⁴².

Their arrival in Rome is noted by Father Tamburini in his record:

The Reverend Fathers Dours and Roux, sent to Rome by the Very Reverend General to take their course in Canon Law, arrived in this City on September 19, 1865⁴³.

Father Théophile Eugène DOURS was born on January 11, 1839, in the village of Rocher (diocese of Viviers), not far from the shrine of N.D. de Bon Secours. He received his first education at Viviers, then entered the minor seminary of Bourg-Saint-Andéol, and then the college at Aubenas. In this latter institution he learned about the Oblates and, after making a retreat, he decided to join this Congregation. He entered the novitiate at N.D. de l'Osier on December 8, 1858 and made his oblation on August 15, 1860. He received his scholastic formation at Montolivet and Autun; here he was ordained priest on May 21, 1864. As a scholastic he had distinguished himself by the quality of his studies and ability to explain what he had learned. He was assigned to teach philosophy at the Autun scholasticate. In August 1865 he was sent to Rome to take his degree in theology and canon law. He was at that time 26 years of age⁴⁴.

Father Victor ROUX was born in Marseilles on October 2, 1841 and grew up in the vicinity of the Oblate establishment at Le Calvaire. He received his education in the College Catholique -- a wealthy lady, who hoped he would become a priest, became his patron and paid for his education. He entered the major seminary of Marseilles and was for two years a seminarian for the diocese. During this time he began to think of joining the Oblates founded by Bishop de Mazenod, whose seminarian he was and whom he admired so much. During the course of religious ceremony at the cathedral he seemed to hear a voice telling him: "Be an Oblate". This insistent invitation persisted until the day he talked about it to his director, Father Rambert, and was dissuaded therefrom. The attacks against Bishop de Mazenod and the Oblates that followed the Bishop's death only strengthened his desire to enter the Congregation. When Superior General Father Joseph Fabre authorized him to enter the novitiate, Victor Roux on August 5, 1862, wrote him a warm letter of thanks. This was just at the time when the new Bishop of Marseilles had asked Oblates to leave the Marseilles major seminary. His mother, who would gladly have seen him as a diocesan priest, found it hard to accept his determination to be a religious and an Oblate. He left Marseilles on August 12th and took the habit on August 14, 1862, at N.D. de l'Osier.

At the end of his novitiate he was sent to the Scholasticate at Autun but not as a professed Oblate: he was still wearing the Oblate novice's habit and technically was still a

novice. The Superior General -- and perhaps others -- seem to have had some difficulty in admitting him fully into the Congregation.

He was of an artistic temperament and could also be a true artist in fact: his musical compositions, his verse and his fine prose are sufficient evidence of this. He was also quite emotive, very impressionable, deeply sensitive. Was this a quality or a liability? Whatever it may be, it netted him much misunderstanding and suffering throughout his entire life as an Oblate. Father Edmont Thiriet describes him in these terms:

His soul was like a harp of the ancient Eolians and it vibrated with the softest breeze. The fogs of Paris and the icy gusts of the North do not always temper the hot rays of the sun of Provence. As a result of an impressionability that was skin-deep, our impetuous native of Marseilles felt everything quite vividly and this for him was a cause of either joy or suffering. Nevertheless, his facial features usually reflected only happiness. While his confreres were amused at his strokes of fine humour, his poor heart was often drowning in tears⁴⁵.

Father Joseph Fabre seems to have seen Victor Roux as lacking the maturity, manliness and strong sense of hard reality so necessary to the Oblate missionary; he considered Victor Roux as being too affectionate and in too much need for affection. Even to Victor Roux's face Father Fabre described him as "jeune ... sous beaucoup de rapports"⁴⁶ⁿ.

On the other hand, Victor Roux's decision to be an Oblate was firm and unshakable: he was even convinced that he had received a mystic sign from God to take up this way of life. He was ready to accept any kind of ministry as an Oblate. His piety was solid and sound, his practice of poverty, obedience and community charity beyond reproach, even exemplary. Thus he could not understand why he was not being admitted to perpetual oblation and his January 26, 1864 letter to the Superior General is a delicate, obedient and painful complaint in this regard.

He was finally admitted to perpetual oblation, which he made at Autun on May 15, 1864⁴⁷. And at Autun he was ordained priest on June 10, 1865.

Regarding his being sent to Rome for higher studies, we find this information in a letter Father Roux wrote on November 18, 1867, to the Superior General:

I also see in a deeper study of Sacred Scripture a more effective and useful preparation for accomplishing the holy ministry, the goal of the hopes of my whole life and for which the task of professor ought to be for me a preparation, as you told me at Autun at the time when I was advanced to the priesthood. If you remember that well ... in the conversation we had together and which is still narrated in my personal papers, you asked me what my tastes and desires were. I answered you that I would be happy to be for a certain number of years to be employed in a life of studies, in spite of my temperament which clamors for activity, in order that I might be more solidly prepared for the holy ministry, to which alone my tastes and dearest aspirations direct me. You then replied to me: "That is also how I see you." You added that you in fact found me too young "in all aspect (sic)" to commit me right away to missions, but that you thought nevertheless that I was more fit to be "an apostle rather than an evangelist", that you would see to this later, when the time was ripe⁴⁸.

In his October 2, 1865 letter to the Superior General, Father Victor Roux gives us a good introduction to what life was like with the Oblates in Rome at this time:

Father Dours, in his quality as the elder, must have officially told you about our arrival in Rome, but I don't see myself dispensed thereby from telling you myself all the thanks that I must address to you for having decided to choose me for this residence in Rome which is so suited to provide solid consolation to the heart of a priest and so proper to second the desire for study and work that ought to animate each true Oblate who wants some day to do a lot of good for souls. During the two weeks since we have arrived here we have been walking from marvel to marvel and still we have not yet seen everything.

Last Wednesday⁴⁹ Father Dours and I had the happiness of being received in audience by the Holy Father. I will say nothing to you of what one experiences at the feet of Pius IX, convinced as I am that three years have not erased from your memory the sweet emotion that you have yourself felt ...⁵⁰.

We are spending the month we still have before courses begin in learning a little Italian

and in preparing for the canonical "institutiones" by means of which two years in Canon Law will suffice for the doctorate. As for the courses themselves, Reverend Father Tamburini thinks it would be preferable, instead of at the same time taking Law, Theology and Philosophy, to take this year only Law and Philosophy and next year only Law and Theology. This arrangement would also allow us to take more easily the course of Hebrew.

In regard to philosophy, the Reverend Father Tamburini does not know how to reconcile the directive that you have given us *ad omnes gradus sive Philosophiae, sive ... suscipiendos*, with what you had told him before, namely, that the degrees in philosophy were not necessary: a clarification on your part on this matter would therefore be helpful.

We also need from you in your goodness that you send us a certificate stating 1. - that we have done a complete course of theology in our Seminary in France; 2. - that this course last for three years. We must have this certificate before classes begin ...⁵¹.

For my part, I am resolved to benefit from this stay in Rome by making myself here more capable for serving my Mother the Congregation, whatever the work may be which it will entrust to me after this retreat of two years. I foresee very well that I will have plenty of tears to offer to the good Lord during these years of study. You know me too well ... not to understand how much I am *alone* here. Father Tamburini is a real father, Father Dours a good brother, but no matter I shall nevertheless often have to sigh and weep because my poor heart need so much to pour itself out into another ... But why should I talk of this: I hope that the routine of study will leave me no time for melancholy.

I will also tell you in all simplicity how great will be my being deprived for two years of developing my music. On this point Father Tamburini shares fully my own regret, for he is also, it seems, a bit of an organist. I'm afraid of forgetting everything and for a musician that is cruel. It would be a fine day for your community on the Via Montanara on which you would allow it to buy a small harmonium, or at least to rent one: that would be eight or ten francs a month at the maximum. Moreover, we will soon have our religious services inside our own house and thus its usefulness would increase; and, besides it would be a powerful means against melancholy ...⁵².

The two new student priests will enter into the same academic world and routine as the first two did: they will take their courses in Canon Law and their Theology course at the Minerva. We have no sources to tell us what went on in the depths of Father Dours' being; but from the quotations above, we have a very good idea of what was churning in that of Father Roux.

In the quotation above Father Roux refers to the moment when they would have their own house chapel and be able to say Mass and have all the other religious services there. We have already seen above that this chapel was inaugurated on October 19th.

5. The work of Father Tamburini

It is now time to consider what the Procurator, Father Ambroise Tamburini had been doing since he took up residence in Rome on March 19, 1863. His task in Rome was double: first, he was the Congregation's Procurator to the Holy See and Therefore he held an official position within the General Administration; then he was also the director of the Oblate residence in Rome, which was the equivalent of being the Superior of the Roman local Oblate community.

As Superior of the local community, Father Tamburini did all that local superiors at that time were expected to do. He saw to the material setting and needs of his community; he saw to the programming and implementation of a regular religious community life, looked after relationships "ad intra" (between the members of his own community, between his community and the rest of the Congregation, especially with the Superior General), and "ad extra" (with persons and entities outside the Congregation). He was actively involved in the study programs and life of the student priests in his community. He would also have to keep the records, financial and other, of his community. He and his community were directly responsible to the Superior General.

He had been mandated to find a permanent establishment for the Oblate community in Rome: one that included, if at all possible, a church that would be entrusted to the Oblates and a house appropriately located and sufficiently spacious for the community's needs. It would seem

that he felt he had at least achieved the latter in the residence on the Via Montanara.

If there were visitors to his community, he would also be the official host who sees that they are comfortable, that they can make the contacts they wish to make in the City, who helps them to plan and organize their visit, and perhaps also accompanies and guides them as they make their rounds to persons, places and events.

All our sources concur in saying that Father Tamburini fulfilled his task well as Superior in Rome. All the Oblates who passed through his community from the outside explicitly praise the hospitality and other services he gave them. The Oblate student priests, though more critical at times, would nevertheless agree that he was basically a good and competent Superior. He may have been a little too meticulous and insistent on certain minor details, he may have felt the need to consult the Superior General on too many small issues, but that has to be understood in the context of the time: the Congregation then was highly centralized at every level and in everything. The Oblates most affected by the way he exercised his function as Superior were the student priests: whatever malaise any individual student Father may have experienced, it cannot be claimed that their study life or their opportunity of benefiting from the many things Rome had to offer them suffered because of a narrow-minded local Superior. As members of this Oblate community in Rome, the student Fathers had the opportunity to develop and grow therein.

As Procurator to the Holy See, he was an official of the Superior General and his Council and the normal channel of communications and business between the Congregation and the Holy See and vice versa. He would also be at the service of Oblate Bishops and Oblate major superiors, even of individual Oblates who might need some service here in Rome.

In practice, this meant doing a whole quantity of what could be termed minor services. Various persons wanted relics of Saints for various purposes, and Father Tamburini presented their requests, received the relics and the authentication documents of the same, and saw that they were sent out to whoever they were meant to go. The Superior General, Oblate Bishops and Provincials needed spiritual faculties and favours. Various dispensations were needed. Oblates requested papal blessings and sometimes a papal audience had to be arranged. For all of these matters records, financial and other, had to be kept; and, in an age when there were no duplicating methods, certain documents had to be copied out longhand for the records. To be noted also is the fact that Father Tamburini had to work in Latin, Italian and French. He seems to have been quite proficient in all three of them.

Whether in minor or major services, Father Tamburini was always prompt, orderly, reliable and efficient. This was no mean achievement when one considers the relative jungle of canon law and the peculiar ways of ecclesiastical administrative practice in those days; the fact that he came to Rome without any prior experience of how things were done in this City; and also that he was given the task of Procurator to the Holy See without any real preparation for it. On-the-job-learning and training was the lot of many Oblates in those days: one is amazed that most of them did very well in spite of that.

The first major difficulty that Father Tamburini had to cope with arose unexpectedly and would cost him and the General Council lots of work, worry and wear. Was the Oblate Congregation exempt in regard to the authority of the local Ordinary⁵³.

On December 22, 1862, Superior General Father Joseph Fabre was received in special audience by Pius IX. During the course of that audience, the Superior General handed the Pope a summary report of the Oblate Congregation's works and situation. The Pope accepted the report and said that he would have it studied⁵⁴. As could be expected, he sent it to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars for this purpose.

Father Ambrose Tamburini took up his functions in Rome as Procurator to the Holy See on March 19, 1863. Shortly thereafter, he had to approach the Holy See for dispensations from age for four Oblate scholastics at Autun who were to receive major Orders. Until that time, all such petitions had been presented to the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide which readily granted them. For some reason, Father Tamburini went to the Secretariate of Briefs with these petitions for dispensations⁵⁵. He himself narrates what happened thereafter:

Because Archbishop Castellani, Substitute in the Secretariate of Briefs, had in the month of April 1863 refused to grant certain dispensations from age asked for by some of our

scholastics until he would know for certain that we were exempt from episcopal jurisdiction, I approached the Secretariate of the Bishops and Regulars and showed to Msgr. Svegliati, Pro-Secretary of the S. Congregation, the Rescript of Leo XII which enables us to share the same privileges as the Congregation of the Most Holy redeemer, so that I could obtain the certificate that Archbishop Castellani was asking of me. But as Msgr. Svegliati himself was reluctant to believe that we were exempt and did not want to give me the certificate that I was requesting from him, after having explained to our Most Reverend Father General everything that had happened to me and asked for his instructions, I, on his advice, presented on January 15, 1864, the following petition to the Holy Father, through the intermediary of Msgr. Pro-Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars⁵⁶.

In relation to the above, we read in the Minutes of the July 15, 1863 meeting of the General Council meeting:

On the occasion of ordinations several dispensations from age were required: they were granted at Propaganda but previously the Procurator of the Congregation had approached the Secretariate of Bishops and Regulars. There they questioned the exemption which the Congregation enjoys. This matter needs to be treated prudently: to us our exemption seems certain, though there are certain limitations to it; but a work on this topic must be prepared⁵⁷.

Msgr. Svegliati, having been approached by Father Tamburini who had referred to a rescript conferring on the Oblates similar privileges as those accorded to the Remptorists, seems to have wanted to verify for himself whether or not the Oblates were indeed exempt. As a first step, he took a stand regarding the request for dispensations. On June 20, he penned the following memo which was to be presented to the Holy Father:

From the Secretariate of the Bishops and Regulars, June 20, 1863.

The undersigned maintains that the dispensations from age for the Oblates of Autun who are to be ordained priests should be addressed to the Bishop of Autun himself.

[Signed:] Stanislao Svegliati, Pro-Secretary⁵⁸.

The Pope agreed with Msgr. Svegliati. We read: "From the Audience of July 3, 1863: The matter is to be referred to the Bishop⁵⁹."

This memo of Msgr. Svegliati and the Pope's agreement with it were not communicated to Father Tamburini, probably because the latter had decided to revert to the longstanding Oblate practice and obtain the sought dispensation from the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide.

Msgr. Svegliati communicated the Holy Father's decision to the Secretariate of Briefs. This department on its own wanted to get to the bottom of this issue and sent a request to the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars:

From the audience of July 3, 1863. The matter is to be referred to the Bishop:

In the question as to whether or not the mentioned Congregation is exempt from episcopal jurisdiction, the "Substitutus" of the Secretariate of Briefs has returned the matter to this Congregation [and requests] the relevant rescript⁶⁰.

The rescript requested by the Secretariate of Briefs, a rescript which would show that the Oblates were truly an exempt religious institute, could not be located in the files of the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars.

None of this was communicated to Father Tamburini. But it is probable that it prompted Msgr. Svegliati to study Father Fabre's report on the Oblate Congregation, a report which must have been in his hands since the end of December 1862. He naturally studied this report with the assumption, confirmed by the papal decision of July 3rd, that the Oblates were not exempt; and from such a perspective, he found more than one area in the Fabre report that seemed to be out of order and needed to be properly regulated. Consequently, he composed a memorandum designed to be presented for decisions in a papal audience: it is dated July 27, 1863, and has some twenty-one points to which the Pope is to give his reply or decision. These points related to certain points of the Oblate Constitutions and Rules, to their canonical status in the Church, and to specific acts that the Oblate authorities had made during the thirty-seven years of their existence.

The papal audience which dealt with this memorandum and its twenty points took place on August 14, 1863⁶¹. Pius IX explicitly responded *Negative* to point no. 9 which inquired as to whether the Oblates were exempt. Point no. 21 had asked the Pope whether all his decisions to the points in the memorandum should now be formulated in an appropriate decree by the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars: and his response was, "Yes".

Again, none of this was communicated to Father Tamburini, probably because, having obtained the dispensations he needed from the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide, he had not returned to the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars.

Thus, Fathers Fabre and Tamburini continued working on the supposition that the Oblate Congregation was indeed exempt and one had only to furnish proof of that fact to the Holy See; at the Holy See itself, the firm attitude had been taken that the Oblates were not exempt -- only for some unknown reason this was not communicated to the Oblate Procurator and Superior General. In such circumstances, Father Tamburini prepared his petition to the Holy Father. Exactly when he completed it we do not know, but, when he did, he forwarded it to the Superior General for approval. The Superior General -- again we do not know exactly when -- approved it and instructed him to present it to the Holy Father. This Father Tamburini did on January 15, 1864, and, what is most surprising, he did it through the intermediary of Msgr. Svegliati!

For whatever reasons, Msgr. Svegliati even now did not see fit to inform Father Tamburini about the July 27, 1863 21-point memorandum regarding Father Fabre's report and the Oblates, or about the August 14th audience wherein the Holy Father gave his authoritative reply to each of those points.

A long period of silence seems to ensue. It is complete on the side of the Holy See. On the Oblate front, we know from Father Fabre's diary that he wrote "a long letter" to Father Tamburini on January 12, 1864, and again on February 21, 1864. He also wrote "a letter" to Father Tamburini on May 1, June 25, June 26, and July 16, 1864. We do not have any of these six letters, Hence we do not know what these letters contained: they may have dealt with the exemption question, but it is equally possible they dealt with entirely different matters.

In September 1864 the silence of the Holy See was finally broken. We read in Father Tamburini's register:

The reply that we were awaiting⁶² was a long time in coming. During the course of the month of September of the same year, Msgr. Svegliati told me that the question was a serious one and that the Holy Father, before replying, wanted it to be examined by the Sacred Congregation. I thereupon draw up a new petition, and after having submitted it to the approval of our Most Reverend Father General, I addressed it to the Sacred Congregation itself on December 16, of the same year 1864. It was written in Italian and in the following terms⁶³:

This indicates that Father Tamburini had gone, early in September 1864, to the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars to inquire. At the Congregation, they had probably by then received Father Tamburini's petition that he had given to the Pope on January 15th: the Pope would naturally have asked this Congregation to advise him on the matter.

Father Tamburini's visit did spark some action at the Sacred Congregation. A consultor of the same Congregation penned the following on September 15, 1864:

The question about the claimed exemption from the jurisdiction of the Bishops returns for the third time. In July (?) 1863 a full report was made to the Holy Father about this entire business; and not only did His Holiness prescribe a reply of *Negative* to the doubt about the cited exemption; but also remedies were given to various undesirable situations occasioned by the false conviction they [i.e. the Oblates] had of having certain privileges which in fact they did not have, v.g. ordaining subjects with dimissorials only from the General, giving faculties to priest of the Institute for confessions of members without recourse to the Ordinary, etc. etc.⁶⁴.

But because the above mentioned decisions were not communicated by means of a nice Decree, these gentlemen have come back to insist⁶⁵. In the year of 1864 was arranged a second document for an audience, the result of which is not known⁶⁶. So today for the third time the General Procurator appears with the attached memorandum ...⁶⁷.

Father Tamburini, having learned that matters were now at the Sacred Congregation for

Bishops and Regulars, felt that it would help the Oblate position if he were to speak directly to the same Congregation, and so he began to compose a petition addressed to the Cardinal Prefect of the same Congregation.

Around November 1864, Father Tamburini learned, through his contacts at the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, of the adverse decisions that had been taken in regard to the claims of the Redemptorists. This helped him in composing his own new petition, for he knew that the Holy See would never grant to the Oblates what they had just refused to the Redemptorists⁶⁸.

When he had this new petition finished, Father Tamburini sent it to the Superior General for approval. The minutes of the November 28, 1864 General Council meeting read:

Our Most Reverend Father communicated a new petition drawn up by Father Tamburini, Procurator General in Rome, to obtain from the Holy Father the confirmation of all our privileges and exemptions. The Council has strongly approved the form and the content of the said petition and has asked our Most Reverend Father to authorize Father Tamburini to present it to the proper authorities⁶⁹.

The Superior General wrote to Father Tamburini on November 30, 1864, and the following December 16th, Father Tamburini presented his petition to the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars.

From the part of the Holy See, another long period of silence sets in. On the part of the Oblates, there was some exercise of patience. On January 6, 1865, Father Fabre wrote to Father Tamburini, but we do not know the contents of his letter. On January 13, 1865, there was a General Council Meeting: in its Minutes we read:

Our house in Rome is still in *stato quo*⁷⁰. Father Tamburini gives constant proof that he is equal to his task. Negotiations are continuing in the Court of Rome to obtain or confirm our privileges and from time to time encounter some obstacles. He hopes, however, that everything will turn out well, in spite of the prejudices that Bishop Chaillot and other personages have sown in the Court of Rome against our venerated Founder and against ourselves⁷¹.

On January 21, 1865, the Superior General wrote Father Tamburini, but we do not know the contents of that letter. On January 30, 1865, there was a meeting of the General Council and in its Minutes we read:

The first letter is from Reverend Father Tamburini from wherein we learn that our business is not doing well in Rome: that they are passed from one to another, from a Cardinal to a Prefect, from a Prefect to a Prelate, without any final outcome: in short, our Fathers in Rome are invited to go and *make their novitiate in the catacombs*, which is to be understood as an invitation to be patient. And this is the attitude that our Most Reverend Father wants Father Tamburini to adopt, but, also he is to request him to prepare a new petition for a *rescript* in case we meet a refusal to the petitions we have already presented⁷².

Both of the meetings mentioned above report a situation about which there was nothing to report. One senses Father Tamburini's frustration and concern lest he be considered incompetent: hence his little convincing refuge in literary sallies. One also detects the growing concern that a decision adverse to the Oblate claims might be in the offing: hence the instruction to Father Tamburini to prepare for this eventuality. Should the Holy See decide that the Oblates were not exempt, then the Superior General would petition the Pope to grant to them, by means of a special rescript, all the privileges that the Oblates had until then thought they possessed in virtue of being an exempt religious institute.

On February 3, 1865, was held another General Council meeting in the Minutes of which we read:

Was read out a letter from Father Tamburini by which it is apparent that our matters will soon be decided; that what is holding up the solution is that they cannot find in the archives the first approbation of our Rules. Hence it would be helpful to send from Paris to the Prefect of Propaganda the Apostolic Brief (in specific form) or at least a copy of it, signed by the Nuncio Archbishop Chigi, that Brief which approves our Constitutions and Rules. Having consulted his Council, our Most Reverend Father has decided that a copy of our apostolic letters will be sent to

Rome, after they have been signed by the Holy See's Nuncio in Paris⁷³.

On February 5th, Father Fabre wrote to Father Tamburini and he did so again on February 7th and February 25th, on May 7th and May 21st, on July 9th and July 23rd. We do not have the contents of these letters.

The General Council Meeting of August 14, 1865, considered the offer of the church of St.Barbara: this has already been treated of above.

Father Fabre again wrote to Father Tamburini on August 20th, September 3rd, September 7th, November 5th and December 15th. Again, we do not know the content of these letters.

Finally the Holy See's silence was broken and the Procurator General made the following entry into his register:

One year and 20 days after I had presented the petition⁷⁴, that is to say, on January 5, 1866, the Sacred Congregation replied that we were not exempt and that in our Congregation there was no jurisdiction neither external nor internal ...⁷⁵.

In fact, on January 5, 1866, Cardinal Angelo Quaglia, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars, addressed a letter to the Oblate Superior General. He told the latter that since in the Oblate Congregation only simple vows are made, it remained subject to the jurisdiction of the Ordinaries according to the provisions of the sacred canons and apostolic constitutions; that we do not have the privilege of exemption because it is not explicitly mentioned in the rescript of 1826 that granted us concessions; and that the Holy Father has ratified and revalidated everything that the Oblate authorities have done in the past, and absolved from all censures, penalties and irregularities that the Oblates may have incurred by using privileges that they did not have. Attached to this letter was a decree of the same Sacred Congregation which in 17 points indicated the decisions taken by Pope Pius IX in the audience to Msgr. Svegliati on August 14, 1863. Besides denying exemption to the Oblate Congregation, the Decree also modified the Oblate Constitution and Rules on several points⁷⁶.

As soon as the letter and decree had been handed to Father Tamburini, he communicated the same to the Superior General in Paris. The latter wrote "a very long letter" to Father Tamburini on January 28, 1866: though we do not have the actual letter, we can suppose that it dealt with this issue. The next day, January 29th, there was a meeting of the General Council and we read in its Minutes:

Our Most Reverend Father General with great emotion communicated a Decree issued by the Congregation for Bishops and Regulars. First of all, the Congregation has decided that our Society does not possess the privilege of exemption because such is not explicitly expressed in the Brief of Approval. Moreover, a decree is attached to this declaration and by this decree several points of our Rules are modified and new obligations are imposed. Without being as yet able to assess the value of these acts, the Council was deeply hurt thereby: all our privileges are diminished or modified. This is nothing less than a trial in which we must have recourse to God⁷⁷.

On February 4, 1866, the Superior General wrote to the Procurator in Rome, but we do not have the contents of this letter. Father Tamburini, for his part, did the following:

After this Decree had been given to me, I thought it best to ask for some explanations from Msgr. De Luca, Auditor of the Sacred Congregation, who had collaborated in the composition of the articles of which it consists and who was therefore by that very fact qualified to know its [the decree's] spirit and content. He told me especially that in making this decree they had in mind only the greatest good of our Congregation, and if among the articles that it contains there is any that could harm the well-being and prosperity of the Institute, they were ready to cancel it or to grant us what is considered necessary. Because their desire is that religious Congregations prosper, and if they make decrees it is not to paralyze their activity but rather to help them accomplish more greater good in God's Church ...⁷⁸.

After I had received these explanations, I communicated them to our Most Reverend Father General ...⁷⁹.

Father Joseph Fabre wrote to Father Tamburini on February 17, 1866, again on March 7th and on April 1st. We do not have the content of these letters. One can suppose, however, that all of them dealt with the Roman decision and that the last one dealt with the Superior General's

trip to Rome: Father Fabre, in fact, left for Rome on April 2, 1866.

6. Father Fabre's second stay in Rome

Father Tamburini mentions in his register this trip and stay as follows:

After I had received these explanations, I communicated them to our Most Reverend Father General, who hastened to come to Rome, accompanied by one of his Assistants, Reverend Father Vandenberghe, and by his private secretary, Father Rey. It was April 6, 1866, when they arrived. This visit, the first that they have made since I have been in charge of the Procuratorship, brought me the happiness of having them with me for a whole month, of accompanying them to the tomb of the Holy Apostles, to the Holy Father, and pretty well to every place that they had to go to. As soon as the duties of piety and civility were accomplished, we concerned ourselves with the Decree of January 5, 1866, and we examined what had to be done if we were to conform ourselves exactly to the directives of the Supreme Pontiff. On the advice of the Fathers who were present, the Most Reverend Father General decided that we must present the following petitions ...⁸⁰.

Besides Father Tamburini's entries into his register, we also have Father Joseph Fabre's own communications regarding this visit to Rome: two are official, namely, his circular letter no. 17 of June 29, 1866⁸¹, another circular letter of June 1866 that was published in *Missions...*⁸²; and there are the entries into his diary.

To the Oblates of the Congregation Father Fabre stated the purpose of this, his second trip to Rome, as follows:

When we had received this sovereign decision, which at first sight seemed to be unfavorable to us because it took away from us that which he had considered to ours by acquired right, we asked ourselves what could be the real reason that had inspired a decision so grave for our dear Congregation. The desire to be fully informed on this important point, the idea of obtaining the indulgences needed to regularize our situation, and especially the determination to make ourselves and in person, in the name of the whole Congregation, an act of submission and obedience to the judgment of the Roman Church, have led us to make a trip to Rome⁸³.

According to his diary, Fathers Fabre, Vandenberghe and Rey left Paris in the evening of April 2nd. Their trip was made partly by train, partly by horse-drawn coach, took them over Mt. Cenis to Turin, down to Alessandria, to Pistoia, to Florence, to Civita Vecchia and then to Rome. Both in Turin and in Florence they spent every available moment to visit what there was to see. Their arrival in Rome on April 6th he describes as follows:

At 6 o'clock we were at Civita Vecchia. It took quite some time to get our baggage and have it examined, even though it was not all that much. At 7.35 we boarded the train in a compartment where we three were able to be by ourselves. We profited therefrom to relax and to give ourselves to sentiments that drawing near to Rome inspired in us. At 10 o'clock we arrived at the central station after having nearly made a complete circle by rail around the City. After we had taken our baggage, we took a carriage and we soon arrived at the Via Montanara 115 where we received the most heartfelt welcome and where we were happy to find ourselves in a family home here in Rome.

After resting a little and having taken our meal, we went to make our first visit to St. Peter's, where we were able at leisure to admire this magnificent church and the square in front of it. We had to make this visit right upon our arrival; we were too tired to make any others. We returned to the house where we spent the evening very pleasantly.

Thus began the first visit of an Oblate Superior General to the first Oblate community in Rome. According to Father Fabre's diary, the entire month was filled with activities: prayer and interest visits to so many places, visits of courtesy and business -- and it should be kept in mind that the exemption matter was not the only business that the Superior General wanted to talk about in Rome. There are indications in Father Fabre's diary that only most rarely was a horse-drawn coach taken, that most of these visits were made on foot. Father Fabre at this time was 41 years old, Father Rey was 37 and Father Vandenberghe was 39; Father Tamburini was 44 -- it is not certain that he himself went along on all these visits. In any case, these Oblates seemed to

be sturdy walkers.

The "tourist" places that were visited, according to Father Fabre's diary are:

- the Coliseum (4 times);
- the Pantheon;
- a walk across the Forum (Campo Vaccino, then) and over the Capitol (twice);
- past the Tarpeian Rock;
- the Palatine ruins of imperial palaces and the Farnese gardens;
- across the area of the Circus Maximus;
- the baths of Caracalla;
- Janiculum and Trastevere sections; courtyard of San Michele;
- a walk through the Jewish Ghetto;
- fountain of Paul V on the Janiculum;
- the Trevi fountain (twice);
- Piazza Barberini;
- the Angel Castle;
- Piazza del Popolo (twice);
- the Pincio (three times);
- the Quirinal (5 times): including the gardens, papal apartments, and chapel of the Madgalene (for adoration).
- Campo Verano, the Roman cemetery.

The remains of ancient Rome were not as excavated and visible in those days as they are today; hence what Fathers Fabre, Vandenberghe and Rey saw then was somewhat different from that which the Oblate visitor sees today. This is true at least for some of the many Roman churches which they visited, both as pilgrims and as sight-seers. Those listed in Father Fabre's diary are:

- St. Peter's (6 times).
- the Sixtine Chapel, the Vatican Museums, mosaic factory, and loggias of Raphael.
- St. John Lateran; also the baptistery, the mediaeval cloister, and the *Scala Sancta*.
- St. Mary Major (4 times).
- St. Praxedes.
- Holy Cross of Jerusalem.
- St. Lawrence outside the Walls.
- St. Paul outside the Walls.
- Tre Fontane.
- Catacombs of St. Agnes; basilica of St. Agnes; Santa Costanza.
- St. Sebastian's basilica and catacombs.
- Catacombs of St. Calixtus.
- San Clemente.
- St. Gregory.
- Sts. John and Paul
- San Lorenzo in Panisperna.
- San Lorenzo in Lucina.

- St. John before the Latin Gate.
- St. Sixtus.
- Sts. Nereus and Achilles.
- Santa Maria in Cosmedin.
- Santa Francesca Romana.
- St. Mark's (3 times).
- Ara Coeli.
- Santa Maria ai Monti.
- St. Peter in Chains.
- St. Francis de Paula.
- San Martino ai Monti.
- St. Pudentiana.
- St. Suzanna.
- twice to Our Lady of Victory, but found it closed;
- Capuchin church and human bone display (twice).
- St. Isidore and St. Ildephonsus -- the church the Oblates had at one time hoped to receive through the Spanish government.
- San Carlo al Corso.
- Santa Maria del Popolo.
- San Andrea delle Fratte.
- Trinita dei Monti.
- Santa Maria in Via Lata.
- St. Magdalene.
- Twelve Apostles.
- St. Vincent.
- St. Dorothy.
- San Carlo ai Catinari.
- St. Mary of the Angels (twice).
- Chiesa Nuova (twice).
- St. Augustine (twice).
- St. Louis of the French (twice).
- Santa Maria sopra Minerva (5 times).
- The Church of the Pilgrims.
- San Pietro in Montorio.
- Santa Caecilia.
- San Andrea della Valle.
- Santa Sabina.
- St. Alexius.
- the church of Gesu.
- St. Ignatius.
- San Andrea al Quirinale.
- St. Yvon.
- St. Stephen's.
- St. Sylvester at the Quirinal.

- one other church the name of which is difficult to decipher.

If any special devotion or event or item was venerated in any of these churches, that is always noted in Father Fabre's diary. He mentions only two items of direct Oblate reference: one concerning Father Tempier (whose feast-day was April 10th) and the other related to the Founder:

Monday, April 9: After 3.00 p.m., ... to St. Francis de Paule *in monte* whose feast it will be tomorrow; we prayed there for Father Tempier.

Tuesday, April 10: ... in passing in front of the church delle Frate, we went in and prayed for Father Tempier.

April 12: We visited St. Sylvester where our beloved Father was consecrated Bishop.

Nothing indicates that in all of this walking from church to church there was any awareness that they were walking in the footsteps of the Founder in Rome. It is truly amazing that Father Fabre never mentions going to Santa Maria in Campitelli which was right next to the Oblates in the Via Montanara.

Besides places, Father Fabre had also come to meet and do business with certain persons. And first of all, there was the Holy Father, Pope Pius IX, whom they were anxious to see. The very day after their arrival, April 7th, they went to the Sixtine Chapel in the hope of seeing him there assisting at a liturgical celebration, but "the Pope did not come to assist at it". But that some afternoon they went to Santa Maria sopra Minerva to make sure that they would have a good place there because the Pope was celebrating Mass there the next day.

Sunday, April 8: There was a papal chapel [celebration] at the Minerva on the occasion of the feast of the Annunciation which is celebrated there on this day. They had promised us places there. We were there as early as 9.00 o'clock in order to take full advantage of the occasion. Father Caré was very kind and gave us the first places that were available: we were in the first places in the choir, directly in front of the papal throne. And so we could see everything and enjoy at our ease this magnificent spectacle, the arrival of the Pope on the *sedia gestatoria* and all the parts of the service. At the end of the Mass the Pope gave the solemn blessing which we received for ourselves and all our own people. After the Mass we went to the sacristy where we were allowed to kiss the [Pope's] feet. Right away went out onto the square to see the departure of the Pope's cortege in great festive form. It was truly splendid. We will remember this truly pious morning for a long time.

On Monday, April 9th, they went to the Vatican to hand in to Archbishop Bartolomeo Pacca their request for a papal audience. On April 12th, they had received "the reply to our request for an audience: it is granted to us for tomorrow at eleven o'clock. On that same Thursday, April 12th:

Rome was on a holiday, celebrating the anniversary of the Pope's return [from Gaeta in 1850 and his escape from the accident at St. Agnes in 1853] ... After dinner we went to the Quirinal Hill to see the Pope who was to go to St. Agnes ... Later we went to a street where we could see the Pope passing by and receive his blessing.

On the day of the papal audience, Friday, April 13th:

We stayed in our rooms until 10 o'clock to prepare ourselves for the audience with the Holy Father. At 10 o'clock we took a carriage to go to the Vatican. Archbishop Pacca received us very kindly and in a friendly way. We had to wait until 1.15 p.m. and allow to go in ahead of us Cardinal Mattei, Pro-Datary, Cardinal Clarelli, Secretary of Briefs, and Cardinal Rolerti, Secretary of Memorials; it was their audience day and they came with full portfolios. After the Chargé d'Affaires of the Republic of Ecuador, we were introduced to the Holy Father. It is not possible to describe with what goodness he received us and conversed with us for a good quarter of an hour. Our joy and happiness was filled to overflowing ... at 2 o'clock we came home, our hearts filled with joy.

In his circular to the Oblates, the Superior General communicated the following about this audience:

The audience that the Supreme Pontiff deigned to grant us on April 13th, a few days after

our arrival, made our happiness complete for it revealed to us in a most intimate way that goodness that is in the heart of Pius IX. The moments spent at the feet of the Vicar of Christ seemed very brief to us; but they left us with imperishable memories. Yes, it is indeed HE who said to us: "I know that everywhere where you are established you are doing much good!" Again it is HE who has blessed us and in this blessing included all the friends of the family ...

In presenting ourselves to the Supreme Pontiff, we say it fitting to place at his feet, in the name of the Congregation, an offering that is indeed a lowly one. You know as we do the needs of our Father; as we do, you too know the penury of our resources. We gave from our poverty, but we gave from the fullness of our heart. With our "Peter's pence" we included our expression of regret that we could not do more. The Holy Father was surprised and moved, and with an ineffable smile of goodness he addressed these words to us which still resonate in our soul: "I know that you are not rich and you should not have imposed this deprivation upon yourself; nevertheless, I accept your offering for I am poor. And I thank you⁸⁴."

Besides the Holy Father, they visited other important people, of which the following are mentioned in Father Fabre's diary:

- Cardinal Alessandro Barnabo, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide (6 times, but 3 times he was not available).
- Archbishop H. Capalti, Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide (6 times, but 4 times he was not available).
- Msgr. Edward Howard, official at Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide (3 times).
- Cardinal Qaglia, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars.
- Msgr. Stanislao Svegliati, Pro-Secretary of the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars (3 times).
- Cardinal Antontelli, Secretary of State (3 times, but twice he was not available).
- Cardinal Caterini, Cardinal Vicar (twice: once not available).
- Cardinal Villecourt (twice: once not available).
- Archbishop Bartolomeo Pacca, Papal Chamberlain (5 times: three times not available).
- Cardinal Pitra.
- Archbishop Francesco Nardi (13 times: 4 times not available and once the Archbishop came to Oblate residence).
- Bishop Place of Marseilles (7 times: 3 times not available and twice the Bishop came to the Oblate residence).
- Bishop of Gap (3 times: twice not available).
- Bishop of Castellamare: (3 times: never available).
- Bishop Chaillot: (5 times: once not available).
- Msgr. Berardi.
- Msgr. Rovieri.
- Msgr. Tommi.
- Msgr. Kaly.
- Msgr. Lacroix.
- Msgr. Bognomi.
- Msgr. Lainoir.
- Father Thoulet.

- Father Capouillet: (3 times: once not available).
- Father Pragonereri.
- Father Régis: (4 times).
- Father Rigonassi.
- Father Croulet.
- Father Modena.
- Father Joubert, Vicar General of Gap.
- Father Faillon.
- Father Streit, Superior of French Seminary.
- Director of the Brothers' Boarding School (twice: once he came to the Oblate residence).
- Lautard.
- Mother Emile, Superior General of the Sisters of St. Joseph (3 times).
- Sister Provincial of the Good Shepherd.
- House of the Good Shepherd: (3 times).

Identifying more exactly all of these people and discovering what precise business the Superior General had with each of them is a task that remains to be done.

Superior General Father Joseph Fabre left Rome a very satisfied man, one who had achieved the objectives of his trip. As he told the Congregation:

What we must tell you is that the first visits made to his Eminence Cardinal Quaglia, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars; to Msgr. Svegliati, Pro-Secretary, and to another Prelate, consultor of the same Congregation, rid us of our painful apprehensions. With immense consolation we could perceive that no complaint had occasioned the decisions taken in our regard, that it was simply the paternal solicitude of the Supreme Pontiff extending to the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate the prescriptions to which are subject, by general or particular law, all the religious societies recognized by the Church, especially those of these latter times; and with a very delicate attention, they proceeded to furnish us proof of the same. We could not have found a more kindly welcome among the Cardinals and prelates we visited ...⁸⁵.

And, as he noted on Sunday, May 6th, upon leaving Rome: "At 6.30 p.m. we boarded the train and we left Rome, our heart content and with the desire to come back."

In his diary Father Fabre says nothing about the Oblates in the Roman community: he mentions only the warm welcome upon arrival. Nor does he mention the Roman Oblate community in the two circular letters that he addressed to all the Oblates after returning from Rome.

7. Another change of location

During his stay in Rome, Father Fabre had also concerned himself with the problem of where the Oblate community in Rome had its residence. We read in his diary for Wednesday, May 2nd: "After dinner we went to visit a new house near the Chiesa Nuova. It is good but a little expensive." And for the next day, Thursday, May 3rd: "When coming back home we visited apartments on the Via Monte Serrato: they seem to be good."

Father Tamburini, for his part, notes the following in his register:

When everything had been settled and pretty well finished, our Most Reverend Father General hastened to return to Paris where other important affairs were awaiting him. So on May 6, 1866, he left Rome with his two traveling companions, after he had blessed the community and made known his desire that we change our residence. To conform ourselves to his desire of our beloved Father General, we looked for other apartments, and on the 25th of the same month we left the too noisy quarter of the Via Montanara in order to live on the Via Monserrato, which is

quite a quiet place. In this new residence we have the advantage of being nearer to the Chancellery Building where I often go on the Congregation's business, and to the Roman Seminary where Fathers Dours and Roux are obliged to go daily to take in the course of canon law. Another advantage that our new residence affords us is that we have as neighbors their Eminences Cardinal De Luca and Hohenloe, and Sir Knight Vicari, Major of the papal finances. These three families are the only ones who use the staircase that leads to our apartments⁸⁶.

The next article in this series will study the Oblate community's existence there.

Aloysius KEDL, O.M.I.

(To be continued)

¹ Registre de la Procure (abbreviated RP from henceforth), 1863-1881, 5. (Author's translation).

² *Codex Historicus* of the Roman Scholasticate, vol. I, 67. (Author's translation).

³ J. Corne to J. Fabre, April 22, 1865. (Author's translation). On March 10, 1865, Father Fabre notes in his diary that he had that day written to Father Lerond. It is probably to this letter that Father Corne refers and replies. Father Fabre's diaries for 1864-1867 are kept in the Oblate General Archives in Rome. The entries are terse, usually a simple list of his main activities during the day, more in the style of administrative aide-mémoires than that of a true diary. He quite regularly lists some of the letters he has written or received on any given day, but this list is at times quite generic and even incomplete. What is most striking is that every single day's entry begins with what can only be described as a one-sentence weather report.

⁴ The large marble statues of the Twins, Castor and Pollux, with their horses, originally found in Campus Martius area and in the 16th century re-located at the top of the grandiose ornamental stairs that lead up to the Capitol Hill onto the uniquely designed square before Rome's City Hall -- an arrangement according to the genius of Michelangelo.

⁵ A famous Franciscan mediaeval church on the Capitol Hill.

⁶ It is intriguing that the tomb of this Cardinal, one of the Founder's great Roman friends, is mentioned in connection with this church, but not the fact that the Founder himself on February 15, 1826, attended nine Masses in a row, waiting for the Commission of Cardinals, meeting in this same Cardinal Pacca's residence located just across the street and in front of the church, to finish their deliberations on our Constitutions and Rules.

⁷ A. Gaudet to J. Fabre, June 11, 1865. (Author's translation).

⁸ GAUDET, Augustin, O.M.I., <<Missions du Texas et du Mexique>>, in *Missions OMI*, IV (1865), p. 481. (Author's translation).

⁹ Details about this entire area can be found in PIETRANGELI, Carlo, *Guide Rionali di Roma: RIONE X - CAMPITELLY*, Parte I.

¹⁰ *RP*, 1863-1881, 8. (Author's translation).

¹¹ Augustin Gaudet was born on May 5, 1821, at Corbelin in the diocese of Grenoble, France. He attended the Juniorate at N.-D. de Lumières and entered the Oblate novitiate at N.D. de l'Osier on June 29, 1843, where he made his perpetual oblation on July 16, 1844. He received his scholasticate formation at Marseilles and here he was ordained by the Founder on September 27, 1847. His first obedience took him to Canada, where he arrived in November 1847 and was at first engaged in preaching parish missions. In the autumn of 1848 he was sent to Pittsburg but back in Montreal by March 1849. In October 1849 he left for Texas where he worked in Brownsville; at the end of 1850 he was called back to Canada. He headed the Bytown College from September 1851 to June 1853, after which he was sent to Burlington, Vermont, U.S.A. In 1856 he was sent back to Texas where he remained for the next 18 years and became the Pro-Vicar for the missions of Texas/Mexico. While in this post of responsibility, he made six trips to Europe (including his presence at the 1867 and 1873 General Chapters) and also attended the Council of Baltimore in 1864. Bl. Eugene de Mazenod both mentioned him in his writings and also wrote several letters to him: cf. Index of Persons (Gaudet, Augustin, O.M.I.) at end of vol. II of the collection *ÉCRITS OBLATS/OBLATE WRITINGS*.

¹² Background to what was happening in the Texas missions and the reasons for this first trip can be found in *Missions OMI*, I (1862), pp. 453-547 and III (1864), pp. 46-88.

¹³ Background material to developments in the Texas/Mexico missions that occasioned this second

trip can be found in *Missions OMI*, III (1864), pp. 399-417 and 449-489.

¹⁴ In *Missions OMI*, IV (1865), p. 457, we read: "This letter [a letter of Father Augustin Gaudet, dated Brownsville, January 6, 1864] had scarcely reached Paris when, on Easter Tuesday [April 18th] the Superior General was greatly surprised to learn that the Pro-Vicar of Texas had arrived at the General House. The first moments were marked by a painful reaction." (Author's translation).

¹⁵ *Missions OMI*, IV (1865), pp. 462-463. (Author's translation).

¹⁶ *Registre des Conseils Généraux* (abbreviated as RCG henceforth), April 19, 1865. (Author's translation). The General Council did not accept to direct the Monterey major Seminary but it did agree to send more Oblate Fathers to Texas.

¹⁷ *RP*, 1863-1881, 5-6. (Author's translation). This same text is quoted in the *Codex Historicus* of the Roman Scholasticate, vol. I, p. 68, where it is enclosed in some contextual sentences.

¹⁸ *Missions OMI*, IV (1865), pp. 481-485. As we do not possess the original of this account, we do not know whether (and if so, how much) anything was edited out of this published account.

¹⁹ The original manuscript of these letters can be found in the Oblate General Archives, Rome. The letters are dated June 11, 1865; June 14, 1865; and July 3, 1865.

²⁰ May 28, 1865, the Sunday after Ascension Thursday.

²¹ John Berchmans, a Jesuit scholastic.

²² Monday, May 29, 1865.

²³ *Missions OMI*, IV (1865), pp. 481-482.

²⁴ Monsignor Bartolomeo Pacca, the Papal Chamberlain.

²⁵ In Father Gaudet's account published in *Missions OMI*, IV (1865), p. 482, we read: "After I had returned to the Procuratorship [i.e. from the Sixtine Chapel], I wrote to Msgr. Pacca, asking him for the favour of an audience with the Holy Father." It would therefore seem that this request was written only in the afternoon of Monday, May 29th.

²⁶ His account in *Missions OMI*, p. 482 reads: "His reply took eight days in coming but it came and was favorable. You can imagine how happy I was. This favor was granted me for the next day, June 8th, at eleven o'clock. Faithful to the appointment, I went to the Vatican in the company of Reverend Father Tamburini. I had to stay in the waiting room for about twenty minutes, just enough time to recollect myself and to calm down my emotions. A little beep sounds: a chamberlain of His Holiness announces my name, opens the door for me to the study, and there I am at the knees of the Holy Father, who dispenses me from kissing his feet by presenting his hand to me".

²⁷ In *Missions OMI*, pp. 482-483, this entire exchange with the Pope is reported as follows: "There is no need to report here all the good words and encouragement he gave me, the different questions he asked me about the Congregation, our Mission of Texas and Mexico".

²⁸ "June 9, 1865. May God bless you and reign over you according to his ways. POPE PIUS IX." It is odd that the audience was on June 8th and the Pope dated this blessing as on June 9th. In *Missions OMI*, p. 483, the date is omitted from the text and the signature is put as follows: PIUX IX P.P. This is certainly a monstrosity.

²⁹ In *Missions OMI*, p. 483, Father Gaudet's account reads: "Again I cast myself at his knees, kissed his hand, and withdrew, my heart beating with happiness. It seemed to me that with this blessing written by the most venerable of hands and with the Pope's signature, I was carrying the Pope himself along with me. My joy was filled to overflowing. Upon leaving the Vatican, I went to kneel at the altar of the Confession [of St. Peter] to thank our Lord, through the intercession of the Prince of the Apostles, for the favour that His Vicar had just granted to me, who am a useless servant, a poor sinner, a Missionary more in name than in fact."

³⁰ The feast of Corpus Christi, Thursday, June 15, 1865.

³¹ June 29, 1865.

³² *Missions OMI*, pp. 483-484.

³³ June 21, 1865.

³⁴ A marble set of stairs said to have been climbed by Jesus when he was led to appear before Pilate in the Antonio Castle. One climbs these stairs on one's knees only.

³⁵ *Missions OMI*, p. 484. In his June 11th letter to Father Fabre, Father Gaudet says: "I will not speak to you about all the little outings I make to visit the churches of Rome; you have already yourself seen all

these beautiful things, that would hardly be of interest to you. I have yet to visit St. Paul's outside the walls, to see some catacombs, to go to the top of the dome [of St. Peter's], and I think after that I will be getting ready to take the road back to Marseilles." (Author's translation).

³⁶ A. Gaudet to J. Fabre, June 11, 1865. (Author's translation).

³⁷ June 4, 1865.

³⁸ A. Gaudet to J. Fabre, June 11, 1865. (Author's translation).

³⁹ DOYON, Bernard, O.M.I., *The Cavalry of Christ on the Rio Grande*, Milwaukee, Bruce, 1956, p.

113. Father Doyon treats of this entire question in Chapter V (pp. 83-118) and of the Roman negotiations in 1865 on pp. 112-113.

⁴⁰ *RP*, 1863-1881, p. 6. (Author's translation).

⁴¹ *RCG*, August 14, 1865. (Author's translation).

⁴² *RCG*, August 28, 1865. (Author's translation).

⁴³ *RP*, 1863-1881, p. 8.

⁴⁴ *Notices Nécrologiques des Membres de la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, II, pp.

169-175. In his file at the Oblate General Archives in Rome there is only his oblation formula plus two letters written when he was again professor after his studies in Rome. These letters contain nothing about his stay in Rome.

⁴⁵ THIRIET, Edmond, O.M.I., <<Le R.P. Victor Roux>>, in *La Bonne Nouvelle*. (Authors translation).

This 4-page printed necrological sketch, is torn out of this publication and found in the Victor Roux file in the Oblate General Archives in Rome.

⁴⁶ V. Roux to J. Fabre, June 13, 1865. (Author's translation).

⁴⁷ This is the date on his oblation formula. Other sources say it was on August 15, 1864.

⁴⁸ V. Roux to J. Fabre, November 18, 1867. (Author's translation). When Father Roux wrote this letter, he had just begun his duties as professor of Canon Law and Sacred Scripture at the major seminary of Ajaccio in Corsica.

⁴⁹ September 27, 1865.

⁵⁰ Father Joseph Fabre was received in special audience by Pius IX on December 22, 1862. cf. *Vie Oblate Life*, 49 (1990), pp. 66-68, for a detailed description of this audience.

⁵¹ The last two paragraphs are a fine example of careless or inconsistent or forgetful administration. Regarding philosophy, it is possible that Father Fabre may have changed his mind about its usefulness, for Father Jean Corne had taken every opportunity to hammer that point home. But in regard to the documents and certificates they were to bring along with them to Rome, Father Fabre had himself written for information about this to Father Lerond on March 10, 1865 and on April 22, 1865, Father Corne had written and given him very precise details on this point. Yet, Fathers Dours and Roux, chosen 4 months later for studies in Rome, arrive in Rome as bereft of necessary documents as Lerond and Corne had been!

⁵² V. Roux to J. Fabre, October 2, 1865. (Author's translation).

⁵³ The latest study of this question is: WOESTMAN, William H., O.M.I., *The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate: a clerical Religious Congregation with Brothers*, Rome, 1984, pp. 91-97. Father Woestman lists among his sources: "Rome. Procurator's Archives O.M.I."; this presumably includes the *Registre de la Procure, 1863-1881* that is quoted here.

⁵⁴ *Vie Oblate Life*, 49 (1990), pp. 66-67.

⁵⁵ Why did Father Tamburini not go to the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide as the Oblates had been doing up to then? It is difficult to maintain that, being new in this kind of work, he simply was unaware of this Oblate practice. He had spent some time at the General House in Paris prior to his departure for Rome in order to familiarize himself with his duties as Procurator to the Holy See: one would think that he would have inquired about what he was expected to do in Rome and how these matters had been handled up to then. Moreover, we see that upon his arrival in Rome he knew very well what personages sympathetic to the Oblates he had to contact and get acquainted with straight away. Did he perhaps wish to establish proper procedures and relationships, now that the Oblates had a regular Procuratorship in Rome? It was somewhat unusual to approach Propaganda Fide for such dispensations and one can only wonder as to why this Sacred Congregation was willing to grant them. Furthermore, on the assumption that the Oblates were indeed an exempt Congregation, an assumption all the Oblate authorities at the time shared, Father Ramburini did go to the proper department of the Holy See when he went to the

Secretariate of Briefs. In any case, even if these petitions for dispensations had not come to ignite the fuse, so to speak, Father Fabre's report on the Oblates that he had left with the Pope and which the latter had handed on to the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars for study, would sooner or later have triggered the same problem.

⁵⁶ *RP*, 1863-1881, 9. (Author's translation). Pages 9-13 of *RP*, 1863-1881, then contain a copy in Latin, in Father Tamburini's hand-writing, of the text of the petition he had addressed to the Holy Father.

⁵⁷ *RCG*, July 15, 1863. (Author's translation).

⁵⁸ The complete text of this memo and other documents relating to this matter have been published in: COSENTINO, Georges, O.M.I., *Histoire de nos Règles*, Ottawa, 1955, IV, 11 ff. (in French translation) and 107 ff. (in the original language).

⁵⁹ COSENTINO, Georges, o.m.i., *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁶⁰ COSENTINO, Georges, O.M.I., *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁶¹ The complete text of Msgr. Svegliati's memorandum and the Pope's reply to each of its 21 points has been published in COSENTINO, Georges, O.M.I., *Ibid.*, pp. 108-111.

⁶² That is, to Father Tamburini's petition that was presented to the Holy Father on January 15, 1864.

⁶³ *RP*, 1863-1881, 13. Pages 13-22 in the same *RP* give the text of this new petition, addressed to the Cardinal Prefect of Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, and handwritten in Father Tamburini's hand. Father Tamburini had included in this new petition every piece of evidence of law and fact that Father Fabre could send him from the Oblate archives and experience.

⁶⁴ The consultor is obviously referring to Msgr. Svegliati's 21-point memorandum of July 27, 1863, and to the Pope's response of August 14, 1864 to the same.

⁶⁵ The consultor's touch of sarcasm reveals that he is clearly unaware that the papal decisions of August 14, 1863 had not in any way been communicated to the Oblate General Procurator or to the Superior General.

⁶⁶ This could only have been in connection with Father Tamburini's petition that was presented to the Pope on January 15, 1864, by Msgr. Svegliati. This would indicate that the Pope had Msgr. Svegliati take Father Tamburini's petition back to the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars, on which Congregation Msgr. Svegliati himself was Pro-Secretary. Then Msgr. had another memorandum drawn up to be presented for decisions in another papal audience. The consultor here does not know whether the latter document was ever presented to the Pope or not; and if it was, he does not know what the outcome was.

⁶⁷ COSENTINO, Georges, O.M.I., *Ibidem*, 111. Just what "the attached memorandum" that Father Tamburini apparently brought is not clear. Perhaps it was simply a written memo noting the matter about which he was seeking information from this Sacred Congregation.

⁶⁸ *PR*, 1863-1881, 22-23.

⁶⁹ *RCG*, November 28, 1864. (Author's translation).

⁷⁰ That is, the Oblates are still at St. Bridget's.

⁷¹ *RCG*, January 13, 1865. (Author's translation). In the anxious and long waiting for a favorable decision from Rome, the element of being persecuted is also entertained.

⁷² *RCG*, January 30, 1865. (Author's translation).

⁷³ *RCG*, February 3, 1865. (Author's translation).

⁷⁴ The petition presented on December 16, 1864, to the Cardinal Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars.

⁷⁵ *RP*, 1863-1881, 23-24. Father Tamburini's entry goes on to explain the reasons given by the Sacred Congregation for its decision, and how the Oblates could obtain from the Pope by rescript the privileges that they felt they needed.

⁷⁶ Summary of this letter in COSENTINO, Georges, O.M.I., *Ibid.*, 16. The text of the Sacred Congregation's decree is published in pp. 16-18.

⁷⁷ *RCG*, January 29, 1866. (Author's translation).

⁷⁸ *RP*, 1863-1881, 31-32. (Author's translation). In pages 32-37, Father Tamburini continues giving the explanations that he received on specific articles contained in the decree.

⁷⁹ *RP*, 1863-1881, 32. (Author's translation).

⁸⁰ *RP*, 1863-1881, 32. (Author's translation). Father Tamburini then entered the text of these petitions: cf. 32-47. Father Tamburini had already submitted two petitions prior to the arrival of the Superior

General and both were granted, one on January 26, 1866, the other on march 2, 1866; now three more were presented and all of them were granted: two on April 27, 1866, the other on May 12, 1866.

⁸¹ *Circulaires Administratives des Supérieurs Généraux aux Membres de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de M.I.*, I, pp. 153-167.

⁸² *Missions OMI*, 5 (1866), pp. 305-341.

⁸³ *Circ. Admin.*, I, p. 154. (Author's translation).

⁸⁴ *Circ. admin.*, I, pp. 154-155. In the circular letter published in *Missions OMI*, 5 (1866), pp. 306-307, Father Fabre wrote: "At the feet of Pius IX we especially asked this great Pontiff to bless us, to bless the whole Congregation and its works. He deigned to do this with an affection that moved all of us to tears. We heard him pronounce over us and you the following words which touch us to the heart: BENEDICTIO DEI OMNIPOTENTIS PATRIS ET FILII ET SPIRITUS SANCTI DESCENDAT SUPER VOS, SUPER CONGREGATIONEM VESTRAM, SUPER OMNES AMICOS VESTROS ET MANEAT IN AETERNUM." (Author's translation).

⁸⁵ *Circ. admin.*, I, p. 154. (Author's translation).

⁸⁶ *RP*, 1863-1881, 47-48. (Author's translation).

Charles-Dominique Albini, o.m.i.

1790-1839

SUMMARY - Guided by the Holy Spirit Father Albini uses all his human and spiritual capacities to begin a labour of transformation that will open to him a life of an authentic communication with God and men. The reader has in front of him a long list of defects and virtues that have characterized this servant of God. To learn more about Father Albini, we refer you to the book of the author: "L'itinerario Spirituale di p. Carlo Domenico Albini", Quaderni di Vermicino, 13.

La rencontre de deux libertés: l'Esprit qui communique constamment la vie de Dieu, la personne humaine qui a le pouvoir de <<vivre selon l'Esprit>>, d'entrer dans la dynamique de transformation qui lui est proposée, pour réaliser progressivement cette unité intérieure qui lui permettra de vivre un authentique rapport avec Dieu et les autres.

Le Père Albini s'est efforcé d'entrer dans cette dynamique, de la vivre à fond, avec sa personnalité, ses qualités et ses défauts, ses doutes et ses certitudes. Homme discret, parfois fuyant, il préférerait se cacher plutôt que de <<paraître>>, conditionné peut-être, par une sorte de timidité naturelle, sa façon de faire <<détachée et réservée>> ne favorisait certainement pas un rapport spontané avec les autres, mais deviendra le terrain propice à une profonde vie intérieure qu'il saura communiquer aux autres.

Le Père Albini était une personne réfléchie, prudente dans ses décisions, parfois même trop, au point qu'on lui a attribué <<le défaut de ne jamais se décider>>. Il hésitera certes avant de mettre en pratique ses résolutions. Sa prudence et son hésitation cachaient une profonde et constante recherche de la volonté de Dieu, qui était sa véritable <<sécurité>>!

C'était un homme sensible. Il prenait sur lui-même le fardeau des autres. Les confessions, la direction spirituelle, le contact continu avec les gens, sa charge de professeur et de formation feront de lui un grand connaisseur de l'âme humaine et, en conséquence, un grand connaisseur de soi-même.

Il connaissait bien ses limites et n'avait pas peur de les admettre: <<... je suis toujours le même, sensuel, bizarre, susceptible, etc., priez pour que je me mette, une bonne fois, au travail et que je me corrige (82)¹.>> Sa modestie le portait à se moquer de lui-même devant les éloges et les succès personnels. Il préférerait attribuer les succès à l'action de Dieu plutôt qu'à l'efficacité de ses propres initiatives. Sa limpidité intérieure, vraiment sincère, lui permettait de reconnaître les <<épreuves>> de sa vie personnelle et apostolique, et de les vivre avec cette acceptation réaliste qui constitue la force d'un homme de Dieu.

La connaissance de l'âme humaine lui permettait de souligner ses propres points faibles, comme aussi ceux des autres et de ses confrères. <<Dès le début, je sais ce que j'aurai à souffrir à cause d'un caractère si indomptable et subordonné ... l'orgueil et la suffisance me font dresser les nerfs!>> (p. 91).

C'était un esprit libre, franc, sans méchanceté. Jamais il n'avait l'intention de blesser quelqu'un, et si cela arrivait, il se réconciliait, sans rancœur. Il s'efforçait d'obéir intérieurement au désir de faire prévaloir la vérité dans la charité sur la suffisance et l'inconstance et d'attribuer aux autres les succès de la mission qui leur avait été confiée, plutôt qu'à ses goûts et ses initiatives personnelles. De là vient le sens profond de sa fidélité à la règle de vie de la Congrégation. Il restait fidèle à cette règle, aussi bien en communauté que dans l'activité missionnaire. Il attribuait à cette fidélité les bénédictions du Seigneur sur la Congrégation, la sanctification de ses membres et l'efficacité de leur vie apostolique.

Ce seront ces potentialités humaines qui, progressivement transformées par l'Esprit de Dieu, permettront au Père Albini de devenir un homme passionné pour l'activité missionnaire,

toujours en recherche, soutenu par une profondeur spirituelle telle que seulement la prière, une formation sérieuse, la régularité de la vie religieuse et les épreuves inévitables de la vie, pouvaient assurer.

Une passion avait mûri dans les premières années de son sacerdoce. D'abord à Menton, où il s'occupait des zones les plus difficilement accessibles de la paroisse. Ensuite dans son douloureux ministère d'aumônier et de confesseur d'une communauté de Soeurs qui étaient chargées du soin des malades à l'hôpital de Nice. Enfin dans sa charge de professeur de théologie au grand séminaire de cette même ville de Nice. Cette passion se réalisera grâce à une rencontre décisive.

Unissant l'enseignement de la théologie et le ministère ordinaire à la cathédrale de Nice, il participera, en qualité d'accompagnateur, à une retraite prêchée à d'anciens détenus par les Pères de Mazenod et Suzanne, alors missionnaires de Provence.

Il avait apprécié leur <<genre de prédication>> et son <<efficacité>>. Il avait été impressionné par ce ministère <<au service des pécheurs ... et des plus pauvres>>. Après avoir <<vécu familièrement avec eux ... et les avoir étudiés soigneusement>>, il décida de répondre à son désir d'une vie plus parfaite et de s'unir à eux. Cela s'est fait dans l'espace de quinze jours.

Tout pousse à croire qu'il s'était agi d'un <<moment de Dieu>> tout particulier. Un changement de direction dans sa vie, dans lequel il met en jeu toutes ses sécurités et qui le porte à se joindre à une Congrégation, bien petite encore, mais qui semble répondre à ses aspirations profondes. (p. 42).

Ce bon Père Albin compte sur les missions, en l'enlevant ne lui fera-t-on pas un trop grand tort? (p. 59) se demande le Père de Mazenod, quelques mois seulement après son entrée dans la Congrégation.

Une passion presque violente qui se manifeste chez lui, dès la première mission qui lui sera assignée et qu'il risque de ne pas pouvoir prêcher.

... j'espère que vous ne voudriez pas me priver de la grâce d'exercer ce ministère ... Ce serait une pénitence trop grande pour moi ... Je prie la Divine Providence de ne pas le permettre. (p. 60).

Il aurait voulu <<attendre avec indifférence>> les sages décisions des supérieurs <<laissant agir la Divine Providence>> mais il ne peut résister. <<... le grand désir de suivre l'attrait que j'ai toujours eu pour les missions ... m'a fait rompre le silence.>> (p. 60).

Ce fut un attrait trop grand, c'est vrai, mais il n'était pas démesuré et il sut y renoncer avec cette résignation toujours animée d'un profond esprit de foi. <<... si la gloire de Dieu et le salut des âmes doivent en souffrir, je me résigne, craignant avec raison de mettre un obstacle aux fruits de cette mission.>> (p. 60).

Mais s'il a dû se <<résigner>> plus d'une fois, le père Albin n'a jamais renoncé à cette passion. On l'a chargé de tâches importantes, comme celle de professeur à Marseille et à Ajaccio, par exemple. Il la considérait comme une <<importante mission>>, puisqu'il s'agissait de former de <<saints prêtres>> pour renouveler l'Église (p. 99), mais sa préférence reste inchangée. <<... je ne puis me persuader que le Bon Dieu ne veuille plus que je m'occupe de l'instruction des pauvres de la campagne qui me donnaient les plus grandes satisfactions.>> (p. 99).

Les pauvres de la campagne et non pas une sorte d'activisme effréné le poussent à avoir cette préférence profondément évangélique. Il répète avec conviction: <<... quelques soient mes goûts et mes penchants pour l'oeuvre des missions, je suis prêt à m'immoler.>> (p. 98). Une disponibilité admirable, mais malgré cela, et malgré les autres nécessités et le point de vue des autres sur la façon d'employer ses indiscutables talents, la voix des plus pauvres est plus forte: <<... je crois devoir vous faire connaître les désirs des pauvres habitants de la campagne qui nous tendent les mains.>> (p. 97).

Le Père Albin est trop convaincu que le zèle apostolique <<n'est autre chose que le *sicut misit me Pater et Ego mitto vos*. La volonté décidée et pleine de courage pour faire connaître Dieu en cherchant sa gloire dans la conversion des âmes>> (p. 61) ne pouvait pas le remplir d'orgueil. Il est conscient du fait que <<les prêtres doivent continuer l'oeuvre de la

Rédemption>>. (p. 61). C'est un humble service qui a certes ses satisfactions mais il a aussi ses croix. <<Me voici revenu de la campagne ... aucune blessure dans le corps, mais dans l'âme, Dieu sait combien j'ai dû en recevoir.>> (p. 65).

Ce sont des croix vécues avec sérénité et dans la joie chrétienne, où Dieu trouve toujours la place qui lui revient. <<Cependant cela ne me décourage pas ... je suis content ... Dieu soit béni, à Lui Seul toute la gloire, parce que Lui Seul a fait toute chose.>> (p. 65).

Cependant ne pensons pas trouver chez le Père Albini un stérile déterminisme spirituel, dans lequel l'homme attend passivement que Dieu opère des prodiges. Il s'agit d'une confiance pleine et active en celui qui avec l'Incarnation et la Rédemption nous a fait participer, le premier, à sa mission avec toutes nos responsabilités.

Méditant sur la vie à Nazareth, le Père Albini sera attiré par l'existence cachée de Jésus. <<... le zèle, la charité? On sauve le monde avec une vie cachée, aussi bien qu'avec des oeuvres d'éclat ... pourquoi donc dois-je me consacrer à la prédication? Il me répond avec le silence. Ne rien faire pour Dieu, c'est faire beaucoup!>> (p. 55). Mais - nous pouvons le dire maintenant, après son infatigable action missionnaire - cela n'est rien d'autre que l'aspect <<contemplatif>> irremplaçable et nécessaire de toute action apostolique. Cette contemplation fera mûrir chez le Père Albini une conviction profonde qui se révélera d'une efficacité extraordinaire.

<<Tout le prédicateur doit se rendre complètement dépendant de l'Esprit de Dieu ... Après avoir fait de votre part, tout votre devoir, mettez toute votre confiance en Dieu. Vous en ressentirez les effets et vous verrez quelquefois qu'avec une seule pensée il vous fera dire des choses excellentes pour le bien de vos auditeurs.>> (p. 56).

Cette dépendance devient l'âme de son apostolat et contribue à créer en lui une attitude et une véritable <<stratégie missionnaire>>.

Vous voulez conquérir l'homme le plus barbare du monde ... qu'il voie toujours dans vos façons de faire et votre comportement votre constant désir de lui manifester vos prévenances et de l'honorer. Qu'il sache que vous ne parlez jamais mal de lui, et qu'il vous trouvera toujours prêts à l'excuser ... (p. 58).

Ces paroles semblent répéter un écho le <<je me suis fait tout à tous pour en sauver à tout prix quelques-uns>>. (1Cor.9,22) de Saint-Paul, et elles constituent en effet le <<secret>> de ses succès apostoliques. Mais un succès, comme la vie ne s'improvise pas.

Un jeune prêtre doit être modeste, au cours des premières années. Longtemps il devra s'occuper de ses études et de ses livres. Étudiez, interrogez souvent, soyez longtemps des disciples avant de devenir des maîtres. (p. 19).

Il s'agit d'acquérir une <<maturité de doctrine, de vertu et de prudence, par une étude continue et en consultant longuement les auteurs et les experts, et surtout Dieu dans la prière>>. (p. 19).

Une étude qui durera toute sa vie, un sens de la formation personnelle, la plus large possible, qu'il s'efforcera de perfectionner constamment: <<... ici j'ai plus de temps pour moi. Je suis presque toujours libre ... je profite de cette retraite (sa maladie) pour revoir ma théologie et écrire quelques sermons car je suis pauvre même en écrits.>> (p. 66).

Formation à l'écoute, pour comprendre et découvrir la Volonté de Dieu!

Cette recherche constante, parfois exténuante, qui lui a coûté tant d'énergies et de souffrances, se concrétisera souvent dans le fait de vivre l'obéissance.

Le Père Albini a été formé selon le principe qui dit que <<résister aux supérieurs c'est se rendre coupable d'une désobéissance à Dieu>> (p. 34); un autre genre de <<dépendance>> qu'il vit avec beaucoup de fidélité.

Pour le Père Albini <<se soumettre à la volonté des supérieurs>>, les respecter, c'est reconnaître qu'il <<tiennent la place de Dieu>> (p. 25), et cela ne consiste pas à <<déléguer>> sa propre liberté, mais cela consiste à vivre une valeur qui a une profonde signification.

Si <<n'est méritoire et agréable au Seigneur que ce qui est imprégné par l'obéissance>> (p. 99), si <<la sainte obéissance fait taire toutes les velléités et tous les goûts contraires au bon

vouloir du Ciel>> (p. 69), ce n'est pas pour écraser mais pour <<libérer ses forces vives>> en lui permettant d'être un homme, un missionnaire toujours projeté en dehors de lui-même. Cela ne l'empêche pas d'exprimer franchement son opinion, lorsque, par exemple, quelqu'un semble profiter de sa disponibilité.

Que faire? lui résister?, mais il a invoqué un passage d'une lettre qui l'autorise, selon lui, à se servir du moi quand c'est nécessaire ... supprimant en conséquence les missions pendant huit mois. Comme je crois que ce soit votre pensée (du père de Mazenod), je ne me laisse pas enchaîner...

Et pourtant il ne perd pas son profond esprit de foi à cause de cela: <<Pour le reste je suis encore la même indifférence ... il me suffit d'une parole de votre part et je vole tout de suite.>> (p. 102).

En fait, il est guidé par un principe très simple et plein de bon sens qui lui garantira sa liberté intérieure.

<<Obéissance .. on peut faire des observations avec respect, mais toujours indifférents à la fin. Dieu s'occupe des inconvénients si le Supérieur persiste ...>> (p. 55).

Dans sa recherche de vivre l'obéissance, ce n'est pas lui qui est le point de référence, ni ses qualités personnelles, ni sa docilité naturelle. Il est trop conscient de ses limites pour tomber dans cette équivoque. <<Je suis toujours plus ou moins le même. Je voudrais toujours être là où je ne puis pas être selon la sainte obéissance!>> (p. 85), reconnaît-il en toute simplicité.

Mais c'est <<l'exemple surprenant de notre Maître divin qui a voulu être obéissant jusqu'à la mort>> (p. 26) qui inspire son comportement. Un exemple qui le fait s'exclamer: <<Oh! Dieu, quel anéantissement ... je veux anéantir mon jugement ... je veux devenir un autre Jésus-Christ, lui ouvrir la porte de mon coeur, le laisser travailler...>> (p. 54).

C'est une résolution importante, mais loin de toute subtile présomption, c'est le chemin ardemment parcouru par le Père Albini, une identification qui représente la vocation fondamentale de toute personne humaine, de tous les chrétiens et de toutes les chrétiennes.

Le modèle est précis, c'est une personne concrète, avec laquelle s'instaurera un rapport unique qui le soutiendra dans la recherche de la Volonté de Dieu, comme dans son ministère. <<Il faut beaucoup prier, pour que Dieu manifeste sa Volonté.>> (p. 55).

La prière, c'est l'atmosphère particulière dans laquelle les deux libertés se rencontrent. Le Père Albini était un homme de prière même et surtout au milieu de ses nombreux travaux et activités apostoliques. Tout moment convenait à sa prière, aussi bien dans la vie régulière de la communauté qu'au cours d'une mission, dans la maladie comme dans les moments de repos.

Pour lui la prière garantissait la fécondité apostolique. Il était convaincu que le ministère du prêtre <<sera frappé de stérilité, s'il n'est pas un homme de prière>>. (p. 54).

La prière devient une réflexion profonde et accueillante de la Parole de Dieu: <<Un prêtre, destiné à devenir un saint, comment pourrait-il se sanctifier sans méditation? C'est impossible! impossible!>> (p. 54).

Se sanctifier est synonyme de <<devenir un autre Jésus-Christ, c'est un cheminement bien long au cours duquel nous devons croître dans l'amour de Dieu ... et pour y arriver il n'y a pas de moyen plus efficace que celui de la prière!

<<Vous voulez un conseil pour pouvoir croître dans l'amour de Dieu. Une prière fervente, brève mais fréquente, la meilleure est celle qui se fait en méditant un épisode de la Passion de Notre Seigneur.>> (p. 86).

C'est le directeur spirituel expérimenté qui parle, il a fait son chemin. Il a acquis une certaine expérience et il peut aussi la communiquer aux autres.

Progressivement nous nous approchons du coeur de son expérience spirituelle. Le Père Albini est introduit progressivement dans le mystère pascal, et il le vit dans son humanité. Il avait fait remarquer dans ses méditations que le Bon Dieu lui avait fait comprendre qu'il <<n'y avait de temps meilleur pour la sanctification que la Semaine Sainte>>, ces remarques ne resteront pas de simples affirmations; elles deviendront bien vite une réalité.

Plus d'une fois le Père Albini a dû tout reprendre par le commencement. Que de

changements, que de charges successives, que de détachements des personnes qu'il aimait sincèrement, pas tellement pour lui-même, mais pour Dieu.

Lui qui, d'aucune façon, n'était un <<missionnaire solitaire>> combien de fois n'avait-il pas souffert des initiatives d'ordre individuel, comme par exemple, le manque de régularité dans la vie communautaire, qui était une des manifestations concrètes.

A l'occasion, avec une profonde douleur, il reconnaît que <<l'obéissance n'est plus qu'une parole>> (p. 69) dans sa communauté. On n'obéit plus au Supérieur, on le critique toujours. Il n'hésite pas à protester contre cet abus. Dans d'autres circonstances, il prend la résolution de <<réformer intérieurement sa façon d'agir>> (p. 70).

Ce sont des moments difficiles vécus dans la foi, qui alternent avec autant d'expériences positives, dans lesquels il reconnaît <<la bénédiction de Dieu>>. Le tout est toujours orienté vers l'avenir, vers d'autres engagements apostoliques.

Et pourtant dans la vie de celui qui s'est laissé entraîner dans l'aventure du Christ, il y a des moments où tout semble s'éteindre pour laisser la place à une croissante aridité.

A la fin d'une année d'intense travail au cours de laquelle sa santé a tenu bon et une <<providence spéciale>> semble <<les avoir visiblement protégés>>, le père Albini se retrouve dans une situation délicate.

Je ne puis dire autant de mon âme, la pauvre, je la vois dans une épouvantable aridité. C'est humiliant pour un prêtre de ne pas pouvoir satisfaire les désirs justes et raisonnables des âmes qui demandent avec ardeur la direction spirituelle. (p. 87).

C'est une aridité momentanée, peut-être, mais elle est vraie et significative, au cours de laquelle on ne peut rien offrir, puisqu'on a tout donné.

Cet enième don de soi-même qui ressemble à un dépouillement complet, à une extrême stérilité, fait souffrir et est frustrant surtout pour celui qui a conscience qu'il doit transmettre ce qu'il a reçu gratuitement à ceux qui attendent la Parole de la Vie.

C'est la mystérieuse participation à ce don définitif du Christ Crucifié et Ressuscité, vécue dans une <<nuit>> qui ne semble pas connaître les ténèbres, car en elle tout est resplendissant de lumière. <<Malgré ma misère, il me semble que ma confiance n'a pas diminué, plus je me sens misérable et plus je me sens touché par la bonté spéciale du Seigneur qui m'a soutenu jusqu'aujourd'hui>> (pp. 88).

Tout nous porte à penser qu'il s'agit d'une vraie épreuve intérieure, dans laquelle la grâce <<surabonde>> là où semblent prévaloir la faiblesse et la misère. Dieu y répète encore: <<ma puissance, en effet, se manifeste pleinement dans la faiblesse>>, et lui donne la preuve que <<lorsqu'on est faible, c'est alors que l'on est fort>>. (2Cor.12,9-10).

Le Père Albini s'efforce de la vivre dans la solitude avec les membres de sa communauté, non pour fuir la réalité, ni pour se recroqueviller sur soi-même, mais simplement pour avoir un peu de repos, pour prier, pour préparer une autre série de missions et surtout pour qu'il <<en sorte tout renouvelé, comme les disciples à leur sortie du Cénacle>>. (p. 87).

Sur le mystère de la Croix est projetée la lumière de la Résurrection. A cette lumière la Croix trouve sa profonde signification. L'Esprit continue l'oeuvre de cette transformation.

Le Père Albini, missionnaire infatigable, s'est rendu disponible à ce plan de salut du Christ Sauveur, plan jailli de l'amour immense que Dieu porte à l'humanité.

De son côté, il témoigne que c'est l'Esprit qui <<explique aux fidèles la signification profonde de l'enseignement de Jésus et de son mystère, car c'est Lui qui est <<l'agent principal de l'Évangélisation>>. (E.N. 75).

Son expérience missionnaire prouve qu'il est nécessaire que l'ardeur de tout porteur de l'Évangile <<jaillisse d'une authentique sainteté de vie et que la prédication, alimentée par la prière et surtout par l'amour de l'Eucharistie, fasse aussi croître en sainteté celui qui annonce l'Évangile>>. (E.N. 76). Car le monde qui a <<douloureusement besoin de Dieu>> doit trouver en nous <<simplicité de vie, esprit de prière, charité envers tous et spécialement envers les petits et les pauvres, obéissance et humilité, détachement de nous-même>> afin qu'il puisse reconnaître en nous des disciples du Christ et croire en Lui.

¹ Dans cet article l'auteur réfère à son volume *L'itinerario spirituale di Padre Carlo Domenico Albini OMI*, dans la série des *Quaderni di Vermicino*, no. 13.

A l'École de la Rue ... la Nuit

SUMMARY - This short report introduces us to an authentic oblate ministry. The author has lived with the "punks" of St. Catherine Street in Montreal and has witnessed the missionary efforts to help them by the announcement of Jesus-Christ and by the testimonies of evangelical examples. "May we have the simplicity of listening to and learning from the humble ones to become better missionaries".

Les vacances et un séjour d'une semaine à Montréal ont été pour moi l'occasion de découvrir deux projets missionnaires qui, différents dans leurs formes, visent cependant un même public, le monde des jeunes de la rue. Ils ne prétendent pas être des modèles universels. Mais situés dans un contexte particulier (la rue, dans le centre ville de Montréal, au Canada), ils m'ont permis d'approfondir ce qu'est la mission.

Dans un premier temps, je présenterai donc ces deux projets, en restant conscient de la limite de mon regard: un flash de deux nuits pour le premier, de sept soirées pour le second. Ensuite, je ferai part des quelques réflexions qui ont éclairé ma perception de la mission.

I. Le <<Camping-Car de Pops>>

Montréal, rue Sainte-Catherine, trois heures du matin. Il y a moins de circulation qu'à la sortie des bureaux! Les <<couche-tard>> ont finalement rejoints leur lit, alors que les gens matinaux ne sont pas encore levés! Pourtant la ville, discrètement, continue de vivre, notamment, pour ce qui nous concerne, un camping-car! Il est stationné, la lumière brille à l'intérieur. Autour s'agitent des jeunes. Le premier regard, celui qui classifie, juge et fige, les a déjà nommés: des <<punks>>, blousons de cuir et cheveux multicolores, démarche d'adultes dans des corps d'adolescents fragiles.

Le camping-car est celui de <<Pops>>, un prêtre anglophone qui, avec une équipe de bénévoles, (différente chaque soir car tous ont une activité dans la journée: travail, études ...), assure une présence dans la rue six nuits par semaine (le samedi soir, il y a relâche car trop de touristes venaient voir, rendant impossible la mission d'accueil de l'équipe). L'objectif premier privilégie l'accueil, pour un moment de la nuit, de ces mineurs vivant en bande instable, supportant difficilement la <<rigidité>> des centres d'accueil même les plus ouverts: un camping-car, cela reste du domaine de la rue!

Ainsi, six nuits par semaine, le car stationne dans quatre endroits durant une heure et demie. Par ce biais, les jeunes trouvent ...

- *Un endroit où manger.* En effet, étant mineurs, ils échappent à bon nombre de services sociaux. Certains adolescents, en pleine croissance, dévorent dix hot-dogs d'affilés!

- *Un lieu où, en bande, ils trouvent une atmosphère familiale, avec des personnes qui les servent (pour une fois!) et avec qui ils peuvent plaisanter, bref un lieu où <<on est bien>>, temps de repos ou peuvent se refaire quelques forces affectives au milieu de la jungle de la rue.*

- *Une place où ils côtoient des personnes avec lesquelles, a plus long terme, ils se lient d'amitié et peuvent parler, c'est-à-dire être écouté sérieusement (par <<sérieusement>>, j'entends, non pas <<dramatiquement>> mais <<sans fausse condescendance>>). Ils ne seront pas toujours compris (leur logique nous échappant parfois un peu!) mais ils sont assurés d'être écoutés!*

- *Un espace où la vie est considéré comme suffisamment importante pour ne pas être trop prise au tragique. Dans le camping-car, l'humour, le rire et la décontraction permettent de prendre le recul nécessaire pour mieux se préparer à vivre, et non à subir, la vie.*

II. Le Café Chrétien

Remontons la rue Sainte-Catherine pour découvrir un autre type de présence: au milieu des boutiques, un bar dont la devanture est peinte en bleu pour mieux faire ressortir le titre au blanc: <<Café Chrétien>>. Jérôme et Claire y travaillent depuis son lancement il y a treize ans. Le projet consiste à rejoindre les jeunes où il sont, à savoir dans la rue. Pour cela, ils ont ouverts ce café, lieu d'Église plus signifiant à la culture des jeunes que des bâtiments en pierre. En outre, depuis quelques années il s'est installé dans le quartier, le <<village homosexuel>> de Montréal, orientant la mission du café de façon particulière. Ceux qui le fréquentent sont surtout des jeunes adultes (20-30 ans), et les horaires d'ouverture (19-24 h) plus humaines pour le visiteur de passage que je suis!

Cinq éléments permettent de caractériser l'action missionnaire du café:

- Il tient une *place clairement identifiée à Jésus-Christ*. Dans le milieu (les voisins sont respectivement un hôtel de soixante chambres pour homosexuels, trois clubs de danseurs nus, un trafiquant de drogue, une rue pour la prostitution masculine et une pour la prostitution féminine), cette identification dit le projet: faire rencontrer Jésus-Christ libérateur qui redonne pleine dignité à tout être humain.

- Aussi, et c'est la deuxième caractéristique, la présence du café chrétien se veut, *non pas geste d'accusation, mais espace d'accueil*. Le milieu ne s'y trompe pas qui y a répondu au départ par des incendies! Quelqu'un qui juge aurait tout au plus amusé, tandis qu'un lieu qui accueille à bras ouverts dérange, pose question, perturbe!

- La troisième caractéristique de cette dynamique missionnaire est d'assurer une *présence radicale et absolue*. Claire et Jérôme ont pris l'engagement de continuer jusqu'au bout, de ne jamais lâcher, quelles que soient les difficultés. Les jeunes le savent et y mettent leur confiance, même s'ils savent que le chemin pour sortir de la drogue, de l'alcool, de la prostitution peut être long!

- Une quatrième réalité constitue la mission, c'est la *complémentarité*. Faire découvrir et mettre en contact avec Jésus-Christ libérateur ne dispense pas de suivre des traitements adéquats vis-à-vis de l'alcool et de la drogue, ou spécialisés pour ceux qui sont psychologiquement perturbés. *L'Esprit-Saint accompagne, il ne remplace pas!*

- Enfin, la présence et l'accueil se veulent *annonce d'Évangile*. Chaque soir durant une heure, un temps de prière, d'enseignement, de partage ou encore de témoignage, permet de vivre la vie de la communauté chrétienne telle que présentée dans les Actes des Apôtres: <<Ils étaient assidus à l'enseignement des apôtres et à la communion fraternelle, à la fraction du pain et aux prières>> (Ac 2,42). *Le dimanche*, la communauté se visibilise et se constitue comme *lieu d'Église en célébrant l'Eucharistie*.

* * * * *

Le café chrétien, le camping-car de Pops, *deux réalités missionnaires*. L'une se veut annonce explicite de Jésus-Christ, l'autre préfère témoigner uniquement par des gestes. Mon propos n'est pas de les opposer, je pense qu'il y a place pour la complémentarité. Par contre dans les deux cas, il m'a semblé être en présence d'une dynamique typiquement missionnaire, car en deçà d'une annonce - explicite ou implicite - de la Bonne Nouvelle de l'Évangile, sont promues des mises en situation dans lesquelles les pauvres eux-mêmes sont Révélation du visage de Dieu. Ainsi, baptisés, nous ne sommes pas missionnaires pour seulement <<dire>> Dieu mais aussi pour permettre la Révélation de Dieu par cette voix privilégiée que sont les petits et les pauvres. En regardant ces jeunes aux cheveux verts et rouges qu'un second regard me faisait trouver beaux et me poussait à me laisser aimer par eux, montait en moi ce passage de St Luc: <<Jésus exulta sous l'action de l'Esprit Saint et dit: <<Je te loue Père, Seigneur du ciel et de la terre d'avoir caché cela aux sages et aux intelligents et de l'avoir révélé aux tout petits>>.>> (Lc 10,21).

Les pauvres de la rue (je ne peux oublier le visage du plus jeune. Il n'avait pas quatorze ans), révélateurs du Dieu de Jésus-Christ, oui je tiens à en témoigner! Ils m'ont montré (involontairement, ce qui donne encore plus de force à leur témoignage) qu'ils vivaient les trois dimensions constitutives du disciple de Jésus-Christ: la foi, l'espérance et la charité.

FOI: Je pense à ce jeune. Cheveux rouges, il nous a montré les oeillets qu'il avait

achetés pour offrir à sa <<blonde>> (dixit! Je n'ai pas osé demander la couleur des cheveux!) hospitalisée: Foi en un monde bâti sur l'amour, la solidarité et la fidélité dans l'épreuve!

ESPÉRANCE: Un jeune de 25 ans est entré au café, tête bouclée, yeux rieurs, lutin sorti tout droit de la <<Comedia Del Arte>>! Au terme de la soirée, il nous a confié son drame: il se découvre homosexuel. Il venait passer la soirée à l'hôtel voisin et a bifurqué au dernier moment pour entrer chez nous. C'est la vue d'une icône du Christ, dans la vitrine, qui l'a décidé. <<Avec Lui, nous a-t-il dit, je dois pouvoir m'en sortir!>>. Espérance!

CHARITÉ: Dans le camping-car, un jeune de 17 ans me disait sa lassitude. A la rue depuis l'âge de 14 ans, il regrette parfois d'avoir fugué. Il ne veut cependant pas rentrer car, dit-il, <<mes parents n'auraient pas les moyens de me nourrir, tandis que dans la rue, je me débrouille toujours assez>>! Le jour même, jour de la fête des mères, il avait téléphoné chez lui!

Puissions nous avoir la simplicité de nous mettre à l'écoute et à l'école des petits, bref de devenir toujours plus d'authentiques missionnaires!

Bertrand EVELIN, o.m.i.

Association for Oblate Studies and Research

News and Information

A. Meeting of the Executive Committee (April 22, 1992)

The AOSR Executive Committee met at the General House on April 22, 1992. The Committee reviewed the status of each of the AOSR's two work projects, discussed the feasibility of undertaking other work projects, and especially considered the AOSR in view of the coming General Chapter. Founded in September 1982 and approved by the General Council the following December, the AOSR was now ten years old. The Executive Committee therefore felt that a comprehensive report on the AOSR was to be made available to the Capitulars; and it also hoped the Chapter would endorse and encourage the AOSR and what it is doing.

The AOSR fared very well at the 1992 General Chapter. Here is what happened.

B. AOSR Report distributed to all the Capitulars

The original plan was to have a few copies of the Report placed in the Chapter Reference room where it could be perused by interested Capitulars. Because this Report was not yet ready in both French and English when the Chapter opened, it was thought best to distribute a copy of it directly to each Capitular: in that way it proved to be a more effective instrument of communication and more Capitulars would be informed about the AOSR and its activities. The Report consisted of a text plus 4 appendices: one gave the text of the AOSR Charter, another the AOSR membership, the third contained the list of articles comprising the *Oblate Spiritual Values Yesterday and Today* project, and the fourth gave a partial list of the articles that have thus far been received in the *Oblate Historical Dictionary* project. Here is the full text (less the 4 appendices) of the Report submitted to the 1992 General Chapter:

The Association for Oblate Studies and Research (AOSR) thanks God and the Oblate Congregation for ten years of existence.

1. Nature, Purpose, Main Activities

The AOSR "is a free association of Oblates activity interested in undertaking, promoting and coordinating research, study and exchange on the history, spirituality, mission and present life" of the Oblate Congregation. The AOSR will promote "projects of study and research, the publication/translation of relevant materials, the organization and upkeep of Oblate Archives, meetings furthering its aims" (Charter of AOSR).

2. Origin and Development

The *initial idea* came from Superior General Father Fernand Jetté's address to the 1978 Inter-Chapter Meeting (April 6, 1978) wherein he recommended that the Congregation should "invest more in reflection". In response to this recommendation, an *ad hoc* committee was formed by Father Gilles Cazabon, Marcello Zago, Angelo Mitri and Edward Carolan to explore the possibility of establishing a network of Oblates interested in promoting the study of Oblate history, values and spirituality.

The *ad hoc* committee's work and consultations led to the Congress on *Evangelization and the Oblates*, held in Rome in September 1982, as part of the bi-centennial celebrations marking Bl. Eugene de Mazenod's birth. The Congress was the occasion for the formal founding of the AOSR: its Charter was drawn up, its Executive elected, and indications given of work projects it ought to undertake. The General Council in plenary session in Cotabato (Nov. 21 - Dec 10, 1992) formally approved the AOSR, its Charter and Executive.

3. AOSR Members

AOSR membership is open to all professed Oblates. To qualify for membership, the following are required: serious interest and activity in the purpose of the AOSR, approval by one's major superior, and acceptance of application for membership by the AOSR Executive. At present, 75 Oblates are AOSR Members.

4. AOSR Research Projects

The AOSR is presently active in two long-range research projects, an Oblate encyclopedia or lexicon project under the title of *Oblate Historical Dictionary* and a study of Oblate spiritual values under the title of *Oblate Spiritual Values Yesterday and Today*. Two other work projects are still in the planning stage.

5. The Oblate Spiritual Values Yesterday and Today Project

This project seeks to identify the main Oblate values which are at the origin of the Oblate way of life and mission, which have been developed during the Congregation's history, which continue to be our main inspiration and life criteria. These are the values that make up the internal portrait of an Oblate.

Some fifty terms have been selected as the content of this project: v.g. Apostles, Daring, Action/Contemplation, Charism, Fraternal charity, Church, Community, Christ the Saviour, Oblate cross, Sacred Heart, Evangelization, Formation, the Poor, Obedience, Poverty, Chastity, Priesthood, Glory of God, Will of God, Religious life, Zeal, Urgent Needs of the Church, Divine Office, Rules, Reconciliation, Superiors, Perseverance, Patrons of the Congregation, Mary Immaculate, Oblate Brothers, etc. Included are certain Oblates who in a special way have lived these Oblate values: the Founder, Albin, Allard, Charlebois, Fabre, Bl. Joseph Gerard, Grandin, and others.

Each of the selected "values" is treated in the light of the Founder's life and writings, of how his first collaborators and the first generation of Oblates lived it, of what the various editions of the Constitutions and Rules say about it, of what is contained in the circular letters of the Superiors General and in the acts of the General Chapters, of how it has been lived in various parts of the Congregation.

Father Fabio Ciardi is the project director of this dictionary. At present, 5 articles (Presentation, Church, Formation, M.A.M.I., and Rules) have been distributed in English and French in a preliminary publication format and 4 more will be sent out before the end of 1992. 20 other articles are ready for printing in 1 language; 6 still need to be assigned to an author; the rest are in process.

6. The Oblate Historical Dictionary Project

Father Robrecht Boudens is director of this project. This "historical dictionary" is essentially factual in nature and is meant to be a practical instrument for quick yet substantial reference. It includes brief but comprehensive articles on key Oblates (deceased only), major Oblate events, all Oblates institutions and works (past and present), all places where Oblates have worked or now work. The articles present the essential facts and try to do so in an entirely objective manner. A list of sources and bibliography is given at the end of each article.

Some 240 articles have been received for this project to date. In a preliminary publication format 29 articles have been sent out in English and in French. They are: Aix-en-Provence, Albin, Archives Deschâtelets, Arncliffe, Brussels-Koekelberg, Colwyn Bay, Cosmic, Courtès, the Cross, Crousel, Deblieu, Delouche, De Mazenod Record, Ferrand, France-Benelux, Hurstville, Icard, July Monarchy, Kerygma, Lebh Shomea, Marseilles-Le Calvaire, Maunier, Mie, Missions OMI, Nimes, N.D. du Laus, Penshurst, Tempier, Der Weinberg. Some 32 other articles will be mailed out before the end of 1992.

7. Preliminary and Definitive Publication

While the Dictionary of Oblate Values may be completed in the course of the next few years, the Oblate Historical Dictionary by its very nature is a project that will require several

decades to complete. So that articles in either project may serve the Oblates as soon as possible, they are printed separately in a loose form and sent out to all major superiors, houses of formation and to some 65 other key communities in the Congregation. This also allows for critical and constructive feedback for revising these articles before they are printed in a definitive way in book form.

8. The 1989 Ottawa Congress

The AOSR Charter requires the membership to meet every three to five years. Besides attending to electing the AOSR Executive and to other AOSR internal matters, such meetings are also the occasion to offer to the Congregation an in-depth study on a topic other than the AOSR work projects. The first such AOSR Congress was held in Ottawa, August 6-11, 1989. Forty-one AOSR members and a number of other Oblates participated. The Congress studied *The Oblate Mission through Apostolic Community* and its acts have been published in French and English by *VIE OBLATE LIFE* (1990). The Congress also elected the present AOSR Executive which consists of Fathers Robrecht Boudens, President, Aloysius Kedl, Secretary-Treasurer, and Giovanni Santolini.

9. The AOSR, the Superiors General and the 1986 General Chapter

As Superiors General, both Fathers Fernand Jetté and Marcello Zago have closely followed the development and activities of the AOSR. Both have shown a personal interest in the AOSR and have strongly encouraged and supported its work, also financially. They have also mentioned and promoted the AOSR at Inter-Chapter Meetings and General Chapters.

The 1986 General Chapter recommended "that the Association for Oblate Studies and Research include in its agenda a study of missionary spirituality, as reflected in the experience of Oblates from the time of the Founder" (MTW 126). The AOSR is responding to this request especially through its Oblate Spiritual Values Yesterday and Today project.

10. AOSR Needs

From all Oblates the AOSR seeks **collaboration** in achieving its aims and objectives; such collaboration to date has already been impressive and encouraging. From the Superior General and the General Council the AOSR hopes to receive **continued encouragement and financial assistance**; to date such support has been constant and the AOSR owes an immense debt of gratitude to the Superiors General and their Councils. Finally, to speed up the processing and distribution of articles, and to improve AOSR communications **a full-time executive person** is indispensable.

C. The General Chapter's Reaction

The Chapter Minutes (Plenary Session #42, Sept. 24, 1992) mention the significance of this Report as follows:

The Moderator then referred to the report of the *Association for Oblate Studies and Research* which had been distributed to all the Capitulars: it was not a Chapter document but an item of information. As it has its importance for the whole Congregation, it was distributed to all and not only put into the Chapter's reference room. For further questions on the Association, Capitulars could address themselves to Aloysius KEDL.

One week later, the AOSR was a special topic on the Chapter's agenda. The Minutes (Plenary Session #57, Oct. 1, 1992) read:

Gode IWELE began to speak about the *Association for Oblate Studies and Research* (AOSR), the work of which he saw as helpful in animating the Congregation. He mentioned that its President was Father Robrecht BOUDENS, and Oblate in Belgium; its Secretary was Aloysius KEDL; that the AOSR was organized and promoted from Father Jetté onwards. He referred to the document on the AOSR that had been distributed to the

Capitulars a few days ago. He suggested that it would be good to hear from Aloysius KEDL and Fabio CIARDI. Aloysius KEDL briefly described the AOSR as it is outlined in the document *Association for Oblate Studies and Research* (1982-1992) and added several details of a concrete practical nature. He expressed special thanks to the General Administration for the constant support, particularly financial, it has given to the AOSR. Fabio CIARDI described the AOSR work project that he directs: *Oblate Spiritual Values, Yesterday and Today*. He especially invited feedback to the articles that are sent out: in that way the entire project can be improved and that too will be a contribution to the animation of the Congregation.

Marc LORTIE expressed particular satisfaction that the articles from the AOSR's two work projects are being shared with the Congregation even in a preliminary way; he and others have found them valuable for animation. Then he moved that the Chapter express its gratitude, appreciation and encouragement for what the AOSR has done and will continue to do. This motion was seconded by several Capitulars and unanimously adopted by a show of hands vote.

Though the Minutes do not note this, the Chapter Assembly followed up its unanimous vote with warm applause.

Aloysius KEDL, O.M.I.
AOSR Secretary

Association d'études et de recherches oblates

Nouvelles et renseignements

A. Réunion du comité exécutif, le 22 avril 1992

Le comité exécutif de l'Association d'études et de recherches oblates s'est réuni le 22 avril 1992, à la Maison générale. Il a étudié l'état de chacun des deux travaux entrepris par l'Association, discuté de la possibilité d'en entreprendre d'autres et surtout réfléchi sur l'Association dans la perspective du Chapitre général qui aurait lieu bientôt. Fondée en septembre 1982 et approuvée par le Supérieur général en conseil au mois de décembre suivant, l'Association a maintenant dix ans. Le comité exécutif a pensé qu'un rapport exhaustif sur l'Association devait donc être présenté aux membres du Chapitre. Il espérait aussi, de la part du Chapitre, une approbation et un soutien pour l'Association et le travail qu'elle accomplit.

Au Chapitre, tout s'est très bien passé pour l'Association. Voici un compte rendu de ce qui est arrivé.

B. Le rapport de l'Association distribué à tous les capitulants

On avait d'abord eu l'idée de mettre quelques copies du rapport dans la salle de consultation du Chapitre de sorte que les capitulants intéressés puissent l'étudier. Comme à l'ouverture du Chapitre, le rapport en français et en anglais n'était pas encore prêt, on pensa qu'il serait mieux d'en distribuer une copie directement à chaque capitulant. Cette façon de faire s'est avérée un moyen plus efficace de renseigner les capitulants sur l'Association et ses activités. Le rapport comportait un texte principal et quatre annexes. L'une d'elles présentait la Charte de l'Association, une autre la liste de ses membres, la troisième la liste des articles du Dictionnaire de spiritualité et la quatrième, une liste partielle des articles du Dictionnaire historique reçus jusqu'alors. Voici le texte complet, sans les quatre annexes, du rapport soumis au Chapitre général de 1992:

L'Association d'études et de recherches oblates (AÉRO) est reconnaissante à Dieu et aux Oblats pour ses dix ans d'existence.

1. Nature, fin et activité principales

L'AÉRO <<est une association libre d'Oblats qui s'intéressent activement à l'entreprise, au développement et à la coordination de la recherche, des études et des échanges portant sur l'histoire, la spiritualité, la mission et la vie présente>> de la Congrégation. L'AÉRO entend promouvoir <<des travaux d'étude et de recherche, la publication et la traduction de textes appropriés, l'organisation et la conservation d'archives oblates, et des rencontres favorisant la poursuite de ces objectifs>> (Charte de l'AÉRO).

2. Origine et développement

C'est une causerie du père Fernand Jetté qui a été à l'origine de l'Association. Lors de la rencontre inter capitulaire du 6 avril 1978, il proposait à la Congrégation <<d'investir davantage dans la réflexion>>. En réponse à cette recommandation, un comité *ad hoc* était formé comprenant les pères Gilles Cazabon, Angelo Mitri et Edward Carolan pour explorer la possibilité d'établir un réseau d'Oblats intéressés à promouvoir l'étude de l'histoire, des valeurs et de la spiritualité oblates.

Les travaux du comité *ad hoc* et les consultations ont abouti au congrès sur *L'évangélisation et les Oblats*, tenu à Rome en septembre 1982 et intégré aux célébrations marquant le bicentenaire de la naissance du bienheureux Eugène de Mazenod. C'est au cours de ce congrès que l'AÉRO fut fondée formellement: sa charte fut rédigée, son comité exécutif élu et l'orientation de son travail établie. Le Conseil général en session plénière à Cotabato (du 21

novembre au 10 décembre 1982) approuva formellement l'AÉRO, sa charte et son exécutif.

3. Membres de l'AÉRO

L'Association est ouverte à tous les Oblats profès de la Congrégation. Sont aptes à en devenir membres ceux qui remplissent les conditions suivantes: un intérêt marqué et une activité répondant au but de l'Association, l'approbation du supérieur majeur de l'Oblat, l'acceptation par le comité exécutif de l'Association de la demande d'adhésion. L'AÉRO compte actuellement soixante-quinze membres.

4. Les projets de recherche de l'AÉRO

L'AÉRO est présentement engagée dans deux projets à long terme: une encyclopédie ou lexique portant le nom de *Dictionnaire historique oblat* et une étude des valeurs spirituelles oblates ayant pour titre *Les valeurs spirituelles oblates d'hier et d'aujourd'hui*. Deux autres projets sont à l'étude.

5. Le projet sur les valeurs spirituelles d'hier et d'aujourd'hui

Le projet sur les valeurs spirituelles cherche à identifier les principales valeurs qui furent à l'origine de la vie et de la mission oblate, qui se sont développées au cours de l'histoire de la Congrégation et qui continuent à nous inspirer et à guider notre vie. Ce sont ces valeurs qui font l'Oblat.

Environ cinquante termes ont été sélectionnés et leur développement constitue le contenu de ce projet: par exemple, apôtres, audace, action/contemplation, charisme, charité fraternelle, Église, communauté, Christ Sauveur, croix oblate, Sacré-Coeur, évangélisation, formation, les pauvres, l'obéissance, la pauvreté, la chasteté, le sacerdoce, la gloire de Dieu, la volonté de Dieu, la vie religieuse, le zèle, les besoins urgents de l'Église, l'Office divin, les Règles, la réconciliation, les supérieurs, la persévérance, les patrons de la Congrégation, Marie Immaculée, les Frères oblates, etc. Y sont aussi inclus certains noms d'Oblats qui ont vécu ces valeurs de façon remarquable: le Fondateur, Albini, Allard, Charlebois, Fabre, le bienheureux Joseph Gérard, Grandin et d'autres.

Chacune des valeurs est abordée sous différents angles: à la lumière de la vie et des écrits du Fondateur; en référence à la façon dont ses premiers collaborateurs et la première génération d'Oblats l'ont vécue; selon ce qu'en ont dit les diverses éditions des Constitutions et Règles ou les lettres circulaires des Supérieurs généraux et les Actes des Chapitres généraux, et selon la façon de les vivre dans les diverses parties de la Congrégation.

Le père Fabio Ciardi dirige ce projet de dictionnaire. Jusqu'à maintenant, cinq articles (Présentation, Église, Formation, A.M.M.I. et Règles) ont été distribués en anglais et en français en format provisoire; quatre autres seront expédiés avant la fin de 1992. Vingt autres articles sont prêts pour l'impression en une langue; six doivent être assignés à un auteur; les autres sont en voie de planification.

6. Le projet de Dictionnaire historique oblat

Le père Robrecht Boudens est directeur d'un projet de dictionnaire historique oblat. Ce <<dictionnaire historique>> est essentiellement de nature factuelle et est destiné à servir comme référence à la fois rapide et substantielle. Il comprend des articles brefs mais complets sur des Oblats réputés (décédés), les principaux événements de notre histoire, sur toutes les institutions et oeuvres oblates (passées et présentes), sur tous les endroits où les Oblats ont oeuvré ou oeuvrent encore. Les articles présentent les événements importants le plus objectivement possible. On trouve une liste des sources et une bibliographie à la fin de chaque article.

A ce jour, quelque deux cent quarante articles ont été reçus pour ce projet. Vingt-neuf articles ont été expédiés en anglais et en français en format provisoire. Ce sont: Aix-en-Provence, Albini, Archives Deschâtelets, Arncliffe, Bruxelles-Koekelberg, Colwyn Bay, *Cosmic*, Courtès, *The Cross*, Croussel, Deblieu, Delouche, *De Mazenod Record*, Ferrand, France-Benelux, Hurstville, Icard, Monarchie de Juillet, *Kerygma*, Lebh Shomea, Marseille-LeCalvaire,

Maunier, Mie, *Missions O.M.I.*, N^omes, N.-D. du Laus, Peshurst, Tempier, *Der Weinberg*. Quelque trente-deux autres articles seront expédiés avant le fin de 1992.

7. Publication provisoire et publication définitive

Alors que le Dictionnaire des valeurs oblates devrait être terminé d'ici quelques années, le Dictionnaire d'histoire oblate de par sa nature exigera plusieurs décades de travail.

Pour que les articles puissent être mis à la disposition des Oblats le plus tôt possible, ils sont imprimés séparément sur feuilles mobiles et envoyés à tous les supérieurs majeurs, aux maisons de formation et à environ soixante-cinq autres communautés plus importantes. Cela permet une réaction critique et constructive avant l'impression définitive sous forme de livre.

8. Le congrès d'Ottawa de 1989

Le charte de L'AÉRO stipule qu'une assemblée générale des membres se tiendra à intervalles de trois à cinq ans. En plus de voir à l'élection du comité exécutif et aux autres affaires internes de l'AÉRO, de telles rencontres fournissent à la Congrégation l'occasion d'une étude en profondeur d'un sujet autre que ceux de l'AÉRO. Le premier congrès de l'AÉRO eut lieu à Ottawa, du 6 au 11 août 1989. Quarante et un membres de l'AÉRO ainsi que d'autres Oblats y ont participé. Le congrès avait pour thème *La mission oblate par la communauté apostolique* et les actes ont été publiés en français et en anglais dans *Vie Oblate Life* (1990). Le congrès a aussi élu l'exécutif de l'AÉRO qui comprend les pères Robrecht Boudens, président, Aloysius Kedl, secrétaire trésorier, et Giovanni Santolini.

9. L'AÉRO, les Supérieurs généraux et le Chapitre général de 1986

En tant que Supérieurs généraux, les pères Fernand Jetté et Marcello Zago ont suivi de près le développement et les activités de l'AÉRO. Tous deux ont démontré un intérêt personnel dans l'AÉRO, ont recommandé ses activités et l'ont soutenue financièrement. Ils ont aussi fait mention de l'AÉRO et parlé en sa faveur aux réunions inter capitulaires et aux Chapitres généraux.

Le Chapitre général de 1986 a recommandé à <<l'Association d'études et de recherches oblates d'inclure dans son programme une recherche sur la spiritualité missionnaire telle que reflétée dans l'expérience des oblates depuis le temps du Fondateur>> (MAM, 126). L'AÉRO répond à cette demande dans son projet de recherche sur *Les valeurs spirituelles oblates d'hier et d'aujourd'hui*.

10. Les besoins de l'AÉRO

Pour arriver à ses fins et poursuivre ses objectifs, l'AÉRO est à la recherche de collaborateurs; jusqu'à maintenant la réponse a été impressionnante et encourageante. Pour accélérer la rédaction et la distribution des articles, et pour améliorer les communications au sein de l'Association, il serait indispensable de disposer d'une personne à plein temps. Le Supérieur général et son conseil ont toujours appuyé l'AÉRO de leur encouragement et de leur aide financière. L'Association leur en est très reconnaissante et ose espérer que ce soutien se poursuivra.

C. Les réactions du Chapitre général

Les minutes du Chapitre, à sa session plénière no. 42 du 24 septembre 1992, relèvent comme suit la portée de ce rapport:

Le modérateur [...] se réfère ensuite au rapport de l'Association d'études et de recherches oblates qui a été distribué aux capitulants; ce rapport n'est pas un document du Chapitre mais une simple information. Comme il s'agit d'une association importante pour l'ensemble de la Congrégation, le document a été distribué à tous et non pas simplement déposé dans la salle de consultation. Pour d'éventuelles questions au sujet de l'Association, les capitulants sont invités à s'adresser à Aloysius Kedl.

Une semaine plus tard, l'AÉRO est à l'ordre du jour du Chapitre. Les minutes de la

session plénière no. 57 du 1^{er} octobre se lisent comme suit:

Gode Iwele commence par parler de l'Association d'études et de recherches oblates (AÉRO) dont il estime le travail utile pour l'animation dans la Congrégation. Il mentionne que son président est le père Robrecht Boudens, un Oblat belge, et que son secrétaire est Aloysius Kedl. Il ajoute que l'Association a été mise en route et encouragée par le père Fernand Jetté. Il fait référence au document sur l'Association qui a été distribué aux capitulants il y a quelques jours (cf. Document: *L'Association d'études et de recherches oblates - 1982-1992*). Il suggère qu'il serait bon d'entendre Aloysius Kedl et Fabio Ciardi.

Aloysius Kedl décrit brièvement l'Association en se référant au document qu'on vient de citer. Il ajoute plusieurs renseignements concrets et pratiques sur la marche de l'Association. Il remercie de façon spéciale l'Administration générale pour l'appui constant - spécialement pour l'aide financière - qu'elle a donné à l'Association. Fabio Ciardi décrit le projet de l'Association qu'il dirige: *Les valeurs spirituelles oblates d'hier et d'aujourd'hui*. Il invite les capitulants à réagir aux articles qui ont déjà été publiés; ainsi le projet pourrait s'améliorer et ce serait une contribution à l'animation de la Congrégation.

Marc Lortie exprime sa satisfaction particulière pour le fait que les articles des deux projets de l'Association sont distribués à la Congrégation, même sous une forme qui n'est pas définitive; lui et d'autres les ont trouvés très utiles pour l'animation. Il propose ensuite que le Chapitre exprime sa gratitude, son appréciation et son encouragement pour ce que l'Association a fait et continuera à faire. Cette proposition, secondée par plusieurs capitulants est adoptée à l'unanimité, à main levée.

Même si les minutes ne le rapportent pas, l'assemblée du Chapitre a fait suivre son vote unanime par des applaudissements chaleureux.

Aloysius Kedl, o.m.i.
Secrétaire de l'Association